

Andy and Julia in Rusyn: Warhol's translation of his mother in film and video

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Mothers



Figure 1 Julia Warhola, in 'Mothers', *Esquire*, November 1966. Photograph by Carl Fischer.

In November 1966, an article in *Esquire* featured interviews with the mothers of four prominent names in the news: White House Press Secretary Bill Moyers, Green Bay Packers running back Paul Hornung, comedian Jonathan Winters, and artist and filmmaker Andy Warhol.¹ The article, entitled 'Mothers', included full-page photographs of the women, each holding a framed picture of her famous son. The women tell their own stories, revealing diverse backgrounds and distinctive personalities. Mrs. Moyers, a 'sedate, impeccably coiffed' working woman, shares her parenting philosophy and shows the interviewer complimentary letters about her son from President Johnson. Jonathan Winters' mother is a natural comedienne,

¹ Bernard Weinraub, 'Mothers', *Esquire*, November 1966, 96–101, 155–58.

who, during the interview, smokes ('Don't worry. It's not marijuana') and quaffs bourbon ('Let's live it up'). Mrs. Hornung, 'her reddish hair ... piled high atop her head', is a government worker who shows off the color television her son bought her and her spacious, 'spotless' apartment. Mrs. Warhola is last in the sequence, and in her photograph as well as her story, she stands out markedly from the others. The interviewer describes her as 'a slight grey-haired woman who speaks with animation, throws her hands excitedly in the air, weeps easily.' Her photograph shows a stolid elderly woman in what must be her Sunday-best hat and flowered dress, her veined, gnarled hand resting on her chin in a similar pose to the one in the portrait of her son that she holds in her lap (fig. 1).

The interviewer, Bernard Weinraub, asked each of the mothers the same basic questions, encouraged them to talk freely, and then presented their words as a free-flowing discourse in their own idiosyncratic speech styles. Each woman talks about herself and her background, her son's childhood, achievements, relationships, and their own mother-son bond. Julia's portion of the article is less comprehensive than the others, which is not surprising, considering the communication difficulties that occurred. But this interview is significant, because it is the only first-hand account of Julia's history, and as such, it is cited in all the Warhol biographies.

In contrast to the interviews with the 'elegantly coiffed' and 'impeccably dressed' mothers, Julia's account contains no political views, cultural critique, or explicit child-rearing methods—concepts that she would probably not have understood and could not articulate. While the other women compare indulgent and authoritative parenting styles, Julia says simply, 'I raise my children okay. Oh, Andy a good boy.' Like Jonathan Winters' mother, a frustrated actress, Julia talks more about herself than her son. She indulges in fond memories of her wedding, grieves her baby daughter's death, and laments the pain of war. According to Weinraub, it was a stream-of-consciousness style of narration. 'The most frustrating thing was her inability to express herself in English. She had a very thick accent, and sometimes broke into another language. I didn't ask about her wedding, but she brought it up. She was sort of in charge of the interview.'² Misunderstanding some of her speech, Weinraub got a few details wrong, but overall, he managed to elicit valuable, verifiable information.

When the *Esquire* article appeared, it caused consternation in the Warhola family. Julia's son John complained that his mother's way of speaking English 'was made to appear ridiculous in a national magazine'. Allegedly, 'Andy had asked beforehand that Julia's conversation be edited for publication—but the magazine decided to emphasize her broken English. Andy was embarrassed and upset by this manipulation of his mother.'³ The Pittsburgh Warhola brothers may well have been

² Bernard Weinraub, interview with the author, 25 February 2020.

³ R. Jay Gangewere, 'Ten Years Later—What Would Andy Say?' *Carnegie Magazine*, May/June 1997, <https://carnegiemuseums.org/magazine-archive/1997/mayjun/feat4.htm>, accessed 2 April 2022.

offended, since their working-class Carpatho-Rusyn background made them sensitive to the 'broken English' of their parents, which carried shame for many American-born children of immigrants. But according to Weinraub, there was no request to standardize Julia's English. In the context of the *Esquire* article, in which Mrs. Moyers speaks in a Texas twang ('Fine, just fine. Honey ... we have some talkin' to do'), and Jonathan Winters' mother hams it up in a simulated southern accent ('I'm gonna have me some Suthun Frahd Cheeken'), Mrs. Warhola's authentic expression highlights her endearing old-world qualities and contributes to her likability. There is no indication that Julia's interview brought any embarrassment to Andy, who would later (through his ghost-writers) refer to his mother's 'thick Czechoslovakian accent'.⁴ In fact, the publication of the *Esquire* article may have alerted him to the creative potential of Julia's speech style. Shortly after the appearance of the article, Warhol cast his mother in his film, *The George Hamilton Story*.⁵ Susan Pile, who was sound tech for the film, wrote to a friend in November 1966, 'I was at Andy's house this week (a truly rare privilege ...). He filmed the George Hamilton story with his mother as star – her screen debut.' Pile goes on to recommend Julia's interview: 'See *Esquire* this month for an interview with Mrs. Warhola, who speaks to Andy in Czechoslovakian and can only rattle off to others a garbled English. She's a very sweet old lady.'⁶

The trouble with Rusyn

In the past, there was much confusion about the Warholas' ethnicity and language.⁷ Mrs. Warhola did not speak 'Czechoslovakian', which is neither a language nor an ethnicity. Julia was a Carpatho-Rusyn from what was, for most of the time she lived there, northern Hungary, and became part of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Her ancestral village, Miková, is located in what is today northeastern Slovakia, which was under Soviet domination from 1945 to 1989. For their own political and strategic purposes, the Soviets rejected the very concept of a Carpatho-Rusyn ethnicity or identity.

⁴ *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*, 1975; Orlando: Harcourt, 2006, 21.

⁵ Greg Pierce, director of film and video at the Andy Warhol Museum, devised a standardized titling system for Warhol's films. Titles given to films by Warhol, used for screenings, and printed in publications, are indicated by italics. Films entitled according to information found on the box, can, or reel are denoted in quotation marks. Hence, *The George Hamilton Story* and its more commonly known title, 'Mrs. Warhol'. See 'Notes on Titling', in Geralyn Huxley and Greg Pierce, eds, *Andy Warhol's The Chelsea Girls*, Pittsburgh: The Andy Warhol Museum, 2018, 318. The disparate titles will be discussed later in this essay.

⁶ As cited in Gary Comenas, 'Mrs. Warhol', https://www.warholstars.org/andy_warhol_films.html, accessed 26 April 2021.

⁷ For more on this point, see Elaine Rusinko, "'We Are All Warhol's Children": Andy and the Rusyns', *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, 2204, 2012, 9-21, <http://carlbeckpapers.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/cbp/article/view/190>.

Carpatho-Rusyns were declared to be Ukrainian, and the Rusyn language was proscribed in education, publication, and official documents. In a move of passive resistance, large numbers of Rusyns in Slovakia chose to identify as Slovak rather than Ukrainian, which partly accounts for the muddle of language and identity among Rusyns in the American immigration.⁸ Miková was located in an ethnolinguistic borderland, and the vernacular language had admixtures of West Slavic languages (Slovak and Polish), numerous loan words from a Finno-Ugric language (Hungarian), and several borrowings from German and Romanian (fig. 2). In the early twentieth century, Rusyns in the United States would have said they spoke *po-nashomu* [in our way], without, perhaps, even recognizing their speech as a distinct language. After the collapse of Soviet control, the proscription against all things Rusyn was lifted, and the language was formally codified in Slovakia and Poland in the 1990s. Today Rusyn is acknowledged by an increasing number of international linguists as a distinct East Slavic language.

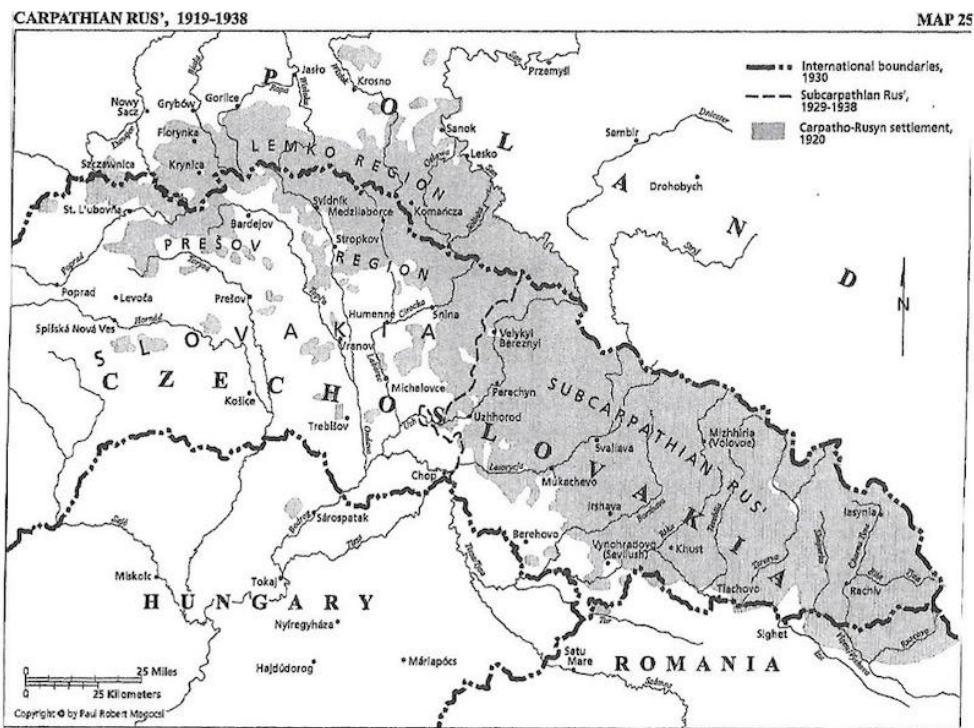


Figure 2 Map of Carpathian Rus' 1919–1938, in Paul Robert Magocsi, *With Their Backs to the Mountains*, Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2015. Miková is located eight miles northwest of Medzilaborce.

⁸ The term 'Rusyn' was historically applied also to Ukrainians and Belarusians. When used here for convenience, it refers specifically to Carpatho-Rusyns. Their homeland, Carpathian Rus', straddles the borders of Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania. It has never existed as a distinct administrative entity. The name of the language is 'Rusyn'. In this study, Rusyn words from the Warholas' correspondence are rendered as written. References to the spoken Rusyn language are given in a simplified version of the Library of Congress transliteration system for Rusyn.

When Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants came to America, lexical borrowings from English infiltrated the language, especially for concepts that had not existed in the Old Country. Phrases like *rent platit* [pay the rent], *lem pyat minute ride* [just a five-minute ride], and *James dostal cara* [James got a car] are convenient mixed phrases that appear in Julia's correspondence and would be understood by bilingual speakers. English verbs were transformed by adding Rusyn morphological endings: *mam klinuwati apartment* [I have to clean the apartment], *vi ne feelujete dobri* [you do not feel well]. As a result, the peculiar mixed Rusyn language was a source of embarrassment and inferiority in the immigration, just as it had been in the homeland, where the prestige language was first Hungarian, then Slovak.

The natural alphabet of Rusyn was Cyrillic, but because their homeland was historically part of the Hungarian Kingdom, Warhol's parents were educated in schools that transcribed Rusyn in the Latin alphabet, using an unwieldy Hungarian system of transliteration. None of the immigrant generation of the Warhola-Zavacky family had more than a few years of elementary education, and they had little awareness of spelling or grammar in any language. Julia and her relatives wrote as they spoke, phonetically, not recognizing lexical segments or sentence boundaries, interspersing English words, and foregoing capitalization and punctuation entirely. For example, Julia's husband Andrii writes *nakari*, misspelling the English word for 'car' and combining it with a Rusyn preposition and case ending to mean 'in a car'. *Taustinemam pisati* is 'and I have nothing more to write to you' [*ta už ti ne mam pisati*]. Deciphering their correspondence is challenging even for native speakers of Rusyn.

A recognition of Julia's linguistic limitations casts new light on the calligraphy she did for Warhol's early artist books. Semiliterate in her own language and totally unschooled in English, she approached copying text as a work of art, focusing on the shape of the letters rather than the meaning of the words. Occasional misspellings and omitted letters were to be expected, as in *25 Cats Name Sam and One Blue Pussy* of the mid-1950s, where Julia dropped the 'd' on 'named'. But for the most part, as in *Wild Raspberries*, 1959, a sendup of a gourmet cookbook on which Warhol collaborated with Suzie Frankfurt, she carefully reproduced the original text, with little comprehension of its meaning.⁹ A related drawing, which was not included in the book, is *Tranches de Fruite à la Jeanne d'Arc*, for which Julia transcribed a fifteen-line text completely in French.¹⁰

⁹ Susan Rossi-Wilcox, who examined the typed sheets for *Wild Raspberries*, concluded, 'Mrs. Warhola faithfully copied the text. The typos, corrections, hyphenations, and duplications are in the original'; 'Social Satire in the Guise of a Cookbook: Warhol's *Wild Raspberries*', in Marianne Dobner and Nina Schleif, eds, *Reading Andy Warhol*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013, 158.

¹⁰ Andy Warhol Museum Archives, hereafter AWMA.

The Warholas retained the Rusyn language longer than many Rusyn-American families. Julia spoke Rusyn with her children and relatives all her life. Her older sons, Paul and John, were able to communicate easily with Carpatho-Rusyn kin in Slovakia when they visited in the early 1990s, and they even gave radio interviews in Rusyn. As a child, Andy spoke Rusyn until he went to school. A cousin wrote to him in 1965, 'You know Andy, I remember an amusing thing about you when you were about four years old. Your mother asked you what you're going to be when you grow up and you answered, "*Ya budu bom, ya vas zastreliu.*" Oh, how we all laughed.'¹¹ That is, in a comment that is of interest for more than just its language, at around four years of age, Andy told his family, 'I'm going to be a bum, and I'll shoot you all.'¹² In Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant culture, the term 'bum' had a sinister meaning that was stronger than the standard American connotation of tramp or vagrant. Akin to a menacing bogeyman, a 'bum' was an ominous malefactor, a rogue scoundrel, or a vague, ever-present spectre to induce good behavior in children. The sense and implication of Andy's childish threat is a topic for another discussion, but the inverted word order and his grammar, the use of a perfective future verb form, are quite correct.

Since there was no name for their *po-nashomu* speech style, Julia and her older sons often told uninformed Americans that they spoke Slovak. Because his mother emigrated from Czechoslovakia, Andy assumed he was speaking Czech with her, and he identified his ethnicity as 'Czechoslovakian'. In July 1967, the Lincoln Center's film festival featured Czech cinema of the New Wave movement. The *New Yorker's* reviewer described the films as 'amazing and unforgettable'.¹³ Noted for their rejection of conventional film forms, their mix of documentary and fiction, their nonprofessional actors and improvised dialogue, the avant-garde Czech films would naturally have attracted Warhol's attention. But he was also intrigued by the visiting delegation of Czech directors. He socialized with them at an organized get-together, and later, the Czechs attended a party at his studio, the Factory. Czech film director Jaromil Jireš recalled, '[Warhol] said something to me that was sort of like Czech, but I couldn't understand it. Then he denied that he spoke Czech at all.'¹⁴ In 1969, Woody Vasulka, a Czech video artist originally from Brno, who knew Warhol from Max's Kansas City and the Factory, tried to converse with him. Warhol refused to respond in Czech, but Vasulka believed he understood

¹¹ Mary (Sally) Zymboly, letter to Andy Warhol, 9 January 1965, AWMA.

¹² It is uncertain precisely to whom this threat was directed. The pronoun is the formal 'you', which children used to address a parent in some traditional Carpatho-Rusyn families. It could also be a plural 'you'. The context here seems to suggest that the entire family was Warhol's audience.

¹³ Penelope Gilliatt, 'The Current Cinema: Czech Wave in New York', *The New Yorker*, 1 July 1967, 54.

¹⁴ Jaromil Jireš, in Rudo Prekop and Mihal Cihlář, *Andy Warhol a Československo* [Andy Warhol and Czechoslovakia], Řevnice (Czechia): Arbor Vitae, 2011, 215.

it.¹⁵ Since there is some mutual intelligibility between one Slavic language and another, Warhol probably would have been able to pick up a word here and there or the general sense of a conversation. But his half-hearted efforts to communicate with Czechs in their language were futile, leading to embarrassment when his own language proved to be not up to par. Finally, near the end of his life, Warhol came to question his life-long ethnic identification. In 1986, he met the Czech model Paulina Porizkova and her mother. He commented in his diary, 'I guess maybe I'm not really Czech, because I didn't understand it when they were talking.'¹⁶

There is video evidence that as an adult, Warhol understood his mother's language perfectly and responded appropriately, although mostly in English, as was typical for children of immigrants. When Julia's sister visited from Miková in 1967, she reported that he seldom spoke to her, but he prayed together with her and his mother in Church Slavonic, the Rusyn liturgical language.¹⁷ His expressive ability in conversational Rusyn seemed limited to discrete lexical items, which he sometimes interspersed in his English-language discourse when speaking with his mother. That is, he knew individual words for everyday use, but not how to link them in grammatically correct syntax. Although there are few documented examples of his spoken Rusyn—precisely four short sentence fragments in one video—it is probably accurate to say that his pidgin Rusyn was on a lower level than Julia's pidgin English.

'Lay down, mom'

In 1965, Warhol told *Tape Recording* magazine, 'The tape machine is so easy to use. Anyone can do it.'¹⁸ In 1970, when he purchased a Sony Portapak, he began to experiment with video in earnest. With his assistants, Vincent Fremont and Michael Netter, he documented the goings-on in his studio on tapes that became known as *Factory Diaries*, uninterrupted and unedited footage of people talking or performing everyday activities. As 'easy to use' as the video camera may have been, before he focused it on friends and visitors, Warhol performed test-runs, with his mother as subject. Three videos, labelled by the Andy Warhol Museum 'Julia Warhola in Bed, Talking', 'Julia Warhola in T-shirt Sick', and 'Julia Warhola in Bed, Talking, Sleeping', were shot in Mrs. Warhola's apartment on the lower level of her son's

¹⁵ Woody Vasulka, in Prekop and Cihlák, *Andy Warhol a Československo*, 218.

¹⁶ Andy Warhol, *The Warhol Diaries*, ed. Pat Hackett, 1989; New York: Warner Books, 1991, 744.

¹⁷ Eva Bezekova, in Michal Bycko, *Nočné dialógy s Andym* [Nocturnal Dialogues with Andy], Prešov (Slovakia): CUPER, 1966, 82.

¹⁸ Richard Ekstract, 'Pop Goes the Videotape: An Underground Interview with Andy Warhol', *Tape Recording*, September–October 1965, as reprinted in *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews: 1962–1987*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith, New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004, 75.

Lexington Avenue townhouse.¹⁹ They were never shown in public, and until now, they were never screened by anyone who understood the Rusyn language. Julia, who does almost all the talking in the videos, is performing for an audience of one, her son. Since Rusyn, at the time, was confined to church and family, Warhol presumably did not anticipate that the tapes would ever be translated. Consequently, they represent private, unmediated interactions between mother and son and a window into their personal relationship. It is uncertain exactly when he acquired his video equipment, but Julia refers to it as 'brand new' in 'Julia in Bed Talking', and internal evidence dates the videos to late summer or early fall 1970. Julia had been hospitalized for a week in January, perhaps for a stroke, and she was being treated throughout the summer by doctors, caregivers, and visiting nurses. In all three videos, she is ill and visibly uncomfortable, but she valiantly follows Warhol's directions and plays her role as test subject.

In 'Julia Warhola in Bed, Talking', Warhol has settled his mother in the camera frame, lying in bed on her right side against an exposed-brick wall. While Andy fiddles with the camera, Julia talks—and talks—in Rusyn.²⁰ Her monologue is at times rambling, but she is articulate and coherent. Her Rusyn, intermixed with occasional English, is emotional and expressive. She speaks to Warhol as to a child, in endearing terminology and diminutives. *Tvoia koshul'ka tu brudna Andik, shirtka brudna* [Your shirt is dirty here, Andik], using a childish diminutive for the Rusyn word 'shirt' [*koshul'ka*] and then adding a diminutive Rusyn ending (*-ka*) to the English translation 'shirt'. Her monologue is laced generously with terms of endearment—Andik [pronounced Andeek], Andriiko, *synok* [little son], *synochko* [a more tender version of 'little son'], *syne mi zlaty* [my golden son]. However, she also uses these affectionate diminutives in reproaches about his indifference and neglect. As he prepares for a trip to Europe, she complains, her voice full of fear and distrust, *Hospodi* [Lord], who will be here with me, *synok?* Will you lock up the house? They would steal everything from you, *synok*. If somebody would find out that Andy Warhola is not here, you would have nothing to come back to. During the day is one thing, but at night I'm afraid to sleep here by myself. *Understand* [English], Andy?' Then, sarcastically, she scolds in Rusyn, 'But why would you care about that?'

While his mother desperately tries to evoke a response from him, Warhol is largely silent behind the camera. We first hear his voice when she complains that her side hurts and she tries to get up, moving out of the camera frame. 'Lay down, lay down, mom, lay down', he repeats, even as she responds in discomfort, 'Yoi,

¹⁹ 'Julia Warhola in Bed Talking', VR.00.0025; 'Julia Warhola in T-shirt, Sick', VR.30.0024; and 'Julia Warhola in Bed, Talking, Sleeping', VR.30.0015. 'Julia Warhola Watching Television' is just under a minute of footage at the beginning of Warhol's *Factory Diary* 'Whitney Museum Retrospective', VE.30.0004, AWMA.

²⁰ Darina Protivnak, a native speaker of Rusyn, assisted with the translation of Julia Warhola's language in these videos.

Andik'. At one point, the phone rings and Warhol carries on a conversation in another room, while Julia obediently remains in place. After another attempt to get up, protesting, 'My hip hurts, my side is hurting when I breathe', countered by the same 'Lay down, mom', she asks, like an eager-to-please child, 'So how is it, Andy? How I'm laying down? Is it all right?' To this question, there is no verbal response. Finally, after a long pause, during which she seems silently distressed, Warhol addresses her in a tender voice with the classic Rusyn expression of affection, an offer of food, using the Rusyn verb 'to eat': 'You want something to eat, mom? eat? *isty*? What *isty* you want?' In English, Warhol offers a sandwich, 'good sandwich', but Julia refuses, answering in Rusyn, 'I don't want to eat. Leave it, give me peace, Andy.' Mournfully, she sighs, 'If only I didn't have stomach problems, if only I could get over this somehow. But I don't think I will be around for very long, because my breath gets stuck here'.

For all her affection and distress, in the same thirty-minute video, Julia also reveals a spirited, feisty, and fiery personality that contrasts with the 'naïve and childlike' image often attributed to her. 'Everybody looks out for themselves', she complains cynically. Speaking about an acquaintance, she carps, 'For the whole world, she won't buy anything for herself. That's how [tightly] she holds onto money. She thinks she can eat it. And then she comes here and she's hungry.' Finally, Julia goes off on a serio-comic riff in Rusyn about a beauty salon on Lexington Avenue where she got a perm.

I don't know why I have a scab on my head. I don't know why I have peeled skin on my head. I don't know who gave that to me. And it's hurting me a lot. Is it because they burned my scalp when they were curling my hair? That damn medicine burned my skin. That old lady [pejorative]. It's the fault of that old *boss woman*, she burned my hair. For my *twenty-five dollars*, she burned my head with that strong evil stuff. I could have her arrested for what she did to my head. ... She burned my head. *With poison*. ... The old devil, she burned my head herself. The young ones wouldn't do that.... She's not that old, but I'm calling her that because I'm angry with her. If it were just my hair, it would be nothing, but it's my skin. She boiled it.²¹

²¹ Italicized words in this passage indicate phrases that Julia Warhola spoke using English. In his biography of Warhol, Blake Gopnik referred to this passage, citing me and Darina Protivnak as translators; *Warhol*, New York: Ecco/Harper-Collins, 2020, 739. However, Gopnik changed 'old devil' to 'old bitch', replacing the mild insult, an inoffensive expression of frustration, with a word that, in Rusyn, conveys malice and vulgarity. My translation with Protivnak, a native speaker of Rusyn from a village near Miková, was done with Julia Warhola's socio-cultural orientation in mind. Altering it misrepresents our translation, distorting Julia's tone, thought, and character.

Gifted with a theatrical personality, Julia developed a natural talent for performance as she practiced the folkways of her native culture. From weddings to religious liturgies, from St. John's Eve festivities to Bethlehem plays, Carpatho-Rusyn peasant culture was replete with ritual and tradition, and multiple versions of folk theatre were performed expertly by unsophisticated, barely literate peasants. Evgenii Nedziel'skii, a Russian ethnographic historian of Carpatho-Rusyn drama, compared the peasants' theatricalisation of everyday life to the elaborate court ceremony of English royalty: 'The theatrical ceremony of the royal court pales by comparison to the traditional, ritualistic, and superstitious aspect of everyday Carpatho-Rusyn peasant life.'²² Performance, in the sense that the term is used in performance studies—'a certain type of particularly involved and dramatised oral narrative'²³—was an integral part of Julia's communicative style throughout her life. From her earliest performances in Miková to the stories she told her children and recorded on tape, to her relationships with Warhol's New York friends and her appearances in his film and video, performativity was basic to Julia Warhola's personality.

Performance and performativity entail a purposeful projection of the self. Julia's outburst in the video magnifies her persona in a performative assertion of identity in a world where social constraints and language insufficiency restricted her self-expression. In this private session before Warhol's camera, she can transgress social and cultural norms, using a pejorative Rusyn term for an old woman, a folk expletive for 'devil', and finally, in a theatrical flourish, threatening to have the 'devil' arrested. The repeated phrase 'I don't know why ...' serves to position her as a character as well as a narrator in her story and emphasizes its poetic and expressive features.²⁴ The performance nature of her monologue is exposed when she reveals that her word choice was evaluative, rather than referential, since the 'old devil' was actually 'not that old'. Code-switching from Rusyn to English, she isolates and sets apart the terms 'boss woman', 'twenty-five dollars', and 'poison' to emphasize their importance. And with her final formulation of the damage to her hair and her skin—'she boiled it'—Julia reaches a dramatic catharsis. After the energetic monologue, delivered in a lively intonation, she becomes silent and pensive. A lengthy pause follows before she changes the subject.

²² Evgenii Nedziel'skii, *Ugro-russkii teatr* [Subcarpathian Rusyn theatre], Uzhhorod (in present-day Ukraine), 1941. It is noteworthy that the 'theatricalization of experience' was also part of the camp sensibility, as described by Susan Sontag in 'Notes on Camp', *Partisan Review*, 31: 4, 1964, 515-30.

²³ Kristin Langellier, 'Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know for Sure', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19, 1999, 127.

²⁴ See Kristin Langellier, *Storytelling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, loc. 344-45, Kindle Edition.

'I just make her take the pills'

In an interview with Warhol for the South African publication *Scope*, published in March 1973, interviewer George Gruskin was particularly interested in Warhol's mother, and the artist was loath to talk about her. Gruskin asks, 'You used to live with your mother, didn't you?' Warhol answers, 'Oh yes, she is around somewhere.' In fact, Julia had returned to Pittsburgh in 1971 and died November 22, 1972. Apropos of nothing, Warhol tells Gruskin that he regularly hurries home to give his mother her pills. When asked what language he speaks with her, he responds, 'I don't talk to her much. I just make her take the pills.'²⁵ One of Warhol's videos, 'Julia Warhola in T-shirt Sick,' cinematizes this difficult procedure. Julia speaks entirely in Rusyn with Andy and her nurse, who respond in English. The camera focuses on Julia, who sits on her bed. She is posing for the camera, and she flaunts her familiarity with the procedure, snapping, 'Don't touch anything, Nancy. He wants to do something with me.' She scolds Nancy: 'You'll break it. What do you know about it? ... I don't want you here. Go to the kitchen.' When Nancy returns and tries to give Julia her pills, she resists, concealing them in her hand. Nancy warns, 'No, no, you're going to lose them that way. Put them in the cap.' Julia responds irritably, 'Don't worry, do you think I'm stupid? I'm not crazy. Just go away. I'll give them to Andy.' Then she turns to her son, and her tone shifts markedly. 'Andrii, *synok* [little son], *syne mi zlaty* [my golden son], I can't eat now. I'll just have coffee.' Warhol patiently doles out her pills 'All these, Andy?' she asks tremulously. She swallows the pills slowly, with great difficulty. 'It won't go down. For all the world, it doesn't want to go down, Andy. The pills are stuck in my throat.' Julia complains that her ears are ringing, but her son is concerned with the pills, and urges her in Rusyn: '*No perulky neber do ruku? . . . No na druhu ruku?*' ['But didn't you put the pills in your hand? In the other hand?'] This awkward utterance is the only known audio record of Warhol's Rusyn-language speech. Julia does not immediately understand Warhol's question, because of the clumsy phrasing. 'I don't have them', she says, and then asks, 'In which hand?' Unsure of his grammar, Warhol changes the case ending: '*Na druhyi ruky. No?*' ['In your other hand?']²⁶

Julia goes on to insist, in Rusyn, that she has only a piece of paper in her hand, and she asks for water to swallow the pills. '*Rozumish, Andriik, chto perulky v hyrtani? Tot paperik ne good*' ['Do you understand, Andriik, that the pills are in my throat? This tissue is no good']. Julia frequently asks '*rozumish?*' ['do you understand?'] to check the communicative channel, to confirm the continued attention of her son, and to elicit a response. Warhol does not react, thwarting

²⁵ 'Who Is This Man Andy Warhol?' *Scope*, 16 March 1973, as reprinted in *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 207–08.

²⁶ It is difficult to translate Warhol's utterance exactly. It may be an imperative: 'Don't take the pills in your hand'. In addition, he seems to be improvising the inflectional endings. My translation here, and probably Julia's understanding, comes from context.

sustained dialogue. As he told Gruskin, 'I just make her take the pills'. After crossing herself three times and saying a prayer, Julia manages to swallow, or *eatwoti* [English 'eat' with a Rusyn verbal ending], a handful of pills and the lunch that Andy brings her. As breadcrumbs fall on her nightgown, she fears ants will feed on them, and momentarily she returns in her mind to a traumatic experience of the 1914–18 war, saying, 'The Germans will come and eat all this.' A cat meows in the background.



Figure 3 Film still of Julia Warhola from *Factory Diary*, 'Julia Warhola in Bed, Talking, Sleeping', ca. 1970–71, 1/2 in. reel-to-reel videotape, black and white, sound, 22 minutes. Camera by Andy Warhol. © The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of the Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.

'Julia Warhola in Bed, Talking, Sleeping' is the only one of the 'Julia videos' that has been shown in public at museums and film festivals. It seems to portray a peacefully sleeping Julia Warhola, but for the first time in these test-videos, she participates unwillingly. 'Andy, don't bother with me, I sleep.' Her mixed Rusyn-English monologue is disjointed and querulous. Again, she has trouble eating ('Maybe I'll choke, Andy'), laments that she does not have a daughter, and complains about 'Jed *paskudnyi*' [disgusting Jed],²⁷ who seemed to be burning something in the kitchen. In English, she asks, 'What's there, Andy? He understand, Andy? Nobody understand. I not happy, Andy.' In both Rusyn and English, Julia repeatedly asks for confirmation that she has been understood, but her concern is only partly about language comprehension. She is asking to be heard and

²⁷ Jed Johnson worked at Warhol's studio, took care of Andy after his shooting in June 1968, and helped with Julia as her health declined. He moved in with Andy in early fall 1968. Although he continued to help with housekeeping and took Julia to doctor's appointments, Julia never liked him. Paul Warhola shared her opinion. See Victor Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography*, New York: Da Capo Press, 2003, 310. Johnson's relationship with Warhol lasted twelve years.

acknowledged, but she does not receive that concession from her son. Finally, she tells Warhol she is not up to performing for him, and concludes, 'If I could only take some pills so I could sleep. My head is burning, my eyes too, that's how much I want to sleep.' Mercifully, she falls asleep, with her glasses and kerchief on, and she sleeps until the tape runs out (fig. 3).

Bringing back old people

In a press conference covered in the *New York Times* on 11 November 1966, Warhol refers to a movie he made 'yesterday afternoon': 'It starred my mother, who played an aging peroxide movie star with a lot of husbands. We're trying to bring back old people.'²⁸ This was Warhol's nonchalant announcement of Julia Warhola's screen debut in *The George Hamilton Story*, commonly known today as 'Mrs. Warhol'.

This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of Warhol's film technique, but it is important to note the most significant features—his disdain for plot, scripts, and technical matters. 'I never liked the idea of picking out certain scenes and pieces of time and putting them together, because then it ends up being different from what really happened—it's just not like life.'²⁹ Most of his films are improvisations organized around a sketchy narrative plotline, which is constantly transgressed when the actors respond to off-screen comments or play to the camera. Warhol insisted that professional actors 'are all wrong for my movies.'³⁰ He preferred amateur performers who were spontaneous and capricious: 'What I like are things that are different every time. That's why I like amateur performers and bad performers—you can never tell what they'll do next.'³¹ His favourite amateurs had strong personalities: 'Somehow, we attract people who can turn themselves on in front of the camera. In this sense, they're *really* superstars.'³² In 1966, Julia Warhola, who had honed her acting skills in Miková folk dramas, became a Warhol superstar. Her tenuous command of English added an unpredictable creative dimension to her performance.

The George Hamilton Story, which consists of two thirty-three-minute reels, was never printed or screened publicly during Warhol's lifetime. Shot in Julia's ground floor apartment in Warhol's Lexington Avenue townhouse, it features Julia with her co-star Richard Rheem, Warhol's then boyfriend who lived with him for

²⁸ 'The Painting on the Dress Said "Fragile"', *The New York Times*, 11 November 1966, AWMA. The reporter comments that Warhol made the remark about old people 'a little sadly'.

²⁹ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s*, New York: Harper and Row, 1980, 110.

³⁰ David Bourdon, 'Warhol as Filmmaker', *Art in America*, 59: 3, May-June 1971, 51.

³¹ Warhol, *Philosophy*, 82.

³² Letitia Kent, 'Andy Warhol Moviemanager: "It's Hard to Be Your Own Script"', *Vogue*, 1 March 1970, as reprinted in *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 187.

about six weeks during the winter of 1966.³³ Also present off-screen, and occasionally heard on the soundtrack, are Paul Morrissey and Susan Pile. Pile described Julia as 'gracious and nice, albeit unintelligible'.³⁴ Most reviewers of the film have commented on her 'almost unintelligible, heavy Czech accent'.³⁵ However, for viewers who are familiar with Julia's speech style and knowledgeable about the Carpatho-Rusyn context, her comedic talent steals the show, and her self-revelatory performance discloses private thoughts, feelings, and memories. The resulting cinematic portrait differs substantially from the standard description of her in film-festival promos as 'Warhol's delightfully oddball mother'.³⁶

The film, shot five years before the *Factory Diaries*, shows Julia at her best. The opening image is a close-up of the almost seventy-five-year-old Julia, wearing glasses, a pink flowered-print blouse and a black and white checked dirndl skirt. Her permed grey-blond hair is covered with a loose net that ties under her chin, an American version of the cap or kerchief worn by married Carpatho-Rusyn women in the Old Country (fig. 4).³⁷ J. J. Murphy, an American scholar of Warhol's films, says, 'She looks very much like an Eastern European peasant.'³⁸ But the Slovak screenwriter and film theorist, Ivan Stadtrucker, who is undoubtedly more familiar with East European peasants, has a different opinion. 'Based on this film, the viewer gets to know Mrs. Julia Warhola as a gentle, intelligent woman who, in her appearance and her psychology, is reminiscent of an elementary school teacher. Her personality differs from that of the primitive, rural woman described in [some] memoirs.'³⁹ In fact, while Julia's language and mannerisms have much in common with Rusyn peasant women, her animated personality and her genteel appearance would set her apart dramatically from her peers in Europe, as becomes clear when her sister visits from Miková the following summer.

³³ See Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography*, 263.

³⁴ E-mail from Susan Pile, 25 July 2015.

³⁵ Douglas Crimp remarks that the film narrative is comprehensible only from Richard Rheem's part of the dialogue, in his book 'Our Kind of Movie': *The Films of Andy Warhol*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012, 123.

³⁶ Harvard Film Archive, Film Series, 8 February 2004, <https://harvardfilmarchive.org/calendar/four-of-andy-warhols-most-beautiful-women-2004-02>, accessed 3 May 2021.

³⁷ Ara Osterweil repeats the 'nearly unintelligible Ruthenian accent' commonplace, but her description of Julia as 'puttering around the kitchen in housecoat and babushka' is unaccountable. 'Sons, Mothers, and Lovers: Ara Osterweil on Andy Warhol's and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's Queer Home Movies', *Artforum*, 55: 9, May 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201705/ara-osterweil-on-andy-warhol-s-and-rainer-werner-fassbinder-s-queer-home-movies-67936>, accessed 14 May 2021.

³⁸ J. J. Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012, 147.

³⁹ Ivan Stadtrucker, 'Andy Warhol a Júlia', *Literárny týždenník* [Bratislava: Literary Weekly], 23: 39–40, 18 November 2010, 16. Stadtrucker refers specifically to memoirs by Ultra Violet and Viva Hoffman.



Figure 4 Film still from Andy Warhol, *The George Hamilton Story*, 1966, 16mm film, color, sound, 67 minutes. © The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of the Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.

Richard Rheem was a darkly handsome twenty-year-old in 1966. Julia affectionately calls him 'Richik' (pronounced Reecheek, with a trilled R), 'Richko', and in a double diminutive, 'Richichko'. In characteristic Rusyn speech style, his name, in one version or another, peppers almost every sentence. The relationship between Julia and 'Richik' is close and playful. She strokes his hair and touches his face, they tickle one another, and in the course of the film, they refer to secrets and shared activities, whispering with furtive smiles about shopping together for whiskey. Their dialogue, filled with imprecise formulations, misunderstandings, and mispronunciations, is the focus of Warhol's film. When the conversation flags, Julia prods Rheem, 'Wake up. C'mon, talk something.' Nonstop chatter was routine for Julia, whether or not she had a willing interlocutor. Her urging of Rheem to 'talk something' echoes curator Henry Geldzahler's recollection of a phone call from Warhol at 2:00 am, asking him to meet for an important talk. 'For a minute or two there was silence while I waited for him to broach the subject. Finally, I asked him why he had gotten me out of bed. Andy said, "We've got to talk ... say something"'.⁴⁰ Andy's love for 'talkers', ('I really don't care that much about "Beauties." What I really like are Talkers'),⁴¹ started with his Rusyn-speaking mother.

⁴⁰ Henry Geldzahler, 'Andy Warhol: A Memoir', in Geldzahler, *Making It New: Essays, Interviews, and Talks*, New York: Turtle Point Press, 1994, 44.

⁴¹ Warhol, *Philosophy*, 62.

Word games

The George Hamilton Story opens with what seems to be an impromptu conversation between Julia and Richard Rheem. On closer analysis, it becomes apparent that it is a vetted interview, in which Rheem asks pointed questions meant to elicit predetermined stories and linguistic peculiarities. In the opening shot, Julia nods to the camera and addresses Rheem: 'What we gonna talk now, Rich'? Rheem responds, 'Tell the story about the wedding', a favourite topic of Julia's that Rheem would have known from the *Esquire* interview that had been published just days earlier, and probably from previous conversations. But Julia resists. 'Oh no, that not ... when me was little girl, Rich ... no, I gonna talk something else for you, Richik.' Julia interrupts the presumed planned narrative and, probably on cue, she redirects the conversation, asking Rheem how old he is. Rheem answers facetiously that he will be seventy-five on 20 November. In fact, it is Julia who will turn seventy-five, a fact that Rheem clearly knew.

Rheem had met Andy Warhol a few months earlier in San Francisco at a party to celebrate an appearance of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, Warhol's multimedia production in which Factory regulars danced to the music of the Velvet Underground against the background of Warhol's films. In a letter from 27 July, he reminds Warhol of their meeting, telling him that he was 'turned on by the Warhol scene' and especially interested in Warhol's offer to be in his films. 'I would like to get this film deal over with one way or the other ... So if you still want me for your films—I'm yours, for your films.'⁴² Rheem appeared in four screen tests and a few other Warhol films. According to Victor Bockris, he 'fit the profile of the shy, egoless young man on whom Warhol could assert his will. Sometimes he took a small part in a movie but his personality did not lend itself to the kind of dramatic self-expression Andy's movies required.'⁴³ This film with Warhol's mother may have been a kind of audition. According to Gerard Malanga, while Rheem lived with Warhol, he spent little time at the Factory.⁴⁴ He seems to have socialized mostly with Julia. From their conversations, it is clear that he knows about her background and her family, even down to one 'cousin Johnny' who was a friend of Julia's son John. As they banter back and forth, Rheem scrambles to direct, and sometimes to keep up with, Julia's performance, which is grounded largely in verbal play.

Their conversation touches on food, language, cats, the Greek Catholic priesthood, and Julia's childhood task of tending cows. Rheem steers the conversation to Julia and her son's previous residence in New York, which he refers to several times as 'a junk house', exploiting for comic purposes Julia's idiosyncratic

⁴² Richard Rheem, letter to Andy Warhol, 18 August 1966, AWMA.

⁴³ Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography*, 263. For unknown reasons, Bockris changed Rheem's name to Green. Details of his life after his connection with Warhol are unknown. He died in California in 2012 at age sixty-six. On Rheem, see also Gopnik, *Warhol*, 516-17.

⁴⁴ Gerard Malanga, interview by the author, 2 March 2016.

characterization of their notoriously messy apartment at 242 Lexington. When she says, 'We move here 1960', Rheem states, simultaneously, '1960', adding 'I'm so telepathic, aren't I?' Clearly not understanding 'telepathic', but showing an intellectual quickness, Julia responds, 'You remember everything.' Similar manipulative techniques lead to conversations about her family and her cats—Hester ('She was really good, she was smart') and the 'black bum', who keeps her up at night with his meow. The crew laughs at some of Julia's old-world word choices and nonstandard usages like *bum* and *bogeyman*, as well as her faulty pronunciation. Rheem plays with her as one would with a child to have her repeat *yogo* (her word for yogurt), chuckling each time she says it, to Julia's amused perplexity. The effect is to draw attention to Julia's eccentricity and the peculiarities of her nonstandard English, playing on the style of the *Esquire* interview that Andy was said to abhor. Mrs. Warhola's unintelligibility and her innocent participation in the verbal buffoonery is a primary source of the film's humour.

Warhol used language differences for creative confusion in other films made around the same time as *The George Hamilton Story* — mangled Spanish in *The Life of Juanita Castro* (1965), German in *Beauty #2* (1965), French in *Ari and Mario* (1966). But random words in those relatively common languages are nothing compared to the comic muddle that is created by Julia's garbled English.⁴⁵

Julia Warhola: I don't know talk English.

Richard Rheem: Yes, you do.

JW: Oh Richik, talk little bit, see?

RR: What about the first time you came to New York? [...]

JW: When me come from Europe, you know, when me come from Europe, I don't know nothing talk. This time you know, I want, ask some lady how name boy, you know, boy. One lady come from Europe, fat lady, and she say, Europe. [Pause.] I say, I know how talk English. I know what mean carrot.

RR: You can say carrot.

JW: Carrot.

RR: The vegetable?

JW: Carrot.

RR: You can say carrots.

JW: Carrot, carrot.

RR: Carrot. [Simultaneously.]

JW: Oh, carrot.

RR: Fourteen carat?

⁴⁵ Rendering spoken language in written form, especially nonstandard dialects, may seem to imply inferiority or a negative stereotype. Here and throughout, I intend no pejorative attitude in my presentation of Julia Warhola's oral performance in her own voice. Rather, I consider Julia's accent and vernacular language to be integral elements of her verbal art.

JW: No, no fourteen carat, vegetable.

RR: Oh, the vegetable, the food.

The ethnolinguistic borderland where Julia lived in Europe nurtured metalinguistic awareness even in uneducated peasants. Referring to the 'fat lady' from Europe, Julia goes on to instruct her young American interlocutor.

JW: She say she know talk, what mean bread.

RR: Bread.

JW: Bread. You know, for Jewish peoples, name *broyt*.

RR: *Broyt*?

JW: English—bread.

RR: Bread.

JW: A Czechoslovak-a—*khlib*. You understand?

RR: *Khlib*.

JW: *Khlib*. I don't know what talk with you. Ask Andy something . . .

Rheem changes the subject.

In a lecture about 'Mrs. Warhol' at the German Film Institute and Museum, media and cultural studies professor Brigitte Weingart argued that the wordplay mix-up of 'carrots' and 'carats' encapsulates the blending of reality and fantasy, private life and performance, and the ironic contrast between fictional, glamorous Hollywood stars and the artless, real-life Julia Warhola.⁴⁶ This assessment is certainly an improvement over the 'delightfully oddball mother' cliché, but lacking the Rusyn language and context, Weingart's analysis misses the private subtexts and ironic contrasts encapsulated in Julia's multilingual monologues.

After another discussion of pussycats, Julia tries to introduce her own topic. Once again, she announces a performance narrative, with 'when me was little girl'.

JW: You know Richik, when me was little girl, I was stuck, hurting. [With emotion.] I go to ... my post office was far away from farm, named Havaj [pronounced Havai]—this post office.

RR: Hawaii? You went to Hawaii?

Struggling to make herself understood, Julia is delighted at what seems to be Rheem's grasp of her story, and she responds eagerly:

⁴⁶ Brigitte Weingart, 'Carrots/carats: Die doppelte Erscheinung der "Mother of Pop Art" in Mrs. Warhol', lecture, German Film Institute and Museum, Frankfurt, 16 January 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKMUO1KF8ao>, accessed 3 May 2021.

JW: Yeah, Havaj ... was Havaj name, this post office. You know this post office was named Havaj.⁴⁷



Figure 5 Signpost at the entrance to the village of Havaj, Slovakia, in Slovak and Rusyn languages. Photograph by Maria Silvestri, 2018.

Viewers familiar with the Carpatho-Rusyn context would know that Havaj is a village near Miková that served as the postal center (fig. 5). Julia goes on, mixing Rusyn conjunctions into her English-language narrative.

JW: And you know what? Next door living priest *i* [and] ... wife, *i* four children. He always call me ... Julia, go to the Havaj, bring me a letter. You know letter? I don't know how say English.

RR: Letter? [Rheem picks up a piece of paper to show what he means.]

JW: Yes, here this letter. You know what, Richik, I go. Was big woods. Maybe two mile. I no running, I flying. [With animation.] I come back, bring letter to for priest, he say, you no was not post office Havaj. I say yeah I was. I give you letter, you know, too many letter, you know for people. ... He say oh, how you flying. I'm flying, Richik. I was really hurting. I was, maybe I was thirteen years old. [Distressed, tearful.] Always I go help, priest children, you know, priest children.

⁴⁷ The Slovak and the Rusyn words for 'Hawaii' are, in fact, the same as the name of the village.

Julia is then sidetracked onto a discussion of married priests in the Greek Catholic church.

The full import of Julia's narrative is uncertain, since we do not have the statement in the original Rusyn. But it seems clear that she struggled to 'fly' to please the priest, and she smarted from his distrust. At this point in the story, her distress is apparent, her voice reveals genuine agitation, and she is almost in tears. Today, the road from Miková to Havaj is 3.6 miles, although Julia would have taken a back way through the forest. In mountainous terrain—Miková is 1362 feet and Havaj, 906 feet above sea level—before paved roads, in bad weather, one can imagine that the trip from Miková to Havaj was no easy task, and it seems she was called on to perform it frequently, with no thanks from the priest. In the film shoot, Julia gets no sympathy from her interlocutor, her audience, or her son behind the camera, who surely had heard the story before and knew the facts. In making the film, Warhol may have been more interested in the fortuitous semantic shift that placed his immigrant mother on a beach in Hawaii, a phenomenon that he later called 'transmutation'.

Something that I look for in an associate is a certain amount of misunderstanding of what I'm trying to do. Not a fundamental misunderstanding; just minor misunderstandings here and there. When someone doesn't quite completely understand what you want from them, or when they didn't quite hear what you told them to do, or when the tape is bad, or when their own fantasies start coming through, I often wind up liking what comes out of it all better than I liked my original idea. ... If people never misunderstand you, and if they do everything exactly the way you tell them to, they're just transmitters of your ideas, and you get bored with that. But when you work with people who misunderstand you, instead of getting transmission you get transmutation, and that's much more interesting in the long run.⁴⁸

In this respect, Julia is a perfect associate for Warhol, for try as she might, she cannot follow directions, and the inadvertent misunderstandings she generates are artistically productive.

The irony and the art of this 'Havaj' sequence is in the fact that Warhol was the only one present—as well as the only one in most subsequent screenings—who 'got' the joke. In her study of Warhol's home movies, Ara Osterweil notes that in 'Mrs. Warhol', as in many of Warhol's films, 'fiction dissolves into documentary'.⁴⁹ In fact, the opposite takes place in this sequence. If Warhol had filmed a documentary, the full story of Julia's travails just hinted at here might be told—

⁴⁸ Warhol, *Philosophy*, 99. Weingart also refers to Warhol's concept of transmutation in relation to Julia's performance.

⁴⁹ Osterweil, 'Sons, Mothers, and Lovers'.

taking the cows to pasture, surviving the war, and working for the priest's family. These were real aspects of her life, and today the lack of information in this potentially revealing first-hand narrative is regrettable. But for Warhol, it is not the factual, documentary details that matter, but the creative 'psychodrama' that emerges when Julia's memory intrudes into present-day life. In the words of Richard Whitehall,

Warhol is a camera with the shutter open. He records, quite coldly, that moment when fantasy clashes with reality and out of the dissonance come glimpses of pain, loneliness, fear, too close to the soul to be simulated. When his actors, despite themselves, seem to stumble over truths they'd rather not face. For improvisation and psychodrama are the heartbeat of these movies.⁵⁰

'Chekai, dear husband . . .'

In the second reel of the film, Julia plays an aging Hollywood star who has poisoned her previous fifteen husbands and is now married to the young, attractive Rheem. 'Mrs. Warhol' is thematically related to Warhol's 'Hollywood trilogy', *Hedy, Lupe*, and *More Milk Yvette*, a series filmed in 1965 and 1966 devoted to Hollywood actresses from the 1930s and 1940s who were known for glamour, scandal, and defiance of moral conventions.⁵¹ In terms of narrative, 'Mrs. Warhol' derives most closely from *Hedy*. Hedy Lamarr, billed as the world's most beautiful woman, was notorious for her controversial role in the German film *Ecstasy*, where she appeared in the nude. But what attracted Warhol's attention was Lamarr's arrest in January 1966 for shoplifting \$86 of merchandise, followed by a sensational six-day trial, in which she attributed her crime to the failure of her sixth marriage.⁵² Warhol's *Hedy* includes factual episodes from this then well-known story, as well as references to Lamarr's role in the film *White Cargo*, where she played an African seductress who poisons her lover. Adding ironic distance, in Warhol's film *Hedy* was played by the transvestite Mario Montez.

This is the context in which the naïve Julia Warhola is figuratively translated as 'an aging peroxide movie star with a lot of husbands'. The ironic incongruity between Hedy Lamarr and the elderly Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant is inescapable, except perhaps to Julia herself, who was most likely not familiar with the

⁵⁰ Richard Whitehall, 'Andiflix II: The Home Movie as Art Form', *Coast FM and Fine Arts*, September 1969, 24, <https://warholfilmads.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/war-coast-12.jpg>, accessed 3 May 2021.

⁵¹ See Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera*, 86–92, 160–65.

⁵² On this story, see '1940s Star Also Tried for Theft: Shoplifting Charges Against Sultry Hedy Lamarr Drew Courtroom Crowds', https://www.recordnet.com/article/20021110/a_news/311109938, accessed 15 May 2021.

Hollywood legend. As with his casting of Mario Montez in *Hedy*, Warhol sets up his mother to subvert Hollywood standards of glamour and cinematic conventions.

Julia opens the second reel of the film by calling to Rheem: 'Richik, you ready? Come, I show you how I do for you. Eat scrambled eggs. Maybe I give it for you, for you girlfriend, Susie' [Susan Pile].

RR: I don't have a girlfriend. You're my wife.

JW: That's what everyone tell me.

RR: What do I need a girlfriend for, when I have a wife like you?

JW: I'm too old for you, too old for you. You just keeping me for cook.

RR: That's not true.

JW: You need sweetheart, for date, for love. ... If you be good husband, I always be making for you scrambled eggs. ... Everyday. You be so big, you can't eat no more.



Figure 6 Film still of Julia Warhola and Richard Rheem from Andy Warhol, *The George Hamilton Story*, 1966, 16mm film, color sound, 67 minutes. © The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of the Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.

Julia makes scrambled eggs and coffee for the crew, while teasing Rheem and chatting continuously (fig. 6). As she focuses on feeding her guests, she forgets the role she is supposed to be playing and asks the off-screen observers if they want sugar, pepper, or more coffee, moving out of camera range to serve them. Rheem

repeatedly tries to bring her back to the premise of the plot by insisting that she is poisoning his food and making him her next victim. There is a good bit of playful banter, in which Julia gives as good as she gets, interspersing Rusyn words within her heavily accented English.

JW: OK mister [pronounced *meester*], my dear husband. ... *Chekai* [wait], I give you coffee. *Chekai, chekai*, dear husband, you such a big one, you very big one. ... Husband, you too big. You leg too big.

RR: You don't like me now. I'm too big.

JW: I like you sometime, when you sleep.

RR: You're gonna get rid of me now, because I'm too big?

JW: I think so. I be looking for 'nother one. With one leg.

RR: With what?

JW: With one leg. So he can't beat me.

The off-screen observers laugh.

As the action proceeds, Julia becomes visibly tired of play-acting, and she tries to tell her own story. In the words of cinema professor David James, the 'drama of the Warhol narratives ... resides in the interplay between the different levels of artifice in any one actor/character as much as it does in the interaction between the separate characters. ... The primary interest lies in people assuming roles; after that point ... in people falling out of them'.⁵³ In the process of 'falling out' of her role, Julia Warhola emerges from the fictional construct of 'Mrs. Warhol' into her own personal performance.

RR: For what movie did you win your academy award?

JW: Oh Richik, no movie. This time there was war. You know? You see, about war ...

But before Julia can describe her wartime hardships, Rheem interrupts, dismissing her real-life story and returning to the fictitious Academy Award: 'A war movie? ... *Combat*?' Rheem had fortuitously transmuted Havaj to Hawaii, but his effort now to place Julia in *Combat!*, a popular television series in 1966, fails. Disappointed at being rebuffed in her effort to convey her horrific wartime experience, Julia deflects his question, returning to her guests: 'I put in pepper for Paul. *Chekai*, Paul—I talk to you, I talk to you Slovak.' She chuckles at her own vacillation between English and Rusyn, which contributes to the fluctuation between reality and illusion—at least for those who understand it. Rheem continues to push the premise of the plot, and Julia plays along.

⁵³ David James, 'The Producer as Author', in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, ed. Michael O'Pray, London: British Film Institute, 1989, 136.

JW: I put poison in that black pepper. [Laughter from crew.] I always poison with black pepper.

RR: Why don't we have a party and poison everybody with black pepper.

JW: I won't poison nobody, only old men.

RR: Just old men?

JW: Old men, who want marry me.

She tells Rheem she can't remember how many husbands she has poisoned, but, she says, 'I'm gonna keep you for rest of you life.' Richik responds with feeling, 'You really like me.' But to Rheem's gesture, she replies, 'You want kiss, I no kiss you. [Shakes head.] No, I kiss nobody.'⁵⁴

As she tires noticeably, the comedy turns to pathos. Julia refuses to play along with Rich's party-planning, and says, 'Nothing to do then. Sleep, go sleep, Richik. ... You be nice boy, but nobody wants you, me no want you. Susie no want you.' Although she chuckles as she says it, Rheem looks sad, then smiles uneasily and says with emotion, 'It's not funny when nobody wants you.' Finally, Julia looks directly into the camera, to Warhol, and says, 'Already finished, no? Andy, nothing to do, put away.' Warhol does not comply, and the camera continues to roll. Then with determination in her voice, she again starts her own story, announcing a performance for the third time, with 'When me was little girl.'

JW: You know Richik.

RR: What?

JW: When me was little girl, was always working *na* [on] farm. Always go to shepherd, grass for cow.

Misunderstanding her, Rheem asks, 'You chopped grass for cows?' Happy to think she's been understood, Julia agrees:

Cows, yes. Yes, I chop it. ... In Europe you want milk from cow, you have to get something for cow. You know I a farmer, ten cow my mama and *didi* [grandfather] have ... maybe nine year old I was. I chopped wheat, *toto* [that is] grass, you know, grass? I say wheat, I know grass. Green grass, nice, grass for cow eating. ... [Proudly] Czechoslovak-a. Was my Europe, long time ago.

Ignoring her interjection and bringing her back to the narrative line, Rheem asks: 'How many husbands did you have in Czechoslovakia?' In a tone that expresses

⁵⁴ In tone and phrase, Julia's ripostes call to mind Carpatho-Rusyn women's lyrical folksongs, which she continued to sing and record in her sixties. See Elaine Rusinko, *Andy Warhol's Mother: Julia Warhola and the Carpatho-Rusyn Immigrant Experience*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming.

weariness and surrender, Julia answers, 'I don't know, seven-eight-nine. I don't know.' And then, Rheem asks,

RR: Did you ever marry a cow?

JW: A cow? Cow?

And the reel ends just when the treatment of Julia begins to take what might be interpreted as a sadistic turn.

Lost in translation

Through a process of creative misunderstanding, the film fortuitously provides insight into the authentic, unstudied Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant woman, for whom the pathos of a childhood burdened by tending cows contends with pride in the number of cows she had to tend. The film also generates in the audience a certain degree of sympathy for her perplexed discomfiture. In Warhol's films of this period, the end of the reel usually determined the end of the scene, and performers are often cut off in midsentence. By chance, this reel, the second and final reel of the film, ends with an effective rejoinder from Julia. Her incredulous repetition of the question 'A cow?' hangs in the air, a potent retort to the mortification that she is scarcely conscious of.

Warhol film scholars have debated whether in his movies cruel manipulation occurs in what may seem to be objective, documentary-like treatments. Warhol said, 'I 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.'⁵⁵ In *The George Hamilton Story*, Warhol sets up a situation that plays on his mother's humble background and her lack of English proficiency. Richard Rheem and the crew members tease Julia, mostly in good fun, although not without knowing mockery. Artful and quick-witted, she responds like the improvisational actress she learned to be in Miková. Most viewers of the film are charmed by Mrs. Warhola's sunny personality, affectionate gestures, and quirky eccentricity, even as they founder in the flow of her unintelligible chatter. According to Ara Osterweil, 'In spite of its ironic conceit, Mrs. Warhol is one of the most touching and least sadistic cinematic portraits Warhol ever made.'⁵⁶

In the words of scholar Brian Schiff, 'Narrating is an expressive act in which life experiences and understanding of life are articulated and made meaningful through their declaration in our present circumstances and in collaboration with co-

⁵⁵ Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, 110.

⁵⁶ Osterweil, 'Sons, Mothers, and Lovers'.

actors.⁵⁷ Julia's narrative performance of her childhood experiences in Miková achieved Warhol's desired 'psychodrama', as his mother confronted past fear and painful truths. But her own goal of self-presentation through narrative performance is ultimately unsuccessful. Language insufficiency prevented her from bridging the gap between her experience and her storytelling, and, faced with a blank camera instead of an attentive audience, she is blocked and frustrated. Ultimately-her pain and fear become a trigger for comedy. On the surface level, she wins over the audience with her sincerity and good-natured humour. But viewers who understand the multiple levels of meaning in her exposition feel her distress and isolation.⁵⁸

During the film shoot, the only onlooker who understood Julia's language and her stories was her son, the man behind the camera. One gets the impression that many of Julia's domestic performances began with 'When me was little girl'. Warhol had probably heard the stories about the war, the cows, and Havaj past the point of boredom. In his film, the seemingly impatient camera, which zooms in to a cup of scrambled eggs, a bag of A&P coffee, and a Tem Tee hot chili peppers jar, might be interpreted as Warhol's bored dismissal of familiar tales. But Rheem, the unaware interlocutor, perceives her stories from a naive viewpoint, revitalizing them and generating a new vision of old trivialities. For Warhol, this is the very definition of art, even if, in this case, he is the only one to appreciate it. The creative defamiliarization of Julia's stories through her interaction with Richard Rheem transformed them into cinematic art, even as it denied Julia—and future generations of viewers—documentary truth. Weingart says, 'Even more than in other Warhol films in which the actors fall out of their roles, "Mrs. Warhol" gets its momentum from the private persona insistently attracting attention to itself.' A more complete understanding of the language and context of the interaction enhances the dramatic tension between the artifice of the screen-star persona and the truth of Julia Warhola, ultimately producing as much pathos as comedy.

Mommy issues

Most commentators on 'Mrs. Warhol' have focused on the mother-son relationship, rather than the depiction of Julia Warhola. J. J. Murphy calls the film 'a highly convoluted Oedipal fantasy', and he refers to the title as 'incestuous'.⁵⁹ According to Weingart, since a person of this name does not exist outside the film, 'Mrs. Warhol'

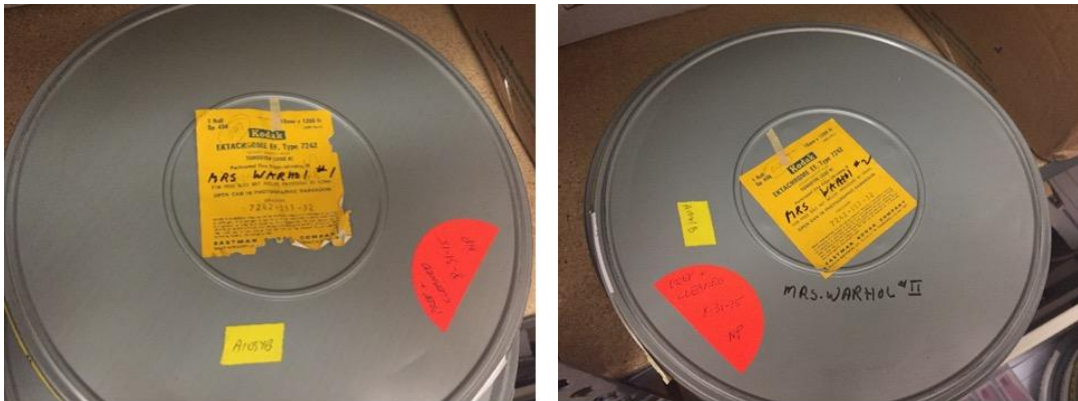
⁵⁷ Brian Schiff, 'The Function of Narrative: Toward a Narrative Psychology of Meaning', *Narrative Works: Issues, Investigations and Interventions*, 2: 1, 2012, 37–38.

⁵⁸ A written transcript or description of the film cannot convey the actor's intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal cues that amplify the substance of her utterance.

⁵⁹ Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera*, 151, 146.

was a fictional construct who might signify Andy's wife or his female alter-ego.⁶⁰ In Ara Osterweil's interpretation, the film's title—'Mrs. Warhol' rather than Mrs. Warhola—suggests that Julia was essentially her son's wife rather than the wife of her late husband, who, following the premise of the plot, was presumably one of the twenty-five that she had killed. 'Thus, in a film that initially seems to be yet another 16-mm bagatelle, Warhol manages to unite himself, his mother, and his lover in a scene of patricidal queer intimacy that lauds the death of the hetero-normative family.'⁶¹ As intriguing as such speculation may be, in this case, Warhol's meaning is, in fact, 'on the surface', in the film's title.

From Susan Pile's comments, it is clear that the film's intended title during shooting was *The George Hamilton Story*. That title has been largely lost in the literature and catalogues. Never printed or released, the raw footage exists only as original camera negative, and is preserved in the Andy Warhol Museum Archives in two canisters labelled in an unknown hand, 'MRS WARHOL', most likely by someone who simply used Andy's last name to designate Julia Warhola, the focal point of the film (figs. 7, 8). According to Greg Pierce, director of film and video at The Warhol Museum, the popular title 'Mrs. Warhol' was not assigned by the filmmaker but was derived from what was found on the can.⁶² Searching for any deeper meaning Warhol may have intended by the phrase 'Mrs. Warhol', then, is a diverting, but baseless, exercise.



Figures 7 and 8 Film canisters containing reels one and two of *The George Hamilton Story*, labelled in an unknown hand 'MRS. WARHOL'. Photographs by Greg Pierce, Director of Film and Video, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, 2018.

Nonetheless, the suggestions of Oedipal fantasy cannot be neglected, as they underlie several relationships touched on in the film. In the first reel, when Julia finally runs out of conversation topics, she asks, 'What else?' and takes a furtive

⁶⁰ Weingart, 'Carrots/carats: Die doppelte Erscheinung der "Mother of Pop Art" in Mrs. Warhol'.

⁶¹ Osterweil, 'Sons, Mothers, and Lovers'.

⁶² Greg Pierce, personal communication, 2 April 2018.

look into the camera, at her son. According to Susan Pile, Warhol was standing just out of frame, feeding her lines, topics, and directions. In response, Julia jumps up and says, 'I be pressing already. C' mon, Richik. I iron you shirt', apparently a pre-planned activity. After setting up an ironing board and fumbling energetically for an extension cord, she unexpectedly deviates from the plan and picks up some laundry. 'I be pressing for you. I be pressing for you *gachi*. Rich, you don't know pressing? Rich, c' mon, I be pressing for you underwear. Underwear is *gachi*, Rich. I be pressing for you *gachi*.' The word *gachi*, used by Rusyn-Americans as a kind of inside joke, has a funny and slightly naughty connotation. Julia irons a pair of men's jockey briefs, then lifts and shakes them out, to the laughter of Rheem and the crew. The effect achieved by her unforeseen turn to *gachi* shows Julia's flare for comedy and is, as Warhol described 'transmutation', better than his original idea.

After folding underwear and socks in accordance with Julia's directions, Rheem returns to the script and asks her to iron his shirt, saying 'I'll take it off.' Julia objects: 'No, no, no. Take jersey. Somebody see you ... somebody see you in window.' He takes off his long-sleeved green shirt, stands shirtless for a moment, smiling knowingly and seductively into the camera, and then puts on the black T-shirt that Julia hands him.⁶³ Julia begins to teach him how to iron a shirt, chattering constantly: 'I be your boss teacher ... do it like this ... do it nice straight ... always pull more straight ... you don't have to squeeze, take it easy ... you good boy, Richik.' Her use of the popular idiomatic English phrase 'Take it easy', in an artificial, stylized intonation and a not entirely appropriate context, exposes an ingenuous attempt to sound modishly American.⁶⁴ The implicitly maternal role Julia has been playing in relation to Rheem becomes explicit:

JW: I bet your mama no teach you.

RR: No, she no teach me.

JW: You be good boy, your mama no teach you. Be good for your wife if you know pressing. Richik. Fix it nice, like this. Fix it like this.

Warhol's camera lingers lovingly on Rheem's handsome face as he and Julia talk, joke, and tease one another playfully and flirtatiously. Julia picks hair from

⁶³ The change of shirt is a key to the proper order of the film reels, which are often reversed. In the kitchen scene, Rheem is wearing the black T-shirt given him by Julia in the ironing sequence, indicating that ironing (roll 1) preceded scrambled eggs (roll 2).

⁶⁴ The expression 'take it easy' was popularized in ads for Coca-Cola, Kellogg's, Gimbels, and numerous department stores. According to Newspapers.com, in a select number of Pittsburgh newspapers from the 1940s, the phrase appeared in 3,531 articles and images—in the Joe Palooka comic strip, in descriptions of wartime bombing runs and patriotic army shows, on the sports pages, in advice columns, and as the official 1946 Pittsburgh traffic slogan. Julia used the phrase also in one of the self-composed stories she told her young sons and recorded on tape in English, as a divine personage tells a lowly hobo, 'Good-bye. God bless you. Take it easy'. Tape recording, John Warhola family collection.

Richard's shirt, they look closely into one another's eyes, and Julia pats his cheeks, as if he were a child.

Richard Rheem came from a prominent but emotionally cold upper-class California family. In letters to Warhol, he described his own mother as depressing, and his stepmother as 'wicked'. 'I have to shut [mother] out when she goes on & on about nothing. You may wonder why I visit her. She is more loving & enjoyable than [sic] Dad & stepmother.'⁶⁵ Given the bleak relationship with his mother figures, it is no wonder that 'Richik' appreciated Julia Warhola's down-to-earth motherly warmth. (However, given his conversations with Julia, there is an amusing irony in his statement about 'shutting out' his mother 'when she goes on and on about nothing.')

Another mother-son relationship is hinted at in Warhol's original title of *The George Hamilton Story*. At a moment in 'Mrs. Warhol' when the crew is busy eating scrambled eggs, the conversation flags, and off-screen whispers can be heard prompting, 'George?' Paul Morrissey says, 'I'll ask it.' He then questions Julia, 'Do you like that one that's marrying the president's daughter?' An exchange of overlapping voices follows, and the vague reference to the actor George Hamilton is lost. In 1966, Hamilton was in the news for his romantic relationship with Lynda Bird Johnson. But his relevance to Warhol's film is his close relationship with his mother, Anne Stevens, a glamorous socialite, who had four failed marriages and numerous affairs with high-profile movie stars. In Hollywood, Hamilton was viewed as a privileged, sensitive 'mama's boy'. As he described her, 'My mother ... was incredibly beautiful, a real charmer, the ultimate Southern belle, irresistible to men, and able to pull rabbits out of hats.'⁶⁶ The film presents an ironic portrayal of the parallels between Hamilton and Warhol, their mothers, and their respective mother-son relationships. In terms of glamour, Warhol was no George Hamilton, and Julia was no Anne Stevens.

In the biographical literature, it is often suggested that Warhol was ashamed of his mother. As an early friend and associate Ted Carey noted, 'She had a very strong accent, and Andy, I think, would have liked to have thought of his mother was [sic] very glamorous. And Mrs. Warhola was not glamorous, and I think he felt a little ashamed of her.'⁶⁷ If so, it did not prevent Andy from introducing Julia to Carey and his affluent, upscale parents, who were prominent in Philadelphia society. In a letter on monogrammed stationery, dated 1 November 1961, Carey's mother wrote, 'We are so happy that we had the opportunity to meet you last Sunday afternoon. We enjoyed ourselves so much and want to thank you for your kind hospitality and also the many kindnesses you have extended to Teddy over the

⁶⁵ Richard Rheem, letter to Andy Warhol, 4 September 1966, AWMA.

⁶⁶ George Hamilton, *Don't Mind If I Do*, New York: Touchstone, 2009, 17.

⁶⁷ Ted Carey, interview by Patrick S. Smith, 16 October 1978, in Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986, 251.

last few years. He has spoken of you often, so we really felt we know you.'⁶⁸ What Carey must have told his parents can be found in another interview: 'Mrs. Warhola was very lovely ... We would just talk. ... And she would laugh. She had a wonderful sense of humor.'⁶⁹

For Carey, as for many of Warhol's friends, Julia's down-home, childlike charm must have prevailed over her lack of traditional glamour. As Weingart points out, "'Mrs. Warhol' demonstrates the error in the judgment that Julia lacked glamour.' Just as Warhol raises banal objects to the level of artistic fantasy in his art, his camera expands the spectrum of normative glamour to include Julia's simple charm, a foil to the screen glamour of Hollywood and the high-class allure of George Hamilton's mother. Like many Rusyn-American children of immigrants, Warhol may well have wished for a more sophisticated, fashionable mother, but in *The George Hamilton Story*, he, perhaps unwittingly, valorises the unpretentious beauty of his simple, loving parent.

Warhol exploited the simple directness of the immigrant Carpatho-Rusyn woman by juxtaposing her with the sophisticated but emotionally vulnerable 'Richik'. Rheem revels in Julia's open affection and responds accordingly. In fact, his fondness for Julia must have outweighed his attachment to Andy. In the second week of December, when Warhol encountered Rheem on the street with another young Factory regular, he jumped to the baseless conclusion that they were lovers, turned Rheem out of the house and changed the locks. It is unknown whether Julia received an explanation for the disappearance of her dear 'Richik' from Andy's life, or how she reacted to losing her confidante and shopping partner. Rheem, however, did not forget her. In a blank envelope marked 'To Andy Warhol's Mother', a note in Rheem's hand reads, 'Dearest Julia, God Bless you and Andy. I love and pray for you both. Always, Richard Rheem. June 6, 1968.'⁷⁰ That was three days after Andy was shot.

Julia Warhola, Superstar

The George Hamilton Story showcases Julia's natural tendency to performance. Along with her co-star, she revels in her muddled language, even as she apologizes for it.

⁶⁸ Correspondence shows a continuing personal connection between Mrs. Carey and Mrs. Warhola. In December 1964, Mrs. Carey writes in a tone of friendly familiarity, 'Ted was home for the weekend and told us that you had been hospitalized and quite ill. ... Do hope you continue to make progress and will be able to enjoy the holidays.' Letter from Ruth Carey to 'Mrs. Warhol', 1 November 1961, AWMA. A Christmas card from Ted Carey, postmarked 20 December 1965, is addressed to 'Mrs. Julia Warhol and her son Andy.' Julia noted on the outside of the envelope, 'From Dear Ted.' Carey's New York address is found in Julia's address book, AWMA.

⁶⁹ Ted Carey, interview by Patrick S. Smith, in *Warhol: Conversations about the Artist*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988, 94.

⁷⁰ Letter from Richard Rheem to Julia Warhola, AWMA.

Andy, who embraced his mother's textual errors in his artist books, now relishes her verbal blunders, and integrates them into his cinematic art. He listens as she tells Rheem about her seminarian-grandson, who was 'teaching self for priest'. 'Priest-*y* [Rusyn plural ending] now 'posed to know how talk Russia, write Russia, *i* [and] Jewish, *i* Latin ... He have to know. Big, big hard time for priest-*y*. You understand? Me no talk good English.' In the same style, she praises her sons. 'My boys-*y* [Rusyn plural ending] all very good. Paul, John, Andy good ... never no tell me bad things.' Even after she tires of role-playing and asks Warhol to stop the camera, she rallies to Rheem's attention, pats his cheeks, and launches an improvisational comedy sketch.

RR: You're so beautiful, I can't believe you.

JW: Oh, Richik, you want a dollar?

They act out a scenario describing Julia's cynical view that a compliment is given only in the hope of monetary return.

JW: Say, you look nice, hat *na* [on] you perfect, say take dollar, *na!* [there!]

RR: *Na!* Two dollars, three dollars ...

JW [To Susan]: You understand? Maybe Susie don't understand. [Clearly, Julia and Rheem had been through this game before.] ...

JW: [To Susan]: Person say you look nice, you hat look perfect. [Acts out with intonation and gestures.]

RR: [To Susan]: Doesn't she [inaudible compliment on Julia's acting.] Don't you love it?

The *Factory Diary* videos, partially translated from Rusyn here for the first time, and *The George Hamilton Story*, from which Julia's pidgin English is decoded to reveal newly accessible meaning, paint a portrait of Julia Warhola that addresses the deficiencies in the conflicting facts and opinions offered by Warhol's associates. In *The George Hamilton Story*, she is a bubbly, playful woman who enjoys socializing, teasing, and flirting with the young people who surround her son. As she aged and her health declined, Warhol's camera captured her melancholy isolation and petulant irritability in the private *Factory Diaries*. Both film and video demonstrate her efforts to articulate the worth and meaning of her life experience and to have it validated by her son. In both cases, she is thwarted by Warhol's apparent dispassionate reaction to her emotional discourse. In the videos, he seems largely unresponsive to her Rusyn-language monologues, and in *The George Hamilton Story*, he transmutes her 'broken English' as comedic art.

Julia was Andy Warhol's first art teacher and studio assistant in his childhood sickroom. When she joined her son in New York, she actively collaborated on his drawings and promotional books. Into her seventies, she continued as Andy's associate, participating in test-videos and enthusiastically taking on the role of 'an aging peroxide movie star with a lot of husbands'.

However, much of Andy Warhol's mother is lost in translation, and the authentic Julia Warhola transcends her cinematic portrayal. For viewers who understand her language and the Carpatho-Rusyn context, there are hints of an interesting and complex woman, who is no less intriguing than her artist son.

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