



Steven Shore. *Warhol*  
taping *Ondine* for a novel,  
in *Factory toilet*, 1965.

# Whereof One Cannot Speak

CRAIG DWORKIN

*That's not writing, that's typing.*

—Truman Capote

*Ah my dear, you have to write,  
you have to take up typing.*

—Ondine

A hundred pages into *a: a novel*, the book tries to account for itself. As if responding, in medias res, to a reader's objection, one chapter opens:

No it's a novel that it's being a novel as a matter of fact—vut what do you mean by a novel? uhhhhhh I know it just . . . ther's no other brush stroke. 12 hours of Ondine a novel? qou're not going—are you going to put it in a in a book or what make it be one whole book.<sup>1</sup>

Several months and hundreds of pages later, when Ondine [Robert Olivo] again asks, “Do you know what this whole project is?” his companion responds, “Well, it's fairly simple to figure out.” “No,” Ondine continues, “I mean this whole thing that we're doing, this whole tape. . . . This is called, its gonna be a novel. . . . We're gonna write a novel. It's a novel, It's being transcribed by three girls.”<sup>2</sup> Ondine sounds as though he may be protesting a bit too much, and his repeated insistence on the genre of the project, further emphasized in the published book's explanatory subtitle, might be understood as an attempt to establish a ground against which the project as a whole can be better understood (or against which the knowing deviations from the defining conventions of the novel can at least be registered). Regardless of its generic legibility, however, none of the characters could have known quite how unreadable the result of their “whole thing” would be. In the summer of 1965, when the recording for *a* began, the only real precedent for such a work—that “typing” which would take the place of “writing”—were portions of Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Cody*.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the similarities, Warhol's book is far less conventional and far more difficult to read than Kerouac's *Visions*. To begin with, those typists mentioned by Ondine appear to have worked quickly—*speed* is all to the point in this amphetamine-fueled work—and without the aid of either pro-

fessional equipment or much experience.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the resultant text is riddled with transmission errors: misspelled words, incoherently punctuated sentences, and inconsistently or incorrectly identified speakers. Ambient noise or inattentive microphone placement left many words inaudible, while others were intentionally omitted. When Maureen Tucker, the drummer for the Velvet Underground, was enlisted to perform some of the transcription, she refused to type any swear words, leaving blanks instead; as Victor Bockris wryly notes, “there were a lot of blanks.”<sup>5</sup> More drastically, complete sides of several tapes appear to be missing entirely, and at least one chapter is severely truncated because its source tape was discarded; in a nice reversal of the book’s final line, “Out of the garbage, into The Book,” the outraged mother of one of the teenage typists confiscated one of the tapes when she overheard it and “threw it in the trash.”<sup>6</sup> “It’s worse than Henry Miller,” as the typist explained.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Warhol himself complicated matters. When not insisting that all of those surface irregularities be scrupulously preserved in the published version, he intervened during the production stage by making occasional, capricious alterations and obfuscations.

Even when the speakers can be identified and clearly understood, however, the fitful and belated hints about the setting leave readers without most of the contextual clues that would presumably help to explain certain utterances or even, perhaps, entire conversations. So with little in the way of any discernable narrative, and nothing that resembles a plot, the activity of the book’s own construction begins to take center stage. As in the passages quoted above, the project of recording and transcribing is often explicitly at issue, creating something like a book “with the sound of its own making.”<sup>8</sup> Even without such pointedly self-reflexive comments, however, many of the conversations register the degree to which they are staged, and the reader is frequently aware that the conversations, like everything else picked up by the microphone, exist in order to end up in a book. This is not to say that all of the conversations are necessarily performed for the tape recorder in the sense that they would not have occurred in its absence, but rather that given the loose parameters of the project—to register a conversational day in the life of Ondine and the “amphetamine rapture group”—they are performed for the tape recorder in the same way that whatever happens to occur in front of a security camera happens *for* the camera. The conversations in *a*, whatever form they take, are what the microphone is there to pick up (in the way that it registers, indiscriminately, all the nonverbal activities of the novel’s participants: blowing, biting, smothering, and a range of percussive batteries).

A thus appears at first glance to be primarily a book about its unusual mode of composition: an instance, or example, or curiosity.<sup>9</sup> Readers soon

realize, however, that the book is as much about the phonograph and telephone as the microphone, and part of its interest lies in the way these discrete media intersect, as one becomes the subject of another, confusing content and form, subject and predicate: “(record: recording),” as the text puts it at one moment.<sup>10</sup> Above all, the book illustrates the degree to which medial networks frustrate the very communication they permit, and to which noise is the very precondition of any message.<sup>11</sup> Tellingly, the prosopoeia of communicative networks, Mercury himself, appears early in the book. In a unique and anomalous instance of illustration in *a*, a line drawing of the god’s head follows the end of the chapter marking the first hour of taping.

The drawing prefigures those signs (both advertising and zodiacal) that will fascinate Ondine’s companions several hours later, and it will be recalled by one of the legendary episodes of Mare (possibly Arione de Winter), whose “mercury bit” was both irresistibly fascinating and potentially lethal. The pharmakon logic of Mare’s mercury, the god in his guise of both trickster and healer, defines the other exploits recounted in the chapter, such as the time she injected everyone in the room with rat poison, resulting not in death but rather in a fantastic high, or the extraordinary hallucinations that followed an awe-inspiring overdose of 200 Seconal.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent two weeks of Mare’s barbiturate-induced immobility figures as the inverse of the narrative in which it appears: a single day of amphetamine-fueled activity. Indeed, amphetamines—like the tape recorder—are both a subject of the work and its prerequisite, spurring and maintaining the conversations that will return, with a morose delectation, to the Obertols administered in the opening pages: “I just have to stay awake so I can work all the time—I mean write things.”<sup>13</sup> Mercury, of course, was also the god of *speed*.

Hopped up, on the go, on the phone: *a* is written, both literally and figu-

to your eye? RH 7-9718, right?  
 He was fighting because of the—oh  
 can you hold one. Oh, go ahead—  
 R, H, 7 . . .  
 Twenty-four hours of Ondine.  
 (24 hours of Ondine) /?  
 You should try that anymore hours  
 are decreed, right?  
 Right, just hold . . .  
 Damn it, look, it’s the baths. We

started off the morning by meet-  
 ing at at the park, then in in to  
 to Stark’s for a severe atmosphere  
 and I had schnecken for the first  
 time, which cleared up my voice  
 entirely.  
 Oh, did it?  
 Yeah, oh I uh . . .  
 I thought it was the five obertols.  
 No, the five obertols didn’t work.



## 2 / 2

This way, pack up your packs, and  
 if he *qua punta la gusta*, that’s  
 all okay, bye-bye.  
 Was he there? Was Rotten there?  
 Nobody there. Now I gotta call  
 Miss Rat Rotten Rita our dear  
 beloved Mayor, and then we have  
 to go to the Duch—we have to  
 go to the Duchess’s. Listen, we  
 have to start instituting rules,  
 rules here. Nothing but the—  
 Studio policies.  
 Nothing but the best-looking  
 (laughter) women are allowed in  
 here.  
 (L) A.W.’s.  
 And without cunts. Uh, let me see,  
 what’s, uh what’s uh Rotten  
 Rita’s, what’s our Mayor’s num-  
 ber—oh, EN 4 . . .  
 Studio policy.  
 Engleberg. Each person—oh and  
 three’s going to be a—  
 (L) Policy?  
 Yeah, that’s the policy.

And we’ve got to find a moron girl  
 for the phone. Do you know any  
 mo—Lucky, Queens is full of  
 these little girls, like . . . just pick  
 out one, drag her here and . . .  
 she’s at the phone.  
 (L) Oh, you mean the switch-  
 board.  
 We need a non-paying moron like  
 like Ruthie on the Uncle Miltie  
 show. “Hello, Ruthie.” Hello, I  
 just called Billy; he’s not there,  
 he’s on-on-on his way. He said  
 Billy’s there and he’s sleeping;  
 he’s been calling there for two  
 hours.  
 He is not.  
 He’s not. Drella said no.  
 Cause I talked to him and he, he  
 slept last night.  
 He spoke to him and he said he’s,  
 he’s on his way down.  
 I tried yesterday.  
 When did you speak to him?  
 Uh, uh, two o’clock.



atively, under the sign of Mercury. Announcing the technological, economic, and social networks that will become its focus, the book opens with the sounds of a pay phone: “*Rattle, gurgle, clink, tinkle. / Click, pause, click, ring. / Dial, dial.*” Long sections of the text that follow are recorded over the phone, and many of those conversations involve talking about talking on the phone: the quality of the connection or cost of the call, interruptions, disconnections, whether to return a call or take a message, and, repeatedly, when to call whom at what number from what phone.<sup>14</sup> Various speakers negotiate answering services, switchboard operators, and directory assistance; they lament an arrest without the customary phone call and extol the privilege of a private line.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the span of the taping includes the training of a receptionist to answer the phone at the Factory, and for much of the book’s entire first half Ondine is trying to come up with a “studio policy of factory plan regarding the use of the telephone.”<sup>16</sup> Recapitulating the early history of telephone advertisements, which were often focused less on selling a particular product than on explaining the proper etiquette for the new technology, Ondine’s rules illustrate Jonathan Sterne’s argument that we ought to “consider media as recurring relations among people, practices, institutions, and machines (rather than simply machines in and of themselves).”<sup>17</sup> In the sixth hour of taping, Ondine finally arrives at something resembling a finished draft:

**One**, no phone calls before the hour of 11:00 A.M. **Two**, use board by the phone for messages and also tools for writing. **Three**—the ability to let the person who is wanted know without revealing his or her presence to the phone needs. . . . Not to let people who can best be called kibitzers stay longer than 3 minutes on the phone call.<sup>18</sup>

Along with the misplacement of a Maria Callas record, the process of codifying these rules is the closest the book comes to presenting a sustained story.

The book, however, will continue to play the telephone game according to other rules, recording interference as well as conversations, and registering the mercurial logic by which channels of communication both convey and distort their messages.<sup>19</sup> As Ondine explains, “The only way to talk is to talk in games, it’s just fabulous”; but as Taxine (Edie Sedgwick) qualifies, “Ondine has games that no one understands.”<sup>20</sup> For the reader who wants to understand Ondine’s game, the problem is not so much a lack of information but an excess. The text is so destabilized by its mode of construction that even the most normative passages can leave the reader unsure of how to resolve its array of potential meanings. For example, when Moxanne (Genevieve Charbon) says at one point “the light screen,” the reader cannot determine whether her comment refers to the video equipment that has been delivered

earlier that day or the traffic signals seen from the cab they are in (i.e., “the light’s green”).<sup>21</sup> Like the eponymous children’s game, the success of which depends on propagating both a sufficient sense of the original message as well as the misheard errors of its whispered links, the round of telephone games in *a* foregrounds slippages along the signifier’s metonymic chain.<sup>22</sup> Those slips are registered not only at the moment of transcription—with mistypings, phonetic spellings, and even the insertion of the typists’ queries and alternative suggestions into the body of the text—but they are also already present in the original conversations, which frequently conform to the rules of the telephone game.<sup>23</sup> That is, of course, simply the language game of language itself. Regardless of their registers or denotations, words evoke other words. And in *a* in particular, the proximity of individual words along the metonymic axis is in fact one of the strongest structuring elements of the otherwise unstructured text.

Most obviously, these structures take the form of either genuine confusion or intentional paronomasia. Misunderstandings are ubiquitous in *a*, with absurd and often inexplicable confusions between “bear” and “there”; “heart sink” and “heart think”; “rat takers” and those who will “take the rap”; *Il Pirata* and “a piranha”; “phallus,” “floss,” and “frog”—and, further and more tellingly, between “filmed” and “filled”; “appointments” and “disappointments”; “meeting us” and “meaningless.”<sup>24</sup> At other times, the speakers do not seem to be aware of the degree to which they are propelled from one topic to another by such displacements. “Punishing,” for instance, seems to lead to “publishing”; “climax” suggests “Max”; a confusion between “kit” and “kid” prefigures “kidding”; and a mention of “steel” reappears as “stealing.”<sup>25</sup> At one moment, late in a long day of amphetamine overuse, Ondine is unable to complete his sentences and finds himself caught in the proliferating pull of the signifier, skipping with a manic stutter from “Via” to “*Vail vile Vial*” to “VOIL, I think. Voil Val//I dunno.”<sup>26</sup> At other points, however, the material proximity of words spurs rather than hobbles or derails the course of conversations. In the *sprezzatura* repartee of their self-consciously witty and catty conversations, characters frequently follow the suggestions made by language itself. Dialogue moves from “kicks” to “tricks,” “hospital” to “hospitality,” “Parcival” to “parcel” to “parts.” Ondine and Taxie (Sedgewick) construct a punning name around the paralogic sequence from *split* to *spit* to *shit*.<sup>27</sup> With a play on “stop” as the punctuation mark of the period, Ondine and Rink (Chuck Wein) coax “groin” into “ground” via several carefully negotiated permutations:

O—Testing challenge witness, grointing?

R—Equals.

O—Equals.  
 R—Groint.  
 O—Grointo, growing to  
 R—Growing to a stop.  
 O—That's, you're using something else there, right.  
 R—Yeah, ground to a stop . . . Testament challenge witness, growing  
 to a stop, haltingly it got to identity.  
 O—You've got to find a way to make it more legible.<sup>28</sup>

Underwriting this exchange is the etymology of “testify,” from the Latin *testis*, meaning both a witness and the male reproductive gland. The connection between the two early denotations appears to be either that only males were permitted to take part in certain aspects of Roman legal proceedings or that by swearing to tell the truth one figuratively—and perhaps quite literally—laid one's balls on the table. In either case, the history of the word takes on a certain charge in the context of Warhol's drag queen entourage and the pseudonyms Norman Billiardballs (Norman Holden) and Irving Du Ball (Lester Perskey).<sup>29</sup> Ondine, moreover, explains that the witnessing testament of the text's tape recording was itself meant to occur *sub testes*: I'm supposed to hide it [the microphone] under my balls . . . under your balls.”<sup>30</sup>

Similarly elided terms also make the logic behind other conversations more legible, as unmentioned middle terms appear to guide or structure entire passages. “Living,” for instance, seems to emerge from the unspoken “lives” conjured by the proximity of the words “lines” and “wives,” just as a later conversation appears to move from “schlitz monger” to “shit dog” by way of the absent but implied “mongrel.” At one point, the typist registers her uncertainty about whether she hears “Callas” or “college boards,” an indecision that seems mediated less by the alliterative proximity of those words than the rhyme between “boards” and “boredom,” a word that happens to occur in the immediately preceding discussion of ennui.<sup>31</sup> For certain passages, the architecture of such bridging is even more extensive and sustained. One entire chapter, for instance, can be understood by tracing the progression of resonance and interference between “mountain,” “Mounties,” and “mounted.” Combined with the misheard “oysters,” discarded “orchids,” and nonce “orchens” that punctuate the giddy conversation taking place during a downtown cab ride, these terms all once again triangulate the testicles: the cooked *criadillas* or Canadian “mountain oysters.”<sup>32</sup>

Ondine describes these moves in his linguistic game as “that filthy pun stage” of an amphetamine high, in which speakers work obsessively through linguistic permutations, unable to stop despite the embarrassment that

follows.<sup>33</sup> But “stage” also hints at the decidedly theatrical performance of puns in *a* and the simultaneous measures of shame and pride, of incognito masking and public exhibitionism, with which personae in *a* assume a range of punning stage names. “Marked by a spirit of theatrical extravagance,” the “repertory company of underprivileged *agents provocateurs*” performing in *a* debate and elaborate on each other’s pseudonyms—Taxine, Moxie, The Sugar Plum Fairy, Rotten Rita, Irving Du Ball, and so on—speculating about their etymologies and connotations throughout the book.<sup>34</sup> Rechristened to the degree zero of surnames, Billy Linich collapses category and instance (or signified and referent) to appear as simply Billy Name. Ondine insists at one point, perhaps wishfully: “They don’t give me, they don’t allow me a name. The people I work for don’t allow me a name. . . . It’s part of the deal.”<sup>35</sup> “To work for Warhol,” as Wayne Koestenbaum observes, “was to lose one’s name.”<sup>36</sup> Compounding the screens of disguise and impersonation on display in *a*, many of the names in the text were intentionally altered after its initial transcription. This aliasing adds considerably to the reader’s difficulty in following conversations, but even without that editorial intervention, the onomastic fluidity of Warhol’s milieu renders names malleable and plastic, suggestively open to the weakest homophonic or graphic associations: “Polk” for “poke”; “Ondine” and “ennui”; “Taxine” and “vaccine.”<sup>37</sup> At one point Warhol’s own fright-wigged “Drella,” a portmanteau of “Dracula” and “Cinderella,” ironically suggests “Prell” shampoo.<sup>38</sup> Warhol’s pseudonym is further underscored in *a* by the repeated playing of arias from Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*). His proper name is also at issue, and following a confusion between a “whole house” and a “whore house,” his name is mistyped as “Warhole.”<sup>39</sup> Or not quite proper name: “the whore house” in question “is all the way down avenue A,” and the added vowel of “Warhole,” in conjunction with the avenue’s alphabetic name, reminds the reader of Warhol’s given name: “Warhola.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the novel’s title, ostentatiously uncapitalized, completes Warhol’s signature, simulated on the cover of the Grove Press edition, as if the terminal letter had floated free of his name, returning, but unreplicable: the small “a” of the Lacanian real—“a lost object (the little bit of the subject lost to the subject, the *objet a*).”<sup>41</sup>

Before settling on that unsettled *a*, the participants in the taping of the novel considered entitling their book *Maria Callas*, and Callas turns out to be a more central character than even Warhol himself. Indeed, Callas recordings are one of the few consistent themes between the different taping sessions of *a*, and she is discussed with all the discernment of what Koestenbaum has called “the gay cult of Callas.”<sup>42</sup> Always a lightning rod for scandal and controversy, her well-publicized feuds and diva caprice kept Maria on a



first-name basis with the tabloids at the same time that a series of thrillingly dramatic performances led admirers to crown her *La Divina*. In the months just prior to the initial taping of *a* in the summer of 1965, “Callasmania,” was at its height. Thousands of fans lined up in May for Covent Garden tickets priced at twice the normal cost (the shows were scandalously canceled, save for the one performance attended by the Queen), and crowds at the Paris Opéra that March rioted when tickets for *Tosca* became scarce. Accordingly, tickets were strictly rationed to American fans who camped out weeks early at the Met. Callas had not sung in New York since 1958, and her return was a social event “bigger than opening night,” with Jacqueline Kennedy in attendance.<sup>43</sup> In a subsequent society exposé that must have stung Warhol, the same article that featured him as one of “the better-known Outs” named Callas as one of the very few celebrities who was an indisputably secure member of the “in crowd.”<sup>44</sup>

Although obviously not chosen as the final title for the book, Callas’s name is still particularly resonant in the novel, and it continues to structure the text in unexpected ways. Like the dropped *a* of “Warhola,” “Callas” similarly disguises its ethnicity, with the family name “Kalogeropoulos” reduced phonetically to *Kallos* and then transliterated. In the novel, that kind of phonetic transformation allows her name to function as both “callus” and “callous,” although the words themselves are never explicitly mentioned. They are, however, circled and approached (in the way that a curve asymptotically approaches a line in calculus). When Warhol’s foot is bothered by a corn, for instance, he exclaims “my callas [...] My callas is hurting me.” The pun that might otherwise be taken for a transcription error is corroborated by Ondine, who exclaims: “Your calls. He’s worried about his callas; it can’t even sing.”<sup>45</sup> Making light of Warhol’s pain, Ondine’s reply is itself decidedly callous and typical of the insensitivity of Warhol’s entourage. “They do terrible things and make awful remarks” as Robert Mazzocco describes it, with more praise than condemnation.<sup>46</sup> Veering from casually catty to sadistically cruel, their unguardedly racist and anti-Semitic conversations become increasingly ugly and antagonistic as the effects of the amphetamine increase.<sup>47</sup> Proving the rule with an exception, someone questions Ondine: “How come all of a sudden you’re being uhm, sympathetic . . . ?”<sup>48</sup> Deliberately mean and admittedly callous, Ondine spends considerable time searching for the word itself, which is on the tips of his “forked tongue” but never quite within reach.<sup>49</sup> The whole of the fifteenth section, in fact, comprises Ondine’s remorseful confessions of insensitivity and his repeated attempts to recall “the word that’s frequently applied to the Youth of the Nation.” Stumbling toward the word itself, he and Name are unable to recall quite the right term, but they know it

means “withOUT EMPATHY” or “unempathetic.”<sup>50</sup> Over a hundred pages later, Ondine is still searching for the precise word, which nags him through the end of the novel. The final chapter opens: “I don’t KNOW it. The word for—. . . non-empathy.”<sup>51</sup>

In the context of these homophones, “Callas” begins to resonate with other words as well. The second side of the tenth tape, for instance, opens with a meditation on Callas’s legal name and the appropriately honorific titles that might be appended to it: “la regina del mondo, la superbe di gratcio di Dio. . . Maria Menegina Callas, e molto.”<sup>52</sup> Woven around this particular discussion, in a kind of conversational counterpoint, are two related concerns: the distortions and repetitions of echoes (nicely enacted at one point by the echoing line “The echo, the echo”); and the ability of the microphone to simultaneously record speaking voices and Callas’s singing without distortion. Those questions of medial noise are then immediately transposed from recording to handwriting when Ondine and Rotten Rita (Kenneth Rapp) contrast the orthographically correct and “right” with the secret “rite” of illegible “writing.” Bringing all of these themes together, they then debate the legitimacy of the word “calligraful” as a description of the “calligraphic” nature of “Chinese characters.”<sup>53</sup> “That’s so beautiful,” Ondine enthuses a moment later, recalling the basis of their philological speculation: “beautiful,” *kallos*, Callas.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, as Ondine’s easy step from “calls” to “callas” illustrates, Callas’s name also rings with all of the telephone *calls* in *a*.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the speculation that they “could call the book Maria Callas” follows from the realization that they “could just call her” on the phone, underscoring the way in which both telephones and names involve kinds of calling.<sup>56</sup> More explicitly, Callas is again linked with the telephone when Paul Morrissey declares early in the book that “She sounds like Mother Bell.”<sup>57</sup> The text further associates Callas with the telephone through the congruence of “opera” and “operator,” but its noisy party line also carries the echo of other conversations, bringing together the telephone, Maria Callas, and amphetamines with the addition of the words “operate” and “operation.”<sup>58</sup> To begin with, the drugs in *a* are what allow or prevent one from operating. The Sugar Plum Fairy (Joe Campbell) chooses the word with careful deliberation: “if I take pills, I won’t be able to . . . operate for the next few hours.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the two chief passions of Ondine’s opera queen clique, known around the Factory as “the amphetamine rapture group,” were drugs and opera, and the two topics coincide throughout the resonantly titled *a*, which echoes both the high of “a” (the then current slang for “amphetamine”) and the high A of the soprano.<sup>60</sup> Anticipating a discussion in which “needles” and “needle tracks” are suspended indeterminately between the hypodermic and the phono-

graphic, Rotten Rita at one point quips, “I hope you hit a high C,” simultaneously referencing both the piercing finale of the recording they are listening to and the “high” Ondine hopes to achieve from “one cc” of injectable drugs (on the record, Callas has managed, just barely, to will her D into an E-flat at the close of the “mad scene” in the Mexico City *Lucia*).<sup>61</sup>

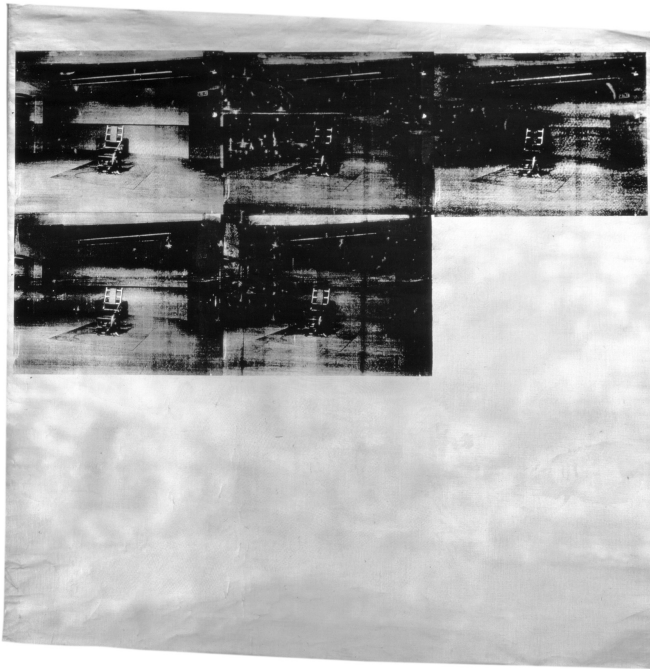
If that tenuous E-flat does not quite ring true, it is nevertheless an apt reminder of the way in which *a* continues to equate the operatic and the telephonic, personified by Maria Callas and Andy Warhol respectively, through tropes of inaccuracy. Picking up on anxieties about the legitimacy of the project as genuine writing, falsity is a recurrent theme of the novel’s conversations, which dwell not only on fraud and forgery but on all manner of illegitimacies, hypocrisies, imitations, and lies. Conversely, the truthful, the real, and the genuine are all topics of conversation, and their constellation of concerns ultimately returns, through the oxymoron of a “genuine zircon,” to the “phoney” gift of the telephone: “he gave me a ring yesterday.”<sup>62</sup> In fact, the “phoney” characterizes both the prosthetic voice of the telephone and the ventriloquizing voice that emerges from what Koestenbaum has called the “queen’s throat.”<sup>63</sup> At The Factory, Ondine and his cast of divas sang along to records played on Name’s Harman-Kardon hi-fi, and the fidelity aspired to by that phonographic mechanism is repeatedly betrayed not only by their accompaniments but by Warhol’s portable tape recorder itself, which translates high volume as distortion.<sup>64</sup> Against the verismo graininess of that tape, *a* not only registers Ondine’s “fake voice” and catches him “*mimicking in a high affected voice*,” but it notes the high, affected, male voices attempting to mimic Callas’s soprano: those forced, unnatural head voices that are a little false, or “*falsestto*.”<sup>65</sup>

The play of accuracy and discrepancy in the vocal drag of these accompaniments is complicated by the fact that the false note was itself part of the Callas experience, part of the authenticity of her vocal signature. By the mid-1960s, Callas’s uncertain and unreliable top register, a perennial concern for reviewers, had become less a specific criticism than one of the defining characteristics of her performance, the other side of the coin that purchased her legendary dramatic force. As Harold Schonberg wrote in his review of her 1965 New York Tosca: “Miss Callas is operating these days with only the remnants of a voice. Her top, always insecure, now is merely a desperate lunge at high notes.” Similarly, a review of her Paris Tosca a month before noted that she “appeared to be unsure of her upper register.”<sup>66</sup> Problems with register had also, of course, become a hallmark of Warhol’s period style and the mode of his painterly production. With the bleed of paint from misaligned stencils, the signature Warhol silkscreen was characterized above all by its inaccurate

registration. As with Callas, these technical errors became a point of interest and almost, even, on occasion, of pride. Warhol explained, “I wanted to do a ‘bad book’ just the way I’d done ‘bad movies’ and ‘bad art’”; within the deskilled text of *a* itself the glaring errors of transmission that accrued as the text was filtered through the semi-anonymous and multiply aliased operators of its inscriptive networks may paradoxically be the very point at which the text most directly reveals Warhol’s own personal signature.<sup>67</sup> The few extant examples of Warhol’s personal correspondence anticipate the roughened and idiosyncratic textual surface of *a*. “[A]lmost every sentence in his hand is full of bizarre spelling errors. . . . Clearly, he was dyslexic.”<sup>68</sup>

Regardless of the difficulties with her high notes, Callas obviously generated a great deal of excitement among her fans. As Leonard Bernstein famously pronounced, “she was pure electricity.”<sup>69</sup> Critics in the 1960s, in fact, would make consistent recourse to that very metaphor, inevitably using electrical terms in place of the vocabulary of heat that had predominated the praise of her singing in the late 1950s, when she (or her voice) was found to be “melting,” “liquid,” “fiery,” “feverish,” “hot tempered,” and so on. By the mid-1960s, in comparison, Callas was a lightning rod for a different idiom: “her conception of the role was electrical”; her acting was “electrifying”; she was “supercharged”; “on the operatic stage, they [her legion fans] find her electrifying.”<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, Ondine recalls that when he heard Callas at the Met “she was shocking,” and he further concludes, while listening to her voice on record, “She’s lethal.”<sup>71</sup> Ondine’s assessment of Callas recasts his concern with the potentially lethal electrical apparatus used to produce *a* itself. When someone (possibly Perskey, but probably Warhol himself) threatens to throw the microphone and tape player into his bath, Ondine exclaims: “Drealla really you must stop with t-t-thing I’m going to electrocute myself—it’s electric you know.”<sup>72</sup> As Nathan Gluck later quipped: “Andy just likes to shock.”<sup>73</sup> Gluck, of course, is characterizing the calculated outrage tirelessly sought by Warhol and his entourage, but “shock” occurs in *a* in its electrical sense as well. Ondine warns at one point, “the current[’s] on” and then moves to a description of a “shock room.” That room underscores the emphatic exclamations of both “TORTURE” and “CRAzy,” with the suggestion of electroshock therapy, but it seems to refer more immediately to some sort of sanctuary in which one can be sequestered for peace and quiet, a special place to which one retreats—or, more darkly, is sent—when one has “talked enough.”<sup>74</sup>

A special room for shock and silence had already been figured by Warhol just a few years before in his series of electric-chair paintings, one of which had been the focal point of his show at the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris in 1964.<sup>75</sup>



Left: Andy Warhol, *Silver Disaster*, 1963. Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, NY.

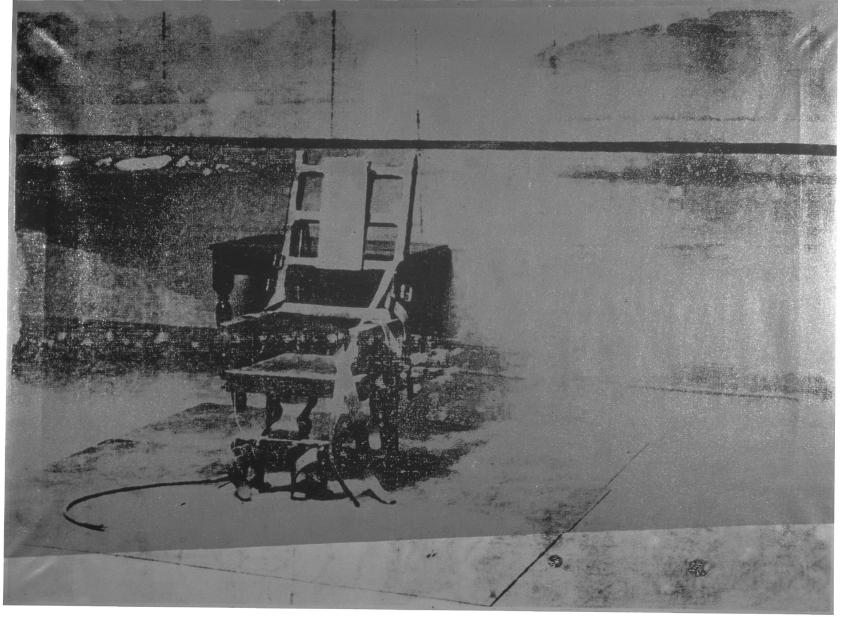
Opposite: Andy Warhol, *Big Electric Chair*, 1967. Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, 54 x 74". © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, NY.

The paintings were first produced (the degree to which one is tempted to write “executed” is a measure of the paintings’ self-reflexive mirroring) in 1963, as part of the “Death and Disaster” series inaugurated the previous year. In that context, the chair shares a clear iconic affinity with the series’ other images of individual and state violence—police brutality,

car wrecks, suicides, a mushroom cloud—and they have an obvious political charge. More specifically, one might note that Warhol took the image from a newspaper article about the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg exactly a decade earlier, a provenance that brings the electric-chair paintings closer to the atomic bomb mushroom cloud that served as the final image in the series.<sup>76</sup> Following renewed debates about the death penalty provoked by California’s execution of Caryl Chessman in 1960 (by gas), the state of New York had outlawed the use of the electric chair in 1963, and the chair pictured in Warhol’s paintings is in fact the apparatus installed in the death chamber at Sing-Sing prison.

A later series using the same image would be more tightly cropped, further emphasizing the internal framing of the chair, which sits on a small square mat and is photographed from a perspective that both fits it neatly under the wainscoting border of the back wall and angles it into the small wooden table directly behind it so that the dark wood of the table serves to set off the overlit back of the chair and the two pieces of furniture seem at first glance to be part of the same mechanism. But in the wider compass shown in Warhol’s original set of paintings from the early 1960s, the gapingly vacant chair—with its drape of slack straps and a sinisterly casual curve to the cable that extends from its feet, head slightly raised at an angle like a snake’s—is further blocked by a series of nested frames: the rubber mat balanced above by two pipes hung from a partially dropped ceiling that itself creates a shallow alcove, bordered on either side by flanking doors set in walls that seem to wing out at angles that are hard to reconcile with the pitch of pipes and the horizontal of the ceiling’s horizon. The room at Sing-Sing prison extended rather far back, well behind the point from which the photograph was taken, and included a seating area for more than a dozen witnesses and attendants. But against the forward projection of the mat and the opening sweep of the side walls, the photonegative flattening of Warhol’s silk-screening cancels that depth and seems to push the chair even closer to the back wall of the room,





while the starkly sharp matte shadows of a harsh high contrast further emphasize the room's evacuated lateral expanse. Even after the viewer has imaginatively reinstated some depth to the image, the small table in the background still seems too much a part of the whole apparatus to distract from the singular focus on the chair, or to seriously vie for our visual attention. One object in the otherwise empty room, however, repeatedly draws the viewer's eye from the lurid central image: an authoritative institutional sign, hung surprisingly high above the right-hand door, reading "SILENCE." Although it speaks from the wings, calling the viewer away from the center of the canvas, its message seems to reinforce the emptiness of the chair and to underscore the absence of human figures in the tableau (even the implied presence of the photographer is difficult to keep in mind). Captioning the scene in this way, "SILENCE" balances between imperative and description, and like the Photostat maps of Robert Smithson's nonsites the sign returns the viewer to the chair and the similarly sized central panel of the chair back, which itself now seems to hang like a blank, silenced sign. The image as a whole thus appears to be bluntly straightforward, and indeed blunt address—or perhaps more specifically the distinctly disciplinary bluntness of institutional address—seems to be the very meaning of the work.<sup>77</sup>

In the hushed silence of that space, however, the whispers play out another round of the telephone game, which requires that any communication will be less clear. Just before embarking on *a*, Warhol had reworked the electric-chair painting in 1964, including it among a series of Thermofax collaborations with Gerard Malanga, whose accompanying poem begins as a caption to Warhol's image and ends by balancing the furniture of that "shock room" with an ominous invocation of electric media:

The electric chair in a room made silent by signs  
Over the door,  
The flames coming toward us—  
Accidents of some future date,  
We sit on couches, but the sleep

And ideas persist  
 Knowing we gain from it,  
 To fall apart again.  
 Some simplicities first  
 Then nothing—night  
 The secret, visible late next day. Or next week.  
 On the telephone. The film<sup>78</sup>

The final lines of Malanga's poem echo the noir conclusion of George Oppen's *Discrete Series*—"Successive / Happenings / (the telephone)"—updating Oppen's Depression-era poem with the apocalyptic register of "The flames coming toward us— / Accidents of some future date," which again recalls the nuclear specter of the Cold War and the A-bomb image in the "Disaster" series.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the last line also reminds us that the electric chair's lineage is inextricably intertwined with electronic media. Specifically, the phonograph and the telephone—those two technologies so prominently on display in *a*—not only share an ancestry that can be traced back to Alexander Bell's "ear phonautograph," but they are also the "sinister counterparts" of their technological stepbrother, Thomas Edison's electric chair.<sup>80</sup> The phonograph originally emerged from Edison's work with the telephone and his desire for a device that could aid transcription by recording a telephone conversation and playing it back more slowly, something that might have helped with the transcription of *a*.<sup>81</sup> "I like Edison," Warhol enthused, "Oh do I like Edison!"<sup>82</sup>

From the beginning, moreover, both the phonograph and the telephone were linked with what Jonathan Sterne recognizes as "the peculiar Victorian culture of death" and its attendant spiritualism, an association that carried well into the twentieth century.<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, *a* repeatedly underscores the deathly valence of medial technologies, itself constituting something like "a mystery message *d'outre tombe*."<sup>84</sup> Ondine explains that the voice on the telephone is the voice of "d-e-a-t-h," cryptically elaborating elsewhere: "answer phone, now dead, kn- also known as the last ring. I'm what happens when you decide to plug in."<sup>85</sup> Similarly, he equates operatic performance with death, emphasizes the "haunting" quality of an operatic melody, and takes part in a long discussion about a poltergeist.<sup>86</sup> Although their interest in that particular spirit seems to hinge on a belief that "geist" derives from "gas" and that a "pülter gast" is thus an evil smelling essence—a sort of ghostly flatulence that brings its noxious cloud into the orbit of Mercury (in his guise as the gas-station's mascot) and the novel's various mentions of petroleum, methane, and natural gas—the actual etymology is in fact all to the point:

poltergeists (from the German *poltern*, “to knock”) are *loud* ghosts, spirits that mark their death by refusing to be silent.<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, in this necrologic context, Ondine’s repeated description of a “tin foil tomb” evokes not only the infamous foil wallpaper of the silver factory “that Billy Name built” but the “resonant tomb” of the phonograph’s original tinfoil medium and its thin metal descendant: the electromagnetic tape used to record *a*.<sup>88</sup>

Warhol’s novel thus registers the seemingly unshakeable cultural trope that has always connected the inscriptive and spiritualist senses of the “medium,” but as we have seen it also connects death and the technological voice through a particular and idiosyncratic logic, triangulating lethal electricity, the telephone, and the phonograph through the figure of Maria Callas. Given that nexus, I want to propose that with Warhol’s novel as an intertextual background we might better understand the proper genre of his electric-chair paintings and see them as portraits. I have already noted her association with lethal electricity, but Callas is also identified—both within *a* and in the broader cultural discourse of the time—with silence. On the one hand, Callas not only warrants a reverential silence in *a* (“please don’t talk while the record’s on”), but the deafening volume at which her records are played frequently silences everything else because “the music’s too loud.”<sup>89</sup> That “*piercing music*” breaks into conversation—as when “*Opera interrupts*”—but it can completely cancel conversation as well.<sup>90</sup> The transcriber of several of the later tapes notes those points at which the conversation is “*overcome by opera*,” “*voices [are] drowned out by music*,” “*music is drowning the voices*,” or when “*Maria Callas and Giuseppe di Stefano are singing the Bnd [sic] Act Duet from Rigoletto and are obliterating parts of the conversation*.”<sup>91</sup> Ultimately, Callas dominates the speakers in *a* as she had once reduced the hapless Kurt Baum to silence with a series of scene-stopping, interpolated E-flats in the Mexico City performances of the early 1950s—some of the very performances, as it happens, to which Ondine and company are listening: “*Maria Callas overwhelms any attempt at conversation*”; “*Maria Callas overwhelms all replies*.”<sup>92</sup>

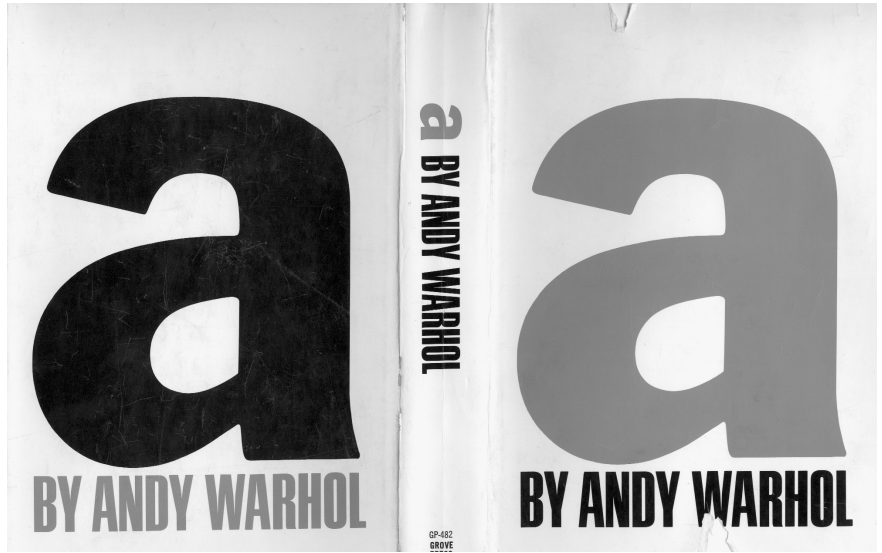
At the same time, the threat of Callas’s own silence was always imminent. Callas *not* singing had become as much a part of her celebrity as her vocal performances themselves. Her scandalous cancelations, midperformance walkouts, and professional feuds dramatized the periodic absence of her voice from certain opera houses. Adding to the perpetual drama of whether she *would* sing, the 1960s brought growing concern about how long she *could* sing. Her seemingly fragile health, debilitating exhaustions, and the increasingly quiet voice to which she was forced to resort in an attempt to manage a declining control over her upper register all seemed to chart an inevitable

path toward the total silence of an early retirement. A vocal crisis had led to a hasty, although temporary, retirement in 1959, and as she admitted, “Everyone thought I was finished. . . . the press were writing so frequently that I had lost my voice I got to the point of believing it myself.”<sup>93</sup> In an article published in *Time Magazine* just days before the taping of *a* began, she spoke of herself in the third person: “Maria Callas has become a lonely world of a woman looking for her voice.”<sup>94</sup> When the conversations for Warhol’s novel were underway a few months later, Callas had given what were to be her final opera performances, and by the time Ondine finally fell asleep to the hiss of the still-rolling last tape, her retirement from the stage seemed to be an irrevocable fact. When the book was published in 1968, Callas had been silent for years, secluded in her Paris apartment, and it looked as if she would never record again.

Highlighting precisely those tropes that defined contemporaneous discussions of Callas—her distinctive electricity, the contrast between her current silence and the vocal power heard on the great recordings from the 1950s—*a* supplements and reorients Warhol’s immediately preceding visual work by inscribing Callas within a network of metonymic associations that extend to the electric-chair paintings as well. The novel, in this way, serves as a lengthy caption to works that otherwise seem to be either hopelessly, impenetrably hermetic or too self-evident to need any gloss at all. Taken together, however, *a* and the electric-chair paintings stand as Warhol’s great displaced diptych portrait of Callas, a figure who fits perfectly into his series of coded, elegiac celebrity portraits from the period, all figures of the dead and near dead, all proxies of mourning and loss: Marilyn, Jackie, Liz—even socialite Ethel Scull has her multipanel portrait of photo-booth vamping shadowed into a modern memento mori through the ineluctable homophonic slippage of her name. My point, however, is not so much about intertextual hermeneutics as about the way in which history accretes to objects (where history includes the patterns of how we use language and the ways in which its materiality implicates both specific practices and the social relations between its users).

That historical accretion is the same mechanism by which the emphatic “SILENCE” and the particular idiomatic force of “chamber” might—in the absence of *a*—shade the electric-chair paintings to look instead like portraits of John Cage, who in the decade prior to Warhol’s own taping had become famous for exploring the artistic limits of electromagnetic tape, phonograph cartridges, and durational events.<sup>95</sup> Always best known, of course, for his so-called silent piece, *4’33”*, Cage’s book *Silence* had been published in 1961, and it foregrounds one of the many versions of his claim to have experienced

Andy Warhol.  
*a: a novel*, 1969.  
Dust jacket, first edition.



an epiphany while isolated in Harvard University's anechoic chamber, an ostensibly silent room in which he could nonetheless hear his circulatory pulse and the high-pitched electrical hum of his nervous system.<sup>96</sup> The Harvard lab is another version of an institutional "shock room," a space constructed under the sign of silence but betrayed by electricity, and a setting further aligned with the room pictured in Warhol's electric-chair paintings by the way in which *chamber* is idiomatically linked to both *anechoic* and *execution* (or *death*).<sup>97</sup> Like Picasso's famous portrait of Gertrude Stein, which she slowly grew to resemble, Warhol's electric-chair paintings attract their subjects with an exact but transient verisimilitude. Or perhaps they pose something more like Wittgenstein's dilemma when faced with the drawing of the duck/rabbit (a drawing that, to be honest, actually looks like neither a duck nor a rabbit but which we recognize, at first glance, as something along the lines of "that drawing which is supposed to look like both a duck and a rabbit"). In the case of Warhol's remotivated image, the lens of history brings certain features to the fore, or forces them to recede, even moments later, when we look back.

With the weight of its associations, *a*—the monumental lens of a particular historical record—tips the scales and constructs a perspective capable of switching the aspect, in the Wittgensteinian sense, of the electric-chair paintings. But it also records a moment on the cusp in its own right, a moment between competing attentions and configurations. From the arrival of a professional Norelco slant-track videotape camera in the early pages to the final chapters' record of an early Velvet Underground concert, *a* documents some of the key transitional moments in Warhol's career. But it also memorializes a moment at which the Factory family was disintegrating: Edie drifting away, Ondine about to sober up and settle down with a steady boyfriend and a government job in Brooklyn, Billy Name days away from going deep underground before disappearing entirely. Just before the book's publication, Warhol was pronounced dead. Callas was silent. Which is all precisely why Edison had developed the phonograph in the first place: "for the purpose of preserving the sayings, the voices, and the last words of the dying member of the family."<sup>98</sup> The novel goes on, as it always has, as it never did. There are thousands of hours of archived tapes boxed in Pittsburgh—unheard, untranscribed, slowly oxidizing.



## Notes

1. Andy Warhol, *a: a novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 100. Compare Warhol, 76, 284. All quotations, including misspellings, appear as in the published text.

2. Warhol, 357.

3. See Reva Wolf, *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 141. Worth remembering, in light of Capote's quip about Kerouac's "typing," is that Warhol was obsessed with Capote. His first exhibit consisted of drawings based on Capote's texts. Wolf, 10–11. See also Victor Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2003), 91–92.

4. Or rather, they seem to have *typed* quickly and *worked* slowly. Warhol recalls: "I had never been around typists before so I didn't know how fast these little girls should be going. But when I think back on it I realize that they probably worked slow on purpose so that they could hang around the Factory more." Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 149. In a discussion of tape recorder technology, Name explains: "there are all these other gadgets you can use for it and you can use a typewriter and and stuff like that . . . I mean you can put one of those foot pedals on and and work with a foot pedal." Warhol, 342.

5. Bockris, 557.

6. Warhol, 451.

7. Warhol, 314.

8. See Robert Morris's roughly contemporaneous work for tape, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961).

9. *A* is not, however, the only book to present the transcript as a literary genre. In addition to Kerouac's *Visions of Cody*, Ed Friedman's *The Telephone Book* (New York: Power Mad Press, 1979) plays out the endgame of New York School poetics by literalizing the basis of Frank O'Hara's "personism": "While I was writing I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem." Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 499. Or as Ondine puts it: "We never finished the poem, we just did the telephone." Warhol, 250. More recently, Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* (New York: Granary Books, 2001) extends the duration of Warhol's project and refocuses its scope, transcribing everything the author said for one week. In one revealing and felicitous conversation in *Soliloquy*, Liz Kotz points out the similarity between Goldsmith's project and *a*, although Goldsmith claims not to have known about the precedent. From another tradition, DJ culture has also led to projects such as those by The Spacewürm, *i listen: a document of digital voyeurism* (San Diego: Incommunicado Press, 1999); and Robin Rimbaud, *Warhol's Surfaces* (Erding, Germany: Intermedium CD017, 2003).

10. Warhol, 103.

11. See Michel Serres, *Le parasite* (Paris: Grasset, 1980).

12. Warhol, 111, 121, 184, 185, 190–191. Although the conversation seems to suggest otherwise, "200" may refer to the dosage rather than the number of capsules; 200 mg is the published upper limit of the recommended adult dose for Secobarbital (sodium quinalbarbitone). On the logic of the pharmakon, see Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 95.

13. Warhol, 1–2, 207.

14. For example, Warhol, 235–236.

15. Warhol, 162.
16. Warhol, 114.
17. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 223.
18. Warhol, 114.
19. For one insistent registration of “interference” and the noise in the channel, see Warhol, 203–205.
20. Warhol, 121.
21. Warhol, 275.
22. Such moves can be located elsewhere in Warhol’s practice. His film *Harlot*, for just one instance, rechristens its subject, Jean Harlow, with the replacement of a single letter. The irreverent play of the title, however, also resonates with the work’s filmic mechanism. *Harlot* was Warhol’s first sound film and even before the soundtrack’s grainy playback begins, the work’s title announces a quasi-mechanical, imperfect duplication of sound.
23. Prefiguring the translations from speech to print that will be made by the typists, the book’s speakers often spell out words by way of clarification and explanation. See Warhol, 134, 158, 163, 260, 262, 342, etc. For one registration of the typist’s uncertainty, see Warhol, 310.
24. Warhol, 27, 166, 211, 285, 313, 360.
25. Warhol, 254, 252, 244, 50.
26. Warhol, 433.
27. Warhol, 126–128, 224, 378, 385.
28. Warhol, 247. Compare the earlier equation of “witness” and “witless.” Warhol, 145.
29. Compare “She’s got big balls, I tell ya.” Warhol, 311.
30. Warhol, 281.
31. Warhol, 310. The typist’s hesitation is later justified when Rotten Rita (Kenneth Rapp), discussing Callas’s early recording of Kundry, associates her with an exquisite boredom: “Parcival is so fuckin dull . . . it’s fabulous.” Warhol, 356.
32. Warhol, 125, 247, ch. 12/1.
33. Warhol, 95. Sally Beauman complains: “Because Ondine’s brain seems irretrievably addled with amphetamine, most of what he says takes the form of grunts, squeals, and bad puns.” Sally Beauman, review of *a: a novel*, by Andy Warhol, *New York Times*, 12 January 1969, 32. As if making a pun on that punning, such actions are in fact known as “punding,” a term coined by G. Rylander to describe the compulsive behavior that characterizes the effects of amphetamine overuse. Indeed, at precisely the same moment Warhol was conducting his experiment with the effects of sustained amphetamine use, G. Rylander was gathering similar data at the Clinic for Forensic Psychiatry in Stockholm. Between 1964 and 1966 Rylander studied the effects of the chronic intake of high doses of phenmetrazine. See G. Rylander et al., “Preludin-narkomaner från klinisk och medicinsk-kriminologisk synpunkt,” *Svenska Lakartidningen* 63, no. 52 (28 December 1966): 49–73; and G. Rylander et al., “Psychoses and the Punding and Choreiform Syndromes in Addiction to Central Stimulant Drugs,” *Psychiatria, Neurologia, Neurochirurgia* 75, no. 3 (May–June 1972): 203–212.
34. Bockris, 192; and Robert Mazzocco: “a a a a . . .” *The New York Review of Books* 12: 8 (24 April, 1969): 34–37, 34.
35. Warhol, 207.
36. Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (New York: Viking, 2001), 3.

37. Warhol, 404. Compare Warhol, 325.
38. Warhol, 263.
39. Warhol, 76, 258, 278, 284.
40. Warhol, 265.
41. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 141. For a discussion of the “strange names” of Czechoslovakians, see Warhol, 73. Additionally, note Warhol’s explanation in the first chapter: “I’m not really pop. . . . I’m sort of a little bit 1930 bohemian.” Warhol, 11. Linich claims that the title was an homage to the typographic gimmick of e.e. Cummings’s signature. Warhol, 453.
42. Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon, 1993), 135. For points at which recordings become the focus of the plot of *a*, such as it is, see Warhol, 139, 147, 171–172, 357. For the rituals of the cult of Callas, see Warhol, 59, 241, 309, 369. Howard Klein describes the “blind adulation” that accompanied “irrational and all-consuming dedication” to *La Divina*. Howard Klein, “Maria Callas’s Imperious Carmen,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1965, X23. Or as Beauman puts it, less sympathetically, “Ondine himself seems to be the silliest of intellectual snobs, boring on for ages about the last exquisite diminuendo in ‘Lucia di Lammermoor.’” Beauman, 32.
43. Arnold H. Lubasch, “Jubilant Met Crowd Hails Callas Return,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1965, 17.
44. Sherman L. Morrow, “The In Crowd and the Out Crowd,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1965, 12–20.
45. Warhol, 264–265. See also the later mention of “doctor Schooll’s corn . . . corn remedy” and the importance of “the difference between a wen and a wart,” as well as additional occurrences of “corn” and the play between “pustural” and “pastoral.” Warhol, 95, 324, 325, 378.
46. *New York Review of Books* 12, no. 8 (24 April 1969): 36.
47. When Rink complains about the “complete insensibility of the people to what’s happening now,” he may have meant (or even have said) the proximate “insensitivity.” Warhol, 162.
48. Warhol, 347. Compare Warhol, 249.
49. Warhol, 189, 379.
50. Warhol, 330.
51. Warhol, 448.
52. Warhol, 241.
53. Warhol, 241, 242. See Warhol, 238, for an earlier discussion of Chinese scrolls.
54. Warhol, 74, 244, etc.
55. For a striking example of this echolalic vocabulary, see the passage where “calling,” “called,” and “calls” appear just before “Callas.” Warhol, 193. Note also, in particular, “call us.” Warhol, 40, 232.
56. Warhol, 258.
57. Warhol, 57.
58. See, for instance, Warhol, 113, 158–159, 181, 223, 259, 347, 350. Harold Schonberg describes Callas’s performance as “operating,” and his assessment was repeated verbatim elsewhere. Harold Schonberg, “Opera: Maria Callas Returns to Met in ‘Tosca,’” *New York Times*, 20 March 1965, 17; “La Callas,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1965, E2. Against the continuous chatter of *a*, operators, like loud opera, are one of the few things permitted to break into conversations (see, for instance, Warhol, 363). “Operation” and “opera” appear together explicitly,

as well as with the implicit etymological pun behind “All right Maria, do your work” (Latin *opera*). Warhol, 72, 356. The conversation recorded on the first half of the tenth tape focuses emphatically on both the word “operated” and the absence of “operators.” Warhol, 227. Additionally, the operator is called to help find a drugstore. Warhol, 363.

59. Warhol, 378.

60. Bockris, 192.

61. Warhol, 358–362, 370, 371; compare Warhol, 192, 214, 225, and the “pin holes” at 342. For another discussion of needles, see Warhol, 360. For another discussion of Callas’s high notes, see Warhol, 197. Note also the equation of opera and “a” in the line “*Opera: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah.*” Warhol, 383.

62. See, among other instances, Warhol, 52, 59, 99, 123, 174, 285–286, 301, 306, 309, 324–325, 378, 380–383, 427, 438, 450.

63. Warhol proposed a television show to be called *Phoney* and made a related video (1973). For the misspelling in *a*, see Warhol, 165, 191; correct versions occur at 59, 424, 440.

64. See, for instance, Warhol, 368, 372.

65. Warhol, 141, 386, 282, 374, 450. For other moments of operatic impersonation, see Warhol, 104, 238, 253. *Speed*, once again, is at issue in the fabrication of the falsetto: “*Tape speeds up to Munchkin chatter.*” Warhol, 390.

66. Schonberg, 17; and Jean-Pierre Lenoir, “Paris Welcomes Callas as Tosca,” *New York Times*, 20 February 1965, 17.

67. Warhol and Hackett, 303. See the discussion with David Bourdon from 1962–1963, in *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, Thirty-Seven Conversations with the Pop Master*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004), 8–9.

68. Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol*, 31. As Bockris understates it, “All four [of the typists involved with *a*] shared a disinclination to spell correctly.” Bockris, 453.

69. Ariana Stassinopoulos, *Maria Callas: the Woman behind the Legend* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 121. For a mention of Bernstein in *a*, see Warhol, 64.

70. Schonberg, 17; Howard Klein, untitled article, *New York Times*, 23 May 1965, X14; “Return of the Prodigal Daughter,” *Time Magazine*, 26 March 1965: 64; unsigned article, *New York Times*, 21 March 1965, E2.

71. Warhol, 59, 253. Earlier *Callas* and *ohms* are used in the same sentence. Warhol, 74.

72. Warhol, 96.

73. Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol’s Art and Films*, Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-Garde, No. 54 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 320. Compare similar comments by George Hartman, Gerard Malanga, Henry Geldzahler, and Richard Mazzocco. Patrick S. Smith, *Warhol: Conversations about the Artist* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 12, 41, 62, 186; and Mazzocco, 34.

74. Warhol, 376. Compare Warhol, 181, 306, 399.

75. Bockris, 171.

76. “Rosenberg” occurs in *a* in the context of accusations of being “a commie spy.” Warhol, 151. In the context of a transcribed book, this occurrence reminds one that Ethel was sentenced, in essence, for her *typing*.

77. That “SILENCE” is also a reminder that the image comes from a photographic document of a room that was legally beyond descriptive language. After the first state electrocution in New York, expert witnesses attending executions were “required to sign a statement affirm-

ing that they would never discuss what they saw in Sing-Sing's death chamber." Metzger 171. With all of the ear-splitting opera played in the Factory while these images of silence were being (re)produced, Warhol's deadpan sensibility might well have registered the irony of the chair's location in Sing-Sing.

78. © Gerard Malanga, used with permission. Transcription from image.

79. *George Oppen: New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Davidson (New York: New Directions, 2002), 35. Malanga had corresponded with Oppen in 1963, just after Oppen's return to poetry with *The Materials* (New York: New Directions, 1962). See Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California at San Diego, MSS 0016, Box 7, Folder 13.

80. See Sterne, ch. 1; and Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 451.

81. See Edison's notebook for 17 July 1877, as well as the final entry in his list of uses for the phonograph: "connection with the telephone." Sterne, 202.

82. Goldsmith, *Mirror*, 69.

83. Sterne, 301. See also Ronell, 98, 248. For all of its deathly resonance, Edison's phonograph was also underwritten by his love of opera and in particular the bel canto repertoire that Callas reinvigorated. See Allen S. Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 95–96.

84. Mazzocco, 34.

85. Warhol, 207, 373. Compare Warhol, 114–115. For the ghostly "spirit" of the telephonic voice in *a*, see Warhol, 124, 162.

86. Warhol, 132–136, 174–175, 265, 384.

87. Warhol, 144, 270, 384, 389. On the first page of *a*, Ondine connects an exploit in which he dressed up in a sheet and "felt like a ghost" with vocal disturbances: "some of my throat is gone." Mazzocco refers to the characters in *a* as "spook hour hysterics." Mazzocco, 36.

88. Warhol, 184. Compare Warhol, 89; and Sterne, 290, 298.

89. Warhol, 35, 362, 365. Compare Warhol, 427.

90. Warhol, 78, 378. Compare Warhol, 382.

91. Warhol, 332, 353, 357, 383.

92. Warhol, 372, 383.

93. Stelios Galatopoulos, *Maria Callas: Sacred Monster* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 377.

94. "Return of the Prodigal Daughter," *Time Magazine*, 26 March 1965: 64.

95. Warhol first saw Cage in the summer of 1948, when the latter gave a talk to the Outliner's Club at Carnegie Tech. David Revill: *The Roaring Silence, John Cage: A Life* (New York: Arcade, 1992), 94. Many points of personal contact would follow, including Warhol's amorous 1951 correspondence with Tommy Jackson, a printer who, like Cage, was at Black Mountain College. Wolf, 11. Warhol and Cage would have been most directly connected by filmmaker Emile de Antonio, as well as by John Cale, and two shared technical collaborators, Billy Klüver and Ronald Nameth, who worked with both artists in 1966 and 1967 respectively. "I think John Cage has been very influential," Warhol admitted in 1963, and although some suspicion remains about the authenticity of Warhol's statements in this interview, the point is that the connection was, at the very least, obvious to Gene Swenson. G.R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I" (1963), repr. in Goldsmith, *Mirror*, 20. Indeed, Ted Berrigan went so far as to collapse the two in his 1965 "Interview with John Cage," a spurious interview



that has Cage ventriloquize Warhol with misattributed quotations lifted from earlier Warhol interviews, including the one with Swenson. Ted Berrigan, *Bean Spasms* (New York: Kulcher, 1967), n.p. In conversation with Ruth Hirschman in 1963, Warhol would say, “I would grant him [Cage], you know, a lot on purely experimental intellectual ‘freeing the other artists’ basis.” Goldsmith, *Mirror*, 42. Cage later reciprocated by noting the similarity of their projects. Jean Stein, *EDIE: An American Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 235.

96. John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 8. Branden Joseph’s important notice of the similarity between Cage’s account and a passage in Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* casts doubt on the veracity of Cage’s uncorroborated story. Branden W. Joseph, “White on White,” *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Autumn 2000): 105–106.

97. *Chamber* attracts few other words: a related set of disciplinary terms (*judge*, *Senate*, and *torture*), *burial* in a narrow range of archeological uses, and some specialized scientific *termes de métier*. All other instances are now archaic (*bridal*-, *bed*-, *-maid*, *-pot*, *Star*-).

98. Theresa M. Collins and Lisa Gitelman, eds., *Thomas Edison and Modern America: An Introduction with Documents* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 73.