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by Andrew Sarris

"**L'AMOUR**," the newest revel of Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey, seems traditional and even innocent in this chaotic and corrupt interlude in film history. For a long time I resisted the pansexual put-ons of the Warhol-Morrissey

menage. There was something there, but whatever it was I didn't like it. Warhol and Morrissey always managed to remind me of the grubbiest days and nights of my Green Witch Village period with its stale taste of Champale, watered burgundy, and witless bohemianism. It was all a long day's journey into a dark night of nasty put-downs. All passion was hoarded for ego-puffing soliloquies and anticipatory insults to accommodate the pill-popping and vein-popping inferno of perpetual paranoia. The kind of chance encounter that in London or Paris led to romance or at least to casual sensuality led in New York either to grotesque rejection or to sordid criminality. Still, hope springs eternal and all that, and, consequently, I endured enough interminable come-on conversations to last me several lifetimes, never dreaming, of course, that one day Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey would make it their metier to regurgitate all this verbal narcissism on film.

Even so, I might have not reacted as strongly as I did to the first Warhol camp classics if I had felt more audience resistance to the outrageous arrogance involved in such blatant self-promotion. Instead, I felt that audiences were being intimidated by the self-confidence of freaks proclaiming themselves the wave of the future. Thus, I found myself reacting not so much against the films themselves as against the sheep-like spectators being led to cultural slaughter. Young people,

especially, seemed to be hypnotized by vinyl and other ersatz substitutes for the soul. Now that I am older and wiser, or perhaps only more cynically despairing, it no longer seems very fruitful to save the Lance Louds of this world from the pernicious influence of Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey. Mediocrity will out no matter what, and the business of saving souls is more an illusion than a vocation.

However, now that I have become resigned to Warhol and Morrissey in the sphere of things, they themselves seem to have mellowed after a fashion into very modest romantics. "L'Amour" is not quite as startling as "Trash" or as striking as "Women in Revolt," but that is largely because it doesn't rely on the relatively facile dialectics of drag. Since Morrissey became the more active partner of the Warhol-Morrissey team, the technical quality of the movies has been steadily improving. This raises an interesting problem for formal criticism in that Warhol's earliest "technique" was so minimal that it almost qualified as something else whereas Morrissey's relative professionalism takes him out of the minimal category without any appreciable advance toward the still distant domains of the most masterful mise-en-scene.

In this instance, "L'Amour" comes so close to being a well-modulated movie that one wonders why the director doesn't turn off the faucet of falsetto histrionics more often than he does, particularly in the monotonously

coy confrontations between Michael Sklar's prissy pederast and Max Delys's soulful stud. Sklar was quite effective in supporting roles in both "Trash" and "Woman in Revolt," and he seems to have been a creative collaborator on "L'Amour," but he seems somewhat too self-consciously derisive to qualify as a Warhol-Morrissey Superstar. By contrast, Max Delys is a real find with his stupidly sensitive good looks and his bumblingly sincere French accent. There is the usual imposture of two obviously gay couples criss-crossing satirically into two burlesque straight romances. The girls—Donna Jordan and Jane Forth—strain very hard to achieve the precious chic of drag queens, but buried somewhere under a mountain of make-up and mannerisms are two American chicks living on sheer nerve and an institutional style. This is the kind of movie in which Michael Sklar is called Michael, and Max Delys is called Max, and Donna Jordan Donna, and Jane Forth Jane, and so forth. Obviously, each character improvises a great deal, if not entirely. "L'Amour" is structured directorially nonetheless, and the ending is uncommonly poignant and romantic.

By making its freaks only a tiny portion of the Parisian scene, "L'Amour" confirms for me at least all the magic and mystery of Paris. And this time around, I

become fondly attached to the Warhol-Morrissey menage for, of all things, being so intransigently American! What has never been acceptable as social allegory is now finally validated as a personal myth. Goodbye Jean-Paul Sartre, and hello, Jean Cocteau.