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Morning breath: Poor Little Rich Girl's Edie Sedgwick wakes up and smells her eyeliner.

Silver is the color of speed

Andy Warhol's long-buried films continue to reemerge. **By Chuck Stephens**

FORGET EVERYTHING you've heard: Andy Warhol's films are not endurance tests. They are films of action — sometimes raunchy, sex-motored, mind-blowing action (like 1968's *Bike Boy*), and sometimes subtle, butt-numbing, minimalist action (like 1965's landmark *Empire*) — and high emotion. Imbued with an ongoing sense of visual mischief (searing colors, revved-up strobe-cuts, babblingly radiant superstars), they crisscross genres (documentary, exploitation, underground, pornography) and are open to endless interpretation.

Mainly, however, they are films about speed. (Find out for yourself, as, over the course of the summer, the S.F. Cinematheque, the Pacific Film Archive, and New Langton Arts unspool several newly retrieved specimens from Warhol's much-misremembered, elusive pantheon.)

Epic quantities of methamphetamine — that kind of speed. Consumed by the art-movers, hip-shakers, and assorted hangers-on at the silver foil-covered Factory, speed seeped through veins and hung in the air. From 1963 to 1968, Warhol-the-filmmaker worked at a manic speed of his own, producing hundreds of films — from three-minute screen tests to 24-hour marathons — and countless prints, paintings, happenings, and other social experiments. This dervish of activity was then delivered to audiences who, already saturated with the energies (if not the pharmaceuticals) of the era, were up-to-date and itchy for the next revolution.

But with the party already in swing, impish Warhol spiked the

punch. Though shot at the standard sound-speed of 24 frames-per-second, Warhol's silent movies are meant to be projected at a time-distorting 16 fps: this increased a film's running time by half and slowed the screen action down to a languorous, druggy dawdle. Pulling patience like taffy, Warhol's downshifted cinema confronted viewers with films that all but refused to budge. Could anything be more antithetical to a meth-head's demonic fast-forward than eight nearly unwavering hours of *Empire's* State Building, a film so resistant to complete consumption that it took scholars almost 30 years to find a fleeting shot of Warhol himself, late in its fourth hour?

For a more bite-sized silent sample, take the altogether stoned, vaguely sexy *Haircut (No. 1)* (1962). Three men hang out in an apartment: One (a naked cowboy) cleans marijuana in a sieve while the second (Billy Name, an early Warhol confidant, Factory "foreman," and photographer) tweaks and snips at the locks of a pouty third. The compositions smack of European art cinema, but the insouciant attitudes of the stars reveal the degree to which the film is a joke: The final shot finds them staring at the camera — and the viewer — and rubbing their eyes in a mixture of delight and disbelief.

Toying with a movie's timeline wasn't Warhol's only method for deranging cinematic sensuality, as the astonishing talkie, *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965) — doubled-billed with *Haircut (No. 1)* — amply indicates. Made shortly after the filmmaker obtained his first sound camera (an Auricon, which allowed Warhol to shoot uninterrupted 33-minute rolls of film and to record

sound directly on the celluloid), *Poor Little Rich Girl* is one of several portrait-films of Edie Sedgwick, Warhol's doped-out doppelgänger and perhaps ultimate superstar. It's also one of the most perverse manipulations of screen presence ever made.

An ostensibly simple, 66-minute portrait of Edie waking up, making up, and taking a phone call, the film's first 33 minutes pose a remarkable challenge: It is shot entirely, outrageously — and altogether intentionally — out of focus. While Sedgwick wades through an ocean of gray-white fuzz, a chimera in black bikini and spray paint hair, Warhol's camera loiters on her elbow, then patrols the valleys of her boyish body. She puts on an Everly Brothers record and just lets it play until the second reel kicks in. Suddenly, Edie's features are crisp, hyperanimate, and enormous, with mascara ladled around her eyes like rumpled velvet and a car crash scar at the summit of her crinkly, cartoon bunny's nose — and on she babbles till film's end.

This is just the tip of the silver iceberg: grab a Cinematheque schedule (or call them at 415-588-8129) or a PFA calendar (or call 510-642-1412) for more information and upcoming dates. And for god's sake, don't miss *Bike Boy* (about which I'll say more in a couple of weeks) at the PFA June 3, then in the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival June 12.

They used to say "Speed kills," but with these incredible Andy artifacts back from the crypt, it's nice to know that all they meant was "Hurry up and wait." ■

For dates, times, and venues, see *Reperatory Film listings*.