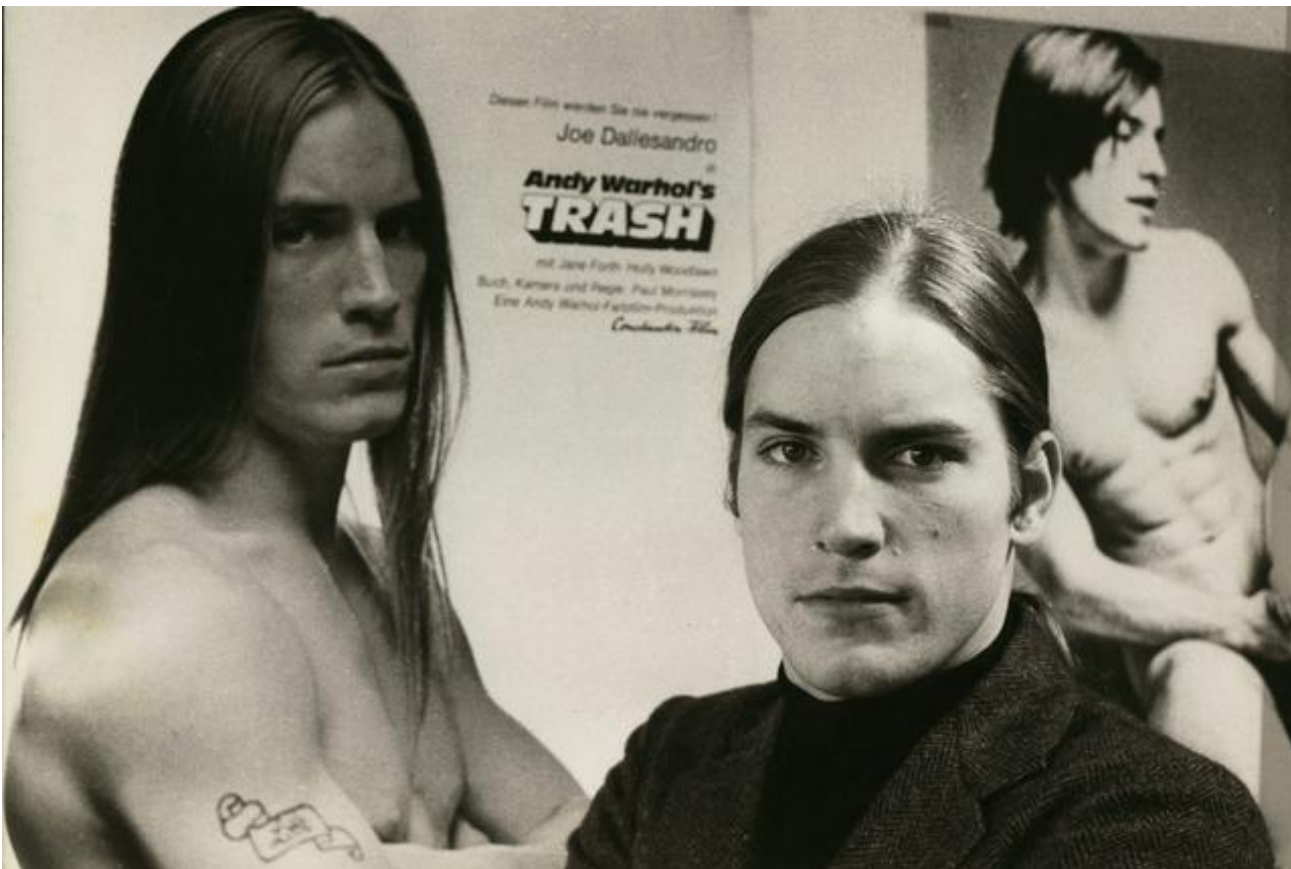


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Trash Talk

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Joe Dallesandro promoting *Trash* in Berlin, early 1970s: Photo courtesy Little Joe Productions and joedallesandro.com.

Curator Jon Davies discusses a landmark Andy Warhol-produced film

By Bil Antoniou

Andy Warhol has been called the 20th Century's quintessential American artist.

Indeed, his career as an artist is groundbreaking for its breadth, encompassing painting, sculpture, magazine and book publishing, as well as television, film and music production. (See the review of the book on the Warhol-produced rock band, The Velvet Underground, in this issue's reviews section.) Not only did he reinvent the idea of what an artist could be, but he was prescient in his examinations of two of North American society's current obsessions - fame and death. During the 1960s, Warhol's studio, The Factory, was a hub of artistic, literary and filmic activity that has become the stuff of legend.

Film maker Paul Morrissey became a Factory fixture in 1965 after meeting Warhol, who asked him to help develop some of the filmic ideas the artist had been pursuing. From 1965 to 1975, Morrissey collaborated with Warhol on approximately 10 films, including the groundbreaking, split-screen opus Chelsea Girls in 1966. Although he made films after parting company with Warhol, Morrissey remains most recognized for the Warhol-produced movies starring Joe Dallesandro. Following the success of 1968's Flesh and preceding Heat in 1972, Morrissey made Trash in 1970, the high point of the "Hustler Joe" trilogy. In Trash, Dallesandro is cast opposite Holly Woodlawn, a drag performer who is unforgettably charismatic as a woman whose greatest goal in life is to get on welfare.

Vancouver-based publisher Arsenal Pulp Press has recently initiated a series of books focusing on films in the 'queer cinema canon', including Jon Davies' book on Trash. Davies, the Assistant Curator of Public Programs at the Power Plant, has produced an enlightening read that contextualizes Trash within the culture that produced it and the cinema it was commenting on at the time.

Davies sat down with Bil Antoniou, film reviewer for www.mygaytoronto.com (<http://www.mygaytoronto.com/>) to discuss the film and its continuing appeal to audiences today.



Jon Davies

BA: You mention the other two films of the "Hustler Joe" trilogy in your book, but focus primarily on *Trash*. Why?

JD: I think *Trash* always stood out for me because of a very strong identification with Holly Woodlawn. There's something about the dynamic between Joe Dallesandro and Holly and the very different models of underground stardom that they represent. You don't have a pair of central characters like these in the other

two films.

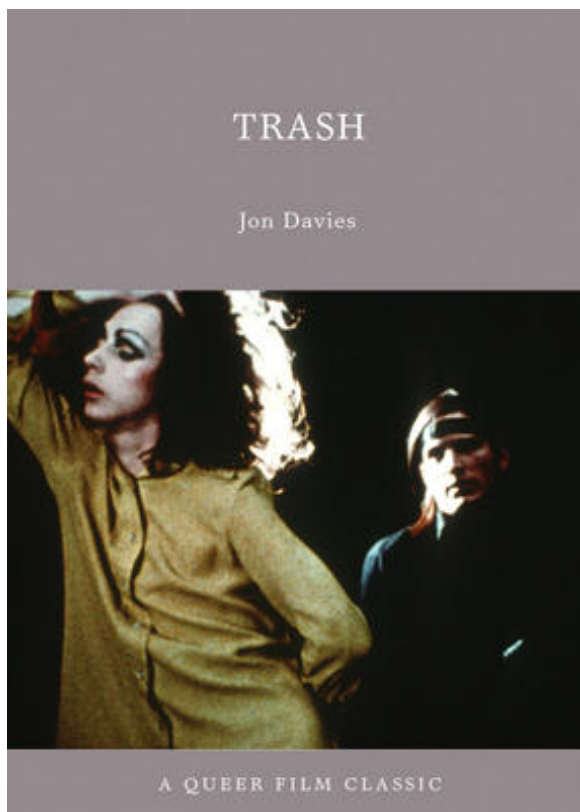
It's interesting that the trilogy has a queer following. Of course, I know why. But, there's really no predominance of gay relationships in them. They don't strike me as gay in content, but in attitude.

I would agree with that. Joe has this sexuality that doesn't really need to be described, he just does what he feels like and he's so comfortable. But, for me, Holly is a big part of the queer appeal of those films. It would be many years before a drag queen/trans character this developed would happen in Hollywood.

I love that there was Oscar buzz for her performance.

I think a lot of it at the time was that if you knew about these films it was a sign of your cultural capital and awareness. Certainly the circles Warhol was travelling in were very "high class".

These movies were reviewed by the likes of Pauline Kael and Vincent Canby. I never realized that they got this level of critical attention.



Trash by Jon Davies: Book cover image featuring the film's stars Holly Woodlawn and Joe Dallesandro.
Courtesy Arsenal Pulp Press.

For sure, and they were opening in big theatres and travelling widely. It was the exploitation film boom and the pornographic film boom. The Warhol group were offering something new; this male body on display. They really rode that wave.

These films were considered counterparts to bigger Hollywood releases: *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) was Hollywood's *Flesh* and *Easy Rider* (1969) is *Trash*.

I think the Warhol group saw the mainstream as encroaching on their territory. They had to reassert what they and the underground could do, be a lot more graphic, more candid, more funny.

Which is funny because *Midnight Cowboy* is so gritty for a Hollywood film.

I'm sure it was an economic concern as much as it was one about authenticity. The makers of *Midnight Cowboy* didn't want the box office dollars to go to another film about a male hustler.

Morrissey has said that he never understood the meaning of the word “camp”, which I find funny because those who claim not to understand it have made some of the campiest films!

Right. His take on conventions is so camp, and I certainly see the fact that Holly’s greatest goal is to get on welfare as such. I think that’s the source of so much of the film’s appeal. The conventions, visually, are so non-Hollywood, more inhabiting these genres and queer takes on them.

I think it’s fascinating that Paul Morrissey was so conservative and yet made these movies that would be deemed anything but. He was against the separation of Church and State. That’s pretty hardcore!

I think there must be some sort of psychological split, because now he really can’t handle the work being talked about as queer cinema, apparently. I think there can only be some sort of self-deception regarding his own actions.

Do you think he’s disappointed because he made these movies in a spirit of criticism of the people they’re about and yet they were taken by their audiences as empowerment?

I don’t know, because certainly some people did take them as criticism. The performances and the incredible humanity that Joe and Holly have transcends any moralizing. You can’t make a message movie and give all your power to the actors. They’re going to do things that you can’t plan for.

Is there any indication that he was a hypocrite? Claiming to have narrow values while enjoying all the excesses of this social set?

I think he saw it as a day job, that he was very cynical and knew that this enterprise could be made into something profitable by pandering to people’s dirtiest desires.



Little Joe documentary poster

It’s fascinating because it doesn’t come across in his movies; the loveliest prose in your book is talking about trash made into glamour, and the lives of the marginalized being romanticized. Maybe Morrissey was a closet liberal!

I say a lot about how it’s the performers who transcend his moralism. But, he was

ultimately the man behind the camera, so he clearly allowed them to subvert his meanings because he had the control. It's interesting that he paints Warhol so bitterly now. Yet, when he didn't have Warhol, his films became less interesting. His more mainstream products aren't bad, but they aren't films that will be remembered in the same way.

How many people watch *Spike of Bensonhurst* (1988) all that often?

Exactly. It shows a profound bitterness and profound thanklessness.

And, we don't even have to say 'Little Joe's' last name and people know who you're talking about.

Well, people like us do!

Trash by Jon Davies is published by [Arsenal Pulp Press](http://www.arsenalpulp.com/) (<http://www.arsenalpulp.com/>) as part of the Queer Film Classic series. Additional titles in the series are scheduled for release through to 2015.

Magenta thanks Little Joe Productions and www.joedallesandro.com (<http://www.joedallesandro.com/>) for the image of Joe Dallesandro. Visit [Little Joe Productions](http://www.littlejoeproductions.com/) (<http://www.littlejoeproductions.com/>) for information on the Dallesandro documentary, *Little Joe*, directed by Nicole Haeusser, that is currently making the rounds of international film festivals.

Bil Antoniou is a Toronto-based actor and writer who regularly blogs about film at [myoldaddiction.com](http://www.myoldaddiction.com/) (<http://www.myoldaddiction.com/>). He is also an editor at [mygaytoronto.com](http://www.mygaytoronto.com/) (<http://www.mygaytoronto.com/>), an online magazine. Bil has been single ever since Joe Dallesandro set a standard impossible for anyone else to meet.



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