THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Comrade Warhol

OPEN ACCESS

Comrade Warhol

Essay for 'Warhol in Europe' issue of JEPC
Glyn Davis, University of Edinburgh

In a 1977 interview with Glenn O'Brien for *High Times* magazine, Andy
Warhol was asked about his current painting projects. His response outlined a
political theme connecting together works made across the decade:

> We've been in Italy so much, and everybody's always asking me if I'm
> a Communist because I've done Mao. So now I'm doing hammers and
> sickles for Communism, and skulls for Fascism. (Goldsmith 2004: 239)

This brief comment serves to link two of Warhol's major groups of works of
the 1970s, the *Skull* and *Hammer and Sickle* series; it also partially reprises
Warhol's common tactic of attributing creative ideas to others, the notion of
making 'Communist paintings' here seeming to originate with unidentified
interrogators. Notably, Warhol does not express any personal political
sympathies in his response: Communism and Fascism are topics, themes for
art to engage with, rather than allegiances. This essay focuses on the
Hammer and Sickle series, and the place of politics, especially Communism,
within Warhol's drawings, paintings, and photographs.

Warhol's mention of Italy in his retort to O'Brien is of crucial significance. In an
essay on the *Skulls*, Trevor Fairbrother notes that in the mid-1970s 'Warhol
and his Factory circle were working with the European art market more
closely than ever before' (Fairbrother 1989: 108). He suggests that 'it is
tempting to read into [the *Skulls*] a new strategy to engage in pictorial
traditions that have always been a part of the Old World art market.' (108)
Such tactics could enhance the appeal of the works to European dealers and
buyers, and thus potentially boost Warhol's finances, as well as his cultural
currency in Europe. Fairbrother connects Warhol's *Skull* works to a historical
genealogy of other paintings featuring skulls, including a *vanitas* still life by
Jacques de Gheyn the Elder and a number of paintings by Cézanne. Beyond
this particular lineage, it may also be profitable to situate both the *Skull* and

Hammer and Sickle series in relation to the lengthy European history of still life painting.

I will return to this topic, but in this essay I primarily want to interrogate an implication lodged within Fairbrother's comment about the European art market. Specifically, I want to explore what value there is in reading the *Hammer and Sickle* series as 'European'. With these works, did Warhol attempt to tailor his output to what he perceived as European themes and concerns? Most commentary on the *Hammer and Sickle* series has stressed the power of the symbol in the United States, reading Warhol's images in relation to the history of Communism in North America. However, as Warhol was attempting at this time to position his work within a European context – to exhibit and sell it there, as a potential source of financial and cultural capital – then it is imperative the *Hammer and Sickle* series is framed from a European perspective. What European resonances and implications have been omitted from the few critical accounts of this significant series of works?

Parts and Labour

The mid-seventies was an especially productive period for Warhol: he received a large number of commissions for portraits; he worked on the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series of portraits of drag queens; he produced the *American Indian* and *Cats and Dogs* series. Warhol began working on the *Hammer and Sickle* series in 1975, in the midst of this prolific run. The series included drawings, photographs, and paintings. According to Bob Colacello, the germ of the idea for the *Hammer and Sickle* works was fomented at the Italian opening of the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series in Ferrara:

> The left-wing Italian art critics went wild, writing that Andy Warhol had exposed the cruel racism inherent in the American capitalist system, which left poor black and Hispanic boys no choice but to prostitute themselves as transvestites. At the press conference in Ferrara, a reporter wanted to know if Andy was a Communist. In Italy in the mid-seventies, the expected answer was yes. "Am I a Communist, Bob?" said Andy. "Well", I said, "you just painted Willy Brandt's portrait, but you're trying to get Imelda Marcos." "That's my answer," said Andy, as

the translators scratched their bearded chins. But back at the hotel that night, he said, "Maybe I should do real Communist paintings next. They would sell a lot in Italy." Thus was conceived the 1977 *Hammers and Sickles* series. (Colacello 1990: 228)

Ronnie Cutrone, Warhol's studio assistant at the time, identifies the origin of the *Hammer and Sickle* series in Italian graffiti uses of the emblem. Warhol, comments Cutrone, 'had just come back from Italy, and he said, "Gee, when you walk around Italy, all over the walls no matter where you go, there's in chalk or paint, there's all these images scribbled on everything with hammers and sickles." So, in a way, that sort of makes it Pop, in a funny way.' (Smith 1986: 278) The wide deployment of the reified symbol of the hammer and sickle by street artists in Italy as part of their lexicon – swiftly and cheaply mass-reproduced, and of denigrated cultural status – unsettled the power of the emblem in a manner analogous to the high/low reversals of Pop art. This may have boosted its appeal to Warhol as a potential theme.

Appropriately enough for a series of images of tools of work, a considerable amount of labour went into the production of the *Hammer and Sickles*. Cutrone's role in Warhol's studio was, as he put it in a 1978 interview, to 'photograph anything that's not people' (Smith 1986: 277). Warhol's appropriation of images made by others – such as his use of a photograph by Patricia Caulfield as the basis for his *Flower* paintings of the 1960s – had previously landed him in trouble (Morris 1981). As Cutrone noted, the photographs he took prevented Warhol 'get[ting] sued from magazines if he cuts pictures out and things like that.' (Smith 1986: 277). Despite this, Warhol initially sent Cutrone out around New York to look for pictures of hammers and sickles. This involved visiting Communist bookstores, which caused Cutrone concern:

I would find myself sneaking along the skyscrapers of the Big Apple and darting into a Red bookstore, looking over my shoulder. I'd find a couple of books and brown-bag them and nonchalantly walk out into the broad daylight. I'd return with the books, heart racing, and Andy would say, half-joking, half-serious, "Were you followed by anybody?" I would answer, "I don't think so, but if I was, I think I'm a little too old to

say I'm a college student studying the Russian Revolution." (Cutrone 2004)

After three weeks of fruitless searching, Warhol and Cutrone decided to use the actual items. Cutrone went to a number of hardware stores, selected a hammer and sickle, and then photographed them in the studio with 'three or four rolls of film, all different ways, using different lighting' (Smith 1986: 279).

Warhol's *Hammer and Sickle* works began to appear in late 1975. As Neil Printz notes, in a videotaped interview with Warhol from late October of that year, 'the Italian art critic Janus remarked upon a *Hammer and Sickle* drawing that he had seen the day before.' (Printz 2014: 329) David Bourdon reviewed a Minnesota exhibition of flower illustrations by Warhol in November of 1975; he commented in the review that Warhol was currently making drawings of 'the Soviet hammer and sickle, rendered as three-dimensional objects' (Bourdon quoted in Printz 2014: 329). Printz also notes that correspondence from early 1976 reveals that *Hammer and Sickle* works 'were already far enough advanced for Warhol to offer them for sale to other dealers in Europe' (Printz 2014: 329). From mid-November to mid-December 1976, Warhol exhibited some of the *Hammer and Sickle* drawings at the Visual Arts Museum in New York City, under the title 'Andy Warhol: Drawings'. In January 1977, *Hammer and Sickle* works were shown at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City in an exhibition called 'Still Lifes'. According to Arthur Danto, the works shown in an exhibition entitled *Hammer and Sickle Series* at Daniel Templon Gallery in Paris, 31 May to 9 July 1977, sold out (Danto 1992: 132).

In comparison to the abstracted iconographic form of the hammer and sickle Communist emblem, the tools in Warhol's images are resolutely solid and everyday. Text etched on the items is sometimes visible in the photographs and reproduced in the drawings and paintings: on the handle of the sickle are the words 'Champion No. 15' above the manufacturer's name 'True Temper'. Although some of Cutrone's photographs placed the two items in a crossed configuration that echoes the emblem's standard format, others did not, with the hammer and sickle occupying separate but contiguous space, the symbol reduced to its constituent components. In comparison to many of the other

series of works that Warhol produced around the same time – the commissioned portraits, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, the *Skulls*, *Cats and Dogs* – the *Hammer and Sickles* have a notably pared-back colour scheme. Black, white, grey and red are the main colours used, the red a bold hue redolent of the colour of the various Communist flags that have featured the symbol.[1] In some of the paintings of the series pinks and greens also appear, but these are less frequently used. The swatches and blocks of colour in the *Hammer and Sickle* paintings rarely fit with the outlines of the tools, bleeding out past them in blocky clumps. Ara Merjian argues that this formal tactic 'siphons off the particularity of even the most singular of signs.' (Merjian 2013) In other words, it restores some of the hammer and sickle's status as symbol by smearing over and beyond the individuality of the everyday items.

Warhol and Cutrone's arrangements of the hammer and sickle included a marked sense of depth, restoring a sense of three-dimensionality to the elements of the symbol. Cutrone noted that the tools were 'lit with long menacing shadows'; this served to 'add the drama that was missing from the flat-stenciled book versions' of the symbol (Cutrone 2004). Warhol had pointedly avoided using shadows in his Pop paintings of household items such as Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles. He also used bold swathes of colour to flatten the images of famous figures such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and Mao, and deployed the same aesthetic in many of his commissioned portraits. This makes the use of shadows in the *Hammer and Sickles* especially striking: an artist who had largely worked to emphasise the surface of his paintings – 'just look at the surface', as he once famously stated in an interview with Gretchen Berg (Goldsmith 2004: 90) – repeatedly included shadows in his paintings of the second half of the 1970s. Neil Printz links the shadows in the *Skull* and *Hammer and Sickle* series to Warhol's monumental 1978-9 *Shadows* series of paintings. To these examples from the 1970s we could also add the *Self-portrait in Profile with Shadow* photograph

---

[1] As Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii (1999: 32) note, 'The colour red has been a revolutionary symbol since 1789. But in Russia it was also associated with the idea of beauty: the word red (*krasnyi*) was a synonym of 'wonderful' (*prekrasnyi*) and 'beautiful' (*krasivyi*) – from which is derived the idea of 'Red Square', meaning beautiful. Red was seen as benevolent and good. There was a proverb: 'reddest is the best' ('*prekrasnyi-samyi krasnyi*').'

and *The Shadow* drawings from 1981. Printz asks 'Were the high contrast shadows integral to the [*Hammer and Sickle*] project from the start, or were they simply a collateral effect that increasingly absorbed Warhol's attention?' (Printz 2014: 327) Benjamin Buchloh asks a further question, and makes an observation: 'Who authorizes the shadow? Like obsolescence, the shadow is also an index of temporality and passing time.' (Buchloh 2009: 11) In relation to the hammer and sickle, then, the presence of shadows (immaterial as cast darkness, rendered more material as graphite or paint markings) may question the power and status of the icon, interrogate the longevity of its standing and force.

In addition to making connections across Warhol's body of work based on the inclusion of shadows, Printz also links the *Hammer and Sickle* series to a small series of five still lifes that Warhol produced in 1975, 'never seen outside the studio in Warhol's lifetime' (Printz 2014: 323). Arguably, the still life is an art historical form that Warhol returned to repeatedly throughout his career; Printz suggests that Warhol's paintings of Coke bottles and soup cans, for instance, could be seen as 'denatured still lifes' (325), but we could also frame many of Warhol's illustrations of the 1950s, both the personal and the commercial, as examples of still lifes. Cutrone has written that, for Warhol, the *Hammer and Sickle* works were 'an extension of the classic still life':

> For years I had been photographing "still lives" for Andy. I would go out and look for objects. I would bring back toilet plungers, fish bowls, cheese graters, telephones, etc. and then I would photograph them. He loved to experiment and update classical themes. For him, it was the best part of making art. Eventually, the Hammer and Sickles became an extension of this ongoing project. (Cutrone 2004)

The decision to exhibit *Hammer and Sickle* works under the title 'Still Lifes' at the Leo Castelli Gallery in January 1977 makes this connection explicit.

The link between the *Hammer and Sickle* series and the genre of the still life was further bolstered by the production of a limited number of photographs in which the hardware tools were arranged alongside a third item: a high heeled shoe, a slice of pizza, a dildo, a loaf of Wonder Bread, a McDonald's Big Mac

carton. These black and white images – closer in composition to the 1975 still lifes than the *Hammer and Sickle* series – present the arrayed objects for perusal, inviting contemplation of their equivalence and distinctiveness. For Buchloh, a clash occurs between the hammer and sickle and the third item: the photographs stage 'a confrontation with a totally different kind of object, one whose company those emblems could have never been envisioned as sharing.' (Buchloh 2009: 13) He stresses the interplay of gendered associations within the photographs: 'These objects and their shadows perform and alternate their gendered identities like actors in a Kabuki theatre.' (15) However, there is arguably also an East/West clash occurring, the components of the Soviet symbol coming up against objects that could be seen as representative of the United States (or, at least, of a Western capitalist economy). But what is being stressed here – the equivalence of all consumer objects, or the lack of commensurability between the hammer and sickle and the intrusive third object? Those third objects all reference or allude to pleasurable experiences, however empty of genuine nourishment. Perhaps these photographs propose that work and leisure are not distinct but intertwined, each deriving meaning from the other. Given Karl Marx's repeated engagement in his writings with labour and leisure, then, are these photographs actually Warhol's most sophisticated engagement with Communism?

Communism Manifest

Warhol's *Hammer and Sickle* series – including the small run of photographs also featuring a third object – was not the artist's sole engagement in his work with facets of Communism. As Blake Stimson notes, the artist's 'recurring and long-standing interest in Communist themes manifest[ed] in many of his works' (Stimson 2001: 541). These works emerge across the span of Warhol's artistic output, from the 1940s through to the 1980s; during that period, the status of Communism significantly altered on the global stage, individual countries and their people evolving complex historical and personal relationships with the political and ideological credo. Stimson traces Warhol's explicit engagements with Communism back to an illustration produced in 1948-9, the artist's final year of study at Carnegie Tech. At this time, the Cold

War was in full force. Warhol's untitled image, based on Robert Penn Warren's 1946 novel *All the King's Men*, depicts an arrangement of characters amongst whose number there appears a caricature of Lenin – albeit one that softens the Russian leader's angular features. As Stimson notes, Warren's novel serves as a 'general allegory of the intellectual culture of the 1930s and the support given to leaders of popular insurrections such as Lenin, Hitler, and Mussolini by its fellow-traveling artists and intellectuals' (533); it is therefore unsurprising that Warhol would choose to include a reference to Lenin in his illustration.

Shortly after graduation, around 1950, Warhol produced two further illustrations that engaged with the topic of Communism, 'Communist Speaker' and 'Crowd with Communist Flags', both in the blotted line style also utilized in the Warren image. 1950 was a significant year in the North American relationship to Communism, as it marked the beginning of Senator Joe McCarthy's attempts to unearth 'Communist subversion', especially within government and the media industries. Although McCarthy swiftly fell from grace, as Robert Service notes, his 'impact was enormous and permanent':

> No longer did the left-wing American press give gentle treatment to Marxism as had been the case before the Second World War. Words like communism and socialism – and eventually even liberalism – became widely pejorative. Mainstream political discourse in the USA underwent a drastic constriction. Sympathy for communism, where it survived outside the Communist Party of the USA, was usually confined to individual writers or students' political groups; it impinged little on popular opinion. (Service 2007: 274)

John Curley discusses Warhol's 'Communist Speaker' and 'Crowd with Communist Flags' as semiotic experiments with content and context: the Soviet flags in both pictures are separate and therefore potentially detachable from the human figures depicted. Identifying these bodies as 'Communists', then, relies on their juxtaposition with a particular symbol. Curley links Warhol's production of these two drawings to the artist's sexual orientation:

> Warhol's "Communist" drawings articulate an interest in the semiotics of the Cold War at this early date, exploring the ways that a charged

context can cause a false identification or misbranding of a subject. Warhol's outsider status as a homosexual male would have made the workings of anti-Communist hysteria even more palpable to him, as the press and popular films frequently equated homosexuality and communism. (Curley 2013: 60)

As, indeed, did Joe McCarthy; in the early 1950s he worked with Roy Cohn to accuse hundreds of government workers of homosexuality, their closeted sexual orientation allegedly making them susceptible to blackmail and therefore a risk to national security (see D'Emilio 1989, Johnson 2004). Curley's observation about these works by Warhol invites a wider reconsideration of all of Warhol's artistic engagements with Communism: how many of them can also be read as comments on queerness?

Curley also draws attention to other 'Communist' works by Warhol, though these are rather less direct engagements with the topic. In a drawing of a 1958 front page of the *Wall Street Journal*, Warhol inserted material absent from the original cover: an advert for a 'foreign securities' company called 'Carl Marks & Co, Inc.' Here a publication associated with a global hub of capitalism is infiltrated by words that invoke the roots of Communist ideology. Curley also convincingly connects Warhol's painting of *Popeye* (1961) to the hammer and sickle:

In Warhol's strange, silhouetted depiction of Popeye, the sweeping white arc that dominates the lower portion of the canvas might not only connote movement; it also resembles the shape of a sickle, with the protagonist's hand at right doubling as a handle. From here, might one interpret Popeye's silhouetted head and neck as a hammer, intersecting with the sickle? […] With the inclusion of stars, two of them red, is it a stretch to see the forms in *Popeye* as a Soviet flag, however twisted, abstracted, and hidden in this painting of a cartoon figure? (Curley 2013: 76-77)

Warhol's *Popeye*, that is, collapses together Western cartoon iconography with Communist symbolism in a manner that, perhaps, suggests subliminal Communist messages may be lodged within seemingly innocuous forms of popular culture. The East/West juxtaposition discussed earlier in this essay in

relation to the mid-1970s series of photographs of the hammer and sickle with a third object – a juxtaposition that challenges simplistic segregation of capitalist and Communist objects or icons – was already being explored within this painting, fifteen years earlier.

A similar challenge to distinctions between seemingly opposed ideologies was made by an inventive Warhol neologism: the word 'commonism'. This was a term, coined in Spring 1962 before 'Pop art' had attained widespread currency, that the artist attempted to launch and disseminate. 'Commonism' would designate work by artists that focused on common and household objects. These were items that, as Warhol noted in his book *POPism*, 'anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split second – comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles' (Warhol 2007: 3). At the same time, the term clearly punned on the word 'Communism'. For John Curley, 'Warhol's clever linguistic formulation equates capitalism's standardization of products and those who consume them with communism's rhetoric of classless homogenization. In a deft stroke, the artist's term dismantles the Cold War's ideological binaries' (Curley 2013: 53). Jonathan Flatley, meanwhile, focuses attention on the 'common-ness' or 'sameness' central to 'commonism': 'as a term', he writes, it 'aptly captures Warhol's broadly pursued interest in creating spheres of likeness, realms of practice, perception, and affect that can be held in common.' (Flatley 2010: 74). Is the homogeneity of consumer culture, 'commonism' asks, really that different from the ideological uniformity associated with Communist beliefs?

'Commonism' did not take off as a term, and Warhol's early illustrations with Communist content were rare one-offs made before his commercial and artistic careers took off. His early-70s series of paintings of Chairman Mao, however, is one of his most substantial and well-known. The series originated in a suggestion from Bruno Bischofberger, the Zürich dealer, who proposed that Warhol should produce a portrait of the most important person of the twentieth century. Bischofberger and his staff proposed Einstein, but Warhol chose Mao Tse-tung. In the spring of 1972, Warhol's studio made over 2000 portraits of Mao. The series was produced when Warhol was working in the

second Factory at 33 Union Square. This was his studio location from 1968 to 1973; incidentally, the space was two floors down from the headquarters of the Communist Party of America. For Bradford Collins, Warhol's Mao series was satirical and mocking, treating the Communist leader as though he were a consumer product:

> The portraits… came in small, medium and large sizes, like a soft drink at a fast-food restaurant. And like other Western consumer products, they were available in a variety of colours to suit individual taste. In short, Warhol transformed the era's most outspoken enemy of capitalism into the exemplary capitalist product – one produced cheaply, to be sold dearly to a mass market. The series involves a number of Duchampian reversals, in fact. The subject of fear has become an object of humour, and a notoriously colourless figure has become colourful; the ruthless foe of freedom of expression is now identified with it because of the painterly, expressionistic surface handling. The Mao series was more than a crass money-making exercise, then; it was a celebration, however light-hearted, of capitalism and political freedom, the essential American values. (Collins 2012: 368-9)

For Collins, then, the *Mao* series imposes a Western, Pop aesthetic on the Communist leader; the sheer scale of the series emphasizes repetition and sameness. Ronnie Cutrone emphasizes the connections between the Mao images and Warhol's earlier paintings of film stars and household items: 'As far as advertising and propaganda go, Coca Cola Signs and Mao posters have the same goal: to promote. In Andy's world, Marilyn and Mao have the same value, they are both Superstars.' (Cutrone 2004)

And yet, taken in isolation from the series, individual paintings of Mao are evidently more complex than these perspectives allow. The *Mao* from 1973 in the collection of the Art Institute Chicago, for example, towers over the viewer at almost 15 feet in height; it dominates space when publically exhibited. The painting's scale may serve to evoke the sort of banners displayed during public May Day celebrations in Communist countries. The colour use is a combination of muted tones and bold splashes and smears: the background is

11

a marine blue, and Mao's jacket a mixture of greens (olive, khaki) shading to yellow and blue-black at the base of the canvas. Mao's face is a muted orange, accentuated by red lips, blue eye-shadow, and salmon blusher that, as Cutrone suggests, recall Warhol's portraits of Marilyn Monroe. The dignity and composure of the original photographic source are maintained, however. John Curley compares Warhol's images of Mao with the artist's 1950 'Communist' illustrations and painting of Popeye. The earlier images, he argues, are concerned with the 'conspiracy underpinning representation'; in contrast, the *Mao* series serves as 'an acknowledgement and begrudging respect of the other' (Curley 2013: 226). Appropriately for their early-1970s context, then, the series operates as an embodiment and expression of Cold War détente (226).

Even more respectful is the series of paintings of Lenin that Warhol produced in 1986, towards the end of his life. These were made for an exhibition at Galerie Bernd Klüser, Munich, which opened in February 1987 just two days after Warhol's death. The series was comprised of paintings in three different sizes, a set of drawings and collages, and a silkscreen print edition. Warhol worked closely with Klüser during the development of the Lenin series, its formats and content tempered and altered to incorporate the suggestions of the European gallerist. Like the *Hammer and Sickle* series, the dominant colours employed in the Lenin works were black and red, similarly referencing the hues historically associated with the Communist party. As with the *Maos*, however, traces of a more Pop colouring were allowed to seep in: pinks, blues and yellows were used to provide contrast and accent. Ara Merjian connects Warhol's Lenin images to his portraits of Queen Elizabeth II from 1985, arguing that the representation of each figure by the artist allows them to retain their grace and stature, despite the Pop aesthetic imposed upon them: 'The monarch's bright-eyed stare and Comrade Lenin's glower remain their own; such are the shreds of singularity that each manages to salvage from Warhol's steamrolling silkscreen' (Merjian 2013). Jonathan Flatley, meanwhile, suggests a subtle affiliation between Warhol and Lenin, one that perhaps partly underpinned the artist's decision to paint the Communist leader. Warhol's practices of collecting, writes Flatley, which manifested in

diverse ways across his practice and life, produced 'assemblages of likenesses' (Flatley 2010: 94) – such as the hundreds of short Screen Tests he made between 1964 and 1966 (see Angell 2006 for a comprehensive guide to these films). These assemblages served 'the work of exteriorizing and representing the collectivity at the Factory that Lenin described the party doing for the proletariat.' (Flatley 2010: 94) Did Warhol, then, experience some degree of empathetic link with Lenin, and did this in any way infiltrate his own politics?

Warhol's Politics

In the 1977 interview with Glenn O'Brien with which this essay began, Warhol denies any political affiliation of his own:

> O'Brien: Did you ever read Marx?
>
> Warhol: Marx who? The only Marx I knew was the toy company.
>
> O'Brien: Do you ever think about politics?
>
> Warhol: No.
>
> O'Brien: Did you ever vote?
>
> Warhol: I went to vote once, but I got too scared. I couldn't decide who to vote for.
>
> O'Brien: Are you a Republican or a Democrat?
>
> Warhol: Neither. (Goldsmith 2004: 241)

This performance of indifference, of neutrality, fails to convince O'Brien: he names particular political works that Warhol has made. Warhol, however, maintains his stance of objectivity and disinterest: 'I just do anything anybody asks me to do', he says (242). And yet, as we have already seen, Warhol produced a considerable number of self-generated works on the topic of Communism during his career, including one image that directly referenced Karl Marx (an illustration that clearly reveals the dishonesty of his 'Marx who?'). And this substantial subset of Warhol's output is merely one portion of his works that could be identified as engaged with political themes.

Warhol may have affected disinterest in politics in 1977, but he had previously associated himself with particular political positions. Adopting these stances sometimes caused him personal difficulties, which may have led Warhol

towards the adoption – at least in his self-presentation to a broader public – of a blank, studied political neutrality. Blake Stimson, for instance, outlines an incident that occurred when Warhol was studying at Carnegie Tech:

> Sometime in late 1947 or early 1948, Warhol and many of the other students in his class reportedly signed a petition supporting Henry A. Wallace's third-party bid for candidacy in the upcoming presidential election. […] [T]he decision to sign the petition was charged with the suspicion of Communist sympathy by many in Pittsburgh. In one of the most notorious examples of pre-McCarthy period Red-baiting, the *Pittsburgh Press* published the names of all those in western Pennsylvania who had signed the petition to put Wallace on the ballot in April 1948. When Warhol's name showed up on the list, it reportedly came as a shock to his family. (Stimson 2001: 541)

Wallace ran as the Presidential candidate for the left-wing Progressive Party. He was endorsed by the Communist Party of America, who did not put forward their own candidate. Wallace's platform advocated for an end to the fledgling Cold War, and he was seen by some critics as 'soft on Communism'. The extent to which members of the Progressive Party subscribed to Communist principles and beliefs has been debated by political historians. Warhol's support for Wallace resulted in his name being included on a published defamatory list of sympathizers. The impact of this humiliation on Warhol is difficult to gauge: it may have been a root cause of his repeated return to the theme of Communism; it could have made him cautious about openly committing to any political ideology.

Certainly, in Gene Swenson's interview with Warhol in 1963, the artist is somewhat more opaque about his political opinions:

> Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. (Goldsmith 2004: 16)

This is a complex set of statements which, though it does not strictly endorse Communism ('why can't it work without…'), forges similarities between the political situations in the early 1960s in the United States and Russia. The latter, says Warhol, enforces Communism through its government; meanwhile in the United States, a system akin to Communism has formed itself without governmental interference or pressure. And yet there is a significant gap in Warhol's expressed view between 'everybody thinking alike' and 'everybody looking and acting alike'; the former is rooted in beliefs whereas the latter is (at least in significant part) cosmetic, aesthetic. Warhol's political dispatch invites reflection on the extent to which any Communist-like homogeneity in the United States is predominantly expressed in sartorial or stylistic ways.

A decisive shift in Warhol's overt commitment to political positions occurred in the early 1970s. Warhol's second Factory at 33 Union Square was sometimes ironically compared by the studio's regulars to Nixon's White House. Pat Hackett, who worked with Warhol on various writing projects, was referred to as Rose Mary Woods (Nixon's secretary). Andreas Killen outlines additional connections:

> As Watergate unfolded, this little joke evolved: Paul Morrissey and Brigid Berlin became the Factory's versions of John and Martha Mitchell [the U.S. Attorney General and his wife], and Bob Colacello became Bebe Rebozo [one of Nixon's friends and confidants]. Asked his reaction to the discovery that Nixon had secretly been taping all his conversations, Warhol blandly stated: "Everybody should be bugged all the time." (Killen 2007: 144)

In 1972, Warhol produced a screenprint of Nixon: the president's face was coloured in sickly, clashing hues of orange, pink, blue, and olive, and the words 'Vote McGovern' were written in capital letters at the bottom of the image. 'By making Nixon's face a lurid green', writes Jonathan Jones, 'he implies the president is diabolic. Warhol wants to show us evil abroad in the land: Nixon is a devil' (Jones 2001). The print was produced in a limited run of 250 copies. Subsequent to its creation, a list of Nixon's enemies was leaked to the press, and Warhol's name appeared as a significant financial supporter of McGovern's campaign. The IRS responded to this revelation by

investigating the artist's tax returns; they audited him annually for the rest of his life. As Killen notes, 'Warhol subsequently went to great lengths to steer clear of political endorsements.' (Killen 2007: 145)

Indeed, Warhol repeatedly – as in the O'Brien interview – denied political leanings of his own, whilst recurrently engaging with political topics in his work. How to interpret this political content has been repeatedly debated: does the Pop aesthetic drain out the political depth and meaning from figures such as Mao and Lenin, from images of race riots, or does their ideological charge remain intact? Blake Stimson argues that this tension is of fundamental significance to Warhol's project:

> This contradiction between what we might call the apolitical *tone* and the explicitly political *content* of his work has posed an ongoing problem for critics and historians, leading to interpretations that generally emphasize one side or the other… This contradiction or ambivalence need not be taken to be an either/or proposition, however, but instead can be more productively understood to be the core structure of Warhol's influential aesthetic sensibility. (Stimson 2001: 542-3)

Or as Stimson puts it in an endnote to the same essay, 'Warhol was a product of a complex set of conflicting influences and aims, and the politics of the position he eventually came to represent so effectively and influentially carried with it all the ambivalence and contradiction of that history.' (546, n.91).

The *Hammer and Sickle* series serves as a valuable example of the complex contradictory forces running throughout Warhol's political output. Ronnie Cutrone, for example, offers differing opinions on the series. Interviewed by Patrick Smith in 1978, he emphasized the 'nice shapes' in the hammer and sickle, and how the symbol's repeated appearance scrawled on walls in Italy caused it to lose its political meaning (Smith 1986: 278). Although he attempted to deny any political significance to Warhol's series, those resonances would not entirely dissipate: 'There's no deep connotation except… I mean, there is obviously 'cause it's a social symbol. Other than that there's really not much thought given to it except of how it really breaks up

into shapes and forms.' (282) In an essay reflecting on the series, Cutrone emphasized the playful nature of the *Hammer and Sickles*: 'when the paintings were finished they always looked like amusement park rides to me. Step right up and ride The Hammer and Sickle. Only 25 cents, if you dare. Not for the weak or faint of heart.' (Cutrone 2004) Treating the hammer and sickle symbol as an 'amusement park ride', of course, has political significance in its own right. The emblem's force and power is partly stripped away – though it retains the potential to scare. In the same short essay, Cutrone offers an alternative reading of the series. The paintings, he says, 'carried with them a serious reminder of the possibility of nuclear destruction much like the earlier works of the Atomic Bomb that Andy Warhol did in the early 60s', though 'with an even greater sense of irony' (Cutrone 2004). Retrospectively, then, the *Hammer and Sickle* series could perhaps be seen as a late contribution or postscript to Warhol's Death and Disaster works of the 1960s – which also included paintings of such topics as suicides, car accidents, and electric chairs.

Like Cutrone, Arthur Danto also offers a complex analysis of the *Hammer and Sickle* works. He begins his comments on the series by pointing out that their 1977 exhibition in New York in Leo Castelli's gallery 'elicited no particular comment – the dogs of political paranoia failed to bark, though an exhibition with just that emblem in the 1960s or the 1950s would have brought out patriotic pickets in force and perhaps raids by the police' (Danto 1992: 131). This reveals, he argues, that 'the Communist logo had lost its toxin in American society.' (131) However, he subsequently focuses on the images in the series which depict the hammer and sickle as separate items, not crossing over each other. '[G]iven the intention of the logo to express unity and combined might', he says, this 'has to be, in its own right, the expression of what one might call the disintegration of the proletariat'. (134) Danto concludes that the *Hammer and Sickle* paintings 'make a political, diagnostic statement of extraordinary subtlety and penetration. They make more plain than any political text of that era that the system which underwrote the logo belonged, as the logo itself did, to another time, a lost mythology, a form of life

into which humans no longer fit.' (135-6) The series' political significance, that is, lies in exposing a particular belief system as outmoded.

Danto acknowledges that his argument is framed from an American perspective. Indeed, he highlights a crucial distinction between Europe and the United States. The hammer and sickle, Danto notes, 'had by 1977 lost all its energy, at least in America, where even its appearance as graffiti would have been puzzling.' (133) In contrast, on his visits to Europe Warhol would have had the chance 'to see the hammer-and-sickle as a virulent scrawl in the language of threat and protest.' (134) A sense of the continued power of the hammer and sickle emblem in Europe was evident in a clash that occurred at the opening night of the exhibition of Warhol's series at the Daniel Templon Gallery in Paris in 1977. The event drew not only members of the art scene, but also a more disruptive element. As Bob Colacello writes, the show was

> invaded by three hundred Parisian punks in leather, rubber, chains, and razors. Templon served raspberry sorbet and a dry Chablis. The punks used the former to scrawl 'Hate' and 'War' on the gallery walls and chugged the latter so rapidly that they were soon vomiting all over the gallery floor. Andy hid out in an inner office… (Colacello 1990: 340)

Decades later, the power of the hammer and sickle continues to resonate across many European countries and beyond, especially in former members of the Eastern Bloc. In 2010, a coalition of six countries – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania – called, unsuccessfully, for an EU-wide ban on communist symbols, including the hammer and sickle. The emblem remains banned in a number of countries, including Hungary, where its public display is considered a criminal offence.

There is then, I would argue, a considerable case to be made for reconsidering the *Hammer and Sickle* series from a European perspective, especially given that Warhol was, at this time in his career, purposefully creating work for the European market. For instance, it is useful to stress Warhol's own historical connections with mainland Europe, particularly through the figure of his mother, Julia Warhola. Warhol's engagement with the European art market in the 1970s might have been partly driven by a desire to

engage with the continent from which his family emigrated. Benjamin Buchloh has noted that 'the homeland of Warhol's beloved mother, still called Czechoslovakia during the 1970s when Warhol pondered the meaning and significance of these emblems, was still under the rule of a Soviet satellite regime after the failed Prague Spring of 1968.' (Buchloh 2009: 16) Warhol had produced a painting of his mother in 1974, two years after she died and a year before he began the *Hammer and Sickle* series. The *Hammer and Sickles* could perhaps, then, be interpreted as a sustained act of mourning, an extended oblique portrait of the artist's mother. Trevor Fairbrother discusses the *Skulls* series made around the same time in relation to Warhol's sustained engagement with the topic of death (Fairbrother 1989: 101-106); the *Hammer and Sickle* series may also need to be considered through this theme. The sickle might be a scythe.

It could also be valuable to compare this series with other political Pop works being produced across Europe in the 1970s. This would include the Hungarian artist Sándor Pinczehelyi's own hammer and sickle works, produced in 1973. Pinczehelyi took self-portrait photographs in which he held aloft a hammer and sickle – sometimes crossed, other times separated from each other. These were used as the basis for silkscreens which were printed in bold Pop colours. Pinczehelyi's hammer and sickle works serve, then, as a vital but often ignored Pop precedent of Warhol's own series of images of the emblem. Ronnie Cutrone attempted to position the *Hammer and Sickle* series as specifically American: 'I chose a sickle that had the word "Champion" on it, but the whole series could have just as easily read "Made in the U.S.A."' (Cutrone 2004). To adopt such a narrow and specifically national take on the series, however, fails to recognize its complexity, including its connections to Europe. Warhol may, as Blake Stimson notes, have returned 'again and again' to the theme of 'all things American' (Stimson 2014: 225, 228). But the artist's work has resonances and significance far beyond the United States.

References

Angell, C. (2006), *Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné Volume 1*, New York: Abrams/Whitney Museum.

Buchloh, B. (2009), 'Drawing Blanks: Notes on Andy Warhol's Late Works', *October* 127, Winter, pp.3-24.

Colacello, B. (1990), *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, New York: Harpercollins.

Collins, B. R. (2012), *Pop Art*, London: Phaidon.

Curley, J. C. (2013), *A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Cutrone, R. (2004), 'Hammer and Sickle', in *Andy Warhol: Hammer and Sickle*, London: Haunch of Venison, n.p.

D'Emilio, J. (1989), 'The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America', in K. Peiss and C. Simmons, eds., *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp.226-40.

Danto, A. (1992), *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Fairbrother, T. (1989), 'Skulls', in G. Garrels, ed., *The Work of Andy Warhol*, Seattle: Bay Press, pp.95-114.

Figes. O. and Kolonitskii, B. (1999), *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Flatley, J. (2010), 'Like: Collecting and Collectivity', *October* 132, Spring, pp.71-98.

Goldsmith, K. (2004), *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, New York: Carroll and Graf.

Johnson, D. K. (2004), *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jones, J. (2001), 'Richard Nixon, Andy Warhol (Vote McGovern), 1972', *The Guardian*, 10 February, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2001/feb/10/art.warhol. Accessed 24 October 2016.

Killen, A. (2007), *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America*, New York: Bloomsbury.

Merjian, A. H. (2013), 'Mascots and Muses', *Frieze*, 23 May, https://frieze.com/article/mascots-muses. Accessed 24 October 2016.

Morris, G. (1981), 'When Artists Use Photographs: Is It Fair Use, Legitimate Transformation or Rip-Off?', *ARTnews*, January, pp.102-4.

Printz, N., ed. (2014) *Paintings and Sculptures Late 1974-1976: The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné Volume 4*, London and New York: Phaidon.

Service, R. (2007), *Comrades: A World History of Communism*, London: Macmillan.

Smith, P. S. (1986), *Andy Warhol's Art and Films*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press.

Stimson, B. (2001), 'Andy Warhol's Red Beard', *The Art Bulletin*, 83:3, pp.527-47.

Stimson, B. (2014), *Citizen Warhol*, London: Reaktion.

Warhol, A. and Hackett, P. (2007), *POPism: The Warhol Sixties*, London: Penguin.