

**ALL THAT
GLITTERS
IS NOT
LOU REED**
BENEATH THAT
FLASH EXTERIOR
THE DARLING
OF THE
ANDROIDS IS
POSITIVELY
STREET PUNK
**ARTICLE BY
DAVE HICKEY**

I am sitting in the Cleveland airport, waiting for Lou Reed and his band to arrive from Toronto on their way to Akron—reading a mimeographed book of Lou's poems—when the shallow splatter of automatic-weapons fire distracts my attention. The gunner is a 20-year-old Brylcreem junkie (four-inch platforms and one of those Japanese jackets he has brought home from Vietnam or Guam); he is studiously blasting away on an ersatz .30-caliber that is mounted

on one of those machines where, for a quarter, you can blow the entire *Luftwaffe* right out of the Kentish skies. There is an alcove of these machines, half of them occupied by low riders who will never take a commercial flight except to Fort Bliss or to some unknown point of debarkation. They are all blasting away.

This tableau gives me hope for the future as I look for Lou Reed. I mean, here are five street kids, 15 feet from the flight-insurance counter, holding a perimeter

right here in this nirvana of American mobility, blasting away at aircraft while the amplified aluminum lady announces arrivals and departures. They wouldn't know pop art from Art Garfunkel or Andy Warhol from Andy Panda, but they are Warhol's natural children. They would understand the insolence of Andy's *Brillo Boxes* in the pristine chic of Leo Castelli's uptown gallery. It is as natural for them to be shooting down airplanes in an airport as it was



Illustration by Peter Lloyd



LOU REED *Nothing much was happening except at Warhol's Factory, where the Seventies were being fabricated, and the Velvet Underground was the musical wing of the Factory and Lou was its singer.*

revolutionary ten years ago for Andy to shoot down art in an art gallery. (Later, Lou Reed will tell me: "The Velvet Underground was to rock-'n'-roll bands what Andy's *Brillo Boxes* were to Brillo boxes.")

Today, of course, there is no more Underground, Velvet or otherwise. Lou's hit single, *Walk on the Wild Side*, is on the jukebox at the Carnation in North Dallas, so SMU coeds with Robert Penn Warren under their arms, Kristofferson patches on their jeans and Quaaludes in their beaded bags can drop in their quarters and find out about all those people who don't go to Max's Kansas City anymore (which isn't Max's anymore), some of them because they're dead. It is a long way to the East Village and back then and too many myths have sprung up around Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground.

The first time I heard Lou Reed sing his songs with the Velvet Underground, I was compelled to record the encounter—wrote it down in the front room of an apartment on Avenue D that some demented citizen had painted into a black, viscous cave, blotting out every exposed surface with soupy black kitchen enamel: floors, ceilings, fixtures, walls, furniture, windows, sinks, faucets, even the commode was rendered opaque with thick black strokes oozing toward the black linoleum floor. This was in 1966 and I had heard some loud rock 'n' roll, But heavy metal? Megafeedback? White noise? Designed distortion? Flex-Mylar? Multiple strobes? Simultaneous film projection? I could apologize for the style of the following extract from my journal, but, like that apartment, it was in the style of the day—pharmaceutical self-pity:

Seeing the Velvets at the DOM, you are at flashing white ground zero with the bottom of hell exploding up around you, releasing damned souls to flicker and swarm in every direction, grinning grotesquely or smiling wan Isherwood smiles as they turn inside the music. The band wears black. John Cale abuses his Viola from Hell. Sterling Morrison operates the bass, looking benign and dangerously out of place. Maureen Tucker, butch angel, inflicts a whimsical blitzkrieg on the drums, while up front, listing at 20 degrees from the vertical, guitar cocked forward, stands Louis Reed of Brooklyn, with his sleeves rolled down, motionless in the strobe, like a ruined Donatello in dark Italian sunglasses, the very picture of ravaged youth and beauty, with the sound blowing around him like an electric gale, so loud

it stops being sound and becomes another chemical—another rush to ride the leading edge of, and he is singing a song about a junkie in a flatted-off voice that would wilt your philodendron—the verbal equivalent of Mitchum's sneer. . . .

*I . . . don't know . . . just where
I'm going
But I'm . . . gonna try
For the kingdom if I can
'Cause it makes me feel like I'm
a man
When I put a spike into my vein
Then I tell you things aren't quite
the same
When I'm rushing on my run,
And I feel just like Jesus' son
And I guess that I just don't know
And I guess that I just don't know.*

Remember, this was the avant Lower East Side, where the streets ran with ersatz hip and the sky stank with over-ripe commitment as the Sixties stewed in their own juices. There was a lot of talk but nothing much happening except at Andy Warhol's Factory, where the Seventies were being fabricated, and the Velvet Underground was the musical wing of the Factory and Lou was its singer, and the songs came down like something from outer space—*Heroin, I'm Waiting for the Man, Venus in Furs, Femme Fatale*.

In fact, Lou had made a daring escape from Syracuse University in 1963 and fled to Greenwich Village, where he took up with a Welshman named John Cale, who, having graduated from the Royal Academy of Music and come to the United States on a Bernstein Fellowship, had made his own escape from the world of classical music to the multimedia scene of the East Village. Then one day, Lou ran into his old Syracuse rock-'n'-roll buddy Sterling Morrison getting off a D train; Sterling moved into the house on Ludlow where John and Lou were sharing an apartment, and with the addition of Angus MacLise—percussionist, aesthete and world traveler, who also lived on Ludlow—a band was formed. "We had no ambition at all," Lou told me. "I mean, we needed money and we liked to play, but we had no musical career mapped out. We were underground people and, basically, we were into the scene and people were into a lot of different things—making movies, doing performances. . . . People were into make-up then, too, and doing a lot of amphetamines.

"But it was *fun*, you know, and the music was tough. In fact, ever since

I recorded *Transformer* with David [Bowie] and became the darling of the glitter queens, everything I've done has been heading back toward where I was in 1965 . . . as far as attitude is concerned, that is. I mean, we didn't really play real well. The Velvets were a rock-'n'-roll band; we didn't think we were artistically heavy—we were *basic*. We didn't think we were weird at all until people told us—and everybody *hated* us; but what the hell? It was just a *scene*."

On a sunny afternoon in Austin, Texas, Morrison would use the same words . . . "We had no ambition at all," he would say, "it was a *goof*; we were playing around at the old Cinematheque and at the Bridge and everything and Lou was writing songs, *The Black Angel's Death Song*, but we never even *considered* playing professionally. I mean, Lou's stuff was not exactly Top 40. When we finally *did* get a gig—and it was totally by accident—Angus quit the band. He said he couldn't do it; there was no way he was going to be a professional musician, because then he would have to be at a given place at a given time. We said, 'Angus, we're not gonna do that. We're just gonna go play for seventy-five dollars. Just this once.' But Angus was getting worried because we'd had pictures taken. I still have one; Lou, I remember, is wearing an Arab headdress and Cale has on his English duds—you know, vest and all—but in general, we looked like the street trash we were.

"It was Angus, in fact, who found the book: *The Velvet Underground*. It was this sleazy novel about wife swapping in the suburbs and it had an S/M cover—you know, whips and boots and all—and it was a *dangerous* association, since Lou already had an S/M song in existence, *Venus in Furs*—you remember:

*'Kiss the boot of shiny, shiny
leather
Shiny leather in the dark,
Tongue of thongs, the belt that does
await you,
Strike, Dear Mistress, and cure
his heart.'*

"Anyway, we said, 'Jesus, this is incredible: Here we are, underground something, with an S/M song and here's this lame book. . . .' And we said, 'This is too good to pass up. OK, we're the Velvet Underground.' So, then, all the connotations of the cover of that book, adequately reinforced by *Venus in Furs* and *Heroin*, plus Warhol—that was enough degeneracy and deviation for ten groups (Continued on page 127)

LOU REED *On 14th Street, he would have been invisible, but Akron casts him into high relief as he comes across the lobby with the wired, wiry step of a successful purse snatcher.*

(Continued from page 82) without ever having lifted a finger.

"Why did Lou write *Venus in Furs*? Was Lou an S/M freak? The answer is no. He liked Sacher-Masoch and did an honest and, in fact, amazing compression of the book. I think the fact that we were so vilified for depravity attests to the power of that song. If anything stuck in people's minds, that song did—that and *Heroin*, but in a more obvious way. *Venus* has a really alien sound to it; musically, it's different. Listen to the cut on the first album, the one with the Warhol banana on the cover. I was *immensely* proud of it; gee, I thought it was so great!"

Since that time, the Velvet Underground has dissolved. Cale is pursuing his own recording career, Morrison is teaching English lit and is engaged in medieval studies at the University of Texas and Maureen Tucker is a key-punch operator on Long Island. Lou, after a retreat into obscurity, is embarked on a solo career now five albums long, going through a protean sequence of image changes with each album—from the punk-junk rocker of *Lou Reed* to the glitter bitch of *Transformer* (produced by David Bowie), to the Weimar naturalist of *Berlin*, to the heavy-metal android of *Rock 'n Roll Animal*, to the très-cool leather stud of *Sally Can't Dance*. "Self-knowledge is old news," a friend of mine used to say, and Lou seems determined to prove him right.

Suddenly, all those old underground strategies of survival are fashionable as hell: David Bowie is in *Vogue* magazine and Alice Cooper is on prime-time TV—the Ken Russell and Walt Disney versions, respectively, of that novelistic territory Lou staked out with the Velvet Underground. The Velvets made popular music that wasn't based on a mythical flight from poverty toward culture and true love, like British rock and black blues, or upon a mythical quest for the perfect hedonistic wave like California rock, or upon psychedelic ghetto liberalism, like the survivors of Fifties folk—simply, the Velvets made hip middle-class rock 'n' roll. Lou *invented*, really, an everyday American music about sex, drugs, vanity, hypocrisy, pettiness and the possibility of tenderness—everyday things: mobility without direction, sensation without emotion, emotion without passion, fashion without style, talent without ambition, success without victory. And today, Lou is a persona—a factor in popular culture—known to thousands of kids who weren't even in grammar school when Andy Warhol gave up

commercial art to change the world, while Lou was reading *Finnegans Wake* aloud to Delmore Schwartz and going back to the dorm to sit up all night with Sterling and play old R&B singles—Johnny Ace, the Magnificent Four, the Nutmegs, the Clovers, Alicia and the Rockaways, for Christ's sake.

"The question we must reflect upon," Whitey Glan, the drummer, is saying, clutching his drink before him in both hands, "is: Are we ripping off the gay community? Certainly, that's the question I reflect upon as I lurk behind me drum kit onstage. I mean, David Jo Hansen has said we appeal to all the old queens outside New York who read *After Dark*."

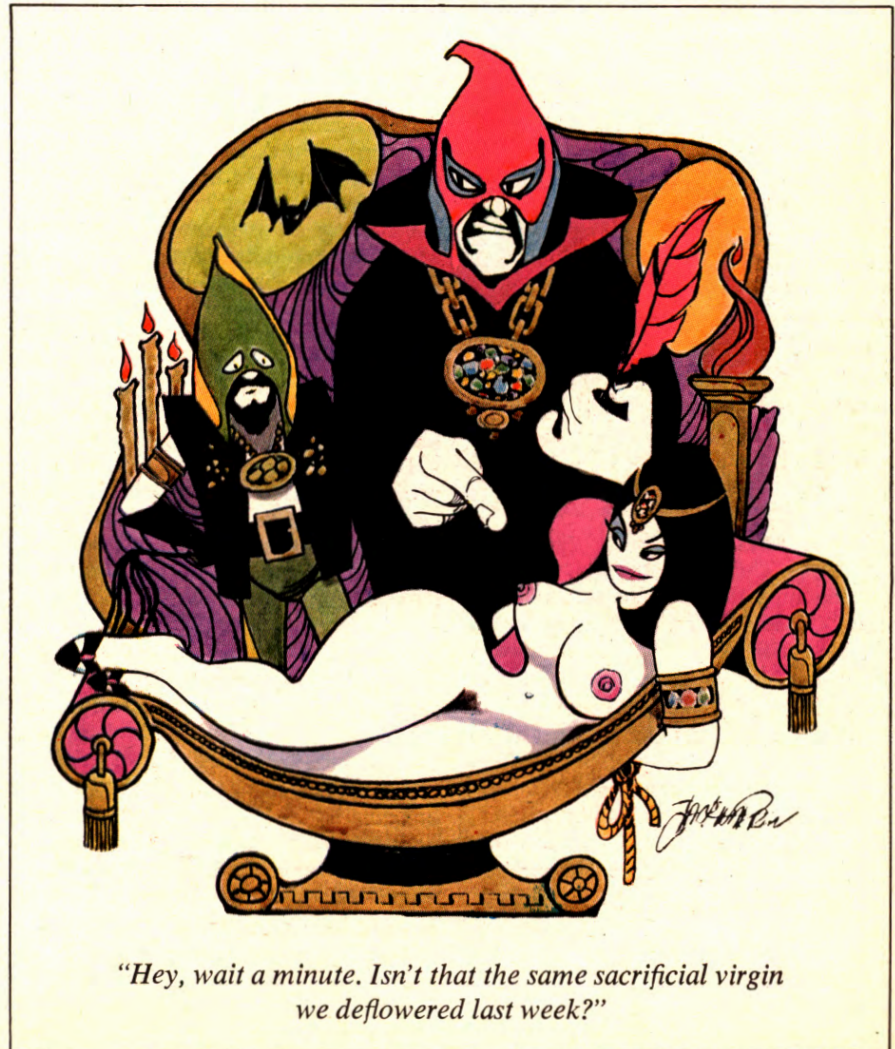
"And to people with morbid interests, in general," says Ray Colcord, keyboard man. "Perhaps we should ask the Phantom of Rock."

"Ah, here comes the Ghoul of Glitter," Dick Wagner says, turning back from the yoga position he has

assumed to check out every girl in the room. We are sitting in the cocktail lounge of the Cascade Plaza Holiday Inn in Akron, which is an ideal place to reflect upon the ethics of rock 'n' roll. The atmosphere is existential Velveeta, the decor is Gerald Ford *moderne* and, at the far end of the twilit, twinkling room, one lonesome red-neck is playing Hank Williams on his metallic-cherry Stratocaster and singing with the sadness of a man who knows he will never give up his day job.

"Our leader," Whitey says, nodding toward the door.

Across the lobby, Lou steps out of the elevator a little tentatively, then he sees us and heads in our direction. On 14th Street, he would have been invisible, but Akron casts him into high relief as he comes across the lobby with the wired, wiry step of a successful purse snatcher. He is very gaunt and his hair is cropped close—maybe a little old for the hustle but still



"Hey, wait a minute. Isn't that the same sacrificial virgin we deflowered last week?"

LOU REED "Hey, man," a local kid will say, "is Lou Reed really bi?" The roadie will pause and look the kid over with ineffable street ennui and say, "No, man, he ain't bi; the fucker's quad!"

positively street punk in his jeans, sneakers, T-shirt and silver sleazo Elvis jacket. He is carrying a copy of *The Portable Dorothy Parker* in his hand and his fingernails are painted black.

He walks straight past our table to the bar, orders two drinks and, tucking the book under his arm, brings them to the table, flopping down into his chair with some authority. This is the head dude's table and Lou is head dude. The skin is drawn very tight on his skull and his eyes are very tired, the pupils so dilated that I can see my reflection in them. He rubs them a moment with his finger tips. His hands, even with the clunky black nail polish, look very fragile. He seems a little speedy and anxious to get drunk, but he is obviously going to deliver some opening remark when Whitey pre-empts him.

"The question under discussion is: Are we ripping off the gay community?"

Lou gives this a long pause, drawing the attention in his direction, then answers blandly, "Not yet. But when we get back to New York, I'll show you how to hustle drinks in leather bars."

"You'll not be getting me into any such place," Whitey says, mock Irish now.

"Well," Lou says, "we'll wait and see how the pictures turn out."

"What pictures?" Whitey says.

"The ones we took in Toronto last night."

"I don't remember any pictures."

"I should hope not," Colcord says. "It was disgusting."

"But it had a certain twisted beauty," Lou says. The tone has just enough levity to silence Whitey's denial, just enough authority that I might conclude that there were pictures.

Wagner leaves the table in response to two girls who are standing in the doorway, beckoning.

"We passed them on the way in," Colcord says. "They were in a Falcon."

"You miss that in Manhattan," Lou says. "Girls in their Falcons. . . . Say, I like the guitar player." He nods toward the red-neck, who is singing *Crazy Arms*. Then he moves into a discussion of an exotic pharmaceutical that is so wicked that Lou, who will try anything once, only tried it once. The red-neck finishes *Crazy Arms* and takes a break, and as he passes our table on the way to the bar, Lou stands up and extends his hand. "Say, I like your singing," he says.

The guy actually blushes across a slab of cheek. "Thanks," he says. "I don't sound too great tonight. Sore throat."

"Well, let us buy you a drink," Lou says.

"Thanks again. Are you guys musicians?"

"Yeah," Lou says.

"I figgered," the red-neck says, easing himself into a chair. He and Lou discuss the ignominy of playing in bars—until he slides his chair back. "Well, I gotta go back to work. Thanks again for the drink."

"We enjoy your work," Lou says. "Watch out for that throat."

The guitar player grins and retreats to the bandstand, flattered, bothered and bewildered—not exactly bewitched—and Lou waits until he is into his second song before he launches into a story.

The Holiday Inn where we are staying overlooks an enormous yellow gash of excavation, flanked on the right by a row of pristine mid-American storefronts and on the left by a dazzling, intricate freeway exchange. It's three A.M. and the panorama is frozen in the blaze of mercury-vapor lamps—a perfect urban crèche. It's cold outside and the black sky is crusted with more stars than you see in a month of Manhattan nights. There aren't even cars on the interchange. All the girls in the Falcons are at home or in bed—down on their ludes or their dudes; all the children of pop are sleeping in Akron and I am looking down on them like some benign survivor of another war—the last speed freak in the country of the downs—wondering what they would have thought about the Velvet Underground or the Village in the Sixties. To them, Lou Reed is a "rock-'n'-roll star" occupying the extreme left wing in the pantheon of bisexual chic (which, after Canada and Dick Cavett, must be the third most boring thing in the world).

During the entire trip, it's hard to avoid the obsessive and rather pathetic concern with Lou's sexuality from nearly everyone around, excepting Lou. At the sound check the next afternoon, a local kid in a Kent State T-shirt will approach one of Lou's roadies, who is hauling an amp across the stage. "Hey, man," the kid will say, "is Lou Reed really bi?" The roadie will pause, leaning back with the amp on his chest, look over at him with ineffable street ennui and say, "No, man, he ain't bi; the fucker's quad!"

Much later, in Austin, Sterling will tell me: "Well, for one reason or another, Lou has no sustained interest in either sex, by virtue of diet, drugs, fatigue and general apathy—usually self-generated, I would imagine. The thing about Lou is that he is an observer—he's voyeuristic, I guess you could say—and

if bestiality came in, he would be curious to see what that was all about, too.

"Now, Lou likes to be flirtatious and, uh, likes to think he's attractive, and if you want to find out if you're attractive, I think the best way to do it is to try being gay. Males react; females, ah, they're going to be coy, you know, restrained. Of course, having a gay constituency is good for a performer. It's like a guarantee at the gate. At least, it always was for the Velvets. But as far as Lou's sexuality goes, you'd have to say that he's too much an observer . . . and he's a gypsy, physically and emotionally. I remember that once when the band was doing real well, Lou rented an apartment up on East Fifty-seventh, a really expensive place—seven, eight hundred dollars a month—and you'd go in there and it would look like it was vacant. There would be some stuff in the icebox and in the medicine chest and in this one little corner where Lou slept, but other than that, the place was empty. It was kinda sad. . . ."

"The problem people had dealing with us, in our worst days of abuse, was trying to figure out who was on what. With Cale, I would say, primarily it was downers; me, too, Thorazine and such, and then I'd further befuddle myself with booze. With Lou, it was everything, which he would compound by dietary experiments that would leave him malnourished and grouchy. One time, that happened on tour and we finally had to put him into the hospital and they put him back together. I don't know what kind of diet it was—no animal products at all—so he ended up with no fat in his body and the nerve sheath in his spinal column was exposed, and that tends to make you irritable. You know, insane things—so he was pretty tense the whole time. I don't know what he weighs now. He looks like he's very thin. If he's drinking moderately, he's likely to be chubby; if he's drinking a lot and not eating, then he's likely to be very thin. Lou's a great juicer, and, of course, he was taking junk before anybody I ever heard of, to be groovy. This was up in Syracuse; you'd see him in the Orange. He'd come and sit down at a table and his elbow wouldn't be touching it and yet he'd be leaning on his elbow, and you'd say, 'Uh, hey, Lou, hey. . . .'"

Lou orders another double bloody mary. It's about two o'clock in the afternoon, and outside the window, downtown Akron is as bright and cold and clear as a Sheeler cityscape. The Holiday Inn dining room looks out across one of those stark urban-renewal plazas where

a piece of institutional abstract sculpture stands in serene isolation. A Martian would look less out of place.

We are moving tentatively through lunch, and things are settling down a bit as Lou talks about the early Warhol scene from which the Velvets sprang. "David Bowie really came to New York looking for that scene," he is saying. "It really fascinated him, but he couldn't find anything." I have a momentary vision of Bowie in his clogs tripping around Union Square, tapping on doorways. "He was too late, but just in time to be famous. It wasn't his fault."

Lou falls into a contemplative silence and I feel relieved. At first, it was a little unnerving, because Reed is such a good reflector; he is almost clairvoyant about what you want to hear, and since being a good reflector is an interviewer's trick at which I'm fairly good myself, the levels of irony, at first, were fairly ornate. I have seen him in a room with several people, giving each of them the Lou Reed they expect; then, when the demands become too complex, shutting down, drawing into himself, turning lead-gray dull. Now, though, he is relaxed and friendly, being a good interviewee, giving his responses an edge of just enough rudeness to lend veracity. When I ask him, for instance, what he will do if his new pop career falls through, he snaps back.

"Well, that's a dumb question," he says, exasperated. "What would you do if you couldn't write articles for stroke magazines?"

"Lay back," I say.

"Well, so would anybody. I'd just go back to Long Island, where I was in the first place, and write poems."

"I like the poems," I say.

"Well, I'm a writer—not just poems and songs but stories, greeting cards, essays, whatever. Basically, though, I just write about people. You have to understand the logic: You see, I come from Brooklyn, so, coming from Brooklyn, I figure if I become a rock-'n'-roll star, then I can get a book of poems published. Right? That makes sense, doesn't it? A slim volume: *We, the People*, by Louis Reed."

"That's funny," I say. "Dylan thought just the opposite."

"Dylan, the wimp, doesn't think; he raps," Lou says. "Do you like Patti Smith?" And we are off on a literary discussion. I ask him why the rock press calls his songs decadent.

"Hell, how should I know? I don't think they are. They're about real people. I try to write down just as straightforwardly as I can the way they are," he says, and he quotes the opening line from one of his classic songs: "Candy says: I've learned to hate my body." That's what she said. *Walk on the Wild Side*, for instance, is all about real people, people I know; you

probably know them, too. I liked the title of Algren's book and wrote it down on a piece of paper; then one day, I wrote the song.

"Decadent," he says. "Now, there is one of Ronald Firbank's novels that I think is decadent, but, Jeez, my stuff is closer to Algren or Hugh Selby or John Rechy, maybe. You know, urban realism. I like Mailer a lot, too. Isn't he great? And the quintessence of *unhip*. I guess you could say I'm just a New York writer—or a city writer—that's what I write about: local color. Just another regionalist poet. That's what Ray Davies is, too."

"Do you like Raymond Chandler?" I ask.

"Do I? He is my *man*. Hey, have you seen the movie of *The Long Goodbye*? I hope they didn't fuck it up. Yeah, Chandler. He and Delmore Schwartz and Andy Warhol are where I come from."

"Finally, always, Andy is the man, though. The thing that really got us off, the Velvets, was Andy's week at the Cinemathèque. You see, all these young film makers were to have a week to show their films. Well, when Andy's week came up, he decided not to show his own film. Very Warhol. He wanted us to play in front of the screen while he showed this porno film of Barbara Rubin's and while various other things were going on, like Bobby Neuwirth running around with a bullhorn, shouting in the faces of all the straight East Side art types, who were already freaked out by the show and by the rest of the crowd. There were people there who never went above Fourteenth Street. Between us and Andy and Barbara, the thing was a dog whistle for freaks.

"It was Barbara, in fact, who first turned us on to Warhol. Andy was on the scene, but we were rock 'n' rollers and what did we know from art. Barbara was making crazy movies and she kept telling us about this guy who had a place called the Factory up on Forty-ninth, and we just thought, 'Big deal.' Forty-ninth Street might as well have been Albany, it was so far uptown.

"Anyway, we'd just gotten a steady gig that paid a little money and food at this basket house down in the Village called the Café Bizarre—one of those places where they serve expensive coffee and have a spade out in the street hooking in the tourists. Boy, did they *hate* us. We already had most of the material for the first album and we were playing it *heavy* metal. I want you to imagine a bunch of straight tourists, like from"—sweeping gesture—"Akron, sitting there drinking coffee and listening to these totally wasted punks playing that stuff. It wasn't Joan Baez. But the lady who ran the place liked us—at least until some sailors got so pissed at *The Black Angel's Death Song* that they



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LOU REED *He prowls the stage like an alley cat, bitchy but not fey, androgynous but not camp—just mean, out there. If anybody came for glitter, he damn sure got rock 'n' roll.*

beat her up on their way out. That was the first night Andy saw us—the last night we played there.

“Even then, it took us some time to get up to the Factory, but when we finally *did*, it blew my mind. The amount of energy was incredible. You know, people talk about how passive Andy is, but he works all the time, and at that time, so did everybody else who hung around there. We started practicing at the Factory, and when I showed up, Andy would say, ‘How many songs have you written today?’ and I’d go, ‘Oh, ten,’ and he’d say, ‘Well, you should have done twenty. You have to do as much as you can.’ I’d never met anybody like that, who had such a clear idea of the artist as somebody who *works*—you know, all the time.

“So, gradually, we became the house band and were in movies and stuff, but we were still basically musicians and not really avant-garde; that is, we were only avant-garde because of the context we played in, like art openings, where it used to be that if they had chamber music, it was far out.”

“You were stars!” I say.

“Yeah, but not because of the band. We were stars because Andy made us stars, because he said we were stars. That’s what Andy figured out: All the artists in New York wanted to be stars; but if they *used* their art to become stars, it fucked up the art and made being a star not any fun. So Andy decided that people should be stars *existentially*, for no reason at all, the same way people were artists. That way, the stardom and the art didn’t get confused.”

“Well, it looks like you’re going to be the first Warhol star to go from pop to popular—to penetrate the puberty barrier.”

“I don’t know if I like that verb—penetrate.”

“How do you like playing for kids?”

“It’s *fun*, and anyway, who else do you play for? I hope you don’t go to concerts for fun. I sure don’t anymore. But the kids are all right. You just have to remember that they’re into downs, which reminds me: How about another bloody mary? Actually, we could use some Southern Comfort. I have always found that it doesn’t matter what you do up in the morning—a little Southern Comfort will take the edge off the day.”

Soon it’s time for the show, and as Lou and I walk through a chilly twilight toward the auditorium, Lou is saying, “You know, there were all these poor, dumb chicks who were trying to be hip and they’d come up to me wanting to score some heroin. Well, I can score it, but turning Jewish girls on to smack is *not* real swift. But I tell myself,

‘If I let this poor chick go, she’s only gonna score on the street.’ So I say, ‘Yeah, yeah, I’ll bring it over tonight.’ I go and score for myself and come back to the apartment and fix up a nickel bag of sugar, and that’s harder than you think—to get the volume—especially when you’re stoned. We’d sit there for hours. ‘Hey, John, does this look right?’ etc., etc. Then I’d take this chick her stuff and give her the riff: ‘This is really heavy shit, etc., etc. I was lucky, etc.’

“Now, she is scared shitless of shooting but she’d *do* it, you know, just to be hip, so I tell her she’d better snort it the first time, ‘cause it might be too heavy, a lot of people can’t handle it, etc., etc. So she lays out a line of sugar; then she lays out *another* line. Seems she’s heard somewhere that you’re supposed to share a hit with the guy who scores it for you.

“So I’m sitting there stoned to the nines, looking down at the lines of sugar. Then she bends over the table with a straw and I tell her she’d better sit down, it might be pretty much of a rush. So she snorts the sugar and so do I and it is *bad*, by which I mean it isn’t any good, but I lean back and do my number: ‘Oh, wow, can you feel it, man, ain’t that great shit?’ etc. And let me tell you, there is *no way* she ain’t gonna get off; so she says, wow, she sure is glad she didn’t shoot it. ‘Well,’ I say, ‘it might not be your trip. It might be too rough for your system,’ and she thinks I’m right.

“So I leave, telling myself that I’ve saved another girl from the evils of drugs. I mean, if she’d gone onto the street, those barracudas would have been leading her around by the nose in five weeks. But the money I ripped off from her was pretty important. I don’t know, I just kept telling myself, I’m doing the humane thing.”

That same problem again: *Nobody should mess around with other people or tell them what to do. Radical permissiveness is the order of the day. But what do you do about people who will kill themselves to be hip? I mean, you should do something when they don’t have the guts to be square.*

“I’m going around front to watch the show,” I say.

“Fine,” Lou says. “I hate for people to watch me put on my make-up.”

I walk out into the lobby of the auditorium; it is one of those Thirties Egyptian *moderne* buildings and it is going to be full: 90 percent teeny-boppers blonde and female, seven percent glitter freaks and pimp-style spades, three percent 40ish gays in their tailored jackets. When the curtain opens, the band is there, dressed in black, blowing right out; then Lou comes on, dressed like

the band except for a black-leather jacket. He no longer plays lead but prowls the stage like an alley cat, bitchy but not fey, androgynous but not camp—just mean, *out there*. If anybody came for glitter, he damn sure got rock ‘n’ roll. Whitey lays down a very funky bottom for *Lady Day* and everybody is moving. By the time *Heroin* starts its excruciatingly slow escalation, everybody is wired and leaning forward, pushing at the tempo with his shoulders. During the break after *Heroin*, a girl approaches me. I think that she is going to sell me some Girl Scout cookies, but she asks me if I have any downs. This depresses me, so I go backstage as the applause mounts for an encore.

Lou does *Sweet Jane* for an encore, and when he goes off, everybody is screaming. Lou is shaking like a leaf and grinning. I give him a cigarette and try to light it and discover that I am shaking like a leaf. For the final encore, Lou does his *one* positive song, *Rock n’ Roll*.

Two days before, I had stood on the porch of an isolated house 20 miles to the swamp side of Tallahassee, talking to a lead guitar player from red-dirt Georgia. The kid was full Dixie greaser with his syrup accent and pale, wasted eyes, dressed as if he’d been drummed out of the Hell’s Angels for bad grooming. There was a pretty big party going on inside and, although this was Allman Brothers country, Lou was on the speakers, *Wild Child* at full volume; it shivered the psilocybin mushrooms growing wild in the yard and the Southern belles growing wilder in the living room.

*I was talking to Chuck
In his Genghis Khan suit and his
Wizard’s hat,
He spoke of his movie
And how he was making a new
sound track
And then we spoke of kids on the
Coast
And different types of organic soap
And the way suicides don’t leave
notes
Then we spoke of the rain,
Always back to the rain. . . .*

The kid was listening, leaning against the porch rail and staring into the darkness. “Ain’t that super?” he said. “Yew know, Ah always thought Lou Reed was the city Hank Williams. He looks right at it and calls a spade a spade, lessen he happens to be a cold drummer. You just don’t realize how much bullshit you *hear* until you hear something straight. Now, I don’t like homos and all that, but you *know*, whatever he did, it was to get *out there*, you know.” ■