

Lester Bangs, Psychotic Reactions & Carburetor Dump (Vintage, 1992)

Iggy Pop: Blowtorch in Bondage

By any normal standards, Iggy Pop's gig at the Palladium last Friday night was a triumph. Iggy himself was in ferociously fine form, and the crowd was ravenously enthusiastic—he could have had as many encores as he wanted. But normal standards have never seemed relevant to Iggy—from the earliest days, when the Stooges went onstage not even knowing how to play their instruments, to the present, when he finally seems to be on the verge of becoming one of the strangest stars we've ever seen. What kind of person tries, for his third and most crucial attempt, to make it in big-time rock 'n' roll with an album called *The Idiot*? The kind, I suppose, who at one time regularly made a practice of literally diving headfirst from the lip of the stage into the middle of his audience and who on Friday night repeatedly twisted his face and body up into masks and gestures symbolic of "idiotcy," torment, and, most of all, bondage.

More than anyone else in the seemingly endless parade of professionally anomic rockers, Iggy really is isolated, and this isolation manifests itself in lightning-stricken desperation. He's the most intense performer I've ever seen, and that intensity comes from a murderous drivenness that has in the past also made him the most dangerous performer alive: the plunges into the third row, cutting himself and rolling in broken glass onstage, getting into verbal and occasionally physical brawls with his audiences. When Iggy sang, "I'm losing all my feelings / And I'm runnin' out of friends" in "I Need Somebody" on *Raw Power*, he was describing, succinctly, as usual, the problem, the anomie. That there is no solution but death is why all the rest of it happens. This is a person who feels profoundly unalive, or,

conversely, so rawly alive, and so imprisoned by it, that all feeling is perceived as pain. But feeling is still courted, in the most apocalyptic terms, which are really the only terms the performer can even understand, and the performance begins to look more and more like a seizure every time he hurls himself across the stage.

It's not minimizing all this to say that what it means for Iggy is ambivalence. "I'm dying in a story / I'm only living to sing this song," another line from "I Need Somebody," conveys the powerful ambivalence he feels towards his audience, his art itself. An apocalypse isn't supposed to be manageable, and when the carnage is done it ain't the audience that's gonna be bleeding. But manage the apocalypse is exactly what Iggy is now trying to do, because this idiot is no fool, and he knows the lie of a manageable Armageddon is the only way to make it in the rock 'n' roll end of showbiz and survive. That's why David Bowie is twerping around, trimming the dementia here and there with neat little clips, and that's why *The Idiot*, Iggy's new album (produced and influenced in every respect by Bowie, who also plays piano in Iggy's current touring band), rings so false.

A far more powerful documentation of the Iggy holocaust at its most nihilistically out of control is available on *Metallic K.O.*, a bootleg import (on Skydog) of the last concert the Stooges ever played, at the Michigan Palace in Detroit in January of 1974. I was at the gig immediately preceding it, at a little club in Warren, Michigan, two nights before, where the love-hate affair the Stooges had been carrying on with their audience for so long finally careened to its inevitable consequences. The audience, which consisted largely of bikers, was unusually hostile, and Iggy, as usual, fed on that hostility, soaked it up and gave it back and absorbed it all over again in an eerie, frightening symbiosis. "All right," he finally said, stopping a song in the middle, "you assholes wanta hear 'Louie, Louie,' we'll give you 'Louie, Louie.'" So the Stooges played a forty-five-minute version of "Louie, Louie," including new lyrics improvised by the Pop on the spot consisting of "You can suck my ass / You biker faggot sissies," etc.

By now the hatred in the room is one huge livid wave, and Iggy singles out one heckler who has been particularly abusive: "Listen, asshole, you heckle me one more time and I'm gonna come down there and kick your ass." "Fuck you, you little punk," responds the biker. So Iggy jumps off the stage, runs through the middle of the crowd, and the guy beats the shit out of him, ending the evening's musical festivities by sending the lead singer back to his motel room and a doctor. I walk into the dressing room, where I encounter the manager of the club offering to punch out anybody in the

band who will take him on. The next day the bike gang, who call themselves the Scorpions, will phone WABX-FM and promise to kill Iggy and the Stooges if they play the Michigan Palace on Thursday night. They do (play, that is), and nobody gets killed, but *Metallic K.O.* is the only rock album I know where you can actually hear hurtled beer bottles breaking against guitar strings.

On one level I suppose all of this is very funny, but if you look past the surface violence and simple abusiveness to the person at the center it's not funny at all. The reason it's not is the aforementioned ambivalence. Jungle war with bike gangs is one thing, but it gets a little more complicated when those of us who love being around that war (at least vicariously) have to stop to consider why and what we're loving. Because one of the things we're loving is self-hate, and another may well be a human being committing suicide. Here's a quote from a review of Iggy's new live show in the British rock weekly *Sounds*: "Iggy's a dancer and more, a hyper-active packet of muscle and sinew straight out of Michelangelo's wet dreams ... who leaps and claws at air, audience and mike stand in an unsurpassable display that spells one thing—MEAT." Ignoring the florid prose, I'd like to ask the guy who wrote that how he would like to be thought of as a piece of meat, how he thinks the meat feels. Or if he thinks it feels at all. Yeah, Iggy's got a fantastic body, it's so fantastic he's crying in every nerve to explode out of it into some unimaginable freedom. It's as if someone writhing in torment has made that writhing into a kind of poetry, and we watch in awe of such beautiful writhing, so impressed that we perhaps forget what inspired it in the first place.

As for the performer himself, he carries that hurt like spikes in his heart, but there is simultaneously a strong element of unconsciousness in his art, which is one of the main reasons why it's so beautiful and so intense. During Iggy's second encore Friday night, as he sang a song called "China Girl" with a stagehand holding a light under him for dramatic Fu Manchu effect, he pulled his face taut with his hands to make slits of his eyes and began to hop in a bizarre imitation of some bound coolie. It was at once grotesque and lovely, conveying in a few simple gestures a pathos so immense that I'm sure if Iggy himself could have seen what he looked like at that moment he would have been mortified. Because there was a vulnerability so naked it wrenched the heart. At that moment I realized that this man did not know what he was doing, and maybe precisely because of that it was one of the most *alive* things I've ever witnessed, just as the performance on *Metallic K.O.* is wrigglingly, obscenely alive, and the person singing on *The Idiot* sounds like a dead man. Iggy may finally become the

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superstar we always knew he could be, and he's already transcended the punk-rock he almost singlehandedly birthed, but there are questions unanswered, and a life hanging on the answers, and I'm not even sure that those answers exist.

—*Village Voice*, 28 March 1977

Kraftwerkfeature

Some skeezy from one of the local dailies was up here the other day to do a "human interest" story on the phenomenon you're holding in your hands, and naturally our beneficent publisher hauled me into his office to answer this fish's edition of the perennial: "Where is rock going?"

"It's being taken over by the Germans and the machines," I unhesitatingly answered. And this I believe to my funky soul. Everybody has been hearing about kraut-rock, and the stupraging success of Kraftwerk's "Autobahn" is more than just the latest evidence in support of the case for Teutonic railery, more than just a record, it is an *indictment*. An indictment of all those who would resist the bloodless iron will and order of the ineluctable dawn of the Machine Age. Just consider:

They used to call Chuck Berry a "guitar mechanic" (at least I heard a Moody Blues fan say that once). Why? Because any idiot could play his lines. Which, as we have all known since the prehistory of punk rock, is the very beauty of them. But think: if any idiot can play them, why not eliminate such genetic mistakes altogether, punch "Johnny B. Goode" into a computer printout and let the *machines* do it in total passive acquiescence to the Cybernetic Inevitable? A quantum leap towards this noble goal was accomplished with the advent of a crude sonic Model T called Alvin Lee, who could not only reproduce Berry licks by the bushel, but play them at 78 rpm as well. As is well known, it was the Germans who invented methamphetamine, which of all accessible tools has brought human beings within the closest twitch of machinehood, and without methamphetamine we would never have had such high plasma marks of the counterculture as

Lenny Bruce, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground, Neal Cassady, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," Blue Cheer, Cream, and Cream, as well as all of the fine performances in Andy Warhol movies not inspired by heroin. So it can easily be seen that it was in reality the Germans who were responsible for *Blonde on Blonde* and *On the Road*; the Reich never died, it just reincarnated in American archetypes ground out by hollowed jerkyfingered mannikins locked into their typewriters and guitars like rhinoceroses copulating.

Of course, just as very few speedfreaks will cop to their vice, so it took a while before due credit was rendered to the factor of machinehood as a source of our finest cultural artifacts. Nowadays, everybody is jumping on the bandwagon. People used to complain about groups like the Monkees and the Archies like voters complain about "political machines," and just recently a friend of mine recoiled in revulsion at his first exposure to Kiss, whom he termed "everything that has left me disgusted with rock 'n' roll nowadays—they're automaton!"

What he failed to suss was that sometimes automatons deliver the very finest specimens of a mass-produced, disposable commodity like rock. But history will have its way, and it was only inevitable that groups like Blue Oyster Cult would come along, singing in jive-chic about dehumanization while unconsciously fulfilling their own prophecy albeit muddled by performing as nothing more than robots whose buttons were pushed by their producers. By now the machines had clattered VU meter first out of the closet for good, and we have most recently been treated to the spectacle of such fine harbingers of the larger revolution to come as Magma's "Ork Alarm" ("The people are made of indescribable matter which to the machines is what the machines are to man . . .") and of course Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*, a quick-buck exploitation number assessed elsewhere in this issue.

But there is more to the Cybernetic Inevitable than this sort of methanasia. There are, in the words of the poet, "machines of loving grace." There is, hovering clean far from the burnt metal reek of exploded stars, the intricate balm of Kraftwerk.

Perhaps you are wondering how I can connect the amped-up hysteria of compulsive pathogens such as Bruce, Dylan and Reed with the clean, cool lines of Kraftwerk. This is simple. The Germans invented "speed" for the Americans (and the English—leave us not forget Rick Wakeman and Emerson, Lake & Palmer) to destroy themselves with, thus leaving the

world of pop music open for ultimate conquest. A friend once asked me how I could bear to listen to Love Sculpture's version of "Sabre Dance," knowing that the producers had sped up the tape; I replied: "Anything a hand can do a machine can do better." An addendum would seem to be that anything a hand can do nervously, a machine can do effortlessly. When was the last time you heard a German band go galloping off at 965 mph hot on the heels of oblivion? No, they realize that the ultimate power is exercised *calmly*, whether it's Can with their endless rotary connections, Tangerine Dream plumbng the sargassan depths, or Kraftwerk sailing airlocked down the Autobahn.

In the beginning there was feedback: the machines speaking on their own, answering their supposed masters with shrieks of misalliance. Gradually the humans learned to control the feedback, or thought they did, and the next step was the introduction of more highly refined forms of distortion and artificial sound, in the form of the synthesizer, which the human beings sought also to control. In the music of Kraftwerk, and bands like them present and to come, we see at last the fitting culmination of this revolution, as the machines not merely overpower and play the human beings but *absorb* them, until the scientist and his technology, having developed a higher consciousness of its own, are one and the same.

Kraftwerk, whose name means "power plant," have a word for this ecstatic congress: *Menschmaschine*, which translates as "man-machine." I am conversing with Ralf Hutter and Florian Schneider, co-leaders of Kraftwerk, which they insist is not a band but a you-guessed-it. We have just returned to their hotel from a concert, where Kraftwerk executed their Top Ten hit, "Autobahn," as well as other galactic standards such as "Kometenmelodie" ("Comet Melody"), "Mitternacht" ("Midnight"), "Morgenspaaziergang" ("Morning Walk," complete with chirping birds on tape), and the perfect synthesized imitation of a choo-choo train which must certainly be the programmatic follow-up to "Autobahn," to a small but rapt audience mesmerized unto somnolence. (At least half the people I took, in fact, fell asleep. But that's all right.) Now the tapes have stopped rolling and the computers have been packed up until the next gig, and the Werk's two percussionists, Wolfgang Flür and Karl Bartos, who play wired pads about the size of Ouija boards instead of standard acoustic drums, have been dispatched to their respective rooms, barred from the interview because their English is not so hot. (I have heard of members of bands playing on the same bills as Kraftwerk approaching these gentlemen with the words "So ya liked blowin' all our roadies. . . ." The Germans smiled and clapped them on the shoulders: "Ja, ja. . .") Now Ralf and Florian are facing me,

very sober in their black suits, narrow ties and close-cropped hair, quietly explaining behavior modification through technology.

"I think the synthesizer is very responsive to a person," says Ralf, whose boyish visage is somewhat less severe than that of Florian, who looks, as a friend put it, "like he could build a computer or push a button and blow up half the world with the same amount of emotion." "It's referred to as cold machinery," Ralf continues, "but as soon as you put a different person in the synthesizer, it's very responsive to the different vibrations. I think it's much more sensitive than a traditional instrument like a guitar."

This may be why, just before their first American tour, Kraftwerk purged themselves of guitarist/violinist Klaus Roeder, inserting Bartos in his slot. One must, at any rate, mind one's P's and Q's—I asked Hutter if a synthesizer could tell what kind of person you are and he replied: "Yes. It's like an acoustic mirror." I remarked that the next logical step would be for the machines to play you. He nodded: "Yes. We do this. It's like a robot thing, when it gets up to a certain stage. *It* starts playing. . . it's no longer you and I, it's *It*. Not all machines have this consciousness, however. Some machines are just limited to one *piece* of work, but complex machines. . . ."

"The whole complex we use," continues Florian, referring to their equipment and headquarters in their native Düsseldorf, "can be regarded as one machine, even though it is divided into different pieces." Including, of course, the human beings within. "The *Menschmaschine* is our acoustic concept, and Kraftwerk is power plant—if you plug in the electricity, then it starts to work. It's feedback. You can jam with an automatic machine, sometimes just you and it alone in the studio."

They also referred to their studio as their "laboratory," and I wondered aloud if they didn't encounter certain dangers in their experiments. What's to stop the machines, I asked, from eventually taking over, or at least putting them out of work? "It's like a car," explained Florian. "You have the control, but it's your decision how much you want to control it. If you let the wheel go, the car will drive somewhere, maybe off the road. We have done electronic accidents. And it is also possible to damage your mind. But this is the risk one takes. We have power. It just depends on what you do with it."

I wondered if they could see some ramifications of what they could do with it. "Yes," said Ralf, "it's our music, we are manipulating the audience. That's what it's all about. When you play electronic music, you have the control of the imagination of the people in the room, and it can get to an extent where it's almost physical."

I mentioned the theories of William Burroughs, who says that you can start a riot with two tape recorders, and asked them if they could create a sound which would cause a riot, wreck the hall, would they like to do it? "I agree with Burroughs," said Ralf. "We would not like to do that, but we are aware of it."

"It would be very dangerous," cautioned Florian. "It could be like a boomerang."

"It would be great publicity," I nudged.

"It could be the end," said Florian, calm, unblinking. "A person doing experimental music must be responsible for the results of the experiments. They could be very dangerous emotionally."

I told them that I considered their music rather anti-emotional, and Florian quietly and patiently explained that "emotion" is a strange word. There is a cold emotion and other emotion, both equally valid. It's not body emotion, it's mental emotion. We like to ignore the audience while we play, and take all our concentration into the music. We are very much interested in origin of music, the source of music. The pure sound is something we would very much like to achieve."

They have been chasing the p.s.'s tail for quite a while. Setting out to be electronic classical composers in the Stockhausen tradition, they grew up listening on the one hand to late-night broadcasts of electronic music, on the other to the American pop music imported via radio and TV—especially the Beach Boys, who were a heavy influence, as is obvious from "Autobahn," although "we are not aiming so much for the music; it's the psychological structure of someone like the Beach Boys." They met at a musical academy, began in 1970 to set up their own studio, "and started working on the music, building equipment," for the eventual rearmament of their fatherland.

"After the war," explains Ralf, "German entertainment was destroyed. The German people were robbed of their culture, putting an American head on it. I think we are the first generation born after the war to shake this off, and know where to feel American music and where to feel ourselves. We are the first German group to record in our own language, use our electronic background, and create a Central European identity for ourselves. So you see another group like Tangerine Dream, although they are German they have an English name, so they create onstage an Anglo-American identity, which we completely deny. We want the whole world to know our background. We cannot deny we are from Germany, because the German mentality, which is more advanced, will always be part of our behavior. We create out of the German language, the mother language,

which is very mechanical, we use as the basic structure of our music. Also the machines, from the industries of Germany."

As for the machines taking over, all the better. "We use tapes, pre-recorded, and we play tapes, also in our performance. When we recorded on TV we were not allowed to play the tape as a part of the performance, because the musicians' union felt that they would be put out of work. But I think just the opposite: with better machines, you will be able to do better work, and you will be able to spend your time and energies on a higher level."

"We don't need a choir," adds Florian. "We just turn this key, and there's the choir."

I wondered aloud if they would like to see it get to the point of electrodes in the brain so that whatever they thought would come through a loudspeaker. "Yes," enthused Ralf, "this would be fantastic."

The final solution to the music problem, I suggested.

"No, not the solution. The next step."

They then confided that they were going to spend all of the money from this tour on bigger and better equipment, that they work in their lab/studio for recreation, and that their Werner von Braun sartorial aspect was "part of the German scientific approach."

"When the rocket was going to the moon," said Ralf, "I was so emotionally excited. . . . When I saw this on television, I thought it was one of the best performances I had ever seen."

Speaking of performances, and bearing their general appearance and demeanor in mind, I asked them what sort of groupies they got. "None," snapped Florian. "There is no such thing. This is totally an invention of the media."

All right then, what's your opinion of American or British bands utilizing either synthesizers or Germanic/swastika overtones? Do you feel a debt to Pink Floyd? "No. It's vice versa. They draw from French classicism and German electronic music. And such performance as Rick Wakeman has nothing to do with our music," stressed Ralf. "He is something else . . . distraction. It's not electronic music, it's circus tricks on the synthesizer. I think it is paranoid. I don't want to put anybody down, but I cannot listen to it. I get nervous. It is traditional."

Not surprisingly, their taste in American acts runs to those seduced (and enervated) by adrenaline: "The MC5, and the heavy metal music of Detroit. I think Iggy and the Stooges are concerned with energy, and the Velvet Underground had a heavy Germanic influence—Nico was from Cologne, close where we live. They have this German dada influence from

the twenties and thirties. I very much like 'European Son.' Nico and John Cale had this Teutonic attitude about their music which I very much like. I think Lou Reed in his *Berlin* is projecting the situation of a spy film, the spy standing in the fog smoking a cigarette. I have also been told of the program 'Hogan's Heroes,' though I have not seen it. We think that no matter what happens Americans cannot relate it. It's still American popcorn chewing gum. It's part of history. I think the Blue Oyster Cult is funny."

They did not, however, think it was funny when I wound up the interview asking them if they would pose for pix the next morning by the Detroit freeway. "No," said Ralf, emphatically. "We do not pose. We have our own pictures."

Why? "Because," flatly, "we are paranoid."

He was just beginning to explain the ramifications of German paranoia when Florian abruptly stood up, opened the window to let the smoke out, then walked to the door and opened it, explaining with curious polite curtness that "we had also an interview with *Rolling Stone*, but it was not so long as this one. Now it is time to retire. You must excuse us."

He ushered us into the hall, quietly swung the door shut with a muffled click, and we blinked at each other in mild shock. Still, it was somehow comforting to know that they did, apparently, sleep.

—*Creem*, September 1975

The Greatest Album Ever Made

It has been suggested that in my annual regress report to the stockholders, published here last month, I neglected in all five thousand words to ever once mention why *Metal Machine Music* is a good album. So here, especially in the light of *Coney Island Baby*, are the reasons:

1. If you ever thought feedback was the best thing that ever happened to the guitar, well, Lou just got rid of the guitars.

2. I realize that any idiot with the equipment could have made this album, including me, you or Lou. That's one of the main reasons I like it so much. As with the Godz and Tangerine Dream, not only does it bring you closer to the artist, but someday, god willing, I may get to do my own *Metal Machine Music*. It's all folk music, anyway.

3. When you wake up in the morning with the worst hangover of your life, *Metal Machine Music* is the best medicine. Because when you first arise you're probably so fucked (i.e., still drunk) that it doesn't even really hurt yet (not like it's going to), so you should put this album on immediately, not only to clear all the crap out of your head, but to prepare you for what's in store the rest of the day.

4. Speaking of clearing out crap, I once had this friend who would say, "I take acid at least every two months & JUST BLOW ALL THE BAD SHIT OUTA MY BRAIN!" So I say the same thing about *MMM*. Except that I take it about once a day, like vitamins.

5. In his excellent liner notes, Lou asserts that he and the other speedfreaks did not start World Wars I, II, "or the Bay of Pigs, for that matter." And he's right. If everybody took amphetamines, all the time,

everybody would understand each other. Either that or never listen or bother with the other son of a bitch, because they'd all be too busy spending three days drawing psychedelic lines around a piece of steno paper until it's totally black, writing eighty-page letters about meaningless occurrences to their mothers, or creating *MMM*. There would be no more wars, and peace and harmony would reign. Just imagine Gerald Ford on speed—he might manifest some glimmer of personality. Or Ronald Reagan—a blood vessel in his snapping-turtle lips would immediately burst, perhaps ridding us of that cocksucker. As is well known by now, JFK enjoyed regular injections of Meth and vitamins from happy croakers. Nuff said. He may not have actually *accomplished* anything (except the Bay of Pigs—wait a minute, Lou hasn't been doing his homework), but he had style and a winning smile.

6. I have heard this record characterized as “anti-human” and “anti-emotional.” That it is, in a sense, since it is music made more by tape recorders, amps, speakers, microphones and ring modulators than any set of human hands and emotions. But so what? Almost *all* music today is anti-emotional and made by machines too. From Elton John to disco to *Sally, Can't Dance* (which Lou doesn't realize is one of his best albums, precisely because it's so cold) it's computerized formula production line shit into which the human heart enters very rarely if at all. At least Lou is upfront about it, which makes him *more* human than the rest of those MOR dicknoses. Besides which, any record that sends listeners fleeing the room screaming for surcease of aural flagellation or, alternately, getting physical and disturbing your medications to the point of *breaking* the damn thing, can hardly be accused, at least in results if not original creative man-hours, of lacking emotional content.

Why do people go to see movies like *Jaws*, *The Exorcist*, or *Isa, She Wolf of the SS*? So they can get beaten over the head with baseball bats, have their nerves wrenched while electrodes are being stapled to their spines, and be generally brutalized at least once every fifteen minutes or so (the time between the face falling out of the bottom of the sunk boat and the guy's bit-off leg hitting the bottom of the ocean). This is what, today, is commonly understood as entertainment, as *fun*, as *art* even! So they've got a lot of nerve landing on Lou for *MMM*. At least here there's no fifteen minutes of bullshit padding between brutalizations. Anybody who got off on *The Exorcist* should like this record. It's certainly far more moral a product.

7. Charisma. Lou's been slipping of late, but for those who remember and understand the Myth, the Legend—i.e., he was an emblem of absolute

negativism—*MMM* has more charisma than a cage full of porcupines has quills.

8. All landlords are mealymouthed bastards who would let the ruins of Pompeii fall on your four-poster before they'd lift a finger. They deserve whatever they get, and *MMM* is the all-time guaranteed lease breaker. Every tenant in America should own a copy of this album. *Forearmed!*

9. My pet land hermit crab, Spud, who sometimes goes for days at a time curled up inside his shell in a corner of the cage so you gotta check to see if he's dead, likes *MMM* a lot. Every time I put it on, he comes out of his shell and starts crawling happily around the sand and climbing the bars. It is, in fact, the only time I ever see him get any exercise. Either that or he's dancing.

10. I have been told that Lou's recordings, but most specifically this item, have become a kind of secret cult among teenage mental institution inmates all across the nation. I have been told further that those adolescents who have been subjected to electroshock therapy enjoy a particular affinity for *MMM*, that it reportedly “soothes their nerves,” and is ultimately a kind of anthem. If anyone out there reading this knows any more about this phenomenon, please get in touch with me immediately.

11. I played it for President Idi “Big Daddy” Amin of Uganda when he flew me and Lisa Robinson over there to interview him for upcoming cover articles in *Green* and *Hit Parade*, and he absolutely loved it. I gave him a copy, and now by special edict he has it piped through the Muzak vents of every supermarket (all thirty-five of them) and doctor's waiting room (all eight) in his great nation, so that the citizens there may be inspired to ever fiercer heights of patriotism for his regime and all that it stands for. He wanted to declare it the Ugandan national anthem, but I told him that I would have to check with the American teenage shock vets first, and being a wise, fair, graciously diplomatic politician, he of course immediately assented, and then, genial host that he is, whisked us off to see a live multiple snuff film done sans cameras and celluloid. “We can't afford them,” he explained. “And besides, the next time you have a dangerous conversation with Paul Simon, you can inform him that the theatre is not really dead.”

12. I think that, in this time of recession/depression and with the whole music business tightening its belt, it is truly thoughtful of Lou to cut recording costs as much as *MMM* must have, especially when you consider the stupefying self-indulgence of so many of today's rock “masterpieces” with their overproductions so baroque lavish it all turns to tinsel. Only James Brown, I think, approaches Lou's achievement here in terms of sheer

economy and minimal booking of expensive studio time. *MMM* is actually, far from some nihilist rampage, one giant WIN button. Or, more precisely, two, since it is a two record set.

13. And *why* is this, of all Lou Reed albums (and the man's songwriting profligacy is indeed astounding, "just lock Lou in a room for an hour," Dennis Katz told me once, "and when you let him out he's got fifteen new songs!") The reason why he keeps on recording old Velvet Underground outtakes he wrote upwards of a decade ago is that he's saving all of his best new stuff for 863 LPs to be released, one every two months, after he dies, assuming that he ever does. "I'm not gonna let those bloodsuckers rip me off and tarnish my memory like happened to poor Jimi," he confided to me once over two Schaefer's drafts at McSorley's. "My fans will never get less than A+ quality, as my friend Bob Christgau would put it, and besides it's quite likely that I will live forever, because me and some doctor friends I hang out with just discovered that there's a secret, heretofore unknown ingredient in methamphetamine which retards the aging process. So theoretically if you can get and just keep shooting this stuff, you could live for the rest of human history, which is why we're doing some resynthesizing experiments to see if we can bring this certain ingredient a little more into the foreground of the compound. I think it's called atropine. It's been around a long time, the Indians knew about it but recognized in the face of their dog-race inferiority it would be more moral to forget about it and submit themselves to extermination by white Europeans, who were the only ones with the technological knowhow to extract the raw chemical and refine it into a form you can cook up and shoot. But anyway that's where you got that Ponce de León business, and his only problem was the fucker, being a dumb spic, naturally had no idea how to prepare it in any potent form. So everybody concluded it was a myth and forgot about it until I came along, and potency is my middle name. So now you can let your readers in on the little secret that not only am I the toughest, baddest, most well-hung stud in show business, which actually is only because in 1973 I went to Sweden and had a transplant so now instead of a cock I got a horse doctor's syringe, not only that but there's a damn good chance I'm even gonna cut that punk Cagliostro at his own riffs and live forever. Of course, you never can discount unforeseen circumstances, plane crashes and the like, which is why I got these eight hundred albums in the can just in case. There's all sorts of stuff, like one is I rewrote my own version of *Rigoletto*, you know that opera by Scriabin, except it's set in this Puerto Rican leather bar where all the customers are amputated at the thigh and rolling around on these little carts on wheels. They keep trying to have punchouts, except

the carts keep bumping and they can't reach each other. So they get very frustrated. I sang all the parts myself, and I stole all the lyrics off old 'Lucas Tanner' dialogue, but nobody will notice the difference because I made the music *salsa* and it's so fucking loud you can't hear any of the words. But I'm not gonna put that out just yet. They'll have to wait a while for that. What my next album is gonna be is the follow-up to *Metal Machine Music*, which sounds exactly the same except it's gonna be a concept album about all this stuff I was telling you about before about aging and a five-record set in a gold embossed box with a booklet inside featuring blown-up Polaroid SX-70s of me tying off, hitting up, sterilizing my works with alcohol and then going out Christmas shopping for Andy and all the kids at Bloomingdale's and the Pleasure Chest, where the last pic is me modeling a cock ring on my horse geezer. I predict by that time the general public will have grown ears and gotten hip enough to appreciate *Metal Machine Music*, so this follow-up, which I'm gonna call *Triumph of the Will*, will be the best-selling LP of all time and those ratfucks in Chicago can suck my asshole along with that little blob Elton John who could use some speed almost as bad as Leslie West but can't have any of mine, because as I think it was Pat Ast said in that *fabulous* review of *Coney Island Baby* in the *Soho Weekly News*, 'I have seen rock's future and its name is Lou Reed'), a double album, you ask? Simple—the two discs are, according to Lou, symbolic of two tits ("There's never more than two," he explained), to signify that this is, albeit mechanized, a very *sexy* album designed to cut in heavily on the hot Barry White market.

14. Everybody knows that drugs come in sexes. Downs are feminine, speed is masculine. Downs make you all nice and sweet and pliant and tenderized like with E-Z Bake, whereas speed makes you aggressive and visceral and forthright and a real take-charge kind of guy/gal. (Makes no difference, because all humans are the same sex, except albinos. It is the drugs that, obviously, determine the gender of the being.) So which one you take when you get up in the morning just involves whether you wanna be Donna Mills or Joe Don Baker that day. It's totally your prerogative.

Similarly, *Coney Island Baby*, fine and indeed heartfelt as it is, is a downs LP. No putdown involved—Lou's favorite old Velvet songs were always the ballads, and he's got a right to get sweet on himself. Love is silt. Anybody who has ever taken Quaaludes and wound up loving the rest of the human race so much they ended up in bed with a human turnip knows that. The lyrics are better than any Lou-née Tunes in a while, but note that not since *Transformer* have so many of them been explicitly preoccupied with the, er, ah . . . "gay" scene. Which certainly can't be said of *CIB*'s

immediate predecessor. Me, I like sex with vegetables, but I nurse this lingering paranoia that someday, some drunken night, I may get a radish between the sheets and discover it's homosexual. Thus I feel threatened by *Coney Island Baby*, just as I feel threatened by Valiums, Tuinals, Seconals, Quaaludes and Compoz. *Metal Machine Music*, on the contrary, reinforces my sense of myself as a man. With it I can kill, even Puerto Ricans, which is the ultimate bar mitzvah. Under my blacklight presidential campaign poster of Hunter Thompson, I bolt upright in repose, my rifle casually draped cross my lap, listening to *MMM* and dreaming of My Lai as starring Fritz the Cat. So fuck downs, avoid *Coney Island Baby* like guys who wear green on Thursdays, and keep it (your fist) up tight.

15. *MMM* is Lou's soul. If there is one thing he would like to see buried in a time capsule, this is it.

16. It sounds better on Romilar than any other record I have ever heard.

17. It is the greatest record ever made in the history of the human cardrum. Number Two: *Kiss Alive!*

—Green, March 1976

from Untitled Notes on Lou Reed, 1980

Lou, I understand you wanna be "dominant." Okay, dominate me. Go ahead, beat me to a pulp, worse, rule my life, do whatever your mind conceives whatever your heart and sinews rush to . . . is it me that can't accept it or you? Who would you really like to kill? Not yourself, because you wouldn't have made all those albums if that was it. Other people, too many, specific people, too limited, too silly. You know your hatred is just like anybody else's. The real question is what to live for. And I can't answer it. Except another one of your records. And another chance for me to write. Art for art's sake, corny as that. And I bet Andy believes it too. Otherwise he woulda killed himself a long time ago.

