

The PHILOSOPHY OF ANDY WARHOL

(From A to B and Back Again)

ANDY WARHOL

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Dedication

To Pat Hackett, for extracting and redacting my thoughts so intelligently;
To beautiful Brigid Polk, for being on the other end;
To Bob Colacello, for getting it all together; and
To Steven M. L. Aronson, for being a great editor.

A: Just a little piece smaller smaller

B AND I: HOW ANDY PUTS HIS WARHOL ON

A: I have never called my answering service.

I wake up and call B.

B is anybody who helps me kill time.

B is anybody and I'm nobody. B and I.

I need B because I can't be alone. Except when I sleep. Then I can't be with anybody.

I wake up and call B.

"Hello."

"A? Wait and I'll turn off the TV. And pee. I took a dehydration pill and they make me pee every fifteen minutes."

I waited for B to pee.

"Go on," she said finally. "I just woke up. My mouth is dry."

"I wake up every morning. I open my eyes and think: here we go again."

"I get up because I have to pee."

"I never fall back to sleep," I said. "It seems like a dangerous thing to do. A whole day of life is like a whole day of television. TV never goes off the air once it starts for the day, and I don't either. At the end of the day the whole day will be a movie. A movie made for TV."

"I watch television from the minute I get up," B said. "I look at NBC blue, then I turn to another channel and look at the background in a different color and see which way it looks better with the skin tones on the faces. I memorize some of Barbara Walters' lines so I can use them on your TV show when you get it."

B was referring to the great unfulfilled ambition of my life: my own regular TV show. I'm going to call it *Nothing Special*.

"I wake up in the morning," she said, "and look at the patterns of the wallpaper. There's gray and there's a flower and there're black dots around the flower, and I'm thinking: is it Bill Blass wallpaper? It's just as famous as a painting. You know what you should do today, A? You should find the best drawer-liner paper in New York and make a portfolio out of it. Or have it made into material and go to an upholsterer and have a chair covered with it. Have the flowers tufted. And you could put accent pillows. You can do so much more with a chair than you can with a painting."

"That forty-pound shopping bag full of rice that I bought in a panic is still sitting next to my bed," she said.

"So is mine, except it's eighty pounds and it's driving me crazy because the shopping bag doesn't match the curtains."

"My pillow is stained."

"Maybe you turned upside down in the middle of the night and got your period," B said.

"I have to take off my wings." I use five wings: one under each eye, one on either side of my mouth and one on my forehead.

"Say that again."

"I said I have to take off my wings."

Was B making fun of my wings? "Every day is a new day," I said. "Because I can't remember the day before. So I'm grateful to my wings."

"Oh, Jesus," she sighed. "Every day is a new day. Tomorrow isn't that important, yesterday wasn't"

that important. I really am thinking about today. And the first thing I think about today is how am I going to save a buck. I wait in bed for whoever I want to call to call me. That way I save at least a dime.”

“I pop right out of bed. I shuffle, I shuttle, I tippy-toe, I cakewalk, anything to avoid the chocolate-covered cherries that are spread all over the floor like land-mines. But I always step in one. I feel the chocolate . . .”

“I CAN’T HEAR YOU. I CAN’T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU’RE SAYING!”

“I said I realize it’s a feeling I like.”

“I get up and I tip-toe. I’m afraid I’m going to wake up my houseguests it’s so early, and then when I slip on a chocolate-covered cherry I really hate it, because it reminds me of putting honey on something, and then, God, the knife is dirty, and I get it on the carpet, you know how honey always drips. Honey should come out of something that squirts—like ketchup in a drive-in.”

“I crawl to the bathroom because I can’t shuffle, shuttle, tippy-toe or cakewalk, with a chocolate-covered cherry caught between my toes. I approach the sink. I raise my body slowly and brace my arms against the stand.”

“I don’t do that,” B said. “I get the chocolate-covered cherry caught between my toes and then I sit in a yoga position and try to get my foot into my mouth so I can lick off the rest of the chocolate-covered cherry. Then I hop to the bathroom so I don’t get any more chocolate-covered cherry on the rest of the floor. Once I get there I have to lift my leg up to the sink and take a foot-bath.”

“I’m sure I’m going to look in the mirror and see nothing. People are always calling me a mirror and if a mirror looks into a mirror, what is there to see?”

“When I look in the mirror I only know that I don’t see myself as others see me.”

“Why is that, B?”

“Because I’m looking at myself the way I want to see myself. I make expressions just for myself. I don’t make the expressions other people see me make. I’m not twisting my lips and saying ‘Money?’”

“Oh, not money, B, come on.” This B is rich so of course she has a one-track mind.

“Some critic called me the Nothingness Himself and that didn’t help my sense of existence any. Then I realized that existence itself is nothing and I felt better. But I’m still obsessed with the idea of looking into the mirror and seeing no one, nothing.”

“I’m obsessed,” B said, “with the idea of looking into the mirror and saying ‘I don’t believe it. How can I get the publicity I get? How can I be one of the most famous persons in the world? Just look at me!’”

“Day after day I look in the mirror and I still see something—a new pimple. If the pimple on my upper right cheek is gone, a new one turns up on my lower left cheek, on my jawline, near my ear, in the middle of my nose, under the hair on my eyebrows, right between my eyes. I think it’s the same pimple, moving from place to place.” I was telling the truth. If someone asked me, “What’s your problem?” I’d have to say, “Skin.”

“I dunk a Johnson and Johnson cotton ball into Johnson and Johnson rubbing alcohol and rub the cotton ball against the pimple. It smells so good. So clean. So cold. And while the alcohol is drying I think about nothing. How it’s always in style. Always in good taste. Nothing is perfect—after all, B, it’s the opposite of nothing.”

“For me to think about nothing is just about impossible,” said B. “I can’t even think about it when I’m asleep. I had the worst dream of my life last night. The worst nightmare, I mean. I dreamt that I was at a meeting someplace and I had a plane reservation to come home and nobody would take me. They kept taking me to this house instead, to look at an art work for charity. I had to go up the stairs and look at all the paintings. And there was a man ahead of me and he kept saying ‘Turn around! You haven’t seen that!’ I said, ‘Yes, sir!’ It was a curved wall going up a curved staircase, it was painted

yellow, from the bottom to the top, and he said, 'Well, that's the painting.' I said, 'Oh.' Then I left with a man in a gray suit and a briefcase who went down to put another fifteen cents in the parking meter, but his car wasn't a car, it was a couch, so I knew *he* couldn't get me anyplace. That's when I tried to stop an ambulance. I wound up having to go to the party another time. Another man dragged me back to see the painting and he said, 'You haven't seen everything yet.' I said, 'I've seen everything.' He said, 'But you haven't seen the man downstairs putting the fifteen cents in his car.' I said, 'Ha. That's not his car, it's his couch. How am I going to get to the airport on a couch?' He said 'Didn't you see him take a black notebook out of his pocket and write fifteen cents in it? He said it was the longest meeting he'd ever been to. It's a tax deduction. That's a work of art. That's his piece, putting the fifteen cents into the parking for his couch.' Then I realized I didn't have any money to pay for my plane reservation—I had made and canceled it four times. So I went to a shingled house near the beach and picked up sea-shells. I wanted to see if I could get inside this broken sea-shell, and I tried, A, I really tried. I got the top of my head in it and my barrette, through the hole. One strand of my hair and my barrette. I went back to the meeting and I said, 'Could you please put a propeller on this man's couch, so I can get to the airport.'"

This B had something on her mind. Why else would she dream like that?

"I had an awful nightmare last night too," I said. "I was taken to a Clinic. I was sort of involved in charity to cheer up monsters—people who were horribly disfigured, people born without noses, people who had to wear plastic across their faces because underneath there was nothing. There was a person at the Clinic who was in charge who was trying to explain the problems these people had and their personal habits and I was just standing there and I had to listen and I just wanted it to stop. Then I woke up and I thought, 'Please, please let me think about anything else. I'm just going to roll over and think about anything else that I can,' and I rolled over and I dozed off and the nightmare was back! It was awful.

"The thing is to think of nothing, B. Look, nothing is exciting, nothing is sexy, nothing is not embarrassing. The only time I ever want to be something is outside a party so I can get in."

"Three out of five parties are going to be a drag, A. I always have my car there early so I can leave if they're disappointing."

I could have told her that if something is disappointing I know it's not nothing because nothing is not disappointing.

"When the alcohol is dry," I said, "I'm ready to apply the flesh-colored acne-pimple medication that doesn't resemble any human flesh I've ever seen, though it does come pretty close to mine."

"I use a Q-tip for that," B said. "You know, one of the things that gets me hot is having a Q-tip in my ear. I love to clean my ears. I really find it exciting if I find a little piece of wax."

"Okay, B, okay. So now the pimple's covered. But am I covered? I have to look into the mirror for some more clues. Nothing is missing. It's all there. The affectless gaze. The diffracted grace . . ."

"What?"

"The bored languor, the wasted pallor . . ."

"The what?"

"The chic freakiness, the basically passive astonishment, the enthralling secret knowledge . . ."

"WHAT??"

"The chintzy joy, the revelatory tropisms, the chalky, puckish mask, the slightly Slavic look . . ."

"Slightly . . ."

"The childlike, gum-chewing naïveté, the glamour rooted in despair, the self-admiring carelessness, the perfected otherness, the wispiness, the shadowy, voyeuristic, vaguely sinister aura, the pale, soft-spoken magical presence, the skin and bones . . ."

"Hold it, wait a minute. I have to take a pee."

“The albino-chalk skin. Parchmentlike. Reptilian. Almost blue . . .”

“Stop it! I have to pee!!”

“The knobby knees. The roadmap of scars. The long bony arms, so white they look bleached. The arresting hands. The pinhead eyes. The banana ears . . .”

“The banana ears? Oh, A!!!”

“The graying lips. The shaggy silver-white hair, soft and metallic. The cords of the neck standing out around the big Adam’s apple. It’s all there, B. Nothing is missing. I’m everything my scrapbook says I am.”

“Now can I go pee, A? I’ll only be a second.”

“First tell me, is my Adam’s apple that big, B?”

“It’s a lump in your throat. Take a lozenge.”

When B got back from peeing, we compared makeup techniques. I don’t really use makeup but I buy it and I think about it a lot. Makeup is so well-advertised you can’t ignore it completely. B went on for such a long time about all her “creams” that I asked her “Don’t you like to have people come in your face?”

“Does it rejuvenate?”

“Haven’t you heard about these ladies who take young guys to the theater and jerk them off so they can put it all over their face?”

“They rub it in like face cream?”

“Yes. It sort of pulls it tighter and makes them younger for the evening.”

“It does? Well, I use my own. It’s better that way. That way I can do it at home before I go out for the evening. I shave my underarms, spray them, cream my face, and I’m all set for an evening.”

“I don’t shave. I don’t sweat. I don’t even shit,” I said. I wondered what B would say to that.

“You must be full of shit, then,” she said. “Ha ha ha.”

“After I check myself out in the mirror, I slip into my BVDs. Nudity is a threat to my existence.”

“It’s not a threat to mine,” B said. “I’m standing here now completely naked, looking at the stretch marks on my tits. Right now I’m looking at the scar on my side from my abscessed breastbone. And now I’m looking at the scar on my leg from where I fell in the garden when I was six.”

“What about *my* scars?”

“What about *your* scars?” B said. “I’ll tell you about *your* scars. I think you produced *Frankenstein* just so you could put your scars in the ad. You put your scars to work for you. I mean, why not? They’re the best things you have because they’re proof of something. I always think it’s nice to have the proof.”

“What are they proof of?”

“You got shot. You had the biggest orgasm of your life.”

“What happened?”

“It happened so quickly it was like a flash.”

“*What* happened?”

“Remember how embarrassed you were in the hospital when the nuns saw you without your wings? And you started to collect things again. The nuns got you interested in collecting stamps, like you did when you were a kid or something. They got you interested in coins again too.”

“But you haven’t told me what happened.” I wanted B to spell it out for me. If someone else talks about it, I listen, I hear the words, and I think, maybe it’s all true.

“You were just lying there and Billy Name was standing over you and crying. And you kept saying to him not to make you laugh because it really hurt.”

“And . . . ? And . . . ?”

“You were in a room in the intensive care unit, getting all these cards and presents from everybody

including me, but you wouldn't let me come and visit you because you thought I'd steal your pills. And you said you thought that coming so close to death was really like coming so close to life, because life is nothing."

"Yes, yes, but how did it happen?"

"The founder of the Society for Cutting Up Men wanted you to produce a script she'd written and you weren't interested and she just came up to your work studio one afternoon. There were a lot of people there and you were talking on the telephone. You didn't know her too well and she just walked in off the elevator and started shooting. Your mother was really upset. You thought she'd die of it. Your brother was really fabulous, the one who's a priest. He came up to your room and showed you how to do needlepoint. I'd taught him how in the lobby!"

So that's how I was shot?

For some reason the idea of B and me needlepointing . . . "After makeup, clothes make the man," I said. "I believe in uniforms."

"I love uniforms! Because if there's nothing there, clothes are certainly not going to make the man. It's better to always wear the same thing and know that people are liking you for the real you and not the you your clothes make. Anyway it's more exciting to see where people live than what they wear. mean, it's better to see their clothes hanging on their chairs than on their bodies. Everybody should just have all their clothes hanging out. Nothing should be hidden except the things you don't want your mother to see. That's the only reason I'm scared of dying."

"Why?"

"Because my mother will come up here and find the vibrator and find the things in my diary that I've written about her."

"I believe in bluejeans too."

"The ones made by Levi Strauss are the best-cut, best-looking pair of pants that have ever been designed by anybody. Nobody will ever top the original bluejeans. They can't be bought old, they have to be bought new and they have to be worn in by the person. To get that look. And they can't be phoney bleached or phoney anything. You know that little pocket? It's so crazy to have that little little pocket, like for a twenty-dollar gold piece."

"French bluejeans?"

"No, American are the best. Levi Strauss. With the little copper buttons. Studed for evening wear."

"How do you keep them clean, B?"

"You wash them."

"Do you iron them?"

"No, I put fabric softener. The only person who irons them is Geraldo Rivera."

This talk of bluejeans was making me very jealous. Of Levi and Strauss. I wish I could invent something like bluejeans. Something to be remembered for. Something mass.

"I want to die with my bluejeans on," I heard myself say.

"Oh, A," B said impulsively, "you should be President! If you were President, you would have somebody else be President for you, right?"

"Right."

"You'd be just right for the Presidency. You would videotape everything. You would have a nightly talk show—your own talk show as President. You'd have somebody else come on, the other President that's the President for you, and he would talk your diary out to the people, every night for half an hour. And that would come before the news, What the President Did Today. So there would be no flack about the President does nothing or the President just sits around. Every day he'd have to tell us what he did, if he had sex with his wife . . . You'd have to say you played with your dog Archie—it's the perfect name for the President's pet—and what bills you had to sign and why you didn't want to

sign them, who was rotten to you in Congress . . . You'd have to say how many long-distance phone calls you made that day. You'd have to tell what you ate in the private dining room, and you'd show on the television screen the receipts you paid for private food for yourself. For your Cabinet you would have people who were not politicians. Robert Scull would be head of Economics because he would know how to buy early and sell big. You wouldn't have any politicians around at all. You'd take all the trips and tape them. You'd play back all the tapes with foreign people on TV. And when you wrote a letter to anyone in Congress you would have it Xeroxed and sent to every paper.

"You'd be a nice President. You wouldn't take up too much space, you'd have a tiny office like you have now. You'd change the law so you could keep anything anybody gave you while you were in office, because you're a Collector. And you'd be the first nonmarried President. And in the end you'd be famous because you'd write a book: 'How I Ran the Country Without Even Trying.' Or if that sounded wrong, 'How I Ran the Country with Your Help.' That might sell better. Just think, if you were President right now, there'd be no more First Lady. Only a First Man.

"You'd have no live-in maid at the White House. A B would come in a little early to clean up. And then the other Bs would file down to Washington to see you just like they file in to see you at the Factory. It would be just like the Factory, all bulletproof. Visitors would have to get past your hairdressers. And you'd take your extra-private hairdresser with you. Can't you see her in her inflatable jacket, ready for war at any moment? Do you realize there's no reason you couldn't be President of the United States? You know all the bigwigs who could get you in, all of society, all the rich people, and that's all anyone's ever needed to get to be President. I don't know why you don't declare yourself in the running right away. Then people would know you weren't just a big joke. I want you to say every time you look at yourself in the mirror, 'Politics: Washington, D.C I mean, quit fooling around with the Rothschilds. Forget about those long trips to Montauk in the Rolls. Think about a little helicopter to Camp David. What a camp it would be. You'd have such a camp. Do you realize the opportunity of the White House? A, you've been into Politics since the day I met you. You do everything in a political way. Politics can mean doing a poster that has Nixon's face on it, and say 'Vote McGovern.'"

"The idea was you could vote either way."

"So, I could vote for Andy Warhol if you put Jasper Johns' face on it."

"Sure."

"So from now on, it's 'Support Andy Warhol.'"

"Well, write it in."

"We can start the country over from scratch. We can get the Indians back on the reservations making rugs and hunting for turquoise. And we can send Rotten Rita and Ondine out to pan for gold. Can you see the Blue Room with Campbell's Soup Cans all over the walls? Because that's what Foreign Heads of State should see, Campbell's Soup Cans and Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe. That's America. That's what should be in the White House. And you would serve Dolly Madison ice cream. A, see yourself as others see you."

"In the Presidency?"

"Oh, it would be so nice, with your brown hat in the wintertime and Archie in your office lying on your coat."

"Mm hmm."

"Just think of yourself doing all the things you do in the morning—like taking off your wings—by doing it in the White House."

"Oh, come on. We've been talking for so long I still haven't taken my wings off."

"Flush them down the toilet."

"Okay."

“A, if you don’t make it to the Presidency, you can become a Customs Official.”

“What? Why?”

“Remember the time you were searched at Customs. Your airline bag was loaded with candy bars, cookies, chewing gum. And they laughed. You used to eat nothing but sweets. You really have the sweetest tooth of anybody I’ve ever known. Now you have gall-bladder problems and have to take those large white pills before every meal. I keep telling you to have it out.”

“I have to go and dye. I haven’t done it yet today.”

“You spend so much time at home fiddling around with the color of your hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows. When we talk on the phone, I’m always hearing some other B yelling, in the background, ‘I’m going to throw out the Clairol 07!’ I don’t think you should throw out your dye, but I think you should dye both eyebrows the same color. When you stay home from the Factory I think it’s because your wig is out being dry-cleaned or dyed. It’s always the same in back, that fluffed-up back that I always want to pat down. Sometimes I’d like to pull your wig off but somehow I can’t ever do it. I know how it would hurt you.”

“Bye, B.”

Love (Puberty)

A: *I like your apartment.*

B: *It's nice, but it's only big enough for one person—or two people who are very close.*

A: *You know two people who are very close?*

At a certain point in my life, in the late 50s, I began to feel that I was picking up problems from the people I knew. One friend was hopelessly involved with a married woman, another had confided that he was homosexual, a woman I adored was manifesting strong signs of schizophrenia. I had never felt that I had problems, because I had never specifically defined any, but now I felt that these problems of friends were spreading themselves onto me like germs.

I decided to go for psychiatric treatment, as so many people I knew were doing. I felt that I should define some of my own problems—if, in fact, I had any—rather than merely sharing vicariously in the problems of friends.

I had had three nervous breakdowns when I was a child, spaced a year apart. One when I was eight, one at nine, and one at ten. The attacks—St. Vitus Dance—always started on the first day of summer vacation. I don't know what this meant. I would spend all summer listening to the radio and lying in bed with my Charlie McCarthy doll and my un-cut-out cut-out paper dolls all over the spread and under the pillow.

My father was away a lot on business trips to the coal mines, so I never saw him very much. My mother would read to me in her thick Czechoslovakian accent as best she could and I would always say “Thanks, Mom,” after she finished with Dick Tracy, even if I hadn't understood a word. She'd give me a Hershey Bar every time I finished a page in my coloring book.

When I think of my high school days, all I can remember, really, are the long walks to school, through the Czech ghetto with the babushkas and overalls on the clotheslines, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. I wasn't amazingly popular, but I had some nice friends. I wasn't very close to anyone although I guess I wanted to be, because when I would see the kids telling one another their problems I felt left out. No one confided in me—I wasn't the type they wanted to confide in, I guess. We passed a bridge everyday and underneath were used prophylactics. I'd always wonder out loud to everybody what they were, and they'd laugh.

I had a job one summer in a department store looking through *Vogues* and *Harper's Bazaars* and European fashion magazines for a wonderful man named Mr. Vollmer. I got something like fifty cents an hour and my job was to look for “ideas.” I don't remember ever finding one or getting one. Mr. Vollmer was an idol to me because he came from New York and that seemed so exciting. I wasn't really thinking about ever going there myself, though.

But when I was eighteen a friend stuffed me into a Kroger's shopping bag and took me to New York. I still wanted to be close with people. I kept living with roommates thinking we could become good friends and share problems, but I'd always find out that they were just interested in another person sharing the rent. At one point I lived with seventeen different people in a basement apartment on 103rd Street and Manhattan Avenue, and not one person out of the seventeen ever shared a real problem with me. They were all creative kids, too—it was more or less an Art Commune—so I know they must have had lots of problems, but I never heard about any of them. There were fights in the kitchen a lot over who had bought which slice of salami, but that was about it. I worked very long hours in those days, so I guess I wouldn't have had time to listen to any of their problems even if they had told me any, but I still felt left out and hurt.

I'd be making the rounds looking for jobs all day, and then be home drawing them at night. That

was my life in the 50s: greeting cards and watercolors and now and then a coffeehouse poetry reading.

The things I remember most about those days, aside from the long hours I spent working, are the cockroaches. Every apartment I ever stayed in was loaded with them. I'll never forget the humiliation of bringing my portfolio up to Carmel Snow's office at *Harper's Bazaar* and unzipping it only to have a roach crawl out and down the leg of the table. She felt so sorry for me that she gave me a job.

So I had an incredible number of roommates. To this day almost every night I go out in New York and run into somebody I used to room with who invariably explains to my date, "I used to live with Andy." I always turn white—I mean whiter. After the same scene happens a few times, my date can't figure out how I could have lived with so many people, especially since they only know me as the loner I am today. Now, people who imagine me as the 60s media partygoer who traditionally arrived at parties with a minimum six-person "retinue" may wonder how I dare to call myself a "loner," so let me explain how I really mean that and why it's true. At the times in my life when I was *feeling* the most gregarious and looking for bosom friendships, I couldn't find any takers, so that exactly when I was alone was when I felt the most like not being alone. The moment I decided I'd rather be alone and not have anyone telling me their problems, everybody I'd never even seen before in my life started running after me to tell me things I'd just decided I didn't think it was a good idea to hear about. As soon as I became a loner in my own mind, that's when I got what you might call a "following."

As soon as you stop wanting something you get it. I've found that to be absolutely axiomatic.

Because I felt I was picking up the problems of friends, I went to a psychiatrist in Greenwich Village and told him all about myself. I told him my life story and how I didn't have any problems of my own and how I was picking up my friends' problems, and he said he would call me to make another appointment so we could talk some more, and then he never called me. As I'm thinking about it now, I realize it was unprofessional of him to say he was going to call and then not call. On the way back from the psychiatrist's I stopped in Macy's and out of the blue I bought my first television set, an RCA 19-inch black and white. I brought it home to the apartment where I was living alone, under the El on East 75th Street, and right away I forgot all about the psychiatrist. I kept the TV on all the time, especially while people were telling me their problems, and the television I found to be just diverting enough so the problems people told me didn't really affect me any more. It was like some kind of magic.

My apartment was on top of Shirley's Pin-Up Bar, where Mabel Mercer would come to slum and sing "You're So Adorable," and the TV also put that in a whole new perspective. The building was a five-floor walk-up and originally I'd had the apartment on the fifth floor. Then, when the second floor became available, I took that, too, so now I had two floors, but not two consecutive ones. After I got my TV, though, I stayed more and more in the TV floor.

In the years after I'd decided to be a loner, I got more and more popular and found myself with more and more friends. Professionally I was doing well. I had my own studio and a few people working for me, and an arrangement evolved where they actually lived at my work studio. In those days, everything was loose, flexible. The people in the studio were there night and day. Friends of friends. Maria Callas was always on the phonograph and there were lots of mirrors and a lot of tinfoil.

I had by then made my Pop Art statement, so I had a lot of work to do, a lot of canvases to stretch. I worked from ten a.m. to ten p.m., usually, going home to sleep and coming back in the morning, but when I would get there in the morning the same people I'd left there the night before were still there, still going strong, still with Maria and the mirrors.

This is when I started realizing how insane people can be. For example, one girl moved into the elevator and wouldn't leave for a week until they refused to bring her any more Cokes. I didn't know what to make of the whole scene. Since I was paying the rent for the studio, I guessed that this somehow was actually *my* scene, but don't ask me what it was all about, because I never could figure

it out.

The location was great—~~47th Street and Third Avenue~~. We'd always see the demonstrators on their way to the UN for all the rallies. The Pope rode by on 47th Street once on his way to St. Patrick's. Khrushchev went by once, too. It was a good, wide street. Famous people had started to come by the studio, to peek at the on-going party, I suppose—Kerouac, Ginsberg, Fonda and Hopper, Barnett Newman, Judy Garland, the Rolling Stones. The Velvet Underground had started rehearsing in one part of the loft just before we got a mixed-media roadshow together and started our cross-country in 1963. It seemed like everything was starting then.

The counterculture, the subculture, pop, superstars, drugs, lights, discothèques—whatever we think of as “young-and-with-it”—probably started then. There was always a party somewhere: if there wasn't a party in a cellar, there was one on a roof, if there wasn't a party in a subway, there was one on a bus; if there wasn't one on a boat, there was one in the Statue of Liberty. People were always getting dressed up for a party. “All Tomorrow's Parties” was the name of a song the Velvets used to do at the Dom when the Lower East Side was just beginning to shake off its immigrant status and get hip. “What costumes shall the poor girl wear/To all tomorrow's parties . . .” I really liked that song. The Velvets played it and Nico sang it.

In those days everything was extravagant. You had to be rich to be able to afford pop clothes from boutiques like Paraphernalia or from designers like Tiger Morse. Tiger would go down to Klein's and Mays and buy a two-dollar dress, tear off the ribbon and flower, bring it up to her shop, and sell it for four hundred dollars. She had a way with accessories, too. She'd paste a ditsy on something from Woolworth's and charge fifty dollars for it. She had an uncanny talent for being able to tell which people who came into her shop were actually going to buy something. I once saw her look for a second at a nice-looking well-dressed lady and say “I'm sorry there's nothing for sale for you here.” She could always tell. She would buy anything that glittered. She was the person who invented the electric light dress that carried its own batteries.

In the 60s everybody got interested in everybody else. Drugs helped a little there. Everybody was equal suddenly—debutantes and chauffeurs, waitresses and governors. A friend of mine named Ingrid from New Jersey came up with a new last name, just right for her new, loosely defined show-business career. She called herself “Ingrid Superstar.” I'm positive Ingrid invented that word. At least, I invite anyone with “superstar” clippings that predate Ingrid's to show them to me. The more parties we went to, the more they wrote her name in the papers, Ingrid Superstar, and “superstar” was starting its media run. Ingrid called me a few weeks ago. She's operating a sewing machine now. But her name is still going. It seems incredible, doesn't it?

In the 60s everybody got interested in everybody.

In the 70s everybody started dropping everybody.

The 60s were Clutter.

The 70s are very empty.

When I got my first TV set, I stopped caring so much about having close relationships with other people. I'd been hurt a lot to the degree you can only be hurt if you care a lot. So I guess I did care a lot, in the days before anyone ever heard of “pop art” or “underground movies” or “superstars.”

So in the late 50s I started an affair with my television which has continued to the present, when I play around in my bedroom with as many as four at a time. But I didn't get married until 1964 when I got my first tape recorder. My wife. My tape recorder and I have been married for ten years now. When I say “we,” I mean my tape recorder and me. A lot of people don't understand that.

The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go. Nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape,

and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem any more. An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everybody knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing.

During the 60s, I think, people forgot what emotions were supposed to be. And I don't think they've ever remembered. I think that once you see emotions from a certain angle you can never think of them as real again. That's what more or less has happened to me.

I don't really know if I was ever capable of love, but after the 60s I never thought in terms of "love" again.

However, I became what you might call *fascinated* by certain people. One person in the 60s fascinated me more than anybody I had ever known. And the fascination I experienced was probably very close to a certain kind of love.

2

Love (Prime)

A: *Should we walk? It's really beautiful out.*

B: *No.*

A: *Okay.*

Taxi was from Charleston, South Carolina—a confused, beautiful debutante who'd split with her family and come to New York. She had a poignantly vacant, vulnerable quality that made her a reflection of everybody's private fantasies. Taxi could be anything you wanted her to be—a little girl, a woman, intelligent, dumb, rich, poor—anything. She was a wonderful, beautiful blank. The mystique to end all mystiques.

She was also a compulsive liar; she just couldn't tell the truth about anything. And what an actress. She could really turn on the tears. She could somehow always make you believe her—that's how she got what she wanted.

Taxi invented the mini-skirt. She was trying to prove to her family back in Charleston that she could live on nothing, so she would go to the Lower East Side and buy the cheapest clothes, which happen to be little girls' skirts, and her waist was so tiny she could get away with it. Fifty cents a skin. She was the first person to wear ballet tights as a complete outfit, with big earrings to dress it up. She was an innovator—out of necessity as well as fun—and the big fashion magazines picked up on her look right away. She was pretty incredible.

We were introduced by a mutual friend who had just made a fortune promoting a new concept in kitchen appliances on television quiz shows. After one look at Taxi I could see that she had more problems than anybody I'd ever met. So beautiful but so sick. I was really intrigued.

She was living off the end of her money. She still had a nice Sutton Place apartment, and now and then she would talk a rich friend into giving her a wad. As I said, she could turn on the tears and get anything she wanted.

In the beginning I had no idea how many drugs Taxi took, but as we saw more and more of each other it began to dawn on me how much of a problem she had.

Next in importance for her, after taking the drugs, was having the drugs. Hoarding them. She would hop in a limousine and make a run to Philly crying the whole way that she had no amphetamines. And somehow she would always get them because there was just something about Taxi. Then she would add it to the pound she had stashed away at the bottom of her footlocker.

One of her rich sponsor-friends even tried to set her up in the fashion business, designing her own line of clothes. He'd bought a loft on 29th Street outright from a schlock designer who had just bought a condominium in Florida and wanted to leave the city fast. The sponsor-friend took over the operation of the whole loft with the seven seamstresses still at their machines and brought Taxi in to start designing. The mechanics of the business were all set up, all she had to do was come up with designs that were basically no more than copies of the outfits that she styled for herself.

She wound up giving "pokes" to the seamstresses and playing with the bottles of beads and buttons and trimmings that the previous manager had left lining the wall. The business, needless to say, didn't prosper. Taxi would spend most of the day at lunch uptown at Reuben's ordering their Celebrity Sandwiches—the Anna Maria Alberghetti, the Arthur Godfrey, the Morton Downey were her favorites—and she would keep running into the ladies room and sticking her finger down her throat and throwing each one up. She was obsessed with not getting fat. She'd eat and eat on a spree and then throw up and throw up, and then take four downers and dod off for four days at a time. Meanwhile her "friends" would come in to "rearrange" her pocketbook while she was sleeping. When she'd wake up

four days later she'd deny that she'd been asleep.

At first I thought that Taxi only hoarded drugs. I knew that hoarding is a kind of selfishness, but I thought it was only with the drugs that she was that way. I'd see her beg people for enough for a poke and then go and file it in the bottom of her footlocker in its own little envelope with a date on it. But I finally realized that Taxi was selfish about absolutely everything.

One day when she was still in the designing business a friend and I went to visit her. There were scraps and scraps of velvets and satins all over the floor and my friend asked if she could have a piece just large enough to make a cover for a dictionary she owned. There were thousands of scraps all over the floor, practically covering our feet, but Taxi looked at her and said, "The best time is in the morning. Just come by in the morning and look through the pails out front and you'll probably find something."

Another time we were riding in a cab and she was crying that she didn't have any money, that she was poor, and she opened her pocketbook for a Kleenex and I happened to catch sight of one of those clear plastic change purses all stuffed with green. I didn't bother to say anything. What was the point? But the next day I asked her, "What happened to that clear plastic change purse you had yesterday that was stuffed with money?" She said, "It was stolen last night at a discotheque." She couldn't tell the truth about anything.

Taxi hoarded brassieres. She kept around fifty brassieres—in graduated shades of beige, through pale pink and deep rose to coral and white—in her trunk. They all had the price tags on them. She would never remove a price tag, not even from the clothes she wore. One day the same friend that asked her for the scrap of material was short on cash and Taxi owed her money. So she decided to take a brassiere that still had the Bendel's tags on it back to the store and get a refund. When Taxi wasn't looking she stuffed it into her bag and went uptown. She went to the lingerie department and explained that she was returning the bra for a friend—it was obvious that this girl was far from an A-cup. The saleslady disappeared for ten minutes and then came back holding the bra and some kind of a log book and said, "Madame. This bra was purchased in 1956." Taxi was a hoarder.

Taxi had an incredible amount of makeup in her bag and in her footlocker: fifty pairs of lashes arranged according to size, fifty mascara wands, twenty mascara cakes, every shade of Revlon shadow ever made—iridescent and regular, matte and shiny—twenty Max Factor blush-ons . . . She'd spend hours with her makeup bags Scotch-taping little labels on everything, dusting and shining the bottles and compacts. Everything had to look perfect.

But she didn't care about anything below the neck.

She would never take a bath.

I would say, "Taxi. Take a bath." I'd run the water and she would go into the bathroom with her bag and stay in there for an hour. I'd yell, "Are you in the tub?" "Yes, I'm in the tub." Splash splash. But then I'd hear her tip-toeing around the bathroom and I'd peek through the keyhole and she'd be standing in front of the mirror, putting on more makeup over what was already caked on her face. She would never put water on her face—only those degreasers, those little tissue-thin papers you press on your face that remove the oils without ruining the makeup. She used those.

A few minutes later I'd peek through the keyhole again and she'd be recopying her address book—or somebody else's address book, it didn't matter—or else she'd be sitting with a yellow legal pad making the list of all the men she'd ever been to bed with, dividing them into three categories—"Slept," "Fucked," and "Cuddled." If she made a mistake on the last line and it looked messy, she'd tear it off and start all over. After an hour she'd come out of the bathroom and I'd say, gratuitously, "You didn't take a bath." "Yes. Yes I did."

I slept in the same bed with Taxi once. Someone was after her and she didn't want to sleep with him, so she crawled into bed in the next room with me. She fell asleep and I just couldn't stop looking

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