The Velvet Underground and the Networks of Sound, Vision and Words of the Fertile Transatlantic Crescent 1965 - 1967

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In the wealth of texts that have explored the Velvet Underground’s early days, the popular history of their origin is largely constructed around the primary role of key actors such as Andy Warhol, his Factory scene and their geographical location in New York. It is an ideal that is supported by the nature of Lou Reed’s lyricism that locates its studied narratives among New York’s underclasses. This simplification supports a Romantic concept of New York driving an aspect of underground pop culture in an enclosed creative cultural network associated with the multi-media impacts of Pop Art and the experimental avant-garde. However, closer investigation suggests that the emergence of the Velvet Underground is couched in the close transitive links between London and New York. These links were afforded by readily available travel and investment in the cultural and economic capitals of each city’s underground by creative intermediaries, especially within the fields of art, film and literature. Contrary to the New York-centric perspective of the Velvet’s origin story there is strong evidence to support the notion that it was in [early] countercultural London where the band achieved a significant level of awareness through a transatlantic network, even before Warhol’s insertion into the band’s biography. From their earliest demo recordings, the Velvet Underground were enmeshed in a ‘web of interaction’ (Crossley 2015: 87) that, expanding on countercultural activist John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins’ concept of west London as a ‘fertile crescent’ (Palacios 2010: 98), can be viewed as the fertile transatlantic crescent.

Drawing on Becker (2004), Crossley, McAndrew and Widdop (2015) note ‘the networked character of music worlds is not restricted to their human participants nor SNA (Social Network Analysis) to the analysis of human networks’ (2015: 4). Thus ‘sites of
activity’ are important too; most obviously for this research such locations include Warhol’s Factory in New York and public venues including the UFO club and Better Books shop in London. We extend this idea to include various private flats and houses that were crucial sites of ‘musicking’ (Small 1998) and countercultural activity. As Crossley, McAndrew and Widdop (2015: 1) state ‘[t]hese activities tend to cluster along… geographical lines’, hence the intense concentration of activities in both Manhattan’s Lower East Side and London’s Notting Hill area, along with other connected countercultural sites. This clustering enabled the construction of a countercultural network and the flow of information, ideas and music within it. These locations and the actors involved serve as ‘the generative force and building blocks’ (Crossley 2015: 12) for the cultural location of the Velvet Underground.

This study investigates this intricate network of countercultural contacts that formed the fertile transatlantic crescent. It explores the vital place that London’s key countercultural actors played in the creation of the early mythology of the Velvet Underground and the cultural intermediation of the transatlantic networks. These networks linked the band to the cultural economy of London’s creative underground of the 1960s via New York’s interconnected experimental art, avant-garde film and beat poetry countercultures. Through this we employ ‘relational sociology’ formed on the fundamental notion that ‘social interactions, relations and networks are the most basic elements in social life; the generative force and building blocks from which all else emerges’ (Crossley 2015: 12). The study will therefore explore the foci of New York and London’s underground ‘social networks’. The dynamics of the networks can be understood through the filter of key actors active in both New York and London’s underground and countercultural scenes. These include music industry personnel, musicians, artists, experimental filmmakers, poets, photographers, fixers, journalists, event promoters and independent newspapers, presses and distribution networks. These key actors developed a strategic attachment to each other in pursuit of shared
ideologies, and in collaboration created the space that the Velvet Underground would eventually inhabit upon the release of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967).

**New York’s Experimental Music, Film and Literary Networks**

Drawing on Durkheim’s idea of ‘collective effervescence’, Crossley (2015) states that ‘[b]ands and stylistic innovations take place within a web of interaction whose participants encourage, stimulate and provoke one another without any sense, initially, of where it is taking them’ (87-8). The main actors come together through shared interests, attitudes and lifestyles as well as the opportunities provided in cities like New York and London. He further suggests that network formation by different actors within a scene can be analysed through the triumvirate of foci, strategic attachment and transivity. Foci are the environments that offer physical spaces for cultural production that actors with a shared interest converge upon. Strategic attachment occurs where participants target each other in order to gain some form of advantage. Transivity occurs in the way that linked actors tend to cluster, interact, share contacts and then grow through clustered participants repeatedly meeting each other in key spaces.

Transivity within and between both the creative pulses of 1960s New York’s avant-garde underground and London’s countercultural underground initially occurred through the foci of shared living spaces, multimedia happenings, cafes, bookstores and creative events. Strategic attachment can be seen to have occurred through the clustering of musicians, filmmakers, poets, alternative media operators and other creatives with a shared interest in experimental, avant-garde and countercultural approaches. While Crossley (2015) may define scenes as ‘networks of sound, style and subversion’ it is more accurate to consider the scene that birthed the Velvets as a network of *sound, vision and the spoken/written word*. This
network initially clustered in the loci of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York and the countercultural ‘villages’ of Notting Hill, Ladbroke Grove, Covent Garden, Cromwell Road, Bayswater and Chalk Farm in west London - John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins’s ‘fertile crescent’ (Palacios 2010: 98). These loci were networked via transatlantic flows of influence through the various strands of cultural production that were working closely together and impacted upon each other.

As viewed in the formative New York scene, the clustering of people was inextricably bound to the activities of avant-garde musicians, poets, actors and filmmakers centred around the Lower East Side, specifically the locus of a decrepit block of apartments at 56 Ludlow Street. Experimental filmmaker, musician and composer Tony Conrad says this address ‘came to stand for a lot in terms of some kind of liberating musical influence’ (Bockris & Cale 1999: 65). Importantly for this study, 56 Ludlow Street was home to key figures in the production and dissemination of the Velvet Underground’s music and myth. English experimental film actress Kate Heliczer (now Archard) states that she and her then husband, poet and filmmaker Piero Heliczer lived in a 5th floor apartment next to musician and composer John Cale and Conrad; the latter having studied at Harvard alongside Piero (Archard 2020a). An old school friend of Piero’s, the actor, poet, drummer and composer Angus MacLise lived in an apartment across the hall from Cale. Other inhabitants of the block included filmmaker Jack Smith and ‘Warhol superstar’ Mario Montez (aka René Rivera). This creative cluster collaborated on numerous interrelated projects such as La Monte Young’s drone ensemble Theatre of Eternal Music (aka The Dream Syndicate) of which Cale, MacLise and Conrad were all members. The trio would also produce the soundtrack to Jack Smith’s 1963 film Flaming Creatures which featured Kate Heliczer and Mario Montez in acting roles. Kate Heliczer also featured in Warhol’s film Couch (1964) alongside the poets Allen Ginsberg, Gerald Malanga, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso,
providing links to Warhol’s creative cluster at another important locus, The Factory, then at 231, East 47th Street, in Midtown Manhattan.

One night at a party in 1964, Cale and Conrad met Jerry Vance of Pickwick Records who recruited them on account of their style to help support the promotion of a pop song called ‘The Ostrich’. Cale and Conrad soon met songwriter Lou Reed, and they were joined by sculptor and drummer Walter de Maria. Together Reed, Cale, Conrad and de Maria became known as The Primitives. Reed, Cale and a rotating crew of associates were ‘always recording’ often for ‘bread and butter’ in their pop work for Pickwick Records (Archard 2020b). As Reed developed a songwriting partnership with Cale he became drawn into the 56 Ludlow Street avant-garde cluster and soon started commuting from Long Island to share the squalid apartment with Cale and Conrad at weekends. An early incarnation of the Velvets, now with Sterling Morrison and known initially as The Warlocks, and then as The Falling Spikes, would jam in the apartment (Archard 2020a) with percussion occasionally provided by MacLise. As Unterberger (2017) has identified, there were also two female members of the band at this time. Most notably Elektrah Lobel sang with the fledgling band at several Greenwich Village club performances and appeared in two 1965 Andy Warhol films. Later Daryl Delafield also briefly joined the band. The Falling Spikes were soon renamed The Velvet Underground at the suggestion of Tony Conrad, sourced from an investigative book on subversive sexual practices he found on the sidewalk in the Bowery.

The Velvets were thus a creative product of the processes of transivity among the Lower East Side avant-garde milieu of experimental filmmakers, musicians and poets. Significantly the first two 1965 Falling Spikes/Velvet Underground gigs were at groundbreaking avant-garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas’ Cinematheque events with films by Andy Warhol, Barbara Rubin and Jack Smith. (Landemaine n.d.) By December’s run of shows at Café Bizarre, Greenwich Village the band had attracted the attention of Warhol and the
Campbell, Factory set. Gerard Malanga (2020) outlined that he ‘was not aware of the Velvets until Barbara (Rubin) personally brought me to Cafe Bizarre to hear them play. That was when I stood in front of them and did my whip dance. It was pure coincidence that they had this song "Venus in Furs" that related to my whip which I wore around my belt as a fashion accoutrement.’

The importance of the network of avant-garde filmmakers in the Velvets’ formative stage is further illustrated by the role of Mekas and Rubin as connectors. Mekas allowed the band to rehearse in the Cinematheque venue’s loft, filmed them at the Annual Dinner of the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry in January 1966 (as did Rubin) and also at the Dom in April 1966. Mekas introduced beat poet Allen Ginsberg to Rubin who further connected the Velvets to the Warhol crowd. Given the existing connections through Montez, de Maria and Mekas it is conceivable that Warhol was aware of the band as part of the Ludlow Street cluster before the Café Bizarre show. Furthermore, Cale already had an association with Ginsberg: ‘Allen Ginsberg, John Cage and La Monte Young were the first three figures of the New York avant-garde I met when I arrived in the city in 1963[...] Allen was the conscience of the underground/ avant-garde to whom we all deferred’ (Bockris and Cale 1999: 278).

British photographer Adam Ritchie became another part of this network. While working for Conde Nast magazines like Esquire and Mademoiselle, he took photographs for avant-garde New York record label ESP Disk and worked nights at the Bleecker Street Cinema where he met Barbara Rubin, Jonas Mekas and the Fugs. At Rubin’s insistence, Ritchie attended and photographed the Velvets playing in Piero Heliczer’s (1965) Venus in Furs film. Rubin instigated a working relationship between Ritchie and the band that saw him shoot them on various occasions including at Café Bizarre, the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry’s Annual Dinner, the Filmmaker’s Cinematheque and an Exploding Plastic
Inevitable show at the Dom. In April 1966 at the Velvets’ first Dom show, Rubin encouraged Ginsberg to sing with them. Curiously he performed ‘Hare Krishna’ while the band improvised and Malanga did his whip dance (Miles 1990: 387).

Warhol had been aware of Piero Heliczer’s multi-media ‘ritual happenings’, with films projected through veils hung in front of a screen and coloured lights and slides superimposed over them, while dancers performed onstage with musicians played in the background (Watson 2003: 210). The spring 1965 show The Launching of the Dream Weapon featured a The Falling Spikes performance. In January 1966 Warhol debuted his own multi-media events The Exploding Plastic Inevitable, a name created from words that Paul Morrissey found in the ‘amphetamine babble’ of Dylan’s Bringing it All Back Home sleeve notes (Miles 1990: 387) that featured Dylan, Rubin and Ginsberg (Miles 1990: 334). The opening night imitated Heliczer’s ‘ritual happenings’ with the Velvet Underground, now also featuring Nico, providing music. Cale and Reed also provided experimental scores for a trilogy of black and white films in which Warhol submitted friends to close-up interviews. The first of these, Hedy (1966), starred Montez in the title role. The soundtrack comprised of twenty-six minutes of music by Cale and Reed that is reminiscent of the experimental work of La Monte Young’s Theatre of Eternal Music.

Transatlantic Networks of Sound, Vision and the Written Word

Through the connections made with Ginsberg, other beat poets and avant-garde filmmakers, and later with the Warhol scene, the Velvets were able to interact with a professionalized transatlantic network of organized underground creatives and successful music industry actors. These included British managers like Simon Napier-Bell and Ken Pitt (Pitt 1983) along with artists such as Bob Dylan and a new breed of rock stars including the Yardbirds.
and the Rolling Stones. James (2019) notes that networks of sound within major cities were also reliant on both cultural commuters and activities in the provinces. He extends Crossley’s (2015) model to propose a further, fluid notion of transivity that shows the relationship between localized clusters and transient ‘commuter’ actors. This understanding that ‘social networks’ are able to exist in differing spaces but with key figures simultaneously enacting change upon geographically distant but subculturally linked spaces allows for the notion of a transatlantic network. The cultural presence of the Velvet Underground within the interconnected spaces of New York and London illustrates this proposition.

Following the Beatles’ Ed Sullivan Show performance on 9 February 1964, there was a teenage hunger across America for British music. ‘[T]he vast increase in contact during this period’ (Malchow 2011: 1) was facilitated by business expansion, a greater focus on the demographics and aesthetics of popular culture, cheaper travel and the broader media, including the mid-1960s emergence of alternative newspaper distribution and syndication services such as the Underground Press Syndicate and HIPS.

This facilitated a steady stream of acts like Herman’s Hermits, The Hollies, The Kinks, The Yardbirds and The Rolling Stones crossing the Atlantic to tour, and encouraged the British music press to invest in sending people to cover music in the United States. In 1964 John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins went to New York in his role as Melody Maker photographer, initially to shoot the jazz scene. He had already met Kate Heliczer in London but soon became acquainted with British ex-pats journalist John Wilcock (a founder of The Village Voice), photographer Adam Ritchie and, of course, John Cale, all of whom would become associated with the Warhol network. Hoppy subsequently alerted friends in London about the New York avant-garde scene. He became a key instigator in London’s countercultural movement and an important actor in the Velvet Underground’s early mythological status in London’s underground network.
When British artist managers and other music industry professionals visited the States, they inevitably came into contact with American creatives such as Andy Warhol who, through his fascination with popular culture and celebrity, had been increasingly drawn towards the potential of the rock star. This is evidenced by his Double Elvis and Triple Elvis pictures (1963), the filmed screen test of Bob Dylan (1965) and his early experiment with developing the avant-noise band The Druds (Russeth 2012). Yardbirds manager Simon Napier-Bell met Warhol in New York in 1965/66 and confirms that ‘Andy wanted to learn more about the music industry. Haha! So did I’ (Napier-Bell 2019). Initially, Warhol was interested in managing The Fugs, a plan that did not come to fruition. By late 1965, encouraged by filmmakers Rubin, Malanga and Morrissey, he recruited the Velvet Underground instead. Stephen Watson states: ‘Paul Morrissey suggested a bigger plan: Warhol should emulate Brian Epstein and sponsor a band. Showing movies behind the band would give them a chance to re-cycle movies that had had a very limited distribution’ (2003: 11). Warner (2014) argues that Warhol linking up with a pop group represented the continued collapse of the high-brow and low-brow, elite and popular cultural divide where ‘Ginsberg and Dylan could establish shared agendas and Andy Warhol would feel able to invite the Velvet Underground into his own palace of mysteries’ (2014: 81). In a sense the band were the perfect embodiment of this transatlantic traffic that was an early feature of the networks created through the high/low collapse featuring as they did three Americans (Lou Reed, Maureen Tucker and Sterling Morrison) and two Europeans - a Welshman (John Cale) and a German (Nico). While the Velvets were clearly their own people and very much an entity before Warhol’s involvement, they came to be seen as an extension of his art practice and personal brand. Indeed, the only words on the front cover of their debut album are his name.

London’s Countercultural Networks
It is significant that the transatlantic flow of music creatives and music business people was bidirectional, and as Miles (1990) indicates ‘London was the place to be, and Americans were flocking across the Atlantic to join in the action’ (371). Young Americans headed to England in the 1960s for a variety of reasons - for jobs and career development, education, to avoid the Vietnam war draft and to party - as London was then considered the epicentre of popular culture. These included producer/A&R man Joe Boyd, documentary filmmaker/promoter Steve Stollman, and Shel Talmy (producer of early singles by The Kinks, The Who and David Bowie/Davy Jones). Musicians also made the journey, including The Walker Brothers, Jimi Hendrix, PJ Proby and PP Arnold. Stollman ran the Spontaneous Underground which put on acts like The Pink Floyd Sound and AMM (featuring John Cale’s London friend and mentor Cornelius Cardew – a John Cage disciple and former Stockhausen assistant). His brother Bernie ran ESP, the avant-garde New York label that was home to The Fugs, Sun Ra, Pharoah Sanders and Albert Ayler. In August 1966 ESP released The East Village Other album that featured early Velvets track ‘Noise’, as well as contributions from Malanga and Ingrid Superstar, Ginsberg, The Fugs’ Tuli Kupferberg and Warhol, again situating the band within the spheres of the counterculture and its media.

Other American ex-pats played important roles within the infrastructure of the London counterculture. Malchow (2011) identifies Jack Henry Moore and Jim Haynes in particular. Moore produced the 14 Hour Technicolor Dream event and for a period edited International Times (95; 131). Haynes, an ex-US Army member stationed near Edinburgh (130-131), was key in setting up International Times and founding the Arts Lab in Drury Lane (1967-69) where Bowie rehearsed and performed. Warhol’s films, popular with the UK student/counterculture crowd (119), were screened at the Arts Lab, which may also have raised awareness of both Nico and the Velvet Underground in London.
These transatlantic networks helped lay the foundations for the UK counterculture, providing a route through which knowledge of the Velvets could be transmitted. Events in New York were a blueprint for London’s countercultural activists. ‘It was a very particular urban, bohemian, beat, jazz vibe which echoed quite strong in Notting Hill. [Notting Hill] certainly wasn’t a laid back, cool, hippy Chelsea fashion thing. It was harder’ says Mike McInnerney (2020), art editor of Hoppy’s The Grove community newspaper and, later, International Times. Indeed, this radical countercultural London had distinct locations and a distinct moment (1965-67), a similar timeframe to its ‘Swinging London’ counterpart, but a world away in social, cultural and political terms (Rycroft 2011) and ended with ‘the hippy invasion’ of Notting Hill sometime in 1967 (McInnerney 2020).

During this countercultural moment, Barry Miles, ‘a facilitator of cultural interface’ (Farren 2001: 87), talked about the ‘various plans to develop Covent Garden as a London Lower East Side’ (Miles 1967a:12), later reflecting that ‘it was very much the Lower East Side drug scene that we were emulating’ with International Times (Green 1988). Knowledge of New York was gleaned from the underground press and other cultural activities, film and the jazz scene as well as transatlantic visitors (McInnerney 2020).

It is worth considering the cultural geography of London in 1965-67 when the countercultural network developed out of the transivity that connected the communal loci of houses, cafes, venues and community spaces like All Saints Hall and the London Free School in the ‘villages’ of Hoppy’s ‘fertile crescent’. As with the Lower East Side, this ‘crescent’ was, to apply Crossley’s term, ‘a web of interaction whose participants encourage, stimulate and provoke one another’ (2015: 87-8). Key catalysts in this were Miles and Hoppy. Archard (2020a) says that Hoppy was ‘[o]ne of those wonderful energetic people who had his fingers in every pie going’ and Miles ‘knew everyone who was anyone’ (2020b). McInnerney (2020) states that ‘a vibe was being engineered, pushed’ by Hoppy, and that ‘Miles had a strong feel
for the idea of a Bohemian beat scene’. They initially centred their activity in Notting Hill as ‘a petri-dish to see how something could grow’, developing infrastructure, locations and forms of communication such as International Times crucial for a self-sufficient community. Miles called this ‘a contained economic community’ and told IT readers ‘DON’T SPEND OUTSIDE THE UNDERGROUND’ (Miles 1967b:8). McInnerney (2020) states that ‘walking around [Notting Hill] gave a strong feeling of kindred spirits… You could meet interesting people in the street… [it] put you in contact with people on the scene then you started talking’, with ideas, plans and action growing out of this contact, whether creative, communal or political. Though not based in Notting Hill, the Indica Gallery and Bookshop, established by Miles, John Dunbar and Peter Asher in September 1965 acted as a one-stop shop for the countercultural community - ‘a ticket to the magic kingdom’, ‘the epicentre of osmosis’ (Farren 2001: 84). Its bookshop featured a range of key texts including William Burroughs, Timothy Leary, Malcolm X, J.G. Ballard, Hubert Selby Jr, the Marquis de Sade and a selection of American underground newspapers like the Village Voice and the East Village Other. There was also a curated rack of albums of music and spoken word such as Sun Ra, The Fugs, Lenny Bruce and Melvin Van Peebles (Farren 2001: 84-85) many on the New York label ESP. International Times was printed in the basement.

Houses and flats were also central within this network, for example, 108 Westbourne Terrace, home to Hoppy, Miles and Adam Ritchie (Green 1988). Wherever Hoppy lived was ‘a conduit for a lot of information that was coming from abroad from Europe or America’ (McInnerney 2020). In the mid-1960s Hoppy also lived at 115 Queensway where he installed an off-set litho printer in order to produce Long Hair magazine. As McInnerney (2020) states: ‘Hoppy’s flat was an epicentre of activity and all kinds of things came out of that’. McInnerney’s own flat at 212 Shaftesbury Avenue was another hot spot. Mick Farren, who lived there immediately after McInnerney, said that it became ‘a three-ring circus’, ‘a pitstop
in the night-time perambulations of friends, acquaintances, total strangers’ on their way back from the Middle Earth club, the Arts Lab or elsewhere (2001:200-201).

101 Cromwell Road provided a further key countercultural location, being home to, amongst others, Syd Barrett and Roger Waters of Pink Floyd, the poet John Esam and the painter Duggie Fields. Visitors included Rudolf Nureyev, Judy Garland, rock ‘n’ roller Vince Taylor, Phil May and Viv Prince of the Pretty Things, and Donovan who immortalized it in his song ‘Sunny South Kensington’ (Palacios 2010: 138-139). Key countercultural actors were regularly orbiting each other, and these locations enabled a meeting of minds and an explosion of creativity. Indeed, as Rycroft (2011: 160) states: ‘London’s enclaves of countercultural living, Notting Hill Gate, Ladbroke Grove, and to a certain extent Chalk Farm and Kentish Town, dictated the pattern of the London and national underground scene’.

These flats/houses were so much more than transient homes, party places, or crash pads. People within the counterculture tended to keep closely to these familiar countercultural locations as they ‘were quite vital, quite important for the secure taking of drugs and being able to discuss your trips … and that was an aspect of ‘the village’ that would grow out of certain activities and individuals who would group together’ (McInnerney 2020). These locations were also ‘safe spaces’ for radical political discussion, planning cultural events and political demonstrations and sharing countercultural knowledge. They were also spaces for experimental living and subversive cultural production, such as writing, designing and printing underground newspapers. Because of controversial content many printers would not print these newspapers, so they were forced to operate alternative DIY presses. Furthermore, they were spaces to listen to and analyse new music. McInnerney (2020) recalls that in these locations ‘I could chill and cool out and listen to some new stuff that was coming in’. Thus, artists such as the Velvets, John Fahey, Philip Glass, Frank Zappa and Tuli Kupferberg were accessed ‘hot off the press or pre-release’.
The Velvet Underground and the London counterculture

Despite Warhol’s important place in the transatlantic acculturation of 1960s popular culture, the Velvet Underground’s links with 1960s London actually pre-date his involvement with the band. Indeed, as previously noted, there were already important links between London’s countercultural literary, film and avant-garde music worlds and those of New York, providing channels through which knowledge of the Velvets and several of their early tapes flowed, aided by key actors.

Central to and illustrative of these links were two 1965 Bob Dylan gigs at the Royal Albert Hall, London (9 and 10 May) and a reading by beat poet Allen Ginsberg at Better Books (11 May). The shop, managed by Barry Miles, was a key incubator of the British counterculture, situated at 4 New Compton Street near Denmark Street, the epicentre of London’s music industry. Better Books released spoken word albums by Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti with sleeves by the early psychedelic artist Alan Aldridge (Palacios 2010: 80). Through his contacts and interests, Miles brought together transatlantic countercultural scenes and music, film, literary and art worlds, strands later reflected in the content of International Times (Rycroft 2011:88). The Dylan and Ginsberg events brought many of the protagonists in the Velvets’ story into each other’s orbit in London without them fully connecting. The Dylan shows were a focal point for the nascent counterculture bringing together, backstage and at Dylan’s hotel, an intriguing mix of creatives: beat poet Allen Ginsberg, Barry Miles, Warhol’s London art dealer Robert Fraser, the Beatles, folksingers Joan Baez and Donovan, Marianne Faithfull, Dylan’s UK PR agent Ken Pitt, Dylan’s producer Tom Wilson and Dylan’s sometime girlfriend, Nico.
Miles engaged Ginsberg for the talk at Better Books while Hoppy took photos, with emerging filmmaker Peter Whitehead also in attendance (Kane 2011: 109). The event has become viewed as a key moment in the emergence of London’s underground scene which author Jeff Nuttall argued ‘could well turn out to have been a very significant moment in the history of England - or at least in the history of English Poetry.’ (Fountain: 1988: 16).

Through his connections, Miles invited Warhol, Edie Sedgwick, Gerard Malanga, Baby Jane Holzer and Barbara Rubin (Palacios 2010: 81). Ginsberg had been acquainted with Malanga from poetry circles since 1958 and, from 1964 onwards, had visited Warhol’s Factory with on-off lover Barbara Rubin who was involved with Warhol through her films (Miles 1990: 334-335). Also present was Kate Heliczer who was carrying, as Miles noted, reel-to-reel tapes of a Velvet Underground demo (Green 1988: 65-66). She had flown over with Rubin who she found ‘very fascinating’ (Archard 2020b). This suggests that the Velvets music landed in the heart of the emerging London counterculture seven months before Warhol first saw the band at Café Bizarre in December 1965, before he recruited Nico and before the band signed a record deal.

Based on the timing of the Better Books event Heliczer’s tapes must derive from one of the various pre-Velvets practice sessions. Indeed, Reed, Cale, Morrison and sometimes Angus MacLise spent much of 1965 writing and rehearsing at 56 Ludlow Street. Cale recorded many of these rehearsals on a Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder given to him by Tony Conrad (Fricke 1995: 14). Heliczer’s tapes pre-dated both the July 1965 demo tape that Cale later distributed and the November 1965 recordings filmed by Heliczer’s husband Piero for his film Venus In Furs, documented in the December CBS News feature The Making of an Underground Film. While it is unclear exactly which songs were on the tapes, it is certain that the band were keen to get their music to the UK music industry. Archard (2020a) reveals: ‘When they heard I was going to London they, I think John Cale, asked “Do try and find
someone who would like to take us on”. Interest was instant, as Archard (2020a) notes: ‘When Hoppy heard that I had the tapes he wanted to hear them. He was very excited about it. He listened to them again and again…’ and ‘[he] thought it was marvellous’ (2020b). As Hoppy was the DJ at UFO ‘he chose all the records up until June ‘67 when he was sent to prison’ (Boyd 2019). Did he or Simon Barley, who succeeded him on the turntables, play the Velvets to the gathered countercultural crowd? McInerney (2020) feels that the Velvets and Warhol provided ‘an underground template for Hoppy’ for a range of activities including the Pink Floyd shows at All Saints Hall, Notting Hill. A while later, Archard (2020a) notes: ‘John Cale wrote to say: “Hold on. Don’t play it to anyone” and I sent it back’ – presumably once Warhol had become their manager or the Verve deal had been signed.

From our research it is clear that several other tapes from different sessions made it into the sonic bloodstream of countercultural London. A few months after Heličer’s tapes arrived, another set was in circulation thanks to Cale’s promotional efforts in late summer 1965 when door-stepping Marianne Faithfull at her London home and handing over a demo tape in the hope that she would give it to Mick Jagger (Cale in Fricke 1995: 15; Bockris & Cale 1999: 80). The tape featured early versions of ‘Heroin’, ‘Venus In Furs’, ‘I’m Waiting For The Man’ and ‘Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams’. It is not clear whether Jagger received the tape but talking to Nick Kent in the NME (1977), he acknowledged the influence of the Velvets’ ‘Heroin’ on the Stones’ ‘Stray Cat Blues’ (1968). The American music journalist Lester Bangs further suggested that the Stones’ albums Sticky Fingers (1971) and Exile on Main Street (1972) were ‘blatantly influenced by’ the Velvets (cited in Julià 1996: 178).

On the same London trip Cale passed tapes to what he identified as ‘the more adventurous record companies’ and to one of his old tutors at Goldsmiths (qtd. in Fricke 1995: 15) that included ‘Heroin’, ‘Venus In Furs’, ‘Black Angel’s Death Song’, ‘Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams’ and ‘Never Get Emotionally Involved with Man, Woman, Beast or
Child’ (Bockris & Cale 1999: 80). Despite some interest, no record deal was secured, but Cale acquired early Kinks and Who records that were ‘played constantly’ in the Ludlow Street apartment. Cale reflected that these English groups ‘were sniffing around the same musical grounds as we were…. With considerable psychological depth and insight, the Kinks’ Ray Davies compared with Lou as a lyricist, and their guitarists were using feedback on records’ (Bockris & Cale 1999: 80). This inspired a sense of confidence and urgency in The Velvet Underground and they even considered moving to England to build their career (Julià 1996: 182).

Mick Farren claimed that his band the Social Deviants covered the Velvets’ ‘I’m Waiting for the Man’ and their Dylan-esque ‘Prominent Men’ before anybody else, after hearing early demo versions likely to be the July 1965 recordings that later resurfaced on the Velvet Underground’s *Peel Slowly and See* boxset (Unterberger 1998). Farren told Unterberger ‘Joe Boyd brought over some tapes of the Velvet Underground, which we stole off him, and somebody immediately stole off us’. However, Boyd (2019) states while he ‘heard about the Velvets through reading the Village Voice’, he had never had tapes of the band before the debut album came out. Nevertheless, Farren, due to his countercultural connections and role in London, was certainly in a position to have heard one of the circulating Velvets tapes. He knew Miles, Pete Jenner and Hoppy, worked the door at UFO, wrote for *International Times*, and had a long correspondence with John Peel who gave support to the Deviants. The Deviants were, in effect, one of the house bands of the London counterculture. The Velvets’ influence can be detected in the chugging rhythm of ‘I’m Coming Home’ on their 1968 debut album *Ptooff!*. In 1968 Farren and the Deviants toured with the Pretty Things and would finish their set with a ‘mutated version’ of ‘Sister Ray’ ‘which went down so well with speedfreaks, but tended to disturb or enrage music lovers’ (Farren 2001: 196).
Just as David Bowie’s manager Ken Pitt brought back an acetate of the first Velvet Underground album from New York in December 1966 (see Hopkins and James (chapter 9) in this volume), so too did Beatles manager Brian Epstein, after, as Unterberger notes, a taxi ride with Lou Reed. Epstein seems to have been keen on the record as he played it at his salons in London (Shaar-Murray 2013). With these tapes, acetates and promo copies in circulation, it cannot be beyond the realms of possibility that someone made copies for personal use or further distribution through the counterculture network beyond the core activists. Mike McInnerney (2020) recalls that: ‘There was quite a buzz, a lot of excitement around the band. It was doing the rounds … maybe through Hoppy’s connections. They were definitely part of the conversation before *The Velvet Underground & Nico* album was released’. Intriguingly he states that when he first heard it, the album just had ‘plain white bits of card covering the disc, no packaging.’ Was this a bootleg? McInnerney replies ‘It makes you wonder.’ Could the disc have been an acetate? This seems possible as Ken Pitt’s Factory story shows that Warhol’s team gave out at least one acetate of the Velvets’ first album. McInnerney believes he first heard the album at his flat in 212 Shaftesbury Avenue. This makes things all the more intriguing as Mick Farren (2001: 202) has stated that Bowie was a regular visitor to the flat, thus raising questions as to whether McInnerney might have heard Bowie’s infamous acetate, even though they never met in person.

**1967: The Velvet Underground Live in London?**

Surprisingly the Velvet Underground did not perform in London until 6 October 1971 by which time Doug Yule was on vocals and only Moe Tucker remained from the original line-up. However, there were concerted efforts on both sides of the Atlantic to organize gigs in Britain even before their debut album was released in the UK. Some of these attempted
efforts were by the London countercultural network. These suggest a clear awareness of the band’s artistic validity and a belief that there was already an audience for them in Britain. Amongst the key cultural intermediaries also involved were Ken Pitt and Brian Epstein.

Between 10 November 1966 and 11 January 1967 Pitt met Denis Deegan twice in New York and once in London, and Warhol once in New York to thrash out details of a proposed Warhol and the Velvet Underground visit to London (Pitt 1983: 60-61; 66). In a co-ordinated strategy Pitt arranged a week of gigs at playwright Arnold Wesker’s Roundhouse venue in the countercultural ‘village’ of Chalk Farm, to start 21 May 1967, and a BBC broadcast of Warhol and Morrissey’s *Chelsea Girls* film starring Nico, Malanga and others from the Factory crowd. Further, he sought to secure a Warhol exhibition at the influential Whitechapel Art Gallery (Pitt 1983: 70). However, the promoter pulled out in mid-April after the Roundhouse hire costs rose and his other commitments took him to the States (70-72). Pitt tried other options including Jim Haynes’ countercultural space the Arts Lab, but ultimately the Velvet Underground shows were shelved, with the cost of nine transatlantic flights also an issue. This was not the end of the band’s UK story and there were other attempts to bring them over.

In April 1967 *Melody Maker* ran a short news story with a quote from the Yardbirds’ Chris Dreja saying that Warhol would be over for the *14 Hour Technicolor Dream* event on 29 - 30 April at London’s Alexandra Palace. This was accompanied by a photo of Warhol taken by Dreja at one of the Yardbirds/Velvets gigs in Detroit (see Hopkins and James Chapter 9 in this volume). As evidenced by a letter to one of the performers, the *14 Hour Technicolor Dream*’s organizers believed that it would be ‘the largest gathering of “underground” people there has ever been in this country’ (Howson & Hopkins 1967). It starred Pink Floyd, Tomorrow, the Pretty Things, the Social Deviants, the Creation and John’s Children and others from the counterculture/mod/psychedelic scenes. Significantly
one of the flyers for the event listed the Velvets and Warhol in the actual line-up. Yet, again, they did not appear. Mike McInnerney (2020) who designed the more well-known official poster says the bill was always changing so for the poster he added the artist names in Letraset. Indeed, an *International Times* news story (21st April) does not mention them at all; the line-up in the news story is essentially that of the McInnerney poster. Intriguingly the 2 June 1967 issue of *International Times* announced that the Velvets would play *UFO* five weeks later, in early July (Velvet Underground at U.F.O. 1967). Elsewhere in the issue Warhol also discusses this imminent VU visit (Vosper 1967: 10).

According to Ignacio Julià (1997), the Beatles manager Brian Epstein had, before his death in August 1967, been hoping to organize a European tour and wanted to manage the Velvets and buy into their publishing company (1997: 205). This may seem an unlikely move for Epstein, but given the prompting of Rubin, Epstein’s genuine love of the record and his own drift towards the counterculture it was perhaps inevitable. He had ties with the London Free School, established by Hoppy as a community adult education project based on the model of American free universities. Joe Boyd’s Osiris Visions produced psychedelic posters for Epstein’s Saville theatre. When *UFO* was evicted from the Blarney club on Tottenham Court Road, Epstein offered them a room at the Saville. There were further links as Paul McCartney helped to fund the Indica Gallery and Bookshop run by Miles and John Dunbar and even designed their wrapping paper. Yoko Ono staged an exhibition there at which she met John Lennon in November 1966.

During a discussion about the Velvets’ debut album with John Peel on Pete Drummond’s Radio London *Coffee Break* show in July 1967, another gig is mentioned that was due to happen ‘later this year’, perhaps around the November UK release of their debut album. Here, Peel spins ‘European Son’, and as the album was not out for another four months (November) in the UK it seems unlikely that Peel had a promo copy. However, as the
album was released on 12 March in the USA, it is possible he had bought an import copy from One Stop Records or Musicland, record shops that catered to discerning music fans (Barnett 2018; Sheehan 2019;) and musicians such as Marc Bolan and Jimi Hendrix. An advert for One Stop in Record Mirror (11 November) proclaimed ‘CAPT. BEEFHEART… VELVET UNDERGROUND…TOUSSAINT McCALL… Does your Record Shop know these artistes and have discs by them? No? EVERYONE AT ONE STOP RECORDS KNOW! American Imports arriving weekly’.

The Underground Press, Pirate Radio and John Peel

Kate Heliczer (Archard) and Barbara Rubin’s roles as key early cultural intermediaries are central to the Velvet Underground’s place within the UK countercultural movement. Some of the key appearances of the Velvets in the countercultural press came about through Heliczer’s association with John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins, linking them to Pink Floyd and the UFO club. Rubin ‘believed they (The Velvet Underground) could be cultural heroes of a new age. In her mind that select group included Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and Jack Smith. She directed her energy in exposing all of them to one another’ (Watson 1995: 252). Indeed, at some point, as Archard reveals Rubin made contact with Beatles manager Brian Epstein to discuss the Velvets (2020b).

At the Better Books reading and in subsequent discussions with Ginsberg at the London flat she shared with Heliczer, Rubin conceived the International Poetry Incarnation/The Poetry International event - organized by John Esam (Donnelly 2011: 130) - that took place at Royal Albert Hall on 11 June 1965. It drew an audience of 7,000 people, Indira Gandhi among them. The poets featured included Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Michael Horovitz, Adrian Mitchell and Alexander Trocchi. Rubin
succeeded in making it happen on a grand scale by quickly plugging into the London network. As Archard (2020) notes ‘Barbara knew everyone on the scene in London within two weeks’. Rubin and Kate Heliczer, amongst others, handed out flowers at the event that was filmed by Peter Whitehead and released as Wholly Communion (1965). Heliczer (Archard 2020) also recalls ‘It was not a great poetry reading – everyone drunk or stoned – everyone behaved badly, but it was an amazing scene. The venue said they would never have a poetry reading again’. Despite the response, as Rycroft (2011: 83) notes it acted as ‘a prelude to the kinds of cultural politics that were about to emerge in London’.

Inspired by the International Poetry Incarnation and the way it had brought out many like-minds, journalist Miles started a counterculture magazine with Hoppy in order to cater to this new audience. Long Hair, (subtitled NATO [North Atlantic Turn-On], a name that was suggested by Ginsberg) was an 80-page magazine with contributions from Miles’ contacts. In the first issue these included pieces by Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Malanga and The Fugs’ Tuli Kupferberg, as well as their British counterparts Michael Horovitz, Brian Patten, Pete Brown and Jeff Nuttall. A poem about heroin by the American free jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp also featured (Miles 2017: 116; Malchow 2011). At this time Miles was also the London correspondent of the East Village Other which had been co-founded by John Wilcock.

Some photography for Long Hair was provided by Adam Ritchie after he returned to London in 1966 and met up with Hoppy and Boyd at their UFO Club. Here he took photos of Pink Floyd’s earliest performances and forged a friendship with Hoppy. Later in 1966 Hoppy would team up with Pink Floyd manager Pete Jenner and offer to manage the Velvet Underground. Pete Frame (1972:54) suggests that they called John Cale, although it’s not clear if they already knew him or if either Cardew, Kate Heliczer or Ritchie provided his number. Nevertheless, the Velvets were by then tied up with Warhol. However, it is interesting to imagine how the band would have benefited from the management expertise of
Brian Epstein, or Pete Jenner and Hoppy and the strong countercultural networks in the UK, rather than being ‘managed’ by Warhol.

The importance of the underground press and the strength of links between publications on both sides of the Atlantic cannot be underestimated. However, it is significant that some of the Velvets’ earliest press actually appeared in the UK – not only Long Hair, through the links in the New York–London countercultural network but also Nottingham-based The Flower Scene and the Love Generation (November 1967). The Flower Scene article alerted the future music journalist Kris Needs to The Velvet Underground, although Nottingham local Richard Williams, who would pen the first Velvets album review in the UK, claims his interest came from ‘East Village Other (John Wilcock’s famous piece) and the Village Voice (Richard Goldstein)’ (see Hopkins and James Chapter 9 in this volume).

In April 1966 Long Hair evolved into THE Global moon-edition Long Hair TIMES (the immediate forerunner of International Times). Alongside articles on LSD and the London Free School, it featured a letter to Miles from John Wilcock discussing his trip with Warhol and the Velvet Underground for two EPI events at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, Detroit and Rutgers University, New Jersey. Wilcock (1966: 5) noted enthusiastically: ‘they use lights, films, rock & roll, & all kinds of turn-on stuff. Very exciting’. He asked Miles to find a London house rental for Warhol and his entourage of 15 people, potentially including the Velvets. By this point Miles and Hoppy had also been alerted to the band by Ritchie’s photos and Kate Heliczer’s tapes.

Heliczer helped sell Long Hair at the CND march in Trafalgar Square on 11 April (Miles 2017: 138-139) at which they shifted all 500 copies. While this may not have been massive exposure in terms of numbers, the majority of those 500 readers were likely to be actively involved in the counterculture and highly engaged with music. Each was an influential node on the tastemaker network in their own way. Indeed, despite claims that the
Velvets received little or no coverage in the press, our research shows that they had a small but semi-regular presence in *International Times*, the most important UK underground newspaper. Indeed, they appeared in the first issue (14 October 1966) where their New York correspondent Bobo (1966: 6) gets it slightly wrong when stating ‘Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitables are back at the Velvet Underground with Supergirl Nico and The Man With a Snake’, presumably Malanga. To underline the links between the New York and London scenes, the same issue mentions Barbara Rubin at a Rolling Stones after-party (Millionaire 1966: 11) and features Piero Heliczer’s ‘American In London’ column (1966: 3). The Velvets, Nico and Warhol also appear in a paragraph about an EPI event at the Dom in John Wilcock’s Other Scenes column (27 February 1967: 4). Overall, the Velvet Underground were featured six times in IT’s first year of production in the run-up to their debut album.

While these were not big features, they must be seen in context. Firstly, *International Times* reached a significant audience of engaged individuals. Miles told Green (1988) that they printed 15,000 copies of their first issue in 1966 and by May 1968 were selling 44,000. Secondly, music was only part of the mix for countercultural publications. As Richard Neville, the founder-editor of *OZ*, noted, the main preoccupations of the underground press were: ‘Vietnam, pot, police, Black Power, pop’ (1971: 122). Surveying the UK underground press from 1966-7 shows that feminism (Germaine Greer wrote for *OZ*), sex, radical politics, gay rights, accommodation, CND, LSD, art, film, poetry and theatre were also important. *International Times* carried a few big interviews with British music artists – Paul McCartney, Pete Townshend - or visiting Americans who were in town – Albert Ayler, Paul Butterfield Blues Band - or material syndicated from US counterculture magazines such as Frank Zappa from the *East Village Other* (13 March 1967). Furthermore, Pink Floyd did not secure that much more coverage despite them being arguably the most important act for the UK
counterculture, and closely tied to the key players at the paper. So the coverage of the Velvets shows they were already accepted into the publication’s pantheon of significant artists contributing to an awareness of them in the wider UK counterculture.

In the UK the alternative press was not the only source of support for the early Velvets. As already noted Richard Williams was evangelical about them from 1967, writing the first printed review of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967) in the *Nottingham Guardian Journal* (Williams, 2020) as well as providing early coverage in *Melody Maker* and later *The Guardian*. Pioneering British music journalist Geoffrey Cannon also wrote about them in *New Society* and *The Guardian* in 1968. An indication that the mainstream British music press understood the Velvets came through *Record Mirror*’s exposure in 1967-8 (including an 8 June 1968 review of *White Light/White Heat*). *Disc and Music Echo*’s review of their debut album (18 November 1967: 14) both nails the band’s appeal and their differences to ‘hippy’ West Coast artists:

The Velvet Underground is an East Coast – New York – group whose material is largely taken from the opposite side of life – evil and ugliness. Their music is hard rock’n’roll brought up to date with electricity. An electric viola adds a distinctive cruel, harsh note – it’s particularly evil on ‘Venus In Furs’ and ‘Heroin’, two of the best tracks on the album which are never likely to get played by the BBC. The drummer is a girl, the lead singer often sounds like Dylan and the beautiful Nico sings sweetly on the strange ‘Femme Fatale’ and the lovely ‘Mirror’.

While ‘Venus in Furs’ and ‘Heroin’ may have been too extreme for the BBC, Peel had already played ‘Sunday Morning’ on Radio 1. Nico is the only member named, and the piece included a photo of her from her time on Immediate Records in 1965, so the publication must
have implicitly made this connection even if they didn’t explicitly mention it in the review. Peel became another influential cultural intermediary for the Velvets who he first became aware of during his time on radio in America (1960-7). He returned to the UK in early 1967 where he presented the *Perfumed Garden* show on the pirate station Radio London. For Mick Farren and others, the show ‘came as close to magic as a radio show can’, and it was where Farren ‘first heard the innovative, the influential and the just plain weird’ (Farren 2001:90). Similarly, McInnerney (2020) states that the programme was ‘a very important conduit into something interesting’.

Brian Eno (2015) acknowledges that it was Peel who switched him onto the Velvets in 1967 through his radio show. Duggie Fields (2019) confirms that he was another of those who had heard the Velvets through Peel’s *Perfumed Garden* while living at 101 Cromwell Road. Throughout the summer of 1967, before the release of *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, Peel regularly played and discussed tracks from the album. On 14th August 1967, the last day of Radio London, he played two Velvet Underground tracks, dedicating ‘Venus In Furs’ to Mick Farren and the Social Deviants saying: ‘He [Farren] explained it to me, you see. Filthy’. In the process Peel confirmed Farren’s place within the counterculture. As the song finished Peel said: ‘Those are the Velvet Underground with their strange, haunting and sometimes frightening things’. Peel’s support of the band did not waver even when he moved over to the more rigid environment of the BBC’s new station Radio 1, playing ‘Sunday Morning’ on his very first day on the *Top Gear* radio show on 1 October 1967. Inevitably Peel’s shows were a staple for London’s countercultural network, connecting the Velvets with a primed audience. He also performed other roles which made him a significant actor within the London counterculture. He was involved with the *14 Hour Technicolor Dream*, compered at *UFO*, Middle Earth and the Roundhouse, and wrote for *International Times*. In
two of his ‘Perfumed Garden’ columns, Peel briefly discussed the debut Velvets album ahead of release and mentioned Nico’s imminent solo album (Peel 1967a; 1967b).

Nico’s London life

Nico, of course, had her own fascinating pre-history that places her, briefly, at the centre of Swinging London’s vibrant music scene. This was facilitated in the early 1960s by her continual travel through the transatlantic cultural networks linking Europe and America, making connections and pursuing careers in fashion and film, and becoming a catalyst for other’s creative activity. Exploring Nico’s brief but productive time in London in 1965, prior to joining the Velvets, opens up a new perspective on early Velvet Underground networks. It was then and there that she connected with an array of established and emerging musicians and executives including the Rolling Stones, their manager Andrew Loog Oldham and future Yardbird Jimmy Page and his future Led Zeppelin band mate John Paul Jones.

Following a period in Italy and France acting and modelling in 1965 she headed to London at the request of photographer David Bailey. She was quickly adopted by the Rolling Stones and their entourage, and manager Andrew Loog Oldham (2019) states that he was introduced to her by her then boyfriend Brian Jones who had said that she could sing. Oldham felt she had commercial potential and after a successful audition he booked her into Pye studio in Marble Arch to cut her debut single with Jimmy Page as producer (Oldham 2019). Nico had wanted to record ‘I’ll Keep It with Mine’, the song she believed Dylan had written for her, but they recorded Gordon Lightfoot’s ‘I’m Not Sayin’ and a Page/Oldham song ‘The Last Mile’ with Page and Brian Jones on guitars. These recordings became one of the first singles on Oldham’s Immediate label. Indeed, Nico played a key role in raising awareness of Immediate. As Oldham (2019) states: ‘Nico was a great assist to the launch of
Immediate. She did all the PR asked of her, everybody wanted to meet her. To the UK she was folk rock's Hildegard Neff or Dietrich. Great fun, a real trouper’. She even ‘joined us on the launch of Immediate as we promoted thru [sic] the factories all over the north of England and Europe’ (Oldham 1998).

In the *Record Mirror* story on Immediate (28 August 1965) which was illustrated by a large photo of Nico with Mick Jagger, editor Peter Jones (1965: 6) captured the appeal of Nico’s vocals: ‘…Nico tackles a good song with a good, big voice; an antidote to the current rash of girls who whisper fearfully through folksey (sic.) lyrics’. For her part Nico lamented that: ‘I have a habit of leaving places at the wrong time… just when something big might have happened to me’ (1965:6). This was an issue that blighted her career, though her return to New York later that year proved a little more successful.

Although Nico had met some of the peripheral figures in the Warhol crowd at Danny Fields’ JFK Assassination party in New York in 1963, which she attended with Denis Deegan (Fields in Shore 2016), her first meaningful interactions with them came in 1965. On a trip to Paris she ran into Deegan, Warhol, Malanga, Edie Sedgwick and Chuck Wein at the Castel nightclub (Witts 1993:109). Back in London she met Malanga again with Deegan (Malanga 2020) while out with Brian Jones at one of Allen Ginsberg’s parties. Malanga (2020) says that he gave ‘Nico the Factory phone number and suggested that if ever she found herself in New York to give me a call’. She duly arrived in New York with her Immediate single as a calling card and phoned the Factory. Malanga remembers the call came ‘around the time the Velvets were performing at the Bizarre [December 1965], and I asked Andy to join me and we met her at a favorite Spanish restaurant of hers’ (2020). Witts (1993: 123) writes that Brian Jones took her to the Factory where she sat a screen test and a few days later acted in Warhol’s film *The Closet* (1966). Soon she found herself drafted into the Velvet Underground. Her time in London had given her confidence and platform for her singing,
while creating a network of contacts who had a part to play in the Velvets story. And, of course, *The Velvet Underground and Nico* producer Tom Wilson had only wanted to sign the band because of Nico (Witts 1993: 149) who he’d met on Dylan’s 1965 UK tour (Savage 2015: 192).

**The Velvet Underground and the ‘fertile transatlantic village’**

Popular histories have located the Velvet Underground’s emergence and mythology as inextricably linked to the Warhol biography. This paper notes that the band’s pre-Warhol story is located simultaneously within a web of interaction between the countercultural undergrounds of New York and London. Each scene found key actors clustered around a range of loci with specific focus on residences. In New York this was viewed through the effects of transivity among a group of avant-garde and experimental creatives operating in the Lower East Side. In the UK the loci were situated within the ‘villages’ of London’s ‘fertile crescent’.

As a result of strategic attachment, individual clusters connected with other professionalized, or high profile, creative clusters. For New York this included Andy Warhol’s Factory, while in London it was spaces such as *UFO* club and *Better Books*. The poets, musicians, managers, film makers and other underground cultural producers associated with these spaces connected New York and London through transient, or ‘commuter transivity’ (James, 2019). Further connections were made through the underground presses and distribution networks that promoted notions of deterritorialization in which the web of interaction that connected loci transcended geographic location. The countercultural underground thus acted as a ‘fertile transatlantic village’ of shared participants who creatively sparked off each other. The Velvet Underground was initially disseminated
through the transatlantic creative networks that connected through countercultural activities and experimental creativity. The professional music industries and media would subsequently play a role in legitimating the Velvet Underground through the authenticating knowledge of, and association with, the ‘fertile transatlantic village’. The final clusters in the social network that enabled the spaces for the emergence of the Velvet Underground were located in the rock, fashion and art film aristocracies that not only associated themselves with the ‘commercial’ energy of the transatlantic underground, but also linked the professional scene orbiting the Rolling Stones to the Velvets’ Lower East Side cool via the introduction of Nico.

Endnotes

1. In 1963 de Maria was a member of the short-lived avant-garde noise band The Druds founded by Andy Warhol. Warhol wrote some of The Druds’ songs with artist Jasper Johns contributing lyrics. The band initially included La Monte Young on saxophone, as well as painter Larry Poons on guitar, and artist/poet Patty Oldenburg (later Mucha) on vocals. (Russeth 2012)

2. Bockris and Cale (1999: 76-77) also discuss The Falling Spikes members Lobel and Delafield. They claim Lobel played guitar with manic intensity resulting in bleeding fingers - Lobel states this is untrue (Unterberger 2017) - but give no details of Delafield’s musical contribution. Instead they discuss Cale and Reed’s personal relationship with her and note she inspired elements of Reed’s Berlin album.


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