

Factories of Deliberate Decay

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"We're interested in information, we're not interested in music as such. And we believe that the whole battlefield, if there is one in the human situation, is about information."

- Genesis P'Orridge (1982)

Expression through Aggression

Early rock and roll used pleasure as a vehicle of subversion. From punk music forward, psychic terrorism has been the principle means of conveying the rattled sounds of the underground. In the industrial arena, this form of sonic assault has been offered as a massive wake-up call to the legion of drones who free-base television and Madison Avenue's trend du jour. "Wake up you idiots, you're a marketing strategy", goes the call. The first sounds of "anti-Musak" have echoed a great distance from the early garage electronics of Throbbing Gristle, SPK, and Cabaret Voltaire to the slick sounds of today's industrial. The current style is so different from the "roots" industrial of the late 70's and early 80's that "post-industrial" would probably a better label. Little is left of the early theoretical purity, the impact of the shock tactics, or the possibilities for cultural subversion. "Industrial" has come to encompass everything from the ambient sounds of the Hafler Trio to the "uberthrash" of Ministry to the rap of MC 900' Jesus and the ideologues at Consolidated. If there are any threads that connect these bands (sampling, a preoccupation with darkness and decline, and socio-cultural ostracism) they are overcome by their diverse musical styles and *raison d'être*. Sub-genre labeling is offered as a way of dealing with this. People talk about "industrial dance", "ambient-industrial", "industrial noise", and "industrial thrash", to name just a few. Perhaps the most sensible demarcation of post-industrial is between all the experimental work (noise, ambient, sound collage) and the many flavors of industrial dance (industrial-thrash, industrial-rap, techno-industrial, attack house, etc.) Today's legitimate industrial bands are lost in a sea of imitators and non-industrial music (some of it excellent in its own right) that has been labeled "industrial" for marketing purposes. It's the same old story : as the industrial (dance) genre became popular, it lost power as a cultural critique, reduced to an image of terror and defiance that sell products. A genre gets labeled and the record companies start marketing the music based on the cliches of that genre. This killed most everything "important" about industrial music - at least as a strategy for cultural confrontation. The economic history of rock and roll has proven that the commodity culture can maintain the facade of rebellion while removing any of the corrosive materials that may prove dangerous to the status quo. Industrial music is the latest victim of this. "Image over action, style over substance" - the pop culture industry wouldn't have it any other way.

Experimental Noise and Post-Verbalization

"Noise is about fascination, the antithesis of meaning. If music is a language, communicating

moods and feelings, then noise is like an eruption within the material out of which language is shaped."

- Simon Reynolds, *Blissed Out: The Raptures of Rock*

Noise has overtaken information in our age. Signal and noise have switched places. We live in the value-dark dimension, a black hole of deconstructed values and exploded worldviews. Early industrial music looked at this cultural wasteland, gathered up some of the junk and decided to make music with it. In the process, they discovered new possibilities for "art noise", explored the boundaries of music and anti-music, order and chaos, terror and bliss, beauty and bestiality. If the age of empire was dying, industrial music was busy scoring the funeral march. As industrial music has "advanced", so has music technology. With the introduction of MIDI systems and sampling, the metal on metal rhythms of the junk yard were replaced by the cut and paste sounds of the videodrome. The nightmarish hissings of the smokestack industry were replaced by the sound-collaged marketspeak of the culture industry. The fascinations of industrial artists have also shifted emphasis from control through subjugation and outward violence to the powers of pleasure-control and the mesmerism of the media simulacra. Through all this, noise, cut-up nonsense, and the cybernetics of feeding the garbage back into the system to hasten its decay, have been employed as operating strategies. Experimental industrial artists, like their close cousins, cyberpunks, the concrete poets, and the modern primitives, have the intuitive wisdom to know that post-verbalism and irrationalism are important territories to explore. The breakdown of an old language ultimately holds the opportunity for a new one. The exhausted aftermath of the primal scream can offer insight.

Apocalyptic Bone Dancing

While the industrial scene as a whole has lost some of its underground values on the way to the dance floor, it would be unfair to write it off as culturally irrelevant. Front 242, Front Line Assembly, Clock DVA and Young Gods are all examples of bands that still bleed when you scratch their surfaces. The same cannot be said (by this author, anyway) of Manufacture, My Life with the Thrill Kill Cult, and some of the incestuous "stupergroups" at WaxTrax! Even if the radical "message" of industrial has been recuperated, victimized by overexposure and marketability, the music still holds out the possibilities for transformation : on the dance floor ! Industrial is white-hot funky dance music, squeezed out of everyday white noise. The sound fragments and fluffed up news of our lives provide the back beat, over which are added lyrics of domination, control, and disaffection, usually sung by a demonic-sounding narrator singing from a distance. Post-Industrial dance (like early Industrial) is built around the sounds our culture makes as it comes unglued.

There is something totally sublime about thrashing to industrial music on an urban dance floor, populated by punks and goths and nerds and rastas and other outcasts. The DJ, high on a perch, surrounded by banks of electronic equipment, ravishes the audience with the latest from Nine Inch Nails, KMFDM, Coil, Skinny Puppy and Nitzer Ebb. Lasers, placed at his feet, slice through the smoke that's being pumped out from below. People scream and howl, beating their arms against their bodies. From the balcony, you have to squint to see through the sympathetic pollution of smoke, heat, and light. The dancers writhe and jerk and stomp, bashing into each other - true friendly fire. I throw my arthritic body into the fray along with the rest. I sacrifice "the meat" to a high purpose - psychic ecstasy. I'm exhausted, I'm in pain, I'm frightened by the self-imposed danger, and I'm as high as I can remember. The DJ punches up Front 242's "Gripped by Fear". I go nuts, put the pedal to the metal, and spin around in Dervish circles. Chant : "Recession/repression/regression". The throb on the dance floor becomes a ritual of thermodynamics ("Your tyranny I was part of is now cracking on ev'ry side...) and I feel like we're pounding the brutal age of sword & steel into history. "...your own life is in danger, your empire is on

fire". Questions of sell-out be damned - in this moment of private ecstasy, the industrial program redeems itself.

I awaken the next morning to a call from a friend. Rumors are flying that WaxTrax! might be merging with Time-Warner Communications ! Last night's bliss is brought to you by the global mega-corporation. "Th...th...tha..that's all folks !"

Recommended Industrial

Experimental :

- PGR/Arcane Device - *Fetish*
- Hafler Trio - *Kill the King*
- Muslimgauze - *United States of Islam*
- Zoviet France - *Shadow, Thief of the Sun*
- Tape Beatles - *Music with Sound* (audio collage)

Dance :

- Clock DVA - *Buried Dreams*
- Front 242 - *Tyranny for You*
- Young Gods - *L'eau Rouge*
- Skinny Puppy - *Too Dark Park*
- KMFDM - *Naive*