Prehistory of Industrial Music

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INTRODUCTION

"Industrial culture? There has been a phenomena; I don't know whether it's strong enough to be a culture. I do think what we did has had a reverberation right around the world and back."

Genesis P. Orridge (Throbbing Gristle) [1]

I've often thought that somebody really ought to write a history of industrial music. After all, there are histories of reggae, rap, and countless rock, jazz, folk and classical histories. Unfortunately, the best books on industrial music (**Re/Search**'s *Industrial Culture Handbook* and **Charles Neal**'s *Tape Delay*) were both written when the genre was still fresh, still on the move, and neither tells us much about where the music came from. A more recent contribution to the field, **Dave Thompson**'s *Industrial Revolution* suffers from Americocentrism, major omissions, basic errors and from a concentration on electrobeat and industrial rock to the near exclusion of all else. Still, this article **isn't** that history; that will have to wait for someone better qualified than I.

Instead, I offer a prehistory, a look at heritage, tradition and ancestry. For all that industrial music set out to provide the shock of the new, it's impossible to understand its achievements without a context to place them in. Few, if any, of its tactics and methods were truly original, although

the way it combined its components was very much of its time.

Before the prehistory can be properly explored, we need to know what this "industrial music" is, or was. It would be hard to disagree with the suggestion that prior to the formation of **Throbbing Gristle** as a side-project of performance art group **COUM Transmissions** in late 1975 [2] industrial music did not exist; and certainly the genre took its name from the label that **Throbbing Gristle** set up, **Industrial Records**. **Monte Cazazza** is usually acknowledged as inventing the term "industrial music", and the label used the name in a very specific sense - as a negative comment on the desire for "authenticity" that still dominated music in the seventies. Very few of the groups who were initially called "industrial" liked the term, although from the mid-80s it became a word that bands embraced willingly, to the extent that nowadays even quite tedious rock bands claim to be industrial, and the jazz / classical ensemble, **Icebreaker**, has even bizarrely been described as an "industrial" group. Rock and jazz groups don't waste much time worrying about the word used to define their genre, so for my purposes I'm happy to include in the "industrial" genre plenty of artists who tried to disown the label.

The groups who were released on Industrial Records (**Throbbing Gristle**, **Cabaret Voltaire**, **ClockDVA**, **Thomas Leer** and **Robert Rental**, **Monte Cazazza**, **S.P.K.**, with the probable exception of **The Leather Nun**

and **Elizabeth Welch** [3]) combined an interest in *transgressive culture* with an interest in the potential of *noise* as music, and it's easy to see how groups like **Einstürzende Neubauten**, **Whitehouse** or **Test Dept** can be considered to share similar interests.

Dave Henderson's seminal *Wild Planet* article [4] presented a survey of the (mainly British and European) "industrial" scene as it was recognised in 1983, but with artists as diverse as **Steve Reich**, **Mark Shreeve**, **AMM** and **Laibach** cited it was clear even then that the borders of industrial music couldn't be clearly defined. Since then, the music has fragmented, most notably into a division between experimental and dance/rock-oriented artists (or uncommercial and commercial). The popular "industrial" musicians, such as **Front 242** or **Ministry**, draw on the elements of early industrial music most amenable to the rock and techno arenas (sometimes this just means aggression and paranoia); the others have explored industrial music's relationships with ritual music, musique concrete, academic electronic music, improvisation and pure noise. In recent times, through the popularity of ambient music, several artists involved in this more "experimental" tradition have achieved more popular recognition than before.

It's tempting to see the fragmentation of industrial music into popular and "underground" areas as just a recognition of the relative accessibility of different musical styles, but this would be extremely misleading. As with jazz and rock, it's another example of *"a music of revolt*

transformed into a repetitive commodity ... A continuation of the same effort, always resumed and renewed, to alienate a liberatory will in order to produce a market" [5]. As industrial music's history and prehistory will make clear, industrial music originally articulated ideas of subversion that go significantly beyond the saleable "rebellion" that the rock commodity offers. It was inevitable that the market would adopt only the superficial aggression and stylisms.


Throbbing Gristle, 1981

It's clear that the label, "industrial music", is of no use in pigeonholing music, but it still serves as a useful pointer to a web of musical and personal relationships, a common pool of interests and ideas which every industrial sub-genre has some connection with. The uncommercial industrial tradition has frequently been labelled "post-industrial"; in contrast, this article attempts to identify "pre-industrial" music. However, as will become obvious, there are few meaningful boundaries between industrial music and its ancestors.

Writing in *Alternative Press*, **Michael Mahan** attempted to define industrial music as "*an artistic reflection of the de-humanisation of our people and the inexorable pollution of our planet by our factory-based socio-economic state*" [6]. This is too simplistic; if industrial music were simply anti-factory music then it would encompass any number of reactionary Luddites. Mahan at least managed to identify some of the genre's important musical precursors, citing **Edgard Varèse**, **Karlheinz Stockhausen**, **David Vorhaus**, **Frank Zappa** and **Klaus Schulze** as some probable ancestors. **Jon Savage** has elsewhere identified *five areas* that characterised industrial music [7]: access to information, shock tactics, organisational autonomy, extra-musical elements, and use of synthesizers and anti-music. By examining each in turn, it will soon become obvious exactly what place industrial music has in the twentieth century cultural tradition.

Endnotes

1. *Re/Search #6/7: Industrial Culture Handbook* (Re/Search, 1983)
2. TG Chronology in *Re/Search #4/5 "William Burroughs / Throbbing Gristle / Brion Gysin"* (Re/Search, 1982)
3. Welsh's *Stormy Weather*, from **Derek Jarman**'s film *The Tempest*, was an Industrial Records single.
4. Published in *Sounds*, May 7 1983.
5. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali (Manchester University Press, 1985)
6. *Welcome to the Machine*, by Michael Mahan, in *Alternative Press* #66 (January 1994).
7. Introduction to Re/Search #6/7, op.cit.
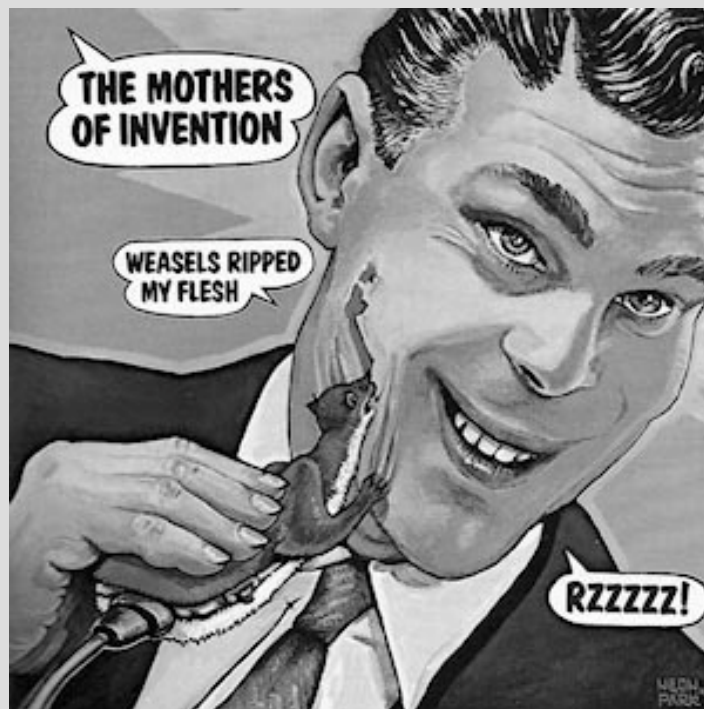
Weasels Ripped My Flesh is an album by Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, released in 1970.
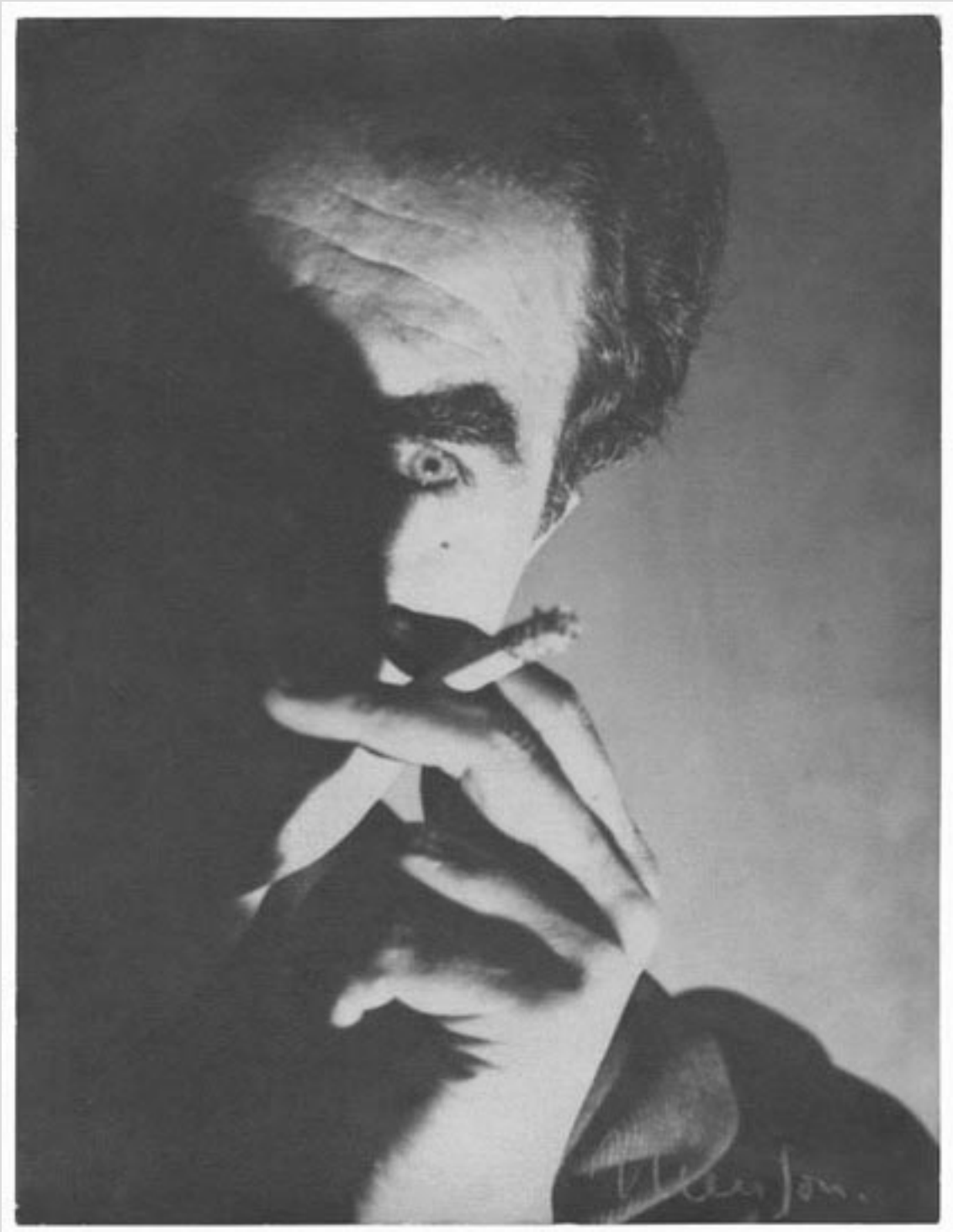
Edgard Varèse

1. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

*"Today there is no reality, or everything is real and everything is unreal. Today the object no longer refers to the real or to information. Both are already the result of a selection, a montage, a taking of views ... Thus the **control** problem is not one of surveillance, propaganda or paranoia. It is one of subjective influence, consent and extension to all possible spheres of life"*

Graeme Revell (S.P.K.) [1]

      Industrial music was fundamentally a music of ideas. For all its musical power and innovation, the early industrial groups were much happier talking about non-musical issues than about musical ones, a direct result of the fact that few if any of them had any real musical background or knowledge. The *Industrial Culture Handbook* is packed with contributors' book lists; titles listed by **Genesis P-Orridge** include books by **Aleister Crowley**, **William Burroughs**, **Philip Dick**, **Adolf Hitler**, the **Marquis de Sade** and **Tristan Tzara**; **SPK**'s Graeme Revell shows a more "intellectual" background with titles by **Michel Foucault**, **Samuel Beckett**, **Jacques Attali** and **Pierre Proudhon**. Of those who list records, **Boyd Rice** shows his obsession with 50s and 60s kitsch; **Z'ev** turns out to be a fan of **Peter Gabriel**, **Bob Dylan** and **Otis Redding**; only **Rhythm & Noise** admit to any knowledge of the avant-garde music tradition, citing the likes of **Todd Dockstader**, **Gordon Mumma**, **Michel Redolfi** and **Iannis Xenakis** [2].

Of all the "major" industrial groups, **Throbbing Gristle** were the most directly concerned with access to information, having accepted what had been obvious since the early sixties, that an increasing area of the world lives in an *information society*, and that military and economic strength are no longer the only important forms of power. Gristle's frontman, **Genesis P-Orridge** (born Neil Megson) took the view that control of information was now the most important form of power. This is on the not unreasonable grounds that if the average person does not believe (or is unaware) that a possibility exists, they are clearly not free to choose such a possibility. Although such a conclusion was a commonplace to the post-modern philosophers and political theorists, it was an unusually sophisticated concern for a musical artist. As **Orridge** has said: *"The idea: to heal and reintegrate the human character. To set off psychic detonations that negate Control ... To exchange and liberate information ... We need to search for methods to break the preconceptions, modes of unthinking acceptance and expectations that make us, within our constructed behaviour patterns, so vulnerable to Control"* [3].

Other industrial groups, particularly **Cabaret Voltaire** and **S.P.K.** espoused similar views. **Genesis P-Orridge** went on after the break-up of **Throbbing Gristle** to make the dissemination of information and the attack on information-based methods of control the focus of his work, through the group **Psychic TV** and the **Temple ov Psychick Youth organisation**. The general approach was simply to publicise the existence of transgressive literature on the grounds that the social definition of "taboo" or

"transgressive" was just another method of control, of persuading people not to examine certain choices. Even for groups who weren't particularly interested in informing people about this sort of information (and ultimately this probably applies to the majority of industrial groups), the awareness of it clearly influenced their music.

The literary counterculture, dating back through the **Beatniks via Surrealism** and mavericks such as **Celine** or **de Sade** is a major tradition that informed many of the industrial groups even if they weren't part of it. Experimental literature had peaked in the 60s, and the importance of the industrial groups' awareness of it was primarily their role as disseminators and popularisers. Obvious examples of this include Industrial Records' issue of a record of **William Burroughs** cut-ups, *Nothing Here Now But The Recordings*.

Although their importance in publicising such literature, and other "unconventional" information, is undeniable, industrial music made no real contribution to the ideas of the counterculture. **Genesis P-Orridge**'s writings mostly consist of borrowings from **Burroughs**, **Crowley**, and **Leary**, although the connections he has made between the cut-up technique, magick, and deconditioning are original.

Endnotes

1. *The Post-Industrial Strategy*, Graeme Revell, in *Re/Search #6/7*, op.cit.
2. *Re/Search #6/7*, op.cit.
3. *Behavioral Cut-Ups and Magick*, Genesis P.Orridge, in *Rapid Eye #2* (Annihilation Press, 1992)
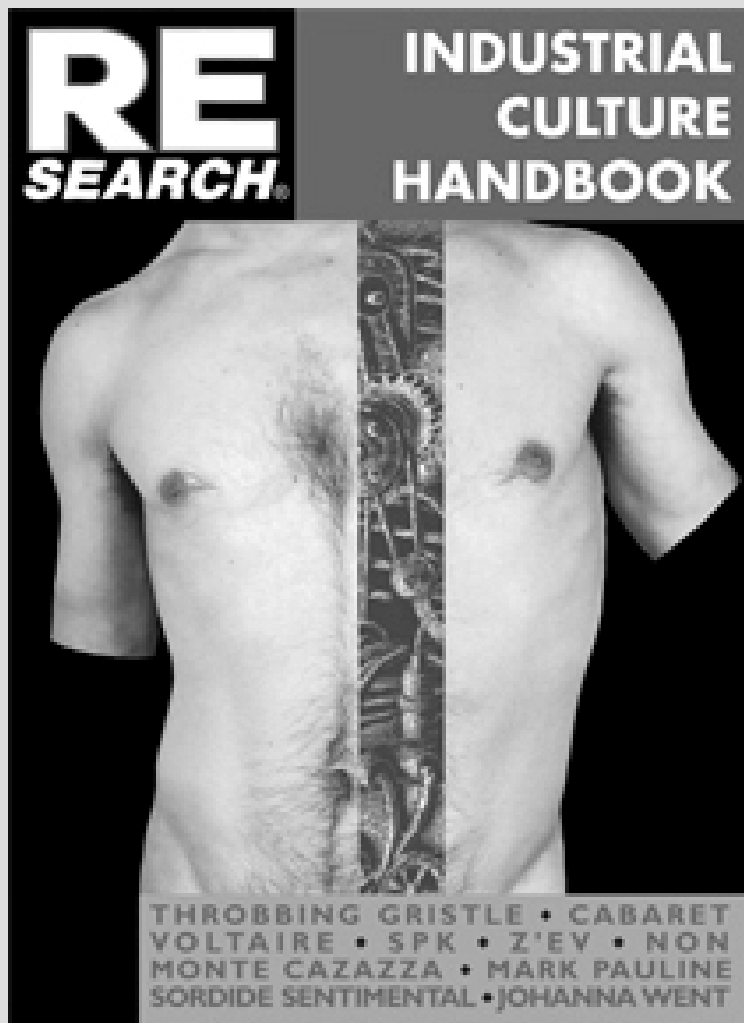
Re/Search #6/7: Industrial Culture Handbook, 1983

2. SHOCK TACTICS

"They are men possessed, outcasts, maniacs, and all for love of their work. They turn to the public as if asking its help, placing before it the materials to diagnose their sickness" - press commentary on Zurich Dada [1]

The main source of industrial music's ideas may have been the radical literary tradition, but a great debt was also owed to the avant-garde performance art tradition, dating back at least as far as **Futurism** at the turn of the century. Here was a tradition from which industrial music drew not just rhetoric but also the tactics and methods.

Performance art as a means of provocation undoubtedly goes back as long as there were people who resented their culture and thought to change matters by creating shock and confusion. As an alternative to purer forms of song, dance and theatre it's history can be traced back through Renaissance spectacle, and medaeval passion plays to tribal ritual. In the nineteenth century, music hall performance came the closest to the mixed media spectacles that would resurface in performance art. Histories of twentieth century performance art often start with the twenty-three year old **Alfred Jarry**'s proto-surrealist performance of *Ubu Roi* in Paris in 1896 [2]. Jarry's absurdist theatre provoked an uproar that would be echoed throughout the century's history of performance art. **Filippo Marinetti**, whose *Futurist Manifesto* was to be published in 1909, took up the provocationist baton in his own play **Roi Bombance**,

written in 1905, and the desire to provoke played a major part in first the Italian Futurist movement, then successively in Dada and Surrealism.

The politics may have superficially differed, but the basic thrust of these movements has many similarities to the later activities of **COUM Transmissions**, **Whitehouse** and others. All three artistic movements (Futurism, Dada, Surrealism) shared a disgust and contempt for the social common ground of the day. Their response varied. Futurism opposed tradition with an enthusiasm for dynamism, for technology, and for patriotic militarism, all of which ensured that fascist politicians would later attempt to claim the Futurist cultural heritage as their own (unlike more recent flag-burners, whose anger has been directed at their own society, the Futurists' flag-burnings of 1914 in Milan were of a foreign country's flag - Austria's).

Their positive view of "progress" has few echoes among the early industrial musicians; even **Kraftwerk**, whose clinical embrace of the coming information age proved such a fertile resource for industrial music's exponents, leavened their technophilia with a sense of irony (at its clearest on their paean to the atomic age, *Radioactivity*). However, as the electronic beat tendency in industrial music drew on emerging synthipoppers like the **Human League** and eventually fed in to the cyber-culture of the late 80s and early 90s, the Futurists' uncritical fetishisation of technology and artifice re-emerged. Marinetti's celebration of the industrial revolution has a lot in common with the ill-digested cyber-fandom of some recent

musicians. Certainly, the electronic pop of the late seventies New Romantics (such as **Ultravox**) betrays a lack of humour that the Futurists would never have shared, but it has the same uncritical adoration of technology. In general, industrial music drew upon a much more cynical view of science's contribution to history.

The similarities between Dada and industrial culture are less ambiguous. Dada's anger was as much inspired by the First World War as by a more general revulsion against the general banality of society. Their reaction also had a lot in common with industrial art; it was an attempt to find an aesthetic where most of the audience only found ugliness. For Dada this consisted of primitivist, abstract painting, and at the **Cabaret Voltaire** in Zurich, performances including seemingly nonsensical sound-poetry. Industrial music also adopted the primitive, abstract approach, and like Dada, rejected conventional musical structures in favour of chaos and noise.

From **Richard Huelsenbeck**'s *Dadaist Manifesto*, written in Germany in 1918: *"Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the*

frenzied cataracts of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time." [3]

Industrial music was very much of its time; you can hear the shattered dreams of the 60s in **Throbbing Gristle**'s music, you can hear the defeatism and boredom that accompanied the decay of the welfare state. As in Huelsenbeck's prescription for "the highest art", this music (whether deliberately or not is irrelevant) addressed the important questions of the day; social alienation, media illusions perceived as reality, and the impossibility of morality in a culture where the traditional arbiters of morality were losing their power.

The anti-art tradition that **Dada** embodied continued in various forms throughout the century. Its first successor was the **Surrealist** movement, which included artists inspired by their direct contact with Dadaists like **Tristan Tzara**, and it also owed a considerable debt to the **absurdist** French art tradition embodied in the work of **Jarry**, **Raymond Roussel** and **Guillaume Apollinaire**. The break between Surrealism and Dada has been presented as a clash of personalities between **Andre Breton** and **Tzara**, but some argue that it represented the replacement of a movement that had valued disorder, anarchy and confusion with one that, paradoxically, attempted to rationalise its irrationality.

The Surrealist search for an escape from socially imposed reality certainly influenced some later industrial musicians; **Nurse With Wound** paid homage to the absurdist and hyper-realist tradition in much of their music,

The cover of the 1915 *BLAST*. The Vorticists published two issues of the literary magazine
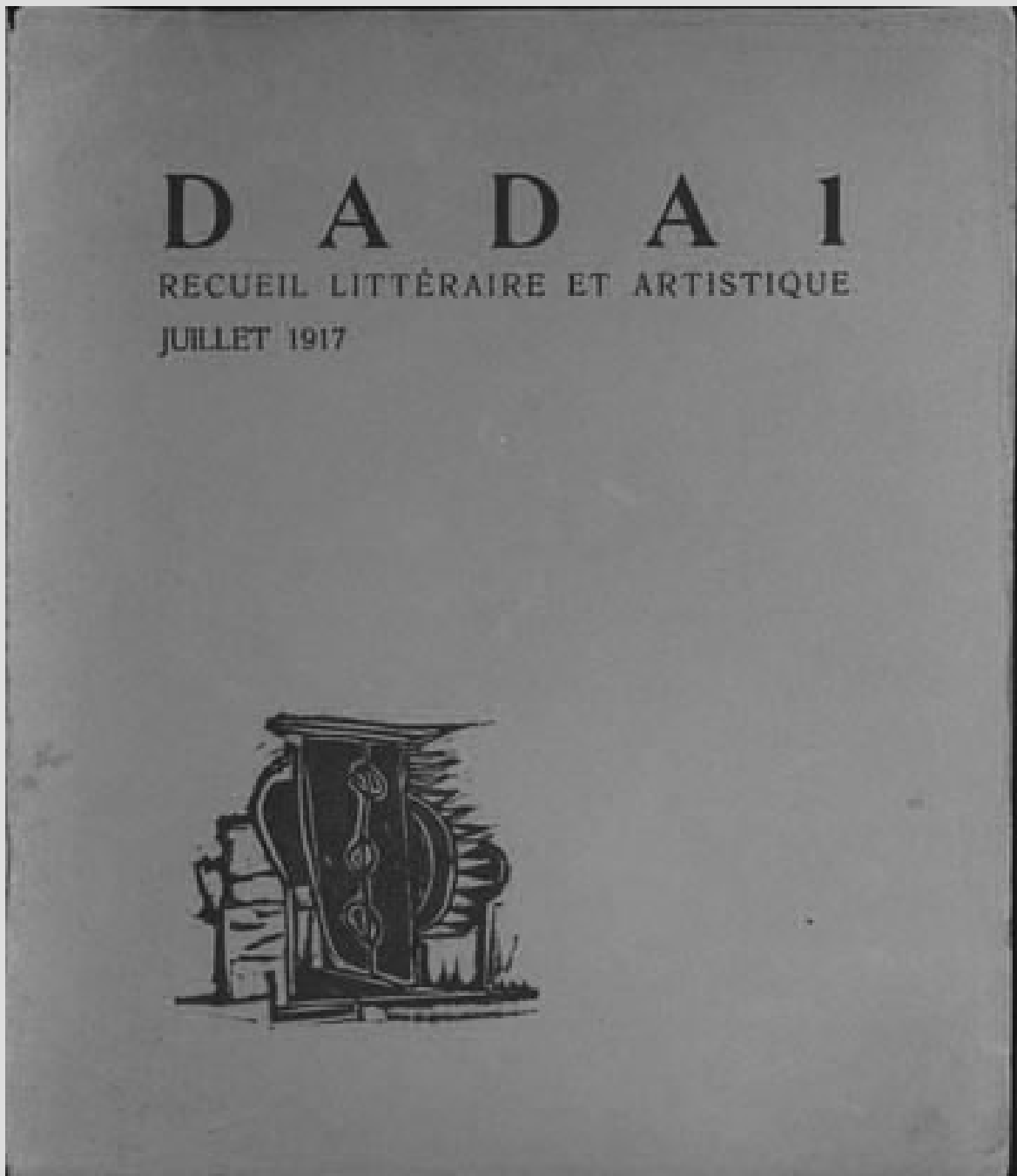
Cover of the first edition of the publication, *Dada*. Edited by Tristan Tzara. Zürich, 1917.

Tristan Tzara

Andre Breton

and more recently, composer **Randy Greif** has specifically said that he attempts to create a genuinely surrealist music (the Surrealists themselves took their figurehead **Breton**'s dislike of music to heart, concentrating on visual art and literature). Others, particularly European groups like **D.D.A.A**. and **P16D4** also show clear traces of surrealism in the way they treat musical collage as an opportunity for humorous juxtaposition.

The Surrealist attempt to put the unconscious on display could be seen as part of a yearning for authenticity through primitivism that has been a major element in twentieth century art. As discussed below, its influence on performance art is one of the more important elements of the industrial music heritage, but several industrial musicians incorporated it more directly. As well as the "surrealist" elements in industrial music, "primitivist" attitudes appear in the work of groups like **Zero Kama**, **Lustmørd**, **Coil**, **Crash Worship** and **Zone** (who share an interest in the occult, spirituality, ritualism). Organum's **David Jackman**, who has passed through the industrial fringes, is even more clearly interested in music's ability to evoke primal spiritual responses, creating drone-based, barely tonal music that owes a lot to non-Western ritual music.

If **Surrealism** lacked **Dada**'s provocationist tactics, later movements did not. **Fluxus** developed in the first few years of the Sixties in America, and combined the prank-events beloved of **Dada** with a specifically anti-bourgeois political ideology. They acknowledged their heritage; in

1962 **Nam June Paik** organised an event *Neo-Dada in der Musik* in **Dusseldorf**, for example. Some of the artists associated with Fluxus, particularly **Terry Riley** and **LaMonte Young** would later go on to develop music that, via popularisers like **Brian Eno**, would ultimately influence many industrial musicians, but Fluxus itself had little direct influence.

However, Fluxus was only one element in a resurgence of performance art in sixties New York. **Allan Kaprow**'s *Happenings* (from 1959 onwards) were some of the earliest and best remembered events, but they sprung from an ongoing history of performance that stretched back to the New York Dadaists (notably Picabia and Duchamp). In 1936, the **Bauhaus**'s **Xanti Schawinsky** joined the three-year old Black Mountain College in North Carolina, introducing a performance element into the curriculum that would engage **Merce Cunningham**, **John Cage**, Buckminster Fuller, Robert Rauschenberg and many others en route to the ***Happenings***.

The growth of interest in performance art in America was paralleled by the activities of various artists at the same time in Europe. Amongst them, **Joseph Beuys** (a Fluxus protagonist) and **Hermann Nitsch** achieved particular notoriety and are particularly relevant to the heritage of industrial music. Beuys' work frequently involved the creation of very personal, meditative situations, isolating himself from humanity for days on end, or sharing an art space with only a dead or living animal. His interest in ritual as a way of recovering art's transformative function is

much more personal than **Nitsch**, whose *Orgies Mysteries Theatre* performances took the form of reenactments of Dionysian rituals, social celebrations involving loud music and the disembowelment of animal carcasses.

Many other artists have entered similar taboo areas. **Chris Burden**'s performances have involved him cutting himself and being shot in the arm [4]; **Stelarc** and **Fakir Musafar** hang themselves from hooks carefully inserted into their flesh; **Marina Abramovic** allowed her audience to cut her clothes and skin with razor blades [5]. The aim is to recover art's shamanic, ritual elements, to break psychological taboos and enter genuinely altered states. **Genesis P-Orridge**, later of **Throbbing Gristle**, was an escapee from this performance art tradition, first in **The Exploding Galaxy**, then via the experimental commune **Trans Media Exploration** in 1969 [6] on to **COUM Transmissions** with fellow performer **Cosey Fanni Tutti**. COUM's performances centered on sex and ritual, culminating in the notorious *Prostitution* exhibition at the I.C.A. in 1976, which brought Throbbing Gristle to public attention (although *Throbbing Gristle* had been first used as title for a COUM performance two years previously). [7]

Throbbing Gristle were probably the only industrial group to evolve directly out of a performance art context, but the live art of the sixties and seventies developed several new ideas that later fed into the work of various industrial groups. **Cabaret Voltaire**'s early performances sometimes included showings of surrealist films as the "support act". Percussionist **Z'ev**'s performances have been

compared to shamanic exorcisms, and proto-industrial group **The Residents** owe much of their live costume drama to the Dada / Bauhaus tradition [8]. Most notably, **Test Dept**, which began life as a music group very rapidly connected with avant-garde theatre; some of their spectacular performances are documented on the *A Good Night Out* and *Gododdin* albums. In 1992, they staged an event in Glasgow entitled *The Second Coming*, in a huge disused locomotive works; this involved three narrators, several dancers, several percussionists and other musicians, and a host of extras, such as flag-bearers and welders. Its large-scale non-narrative approach to performance owes a great deal to the work of people like Robert Wilson in the seventies, although its preoccupations are quite different.

However, **Test Dept** were unusual among industrial musicians in that their disgust for the society they found themselves in led them to a politics of protest that directly embraced the ideas of the left; solidarity being the major one, leading the band through a series of concerts opposing the Conservative assault on the trade union movement, supporting the striking miners' unions, ambulance workers, print workers, and anti-poll tax campaigners. They remained sophisticated enough never to match their strong political feeling with simplistic and unequivocal support for any of the parties of the left, but nonetheless, their allegiances had little in common with most other industrial groups, who distrusted all conventional politics, of whatever wing. Groups like **Throbbing Gristle**, **S.P.K.** and **Cabaret Voltaire** all saw society as a whole to be too

corrupt for conventional politics to be worth bothering with.

In Gristle's case, their music and lyrics appeared to present an amoral face full of nothing but revulsion; their songs catalogued the horror of the modern world without attempting to pass comment. Inevitably, their interest in mass murderers, Nazism, and similar topics led to accusations by some that **T.G**. were more than interested, they were attracted to such ideas. Nothing could be further from the truth, as the surface amorality disguised a deep moralism. It was their hatred of pretence, hypocrisy, oppression and authoritarianism that led to their violent rebellion.

Following the break-up of T.G., this hidden morality made itself most clearly felt through **Genesis P-Orridge**'s group, **Psychic TV** (Peter Christopherson, also ex-Gristle, soon left to join John Balance in **Coil**), and its associated "anti"-organisation, **the Temple ov Psychick Youth**. Ostensibly an attempt to use the framework of a "cult" to decondition people's minds from social indoctrination, rather than to brainwash them, **T.O.P.Y.** never succeeded in getting beyond its own paradoxes. While it was on the one hand encouraging its members to think for themselves, to question and reject received ideas, it nonetheless insisted on set methods of achieving this de-conditioned salvation (e.g. ritual sex magick), suggested standards of behaviour for members to live up to (members who failed to toe the line were in some cases effectively ex-communicated), and, most importantly, relied on a hierarchical organisation that

never succeeded in being in any way democratic or transparent. Its achievements (primarily the sense of community amongst like-minded misfits) were compromised by the fact that its initiators never freed themselves from their situation as role models and, if they ever understood the lessons of anarchist and liberationist political theory, never applied them in practice.

Whitehouse's **William Bennett** appeared to decide that the moral amorality of Throbbing Gristle was doomed to failure, and his group stuck to its guns with unrelenting challenges to listenability and unrelentingly tasteless lyrics about Nazism, serial killers, rape and similar topics. According to one person who worked with **William Bennett**, **Nurse With Wound**'s Steven Stapleton, Bennett is "*only interested in upsetting people ... His ethic was 'Everybody who buys my records is basically a cunt'*" [9]. However, Whitehouse's **Stefan Jaworzyn** has acknowledged Whitehouse's extra-musical influences: "*I've always considered Whitehouse to be more like performance art ... in that Whitehouse is outside of rock, experimental music or whatever.*" [10] In this respect, Whitehouse continue a long tradition of attempting to outrage and assault the audience; there have certainly been other performance artists who have physically attacked their audience in the past. Notably, this contrasts strongly with the tradition of self-abusive performance that **Throbbing Gristle** were heir to.

Whitehouse's own inability to articulate their motives has left them open to misinterpretation and

opposition. Are they satirists, like **Brett Easton Ellis**? Whatever the case may be, the attempt to maintain such an extreme vision shows real single-mindedness. Whether or not this culmination of the Dadaist tradition leads onwards is open to doubt. One writer, **Hakim Bey**, is particularly critical: *"We support artists who use terrifying material in some 'higher cause' - who use loving / sexual material of any kind, however shocking or illegal - who use their anger and disgust and their true desires to lurch towards self-realisation and beauty and adventure. 'Social Nihilism', yes - but not the dead nihilism of gnostic self-disgust. Even if it's violent and abrasive, anyone with a vestigial third eye can see the differences between revolutionary pro-life art and reactionary pro-death art"*. [11]

Another Crack Of The White Whip (compilation album), 1991.

Endnotes

1. *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, Hans Richter (Thames and Hudson 1965)
2. *Performance Art*, Rose Lee Goldberg (Thames and Hudson 1979)
3. *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, op. cit.
4. *Art in the Dark*, Thomas McEvilley, in *Apocalypse Culture*, 2nd edn, ed. Adam Parfrey (Feral House, 1990)
5. *Performance Art*, op. cit.
6. *Rapid Eye #1*, Simon Dwyer (R.E. Publishing, 1989)
7. *Time to Tell* CD booklet, Cosey Fanni Tutti (Conspiracy International, 1993)
8. *The Eyes Scream: A History of the Residents*, video (Palace, 1991); *Meet the Residents*, Ian Shirley (SAF, 1993)
9. Interview in *Audion* #28 (1994)
10. Interview in *Music From The Empty Quarter* #6 (1992).
11. *T.A.Z.*, Hakim Bey (Autonomedia, 1991)

3. ORGANISATIONAL AUTONOMY / EXTRA-MUSICAL ELEMENTS

"We were the first independent record company in England to actually release proper professionally made video cassettes" - **Peter Christopherson (Throbbing Gristle)** [1]

Independence was nothing new by the time industrial music was christened. Almost every genre of music that had limited commercial potential amongst mainstream Western audiences (jazz, reggae, "world" music) already had a history of pioneering independent record labels, such as **Sun Ra**'s **Saturn**, or the improv label **Incus**. Even the mainstream had its nominal independents, such as **Island** or **Virgin**. The setting up of **Industrial Records** was clearly nothing new, but it was important. Unlike other forms of popular music, industrial music was (and remains) critical of systems of power and control, and this criticism clearly extends to the record industry. While several punk bands competed for a major record deal, none of the early industrial bands had much taste for the compromise involved.

It has been argued that industrial music wouldn't have happened if punk hadn't freed listener's expectations; after all, groups like **Suicide** toured with the **Clash**, and bands like **the Slits**, with their complete inability to play instruments "properly" were arguably as Dada as anything that deliberately proclaimed to be so. Personally, I think industrial music would have happened anyway. The explosion in what was basically amateur musique concrète was the inevitable consequence of the collision between

pent-up creativity and inexpensive outlets; and the subculture that was interested in "weird" music of various kinds predated punk and was already well established, if tiny. Certainly, the simultaneity of punk created an opportunity for "industrial" to be perceived as "popular" music, and thus reach a wider audience than might otherwise have occurred. Industrial music and punk shared for a couple of years a strong desire for *negation*, a strong desire to break (musical) rules and express disgust.
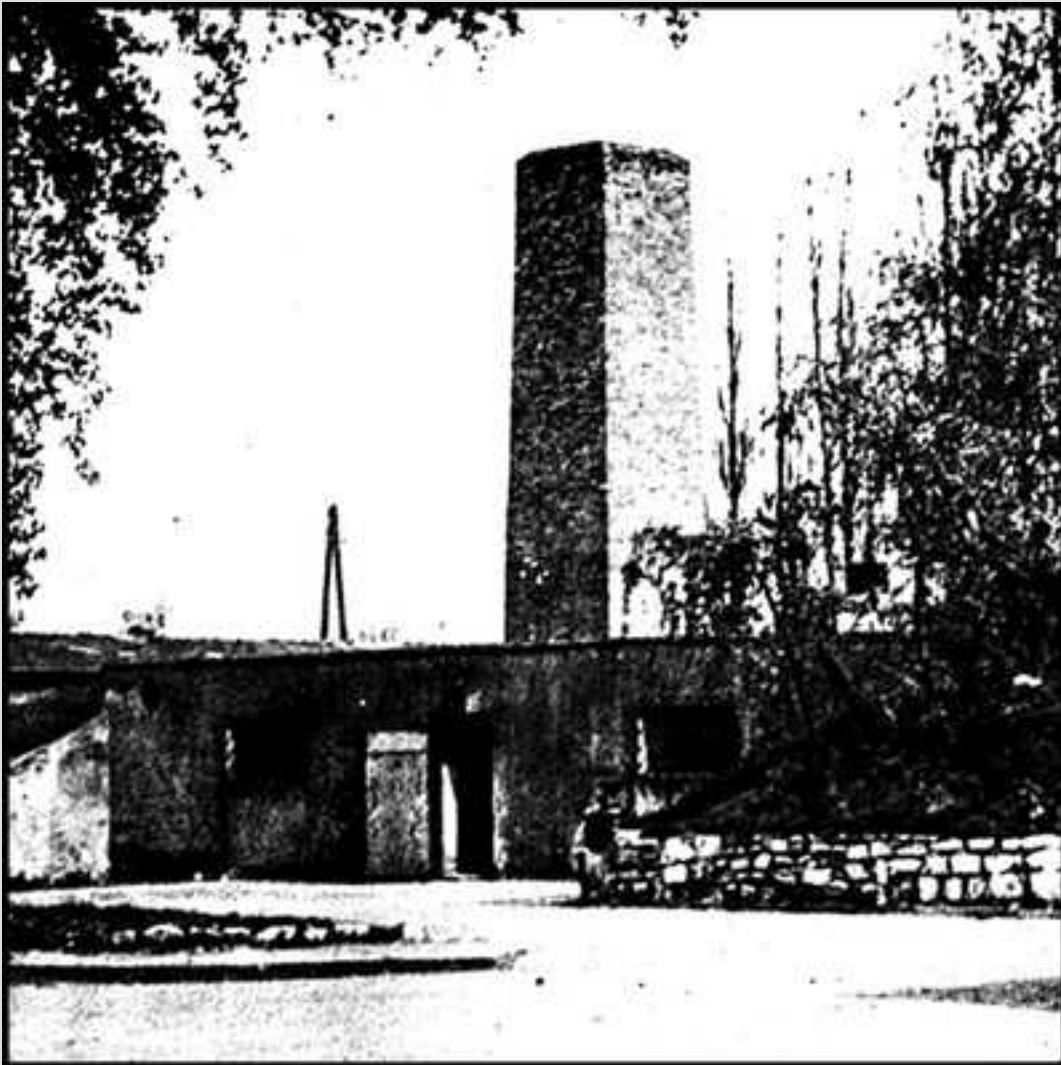
Industrial Records were as independent as possible from the mainstream, although this probably owed as much to its being viewed by its founders as an "art project" as it has to do with ideological concerns. Although fated to last no longer than the "house" band, **Throbbing Gristle**, **Industrial Records** proved enormously influential. While **Eno**, **Kraftwerk**, **Faust** (and other industrial antecedents) had felt it necessary to work with relatively powerful mainstream labels in order to reach an audience and make a living, Industrial Records taught many budding musicians that you could operate successfully at whatever level you chose. If you wanted to try and sell your records to a mass audience, a recording contract was always available with a major label (for example, **Cabaret Voltaire** signed up with **EMI** for just this reason); if you didn't want to compromise your music or ideas, it was still possible to obtain distribution and reach some sort of audience.

Some of the labels that began in the wake of Industrial have been long-lived and achieved some commercial success (**Third Mind**, **Play It Again Sam**), and some enormously successful (**Mute**). Others, like **United Dairies** and **Side Effects** have kept a lower profile, but still survive in mutated forms. Possibly more important than the record labels has been the so-called "underground" cassette network, the result of the discovery that it need cost next to nothing to record and distribute your music, thanks to the widespread and very cheap availability of home cassette recorders. Despite its ghetto nature, the network of cassette labels has allowed musicians (of the sort unsuited to live performance) to define goals other than fame or money. It
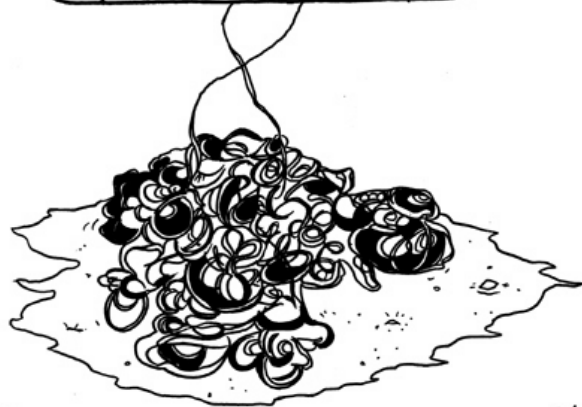
An exhibition was held at Printed Matter in New York City devoted to current American cassette culture entitled "Leaderless: Underground Cassette Culture Now" (May 12–26, 2007).

encourages communication and cooperation between participants in different musical genres, and like the fanzine "world", provides an encouraging environment in which to make the transition from passive consumer to active creator.

To **Jon Savage**, industrial music's most important adoption of extra-musical elements came in the form of its use of film and video. Clearly, this was also nothing new; in a popular context, film was used by groups since the days of psychedelia. However, industrial music coincided with the early days of pop video production, and industrial musicians were keen to have a go and experiment. Bad quality, colour bleeds and feedback were inevitable results of primitive technology, but at least for industrial artists they formed desirable elements in their aesthetic.

Savage wrote in 1983 that the interest in video was important for more than aesthetic reasons. At the time, following the break-up of **Throbbing Gristle**, and a perceived end to the classic "industrial era", **Psychic TV** and **Cabaret Voltaire** (with their independent video label, **Doublevision**) were announcing to all who cared to listen that the next arena for their cultural activities would be television. Having tackled all they cared to of musical control, television seemed a far more relevant medium. Here, surely, was where the battle against indoctrination and manipulation had to be fought.

Unfortunately, it was never to be. The technology and techniques of television were already far in advance of anything these industrial musicians could bring to bear, and

an understanding of and opposition to the mainstream television agenda was already well-established, both on the political left and within the television establishment itself. These have ensured that although the TV mainstream (like pop music) has remained unassailable by its strongest opponents, severe criticism is still often forthcoming from industry insiders.

Endnotes

1. *Throbbing Gristle on KPFA*, interview in *Re/Search #4/5*, op.cit.
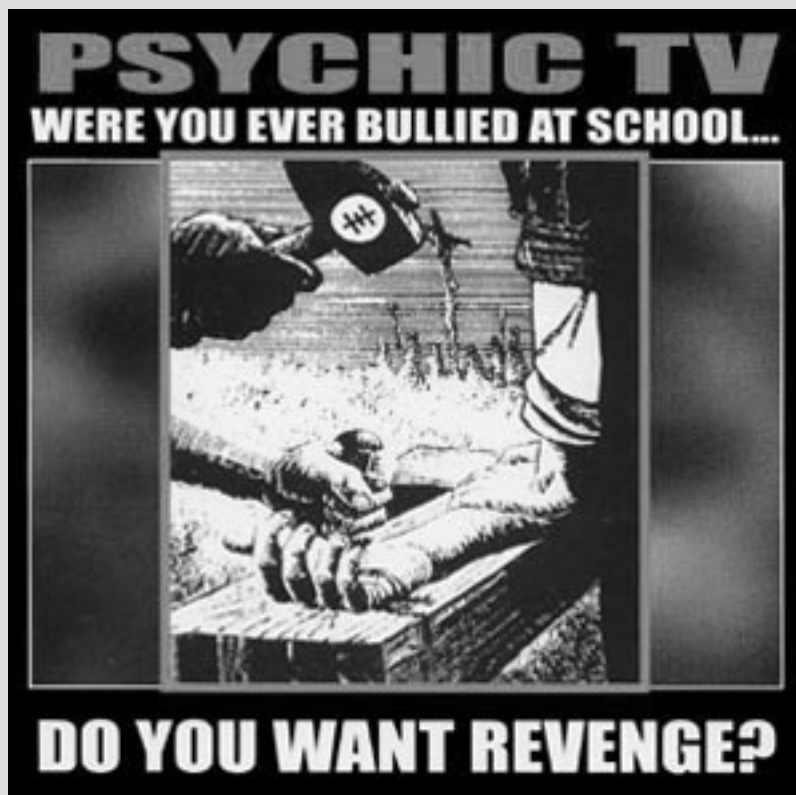
Psychic TV | Were You Ever Bullied At School ... Do You Want Revenge? (1999)

4. USE OF SYNTHESIZERS AND ANTI-MUSIC

"The trouble with avant garde music is that it has lost its original meaning and now has as many rules and clichés as country or rock & roll. If in 50 years time they will look back at the early 1980s, or whenever, and say that was the new avant garde era, that event must be avoided if we are to remain true" - **William Bennett** (**Whitehouse**) [1]

i. Use of New Musical Technology

Mechanical instruments of various sorts date back several centuries. Clockwork musical boxes and hand-cranked barrel organs both date back to the eighteenth century. One inventor of the period, **Jacques Vaucanson**, even produced a musical box with mechanical figures on it who actually went through the motions of playing real instruments. However, none of these developments lent themselves to the production of creative music.

Industrial music relied to a great extent on the use of electronic instrumentation, as well as on other technological innovations of the twentieth century such as tape recording. By the late seventies, this technology had long since passed from the province of academic composition into use by popular musicians, but with rare exceptions most rock-based artists made little attempt to really explore the technology's potential. For most pop bands, tape and electronic filters allowed them to clean up their sound, present an illusion of space or depth, and generally to ensure that very conventional music was

shown in its best light. Where keyboards were used, they were most often employed like pianos or organs. In the eighties, the technology would become essential for most pop and rock music, but in the seventies, only pioneers like the dub producers, German cosmic bands, or **Brian Eno**, applied the lessons learnt by earlier avant-gardists to more accessible music.

The use of electricity to produce sound can be traced back at least to 1837, when **Dr C.G. Page** of Massachusetts reported his accidental discovery of "galvanic music", a method of generating a ringing tone using horseshoe magnets and a spiral of copper wire [2]. At this time, however, nobody successfully applied the phenomenon to the production of an actual musical instrument. The first genuine electronic musical instrument is claimed to be **Elisha Gray**'s "musical telegraph", invented in 1874 (a two-octave polyphonic electric organ), and many others followed; **William Duddell**'s "singing arc" in 1899 and **Thaddeus Cahill**'s telharmonium in 1900, for example. This latter instrument was an extremely complex device, weighing 200 tons and 60 feet long. Although the telharmonium was unsuccessful, the mechanical principles it used were later adopted by the Hammond organ (first built in 1929).

Commercial electronic instruments followed the development of the thermionic valve by **Lee De Forest**, and include the **Theremin**, **the Ondes Martenot**, the **Sphärophon** and the **Trautonium**, all of which were available in the 1920s. Adventurous composers such as

Edgard Varèse, **Darius Milhaud** and **Oliver Messiaen** all wrote music for these instruments, seeing them as an opportunity to extend their sound vocabulary, but they amounted to little more than that. In addition, these instruments became quite popular in Variety and music hall performances, where as a source of particular amusement they were at least treated as more than just another orchestral instrument. In 1931, Leon Theremin produced a special keyboard for the American composer **Henry Cowell**, called the rhythmicon, which could produce repeating series of notes, and was probably the first ever sequencer. Cowell's book, *New Musical Resources*, had been published the previous year, documenting his search for new piano-based sounds, such as tone clusters, and effects produced by playing directly on the piano strings [3], and he remains one of the most important figures of the classical avant-garde in this century.

By 1942, **John Cage** was prophesising the future, writing "*Many musicians have dreamed of compact technological boxes, inside which all audible sounds, including noise, would be ready to come forth at the command of the composer.*" [4] One of those was Edgard Varèse, who told one interviewer: *"I myself would like, for expressing my personal conceptions, a completely new means of expression. A sound machine."* [5] Varèse's historical significance is due to his realisation that music need not just be a series of notes and harmonies, but could consist of any form of "organised sound", and although he considered musique concrète "simple-minded", this was

one of the important changes in musical philosophy that forms part of industrial music's prehistory.

It wasn't until shortly after the Second World War that composers really began to explore the potential of these new technologies as anything other than an adjunct to conventional orchestration. The significant event was the invention of the tape recorder.

The first magnetic recorder had been patented in 1898 by Danish inventor **Valdemar Poulsen** [6]. His device used a microphone (itself dating back to Bell's 1876 experiments in telephony) to drive an electromagnet which altered the magnetic pattern on a coil of steel piano wire. Steel-based recorders were superseded in 1935, when plastic tape coated with a magnetic iron oxide was produced in Germany, and as commercial devices appeared after the war, their potential for use in creating new music soon became evident. Musique concrète was introduced to the world in 1948 by French sound engineer, **Pierre Schaeffer**. His first composition, *Etude aux chemins de fer*, used recordings of steam locomotives, an interesting thematic link to the obsessions with modern industry of the futurists and perhaps even to the imagery that the words "industrial music" erroneously evoke. This work actually used record players rather than tape, but allowed the collage of separate recordings, changes in speed, repeating grooves, and backwards recording. (Others had already experimented with the use of variable speed record players to create new music rather than just record it, including **Edgard Varèse**, **Darius Milhaud**, **Paul Hindemith** and **John Cage**). In

1950, collaborating with **Pierre Henry**, the *Symphonie pour un homme seul* was finished, again using record players, and representing a much more complex and powerful attempt to combine spoken voice, pre-recorded music, mechanical and natural sounds.
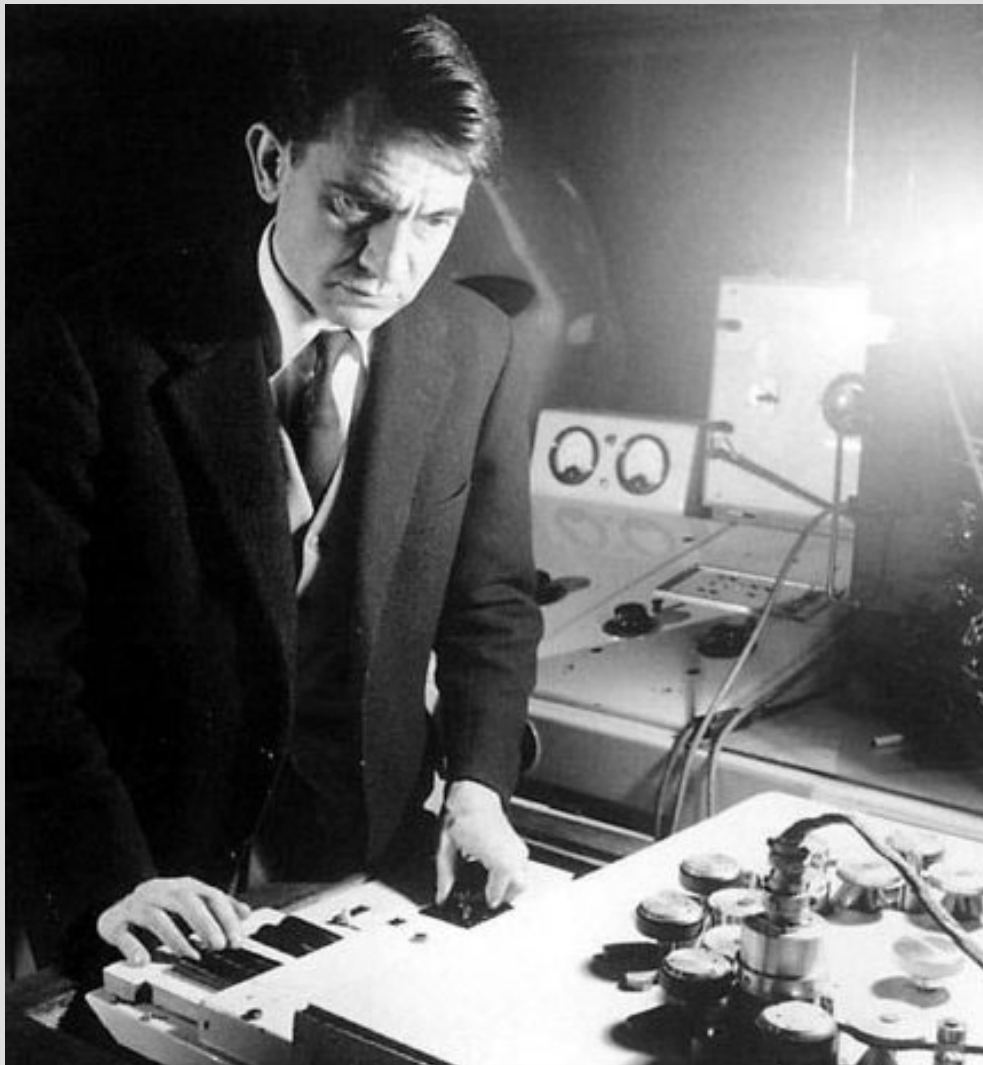
Pierre Schaeffer working with the phonogene in his studio; taken circa 1948 by French photographer Serge Lido.

As with the use of electronics to generate sound, the techniques involved encouraged several musical revolutions. Initially, in the hands of trained composers, it provided access to sounds that had previously been unavailable to music. It also allowed these sounds to develop over time in ways unreproduceable by traditional players of instruments. Finally, it laid the seeds for the production of music by the musically untrained; it was no longer necessary to practice an instrument or learn to read music in order to produce worthwhile music. It would be some time however, before musicians outwith the classical avant-garde began to realise the possibilities inherent in tape recording that musique concrète explored.

Meanwhile in **Cologne**, **Herbert Eimert**, **Robert Beyer** and **Werner Meyer-Eppler** had founded the **Studio for Electronic Music** at **Northwest German Radio**. Their instrumentation was primitive, and it was only through the creativity and dedication of **Karlheinz Stockhausen**, who came to the studio in 1953, that their pure electronic music developed into something significant. Initially, the **Cologne** musicians concentrated only on electronically generated sound, but by the middle of the decade, the barriers between conventional instrumentation, electronic sounds, and manipulated tape recordings were broken, resulting in such seminal works as **Stockhausen**'s *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1956) and Varèse's *Poeme Electronique* (1958).

By the end of the fifties, early synthesizers had been developed, notably the RCA Synthesizer best known through its use by American composer **Milton Babbitt**

(throughout the fifties, the activity in Europe was paralleled by work in America, by composers such as **John Cage**, **Otto Luening**, **Vladimir Ussachevsky**, **Gordon Mumma** and **Robert Ashley**). **The Moog** and **Buchla** synthesizers of the late sixties continued a trend towards more flexible, more portable, less expensive instruments that allowed musicians outside the classical realm to apply the new technology and techniques to their own forms of music. Although much of the early electronic music had met with indignant and outraged audience reactions, the sixties saw a process of gradual popularisation occurring. Notable milestones along the way included **Louis and Bebe Barron**'s electronic soundtrack to the film *Forbidden Planet* (1955), **Frank Zappa**'s *Freak Out* (1966), **The Beatles**' *Revolver* (1966) and *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), and **Walter Carlos**'s *Switched On Bach* (1968).

The avant-garde musical tradition is fundamental to industrial music in terms of the techniques and type of music presented. Listening to almost any electronic or concrète composer from the 50s, 60s or 70s alongside industrial music by **Zoviet France**, the **Hafler Trio**, **P16D4**, **Cranioclast**, **Strafe F.R**. or **Nurse With Wound**, is an interesting experience. Not only are the techniques (electronic synthesis and processing, tape manipulation) identical, but the abstract nature of the sounds employed is too.

Luc Ferrari, who has been an active composer or musique concrète since 1958, stands apart from other

similar composers in his reluctance to process natural sounds into unrecognisability, allowing the mental associations provoked by the sounds used to create a kind of narrative drama. Works like *Petite symphonie pour un paysage de printemps* (1973), or *Hétérozygote* (1964), share unmistakable similarities to the work that the Hafler Trio creates two decades later. Ferrari's earlier *Visage V* (1959) was notable for sharing the Futurists' taste for industrial (mechanical) sound, material which was also employed by **Philippe Carson**, in his dissonant *Turmac* (1962), and **Luigi Nono** in his political protest piece *La fabbrica illuminata* (1964). Ferrari's work is particularly interesting, because he showed clear awareness that musique concrète's real radical impact was to open avant-garde music up to the amateur, to the non-musician. *"My intention was to pave the way for amateur concrète music, much as people take snapshots during vacations"*. [7]

Similarly, **Bernard Parmegiani**, one of the most prolific of concrète composers, shares much in common with abstract industrial musicians; not only did he have no formal musical education (other than childhood piano lessons), but as a result he adopted an intuitive, improvisatory approach to tape music, dispensing with scores and technical details in favour of a hands-on, intuitive approach. His works, such as *La table des matières* (1979) and *De Natura Sonorum* (1975), tend to adopt gradual, transformative shifts from one sound texture to another, a form that finds favour amongst such industrial groups as **Zoviet France, P.G.R.** or **John Watermann**.

What the composers of electronic music and musique concréte had done was to demolish the primacy of the score in "art" music. As **Evan Eisenberg** has written, *"Suppose one wished to make music as directly as a painter paints. A painter would be outraged if he were asked to create a work by listing the coordinates of dots and the numbers of standard colours, which we could then interpret by connecting the dots and colouring by number. But that is what a composer is asked to do"* [8]. As will be shown below, **Ferruccio Busoni** was one of the first classical composers to dream of a way out of the straitjacket of score-writing, and **Edgard Varèse**'s desire for the same freedom had caused him great frustration until tape music came along. From the beginning of the 1950s, the classical avant garde began to enjoy the freedom to create music like painters, intuitively.

The industrial musicians, although in many cases aware of this avant-garde tradition, owe a more direct debt to the fringes of rock music, notably groups like **Tangerine Dream** and **Kraftwerk**, who combined "serious" composers' fascination with new sounds with an interest in accessible rhythms. In Britain, which it's not unfair to name as the main home of industrial music, the only interest that fringe-rockers seemed to show in electronic instruments was as enhancement to a more conventional rock instrumental line-up (**Hawkwind** and **the Beatles** are two possible examples) or as a means of replicating the grandeur of classical music (**ELP**, **Yes** and far too many others). In the early seventies in Britain, there seemed to be little interest outside the classical community in genuinely

seeing what kind of new music the technology would create.

Elsewhere the situation was different. In America, **Frank Zappa**'s knowledge of classical avant-gardism had an enormous impact on his rock-based music, leading to mixtures of electronics and tape manipulation such as *The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny* [9]. Other psychedelic bands, such as United States of America, also adopted electronic instruments and elements of avant-garde techniques [10]. Similarly, **The Residents**, from their beginnings in the early 1970s, created music that ignored and assaulted conventional notions of taste and quality, playing with tape technology and (on albums like *Third Reich'n'Roll*, a classic collage of sixties pop viewed through a very grimy lens) not only predating pop sampling controversy but doing a better job of it as well. In 1968, a New York duo called **Silver Apples** combined simplistic, machinelike electronic oscillators with psychedelic pop and pre-Can metronomic rhythms that foreshadowed the following decade's music from artists like **Devo** or **Kraftwerk** [11]. If you trace a line back from industrial music through **Kraftwerk**, you'll find that **Silver Apples** are their oft-ignored true ancestors.

In Germany, artists like **Tangerine Dream**, **Faust**, **Neu**, **Cluster**, **Klaus Schulze** and **Can** (as well as many who never achieved quite such a level of fame) took the new, less expensive electronic instruments as a signal not for rock-based experimentation (which with groups elsewhere like **Pink Floyd** and **Roxy Music** was gaining

Asmus Tietchens (up)   Merzbow (down)

more attention) but to create music that appropriated the ideas of the "serious" composers while stilling aiming at a popular audience. **Can's Holger Czukay** is one of the most obvious examples of how the technology (and the associated taste for musical experimentation) crossed from the elite to the popular. After studying with **Stockhausen**, **Czukay** and **Irmin Schmidt** took their ideas into the rock world, and **Czukay's** earlier experiments with tape collage can be heard on the *Canaxis* album. On their early albums, even bands who later moved towards tonality and clarity, like **Tangerine Dream** and **Cluster**, created music that thrived on noise, atonality and confusion.

Faust demonstrated most clearly an attitude of total freedom to explore and experiment, utilising every new technology and quite capable of embracing noise, collage and a rock rhythm within a single album, if not a single track. Although **Can**, as the most popular of these German groups, are the most often cited by more recent musicians, **Faust** and the others had the most important influence on industrial music, by demonstrating that experimentation didn't have to be inaccessible, and that the willingness to *try* things was more important than instrumental proficiency.

Kraftwerk's growing taste for a music that not only used the new technology but also stylistically mirrored their perception of that technology had resulted in two classic albums by the time **Throbbing Gristle** made their first recording; *Radio-Activity* and *Trans Europe Express*, both of which fashioned a clarity and beauty out of the sterile,

repetitive sounds that electronic oscillators most readily produced. Having established a suitable aesthetic mirror for the developments that (at the time) had the greatest long-term impact on society, budding industrial musicians saw rhythmic electronic music as one of the essential elements in their own creations. Like Kraftwerk, they wanted to mirror their environment, but unlike Kraftwerk they were motivated by a comprehensively critical revulsion against that environment.

Surprisingly, throughout the seventies in **Germany**, there was little evidence that the avant-rock groups and the avant-garde composers could work on common territory. There are isolated examples of serious composers who gained more popular acceptance, such as **Asmus Tietchens**. He had started producing serious electronic music in 1965 [12], but it wasn't until 1980, when he briefly ventured into more accessible synthesizer-based realms, that he received any public recognition. Since then, he has collaborated with such industrial musicians as **Merzbow** and **Arcane Device**, without compromising his atonal concrète music. **Tietchens'** position is significant, as it shows how meaningless the distinction between "serious" composers and enthusiastic amateurs has become in the field of abstract electronic and tape-based composition. Perhaps industrial music's lasting significance will be recognised as its demolition of this outdated distinction.

In **Britain**, perhaps the most important artist to have any real influence on industrial music was one whose aesthetic was quite opposed to it; **Brian Eno**. Eno's time as

an art student had introduced him to avant-garde music by the likes of **LaMonte Young** and **Philip Glass**, and he happily applied these influences to rock music, first as a member of **Roxy Music** and then on his own. (The album *No Pussyfooting*, recorded with **Robert Fripp**, is basically a guitar-based reworking of **Pauline Oliveros**' electronic composition *I of IV*, for example). Most importantly to the budding industrial musicians, his concentration on the use of the studio, and his insistence that he was a "non-musician" inspired many who had no formal musical training to try it for themselves.

Also important was the existence of the **B.B.C. Radiophonic Workshop**, Britain's equivalent of other institutionally-sponsored electronic studios such as the **Northwest German Radio** studio that Stockhausen used, or the **Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center**. Unlike earlier studios, which provided facilities for the abstract explorations of avant-garde composers, the **Radiophonic Workshop** had a more prosaic role producing soundtrack music and special effects for radio and television, and as a result its electronic works were heard by a much wider public [13]. Like earlier associations between electronic music and science fiction entertainment, the public found it difficult to disentangle electronics and imagery of outer space, but the **Radiophonic Workshop** ensured that potential future industrial musicians were well aware of the potential of electronic sounds.

These threads don't just lead to industrial music of course. **Bruce Gilbert** and **Graham Lewis** (of rock band

Wire) showed how the same musical influences as the industrial musicians weren't enough; they lacked the same drive to transgress and consequently their work as **Dome** (and under other names) is of more musical than cultural interest. Similarly, lacking any transgressive instinct whatsoever, there has been a very large number of artists who would take not just the technique of **Eno**, but also his limpid, passive style, combined in varying proportions with the spaced out attitude of the mostly-electronic "cosmic" musicians.

It's also important to point out that several bands who were categorised as "industrial" drew influences from much more popular music than others. Funk and disco, via artists like **Defunkt**, **Donna Summer** & **Giorgio Moroder**, **Chic** and **James Brown**, all fed into the anti-soul dance music of **Cabaret Voltaire**, **ClockDVA**, **23 Skidoo**, **Hula** and others. With hindsight, it's easy to feel disappointed that the loose-limbed, less uptight dance music that inspired such early industrial groups was replaced by a funkless rigidity in later industrial dance outfits.

It took three decades for the technological revolution in music to truly make itself felt, as the new technology progressed first from the hands of the "establishment", and then from the hands of more conventional musicians, such as the rock virtuosos. Punk, when it came, was arguably less revolutionary; jazz, reggae and other genres had already introduced the independence that punk ideologues trumpeted so loudly, and for all punk's claim that it allowed people with no training or experience to pick up a guitar

and get themselves heard, it still relied on an ability to learn basic chords; tape-recording and electronics have had a far more radical influence.

Endnotes

1. Interview in *Flowmotion* #4 (1982).
2. *Electronic and Experimental Music*, Thomas Holmes (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985); information also taken from *Electronic Music*, Andy Mackay (Phaidon Press, 1981) and A *Guide to Electronic Music*, Paul Griffiths (Thames and Hudson, 1979) all of which give a much more comprehensive history of classical experimental and electronic music than is presented here.
3. Holmes, op. cit.
4. *For More New Sounds*, included in *John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (1971).
5. *The Recording Angel*, Evan Eisenberg (Picador, 1988).
6. *Inventions That Changed The World*, ed.G.R. Taylor (Reader's Digest, 1982)
7. Quote taken from *New Perspectives in Music*, Roger Sutherland (Sun Tavern Fields, 1994).
8. Evan Eisenberg, op.cit.
9. From the album *We're Only In It For The Money* (1968).
10. *United States of America* LP (Columbia, 1968).
11. *Silver Apples* LP (Kapp, 1968) and *Contact* LP (Kapp, 1969).

12.   Early compositions such as *Hitch* and *Studie für Glasspiel* are included on the album *Formen Letzer Hausmusik* (United Dairies)
13.   Also significant is that while earlier state-funded studios were open to all interested composers, the Radiophonic Workshop refused to provide access to its facilities to outsiders.
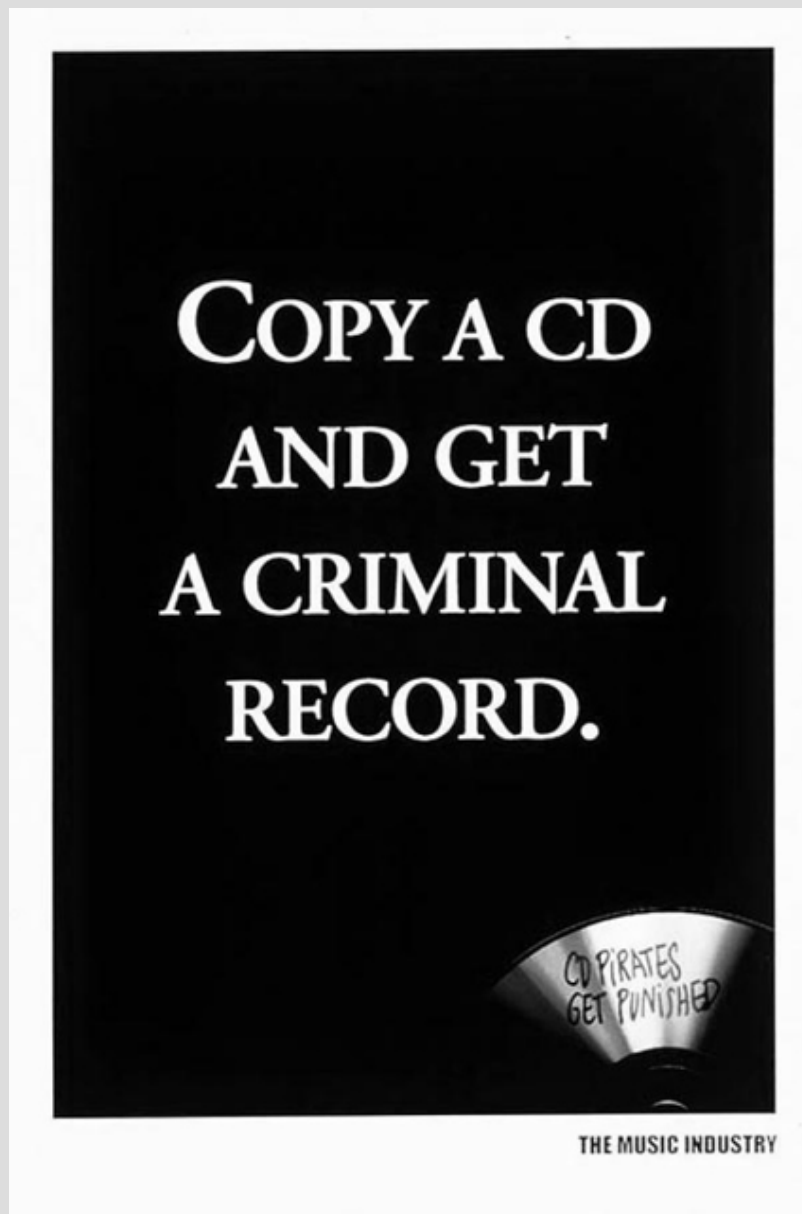
ii. Anti-Music

Although it would be nice to trace back the idea of using *noise* as an element in music to the futurist **Luigi Russolo**'s manifesto, *The Art of Noises*, published in 1913 [1], there are earlier ancestors. The painter Russolo's manifesto was itself inspired by the writings of futurist composer **Balilla Pratella**, whose **Technical Manifesto of Futurist Music** (1911) includes the passage: "*[Music] must represent the spirit of crowds, of great industrial complexes, of trains, of ocean liners, of battle fleets, of automobiles and airplanes. It must add to the great central themes of the musical poem the domain of the machine and the victorious realm of electricity*" [2]. Sadly, **Pratella**'s own music was much more conventional than his aims might suggest.

In the few years before these, better known classical composers were already struggling out of the straitjacket their musical tradition had placed them in. **Ferruccio Busoni**'s 1907 *Sketch for a New Aesthetic of Music* asked: "*In what direction shall the next step lead? To abstract sound, to unhampered technique, to unlimited tonal material*" [3]. (Busoni also praised **Thaddeus Cahill**'s *trautonium*, recognising early on the potential of electronic music). The composer surely didn't realise quite what he was prophesying; the next step he imagined might appear to be the one taken by **Schoenberg**, **Ives** and **Cowell**, who between 1907 and 1919 worked through increasingly atonal approaches to music that rapidly increased in dissonance and (in Cowell's case) in their exploration of new uses for
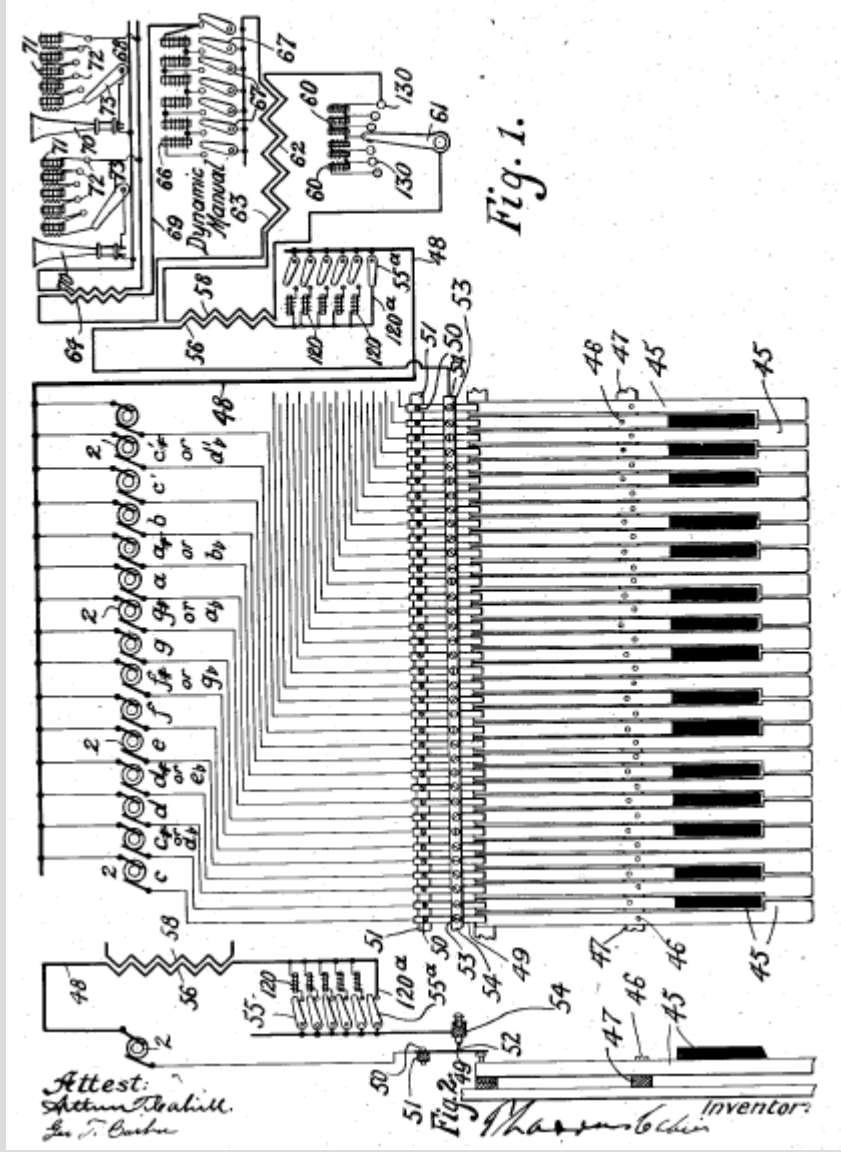
The **Telharmonium** (also known as the **Dynamophone**) was an early electronic musical instrument, developed by Thaddeus Cahill in 1897. The electrical signal from the Telharmonium was transmitted over wires; it was heard on the receiving end by means of 'horn' speakers.

Russolo au Russolophone, photographié par Seuphor, en 1930.

Ferruccio Busoni

old instruments. However, Busoni's words could just as easily be taken to imply the diverse musics of artists like **Asmus Tietchens**, or **Merzbow**. When the classical composers first resolved to let noise enter their music, they didn't realise quite what it was that they unleashed.

One of the aims of the Futurists was to oppose the classicism and romanticism that they felt dominated artistic expression at the time. Both art and music, the Futurists thought, were concerned with nostalgia, with the depiction of mythical past idylls. In opposition to this, they demanded that their art reflect dynamism rather than stillness, the future rather than the past, and the grinding noise of the machine rather than the pure, beautiful sounds that Romanticism produced.

Russolo's instruments have long since been destroyed, and his music can now only be heard in rare reconstructions, but his importance lies more in his ideas than in the tiny influence that he actually had on other composers and musicians. *The Art of Noises* is notable because its aesthetic ideas comprehensively predate almost all the musical movements that eventually produced industrial music. **Pierre Schaeffer** and **Pierre Henry** paid tribute to **Russolo** when they created *musique concrète*, but they had little idea what his music actually sounded like: there is only one surviving recording of his instruments, and it wasn't unearthed until 1957. [4]

If **Busoni** had taken one faltering step towards musical freedom, *The Art of Noises* took a giant leap. According to **Russolo**: *"In the 19th century, with the invention of*

machines, Noise was born. Today, Noise is triumphant and reigns sovereign over the sensibility of men ... Musical sound is too limited in its variety of timbres ... We must break out of this limited circle of sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds ... Noise, arriving confused and irregular from the irregular confusion of life, is never revealed to us entirely and always holds innumerable surprises." [5]

Not only had **Russolo** set out ideas that would resurface in previously unimaginable areas of twentieth century music, but in his words about the "confusion" inherent in noise, he anticipated an idea of central importance to any aesthetic theory of noise music. Despite this, **Russolo's** manifesto also contains some highly conservative ideas, most obviously his proposal that noises be selected according to their pitch. I can't imagine how he intended to assign a pitch to noises like "explosions" and "death rattles", both of which he planned to create.

Russolo created many noise instruments, such as the "Whistler", the "Burster" and the "Croaker", each of which had a limited ability to produce one type of noise, and according to his own accounts, early performances using them tended to degenerate in near riots, in much the same way as nights at the **Cabaret Voltaire** or the premiere of **Stravinsky's** *The Rites of Spring* did. More recently of course, the response to performances by groups like **Throbbing Gristle**, **Cabaret Voltaire** and **Whitehouse** has been similar. It's easy to exaggerate **Russolo's** similarities to the later industrial musicians; after all, for

every occasional rumpus when **Genesis P-Orridge** took up his mike, there were ten at punk gigs in the late seventies.

None of the people involved in industrial music seems to have thought much in a theoretical way about their use of noise elements, which is in keeping with the groups' general ignorance of musical matters. Perhaps the most interesting study of the topic is **Jacques Attali**'s *Noise - The Political Economy of Music* [6]. Attali wrote that: "*Listening to music is listening to all noise, realising that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political ... The theorists of totalitarianism have all explained that it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences and marginality: a concern for maintaining tonalism, the primacy of melody, a distrust of new languages, codes or instruments, a refusal of the abnormal - these characteristics are common to all regimes of that nature*". Attali's view gives the lie to those who think that music and politics don't mix; I agree with his view that what is political about music occurs at a more basic level than that of lyrics or presentation.

Attali presents the history of music as a mirror of the history of capitalism, dividing that history into three stages (broadly, of "primitive" ritual music, scored music and recorded music [7]). He points out correspondences between the rise of scored music and the rise of technocratic, bourgeois society, and also between the growth in recorded music and the transformation into a more classless, commodity-centred society. Attali presents a blueprint for a

fourth stage in musical history, which he expects to prefigure wider social and economic transformations. A key element in this fourth stage (which Attali confusingly terms composition) is that musicians will again begin to create music not just as a commodity or text for exchange, but for their immediate personal pleasure (this has of course been an important trend in recent decades). Another key element is that the new music will operate outside the mainstream musical industry, but the most important component is that the new music will rediscover noise and violence as crucial for its expression (he cites **John Cage** and free jazz as prototypes of this new musical stage).

One musicologist suggested that **punk** or **new wave** was the first major sign of this musical paradigm shift. *"Many of the original groups began as garage bands formed by people **not** educated as musicians who intended to defy noisily the slickly marketed 'nonsense' of commercial rock. The music is often aggressively simple syntactically, but at its best it conveys most effectively the raw energy of its social and musical protest. It bristles with genuine sonic noise (most of it maintains a decibel level physically painful to the uninitiated) ..."* [8] As is usual with academic commentators, there is a marked tendency not to be aware of anything outside a narrowly defined frame of reference, and it's tempting to suggest that much of industrial music fits this description better than the punk rock that inspired it. However, there are musical areas which fit Attali's ideas more closely (particularly free improv music), and industrial music should be seen as only

one strand amongst many attempts to break free of this century's more reactionary musical trends.

Clearly then, industrial music's attempts to smash received musical values and rules, to tear down conventional notions of taste and to seek pleasure in brutal ugliness, were part of an important tendency in modern music, a reaction against the political control that most music mirrored, both in its overall aesthetic and in its means of production. **John Cage**'s understanding of the same ideas led him to seek to minimise his own control over the music he made; **Brian Eno**'s control over his sound is much tighter, but he shows equal political radicalism in attempting to create a music that allows many different levels of attention for the listener, that presents a surface for the listener to investigate rather than a (party) line for the listener to follow. In free improv of the sorts pioneered by **Evan Parker** or **AMM**, the political message lies in how the group organises itself to create sound, rejecting one individual's programmatic vision in favour of sound that is spontaneous, cooperative, and above all, playful.

As an aside, **Throbbing Gristle** may not be the first name that improv historians think of, but more than most rock bands, they relied heavily on an improvising approach. The recordings of their dozens of live performances are valued by fans for this very reason. According to T.G.'s Peter Christopherson: "*Pieces were created more or less spontaneously, without any rehearsal or preparation other than Chris' privately made rhythm tracks and a general*

discussion about possible topics for a new lyric which Gen would use as inspiration for the lyric ... We had little idea of what was going to happen in any performance or recording session, and each of us contributed our share entirely on the basis of what was going on at that very moment." [9] Given the personalities present in T.G., you could be forgiven for thinking that Christopherson is idealising what actually happened, but it's clear that the level of improvisation in T.G. and other groups went far beyond what happens in song-fixated rock groups.

For a slightly less politicised idea of the importance of the noise element in industrial music, I find some inspiration in the writing of rock critic **Simon Reynolds** (for his part, he draws heavily on the ideas of post-modernist philosophers like **Roland Barthes** and **Jean Baudrillard**). Reynolds' view of noise relies heavily on its power to disrupt and intoxicate: *"Noise then, occurs when language breaks down. Noise is a wordless state in which the very constitution of our selves is in jeopardy. The pleasure of noise lies in the fact that the obliteration of meaning and identity is ecstasy."* [10]

Before industrial music there were certainly strong noise elements in music, but rarely in the way that there were afterwards. **Russolo's** noise instruments, for all their potency in their day, sound nowadays like mere sound-effects machines, and strangely subdued ones at that. **Edgar Varèse**, lauded by **John Cage** as the "father of noise" in twentieth century music composed much that was radical by conventional classical musical standards, but

little that matches the noise music of recent years. **Iannis Xenakis**, like **Krysztof Penderecki** and **Gyorgy Ligeti**, explored microtonality to create terrifying musical effects that are still powerful today, but the textures they created could in no way be considered "noise".

Of all the avant-gardists of the first 60 years of this century, only **John Cage** can really take credit for producing music that even today's <u>Gerogerigegege</u>* fans might find hard to listen to. As well as his percussion-oriented pieces for prepared piano, where the irregularity of the objects placed between the piano strings ensured a sound that was sometimes cacophonous, it was his live electronics pieces that delivered the healthiest dose of raw, obnoxious noise. Cage's insistence on chance procedures (for example, while some performers produce the sounds, others operate the volume controls, all in accordance with randomly-determined timings) ensured that his music would be unpredictable and chaotic. In a piece like *Cartridge Music* where much of the sound is produced by rubbing a record player's stylus cartridge against various objects and surfaces, the sound itself takes on a raucous, violent feel, with a shocking, harsh texture that some industrial groups never matched.

In 1937, **Cage** had written: "*Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise ... Whether the sound of a truck at 50mph, rain, or static between radio stations, we find noise fascinating ... [I intend] to capture and control these sounds, to use them, not as sound effects, but as musical instruments*" [11]. Cage cited **Russolo's** *The Art of Noises*

and **Henry Cowell**'s *New Musical Resources* as important precursors, and his comments on the use of everyday noises as the constituents of music predate musique concrete. Pieces like his *Third Construction*, for a variety of traditional and "found" percussion instruments, predate industrial music's love of metal percussion by several decades. Unlike the futurists, however, **Cage** was not interested in simply reflecting modern technology in his music, but in gaining access the whole field of sound.

Dig hard enough and you'll find other examples, as after all, white noise was as rapid a byproduct of new technology as pure tones were. So it is that even in 1973, a composer like **John Oswald** could create noise music almost indistinguishable from the post-industrial musicians, using an evolving swarm of electronically-generated white noise.

Outside the "classical" world, however, there was a far more important source of inspiration. With the release of the Velvet Underground's first record in 1967, rock music had reached a turning point. For not only did the V.U. incorporate elements of the avant-garde tradition into their music (mainly thanks to **John Cale**'s education in drone courtesy of **La Monte Young** [12]), but they combined this with one of the most alienated, hostile attitudes rock had so far developed. If their art background (courtesy of **Andy Warhol**) and interest in sexual deviance (*Venus in Furs*, *Sister Ray*) had echoes amongst the first wave of industrial groups, perhaps it's no surprise.
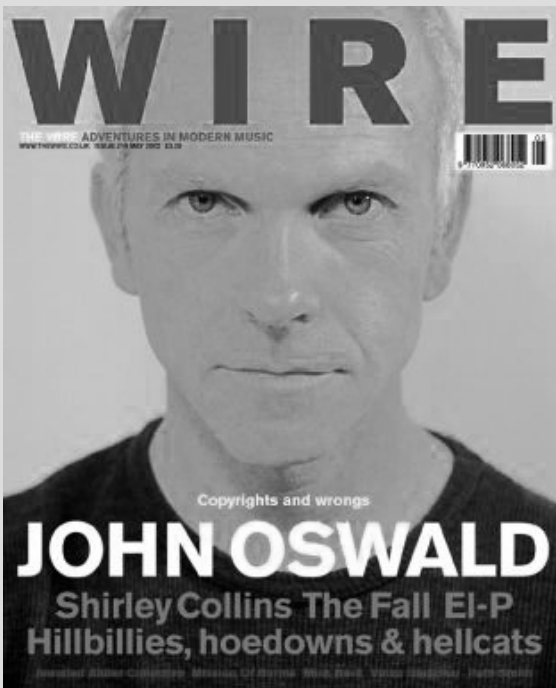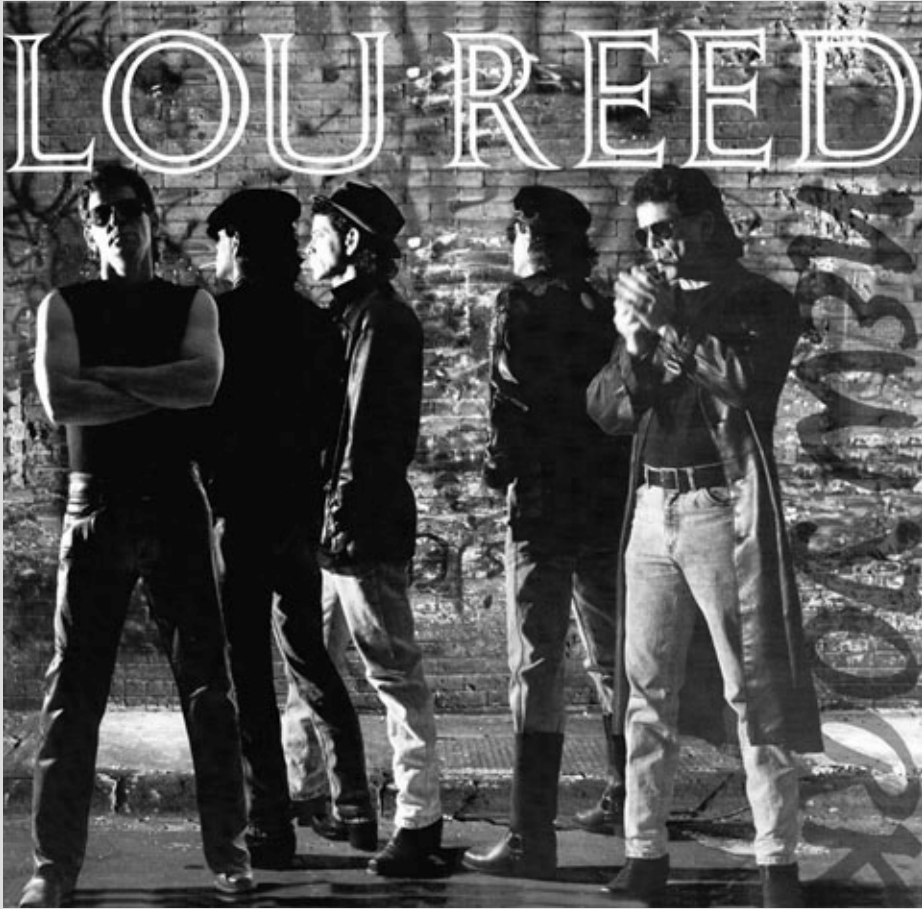
La Monte Young

Singer-songwriter **Lou Reed**'s post-Velvets career is mostly of no relevance whatsoever to industrial music, but his 1975 double-album, *Metal Machine Music*, remains an awesome landmark. Most of his fans fell for the story that this was a "contractual obligation" record, a successful attempt to piss off his label, RCA. Very few people took it seriously: it's been described as "unlistenable noise" by most writers who otherwise enjoy Reed's output. At the time, Reed's own comments were ambiguous, sometimes adding fire to the stories about arguments with his label, but at other times he stated that the album was intended as a serious composition. With hindsight, it's easy to see *Metal Machine Music* as the honoured ancestor of post-industrial noise, four sides of churning, screeching feedback that never let up for a moment. Compared to some of today's noise-makers it seems positively polite, and the interest in repetition and drone frequencies make clear that Reed had paid attention to his band-mate Cale's influences. Whether or not many industrial musicians had heard the record or not must be doubtful, but it still sounds refreshing today, even in the light of two decades of industrial and no-wave aural abuse.

The development of further music that employed noise not just to distract from more conventional textures, or as a byproduct of conventional rock guitar aggression, had to wait until after the industrial music revolution, but it owed as much to *Metal Machine Music* as it did to the proof by people like **Cage** and the improv group AMM that a

musical experience could be created from even the most unlikely materials. Many musicians have experimented with extreme noise; as well as artists like **Non**, **Controlled Bleeding** or the **New Blockaders**, Japan is recognised as home to much of the most powerful variety, thanks to groups like **Merzbow**, the **Gerogerigegege**, the **Hanatarash** and others. The motives of the musicians vary; some, like bungee jumpers, are just looking for an intense experience; others may have genuine loathing that they want to express; others just find a child-like fun in noise-making.

Simon Reynolds recognises the symptoms that ensure noise music often goes hand in hand with other extreme subject matter: *"The subliminal message of most music is that the universe is essentially benign, that if there is sadness or tragedy, this is resolved at the level of some higher harmony. Noise troubles this world-view. This is why noise groups invariably deal with subject matter that is anti-humanist - extremes of abjection, obsession, trauma, atrocity, possession ..."*

Despite his lucid attempt to describe noise's revolutionary potential, capable not of destroying any external enemy but of demolishing internal mental power structures, Reynolds acknowledges that theory and noise are at odds. Noise resents being asked to have meaning, it refuses simple explanations and it is at its best when it just **exists**; deep and meaningless.

As a response to society noise is the apotheosis of many of industrial music's aims. **Throbbing Gristle** and **Cabaret**

Voltaire may have mirrored the faceless anonymity of post-industrial society in their drab, grey-stained rhythms but the noise elements in their music also reflected an anger, recognising their own alienation and loathing it deeply. In a society where people cross the road at the merest hint of violence, not out of fear (because television hyper-reality desensitises **that** emotion), but out of disinclination to be involved, where the powers that determine our freedom of action seem increasingly less concrete, less amenable to opposition, the sense of meaning is collapsing, and the appropriate musical response is obvious; the silent scream, brutal, oblivious burnout.

The concern of earlier avant-gardists was simply to search for freedom from the will-to-power that **Jacques Attali** sees in all composed music; the concern of industrial music was to find an adequate response to a post-collapse society, a society that had yet to understand quite how empty its core had become. With industrial music, the power set in motion by **Russolo** had finally begun to realise some of its true potential.

Endnotes

1. *The Art of Noises*, Luigi Russolo, 1913 (republished Pendragon Press, New York, 1986, with an introduction by Barclay Brown)
2. Introduction to *The Art of Noises*, op.cit.
3. Griffiths, op.cit.
4. *The Sound World, Instruments and Music of Luigi Russolo*, Hugh Davies (*Resonance* Vol.2, No.2)
5. *The Art of Noises*, op.cit.
6. *Noise - The Political Economy of Music*, op.cit.
7. *Noise - The Political Economy of Music*, op.cit.; Attali labels these the sacrificial, representational and repetitive modes; they correspond in some ways to Chris Cutler's folk, classical and recorded modes (*File Under Popular*, ReR/Semiotexte, 1991), although Cutler's arguments are significantly different to Attali's.
8. *The Politics of Silence and Sound*, Susan McClary (afterword to *Noise - The Political Economy of Music*, op.cit.)
9. Sleeve notes to *TGCD1* by Peter Christopherson (Mute Records, 1986).
10. *Blissed Out*, Simon Reynolds (Serpent's Tail, 1990).
11. *The Future of Music*, John Cage (1937)
12. Himself a noteable figure in the history of noise music for other reasons. Young's *Two Sounds* (1960) was composed for amplified percussion and window

panes; his *Poem for Tables, Chairs and Benches* (1960) used the sounds of furniture scraping across tthe flooor.