



● "The thing about magazines in London – and a lot of other places – is that they go out and look for a readership, then look for stuff to supply it with. I'm that stuff this month. It pisses me off in a way, I hate the idea that I'm the Flavour of the Month, but that is how it is in terms of the media. I've been doing this for years, and all of a sudden I'm an overnight mini-success, and your paper is dutifully 'covering' the new Flavour – that isn't subversive in any way whatsoever. Me talking to you, you talking to me; neither act is doing anything useful at all. It's a very weird state of affairs."

I'll say it's weird. It's a lot weirder the way people will consent to go through with it without acknowledging what it is that we're undertaking, though. Most of the people I interview mutely consent to being turned into a piece of confectionery for your consumption, readers. Don't you find *that* a little strange?

**Jim Thirlwell** used to work in a record shop, saving money to finance his own recording label, Self Immolation, through which he released two LP's, one twelve inch and three seven inch singles. By the time the sixth release came around he was "just about bankrupt and totally miserable". He had attracted some notice in isolated pockets around the world, and became thick with Stevo's Some Bizzare organization. And so it is that Jim, under the name of 'Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel' is offering a new LP, *Hole*, and under the name of 'Foetus Art Terrorism' a twelve inch single, *Calamity Crush*, to the world this season. To be quite honest, most of you will hate them, not that Jim is too bothered or surprised about that. But for a lucky few, *Hole* might permanently skew your perspectives on music around to unpredictable angles. The Sound of Scraping Foetus off the Wheel will challenge you to love it just for itself; there will be no shock of recognition, I can promise you that much.

Let's get on with it. Why 'Foetus'?

"People have asked me this before, and I can't honestly tell you how it originated. It was just like... I was sitting on a bus one day and I thought to myself, 'Self Immolation! Perfect!' – 'Foetus' was an idea that hadn't been exploited. I really like the word, it's a good name. I like the fact that I can approach different projects under different variations on the name. It's an ongoing thing. There's no schematic theory behind the name 'Foetus', it just... came. I do give a great deal of thought to the new variations on the name, and as such I think of all the imaginable interpretations you could bring to a name like 'Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel' – which is a fairly blunt name, I must admit, that one's pretty blunt. It almost conjures up a fixed mental image, whereas 'You've Got Foetus On Your Breath' was a lot more subtle – it was supposed to have a



**Jim Thirlwell.**

duality to it. It could be interpreted as a person actually eating, or having eaten a foetus, but I preferred it to be thought of as analogous to being pregnant. So that one was fairly abstract, and 'Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel' was more blunt – there is a distinct image there, of a foetus being tied to a railway track, and being run over by a train.

"'Foetus Art Terrorism' grew from F.A.T – I wanted something with those initials, and someone suggested 'Foetus Around Town', which I thought was

rather flippant, really. I wanted something a little more substantial. 'Foetus Art Terrorism' actually sums up some of my approaches – Art terrorism is an idea that I've chewed on for some while..."

Is there a strong division between 'Foetus' and Jim Thirlwell?

"No, they're one and the same – I am 'Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel', I am 'F.A.T'... I am 'Self Immolation'. I don't say that this or that is my alter ego, because basically it's me. Previously I

distanced myself from those names by using a lot of mythology, partly to diffuse the 'personality' aspect of the music business, which I find abhorrent...

Is 'Foetus' nihilistic?

"It's positive nihilism... I think..."

No! I don't think it's nihilistic at all. To an extent, I embrace certain things that could be construed as being nihilistic but ultimately, so far as I am concerned – I'm not sure about the listening public at all, whoever it is that might buy my records – to me the outcome is positive,

because I'm purging something from my system. Because I can articulate it, and because I'm happy with that articulation, I have concisely expressed an emotion that I was feeling when I wrote something, it's a liberation – I'm not wallowing in it. I don't feel that when I go and write a song I've got to go and get miserable first. I've got this pat phrase – positive negativism – which is how I see what it is that I'm doing . . ."

You seem too busy to be a nihilist anyway – most nihilists I ever met were really lazy . . .

"Heh! Heh! Well yeah, I get around – I try! When I was a teenager I used to see myself as some sort of closet existentialist – which was rather at odds with . . . living with my parents and things! I know there's a lot of different interpretations to existentialism, but I think that was rather misguided. Now, I don't place myself under any philosophical banners at all – I do have a few catchphrases of my own, but obviously when I do something, I don't stop and think, 'Hmmm . . . is this Positive Negativist?' "

Are you in any sense a 'Rock'n'Roller'? (Jim is slightly taken aback by the question.)

"What? A rock'n'roller? Well . . . sometimes I use the term 'rock'n'roll' flippantly, to myself, but I feel no identification at all with Rock'n'Roll per se. There are rock'n'roll elements in some of my songs, deliberately, but I can't explain why. The songs are simply what I want to hear, so if that's crept into the music, it's unconscious – I can't say I love rock'n'roll, because I don't. I've never owned an old rock'n'roll record. The only exposure I've had to it is how it's been assimilated into popular culture. For me, a video tape of Dick Clark's 'Twenty Five Years of Rock'n'Roll' is enough. I have no reverence for the 'Heritage' or anything like that . . ."

How would you like your work to be received? Once you've arrived at the fact of a person listening to your records, what do you want them to feel?

"That's a difficult question. It's not something I've really thought about much – ideally, I'd like them to receive it in the spirit in which it's made, but that's not always possible to accomplish, because I'm not very big on explanatory sleeve notes. Basically I'm throwing out this artefact and I leave it wide open to interpretation. I totally welcome misinterpretation, it can be very stimulating. But I hate the idea of designing your product to fit how you see your audience – your consumers. People like ABC and Heaven 17 will design their package, manufacture their seductive pop. I find that totally vomitous . . ."

I wish I had more room to put you down some more. Maybe next time. Foetus will still be around next month . . .

□ MARC ISSUE