

Under his various monikers, Jim Thirlwell has created a library of aurally stretching albums and despite the demands of running his own company, remains true to his artistic intents. DAN O'REILLY-ROWE meets up with him in New York.

New York

DEXTROUS FOETUS

You could say that Jim Thirlwell has multiple personalities. He is best known as Foetus, a seminal figure in post-punk industrial music, influencing and collaborating with artists and groups such as Nick Cave, Lydia Lunch, The Young Gods and Nine Inch Nails. But his extensive list of aliases (Steroid Maximus, Manorexia, DJ Otefsu, Good Ruin, Frank Want and many more) points to an artist who both defies and utilises conventional musical genre pigeonholing.

Thirlwell is an expatriate Australian who, after leaving Melbourne in 1978, moved to New York City following a brief stint in London. He has not visited Australia in the last twenty years and is now living in Brooklyn. There, in a converted warehouse loft space, he has built a studio/communications hub which serves as the nerve centre for the multiheaded beast which is Robotic Ants, his corporation. "Each facet has a different intention," Thirlwell states. "I guess Foetus is the primary thrust of what I do. Off on tangents there's Steroid Maximus, which is an instrumental project and also an opportunity to bring in collaborators. That's increasingly being influenced by DJ Otefsu. DJ Otefsu is probably the most no-brainer part of the franchise where I spin crime/spy/60s/70s/go-go type stuff for special occasions. Manorexia is the new thing that just started to spurt out."

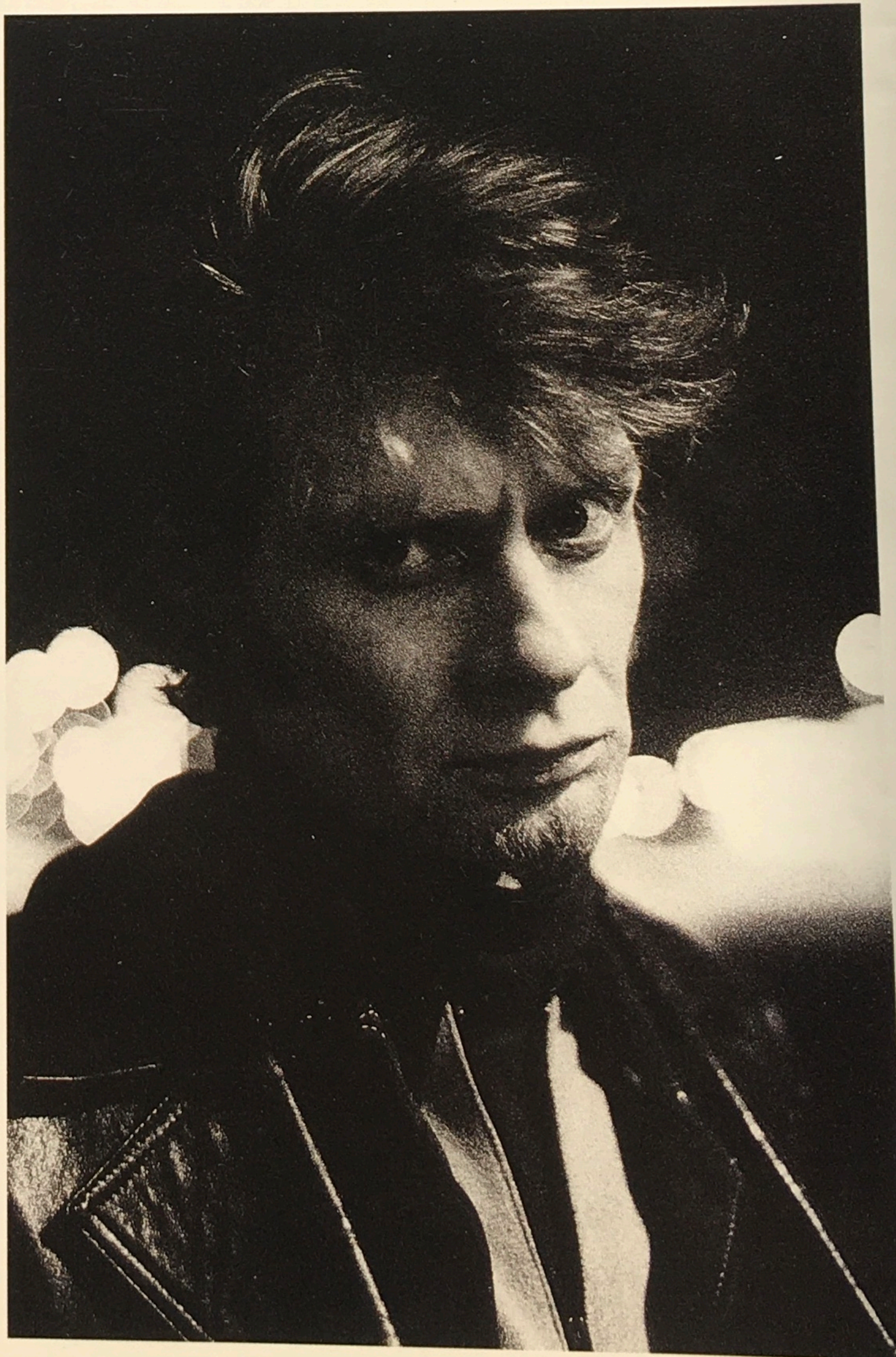
The new Foetus album, *Flow*, is due to be released in April. As with previous albums, Thirlwell is responsible for virtually every aspect of the project, from production to performance to sleeve design. "I think that all the Foetus albums are very different from each other. There's definitely a thread between the studio albums. They're very autobiographical. When I look back at each one there's some indomitable urge to somehow touch on the entire history of recorded music in the whole album at one point or another. The last of those albums was *Gash*, which came out on Columbia. I'd been making these statements with fierce albums which were sort of 'this is the last thing you listen to before they drop the big one', this apocalyptic 'kill your parents and then kill yourself'. It's kind of shattering, but at the same time immensely entertaining. But there's only so long you can make these end of the world statements. What are you going to say, 'And there's another thing I forgot to say last time we ended the world!?' You can hammer that to death. And the very title *Flow* connotes a continuum of ideas. This is one of a series rather than the idea of a finality."

In keeping with this concept of progression, *Flow* will be followed by a remix album, *Blow*, due for release in September. The contributors to *Blow*, including Amon Tobin, Kid 606, Pan Sonic, DJ Food and members of Nine Inch Nails and The Young Gods, are a further testament to Foetus' influence on experimental and industrial music. Thirlwell's exploration of continuum can also be seen in his latest guise, Manorexia. "For want of a better word, it started off as an ambitious project. It's actually a lot of movements that crossfade and develop or don't develop as the case may be. One sound might loop for a minute before something joins it. So the brain is led in, listening to every element of that sound, dissecting that sound, and just as they've assimilated it, something else moves in, something which might jar against it. It's very dark, but it's got a whole separate set of artistic criteria from Foetus. Manorexia is now a real chance to stretch out."

The recently completed Manorexia album, *Volvox Turbo*, will only be available through the official Foetus website. Thirlwell explains that the decision to keep *Volvox Turbo* off the record shop shelves is intended to preserve the project's integrity. "I sort of went though the ringer after *Gash*. What really should have been a positive time, given that I had the support of multinational Sony behind me, was actually the biggest fucking disaster. I fired a manager and started looking for another. I started putting out feelers in the music biz to get a sense of the lay of the land. As a result, I started working with another manager on a trial basis. That didn't work. I

kind of came to the conclusion that I'm just as connected, if not more, than either of those people and I'd just have to do it myself. The problem with this is that then you can concentrate on the business side of things at the expense of the art side. Sometimes it's difficult to keep that balance, especially when you're working on a song and fielding phone calls literally at the same time. It depends on which project I've got boiling at any one time, but after concentrating on the biz for about a year, I've realised that it's a total fucking waste of time. It's much better to just get moving on things. You could wait forever for the perfect setup or distribution deal, and it's just not there."

So Jim Thirlwell is obviously a man in control of his own enterprise. But is he happy? "I'm alive, that's for sure. If I'm going to be alive, I'd better fucking make the most of it. I try and be grateful for what I've got. It's hard to stop and smell the roses when you're a control freak megalomaniac. Sometimes I'll stop and I'll be positively euphoric and I'm like, 'Man, it's all come together', and then, poof, it's all gone. What happened? I do have those moments which you could call happy. Are they happy or are they just the other side of the manic depression? I don't know."



Photography RACHAEL CASSELLS