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"I DON'T MEAN TO IMPLY THAT YOU'RE A TYRANT."

The obnoxious drunk's barb was aimed right at Jim Thirlwell, the grandpappy of all things industrial, but a musical enigma himself.

"BUT I AM A TYRANT," THIRLWELL PROUDLY BOASTED.

He'll tell you he's a tyrant without hesitation, and those who have worked with him will swiftly concur; he'll even tell you he's Hitler. But, ironically, tyrant sounds too extreme. Perfectionist seems too banal. Perhaps visionary is a fitting term: a visionary with a tenacious grip on a myriad of convictions and abstracts. Throughout his career, Thirlwell has remained a Zelig-like figure in the public eye. Cited by Leonard Cohen in interviews, touted as extremely influential by Ministry's Al Jourgensen and Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor, he, like many other visionaries, has yet to receive the adulation and the cash he deserves. He wants to be a millionaire, and perhaps with the release of *Gash* (Columbia) and the upcoming EPs, *Null* and *Void*, 1995 will be the year of the Foetus and his dreams will be fulfilled. (One dream involves a two-night New York engagement in which Thirlwell, donning a Vegas-style sequined jacket, directs a 25-piece big band orchestra seated behind podiums adorned with the Japanese Foetus logo.)

THIRLWELL SEES HIS LIFE AS A WORK OF ART THAT HE PRESIDES over with a meticulous eye. A deeper understanding can be divined when exploring his Brooklyn loft. The conscientious order in which he keeps his enormous and diverse musical library and the painstaking care taken to juxtapose each bauble, trinket, dead animal and painting reflect the man within. "My loft is my best piece of art," he claims, but music is his central muse.

"TO ME, MUSIC IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF ART," HE SAYS. "IT'S EMOTIONALLY MOVING, BUT IT'S INTANGIBLE AT THE SAME TIME."

HIS FIRST ACCOUNTABLE CONSCIOUS THOUGHT INVOLVES MUSIC. A precocious three-year-old smitten by Viva, a girl with long, black hair down to her ass, he crooned "Viva Las Vegas" to her.

"I'VE BEEN IMPERSONATING ELVIS AND HITTING ON BABES FOR A long time," he claims. "My life has gone full circle. I may as well die."

THIRLWELL'S MUSIC IS KNOWN BY MANY NAMES — WISEBLOOD, Steroid Maximus, Foetus, among others. Keeping his projects well-ordered is a simple task: It's instinctive, he says. Each group has its own personality. Wiseblood, as the stark black, white and gray designs of its covers suggest, is blunt. Steroid Maximus is instrumental and collaborative. Foetus is the priority. It is autobiographical and deeply personal. Like his loft, it is another reflection of the man within.

AFTER A FLURRY OF RECORDED ACTIVITY IN THE 80'S, beginning with *Deaf*, which was funded by sick pay he received after a bout with glandular fever and a collapsed lung, and ending with *Thaw* (1988), his last studio album, Foetus was put on the back burner for a good portion of the 90's. Thirlwell kept himself busy with Steroid Maximus, Wiseblood, the *Mesomorph Enduros* compilation, a Clint Ruin and Lydia Lunch project, voice-overs for MTV Sports and a slew of production work. Remixing other people's work proved to be artistically crippling when Thirlwell decided to bring Foetus back to the fore.

"WHEN WRITING THIS ALBUM, I WROTE 50 FUCKING songs in various states of completion," he recalls. "The first 10 that I wrote were horrible. I didn't like them and I think I had almost been raped by rewriting

other people's songs — all those remixes and so on. Every time I wrote

a song, it would be this chunky type of [song] and that was horrible for my self-esteem. 'Oh God, I can't write a song. All I can do is rewrite other people's songs.' And then the dam broke and I wrote 'Mortgage.'"

IMAGINE THE WORLD'S LARGEST DAM BURSTING A FEW FEET IN front of you. Chunks of concrete fly at you from all angles with stunning velocity. Water that had been restrained from its natural flow spews forth in a violent gush. That is *Gash*, Foetus' long-awaited major-label debut. Multitiered, caustic compositions, full metal bravado, beats that swing mean, slow burns and glorious bursts of noise, sharp social satire, lyrical open sores — all congeal to compel the utterance of only one adjective: harsh.

"I'M NOT TRYING TO BE HARSH; THAT'S WHAT COMES OUT,"

Thirlwell claims. "I'm not trying to create something that is perceived by a third person. I'm creating for myself and then if other people like it, fine. It just so happens that that's what I'm putting across. It's an emotional expressway to hell, but it's real melodic."

THIRLWELL IS NOT ONLY HESITANT TO LISTEN TO HIS recent work, but also rather leery about listening to his earlier recordings. "Embarrassed as I am about my earlier work," he concedes, "I wouldn't have reached the conclusion that I have had I not done that." After some arm-twisting and browbeating, Thirlwell plays "Instead I Became Anemone," from *Ache* (1982), which brings to light a construct that lies at the heart of his songwriting talents: pop sensibility enveloped in a jarring and unnerving wrapper.

ASIDE FROM HIS MUSIC, PERHAPS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE

example of Thirlwell's million-points-of-light ethic is the upcoming video for "Verklemt," *Gash*'s first single. Directed by Alex Winter, the video is an epileptic fit of images of Thirlwell in varying states of angst at several New York City locales.

"HE NAILED MY PERSONALITY," THIRLWELL SAYS OF WINTER.

"I think the biggest triumph on that video was nailing my personality in terms of editing, and in that it's really intense. It really reminded me of me."

"THE POINT IS TO MAKE A POINT," HE SAYS SHORTLY AFTER JOKING that Foetus is pointless. "The point is to stay out of jail. That's basically the reason I do it: to keep out of jail." ★

