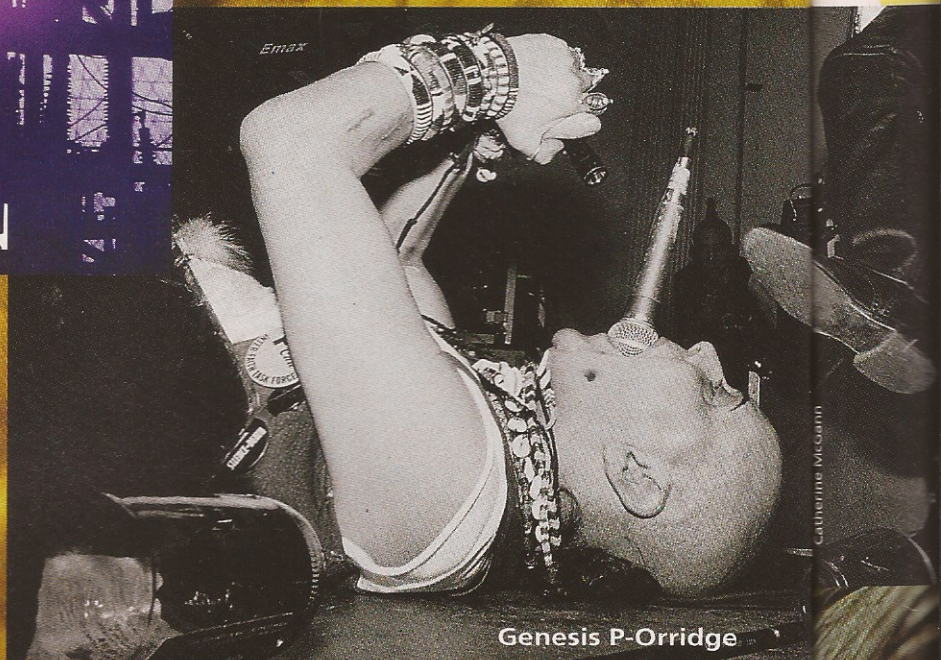


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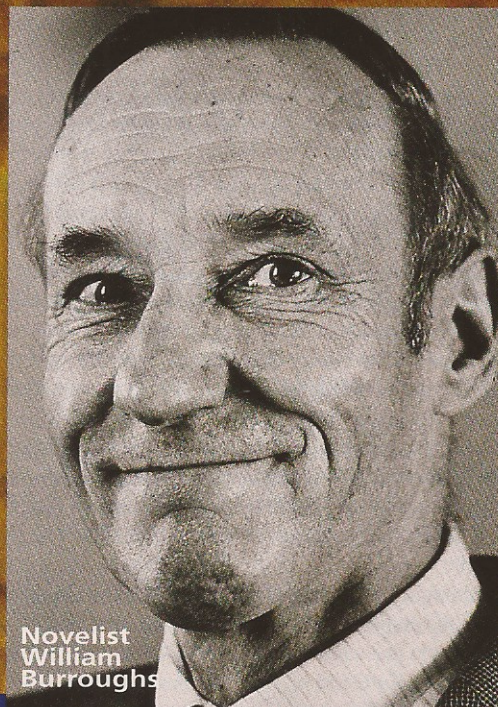
## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Long before Trent Reznor and Nine Inch Nails appeared on MTV, industrial music was played in the trenches by bands like Throbbing Gristle, Ministry and Skinny Puppy. Here is their story.

by Alan di Perna



Genesis P-Orridge



Novelist  
William  
Burroughs

Baron Wolman/Retna

Robin Fagan/Retna



# Rockhammer of the GODS

TRENT REZNOR IS the Elvis Presley of industrial. Just like the King, Reznor dyed his hair black, put on some tight, black leather pants and hit a deep, twisted nerve in America's pop psyche. And, just like Elvis, Nine Inch Nails' charismatic leader took an obscure, marginalized, wrong-side-of-the-tracks style of music and gave it mass appeal. Sex appeal. What Elvis Presley did for black American rhythm and blues, Trent Reznor has done for the 20-year-old, noisy, subversive style known as industrial music.

There's a long history behind Reznor's agonized bullhorn screams and NIN's violent, jerky rhythms, grainy samples and slashing guitars. Industrial is punk's dark, disturbed alter-ego. The two styles both stem from the same late-Seventies welter of social discontent and boredom with bad rock and roll. Industrial is easily the most extreme style the rock era has yet produced. Is it any wonder that an alienated kid from out in the boonfucks of Pennsylvania chose to make it his own?

"The only thing I find interesting about rock music today is a sense of danger," says Reznor. "Breaking rules, doing something that offends people, or at least smacks them in the face."

Where did industrial music first come from? Read on, as we trace industrial's journey from underground art music to the mass media voice of disaffected Nineties youth. Along the way, we'll track the growing importance of guitar in industrial music and hear not only from Reznor, but also from Ministry's Al Jourgensen, Jim "Foetus" Thirlwell, and members of Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, KMFDM, Nitzer Ebb and Skinny Puppy. Some of these artists will already be familiar to you, others won't—but they're all coming through a maxed-out, chronically overmodulated distortion circuit, demanding your attention, compelling you to read big words and like 'em...



Catherine McGinn



Blixa Bargelde of  
Einstürzende Neubauten



Cabaret Voltaire

Colin Bell/Retna

Baron Wolman/Retna

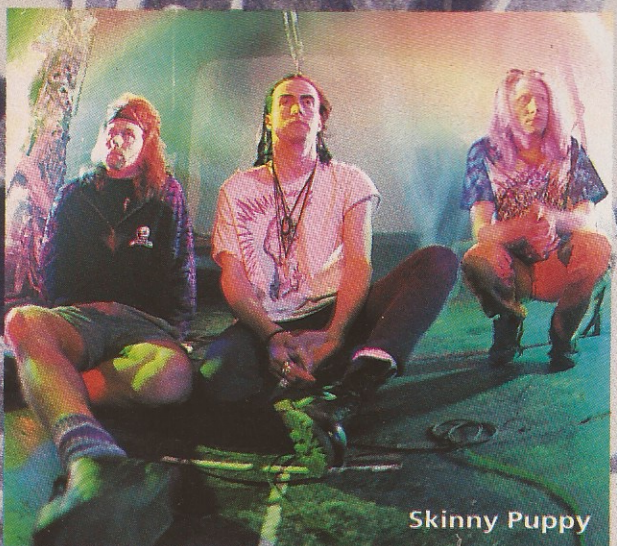
Robin Francis/Retna



# INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



Foetus's Jim Thirlwell



Skinny Puppy

## PHASE 1 (1975-81): COUNTERMANDING THE ORDERS OF SOCIETY

The term and concept "industrial music" was invented in 1975, in a place called the Death Factory, by a man called Genesis P-Orridge. The Death Factory was a basement in Hackney, a squalid, working-class district in London. It was called the Death Factory because beneath the nice, green park that stands adjacent to the basement there is a mass grave pit used to bury bodies during the bubonic plague of the 17th century. No one

is quite sure why the man is called Genesis P-Orridge. But in 1975 he was an ex-hippie, a performance artist and all-around counter-culture troublemaker who was about to become the leader of Throbbing Gristle. With all those decayed, potentially still-infectious corpses just on the other side of his wall, Genesis was searching for a way to reflect his surroundings through music.

"What is this music that has become rock and roll?" he recalls asking himself. "Basically, it is post-African slave music—blues and jazz. But now we need a new kind of music, because we're in a new kind of society, an industrialized, Western, primarily white culture. And we're displaced as well. Now *we're* the slaves. Only now, here in London, the slaves no longer work in cotton fields. They work in scrapyards and factories with conveyor belts, just doing repetitive, noisy jobs with the frequencies of all these machines and technology around them."

P-Orridge had been searching for a name for this new kind of music. He'd discuss the idea for hours on end with his friend, the artist Monte Cazzaza. "I'd go on and on about how we're in this industrial place, this industrial area," Genesis recalls. "One day Monte just said to me, 'Gen, you're *saying* it. It's industrial music!'"

Industrial music began with two English groups: Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire. In this segment, we will have much to say about Throbbing Gristle; not only did P-Orridge coin the term industrial music, but it was his band that put out the first-ever industrial record (1978's *Second Annual Report*). What's more, Throbbing Gristle's cathartic, chaotic live performances took the genre to far greater extremes than any subsequent practitioners ever dared to.

**"I make up my own tunings as I go along—  
I do 'em by ear—and play barre chords. That's  
music sounds like Gary Glitter from Hell."**

These days, P-Orridge lives in a remote part of Northern California and leads the chameleonic group Psychic TV. Very much the grand patriarch of the industrial scene, he has performed with Martin Atkins's "industrial supergroup" Pigface and is currently working on a record with his good friend Ogre Nivek of Skinny Puppy. He's a surprisingly cheerful, rational man who speaks in the chirpy tones of his native Manchester—not at all the psychopathic crazy or sourpussed ideologue one might expect from his work.

Gen, as everybody seems to call him, was still in his hippie phase when, at a 1969 acid test, he met a pretty, dark-haired, 16-year-old English girl who'd recently left home. The world would later know her as Cosey Fanni Tutti, Throbbing Gristle's guitarist. Gen and Cosey lived as lovers, artistic collaborators and co-conspirators in a variety of communes. They got involved in street theater and started a performance art troupe called COUM Transmissions. Their performances were free-form events that included self-laceration, urine drinking, masturbation, copulation . . . the works. P-Orridge would routinely do things like insert a hypodermic needle into his scrotum and extract syringes full of blood, which he'd then reinject into his arm.

Explains Gen: "A lot of the performance art we did was about deprogramming our own social conditioning—our personal conditioning about



sexual taboos and different ways of perceiving oneself."

By the mid-Seventies, P-Orridge felt he'd achieved his goals with performance art and turned his attention to what he termed "the larger target": the mass media and, in particular, popular culture. Being a child of the radical Sixties, I was—and still am—an idealist about wanting to liberate young minds from the feeling that they are not able to achieve and express everything they feel inside. In other words, countermanding the orders of society. So that led to choosing either television or popular music. Popular music seemed the best medium for us to work with, because it was the most accessible to the most rebellious and innately radical young people."

While Genesis gave up performance art after the birth of TG, Cosey went on to blur the line between performance art and "legitimate" porn by working as a stripper, nude model and adult film actress. Simultaneously, she became Throbbing Gristle's guitarist and cornetist. She'd had no prior experience on either instrument.

"I can't play chords and I don't want to learn," she said in an early interview in the American skin mag *Partner*. "I walked into [guitar playing] blind, so I can get sounds out of it that someone who plays it normally could not. Our guitars aren't normal rock guitars. They've been treated with different effects. I use a Heil Talk Box, wah wah, phaser . . . and we have a small electric box that [TG synthesist] Chris [Carter] made for me, which we call the 'Gristle-izer.'"

In forming Throbbing Gristle, Gen and Cosey were joined by Carter, a synthesist and all-around gadget head who built his own synths and much of the equipment TG used, including their P.A. He put new pickups and hardware on Cosey's cheapie Satellite guitar. When she complained of the instrument's weight, Chris and Gen sawed the body wings off, thus fashioning a crude precursor of the Steinberger guitar. The fourth member of the group was Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson, a successful graphic artist, soon to be a partner in the album design firm Hipgnosis. Among his other distinctions, Sleazy is the creator of Pink Floyd's huge inflatable pig. (Much later, he would direct videos for Nine Inch Nails. His current group, Coil, are now on Trent Reznor's Nothing record label.) Christopherson's role in TG was to mix the sound and spin taped dialogue and other "found" audio sources into the mix.

used a Morley Fuzz Wah so I could get really high, strange shrieks and notes on the top strings. Usually, I'd play with a leather glove on my hand to pluck the strings. I liked the sound better that way. But if I was excited, I'd take the glove off, 'cause I liked to see the blood shoot everywhere when I got carried away."

Throbbing Gristle were greatly influenced by the Cut Up theories of novelist William S. Burroughs and poet Brion Gysin. Burroughs would take a text he'd written and literally cut the pages up into little pieces. The pieces would then be re-assembled randomly. This technique enabled the writer to create the druggy, disoriented, yet perversely logical world of novels like *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs applied the same concept to audio recordings of conversations, television broadcasts and such. So, strangely enough, it was a novelist who gave modern pop one of its main stylistic signatures (and now, alas, biggest clichés), the sampled dialogue snippet.

An examination of Throbbing Gristle's four studio albums and innumerable live tapes reveals all the stylistic hallmarks of what people today think of as industrial music: menacing textural noise; "disembodied" dialogue snippets; vocals processed through guitar effects; and shocking, deliberately "distasteful" lyrical and graphic images—pornography, war atrocities, medical documentation of extreme mutilation cases. In the case of TG, this was clearly an outgrowth of Gen and Cosey's performance art work. The intent wasn't to titillate or make adolescent morons go "huh, huh—cool," but to reinvest those images with the horror that the mass media had taken away from them by mind-numbing repetition on nightly news broadcasts. "If the media can use these images for their ends," Gen demands, "why can't artists?"

Throbbing Gristle's music isn't always easy to listen to, intentionally so. There's often no beat, no aural "hooks" to catch the ear, but just a troubled sea of corrosive textures. P-Orridge's lugubrious, heavily processed moaning can be quite irritating. In short, TG achieved what punk only said it wanted to do: they created a music that was completely unrelated to Seventies arena rock clichés—an abrasive wake-up call to the butt end of the twentieth century.

Punk and industrial grew up side by side in late-Seventies London, and the two scenes often intersected. For example, it was P-Orridge who chose the members of the punk group Chelsea, including Billy Idol and

## why I sometimes think my —Jim Thirlwell

Although P-Orridge was proficient on drums (his father had been a big band drummer), he became TG's bassist, vocalist and occasional violinist. He explains that none of the group's string instruments were tuned or played conventionally: "Our basic theory was that you should approach any instrument the way a child does. I played bass in TG because it was the thing I was least qualified to do. Cosey played lead guitar because it was initially the instrument she was least attracted to. Chris was the only person who worked with technology he actually liked. We all had Roland Space Echos and WEM Copycats and the Gristle-izers Chris built, which were simple analog filter envelope controls. We had those on instruments and vocals. And on my bass guitar, I always



Trent Reznor—Nine Inch Nails



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Al Jourgensen of Ministry

guitarist Tony James (later of Sique Sique Sputnik and Sisters Of Mercy). This was done as a favor to Gen's friend John Krivine, who ran the Boy shop on London's King's Road and wanted to assemble a punk band to rival the Sex Pistols, which Malcolm McLaren had assembled to advertise his own shop, Sex. Peter Christopherson was one of the first photographers to do band shots of the Pistols. Sleazy posed them in bondage gear that included handcuffs and strait jackets. According to Genesis, McLaren rejected the photos as being "too extreme."

"That was the difference between punk and industrial," Gen laughs. "That really summed it up. They thought we were too heavy, too shocking. They were literally scared of what we were doing. When Siouxsie, before she had the band the Banshees, went to see the first Throbbing Gristle gig, she was warned by Billy Idol, 'You gotta be really careful of that Genesis. He's crazy. I heard he's gonna hang himself with a piano wire on stage.' They'd heard these tales of performance art strangeness, and were scared of it. They were only kids from the suburbs, you know."

Cabaret Voltaire, the other important early industrial band, weren't from the suburbs. They hailed from Sheffield, a factory city in northern England. The group began very casually, just three friends—Richard H. Kirk, Stephen Mallinder and Chris Watson—experimenting with tape recorders in Watson's loft. Kirk, Mallinder and Watson took a lot of inspiration from Dada, the early-twentieth-century art movement that sought to destroy every received notion that had come down through millennia of Western art history. (Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart had earlier taken a big cue from Dada.) The Cabs named themselves after the club set up by the Dadaists in Zurich.

Kirk, Mallinder and Watson experimented with tape machines and very basic synth gear as early as 1973; their first public performance was in '75. If Throbbing Gristle can be credited with giving industrial music its abrasive texture and confrontational stance, then Cabaret Voltaire must be credited with pioneering the music's propulsive "machine" rhythms. At first, rhythms were created by regularly repeating tape loops and banging on metal objects. Later, primitive drum machines entered the picture, not to mention more synths. Cabaret Voltaire's instrumentation grew as the group evolved. Mallinder got a bass. Watson adopted an old Vox Continental combo organ. Kirk bought a clarinet and then a cheap guitar.

When Throbbing Gristle's first album came out in 1978, Cabaret Voltaire promptly wrote to them, sending tapes and expressions of joy at finding someone else working in a similar musical vein. P-Orridge released some of Cabaret Voltaire's material on cassette, on TG's own Industrial label. But the Cabs' proper debut was their 1978 *Extended Play* EP, on the then brand-new Rough Trade label. It was followed in '79 by *Mix Up*, a pulsing, mesmerizing collage of fascinating sounds, which to this day stands tall as one of industrial music's premier albums. Cabaret Voltaire made their own films, which were used as part of their live performances. They are the progenitors of industrial's jerky, "psychosis-inducing" audio-visual style, where fragmented images and truncated sound shards fly at the spectator from every direction. No sound or image lasts long enough to be recognized, thus creating a disoriented, out-of-body kind of experience. Today's virtual-reality, cyber-acid-trip vibe owes a huge debt to the Cabaret Voltaire. Sci-fi novelists like Phillip K. Dick—of whom the Cabs were huge fans—imagined and described "cyberspace." Cabaret Voltaire created it.

And that's just part of their contribution. The Cabs' 1980 *Three Mantras* was



one of the first records to place “samples” of Arabic music (everything was still tape-based then) in an electro-industrial setting. On 1981’s *Red Mecca*, Cabaret Voltaire drew from the score to the Orson Welles film *A Touch Of Evil*, thus pioneering that “film noir menace” mood—blaring Fifties trumpets and “savage” bongos—that everyone from Foetus to My Life With The Thrill Kill Cult would later exploit to good, if campy, effect.

With the emergence of TG and Cabaret Voltaire, a full-on industrial scene began to flourish. Kindred post-punk rock groups like Clock DVA and 23 Skidoo entered the picture. Mute Records founder Daniel Miller (whose label would become a bastion of synth pop and home to groups like Depeche Mode and Fad Gadget) issued several stark, industrial-sounding records under the name The Normal. His collaborations with Robert Rental were highly influential, and The Normal’s “Warm Leatherette” later became an underground club anthem when it was recorded by Grace Jones.

But just as industrial was coalescing into a style—one that embraced not only music and film but also fashion, architecture and design—Genesis P-Orridge decided that the whole thing had become a bit too formulaic. In 1981, he dissolved Throbbing Gristle: He and Christopherson went on to form the first incarnation of the band Psychic TV. Later on, Christopherson split off and formed Coil. Meanwhile, Chris and Cosy became a couple, had a son and veered off in an electronic dance direction, developing the melodic side that had been present even in their work with Throbbing Gristle. Cabaret Voltaire, meanwhile, would go on to work in a similarly danceable vein throughout the Eighties. (Chris Watson left the group in ’81.) Their music, while always competent and frequently quite impressive, gradually lost the experimental edge of its early days. For many of industrial music’s original fans, Throbbing Gristle’s auto-destruct and Cabaret Voltaire’s long, slow fizzle seemed to confirm that 1981 marked the end of an era.

## PHASE 2 (the early Eighties): HEAVY MACHINERY

But if one chapter had ended, another was just beginning. Germany’s Einstürzende Neubauten released their first album, *Kollaps*, in 1982. Einstürzende Neubauten (the name means “collapsing new buildings”) took the term “industrial music” literally. Their instrumentation included jackhammers, cement mixers, welding torches and other heavy tools, used in conjunction with regular rock instruments. Frontman

They made each performance an act of terrorism.

These pyromaniacal Berliners spearheaded a new noise scene that grew to prominence in the early Eighties and included such groups as England’s Whitehouse and Test Department, and Germany’s D.A.F. (Deutsche Amerikanische Freundschaft, or German American Friendship) and Die Krupps. Australia’s S.P.K. joined the fray with a Gristle-esque blend of strident noise and emergency-ward shock imagery. (Warning: Test Department, D.A.F. and S.P.K. all later went in a more accessible, dance-oriented direction. So if you’re only looking for the noisier stuff, you’d best confine yourself to their earliest records.)

A different, and no less important, aspect of industrial’s second wave is represented by the obsessive, intense person known as Jim Thirlwell, a.k.a. Foetus Under Glass, You’ve Got Foetus On Your Breath, Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel, Foetus All Nude Revue, Foetus Art Terrorism, etc. An Australian by birth, Thirlwell moved to London in 1978. He’s an important link between the first and second waves of industrial music (although he loathes the i-word and denies any association with it.) As a clerk at the Virgin Records shop on London’s Oxford Street, he organized an in-store record signing for Throbbing Gristle’s 1979 *Heathen Earth* album. (In the process, he became friendly with Peter Christopherson and would later produce Coil.) He was also influential in getting Einstürzende Neubauten’s music released in England and in bringing the group over there to play, a pivotal move in introducing them to the world at large.

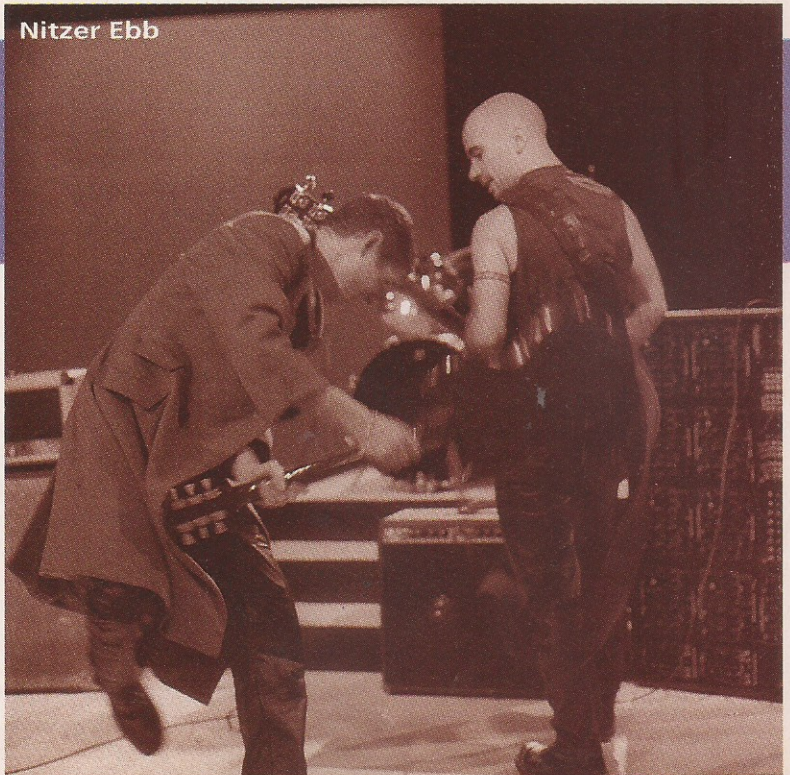
But Thirlwell’s most remarkable achievement is his own music. The early Foetus records—*Deaf* (Self Immolation/ Ze/ PVC, 1981), *Ache* (Self Immolation/ Ze/ PVC, 1982) and the brilliant *Hole* (Self Immolation/ Ze/ PVC, 1984)—were a complete revelation because they were so incredibly tight. Thirlwell eschewed the free-form chaos of earlier industrial music, and showed how those same abrasive textures could be put to good use in violently concise, psychopathically focused and virulently nasty songs. He also introduced an element of disturbed humor into the picture. The Foetus “persona”—wisecracking sociopath, abusive serial killer, ugly homicidal bully—had an immense influence on later industrial artists, and on pop culture in general. Listening to the playback of one of his vocals for the new Foetus album, *Gash* (Columbia), Thirlwell remarks, “Man, I don’t ever want to meet *that* guy!”

No matter what permutation of the Foetus name appears on the early

**Nitzer Ebb and Skinny Puppy became two of the first industrial acts to sign with major labels. Together, they presented a more “palatable,” marketable brand of industrial music in the mid-Eighties.**

Blixa Bargeld (now Nick Cave’s guitarist) was a major Trent Reznor precursor—a tortured, good-looking boy in black leather, clawing at his skinny, bare torso as he explored the idea of “temper tantrum as performance.” On stage, Bargeld would pummel his black Strat and yowl like a hellhound while bassist Mark Chung gave new meaning to the words “slide guitar” by rubbing his bass strings along a hefty length of concrete sewer pipe. The air at a Neubauten gig was always heavy with exhaust fumes. In 1983, I watched them methodically spread gasoline all over the stage of an old Los Angeles theater and set fire to the age-dried planks. Out in the audience, stupefied disbelief gave way to utter panic as flames licked perilously close to the frayed stage curtains; they were extinguished just in the nick of time. There’s an old saying that one should never yell “fire” in a crowded theater. Einstürzende Neubauten didn’t yell, they started fires.

Nitzer Ebb





## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



KMFDM

records, all the instruments were played by Thirlwell himself. After an earlier, dissatisfying band experience, Thirlwell decided that solo was the best way to go. Originally a bassist (with some childhood training on cello and drums), he seems to have no problem picking up whatever instrument he deems necessary for a record: "A lot of people seem to think that it's all samples or sequences on *Hole* and *Nail* [*Self Immolation/Some Bizarre/Homestead*, 1985]," he says. "But all the drums were played live, all the guitars were live, and so on."

There's never been any doubt that Mr. Jim can rock. But he had some arty influences as well: "On my early stuff, especially compositionally, there are some experiments which are definitely a rip-off of [avant garde composer] John Cage and his numerical systems. Like on every seventeenth beat, there would be something like a hit on a vacuum cleaner tube. And maybe every ninth beat there's something else. So things were not parallel the whole time."

Much of Thirlwell's guitar inspiration comes from a less refined source: Seventies English glam rocker Gary Glitter and his Glitter Band. In his pre-Foetal days, Thirlwell got to play on a record that was engineered by a former member of the Glitter Band. "I was a big Gary Glitter fan, so I pumped him for all the Gary Glitter secrets—how they got their sounds and stuff. What they did was tune all the strings to octaves and play them with slides. I started doing a similar thing myself. I make up my own tunings as I go along—I do 'em by ear—and play barre chords. That's why I sometimes think my music sounds like Gary Glitter from Hell."

Like many of his industrial predecessors, Thirlwell also became extremely adept at tape manipulation: "The way I look at it, I was using sampling before sampling technology existed," he says. "I would do it with tape loops and pause buttons on a cassette machine and stuff like that. So when sampling technology became accessible, it was what I'd been doing all along anyway. Now it just became easier."

These days, Thirlwell (who shifted his operations to Brooklyn, New York, in 1983) has evolved to the point where he combines all these techniques to make records of stupefying sonic clout. His remixes for bands like Nine Inch Nails, Front 242, Pantera, White Zombie, Ethyl Meatplow, Prong, Megadeth and others have made him a highly sought-after audio makeover artist. His own new record, *Gash*, includes the thrashy tour de force "Verklemmt," which combines sampled guitars, Thirlwell churning away on his open-tuned Fender Squier, and some frenetic wah leads by underground virtuoso Marc Ribot that were lifted from another track, varisped on an analog tape machine and then fed through a harmonizer to match the song's key. This kind of intensive sonic sculpting—and the grainy, sawtooth textures that it creates—has come to be a major hallmark of industrial music. It's some of the rawest stuff around, but, paradoxically, also the most obsessively crafted.

### PHASE 3 (MID-EIGHTIES): DANCE FLOOR TRANSITIONS

Like most styles of music, including rap and punk, industrial music has gone through a few slumps—periods when it looked like the style would peter out for keeps. For industrial, the first of these low points came circa 1983-84, after the initial impact of the noise bands like Neubauten had begun to wear off. Isolated individuals like Thirlwell and the Cabs were still doing good work, but the scene seemed to have lost its drive. Two groups that started up at that time, Nitzer Ebb and Skinny Puppy, would later find their niches in the industrial pantheon. But at the time, it seemed as though they'd missed the boat.

"We were making records for 1984, but nobody wanted to know," Nitzer Ebb's Bon Harris told me in a 1990 interview. "I mean, the press didn't want to know.



I remember a review saying that we were two years too late with what we were doing. It wasn't trendy anymore, but we were still well into it. Part of it is that we were so young—just teenagers when we started. In actuality, there were a lot of things we were probably two years too early with. That became clear with the rise of acid house and house music later on."

In popular music, it often pays to be a little behind the curve, which is what happened in this case. Nitzer Ebb and Skinny Puppy became two of the first industrial acts to sign with major labels (Geffen and Capitol, respectively). Together, they presented a more "palatable," marketable brand of industrial music in the mid-Eighties—which is not to detract from them. Their music is generally competent, and their intent is quite sincere.

Like Nitzer Ebb, Skinny Puppy formed in 1983, influenced by earlier industrial sounds that had made their way to the band's native Canada via an underground tape exchange network. "There was a lot of tape exchanging going on in Canada," says Skinny Puppy's Nivek Ogre. "For us, it was all a reaction against where [rock] music was going at the time—what would eventually become bands like Mötley Crüe and things like that. Through a bunch of people, we got into noise—using noise in a rhythmic fashion. It became such an experience for us that it was hard to listen to other music without laughing. The whole thing was begun by people like Genesis P-Orridge and his label, which included a lot of things like Thomas Leer and Robert Rental, who influenced us very much. Then I worked with a woman who was an art historian, and we were able to bring both Neubauten and Test Department to Vancouver for a big expo called Transportation Mutations. So I got to hang around with those groups and see where they were coming from."

Skinny Puppy's early recordings are heavily indebted to the "drone and moan" style that sprang up in the wake of Genesis P-Orridge and TG. But they brought a distinctly North American adolescent male perspective to the industrial genre. Earlier industrial groups wouldn't have thought of Mötley Crüe as something to react against; that sort of thing simply wasn't part of their universe. Skinny Puppy's samples were drawn heavily from *Nightmare On Elm Street*-era suburban horror movies. Their lyrics—and even their name—had a sophomoric quality that seemed calculated to give the willies to pubescent boys from Des Moines. All this proved to be just what the doctor ordered. Skinny Puppy's recordings for the Canadian indie Nettwerk were picked up by Capitol in the mid-Eighties.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, industrial was moving in a different, unabashedly dance-oriented direction, largely spearheaded by Belgian groups like Front 242, whose records came out on the Play It Again Sam label. In a sense, these artists just maximized the rhythmic drive that Cabaret Voltaire had injected into industrial music back in the Seventies. The churning, sex-machine sequences and relentless quarter-note kick beats of these new industrial records had much in common with other mid-Eighties electronic dance styles. But the harsh textures, distorted vocals and ironically sculpted samples held the soundscape firmly in industrial terrain.

Germany's KMFDM was another important group to emerge during

this period. Group founder Sascha Konietzko started out doing performance art. (His first show used only vacuum cleaners as instruments.) But he soon found himself reacting against it. "We did all that stuff: covering yourself in flour and blood, shooting at TV sets, setting fire to stages—it all got really boring," he sighs. When Sascha teamed up with tall, quirky guitarist En Esch, the duo formed the nucleus for what would become KMFDM.

"Actually, when KMFDM started, we were pretty repelled by bands like Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire, that whole structureless, depressive overall mood," Sascha explains. "We wanted to do something that was a counterpoint to all of that. We wanted to do dance music and we wanted it to be a bit Zappa-esque. We wanted to have songs. We happen to be song structure fanatics—intros, bridges, verses, choruses—and took more of a poppy approach, without trying to do pop music."

KMFDM's 1986 debut album, *What Do You Know, Deutschland?* (Wax Trax), was followed in 1988 by their dance floor breakthrough single and LP, *Don't Blow Your Top* (Wax Trax). Bands like KMFDM might never have been heard in America had it not been for an enterprising Chicago label called Wax Trax, which set up distribution deals with Play It Again Sam and other European industrial labels. In the mid-to-late Eighties, Wax Trax became The Voice Of Industrial Music in America. The label also cultivated domestic talent—most notably an

excitable young man named Al (Alain, Alien) Jourgensen, leader, director and guiding sicko of the band they call Ministry.

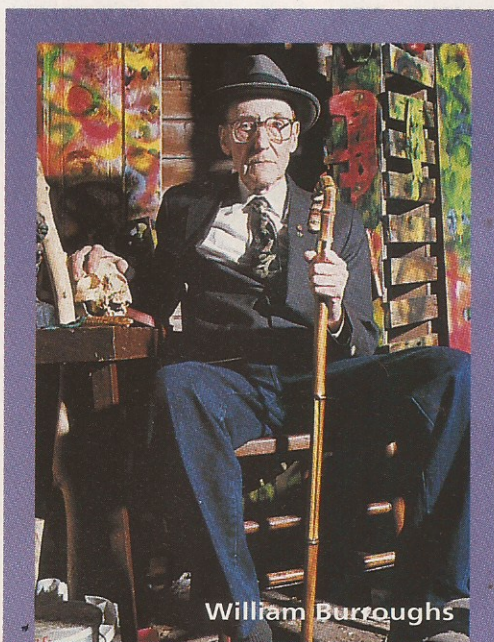
Ministry's debut EP, 1983's *Cold Life* (Wax Trax), has become a lifelong embarrassment to Jourgensen. The record is a tepid, if competent, effort to ape the kind of melodic British electro-pop that was popular on the early Eighties alternative music scene. But shortly afterwards, Jourgensen began to find the style for which he is today so justly famous. He really hit his stride on 1986's *Twitch*, Ministry's first album for Sire. Aptly named, the record is a lurching, jerking orgy of highly sculpted white noise and primal scream therapy. Jourgensen proved himself a major new talent, an industrial "auteur" in the Foetus vein: a monolithic, angry, total studio obsessive. When I interviewed him in 1988, Jourgensen likened his approach to "killing an ant with a sledgehammer."

Jourgensen's notorious work habits also did much to establish what has become another standard feature of the industrial scene life: rampant collaboration, a loose, communal atmosphere in which

members of different groups can get together on side projects. A virtual who's who of industrial began joining Al and his "partner in grime" Paul Barker in the studio for intoxicated, all-night recording parties. The results began coming out under a bizarre series of monikers: the Revolting Cocks (whose line-up, at various times, included Trent Reznor, Ogre and members of Front 242); 1,000 Homo DJ's (with Reznor); Acid Horse (with Cabaret Voltaire); Lard (with the Dead Kennedy's Jello Biafra); and Pailhead (with Fugazi's Ian MacKaye). As Jourgensen said in 1988, "Whoever's drunk-est gets on the drums."

Collaboration fever spread throughout the industrial camp. KMFDM's Sascha and My Life With The Thrill Kill Cult's Buzz McCoy teamed up to form Excessive Force.

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**...strangely enough, it was a novelist who gave modern pop one of its main stylistic signatures...**



# INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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Cyberactif was a Frontline Assembly/Skinny Puppy collaboration. This collective vibe has given the industrial scene a remarkable sense of cohesiveness, making it possible for founding fathers like Peter Christopherson and P-Orridge to work with relative newcomers like Trent Reznor and Skinny Puppy, respectively.

Between Jourgensen's endless spinoff groups and Wax Trax' growing pan-European roster, the label assembled a prodigious industrial catalog that included Meat Beat Manifesto, Greater Than One, Controlled Bleeding, Mussolini Headkick, Pankow, Sister Machine Gun, Pig, Chris Conelley and others. The recently released *Wax Trax Black Box* retrospective is highly recommended for those who don't own the original vinyl releases by these bands and want to catch up. But in the end, all that industrial Wax proved to be a little too much of a good thing. By the late Eighties, a generic "Wax Trax Sound" had become all too recognizable. For a while there, it seemed like anyone who could figure out how to program 16th notes into a sequencer and plug a microphone into a fuzztone could put out an industrial record. (A similar phenomenon took place when techno hit big a few years later.) As a result, something of a Wax Trax backlash set in and the label went bankrupt in 1992. (It has since been purchased and resuscitated by TWT Records.) As the Nineties approached, industrial music had fallen into one of its periodic slumps. But rescue, in an unlikely form, was on the way.

## PHASE FOUR (Late Eighties to The Present): INDUSTRIAL GOES HEAVY METAL

As we've seen, the guitar was a component of industrial music right from the start. But the unapologetic use of heavy metal guitar riffs on industrial records dates from the second half of the Eighties. The two prime movers in this development were KMFDM and Ministry.

"[KMFDM's] infatuation with ripping off metal licks started in '87 or so," says Sascha. "Or maybe even as early as the winter of '86, when I bought my first Emax and started going nuts sampling things." Sascha adds that he was never a heavy metal fan. "It was just interesting to use it as a kind of white noise reinforcement for our music. All of a sudden, heavy metal was free from all those tempo changes and boring attitudes it always had. What I always hated most about heavy metal was that the best riffs came only once and were never repeated. So the fascination, actually, was to sample a great riff, loop it, and play it over and over again. Of course, the samples were often taken from bad cassettes. They were noisy, weird and out of time. But we stumbled

on this guy, Svet Am [a.k.a. Gunter Schulz] who could actually play all that shit." (A third guitarist, Mark Durante, was added in 1990, after KMFDM relocated to America.)

KMFDM's combination of sampled and live heavy rock guitars has proven an interesting one. The big, loud axe quotient became increasingly dominant in KMFDM mixes and burst into the foreground on 1993's *Angst*, which features such brilliant self-parodying tracks as "Sucks" and "A Drug Against War." The band's latest, *Nihil* [Wax Trax/TVT] shows that they have no intention of turning down their Marshall stacks in the near future.

To many old-guard industrial fans, of course, heavy metal guitar is far more repulsive than even the most graphic surgical mutilation footage. But then, industrial music was never supposed to be easy to listen to—it's meant to challenge preconceived notions about music and culture. The unlikely marriage of industrial and metal has been a refreshing poke with a sharp stick in the eye of the elitism of the earlier industrial scene. On the other hand, nothing sells records to middle America like those big ol' blazin' guitars. So by the early Nineties, industrial was poised to go mass market in a king-sized way.

It seems that none of this was lost on Al Jourgensen. Originally a guitar player, he found it very liberating to return to his first love on Ministry's 1988 LP, *The Land of Rape and Honey*. "Rediscovering the guitar was almost like the first day I got my Fairlight [computer musical instrument]," Jourgensen told me in 1988. "I hadn't really touched a guitar in five years. But when I heard that first feedback come out of the Marshall stack, I almost came! All of a sudden there was a whole new parameter for me within guitar playing itself—especially in combination with other sounds that you can get out of a keyboard. For example, no one had ever used sequencers to do thrash. It occurred to me that that's dumb, because you have all these drummers that love thrash music but can't play fast enough. It's not humanly possible to keep it up. So guitars and sequencers just seemed a natural combination."

The rip-roaring riffs—and Ministry's popularity—continued to escalate with 1989's *The Mind Is a Terrible Thing To Taste*. Shortly after that, Jourgensen went out and hired a real, live actual death metal guitarist, Mike Scaccia, formerly of Rigor Mortis. "Al was basically a fan of Rigor Mortis' music, which really surprised me," Scaccia marveled at the time.

Returning to guitar seemed to exorcise a new persona from Jourgensen's twisted psyche. Maybe it was in atonement for impersonating an Englishman on his first record, but he now took to appearing onstage as a yee haw, shit-kickin' biker just sprung from prison by some grievous clerical error. The kids went berserk. Ministry took to playing behind a chain link

fence. The whole thing coincided with the late-Eighties/early-Nineties re-legitimization of heavy metal by bands like Jane's Addiction, Soundgarden and Pearl Jam. Suddenly, heavy metal wasn't just for witless stoners anymore. It was *alternative*. And turnabout was fair play. If you could add some metal flavors to industrial, why not add a taste of industrial to thrash metal? That's exactly what acts like Prong, Godflesh and Stabbing Westward began to do.

No matter how the old guard feels about this rapid march of events, these developments have created a climate in which all sorts of guitar styles are once again admissible in industrial music. The new Psychic TV album, *Trip Reset*, will include the work of the blues-influenced guitarist Mike Campagna. And, after years of pursuing a percussion-and-computer-based approach, Nitzer Ebb have taken up guitar and bass on their newest album, *Big Hit*.

It was during these years of transition that Nine Inch Nails had their meteoric rise. Distorted guitars figured into the electronic mix on their debut, *Pretty Hate Machine* (TVT), but Reznor's approach became even more raw on his second opus, *Broken*. There are even more strident moments on NIN's latest, *The Downward Spiral*, but there are also passages that have the menacing calm of a whispered threat. Protean axe-bender Adrian Belew contributes some textures that defy categorization, which seems to suit Trent Reznor's artistic agenda just fine. As a songwriter and performer, he has always been too mercurial, too eclectic to ally himself with one musical tag—whether it's industrial, metal or otherwise. Ask him about influences, and he'll mention anyone from Prince to Coil, De La Soul to Kiss. Which accounts for the emotional range of *The Downward Spiral*.

"I wanted to make an album that went in 10 different directions but was somehow united," says Reznor. "I didn't want to box NIN into a corner where everything had to be faster and harder than the last one and 'look how tough we are.' I don't think that's really me. There are aspects of that in me. But lots of times I'll come up with musical ideas that don't fit that mold. I don't want to be pigeonholed. So I made a conscious effort to explore different things on the record. I was more concerned with mood, restraint and subtlety than getting punched in the face 400 times."

If industrial music must have an Elvis, it's good to have one who strives to avoid formulas and clichés, be they heavily quantized synth bass sequences or recycled Slayer riffs. Besides, you gotta love a guy who can make an industrial-pop hook out of the line, "I want to fuck you like an animal." The first Elvis never could have gotten away with that.

*Thanks to my brother, Jeff, for research assistance, and for being there when the sparks really flew.—A.d.P.*