

CONCLUSION:

Sounding a Warning to the Future

It's certainly not a music style which expresses a fluffy happy-ending mood. I see it as standing for a bleak, disillusioned vision of not only the future, but in a more subtle sense of the state of current affairs [Mark].

8.0 General Summary

This thesis set out to explore industrial music, and, in doing so, explore approaches to the study of genre. My primary aim was to provide the first comprehensive overview of industrial music. My secondary aims were to determine, by approaching my primary aim in various ways, what we might learn about popular music genres and the methodologies used to study them. I would like to explore how those aims were reached, what conclusions can be drawn, and what questions have been raised by the results.

In Chapter One I explored industrial's musical-structural and lyrical parameters. In discovering what the structural rules of the genre were, there were several important findings. It was revealed that fans did not appear to place much emphasis on the lyrical content of industrial songs. Lyrical analyses carried out showed an ambiguity and lack of consensus in their interpretation by fans and others. Nevertheless, fans had a general conception of industrial lyrics as being primarily dystopian-related. It was then suggested that fans were reading lyrics through the 'filter' of the context (whether musical or social). This raises questions about the emphasis in popular music studies on lyrical analyses, and the ways in which lyrical analyses have been carried out. Simon Frith, among others, has previously indicated that more might be 'said' verbally

through the vocalisation of the lyrics, rather than the words, and the empirical evidence found supports this contention. The finding also suggests that any analysis of lyrics should be situated within the context of the song's genre.

In Chapter Two, I examined the socio-cultural tradition upon which industrial draws and from out of which industrial grew. The account of industrial music provided makes explicit the range of crossover transactions between popular music and other forms of expression. The study of industrial therefore required an interdisciplinary approach, accounting for these other forms of expression.

For example, industrial's appropriation of the dystopian aesthetic drew on a long history of visual, verbal, and sonic representations going back centuries. In order to understand industrial, it was necessary to introduce musical representations of dystopia and Hell. Although there are many studies of the visual or the literary aspects of dystopia and Hell, this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, the first to examine in detail the sonic properties of Hell. This examination included how this sonic aesthetic developed in the contemporary dystopia, and then has been reincorporated back into present-day representations of Hell. Allied with the modern representations of Hell was the symbolism of the machine aesthetic. Twentieth century Western arts are unique with respect to previous representational history in the overwhelming use of the machine as a metaphor. Relative to other expressive forms, there are few studies of the way in which technology is implicated in musical expressions in the twentieth century. Frequently, the modern sentiments of isolation, loss of control and alienation are

represented in metaphors of machinery. There are few modern dystopian works that do not depict humankind suffering at the hands of science, rationalisation and technocracy. An exploration of this para-musical contextual aspect of industrial was crucial to the interpretation of the music and fan culture.

In the current multimedia cultural environment, industrial does not stand out as unique in drawing on many forms of media. Other popular musical genres may have similarly developed from out of—or been influenced by—the avant-garde, film, literature, visual arts, drama, television and video games, for instance. Although Frith and Horne (1987) have gone some way to developing this history, the range of crossover transactions is clearly an area that could be examined in greater detail in future studies.

Relating to this finding is the influence of film on industrial music, particularly techniques used to create or add suspense. From the sound effects, verbal dialogue, character style, to appropriating the scores outright, ideas are borrowed from film throughout the industrial genre. I suspect, however, that the influence runs on a two-way street, as many industrial musicians have become involved in film scoring, including Cabaret Voltaire, Einstürzende Neubauten, Skinny Puppy, Graeme Revell (SPK) and Brian Williams (Lustmørd). This mutual influence needs to be explored further and raises questions such as, how much is popular music influencing film scores, and to what extent have film scores influenced other popular music styles? To what extent is the pressure of film soundtrack sales changing the nature of music used in films, and subsequently the nature of film's influence on popular music? It would be

particularly worthwhile to see a more developed argument about the growing importance of sound effects in film and their influence on popular music. I suggested briefly that, in fact, the codal competence of the audience—and perhaps their resonance with the music—is influenced by a familiarity with the para-musical references found in film.

Not only do these non-musical references require further investigation, but other popular musical genres which share elements and fans with industrial requires further academic attention; specifically, goth, Neue Deutsche Welle, synth-pop and disco. Work still needs to be carried out also on the many variations of industrial that may deviate from aspects of this thesis—particularly neo-folk and Noise. It will also be up to future work to examine local variants of the fan community described in this thesis.

Behavioural, social and ideological rules were focussed upon in Chapters Three and Four. I addressed the media's reaction to the Columbine High Massacre by showing that, in fact, apart from a few fringe artists, industrial is primarily left-wing, using dystopian imagery as a form of critique. This critique involves, in part, a criticism of the technological and social 'advances' of our society, specifically rationalisation in the form of capitalist 'totalitarian' management systems. I have in fact, suggested throughout the thesis that this specific critique is particularly concerned with a late capitalist rationalisation implying several interrelated themes: control by the system, simulated interaction, efficiency and speed, calculability, predictability and standardisation, mechanisation and dehumanisation. These themes fit into the wider dystopian themes; the use of technology, the critique of the system, the apocalyptic

outcome, and the creation of an alternative.

The thesis showed how many industrial fans attempt to regain some control through this creation of an alternative (e.g. alternative ways to dress, distribute and manufacture goods, learn musical skills and acquire instruments, etc), by embracing or appropriating taboos of the mainstream ideological system (fascism, communism, paganism, sexual fetish, etc.). This idea of an alternative, as indicated throughout the thesis, is hardly unique to industrial: most music cultures are somehow positioned as an alternative to something else.

The specific appropriation of dystopia helps to differentiate industrial from these other alternative groups. The reasons why dystopia is particularly popular with the industrial community are several. Dystopias are one of the traditional artistic ways to criticise the system, and have often taken a left-wing, fiercely anti-totalitarian and openly political position with an attempt at educating 'the masses' to the logical outcomes of the present, and many fans identified with such an ideological position. Dystopias of more recent decades also represent a 'pop-critique' of the West. Films representing a secular version of Hell complete with its associations of violence and apocalypse, like *Terminator*, for instance, which may include overt social critique, are pitched at a less politicised audience. Those fans who may wish to show disgust with the present capitalist system, but who have not yet consciously articulated their ideological position, may be identifying with the criticisms raised by these films, without having to articulate a solution.

Chapter Five elaborated on Chapters Three and Four, in terms of how industrial maintains itself on an independent level, and how this independence is reinforced by the structure of the music industry. I discussed the contradictory nature of the resistance against the popular mainstream. Dystopia, for instance, is undoubtedly popular culture—*Terminator 2* is one of the top grossing films of all time, and industrial itself, as I have shown, enjoys some popular success. Recent recordings like Paul Oakenfold's remix of the *Planet of the Apes* theme, or Björk's *Selmasongs* indicate an increase in the acceptance—and enjoyment—of industrial sounds in film scores and other popular music. Therefore, what defines industrial as a genre is at times determined by the ideological ideals imposed upon the artists or albums by the fans. The boundary between the mainstream and industrial is therefore more fluid than some fans might admit. I discussed how these genre boundaries are established, learned and maintained through the marketing, mediation and distribution of the music. The negotiation between the alternative and the mainstream is indicative of the further genre boundaries drawn specifically around ideology. In other words, the co-option of an industrial aesthetic into the mainstream is something that fans have accepted, but genre is dependent on more than the sonic and visual—genres also contain semiotic and ideological rules. Accounts of genres, therefore, must not only be contextualised in terms of their historical situation and fan culture, as described above, but must also be conscious that *musical* aspects can be affected by these other rules of genre.

In examining the meaning of the music in Chapters Six and Seven, I showed that both fans and non-fans shared a codal competence to 'decode' the music, that is, to understand its basic message. Nevertheless, it was also discovered that the subsequent

reading of that basic message differed. Those that interpreted the music as fascist may be hearing “oppression” in the music, but rather than identifying this connotation as, ‘dystopia often draws on totalitarian imagery to show the oppressive nature of the political system, and I identify with that feeling of being oppressed and alienated’, they are perhaps identifying the ‘oppression’ as an attempt to *be* oppressive.

To discuss this differentiation in interpretation, I introduced the term *supplementary connotation*, suggesting that genres help to create connotations for connotations, in other words, the richer meanings ascribed by the fan community. The interpretation of the music is contingent upon genre familiarity. In this sense, genres, as ‘sets of ... expectations’ (Fabbri 1981: 52), provide the reader with the knowledge of what to expect from the text. The learning and understanding of ironic content—musical and otherwise—is frequently dependent on community involvement, where discussions arise and “wrong” interpretations are rebutted.

These supplementary connotations also suggest that those who listen to industrial regularly may feel some “resonance” with those meanings unique to fans. This seems to indicate that personal attachment to and involvement in a genre relies not only on understanding references (codal competence) and knowing how to interpret those references (supplementary connotations), but also *identifying with* those references. Any semiotic analyses of popular music, therefore, should address the issue of whether the interpretation of the music in question should be based on that of fans, or that of the general hegemonic viewpoint, as these may clearly differ. In order to decode the the music as fans do, it is necessary to involve fans in the interpretation and to take

into account the many facets of context as described above.

8.1 A Final Word on Industrial, Dystopia and the Aesthetic of the Machine

Industrial music as a genre remains relatively in the shadows, but the industrial aesthetic, as described above, has been well absorbed into the mainstream and turns up with increasing regularity in films and advertising. Perhaps more significantly than industrial turning up with increasing frequency, is the increase in dystopia. Just since the beginning of this research, there have been remakes of *Planet of the Apes* and the *Time Machine*. There have been other popular dystopias, including *Minority Report*, *AI*, *Robocop 4* and *The Matrix*. *Terminator 3* and *The Matrix 2* will be released shortly. Liverpool city library has begun a section devoted to dystopia which it calls 'Future Tense'. Culturally, we seem to be fascinated with the future, but where have all the utopias gone?

It is possible that utopias have not disappeared, but merely become dystopian. One of the purposes of dystopia is to cause the audience to recognise the source of their alienation, to disturb their awareness and thereby bring about social change. In this sense, dystopias, and industrial through appropriating dystopia, share this purpose. In other words, it could be argued that industrial music, rather than being 'Satanic', 'oppressive', 'fascist' or 'violent', represents hope that we have the power to change the world, for if there was no hope in the future, there would be no sense in sounding a warning.