Industrial Music: A Listening Guide

1. During class on Thursday, we had a brief discussion of front men for bands who simply cannot sing – John Lydon of PiL, for example. It is worthwhile to follow up on this and ask why anyone would buy a recording made by a bad singer.

As one man’s answer, read the recent article out of the Chronicle of Higher Education on ”The Discrete Charm of the Bad Voice.” In this article, Kevin Dettmar focuses on two singers, Bob Dylan and Neil Young, but he also has something to say about punk and postpunk, even Radiohead for that matter.

- Dettmar makes a distinction between merely mediocre voices and those that are bad (that is, bad but at the same time incredibly powerful). How does he classify Dylan’s and Young’s voices – as mediocre or as bad?
- Dettmar decides not to include the punk-rock voice in his discussion. What does he have to say about the bad punk rock voice and how it fits well with the genre?
- Why does the author say about how the appearance of amateurism affects our response to a singer and his/her song? Why do we respond to it?
- In the lecture on Sixties Rock, we discussed the important characteristic that Bob Dylan brought from Folk music into rock. After Dylan we listened to rock music differently and judged it by different criteria. What did Dylan bring from folk music that rock had never cared about before? What does this have to do with Dettmar’s conclusion?

2. In Adorno and Eisler’s short essay in Audio Culture, what do they say is the function of melodic “middle-class music” in an advanced capitalist society.

- How does the amusement industry fit into this picture?
- Assuming that Adorno and Eisler are correct, what function should industrial music, such as that of Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire serve?

3. Read pp 124 – 138 from Rip It Up and Start Again and pp 7.13 – 7.25 from Wreckers of Civilization, both about Throbbing Gristle. Listen to the assigned Throbbing Gristle music and watch the live video of “Discipline,” all by TG.

- What does industrial music share with the psychedelic music of the late 1960? How does it draw from techniques developed by Stockhausen and other pioneers of electronic music?
- What was COUM Transmissions? From what art movement of the 1960s, which we studied earlier in this course, was COUM descended? How does Reynolds describe their performances?
- Why did P-Orridge want to switch from COUM to Throbbing Gristle?
- What was TG’s vision of the future today? In our earlier reading about punk rock in Great Britain we talked about the economic conditions in this country at the time. How does this relate to TG’s vision?
- Watch the video of TG performing “Discipline” around 1980. Describe their performance.
- To what did Chris Carter compare the group and how is that part of their performance style? What did they name their record label? What was the label’s motto?
- What does Reynolds say about TG’s approach to “rock”?
- What did TG think about punk? What differences did they cite with Kraftwerk?
• What was TG’s approach to their instruments?
• TG has many links to the 20th century avant garde. What are they?
• At the end of the reading in Wreckers of Civilization, what does P-Orridge say happened to the band that they hadn’t expected. What had they intended to be? What had they become?
• What eventually happened to TG? How did their politics shift toward the end?

   • What did the name “Cabaret Voltaire” come from? How did this inspire the group?
   • Both TG and Cabaret Voltaire had art backgrounds – what kinds. What effects did this have on their music?
   • What was Cabaret Voltaire’s response to the arrival of punk?
   • How does Reynolds describe the definitive Cabaret Voltaire sound? How do you hear this in “Nag, Nag, Nag”?
   • Compare Cabaret Voltaire’s use of the synthesizer with the way it was used by Kraftwerk, Brian Eno, Gary Numan, and Yes.

5. From the music you have heard, which of the Krautrock bands was the biggest influence on industrial music?

6. Eno and Yes were commercially successful. Judging from their music, do you think Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire were aiming for commercial success?

7. Industrial music often is classified as “post-punk.” Look at the dates from the reading about when these groups were active:
   • Sex Pistols: 1975 – 1978
   • Throbbing Gristle: 1976 – 1981
   • Cabaret Voltaire: 1973 - …. 

We see that in fact much of early industrial is contemporary with punk. Compare and contrast punk and early industrial music. How are they similar and how are they different?
8. Read pp 142 - 144 from *Rip It Up and Start Again* about Suicide, an influential New York group that was an important influence on No Wave. Listen to the recording of “Frankie Teardrop” and watch the live video of the band performing “Ghost Rider,” both from 1977.

- What were the backgrounds of the two men in the band? How was Suicide a prime example of art and rock coming together in the seventies?
- From the recording and video, describe Suicide’s sound.
- How would you describe “Frankie Teardrop,” from the standpoint of its sound and lyrics?
- All industrial music, such as that of Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire, is consciously political in one way or another. Is “Frankie Teardrop” more or less political than the industrial music you have heard?

9. Listen to the recordings and watch the assigned video by Einstürzende Neubauten, a German industrial group. Read “Rough Music, Futurism, and Postpunk Industrial Noise Bands.”

- What are the Einstürzende Neubauten musicians using as instruments?
  - How does this distinguish them from the other industrial and noise bands?
  - Why might we say that Einstürzende Neubauten is more of an actual noise band than some?
  - What do you think would be John Cage’s reaction to Einstürzende Neubauten?
- Compare Einstürzende Neubauten’s sound with that of earlier industrial groups, such as Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire.
- In “Rough Music, Futurism, and Postpunk Industrial Noise Bands,” Russo and Warner begin with information theory to help them formulate a definition of noise. How does their definition correspond with those of Varèse and Cage?
- Russo and Warner discuss Russolo’s attitude about not being a professional musician.
  - What was Russolo’s attitude about his lack of musical credentials?
  - How is this reflected by later Punk musicians?
  - What about experimental composers, such as Cage?
- What do Russo and Warner say about the music of Einstürzende Neubauten and the instruments they used to make their music? How have they gone beyond Punk?

10. Listen again to the early industrial music (Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, Einstürzende Neubauten) in this lesson and ask yourself the following questions:

- What is new in this music? What sets the industrial bands apart from the music of the late sixties and early seventies?
- Is this music more experimental or more of a consolidation of previous experiments?
- What do these bands and their music have in common?
- How are the bands and their music different from each other?

11. Read the online article by Ryan Speck on modern industrial music.

- On what did P-Orridge base this new genre of music?
- What bands were part of the next wave of industrial music following Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire? What did their music sound like? Compare their influence with the original two bands.
- What did Nine-Inch Nails do with industrial? What effect did this have on its popularity?
- Speck comments that the origin of industrial music is different from that of other genres of music. How so?
- What does Speck say the various subgenres of industrial music have in common?
12. Listen to the assigned recordings of later industrial bands such as Skinny Puppy, Front 242, Ministry, and Nine-Inch Nails. We will discuss their music in class.

13. In this course we are following five general trends that characterize most, if not all, of the ways that the avant-garde music has influenced popular music. Which of the five general trends is evident in the music to which you have listened today?

- Simplicity
- Decomposition of Musical Structure
- Pastiche
- Electronic Music
- Noise as Music