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CHAPTER 5

The Limits of Control: Industrial Dystopias and Techno Utopias in Mika Vainio's Music

Janne Vanhanen

Abstract

The chapter highlights the affinity of dystopia and utopia in contemporary electronic music. Focusing on the Finnish musician Mika Vainio (1963–2017) and his extensive life's work, Janne Vanhanen argues that techno music both originates from and takes its listeners to cultural scenes that are neither purely dystopian nor utopian in their conception of the world. Rather, in the varieties of electronic music, such categories become ambiguous: their limits are exceeded and merged. Vanhanen sheds light on the extra- and paramusical contexts of what he calls meaning-making or sonic "fictioning" in music. Fictioning creates different visions of futurity, but do these visions suggest promises – or threats? Vanhanen examines this equivocation by clarifying the aesthetics of electronic music, the semantics of which is not only grounded in the audible material but also in the listener's emotions and associations. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's views on autonomy and experience of art, he examines reasons to conceive of Vainio's music as an example of ambiguity, whose scope is both dreamlike and nightmarish.

Keywords

Mika Vainio – electronic music – sonic fiction – listening – control – autonomy – Gilles Deleuze – Félix Guattari

1 Introduction

In what follows I discuss the work of the Finnish electronic musician Mika Vainio (1963–2017) in conjunction with the element of sonic fiction associated with our reception of music and its adjoining paraphernalia and rituals. The point of departure for this analysis is thus the idea that music is never "only" music, as it inevitably arrives in a context of discourses, lineages, customs and cultures, which themselves transfer into new contexts in various instances of reception. I focus on those features in Vainio's music evocative of sonic fictions that could be labelled as dystopian or utopian and trace them in the wider musical genres of Vainio's work, namely industrial and techno music.

A major theoretical question regarding music is whether, and how, it is able to express something in itself or evoke something in the listener. This problem is especially pertinent in the case of "pure" or "absolute" instrumental music that arrives with very little extramusical content. The concept of sonic fiction includes the assumption that music affects receivers in such a manner that they are oriented

towards interpreting and discovering meanings in music. The less "information" music itself carries, the more the listener is oriented towards searching for meaning in other characteristics within the context of reception. Especially in the case of popular music, these extra- or paramusical features include song titles and lyrics, record sleeve art and notes, the public persona of the performer, the iconography of a musical genre and so on.

As musicologist Franco Fabbri states, genres "can help us to understand musical events, but, above all, they permit us to speak of them".[1] My only addition to this claim would be to include other abovementioned extra- or paramusical contexts of meaning alongside genre in the meaning-making or "fictioning" process of music. On this basis, it may be possible to speak of music that is dystopian or utopian, as the result of the emergent effect of multiple factors present in the event of musical reception. My aim is to study these elements in Vainio's music.

I focus my interrogation mainly on the dystopic and utopic sonic fictions of Vainio's output, including the wider cultural currents that have influenced his work. My intention is that these observations could be extended to a more general context in order to provide some insight into the formation of dystopias and utopias as a whole. This process of fictioning can take place as an amalgamation of different domains, ranging from the affective and somatic to ideational and ideological. As for the term itself, I keep to a generic definition of dystopia as a representation of an unfortunate future, the potential of which is present in the contemporary state of affairs.

2 In the Beginning There Was Ø

In 1993, browsing the techno music section of a record store carrying a proper selection of electronic music, one could come upon two distinctive artefacts. Packaged in reflective silver-foiled covers, there were two 12" vinyl records with scant information. On the mirrored front of the sleeves there was a small sticker displaying some cryptic titles arranged in a grid-like layout, which read, respectively: SÄHKÖ-001 Ø RÖNTGEN and SÄHKÖ-002 Ø KVANTTI. On the reverse side, another sticker displayed the contact information of Sähkö Recordings in Helsinki.[2] Even in the milieu of minimal information of techno music releases, these early Sähkö Recordings vinyls caught one's attention at first sight by their controlled, precise visual arrangement. Those few clues that were available felt cryptic and raised questions. Was Ø the nom de plume of the artist? Were *Röntgen* and *Kvantti* release titles? At least SÄHKÖ-001 and 002 seemed like catalogue numbers that indicated the first releases of a previously unknown Finnish record label.

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[1] Franco Fabbri, "What kind of music?", trans. Iain Chambers, *Popular Music* 2, no. 1 (1982): 142.

[2] "Kvantti" is Finnish for "quantum", "sähkö" translates as "electricity".

Putting the needle on the first record, *Röntgen*, a steady bass drum pulse of around 135 beats per minute begins the first track. This rigid rhythmic grid, as well as the syncopating, rhythmically squelching "acid sound" of a Roland TB-303 bass synthesiser, marks the music as belonging to the then-nascent genre of techno. The following three tracks of the first release and the three tracks of the subsequent *Kvantti* EP follow suit: we are presented with a minimal scattering of pulse-like electronic tones over an inflexible 4/4 beat. What captures the listener's attention is the economical sparsity of means – merely a few sounds, with some eventual variation in their parameters, comprise a track. These releases incorporate an intriguing aura of uniqueness in their meticulous sparsity of presentation and musical content, setting them apart from standard fare techno music. Jimi Tenor, one of the initial Sähkö Recordings artists, testifies that when the record label's founder Tommi Grönlund took some the first two Ø EPs to the renowned Berlin record store Hard Wax for them to sell, the whole place fell silent, customers stopping their chatting and record-browsing when the clerk played the Ø records over the store's sound system.[3]

The heedful quietude descending over the clientele and staff of the record store could be interpreted as the emergence of a sonic fiction capturing the attention of those present. Something unheard of enters the room and forces one to get to grips with it. Yet, what sonic fiction denotes as a term is not simply the inevitability of a hermeneutical horizon of interpretation that necessarily accompanies any cultural artefact. The concept of sonic fiction was introduced in Kodwo Eshun's *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (1998). In the book, Eshun assumes a perspective on his listening to Afrofuturist music such as Sun Ra, the 1970s output of Miles Davis, George Clinton's bands Funkadelic and Parliament, and early hip hop, electro and techno, that seeks to highlight the generative aspect of those musics, rather than their methodical interpretation. In a highly idiosyncratic jargon, abounding with terms such as "Futurhythmachine" and "MythScience", Eshun takes the reader through -various musical movements and releases that act as flashpoints of future trajectories in music and also in thinking. This manifests in Eshun's deluge of novel concepts that arise from the exploration of not only the musical material itself but also the whole mythology emerging from the artists' work.

This view bears resemblance to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conception of

[3] Tuomas Karemo, "Mika Vainio – A Quiet Life", *Kulttuuricocktail*, December 18, 2017, https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2017/12/18/mika-vainio-a-quiet-life. Jimi Tenor was and still is an integral member of the Sähkö Recordings circle and released his first solo album, *Sähkömies* ("-Electrician"), on Sähkö's Puu sublabel in 1994. Similarly to Vainio's, Tenor's musical career has its beginnings in industrial music, as he was the leader of the band Jimi Tenor and His Shamans (1986–1992) that used materials like scrap metal and oil barrels as instruments. Tenor moved to Berlin in the early 1990s and his connections helped Sähkö get noticed in the nascent German techno scene. Tommi Grönlund, an architect by profession, founded the Sähkö imprint with Vainio in 1993. Since then, alongside managing the label, he has become a successful artist in collaboration with Petteri Nisunen, producing installations with -technology, sound and light as their primary material.

art as a site of creation of new kinds of futures. Artworks are not only actualisations of existing possibilities but rather virtualisations of yet-unformed potentialities that can introduce genuine differences in praxis, politics and thinking.[4] Thus, there is a point of comparison between the Deleuzian notion of art and Eshun's call to consider music and its creators not as objects of inquiry requiring explanation and theorisation but rather as -producers of novel ways of sensing and thinking. Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Eshun, thus demand from music a degree of deterritorialisation, that is, opening up new spaces of possibility by creating novel associations between the elements of the artwork and the receiver.

What for Eshun is a crucial turning point in deterritorialising the Black musical tradition is its "Postsoul Era".[5] This emphasis steers him towards music with a decidedly futuristic, science-fictional feel that, with its focus on musical technology, can appear dystopic as it does away with the centrality of the human. The increasingly technological music enters a posthuman phase that detaches its reception from any aforementioned hermeneutics of interpretation and forces us to approach music as experimentation in every sensory and technological domain. Alongside the physical, material appearance of sound and its resulting sensation arrives a cluster of multimodal aspects, for example corporeal, tactile, visual, textual, social and ideational. These do not allow us the freedom of an outsider's perspective but rather have always-already captured us within their sonic fiction that initially appears as an alien terrain, making the listener an experimenter. As a form of speculative fiction or science fiction, sonic fictions open up different futurities – utopian or dystopian. Therefore, the concept of sonic fiction works as a useful means of extracting these positive or negative projections from a given body of work. In this particular context, I wish to bring up the works of Mika Vainio as a source of sonic fictions that occupy an ambiguous zone between dystopian and utopian visions.

3 Vainio's Sonic Fictions versus Afrofuturism

The perspective on music as production of sonic fictions suspends traditional musicological and historical accounts of music in order to focus on "this huge world opened up by a microperception of the actual material".[6] Yet, why -consider especially Mika Vainio's music in relation to sonic fictions, taking into account the elaborations on the concept of dystopia? This question is pertinent as, concerning

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 177.

[5] Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998), -005. Alongside its original use of language, the pagination and layout of the book are unconventional.

[6] Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*, 179.

sonic fictions, Eshun's approach is fundamentally tied to the epistemological and aesthetic idea of Afrofuturism. Ytasha L. Womack provides a concise definition of Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation … redefin[ing] culture and notions of blackness for today and the future".[7] As a response to the African and Black diaspora, theorists of Afrofuturism envision the (mainly) forced cultural dispersion of peoples enslaved by European colonialists as an event that is not only an exemplary case of exploitation and injustice, but one that can also be used to fashion an affirmative Black identity as an alien, self-reinventing subjectivity not bound by Western hierarchies and disciplines. The idea is: if you as a member of a certain culture are abducted and uprooted, alien in your new environment that appears dystopic to you – why conform to the norm? As an alien, why not reinvent yourself and your future? For Eshun, the electric jazz-fusion period of Miles Davis and his orchestra's pan-global funk, Sun Ra's astronomical esotericism and the sci-fi electronic sounds of early hip hop's mutation into synthetic electro are some figures of an established "credible" tradition of a minority, for instance jazz music, mutating to acquire an empowering alien point of view.

From this perspective Vainio, a white, middle-class person of North European descent, and his *œuvre* would seem to be situated far from the Afrofuturist movements that inspire Eshun. During his career Vainio became one of the most respected experimental electronic music artists of his time, as well as a successful sound artist and collaborator with filmmakers and choreographers – all rather "highbrow", more credible cultural contexts of reception. Yet Vainio's work also gathers elements from those subcultural movements that have been explicitly included in the Afrofuturist context. A key one of these is techno music, a milieu that is crucial to Vainio's initial solo work and informs his later output. As many have commented, techno can be seen as a phase in a cultural lineage that has genealogical roots both in the European avant-garde movements such as Futurism, *Elektronische Musik* and *musique concrète*, and in the various strands of Black popular music that, for Eshun, served as the impetus for the notion of sonic fictions.[8]

Vainio is also aware of the dimension of sonic fictions in music. In an interview,

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[7] Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: -Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), 9.

[8] Geeta Dayal and Emily Fernigno bring up Italian futurist Luigi Russolo's noise -instruments, intended to widen the scope of musical instrumentation; Pierre Henry's and Pierre -Schaeffer's tape-based *musique concrète* that utilised recorded sounds as musical -material; Jamaican dub reggae producers Osbourne "King Tubby" Ruddock's and Lee "Scratch" Perry's inventive studio methods; and German group Kraftwerk's all-electronic instrumentation, as influences and predecessors of many techniques and principles prevalent in techno music and electronic dance music in general. Geeta Dayal and Emily Ferrigno, "Electronic Dance Music", *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Roote, accessed 5 October 2022, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002224259. Dan Sicko adds the futurist Alvin Toffler to the mix of -influences informing the nascent scene of techno musicians in Detroit. Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2010), 12.

he once stated:

> it seems to be that the line between what is music or not music becomes more obscure and hard to determine where the line can be drawn. I don't think that the actual sound, the changes in air pressure, is the only thing we can call music. Music can be also visual and also based on other things, physical things.[9]

Reinforcing this view is Vainio's insistence on coherence between the musical and paramusical aspects (for example titling and graphic design) of his releases, highlighting his intention to produce aesthetically multi-modal works. Hence, I claim that it is productive to consider Vainio's work in the context of sonic fictions, including their dystopian and utopian aspects. In the next sections I do this by situating Vainio within the two musical milieus from which his productions gain their dystopian or utopian aspects, the genres of industrial and techno music.

4 Industrial Dystopias: Control and Counter-Strategies

As a techno music maker, if only initially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vainio can be seen as a descendant of one musical trajectory that preceded techno, namely industrial music, a dystopic musical subculture originating in the late 1970s as an amalgamation of post-punk, avant-garde electronic music and transgressive art. Presented in an intentionally ambiguous manner, pioneering industrial acts such as Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, -Einstürzende -Neubauten and SPK referenced earlier works of cultural extremism. These include the aesthetic transgressions of Marquis de Sade, Artaud, Italian -Futurists and Viennese Aktionists, the dystopic science fiction of William S. Burroughs, Philip K. Dick and J. G. Ballard and the often-pessimistic cultural theory of thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Deleuze and Michel Foucault.

Based on these influences, industrial acts painted a bleak picture of the contemporary world as a mechanised, industrialised and capitalist society of control that seeks to suppress individual desires and reroute them into mass consumption of material goods and entertainment. For example, for their first live appearance, in 1976 at the AIR Gallery, London, the seminal industrial group Throbbing Gristle provided a handout for the audience, an extract from which states: "It's 1984. The only reality is waiting. Mortal. It's the death factory society, hypnotic mechanical grinding, music of hopelessness."[10] George Orwell's dystopia had arrived,

[9] Michelle White, "Sähkö 20 Years Anniversary Special Interview with Mika Vainio & Tommi Grönlund", *Cargo Collective*, February 2014, accessed 5 October 2022, https://cargocollective.com/mosaictheory/Sahko-20-Years-Anniversary-Special-Interview-with-Mika-Vainio-Tommi.

[10] Quoted in Simon Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation: The Story of COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), 6.16–17.

Throbbing Gristle claimed. Another early -industrial group, SPK, took its name and theoretical underpinnings from -Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv, a militant Marxist and antipsychiatric collective started by Wolfgang Huber and Ursula Schaefel at Heidelberg University. Their belief was that mental illness was caused by the capitalist system and, thus, illness had to be transformed into a weapon against society.

In sonic and cultural terms, Vainio's music has many affinities with the dystopian industrial heritage. In the early 1980s he formed an industrial group, Gagarin Kombinaatti ("Gagarin Collective Combine"), that utilised metal objects, industrial tools, radios, tape loops and synthesisers as instruments.[11] In a fanzine interview Tommi Grönlund describes Vainio's most important -influences as being "early eighties groups, like Psychic TV, Chris and Cosey, Throbbing Gristle, maybe some Einstürzende Neubauten" – truly a canon of early industrial groups.[12]

In the following, I detail some central aspects of industrial music and the worldview informing its early proponents. As I propose, Vainio's solo work draws equally from the discourse prevalent in the context of its emergence, the techno music subculture of the late 1980s and early 1990s with its utopian optimism that technology would liberate human individuality, through affordable media production tools, free distribution of information via computer networks and enhancement of consciousness by synthetic psychoactive substances. While these utopian promises seem to have largely failed from our 2020s perspective, the implicitly Marxist notion of liberating the means of production for the service of counter-action is one that techno utopianism shares with industrial dystopianism. Therefore, Vainio's sonic fictions can be considered as fundamentally ambiguous regarding the emancipatory potential of technology.

In trying to define cultural movements – in this case, a musical genre – the risk of over-simplification always looms. Yet, in attempting to -situate the -connection between Vainio's music and industrial music, it is necessary to -provide a frame of reference. Musician and scholar S. Alexander Reed lays out the problems in trying to put together a critical history of industrial music, beginning with the "I-word", the term "industrial" itself. While there is one source that is "indisputably 'industrial' – releases by the label Industrial Records, 1976–1981", a substantial body of work has accumulated since then that is entitled to be included in this genealogy by virtue of

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11 Ari Väntänen, "Mika Vainio on poissa, musiikki elää ikuisesti", *Musiikki kuuluu kaikille*, April 19, 2017, accessed 5 October 2022, https://musiikkikuuluukaikille.musiikkikirjastot.fi/2017/04/19/mika-vainio-on-poissa-musiikki-elaa-ikuisesti/.

12 Uncredited, "Sähkö Recordings Interview", *Alien Underground* 0.0, accessed 5 October 2022, https://datacide-magazine.com/sahko-recordings-interview-1994/. A personal anecdote recounted by his brother Atte Vainio makes palpable the influence of industrial music on Mika Vainio: obsessed with the group Psychic TV, Mika, along with a friend, tried to brand the group's symbol into their arms with a knife heated on the sauna stove, resulting in inflamed burns and subsequent scarring. Karemo, "Mika Vainio – A Quiet Life".

"a reasonably -consistent sound palette, a compatible set of visual aesthetics, a commonly understood lyrical code, and … self-declared lineage".[13] Yet, many of the originators and major artists of the genre deny that their work belongs to industrial music. Reed names musicians from foundational acts such as Cabaret Voltaire, Einstürzende Neubauten, Nitzer Ebb and Skinny Puppy dissociating themselves from the industrial nametag and speculates that this unwillingness to declare involvement in the genre is due to how the phenomenon of a genre in itself functions. A genre is a social construct par excellence and belonging to such a social group suggests certain identity traits, leading to continuous negotiating of the ownership and membership of the group.[14]

As a genre typically begins as an "avant-garde" movement of a select few, broadening the group poses problems related to the identity of the initial construct and results in many originators' detachment from the scene once larger participant numbers and audiences come to be associated with it. This often leads to a clash between perceived positions of purism and populism.[15] In industrial music's case, such purism would restrict the hard core of the genre only to the initiators, for instance the aforementioned Industrial Records label, even though from a more detached vantage point a much wider cultural movement is apparent.

Nevertheless, as most of the central features of the genre were present in the initial stages of the movement, we can restrict our consideration of the legacy of industrial music in Mika Vainio's work to those early instances. One literary source contemporary with the early stages of the genre, *Industrial -Culture Handbook* (1983), provides a number of useful guidelines. Jon Savage, a British journalist involved with many countercultural scenes, deplores in his introduction to the book that it is only possible to talk about "Industrial Culture" after its heyday: "the fact that a series of different, if related, projects can be given such a generic indicates assimilation and eventual supersession".[16] Fear of assimilation and control described here appears as a major topic in the aesthetic production of the industrial genre, in the music itself and in participants' awareness of the social threat of the genre's dissolution.

Despite his precautions, Savage provides some positive traits of identity.

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13 Alexander Reed, *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 13.

14 Reed, *Assimilate*, 13–14.

15 Even though, as Michel Chion notes, the avant-gardists' initial "austere" and "purist" will to produce "a specific art, with its own language" more often than not reaches a more lenient "hybrid" stage, where "the puritan impulse relaxes". Chion quoted in Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Introduction", in *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xiv.

16 Jon Savage, "Introduction", in *RE/Search #6/7 – Industrial Culture Handbook*, ed. V. Vale (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1983), 4.

According to him, industrial music continued punk rock's attack against the tedium of normal, everyday life, but was also aware of punk's quick assimilation into the entertainment industry and used that process as an example of capitalism's ability to absorb almost anything into its flows of production. A more defiant stance of opposition was necessary and resources for that -non-compliance were found in post-war art movements such as performance art and mail art, the literature of William S. Burroughs and J. G. Ballard, the academic musical avant-garde and the leftfield pop of acts like Kraftwerk, Devo, The Residents and the more electronic strains of disco music such as Giorgio Moroder. Savage names Throbbing Gristle in London and Cabaret Voltaire in Sheffield as groups that began to use the aforementioned influences in a way that brought out shared ideas that later typified industrial as a genre.[17]

As if packaging the already-processed product, Savage even provides a list of ingredients – the ideas and elements that define industrial music: 1) organisational autonomy (independent publishing and distribution); 2) access to information (awareness that "the struggle for control was now not territorial but communicatory", thus prioritising dissemination of information in the popular arena, i.e. popular music); 3) use of synthesisers and anti-music (as dictated by "the necessity of matching form to format"); 4) extra-musical elements (use of literary sources, but also film and video); and 5) shock tactics (to attract attention in order to combat information society).[18]

This list makes evident the information-centric approach of early industrial acts. As Throbbing Gristle stated in an interview for the *Handbook*: "We're interested in information, we're not interested in music as such. And we believe that the whole battlefield, if there is one in the human situation, is about information."[19] Here one can discern more than a hint of Burroughs' influence and his view that cybernetic communication technologies were important in controlling the populace on every level from societal to personal. This vision of a universal control apparatus could be compared to Guy Debord's notion of the society of the spectacle, where lived reality has become representation. Burroughs talks about a "reality studio", a superstructure that produces our consensual, "objective" reality. In *The Electronic Revolution*, Burroughs analyses the ways of control in contemporary information society, as well as the logic of resistance needed to subvert them: "The control of the mass media depends on laying down lines of association. When the lines are cut the associational connections are broken."[20] The logic is to seize the means of production and

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17 Savage, "Introduction", 4–5.

18 Savage, "Introduction", 5.

19 Uncredited, "Throbbing Gristle", in *Industrial Culture Handbook*, 9.

20 William S. Burroughs, *The Electronic Revolution* (Ubu Classics, 2005), 13, accessed 5 -October 2022, https://www.ubu.com/historical/burroughs/electronic_revolution.pdf.

dissemination of information in order to scramble the broadcast from the reality studio by introducing cuts into the information flow and breaks into habitual associations. For Burroughs, a tape recorder works as a model for such a counter-action as it can "freeze" time: it materialises it onto the magnetic coating on a strip of plastic film. This makes it possible to deconstruct time by cutting the tape up into pieces and reassembling them, producing novel chains of associations and subsequently fracturing those habits that maintain consensual reality.

Burroughs's notion of control as reality production is at the bottom of Deleuze's later view of the control society. In his short essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control" Deleuze begins from the assumption that the historical formation of a disciplinary society, as theorised by Foucault, has been superseded by a new one. While disciplinary societies that corresponded with Western industrialised modernity of eighteenth–twentieth centuries were organised by applying explicit division and confinement, such as in prison, hospital, barracks and factories, Deleuze sees an emerging social formation based on all-pervasive control that is maintained by gathering information on the -movements and choices of ostensibly liberated individuals who are able to choose freely.[21] The dystopic aspects of this new formation are evident, even more so today: while Deleuze could envision data gathering about individuals' movements and choices via electronic keycard and credit card use, today's almost-completely networked existence accumulates a massive amount of data that we provide voluntarily for the sake of convenience.

Burroughs's "reality studio" was still a metaphor of a centralised, unidirectional broadcast, while contemporary life is increasingly led via interaction on social media and smartphone applications. These changes, as Shoshana Zuboff notes, pose a danger that even the most intimate experiences are subject to commodification and surveillance:

> Instead of claiming work (or land, or wealth) for the market dynamic as industrial capitalism once did, surveillance capitalism audaciously lays claim to private experience for translation into fungible commodities that are rapidly swept up into the exhilarating life of the market.[22]

What is more, with the development of predictive algorithms capable of cross-analysing vast amounts of personal behavioural data, users' online content can be modified to steer future action. This completes the circle and brings us back to the "reality studio" situation where individuals are fed associations, leading them to form predictable habits. This invades the autonomy of the subject's inner life as, in the contemporary mode of "experience economy", commerce involves more and

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[21] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", trans. Martin Joughin, *October* 59 (Winter 1992).

[22] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile, 2019), 11.

more mental entities, such as expectations and memories, the flow of which can be regulated by predictive analysis. This is evident in the "filter bubble" effect of social media algorithms.

It is on this battleground that the counter-cultural criticism practiced by the proponents of industrial music is situated. Burroughs's method of cutting up is applied to a musical medium in a way that involves other modes of communication that are not purely auditory. S. Alexander Reed provides a detailed examination of the cut-up method used by the "purist's choice" industrial act Throbbing Gristle – the founders of Industrial Records – in their music and lyrics.[23] Yet, the method can be seen throughout all aspects of the group's production: records and their graphic design, interviews, press releases and other communiqués, or the military-style clothing worn by the members in -photographs and on stage. Joseph Tham distils this orientation: "Everything they produced was meant to be a statement."[24]

All these aspects, one might add, make up an exemplary sonic fiction, a whole world for the listener – or rather receiver of sounds, images, words and ideas – to dive into and absorb. As Simon Reynolds formulates it, "Being a Throbbing Gristle fan was like enrolling in a university course of cultural extremism"[25] and, one can deduce, this course was oriented towards unveiling the control society that constitutes our consensual reality. Throbbing Gristle used shock tactics, transgressive and disturbing lyrics and imagery, as well as explicit amateurism in musical execution, leaving a lasting impression on the subsequent acts that came to form the genre of industrial music. The group quickly realised that their method of criticism was in danger of becoming a style in itself and Throbbing Gristle finally disbanded in 1981. Two of its members, Genesis P-Orridge and Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson, subsequently formed the group Psychic TV, whose name can be seen as indicating a wider focus beyond music on video art, and started to experiment with resisting social control, not only in the public space via media tactics but through more individual magical practices and creation of cult-like group environments.[26]

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23 Reed, *Assimilate*, 35–37.

24 Joseph Tham, "Noise as Music: Is There a Historical Continuum? From Historical Roots to Industrial Music", in *Resonances: Noise and Contemporary Music*, ed. Michael Goddard, Benjamin Halligan and Nicola Spelman (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 268.

25 Simon Reynolds, "Sonic Youth are caught under the influence", *The Guardian*, April 7, 2009, accessed 5 October 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2009/apr/07/sonic-youth-underground-influences.

26 P-Orridge's explorations of totalitarian mindset, group psychology and manipulative tactics in cult-like settings resulted in the formation of Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth, an international network of like-minded individuals interested in an alternative lifestyle that sought liberation from societal control. While the Temple was without dogma, it utilised methods and principles adopted from sources such as the international mail art movement and briefly fashionable 1960s phenomenon Process Church of the Final Judgment. See Daniel Siepmann, "Unholy Progeny: Psychic TV and Witch House at the Crossroads of Occultism in the Information Age", *Journal*

The fate of Throbbing Gristle – announcing that "The Mission is -Terminated" on a black-rimmed postcard dated June 23, 1981 – illustrates the danger of arriving at a dead-end position that is inherent in transgressive aesthetics applied as a reaction against a seemingly dystopic societal situation. If the control society's continuous "reality studio" transmission works as manipulation, as envisioned by Burroughs, does not the counter-action of the cut-up appropriate those same methods of exerting influence?[27] Shock tactics can liberate but they can also oppress and lead to numb passivity. Reaction against global structures of control can end up replicating those self-same formations on a smaller scale. In the final analysis, what kind of change does Industrial Records' lyrical and visual imagery of murder, genocide, disease and manipulation-via-communication bring about? Instead of functioning as a wakeup call, do the dystopic industrial sonic fictions, involved with the mechanics of oppression and evil, rather hinder than instigate action? If not a downright dead end, the impasse encountered by the early proponents of industrial music indicates at least a problematic position.

5 Techno Utopias

Many characteristics of Mika Vainio's music, as well as his personal -history as a musician and listener, could attach his work to the genre of industrial music. These include the graphically stark visual presentation of his releases, often incorporating monochrome printed graphs and grid-like structures on uncoated cardboard and terse album and song titles that bring to mind -scientific reports. As an example, a few titles from his 1994 album *Olento* ("Being") album include "Stratosfaatti" ("Stratosphate"), "Tutkamaa" ("-Radarland"), "Hallitaajuus" ("Hall Frequency"), plus "Mugwumb", a reference to mugwump, a creature in -Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. As I pointed out earlier, a stern 4/4 rhythm underlies much of his music. Crackles, sine tones and bleeps bring to mind some 1950s experiment in perceptual psychology or mind control. All in all, from Vainio's projects one could conjure up a sonic fiction of some retro-futurist technocratic dystopia.

Further, the use of noise as musical material connects Vainio to the -lineage running from the Italian Futurists to Edgard Varèse, the *musique concrète* of Pierre Schaeffer and other composers of the Groupe de recherches musicales, and the electronic music of the European post-war avant-garde, which informed many practitioners of industrial music. Especially in concert settings, Vainio's music could appear as downright confrontational, as he utilised both extreme frequencies and

of Musicological Research 37, no. 1 (January 2018).

27 With respect to the topic of exerting influence, P-Orridge has been accused of abusive behaviour by another Throbbing Gristle member, Cosey Fanni Tutti, in her -autobiography, where other participants in the performance art and industrial music scenes of that era relate similar things. See Cosey Fanni Tutti, *Art Sex Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017).

sound pressure in solo work and in the Panasonic group with Ilpo Väisänen.[28] This kind of sensory overload was a tactic employed by many industrial music acts.

Despite its often sombre and dark mood, Vainio's work contains potential for a more optimistic, even utopian outlook. This is due, I claim, to the initial context of his solo production, the futurist leanings of the early techno music scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The sonic fictions of industrial music tended to paint a picture of the post-war information society as forming a regime of comprehensive control, against which one could only use the shock tactics of noise and the cut-up, whereas techno music's began with more of an ethos of creating "temporary autonomous zones" that could thrive in the blind spots of the capitalist apparatus of control. An element of Afrofuturist sonic fiction was prevalent in the early years of techno – a "dream of electrifying the inner city with hi-tech, sci-fi thoughts and dreams" – as "Mad" Mike Banks of the Detroit group Underground Resistance attests.[29] Granted, the industrial and techno scenes often share methods: using affordable mass-market electronic instruments, creating grassroots international communication and distribution networks between diverse regional scenes, and self-organising concerts and club nights. The main distinction between industrial and techno is thus the former's logic of transgression versus the latter's logic of autonomy.

Conveying such a logic of autonomy one can find the concept of -becoming-imperceptible, as formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. This is the last step in their list of necessary segments of becomings: becoming-woman, -becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-vegetable, becoming-mineral, becoming-molecular, becoming-imperceptible. This multifaceted path of becoming-other is only a "kind of order or apparent progression",[30] but its objective is to evade two contemporary models of thought, representation and information, that act as forces of control and produce the present day's most valued commodity – identity. Counter to this, Deleuze's philosophy can be seen as an incessant endeavour to affirm difference as

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[28] Artists from the Sähkö record label gained instant notice in the UK music press when their showcase concert at Brixton club Vox overloaded the electric circuits. Paul Smith, who attended the show and signed Panasonic to his Blast First record label, recounts the incident: "warm motoric analogue fug filled the room, got louder, then louder still … Ten minutes into the set, the room was emptying apace while Sue and I were magnetically pulled TOWARDS the sound. Three young-ish techno types, their hands on clearly not shop-bought 'tronics, were ever so slightly bobbing their heads in unison. At 12 minutes in it got even louder and, on a mid-beat THUD, the PA blew and what little light there was extinguished. The emergency lights came on. No sound returned." Paul Smith, "Mika Vainio RIP", *Red Bull Music Academy Daily*, April 17, 2017, accessed 5 October 2022, https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/04/mika-vainio-rip.

[29] Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen, *Der Klang der Familie: Berlin, Techno and the Fall of the Wall*, trans. Jenna Krumminga (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2014), 154.

[30] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 272.

a contrary force to the unity of identity.

This ethos and logic of autonomy is apparent in techno music. Techno -historian Dan Sicko states that techno "already takes [autonomy] for granted" and that "[b]y the early 1990s … 'underground' had become a statement of purpose".[31] The essence of techno as a distinct musical genre is summarised by Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson:

> The word "techno" … began as a spin-off of Chicago house, was intended to describe the particular products of nearby Detroit's club scene, which had been producing a somewhat icier, more futuristic take on its -neighbour's minimal recomposition of disco … black American techno musicians, such as [Derrick] May, Juan Atkins and Carl Craig, were greatly influenced by the European practitioners of new wave rock and -synth-pop … the insistence of the dancefloor, and Afro-American -musical priorities were still being actively upheld.[32]

Initially a local music scene in 1980s Detroit, techno found a wider audience especially in the UK and Germany near the end of the decade. In both countries, the adoption of techno as a galvanising music for underground, (semi-)illegal dance parties created a whole subculture around the "raver" lifestyle.

Describing European rave culture's nascency through emerging acid house and techno parties in the late 1980s UK, Simon Reynolds notes that the -phenomenon was not directed explicitly against the social status quo but was "more like a secession from normality".[33] In this context Reynolds refers to Antonio Melechi's concept of "collective disappearance" and quotes a -statement from journalist and early raver Louise Gray, who describes her exhilaration at "the idea that there was this whole society of people who lived at night and slept during the day … Like slipping into a parallel universe, almost". Recounting the newly emerged night-time geography of clubs and warehouse parties, Reynolds observes that "London was transformed into a magical city, transected by new pathways and highly charged itineraries".

This collective becoming-imperceptible remains quite literally "underground", below the circuits of information which, according to Burroughs and proponents of industrial music, form the apparatus of control. Rather than directly attacking this structure by provocations designed to upset the complacency of normality, techno

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[31] Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2010), 132, 96.

[32] Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (London: Routledge, 1999), 74–75.

[33] Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Dance Music and Rave Culture* (London: Picador, 1998), 48. All subsequent quotes in this paragraph refer to the same page.

culture first thrived in invisibility and created its own parallel utopian society – however temporary, even for one night only – as "[i]mperceptible rupture, not signifying break".[34] Early raves in the UK, often arranged without a permit in disused warehouses or outdoor locations, were what could be termed following anarchist Hakim Bey as "temporary autonomous zones" that, as concisely characterised by Simon Sellars, are "indeterminate zones within late capitalism, everyday occurrences that refuse, whether by accident or design, to be incorporated into dominant narratives"[35] and which thus remain imperceptible in a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense.

A certain continuity is noticeable between earlier British free festivals, such as those held at Stonehenge and Glastonbury, exhibiting a "utopian model of an alternative society" that is built on a loose creed of "[n]o -moralism. No prohibitions. Only the limits of common humanity",[36] and the semi-clandestine organising of rave parties that in many ways sought to bring about a boundary-erasing collective experience, aided by the multisensory rave environment of music, lights and movement, often intensified by the use of the empathogenic drug mdma, or ecstasy. This temporary eroding of subject's boundaries could be interpreted as one form of becoming-imperceptible via becoming-multitude. Reynolds describes his rave experiences under the influence of mdma:

> intimacy is dispersed into a generalized bonhomie: you bond with the gang you came with, but also people you've never met. Anyone who's been to a rave knows the electric thrill of catching a stranger's eye, -making contact through the shared glee of knowing that you're both buzzing off the same drug–music synergy … You feel like you're dancing inside the music; sound becomes a fluid medium in which you're immersed … In the rave context, Ecstasy's urge-to-merge can spill over into an oceanic mysticism.[37]

After his mid-1980s industrial music experimentations, it is in these utopian temporary autonomous zones that Mika Vainio appears: first as a DJ and party organiser, then as a musician. Vainio was one of the founders of Hyperdelic Housers, a Turku-based collective that is often credited as the one that "brought techno to

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34 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 24.

35 Simon Sellars, "Hakim Bey: Repopulating the Temporary Autonomous Zone", *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 83.

36 Christopher Partridge, "The Spiritual and the Revolutionary: Alternative Spirituality, -British Free Festivals, and the Emergence of Rave Culture", *Culture and Religion* 7, no. 1 (2006) 42–43.

37 Reynolds, *Energy Flash*, xxv–xxvi.

Finland",[38] as they began setting up warehouse raves as early as the summer of 1989.[39] Even though at the time drugs were largely absent from the Turku dance music scene – partying was fuelled mostly by lager – Hyperdelic Housers' warehouse events were often closed down by the police or the fire brigade, so eventually operations dwindled around 1993 and ended in 1995.[40] In 1993 Tommi Grönlund, one of the collective's key members, founded Sähkö Recordings with Vainio, and Sähkö became the main outlet for Vainio's initial output.

If the activity of Hyperdelic Housers was a prime example of diy, so was Vainio's music making. Both his solo work and that of Panasonic group utilised oscillator-based electronic instruments custom made by Jari Lehtinen, an "extra member" of Panasonic. These homemade electronics, as well as Vainio's home studio in a sauna, were often the focus of attention in early interviews and features on Vainio and Panasonic. Jimi Tenor's 1995 documentary, *Sähkö The Movie*, portrays the Sähkö crew's activities in a home studio, hand-assembling record sleeves and so on; as DJ Nina Kraviz comments in the preview of the 2017 rerelease of the film, it gives one a glimpse into the autonomous, idiosyncratic microcosm of these young Finnish people.[41] This sense of a microcosm, a peculiar self-organised environment, is what the concept of sonic fiction could be seeking. What is evident here, instead of reaction against society and transgression against control, is the creation of a limited utopia. This involves an element of bricolage, of improvising creatively with whatever means are available and proceeding experimentally and holistically, as opposed to creating based on rule or custom.

This multi-modal or transversal orientation enables the emergence of -creative situations for Deleuze and Guattari, who distinguish between "-authoritarian utopias, or utopias of transcendence, and immanent, -revolutionary, libertarian utopias".[42] Whereas transcendent utopias would project a possible future horizon, an ideal towards which history should progress, immanent utopias do not represent some model waiting to be realised but rather liberate potentiality for change that remains beyond representation. Becoming-imperceptible is oriented precisely

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38 Harri Uusitorppa, "Tommi Grönlund ystävineen toi teknon Suomeen", *Helsingin Sanomat*, February 15, 2017, accessed 5 October 2022, https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000005087668.html.

39 Erkko Lehtinen, "Olipa kerran Turussa", in *Kone-Suomi*, ed. Kalle Kinnunen (Helsinki: Khaos, 2017), 46. Pertti Grönholm, "Hyperdelic Houserseista Saksan teknolistoille – DJ Øm vie turkulaista underground-teknoa maailmalle", in *Tekno – digitaalisen tanssimusiikin historia, filosofia ja tulevaisuus*, ed. Sam Inkinen (Hämeenlinna: Aquarian, 1994), 254.

40 Lehtinen, "Olipa kerran Turussa", 54.

41 Boiler Room, "Nina Kraviz & Powell on 'Sähkö The Movie' – starring Mika Vainio – Trailer | Boiler Room," YouTube, July 31, 2017, 1:36 to 2:08, accessed 5 October 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SD9BVh-1nzc.

42 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 100.

towards escaping the model of representation that prioritises sameness over difference.

Returning to discourse on techno, rave culture's inclination towards -becoming-imperceptible, existing as a kind of night-time shadow culture, has been condemned for its lack of (political) representation. In their analysis -Gilbert and Pearson state:

> If dance culture encourages a collective and individual withdrawal from "mainstream" political society, then its participants are not likely to be able to effect any serious political or social change … Dance culture and its experiences have thus been articulated with a libertarianism which is so anti-political as to be self-defeating.[43]

Correspondingly, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy has been criticised on the very same grounds as anti-political aestheticism that leads to withdrawal from the world. Yet, at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's critique is the concept of "the world" as representable totality that is posited as an object of knowledge and representation. Thus, what connects Deleuze and Guattari, underground musical cultures such as industrial and techno and the figure of the *bricoleur* are the themes of autonomy and experimentation, out of which a creative act can emerge and form new relations within a certain state of affairs.

Can the sonic fictions of Mika Vainio be appraised as creative and utopian in a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, even though his music contains features that are inherited from dystopian industrial music culture? Vainio's works often have sparse, even severely minimal musical structures where a strict, rigid 4/4 beat forms a grid upon which singular sounds are positioned in patterns that include very little variation. Sounds become signal-like, clear tones, -evoking -associations with scientific instruments and data. It is in the midst of this -sparsity that the tiniest features of sounds, on the threshold of becoming-imperceptible, attain the most importance. Sounds merge by distortion overlaying the frayed edges of sounds, or by cavernous echo containing ever-fading trails of sounds that begin to intermingle. As Vainio describes his creative work, "the most important thing is to find the right kind of sounds and the right combinations between them. It is only after that when the structure comes into play when I start to arrange the work".[44]

Experimenting with creation of sounds, implemented through his array of electronic instruments, many of which were custom made, forms the material basis of Vainio's music. The emphasis on sonic materialism, partially overlapping but also contrasting with the symbolic transgressions of industrial music, situates the music

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43 Gilbert and Pearson, *Discographies*, 182.

44 Pertti Grönholm, "Mika Vainio jätti elektroniseen musiikkiin pitkän kaiun", in *Toisen -soinnun etsijät – turkulaisen populaarimusiikin villit vuodet 1970–2017*, eds. Pertti -Grönholm and Kimi Kärki (Turku: Turun historiallinen yhdistys, 2017), 225.

at the threshold of clarity and obscurity. Here both the dystopic and utopic dimensions of Vainio's music are audible, as the most clear and distinct tones emerge from and recede into that obscure imperceptibility of noise and silence that enables their individuation. In my interpretation, this liminal character of sound that is emphasised by Vainio steers his music's sonic fictions from industrial dystopianism and its danger of slipping into nihilism towards techno-inspired experimentation with unpredictable outcomes – an undetermined utopia.

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