

Etika Makinal

Ante todo, calma



The slogan "industrial music for industrial people", coined by Genesis P-Orridge, contains multiple lines of force. The term "industrial" means an economic activity based on the endless development of technology, an activity that implies a social transformation driven by the transformation of the environment, of the landscape, and of the relationships between the workers. It is, at least in theory, a linear and upward movement that leads humanity into a coveted progress.

But what happens when this journey to happiness is broken? What happens when there is a need to renegotiate which industrial sector must be abandoned in favour of a new one? Then, as happened in the United Kingdom in the late sixties, the discontent grows. At that time, music was a sort of catalyst for a primitive type of violence, for a primary discontent, that projected the punk movement until well after its supposed birth.

In the early eighties, Mieres was looking for ways to digest the famous Spanish conversion, that is, the definitive abandonment of the Fordist dream of Francisco Franco. Therefore, the Equipo Estético Ética Makinal was born at a time when unemployment was rising and the city was beginning to depopulate.

Ética Makinal was a group of teenagers who experimented with music created with synthesisers. Their aesthetic was related to punk, noise and industrial movements, but they also referred to other times and forms - they researched the visual principles of avant-garde and they were influenced by Futurism, Dadaism and Constructivism. In spite of living in the periphery, in the isolated Asturias, they soon engaged with the emerging national scene, which had nothing to do with the famous "Movida", and they even exchanged letters, fanzines and cassettes with groups from other countries, likes France, Italy and USA.

The following is an email interview made by Alfredo Aracil from LABoral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial.

Question: How did you find out what was happening in Spain and in other countries? What was your first contact with industrial music?

Ernesto Avelino: I don't remember, but I guess that it was some record by Throbbing Gristle, maybe because we saw the Industrial Records logo on the cover. It was in the air, in our conversations. We assumed it as a vital mission. Besides, most people didn't know anything about it, they were following other paths, we possessed a strange knowledge. There were things that no one thought that were important to us. At first we used a lot the term "experimental music", but I always thought that what we were doing were Futurist cultural manifestations. We were discovering the futurists of our time, people that were following more or less the same ideas of the interwar period. That's what I thought.

Rafael González: Equipo Estético Ética Makinal (3EM) was there already before the introduction into the industrial scene. At the beginning, we were a large collective connected through comics and music, especially techno-pop and new wave. We read a lot of magazines, we listened to Radio 3 and we watched *La edad de oro* (a TV show). Then we started to find out about riskier proposals, when we got in touch with STI (Sindicato de Trabajos Imaginarios, Zaragoza) after buying one of their fanzines at a bookshop, or maybe at a record store, in Oviedo. At that point we introduced ourselves into that kind of music and activities.

Question: What relationship had your music, or your activities, with what was happening in the rest of Spain?

Ernesto Avelino: We corresponded with a lot of Spanish artists and they published our drawings, music and texts. We listened to similar artists, bands and collectives. I'm not talking only about industrial or electronic and experimental bands, we were also in contact with contemporary artists, sculptors and painters. We talked about STI, but also about Jaime Plensa.

Question: What kind of relationship had the industrial movement with the official "Movida"?

Ernesto Avelino: We didn't have any kind of relationship, but we were coetaneous. We listened to some "Movida" bands, we went to their concerts and we bought their records. I listened a lot to Esplendor Geométrico, but also to Radio Futura, I knew all their songs. Besides, for us the break up between Esplendor Geométrico and Aviador Dro was a battle royal between radical music and commercial music.

Rafael González: Sometimes we think about them as two parallel universes that evolved at the same time, but the truth is that Esplendor Geométrico was a split-off of Aviador Dro. At that time, DRO and Diseño Corbusier worked in collaboration with Grabaciones Accidentales, so there were some meeting points. Besides, at the beginning the "Movida" was not something official, and its impulse was an inspiration to Equipo Estético Ética Makinal (3EM). Most of us admired some of the bands and projects related to the "Movida".

Question: What was the role of the correspondence and the letters that you exchanged with other collectives?

Ernesto Avelino: They were a means of communication. We also made phone calls, when my parents weren't at home I used to call to Madrid or Málaga to talk to Orfeón Gagarin or to people from the Agustín Parejo School. We sent a lot of letters to ask for records, cassettes and fanzines, and mail art was also very important. All those things gave meaning to the fact of establishing a communication network that covered the entire world.

Rafael González: Their role was essential. In those days, it would have been impossible to have anything like that without correspondence, without the postal service. As I said before, for your development as a creator you needed the contact and the relationship with other people involved with the movement. The important thing was to share, exchange, and collaborate.

Question: When did you start to tinker with music equipment? How did you get it?

Rafael González: We started to use music equipment at the very beginning of 3EM. Some of us thought that traditional music instruments and rock music were things from the past. Our equipment was really poor because we didn't have any money only some help from our parents, who weren't rich, indeed quite the opposite. We had a monophonic synthesizer I don't remember the brand and record players, cassettes, radios, and a lot of cables. We recorded everything with a very low quality recorder.

Ernesto Avelino: I worked with radios. I was fascinated with interferences, so I listened to them, and I recorded them. I was obsessed with picking up waves from space, from the Sun or from Jupiter. I was also interested in listening the background noise of human civilization. It was a technological background, an enigmatic ocean that I didn't understand, but those sounds and their rhythms were like celestial music. Pablo and Ángel had a synthesizer, a mixer, and some equipment for duplicating tapes. For me, all those things were the opening to a wonderful world.

Question: You were only teenagers, but *Étika Makinal* was politically charged. Did you live in a politicized environment? Did you have any kind of relationship with traditional politics, like political parties or labour unions?

Ernesto Avelino: We were four people and I was the only one politically active. The others were more or less politically aware, but not really committed. We lived in a politicized environment, but it should have been more politicized, at least in my opinion. It was a time of disenchantment and evasion. The welfare state was fully developed and people didn't care about politics. It was a very hedonistic time. There were some important miner strikes, but it was something usual, cultural, completely rooted. I was ashamed of going with *Vivenza* records to the union meetings. I felt weird because I was carrying a knowledge that put me out of context among those men, among those miners. When I was a teenager, Mieres was not very politicized, I wanted more, but now I'm aware that it was much more politicized than other Spanish cities. Mieres has always been a left-wing laboratory. Throughout the twentieth century, the values that have remained in the operational thinking of the people are left-wing values. I could talk about a lot of good and bad things related to this subject, but it's not the time.

Rafael González: The other members of 3EM had not links to political parties or labour unions. We wanted to be an union, but it's true that we weren't all politicized in the strict sense of the word. We were interested in Futurism and anarchism as political forms, but with a coat of science fiction. We made only one cassette that was clearly political, *Mieres 1934*, and it was the result, with other recording, of the influence by UHP/Peña Wagneriana/Agustín Parejo School (Málaga), with whom we had a good and close relationship.

Question: Were you aware of what was going to happen in Mieres at the beginning of the eighties? Could you see the first effects of the industrial conversion?

Ernesto Avelino: Yes, of course. *Fábrica de Mieres* was already shut down. My father was transferred to *Factoría de Veriña*, in Gijón. Mines were closing and people fled. We were teenagers, so we were cheeky. We were more concerned about aesthetics than about anything else, I personally preferred the surface to the background. Now, if I think about it, I'm aware of more details, of what the environment was doing to me at certain levels of influence. We grew up surrounded by mines and factories.

Rafael González: The effects of industrial conversion were there, it was something gradual, but you could feel it. I don't know if we were aware of the imminent crack. In a creative sense, for some of us Mieres was enough, it had nothing to envy to other places. However, some of the members of our group had always in mind to leave the city, and that was what happened in the end and why we break up.

Question: What influence had the landscape on you? I'm thinking about the factories, the wells and the chimneys, but also about the strikes.

Rafael González: That was our landscape and our inspiration, although it may sound a bit stupid. I know that we were pretty naive, but we thought that this kind of music and activities couldn't happen in a place with different characteristics.

Ernesto Avelino: I guess that we were very influenced by our landscape, but I was always listening to Kraftwerk and Japan and thinking about Moebius perspectives and travelling to other planets. Anyway, the advertisements of 3EM used images of chimneys, blast furnaces, and industrial landscapes. I was fascinated by Hans Poelzig architecture, which was similar to some of the industrial buildings that I saw everyday in my surroundings. The Bauhaus. Strikes were a daily occurrence; they were something normal in an industrial and working-class society. Miners never worked the entire month.

Question: How did you get interested in the machine as a metaphor for the industrial development at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century?

Rafael González: We were interested in science, and we were fans of science fiction. Our main reference was Futurism, and we liked bands that addressed those subjects in their lyrics.

Ernesto Avelino: I was a futurist and a Marxist. I adored Maiakovski. Eisenstein's films mesmerized me, frame by frame. I wanted a huge industrial development. Carried along by imagination, I was always thinking about a technological world designed and built with megalomania. I also liked Buck Rogers, Little Nemo, and Krazy Kat because I thought that they were good examples of advanced art. I even came to think that at some point when human beings had the sufficient energy resources we would see decorative thermal power plants releasing water vapour through big chimneys just for landscaping purposes. I wish to see that one day.

Question: How and why did you approach to historical avant-garde?

Ernesto Avelino: We loved historical avant-garde, we were educated, we knew well the Generation of '27, and Dadaism and Futurism were our guides, our GPS. I remember talking about Marcel Duchamp when we were just 15 years old.

Rafael González: The first approach was through music. There were several bands that we admired greatly that made constant references to historical avant-garde, especially Futurism. That "ism" fitted perfectly with our interests, with our vision of the world, or with our intended vision. At that time, we thought that futurist ideas were still valid, that had not been adequately exploited. Besides, that aesthetic seem really beautiful to us.

Question: How did you handle the visual aspect? Were you interested in comics?

Ernesto Avelino: We collected comics, we bought all we could, and we also stole. We had a great, vast collection of European and American comics. One of the main reasons of our creative activity was to draw: to draw, to lay out images, to search photos in encyclopaedias, to request fanzines by mail. We were up-to-date of everything related to comics, we were real experts.

Rafael González: Comics were the beginning of everything. We met and we became friends because of this common interest. In fact, our first projects were focused on comics. Personally, I think that we had one of the best illustrators and comic artists and we didn't make the most of that.

Questions: You also edited a fanzine, right?

Rafael González: We edited several fanzines. I remember one entitled Gente Non Grata.

Ernesto Avelino: Yes, that's where I published my first texts, photos, and drawings. We made three issues. The last one was professionally printed and distributed with the high school magazine it was announce with fanfare.

Question: Returning to the subject of strikes. I'm going to move on from music to slogans, to the proclamation "Mieres 1934". How did start your interest in violence?

Ernesto Avelino: Violence was one of the reasons of industrial aesthetics, and still is. Besides, my grandfather died in 1934. He was the second casualty. He was a miner, he rebelled and he participated in the attacks prior to the first day of the beginning of the revolution. Then he participated in the taking of quarters and in the Battle of Manzaneda. He died just after arriving at Oviedo. At a family level, the Revolution of 34 is very important to me. My grandfather was one of the Cyclops that arose from earth to assault the heavens. This is part of the family and social mythology of Mieres and Asturias. Then there was the aesthetics of violence, which emerged from our lectures and our artistic contemplation. We knew Miguel Ángel Martín, and Whitehouse. Whitehouse was very influential to me. Then we started reading Marquis de Sade. It was just an aesthetic treatment of violence; we weren't violent at all. We opened the door to some social taboos from the same point of view of many contemporary artworks that we knew. It was the dark side of postmodernity, and the dark side of the art that was questioning it.

Question: At first, you published your own material, but then you contacted with similar collectives, like Sindicato de Trabajadores Imaginarios. How did you get in touch?

Rafael González: The relationship with STI was our gateway to this movement, because it allowed us to know and make contact with many people that were working in the same terms. STI was like a huge window display, they published and distributed a lot of interesting fanzines, magazines, and cassettes. Their "word spreading" work was essential.

Question: Ética Makinal broke up at the beginning of the nineties. At that time, I think that the industrial scene began to integrate into techno. Do you see yourselves as pioneers? Did you see yourselves as underground or avant-garde musicians?

Ernesto Avelino: I didn't have the capacity to judge and analyse with wit all the political processes related to my creative activities, but I was completely aware that I was doing something important in a creative sense, and that my adolescence was different and special. That was clear when I compared myself to other guys from the street or neighbourhood. I could see the difference, and I knew that what we were doing was important. I knew that, and I knew also that someday someone would ask about it. I realized that art was something that, one way or another, would provide the backbone of my life.

Rafael González: We thought that we were making avant-garde music. We thought we were avant-garde, as it could not be otherwise considering our age. But to be honest, I don't know if anyone would consider us pioneers, or if we had an impact on someone else. The truth is that when Equipo Estético Ética Makinal was created there were already several Spanish projects about those topics, developing that kind of activities. They are the real pioneers, the mirror in which we saw ourselves. Until a few years ago, I thought that all that we had done was just a curious anecdote that only a few people remembered. Now it seems that there's some attention on us, because of the emergence of several blogs dedicated to what happened within that musical trend, and because of the current musical activity of one of the old members of 3EM.
