





JOY DIVISION

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Enitharmon Editions



















LICHT UND BLINDHEIT

MICHAEL BRACEWELL

Manchester, 1978. Some meagre film footage records them. Neat, schoolboy haircuts; shirts and trousers of no discernible style – one, the guitarist, wears a thin black tie. The music is aggressive, building in speed and violence. The guitarist plays carefully, as though practising a lesson, never taking his eyes off his fingering. He wears his guitar high. The bearded bass player wears his low, standing with legs apart, chin up, meaning business. No smiles. The drummer mostly looks to one side; his thin face is taut with endurance, the music requires him to play so fast.

The skinny singer's short brown hair sits in a ragged fringe across his pale forehead. He has the face of a drugged angel. His name is Ian Curtis. He looks unwell, heavily medicated – his skin clammy. He sings in a harsh, deep, desperate voice. At first he sings with his eyes closed, as though he can barely open them. When he does, he stares blearily upwards, into the lights, unseeing. His mouth lolls open. At two minutes and six seconds into the song his body seems to jolt into convulsive movement, his eyes wide open and staring, as though suddenly faced with some horror that only he can see.

In his open-necked grey shirt and grey trousers, he looks unusually old fashioned – an impoverished poet of the 1930s. Bent at the elbow his arms jerk and flail. He pushes away the microphone stand; he looks as though he is about to lose consciousness; he twirls a finger and points at the side of his head, singing faster, more harshly, almost screaming. *'Dance! Dance! Dance! To the radio...'*

He is singing as though his life depended on it. In his eyes is the madness of Nijinsky, who wrote how he 'danced frightening things.' And then the song decelerates; the singer's body slumps; he looks exhausted and defeated. The intent musicians bring their music to rest.

Time passed. Snow fell.

The music manifests from resonant silence. It is as though a sound-proofed door has been opened at the far end of a long corridor. We seem suddenly to be hearing an instrumental exercise that might have been following its course for some time, gradually building in controlled intensity.

Stark and deft, the loosely swinging, echoing beat provides a chassis to carry the interplay of guitar and bass. The guitar sound is metallic, scything. It brings to mind the wind through power lines, or

machine parts being sawn from sheet metal. The sound is also plaintive, sinuous and fluid, given depth by the bass running softly ahead, just beneath the surface of the rhythm. The drums, guitar and bass configure and entwine like a trio of sonic apparitions.

Fifty seconds in, this accumulating intensity shifts temper. The guitar becomes more aggressive, breaking out into four clamorous crescendos, each backed by the tumbling accompaniment of the bass. This abrasive passage is closed with a double-beat on the drum, and the rhythm becomes looser, resuming its swinging beat. The intensity appears to ease; aerating space opens within the track. The heat of emotion meets the acoustics of absolute zero.

The calm is short-lived. With accelerating urgency, guitar and bass drive the music to a reprise of the harshly metallic crescendos. The last of these seems to fall neatly into place, its collapse caught by a deft doubling of the drum beat. And at two minutes twelve seconds – a little under half-way through the track – Curtis starts to sing. His deep, faintly transatlantic voice sounds at once frightened and frightening, stentorian yet pushed by gathering panic: *'Someone take these dreams away...'*

It does not sound like the voice of a young man. Nor does the emotion in the voice sound performed. The song conveys fear and panic, neurosis and psychosis. The core of its tortured emotion resides in the refrain, *'Calling me, They keep calling me...'* The agonized lyric seems to arise as though the singer himself is a tormented apparition, ritualistically conjured by the compulsive and interweaving overtones of the music. The song begins to feel like a cruel yet thrilling ceremony, part requiem, part exorcism.

Such is an experience of listening to 'Dead Souls' – a track recorded by Joy Division, produced by fellow Mancunian Martin Hannett and released in March 1980 on a French limited edition EP, 'Licht Und Blindheit'. Put out by Rouen-based label Sordide Sentimental, the 'A' side of this seven-inch vinyl single was called 'Atmosphere'.

The record's sophisticated packaging comprised a magazine in the medium of a portrait-format painted folder. The cover artwork was a painting by Jean-François Jamoul: a robed and hooded figure is depicted walking through a mountain landscape, its drama redolent of the Sublime of German Romanticism. The painting style is figurative; the colours – blue, leaf green, copper brown, silver white and lavender grey predominate – fresh and bright. Printed inside the folder were collage and liner notes by Jean-Pierre Turmel, the label's co-founder.

The musical pace of 'Atmosphere' is slower than that of 'Dead Souls', and in this the two tracks compliment one another. The former's mood combines feelings of coldness, ceremony and limitless

space. Reminiscent of a processional, the highly distinctive acoustics of its sonic architecture (acknowledged by the band to be Hannett's particular creation) convey an impression of freezing interstellar stillness. The atmosphere of science fiction never seems too distant from the music of Joy Division, nor the night sounds of a haunted warehouse: the screeching creak of a heavy lock, the distant clattering of a service elevator.

The cold, cavernous industrial feel of Hannett's sonic brutality is offset, musically, by accents of icily glittering beauty – encoded on 'Atmosphere' in symphonic sweeps of synthesizer chords overlaid by sleigh bells. The funereal sombreness of the measured, emphatic drum beat and murmuring bass gives way to passages of luxuriant emotional release, building to cathartic crescendo. The tone of the lyric is alternately brooding, accusatory, imploring and resigned – its mood pivoting on the repeated plea, *'Don't walk away, In silence...'*

Both tracks on 'Licht Und Blindheit' feel sepulchral, intimating isolation, fear and the death of hope as presentiments of death itself. Exemplary of Joy Division's dark appeal, they seem driven by a compelling sense of tragic destiny. Musically and lyrically, their amphetamine-like confluence of urgency and exhaustion plays out as neurasthenia and foreboding, held in uneasy tension.

Ian Curtis's suicide two months after the release of 'Licht Und Blindheit' (the last Joy Division record to be issued during his lifetime) appeared to confirm and fulfil these intimations of terrible prophecy. And so the group's name, brief history and output (two studio albums and five singles recorded between 1978 and 1980) were committed to the unquiet grave of legend.



It was me waiting for me

We told the old stories of the future.
Were we living it?

Everywhere was aftershock:
the decay of an event so fundamental that it passed unremarked.

Everywhere was a small town shutting up early
while the young gathered to contemplate
violence – the one thing they could make occur.



Slow roses

The great halls were empty.

The air so chill and damp and trapped, it bloomed in slow roses.

The cinemas and stations that had been our guardians for so long
entered a sleep from which they would wake recast
as we would wake to find ourselves in middle age.

The edge of the island was empty.

We gathered at the silent dock and waited for new ways to leave.



To the centre of the city

We danced in rooms built for the arrival
of cotton and grain by water or steam.
We met in market squares and tobacconists.
We dressed as spies and highwaymen.
All roads were open and unlit.



Arrangement

Someone was making the noise we wanted to
about feelings we didn't know we had.
Making noise away from each other and towards themselves.

We dealt in insight, relying on the one solid phrase.
We wrote, and spoke, in capital letters.

We wanted scale and depth and glamour
and found them in disused space and a failure to connect.
This was its noise.



He started to dance

As if climbing ice while fighting shadows.

A boy waiting to feel
or to find someone who could show him how to

when what arrived was so total
that it had neither the shape nor direction required.



Small words

Etched, corroded and left out in the rain
until context pooled and dissolved:
electrified and then sedated.



The failure of his agony

A young man turning away
in pursuit of himself in reflection turning away.

For all the books and methods and rules,
the medication and the blue room,
the sidesteps, variants and deletions, the different endings

he could not reach himself and met only himself
turning away.

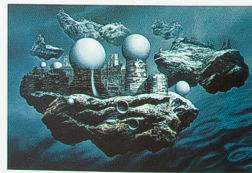




New Dawn Fades, 2000
Oil on panel
71.5 x 62 cm



Everyone Sang (Painting for Ian Curtis)
copied from illustration "Gammaden 02"
by Chris Foss, 1996
Oil on canvas mounted on board
59 x 79.5 cm



Böcklin's Tomb (copied from
"Floating Cities" 1981 by Chris Foss), 1998
Oil on canvas
221 x 330 cm



Heart & Soul, 1999
Oil on wood
102.5 x 84 cm



Towards an International Socialism
(after "Icebergs in Space" 1989
by Chris Foss), 1997
Oil on canvas
220 x 328 cm



The Tragic Conversion of Salvador Dalí
(after John Martin), 1999
Oil on canvas
222 x 323 cm



Ornamental Despair (Painting for Ian Curtis)
copied from "Asternod Hunters" 1971
by Chris Foss, 1994
Oil on canvas
200 x 300 cm



Dead Souls (copied from "Cities in Flight:
A Clash of Cymbals" 1974 by Chris Foss), 1997
Oil on canvas
213 x 339 cm



Dark Angel (for Ian Curtis) after Chris Foss, 2002
Oil on canvas
225 x 341 cm

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With each copy is a signed original screenprint by Glenn Brown, in two colours,
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