

# TIMES OF INDUSTRIAL COOL

BY ROBERT WILLIM

**Recently, a new perspective on society has emerged. It is mainly characterized by a changed perception of traditional manufacturing industries. This perspective can be called Industrial Cool, and has now taken musical form.**

New light has been shed on the traditional manufacturing industries of the western world. Something has happened, after decades of closure and moving of industrial activity to other parts of the world. Is it now possible to speak of living in a postindustrial society? The term postindustrial on one hand has turned into something of a cliché in its description of the last couple of decades of change in society. It was strongly worn out in connection with the rise and fall of the dot-coms' precocious rhetoric about how the industrial society had gone obsolete. On the other hand, there are a number of signs that traditional industry is undergoing quite some changes. There are negative consequences

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from closed-down factories in the form of unemployment and depopulation of certain areas, but also more positive examples. New activities have grown in connection to industrial change. One common denominator for these is a more or less distanced and reflecting relation to what the industry has been, another is that activities are built upon the aesthetics of earlier industry. We would like to say that these activities are characterized by Industrial Cool, meaning several of the aspects that have been distinguishing marks of the manufacturing industry during more than a century are now seen as aesthetically pleasing. The processes in which industries are seen as artful and aesthetically pleasing can be called Industrial Cooling, in short: IC'ing. There are a number of different examples of these processes.

*Recycled factories:* Abandoned industrial settings have started to be recycled lately, often by cultural institutions. Art galleries, culture centres and museums are moving into the previously industrial premises and give them new functions as well as an aesthetical aura. One of the more obvious examples of this is the art and cultural centre BALTIC in Gateshead, England. What has been an industrial flour mill has been resurrected after its closure. The buildings have been redesigned and transformed

into containing an arts factory, a meetingplace for artists and audiences. Character, stories and well chosen style elements from the earlier activities have been raised and made more aesthetically appealing. The industrial environment is reminiscent of earlier days. This temporary distance is used to create the aesthetical aura that surrounds the culture- and arts factory. There are a number of similar examples of reuse of industrial environments in a number of countries. They all contribute to shedding new light upon the old industry. They all contribute to the growing movement of Industrial Cool.

*Staged factories:* Another aspect of Industrial Cool is that a new type of factories have appeared, accentuating aesthetic dimensions and inviting consumers and the general public to take part of the staged production in the premises. The most significant example is Volkswagen's factory "Die Gläserne Manufaktur" (The Transparent Factory) in Dresden, Germany. Luxury cars are manufactured in a newly built, architecturally grand factory, dominated by glass. Visitors may watch production as it is performed by shining machines and workers dressed in white. Work takes place as silently as possible, on wooden parquet flooring in tasteful lighting. The facility is like a hybrid of a modern manufacturing industry and an art museum. Situated in the centre of Dresden, it is supposed to symbolize the reunion of the industry and the city with its cultural life. The Transparent Factory is also an excellent example of Industrial Cool.

## **Old factory - new sound**

Having analyzed these phenomena for a longer period of time it was time to try a new approach. Swedish musician and producer Håkan Lidbo showed his interest, and so did the design team PLOT. Together, we therefore started the project named The Birth of Industrial Cool. In this project, we wanted to interpret processes in which the worlds of industry and art are brought together. We wanted to create something that could be interpreted as Industrial Cool. The result was a sort of audio-visual reuse of a traditional manufacturing industry.

The most fitting and at the same time inspiring object in our immediate geographic neighbourhood was assessed to be the sugar refinery of Arlöv close to the city of Malmö in the south of Sweden. After consulting the refinery management we had unlimited access to the entire facility, where the refining and manufacturing of sugar products takes place 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year round. Sounds of hissing pipes, spinning engines and squeaking cranes were digitally captured, thousands of photos were taken and many hours of video were recorded. The suggestive and almost magical aspects of the seemingly commonplace and prosaic in the industrial setting was sought and documented.

At this stage, more and more artists showed an interest in the project, making it natural to evolve a step further. The sounds of the factory became raw material for an array of musical interpretations. An impressive row of musicians and producers of electronic music were given access to a common soundbank to create their very own, personal interpretation as a musical contribution to the project. The result is the compilation cd: IC1 - The Birth of Industrial Cool, released on 23Hz (and distributed in Scandinavia by Playground). Besides Swedish world artists like Håkan Lidbo, Lowfour (Andreas Tilliander) and Berlin-based Mikael Stavöstrand, contributions have come from all possible places around the world, British artists Scanner and Tonne, Rechenzentrum from Germany, Replicante from Argentina, Jay Haze and Pheek from USA and Canada respectively, they have all made delightful creations of the southern Swedish industrial sounds.

Extending the project, we have now started work on Sugar Added - Further Dimensions of Industrial Cool. The imagery from the refinery will here be used as raw material for a film. This film is based on the music from the cd and is an abstract and suggestive account of the refinery. The film is being produced and edited by Anders Weberg. A shorter version of the film will be presented in connection to the promotional work for the cd.

The Industrial Cool project is an interpretation of the phenomena that occur in conjunction with the changing views on traditional manufacturing. Furthermore, it can be seen as a commentary on some of the earlier aesthetic interpretations of industrial settings. This kind of interpretations has often taken musical form and has been performed by artists like Cabaret Voltaire, Throbbing Gristle, Einstürzende Neubauten and Skinny Puppy since the seventies. It has often been aggressive and relied upon the exploiting and rough of the industrial. Considering the roles industry has received in a society that more and more people call postindustrial we wanted to reinterpret these musical expressions. Without wanting to glorify industrial production we tried to enhance the dimensions available in Industrial Cool. Instead of emphasizing the aggressive and raw, we tried to stress the inherent beauty that can be found in industrial milieus.

The musical production process behind the IC1 album is also different from how previous industrial music has been created. Earlier, large physical objects, such as different metal objects, power tools and so on, were lifted out of their standard environment and integrated in studio working contexts. For instance, a story is told about how the german band Einstürzende Neubauten sometime in the eighties dragged an enormous oil

tank into the recording room of the legendary Hansa Studios in Berlin. During sessions, the tank was used as a percussive instrument. Working on IC1, no heavy objects were moved. Nor was any large and expensive studio complexes used. The music has to a high degree been created using computers. In several cases an ordi-

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nary laptop has been the central musical instrument and at the same time the entire studio. Digitally recorded sounds from the sugar refinery have been the raw material used in conjunction with computer software. This way of working mirrors the Industrial Cool spirit well. Artists on the other side of the world has, via the Internet, been able to download the Arlöf sounds and use it in their creations. The sounds have been digitally cut, manipulated and edited into new musical ones. In this globally distributed, digital recycling of industrial sounds, potential for a totally new musical sound is created.

### **Cool Factory vs. Fame Factory**

Finally, the IC1 project turns the concept of industrial in another way as well, as it has been carried out on a close to non-profit basis. The musicians and producers that have added to the project have done so primarily for the artistic satisfaction and without any real demands for compensation more than the attention and possible gratification they get for their interpretations. The methods of production are largely different from how most of the music industry of today works. The music business, characterized by “fame factories” and run-of-the-mill produced pop, has taken over the negative aspects, long-time associated with industrial production in the form of exploitation and mediocre standardization. The music industry of today is generally far from Industrial Cool. It is therefore natural that a small, independent company has taken charge of the development of this phenomenon. All with the generous aid of a long line of enthusiastic producers, musicians and driving forces. We would like to take this opportunity to send a big thank you to the 30-odd people involved in this project so far, now it's time for the industrial revolution - again!



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