

Brainwashed - Lucrecia Dalt, "Anticlines"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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This album, Dalt's sixth, is my first exposure to the iconoclastic Colombian's work and it feels like an ideal entry point, as it is quite a beguiling album that is universally hailed as a major creative breakthrough. Due to its stark and unusual futurist aesthetic and constrained palette of primitive-sounding electronics, *Anticlines* definitely calls to mind both classic Chris & Cosey and minimal wave fare, yet Dalt's vision is transcendently bizarre enough to feel like something radical and new. Her desiccated and industrialized Latin/South American rhythms are certainly a part of that, but the real brilliance of *Anticlines* lies in Dalt's lyrics and vocals: on songs like "Tar," she resembles a sexy cyborg, bloodlessly and seductively intoning breathy, cryptic poetry that feels like it alludes to vast depths of hidden meaning and feeling.

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Lucrecia Dalt's life and career have had a rather singular trajectory, as she was once a geotechnical engineer, then had some success as an indie synthpop artist. At some point, Dalt moved to Berlin, and her music gradually became increasingly radical, experimental, and abstract. To some degree, *Anticlines* feels like an inspired synthesis of Dalt's pop side and her more cerebral, outré impulses, but it also feels like she just added a whole new level of playful experimentalism to her existing aesthetic with her poetic word craft. That is an impressive and rare feat, as Dalt has simultaneously deepened and expanded her art and shaped her vision into an incredibly listenable "pop" album (of sorts). Also, Dalt seems to be almost supernaturally gifted at filtering and diffracting incredibly disparate influences through her distinctive vision, as she drew inspiration from everything from poetry (Alice Fulton) to phenomenology (Dylan Trigg) to Robert Ashley to Aaron Dilloway. She also collaborated with two artists, Henry Anderson and Regina de Miguel. I am sure shades of all of those folks appear here, but I would be very hard pressed to identify any of them after everything has been distilled to just a simple synth pattern and Dalt's voice. Put glibly, I could probably say that *Anticlines*

sounds like Daphne Oram aggressively remixed

Songs of Love and Lust

and totally gutted most of Chris Carter's contributions, and be stylistically quite close to the mark, but there is too much depth and subtlety in Dalt's work for any comparison to be truly apt. Dalt is making very forward-thinking art, yet her extremely simple arsenal of a compact synth

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and an effects processor unquestionably harkens back to an earlier era of electronic music: these songs are almost all crafted from repeating patches and little more.

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does not feel kitschy or retro though—it instead feels like Dalt is making something vibrant and sophisticated from relatively rudimentary tools. The simplicity makes these pieces feel direct and undiluted by unnecessary artifice.

Unsurprisingly, the strongest pieces are ones with the best hooks (I like hooks), particularly the album's lead single "Tar." As with every song on *Anticlines*, the musical component is extremely minimal, but "Tar" is a bit more rhythmic than the other pieces, marrying a sultry and burbling Latin rhythm to little more than woozily passing synth coloration and some eerily seductive vocals ("we have touched...as only atmospheres touch"). The vocals predictably steal the show completely, but Dalt also displays a vivid talent for creating a disorienting sense of unreality, as the simmering pulse sounds like digitized dripping stalactites and strange sounds irregularly flutter into the piece like confused electronic birds. The album's other "pop" highlight is the opening "Edge," as Dalt announces that she is "gathering up skins and blowing them up like balloons" and wonders aloud "how long does everybody last without organs?" over a chirping and squiggling backdrop of electronic bleeps and beeps. I am also quite fond of the more inhuman and hostile-sounding "Analogue Mountains," which combines a relentlessly repeating chromatic spew of synth tones with rather cold and distant vocals. "Errors of Skin" is similarly robotic, creeping into Throbbing Gristle-esque territory with its mélange of clock-like rhythm; chilly, processed vocals; and warped, sickly intrusions of "melody." The rest of the album is also quite interesting, but the remaining pieces are considerably more abstract and nakedly experimental, unfolding more as a series of hallucinatory interludes than distinct, memorable songs. The best of the lot might be the dreamily slow-motion and clanking fugue of "Glass Brain," which feels like one of Dalt's catchier songs has been stretched and corroded beyond recognition. Other pieces, like "Axis Excess" and "Indifferent Universe," feel like shards of actual songs that blossomed into something stranger when decontextualized. Elsewhere,

Anticlines

resembles everything from the ambient sounds of an abandoned space station ("Antiform") to a chopped and alien-sounding gospel choir ("Eclipsed Subject").

My sole caveat with *Anticlines* is that it is heavily front-loaded with Dalt's most inspired and fully formed songs (the voice-centered ones), which I suppose makes a great deal of sense from a sequencing perspective: Dalt drew me in with her catchy avant-garde pop fare, then expanded into increasingly experimental and obtuse fare once I was ensnared. While I do enjoy the many strange instrumental vignettes that populate the second half of the album, it is the comparatively accessible songs like "Tar" and "Edge" that stand out as memorable and capture Dalt at the height of her powers as a visionary avant-pop auteur.

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is leaner on such moments than would be ideal and would be better if the last part of the album were broken up by another hook-filled gem or two. That said, the album does otherwise have a very distinctive and coherent aesthetic, an effective dynamic arc, and a sense of constant

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forward momentum, as Dalt is always doing something appealingly unusual and never lets a piece overstay its welcome.

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maintains an unbroken and evocative retro-futurist spell from start to finish. More importantly, *Anticlines'*

minor flaws are easily eclipsed by the magnitude of its success, as Dalt has achieved something quite wonderful and singular: she has conjured up a perversely sensuous futurist dystopia that feels refreshingly simple and intimate. Given all of its conceptual and cerebral themes, this album is unquestionably Serious Sound Art, yet Dalt has found a way to imbue her more challenging impulses with soul, dark eroticism, and DIY charm.

Samples:

- [Edge](#)
- [Tar](#)
- [Analogue Mountains](#)