

Brainwashed - Stephen Thrower, Little Annie, and Danny Hyde on Love's Secret Domain

Written by Jon Whitney

Saturday, 30 July 2011 21:00 - Last Updated Saturday, 06 August 2011 15:49

Unfortunately the core duo of Coil can no longer reply to us but we are happy to feature three people who were present at the time. Attempts were made to contact other people involved: guests and collaborators, but responses were and are still waiting to be received. If more responses come in, this article will be appended.



Stephen Thrower: Coil member

JW: What was the first direction Coil were heading in following Horse Rotorvator and can you remember how things evolved.

ST: Recording sessions continued almost unbroken after Horse Rotorvator, without an immediate sense of where they were going. Just "the next album". The title first floated, I think, was The Sound of Music, after which The Dark Age of Love was front-runner for a while. The

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songs were still quite similar in construction to Horse Rotorvator and the more evolved parts of Scatology, so if Dark Age of Love had actually materialized it would have sounded a lot more like the first two albums.

JW: Can you tell me some of the external influences that had either some major or minor impacts on the composition of the material?

ST: It's often said that two things push music forward - new technology and new drugs. Completely true in Coil's case! By the time we were into the LSD sessions, the club scene was intensifying; 'E' and acid-house were more and more prevalent in the gay scene. The background thump was moving from House to acid and then techno. There was some overlap between the sounds being used in this new music and the bleepy synth/bludgeoning rhythm side of TG, so I think Geff and especially Sleazy were intrigued by the way wider pop culture was beginning to sound indebted to TG's sound.

JW: Can you explain your roles in the process? What kinds of materials (sound or compositionally) did you bring into the mix?

ST: I could play a little on a lot of different instruments. I was okay on drums, okay on bass or guitar as far as the noisier stuff was concerned, I could do good things on brass or woodwind, and I generally waded in with whatever synths were lying around. I knew nothing about programming or sampling back then, that was entirely Sleazy's domain, and please god don't point a vocal mike at me! I had the ear, and the arrogance, to make suggestions based on what I thought a song was currently lacking. Geff and Sleazy generated the majority of the ideas but I was always able to push for sounds I thought we should add.

Compositionally, there were two ways of getting involved. One was to be present at the demo stage when early song structures were being put together (which happened with me on the previous albums), but in the case of LSD most of the backing tracks were made by Sleazy in advance. The other way was to make suggestions about how to 'guide the ship' once it was moving. That was more my involvement on LSD. What is this thing? How can we mutate it? How can we give it new shapes and contours? Does it need a drunk Mexican prostitute rapping on it?

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JW: The album took years to assemble and arrange so there must be some reasons how and why?

ST: There were many long sessions, many nights, most of which were supported with whatever chemicals were at hand. We were locked into a reckless combination of work and play that sometimes brought out marvels and other times just wasted the money being spent. During "Dark River" we spent literally as much time rolling around on the floor under the desk as we did hovering over the controls. We had to mix it in real time because the desk automation was faulty, so that one was a bloody nightmare - it probably took about forty passes, each time requiring all four of us (me, Sleazy, Geff and Danny Hyde) tweaking and panning and fading things in and out; after each effort me and Geff would collapse to the studio carpet and go and live with the fluff babies for a while.

JW: Can you recall parts of the album you're pleased with and parts you would do over again?

ST: I pretty much like it all, with the exception of "Things Happen," which sounds a bit half-baked, and "The Snow," which sounds bland to me and always did. Knowing what I know now, I would love to get my teeth into "Further Back and Faster" and have a stab at a new version - even though it's one of the highlights I still think it could go 'further'!

JW: Was the LP version the canonical version? I ask this because I received an early promo of it on cassette back in 1990 from WaxTrax! and by the time the CD came out in July it seemed like lots of elements were "added" (additional mixes of Teenage Lightning, "tags" on the end of Windowpane and The Snow).

ST: Both are 'canonical' really. The LP version was planned and timed and laid out ahead of the CD version, but the longer running time of the CD meant we could add more playful elements, with reprises, false fades etc. One's the 'Standard' edition and one's the 'Deluxe', I guess.

JW: Can you take a peek at the song list and provide any insight on things that may have never been covered?

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ST:“Disco Hospital”

Disco Hospital I adored, I thought it set just the right tone. It's absurd and shonky and bizarre, as it's been tripping for an hour already! It's all Sleazy's work as far as I can recall. The chopped-up tape stuff is him, and he did that obscenely chirpy keyboard line as well.

“Teenage Lightning 1”/“Teenage Lightning 2”

A huge buzz to work on, a really pleasurable part of the album. Being an early Roxy Music obsessive, I always wanted us to get the VCS3 out of the cupboard if possible: Jhon and I did two takes of guitar through the VCS3 synthesizer; on one take I played guitar and he twiddled the synth, and on the other take vice-versa. I think the basis for the track came out of discussions we had about the limitations of what people were starting to call 'dance music', and how we wanted to involve Latin rhythms, not just a boom-boom-boom-boom four-four beat.

“Things Happen”

The guests are good, Annie Anxiety and Charles Hayward were both vital to it. Annie came through Geff and Sleazy, I'm not sure how they first met but they knew each other already. She asked for a bottle of Tequila, and that's how she worked her way into the role she plays on the piece. All gone by lunch-time! I suggested we approach Charles. I think Geff and Sleazy were a bit wary of him because he was regarded as a bit of a 'lefty' but I pushed for him because I thought This Heat were so incredible. Geff loved some This Heat too, especially things like “24-Track Loop,” and we would both listen to the Health & Efficiency 12” at maximum volume round at Beverly Road. Sleazy wasn't so sure. Then Charles came in, marched into the drum booth, set up, and started pounding and racing around the kit, at which point Sleazy was beaming. He started sampling him on the fly, which is where the drum loops for 'Scope' (from the Shock Records 7”) came from.

“The Snow”

I was a bit of a curmudgeon about it. A session guy from the studio next door came through while we were mixing it and said, being very friendly, wow this is cool, would you like a little keyboard soloing on it? Geff and Sleazy were on 'E', I think he may have been smoking. So they said yes and he did this very accomplished sort of jazz-fusion keyboard solo that fitted perfectly. Nothing against the guy, but I wasn't in that space really, that sort of 'hey, we're all on drugs guys, this sounds mellow, how about if I jam with you?' vibe. I thought the session players next door ought to have been closing their doors to blot us out! I was gunning for speed a lot more than 'E' and of course it's a very different head space. I think his is the best bit, these days.

“Where Even the Darkness is Something to See”

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One of Sleazy's sly surprises... he just pulled this alternate take out of the air, using what was then brand new time-stretching software to create that 'wading through heavy atoms' feel at the end.

"Windowpane"

My windows are too smeary...

"Further Back and Faster"

This was both a huge pleasure and a huge pain to mix. Lots of arguing and 'debate'. The whole 'Love/Hate' thing was analyzed to the point of absurdity. Some of what we were arguing about really advanced the thing, the rest was just stupid drug rapping that wasted time and money. There were a few Spinal Tap moments, probably! Musically, we were getting inside the mix and shaping it from within, rather than standing back and listening more objectively. We looked upon it as probably the cornerstone of the album, we knew it was working really well as a piece that would immerse and entrance people who may be listening on acid, and we wanted to sculpt and weave the shapes as deliriously as possible. It was just a bit mad trying to do it against the clock in an expensive studio whilst everyone present was off their tits...

"Chaostrophy"

Sleazy started acting strangely towards the end of the LSD sessions. He concentrated on an amazingly luscious orchestral arrangement that Billy McGee had provided, based on a melody of Sleazy's. He took over the mixing desk and exuded some kind of weird energy that pushed me and Geff out of the room. We were left to peer in through the control room window as he turned this stately, complex string piece into what became "Chaostrophy." He mixed it all night at ear-splitting volume. It makes my head clench even now to remember the atmosphere in that room. I think it's Sleazy's most personal expression on the album.

JW: Can you comment more on music trends: you mentioned the shift from house to techno but Coil was never "accepted" into those circles – at least I don't remember ever hearing Coil in any dance club other than an "industrial/goth" kinda night. Coil music wasn't pure enough for the trendster purists. Do you think that this possible impurity of genre / purity of thought contributes to making the music less dated?

ST: There were DJs on the London gay scene who liked Coil and played "Anal Staircase," "Windowpane," and "The Snow" at big venues like Heaven, Limelight, various of the heavier SM clubs, none of which were 'industrial' except for maybe playing the odd Nitzer Ebb record. But

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yes, as you say, the longevity of Coil music is very much allied to its impurities, the fact that although there's a lot of dabbling with this or that, Jhon and Sleazy never allowed themselves to become entirely swallowed up by surrounding musical trends. I did worry about that happening myself, back in the early 1990s, but as it turned out Coil's flirtation with dance floor was short-lived.



Little Annie: guest vocalist on “Things Happen” and sampled for “The Snow.”

I met Sleazy while he was still in Throbbing Gristle. I was meeting Gen for coffee or something one afternoon and he took me to where Sleazy worked. I don't remember why but we stopped in, but I have such a vivid picture of the room and the weather and being struck instantly what a gentleman he was. We met again a few years later along with John Balance via David Tibet. They were both instant 'likes' and then easy to love.

For the recording of “Things Happen,” Coil just asked me to come to the studio (again I have a strong memory of the walk over, the weather, a gorgeous summer dusk (as it was London that was rare!) I hadn't heard the track and there was no concept, that is till after they played the track to me. Then it was true concept. They gave me a background scenario, being a hooker in somewhere like El Salvador as all hell was about to break loose. Then we just did it. I ran with that image. It was one take. Very fast, very easy going.

My times with them were all just really warm & easy. We didn't see each other that often but

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when we did it was lovely. John and I became sorta kindred spirits as the years went on. We'd check in with one another and shared some of the same ghosts, nothing that we ever spoke of. He was very caring and protective, they both were. It was like having two very sweet brothers that lived overseas.

I loved what they did with "Things Happen," though like all my work, I listen once and then need to give a number of years in order to be able to hear it objectively. I guess I was surprised how wide reaching *Love's Secret Domain* was. England being an island doesn't give you an accurate picture of things (the same with Manhattan) but mainly what I think about is two men who I love dearly, and I like to think of them as being together in heaven now, that having been said, wish they were here, but will see them again.



Danny Hyde: producer, engineer, and programmer

I first worked with Coil in 1985, probably *Hellraiser* time, I then worked with them on *Horse Rotovator* by the time *LSD* started being created I was programming with them.

The first recording session was in Paradise studio Chiswick London, a fully computerized studio, Coil only needed to bring themselves. The first thing I noticed early on was how away from the mainstream was their attitude. The extent of guest musicians was more grand than anything before (or after) and songs seemed to materialize from no other explanation than the studio.

With Coil until release there was never a running order, things morphed and morphed until being forced by time restraints. They would change things right up to release including names, many times. We had to mix within a week we took too many uppers and stayed awake too many hours to function in any sane way. We all agreed afterwards we would never work that way again and we never did.

Reflections on particular songs:

"Disco Hospital"

Recorded at Point Studio, Victoria. Pete throws lots of ¼" tape into the air and randomly edits it together. We then created a loop from it feeding MPC 60 through Boss twah pedal.

"Teenage Lightning"

Starts with our first ever experiment with time stretching an acc gtr right out into space
Based on a rhythm that Pete was playing from his newly acquired Casio bip/bop machine.

"Things Happen"

One of the many jams beats we had from Point Studio sessions; Annie just came in and rambled to the track which we then arranged.

'The Snow'

Geff decided he wanted to try some type of acid tune, so we knocked it up in minutes using Akai MPC 60 and a King Singers sample.

The jazz solo was a musician I had worked with before who happened to be in the studio next door, he popped into our drug addled spaced out session and had some indulgence, he returned 40 minutes later and insisted on jamming the solo, of course we allowed it to happen.

"Dark River"

Pete's experiment from Point Studio with his newly acquired digital performer software

"Where Even the Darkness is Something to See"

Cyruing jamming to tape and we ran basic beat against it

"Further Back and Faster"

I will remember to the day I die the convoluted hilarious back and forth dialogue between Geff and Steve both fuelled by drugs and lack of sleep discussing over and over whether it should be the left or right hand that "loved hate" and the political implications to that meaning, me and Peter almost collapsed in pain from laughing.