



## Research > AVANT

Sound art and experimental music arrived to Spain relatively late, but over the course of the last three decades they have produced names, scenes and works that have managed to establish themselves with certain authority on the international stage.

From the most academic electroacoustics to industrial music, from radiophonic art to post-no-wave improvisation, AVANT has joined together with some of the most important performers of experimental music in Spain to retrace some of the key moments of the country's musical avant-garde, scarcely documented until now.

Each AVANT focuses on the work and career of a group project from the scene, documented and composed of two parts: the first part reconstructs the artist's context through interviews, and the second part retraces the artist's work with musical examples.

Curated by Roc Jiménez de Cisneros.

### PDF Contents:

- 01. Biography
- 02. List of sound fragments  
Part I
- 03. Related links
- 04. Acknowledgments
- 05. Copyright note

Roc Jiménez de Cisneros (Barcelona, 1975) is a musician and composer. Since 1996, he is the core of computer music project EVOL, and his work has been released on internationally acclaimed record labels. In 2003 he began developing a series of electroacoustic pieces entitled "Punani", in which he deepens in some of the main aspects of his work, namely algorithmic composition, various synthesis techniques, spectro-morphology and the musical application of fractal geometry and other mathematical phenomena. Since 1997, he co-runs the record label and artists collective Alku with Anna Maria Ramos, as well as imbecil.net, a platform for absurd computing and binary obfuscation. He lives and works in Barcelona.

Voice: Clàudia Faus

# AVANT #8

## Vagina Dentata Organ

Vagina Dentata Organ, the project by Catalan artist Jordi Valls, has long been attracting cult followers and record collectors from around the world. His remarkable sound readymades, a collection of morbid portraits of human emotions, primal instincts and cultural violence assembled from audible *objets trouvés*, place Valls in an interesting no mans land in relation to Spanish sound art, obviously linked to UK post-punk and post-industrial scenes but also close to the more provocative end of conceptual art.

### 01. Biography

Jordi Valls happened to be in the right place (London) at the right time (the tail end of the seventies) to witness one of those subtle transitions that can only be identified by an observer with a finely honed historical perspective. Punk had appeared out of nowhere, having brewed in the catacombs of the underground at arms length from the conventions of the record industry. But almost immediately it mutated, again spontaneously and without a strategy, to become something else altogether. This movement, which continues to embody the spirit of self-management and independence to this day, exploded into a million pieces, leaving behind a perfectly defined, almost textbook, stereotype of what punk should be. At the same time, it gave way to numerous different sub-scenes that took its oppositional, dark and destructive seed one step further. One of these metamorphoses led to something that its exponents called "industrial music", which history has often portrayed as rather Manichean, but, particularly in its early days, proved to be an enormously important breeding ground for Western contemporary subcultures.

As a privileged front-row spectator of this new anti-genre that began with mechanical repetition, noise and the use of electronica, under the banner of "Industrial Music for Industrial People", a young Jordi Valls (living in exile in the British capital for decades before returning to Barcelona in 2008), could have joined the growing list of names who emulated the work of line-ups like Throbbing Gristle, NON and Cabaret Voltaire. But Valls preferred to distance himself from the main scene with a project that is still difficult to pigeonhole today due to its unremittingly personal nature.

Vagina Dentata Organ was born at the same time as many groups from the first crop of English industrial bands, but the form and the concept of its sound and visual works make it impossible to limit its legacy to a simple label tying it to a particular time and culture. Vagina Dentata Organ is the surrealism of Breton, Dali and Éluard, Bacon's unwholesome darkness and the grotesque triptychs of Bosch, passed through the filter of post-punk. A collection of gruesome portraits of human emotions, primal instincts and cultural violence constructed with audible *objets trouvés* – field recordings in which the artist's only obvious intervention is the selection of the material. The pieces are enormously diverse: Holy Week drums, howling wolves, recordings of the final hours of Jim Jones' sect in Guyana in 1978, the sound of a Harley Davidson motorbike on the roads of Catalonia's Empordà... But they all share an attraction for the dark side of human nature, for the brutality that underlies social relationships and religious conventions and the dark and bloody element that hides in all of them, brought together by the small obsessions of Valls, the silent common denominator. In spite of the radically aseptic attitude of its creator (who chose to let friends and acquaintances talk about him for this interview), Vagina Dentata Organ has had cult status for many years, and its work is sought after by collectors around the world.



[Picture of Jordi Valls by Julian Hawkins, London]

His singular "ready-mades", edited in the form of picture discs, are already icons of the recent history of sound art and experimental music. A name and a professional career that are synonymous with provocative symbolism, the destruction of taboos through impenetrable narrative and an anthropological fascination that suddenly becomes perversion, all blurring the line between document and visceral portrait.

## 02. List of sound fragments

### Part I

La Banda Trapera del Río, "Ciutat Podrida" (in *La Banda Trapera del Río*, 1979)  
 Sex Pistols, "Anarchy in the UK" (1976)  
 Crass "Asylum" (in *The Feeding of the 5000*, 1978)  
 Throbbing Gristle, "Slug Bait - ICA" (in *The Second Annual Report*, 1977)  
 Whitehouse, "Dom" (in *Dedicated to Peter Kürten*, 1981)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Trained to Kill" (in *Music for Hashasins*, 1983)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Triumph of the Flesh I" (in *The Triumph of the Flesh*, 1984)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Untitled" (in *The Last Supper*, 1984)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Sex Star I" (in *Cold Meat*, 1986)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Sex Star II" (in *Cold Meat*, 1986)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Chant Premier" (in *Un Chien Catalan*, 1994)  
 Throbbing Gristle, "Hamburger Lady" (in *D.o.A. The Third and Final Report of*, 1978)  
 Nurse With Wound, "The Six Buttons of Sex Appeal" (in *Chance Meeting on a Dissecting Table of a Sewing Machine and an Umbrella*, 1979)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Chant Premier" (in *Un Chien Catalan*, 1994)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "The Dog's Bollocks" (in *The Great Masturbator*, 2004)  
 Whitehouse, "Peter Sutcliffe" (a *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1983)  
 Fragments of the program on TVE2 "La Edad de Oro" (1984)  
 Psychic TV, "Catalan" (in *Dreams Less Sweet*, 1983)  
 Fragments of the program on TVE2 "La Edad de Oro" (1984)  
 Vagina Dentata Organ, "Catalan Dog Barking at the Moon" (in *Music for the Blind*, 2007)

Note: the tracks on this compilation come from recordings released on various formats. The differences in sound quality and feel were preserved for the sake of historical value.

## 03. Related links

<http://www.discogs.com/artist/Vagina+Dentata+Organ>  
<http://www.uncarved.org/music/Vdo.html>

## 04. Acknowledgements

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## 05. Copyright note

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["Creu hipercilíndrica" by Jordi Valls]