

The Masthead

The 1970s were haunted by tapes: Watergate, Francis Ford Coppola's 1974 thriller *The Conversation*, Nigel Kneale's 1972 BBC TV play *The Stone Tape*. For German rock bands of the era, their tapes went on to haunt the decades that followed. When Rob Young visited Can's Inner Space Studio in Cologne for *The Wire* 158 in 1997, he was shown "a cupboard stacked floor to ceiling with all the remaining Revox tapes from the era... the tapes were constantly running, even when they thought they weren't". Some of these recordings would emerge decades later as *The Lost Tapes*. For Neu!, the most direct way to hear their elusive old albums through the 1980s and 90s was via cassettes passed from listener to listener, nth generation copies where you finally heard the skeletal heartbeat rhythms inspiring bands such as Stereolab, Quickspace and Electrelane. Meanwhile Faust's most enigmatic and fabled release was *The Faust Tapes*, a shape-shifting collage of sketches and fragments from the studio floor that, like collections such as *Münich And Elsewhere*, were a tantalisingly unreliable witness of time and place.

Fast forward to the present day and the tangled recordings and catalogues left by such groups can create opportunities, red herrings and dead ends. Faust's 1970s recordings are this month released in a detailed Bureau B box set that provides a handy entry point into their classic catalogue. The group tell Daniel Spicer in our cover feature how a concentrated, isolated creative sabbatical in the sleepy town of Wümme – the likes of which it is hard to imagine possible in the 21st century – yielded recordings that have sustained decades of listening and reappraisal. "The only contact we really had was when we were allowed to go to this pub close to the studio," says Hans-Joachim Irmiler. "Even when we go to the pub, we would go in the kitchen, not sitting in the official pub."

History is not always so simple. As Edwin Pouncey explains in one of several essays on German rock

this month, Amon Düül's recordings crept out in unpredictable bursts across labels of questionable status, and their more successful offshoot Amon Düül II moved from label to label, leaving a trail of licensing complexities in their wake. The music of this groundbreaking collective has been effectively left to rot, with few serious reissues and little attempt to bring their body of work together. The concise catalogue of Neu! was eventually respectfully reissued by Astralwerks and Grönland in the early 2000s, but the work of Klaus Dinger's subsequent projects has been ignored, in a way that elevates the immaculate beauty of the original band at the expense of the weird raunchiness of the latter.

Even the Faust story doesn't have a simple conclusion. The new box set advertises the presence of the group's final record *Punkt*, but the similar *71 Minutes Of Faust* CD – on Chris Cutler's ReR Records, who hitherto did peerless work preserving the group's legacy – had already described itself as "The Last LP". Is this the final word, or was that the final word? It's hard to say.

Meanwhile, Mute and Spoon Records are continuing their impressive ongoing archive work with two new Can live recordings this year. There are undeniably monster grooves on these Brighton and Stuttgart recordings from 1975, extending for ten to 20 minutes at a time, with each member of the group jamming freely at full capacity. Yet part of me can't let go of the earlier live sets which emerged on the 1990s *Can Box* set. On a sprawling 38 minute recording simply labelled "Colchester Finale" from 1972, it seems like the band are searching around for each other in the fog until they find some previously unknown common point of resonance, a lick, a pattern, a groove. Old tapes can be cryptic, but sometimes can be truer to the original spirit than any amount of tidying up.

Derek Walmsley

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