

The Definitive History of PERE UBU

PERE UBU/A

DURATION: September '75

PERSONNEL:

Tom Herman: guitar, bass.
Scott Krauss: drums.
Peter Laughner: guitar, bass.
Allen Ravenstine: synthesizer.
David Thomas: vocals.
Tim Wright: guitar, bass.

RECORDINGS:

"30 Seconds Over Tokyo"/"Heart of Darkness":
Hearthan HR-101.

NOTES:

Most Cleveland bands, it seems, were broken up in 1975, and towards the end of the summer there was very little activity. Certain musicians found themselves "between bands": D Thomas and P Laughner had been members of a band that had disintegrated in August; T Wright had worked occasionally as a sound man for that group; S Krauss was rehearsing in an informal arrangement with two girls from Akron; T Herman had been involved with a series of jam bands; A Ravenstine had performed years earlier as half of an electronic music duo and was currently landlord of an apartment building where he,

Krauss, Herman and Laughner lived: The Plaza, 3206 Prospect Avenue.

In September, Thomas initiated an informal grouping for the purpose of recording a self-produced single. The various musicians agreed to work together on this project for two reasons: 1.) Nobody was doing anything else of any significance; and, 2.) It was agreed upon by all involved that this particular grouping of talent might result in unique music. There were no plans to perform "live." In more optimistic moments it was imagined this grouping might continue to work together informally for the purpose of recording, but there was a reluctance to commit oneself to another band in Cleveland given the unfavorable conditions under which one would have to operate.

The record was, originally, planned to be "Final Solution"/"30 Seconds Over Tokyo." Both had been written and performed by the Thomas-Laughner group that had recently split ("Tokyo" had been written by Thomas, Laughner and Gene O'Conner, another guitarist in the group. "Solution" had been written by Thomas and Craig Bell, the bassist in the group, but was later credited to all of Ubu). During the rehearsals in preparation for the studio, however, "Heart of Darkness" developed and the recording of "Solution" was postponed.

PERFORMANCES: None.

PERE UBU/B

DURATION: November '75 to May '76.

PERSONNEL:

Tom Herman: guitar, bass, backing vocals.
Scott Krauss: drums.
Peter Laughner: guitar, vocals, backing vocals.
Dave Taylor: synthesizer, organ.
David Thomas: vocals.
Tim Wright: guitar, bass.

RECORDINGS:

"Final Solution"/"Cloud 149": Hearthan HR 102.

PERFORMANCES:

The band premiered at a bar called the Viking Saloon in downtown Cleveland on 12/31/75. There followed two performances at a large rock club called The Agora; one of those starting at 4:30 in the morning on the last leg of a "Cleveland Rock Spectacular." The most fondly remembered gig from this period was a highly successful pre-teen dance at a place called Bain Park Cabin in a Cle suburb. Between April 7 and May 5 the band shared four Wednesday night jobs with Tin Huey at a bar called The Mistake and went to NYC to open for Suicide at Max's Kansas City.

NOTES:

A series of meetings followed the "Tokyo" studio sessions. Over the course of these meetings it was decided: 1.) The record didn't sound so bad after all; 2.) It might be good to play out a couple of times just for fun and to promote the record; and, 3.) It might be feasible to develop a band arrangement, but with the understanding that any continuation of such an arrangement would be dependent upon results.

At this point Ravenstine announced that he was not prepared to perform live and would have to withdraw. It was known that a clerk at a certain record store played synthesizer and might fit the group. Dave Taylor joined the band. A small bungalow in South Euclid was rented for the purpose and rehearsals began.

When it came time to record the next 45 the band switched to Cleveland Recording Company, the studio that



had mastered the first 45. An immediate rapport was established with the engineer, Ken Hamann -- a rapport that continues down to the present. Paul Hamann, his son, engineered THE ART OF WALKING and often tours as the band's sound man.

Following the trip to NYC an agreement was reached with Ram Records to lease them "Final Solution" for inclusion on the MAX'S KANSAS CITY, VOLUME ONE anthology. As part of this agreement a sum of money was advanced to the band for the recording of a new track scheduled for inclusion on the second volume. This version of Ubu, however, stopped operating as a unit soon afterwards and was disbanded in late May '76.

Laughner went on to form a band called Friction over the summer and later a group called Peter And The Wolves. He died in June '77. Dave Taylor moved to Florida to manage a record store.

It was at this point that Ravenstine, after attending what turned out to be the last performance of this group, decided that he was ready to perform live.

Taken from CLE

PERE UBU/C

DURATION: June '76.

PERSONNEL:

Alan Greenblatt: guitar.
Tom Herman: guitar, bass.
Scott Krauss: drums.
Allen Ravenstine: synthesizer.
David Thomas: vocals.
Tim Wright: guitar.

RECORDINGS:

"Untitled"-- unreleased until DATAPANIK.

PERFORMANCES: None.

PERE UBU/D



DURATION: July '76 to December '77.

PERSONNEL:

Tom Herman: guitar.
Scott Krauss: drums.
Tony Maimone: bass.
Allen Ravenstine: synthesizer, sax.
David Thomas: vocals, horn.

RECORDINGS:

"Street Waves"/"My Dark Ages": Hearthan HR 103.
"The Modern Dance"/"Heaven": Hearthan HR 104.
THE MODERN DANCE (lp): Blank 001 & Mercury 9100 052.

PERFORMANCES:

Beginning in late October '76 and extending through to the first of December '77, the band played 38-40 week-night gigs-- mostly Thursday nights-- at a bar in the industrialized Flats section of Cleveland.

NOTES:

The band was quickly re-organized following the late May dissolution; Ravenstine rejoined the band, and a new rehearsal studio was rented in an office building on Cleveland's east side. The future direction and orientation of the group, however, was, as yet, undecided. Studio time was booked in order to fulfill the contract with Ram Records and rehearsals began. A Greenblatt, the guitarist in a local R&B group and a friend, agreed to do the session. He had been asked in the hope that he could be persuaded to become a permanent member.

As it turned out, Ram Records rejected the recording: "unintelligible vocals"; and Greenblatt declined the invitation.

The following description is lifted from CLE #3A:

"That first winter between thirty and fifty fans would show up on good nights, and most of them ended up standing on their chairs to keep warm: heat rises. The first Ubu/Devo show was flooded out when cold burst water pipes in the bathrooms.

"As the weather warmed, and then into the summer of '77, Ubu nights became something of a private party. Everyone knew everyone else. The same faces, the same 200 people showed up every Thursday night. These are fondly remembered times: inside was Ubu; outside was the heart of the Flats. The Cove is located on the ground floor of what was once Rockefeller's first warehouse. A hundred yards away the Cuyahoga River, which winds and bends through the Flats, empties into Lake Erie. Ore boats pull up opposite The Cove to unload ballast into huge gravel mounds. The Aeronautical Shot Peening Company, across the road, pushes air-sounds into the night from behind a surrealist architectural facade of odd angles and pastel

colors. Overhead, high level bridges connect the opposite sides of the valley that contains the Flats".

During this period the band travelled down to Akron to play a weekend with Devo at their home club, played Max's Kansas City in NYC twice, did the Prospect street fair, and performed a series of five Wednesday nights at a suburban disco over the summer. The low point came at a Spring Prom dance at North Ridgeville Junior High: a show that went over like the proverbial lead balloon.

NOTES:

Various discussions followed the "Untitled" sessions. Up to this point bass guitar duties had been shared among the guitar players. It was decided a permanent bass player would be beneficial. Tony Maimone agreed to join the unit as bass guitarist. Tim Wright decided to leave the band. He later moved to NYC and is currently playing with DNA.

There followed discussions on the merits of Two Guitars vs. One Guitar. It was decided that two guitars tended to overload the sound.

The structure of the unit was now solidified. The band rehearsed over the summer, writing new material and re-working much of the old, and began playing out again in October '78.

In January, a head of A&R for Mercury Records, Cliff Burnstein, contacted the band.



PERE UBU/F

DURATION: January '78 to September '79.

PERSONNEL:

Tom Herman: guitar, bass.
Scott Krauss: drums.
Tony Maimone: bass, guitar.
Allen Ravenstine: synthesizer, sax.
David Thomas: vocals, horn, organ.

RECORDINGS:

LPs:

Dub Housing: Chrysalis CHR 1207.
New Picnic Time: Chrysalis CHR 1248.

45s:

"Fabulous Sequel"/"Humor Me" (live), "The Book Is On The Table": Chrysalis CHS 2372.

NOTES:

THE MODERN DANCE was released on Blank Records, a subsidiary of Mercury, in February, followed by the First American Tour from February 18 to April 1.

At the end of the summer '78 the band was released from its contract Phonogram world-wide and was subsequently signed by Chrysalis, first in the U.K. and Europe, and then in the US.

During this period the band toured Europe twice and the US four times.

In September '79, following the tour of the west coast, the band broke up. T Herman formally quit and recorded an LP on his own. The other members of the band engaged themselves in various personal projects.

PERE UBU/E

DURATION: December '77 to January '78.

PERSONNEL:

Anton Fier: drums.
Tom Herman: guitar.
Tony Maimone: bass.
Allen Ravenstine: synthesizer, sax.
David Thomas: vocals, horn.

RECORDINGS: None.

PERFORMANCES: None.

NOTES:

Events necessitated a shift in alignment. The dedication to A Fier on the DATAPANIK EP is in gratitude for his role during this period. He is currently playing in NYC with The Feelies.



Graphics by Johnny Dromette

If there are any further questions write UBU COMMUNEX c/o 3206 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH, USA 44115. Extremely specific inquiries are most likely to be answered.





PERE UBU IN ACTION: CBGB, NYC, on the COED JAIL TOUR. Photo: Ebet Roberts.

PERFORMANCES:

First American Tour (2/18 to 4/1/78): Cleveland, Baltimore, Bethesda, Washington DC, Philadelphia, NYC, Worcester, Boston, Cleveland, Rochester, Detroit, Toronto, Minneapolis, Cleveland.

First European Tour (4/28 to 5/9/78): Manchester, Liverpool, London, Birmingham, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, London.

Ubu Dance Party Tour (10/9 to 12/18/78): US- Cleveland, Minneapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, Toronto, Kent, NYC; UK- Chiselmhurst Caves, Middlesboro, Newcastle, High Wycombe, Leicester, Cambridge, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, London, Plymouth,

Portsmouth, Brighton, Norwich, London, Uxbridge, Leeds, Edinburgh; Europe- Brussels, Paris, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Dusseldorf, Hamburg.

Support bands: US- Suburbs, Flamingos, Nash The Slash, Urban Verbs; UK- Red Crayola, Soft Boys, Prag vec, Human League; Europe- Red Crayola.

Picnic Tour (2/21 to 5/5/79): Columbus, Ann Arbor, Pittsburgh, Washington DC, Toronto, Cleveland, Philadelphia, NYC, Boston, Albany, Chicago.

Goodbye Tour (7/17 to 8/6/79): Cleveland, Milwaukee, Boulder, Portland, Vancouver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Costa Mesa, San Diego.

Support band- John Ottway.

PERE UBU/G

DURATION: December '79 to ?

PERSONNEL:

Scott Krauss: drums.
Tony Maimone: bass, guitar.
Allen Ravenstine: synthesizer, sax.
David Thomas: vocals, organ.
Mayo Thompson: guitar.

RECORDINGS:

LPs:

The Art Of Walking: Rough Trade.

45s:

'Not Happy'/'Lonesome Cowboy Dave':
Rough Trade.

NOTES:

In November '79, Thomas, Ravenstine, Krauss and Maimone discussed the feasibility and desirability of working together again. Subsequently, Mayo Thompson was asked to join the band as guitarist. He will continue to live in England, and lead the Red Crayola when not engaged in Ubu business.

PERFORMANCES:

AOW Summer Tour (7/17 to 8/16/80)- NYC. Philadelphia, Washington DC, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Lynn, Northampton, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, Minneapolis, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles.

COMPLETE UBU DISCOGRAPHY



LABEL / NUMBER: Hearthan HR101

RELEASE DATE: December 1975

RECORDED: Sept. 28 - Oct. 1, '75

SONG TITLES: "30 Seconds Over Tokyo"/"Heart of Darkness"

DATA: Engineered by Bill Cavanaugh. Mastered at Cleveland Recording Co. by Mike Bishop. Sleeve art by John Luoma. Liner notes by Peter Laughner. 3500 copies printed between December '75 and April '77; the first 1000 with pic sleeves. and red/white label.

STATUS: Out of print.

LABEL / NUMBER: Hearthan HR102

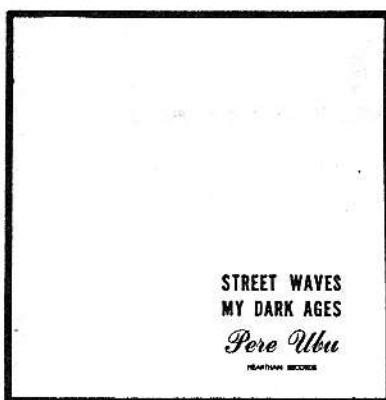
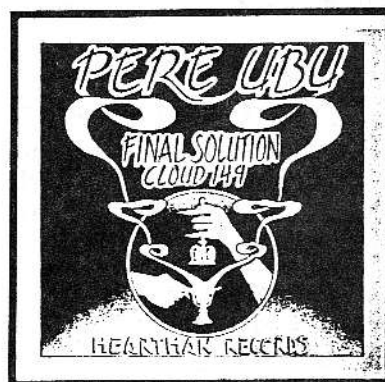
RELEASE DATE: March 1976

RECORDED: Feb. 26, '76

SONG TITLES: "Final Solution"/"Cloud 149"

DATA: Recorded and mixed at Cleveland Recording Co. Engineered by Ken Hamann. Mastered at Cleveland Recording Co. by Mike Bishop. Sleeve art by Tim Wright & Jay Vecchio. Liner notes by Tim Wright. 4100 copies printed between March '76 and April '77; the first 600 with pic sleeve.

STATUS: Out of print.



LABEL / NUMBER: Hearthan HR103

RELEASE DATE: December 1976

RECORDED: November '76

SONG TITLES: "Street Waves"/"My Dark Ages"

DATA: Recorded and mixed at Cleveland Recording Co. Engineered by Ken Hamann. Mastered at Cleveland Recording Co. by Mike Bishop. Sleeve art by David Thomas. 4000 copies printed between December '76 and April '77; most all with hand stamped sleeves.

STATUS: Out of print.

LABEL / NUMBER: Hearthan HR104

RELEASE DATE: September 1977

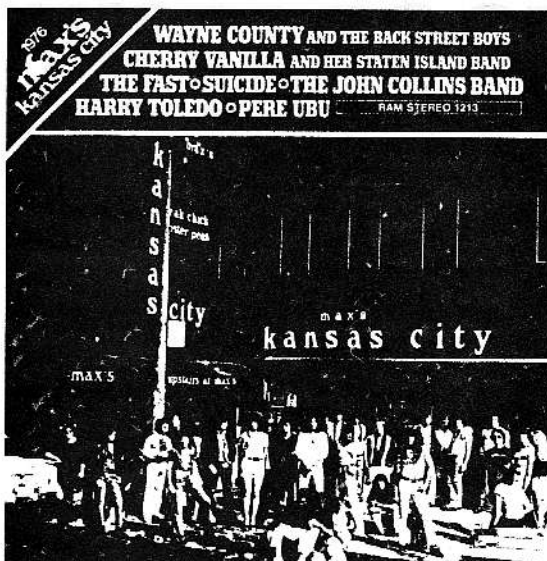
RECORDED: July 8, '77 / March 30, '77

SONG TITLES: "The Modern Dance"/"Heaven"

DATA: Recorded and mixed at Cleveland Recording Co. Engineered by Ken Hamann. Mastered at Cleveland Recording Co. by Mike Bishop. Sleeve art by Tom Herman and Steve Kornajchik. 1000 copies printed in September '77, all with pic sleeves.

STATUS: Out of print.





MAX'S KANSAS CITY 1976, VOLUME ONE LABELS/NUMBERS/ RELEASE DATES:

- Ram 1213 (US): '77
- CBS 82670 (UK): '78

DATA: This anthology of NY bands includes a re-mastered version of the Hearthan recording of "Final Solution", NOT a live recording as has been reported in various places at various times.

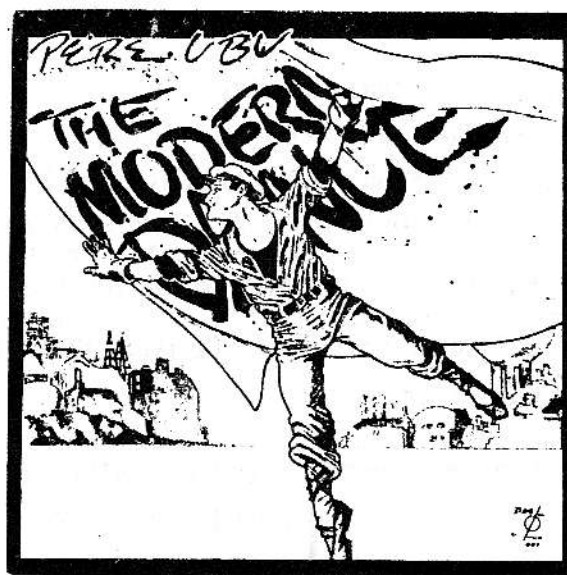
STATUS: Import currently available.

THE MODERN DANCE

LABELS/NUMBERS/RELEASE DATES:

- Blank 001 (US): February 1978
- Phonogram 9100 052 (UK): May 1978
- Mercury 6338 874 (Europe): May 1978
- Rough Trade ROUGH 22, RT US 7: Jan 1981

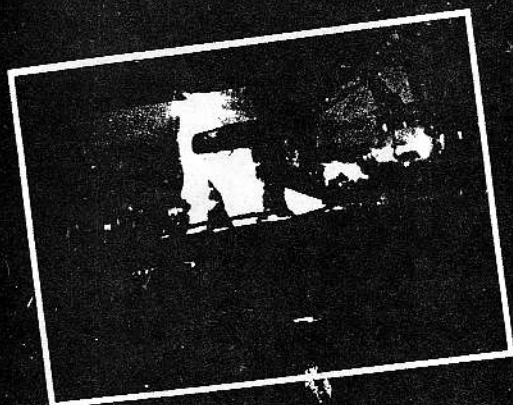
DATA: The first album release for both Pere Ubu and Blank Records, an experimental subsidiary of Mercury/Phonogram in the US. The only other release on the label was an LP by a group called the Suicide Commandos. Blank was shut down by the end of summer '78 and Ubu was released from its contract with Blank, Mercury, and Phonogram. The rights were re-acquired by Ubu Projex Inc. and leased to Rough Trade for re-release.



STATUS: Original edition deleted.
Reissue currently available.

PERE UBU

DATAPANIK IN THE YEAR ZERO



DATAPANIK IN THE YEAR ZERO

LABEL/NUMBER: Radar RDR 1

RELEASED: April 1978

SONG TITLES: Heart of Darkness, 30 Seconds Over Tokyo, Cloud 149, Untitled, Heaven

DATA: Released in the U. K. and New Zealand, this 12" 45 rpm EP contains re-mastered versions of the Hearthan mixes as well as a previously unreleased version of "The Modern Dance" here labeled "Untitled" for legal reasons. "Heart of Darkness" is edited by 1:07 minutes on this edition.

STATUS: Out of print.

DUB HOUSING

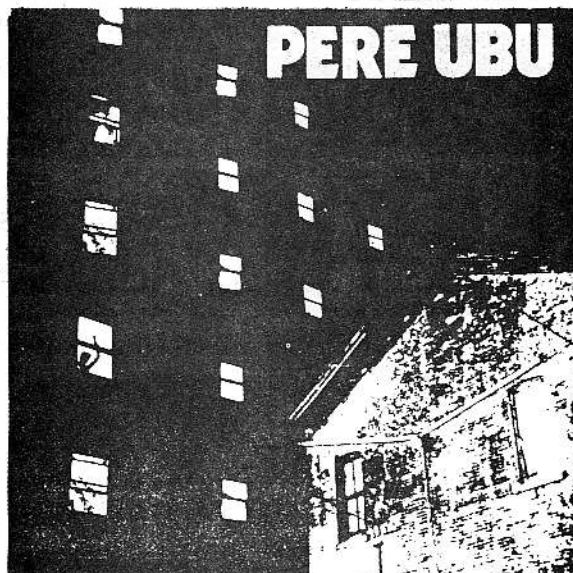
LABELS/NUMBERS/RELEASE DATES:

- Chrysalis CHR 1207 (UK): November 1978
- Chrysalis CHR 1207 (US): April 1979

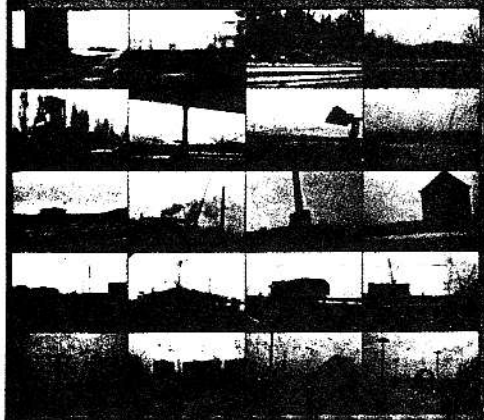
SONG TITLES: Navvy, On The Surface, Dub Housing, Caligari's Mirror, Thriller!, I, Will Wait, Drinking Wine Spodyody, Ubu Dance Party, Blow Daddy-O, Codex

DATA: Recorded and mixed at Suma in August-September '78, and engineered by Ken Hamann, this is the first of two albums released while under contract with Chrysalis. Ubu Projex Inc. re-acquired rights to DH for the world in April 1980, which means that Chrysalis has deleted the album. Cover art by John Thompson. Cover photos by Mik Mellen.

STATUS: Deleted.



THE RED CRAYOLA SOLDIER TALK



SOLDIER TALK by The Red Crayola
LABEL/NUMBER: Radar RAD 18 (UK)

RELEASED: January 1979

DATA: All members of Ubu appear in varying combinations on a number of the tracks on this album.

STATUS: Out of print.

NEW PICNIC TIME

LABEL/NUMBER: Chrysalis CHR 1248 (Europe)

RELEASED: September 1979

SONG TITLES: Have Shoes Will Walk (The Fabulous Sequel), 49 Guitars And One Girl, A Small Dark Cloud, Small Was Fast, All The Dogs Are Barking, One Less Worry, Make Hay, Goodbye, The Voice Of The Sand, Jehovah's Kingdom Comes!

DATA: Released in the UK, West Germany, Italy, Benelux, France, Sweden, and possibly Australia and New Zealand. The rights were re-acquired for the US by Ubu Projex Inc. after the business relationship with Chrysalis was terminated by the latter. Plans call for a US release on Rough Trade in early '81.

STATUS: Deleted in the UK and Europe.

Available on Rough Trade (US) in early '81.





LABEL / NUMBER: Chrysalis CHS 2372

RELEASED: September 1979

SONG TITLES: "The Fabulous Sequel"/"Humor Me", "The Book Is On The Table"

DATA: Released in the U. K. "FabSeq" and "Book" recorded and mixed at Suma Studios. Engineered by Ken & Paul Hamann. "HM" recorded live at London College of Printing, London (12/5/78), by Maison Rouge. Mixed at Suma. Remote & studio engineering by Paul Hamann. Sleeve art by Ambulant Images. Vocal tapes on "Book" by Ann Titolo.

STATUS: Out of print.

**U-MEN- LIVE AT CLUB WOW/XMAS
CONCERT AT INTERSTATE MALL**

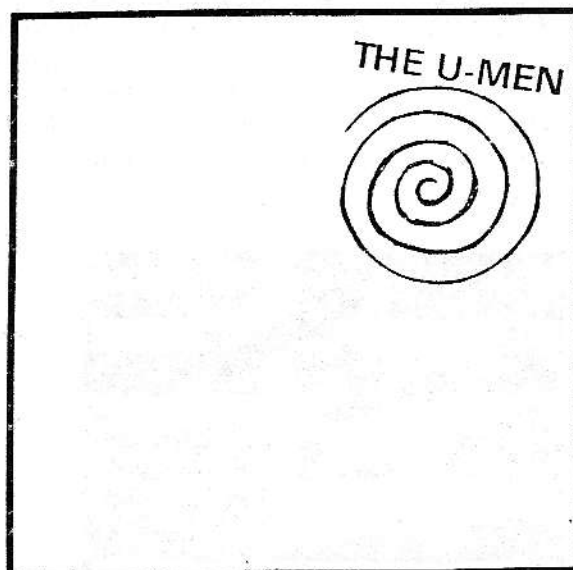
LABEL/NUMBER: Tri-City Records.

RELEASED: ?

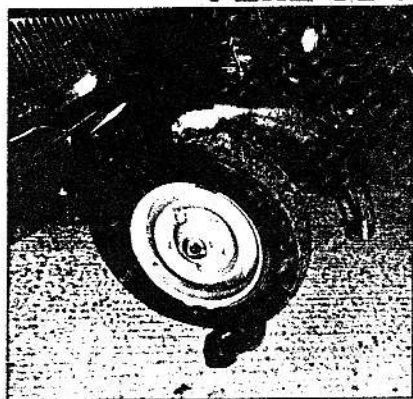
SONG TITLES: Hard To Start, No Problem,
Mad Doctor, 491, Help Me, First World War,
Random Wages, My Back Pages, Doris Day
Sings, Little Skunks

DATA: This LP seems to be a collection of MD-
period performances.

STATUS: Bootleg.



PERE UBU



DON'T EXPECT ART

DON'T EXPECT ART

LABEL/NUMBER: Impossible Recordworks IMP 1-07

RELEASE DATE: ?

SONG TITLES: Same as above.

DATA: This is a re-boot of the U-Men LP, and is
of substantially poorer quality. Caveat emptor.

STATUS: Bootleg.

DATAPANIK IN THE YEAR ZERO-A

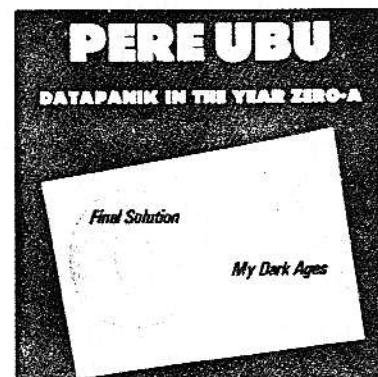
LABEL/NUMBER: Rough Trade RT049

RELEASED: July 1980

SONG TITLES: "Final Solution"/"My Dark Ages"

DATA: A 45 rpm single re-release of Ubu's limited edition
versions of the same recordings (Hearthan HR102A and
HR103B) in a redesigned Datapanik sleeve. Released
in the UK.

STATUS: Currently available.



THE ART OF WALKING

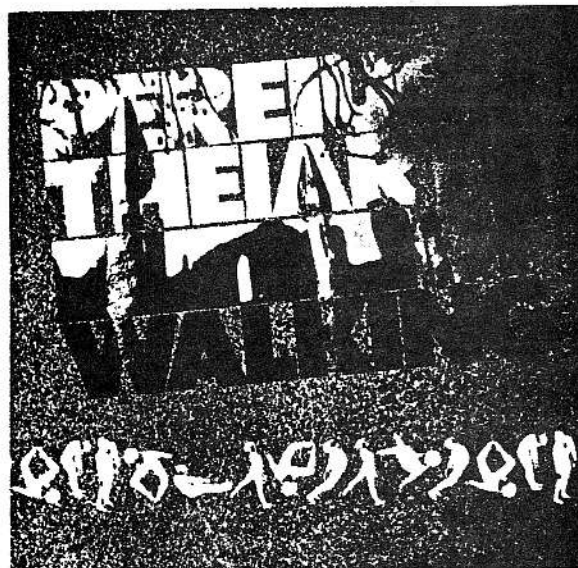
LABEL: Rough Trade

NUMBERS: ROUGH 14 (UK)
RTUS 4 (US)

RELEASE DATES: July 1980 (UK)
August 8, 1980 (US)

SONG TITLES: Go, Rhapsody In Pink,
Arabia, Miles, Misery Goats, Loop,
Rounder, Birdies, Lost In Art,
Horses, Crush This Horn.

DATA: This album is the first release with Mayo Thompson as a new member. Original pressings of this disc (identified by the words "Porky Prime Cut" near the matrix number) suffer from an audible blemish in the mastering process. This defect affected the entire initial English pressing of 5-6000 copies and 1800 copies of the US pressing which Rough Trade attempted to recall, and has since been replaced with a new and improved pressing (which can be identified by the word "Masterdisk" etched into the vinyl near the matrix number.) No change was made in cover art, labels, or matrix numbers. There is an overall difference in the Lp's frequencies which the listener may or may not notice. However,



there are significant differences between the mixes of "Arabia" and "Miles." The correct pressing features an "Arabia" with vocals vocals. The incorrect pressing features a longer instrumental version of the song. The correct version of "Miles" is a shorter and a warmer mix.

STATUS: Improved version currently available.

LABEL/NUMBER: Rough Trade RT066 (UK), RT 004 (US)

RELEASED: February 1981

RECORDED: August 1980

SONG TITLES: "Not Happy"/"Lonesome Cowboy Dave"

DATA: A 45 rpm single recorded immediately following the AOW Summer Tour, released at the time of the UK/Euro tour. Cover artwork by Mary Thomas. Back cover by David Thomas.

STATUS: Currently available.



LABEL/NUMBER: CLE #3B

RELEASED: March 1981

RECORDED: April 4, 1976

SONG TITLE: "Pushin Too Hard"

DATA: Produced exclusively by Cle Magazine, this 33 1/3 rpm "flexi-disc" anthology of Cle bands features a long-vaulted historical recording of the grouping of UBU/B musicians doing their rendition of the Seeds classic, recorded live at their last performance.

STATUS: Limited edition of 2000 copies available while supply lasts.



Pere Ubu Go Animal

VOICES DECEMBER 10-22, 1981

By Jon Pareles

"I've thought of new ways to say the same old things!" exults David Thomas on *The Sound of the Sand*—a true statement, not to be taken at face value. Thomas's idea of "the same old things" isn't much like mine or yours, unless you're obsessed with feet, birds, and happiness. Even if you are, Thomas's "new ways" amount to silly, putty transformations, never the same warp twice. Fronting Pere Ubu and the aggregations (the Pedestrians, the Eggs, the Trees, the Golden Palominos) assembled for *The Sound of the Sand*, Thomas plays off and with so many artful strategies and heartfelt beliefs that he ends up in a private domain akin to a state of innocence.

Not naive. While Pere Ubu are as brilliantly eccentric as all getout, that doesn't mean they're idiot savants. Practically speaking, a naive band wouldn't have survived on the club circuit for six years (although they did accede to the Mudd Club's 2 a.m. starting time for an announced one o'clock set last Friday night, making every sardine in the place auri). Pere Ubu's creative principles are quixotic, but fully thought out. Although the changes in their music since 1975 may sound like disintegration, they reflect a self-conscious evolution, out of a borrowed vocabulary into Pere Ubu's own.

Those principles suggest a triumph of the carnal over the mechanical. Or choose your metaphor: nature over industry, flux over fixedness, whim over syllogism, analog over digital. Pere Ubu weren't the first to apply these distinctions to music; whoever invented improvisation did that implicitly. And the friction between singer and song, pulse and beat, heats up every decent funk and rock track. Pere Ubu's leap was the realization that the struggle of man versus machine, no matter how heroic, was contrived. Guess who made the machine? Just as certain painters during the Industrial Revolution devoted themselves to landscapes and classical ruins, Pere Ubu—who had the makings of a damn good funk or rock band—turned to sounds they could n't fully control. Not natural sounds, which wouldn't penetrate the electronic 'cin, but rule-breaking, indeterminate noise.

At first, like Alice Cooper or Lothar and the Hand People, they added noise obligations to basic rock songs. On 390 *Degrees of Simulated Stereo: Ubu Live Volume One*, early songs performed in 1976-79, they sound like an above-average, no-love-in-E, crushed-Velvet punk band, tinged with wildcatting synthesizer or sax and Thomas's defiant burbled vocals. The studio versions of the songs (on 45s and *The Modern Dance*) have more and stranger murk, but not until their first masterpiece, *Dub Housing* (recorded in mid-1978; live renditions are slated for Volume Two, and I can't wait) did Pere Ubu start to mess around in earnest. Noise had seeped into the songs themselves; you might or might not find a steady beat, a fixed key, a typical chord, and Thomas's voice would cling to one instrument at a time, or none, while the rest floated by on their own recognizance. In "Thriller" you could follow the repeated bass riff, or the slide guitar it never synched with, or you could try to make out the distorted, buried-in-the-mix words, or just let the track ooze on by. Throughout the album, with lyrics about hurricanes, waves, thunderstorms—uncontrollable, elemental acts of nature—Pere Ubu announced the dissolution of their songs.



David Thomas ponders the "small things that give pleasure"

Or, rather, the partial dissolution. Pere Ubu weren't headed for free improvisation, which would mean completely abandoning the tension and the expectation/fulfillment mechanisms of rock. They were after an alternative, pop seen in Caligula's mirror, *l'art de la vie* by accretion (like a stalagmite) instead of according to blueprint (like a skyscraper). Another simile: the average pop song uses exact, repeatable, recognizable components like pieces from an Erector set, while Pere Ubu songs expand like slime molds, absorbing or bypassing obstacles, with coherent but irregular results. From *Dub Housing* onward, it's impossible to know in advance whether a Pere Ubu noise is structural or ornamental or a little of each, so a listener has to find the context for each one. Is that guitar lick on the one? Do the keyboard and drums really hiccup together there? Is that supposed to be funny? Eventually, like someone lost in a jungle or an ocean or an unfamiliar city, a Pere Ubu listener has to choose a direction and try to follow it.

That was a terrifying prospect on *Dub Housing*, to judge by its lyrics, although Thomas's voice and the band's bursts of slapstick hint that being swept away has its points. On *New Picnic Time*, *The Art of Walking*, and *The Sound of the Sand*, the fear is gone. Robert Christgau's explanation is that Thomas was "born again" between albums, and he now dumps his angst on God. But though I guarantee my anticlericalism is as rabid as anyone's, only a puritan would deny Thomas the right to be happy—especially since, Jah or no Jah, that's where the music was headed anyway.

The joy in Pere Ubu's music—a lot of it—is the pleasure of reclamation, of sifting through quasi-random debris to assemble a song in your head. A year after *The Art of Walking* came out, I've started to hear "Miles" as a slow-breathed, rolling funk interchange between dollops of white noise, organ, rhythm machine, and horn; the tighter Pere Ubu gets, the more attenuated their songs become. And I think the implication is that, given the right perspective, you can navigate trackless wildernesses—oceans, jungles, cities, lives, Pere Ubu songs—by savoring every detail. (Yes, that sounds hippie-ish—so what?) For Thomas, the unencumbered, natural perspective he wants is in the animal kingdom, especially in songful, airborne birds. "The birdies are saying what I want to say!" he insists; meanwhile, as a human, he can just as easily have a good time as a bad one, because there are always "small things that give pleasure."

Yet Thomas hasn't traded in his brain for a smile button. Even when he writes about being happy, he tends to drop lines like "as the past fills with failure," and sometimes he seems to be nagging someone—himself—to get happy, that most useless of exhortations. Still, there's a reservoir of unbridled, childlike glee in *The Sound of the Sand & Other Songs of the Pedestrian* (full title; note lack of final "s"), which sounds more easy-going than Pere Ubu because the pick-up bands use steady rhythms and vamps. Indeed, "Happy To See You" ("I was so happy to see you I fell into the basement!") and "Yiki Tiki" are unabashedly, foolishly joyful. But watch the perspective (and listen to the Celtic dread in Richard Thompson's guitar): when Thomas sings about a physicist "humming like a merry loon" down in "The New Atom Mine," he's celebrating the pleasures of the pedestrian with a bit of irony, and there's no way to make "Sloop John B" cheery. Meanwhile, a manic waltz, "Confuse Did," keeps asking unerving questions ("What would you do if all hope walked away?"); the answers ("Go out and bring it back") appear only on the lyric sheet, where they can't help.

At the Mudd Club, Pere Ubu assumed any worries that they're oversimplifying, worries occasioned by their latest single, "Not Happy"/"Lonesome Cowboy Dave." As always, they took remarkable liberties with their old songs, ignoring or demolishing details that seemed central on record; in "Rhapsody in Pink," the band riffed at half-speed, while an extended "Arabia" introduced a mosquito-ish synthesizer noise and a clickety drum pattern from recent recruit Anton Fier. Both new material and old exploited extremes. I hadn't remembered: vast rolling crescendos and sudden, sharp-focus interludes with an almost no-wavish crispness. The image that stays with me is Thomas, all 250 pounds of him, leaping in the air and flapping his arms at the end of "Birdies." My perspective isn't the same as his, but I hope his next step is off the ground.

Pere Ubu will appear at the Peppermint Lounge December 17.



Left to Right: Tom Herman, Tony Maimone, Allen Ravenstine, Scott Krauss, David Thomas

PERE UBU

Twin Tone
RECORDS