

GROTUS: Slow Motion Apocalypse

(Alternative Tentacles)

OPENER 'UP Rose The Mountain' is locked in a slow-burning, industrial dance gloom, but minus the Euro-techno kind – more a loose funk vibe supplied by toe-twitching bongos, sax and subtle samples. The earnest wash of sounds sets the framework for a genre-bending album, which combines metal bashing outings, lyrics obsessed with the decay of morals, and sultrier, softer dance influences. It's a little too long, but these San Franciscans are leaps away from the stoic Alternative Tentacles hardcore bracket, and all the more interesting for that.

N.M.E. 12/6/93
ANGELA LEWIS

GROTUS

Slow Motion Apocalypse
Alternative Tentacles VIRUS 118

THE TROUBLE with half this Industrial gubbins is that it's an anaemic load of bollocks! Flat, colourless, supposedly malevolent bash-bash-bash programming by middle-class bedroom nerds. San Francisco's Grotus seem to have absorbed a few lessons in noise from the Rock underground before tinkering with their machines. Consequently, they've managed to mesh their samples into a wide range

of magnificent subtle and heavy landscapes, with a strong undercurrent of black humour. Presumably, with real drums, bass and guitars, they can cook live an' all, like Cop Shoot Cop. Grotus are everything this scene promises but seldom delivers. ****1/2

IAN LAWTON 'RAW'

GROTUS Slow Motion Apocalypse

(Alternative Tentacles VIRUS118)

Once, everything on Jello Biafra's label would be noisy, gnarly, good old-time hardcore-ish and extremely left-wing. Disposable Heroes Of Hiphoprisy (and their predecessors The Beatnigs) changed all that. Now, almost everything new from AT seems to be dance-oriented—or, at least, ultra-industrial—and extremely left-wing.

Grotus' début for the label is a sporadically effective work in this vein, throwing up a narrow range of musical comparisons: the Disposables, Young Gods, Ministry... At times, they make an extraordinary racket—'Good Evening', for instance, uses sampled explosions to amazing effect. Elsewhere, using soundbites stolen from TV news bulletins, they poke fun at newscasters' pseudo-gravitas while getting across the point that this ol' world is seriously messed-up.

Ironically, their own attitude is often just as sombre. They obviously know their craft—what they need is a little more humour. ● 5 Leo Finlay

VOX JULY '93

GROTUS 'Slow Motion Apocalypse' (Alternative Tentacles VIRUS 118CD)

KKKK

I DON'T know what game Grotus think they're playing, but I sure as hell want to join in.

As you can guess from the album title, Grotus – particularly with the haunting 'Shivayanama' – are more than likely to have you conjuring up images of Captain Willard punching the mirror in the classic 'Apocalypse Now'. The overall sound, complete with excellent samples and that Andrew Weiss-like bass rumble, is not entirely comfortable, like the Butthole Surfers, Young Gods, Ministry and Joy Division locked in a padded studio... with Satan at the mixing desk.

With a surprising effortlessness, the band fail to fit into any convenient pigeonholes. Try knocking them into the Industrial box and they'll swerve off in a different direction at the last minute. Likewise, there are too many odd, harsh angles for them to fit into any Indie hole. Then, just when you think you might have 'em sussed, right at the end they veer off into this wonderful tribal pulse, like the hoof-beats of the Four Horsemen way off in the distance.

The end is nigh, apparently.
Dress informal. MORAT

KERRANG! 45

GROTUS GLOW MOTION APOCALYPSE

(Alternative Tentacles Records)

IMAGINE a band who combine the impact of Consolidated's industrial rhythms with the grooves of Asian activists Fun-Da-Mental, the epic grandeur of The Young Gods with the grind of Cop Shoot Cop. Now you have a pretty accurate image of San Francisco four-piece Grotus.

The Hindi Goddess Of Destruction, "Kali", gazes out from the cover of "Glow Motion Apocalypse", officially their second LP but the first available in the UK. Yet Grotus's altruistic obsessions are not with the destruction of civilisation but with nature. And, my word, they're angry, although these songs are harder on themselves than the listener, forcing techno and rock to bump and crunch their way through funky rhythms, right alongside the ever-relenting growl of the vocalist. (Foreheads In A Fishtank meet Ministry!)

Easy-listening music is never a criterion for the bands that Alternative Tentacles decide to champion.

NGAIRE-RUTH

MELODY MAKER
17 / 7 / 93

RAW - SEPT '93

GROTUS

Luddite

Alternative Tentacles Virus 128

SAN FRANCISCO's Grotus operate on the border of Sludge and Industrial. There are no light-hearted, Wax Trax-y, MTV-friendly cover versions on 'Luddite', which is the mini-album follow-up to this

year's full-length freak out, 'Slow Motion Apocalypse'. Overall it feels like a more unrelentingly grim affair, which is a pity, because Grotus' playful, black, humorous edge is what sets them apart from the legions of miserable Killing Joke wannabes.

Whatever the angle of attack, Grotus still do it better than most. The title track is a lumbering dirge that sounds akin to early Swans, and 'Marginal' hinges around a quanta of melody that pulls it back from the black hole of absolute doom. 'Shelflife' is perhaps the best moment, sounding just like an old Fad Gadget number before the guitar slams in and a deeply fuzzed bass leads a descent into other-wordly strangeness.

'What Is The World?' is difficult listening again, while the closing 'Brown' is a heavy, bass-driven number on a Kong-ish stoned-out trip. 'Luddite', then, isn't the most

accessible point to pick up the trail of Grotus, but it'll definitely keep converts happy until their European tour in the Autumn. ***

IAN LAWTON

KERRANG - SEPT '93



GROTUS



**Highbury Garage, London
Thursday, September 9**

GROTUS ATTRACT a special kind of lunatic to their audience - but that is because Grotus are lunatics themselves. The two guitarists are wearing what look like African tribal dresses, while vocalist Lars Fox resembles Angry Anderson on angel dust.

Yes, Grotus are indeed a manic bunch, and this comes across in their stunning musical approach. It's like Ministry meets Test Dept, with wild, barbarous images flashed at us from a TV screen at the back of the stage. If anyone can guess how the hell the band keep the imagery spot-on in time to the music, then I'll drink the poison from Chris Watts' pen!

Few bands can stain the mind to this extent, and the sight of their two drummers, Bruce Boyd and vocalist Fox hammering away to a backdrop of pumping bass and haunting didgeridoo samples will remain with me for a long time. No wonder the nearest word to Grotus in the dictionary is 'grotesque'!

MÖRAT

KEEP ON ROCKIN' IN THE GENE POOL

by Greg Barbrick

THE PHOTOGRAPH ADORNING the cover of *Brown* is of various types of dead fish that have been sitting on a porch for a week or so. It is an appropriate metaphor for Grotus, who sing of a planet in decay.

"We wanted an image that was beautiful and dead," lead singer Lars Fox says. "I wrote most of the lyrics to *Brown* just before we recorded it, while I was living, breathing and eating environmental activism. I was really pissed off, enraged in fact, and our music lends itself to that feeling."

Raging, explosive and overwhelming are apt descriptions of Grotus' music, a mix of samples, guitars, machines, vocals and more. The mixture is violent and indecipherable, twisted and compelling and has been described as industrial punk, cyber-metal and grinding noise-pop. The hyphens lose the desperate urgency of the music; *Brown* (their debut on Spirit Records) sounds as if it were recorded on the run, and by the time the rest of us hear it, it will be too late.

The band is based in San Francisco, though the members come from all over. Guitarist and sampler Adam Tanner and Lars were in a flannel band in LA for a few years before Lars left music to pursue his career in environmental activism. Adam and bassist John Carson met in a death rock band and were ready to leave music for other things when they decided to buy some samplers and make soundtracks. They had a little trouble making the samplers work at first, and asked Lars over to help. The trio immediately realized they had the makings of a band that could do anything they wanted it to. The single "Edward Abbey," a benefit for Bay Area Earth First!, was their first release.

The Bay Area cognoscenti quickly took notice, and soon they were opening for bands as diverse as Mr. Bungle, Nine Inch Nails and Consolidated. The need for a live drummer became evident, so they added Bruce Boyd. Since *Brown* had basically been written and recorded already, the effect of Boyd's addition may only be gleaned by Lars' comment: "We are heavier."

"Live, we try and do a lot of shit at once," Lars says. "We use video to relate images of what the songs are about, because if I am screaming at the top of my lungs or flying through

the air, it gets hard to understand what the fuck I'm saying. We have a new song called 'Clean,' about war as entertainment. So we juxtapose video games with footage from the war and then George Bush fishing, then shots of fat, decaying Iraqi soldiers' bodies, followed by Dan Quayle golfing. Ed McMahon introduces it.

"Our bass player and guitar player look a lot alike, so they do lots of synchronized moves. I run around and sweat a lot, and since I am bald, the veins stick out all over my head. The videos are going, we have a lot of smoke going, and we have a light person. It gets confusing, even to us, and it is loud. Grotus is a fucking loud band."

The environmental abstractions of the lyrics still come through clearly, yet the music is pure technology. "Maybe we are being hypocritical," says Lars, "but I kind of see us as a mutant byproduct of our world. This is our music, and for this record we decided to address ecological disregard. The new material we are working on will be much different, not particularly environmental."

What we really wanted to know about, though, was the name, which is properly displayed with umlauts over the consonants. "A friend was walking through the meat department at a supermarket," Lars explains. "And he noticed a package of beef tongue. He just blurted out, 'Oh grotus!' We thought it would make a good name. Originally we were going to call the band Umlaut, and just have two large dots on the cover, but we figured nobody would get it. So instead we decided to emulate Spinal Tap and break the grammatical rules by only putting them over the consonants in our name."

Beyond the message, the music and the umlauts, Grotus had the good sense to pay homage to the musical legacy of Grand Funk Railroad. The B-side of their second single is a cover of "We're An American Band." It is slightly different from the original; rather than a guitar they use a power-saw, and rather than a solo there is a sample of the line, "Come on dudes, let's get it on," repeated over and over. "You have to understand the reason I wanted to do that song was so I could say, 'Come on dudes, let's get it on,'" Lars explains. ■

(*Grotus* will be at the Portland Underground 1/17, and at Rock-Candy in Seattle 1/18.)

GROTUS

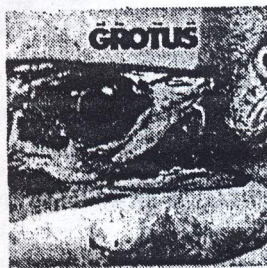
Brown
(Spirit)



Although it has never been considered an industrial stronghold, the Bay Area has at last found a top-notch exponent of the genre in Grotus.

The words that kick-start *Brown*'s title track—"push, meat, blood, and hair"—(those lyrics do seem to be referring to, ahem, fecal matter) warn of what's to follow: meaty, bloody, sweaty, rather *dirty* music.

Straddling the line between the danceable strains that industrial purists abhor and the grating noise others find completely inaccessible, Grotus's intensely rhythmic music is frightening and hard as nails. Closer to tribal than techno, this is one industrial outfit that is highly attuned to the grind. *Brown* features a pumping, chunky sound, full of furiously blaring guitars and gritty, tortured vocals. Soundbyte



embellishments culled from sources as varied as *Star Trek*, TV jingles, and old B-movies add an eerie, hallucinatory touch.

Grotus is, of course, a highly political band, and diatribes against environmental destruction, consumerism, television, and genetic engineering figure heavily into Lars Fox's lyrics. But while topical songs can be self-important and annoying, Fox does an admirable job of melding cynicism and poetry. "Daisy Chain" is, for example, a simply worded indictment of the science of destruction that is accompanied by subdued yet nightmarish music; and with its sweeping, terrible grandeur, "Morning Glory" is a portrait of nuclear annihilation that is as seductively beautiful as it is horrific.

Brown is an album that demands to be listened to, preferably with the lights out and the volume turned up very, very loud. In a word: awesome.

—Leah Hennen



TÖNGUE LASHING

Ask Lars Fox, the singer/lyricist for Grotus, what he does for a living, and he'll tell you the brutal truth: "I dump toxic waste down the drain."

The darkroom worker goes on to explain that he has cut back on certain poisons without damaging the quality of the prints he produces.

Unfortunately, such small compensations aren't enough to satisfy Mother Nature, and you'd better believe she's pissed, judging from the horrifying close-up head-shot of a minnow on the cover of Grotus' debut LP, *Brown* on San Francisco's Spirit Records.

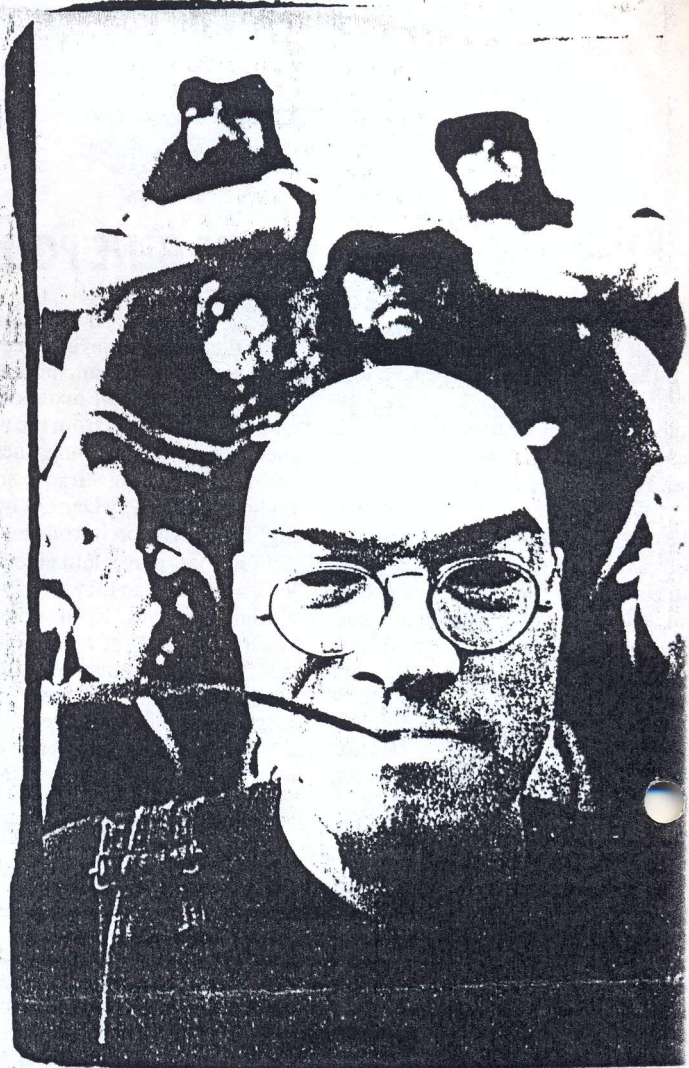
"That little fish looks like it's rebelling," sampler/guitarist/bassist Adam Tanner explains. It looks to me like it's telling a very nasty secret to its buddy minnows."

Grotus' sound is "heavy" but frontman Lars admits it is closer to industrial than heavy metal. Still, Lars is resistant to the category, partially because "industrial music is about the erosion of civilization—our music is about the erosion of nature."

Contributing to their steady rise in the San Francisco alternative scene since their formation in 1989 is an emphasis on entertainment rather than dogma. "Our songs talk about a lot of issues, but there's a purposeful ambiguity there," Adam says. "Anyway, we couldn't agree on a message even if we had one," he adds with a wry smile. Unlike their fellow San Franciscans Consolidated, Grotus has focused on music and performance rather than messages and manifestos.

The fruits of their efforts are evident in the riveting live show, a multimedia act including tightly meshed music combined with cartoon and documentary videos spliced by Lars. Musically, the band started out making heavy use of samples and has added a rock layer performed by bassist John Carson, guitarist Adam Tanner and drummer Bruce Boyd (formerly of New Jersey's Pagan Babies). Lars' screech is the focus, akin in its intensity to Nivek Ogre of Skinny Puppy.

Like Skinny Puppy, Grotus' songs cover the gamut of biotech alienation. But Grotus avoids the somber, no-fun attitude of the industrial scene, sporting Latin-American parkas and swinging in silly unison. They know how to laugh at themselves: "Thank you for putting up with our bullshit, goodnight."



Grotus does assault the audience in much the same way as Skinny Puppy, using their multimedia show and keeping the volume high. "The show isn't a pick-up scene," Adam says proudly. "You either stay and with the confrontation or split."

Most everyone stays, enthralled by some aspect of the show. For example is a video created by Lars, which expressed ideas sometimes in the garbled lyrics and samples: sheep strung up by one leg and relentlessly disgorged, heaping forks of dead flies shovelled through parted, culent lips, or animation borrowed from Walt Disney for psychedelic singing. The juxtapositions are lucid: dinosaurs marching inexorably to mushroom clouds, video war games, and charred Iraqi babies. Lars, five-foot five and bald, bounces in the center of the scene, screaming like a harpy.

"When all that shit's going on, I just get lost," Lars says. The same could be true for some of the audience, crushed by so many layers and so much volume. But the band's live show is saved from the blob of sound by the crunching guitar and bass, which have grown stronger since *Brown* was recorded. Grotus' evolution into a rock 'n' roll band may save them from the monotonous clamor of assault rock; if you mix all the colors together you always get brown.

The name of the band exemplifies their ability to mock themselves, which saves them from falling victim to critics. Inspired by a packaged tongue, a friend blurted "Grotus!"—a subconscious contraction of "grotted bloated scrotum." The umlauts were added in honor of Spinal Tap.

—Tom Celeb

THE BAY AREA'S BEST UNSIGNED ARTISTS

INDUSTRIAL

GROTUS—Formed in 1989, Grotus "never planned to make 'industrial' music, it just kinda got called that." So says vocalist Lars Fox in a letter accompanying the group's tape. OK, fair enough. But the fact remains that the ensemble *does* make industrial music, and does it well. According to Melinda Simon, a booker for Club O's Creature Feature nights, "Musically, they're invasive in a necessary way, penetrating and primordial. And they're great people—both smart and accessible—who won't compromise their beliefs." I'd add to that assessment these words: thick, layered, imposing, thought-provoking, heavy, political, outrageous, and disturbing (not necessarily in that order). "We consider our music a reflection of what's going on around us—



Grotus

hope our performances are able to get that across. We are more interested (as a live band) in creating a memorable, noisy, visual circus versus just playing our songs," continues Lars's correspondence. With some help from Simon, the band gained the attention of Mike Patton and his cohorts in Mr. Bungle (the two have tentative plans to tour together later this year). Last March, Grotus released (on local label Spirit) a 7-inch called "Edward Abbey," to benefit Bay Area Earth First, which has gotten favorable press in *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, *CMJ*, and *Rockpool*. Rockpool, in fact, insisted, "Here's one that Wax Trax, Nettwerk, even Amphetamine Reptile will wilt at when they hear it." Indeed, such industrial-oriented indies ought to take a long, hard look at Grotus. In August, the band will put out both another 7-inch ("Mother of Pearl") and a four-song CD single as a prelude to the release of *Brown*, its full-length work.

—Alexandra Haslam

Hazardous to rats

You could die laughing at Grotus' high-tech eco-terrorist noise

By Mike Rowell

MY RAT DIED last week listening to the new Grotus CD, *Brown*. I'm not suggesting a definite correlation between the Grotus sonic onslaught emanating from my speakers that evening and the unfortunate demise of my pet of two years. Call it a weird coincidence. But if any music is capable of actual rodenticide, it might well be Grotus.

The Grotus noise is harsh, jarring. Twin samplers provide grinding rhythmic loops upon which additional samples, bass, drums, guitar and growling vocals are layered. The resultant cacophonous crush is Heavy with a capital H, and can be at times eerily beautiful, morbidly fascinating, adrenal, cathartic, even danceable. The guys in the band — sampler/bass/guitar players John Carson and Adam Tanner, vocalist Lars Fox and drummer Bruce Boyd — pride themselves on "not sounding like everything else," although similarities to industrial noise merchants like Foetus, Big Black, Negativland and Skinny Puppy abound in their sound.

track kind of stuff." The film score concept was quickly jettisoned, although the soundtrack aesthetic is still a key cog in the Grotus grind.

"When we first started out," says Fox, "we had all been in guitar bands for a number of years and were kind of uninspired, not very interested in pursuing that anymore. Then Adam and John went out and got these samplers and it was like, 'Oh my god — there's this whole world of stuff you can do.'"

The song subjects on *Brown* tend toward environmental and social commentary. According to former professional environmental activist/lyricist Fox, *Brown* is "ultimately about decay and environmental degradation." Specific targets run the gamut from genetic engineering and mindless consumerism to Las Vegas and the evils of beef. One song, "Edward Abbey," sympathizes with Earth First! and their eco-terrorist tactics. The guys in Grotus see the irony in using technology to rail against today's high-tech world, but don't feel they're being contradictory.

"Technology is not a bad thing necessarily," argues Tanner. "But it's got to be used for purposes that promote

Green grumps. Not true. They're actually four affable optimists who consider their songs more reflections of the absurd world surrounding them than political diatribes.

"Our songs are bleak in a ridiculous sort of way," Fox says. "On the one hand they're about issues, but live, there's a lot more humor, it's a lot more tongue in cheek."

The Grotus sense of humor is indeed more evident live, to the point of self-parody. If you find yourself amused by the visual circus of a snarling shaven-headed singer flanked by identically clad, long-haired headbangers, with tribal metal drums, smoke, lights and found-footage video samples, you're laughing with the band as well as at them.

Says Tanner: "I like it when people come up to us and say, 'Are you guys really serious or are you just joking around?'"

"It's like we have to make a choice: serious or ridiculous," adds Fox. "Why do we have to make a choice?"

"I'd rather have people walk away saying, 'What the hell was that all about?'" Tanner says. "People are just so numb that ultimately if you affect them in any way, you're succeeding."



Cacophonous Crush Grotus is (left to right) John Carson, Bruce Boyd, Lars Fox and Adam Tanner.

Grotus was spawned around the time of the '89 World Series earthquake, when Carson and Tanner purchased two Akai samplers, intent on what Carson terms "scary film sound-

peace and sustenance of human life. Hopefully samplers aren't killing anybody."

Thus far, you might misconstrue Grotus as a grim group of ax-grinding

► Grotus play a record release party Tues, Dec. 3, at DNA, 375 11th St. S.F. Call 626-1409.