

"Arriving in each new city, the traveller encounters something of his past, the possession of which he had no longer been aware: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer own is expecting you on the threshold of new locations."

-- Italo Calvino

They've taken their time. Following *Silence Is Sexy*, their *Strategies Against Architecture III* anthology, the Berlin Babylon soundtrack, and the live cut *Brussels 9-15-2000*, *Perpetuum Mobile*, EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN's long-awaited new studio album, has arrived at last. Time brings about changes – and since their foundation, EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN have, like no other band, reflected these major and minor, public and private vicissitudes. They have been exemplary in reinventing themselves with every new album – while remaining faithful to themselves, especially in their constant metamorphosis. "Perpetuum Mobile" expands the range of their music, enriching it with new facets: like in the radicalism with which melancholia, wafted through with farewells, is portrayed here. Or the long, almost epic narratives that rigorously take all the time they need to develop their perfect dramaturgy. Alongside these, we find subtle sonic images, whose intensity develops out of reduction, or songs that breathe a fragile beauty ("Paradiesseits") and deeply felt mourning ("Dead Friends (around the corner)"). But EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN also immediately continue their search for that unexpected new sound – with new installations (see "Boreas") or surprising instrumentations consisting of wind players, tubes, pedal steel guitars, the clavichord, bird calls, and air compressors. But the game with "foreign" sounds is no end in itself, no pure exploration of materials, but a means of painting seductively disconcerting sound landscapes in which lyrics, rhythm and sound come together to form a unified entirety. Just like the whole album, which develops a manifest logic in view of these many surprising aspects – right down to the final track, "Grundstück".

Departure

In the beginning is the farewell: "Ich gehe jetzt" (I'm going now). The truism that in each demolishing movement there lurks a moment of departure has been illustrated more clearly, logically and convincingly by EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN on their new album *Perpetuum Mobile* than ever before in the band's long history. The Neubauten are in motion, and always have been, musically. But now they've specified this momentum in a conceptually closed album: it describes – veined by numerous references and reflexives – the routes and detours that life holds in store for thought. Flight movements small and great, occasionally ironic, at times daringly direct. Neubauten in motion: this can be taken quite literally. The space has widened: Berlin remains only a spot on the map; it has been moved out of the centre of experiences, and the fixed geographic perspectives have dissolved into a life of nomadism. EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN do not live here any more, at least not with that erstwhile exclusiveness. Since circumstances tend to have an inevitable inclination to invade all forms of artistic production, *Perpetuum Mobile* reflects life en route. Life appears like a single transit movement, revealing that borders have only one remaining purpose: they are there to be transgressed.

Under Surveillance

Silence Is Sexy (2000), the most recent album by EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN, was recorded in different studios over a long period of time. For *Perpetuum Mobile* the band, who have been operating as a constant line-up consisting of Blixa Bargeld, Alexander Hacke, N. U. Unruh, Jochen Arbeit and Rudi Moser since *Ende Neu*, decided on a novel and unusual production approach. Webcams were installed at the Neubauten studio in Berlin's north to transmit the entire creative process via the Internet on their homepage, www.neubauten.org. Interested fans were granted access to the site after paying a one-off fee which served to guarantee the financial independence

of the production. At previously announced fixed times, their supporters had the opportunity to watch the creative process live and to send their comments live to the band. To be able to react to incoming remarks, everybody in the studio, including sound engineer and webmaster, was equipped with a laptop. All the sessions broadcast – and later also the rough mix versions – were filed in an archive that could always be accessed online and discussed later in the chat or the forum. There were a number tracks, says Blixa Bargeld, that the band would have abandoned after a few attempts ("Ein seltener Vogel"), but continued to work on because the supporters insisted on their completion. So these fans, through their influence on the music, the lyrics and the production, were supportive in two respects.

" The feedback they offered and the attention they gave us were rather substantial. We announced from the start that we'd welcome their interference. But I didn't know which form this would take. I treated the supporters like an extended circle of friends, like people whom you would play a rough mix to. They were invited to access rough mixes on the site and join us in tinkering with the lyrics. In one track, for example, two mistakes in terms of content were pointed out to me. So I changed the sentence. In the next version I sang the new line." (Blixa Bargeld)

On completion of the production process, each supporter received the Supporter Album # 1, mainly consisting of material different to the songs now released on Perpetuum Mobile – exclusively conceived in the sessions that were broadcast live.

Route Network

" But where there is danger,
what saves also grows."

Hölderlin

As EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN always develop their tracks in the studio, a theme, a direction, an issue only tends to emerge as the work progresses. The same applies to Perpetuum Mobile. The lyrics have an even stronger link with each other than on previous albums – themes are hinted at, elaborated on later, and finally explicitly named. Perpetuum Mobile tells of changes: flux, movement, and transit. Every creative process is like a period of transition that runs through the lyrical landscape. We find a number of catastrophes and rushing natural forces – tornadoes, tsunamis, tidal waves; a pandemonium of catastrophes that accompany the flight movements. Own catastrophes and alien ones, ones that were experienced and others that were stage-managed, ones that were suffered and others that are overdrawn with the help of literary devices. This little A to Z of catastrophes, courtesy of EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN, marks a sober list of turning points, just like every catastrophe arrives at a stage where the development takes a new turn. The apocalyptic, that much becomes apparent on Perpetuum Mobile, has many sounds – indeed cheerful ones, too.

It would be possible to find many stretches of road for this album along which to access its apparent and hidden themes. One constant, however, is impossible to ignore: "There's not one single track which doesn't talk about the wind, the storm – where it isn't mentioned explicitly, you can at least hear it." (Blixa Bargeld) It pops up not only in the lyrics ("Ein leichtes Säuseln"; "Boreas" – in Greek mythology the god of the northern winds), it wafts

through the songs in the sound of three air compressors: "So there's a little less metal, a little more air ..." (Blixa Bargeld). The compressors turn various pipes into a veritable horn section, create sub-bass sounds, produce the big flood in "Ozean und Brandung." In its popular metaphorical guise, the wind marks change, the fleeting, the non-tangible and imponderable. It is animated substancelessness, yet it has the inherent power of moving others – through erosion, through its songs.

"The Khazars had master builders who chiselled massive chunks from the salt face and put them up in the path of the winds. A group of salty marble blocks was erected in each of the paths of the forty Khazaric winds (which were part salty, part sweet), and then, when the annual winds revived, the crowd came together in these places to hear which master builder had assembled the most beautiful song. Because in touching them, the winds played with the blocks whilst gliding through them or combing their peaks, always a new song, until the marble blocks, eroded by rain, whipped by the glances of the passers-by and licked at by the tongues of the sheep and buffaloes, disappeared together with their master builders." (Milorad Pavic, "Dictionary of the Khazars")

Monosyllabic

When it came to writing the lyrics for "Ich gehe jetzt", Blixa Bargeld began by collecting a number of monosyllabic words which he used as the basis for the song. New contexts of meaning were created successively by recombining originally disparate terms, in due course encircling the subject and its many aspects, shaping it. The title track eventually specifies the state of constantly being on one's way: symbolising a musician's tour routine ("in einem Bus mit hundert Sachen" [on a coach at a hundred mph]), but also the day-to-day life of two people living apart: "Von A nach B der Liebe wegen" ("From A to B because of love"). What may initially appear somewhat surreal (the enumeration of invisible things that accompany the traveller) eventually forms into a clear statement about the idea of quasi-geo-psychological change; an idea which is exposed layer by layer also in the other songs.

Perpetuum Mobile is the result of an exceptional situation. Not only that its production method was radically different from familiar recording processes. The tracks on the album were created in a situation where the band still had one foot in Berlin, not yet having arrived in another place with the other. This is reflected by the store of subjects addressed by the lyrics which remain suspended between farewell and arrival.

Into the Open

Despite all the seriousness that makes up the background of Bargeld's lyrics, we must never underestimate the (self-) ironic capacity of the band. One of the characteristic elements of Blixa Bargeld's lyrics has for many years been this occasionally ironic movement between micro and macro: proceeding from a detail, the glance is directed into the distance, into the open. "Toying with cosmic metaphors was declared a game even on 'Die Interimsliebenden'. On this album, I did it more or less systematically." (Blixa Bargeld) Thus 'Der Weg ins Freie' describes two expeditions in two parallel sets of lyrics, which come together in certain sentences or words: cinematic split-screen technology transferred to music. The voice on the left channel describing the way to the window after waking up, while the voice on the right tells of an awakening where you look down on Earth as from a distant planet. It is these abrupt, unexpected changes of perspective from which EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN create lyrically and musically that kind of highly artificial irony that Friedrich Schlegel once described as that "feeling of dissoluble conflict between the absolute and the conditional, the impossibility and the necessity of absolute communication."

EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN still occupy that space between "Ende" (End) and "Neu" (New), still draw their creative energy from the constant and contradictory reinvention of their own position, from the oscillation between the extremes. Infinitely much has been said since their foundation in 1980 about the delirious moment of sound descending, the self-relinquishment, about the principle of the machine, about the sound of materials, about their incessant refusal to become part of any kind of mainstream. They resemble an erratic block in the cultural landscape that unwaveringly refuses to make concessions to trends. We trust in them because they remain faithful to themselves, especially in their constant metamorphosis. An updated route map for change is now available in the shape of Perpetuum Mobile, which not only reflects once more all the familiar aspects of the band but also introduces astonishingly new ones.

Postscript

That it happened to be the Berlin author of "Astralnoveletten" (Astral Novelettas) who wrote the most amusing (and at the same time absurd) book about the perpetual motion machine at the beginning of the 20th century remains but a footnote: Paul Scheerbart. Another one who persistently worked on making the impossible reality.