

BARBELLS

FOR BONZO

MID-EXISTENCE CRISIS FOR THE NOISE — MERCHANTS?

DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO SONG-WRITING/MISERY IN SCUM-TOWN?

● WORDS — TOM VAGUE / PHOTO — MARIA TETE - NOIR

● The songs of capitalism must one day be drowned in the roar of it's enemies, those who desire to live not merely to consume. In order to make the world dance one must first turn off the music.

(Harry Harris, 'The Death of the Walrus')

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING IN 1985 THAT CAN STEAL THE FIRE OF EINSTURZENDE NEUBAUTEN ALIVE AND

DRILLING. THAT'S WHEN THE REAL THING HAPPENS SPONTANEOUSLY, OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF DISNEYLAND

CLUBS. AND I DON'T MEAN TOKEN TANTRUMS IN THE ELECTRIC BALLROOM. I MEAN WHEN THE COLLAPSING

NEW BUILDINGS REALLY COME DOWN : LIKE THEY DID IN BIRMINGHAM, A WEEK AFTER NEUBAUTEN'S LATEST

ASSAULT ON THE CAPITAL'S DESIGNER SET. 'ART IS TERRORISM' AS EXPRESSED BY THE PEOPLE OF HANDSWORTH.

IT ALWAYS LOOKS MORE CREATIVE AND BEAUTIFUL IN EVERYDAY LIFE, DIVORCED FROM THE ROCK'N'ROLL

SPECTACLE.

● Yet I fear the mummified souls of Stoke Newington have been too long insanesburys and ESB hostelrys to sample the delights of making bacon themselves : So I was there knock, knock, knocking on Heaven's door, an hour or two later than advertised, having to submit to the petty restraints and jobsworth thugs employed by the club, and questioning the necessity of such aggression/oppression in order to feel alive/anything.

Another ambiguous warning note: *"Heaven is not the place to bring or consume drugs : Anyone found with illicit substances will be immediately ejected and barred."* (Who needs amys when you've got fuses popping every 10 minutes?)

Blow it up, burn it down, kick it till it breaks by all means. It's alright by me: a good healthy pursuit for young persons. But when the first fuse went after 10 minutes or so, and the speaker stacks started to wobble, it did all begin to have a familiar ring to it.

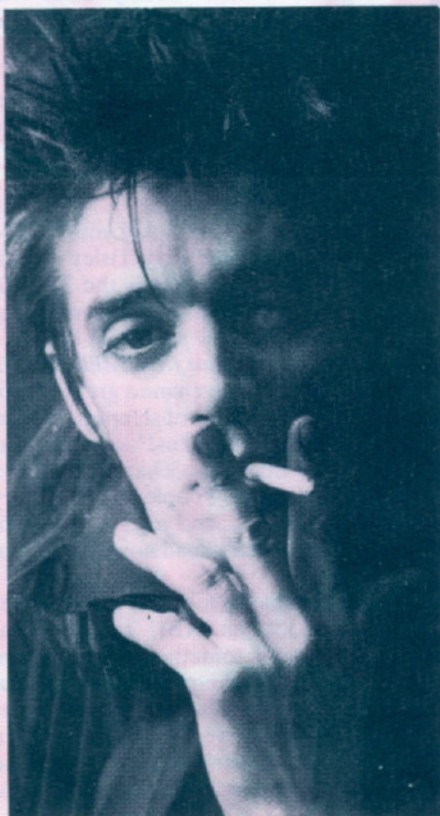
Still *Neubauten* did it first (*this time*), and still do it better and with more style than anyone else. So I'll let them get away with a little 'orchestrated spontaneity'. And the next day Blixa and Mufti will swear blind and more or less

convince me that it really *was* down to fire regulations, fuses blowing, dum-dee-dum.

Anyway it just wouldn't be a Neubauten happening if everything ran comfortably. *'LISTEN WITH PAIN. HEAR WITH PAIN. EARS ARE WOUNDS!'* Cue re-programming scene in *'A Clockwork Orange'*, where little Alex is made to feel repulsion for his beloved *'Ludwig Van'*. Distort and fade into those grating teeth-grinding squeals Blixa makes before the melancholy wail of *'Letztes Biest'* ... I find myself more drawn in this time than by any of their previous performances. It wasn't just masochism or nihilism either. And it was despite of what they termed the *'loss of tension'* due to the fuses. As far as I was concerned the intensity didn't dissipate as much as explode all over the place. Alex Hacke (Von Borsig) appeared to be similarly affected, forsaking his sound-desk to join Unruh on shopping trolley and loll about with his head jammed into a speaker.

Which was how I felt the next day, waiting for Blixa at *'Some Bizarre'*, with a weird anxiety over the prospect of pitting wits with *Herr Bargeld*.

His colleague and physical opposite,



EINSTURZENDE NEUBAUTEN

lovable troglodyte **Mufti** breaks the ice and puts me at ease with gossip about his many solo projects : Covering *Brecht* and *Weil* classics with Russian expatriate *Mona Mur*, some stuff with *Christiane F*, who he also co-stars with in *Klaus Maek's* 'DECODER' and his old *Abwärts* (now 'Rotting Sausage' apparently) — to name a few. Mufti and the others, Alex, Unruh and Marc Chung seem to be normal, healthily committed psychos. But this Bargeld fellow is another kettle of fish, as I knew from previous brief encounters and secondhand accounts.

As the following interview emphasised **Blixa** is the hook, the central personality, the flickering flame around which the others cluster like moths to make their stunning cacophony. I can embrace that noise, and find it stimulating, beautiful, whatever. I love the image, philosophy, propaganda, the works.

But as a personality I just couldn't warm to Blixa Bargeld, like I would to lovable eccentric geniuses like *Mark Stewart*, *Genesis P. Orridge*, *Mark E. Smith*: *Lydia Lunch* even.

Blixa's of a new generation of classical poet-punks. *Unapproachable, hip, young gunslingers*, that are making smoking cigarettes to the butt cool again.

They're all doing it — *Nick Cave*, *Rowland S. Howard*, *Jim Thirlwell*. And they appear even more dangerous than their elegantly wasted forefathers, because of a certain intelligence, depth and caustic wit that was found so sadly lacking in the last generation. I had Blixa Bargeld all made out as an *intelligent, sharp, deep type*, but also as a *self-assured, conceited blighter*. Not a shallow rock'n'roller by any means but a right pain nonetheless. My first impressions are proved more or less correct. But he can be quite fun to talk with, when he's not on the defensive (which isn't often). The key to this is of course, get him talking about himself.

"The reaction I like to provoke is when something happens for myself. I think after a good performance I should have the feeling that I've broken through a certain point in myself and I've had the feeling of being alive for at least a second. You should have that feeling, the memory of being alive for a moment. To break through a certain point that you haven't reached before."

Neubauten's relationship with their audience is a very unpredictable thing. The divisions aren't as clear and stable as they are with traditional rock groups. Often it results in destruction — as it did last year at their 'Concerto for Machinery and Voice' at the ICA. Or it can end up with Marc and Alex joking and poncing fags off the punters, like it did at Heaven. Blixa wasn't very impressed by either forms of inter-action;

"What we're doing is pretty coded I think," he elucidates. "I think the key to that code is in the live situation. It doesn't matter where it is so long as the attitude is there. I wouldn't say we give any clear messages, it's so far coded. But you start understanding what we are doing in a live situation. There is a certain attitude in the way we are playing. That's not talking about the instrumentation. We're not talking in simple abstract musical terms."

That attitude is something along the lines of a group of individuals striving to push themselves to personal peaks. Which although often mistaken for is diametrically opposed to Test Dept. fusing together their individualities, rejecting their egos and making the point that it's all the same thing anyway. Or as Blixa puts it "They want to be one thing that isn't possible to split into individuals."

If their aims and aspirations differ, what they do have in common is decidedly aggressive and brutal methods. But it's a matter of whose definition of aggressiveness and brutality you take. In a lot of ways I find Nik Kershaw or Madonna far more brutal than Unruh drilling a creative hole in a stage. Or as Blixa says of a suggested 'more gentle' approach;

"I haven't got that much time to do it in a gentle way. If I try to tear down this house in a gentle way it takes a long time and someone's going to build up another house while we're trying to pull down this one. *Life is vandalistic*. I think real emotions are vandalistic. I think metaphorically speaking we do kiss the audience."

It might seem like the kiss of death to some, romanticised nihilism to others? Blixa scoffs;

"I think if people see something hap-

pening which doesn't fit in with their values, their moralistic and realistic values, it is nihilistic to them."

Black Hole : Cold stars; in astrophysics Black Holes explode into 2,000 times their own size, then implode and no longer shine. They suck in all material and light around. The energy builds. "We are cold stars!" ('Kalte Sterne': 'Strategies against Architecture' sleeve notes.)

One cold star implodes further;

"I think I'm totally empty. I'm totally hollow. Sometimes I think I'm so totally hollow that I'm able to project things onto myself — which I take off the audience."

"Nick Cave's got a totally different attitude to the way he performs. He projects but he doesn't even need an audience for that. I don't want to put him down — but I don't think he's as involved emotionally in what he's doing as I am. I think he is just much more dramatic and self-parodistic. He's doing something else. He doesn't take off other people's energy to project on himself. I don't think he's trying to lose control. I think he's trying to act as perfect as possible — which is brilliant. I'm trying to be nothing. I'm trying to forget. To lose control."

Which seems to be a suitable point to halt the all-consuming Bargeld ego, and wind this up by praising Neubauten's recently released album 'Halber Mensch' (on 'Some Bizarre'), onto which they project not only their usual uncompromising, inventive apocalypse of a sound but a certain structured clarity, that if they're not careful could easily be mistaken for songs.

... And Blixa's definition of a Neubauten concert?

"The concert is over. The audience turns back, picks up their coats and walks home. Only there are no coats and there is no home..." ●

