

A Fearless Foot and an Unscrupulous Mind (A Scream from the Extremity)

One reason for the asphyxiating atmosphere in which we live without possible escape or recourse—and for which we are all responsible, even the most revolutionary among us—is this respect for what has already been written, formulated, composed or performed, what has been given form, as if all expression were not finally exhausted and has not reached the point where things must fall apart if they are to begin again.

—Ludwig Fischer and Mattin

For all those interested in the perfidy of critique, let me recall an event, an intervention, a date, January 3rd, 2009—in which I, Ludwig Fischer, was less a collaborator than an accomplice, a participant in a kind of cerebral crime. Through a mixture of friendship, convenience and comradely commitment, Mattin solicited myself and one L.F. to play the part of the critic, to be responsible for introducing a critical incision into his performance with Drunkdriver at the Silent Barn.

The occasion for this reflection is the recent release of Mattin's and Drunkdriver's album, *List of Profound Insecurities* by Philadelphia's Badmaster label—a potent document of their shared commitment to those sonic experiments that trouble classificatory regimes and demineralize the obvious. However, despite its many virtues, it could not but be a hopeless substitute for the insecurity and the prevailing sense of threat that pervaded their performances—an impossible record of their essential cruelty, their hunger after life and cosmic strictness, to which I lent a piteous foot. The many joys of the album poorly convey the shear effort of their collaboration, its difficulty and antagonism. Let us recall, invoking one of my many masters, that effort means cruelty, existence through effort is cruel.

It is important not to let the antagonism engendered and internalized between Mattin and Drunkdriver, whose faint echo can be heard on the recording only with immense effort, fade into indifference. Let this little text, however insufficiently, serve to amplify this echo.

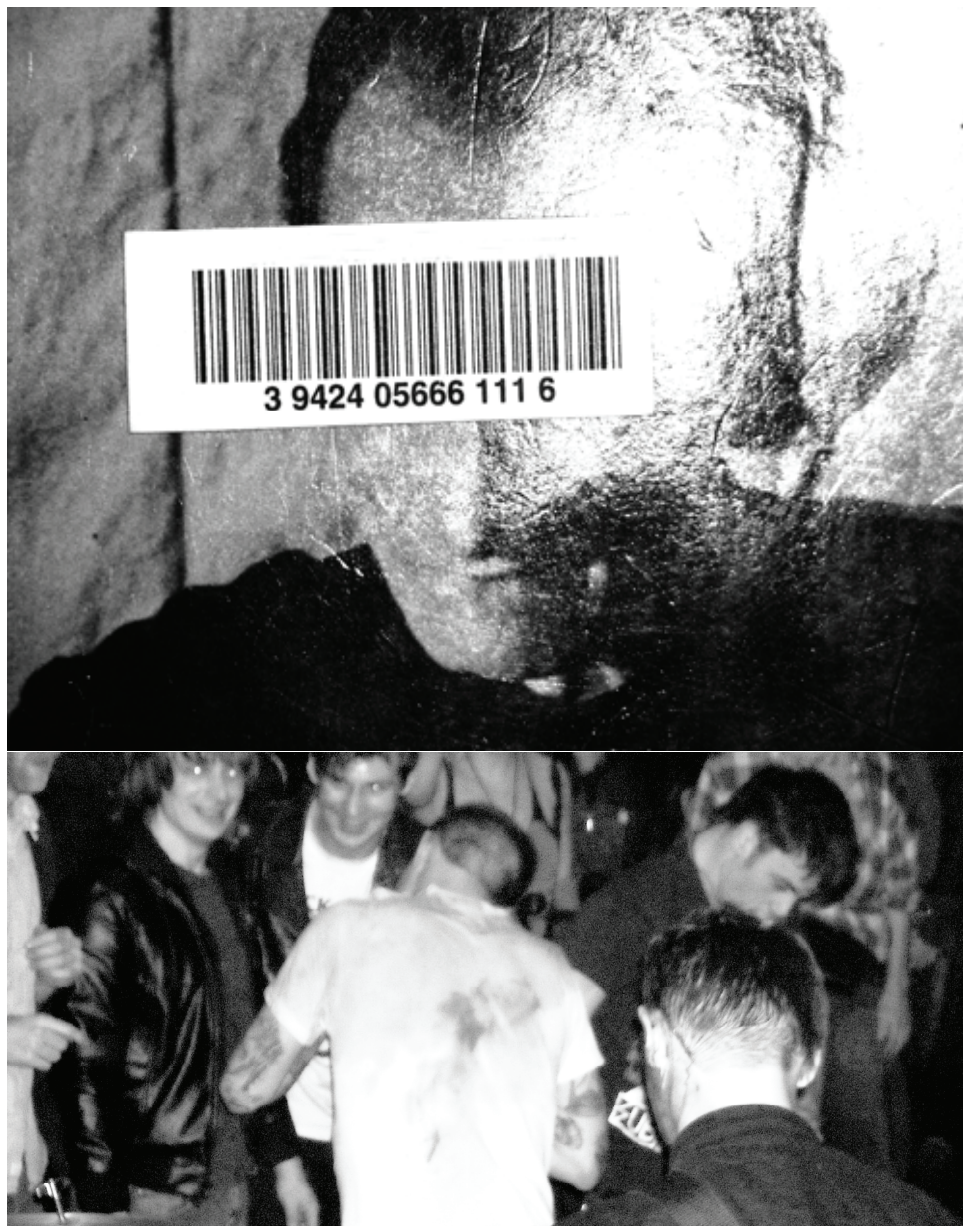
For those familiar with Drunkdriver's refined malevolence doubtless know that the brute materiality of their performance buries all pretension, especially to sense, forcing language to reside somewhere between thought and gesticulation. Michael Berden's microphone seems an extension of a striking fist, a weapon that he frequently swings like a ball and chain or hurls into the crowd, convinced that a performance, like a dream, must be bloody and inhuman in order to unforgettably root in the audience an idea of perpetual conflict. Yet, the addition of Mattin and his fateful instrumentalization of my foot that evening at the Silent Barn, served to reveal that the precedent of their performances and the source of their vitality seemed to lie less within the annals of punk-rock and the proliferation of its sub-genres, as within the tortured screed of the theater of cruelty. Mattin's cerebrally focused machinations introduced a new tension into their performances that could not but be perceived as a threat to Drunkdriver's organic integrity. Sometimes the critic must risk destroying the object of one's love.

The integrity of Drunkdriver's sound depends upon their ability to generate a momentum that careens centrifugally, always at the limits of control. And Berden's pact is to place himself at the mercy of this limit, affirming the dangerous vitality of a ship manned by a drunken master, kept on course by its own forward momentum. Mattin's interventions that night took aim at this pact by tactically interrupting the momentum, severing Berden from the sound that acts as his rudder.

For all appearances Mattin integrated himself quite well into the band. However, he set strict temporal parameters on the development of the performance. These restraints served to construct

a situation that forced the band, Mattin included, to react to conditions that were artificial and designed to challenge the group's organic integrity by interrupting its development and exposing it to the vicissitudes of contingency.

My role was clearly defined. Ten minutes into the performance I had to step onto a pedal that cut the amplification to the guitars, signaling the drummer to stop. Only the microphone was left on. At fifteen minutes, the amplification was to be turned back on and the performance was to conclude at twenty. In the interval, as if to intensify the cruelty of the situation, Mattin planted a heckler, one L.F., to critically malign the performance. The extreme austerity and simplicity of these restraints served to condense the critic's great contempt to the muscular exercise of the foot—a blow I delivered like a nerve spasm that suddenly cut short the life of the organism, opening the band to unforeseen contingencies. This simple exercise shifted control from the band to the audience and suddenly Drunkdriver (Mattin included) had to confront head on the intensities that their sound had engendered. By suddenly cutting all amplification except to the microphone, the band's sovereign, Michael Berden, was cut loose and had to reel independently of the noise colossus that normally steers him. The crowd grew restless as the time unfolded, each second being felt, their ire stoked by L.F.'s aspersions.



By ratcheting up the cruelty to ascetic proportions, Mattin designed a perilous situation, letting loose forces that the band itself could not endure. The drummer broke his commitment to follow the parameters. He began to drum, deploying a ritualistic and clichéd drumrole to anchor Berden's chaotic meanderings. Mattin, struck in the head by the swinging microphone and bleeding, momentarily fled the scene, not before smearing audience members with his blood. The performance continued, but now under conditions that were unpredictable, flawed, botched.

The collaboration went awry. But by maintaining oneself within this prolonged laceration something was touched upon that no party could really sustain

or maintain. Mattin was less a transient member of the ensemble than a rogue particle, a foreign agent that MUST be expelled by its host. The violent intensity that their collaboration fomented could neither be sustained by Mattin or Drunkdriver, for it was bent on their mutual disintegration. Such is the end of all vital collaborations.

Mattin's interventions, like my own, proceed at times with surgical precision and others with the crudeness of a cranial blow from a battleaxe. There are no doubt times and situations appropriate to both actions. At the Silent Barn, he swung the battleaxe. Yet, the failure of the performance exposed the radical difficulty, the inhuman effort required of us critics who seek to question structures of mastery. I for one share the conviction that the present state of society is iniquitous and ought to be destroyed. If Mattin's sunflinching commitment to improvisation is a certain gust of fresh air, situating his experiments in the interstices between performance, punk-rock, noise and electro-acoustic improv, it no doubt due to the innocence with which he leaves formal concerns to the aesthetes, to those eardrum sophisticates whose erstwhile commitments amount to little more than the institution of a new form of decorum.

With an untroubled insistence Mattin refuses the autonomy of the auditory, inscribing it at all times within a social apparatus that the musician whether consciously or unconsciously performs.

Decorum is not merely an external ornament, but an affective regime that one internalizes and then performs. And music, as with all of the arts, is worth little if cannot interrupt this process that leads to new forms of consensual judgment, to new forms of mastery, serving as a new stimulus to good taste, confirming rather than challenging the established order. It is thus above all in the performance that Mattin seeks to dislocate, disturb, or at a minimum expose the mechanics of aesthetic refinement, reminding himself as much as his listeners of that now ancient adage: To be done with judgment!

One must treat *List of Profound* as a literal record, a document not simply to be listened to, but read. If most improvisation labours over the introduction of a little necessity into contingency, obsessing over compositions perilously perched at the

very edge of disappearance, Mattin perverts this procedure, accelerating the contingent, the random, the chaotic in order to make thought coincide with actions. One should attend to those moments in the record when the machinic crackle of Mattin's laptop obliterates the difference between foreground and background, the structure swallowing that which it structures, the master exposing his bloody head.

In such rare moments the guiding proposition of Drunkdriver's and Mattin's short but intensely agonistic collaboration becomes discernable:

Ah, that's it, that's life! Well, it's a mess.

—Ludwig Fischer