One reason for the asphyxiating atmosphere in which we live without possible escape or recourse—for which we are all responsible, even the most revolutionary among us—is this respect for what has already been written, formed, composed or performed, which 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 perdity 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 accidental 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 careers centrifugally, always at the limits of control. And their ability to generate a momentum that careens, frequently swings like a ball and chain or hurls 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, however, there were none.

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

-Ludwig Fischer