

Perpetuum Mobile. Non-places in Blixa Bargeld's journals

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Word games

Philippe Lejeune has this to say about the unlimited freedom that the diary offers: “Everyone feels that they have the right to use language they want to use. [...] You can choose your own rules of the game. Keep several notebooks. Mix genres.”¹ It means that life writing is a very broad category, one which inspires people to invent their own literary (and intermedia) formulas and impose rules and limitations on themselves. Recording life experiences and reflections actually becomes a kind of a game played that the writer plays – which makes sense insofar as the combination of chaos and order is a feature of both play and life.

Many avant-garde movements used games and play to foster creativity and inspire (self-) reflection. Mel Gooding emphasizes that surrealists used games to challenge conventional ways of speaking and behaving in order to reach hidden meanings: “it was through games, play, techniques of surprise and methodologies of the fantastic that they subverted academic modes of enquiry, and undermined the complacent certainties of the reasonable and respect-

¹ Philippe Lejeune, “Drogi zeszyt...”, “Drogi ekranie...”. O dziennikach osobistych [“Cher écran”: Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet/“Dear Diary...” Dear screen”: Personal diaries] trans. Magda and Paweł Rodak (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2010), 42. The quote was translated into English from Polish.

able. Playful procedures and systematic stratagems provided keys to unlock the door to the unconscious and to release the visual and verbal poetry of collective creativity.”² Avant-garde game strategies helped one rediscover the world and allowed one to explore what was hidden behind the veil of reality and consciousness.

Considering the above remarks on avant-garde games, the following quotation from an interview on jazz, alternative, and experimental music published in *The Wire* in 1999 sounds surprisingly familiar. The German artist Blixa Bargeld talks about his artistic strategies, located at the intersection of music, literature, and performance art, moving in-between rigid rules and a game of chance: “It’s a particular method that developed within me and it opened up channels where the words that just came in were outside of my direct responsibility. [...] They would form patterns and, if you’re lucky in the end, you could talk about a text.”³ Bargeld talks about *Rede/Speech* vocalizations and performances (both “Rede” and “Speech” refer to the same thing), also called “pseudo-scientific entertainment,” in which he used a microphone and a mixing console to break down spoken or hummed words and phrases into sounds, demonstrating how words (including those in the local language, “suggested” by his audience) gradually transform into music. However, the artist uses exactly the same method in his other artistic endeavours, that is composing music, writing song lyrics and experimental prose. In all of the above-mentioned cases, he works with the autobiographical, and as such his music, literature, and photography are *life writing*, alas in a decidedly avant-garde perspective.

The avant-garde tradition: *Geniale Dilletanten*

The artistic path of Blixa Bargeld, born in 1959, is both original and characteristic of the most creative minds of his generation, which is referred to in the history of German culture as the generation of *Geniale Dilletanten*. The name refers to the event called *Festival Genialer Dilletanten* which took place on September 4, 1981 in (West) Berlin’s Tempodrom, during which a big audience (over 1,400 people) were introduced to a group of young, previously unknown, artists who had worked on the margins of mainstream culture (including the bands Die Tödliche Doris und Einstürzende Neubauten, Gudrun Gut, Christiane X and Alexander von Borsig).

A spelling error (“Dilletanten” instead of “Dilettanten”) was apparently made when a festival leaflet was being prepared but the effect was so “dilettante” that the name was soon used to refer to the entire movement/subculture of the early 1980s, active both in West and East Germany.⁴ Most *Dilletanten* were associated with different art schools and explored independent means of artistic expression – manifestos and poems in photocopied fanzines, Super 8 films, happenings and performances, photographic collages, installations, painting and sculpture

² Mel Gooding, “Surrealist games”, in: *A Book of Surrealist Games*, ed. Alistair Brotchie, Mel Gooding (Boston – London: Shambhala Redstone Editions, 1995), 10.

³ Louise Gray, “Invisible Jukebox: Blixa Bargeld”, *The Wire* 8 (1999): 37.

⁴ The following year, Merve Verlag, a publishing house founded in 1970 which specialized in contemporary philosophy, art, and left-wing political thought, published a book that summarized the goals of the generation: Wolfgang Müller, *Geniale Dilletanten* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1982).

which deliberately challenged conventional aesthetics – as well as created noise and experimental music using sounds of everyday life. According to Joseph Beuys, who famously argued that art was not craftsmanship, “emphasis was placed on expression rather than technical perfection, artistic impact rather than skill” (as explained in the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition devoted to the movement organized in 2015 at the Haus der Kunst in Munich⁵).

When it comes to musical inspirations, *Geniale Dilletanten* were influenced by first-wave punk, new wave, and the sound of British Industrial music. One of the most important points of reference was the English industrial band Throbbing Gristle, whose members were originally visual and performance artists; the band had evolved from the COUM Transmissions performance art collective, which organized exhibitions and happenings inspired by Dada, Surrealism, Beat writers, and the New York artistic community in the second half of the 1960s. COUM Transmissions operated from 1969 to 1976.

Geniale Dilletanten also continued the long tradition of the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde, with particular emphasis on German and Swiss achievements in this field. The name pointed to the most important reference. The cover of the first (and only) issue of *Die Scham-made* published in 1920 in Cologne read: “Dilettanten erhebt Euch gegen die Kunst!” (Dilettantes, rise up against art!); the same slogan was painted on a wall during the *Erste Internationale Dada Messe* (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin in 1920. Devising new strategies of challenging, and not making, art turned out to be the long-term goal of young German artists, both in the 1920s and in the 1980s.

Einstürzende Neubauten

Strategien gegen Architektur,⁶ that is “Strategies against architecture,” is the title of a four-part anthology series by Einstürzende Neubauten, a group whose controversial name (“collapsing new buildings”) was inspired by the partial collapse of the Berlin Congress Hall in 1980. From the perspective of over forty years which had passed since the *Festival Genialer Dilletanten*, Einstürzende Neubauten turned out to be the most important, innovative, and influential band among the invited groups. The group still (with only some line-up changes) records and performs, and its current and former⁷ members boast significant achievements not only in the field of music but also film, theater, performance art, radio art, visual arts, and literature.

⁵ “Geniale Dilletanten: Subculture in Germany in the 1980s”, E-Flux, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/29393/geniale-dilletanten-subculture-in-germany-in-the-1980s/>, date of access 8 Feb. 2023.

⁶ Einstürzende Neubauten, *Strategien gegen Architektur I-IV*, Mute, CD, 1984, 1991, 2001, 2010.

⁷ The achievements of one of the co-founders of Einstürzende Neubauten, F.M. Einheit (Frank-Martin Strauß), are particularly important. He left the band in 1995 and pursued a career as a composer of contemporary music and film soundtracks. He is also involved (together with the writer Andreas Ammer) in radio plays. See: Lukáš Jiříčka, *Zdobycy scen akustycznych Od radioartu do teatru muzycznego* [Conquerors of acoustic stages: From radio art to musical theater], trans. Krystyna Mogilnicka (Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, 2017).

From the very beginning, the band drew on eclectic avant-garde and neo-avant-garde inspirations, including concrete and industrial music. However, the lyrics, the singing, and the performative aspects of live shows (which focused on destruction, physical pain, and fear) were also inspired by Artaud's Theater of Cruelty and its focus on screams.⁸

The futurist tradition, especially "The Art of Noises," is equally important for Einstürzende Neubauten. Luigi Russolo argues in the manifesto that: "Ancient life was all silence. In the 19th Century, with the invention of machines, Noise was born. Today, Noise is triumphant and reigns sovereign over the sensibility of men."⁹ The reconstructed *intonarumori* – fanciful futurist instruments used to produce hums and noises – were featured in the music video for the song *Blume*,¹⁰ which was a re-enactment of the iconic photograph showing futurists with their noise machinery in the background.¹¹ The band's instruments point to the futurist heritage: instruments which are usually used in rock music, such as electric and bass guitars, are not as important as found objects (metal and plastic pipes, oilcloth bags, or shopping carts used as drums) and DIY instruments ("pipe organs" made of actual pipes which come to life thanks to a compressor, bags filled with small objects which imitate the sound of sea waves). Objects from degraded construction sites, garbage dumps, and supermarkets are used in a new and surprising way; they become musical instruments and as such refer to avant-garde *objets trouvés*.

However, Dada remains the most important source of inspiration for the band. The nickname of Einstürzende Neubauten's frontman – the singer, guitarist, co-composer and lyricist Blixa Bargeld – is a tribute to Dada. Born Christian Emmerich, he borrowed his surname from Johannes Theodor Baargeld (Blixa was a type of pen; the fact that it sounds like a female name was also important). The Cologne painter, graphic artist, poet and satirist Johannes Theodor Baargeld (real name: Alfred Emanuel Ferdinand Grünwald), although not as emblematic of Dada as Marcel Duchamp, was one of the founders of the Dada group in 1919 (together with Max Ernst and Hans Arp) and the publisher of *Der Ventilator*, *Bulletin D* and *Die Schammade*.

⁸ Cf. Jennifer Shryane, Blixa Bargeld and Einstürzende Neubauten: German Experimental Music. 'Evading do-re-mi' (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

The interest in Artaud was probably strengthened by the band's long-term cooperation with Heiner Müller, who has repeatedly referred to Artaud in his work. The band, among others, prepared the musical score for Müller's radio play *Hamletmaschine*; Blixa Bargeld played Hamlet (Einstürzende Neubauten & Heiner Müller, *Die Hamletmaschine*. Hörspiel, Ego 1991).

The band was also asked to cooperate with artists interested in butoh (the bodies of dancers are not only "post-Artaudian" but above all conceptualized "after Hiroshima") which further confirms their interest in Artaud: Sōgo Ishii in 1985 (documentation: Einstürzende Neubauten, *Halber Mensch*, directed by Sōgo Ishii, Atavistic, VHS, 1992) and Anita Saij's company Nordic Butoh Dance Lab in 1995.

⁹ Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto", trans. Barclay Brown, in: *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox, Daniel Warner (New York-London: Continuum, 2004), 10.

¹⁰ Einstürzende Neubauten, *Tabula Rasa*, Potomak, CD, 1993.

¹¹ Blixa Bargeld also took part in Luciano Chessa's *Music For 16 Futurist Noise Intoners*, where he performed original and new compositions on the *intonarumori* (New York 2009).

Representatives of the first avant-garde proved inspirational in discovering the visual and audio aspects of literature. For example, Richard Hülsenbeck¹² argued that the 20th century would mark the end of the Gutenberg era, in which poetry would no longer be read (privately, in silence) but performed live. References to the history of Swiss and German Dadaism may often be found in Einstürzende Neubauten's lyrics, for example in *Let's do it Dada*,¹³ which refers to many Dada artists, locations, and works of art – from Baargeld, Ernst, and Hülsenbeck to Schwitters and his *Merzbau* as well as the poet Hugo Ball. Einstürzende Neubauten also draws on sound poetry (for example in *Nnnaamm*,¹⁴ which stands for “New no new age advanced ambient motor music machine” and has been inspired by the frequency and voltage of electric power – and *Hawonnnti!*¹⁵) and random poetry.¹⁶ The band also experiments with various languages sound (not only German, English, and French but also Japanese and Latin).

Projects such as *Blixa liest Hornbach*¹⁷ (a series produced for Arte TV as part of a thematic evening devoted to poetry) may also be considered literary and performative equivalents of Dadaist *objets trouvés*. In these short films, Bargeld can be seen standing against the backdrop of post-industrial spaces, wearing a suit and a hat, and expressively reciting specifications of tools and materials one could order from a catalogue. Bargeld brought to life the semantic and acoustic potential of German technical vocabulary (words such as Bohrlochschwämme and Quarzitpolygonplatten). The “patron saint” of this particular project (apart from Dadaists) was most likely the post-Dadaist Ernst Jandl. This notwithstanding, Bargeld still performs live with Einstürzende Neubauten, and he has for many years also toured with Nick Cave's band The Bad Seeds. Indeed, the most important part of Bargeld's career (and the main source of income) is performing live.

Non-places

European and world tours do not have a specific goal (artists often do not use the shortest route to travel from one city to another; due to logistical reasons, they often move like a knight in a game of chess) and they actually never end (artists such as Bob Dylan no longer set the beginning or end of their tours – they “tour” non-stop; the tour may be sometimes in-

¹²Richard Hülsenbeck would recite poems from his collection *Phantastische Gebete* (1916) at Cabaret Voltaire, often accompanying himself with a riding crop or a drum. See: Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 28. See also: Richard Hülsenbeck, “About My Poetry (1956)”, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, in: *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, ed. Hans J. Kleinschmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

¹³Einstürzende Neubauten, *Alles wieder offen*, Potomak, CD, 2007.

¹⁴Einstürzende Neubauten, *Ende Neu*, Potomak, CD, 1996.

¹⁵Einstürzende Neubauten, *Musterhaus 7: Stimmen Reste*, Potomak, CD, 2006.

During the band's anniversary concert in 2010, one of the musicians, N.U. Unruh, recited the sound poem *Hawonnnti!* dressed in a white tube cap and a stiff coat, a replica of the “magic bishop” costume immortalized in the iconic photo from 1916, in which Hugo Ball recited *Caravan* at Cabaret Voltaire.

¹⁶Bargeld designed a system called Dave, a pack of six hundred cards with various suggestions regarding the choice of the instrument, the structure of the song (verse, chorus, intro and outro), lyrics, tempo, emotions, etc., used in collective songwriting. Each musician would pick a card, and the resulting combinations were the starting point for new compositions.

¹⁷All videos can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kdLmXRmEec>, date of access 8 Feb. 2023.

terrupted by random events such as the coronavirus pandemic). Musicians often describe life on the road *not* as an exciting artistic adventure, full of surprises and antics, but as a “Groundhog Day” – the setlists are (mostly) the same and the daily schedule is mostly the same: travel, rehearsal, performance, night spent at the hotel, travel.

We may ask whether “being on the road” can be defined as a journey at all, especially when we think about how this experience may be translated into an artistic medium, for example into a work of literature. The American scholar John Joseph, who analyzed Romantic travel journals after Chateaubriand, thus defined the features and goals of such writing:

The travel literature of a given period shares the aesthetic and philosophical undercurrents shaping fictional writing, along with some of the same goals: to instruct and entertain by transporting readers, through the printed page, into contact with settings, circumstances, and characters unfamiliar to them, of a sort they have likely not encountered in actual experience and may or may not in the future. By reading about other places and persons, readers will come to an improved understanding of humanity and the world in general, of themselves, and the places most familiar to them.¹⁸

Although what Joseph described may still be found both in “professional” literature and “private” texts (as evidenced by the popularity of different guides to creating travel diaries and notebooks, with a particular focus on the use of multimedia, combining words and images or archiving artifacts such as tickets), today the meaning of the word “travel” has become somewhat unstable.

The ethnologist and cultural anthropologist Marc Augé has argued that we need to redefine the relationship between place and identity in the era of excess time and space, marked by transportation boom and the development of places which only serve travel purposes (airports, stations, hotels). Augé calls spaces that cannot be described as identity-defining, familiar or historical “non-places.”¹⁹ Seemingly, non-places do not meet any of the conditions that make a given space worthy of description. However, according to Augé, people are still looking for symbolic orders and thus non-places can also be included in broadly defined travel literature or simply “travel” as a genre.²⁰

Joseph refers in the title of his article to the “I-Tinerary,” placing emphasis on the pronoun “I” as part of the word “Itinerary.” When we change how we think about the subject’s identity, we change how we write. Irene Kacandes, who studies such developments in life writing, observes that different experimental techniques are used in contemporary literature to reproduce “the layers of the human psyche, split subjectivity, or the human experience of time

¹⁸ John Joseph, “I-Tinerary: The Romantic Travel Journal after Chateaubriand”, *South Central Review* 1 (1984): 40.

¹⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London-New York: Verso, 1995).

²⁰ Cf. “Podróż” [Journey], in: *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], ed. Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2007), 394–395.

and space.”²¹ She argues that texts which rely on such experimental techniques should still be classified as *life writing*. The contemporary diarist who travels through non-places may employ various avant-garde strategies to map his experience, translating it into a specific form.

The everyday in photographs

Blixa Bargeld estimates that as a touring musician he visits two hundred hotels a year. He decided to immortalize this, for him crucial, experience of visiting non-places in a way that is a negative of travel photography, insofar as it highlights repetition, lack of individuality, ugliness, and claustrophobia (although the artist has been active on Instagram for several years, he does not document his private or professional life online²²).

Bargeld started taking photos with cheap disposable cameras (considered to be the opposite of classic “artistic” SLR cameras) in 1990 and decided to immortalize each of his hotel stays. He did not want to photograph hotel beds because they easily lend themselves to metaphorization;²³ instead, he decided to photograph every hotel bathroom because, to paraphrase Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes’s famous observation about Dada, they do not mean anything. However, the musician believes that it is impossible to fully escape from meaning-making, because the recipient of a work of art will always look for it, look for associations, or at least for structure, rhythm, and organizing principle. So, he set clear rules for himself: he took one or more photos, and he always photographed the washbasins first. There is usually a large mirror above hotel washbasins, but Bargeld tried to take photographs in such a way as not to appear in them. However, he did not always succeed and sometimes he appears in the photograph as a reflection in the mirror, akin to Jan van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Portrait*. When his flash-lamp broke down in Chile, the photograph was almost black. Still, Bargeld included it in the collection because it was important for him to follow the established and newly discovered rules. He also emphasized the importance of repetition, and not the photograph itself or its quality. According to Bargeld, collecting such images helps maintain a balance between chaos and order.²⁴

²¹Irene Kacandes, “Experimental Life Writing”, in: *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, Brian McHale (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 382.

²²<https://www.instagram.com/blixa.official/>.

In this context, it might be interesting to mention other artists who use Instagram to document their experiences as touring musicians. One of them is Mick Jagger, who, unlike Bargeld, cultivates the myth of the musician-tourist, mainly by taking photos during his walks, mostly at night and after the shows, and posing in front of monuments. See: <https://www.instagram.com/mickjagger/>.

²³For some people, this aspect (reinforced by the cultural memory of Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* (1996)) is important. The choreographer and dancer Leszek Bzdyl has photographed all his hotel beds after waking up for several years. He posts his photographs on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bzdyl>.

²⁴The “collector’s” theme of Bargeld’s works could probably be discussed in the context of one of Bargeld’s favorite critics, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin tried to restore subjectivity to mass-produced objects by creating collections in which these objects would be “liberated from the compulsion to be useful.” Walter Benjamin, “Paris: Capital of the 19th Century (1935)”, in *idem: Selected writings: Volume 3*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 39. Cf. also: Beata Frydryczak, *Świat jako kolekcja. Próba analizy estetycznej natury nowoczesności [The world as a collection. An attempt to analyze the aesthetic nature of modernity]* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, 2002).

The first exhibition of Bargeld's photographs, *Serialbathroomdummyrun*, opened in 1997. The exhibition catalog was published the same year.²⁵ The collection grew with each tour; a question arose as to whether, when, and how the project should end. A journal or a diary, at least in its most classic rendition, does not end on a date that has been set in advance; writing is interrupted by death. However, Bargeld decided that the project should end on a special night: the night he spent at the world's tallest hotel in Shanghai celebrating Chinese New Year.²⁶

Bargeld's project is neither nostalgic (aseptic, impersonal hotels where the musician spends most of the year in isolation fade in comparison with his home, family, pets), nor does it serve to provocatively overturn any hierarchies (as is the case, for example, in Jean-Philippe Toussaint's famous novel/quasi-diary entitled *The Bathroom*, in which the protagonist moves to the most inconspicuous room in the apartment, taking all his possessions and, gradually, his entire life with him²⁷). Bargeld does not mind the fact that chain hotel bathrooms are all the same; he refers to Howard Hughes, who, as a billionaire and aviator, could afford to have identical copies of his house erected across the United States.²⁸ He is fascinated by the fact that in their "natural state" such places are marked by anonymity and unremarkability – they lack individualization; when you live in hotel rooms, even for a short period of time, you in a sense desacralize these spaces, and after temporary residents leave, the staff must return the room to its original state of asepticity and transparency. The hotel bathroom turns out to be not only a non-place but also a space exempt from the laws and the passage of time. It thus becomes something of a *pars pro toto* for touring.

The everyday in words

In 1993, shortly after he began his "bathroom" project, Blixa Bargeld started writing every day; he says that many authors (and musicians) advised him to write regularly, day by day. This habit, on the one hand, helps document everyday life, and, on the other hand, it is intended to make creativity almost automatic. As the artist says, it helps develop individual style and fosters freedom of expression: "The less you write the more you are inclined to worry about each and every word. If you write a lot, you stop doing so."²⁹ To draw on Paweł Rodak, it can be said that in and through *life writing* Bargeld combines "existential aspects" (the desire to record life) with "professional" artistic endeavors.³⁰

²⁵Blixa Bargeld, *Serialbathroomdummyrun* (Berlin: Juliettes Literatursalon, 1998).

²⁶Quote after: Max Dax, Robert Defcon, *Nur was nicht ist ist möglich. Die Geschichte der Einstürzenden Neubauten* (Berlin: Bosworth, 2006), 299.

²⁷See: Jean-Philippe Toussaint, *The Bathroom*, trans. Nancy Amphoux and Paul de Angelis (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008).

²⁸Cf. Blixa Bargeld, "Das Spiel wird erfunden, die Regeln werden entdeckt", in idem: *Serialbathroomdummyrun*, 8.

²⁹Quote after: *Einstürzende Neubauten, Perpetuum Mobile, tourbook* (Berlin: minus Verlag, 2004), 10.

³⁰Cf. Paweł Rodak, "Dziennik pisarza: między codzienną praktyką piśmienną a literaturą" [A writer's diary: between everyday writing practice and literature], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2006): 34–35.

Still, the German artist distances himself from the diaristic tradition: “My notes are a form of writing which prevents me from writing a diary. And it takes a clear formal shape: Place, comma, date, then two lines down I will note what I intend to write. This ranges from poetry to essays, from notes to lists.”³¹ Perhaps Bargeld’s notes are in fact what Philippe Lejeune calls “a series of dated traces” [série de traces datées];³² such notes are both continuous and discontinuous.

Bargeld’s notes from one particularly long European tour with Einstürzende Neubauten in 2008 (Alles Wieder Offen Tour) were published in a book which he edited and ironically described as “Bildungsroman in der erst besten Person”³³ (a Bildungsroman in the first best person). The book describes, rather peculiarly, Bargeld’s “Journeyman Years,” the musician describes life on the road as an experience that offers nothing (in the sense of experiences or knowledge gained about the world or people) and yet at the same time also as an experience which does not deprive him of anything (he does not portray himself as a martyr, as an emotionless craftsman). Being on the road, being in constant motion, consumes life energy as much as it generates it: it is like a perpetual motion machine (*perpetuum mobile*).

The book is titled *Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei* (Europe Crosswise: A Litany). The subtitle refers to the fact that the book is a long list of dates and cities, with repeated comments (e.g., playlists which are practically identical throughout the entire tour or descriptions of routine activities during sound checks). In-between, Bargeld places variations: in particular, notes on the least routine element of being on the road, i.e. food,³⁴ and his reflections of a specific or general nature.

In a sample entry about Gothenburg, we read about the musician’s taxi ride from the airport to the hotel, about herrings (prompted by news of the death of *The New York Times* food critic), the hotel room (a bottle of Bordeaux wine, a cookie), TV channels, ENT medications taken. Later, we read about a dinner at a restaurant:

Biff-blomkål-lök-aska
 Beef-cauliflower-onion-ash
 Långarygg-böner-mandel-lakrits
 Ling fillet-beans-almonds-liquorice
 Långa? Ling? Fishes can’t be translated, they have a different name every 50 miles;
 Carl Linnaeus, and he was definitely Swedish, classified this one as follows:

³¹Quote after: Einstürzende Neubauten, *Perpetuum Mobile*, tourbook, 11.

³²Lejeune, 36.

³³Marcus, “Blixa Bargeld – Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei (Rezension & Lesung)”, *Mainstage Musikmagazin*, <https://mainstage.de/blixa-bargeld-europa-kreuzweise-eine-litanei-rezension-lesung/>, date of access 10 Feb. 2023.

³⁴The topic of food was also at the center of another autobiographical publication about life on the road – a book by Alex Kapranos, the frontman of the Scottish band Franz Ferdinand, originally published in the form of weekly columns in *The Guardian*. However, Kapranos, unlike Bargeld, emphasizes the unique nature of each place, meal, circumstances, and people with whom he shared the meal. He is also clearly aware of a certain literary tradition/context (many dishes function as a kind of Proustian madeleines, the taste of which inspires one to reminisce and reflect). “Food is an adventure,” the musician writes. See: Alex Kapranos, *Sound Bites. Eating on Tour with Franz Ferdinand* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 9.

Kingdom: Animalia
 Phylum: Chordata
 Class: Actinopterygii
 Order: Gadiformes
 Family: Lotidae
 Genus: Molva
 Species: *M. molva*
 Molva Molva is its name.
 Good meal.³⁵

An excerpt from the menu comes first, and then we read about what Bargeld found out about on Wikipedia (most likely using a smartphone or a laptop). At this point, his notes trigger associations with a collage or *silvae rerum*.³⁶ Bargeld collects and systematizes more or less important information, including detailed train and flight schedules, blood test results, and what the Swedish musician and writer Carl-Johan Vallgren told him about literature at dinner.

The description of that evening becomes even more condensed: the list of ingredients smoothly turns into a playlist, without any comments, and then we come across a short note about a trip to a different Swedish city:

Lingon-havre-mjolk-lingonsorbet
 Lingonberries-oats-milk-lingonberry sorbet
 Die Wellen
 Nagorny Karabach
 Dead Friends
 Let's Do it a Dada
 Weil Weil Weil
 Unvollständigkeit
 Tagelang Weiß
 Rampe / Von Wegen
 Die Befindlichkeit des Landes
 Sabrina
 Susej
 Ich Warte
 Gothenburg -> Stockholm. Roadworks on the highway. Huge machines, each operated by a bored worker, motionless in the sun, very focused.³⁷

In the end, we find a summary written from the perspective of the finished tour. In a sense, this is another instance of draining one's memory, which does not retain much: names of cit-

³⁵Blixa Bargeld, *Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2009), 56.

³⁶On the influence of contemporary "scattered" multimedia forms of reading and writing (from paper books to smartphones) on the development of *silvae rerum* cf. Jarosław Płuciennik, "Sylwiczność nasza powszechna i metakognicja" [Our everyday use of *silvae rerum* and metacognition], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2012).

³⁷Bargeld, *Europa kreuzweise*, 57.

ies, sometimes some words or events.

Europe – summary: what’s missing?

Zurich, Venice...

Reykjavík: “What problems are you dealing with here?” “Drug addiction and suicides in winter”

Madrid, Manchester, Rennes in Brittany ...

Rotterdam: Amid a hail of bullets, opening for U2...

Florence, Bratislava, Århus, Antwerp ...

Klagenfurt: Almost arrested for imitating taxi driver radio ...

Malaga, Krems, Nantes, Reggio Emilia.

Bolzano: Our instruments had to be carried upstairs ...

Potsdam, Ljubljana, Ghent, Leeds ...

Turin: The tour bus on a raceway on the roof of a former futuristic Fiat factory ...

Thessaloniki, Belgrade, Glasgow, Strasbourg ...

Dublin: No, I didn’t break the glass door, please watch the security camera footage again... I didn’t break it.

Istanbul, Salzburg, Venice, Krakow ...

Rome: I dreamed about my death, purgatory and what happened next ...³⁸

Bargeld’s book seems to confirm Marc Augé’s observations about “supermodernity.” Touring, as described by the German musician, “empties the landscape, and the gaze of which it is the object, of all content and all meaning (...) and becomes the object of a secondary, unattributable gaze,” while his notes show how “the individual consciousness” is subjected to “entirely new experiences and ordeals of solitude, directly linked with the appearance and proliferation of non-places.”³⁹

The everyday in sounds

Blixa Bargeld has been keeping his notes on a computer from the very beginning, clearly distancing himself from the mythologized status of a paper diary. He emphasizes that he uses the search engine in text files to easily find, for example, all instances in which the word “alcohol” has appeared in his notes in the past ten years.⁴⁰ He has been inspired by Arno Schmidt, a German writer and translator of English and American literature, who was very experimental in his prose; for example, he constructed maze-like plots or based them on game theory. Schmidt used index cards; today, technology makes it much easier to navigate one’s private archive.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their analysis of life writing archives emphasize their dynamic and metamorphic character: “A written life entering the world as a book, manuscript, blog, or the like, is filtered through other kinds of archives and may be changed by subsequent

³⁸Bargeld, *Europa kreuzweise*, 122–123.

³⁹Augé, 93.

⁴⁰See: *Einstürzende Neubauten, Perpetuum Mobile, tourbook*, 19–20.

editions or translations into different media and languages. That is, a published ‘life’ enters into circulation as new reading publics access different versions of it over time; and it acquires an ‘afterlife’ that shifts its relationship to archival material and generates other versions of the subject.”⁴¹

Bargeld has, in a way, recycled his *life writing* archive. Many of his songs are based on the notes he writes every day. He often reaches for them in the final stages of working on a new album, when all the songs have been written but some still lack lyrics, and the lyrics have to be written fast. The rhythmic structure of the song imposes certain limitations: for example, twelve lines are required, each of which should consist of fifteen syllables. The notes provide inspiration and sometimes ready-made phrases.

One of the songs created in this way is the almost fourteen-minute-long title track from the album *Perpetuum Mobile*.⁴² It talks about the world and man in motion but Bargeld, born and raised in West Berlin⁴³ – such a mythologized space strongly saturated with history – is interested primarily in non-places, transitive spaces in which stability or symbolic significance fade.

Perpetuum Mobile has the structure of, as Bargeld puts it, the so-called moving poem – it describes each section of the journey from point A to point B, focusing not so much on the place but selected aspects of reality: colors and shapes, sounds, but also, for example, the means of transport. Musically, it consists largely of non-musical sounds, paying homage to Pierre Schaeffer, the father of *music concrète*, who in his 1948 *Cinq études de bruits* [Five studies of noises] used, among other things, the sounds of trains and canal boats. The remembered sounds are further “processed” musically, and ultimately the composition turns into a life writing archive.⁴⁴

In the first half of the composition, Bargeld recites a detailed list of all the means of transport he used to get from his Berlin apartment, through Berlin Tegel Airport and London Heathrow, to his London hotel:

Fahrrad [bicycle]
 Fahrstuhl [elevator]
 Taxi [taxi]
 Gepäckwagen [baggage cart]

⁴¹Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, “The Afterlives of Those Who Write Themselves: Rethinking Autobiographical Archive”, *European Journal of Life Writing*, Vol IX (2020): 11.

⁴²Einstürzende Neubauten, *Perpetuum Mobile*, Potomac, CD, 2004. All quotes from the song are from the CD booklet.

⁴³Berlin, seen through the prism of lieux de mémoire, features in the albums *Berlin Babylon* (Ego, CD, 2001) and *Alles in Allem* (Potomac, CD, 2020), which includes, among others: songs dedicated to Landwehrkanal or Tempelhof.

⁴⁴When asked about his “actual” diary, as opposed to his notes, Bargeld says: “My memories are engraved in the music. I can only hear myself and the others in the time that we have made the music. I can still hear the sound of the recycling bottles we brought back when we recorded *Kollaps* in the studio or how I fell asleep in the bath tub when we recorded *Abwärts*. When I hear our songs, I hear the circumstances in which they were born. I can’t get rid of that. I just can’t listen to the music in the unbiased way everyone else can”. Quote after: *Einstürzende Neubauten, Perpetuum Mobile*, tourbook, 11.

Flugzeug [airplane]
 Gepäckwagen [baggage cart]
 Rolltreppe [escalator]
 Rolltreppe [escalator]
 Zug [train]
 Flugzeug [airplane]
 bus [bus]
 escalator
 moving walkway
 moving walkway
 escalator
 baggage cart
 limousine
 elevator

The means of transport are recited rhythmically against the musical background (interestingly, after “landing,” that is starting with the word “bus,” Bargeld switches from German to English; later in the same composition he describes another, longer, journey from San Francisco to Berlin (with one layover)).

The way in which Bargeld uses strategies of restriction and proceduralism brings to mind not only Dada games but also OuLiPo, for example Georges Perec’s notes/catalogues.⁴⁵ In a different part the song, the musician recites a long list of answers to questions routinely asked at the airport. He has heard them so many times that he replies almost automatically (he does not even have to hear the question first):

- Yes, this case was sometimes left unsupervised.
- Yes, others had access to it.
- Yes, I was asked to carry presents.
- Yes, there are electronic appliances in the case.
- Yes, many batteries.
- No, not everything belongs to me.

In non-places, a non-language is spoken; any attempt to go beyond its narrow framework is considered sign of emancipation. In the lyrics to *Perpetuum Mobile*, dull phrases (such as the ones quoted above) are juxtaposed with lyrical parts that constitute an attempt to enter the world of thoughts and experiences of the moving subject.

Bargeld’s intermedial notes probably should be described in terms of mapping experiential space. Not least because the artist constantly moves “crosswise” through Berlin, Europe, and the world. As Mikołaj Madurowicz writes, the cartographer must first consider what kind of space he wants to map – and differentiating oppositions (“my – somebody else’s,” “close

⁴⁵Cf. Georges Perec, *I Remember*, trans. Philip Terry & David Bellos (Boston: David R. Godine, 2014); Cf. also Jan Baetens, “OuLiPo and proceduralism”, in: *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, Brian McHale (London – New York: Routledge, 2012), 115.

– distant,” “known – unknown,” “everyday – unusual,” “public – private”⁴⁶) play a key role in experiential space. In strictly cartographic terms, a map reflects the real using the principle of equivalence: each point on the map corresponds to an actual place;⁴⁷ alas, not every autobiographical element corresponds to a real object, phenomenon, or event in time and space. However, this may not be necessary. As Madurowicz writes, the map is essentially an “intersection of several axes: between memory and imagination, between thought and experience, between mapping the world and its projection, between objectivity and intentionality.”⁴⁸ This could be the definition of *life writing*.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁴⁶Mikołaj Madurowicz, “Mapa jako optyka” [Map as optics], *Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne* 60 (2021): 14–15.

⁴⁷Wprowadzenie do kartografii i topografii [Introduction to cartography and topography], ed. Jacek Paślowski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Nowa Era, 2006), 16.

⁴⁸Madurowicz, 13.

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KEYWORDS

Blixa Bargeld

GENIALNI DYTLETANCI

ABSTRACT:

The article analyzes life writing strategies of the German composer, musician and performer Blixa Bargeld, who has been documenting his life on tour since the 1990s. The experience of moving between successive identical, impersonal, as Marc Augé puts it, non-places, such as hotels and airports, turns out to be the opposite of traveling. As a result, Bargeld's travelogue takes unusual forms: from a series of photographs showing hotel bathrooms (*serialbathroom-dummyrun*), through experimental prose (*Europa kreuzweise. Eine Litanei*), to concrete music (the album *Perpetuum Mobile*).

life writing

moving-poems

non-places

TRAVELOGUE

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