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The Experimental Music of Einstürzende Neubauten and Youth Culture in 1980s West Berlin

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the music of West Berlin experimental music group Einstürzende Neubauten. The unique social, political, and economic conditions of West Berlin during the 1980s created a distinct urban environment that is reflected in the band's music. The city has been preserved by Einstürzende Neubauten in the form of sound recordings, and conserved in the unique instruments originally found by the band on the streets of West Berlin. The band's music is evidence of their refusal to conform to pre-existing structures and expectations of society. The band challenged the architecture of the urban landscape and of the mind by manifesting Walter Benjamin's *Destructive Character* in their art, and restructured the framework of the pop song. They also confronted the contemporary rock music performance with a revolutionary stage performance that relied on physical brutality, emotion and freedom of expression inspired by playwright Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*. To this day, the work of Einstürzende Neubauten continues to exist as both a representation of the society and youth of 1980s West Berlin, and as a progressive art that challenges and restructures the framework of music and performance.

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Epigraph

“You have to imagine Berlin during the eighties as a grey place. We had the wall around us and were isolated. The city doesn’t work like LA. Berlin is built on blood. During the eighties Berlin still looked very bombed out. It was full of holes and brittle.”

– Beate Bartel, bass player at the first ever Einstürzende Neubauten concert.

INTRODUCTION

On May 21st, 1980, the roof of the West Berlin Kongresshalle building collapsed. The collapse killed one person and injured many more. A little over a month earlier on April 1st, experimental musical group *Einstürzende Neubauten* played their first concert ever in a small West Berlin club called the Moon Club. *Einstürzende Neubauten* is German for “collapsing new buildings”. More specifically *Neubauten* refers to all buildings built following World War II. The name *Einstürzende Neubauten* had suddenly acquired a much more symbolic meaning after the roof collapse. West Berlin was in such a state that even post-War buildings were now falling apart. In this paper, I will examine how the music of *Einstürzende Neubauten* reflected the sociopolitical atmosphere of West Berlin in the 1980s. I intend to show that the unique situation in West Berlin created a rare environment, which shaped a one-off generation of youth. Some of this youth ended up forming *Einstürzende Neubauten*. As such, *Einstürzende Neubauten* is not only a product, but also an embodiment of part of the young generation of West Berlin society.

West Berlin had the unique conditions for an original band like *Einstürzende Neubauten* to form. At the time, West Berlin was a very singular place, culturally and politically. Scharenberg, and Bader (2010) claim that cultural innovation is a characteristic of a city in crisis. They believe that “it is no accident that alternative visions and creativity reached a high-point during the 1980s in West Berlin...” (77), due to the freedom for subcultures and movements to organize themselves. Although nothing was preventing the

various subcultures from freely forming, they all shared one common feeling that brought all of them together: the general atmosphere felt by the youth in the early 1980s was that of fear and impending doom. Einstürzende Neubauten founding member and bassist Alexander Hacke remembers it as such: “There were riots, squatter demonstrations, evictions every week. People were afraid of nuclear war [...] it felt like the end of the world was near. [As a result] we recklessly depleted our bodies. I seriously didn’t believe I would live to see 18” (Dax, and Defcon, 15). Additionally, the city was “essentially completely isolated from West Germany” (17) which provided the ideal circumstances for a band like Neubauten to form.

Shryane has argued that Einstürzende Neubauten is one of the few examples of rock musicians that have stayed open to development and experimentation (5). She argues that they are a rare example of “complete Artaudian practice in contemporary performance” expressed by the physicality present on stage and destructive, anarchic humour found in their music, and that they help to present the case for the re-evaluation of non-English contemporary music. However, I would also argue with Scharenberg and Bader that the environment played an enormous role in the founding of Neubauten. The youth culture that sprung up in the city around the 1980s was one that revolted against the ideals of the 68ers. The growth of this culture was facilitated by the lack of need for employment and availability of squatter houses for housing. In addition to the unique environment, Neubauten’s music in itself is also very much one of a kind, and I believe that the Berlin wall inadvertently influenced the generation that grew up surrounded by it, to act in a

certain way that was different from that of other youth subcultures in the western world. Some of this youth turned to music, like Neubauten founder and leader Blixa Bargeld.

Although the beginnings of using found sounds and objects in a musical fashion date back to *musique concrète* in France in the 1940s, Einstürzende Neubauten is the first band to have effectively used found objects as musical instruments in a popular music context. Although little has been said about Neubauten in an academic context, it is important to understand the motivations behind using found objects and noise in a musical context, and specifically within the context of Neubauten's music. Duguid (2003) looks at how industrial music expressed ideas of rebellion beyond that in rock music. He explores the avant-garde performance art tradition and how it intends to create shock and confusion, much like Neubauten, both aurally and physically. He argues that this stems from "contempt for social common ground of the day", and if we look back historically, from the anti-art tradition of Dada. Neubauten can also be linked to the Dada movement; after all Blixa Bargeld was inspired to adopt the Bargeld name after German Dada painter and poet Johannes Baargeld. Hegarty (2007) argues that the idea of what noise is or what it should be changes throughout time, but that it is always accompanied by disruption or lack of order. He concludes that noise is "a negativity [or] a resistance" also defined by that which society doesn't accept. Kahn (2001) looks at the history of sound as used in art. Notably he also looks at the relationship between noise and music, a relationship with a fluid boundary, and most importantly he looks at Artaudian elements in music. Since these elements are not commonly utilized in contemporary rock or pop music they express a rebellious stance to contemporary rock and pop music structures.

The philosophy behind Neubauten's performance can be traced in part to French playwright and theatre director Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* (1938), specifically Artaud's text on the *Theatre of Cruelty*. The band's performances contained many elements of this theatre, such as noise, brute physicality, and submitting to the performance with their body. The philosophy behind their performance and music can also be attributed to the influence of German philosopher Walter Benjamin's 1931 text "The Destructive Character" (2002). Benjamin's "Destructive Character" is one that has a need for open space, which he gets from destroying and making room. He is young, has few needs, does not care to be understood, even provoking being misunderstood. Many of the characteristics of the destructive character reflect both Neubauten's musical style, and their life philosophy. Blixa Bargeld has quoted the text numerous times in various interviews, and he often used the Destructive Character to explain the ideas behind Neubauten.

While further exploring all of the previous points, I also intend to look at Einstürzende Neubauten and the connection to the architectural landscape of Berlin, an angle that has yet to be explored. Benjamin's destructive character can serve to bring together the role of architecture in my thesis, and the music of Einstürzende Neubauten. Shelley Hornstein has examined the connection between architecture and memory (2011) and claims that "architecture exists as a physical entity and [...] registers as a place that we end up remembering" and she sees architecture as a "mapping of physical, mental, and emotional space". In other words, we have a relationship with architecture; we rely on

buildings for shelter and space, and we think of them as permanent. We only realize that this is untrue when buildings collapse or are otherwise destroyed. Despite physical buildings not existing forever, they can continue to exist in our imaginations.

In this paper I will discuss how Berlin's physical space and the history behind that space influenced Neubauten's generation. I will also discuss how that space continues to be preserved in the music of Neubauten despite West Berlin no longer existing. I then examine how the Benjaminian concept of destruction became such a key point for the band, and how that concept was reflected in the band's music and stage performance. In addition, I will discuss the influence of French playwright Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, and analyze how Einstürzende Neubauten challenged the contemporary rock concert, and the concert's audience, with a theatrical performance that relied on a physical and emotional performance.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW

The music and culture of West Berlin during the 1980s has not been well documented in academic scholarship. Much of the existing documentation is in the form of sound or video, and the rest is compromised of a handful of books and magazine articles. Nonetheless there is a vast amount of resources that deal with the individual pieces that made up the West Berlin puzzle. West Berlin was a complex place, a city divided by a wall, and surrounded by the German Democratic Republic on all sides. This made for a very unique social situation. For example, West Berlin was the home of dozens of escape organizations, most of which were set up by the large student population living in West Berlin. By the late 1960s, the city had ironically acquired the qualities of a “free city”. Berlin had started attracting a particular crowd that was looking for a place that accepted alternative lifestyles, cheap rent, abundant housing, and a booming nightlife. In addition to that, it gave many West German males the opportunity to avoid being conscripted into the Bundeswehr due to a law set under the Allied occupation (Taylor, 357).

Nonetheless the city was one caught in a political crisis. This crisis ended up contributing towards the growth of culture in the city. Scharenberg and Bader claim that cultural innovation is a phenomenon of cities in a state of crisis (77). The dynamics of squatter movements are directly connected to strategies of urban renewal. Namely it has been found that movement crises occur when urban establishments are threatened (Holm, A., and Kuhn, 646). Free space is not given but rather groups such as squatters and punks

must take it. This naturally caused some friction between squatter groups and developers who may want that space. Katz and Mayer found that squatting was the last step taken by squatters to stop the deterioration of buildings and forced vacancies by private landlords and developers. This led to the appearance of so called 'rehab-squatting' (*instandbesetzen*). Squatters now not only occupied vacant buildings, but also attempted to restore them and make them liveable (33). With regards to West Berlin, it was not an accident that creativity reached a high point during the 1980s. Scharenberg and Bader accredit this to subcultural movements (such as 'rehab-squatting'), which organized themselves, and fought for the free space available throughout the city. This environment provided West Berlin youth with the freedom to organize into groups and establish subcultures freely (Scharenberg, and Bader 2010, 87). As a result, West Berlin was home to many backroom record stores, independent often bedroom-based music labels that freely distributed tape copies of local music, and illegal bars that appeared as quickly as they were shut down (Schyma 2002, 79). Counterculture activity exploded as squatter, gay, student and punk subcultures interacted with each other and formed a new rebellious and active youth culture (Teipel, 7-8). This culture in turn attracted musicians and artists from outside of Germany as well, including David Bowie from England, Iggy Pop from the United States and post-punk group The Birthday Party from Australia. These musicians contributed their own element to the new culture while being influenced by it at the same time (Connell, J., and Gibson, 105).

Out of the many bands that came from this culture was Einstürzende Neubauten. The band is known for being innovative and experimental; they are a band whose music not only reflects changes in art and politics, but also defies the boundaries of previously

established media and genre. Most of this unique quality is attributed to the implementation of found objects as instruments, their use of German as the language of choice, their unique theatrical live performance, and the dark apocalyptic subject matter of particularly early texts (Shryane, 9).

However, West Berlin was also a place that did not give the youth much hope for the future. Part of this came from a punk “No Future!” approach (Scharenberg, and Bader, 82) and part of it came from the tensions of the Cold War. People were afraid of nuclear war and to many, it felt like the end of the world was near. Riots and demonstrations were a regular occurrence. As a result much of the youth recklessly depleted their bodies. Einstürzende Neubauten founding member and bassist Alexander Hacke did not think he would ever live to see his 18th birthday (Dax, and Defcon, 15). Much of this attitude came across in the noisy unconventional music of Einstürzende Neubauten, with songs such as *Krieg in den Städten (War in the cities)*, *Kollaps (Collapse)*, *Für den Untergang (For the Downfall)* and *Draußen ist Feindlich (Outside is Hostile)*. As Neubauten leader Blixa Bargeld said himself, when you are stuck in a small space under the Autobahn, it is hard to create something that has to do with the peace movement (Wagner, 138).

Bargeld has never considered their music to be simply noise. In fact his original intent was to see to what extent the environment influenced the music, and to what extent that environment could be used as an instrument, instead of conventional instruments. All of the band’s unconventional instruments were taken from their surroundings (Teipel, 236). Neubauten’s first single illustrated this; the song was recorded under an Autobahn

overpass in a hollow steel room onto a portable tape recorder. Bargeld stomped his foot on the bare metal floor to provide a percussive beat, yelling over the noise, while Unruh contributed to the beat by playing with bricks and assorted found metal pieces (Neubauten Liebeslieder DVD 2003).

This noisy music by Neubauten brings us to relationship between noise and music, and what role noise plays in a musical context. To begin, noise has a complex relationship with music, because many find it to be unpleasant, and is therefore considered an amusical element. In the book *Noise/Music*, Paul Hegarty believes that the idea of what noise is, or what it should be, changes throughout time. Despite noise being redefined regularly, one element that stays constant is that it is always accompanied by disruption or lack of order; noise is something that forces a reaction out of the listener (3) and something that society doesn't accept (5). When noise is used in a musical framework, it "tests [the] notions of hearing and listening, and tries to destabilize [the listener's] expectations of content and artistic form." (5) His general theoretical conclusion is that noise is a form of resistance or negativity, in the sense that it provokes a reaction by confronting the expectations of a listener. In a broader sense, one could imply that noise in a musical context cannot actually exist, since noise challenges the idea that music is something we enjoy listening to.

Despite this, noise has been effectively used in the music of Einstürzende Neubauten as a tool with which Neubauten challenged music. By using noise, Neubauten challenged the concept of music and sounds that are considered musical. They also challenged the idea of what a musical instrument is by using unconventional items as instruments. Blixa

Bargeld approached the various scrap metal objects they used as the objects they represented; a steel beam was chosen not for its sound, but for the reason that it was a steel beam, and should inherently represent a steel beam (Wagner, 138). Thus it was not chosen for its tonal quality, but only for its physical representation. These found materials were being used outside of their intended purposes and “turned on themselves”. They were being used to destroy the original intended purpose with a newfound use (Hegarty, 113). Since these materials had always possessed inherent tonal, percussive or otherwise musical qualities (114), Neubauten’s use of them added an additional meaning to their original definition. Challenging the objects’ original intent allowed for them to be used in a musical context.

Douglas Khan sees the relationship between noise and music, as one with a fluid boundary. Noise is an abstraction of sound, and while noise itself is not extramusical, it has been accepted as something that cannot be used in music (69). That being said, sounds that are otherwise not considered musical can be musicalized, such as Neubauten’s steel beam. This pattern repeats throughout history as the empirical definition of noise is constantly being changed as music evolves. Duguid believes that industrial music expresses ideas of subversion and rebellion beyond that which is seen in rock music (2). The avant-garde performance art tradition intends to shock and confuse the audience. The reasoning behind this is that it stems back from contempt for social common ground. This all originated from the anti-art tradition of the Dada movement. He suggests that noise groups deal with “anti-humanist subject matter” such as obsession, trauma and possession (19).

To further understand the significance of West Berlin as an urban environment and the subsequent effect of that environment on the music of *Einstürzende Neubauten*, Ladd (1998) examines the urban history of Berlin. He finds that buildings are important, as they give us shelter, but human beings are the ones that attach meaning to these buildings in the actions they perform. This is what makes buildings important to us. Additionally, Ladd believes that buildings serve as a visual reminder of the past. Western societies are attached to their past, and Berlin is unique in this, as it is a city of “bold gestures and startling incongruities [...] of destruction”. Hornstein believes that architecture can exist beyond its physical site, even if it has been destroyed (82) in the form of an image or idea in the imagination. Hornstein looks at architecture as a mapping of physical, mental and emotional space.

This in turn can be tied back to philosopher Walter Benjamin, whose concepts about destruction played a great role in the philosophy of *Einstürzende Neubauten*. Benjamin understood the decay of a dwelling as a sign of crisis of the intellectual class to which artists also belong (Elliot, 7). Benjamin’s “Destructive Character” (1931) is one that has a need for open space, which he gets from destroying and making room. Benjamin saw the destructive character as young and cheerful (541), something that resonated with Bargeld who once said “I like the collapse. I’m living with the positive feeling; I’m dancing for the decline. I’m not against it. I’d like it as soon as possible.” (Maeck, 33) Many of the characteristics of the destructive character are echoed in *Neubauten*’s musical style and also relates to the theory behind the musicalization of noise over time. *Einstürzende Neubauten* were destructive to the traditional norms of music, but they made room for

these new sounds and noises in the space of music. Over time, their noisy and unusual use of found objects was accepted as musical within the context of their music.

Keeping all of these concepts in mind, Einstürzende Neubauten took advantage of their unique environment and not only became a product of it, but used the environment itself as a instrument in their music. The band went out into the streets of West Berlin and found scrap metal, boxes, springs, and other types of junk and transformed these otherwise uninteresting objects into musical instruments by the manner in which they used them. They also used the urban landscape as their recording studio and their stage, such as the old steel water tower near the Gleisdreieck in Schöneberg, inside which they recorded the track “Wasserturm” in 1984. Lack of interest and authority from the West Berlin government allowed for the band to simply climb into the abandoned tower and record their song. Even the ease with which the band achieved this displays the critical state in which the city was at the time. Although this is not necessarily visible at first glance, if one looks closer, it becomes clear that Einstürzende Neubauten possess all the qualities that present them as a product of a city in crisis, with a disenchanting, often scared youth. Nonetheless there also appears to be a complex theoretical framework hidden behind the avant-garde façade, which involves yet again redefining the notion of noise, using the urban environment as an instrument, much of which can be connected by the theories of Walter Benjamin, and the role of destruction and urban space.

CHAPTER ONE: NEUBAUTEN'S BERLIN

Einstürzende Neubauten was officially formed in April of 1980 in West Berlin by vocalist and leader Blixa Bargeld. By 1981, the core group lineup was established, comprising of Bargeld, percussionist NU Unruh, and percussionist FM Einheit. The band's lineup was soon firmly established after guitarist (and later bassist) Alexander Hacke, and bassist Mark Chung joined the band in 1982. In this chapter, I will analyze a selection of songs off of Einstürzende Neubauten's 1981 debut album *Kollaps (Collapse)* within the context of West Berlin's social and cultural atmosphere.

The unique situation in West Berlin created a rare environment, which shaped a one-off generation of youth, and some of this youth ended up forming Einstürzende Neubauten. As such, Einstürzende Neubauten is not only a product, but also an embodiment of West Berlin society, and the various social and political factors that made West Berlin unique. While the band's music is abrasive, loud, and unconventional to most listeners, it demonstrates the act of Neubauten taking objects from the streets of Berlin. The band picked up discarded objects such as scrap metal and power tools they encountered on the streets of West Berlin, and used them as instruments. By using these objects for purposes other than those for which they had been made, they band challenged the objects' original intent (Hegarty, 114).

Neubauten members were active participants in West Berlin's musical and social environment, and *Kollaps* serves as a manifestation of the chaos and disorder that they experienced in Berlin at the time, in both the musical style and the lyrical content. Themes

of chaos, destruction, and collapse are present in vocalist Blixa Bargeld's lyrics, and revolve around a theme of a "conquest for an urban, non-human space" (Dax, and Defcon, 128). Although Blixa Bargeld has described the creation of the album as an attempt to make an "unlistenable record" (Dax, and Defcon, 70), he never considered the band's music to be simply noise. In fact his original intent was to see to what extent the environment influenced the music, and to what extent that environment could be used as an instrument (Teipel, 236). Essentially the music serves as an expression and reaction to the environment. Bargeld attributes this to the lifestyle led by the band during the 80s (Dax, and Defcon, 128). "Squat houses, sleeping on the floor, broken mailboxes, abandoned urban landscapes, junkyards and freeway bridges" made up the architectural world that the band came from and was familiar with (129), and all of these elements come together, musically, lyrically, and physically in the aural representation of found objects, on *Kollaps*.

The album begins with the buzz of a detuned synthesizer, radio static and the nervous voice of vocalist Blixa Bargeld commanding the listener to "stell' dich tot!" or "play dead!" in the opening track *Tanz Debil (Dance stupidly)*. After about 15 seconds, a rhythm appears, which continues throughout the song until the end. The rhythm is not played on a conventional percussive instrument such as a drum, but rather on some sort of scrap metal which emits a very abrasive, noisy tone. Other than this rhythm and Bargeld's voice, there is no melody or tonal instrument present during the song. The text suggests that he is directly addressing lust for narcotics, as well as for "flesh", an unnamed other person which he refers to as "you", and simply for "more". One thing that helps Bargeld control his lust is

him submitting to the spastic dancing implied by the song's title. Relief is only brought when Bargeld, tired from the dancing lays on his back and plays dead ("lieg' auf 'm Rücken und stell' mich tot"), just like he has been commanding his craving, at least for the time being. Interestingly enough, although the song does not set the apocalyptic tone of the album, which later becomes apparent, it does give the listener a glimpse of the culture that Bargeld and other Neubauten members were part of. Neubauten's generation was one raised with the Berlin Wall surrounding the city on all sides. It was a culture free of any need for job stability or routine, as it was filled with students, draft dodgers, and artists (Dax, and Defcon, 16). Neubauten spent many of their days and nights carelessly partying without any worry for the future. Despite the generation's lack of interest in the future, riots, demonstrations and evictions of squat houses were a regular occurrence in the city of West Berlin (15) due to the interests of city government and investors. Many of these demonstrations were provoked by the forced eviction of squat houses for the purpose of redevelopment. This plan was put into action by the city's Senate due to a housing crisis, which was in fact being created by housing associations and owners, who were allowing buildings to stay vacant and decay in hopes of being allowed to tear them down and rebuild on the land using government funding and subsequently profit on rent of newly built apartments (Holm, and Kuhn, 645-46). All of these factors contributed to the chaotic atmosphere of the city. Current bassist and longtime member Alexander Hacke remembers feeling like the end of the world was near the whole time, and he didn't believe he would actually live to eighteen. As such, he spent much of his time exhausting his body in any way he could (Dax, and Defcon, 15).

1.1 Chaos and Squatting in the Streets of Berlin

The following song *Steh' auf Berlin (Rise up Berlin)* calls to the youth to rise up and revolt and expresses the chaos of Berlin's many riots and demonstrations. The song begins with the sound of jackhammers, followed by a rhythmic drumming on a hollow metal container. Musically the song is sparse and does not evolve much past the hollow drumming, with the occasional burst of unidentifiable noise. This forces the listener to instead focus on the text. The first line of the song is *Krieg in den Städten (War in the Cities)*, which sets up the space within which the song's events play out. Bargeld speaks of burnt earth, crashes, explosions, and he expresses the appeal of fire, smoke, noise, stones, decay, sickness, decline, the end (death or otherwise), and hell. Bargeld's text describes a chaotic, destructive scene, and although the fear of the end of the world was very real to the musicians, Neubauten also found the chaotic mood to be a source of inspiration for them. Percussionist FM Einheit had initially been inspired by the scenes and sounds of riot demonstrations on the streets of West Berlin. His intention was to capture not only the sounds of protesters drumming on overturned waste bins and steel police barricades, but the chaotic atmosphere and the lingering tension in the air (Dax, and Defcon, 180).

All of this chaos and rioting was rooted in the desire of Neubauten's generation to distance itself from the 68er movement (16), a student protest movement that appeared in Germany and throughout Europe. Neubauten's generation considered the 68ers to be their "class enemy" (16). The 68er movement had similarly used demonstrations and riots to make their opinions known to the authorities, but they resorted to them for different reasons entirely. Political scientist Wolfgang Kraushaar argues that despite there existing

many myths surrounding the motives of the 68er movement in Germany, one thing he can say for certain is that the 68er movement was a criticism of essentially everything that society offered. This included religious or philosophical beliefs, scientific certainties, or civic duties or virtues (Kraushaar, 15). In Germany students were protesting the government's lack of confrontation with the nation's Nazi past, capitalism as a means of exploitation economically, and the imperialist treatment of second and third world countries by western societies (16). Neubauten were not fighting for the same causes as the 68ers, and often were not fighting for anything at all. After all they were essentially waiting for the world to end. When they were fighting for something, instead of protesting national or international political issues, they protested local matters such as the eviction of squatter houses. Although the band was not explicitly supporting or protesting any particular political movement, they found themselves to be associated with the squatter scene (Dax, and Defcon, 16).

Squatter houses are relevant to Neubauten since the band was associated with the squatter movement quite early on. Much of this association was due to the band's architecture-related name (Dax, and Defcon, 36) and due to the involvement of band members in the squatter scene; all members of the band had lived in squats at some point during their youth. Neubauten percussionist NU Unruh lived in a Berlin-Neukölln squat with fellow band member and bassist Alexander Hacke in the early 1980s (34) and in 1981 Neubauten performed at a local festival and passed on part of their earnings to squatters (36). Squatter houses can also be interpreted as a symbol of the West Berlin economy. There was little private investment into West Berlin's economy, because it was not seen as

a good place to invest, primarily due to cold war tensions (34). The economy of the city was artificially stimulated by government funding to make it appear appealing, though it still had hardly any industry at all. The city was populated mostly by unemployed artists, retirees, dropouts, and West Germans who had wanted to avoid conscription, due to a law set under the Allied occupation (Taylor, 357) that exempted residents of West Berlin from having to serve in the Bundeswehr. These artists used the availability of vacant run-down buildings as an opportunity to create a space they could live in (Dax, and Defcon, 34), which they would then renovate, a phenomenon called *Instandbesetzung* (repair squatting). Squatters now not only occupied vacant buildings, but also attempted to restore them and make them livable (33). *Instandbesetzung* was the direct consequence of the conflict between squatters and strategies of urban renewal. German urban sociologist Andrej Holm has found in his research that movement crises occur when urban establishments are threatened (Holm, A., and Kuhn, 646), such as when a squatter house is threatened by city authorities. Naturally there was friction between squatter groups and developers since squatters took over an unused space, rather than being given that space, and made it a home for themselves. Katz and Mayer found that squatting was the last step taken by squatters to stop the deterioration of buildings and forced vacancies by private landlords and developers (33).

Negativ Nein (Negative No) is the third track on the album and consists of mainly a watery bubbling sound and a plucking sound, while Bargeld screams the words “Negativ Nein” over and over, occasionally telling us to “say no”. While lyrically simple, the song reflects the attitude of many young people at the time; they simply said “no” to the norms

and expectations of the previous generation. The band's generation was rebelling against the generation of their parents by doing things such as squatting, participating in riots and demonstrations, and showing no interest in the future, instead living in the present while waiting for the end of the world. Musically the song also casts aside previously established pop music structures, also saying "no" to conventional pop music forms; the song contains no discernable verses or choruses, instead being compromised of a repeated plucking and bubbling.

Negativ Nein is followed by an instrumental interlude titled *U-Haft-Muzak*. "Muzak" is a term used to describe so-called "elevator music", while, more importantly, "U-Haft" means "detention awaiting trial", a song that touches on the significance of squatting in West Berlin, and Neubauten's own experiences with squatting. Blixa Bargeld explains *U-Haft*, and another unreleased song *Warten auf die Räumung (Waiting for the Eviction)* within the social context of the time in an interview with Dax and Defcon; the song was inspired by Bargeld's own experience in a squat house. At the time, there had been an increase in police evictions of squatter houses. Bargeld intended these songs to express the experience of living in a squat and to express the fear of whether the squatters would be able to spend another night in the squat house, or if they would be forcibly evicted during the night (Dax, and Defcon, 37), and be spending the night in a cell. Squat houses at the time were a common target of police evictions due to a rise in interest of property landlords and developers who wanted to get rid of the squatters. This tension between squatters and city developers reached a peak when squatting was essentially criminalized by the state and squatters were being charged with terrorism charges (Katz, and Meyer, 34) and facing

lengthy jail terms for essentially occupying vacant space and turning it into a living space. *U-Haft* conveys the tension between the squatters and the city government. Again musically quite sparse, it contains little more than a low-pitched sound sourced from the so called “bass spring”. It is important to consider the significance of the bass spring within the greater social and political context as well, as it leads us to an interesting event in West Berlin’s history. The bass spring itself was taken from a Plexiglas divider which was installed in Berlin taxis during a period of time when taxi drivers were regularly being mugged. The dividers eventually led to a drop in taxi driver muggings, and the city scrapped them (92). Founding Neubauten member NU Unruh eventually came across one of these dividers somewhere in the city, and decided to experiment with the spring mechanism.

The following song *Draußen ist Feindlich (Outside it is hostile)* looks at the world outside West Berlin as a hostile place, further reflecting the fear of the Cold War and tensions between the Eastern Bloc and the western world, and impending doom felt by Neubauten. West Berlin was the world to Neubauten and the entire generation that grew up behind the wall. Everything outside of it was something that threatened that world. All of these elements of youth rebellion and fear are expressed in these songs. Shryane interprets the “outside” as that of East Berlin and the Eastern Bloc. In the lyrics, Bargeld asks someone; “Schließ dich ein mit mir, hier sind wir sicher” or “shut yourself in with me, here we are safe”, suggesting that there is only little room where one may feel safe. She interprets this as “the wider situation of paranoiac West Berlin surrounded by hostile listeners” (Shryane, 162).

1.2 Noise and the Pop Song

The song *Schmerzen Hören* (*Listen with Pain*) begins with a loud metallic banging that continues for the entire duration of the song. Occasionally the rhythm is accompanied by a screeching guitar, and Bargeld yelling “hör’ mit Schmerzen!” or a variant of it. The song is a clear demonstration of Neubauten’s use of objects with desire to annoy. “I just want to annoy” was a phrase that was often uttered by West Berlin youth. “Noise is the melody of today” was also one heard quite often (Dax, and Defcon, 18), and it is a phrase that is particularly apt when it comes to Neubauten’s music. Both Alexander Hacke and NU Unruh saw the act of annoying listeners as an achievement, which in the context of popular music is the opposite of what a performer wants to do to their audience (19). According to bassist Alexander Hacke “having trouble with neighbors due to noise seen as a success.” He explains that when one wants to make noise and have the neighbors tolerate it, one has to make as much “brutal noise” as possible at the very beginning, literally making neighbors “listen with pain”, as the song title states. Hacke found that once neighbors begin to complain and ask you to turn it down, you turn the volume down slightly, but just enough that the neighbors think that you have turned it down substantially (19-20).

Bargeld approached the various scrap metal objects that the band utilized in their music as the objects they represented, and not as objects with particular musical qualities. By doing this and creating noise, the band challenged the idea of what a musical instrument is. They strayed from conventional musical instruments, and when they did in fact use them (such as Bargeld often using a guitar), they played them in unconventional fashion: Bargeld often simply pounded on his untuned guitar in a percussive fashion, yielding a

cacophony of dissonance. When the band chose objects to utilize in their music, they chose them for what they represented. A steel beam was chosen not for its sound, but for the reason that it was a steel beam, and should inherently represent a steel beam (Wagner, 138). Thus it was not chosen for its tonal quality, an otherwise important quality in contemporary instruments, but rather only for its physical representation. In 1983 during an interview for *Epitaph* magazine, percussionist FM Einheit further explained the philosophy behind this idea; “A hammer is essentially more of a musical instrument than a guitar, because a hammer does something (it can change, and cause something to happen), while a guitar can only amplify vibrations, and produce tones which cannot leave an impression in a wall, let alone hammer in a nail” (28). By doing this, the band not only challenged the concept of a musical instrument in form and sound, but also introduced noise as a useful element in their music. Noise was in fact being used in a similar manner that a conventional musical instrument would normally be used in mainstream music. By doing so the band was questioning the structure of the pop song, and the definition of the musical instrument while also confronting the expectations of the listener with noise.

Schmerzen Hören is followed by *Jet'm*, which is a playful stab at mainstream pop music, specifically targeting Serge Gainsbourg's “*Je t'aime...moi non plus*” (“*I love you...me neither*”). In contrast to the original song, Neubauten's version is noisy and unpleasant, with the song's melody crudely played on an organ. Serge Gainsbourg was a hugely popular French musician and the writer of “*Je t'aime... moi non plus*”. The song was an enormous hit in 1969 despite being controversial due to its sexual lyrical content and sounds (provided

by Gainsbourg and his partner Jane Birkin). It is interesting that Neubauten chose to cover such a popular song given their tendency to shy away from popular appeal.

Pop music often appears to be driven by mass appeal and things such as fashion and contemporary trends, or as was the case with "*Je t'aime*" controversy. German sociologist and musicologist Theodor Adorno understood pop music as music that was mass-produced, commodified and standardized, which required little originality or variety (Adorno, and Horkheimer, 41). Mass production of pop music relies on technology, which distributes the music to a larger audience (Harrison, 7), thus allowing record companies to garner large amounts of profit if successful. This technology is accessible to large record labels and distribution companies that have the financial freedom that allows them to invest in this music. This is something that was not present in West Berlin. By including the cover the band manifested their movement away from contemporary trends and fashion, and away from commodity and mass-production, and towards expressing a unique aspect of their social sphere.

West Berlin's unique economic environment further encouraged this movement away from commodity and mass production. There were minimal market forces at work in West Berlin, and as mentioned before the city's economy was very much artificially driven. As a result, music from this particular scene did not make it very far outside of West Berlin. In Neubauten's case, the band was signed to a London-based recording company called Some Bizarre Records, which released their next album *Zeichnungen des Patienten OT* (*Drawings of Patient OT*) for them in 1983 (Dax, and Defcon, 94). This introduction into the English record label scene pushed Neubauten out into the international scene, as they were

now receiving funding and support from their record label to further their musical endeavours. Neubauten's *Kollaps* album on the other hand was not written with the intent to make a large profit and appeal to the masses; it was written to be unlistenable (70), which is hardly a quality one desires when wanting to attract a large crowd. Interestingly enough, this appears to be the point where pop song *Je t'aime* and Neubauten cross paths; they are both controversial.

While the band was interested in seeing how much the environment influenced the music, and how that environment could be utilized in their music (Teipel, 236) the economic situation was an additional factor that facilitated the move towards the band going out into the environment and exploring it. None of the members of Neubauten were well off financially, and thus they could not afford expensive musical instruments, such as synthesizers, which were growing in popularity in the early 1980s. For example, percussionist NU Unruh sold his drum set so that he could pay his rent, and the lack of conventional drums forced Neubauten to find a replacement for them (Turner). Essentially, if they were unable to steal or otherwise get instruments for free, they could not have them at all. They ended up turning to the streets and gathering material (Dax, and Defcon, 91). Despite the band having very little money, it is important to remember that there was no need for large amounts of money. Living costs in Berlin were very cheap at the time. Cheap rent, abundant housing, and a booming nightlife were all characteristics of Berlin at the time that attracted artists to the city (Taylor, 357). Band members also took advantage of the availability of squats, which cost nothing (Dax, and Defcon, 36). The relationship between creativity and economic necessity in Neubauten's case is interesting because lack

of financial means was one of the factors caused the band to have to turn to unconventional methods of creating music, thus making their music unique. Creativity and individuality appeared to flourish in an economically austere environment like West Berlin. Neubauten's creativity was encouraged by social, political, and economic factors unique to the city, and the resulting music conversely reflected those factors.

1.3 Pop Music, Profit, and Cultural Meaning

Connell, and Gibson have found that there exists a tension between music being a commodified product, which serves a corporate interest, and existing as an arena of cultural meaning (6). Music today is an industry, aimed at the production of a commodity, and thus functions within an economic framework. (7). That said, music always continues to exist in a cultural and social sphere, even when it is being manufactured and distributed for profit (9). My understanding of the relationship between economics and the cultural and social sphere within this context is that, although music from a particular cultural scene can be taken and marketed and sold, that music will still retain its cultural and social significance. Because of this, the music will always represent the social identity, culture, and the place from which it originates (9). Within these spheres originate musical scenes, which interact with, and inevitably are affected by the physical, social, political and economic factors of the surrounding environment (13). A new emerging scene usually inherits social relations, traditions and circumstances from the previous generation (14). In the case of West Berlin, the scene inherited the unique geopolitical circumstances of the city, which formed and shaped the scene in a particular way. Both sound and video are

spheres where “narratives of place are generated and articulated” (15). Music provides a place for the expression of marginalized voices (15), and thus is an integral part of the process of creating spaces for socializing, entertainment, and fun (15). Connell and Gibson have found that cities have often been portrayed as “places of hope, new social or economic lives”. Cities have also been described as places that are home to racial issues, unemployment and places that allow for anonymity in the lyrics of a variety of artists in the 20th century. The city was also often described as a place that promised the illegal and the forbidden, it was the home of excitement, variety, danger and decay, but one thing it was not, was a boring or tranquil place; on the contrary, it was a place of action (74).

In Neubauten’s case, West Berlin has characteristics of the city often portrayed in lyrics that I have described. Where the city different was that it lacked the element of hope and the circumstances that could yield new social and economic lives. It was a place of decay and action. Despite the someone bleak outlook, former Neubauten percussionist FM Einheit recalls that, while Hamburg was known for its violent and simple punk scene, Berlin was known for its greater artistic freedom and tolerance, where artists worked on using various types of media in their art in an interdisciplinary fashion (Dax, and Defcon, 59). This allowed different scenes and forms of art to interact and work together. Counterculture activity exploded as squatter, gay, student and punk subcultures interacted with each other and formed a new rebellious and active youth culture (Teipel 2001). What made this interesting is that all of these subcultures developed in West Berlin, a city that was isolated from the outside world and surrounded on all sides by a wall. This unique environment proved to be fertile ground for the growth and development of subcultures

due to the cultural and artistic freedom, and due to the isolated nature of the city, these subcultures were more prone to interact with each other.

One common element of existing pop music literature concerned with specifically “rock music” is the tendency to look for connections between the place of origin and the sound, and the source of inspiration (Connell, and Gibson, 91). The uniqueness of a local music scene and the music produced by that scene can be explained quite simply; it is made in specific geographical, socio-economic and political contexts, which are reflected in the lyrics and music (90), such as what I have demonstrated with Neubauten’s *Kollaps* earlier in this chapter. A contemporary case of isolation comparable to that of West Berlin in the 1980s is that of Iceland today. Iceland’s isolation and the unusual, unique style of Icelandic musician Björk has led to the suggestion that there is a close relation between the physical and social geography of Iceland, and the music that is produced by Icelandic artists which reflects that geography (93). The music of fellow Icelandic band Sigur Rós for example has been linked to the “barren, desolate landscape, and the links to stories, sagas, magic and ritual” (94). The music scene in Icelandic capital Reykjavik starkly echoes the music scene of West Berlin from 30 years ago. Despite the city faring better than West Berlin and having a much less turbulent history, Reykjavik is similarly isolated, geographically, culturally and musically. Reykjavik has a relatively small population of 120,000 people, and the music scene is made up of network of independently run shops often run by musicians, magazines and media, and independent record labels which release independent unconventional music (94).

Despite Reykjavik not being as economically and politically isolated as West Berlin, both cities were similarly isolated geographically. Due to this isolation, the music scene in West Berlin relied on running itself independently, on its own means, like the network in Reykjavik. The city was home to many backroom record stores, independent (often bedroom-based) music labels that freely distributed tape copies of local music, and illegal bars that appeared as quickly as they were shut down (Schyma 2002, 79). Music was distributed on cassettes in the form of mix-tapes, which were released independently on music labels that were established by the musicians themselves, similarly to Reykjavik today. Isolation plays a significant role in the formation of unique music scenes, as people in such places must work with what is provided in the immediate area. While economic conditions can further affect this scene (as demonstrated by Neubauten's initial gravitation towards found objects), they are only one of the factors that can motivate a scene to move in a particular direction; geographic isolation is another.

Blixa Bargeld ran his own shop in the Schöneberg district called "Eisengrau" in early 1980 (Dax, and Defcon, 25). It served most as a place for socializing, but also as a place where musicians from the local scene would come and occasionally record music. Evidence of this can be heard on Neubauten's 2006 release *Kassetten*, which contains the original *Eisengrau All-Stars* cassette compilation with music from artists such as Wolfgang Müller's Die Tödliche Doris, Mania D, Testbild, Neubauten member Alexander Hacke (as Alexander von Borsig), and of course Einstürzende Neubauten themselves. Continuing down the road of self-publishing and distribution, in 1986, Neubauten member and then bassist Mark Chung founded his own publishing company "Freibank" in order to handle Neubauten's

finances and to prevent having to give up the rights of the band to an existing publisher (165). Mark Chung recalls:

The foundation of Freibank was a logical continuation of the principle of self-determination. The music publishing business [...] was remarkably ineffectively organized, with archaic structures, and GEMA (“The society for musical performing and mechanical reproduction rights”) held a monopoly, [allowing them to] charge economically unjustifiable commissions for the collection of exploitation rights of artists” (166).

One way that the Berlin scene differed from other recognized urban music scenes is the fact that, for the most part, it was not explicitly marketed for its sound. In the past, Detroit –to give one example– had been known for the Motown sound, a variation on R&B and soul music created by producer and entrepreneur Berry Gordy (Connell, and Gibson, 97). The distinct Motown sound became not only a signifier of the sound, but of the place it came from (99). Berlin had instead attracted a handful of outsider musicians with its unique geopolitical status as a divided city (104) and not with a characteristic sound. The musicians came to the city not to pick up some of the city’s distinct sound, but rather to be inspired by the atmosphere. In the 1970s, American musician Iggy Pop, alongside his friend and fellow musician David Bowie, was attracted to Berlin initially because he “dug the idea that [...] Berlin was a war zone, a no man’s land” (104). Many years later, in 1991, Irish band U2 came to Berlin to record their album *Achtung Baby*, and both the album artwork

and promotional media was filled with “images and metaphors of the divided city, including civic monuments, the Trabbi, urban decay, black and white images of bleak, empty streets, and bars filled with smoke.” (105). Many of the recording sessions were at the famous Hansa Studios near Potsdamer Platz, a no man’s land since 1961 (104). This literally placed the musicians recording there at the edge of the Cold War conflict that isolated West Berlin in the first place. West Berlin gave the musicians the freedom to record culturally significant albums at Hansa, and it represented a place with a style that contained elements of both hedonism and geopolitical tension (105). If this unique environment attracted and inspired so many musicians from outside of West Berlin, then it is no surprise that it inspired local musicians and artists to give birth to such a unique musical and social scene. I argue that this phenomenon demonstrated that while economic factors affected and influenced musicians who were from West Berlin, social and political factors along with the isolated territory were something that influenced both musicians from within the city, and those who came from outside the wall. In Bargeld’s case he attributed much of his lyrical inspiration specifically to the architecture of the city. To Bargeld, architecture serves as “a metaphor where lyrics and music exist as living spaces and topographies” (Dax, and Defcon, 128).

1.4 The Final Collapse

Kollaps is the title song of the album, and begins with the sound of white noise being sent through a filter. After about a minute, the song launches into a repetitive rhythm played on the bass spring, accompanied by a single repetitive note played by Bargeld on

guitar. The song continues along this path for 8 minutes, and is the longest song on the album. The length of the song is significant, as it serves as the cumulating point of all the fears of doom and collapse expressed earlier by Hacke. The lyrics revolve around the phrase *“Kollaps, bis zum Kollaps, nicht viel Zeit”*, or *“Collapse, not much time until the collapse”*. By this point, Bargeld has accepted that the apocalypse is near, and that there is little time left. He speaks of aimless wandering during the night (*“nächtliches Wandern”*) which I understand as an allusion to the many sleepless nights the band members spent partying and otherwise “recklessly depleting” their bodies, in the words of Hacke (Dax, and Defcon, 15). Instead, he simply is, and wanders the grey crumbling streets of West Berlin day and night until the end. Berlin is already in a state of collapse. Buildings are in a state of disrepair. Neubauten friend and founder of band Mania D. Beate Bartel recalls Berlin as a grey isolated place, which looked bombed out and very brittle as a result (Dax, and Defcon, 16). It is important to remember that this generation was waiting for the complete collapse of Berlin, a city already on the brink socially and economically, and with it, the world. The world outside of West Berlin did not exist to the members of Neubauten until they actually traveled outside of the borders of West Berlin. Until that point, their world was West Berlin, and everything outside of it was a threat to that world.

Sehnsucht (Desire) is based on a simple repetitive piano and Bargeld’s voice. He repeats the phrase *“Sehnsucht, kommt aus dem Chaos, Sehnsucht ist die einzige Energie”* or *“Desire comes from chaos, and is the only form of energy”*. The only source for desire and energy is that of chaos, something that the band was familiar with in their daily lives. West Berlin’s chaotic, grey, doomed atmosphere was a source of energy to Bargeld and the rest

of Neubauten. It provided the band with a source of inspiration, which they then expressed in their music. *Vor'm Krieg (Before the War)* is an instrumental interlude which is comprised of a single sample of cheery brass music, which is slowed down significantly, giving the song a sluggish, drunken mood. This song also alludes to the carelessness and freedom in which the band lived. Simply put, they were going to party until the end, despite the impending "war". *Abstieg und Zerfall (Descent and Disintegration)* is the last proper song on the album, and with such a foreboding title, appropriately so. For it, Bargeld wrote an abstract text that speaks of emptiness. At first, it seems to be a critique where Bargeld accuses the youth of being empty, while their time here is crumbling away in front of their eyes. Their youth is being eaten by time and they are descending into essentially becoming nothing (brought on by the imminent end of the world). Despite this, they have no fear of it. On the contrary, they have surrendered to it, in the same sense Bargeld and Neubauten accepted the anticipated nuclear apocalypse.

As I have shown in this chapter, many factors played into the creation and inspiration behind *Kollaps*. Political movements and interactions between the population and the authorities was a source of inspiration for the band; the unique living situation of squatters inspired Blixa Bargeld to write songs that reflected the interaction between squatters and the police, and the rise in crime against taxi drivers led to Plexiglas dividers being installed in taxis as a safety precaution. These dividers later ended up becoming the source of one of Neubauten's most important and most often used instruments, the bass spring. The bleak economic situation both allowed artists, and otherwise unemployed

young West Berliners, to live without the need for large amounts of money, and forced others, such as percussionist NU Unruh, to have to sell his drum kit and turn to the streets of West Berlin to replace it. This was one of the factors that led to the sound for which Neubauten is known today. In addition to being affected by the local economy of the city, the band also commented on pop music and the economic mechanism that drove commercial pop music to success by including an atonal, brash cover of Serge Gainsbourg's *Je t'aime...moi non plus* on an album that was meant to be "unlistenable". The small musical community required individual, self-sustained distribution for music, as major labels were not (yet) interested in the music scene. This in turn gave the band the opportunity to learn how to take care of distribution themselves later on in their careers when Mark Chung founded Freibank and managed all of the band's distribution and publishing rights himself. Einstürzende Neubauten's debut album *Kollaps* is a complex work, which not only broke ground for contemporary experimental and industrial music, but also reflected on the unique socio-economic and political context in which West Berlin existed, and expressed the band's reaction to the many factors that made West Berlin characteristic.

CHAPTER TWO: NEUBAUTEN AND ARCHITECTURE

Professor of architectural history Shelley Hornstein (2011) suggests that physical architecture serves as a “mapping of physical, mental and emotional space” (4) and also argues that architecture can exist beyond its physical site, even if it has been destroyed (82). Architecture and the physical space in which it existed will continue to exist, she argues whether it is on a picture, as a sound, a film, or in our memories, even after that physical space has been destroyed (2) because the architecture of a physical location is tied to a place in the imagination (6).

Within this context, I argue that, even though West Berlin no longer exists since the fall of the Wall in 1989, West Berlin’s unique space as it existed in the 1980s continues to exist in the music of Einstürzende Neubauten. The isolated crumbling post-war landscape that made up West Berlin created a unique urban environment and physical space and the music was created by utilizing what the physical environment provided. Thus the physical space manifested itself in the music. Much of this space consisted of architecture in the form of buildings and other spaces such as underpasses and water towers. As such, West Berlin’s urban architecture made up much of the space in the mind of the city’s inhabitants. Consequently, I will also explore the philosophical background behind the role of architecture and destruction in their art, and the role of architecture as subject matter in Blixa Bargeld’s texts.

2.1 West Berlin: Architecture and Space as an Instrument

Soon after the end of the Second World War cultural events were already being performed on a stage created by destruction, in the space that made up Berlin. Practically all of Berlin was destroyed and left crumbling after the war. Just after the war, the city was filled with thousands of new refugees arriving each day, and “hundreds of thousands of dwellings had been reduced to rubble”. Packs of orphaned children wandered the streets and burgled buildings and collected scrap in hopes that they would be able to sell what they had found (Taylor, 45). Seventy-five percent of Berlin’s theaters and concert halls were destroyed completely, and the majority of the artists that would have normally been in these places had either fled or were no longer alive (Shryane, 29). Despite this bleak scene, culture began to thrive within one year following the end of the war, particularly in the Western sectors of the city. Out of the rubble sprung up theaters, clubs, cabarets, newspapers and even film studios (Taylor, 47). When the wall was built in 1961, Berlin’s landscape was once again scarred and divided. This destructive action provoked the West German government to find another way to fight the Cold War with the East, and one way of doing that was with culture. Culture became a point of interest for the West German government, as culture could serve as a new means of competition with the East. Culture and the arts became a major part of West Berlin’s identity, while being artificially stimulated by a government program (Shryane, 65). For example, a new “Culture Forum” was built not far from the wall in 1963 in West Berlin in order to compete with the Museuminsel, an island on the Spree river that contains numerous museums, in East Berlin (30).

This uniquely constructed environment was the world in which Einstürzende Neubauten formed, who in turn used the city as an instrument. Shelley Hornstein proposes that architecture can “exist beyond the physical site itself in our recollection of it” (3). Hornstein gives the example of the Eiffel Tower as a piece of architecture that exists in many forms, and would continue to exist even if the physical tower no longer stood in Paris. Although the tower is still physically present in Paris, it also exists on photographs and postcards as an image of the tower, as well as in all the locations that postcards of that image are found (1). The physical structure is “supported by visual and textual imagery [which] enables us to transport architecture (in a sense) from [the] physical location, to the imagination” where it continues to exist. In a similar way that the Eiffel tower exists in many forms, I propose that Neubauten’s West Berlin continues to live on in their music despite no longer physically existing. When listening to the early music of Einstürzende Neubauten, the listener can imagine the landscape without ever having been there before, as this location is a part of the music. Even if a location has been modified or destroyed in the meantime, that physical space still exists in the sound the listener hears.

The city was the source of instruments and sounds for the band: Percussionist NU Unruh developed the “bass spring” instrument after violence against taxi drivers in the city dropped, causing taxi companies to get rid of the protective Plexiglas spring-loaded divider, while percussionist FM Einheit recorded a riot in Berlin district Kreuzberg in 1987 which was then used on Neubauten’s 1989 album *Haus der Lüge*. The city also served as a recording space: The band’s first EP was recorded by singer Blixa Bargeld and NU Unruh

inside the crawlspace of a West Berlin Autobahn overpass, and the song *Wasserturm* off of the 1983 album *Zeichnungen des Patienten OT* was recorded inside of an old water tower in Berlin-Schöneberg. Today this water tower is not accessible to the public, although it is possible to view it by visiting Berlin's Deutsches Technikmuseum, or when passing by on the U2 U-Bahn line near the Gleisdreieck station. Nonetheless, the reverberation of the inside of the water tower has been captured on the recording, as has been the abandoned landscape surrounding the tower that allowed the musicians to record in it without requiring anyone's permission in the first place.

It is important to remember that founding members Blixa Bargeld and NU Unruh were both native West Berliners. This environment was part of the architecture and landscape created in their minds from a young age. Bargeld for example grew up in Berlin's Schöneberg district, and was familiar with the Autobahn crawlspace, which would later be used as a recording space for their first EP, from when he was a young boy (Shryane, 5). NU Unruh picked up the spring walking down the street when he was still a teenager, and held onto it until he decided to put it to use as a percussive bass instrument (Dax, and Defcon, 92). All of these elements were taken directly from the environment. They were not initially sought for any preconceived purpose, but rather were discovered by chance, and later utilized in a musical context. The idea was to make music out of the objects they had found, and to seek out unique environments in which to play, some of which they were already aware from previous experiences, such as the crawl space or the empty water tower, to see how the space could be used as part of the performance.

2.2 From Places to Words: Strategies Against Architecture

Architecture not only played a role in Neubauten's physical performances, but also has a dominant role in the texts written by Bargeld. Even album titles include references to architecture. The band has, up to this point, released 4 compilation albums of music titled *Strategien gegen Architektur I/II/III/IV*, or *Strategies against Architecture*. The title illustrates the band's intentions towards urban architectural space as a strategy against that space, as something that confronts that space; their music is a way of challenging architecture, whether it is the physical architecture of a building or site or the architecture of a social structure. Their 1987 album *Fünf auf der nach oben offenen Richterskala* ("Five on the open ended Richter Scale") is concerned with the Richter scale, which is used to measure the magnitude of an earthquake. Earthquakes are a destructive force, which affects architecture extensively. The album artwork contains a modified Richter scale that appears as such:

- 0 Absolute Ruhe/Absolute calm
- 1 Spürbare Vibration/Noticeable vibration
- 2 Risse in Mauern/Cracks in walls
- 3 Bauwerke zittern/structures shake
- 4 Teile von Gebäuden zerstört/parts of buildings destroyed
- 5 Einstürzende Neubauten

Although a real Richter scale continues past 5, the scale proposed by the band here stops at 5. In this sense, the band exists as the ultimate destroyer of architecture. By including themselves on the scale, they claim that there is nothing that can cause more damage to architecture than the band itself. In the hands of the band, architecture ceases to exist; one could even say that it is destroyed in its traditional form of shelter or housing and instead acquires the new function of being an instrument. This means that, similarly to the bass spring acquiring its new role as a percussion instrument in the hands of NU Unruh (and simultaneously losing its role as a mechanical spring in a mechanism), architecture too loses its function when utilized by the band as an instrument. The Schöneberg water tower was not only a water tower the moment the members of Einstürzende Neubauten climbed inside and recorded inside it, drumming on the sides of it, and stomping on the floor. Once the members left, the water tower regained its status as a water tower, but the existence of its space as an instrument will continue to exist on the *Zeichnungen des Patienten OT* album.

Hierarchy can also be interpreted in the form of architecture, as can a social or political structure, or the classical structure of a song. With *Kollaps* Neubauten demonstrated their disdain for the traditional pop music format. Not only did they challenge the traditional music instrument by utilizing found objects for the reason that they were found objects (and not for any remotely musical or tonal quality) (Wagner, 138) instead of drums, they also wrote an album that was supposed to be unlistenable to the conventional listener (Dax, and Defcon, 70). As former manager Alfred Hilsberg recalls, Neubauten took a step back from the way music was going, and broke the logic and

“destroyed structures”, something that is considered very important to pop music (70). If one listens to the *Kollaps* album, there is little sign of melody at all (a key element in pop music), and there is virtually no sign of the common verse-chorus-verse structure. Instead one hears noisy banging and scraping, and the songs drone on incessantly, rarely breaking from their repetitive form. The band thus redefined the structure of music, in a similar manner that they redefined the function of the objects that they found and the locations in which they recorded.

In addition to redefining the structure of music and the function of found objects, the band also challenged the structure of society and hierarchy. Below I interpret Blixa Bargeld’s use of the structure of a multi-storied building in the form of lyrical verses as a critique of the structure of classical social hierarchy in the song *Haus der Lüge (House of Lies)*, on the 1989 album of the same name. The listener comes along for the journey, with the arrival on each floor being marked by the audible ringing of a bell (like an elevator that has reached a desired floor). Bargeld begins with the first floor, which he describes as such:

“Erstes Gechoss: hier leben die Blinden, die glauben was sie sehen, und die Tauben die glauben was sie hören”

(“First floor: here live the blind, who believe what they see, and the deaf, who believe what they hear.”)

The first floor is the home to the blind and the deaf who believe what they see and hear, despite being physically unable to do so due to their physical impediments. The verse also contains a figure, "ein Irrer", a fool or maniac, who is bound and gagged and believes only that what he can touch and feel with his hands. Thus, the blind and the deaf on the first floor represent the masses of people within a society who unquestionably follow what those at the top dictate, while the bound fool represents those who believe only in what can physically be perceived.

The next verse takes us to the next level of social hierarchy on the second floor, where those responsible for the media live:

"Zweites Geschoss: Rolle für Rolle, Bahn für Bahn, Rauhfaser tapeziert, in den Gängen stehen Mieter herum, betrachten die Wände aufmerksam, suchen darauf Bahn um Bahn nach Druck- und Rechtschreibfehlern, könnten nicht mal ihren Namen entziffern."

("Second floor: roll after roll, length after length in woodchip wallpaper, tenants stand around observing the walls with frowns searching row by row looking for printing and spelling mistakes they couldn't even decipher their own names.")

Despite being higher up in the social structure, those responsible for the spread of information to the masses are themselves illiterate and are in no position to be responsible for the propagation of information to those below them. They are in fact no better than

those on the floor beneath them, as they have no idea about what they are spreading, since they cannot read.

The third floor has never been completed, and can only be reached by the stairs, effectively creating a barrier between the lower and higher levels of social class. The floor is instead used as a place to store errors (in the form of tiles that cover the floor) that belong to “the firm”, presumably at the top of the social ladder:

“hier lagern Irrtümer, die gehören der Firma damit kacheln sie die Böden an die darf keiner ran.”

(“Here are stored errors, which belong to the firm they tile the floors with them upon these none may tread.”)

It appears that human mistakes throughout time, rather than an intentional division, are what have led to the division between the top of the social structure and the bottom.

Nonetheless, this is a division that has been exploited by those that benefit from it at the top. Following the visit to the third floor, Bargeld takes us to the fourth floor, the home of the architect:

“Hier wohnt der Architekt. Er geht auf in seinem Plan, dieses Gebäude steckt voller Ideen. Es reicht von Funda- bis Firmament und vom Fundament bis zur Firma.”

(“Here lives the architect, immersed in his idea of this building, full of ideas, which stretches from the foundations to the sky, to the firm.”)

Although initially it is easy to interpret the architect as God, it becomes apparent in the following verses that while the architect is an intermediary who is executing a plan, he is not the one who has designed it. He is the one that is responsible for implementing the existing social structure and the division of people across the floors of the structure, to which the people are bound.

This idea is also reflected in the Neubauten song *Architektur ist Geiselnahme* (*Architecture is hostage-taking*) from the *Strategien gegen Architektur IV* album. The title is that it suggests that architecture is a force that confines. This can be the physical architecture of a building, which confines persons within it in the form of shelter, or the ideological architecture that is designed by the architect and put into place to establish a social hierarchy. Once this hierarchy is established, it is extremely difficult to move up in the hierarchy due to obstacles such as the tiles that one is not allowed to step on or the lack of an elevator going up to the next floor, as presented by Bargeld in *Haus der Lüge*. After all, only Bargeld and the listener are allowed to see what all of the floors look like, and there is no sign of any of the inhabitants moving between floors.

After visiting the fourth floor, Bargeld takes the listener all the way down to the ground floor:

“Im Erdgeschoss: Befinden sich vier Türen die führen direkt ins Freie oder besser gesagt in den Grundstein. Da kann warten wer will um zwölf kommt Beton.

Grundsteinlegung! Gedankengänge sind gestrichen in Kopfhöhe braun infam oder katholisch violet zur besseren Orientierung”

(“On the ground floor, there are four doors, all of which lead outside, or better said, to the foundation. There whoever desires can wait. At 12 comes the concrete. Laying of the foundation stone! Trains of thoughts are painted in brown (at face value), or in Catholic purple for better orientation”)

In this verse, the foundation of the entire structure of society is religion. Although the four doors appear to give a choice, they all lead to the same thing, the foundation, which for many western societies has been religion. The concrete symbolizes the overpowering force of religious belief on the thoughts of individuals. The concrete also binds the individuals together and traps them in the mass. Individual thinking is painted brown, or in purple (a symbol of pain, suffering, or penitence in the Catholic Church) to keep everyone's thoughts orientated in the same direction. Why Bargeld targets specifically the Catholic Church is difficult to say, but the Vatican blacklisted the song shortly after its release, suggesting that the Vatican took the song as an attack on the institution.

Lastly Bargeld brings the listener to the top floor where there lives a weary, frail God:

“Dachgeschoss: Es hat einen Schaden im Dachstuhl sitzt ein alter Mann auf dem Boden tote Engel verstreut (deren Gesichter sehen ihm ähnlich) zwischen den Knien hält er ein Gewehr er zielt auf seinen Mund und in den Schädel durch den Schädel und aus dem Schädel heraus in den Dachfirst dringt das Geschoss”

(“Top floor: has some damage. In the rafters sits an old man. Dead angels are strewn across the floor (their faces resemble his). Between his knees he holds a gun, he aims it at his mouth, and into the skull, and out of the skull, and out of the skull's other side, into the roof's apex goes the bullet.”)

The top floor is damaged, and God is an old man. All those who were made in his image are dead, and he is alone. He has resorted to shooting himself in the very place that he built, as he can no longer bear what society has done in his name. God's decision to commit suicide results in the top floor being built out and renovated; implying that without this traditional hierarchical religious-based social structure, the entirety of society would be restructured and renewed. The text doesn't target the belief in God as something evil, but rather targets the use of religion by mankind as a tool to imply a strict class order, where the foundations are based on religion, and an “architect” higher up designs a plan for society in the name of God. More generally speaking, the song questions the entire existence of class structure, and calls for a rebuilding of society without the need for an architect. This in turn reflects Einstürzende Neubauten's attitude of going against the classical structure of music. Bargeld

himself said in 1983; “Music is something extreme to me, something that isn’t quite where it should be. It’s also not what we are doing, but rather a display of something that should be there, and isn’t (Spex, 25). The song itself contains no standard verse-chorus-verse structure, but rather plows ahead from verse to verse and demonstrates the band questioning the very idea of architecture in words, musical structural form, and performance.

2.3 Philosophy: Architecture, Destruction, and Collapsing New Buildings

German philosopher Walter Benjamin’s figures of the “Destructive Character” and the “Angel of History” are prominently found throughout Neubauten’s work, both literally in the form of lyrics and text (such as the aptly named *Engel der Geschichte* on the *Berlin Babylon* soundtrack album, which has German actress Angela Winkler reciting Benjamin’s 1940 text *On the Concept of History*) as well as figuratively in the band’s approach to their surroundings, as I explain below. Shryane proposes that “Neubauten’s sonic and textual landscapes reflect Benjamin’s denial of the past as simply that which is no more and which culminates in the present. Their [...] music suggests his non-linearity through sounds, which never seem to settle for a single resolution”. Their early work was one that celebrated the decay and the greyness of environment (78). In order to better understand the Benjaminian influence on Neubauten’s art, I interpret the *Destructive Character* text within the context of Neubauten’s music, and I also touch on the “Angel of History” and Shryane’s interpretation of the text in relation to Berlin’s landmark victory column, the Siegessäule.

In 1931 Benjamin wrote on the subject of the destructive character, a work that later went on to be a source of inspiration to Blixa Bargeld, and contributed greatly to the entire philosophy of Einstürzende Neubauten:

“The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own age; it cheers, because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed a rooting out, of his own condition. [...] The destructive character is always blithely at work. It is nature that dictates his tempo, indirectly at least. The destructive character does his work; the only work he avoids is creative. [He] tolerates misunderstanding, [and] stands in the front line of traditionalists. The destructive character sees nothing permanent, but for this reason, he sees ways everywhere. [...] But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere.” (541-42)

In the song *Grundstück* on the 2004 album *Perpetuum Mobile* the destructive character is channeled through Bargeld’s words when he sings, “was ich in deinen Träumen suche? Ich suche nichts, ich räume auf” (“what am I looking for in your dreams? I am not looking for anything. I am cleaning up”). Bargeld also echoed these sentiments earlier in 1992 when he said, “I think that destruction is absolutely necessary to create space. And that’s it” (Cangioli, 40). Benjamin claimed that the destructive character is making room in

the mind, clearing away the clutter of dreams, as he desires open space. In the process, the dream is destroyed (541).

Although destruction is often seen as a negative thing, Benjamin sees the destructive character as young and cheerful (541). Bargeld touches on this aspect in the context of the West Berlin environment in an interview from the 1980s where he says:

“For me, it is now time of the decline, the end of time, definitely. [...] Decline is decline. I like the collapse. I’m living with the positive feeling, I’m dancing for the decline, I’m not against it. I’d like it as soon as possible. [...] I lust for it, and I don’t kid myself that there’s anything else coming.”(Maeck, 33)

It is important to remember that West Berlin was a place that did not give many youth much hope for the future. Part of this came from a punk “No Future!” approach (Scharenberg, and Bader, 82) and part of it came from the tensions of the Cold War. People were afraid of nuclear war and to many, it felt like the end of the world was near. Riots and demonstrations were a regular occurrence. As a result much of the youth recklessly depleted their bodies. As previously mentioned, bassist Alexander Hacke did not think he would ever live to see his 18th birthday (Dax, and Defcon, 15). The destructive character comes across in Bargeld’s attitude, where he is waiting for the end of the world, and nonetheless having fun while waiting for it, “dancing for the decline”, despite the fact that he has absolutely no hope for the future. Since there is no foreseeable future, like the

destructive character, there is no trace of age, as the point of reference in the future is lost. Additionally, like the destructive character, nothing was seen as permanent, because everything was heading towards an absolute end, thus allowing Neubauten to take any path in their work, for there was little stopping them, and like the destructive character, they too always kept busy.

With regards to work and always being busy, Benjamin says that nature is the one who dictates the destructive character's tempo. Nature gives us a natural progression of time, even when we have no hope for the future like the Neubauten members behind the wall. This is what allows the destructive character to continue his work.

As Bargeld himself had said, "To me, playing instruments is always playing the instrument of preservation/maintenance" (Spex, 25). Playing on instruments is what preserves and maintains the destructive character. The destructive character also tolerates misunderstanding (something that the band had inevitably faced, especially outside of West Berlin, such as in Hamburg when they played there for the very first time), and stands in the front line of traditionalists, to which arguably Neubauten do not belong; they neither play traditional instruments, nor do their songs (particularly in their early work) follow the traditional verse-chorus verse song structure.

Einstürzende Neubauten further propagated the idea of destruction with their art by turning to their damaged environment for inspiration, and as a source for their instruments. The instruments traveled with the band to all of their performances, and those instruments carried in them their individual histories. In Benjamin's "The Work of

Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” he wrote: “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element; its presence in time and space, and its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (105). Mechanical reproduction took away the aura of art, which Neubauten succeeded in maintaining. They did this in part by actively using the space as an instrument; the space became a part of the performance, and inversely the performance part of the space by means of preservation. Neubauten, even with today’s advanced sampling and recording technologies, refuse to resort to digitally sampling all of their instruments to facilitate recording or live performance. In a broader context, going along the lines of Benjamin, I suggest that this presence in time and space is preserved by the band’s use of these instruments in a live environment and their use of the space as an element in the performance. Percussionist NU Unruh continues to play the bass spring that he found decades ago on the streets of West Berlin, and by continuing the active use of that spring, he preserves the entire history of the spring within the context of the city, while also destroying the spring’s original intended purpose. The spring’s original purpose, the reason for its disposal, and lastly its final role as a musical instrument only continues to exist when it is being used as such. If Unruh were to stop using the spring, it would return to being just a spring, a lifeless object, and lose its entire context, and its purpose. By being played by Unruh, the spring is given a new life as an entirely different object, with an entirely new function, but only by being played it is this function preserved.

The band utilized objects and spaces they found, and their use of those objects and places introduced a duality of preservation and destruction. The original intended use of

the objects and spaces was destroyed when the band. These objects also acquired a new function, which preserved the historical and environmental context in which these objects were found. In addition to this, the entire historical context of the objects (their previous use, their discovery, and the subsequent transformation into an instrument) was now being preserved in the objects itself.

This duality of conservation and destruction was in fact also present in the architecture of West Berlin. Ladd (1998) has examined the urban history of Berlin, and has found that although buildings are important in their function as a source of shelter, we are the ones that attach meaning to these buildings. Thus this is what makes buildings important to us (2). Ladd also believes that buildings serve as a visual reminder of the past. Western societies are attached to their past, and Berlin is unique in this, as it is a city of “bold gestures and startling incongruities [...] of destruction” (3). The Siegessäule (Victory Column) is a prominent piece of architecture in Berlin that Shryane sees as a representation of Benjamin’s Angel of History (19). The golden angel at the top of the column has been a witness to the many victories of Prussia, the rise of the Nazis, the destruction caused by the war, the building of the wall, and most recently the unification of Germany. Although the angel has not actually witnessed anything, it has become a symbol of the events that have unfolded during its existence, because we have attached this historical meaning to the structure. This one single piece of architecture carries the burden of over a century of German history because this history has been associated with the architectural form by people. Similarly, each of the bombed out, crumbling buildings of

West Berlin carried the burden of the city's suffering, and that history remains tied to that architectural space because people have associated the city's turbulent history with the city's architecture.

Continuing along this line of thought, what we do in, and to, these buildings ends up being a part of the physical architecture of a building, with our actions being preserved in the walls. These buildings preserve the events, which happen in and around them, while these events corrupt and destroy the buildings' original purpose. Benjamin's Angel of History represents the burden of history (18) where history exists as ruin, as a sort of single "pile" of catastrophic events that have occurred (Benjamin, and Osborne, 87) and the angel faces the future with its back, while the past gathers as a pile of ruin at his feet. I propose that Neubauten similarly faced the future with their backs, and instead were confronted by the past in the war-damaged architecture and geopolitically isolated environment that surrounded them. Like much of the architecture of post war Berlin, the Siegestsäule originally was intended to serve as a visual reminder of the victory for the Prussian army, but over the course of time, the city's violent history has been associated with the structure. The column has lost its original intention due to the events that have since become history. This history has "piled up" and become part of the Siegestsäule, which in the eyes of the observer now carries the burden of much more than what its original intention would have ever entailed.

One location that brought together the music of Neubauten, architecture, and the politics and history of Germany is the now-demolished Palast der Republik, the former seat of the parliament of East Germany. In 2004, Einstürzende Neubauten played a concert for two nights at the Palast der Republik. At the time, the Palast der Republik was in the process of being “deconstructed” or taken apart, piece by piece, rather than being demolished, and lacked the majority of the external façade, and the interior had been stripped bare to its pillars and beams. Notably, the first concert was specifically for a group of “Unterstützer”, or supporters, comprised of fans who had subscribed, and paid for the production and recording of the band’s *Grundstück* album. At this concert, the band was played on the ground, at the same level as the audience, and had full active participation from the audience during the performance (Dax, and Defcon, 274), which disregarded the traditional gap maintained between the artist and the audience. (The second concert was open to the general public, and was a much more conventional concert, with a stage and “the usual security barriers” as NU Unruh described it (274); therefore I only discuss the first concert).

While the second concert was not particularly unusual or unique, the performance on the first night at the Palast der Republik not only deconstructed the traditional rock concert (Shryane, 113), but it also served as a confrontation with the past, in a location that was associated with a significant period of Germany’s Cold War past that affected both West Berlin and East Berlin, and which was now in the process of being taken apart. Also, quite humorously, a band called “Collapsing new buildings” was playing a concert called *Grundstück* (a property or piece of land) while the old Palast der Republik building was

being dismantled since the land beneath it was going to be used as the site of a replica of the old city palace. The performance was a materialization of Neubauten's philosophy and a physical manifestation of the principle of using one's surroundings as an instrument; the band not only played in a historically significant location that was in the process of being destroyed; they literally played the building as an instrument. Pillars, beams, handrails, and other elements of architecture were amplified and actively used throughout the performance. In that sense, the Palast der Republik concert was a culmination of all that Neubauten stands for, musically and philosophically.

CHAPTER THREE: NEUBAUTEN AND STAGE PERFORMANCE

In the previous chapter I explored the role of architecture and Benjaminian theory in the music of Einstürzende Neubauten, where I discovered that there exists a duality of destruction of original intention, as with NU Unruh's Bass Spring, and conservation of the environment in the music; West Berlin continues to exist in the music of Einstürzende Neubauten as the physical space manifests itself in the music. A comparable duality exists in Neubauten's stage performance. Neubauten destroyed the classical structure of the rock music stage act and instead built a free, improvisational performance in its place, in accordance with the motto found on the inside cover of their 1983 *Zeichnungen des Patienten OT* album, which states "destruction is not negative. You must destroy to build".

While the band's ideas about destruction were based in part on the theories of philosopher Walter Benjamin, its performance drew much from French playwright Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*. In 1938 Artaud published a book titled *Le Théâtre et son Double* (published in English as *The Theatre and its Double*), which introduced the *Théâtre de la Cruauté*, or *Theatre of Cruelty*. Artaud challenged classical theatre with his cruel version, with the intention of destroying theatre as it existed in its contemporary form and presenting a new form of theatre more reliant on gestures and acting, a theatre, which serves as "an outlet of our repressions" and "wakes up our heart and nerves" (Artaud, 9).

I argue that, as Artaud challenged the classical theatre, Neubauten challenged the typical rock music concert format with a stage performance that relied not on an elaborate planned stage production, but rather on a raw physical brutality and emotional intensity,

and on freedom of expression in all forms, whether it is sound, voice, or physical movement. This intensity was not only expressed by the band on the stage, but was also meant to be felt by the audience. In this chapter, I focus particularly on Neubauten's performances in the 1980s when they were at their raw destructive peak, and refer to the 1985 performance film *Halber Mensch* to illustrate the Artaudian elements of Neubauten's performance.

3.1 The Art of Improvisation

From the moment the members of Einstürzende Neubauten picked up scrap metal off the street and brought these elements to the stage in the form of instruments, they challenged the conventional rock performance with a theatrical performance. Normally a band plays within a contextualized rock performance, which has a light show, a set list, in some cases a choreographed routine (dance or otherwise), and an encore. Most importantly we must understand that the key objective of a rock concert is to fulfill the expectations of the audience, which has come to see a band and hear their favorite songs. Although Neubauten's concerts usually included lights and some basic effects on behalf of the venue, improvisation and the lack of a set performance routine played a key role on the stage, which moved far outside of the provided light show. In some cases, this lack of routine and structure extended to the point where the band came essentially unprepared for the performance that day, with the exception of a few key instruments such as the bass spring. The band often spent the afternoon before the concert at the junkyard gathering materials for that evening's performance (Dax, and Defcon, 91-92).

This process is visible in the Sohgo Ishii film *Halber Mensch*, which documents Neubauten's performance in Tokyo, Japan in 1985, where the band is seen gathering materials at the junkyard before the performance. Although this may seem chaotic to the observer, this situation and last-minute gathering process presents the band with a certain creative freedom, almost forcing the band to improvise. Members of the band have spoken of it being necessary to expose their vulnerability on stage for the performance to truly be improvised. For example, percussionist FM Einheit felt, that

“Improvising on stage is a way of performing that can also totally fail. You have to be totally open to the music and to what the others are doing. And you have to listen because that's the only way it can work. At the same time, you have to trust the others that they will treat you and your music the same way. Only then are you not alone and you can expose yourself on stage. [...] The stage protects you. I have always understood the stage as a place where I feel completely at home and protected.” (80)

Similarly to Einheit feeling safe on stage, Bargeld felt a sense of invincibility once on the stage:

“The moment I completely open up on stage is also the moment when I become untouchable. Every actor knows about this problem of opening up, of making yourself become fragile and violable. And you are indeed vulnerable. But the stage

and the performance of the artist are nothing other than a kind of protective fluid.

On stage, I can completely remove my armour". (80)

The stage allowed the band members to unite in a raw physical performance based on an underlying trust. This allowed each member to remove his armour, as Bargeld called it, and succumb to the body instead, without having to worry about the interference of the mind.

Neubauten's performance was deeply rooted in Artaud's ideas about the *Theatre of Cruelty*. Neubauten experimented with the boundaries of contemporary music and pushed past them by incorporating found objects as instruments, and performing in unconventional spaces and venues. The performance also required physical exertion, excess, and a degree of risk (Shryane, 85). Artaud proposed something similar in the *Theatre of Cruelty* with regards to the role of the actor. In this new theatre, the actors must "surrender themselves to a performance, [and] live through it and feel it, rather than merely think about it" (Bermel, 7). The performance should be a "total experience for the anatomy, for both the artist, and the spectator" (Shryane, 84). The conscious mind does not dictate the performance as a script or a stage director would (85), but rather the body and the senses surrender to the performance and become a part of it. Because it requires surrender and a display of vulnerability, such a performance challenges not only the actors as individuals but also challenges and confronts the stage where this act is performed by presenting something unrelated to the conventional rock concert. Einstürzende Neubauten not only pushed themselves to the surrender of their bodies to the point of physical

exhaustion on stage, but also confronted the stage and the rock concert with an act that was meant to “infect the ears and eyes and breast” (84) of those who witness it.

3.2 Physicality and Challenging the Stage

Bargeld has described his work on stage as “squeezing himself like a lemon, using his whole person as a test object, putting his whole life forward as an experiment [to] force people to keep redefining the boundaries and then go outside of it again... until there is nothing left that is not music” (Shryane, 92). In the same way the band confronted the definition of music, and essentially transformed conventionally unmusical objects into musical instruments, it also destroyed the boundaries of the musical stage performance by destroying preconceived expectations of the audience. One way that the band did this was with the use of movement on stage.

Shryane examined the role of dance in Neubauten’s stage show, and found that it functions as a “physical interaction of the musicians with their site and their instruments, [...] a carefully orchestrated assault on their materials” (89). When Neubauten traveled to Japan in 1985 to film the *Halber Mensch* performance film, they collaborated with Kazuo Ohno, a renowned Japanese Butoh dancer, and incorporated Butoh elements in the sequence for the song *ZNS*.

The word "Butoh," originated as ankoku buyo following the Second World War, and has since become a generic term for this Japanese form of avant-garde dance. Ankoku buyo is a term made up of two Japanese words, “Ankoku”, which means "utter darkness" and "Buyo," a generic term for dance. Later on, ankoku buyo developed into ankoku buto. Butoh

founder Hijikata Tatsumi created the term "ankoku butoh" to "denote a cosmological dance which departed from existing dances and explored the darkest side of human nature" (Nanako, 12). Nonetheless, Butoh dance is difficult to define, as it does not conform to any preconceived idea of western dance.

That said, Butoh has very much in common with Neubauten, as Butoh is a dance that is "born from devastation, [...] springs from its environment, [and] grows like a flower from rubble". The essence of the dance is "crisis and growth", where the dancer has to "look inside to find reason to move" (Ruhe). Butoh is a corporeal dance that intends to "bring the body back to its original state" (Shryane, 96) that requires "rawness" and is centered on "primitivism [...], emotion and instinct". It relies on the physical body to provide reason to move. Butoh serves as a "manifestation of all things through the dancer's body" (Ruhe) to lead the way instead of the mind, which will yearn for routine and order. Both Butoh and Einstürzende Neubauten are products of war and a damaged environment. Neubauten came from the scarred, crumbling city of West Berlin, divided up and isolated as a result of World War II and the Cold War, while Butoh rose out of the ashes of the Second World War. Japan developed quite a bit differently than West Berlin following the war, but both produced a type of art that was inevitably affected by the post war environment. Both had been subjected to allied occupation, although Japan was only occupied until 1952, after which it became an independent state (Takemae, xxv). The essence of Butoh has been said to be "crisis and growth", while Neubauten emerged from an area of both crisis and artistic growth (as previously described by Scharenberg and Bader in Chapter 1). While it is interesting to see Neubauten choose to perform Butoh dance for their performance of ZNS

in the *Halber Mensch* film, it is not surprising. Both the Butoh dance and Neubauten's art originated in a unique post-war environment. This common element is manifested in both the Butoh dance, and Neubauten's performance in the form of succumbing to the performance, by letting go of inhibitions and expectations, and instead manifesting the body's desires through movement.

I propose that both inhibitions and expectations are products of the conscious mind. When the performer allows the body to lead the way without allowing the conscious mind to play a role in the performance, the body is free to behave according to the inner drive. Kazuo Ohno himself has said that, while performing Butoh, he works to his fullest [physical] limit (Schechner, and Ohno, 168), while Bargeld has admitted to "[screaming] until everything went black" (Dax, and Defcon, 108), due to extreme physical devotion and exertion while on stage. For the *Halber Mensch* Butoh performance, the band chose the song *ZNS*; *ZNS* stands for "zentrales Nervensystem" or "central nervous system", the core of our body (the brain and spine), which is responsible for coordinating all of our movements. The song's lyrics revolve thematically around the idea of movement within the body, movement for which the *ZNS* is responsible. Bargeld begins the song with the following line:

"Aufstehn! Schwarz vor Augen. Voll die kalten Finger. Was soll ich machen beim zitternd Erwachen? Und das Zimmer hat Seegang" (Bargeld, 194)

(“Get up! Stars in my eyes. Fingers like ice. What should I do when I wake up trembling? And the room looks topsy-turvy.”) (196)

Here Bargeld describes waking up, and realizing that he is trembling. The central nervous system is responsible for his tremors; his body has taken control of his movement by means of the central nervous system, and it is a movement that Bargeld cannot consciously control. He is also dizzy, and the room is moving in front of him, also something he cannot control. In a similar manner, during a Butoh performance or a Neubauten stage performance, the performers must give in to their central nervous systems, and allow the body to lead the way, and go to the “further physical limit” described by Kazuo Ohno. Bargeld intends to submit himself to the mercy of his body the minute he steps on stage. Once the performance starts, the body takes over, and simply interacts with the surroundings, whether that is the space, other band members, or the audience. This phenomenon can be understood similarly to Bargeld’s description of a “trembling awakening”: Bargeld can observe it, but cannot stop it. It is not a routine that has been practiced, scripted or choreographed, but rather the motivation for movement comes from somewhere inside. Ohno has called this source of motivation for movement the “small cosmos”, which, during the dance, meets with the “large cosmos”, the performance space (Schechner, and Ohno, 165). During a Neubauten performance, the two cosmoses also meet, which is manifested as the interaction between the band and the space in which they are performing.

Bargeld continues later on in the song:

“Es tanzt das ZNS [...] das ZNS tanzt den Kreislauf. Der Kreislauf. Alles läuft im Kreis. Immer an der Wand lang...Es geht rund hier. Es tanzt das ZNS. Das ZNS tanzt den Blackout. Kann mich an nix erinnern.“ (194)

(“The CNS dances, it circulates. Circulation. It relates in circles. All along the wall. Swings. The CNS dances. Blackout. I can’t remember a thing”) (196)

Here Bargeld’s body is dancing, and his blood circulates through his body as a result of the movement. The dance is what keeps him awake. The dance ends with a blackout, which signifies that he has exhausted his body in a similar fashion as Kazuo Ohno by working his body to the furthest physical limit. Once his body has reached its limit, it simply shuts down, unable to move anymore. The reason Bargeld has no memory of his dance is because his conscious mind was not involved in the process. As he describes it, his body directed the entire dance.

The idea of circulation and everything running according to a cycle also appears in the philosophy informing Butoh dance. One understanding of Butoh is that the dance is based on the idea that

“The story of all those lives and deaths [of those who died for you to be here] is emanating from the temporary body of the dancer. The history of these lives and deaths is written inside you, in your DNA. And soon, that dancer's life and death will dance through someone else. Butoh dance [...] is an eternal recognition, [a] stepping forward.” (Ruhe)

The Butoh dancer carries inside him the burden of mankind in the basic building block of all living things, in his DNA. The Butoh dance helps express and release these stories of life, death, and sacrifice in a physical manner. The body itself is an expression, a product of the DNA, and thus only the body can serve to fully manifest these stories (Ruhe).

Comparatively Neubauten's music serves to manifest the band's urban environment, while the act on stage serves as a manifestation of each individual's uninhibited raw basic corporeal drive. Since the conscious mind does not dictate the performance as a script or a stage director would (Shryane, 85), the body and the senses instead are the elements that surrender to the performance. In *ZNS* Bargeld had proposed the idea that all individuals possess a corporeal drive, and the source of that drive is the nervous system. In the context of stage performance, this drive is expressed when the band submits to the body while they are on the stage, and the drive is what pushes them to the boundaries of their physical limits. As Bargeld had said, “This is the real Psycho-beat, the rhythm which is in us. Because it is the rhythm which is around us” (Maeck, 33). There is a mutual relationship between the inner drive of the nervous system and the performance; the body surrenders to the performance, which in turn drives the performance.

Due to the intensity of Neubauten's performance, it was not uncommon for the band members to occasionally physically injure themselves in such bouts of absolute corporal surrender. Bargeld insists that "Most of the time, it was the brutality with which we placed our concerts in the eighties, which led to things getting destroyed. It was never intended" (Dax, and Defcon, 82). Unruh agrees that physical destruction and damage occurred because things "[wore] out [and] our hands and joints suffered quite a bit too" (83) but that causing pain was never an intention. Pain was merely an occasional side effect of the performance, while the intention of the performance was to surrender to the inner physical momentum and push the body to a maximum degree of exertion and expression.

Occasionally, injury occurred due to the struggle between the environment and the performance. Sometimes elements in the environment did not withstand the force of the band's performance, resulting in damage to instruments, buildings, and the musicians themselves. One incident in Copenhagen in the late 80s illustrates this point very well. The "Kango hammer", an electric hammer drill, was a staple of Neubauten's live show during this time, and had been with Neubauten from the very beginning of their career after being used on the band's debut album *Kollaps*. It can be heard on the song *Steh' auf Berlin* as discussed in Chapter 1. Although the hammer was often used during concerts, this particular night, NU Unruh decided to use it on the walls of the squat house the band was playing in. This act was completely improvised and spur of the moment, and certainly not something that happened at every Neubauten show. By doing this, Unruh went from performing in a space to performing with a space and using that space as an instrument, as an element of the performance. In addition to the structure itself suffering physical damage,

the preconceived intention of the squatter space being used as a venue was destroyed and redesignated as an instrument for the duration of the performance.

Other times it was the performers that could not confront the environment without coming away with injuries. Bargeld recalls one incident in Münster in 1980 where he cut himself on a windowpane, resulting in a permanent scar on his hand:

“In a dramatic gesture I accidentally smashed straight through a window pane. We totally involved and lost ourselves on stage. We set loose powers, which didn’t always live up to the materials that surrounded us. And it was the same the other way round. Windowpanes broke, [...] things were destroyed in the heat of the moment. So we all, man and material, came away with wounds.” (Dax, and Defcon, 85)

This physicality was also present while recording in the studio. The song *Durstiges Tier* for example was recorded early in Neubauten’s career, in 1982, in West Berlin, and revolves around percussionist FM Einheit beating on Bargeld’s chest in a rhythmic fashion, while Bargeld emits a droning vocal whine. In this song it is no longer simply the personage of a band member who uses his muscles to produce sound on inanimate objects, but instead the body serves literally as an instrument, Although one might be familiar with the body being used as an instrument in the form of singing, it is still uncommon to come across an artist who will drum on his band mate while he is hooked up to contact microphones in order to

record a rhythm. By doing this, Bargeld lives up to his intention to use his whole person as “a test object, [...] [to] force people to keep redefining the boundaries of performance and music until there is nothing left that is not music” (Shryane, 92).

3.3 Taunting the Audience

In addition to improvising and surrendering to the body, Neubauten strove to “go out and floor [the audience] with pure presence, with physical noise [and] trancelike pressure through repetition” (Dax, and Defcon, 76), instead of satisfying the audience’s expectations by playing the songs they wanted to hear, and giving them the stage act that they had come to expect from previous reports of shows involving jackhammers and fire. According to bassist Alexander Hacke, they even went to the extent of being proud when they managed to empty a venue, because it meant that they had successfully ignored the audience (76).

Nonetheless, word spread about Neubauten’s powerful stage performance, the audience began to go to concerts with expectations; at one point in time, the band was using fire on the stage as an instrument, something that also started by coincidence, according to Blixa Bargeld (77). Former percussionist FM Einheit attributes this to Unruh’s “pyromaniac streak”, where he would bring out Molotov cocktails during the song *Abfackeln!* (*Burn it down!*) in an effort to “make the whole thing visual [and use the fire] as a dramatic interlude” (78). This became something that audiences expected to see when they came to see Einstürzende Neubauten. Bargeld realized this early on, and stopped it soon thereafter (82), once again breaking audience expectations.

Another way that the band teased the audience was with silence. The band explored the role of silence in music on their 2000 album *Silence is Sexy*, and demonstrated that silence could in fact be as effective as noise in a musical context. In the context of performance, FM Einheit remembers these moments as particularly important: “I understood these moments of silence, including the disturbed reaction of the audience to this silence, as music, just as much as other people think their guitar chords are music (80).” One particularly good example of the audience’s reaction to silence, and subsequent bursts of music is heard on the live recording of *Leid und Elend* from the *Strategien gegen Architektur II* album. At one point near the end of the song, the band falls silent, while the audience waits, unsure of what is to come. After a lengthy almost 20 second pause, the band returns with an unexpected loud crash, which is accompanied by a startled audience member who lets out a scream in surprise. The band repeats this once more shortly after, once again startling the audience, with the same audience member vocalizing her surprise with a scream, followed by a nervous laugh.

The band also attempted to deny the audience the satisfaction of enjoying the music, or expressing their enjoyment in the form of dance, because it wanted to tear down preconceived notions about rock music. More specifically, the band wanted to have the audience disconnect from their conscious expectations of the performance and the music and instead connect with a dominant impulse within, allowing that impulse to direct their reaction to the performance.

As percussionist FM Einheit explains:

“Anytime at a Neubauten performance that an improvisation evolved into some kind of music that you can dance to, we’d immediately stop the song. As soon as we noticed that people started dancing, we’d stop playing that groove, and do something else. It was a good way of making a statement.” (81)

Bassist Alexander Hacke further elaborates the reasoning behind the statement:

“Back then, anytime something rocked, that was fast and rhythmic, it was automatically understood as a reference to rock music. For us it was always important to avoid those rock elements. It was very important to Blixa, because he couldn’t stand rock music. That was always an important factor with the Neubauten: even if it became some kind of grooving danceable music, it wasn’t under any circumstances allowed to work within a rock schema and appeal to the same basic instincts as rock music does. [...] Those rock instincts are welcome, but not if they are caused by rock attitudes.” (82)

Hacke’s remarks here describe a conflict between the brain and body. The brain is presented as responsible for the audience’s conscious control of responses to the performance, as well as for their expectations of the performance and the music. Rather

than have an audience, which consciously observed the performance, the band tried to get the audience to find their inner “little cosmos” and allow it to freely interact with the “big cosmos”, the space and the performance within that space.

The rock attitudes that Hacke speaks of are the preconceived ideas of rock music that the audience knows and comes to expect. Instead, the band wanted the audience to connect to the music in the same fashion as the band was connected to their performance: not with their brain in a conscious fashion, but with their body in the form of surrender to the nervous system. By constantly disrupting the audience’s expectations, the band tried to force the audience to surrender to the improvised performance and abandon the expectations with which they had arrived. The audience had to become vulnerable in the same manner the band became vulnerable on stage. The band surrendered to their performance on stage and also wished that the audience similarly surrender to what they were experiencing.

Theatre critic Albert Bermel proposed that Artaud’s work “evinced a hatred for limitations, especially conventional ones” (6). In the *Theatre of Cruelty* Artaud proposed “the kind of theatre [which] would use the classics but only after subjecting them to a radical overhaul”. This overhaul would allow for a “theatre of possibilities in the absence of limitations” (Bermel, 6). Neubauten exhibited something similar with their stage performance, by taking an already established form, the rock concert, and presenting a new raw performance based on a free expression of sound and emotion, and one free from limitations, instead of the traditional rock music show. Bermel’s understanding of the role

of the actors in the Theatre of Cruelty was that “[the actors] would surrender themselves to a performance, live through it and feel it, rather than merely think about it” (7), something that Neubauten also attempted to do on stage, both with themselves and with their audience.

As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, Neubauten surrendered themselves to the performance as well, aiming to perform according to an inner drive in the central nervous system, which they saw as reaction to the sound that they were producing. In addition to doing this on the stage, they also attempted to have the audience surrender to the stage act. The entire scope of the modern stage would also play a part in the performance in a much more active manner. Bermel continues, and remarks that, in the *Theatre of Cruelty*, “lighting, sound equipment and other technical means would no longer subserve the text [but] would partially replace it. The noises, music and colours that generally accompany the lines would in places substitute for them” (7). The role of these technical means changed from passive to active in Artaud’s theatre, and Neubauten’s performance illustrated a similar shift. The music, noises (Bargeld’s scream included) and lights would all be used in an attempt to shock the audience and dispel their expectations for the show, while the text would continue to exist as an element of the performance, but not necessarily as the main point of interest.

With regards to the role of the text in Neubauten’s case, Bargeld’s texts in the early stages of the band’s career were often disjointed and rarely existed as coherent, linear texts. Many of Bargeld’s lyrics were written under the influence of various stimulants. The

band's stimulant of choice was speed, which would keep the band members awake for days on end until they exhausted themselves. As a result, much of what Bargeld wrote was based on a stream of consciousness rather than a structured text with an intended message.

Bargeld describes the use of speed in the creative process, and remembers it as being the way to "open the door to [his] subconscious". He found it interesting how the use of the drug, and the resulting exhaustion caused his thinking to dissolve, which in turn yielded results that he believes never would have otherwise surfaced (Dax, and Defcon, 52).

In a sense, many of the texts were written in the same way the music was performed on stage, that is, in a state of complete submission to the body, without the interference of conscious thinking and imposed structure. In addition to this, Bargeld often replaced the text with the scream and other vocal noises as a form of ultimate expression, which words could not fully express.

3.4 The Scream

*"Ich kam vom Schreien zum Singen" – Blixa Bargeld*¹

Artaud placed major emphasis on the role of the scream in the *Theatre of Cruelty*. What Artaud proposed was to "make the language convey what it does not normally convey, [...] to use it in a new, exceptional, unusual way, to give it its full, physical shock potential, to turn against language" (Artaud, 35). In addition to the noises, music and other

¹ Bargeld, *Stimme Frißt Feuer*, 110.

stage props (such as lights) which would substitute the text in Artaud's theatre of cruelty (Bermel, 7), human noises, such as screams, grunts, moans, sighs, and yelps, gestures and movement would be key elements in the performance. These expressions were meant to strengthen the performance, and "extend the range of the actor's art, and the receptivity of the spectator"(7).

From the very beginning, Bargeld was drawn to the guttural, raw sound of yelling and screaming with which he could express himself rather than complex use of language. In the same way the band had turned against conventional instruments and the conventional rock music performance, Bargeld had turned away from using language as a sole expression of emotion by incorporating the scream. Bargeld himself has said that he can scream for great lengths of time [because] he has trained screaming as a means of expression. In fact, to this day, Bargeld continues to employ the scream, which has become a characteristic of the band's sound both on stage and in the studio. University of New South Wales Media and Innovation professor Douglas Kahn has spent much of his career studying the use of all sorts of sounds in avant-garde and experimental music, and he has found that the scream is something that demands an urgent, empathetic response. The human ear is familiar with the scream as it is associated with things such as childbirth, life-threatening situations, pain, pleasure, anger and so on. Although the scream does not rely on language, we still interpret it in a certain manner, and a parent can still distinguish a child's playful joyous scream from a painful scream (345). Thus we are attuned to the scream in a particular way, in that it provokes a reaction in all of us. Within the context of Neubauten, the band's music has always aimed to redefine and challenge boundaries and

structures, and to evoke a reaction out of their audience. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, they attempted to have their audience abandon any conscious expectations, surrender to the performance, and provoke their bodies to react to what they were witnessing. With Bargeld's scream, the band was also attempting to evoke an urgent response from the audience, a response that came from the body.

In a musical context, the scream is very much like noise. In Chapter 1, I discussed the role of noise in the pop song and found that Neubauten members hailed from a place where "Noise is the melody of today" was a phrase often uttered (Dax, and Defcon, 18). This noise served partially as a means to annoy listeners (and neighbors) (19). However in the context of the band's music and performance, the band used noise in a musical setting to challenge the concept of the musical instrument, including the singing voice. An object was not chosen for the sound it produced, but for what it represented. There continues to be a complex relationship between music and noise, because noise is still often perceived as something unpleasant to the ear that does not belong in music. Paul Hegarty believes that while the idea of what noise is or what it should be changes throughout time, it is always accompanied by disruption or lack of order. His general theoretical conclusion is that noise is a form of resistance or opposing force. It is defined as "that which society rejects" (3). Thus by using noise, and the scream, the band disrupted the conventional pop music structure. The music of Neubauten can be considered the "opposing force", as it contains elements that are not accepted by conventional music listeners. Nonetheless, these elements provoke a reaction of the body. The listener will react to Bargeld's scream

because humans associate the scream with situations that require an urgent response (Kahn, 345).

Neubauten took scrap from their surroundings and began to use it in a musical fashion, effectively transforming those pieces of metal into instruments, as I discussed in depth in Chapter Two. The intention was to have listeners accept that object as an instrument and accept the noise it produced as another sound within a musical context, and not as something unpleasant or amusical. The band challenged the stage by often performing on the same level as the audience and surrendering to their bodies, pushing themselves to their furthest physical limits. This allowed the band to get an immediate physical reaction from the audience that stood directly in front of them, and according to NU Unruh, “gain respect [by acting] percussively towards the audience until [the audience] stopped interfering [with the performance]” when necessary (Dax, and Defcon, 77).

With the scream, Bargeld utilized an element that all human beings are familiar with, but placed it in an entirely new context, effectively “musicalizing” it in the same way the band had done with objects that traditionally would have been considered amusical. According to some theories, the scream comes from the deepest depth of the body and is purely corporeal. It exists as an uninhibited expression, and serves as an element that also pushes the body to the brink. The scream appeals to our most basic instincts. It requires no linguistic understanding, as proven by infants who can scream without any concept of spoken language and is nonetheless perceived by others as a physical expression of many emotions, including joy, pain, grief, and anguish.

Neubauten's performance relies on an absolute abandonment of cerebral inhibitions, which they intend to do by giving into what they consider the instinct drive within their bodies, for them the ZNS. This surrender is manifested by the body and the voice in the form of movement and dance, by the sound of the band's gathered instruments, and Bargeld's scream. The performance thus contains within it an immediacy that is not found in contemporary rock stage performances: there is no intermediate process between the stage and the performers. The stage becomes a battlefield where the musicians fight with the materials, and the materials fight with them. The musicians also reject the expectations of their spectators by turning away from them and instead follow the expectations of their bodies, relying on primitivism, emotion and instinct (Ruhe). Every element of the performance, from the noise to its raw brutal physicality challenges preconceived notions of what the conventional music and stage performance should be. Although Artaud had previously challenged the classical theatre stage in a similar fashion, Neubauten's stage show followed similar practices in a new way by applying them to the conventional rock music performance. Instead the band attempted to embrace the physical expression that came from within themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discuss the main concepts presented in this thesis and argue that the band's art is based on confrontation of form and convention, and destruction. The band questioned established pop music structures, challenged the conventional musical instrument, challenged the conventional rock concert and confronted the urban space they inhabited. The band also demonstrated a duality of destruction and conservation in their music. While they were destroying all of these pre-existing forms, they were also creating new structures, within which they conserved the unique social and political context of West Berlin.

4.1 A Question of Environment

In the first chapter, I discussed the city of West Berlin as an environment that affected the music of Einstürzende Neubauten. The political and social situation in West Berlin provided the unique circumstances for a distinctive youth culture to form. Einstürzende Neubauten's art was influenced by many factors, namely political and social movements, as well as interactions between the population and the authorities. Part of this can be attributed to the unique living situation of squatters, which inspired vocalist and lyricist Blixa Bargeld to write lyrics that reflected the interaction between squatters and social institutions. Other factors that affected West Berlin society also played a role in contributing to the band's unique style.

While Neubauten's musical style is arguably original and unconventional within a traditional rock music framework, they were far from being the first industrial band. The genre name originally came from the name of a record label, Industrial Records, set up by the group Throbbing Gristle in 1975 (Duguid, 1). The label went on to release music by bands like Cabaret Voltaire and SPK, bands considered pioneers of the genre to this day. The term was initially used to describe music that was a "negative comment on the desire for authenticity in music in the 70s". As the term became more popular in the 80s, it started to be associated with many different types of music (including jazz ensembles), which had anything to do with the original definition of the term. Once synthesizers had become more affordable to the general public, they became an essential part of rock and pop music in the 1980s (10), and the term was suddenly applied to this type of music; the term continues to be associated even today with synthesizer-heavy rock bands like Ministry or Nine Inch Nails.

Einstürzende Neubauten's music, especially during the early 1980s, moved far away from this tendency, and instead showed more in common with the music of the original "Industrial" groups. Neubauten shared with these bands their use of noise in music and an attraction to transgressive culture (1), instead of contemporary and popular trends. What made Neubauten different from Cabaret Voltaire, SPK, or Throbbing Gristle was the fact that, while these bands were also improvising and experimenting with performance, sound and noise (17), none of them were as interested in the urban environment that surrounded them as Neubauten was. Bargeld's initial interest in how much the unique environment

shaped the music and how elements from it could be used as an instrument (Teipel, 236) was one of the driving forces behind Neubauten's formation and subsequent creative path. While they may not have been the first to use amusical elements, or challenge pop music, they were the first to utilize their surroundings in such an explicit and direct manner.

Bargeld attributed his interest in the relationship between his music and the urban landscape to the lifestyle led by the band during the 80s (Dax, and Defcon, 128) and the environment in which they enjoyed this lifestyle. Bargeld recalled that "squat houses, sleeping on the floor, broken mailboxes, abandoned urban landscapes, junkyards and freeway bridges" made up the space that the band was familiar with (129). To further explore how this unique urban environment was reflected in the band's music, I analyzed songs from Neubauten's 1981 debut full-length *Kollaps*. I discovered that the album clearly demonstrates the act of Neubauten taking objects from the streets of Berlin (power tools, scrap metal, and a variety of other objects are clearly audible throughout the album) and using them to create an abrasive, noisy type of music. By doing this, the band challenged the idea that music is something enjoyable, by incorporating "unpleasant" noise (Hegarty, 3). *Kollaps* overall served as a manifestation of the chaos and disorder that the band experienced in Berlin at the time. This manifestation was expressed both musically by using found objects as instruments, as well as thematically in Bargeld's lyrics.

Something that made Neubauten's generation unique was that it was raised in a city surrounded by a wall where riots, demonstrations and evictions of squat houses were a regular occurrence, especially during the 1980s. Many of these demonstrations were

provoked by the forced eviction of squat houses for the purpose of redevelopment (Holm, and Kuhn, 645-46). Such events created a chaotic atmosphere in the city. In addition to this element of chaos, much of the youth felt fear caused by Cold War tensions and had little hope for the future. Despite the looming fear of the end, Neubauten was very much inspired by the city's tense chaotic mood. Percussionist FM Einheit captured the sounds of protesters drumming on overturned waste bins and steel police barricades, with the intention of capturing the chaos and the lingering tension in the air in those sounds (Dax, and Defcon, 180).

The rioting that inspired FM Einheit to create music that reflected social tensions was rooted in the youth's desire to distance itself from the student protest movement called the 68er movement (16). Neubauten's generation considered the 68ers to be their "class enemy" (16). In Germany specifically, the 68ers protested the government's lack of confrontation with the nation's Nazi past, criticized capitalism for being economically exploitative, and denounced the imperialist treatment of second and third world countries by the western world (16). Neubauten on the other hand distanced themselves from explicit political causes, and avoided situations where the band could be exploited in the interest of politics or a political party. Although the band was not explicitly supporting or protesting any particular political movement, they quickly found themselves to be associated with the squatter scene (16). Squatting turned out to be an important factor in Neubauten's world, not only because Neubauten members briefly took part in the squatting scene as squatters, but also because squatting was a reflection of the struggling West Berlin economy.

It is interesting then to consider that, although architecture plays such a major role in Neubauten's art, the creation of the band name was a spontaneous response to a gig offer. Bargeld had been asked to play a show at the Moon club on the 1st of April 1980, and had to provide the concert organizer with a band name on the spot. He decided on Einstürzende Neubauten, after which he contacted his friends NU Unruh, Gudrun Gut and Beate Bartel to quickly assemble a band (Dax, and Defcon, 43). As I discussed previously in Chapter 1, the name was quickly noticed, and politicized by both the media and squatters. For example, when the Berlin Kongresshalle collapsed, the media associated the band with the event, although essentially it was purely by chance that the band had such a fitting name (42), and the band had nothing to do with the collapse itself.

The band was attractive to squatters because their name spoke for the collapse of the Neubauten. Developers were evicting squatters out of prewar Altbauten buildings that squatters had renovated and restored (Katz, and Meyer, 33), and were demolishing these spaces to make room for new developments, Neubauten; The Neubauten were seen as a threat to the Altbauten. At the very beginning of the 80s, squatters were mainly fighting for the release of arrested squatters, the abolition of all police investigations and trials against them, and they wanted the state to lessen the severity of criminal charges being held against squatters (some were even being charged as terrorists because they had barricaded themselves inside buildings during evictions). They were also pushing for the establishment of an intermediary organization that would help them communicate with the state. By 1982 the squatters had in fact successfully established *Träger*, a "community

development corporation” which would serve to negotiate transfers of squats into the hands of the public, and work out things such as long-term lease agreements (33-34).

While the band was briefly involved in the squatting scene as squatters, they refused to be involved in the scene’s political agenda against developers, despite having a very fitting name. Bargeld himself has said that the band has a “political background as a conscious band” (Dax, and Defcon, 36), the band has refused to be politicized based on their name. Being exploited for a political reason was never the intent of Einstürzende Neubauten. Bargeld wanted Neubauten to first and foremost be a group that made music, and not a political tool (33). Their connection with squatting was more a result of the types of people with which they socialized, and a single performance at a squatter festival (36) rather than an explicitly political decision made by the band. Squatters and the media politicized the band’s name and tried to make the band seem more politically significant for their own interests rather than understand the band for what they were.

When it comes to Neubauten’s interest in architecture and history, they were specifically interested in how this space could be utilized in the context of music and performance, and how history is conserved in architecture. Although politics obviously play a role in history, Neubauten shied away from the political angle; they didn’t perform in historically significant places because of some underlying political ideology. On the contrary, the band performed in these places, as Bargeld put it, as a “form of total opposition” with the intent to “imbue the place with a new meaning” (Dax, and Defcon, 132) rather than to further support and advocate a certain political belief. When the band

played the Nuremberg Rally Grounds for example, they all but ignored the Nazi symbolism of the otherwise historically burdened location (133). It appears that while Bargeld's interest in the use of environment and architecture manifested itself in the decision to name the band Einstürzende Neubauten, the choice was not a political one. Nonetheless, they could not avoid being at least partially associated with politics, whether by the media, or the public.

The inclusion of a cover of French singer Serge Gainsbourg's international hit *Je t'aime...moi non plus* on *Kollaps* also served as a reflection of West Berlin's economy. The success of pop music exemplified by the widespread success of Gainsbourg's song, is driven by market forces, which were all but absent in the artificially driven economy of West Berlin. The small community of musicians in West Berlin could not rely on large music labels to discover and sell their music. Instead, they required individual, self-sustained distribution for music. In Neubauten's case, this taught the band how to take care of distribution themselves later on when the band's bassist Mark Chung founded publishing company Freibank and managed all of the band's finances and distribution himself.

Interestingly enough, despite there being little interest in the West Berlin scene from outside music labels during Neubauten's early career, by the mid 1980s, the band's music had been exported to England, marketed in Japan, and the city had become a marketable place that drew in musicians from outside of Germany. Berlin was suddenly being sold as a place with a style that contained elements of both hedonism and geopolitical tension (105). Despite music having become a commodity, Connell and Gibson

suggest that music always continues to exist in a cultural and social sphere, even when it is being manufactured and distributed for profit (9). Because of this, it always brings to mind representations of the identity, culture, and the place from which it originates (9). In the case of West Berlin, the musical scene was affected by the unique geopolitical circumstances of the city. These circumstances thus formed and shaped the scene in a particular way (15). I concluded that *Kollaps* was an expression of the band's reaction to the sociopolitical factors of the environment.

4.2 Space as an Instrument

Chapter 2 built on the previous chapter's argument by looking even closer at the physical architecture of Berlin, and the band's use of space. It then argued that since architectural terms are common in the band's lyrics, titles, and even their name, which means "collapsing/implosion of new buildings", architecture is thus an important element in the band's philosophy; Bargeld believes that architecture is a metaphor where lyrics and music exist as living spaces and topographies (Dax, and Defcon, 128).

In Chapter 2 I argued that even though West Berlin no longer exists on the map, West Berlin's unique space as it existed in the 1980s continues to exist in the music of Einstürzende Neubauten because West Berlin existed as part of the architecture and landscape created in the minds of Berlin natives Blixa Bargeld and NU Unruh from a young age. The band created music by utilizing their physical environment, and thus the physical space manifested itself in the music. When one listens to the early music of Einstürzende Neubauten, the landscape of the city manifests itself in the mind. Bargeld was familiar with

the Autobahn crawlspace since he was a young boy (Shryane, 5) where the band's first EP was recorded years later. All of these elements existed in the landscape of West Berlin, and neither Bargeld nor Unruh looked for them with a preconceived intention, but rather they discovered them by chance and ended up utilizing them in the band's music.

Architecture has also had a large role in the texts written by Bargeld. The band has even released a set of 4 compilation albums titled *Strategien gegen Architektur I/II/III/IV*, or *Strategies against Architecture*. The band continuously challenges architecture with their music, whether it be the physical architecture of a building or site during a performance, or the architecture of a social structure. Within this context, Neubauten reveals its destructive streak. Architecture ceases to exist in its original form when challenged by Einstürzende Neubauten, because its original intention as shelter is destroyed, and the space is given the new function of an instrument. For example, the Schöneberg water tower in which the band recorded *Wasserturm* on *Zeichnungen des Patienten OT* was no longer just a water tower the moment the members of Einstürzende Neubauten recorded inside it, but once they left, the water tower regained its status as a water tower, and the existence of its space as an instrument and a performance space had been preserved on the *Zeichnungen des Patienten OT* album.

In addition to the literal use of architecture, the symbolic use of architecture and structure also appears in Bargeld's lyrics and Neubauten's musical constructions. Both social hierarchy and the classical verse-chorus-verse structure of a song can be interpreted

in the form of architecture. On *Kollaps* Neubauten showed their disdain for the traditional pop music format by challenging the traditional music instrument with steel beams and other various objects; they created an album that was supposed to be “unlistenable” (Dax, and Defcon, 70). Neubauten moved away from the pop music format, and “destroyed structures”, that are considered very important to pop music (70). The entire *Kollaps* album contains little melody, and instead presents the listener with noisy clatter and repetitive droning. In their art, the band re-defined the structure of pop music and re-defined the function of the objects that they used as instruments, as well as the places in which they recorded.

This challenging of structure is also present in Bargeld’s lyrics. His use of the structure of a multi-storied building in the form of lyrical verses served as a critique of the structure of classical social hierarchy in the song *Haus der Lüge (House of Lies)*. The song questions the entire idea of class structure, and calls for the rebuilding of contemporary society without needing an architect, who as it later turns out in Bargeld’s *Haus der Lüge* has killed himself, no longer being able to look at what he had built. This reflected the band’s general attitude of going against the grain, whether that is against pre-conceived notions about music, or about the objects that were now instruments.

The music, lyrics, and performance of the band all contain a thread of destruction; they destroy the original intentions of objects and spaces by using them in new ways, restructure, and effectively destroy, the structure of the pop song and question the structure of society. Cambridge scholar Jennifer Shryane found that the band’s early work celebrated the decay and the greyness of West Berlin (Shryane, 78). Much of this was the

result of Bargeld being inspired by the work of German philosopher Walter Benjamin, and more specifically Benjamin's *Destructive Character*. Although Benjamin's text was originally written about his banker friend in jest (Raaijmakers, 6), I was interested in Bargeld's interpretation and application of Benjamin's *Destructive Character* text to the band's philosophy and performance. Theorist and performance artist Dick Raaijmakers has analyzed the destructive character, and has argued that the character is one that is not interested in construction or constructive energy, but simply destruction (15) which I argue paints the destructive character as a negative figure. It appears that Bargeld's understanding of the text is slightly different, as he does in fact take into consideration the constructive trait that the destructive character possesses. The destructive character makes room; within the context of Neubauten's music for example, by not conforming to, and subsequently destroying old pop music frameworks, the band "made room" so to speak, room which they could now use in a constructive manner to substitute the old framework with their own.

Raaijmakers also argues that the destructive character is one that aims at destroying valuable things in our immediate environment (16) and the culture within these things. The character, in his opinion, is not suitable for this, as only "we [...] the owners, possessors and guardians of our things" are allowed to do so (16). My concern with this argument is the idea that the destructive character is only destroying culture, and exists as a separate entity from this culture. Neubauten may have challenged and destroyed previously established structures of music and performance, but they did so within their own environment. After all, contemporary rock concerts and pop music both continue to exist

today around the world, despite Neubauten challenging the form of both and continuing to do so at their own performances. Neubauten may have destroyed a previously conceived notion of music or performance within their sphere, but by doing so, they also introduced a new kind of performance and a new approach to music, which has since become part of culture and that particular cultural sphere, and has gone on to influence other musicians and artists. Destruction was seen as something positive by the band, as something that was necessary to make space within that culture for something new.

In "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*" Benjamin proposed that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element; its presence in time and space, and its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (105). Neubauten performances marked their place in time and space and in the unique place where they were being held. Each Neubauten performance differed from the previous and individually marked its place in time and became a part of the performance space. Neubauten succeeded in maintaining their art's presence in time and space by actively involving the space in the performance. The space became a part of the performance, and the performance was preserved in the space by means of preservation. They also did this by always using their found instruments. To this day Neubauten continue to use all of their instruments in the studio and on stage, despite modern sampling technology, which could effectively reproduce all of those sounds without needing the instruments there. Based on this, the presence in time and space that Benjamin speaks of is preserved when Neubauten uses their instruments. This exemplifies the duality of destruction and preservation expressed in Neubauten's performance.

This concept of duality was also demonstrated in the spaces that Neubauten used in their performances. The actions performed in a building throughout history become a part of the physical architecture of that building. By doing this, they destroy the original intention, but also contribute to the building's history. I argued that that Neubauten were confronted by the past in the war-damaged architecture and geopolitically isolated environment of West Berlin, and I drew a parallel between the band's approach to history, and that of Benjamin in his text *The Angel of History*. Benjamin's Angel of History represents the burden of history (18) where history exists as ruin. Rather than being a structured, ordered linear sequence of events, instead it exists as a sort of single "pile" of catastrophic events (Benjamin, and Osborne, 87). The angel faces the future with its back, while the past collects as rubble at its feet. Neubauten's approach to the future was similar, due to a lack of hope for the future, thus also facing the future with their back instead of looking towards it. They were confronted by the past in their surroundings. Although the column was originally supposed to serve as a reminder of Prussian military victories, over time, the column acquired more historical significance, and lost its original intention due to the events that subsequently transpired. To a contemporary beholder, the column carries the burden of Berlin's history since the time it was built. NU Unruh's bass spring also preserved its entire history within it in a similar fashion. First its initial function was destroyed, but then it acquired a new function, which contains a history, and that history is preserved for as long as that spring continues to be used as an instrument.

In conclusion Neubauten's 2004 performance at Berlin's Palast der Republik brought together the music of Neubauten, architecture, and the politics and history of Germany. The performance not only deconstructed the traditional rock concert (Shryane, 113), but confronted Germany's past, in a historically significant location which was in the process of being taken apart. The building that had served as the seat of the East German parliament was now being used by a band, whose name translated to "Collapsing new buildings" that happened to be playing a concert called *Grundstück* (a property or piece of land). As Chapter 2 argued, the performance served as a materialization of Neubauten's philosophy. The band played on the same level as the audience, instead of adapting the typical concert scenario where the stage is above the audience, and involved the audience in the performance (Dax, and Defcon, 274). The concert was also a physical manifestation of the principle of using surroundings as an instrument: the band was playing in the former GDR parliament building, while the building was being deconstructed to make room for a new structure. The band served as an opposition to the ideas of the GDR by performing in that space. The band took advantage of the fact that the building was stripped to its foundations and the toxic asbestos had been removed, and literally played the building as an instrument. They amplified pillars, beams, handrails, and other elements of architecture and incorporated them into the performance. The Palast der Republik concert was a culmination of all of the elements that make up Neubauten's philosophy, music, and performance.

4.3 Challenging the Stage

In addition to challenging the structure of music, the definition of the instrument with found objects, the function of urban space and architecture, Neubauten also destroyed the classical structure of the rock music stage act. What the band did instead was replace the contemporary rock music concert with an improvisational performance. In Chapter 3, I proposed that, as French playwright Antonin Artaud challenged the classical theatre with his *Theatre of Cruelty*, Neubauten challenged the rock music concert format with a stage performance that was based on physical brutality and emotional intensity. While Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* proposed a "kind of theatre [which] would use the classics but only after subjecting them to a radical overhaul" (Bermel, 6), Neubauten took the contemporary rock concert, and presented a raw performance based on a free expression of sound and emotion. To further explore Neubauten's stage performance, I focused on the band's performances during the 1980s when they were in their most raw, visceral state. In referring to the band's 1985 performance film *Halber Mensch* I found the group's stage act to contain many elements of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, the breaking down of pre-existing structures (both physical and mental) is a common element found in all aspects of Neubauten's music. After all the band proclaimed itself the ultimate threat to architecture in the artwork of 1987 album *Fünf auf der nach oben offenen Richterskala* where they placed themselves at the top of a modified Richter scale, as discussed in the section of Chapter 2 titled *From Places to Words: Strategies Against Architecture*. The band strove to

challenge and question every aspect of their environment, whether it was by digging through a junkyard for instruments on the evening of a performance, or by using various locations in West Berlin as a recording space.

With their revolutionary stage act, the band was again breaking down a pre-existing form of concert and replacing it with a theatrical performance. This performance allowed the musicians to unite in a raw physical act and gave each member the opportunity to “remove his armour” (Dax, and Defcon, 80) and express the raw desire of the body instead, without the interference of the mind. Artaud proposed something similar in the *Theatre of Cruelty* where the actors must “surrender themselves to a performance, [and] live through it and feel it, rather than merely think about it” (Bermel, 7). Here, the conscious mind does not lead the performance, but rather surrenders to the body. Neubauten’s performance was based on a desertion of cerebral inhibitions, and instead required that the band give into the nervous system. This surrender was manifested by various elements exhibited on stage.

One way that the band expressed surrender on stage was with movement and dance. This movement functioned as a “physical interaction of the musicians with their site and their instruments” (Shryane, 89). The movement also shared common traits with a Japanese avant-garde style of dance called Butoh. I compared the two performances and found that both Butoh and Neubauten are products of a damaged environment. Neubauten came from West Berlin, a damaged urban environment, while Butoh rose out of the ashes of

Second World War Japan. The essence of the dance is “crisis and growth”, where the dancer has to “look inside to find reason to move” (Ruhe). Butoh and Neubauten’s performance both shared the common trait of requiring the performer to succumb to the performance, and let go of inhibitions of the mind. Butoh requires that the performer works to his fullest [physical] limit (Schechner, and Ohno, 168) and allow the body to lead the way, something Bargeld has demonstrated where he has “[screamed] until everything went black” (Dax, and Defcon, 108), due to extreme physical exertion during the performance. In the *Halber Mensch* film, the band performed a Butoh dance to the song *ZNS*, which stands for “zentrales Nervensystem” or “central nervous system”. Following my analysis of the lyrics to *ZNS*, I proposed that Bargeld’s text suggests that we all possess an inner drive, and that the source of that drive is the nervous system. The performances of Neubauten attempted to exploit this idea in affecting the audience by refusing to fulfill their preconceived expectations and instead trying to have them connect with the performance with their bodies instead of their minds.

This type of performance also occasionally caused the band to damage things in the performance space, but it is important to understand that such damage was not planned, but merely an effect of the performance. Sometimes the environment was unable to resist the force of the band’s performance, which resulted in damage. In Chapter 3 I provided the “Kango hammer” incident as an example of this where NU Unruh used the electric hammer drill on the walls of the squat house the band was playing in, in a spur of the moment improvisation. Although this arguably caused physical damage to the building itself, this event also once again demonstrated Neubauten re-working the rock concert structure. It

also demonstrated the band using actively a space as an instrument as a performance element in the show. The duality of destruction and preservation is again visible here: the preconceived intention of the squatter space being used just as a venue was destroyed. It had instead become an instrument during the performance.

In addition to surrendering to the performance themselves, the band also tried to deny the audience the satisfaction of enjoying the music. What the band wanted instead was to have the audience abandon their expectations for the performance and the music, and surrender to the performance with their body, not their mind. The band tried to do this by disrupting the audience's expectations. They did not wish to satisfy the audience by playing favourite songs and giving the performance fans had come to expect from them. They wanted instead to "floor [the audience] with pure presence, with physical noise [and] trancelike pressure through repetition" (Dax, and Defcon, 76). The band teased the audience with silence, and would immediately begin to play something different the minute they realized that their audience was dancing (81). They did this because the audience's reaction was understood as a reference to contemporary rock music, and the band did not want to appeal to the same instincts as rock music (82). In the same way Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* took classical theatre and "subjected [it] to a radical overhaul" (Bermel, 6), Neubauten took the rock concert, and subjected it to a performance based on a free expression of sound, emotion, and body.

The scream also became an important element in the band's music, both on and off stage. The scream was also a prominent element in Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, as it could

“make the language convey what it does not normally convey, [...] to use it in a new, exceptional, unusual way, to give it its full, physical shock potential, to turn against language” (Artaud, 35). Bargeld often replaced text with the scream and vocal sounds as a form of ultimate expression. Neubauten’s use of the scream exploits ideas supported by some research that the scream is something that appeals to our most basic instincts. It requires no linguistic understanding, and nonetheless we understand it as the expression of a variety of feelings and emotions. By using the scream, Bargeld used something we are all familiar with but placed it in an entirely new musical context.

In the end, the stage becomes a place where the musicians fight with their instruments, their audience, and the space surrounding them, and those elements resist the performance with little success. Every element of the performance challenges preconceived notions of what music and stage performance should be. Einstürzende Neubauten’s performance challenged and destroyed the previously established framework of a rock concert, and instead utilized the physical drive of the musicians as the ultimate expression. It relies on an abandonment of conscious inhibitions and instead requires all participants to surrender to the body, to the ZNS.

4.4 Final Remarks

In this thesis I have attempted to illustrate the many different elements that Einstürzende Neubauten took from the unique urban environment of West Berlin, which gave them their incomparable style and sound. I have found that environment has played a significant role in pushing the band in the direction of an uninhibited, improvised art which

questions the many pieces of the puzzle that make up contemporary rock and pop music. Neubauten have demonstrated a duality of destruction of pre-existing ideas, and a conservation of the context within which that destruction had happened. They gathered objects off of the streets of West Berlin, and redefined the function of those objects by using them as instruments. They took objects that were not conventional musical instruments, and made them into musical instruments. They incorporated noise, an amusical element, into a musical context, and they took something unlistenable and made it listenable. They made music by utilizing the urban environment as a source of sound, and as a performance space. Thus the environment of West Berlin and the history of those spaces and objects continue to live on in Neubauten's music. And while the band never wanted to be used as a political tool and resisted being associated with politics, their music nonetheless still expresses the influence of politics on West Berlin to some degree, simply due to the fact that politics cannot be completely disregarded within any social sphere. To this day *Kollaps* still reflects the unique socio-economic and political context in which West Berlin existed, despite the fact that the city itself no longer exists.

The band destroyed the original intentions of objects and spaces by using them in new ways, and they restructured the framework of the pop song, and destroyed the old framework as a result. They questioned the structure of society, and they challenged the architecture of the landscape, as well as of the mind. In this, they reflected characteristics of Benjamin's Destructive Character; they destroyed with the intention to make room, to get rid of these established structures and frameworks, whether those structures were physical structures, or musical structures. Neubauten destroyed to free themselves from an

existing foundation and allow for an uninhibited freedom of expression. They challenged the rock music concert with a revolutionary stage show that expressed physical brutality and intense emotion. The performance relied on freedom of expression in the form of sound, voice, and movement. In their early works, they reflected the apocalyptic mindset and the rebellious stance of the youth. They refused to conform to pre-existing structures and expectations of society, and instead created their own. Although many years have passed, the unique social and political atmosphere of West Berlin continues to manifest itself in Neubauten's music.

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