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MY BERLIN FOR YOUR BROOKLYN

Written by Stephanie Schroeder October 30, 2013



To me it has always felt like the two cities are ^{SEP}connected by a subway line.^{SEP} Alexander Hacke, aka Dr. Hacke, Einstürzende Neubauten

An experienced home exchanger with six apartment swaps under my belt, I was in no position, in the winter of 2009-2010, to travel abroad. So, when someone from Berlin inquired about an apartment swap, I sent back a modest proposal.

I offered my apartment as the New York City-based accommodation for the inquiring Berliner and her partner while the designated traveler would be my friend Marion, a writer, web designer, and translator.

This was my very special gift for Marion's 50th birthday. She had enough airline miles to cover her plane ticket and an abiding desire to visit Berlin. My plan would involve me staying at my relatively new girlfriend's place in Bushwick with her and her roommate. No big deal since I spent a great deal of time there anyhow.

The potential exchanger accepted my proposal!

In December of 2009, I let Danielle and her partner Alexander into my large L-shaped studio in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. They were weighed down with various musical instruments in addition to their suitcases. Warm and friendly, but tired from their long journey, an 11-hour bus trip from Canada, the two Berliners invited me to their performance scheduled for the next evening at the Issues Project Room. Ah, I had known the founder of that venue in a different life. So...we had mutual acquaintances.

I had to decline their offer due to a previous engagement. But, we arranged to meet for coffee within the week. I handed them two sets of keys and bid them adieu.

Marion had flown out a few nights before. She wrote frequently. And so, over the course of the three-week exchange, through the very detailed emails Marion sent to me, I came to find out that my guests were not just any Berliners, but the darlings of the experimental music and arts scene.

Alexander Hacke needs no introduction to Berliners. But, for New Yorkers who do not inhabit the international avant-garde world, **Dr. Hacke**, the name he used to perform under, was primarily known as a longstanding member of the influential German industrial group **Einstürzende Neubauten**. **Danielle Del Picciotto**, my swap correspondent and Hacke's wife and artistic partner, is originally from the US. An artist, musician, writer, and filmmaker, she is also significant figure in the Berlin, and international, experimental art, music, and literary scenes.

The home exchange site with a free annual membership that provided me with inquiries from all over the world yielded me a glancing acquaintance with Del Picciotto and Hacke.

We haven't kept in very close contact, but I did correspond with the two recently.

Stephanie Schroeder: Will you tell us about your latest projects, both individually and as an artistic team?

Alexander: I just returned from playing a few European shows with Chicago based sound-artist J.R. Robinson for his drone/black metal project *Wrekmeister Harmonies*, I am writing and producing the score for **Fatih Akin's** new international feature length movie here in Hamburg and **Einstürzende Neubauten** have been commissioned to compose a piece in memory of World War I, which will be first performed in Diksmuide, Belgium in November 2014, exactly 100 years after the infamous battle there and in February an album of **The**

Unsemble will be released on Ipecac, an instrumental project I started last year with guitarist Duane Denison of Tomahawk and formerly of **The Jesus Lizard** and the drummer **Brian Kozur** in Nashville, TN, which is our take on “Electric Chamber-music.”

Danielle did the great artwork for the cover.

Danielle: I am currently finishing a film documentary on the NYC artist Lary 7 on which I have been working for the last seven years – I hope to release the film in 2014. Besides having toured with **Crime & The City Solution** in spring and preparing drawings for a couple of exhibitions in Berlin and Hamburg I also prepared a multimedia reading performance for my new book **We are Gypsies Now** with which I have been touring since February, Alexander accompanying my visuals and reading with music.

In September Alexander and I started preparing a theater piece for Dortmund, Germany, which consisted in composing music together with **Paul Wallfisch** of **Botanica** and **Mick Harvey** of the **Bad Seeds**. It will be an adaptation of Grimms fairy tales with the Anne Sexton text version which is very inspiring..

Stephanie: You're constantly on the go, where are your travels currently taking you?

Alexander: New York City, Hamburg, Detroit, Torino, the Yucatan, Austria and Australia...

Danielle: We gave up our home in Berlin 2010, deciding to become nomads because of a general restlessness and dissatisfaction with the gentrification of Germany. We go where our commissions lead us and have travelled Australia, the US and Europe non-stop within the last three years.

Stephanie: How have your personal and professional worlds expanded in the past several years as you have grown in stature as multi-genre artists with many and complex, multi-layered projects?

Danielle: Ever since we became nomads our creative output has increased incredibly. We have met so many inspiring people and projects in the last three years that we are pretty much booked out until 2015. Being on the road has tremendous impact on every part of our lives – we have become very aware of what we are really interested in and do not spend time procrastinating. This can be quite exhausting but for the time being it is very rewarding. Because of this tight schedule we also live very healthily, we have become vegan, meditate a lot and hardly drink alcohol. Sounds tough but constant traveling is not doable otherwise and with all the eccentric people we meet we still have a lot of fun non-the-less.

Stephanie: Do you have a favorite artistic medium in which to work? How does this manifest?

Danielle: I am an interdisciplinary artist and every medium I work in is as important as the others. Just like I need all of my organs to function as a body.

Alexander: I work with sound. That is my livelihood, how I make a living. I am a musician, a composer, a singer. I produce music and sometimes I even deejay.

These are my means of expression, my tools. This is what I do very well and the field where I

know exactly what I am doing.

You could say that this is how I communicate with God.

Everything else I might do, I do for my personal entertainment, or because somebody deems it interesting to have me do something different and also happens to be able to pay me for it.

Stephanie: What is your Berlin-New York connection? How does each city figure into your personal milieu and artistic vision?

Alexander: To me it has always felt like the two cities are connected by a subway line.

Danielle: I am from NYC originally. It is my heartfelt home. I moved to Berlin in 1987 and I have loved the city ever since. I guess its like with divorced parents –you never stop moving back and forth to always stay in touch. Both are inspiring in their separate ways, both have a lot of similarities as well in their overflowing creativity.

Stephanie: Are you still doing apartment swaps, or do you have other ways to secure housing as traveling artists?

Danielle: We gave up our house and became nomads so house swapping is no longer possible but we stay over at friends places, book “air-bnb” rooms or take care of pets when we are not booked into hotels.

Stephanie: How do you support your arts projects financially? This is an ongoing professional curiosity and artistic interrogation of mine as a writer in the U.S. where there is almost no support whatsoever for the arts on any level. How do you manage to support your work, travel, etc.?

Danielle: To survive as an artist, the main factor seems to be working non-stop. That seems to be the common factor for everybody I know, who survives in our tough economical times. I do not mean jobs on the side. I mean jobs in our specific sphere. A lot of compromises need to be made – sometimes I work for a lot less than my work is worth, sometimes a lot more than expected but to be able to go into depth and to keep your career rolling there is not a moment of relaxation for the free lancing artist. The competition never sleeps...

We have never received financial support from any grant but have been invited to do a couple of residencies, which were great. Besides that we also are very inventive about creating jobs – making people want something we have to offer. That is very important – seducing an audience into loving what you do.

Stephanie: Any additional comments, ideas or concepts you'd like to contribute?

Danielle: Another thing I learned as a nomad is that the communities that have a strong support and understanding of each other are the strongest. The more we are aware of the people around us and take their dreams and hopes just as seriously as our own – the healthier and happier we are. Artists cannot survive without a circle of strong supporters so the more we support each other the more chances of succeeding we have.

To find out more about **Danielle Del Picciotto** and **Alexander Hacke**, visit their websites:
www.danielledepicciotto.com and www.hacke.org.

If you are interested in swapping your apartment in NYC with somebody in Berlin, these are free-to-sign-up home exchange sites:

<http://swapartment.com>

<http://casaversa.com>

<http://www.upforswap.com>