

Pantha du Prince – “The Triad”

The triad promises to help us shed the straitjacket of binary oppositions, of digital zeroes and ones, of rigid antinomies. Tertium datur: on his new album “The Triad,” Hendrik Weber a.k.a. Pantha du Prince breaks out of the dispensation of carefully calculated either-or choices, opening his work to the unpredictable serendipity of social and technological interaction in more than one way. He collaborated with Joachim Schütz, Stephan Abry, Scott Mou, Bendik Hovik Kjeldsberg, Kassian Troyer, and Thilo Kuhn, working in a different constellation of three musicians for each track. Rather than monopolizing control over the project like so many producers and DJs, Weber allowed himself to rely on improvisation and empathy and embraced an inevitably time-consuming production process. He shut down the ego machine by reorganizing the setting of musical creativity. Drafts for several tracks in hand, he and his collaborators withdrew to the southwest German countryside to flesh out his sketches in the studio operated by the band collective Metabolismus. He explicitly encouraged states of instability and challenging questions to make new forms possible. The results also dismantle the entrenched distinction between technology and nature in favor of something like what John Tresh, in his book *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon*, has called “mechanical romanticism.” Weber read the book during the recording phase and thought it captured his own perceptions and approach to music-making. Obsessively tinkering with the details, the musicians probed the quasi-magical potential of the “charismatic technologies” (Tresh) at their disposal; among their equipment were several legendary analog synthesizers from the 1970s. The delicately balanced human-technological ensemble has engendered a rich yet fine-grained and opulently multidimensional sound. Like the social process, the old machines have had a decelerating effect; moods and energy fields gradually emerge and often do not come into their own as hooks or compact atmospheric elements until the end of a track – the skill with which the musicians perform such transformations recalls Arthur Russell’s work. In many songs, and not just the programmatic “You what? Euphoria!”, the exploration of musical byways builds up to a boundless elation. The gesture of excess is flanked by rousing bass lines, hymnlike voices, and, where appropriate, bells—ever since his project “The Bell Laboratory,” this heavenly signifier has been especially dear to Weber’s ear. Strikingly, the music, though it solicits an infinitely acute attention,

rewards the casual listener as well. Its acoustic abundance is meant to welcome, not intimidate.

And then “The Triad” always also lets us hear the outside world and those others: migrant masks, different voices, dazzling natural impressions, alternative forms of life. So when Hendrik Weber’s own voice is featured on four tracks, that does not make it the original sound of a commanding lead singer. It is a tool among others, an element in a techno-organic process, and turns out to be a “romantic machine” in its own right. Weber had previously explored the question of how social experiments can change the self during an extended residency at Villa Aurora in Los Angeles. Traveling the West Coast in search of the traces of historic alternative communities, he encountered physical manifestations of utopian visions that inspired him even in their present ruined state, prompting reflections on how autarkic structures are possible, in music as elsewhere. To put it with all due solemnity: with “The Triad,” the “mechanical romantic” has brought back the sound of such real utopias. Pantha du Prince shows us the way to artificial paradises. And if we go astray and become lost in the fog: so much the better.

Aram Lintzel, February 2016