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DARMSTADT SCHOOLS: DARMSTADT AS A PLURAL PHENOMENON

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We are all, more or less consciously, parricidal children of Darmstadt

Helmut Lachenmann (1987)

I

The notion of the Darmstadt School lies at the very heart of any conception of what the Darmstadt New Music courses were, how they functioned and what their purpose was. Arguably, the notion is important, too, in understanding what the Darmstadt New Music Courses still *are*, even now, a half-century on from the original coining of the term itself.

Descriptions of Darmstadt are often expressed through one of two stories, each of which expresses a particular view of what one might understand under this umbrella category of the 'Darmstadt School'. The first, largely an Anglo-American model, proposes that a group of young composers gathered at Darmstadt and created the most rigidly deterministic music ever known, basing their thinking on mathematical, rather than musical, considerations. The second story is predominantly a Germano-Italian one. When the story is told this way there is no dispute that the composers in question did go to Darmstadt, but it is claimed that the appearance of unity amongst them is unconvincing and that approaches to serialism are dominated more by dispute and disagreement than by unanimity of purpose. No doubt there is some level of irony in the results of this bi-location. The Anglo-American position, which promotes a strong, unified Darmstadt – in short a Darmstadt of clear and obvious 'traditional' historical importance – simultaneously constructs the Darmstadt School as some sort of fatal other: a serial bogeyman, the sort of thing right-minded composers might scare their students with at bedtime. The Germano-Italian position, evidently more favourable to the endeavours undertaken at the Darmstadt courses, weakens the power and authority of Darmstadt as an institution, relying on the individual histories of particular people (who are certainly no longer what history might once have termed 'great men'), while simultaneously providing a seemingly richer, more densely-layered account. It is worth adding, too, that the Anglo-American account ostensibly focuses almost exclusively on the period between 1951 and 1958 (or perhaps, at latest, 1961), while the Germano-Italian account tends to emphasize the importance of events prior to 1951 and after 1961, in addition to the period between these dates. Unquestionably, these decisions have played a part in how Darmstadt has been constructed by both parties, but my intention here is neither to criticize, nor even simply critique, such positions. To oversimplify only a little, if the Anglo-American explanation is essentially a modernist, authoritarian view of history, then the Germano-Italian description, even if informed

to a large extent by Marxist and post-Marxist theory, is to a great extent a post-modernist, fragmented view of it. Thus in each case, the object of the critique is arguably being examined with the same tools that are being criticized in the object itself.

Doubtless, too, there are many more versions of the story than this,[1] but these are the tales that have, to date, been told by those who have shouted loudest in the musicological world. Before going on to propose an alternative model, therefore, I intend to offer a brief précis of the dominant musicological positions and their relationship with various constructed versions of the Darmstadt School. Neither of these stories really describes what Darmstadt was 'about', insofar as it was ever really 'about' anything. Or, more accurately, the two stories explain only a fragment of what Darmstadt constituted and what was constituted in Darmstadt. In conclusion, therefore, I plan to draw these threads together, to explain the need to examine why composers at Darmstadt would have found utility in the bundle of ideologies which ultimately became gathered together in the expression, 'Darmstadt School', and, rather more importantly, to demonstrate the balance that is present between such conceptions – which are just as disjunctive as the Germano-Italian model argues – and the small-scale belief that a 'Darmstadt School' of some fashion did exist, as the Anglo-American model would have it.

Expressed in simpler terms, the notion of the school makes it too easy to infer a singularity at the heart of the serial 'project'. Yet, doubtless, there were points where such a union was expressed. The dislocations between perceptions of generalized concordance and the actuality of compositional work are skimmed over. What is missing from both stories is an engagement with the seemingly superfluous, very small-scale relations – and, vitally, friendships – between the composers engaged in the ongoing discourse which formed ideas of Darmstadt. An examination of these apparent superfluities, the 'non-musical', will allow us better to understand the ways in which Darmstadt, when viewed from certain angles, gives the impression of being Brigitte Schiffer's 'Citadel of the Avant-Garde' and, when examined from a different perspective, enables Christopher Fox to describe events there as little more than mythological and mythologized.[2] The construct I will ultimately develop argues that the Darmstadt School, so far as that concept is a helpful one, might be better conceived as being plural, which is to say, instead, as Darmstadt Schools.

II

I have, rather unfairly, selected Joseph Kerman as a spokesperson for Anglo-American musicology. While Kerman is certainly representative of the trends I will outline, any number of standard undergraduate-level textbooks would have served the purpose perfectly well, as would

[1] The most obvious other stories would probably be the differing ways in which Darmstadt might be viewed from Eastern Europe and from the Far East, stories which both have clear and important pertinence to any genuinely rich comprehension of the Darmstadt phenomenon but which are for the most part marginalized to date in descriptions of the events of Darmstadt and the New Music Courses which took place there.

[2] Brigitte Schiffer (1969), 'Darmstadt, Citadel of the Avantgarde', *The World of Music* 11, no. 3, pp. 32–43; Christopher Fox (1998), 'Darmstadt and the modernist myth', a paper given at the conference 'Neue Musik in Darmstadt und ihre Rezeption in Musikwissenschaft und Musikpädogogik', Musikwissenschaftlisches Institut, Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz, 27 March 1998. Many aspects of this later essay appeared in a revised form in Christopher Fox, 'Darmstadt and the Institutionalisation of Modernism', *Other Darmstadts*, eds. Paul Attinello, Christopher Fox, Martin Iddon (Abingdon: Routledge: 2007), pp. 115–23.

selections drawn from, say, the writings of Susan McClary, Roger Scruton or Richard Taruskin. Since this is to some degree always going to involve crude generalization and, perforce, ignore more multi-faceted contributions from, amongst others, Amy C. Beal, Morag Grant and Christopher Shultis, Kerman is admirably fit for purpose, particularly given that my specific example is drawn from Kerman's *Contemplating Music*. This was the book which set the stage for the radical rethinking of Anglo-American musicology in the late 1980s and 90s – ultimately termed, rather unfortunately, the 'New Musicology'.[3] In the introduction to *Contemplating Music*, Kerman states:

> By 1950, young Europe's discovery of Schoenberg and Webern, Debussy and Messiaen was already an old story; Darmstadt and Donaueschingen were established forces and the Paris Conservatoire the unlikely site of Messiaen's revolutionary analysis classes. The earliest studios for electronically generated music were in the advanced stages of construction. And the theorizing was well under way. Messiaen and Eimert had published full-scale treatises, and smaller but more fervid writings by Boulez and Stockhausen were beginning to appear. *Die Reihe* started publication in 1955, by which the first important compositions of Boulez and Stockhausen, Barraqué, Xenakis, Pousseur, Ligeti, Berio, Maderna, and Nono had all been heard and were beginning to make their impact.[4]

I don't intend to dwell here on the more obvious inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Kerman's position, despite the fact that, in a volume the sole point of which was to argue against positivism in musicology, practically every sentence contains a significant historical error.[5] The cumulative result of these errors encourages the reader toward a totalized view of European composition. Yet what is more important to focus on here is Kerman's implicit understanding about 'European composition', which could admittedly be signified here just as well through the words 'Donaueschingen', 'Paris' or '*die Reihe*' rather than 'Darmstadt.' To some extent, this is arguably the point. First, such a(n Anglo-American) conception of 'European composition' in the years after 1945 largely appears to regard events as (relatively) unified and uniform. For Kerman it is possible to speak of Stockhausen and Barraqué, or indeed Pousseur and Xenakis, in one breath, even though it is perfectly clear that from a musical and ideological point of view the distance between the parts of each pairing is really rather large.

As becomes immediately clear in Kerman's original text, this leads to the second point: the linkage is really one made by word-association, as well what appears to be a slightly curious linguistic pride. The word-association is that of the word 'serialism'. In short, because Babbitt (whose English-language writings the Anglo-Americans could read easily, without having to wait for the, sometimes rather poor, translations of *Die Reihe*) was writing 'total serialism' and the Darmstadt composers were writing 'total serialism', it had to be the same thing they were doing, surely? Even though Kerman *is* aware that there was a vital difference between East-coast, WASP-y American music theory and what was on show at Darmstadt in the 1950s, he tacitly still accepts the correlation, and is willing to enter into the ongoing tit-for-tat clash between Europe and America when he offers a pointed reminder that

[3] In passing, it is certainly worth noting that, just as is the case with regard to Darmstadt and its 'School', 'New Musicologies' might be a rather more apposite term.

[4] Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 20–21.

[5] To observe only the most obvious: by 1955, Ligeti had not yet departed Hungary for the West. His compositional work, as it might be understood in the frame of post-war Western Europe musical modernism, had by then not even begun, let alone made an impact.

> Milton Babbitt conceived of and composed the first piece of music with durations serialized as well as pitches in 1947, actually a little ahead of Messiaen's independent effort along similar lines.[6]

The purpose of this examination is hardly to critique Kerman, however; rather, I am aiming to demonstrate some of the musico-historical consequences of the constructions he develops. In order to do so, I turn to the (broadly speaking) opposite point of view. For this purpose (and again doubtless being rather unfair to Kerman), I intend to use two examples, Hermann Danuser and Antonio Trudu. Doubly unfair because not only are there two of them, but they're also Darmstadt scholars speaking from within the discourse, as it were. Perhaps it will ultimately be enlightening, though, that their positions are not necessarily much more useful than Kerman's – or, rather more accurately, that without elements of Kerman's thought being added to them they fail to explain what might really be meant by the expression 'Darmstadt School'.

Hermann Danuser proposes two separate ways in which one might view the notion of a Darmstadt School,[7] and examines the way in which such a notion might have become constructed. At a very basic level, Danuser observes that there are linguistic difficulties between the original German nomenclature and the manner in which both English- and French-speakers would refer to the Ferienkurse. The English translation of Ferienkurse, rather than being 'vacation courses' has, for the most part, been 'summer *schools*', a term which has rather more currency in English, though evidently hugely misleading; it leads one to regard Darmstadt as what Beal terms 'a summer camp'.[8] In France, Messiaen referred to an 'école de Darmstadt'.[9] It is Danuser's contention that Messiaen's description can contain a double meaning in French: both to go to school at Darmstadt, or alternatively to *make* a school in Darmstadt. This double-meaning is perhaps more important than Danuser intended it to be, since it explains, in one language at least, how Darmstadt can be simultaneously perceived as having two separate and entirely distinct functions.

It is from this premise that Danuser suggests the first of his two reconstructed 'school' narratives: the notion of schools within the school. This notion appears superficially plausible. Most of the composers in Nono's conception of the Darmstadt School had pupils who would not only be in attendance at Darmstadt but would also, in later years, hold significant sway within the Ferienkurse. Danuser, however, is not convinced by this 'collegiate' manner of viewing any Darmstadt school. He observes that in fact only Stockhausen ever really reached a stage at which one might consider his following a school, as a result of the position of institutional dominance which Stockhausen achieved between 1966 and 1974, after Boulez's departure for Bayreuth, most especially in the collective compositions *Ensemble* and *Musik für ein Haus* in 1967 and 1968 respectively.

The argument by which Danuser constructs his second 'school' narrative follows three separate strands. In the first place he contends

[6] Kerman 1985, p. 21.

[7] Gianmario Borio and Hermann Danuser (eds.), *Im Zenit der Moderne: die internationalen Ferienkurse für neue Musik Darmstadt 1946–1966*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Rombach, 1997), pp. 333–380.

[8] Amy C. Beal, *Patronage and Reception History of American Experimental Music in West Germany, 1945–1986* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999), p. 82.

[9] Borio and Danuser 1997, p. 346.

that, even during periods of individual dominance, there was always a sufficient degree of 'other' material on display at Darmstadt to make it impossible for followers of Nono, Stockhausen or Boulez to be considered a dominant 'school'. Second, he feels that there is too much disparity between the individual compositions even of such small groupings, even by the middle of the 1950s, to justify terming a small clique a 'school'. Finally, he claims that Darmstadt was always already divided into at least three separate periods within these first few years, and that for it to be possible to posit the notion of a school in any traditional sense a greater degree of continuity would be necessary.[10] Instead of this Danuser suggests a 'dynamic' conception of 'school' in the case of Darmstadt. In many ways this is a formalizing of the types of thought already expressed, and is suggestive of a complex Venn diagram, shifting rapidly, with few static moments. In essence Danuser's 'dynamism' claims that, within the highly charged atmosphere of only a small number of weeks, great influence *can* be achieved in moving compositional styles together, or apart. Miniature schools may appear within this framework from time to time and may just as quickly disband. Danuser also wisely appears to note the vital influence of human interaction as being potentially far more important in this regard than similarity of compositional style or ideology.

Danuser's scaffolding is certainly useful and close in outlook to what I shall propose in conclusion. Yet, it lacks one fundamental point. It fails to deal with the actuality of the power that the expression 'Darmstadt School' acquired. The linguistic confusion of 'Ferienkurse' and 'Summer School' is hardly sufficient on its own to explain the dislocation between the Anglo-American and Germano-Italian positions and, in a conception which allows us to comprehend Darmstadt accurately, these positions must be mediated between.

Trudu's standpoint is certainly initially extremely wide-ranging, if rather diffuse. The conclusion to Trudu's *La 'scuola' di Darmstadt* reads through the history of Darmstadt multiple times, on each occasion promoting a different stratification of the history.[11] His first reading suggests that Darmstadt's history might be divided up according to its directors: 1946–1961 for Wolfgang Steinecke, 1962–1980 for Ernst Thomas and 1982–1990 for Friedrich Hommel. Another reading posits divisions at 1948 and 1958, symbolically the moment at which Darmstadt first became an international institution and the point of the introduction of American experimentalism as a genuine force at Darmstadt.[12] Further

[10] Danuser places divisions at 1946, 1953 and 1975. 1946 and 1958 are obvious in their significance – the founding of the courses and Cage's visit respectively – 1953 presumably refers to the 'Webern evening', considered by many scholars to be a greatly significant moment (Borio and Danuser 1997, p. 354). Clearly the list of breaks of continuity is potentially almost limitless. 1951's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*, or the 'Wunderkonzert' in 1952 (where works by Maderna, Nono, Stockhausen and Boulez were all programmed on the same bill, though Boulez's *Structures* Book I in fact never materialized) could easily be substituted for 1953.

As a subsidiary point, though Danuser does not mention it, it is worth considering what sort of number of acolytes of any particular compositional position it would be necessary for a single composer to attract before it would be possible to recognize a genuinely independent stylistic camp within the institutional frame. Though arguably such a critical mass never existed during the 'golden age' of Darmstadt in the 1950s, potentially Stockhausen, again, reached this level of dominance in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the culture of Darmstadt in the 1980s was largely dominated by rather more clearly defined stylistic tribes.

[11] Antonio Trudu, *La 'scuola' di Darmstadt: I Ferienkurse dal 1946 a oggi* (Milan: Unicopli, 1992), pp. 303–318.

[12] 1958 is, of course, the point at which John Cage reached Darmstadt in person. Trudu is shrewd enough to complicate this by mentioning that Stefan Wolpe's visit in 1956 would be an alternative date for the introduction of a strand of American experimentalism at Darmstadt, though the furore surrounding Cage's 1958 arrival, to my mind at least, suggests that Trudu's selection of 1958 is one which creates a stronger (or more plausible) narrative.

versions are delineated according to who the leading members of the composition, or for that matter performance, faculty were, or with reference to important performances or presentations. Trudu makes it perfectly, and usefully, clear that there are not necessarily any obvious or rational linkages to be made between all these possible sectionalizations.

Trudu therefore certainly provides an example of exactly the sort of multiplicitous reading of Darmstadt for which I am calling, but in one sense it fails to go far enough and, in a second, it fails to comprehend the two aspects of the 'Darmstadt School' that are most vital here: first, why did the idea arise and take hold? Second, what use can actually be made of its historical existence? In short, Trudu fails to provide a framework that encompasses all of the possible models he suggests and, since they are all valid and accurate ways of modelling the history of the Darmstadt School, it is disappointing that Trudu does not complete the task. Trudu's model ultimately concludes that the Darmstadt School is merely a myth, following the Germano-Italian reading, in some ways, of the Anglo-American perception. Yet, in order to understand the Darmstadt phenomenon it is necessary, instead, to combine theories that argue that the Darmstadt School existed and those that claim that it never did. How can these seemingly inflexible positions be reconciled?

III

To bring the two stances together, in a way that is useful for understanding how the idea of the Darmstadt School can remain both historically viable and important, a first consideration would be to adapt aspects of these perspectives into a cogent framework. First, Trudu's implicit position – that the Darmstadt School cannot be considered in the singular, or as a workable notion at all, because there were other periods of Darmstadt than the one in which the idea of the Darmstadt School seemingly has the most potency – must ultimately be reconsidered. Of course, Trudu is right that the Darmstadt School, and Darmstadt itself, was different things at different times and, to some extent, in different places, to different people. Yet the distinction is not an absolute one. Because the meaning of Darmstadt was different for all the people involved in it, it does not follow that their perception was an absolutely different one. It is vitally important in reconstructing even a pluralist Darmstadt School, or set of Schools, that it be accepted that, within this collection of disparate projects, there were centres around which other things revolved. These centres are in certain respects the Darmstadt Schools of my title.

Yet this does not solve the problem of how to define these centres, how they came into being, how they dissolved and, vitally, how they are distinct from Danuser's Venn diagram shifting across time. It is in making this distinction that it becomes possible to understand why the Anglo-American position is capable of comprehending the Darmstadt School as a singular mass. To do this, what I believe are the real foundations of Darmstadt must be considered. These foundations are, surprisingly perhaps even today, neither compositional nor even strictly musical at all. The true foundations of Darmstadt are surely small-scale individual friendships: Nono and Maderna, Stockhausen and Goeyvaerts. These two friendships above all else defined the first moments of what has been considered the Darmstadt style. If one were to consider Darmstadt, across its history, not as Danuser's Venn diagram, nor as Kerman's mass, but rather as a sequence of linkages – akin to lines of flights – between individuals, of varying weightings

and meanings (friendships, teachers, students, most prominently and importantly), tightly-packed bundles of linkages in some places and more diffuse relationships in others would be discovered, which do change across time. The most compressed of these interwoven nexuses, it can be no surprise, is formed around the 'Darmstadt School', specifically the members of Nono's original conception of it: Stockhausen, Nono, Boulez and Maderna. They are, in a very real sense, the 'best-connected' members of the new music scene at Darmstadt.

Vitally for the historiography of music after World War II, the idea of a 'new music community' is ultimately erroneous. The conception outlined above suggests that the reality is what a political economist might prefer to term a new music *network*, and one which one can choose to view from multiple perspectives as well as time frames, rather like constellations of stars. From far away only the very central conglomerations would be visible, only the best-connected could be seen. No surprise, then, that from the macroscopic American perspective, the Darmstadt School looks singular. Very close to, all that can be seen are small-scale individual relationships. It is possible to observe only the individual projects, agglomerations which lead to only a dim awareness that they make up a whole, invisible from this vantage point. Hardly surprising either, then, that the Germano-Italian position, with a microscopic view, claims that Darmstadt was utterly diffuse. The middle-ground is the important area, mediating between the two. Here, the Darmstadt new music network is visible almost in full. Nexuses are gathered round certain figures: the Darmstadt Schools that each of these constellations represents. The ways in which each of these Darmstadt Schools is linked together with each of the others, too, becomes clear. To understand the Darmstadt School(s) it is necessary to accept a multiplicity of perspective: it is simultaneously one network and several schools.

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