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LOVE AND APPROPRIATION

Donal Sarsfield

It is now six weeks since I stepped between the train and the platform at Frankfurt am Hain, rushing to catch the slightly delayed 17:34 train to Darmstadt Hauptbahnhof. I'm not sure why I was rushing – the first concert was not until 20:00, so I had plenty of time. My right foot fell through, and the front of my leg hit the step of the train quite hard. I thought it would bleed, but it didn't. It just turned to a very hard bruise (haematoma I was later told). You couldn't really see the raised bump with the eye, it wasn't sore, but if you ran your hand over my leg you could feel it. I had booked my train from Liverpool specifically so I could see Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Vortex Temporum* once more. I had seen it at Sadler's Wells and had been pleased, but was lucky enough to see Rosas performing *Work/Travail/Arbeid* as an installation at the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. There, it was a revelation. Whether it was the space, the extra forces, or just the freedom to walk away, I was entranced. Best of all it was free. She was there herself, making comments, keeping an eye on things.

After the ceremonial opening speeches and delayed start, and given the stifling heat within the Darmstadium, ICTUS could be forgiven for not sustaining perfect breath control through the opening arpeggios. The first movement is played, the musicians leave, the dancers enter in suspended synchronicity with the music we just heard. We have just heard the music: now we see the dancers. The musicians return: the piano spins around the space, the dancers move in circles, curves, curved, curving. . . .

How simple, the movement of the musicians: front – middle – rear.

Two things struck me about the performance: the first is that the dancers, from what I remember, never touch each other. They huddle closely, but there is no embrace. As anybody familiar with her work knows, de Keersmaeker considers everything, from the specific shadows of the lights and the sneakers of *Fase*, to the spatial development, hand movements and costumes in *Drumming*. We can see all this, at various points, if we look as hard as she does, but usually we are lucky to experience a piece once. If we have time, and the opportunity, we can go back and see more.

The other point that struck me was during the piano solo in the first movement. There was a point, somewhere after rehearsal number 68, when the pianist's left hand crosses over his right hand and smacks the top of the keyboard like he was smacking a thieving hand. I loved the force, motion and *precision* of this movement across three staves. At ♩ = 150 that's .4 seconds to *bound* five octaves, from bottom to top. I wondered whether this gesture was dictated in the preface page, or unwritten in the performance practice that has developed around the piece. Or whether it is just in the music, itself, and Jean-Luc Plouvier performed it this way, or whether de Keersmaeker

asked him to accentuate the motion. Looking at the score, it would seem to be the most efficient way to perform those gestures, as the right hand sits in the middle.

Name the dog

I attended the Darmstadt summer courses to be part of the writers' workshop, one of the 11 projects which run throughout the Ferienkurse. Subconsciously I knew I was coming to say something but I did not know what I was going to say before I came. On the first day Anne Hilde Neset gave us some advice – we were told to 'name the dog' – if a dog has to cross the street, don't waste the opportunity to describe what type of dog it is. She also introduced the concept of the standfirst – that opening short summary of what you are about to read. The everyday abstract. A hook at the end of the fishing line, that might entice the time-strapped reader to bite. Gotcha.

HOTEL

I stayed in the hotel: not the hotel I stayed at in 2012, but the other Maritim hotel. €38 B&B and the chance to share a room with a total stranger. Not unreasonable. Since everybody is always at everything, this only means sharing a sleeping space. On the first night the window was left open; when the freight train passed at great speed it was quickly closed. In Germany a lot of goods are transported by rail. The other Maritim hotel is closer to the station, but this hotel was closer to the tracks. I remember spending a lot of time at the hotel bar last time, because it was a centre for drink and discussion (=gossip), and because it was literally on the way to bed. Here very few people went to the hotel bar.

However, breakfast was terrific! I had small discussions with people I knew, but mostly breakfast was for solitude, for reading photocopied NYROB reviews, or short stories – things to keep me grounded: 'What swimming person, provided he is not about to drown, can help being in excellent spirits?'[1]

FELDMAN = SORROW

I sat at the end of the bleachers of the Gymnasium, at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning, for the performance of Feldman's *String Quartet No. 1*. Even with the wall for support for my back I must admit it took me about 15 minutes to settle into the piece. I was there, but I wasn't listening to the Arditti Quartet. But there was an hour when I was there. I did not make it to the end of the piece, and I'm not sure Feldman did either. But he finished the piece, or rather the piece did end! Not every piece knows how to end, or maybe not every composer wants to land. We can all drop from the sky, but there is a knack to landing as gracefully and efficiently as a robin or a swan. Who knows? In the front far right of the audience, there was a score follower. On either side of him sat what I could only presume were his two sons. They looked about 11 or 12. I could never imagine my father taking me to Feldman.

[1] Robert Walser, *The Assistant*, translated by Susan Bernofsky (New York: New Directions, c. 2007), p. 32.

Avoid feedback loops

In the workshop Anne Hilde offered some more advice: avoid feedback loops – comparisons with previous festivals are not useful. Last year the Nadar Ensemble presented a multimedia open-air event in the main square attended by thousands of people (people always referred to the previous Darmstadt as 'last year', as if 2015 didn't happen) but comparisons with this year's opening concert were not valid. You can't have multimedia hot air balloons, or *Atlas Eclipticalis*, or *Vortex Temporum* every year.

Most of the discussion in the writing workshop was about the debacle of the awarding of the prize at the Music Theatre concert the day before. The rest of the discussion in class centred on Stefan Prins's *Piano Hero*, the complete cycle. I had seen the first movement in 2012 at Darmstadt, and somehow by making it a cycle, there was both more *and* less in equal parts. The piece is in three distinct parts, of, or relating to, the piano. But this is not a piano, *ce n'est pas un piano*. Prins calls *Piano Hero* 'an immersive cycle for midi-keyboard, grand piano, live-cameras, video and live-electronics' (which includes multiple MAX/MSP patches, a multi loudspeaker array, and a soundtrack of field recordings).

In the first movement the piano is seen and heard, but not there. The pianist triggers samples of a piano frame being struck with hands and hammers, and we see these audio visuals spliced into shape by the sampler. The second movement introduces an actual piano, which dialogues with the sampler in between buzzes, sometimes beautifully even at the same pitch. This continues a theme of surveillance and we are not quite sure if what we are seeing is what we are really seeing, through the quarter-screen live-video projections. The third movement dispenses with the video, and focuses instead on the piano as a resonator: not a resonator for the hammers on the strings, like all the music from those composers from the nineteenth century, but as a resonator for the subwoofer underneath the sounding board, which causes the objects placed on top of the strings to vibrate, producing many wondrous sounds. The process is complicated, but beautiful. The light shone brightly into the lid, reflecting onto the soundboard, but not on to the loudspeaker underneath. The third movement is much longer than the other two sections, and somehow seems longer than it needs to be. At some point I heard the sound of a pneumatic drill in the soundtrack, which *sounded* exactly like the sound produced by the speaker resonating the objects on the strings, with the foot on the sustain pedal. It was there, and not there.

This was not the only upturned subwoofer with speaker case removed in the festival. Ashley Fure's *The Force of Things* also featured (amongst other things) multiple upturned subwoofers with their speaker cases dismissed.[2] At first glance there would seem to be little in common between the two composers other than that they both studied at Harvard.

[2] *The Force of Things. An Opera for Objects* was billed as concert-installation, 'drawing from traditions of object theatre and puppetry', combining 'live and electroacoustic music, architectural design, and theatre'.

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Ruler, setsquare, compass

On the third day of the writers' workshop we meet our German colleagues – we shuffle into the adjacent classroom, and everybody can speak a little English. Some speak excellent English, as their second or even third language. I feel appalled that my German can barely extend to pronouncing Hefeweizen correctly.

We briefly introduce ourselves to ourselves, and rush off to the first Rückspiegel. On the way out I notice that their classroom also has a ruler/setsquare/compass on the wall. It turns out all the classrooms in the Lichtenbergshule have these ruler/setsquare/compass contraptions on their walls.

Rückspiegel

Ulrich Mosch conceived of the lecture/concert series as an interactive analysis of seven works. In German the word Rückspiegel means rear-view mirror; we glance backwards, but while driving forward. When I was learning to drive I was told by my driving instructor that I should check my mirrors every seven seconds. Mosch provided the context, some analysis, and a performance of the work followed; theory in performance. The pieces were chosen not as representatives of their decade (1946 was the starting point), but for the aesthetic topics they raised.[3] The aesthetic topics were representative – adjudication at a side step! *Piano Hero #3* was only performed yesterday, but already as Mosch reminded us, it was in the past, history.

Monday Was an Important Day

Monday was an important day at Darmstadt. It was important because nothing happened. Nothing that hadn't happened before. Nothing that won't happen again, tomorrow, or the day after. *Everything stayed the same*.

Two invited composers gave lectures about their music: one spoke of breathing as an independent and fully materialised musical element within a composition; the other showed a picture of Tolstoy ploughing in his field. One spoke of exploring a universe of grey between black and white, all in between; the other about notation in the renaissance, and how time is experienced through listening.

All in between.

Both played examples of their music from a computer, through loudspeakers, to give the audience an idea of what they have composed. The loudspeakers were all around us. We listened, but we could not see.

Love and empathy.

In one lecture the sound of children playing outside was heard. We could not see the children, but we all heard them. The door was closed, and then the composer informed us that we had disconnected ourselves from the external world and we were in the new music world.

This is not new.

After the lectures I observed a group lesson. Some younger composers offered up their scores for comment to another invited

[3] Serialism, Aleatoric music, 'New Simplicity', complexity, dealing with live electronics and live image transformation.

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composer. We listened to the pieces and he registered some general thoughts and impressions. He was positive, polite, but critical in what he said, and sometimes left a gap, maybe five seconds, between one comment and the next. The pauses seemed pure; considered. Something caused him to mention the snare drum roll in *For Frank O'Hara*, and to say that it always surprised him, still, every time he heard the piece. When one student said they were afraid of being boring he offered some advice which I wrote down:

'Don't be afraid of being boring'.

An ensemble of four men got together in a gymnasium to perform a piece for a different kind of sport. A sport of the intellect, or an exercise for the imagination. Hundreds of people sat in chairs, facing forward. Bows were used, some instruments were involved, a man spoke into a microphone, the people left. The effort to interpret the sounds from the score was enormous. This particular piece had been played many times before and this exact ensemble of instruments was well known. Many composers have written thousands of works for this combination. The music was complex; everything moved so quickly I could barely register the layers of sound, but one passage in the second movement struck me. I was glad that I experienced it. I left wanting to hear more.

The quality lies in the thing itself.

Later there was an event at a space in the Centralstation. There was a queue to get in because the piece was new, and so nobody had seen or heard it before. It was exciting. We sat in the centre on mats, facing in all directions. The production was extravagant.

Enormous sheets of crumpled paper surrounded us, the lights behind the paper changed gradually, a drum beat slowly, the sheets of paper shimmered, and two women started to breathe in and out, slowly, through megaphones. Then a fast reiterative sound caused the loudspeakers to pulsate fantastically. We could all see the loudspeakers. Some other instruments were heard, but we could not see them. They did not play often, only now and then. Together, the instruments and loudspeakers made many beautiful sounds, which at times reminded me of the sound of a small, distant, helicopter. The sound also reminded me of my washing machine.

At one point three translucent silicone shawls were raised, slowly, above the loudspeakers. This was new. I had never seen anything like this before.

About half way through the piece three male percussionists came towards us. Bows were used, but instead of instruments they each stood in front of an object: a polystyrene sphere, at eye level, cut in half, intersecting so one sphere faced alternated with the other. Lying tensed on top of the polystyrene sphere was a very long string, which clasped the object to a metal pole. They extracted an enormous range of sounds from the object. I could hear lots of detail. I could see the effort. The force of the bowing grew and grew until all three percussionists were bouncing their bows, unisono. Beauty from process. It was a moment of wild chaos.

Later in the piece I imagined I heard the sound of Park Street Station in Boston, where the red line meets the green line. But that memory was just for me. I could see that it was not the sound of the trams squeaking at Park Street Station in Boston. What I thought was the sound of trams squeaking their way into and out of the six tracks at Park Street Station in Boston was in fact a complex combination of instruments and sound projected through loudspeakers in a large space in Germany.

The reiterations returned. The silicone shawls were wound down and three women came towards us singing urgently at the top of their voices. But now it was the man breathing, slowly, through the megaphone.

On my way out I saw what caused the paper sheets to shake; it was a pair of loudspeakers. They had been removed from their cases and were lying facing upwards. Some wires were attached it the cones, and these wires extended upwards to the back of the paper. I thought this was wonderful. I also saw some hairpins on the back of the paper. It was not immediately clear what they were doing there, but I enjoyed the fact that behind such complexity there is usually a simple object, doing nothing but what it was designed to do: in this case, holding something in place. Out of sight.

I wondered. What had I seen?

I keep wondering why we had heard what we heard, and why did we see what we saw?

I wondered is a sound more beautiful if it is produced by design, or by accident?

. . .

In the final concert of the day four pieces for percussion were performed by two percussionists.

The first piece featured many long metal rods. Holding one metal rod vertically the percussionist loosened his grip which caused the rod to bounce off the stage. The percussionist tightened his grip on the rebound. On. Off. On. Off. Sound. Silence. Sound. Silence. It sounded metallic, but we could all see the rods; we could all hear the density. The effort to perform the piece from memory must have been great. Some rods were treated vertically, but most of the rods were horizontal, and he attacked them in a variety of ways. Vertical and horizontal. The percussionist in the middle was standing in front of a metal frame which reminded me immediately of the cages in a painting by Francis Bacon. Those cages which are there, and not there. It had that look about it.

The second piece incorporated some video. Some people laughed because what they saw and what they heard played a joke upon each other. It was not a simple joke; it was a musical joke for the eye and for the ear. The room was full of people who love music and so some people found it funny. Some people did not. In a room full of people somebody will always laugh at a joke. I do not know any other joke which requires a vibraphone and a percussionist, but why not?

The third piece featured a number of Pauken, some of which had different types of what looked like Chinese bowls positioned on top. The timpani behaved not like the timpani in a Sibelius symphony, but more as resonators, amplifying the vibrations which passed from the bow, through the bowls, into the shell. Nonetheless they were timpani. Again, the effort from the performer was great, pedalling and bowing at the same time. Although the venue was full of loudspeakers, the timpani were not amplified.

It had been a long day. I was enjoying the piece, but I was fighting the urge to leave the concert. A woman behind me stooped to roll a cigarette on her knee, very slowly, and I was distracted from what was happening on stage by the slow creasing and folding of cigarette paper. I looked at her a number of times, but she did not notice. She was oblivious. My attention went back to the piece.

I left the concert before the final piece and had a beer with some friends, chatting not about the world, but about the music. A pianist

came and joined our conversation. I asked him about a piece of contemporary music which he had been playing a lot over the past few years: he said, for him, it was now like Beethoven. He found something in it every time he performed it. This was the first time I had heard somebody mention Beethoven, but it was only the fourth day of the music festival.

I did not see Beethoven.

Attack the future

For Tuesday's writing workshop Anne Hilde organised a press conference with the director of the festival, Thomas Schäfer. He answered questions we had, from the strategy of programming, social engagement and audience development, the concept for the Rückspiegel, gender relations in Darmstadt, and an overemphasis on questioning our relationship with new technologies. At the end Anne Hilde also asked some questions:

> AHN: . . . With the contemporary music scene being as messy and confusing as it is (laughs), with boundaries in all different directions and genres melding, and, ahhm . . . a lot of electronics being used, contemporary music may be coming from different, ahh, where is the, bleeds into what is improvised music, I'm thinking about things like maybe the Wandelweiser collective, or the reductionist scene in Japan, ahh, Tagasuki Molto?, that kind of thing, where- where do you, somehow, do you draw a kind of boundary as to what, because it's ahm . . . how, how do you kind of define that, ahh, that Darmstadt scene, when there's so much kind of goes on that bleeds into other areas, and music . . . ?
>
> TS: Yeah, I mean if, you, if you're not able to define the core, you don't know where the boundary is. See? So, I mean, I wouldn't, I wouldn't say, ahm, this is really, this is the core of the new music scene. I wouldn't say that, and I'm not really interested in that, so I'm more interested in the boundaries, I would say, and see, what other . . . I mean for example, um, Distractfold present this, umm, piece by Michael Pisaro, nobody would expect this here in Darmstadt, some years ago. And so – I mean, I could tell lots of examples, but I'm interested in that, you know? It might, it might – people might say 'wow, this is really eclectic what you are doing here, putting all stuff from all boun- from all different fields together', but I think this is, umm, this is much more interesting for me than, ermm, than you know, doing, doing this, just Darmstadt, um . . . music. But I can't say what it is, it's, it's, I'm always reading about it, but . . .
>
> Monika Zyla: Darmstadt School?
>
> TS: Yeah. Yeah, Darmstadt School.

That both titles SHOUT at us is something else

It is hard to know how we deal with being alive today, as a person, as a composer. When so much of our lives are mediated by technology that can find us almost everything – and almost nothing – as quickly as possible how, can we respond through old technologies?

It's funny how some works can be dated very specifically by internal evidence, their methods or material of construction, while others would have to be carbon dated to provide an accurate indication of their date of birth.

I found Czernowin's *HIDDEN* frustrating; the material was not trying to seduce, it was just there; a universe of measured. stasis. all in between. Grey. Dry would be too rich an adjective; 'desiccated' perhaps, shards of filtered sounds, occasional droning. Yet by seeing the Arditti Quartet we could see how little they perform, but how much there is still for us to hear. There was a purposeful inequality between seeing and hearing. If ever a piece was the embodiment of its title, this

was it. Whatever was hidden, remained hidden, at least upon first contact. It takes a mad sort of bravery to hide things so publicly. It was for me the most frustrating piece of the festival; there were moments, but it is now so long since those moments happened that I can't remember what they were.

"Frustration is one of the great things in art; satisfaction is nothing".[4]

Walshe's *EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT*, for voice, string quartet, video and tape was a high point of the first week. It marked a change in the tone of the festival. Many musical colours and moods were present before sharply cutting to another. I remember a death-metally bit, some quadrille reimagined from space, and one point where Irvine Arditti seemed displeased to be bowing fast repetitive arpeggios from top to bottom. The video was stunning. It cut rapidly between a redundant nuclear bunker with multiple wall-mounted telephones in Limerick; close-ups of iodine tablets distributed by the Irish Government in 2002 to spare the population a day or two more of nuclear living, solar storms, fingers pointing to the sky, the words DISASTER PORN, blue-screen shots of Tony Conrad and Walshe wired together bowing wires in skin-tight neon outfits, advice for anti-surveillance make up demonstration. It was an overload, but there was an equality between what we saw and what we heard – whether that was Walshe's Issey Miyake dress or the last minute repositioning of the CAPITAL LETTERS TEXT in the video from the centre to the TOP OF THE SCREEN so it was legible in the shoebox shaped Orangerie, or the shitty *sounding*/sonically compromised techno, or Sarkissjan's crappy megaphone, or Walshe's microscopic ear for reproducing exactly the correct intonation and inflection of three exclamation points, '*Hey Ladies!!!*', or hipster apathy: '*yeahhhh*, oooh *yeahhhh* . . .'. Walshe is her own recorder. Towards the end of the piece she walked from stage left to stage right and vogued to some techno, while Lucas Fels put down his cello and got up to dance. Fels did his best, but we all dance better in the dark.

No other piece (that I saw) at the festival energised the audience quite like *EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT*. It reflected the overload of the society in which the work was created. *HIDDEN* reflected something that the composer wanted to say, but that may remain hidden for all but the composer. That the Arditti Quartet would programme both pieces, side by side, is a great thing.

. . .

"Short textures – no variation or development – isolated fragments – unmotivated outbursts . . . toomuchness".

Ulrich Mosch, on Ferneyhough's *String Quartet No. 3*

GRID[5]

A number of different artists were invited to respond to the wealth of material in the IMD archive.[6] As part of her work in the IMD archive Ashley Fure considered what wasn't in the archive. A useful unlooking. The numbers are shameful, but not surprising. There have been

[4] Philip Guston, *"Faith, Hope and Impossibility"*, in *Philip Guston Retrospective* (London: Thames Hudson), 2003, p. 95.

[5] Later during the Ferienkurse, people were labelled with a GRID sticker/symbol. One might wonder how a gay man would feel being labelled 'GRID', given its earlier usage in the 1980s.

[6] A number of artists responded to the archive, resulting in four sound and video installations, discussion panels like the GRID talk, and even a CD of six archival recordings remixed by artists.

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14 summer courses where not a single female composer was programmed, the last in 1982. As of 2014, participant rates are above 40 per cent; if the goal is 50 per cent then that is a 'good', or at least a 'better'. Programming however 'needs much improvement'. From the pure analysis of how things have gone, which can be an indication of where things will go, it will take decades to reach parity for programming.

At one point during the festival my friend showed me an app on his phone which had a gender breakdown for the festival participants, programmed composers and even performers in those programmed concerts. The numbers seemed to me a little calculated, but then what are numbers for, if not for calculation? What exactly is the goal? What do we *really* want? If we are trying to reach the incalculable, then talking about it terms of calculation just complicates the issue. Do we want to have a 50/50 gender balance for participants, performers and for programmed pieces at Darmstadt or do we want enhance the experiences of the audience and participators? Are those goals incompatible? Surely not? I do not know.

It would be fair to say that there have been more bad male composers than there are female composers. To paraphrase Fran Lebowitz, there are too many composers; when there are as many bad female composers as bad male composers, then perhaps we will have reached equality, in this small field that we call music. Because it is a very small field. There was a pointing out of inequalities over the years, and a series of activities which 'sprang up', but chalk marks in a rainstorm can only last so long. Maybe it was necessary for somebody to point out these inequalities, but I feel the topic was given more attention than it deserved. Not because it doesn't deserve attention – equality will always deserve attention – and these things needed to be said. But they *always* need to be said. Again and again. And they need to be said everywhere, not just in Darmstadt at a prescribed lecture, in a designated space, with invited speakers. What was said at Darmstadt was important, but what mattered most is *who* said it. It seems from the history of the festival that this was the first example of one half of humanity raising their voices on this topic, in this manner: on the record.

CAGE IS CAGE IS CAGE

Looking at the numbers from another perspective is equally troubling. In Ernst Thomas's last summer course as director in 1980, there were 27 pieces programmed. Four per cent were by female composers. Friedrich Hommel became director in 1981. Excusing his first festival as director (it must take at least one festival to learn the ropes and some time to find your feet), in 1984 there were 238 pieces programmed; 5 per cent of which were by female composers. In the space of four years there was almost a 1000 per cent increase in the number of works performed. And this is the problem: quality does not come in equal measure. You might come across a handful of pieces that you love at a festival, but finding that handful might take an enormous effort. Is it harder to programme 27 pieces or 238? Does it matter? If you want to include more voices, will people take the time to listen to what they have to say?

The numbers also revealed that John Cage was the most performed composer of the history of the course. Martin Iddon's book on Darmstadt[7] provides a much more nuanced picture of Cage's relationship with the festival: his first unofficial entry in Wolfgang Rebner's lecture

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performance in 1954; how he attended the course in 1958 and effectively stole the show; smoking cigarettes in lectures; his Zen sentences becoming over-translated, showing sound separate from the system. His appearance marked a turning point from the direction, or at least pit-stop of the total serialism 'Darmstadt School' which we all learnt about in college. His visit caused such a furor that his music was not performed from 1962 until 1974. Even with a 12-year embargo, he is still the most performed composer of the course by a country mile. One wonders if people really listened to Cage? Or whether he was simply the most useful foil to energise a larger aesthetic? If Cage is the most performed composer in the history of the courses, why would programming Michael Pisaro's *Concentric Rings in Magnetic Levitation* mark such a bold step? The centrality of Cage for the Wandelweiser collective is beyond question. His name appears 66 times in Doug Barrett's article on the group.[8] His name might have only appeared once, but numbers rarely explain the quality of the relationship. Even with numbers it is quality, not quantity.

Postcards from the edge

On my way out of the Rückspiegel at the Bollenfalltorhalle I noticed some postcards on the edge of the table of programmes. I presumed these were FREE so I grabbed a handful. There were three different postcards from three different Darmstadt's:

1. A rather sly, five o'clock shadowed Boulez, sitting at the piano, in suit and tie with Stockhausen leaning on its edge, while Maderna is standing a little removed, with his hands in his pockets. Suited, but collar open. On the blackboard behind them are scribbled a few random treble clefs, sharps and flats, and a compound time signature. (1956).
2. John Cage, right arm raised in the air, mouth slightly open, in casual dress. In front of him there is a rudimentary microphone stand, microphone and cable, while in the background there is what looks like a white board, although what is written on the board is illegible. His glasses are folded and positioned on top of his notebook on the desk. It looks like he both wants to ask a question, and to give us an answer. (1990).
3. Jennifer Walshe, performing at the Hochzeitsturm of the Mathildenhohe in the sunshine. Her mouth is wide open, and it looks like she is screaming or shouting. She holds a megaphone with both hands; her right on the handle, her left beneath the speaker cone. This postcard is in colour so we see a bit more detail than the other two postcards: Walshe's blonde hair, a flickering red ribbon floating free in the air in front of her, the sunshine on the unsettlingly uneven brick work of the tower. The photograph was taken outside and above the window is some kind of sundial. We cannot see Walshe's body, and in the proportions of the photograph, her head is smaller than the megaphone. (2012).

everything is important.

[7] Martin Iddon, *New Music at Darmstadt: Nono, Stockhausen, Cage, and Boulez* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[8] G. Douglas Barrett, 'The Silent Network – The Music of Wandelweiser', *Contemporary Music Review* 30 (2011), pp. 449–70.

JUST LEAVE THE DOTS

On the fifth day of the writing workshop we all brought examples of our work for the class to discuss. At the beginning of the week we were just discussing what we thought, but after a few days we started writing down what we believed. We would all read the text, and then offer suggestions as to how we could improve the piece, be it grammatically, structurally, or editorially. Not everybody had something to say about every text, but the feedback was open and honest, critical.

Sometimes you learn more when you see something that does not work for you.

It was up to the authors to see for themselves what made a piece stronger. In one piece I suggested taking out a superfluous line. The author demurred; but then another participant backed me up. 'No, no; it's really not needed – you have said this before'. The author then changed their opinion and the line was cut. Whoop! I felt a little happiness at being right, and suggested we draft an imaginary scoreboard on the blackboard to keep track of the best edits. Something similar happened again: I suggested something, the suggestion was suspended, but eventually reinforced by another voice and the author strengthened the text by editing it down into a concise argument. I was on a high. I thought I must be a good editor after all.

The third time this happened, I saw with clarity the situation.

I immediately shouted out, 'Wipe the names off the board – just leave the dots'.

But everybody has a name.

. . .

I spent most of Friday in my hotel room, window open, trains roaring past, writing and talking to myself in the resonant bathroom. I was ruminating on the 'Thoughts upon a "New Discipline"[9] lecture from the day before. Walshe mentioned Beckett a couple of times: once in relation to questions she received from German interviewers when she first came to Darmstadt. She would be asked 'but I thought there were no composers from Ireland', to which she would reply, 'but yeah, we had Samuel Beckett . . . We win!'. I thought about this afterwards.

We all have to reach for Beckett.

The other mention of S.B. was regarding his name cropping up constantly as a reference point in conversations with other Irish composers. I am also an Irish composer, so I also happen to have talked with lots of other Irish composers. From my experience we talk a lot of nonsense, sometimes brilliant nonsense, but no one's perfect. Of course Beckett's name occasionally crops up, but what most Irish composers talk about is probably no different to what most composers anywhere talk about: money. We all talk about funding and money because most of us don't have very much of it. But then, 'Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for'.[10] Maybe all we are looking for is a bit more dignity?

New?

This is not.

[9] Walshe's statement on 'The New Discipline', *MusikTexte* 149, May 2016, pp.3–5, is a personal observation on the work of a number of composers which all 'share the common concern of being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical'.

[10] Virgina Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth, 1938).

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Since I had been on my own all day I was looking forward to the evening's concerts. Sergej Newski's *Rules of Love* for voices and ensemble performed by Ensemble Interface opened the concert. The texts are taken from the urban folklore collection *The Handwritten Girls' Stories*, and deal 'with erotic declarations from the pre-Facebook era, stories of Soviet schoolgirls from the 70s and 80s, all devoted to just one topic: love'.[11] They were the only love songs I heard at Darmstadt.

Gravity's Rainbow by Michael Pelzel was a full-blown virtuoso showcase concerto for orchestra and sensory-dynamic contrabass clarinet, played beyond description by Ernesto Molinari. The CLEX (Clarinet Extended) is a completely new instrument that 'has been built whose "system" can be reprogrammed and constructed anew by performers and composers'.[12] This new technology was framed by an older technology, the Basel Sinfonietta, who seemed to enjoy performing whatever the composer asked of them.

During the interval I went back into the hall and noticed about 20 or so people all standing at the front of the stage, gawping at this enormously sleek extended contrabass clarinet. A similar situation occurred a few days later at the Galerie Kurzwell after Mario de Vega's set, when there were about the same number of people crowded around looking at his no-input mixer. If there is an instrument/technology, there will almost certainly be a composer close by, looking at it, and asking it to do something.

PRESUMABLY STRONG DEMAND, LIMITED CAPACITY[13]

I left the concert early because I did not to miss *Sideshow* by Steve Takasugi. I think I started to queue an hour before the concert started, but that wasn't enthusiasm, just fear of not being admitted. The day before people were turned away from the Talea Ensemble concert because the capacity of the venue was limited. This happened on a couple of occasions during the courses – did everybody want to hear the Talea Ensemble and the chosen composers' works, or did they just pay to be in a place where all this music was included in the price of admission? I stumbled into the concert, knowing there was a piece by Stockhausen, but not remembering it was *Mikrophonie I* until I was inside.

What brings you to this and not that? Maybe you follow the advice of a friend, a name or piece you know, a standfirst which hooks you in, or perhaps you just stumble in because there is a concert on, and it's at Darmstadt, so it might be good.

I asked a few people what they were doing at Darmstadt,[14] or I rephrased it so the question sounded less militant, like why do you come, or what's brought you here? Most people said the same thing: it was a quick way to see a lot of things, to catch the pulse of contemporary music, which is true. It is also a cost-effective way to see a lot of concerts, lectures and even friends. Throw in the fact your favourite composer or performer might be wandering around

[11] Programme Note, *Clarinet Extended*, 5 August 2016.
[12] www.internationales-musikinstitut.de/en/program2016/321-05-08-2016/1838-extended-clarinet-en.html (accessed 13 September 2016).
[13] Advice attached to concerts with restricted capacity, listed in the daily IMD email. There were roughly 450 participants and 200 invited guests at the courses this year.
[14] Admittedly mostly composers.

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a small German city for two weeks and there are hundreds of reasons why attending the courses makes a lot of sense.

But is there a cost-effective way to listen? It is hard, if not impossible, to browse when we listen, we usually target exactly what we want to hear because our time is precious: time is money. The administrators checked everybody had a ticket or pass, but nobody ever asked us 'are you ready to listen?'

How do we know when we are ready to listen?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

Peter Meanwell took over the course in the second week and we switched from writing to recording. He explained that as a group we were now responsible for the content of the unofficial-official daily Darmstadt Radio Show by the Writing Workshop (English). On his first day Peter talked about how sound can be utilised alongside language (in the context of radio) for a rugged discourse, and working within the limitations of the medium to imagine a different kind of reality and present the diversity of voices present. He said, casually, that there are no masterworks, just works. He also said Darmstadt is a good place to work out who and what you are, *in relation to other people*. We were told that the show would be made every day: there would be a producer, a presenter, and some hosts and that these responsibilities would rotate across the participants each day of the week.

Archive Fever

We usually take our senses for granted, that is until they cause pain or are attacked, from some outside source. From previous experiences I know that fast flashing strobe lights make me feel odd and queasy. I felt this at one concert during the 2012 Ferienkurse, and I felt it again upon entering Lars Petter Hagen's concert installation *Archive Fever*,[15] as I ascended the stairs of the Justus-Liebig-Haus. The flashing strobe lights were incredibly strong, and bright, but luckily I could close my eyes as I held on the hand rail. I felt my way to safety, and looked back at what was projected at the top of the stairs: hundreds, if not thousands of pictures from the IMD archive in rapid succession. The images were too quick to register, let alone count, but some faces appeared multiple times – the only person I remember seeing was Ferneyhough. I thought this was an incredibly succinct visual summary of the festival. A good reminder that with the passage of time all things can disappear in the blink of an eye.

The beauty of audition

Earlier in the week another participant of the workshop, Alex Taylor, had recorded an interview with Klaus Lang. Having attended his lecture on Monday I was interested in listening some more to what he had to say.

Even though English was not his first language, he spoke it beautifully, in carefully measured paces. Lang was a pleasure to both listen to and transcribe. The tempo of his thoughts matched the speed at

[15] Hagen's was billed as a 'live-installation and lecture for small ensemble, electronics and visuals', and was split across five spaces of the Justus-Liebig-Haus.

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which I could jot them down. I barely needed time to pause and reflect: he was clear, concise, understandable. I felt he raised a lot of good points in the 22 minutes, but we were encouraged to pick the best 5–6 minutes for broadcast. Radio should be snappy! Who wants dead air? I suggested what I felt were the most important points; Alex agreed with the suggestions and the interview was edited quite quickly. Done.

> Alex Taylor: How do you see your relationship Darmstadt, to, what goes on here – why do you come to Darmstadt?[16]
>
> Klaus Lang: Of course because it's such an honour to be invited to come here . . . but I think, what I think is interesting, is, is, to get to know many different people. I have the privilege to be – young composers are presenting their work to me, to show me what they are interested in at the moment, what, what their questions are – and I think this is for me this is a very precious situation to get to know other people's opinion, and other people's comments on the world we are living in. And to learn from, from, these questions that they have – so this is, ahhm.
>
> This is also, also shows me that me that we are all having the same questions, I mean this is just a common thing, that we all share the same problems, when composing, we all share the same situation that we are exposed to, so this is also referring to this first part, it's not that I am the only person who has this question, this problem – everybody has the same questions, but what we do is exchange possible answers to these questions and, yah, and this is also a communal fact it's not, ah, aspect of the thing, it's not I'm trying to look for myself for the right answer, but we share these answers and then we maybe . . . this pushes us forward a little bit.

The transcription is a little flat. His speaking voice has more warmth than the words on the page suggest. That is the beauty of audition – you can hear more than is said.

DISTRACTFOLD

As ever in the writing workshop the talk was about the previous night's concert. I liked the Distractfold concert, or rather I liked some of the pieces; Alex didn't like the concert. We talked back and forth, and since I knew some of the composers, and the players, it was hard for me to be objective. We had both listened to the Klaus Lang interview on Sunday and somehow this idea of sharing the possible answers came into sharp focus during our discussion: 'everybody has the same questions, but what we do is exchange possible answers to these questions'. My opinion of the concert evolved, and I saw what the concert from another point of view: although some pieces were for instruments, and others were not (the nothing to see here pieces) and some incorporated video, all the pieces shared a similar approach to the sonic material, a building up of sound from the grain up. The concert was five very different pieces, but they all shared a similar kind of answer. The Pisaro the following night was a *different* answer.[17]

But then this was just one concert; across a season Distractfold present a lot of different works. One concert is just that. But it made me

[16] IMD, Summer Course, What Are You Doing Here? https://soundcloud.com/imd-summer-course/what-are-you-doing-here-monday-8th-august-2016?in=imd-summer-course/sets/what-are-you-doing-here (8 August show; accessed 14 September 2016).

[17] If you compose for the piano today, you have to ask yourself what is your relationship with the nineteenth century. In both the Pisaro and the Prins the piano is transformed into a sound producing device: a sound producing device that just happens to be a piano. We can see it is a piano, we can hear it is a piano but one composer ignores the nineteenth century completely, while the other successfully leaps over it with the help of technology.

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think. In unifying an aesthetic, do we only want voices which sound like our own? How do you know what you need? As a composer, as a performer, as a listener, as an ensemble, as a festival, as a country? We all know what we *want*, what we *like*, what we found *interesting*, but interesting is not always the best instructor.

My Body is Technology – Composer, Performer, Workshop

Throughout the Ferienkurse there was talk of boundaries: breaking boundaries, crossing boundaries, extending boundaries. A lot of composers want to break through the boundaries of music to reach another level. There was also a lot of discussion about bodies, having bodies, and wanting to activate the body of the performer: the visual as well as the sonic. Some composers felt the most efficient way to do this was to *visually* consider the bodies of the performers. The what we see, not just the what we hear. There was also some talk about the agency of the musicians and how conservatoire education was some sort of breeding ground for workers who became cogs in the machine, of the orchestra, or some other larger music machine. When did the education system become a main road for musicians?

On the first Thursday Rebecca Saunders and violinist Ashot Sarkissjan presented an impromptu Open Space on composing for violin.[18] Saunders did most of the talking and spoke of how she had avoided using trills in her work for nearly 20 years. Now, having found a way to incorporate the gesture into her musical language, she can't stop using them. It started with the physicality, and the material dictates the physicality. For Saunders looking at the physical gesture informs part of the process of composition; but it is just the starting point. Trills only work a certain way – from Sarkissjan she learned that there were trills which would take too much energy to perform, so these were avoided. To be precise during the process of writing *Fletch* she would put fingerings on everything, 'like Brahms gone mad'.

To demonstrate the examples Sarkissjan would immediately play: in one instance the opening gesture of *Fletch*, a double harmonic trill, with a glissando, going to a bow stop, from dal niente to forte. It takes longer to describe his action, bow and fingers, top to bottom, than it does to perform the action itself. It was shocking how, in between all this polite speech and explanation, a violent sound erupted from the other side of the room. Saunders spoke of his incredible technique and described *exactly* what it was that she had noticed over the course of watching him perform, and working with him. I tried to remember the exact phrase at the time, because it struck me how casually I had overlooked it during the Arditti Quartet concerts. All of these players have an incredible technique, which takes years to master. Before the workshop I chatted briefly with Sarkissjan and asked him how long he had been playing, to which he replied, 'oh you mean trying to play the violin, since I was five'.

The Open Space composer–performer encounter was very informal, but the workshop demonstrated the limitations of both the composer and the performer. When you enter into a relationship, you hope that it's not just a one-way thing, but that may not always be the case. Sometimes the obsessions of the composer and the

[18] Sarkissjan wants a new piece and Saunders wants to write for him.

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obsessions of the performer align as easily as the stars in the sky: I'm thinking now of Berio and Berberian, but that is only one famous example.

The performer can suggest things for the composer but whether the composer decides to incorporate these suggestions is up to them. If you offer a suggestion, what's the worst that can happen?

When did a limitation become anything other than a challenge?

"YOU OWN EVERYTHING – EVERYTHING IS YOURS"[19]

There was a considered simplicity to all of the work presented as part of Walshe and Helbich's Composer–Performer workshop in the Kunsthalle Darmstadt. It was not an easy simplicity, more a fundamental efficiency, either of technologies used or materials explored. Everybody performed their own work, and the challenge was to find the exact technique you needed to articulate an idea, within the limits of their own abilities. The workshop was 'deeply inspired by the history and state of sound and music as well as by the outcomes of many years of performance art, theatre, dance and much more'.[20] Perhaps there was no need to present the outcomes of the workshop in public, but it's good to get feedback, one way or another. Letting go in public is hard to do, because you sometimes have to expose yourself. I don't mean physically, although this can happen, I mean mentally. As soon as you walk into the room, or on stage, you are saying *all eyes on me*.

That is the ultimate interaction.

Between one person and another.

You can increase the quantity of people, and the quality of the interaction will stay the same, but that only happens if you are very lucky.

Every interaction is new.

Sometimes everybody in the audience loves you, but more often than not there is some seduction for attention involved; you can even scold an audience, like Nina Simone or Keith Jarrett, but they do that infrequently, and anyway are extreme examples. It takes courage to walk in front of people and present an idea; if you are a performer then you are responsible for the performance, if you are the composer, then you are responsible for what is performed. Sometimes people can do both, some can't. We can't all be a Victoria Wood or a Joni Mitchell. It is certainly cheaper to perform your own music: your time is your money. I wonder if Reich and Glass hadn't been so practical, or outgoing, or in New York, would they have composed/performed with as much success as they did?

Josh Spear's *Haus* moved the audience between two spaces: between this, and that. In the first space he played some House music on a Boom box and lay down on the floor. To welcome us into the larger space he used a sample of speech from *Paris is Burning*[21] before shining a small flashlight over parts of his body, holding it in his mouth, and then making U-shaped hand gestures against a wall, saying the words poverty, racism, art, me, over and over. He was both compèring and thinking out loud for himself, using his own voice, which had a sultry depth, but not quite the low register of a

[19] Quotation from the film *Paris is Burning* (1990).
[20] Run by Jennifer Walshe and David Helbich, IMD Programme.
[21] Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary film which chronicles drag ball culture in New York in the late 1980s.

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bass. He started a dialogue with his pre-recorded self, about why a 'posh white boy' from Surrey could use material so embedded in the New York African-American, Latino, gay and transgender communities of the late 80s, but before he answered the question the performance ended and we were ushered into another space.

Spear's piece stumbled onto a theme that had been floating around my head since I had reached Darmstadt, but he had to say it out loud for me to hear: appropriation. Later I wondered why he had used the small sample from *Paris is Burning* – it was only a few lines, but they were right at the point of transition between the two rooms. What matters is not saying something new, but saying something important. Spear's piece was (in part) a thank you to *Paris is Burning*, to what the film captured, the spirit of the times, because it is long since disappeared. Sometimes if we are lucky a recording can preserve that interaction so it is just for you. It does not matter what you love, but loving something gives you the first step to use the thing you love well. It is a simple thank you for existing, for making you smile, or think, or cry, or feel something you might have never felt before. He didn't have to say thank you, but as my mother always told me, good manners cost nothing.

Beauty Through Audition

There were more direct responses to the what-we-see considerations in the concert by the MOCREP group from Chicago. The movement of the musicians worked best for me when I did not know what I was seeing. At the opening of *Crackles*, by Neele Thuneker, nine musicians walked on stage, arranged in a zigzag height standing in a row and started to bend their knees, slowly, before unbending their knees, slowly. I wondered what I was seeing, and why I was seeing it. I did not know but I admired how her piece composed the bodies on stage. I have not read the book to which her programme note referred. A day later I spoke with her briefly when I met her in the hotel lobby. The main thing I wanted to know what how the musicians synchronized their bending, their supplication. One of the players snorts. From where I was sitting I could see, but I could not hear the signal to move. MOCREP had to rely on their ears for direction; beauty through audition.

The outcomes of another workshop, Marko Ciciliani's 'Music in the expanded field', were presented on the second Friday night. By this stage I was so exhausted that I am only able to offer some words from an interview with two of the seven participants, Celeste Oram:

> It's like music+. So we are all using sound as a really important, ahm, like, ah sort of, like base element of our pieces, but for example all of us are using video projectors, as well … ahm, so these are performances that really have to be seen. That's kind of why I'm afraid we probably can't share anything of our pieces with you on the radio, it wouldn't make a lot of sense.[22]

For another participant Miika Hyytiainen the medium is no longer the message – a violin, or video, or MAX/MSP is not a statement, the important thing is *what you do with it*. Asked about the New Discipline Oram goes on to say,

> It's about the discipline; … it's not only taking the ahm, the lessons or the logic of music composition, but also the discipline and the logic of theatre, or of

[22] IMD, Summer Course, What Are You Doing Here? (12 August show).

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visual art, of image media as well, and all of these end up playing into making the piece a good piece.[23]

How quickly can we learn the lessons of theatre, or visual art? What does theatre or the visual arts learn from us?

Time is money.

Of all that is seen and unseen

All this talk of seeing things sent me back to Kreidler's New Conceptualism lecture from 2012. I had attended the talk and written a few notes, but thankfully a video of the lecture is on YouTube.[24] As is often the case with recordings, things have been slightly amended for improved performance: the projected screen is to the centre, and throughout the video in the upper right corner we can see the man himself. He is visible, always, except when his presence would detract from the example.

His 'new' conceptualism has four definitions or characteristics:

1. A single idea which produces a whole piece;
2. A principle which can be realised in different ways;
3. An idea that has to do with music (but isn't necessarily sound).

For Kreidler it is the fourth definition which is the newest characteristic:

4. A piece of music where an additional (verbal or visual) information is crucial.

This is not new.

Did Pythagoras really need a curtain?

—

Rather than focus on the message, we are looking at the screen.

Although it is a slight addition to *a* definition of *a* music conceptualism, it forms the basis of all of Kreidler's work that I have experienced in concert. There is a radical, almost neutral equalisation between the *what we see* and *what we hear*. The primary concern is neither what nine pianos played simultaneously sounds like, nor is it seeing what nine Daniel Barenboim's look like split-screened into nine equal parts. For Kreidler the compositional concerns meet halfway, in an entertaining, confusing no-man's land of conception and tomfoolery. The performances invite comment easily, and are perhaps more comfortable on YouTube than in the concert hall.

But the times have changed I hear you say? Get with the programme! We've got Skype! the Internet! Ryanair!

Yes! but the times are always a-changin': can we ever imagine what it was like to see the ground from the air for the first time? To hear a recording for the first time? To explain what a printing press could do? To download the entire output of an artist's life in less time than it takes to read Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*? We take these things for granted because they are no longer new; but they are still important. In looking for what's new, are we ignoring how

[23] IMD, Summer Course, What Are You Doing Here?
[24] www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-kEs_RIiiE (accessed 13 September 2016).

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people dealt with change in the past? Finding something new is not the same thing as finding something important.

Feedback reacts chaotically

Nowadays everybody wants feedback, but are we actually open to suggestions of how to improve what we have to offer? As Mosch pointed out in the very first Rückspiegel, feedback reacts chaotically. We think we can control it, but in most cases we only set up parameters within which we feel comfortable.

Various people are invited to the Ferienkurse who can bring something to the art of music making, but perhaps from an angle we wouldn't automatically have considered before. Heloisa Amaral was invited to deliver a workshop for composer–performer feedback, 'inspired by a method for actors and visual artists created by philosopher Karim Bennamar for the DasArts School in Holland'.[25]

Monika Zyla from the writing workshop had interviewed Amaral and I offered to transcribe the recording. Heliosa spoke with a soft, mountainous intonation; sentences didn't behave in a regular pattern, and often the. First word or words from one sentence would be attached to the previous. Sentence and the thoughts would sometimes run and halt within the space of a moment. Her delivery was not in short, sound chunks, but in fluid, hesitant, enthused considerations. Editing the recording would be hard. Work. It was.

> Monika Zyka: … So what are the biggest problems when we give feedback to fellow musicians, or others?[26]
>
> Heliosa Amaral: One … aspect of it is that we tend to fall back into safe modes of giving feedback, that means we go very fastly to … to more technical parameters, so, instead of for example dealing with the motivations of why you are doing what you are doing, or what you are trying to achieve, we talk about, oh, I think it should stronger here, or softer there, you know you go into the technical parameters of the score. And you judge the performance based on … what the intentions of the work … could have been.
>
> The second thing is and for composers also, very often, it's, it's they are often used to justify their choices through musical terms. Like very often you would like ask, why would you do that? Oh, because the structure in the first part, and ahm, and the repetition, you kind of fall into describing the score, more than describing what is behind, the score, or why the score became the way it is.
>
> And the third thing is, is just this idea of, there are different ways of receiving feedback, like different ways we usually receive feedback. There are very few structured, ahm, ah like spaces for to do it. But often you, say you have it in a lesson, or in some schools you have meetings where, either you go from a purely subjective point of view, or the person giving feedback is talking, ahm, is giving a critique, expressing what she or he thinks, not necessarily thinking in a constructive manner, or, on helping, but just uttering, ahm, a commentary, and ah, or we have this typical pattern, which is ohh what you did was fantastic, I like this and this, BUT, so we are always waiting for the next part, which is going to be the … real negative critique, so this already creates a defensive situation from the part of the person receiving feedback and it can lead to personal interactions that are, that are not necessarily productive. So this method is very based around, breaking this kind of expectations of the negative. Trying to work from what, try to start working, from what actually already worked.

Monika asked another question about how the feedback workshop was evolving during the course. Heliosa replied that together they

[25] IMD 2016, Programme book. I met her briefly after a concert at the hotel bar during the first week.

[26] IMD, Summer Course, What Are You Doing Here? (11 August show).

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realised how 'difficult it is to formulate the question that will give you the good feedback'.

Is this not new?

'Prudens quaestio dimidium scientiae' – Half of science is putting forth the right questions.[27]

'Stop relying on that body'[28]

In two separate lectures of the first week we heard about how introducing blind auditions in orchestral recruitment in America in the 1970s improved the gender balance.[29]

We were told that by not looking at the body of the performer, we could hear the quality of the musician's playing with greater clarity. In order to create the best orchestra, it was the quality of the playing that counts, not the name or gender of the person playing. By not seeing, we could hear something differently. We could hear the *quality* of the playing, clearer, without our own preconceptions/unconditional bias getting in the way.

———

Later I dug out the article.[30] The essence of the research can be boiled down to a succinct finding: when we cannot see, we hear differently.[31] There is no valid reason why women should not be allowed to play in an orchestra. Full stop. It shouldn't take a screen for us to realise this, but ... When blind auditions were first introduced nothing much changed because the audition panel could identify the gender of the performer through the sound of their footwear. Men usually don't wear heels to job interviews. Perhaps we should. Either way it was easier to get everybody to just take off their shoes. But it's not the shoe that's the problem; it's the society which unconsciously discriminates against the sound of one shoe over another. Discrimination can activate the ear as quickly as the eye.

How blind can we be?

Did Pythagoras really need a curtain?

Yes.

He did.

The world beyond our instruments[32]

I always thought Cage was about letting the sounds be, and letting the world into the composition – this is what I learned in college about *4′33″*; but really Cage was just about Cage. He is no different from the rest of us, we all have to look out for ourselves. The credit (and the royalties) don't go to the birds outside the open window or the air conditioner, or to the passing truck, or truck driver. They go to Cage. Cage just put a frame around everything and wrote his

[27] Attributed to Roger Bacon, Francis Bacon, and also Aristotle.
[28] Feedback given to Carmen Carrera by Michelle Visage in season three of RuPaul's Drag Race.
[29] See Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, 'Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians', National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper No. 5903. www.nber.org/papers/w5903.
[30] To a non-statistician the numerical investigation is staggeringly complex.
[31] With more equality.
[32] Another topic at the 'holiday' courses this year.

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name in the bottom corner. What a concept! What an interesting thief!

Maybe he was not as open as everybody thinks! But he was very clever.

Without the body on stage, it's just a piano/instrument.

Without the instrument, it's just an empty room.

Later, I wondered whether that was love, or appropriation?

It is the context, or the act itself that matters? Or is it a bit of both?[33]

What is it about *not seeing* a body on stage that really rattles people?

Maybe men have said too much!?

On the second Wednesday, in a lecture, I thought that the person who was invited to talk would say something of interest for me, but he didn't.[34] After 15 minutes I stopped listening, because already he had said so many things that went over my head but which I would loosely disagree with. I was there, but I was not listening. Gradually though, as he included more examples and more and more names, I became aware that, with the lone exception of Rosalind Krauss, all the references and quotes were from men. This wasn't intentional, or unintentional – I can only guess that he reached for the works which resonated with him or which were useful for his lines of thought. Or perhaps he reached for the works which have been written. I had finished reading Wilde's *De Profundis* the day before. Wilde's words were still in my head, and in my notebook:

'I saw then at once that what is said of a man is nothing. The point is, *who says it*'.

Listening to this man made me realise something I had never realised before. As the lecture ended my arm shot up. I made a couple of points, the last of which was that *maybe men have said too much*. He took offence, but it was not a personal attack. In hindsight, it was both a comment and a question – perhaps one of the few sentences of mine which deserves an interrobang.

—

EDGAR WITH A D

I did not expect to write so much while I was at Darmstadt. The texts are not concert reviews as such, or at all. They were just words that I felt needed to be written. *Voiced*. By the end of the second week I had enough of everything: concepts, ideas, opinions, statements, music and everything that people had attached to it, lack of sleep, too many Hefeweizen.

I decided to present three texts in an Open Space. This is just an hour in a classroom in a school in Darmstadt. It is a space that anybody can use for anything. One of the rules of Open Space is 'don't

[33] When people are choreographed to walk in a curve backwards we call it one thing: art. When somebody has to sit outside a toilet for eight hours a day we call it something else: life.

[34] To listen to somebody takes time, but sometimes we don't know who we need to listen to, until we have listened to them.

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leave traces'. The texts related to my experience in the writing workshop editing each other's work; to the unending mis-pronunciation of my own name, Donal; and some thoughts on love and appropriation.

I was concerned about how best to deliver the texts. I decided to record myself speaking, that way I didn't even have to be in the room while it all happened. Presence in absence. I found a strangely resonant brick bike shed, a washing machine in flight in a tall tiled room, and the square courtyard of the Lichtenbergshule whose skin creaked under the heat of the sun; building as resonator. I read out loud what I had written down, moving one line from here to there.

Done ...

On my way to the Open Space on Saturday I met two people I knew at the tram stop: a composer, and a performer. We spoke about this and that. The performer had presented some work in the Open Space a few days earlier. I asked him how many people were there, a curious tic I have picked up from my father – a rational question which will always have an irrational answer. He said that three or four people had come into the room, but that he had filmed it on his phone and used Facebook Live to broadcast it to his friends. Although the quality of the recording was a little rudimentary, more than 400 people had watched the performance online. Recording has its advantages.

I got to the room early. I struggled to get the sound to come out of the speakers, but after ten minutes I could hear myself speaking. The three texts lasted 12 minutes in total. Although there is no narrative, hearing the three texts in order makes a lot of sense. Repeating something six times at Darmstadt is something of a luxury I had all to myself. I left the door open.

One person came a little after 10 – I had shown him one of the texts the day before and he knew what I was doing. We talked a little bit over the texts; just some simple questions and answers. While he was there one of the administrators closed the door – an acoustic consideration for the other people in the classrooms. At least the windows were still open. He asked if I had told anybody about this, and I said no: he took out his phone, tapped something quickly, and left.

The composer I was speaking to on the tram popped in for five minutes. She stayed for the middle section but then had to leave for a rehearsal. Another person came into the room ten minutes into the cycle and I told him that it was perhaps best to return in two minutes. He did.

He sat for the whole 12 minutes. I don't remember any questions.

I sat amongst the chairs. The more I listened to the recordings the more I heard the small mistakes. The lines that were unnecessary. The line that could have flowed into that line better. Small corrections, but it was recorded quickly because I felt saying something was better than capturing something perfect. Rather than record in the studio I knew that recording outside always lets the world into the work; the good and the bad.

This was what I was thinking about while the third person was listening. When I turned to him at the end of the 12 minutes I knew that he had listened. It's very hard to tell if people listen to what you say, since there is rarely any visible proof. He sat for a moment, and then left to go to the MOCREP workshop. Another person came in for five minutes and heard the last text. She too had to leave, but she mentioned that my piece was topical – strange, since I mentioned nothing specific. I thought four people was not bad. Better than nobody. Even with listeners it is quality, not quantity.

I stopped the playback at 11 exactly. I packed up my stuff and dragged my wheelie bag to the library. I read a book that I had wanted to buy for a long time, and flicked through a couple of scores. I found a beautiful picture book called *BELGIAN SOLUTIONS*, which I promised to buy once I found it in the real world.[35] On the back it says, 'Not every solution is an answer to a problem'.

In the library was a sample of pieces from the 70 years of Darmstadt. The section from 1946–1956 included a facsimile of Boulez's *Le Marteau sans Maître*, Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*!, and a pair of Varèse scores: *Density 21.5* and *Octandre*. I flicked open the score and noticed something – the publisher had spelt his name wrong. His name was published as 'Edgar' but his name was not 'Edgar', it is 'Edgard'. Somebody had scribbled an extra D at the end of his name in blue pen, on both the title page, and the front cover. I looked at the score of *Octandre*, and saw the same mistake and correction there too. Edgar with a d.

. . .

What we say, what we hear and what we see are very different things. These senses activate different parts of the brain, which somehow all interconnect somewhere when we say the name Edgard. It might sound like Edgar, because in French pronunciation of the name the d is silent. Just because it's silent, doesn't mean it's not there.

What am I doing here?

I can't remember exactly what made me attend Darmstadt in 2012, but I had a lorra lorra laughs. This time I applied to the writing workshop because I wanted instruction on how to become a better writer. I was looking for clear instruction, but instead was offered good examples. I thought this was frustrating, but as Anne Hilde told me, a writer has to think for herself. If not, then you may as well just read the news.[36] Maybe that's why I got so much from the Ferienkurse, because I didn't need to go. I had no expectations – I didn't have any lessons with invited composers or have any pieces performed. I wasn't in competition with anybody: I wasn't up for the prize.

But then, what exactly is the prize?

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[35] David Halbich, *BELGIAN SOLUTIONS* (Antwerp: Luster, 2015).
[36] What was newsworthy this year at Darmstadt will no doubt be mentioned elsewhere.

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