

## **Taking GRID Forward With IMD: Proposals for the 12/10/2016 Think Tank**

Darmstadt is (and has always been) an epicenter of energy that radiates outwards in the new music world. Young composers and performers from all over the world gather there to take in a body of work and a space of discourses they transport back to their home contexts. As such, IMD is a powerful site of intervention, one with the potential to shift cultural norms far beyond the biannual events and the city's limits.

Acknowledging this potential, GRID (Gender Research in Darmstadt) formed as a collective of concerned community members interested in using the platform of Darmstadt to question and challenge the homogeneity of the new music scene. Sparked by Ashley Fure's *Historage research* (commissioned by IMD), GRID emerged from the ground up in August 2016 as an open conversation, staged through daily open meetings, aimed at picking apart the complex mechanisms that reproduce the status quo around us. Questions of gender, though central, rapidly expanded to include a concern with other vectors of under-representation in current arrangements. Since August, GRID has expanded online. As an interest group, it brings together composers, performers, critics, and many others involved in new music; while it is not a homogeneous organism, the degree of unanimity that has emerged on these issues is extraordinary.

The behaviors, presumptions, and patterns of thought that propagate gender and racial imbalance in the new music scene are often hard to see, hear, and name. No signs on the door read 'men only.' No segregated bathrooms appear. No discussions or meetings are overtly guided by the injunction 'White male voices privileged'. Rhetorically, the vast majority of us agree: we'd like to see more balance, but we're not quite sure how to achieve that. It's precisely because of this uncertainty that we see GRID as a platform for energizing a necessary and urgent musical-cultural-social experiment, the initial ideas of which are outlined below. We want this project to become a collaborative experiment between IMD and its constituencies, an experiment that may, as it develops, require new organizational arrangements and support, including possible mediation and animation by some dedicated workers. Let us stress that everything below is offered as a prompt for dialogue: none of us have the answers; we will all learn from dialogue. We also recognize that IMD has other important dimensions to its work, and that GRID must respect the complexity of what IMD does.

With that in mind, we have listed below a series of proposals aimed at different aspects of IMD policy: admission, curation, and culture. We offer these thoughts in a spirit of experimentation and optimism, realizing that the problems we seek to address are deeply and differently embedded not only in IMD but in all of us. Genuine cultural change will take sustained collective effort to achieve: the burden of action falls on each and every one of us.

## **Policy Proposals**

### **Basic Premises**

Representation is a tricky matter: calls for equal representation can take the form of authoritarian demands for numerical, on-paper equality: '50-50' (etc) splits. We stress that serious, sustained and energetic progress towards equal representation is what we seek collectively. Numbers are a helpful means of self-auditing towards a kind of transparency, and are important tools for those reasons; but they should not be fetishized.

Moreover, given the entanglement or 'intersectionality' of the several vectors of disadvantage at issue -- gender, sexuality, race, class, disability and so on -- it's undesirable and difficult to pull out any one vector. Our politics should not be either-or but both-and, progress on one front being seen as an index of potential progress on other fronts. Nonetheless, as a guide to major absences, and as a measure of progress, it makes sense to pull out some of these vectors for specific scrutiny in how IMD works. We believe that IMD and GRID converge on gender, race and class (as indicated by having the economic capacity to attend) as urgent concerns.

A third premise is that GRID accepts that it will be important to prioritize goals in terms of what is more and less achievable: what can be done immediately, in the short term, and what in the medium and long term. This ranking is a key to the practice of change and the dialogue with IMD. But we don't want to lose track of the big picture, the long-term: it must always be kept in view.

### **Enrollment**

Right now, student enrollment at Darmstadt operates on a first-come first-served basis. Applications open on a specific date and enrollment stops when the maximum number of students is reached. While on the surface this seems like a neutral and objective process, we fear it unintentionally reproduces the status quo, privileging those who are 'in the know' and have the resources and confidence to apply first.

Below are a series of policy ideas that could help shift this dynamic.

- A series of **competitive scholarships**, appropriately advertised and geared toward underrepresented demographics, could encourage the active application of those who tend to self-select out.
- A **payment plan** allowing students to pay the admission fee in a series of installments would open the door to students who cannot afford the bulk sum upfront.
- **Demographic bins:** The first-come, first-served registration model relieves IMD of the burden of having to evaluate hundreds of student applications for quality. How, then, might we address the demographic makeup of the student body without drastically increasing the workload of IMD staff? Perhaps a compromise exists, one that maintains a first-come first-served structure while allowing for intervention geared at inclusivity. One idea could be:
  - Applications are held for 2 months and time-stamped for submission. At the end of this application period, IMD staff attempt to fill target demographic bins, striving for greater gender equality and racial and socioeconomic diversity, maintaining the first-come first-served policy within different demographic areas.

## **Faculty**

Gender parity and greater racial diversity amongst all major faculty and invited positions is a vital goal: such diversity and parity should be present in composers commissioned and programmed, instrumental and performance teachers, and intellectuals featured in the lecture program. A commitment to diversity and equality at the highest levels of aesthetic and intellectual visibility will be a powerful symbolic statement to IMD's broader, transnational new music community. Achieving gender balance and racial diversity amongst composition and performance faculty and invited intellectuals will be 'low hanging fruit,' in our opinion: an impactful and easy-to-execute gesture that brings no risk at all of quality compromise.

## **Curation**

Since its inception, Darmstadt has, along with the vast majority of festivals, institutions, and ensembles that populate the new music scene, been artistically directed by cis white males. Coordinated actions that could open access to these privileged curatorial positions might include:

- Creating a program of invited **co-curators** to work on elements of the main program and to assist collaboratively in changing the culture, with particular focus on those--likely themselves to be curators from underrepresented demographics--with strong track records of programming composers from minority demographics.
- A **'young curators' program**, similar to the writers workshop, where students and young curators of promise would be invited to study, discuss and tackle the complex problems of changing the existing cultures and structures of curation, with a showcase presentation of selected programs.
- A **research** component that would follow the progress of these two initiatives in order to reap the maximum of wisdom and 'best practice' for the larger community going forward. Since transforming curation is at the heart of our challenge, this element seems to us particularly ripe not only for action but for research-based reflection.

### **Programming of Main Stage Events**

As described above, legislating balance in aesthetic contexts can be tricky. Calls for 50-50 gender splits regarding composers programmed in any given concert not only risks constricting the curatorial liberty of IMD, but it also simplifies the problem: **numbers** alone do not encapsulate equivalence. Scale is a key issue here as well. 4 50-minute large ensemble works by men do not equal 4 5-minute piano solos by women. Furthermore, gender is only one thread of underrepresentation at Darmstadt.

Complexity in relation to commissioning cannot justify complacency, however. Every effort must be made to destabilize the status quo and push the allocation of resources and the number of pieces programmed toward a more gender balanced and diverse terrain. Effort and awareness are key words here: enacting diverse programming will undoubtedly take more energy than drawing from a familiar network. Only through this active, communal effort on the part of each and every one of us will meaningful change come about.

Attention should also be paid to **scale**: programming larger works by female composers (just as was done in 2016 with the works of Czernowin, Walshe, Reiter, Black and Fure) has an important resonance for younger composers. We need to look deeper than surface numbers and attempt to gain a nuanced understanding of where production resources are being spent in terms of composers featured and ensembles invited.

Lastly, **repetition** is also central to the issue of canon creation. A scan of the archive reveals performance data for the top 10 male and female composers. Over the course of Darmstadt's history, the top 2 men (John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen) have been performed 88 and 57 times, respectively. The top 2 women (Younghi Pagh-Paan and Isabel Mundry) 18 and 14 times, respectively. Repeated and consistent support over time, through programming, commissioning, and intellectual platforms-- notably, teaching and public lecturing--would all contribute to a more meaningful balance, not just in terms of abstract numbers but in the creation of major composer icons--significant figures wielding real music-historical authority and power.

### **Programming of Repertoire in Performance Studios**

Many student performers and instrumentalists report that they have never, in many years of studying at IMD, been asked to learn a piece by a female composer. Young instrumentalists come to Darmstadt and return to their homes across the world to perform and disseminate the repertoire they learn. This is the heart of canon formation. Pressure should be put on studio instructors to teach a more diverse repertoire that will help to spread important but underrepresented composers across the globe. The effect will be to send out ripples that, iteratively and gradually across the years, transform both the repertoire and, in turn, the canon.

Relatedly, instrumental teachers should be tasked with taking pieces by female composers from the IMD archive that have only been performed once, or a few times, and introduce them to their students. An organic and living relation could thus be made between IMD's own history and this broadened, ears-and-mind-opening repertoire and training. A link could also be made here with our suggestion for a new musicological effort around the IMD archive, below.

### **Programming of Discourse Events**

Open Space has done wonders to alter the landscape of Darmstadt and offer ground-up energy a place to flourish and find itself. However, we are convinced that it would also be fruitful to explore co-curation of discourse events on the IMD 'main stage'. This could open the door for new issues to be addressed, new lecture/discussion formats to be explored, and a new cast of invited guests each round of the festival. The official intellectual program is an important site of intervention: it sets the tone and draws a line around the center of discourse. Offering the reigns of that conversation to a broader group of collaborators could enliven the Darmstadt discourse. A commitment to more diversity in the intellectual invitations would, in

fact, be likely to renew and reinvigorate the intellectual grounds of the Darmstadt community, bringing new paradigms and new transnational networks to the fore.

### **History: Revising the Canon**

The present cannot be changed without also re-assessing the past. The two processes of change must go hand in hand. We have already outlined the need to change the repertoire for instrumentalists, and a new practice of diverse commissioning and curation, all of which feeds into the transformation of 'history in the present'.

In addition, to synergize and deepen these processes, we would like to suggest a workshop call for senior and PhD level musicologists who would like to work in the archive of the IMD to undertake research on women composers who have been programmed in Darmstadt in the past. The archive is filled with female composers whose stories (and musics) have slipped through the cracks: composers like Dika Newlin, Norma Beecroft, Gillian Bibby, Moya Henderson and Elisabeth Lutyens. We do not see this workshop as necessarily a prolongation of an existing 'feminist musicology' but as inaugurating a new wave of research on women composers with an eye to new practices in the present--the challenges posed by GRID.

This workshop should become a regular biannual event, with the explicit remit to re-address and recover pasts that have been lost. It should also involve training of younger musicologists in the issues around such efforts to 'revise the canon', and--importantly-- how these are not simply scholastic matters but bear urgently on the present and the future of new music. One of the important and interesting aspects of this process will be to engage openly with the archive, without preconceptions.

### **Childcare**

The lack of arranged childcare severely inhibits the potential of parents to participate in the festival. This issue affects both women and men, and must be addressed if we aim to create a more inclusive community.

- Perhaps work-study scholarships could exist, where certain students receive a discount on tuition if they are willing to work x-amount of hours per week in childcare?

### **Discussion Formats**

We feel the main programmed lecture and seminar discussions and workshops could benefit from a new culture of dialogical engagement, modeled on the etiquette developed by

diversity-and-equality-conscious activist groups (eg Occupy) to allow more equally distributed speech and listening. This would be a system that consciously adopts rules that weigh against the 'Darwinian jungle' of mic grabbing and lengthy (male) monologues.

### **Demographic Tracking**

As a means of self-audit and a way to track the progress of inclusivity initiatives, it is important that we gather and publish participant and programming demographics each year. For the faculty and student body, this could be as simple as asking applicants to list race, gender (including non-binary options), and nationality data on their applications (and perhaps this already exists?). For the music programming, tracking should be more ambitious. Each ensemble should be asked to submit detailed information tracking not just gender breakdowns of compositions performed, but also gender breakdowns of minutes of music, forces required, and ensemble performers. This information should be publicly presented each year, with an eye toward collectively tracking progress on an individual ensemble and festival-wide scale. Progress will not be immediate, but the widespread change of consciousness will have effects in gradually putting these matters on the agenda and at the forefront of planning.

## **Why Here/Why Now**

GRID is a movement to change the gendered nature of IMD as an institution. This matters in itself. But it can also become a lead or even model for other processes of institutional change in new music and more broadly in art today. The need to change IMD is intimately related to the need to change the currently dominant representations of history -- not just the history of IMD (as occurred in the GRID historical survey), but wider prevalent histories of music, composition and performance, particularly as they are reproduced in the academy and conservatoires. This means challenging entrenched canons: who and what are deemed to have been the most important and valuable composers, musical works and events to be taught, played and emulated. This is, of course, not a fast process: it means sustained attempts to recover and re-evaluate what has been lost, forgotten or passed over -- notably, the earlier work of women musicians. While IMD can take a lead in this questioning, recovery and reconsideration, it can't achieve the change on its own. But the symbolic importance of such efforts and such change occurring at Darmstadt will radiate out transnationally---helping to stimulate changes globally.

Why is Darmstadt particularly well suited for the experiment inaugurated by GRID? From the outset, IMD was conceived as a vehicle for radical cultural rebirth and renewal in the aftermath of the devastation, degradation and despair of WWII. From its birth, IMD has been

experimental and has nurtured experiment--and this project continues in that spirit. We think of GRID as continuous with the substance and spirit of Darmstadt's history. But now the institution itself and its practices of curation, commissioning, reflection and training become the site for experimentation in quite new ways, unforeseen in previous decades.

Moreover, to ask: 'how should an established institution, now 70 years old, renew itself on the basis of self-reflection and auto-critique?' is likely to provide immensely powerful new means of legitimation for IMD. Across Europe, in Germany but also Britain, Norway and other countries<sup>1</sup>, there is an urgent recognition both of radically new, in some ways unforeseen creative currents in music and the arts and of the need to redress the existing lack of diversity and unequal representation in cultural production, including the new music field<sup>2</sup>. In Germany, the recent federal study of gender relations in all sectors of cultural production; in the UK, the direction of the key public music organization, Sound and Music; in Norway, the orientation of the new Head of the Arts Council: all point to the need to create initiatives devoted to energetically boosting diversity and overturning existing biases; but, crucially, they point also to such initiatives as providing new bases for the legitimation of cultural institutions today. Transnationally, the time has come! For IMD to be seen to take the lead, to be in the vanguard on gender, race and class, on diversity and equality, is likely to be hugely beneficial in the wider scheme of public funding and debate and cultural profile.

**In summary:** our proposal as to how to promote these changes has three key elements-- action, interaction, and reflection.

First **(action)**, we suggest that IMD might invite and appoint the guidance of a dedicated and talented collaborator on the issues of diversity and inclusivity, someone likely to come with experience who can launch initiatives (such as those listed above), set goals, track progress, and help shepherd IMD toward the vanguard on this crucial issue.

Second **(interaction)**, we propose that GRID remains a decentered, shape-shifting, and imperfect but vital organism, galvanizing input from the wide, transnational new music community and providing feedback on IMD's initiatives on diversity--on gender, race and class. In the spirit of momentum, Darmstadt 2018 offers a ripe moment to continue this dialogue and explore new platforms of exchange.

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example, calls for gender equality at [Ars Electronica, Warsaw Poland](#), and the [Gender Bender Festival](#) in Bologna, Italy

<sup>2</sup> As evidenced by these [funding opportunities](#) for gender-oriented initiatives

And third **(reflection)**, we suggest that in parallel, an 'action research' initiative is developed that will act as a vehicle for reflection on and promotion of the policies enacted. The questions that might be explored have exciting resonances not only for IMD but potentially for musical and artistic institutions across the world: how do long-standing cultural institutions approach meaningful change? How, in the new music and artistic fields, do we balance a desire for diversity with our other musical, aesthetic, and political agendas? How do we take progressive steps to equalize gender, race, and class representation while retaining commitments to high musical and artistic ambition?

There are no simple answers: and that is why the opportunity IMD has to address these issues is so exciting, musically and intellectually, and also why it is essential to engage collaboratively in reflection and research. The questions are vital; the insights that we gain will have far-reaching ramifications across the musical-artistic fields.

Of course, our proposals are initial and we welcome responses. But we hope these thoughts lay the groundwork for the partnership that we seek and offer fuel for the changes that we know IMD is also keen to pursue.

**GRID, October 5, 2016**