

Late Serialism in Early Lachenmann

by Benjamin Downs

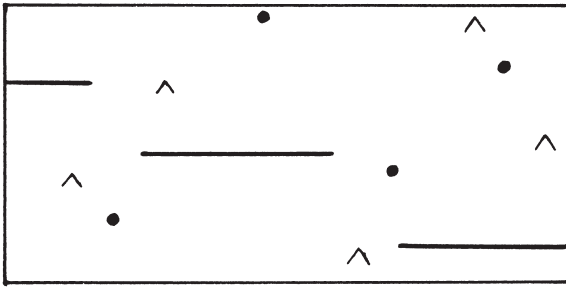
On the outside back page of his 116 pages of sketches for *Salut für Caudwell* (1977), Helmut Lachenmann writes a characteristically strong self-admonition: “äußerst *strenge* Anlage!” This “exceedingly rigorous construction” that Lachenmann sees in his drafts stands in sharp contrast to the dominant historiographical and theoretical tendency to examine his work as unsystematic explorations of physicality, spatiality, the labor of sound production, or strict avoidance of the familiar. Little attention has been given to his systematic processes, despite his admission that serialism continued to influence his work well beyond the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Indeed, current scholarship draws a hard historical line at 1966, marking the publication of his essay “Klangtypen der Neuen Musik” as his compositional *Stunde Null*.² This essay ostensibly signals Lachenmann’s graduation from the parametric and serial thought of high modernism to a qualitatively new “meta-music” grounded in his typology of sounds on the one hand, and his commitment to break open the ossified musical listening tradition on the other.³

While many of these arguments do justice to what is new in Lachenmann’s compositional thought – his focus on perception over conception, negation of the familiar, and affirmation of materiality –, they often do so at the expense of identifying the clear lines of continuity that he twists and

1 In one interview, for instance, he retorts: “Serielle Mittel als Inventionshilfe – warum nicht?” See Helmut Lachenmann, “Werkstatt-Gespräch” (1970), in idem, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung: Schriften 1966–1995*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), pp. 145–52, esp. p. 148.

2 The actual range of years that scholars choose to mark is from 1966 to 1970, based on whether the scholar uses the date that Lachenmann gives for the essay (1966), the date of his first compositions putting this into practice (1968) or the essay’s publication (1970).

3 Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, “Zwei Versuche zu Helmut Lachenmann,” in *Auf(-) und zuhören: 14 essayistische Reflexionen über die Musik und die Person Helmut Lachenmanns*, ed. Hans-Peter Jahn (Hofheim: Wolke, 2005), pp. 13–25, esp. p. 16. See also Jürg Stenzl, “Helmut Lachenmanns Wege / Helmut Lachenmann’s Pathways,” liner notes, *Schwankungen Am Rand* (Munich: ECM Records, 2002, ECM 1789), and Alistair Williams, “Postlude: Helmut Lachenmann, Wolfgang Rihm and the Austro-German Tradition,” in *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Max Paddison and Irène Deliège (Burlington, VT, and Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 361–70, esp. p. 362.



Example 1: Schematic representation of the “Strukturklang” from Lachenmann, “Klangtypen der neuen Musik” (*Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie*, 1 [1970], no. 1, pp. 20–30, esp. p. 28).

bends. In this essay, I chart some of these genealogical lines, connecting Lachenmann’s “exceedingly rigorous construction” to the serial past by showing how his compositional method inherits serialism’s parametric orderings.

Before turning to the sketches, it is worth noting that Lachenmann’s typology of sounds in his “Klangtypen” essay was itself based on a distinction in mid-century serialist theory between “texture” and “structure,” and many of his examples gesture toward that heritage.⁴ The most striking example is his schematic representation of a “Strukturklang.” This diagram is meant to depict a multi-dimensional sound with several layers of simultaneous orderings, and, like the serialist theory of high modernism, each order in the “polyphony of orderings” exhausts the aggregate without repetition (see *Example 1*).

The ordering, an example of a “Strukturklang,” is comprised of three sets, one with three elements (lines), one with four (dots), and one with five (carets).⁵ The elements of each set are equidistant in both range and duration from both other elements in their respective set and the frame itself. In the language of mid-century serial theory, this yields a flat texture and a multi-dimensional structure.

The sketches from *Salut für Caudwell* show his serial debt even more clearly. The twenty-five-minute piece for two guitars signals its serial inheritance from the very beginning: the first guitar begins by playing a perfectly orthodox twelve-tone row ([0T139E452687]) before all traditional serialist parametric ordering seems to dissolve (see *Example 2*).

4 I include a lengthy discussion of his debt to serial theory’s texture/structure distinction in my dissertation, “Dividing Sense from Sense: Post-War Avant-Garde Music and the Politics of Listening” (Stony Brook University, in preparation).

5 For the edition of “Klangtypen der Neuen Musik” in *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung* the schematic representation of a “Strukturklang” was modified (see note 1, pp. 1–20, esp. p. 18).

Example 2: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, Performance Score, New Edition (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, cop. 1985, Edition Breitkopf 8399), mm. 1–11, Guitar I.

The sketches, however, show that he made both large-scale and detailed compositional choices that grow out of serial thought.

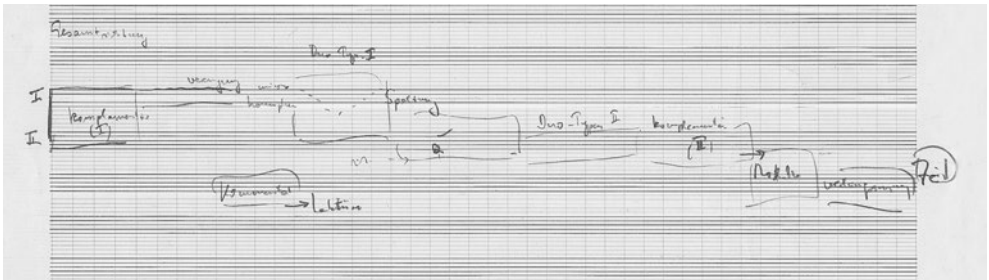
Lachenmann began by almost rigidly defining categories that are then used as the scaffolding for the piece. The two most salient categories are the *Spieltypen*, a set of six interrelated “playing types,” and the ordering of the strings into dual six-string sets. Lachenmann uses the six *Spieltypen* to delineate the piece into separate sections that he charted in what is likely an early schematic graph of the piece. As the graph and the corresponding *Spieltypen* show, the piece progresses by concatenating moments, each moment dedicated to a particular *Spieltyp* (see *Examples 3 and 4*).

On a more detailed level, Lachenmann uses a parametric ordering to determine the guitarists’ right-hand action, derived from the unconventional notation that he develops. Both guitars play from two staves, the upper (six-line) staff indicating which string the right hand should play, and the lower (five-line) staff indicating the position for the left hand.

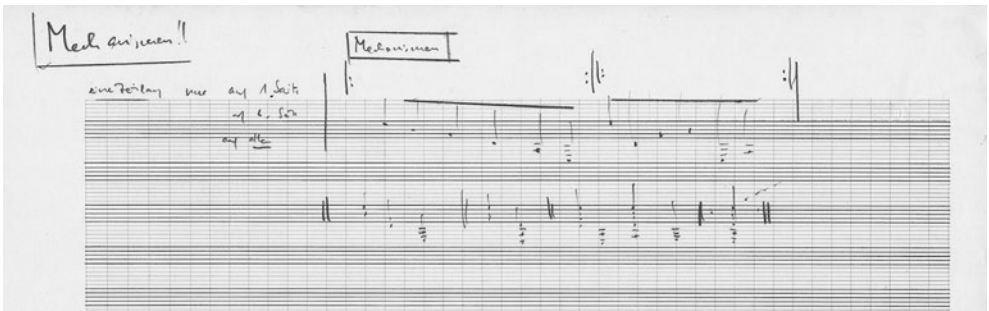
By tracking this notational scheme from the earliest sketches to the printed form, one can see how the right hand owes its final ordering to a carefully elaborated quasi-serial process. In the figures that follow, I show the process leading to the final form, beginning with Lachenmann schematically sketching the possible pitches of the guitar’s open strings, then obsessively working out the permutations and possible combinations of the strings, developing what he labels the “*Kernmelodie*,” and finally providing its instantiation in the score.



Example 3: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, sketch for six *Spieltypen* (Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).



Example 4: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, sketch (Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).



Example 5: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, sketch (Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).

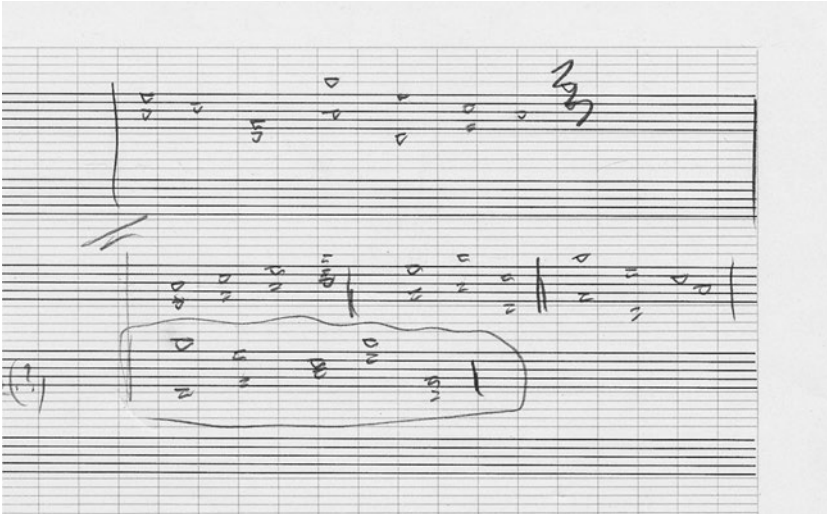
In what is presumably the earliest schematic sketch, above the heading “*Mechanisieren*,” Lachenmann writes all the possible pitches of the open strings of the guitar, and possible orderings of them that would satisfy the serial principles of non-repetition and aggregate completion (Example 5).

Two melodic rows are followed by three dyads, two trichords, a tetra-chord plus dyad, a pentachord plus unison, and a hexachord. Each separate group includes each string only once.

In his manuscripts Lachenmann eventually replaces this traditional pitch-notation with a notational scheme that indicates the string to be



Example 6: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, sketch
(Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).

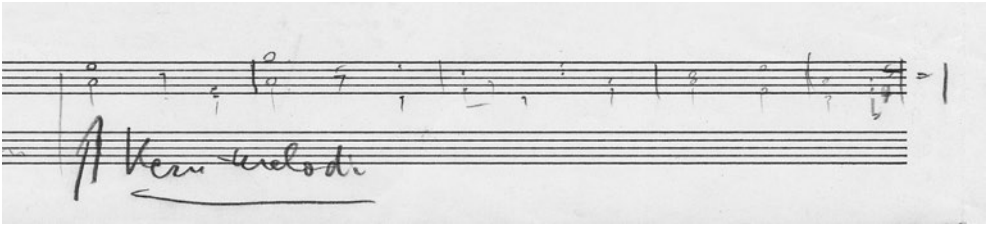


Example 7: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, sketch
(Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).

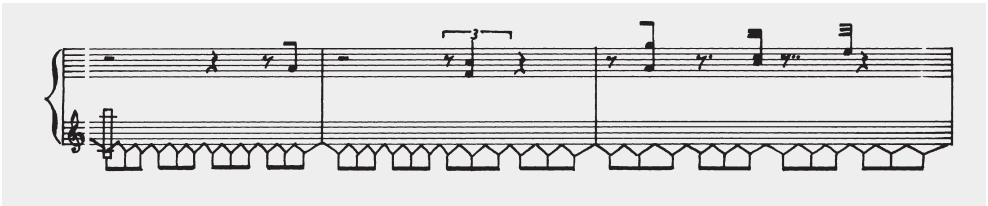
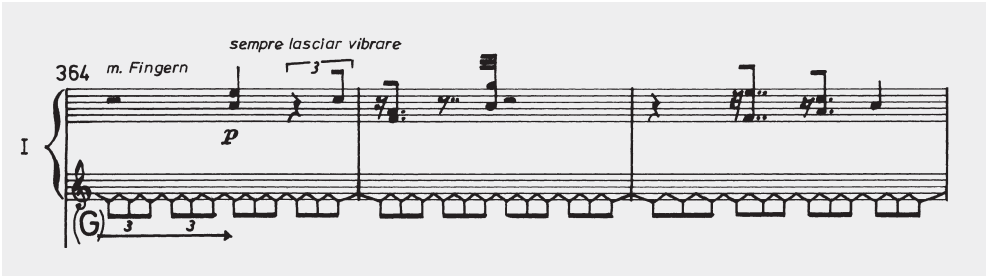
played rather than the pitch: string 6 notated on the lowest space, string 5 the space above, string 4 the space above that, and so on. With this abstraction in hand, he cycles through all the possible orderings of each combination of open-string dyads, “string-intervals” to be performed – neighboring strings, separated by one, separated by two, and so on (*Example 6*).

He begins to mix these orderly schematic configurations into fragments that contain one instance of each “string-interval” class with a minimum repetition of each string (*Example 7*).

The middle line is similar to the earlier permutational exercises, while the upper and lower lines are a more complex ordering that combines each string-interval with the string aggregate. The upper line, for instance, is ordered so that one of each type of string-interval is performed before any is repeated (“string-interval”: 2, 0, 1, 3, 4), while the strings are evenly distributed, each being played twice with the exception of string number 1.



Example 8: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, sketch (Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).



Example 9: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, Performance Score (see Example 2), mm. 364–69, Guitar I.

These excerpts show the final steps in his transformation of the largely abstract figure into its finished form, which he then labels “Kernmelodie” (Example 8).

This sparse form of the so-called *Kernmelodie* is played only once in the entire piece, namely, in the fifth section, which uses the *Spieltypen* that he labels “melodie” (Example 9).

As in the sketched “*Kernmelodie*,” this fragment presents the strings in their serial ordering twice, with each string being played once and each “string-interval” played once with minimal repetition and doubling.

Throughout this entire section, the “*Kernmelodie*” becomes progressively more minimal and strictly ordered. The first guitar performs the fragment a total of three times between mm. 381 and 411, each time following the parametric ordering strictly, with each string being played once without repetition. The second guitar follows suit, each repetition becoming more



Example 10a: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, published edition (Performance Score, see Example 2), with incorrect note, Guitar I, left hand, mm. 428–30.



Example 10b: Helmut Lachenmann, *Salut für Caudwell*, fair copy, mm. 428–30 (Helmut Lachenmann Collection, PSS).

orderly as the intervals eventually give way to the bare schematic form of his earliest sketches.

According to the printed edition, the order seems to break down by only one note; but this is due to a mistake in the editorial process. In the final seven bars of this section, the second guitar performs the aggregate in its perfectly strict form three times in a row: each string one time, each time differently. The published edition prints one note erroneously, for as the fair copy shows, the first note in measure 430 should be string number 5, not string number 6 (see *Examples 10a* and *10b*).

This completes the second iteration of the aggregate before the section comes to a close and the final *Spieltyp* begins.

Lachenmann’s careful development of both the large-scale form and the plucked strings’ detailed ordering shows that his working process was systematic, even parametric, long after his “Klangtypen” essay and the decline of high modernist serialism. So although the finished work may explore the physicality of sound or the avoidance of the familiar, the sketches show that his process remained connected with serial practice to produce his “exceedingly rigorous construction.”