

**THE TOTAL ARTWORK IN KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN'S *LICHT*:  
"IN THE BEYOND – ALWAYS AND FOREVER"**

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In the wake of musical avant-garde's definitive abandonment of the struggle against opera and its experimentation with open form in the 1960s and 1970s, musical research in the past few decades has sought new possibilities for synthesizing creative methods and genres (ECO, 1989). The current situation in musical research and, more generally, research in the domain of mixed artistic production can schematically be defined in terms of the flexible interaction of two opposing formal orientations : that of the closed and coherent work viewed as a network of relationships, as it has been elaborated in the Western tradition with its closed, narrative, teleological model, close to the Wagnerian model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and that of the open and fragmented work, scattered or in a process of dispersion, that reinvents in new contexts various open compositional strategies similar to improvisational practices, often involving mixed media and new technologies.

The so-called "stronger" formal approach, aiming toward a closed work and a coherent whole, is based on the Western written narrative tradition on a global vision of the "architectural and premeditated structure" that precedes the work (Stéphane Mallarmé's phrase was often taken up by Pierre Boulez throughout the 1950s and 1960s). The "weaker" (VATTIMO ROVATTI, 1983) dissipative formal approach, which has taken root in Western music since the 1950s, renounces the idea of a global synthesis seeking coherence in the "work-totality" (*oeuvre-totalité*), in favor of open and multiple formal processes. Based in pluridirectional and polyvalent enumeration and superposition, these processes relate to a renewed interest in non-written traditions and improvisational techniques while still referring, in certain cases, to traditional Western narrative strategies. This theoretical distinction between "stronger" and "weaker" formal approaches is not in the least meant to imply a value judgment, but rather it is only theoretical, providing a tool that allows us to grasp the structural differences that exist in the interior of diverse creative products using one or many aesthetic languages. In both approaches, various materials and aesthetic languages—text, music, dance, decor, lighting, costumes, etc.—may be used, as only the formal approach differs: the distinction resides only in the principles that organize the materials.

Wagner's musical drama, his theory of the total artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), and his leitmotif technique, of course, reflect the stronger formal approach in the context of the aesthetics of later romanticism and in the conditions of a strongly chromatinized tonal language.

This compositional system effectively creates a unique synthesis of tonal language and thematic content; in other words, harmonic functionalism in the context of chromatinized tonality and thematic relationships and interactions imposed by the imaginary scenario of a theatrical action and a symphonic narrative. It is a compositional system based on the correlation or complementary relationship between a fluctuating tonal language and thematic structuring. - In his 1911 book, *Theory of harmony*, Schönberg speaks of “vagrant chords” and “suspended tonality” in the *Ring* (SCHÖNBERG, 1978, p. 370). This is necessarily linked to a centralized and centralizing overall conception of the work but, in the conditions of the multiplicity of the later romantic period, it is also a question of shaken tonality—because it is strongly chromatinized and fluctuating—and of multiplied thematism; however, it still remains a centralizing and cohesive factor in great symphonic works Remember that Wagner only once used the idea of the total artwork although it became, a sort of signature for his art and one of the essential artistic orientations since romanticism (KUNZE, 1983, p. 101).

Without intending to present an exhaustive explanation of the aesthetic and compositional strategy of Wagner’s musical drama—these questions have been widely studied since his death—we will instead focus only on those formal aspects of his compositional work which are essential for an understanding of the stronger formal approach, and of which certain particularities will be observed, albeit in a completely new context and in very different ways, in the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen.

It is well known that the notion of the artwork (*Kunstwerk*) is for Wagner almost synonymous with “drama”: “Our idea of ‘*Shauspiel*’ (“spectacle”) is therefore a very sensible, very comprehensible name for what the Greeks more naïvely still called ‘drama’.” (WAGNER, 1892-99, vol. 5, p. 301).

Wagner understood his work not as a particular form of drama whose specificity was defined simply by the presence of music—“*Musikdrama*,” “*musikalisches Drama*”—but as drama itself: real drama, vast and profound, finished and accomplished. True drama is musical drama, “*Wort-Ton-Drama*”—drama with words and music. It has become tradition to consider *Lohengrin* as a “romantische Oper” (“romantic opera”) while the term “*Musikdrama*” / “musical drama” is used to describe Wagner’s tetralogy.

Wagner’s “musical drama” (*Musikdrama*) is, by all evidence, both regression and utopia at the same time, a return toward the past and an aspiration toward the future. The musical drama is a return toward the Ancient Greek tragedies, which represented for Wagner the paradigm of original unity of word, music and gesture, and also an “artwork of the future,” the necessary consequence of Shakespearean theatre and the Beethoven’s

symphonism. Musical drama allows the composer to overcome the deficiencies of the operatic genre: “the error in the art-genre of Opera consists herein: that a Means of expression (Music) has been made the end, while the End of expression (the Drama) has been made a means.”

Wagner’s theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* rests on the idea of interaction between the arts, on a global conception that is at the same time poetic, musical, and theatrical (DAHLHAUS, 1971; KUNZE, 1972, vol. 2, p. 196-229). The *Gesamtkunstwerk* implies an interaction between “three kinds of art that are purely human”—the art of dance; the art of sounds, or music; and the art of poetry—which are intrinsically inseparable, just as they were in Ancient Greek drama and lyric art. Subsequently separated and thus unfree and limited, they can become free and perfect again only by a new union in the “artwork of the future.” This idea of the interaction between the arts in a multiple artwork was not new in Wagner’s time, as it had fascinated several artists and philosophers before him—notably Herder, Goethe, Novalis, the Schlegel brothers, and Schleiermacher—but it was Wagner who proposed a radical theory whose resonances are far from being forgotten (MOOS, 1906; SCHLEGEL, 1962-1974, vol. 1, p. 145). “Drama,” according to Wagner, is by nature a multiple work: it is variously called a “total artwork” (*Gesamtkunstwerk* or *künstlerisches Gesamtwerk*), a synthesis of the different types of art it encompasses (WAGNER, 1892-1899, vo.1, p. 88, 193). It signifies both the accomplishment and the surpassing of historically established and defined arts. By insisting on the importance of theatrical production, on the “gestural-theatrical” and on the decisive role of the performer, Wagner reversed the Hegelian hierarchy of the arts: “I only expressed half consciously my knowledge that the *performer* alone is the true artist. Our creations as poets and composers are in reality just volition, not power; only representation is power—and is art.” (WAGNER, 1969, vol. 1, p. 75). “Gestural-theatrical” representation, which occupied an entirely subordinate place in classical aesthetics, is now placed first; music, insofar as it is the realization of the poet’s intentions to express emotion, is in second place; finally, the poetic work (“*das Werk des blossen Wortsprachdichters*”: “the work of a simple poet of words and language”), which Wagner considered as a “non-realized poetic aim,” is in third, and last, place (WAGNER, 1892-1899, vol. 2, p. 344).

The preponderance of a closed totality-form (*forme-totalité*), a self-contained overall form, in relation to the literary and theatrical peripeteias of a conventional operatic libretto, is one of the essential aspects of Wagnerian drama and its principal difference in regard to opera. The stronger formal approach of understanding a work as a coherent whole goes hand

in hand with the necessity to construct the totality of a multiple work, and not only its parts, through a dense, closed network of motif relationships. And this idea of formal order is present in Wagner's work throughout his entire compositional process, from his first drafts of a literary scenario all the way to the final elaboration of the work in its every detail. The later crystallization of the leitmotif technique is closely linked to the precise overall project that Wagner had already conceived.

A true symphonist, Wagner necessarily attributes a capital importance to the larger form, to the vast formal components; the whole of the cycle takes precedence over the works that constitute it, the acts over the individual scenes (DAHLHAUS, 1971, p. 27). And Wagner's formal concerns, corresponding to the rich and varied content of the tetralogy, is to organize the work "in a small number of large masses" for better comprehensibility, in few large formal components the symphonic gestures of which will draw the active listener into the musical reflection sought by the leitmotif technique.

The characters in the drama—belonging to the world of the gods, of mortal humans or of fairy tales (giants and dwarfs)—have a precise place and function within the whole of the work. In their existence and their signification they depend on the global dramaturgical construction to which they belong. They are not the active agents in a dramaturgical situation of conflict; rather it is the dramaturgical context that gives them life and puts them convincingly into action.

For Wagner, musical drama should manifest "the purely human" by turning toward the archaic, toward myth. The choice of historical subjects instead of mythological subjects is for Wagner one of the capital errors of the opera of his time. And he defines his tetralogy as a drama about "the beginning and the end of the world," that is to say, on a very vast mythological subject (WAGNER, 1969, vol. 1, p. 257). Remember that for Aristotle, mythological subjects were to be avoided because of the multiplicity of their content. For Wagner, it is exactly the density of the content or the multiplicity of themes and material in the vast mythological subject that is the necessary condition for the composition of a musical drama; it is the mythological structure that allows the musical drama to transcend the unidimensional libretto of a conventional opera.

According to Wagner, the first function of the leitmotif is that of sound memory, putting the present into relationship with the past: the leitmotif is "a memory, remembrance, reminder" (*Gedenken*) (WAGNER, 1892-1899, vol. 2, p. 335). With the "orchestral melody," a second function is added to the first: that of premonition, anticipation, or even pre-figuration

(*Ahnung*). The leitmotif technique as a “characteristic tissue of principle themes that spreads itself...over the whole drama” is described by Wagner in the third part of his work *Oper und Drama*; the term “leitmotif,” on the other hand, was coined decades later by his friend Hans von Wolzogen and has become one of the keywords for the understanding of Wagnerian technique (WAGNER, 1892-1899, vol.1, p. 368).

Leitmotifs were not conceived principally as vocal but as orchestral motifs. The exposition of a leitmotif first as a vocal melody is an exception rather than a rule as imagined by the uninformed music lover. Leitmotifs are nourished by the orchestral texture of the work and create, in a fusion with this orchestral texture, the “total melody” (*Gesamtmelodie*). (WAGNER, 1892-1899, vol. 3, p. 333). And to recognize and understand them in the context of the musical drama, theatrical and gestural moments have an equal importance to that of the text (or rather of the keyword in the text).

Wagner was never a source of inspiration for Stockhausen. His operatic preferences tend more toward Mozart and Monteverdi, and the master of Bayreuth practically never attracted him: “Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is a brilliantly composed opera, very beautiful. Monteverdi’s operas are unfortunately never produced but I often think that his operas are very beautiful, that the music is wonderful. Monteverdi is a fantastic composer.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 281). Even in his youth, Stockhausen never succumbed to the “Wagnerian syndrome” so widespread in Germany:

During my studies, I was often disgusted by a certain kind of music from Strauss, Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg because for me it was quite simply too vulgar, too flat, too physical, sometimes even too bestial (there are, in effect, many expressions in this kind of music that use cries, yelling, furor, stamping, tearing)...This is only one side, the bestial side of man. There is also another side that can transmit all these experiences in a more cultivated fashion without making itself into a victim of passion: the mind can use all these things as possibilities in an enormous palette. Anything can come about but we must have a balance between spirituality and animality: we human beings represent this marvelous mixture. (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 555).

It is this “animal” content, qualified as “primary,” that above all defines Stockhausen’s explicit reticence vis-à-vis Wagner’s music: “For composers like Wagner, the principal content of the music was quite simply to express human passions and emotions so that they naturally affect each person. But this aspect of the human being, psychologically conditioned and limited, is only the mortal being. What is more important is that there is something completely different, the eternal spirit, that is only temporarily a human being...” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 228). According to Stockhausen, Wagner’s legacy was never

important to his work as a composer. To the question, “What does Wagner’s music mean to you?” he responds, “Very little. Twice in my life I’ve gone to one of Wagner’s operas and both times I left after a short time, truly disgusted. It was also a bit because of the staging but above all because of the musical content: it is so repugnant to me.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 280).

An exceptional musician, Stockhausen nonetheless could only appreciate the art of Wagner as a symphonist. And he clarified,

The only thing that I listened to with pleasure was a performance of the *Vorspiel* (prelude) of *Parsifal* by the Cleveland Orchestra directed by Boulez in Osaka during the World Fair. A long time ago I also heard the prelude from *Tristan* on the radio and I was deeply moved. Those are the positive experiences. I don’t know his operatic work. Except for those two attempts (I went wisely to the opera with the intention: I want to know), I have never gone to one of Wagner’s operas. That was more than twenty years ago. And all the parallelisms journalists describe between Wagner’s work and mine do not affect me at all. I do not know what all those people want or think. (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 281).

Stockhausen always considered the comparison of his *Licht* with Wagner’s operas “rather superficial” or squarely “false”: “The superficial affirmation that my operas would be related to Wagner’s is false. This judgment is clearly exterior to the music. If we judge according to musical content, we arrive at precisely the opposite judgment.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 497). It is interesting to note that Stockhausen’s statements about a potential relationship between his and Wagner’s music are always a matter of content and never compositional technique. Indeed, it is quite difficult to imagine that Stockhausen, as an avant-gardist of the 1950s and 1960s and inventor of many compositional techniques and new formal processes—*Gruppenkomposition* (composition with groups), *Momenttechnik* (moment technique), *variable Form*, *Textkomposition* (textual composition), *meditative Musik* (meditative music), *Raum-Musik* (spatial music), *Formelkomposition* (formula composition)—could think about technical resemblances, still entirely possible despite many differences, with Wagner’s music. Wagner’s music is strongly chromatinized but still tonal, and Stockhausen frankly loathed its content from the time of his youth:

One only takes into account the length of [Wagner’s] operas and the fact that he united several operas into a cycle. As to the rest, nothing in the world could be more contrary to the spiritual content of Wagner’s music than mine. In my opinion, his music is above all else the highest synthesis of emotional man in the time when Wagner was living, that is to say on the threshold between two great ages, just before the explosion of the futuristic and cosmic man and at the heart of German nostalgia that looks back toward the dawn of man’s becoming. Wagnerian mythology is a typically German, northern European retrospective. By retrospective I mean that he, as a child of his time, brought the last spiritual message of his time: the gods’ fortress, the castle of Walhalla is consumed by fire and reduced to rubble. (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 28).

Contrary to his view of Wagner's work, Stockhausen's compositional research sees itself as open to the future. Let us remember that Wagner also spoke in his time of "Zukunftsmusik" ("music of the future"), of "Kunstwerk der Zukunft" ("the artwork of the future"). Stockhausen specified:

My music is oriented toward the future man, toward an opening forward. It is directed toward a human being who wants to travel in the cosmos, who considers the planets as departure points and way stations and who understands that he is a visitor here only for a short time, in order to learn certain things, and relatively little; and that he is extremely limited in his mental and physical faculties. His goal is in the beyond—always and forever. All of this gives a different content to my music. This content is not oriented backwards, nor looking to the historical founders of religion, nor toward gods, Germanic or other—but refers rather to the eternal cosmic spirits that are sought in *Licht*: Michael, Luzifer, Eva. They are timeless, eternally present. (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 28).

### **The Stronger Formal Approach and *Formelkomposition***

Stockhausen is doubtlessly among the most important representatives of the stronger formal approach in the great Germanic tradition, that of Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, and Schoenberg. And just like his illustrious predecessors, Stockhausen is a master of artistic synthesis who produces, always differently, new and convincing versions of his work as a premeditated network of relationships and a coherent totality.

### **Formal Schema and Formula Composition**

*Formelkomposition* (composition via the use of musical formulas), which Stockhausen develops in *Licht*, is a premeditated formal approach with roots in serialism that consists of "aiming for a unified and coherent composition": "I find that one gets further and evolves more deeply if one deploys everything, thematically and structurally, from a single core," writes Stockhausen (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 170). "This produces professional requirements that are much greater than when one always bakes little rolls, independent works, *pieces*, that one then orders according to their character in an opus list, instead of searching for a single unified and coherent composition.... Actually the piece itself, the work-piece (*Stückwerk*), belongs to a pre-artistic world." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 170). And the compositional process for *Licht* begins with a global vision of the work, that is, a formal schema of the coherent work-totality (*oeuvre-totalité*). However, contrary to the classical tradition and to part of the romantic, here the formal schema is valid only for the specific work in question: "I first composed the formal schema for the entire week, as well as the three melodies from which everything would be born. Now I must produce the flesh for this skeleton, give life to the whole through individualized scenes." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 357).

It is while composing *Jahreslauf* (*The Course of the Years*) in Japan, a work that is a part of *Dienstag aus Licht* (*Tuesday from Light*) for the ballet, an actor and orchestra, or for orchestra alone, that Stockhausen had the idea of developing all the days of the week into a colossal work, *Licht* (*Light*), on the basis of a single formula that would determine all the musical particularities. The first works to define the fundamental principles of formula composition are *Mantra* (1970) for two pianos where the composer uses a single simple formula; *Inori* (1973-74/1977) where the formula also includes the series of 13 degrees of prayer gestures; and *Sirius* (1975-77), electronic music with trumpet, soprano, bass clarinet, and bass where the composer works with four formulas.

Always in search of density and coherence, in *Licht* Stockhausen uses a formula with seven parts, one for each day of the week. This formula—or point of departure—which Stockhausen calls *multiformula* is comprised of three levels, each corresponding to one of the three essential “spirits” in *Licht*, Eva, Michael, and Luzifer: “In *Licht* the formulas melt into a *multiformula* or a *superformula*: the formula of Michael, the formula of Eva, and the formula of Luzifer are united in *one* formula. The three are verticalized and always presented in this combination.” And “what interests me is the *entire* structure, the spiritual structure and the hierarchy of the universe, where each human being is a spiritual being and only temporarily a corporeal being; a Being then, a timeless individuality, an eternal spirit.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 169).

A formula is not a *leitmotif*, that is, a relatively stable musical character that can be reproduced in different contexts, but is rather always an abstract basic material, a premeditated concentrate, a plural and pluri-valent core that consists in, and from which are derived, a multitude of materials or elements: sounds that constitute melodies, echoes, pre-echoes, scales, noise-sounds, colored silences, improvisations on one part of the melody, etc. The superformula for *Licht* has much more content, much more substance than the formulas of *Mantra*, *Sirius*, or *Inori*. The richness and density of this multiple core make possible an infinite number of possibilities in deployment, which all always maintain their relationship to the formula, and this constitutes the powerful coherence factor. “Thus I could compose with this formula my whole life,” Stockhausen affirms, “in so far as I conceive parts of pieces or sections or moments or scenes as dialects, in a specific way; it is a question of coloring this abstract formula-figure and each time producing a local music.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 197-198).

Formula composition rests on the conception of the work as a unified and coherent totality: “The essential, the universal, is valid for the whole universe, just like for example this



superformula in *Licht*. When we hear it, we don't recognize yet that it can sound like something from New York (as in *Michaels Reise / Michael's Journey Around the Earth*) or that later it could sound Japanese or Balinese or Indian.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 198) The omnipresence of the superformula creates unity and coherence but not uniformity or redundancy. It incites the creation of different “dialects” that depend, of course, only on the strength of the composer's imagination.

In Stockhausen's technique, the same principles that arise in serial music are further developed on the basis of a new synthesis. Thus his formula composition seeks the formative force of contrast in the interaction of liberty (intuitive play) and restriction (completely determined composition). These opposites are present in embryonic form even in the basic formula. In this way, the composer can in the same work accomplish the synthesis of various aspects that “before, had to be distributed among different works.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 329). Indeed, in works like *Kontra-Punkte*, *Gruppen*, and *Kontakte* it is a closed formal organization, linked to “the stronger approach,” that is in the forefront. In *Spiral*, *Pole*, or *Aus den sieben Tagen*, on the other hand, it is liberty, improvisation, and intuition—comparable to the “weaker approach”—that prevail. But Stockhausen is more attracted to the strategies of the stronger approach: “I am more and more interested in subjecting everything in a given work to a unified compositional conception.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 300). And formula composition rests on a particularly dynamic conception of the formula as foundation, origin, and generative core of a completely unforeseeable multitude of deployments of the musical concept. In place of linear or teleological development or unfolding of the classical theme, here we see a dynamic explosion of the formula in every dimension and direction of the musical utterance. And despite the fact that formula composition is, perhaps, a new form of the stronger approach to music, it actually corresponds to an open and uncontrollable extension of the formula-core that generates an unlimited quantity of musical galaxies. The formula is a concentrate of musical ideas whose explosion, projection, and expansion in all directions generate an unconventional, nonlinear, nonteleological form. As a point of reference and readability factor for the listener, the formula must of course be easily memorizable and singable. The conception of form in the context of formula composition is a pluridimensional, dynamic, spatial, and particularly intensive conception because its yield—its production and proliferation—is always centered, but practically unlimited.

### **Formula and Architectonic**

The omnipresence of the formula bears witness to the explicit necessity of conceiving the work—strong, classic—as a premeditated architecture: “I know that in all its dimensions a

temple, of course has, a profound secret of perfect mathematical harmony, and good music is made in this way as well,” writes Stockhausen. (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 192). “I have never left indeterminate the construction of the larger form. Even in the most free textual pieces we can see formal intentions and goals.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 339). The search for an architectonic balance in the work is, for Stockhausen in his formula composition, systematically linked to an explicit opening of the system. In other words, despite the fact that the formula and global structure are defined in advance, *Licht* has no closed story or linear teleological enunciation (as is the case in Wagnerian drama), there is no directional succession of events or dramaturgical logic with graduated climaxes that trace an overall, coherent arc. In *Licht*, “there is no story, no evolution of events” but rather, “a lot of events” and each scene, just like each day of the week, can be played separately. (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 356). The explosion of the formula is closely linked to the rejection of the teleological narrative structure of opera and allows an oscillation between the “dramatic form being developed and the lyrical form of moments.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 252). The musical form of *Licht* has nothing to do with a linear succession of formal functions in the morphology of a symphonic narrative or an operatic libretto (PROPP, 1970) : “I do not want to represent a *Story* as an arc of events with musical climaxes in the moments where they happen in a story, rather it is always a multitude of simultaneous processes that take place, based on the superformula and its interpretation in theatrical events. I can thus create a representation on many levels, made from very different successions of events. I do not feel tied to representing an evolutionary arc that comes from a dramatic story.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 118-119). And, in *Licht*, no formal functions are subjected to a narrative teleology, and so there is no “foreseeable conclusion. The three protagonists exist as ‘spiritual beings.’ Michael, Eva, and Luzifer are ‘active as forces in the present.’ I can thus intuitively compose innumerable scenes of meetings, confrontations, and unification of these three beings and all of this in completely different ways. Nothing is completely fixed!” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 117).

Stockhausen, as the inventor of *Formelkomposition*, uses a formal reasoning that is still logically derived from a formal approach with a long history, especially in the Germanic philosophic and literary traditions. Even the definitions of formula and formula composition rest on an organic conception: “A formula is a body with a determined number of elements; these are their pitches and their lengths with *tempi* for members and sub-members of the formula (like the members of a body)” and “each musical form inside a larger organism acts

as a living being.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 112). In his organicist conception, Stockhausen is, of course, heir to the tradition of Goethe, with his idea of the *Urpflanze*, the original plant, and also to Schoenberg (SCHÖNBERG, 1912). For Stockhausen, “a composition is an ensemble of smaller organisms that together form a larger organism that contains the combination and the interaction of the smaller organisms...We did not invent the principle, it is present inside us, in our bodies, in our minds, as it is in all living beings.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 112).

### ***Raummusik / Music in the space***

As a prolongation of serialism, formula composition produces in Stockhausen’s works particular forms that can be continually transformed. Since 1977, the superformula of *Licht* has been the point of departure for the production of vocal-instrumental and electronic forms “that were not at all present at the outset. I move in several different directions on the basis of these intervals and figures and I produce others, completely different.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 314-315). Movement “in several directions” is one of the essential aspects of Stockhausen’s compositional work, inconceivable in a thematic context. The notions of dilatation, compression, *Nulldurchgang* (That is, compression of melody, for example, until a particular sound or the compression of rhythm until periodicity is reached.), echo, colored silence, explosion, projection, inserted free passages, genetic formal principles, movement toward clarity of form or toward dilution of form, speed of spatial modification, intuitive constitution of form, Fibonacci progressions, constructions inspired by the Golden Section, and so forth—all these notions are linked to a dynamic conception of material and form as pluri-dimensional movement of sound material in space.

Stockhausen’s musical form is necessarily a process-form, a pluri-dimensional movement-form: on stage, in the audience, and outside the concert hall. This can be heard in many works especially *Michaels Reise um die Erde* (*Michael’s Journey Round the Earth*) from *Donnerstag*; *Luzifers Tanz* (*Lucifer’s Dance*) from *Samstag*; *Der Kinderfänger* (*The Pied Piper*) and *Entführung* (*Abduction*) from *Montag*; *Kinder-Krieg* (*Children’s War*) and *Chor-Spirale* (*Choir Spiral*) from *Freitag*; *Invasion* from *Dienstag*; *Helikopter-Streichquartett* (*Helicopter String Quartet*) from *Mittwoch*; and, of course, *Unsichtbare Chöre* (*Invisible Choirs*) from *Donnerstag*, *Oktophonie* from *Dienstag*, and *Tonszenen* from *Freitag*. With every available means—the theatrical action of the performers, multi-dimensional spatialization, direct movement in space, stereophony in movement, recent technology, etc.—Stockhausen is always seeking to give his music more movement—in other

words, more process, more vitality, more life. This necessarily entails an always controlled yet dynamic explosion of formulas with every possible means and in every possible direction in space; a dynamic spatialization of theatrical music: “Every idea according to which form is something fixed and the artwork is only a frozen individual form,” writes Stockhausen, “is a completely particular determinist representation, and the definition of relativity in all domains makes us conscious of a time that flows, indeed that time as an abstraction does not exist...but manifests itself first in things, and things are always in transformation.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p; 340). Stockhausen’s stronger formal approach implies not only a detailed analysis of movement but also and necessarily its clear and perceptible synthesis. In his formula composition the totality of the work is neither given nor pre-determined: the totality is open and is constantly modified in order to allow new things to spring forth, that is, to create its duration. But duration in Stockhausen’s work is not linked to the linear narration of the musical drama or to teleologically unidimensional language, but rather to the spatial and pluridirectional explosion of his formulas and imaginary scenarios.

“It is important”, writes Stockhausen, “that everything that is acoustically perceptible in the world enter into music—and, on the contrary, that music be capable of developing, refining, and enriching itself through the acoustical elements in this world.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 121). If the living organism is a whole, then this whole must necessarily stay open to the world. Stockhausen’s forms are living precisely because they are always seeking “balance between a desire for form and a desire for adventure.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 345). This is because they are always in a position to develop what is essential on very different registers and to integrate chance, unexpected stimulus, perturbing elements, or events exterior to music and to the coherent totality of the work. In *Elektronischen Studie I*, for example, we suddenly hear “a terrible noise and no one but me knows what it signifies, that it is in fact the canon fire at the birth of my daughter Suja.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 325).

### ***Szenische Musik* / Theatrical Music**

The heptology of *Licht* as “theatrical music” (“*szenische Musik*”)—Stockhausen uses the term only to define his own music (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 118) —is seen as an “artistic place largely open for the elucidation of music. In theatrical music it is a matter of coordinating sense perceptions for a musical deepening.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 731). And for this, one necessarily needs a “theatrical musician,” a performer-musician, a singer but also an instrumentalist-soloist who evolves on stage, without looking at the score, before the

audience's eyes: "The time of the theatrical musician has come. And we can never go back." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 329). Each piece—each constitutive part of *Licht*—has its own costumes and its own choreography in terms of steps, posture and action of the performers' limbs, body, eyes, and so on. "All of this belongs to the musical work...We see music with the same degree of differentiation that we hear it: this is also an ideal that I will forever pursue and that I want to structure under continuously new forms." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 329). For Stockhausen, "musical theatre" ("*Musiktheater*") and "theatrical music" ("*szenische Musik*") are not synonymous. And he clarifies that "for musical theatre we really need a production, décor, costumes, etc. 'Theatrical music,' on the other hand, is a new kind of musical play with new musical movements, with simple costumes, a musical lighting, a pluridirectional sonic projection with the help of transmitters—played by memory and realizable on every concert stage." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 463). Even in starting from "the spirit of the music," like Wagner, as a 20<sup>th</sup> century creator Stockhausen invents his own form of "theatrical music" which corresponds to a "total idea ('*Gesamtvorstellung*') of musical theatre that has the goal of the composition of *all* perceptive domains." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 699). But to the question "Does the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the theory of the 'total drama' as elaborated by Wagner, seem to you to be obsolete, old-fashioned, or utopian?" Stockhausen responds, "The *Gesamtkunstwerk* has existed from ancient times in Indian, Indonesian, Chinese, and Japanese drama. In Western operatic tradition several aspects of musical drama were not realized by the composers but instead given to others (directors, scenographers, choreographers, decorators, lighting designers, etc.). This is the reason that opera never became a perfect art form and has progressively crumbled. In this crisis, *Licht* is the first step in the direction of an integral musical-theatrical artwork (*eines integralen musikszenischen Kunstwerkes*). (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 699).

### **Music and Text**

Wagner's notion of "Wort-Ton-Drama" necessarily implied the fusion of and interaction between the dramatic text and music. But in the romantic era, one could not help but see music as a double or, at best, an amplifying force for the meaning of words, as is the case in every narrative enunciation in music. Stockhausen states: in *Licht*, "I do not use pre-existing texts. A synopsis is the summary after having finished a section of *Licht*." (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 d, p. 699). Stockhausen's *Formelkomposition* goes hand in hand with the explosion of the linearity of the literary text and even of the word as a linguistic unit

of signification. The dynamic conception of musical material, explicit in the formula technique, necessarily requires the liberation of the text from the prison of linear language; hence the frequent explosion of words that can be diluted in music: onomatopoeias, glossolalias, phonic material.

The renouncing of linear teleology in *Licht* is inevitably linked to the suppression of historical linearity and, necessarily, of unidimensional and univocal language. It is a well-known fact that literary romanticism and, even more so, the symbolist, impressionist and expressionist movements, worked toward an extension or opening—indeed, toward the “musicalization” through pluralization of meaning, metaphors, glossolalias, and so on—of literary language. However, Stockhausen’s conception of the textual material, due to his experiments with electronic and mixed music, is fundamentally different: “Our entire traditional conception of ‘language’ must be rethought.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 185). Effectively, the dialogue between the trumpet and the bass or the trumpet and the basset horn in *Michaels Reise* from *Donnerstag* gives a picture that is “deeper and more perfect of the psychic sensations and exteriorizations of the soloists than any spoken language, which forces complex linguistic content to enter in words.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 185). Stockhausen’s text has little in common with the traditional operatic libretto. It does not tell a story; it is born in the compositional process in close relationship with the formula technique and the actions of the “spirits”—Michael, Eva, Luzifer—given that the “character” is conceived as an “emanation.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 186). Neither “Prima le parole, poi la musica” (“First the words, then the music”) as Gluck had said, nor “Die Dichtung gehorsame Tochter der Musik” (“Poetry, the obedient daughter of music”) as in the famous saying of Mozart. Stockhausen nullifies all pre-existing priorities in the pursuit of his “theatrical music” which is necessarily a mixed and multiple form and which needs all possible means in order to become music-theatre. His texts are born in the compositional moment. If he is working on a scene in which there are also singers, the text is often formulated after the rhythm is fixed. This is case, for example, in the first act of *Montag aus Licht*: the bass part in *Kindergeschrei* (*Children’s Cries*) is first composed rhythmically with the exact formulation of the text coming later. The texts for *Sirius*, electronic music for trumpet, soprano, bass clarinet, and bass, are also composed, in large part, after the rhythm, composed earlier in relationship to the pieces from *Tierkreis*. (*Tierkreis* exists in several versions: twelve melodies for the signs of the Zodiac, for voice and strings, for chamber orchestra, for clarinet and piano, for trio (clarinet, flute or piccolo, trumpet or piano). The texts for *Licht* are often simply a constitutive part of its “theatrical music”: in other words, the

music of the texts, the linguistic symbols, the glossolalias, etc., is simply one component of a complex musical-theatrical universe built on the interaction of several interconnected semiotic systems. In *Invasion* from *Dienstag aus Licht* there are several plays on words with the names of Michael and Luzifer (“Mikaluz,” “Kaluzelmifer”) that seek to transmit the confusion and disarray of war. In the final chorus of *Jenseits* in *Dienstag* the composer invents an incomprehensible language as a great spiral of vowels and consonants. The verbal sonic material is only one component of a musical material that is necessarily mixed. Moreover, for Stockhausen, “In a highly developed world, we will only sing and we no longer reduce what we have to say to words (which is actually very primitive)” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 347); “Language is horribly primitive, but we can transcend it.” STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 348); In the context of formula composition, verbal language and linguistic elements definitively renounce the linearity and teleology of enunciation to keep only the power of certain kernels of meaning, of the atmosphere of the story, or of praise.

### **The Open Multiplicity**

The function of the word in Stockhausen’s *Licht* can be compared to that of the formula. Strongly charged with meaning, saturated with references to cultural zones and different historical periods, it acts in an open, playful space of meaning and interpretation—an open space that is necessarily limited by the perceptual capacities of the listener-spectator. Thus, *Montag/Monday*, the first day of the week of the *Licht* cycle is the day of the moon—Mond-Tag, Monday, Lundi, Lunedì—but also the day of Eva—“Day of the woman, the mother, day celebrating new birth, a modern Christmas.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 169); As Stockhausen explains,

When I was working on a part of the larger process in *In Hoffnung (Waiting)* in *Montag* from *Licht* and I needed text, I stumbled upon sources that had been given or sent to me by interested people—apparently by chance—like, for instance, a book on *Inana* or a book on ancient Germanic mythology. I like very much choosing names that are related to Eva, putting them into relationship with water. Thus I discovered certain relationships between cultural fields of the past and I invented other things that were not there. I feel completely free to color with singular words, to complete the musical meaning that exists in an abstract way. I do not want to exclude the fact that there are reactive relationships, if on the basis of the textual composition ideas come up that I then put into rhythm in the music and that I complete with the sounds of the melody. Fortunately, the system is so open that this sort of thing is always possible.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1998 c, p. 104-105).

For Stockhausen, the plurality of the imagined scenario and the epic orientation recall, perhaps, the primary orientation of Wagner’s musical drama with the interaction of the world

of the gods, the world of man, and the world of fairy tales in the tetralogy. But the spatial-temporal openness of the musical-theatrical enunciation, without historic necessity or directional development, recalls perhaps more strongly such ancient texts as the Purana, for example, where one finds a fascinating disarray of cosmogonic stories, or the adventures of Vishnu, Shiva, or the Goddess, or also a multiple space of cosmologies, rites, social and religious laws, calendars or ancient stories. It reminds one also of the ritual Japanese Noh theatre or the Indian Kathakali tradition, or mythic traditions that traverse the world and the ages. Indeed, myths are intrinsically multiple, “constructed like the old cathedrals that we admire; it took hundreds of years to build them. Several generations worked on the construction and left their marks in the architecture.” (REIK, 1979, p. 224). And in myths, just as in the unconscious or dreams, “all civilizations cohabitately impossibly, no investment is refused.” (LYOTARD, 1977, p. 106). In a similar way, Stockhausen’s theatrical music rests on the principle of free association—in the free wandering of the creative imagination. Always faithful to his stronger compositional approach but always a child of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well, Stockhausen *first* composes the overall development “with its phases and temporal periods” and then the concrete action and precise verbal material: “There are important themes that I gave myself, somewhat like the old popular stories or in the Noh dramas which refer to universal contents (legends that we could summarize very briefly in only a few lines).” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 278). The density of meaning is not necessarily linked to linguistic signification. On the contrary, prayer gestures, for example, as in *Inori* or the gestures and flavors of the Seven days of the week, as in *Düfte-Zeichen* from *Sonntag aus Licht* have a suggestive force necessarily productive of meaning, which can perfectly concur with and even surpass the text or verbal material.

## Conclusion

Stockhausen was never directly influenced by Wagner, and his search for a “integral musical-theatrical work” using the procedures of *Formelkomposition* was never directly inspired by the master of Bayreuth. However, similarities—despite the differences—are quite evident.

“I am happy,” writes Stockhausen, “when I discover spiritual kinship in other domains and that in the world things are revealed that many minds perceive and develop differently. This is the most important thing in the history of evolution, to discover this kind of parallelism. The universal spirit manifests itself in multiple ways.” (STOCKHAUSEN, 1989 b, p. 313). The “spiritual kinship” that, despite their differences, links Bach, Beethoven,



Wagner, Schoenberg, and Stockhausen is defined by the stronger formal approach, by the exceptional faculty of synthesis in these creators who have at their disposition compositional methods that are completely different. Separated in time, they attract us strongly, like magnets that have become points of orientation in Western music by the power of their works which is, simultaneously, the strength of the approach: strong organization of the material on the basis of firmly defined principles, strong presence of creative imagination in the framework of a basic system that is well defined, and a strong and unlimited opening to content and spiritual values.

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