

“Consciousness is power”: Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Aus den sieben Tagen*

Abstract. The year 1968 was a year of many changes for Karlheinz Stockhausen. After receiving some devastating news and a short period of depressive thoughts, he found a book about Sri Aurobindo that helped him to change his mind and create a new genre of music. Stockhausen started composing *Aus den sieben Tagen* – the piece that opens a new chapter in the composer’s output called “intuitive music”. The score consists only of 15 short texts in which the composer gives the musicians hints. However it is hard to answer what *Aus den sieben Tagen* really is: an improvisation, free composition or indeed a new genre? What is the importance of intuition here and is there any space for rational thinking? In this paper, the author would like to present the aforementioned piece from the historical point of view, as well as from the personal one – from a perspective of a listener, a performer, and a teacher.

Keywords: intuitive music, German contemporary music.

1. Introduction. “I become what I see in myself.”¹ How intuitive music was created

Monika Pasiecznik, an author of a book about Stockhausen’s *Licht*, wrote that 1960s and the 1970s was the period of Stockhausen’s emotional and artistic crisis, time of his greatest doubts (Pasiecznik 2011: 40). After a premiere of a piece titled *Kurzwellen* – a process composition in which radios are used as musical instruments – Stockhausen was waiting for his wife Mary Bauermeister and their children to come from the USA to their home in Kürten. But Bauermeister sent him a letter in which she explained that their marriage had come to an end and that she wanted a divorce. She was over his numerous and visible love affairs. Stockhausen was trying to convince her to come back together, but it was in vain, so he decided to change her mind differently. He started a hunger strike and even tried to commit suicide. As Pasiecznik wrote (2011: 40): “For Bauermeister Stockhausen’s suicidal threats were only an attempt to put her under pressure, a kind of an emotional blackmail because of anger and fear of her decisive objection”.

While fasting Stockhausen was asking himself: who am I? What are my life goals? One day he found a book by Satprem about Sri Aurobindo titled *Sri Aurobindo, or The Adventure of Consciousness*². It was on the composer’s bookshelf for quite some time completely untouched. The book was given to Stockhausen by a young woman in California after a seminar. As the composer mentioned (Kurtz 1992: 160):

“On the second day of waiting – I had absolutely resolved not to go on living... In my bookcase I discovered an old, out-of-print book. It was Satprem’s book about Sri Aurobindo. A girl had given it to me one day during a seminar in California. I had never read it but I brought it back home with me. I found that what I was reading was in extraordinary accord with the feelings about life and the spiritual mood that was in me at that moment.”

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) was an Indian yogi, philosopher and poet. He thought that above mind, which is the highest thing that the evolution reached by now, there is supermind, eternal the Truth-Consciousness that “is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge”³. Only because of supermind can one become better, but “It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one’s true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body”⁴.

The aforementioned philosophical texts were a godsend that healed Stockhausen’s soul. The author of the composer’s biography, Michael Kurtz, claims that the situation described above was an impulse for purification. As he wrote (Kurtz, online): “Coming at a crisis point, it [the book with the texts on Sri Aurobindo] was the impulse for a catharsis that immediately generated new music”⁵.

Readings and fasting were the starting point for Stockhausen’s writing. The short poems became later a content of a score *Aus den sieben Tagen* (*From the seven days*). The piece opened a new chapter in the composer’s life – personal as well as professional one. The score consists of 15 text-compositions in which no musical note was written.

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, text available on: <http://intyoga.online.fr/tg.htm>

² Published in French as: Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo ou L’aventure de la conscience*, Paris 1964. English translation: Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo, or The Adventure of Consciousness*, New Delhi 1964, text available on: https://www.aurobindo.ru/workings/satprem/adventure_of_consciousness_e.htm.

³ A Life Sketch, [online] http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/ashram/sriuro/life_sketch.php.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Michael Kurtz, *Stockhausen: Life and work*. Quotation after: *Stockhausen Edition No. 14 (Aus den sieben Tagen)*, [online] <http://www.sonoloco.com/rev/stockhausen/14.html>.

The first performances of the piece took place on 25 November 1968, when the group Arts Laboratory Ensemble played parts *Es* and *Verbindung*. Less than a month later, on 15 December 1968, *Stockhausen Group* played *Es* in Brussels. Next year, Stockhausen recorded the piece (excluding the part *Oben und Unten*)⁶.

2. Intuitive music versus improvisation

One of the most important questions is: what is understood by Stockhausen under the term “intuitive music”? The composer claimed that it is not equal to the improvisation both in jazz (even free jazz) and Eastern music, because a musician uses some scales, certain style and there are specified rules how to conduct voices in the piece. He said (Stockhausen 1972: online): “In Intuitive Music, I try to get away from anything that has established itself as musical style. In improvised music, there is always, as history has shown, some basic element – rhythmic, or melodic or harmonic – on which the improvisation is based”.

Stockhausen claimed that even in free jazz, in order to call it jazz, musicians are recalling certain style of music. The very first symptom of it is the setting, which is associated with a typical jazz band that consists of saxophones, piano, drums, double-bass, etc. Intuitive music is not also similar to what we can experience in Eastern Music. In his lectures, Stockhausen gave an example of music from India, where, in order to play a piece, a musician has to work hard under the supervision of the master – the person that is teaching him (or her) how to use the instrument, how to produce a sound, which scales to use, how to develop rhythm, form and many more. There are many rules that one has to follow to produce just a single note. This, according to Stockhausen, is narrowing the possibilities that one can have.

Intuitive music is based on freedom. But it also cannot be called totally aleatoric as it sometimes is (see Jarzębska 2005). The composer gave many details which sound should be produced. The idea is to spontaneously create the piece according to the score which is just a kind of source of mental preparation for a performer. This new music genre is based on a spiritual connection between members of the performing group. Texts just help them to meditate and get to a certain level of consciousness.

It is also not true that the intuitive period in Stockhausen’s output was something that happened unexpectedly, that music from this period is something odd compared to other of his works before and after. In fact since the beginning of his career, Stockhausen was experimenting, improvising on piano and each action was bringing him closer to intuitive music. We can see first symptoms of a new genre in his idea of process music and analyse intuitive music as one of this genre. For example, just a year before *Aus den sieben Tagen*, Stockhausen composed *Prozession* in which musicians had to react to what others are playing according to signs “+” (higher, faster, louder, etc.), “-” and “=”. Then he created *Kurzwellen*, in which the idea of guiding the musicians by signs “+”, “-” and “=” was the same, but the performers had to react to short wave radios.

The composer was aware that in fact a new generation of musicians has to be born in order to be able to understand this new kind of music and play it. He faced some problems when he wanted to perform *Aus den Sieben Tagen*. A couple of performers thought that writing poems cannot be called composing, there were also people not open to new kind of musical experience.

3. The structure and setting of *Aus den Sieben Tagen*

Aus den sieben Tagen was composed between 7 and 11 May 1968, most of the movements were written on 8 May. Each part has its own title and sometimes more precise information about the setting (see Table 1). There is no information that one should perform movements only together, so performers can choose from them freely.

The exact setting of the piece is also not mentioned. In the score we can find that, for instance, *Unbegrenzt* is “For ensemble” and *Litanei* for a solo performer. However, Stockhausen said in an interview during his seminars in London in 1972 that it is best to perform this piece in small groups. As he said (Stockhausen 1972: online): “The best number is 4 or 5. Even with 6, in my opinion, one needs a lot of self-discipline to stop playing for relatively long periods of time during the performance, and to know exactly when the right moment has come, so that also solos and duos and trios occur – not just sextets all the time”.

Stockhausen found out that the setting can be the very first symptom of a style of music. Maybe this is the reason that during the recording of *Aus den sieben Tagen* that took place between 1969 and 1972, he was experimenting with different ensembles and, himself, with rather odd instruments. He played, for instance, on siren-whistle, short wave receiver and cardboard box with sand and pebbles (see Table 2). There are also many exotic instruments used like Japanese rins and bamboo flute or Indian sitar and tabla. “Usage ... helps to get away ... as well as expands the sound possibilities”.

⁶ Stockhausen Edition No. 14 (*Aus den sieben Tagen*), recorded in 1969 and 1972, released in 1993 by Stockhausen Verlag.

Table 1. The structure of *Aus den Sieben Tagen*

| Title in German | Translation | Date of creation | Setting |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|--|
| <i>Richtige Dauern</i> | <i>Right Durations</i> | 7 May | For circa 4 players |
| <i>Unbegrenzt</i> | <i>Unlimited</i> | 8 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Verbindung</i> | <i>Connection</i> | 8 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Treffpunkt</i> | <i>Meeting Point</i> | 8 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Nachtmusik</i> | <i>Night music</i> | 8 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Abwärts</i> | <i>Downwards</i> | 8 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Aufwärts</i> | <i>Upwards</i> | 8 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Oben und Unten</i> | <i>Above and under</i> | 9 May | Theatre piece |
| <i>Intensität</i> | <i>Intensity</i> | 9 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Setz die Segel zur Sonne</i> | <i>Set Sail for the Sun</i> | 9 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Kommunion</i> | <i>Communion</i> | 9 May | For ensemble, at first for 3, then 4, 5, 6, 7 players, singers |
| <i>Litanei</i> | <i>Litany</i> | 10 May | To the player |
| <i>Es</i> | <i>It</i> | 10 May | For ensemble |
| <i>Goldstaub</i> | <i>Golden dust</i> | 10 May | For small ensemble |
| <i>Ankunft</i> | <i>Arrival</i> | 11 May | For any number of musicians |

Table 2. Musicians and instruments used in recordings of *Aus den sieben Tagen*. "Exotic" instruments are in italics, musical objects – in bold

| Title of the part of <i>Aus den sieben Tagen</i> | Instruments used |
|--|---|
| <i>Richtige Dauern</i> | Piano, Hammond organ, percussion, trombone, double-bass, voice, <i>bamboo flute</i> |
| <i>Unbegrenzt</i> | Piano, percussion, viola with contact microphone and filter, trombone, double-bass, clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, voice, 2 rins, siren-whistle, short wave receiver , filter and 2 potentiometers for viola |
| <i>Verbindung</i> | Tam-tam and percussion with microphone and filter, electronium, double bass, <i>tabla</i> , <i>Indian bells</i> , percussion, viola with contact microphone and filter, piano, 2 filters and 4 potentiometers for viola and tam-tam |
| <i>Treffpunkt</i> | Piano, tam-tam with microphone, <i>bamboo flute</i> , trombone, piano, tenor saxophone, clarinet, glissando flute, short-wave receiver , filter and 2 potentiometers for tam-tam |
| <i>Nachtmusik</i> | Tam-tam with microphone, flexatone, <i>guero</i> , <i>jaw's harp</i> , electronium, double bass, percussion, viola with contact microphone and filter, piano, short-wave receiver , cuckoo flute, 2 filters and 4 potentiometers for viola and tam-tam |
| <i>Abwärts</i> | Tam-tam with microphone, percussion, piano, trombone, piano, cuckoo flute, <i>bamboo flute</i> , short-wave receiver , glass with stones , cardboard box with sand and pebbles , 1 filter and 2 potentiometers for tam-tam |
| <i>Aufwärts</i> | Tam-tam, claves, viola with contact microphone and filter, trombone, piano, filters and potentiometers for viola and tam-tam, short-wave receiver , 2 rins |
| <i>Intensität</i> | Piano, percussion, viola with contact microphone and filter, tam-tam with microphone and filter, saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet, flute, hammer , nails , block of wood , sand-paper , rasp , file , 4 car horns , siren-whistle, 2 filters for viola and tam-tam |
| <i>Setz die Segel zur Sonne</i> | Tam-tam with microphone, piano, electronium, percussion, viola with contact microphone and filter, trombone, double-bass, clarinet (E-flat), clarinet, basset-horn, tenor saxophone, <i>taragod</i> , 2 filters and 4 potentiometers for viola and tam-tam |
| <i>Kommunion</i> | Tam-tam and percussion with microphone and filter, Hammond organ, piano, viola with contact microphone and filter, double bass, trombone, saxophone, flute, clarinet, voice, short wave receiver, glass with stones , 2 filters and 4 potentiometers for tam-tam and viola |
| <i>Es 1st version</i> | Piano, percussion, trombone, double-bass, saxophone, flute, clarinet, voice, siren-whistle, short-wave radio |
| <i>Es 2nd version</i> | Tam-tam and percussion with microphone and filter, electronium, viola with contact microphone and filter, piano, filters and potentiometers for tam-tam and viola, voice |
| <i>Goldstaub</i> | Electrohord, <i>keisu</i> , <i>rin</i> , voice, <i>sitar</i> , saucepan partly filled with water , 2 little bells and ship's bell, voice, conch shell, large cowbell, 14 rins, jug and bowl of water , Kandy drum, ring of bells, voice, hands, recorder |

4. Rational *versus* intuitional

Although it seems that *Aus den sieben Tagen* is an example for total indeterminacy in music, it is not quite true. There are many fragments of the pieces in which one needs to play exact rhythms. Mostly the performer has to have kind of self-confidence and belief in what he or she is doing. Since this is a piece that is created “here and now” by a group, it is crucial to have an ability to listen carefully to others and react to what they do. In *Richtige Dauern* one has to play and stop when he or she feels it should be stopped. In *Intensität* it is required to play a single sound until a musician feels the warmth in the whole body. Similarly, in *Setz die Segel zur Sonne* one has to play a tone and focus on its harmonics, then listen to other players and their tones, blend with them and come back to his/her tone. The idea is to create complete harmony “and the whole sound turns to gold/to pure, gently shimmering fire” as it is written in the text. Also in *Treffpunkt* musicians should “meet” in one tone. There are several movements of *Aus den sieben Tagen* that they seem to be very similar. Stockhausen asked to play in a rhythm of some vibrations, then to mix them together (*Verbindung*, *Nachtmusik*, *Abwärts*, *Aufwärts* and *Kommunion*). For example, in *Verbindung* there are vibrations of the body, heart, breathing, thinking, intuition, enlightenment and universe mentioned. Playing these rhythms requires a lot of consciousness and imagination. It seems to be something both rational and intuitive.

4.1. Experiencing *Aus den Sieben Tagen* as a Listener

Every performance of *Aus den sieben Tagen* as a very intimate time that one has to experience while being with musicians and being connected to them. Therefore, the author of this study does not recommend listening to the recording of the piece, because this kind of music is created here and now. Taking part in a concert can help to experience each sound with no certainty what will happen. By listening to the recording one assumes that the performance already took place, that the music on the CD is yet gone. Also one can perceive this piece as a total chaos. Intuitive music is very organic one – the music is being born, it lives and dies when it is finished. Although, one can have such an experience while taking part in any performance, there is one barrier. Because of the knowledge of styles, forms, genres and so on we somehow are not surprised by what is happening in the music now and we have some expectations on what will happen. Thanks to intuitive music one can get to the stage of deep or focused listening, which is listening with curiosity and with no certain expectations, letting the music be a guide and forgetting the time. Experiencing the piece in this way helps to understand the intuitive processes that are taking place on stage at the very moment that one listens.

4.2. Being a Player

At a concert at the Karol Lipiński Music Academy in Wrocław on 23 November 2013 a performance of *Aus den sieben Tagen* took place. It was during a festival called StArtFest that was organized by two students – Agata Chojnacka (née Kniaź) and Monika Wasilewska. The group of performers was diverse – there was a composer, a student of secondary school, musician and three theoreticians. Three pieces were performed – *Richtige Dauern*, *Treffpunkt* and *Verbindung*. The instruments used during the performance were: violin, viola, cello, double bass, accordion and electric guitar. The group was formed just for this occasion and there were no rehearsals nor had the group ever played together before. Some people from the group were not even playing their instruments for some time, but all wanted to experiment. The author of the study decided to play viola as she saw this instrument allows using more interesting effects than on violin. The experience of playing this piece was for the author something very new because of feeling connected to the people that were around and amazing freedom that one can express themselves the way they want mixed with remembering nothing from the performance.

Similar experience had a composer Johan Boberg who wrote an article about his experience of playing *Goldstaub*⁷. The text of this piece is as follows:

“Live completely alone for four days
without food
in complete silence, without much movement
Sleep as little as necessary
Think as little as possible

After four days, late at night
without conversation beforehand
play single sounds
WITHOUT THINKING which you are playing

Close your eyes
Just listen”

⁷ The text of this composition is quoted after Johan Boberg: <http://www.sonoloco.com/rev/stockhausen/goldstaubaccount.html>

With his friend Fredrik Högberg Boberg decided to try playing the piece in 1990. They remained separated for four days in one of the small houses that their school was using for ensemble playing. They informed everyone about the experiment, so that no one would disturb them. They even were wearing earplugs all the time. After four days they met in a room and started playing. Boberg wrote (Boberg, online):

“We took our positions, concentrated and started to play. I do not remember anything from that. It is like a black hole. I remember having the feeling that we didn’t play very long, but I really don’t know how long. Perhaps this was the only time during these four days that I actually didn’t think at all. ... GOLDSTAUB is for me a turning point in life that a great deal of my musical thinking is derived from. It is difficult to say exactly how, but I believe that GOLDSTAUB changed my life.”

What is the key to experience playing *Aus den sieben Tagen* in the way Stockhausen wanted that means – playing without thinking, without feeling the time passing by, with intuition turned on? Maybe it is because of curiosity, openness, group of people to play with – one has to answer after their own experiments.

4.3. Using of *Aus den Sieben Tagen* in educating

The author of the study used this piece with her music therapy students⁸. They were asked to bring with them instruments that will help them to express them the most freely. After an introduction of what is the idea of intuitive music and the history of the creation of *Aus den Sieben Tagen*, two fragments were chosen and read loudly by one of the students. Then the light went off, so they had some time to think and prepare to play. It is worth noting that all of the music therapy students are using improvisation during their studies – while working with patients and at lessons at the academy, but at the same time most of them do not listen to new music, nor like it. For all of them playing intuitive music was something new. During the performance of *Treffpunkt*, two of them, without any agreement made before chose the same pitch to start with and did it at the same time. After the performance, they said it is very hard to get rid of harmonic and melodic thinking in order to blend with others and create harmony that they are used to. Students found out that the personalities of people playing as well as the general feeling of the group can be shown by intuitive music and affect the performance. They claimed that there are many factors that can change the performance – usage of light in the room or lack of it, the day, weather, feeling of doing something new and quite challenging were what they said that influenced them. The author sees that the more a group is opened to new music and new experiences in general, the better it can concentrate and really play the piece how Stockhausen wanted. The author, on the contrary, because of the role of a teacher had to become a kind of a guide. Therefore she had to start making music to break the silence and inspire students to use their intuition and take musical actions. Starting to play became a much rationalised action in order to help students to experience freedom of intuitive playing.

5. Was there the end of intuitive music? Similarities to other genres and contemporary approach to intuitive music

The aforementioned piece is rather hard to define or to be labelled. Is it a kind of musical theatre, maybe a performance or ritual on the stage? It can be a vocal piece as well as an instrumental one. *Aus den sieben Tagen* is not an only attempt of intuitive music. Between 1968 and 1970 Stockhausen wrote another set of text-compositions entitled *Für kommende Zeiten*. This kind of approach to musical material was helpful for the composer for years. Since 1980, Stockhausen’s son Markus has been giving intuitive music concerts and workshops.

In 1990, the term intuitive music was used in rock music. Its definition was not so similar to what Stockhausen had in his mind, as it is understood as a kind of psychedelic rock, as Jim DeRogatis writes: “It’s simply an approach to the recording studio as a tool to transport yourself and the listener some place else – some place strange and magical” (de Rogatis, online). As the representatives of this rock genre can be seen such groups as: *Velvet Underground*, *La Bradford*, *Flying Saucer Attack*, *Jessamine*, *Cul de Sac*, *Microstoria* czy *Windy & Carl*. A member of a group *Microstoria* said:

“Our idea is to ask the listener to take a step ‘inside’ the music. It’s not like we build a soundscape that we put down in your home; the music itself is the architecture. It is meant to be three-dimensional, so that you discover a sound behind the sound” (de Rogatis, online).

Also in 2002 a band called *Intuitive Music Orchestra* came into being. Musicians from this ensemble are giving concerts and recording CD without previous rehearsals together. They use diverse instruments, among which there are: french horn, saxophones, flutes, gongs, didgeridoo, percussion instruments, vocals and rubap.

⁸ Twice – in 2016 and 2017. The more recent experience will be described in the study above.

We can also see some similarities to, for instance, Chinese music, where, according to the legend, in order to produce real music that was united with nature a musician had to understand processes and emotions within him (Sachs 1943: 106–107). Also thinking of a sound as something endless, thinking of no space or time is present in Eastern philosophy.

6. Conclusions

Rudolf Frisius said that: “Stockhausen has been continually proving his readiness and power to break free from what was known and to risk [doing – KB] something totally new” (Frisius 2010: 192–211). *Aus den sieben Tagen* is a very interesting and controversial piece, through which we can see that Stockhausen was not afraid of challenges and experiments.

The uniqueness of Stockhausen’s intuitive music comes from a lot of freedom and a possibility to use imagination. Intuitive music sets musicians free from what they learned, from clichés. It helps to express oneself. At the same time the boundary between improvised and intuitive music still seems blurry. It is hard to get rid of all the rules, as sometimes playing according to them can be intuitive, therefore to break with them one has to rationalise what he or she is doing. Also being a kind of a guide to other performers, especially when being a teacher, seems to require only rational actions that concern when to start playing, which pitch to play, in order to give a comfortable space for others to perform totally freely. While performing, there are many factors that could make the actions of a performer rationalised – a feeling of doing something odd, being closed to new experiences, feeling not connected or distant to other instrumentalists, etc.

However, “Aus den sieben Tagen” is a very unique piece that is kind of Stockhausen’s diary. The poetic texts are witnesses to what happened in his life and also his own music therapy. There is no place for coincident in this music, there is just consciousness. What Stockhausen really did can be described by the same words that Satprem wrote about Sri Aurobindo:

“The age of adventures is over. Even if we reach the seventh galaxy, we will go there helmeted and mechanized, and it will not change a thing for us; we will find ourselves exactly as we are now: helpless children in the face of death, living beings who are not too sure how they live, why they are alive, or where they are going. ... Sri Aurobindo leads us to a twofold discovery, which we so urgently need if we want to find an intelligible meaning to the suffocating chaos we live in, as well as a key for transforming our world. By following him step by step in his prodigious exploration, we are led to the most important discovery of all times, to the threshold of the Great Secret that is to change the face of this world, namely, that *consciousness is power*” (Satprem, online).

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