

The Light Within: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Karlheinz Stockhausen's LICHT

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In his later philosophical writings, Martin Heidegger put forward the notion of 'the fourfold' to describe the human condition: mortals awaiting the gods, dwelling on earth looking to the sky.¹ It was a description that captured something of the ubiquitous human curiosity about our own nature and the universe in which we live. It is a curiosity rooted in the temporal and spatial limits of everyday life, and yet looks to, and wonders about, concepts of universality, eternity, and infinity. These are the concepts that Karlheinz Stockhausen sought to navigate in his seven-part opera cycle LICHT (LIGHT) (1977–2003),² a work that he once described, simply but grandly, as being 'about God as light in music.'³ Although the symbolism of the God with whom Stockhausen sought to infuse his massive opera cycle was drawn from diverse mythologies, religions, theosophical and esoteric writings, and sometimes even his own dreams, it was nevertheless a God perceived by a composer living in the time and space of everyday late-twentieth-century Germany. As such, LICHT can be understood not just as an exploration of the gods and skies—as Stockhausen conceived it to be—but also of the

¹ For an outline of the concepts of Martin Heidegger's 'fourfold' see his essay, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking,' in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York; Sydney: Harper & Row, 1975), 143–61.

² Stockhausen's usual practice was to capitalise the titles of his works. I have followed this practice throughout this article, except where I directly quote authors who do otherwise.

³ Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Music Is the Most Spiritual of All the Arts,' in *Texte Zur Musik Band 17 1998–2007* ed. Imke Misch (Kürten, Germany: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2014), 328.

earth-dwelling mortals who wait for them and wonder about them. This article will approach LICHT in this latter way, seeing it as a navigation of the nature of mortal human being—an approach largely ignored in the literature. It does this through the lens of Jacques Lacan’s three registers of the human psyche: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real.⁴

The LICHT Superformula

The seven operas of LICHT, comprising some twenty-nine hours of music, all derive from a single, serially composed ‘Superformula’. The ‘Superformula’—as Stockhausen called the three-layered, nineteen-bar page of music—operates as a kind of genetic core, informing the music’s form and content throughout the entire cycle. It is the most elaborate iteration of ‘formula composition’, a technique that Stockhausen had been working with since 1970, when he composed MANTRA for two pianos with ring modulation. He later described this technique as referring to formula in the dual sense: as a system of mathematical proportions ‘from which a world of relationships can be deduced,’ and of a ‘magical formula from which it is possible to evoke marvellous events.’⁵ Stockhausen originally derived the three-tiered LICHT Superformula from three twelve-note tone rows, each representing one of the three characters upon whom LICHT focusses: Michael the cosmic creator, who is the representative of the Divine on Earth; Eve the sexualised earth mother, who represents birth and nurture; and Lucifer the spiritual anarchist and advocate for spiritual purity, who despises the compromised world of humans and denies the existence of a God who gives coherence and meaning to it all.⁶ By the time Stockhausen assigns these three rows to the three characters, however, he has already adjusted them. He moves one pitch, D, from the Lucifer row to the Michael row, giving Michael thirteen notes (starting on d^{'''}, ending on d^{''}), Eve twelve, and Lucifer eleven. These rows are then divided into seven ‘limbs’, each representing one day of the week (see Figure 1). The double barlines in Figure 1 mark the three major divisions of the three rows, creating what Jerome Kohl has described as ‘a typical Darmstadt “magic square”’. In this case, all twelve chromatic pitches appear in each of these three major vertical sections as well as in each of the three horizontal rows (except the D, which has moved from the Lucifer row to the Michael row).⁷

⁴ Throughout this article, I use the term ‘psyche’ in its classical sense, deriving from the Latin term for ‘breath’ and referring, as such, to the essential life-force of human beings. This has also been referred to variously throughout philosophy, psychology, literature, and culture more broadly by such terms as ‘spirit’, ‘soul’, ‘mind’, and ‘consciousness’. It refers to an abstract notion of mind, both rational and irrational, rather than to the material thing that is the brain. It captures the overall totality of ‘mind’, rather than individual traits that might become evident in particular aspects of a person’s psychology or character.

⁵ Karlheinz Stockhausen, *The Art, to Listen: A Musical Analysis of the Composition in Friendship*, trans. John McGuire, 2nd ed. (Kürten, Germany: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2015), 2.

⁶ Stockhausen drew on a number of sources in creating these characters including *The Urantia Book* (Chicago: Urantia Foundation, 1955), and various theosophical texts, especially from Helena Blavatsky and Alice Bailey. See, for example, H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy. Volumes 1 and 2. A Facsimile of the Original Edition of 1888* (Los Angeles, USA: The Theosophy Company, 1888/2004), and Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology: Volume 1 of Treatise on the Seven Rays* (New York, USA: Lucis Publishing, 1962). The LICHT sketches at the Stockhausen Archives in Kürten, Germany, also show references to a wide range of mythological sources in relation to each of Michael, Eve, and Lucifer. See, in particular, Karlheinz Stockhausen, ‘Licht Allgemeine Skizzen’ (Kürten: Stockhausen-Archiv). An example of these sketches is reproduced in *Texte Zur Musik Band 5 1977–1984* (DuMont 1989), 150.

⁷ Jerome Kohl, ‘Into the Middleground: Formula Syntax in Stockhausen’s “Licht”’, *Perspectives of New Music* 28, no. 2 (1990): 267.

Figure 1. The LICHT nuclear notes, indicating the three layers corresponding to the characters of Michael, Eve, and Lucifer, and the seven limbs corresponding to the days of the week.

The figure shows three staves of musical notation, labeled Michael, Eve, and Lucifer. Each staff contains seven notes, one for each day of the week: MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY, and SUNDAY. The notes are arranged in a grid-like structure, with Michael's notes on a treble clef staff, Eve's on a middle treble clef staff, and Lucifer's on a bass clef staff. The notes are connected by lines, forming a complex web of relationships between the characters and the days.

Stockhausen then elaborated upon these nuclear pitches with serially organised changes in durations, dynamics, timbres, and a chromatic scale of tempi: twelve equally incrementally increasing tempi ranging from $J=45$ to $J=85$. He also added ornamental embellishments, microtonal glissandi, echoes, and various additional sounds. These he referred to as 'coloured noise' and 'coloured silence', comprising sounds such as whooshing-type noises, kissing sounds, tongue-clicks, breathing, and whispered counting. The result was the Superformula (Figure 2).⁸

The proportional relationships within the various musical parameters of the Superformula inform the music of LICHT on multiple levels. In addition to the music played and sung from bar to bar, the relative duration of acts and scenes, and changes of tempo and pitch register are all drawn from different combinations of the three character-connected formulas and the seven day-connected limbs, sometimes adopting the familiar serialist devices of transposition, inversion, and retrograde.⁹ Beyond the Superformula's role of shaping the musical content of LICHT, it also represents Michael, Eve, and Lucifer beyond their physical representations on the stage (the three core characters of LICHT are represented on stage in three forms: singer, instrumentalist, and dancer/mime).¹⁰ Stockhausen described the formulas as 'the real theatrical figures,' adding that 'an element of the formula, an interval with a particular sound shape can be materialised in manifold ways. I can interpret the same element of the formula in very different visual or scenic realisations.'¹¹ It is in this way that Stockhausen imbues his characters' musical formulas with a sense of personality so real and profound that he sees their material manifestations—on stage as singers, instrumentalists, and mimes—as derivative of their most essential forms, their formulas.

The integral relationships across both the horizontal and vertical axes of the Superformula, formed by virtue of the Darmstadt 'Magic Square' structure, suggests a structural interdependence of the three layers and, therefore, of the three characters. This interdependence is further underscored by the placement of Lucifer's D into Michael's formula, making

⁸ See Kohl's article for a more thorough analysis of these elements of the Superformula, and the various serial aspects of how they are organised: Kohl, 'Into the Middleground,' 262–91.

⁹ A comprehensive overview of the ways in which the Superformula is deployed throughout LICHT can be found in Rudolf Frisius, *Stockhausen: Die Wekzyklen 1977–2007* (Mainz: Schott, 2013). For examples of more detailed analysis in relation to particular scenes or operas, see Richard Toop, 'Kathinkas Gesang Als Luzifers Requiem' and 'Elektronische Musik Mit Tonszenen Vom Freitag Aus Licht,' in *Six Lectures from the Stockhausen Courses Kürten 2002* (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2005).

¹⁰ Michael voice and instrument are tenor and trumpet, Eve's are soprano and basset-horn (and occasionally flute), Lucifer's are bass and trombone.

¹¹ Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Das Theater Ist Das Ergebnis Der Musik,' in *Texte Zur Musik Band 16 1998–2007* (Kürten: Stockhausen Verlag, 2014), 5.

Figure 2. The LICHT Superformula. © www.karlheinzstockhausen.org

Superformel für LICHT Stockhausen

The score is written for three parts: MICHAEL (top staff), EVA (middle staff), and LUZIFER (bottom staff). It includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (p, pp, mp, mf, f, ff). Performance instructions include 'vibr.', 'Geräusch-Gliss.', 'ECHO', 'Jodel', 'Vorecho', and 'rit.'. Time markers in boxes indicate specific points in the piece: 60, 63.s, 53.s, 63.s, 50.s, 47.s, 60, 85, 60, 45, 60, 56.s, 71, 75.s, 80, 63.s, 67, 60 rit. The bottom right corner contains the date '24. III. - 4. IX. 1978'.

each intimately connected with the other, while both formulas are mediated by that of Eve, whose formula is not only placed as the central layer of the three, but whose pitch range in the Superformula alone overlaps the pitches of the other two. In this way, all three formulas become tied together and it is only together that any of them approaches totality.

The Superformula as Personality: Lacan's Registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real

Given the interconnectedness of its layers, it is possible that the personality Stockhausen invests in the Superformula is not so much the personalities of three distinct characters, but rather of one character with three separate but connected, mutually dependent strands. A deeper exploration of the nature of that character and its complex, three-stranded personality therefore enables a new understanding of LICHT as a depiction not just of the gods and mythologies upon which other commentators have focussed, but as one of the human, earth-dwelling mortal who looks to those gods.¹² While Stockhausen himself did not deeply explore this aspect of LICHT, focussing much more on its theology than its psychology, this reading is nevertheless consistent with his ongoing belief in a self-reflective, self-similar universe, where 'patterns replicate themselves throughout the universe on different scales and in different domains.'¹³ Such a view had come into vogue with the passing of positivism in the 1940s and 1950s, and deeply influenced Stockhausen's compositional genesis. It was surely such a belief that also enabled the young Stockhausen to form a strong association with Hermann Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*, which he read at twenty years of age in 1948 and, three years later, remarked in a letter to his friend, the Belgian composer Karel Goeyvaerts, on its message of the 'disappearance of borders between disciplines.'¹⁴ Stockhausen maintained this belief in the connections of different levels of reality throughout his life. In an interview of May 2007, just a few months before his death, Stockhausen related the shifting tempi, time signatures, and rhythmic structures of his music to a growing liberation in human development, breaking free from strictures of a regimented past.¹⁵

Such a depiction of LICHT does not pretend, however, to depict Stockhausen's own personal views about how the human psyche functions. Rather, it accepts that Stockhausen's view of the interconnected nature of reality invites such an exploration, even though he did not make it himself. It is also consistent with a now long tradition of Lacanian cultural critique, even though the tendency of music towards less concrete signification than literature or film can mean that such explorations are far from straightforward. Lacan himself did not tend to write about music, and, indeed, Lacanian commentator François Regnault went so far as to question whether music can ever be of use in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Regnault nonetheless conceded that 'a structural approach rather than a compositional one might demonstrate a procedural identity between the [Lacanian concepts of] the chain, the knot, etc. and the temporal organization of a piece of

¹² For examples of these theologically-oriented analyses of LICHT, see Thomas Ulrich, *Stockhausen: A Theological Interpretation*, trans. Jayne Obst (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2012); *Stockhausens Zyklus Licht: Ein Opernführer* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2017); Georg Henkel, *Kosmisches Lachen: Synthi-Fou Und Der Närrische Humor in Karlheinz Stockhausens Openzyklus Licht* (Hamburg, Germany: Tredition, 2012); and Günter Peters, *Holy Seriousness in the Play: Essays on the Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen* (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2003).

¹³ Jerome Kohl, *Karlheinz Stockhausen: 'Zeitmaße'* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2017), 3–4.

¹⁴ Karlheinz Stockhausen and Karel Goeyvaerts, *Karel Goeyvaerts - Karlheinz Stockhausen: Briefwechsel/ Correspondence 1951–1958*, trans. Jayne Obst (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2017), 235.

¹⁵ Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Ich Möchte Ins Paradies,' in *Texte Zur Musik Band 15 1998–2007*, ed. Imke Misch (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2014), 320–1.

music.¹⁶ As such, the formulas of LICHT can be seen to exhibit some structural and conceptual characteristics of Lacanian theory, which allows the Lacanian theoretical tools to be applied in a way that invests the music with characteristics of the human psyche.¹⁷

In recognising the possibility of understanding the LICHT Superformula—and therefore LICHT more generally—as a depiction of the human psyche, the question arises as to what type of personality it is. As Stockhausen himself did not address this directly, other models for the analysis of human personality must be sought. Given the richness and complexity of LICHT's symbolism, there are likely to be many ways of approaching how that symbolism might connect with human personality. It is here that Lacan's triune model of psychic registers captured in his notions of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real becomes most relevant.¹⁸ Upon examining the three formulas of LICHT in both their nuclear pitch and their Superformula forms, distinctive characteristics emerge: characteristics that align enticingly with the Lacanian registers. These alignments are then further reinforced as the characters are instantiated on stage throughout the operas.

Michael's nuclear row is dominated by largely consonant intervals: especially perfect fourths and major thirds. In the Superformula, this predominance of consonant intervals creates a sense of tonality that is unusual in serial music, and the return to D at the end—an octave lower than the beginning—creates a feel of completion, almost like a return to the tonic. The 'roundedness' of this sensation is like that which theologian Thomas Ulrich describes as indicating Michael's appearance on earth as a representative of God is essentially the same in both his divine and his earthly incarnations.¹⁹ These consonant elements of the Michael formula, and the sense of tonality with which they invest it, tend to make it the most singable, the most graspable, of the three formulas. These are all characteristics that accord closely with the Lacanian Symbolic. In this register, abstract concepts and subjective images are given signification that can be understood and shared socially, through common language or through social conventions and systems of order such as laws, religion, and cultural norms.²⁰ It is a role of signifier, making graspable and communicable that which would otherwise be known at best only subjectively and intangibly. Michael himself articulates this when, in the Third Act of *DONNERSTAG*, the opera that focuses on his time on earth as a human, he says that he became a man 'so that Man can listen to God and God can hear his children.'²¹

¹⁶ François Regnault, 'Art after Lacan,' *The Symptom* 14 (2013), <http://www.lacan.com/symptom14/art-after.html>, fn 24.

¹⁷ This approach is already foreshadowed in, for example, Michael L. Klein, *Music and the Crisis of the Modern Subject* (Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 2015), which, throughout the text, invests particular aspects of musical compositions with various Lacanian theoretical concepts (such as the appearance of an unexpected G flat in the opening bars of the Brahms F Minor Clarinet Sonata op. 120 no. 1, which Klein connects with the Lacanian 'symptom'. Klein, *Music and the Crisis of the Modern Subject*, 27.) but does not go so far as to describe an entire musical structure as a representation of the totality of the human psyche, as I do in relation to the LICHT Superformula.

¹⁸ These concepts developed considerably over Lacan's life and writings and different periods of his life tended to emphasise different registers, but the interconnectedness of all three is perhaps most thoroughly explored in one of his latest seminars. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXII: R.S.I. (1974–1975)*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10788/179>.

¹⁹ Ulrich, *Licht*, 36.

²⁰ See, for example, Jacques Lacan, 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,' in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: Norton and Company, 2006), 225.

²¹ Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Michaels Heimkehr: Iii. Akt Vom Donnerstag Aus Licht (Score)' (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 1986), Vis. 22–23 (trans. Ian Parsons).

Major and minor thirds predominate in the nuclear form of the Eve formula, which may suggest a sense of harmony, given that these intervals lie at the basis of the most fundamental chord of Western tonal harmony, the triad. In the Superformula, however, the notes of the Eve layer are connected by microtonal glissandi and 'coloured noise' such as breathing, kissing, and whooshing sounds. Thus, pre-musical and extra-linguistic noises, along with the fluidity of microtonality, connect with these basic intervals of Western tonal harmony, forming the totality of Eve. It is, as such, reflective of what Lacan describes as the 'orthopedic' totality that emerges in the realm of the Imaginary where, during what he calls the 'Mirror Stage' of development, a child sees its own image in a mirror and, through forming imaginary connections between body parts—seeing them as belonging to a single self—constructs a unified sense of identity from a fragmented image of the body.²² It is a process that continues throughout life as the human psyche continues to integrate different aspects of itself into this consolidated image of identity. Eve's role in generating this unified identity is underscored in Act III of MONTAG when, during the seductive basset-horn solo of Eve's instrumental character, Cœur de Basset, the male choir sings to her: 'You collect the formula's limbs, distribute anew, heal the world through the unification of EVE's body-thirds.'²³

The Lucifer formula is the most erratic of the three. Its intervallic structure in the nuclear row shifts fitfully from incremental steps to large leaps and, in the Superformula it is marked by irregular rhythmic patterns. Unlike the general downwards direction of the Michael formula or the upwards of Eve's, no overall pitch trajectory is apparent in the Lucifer formula. It is the most elusive of all three: interspersed with brackets of whispered counting, and eschewing both the solid, graspable gestures of Michael and the unifying fluidity of Eve. In this way, Lucifer becomes aligned with the Lacanian Real.

The Real is the most difficult of Lacan's three registers to define, in the sense that any attempt to do so is, to some extent, inconsistent with its essential nature: that which resists both the signification of the Symbolic and the imagery of the Imaginary. It refers to that part of the human psyche that both precedes and resists either of the other two registers, which nevertheless arise out of it. There is a primacy to the Real, rather like the chaos out of which the universe emerges in many creation myths. Lacan describes the Real as that which 'does not wait, especially not for the subject, since it expects nothing from speech. But it is there, identical to his existence, a noise in which one can hear anything and everything, ready to submerge with its roar what the "reality principle" constructs there that goes by the name of the "outside world".'²⁴ In this way, the Real becomes a disruptive, chaotic, but ineffable domain of human personality, always present but never knowable, a more raw and more profound version of that which is later perceived, in the outside world, as reality. The chaos it embraces allows the coexistence of contradiction, which can never really be dismissed by the Imaginary's attempts to form its disparate parts into an

²² Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,' in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W W Norton & Company, 1949/2006), 78.

²³ Karlheinz Stockhausen, *EVA's ZAUBER*, (score), trans. Suzanne Stephens (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2000), XVII. This passage from the opera then continues by referring to the connections Eve also creates with Michael's 'soul-fourths', reinforcing her connection with Michael and, therefore, of the Imaginary with the Symbolic. For a fuller description of how the Imaginary links with, and ultimately merges into, the Symbolic see Andrea Hurst, "'Know Thyself!' A Lacanian Model for Understanding Subjective Complexity,' *South African Journal of Psychology* 39, no. 3 (2009): 275–88.

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, 'Response to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary on Freud's "Verneinung",' in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966/2006), 324.

illusion of unified identity, nor the Symbolic's attempts to order it through the social signifiers of language. This defiantly persistent internal contradiction is both traumatic and necessary in the psyche that develops out of it and will always, to an extent, be rooted in it. The Real's presence will be ubiquitous but veiled, revealing itself only subversively and as distorted, such as through psychological symptoms that might hint at it, but never expose it directly, but which, as Slavoj Žižek has described, 'disturbs the surface of the false appearance.'²⁵ This 'false appearance' is here the illusion of unity built by the Imaginary and the socially constructed semblance of order of the Symbolic. Its disruptive but necessary nature is captured in Lucifer's words in the third scene of SAMSTAG, the opera that focusses on him specifically: 'If you, Man, have never learned from LUCIFER how the spirit of contradiction and independence distorts the expression of the face ... you cannot—in harmony—turn your countenance towards the LIGHT.'²⁶

The synergies of these connections between Stockhausen's three characters and Lacan's three registers are both surprising and unsurprising. They are surprising insofar as the intellectual milieus of the deeply spiritual German composer and the atheist French psychoanalyst were widely divergent and I have found no evidence that either was aware of, much less interested in, the other. The comparisons are, however, unsurprising in that both are intricately interconnected triune models that illuminate the internal relationship between the opposites outlined by the same Heideggerian fourfold: the gods and skies in which Stockhausen was so interested, and the earth-dwelling and mortal humans who were Lacan's focus. Whether humans are an atom of God, as Stockhausen believed,²⁷ or whether God is created in the image of humans as Feuerbach argued,²⁸ the possibility that each might be analysed and explained through models that connect and are compatible with each other is, despite their divergent perspectives, hardly startling.

A cautionary note should, however, be made in relation to these synergies. It would be naïve to assume that the connections I have posited here are entirely neat, or that they can be made without qualification. Neither Lacan's registers nor Stockhausen's characters were created with any awareness of, or reference to, one another, and there are, indeed, instances in LICHT where Lacan's registers are inadequate to fully explain how the characters develop. Consequently, the connections I am suggesting are more in the nature of overlaps rather than absolute equivalence. In order to maintain a psychoanalytic perspective on the operas, it is necessary to invoke concepts other than those of Lacan.

An instance where this is necessary is at the appearance of the flute in LICHT. This appearance has been described as another incarnation of Eve, alongside her more commonly noted representation in the basset-horn.²⁹ Lacan's Imaginary does not provide a cohesive explanation for the ways in which Eve is sometimes represented in the basset-horn, sometimes in the flute, and sometimes in both together. However, Carl Jung's notion of 'the shadow', the

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2008), x.

²⁶ Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Luzifers Tanz (Vom Samstag Aus Licht) (Score)' (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 1991), Ta XXI. (Trans. Suzee Stephens).

²⁷ 'Zweites Gespräch,' in *Texte Zur Musik Band 4 1970–1977* ed. Christoph von Blumröder (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag), 533.

²⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 187.

²⁹ See, for example, Richard Toop, 'KATHINKAs GESANG als LUZIFERs REQUIEM,' in *Six Lectures from the Stockhausen Courses Kürten 2002* (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2005), 126.

destructive side of consciousness, does open up some possibilities in this regard, particularly in the final Act of MONTAG (which I discuss later in this article), where the alto flute and piccolo player—in the guise of the fabled and somewhat dark Pied Piper—abducts Eve’s children.³⁰ It is therefore with this caveat that I offer the examples outlined in this article of how Lacan’s registers enable new insights into the connection between Stockhausen’s characters and the internal functions of the human psyche.

LICHT through the Lacanian Lens

Layering the three Lacanian registers onto Stockhausen’s formulas generates new possibilities for viewing what LICHT depicts of the human dimension of the self-similar universe with which the composer was so deeply fascinated. As the threads of the formula are fragmented and reconnected, inverted and put in retrograde, and as they interact with and change one another throughout the course of the seven operas, different commentaries on these aspects of the human psyche begin to unfold. This results in a very rich and vibrant picture of the human psyche, which allows LICHT to be seen as a constant internal struggle of the different strands of human being. These strands try in different ways to dominate and influence one another, to blend with or change one another, tangled in the different permutations and combinations that are featured in each of the seven operas: themselves each constituting a focus on one, or some combination of, the three characters of Michael, Eve, and Lucifer, and using their formulas to reflect their focus.

The domination by the Symbolic at the exclusion of the other two is seen, for example, in Act II of DONNERSTAG: MICHAEL’S REISE UMDIE ERDE (MICHAEL’S JOURNEY AROUND THE EARTH). In this central act, Michael travels the world, appropriating its musics into the bold stridency of his formula, which is played on his representative instrument, the trumpet. While he seems charismatic and powerful at first, he soon becomes lonely and out of touch with himself, calling at one stage for the world to stop rotating so he can seek out Eve. Here the story becomes an allegory for the process whereby human engagement with the conventionally Symbolic world—through religions and laws that colonise and popularise—ultimately loses touch with the human self of the Imaginary: becoming empty and meaningless and ultimately without the capacity to progress.

In the final Act of Eve’s opera, MONTAG, a basset-horn incarnation of Eve becomes increasingly absorbed in herself, staring at her reflection in a glass sculpture until it breaks. Her formula is turned in on itself, with fragments of inversions echoing one another in a scene that is, in essence, a re-imagining of the tale of Narcissus and Echo. Here, however, the formula—played on the alto flute and piccolo—leads the children, to whom Eve had given birth earlier in the opera, into the sky. Eve has here become a darker version of herself emerging, it seems, out of her own shattered image. The music is electronically transposed, higher and higher, at first becoming almost gratingly piercing and eventually unable to be heard at all. The sense of identity and self, nurtured in the Imaginary, became so self-absorbed and disconnected from the world that it loses the capacity to be perceived, effectively losing itself in itself.

Lacan’s mirror never fractures in the way that Eve’s does. In this way, this scene in LICHT becomes an example of how viewing LICHT through the Lacanian lens offers a new perspective

³⁰ For an overview of Jung’s concept of the shadow, see Carl G. Jung, ‘Approaching the Unconscious,’ in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (USA: Dell, 1964), 83.

not just on the operas, but also on some of Lacan's concepts. It gives rise to the notion that too much absorption in the Imaginary—that is, to much focus on the self—leads not only to a break down of connection with the outside world that would otherwise have been enabled by the Symbolic, but also, ultimately, to a destruction of the Imaginary's unified image of self as well. Lacan never discussed the Imaginary becoming too absorbed in itself, nor the mirror image of self being fractured as a result. It is a notion that emerges, however, once the Lacanian Imaginary is given opportunities for new interrogation through seeing its synergies with Stockhausen's Eve.

In the case of the Real, Lucifer is potently represented in LUZIFER'S TANZ (LUCIFER'S DANCE), the third scene of his opera, SAMSTAG, where a huge wind orchestra is assembled vertically on stage, divided into ten sections representing different parts of a human face. The Lucifer formula dictates the different rhythms and tempi in which each section plays, all against one another. The ensuing chaos and contradiction eventually immobilises everything when the orchestra calls a strike and refuses to finish the piece. This is the immobilising psychosis of a personality that has become too dominated by the chaos of the incomprehensible Real, where the dark and ineffable core of the psyche takes over and dominates.³¹

Throughout the operas, these themes play out in different ways, as each of the days focus on different combinations of the characters and therefore on different interactions of these three aspects of the human psyche. As the formulas fragment and interact, different tensions and irresolutions arise; for example, in the noble but lonely sounds of five trumpets at the end of DONNERSTAG playing the bare nuclear notes of the Michael formula from rooftops surrounding the theatre, or in the choral conclusion to FREITAG—the day that focuses on Lucifer's sexual domination of Eve and, therefore, of the Real's exertion of power over the Imaginary—the nuclear notes of the combined Eve and Lucifer formulas are dissolved into notes high above the stave for the sopranos and below it for the basses. Throughout almost all of LICHT, the integral completeness of the original Superformula, and of the Darmstadt Magic Square from which it arose, is constantly obscured and lost as the formulas separate and dominate in these different configurations. Layered with Lacan's registers, this then becomes a charting of a human psyche always out of balance, where the tensions between its component strands remain unresolved through the one or other strand taking precedence over the others.

Lacan's own description of the relationship between the three registers of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary was through the metaphor of a Borromean Knot: the three interconnected rings, of which the removal of any one leads to the unravelling of them all.³² Despite this depiction, Lacan never seemed to suggest that it was either desirable, or even possible, to maintain an equilibrium between the registers. Indeed, he referred to the relationships and interactions within the Borromean Knot as a 'dialectic', implying that it will always contain a degree of contradiction and opposition.³³ Furthermore, while he referred to the role of psychoanalysis in assisting to uncover the connections and natures of that dialectic relationship, he did not go so far as to suggest that some sort of equilibrium between the three

³¹ For an examination of the relationship between the dominance of the Real and psychosis, see Louis Sass, 'Madness and the Ineffable: Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Lacan,' *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology* 16, no. 4 (2009): 319–24. Lacan also discusses the role of the Real, and its manifestation in psychosis, citing the later writings of James Joyce as examples of this. See Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome – the Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, trans. A.R. Price, *Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016).

³² Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXII: R.S.I.*

³³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXII: R.S.I.*, 67.

registers was the ultimate aim of this process.³⁴ That equilibrium is, however, implied in the integral completeness of Stockhausen's Superformula, and so in that sense, it invites us to question the very desirability and possibility of balance. When any formula dominates the texture at the expense of another, the totality of the Magic Square—that is, the dodecaphonic completeness of its vertical layers and its horizontal limbs—is not realised. In this way, the music leaves open the questions of how balance might manifest, whether it could ever really be achieved, or whether it can only exist as a conceptual possibility in the form of the nuclear structure on which the Superformula is built.

The closest LICHT comes to realising this balance is at the very middle of the cycle's week: MITTWOCH. In its final scene, MICHAELION, the full Superformula is performed more or less unadulterated for the only time in the whole twenty-nine hours of the seven operas. Over four rounds, a vocal sextet sings all three layers, simultaneously, initially heard as a slightly elaborated version of the nuclear notes. Each iteration gradually builds in detail until the complete Superformula is performed in the fourth round. It is a moment of incandescent beauty that seems to suggest, with all the shifting, fragmenting, inverting, and retrograding of the formulas, that the real balance musically, and ultimately in the human psyche, is found in the simplest of ways: each formula, character, and register of the human psyche, being accepted for what it is.

This is the message of the final moments of MICHAELION, where each layer of the Superformula coexists as itself and, in doing so, proclaims that the balance and nature of the whole lies in the equality of its parts—each register needing the other two. It is, then, the musical realisation, through the statement of the full Superformula, of the integral totality of the nuclear pitches that existed only as a conceptual idea in the form of the structure of the foundational Magic Square.

What is crucial in this extraordinary moment, however, is how quickly it is over. It is not like a Wagnerian apotheosis where the end comes, and everything is resolved in radiance. The singers disperse out of the auditorium and into space and the score specifically directs that they no longer sing in sync with one another.³⁵ This magical moment of balance has been and gone in an instant. A shimmeringly beautiful chord in the synthesiser leaves us with the unmistakable sense that something exceptional has been accomplished, but the vanishing voices also tell us that it has past. Stockhausen insisted that there is no clear start or end to the LICHT cycle.³⁶ It is, however, worth noting that MITTWOCH, which corresponds to the Wednesday limb of the Superformula (its fifth and sixth bars) is located very much at the centre of the formula. Placed in the middle, its message is that the notion of a balanced and integrated psyche is not a goal but rather one step in an ongoing process. In this way, the layering of Lacan's registers onto Stockhausen's formulas offers an enriched commentary on the issue of balance, enabling a perspective on the internal relationships within the human psyche, beyond that which Lacan himself addressed in his own analyses.

³⁴ See, for example, 'Function and Field of Speech,' 208, where Lacan talks about the importance of analysis in uncovering the 'imaginary intention' attached to the 'symbolic relation in which it is expressed,' and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 6, where he describes analysis as 'a concerted human action ... to treat the real by the symbolic' but in which the practitioner also 'encounters the imaginary to a greater or lesser degree.'

³⁵ Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Michaelion 4. Szene Vom Mittwoch Aus Licht (Score)' (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2002), 131.

³⁶ '7 X Licht Im Rundfunk (2001–2007): 7 Teil: Sonntag Aus Licht,' in *Texte Zur Musik Band 16 1998–2007* ed. Imke Misch (Kürten: Stockhausen-Verlag, 2007/2014), 161.

In any event, the Lacanian perspective on LICHT reveals a human psyche that is forever in a state of flux, arising from a kernel of exquisite, but ultimately elusive, totality and completeness as captured in the integral and serialist totality of the Superformula. As the formal genome of LICHT, the Superformula informs and shapes the opera cycle's development, and in this sense it is the drive that continually propels its musical evolution. That evolution is, however, always incomplete because, even in the most musically vibrant moments throughout the twenty-nine hours of its deployment, the opera lacks the original totality and balance from which it arose and which, in that sense, it is always seeking. That LICHT reaches this resolution in the final moments of MITTWOCH, only to lose it again a moment later, and to continue in the opera's ongoing cycle where each day leads to the next with neither start nor end, is not, however, in any sense presented pessimistically. For Stockhausen, LICHT was the cycle of God as light in music, and although it is never fully resolved, the human search for balance and connection that that cycle entails can nevertheless be instructive and worthwhile. In this way, LICHT's music remains full and fertile, even when the strands of its genesis, the Superformula, are fragmented, frayed, and stretched. Those strands might always be tense and in flux, but the music tells us that tapestry they weave is always rich and beautiful.

Conclusion

This article has made just some of the observations that can be found when LICHT is viewed through the Lacanian lens of the Symbolic-Imaginary-Real. There will, of course, be other theoretical frameworks for exploring this human dimension of LICHT beyond that of Lacan and even Lacan's ideas, despite the correlations I have suggested, do not connect with every aspect of LICHT. I have already noted how Jung might provide some insights into aspects of LICHT where Lacan cannot. Models totally outside of psychoanalysis will also offer different perspectives. It is likely that several models and approaches might be relevant to an exploration of the dimension of LICHT as an exploration of the human psyche and that several of them might be applicable at once, just as Stockhausen drew from many diverse theological, theosophical, and mythological sources in conceptualising and developing the spiritual dimension of his characters.³⁷

Lacan's Borromean Knot of human psychic registers, like Stockhausen's Superformula, offers a rich and fecund launching pad for the exploration and expansion of the complexities and possibilities that lie in each. This enables us to better understand the binding connection Heidegger made between earth-dwelling mortals and sky-faring gods, as it appears in Stockhausen's self-similar universe where the atoms of one and the galaxies of the other all move in the same universal patterns of integral serialism.

About the Author

Ian Parsons is a PhD graduate from Monash University, Australia. He has a keen interest in the connections between musical form and philosophy. He is also a radio presenter in Melbourne, focusing on avant-garde and experimental art music.

³⁷ Throughout LICHT, references can be found to symbolism and texts from sources as diverse as the Bible (particularly the Apocrypha), Tibetan Buddhism, Vedic Hinduism, Sufism, *The Urantia Book*, theosophical writings of Helena Blavatsky and Alice Bailey, and various ancient mythologies.