

# KONTRA-PUNKTE

(Introduction to a concert on 22 August 1992 at the *Mozartsaal* of the *Alte Oper* in Frankfurt, where the *Ensemble Modern* performed KONTRA-PUNKTE conducted by Stockhausen. It was the second of seven concerts with introductions by Stockhausen during the *Frankfurt-Feste '92*. The programme: HYMNEN 1st Region [Electronic music and musique concrète] – KONTRA-PUNKTE for 10 Instruments – QUELLE DES LEBENS, choir music with tone scenes [8-track projection].)

KONTRA-PUNKTE (COUNTER-POINTS): I wrote the title with a hyphen. There is a special development in this work that I would like to explain to you before we play it.

We have rehearsed this and other works during the past few weeks. I would like to point out to you what we concentrated on during those rehearsals.

KONTRA-PUNKTE actually begins with points in the first few bars. The melodies are composed so that the timbre changes with every note. Each instrument only plays isolated notes. The notes have different pitches, durations and dynamics. This goes on at the beginning for only seven bars. Already at the end of these seven bars, three little figures appear in which the flute first plays three notes, one after the other, then the clarinet plays two, and finally the trombone plays two. Those are no longer points, but rather notes grouped together by colours.

I will play this beginning for you. Pay particular attention to the points and how they are grouped.

Example 1, Bar 19: Beginning  
(Points – first groups in flute, clarinet and trombone)

Those were the first groups between the points.

Now throughout the entire work, these groups develop to become larger and larger. But I always I go back to the points. In other words, first isolated notes and a few groups are heard; then gradually the groups grow larger, recognizable by the instruments that play several notes in succession and usually also faster, with small differences in duration.

I will begin now with the first groups that you have already heard, and we will then continue to play so that you can hear a second moment, in which the notes are grouped by colours.

Example 2, Bars 7 – 14: First groups – tone points – new groups

The groups grow larger: more and more groups of notes are played by the individual instruments in groups.

Example 3, Bars 22 – 29: Continuation (transition to larger groups)

We will now play from the beginning until here: Points – small groups – points again – larger groups – points again.

Example 4, Bars 1 – 29: Beginning – continuation – extrapolation  
(Points – groups – points – groups – points)

After another structure of points, several such groups are heard simultaneously (nested inside each other) and in a faster tempo.

Example 5, Bars 43 – beginning of 52:  
points – growing and later overlapping groups

During the entire work the following takes place: Gradually, the individual instruments cease to play. The piano takes over the notes that other instruments had played before. So there is a change in timbre because the development is concentrated more and more on the piano: The piano collects the other colours in its part. At the same time there is a secret acceleration. It is not readily noticeable; but because of the groups that occur more and more frequently and in increasingly larger dimensions, the rhythms also become faster. A first announcement of this is an explosion in the piano part. You do not yet know where that will lead. Please listen to this.

Example 6, Bars 64 – 74: Acceleration in the succession of the groups –  
quick piano “explosion”

The group structures continue, but a development similar to what happened with the piano now takes place, in that a melody is completely torn apart into lots of small and very sharp points. You hear a whole swarm of these points, but actually it is a fast melody, divided up into lots of different instrumental colours. After this side, you also recognize the other side: on the one hand the piano that combines many different notes of the same colour; and now many notes of different colours.

Example 7, Bars 76 – 90: fast colour changes within the groups

The woodwinds take over more and more long groups, in which the notes are connected and the individual points are transformed into melodies that you can also clearly follow, because *one* instrument virtuosically plays many tones in succession.

Example 8, Bars 91 – 116: long groups with connected notes

Now many melodies follow, for the first time with very much contour. That is, each musician changes the dynamics step-wise from note to note. That way the music gains more depth in the course of becoming more melodious.

Example 9, Bars 117 – 128: melodic groups with contour  
(dynamics change from note to note)

In my description, I will skip the point-moments that return again and again.

Now I will show you how the piano relatively quickly takes up broad passages of notes for the first time. (I already said that the differences in duration disappear more and more.) The other instruments add short groups.

Then another moment follows, in which all the notes change their characteristics. The notes are staccato, separated by pauses.

Example 10, Bar 158, from the last *sforzato* piano tone up to bar 174:  
broad piano passages – tone points

After that, very long groups of notes (mainly in the woodwinds) are marked by the other instruments with *sforzati* and sharp accents. You also hear sharp points against lines.

Example 11, bars 175 – 194 first note: lines and accents

I just said that the instruments gradually stop playing. Before an instrument stops, it gets a very distinct form – for example the trombone as the first instrument.

Example 12, bar 202, last note until bar 216: trombone cadenza

Before the violin plays its last substantial passage, it has a rendezvous with the cello. They play a duet together. They run towards each other in *pizzicato* and then get lower. After the violin has very clearly marked its final passage, the whole ensemble plays many little points around the violin passage. Everything flies apart in staccato points, and then for the first time a fermata appears, which brings the development to a halt.

Example 13, bars 273 – 323: violin - violoncello duet with accompanying tone-points – violin cadenza – tone-points that expand into the tone-space – calm (fermata)

The piano becomes more and more important. When it takes over smaller passages with faster melodic sequences, the others add sharp accents – i.e. points. Thus an initial counter process emerges, after more and more lines had been created.

Example 14, bars 340 – 400: Piano passages with accents by other instruments

Up until now, the harp usually played small groups or single notes, and it takes leave by playing a solo.

Example 15, bars 401 – 423: harp cadenza

The end is quasi a piano solo. Besides the piano, only the clarinet, cello and flute are left. Clarinet and cello stop one after the other; finally, the flute is the only instrument left playing with the piano. After that, the piano is left alone.

The process of the entire work develops from the point – the point as the dissolution of melodies by changing timbres. More and more, they transform into individual groups that also become polyphonic, and then are gradually taken up by the piano leading to the first piano cascade.

One after the other, the instruments stop playing, whereby each instrument performs a characteristic figure at the end of his part, and the development ends up in the piano part. The tempo accelerates more and more.

It is a mental process that I imagined while composing, that a union gradually evolves out of the multiplicity at the beginning: in the homogeneous timbre of the piano, but with all the nuances of dynamic variety and with very fine differences in duration. It is a process of life that can be understood in a very basic way.

Now we will play the entire work.