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Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke* in Leeds

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This is a slightly adapted transcription of an oral presentation given at an archival research workshop entitled 'Exploring Theatre and Music "Ephemera."' It was hosted by the Centre for the Comparative History of Print (CHOP) and held at the Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds on Friday, 17 May 2013. The purpose of the workshop was to highlight, for the benefit of both Special Collections staff and other academics, the research potential of various items within the Collections. Thus, presentations were brief, and not aimed at music specialists in particular (the audience was an interdisciplinary arts one). An audio-visual version of the presentation, with recorded narration and a sound example, is available online: http://www.james-mooney.co.uk/stockhausen_pianopiece11/.

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In this essay I very briefly discuss Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* (*Piano Piece 11*) and outline its relevance to: (a) the city of Leeds; and (b) two of my current research and teaching projects. The presentation on which this essay is based came about because a copy of the score for *Klavierstück XI* turned up in the Special Collections archive at the University of Leeds. There was nothing particularly unusual about the score itself—it was merely an ordinary copy of a commercially published score—but the piece did turn out to be a connected with Leeds, and with my own research.

I will begin by briefly discussing the piece itself, its score, and its relationship to Stockhausen's electronic music. I will then mention the connection that Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke* have with the city of Leeds. I will conclude by outlining the *Klavierstücke*'s relevance to two of my current research and teaching projects, one project documenting the life and work of electronic musician and researcher Hugh Davies (1943–2005), the other a broader research and teaching project exploring the relationships between musical tools/technologies and musical practice.

The German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007) is regarded by many as one of the most important avant-garde art-music composers of the post-war era. The score for *Klavierstück XI* (composed in 1956) is not a conventional musical score, in the sense that it is not read from left to right, and from the top to the bottom of the page. Rather, the score—a single large page—comprises several visually distinct and separate groups of notes positioned variously on the page. The piece begins as follows. "The performer

looks at random at the sheet of music and begins with any group that catches his eye. This this he plays, choosing for himself tempo [...] dynamic level and type of attack,"¹ that is, whether the notes are played *legato* (smoothly) or *staccato* (abruptly), and so on. When the performer reaches the end of the first group of notes, there is a new set of tempo, loudness, and type-of-attack instructions. The next group of notes is played in accordance with these instructions and, again, is supposed to be the next group of notes to catch the performer's eye. This may turn out to be the same group of notes again (if that is what happens to catch the performer's eye) or it might be a different one. If ever a group of notes is played for a second time, there may be an additional instruction in the score to play it an octave higher or lower in pitch (or two octaves higher or lower). The piece proceeds in the manner described until any one of the fragments is arrived at for the third time, at which point the performance ends. Thus, a performance could be short or long in duration, and may or may not include all of the groups of notes printed in the score. In any case it is likely that each performance of the piece will be different.

The complete *Klavierstücke* were performed and recorded in 1965 by Aloys Kontarsky,² Stockhausen's pianist of choice in the 1960s and 70s. (The complete set at this time included pieces 1 to 11; further piano pieces were composed in and after 1979.) In his performance of *Klavierstück XI* Kontarsky begins with what is the largest printed group of notes in the score, lasting about a minute and a half at his chosen tempo. Then, a shorter fragment is selected, following the tempo, loudness, and articulation instructions given at the end of the first fragment. This second fragment is shorter, lasting about 30 seconds. The third fragment selected lasts 24 seconds, and the fourth fragment 6 seconds. No fragments have been repeated up to this point.

At the time *Klavierstück XI* was composed—1956—Stockhausen was also composing electronic tape music (music constructed from recorded or synthesized sounds and assembled on magnetic recording tape). In the electronic music studio, magnetic tape is literally cut up into pieces with a razor blade and stuck together with splicing tape, and the music put together in this way. When composing with a tape machine, sounds could also be transposed up and down in pitch by speeding up or slowing down the tape playback. Although some tape machines allowed the playback speed to be continuously varied, it was much cheaper—and therefore more common—for tape recorders to have a switch that allowed the tape speed (in inches per second) to be selected from a number of predetermined options. Typical tape

¹ Stockhausen, K. (1956), *Klavierstück XI* (Piano Piece XI) (Vienna: Universal Edition), score.

² Released in the UK as follows: Stockhausen, K. (1967), *Complete Piano Music* (CBS, 77209), double LP. Subsequently reissued as follows: Stockhausen, K. (1993), *Klavierstücke I-XI / Mikrophonie I & II* (Sony Classical, S2K 53346), double CD. At the time of writing these recordings of the *Klavierstücke* are available online via the Avant Garde Project website as follows:
<http://avantgardeproject.conus.info/mirror/agp101/index.htm>.

speeds were 30, 15, 7½, or 3¾ inches per second. This kind of switch, in other words, allowed one to double, or halve, the tape speed. A doubling in tape speed would transpose the recorded sound up one octave in pitch, and a halving of tape speed would transpose down an octave.

An interesting feature of *Klavierstück XI* is that 'tape-like' treatments of the material can be seen even though the piece itself did not directly involve the use of tape recording or playback.³ The fact that there are independent sections of piano material that can be joined together in arbitrary configurations is rather similar to the process of assemblage afforded by tape splicing. When sections of the piano piece are played for the second time, as mentioned, they might be transposed up or down an octave, in a manner reminiscent of the transposition capabilities afforded by doubling or halving tape playback speed. The permutations and transformations of piano material in *Klavierstück XI* are, in other words, similar to those attainable with tape techniques.

Klavierstück XI has a Leeds connection in that the complete piano pieces—1 to 11—had their first British performance as a complete set in Leeds.⁴ The performance took place as part of Leeds Triennial Music festival on 21 April 1970, and the pianist was Aloys Kontarsky.⁵ The Earl of Harewood was Artistic Director of the Festival at this time.

Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke* are related to my research and teaching in two separate ways. The first concerns an ongoing research project focusing on the life and work of Hugh Davies, a musician, researcher, and instrument-builder who (amongst other things) made significant contributions to the field of electronic music, particularly in the documentation of its early history throughout the world.⁶ Davies was Stockhausen's personal assistant from 1964–66, and carried on working with Stockhausen in a less formal capacity until at least the late 1990s. Davies was contacted by the Earl of Harewood⁷ (presumably on Stockhausen's recommendation) and asked to write programme notes⁸ for the performances of the *Klavierstücke* in Leeds. These performances were thus part of Hugh Davies's life and as such I am interested

³ Relationships between Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke* and his electronic music have been alluded to by Stockhausen himself, and also by Hugh Davies in his programme notes, discussed shortly. Such relationships are also mentioned, for example, in Maconie, R. (2005), *Other Planets: The Music Of Karlheinz Stockhausen* (Oxford: Scarecrow Press).

⁴ Harewood, the Earl of (1969), letter to Hugh Davies, dated 17 December 1969 (unpublished).

⁵ Leeds Triennial Musical Festival (1970), Leeds Triennial Musical Festival 1970 (Leeds: Arts Council of Great Britain and the Yorkshire Arts Association), festival catalogue, p.7.

⁶ I discuss this aspect of Davies's work in the following: Mooney, J. (2013), 'International Electronic Music Catalog: Hugh Davies and the (ethno)Musicology of Electronic Music,' oral presentation given at the Electronic Music Symposium at Anglia Ruskin (EMSAR), Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, 11 May 2013. Text and video available online at <http://www.james-mooney.co.uk>.

⁷ Harewood (1969).

⁸ Davies, H. (1970), 'Complete Piano Works,' in Leeds Triennial Musical Festival 1970 (Leeds: Arts Council of Great Britain and the Yorkshire Arts Association), festival catalogue, pp.71–5.

in finding out more about them. Naturally I am also interested in exploring links with the city of Leeds, since this is where I currently live and work. It would be interesting, for example, to see look for reviews of these performances in the local newspapers of the day. (At the time of writing I have not yet attempted to do so.)

The second connection to my research and teaching is more general, and concerns the relationship between musical tools and technologies and musical practice. Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* is a neat example of one of the many ways in which technology can influence compositional processes. In this case tape techniques are not directly used, but it is possible that Stockhausen's parallel experiences of working with tape machines might have influenced his acoustic composition techniques, as mentioned previously. The influence of musical tools (not just electrical technologies but acoustic instruments and other tools as well) upon creative processes is a theme that I began to explore in an article written in 2010, intended mainly as an encouragement to students of music and music technology to think more critically about the ways in which technology might influence musical practice, and how this has changed over the years.⁹ Following this, I have written an undergraduate module entitled 'The Tools of Music-Making,' which was delivered for the first time in 2013. Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* would be a good example to include in that context.

Biography

James Mooney is a researcher, writer and lecturer based at the School of Music, University of Leeds. His research addresses historical, critical and interdisciplinary approaches to music technology and electronic music. In 2010–11 he was Edison Research Fellow at The British Library, and a visiting researcher at The Stockhausen Foundation, Germany. He has published texts on musical tools and affordance theory, and developed and written about multi-loudspeaker systems for electroacoustic music sound diffusion. The 'M2' and 'Resound' diffusion systems are used for performance and composition by practitioners and institutions in the UK and USA. His current project explores the work of Hugh Davies (1943–2005), his influence upon electronic music culture from the 1960s onwards, and his association with composers including Stockhausen, Cage, Oram, and others. Recent presentations of this work include three research seminars at Goldsmiths, University of London and University of Huddersfield, and a public lecture at the Science Museum, London. Recordings of these presentations, and other writings and materials, are online at <http://www.james-mooney.co.uk>.

⁹ Mooney, J. (2010), 'Frameworks and Affordances: Understanding the Tools of Music-Making,' *Journal of Music, Technology and Education*, 2(2–3), pp.141–154.

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