

# Affirming Chance: Experimentation Between Sound and Philosophy

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The emergence over the last twenty years of sound studies as a discrete and distinctive intellectual endeavor, marked in 2012 by the publication of a reader on the field edited by Jonathan Sterne, can be considered the latest stage, if not perhaps the culmination, of a much longer-term struggle over how to think about sound; as Michelle Hilmes puts it, in her review of Sterne's earlier book *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 'the study of sound, hailed as an "emerging field" for the last hundred years, exhibits a strong tendency to remain that way: always emerging, never emerged' (Hilmes 2005, p.245). The question, then, for all of us who would commit to the value and significance of sound studies as a project, is as follows: what is it about sound that 'calls for thinking', as Heidegger would have it, but which nevertheless resists it (Heidegger 1968)? What new response, moreover, does sound studies have to offer to this question? To borrow Sterne's own formulation, in his introduction to *The Sound Studies Reader*, what are the 'core concepts and objects' to which sound studies 'reflexively attends,' and which provide it with its novelty, its unity, and its priority as a field of study (2012, p.5)?

My exploration of this question will proceed in three stages, and my overall intention will be broadly theoretical – in the sense that it will focus on the conceptual frameworks drawn from cultural theory and philosophy that have marked the development of sound studies – and methodological – in the sense that it will focus on the question of how these concepts can or should relate to and determine sound as an object of theoretical investigation. Firstly, I

will discuss some central aspects of the ongoing theoretical-methodological debates in sound studies over how to think about sound; in particular, the ontological (regarding the nature or essence of sonority) and epistemological (what kind of knowledge we can have about it) debate that has coalesced around the term ‘sound-in-itself’. Secondly, I will explore the suggestion, made by Christoph Cox in context of this debate, that the work of Gilles Deleuze can offer us a way to reformulate this issue, and thereby propose new possibilities for sound studies as a specifically theoretical endeavor; my approach to Deleuze’s work, however, will differ from that of Cox, insofar as I aim to emphasise the way in which Deleuze’s work allows us to reconfigure the very premises on which sound studies in its theoretical aspect is based—namely, the assumption that theory should be extrinsically applied to sound in such a way as to make it thinkable. Finally, this latter point will be extended, in the mode of a demonstration, into an encounter between Deleuze’s work and that of John Cage, through their shared commitment to an experimental practice of theoretical-philosophical and sonic composition, respectively. As I will show, central to this Deleuzian approach to sound studies would be a commitment to the open, creative, and necessarily incomplete nature of the relationship between theory and sound.

Ultimately, then, it will be a question of turning back upon the initial premises of the enquiry, of uncovering and ultimately resisting the ‘implicit presuppositions’ (Deleuze 2004a, p.164) that are encoded into sound studies’ methodological problematic when posed in the form: how to think about sound? I hope to demonstrate that it is only by placing in question the very “aboutness” of theory in relation to sound that we can uncover an alternate intersection between the two—one in which neither can claim ‘privilege over

others,' but in which each forms a distinct practice capable of variable forms of 'interference' (Deleuze 2005, p.268). Though this article will only be able to loosely suggest the forms this interference might take, this is as it should be; for the claim at which my argument finally aims is that such interferences require an openness in principle which would forego any pursuit of a solution to the problematic relationship between sound and theory. We will be able, finally, to affirm Sterne's claim that 'there is no a priori privileged group of methodologies for sound studies,' though with a sense that he did not intend it, and declare that it is the problematic nature of sound studies as such that gives it its theoretical force (2012, p.6). Perhaps the best we could hope for sound studies is that it may remain 'always emerging, never emerged' (Hilmes 2005, p.245).

### **Between Sound-In-Itself and Sound-For-Us: The Ontological and Epistemological Problematic of Sound Studies**

Let us first return to my initial question: what distinguishes sound studies from the longer tradition of sonic enquiry alluded to by Hilmes? For the purposes of my argument, a particularly significant feature of the discourse that marks it as a novel development is its broadly theoretical orientation, such that it intersects in various ways with the wider field of contemporary cultural theory and philosophy (I will not distinguish these terms here, though in many respects it is important to do so; Osborne 2011 provides a strong recent account of this problem). It is vital to note, however, the way in which this theoretical orientation is consistently framed as problematic—that is, in terms of a problem posed *to* theory *by* sound, for which there is (as yet) no clear, unified, or dominant response. As such, while many of the key texts in the development of sound studies over the last

twenty years explicitly adopt specific positions drawn from the history of cultural theory, they regularly do so with a sense that this positioning is uncertain and contested, and that uncertainty derives from the nature of sound itself. For sound studies, the relationship between sound and theory is an issue for it—not merely in the specific form it takes, but in its very possibility.

For this reason, what I have termed above the ontological and epistemological problematic of sound studies has become increasingly emphasized within the discourse. Iterations on the claim that sound is intrinsically resistant to theoretical articulation abound, functioning to explain the similarly widely-affirmed lack of theoretical attention to sonic practice by comparison with visual media. To take a particularly clear example, the following is from the opening page of Aden Evens' *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience*: 'Music resists theorization at every step. [...] Partly because sound is dynamic, Western intellectual traditions show a marked preference for vision as the figure of knowledge' (2005, p.ix). On this basis, sound studies would not only be a difficult endeavor, struggling against the theoretical preference for visuality, but also a necessary one: it would provide a long-overdue corrective for such preferences. Such formulations also have the further advantage of allying sound studies to the critique of ocularcentrism, a dominant theme in twentieth-century French thought, and in the forms of cultural theory that have borrowed heavily from this tradition (Jay 1993 provides an excellent overview).

However, these claims regarding a fundamental mismatch between the nature of sonority and the visually-biased epistemic criteria of theory, in particular, or even Western knowledge, more broadly, have not gone without criticism. Jonathan Sterne, for instance, has grouped the various ways in which sound has been

placed against vision according to a set of opposable and exclusive criteria (e.g. dynamic and static, as in Evens' remarks cited above) under the pejorative heading of the 'audiovisual litany' (2005, p.15-19). It forms a litany, according to Sterne, precisely insofar as it relies on a set of ahistorical and essentialist claims about the nature of the senses and their respective objects that are ultimately derived from the 'longstanding spirit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism' (Sterne 2003, p.16). Whatever the merits of Sterne's specific argument here, we can note that a more general resistance to claims about the essential nature of sound has become the site of a significant debate in sound studies itself, a debate which draws together and poses most clearly the simultaneously ontological and epistemological scope of the question of how—or whether—sound can be theorized. This debate has recently coalesced around the ambiguous term 'sound-in-itself', and I want to examine the arguments over this term as being exemplary for the current state of sound studies, such that it will be the spur for my suggestion as to (one of) its possible future(s).

The term 'sound-in-itself' was initially introduced into the discourse of sound studies by Douglas Kahn, in his significant and influential book *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Kahn 1999, p.165), but its fullest and most polemical deployment is to be found in Seth Kim-Cohen's 2009 work *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*. For Kim-Cohen, sound-in-itself refers, on the one hand, to the claim, encountered above, of a universal and ahistorical essence of sound. Yet Kim-Cohen further develops the notion, already implicit in Sterne's account of the audiovisual litany (see Sterne 2003, pp.10-12, p.19), that any such claim regarding the essence of sound could only be grounded on an experience of sound divorced from any signification; hence, the

implicit distinction of sound-in-itself from sound-*for-us*. I will return to this claim shortly, but firstly I will trace Kim-Cohen's argument in broad strokes, in particular insofar as it draws upon Jacques Derrida's critique of the 'metaphysical conceit of presence' (Kim-Cohen 2009, p.13).

For Kim-Cohen, Derrida's engagement with the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, in particular, serves as a general repudiation of the possibility that 'we can posit direct, inner experience of ourselves in a way that would render useless any sign, language, or mediation' (Kim-Cohen 2009, p.13-14). Though the gesture of reduction at the heart of Husserl's phenomenological method purports to achieve the 'bracketing-out of semantic, historical and semiotic considerations' (Kim-Cohen 2009, p.12) in order to disclose an unmediated experience of the 'thing-in-itself' (Kim-Cohen 2009, p.14), Derrida's work, in Kim-Cohen's reading, shows that both differentiation and, therefore, signification cannot be eliminated from experience, but are rather constitutive of it. Far from being self-contained or sufficient, the immediacy of experience, the instant in which it is given, is 'a product of differential meaning making, a product reliant on the mediation of signification' (Kim-Cohen 2009, p.81). As with the thing-in-itself in general, so with sound-in-itself in particular: the impossibility of performing a phenomenological reduction in the Husserlian mode, due to the inevitable insinuation of signification into the very instant of experience, entails the impossibility of us encountering sound in its essence—or, at least of saying anything about it.

The validity of these arguments is not my concern here. Rather, my interest is in the way, on the basis of Derrida's work, Kim-Cohen extrapolates the claim that sound cannot be experienced 'in-itself', but only in relation to specific, irrecusably meaningful

contexts (historical, social, biographical, etcetera). Kim-Cohen himself does not shy away from drawing the full implications of this argument for sonic theory: all experience, sonic experience included, is (pre)determined by language. As he puts it:

Since being human is a state inexorably tied to language [...] then presumably linguisticity is the order that obtains. [...] [I]f some stimuli actually convey an experiential effect that precedes linguistic processing, what are we to do with such experiences? [...] If there is such a strata of experience, we must accept it mutely. It finds no voice in thought or discourse. Since there is nothing we can do with it, it seems wise to put it aside and concern ourselves with that of which we can speak. (Kim-Cohen 2009, p.11)

I want to emphasise here that this is a fundamentally idealist position—that is, a position in which the nature of an object cannot be discussed beyond its relation to the subject experiencing it. For Kim-Cohen, not only can sound only be experienced as always-already mediated through a linguistic framework, this limitation on experience is also, simultaneously, a limitation on knowledge; though Kim-Cohen suggests the possibility of experiencing sound-in-itself, he simultaneously forecloses the possibility that doing so would have any significant effect on how we can think about sound. The term sound-in-itself finds its full Kantian resonance in the claim that such an in-itself must necessarily fall beyond the limits of knowledge; we can know only sound-for-us, determined by the (in this case, linguistic) conditions of possible experience.

These Kantian elements, which remain implicit in Kim-Cohen's account, form the target of Christoph Cox's 2011 article 'Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism.' The shared use of 'toward' in the subtitle of both Cox and Kim-Cohen's texts indicates what is at stake here, and why I

take the debate conducted between the two texts to be of such significance: it is a question of the way forward for sound studies, as determined by the ontological-epistemological position taken towards sonority. Cox's position unfolds and opposes the idealism latent in Kim-Cohen's approach, in favour of a nascent sonic materialism. Central to my own concerns will be the two figures Cox takes up as being vital theoretical reference points for this path for sound studies: Gilles Deleuze and Friedrich Nietzsche.

We must note that, for Cox, it is not a question of rejecting the 'theoretical approaches' on which Kim-Cohen's account draws, and which have been typically referred to as the 'linguistic turn' (2011, p.146). Cox affirms that these approaches 'are philosophically rich and have proven to be powerful tools for cultural analysis' (2011, p.147); in particular, these approaches 'rightly reject essentialism,' which Cox is not proposing to recuperate. Yet for Cox, the implicit 'textualism' of these approaches (that is, their reliance on claims about the linguistic nature of experience) entails a set of epistemological and ontological claims that are highly problematic, and go far beyond what is demanded simply by the rejection of essentialism. Cox explicitly connects these claims to the Kantian inheritance noted above:

Contemporary cultural theory [...] manifests a problematic Kantian epistemology and ontology, a dualistic program that divides the world into two domains, a phenomenal domain of symbolic discourse that marks the limits of the knowable, and a noumenal domain of nature and materiality that excludes knowledge and intelligible discourse. (2011, p.147)

This outline applies very clearly to Kim-Cohen's arguments as outlined above, and Cox himself makes this connection using a



number of the same passages as I have. The key point here is that Kim-Cohen's argument is premised upon a distinction between that which can be experienced, and therefore known, and that which necessarily transcends it, about which nothing can be said; that is, it relies not only upon the presupposition that experience is always-already meaningful, but, further than this, on the claim that nothing can be known outside of its being given in such meaningful experiences, sound included.

Cox's aim, in disputing both these premises, is to avoid any forced choice between essentialism and idealism; if 'critical approaches [...] concerned with signification, representation, and mediation' risk an 'epistemological and ontological insularity,' it is precisely insofar as they take the rejection of essentialism to necessitate both the disavowal of ontological claims *tout court* and the affirmation of a fundamentally and inextricably discursive dimension to experience. Effectively, Cox takes this dichotomy to be symptomatic of a failure to pursue the fullest implications of the critique of representation upon which cultural theory's anti-essentialism is founded; this critique, while eliminating the ahistorical domain of essences, is not extended to either the sufficiency of language, or the anthropocentric privileging of 'human symbolic interaction.' For this reason, he asserts that 'contemporary cultural theory's critiques of representation and humanism are not thorough enough,' as a 'rigorous critique of representation' would serve to 'altogether eliminate the dual planes of culture/nature, human/non-human, sign/world, text/matter' (Cox 2011, p.148); that is, precisely the dual planes upon which the residual Kantianism of cultural theory continues to rely.

My purpose, in the subsequent sections of this article, is to raise the question of what, precisely, such a 'critique of

representation' would involve (Cox 2011, p.148), and, in particular, to explore how for Deleuze such a critique necessarily reframes the relationship of philosophy to its "others". That is, while affirming the broad intention of Cox's project, I want to raise the question, as Deleuze himself does, of how a philosophy committed to eliminating any dualism between subject and world, meaning and matter—that is, a philosophy of immanence in which there can be no a priori divisions or absolute disjunctions, idealist or otherwise—would function in practice as a theoretical support for sound studies. I aim to propose that, if we take up the Deleuzian critique of representation in order to pursue a trajectory for sound studies that would be neither essentialist nor idealist, we must follow Deleuze's own reconfiguration of the nature of philosophical activity as such.

### **From Critique to Creation: Thought and the Outside**

Let us take up again the initial formulation of the question posed by and through sound studies: how to think about sound? Clearly, this implicates a certain conception of the nature of thinking that would be characterised by "aboutness", the reflection upon an object that is in principle external to thought but nevertheless arrogated to it—in this case, sound. This notion of a self-sufficient interiority of thought, and the externality of the objects it thinks, is exactly that which we discovered underpinning the implicit Kantianism of Kim-Cohen's articulation of sound-in-itself. This 'implicit presupposition' about the nature of thinking is precisely what Deleuze refers to throughout his work as an image of thought—'the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p.37). This image remains implicit insofar as it does not form part of the explicit

conceptual framework of a particular philosophy, as an avowed and defended premise, but rather determines, in advance, what can or cannot be thought by it in the first place. The implicit presuppositions about the nature of thinking provided by an image of thought ensure that, as François Zourabichvili puts it, ‘all cognition [*connaissance*] is re-cognition [*re-connaissance*]’ (Zourabichvili 2012, p.47); we can recall here Nietzsche’s image, in ‘On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,’ of truth as the “discovery” in the world of something humanity itself has hidden there (Nietzsche 2001, p.57). But what would it mean to think in such a way that thought itself is not given to us in advance? And how would this enable us to reformulate the project of sound studies?

In the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, one of the central points in his entire oeuvre, Deleuze offers us an account of the alternative to this dogmatic image of thought: it would involve making thought depend upon an encounter with something which ‘forces us to think’ precisely by striking us as unrecognisable according to our existing capacities for thought (2004a, p.176). I want to emphasise two vital aspects to this reformulation of thinking proposed by Deleuze. Firstly, thinking, rather than forming an enclosed interiority beyond which nothing can be said, would itself be produced by an encounter with an outside, on whose forces it would rely to make us think: ‘[t]hinking depends on forces which take hold of thought’ (Deleuze 2006, p.100). Secondly, thinking would lose its universality, becoming rather something that must be created and recreated anew, and about which nothing definitive can be said in advance. Beyond the image of thought, we would find a ‘thought without image’ (Deleuze 2004a, p.168), whose real nature would be creation as such: ‘To think is to create [...] but to create is

first of all to engender “thinking” in thought’ (Deleuze 2004a, p.185).

A ‘true critique’ of representation would therefore require that we make thinking into a ‘true creation’ (Deleuze 2004a, p.176), insofar as thinking would not simply apply a set of extrinsic coordinates by which it could carve up experience—such as, for instance, the linguistic framework that Kim-Cohen takes to be ineradicable. On the contrary, as Deleuze puts it in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

Thinking is never the natural exercise of a faculty.  
Thought never thinks alone and by itself [...].  
Thinking depends on forces which take hold of  
thought. Thinking, like activity, is always a second  
power of thought, not the natural exercise of a faculty  
but an extraordinary event *in* thought, *for* thought  
itself. (Deleuze 2006, p.100-101, original emphasis)

The critique of essentialism on which contemporary cultural theory is based, as seen so clearly in Sterne and Kim-Cohen, is thus extended to the supposed universality of experience upon which even these critiques relied. Thinking is no longer separated from what it thinks—or rather, what it is forced to think—and therefore no longer limited to reflecting upon its objects from without, always safeguarded from any real contact. Instead, thinking must continually be produced in contact with the real itself.

It is in this sense we can understand Deleuze’s commitment to philosophy as a creative activity, famously articulated in his final collaborative work with Guattari, 1991’s *What is Philosophy?*, but part of Deleuze’s work as early as a 1956 article on Bergson (Deleuze and Guattari 1994; Deleuze 2004b, p.22). However, there is a vital supplement to this commitment on Deleuze’s part: philosophy does not have any privilege on this creative activity, not even insofar as it

relates to thinking. On the contrary, ‘art, science, and philosophy’ represent ‘thought in its three great forms,’ and ‘no one of these thoughts is better than another, or more fully, completely, or synthetically “thought”’ (Deleuze and Gattuari 1994, p.197–98). The reformulation of thinking toward creation through an encounter with its outside, rather than the interiority of recognition, is therefore coupled to a pluralisation of the modes in which this thinking takes place, as well as an affirmation of their equality.

The importance of this step cannot be overstated. While it is no doubt extremely significant, in relation to my above engagement with sound studies, that Deleuze would propose to reorient thought away from a model of extrinsic conditioning to one of genesis in contact with the real, nevertheless it is only by taking the subsequent step of making philosophy only one form of thought amongst many that the potential for a truly open, creative, and, ultimately, experimental relation between sound and philosophy is opened up. The question that remains for us to ask, then, is what would this mean for sound studies? Clearly, from a Deleuzian perspective it can no longer be a question of how to think about sound, but rather how to cause ‘interference’ between two modes of creative practice (Deleuze 2005, p.268). I want to explore, in what remains of this article, one possibility for such interference, focused upon the simultaneously sonic and conceptual valences of the term “experimentation”.

### **Thinking and/as Experimentation: Deleuze, Cage, and the Affirmation of Chance**

References to the work of John Cage are relatively rare in Deleuze’s work, who draws far more regularly on European figures of

modernist art music such as Pierre Boulez and Olivier Messiaen; by far the most consistent engagement with Cage comes in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second of the two volumes of *Capitalism & Schizophrenia* co-written with Félix Guattari, and this amounts only to occasional, brief discussions. Yet I want to take up here an even briefer and more allusive reference to Cage made in passing in the preceding volume, *Anti-Oedipus*, in which Deleuze and Guattari cite, affirmatively, Cage's definition of experimentation, 'not as an act to be later judged in terms of success and failure, but simply as [...] an act the outcome of which is unknown' (Cage 1969, p.13, cited in Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.405). Finally, then, I want to expand this connection between Cageian experimentation and Deleuze's commitment to thought as an act of creation that cannot be indexed to or evaluated through 'established values' (Deleuze 2004a, p.66, pp.171-72). According to Deleuze, for thought to be creative demands that we affirm chance as precisely the excess of thinking over 'the values of the day,' through the claim that we are (always) not yet thinking (I allude here once again to Heidegger 1968, as Deleuze himself does in this context; see Deleuze 2004a, pp.181-182). Thought itself 'with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever anew' (Deleuze 2004a, p.172). In what way could these two commitments to the experiment be made to interfere with one another?

Prior to establishing any response to this question, it must be acknowledged that the critical literature on Cage is extensive, and that his reception is in many ways overdetermined by the importance he has come to attain in the trajectories of both experimental music and post-War developments in the gallery arts. Yet I find it worth taking up his work once more here insofar as he has been a consistent reference point for debates in sound studies—not least that

over sound-in-itself. Indeed, this latter term's first deployment in the discourse, by Douglas Kahn, is precisely in the context of a discussion of Cage's commitment to 'let sounds be themselves' (Cage 1969, p.10), a commitment which raises the question, ultimately so important to Kim-Cohen, of whether sounds can, in fact, be encountered "in-themselves".

However, it is not a case of making Cage once again the privileged reference point, offering a renewed interpretation that would finally have find the "correct" theoretical framework within which his work is to be understood. Instead, I want to suggest that, in terms of both the demand for thinking sound as distinct from the narrower domain of music, and the ways in which a mode of thinking that privileges language may have difficulty in doing so, Cage's work is not simply exemplary for a theoretical reflection that remains external to it, but rather the site of an autonomous activity of thinking-as-creation. Cage's work thinks through the relation of sound and meaning in a way that is no less thoughtful for not being articulated within the parameters of cultural theory, or even Western philosophy more generally; it is a thinking conducted in and across the media of sound, theatre, text, film, etcetera. Rather than asking how and if we are able to explain Cage's work theoretically (or rather if we should have reason to reject it for the lack of such a possibility), we should ask after the possibility of taking up, from within philosophy, the shock of the encounter with Cage's own activity of thinking.

In order to suggest how this might be done, I want to consider a central aspect of the Deleuzian reading of Nietzsche, an aspect that is not examined by Cox in spite his emphasis on these two thinkers: the relationship between thought and chance that is figured through the image of the 'dice-throw'. Once again, we can

note here the extent to which the problem of thought as creation and experimentation extends throughout the course of Deleuze's work; though the image of the dice-throw emerges first in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, published in 1960, we can nevertheless turn to 1986's *Foucault* to find an exemplary declaration of its significance for Deleuze: 'thinking involves throwing the dice' (Deleuze 1988a, p.87). Moreover, later in the same text we find the following proposition: 'To think means to experiment [...]' (Deleuze 1988a, p.116). To what degree are these equivalent? That is, in what sense is the demand of experimentation captured in the figure of the dice-throw, insofar as both serve, for Deleuze, to characterize thinking? To respond to this, we need to examine briefly how this figure is deployed in both *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and *Difference and Repetition*.

In both texts, a distinction is drawn between two ways in which one can throw the dice—that is, two ways in which thought can be opened onto its outside, beyond the presupposition of a 'beautiful interiority' in which thought possesses its own self-consistent and sufficient nature (Deleuze 1988a, p.87). In the first case, the 'bad player counts on several throws of the dice,' in order to '[make] use of causality and probability to produce a combination that he sees as desirable' (Deleuze 2006, p.25). As Deleuze elaborates in *Difference and Repetition*, in this case 'even when [a person] is given a situation of chance or multiplicity,' that is, a situation in which thought is not given in advance according to a natural, dogmatic image, nevertheless he or she 'understands affirmations as destined to impose limits upon it, [their] decisions as destined to ward off its effects' by appealing to a 'winning hypothesis' (Deleuze 2004a, pp.141–42). The introduction of chance is mitigated by the evaluation of each "throw" (that is, each encounter or shock that



forces us to think) according to an intended or predicted outcome that, by its nature, is external to the throw itself—as Deleuze puts it elsewhere, the criteria of evaluation are transcendent, rather than immanent (for a clear discussion of this distinction in relation to Nietzsche and Spinoza, see Deleuze 1988b, p.22–25; Smith 2007 provides a good overview of Deleuze’s position).

The connection to Deleuze and Guattari’s citation of Cage in *Anti-Oedipus* is clear: by evaluating chance according to an intention established at the outset, we fail to play insofar as we are not willing to affirm chance as such and as a whole; rather, we judge that which we encounter according to a rule that pre-exists, and determines whether we have won or lost. Cage’s own practical deployment of the experimental impetus, particularly through the use of chance procedures in his compositions from 1950 onwards, pursues precisely the same logic; as he puts it in an interview with Daniel Charles: ‘if we want to use chance operations, then we must accept the results. We have no right to use it if we are determined to criticize the results and seek a better answer’ (Cage 1981, p.94). However, we must proceed cautiously here; we risk too readily arrogating the sonic thinking of Cage to a philosophical trajectory that is clearly external to it by simply claiming an analogy or resemblance between his work and that of Deleuze and Nietzsche. In order to mitigate against this possibility, I want to reconstruct the logic of Cage’s own turn to the affirmation of chance in order to demonstrate the way in which these two distinct modes of thinking, the sonic and the conceptual, intersect and amplify one another according to a shared methodological commitment to creation as Deleuze has defined it—that is, experimentation.

During the 1940s, Cage had not yet developed the antipathy to composition as a form of self-expression for which he would

subsequently become known. His 1944 piece *The Perilous Night*, for instance, was intended to express, in Cage's own words, 'the loneliness and terror that comes to one when love becomes unhappy' (Cage quoted in Larson 2013, p.118). The press reaction to the piece, however, was 'hostile and clueless,' as Kay Larson puts it, and Cage himself later remarked: 'I had poured a great deal of emotion into the piece, and obviously I wasn't communicating at all' (Larson 2013, p.119). Ultimately, Cage resolved to 'stop writing music until [he] found a better reason than "self-expression" for doing it' (Larson 2013, p.120). I want to locate, in Cage's subsequent shift from self-expression to the use of chance procedures, a struggle against what we might call, drawing on all the resonances of the audiovisual litany, an image of sound. I take this formulation to be merited here insofar as any success in communicating through sound could only be based, precisely as Kim-Cohen's linguistically-mediated sonic experience was, on a set of extrinsic conditions imposed upon sound from without—that is, conditions of signification that would limit in advance what sound can do.

Cage himself would pursue similar reasoning on this point, and it is from this perspective that we are able to take up, in a philosophical register, the subsequent disjunction Cage would place between sound and meaning—a disjunction that would prove so troubling for Kahn and Kim-Cohen. The following statement illustrates the point clearly:

We are not, in these dances and music, saying something. We are simple-minded enough to think that if we were saying something we would use words. We are rather doing something. The meaning of what we do is determined by each one who sees and hears it. (Cage 1969, p.94)

Implicit in these remarks is the claim that sound itself does not intrinsically bear meaning but rather that meaning is only ever actively produced in the course of an always-singular encounter—and, what is more, this production can always be accomplished differently. The alternative—communication—would require that a single, unitary meaning be determined in advance by the composer, and necessarily apprehended in each successful experience of listening.

Of course, there is an important caveat to be made here: this model of communication that Cage is resisting is not one that is appealed to by Kim-Cohen and Kahn's rejection of sound-in-itself; indeed, Kim-Cohen's remarks make it likely that he would reject this model just as strongly as Cage does, if for different reasons. As Cox notes, the theories that emerged from the linguistic turn appealed to the 'contingency of meaning [...and] the multiplicity of interpretation,' and would similarly disavow the possibility of a direct and unequivocal communication (2011, p.146; a key text, with regard to communication in particular, would be Derrida 1988). On this basis, Kim-Cohen's position would, to a certain degree, support Cage's own claim that the meaning of sound is determined differently in every act of listening. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference that must be observed: Kim-Cohen's position, given its Kantian presupposition, would subtract from this transformation of meaning the resistant and non-signifying materiality of sound-in-itself which, for Cage, is its very motor. For Kim-Cohen, this resistance on the part of sonority can at best be figured only as an inexpressible limit of the linguistic domain, and his theoretical commitment to the priority of discourse would demand that, '[s]ince there is nothing we can do with it,' we may as well 'put it aside' (2009, pg.11).

In order to suggest an alternative to this position, let us return to the above-quoted remark of Cage's regarding chance procedures as requiring an acceptance, rather than an evaluation according to pre-existent criteria. On the basis of this remark, we can observe that Cage makes his own demand, as Deleuze does on different terms, to 'affirm the *all* of chance' (Deleuze 2004a, p.142, original emphasis), rather than evaluating the outcome of chance procedures according to a hypothesis or preference—that is, according to a set of pre-existent rules or capacities. However, it is clear that the affirmation that Deleuze insists upon takes us somewhat further than the passivity that may be imputed to the acceptance invoked by Cage. Yet this more active aspect is also present in Cage's thinking: to accept the result of a chance procedure, for Cage, entails a transformation of oneself, insofar as one must actively disavow the existing criteria or established values by which one would ordinarily evaluate the result. As he puts it, in the same interview: 'If I am unhappy after a chance operation, if the result does not satisfy me, by accepting it I at least have the chance to modify myself, to change myself' (Cage 1981, p.95). In a later interview with Joan Retallack, Cage summarizes this shift from communication to creation as follows: 'instead of self-expression, I'm involved in self-alteration' (Retallack 1996, p.139).

Against the pure interiority of the thinking Self, then, the affirmation of chance as a modality of both sonic and philosophical practice puts thought in direct contact with its outside, by making it a process of (self-)transformation that is in principle incomplete and ongoing. Far from being subordinated to a set of necessary conditions, linguistic or otherwise, thought becomes creative once 'necessity is affirmed of chance' (Deleuze 2006, p.24). The only necessary thing, the only thing that thought must affirm, imperatively, in order to create, is the certainty that nothing is settled

in advance: ‘That the universe has no purpose, that it has no end to hope for any more than it has causes to be known—this is the certainty necessary to play well’ (Deleuze 2006, p.25). In such a model, thinking, in each of its ‘three great forms’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p.197), would ‘*affirm* life’ rather than being subordinated to ‘a knowledge that is opposed to life [...]’ (Deleuze 2006, p.94, original emphasis):

Life would be the active force of thought, but thought would be the affirmative power of life. Both would go in the same direction, carrying each other along, smashing restrictions, matching each other step for step, in a burst of unparalleled creativity. Thinking would then mean *discovering, inventing, new possibilities of life*. (Deleuze 2006, p.94, original emphasis)

In order to attain this thought without image, theoretical engagements with sonority must resist the implicit dualisms which would separate thought from the object of study, and instead allow itself to be precipitated into the creative procedures of the sonic arts themselves, bringing its own unique capacities to bear on a shared problem: the conditions of a true creation.

### **By Way of a Conclusion**

It should hopefully be clear from the foregoing that it is not a question of theoretically identifying and privileging certain procedures in the history of experimental music—such as Cage’s use of chance—as being more properly creative than others; needless to say, such an evaluation can only be local, partial and contingent in relation to actual sonic practices. Ultimately, it does not fall to theory to make such judgments; the conditions under which new sonic forms can be produced are a matter for those engaged in such

productions. The question for sound studies is analogous, but nevertheless distinct: how can the practice of conceptual creation, that I have indifferently referred to throughout as theory or philosophy, similarly find the conditions to transform itself in and through its intersections with other practices, over which it holds no privilege? The foregoing analysis should be taken as an indication as to how I see such intersections being constituted, insofar as I have attempted to figure chance and experimentation as a simultaneously sonic and theoretical problem—that is, a problem that each of these practices must confront in its own way, but which nevertheless allows for relays and resonances between the strategies of each. Cage’s own engagement with chance is taken here as an injunction to sonic theory to abjure its focus on the possibility, or lack thereof, of thinking “about” sound, in favour of a suspension of thinking’s own ‘implicit presuppositions’—that is, the image of thought. It is a question, then, of taking up within theory itself the problem of chance and experimentation, under the condition of an encounter with concrete sonic practices, in order to reconfigure the sense in which we understand the function of theory itself.

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