

## Cage and the Correlationism of Music.

During the 1950s and 60s within descriptions of modern art practice and particularly music, the term “Experimental” became popular.

The use was borrowed from science. Modern Art often “borrowed” not only scientific terminology but also attempted to borrow its methodologies, for example such naive ideas that art was about “discovery”, that art was about discovering truths. The term “Experimental” however as borrowed from science, is more than inappropriate to the ideas of the avant garde, it simply doesn't work.

Karl Popper's preferred use of the purpose of an experiment in genuine science is not to supply additional information, more experiences that support a hypothesis, but that the experiment should attempt to invalidate a hypothesis by producing results counter to those which the hypothesis maintains should be the case. In simple terms, Popper's idea was that experiments could not prove a hypothesis to be true, but only support the hypothesis. No matter how many positive results are produced from experiments, it requires only one experimental outcome that is counter to the hypothesis, in order to invalidate or at least question the validity of the hypothesis. For instance, you only need one black swan to invalidate the hypothesis, “All Swans are white”. A hypothesis which has no possible invalidating experiment, in Popper's terms, was not a scientific hypothesis, but a pseudo-scientific hypothesis. Pseudo science is not science, but something falsely masquerading as science, in order to appear to have the same kind of ‘objectivity’ of that claimed by science.

Popper's theory has problems of its own, but there is a famous misuse of “experiment” in modernity that demonstrates the difficulties with “experimentalism” within the arts. This is the “experimental” work of John Cage's 4'32” and the supposed rejection of the notion of silence. Why music should bother with such ideas as truth propositions is a borrowing from science, and there is a whole history of High Modernist theory which maintains that truth is related to beauty. Theories of truth and beauty in the ideology of “western art” and within modernity have become a capitalization of truth. Truth was regarded as having a value, a survival value, a socio-economic value, a monetary value. These ideas are now no longer as clear or as simple. Modernity's “truth” and “beauty” have been seen to be discredited by the failed social engineering of post-war development and the march of minimalism until nothing was left either on the walls or floors of art galleries, the musical silences, that in turn was replaced by naked capital exploitation of the arts in the simplistic sensation and ugliness of the post-moderns. If the Cage work has credentials as in the truth of a hypothesis, “The impossibility of silence”, then a refutation would be a simple experiment in which “silence” as an object is produced.

It is important to note the ‘position’ not only in cultural history of 4'32” but also in that here silence means, the inaudible for humans. Silence in Cagean terms is a correlation between sound or no sound, and hearing, conscious hearing. Silence is therefore impossible in Cagean and Kantian terms, the object or non-object of silence is removed from us, as in Correlationism we can only know via our perception, therefore we can only “hear” likewise. We can only know sound likewise. To perceive non-perception is an impossibility. Cage's hypothesis is “proved” prior to any experiment, by the assumption of what music and sound a priori are. Yet as Meillassoux points out science and mathematics can and does have objects that no human can directly experience, sub atomic particles, The Big Bang, infinities... that can be regarded as real, even if removed from human perception. Therefore, similar to these there are possible and actual silences, for instance, the digital zero in a compact disc's data. It is now well known that an audio CD is stored binary data, and

so it would not be a surprise to argue that a string of zeros is effectively a cybernetic “silence”. However, there are digitally 65536 possible silences on an audio CD.

The 65,536 silences in digital P.C.M. data as stored in computer systems and on compact disks is any set of data that results in a continuous D.C. offset, is in itself, “silent.” See Jliat - Still Life #5: 6 Types Of Silence, edition 11, released 2000. Also, 10 seconds of all 65536 possible silences on audio CD, can be downloaded from <http://www.jliat.com/silence/>.

One of the features of a certain group of contemporary philosophers, labeled variously as Speculative Materialism, Speculative Realism, Object Oriented Philosophy, or Object Oriented Ontology, has been a critique not only of postmodern and continental philosophy but also of Anglo-American analytic philosophies, identifying “Correlationism” within all of these philosophies. The terms originated in “Speculative Materialism”, the title of a conference held at Goldsmiths College, University of London, in April 2007. The members of that conference (and others), as the numerous titles above indicate, are not so much a “group” or “movement” but instead philosophers who have an interest in a metaphysical realism as critique of the dominant forms of post-Kantian “correlationist” philosophy.

The idea of Correlationism effectively critiques all philosophy since Kant, and identifies Kant not as the originator of a Copernican revolution in thought but rather as a reactionary Ptolemaic in his unwillingness, and prohibition against thinking “The Real.” And it is possible to employ the same correlationist critique of philosophy to music.

Philosophical Correlationism can be summarized as the idea that philosophical thought, properly metaphysical thought, never has access to the real, to things in themselves, but it has access to, in fact it is the correlation between, thought and its object. It is only in the correlation that we can ground a philosophical necessity, an absolute and objective knowledge. As Kant stated in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

“Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their unison can knowledge arise.”

In a gross simplification we can say we only experience our perception and never what exists outside our perception, and therefore cannot know anything of objects but only have knowledge of our experience of them. For instance key to human experience are Time and Space, but these are, in Correlationism, not real things but the necessary constructs for us as humans to experience both the outside world and our inner consciousness.

Kant again.

“Time is nothing but the subjective condition under which alone all intuitions can take place within us.”

Meillassoux et al. want to reject this correlation in favor of access to the Real, which science seems to have enjoyed, unlike philosophy, since Kant, and one of their main motivations is to combat the relativism of post-modernity.

Regardless of philosophical Correlationism, it appears at first obvious that art exists as a form of Correlationism. Art exists as a perceptual activity by us, by humans. For Correlationism appears to be an essential, a priori necessity, that constitutes what art is.

One of the consequences of a radical regard to noise and its relation to music is that it exposes and breaks that thought. Alternatively, noise can safely be regarded as one more trope or ingredient for music, perhaps even a dangerous supplement, but one that does not question music's ontology. Crucially though, if this ontology is questioned, then not only is music radicalized but also all of the arts. And so it is from the radicalization of music by noise that a general radicalization of representation might be achieved.

The key here is the idea that noise, regardless of music, can and does exist outside of any correlation.

There are numerous theories of art, however most if not all posit an object and a subject, and the status of the object's art-ness is not something located in the object but instead in the nature of the relationship between the object and subject. Music is heard, paintings are seen. Music is played, paintings are painted. Duchamp's urinal or Cage's silence exist in, and because of, this correlation. In fact they expose it, rely on it, and work with it. In Duchamp, the context provides the status of art. Cage's 4'33", presents the impossibility of silence as an impossibility for us in our experiential relationship within the performance.

Philosophically, the tree falling in the forest may or may not make a sound. No such dilemma exists in 4'33", here will always be sound, for us, as long as we are conscious, and can hear.

Meillassoux however posits a time before human existence, and so before human perception and thought, as well as a time trillions of years in the future where humanity will also not be present.

To say that in such times events did not take place seems very wrong, as clearly there is for past events archeological evidence. That these events didn't involve, amongst other things electromagnetic vibration has been shown to be not true, such echoes of past events are well known to astro-physicists. That no sounds occurred, as vibrations in air, before any human, or other creature could hear them seems similarly odd. Ears like eyes supposedly came about by an evolutionary advantage in a life form being able to better perceive its environment. Life evolved in water, and in a world which already had water, as well as one in which sound and light already existed, even if they were not perceived. Noise is an archeological object.

So Meillassoux's claim to existence prior and post Homo sapiens, even the idea of existence and temporality where no cognition exists at all, seems acceptable. However, if we move the claim from philosophical ontology to the ontology of music, we arrive at something quite radical and contrary to the Cagean, correlational ontology of music.

Music where no human exists to create the correlation is a very radical idea; the idea of non-correlationist music might appear impossible or absurd. We may think of the possibility of noise outside of a human correlation and outside of cognition: it may be debatable but it would not be ontologically impossible, otherwise no debate could take place.

Therefore the acceptance of noise as music can either simply ontologize and make noise part of a human correlation or alternatively radicalize music itself by destroying its seemingly obvious correlational ontology. A choice needs to be made, but before it is, it is crucial to explore just what is at stake.

It would, I think, in light of what has now been stated, be difficult to maintain absolutely that sound is only a correlation. To propose that music existed before human thought and will exist after, is much more contentious because music is accepted as the correlation in which humans must take a part. We have shown that though Cage's silence is an impossibility for us, it is not an impossibility per se.

We have a precise analogy between Kant's phenomena and noumena, the latter existing independently of us yet, for Kant, absolutely removed from us.

Cage is a Kantian and the Speculative Realist as musical, or noise theorist, can challenge this thought. The Speculative Realist could simply say that it is not at all contradictory to imagine or postulate a time in the far future where no particles vibrated and energy was at its lowest state, so no processing could occur, and that would be a de facto silence. Silences more trivial also exist, deafness for instance, creatures and objects which cannot hear, the lack of any movement at absolute zero. Therefore, there can be silences, but we can never perceive these because we cannot perceive non-perception. We can however think these, and imagine these. It is now for the correlationist to show how an artist cannot validly present an idea or speculation which is external to a perceptual experience. Though at first it appears much or all of art is and has been perceptual, particularly western art from the renaissance to the beginning of the twentieth century, art which is non perceptual has been created and can be created. And why should not then the conceptual manipulation of the idea of a sound not be properly thought to be music. Far from music being correlational, western music's tonal systems and atonal systems are essentially reliant on the 'conceptual manipulation of the idea of a sound'. Classical music can be regarded as an abstract art form, as well as a sensational presentation or manipulation, though neither is excluded.

Noise and silence also address the cliché that music is organized sound. Music as perception seemed obvious, and signification, ordering is no different. Neither sound as noise or sound as no-sound has structure or organization. The argument that is then raised could be that this is in music deliberated and intentional. But again why cannot an improvisation be non deliberated and sounds made unintentionally and allowed as part of a musical performance? How can these be ruled out?

We can think noise outside of perception, outside of a correlation. It exists in any system as an unwanted possibility, which is why noise qua noise is always unwanted, even in the arts because it destroys the correlation, or, if used at all, it is used to achieve some destructive act in a very careful way. Noise qua noise is more than a dangerous supplement, for in any correlationist idea of art, without applying a limit, noise becomes destructive and fatal to the correlation. The application of a limit renders noise as a token or symbol, for instance of nihilism or anti-art. However noise in-itself is more radical as it effaces the possibility of any symbolism at all.

What this correlation does is make music, as it exists now, an incredibly small fraction of the known universe. There is in principle nothing wrong with this, unless any claims are made that this music represents the Real. In the known universe music as such can only picture the Real as a gross distortion, notwithstanding other possible universes and infinities.

Thus the real in sound terms is noise. Which in itself is not differentiated from silence. That we can think that, and that we can speculate that, whereas in music we cannot do so, as music is limited to the human correlation, makes music at odds with reality, and so it now becomes the oddity.

For why should Cage's silence be 'music', and our digital silences be not likewise music. Or Stockhausen's , - Aus den Sieben Tagen, (The Seven Days), or Yoko Ono's "count all the stars of that night by heart...", and "do not make any sounds". Why should a musician be limited to a music which is perceptual. And if it is so limited, then a radio transmission of Bach, only becomes Bach, if someone is listening. Which supposes "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other."