

# Sound, Music, Affect



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Theorizing Sonic Experience

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Non-cochlear sound: on affect and exteriority

*Will Schrimshaw*

This chapter considers the notion of the sonic affect: what it is, what it can be and what it does. Affect is commonly thought in terms of feeling or emotion, an event bound to ‘labor in the bodily mode’, of which the products are ‘intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion’ (Hardt and Negri 2001: 293). The present argument, however, is primarily concerned with a notion of affect theorized as an indifferent complement to these emotional products that is nonetheless implicated within them, constituting a ground that undermines their ‘immateriality’ (ibid.: 292). This implicated yet indifferent complement is the independent affect famously theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. The frequently cited ‘autonomy of affect’ theorizes affect as independent of the ‘bodily mode’ in which it is rendered as emotion or affection.<sup>1</sup> This essay examines some of the consequences and problems of asserting the autonomy of affects, the most obvious being in what capacity an independent affect can be known if it is thought to be in excess of its subjective capture or encoding as emotion. It is argued that a positive consequence of the argument for independence is – at the price of a degree of abstraction – the potential for a broader consideration of sound in the arts through decentralizing the necessity of its direct perception. Various steps are taken to align a notion of non-cochlear sound with theories of autonomous or independent affects, as these terms can

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<sup>1</sup>See Deleuze and Guattari (2003: 163–4) and Massumi (2002: 23–45). Throughout this essay frequent reference is made to Deleuzian jargon, as it is within this philosophical context that much contemporary discussion of affects takes place.

productively be considered as structurally equivalent. The independence of affects can also be understood to augment the efficacy of an affective politics by freeing up affect from the affirmation of subjective interiority, which primarily serves the ideology of individualism.

Notions of interiority, immediacy, immanence and individuality tend to dominate discourse on sonic experience and affectivity – normally opposed to the supposedly more ‘removed’ criticality of vision and visual culture. Perhaps the clearest and most concise expression of this position is given by Juhani Pallasmaa for whom – building upon the work of Walter Ong and the ‘Toronto school’ – ‘sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates [...] The sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority’ (2005: 49). The sense in which this interiority affirms individualism is to be found in Ong’s understanding of sound centring ‘man’ within not only sonic experience but the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> This centring – which is also characteristic of Marshall McLuhan’s understanding of ‘acoustic space’ as being comprised of ‘multiple centers without margins’ (2006: 48) – is brought about through an ‘immersive’ experience of sonority considered immanent when opposed to a strictly distal or ‘detached’ concept of vision (see Voegelin 2010: xii). Such assertions, while seeking to critically address ocularcentrism, considerably undermine and disempower the creative, critical and political potentials of sonic practice; independence is thereby invoked in support of a theory of affects capable of thinking the exteriority normally ascribed to vision in what Jonathan Sterne has called the ‘audio-visual litany’ (Sterne 2003: 19–29). Addressing the consequences of an autonomy of affects, the emphasis of the present argument is placed not so much on the subject of sonic affects as sonic affects themselves, on the possibility of a scission whereby affect is excised from the *necessity* of subjective affirmation. Accordingly, emphasis is placed upon experimental practices that, in exploring the possibility of such a scission through the notion of ‘sound-itself’, focus upon the nature of sonic events and the exploration of signals in excess of the ear. Emphasis is placed upon the excess of signals beyond their audibility or perceptibility as we will consider signals to be synonymous with affects, or – for reasons that are clarified below – structurally equivalent within the Deleuzian ontological framework that is assumed as a basis for the following argument.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sterne presents extensive critique of this position – the ahistorical opposition of sight and sound – in both *The Audible Past* (2003) and ‘The theology of sound: a critique of aurality’ (2011). In addressing Pallasmaa I do not intend to make too much of what is a minor publication – within music and ‘sound studies’ if not architecture – but draw upon this passage as it summarizes what I refer to as an ideology of immanence within the field of auditory culture. This sentiment can, for example, be found clearly expressed in Salomé Voegelin’s *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010). See also Walter J. Ong (1991: 73).

The notion of ‘sound-itself’ is repeatedly returned to throughout this text – despite appearing somewhat antiquated after the critique of sonic and aesthetic experience according to its social construction. Sound-itself remains persistently ‘problematic’, having received significant attention in a number of recent publications.<sup>3</sup> Most significant for the present argument is the importance that ‘sound-itself’ holds in Christoph Cox’s recent call for a sonic materialism sympathetic to contemporary developments in philosophical realism (Cox 2011).<sup>4</sup> In advancing a theoretical background to the *experimental* conditions of a sonic materialism, sound and signal are subsumed within the more general term affect. The assertion of a structural equivalence between these terms is carried out in order to map the terms of the present argument onto the work of others who have extensively explored and expressed a theory of affects, arguing for their independence from the *necessity* of subjective affirmation. More specifically, a notion of sound-itself is to be developed and aligned with arguments for an ‘autonomy of affects’ towards a theory of sonic materialism.<sup>5</sup> The move towards a sonic materialism is considered pressing for a number of reasons – beyond simply wishing to keep up with philosophical trends. First, such a move appears necessary if we are to move beyond the ‘dead end’ of phenomenology (Kim-Cohen 2009: xix). Stating this point more carefully, a sonic materialism is required if we are to move away from what Jonathan Sterne has identified as the onto-theological debates regarding the ‘inherent’ interiority and immediacy of sonic experience in contrast to the supposedly discrete, externalizing criticality of vision (Sterne 2003: 19–29; 2011). A consequence of this critical move is that a step is taken beyond the sufficiency of perception in providing an ontology of sound and an account of the conditions of sonic experience. The second point that necessitates a move towards sonic materialism is – as has been outlined by Christoph Cox – the insufficiency of certain critical approaches, developed under the broad scope of the linguistic turn, in accounting for the importance of sound practices and sonic experimentalism, the function of which exceeds the critical capacity of analytical methods bound to signification. In moving towards a theory of sonic materialism it is not suggested that we undertake a futile attempt to abandon representation towards an immediate expression of the real. This essay builds upon the work of artists

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<sup>3</sup>See Kim-Cohen (2009), Voegelin (2010) and Cox (2011). The term problematic, as it is used herein, should not be thought to denote negativity – in the sense of something that needs to be fixed – as the term problematic is here used in the Deleuzian sense of something which forces thought and provokes responses or creative ‘solutions’. For a concise explanation of the Deleuzian concept of the problematic see Toscano (2006: 2).

<sup>4</sup>Here I refer to the philosophical movement formerly known as Speculative Realism, also ‘continental realism’ in Levi Bryant et al. (2011).

<sup>5</sup>Arguments for an ‘autonomy of affects’ can be found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2003), Massumi (2002) and Shavero (2010).

and writers who have shown that there is much to be said of what remains in excess of the symbolic and that we need not pass over it in silence.<sup>6</sup>

Where we are concerned with the extent to which affect can be excised from affirmation, excess becomes a key issue insofar as there is to be anything left of the affect to speak of once the necessity of its being felt is removed. Rather than signifying impoverishment due to its excision from symbolic and subjective sufficiency, this excessive remainder is considered characteristic of affect, distinguishing it from emotion. It is in dealing with the excess of sonic matters beyond their symbolic and subjective affirmation that a turn towards a theory of autonomous or independent affects is assumed in developing a sonic materialism. As this is not simply a metaphysical argument, consideration is also given to the experimental methods and aesthetic implications of what can be considered a step 'outside', from affirmation to exteriority. In arguing for a sonic materialism that builds upon excessive or 'autonomous' theories of affects, an attempt is made to move beyond the narcissistic circuit of auto-affective affirmation – that is both synthetically underwritten and socially constructed – towards an ethics of exteriority.

## The affective affirmation of interiority

Towards providing an account of sonic materialism it is necessary – due to the stated equivalence between sound and affect – that a case be made for the severance of affect from the necessity of affirmation, and therefore sound from the necessity of its being heard. Affirmation here refers to the subjective 'capture' of affects towards an affirmation of interiority or the somatic consistency of the subject (Shaviro 2010a: 3). Insofar as affect is thought as being necessarily relative or bound to feeling it cannot be thought in terms other than those of affirmation, even where this affirmation is considered negative. Whether 'negative' or 'positive', the affect remains productive yet reduced to a unit of feeling, bound to the affirmation of interiority and the experiential individuality of the subject.

Following the work of Shaviro (2010a) and Massumi (2002) the terms of the present argument can be clarified as follows: emotion is thought to reside on the side of subjective affirmation while affect 'itself' constitutes something akin to the carrier of this affirmation while remaining distinct from it. It is this distinction that defines affect in terms of autonomy, an event other than or without the self in which it is rendered as feeling

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<sup>6</sup>According to the analytical methods favoured by Kim-Cohen (2009), for example, the importance of many approaches to sonic matters are rendered meaningless insofar as meaning resides within a symbolic domain that experimental practices and sonic realism partially elude.

or emotion. To clarify exactly what is meant by affirmation, emotion is understood as the subjective capture of affects which defines the nature of affective affirmation, affirming the interiority and individuality of the listening subject. Counterpoint to affirmation, independence and autonomy describe the pre- or a-subjective exteriority of what remains in excess of both perception and affirmation. Unbound from affirmation yet remaining accessible to thought, the affect need not be felt in order to be thought of as ontologically coherent. If we accept a structural equivalence between the terms sound, signal and affect – the former two terms referring to differing relational states of an object belonging to the broader ontological category or class of affects – a consequence of autonomy and excess is that the sound-affect need not be heard in order to be considered ontologically coherent. Considering sound as a sometimes silent signal that nonetheless retains affective efficacy moves us through a continuum of experimental practice, from sound as the object of music to signal as the object of sound. The imperceptible remains efficacious, inaudible yet functional. Clarifying the ontological status of sound-affects in light of the claim that excess is to be considered characteristic of affects in general requires that the sound-affect *itself* be identified as silent, residing – at least in part – beyond the ear.

### The autonomy of affects

An equivalence of sound, signal and affect is derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari for whom ‘harmonies of tone or colour, are affects of music or painting’ (2003: 164). In the context of its artistic implication the affect nonetheless remains ‘independent of the viewer or hearer [...] independent of the creator’ (ibid.: 164). According to this formulation the affect remains irreducible to and independent of its reception or subjective synthesis. In addition to Deleuze and Guattari’s list I would add that the affect also remains independent of art. So as not to make undue claims for art as the privileged site of affective production, it must be made clear that the relationship between affect and art does not fully account for the production or ontological status of affects insofar as the excess considered characteristic of affects applies equally to their artistic implication. If, following Deleuze and Guattari, we are to consider artistic productions in the terms of a bloc or ‘compound of percepts and affects’, it is art that is composed of affects as much as affects being of art (ibid.: 64). Sound constitutes the affective matter of which music is composed or a compound. In distancing these statements from Modernistic disciplinary isolationism and the concern for internal consistency – as we find in Greenberg’s definition of Modernist painting, for example – it should be made clear that these claims of autonomy and independence are not made on behalf of the art

work, as if elevating it from all – social, cultural, economic, etc. – context (see Greenberg 1995: 85–93). Independence is instead claimed for the affect implicated in yet remaining in excess of art and aesthetics. Rather than professing the autonomy of art, the autonomy of affects undermines such claims in attempting to account for work that takes as its object its own *materially transcendent* conditions, orienting itself outside, towards its external contingencies. The independence of affects does not claim art's immunity from the productive contingencies of socially conditioned selectivity and subjectivity but claims that these latter conditions of experience do not account for the totality of the perceived or an affective remainder that persists beyond perception. The ontological excess of the affect with regard to perception is summarized concisely by Deleuze and Guattari:

Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 164)

This statement outlines the extent to which, if we are to assume the 'autonomy of affects', we assume a notion of the affect counter to common sense, according to which it is necessarily bound to feeling. Consequently it becomes necessary to clarify the means or method whereby we arrive at a notion of autonomous affects, severed from the affirmation of interiority. It is through this method that we arrive at a notion of sound equivalent to independent affects.

In claiming the equivalence of sound and affect, as well as their independence from affirmation, we must ask how we move from a definition of sound in the terms of experiential, aesthetic and 'qualitative extension' to one of sound as autonomous affective 'intensity'.<sup>7</sup> This question can be stated simply as asking what remains of the affect excised from the necessity of affirmation, of its being felt? Following a Deleuzian path towards an independent definition affects the process to be taken is one of 'prodigious simplification' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 380). The question becomes: what is lost in this process of subtractive rarefaction, of what Alvin Lucier refers to as 'cutting things down to their simplest form' (Lucier 1995: 232)? Less shed in its entirety than diminished is the centrality of aesthetic experience or qualitative extension, the point of subjective synthesis that constitutes the conditions of perception. This remainder presents a peculiar kind of non-phenomenological sonority that persists in inaudibility, in silence. Silence here names the inaudible 'interior' of sound-itself, reduced

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<sup>7</sup>The terms qualitative extension and intensity are returned to in more detail below.

to the bare minimum of constitutive relations, which remains in excessive exteriority with regard to both objective source and listening subject. It is this sense of a persistent and excessive – i.e. inaudible – sonority that we need if we are to think affects beyond their conservative limitation to anthropic experience and in the Deleuzian sense of independent affects. Affects are in this sense primarily functional and *informative*, the agents of qualitative, sensory appearances that remain irreducible to them.

## Prodigious simplification

Clarifying some Deleuzian jargon, qualitative extension can for present purposes be considered synonymous with external appearances, with the pinning of affect to affection, its being ‘for us’ rather than ‘in itself’. Qualitative extension, due to its necessary relationality, is that which occludes possible knowledge of affective excess and autonomy. It is the *necessity* of this subjective, relational extension that is shed, stripped away or cut down in processes of what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘prodigious simplification’ (2004: 380). The necessity of anthropic relational extension is in this sense understood as providing an obstacle to the autonomous definition of affects. A step must therefore be taken beyond given experiences if we are to conceive of affects as ‘beings whose validity lies in themselves’ (ibid.: 164). This abstract methodology of stripping away qualitative extension towards affective autonomy can be clarified with a more detailed reference to Deleuze’s concept of intensity, thereby positing an equivalence between affect and ‘intensive quantity’.<sup>8</sup> Before diving into yet another exposition of terms, we can consider the aesthetic consequences of asserting equivalence between affective autonomy and intensive quantity, specifically with reference to a process of simplification whereby intensive quantity may be mobilized independently of qualitative extension.<sup>9</sup>

The notion of prodigious simplification is of particular importance to the present argument as it outlines a practical if abstract method whereby we can claim the equivalence of sound, affect and intensity. This reduction or simplification that leads towards the autonomy of affects has aesthetic consequences that are manifest in the explicitly experimental practices of numerous artists and musicians. For Deleuze and Guattari this ‘prodigious simplification’ appears most clearly in the work of La Monte Young, whose extreme durational works are often comprised of simple tones. These simple

<sup>8</sup>The equation of affect and intensity is also carried out by Brian Massumi; despite this precedence it is necessary to state the reason for this equation more explicitly herein. See Massumi (2002: 27).

<sup>9</sup>For a detailed discussion of the concepts of qualitative extension and intensity see Deleuze (2004a: 289–303).

sonorities have either shed or never possessed complex overtones, the harmonics yielding timbre that allows a note to be identified as of a banjo, voice or particular individual. In this sense spectral complexity affords identifiability; sounds become referential and divert attention from the *intensive quantities* of sound-itself to the image of somatic origins. Despite Young being an excellent example, for my present purposes a better example is found in the equally canonical work of John Cage and Alvin Lucier.<sup>10</sup> Approaching the notion of affective autonomy and its importance within experimental practice by way of Deleuze and Guattari's abstract schema of 'prodigious simplification' could, if left to the example they make of La Monte Young, suggest an aesthetics of the pure and simple tone as that which veridically manifests 'unspoil' duration. This would, of course, be too simple, and would also fail to recognize that Deleuze and Guattari 'are not at all arguing for an aesthetics of qualities, as if the pure quality (color, sound, etc.) held the secret of a becoming without measure [...] A functionalist conception on the other hand, only considers the function a quality fulfils in a specific assemblage, or in passing from one assemblage to another' (2004: 275). The 'functionalist conception' of sound is perhaps more clearly described as an *infraesthetic functionalism*. This functionalist perspective focuses upon interactions between and within assemblages – such as those composed of bass drums, ping-pong balls, amplifier and oscillator in Lucier's (1980) *Music for Pure Waves, Bass Drums and Acoustic Pendulums* – emphasizing the intensive, affective capacities underpinning sonorous quality.

Beyond an aesthetic orientation concerned with the experience of pure qualities, how is this simplification realized, if not just in the reduction of sound to simple tones? How do we conceive of the process of simplification in practical terms? At the most basic level we can, of course, conceive of this simplification as composition using only simple tones, filtration or a generalized subtractive synthesis, yet here we remain bound to the appearance of simplicity rather than its infraesthetic function. Where a 'bloc' or 'compound of affects' is taken as describing a complex waveform, its reduction towards 'prodigious simplicity' may realize its complex being as the sum of simple parts, its quantitative composition in terms of degrees of phase and magnitudes of frequencies. Simplification may be manifest in aesthetically simple sounds such as those heard in the work of Young, Ryoji Ikeda or Toshiya Tsunoda's 'Bottle + Signal 121Hz'. Less obvious is the approach to intensive simplification through selective exploitation of the affective capacities of harmonics that are functionally and resonantly

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<sup>10</sup>More contemporary examples – of what I have begun referring to as infraesthetic functionalism, or infraesthetics – could be made of the work of artists such as Jacob Kirkegaard, Toshiya Tsunoda, Kanta Horio and Christine Sun Kim, yet the limited length of a single chapter makes it more feasible to make reference to work and historical contexts that the reader may already be familiar with.

deployed within or between assemblages. The process of simplification is also conceived as placing some distance between sound and signification, allowing for its consideration in explicitly functional or affective terms. Explicitly linking the method of simplification to the mobilization of affective intensity, Deleuze and Guattari state that ‘to grasp or capture intensity, sonic matter must be molecularized, simplified in order that it might be able to “move” more freely’ (2004: 378–9). Through processes of simplification such as the shedding of overtones, the sound-affect is thought to be mobilized with a degree of independence from representation insofar as it lacks a clear timbral indication of its origins, expressing only intensive quantities such as duration, frequency and amplitude. It is in this sense that a sound may move independently of the representations in which it is implicated, drawing attention to intensity by way of its affective capacities. In more functional and explicitly affective terms this simplification, as described above, ‘captures intensity’ through the exploitation of resonant frequencies, through the mobilization of the simple yet resonant components of an otherwise complex sound.<sup>11</sup> Similar processes of simplification are deployed throughout the work of Alvin Lucier towards ends that are not exclusively aesthetic but functional and affective. Before moving into a discussion of his work the connection being made between affect and intensive quantity should be made explicit.

## Affect and intensive quantity

Affect and intensity are considered structurally equivalent, as both are understood according to common sense to be bound to an affirmative experience, yet both are identified by Deleuze as persisting in excess of that which is empirically given, constituting the external conditions of experience. It is for this reason that we must state the nature of this equivalence a little more precisely, so as not to confuse the matter with common sense. The affect excised from the necessity of affirmation is in the same gesture excised from ‘qualitative extension’. What remains of the affect after this critical excision is – again using the terminology of Deleuzian ontology – intensive quantity.<sup>12</sup> Distinct from the formal appearance or experiential qualities of a unified sound object, intensive quantity refers to

<sup>11</sup>It could also be said that this functional orientation towards the affective capacities of sound at the expense of its aesthetic qualities is what gives much experimental practice a certain ‘lo-fi’ appearance, as its concerns reside elsewhere, beyond appearance, with interactions between assemblages that are technical, organic or otherwise.

<sup>12</sup>Deleuze refers to intensity in *quantitative* terms as intensity is not considered an object of *qualitative* perception or experience, being a term used to describe the imperceptible dynamics that are considered the conditions of experiential qualities. See Deleuze (2004: 290–7).

the magnitudes constituting the affect's own 'internal' composition: degrees of phase, bandwidths and magnitudes of frequencies. These magnitudes define affective capacities, the capacity to affect and be affected that are dependent upon degrees, strengths or amounts of force. It is in this sense that the autonomous affect is considered structurally equivalent to intensity or a set, bloc or compound of intensive quantities not necessarily manifest in experience yet nonetheless real. This quantitative definition of intensity is carried out in order to clarify what might be left to speak of where affect is excised from affirmation and sound from the necessity of its being heard. The intensive quantities that define affects as independent rather than necessarily the objects of experience can be considered in the terms of affective capacities, such as the capacity to move or be moved. With this in mind, we find concise summary of this point in Robert Pasnau's statement that 'the more a definition of sound is linked to motion and vibration, the more it becomes defined in quantitative rather than qualitative terms' (2000: 31). It is precisely such a linking of sound to movement and vibration that is carried out where sound is identified with a notion of affects that, within the structure of Deleuzian ontology, occupy a position of excess – with regard to feeling and perception. This quantitative and excessive definition of sound maintains its ontological status beyond the ear, at degrees of movement, vibration or frequency exceeding the capacities of audition. It is this quantitative definition of sound that forms the grounds for claiming its equivalence with the broader ontological category of affective intensity, uncovering what remains to be said of affect excised from affirmation.

Perhaps the most exemplary instances of an intensive notion of sonority affectively deployed can be found throughout the work of Alvin Lucier. Lucier's work is of great significance to the present argument for the manner in which it meticulously investigates the elementary conditions of sonic experience without recourse to the binary oppositions of the 'audio-visual litany' (Sterne 2003: 19–29). It is the explicitly experimental approach to both sound and music taken by Lucier that allows him to concisely and often poetically circumvent assertions of sound being the privileged site of an internal, pre-critical, immediate and superiorly embodied experience.<sup>13</sup> Drawing attention to this circumvention, or rather the irreducibility of Lucier's work to the affirmation of interiority, Douglas Kahn has highlighted the irreducibility of the spatial dimension of Lucier's practice to immersion, an experiential quality frequently taken to be a particular privilege of sound.<sup>14</sup> Kahn describes how the understanding of 'Lucier's

<sup>13</sup>These 'innate' qualities of sound being readily opposed vision, or a 'hegemony of the visual', to which the opposite qualities are ascribed (Cox 2011: 157).

<sup>14</sup>Examples of immersion being claimed as a privilege of auditory experience against the discretion of the visual can be found in Voegelin (2010) and in Marshall McLuhan's concept of acoustic space.

architectural dimension needs to be extended from immersion to include propagation' (2009: 26). The distal orientation arising from emphasizing propagation is also manifest in Lucier's understanding of sound in terms other than those limited to the durational, whereby 'long' is conceived both spatially and temporally: 'I think of sounds in terms of wavelengths [...] I'm dealing with lengths of sound, its physical dimensions' (Lucier 1995: 44).<sup>15</sup> Where immersion places the listening subject at the centre of the sonic event, the equal importance of propagation to Lucier's work understands the sound event itself as being at the centre of the sonic event, with listening subjects decentralized, ushered and propelled, along with the sound itself 'into another room', 'out the front door [...] and down the freeway' (Kahn 2009: 26). Sound-itself features as a central and primarily affective agent in Lucier's work. In the understanding of sound in terms wavelengths we can identify a deployment of sound according to its intensive quantities: its being in terms of vibration and movement, its capacity to propagate, move and be moved. This is particularly evident in *Still and Moving Lines of Silence in Families of Hyperbolas* (1973–4). An edited version of Lucier's prose score for the piece is as follows:

Create standing waves in space caused by constructive and destructive interference patterns among sine waves from loudspeakers. With single sine wave oscillators, amplifiers and pairs of loudspeakers, design sound geographies for dancers consisting of troughs and crests [...] the size and number of which are determined by the frequencies of the sine waves and the distances between the loudspeakers. When necessary, clear pathways for dancers by slightly changing the frequencies of the sine waves, shifting the location of the hyperbolas [...] Sing within intervals, beating upper pitches at one speed, lower ones at another, creating double rhythms. (Lucier 1995: 344)<sup>16</sup>

*Still and Moving Lines ...* calls for the construction of a structural yet shifting 'sound environment' through the use of 'pure wave oscillators' (ibid.: 212–16), a sonic terrain or 'geography' that is not metaphorical but physical. Performers find their way through the sound field established at the outset of *Still and Moving Lines ...* wherein the voice meets the 'pure wave' on a synthetic plane that is primarily spatial in nature yet

<sup>15</sup>This understanding of sound is considered 'distal' due to the decentralized listening subject and existence of sound as a physical event beyond its perception, rather than in a sense strictly concomitant with the distal theories of sound presented by authors such as Pasnau and Casey O'Callaghan. The spatial and durational understanding of length in Lucier's approach to sound is also pointed out by Douglas Kahn (2009).

<sup>16</sup>The full score for *Still and Moving Lines* affords greater complexity, but for present purposes this summary will suffice.

nonetheless ephemeral and necessarily durational. A kind of wave field synthesis is performed, yet one opposed to the replication or modelling of space in favour of a kind of vibrational burrowing or parasitic occupation of intervals and harmonic structures.<sup>17</sup> Both the voice and the body of the performer find a place between the waves within this piece, yet while the score calls for singing, the voice need not be heard. Recounting the rehearsal of this piece Lucier describes how:

Joan [La Barbara] was finding a place for herself in which she felt comfortable. And I was never sure whether that was in a crest or a trough. She would be receiving constant sine tones from the loudspeakers, and what she did when she sang was to beat against these tones, alleviating the constancy of the sound waves. She said she felt as if she were pushing the wave away from herself [...] By trying to alleviate the constant pressure, she probably added to it, but her effort gave the illusion of pushing it away [...] One of the things we decided was that her voice should be inaudible; she should use it to move sounds, not to create them. In Paris she stood for twenty-five or thirty minutes and sang, mostly inaudibly, but nobody in the audience budged because they knew she was doing something, even if they didn't know she was singing. (1995: 162)

Particularly interesting here is the use of voice, as the affective capacities deployed in the movement of sounds are far from the usual auto-affective associations of voice as an affirmation of internal and immediate self-presence.<sup>18</sup> The voice is used in the dispersal as opposed to the audible creation of sound, as a means of hollowing out a space within a saturated environment; the voice is here an *additive* producer of silence. Whether the voice is heard or not, by either La Barbara or the audience is of secondary importance to its functional and affective capacity for spatial production, its inaudible deformation of a field of otherwise 'pure waves'. Through its use of voice this piece makes particularly clear the ambiguous affectivity of sound: its affective capacity not always being an affirmation of interiority.

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<sup>17</sup>Wave field synthesis is a technique used in the creation of virtual acoustic environments, and complex sound spatialization and acoustical modelling.

<sup>18</sup>This is, of course, the target of Derrida's famous critique of the 'metaphysics of presence', according to which 'the logos can be infinite and self-present, it can be produced as auto-affection, only through the voice: an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow from outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time' (Derrida 1997: 98). It should be pointed out, however, that the critique of the voice according to the auto-affective capacities thought to expel the exteriority of writing does not constitute the sum of Derrida's thinking on the voice (see, for example, Derrida 2005: 292–316). Regrettably there is insufficient space for a discussion of the gender politics implicated within this piece and its performance.

The emphasis placed upon the intensive quantities and affective capacities of sound, rather than leading to auto-affective affirmation and contributing to a pervasive ideology of individualism, can orientate both sound and its listening subjects towards their external contingencies. The equivalence of affect and intensity shows how the notion of intensity is not so easily aligned with one of an interiority that is necessarily affirmative 'for us', insofar as it accounts for a kind of excessive process of becoming over the apparent.<sup>19</sup> This appears contrary to the ideology of immanence according to which one is always on the inside of sonority or a 'sonorous envelope'.<sup>20</sup> The 'inside' of sonority, however, remains the inaudible territory of sound itself, as that which we call and experience as sound is necessarily manifest as qualitative extension 'for us'.

Having stated the terms of the equivalence posited between affect and intensity above, the relationship between affect and extensity that underpins the abstract methodology of simplification can be made explicit. It is this method that, as outline above, aims at uncovering independent affects through the shedding of qualitative extension. Deleuze writes that 'though experience shows us intensities already developed in extensions, already covered over by qualities, we must conceive, precisely as a condition of experience, of pure intensities enveloped in a depth, in an intensive spatium that pre-exists every quality and every extension' (Deleuze 2004b: 97). Having claimed the equivalence of affect and intensity we can read the above passage as making an equal claim for 'pure affects' as the conditions of experience. It is this 'depth' or 'intensive spatium' that names the noumenal realm from which the conditions of experience are drawn ahead of their synthetic actualization. It is the noumenal to which we turn in a movement from the experience of qualitative extensity to the autonomy and imperceptibility of intensive quantity, from affects bound to affirmation to their independence and indifference with regard to experiential extension. Here we make a distinction between two categories that while distinct are not considered entirely discrete, with each being complicit in the other: on one side we have the qualitative, experiential and affirmative, on the other the intensive, quantitative and autonomous. In locating affect as residing in the latter we perform a transposition of its ontological status from the necessarily subjective to the immanent yet indifferent real. Identifying the

<sup>19</sup>Even where the discussion of affective intensity is restricted to somatic terms, as we find it in Brian Massumi's work, it is not taken to indicate an affirmation of interiority, but rather the extent to which the body is 'radically open' to the influence of external signals and events (Massumi 2002: 29).

<sup>20</sup>What I refer to as the ideology of immanence is perhaps best summarized in Voegelin's statement that 'sound's ephemeral invisibility obstructs critical engagement, while the apparent stability of the image invites criticism [...] Hearing does not offer a meta-position; there is no place where I am not simultaneous with the heard. However far its source, the sound sits in my ear. I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in its auditory object' (2010: xi-xii).

sound-affect as residing within the real, beyond that which is subjectively determined and synthetically produced, we return once again to a notion of 'sound itself', insofar as the acoustical real need not appeal to the ear. Having returned in this argument to the notion of sound-itself popular amongst leading proponents of the twentieth-century North American experimental scene, it becomes necessary to disambiguate the equation of sound-itself with affective autonomy. Clarifying both the terminology used and the experimental context from which this term is explicitly derived it should be stated that the matter of primary concern is thought less in the terms of objects than things; less according to the approximation of Husserlian intentional objects that concerned the experimental practice of Pierre Schaeffer than the notion of sound-itself that can be identified most clearly in the work of John Cage and Lucier. For Schaeffer, sonority comprised pure appearance, the object of a universal perceptual synthesis not to be confused with the physical domain of signals. This latter domain is more the territory of Cage and Lucier, who both developed notions of sound in excess of audition, providing an experimental precursor to contemporary attempts at outlining a theory of sonic materialism. Experimenting with physical signals and their affective capacities beyond the ear, this work shared an 'object' with science while largely ignoring its methods. In taking sound not only as the intentional object of auditory experience, but as physical thing in excess of its perception, this thing – the sonic event whether heard, unheard or inaudible – is neither reducible to nor dependent upon its being heard for its ontological status, thereby falling outside the horizon of Schaeffer's experimental objectivity. It is in this sense that the Schaefferian object does not suffice insofar as the objective autonomy that it claims is claimed for perception, for the intentional objects of experience. In siding with the notion of sound-itself this argument is aligned with a history of experimental practice, the ontological and aesthetic positions of which are plugged into an ethics of exteriority capable of thinking affect beyond auto-affection.

## Non-cochlear sound

It has been proposed that the consequences of an 'autonomy of affects', within the context of sonic experience, leads to the equivalence of sound-itself and silence, Asserting the clamorous interpretation of this latter term proposed by Cage, while attempting to counter its polemical opposition to noise and spiritualist ramifications, the notion of non-cochlear sound is adopted.

Seth Kim-Cohen (2009) has – following the conceptual and contextual turn ushered in with Duchamp's non-retinal art – already outlined a theory of non-cochlear sonic art. The importance of Kim-Cohen's argument is

to be found in his primary aim of diverting the sonic arts from a well trodden ‘phenomenological cul-de-sac’ (Kim-Cohen 2009: xix). Kim-Cohen attempts to steer the sonic arts away from the dead-end argument of the in-itself, the essentializing logic of which is capable only of futile attempts at describing what the thing *is* in-itself. Seeking to avoid the shortcomings of a critical route blocked by the in-itself, Kim-Cohen – contextualizing sound within the history of conceptual art – attempts the production of a framework whereby sonic practices might avoid the phenomenological traps primarily associated with Schaefferian objectivity, instead embracing the relational logic and discursive contingencies of the linguistic turn. Yet Kim-Cohen’s argument betrays numerous symptoms indicating the persistence of a traumatic object occupying a spot that cannot be itched. Despite this persistent agitation Kim-Cohen would rather that we pass over the in-itself in silence – or turn a blind eye – an avoidance tactic that only maintains the irritable object that has drawn out Kim-Cohen’s critique. Despite the conceptual sufficiency at the heart of Kim-Cohen’s polemic, I fully endorse his call for a sonic art that steps beyond phenomenological sufficiency and the assumption of ear and audition as simply given. I, however, wish to take a step in the opposite direction. Accordingly, this argument does not constitute a negation of Kim-Cohen’s position but rather a ‘transcendental’ complement and undermining, an attempt to begin accounting for its conditions.<sup>21</sup> Where Kim-Cohen’s notion of the non-cochlear firmly positions virtuous sonic practice within the context of conceptual art, the step that I wish to take towards a theory inclusive of affectivity requires that we move towards – rather than simply passing over in silence – the conditions and material contingencies of a conceptual practice. This move, rather than being counter-conceptual, intends to reposition conceptual practice within a materialist continuum, exposing its conditions through an *experimental* practice exploring relations between concept and material. Where it is treated as sufficient, the turn towards the conceptual appears equally as isolating a gesture as that associated with phenomenological sufficiency or intentional objectivity; both positions restrict significance to the strictly anthropic, whether that be primarily of experience or meaning – insofar as they might be opposed. To critically approach the problem of the in-itself – which herein is considered equivalent to affective intensity – does not require the abandonment of relations in favour of objective essentialism. Instead it is argued that to pass over in silence that which persists in excess of representation or subjective capture is to ignore the conditions of the conceptual, positing its existence as inexplicably given. Neither must attempts to engage the in-itself in terms of affective autonomy be understood as restricting what can be said of sound

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<sup>21</sup>This complement or undermining is considered transcendental in the sense of a transcendental materialism rather than idealism.

to auto-affective affirmation, as a disavowal of difference and alterity. This solipsistic isolation occurs where the real is identified as intentional, as an object of experience – universal or otherwise. In thinking affective autonomy as anterior to and in excess of both experience and representation, the problem of the in-itself attains an exteriority capable of thinking alterity beyond the anthropic terms of linguistic and conceptual correlationism.<sup>22</sup> The nature of such a non-anthropic alterity or exteriority has been explored throughout the history of experimental practice, in works exploring the conditions of the conceptual. Such work has occasionally been concerned with the relationship between the elements of nature and thought – between Idea and concept – revealing the latter to be of the former in place of any dichotomy, as was John Cage's concern.<sup>23</sup>

For Cage, experimental practice entailed a turn orientating thought beyond that which appears given to it, a turn towards nature and the in-itself. Cage states that 'this turning [...] seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity' (2009: 8). That which 'belongs to humanity' is the conceptual or linguistic, entailing – with specific reference to composition – the musical control and organization of sound, executed through symbolic discretion and according to the requirements of representation. Stated crudely, the definition of experimental music to which Cage was devoted concerned itself with the signals underpinning such systems: sonic matter or sound-itself, that which is mobilized and organized in the composition of music yet remains in excess of musical organization. Cage was also concerned with the extent to which systems of representation such as musical scores were not limited to representation, but productive of affects. Graphical scores were understood as catalytic elements whose various signs did not necessarily represent sounds to be recalled but presented affective capacities beyond the possibility of any sonification. At a more general level, the experimental turn – identified by Cage as beginning in the 1940s with the introduction of magnetic tape into musical practice – lead away from 'everything that belongs to humanity [...] to the world of nature, where gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together' (Cage 2009: 8). It is due to this concern for opening creative practice up to that which is thought beyond the horizon of humanity, an attempt to realize a continuum between thought and nature, that I believe we find stronger, richer accounts of non-cochlear sound in the history of experimental practice than we do

<sup>22</sup>The term correlationism is taken from the work of Quentin Meillassoux (2009) and can be crudely summarized as naming philosophical positions wherein reality is only insofar as it is perceived, held or rendered in the mind.

<sup>23</sup>For Deleuze 'the Ideas as concrete universal stands opposed to concepts of the understanding' (2004: 220), and so the relationship between Ideas as 'the ultimate elements of nature' (ibid.: 205) and concepts is that of 'a profound complicity between nature and mind' (ibid.).

in that of strictly conceptual practice, as the former does not exclude the latter from its concerns. A strictly conceptual interpretation of non-cochlear sonic art concerns itself with the discursive impact of sonic practice, with an order of sound *effects*. Expanding the non-cochlear along materialist lines, it retains the ability to account for sound *affects* beyond the ear, what Cage refers to as ‘non-sounds’: the affectivity of sonic events both unintentional and unheard, events finding resonances in bodies other than *the* body. Presenting this extra-somatic affectivity, Cage’s experimental practice expresses how ‘non-sounds [...] received by other sets than the ear, operate in the same manner’ (Cage 2009: 14). The notion of the non-cochlear presented herein is aligned with this particular understanding of non-sound as a model of clamorous silence populated by inaudible yet affective signals, signals that are taken as structurally equivalent to autonomous and infraesthetic affects. It is in this Cagean sense of an extrasomatic affectivity that sound’s independence from the necessity of its being heard is to be understood, as independence from the necessity of its being heard ‘by us’, suggesting a non-anthropocentric audition or a scientific art of signals. Sound is thereby understood as being independent of its synthetic reproduction by *the* body but not necessarily all bodies or ‘sets other than the ear’. The affect thereby remains a relational event yet this relation is not necessarily manifest for us but, rather, for *any* body.

Opening onto a larger vibrational continuum of sonic affects, both non-sound and the non-cochlear can be utilized in accounting for the inaudible conditions of the heard. Insofar as a sound is necessarily listened to, what is heard cannot be considered in-itself, yet sound-itself is posited as a necessary anteriority to the synthetic production of what is heard. Considered ‘in-itself’, sound is set apart from audition; from the perspective whereby sound must be heard to be defined as such – according to which there can be no sound apart from the ear, no affect apart from affirmation – sound-itself is not sound but rather a kind of non-sound or clamorous silence. Non-sound thereby presents a kind of ‘immanent transcendence’ insofar as it is that which is affective within sound yet goes unheard, thereby remaining external to it; it is that which resonates with sets other than the ear, or fails to resonate at all.

