

Jeffrey Perry*¹

*Louisiana State University, United States of America

¹jperry@lsu.edu

Imitations, Analogs, and Filters: John Cage Erases and Recomposes Satie

ABSTRACT

Background

In 1969, John Cage sought permission from Editions Max Eschig to use his two-piano arrangement of Satie's *Socrate* as the score for the Cunningham dance *Second Hand*; denied this permission, he used chance procedures to compose *Cheap Imitation*, a work that preserved the rhythmic structure of *Socrate* while changing its pitch content. In terms of Cage's oeuvre it was at once an anomaly and a way forward. The work Cage created against Satie and for Cunningham's dance rami-fies, multiplies, and problematizes authorship. It was the first of a series of works that proceeded similarly. The process that the work catalyzed allowed Cage to return to working with tones after a decade of more abstract, conceptual projects. Cage's 'imitations' suggest new ways to consider intertextual networks (and the compositional process) in terms of subtraction, filtration, and translation, rather than merely in terms of shared materials. They also provide the source of the monophonic musical surface that predominates in the later Cage of the 'number' pieces (1987–1992) and provide a means of re-appraising the pivotal *4'33"* (1952) as well. Most significantly, the 'imitation' process gave birth to a number of the *Solos for Voice* that Cage composed in 1970 as part of the *Song Books*. I present a cartographic summary of Cage's 'Imitations' and 'Rubbings' that situates them in the context of the music and literature they draw on, provide homage to, and erase. As I will show, such cartographic analysis opens doors to extrinsic analyses of works not explicitly modeled on prior music as well.

Aims and Repertoire Studied

By investigating the relationship of Cage's source material to its chance-derived 'imitation', I hope to explore Cage's relationship to his influences. The works discussed are the following 'Cheap Imitations' from the *Song Books*:

- Solo 18. Music: Satie, *Socrate*, III, via Cage, *Cheap Imitation*, III. Text: V. Cousin, from Satie, *Socrate*, III, subject to chance operations;
- Solo 25. Music: Satie, *Ludions* No. 3, 'La grenouille américaine'. Text: Fargue, 'La grenouille américaine', syllable mix;
- Solo 27. Music: Satie, 'Kyrie' from *Messe des pauvres*. Text: Thoreau, *Journal*;
- Solo 30. Music: Satie, *Socrate*, II, via Cage, *Cheap Imitation*, II. Text: A 'collage' (not a mix) from Thoreau's *Journal*;
- Solo 39. Music: Schubert, 'Die Hoffnung', D. 295. Text: Schiller, 'Die Hoffnung' (*Gedichte*, Ch. 74);

- Solo 47. Music: Mozart, 'Queen of the Night' Aria from *Die Zauberflöte*, K. 620. Text: Syllable mix drawn from the ten 'thunderclaps' of Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*;
- Solo 85. Music: Satie, 12 *Chorals*. Text: Syllable mixes from Thoreau's *Journals*.

Methods

The study is supported by examination of the *Solos for Voice* and of the source works, especially those by Satie.

Implications

Cage's statements about why he chose his influences, and what he took from them, have received little attention. This study allows us to examine the process of appropriation through a keener lens. Further work will, I hope, allow me to pinpoint the textual sources for Solos 27, 30, and 85 in Thoreau's *Journal*.

Keywords

Cage, Chance, Indeterminacy, Satie, Thoreau, Song Books, Cheap Imitation, Socrate, Collage.

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