

Velvets' approach with the more soulful sound of Afro-American music – a musical marriage of the “stiff, totalitarian” aspect of rock with the “fluid, sensual quality of black music”:

I think it would make a saleable combination if Kraftwerk employed Parliament, or the other way around. It would be interesting if you had the Parliament group playing bass, and Kraftwerk playing the drums. There would be a cross-cultural hybrid, especially if everybody stuck to their guns.¹²

Although Eno played clarinet with the Portsmouth Sinfonia, and although he has systematically attacked the “pyramidal” social structure of the classical orchestra (in a crucial article treated in Chapter 4), he seldom discusses Western European art music in interviews. If he owes a debt to that tradition, it is to its avant-garde, experimental factions that rallied to John Cage's proclamation in the 1950s and 1960s that “everything we do is music,” and to the group of composers who have followed paths set out by La Monte Young and Terry Riley and have come to be called “minimalists.”

Eno read Cage's epochal book *Silence*¹³ in the 1960s. Glancing through its contents today, one is struck by the frequency of passages that presage Eno's own approach to music and the philosophy of music. Cage quotes from an article by Christian Wolff:

Notable qualities of this music, whether electronic or not, are monotony and the irritation that accompanies it. The monotony may lie in simplicity or delicacy, strength or complexity. Complexity tends to reach a point of neutralization: continuous change results in a certain sameness. It goes in no particular direction. There is no necessary concern with time as a measure of distance from a point in the past to a point in the future, with linear continuity alone. It is not a question of getting anywhere, of making progress, or having come from anywhere in particular, of tradition or futurism. There is neither nostalgia nor anticipation. Often the structure of a piece is circular.¹⁴

Though the sounding surfaces of Wolff's examples – Pousseur's *Exercices de Piano* and Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* – are about as diametrically opposed to Eno's ambient music as conceivably possible, the writer could be describing any number of Eno pieces written since 1975, and it is easy to imagine Eno in the 1960s reading such a passage and turning it over in his mind. Cage's essay on Erik Satie likewise contains quotations that could almost have appeared in the liner notes to an album like *Music for Airports*, an album that is in a sense a response to the Frenchman's challenge. Cage quotes Satie:

Nevertheless, we must bring about a music which is like furniture – a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment, will take them into consideration. I think of it as melodious, softening the noises of the knives and forks, not dominating them, not imposing it-

¹² Roman Kozak, “Math Qualities of Music Interest Eno,” *Billboard* 90 (13 May 1978), 51.

¹³ John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1976, first published 1961).

¹⁴ Cage, *Silence*, 54.