

self. It would fill up those heavy silences that sometimes fall between friends dining together. It would spare them the trouble of paying attention to their own banal remarks. And at the same time it would neutralize the street noises which so indiscretely enter into the play of conversation. To make such music would be to respond to a need.<sup>15</sup>

Eno's own philosophy of ambient music is not so peevish as Satie's, and Eno has been more interested in enhancing and incorporating the environment's extraneous noises than in neutralizing them. Nonetheless,

the parallels are obvious. Cage's description of Satie's proto-minimalist work *Vexations* – a piece lasting, in Cage's estimate, “twenty-four hours, 840 repetitions of a fifty-two beat piece itself involving a repetitive structure: A, A1, A, A2, each A thirteen measures long”<sup>16</sup> – immediately brings to mind Eno's highly repetitive piece “Discreet Music,” in which a couple of short synthesizer melodies meander, repeat, and randomly overlap over a period of thirty minutes, and Eno's recent audio-visual installations, in which repeating, overlapping cycles can go on for as long as six weeks. In discussing Satie's music to accompany the sounds of knives and forks, Cage says that “It is evidently a question of bringing one's intended actions into relation with the ambient unintended ones.”<sup>17</sup> Although Eno has never publicly said as much, this reference to “ambient” sounds is very likely the genesis of Eno's own concept of ambient music, or at least the source of his use of the word. Later on the same page, Cage characteristically defines silence as “ambient noise.” Cage quotes Satie again:

They will tell you I am not a musician. That's right ... Take the *Fils des Etoiles* or the *Morceaux en forme de poire*, *En habit de cheval* or the *Sarabandes*, it is clear no musical idea presided at the creation of these works.<sup>18</sup>

Again, although one may not be exactly sure how to interpret Satie's blend of irony, bitterness, and wit, the statement “I am not a musician” was taken up eagerly by Eno in the 1970s, and became almost his motto or credo, however numerous the misunderstandings to which it has given rise may be. (I shall return to this issue in Chapter 3.) Eno specified that it was the “systematic” Satie with whom he strongly identified: “He was a systems composer, you know, planning chord changes by numerical techniques. In the midst of extraordinary chromatic experimentalism, with everyone doing bizarre things, he just wrote these lovely little pieces of music.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 78.

<sup>17</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Demorest, “The Discreet Charm of Brian Eno: An English Pop Theorist Seeks to Redefine Music,” *Horizon* 21 (June 1978), 85.