

Apart from such specific references, there is much in *Silence* that clearly influenced Eno: the fascination with chance operations, which Eno was to incorporate in his deck of oracle cards, the *Oblique Strategies*, in the mid-1970s (see Chapter 4), the Zen anecdotes and the excursions into Eastern philosophy, the mildly, jocosely irreverent attitude towards canonical principles of Western art music, with regard to both musical structure and social setting, the unconventional typography and free mix of musical and written media (such as in Cage's "45' for a Speaker"), the idea of "Composition as Process" (another chapter title), and the ever-repeated axiom that all sounds have the potential for being experienced as music. *Silence* served Eno, like countless young artists and musicians of the last few decades, as a somewhat ad-hoc, yet more or less comprehensive survey of major developments in experimental music in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Eno has acknowledged Cage's influence on several occasions. The first published reference to Cage is in a 1972 interview. Eno was discussing the tape-delay technique he had recently been exploring with Robert Fripp, the results of which can be heard on their 1973 album *No Pussy-footing*. Eno was aware that Terry Riley had just gone public with a similar delay system. Then he added (if we are to accept this as a literal quotation): "Actually, soon afterwards I found out that John Cage had discovered the same things years ago. But he was a creep, and anyway he didn't know how to use it!"²⁰ By 1977, Eno no longer had to adopt the aggressive attitude of the *enfant terrible* feeling his oats: "'Art is a net,' Cage said. Years later I read Morse Peckham. He said, 'Art is safe.' I realized that's what Cage meant. You're creating a false world where you can afford to make mistakes."²¹

In 1980, after again acknowledging Cage's influence on the development of his ideas, Eno revealed that he had sent Cage a score of his around 1966, and that he had received in return "like a circular, I guess, [that] he sends out to the thousands of people a week who send him scores, and it said, 'thank you very much for the score. It has been duly filed and appreciated,' or something of that type." Eno added, with a self-deprecatory laugh, "I was very pleased to get this accolade from John Cage."²²

More revealing still are comments Eno made in a 1981 interview. Calling Cage "the most influential theorist" he had had at a certain point in his life, "a completely liberating factor," Eno goes on to say that Cage "reintroduced the notion of spirituality into the making of music." Much musical composition in the first half of the twentieth century struck Eno as being a sterile enterprise: "The history of music was seen as the breakdown of the old tonal system and the move into chromaticism and the tone row, and everything was being discussed in these terms." The formal and technical agenda had replaced or submerged aesthetic concerns, and to be a good composer, what you had to do was understand what had happened on a formal level and then break certain of those rules. Now clearly, this has never been what good music was about. In fact, the quality that one seeks is the spiritual quality, which incidentally sometimes breaks the rules. But it's incidental, you know? It sometimes keeps those rules as well. So what Cage did that was so important was to say, "Look, when you make music you are acting as a philosopher. You can either do that consciously or you can do it unconsciously, but you're doing it." To be reminded of that was the most important thing. For me it wasn't a

²⁰ Richard Williams, "Crimso Meets Eno!," *Melody Maker* 47 (4 Nov. 1972), 65.

²¹ Frank Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," *Village Voice* 22 (28 Mar. 1977), 69.

²² Amirkhanian, "Eno at KPFA," 7.