

speak, and so on. And it was that same thing again – there’s a lot of space here, a lot of new territory. It’s a territory that nobody had yet had the time to say you couldn’t do something.<sup>28</sup>

Eno did homage to Cage in 1976 by producing an album that included performances of five Cage pieces.<sup>29</sup> If there is a gulf that separates the two men, it ultimately has to do with age and background. Cage is the elder statesman of the avant-garde, he studied with Schoenberg, and his views on music, as summarized in *Silence*, revolve around developments in the Western art music tradition – indeed represent developments more or less specific to that tradition, some of his chance music bears an aesthetic surface strikingly similar to that of serially-composed music, to which it is so adamantly opposed at the philosophical level. Eno’s *musical* roots are in popular music traditions, and this is reflected not only in his somewhat superficial knowledge of the classical tradition and his disdain for its institutional infrastructure, but in his music itself, which is generally by far more consonant and accessible than much of Cage’s, even when it is not outright rock.

Cage’s influence on Eno has thus been far-reaching, but as is true of Cage’s impact on many composers, it has been more conceptual than specifically musical in nature. A more concrete musical influence has been that of minimalist composers such as La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich, whose music has influenced Eno more than any other, with the possible exception of the popular music of the 1950s already discussed. For Eno, minimalism represents the most significant and potentially fruitful aesthetic point of departure in the 20th century – a new musical meta-idea, so to speak, which promises untold riches not simply in the development of compositional techniques, but in the development of new ways of listening.

The pre-history of minimalism goes back at least to Satie’s *Vexations*. But one of the earliest examples of minimalism proper is by Terry Riley (b. 1935), who, shortly after graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, with a degree in composition, wrote the seminal work *In C* (1964). The score consists of fifty-three notated melodic fragments, which the performers, who are variable in number, are to play one after the other, in synchronization with a steadily repeated “pulse” on the top two C’s of the piano keyboard, repeating any given fragment an indeterminate number of times and pausing between fragments as they see fit. The piece ends after everyone reaches the fifty-third fragment. Typical performances last between forty-five and ninety minutes, though one *In C* marathon in Mexico City in 1982 lasted for three hours. The effect of the music depends to a large extent upon the quality of the interaction among the musicians in the ensemble. Thus a high degree of repetition and a requirement of active listening by both performers and audience are built into the structure of the piece.

Although Eno has spoken with admiration of Riley’s music, a more decisive minimalist influence on his work was Steve Reich’s (b. 1936) phase tape pieces. In a 1985 interview he singled out Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain* as “probably the most important piece that I heard, in that it gave me an idea I’ve never ceased being fascinated with – how variety can be generated by very, very simple systems.” Reich made short tape loops of a black preacher saying “It’s gonna rain,” so that what we hear is this one phrase incessantly repeated over and over again. The tape machines are running at slightly different speeds, however, so that as the piece progresses, the loops gradually shift out of phase with each other. Eno comments:

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<sup>28</sup> Tannenbaum, “Cage and Eno,” 70.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Steele and John Cage, *Voices and Instruments*, Obscure/Editions EG OBS 5, 1976.