

ERIK SATIE'S *TROIS GNOSSIENNES* IN THE FRENCH *FIN DE SIÈCLE*

by

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Abstract

A majority of modern studies of Erik Satie's *Trois Gnossiennes* seem to consider the French composer's early piano music as a form of anti-Wagnerian nihilism. This view is misinformed. From Ravel's first staging of Satie's early piano music at the Société Musicale Indépendante in 1910, to John Cage's lecture on the 'Defence of Satie' in 1948, composers from both waves of the modernist period (1890-1914 and post 1940s) have often given too much attention to Satie's apparently anti-romantic and anti-Germanic mentality, failing to consider his early symbolist identity in the French *fin de siècle*. As a result, numerous studies today examine Satie as a precursor to the light-hearted nihilism of Les Six, Dadaism and the later John Cage.

However, this dissertation argues that Satie's initial behaviour in the *fin de siècle* period may have been influenced by mysticism, closely associated with the ideals of late-romanticism. Examining the period 1886-1893 (the years of Satie's youth), this thesis offers a reinterpretation of some of the primary characteristics of Satie's early piano music, taking into consideration the contextual evidence available on the anti-establishment of Montmartre. In this case, Satie's aim was to use symbolist means to resist modern rationality, while also ascetically restraining himself from the grandiose subjectivity of late-romantic rhetoric.

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Introduction

This thesis reinterprets the primary characteristics of the early piano music of the French composer, Erik Satie. As a relatively obscure composer in Montmartre circles of the late 1880s and early 1890s, Satie became known for his quirky cabaret attitude and his non-bourgeois preoccupations, a response perhaps to the commercialism of the Parisian artistic establishment.¹ In a period in which concert goers remained fascinated by the spiritual qualities inherent in Wagner's grandiose rhetoric, the as yet unheard French composer defiantly broke away, composing miniaturist piano works 'stripped' of subjectivity and harmonic development. For these reasons, scholars have often positioned him as a precursor to later modernist developments, such as Ortega's 1920s avant-garde theories,² Dada, Les Six and John Cage.

However, this thesis argues that early musicology from the 1940s has largely misunderstood Satie's initial 'cultivation of minimalist aesthetics', and that this misunderstanding still appears in musicology today.³ Numerous studies take too lightly Satie's initial symbolist behaviour, mixing the composer's 'Satiean spirit' with the late-1940s 'Cagian' ideas of John Cage's New School.⁴ It may seem that Satie's aesthetic based on 'emptiness' approximates John Cage's anti-Wagnerian and anti-Germanic modernist identity, and that his critique of art and society was ironical and rather playful.⁵ But there also seems to be a contradiction. In the early 1890s, Satie participated in the kind of symbolism that was closely aligned to late-romantic and post-Wagnerian mysticism. His occultist swing towards the idealist novelist, Joséphin Péladan and his Rosicrucian sect (1891), along with the formation of L'Église

¹ Pasler (2009), 537-544.

² Taruskin (2010), 69.

³ Davis (2007), 42-43.

⁴ Gillmor (1988), 261-262.

⁵ Whiting (1999).

Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur (1893), which coincided with the publication of the precariously titled *Trois Gnossiennes* (1889-1893), suggests that the French composer was quite eager to isolate himself from society in the *fin de siècle*'s mysticism.

This warrants further investigation. It is exactly because this modern mysticism forms a transitional period between late-romanticism and early modernism that Satie has a rather ambiguous early identity. The misunderstanding seems to stem from the fact that Erik Satie came to prominence late in life, when Parisian modernism and the avant-garde were in full swing. Maurice Ravel, who performed the composer's early piano music at the Société Musicale Indépendante in 1910, brought the composer from relative obscurity to the focus of the Parisian elite avant-garde, the New French School of Fauré, Debussy and Ravel.

This change in direction is important to highlight. Satie revelled in his stardom, becoming more eccentric, critiquing society on a rather more fundamental level. He moved towards extreme nihilistic experiments in the humorous piano suites (1913-1917) and *Musique d'Ameublement* (1920) as well as becoming the father figure to Poulenc and Les Six (1920).⁶ The latter group treated Satie as their precursory 'Prince of Musicians'.⁷ Satie's eccentricities, caught up in 1920s modernism, swiftly became associated with Dadaism. It may have been in this context that the American composer John Cage discovered Satie's musical eccentricities in late 1940s New York.⁸ Under Cage's influence, the French composer's eccentricities would become part of the New School's response to Darmstadt's neo-Viennese modernism.

⁶ Davis (2007), 81-106.

⁷ Ibid, 83.

⁸ Nyman (1973), 1227-1229.

Cage brought Satie to the attention of the postwar American avant-garde across the arts and promoted his aesthetic as a powerful alternative to more hermetic modes of modernism – an antidote to the control-orientated approaches of Schoenberg, Boulez and Stockhausen.⁹

As this thesis will investigate, Cage's 1940s ideas were radically more avant-garde than Erik Satie's early experiments in the *fin de siècle* period.

This study owes a debt to the recent Satie scholar, Mary E. Davis, whose informative 'Critical Lives' biography has encouraged diverse interpretations of Erik Satie's past, and whose concise documentation of Satie's youth will be referred to throughout. As this study will discover, in the period from 1886 to 1893 there is room to re-interpret the initial ideas of Satie's early piano works. Early pieces such as the *Ogives* (1886), the *Sarabandes* (1887), the *Gymnopédies* (1888) and the *Trois Gnossiennes* (1889-1893) were not dada-inspired. These works have become re-contextualised over time.

Methodology and Synopsis

In order to establish the context of Satie's reception by John Cage in the late 1940s the first chapter will begin by sketching the role subjectivity played in Western art music from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century onwards. It will highlight the rise of both the rational bourgeoisie and the romantic subject, before discussing the anti-subjective avant-garde reaction of Cage and allegedly, Satie. Second, the chapter will discuss John Cage's reading of Erik Satie and promote an opposing theory, taking into account the French composer's early mysticism.

⁹ Davis (2007), 9.

In the second chapter, the thesis will revisit the context of *fin de siècle* Paris, initially exploring the Parisian musical establishment and its relationship with the rational, republican philosophy of the rising bourgeoisie in Third Republic France. The chapter will outline the exponential increase in irrational Wagnerism, which will form the foundational context for Satie's early mysticism.

Chapter 3 will survey the context of mysticism in the *fin de siècle*'s transitional period between late-romanticism and early modernism, examining Erik Satie's initial composing career in the *fin de siècle*. The chapter will investigate the two popular bohemian styles of thought, *la blague* and *le recherché*, which characterise much of the satirical and allegorical artwork of Montmartre. Second, the chapter will propose that Satie's inherently unorthodox musical style was a result of his fascination with the mysticism of the medieval and Hellenic past.

Finally, citing all previous research, chapter four will examine Satie and his *Trois Gnossiennes* (1890), discussing how their misunderstood identity may be linked more with *le recherché*'s religious mysticism. Using original sources, the chapter will show how the *Trois Gnossiennes*' symbolical content takes into account the wave of exotic folk music that had fascinated many French composers after the Universal Exposition in 1889, and the back-lash of religious art sects that were established during secular society's 'religious' revival. It will provide sufficient evidence to suggest that Erik Satie was ascetically restraining his subjective identity in reaction both to commercialism as to the grandiose rhetoric of late-romanticism. Evidently this will highlight the purity, distinction and authenticity that Satie strove to emphasise in his early piano music of the *fin de siècle* period.

Chapter 1

Art as a Subject: John Cage and Satie's Ascetic Self

Since the emergence of the modern individual in the ‘enlightenment period’, Western art music has come to embody aspects of our subjectivity. As a result, art music has often been distinguished for its ability to represent fundamental human ideals. However, citing Adorno and Eagleton, this section will begin to understand the context of the crucial anti-subjective mentality of the avant-garde in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It will highlight how the negation of subjectivity has been explored in the two waves of modernism (1890-1914 and post-1940s), the total nihilism of John Cage, but long before that, the asceticism of Erik Satie.

During the ‘enlightenment’ period (the eighteenth century), humanity learnt to rationalise symbols and govern principles for its own ends. Rational intellectuals began to evaluate knowledge, favour modern reason over authority, modern science over superstition. Most importantly, the individual began to learn how to rationalise nature. No longer viewed as a primitive artefact, art inherited the modern subject’s freedom and expressive value.¹⁰ Music was not a craft as such and dedicated to a religious function, but a language and a concept. It had the capacity to sound human, to reflect on fundamental human ideas. It could elaborate on a subject’s spontaneity, freedom, autonomy, or perhaps go further and emphasise the irrational romanticist’s ‘wondrous ideal of the infinite’.¹¹ For Terry Eagleton in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, this new found freedom of thought coincided with the rise of the rational bourgeoisie and its counterculture, the romanticists.

With the emergence of the early bourgeoisie, aesthetic concepts (some of them of distinguished historical pedigree) began to play, however tacitly, an unusually central, intensive part in the constitution of a dominant ideology. Conceptions of the unity and integrity of the work of art, for example, are commonplaces of an ‘aesthetic’ discourse which stretched back to classical antiquity; but what emerges from such familiar notions in the late eighteenth century is the curious idea of the work of art as a kind of *subject*.¹²

The ‘enlightenment’ bourgeoisie employed the aesthetic in order to govern art with a set of moral values. However, for romanticism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, art could allow the individual to re-access the ‘metaphysical’ and transcend everyday existence. Kevin Korsyn in *Decentering Music* notes that ‘the artwork was called on to

¹⁰ Eagleton (1991), 9.

¹¹ Hoffman quoted in Bonds (1997), 392.

¹² Eagleton (1991), 4.

play an ideological role beyond the power of any artefact'.¹³ As a result, romanticism's rhetoric became closely associated with feelings and inner emotions.¹⁴

The Negation of Subjectivity

This concept is important to consider in relation to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century avant-garde. One perceived fault of romanticism by the time of the first modernist period (the *fin de siècle* period through to the pre-World War 1 European avant-garde) was the crudeness of its rhetoric. As the poet Ezra Pound once stated, 'the whole flaw of "emotional music"' is that it must have 'more noise each time, or this effect, this impression which works from the outside, in from the nerves and sensorium upon the self – is no use, its effect is constantly weaker and weaker'.¹⁵ For example, Wagner's endless melodies, as well as his sensuous, emotional harmonies had reached their expressive limitations. As Adorno commented in the *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, the inwardness of romantic subjectivity contradicted the individual's true social reality, that of suffering and oppression.

Adorno, like many of the European modernist theorists, was particularly critical of humanity's increasing domination of nature, a consequence of urbanisation and capitalism. Autonomy had raised art so that it was interesting in itself, hence the notion of art religion. However, at the same time, art via the bourgeoisie had gathered a dual status. It was also a commodity to be bought and sold. For Adorno, commodification had now become the dominating, 'chief regulator' of art. Gestures of subjective expression had become mechanical clichés. The real truth in the duality of the modern subject's 'degenerated

¹³Korsyn (2003), 44.

¹⁴Dahlhaus, trans. Lustig, (1991), 88.

¹⁵Pound quoted in Taruskin (2010), 1.

ideology' was the false preoccupation with apocalyptic and metaphysical late-romantic ideals.¹⁶

For Adorno, individuals were now forced to liquidate their modern spontaneity. This involved manipulating and restraining the subjective. Western art music could then be reinterpreted within its social tradition (the universal) and re-connected with the subject's truth.¹⁷ This truth was not freedom but suffering, the revelation that the individual is isolated by alienation. In order to negate the modern subject, the subject must 'think against itself',¹⁸ self-contradicting the virtues of thought that were developed in the 'enlightenment period'. As we will discover in Satie's career in the *fin de siècle* period, thinking against oneself was already an idea being explored in the 1890s. The emotive content of his music was being deliberately restrained.

By the time of John Cage and his experimental avant-garde mentality in the late 1940s, negation took on a different form. As Eagleton states, 'the subject gradually implodes into some empty, mechanical conformity'.¹⁹ Rather than distinguishing his art from nature, Cage mocked the aesthetic tradition by reintegrating his art with nature. As we will discover, Cage's significance in modern music and musicology has re-contextualised Satie's initial symbolist means. Satie's early ideas, polarised against the 'old music' of late 1940s New York, have been exaggerated.

¹⁶ Adorno trans. Mitchell and Blomster (1993), 66-67.

¹⁷ Ibid, 41.

¹⁸ Eagleton (1991), 347.

¹⁹ Ibid.

John Cage and the late 1940s Reception of Satie

[Satie's] limited body of compositions [were viewed as] laboratory examples for others to emulate and develop.²⁰

Cage's interest in Erik Satie lies significantly in the French composer's unconventional approach to composing, presented best of all in his Dadaistic attitude in the 1920s. After Satie's scandalous musical collaboration with the poet Jean Cocteau in the ballet *Parade* (1917), the French composer's musical methods became closely associated with Apollinaire's term *L'esprit nouveau* (1917).²¹ Jean Cocteau upheld Satie's stripped down approach as a model for the young avant-garde to follow, shaping the understanding of Satie during the 1920s. In his manifesto *Le Coq et l'arlequin* (1918), Cocteau praised the innovation of Satie's ideas which provided 'young musicians with a teaching that [did] not imply the desertion of their own originality', in contrast to the music of Wagner, Stravinsky and Debussy.²² Evidently, Satie's use of silence and simplicity had created a 'clear road upon which everyone [was] free to leave [their] own imprint'.²³

Now, while Debussy delicately spreads his feminine grace, strolling with Stéphane Mallarmé in the Garden of the Infanta, Satie continues on his little classic path. He arrives here today, young among the young, at last finding his place [...].²⁴

John Cage may have been influenced by Cocteau's appropriation of Satie for this earlier Parisian avant-garde, particularly this anti-conventional role that Cocteau associates with Satie's music. Robert Orledge wrote in *Satie the Composer* how Cage was most enthused by Satie's unorthodox musical language, presenting structure as 'blocks of sound of [a]

²⁰ Gallez (1976), 50.

²¹ Orledge (1990), 205.

²² Cocteau (1926), 17-18

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cocteau quoted in Austin (1962), 228.

predetermined length' and promoting non-development as a social experiment based around 'boredom', replacing 'traditional signposts like climaxes with stasis'.²⁵ As Alan Gillmor similarly states in his biography of Satie, Cage discovered that the French composer's music was 'quiet, precise, and direct [...] fresh and new-born, devoid of rhetoric', a music that removed the late-romantic subject's 'preoccupation with the sublime'.²⁶ This supports Michael Nyman's portrayal of the two composers in an article published in *The Musical Times* (1973). Cage chose in the 1940s to imitate 'many features in common with Satie: melody-modality, stasis, flatness of movement [...] and unpretentiousness'.²⁷

More recently, scholars such as Matthew Shlomowitz (1999), alongside Nicholas Fogwell's website *Satie-Archives*, have begun to question Cage's reading of Satie, asking 'how Cage has affected Satie's place in history'.²⁸ Shlomowitz concludes in his investigation of the two composers that 'Cage was a committed enthusiast of Satie's work, and the many people that have taken an interest in Cage have also taken an interest in his interests'. He continues by stating that 'Cage's engagement with Satie was extensive, and involved every aspect of his musical life - as a writer, composer, pianist, and concert organizer'.²⁹ This would suggest that Cage's reading of Satie was rather personal. Shlomowitz notes earlier in the article that 'Cage's radical interpretation of Satie's music [...] does not seem to have been supported by anyone else'.³⁰ As an example, he cites *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, a book written in Britain ten years earlier by the composer and conductor Constant Lambert. In Lambert's chapter on Satie, the French composer is praised for his apparent neo-classicism.

²⁵ Ibid, 259.

²⁶ Gillmor (1988), 120. Gillmor places John Cage against the 'Germanic rhetoric' of Wagner as well as 'Debussyan Impressionism'.

²⁷ Nyman (1973), 1228.

²⁸ Schlomowitz, reprinted in <http://www.satie-archives.com/web/article8.html>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Lambert wrote that ‘in *Socrate* and other works [Satie] was able to achieve a classical calm that was in no way due to pastiche, because there had always been a classical element in his work’.³¹ As Shlomowitz stresses, both these contrasting interpretations present ‘very personal’, influential views on the French composer.³² However, they also vary tremendously.

John Cage’s late 1940s Social Context

As Joseph Kerman points out in his text *Contemplating Music*, after the ‘major development’ of music in the initial modernist period (pre-First World War), the ‘second phase of modernism [post-World War II] erupted with remarkable speed’, ‘virtually every aspect of music was transformed’.³³ While the ‘continental avant-garde’ celebrated the institutionalisation of pre-war European serialism as well as experiments in total serialism, a ‘strain’ of the American avant-garde ‘content to continue working at home’, began to discover their own experimental attitudes.³⁴ This new accessibility of non-institutionalised attitudes ‘coincided with a surge of interest in Cage, indeterminacy, minimalism [...] writings in the form of lectures, non-lectures, squibs, interviews, and ‘silences’’.³⁵

Kerman’s argument notes how ‘musical life’ in the American concert hall was polarised ‘between the old and the new’.³⁶ Like the pre-war modernists in Europe who wanted to preserve high-art from ‘ephemeral’ society,³⁷ Cage’s radical avant-gardism opposed the ‘vigorous revival’ of commercialised neo-classicism, now reproduced for the record player. ‘The left accused symphony orchestras, opera companies, and other standard concert

³¹ Lambert (1934), 125.

³² Shlomowitz, reprinted in <http://www.satie-archives.com/web/article8.html>.

³³ Kerman (1985), 20.

³⁴ Ibid, 20-22.

³⁵ Ibid, 22.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ortega quoted in Taruskin (2010), 60.

institutions of turning themselves into museums, museums without modern wings'.³⁸ Cage took it on himself to remove the subject from its position in aesthetics and ideology, essentially 'debunking' the commercial status of high-art.

Cage's Erik Satie

How may this have affected the reception of Satie? In order to answer this, the chapter will examine extracts from Cage's literary output, 'Defence of Satie', 'Satie Controversy', 'More Satie' and 'Silence'. It will evaluate Cage's thoughts on Erik Satie and compare the composition of Cage's String Quartet with Satie's *Sarabande No.1*. One of Cage's most high-profile reflections on Satie appears in 'Silence' from 1961. Here Cage wrote:

To be interested in Satie one must be disinterested to begin with, accept that a sound is a sound and a man is a man, give up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment, and all the rest of our inherited aesthetic claptrap.³⁹

Citing Satie's *Musique d'Ameublement* (1920), Cage argued that Satie's objective had been to give 'consideration to the sounds of knives and forks', that is, to allow 'the street noises' to enter into his work.⁴⁰ His musical structures were designed to allow nature to replace the role of the composer. This concept is significant. As Nyman notices, the French composer's idea of environmental noise and Cage's own were very different.

For Satie, furniture music would be "part of the noises of the environment", whereas for Cage the noises of the environment are part of his music [...] Cage [became] concerned with society on a rather fundamental level.⁴¹

³⁸ Kerman (1985), 22.

³⁹ Cage (1987), 81-82.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nyman (1973), 1229.

It would seem that Satie's compositional style was often portrayed by Cage as the foundation to his own experiments. As Pasler states in her article 'Inventing a Tradition', 'the point is not what Satie did, but how Cage uses the Satie example to help him define [musical] structure'.⁴² These environmental associations occupied a key role for Cage in removing the subject from his music, a move originating in the 1948 'Defence of Satie' lecture Cage organised at Black Mountain College. Here Cage set up a position for Satie as a precursor to his own contemporary musical thought. He opened with a description of the 'contemporary' in modern art, outlining a theory that would bring together the polarised views of 'new and old music'.

A most salient feature of contemporary art is the fact that each artist works as he sees fit, and not in accordance with widely agreed-upon procedures. Whether this state of affairs pleases or displeases us is not exactly clear from a consideration of modern clichés of thought. On the one hand, we lament what we call the gulf between artist and society, between artist and artist, and we praise [...] the unanimity of opinion out of which arose a Gothic cathedral, an opera by Mozart, a Balinese combination of music and dance. [...] For I suspect that our admiring two opposite positions, that of the traditional artist and that of the individualist, indicates a basic need in us for this pair of opposites.⁴³

This passage emphasised the common ground between 'traditionalists' and individualists', identifying the principles of music that should be concrete in law, and the principles of music that should be left to interpretation. His objective was to reintegrate the two opposites so that an art might be created that would be 'paradoxical in that it reflects both unanimity of thought and originality of thought'.⁴⁴ He discovered that structure is always necessary in order for music to be distinguished 'from non-being'.⁴⁵ This was the principal, most important characteristic of music. On the other hand, form, material and method should not

⁴² Pasler in Perloff and Juckermann (ed.) (1994), 5.

⁴³ Cage quoted in Konstelanetz (ed.) (1991), 78.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 79.

be agreed upon, since form particularly was ‘purely a matter of the heart’.⁴⁶ Satie as a pioneer of non-harmonic development was praised by Cage for reconciling ‘law and freedom, in a random world situation’.⁴⁷ As Cage wrote, comparing the compositional style of the traditionalist, Beethoven to the individualist, Satie:

Before Beethoven wrote a composition, he planned its movement from one key to another – that is he planned its harmonic structure. Before Satie wrote a piece, he planned the lengths of its phrases.⁴⁸

For Cage, Satie’s pre-planned phrase lengths based on measuring lengths of time - hence, structured around rhythm - allowed incongruent, non-human sounds to exist autonomously, escaping the egoism of the Western subjective ‘idea’.⁴⁹ This was in contrast to the ‘harmonic structure’ evident in Beethoven’s tonality, which he saw as a style occurring at the same time as Western materialism, and therefore, never an authentic origin of music.⁵⁰ His disdain for the ideal that drove the romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was noticeable. Mocking the common perception of traditionalists that Beethoven’s music was the most superior musical thought, Cage proceeded to explain that in Satie’s music, ‘the most fundamental’ and ‘necessary partner to sound’ was duration.⁵¹ Duration sustained sound beyond its harmonic structure, beyond the subject’s control. It was a silence measured ‘in terms of time lengths’. Using duration as ‘the necessary partner of sound’,⁵² Cage could ‘free himself from the trap of Western harmonic practice’.⁵³ Sounds would then simply exist as sounds, free from the composer’s authority. These sounds could then ‘annul the separation of

⁴⁶ Ibid, 83.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 83.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 82.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 84.

⁵¹ Ibid, 81.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Pritchett (1996), 55.

art and life', creating an art form synonymous with nature.⁵⁴ The effect is apparent earliest in Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1949).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Paddison (1997), 275.

⁵⁵ Nattiez (ed.) (1994), 5. The *String Quartet in Four Parts* was composed between Paris and New York, after researching the life and works of Erik Satie at the Bibliotheque nationale de France.

Ex. 1: 'Nearly Stationary'

Handwritten musical score for 'Nearly Stationary', measures 200-220. The score is written in 2/2 time and consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 200-205) features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a bass line. The second system (measures 210-215) includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *ppp*, and performance instructions like *PIZZ.* and *ARCO*. The third system (measures 215-220) continues the melodic and bass lines, with further dynamic markings and performance instructions. The score is marked with measure numbers 200, 205, 210, 215, and 220 in small boxes. The page number '-20-' is centered at the bottom.

One of Cage's last non-aleatoric compositions, the String Quartet uses a gamut of pre-designed sonorities, designed to subordinate melody to harmony. The result is a musical system stripped of traditional Western phrasing and sensuality. As James Pritchett notes in his study of John Cage, 'the quartet (particularly the third movement) has that overall mood of austerity and understated beauty found in Satie'.⁵⁶ Evidently, Cage's objective here was 'to divorce harmony from voice leading' to 'produce a succession of harmonies that is truly freed from structural responsibility'.⁵⁷ As Pritchett notes, the third movement in particular, replicates the 'static expressiveness' that Erik Satie had exposed.⁵⁸ However, this effect, while un-personal, may not have been Satie's fundamental idea in his initial piano music.

Ex.2: *Sarabande No.1* (1887) bars 1-8.

The image displays a musical score for the first eight bars of 'Sarabande No. 1' by Erik Satie. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is characterized by dense, block-like chords and a static, unchanging harmonic texture. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The second system also includes a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The notation is dense, with many notes beamed together, creating a complex, multi-layered sound.

⁵⁶ Pritchett (1996), 55.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 51.

For instance, behind the complexity of accidentals in Satie's *Sarabande No.1*, Orledge notes that there remains a 'highly expressive' content 'full of dramatic contrast', not quite as alien to subjective expression as Cage might have insisted.⁵⁹ This *Sarabande* reflects Satie's initial use of traditional expressiveness alongside modern anarchy. Taruskin notes that it is 'faithfully cast in old "baroque" dance forms (two or three repeated "strains," with repetitions fully if needlessly written out rather than marked with repeat signs') but that it is 'at once more up-to-date'.⁶⁰

We can also see that Satie was employing unresolved seventh and ninth chords, something that only Chabrier had previously been documented as doing in *Le Roi Malgré Lui* (1887).⁶¹ The tonal dissonances are the major novelty of the *Sarabandes*. The non-resolving 'dissonant chords' are presented like consonances. Taruskin observes that 'not one of these intervals resolves according to traditional voice leading - 'they are harmonically stable, making the music they inhabit harmonically static'. As a result 'the "cadential imperative" [of romanticism] is weakened - and with it, the power of music to represent desire'.⁶² This music discourages the romantic and subjective association with emotional content, along with the common Germanic technique of 'half-step relations'. As Taruskin argues, Satie was 'ridding [the] music of its harmonic glue'.⁶³

But these conclusions are perhaps not entirely justified. Taruskin is trying to show how Satie's early compositions relate to the later 1920s avant-garde theories of Ortega, that is, in so far as they avoid subjectivity, 'consider art as play' and 'dehumanize art'.⁶⁴ But the latter seems too strong a term. If anything, Satie would seem to be creating more sensuality by

⁵⁹ Orledge (1996), 558.

⁶⁰ Taruskin (2010), 65.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, 66.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ortega quoted in Taruskin (2010), 69.

employing innovative but warm, dissonant sounding chords. The opening passage concludes on a cadence of a sort, with the B double flat major chord. The visual novelty of the double flats on paper masks the conventionality of the modal progression. Taruskin notes how this could not be linked to subjective desire because bar 7's leading note is 'suppressed'. Instead of A flat, Satie flattens it to an A double flat.⁶⁵ But as Orledge notes, 'Satie's procedures had stronger links with the past than he cared to admit'. He observes how 'each of the three Sarabandes begins and ends with the same perfect fifth on the tonic in the bass'.⁶⁶ Furthermore, we will find that after re-writing bar 7 and 8 in D major, these additional double flats are no longer necessary. This would suggest that Satie was deliberately trying to camouflage the conventionality of *Sarabande No.1*.

Ex.3: *Sarabande No.1*, bars 7-8 re-written in D major



⁶⁵ Taruskin (2010), 69.

⁶⁶ Orledge (1996), 564.

In contrast to Cage's clear 'dehumanizing' avant-garde stance in his String Quartet, Satie's music seems less sure of itself. It may have been gesturing towards the mysticism of late-nineteenth century symbolism. The additional accidentals could be 'an aspect of the preference for the esoteric', perhaps a method employed to mystify the performer's perception of this music.⁶⁷ Stefan Jarocinski suggested a similar opinion in his study of Debussy's early symbolism.

He [Debussy] either assembles the sounds in more or less homogenous groups, or else allows them to create disorder in combinations which have long been considered respectable, and in this way throws new light upon both momentary and more durable associations of sounds, continually changing their expressive values, and preventing them from establishing themselves or assuming an 'identity'.⁶⁸

Using a perverse and anti-rote musical language, Satie forces the performer to be unable to grasp the music's harmonic identity. As we will discover, Satie abstracted the subject leaving behind 'symbols of [the subject's] meaning', but 'not the meaning itself'.⁶⁹ Orledge notes that the fluidity of these unresolved seventh and ninth chords implies that Satie 'secretly loved sensuous harmonies, for all his outward iconoclasm'.⁷⁰

'Satie Controversy': Art, Life and Ambiguity.

To continue this investigation of Cage's reconfiguration of Satie's identity we can analyse the American's writings of 1951. At this point in time, Cage was moving away from Satie's piano music and towards aleatoric composition, that is, towards what Nyman describes as an art that incorporated nature as content. However, Cage did continue to take an interest in the legacy of Satie, engaging in a polemical argument with the critic Abraham Skulsky in two

⁶⁷ Taruskin (2010), 67

⁶⁸ Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Orledge (1990), 563.

articles, ‘Satie Controversy’ and ‘More Satie’ published in *Musical America* (December 15th 1950 and April 1st 1951). The argument originated from Skulsky’s initial comments which labelled Satie as a technically inept humorist. He discussed how the composer’s preference for the absurd, left him largely ignored. Satie wrote only for himself, ‘he became immured in an ivory tower’, ‘not only [ignoring] conventions’ but also ‘any real or imagined audience’. In this sense Skulsky positioned Satie in the modernist bracket: he was a composer who had many a great idea, but whose isolation from society caused him to have little significance for ‘today’s serious audience’.⁷¹ Cage responded by criticising Skulsky’s perception of the modern artist.

Art when it is art as Satie lived it and made it is not separate from life [...] Satie never lived in an ivory tower [...] there is nothing in life from which he separates himself.⁷²

This statement, like the earlier passage from *Silence* proves that from Cage’s perspective, Satie was a vital precursor to his own anti-art nihilism. Skulsky, reminding the reader of his position as a critic, emphasised Cage’s failure to consider the ‘historical development’ of Satie’s compositional career. ‘The latter [Cage] tends to regard the works of the former as musically valid in themselves’.⁷³ He stated how it was a critic’s job to find out the contextual truth, while the composer adopts the precursor in order to find ‘creative impetus towards the achievement of his own ideals’.⁷⁴ Cage’s response continued to defend his understanding of Satie. ‘Art is not a business [...] art is a way of life. It is for all the world like taking a bus, picking flowers [...] ad infinitum.’⁷⁵ But the evidence of *Sarabande No.1* would suggest that

⁷¹ Skulsky quoted in Konstelanetz (ed.) (1991), 91-92.

⁷² Cage quoted in Konstelanetz (ed.) (1991), 93.

⁷³ Skulsky quoted in Konstelanetz (ed.) (1991), 90-91.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cage quoted in Konstelanetz (ed.) (1991), 93.

Satie may have initially been building symbolist barriers between himself and his environment. Skulsky recognised the importance of reading Satie in relation to his time.

The point here is to lend this opinion new emphasis. The British critic David Drew noted in his article ‘Modern French Music’ (1961), that Satie’s whole work is characterised by some form of symbolical ‘*violence*’ that ambiguously mystifies his music’s identity.

Sometimes it is implicit in a cruel juxtaposition of opposed tonalities, but more often it is indefinable in technical terms. I do not feel that this violence is incompatible with a religious sense which is not to be found anywhere in Debussy.⁷⁶

He suggested that Satie may have been more interested in the ideas of music from the pre-enlightenment, before the rise of the rational and romantic subject.

If we regard the *Sarabandes* as melodically rather than harmonically conceived, we can rid ourselves of the sensuous associations which Debussy has given to this type of harmony, and are able to see its affinities with the austere church music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.⁷⁷

This proposes that Satie’s music could not be easily rationalised, that Satie may have engaged with mysticism in order to confound rational notions of expression. His music is ‘never explicitly gay or explicitly sad, never wholly abstract or wholly descriptive.’ With this in mind, we ‘find ourselves in the presence of a mystery that is beyond analysis’.⁷⁸ In keeping with this notion, the recent Satie scholar, Noel Orillo Verzosa writes in his PhD thesis on French music and modernism that Satie’s ideal can be located in ‘a musical purity founded on emptiness’.⁷⁹ For Verzosa, Satie proceeded to break down traditional expressive barriers

⁷⁶ Drew quoted in Hartog (ed.), 267.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Even here, it is arguable whether Satie’s violence eradicates all ‘sensuous associations’ as Drew had suggested.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 268.

⁷⁹ Verzosa (2008), 95.

and reinvent them in new guises, progressively translating his music over time from the realm of mysticism towards the realm of modernist realism, with the advent of the twentieth century. Verzosa considers Satie to be a ‘mystic from beginning to end’, not so much de-humanizing art, as making it more mysterious.⁸⁰

There are many parallels here with our own study. Satie’s anti-subjectivity may be more complex than Cage declared. One way to try to understand this subjective ambiguity is to compare Satie’s music to the pictorial arts. His early piano music is often compared in style and idea to the early work of the symbolist painter, Puvis de Chavannes.⁸¹

Ex.4: Chavannes’ *Doux Pays* (1882).



⁸⁰ Ibid, 104.

⁸¹ See Stanislas Fumet, quoted in Orledge (1995), 36-37. Fumet the son of the mystic and symbolist pianist, Victor Fumet, documented how Satie was fascinated with Chavannes’ pure, ‘empty’ ‘colourless’ ideas.

Ex.5: Extract from *Gymnopédie No.1* (1888).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the first system of Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie No. 1*. The first system is the piano introduction, marked 'Lent et douloureux' and 'pp'. It features a steady bass line of quarter notes in the left hand and chords in the right hand. The second system shows the main melody, marked 'p' and 'f', with a long slur over the right-hand part.

An initial study of Satie's *Gymnopédies* by Rollo Myers (1948) noted that Satie was possibly imitating Chavannes. 'Satie [...] intended to suggest (perhaps with some fresco by Puvis de Chavannes [...]) the tracing of some graceful arabesque by naked boys dancing under an early-morning sky'.⁸² The use of clean, diatonic scales and simple, static phrases perhaps implies a form of nostalgia for a simpler, purer past. A study of Chavannes' *Doux Pays* by the art historian Levin states how the painting aims to reconcile modern humanity with past nature. 'Through their labor' ('the fruits of which are enjoyed by the figures at the left'), the family are reconciled with nature by a weekend away, reminding the viewer of a peaceful, harmonious past.⁸³ In T J Clark's study of modernism, he remarks on how Chavannes links the French countryside to allegory by presenting his paintings as dreamy, non-decorative ideals, full of sensation and submission, distracting the viewer from modern politics and social disillusionment.⁸⁴ The key feature here is the emphasis on the modern individual's

⁸² Myers (1948), 71.

⁸³ Levin (1986), 157.

⁸⁴ Clark (2001), 84.

harsh endeavours. Obtaining tranquillity is not possible without austerity. Levin notes that the ‘pleasure achieved through labor in a preindustrial utopia is a languid lassitude, puritanical and passionless, a respite from the mechanized energies of industrial existence’.⁸⁵ Chavannes’ pastoral paintings pronounced clear social and moral goals.

Conclusion: Satie’s Ascetic Self

The Chavannes comparison does not support Cage’s argument that Satie was creating art ‘not separate from life’. Instead, the Chavannes example highlights the nostalgic, spiritual value that may have been connected with Satie’s early piano music in the *fin de siècle*. The clean, restrained compositional style can be interpreted as a form of asceticism. As Gavin Flood explains in *The Ascetic Self*:

Asceticism refers to a range of habits or bodily regimes designed to restrict or reverse the instinctual impulse of the body and to an ideology that maintains that in so doing a greater good or happiness can be achieved.⁸⁶

In this case, by emptying out possible impurities ‘the ascetic appropriates the tradition to his or her self-narrative’.⁸⁷ Satie, restricting the expressive value of his musical work, can liberate his compositions and develop ‘humility and detachment’ from the material world.⁸⁸ Hence, Satie’s early piano music may be better described as static rather than natural, ascetic rather than objective. It may well have a spiritual implication that suggests more than ‘just sounds’ ‘folk tunes’ and ‘unresolved ninth chords’.⁸⁹ In contrast to John Cage’s late 1940s nihilism,

⁸⁵ Levin (1986), 157.

⁸⁶ Flood (2004), 8.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 5.

⁸⁹ Cage quoted in Konstelanetz (ed.) (1991), 80.

we can propose that Satie's early music employs symbolism in order to 'see the truth' in past civilisation and '*suggest* the nature of that experience'.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 59.

Chapter 2

The Third Republic: Towards the Modern Ca. 1870-1890

In order to understand the context of Erik Satie's *fin de siècle* period, we must first outline earlier events that account for the revival of mysticism in the 1890s. The dates chosen, 1870-1890, take into account a variety of social changes that marked the legacy of the Third Republic, from the rise of both the bourgeoisie and mass culture, the democratisation and rationalisation of Western art music, to the aristocratic reaction and the rising irrational 'religion' of Post-Wagnerism.

The Third Republic

The Third Republic was established on 2 September 1870, two days after Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's capture at the Battle of Sedan during the Franco-Prussian War. Significantly, on 19 September 1870, Paris was taken siege by the Prussian and German armies. They remained present until the signing of the Frankfurt Treaty on 10 May 1871.⁹¹ The social and economical ramifications of this were quite startling. France was forced to accept Germany as the new economic power-house of Europe, while also conceding the regional borders of Alsace and North Lorraine. As the then republican minister Jules Simon made clear in his public speech on 26 October 1871:

We have not only material ruins to deplore, but spiritual ruins as well [...] We have replaced glory with money, work with speculation, loyalty and honor with skepticism, the battles of parties and doctrines with the competition of interests.⁹²

Initially, the republicans formed a coalition government alongside conservatives from the monarchist and Catholic parties. Known as the Moral Order, this coalition focussed on regenerating the collective interests of 'civic society'. It aimed to reform the 'Church and state' and appoint 'monarchists and Catholics' to 'head the major ministries, including the Ministry of Public Instruction, Religion, and Fine Arts'.⁹³ This also included the notable Academie des Beaux Arts, the central institution for French arts and high culture. These institutions represented the core values of the Moral Order, 'order, stability and peace'.⁹⁴ It is worth quoting a passage from Pasler's study at length, where she establishes the initial interests of the coalition parties.

⁹¹ Pasler (2009), 701-702.

⁹² Simon quoted in Strasser (2001), 233.

⁹³ Pasler (2009), 165.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 167.

The Moral Order solved the problem of the Republic's legitimacy by practical consensus both within rival factions and between them, albeit for contradictory purposes. Legitimists and conservative Orléanists agreed on the need for another monarch [...] Whereas Legitimists hoped for a return to the Ancien Régime, Orleanists wanted to integrate the French monarchy into the modern world [...] A third elite constituency, the Bonapartists, were nostalgic for the Empire [...] Sharing an interest in property, social hierarchy, and the Church as a force for social order, these three constituencies saw a revival of Christianity as "the first condition of the recovery of France".⁹⁵

Republicans had long offered resistance to the various monarchists [...] But the working classes they wanted to represent were divided, the urban populace pitted against the peasantry, with the former inclined to social revolution and the latter opting for stability. Consensus was needed among conservatives (including Catholics), moderate republicans (the *opportunistes*), and broad sections of the middle class.⁹⁶

For the remainder of the nineteenth century, the republicans worked to abandon the Second French Empire's favouritism of aristocracy, wealth, social hierarchy, uniformity and clericalism. Instead, republicans would establish a new philosophy based on the rising influence of the rational bourgeoisie.

Citing Jann Pasler's encyclopaedic study *Composing the Citizen*, this chapter will discuss how establishment music changed under the Republic after the decline of economic wellbeing, military prowess, social status and order. It will explore how the arts became a medium for regenerating 'national identity'. Pasler's study of the Republic depicts a state that was 'willing to entertain compromise', particularly 'political compromises'.⁹⁷ This is an important point. Many of the state's philosophies derived from a need to satisfy the collective interests of the divided 'parties and doctrines'.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 165-166.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 167.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 163-164.

Concert Music in the Early 1870s

The artistic establishment occupied a fundamental role in revitalising the national identity of ‘civic society’. Under the doctrine of *utilité publique*, establishment music would serve a political strategy and rejuvenate moral stability, sociability and intellectuality, aiming to re-moralise the monarchists, promote Christian worship for the Catholics and re-unite the rural working classes for the republicans. The republicans highlighted how concert music could be ‘more than merely a frivolous activity of aristocrats or an emblem of monarchical power and prestige’.⁹⁸ Its ‘ideas set the terms for a revolution in values – the liberty, equality, and fraternity that made the people, the working classes, an important part of the nation’.⁹⁹ Most importantly, concerts set up and run through the Société des Beaux Arts, as well as the Paris Conservatoire, focussed on orchestrating repertoires that could ‘knit back together identity and national unity’.¹⁰⁰

As a result, a common method in the 1870s was to orchestrate concert performances that juxtaposed the ‘great’ composers of *la musique classique*: Handel, Weber, Mozart and Beethoven, with the contemporary composers of *la musique moderne*: Gounod, Massenet, Thomas, Lenepveu, Dubois, Saint-Saëns, and Franck (along with the recently deceased Berlioz). Pasler states that ‘such concerts served as useful occasions to learn and practice the art of comparison’.¹⁰¹ The deliberate clash in periods, a habit ‘developed from the grand opera since the revolution’,¹⁰² emphasised the ‘conflicting ideals’ of the arts in the history of the French nation. By rationally comparing new and old music, the concert, likened to a museum, presented a progression of ‘distinctive and admirable’ qualities that reflected the present

⁹⁸ Ibid, 95.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Larroumet quoted in Pasler (2009), 90.

¹⁰¹ Pasler (2009), 219.

¹⁰² Ibid, 218.

musique moderne.¹⁰³ For instance, Handel's oratorios and vocal music, perceived as pure, masculine and vital, were often imitated by new music. His music's apparent virtues 'called on memory and reason' to address 'important educational goals'.¹⁰⁴ Fragments of an 'overture or symphony' or a 'concerto or chamber work' were played. They provided enough 'important educational goals' without challenging 'listeners with too much of any work'.¹⁰⁵ Listeners were encouraged to reflect upon the moral meaning of each work, rather than allowing music to exist for its own sake.

This enabled *la musique moderne* to prosper throughout the 1870s. Saint-Saëns' composers group, the Société nationale de musique (1871), united under the motto *ars gallica*, aimed to support a 'worthier' aesthetic perceived in the Great Tradition's instrumental music.¹⁰⁶ French composers from 'all political persuasions', joined together to oppose the elitist, operatic music of the Second French Empire.¹⁰⁷ In Michael Strasser's study of the Société, he remarks that 'the founders of the Société Nationale looked to German masters from Beethoven to Wagner to light their way' – their "pure" music emanating from across the Rhine was that of a strong and vital society'.¹⁰⁸ For the Société, instrumental music emphasised the apparent French qualities of grace and clarity. These virtues gave 'the people a sense of what it felt like to inhabit an orderly, well-proportioned space – a just world – if only in their imaginations'.¹⁰⁹ Contemporary 'French' music was often praised for its Apollonian qualities, its imitation of classic Latin values, apparent in Mediterranean classicism, Greco-Roman

¹⁰³ Ibid, 219. Pasler notes that this idea 'harks back to eighteenth-century theorists like Quatremère who used the Greek notion of imitation to explain how, in great art, one compares art with nature. But in this case, the comparison is with other works and the process calls on memory and reason'.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 217.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ See Strasser (2001), 235.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 240.

¹⁰⁹ Pasler (2009), 238.

society and Cartesian rationality.¹¹⁰ In this sense, one could describe the Société as an early supporter of neo-classicism.

As the dust began to settle on the Franco-Prussian War, grace and clarity became increasingly exploited by republican rationality and bourgeois commercialism. Many rational intellectuals from the bourgeoisie began to favour ‘compelling alternative’ methods of analysing music, taking into account ‘reason, progress, pragmatism, and public service’.¹¹¹ It was the bourgeoisie’s influence that led to a majority vote for the republican *opportunistes* party in the March 1876 elections, leading to a major change in the direction of the artistic establishment. Freed from nobility and the Church, establishment music would begin to utilise and promote ‘bourgeois values in the population’.¹¹²

Towards Heterogeneity: Eclecticism of the 1880s

The republican *opportunistes* encouraged further comparisons between music’s forms and sensations and society’s moral and political ramifications throughout the 1880s. However, this time, the republicans stifled the influence of the Catholic Church in state education, as they began to promote heterogeneity and eclecticism in a secular society.¹¹³ This time, rather than avoiding styles and genres associated with the *Ancien Régime*, republicans planned to use these elite ideas to ‘assimilate the aristocratic French past’ into secular society and ‘construct a new history’.¹¹⁴ They hoped that by excavating noble dance forms (the sarabande, pavane and minuet for example¹¹⁵) and by researching a wealth of forgotten folk tunes,¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 238.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 168.

¹¹² Ibid, 170.

¹¹³ Ibid, 311.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 375.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 497.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 396. In a bid to recreate the authentic race of ancestral France in the 1880s, Bourgault-Ducoudray encouraged a revival of folk music such as the *chansons populaires*, believing that the Hypodorian mode could solve the technical problem of the exhausted, inexpressive major and minor scales, while also identifying music

‘pleasure could be part of a rigorously secular republican morality that found meaning in leisure activities, a way to connect private experiences with the social good’.¹¹⁷ For example, by over-emphasising the seductive qualities inherent in ‘feminine’ oratorios and comic-operas, Massenet and Delibes, teachers and composers at the Paris conservatoire, showed how exaggerating grace, charm and pleasure could bring great commercial success to the modern composer (both forms were seen as exceptional cases to the Société Nationale de Musique’s emphasis on strong, masculine themes).¹¹⁸ Massenet’s *Manon* employs a melodrama for such a purpose. As Huebner explains in *French Opera in the Fin de Siècle*, the melodrama exaggerates the music’s rhetorical emotions, emphasising moments of speech with ‘sustained harmonies’ that form sensuous, colourful textures.¹¹⁹

Post-Wagnerism and the Establishment Divide

For republican *opportunistes*, there was a fine line between music that represented the collective and music that seemed to communicate only to the individual. Arguably this idea revolves around the political divide that occurred after Wagnerism was introduced to the Parisian artistic establishment. After the death of Richard Wagner in 1883, the German’s music became increasingly popular with disillusioned, idealistic artists who sought the ‘last great exponent of an unusual romantic past’, beyond the rationalism and commercialism of republican philosophy.¹²⁰ Pasler explains that ‘listeners sick of materialism flocked to the Concerts Lamoureux, whose conductor promised escape from bourgeois banality and

that was inherently French. More directly relevant to Erik Satie was F-A Gervart’s book, *Histoire et théorie de la musique de l’antiquité*. This documentation on Greek chords and scales, published in Paris in 1875, was widely read during the Hellenic revival of the late 1880s and early 1890s. See also Davis (2009), 43.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 384.

¹¹⁸ Strasser (2001), 237. ‘Saint-Saëns saw nothing wrong with reviving the “clear and light” music of the opera comique. This would be a “charming” way for the French to amuse themselves “en famille,” but such entertainments would have no impact beyond the country’s borders’.

¹¹⁹ Huebner (1999), 63.

¹²⁰ Botstein in Fulcher (ed.) (2001), 177.

commercialism'. Along with the *Revue Wagnerienne* set up in 1885, these concerts evaluated Wagnerism 'on its own terms', without the need to rationalise or compare with other ideas. Rationalisation 'simply did not work' because Wagner's music 'called on the unfathomable, the uncontainable, and the incommensurable'.¹²¹ The supporters of Wagner yearned for that 'religious' spirit of past mythology that modern secular society had failed to consider.

Since Intellectualism was incapable of understanding the real world, it was not possible to provide an intelligible exposition of the passage from principles to action without the use of myth. The myth could not be refuted; it was an appeal to a "deeper consciousness".¹²²

Republicans in contrast disdained this spirituality. Wagner's music evoked the wildness of Dionysian tragedy rather than the ordered principles of Apollonian philosophy.

Republicans distrusted unstructured, formless works as expressions of uncontrolled emotions. They considered the excesses of romantic individualism elitist and antidemocratic.¹²³

From a republican perspective, Wagner's music's claim to metaphysical truth, the individual pursuit towards the 'will' of Schopenhauer's noumenal world, was hostile to the ideal of social utopia.

¹²¹ Pasler (2009), 508-509.

¹²² Sorel quoted in Curtis (2010), 129-130.

¹²³ Pasler (2009), 518.

D'Indy and Saint-Saëns

Towards the latter half of the 1880s, Wagner's ideas and musical rhetoric were often imitated by composers considered to be either classicist or post-Wagnerian. Although the more reflective classicists disagreed with aspects of Wagner's art religion, the German was still praised for his intellectual subject matter along with his modern rhetoric, 'extreme chromaticism and innovative dramatic form'.¹²⁴ The post-Wagnerian camp of the Société Nationale de Musique had gradually been gaining prominence, in part due to the aristocratic composers Vincent d'Indy and his teacher Cesar Franck, as well as Chabrier, Bordes, Duparc and Chausson. D'Indy, believing that high art should aspire to reach the heights of religion, portrayed spirituality as 'the foundation of all art'.¹²⁵ As Leon Botstein notes, 'd'Indy sought to connect music to general metaphysical categories such as passion, charity, hope, and love'.¹²⁶

Saint-Saëns and his 'classicists', by contrast, supported more classical French compositional models and ideas. Huebner notes that 'as early as 1876, Saint-Saëns frankly admitted that he could not be called a *wagnérien*, questioning the restrictiveness of musical taste implied in the term'.¹²⁷ Bewildered by the 'uncritical acceptance of everything that the master [Wagner] produced',¹²⁸ Saint-Saëns remarked that Wagner's total work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, threatened the survival of the French school. His aim was to counterbalance post-Wagnerism by using music and drama allied with 'classical models and aesthetic principles'.¹²⁹ In this way, the composer could balance the formlessness of Wagnerian rhetoric with structured

¹²⁴ Ibid, 509.

¹²⁵ Woldu in Fulcher (ed.) (2001), 236.

¹²⁶ Botstein in Fulcher (ed.) (2001), 164.

¹²⁷ Huebner (1999), 199.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 195.

models of grace and harmony. Music should allow the listener to reflect upon imagery and ideas but not impose one idea on an individual.¹³⁰

In 1886, the tension between these two composers' political and artistic views became clearly apparent. Vincent d'Indy voted in favour of more Wagnerian works at the Société. As Pasler notes, 'hoping to alienate Saint-Saëns and take control of the organisation', d'Indy forced Saint-Saëns to resign from his position as president.¹³¹ The composer then began to plan the programming of Wagnerian concerts in the Société with the help of the Wagnerian conductor, Padeloup. For d'Indy, Wagner's music could 'feed nationalist aspirations'.¹³²

The event also coincided with the creation of symphonies by the two composers. The symphony, still perceivably 'the purest and most abstract form of music', capable of expressing 'feelings of the highest order', was the pinnacle work of a 'successful' composer's career.¹³³ For d'Indy and Saint-Saëns, their respective symphonies emphasised the growing divide between classicist and Wagnerian techniques and ideas.

Saint-Saëns' traditionally titled Third Symphony emphasises all the beauty and grace of a Beethovenian classicist. It falls into the four traditional movements, although he only marks out two. This links each half's two movements together. The music can be treated as an organic entity, developing a sensuous idea throughout the various movements. This seems indebted to 'Liszt's notion of thematic transformation'.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Ibid, 245.

¹³¹ Pasler (2009), 514.

¹³² Huebner (1999), 200.

¹³³ Pasler (2009), 520.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 520.

Ex.1: Initial theme of the Third Symphony.



As the initial idea develops, the theme is repeated in turn throughout the orchestra. This includes both a piano played by two and four hands and an organ, major novelties at the time.¹³⁵ According to Pasler, the expansion of the orchestral repertoire was a ‘direct response’ to the maximalist character of Wagnerism. This seems valid. The adagio introduction with its ‘A ♭ in rising thirds’ suggests an ‘allusion to the opening of [Wagner’s] Last Supper theme’ in Parsifal. The chromatic melody from bar 12 modulates through several keys into an ‘expressive phrase’, eventually being redeemed (*à la Parsifal*) by a ‘calm and elevated’ ideal in the Maestoso movement.¹³⁶

However, it is apparent that Saint-Saëns was trying to create the perfect, most beautiful symphony, emphasising technicality and virtuosity. As Taruskin notes in his study on the internationalisation of the symphony, Saint-Saëns’ work reflected the common ‘virtuoso’ mentality of the late nineteenth century, that progress was based on grand gestures of expression and a superior technique. These ideas ‘offered sensuous and intellectual gratification’ for the modern individual.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ See Brown (2008). The program notes stated, ‘The composer, believing that symphonic works should now be allowed to benefit by the progress of modern instrumentation, has made up his orchestra in the manner following: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 1 English horn, 2 clarinets, 1 tuba, 3 drums, organ, pianoforte (sometimes played by two hands, sometimes by four), 1 triangle, 1 pair cymbals, 1 bass drum, and the usual strings’.

¹³⁶ Pasler (2009), 521-523.

¹³⁷ Taruskin (2005), 786.

On the other hand, d'Indy's marvellously grand *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard* evokes a much stronger nationalist imagery of regional France, taking into account an array of Wagnerian harmonic techniques. It is formed of three movements: *Assez Lent*, *Assez Modéré* and *Animé*, after the model of a concerto. Very unusually for a work entitled 'symphony', it features a solo piano. The initial movement follows a traditional sonata form with an introduction that presents the folk melody and primary material of the entire symphony. The second movement also follows with slow refrains between the piano and its orchestra. The final movement is a fast-paced 'Sonata-Rondo'.¹³⁸

The real audacity is the harmonic content. Primarily, the piano occupies an un-prominent role. When employed, it glides over the top of orchestra adding extra texture. This seems to enhance a predominant idea. As the composer Dukas noted, d'Indy's three movements represent the different stages of the mountain air.¹³⁹ The symphony portrays the distant past lands of ancestral France through the cyclical reappearance of the opening folk theme.

Ex.2: Folk Theme



Perhaps, d'Indy highlights a spiritual 'voice by which the mountain itself speaks'. He employs an array of Wagnerian rhetoric: vast orchestral textures, intervallic leaps, late resolutions and fragmentation. A primary characteristic of the Wagnerian style is a last minute resolution after a seemingly endless melodic development. In d'Indy's symphony, the

¹³⁸ D'Indy quoted in Brown (2008), 642.

¹³⁹ Dukas quoted in Brown (2008), 654. As Dukas put it, 'his work is but an application of the expressive content of this melody, this voice by which the mountain itself speaks and lives. And it is in fact a "poem of the mountains" [...] a poem of nature that reflects something of the lofty independence of the summits, a page of music where you feel you are breathing their perennial air'.

transitions often involve fragmentation of material without completing an idea on a clear cadence. In bar 27 of the first transition into *Modérément animé*, the trombones suggest that the symphony is moving into E minor, when in actual fact they lead into a new thematic transformation.

Ex.3: Bar 26-27 Fragmentation of Material

This is a typical example of a Wagnerian's 'emotionally draining' and 'physically exhausting' version of musical experience.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Taruskin (2005), 557.

Conclusion

The rise of orchestral repertoires by classicists and post-Wagnerians alike provided a variety of styles for individuals in search of an identity. However, by focussing on the inner experience of music, post-Wagnerians moved the arts closer to religion, which had a more complex subjective state than classicism. This was a demoralising situation for the republicans. They could no longer promote one superior art that would satisfy the collective. Instead, as Pasler remarks, ‘Wagner’s music turned admirers into a sect and concerts into pseudo-religious rituals’.¹⁴¹ Essentially, Western art music was becoming ever more abstract, individualistic and intellectual by the time of Satie’s early piano music in the *fin de siècle* period.

¹⁴¹ Pasler (2009), 540.

Chapter 3

Satie's Role in the Anti-Establishment

It was at the time when neo-mysticism and symbolism gushed forth from the solemn fount of *Parsifal*. [...] The souls of the cathedrals were being discovered. It was the epoch of long stations in minster naves impregnated with the glow of stained-glass windows of symbolic design.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Chennevière (1919), 470-471.

The Extreme Left and Right

Thus we move on to Satie and his anti-establishment behaviour from the late 1880s through to the middle of the 1890s. In her study of Puvis de Chavannes, Jennifer Shaw remarks that ‘French culture was marked by political division’. Rather than working together to satisfy the ‘collective interests’ of ‘civic society’, the arts were confronting each other in an ‘ideological battleground’.¹⁴³ As the last chapter discussed, the republican *opportunistes* and post-Wagnerians had ‘very different conceptions of what Frenchness was’.¹⁴⁴ Over the course of the 1880s and into the initial half of the 1890s, these political views became increasingly extreme, reiterated in culture outside of the musical establishment. ‘There was disagreement about which regions best represented France and which historical moments were authentically French’.¹⁴⁵

In 1885, after the coalition government returned, there were threats to the republican *opportunistes*’ ideas from radical parties of both the Right and Left. This time, with 200 conservatives and 380 republicans split down the middle, the government was divided over the direction of politics, the economy and the people.¹⁴⁶ ‘Radical republicans’ promoted ‘both syndicalism on the Left and extreme forms of nationalism on the Right’.¹⁴⁷ Thus it is no surprise that Marxist socialism as well as ‘xenophobic nationalism’ were on the increase by the 1890s.¹⁴⁸ This was not helped by the ‘Boulangist crisis’ (1885-1889) as well as the Dreyfus Affair (1894).¹⁴⁹ Both events slowly discouraged followers of the republican

¹⁴³ Shaw (1997), 587.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 586.

¹⁴⁶ See Pasler (2009), 704.

¹⁴⁷ Shaw (1997), 586.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ See McMillan (ed.) (2003) and Pasler (2009), 496. General Boulanger, a war hero in France and the then minister of War, was adopted by the radical republicans in the late 1880s. Concerns and general discomfort over the power of its neighbour, Germany, and France’s own industrial revolution, led to a rally of Boulangists wishing to re-root French culture.

opportunistes. The Right perceived the rise in nationalist, ‘antirationalist [and] antihumanitarian politics’ spread by General Boulanger as a stronger alternative to the ‘political and economic liberalism’ of the republican *opportunistes*. This appealed to elitist aristocrats, post-Wagnerians and supporters of the monarchy. However, this nationalism escalated into prejudice. The result was epitomised in the persecution of the Jewish-born Captain Alfred Dreyfus for the alleged transfer of military documents to the Germans in 1894. As Pasler notes, what ‘began in the spirit of Jacobin patriotism [...] migrated gradually to the Right’.¹⁵⁰ Socialism also increased in influence as the working-classes voiced their dismay over the ‘plight of workers’ under the bourgeoisie.¹⁵¹

The need for social reform as well as an escape from the plight of urbanisation was reflected in the behaviour of the artistic anti-establishment in Montmartre. Pasler states that ‘culture became a tool to appropriate for different needs and desires than those of the republican state’.¹⁵² As a result, many individual art movements became increasingly fascinated with how music could be employed to resist modern society. ‘Some looked to satire to channel critique, others to the sublime [...] especially as represented by Wagner’s music’. Chabrier’s prominence at the comic opera in 1887, with his ‘comedic’ mix of ‘serious and light’ subject matter in *Le Roi Malgré Lui*, had a significant effect on new music’s potential as a form of resistance.¹⁵³ His supposed mocking of noble society not only highlighted how humour could be employed in music to criticise society, but also how unconventional harmonies, such as the non-resolving seventh and ninth chord, could be developed within conventional forms as part of a novel twist on an old tradition. This may have re-ignited many composers’

¹⁵⁰ Pasler (2009), 495.

¹⁵¹ McMillan (ed.) (2003), 24.

¹⁵² Pasler (2009), 497.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 499.

enthusiasm for the ‘memory of the Ancien Régime’.¹⁵⁴ For instance, in the same year that Satie composed his *Trois Sarabandes* (1887), Pasler notes that ‘aristocrats began to perform old dances, sometimes in period costumes, wigs and all’, in order to remain educated ‘in the *moeurs* of the Ancien Régime’.¹⁵⁵

This action may have been a way of subtly negating modern society, seeking a position of moral superiority. However, it seems that there may have been more to this resistance. Pasler notes earlier that many artists entertained ‘the metaphysical and the mysterious, the strange and the obscure, even if it meant tolerating, even enjoying the barely comprehensible’.¹⁵⁶ For example, Debussy, absorbed in the symbolist doctrines of Maeterlinck, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé, employed sonorities and forms using Fibonacci-styled numerology in the hope that he might arouse in music ‘what words are incapable of conveying’.¹⁵⁷ Of ‘Le Balcon’, from the *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*, Jarocinski states that ‘with Debussy, the parallel chords invest the theme with a static quality; everything happens as if he had paused for a moment to find the past intact [...] without any suggestion of despair’.¹⁵⁸ By the time of the last song, ‘Le Jet d’eau’ (1889), there is no attachment to ‘outside influences’, ‘no harmonic character’. The music’s ‘modal character’ shows no signs of acknowledging the common morality of the present day.¹⁵⁹ This is also apparent in the archaic *La Demoiselle Eluë* (1888), which conceals references to the Pre-Raphaelites amidst ‘a mix of colouristic harmonies and fluid tonal shifts’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 498.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 502-503.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 497.

¹⁵⁷ Debussy quoted in Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 116. Also see Howat (1983).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 124-125.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 126.

¹⁶⁰ See Clevenger in Fulcher (ed.) (2001), 70-90.

As this chapter will discuss, in order to ‘escape the period’s near exclusive concern for reality, the real, and the possible’, Satie and his anti-establishment contemporaries ignored the urbanisation of contemporary culture through a mix of symbolism and satire.¹⁶¹ In these early beginnings of modernism, music became ‘for the mind’, challenging republicans’ notion of utility and the traditional sentimentalists in the establishment. This anti-establishment approach surpassed the expressive ‘confines of purely functional music’. It went beyond the ‘worn out symbolism’ apparent in the romantic rhetoric of Wagner, ‘opening up new perspectives for the music of the future’.¹⁶² Most importantly, these individualistic movements of the bohemian counterculture were defined by nostalgia for a past ideal that sheltered artists from the commercialism and mediocrity of contemporary society. Erik Satie’s precarious position sits amidst these politically and spiritually motivated groups.

Mysticism: The Bohemian Counterculture

Although he was educated to a Conservatoire level, Satie chose the life of a cabaret pianist, playing in high-profile cabaret houses such as the Chat Noir (1889) and the Auberge du Clou (1893). This ‘cultural underground’ of resistance and experimentation represents Erik Satie’s *la bohème* days, the ‘Mystical Period’ of the *fin de siècle* (1886-1893).¹⁶³ However, what is less clear is how serious Satie’s mysticism was, and how others employed mysticism and the mysterious.

¹⁶¹ Pasler (2009), 497.

¹⁶² Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 11

¹⁶³ Wilkins (ed.) (1980), 20.

From café and cabaret concerts to the avant-garde meetings of Mallarmé's symbolists, mysticism – either serious or satirical – encapsulated the atmosphere of the bohemian counterculture. This movement took on a broad definition, however. A common view is expressed by Roger Shattuck in his book *The Banquet Years*. For him, bohemian mysticism was of a pseudo-religious spirit. 'In Satie's life, it was a conveniently short distance from esoteric religions to cabaret gaiety'.¹⁶⁴ The relationship between these two, as Steven Whiting explains in *Satie the Bohemian*, 'fostered mysticism as well as mystification, often in such a way that the two were nearly indistinguishable from one another'.¹⁶⁵ Bohemia was a 'cultural underground smacking of failure [and] fraud', which after much searching, 'crystallised for a few decades into a self-conscious avant-garde that carried the arts into a period of astonishingly varied renewal and accomplishment'.¹⁶⁶

According to Whiting, the irrational groups of the anti-establishment communicated their political and social frustrations in two ways: by inwardly searching for the purest ideal, '*le recherché*' or by outwardly criticising modern society through satire, '*la blague*'.¹⁶⁷ For the artist pursuing *le recherché*, emphasising an irrational existence was all about escaping connotations with materialism, capitalism and mediocrity and preserving artistic integrity by the pursuit of something pure, authentic and original. Adopting the bohemian lifestyle was one example. In Davis' study, Satie's close friend and symbolist poet, Contamine de Latour (affectionately known as, 'Lord Cheminot'),¹⁶⁸ is quoted describing how he and Satie often 'lived out the final scenes of Murger's *La Bohème*, transplanted from the Latin Quarter to

¹⁶⁴ Shattuck (1969), 120.

¹⁶⁵ Whiting (1999), 130.

¹⁶⁶ Shattuck (1969), 120.

¹⁶⁷ Whiting (1999), 67.

¹⁶⁸ Davis (2007), 20-21. Unsurprisingly, Lord Cheminot was a lavish title employed to distinguish Latour from mass society. As Davis points out, Latour claimed to be 'a descendent of Napoleon and a rightful heir to the French crown'.

Montmartre'.¹⁶⁹ Murger, commonly viewed as the first Parisian bohemian, wrote *La Bohème* about a group of optimistic bohemian youths who aimed to escape their bourgeois heritage. With no concerns for money, capitalism or industry, they resisted cultural transformation. In order to cleanse their impure consciences, these bohemians sought a localised, esoteric environment, isolated from urbanisation. In this sense, the bohemian was free to pursue otherworldly objects and gain the moral high ground. Civilisation and democratic society were sacrificed for a 'new way of life'.¹⁷⁰ There was a 'desire to be enchanted by the unknown' and to renounce the familiar.¹⁷¹

This may explain why symbols were one of Satie's chosen mediums. When it came to *le recherché*, most prominent were the symbolists, fronted by the Wagnerian poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the writer Jean Moréas in 1886, both influenced by Wagner and Baudelaire.¹⁷² We discussed symbolism briefly in chapters one and two, along with Satie's *Sarabande No.1*. The exterior complexity of this piece, like Mallarmé's poetry, required 'significant effort from [the listeners,] never lowering themselves to broad accessibility'.¹⁷³ The symbolists longed for individualism, being 'moved by the same desire to grasp the inexpressible'.¹⁷⁴ They wanted to use poetry to express a sign, to convey a free and true expression, 'an open form capable of receiving various meanings without having any definite meaning in itself'.¹⁷⁵ Their art was meant to be express more than one meaning, criticising republican realism and the exhausted, expressive art of the academies. As Moréas noted, symbolism was an 'enemy

¹⁶⁹ Latour quoted in Davis (2007), 21.

¹⁷⁰ Shattuck (1969), 120.

¹⁷¹ Pasler (2009), 546.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 526. Moréas wished to distinguish his symbolist group from the decadents associated with 'eccentricity and decadence'. He published a doctrine in 1886.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 530.

¹⁷⁴ Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 69.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 67.

of teaching, declamation, false sensibility, and objective description'.¹⁷⁶ In this sense, symbolism went beyond excessive aestheticism, as outlined in the famous Huysman novel, *À Rebours* (1884).¹⁷⁷ Symbolism was more refined, more pro-active, 'challenging the core of the republican ideology – universal secular education, art education, nationalism, and imperialism'.¹⁷⁸ Mallarmé, the symbolist leader from 1883 until his death in 1898, sought an alliance of music (the most abstract art form) and language. Together they could 'evoke, far better than words, the mysteries of life'.¹⁷⁹ It is under Mallarmé that the symbolists pursued spirituality and irrationalism, hoping to engage 'the primitive, natural world'.¹⁸⁰ The work of art was intended to express 'a sensation', 'a translation', an abstraction of reality, not reality itself.¹⁸¹ Poetry for instance, was fixated 'not on counting syllables, but on phrases, stress patterns, vocal sounds, and pauses in the thought', the innocent, primal origins of Western pasts.¹⁸²

Closely allied to this symbolist rejection of society however, was the illogical, slapstick satire of the cabaret arts. For example, the practice of *fumisme* involved socially critiquing the banal, employing art forms derived from popular culture, such as shadow-plays and theatre to ridicule and confound the bourgeois audience. In *Popular Bohemia*, Mary Gluck notices that *fumisme*'s illogicality was often a 'more effective' de-stabiliser of 'conventional culture' than any bourgeois logic by 'the respectable man of wit'.

¹⁷⁶ Moréas quoted in Pasler (2009), 527.

¹⁷⁷ In *À Rebours* (1884) the main fictional character Duke Jean Des Essientes witnesses how the rationality of secular society has made everybody the same. In a bid to escape this mundane reality, Des Essientes closes himself off from the bourgeoisie and approaches life from the position of an aristocrat, indulging in the finer things in life.

¹⁷⁸ See Pasler (2009), 526-531. Most symbolists who disdained the rise in a capitalist-driven market were hypocritical '*rentiers* living off unearthed income and having nothing to do but contemplate'.

¹⁷⁹ Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 72.

¹⁸⁰ Pasler (2009), 527.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid, 528.

The man of wit was logical and direct, using his powers to openly reduce his opponent to an imbecile. The *fumiste*, by contrast, was illogical and indirect, assuming the identity of the imbecile and thus multiplying the impact of the attack [...] [*fumisme*] was able to reinvent culture and establish its independent forms [it was] the *l'art pour l'art* of humor.¹⁸³

We see how the use of the ‘illogical’ presented the rational bourgeoisie with a problem. It perplexed the individual instead of providing answers. Whiting notes that ‘cabaret was always tempered with *la blague*, the gag’.¹⁸⁴ For example, the humorist group Les Incohérents, ‘abolish[ed] logic and common sense’ and like the Dadaists to come, employed nihilism to provoke mundane society.¹⁸⁵ For example, Satie’s friend and fellow Honfleurian, Alphonse Allais (1854-1905) the ‘editor and chief of the *Chat Noir* weekly’, commonly employed nihilism and spoof in his performances on stage, committing to audacious and anarchistic ‘bluffing practices’.¹⁸⁶ The titles of some of Allais’ works are a testimony to this audacity. One can sense the irony in his painting of a single red rectangle, *Tomato Harvest on the Shore of the Red Sea, by Apoplectic Cardinals*, which as Whiting explains, was a mock tribute to Pope Leo XIII’s Peter’s Pence scheme.¹⁸⁷ Satire is also apparent in his 1884 Funeral March, *Great sorrows are mute: Incoherent funeral march*. This score consisted of 24 empty bars. A singular performance direction requested that:

Great sorrows are mute, the performers should occupy themselves with the sole task of counting bars, instead of indulging in the kind of indecent row that destroys the august character of the best obsequies.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Gluck (2005), 129.

¹⁸⁴ Whiting (1999), 138.

¹⁸⁵ Pasler (2009), 538.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 538-539.

¹⁸⁷ Whiting (1999), 81. The Peter’s Pence was a payment, a tribute made by Catholics to the pope as recognition of their faith. It was popular during the Byzantine period of late antiquity and the middle ages. Perhaps it can be suggested that Allais was using this period as an example of his current criticism with money laundering society.

¹⁸⁸ Allais quoted in Whiting (1999), 81.

The performance direction was actually added in 1897 as part of his humorous *Album primo-avrilesque*.¹⁸⁹ It seems logical to suggest that Allais may have been poking fun at the over-emphasis placed on subjective expression in art music of his time. His jokes often ‘mocked, through pretended espousal, viewpoints opposed to his’.¹⁹⁰ This notion is significant. While some of Satie’s contemporaries were entirely serious about their *recherché* ideals, others adopted the same guises only to comically criticise this position. This is why it is very difficult to distinguish whether Satie’s bohemian behaviour amounted to mysticism or mystification.

Reviving *l’esprit gaulois*: Erik Satie as *Monsieur Le Pauvre*

There is only one way to escape the morass in which we struggle: to return to the old spirit of the old ways; to be, as in the past, people who believe something [...].¹⁹¹

In order to produce more evidence about this we must examine the importance Satie placed on reviving *l’esprit gaulois*. As Robert Orledge notes, in the late 1880s Satie sought from the distant past a pure French spirit. It is no surprise then to find that the French composer developed a ‘fascination with the medieval past, for an ideal lost world of chivalric orders, fairy-tales and Gothic castles’.¹⁹² Glancing away from contemporary society, and instead, backwards towards esoteric medievalism, Satie began to cultivate his own ideal of an organic past. Davis notes that the composer, influenced by the (current Gothic) revival of late 1880s, ‘became increasingly fascinated with Gothic art and architecture’.¹⁹³ The restoration of Notre Dame, among other medieval buildings, was a ‘revelation for the young composer, a new piety seized him. Satie “affected a great humility” and began to speak “endlessly about his

¹⁸⁹ Pasler (2009), 538.

¹⁹⁰ Whiting (1999), 81-82.

¹⁹¹ ‘Le Cler’ quoted in Emery & Morowitz (2003), 143.

¹⁹² Orledge (1990), 42.

¹⁹³ Davis (2007), 22.

religion”¹⁹⁴. The French composer proceeded to turn ‘toward earnest austerity’, developing ‘a new aesthetic’ in the meantime, ‘aiming to translate medieval style to the musical realm’.¹⁹⁵ Satie’s behaviour suggests that he rejected the urbanisation of music in contemporary society, adopting the bohemian persona of ‘*Monsieur le Pauvre*’ and righteously immersing himself in the piety of medieval society, ‘plainsong and Gothic art’.¹⁹⁶

This behaviour affects all of Erik Satie’s first original piano works: *Ogives* (1886), *Trois Sarabandes* (1887), *Trois Gymnopédies* (1888), *Trois Gnossiennes* (1889-93) as well as the Rose-Croix works: *le Fils des étoiles* (1891), *Dances Gothiques* (1893), and *Vexations* (1893). As the majority of the titles suggest, Satie seems to have developed his influences from the medieval (*Ogives* and *Dances Gothiques*), the Hellenic (*Trois Gymnopédies* and *Trois Gnossiennes*) and also the esoteric (*Le fils des étoiles*). The mix of ‘ancient’ styles or styles from an esoteric background suggests that each of these compositions were based on a vague understanding of Hellenic/medieval society. As Emery and Morowitz note in *Consuming the Past*, ‘subject matter and themes’ from the ancient past were a ‘springboard for [the bohemian’s] own aesthetic experiments’.¹⁹⁷

However, medievalism may also have had more significance for Satie. As Gillmor states, and as we discovered from David Drew’s comments cited in chapter one, the French composer concentrated on the ‘unfamiliar relationships of time and space’ found in ‘certain pre-Renaissance (and non-Western) conceptions of musical form’.¹⁹⁸ Orledge notes that Satie’s early works employed these ideas to create ‘asymmetrical fluidity and modality’.¹⁹⁹ Another

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 23

¹⁹⁶ Gillmor (1988), 33.

¹⁹⁷ Emery & Morowitz (2003), 186.

¹⁹⁸ Gillmor (1988), 36.

¹⁹⁹ Orledge (1990), 146.

reason for Satie's interest therefore, may have been that pre-renaissance plainchant was untainted by the establishment's romantic rhetoric. Second, as Morowitz reiterates in her study of medievalism, bohemian artists believed 'the Middle ages symbolised a pre-capitalist and organic society', the purest origins of Western art music.²⁰⁰ As Pasler reminds us:

Many embraced Palestrina as the origin of Western harmony, Gregorian chant as the origin of Western music, and ancient Greece as the origin of Western civilisation. Incorporating these diverse definitions of *musique ancienne* made old music relevant to a wide range of contemporary musical concerns.²⁰¹

In the modern era of Western society, there was still an 'old world of pious faith and satisfying labour' waiting to be re-exposed, one that 'had been destroyed with the encroachment of the modern industrial age'.²⁰² Those who disagreed with the developments in the 'modern industrial age' revived the humble atmosphere of *l'esprit gaulois*. Current music that owed its techniques to this 'forgotten past' expressed the 'survival of prerevolutionary values', the religious spirit of this time, characteristics important for aristocrats, bohemians and independent *l'art pour l'art* artists defending their art's independence and authenticity.²⁰³

Medievalism in the *Ogives*

A good example of pre-enlightenment nostalgia within Satie's piano music is the *Ogives* (1886). While Saint-Saëns, d'Indy and the *Société* were disagreeing over the Wagnerian identity of instrumental music in the establishment, the youthful Erik Satie was 'mining the past', composing piano music that simplified the concept of thematic expression and form in

²⁰⁰ Morowitz (1997), 36.

²⁰¹ Pasler (2009), 640.

²⁰² Morowitz (1997), 37.

²⁰³ Pasler (2009), 683.

Western art music.²⁰⁴ Published in the *Chat Noir* during 1889, after the success of his *Third Gymnopédie*, the *Ogives* present many of the initial ideas that Satie was to experiment with by the time of the *Trois Sarabandes*, *Trois Gnossiennes* and the *Rose-Croix*. It was also the first work to exclude bar lines and an opening key signature. Metre and harmonic identity seem to have been left deliberately vague. Satie also seems to have been planning this work on the rhythmic repetition of one simple musical idea rather than plotting a developing harmonic path, questioning the psychological effect that ‘time and space’ can play in music. All four *Ogives* function in this way. In *Ogive No.1* for instance, form is based on the repetition of the opening plainchant styled phrase, which is mirrored in each response. The initial phrase (A) is simply repeated three times in varying degrees (both through a change in dynamic and additional harmonisations), resulting in a form of A, A’, A’’ and A’.

²⁰⁴ Davis (2007), 24.

Ex.1: *Ogive No.1*

Très lent ERIK SATIE

Piano

p

ff

pp

ff

In terms of harmonic content, the parallel chords are the piece's major novelty. These chords not only vary the identity of the initial statement, but perhaps also link the idea behind the *Ogives* to medieval Christian ritual. Davis proposes an interesting theory. She explains that the 'slow parallel harmonic motion calls to mind the early polyphony known as organum.'²⁰⁵ Introduced to Western plainchant from around the 9th century as a way of harmonising modes in Christian prayer and popularised by the newly established Notre Dame in the 12th century, medieval organum was usually employed in chant music that had up to three refrains, taking into account the different chants for the soloist, choir and the congregation.²⁰⁶ In *Ogive No.1*, the parallel chords of passage A' (the fortissimo sections) use grand sounding tetrads in octaves. In passage A'' (the pianissimo sections), the parallel chords are thinner sounding triads rotating between first and second inversion root-position chords. This implies that the monophonic passage A, and the homophonic passage A'' are to be 'sung' by a soloist and the choir respectively, while the two passages of A' involve the congregation.²⁰⁷

We can develop Davis' concept. The *Ogives* perhaps aim to replicate the characteristics of Christian liturgy. That is, they present the idea of a communal prayer, mediating between the congregation and divinity. Debussy's *La demoiselle élue* employed a similar transcendent theme two years later, hoping to use parallel chords to 'forge purely musical correlates for Symbolist poetic techniques'.²⁰⁸ The composer Rudhyar Chennivière, himself an eccentric symbolist, proposed that Satie may have spent hours indulging himself with these musical overtones in order to reunite his natural body with the metaphysical and transcend physical barriers.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ See Kennedy (1996), 535.

²⁰⁷ Davis (2007), 24.

²⁰⁸ Clevenger in Fulcher (ed.) (2003), 88-89.

One senses that their originator has dallied voluptuously with these sonorities [...] One feels that for hours at a stretch he has caressed the ivory keys [...] One feels that the composer's sense of hearing, his nerves, vibrate sensuously, lulled by these infinite undulations of sound.²⁰⁹

Perhaps this was one of Satie's first works to seriously consider the psychological effect of sound, developed more prominently in later works like *Vexations* (1893). There are further parallels. In *Vexations* a chromatic passage is created by employing a Fibonacci styled sequence that orders each parameter of sound in the score.²¹⁰ A ritualistic atmosphere developed from the same repeating passage is generated. Each repetition of an accidental or unresolved chord is designed to disorient and teach the performer to constrain their expressive instinct, producing what many scholars have believed to be 'hallucinatory effects'.²¹¹ Although no mathematical formula is apparent in the *Ogives*, the imitation of medieval organum may have been symbolic, mimicking the ritualistic characteristics of pre-enlightenment chant music.

On this note, one inspiration for this work could have been the *trompe l'oeil* architecture of Notre Dame, designed by the architect Viollet-le-Duc during the cathedral's Gothic restoration in 1866-7. Viollet-le-Duc commonly juxtaposed 'striking matt colours in unexpected combinations' with medieval architecture in order to 'give an [added] impression of depth of weight', creating a modern version of an old tradition.²¹²

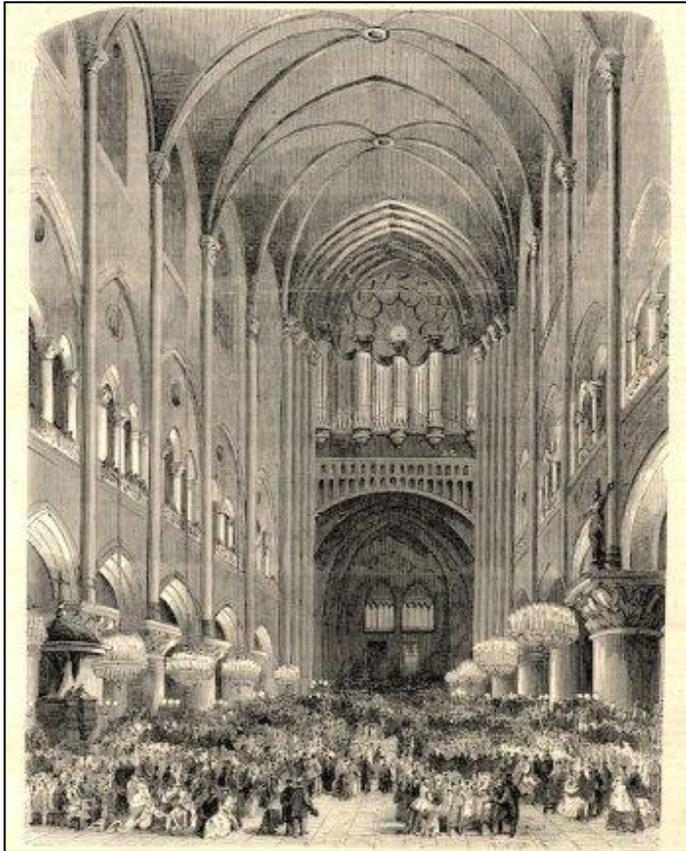
²⁰⁹ Chenevière (1919), 470

²¹⁰ Orledge (1998). The sequence: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13... determines the position of each musical parameter in *Vexations*, suggesting a universal link between music and nature.

²¹¹ Orledge (1990), 143-144.

²¹² *Ibid*, 339.

Ex.2: The View of the Grand Organ from the Notre Dame's Nave



In this scenario, the high ceilings and the vast, pointed arches of the nave are designed to create a space that will excite a spiritual mood within those who contemplate it. The 12th century Notre Dame's architecture was designed to express the inexpressible. This form of symbolism, as Jarocinski explains, 'was [...] based on the belief that Nature is only a symbol of reality of a superior kind'.

Whatever inspiration an artist may draw from nature and express in a work of art can direct men's thoughts towards the supernatural. This is why cathedrals, are so rich in symbols, allegories and objects of every kind charged with metaphysical meaning.²¹³

²¹³ Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 26-27.

Perhaps Satie's conception of space in the *Ogives* may too have been intended to be 'charged with metaphysical meaning'. This would explain the work's design, its slow and contemplative modality, its lack of bar lines and key signature, resulting in an unemotional, timeless detachment.

La Blague or Le Recherché

The publication of *Ogives* in 1889 in the satirical journal *Chat Noir* questions the relationship between this *le recherché* mysticism and the *Ogives*. An advertisement appeared describing the French composer as a 'sphinx-man', a 'composer with a head of wood'.²¹⁴ This tone clearly contradicts the analysis here. Perhaps *la blague* was also employed as cover up, an ironic ploy for a more religious message. According to Whiting, underneath the humoristic *fumiste*'s 'ironic reproof', humour unveiled 'what was dearest to one's heart'.²¹⁵ For instance, Jules Lemaître, one of the dramatists and writers at the *Chat Noir*, remarked that often the re-enactment of medievalism within theatre and shadow-plays developed from a 'religious spirit'.

The *Chat Noir* is a sanctuary where *fumiste* [French gaiety and cabaret spirit] and mysticism have always lived happily together [...] nowhere else is one more respectful of the past, more sentimental, more chauvinistic, more taken with traditions and legends; nowhere (and I am not joking as much as you might think) is there a more religious spirit.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ *Chat Noir* (1889) quoted in Whiting (1999), 93. Whiting even suggests that Satie may have written it himself.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

²¹⁶ Lemaître quoted in Whiting (1999), 91.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to highlight the complexity of French culture after art became a medium of resistance. It has shown this in the way mysticism seems to have become a paradoxical term, implying a religious spirit for some, *le recherché*, and a form of satire for others, *la blague*. It is apparent that most artists perceived *l'esprit gaulois* to be defined in the 'middle ages, the Catholic Church, and the music of Palestrina (considered the last medieval composer and often referred to as primitive)'.²¹⁷ For many of the humorists like Allais, 'modern life [was] so arranged (in the middle ages, modern life was a different affair)'.²¹⁸

Then the chapter discussed Satie's *Ogives*. Perhaps these pieces employ medievalism in order symbolically to convey a new conception of an older, purer past. In this sense, the *Ogives* fit in with other artistic ideas around this time, exploiting past ideas in order to resist modern rationalism. However, whether this music is of a genuinely religious nature is hard to decide. Whiting recognises that *Monsieur le Pauvre* acted as a poor 'unfortunate gentleman', delving into pious behaviour in order to try and purify his art.²¹⁹ But this purity could have been found by mimicking religious experience, rather than allowing 'religious domination' to govern.²²⁰ Second, as the Allais example showed, satire was sometimes indistinguishable from mysticism. What seems definite is that Satie's behaviour in this period, as Pasler would likely suggest, was adopted as a reaction to rationalism.

²¹⁷ Pasler in Brown (ed.) (2007), 160.

²¹⁸ Allais (1889) quoted in Whiting (1999), 81.

²¹⁹ Whiting (1999), 92.

²²⁰ Jarocinski, trans. Myers (1981), 27.

Thus we can conclude that Satie may have been balancing the two, reuniting nature with science, while at the same time detaching his modern subject from society around him. But this yearning for ‘religious spirit’ may have become more serious as bohemian culture began to exploit modern commercialism. For example, in 1885 the Chat Noir re-branded itself in a new location. Whiting notes that the opposition felt ‘Salis [owner of the Chat Noir] had sacrificed ambiance and idealism of the cabaret by making a public spectacle of their gatherings for his own profit’. Satie ‘followed a well-established migratory pattern’, migrating from the Chat Noir to the ‘modest’ Auberge du Clou cabaret in 1891.²²¹

²²¹ Whiting (1999), 108.

Chapter 4

The *Trois Gnossiennes*: Satie's relationship with Religious Mysticism

Mary E. Davis observes that the thinking behind Erik Satie's *Trois Gnossiennes* (1889-1893) may relate to 'Satie's deepening interest in religion and occultism', particularly 'his fascination with Gnosticism officially re-established in France in 1890'.

Founded on principles of spiritual enlightenment the Gnostic church included Rosicrucianism as one of its most important orders, thus Satie's engagement with this sect would have been natural.²²²

Davis' interpretation seems to propose that the title *Gnossienne* derived from the Hellenic term Gnosis, meaning to gain insight, a primary aim for many *fin de siècle* occultists and philosophers. This again questions the nature of Erik Satie's documented *blague* behaviour. Perhaps Satie's relationship with *le recherché* and religious mysticism may have been more serious than scholars have first thought. Citing the material of the previous three chapters, this chapter will study the contextual evidence that precedes the publication of the *Trois Gnossiennes* in September-October 1893. This includes the composer's brief association with Joséphin Péladan's Rosicrucian cult and the formation of *L'Église Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur*. Could the timing of the *Trois Gnossiennes* publication amidst this occultist activity be coincidental or did Satie have a more serious objective?

²²² Davis (2007), 61.

Catholicism and the Republic Reunited

During the early 1890s, while Satie was playing at the Auberge du Clou, he met the eccentric novelist and art critic Sâr Joséphin Péladan and joined his exclusive Rosicrucian group, the Rose-Croix Catholique du Temple et du Graal (1891). After a brief association with this organisation, the French composer withdrew into his own fantasy foundation, *L'Église Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur* (1893). As the last chapter concluded, one of the motivations for this 'spiritual' direction may have been the rise of commercialism in Montmartre, causing many bohemian groups to experience 'a need for detachment from the masses'.²²³

Another reason may have been the political exploitation of Catholicism in the Republic during the early 1890s. In 1892, the republicans tried to promote the idea of 'solidarity' among citizens, similar to their notion of collective utility a decade earlier.²²⁴ This involved finding the common ground between the nation's divided groups: the socialists, the nationalists and the republicans. After the moderate republicans succeeded in obtaining control of the government in the 1889 election polls, their perception of 'common ground' was shared mainly with groups from the Right. Pasler notes that these groups' opposition to the anarchist socialists (who wished for revolution, a shakeup of the power of the bourgeoisie and the hierarchy of the monarchists), was apparent in the way 'moderate republicans reached out to this new Right, recognising that they shared with it a deep concern for socialism'.²²⁵ In this sense, republicans competed against the rise of socialism, aiming to stifle the latter's influence and unite the doubters of republicanism. They moved further to the Right, accommodating the monarchists and the Catholics.

²²³ Pasler (2009), 684.

²²⁴ Ibid, 605.

²²⁵ Ibid, 614. Satie eventually joined the socialist party in 1914.

For some time, monarchists had already been willing to cooperate with this notion of ‘solidarity’ and modern democracy, believing that the monarchy would never return. However, Pope Leo XIII’s message in 1892 that Catholics should form an alliance with anti-clerical republicans was a radical, untoward step for Catholicism. In the text *Au Milieu des Sollicitudes*, he wrote that Catholics must ‘devote themselves to peace’ and reunite secular society, including the workers, with the practice of ‘Christian social justice’.²²⁶ From the Pope’s perspective, socialist groups could learn from Catholicism’s humility and respect for all men. However, as Debora Silverman writes in her study of Art Nouveau in France, this ‘solidarity’ or *ralliement* (as the republicans preferred to describe it) was a ‘particular manifestation of a more general effort by bourgeois republicans to find a basis of unity with the older aristocratic forces, an ongoing quest to solidify the ranks of one elite’.²²⁷

In this sense, the purity of religious practice was compromised by being utilised in a secular society. In the music establishment, ‘interest in chant sky rocketed’. The liturgical music of Mozart, Handel and Palestrina was regenerated and reinterpreted in many different ways by the Société de Nationale, the Paris Conservatoire, and most importantly by d’Indy’s pro-religious school, the Schola Cantorum.²²⁸ It would seem that Satie’s chant inspired *Ogives* were well ahead of their time. This music helped to plot the ideas for the future of Western art music, while also giving the ‘elite’ some stability with respect to socialist anarchism. However, Pasler notes that ‘in many ways, the musical world provided a medium for both resistance and public reconciliation of the republicans with the Catholics’.²²⁹ While the establishment exploited religious music in order to re-unite the ‘one elite’, the anti-

²²⁶ Pasler (2009), 615.

²²⁷ Silverman (1989), 48-49.

²²⁸ Pasler (2009), 616-619. In 1894, d’Indy established the Schola Cantorum, dedicated to researching liturgical music in respect to ‘modern needs’. This school challenged the virtuoso mentality of composers such as Saint-Saëns and the Paris Conservatoire’s favouritism of operatic studies.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 615.

establishment worked against this, employing religion as both a method of resistance and an answer to their own social disillusionment.

The Péladan Affair

This seems the most logical explanation for the influx of exclusive sects and societies in Montmartre.²³⁰ Erik Satie's participation in Joséphin Péladan's Rose-Croix order and his resultant ideas for his *église* may have coincided with not only his interest in 'the Gothic World of the Catholic Church', but also his unease at Catholicism's secularisation.²³¹ This fits with Satie's progressively anti-bourgeois behaviour in the *fin de siècle* period, which may have driven him to seek out Sâr Joséphin Péladan and his occult Catholicism. As Davis mentions, Joséphin Péladan was a popular figure at the Chat Noir 'in the procession of the notable adepts [aesthetes] of the cabaret'. He attended regular 'performances in the provinces' as well as meetings and orders for the exclusive artists of the 'Rose-Croix kabbalistique' society at the Auberge du Clou in 1887.²³² Significantly, Satie's acquaintance with Péladan seems to have emerged from the *blague* atmosphere of the cabaret. However, it would seem that Péladan saw himself more seriously than this. The eccentric novelist and art critic viewed himself as a redeemer of modern society rather than a satirist, and in that sense he was closely aligned to the *recherché* symbolists.

By 1890 he had proclaimed himself 'Sâr' (the honorific assumed by kings of ancient Babylon) and was widely recognised personality, traversing Paris dressed in priestly robes and a sheared fur hat, his beard pointy and unkempt, his hair well beyond his collar.²³³

²³⁰ Ibid, 684.

²³¹ Davis (2007), 47-48.

²³² Ibid, 47.

²³³ Ibid, 45.

Péladan was an avid enthusiast of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Much of his writing employs the technique of the leitmotiv.²³⁴ However, he went one step further by converting *Parsifal*'s idealism into an 'aesthetic religious order patterned after the knighthood of the Holy Grail'.²³⁵ Péladan created a modern Rosicrucian order.²³⁶ At the centre of this was an exclusive artistic society, the Rose-Croix Esthétique. Satie, as the house pianist, was ordained with the title of *Maître de Chapelle* (1891), and honoured by Péladan on the day of the official opening as one of the 'idealist composers that the Rose-Croix will shed light on' (10th of March 1892).²³⁷ It was here that Satie composed and performed the *Trois Sonneries de la Rose-Croix* (1892) as well as *Le Fils des étoiles* (1892). Both are modally and rhythmically similar to the static, non-development character of Satie's *Ogives*, but they experiment radically with juxtaposed chains of six-three chords.²³⁸

The Rose-Croix may have offered Satie the opportunity to continue experimenting with his music more profusely without compensating his artistic integrity. Furthermore, the Rose-Croix Esthétique's salon was a serious challenger to the main establishment society, the Société des Beaux Arts. Satie may have seen this as a good opportunity to overthrow the current establishment. There is evidence to suggest that he may also have wished to become a part of this establishment. Orledge documents how, between May 1892 and April 1896, Satie

²³⁴ See Whiting (1999), 132.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

²³⁶ See Yates (1972). The original 'Rosicrucian enlightenment' created by German intellectuals in the seventeenth century, constructed a secret society that safeguarded secretive knowledge of the esoteric past.

²³⁷ Péladan quoted in Pincus-Witten (1968), 209.

²³⁸ See Gowers (1965-1966), 1-25. Satie wrote down in his sketch books 'seven ways of harmonising a melodic step of a second, one of a third and two of a fifth, followed by three cadential formulae'. This suggests he was experimenting with a limited musical vocabulary. Gowers also proposes that Satie was learning melodies based on the Greek chromatic genus.

applied on three separate occasions to join the Académie des Beaux Arts.²³⁹ Although unsuccessful, the composer may have been serious about his application.

The task of Péladan's ordained society was to 'insufflate contemporary art, above all, aesthetic culture with theocratic essence',²⁴⁰ in other words, to 'recast aspects of religion as art'.²⁴¹

Just as Religion has made itself into art in order to speak to the masses, so Art must make itself into a religion in order to speak to the minority.²⁴²

This was high art at its most profound. As Steven Whiting notes, with the 'mysticism in the cabaret always tempered with *la blague*', 'one can easily imagine Satie being stirred by such words' which would have spoken 'to the earnest idealist in Satie'.²⁴³ Evidence from Robert Pincus-Witten in his study of the Salons de la Rose-Croix suggests further evidence to support this. Many disillusioned artists such as Péladan, perhaps even Satie himself, found 'a middle ground' at the Rose-Croix salons, 'a compromise, between the vulgarity of the late nineteenth century academic art and the then almost unintelligible pathways into the twentieth century'.²⁴⁴ Convinced that pure art must be practiced in social exclusivity, Satie and the Rose-Croix created a modern aesthetic based on an antique past, bestowing the mysteries of Catholic art on contemporary subjects. As Davis notes, Satie, 'drawn to the occult and mystical aspects of Péladan's enterprise', had the 'opportunity to explore the possibilities of translating these qualities into a new mode of musical expression'.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ Orledge (1990), xxii-xxiv.

²⁴⁰ Péladan quoted in Davis (2007), 46-47.

²⁴¹ Pasler (2009), 684.

²⁴² Péladan quoted in Volta, trans. Bullock, (1989), 54.

²⁴³ Whiting (1999), 138.

²⁴⁴ Pincus-Witten (1968), 6.

²⁴⁵ Davis (2007), 48.

The *Trois Gnossiennes*: Preserving the Purity of Art

The "*Gnossiennes*" could [...] be looked upon as the first musical expression born out of Satie's collaboration with Péladan and his *Rose et Croix* sect.²⁴⁶

Although Satie's participation in Péladan's Rose-Croix sect was brief (it officially ended on the 14th of August 1892),²⁴⁷ in the following year he would continue to involve himself in various 'occultist' activities, drafting the Christian ballet *Uspud* (November-December 1892), composing the *9 Dances Gothiques* (March 1893) and *Vexations* (June 1893), publishing the *Trois Gnossiennes* (September-October 1893) and founding his own *Église Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur* (October 1893).²⁴⁸

Uspud, *9 Dances Gothiques*, and *Vexations* have often been compared with Satie's own ascetic behaviour. We can recall from the previous chapter Orledge's discussion of *Vexations*' 'hallucinatory effects'. Orledge connects this ascetic idea with the French composer's 'straightened financial circumstances', suggesting that compositions such as *9 Dances Gothiques* may have been composed to 'restore peace of mind'.²⁴⁹ Satie himself wrote underneath the title of *9 Dances Gothiques*, 'neuvaine pour le plus grand calme et la forte tranquillité de mon Âme'.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Höjer (1996), <http://www.satie-archives.com/web/article2.html>.

²⁴⁷ Davis (2007), 51. Satie wrote in a letter published in *Gil Blas* how he wished to venture out from his 'disciple' image associated to Péladan.

²⁴⁸ Orledge (1990), xxii-xxiii.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11. Satie also had an un-lawful love affair with the painter Suzanne Valadon around this time. Their relationship would come to an abrupt end shortly after *9 Dances Gothiques*.

²⁵⁰ Satie quoted in Orledge (1998), 391.

However, comparisons to Satie's ascetic circumstances and the *Trois Gnossiennes* have not been explored in much depth. Orledge suggests that the *Gnossiennes* signified a move away from the mysticism of the Rose-Croix. Satie's 'enquiring mind' at this time 'was, of course, always open to new possibilities'.²⁵¹

But evidence would suggest that the *Trois Gnossiennes* are an extension of the Rose-Croix mysticism. A study of the *Trois Gnossiennes*' initial publication dates prove that they were composed and published during this occultist period. Ornella Volta's analysis of the 1912 second galley proofs shows that Satie marked the collective compositional date as 1890, but not each individual work.²⁵² Each *Gnossienne* was published in facsimile two weeks prior to the announcement of Satie's *Église Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur* (15th October 1893). *Gnossienne No.1* and *No.3* were printed together as *Deux Gnossiennes* under the sub-heading, 'Varieties et Curiosités Musicales' in issue 24 of the national newspaper, *Le Figaro* (Monday 26 September, 300-303).²⁵³ Notably, the two movements appeared as they do in the 1913 publication, albeit without performance directions. *Gnossienne No.2* was published separately in an esoteric journal known as *Le Coeur*. There may have been a closer link with mysticism here. Titled *bième Gnossienne, No.2* appeared as an original manuscript with the date marked April 1893. We can propose that this *Gnossienne*, composed in the two months between *9 Dances Gothiques* and *Vexations*, may continue the same theme, music composed 'to restore peace of mind'.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Ibid, 190. Orledge notes that the *Trois Gnossiennes* were composed between 1889 and 1891.

²⁵² Volta (1987). To date there are also four other *Gnossiennes* acknowledged by the composer, Robert Caby. One of these *Gnossiennes* has the compositional date 1897. However, there was no stated evidence by Satie that links any of these other compositions with the 1913 *Trois Gnossiennes*.

²⁵³ Whiting (1999), 119.

²⁵⁴ Orledge (1990), 11.

Ex.1: The Trois Gnossiennes' proposed compositional dates.

Gnossienne No.1	1889-1893?
Gnossienne No.2	April 1893
Gnossienne No.3	1890

Ex.2: Deux Gnossiennes reproduced from Le Figaro (Monday 26 September 1893, 300-303).

Mardi 26 Septembre 1893 Le Numéro : 15 cent. à Paris, 20 cent. dans les Départements. 36^e Année - 3^e Série - N^o 300

FRANCIS MAGNARD
Rédacteur en chef

A. FÉRIER
Secrétaire de la Rédaction

Prix des Abonnements
Paris : 45 fr. 33 fr. 64 fr.
Départements : 48 fr. 36 fr. 68 fr.
Dances Postales : 21 fr. 43 fr. 66 fr.

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ANNONCES, RECLAMES ET PETITES CAUVITES
P. DOLLNÈVE & Co, 16, rue Croix-Boulevard

LA SIGNATURE

Je viens de lire le *Mémoire* présenté par M. Zola au Congrès des journalistes...
Son *Mémoire*, je demande pardon de le lui dire, n'est pas documenté...
Mettant en opposition l'anonymat soigneusement gardé par l'une avec la signature partout datée chez l'autre, il n'est dans ce contraste le marque distinctif des deux races, le signe expressif des deux tempéraments...
L'explication de M. Zola, pour être ingénieuse, n'en reste pas moins fantaisiste, et s'il avait pris la peine de se renseigner en cette matière avec autant de soin qu'il l'a fait en certaines autres, il eût évité facilement l'erreur dans laquelle il est tombé...
C'est, en effet, ni la turbulence du sang ni l'infatigable nationalité qui ont recherché et introuvé chez nous la signature dans les journaux politiques...
L'œuvre d'ensemble se rapetissant pour se perdre dans la somme et non l'introu-

quodienne embusquée derrière leur journal comme des artilleurs derrière le muraille de leur bastion...
Un journaliste alerte, Edmond Texier, répondit à ce besoin de curiosité en publiant tout de suite une monographie de chaque organe de la presse, avec la biographie rapidement crayonnée de ses rédacteurs...
John Lemonnier, par exemple, était natif depuis 1840 dans la vieille maison des *Figariers*...
Je me souviens d'une aventure assez amusante. Le vénérable M. Laurent, rédacteur en chef de *l'Union monarchique*, était de la vieille école...
Mais, c'est en français que s'engagent généralement les conversations, et les interprètes mis à la disposition des rares intrançais d'Angleterre ou d'Amérique ont à intervenir que par exception...
L'abrupt de ces étrangers sont entendus des commerçants ou des industriels parisiens. Aucun ne porte la redingote à brandebourgs ou le maillotin...
C'est vrai, il avait décapé quelques pages du *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* sans en changer un mot...
Pou à peu, on s'habitue à la pratique nouvelle; le lecteur prit du goût pour certains écrivains; il les rechercha comme on recherche un cadavre un trépassé ou une chanteuse...
Pendant une période, le journal a pu y perdre dans sa majesté collective et mystérieuse, tandis que le journaliste y gagnait dans sa glorification personnelle...
L'œuvre d'ensemble se rapetissant pour se perdre dans la somme et non l'introu-

On discutera jeudi cette question de dévotion industrielle...
C'est ainsi que l'escadron de l'amiral Avellan séjournera dans les eaux françaises aussi longtemps que l'escadron de l'amiral Gervais séjournera dans les eaux russes...
M. Ch. Dupuy, président du Conseil, compte, si aucun événement imprévu ne vient mettre obstacle à ses projets, prendre, à partir du 1^{er} octobre, la seconde partie de ses vacances...
La création d'un ministère des colonies est chose absolument décidée...
On ne craint pas que le décret présidentiel soit modifié ou révoqué...
Le commandant Montell, délégué par le gouvernement pour assister aux obsèques du duc d'Uzès, est parti hier soir pour Uzès où les funérailles auront lieu demain matin...
Dans le même train se trouvaient la duchesse d'Uzès, la duchesse de Luynes, Mlle de Crussol et M. le duc de La Trémoille...
Une question fort importante, mais à laquelle le gouvernement seul ne peut résoudre...

ment attendu par les professeurs de gymnastique...
On voit combien nous sommes loin des régimes disparus, on régalait la faveur et le népotisme...
FIGARO MUSICAL
Le *Figaro Musical*, fascicule de septembre, est en vente partout...
I. - CHANT
G. SALVAYRE: *Réponse de Mignon*, poés. de L. Kullbrenn.
G. FÉRIER: *Pris d'écueil*, poés. de Victor d'Aunoy.
E. BERTIN: *Mariage*, sur un sonnet, poés. de R. F...
H. de METZNER: *En souper avec une jeune comtesse*, poés. de H. Malibon.
II. - PIANO ET MUSIQUE INSTRUMENTALE
CAMILLE BRUNNER: *An Zensberg*, valse styrienne.
HUBERT DUVAL: *Poésies d'Albion*: a) *Calzaretta*, b) *Carillon*, c) *Milidia*.
III. - VARIÉTÉS ET CURIOSITÉS MUSICALES
FRANZ LASKER: *Patet nostro*, œuvre posthume.
G. FÉRIER: *Chansons polonoises*.
J. BAZZANO: *Poésies*.
A. BARRI: *Chant d'Espérance*.
R. LAVRELL: *Général des Pages*.
BROUET: *Alto*, marcha.
G. HESS: *Dandemano*, valse.

HORS PARIS
Le comte de Paris et le duc d'Orléans sont arrivés hier à Copenhague.

FIGARO MUSICAL

Le *Figaro Musical*, fascicule de septembre, est en vente partout.
En voici le sommaire :

I. — CHANT

- G. SALVAYRE : *Réversé de Mignon*, poésie de L. Ratisbonne.
G. PÉNAVAIRE : *Près d'elle*, poésie de Victor d'Auriac.
ESTÈBAN MARTI : *Sur son épousai*, poésie de E. Paz.
H. DE MERTENS : *En songeant aux jeunes années*, poésie de H. Matabon.

II. — PIANO ET MUSIQUE INSTRUMENTALE

- CAMILLE ERLANGER : *Au Rosenberg*, valse styrienne.
HUBERT DUVAL : *Feuillets d'Album* :
a) Canzonetta ;
b) Carillon ;
c) Mélodie.
E. DE HARTOG : *Contes d'autrefois*, bourrée.
M. CASOLONCA : *Notte*.
J. BRDLIKOVA : *Pensée*.
A. BARBI : *Chant d'Hyménée*.
R. LAVELLO : *Gavotte des Pages*.
BROUSTET : *Kitvá*, mazurka.
G. HESSE : *Desdemona*, valse.

III. — VARIÉTÉS ET CURIOSITÉS MUSICALES

- FRANZ LERT : *Pater noster*, œuvre posthume.
G. PFEIFFER : *Chansons périgourdines*.
L. MOREAU : *Impression de Midi dans le Nord*, carillon flamand.
DAMARÉ : *France et Russie*, la « Marseillaise » contrepuntée sur « l'Hymne russe ».
IPARRAGUIRRE : *Guernicaco arbola*, chant de guerre espagnol basque.
ERIK SATIE : *Deux Gnossiennes*.
Ephémérides musicales du mois de Septembre.

GNOSSIENNE

ERIK SATIE

№ 1

Lent.

PIANO.

p

f

The first system of music features a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment of quarter notes. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present in the right hand.

The second system continues the piece, showing the melodic development in the right hand and the accompaniment in the left hand.

The third system shows further melodic and harmonic progression, with the right hand's line becoming more intricate.

The fourth system continues the musical texture, maintaining the rhythmic and melodic patterns established in the previous systems.

The fifth system shows the continuation of the piece, with the right hand's melody moving towards the end of the system.

The sixth and final system of music on this page concludes the piece, ending with a double bar line. A dynamic marking of *f* is visible at the beginning of the system.

GNOSSIENNE

ERIK SATIE

№ 2

Lent.

PIANO. *p*

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems. Each system contains a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The tempo is marked 'Lent.' and the dynamics are 'PIANO.' and 'p'. The music is characterized by a complex, repetitive melodic line in the treble staff and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the bass staff. The piece is in 3/4 time and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

303

The image displays a page of musical notation, numbered 303 in the upper right corner. The page is organized into five systems, each consisting of a treble staff and a bass staff. The notation is written in a standard musical style, featuring various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a harmonic accompaniment. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development. The third system features a more complex melodic line with some slurs. The fourth system shows a continuation of the melodic and harmonic patterns. The fifth system concludes the page with a final melodic phrase and a double bar line. The overall style is that of a classical piano score.

Ex.3: Gnessienne No.2 (No.6) reprinted from *Le Coeur* (6-7 October 1893, 12).

12
LE CŒUR

A ANTOINE DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

6^{ème} Gnessienne *Erk Satie*

Nous avons donc résolu, d'accord avec Notre conscience et confiant en la miséricorde de Dieu, d'édifier dans la métropole de cette nation franque, pendant tant de siècles se prévalant du glorieux titre de Fille aînée de l'Eglise, un Temple digne du Sauveur, conducteur et rédempteur des peuples; Nous en ferons le refuge où la catholicité et les Arts, qui lui sont indissolublement liés, croîtront et prospéreront à l'abri de toute profanation et dans la complète expansion de leur pureté, que les efforts du Malin ne sauraient ternir.

Après mûre réflexion, Nous avons donné à cet asile de la Foi vivifiée le nom d'*Eglise Métropolitaine d'Art*, et l'avons placée sous la divine invocation de *Jésus conducteur*. Les premiers et inestimables témoignages d'affectueuse gratitude et de chrétienne approbation qu'un grand nombre de Nos frères ont daigné nous apporter, ont répandu dans Notre cœur en même temps qu'une ineffable joie, une fortifiante semence de courage pour résister aux embûches que pourrait nous susciter l'Enfer.

Nous vous supplions donc, mes Frères, au nom du Salut de l'Humanité, comme de notre propre salut, de Vous unir à Nous pour le triomphe de Notre-Sainte-Mère l'Eglise, par la purification de la Foi et des Arts, qui sont une des voies par lesquelles la Providence nous appelle à Elle; et Nous Vous baisons dans la Paix et la Fraternité de J.C. N.S.

ERIK SATIE.

Donnée à Paris en octobre 1893, le 13.

LA SCIENCE

LES PHÉNOMÈNES TÉLÉPATHIQUES

ET LA
PSYCHOBIOLOGIE MODERNE

Faut-il donc déclarer avec Faraday, Weber, Helmholtz, qu'avant de procéder à l'étude de certaines questions rentrant dans l'ordre physique, nous devrions nous faire des idées claires de ce qui est *naturellement* possible ou impossible? Non, certes, car repousser *a priori* tout fait dont la raison s'échappe momentanément à notre analyse, c'est oublier, comme dit W. Crookes (4) « qu'en dehors des mathématiques pures, la possibilité n'a d'autres limites que l'expérience. » Il n'y a pas de raisonnements qui prévalent contre les faits; et c'est ici le lieu de distinguer entre l'in vraisemblance absolue et l'in vraisemblance relative: l'une implique l'absurdité et relève de la logique; l'autre est du domaine de la réalité et ne trahit que notre ignorance. « Les faits que nous disons surnaturels, dit M. Richet (2), répondent à deux conditions différentes: d'abord, nous n'en connaissons pas la cause; puis, nous ne les voyons pas survenir communément. » Or, cette double condition se trouve réalisée pour les phénomènes télépathiques: ils sont toujours inattendus, et ils ne se produisent que dans certaines circonstances très rares et actuellement impossibles à déterminer.

Mais, après tout, la raison explicative de bien des choses ne se réduit-elle pas à des hypothèses? Qu'est-ce, au fond que la gravitation, l'électricité, la génération, la pesanteur? Et sans rappeler l'accueil fait aux découvertes des Galilée, des Harvey, des Jenner, que de phénomènes indiscutés aujourd'hui, dont la science s'est longtemps défilée! Les aéroolithes, les éclairs en boule, les mirages, les aurores boréales ont lentement conquis leur place dans l'ordre des faits naturels; et, si l'on a voulu les en séparer, c'est par suite d'une fautive conception du miracle, d'ailleurs habituelle aux savants de tous les temps.

Je voudrais, avec M. Bernard Lazare, qu'on appellât *miracle* « tout fait survenant sans cause ou ne produisant aucun effet... Si cette définition était admise, rien ne deviendrait plus difficile à établir qu'un miracle; et d'autre part, devant tout fait mystérieux constaté formellement, on ne pourrait plus que dire: j'en ignore la cause ou je n'envoie pas les effets, mais on ne le nierait pas *a priori*, sous prétexte qu'il est miraculeux (1) ». On ne saurait mieux ni plus simplement refuter, ce me semble, le vieux *credo* de l'orthodoxie scientifique, qui repose tout entier sur ce dogme fondamental: n'admettre comme vrais ou vraisem-

(4) W. Crookes. — *La force psychique*.
 (5) Ch. Richet. — *La suggestion mentale et le calcul des probabilités*.

Le Coeur was a privately funded esoteric journal founded by the occult novelist, Jules Bois and the ex-Rose-Croix aristocrat, Count Antoine de la Rochefoucauld (*Bieme Gnostienne* is dedicated to the latter). The journal comprised ten issues (1893-1895), with articles on the occult sciences and esoteric arts. According to Martha Ward in her study of Pissarro in the Parisian avant-garde, the journal's main articles discussed methods of hypnotism, psychotherapy and telepathy in detail, as well as research by philosophers on esoteric religions.²⁵⁵ These articles gave symbolists insight into the ideas of past civilisation.

Le Coeur resisted modernisation by rekindling among its minority audience an authentic spirit, an original mysticism that exposed the fakers of 'neo-mysticism', 'identified as a recent charlantry involving morose medievalism'.²⁵⁶ This suggests that it distinguished itself from the *la blague* jokes of the cabaret. The journal 'distanced itself from the moneyed elite [...], while claiming for itself a social exclusivity based on moral superiority'.²⁵⁷ This notion shares characteristics with Satie's behaviour at this time. The more serious brand of mysticism proposed here excommunicated un-pure society, sharing 'secretive' knowledge of the occult arts and sciences with a social minority. However, this was by no means 'morose, foggy, and Schopenhauerian'. Furthermore, the journal did not conform to the current 'ironic' revival of religion in the Republic. Instead, these esoteric 'secrets' taught this

²⁵⁵ Ward (1996), 211-212. The most high-profile philosopher was Edouard Schuré, an associate of Friedrich Nietzsche. Schuré's hugely influential 1889 study, *The Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Religions* had opened many a mystic's eyes to the secretive origins of esoteric society. Like Péladan, Schuré believed that self-knowledge could be acquired through some form of ascetic striving. Schuré convinced many dissatisfied followers that esoteric society could teach modern civilisation how to reconcile the humble origins of 'science and religion' with mysticism and purify spirits.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

exclusive minority how to re-access modern society from a higher morality, a characteristic ‘necessary for a joyous future’.²⁵⁸

Analysing the *Trois Gnossiennes*

Davis’ study of the *Trois Gnossiennes* contrasts with other high profile studies that depict these works as anti-Wagnerian. For Alan Gillmor, the *Gnossiennes*’ ‘deceptive simplicity breathe fresh air into the decadent humidity of the fin de siècle, resurrecting the quintessentially Gallic virtues of Rameau and Couperin’.²⁵⁹ The exotic melodies are compared to the arrival of ‘fresh sounds from the east’ during the Universal Exposition in 1889, which were revolutionising the perspectives of ‘impressionable young French musicians’ and helping a ‘struggling *ars gallica*’ overcome ‘a sea of Wagnerism’.²⁶⁰ The resultant *Trois Gnossiennes* ‘look ahead to the clean and uncluttered neoclassicism of the 1920’s’.²⁶¹

Gillmor is correct in saying that Satie’s piano music is clearly not Wagnerian rhetoric. It is pale and weak in comparison. But comparisons with the ‘clear’ realism of 1920s neo-classicism are not supported by the contextual evidence here. Satie’s occultist interests before and after the three *Gnossienne* publications suggest that the French composer was immersed in the period’s mysticism. Indeed, the *Trois Gnossiennes*’ connotation with gnosis, as well as the potential link to the exotic symbolism at the Universal Exposition, suggests that Satie was aiming to portray ‘an authentic spirit’ harking back to a pure, folkloric society.²⁶² This relates

²⁵⁸ Davis (2007), 51-52.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 51.

²⁶⁰ Gillmor (1988), 45.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 51.

²⁶² Fauser (2005), 205.

to the notion of purity we have discovered in the Chavannes inspired *Gymnopédies* in chapter one, and the *l'esprit gaulois* inspired *Ogives* in the previous chapter.

In terms of structure, the *Gnossienne No.1* from *Le Figaro* is formed of three eight bar sentences in binary form. The presentation phrase opens on the root-position F minor tonic triad, with a basic idea consisting of four notes, C, E flat, D natural and B natural. The accidentals highlight the piece's oriental identity, the raised fourth (B natural) forming an augmented second interval with the A flat in the lower voice. This is followed by a varied repetition of the basic idea in the response and a conclusion on the tonic F. In the continuation phrase there is hardly any fragmentation or variation in rhythm, instead the continuation simply repeats a variation of the basic idea on the same harmonic level, emphasising the passage's simplicity.²⁶³

Ex.4: Opening Sentence *Gnossienne No.1*

The image shows a musical score for the opening sentence of *Gnossienne No. 1*. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in F minor (one flat). The music is divided into three sections by a vertical bar line. The first section, labeled 'Leut', begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and contains two phrases: 'b.i.' (first iteration) and 'rep.' (repetition). The second section, labeled 'Continuation/Cadence', begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and continues the melodic line. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

These three phrases, which make up the unit we shall call A, are followed by two others, B and C. The binary form consists of a repetition of the basic idea (A), a cadential phrase moving from subdominant to tonic (B) and a codetta (C), resulting in A, A, B, B, C, C, B, B / A', A', B, B, C, C, B, B.

²⁶³ See Caplin (2001), 42.

Ex.5: Passages A, B and C rotating between tonic and dominant chords

Passage A:	
Passage B:	
Passage C:	

The lack of harmonic change in the lower voice causes each passage in this *Gnossienne* to remain static. Ideas are simply repeated over and over again, suggesting, as Pasler argues, a ‘deepening awareness of one idea or state of mind’.

Satie reduced his musical materials to a minimum. This allowed him to forge an original perspective on simplicity, distinct from the lightness of café songs or the naïveté of *chansons populaires* and, ironically, both serious and musically important.

Working with short musical ideas with few formal implications also gave new freedoms. [...] There is intensification, deepening awareness of one idea or state of mind rather than a constant movement from one to the next.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Pasler (2009), 541-543.

The crude character of this piece, the simple, repeating melodies and the application of nagging appoggiaturas could be inspired by *la blague*. However, it is the reduction and repetition of the same musical material throughout the piece that seems to create the illusion of something more, perhaps a ‘state of mind’. Pasler notes that each motionless passage creates a ‘kind of [Chavannes influenced] musical decor’, sensing that the music ‘can contribute to a sense of harmony or serve as a model for progress as linear evolution’.²⁶⁵ She proposes that Satie advances on an idea Wagner began in the Holy Grail scene of *Parsifal*, ‘removing the emotional, religious and idealistic associations’,²⁶⁶ to create a fresh atmosphere where ‘time becomes space’. This may be what Gillmor is referring to in his own study when he discusses the *Gnossiennes*’ ‘clean and uncluttered’ style. However in *Parsifal*, removing these subjective associations ascetically purifies the subject, clarifying ‘the goals of man’s life’. Perhaps Satie’s ‘simple ideas, reduced to the fewest details’, could also be a method of gaining insight, gnosis.²⁶⁷

This notion correlates with the symbolism of *Gnossienne No.1*’s exotic melody. In passage C, Satie employs the F melodic minor scale with the addition of a raised fourth, giving his music a distinctive oriental flavour. According to Anagret Fauser in her study of exoticism at the Universal Exposition of 1889, Satie attended performances of the Romanian folk ensemble at the Romanian salon, which may have directly influenced his own ideas for these *Gnossiennes*. Many critics and artists appreciated the Romanian gypsies’ primitiveness and unorthodoxy as well their music’s pure, ‘melancholic and feminized’ melodies ‘suffused with exotic charm’.²⁶⁸ There was an element of preserved authenticity in their folkloric idiom.

²⁶⁵ Pasler (2009), 543.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 540.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 543.

²⁶⁸ Fauser (2005), 261.

Amid the urbanisation of the modern world, Romanian folk music had managed to remain ‘uncorrupted by the internationalisation of music’.²⁶⁹

If as Gillmor suggests, Satie’s *Trois Gnossiennes* were influenced by the Universal Exposition’s ‘fresh sounds from the east’, then there is a strong argument to suggest that the notion of purity and authenticity associated with these sounds may also be relevant here. One critic wrote that the Romanian folk ensemble successfully portrayed the ‘musical soul of the people’.²⁷⁰ Again, there are comparisons here with the purity invoked in the revival of *l’esprit gaulois*. Many symbolist and Wagnerian composers believed that by utilising exotic symbolism, they could add ‘another layer of referentiality to existing Wagnerian or symbolist interpretations’.²⁷¹ The post-Wagnerian interpretation of exoticism was to seduce, to ‘take possession’ of the listener.²⁷² However, after the Universal Exposition, exoticism was appropriated by French composers, Debussy in particular, in order to express ‘an encounter with alterity’.²⁷³ In this case, exotic symbolism depicted the subject in a condition of otherness, alien within its surroundings. In *Gnossienne No.3* (composed soon after the Universal Exposition), the main melody is deliberately haunting, utilising fluid and melancholic oriental scales.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 253.

²⁷⁰ Goudeau quoted in Fauser (2005), 259. Romanian communities had remained united even after centuries of foreign invasions. There was a sense that their music reflected their suffering and triumph. It was essentially soulful and rich in heritage.

²⁷¹ Fauser (2005), 204.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid, 205.

Ex.6: *Gnossienne No.3*'s Opening Passage

The opening melody is close in orientation to the second octave species of the Ancient Greek modal scale. As we documented in chapter two, many modes and folk scales were being excavated throughout the Republic, specifically in the 1890s. As Whiting notes, Satie's imitation confirms what Patrick Gowers stated in his study of the Rose-Croix music, that 'Satie experimented during the early 1890s with Ancient Greek modal scales, specifically with a scale derived from the chromatic genus'.²⁷⁴ In this *Gnossienne* example, Satie seems to be employing the B Phrygian dominant scale.

Ex.7: B Phrygian dominant scale

²⁷⁴ Whiting (1999), 120-121.

The distinctive exotic sound is created by employing a flattened second, the C natural together with an augmented third, the D sharp. Again, the replication of an exotic scale may have represented Satie's desire to promote the purity inherent in folkloric society, an authentic ethnic spirit.

Gnossienne No.2's Performance Directions

The melodic idiom of *Gnossienne No.2* is similar in style to chant. This piece may have been originally isolated from the *Deux Gnossiennes*. The form of A, A', B, B', C, C, B, B', A suggests that each repeat of a passage was meant to act as a refrain. Like the *Ogives* and also *Gymnopédie No.3*, each passage is separated by the same drawn out chords that form the cadences in the lower voice at the end of each phrase. The opening statement flows through a Grecian-oriental styled melody ending on the tonic. The refrain, melody A', imitates the initial statement but like medieval chant, the cadence varies ever so slightly, suggesting a continuation into a new idea. Each higher voice is to be played as triplets in 12/8, while the lower voice remains in common time, emphasising the same static quality found in *Gnossienne No.1*.

Equally fascinating are the strange, sanctimonious performance directions which accompany the manuscript in *Le Coeur*. Orledge characterises these performance directions as 'witty communications', referring to the later *blague* styled commentaries of the humoristic piano suites (1913-1917).²⁷⁵ However, this may not be fair. The religious orientation of the article 'Epistle to Catholic Artists', which appears on the right hand side of the manuscript may relate to these performance directions. Published officially at the opening of *L'Église Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur* in Paris 15 October 1893, the article reiterated the

²⁷⁵ Orledge (1990), 190.

idealist message Péladan had outlined at the opening of his Rose-Croix salon, reuniting Catholicism with the arts.

We have thus resolved, following the dictates of Our conscience and trusting in God's mercy, to erect in the metropolis of this Frankish nation, which for so many centuries aspired above all others to the glorious title of Elder Daughter of the Church, a Temple worthy of the Saviour, leader and redeemer of all men; We shall make it a refuge where the Catholic faith and the Arts, which are indissolubly bound to it, shall grow and prosper, sheltered from profanity, expanding in all their purity, unsullied by the workings of evil.²⁷⁶

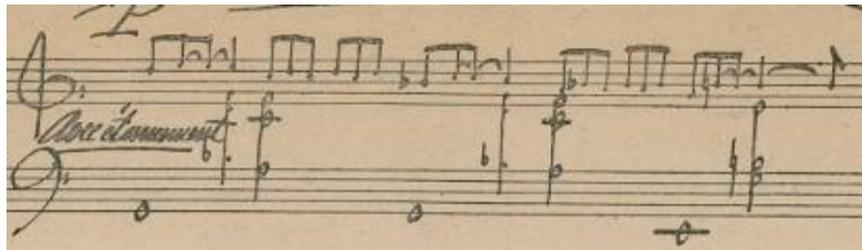
Unlike conventional performance directions that aim to emphasise the composer's reading of the musical work, alongside each passage A, B, C, B and B' in *Gnossienne No.2*, an accompanying performance direction instructs the performer on how to engage with each phrase. Verzosa notes that Satie may have been serious about his aspirations in this period. Satie may have used such 'aphoristic language' to convey 'mystical truths'.²⁷⁷

Ex.8: *Gnossienne No.2* (1893).

Passage A:

'Avec étonnement'

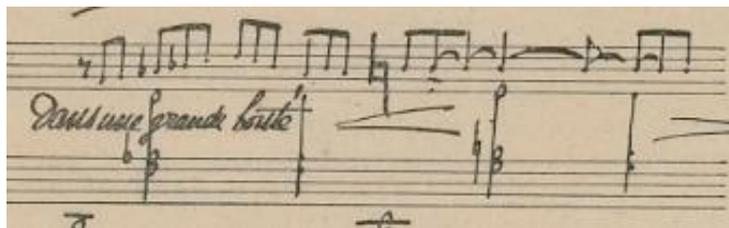
'With astonishment'



Passage B:

'Dans une grande bonté'

'With great kindness'



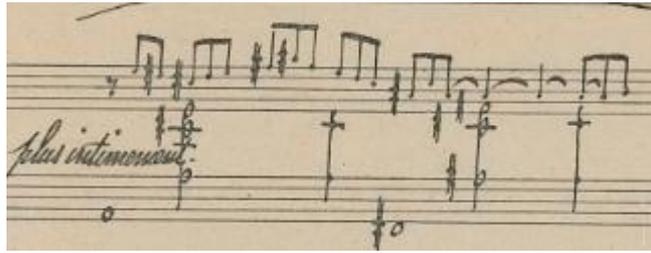
²⁷⁶ Satie quoted in Wilkins (1980), 36.

²⁷⁷ Verzosa (2007), 125.

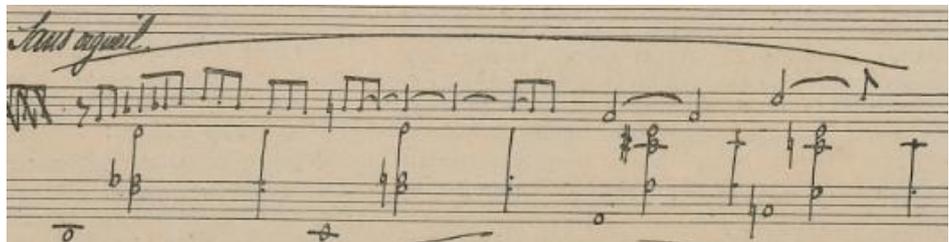
Passage C:

‘plus intimement’

‘more intimately’

**Passage B’**‘Avec une légère
humilité’‘With a light
humility’**Passage A’**

‘Sans orgueil’

‘Without
arrogance’

The official 1913 Rouart, Lerolle & Cie publication includes 20 performance directions in all three of the *Gnossiennes*, ranging from the eccentric, ‘Ne Sortez Pas’ to the pseudo-mystical, ‘Questionnez’. ‘Ne Sortez Pas’ was added later in *Gnossienne No.2* at the beginning of passage A’. This perhaps jokingly mocked the composer’s former mysticism. Arguably, the directions added in April 1893 could have been stimulated by the influence of Rosicrucian and Wagnerian sects. These groups would employ such idealistic language ‘to pursue their own internal purification’. Pasler argues that ‘Satie was [...] parodying the self-seriousness of Wagner and Wagnerians, taking aim at what performers were supposed to be thinking of when playing this music and how listeners behave at Wagnerian concerts’.

Satie's instructions bring attention to the ethical ramifications associated with performing and listening to music and to the paternalistic nature of composition during these times.²⁷⁸

Satie's performance directions do seem to contrast with Wagner's grandiose language in *Parsifal*. Certainly Satie's performance directions do not express the same range of emotion. However, perhaps parody was not the objective. Equally, Satie's performance directions could correlate with the behaviour of his pious persona, *Monsieur le Pauvre*. Three out of the five directions instruct the performer to act humbly when playing each phrase, 'Plus intimentement', 'Avec une légère humilité' and 'Sans orgueil', which relate to the previous chapter's depiction of the simple life of *l'esprit gaulois*. Furthermore, 'Avec étonnement' and 'Dans une grande bonté' may highlight how Satie was trying to confound notions of expression. As with the symbolism of *Sarabande* No.1, we can suggest from this evidence that Satie may have employed these performance directions in order to mystify the performer's perception of the work. As Davis notes:

Prosaically vague yet poetically precise, these directives represent a major and often overlooked musical innovation, as they redraw the relationship between composer and interpreter, requiring performers to grapple with interior complexity rather than simply respond to rote technical language.²⁷⁹

However, Davis argues that this idea was a result of *la blague*. 'One indisputable influence in this regard was the *fin de siècle* cabaret, where language was developing as the centrepiece of a unique mode of ironic humour that was captured in contemporary parlance by the complex term *blague*'.²⁸⁰ She cites the verbal commentaries of the humoristic piano suites, *Flabby*

²⁷⁸ Pasler (2009), 539-540.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 62.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 85.

Preludes (for a dog) (1912), *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (1913), and *Embryons déséchés* (1913).

Ex. 9: Opening two staves of *Embryons déséchés*

The image shows the opening two staves of the piano piece *Embryons déséchés*. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The tempo/mood is marked "Allez un peu" and the dynamics are marked "p". The lyrics are: "Sortie du matin" and "Il pleut". The bottom staff continues with the lyrics "Le soleil est dans les nuages". The music consists of a simple, repetitive melodic line in the right hand and a more complex, rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

It is evident from the *Embryons déséchés* that these directions do not instruct, neither are they idealistic and mystical. They are an ironic commentary on a mundane activity, in this case, the day-to-day life of a very ordinary sea invertebrate, the Holothuria (sea caterpillar). However, in works composed in the same period as *Gnossienne No.2*, such as the *9 Dances Gothiques*, Satie creates mystical titles for each piano movement, reflecting upon his youthful affection for mysticism and medieval Catholicism. The second movement of this piece is titled *Dans laquelle les pères de la très véritable et très Sainte Eglise sont invoqués*. This style contrasts with Davis' ironic example.

We can recall from the previous chapter that mysticism was never easy to authenticate. Allais, the main protagonist of cabaret *blague*, often ‘mocked through pretended espousal’. However, the contextual evidence for *le recherché* in *Gnossienne No.2* is significant. Satie’s participation in exclusive symbolist sects, at a time when the cabaret was ‘tempered’ with *la blague*, suggests that for a brief period of time the French composer turned his back on satire and indulged in the idealistic atmosphere of the *fin de siècle*. Perhaps these compositions and the contemporaneous *église* aim to purify and distinguish the composer’s music from ‘civic society’. As his epistle stated, ‘we shall make it a refuge where the Catholic faith and the Arts [...] shall grow and prosper [...] expanding in all their purity’.²⁸¹ The contextual evidence for the performance directions of *Gnossienne No.2* suggests that these directions could be a set of ascetic instructions employed to cleanse the performer’s interpretation of the music, maintaining the purity (gnosis) of this piece.

²⁸¹ Satie quoted in Wilkins (1980), 36.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to emphasise the importance that mysticism has occupied in Erik Satie's life and early piano music from 1886 to 1893. The study began in chapter one by investigating the reception of the French composer in John Cage's influential post-war writings. We learnt that the reduction of subjectivity in Satie's music may remain in essence romantic, while Cage's music (a response to the first wave of modernism), de-humanises subjectivity and negates the aesthetic tradition. Furthermore, the chapter showed how Erik Satie's identity in Western art music and musicology had changed in the post-war period. Cage's statement in his article 'Satie Controversy', in which he proceeds to describe Satie's art as a medium synonymous with life, was misleading. As Nyman showed, Cage's interpretation of nature and life was rather more radical than Satie's own. The French composer, like the symbolist painter Puvis de Chavannes, was concerned more with employing symbols of nature rather than nature itself. Satie ascetically restrained the subjective element in his early music; he did not negate it.

In chapter two, the study continued by examining events that preceded the *fin de siècle* counterculture, analysing the influence of the rising bourgeoisie's rationalisation of France's artistic establishment. We learnt that concert music became a utility, having a duty to support and promote republicanism. Hence, we learnt also how republican ideologies were a platform for the accessibility of mediocre art in a commercial domain, and why aristocrats and aesthetes in contrast, followed the post-Wagnerian ascendancy, hoping to use spirituality in music to engage in an irrational otherworld.

In chapter three we discussed the inherent mysticism that drove Satie's *Ogives*, and the purity many artists tried to replicate from the medieval *l'esprit gaulois*. The chapter aimed to find some authenticity here. We came across the two terms, *la blague* and *le recherché*, and concluded that Satie would have been in contact with both ideas at this point in his life, shuttling between the cabaret and symbolist sects. We also learnt that mysticism was a contradictory term that did not always correlate with spirituality and religion. It could also be a form of resistance employed by satirists in order to confound rationalists. The chapter came to the conclusion that Satie had a social and political desire to escape the confinements of secular society, hence the 'backwards glancing' towards Hellenic as well as towards medieval society.

Finally, in chapter four, the thesis discovered the extent to which this mysticism became religious. While many scholars interpret the Rose-Croix period as Satie's chance to eccentrically lampoon society, this chapter aimed to look at another under represented aspect of Satie's youth, his inherent religiosity. By exploring the context of the Republic's secularisation of religious practice, the chapter showed how Erik Satie was beginning to take religion into his own hands, re-uniting artistic practice with esotericism and occultism. The analysis of the *Trois Gnossiennes* presents Satie as an exclusive symbolist concerned with subjective purity. The title *Gnossienne* and its connotations to Gnosis correlate with the activities of high art symbolist sects, which employed knowledge of the esoteric to gain a superior insight into modern culture. Along with the cryptic, 'apostolic' performance directions of *Gnossienne No.2*, these ideas may well have provided some form of symbolist truth for Satie, a method of responding to the dire situation of mass culture and the exhausted language of the romantic rhetoric. Perhaps Satie's *la blague* irony was less apparent in this period.

We can conclude from this study that Erik Satie's 'cultivation of minimalist aesthetics' was part of a broader based artistic movement in the *fin de siècle* period reacting to the mass exposure of French art music to the secular domain. By mystifying the expressive character of his early piano music, Satie conformed to the symbolist notion that art should require 'more effort to understand'.²⁸² However, the composer's ascetic stance, restraining his compositions from the overt expressivity of the romantic tradition, was also an early modernist attitude involving the liquidation of spontaneity. We can propose that the objective of this stance was to create an art music that was both intellectually challenging and also 'pure' in its ideals. In a similar scenario, Pasler notes that many 'Wagnerians', 'music lovers' and 'professionals' in the 1890s began to insist on music's ritualistic nature by listening in silence. Silence would distinguish such listeners from the 'natural spontaneity associated with ordinary people', the mass society. For these groups:

[Music] was not reducible either to the banal concerns of everyday life or the aspirations of the country, but construed as a superior kind of experience, the result of the mind in possession of itself. [...] Like religious practice, it depended on removing the self as the center of one's practice, and focussing on something absent, the composer's concerns. For those capable of doing this, listening based on reflection constituted an ascetic practice and implied a new morale.²⁸³

There seems to be no argument to suggest that Satie was routinely employing *la blague* to mock such an idea. Instead, by gradually abstracting the rhetorical 'impurities' from his early piano music, Satie was capable of using silence to emphasise the beauty of his music's underlying symbolism without drawing attention to the expressions of the modern self. Like the elitist groups mentioned above, the composer at first distinguished his music from mass

²⁸² Pasler (2009), 689.

²⁸³ Ibid, 686- 687.

society, pursuing perhaps what he believed to be a 'new morale', a simplicity that would add fresh perspective on the tradition of Western art music in the twentieth century.

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