Music, Place, and Mobility in Erik Satie's Paris

Jonathan Hicks, New College

DPhil Music, Trinity Term 2012

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Erik Satie (1866-1925) lived, worked, walked, and died in Paris. The key locations of his career – all within a single urban region – are well known and well researched. Yet he has often been presented as an eccentric individualist far removed from any social or geographical context. This thesis seeks to address – and redress – the decontextualisation of Satie's career by re-imagining his music and biography in terms of the places and mobilities of turn-of-the-century Paris. To that end, it draws on a range of documentary and fictional material, including journalistic and scholarly reception texts, illustrated musical scores, chanson collections, contemporary visual culture, and cinematic representations of the people, place(s), and period(s) in question. These diverse primary and secondary sources are discussed and interpreted via a set of on-going debates at the intersection of historical musicology, cultural history, and urban geography. Some of these debates can be traced through existing research on the geography of music. Others are more local to this project and derive their value from suggesting alternative approaches to familiar problems in the study of French musical modernism. The main aim throughout is to develop a better understanding of the relations existing between Satie's musical life, his compositional strategies, and the changing urban environment in which he plied his trade. Chapters One and Two focus on the working-class suburb of Arcueil and the 'bohemian' enclave of Montmartre. Chapters Three and Four are organised thematically around issues of musical humour and everyday life. By using the particular example of Satie's Paris, the thesis proposes that more general avenues of enquiry are opened up into music and the city, thus demonstrating the potential benefits of incorporating the urban-geographic imagination into historical musicology more broadly, and bringing musicological thinking to bear on inter-disciplinary discussions about space, place, and mobility.

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Preface

How We Learned to Expect the Exceptional

And what to do about it

In a recent collection of stories entitled *Classical Music's Strangest Concerts and Characters*, one man has more pages allotted to him than any other in the past five hundred years of music history.[1] Despite the sensational appeal of 'Masochism, Murder and Madrigals', it is not Carlo Gesualdo who stands out as the most extraordinary of classical music's many strange characters. Nor is it the 'Conductor Who Beat Himself to Death' (Jean-Baptiste Lully), or the virtuoso pianist Vladimir de Pachmann, whose gesticulations on the concert platform earned him the nick-name 'The Great Chopinzee'. Stranger still – at least according to the authors of this light-hearted book – was 'The Man of a Hundred Umbrellas: Erik Satie (1866-1925)'. One can imagine it took some time to decide on a title for the chapter on Satie, since he could equally have been introduced, with only minimal exaggeration, as 'The Man of a Hundred White Handkerchiefs',[2] or 'The Man of a Dozen Corduroy Suits',[3] or even 'The Man Who Composed Music for Cleopatra while Lying under an Obelisk during an Air Raid in the

[1] Brian Levison and Frances Farrer, *Classical Music's Strangest Concerts and Characters: Extraordinary but True Stories of Harmony and Discord* (London: Anova Books, 2007), 87-92.

[2] According to Madeleine Milhaud, when she took Satie his laundry on his sick bed, he 'blew up because there were only ninety-eight handkerchiefs when it seemed he had given ninety-nine or a hundred to the laundry'. Quoted in translation in Robert Orledge, *Satie Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 213. Elsewhere, Satie's 'scores of clean handkerchiefs' and more general 'acquisitive streak' have been presented as an index of his oddity. See Piers Letcher, *Eccentric France* (Chalfont St Peter: Bradt, 2003), 129.

[3] Darius Milhaud's description of Satie's apartment as he found it after his friend's death records 'a half-empty wardrobe in which there were a dozen old-fashioned corduroy suits'. Quoted in translation in Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, 214-215.

First World War'.[4] Indeed, for anyone wishing to cast Satie among the oddest of classical music's odd-ones-out, there is no shortage of anecdotal and archival material on which to draw: from a youthful bout of bronchitis deliberately brought on to escape military service,[5] to his dying words – 'Ah, the cows'[6] – there is scarcely a passage in Satie's life, or a page of his music, that does not come handed down to us complete with a curious vignette or quirky *bon mot.*

The fact that much of the 'evidence' for Satie's eccentricity has been embellished over the years, or was apocryphal in the first instance, hardly seems to lessen its appeal. Take the example of his supposed last words: according to Mary E. Davis, it was Henri Sauguet who remembered Satie uttering the phrase 'Ah, the cows'.[7] But Sauguet himself stated in 1945 that he was not present at the time of Satie's death, which inevitably casts doubt on his account.[8] There is also a question mark over the translation from the original French (which Davis does not include or reference) since 'Ah, la vache!'(singular) is a colloquial expression indicating surprise, roughly equivalent to 'gosh!' or 'well I never!', and has no literal connection with cows. Nonetheless, if the odd cap fits, Satie might as well have worn it. Since it is entirely in keeping with the popular impression of this musician that he would have been playing word games until the bitter end, it is tempting to give the bovine phrase the benefit of

[4] The obelisk incident at the place de la Concorde on 13 March 1918 is discussed in Blaise Cendrars and Michel Manoll, *Blaise Cendrars vous parle . . .* (Paris: Denoël, 1952), 209-210. The relevant passage is quoted in translation – with an attempted reconstruction of Satie's 'little march' for Cleopatra – in Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17-18.
[5] The 'drastic steps' Satie took to escape the 33e Régiment d'infanterie in Arras were described by his first biographer. See Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie* (Paris: Rieder, 1932), 13, available in English as Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie,* trans. Elena L. French and David S. French (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969). For a translation of only the Arras incident, see Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, 9.
[6] Satie's last words, as reported by Henri Sauguet, are quoted in Mary E. Davis, *Erik Satie* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 146.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See Henri Sauguet, 'Vive Satie!', *La Bataille* (15 July 1945), 4.

the doubt. Certainly, if one did look for the *vaches* to which Satie may have been alluding, there are plenty of options available: in 1896 and 1897 there were street processions in Montmartre – where Satie was living at the time – that went under the banner of *La Promenade de la Vache enragée* (Mad Cow Parade) or *Le Vachalcade* for short; [9] we also know that Satie arranged a song entitled 'Cette Bonne Vieille Vache' (This Good Old Cow, 1897) when working with the cabaret performer Vincent Hyspa;[10] later in his career, Satie wrote 'vivache' in place of *vivace* as a performance instruction in the final movement of his *Sonatine bureaucratique* (Bureaucratic Sonatina, 1917); and there was even a junction close to Satie's home in Arcueil known as La Vache-Noire (Black Cow), which he would have passed on a daily basis on his commute in and out of the city centre.[11]

None of the potential points of reference given above proves what Satie did or did not say on his deathbed, but collectively they demonstrate the extent to which the myth of Satie's eccentricity is self-perpetuating. Regardless of the verifiability of the many distinctive stories, images and quotations at our disposal, their continued circulation and proliferation ensures that Satie's character and compositions are now habitually described (and, in the process, marginalised) by emphasising their difference from implied social and aesthetic norms. To put it crudely, anyone who knows anything

[9] For an introduction to *Le Vachalcade*, see Steven Huebner, 'Between Anarchism and the Box Office: Gustave Charpentier's "Louise"', *19th-Century Music* 19/2 (1995), 152-155. A more extensive bibliography is given in David M. Pomfret, '"A Muse for the Masses": Gender, Age, and Nation in France, Fin de Siècle', *The American Historical Review* 109/5 (2004), http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.5/pomfret.html (accessed 26 July 2012), note 9.

[10] Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 420 note 10.

[11] As I will discuss at length in chapter 1, Satie moved to the southern Parisian suburb of Arcueil in 1898. The name Vache-Noire remains to this day in the form of a roundabout and *centre commercial* just outside the Boulevard Périphérique (the Paris ring road).

about Satie knows that: a) he composed the *Gymnopédies* (1888), and b) he was a little odd. Yet the fact that Satie's alterity is so readily taken for granted also means that it can be easy to pass over and is rarely subject to the considered critical attention it deserves. Since this issue will be discussed at greater length in the introductory chapter to this thesis, it will suffice here to give just a few examples of the broader pattern: 'In the world of classical music', begins one online CD review, 'Erik Satie is an oddity'.[12] In case the point was not made clearly enough in the first instance, it is soon repeated not once ('[Satie wrote] odd little works with odd little names'), but twice ('this odd little man with his odd little pieces'). Generally speaking, statements as blatant as these are only to be found outside the peer-reviewed literature, but similar claims are also made in academic publications, albeit in a more subtle and qualified manner. The dust jacket of the first collection of Satie's writings to appear in English, for example, introduces its contents and their author as follows:

> Composer . . . eccentric . . . mystic . . . Father of Dada . . . precursor of modern satire . . . madman! . . . these are all descriptions that have been applied to Satie. But as well as being one of the most individual musicians to span the transition from nineteenth-century French romanticism to twentieth-century French modernism, Satie was also something of a cult-figure.[13]

By reproducing a set of anonymous epithets under the guise of received opinion, then supplementing these opinions with a description of Satie as 'one of the most individual musicians [of his era]' who was 'also something of a cult figure', this hyperbole serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy; even before reaching the contents page, the reader is

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[12] 'Erik Satie – Gymnopedies [*sic*], Gnossiennes, etc.' [review of Aldo Ciccolini, *Erik Satie Piano Works*, 5 CDS (EMI, 2003)], *Good-Music-Guide.com*, http://www.good-music-guide.com/reviews/085_satie_gymnopedies.htm (accessed 26 July 2012).

[13] Erik Satie, *The Writings of Erik Satie*, trans. and ed. Nigel Wilkins (London: Eulenberg Books, 1980). The most comprehensive published collections of Satie's writings and drawings are Erik Satie, *Écrits*, ed. Ornella Volta, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1981) and Erik Satie, *Correspondance presque complète*, ed. Ornella Volta (Paris: Fayard/IMEC, 2000).

predisposed to think of anything pertaining to Satie (in this case his written output and selected drawings) as *ipso facto* out of the ordinary.

Indeed, the trope of Satie's extraordinariness, difference, individuality or idiosyncrasy – the same insinuation operates under different names and draws on various social, sexual, physiological, and aesthetic discourses – is now so well established that it has arguably become the default strategy for framing Satie's life and work.[14] One reason this strategy has proved so successful in regulating the interpretation of his music and biography is that it is not restricted to any single strand of reception, but is deployed relatively consistently across popular appraisals, critical commentaries, and musicological studies alike. Entries under 'Satie, Erik' in scholarly dictionaries and encyclopaedias, for example, use the word 'eccentric' with notable regularity.[15] Elsewhere, the publisher's blurb for one late-twentieth-century analytical monograph remarks that 'Satie remains one of the most bizarre figures in music history'.[16] Another example comes from CD liner notes by Ornella Volta, the curator of the Archives de la Fondation Erik Satie and author of numerous books on the musician:

[14] See, for example, Catherine H. M. Fung, 'Asperger's and Musical Creativity: The Case of Erik Satie', *Personality and Individual Differences* 46 (2009), 775-783. Or, for a discussion of Satie's 'repressed homosexual[ity]' in the context of his relationship with Debussy, see Marc Bredel, *Erik Satie* (Paris: Mazarine, 1982), 84-90. For a more historically-minded discussion of the musical construction of sexual difference, see Samuel N. Dorf, '"Étrange n'est-ce pas?": The Princesse Edmond de Polignac, Erik Satie's Socrate, and a Lesbian Aesthetic of Music?', *French Literature Series* 34/1 (2007), 87–99.

[15] See, for example, Robert Orledge, 'Satie, Erik', in *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40105 (accessed 27 April 2012) and 'Satie, Erik', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. Michael Kennedy, 2nd ed. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e8971 (accessed 27 April 2012).

[16] See the back cover of Orledge, *Satie the Composer*. The word 'bizarre' appears 12 times in the body of Orledge's text (see pp. 6, 9, 15, 17, 56, 120, 165, 190, 209, 231, 247, and 297).

'Over a century since he first set tongues wagging, Erik Satie remains an enigma'.[17] Each of the qualifiers and descriptors used here – eccentric, bizarre, enigmatic, etc. – brings to mind and reaffirms the conventional view of Satie as an exceptional figure in the history of twentieth-century European art music, not only in relation to the 'normal' rules of behaviour and composition, but also in terms of the mode of interpretation demanded (or, just as importantly, forestalled) by his well-known intermingling of musical, visual, literary, and sartorial creativity.

As one might expect, Satie himself was partly responsible for establishing what might be called an 'expectation of exception'. In Volta's words:

> [T]his half-Scottish Norman, who called himself 'the oddest musician of his time' and claimed affinity with the fantaisistes, 'all of whom are proper, right-thinking people', did much to add fuel to his own legend.[18]

We might also note how Alphonse Allais, a fellow Norman and one of Satie's 'bohemian' colleagues in fin-de-siècle Montmartre, referred to his friend as 'Ésoterik

[17] Volta's liner notes, translated by Roger Greaves, are included in Duo Campion-Vachon's *Satie: Complete Works for Four Hands* [CD] (Montreal: Anaklekta, 1995). For evidence of the historical longevity and international reach of the 'enigma' trope, see Everett Helm, 'Satie—Still a Fascinating Enigma', *Musical America* 78 (1958), 27-28.

[18] Volta, *Satie: Complete Works for Four Hands* [CD liner notes]. 'Fantaisistes' refers here to a group of humourists (discussed in chapters 2 and 3) closely associated with the cabarets and satirical reviews of Montmartre. For an introduction to *fantaisisme*, see Phillip Dennis Cate, 'The Spirit of Montmartre', in *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-garde, 1875-1905*, ed. Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), 1–94. Another important source of Satie's self-mythologising comes in the form of his *Mémoires d'un amnésique* (Memoirs of an Amnesiac), the first seven 'fragments' of which were serialised in the house journal of the Paris chapter of the Société international de musique (the *Revue musicale S.I.M.*) between April 1912 and February 1914. Largely because of the advent of war and the dis-establishment of the *Revue musicale S.I.M.*, there was a considerable gap before Satie continued his memoirs with the unpublished 'Un Simple Question' c.1920 and 'Recoins de ma vie' (Odd corners of my life) published in *Les Feuilles libres* in 1924. All of the *Mémoires* are reprinted with full bibliography in Satie, *Écrits*, 19-27.

Satie', thus adding yet more fuel to the same eccentric legend.[19] Even Olga Satie, Erik's younger sister, has been quoted as saying '[it] doesn't seem that he was ever perfectly normal'.[20] But these well-documented tactics of self-othering by Satie and associates do not, in and of themselves, account for the manner in which scholars and commentators continue to treat our subject as a special case – 'le cas Satie' in Alfred Cortot's memorable formulation.[21] Rather, Satie's enduring reputation for personal and professional weirdness is, to a considerable degree, a product of critical discourse. That is not to say that no-one who crossed paths with the 'real' Satie in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris would have considered him or his music in any way unusual, but it is to say that the question of Satie's apparent otherness engages much wider and more important issues than the personal characteristics of one dead, white Frenchman.

For example, Satie's association with a left-leaning suburb, and his membership of the so-called Soviet d'Arcueil, raise questions about class politics and the spatialisation of social inequalities, while his links with the *cabarets artistiques* of Montmartre encourage us to think about the construction and inter-relation of local,

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[19] See Alphonse Allais, *Œuvres anthumes*, ed. François Caradec, 3 vols. (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1964-7), 1/436. Satie described two of his own fin-de-siècle works as 'drames ésotériques': his two preludes for Henri Mazel's play *Le Nazaréen* (The Man from Nazareth, 1892), and his incidental music for Jules Bois's *La Porte héroïque du ciel* (Heroic Gate of the Sky, 1894). See Ornella Volta, *Erik Satie: d'Ésoterik Satie à Satierik* (Paris: Seghers, 1979).

[20] Simon John, 'The Composer as Clown', *The New Leader* (November 2003), http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-112411549.html (accessed 17 August 2012).

[21] Alfred Cortot, 'Le Cas Erik Satie', *La Revue musicale* (April-May 1938), 248-272. Within the decade, Cortot's phrase had been taken up by a Francophile American who would go on to write the first English-language biography of Satie: see Rollo H. Myers, 'The Strange Case of Erik Satie', *The Musical Times* 86 (1945), 201-203 and Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948). For an extended discussion of the after-life of Cortot's phrase, and a plea to look beyond Satie's personal eccentricity to the influential music he produced, see Karin Sandberg-Brennan, *Contemporary Criticism and 'Le Cas Satie'*, MA thesis (University of British Columbia, 1983).

national, and cosmopolitan identities.[22] By the same token, Satie's musical humour can lead us to consider the use of pianistic performance to control or 'humanise' a potentially alienating urban environment, and his repetitive compositions invite commentary on the similarities amongst economic, biological, and cinematic schemes of metropolitan representation. It is precisely these wider cultural and political issues that the present study seeks to address in the course of investigating how the city of Paris has figured in accounts of Satie's biographical and musical difference.[23] On the one hand, this means addressing how notions of personal otherness have been formulated and elaborated by recourse to the complex of places, boundaries, and mobilities that constitute the urban environment in which Satie lived and with which he remains imaginatively entangled. On the other, it requires a re-thinking of some of the longest-running themes in the critical reception of Satie's work (namely his problematic sense of humour and the trope of the urban everyday) in light of the cultural geography of Third Republic Paris and a more abstract sense of the French Imperial capital as a privileged locus of accumulation, exchange, and perpetual circulation.

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[22] Satie had been a supporter of the centrist Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste up until 1914 when the assassination of the antimilitarist socialist Jean Jaurès prompted him to join the Section française de l'internationale ouvrière (SFIO) (French Section of the Workers' International), which Jaurès had led prior to his death. When the Parti communiste français was formed in 1920 as a breakaway from the SFIO, Satie was quick to join the new organisation. He made reference in an unpublished notebook from around this period to his 'chers amis communistes' (dear communist friends) in Arcueil and stated clearly, 'je fais partie du "Soviet d'Arcueil"' (I am a member of the 'Arcueil Soviet'). See *Fonds Erik Satie* MS 9670 (Paris: Département de la musique, Bibliothèque nationale de France, n.d.), 15. For more on this notebook and Satie's 'apprentissage politique' (political apprenticeship) in the Parisian suburbs, see Ornella Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie* (Arcueil: Editions Macadam & Cie, 1999), 68-73. For further corroboration of Satie's membership of the Soviet d'Arcueil, see Henri Sauguet, 'Erik Satie', *Le Courrier musical de France* 52/4 (1975), 129. Satie's 'creative politics' are also discussed in Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 194-204.

[23] The four issues mentioned above correspond to the four chapters summarised at the end of this preface.

As the reader will no doubt have already deduced, one of the central aims of this thesis is to argue against the essentialising or fetishising of Satie's alterity by insisting that his status as an exception in music-historical narratives is not given, but made. After all, if Satie's eccentricity concerned nothing or no-one beyond himself, his story would scarcely be worth re-telling. While this constructionist approach is, in itself, nothing new, my modest ambition for the present study is to contribute to the existing anti-essentialist and contextual literature on Satie and his music by focussing on the particular significance of place and mobility to the character of his creative practice and subsequent responses to it. These urban and spatial questions have not been entirely absent from earlier scholarship on French musical modernism at the turn of the twentieth century; on the contrary, their implicit presence is one of the reasons for drawing attention to them here. However, the role of the city in the construction of musicological narratives and the shaping of critical interpretations has only recently begun to receive the same level of attention as other contextual aspects of historical music-making, such as political affiliation, institutional structures or creative exchanges between artists working in different media. By focussing on the complex relations between modernist music and the modern metropolis – and by emphasising the importance of movement to the production of places in the city – this study of Satie's Paris is able to ask new questions of broad relevance about the nature of urban experience and the production of musical difference.

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The Introduction begins by outlining just some of the institutional, commemorative, and imaginative aspects of Satie's Paris (or the 'Satie-Paris complex' as I also refer to it)

that will feature in the course of this thesis. It then goes on to situate the current project in relation to both the well-established pattern of placing Satie out of context and more recent attempts to study his music in relation to particular professional networks and urban milieux. What distinguishes the present study from existing contextual accounts is the mobilised sense of place I bring to the study of Satie's Paris. Rather than conceptualising the environment in which Satie worked as a fixed assemblage of objects, locations, and rooted identities, I propose that the modern capital(ist) city is best understood in terms of process, practice, circulation, and flow. As well as providing a critique of conventional notions of cultural context, these dynamic categories open new lines of enquiry into the performance of music in the city and the representation of the city in music.

Chapter 1 takes up the theme of music, place, and mobility by offering close readings of biographical texts dealing with Satie's time in different parts of Paris. Since he was active in a number of areas of the city, Satie's biographers have inevitably been drawn into discussions of the nature and limits of the Parisian region. The writing of his musical life thus emerges as one site among many for the construction of a specifically French 'suburban imaginary'. What is more, I argue that Satie's association with the working-class *banlieue* of Arcueil has been used to underwrite the critical interpretation of his music in hitherto under-acknowledged ways. Though the general notion of an interpenetration of urban geography and composer biography is hardly unique to Satie, the particular importance of suburban sites in the writing of his musical life provides an opportunity to reflect on a domain of Parisian social and cultural life that has rarely received focussed attention within historical musicology.

If chapter 1 is an attempt to map Satie's career as a whole (and to address the implicit significance of mapping to the project of Satie biography) then chapter 2 is

focussed on one uniquely famous place and period: fin-de-siècle Montmartre. Specifically, it asks how the cabaret scene of northern Paris has been used to structure accounts of Satie's early career, and considers some of the issues that arise from contextualising musical practice in a set of localised *(mi)lieux* (communities/places). Windmills are a useful point of reference here because they provide a novel means of thinking afresh about Satie's long-standing association with a well-studied and apparently familiar cultural landscape. In particular, the differences between two of the era's most famous mills – the Moulin Rouge and the Moulin de la Galette – help to illustrate the internal divisions and external representations of the place-specific entertainment industry in which Satie played an important part.

After the first two chapters have drawn attention to the ways in which Satie scholarship has always already been bound up with issues of place and mobility, the final two chapters propose geographically-inflected readings of key works and issues in the recent Satie literature. Chapter 3 does this by considering the importance of intimacy in the performance of Satie's *Pièces humoristiques* (Humorous Pieces, 1912-1917). While recent research has shown the stylistic debt these pieces owe to Satie's earlier work with the parody singer Vincent Hyspa, I argue that the blurring of cultural boundaries this debt has been taken to imply was, in practice, strictly limited. The social and artistic stratification of performance venues remained a crucial feature of musical life in Satie's Paris. Moreover, the ways in which performance spaces inflected the meanings of parody texts opens a window onto the multiple forms of musical practice available in the modern city and the sorts of urban sociability on which they drew and depended.

Chapter 4 addresses the prominent and long-running trope of the everyday in Satie's music, texts, and collaborative productions. Once again, my aim is to

supplement existing discussions of Satie's creative engagement with urban life and quotidian experience by thinking through these issues in relation to place and mobility. In particular, the notion of circulation provides a means of bringing Satie's conspicuously static compositional strategy into the same conceptual field as the movements of the contemporary city. A number of Satie's instrumental pieces figure in this discussion, along with songs by Hyspa and the veteran *café-concert* star Paulus, and Futurist views on music published in Paris at the time. The first question asked is the obvious one: how did musicians attempt to realise modern urban life musically? Subsequently, the chapter discusses competing versions of 'the urban' in music, and considers how logics of musical representation related to material, social, and economic changes in contemporary Paris.

While the themes of my four chapters inevitably do not cover every facet of music, place, and mobility in Satie's Paris, they do map out some of the key patterns and tensions, while suggesting potential routes for future research. From the outset, I should make it clear that my conception of Satie's Paris is resolutely open-ended; even within the limited pages of this thesis, the various accretions of anecdotes and arguments will inevitably – indeed, deliberately – add yet more layers, links, and detours to the unfinished story of Satie and his city. This emerging state of complexity is neither a methodological inconvenience, nor an intellectual 'good' in its own right. It is merely the ground on which any study of this sort must be built. As the French cultural geographer Claire Guiu has observed: 'Sound and music interact with space and territory in a plural manner'.[24] The case of Satie's Paris is no exception.

[24] 'Faits sonore et musicaux interagissent avec l'espace et le territoire sur un mode pluriel'. Claire Guiu, 'Introduction [special issue: Géographies et Musiques: Quelles perspectives?]', *Géographie et Cultures* 59 (2006), 3.

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Introduction

In Search of Satie's Paris

Entanglement, isolation, and the musical-spatial imagination

In order to lay the foundations for the four chapters that follow, this introduction explains the rationale behind my deceptively simple assertion of a meaningful connection between the city of Paris and the subject of Satie. In part, this is a matter of acknowledging the many professional and institutional threads tying Satie and his œuvre to the cultural life of the French Imperial capital in the middle decades of the Third Republic. But it also means approaching what might be called the 'Satie-Paris complex' from a different perspective by considering how, for anyone writing in today's Anglophone or Francophone academy, a study of Satie is always already a study of the city for reasons that go beyond the demonstrable urban context of his biography and musical practice. A dual approach is important because it registers the extent to which this thesis is concerned with both the historical-geographical circumstances of Satie's musical career and the methodological or disciplinary questions to which his career has given rise. Crucially, the real-life Satie is not the only subject under investigation here, but also his discursive double. And this second, primarily textual Satie – who might be thought of as a distinctive constellation of musicological issues, ideological agendas, and narrative constructions – is as much bound up with the workings of Paris as his walking, talking, rent-paying namesake. Towards the end of this introduction I show how both lines of enquiry – the actual and the abstracted, the historical and the historiographical – can be made to converge on a critical engagement with notions of place and mobility. These twin terms – at times complementary, at times antagonistic – are a recurring theme in each of the individual

chapters and a conceptual compass for the thesis as a whole. Ultimately, it is through a focus on place and mobility that I seek to re-imagine Satie's Paris and to shed new light on his status as a music-historical exception. First, though, it is worth rehearsing some of the more intuitive, if ultimately less productive, arguments for a link between Satie and the city, if only to show the limitations of such under-theorised approaches and to pave the way for the arguments to come.

The Satie-Paris complex

Leaving aside two short excursions late in his career (to Brussels and Ghent in April 1922, and Monte Carlo in January 1924) Satie was resident in Paris for the entirety of his working life.[25] Even before his first paid employment as a pianist and arranger at the Chat Noir cabaret, Satie had studied at the Paris Conservatoire in the ninth arrondissement and was familiar with the 'bohemian' scene a little further up the hill in the eighteenth (better known as Montmartre).[26] Thanks to the many personal and professional connections he made during these formative years, most of the societies or associations with which he was subsequently involved had their origins and administrative infrastructure within the same few square miles.[27] Similarly, his music

[25] The first of these visits marked the Belgian premiere of *Socrate*, which had received its first public performance two years previously in Paris under the auspices of the Société nationale de musique. The occasion for the Monte Carlo trip was a performance of Gounod's *Le Médecin malgré lui* (The Mock Doctor, 1858) featuring Satie's newly-composed recitatives.

[26] Satie attended the Paris Conservatoire from 1879 until his military service in 1886-1887. On returning to Paris after his posting, he moved out of the family home into an apartment at 50 rue Condorcet in Montmartre, near to the already-famous Chat Noir cabaret.

[27] In addition to Satie's links with the *Société nationale de musique* – which patronised Parisian venues including the Salon (later 'Salle') Pleyel, the Salle Érard, and the sixteenth-century Church of Saint-Gervais – we might note that Satie's *Mémoires d'un amnésique* were published by the house journal of the Paris section of the Société

was for a long time only published by firms based in Paris, and almost all his premieres took place there.[28] Likewise, the majority of contemporary reviews of his works appeared in journals that had their offices and priorities firmly rooted in the nation's capital.[29]

If the 'Parisian-ness' of Satie's creative, commercial, and critical networks appears self-evident, then much the same can be said for the themes and content of many of his songs and instrumental pieces. When working with vocal performers in the *cabarets artistiques* of Montmartre, for example, it was common for Satie to sit at the piano accompanying verse after verse about the events and peculiarities of the contemporary metropolis: the 'joys' of the 1900 Exposition universelle and the disastrous trial run of a motorised omnibus were just two of the urban experiences he helped satirise in newly-composed or wittily-adapted strophic songs.[30] A number of years later, after Satie had ceased performing at cabaret venues, he composed a

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internationale de musique, and that Satie's compositions featured in the inaugural concert of the Paris-based Société musicale indépendante, which was formed in 1911 by Ravel (whom Satie first met at La Nouvelle Athènes cabaret in Montmartre).

[28] All Satie's music published in his lifetime was published in Paris, and all his works (save for *Le Médecin malgré lui*) were premiered in Parisian venues. Even among posthumous premieres, all except four were held in Paris. See Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 266-335.

[29] It is true that by the time of *Parade*, Satie's compositions were attracting the attention of critics well beyond Paris. At the time of his death, obituaries appeared in major British and American music journals as well as those based in Paris. However, the exposure that led to this international renown was made possible by reviews of Satie's works in Paris-based journals such as *Le Courrier musical* and *Le Guide du concert*.

[30] For 'L'Omnibus automobile' (1906), Satie set the words of the Montmartre *chansonnier* Vincent Hyspa to his own newly composed music. See Steven Moore Whiting, 'Erik Satie and Vincent Hyspa: Notes on a Collaboration', *Music & Letters* 77/1 (1996), 64–91. 'Les Joies de l'Exposition' (Joys of the Exhibition, 1900) was another of Hyspa's songs, but this time the words were set to the tune of 'C'est la fille à ma tante' (She's the Daughter of my Aunt) from Louis Varney and Fabrice Carré's operetta *La Femme de Narcisse* (Narcissus's Wife, 1891). We know that Satie performed 'Les Joies' with Hyspa because the tune is included in one of Satie's *cahiers de musique* now housed at Harvard's Houghton Library. See Steven Moore Whiting, 'Musical Parody and Two "Œuvres posthumes" of Erik Satie: The Rêverie du pauvre and the Petite Musique de clown triste', *Revue de musicologie* 81/2 (1995), 215-234.

sumptuously-illustrated album of piano miniatures dedicated to the hobbies and activities of the leisured classes around Paris.[31] Of the 20 *Sports et divertissements* (Sports and Amusements, 1914) depicted therein, it has to be said that few were the preserve of Paris alone: as the international nouns of 'Le Golf', 'Le Pique-nique', 'Le Water-chute', 'Le Flirt', and 'Le Tango perpetuel' imply, these activities could have been undertaken in many locations, while 'Le Bain de mer' (Sea Swimming) was obviously not possible in a land-locked city. Nevertheless, the overall impression of a fashionable set at rest and play was widely understood at the time to refer to the stylishly elite social grouping known as 'le Tout-Paris' (high society).[32] Significantly, Satie was not only an observer of this group, but also one of its representatives. As Mary E. Davis explains:

> In the June 1923 issue of French *Vogue*, an unusual portrait of an unlikely subject appears amid the fashion plates. Accompanying a story about the adventures of a fictional Parisian named Palmyre, the drawing is fashion illustrator Eduardo Benito's sketch of the 'good musician' Erik Satie, 'bearded and laughing like a faun'. The composer is just one of the characters in the larger tale of Palmyre's 'escapades in the world of artists', which is part of the magazine's feature series tracing the lives of six stylish young women in the French capital. Palmyre, in this instalment, dines with Raymond Radiguet, the 'author of stunning novels', then accompanies him to the fashionable club Le Bœuf sur le toit, 'where the jazz band is all the rage'. She rubs shoulders with the Bœuf's habitués, including Jean Cocteau, Francis Poulenc, Georges Auric, and Darius Milhaud, but the high point of the adventure is an encounter with Satie, 'simple and good like a child'. These outings, 'the dearest to Palmyre's heart', allow her to 'partake in the current taste of elegant Parisians for nightclubs'.[33]

In fact, large parts of Satie's work and reputation are inseparable from the themes and scenes of contemporary urban life: in addition to the examples given above, we might

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[31] See Mary E. Davis, 'Modernity à la Mode: Popular Culture and Avant-Gardism in Erik Satie's "Sports et divertissements"', *The Musical Quarterly* 83/3 (1999), 430–473.
[32] The phrase 'le Tout-Paris' dates from at least the seventeenth century, but gained widespread currency only in the nineteenth: see Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Vie élégante ou la formation du Tout-Paris, 1815-1848* (Paris: Fayard, 1990). For an account of Parisian musical culture that makes reference to both Satie's creative persona and le Tout-Paris, see Mary E Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[33] Davis, *Classic Chic*, 1.

note that shortly before he died he prepared a score to be played in synchrony with moving pictures, including footage of himself on the roof of the Théâtre des Champs Elysées (see fig. 1). Not only did this image place Satie (and his Dadaist colleague Francis Picabia) in front of a panoramic view of the expansive metropolis, but it also served to remind those watching the projection (i.e., the audience inside the theatre) that they too were situated within the same unfolding and enfolding urban landscape – a landscape which, then as now, was both immediately familiar and conspicuously (re)mediated.[34]



Figure 1. Still from René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924). Satie is on the left; Picabia is in the air.

In another example of the complex mediation of urban imagery and materiality that will become a feature of this study, Satie's historical presence in particular parts of

[34] *Entr'acte*'s breaking of the fourth wall (discussed further in chapter 4) was partly achieved by the cannon shown in figure 1, which appeared to fire directly at the audience.

Paris has been visibly and legibly memorialised in the decades since his death by plaques on two of his former apartments and a hotel where he stayed towards the end of his life.[35] Near to this last address is the Lycée Erik Satie, a secondary school named in his honour, which – coincidentally or otherwise – occupies a site along the route of his one-time commute in and out of the city centre.[36] Some distance south is the suburb of Arcueil, which Satie called home for most of his adult years. As I shall discuss at length in chapter 1, Satie's long-running association with the Parisian suburbs has proved problematic in the reception of his music and the ongoing negotiation of his socio-aesthetic identity. For now, we need only observe that, in addition to the aforementioned plaque, Arcueil has also given Satie's name to a *centre culturel* and a late-twentieth-century cul-de-sac.[37] Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the city, near to the Parc de la Villette, another rue Erik Satie lies within striking distance of both the modern-day conservatoire and the museum/concert/exhibition complex known as the Cité de la musique. Without pushing the point too far, one might suggest that the proximity of Erik Satie Street to one of the city's busiest and most visible centres for

[35] The first two plaques mark Satie's 'placard' (cupboard) at 6 rue Cortot in Montmartre and La Maison aux quatre cheminées (House with Four Chimneys) at 22 (now 34) rue Cauchy in Arcueil. The third plaque lists Satie among a number of artists and writers who once frequented the Hotel Istria in Montparnasse. For an exhaustive list of Satie's addresses, see 'Erik Satie' in Nigel Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 125-127.

[36] For details of the route of Satie's commute, and an account of how one young boy from Arcueil used to follow this route with his uncle as a treat, see Ornella Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie* (Arcueil: Editions Macadam & Cie, 1999), 33-37.

[37] Incidentally, the Arcueil cul-de-sac faces the one-time residence of the Marquis de Sade, who eventually ended up imprisoned in the nearby 'hôpital' at Bicêtre. Whether Satie knew about de Sade's home in Arcueil is unclear; if he did, it would invite new interpretations of an oft-reproduced drawing by Satie (from a letter to Jean Cocteau in 1917) with the caption 'Monsieur Sadi dans sa maison. Il songe' (Mr Sadi at home. He is dreaming). See Satie, *Écrits*, 219.

the creative and performing arts renders concrete his place in the musical imagination of the French political and cultural capital.[38]

As one would expect, the imaginative association between Satie and Paris has not only been played out in the streets of the city, but has also been elaborated over the years in many different ways across many different media. To take a fairly arbitrary sample from the archive of twenty-first-century cinema and video: there is a character named 'Satie' in Baz Luhrmann's 2001 film *Moulin Rouge!*, which is set, explicitly, in 'Paris, 1900'.[39] Along similar lines, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's 2001 film *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (released for Anglophone audiences as *Amélie*) – which is set on and around Montmartre and is suffused with imagery from the Parisian Belle Époque – features original compositions by Yann Tiersen, whose writing for piano has been compared to Satie's on more than one occasion.[40] Another recent Paris-based film, entitled simply *Paris* (2008), comes from the Paris-born director Cédric Klapisch, and is notable for including Satie's first *Gnossienne* (1893) in the soundtrack. One reviewer of the accompanying CD remarked that:

> [I]t absolutely captures the 'feel' of Paris in all its glory. Unlike many soundtrack albums this isn't just a repetition of several key theme tunes reworked to fit different scenes. It is, like Paris itself, a kaleidoscope of different things. . . . in this case superbly evocative & exciting music from Eric [*sic*] Satie through to reggae, Wilson Pickett and raw punk, with some exquisite electro-jazz on the way. And, if you know Paris, then this is the city

[38] Such geographical readings of identity are necessarily open-ended; the rue Erik Satie near to the Cité de la musique is also near to the avenue Jean Jaurès, the man whose assassination prompted Satie to join the left wing party of which Jaurès had been leader.
[39] As I explain in chapter 2, the setting is made clear in the prelude to the film, which follows an orchestral overture conducted by a figure who turns out to be a version of the 'Satie' character.
[40] One article states: 'For classical comparisons, you should look to Tiersen's countryman Erik Satie or the minimalist Michael Nyman'. See 'Yann Tiersen – French individualist', *www.mfiles.co.uk*, http://www.mfiles.co.uk/composers/Yann-Tiersen.htm (accessed 19 August 2012). Another website, described as 'The music lineage guide' lists Tiersen's influences as Satie, Chopin, Nyman, and Glass (in that order). See 'Yann Tiersen', *Inflooenz.com*, http://inflooenz.com/?artist=Yann+Tiersen&influencer=erik+satie (accessed 19 August 2012).

> captured in music: at times ecstatic, often deeply reflective, occasionally abrasive or lonely but, at all times, unforgettable.[41]

Finally, towards the budget end of the production spectrum, *YouTube* hosts a small sub-genre of montage videos combining one or more performances of compositions by Satie with archive or personal recordings of various landmarks and street scenes in Paris. One example, entitled 'films from the Paris metro', has footage from Ligne 2 running along the boulevard at the foot of Montmartre accompanied by Satie's *Nocturnes* (1919).[42] A second example, entitled 'Erik Satie: Paris', features the first *Gnossienne* as well as various scenes of open-air music and dancing, a range of gothic and Haussmannian architecture, and a prominent black cat (presumably a reference to the Chat Noir).[43] Among the comments under this video, 'perss2000' left the following remark: 'What an excellent montage of Paris set to Erik Satie . . . you really capture the essence of Paris with this video'.

Taken in isolation, none of the details given above constitutes a persuasive case for affixing the adjective 'Parisian' to Satie's musical identity. Yet taken as a whole this assemblage of biographical, professional, memorial, and intertextual associations does give the impression of a man whose life, work, and reception are, at the very least, significantly entangled in the sites and symbols of the city of Paris. This easy-to-detect yet hard-to-define entanglement is what I mean by the Satie-Paris complex – a notion that clearly does not aspire to name a single entity or simple relationship, but rather gestures towards a loose assemblage of partially-mapped issues and indefinite

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[41] nicjaytee, 'It's a soundtrack . . . but what a soundtrack . . . [review: *Paris Soundtrack CD* (2008)]', *www.amazon.com*, http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0012BT1CE/?tag=imdb-retail-20 (accessed 19 August 2012).
[42] See fromforests, 'films from the Paris metro', *YouTube.com*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49N4FrKpnpY&feature=plcp (accessed 19 August 2012).
[43] See GiorgioMontanaro, 'Erik Satie: Paris', *YouTube.com*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZASAKoYEpSI (accessed 19 August 2012).

identities. One way of conceptualising this imaginative and pluralist approach to the cultural geography of musical figures is to look to the rationale behind an inter-disciplinary collection of essays entitled *Parisian Fields*, edited by the English scholar of surrealist literature Michael Sheringham:

> To see Paris as a set of fields . . . is to put aside any attempt to pin down an elusive essence. The point is to dispel the illusion of an imaginary unity that threatens to immobilise perceptions of the city and instead to open less familiar sightlines, looking, for example, at how Paris is constructed in tourist guides, in the migrations of intellectual groups across its quartiers, in the tradition of urban wandering inherited and transmitted by the Surrealists or in the remappings of its topography effected by film-makers in the 1920s and '30s. . . . The point is not only to ward off the spectres of unity and totality, but in doing so to underline plurality.[44]

The present study could aptly be described as an attempt to 'open less familiar sightlines' onto Satie's biography, accomplishments, and legacy by plotting various routes across and around the 'fields' of the city in which he lived and with which he remains intimately associated. This sense of Satie's Paris as an ambiguous, dynamic, and open-ended set of relations represents a novel contribution to the discourse on this musician, but I do not pretend that it is an especially controversial or contentious one. Though Satie's multivalent Parisian-ness has rarely been addressed directly in the literature, this is largely because it is so easily taken for granted as a 'given' of his working life and creative achievements.[45] Indeed, one could be forgiven for thinking that describing Satie as a Parisian musician amounts to little more than labouring the banal and fixating on the obvious. However, my motivation for drawing attention to this

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[44] Michael Sheringham (ed.), *Parisian Fields* (London: Reaktion, 1996), 2. Not to be confused with the 'Parisian Fields' blog (http://parisianfields.wordpress.com/) written by Philippa Campsie and Norman Ball, which includes two posts mentioning Satie: 'The Photograph I Didn't Take' (29 April 2011) and 'Parisian Cats' (22 October 2010).

[45] Even in books directly addressing the places of Satie's career, Paris often remains in the background of the text. Robert Orledge dedicates a chapter to 'Why and Where Satie Composed' – see *Satie the Composer*, 8-20 – but 'Paris' (unlike 'Monte Carlo' or 'Brussels') is not listed in his index. 'Paris' is also absent from the index of Whiting's *Satie the Bohemian*.

tacit consensus in Satie scholarship is to suggest that it may be deceiving. Of the points mentioned so far – about centralised career networks, metropolitan subject matter, civic commemorations, and Paris-appropriate soundtracks – not one is unique to Satie. On the contrary, similar lists could be drawn up for a great many, if not the majority, of his composer contemporaries in Third Republic Paris. This raises an important question: given that the aim of this thesis is to arrive at a better understanding of the set of relations that constitute *Satie*'s Paris, what was – or, indeed, is – the significance of this city to the work and reception of other French musicians from the same period?

Claude Debussy, to take one obvious example, had just as strong a claim to Parisian residency as his friend and long-time dinner partner, Satie. In fact, Debussy's claim may have been the stronger because, unlike Satie, who was born in the Normandy town of Honfleur, Debussy entered the world, in 1862, in the west Parisian suburb of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. He then moved with his family to a more central location in the same city before escaping to the south coast for five years around the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Shortly afterwards, in 1872, Debussy returned to Paris to attend the same conservatoire as Satie, and despite a much greater degree of travelling throughout his career, never settled anywhere outside the capital, which is where he died in 1918.[46] Needless to say, Debussy was also professionally reliant – if perhaps a little less exclusively so than Satie – on Paris-centred publishers, performers, audiences, and critics.

When it comes to compositions *about* Paris, it is hard to know where to begin. It goes without saying that the cabarets, *café-concerts* and music-halls of Satie's day were replete with place-specific references to various parts of the city – both in the words of many of the songs performed and in the accents and personas of a number of the star

[46] For more details, see 'Claude Debussy' in Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer*, 51-55.

turns.[47] Given the fin-de-siècle vogue for operatic realism, the lyric stage at this time was another prime site for the enactment of historical and contemporary scenes from Parisian life: one need only think of Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème* (Paris premiere 1898) or Gustave Charpentier's *Louise* (world premiere in Paris 1900) to substantiate this point.[48] Looking further afield, Carnegie Hall was the venue, only three years after Satie's death, of the premiere of George Gershwin's 'rhapsodic ballet' *An American in Paris*, which had been written on location during Gershwin's stay in Paris in the mid-1920s. As the composer recorded in an interview prior to the first performance: 'My purpose here is to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere'.[49] Quite clearly, Satie was not the only creative worker in early-twentieth-century Paris to be inspired or intrigued by the surrounding – and at times overwhelming – urban environment.[50]

Nor is Satie the only musical figure from that era to be remembered in Paris today: turn right off rue Erik Satie in Arcueil and one quickly finds rue Arthur Honegger; carry straight on to arrive at rue Darius Milhaud; bear to the left for rue

[47] For a discussion of the history and classification of Parisian entertainment venues, see part 1 of Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 7-58. For more on the place-specific songs of cabaret performers such as Aristide Bruant (whose distinctive accent is registered in the phonetic spelling of Montmartre in his *chanson réaliste* 'À Montmertre'), see Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 196-218.

[48] The action in *La bohème* takes place mostly in the Quartier Latin, where Henri Murger had set his *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Scenes of Bohemian Life, 1851). However, Act III depicts the contrasting environment around a toll gate known as the La barrière d'Enfer (Hell's Gate), which was on Satie's real-life commute in and out of the city. *Louise* is set mainly in Montmartre, although other parts of Paris also figure in the opera.

[49] Hyman Sandow, 'Gershwin Presents a New Work', *Musical America* 48/18 (18 August 1928), 5.

[50] For a discussion of how Parisian artists and intellectuals reacted to the changing experience of the city, see James G. Mansell, *Sounds Modern: Perils and Possibilities in the Audible Metropolis, 1889-1939*, PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 2008).

Germaine Tailleferre. The other rue Erik Satie, near to the Cité de la musique, is equally near to an allée Darius Milhaud and a rue Georges Auric. I might add that in the course of researching this thesis I had the pleasure of staying at an international centre for students in Paris named after yet another composer from the period: Maurice Ravel. Predictably enough, the centre is situated near to an avenue that also bears Ravel's name.[51] Of course, many more famous – and more monumental – concretisations of musical status can be found elsewhere in the city: there are various busts in prestigious cemeteries (my favourite is Georges Bizet's in Père-Lachaise) as well as a museum dedicated to 'La Vie romantique', which is among other things a shrine to Pauline Viardot, Frédéric Chopin, and Charles Gounod.[52] And one could hardly overlook the diamond of boulevards comprising rues Scribe, Auber, Halévy, and Gluck that encloses the Palais Garnier – a building which, lest we forget, not only took for itself the name of a particular musical-dramatic genre, but subsequently gave that name to one of the most celebrated (and critiqued) areas of urban real estate anywhere in the nineteenth-century world.[53]

One final observation worth recording here is that for every filmic representation of Paris accompanied by a *morceau* of Satie's pieces for piano, there are just as many scenes of the city accompanied by the work of other contemporary composers, and many more still by tunes, songs, and early recordings from the dance-

[51] The *Centre International de Séjour à Paris Maurice Ravel* is situated in the east of the city, and boasts among other facilities an excellent view of the Périphérique.
[52] For comprehensive listings of dead musicians' whereabouts, and museums in their honour, see Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer*.
[53] The classic discussion of opera's urban contexts is Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). For a perspective from outside music studies, see Penelope Woolf, 'Symbols of the Second Empire: Cultural Politics and the Paris Opera House', in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 214-235.

hall and chanson traditions. Yann Tiersen's score for *Amélie*, for example, may occasionally be compared to Satie's piano music, but it could just as well be likened to the *bal musette* tradition that developed in Paris towards the end of the nineteenth century.[54] And Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!*, despite featuring a character named Satie, does not use any of Satie's music. At the risk of stating the obvious, Satie's music does not have – and never has had – a monopoly on the effective and affective evocation of late-nineteenth or early-twentieth-century Paris. Many pieces by figures as diverse as Gabriel Fauré and Édith Piaf could feasibly do the job just as well, not to mention any number of anonymous quadrilles or accordion solos (prominent examples of which are featured in *Moulin Rouge!* and *Amélie* respectively). Bearing this in mind, one may well be justified in describing Satie as a Parisian musician – or, more accurately, a musician closely associated with the material and fictional realities of a complex of Parisian fields – but in the context of this period of French musical culture that description may prove to be so ubiquitous that it is bordering on meaningless. Indeed, this observation goes some way to explaining why there have been numerous studies of Satie in relation to specific parts of Paris, but none in relation to Paris as a 'whole'.[55]

With the notable exception of a handful of composers whose reputations rested on a self-styled resistance to the dominance of the nation's capital, almost any major figure in the French musical life of Satie's time still known to us today is likely to have

[54] For more on the *bal musette* tradition, see Henri Joannis-Deberne, *Danser en société: Bals et danses d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Bonneton, 1999) and Kali Argyriadis and Sara Le Menestrel, *Vivre la guinguette* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003).
[55] See, for example, Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*; Michel Robillard, *Erik Satie d'Arcueil* (Arcueil: M. Robillard, 1990); *Erik Satie à Montmartre* [exhibition catalogue] (Montmartre: Musée de Montmartre, 1982); and *Satie dans les salons* [exhibition catalogue] (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Fondation Erik Satie, 1985). Paris as a 'whole' is in scare quotes here because, as Bruno Latour has pointed out, it is not possible to know Paris in its entirety, no matter how many elevated panoramas may claim otherwise. See Bruno Latour, 'Cheminer no.1', in *Paris: Ville Invisible*, www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/index.html (accessed 12 February 2012).

spent a significant portion of his or career in and around Paris.[56] In turn, the reception of their work is no doubt just as entangled in the sites and symbols of the city of light as Satie's has been. This pattern is no coincidence, but is symptomatic of what might be called the 'centripetal tendency' in modern cultural life – a tendency that was more than usually pronounced in Third Republic France, where politics, linguistics, education, and demographics all converged on a hegemonic metropolis at the head of an apparatus of nationhood increasingly focussed on tighter unification.[57] Nowhere was this hegemony more evident than in the fields of music and the performing arts, which – in an era before the dominance of broadcast media – relied for success on the publicity generated by attention-grabbing live events and the critical mass of organisational and artistic forces often found only in Paris.[58]

In light of all these caveats and counter-arguments, it seems pertinent to ask what now remains of the case for Satie's Parisian-ness, as well as the larger Satie-Paris complex that was supposed to make up the rationale for this thesis. In logical terms, one might say that the connections between Satie and the city considered thus far should be

[56] Of course, this does not only apply to native French musicians, but also to the many musicians who came to Paris on account of its international and cosmopolitan reputation. For a discussion of one of those musicians associated with a place *other* than Paris, see Katharine Ellis, '*Mireille's* Homecoming*?* Gounod, Mistral, and the Midi', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65/2 (2012), 463-509. Incidentally, Satie parodied an aria from *Mireille* in 'Le Chapelier' (Mad Hatter), one of his *Trois Mélodies* of 1916.

[57] The best-known account of French centralisation in the decades preceding the First World War is Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). Despite the fact that more recent scholarship has questioned Weber's potentially reductive narrative – see, for example, James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) – the centripetal tendency remains significant for the study of musical culture. See, for example, Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[58] For an account of how central government policy affected French musical life in Satie's Paris, see Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music As Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

classed as necessary but insufficient conditions for validating the present study: necessary because, if Satie had never lived in Paris, had not engaged creatively with the tropes of contemporary urban life, and had nowhere been remembered in any sense as a Parisian musician, then it would be absurd to insist on the centrality of this city to an interpretation of his work. (For comparison, one could scarcely imagine a thesis on Satie the Peruvian, say, or Satie the Mancunian.) Yet the links outlined above are also insufficient because they fall short of providing a fine-grained account of the relations between Paris and Satie over and above the relations between Paris and the many other contemporary French musicians equally associated with that city. Why not Debussy's Paris, or Tailleferre's Paris or the Paris of Piaf? In order to characterise Satie's Paris more precisely – and to explain why Satie invites urban speculation in a manner that marks him out from many, though of course not all, of his musical and Parisian contemporaries – it is necessary to take the counter-intuitive step of suspending any assumption of Satie's Parisian-ness (whatever that may mean) and imagining instead a scenario in which he is placed dramatically *out of context*. As it happens, this is not so very hard to do.

The enduring trope of Satie's (e)strangeness

Look for Erik Satie in Yifan Hu's 'Landscape of Music' (see figs. 2 and 3) and you find him alone, conspicuously so. Produced in 2010 under the auspices of the Information Visualisation Department at AT&T laboratories, Hu's interactive online tool is one of a series of similar projects devoted to movies, books, TV shows, etc., and is designed to 'show relations between musicians/groups' by displaying those relations in the form of

a multi-layered Google Maps-style image.[59] Although Hu's map is a marginal document in the history of Satie reception, it has nevertheless received a respectable amount of digital attention, with 160 Tweets and 3,165 Facebook 'Likes' at the last count. As with a conventional online map, users are able to navigate within and across 'countries', as well as zoom in and out along a six-point incremental scale: at the close-up level, each of the hundreds of names of musicians or groups is accompanied by a small portrait that clicks through to a profile page on the web-based radio service LastFM; viewed from the point of furthest remove, only 32 names are shown – some in relatively large font, others relatively small – and the whole continent appears surrounded by a vast expanse of empty blue space.[60]

[59] Yifan Hu, 'The Landscape of Music', *research.att.com*, http://www2.research.att.com/~yifanhu/MusicMap/index.html (accessed 19 August 2012). Hu is not alone in building on the commonplace metaphor of a cultural or musical landscape. On 24 July 2012, BBC Radio 2 broadcast a programme presented by Paloma Faith entitled 'A Musical Map of East London', http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01knqwg (accessed 19 August 2012). See also 'Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music', which displays distinct genre names distributed across a coloured background reminiscent of a map, http://techno.org/electronic-music-guide/ (accessed 19 August 2012).

[60] Ordinarily, the typographic distinction between large and small names on a map would be used to signify the relative size and/or importance of places, and it seems to serve a similar purpose here: all the big name acts on the mainland – Frank Sinatra, The Beatles, Madonna, Eminem, et al – stand out as large-font places (whether that implies countries, regions or major cities); by contrast, the names of lesser-known musicians/groups – e.g., Astrud Gilberto, Richard Cheese, Anathema, and Alexisonfire – are shown in smaller font, as if to suggest they hold only local or at best provincial significance.

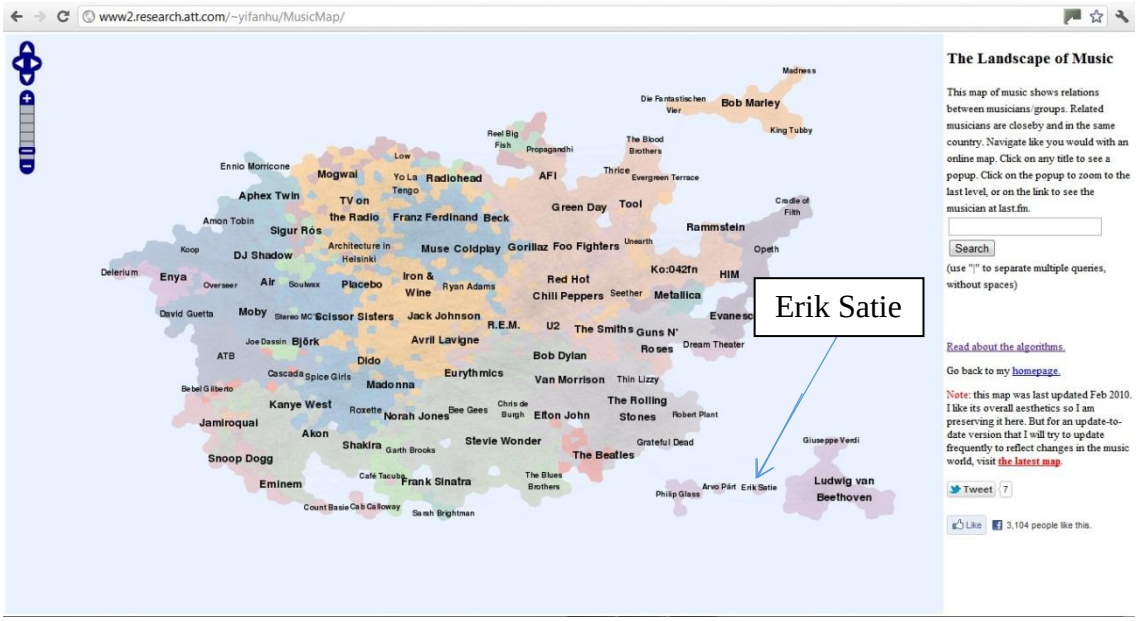


Figure 2. Satie's place in Yifan Hu's 'Landscape of Music' (2010).

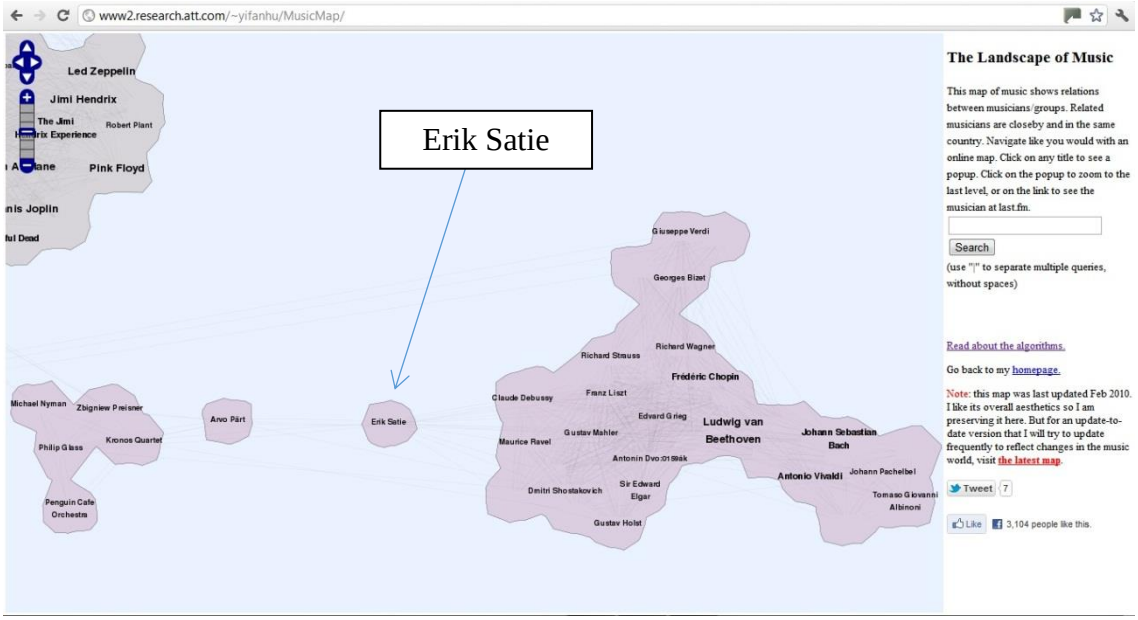


Figure 3. Close up of Satie's place in Hu's 'Landscape of Music'.

To say that Hu's map is more concerned with establishing relations between different musicians than it is with establishing relations between musicians and the

wider 'non-musical' world would be an understatement. Every node in this network is linked to others by an all-encompassing web of thin blue lines, each of which implies an un-specified sort of affinity (in sales parlance, 'if you like this you'll like that'). However, there is no evidence of anything around or beneath this web save for the shaded background of what we are invited to believe is a map. In this respect, Hu's virtual landscape is arguably more celestial than it is terrestrial since the space between musicians is, as far as one can tell, entirely vacant. There is certainly no 'Paris' to be found – never mind any detailed picture of the suburban or urban-marginal areas in which Satie spent so much of his time and with which he remains frequently associated. Of course, the visible absence of any real-world context raises the familiar spectre of a purely musical universe, and opens Hu's project to the charge of dressing up a nineteenth-century idea of aesthetic autonomy in the twenty-first-century clothing of data visualisation.[61] Certainly, it would be difficult to defend Hu against such a charge – just as it would be difficult to defend the North American and Anglophone bias of the musicians his Landscape includes.[62] But without wishing to overlook or apologise for these aspects of Hu's map, I suggest they are so transparent that they hardly merit further comment. Instead of criticising Hu for failing to engage sufficiently with music's complex historical, social, and cultural contexts – or worse, for over-writing contested communities of place with abstracted communities of taste – it is more productive for the purposes of the present study to use his distinctive cartographic

[61] In his well-known critique of the notion of 'the music itself', Richard Taruskin used the metaphor of a *cordon sanitaire* to describe the strategies of those who would resist the social and cultural contextualisation of music. See Richard Taruskin, 'A Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rite of Spring, the Tradition of the New, and "The Music Itself"', *Modernism/Modernity* 2/1 (1995), 6 and 8. Ironically, it is precisely by appropriating the worldly iconography of mapping that Hu is able to sanitise his musical landscape.

[62] In fairness to Hu, his data-set is taken from the playlists and preferences of thousands of *LastFM* users, so the inclusions and exclusions relate to more than his personal decisions.

fantasy as an opportunity to reflect on the various uses of decontextualisation and disemplacement in the on-going reception of Satie's life, work, and creative identity.

In particular, Hu's Landscape instantiates a radically different formulation of Satie's artistic status and situatedness to the description I have given so far in this introduction of a musician inextricably entangled in the fictional and institutional complexities of the city of Paris. Far from locating Satie at the heart of a globally-significant cultural hub – where his place-specific identity was shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by almost all well-known French musicians from the time – Hu's totalising vision of musical inter-relatedness sees Satie cast adrift on an island off an island off an island off the mainland. This eye-catching illustration of isolation is, in fact, only one relatively extreme example of a common strategy in Satie reception – a strategy generalised in my preface as the 'expectation of exception'. Hu's marooning of Satie in the Landscape of Music is thus remarkable only to the extent that it makes visible – and therefore available for critique – an assumption of eccentricity that might otherwise pass un-noticed. Since the enduring trope of Satie's difference or uniqueness has an important part to play in much of what I shall have to say about the relations amongst music, place, and mobility in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Paris, it will be helpful to look a little more closely at the manner in which Hu maps Satie's strangeness (or estranged-ness) in his Landscape of Music.

On the face of it, the methods used in Hu's Landscape are straight-forward: 'Related musicians are close by and in the same country', whereas unrelated or less-related musicians are, conversely, further apart and not in the same country.[63] To take one of the stand-out examples: the 'east coast' of Hu's map is dominated at the wide-angle perspective by the names of classic rock and metal bands including Led Zeppelin,

[63] Yifan Hu, 'The Landscape of Music'.

Deep Purple, Metallica, and Rammstein. Few would argue against the suggestion that these bands exhibit a relatively high degree of generic similarity or 'family resemblance', and it is certainly easier to suggest affinities amongst this quartet than it is between, say, Metallica and Frank Sinatra (who is located on the south coast) or Metallica and Enya (on the west). In the case of Satie, the three names nearest to his own when looking at the closest-up version of the map (i.e., one increment closer than fig. 3) are those of Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Igor Stravinsky, none of whom would be out of place in any standard musicological survey of Satie and his Parisian world. Where things get more complicated, however, is in the interpretation of Hu's plotting of particular musical families around the continent as a whole. Given that neither map-making nor map-reading is a simple activity, this is only to be expected: rather like musical notation and performers' decision-making, cartography and navigation have long and complex histories as well as messy and changeable patterns of everyday use. As a result, when people look at maps – whether maps of the physical world or maps of abstract stylistic associations – they see far more than quantifiable proximity and distance (or in the case of Hu's project, similarity and difference).[64]

Take the example of the aforementioned metal bands: supposing we can agree that Metallica, Rammstein, and the rest share something meaningful in common, why should their relatively 'heavy' guitar-driven music reside on the east coast of the continent as opposed to the west coast or the south or, for that matter, any of the many areas inland? Since Hu provides no answers, we are left to draw our own conclusions. In fact, we are seemingly encouraged to do so because the implicit objective for this sort of data visualisation project is to exploit the similarities between relational graphs

[64] For an introduction to the study of maps in the context of landscape studies, see J. B. Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power', in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277-312.

and conventional maps in the expectation that users will bring to their interpretations of ostensibly 'non-geographic' data all the subtleties and felicities of their cartographic imaginations. This is something Hu appears to acknowledge by using the politically-loaded word 'country' to introduce the logic of his online tool. And if Hu thinks there are countries to be seen, then why not borders, regions, peripheries, centres, heartlands, and many other territorial features that cannot be controlled by purely mathematical definitions?

Of all the features arguably apparent in Hu's virtual landscape, few are likely to elicit as stable or unambiguous a reading as the small number of musical islands scattered across the eastern seaboard of the dominant landmass.[65] Indeed, it would be hard *not* to interpret these islands in terms of a strong degree of stylistic separation – much stronger than that implied by an equivalent distance between musicians across an uninterrupted stretch of land. In some instances, this sense of separation is overlaid with place-specific associations from pre-existing musical geographies. For example, the large island to the northeast of Hu's musical continent plays host to Bob Marley and various other reggae or reggae-inspired artists who are historically and generically associated with the island nations of the Caribbean. But there are other instances where no such association presents itself. Notably, the large island to the southeast of the continent is dominated on the zoomed out version of the map by the single name of Ludwig van Beethoven, and is populated exclusively by 'classical' composers. Unlike

[65] For the record, the version of 'The Landscape of Music' discussed here is not the only one available. As Hu explains in a note just visible at the bottom right of figures 1 and 2, 'this map was last updated Feb 2010. I like its overall aesthetics so I am preserving it here. But for an update-to-date [*sic*] version that I will try to update frequently to reflect changes in the music world, visit the latest map. [http://www2.research.att.com/~yifanhu/Music_Map/index.html (accessed 20 August 2012)].' Significantly, this latest map comprises a single continent with no outlying islands. Here Satie is placed in the 'north west', near to Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky as well as Nyman, Pärt, and, relatively speaking, Yann Tiersen.

the reggae example, the distancing of Beethoven and Co. from the main continent has little to do with real-world geographic associations and much more to do with the cartographic articulation of cultural, generic, and aesthetic difference.[66]

If it is the case that the relatively large reggae and classical islands enlist map-making and map-reading in the strong demarcation of musical difference, then the tiny 'Île de Satie' (as I like to call it) offers a yet more striking example. Of all the hundreds of names inscribed in Hu's virtual landscape, Satie is one of only two individuals (the other is Arvo Pärt) to be afforded the dubious distinction of total isolation. Of course, one cannot presume that all users will always interpret Satie's twice-removed island location in the same, predictable way: some might make a connection between the virtual Île de Satie and the real Île de France (the administrative title for the greater Paris urban area); others might detect echoes of the life of Satie's contemporary Paul Gauguin, who moved from Paris to Haiti around the turn of the century (i.e., from the French Imperial capital to an island at the edge of its colonial reach); others still might look at Satie the metropolitan castaway and be reminded of the Situationist call to find 'the beach beneath the streets'. Alternatively, the location of Satie and Pärt *in-between* the western shores of the large classical island and the eastern edge of a smaller, loosely 'minimalist' island might be read as a representation of stylistic liminality in keeping with the reputations of these two musicians for blurring boundaries between putatively high and low, classical and commercial, sacred and secular musics.

[66] Hu's separation of classical music is reminiscent of the layout of most high street record stores. For a discussion of this very point in relation to one typical shop in central Amsterdam, see Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (London: Routledge, 2007), xiii-xvi. It also brings to mind the notion of a 'great divide' which had previously been declared a historical relic: see Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

Yet, however open to interpretation the Île de Satie may be, the striking image of isolation remains unmistakeable. By locating Satie's musical identity in a small, discrete and under-populated territory, Hu simultaneously challenges the wisdom of John Donne's famous meditation on the shared nature of suffering – 'No Man is an Island / Entire of itself / Each is a piece of the continent / A part of the main' – and re-affirms one of the most enduring tropes in Satie reception: the powerful and oft-repeated idea that Satie was a musician who operated at some remove, creatively and stylistically, from those who worked around him. Hu's map can thus be said to project a by now familiar interpretation into cartographic form. In a novel twist on the conventional metaphor of a cultural main*stream*, Satie's difference is depicted here in terms of his distance from the main*land*; his strangeness is rendered as his estranged-ness from the imaginary continent of music. In spite of all the evident shortcomings of Hu's map, this cartographic fiction has the distinct advantage of encouraging us to think of Satie's strangeness not only as an attribute of personal and musical identity, but also as a powerful geographic metaphor – one that draws on the rich etymological and literary history of the French word 'étranger' (stranger).[67] This metaphor, which will be especially important in the first two chapters of this thesis, provides a valuable interpretative lens through which to view the conventional image of Satie as a loner, an outsider, and a foreigner to all but himself. But it also raises questions about how we

[67] The semantic field mobilised by the word *étranger* is irreducibly complex: at times it is used in a practical sense, as in the tradition of tourist guides addressed *à l'étranger*; at other times the sense of difference implied by *étranger* can have more suspect or pejorative undertones, as in the case of 'strangers', 'outsiders' or 'aliens'; moreover, the adjectival form of the word can carry implications of unknowableness, unconnectedness or irrelevance. One major point of reference here is Albert Camus's 1942 philosophical novel *L'Étranger*, which is most commonly translated into English as 'The Outsider' or 'The Stranger'. While the strange-ness of the book's central character, Meursault, is largely related to his failure (or refusal) to react to dramatic events in a manner deemed socially appropriate, his apparent disengagement from locally endorsed behaviour is also related to his status as a French Algerian in a colonial landscape that seems to inhibit any strong sense of belonging.

might interpret the spatial aspects of other, less obviously geographical accounts of Satie's strangeness. It is these accounts to which we shall now turn.

The placelessness of eccentricity

As I have been intimating from the very beginning of the preface, Satie is habitually presented as an aesthetic agent somehow distanced or rendered disjunct from the musical culture of the era in which he lived. Niclas Fogwall, an amateur enthusiast who collects recordings of Satie's compositions and occasionally contributes to Satie-Archives.com, has written that '[Satie's] music was ahead of his time'.[68] Similarly, one anonymous online review of a CD of Satie'e early piano pieces states that 'Satie wrote music independent from the prevailing standards [of his time]'.[69] Of course, these twenty-first-century remarks are easily dismissed as tired, shop-worn clichés. But the reason they sound so familiar is that they have a long and well-documented genealogy in the writings of earlier generations of critics and composers whose texts have persistently articulated one version or another of the central idea that Satie was out of step with his contemporaries. The programme notes to a 1911 concert in Paris featuring Satie's early pianos pieces, for example, described the composer as a 'genial precursor' of the modern style.[70] Even earlier, around the time the pieces on the 1911 programme were being written, Debussy famously described his friend and colleague as a 'gentle medieval musician lost in this century' – a comment that not only dissociated Satie from the present moment, but also linked him with a historical construct (the Middle

[68] Niclas Fogwall, 'Erik Satie', *Satie-Archives.com*, http://www.satie-archives.com/web/intro.html (accessed 27 April 2012).
[69] 'Erik Satie - Gymnopédies, Gnossiennes, etc', *Good-Music-Guide.com*, http://www.good-music-guide.com/reviews/085_satie_gymnopedies.htm (accessed 27 April 2012).
[70] Anonymous programme note to concert of Société musicale indépendante at the Salle Gaveau, 16 January 1911. Quoted in Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie*, trans. Elena L. French and David S. French (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), 33.

Ages) that referred to both a particular period in time and a pervasive sense of timelessness.[71]

To a certain extent, the two-way temporal dislocation described above – i.e., Satie hints at the future and Satie belongs to the past – can be explained by a wider fin-de-siècle fascination with the nature of time as such.[72] Furthermore, it is likely that Debussy's 'medieval' remark related to some specific stylistic features of Satie's music during his Rosicrucian phase in the late 1880s and early 1890s (notably his abandonment of barlines, his preference for ecclesiastical instrumentation, and his avoidance of leading notes at cadences in order to achieve what was considered a modal effect).[73] Nevertheless, the overriding sense of Satie as a singular individual pursuing his own agenda, with his own means, at his own pace survived long after the fin-de-siècle obsession with the pseudo-archaic. Indeed, the description of Satie from 1911 as a 'genial precursor' already hints at the language of modernism. And later in the twentieth century, Satie would be decontextualised and dehistoricised yet again with reference to new models and ideologies of cultural production. When Alan Gillmor described his subject in 1983 as a 'born iconoclast' he not only naturalised Satie's difference (iconoclasts, apparently, are born not made), but also re-articulated the

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[71] Debussy included this description of Satie as part of 'the red-ink dedication on the presentation copy . . . of his *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, dated 27 October 1892'. See Robert Orledge, 'Satie, Koechlin and the Ballet "Uspud"', *Music & Letters* 68/1 (1987), 27 note 6.

[72] It was in 1889 that Henri Bergson published his first major work on temporality, in which he defined *la durée* as 'a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another'. See Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 104. For a general guide to the historical study of temporality, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time & Space, 1880-1918*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[73] One of the earliest studies on this period of Satie's career was Patrick Gowers, 'Satie's Rose+Croix Music (1891-1895)', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 92 (1965-1966), 1-25. See also Orledge, 'Satie, Koechlin and the Ballet "Uspud"', 26–41.

notion of creative difference using an avant-gardist rhetoric that was not yet stabilised at the time of Satie's death.[74]

In a similar fashion, the long-running association of Satie with surrealism – an association seemingly authenticated by the fact the term had one of its first appearances in Guillaume Apollinaire's programme notes for the premiere of *Parade* in 1917 – has provided yet another set of strategies for situating Satie somewhere other than the Parisian environment in which he lived.[75] Such strategies are not only discernible in discourse, but can also be seen in action at the Maisons Satie museum and visitor attraction in Honfleur, which promises an experience 'à la fois ludique et informative' (at once playful and informative).[76] While it would be misleading to suggest that the Maisons Satie provide no details about the historical circumstances of Satie's time in either Normandy or Paris, the major selling point of this immersive exhibition – a giant floating pear with wings, which features on all of the museum's publicity material – has little to do with the specificity of either place. On the contrary, it is an object that embodies as well as any other the elision of Satie's musical œuvre – not least his *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* (Three Pear-Shaped Pieces, 1903) – with the broader history and iconography of surrealist visual art. In this respect, Honfleur's flying pear is far from unique: if one compares the front cover of a recent children's biography entitled *Strange Mr. Satie* (see fig. 4) with René Magritte's famous painting of 1964, *L'Homme au chapeau melon* (Man in a Bowler Hat, see fig. 5), it is easy to see the

[74] Alan M. Gillmor, 'Erik Satie and the Concept of the Avant-Garde', *The Musical Quarterly* 69/1 (1983), 116.
[75] The programme note is reprinted in Guillaume Apollinaire, *Œuvres en prose*, ed. Michel Décaudin and Pierre Caizergues, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1977-1993), 2/865. For more on the origins of the term 'surrealism', see Willard Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002).
[76] See 'Les Maisons Satie', *www.ot-honfleur.fr*, http://www.ot-honfleur.fr/decouvrir-honfleur/les-lieux-de-visite/les-maisons-satie/ (accessed 20 August 2012).

extent to which the principle of surrealist decontextualisation – including the ubiquitous blue backgrounds and anonymous bourgeois attire – has been woven into the fabric of Satie reception, despite the fact that much of this iconography post-dates the life of the musician in question.[77]

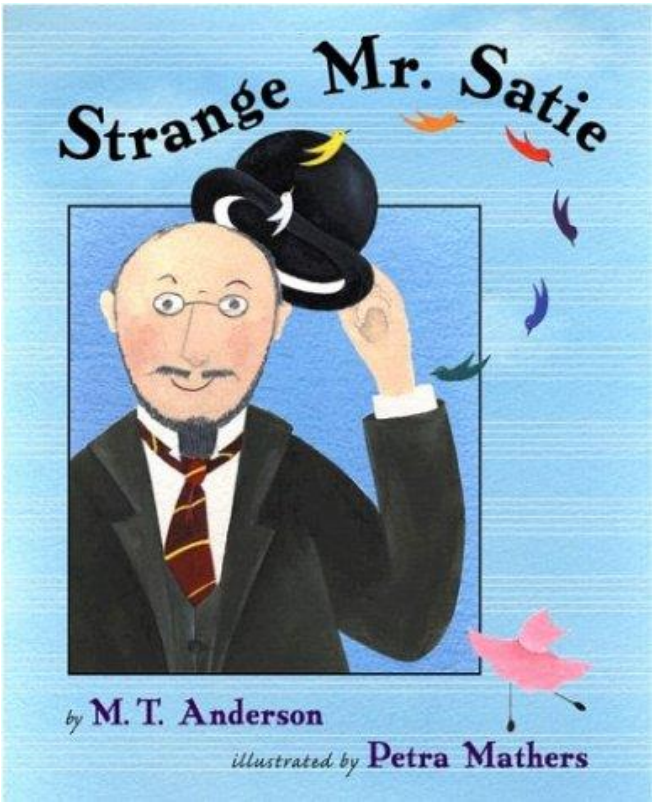


Figure 4. Front cover of *Strange Mr. Satie* (2003).

[77] M. T. Anderson and Petra Mathers, *Strange Mr. Satie* (New York: Viking Juvenile, 2003). Though it is a matter of historical record that Satie wore a bowler hat and plain suit for much of his adult life, the meaning of this outfit arguably changed post-Magritte.



Figure 5. René Magritte, *L'Homme au chapeau melon* (1964).

Even when Satie's influence on musical contemporaries and later generations is acknowledged and identified – which, one would suppose, suggests some level of connection with those around him – this influence can be read as a mark of Satie's pronounced separation from or indifference to the dominant trends of fin-de-siècle musical thought and practice. Satie's integration into larger music-historical narratives thus offers yet another occasion for articulating his exceptional status; he can be presented as an individualist who swam against the successive tides of *Wagnérisme*, *Debussysme*, and Schoenbergian chromaticism.[78] The fact that Satie was barely aware of the last of these three supposedly hegemonic compositional doctrines has not stopped

[78] For an innovative study of Satie's aesthetic development as it relates to the ideas and stylistic practices of Wagner and Debussy, see Noel Orillo Verzosa, Jr., *The Absolute Limits: Debussy, Satie, and the Culture of French Modernism, c. 1860-1920*, PhD thesis (University of California, Berkeley, 2008).

him being portrayed as its antithesis. Take, for example, the following extract from Virgil Thomson's 1941 essay on Satie, which accomplished the impressive feat of singling out Satie's unique contribution to music history by insisting that his music remained somehow immune to history itself – as if Satie had landed from another planet like an alien, or an *étranger*:

> This writer is in agreement with Darius Milhaud and with some of the other contemporary French composers in placing Satie's work among the major musical values of our century. [Milhaud] has even gone so far in print, nearly twenty years ago, as to parallel the German three B's – Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms – with the three S's of modern music – in descending order of significance, Satie, Schönberg, and Stravinsky. . . . The Satie musical aesthetic is the only twentieth-century musical aesthetic in the Western world. Schönberg and his school are Romantics; and their twelve-tone syntax, however interesting one may find it intellectually, is the purest Romantic chromaticism; Hindemith, however gifted, is a neo-classicist, like Brahms, with ears glued firmly to the past. The same is true of the later Stravinsky and of his satellites. Even *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring* are the Wagnerian theatre symphony and the nineteenth-century cult of nationalistic folklore applied to ballet.
> Of all the influential composers of our time, and influence even his detractors cannot deny him, Satie is the only one whose works can be enjoyed and appreciated without any knowledge of the history of music. These lack the prestige of traditional modernism, as they lack the prestige of the Romantic tradition itself, a tradition of constant Revolution. They are as simple, as straight-forward, as devastating as the remarks of a child.[79]

As with the case of fin-de-siècle medievalism, it is possible to historicise Thomson's attempt to dehistoricise Satie's contribution to music history. In addition to the long-standing North American ambivalence with regard to any inherited traditions of the 'Old World', there were more pressing reasons in the early 1940s for Thomson to be wary of cultural practices associated with Germany and Russia respectively. Even after the war, however, similarly extraordinary claims relating to Satie's music-historical importance continued to appear in North America. In 1958, John Cage published an imaginary conversation between himself and Satie, which ended with the following oft-

[79] Virgil Thomson, 'French Music Here [Erik Satie] (1941)', in *Virgil Thomson: A Reader. Selected Writings 1924-1984*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (London: Routledge, 2002), 108.

quoted endorsement: 'It's not a question of Satie's relevance. He's indispensable'.[80] Significantly, this assertion came immediately after a passage reiterating Satie's status as an emblem of non-inheritance and disengagement:

> 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.[81]

In light of these examples, one is led to conclude that Satie earns his place in narratives of musical modernism as much for what he (apparently) rejected as for what he produced. The precise object of rejection varies from account to account: it might be some aspect of urban modernity (as in the case of Debussy's quip about a 'medieval musician'); or the more staid elements of European culture (as in Thomson's effusive praise for un-prestigious non-traditionalism); or, in the case of the committed communist Henri Sauguet – who described Satie as an 'anti-conformiste' in a memorial article half a century after the musician's death – one suspects it was the 'bourgeois establishment' against whose *conformisme* Satie stood out.[82] In any case, it is surely one of the most remarkable features of the discourse on Satie that he is defined, more often than not, by difference.

The reason for underscoring, once again, how often Satie is presented as an exception to the music-historical rule is to suggest that this expectation of exception brings with it a particular set of spatial assumptions. In order to understand the discursive production of Satie's difference better, I need to interrogate how these assumptions have operated, both metaphorically and ideologically, in Satie reception to

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[80] See 'Erik Satie' in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (London: Marion Boyars, 1968), 82.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Henri Sauguet, 'Erik Satie', *Le Courrier musical de France* 52/4 (1975), 129. Satie propagated this reputation himself by writing about his attempts to gain membership of the Académie des Beaux Arts. See 'Mes Trois Candidatures' in Satie, *Écrits*, 21.

date. At the most basic level, the sorts of exception/rule relations described above can be seen to map onto some familiar radial models of 'inside and outside' or 'centre and periphery', with Satie representing the exterior term in each case. As Georgina Born has argued, following French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, any given social or cultural institution actively requires its 'constitutive outside'.[83] According to this logic, labelling Satie as a non-conformist (no matter what Sauguet's intentions may have been) has the consequence of consolidating or 're-centring' a musical tradition to which this ec-centric practitioner potentially posed a threat, or at least proposed an alternative. One might therefore suggest that Satie is commonly presented out of context because much of the discourse about Satie is not really discourse about Satie at all. Rather, he is discussed primarily to bring other, apparently more important musical matters (Romanticism, Impressionism, Neo-classicism, atonality, etc.) into sharper relief. When it comes to the study of Parisian musical culture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, however, the logical relationship between exceptions and rules is arguably complicated by what Richard Taruskin has called the 'tradition of the new'.[84] This exaggerated focus on the radically novel and as yet unheard had the predictable effect of denigrating any music deemed unadventurous or reactionary, but it also had the rather less expected consequence of fracturing or disintegrating what had once been widely shared assumptions about the nature and purpose of musical material. In this scenario, the gravitational attraction of the metaphorical core was weakened to the point that the exception no longer proved the rule because the exception was the rule. To differentiate oneself and one's work from the crowd or the (immediate) past was, for

[83] Georgina Born, 'The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuian Theory of Cultural Production', *Cultural Sociology* 4/2 (2010), 23.
[84] Taruskin, 'A Myth of the Twentieth Century'.

many of Satie's contemporaries, and arguably for him too, a fundamental tenet of the modernist project.[85]

Despite the fact that notions of modernist creativity are as much a retrospective construction as a product of 'the period itself', the centrality of novelty and innovation to critical appraisals of musical modernism casts a new light on the dominant theme of difference in Satie reception. As we have already seen in the quotations from Thomson and Cage, Satie had no shortage of admirers in the upper echelons of twentieth-century concert culture. Moreover, this admiration was arguably the result of (not in spite of) his status as an exception. While it is true that Satie has, at times, been presented as a cameo contrarian in an otherwise 'mainstream' musicological narrative, there have also been plenty of occasions where the specifics of his approaches to aesthetic problems have been placed front and centre of the discussion.[86] In fact, Satie's eccentricity has sometimes been valued so highly that it is possible to discern some striking parallels between the figure of the idiosyncratic loner and the figure of the great composer. For the purposes of the present discussion, the most important of these parallels is the potential for both genius and weirdness to 'transcend' any binding sense of context or place. No matter how many voices have joined the chorus proclaiming Satie's opposition to inherited Romantic aesthetics – and no matter how antithetical this 'odd little man with his odd little pieces' may seem when compared to a Brahms or a

[85] The injunction to passers-by to be modern was literally built into the framework of the second Chat Noir in the form of a hand-made sign by the entrance, which read 'Passant, soi moderne!' See Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 68.
[86] The most obvious example here is Orledge's lengthy monograph, *Satie the Composer*.

Beethoven – the decontextualisation and disemplacement so evident in Satie reception is strikingly similar to the much-critiqued ideology of 'absolute' or universal music.[87]

Whereas popular music, folk music, and 'exotic' music have always been linked to particular groups, places, and institutional networks, it is has been widely remarked that throughout the nineteenth century the North-European bourgeoisie had a distinct propensity to obscure the social and spatial details of its most privileged musical culture.[88] As Daniel Chua has remarked:

> Absolute music has 'no history'. It denies that it was ever born. The fact that it emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century was not a birth, it claims, but an emancipation, a discovery unveiled by the German Romantics, as if absolute music had always been there, eternal and absolute. After all, an absolute by definition cannot have a history; God – the absolute absolute – cannot be historically grounded, and neither can the surrogate absolutes of the secular world such as Reason or the Transcendental Ego; they all claim to start from nothing, as a self-sufficient method or metaphysical entity, without genealogy or narrative.[89]

In addition to Chua's work on the historicity of absolute or idealist aesthetics, a number of writers have produced important critiques of the universalising and decontextualising discourses associated with the broader categories of 'Western' and 'classical' music.[90] One of the principle refrains in these critiques is the insistence that – like white-ness, maleness, and heterosexuality – Western classical music is not a neutral category and

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[87] One of the most trenchant accounts of Satie's difference from Beethoven is found in a pre-concert talk given by John Cage in 1948, reprinted as 'Defense of Satie', in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 77-84.
[88] The distinction between the conspicuous emplacement of some musical cultures and the universalisation of others has been reproduced in scholarly literature. For example, the 'Places' section of Alastair Williams's *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) is dedicated exclusively to 'non-Western' music.
[89] Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3. See also Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
[90] See, for example, Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds.), *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Julie Brown, *Western Music and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Rachel Beckles Willson, 'Doing More than Representing Western Music', in Joshua Walden (ed.), *Representation in Western Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2013).

cannot be understood in a social, historical or geographical vacuum. It is no coincidence that a similar argument was made in the opening pages of *The Place of Music*, one of the first major collections of essays to take seriously the inter-connections between musical and geographical enquiry:

> Since the mid-18th century classical genres have been defined by practitioners and musicologists as a transcendent language of individual self-expression, above concerns of economy, polity and society. Such a definition has its own historical geography, one linked to the rise of the nation-state and bourgeois society.[91]

As far as I am aware, this sort of argument has not yet been made in relation to the ideology of eccentricity embodied so clearly by Satie's music and biography. Yet just as the discourse on Western classical music once served to render cultural specificity more or less invisible, so too has the cult of Satie's (e)strangeness acted as a bulwark against emplacement and contextualisation. To be sure, there are considerable differences that ought not to be overlooked: in the most extreme iterations of the idealist absolute, the Great Works of Beethoven are said to belong to everyone, everywhere, for all time; by contrast, the exceptionalist account of Satie's creativity attributes his music to no-one (besides the composer's idiosyncratic self), nowhere (hence the conspicuously non-specific blue backgrounds) and no time in particular (as demonstrated by the persistent idea that Satie's aesthetic journey was somehow tangential to the contemporary course of music history). It is also fair to say that the stakes in the study of Satie's strangeness are not as high as those relating to absolute music, simply because there have not been as many claims to cultural superiority made on his behalf. Nevertheless, the evident similarities between the decontextualising tendencies of Romantic universalism and what might be called the 'placelessness of

[91] Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill, 'Introduction: Music, Space, and the Production of Place', in Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill (eds.), *The Place of Music* (London: Guilford Press, 1998), 6-8.

eccentricity' ought to give pause for thought. In particular, the fact that the supposedly universal language of classical music is not universal at all, but 'has its own historical geography', raises the question of what equivalent social and spatial forms have underwritten the expectation of exception in relation to Satie's music and biography?

Though the relations between space, place, and difference have not been discussed directly in the Satie literature to date, they have been addressed indirectly in the work of a number of scholars whose methods provide a much-needed corrective to the decontextualised accounts of Satie described above, as well as an immediate disciplinary context for the arguments and ideas of this thesis. Where modernist historiographies traditionally de-privileged most of the circumstances of Satie's working life in order to emphasise the strangeness and novelty of his musical production, more recent cultural histories of music have tended to focus on the localities and particularities of Satie's aesthetic production, which has led to substantial research into the places and communities (*lieux* and *milieux*) of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris. This is precisely the strategy advocated by the editors of *The Place of Music*, who follow their account of the 'universal language' of classical music with a call to 'particularis[e] the classical' in the historical and geographical contexts where the music took (and produced) place.[92] Since a number of these studies will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters, it will suffice here to give a few brief examples.

The most important Francophone scholar to consider Satie's musical activities in the context of particular localities is Ornella Volta, whose research on Montmartre, Arcueil, Honfleur, and the Parisian salons will be addressed directly in chapter 1.[93] In

[92] Ibid., 8-9.
[93] Ornella Volta, 'Satie sur la Butte', in *Erik Satie à Montmartre* [exhibition catalogue] (Montmartre: Musée de Montmartre, 1982) ; *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie* ; *Erik Satie*

terms of Anglophone musicology, Nancy Perloff's 1991 study of 'the Circle of Erik Satie' broke new ground in the field by focussing on the relations between early-twentieth-century French musical modernism and the contemporary urban environment.[94] Steven Moore Whiting's *Satie the Bohemian* followed a similar path to Perloff, but engaged more extensively with the particular context of fin-de-siècle Montmartre. Most recently, Mary E. Davis has situated Satie in the sites and social structures of the nascent fashion and entertainment industry.[95]

It is also worth noting that Satie appears in more general histories that have similar points of geographical focus: for example, Jane F. Fulcher's study of the cultural politics of music in Third Republic France elaborates a rich and densely interconnected set of pedagogical and performance venues that could not be further from the disemplaced models of Romantic universalism and eccentric utopianism (in the literal sense of the word).[96] Similarly, Annegret Fauser's work on the 1889 Exposition universelle adopts a strict geographical limit in order to explore the complexities of various musical 'encounters' therein.[97] Finally, Jann Pasler's latest book on French musical culture in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century – which includes a discussion of Satie's 'static' compositions to which we shall return in chapter 4 – begins with a walking tour of Paris under the headings of 'topographies of power', 'the semiotics of the Parisian landscape', and 'life in the city'.[98] In sharp contrast to those who would place Satie, in Sauguet's words, 'outside all systems and

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Honfleurais (Honfleur: Editions de la Lieutenance, 2007) ; and 'Satie dans les salons', in *Satie dans les salons*.

[94] Nancy Perloff, Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[95] See Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic* and 'Modernity à la Mode'.

[96] Jane F. Fulcher, French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially 194-203.

[97] Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), especially 205 and 259.

[98] Pasler, Composing the Citizen.

all conventions', the approach taken by the writers listed here sees Satie's creative practice firmly embedded in the networks, alliances, debates, and oppositions of the urban social world in which he lived and worked.[99]

Given all of this interest in the context of Paris, it seems timely to re-assess Satie's music and biography in light of urban geography. However, my aim in this thesis is not merely to draw attention to the proposition that the now orthodox notion of putting music in context always involved a measure of placing music (and musicians) in situ. I also want to use the particular case of Satie's Paris to re-consider the conceptual basis for the apparent synergies between cultural location and musical production. In particular, I am anxious to avoid any sense of place that fails to account for the dynamics of urban processes and the mobilities of urban life. In order to do this, I will need to reflect again and again in the coming chapters on what is meant by familiar sounding terms such as context, locality, the city, home, and, most importantly, place.[100] Far from a backdrop to the main musicological story, I will be arguing throughout that the city in which Satie lived, worked, walked, and died played a decisive role in both shaping his creative practice and structuring responses to it. This methodological orientation is at once retrospective and prospective; it is a way of taking stock of the existing discourse on Satie and the city as well as developing new musicological paths within and beyond this particular field of study. The search for Satie's Paris is thus conceived as a search *through* Satie's biography and reception to a

[99] '[À] l'écart de tous systèmes comme de toutes conventions'. Sauguet, 'Erik Satie', 129.

[100] For a brief overview of the Anglophone literature on music, sound, and place, see Ben Anderson, Frances Morton, and George Revill's editorial introduction to 'Practices of Music and Sound [special issue]', *Social and Cultural Geography* 6/5 (2005), 639-643. As the name of the journal suggests, this review is largely written from the point of view of geographers engaging with music, rather than the other way round, but it does suggest a particular moment of disciplinary rapprochement in the early 1990s when an interest in sensuous geographies coincided with the 'New Musicological' turn to questions of cultural and social practice.

broader set of questions about historical musicology on the one hand and the condition of urban modernity on the other.

Like Hanif Kureishi's Buddha of Suburbia, who introduces himself to the reader as 'an Englishman born and bred, almost', Satie's place-specific identity has been variously taken for granted and summarily dismissed, sometimes within the pages of a single publication. My aim in this thesis is not to come down on one side or the other, but to reset the terms of discussion by proposing a new series of enquiries into the relations between Satie's creative identity, his compositional practice, and the (sub)urban context in which he operated and with which his music retains a complex and sometimes problematic association. Above all, it is Satie's movement across and around the various places of his career that calls into question what the familiar notion of context might mean, and opens new perspectives onto the representation, negotiation, and experience of space and place in music. Less of a Parisian through and through, and more of a Parisian *passing through*, Satie's eccentric musical identity is unimaginable without the twists and turns of his characteristic mobility.[101] It is in light of this suggestion that I now turn to the writing of Satie's musical life in Paris and the importance of creative journeys therein.

[101] *Erik Satie Passing Through* is the title of a 1977 short film by the British animator Pat Gavin.

Chapter 1

No Place Like Home

The city and its others in Satie biography

'It is possible to localise geographically, in a very precise manner, the three ages of Satie's life: childhood is Honfleur; youth, Montmartre; maturity, Arcueil.'[102] This statement by Ornella Volta encapsulates a common assumption of artistic biography: namely, that a narrative of aesthetic development can be mapped onto the various locations in which a musician lived and worked, that the cliché of a 'creative journey' is as literal as it is figurative. Far from challenging Volta's assumption, I take it as a given that biography is always already bound up with notions of territorial identity, whether local, regional, national, urban, rural or – as is often the case – a combination of the above and more. In this chapter, I begin by unpacking Volta's compact statement of geo-biography before providing an outline survey of how each of the three key locations she mentions has figured in the writing of Satie's musical life. From that, I go on to consider some of the ways in which we might exploit the interdependence of biography and geography in order to understand the critical reception of Satie's music better. In particular, I address how Satie's association with the outlying Parisian *commune* of Arcueil – where he lived for over 25 years, most of his adult life – has contributed to the complex of myths surrounding the musician;[103] how, for example, the image of Satie as a solitary, enigmatic composer has been underwritten by his

[102] 'Il est possible de localiser géographiquement, d'une façon très précise, les trois âges de la vie de Satie: l'enfance, c'est Honfleur; la jeunesse, Montmartre; l'âge mûr, Arcueil.' Ornella Volta, 'Satie sur la Butte', in *Erik Satie à Montmartre* [exhibition catalogue] (Montmartre: Musée de Montmartre, 1982), 5.

[103] The word 'commune', which inevitably brings to mind notions of communism, is used here to designate the lowest level of administrative division in the French Republic.

infamously impenetrable home in a seemingly unknowable suburb.[104] At the same time, the fact that Satie lived and worked in Montmartre (on the northern fringe of central Paris) as well as Arcueil (two kilometres beyond the city walls to the south) has repeatedly drawn his biographers into discussions of the nature and limits of the Parisian urban area. Musical biography thus emerges as one site among many for the construction of a specifically French 'suburban imaginary' – a repository of formulaic representations that helps shape how the historical suburbs of France might be viewed, heard, and critiqued. I propose that this suburban imaginary is dependent on the movement of individuals across different sorts of places, and it is this attention to mobility that allows us to understand the production of Satie's personal and musical eccentricity better.

The present chapter is not the place for a comparative discussion of the differences between French suburbs and their international counterparts, but the basic problems of linguistic and demographic differences ought to be acknowledged. Though the Latin-derived adjective 'suburbain' (sub = close to, urb = city) found its way into the French language long before it was used in English, the modern Anglo-American sense of suburbs translates awkwardly into French. Many of the *faubourgs* (literally 'false towns') that developed around Paris and other major cities in France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have since been assimilated so successfully into the urban nucleus that they no longer retain any strong sense of being distanced from or different to the principal city. The term *couronne* (literally 'crown'; also a circular loaf)

[104] Satie strictly forbade anyone to enter his rooms in Arcueil. James Harding records that, on his death, '[t]he moment came when the flat at 22 rue Cauchy had to be opened up. Conrad Satie [Erik's brother] asked Milhaud, Roger Désormière, Jean Wiener and Roger [Robert] Caby to go with him. . . . For twenty-seven years no one had ever penetrated this inner temple. . . . They could not believe that the neat and impeccable Satie had lived in such desolate penury'. James Harding, *Erik Satie* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 241-242.

is sometimes used to refer to the outlying zones of French cities, but that term does not have the same currency as the English 'suburbs'.[105] The best approximation is *banlieue*, but that term is not without problems: in its original medieval usage banlieue referred to that area (*lieue* = league) beyond the strict city limits yet still within its legal (*ban* = law) or administrative reach. In modern French, however, the term has assumed particular, often pejorative, connotations that place it closer to North American 'projects' or British 'sink estates'. The definitional divide between suburbs and banlieues is, in part, a result of real contrasts in human and economic geography. As John Merriman has explored in *The Margins of City Life*, the suburbs that developed in nineteenth-century France had a very different physical, social, and political profile to their counterparts in England and America, which one historian has memorably described as 'bourgeois utopias'.[106] By the early twentieth century, the ring around British or American cities was commonly understood to be a relatively homogenised zone of middle and upper-middle income housing linked to the city by networks of commuter transport. The 'street car suburbs' of Boston, for example, or the 'Metro-land' dormitory towns northwest of London promised country living within reach of the city and became a potent symbol of bourgeois aspiration that remains familiar to this day.[107] As John Carey has documented and discussed in his history of *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, these widespread developments were the object of both architectural

[105] It is telling that Anglophone urban morphologists speak of 'doughnut' effects, while their French counterparts maintain the language of the *boulangerie*.
[106] See John M. Merriman, *The Margins of City Life: Explorations on the French Urban Frontier, 1815-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
[107] See Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). 'Metro-land' was a term coined by London's Metropolitan Railway for an annual guide (published 1915-32) to properties along newly-built routes out of London. See George Revill, *Railway* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 178. Incidentally, the English novelist Julian Barnes's first book, entitled *Metroland* (1980), told the story of a young boy's journey from the London suburbs to the city of Paris.

and literary scorn.[108] Books such as *England and the Octopus* (1926) by Clough Williams-Ellis (who would go on to design the 'anti-suburban' village of Portmeirion) and George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939) were fiercely critical of what they considered to be the suffocating sprawl of British suburbs. However, this image was – and remains – far from adequate to a description of the vast majority of French suburbia.[109] Certainly in Paris, the bourgeoisie has been historically disinclined to move beyond the city centre, leaving what Merriman terms the 'French urban frontier' untouched by the conservative associations of Anglo-American suburbs. Indeed, the contrast between the conspicuously bland, cement-covered suburbs of Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* and the threatening back alleys of the fictional faubourg of 'La Garenne-Rancy' in Louis-Ferdinand Céline's almost contemporary *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Journey to the End of Night, 1932) could hardly be more striking. As John Sturrock explains:

> [La Garenne-Rancy is] richly expressive as all Céline's made-up names are: *la garenne* is both the French for a rabbit warren and also the name of a real suburb of Paris . . . while Rancy, or *ranci*, is our 'rancid' and intended to be descriptive of life as lived in this populous and unflavoured warren. (A further determinant of this place-name was perhaps the Cirque-Rancy, a travelling circus famous in the [nineteenth] century; circuses are raffish, nomadic entertainments of a kind Céline admired. There is also an eastern suburb of Paris called Le Raincy.)[110]

[108] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intellegentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).
[109] I say the 'vast majority' because there are significant exceptions. For example, the western suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine has long been one of the wealthiest communes in the Île de France. The contrast between this sort of comfortable, residential suburb (known as a *banlieue pavillonnaire*) and suburbs with high working-class, or workless populations (*banlieues populaires*) was dramatised in 2005 when Nicolas Sarkozy, then Minister for the Interior and a former mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine, described a group of suburban youths as 'racaille' (rabble or riff-raff) on a visit to Argenteuil, after which followed a widely publicised period of unrest.
[110] John Sturrock, *Céline: Journey to the End of the Night* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 20-21.

More generally, the fearful image of central Paris besieged by a suburban proletariat was a recurring theme in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French political discourse.[111] Quite how this fear relates to the writing of Satie's biography – given that he self-identified as a member of the so-called 'Soviet d'Arcueil' – is one of the questions this chapter sets out to address.[112]

Since this chapter is largely devoted to the exploration of historical suburban geography and its relation to biographical writing, I need to address what place 'the music' will occupy. Put simply, music (much like the suburbs) is not at the centre of things. When it is heard, it is heard only obliquely, through the pages of biographies and through the descriptions of those places in which it was made, played, and paid for. That is not to say that music is entirely absent – on the contrary, Volta's narrative of 'the three ages of Satie's life' is an effective strategy for embedding Satie's works in a particular journey through (and beyond) the city of Paris – but it is to say that this chapter does not stand or fall by musical examples. There is no attempt to discern suburban characteristics in specific works, as if 'the music' would show the effects of a suburban cause, nor is there a systematic attempt to isolate the musical practices most typical of suburban locations. Rather, I am interested in the relations between life-writing and suburban representation, between a musician's identity and his itinerary. These relations, I suggest, are better understood in terms of inextricability than

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[111] On this point, see Merriman, *The Margins of City Life* and Annie Fourcaut, *Banlieue Rouge 1920-1960: Années Thorez, Années Gabin* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 1992). For more general discussions of the history and geography of French suburbia, see Annie Fourcaut, *Un Siècle de banlieue Parisienne, 1859-1964: Guide de recherche* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988); Alain Bertho, *Banlieue, banlieue, banlieue* (Paris: La Dispute, 1997); Alain Faure, *Les Premiers Banlieusards: aux origines des banlieues de Paris 1860-1940* (Paris: Editions Créaphis, 1991); Jean Bastié, *La Croissance de la banlieue Parisienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964); and Michel Phlipponeau, *La Vie rurale de la banlieue Parisienne* (Paris: A. Colin, 1956).
[112] On Satie's membership of the 'Soviet d'Arcueil', see Preface, note 22.

causality. If that leaves the music somewhere in the margins, all the more appropriate for an exercise in suburban scholarship.

Honfleur – Montmartre – Arcueil

Let us begin by addressing Volta's 'precise' list of locations: Honfleur, Montmartre, and Arcueil. The first thing to note is her confidence in describing a straightforward trajectory from a small town in the provinces to a well-known part of Paris, and from there to a less well-known part of the same city. The obvious question to ask when faced with such a neat summary is whether Satie's life can be localised so efficiently without compromising its complexity? It was certainly the case that he did not travel widely, at least compared with some of his composer contemporaries: Ravel's role as concert pianist took him all across Europe and North America; Milhaud passed the years of WWI with the French diplomatic corps in Brazil, and was musically inspired by visits to New York long before his forced migration to the United States in 1940. By contrast, aside from the two professional excursions to Belgium and Monte Carlo mentioned in the Introduction and one family holiday to Brighton early in his life, Satie rarely ventured more than short, usually walkable, distances from wherever he was living at the time.[113] In other words, Volta's headline list may not be comprehensive, but it contains no glaring omissions. There are few who would claim to have studied Satie's comings and goings in as fine a detail as Volta,[114] and the three-point itinerary she proposes is a consensus position among Satie's biographers.[115]

[113] See Introduction, note 1.
[114] Not only does Volta express this formulation in the quotation selected for this chapter, but she has followed her own tri-partite logic in a series of further publications: see Ornella Volta, *Erik Satie Honfleurais* (Honfleur: Editions de la Lieutenance, 2007);

Given that there is conspicuously little disagreement on the subject of where to stick pins in the biographical map, the next question concerns Volta's alignment of Honfleur, Montmartre, and Arcueil with the 'three ages' of Satie's life. According to this formulation, the time between Satie's birth (1866) and his move to Montmartre (1887) is marked off as 'childhood'; the decade or so before his move to Arcueil (1898) is 'youth'; and there on in (until his death in 1925) is 'maturity'. Although this results in a neat timeline, with decisive breaks at the ages of 21 and 33, there is once again relatively little manipulation required for the basic facts to fit Volta's biographical scheme. Of course, if one wished to construct a finer-grained account then the three periods could be sub-divided or complicated in various ways. For example, Satie was born and spent much of his childhood in Honfleur, but it would be misleading to suggest that he had a settled upbringing in a single location. At the age of four, his family moved to Paris so that his father could take up a new job. Two years later, his mother died and the children (Eric – then spelt with a 'c' – had a younger brother, Conrad, and younger sister, Olga) were sent back to Honfleur to live with their paternal grandparents. The to-ing and fro-ing between Honfleur and Paris continued in 1878 when the children's grandmother died and they returned to live in the capital with their

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La Banlieue d'Erik Satie (Arcueil: Editions Macadam & Cie, 1999); and 'Satie sur la Butte'.

[115] Four examples should suffice to make the point: the first English-language biography was Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948). Myers's chapter headings begin with 'Early youth and early influences' (for which, read 'Honfleur'), before moving on to 'The Rosicrucian adventure – Montmartre – Relations with Debussy' and then to 'Life at Arcueil—Exploration and discoveries'. Almost exactly the same chapter divisions are evident in Harding, *Erik Satie*. Even the writers of Satie's entry on *wikipedia.org* (whoever they may be) have opted for the sub-headings 'From Normandy to Montmartre' and 'Moving to Arcueil' in their account of Satie's career. Finally, the capitalised declaration 'UNE VIE, UNE ŒUVRE. HONFLEUR – PARIS – ARCUEIL' appears beneath a photograph of an ageing Satie in Michel Robillard, *Erik Satie d'Arcueil* (Arcueil: M. Robillard, 1990), 10.

father.[116] As far as the ages of youth and maturity are concerned, however, there is less detail to add. After Erik (by now spelt with a non-conformist 'k') had left his father's house to live in Montmartre, he changed address only once – opting for a cheaper flat in the same area – before moving to rooms at a building known as La Maison aux quatre cheminées (House with four chimneys) in Arcueil.[117] There he stayed until his health deteriorated and he was put up in central Paris at the expense of pianist and composer Jean Wiener, before moving to another *hôtel* in Montparnasse – which now displays a plaque recording his presence – and finally to Saint-Joseph Hospital (further out of the city, near the modern day Boulevard Périphérique) where he died from cirrhosis of the liver.[118]

It would seem, then, that the only serious challenge to Volta's geographic localisations relates to her omission of Satie's childhood experience of Paris. But is it reasonable to assume that Volta's three ages merely correspond to three different places of residence? Or does the association between period and place in music biography work on more levels than simply 'when and where Satie made his bed'? Supposing the latter is the case, Volta's strategy – and by extension, one of the most common strategies in Satie biography – becomes at once more problematic and more interesting. Why, for example, does she seek to locate Satie's childhood *not* in Paris? How does her unidirectional succession of places account for Satie's continued work as a pianist in

[116] For a fuller account of this period of Satie's life, see Mary E. Davis, *Erik Satie* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 13-20 and Volta, *Erik Satie Honfleurais*.
[117] For an exhaustive list of Satie's addresses, see 'Erik Satie' in Nigel Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). We shall return to La Maison aux quatre cheminées towards the end of this chapter.
[118] Incidentally, despite various biographies talking up the extent of Satie's drinking, cirrhosis was a common killer in France at the time. One study puts the figure of cirrhosis deaths for 1925 at 30 per 100,000 in France, compared with five for the same year in the United Kingdom and seven in the United States. See Angela K. Dills and Jeffrey A. Miron, 'Alcohol Prohibition and Cirrhosis', *American Law and Economics Review* 6/2 (2004), 289-290.

Montmartre following his move to Arcueil? And what are we to make of the term 'maturity' given all the aesthetic baggage that word carries? Such questions are not intended to undercut Volta's scholarship, but rather to draw attention to the various knots of geography and biography that, when strung together in a convincing narrative, go a long way to shaping received wisdom about musicians and their music. In the survey that follows I focus on some of the more enduring knots in Satie biography, beginning with a simple question: where did Satie come from?

Honfleur

The short answer is Honfleur. Without doubt, this picturesque seaside town in the Calvados *département* of Normandy, north-west France, has been the focus – or better, the locus – of most attempts to describe Satie's cultural and, to a limited extent, musical origins. To give some background: the size of Honfleur's fixed population has remained remarkably constant from the turn of the nineteenth century (8664) to the present day (the last recorded figure, in 2006, was 8139); as it happens, the population peaked in 1866, the year of Satie's birth.[119] Since then, the lion's share of the trade which previously passed through Honfleur has been redirected to the much larger port of Le Havre, just across the mouth of the Seine. This has had the result of leaving only a small fishing industry and an un-modernised seafront, both of which now make the town an easy sell for vendors of real estate and tourism. Indeed, the population data quoted above is potentially misleading to the extent that it does not take into account

[119] These population figures are taken from the 'Honfleur' page of *Territoires et populations, : deux siècles d'évolution: des villages de Cassini aux communes d'Aujourd'hui*, http://cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html/fiche.php?select_resultat=17232 (accessed 6 October 2010).

the large numbers of tourists visiting the town. For those who do make the trip, part of the 'heritage offer' in twenty-first-century Honfleur is a visit to the Maisons Satie, a permanent museum/exhibition space in the house where the musician once lived. As the only institution of its kind, this highly visible public symbol certainly does its bit to perpetuate the linkage between Satie and Honfleur (as well as the link between Satie and surrealism), but, for present purposes, the question is what role biographers have played in establishing and interpreting that link.[120]

As it happens, the very first biographer of Satie, Pierre-Daniel Templier, based much of his 1932 life-and-works on conversations with Satie's brother Conrad.[121] Although Conrad remained close to his older brother throughout his life, it is inevitable that he would have had more to say about Honfleur than other informants who had struck up a relationship with Satie only after he had established himself in Paris. In any case, it is beyond doubt that Honfleur has enjoyed a sustained and significant presence in the writing of Satie's musical life ever since, as demonstrated by the most recent English-language Satie biography, which begins with a chapter entitled, unsurprisingly, 'Honfleur'.[122] While the gesture of beginning at the beginning is hardly noteworthy in itself, the fact that it has been repeated in virtually every biographical account published in the years between those of Templier and Davis suggests that each of these authors has, deliberately or otherwise, set himself the task of writing about Satie's time by the seaside as if it were an overture to, even an explanation of, the rest of his life and music.

Typically this has involved sketching some combination of what have become the stock descriptions of Satie's early years: at school he was 'a mediocre student at

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[120] On the link between Satie and surrealism, see Introduction, note 51.
[121] Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie* (Paris: Rieder, 1932). Available in English as Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie*, trans. Elena L. French and David S. French (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1969).
[122] See Mary E. Davis, *Erik Satie* (London: Reaktion, 2007).

best'[123] and allergic to academic discipline; his musical education (such as it was) consisted of lessons with Monsieur Vidot in the 'gloomy confines of [the church of] Saint Léonard';[124] his father, Alfred, was 'studious and docile',[125] while his uncle Adrien (in whom 'the Satie strain of fantasy had . . . come to full flower')[126] went by the English nickname 'Seabird' and had a boat so fastidiously clean it rarely left the harbour. With hindsight, it is possible to draw lines of influence between the experiences of the small-town boy and the achievements of the adult avant-gardist. Satie's early preference for self-sought knowledge, for example, can be linked to his later status as an aesthetic 'outsider' who (supposedly) favoured intuition and simplicity over any inherited or learned styles.[127] Similarly, Satie's large fin-de-siècle output of religious, or at least cultish, compositions can be traced back to 'the Gothic look of Vinot's church and the sound of the Gregorian mode which he heard there'.[128] More specifically, numerous writers have observed that the story of the King's unused ivory staircase told between the staves in the 'Marche du grand escalier' (March of the Grand Staircase, 1913) is a direct reference to Erik's eccentric, boat-owning uncle.[129]

As the above examples illustrate, links between Satie's Honfleur childhood and his adult career range from the tenuous to the obvious. But there is one important aspect of his character and compositions that almost all biographers have attributed to

[123] Ibid., 17.
[124] Alan M. Gillmor, *Erik Satie* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 9.
[125] Templier, *Erik Satie,* 7. Note that page numbers refer to the English translation. This description is repeated in Davis, *Erik Satie* 14.
[126] Harding, *Erik Satie,* 8.
[127] For the clearest exposition of this argument, see Adriano Bassi, *Erik Satie: l'Antiaccademico* (Foggia: Sannicandro Garganico, 2003).
[128] Harding, *Erik Satie,* 13.
[129] See, for example, Myers, *Erik Satie,* 15.

the culture of Satie's native town: his curious sense of humour.[130] The combination of deadpan wit and whimsical fantasy that became a fingerprint of Satie's compositional style (and an insurmountable critical obstacle for those people who did not take kindly to titles such as *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* (Three Pear-shaped Pieces, 1903), *Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)* (Genuinely Flabby Preludes (For a Dog), 1912), and 'Être jaloux de son camarade qui a une grosse tête' (Being Jealous of a Playmate with a Thick Head, 1913) was, according to successive Satie biographers, unique to Honfleur. The apparent proof of this hypothesis is the corroboration provided by Alphonse Allais, a contemporary poet and artist who made the exact same journey from Honfleur to Montmartre and became known as a humourist in a similar vein to Satie.[131] Whether there was something in the Normandy air (or perhaps in the water?) is nowhere very well explained, but that is largely beside the point. By rooting Satie's humour in his native Honfleur, biographers have constructed a logical point of origin for a dominant and much-discussed aspect of Satie's personal and aesthetic identity. To this extent, Honfleur is as much a function of music-biographical discourse as it is a real location to be mapped, measured, and accounted for. If this is the case, then 'Honfleur' might profitably be understood as a discursive anchor for Satie's alterity, and the reason it performs this function so well is that it is at once easily specified and conspicuously under-determined: a picture of Honfleur's charming seafront or the formal garden in front of the Satie family home (see fig. 6) can be easily packaged as the cradle of

[130] Satie's musical humour will be discussed at greater length in chapter 3, by which point it will be apparent that his satirical and parodic techniques have not only been linked to Honfleur, but also to the cabaret scene of fin-de-siècle Montmartre.
[131] For an introduction to and contextualisation of Allais's work, see Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (eds.), *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humour, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996).

Satie's creative humours, yet it is almost impossible to locate this image in any specific historical period.

Significantly it is not only biographers who have constructed Honfleur in this manner. Satie himself, in his article 'Recoins de ma vie' (Odd Corners of My life, 1924), the last in a series of his *Mémoires d'un amnésique*, grounds his personal and familial history in a nostalgically rendered vision of the geography of Honfleur:

> The origins of the Saties probably go back to ancient times. Oh yes . . . I can't confirm it, but neither can I unconfirm it. . . . Let the memory of my ancient ancestors rest in peace. Oh yes. . . . As for me I was born in Honfleur (Calvados), in the Pont-l'Évêque district on the 17th May 1866. . . . Honfleur is a small town watered by the poetic waves of the Seine and in complicity the tumultuous ones of the channel. Its inhabitants are very polite, very agreeable. Oh yes. . . . I had an unremarkable childhood and adolescence, with no features worth recording in serious writing.[132]

As the last line of this passage makes clear, the text discourages the reader from taking it too seriously, and I would sympathise with any reader who reached for notions of parody (whether of grandiose historical prose or tourist brochure schmooze) to explain 'what Satie was up to' in this article. However, what I would like to draw attention to is not the play of intertextuality, but the implied position from which this memoir was written. Since 'Recoins de ma vie' was published only a year before Satie's death, Honfleur was already at the far end of a (slightly fuzzy) personal historical telescope. Just as important, however, is the fact that Honfleur is described as if from a

[132] 'L'origine des Satie remonte, peut-être, aux temps les plus reculés. Oui . . . Là-dessus, je ne puis rien affirmer, ni infirmer, du reste. . . . Que la mémoire de mes vieux ascendants repose en paix. Oui. . . . Pour ce qui est de moi, je suis né à Honfleur (Calvados), arrondissement de Pont-l'Évêque, le 17 mai 1866. . . . Honfleur est une petite ville qu'arrosent ensemble, et de connivence, les flots poétiques de la Seine et ceux tumultueux de la Manche. Ses habitants (honfleurais) sont très polis et très aimables. Oui . . . Je restai dans cette cité jusqu'à l'âge de douze ans (1878) et vins me fixer à Paris . . . J'eus une enfance et une adolescence quelconques, sans traits dignes d'être relatés dans de sérieux écrits'. Erik Satie, 'Recoins de ma vie', *Les Feuilles libres* 6/35 (1924), 329. Reprinted in Erik Satie, *Écrits*, ed. Ornella Volta, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1990), 26. My translation is based on the voiceover to Christopher Hale, *Erik Satie: Things seen to the Right and the Left* [film] (BBC 2, 1992).

considerable geographical distance. These are quite obviously not the first hand experiences of a current inhabitant impressing themselves on the page; the whole tenor of the memoir and its well-ordered structure does not shout loudly of ‘here and now’, but tells calmly of ‘there and then’. As such, ‘Recoins’ can be seen to inaugurate a tradition in Satie scholarship of imagining Honfleur as somewhere that exists only in displaced recollection. Hence my use of the phrase ‘nostalgically-rendered geography’; not to imply a rose-tinted view of the past and its places (after all, the Honfleurais are described only as ‘polite and agreeable’, hardly a heart-melting remembrance), but rather to suggest a certain distance on the part of the author from the object of his contemplation.



Figure 6. Photograph of Satie's birthplace in Honfleur (Archives de la Fondation Erik Satie, n.d., reprinted in Davis, *Erik Satie*, 14).

Of course, the same loosely defined 'distance' could be read into any attempt to describe a chronologically past situation, but whereas some (auto)biographical writing attempts to conjure a sense of present-ness and proximity, neither of these terms seems appropriate to either Satie's or his biographers' invocations of Honfleur. The question this raises is how best to characterise the distance between 'writer' and 'written about' that is registered in the text. Having already referred to Honfleur as a 'point of origin', it is tempting to project that notion onto the pictorial plain and consider Honfleur as a 'vanishing point' in Satie biography; a location tinged with the blue hues of memory to which writers can only gesture from some more finely-grained and tangible present. Despite the attraction of such an idea, there are other, more literal measurements that hold more significance for the present discussion. For example, I have already pointed out that Honfleur as described in 'Recoins' is Honfleur as viewed from where Satie was living at the time. This distance – between Paris and the provinces – is not only pertinent to Satie's personal itinerary, but also relates to broader questions of the relations between capital city and what are taken to be cultural hinterlands.[133] By this thinking, the local specificity of Honfleur that is so readily asserted by Satie's biographers is, in fact, deceptive. Far from 'special' in its own right, Honfleur's supposed idiosyncrasies are precisely a measure of its distance from Paris. Substitute the word 'eccentricity' – which, as we have already established, has frequently been used to describe Satie's and Allais's humour – and the image of a point from which difference is judged in concentric circles becomes instructive, if more than a little simplistic. What this reading of eccentricity implies – and here I must underscore that

[133] On this point, see Alain Corbin, 'Paris-Province' in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 1/ 777-823.

the music-biographical discourse in question represents the norm, not the exception – is that Satie's musical life has tended to be written from a position of assumed cultural centrality. To repeat the spatial or geographic simile proper to France, it has been written *as if viewed from Paris*. It turns out that the significance of my starting question – where did Satie comes from? – lies not in how it has been answered, but in how it has been asked. To state the obvious, if Satie's biography had been written from the point of view of Honfleur, he would not have had to have 'come from' anywhere – except, perhaps, an English, protestant mother, but that is another story.[134]

Montmartre

Given what has been argued above, it should come as no surprise that Satie's move to Montmartre has been written as a move *towards* the centre of French cultural and musical life. Unlike Honfleur, this famous district in the north of Paris needs no introduction. Or rather, the sheer abundance of iconographic, filmic, and musical representations of the area – especially of the fin de siècle, when Satie was resident – creates a strong sense of familiarity, and ensures for this location a privileged place in the popular (and, I would argue, musicological) imagination. Baz Luhrmann's 2001 musical film *Moulin Rouge!* (in which Matthew Whittet performs a composite of caricatures in his role as 'Satie') is only the most visible recent example; the recurrence of Théophile Steinlen's 'Tournée du Chat Noir' (Chat Noir Tour) image on café walls and at student poster sales is equally important in conditioning attitudes toward the location Volta identifies so closely with Satie's 'youth'. While the bohemian mythology of Montmartre – including the marketing of local cabaret entertainment to 'non-local' audiences – will be discussed at greater length in chapter 2, it is important to

[134] For a brief discussion of Jane Leslie Satie's biography, see Davis, *Erik Satie*, 15.

acknowledge here the extraordinary status afforded its emblematic performance venues, even those whose doors have long since closed to the public. Witness the following assertion from a website dedicated to 'The First Cabaret':

> Le Chat Noir made Montmartre the artistic centre of Paris in the late 19th century. Since Paris already fancied itself the artistic centre of the world, that's saying something.[135]

The fact that this statement exhibits clear similarities with the self-promotional prose of the Chat Noir's proprietor, Rodolphe Salis – who described his own premises as 'the most extraordinary cabaret in the world' – hardly undercuts its force.[136] On the contrary, the success of Salis's hype in securing his own history should not be underestimated; his central idea – that, in terms of creative energy, Montmartre outstripped any other part of contemporary Paris – now circulates with some regularity, as demonstrated by the accompanying text to a 2005 exhibition of paintings by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec:

> In the late nineteenth century, Montmartre became the heart of a daring, often racy, entertainment industry that lured thrill-seeking Parisians to its dance halls and cabarets, circuses and brothels. The district was electrified by the unusual mix of people drawn to the quarter: working-class labourers enticed by the inexpensive housing, performers seeking fame and fortune, adventurous Parisians who strayed from the more bourgeois city centre, and curious tourists.[137]

Judging by these twenty-first-century accounts, it would be an understatement to say that Montmartre's cultural star has burned brighter and hotter than that of Honfleur. The Normandy town of Satie's birth may (or may not) have had a distinctive sense of humour, but I do not know of any writer who has claimed it had what in popular music

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[135] VickeyK, *Chat Noir: The First Cabaret*, http://hubpages.com/hub/Chat-Noir-The-First-Cabaret (accessed 6 October 2010).
[136] Salis's remarks, which appeared in the eponymous house journal of the Chat Noir on 8 April 1882, are quoted in Cate and Shaw (eds.), *The Spirit of Montmartre*, 26.
[137] See 'Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre', *nga.gov* [National Gallery of Art, Washington DC exhibition site], http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2005/toulouse/index.shtm (accessed 6 Oct 2010).

studies is called a 'scene'.[138] However, there is one crucial respect in which the description of Montmartre resembles that of Honfleur: they have both been defined in terms of their distance and difference from central Paris. Though Montmartre may have been, culturally speaking, more central than Honfleur, in simple geographic terms the Butte Montmartre was not to be found in the centre of the city. Perched on a hill overlooking the capital, Mont-martre (literally 'Martyr's Mount') was once a village, and remained outside the boundaries of the first arrondissements drawn up in 1795. It only came within the ambit of Parisian administration in 1860 when it was christened the eighteenth of 20 new arrondissements.[139] Despite its inclusion in this rationalised compartmentalisation of the capital city, Montmartre's streets were left relatively untouched by Baron Haussmann and Napoléon III's mid-century 'embellishments'.[140] Indeed, up to and including the fin de siècle, the area was often characterised as semi-rural or 'villageois'.[141] Even today, the Cabaret du Lapin Agile is situated in conspicuously green surroundings, between a graveyard and a vineyard, on the other

[138] Of course, that is not to say that there was no musical life in Honfleur. For details of concerts conducted under the auspices of the Société le vieux Honfleur (Society of Old Honfleur), see J. Sauerwein, 'Le mouvement musical en Province et à l'Etranger', *Le Courrier musical* 7/16 (15 August 1904), 477-478. For a recent discussion of the notion of musical 'scenes', see Adam Krims, 'Studying Reception and Scenes', in Derek B. Scott (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 397-410.

[139] See Merriman, *The Margins of City Life*, 41.

[140] For a discussion of Haussmannisation, see David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Agulhon, Maurice (ed.), *La Ville de l'âge industriel: le Cycle Haussmannien* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

[141] Georges Montorgueil, for example, wrote of 'ce petit village de Montmartre' and commented on 'des rues pittoresques' (picturesque streets) in *La vie à Montmartre* (Paris: G. Boudet, 1899), 18, 6. Similar descriptions can be found in more recent histories: 'Montmartre, with its rustic character and its cheap cafés . . . remained a place where the marginal forms of social existence could still be seen and experienced.' See Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York: Viking, 1986), 224-225. For a brief summary of Seigel's work on the cultural history of Parisian bohemia, see Jerrold Seigel, 'The Rise of Bohemia', in Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (eds.), *Giacomo Puccini: La Bohème* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-11.

side of the hill from central Paris.[142] To an important extent, then, the Montmartre in which Satie lived remained – to borrow Merriman's phrase – at the margins of city life. This sense of marginality, which allows for a complex enfolding of cultural and geographical commentary, has been a recurring theme in the discourse on fin-de-siècle Montmartre.

> Set upon a butte, or hill, and removed from the city centre, Montmartre had an identity distinct from central Paris. Its rural roots were evident at the end of the century, when working windmills still dotted the landscape. Narrow, winding, and haphazard streets also contrasted Montmartre with central Paris, where Baron Haussmann's urban modernization plan had created a coherent design with broad avenues and uniform street lamps. . . . Montmartre's separation from central Paris – geographically, demographically, historically, and architecturally – set the stage for the decadent fringe culture that arose in the district on the butte.[143]

The significant feature of this passage – best summed up by the phrase 'fringe culture' – is the attempt to link the peripheral location of the eighteenth arrondissement to the conspicuous non-conformity of the entertainment culture for which it became famous. The reason this portrayal of Montmartre as an alternative cultural milieu to that of central Paris has been so important in Satie biography is that it allows for the musician to be presented as both a bohemian outsider and as a central figure in the history of French music. Typically, this is something biographers address by showing rather than telling. Steven Moore Whiting's monograph *Satie the Bohemian* is a good example: in a series of chapters under the heading 'Satie's Involvement in Popular Milieux', Whiting effectively walks the reader around the Montmartre neighbourhood where every café boasts among its *habitués* at least a couple of now-canonical composers, poets, painters, etc., and every conversation sparks an irreverently brilliant aesthetic innovation.[144] At

[142] The significance of the context of bohemian Montmartre in the writing of Satie's early career will be discussed at greater length in chapter 2.
[143] 'Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre'.
[144] See especially chapters 4-6 in Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

the Auberge du Clou, c.1892, for example, Satie meets Debussy and thus begins their 'complex and surprisingly long-lived friendship'.[145] As Whiting points out:

> Partisans of Satie make him responsible for Debussy's unresolved ninth chords . . . and no less important, for intervening in time to lead Debussy away from artistic subservience to Wagner.[146]

A year or so later, c.1893, Satie meets Ravel at the Nouvelle Athènes, a café on the place Pigalle.[147] Elsewhere he befriends pianists (Ricardo Viñes), humourists (George Auriol), *chansonniers* (Vincent Hyspa), and visual artists (Suzanne Valadon).

Before Satie can be presented as part of this exceptional milieu, however, biographers have to account for the manner in which he arrived in Montmartre. When it comes to this point in the narrative, there is one event that no writer could afford to leave out; not only is it a charming vignette, but it has also become central to the mythology of Satie's 'Montmartre period'. It is therefore worth quoting at length a passage from Davis's *Erik Satie* – though, as I say, some version of the same story can be found in almost every Satie biography:

> On the evening of 28 December 1887 a shadow play of unprecedented ambition and opulence had its premiere; this was [Henri] Rivière's adaptation of Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* . . . This premiere seems to have occasioned Satie's initial visit to the Chat Noir as well as his introduction to [the proprietor, Rodophe] Salis. As [Contamine de] Latour recalled the moment, Satie's friend Vital Hocquet, a plumber who published poetry under the pseudonym Narcisse Lebau, 'announced imposingly 'Erik Satie, gymnopédiste!' to which Salis, bowing as low as he could, replied: 'That's a very fine profession!'
>
> Satie, who at the time of this meeting had at best made preliminary sketches for the works that would become the famous *Gymnopédies*, had in a stroke found an identity and a new second home. Certainly he would have warmed to the Chat Noir's eclectic décor, so precisely in tune with his own fascination with the past, and he must have been delighted to fit into a clique of regulars that included a number of fellow Normans, notably Alphonse Allais, who although a decade older than Satie had lived on the same street in Honfleur and attended the same boarding school. . . . Within weeks of his first visit Satie was hired as the cabaret's 'second pianist', replacing Dynam-Victor Fumet. This new post, and more generally the Chat Noir milieu, inspired a major change of

[145] Ibid., 110.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 345.

> affect in Satie; Latour recalled the composer, 'til then shy and reserved, gave free reign to the hoard of wild goose humour that lay dormant in him'. He changed his appearance entirely and, following a 'chatnoiresque rite', let his beard and hair grow long. As for wardrobe, Latour recalled that Satie destroyed the few garments he owned in a frenzy.[148]

While Satie's initial, grandiose entrance and Salis's mock-reverential welcome constitute the nugget of this story, what follows is equally important since the account as a whole gives the impression that Satie's first steps into the antique-decorated rooms of the Chat Noir were a decisive moment in his creative journey. The sheer speed with which he was assimilated into the milieu ('in a stroke [he] found an identity and a new second home'; 'Within weeks . . . [he] was hired as the cabaret's "second pianist"'), and the immediate changes registered in his behaviour (from 'shy and reserved' to 'wild goose humour') and appearance (out with the old and in with the hairy) suggest a significant change in Satie's outlook and activity. However, the manner in which this pivotal event is anticipated in Davis's account also deserves attention. The above passage is included in a chapter entitled 'Student, Soldier, Gymnopédiste', which, unlike Volta's clear-cut biographical itinerary, allows for a discussion of Satie's Parisian experience prior to his arrival in Montmartre.[149] On first impressions this would seem to disrupt Volta's notion of a progression from Honfleur/childhood to Montmartre/youth by allowing for a period of Paris/adolescence in between. But much of Davis's chapter effectively treats Satie's experiences as a student at the Paris Conservatoire and a soldier on military service as an extended preparation for his arrival at the Chat Noir. The Conservatoire's reputation for conservatism and the salon-music tastes of Satie's father and step-mother become useful stand-ins for the familiar idea of bourgeois mediocrity from which cabaret culture promised an exhilarating

[148] Davis, *Erik Satie*, 29-31.
[149] Or rather, prior to his theatrical arrival in Montmartre's cabaret scene, since the home of his father had technically been within the eighteenth *arrondissement*. See 'Erik Satie' in Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer*.

escape. And the military service – a disaster waiting to happen that ended with the aforementioned bout of self-inflicted bronchitis – is yet another dramatisation of Satie's flight from discipline and conformity.[150] Davis's account even suggests that Satie's convalescence can be read as an anacrusis to his Chat Noir entrance, as it was during this period that he first turned to the works of Flaubert, including *La tentation de Saint Antoine*.

It goes without saying that the presentation of Satie's arrival in Montmartre as the logical outcome of an anti-establishment mind-set entails a good deal of biography in hindsight. Like a 'Just So Story', it describes the process of an artist's self-realisation as if it could never have been otherwise. But the historiographical problems with Davis's account are, to a certain extent, less important than the question of whether or not it makes for a convincing narrative. The fact that this particular narrative has been repeated in successive biographies suggests that, by and large, it does. Readers have been repeatedly told that Satie and the *cabarets artistiques* were a perfect fit; a match made in Montmartre, if you will. The dandified personages of which Satie was (and remains) typical and the un-Haussmannised streets through which he paraded were mutually defining. All the more remarkable, then, that in 1898 Satie took all his belongings and pushed them, in a handcart, the 10-plus kilometres to a working-class suburb south of Paris.

Arcueil

As one might well imagine, Satie's biographers have done a lot of head-scratching when it comes to this stage in his creative journey. Answers to the question 'why move to Arcueil?' have ranged from the practical (the rent was cheap) to the personal (he may

[150] For details of the bronchitis incident, see Preface, note 5.

have been following in the footsteps of Salis's cousin, André – another heavy-drinking bohemian who found his way to the very same southern suburb at the fin de siècle).[151] But regardless of how the question is answered, the fact that biographers have felt compelled to explain the motives behind Satie's move contributes to the overriding impression that 'the suburbs' were a strange place to be. As Templier put it: 'In 1898, Satie felt the need for a change of environment and moved to the other end of Paris, pitching his tent in the wasteland [*pays perdu*] of the Parisian suburbs'.[152] The epigraph Templier chose to accompany his chapter on Arcueil was 'Je me retire' (I withdraw).[153] Furthermore, Templier positioned this material in a biographical no man's land; after the chapter on Satie's early music, but before the chapter entitled 'Recognition'. And all this despite the fact that Templier was born and raised in Arcueil – son of the local Mayor, no less. Aside from this being a clear example of musical biography written *as if* from a central position, it demonstrates what was at stake in Satie's move from one type of suburb to another. Montmartre might have been peripheral in a limited sense, but Arcueil – at least as it has been rendered in Satie biography – was beyond the pale.

Even though Satie continued to earn his living as a pianist at various Montmartre venues (particularly the Auberge du Clou), biographers have invariably treated the move to Arcueil as a watershed, as if his change of address were symptomatic of a broader shift in his musical life; a shift every bit as game-changing as the entrance to the temples of cabaret culture in Montmartre. According to Alain Pâris:

[151] Whiting, for example, suggests 'The immediate cause [of the move] was lack of money'. Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 179. Davis points out that 'his [Satie's] new apartment, which lacked all modern conveniences, had belonged to one of Salis's relatives'. Davis, *Erik Satie*, 63.
[152] Templier, *Erik Satie*, 22.
[153] Ibid., 24.

'In 1898, Satie moved to Arcueil . . . It was the beginning of a new period'.[154] Since, in most accounts, Satie's time in the creative wilderness is said to have lasted until Ravel's decision to champion his music in 1911, it is only going slightly too far to say that the move to Arcueil is written as the beginning of a lost decade.[155] In her discussion of the effect of the move on Satie's personality, Volta plays on a similar idea of disappearance, or, in theatrical terms, an exit from the scene: Montmartre, Volta claims, was a 'permanent stage, where individuality was the law . . . [and] Satie kept himself constantly in the front line.'[156] However, '[a]fter his retirement to Arcueil, he followed the opposite path, striving for anonymity and the effacement of the self with the same dedication that he had shown in his repeated eccentricities on la Butte.'[157] What is important to recognise is that, in constructing her narrative of social and artistic retreat, Volta draws heavily on the distinctions of (sub)urban geography. In the above extract she opposes the dynamic identity of Montmartre and the apparent anonymity of Arcueil; elsewhere, she invokes the singular significance of crossing the walled boundary of the city, and the broader distinction between *intra-muros* (Paris) and *extra-muros* (not-Paris).[158] In particular, Volta draws attention to one of the landmarks on

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[154] 'En 1898, Satie s'installe à Arceuil...C'est le début d'une nouvelle période'. Alain Pâris, 'A la Recherche d'Erik Satie', *Le Courrier Musical de France* 52/4 (1975), 131.
[155] According to Whiting, 'It was Maurice Ravel who would bring Satie out of bohemian obscurity into the limelight of Parisian concert life.' Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 345. Davis describes 1911 as 'a breakthrough year'. Davis, *Erik Satie*, 81.
[156] 'Sur cette scène permanente, où la règle est de singulariser, Satie se maintiendra constamment en première ligne.' Volta, 'Satie sur la butte', 5.
[157] 'Après sa retraite à Arcueil, il suivra le chemin inverse, visant l'anonymat et l'effacement du Moi avec la même application que supposent, sur la Butte, ses excentricités répétées.' Ibid., 6.
[158] Unlike other early-twentieth-century mega-cities, Paris was, until after the First World War, entirely surrounded by fortified walls. It was prohibited to build within 200 metres of these walls, which left a conspicuously empty space known as 'la zone'. When the walls were demolished after WWI, the sense of vacancy only increased. It took until the 1970s for the space to be filled by the building of a multi-lane ring-road, the Périphérique. If anything, this road now serves as an even more effective barrier between the suburbs and the city.

Satie's daily route between his lodgings in Arcueil and his workplace in Montmartre, which, as luck would have it, was called La barrière d'Enfer (Hell's gate).[159] In reality, this was nothing more than a glorified toll booth – a hangover from an early-nineteenth-century scheme to enforce an import tax on goods entering Paris – but Volta is quick to point out that its name brought added significance to Satie's return journey from Montmartre, which took him beyond the city's physical and metaphysical limits.[160]

It thus seems fair to say that Satie's biographers have placed a lot of emphasis on the gesture of departure from Paris, and, to that extent, the details of who and what was in Arcueil are arguably less important than the fact that Arcueil was not within the established boundaries of the city. However, the relationship between the suburb and the city is, in this instance, not only one of difference, but also one of inequality, or subservience. Arcueil was best known (if it was known at all) for the many arches of an aqueduct, which provide the etymological root of the name 'Arc'ueil. Not merely a passive feature of the landscape, the aqueduct testifies to an important aspect of the commune's economic and social history. Although the present arrangement dates from the nineteenth century, it was the Romans who first built such a structure through the area to transport water to their city centre. This relationship, whereby a satellite settlement provides services to a central city, has been a recurring theme ever since. The gothic splendour of Notre-Dame, for example, was carved out of stone cut from quarries near Arcueil. And when Satie arrived at the turn of the century, a number of his neighbours were employed either in the local bleach factory or in using that bleach to wash Parisians' dirty clothes. It is difficult to imagine a more servile connection between a peripheral and central location, and I hazard a guess that these less-than-

[159] Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 18.
[160] This is the very same barrière d'Enfer that provides the setting for the third act of Puccini's *La bohème*. Significantly, the characters in the opera never travel further from Paris than this point.

glamorous occupations have coloured the image of Arcueil in the minds of those who have written about Satie's time in – and identification with – this southern suburb.

Of course, it is possible that Templier knew what he was talking about when he called his own birthplace a 'wasteland', but what are we to make of musicologist Alan Gillmor's description of Arcueil as a 'grimy Parisian suburb'?[161] Or E.L.T. Mesens's line about 'the atrocious suburban landscape' in which Satie lived?[162] Not to mention this almost-Dickensian passage from writer Suzanne Sens:

> This isolated, desolate corner of the Parisian suburbs . . . a panorama of small squalid houses, of sad streets surrounded by wastelands, more or less rundown, in an atmosphere thick with the fumes of numerous tanneries.[163]

Judging by two relatively recent books and an older CD compilation of recorded interviews, all of which collate a wealth of information relating to Satie's life in Arcueil, it seems fair to say that a number of writers have overstated the case against this sort of Parisian suburb.[164] Neither of these books has yet been translated into English, or had any real impact on English-language Satie scholarship, yet collectively the research points towards a more nuanced understanding of Arcueil in particular and banlieues in general. To cut three long stories short: we hear not only of laundry, but also of vineyards – some of the closest to Paris then remaining. As Volta explains:

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[161] Alan M Gillmor, 'Erik Satie and the Concept of the Avant-Garde', *The Musical Quarterly* 69/1 (1983), 104.
[162] 'Le paysage atroce de banlieue'. See E.L.T. Mesens, 'A la gloire d'Erik Satie' in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 15.
[163] 'Ce coin isolé, désolé, de la banlieue parisienne...le panorama fait de petites maisons sordides, de rues tristes entournées de terrains vagues, plus ou moins lépreux, dans l'atmosphère alourdie par les fumées émanant des nombreuses tanneries'. Suzanne Sens, *Découverte Erik Satie* (Paris: Hérault, 1984), 50.
[164] Sylvie Albert (ed.), *Erik Satie, l'Inconnu d'Arcueil* [2 CDs] (Paris: Abeille Musique, 2003), first broadcast on France Culture on 18 September 1965; Robillard, *Erik Satie d'Arcueil*; and Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*.

> At the turn of the century, in effect, Arcueil was still rural [*verdoyant*]. The last vines had not yet been removed and several farms provided milk for the commune from the cows they raised. [165]

There was also relatively little motor traffic, easy access to open spaces, a smart Hôtel de Ville, and a strong sense of local solidarity.[166] Indeed, one of the principal insights of this more recent work is to present Arcueil as plugged into a broader network of places and activities than a centre-periphery model would suggest. In particular, the details of Satie's involvement with various local organisations – notably the Radical-Socialist Committee – opens a window onto a complex set of suburban identities and political strategies. One observation I would like to add relates to Satie's work with the Patronage laïque d'Arcueil, a sort of secular Scout group.[167] Of the numerous day trips he organised for local children, not once did their routes take them closer to Paris.[168] On each occasion they set off with their backs to the city and went to visit old churches, *châteaux*, and nearby countryside; landscapes and landmarks that can certainly be considered French, but not necessarily Parisian. For what it is worth, my own impressions on visiting Arcueil in 2009 and 2012, however distant they may be historically from the turn of the twentieth century, reinforced the idea of a connection more with small-town France than metropolitan Paris.

So, is it rash to dismiss Arcueil as a grimy, parasitic suburb? Probably. But flying the flag for a much-maligned banlieue does not, I think, get to the bottom of the

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[165] 'Au tournant du siècle, en effet, Arcueil était verdoyant. Les dernières vignes n'avaient pas encore été arrachées et plusieurs fermes tenues par des nourrisseurs alimentaient la commune en lait des vaches qu'ils élevaient.' Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 19.

[166] Ibid.

[167] For more on the importance of secularism in the years after the *laïcité* legislation of 1905, see Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[168] Details of the excursions from Arcueil, including to 'l'ancienne abbaye du Vaux-de-Cernay, propriété du Baron Henri de Rothschild, et de l'église Notre-Dame-des-Vaux' are given in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 62-63.

problem. Part of the reason for Satie biographies perpetuating such non-specific suburban stereotypes is bound up with the point already stressed about musical histories – whether life histories, or generic histories – being written as if from a position of cultural, and by implication geographic centrality. In order to disrupt this tendency to think as if from the centre looking out, I will use the next part of this chapter to consider the notion of Satie's movement *between* contrasting urban and suburban locations; asking whether this movement carried the same significance when viewed from the suburbs as it did from the city.

From Arcueil to chez Bongard . . . and back again

As we have seen, Satie's decision in 1898 to 'pitch his tent' beyond the city limits and make his home in a suburb that was virtually unknown (and seemingly unknowable) to even his closest friends, was a decision that most biographers have struggled to read as anything other than a withdrawal or retreat. Volta has written of Satie moving to an 'inaccessible elsewhere' and suggests that 'in choosing to live in the suburbs' Satie was effectively 'placing himself in a sort of exile'.[169] Even as early as 1913, the key features of this interpretation are evident in an article on Satie by his friend, and composer, Florent Schmitt:

> Erik Satie went off in search of solitude and self-effacement. In the contemplation of a desert-like suburb, in the peace of the infinite Steppes, he meditates on the truths of this world and the instability of false relations.[170]

[169] 'Inaccessible ailleurs'; 'En choisissant d'habiter la banlieue (et de se mettre ainsi, en quelque sorte, au ban, lui-même)'. Ibid., 18; 19.

[170] 'Erik Satie s'en est allé chercher au loin la solitude et l'oubli. Dans le recueillement d'une banlieue désertique dans le paix des steppes infinies d'Arcueil-Cachan, il médite sur les vérités de ce monde et l'instabilité des fausses relations.' Florent Schmitt, 'Erik Satie', *Montjoie!* (November-December 1913), 11.

On the one hand, there is the vague but pervasive notion that Satie needed to 'get away from it all'; on the other, there is the description of his destination by recourse to barren and distant metaphors. Compared to Honfleur as a point of departure, and Montmartre as a point of arrival, one would be forgiven for thinking that Arcueil was very nearly the point of no return. But the biographical clock does not stop at the moment of Satie's arrival in the suburbs, at least not permanently. Towards the end of his life and career, 'Erik Satie d'Arcueil' or 'le bon maître d'Arcueil' (Good Master of Arcueil) as he was then commonly referred to, seemed to have found a way of grounding his identity in both the suburbs and the city. After his long period out in the cold, so the story goes, Ravel et al had welcomed Satie back with open arms and celebrated his earliest music as a 'genial precursor' to the modern French style.[171] In the years immediately prior to the First World War, Satie began – for almost the first time in his life – to hear his compositions programmed in central Parisian venues.[172] On the back of this new concert profile he secured contracts with music publishers and began what is generally presented as a period of intense and prolific creative activity, culminating in the *succès-de-scandale* of the wartime ballet *Parade* (1917) and his 'masterpiece' *Socrate* (1920).[173]

Increasingly, Satie found himself at the hub of an internationally-feted network of creative talent. Yet all the while, he was still living in Arcueil. Or, as Cocteau put it: 'He lived in the outskirts of Paris, from which he came and to which he returned by

[171] See Introduction, note 46.
[172] The notable exception was the performance of Debussy's orchestrations of his *Gymnopédies* Nos. 1 and 3 at the Salle Érard on 20 February 1897.
[173] For a recent discussion of the reception of *Socrate*, see Pietro Dossena, 'À la Recherche du Vrai Socrate', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 133/1 (2008), 1–31.

foot, protected by his angels.'[174] It has to be said that Cocteau did not reserve angelic description for Satie alone.[175] Nevertheless, the image is striking, and it was picked up in an article of 1945 by Satie's first English-language biographer, Rollo Myers:

> Carrying his inevitable umbrella, his shrewd eyes glinting through his pince-nez and his quizzical, bewhiskered face crowned invariably by a bowler hat, he was often to be seen trudging through the streets of Paris engaged on who knows what mysterious errands . . . For he went everywhere on foot, and it was this idiosyncrasy that drew from Cocteau this touching tribute which might well serve as an epitaph to his memory: 'Another poet whom the angels guide, cherish and torment is Erik Satie who walks every night from Montmartre or Montparnasse to his home at Arcueil-Cachan – a miracle which cannot be explained unless the angels carry him . . .'[176]

Forty years later, the mysterious or even mystical trope of the angels was still in evidence in a foreword to an exhibition guide on Satie by Henri Sauguet:

> Who can really say they knew Erik Satie well? A mystery! This musician was a man like the rest of us, yet so strange, so hard to trace, so fascinating, puzzling, disconcerting, engaging, moving. And what if he had been an angel among men?[177]

Unlike biographers' attempts to understand Satie's initial attraction to Arceuil – attempts which almost always prove abortive, and are generally coupled with emphatically empty descriptions of the Parisian suburbs as a 'wasteland' or 'desert-like'

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[174] 'Il habitait aux environs de Paris, d'où il venait et où il rentrait à pied, soutenu par ses anges.' Jean Cocteau, *Erik Satie* (Liège: P. Aelberts, 1957), 8. Cocteau's 1957 publication was adapted from an article in *La Revue Musicale* (5 March 1924), 217-223, which in turn had been based on notes from a lecture by Cocteau in 1920.

[175] For more on Cocteau's interest in angels, see Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 213-214; Diana Lynn Hawanczak, *The Image of the Angel in the Poetry of Jean Cocteau* (Akron: University of Akron, 1970); and Frederick Brown, *An Impersonation of Angels: A Biography of Jean Cocteau* (London: Viking Press, 1968).

[176] Rollo H. Myers, 'The Strange Case of Erik Satie', *The Musical Times* 86 (1945), 203. Myers's full length biography appeared three years later: see Myers, *Erik Satie*. Myers was familiar with Cocteau's writings on Satie having earlier translated his *Le Coq et l'Arlequin: Notes Autour de la Musique*. See Jean Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin: Notes Concerning Music*, trans. Rollo H. Myers (London: The Egoist Press, 1921).

[177] 'Qui peut affirmer avoir bien connu Erik Satie, vraiment? Mystère! Ce musicien était un homme comme les autres et cependant si étrange, si indiscernable, si fascinant, déroutant, déconcertant, attachant, émouvant. Et s'il avait été un ange parmi les hommes?' Henri Sauguet, Avant-propos, in *Erik Satie à Montmartre* [exhibition guide] (Paris: Musée de Montmartre, 1982), 3.

and ‘desolated’ non-place – the Cocteau-inspired invocation of the angels serves, paradoxically, to normalise Satie’s association with the suburbs. The initial quotation, like the longer piece of writing from which it is taken, is conspicuously short on details – just like Honfleur, the suburbs must remain under-determined – but the old biographical trope of Satie’s self-imposed solitude is here doubly redeemed: first, by its elevation from the realm of the social to that of the spiritual (the lonely outcast reinvented as the sagacious hermit);[178] second, by a shift in emphasis from marginalisation to mobility (‘from which he came and to which he returned’). Whereas Volta drew attention to La barrière d’Enfer as a symbolic and material limit beyond which lay a relatively unknown territory – a latter-day River Styx, if you will, which one crossed at one’s peril – the defining feature of Cocteau’s account is the sense of Satie’s movement back and forth across the (sub)urban boundary. Without wishing to uncritically endorse Cocteau’s vision, it is useful for the present discussion to the extent that it hints at an alternative, more dynamic conception of the connections between musical biography and Parisian geography.[179]

Earlier in this chapter I used the metaphor of sticking pins in a map to suggest the confidence some of Satie’s biographers have had in identifying the key places in his musical life. While this metaphor makes sense in relation to singular and rooted identities – *Erik Satie Honfleurais*, for example, or Erik Satie the archetypal Montmartrois – it is ill-suited to any discussion of shifting or multiple identities. To put it another way, if we are to get to grips with the significance for Satie reception of his

[178] Crucially, the idea of Satie as a solitary hermit figure is not new: ‘On a souvent parlé d’Erik Satie comme de “l’ermite d’Arceuil”’ (People have often spoken of Erik Satie as ‘The Hermit of Arcueil’). See Volta, ‘Satie dans les salons’, 5.

[179] For a broader discussion of angelic mobility in relation to modern communications technology, see Michel Serres, *La Légende des anges* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993). Available in English as Michel Serres, *Angels, a Modern Myth*, trans. Francis Cowper (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).

movement *between* contrasting locations, fixed cartography will not suffice. In addition to 'localising' Satie's biography, it is necessary to ask what relation (if any) Satie's geographical border crossings had to the aesthetic border crossings for which he has been singled out. For this we might turn to Davis:

> Satie explored various ways of integrating high art – as represented by the learned techniques and forms of French art music, along with its idealized qualities of clarity, simplicity, and structural balance – with melodic and harmonic materials derived from contemporary Parisian entertainments, including music-hall tunes, sentimental waltz melodies, operetta airs, and traditional French folk songs. The source of this mingling of high and low often has been traced to Satie's biography, since from the late 1880s through the 1900s he was at home equally in the city's elite music establishment and its popular entertainment venues and was composing art music as well as waltzes and cabaret songs. . . . Biographical detail has thus been perceived as corresponding to artistic practice: participating simultaneously in high art and low culture, Satie is seen to personify the aesthetic his music promotes.[180]

While the city/suburbs boundary is not mentioned explicitly here, elsewhere in Davis's writing she gives details of where this hybrid music – 'high art and low culture' – took place. Describing 'an evening in late May 1916', Davis says the following:

> A select group of Parisians gathered at fashion designer Germaine Bongard's boutique on the stylish rue de Penthièvre . . . The evening's highlight was a concert of the latest works by Erik Satie and Catalan composer Enrique Granados. . . . For Satie, the evening marked a significant career juncture: bringing him into contact with the fashionable Parisian intelligentsia . . . the concert chez Bongard established him as a darling of the creative set and laid the groundwork for his entrée into the city's loftiest artistic domains.[181]

Suffice it to say, the 'city's loftiest artistic domains' can be located quite specifically in the urban geography of central Paris: Bongard's gallery was found in a wealthy area just north of the Avenue des Champs Elysées, and notably just round the corner from the Salle Gaveau where, five years earlier, Ravel had championed a hitherto marginal composer by programming Satie's early piano music as part of a concert series for the

[180] Mary E. Davis, 'Modernity à la Mode : Popular Culture and Avant-Gardism in Erik Satie's "Sports et divertissements"', *The Musical Quarterly* 83/3 (1999), 433-4.
[181] Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 93.

Société musical indépendante. Indeed, Satie's involvement in the salons and *soireés* of central Paris is now well-documented. As long ago as 1985 there was even an exhibition entitled 'Satie dans les salons', in the notes to which Ornella Volta claimed there were a 'thousand anecdotes about Satie's behaviour in these fashionable gatherings'.[182] Volta mentions his irreverence in the presence of Romanian royalty, and how he would pretend to have stumbled upon a grand ball after walking 10 kilometres from Arcueil to get there – all of which, she suggests, was met with great amusement by Satie's aristocratic hosts.[183] In other words, Satie's suburban identity – or, rather, his apparent ability to slip between identities and transgress conventional social boundaries – was turning into a distinct professional advantage. He received commissions from the wealthiest and best-connected patrons of his day.[184] And he found himself surrounded by a host of enthusiastic young musicians who were so enamoured of the ageing composer that they christened themselves 'l'École d'Arceuil'.[185] But all was not as rosy as it seemed. While his mysterious residence in the unfathomable banlieue, and even his membership of the increasingly powerful Parti Communiste, could be harmlessly incorporated into the image Cocteau and others had of an eccentric and radically chic musician – a 'misanthrope mondain' (fashionable loner) as Claude Séférian has described him – the same *jouissance* of transgression struck less of a chord

[182] 'Mille anecdotes fourmillent sur le comportement du compositeur dans ces réunions mondaines.' Volta, 'Satie dans les Salons', 7.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Notably the Princesse de Polignac (a.k.a. Winnaretta Singer, the American heiress to the sewing machine empire) who not only provided the artistic and financial support for Satie's 'drame symphonique' *Socrate*, but also lent him the money to pay a fine and damages – Satie had sent an inflammatory postcard to one newspaper critic – and helped secure his release from prison for the same offence. See Davis, *Erik Satie*, 118-120. For more on the life of Polignac, see Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: A Life of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003).
[185] See Robert Orledge, 'École d'Arcueil', in *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08530 (accessed 16 February 2012).

in the left-leaning suburbs.[186] When Satie stood for election to the municipal council of Arcueil in 1919 he was stung by the clear rejection he received from his neighbours and one-time comrades. In Satie's own words they considered him a 'dirty reactionary' on account of his links with 'the counts, the dukes, and the marquises'; a clear reference to the salons of central Paris in which Satie was spending an increasing amount of time.[187]

At the time, no one was in any doubt that Satie was attempting to move between contrasting groups of people in contrasting locations – the idea of moving between two separate worlds occurs frequently in the literature.[188] The Catalan pianist Ricardo Viñes, for example, compared Satie to Segismundo – a character from Pedro Claderon de la Barca's c.1633 comedy *La Vida es sueño* (Life is a Dream) – because, like the fictional pauper-turned-prince, Satie appeared incapable of distinguishing dream from reality:

> Something of *La vida es sueño* seems apparent in the singular destiny of the bon maître d'Arcueil who, during his incessant comings and goings between his miserable lodgings and the elegant salons of the capital, must have asked himself sometimes, the modern Segismundo, where, in this double and hallucinatory existence, was the dream and where the reality.[189]

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[186] The quotation is taken from Claude Séférian's recollections of his first encounters with the 'univers musical d'Erik Satie', as recorded in Volta, 'Satie dans les salons', 5.

[187] Volta records how Satie expressed his dismay to his friend, the pianist Ricardo Viñes: '"Ca a été un vrai fiasco, car je ne suis plus pour eux qu'un sale réactionnaire", et cela à cause de ses relations dans les Palais de la Ville-Lumière, avec "des comtes, des ducs et des marquis".' ('It was a complete fiasco because I'm nothing more for them now than a dirty reactionary', and this was due to his associations in the palaces of the City of Lights, 'the counts, dukes and marquises'.) Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 81.

[188] One way of pursuing this line of enquiry further would be to utilise the concept of 'intermundane' (i.e., inter-world) creative production developed in Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, 'Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane', *TDR: The Drama Review* 54/1 (2010), 14-38.

[189] 'Ce qui était bel et bien la vérité, admet Viñes, car quelque chose de semblait alors se reproduire dans le destin singulier du bon maître d'Arcueil qui, pendant ses incessantes allées et venues de son misérable taudis aux élégants salons de la capitale, dut se demander quelquefois, moderne Segismundo, où, dans cette double et hallucinante existence, était la fantasmagorie, et où la réalité.' Ricardo Viñes, *Tres*

Immediately after quoting the comments from Viñes given above, Volta offers her own summary of the differences between the social groups in which Satie moved: 'The two opposing worlds, with no links between them, which Satie had frequented in the last years of his life, would only meet on one occasion: his funeral [in Arceuil].'[190] The key question for the present discussion is how that movement was perceived on either side of the city walls. Arguably, it is the view from the centre – the view that his geographic mobility meshed happily with his modern and entertaining music – that currently has the upper hand in Satie scholarship. What I have tried to show is that the story of Satie and the suburbs is more complicated than that. While critics and biographers from Cocteau to Davis have claimed that Satie succeeded in blurring aesthetic and social boundaries, there were other voices – less clearly articulated and poorly recorded– for whom Satie's to-ing and fro-ing (both generic and geographic) merely exacerbated class division. To return to the image of the angels: Cocteau might have given Satie his wings, but the suburban socialists clipped them. If that gesture seems violent, it should come as no surprise because early-twentieth-century Paris was a divided and antagonistic city. By re-reading accounts of Satie's musical life in light of what we now know of this historical urban geography, it is possible to recapture something of that social tension and to better understand the place – and mobility – of one musician within it. On the one hand, the invocation of angelic transit suggests that Satie, unlike ordinary people, left no trace, and travelled without friction between one place and its social opposite. On the other hand, the suburban mistrust of Satie's association with le Tout-Paris' construes his (musical) mobility as a threat to a particular sense of locality

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Aristócratas del Sonido, Semblanzas de Claude Debussy, Erik Satie y Maurice Ravel (Buenos Aires : n.p., 1934), 14, quoted in translation in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 81.

[190] 'Les deux mondes opposés, et non communicants entre eux, que Satie avait fréquenté dans les dernières années de sa vie, ne devraient se rencontre qu'en une seule occasion: à son enterrement.' Ibid., 82.

and place.[191] The former model can be seen as yet another strategy for decontextualising Satie's musical life; the latter as an assertion of an exaggeratedly rooted sense of place. In the final section of this chapter I would like to reject this Hobson's choice and propose an alternative model of geo-biography that is both fully aware of the place where Satie lived and open to the possibility that this place was produced through his repeated movements across the real and imagined spaces of the city.

The house with four chimneys/paths

As mentioned earlier, from 1898 until his death 27 years later, Satie rented a room in La Maison aux quatre cheminées (see fig. 7). To this day, the building maintains a relatively high profile across a range of academic and non-academic discourses. To give just three of the most recent examples: the quatre cheminées is discussed at length and pictured no fewer than six times in Volta's 1999 publication *La banlieue d'Erik Satie*.[192] In the summer of 2011, BBC Radio 3 broadcast a programme entitled 'Erik Satie Walks to Work', which made repeated references to Satie's apartment in the 'obscure suburb of Arcueil'. An accompanying website documenting the route of the walk features a map with an arrow pointing out 'the House with Four Chimneys, on rue

[191] For a well-referenced discussion of the theoretical debates regarding place and mobility, see Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), esp. 33-53 and chapter 3 'Reading "A Global Sense of Place"', which addresses Doreen Massey's 1994 essay of that name, a direct response from David Harvey, and Cresswell's thoughts on what an 'extroversive' (as opposed to 'introversive') sense of place might mean. See also Tim Cresswell, *On the Move* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006), and Ginette Verstraete and Tim Cresswell (eds.), *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalised World* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002).

[192] Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*. The quatre cheminées is pictured seven times if you include Satie's self-portrait with the caption 'Monsieur Sadi [*sic*] dans sa maison. Il songe'. For more on this image, see Introduction, note 13.

Cauchy'.[193] Even more recently, the news of refurbishment plans for the quatre cheminées made the Val-de-Marne edition of a French daily newspaper, thus providing the journalist with an opportunity to rehearse and reaffirm Satie's links both with this particular apartment block and the commune of Arceuil in which it is located.[194]



Figure 7. La Maison aux quatre cheminées, Arcueil. Photograph by Pierre-Daniel Templier, c.1930.

[193] The initial broadcast, presented by Sarah Walker, was aired on 27 August 2011. For the website, see www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wlg7h (accessed 12 February 2012).
[194] See 'La "Maison" d'Erik Satie Bientôt Réhabilitée', *Le Parisien* (18 October 2011), www.leparisien.fr/abo-val-de-marne/la-maison-d-erik-satie-bientot-rehabilitee-18-10-2011-1658097.php (accessed 12 February 2012).

The fact that the quatre cheminées provided Satie with a home for most of his adult life no doubt goes some way to accounting for the continued interest in the building illustrated by the fairly arbitrary examples given above. But longevity of tenure does not in itself guarantee such attention; there are, after all, plenty of performing or composing artists whose long-term address does *not* become a recurring feature of biographical, historical, and critical writing. So what is it about this particular 'maison' that has allowed it to stick in the imagination? For one thing, it was – indeed, still is – a striking and strangely photogenic structure. Though it is hard to separate an interest in the building's form from an interest in its tenant, both the sculptor Constantin Brancusi (who knew Satie personally) and the photo-journalist Robert Doisneau (who did not) photographed the quatre cheminées when visiting Arcueil in the years after Satie's death.[195] Especially when viewed from in front and below, as it is in both Doisneau's print and figure 7, this triangular assembly at a fork in the road has the air of an architectural island floating in a sea of cobbles (or nowadays, tarmac). The fact that the neighbouring premises were only just out of shot on either side of the frame of figure 7 only draws attention to the photographer's decision to picture the building *as if* it were standing alone. Since the photographer in question, Pierre-Daniel Templier, was also Satie's first biographer, this decision should not go unnoticed.[196] Indeed, a similar artistic licence was taken in an oil painting by Augustin Grass-Mick, one of Satie's closest friends at the time of his move to Arcueil.[197] Here Satie is shown walking arm-in-arm with two companions as they 'discover' the quatre cheminées. The building itself, which occupies the top right-hand quadrant of the canvas, is encircled – and thus

[195] See Ornella Volta, *L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie*, rev. ed. (Paris: F. Van de Velde, 1979), 44.
[196] Templier, *Erik Satie*.
[197] Augustin Grass-Mick, [Henri] *Pacory, Satie et Grass-Mick découvrant la Maison aux quatre cheminées* (Pacory, Satie and Grass-Mick discovering the Maison aux quatre cheminées, n.d.). Reproduced in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 23.

isolated – by a vacant pictorial space of high-contrast off-white. Part of the significance of these exaggeratedly 'empty' settings is that they mark out Satie's lodgings as considerably less than urban. The vision they offer of the quatre cheminées is a long way from the familiar image of seven-storey apartment blocks on the boulevards of post-Haussmann Paris. The visual echo of another chimney a little way up the hill in Templier's photograph – this time belonging to a factory – adds to the overriding impression of an under-populated, 'un-Parisian', semi-industrial landscape.[198]

As well as its unusual form and unmistakeably sub-urban location, the attention paid to the quatre cheminées also results from a number of biographical strands that tie in this building with a complex of anecdotes, memories, and myths about Satie the eccentric composer. Most famously, no one save the occupier was ever allowed inside the second floor apartment until after his death in 1925. Even close friends such as Grass-Mick, who had helped Satie move there from Montmartre in 1898, were unequivocal in recalling that 'no one set foot in his room during his lifetime.'[199] One of the most remarkable aspects of this already remarkable ban on all visitors to Satie's home in Arceuil is the fact that it did not stop his creative identity becoming closely associated with the name of his adopted suburb. We have already heard how he was referred to, with or without tongue in cheek, as 'le bon Maître d'Arcueil', and how a group of young composers who knew Satie well and admired his approach to composition chose to refer to themselves as 'l'École d'Arcueil'.[200] Judging by the words of one ambitious young politician in 1985, the link between Satie and his place of residence remained just as strong at the end of the twentieth century as it had been at

[198] Another photograph by Templier, looking down towards the quatre cheminées, has the same factory chimney in the foreground, thus making the industrial context even more prominent. Reproduced in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 15.
[199] Quoted in Ornella Volta, *Satie Seen through his Letters*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Marion Boyars, 1989), 70.
[200] See note 83.

the beginning: 'It is a great pleasure for the town of Neuilly [sur Seine]' wrote Mayor Nicolas Sarkozy, 'to present . . . an exhibition on *Satie in the Salons* . . . I trust this show will meet with the interest it deserves and encourage the visitor to explore a little further the aesthetic universe of the *Maître d'Arcueil*.'[201]

Ironically, it may have been the sheer impenetrability of the quatre cheminées that did more than anything else to establish the building – as well as the suburb in which it is situated – as a significant landmark in the imaginative geography of Satie's Paris. This point is backed up by one British documentary film from the 1990s, which includes a sequence following the Austrian composer Kurt Schwertsik in his thwarted attempts to communicate with Satie's domestic past.[202] Upon arriving in Arcueil, Schwertsik immediately makes his way to the quatre cheminées: he enters the building, climbs a flight of stairs and proceeds to knock on the door of what we are led to believe is Satie's former apartment. The silence of the response is as deafening as it is predictable. Schwertsik is forced to acknowledge the obvious: 'Nobody home'. Quite what this implies about the erotics of musicological knowledge and the lure of unenterable objects is a question for another time. Let me simply add that one of the most reproduced images of Satie's suburban dwelling, alongside the view shown in figure 7, is that of a shadowy opening with stairs leading to the front door – a none too-subtle symbol of the forbidden, unknowable and thus desirable space that lies within.[203]

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[201] 'C'est un grand plaisir pour la Ville de Neuilly [sur Seine], de présenter . . . une exposition Satie dans les Salons . . . Je souhaite donc que cette manifestation . . . rencontre l'intérêt qu'elle nous semble devoir mériter et incite le visiteur à prolonger sa rencontre avec l'univers esthétique du Maître d'Arcueil.' Nicolas Sarkozy, Preface to Ornella Volta (ed.), *Satie dans les salons* [exhibition guide] (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Fondation Erik Satie, 1985), 3.

[202] Hale, *Things seen to the Right and the Left*.

[203] See Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer*, 128. The caption reads: '[Constantin] Brancusi's evocative photograph of the staircase was perhaps the closest any of them [Satie's friends] came [to the apartment] during Satie's lifetime.' Since Simeone dates the photograph to 1928, it seems the entranceway retained its aura long after Satie's

If it is undeniably the case that Satie's intensely-private living quarters have acquired over the years a certain degree of mystique, then there is one particular moment in the making of this mystique that warrants our attention. Shortly after Satie's death in 1925, the time came for a small group of family and friends to empty his hitherto 'undiscovered' apartment. Looking back, Darius Milhaud described the event in half-reverent, half-archaeological terms:

> A narrow corridor, with a washbasin in it, led to the bedroom, into which Satie had never allowed anyone, not even his concierge, to penetrate. It was with a feeling akin to awe that we approached it now. What a shock we had when opening the door![204]

What Milhaud and Satie's brother Conrad found on entering the room was nothing like a hidden crypt or a golden tomb, but something much closer to a store room or props cupboard:

> The man, whose faultlessly clean and correct dress made him look rather like a model civil servant, had literally *nothing* worth a shilling to his name: a wretched bed, a table covered with the most unlikely objects, one chair and a half-empty wardrobe in which there were a dozen old-fashioned corduroy suits, brand new and almost identical. In each corner of the room there were piles of old newspapers, old hats and walking sticks.[205]

Part of the interest in this account is that a number of the items mentioned can be cross-referenced with what Volta termed the different 'ages' of Satie's life, or what Mary E. Davis has labelled Satie's 'velvet gentleman' and 'bourgeois radical' periods: the old-fashioned corduroy suits (no longer worn in later life) are emblematic of Satie's 'bohemian' years in fin-de-siècle Montmartre, while the old hats and walking sticks

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death. A close-up of the same photograph occupies a full page in Volta, *L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie*, 91, opposite a reproduction of Robert Caby's ink-drawing of 'Erik Satie sur son lit de mort' (Erik Satie on his deathbed, 1925).

[204] Quoted in Robert Orledge, *Satie Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 214.

[205] Ibid., 214-5. Emphasis in the original.

correspond to many of the images of the musician after his move to Arcueil.[206] However, there is more to Milhaud's account than a checklist of wardrobe essentials: what the posthumous inventory of Satie's possessions also reveals is the extent of his domestic poverty, which one could almost imagine slotting into a conventional narrative about a struggling, world-weary artist.

I say 'almost' because Satie's apparent ability to emerge 'faultlessly clean' from such a shockingly 'wretched' apartment suggests something rather more theatrical and enigmatic than miserable and romantic. Though this may seem like a small distinction, it goes to the heart of the special function of the quatre cheminées in the construction of Satie's eccentricity. On the one hand, we know the prosaic truth that this apartment block was simply where one commuting musician spent most of his nights and some of his days – and that, for whatever reason, he preferred not to share this time or space with anyone besides himself. On the other, the quatre cheminées can be seen to occupy, rather more poetically, the site of unusual, even mysterious goings on – not in a particularly troublesome sense (a comparison with Bluebeard's Castle, for example, would fall apart rather quickly), but in the sense of mild puzzlement and unfathomability. Satie's aforementioned spotless appearance is one such minor mystery, another is the fact this composer was able to compose at all given the state in which Milhaud found his one and only instrument: 'On the ancient, broken-down piano with its pedals tied up with string, there was a parcel whose postmark proved it had been delivered several years before'.[207]

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[206] See Davis, *Erik Satie*, 59-73; 81-105. The question of Satie's changing attire is by no means a superficial aspect of Davis's account: 'This biography . . . takes Satie's purposeful meshing of public image and artistic enterprise as the backdrop for consideration of his career. Against the screen of his dramatic shifts in wardrobe and changing self-presentation, his work and legacy come into fresh perspective.' Ibid., 12. Satie is also a central character in Davis, *Classic Chic*.

[207] Quoted in Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, 215.

Even assuming there are rational means of solving each of the above conundrums (which, of course, there are), that would scarcely undermine the status of the quatre cheminées as a placeholder for Satie's enigmatic creativity.[208] Not the only one by any means, but an important one nonetheless. Significantly, the place Satie's suburban dwelling holds in the reception of his life and work is irreducible to either its poetic or prosaic attributes. Like all legends, it thrives on what one might call the suspension of distinction between fiction and fact. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in a 1965 production for French radio entitled *Erik Satie: L'Inconnu d'Arcueil* (literally the 'Unknown of Arcueil', but translated in the CD liner notes as the 'Mystery Man').[209] This substantial broadcast (c. 145 minutes) combined aural history, narrative documentary and a sequence of recordings by Italian pianist Aldo Ciccolini, as well as Henri Sauguet (formerly of l'École d'Arceuil) in the role of Erik Satie. The result is a complex and nuanced over-layering of interviews with old friends and local residents, snatched performances by Ciccolini, and recitations by Sauguet of Satie's whimsical and satirical texts. Track one, for instance, is entitled 'La Banlieue d'Erik Satie' (Erik Satie's Suburb) and features the first and second *Morceaux en forme de poire*, one of the earliest works for solo piano Satie composed following his move to Arcueil. Track three has Sauguet reading from 'Recoins de ma vie' underscored by 'Sur un Vaisseau' (On a vessel, 1913), one of the so-called *Pièces humoristiques*.[210] Meanwhile, track two, entitled 'Le Logis d'Erik Satie' (Erik Satie's Lodgings), includes another of the *Pièces humoristiques* – 'Obstacles venimeux' (Venomous Obstacles, 1914) – along

[208] The likely explanation for Satie's clean clothes is that someone else washed them for him – possibly locally, as 'blanchissage' (laundry) was a common occupation in Arcueil. As for how he managed to survive without a working piano, see Robert Orledge, 'Why and Where Satie Composed' in *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8-20. Incidentally, the cover image for Orledge's monograph features the aforementioned drawing of Satie 'dans sa maison'. See note 90.
[209] Albert (ed.), *Erik Satie, l'Inconnu d'Arcueil*.
[210] Satie, 'Recoins De Ma Vie'.

with various voices discussing Satie's small apartment in Montmartre and, of course, La Maison aux quatre cheminées in Arcueil.[211]

The choice of music to go with this last discussion is particularly noteworthy: though most listeners would have been be unaware of the precise texts written between the staves in 'Obstacles venimeux', it seems more than a coincidence that the first line of this piece presents – alongside a conspicuously sparse left-hand-only piano part – the following description of exoticised isolation: 'This vast part of the world is inhabited by one single man: a negro / He's bored to death of laughing'.[212] For the purposes of the present argument, it does not matter whether one chooses to interpret this snippet of 'Obstacles venimeux' as an instance of self-othering on Satie's part, as an inter-textual allusion by the makers of the radio programme, or, indeed, an example of racism repurposed as background accompaniment. It could be all three. What does matter is that the account of Satie's career provided by this radio broadcast is inextricably bound up with both real and imagined places, often at the same time.[213] In the first three tracks alone we hear of 'Satie's suburb' (Arcueil), 'Satie's lodgings' (in Arcueil and Montmartre) and the 'odd corners' of his life (including an extended description of the meeting of the Seine and the Channel at Honfleur). We might add to this the 'vast part of the world' with a bored-of-laughing inhabitant, as well as any other spatial allusions potentially triggered by Ciccolini's various piano excerpts. In this respect, *L'Inconnu*

[211] One point of reference for the title of this track is a painting of the same name by the Catalan-Spanish artist Santiago Rusiñol (1891). Reproduced in Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 12.

[212] 'Cette vaste partie du monde n'est habitée que par un seul home: un nègre / Il s'ennuie à mourir de rire'.

[213] The North American urban theorist Edward W. Soja has dealt explicitly with the spatial symbiosis of the real and imagined: the key term in Soja's theory is 'Thirdspace', which he describes as 'a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focussed on the "real" material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through "imagined" representations'. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 6.

d'Arcueil may be an unusual, even unique cultural document, but it is also indicative of a broader trend in Satie reception that has hitherto gone largely unremarked. Specifically, I suggest that a concern with multiple and sometimes overlapping musical geographies has been implicit in the Satie literature from the very beginning, not least because Satie himself was an ardent exponent of the art of creative place-making. Milhaud once again:

> With his characteristic meticulous care, he [Satie] had arranged in an old cigar box more than four thousand little pieces of paper on which he had made curious drawings and written extravagant inscriptions. They spoke of enchanted shores, pools and marshes in the time of Charlemagne . . . He had also very carefully traced tiny plans of an imaginary Arcueil, in which the place du Diable stood very near the place Notre Dame.[214]

I should make it clear that my intention here is not to make a case for either the quatre cheminées in particular or Arcueil more generally as *the* privileged site in Erik Satie's Paris. Tempting as it may be to suggest the city orbited the suburbs and not the other way round, it is ultimately more important to acknowledge the truism that the quatre cheminées was only one place among many in Satie's long and diverse career. This awareness of multiplicity, or 'multi-locality', is one response to Claire Guiu's assessment of the plural interactions among sound, music, space, and territory, which I quoted at the end of the Preface.[215] Another is to highlight how such interactions play out across more than one sensory domain: this discussion of the quatre cheminées, for example, has included a considerable audible component (think of Schwertsik's footsteps and unrequited knocking, the 'simplistic' compositional aesthetic of the École

[214] Quoted in Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, 215. The image in question is reprinted in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 32. For more drawings of imaginary places and buildings, see ibid., 29, 31, 62-3, and Volta, *L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie*, 96; 102; 106..

[215] Multilocality is now a well-established term in management studies, but it also gaining currency in cultural geography. A recent conference of the International Geographical Union (28-31 August 2012, Cologne), for example, included a session on 'Multilocality: Symbolic and Material Constructions of Space in Societies of Mobile Individuals'.

d'Arceuil, and Ciccolini's lonely left hand playing 'Obstacles venimeux'), but it has also made reference to pictures, words, and first-person encounters, the last of which can scarcely be reduced to *only* listening or *only* looking. Yet another plurality is found in the range of authors and sources on which this discussion has drawn: as you might expect, some of Satie's compositions have already been mentioned (one well-known, the others less so), but these are only part of a bigger mix – quite literally in the case of *L'Inconnu d'Arcueil*, which was a collaborative undertaking with one producer (Sylvie Albert) and many contributors. A fourth plurality relates to the temporal unfolding of Satie's Paris: though the decades either side of the turn of the twentieth century constitute an obvious (and necessary) point of focus, the history of Satie's personal 'life-time' or contextual *époque* is no more unified, contained or fixed in advance than the geography of his apartment. Despite post-dating Satie's death by a collective total of 112 years, the radio broadcast (1965), documentary film (1992), and biographer's photograph (1930) discussed above are all profoundly implicated in the historical geography of Satie's Paris – so too is the current plaque on the quatre cheminées (unveiled in 1998), and even the words you are reading now, which cannot help but contribute, in however small a way, to the ongoing process of marking and re-marking the map of this musician's career.

To the best of my knowledge, no one has previously suggested that Satie lived in a house with four paths (*chemins*). Yet I would be surprised, given the predilection for puns and *double entendre* among his network of friends and colleagues, if I were the first to notice the word 'chemin' hiding among the cheminées. The precise trigger for my own mind was an encounter with Bruno Latour's web-based project entitled *Paris:*

Ville Invisible (Paris: Invisible City).[216] The experimental design of the site encourages the user to explore different ways of seeing or 'knowing' Paris, all on the understanding that no single vantage point (real, virtual or any combination thereof) can afford complete and comprehensive knowledge. This banal premise – that none of us has the eye (or ear) of God – is far less important than the inventive means the site proposes for navigating the infinite specificity of a vast and unknowable field of places called Paris. In particular, Latour has devised four themed routes, which he terms 'permettre' (allowing), 'distribuer' (distributing), 'dimensionner' (proportioning), and 'cheminer' (traversing).

Even if this particular *jeu de mots* is best considered a twenty-first-century accident, it is still a useful means of addressing one of the most oft-remarked and under-theorised aspects of Satie's engagement with urban geography. Throughout the whole time that Satie was living in the quatre cheminées, he was also physically and creatively engaged in the practice of *cheminer*. As the Arcueil historian Léon-Louis Veyssière puts it: 'Satie was a tireless walker'.[217] This might seem like a superficial observation, but it would be hard to overstate the significance of Satie's walking to the ongoing reception of his life and work. The aforementioned radio broadcast entitled 'Erik Satie Walks to Work' is only the most recent instance of a persistent and generative trope. Though it is rarely referred to in such matter-of-fact terms, no biography would be complete without an account of the musician's daily commute between his lodgings in Arcueil and his workplaces – first in Montmartre, then later in more central areas of the city. As ever, some of the myth-making around Satie's pedestrianism was learnt from

[216] Bruno Latour, *Paris: Ville Invisible*, www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/index.html (accessed 12 February 2012).
[217] 'Satie était un marcheur infatigable'. Quoted in Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie*, 34.

the man himself: when asked in 1919 ‘what is your favourite sport?’, he is reported to have answered ‘la marche’ (walking).[218]

Satie’s much-discussed movement presents an opportunity for this study to reflect not only on the construction of tense fields of dynamic action, but also on the construction of place, including the sense of dwelling, belonging, and home.[219] That is not to say that the end point of this thesis will be an answer to the knock on Satie’s famously unwelcoming door. Rather, it is a reminder that fluidity and flux can be exaggerated just as much as fixity and stability. Satie’s Paris was no more the site of infinite open-ness than it was of unshakeable separate-ness; the challenge is to plot a course through the fictional and documentary material without settling into one or the other pre-determined path. Neither an angel (as Cocteau suggested) nor a traitor to the socialist cause (on account of mixing with ‘marquises and dukes’), Satie was a commuting musician whose movements were productive of a complex, dynamic sense of place. The more we engage with this sense of place – critically, creatively and historically – the more we understand of its role in shaping Satie’s status as a musical, social, and spatial exception.

[218] See Ibid. Volta’s source for the interview is Curnonsky [a.k.a. Maurice Edmond Sailland], *Huit Peintres, deux sculpteurs et un musicien très moderne* (Paris : n.p., 1919).
[219] For an exploration of these issues from an anthropological perspective, see Martin Stokes (ed.), *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

Chapter 2

A Tale of Two Windmills

The bohemian mythology of Satie's early career

In the last chapter, I traced the significance of a number of key places – and the movements between them – in the writing of Satie's musical life as a whole. This chronological survey revealed the complex interconnectedness of biographical narratives and geographical localities summed up by the metaphor of a creative journey or career path (the French 'parcours professionnel' has the same double meaning). As an alternative to existing uni-linear 'itineraries' of artistic progress, I proposed a pluralist model of geo-biography based on Satie's Maison aux quatre chemin(ée)s. One thing I did not mention about this building, however, is that before Satie arrived there it had played host to a working mill, which provides a convenient link to the subject of the current chapter.[220] Here, I continue to address the theme of place and mobility in the (re)production of Satie's musical identity, but shift the focus from the diachronic to the synchronic by concentrating on just one uniquely important place and period: fin-de-siècle Montmartre and Satie's early career. As I have already intimated, many of the entertainment venues in this area of turn-of-the-century Paris remain well-known to this day. More importantly, Satie remains an integral part of the representation of this distinctive cultural 'context', as demonstrated by his inclusion in Baz Luhrmann's 2001 film *Moulin Rouge!* In fact, if Luhrmann's cast were listed in order of appearance, the name at the top would be Erik Satie. Though the wildly-gesticulating conductor of the overture sequence is anonymous in the first instance, he is clearly recognisable in

[220] See Ornella Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie* (Arcueil: Editions Macadam & Cie, 1999), 23.

retrospect as an offshoot of the character (played by Matthew Whittet) known throughout as 'Satie'.

At first glance, Luhrmann's conspicuously unrealistic production may seem a rather obscure point of reference for a discussion of the uses of place and locality in the discourse on Satie's early career. However, it is entirely in keeping with the 'expectation of exception' that Satie should be contextualised in a place that somehow falls short of historical specificity: Honfleur, as we saw in the last chapter, is presented as vaguely nostalgic; Arcueil as troublingly under-specified; and Montmartre as an unreal or hyper-real place. In certain key respects, *Moulin Rouge!* is surprisingly typical of the particular strategy of representation and contextualisation to which the current chapter responds: the marked theatricality of the main characters, the stylistic bricolage they embody, and the notion of a creative underworld perched on a hill at the urban fringe are not one cinematic director's inventions, but recurring themes in the complex mythology of Parisian bohemia. In order to familiarise ourselves with this mythology – and to set the scene for the rest of the chapter – it will be helpful to describe the early stages of Luhrmann's film, from the overture mentioned above to the first entrance of Satie in the company of his 'Boho' colleagues.

Meet the bohemians

As one would expect, the overture introduces some of the film's most dramatically significant music, including passages from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* (1965) and the famous cancan from Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers* (Orpheus in the Underworld, 1858). While the music is playing, the setting of the story is given by the words 'Paris, 1900', which fill the screen with an appropriately 'period' typeface.

This caption is followed by a tableau vivant (see fig. 8) that frames the tragedy about to unfold: at the far left a Pierrot-like character singing from the roof of a windmill with illuminated sails announces our protagonist, Christian (played by Ewan McGregor), whose smiling, innocent face duly appears opposite; in the centre of the picture is a typical, though slightly shabby, Paris apartment building emblazoned with what looks like a brand name (it actually says 'l'amour'); on the right, further in the distance, the stylised city-scape is completed by the unmistakable image of the Eiffel Tower.

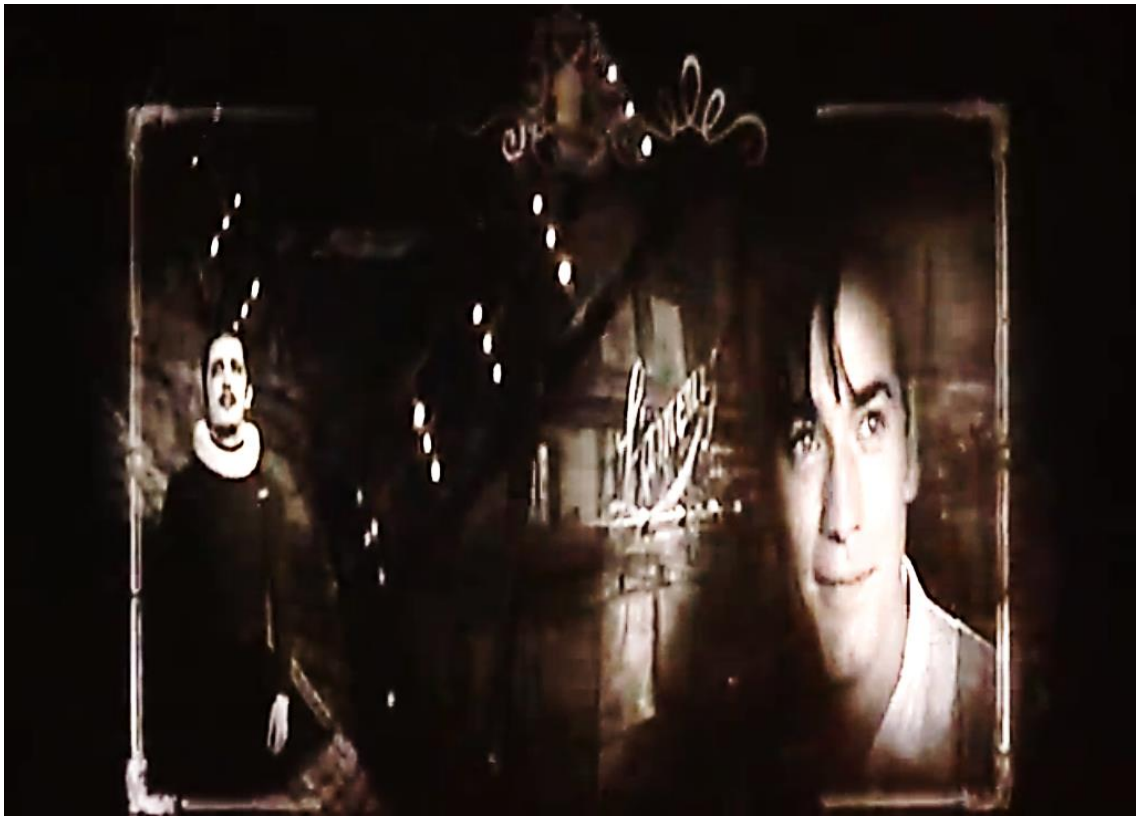


Figure 8. Still from the prologue to *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) showing the Eiffel tower in the distance (top right).

I say the city-scape is 'completed' because throughout *Moulin Rouge!* the Eiffel Tower occupies the point of furthest remove from the main setting of the story, Montmartre. Immediately after the tableau described above the camera begins the first

of a series of CGI-aided travelling shots between the great iron landmark on the south of the river and the basilica-topped hill of Montmartre in the north (see fig. 9).[221]



Figure 9. Still from *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) showing the polar opposition of the Eiffel Tower and the Butte Montmartre.

In this instance, the camera swoops down before reaching the hill to show a street-level view of what lies ahead: a gate in the shape of a hell-mouth that bears the name 'Montmartre' and a stern-faced priest urging whoever might listen to 'turn away from

[221] The basilica in question is, of course, the Basilique du Sacré-Cœur, which was still under construction in 1900. For a discussion of the building's history and politics, see David Harvey, 'Monument and Myth', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69/3 (1979), 362-381. A revised version of this essay is included in David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 303-333.

this village of sin.'[222] Judging by the onward motion of the camera, the priest's words go unheeded. Within seconds, the viewer is face to face with first a prostitute, then a junkie, both portrayed in almost Hogarth-like caricature. As the camera proceeds, it rises skyward to leave the social gutter behind and below. Its destination, it transpires, is a window in an apartment building, the same apartment that featured in the tableau. Visible through the window is a crouched, dejected figure surrounded by empty bottles of Champagne and absinthe. At his table is a typewriter, and scattered about the floor are the paper fruits of his bohemian labours. The figure is, of course, our protagonist, Christian, whose boyish smile has been displaced by bearded melancholy. His wretched demeanour sets the tone for the tragic conceit of a doomed love story narrated after the fact.

While there is no need for a synopsis here, it is worth noting that Christian's story begins by recalling his first visit, 'one year ago today', to the enigmatic Moulin Rouge: 'it was a nightclub, a dance-hall, and a bordello . . . where the rich and powerful came to play with the young and beautiful creatures of the underworld.' In part, this line sets up Christian's heartfelt remembrance of 'the most beautiful creature of them all', Satine (played by McGregor's co-star, Nicole Kidman).[223] But these comments also play a broader role in shaping our expectations of the semi-fictional world in which events are about to take place. Most obviously, they forewarn the audience that the

[222] Like so much of Luhrmann's film, this gate is both utterly fantastical and impeccably researched: on the one hand, there was no single entrance to Montmartre – as we shall see, the boundaries of bohemia were not nearly so clear-cut; on the other, the computer-generated hell-mouth is a direct homage to the exact contemporary and near-neighbour of the Moulin Rouge, the Café de l'Enfer (Hell's Café). For an image and brief description, see 'Birth of the Theme Restaurant', *Restaurant-ing Through History.com*, http://restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com/2010/04/01/birth-of-the-theme-restaurant/ (accessed 05 August 2011).

[223] While it is tempting to incorporate the obvious similarity between 'Satie' and 'Satine' into a reading of *Moulin Rouge!*, the fact that the two names are never heard in close succession would seem to put the brakes on this particular interpretative strategy.

Moulin Rouge is indelibly marked by social difference and division, a theme to which this chapter shall return. Far from a paradise of egalitarian hedonism, Christian's recollections position the venue as a site of tensions – between love and prostitution, wealth and creativity – which play out dramatically through the course of the film. No sooner have the tensions been alluded to, however, than the cinematic image of Montmartre is literally and metaphorically brightened as Christian's narrative voice directs our attention to a more optimistic past. This backwards shift in time is articulated visually by a reversal of the aforementioned travelling shot (this time moving from Sacré-Cœur to the Eiffel Tower) and musically by the backwards-playing of the opening bars of a waltz on solo piano. By the time the waltz becomes recognisable as 'Complainte de la Butte', performed by the American singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright, the camera is once again describing the fixed distance between the Eiffel Tower and the Butte Montmartre.[224] On this occasion, the journey is accompanied by Christian's excitement at discovering that Montmartre was 'not a village of sin, but the centre of the bohemian world.' In place of sex-workers and drug addicts in threatening alleys, we see 'musicians, painters, writers' joyously singing in the streets. 'Yes', says Christian, 'I had come to live a penniless existence. I had come to write about truth, beauty, freedom, and that which I believed in above all things: love!'

As our hero frets about the fact that he has never actually been in love, his sheltered experience is shattered by the arrival of the bohemians he had come to Paris to find: 'Luckily', Christian types in recollection, 'an unconscious Argentinian fell

[224] 'La Complainte de la Butte' (music by Jean Renoir, words by Georges Van Parys) was originally written for another Moulin Rouge film, Renoir's *French Cancan* (1955).

through my roof. He was quickly joined by a dwarf dressed as a nun.'[225] After the grey and tragic image of the tableau, these exuberant hyper-portraits could hardly paint a more contrasting picture of bohemian Montmartre. It is in the context of this slightly manic and altogether wacky scene – entitled 'Meet the bohemians' on the DVD – that we have our first acknowledged encounter with the character of Satie. He appears as one of three bemused heads poking through the ceiling of Christian's room. He wears a long multi-coloured scarf and glasses with four bluish lenses. In the words of the actor who played the part:

> Satie is based on a loose mix between Eric [*sic*] Satie and Ravel. Our Satie's the young eccentric musical genius. The other Bohos are all rather large. They're like strutting birds, peacocks. Satie's more like a quail. Where all the Bohos are outcasts in some way, Satie fits into the group by virtue of being young, twitchy and extremely cerebral.[226]

As this description suggests, Whittet's portrayal of Satie is not intended to be accurate, at least not in any straightforward sense: his bald head, for example, bears little relation to the way Satie wore his relatively long hair at the turn of the century; similarly, the actor has no beard, whereas Satie maintained one more or less throughout his adult life; and the wardrobe chosen for the Satie character in *Moulin Rouge!* brings to my mind the inventor uncle in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* – or possibly a composite of various Doctor Whos – not the famous corduroy suits we know Satie favoured during this period.[227]

Notwithstanding such discrepancies, complaints about the inaccuracy or unrealism of Luhrmann's larger-than-life production quite obviously miss the point.

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[225] The 'dwarf' (played by John Leguizamo) turns out to be Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was the central character in yet another Moulin Rouge film, John Huston's *Moulin Rouge* (1952).
[226] See 'Matthew Whittet (Biography)', *Culture.com*, http://www.culture.com/people/006/185/matthew-whittet/index.phtml (accessed 08 August 2011).
[227] For an account of Satie's sartorial preferences in this period, see Mary E. Davis, *Erik Satie* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 59-73.

The reason for beginning this chapter with a discussion of Satie's entrance into the bohemian world of *Moulin Rouge!* is not to launch into a series of historically-informed criticisms of Luhrmann's production (in any case, the film is voracious in its anachronistic use of historical materials).[228] The more interesting observation regarding this 'Meet the bohemians' scene is that even when we are asked to believe the unbelievable – namely, that Satie wrote 'The Sound of Music' – there are elements of Whittet's performance that correspond to the broader critical reception of the real-world Satie. For example, his accompaniment to the 'very modern' play which the bohemians are rehearsing when they crash through Christian's ceiling is itself considered remarkably modern: 'your insufferable droning is drowning out my words, can we please just stick to a little decorative piano' complains the soon-to-flounce-out writer. Similarly, when everyone else in the room agrees with Christian that 'the hills are alive with the sound of music' is an excellent way to begin a song, Satie prefers to plough his own aesthetic furrow: he suggests 'the hills are vital, intoning the descant' as a suitable alternative, and accompanies his own version on an organ-cum-harmonium topped with 'tuned' wine glasses full of neon-green liquid and what looks like dry ice.[229]

In part, the juxtaposition of Christian's show-stopping musical classic with Satie's 'insufferable droning' on a fantastic instrument serves to dramatise, once again,

[228] In addition to the aforementioned Café de l'Enfer (see note 3), we might note that the prominent elephant in Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* is based on the 'enormous stucco elephant, made for the occasion of the Universal Exhibition of 1889' that was located in the garden behind the windmill façade. See Jacques Pessis and Jacques Crépineau, *The Moulin Rouge*, trans. Andrew Lamb (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1990), 12.

[229] Satie's variation on a glass harmonica brings to mind both a mad scientist at his workbench and the alcoholic organ built for Des Esseintes, the reclusive protagonist of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (Against Nature, 1894): '[his drinks were] stored in a cabinet built like an organ on which he composes symphonies of taste.' Quoted in Rosalind H Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 127.

the generic diversity of the film as a whole.[230] But it also exemplifies what I have described earlier in this thesis as the 'expectation of exception' by marking out Satie as something of an oddball, even in this conspicuously non-conformist company. The fact that this characterisation neither depends on, nor illuminates any of Satie's actual compositions – none of which is incorporated into the sound design of this or any other scene in *Moulin Rouge!* – hardly seems to matter. What is important is that Whittet's portrayal tallies with, and in no small way perpetuates, the common perception of Satie as a musical maverick who operated at some remove from the conventions of the day. That is not to say that the Satie character has a monopoly on alternative or unconventional creativity: 'all the Bohos', as Whittet tells us, 'are outcasts' or, in Christian's words, 'creatures of the underworld'. And as we have seen, Montmartre itself is defined early on in the film by its distance from a geographic and cultural centre symbolised by the Eiffel Tower. Thus the portrayal of Satie's difference – his status as a 'quail' among 'peacocks' – is only one aspect of a broader and more complex enactment of 'outsider' culture in which Montmartre figures just as large as any single character. Indeed, it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that Montmartre takes part in the action of *Moulin Rouge!* just as much as the action of *Moulin Rouge!* takes place in Montmartre. It is this easy-to-detect but hard-to-define link between Satie's creative persona, the place called Montmartre, the windmills therein and the notion of fin-de-siècle bohemianism that forms the focus of this chapter.

Compared to chapter 1, then, the present discussion is less concerned with biography in the narrative sense, and more concerned with what it means to describe a place as the 'context' for a particular phase of a composer's working life and artistic

[230] For a recent discussion of the 'postmodern' aesthetic of Lurham's film, see Mina Yang, '*Moulin Rouge!* and the Undoing of Opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 20/3 (2008), 269-282.

development. Though the meanings and uses of context clearly cut across a wide range of musicological enquiries, one monograph in particular – Steven Moore Whiting's *Satie the Bohemian* – offers a valuable point of reference for the present discussion of the bohemian mythology of Satie's early career.[231] In a similar fashion to Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!*, Whiting's book demonstrates how the time and place of fin-de-siècle Montmartre can be used not only for historical and geographical precision, but also as a form of aesthetic qualification. Far from an innocent or inconsequential piece of scene-setting, I propose that descriptions of the 'bohemian' part of Paris where Satie learned and plied his pianistic trade have come to set the terms on which certain aspects of his later music are discussed and evaluated – not least his absurdist sense of humour and the aestheticisation of everyday life, which will be the subjects of chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Despite the increasing prominence of bohemian Montmartre in accounts of Satie's early career, there has been little discussion of what sort of place Montmartre was, how that place was produced and what was at stake in determining and articulating Montmartre's self-consciously non-conformist (musical) identity. In responding to this lacuna, I suggest that fin-de-siècle Montmartre has been represented in biographical and critical writing as a relatively bounded geographical context or 'culture area'.[232] This conspicuously fixed and localised sense of place (indicated clearly in *Moulin Rouge!* by the camera's passage through a named entrance gate) is one aspect of a powerful bohemian mythology that demands close critical attention. Indeed, one of the central aims of this chapter is to advance a more nuanced understanding of the spatial cultures

[231] Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[232] For a discussion of the notion of an ethno-geographic 'culture area' in relation to music, see John R. Gold, Daniel M. Grimley, and George Revill, 'Music, Maps and the Global Jukebox: Culture Areas and Alan Lomax's Cantometrics Projects Revisited', in S. D. Brunn and M. Dodge (eds.) *Mapping across the Academy* (Berlin: Springer, forthcoming 2012).

at work (and play) in the production and reception of Satie's early career by re-imagining fin-de-siècle Montmartre less as a rooted local context and more as a dynamic 'field' inseparable from city-wide, nation-wide, and international networks of travel, trade, and musical exchange. As mentioned in the Introduction, this notion of a Parisian field draws on a collection of essays edited and introduced by Michael Sheringham, which proposes that tensions of place are brought into being by the actions of mobile individuals:

> Force field, magnetic field, field of vision, field of battle, field of play: at the centre of this semantic network is the idea of a space whose coordinates are determined by the movement of agents or agencies to which it plays host. The field is at once purely notional and highly situated, constrained and constraining.[233]

The reason windmills are useful in this discussion goes beyond the obvious presence of certain windmill venues in Montmartre; these buildings and symbols also provide a novel means of bringing key bohemian tensions into sharper relief and allow us to think afresh about Satie's long-standing association with a much-studied and apparently familiar part of Paris. It goes without saying that the mills of Montmartre were nigh on ubiquitous in contemporary representations of this area, including representations of musicians and music-making.[234] And it is undoubtedly the case that the dance forms popularised by venues such as the Moulin Rouge and Moulin de la Galette left a considerable mark on Satie's musical imagination, as evinced by the two

[233] Michael Sheringham (ed.), *Parisian Fields* (London: Reaktion, 1996), 3. The conceptualisation of fields or places of tension has certain affinities with John Wylie's work on landscape. See John W. Wylie, *Landscape* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), esp. 1-11.

[234] In addition to the various images which will be discussed in the course of this chapter, we might note one fin-de-siècle account of 'life in Montmartre' that features three windmill pictures (two of the Moulin de la Galette and one of the Moulin Rouge) even before the first chapter: see Georges Montorgueil, *La vie à Montmartre* (Paris: G. Boudet, 1899). Another example is Louis Morin, *Montmartre s'en va* (Paris: Jean Borderel, 1908), which features an engraving of a windmill on the first page as well as on the printer's stamp.

quadrille movements (nos. 1 and 7) of *Le Piège de Méduse* (Medusa's Trap, 1913) and the 'Cancan grand-mondain' (High Society Cancan) in *La Belle Excentrique* (Beautiful Eccentric, 1920). But there is another side to the story. I propose that the history of these distinctive venues can help to explain the changing social and cultural geography of this particular section of the Parisian urban fringe, including the importance of musical performance in the shift from an economy dominated by light industry and agriculture to one organised around light entertainment and spectacle. Nothing embodies this shift more succinctly than the image of a brightly-lit mill 'qui ne moud plus de grains' (that no longer mills grain) – or, in the case of the Moulin Rouge, one that never milled grain in the first place.[235]

[235] The phrase 'un Moulin qui ne moud plus de grains' is taken from Lucienne Delyle's 1946 song entitled 'Le Moulin de la Galette'.

Bread and circuses

One way of approaching this issue of music and deindustrialisation is to consider the colloquial French expression 'on y entre comme dans un moulin', which is generally translated as 'you can just slip in' or 'walk right in'. The sentiment is straightforward enough – a real or metaphorical space is relatively public and has few restrictions on access – but the idiomatic means of expression is, at least to a non-native French speaker, initially rather puzzling. Why should it be the case that anyone can just walk right in to a moulin? What business would they have there? Might it not be best to ask the permission of the miller first? As it happens, the expression would have made as little sense in French two hundred years ago as the literal English translation does today, since it was only in the nineteenth century that mills gained the connotations described above. This is because from around the 1830s onwards a number of *guinguettes* (outdoor cafés) were incorporated into mills all over France, especially those located in the outskirts of major cities.[236] Nowhere was this phenomenon more pronounced than on the hill of Montmartre, which rose above the Place Blanche.

As we heard in the last chapter, prior to 1860 Montmartre was generally considered either a village or a *faubourg* – both terms indicating that it was not part of Paris proper. Legally speaking, the district was also outside of the *octroi* (tax limit) of the city, which made it a perfect location for growing and drinking cheap wine.[237] Even after it was annexed to the capital, Montmartre retained – at least in the imagination of metropolitan Parisians – a certain village-like atmosphere with its old buildings, winding streets, and contrasting feel to the newly-standardised city centre.

[236] For more on the history of *guinguettes*, see Henri Joannis-Deberne, *Danser en société: bals et danses d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Bonneton, 1999), and Kali Argyriadis and Sara Le Menestrel, *Vivre la guinguette* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003).

[237] At least one of Montmartre's vineyards remains to this day, near to the Lapin Agile cabaret on the northern side of the hill. See chapter 1, note 40.

Unsurprisingly, a number of local patrons decided to capitalise on the distinctive status of the locality by opening food, drink, and dancing establishments that provided visitors – usually on a Sunday – with precisely the sort of *villageois* package they had come looking for. When, towards the end of the century, the gypsum quarries on which the Montmartre economy had previously depended began to run empty, this process of economic diversification only accelerated.[238]

One of the best-known images of this diversified or deindustrialised Montmartre – even if it is rarely couched in those terms – is Auguste Renoir's 1876 oil painting, *Le Bal du moulin de la Galette* (see fig. 10). While the commentary on this painting is far too extensive to be summarised here, one point worth noting is the variety of hats on display – top hats, bowler hats, and fashionable straw hats – which implies a mixed crowd all sharing the same informal, open space. This was precisely the appeal of venues such as the Moulin de la Galette: thanks to its location near the cement quarries and workers' faubourgs, it promised its wealthier visitors the chance to rub dancing shoulders with poorer people, and indulge in a bite-sized piece of rusticity. Even the name of the mill makes reference to a simple Breton rye bread – at a time when Bretons still spoke their own language and were considered by many Parisians to be comically, even exotically primitive.[239]

[238] Incidentally, the phrase 'plaster of Paris' derives from the gypsum quarries of Montmartre.

[239] Before leaving for Haiti, Paul Gauguin visited Brittany in order to paint the scenery and local people. The best known of these pictures is *Bonjour Monsieur Gauguin* (1889), which depicts the contrast between the city gent in the country and the country girl in head-dress and clogs.

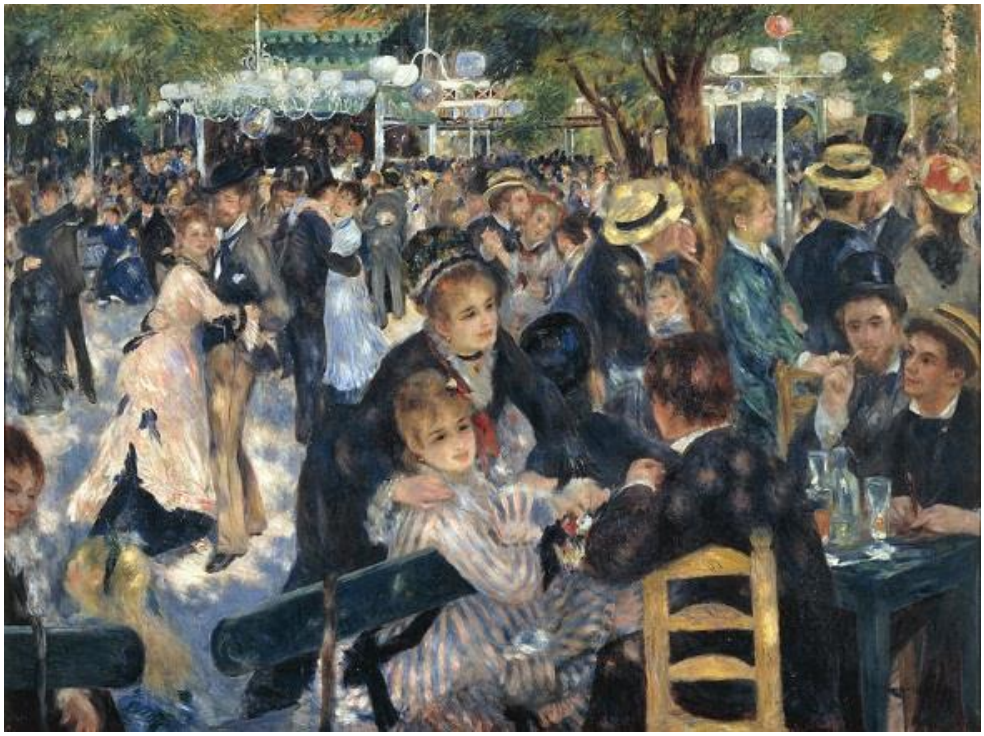


Figure 10. Auguste Renoir, *Le Bal du moulin de la Galette* (1876).

A little over a decade after Renoir's scene was painted, the economic diversification of this part of northern Paris had proceeded to such an extent that Montmartre now depended as much – if not more – on leisure and tourism than it did on the extraction and processing of building materials. It was therefore unsurprising to find, on the first Sunday of October 1889, a new dance-hall opening its doors on the Place Blanche at the foot of the Butte Montmartre. In order to stand out in the crowded marketplace of night-time entertainments, the street-frontage of this particular dance-hall was dominated by a most peculiar structure:

> The design was that of a mill, painted red, its sails revolving, with the miller's wife looking out of one window, while the miller leans out of another. It was so designed that, as the illuminated sails began to turn, the two exchanged gestures of affection.[240]

[240] Pessis and Crépineau, *The Moulin Rouge*, 11.

As this description makes clear, the Moulin Rouge never was, and was never intended to be, a productive, functioning mill – at least not in the sense of productivity espoused by the pavilions of industry surrounding the gigantic iron tower of the contemporaneous Exposition universelle. Rather, this outlandish windmill-fronted pleasure-vendor, designed inside and out by the painter and caricaturist Adolphe Léon Willette, was purpose built as a dance-hall, later used as a music-hall and cinema, and remains to this day one of the world's most recognisable performance venues.[241]

Despite the unarguable fame and influence of the Moulin Rouge, the scholarly literature on the institution is surprisingly sporadic and slight. Within the field of musicology, it seems that the Moulin Rouge has a habit of fading into the background; when the venue is mentioned, it is typically treated as one setting in a larger story, a familiar 'context' but rarely the 'text'.[242] As a result, there is plenty of published work related to the Moulin Rouge – not least writing on the various fictional, filmic, and musical representations of the venue – but the unsystematic nature of the research to date has resulted in a picture of the Montmartre institution that is at once over- and under-drawn: on the one hand, the venue is all too easily defined by a colourful cast of caricatures on a mass-reproduced advertisement; on the other, a number of basic questions relating to the origins and meanings of the Place Blanche Moulin Rouge remain insufficiently addressed. While there is not space to answer all such questions

[241] For a stage-by stage account of the history of the Moulin Rouge, Pessis and Crépineau's well-illustrated but poorly-referenced book (ibid.) remains the best single option.

[242] To give only one of many possible examples: Roger Shattuck, in his classic account of modernist art in turn-of-the century France, mentions the Moulin Rouge only twice in nearly 400 pages. Yet right at the beginning of the book, he calls upon the venue to help set the scene for all that is to come: 'It was the era of gaslights and horse-drawn omnibuses, of the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergère, of *cordon-bleu* cooking and demonstrating feminists.' Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*, rev. ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 4.

here, I propose that the status of the Moulin Rouge as some kind of windmill can help us to understand better the place of Montmartre in the wider landscape, economy, and imagination of fin-de-siècle Paris, which in turn raises questions about the ways in which musicologists have attempted to contextualise Satie's early career.

By 1889, it was already well within the French horizon of expectations that a mill would be, amongst other things, a place for dancing. What the founders of the Moulin Rouge did was take this one step further and build a windmill *only* for dancing. It is this that rendered the Moulin Rouge truly spectacular: not in the literal sense of bright lights and sweet-shop colours, but in the theoretical sense of privileging surface over substance, image over reality. At the time of Renoir's painting, a visit to the Moulin de la Galette meant a dance and a good time plus a panorama of Paris from the height of the windmill's *point de vue*. By the time the Moulin Rouge was attracting the attention of central Parisians (and tourists from further afield), the venue itself was being constructed not only as a site of eroticised entertainment, but also – even primarily – as a visual object of attraction. The participatory dancing we see in Renoir's painting did not survive such pressures: before the century was out, what had been called the *quadrille naturaliste* had morphed into *le French cancan* – a dance for seeing and hearing, but less often for doing. This shift from milling grain and stone to 'milling' love and pleasure is intimately bound up with the peculiar claim to modernity asserted by fin-de-siècle Montmartre. The Moulin Rouge was an urban playground in the shape of a rural factory and destabilised most of these terms in the process.

One early account of the Moulin Rouge, which articulates something of this instability is a poem by Maurice Boukay later set to music and performed by Marcel

Legay.[243] Entitled simply ‘Le Moulin-Rouge’, the text plays throughout on metaphors of milling, and would make no sense outside of that frame of reference. The first verse, for example, rhymes ‘grain’ with ‘chagrin’ and ‘ailes’ (sails) with ‘Elles’ (the girls). The refrain continues in a similar vein:

> Moulin-Rouge, Moulin-Rouge
> Pour qui mouds-tu, Moulin-Rouge?
> Pour la mort ou pour l’amour?
> Pour qui mouds-tu jusqu’au jour?
> ---
> Moulin Rouge, Moulin Rouge,
> For whom are you milling, Moulin Rouge?
> Can it be death or is love your corn?
> For whom are you milling until the dawn?[244]

According to Jacques Pessis and Jacques Crépineau, the Moulin Rouge was not only the title and subject of Boukay’s poem, but also the site of its regular performance:

> Every evening [c. December 1890] the main attraction at the entrance to the Moulin Rouge is Marcel Legay, the poet of Montmartre. With arm upraised, he recites a verse of his own composition [i.e., ‘Le Moulin-Rouge’].[245]

While Pessis and Crépineau do not include the source of this information, it is certainly within the bounds of possibility that Legay, who was known to have sung and sold his songs in the street, would have performed the text in such a manner. If this were the case, his recitations would only have reinforced in verse what was already staring people in the face: from the perspective of the Place Blanche at the end of the nineteenth century, the Moulin Rouge was self-evidently some kind of windmill. Of

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[243] Though the date of composition may have been earlier, ‘Le Moulin-Rouge’ was included in Charles-Maurice Couÿba, *Chansons rouges* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1897). In this collection each poem is set to music by Marcel Legay and illustrated by Théophile Steinlen.

[244] Translation from Pessis and Crépineau, *The Moulin Rouge*, 43.

[245] Ibid. The dating to December 1890 is implied by a sub-heading in Pessis and Crépineau’s text. The fact that the *Chansons rouges* collection in which the ‘Le Moulin-Rouge’ appeared was not published until some seven years later suggests that we cannot be confident of such an early date.

course, the identity of this irreducibly complex institution cannot be exhausted by its status as a windmill. On the contrary, one of the most striking features of Boukay's poem is the way in which the purpose of the mill is continually brought into question. Quite literally, since with each refrain we hear the words 'pour qui mouds-tu?' Crucially, this is not a rhetorical question – various answers are given in the verses of the poem, each of which (except the opening verse) is written from the first person perspective of the mill itself. In demanding that the Moulin Rouge explain itself, Boukay betrays (or at least plays upon) a distinct uncertainty with regard to the nature and function of the institution. He might just as well have asked 'what are you for?' or 'why are you here?', the effect would have been the same. At some level, this uncertainty relates to the conspicuous eclecticism and artificiality of the venue's design. In the words of Pessis and Crépineau:

> As for the architecture, this is revolutionary. Up to now it has always been assumed that, for this type of dance hall, the entrances are formal arcaded affairs, with porticos possessing pilasters and balustrades, and flights of steps as if up to a temple. Willette, the architect chosen by Joseph Oller, is changing all that; you find yourself standing before the most extravagant mixture of forms and colours imaginable. In a few seconds you pass from the bullring in Granada to a thatched cottage in Normandy and then on to the windmills of Holland.[246]

While the authors here perhaps give a misleading impression of the homogeneity of theatrical architecture prior to the opening of the Moulin Rouge, their description does underscore the extent to which the structural identity of the new venue was not only unsettled, but deliberately unsettling.[247] And that is before we mention the giant stucco elephant that stood behind the windmills in the pleasure garden at the rear. Part of the attraction of the early Moulin Rouge was its promise of a fantastical terrain in which the

[246] Pessis and Crépineau, *The Moulin Rouge*, 12.
[247] For striking examples of 'non-homogeneous' theatrical architecture, one need look no further than the *chinoiserie* of the Bataclan (built 1864) or the mixture of Moorish and Byzantine elements in the Palais du Trocadéro (built 1878).

experience of location was expanded, suspended or temporarily shaken loose. The fact that the building both was and was not a windmill can thus be seen to have opened up an imaginative space that Boukay and Legay were quick to exploit.

There is a well-established tradition of describing turn-of-the-century Paris in terms of an exhilarating jumble of disorientating sensations – Benjamin's Arcades project and the marvellous distractions of the Expositions are only the most famous examples. If we are to follow this line of thinking, then the fantasy zone of the Moulin Rouge invoked above could be taken as further evidence of the sort of hyper-stimulation that writers from at least Baudelaire onwards have made characteristic of urban modernity. But even a cursory reading of the verses of Boukay's poem suggests we ought not to exaggerate the extent to which entertainment venues such as the Moulin Rouge achieved the shaking loose of fixed identities that their advertisements so eagerly promised. Though the precise nature of the mill remains in question throughout Boukay's poem, the introduction of certain generic characters drops heavy hints about the social positioning of the venue. Take, for example, the second verse:

> Je mouds pour que les nains, les fous,
> Les déshérités, les malades
> Aient moyennant quarante sous
> Leur part d'amour et de ballades
> Je mouds pour que les malheureux
> Les orphelins, les sans-caresses
> Aient des hivers moins rigoureux
> Près de leurs sœurs les pécheresses
> ---
> I grind so the midgets, the mad,
> The deprived, the sick
> Might have, for forty pence,
> Their share of love and singing.
> I grind so that the unhappy,
> The orphans, the unloved
> Might have winters that are less tough
> Near their sisters the sinners.

The midgets, the mad, the deprived, the sick, the orphans, the unloved. In part, we might attribute this interest in the lurid variety of a faceless underclass to the widely-felt

influence of the naturalist or realist aesthetic across all the arts in late-nineteenth-century France. In the specific genre of sung poetry, Aristide Bruant is the best-known point of reference and a likely influence on Boukay: Bruant's carefully-managed image as a rough-and-ready performer was being honed around the same time as Boukay began writing, and Bruant's first collection of *chansons réalistes* was published the same year as the opening of the Moulin Rouge.[248] When presented in this context, the population of Boukay's poem seems nothing out of the ordinary. Yet we may still wonder why the poet chose to assemble these fictional types at the Red Mill. Or, more precisely, why Boukay's Moulin Rouge presents itself as not only a gathering place but also as a benevolent host, since by the end of the poem the purpose of the venue is clearly aligned with the interests of the weak and the destitute.

One answer to the above question is that, for Boukay, the 'Rouge' was just as important as the 'Moulin', if not more so. It is significant that the poem in question was included in a collection entitled *Chansons rouges*, which featured on the cover a Marianne-like figure shown mid rallying cry and draped in a large single-coloured flag (i.e., not a tricolore) (see fig. 11). Although this cover image clearly exploits a young and attractive female figure for the benefit of the male consumer's gaze – in addition to the conventional bare breast, Marianne's nudity beneath the flag is advertised with a prominent bare thigh – the political symbolism of the embodiment of the Republic intertwined with (what we are led to believe is) a red flag could scarcely have gone unnoticed.[249] What is more, 'Boukay' was in fact the anagrammatic pen name of the

[248] Aristide Bruant, *Dans la rue: Chansons et monologues* (Paris: Bruant, 1889). The illustrations for this volume (and subsequent volumes published under the title *Dans la Rue*) were provided by Théophile Steinlen, who also illustrated Boukay's *Chansons rouges*.

[249] This period of French history is frequently characterised by a heightened sense of political awareness. For a discussion of the place of music and musical institutions in this intensely politicised climate, see Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and*

politician Charles-Maurice Couÿba, who was elected as a Radical Député in the same year as the *Chansons rouges* collection was published. Later on, he joined an explicitly left-wing group in the Sénat – the *Gauche démocratique* – and throughout his political career had a special interest in what might loosely be termed 'working issues' (trade and industry, pensions, social security, regulations of working hours, etc.).

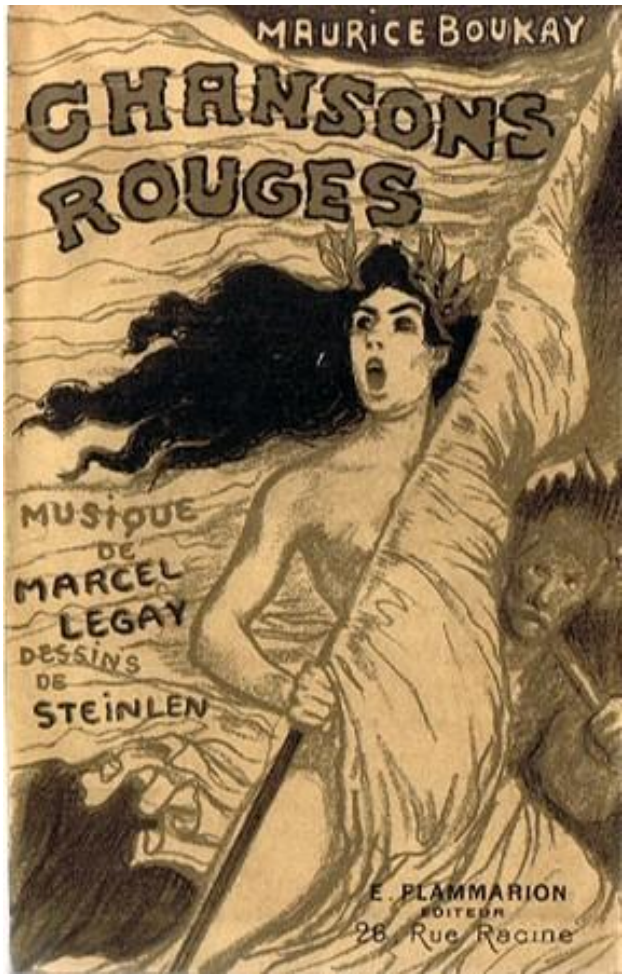


Figure 11. Front cover of Charles-Maurice Couÿba, *Chansons rouges* (1897).

Re-reading Boukay's poem with rouge-tinted spectacles, a number of lines take on added political significance: the fourth verse, for example, begins with 'les ouvriers des cités' for whom the Moulin grinds a consoling dance, before emphasising as line-

Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

end rhymes the words ‘libertés’, ‘l’Égalité’ and ‘la Carmagnole’ (a celebratory song from the 1789 Revolution). Moreover, the ‘red-ness’ of Boukay’s Moulin Rouge is not limited to occasional references to workers and political slogans: if read or heard from start to finish, the poem can be said to describe a political awakening from other-worldly slumber to proletarian struggle. Of course, I cannot be sure that such a reading corresponds with either Boukay’s intentions or his contemporaries’ interpretations. Nevertheless, even in a poem so rich in allusion and overlapping messages, there is no mistaking the implicit answer to the repeated question ‘pour qui mouds-tu?’ since Boukay clearly identifies his version of the Moulin Rouge with the working (and non-working) class. Moreover, Boukay envisages the venue as a privileged site for social mixing. Consider this extract from the fourth verse:

> C'est un vis à vis, aux quadrilles,
> Avec un baron bien renté
> Qui jette un peu d'or à leurs [les ouvriers] filles
> ---
> It’s face-to-face in the quadrilles
> With a well-heeled gent
> Who throws a bit of money at their [the workers’] daughters

As far as social mixing goes, this is without doubt a fairly miserable and limited sort: the equality gained by the workers lasts only as long as the quadrilles are played, and the redistribution of wealth amounts to nothing more than a few coins tossed the way of their daughters. Even so, the presence of this image in Boukay’s poem introduces the idea of dancing as a social leveller, as well as social escapism. This is important because it provides a specific reason for thinking of the Moulin Rouge as an institution that somehow serves the interests of the working class. Indeed, without the claims made for the special sociality available through dancing, one could be forgiven for thinking that Boukay’s ‘red-ening’ of the Moulin Rouge was nothing more than an opportunistic

play on the name of the institution.[250] Ultimately though, such a thin description proves inadequate: reducing Boukay's complex poem to a single colour – even a colour with such heavy cultural and political baggage as red – risks ignoring the significance of both the venue's function (as a dance-hall) and its location (in Montmartre). In other words, the solidarity of the windmill-persona with the workers enacted in a performance of Boukay's poem succeeded not only because the moulin was rouge, but also because it was a place for dancing, and because it belonged in – perhaps even belonged to – Montmartre.

In light of the complex contemporary politics of Montmartre's dancing mills, I want to use the next section of this chapter to build on the existing research into Satie's engagement with what Whiting terms the 'popular milieux' of northern Paris. Specifically, I propose that Satie's apprenticeship among the windmills not only provided the young pianist and composer with a lesson in the modern musical vernacular, but also introduced him to a number of conflicts and tensions in one of the most internally-divided and globally-mediated places in the whole of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris. In short, Whiting may be justified in describing Satie as a bohemian musician, but his landmark publication can be productively supplemented by acknowledging that bohemianism is neither a fixed identity nor a distinctive *couleur locale* of a discrete urban zone in northern Paris. On the contrary, Satie's status as a bohemian outsider figure is both reflective and productive of a complex set of spatial and musicological discourses, the study of which offers a timely

[250] If it were the case that Boukay had simply been looking for a conveniently-coloured landmark, it is fair to say that there were few alternatives to the Moulin Rouge. There was a *cabaret chantant* called l'Âne Rouge (Red Donkey) on the nearby avenue Trudaine, but this had nothing like the same cultural visibility as the Place Blanche venue.

corrective to some of the more restrictive notions of cultural context currently in academic circulation.

The popular turn and the limits of context

In order to grasp the significance of the bohemian mythology in the writing of Satie's early career, I first need to take a step back and consider why it is that bohemia has emerged as an important contextual category in recent studies of this musician. As I have argued already in this thesis, it is possible to identify a particular point in the disciplinary history of musicology when a turn to questions of cultural context led, perhaps inevitably, to questions of location and situated-ness. To a certain extent, this was the result of a rapprochement on the part of historical musicology with anthropological and ethnographic approaches to music, which had long been engaging closely with the grounded and site-specific production of (musical) culture. At the same time, the cultural turn in historical musicology corresponded with – and in no small part contributed to – a broadening of the scope of repertoires and creative practices considered worthy of study. Most notably, the critique of rigid hierarchies of musical value levelled at so-called 'modernist' historians of music encouraged a greater awareness of popular musics as well as the complex relations between these musics and more 'elevated' or elaborate forms of composition and performance. Crucially, what might be called the 'popular turn' in Anglophone historical musicology had significant spatial implications: just as the tradition of fieldwork in ethnomusicology had required researchers to deal directly with the places of music-making (even if place was not always identified or theorised as a key category of musical experience), so too did popular music studies have a strong tradition of addressing musical scenes and the

importance of local, regional, and larger networks of performance and distribution. It was during this extended disciplinary moment – the consequences of which we are still living and working with – that the relatively small field of Satie studies exhibited its own popular turn, which was a necessary pre-requisite to the interest in the bohemian context of Satie's early career.

To be more precise, the popular turn in Satie studies refers in what follows to a late-twentieth-century trend in Anglophone and (to a lesser extent) Francophone musicology that can be summarised as a shift from downplaying to celebrating Satie's creative engagement with entertainment culture. For all this label risks in grouping together very different musicologists with very different approaches to their study, it is a convenient shorthand for a key set of methodological changes and musical revaluations. Not coincidentally, one of the best accounts of the popular turn (even if it is not called by that name) is given in the introduction to *Satie the Bohemian*. As Whiting observes, the earliest studies of Satie's life and work made only brief mention of his many years of work at the keyboards of Montmartre cabarets – the implication being that such work was either shameful or insignificant:

> Satie's first biographer, Pierre-Daniel Templier, knew little about his involvement with Parisian entertainment music, and his second, Rollo Myers, even found it a source of embarrassment. In Roger Shattuck's landmark study, Satie's stint as a 'Montmartre piano player' serves as an exotic backdrop to his 'real' career, which began once Ravel brought him out of obscurity in 1911. Twenty years later, Grete Wehmeyer was the first to suggest that understanding Satie, and indeed his significance in the history of twentieth-century music, depended on assessing his activities as a performer and composer of popular music. Wehmeyer, however, stopped short of providing such an assessment, and her review of the relevant manuscript sources was hurried and largely inaccurate.[251]

[251] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 2-3. The texts mentioned by Whiting are Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie* (Paris: Rieder, 1932), available in English as Pierre-Daniel Templier, *Erik Satie*, trans. Elena L. French and David S. French (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969); Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948); Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*; and Grete Wehmeyer, *Erik Satie* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1974).

By contrast, the latest wave of Satie scholarship (roughly from the late 1980s onwards) has been explicitly concerned with elaborating the relationship between Satie's musical practice and contemporary popular culture. In 1988, for example, Ornella Volta organised an exhibition on Satie at the Musée des arts et des traditions populaires in Paris.[252] Three years later, a major university press published Nancy Perloff's *Art and the Everyday*.[253] In 1996, Whiting himself edited nine of Satie's previously unreleased *Chansons de Cabaret et de Caf' Conc*' and published research on key figures in the Montmartre cabaret scene that would eventually feed into his aforementioned monograph.[254] Given this pattern of publications, it is unsurprising that Volta's introductory commentaries to new editions of Satie's *Pièces humoristiques* (1912-17) prepared in 2005 were largely concerned with detailing Satie's musical references to sources including popular songs, operettas, and nursery rhymes.[255] Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine anyone writing on Satie today *without* engaging, in one way or another, with the notion of popular or entertainment culture. This thesis, of course, is no exception.

Though one should not be too quick to collapse the popular turn exhibited in Satie scholarship into a broader postmodern turn across musicology and the wider humanities, it is nevertheless the case that the two rely on many of the same intellectual conceits.[256] For example, when Mary E. Davis recently praised Satie's version of

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[252] Ornella Volta, *Erik Satie & la tradition populaire* [exhibition catalogue] (Paris: Musée des arts et des traditions populaires/Fondation Erik Satie, 1988).
[253] Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
[254] Erik Satie, *Neuf Chansons de Cabaret et de Caf' Con'*, ed. Steven Moore Whiting (Paris: Editions Salabert, 1997).
[255] Erik Satie, *Pièces humoristiques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions Durand, 2005).
[256] Despite most accounts of (musical) post-modernity marking an epochal shift at some point in the latter twentieth century, it is not uncommon for Satie's name to be included among lists of postmodern composers. See, for example, Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (eds.), *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (London: Routledge, 2001), 30

musical modernism for being 'fashionable, entertaining, and fun', she was implicitly critiquing an older modernist discourse (or at least the caricature thereof) that remained hostile to the market, entertainment, and pleasure.[257] More generally, both turns – the popular and the postmodern – have had important consequences for the study of Satie and 'his' music. As the scare quotes suggest, one of the first things to note is an increased scepticism towards what now seem like out-dated notions of composerly autonomy. Of course, such scepticism has been felt right across the sub-disciplines of musicology, with the cult of the lone genius – too often typified by a lazy amalgam of German-ness, Romanticism and Beethoven – coming in for especially harsh criticism.[258] Though it has long been argued that Satie's musical aesthetic was diametrically opposed to the unholy trinity invoked above, the critique of the ideology of the solitary composer has nevertheless had an impact on the ways in which Satie's creative output has been discussed and accounted for.[259] Although the expectation of exception remains very much a part of Satie scholarship, it is nevertheless the case that there is now less overt emphasis placed on inherited clichés about an isolated musician 'ahead of his time' – or as Claude Debussy famously put it, 'a gentle medieval musician

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and 198. See also, Daniel Albright, 'Postmodern Interpretations of Satie's *Parade*', *Canadian University Music Review*/*Revue de Musique des Universités Canadiennes* 22/1 (2002), 22-39.

[257] Davis, *Erik Satie*, 106.

[258] Two of the best known (and least lazy) of these critiques are Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) and Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[259] One of the best-known texts to position Satie as an anti-Teutonic composer is Jean Cocteau's *Le Coq et l'arlequin: notes autour de la musique* (Paris: Editions de la Sirène, 1918). Available in English as Jean Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin: Notes Concerning Music*, trans. Rollo H. Myers (London: The Egoist Press, 1921).

lost in this century'[260] – and more on that once-fashionable and now orthodox musicological notion of the context in which Satie conducted his musical business.[261]

A further consequence of the popular turn – one that follows logically from the first – is a pronounced interest in what we might broadly term Satie's creative environment: the people, places and venues that made up his immediate web of culture (to borrow another formulation of the contextualist methodology).[262] A landmark publication in this regard was Perloff's already-mentioned *Art and the Everyday*. 'At last', wrote one reviewer, 'we have a clear picture of who could have heard what, and when, and it is for her strengths as a meticulous cultural historian that Dr Perloff deserves to be remembered.'[263] Aside from the telling observation that yesterday's 'cultural historian [of music]' sounds a lot like today's historical musicologist, it is important to note that Perloff's work was not only memorable, but generative. This is because much of the important writing on Satie since the early 1990s has effectively taken Perloff's thesis – that Satie and his associates drew extensively on the resources and examples of contemporary popular culture – and moved it chronologically backwards. Davis, for example, has argued that Satie's output for piano in the five-or-so years prior to *Parade* was equally informed by an alternative form of 'popular' culture:

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[260] Debussy included this description of Satie as part of 'the red-ink dedication on the presentation copy . . . of his *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, dated 27 October 1892'. See Robert Orledge, 'Satie, Koechlin and the Ballet "Uspud"', *Music & Letters* 68/1 (1987), 27 note 6.

[261] For a discussion, from a Leftist perspective, of the uses and ideologies of 'context' in recent musicological thought, see James R. Currie, 'Music After All', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62/1 (2009), 145-203.

[262] See Gary Tomlinson, 'The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology', *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (1984), 350-362.

[263] The reviewer on this occasion was Robert Orledge. See Robert Orledge, 'Book Review: Art and the Everyday by Nancy Perloff', *The Times Literary Supplement* 4607 (19 July 1991), 16. Orledge's own, relatively 'non-contextual', monograph on Satie had been published the previous year. See Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The fact that two such books should arrive in quick succession tells us something about the musicological interest in Satie during this period.

the emerging – and already gendered – industries of *haute-couture* fashion and lifestyle magazines.[264]

Whiting was another musicologist to take up Perloff's baton, and once again his methodological framework favoured contexts and networks – in Whiting's terms, the popular milieux with which Satie was engaged both imaginatively and professionally.[265] What is distinctive about Whiting's account is that its centre of causal gravity sits further back in time than that of either Perloff's or Davis's. More precisely, Whiting assembles a wealth of archival material and published commentary that point towards fin-de-siècle Montmartre as the foundational site in the construction of Satie's aesthetic persona. Whiting's Montmartre milieux – and by implication, the *lieux* (places) in which the milieux mingled – thus assume the status of what Kevin Korsyn has termed a 'privileged context'.[266] In Korsyn's usage, a privileged context refers to a particular period of reception history – almost always the first – which is given priority over any and all other periods in the life of a musical work. In *Satie the Bohemian*, the context of fin-de-siècle Montmartre is afforded both this, and a supplementary privilege: not only does the author suggest we can best understand Satie's early works (such as the *Gymnopédies*, *Gnossiennes* and Rosicrucian pieces) by situating them in the broader cultural scene of their 'bohemian' conception/reception, but we can also recover some

[264] See especially Mary E. Davis, 'Modernity à la Mode: Popular Culture and Avant-Gardism in Erik Satie's "Sports et divertissements"', *The Musical Quarterly* 83/3 (1999), 430-473. See also Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[265] See especially 'Part II: Satie's Involvement in Popular Milieux', in Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*. Some of the material included in this section of Whiting's book was previously published in Steven Moore Whiting, 'Erik Satie and Vincent Hyspa: Notes on a Collaboration', *Music & Letters* 77/1 (1996), 64-91.
[266] See Kevin Korsyn, 'Beyond Privileged Contexts: Intertextuality, Influence and Dialogue', in Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (eds.), *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55-72. Some of the same concerns are revisited in Kevin Korsyn, *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

of the meanings of his later compositions (notably the *Pièces humoristiques* and ballet music that will be discussed later in this thesis) by putting them back into dialogue with their newly-unearthed cabaret inheritance.[267]

Though the reader will no doubt sense a 'but . . .' is coming, I ought to make clear that Whiting's thesis is, to my mind, robust and compelling – not least because it applies some much-needed pressure to the canonic image of Satie as an aesthetic pioneer working in isolation from other musicians around him. Certainly, Whiting's study could hardly be more different to Yifan Hu's 'Landscape of Music', or the chapter on Satie in *Classical Music's Strangest Concert and Characters*, or the children's book, *Strange Mr Satie*, which pronounces (with a remarkable tautological flourish) that 'Satie, most of all, was Satie'.[268] Instead of the long list of 'firsts' for which the composer has so often been given credit – first minimalist work (*Vexations*), first Muzak (*Musique d'ameublement*), first synchronised film score (*Entr'acte*), etc. – Whiting argues that Satie's distinctive musical manners were in many respects a product of his situated-ness in a particular cultural locality. Nowhere is this more evident than at the very end of the book when the reader is left with the provocative suggestion that Satie was not quite the fountainhead of innovation various high-profile advocates have made him out to be, but the latest in a long line of French (musical) humourists – an idiosyncratic exponent of an esteemed tradition of idiosyncrasy:

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[267] This last idea is the rationale for the third part of Whiting's monograph, 'From Cabaret to Concert Hall', in which he examines the influence on Satie's mature compositions of his earlier cabaret training.

[268] See Yifan Hu, 'The Landscape of Music', *research.att.com*, http://www2.research.att.com/~yifanhu/MusicMap/index.html (accessed 19 August 2012); Brian Levison and Frances Farrer, *Classical Music's Strangest Concerts and Characters: Extraordinary but True Stories of Harmony and Discord* (London: Anova Books, 2007), 87-92; and M.T. Anderson and Petra Mathers, *Strange Mr. Satie* (New York, NY: Viking Juvenile, 2003), author's note, inside back cover.

> Symbolically (and, in the case of *Mercure*, physically), Satie returned [in his late ballets] to Montmartre. Over the years, the artistic alliances had shifted, and Satie's own compositional technique and aesthetic aims had doubtless advanced; but the fundamental attitudes and the basic parodic strategies remained those learnt on the Butte. Even without apologists from Cocteau to Cage arguing for Satie's indispensability to the formation of twentieth-century musical sensibilities, he would be estimable for his highly personal, even unique translation into concert music of the pince-sans-rire [deadpan] irony, the unbridled buffoonery, and the wry tenderness that he encountered in the cabarets, not just onstage but backstage and at the tables where the habitués joked and argued and posed for one another. In so doing, he took his place in a venerable line of French humourists from Rabelais to Allais, who invited us to celebrate our humanity and to preserve our sanity through the irreverent jest. Surely that is serious enough.[269]

Coming as this passage does at the end of a substantial monograph, there are clearly a number of different threads that the author is attempting to draw together, including the notion addressed in the final line that any composer deemed 'non-serious' requires special pleading. While the vexed question of Satie's 'translation into concert music' of cabaret techniques will be considered further in the next chapter, the most important observation for the argument in hand is that Whiting attempts to nudge Satie the lone composer off his pedestal by rooting his creative practice in the cabaret culture of fin-de-siècle Montmartre. This act of musicological contextualisation is at once descriptive and normative. Whiting does not simply identify fin-de-siècle Montmartre as one period/location in Satie's musical development, but also as a set of aesthetic priorities: 'pince-sans-rire irony', 'unbridled buffoonery', 'irreverent jests', etc., are all offered as traits common to Satie's music in particular and cabaret culture in general. Moreover, Whiting elsewhere subsumes these same traits under the umbrella term of an 'esprit Montmartrois', thus making explicit the intimate relation between place and description, location and adjective.[270]

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[269] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 561-562. For Cocteau's writing on Satie, see note 40. For Cage, see 'Erik Satie', in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), 76-82.

[270] See Steven Moore Whiting, 'Music on Montmartre', in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (eds.), *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde,*

In terms of what the 'Montmartre spirit' means in Whiting's work on Satie, we might note – in addition to the brief stylistic checklist given above – that it has strong affinities with the 'radical disregard for traditional divisions separating popular and classical forms of creative expression' that Perloff dated much later, to *Parade* (1917) and the cultural upheaval of the First World War.[271] It also chimes with many of the essays collected in an interdisciplinary volume subtitled *Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* to which Whiting contributed the chapter on music and musicians.[272] Furthermore, there are clear similarities between Whiting's usage of the esprit Montmartrois and Bernard Gendron's positioning of fin-de-siècle Montmartre at the beginning of a monograph on *Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*.[273] Indeed, throughout much of the extensive literature on the arts in France in this period, the sense of rapprochement between 'high' and 'low' forms of creative expression is a recurring, if not dominant theme. Take for example the publisher's blurb for an art history volume dedicated to Montmartre, which appeared only two years after Whiting's monograph:

> By the beginning of the twentieth century, the artists in the quarter began to create works blurring the boundaries between fine art and popular illustration, the artist and the audience, as well as class and gender distinctions. The creative expression that ensued was an exuberant mix of high and low – a breeding ground for what is today termed popular culture.[274]

1875-1905 (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), 159-197.

[271] The quotation here is taken from Perloff, *Art and the Everyday*, dust jacket blurb.

[272] See Whiting, 'Music on Montmartre'.

[273] Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Gendron's nesting of a chapter entitled 'The Song of Montmartre' within 'Section A: Cabaret Artistry (1840-1920)' and 'Part 1: Pop into Art: French Modernism' speaks volumes about the complex of ideas used in discussions of the creative climate in fin-de-siècle Montmartre.

[274] Gabriel P. Weisberg (ed.), *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

Given the family resemblances between these diverse publications from within and beyond musicology, it is important to note that Whiting is by no means the only writer to make claims for a blurring of the putative 'high/low' divide in fin-de-siècle Montmartre. Nor is he the originator or sole exponent of the notion of an esprit Montmartrois. Nevertheless, *Satie the Bohemian* is a logical point of reference for the current chapter because it is the single strongest statement on how the cultural scene of fin-de-siècle Montmartre informed, even conditioned Satie's own 'radical transvaluation of artistic values'.[275] It was *here,* Whiting convincingly argues, that the young, conservatoire-trained musician learned what turned out to be the most enduring aspects of his pianistic trade; it is *these* popular milieux that provide the interpretative lens through which to see more clearly Satie's later, now highly-regarded compositions.

And yet there is an unresolved question relating to Whiting's approach. By decentering his composer monograph so that it becomes an account of Satie's relations with the cabaret culture of fin-de-siècle Montmartre rather than an account of Satie alone, Whiting inevitably places greater and greater emphasis on the context of Satie's musical practice. To quote once more form the blurb on Whiting's dust cover:

> Satie's output is daunting in its sheer diversity and heterodoxy; but his radical transvaluation of received artistic values makes far better sense once placed in the fascinating context of bohemian Montmartre.

The problem for Whiting – though by no means only for Whiting – is that in the course of opening out from a narrowly composer-centred account to a discussion defined, at least in part, by the circumstances of musical production, there is a danger that the socio-aesthetic identity of fin-de-siècle Montmartre is taken as singular and self-evident. The fact that this place and time is now synonymous with the dissolution of social, generic, even sexual boundaries has the curious effect of limiting in advance our

[275] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, dust jacket blurb.

understanding of that part of late-nineteenth-century Paris with which Satie is now most often linked. A similar point has been addressed elsewhere by Kevin Korsyn:

> [T]he doctrine of the autonomous work is not the only place where aesthetic ideology can produce mystification. One can just as well seek closure at the level of context as in the individual text, ascribing a kind of organic unity, for example, to a historical period or to a particular mode of social organisation.[276]

As Korsyn continues, the critique becomes more pronounced:

> You can place your 'God term' ([a notion taken from] Kenneth Burke) at the centre or the periphery, you can contract to a point in your desire to reach the essence of an individual composition, or you can expand to the edges of your mental universe in your quest for ever larger contextual frames, but you're still moving within the series of what I have elsewhere called 'privileged contexts'.[277]

While I do not mean to imply that Whiting promotes a reductive account of the cultural scene in fin-de-siècle Montmartre – his scholarship is far too nuanced and attentive for that to be the case – we should be alert to the possibility that the meaning of fin-de-siècle Montmartre might be too readily assumed. To put it another way: in recent writing on Satie's early career – and the influence of his early career on the later compositions – fin-de-siècle Montmartre has become something like a 'God term'; it suffuses all manner of subjects and objects with (musical) meaning, without itself being subject to sufficient scrutiny.

Faced with this possibility, I envisage two main lines of response: first, we might say that fin-de-siècle Montmartre cannot be the explanation of anything until it has itself been explained. This position leaves more or less intact the assumption that we are dealing with an exceptional place and period in (French) cultural history, but

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[276] Korsyn, *Decentering Music*, 44. For a comparable critique of context from cultural geography, see James Duncan, 'The Superorganic in American Cultural Geography', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 70/2 (1980), 181-198. Duncan's objection to the 'superorganic mode of explanation in cultural geography' is that it 'reifies the notion of culture assigning it ontological status and causative power' (181).
[277] Korsyn, *Decentring Music*, 45. For the 'privileged contexts' reference, see note 47.

demands a more robust account of how it was that such a creative and apparently transgressive scene emerged when and where it did. There would be much to commend in such an enquiry – not least its implied empirical dimension and the attachment to the logic of cause and effect. But it would inevitably place most emphasis on understanding the historical geography of Montmartre, rather than on Satie's relationship with his contemporary geography (not necessarily limited to Montmartre). This leads us to the second course of action, which is to take seriously Korsyn's Foucault-inspired call to '"suspend the unities" by which we organise discourse, including those of the book, the œuvre, tradition, influence, the spirit of the age, and so on.'[278] It is this line of enquiry that I wish to pursue further in order to guard against fin-de-siècle Montmartre becoming just such a discursive unity in accounts of Satie's early career. I do not, however, wish to exchange false discursive unity for self-imposed discursive chaos and epistemological confusion. Rather, the key aim is to develop a sophisticated understanding of the relations between cultural location and musical identity whilst retaining a critical alertness to all the conventional devices of the artistic biographer and musicological contextualizer. With this in mind, the next section of this chapter aims to gain some perspective on Satie's association with a supposedly distinct and discrete cultural environment by positioning ourselves in a part of the city with which Montmartre is generally compared in the most contrasting terms.

Montmartre and the Martian Fields

[278] Ibid. Korsyn's quotation is taken from Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 21-24.

It was the best of times, and things were getting better. That, or something like it, was the message for each of the 32 million visitors to the 1889 Exposition universelle de Paris.[279] As the first event of its kind in the city since the Second Empire's last hurrah in 1867, this was a much-anticipated and widely-discussed undertaking – all the more so because its location and timing came charged with political significance. The site chosen for the Exposition – a Left Bank park known as the Champs de Mars – was exactly the same as that used in 1867, except now it was transformed by a structure so huge, and so aggressively modern it seemed to belittle all that had come before it: the Eiffel Tower. Just as it was impossible to ignore the giant iron pylon to the south of the Seine, it was equally hard to miss the symbolism of an exhibition planned by the Republican authorities to correspond with the centenary of the 1789 Revolution. As it turned out, some of the most overtly political celebrations – especially those around Bastille Day – were deliberately toned down for fear of destabilising an already fragile Republican government. Indeed, this fragility had been dangerously exposed only months before the opening of the Exposition when, in January 1889, there had been a serious possibility of a *coup d'état* led by the militarist pin-up, General Boulanger. A summer-long international fair thus seemed like a good opportunity to bury the memory of the dashing General (and his memorialising of the Franco-Prussian War) under the less controversial stuff of trade, industry, and, of course, music.

Thanks largely to the work of Annegret Fauser, we now know a good deal about the many and varied 'musical encounters' that took place around the exhibition sites of

[279] One of the best sources for general information on the 1889 Exposition in relation to broader trends in French cultural history remains Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

1889.[280] We also know that Satie – by then a resident of Montmartre – was among the millions who went to visit the attractions.[281] As with other composers in attendance – notably Debussy, whose delighted 'discovery' of the Gamelan has gone down in musicological lore – there has been much interest in what Satie might have heard and how it might have influenced his musical thinking. According to his first biographer, it was the Romanian folk bands that grabbed the attention of the young musician.[282] This, in turn, has led to speculation that the modal and timbral inflections of Satie's contemporaneous *Gnossiennes* may, in part, be a product of his 'exotic' encounters on the Champs de Mars.[283] Whether or not this was the case, there is another issue related to Satie and the 1889 Exposition that has not, thus far, received much attention. Simply put: why was he there? Though this may seem like a glib and unfocussed question, the notion that Satie was influenced by the performances he encountered at a state-sponsored exhibition in the heart of bourgeois Paris ought to give pause for thought. To be sure, no serious musicologist – certainly not Whiting – has ever suggested that Satie's early career was spent *only* in the eighteenth arrondissement. Nor has anyone claimed that Satie's musical inspiration derived *exclusively* from what went on within that area. Nevertheless, the image of our young, supposedly anti-establishment composer mingling with the crowds at the base of the Eiffel Tower goes so much against the bohemian grain that it warrants further consideration.[284] It may even help to

[280] Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005).
[281] For details of Satie's various addresses, see 'Erik Satie' in Nigel Simeone, *Paris: A Musical Gazetteer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
[282] Templier, *Erik Satie*, 15.
[283] See, for example, Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 118.
[284] On this point, it is worth noting that one of the authoritative texts in the study of 'bohemian' Paris makes absolutely no mention of the various Expositions held in the centre of the city within its time-frame. See Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York, NY: Viking,

destabilise the unity of fin-de-siècle Montmartre in our understanding of Satie's early career.

Satie at the Eiffel Tower

One way of bringing to mind the cultural distance Satie had to travel to reach the site of the bourgeois Exposition from the heights of bohemian Montmartre is to recall for a moment the world of *Moulin Rouge!* Here, the Butte and the Tower are presented not only as distinct, but more accurately as polar opposites: repeated travelling shots in the prologue establish a strong sense of distance and dissimilarity between these two highly-symbolic locations. In part, we might attribute this polarised geography of Paris to the poetic license of a director well known for stylistic extravagance. After all, *Moulin Rouge!* is anything but a naturalistic production: there is one scene, for example, where a gun thrown from the dance-hall in Montmartre ricochets off the side of the Eiffel Tower while a moon with the voice of an operatic tenor sings to the night sky. Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons to take Luhrmann's exaggerated opposition as a point of departure for more historically-grounded enquiry. For example, the real Moulin Rouge first opened its doors on the last Sunday of October 1889 while the Exposition and its towering centrepiece were very much fresh in people's minds. Though we should always be careful about over-interpreting coincidence, the fact that these two landmarks are chronological twins cannot help but make the pairing more intriguing.

Furthermore, Luhrmann is by no means alone in emphasising the extent to which Montmartre and its bohemian inhabitants were defined by their distance from a loosely-demarcated urban centre. As we heard in the last chapter, the status of

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1986). Seigel's silence invites us to consider the possibility of distinct, even incommensurate historical urban geographies of Paris.

Montmartre as a 'marginal' site allows for easy – perhaps too easy – elision of cultural and geographical commentary. Witness the following introduction to an exhibition of paintings by one of Satie's fellow 'Bohos', Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec:

> Set upon a butte, or hill, and removed from the city centre, Montmartre had an identity distinct from central Paris. Its rural roots were evident at the end of the century, when working windmills still dotted the landscape. Narrow, winding, and haphazard streets also contrasted Montmartre with central Paris, where Baron Haussmann's urban modernization plan had created a coherent design with broad avenues and uniform street lamps. . . . Montmartre's separation from central Paris – geographically, demographically, historically, and architecturally – set the stage for the decadent fringe culture that arose in the district on the butte.[285]

As with the quotation from the end of Whiting's monograph, there are a number of issues raised by this text, including the use of the phrase 'set the stage', which subtly reinforces the Luhrmannesque idea of Montmartre as an inherently theatrical environment. However, it is the centre/fringe dynamic I want to pursue further by returning again to *Moulin Rouge!*

In Luhrmann's film, the imaginative geography is not only polarised but also asymmetrical: what makes the semi-fictional dance-hall unique, sociologically-speaking, is that it provides the (strictly-regulated) circumstances under which the 'rich and powerful' people – implicitly associated with the city centre – can spend their nights among the 'young and beautiful creatures of the [Montmartre] underworld'. At one level, this asymmetry is unsurprising since capital cities, almost by definition, exhibit a centripetal distribution of administrative and political power. In the particular case of post-Haussmann Paris, an already unequal distribution was exacerbated by the

[285] See 'Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre', *nga.gov* [National Gallery of Art, Washington DC exhibition site], http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2005/toulouse/index.shtm (accessed 16 August 2011).

planned removal of working-class housing from the largely reconstructed city centre.[286] But as Christian's description of the Moulin Rouge suggests, there is more to the centre/fringe model than the concentration of capital in a gentrified urban nucleus: there is also the issue of urban circulation. More specifically, in Luhrmann's film, mobility is the exclusive privilege of the wealthy. We are led to believe that the rich and powerful shuttle to and from Montmartre at will, but there is never any suggestion of social traffic in the opposite direction. On the contrary, Luhrmann's Bohos (Satie included) are a sedentary lot: they live, love, and rehearse chorus numbers without ever leaving the Place Blanche, never mind Montmartre. Christian's apartment, for example, stands directly opposite the Moulin Rouge. And when Satine sings 'One Day I'll Fly Away' from within the grounds of her windmill-fronted workplace, it is clearly more in hope than expectation.

Once again, Luhrmann's film proves both uniquely stylised and surprisingly consistent with historical accounts of central Parisians climbing the hill for a night on the Butte. What we rarely hear – if at all – is evidence of a 'return leg', whereby those living in Montmartre took a stroll in, say, the Jardin des Tuileries or the Champs de Mars.[287] Given the apparent immobility of fringe culture, the image of Satie at the Eiffel Tower becomes doubly dissonant: not only is it jarring to imagine a bohemian musician at the playground of the bourgeois establishment, but it is also remarkable that he ventured that far in the first place. In response to this dissonance it is tempting to adopt the discourse of authenticity and conclude that Satie's attraction to such bourgeois

[286] For a detailed account of Haussmann's urban transformations, see Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* and Agulhon, Maurice (ed.), *La Ville de l'âge industriel: le Cycle Haussmannien* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

[287] As we saw in the last chapter, the movement from the outskirts inwards was not typically associated with the pursuit of leisure. Rather, this direction of travel was most commonly linked with the mundane business of suburban commuting or the perceived threat of a working-class assault on the city centre.

festivities undercuts his claims to being a *real* bohemian. Alternatively, we might frame his attendance with irony and suggest that Satie had tongue firmly in cheek when taking part in these fanciful displays of productivity and industry. Or if both of the above seem too far-fetched, we could simply view Satie's visit to the Tower as an exception that proves the contextual rule – a one-off trip that ultimately vindicates the musicological strategy of situating Satie's early career in the popular milieux of northern Paris. However, it is important to remember that the aim of the current chapter is not to find a smoking gun that appears to give the lie to existing scholarship by demonstrating how Satie was not, after all, a Montmartre bohemian. Rather, it is to find fresh ways of thinking about the role and limits of local contextualisation in our understanding of Satie's Paris. With this in mind, I suggest we look again at some of the cultural and geographic assumptions lurking in the background of the present discussion.

Instead of accepting in advance the fixed identities of bourgeois centre and bohemian fringe, we might use Satie's participation in the 1889 Exposition as an occasion to question the sharp – perhaps too sharp – distinction between the two. While there is undoubtedly some mileage in thinking of central Paris as, paradoxically, the constitutive outside of a Montmartre-based counterculture, we ought to be wary of any attempt to map discrete socio-aesthetic identities onto well-marked urban territories – especially when those identities/territories come in ready-made binary oppositions.[288] Unlike Luhrmann's fictional Bohos, the real Satie was not a caricature, and did not live out his entire life on the Butte – far from it. This much was clear from the discussion of his geo-biography in the last chapter. Moreover, no gathering of over 30 million visitors – with all the diversity of experiences and expectation that implies – can be dismissed

[288] The notion of 'constitutive outsides' is taken from Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135/2 (2010), esp. 221-231.

in good conscience as *merely* a bourgeois festival of technocratic or industrial modernity. In other words, we cannot assume that either the Champs de Mars or fin-de-siècle Montmartre was a site of stable or simple identities. Nor will we get very far by imagining the 1889 Exposition as one half of a binary of which the other half is an idealised vision of bohemian retreat.

To a certain extent, both criticisms above could apply to any place at any time: identities are complex, binaries are suspicious – we know that. But there is another point to make that relates specifically to fin-de-siècle bohemianism. So far, I have considered the distance of Montmartre (in reality and representation) from the central areas of Paris – a distance seemingly accentuated by the distinctive topography of the Butte as well as by the rural-looking windmills that featured so prominently in contemporary images of the area.[289] However, I have not yet addressed the *scale* of Montmartre, which is equally important in establishing the character of a location and the nature of the musical encounters available there. Whereas many accounts of the 1889 Exposition emphasise the volume, abundance, even excess of its attractions and performances – not to mention the vast quantities of visitors in attendance – accounts of the *cabarets artistiques* in fin-de-siècle Montmartre typically portray a very different scenario. To take an example from Whiting's monograph: the first three chapters grouped under the heading 'Satie's Involvement with Popular Milieux' are concerned with relatively small performance venues – the Chat Noir, Divan Japonais, and Auberge du Clou – each of which was within very easy walking distance of the others.

Clearly, there is more to the issue of scale than the simple measurement of distance. As any concert promoter will attest – and as I shall discuss in relation to

[289] Incidentally, we might note the foregrounding of the topography of the Butte in *Moulin Rouge!* Not only does the camera rise to Christian's apartment in the prologue, but the inclusion of 'The Sound of Music' cannot help but bring hills to mind.

Satie's humour in the next chapter – the assessment of (musical) intimacy is irreducible to crude empirical observation. In terms of area, the Champs de Mars is no larger than Montmartre, but the site of the 1889 Exposition was organised in such a way that it foregrounded the large-scale and the international. After all, what could be bigger than the tallest structure ever built? What could be more overtly international than an array of pavilions representing almost all the nations of the world? Compared to this, the back rooms, cellars, and invite-only meetings of the Montmartre cabarets appear to articulate a very different sense of urban scale. Hence Whiting's preference for the words 'milieux' and 'habitués', which bring to mind notions of locality, informality, and familiarity. To write of the 'wry tenderness that he [Satie] encountered in the cabarets, not just onstage but backstage and at the tables where the habitués joked and argued and posed for one another' is to invoke an intimate, community-based geography of the neighbourhood or *quartier*.[290] At the risk of stating the obvious, the scale and character of the quartier are quite unlike the scale and character of what one writer has called the 'fleeting cities' of the great exhibitions, or, indeed, the dehistoricised, depersonalised spaces of Haussmann's rebuilt urban centre.[291]

It seems that size – or rather scale – really does matter. But attributing a distinctive sense of locality to Montmartre has the unintended result of bringing us back to issues raised in relation to Satie at the Eiffel Tower: after criticising the simplistic cultural geography of bourgeois centre and bohemian fringe, the turn to questions of scale threatens to re-introduce a polarised vocabulary of large versus small,

[290] The scale and character of the Parisian quartier – and the 'quartier economy' – is discussed at some length in T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23-78. The anglicised term 'quarter' was also used to refer to Montmartre in the gallery guide quoted above.

[291] Alexander C.T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

international versus intimate. More importantly, these polarising distinctions only make it harder to suspend the unity of fin-de-siècle Montmartre because the more we isolate it from central Paris – 'geographically, demographically, historically, and architecturally' as it says in the gallery guide quoted above – the more privileged it becomes as a context for Satie's early career. To state the problem otherwise: by suggesting that a sufficiently distinctive socio-aesthetic group might generate its own, uniquely appropriate spatial forms, we replicate in reverse the existing claim that a sufficiently distinctive place might generate its own creative 'spirit'. No matter how attractive such an idea may be in light of Henri Lefebvre's oft-quoted dictum that 'space is socially produced', the prospect of an espace bohème to complement the esprit Montmartrois raises all manner of tautological problems.[292] And to reiterate my earlier concern: the closure of the contextual circle around Satie's early career risks limiting our understanding of his relations with contemporary Parisian geography. In an attempt to enlarge our sphere of reference, I suggest we retrace our steps, strike out on a new path across the Parisian fields, and returns to the Champs de Mars eleven years after the Eiffel Tower was new. This time Satie was not, as far as we know, among the visitors. But his image – and that of a famous Montmartre mill – occupied a prominent place in that summer's attractions. By considering Satie's portrait in situ I hope to begin the task of re-situating fin-de-siècle Montmartre in an international – by which I mean de-localised – economy of travel, commerce, and signification.

El bohemio at the Grand Palais

[292] The fullest exposition of Lefebvre's theory of the relations between social and spatial production can be found in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

If the centenary festival of 1889 was a large-scale affair, the Exposition universelle at century's end was even bigger.[293] With more than 50 million visitors over the course of the summer, the sheer volume of human traffic was itself a spectacle to behold. Aside from the size of the crowds, the exhibits and attractions on and around the Champs de Mars were of such magnitude and variety it is scarcely possible to describe them without slipping into the rhetoric of the hyperbolic list. Take, for example, the Grande Roue de Paris; standing at the suitably-rounded height of 100 metres, it was 25 per cent larger than the Chicago Ferris Wheel of 1893, and six strides taller than London's Great Wheel of 1895. Not content with surpassing only the scale of its European and North-American competitors, the 1900 exhibition also promised innovation in the shape of never-before-realised immersive entertainment: the Globe Céleste, for example, transformed curious tourists into 'astronautes de fauteuil' (armchair astronauts) who could sit back and watch solar panoramas pass before their eyes; for three days before its closure on safety grounds, the Cinéorama went one step further, combining panorama with ten simultaneously-projected moving images to simulate a balloon ride over the Jardin des Tuileries; meanwhile, the Mareorama took its 'passengers' on a multi-sensory voyage from southern France to the shores of Japan with the aid of a ship-shaped motion platform, gigantic rolling paintings, flashes, fans, and the real-life smells of tar and seaweed.[294]

If the imaginative disjunction of sailing half way round the world without leaving the banks of the Seine seems remarkable enough, we might also recall that

[293] In addition to countless contemporary publications, there is now a substantial general literature on exhibition of 1900. See for example Richard D. Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) and Jean-Christophe Mabire (ed.), *L'Exposition universelle de 1900* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).
[294] The Cinéorama and Mareorama are discussed in Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 171-173. Further attractions at the Exposition are addressed in Williams, *Dream Worlds*.

simply getting between the attractions entailed stepping, quite literally, into an imagined future: the Rue de l'Avenir was a 3.5 kilometre-long moving walkway that transported new configurations of stationary-yet-mobile crowds around the grounds of the Exposition. Add to this three purpose-built railway stations and the first underground trains in Paris.[295] Not to mention the first known public presentation of sound film, the largest refracting telescope the world had ever looked through, and one of Rudolf Diesel's engines running on peanut oil. No wonder so many visitors left feeling over-stimulated by the cornucopia of dynamised sensation that was the 1900 Exposition.

Or was it? As the case of the over-subscribed and under-prepared Cinéorama suggests, we would be wise to take the super-size hype with a generous pinch of salt. Did the inaugural métros run quite as well to time as the published schedules would have us believe? How many rides on the Rue de l'Avenir did it take before the journey into the future became an exercise in frustration, fatigue, even boredom? And what about Eiffel's monstrous iron pylon, which was so hated during the first decades of its existence that it was only saved from demolition thanks to its usefulness as a radio transmitter?[296] Though flippant, these rhetorical questions highlight the shortcomings of any monological account of the 1900 Exposition and the urban experiences it made available – or at least desirable – to a freshly-incorporated mass public. Indeed, thanks

[295] The new stations were the Gare d'Orsay (which now houses much of the national art collection for the period 1848-1915), the Gare des Invalides, and the substantially-remodelled Gare de Lyon. The first *chemin de fer métropolitain* ran along an east-west axis between Porte de Vincennes and Porte Maillot.

[296] In its early years, one of the Eiffel Tower's best-known detractors was Guy de Maupassant, who 'often lunched in the restaurant in the tower, though he didn't much care for the food: It's the only place in Paris, he used to say, where I don't have to see it.' Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3. See also chapter 2, 'Useless and Monstrous', in Joseph Harriss, *The Tallest Tower: Eiffel and the Belle Époque*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Unlimited Publishing, 2004), 13-20.

to guide books, press reports, and no doubt a little urban intuition, members of said public would have been well aware that the geography of the exhibition site – or rather, sites – articulated a range of more or less distinct modes of recreation and entertainment: on the Left Bank, beyond the Eiffel Tower, was the grand fairground of the Champs de Mars described above, as well as the Palais de l'Électricité and a gigantic cascading fountain (not to mention a model windmill); on the opposite side of the river stood the Palais du Trocadéro and the Exposition coloniale with its juxtaposition of temporary pavilions in all manner of exotic styles. A short distance upstream, two further sites – the Esplanade des Invalides on the Left Bank, and the Grand Palais and Petit Palais on the Right – offered more sober attractions: the Esplanade, overlooked by the great dome of Les Invalides, was a relatively formal affair with neither the grassy expanses of the Champs de Mars nor the pick-and-mix architecture of the Exposition coloniale; across the Seine, the scale and structure of the two glass palaces – initially used to mount displays of French and international art – echoed the grandeur, if not quite the gravitas, of Les Invalides. And unlike the Grande Roue or the Tour Eiffel, which sought to elevate visitors' spirits by first elevating their bodies, the voluminous interior of the Grand Palais was dedicated (at least in the first instance) to the more cerebral pleasures of art and connoisseurship.

In other words, the 1900 Exposition was not simply one big soup of overwhelming sensation, but rather a highly-structured assemblage of heterogeneous – though not uniformly heterogeneous – sites, sub-sites, and interstitial spaces, each of which afforded visitors different kinds and combinations of urban experience. That is not to say that no efforts were made to corral the whole assemblage into a single coherent order: aerial views on souvenir postcards were relatively successful in this aim – so was the programme of sculptures on the newly-built Pont Alexandre III, which

proudly declared modern France to be a union of industry, history, science, and beauty. But such top-down plans and plastic declarations were inevitably contingent on their reception, and who can say how dog-eared the postcard was by the time it reached home, or how convincing the bridge's elegant claim to Imperial identity was when 'received' by tens of thousands of pairs of tired tourist feet?

Given the practical and theoretical problems in attempting to grasp, conceptually, the whole of the Exposition, any attempt at developing a comparison between it and Montmartre is inevitably open to the charge of over-simplification. This much was clear from the Moulin Rouge/Eiffel Tower binary discussed above. Since there is, quite obviously, no cultural map from which we can read the fixed identities of any of these sites (or the distances between them) it might be productive to imagine instead just one of many possible journeys from somewhere in the Exposition to somewhere in Montmartre. The journey I propose begins where we left off, with the tired feet on the Pont Alexandre III. More specifically, I want to imagine – not unreasonably – that some of the tourists crossing the bridge did so en route to the Grand Palais and its huge displays of paintings arranged in national groups. As with all journeys at the Exposition, the movement from Les Invalides to the Grand Palais invites multiple readings: since Napoléon Bonaparte lay entombed beneath the dome on the Left Bank, and the inaugural address of the 1900 Exposition was given by President Émile Loubet in the great glass palace opposite, we might think of the crossing of the bridge as a symbolic transition from (First) Empire to (Third) Republic. The fact that Loubet reached the peroration of his address by invoking 'the slow evolution of labour towards happiness and of man towards humanity' would seem to support this future-facing reading.[297] Yet we cannot ignore the truism that bridges are two-way structures,

[297] Quoted in 'Opening of the Paris Exhibition', *The Times* (16 April 1900), 2.

and the architectural similarities between the curves of the new Palais and the dome of Les Invalides could be read as indicative of an ideological conservatism at the heart of the (relatively) new regime.

With such potentially conflicting readings in mind, it seems appropriate to imagine the approach to the Grand Palais in terms of a Janus-faced itinerary – a glance over the shoulder at the point of moving on. What with the wide-open wounds of the Dreyfus Affair and the embarrassing unreadiness of some of the attractions, the faith in progress we have come to associate with the so-called 'Belle Époque' was already being undermined by partisan politics and over-ambitious logistics.[298] Even the Grand Palais itself showed signs of faltering confidence thanks to an unpredictable water-table and rather-too-muddy foundations. Nevertheless, the show still went ahead, with the official judges giving the Grand Prix and a medal of honour to the painter they deemed most worthy. His name was Joaquin Sorolla y Bastida and he was garlanded for a suitably-monumental (210cm x 285cm) work entitled *Triste herencia* (Sad Inheritance, 1899), which depicted child polio sufferers bathing in the sea in Valencia under the watchful eye of a fully-clothed monk. Whether it was the naked realism of Bastida's style or the social importance of his subject that impressed the judges we do not know. But we can be fairly sure that a good many visitors took their cue from the experts and made a beeline for the winning painting.

Upon arriving at the Spanish section of the exhibition, it would have been apparent that *Triste herencia* was not the only work on display whose relationship with Loubet's themes of progress and happiness took some explaining. The Catalan-Spanish artist Ramón Casas, for example, had two of his portraits on show: the first – a full-length study of his younger sister, Elisa Casas Carbó – could just about pass for an

[298] For an account of the relations between contemporary politics and musical practice, see Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*.

image of a fashionable woman in a modern street setting, but when it came to the second portrait, such claims to lifelike contemporaneity could not be so easily made. Although the dimensions of *El bohemio, poeta de Montmartre* (1891) were almost identical to those of the *Retrato* [portrait] *de Elisa Casas Carbó*, the Montmartre painting depicted a different sort of subject in a different sort of setting (see fig. 12). Adorned with the conspicuously old-fashioned accessories of a top hat and pince-nez glasses, the figure in *El bohemio* peered out at the viewer (that is, the tourists) from a murky middle ground that could scarcely be described as a street – certainly not in the sense of the planned, paved, linear walkways for which late-nineteenth-century Paris had become famous. Moreover, the canvas was almost entirely devoid of sharp lines, and the palette was restricted to the subdued hues of blues, blacks, and greys. The only distinguishing features that rescued the background from abstraction were a wispy tree and a simple windmill, both of which drew on the pictorial conventions of the day to illustrate the location specified by the title of the painting.

For anyone even vaguely familiar with contemporary iconographic clichés, this bearded and bespectacled figure clearly did not belong in central Paris; his scruffy yet dandified appearance was emblematic of the bohemian milieu associated with, among other places, the Butte Montmartre. Since the reputation of the 'poet' in the portrait did not yet extend much further than the locality in which Casas had pictured him, we must assume that most of the visitors to the Grand Palais would have recognised him only as a generic bohemian.



Figure 12. Ramón Casas, *El bohemio, poeta de Montmartre* (1891).

In fact, the bearded figure was – as the reader will no doubt have guessed – Erik Satie. Completed nine years prior to the 1900 Exposition, Casas's *El bohemio* is one of the most accomplished of the many images of the musician that would be made over the years, as well as an important early instance of the windmill trope in Satie reception. And, significantly, it is also the cover image for Whiting's monograph, *Satie the*

Bohemian.[299] More specifically, the portrait places Satie in front of the Moulin de la Galette – a dance-hall, viewpoint and once-working windmill – where Casas lived for a time with his fellow Catalan-Spanish artists Santiago Rusiñol, Miquel Utrillo, and Ramón Canudas. According to the description of the painting in the catalogue of its current owners, Utrillo was the initial link between Satie and Casas – a suggestion supported by the fact that both Satie and Utrillo had relationships with the same artist and model, Suzanne Valadon.[300] Moreover, we know that Satie attended a Christmas Eve party at the Moulin de la Galette in 1890, so it is safe to say that the location was more than a picturesque backdrop for the portrait of the young musician.[301]

The existing commentary on Rusiñol's portrait of Satie has drawn attention to the manner in which the sitter represents a typical bohemian as much as – if not more than – a distinct individual. For Mary E. Davis, the painting 'shows Satie in full Bohemian regalia in front of the Moulin de la Galette'.[302] Whiting also uses the word 'regalia' – and even speaks of a 'Montmartre uniform' – before adding:

> The original title of El Bohemio, suggests that Satie represented a type to Casas; the proud, unabashed bohemian of Montmartre (the Moulin too takes on a symbolic value). Interestingly enough, the portrait at first showed Satie holding an umbrella, traces of which are visible through the thinly applied paint; but Casas eventually rejected this personalising touch.[303]

In addition to the fact that the content of the picture exemplifies the inseparability of figure and ground that has been discussed throughout this chapter, we might also note that the general circumstances of the painting's production resonate with received

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[299] For some reason the image on Whiting's front cover has been 'flipped' so that Satie is facing the opposite direction to how he appears on Casas's original.
[300] See 'Art in the Eloise W. Martin Reading Room', on *library.northwestern.edu* [Northwestern University Library], http://www.library.northwestern.edu/libraries-collections/evanston-campus/art-collection/art-the-reading-room (accessed 11 August 2011).
[301] See Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 120.
[302] Davis, *Erik Satie*, 43.
[303] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 123-124.

notions of fin-de-siècle Montmartre as an exceptional enclave for bohemian creativity. Whether it is Casas and his friends' shared living space or Satie and Utrillp's shared love interest, there is a strong temptation to imagine *El bohemio* as the product of an isolated, self-supporting community holed up in a windmill on the northern fringes of Paris. Other images of Satie from the period – notably Rusiñol's *Le Logis d'Erik Satie* (Erik Satie's Lodgings, 1891) (see fig. 13) – fit a similarly mythic mould. In Rusiñol's portrait, the subject is pictured alone in the corner of a sparsely-decorated room – 'in the corner of his cold' as the sitter would later put it – apparently contemplating the dull warmth of his meagre fire.[304] Instead of relying on the exterior of a place-associated building (i.e., a windmill) to establish the setting of his portrait, Rusiñol's painting invokes one of the most familiar sites in the literary geography of nineteenth-century Paris: the artist's garret. Thanks in no small part to Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Scenes of bohemian life, 1851), this sort of draughty, uncomfortable interior was not merely suggestive of poverty, but also indicative of certain kind of anti-bourgeois aestheticism, which was voraciously consumed by the contemporary bourgeoisie of Paris.[305]

[304] Satie is said to have described himself in this picture using the phrase 'Au coin de son froid'. See Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 12.
[305] We might also note that Puccini's operatic realisation of Murger's stories, *la Bohème* premiered in Paris at the Théâtre des Nations only two years before the 1900 Exposition.

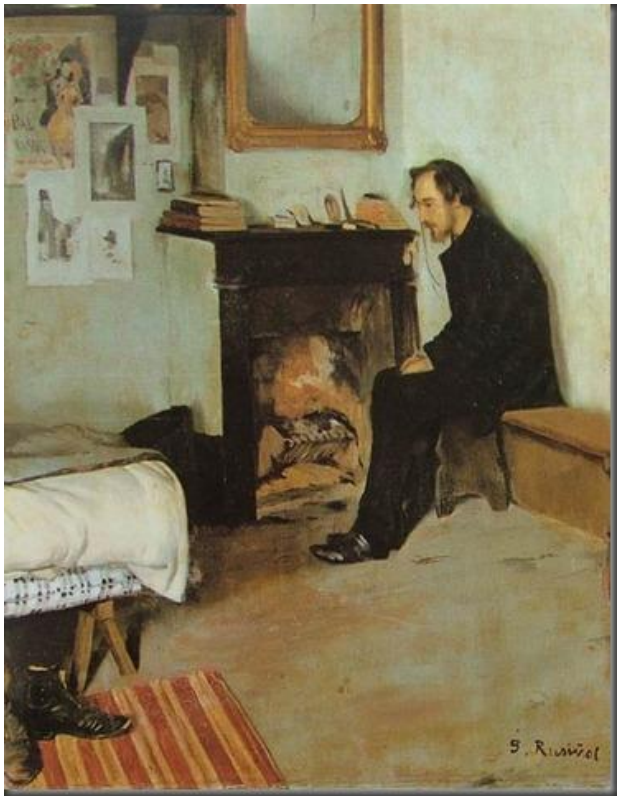


Figure 13. Santiago Rusiñol, *Le Logis d'Erik Satie* (1891).

Clearly, it is not the largest of leaps from the Spartan interior described above to the aesthetic qualities of '[s]implification, plainness, [and] economy of means' with which Satie's music has been associated since at least the early 1890s.[306] But it would be misleading to suggest that the contextualisation of Satie's early career amounts to an attempt to root his compositional style in only the non-urbane, un-embellished, and relatively poor environs of northern Paris. On the contrary, it has been far more common to describe the bohemian scene of fin-de-siècle Montmartre in terms of mixture, mélange or even synthesis. In Luhrmann's prologue, for example, Montmartre is cast in both shadow and spotlight. In Gendron's cultural history, it is the meeting place of popular culture and the avant garde. In Davis's reading of the two paintings mentioned above, it is the 'dual facets of the Montmartre musician' which she seeks to

[306] Davis, *Erik Satie*, 43.

emphasise: 'isolated and contemplative on the one hand, public and performantive on the other.'[307] Another frequent claim is that the bohemian culture in which Satie moved allowed for an uncommon symbiosis of the solemn and the irreverent, as memorably expressed by Roger Shattuck when he wrote that '[i]n those days, and in Satie's life, it was a conveniently short distance from esoteric religions to cabaret gaiety.'[308]

Unquestionably, the almost oxymoronic notion of esoteric gaiety can be a useful conceptual tool for understanding a particular form of creative expression in the period. But the net result of this and the other pairings mentioned above is that Montmartre appears as a place where hitherto divergent ideas come to fuse. The 'Catalan Connection', as Whiting calls it, is another case in point. The aesthetic affinities and social relations between Satie and the aforementioned Spanish-Catalan painters can all too easily be read as a defining instance of the melting pot model of creative encounter. Not only did young artistic minds travel from far and wide to get to northern Paris, so the argument goes, but once they arrived there, their work was marked by an attempt to reconcile apparently contradictory imperatives. For example, it was largely through Rusiñol et al that Satie became acquainted with the work of the French neoclassical painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. According to Davis:

> Puvis' updates of the classical world were a touchstone for Satie, who had all along been mining the past as a way of moving art forward. Rusiñol and his circle dubbed Satie their 'Greek musician', and described his compositions as 'baptized . . . with the name "Greek harmony"', but exactly what constituted this 'Greekness' in Satie's music has been a matter of speculation. The title of the *Gymnopédies*, as we have seen, surely reflects some degree of engagement with the classical world on Satie's part. On a more technical level, a number of scholars have proposed that in the 1890s Satie was actually experimenting with the ancient modes of Greek music, offering as evidence a sketch in one of the composer's notebooks in which he laid out a series of pitches that can be manipulated to approximate a Greek chromatic scale. . . . Whatever its origin, the pseudo-Greek scale provided Satie with an underpinning for a number of works in this phase of his career,

[307] Ibid.
[308] Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 69. A very similar claim – 'mysticism in the cabarets was always tempered with *la blague*, the gag' – is found in Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 138.

> helping to define his identity as a backward-glancing modernist much in the vein of Puvis de Chavannes.[309]

Given that Satie came to Puvis de Chavannes via a group of artists living in the Moulin de la Galette, this notion of a 'backward-glancing modernism' could, without too much of a stretch, be included within that group of descriptors labelled 'Montmartrois'. Furthermore, we might cite the Moulin de la Galette itself as yet another index of a creative cultural ambivalence since it offered rustic charm and the latest entertainment within the self-same hill-top setting. Add to this the fact that Puvis de Chavannes – like Utrillo and Satie – had an affair with Suzanne Valadon, and the impression we have of fin-de-siècle Montmartre is that of a peculiarly close-knit community of painters, poets, and 'Greek' musicians.

Once again, the conceptual circle is threatening to close as the unity of fin-de-siècle Montmartre is affirmed by an unending supply of pictures, anecdotes, and secondary comment. However, there is something about Satie's Greekness that sticks in the throat. Earlier on we heard how the *Gnossiennes* may have been influenced by an encounter with Romanian musicians. Now we hear that the *Gymnopédies* are indebted to the neoclassical landscapes of a French painter who may have spent some time in Montmartre, but later became the President of a major cultural institution, the Société des Beaux Arts.[310] Moreover, much of this debt was mediated by artists whose self-identified home was neither Montmartre, nor Paris, but Catalonia. In other words, there are many strands in the Montmartre web that lead outwards as well as inwards. The backward-glancing modernism, for example, echoes the earlier reading of the Pont Alexandre III where anxieties about faltering progress were associated with the centre

[309] Davis, *Erik Satie*, 42-43.
[310] The Prix Puvis de Chavannes went on to become a high-profile award recognising a substantial contribution to the visual arts. As it happens, the prize included a retrospective exhibition, many of which were held at the Grand Palais.

of Paris as much as the periphery. Even if we leave aside such speculative interpretations of imaginary tourist trails, the simple fact that Casas's portrait of Satie was hung in the Spanish section of an international exhibition at the Imperial Grand Palais sits uneasily with an exclusively Montmartre-centric account.

At the very least, we should acknowledge the striking connections between the artistic milieu of Montmartre and that of Barcelona: for example, both Rusiñol and Utrillo were involved with the Quatre Gats cabaret, a self-conscious attempt to emulate in Barcelona the Chat Noir of Montmartre; furthermore, Rusiñol and Casas had earlier collaborated on a series of articles about their time in Montmartre for the journal *La Vanguardia*. Entitled simply 'Desde el Molino' (From the Mill), these articles exported the Montmartre-specific image of a bohemian windmill to a curious and sympathetic Iberian readership. Yet even this expanded, dual-city perspective still allows many of the hoariest bohemian clichés to pass by unattended. Why, for example, was the Chat Noir so special that it warranted a franchise? Was it, in any case, the only venue to be flattered by such imitation? Part of the difficulty in asking – never mind answering – such questions relates to the fact that, from a twenty-first-century perspective, it is all too easy to attribute exceptional cultural status to Montmartre or to posit some Zeitgeist-like connection between Montmartre and Barcelona. If we were to make the same claims with regard to, say, La Villette (the next door arrondissement to Montmartre in northern Paris) or Valencia (south of Barcelona on the east coast, and the next largest city in Spain) they would likely as not be met with incredulity. Not because Valencia and La Villete are or were culturally bankrupt – far from it – but because neither of these locations has achieved anywhere near the same prominence in the popular or scholarly imaginary of the art of the period as Montmartre or Barcelona. While the reasons for their sustained prominence are beyond the scope of this

discussion, what matters for the present argument is that fin-de-siècle Montmartre was not only linked to other imitation Montmartres, but also to other 'non-bohemian' locations both within and beyond Paris.

One way of illustrating this is to consider how it was that *El bohemio* ended up where it is now: on the wall of the Deering Library at Northwestern University, Illinois. Not simply a case of a wealthy private college making strategic cultural acquisitions, the ownership history of Casas's portrait invites us to reconsider both the character and the scale of the artistic economy of fin-de-siècle Montmartre. As the University website explains:

> This portrait was acquired by Charles Deering when he studied painting in Paris in the early 1890s. It was bequeathed to Northwestern University Library by his daughter, Mrs. Chauncey McCormick, in 1956.[311]

It is thus possible that by the time *El bohemio* was displayed at the Grand Palais, it was not only framed by its inclusion in the Spanish section of international exhibition, but was also the property of that most twentieth-century of characters: an American in Paris. What is more, we are told that 'Casas visited the United States twice, in 1908 and in 1924, as a guest of Charles Deering, for whom the Deering Library is named.'[312] This sort of transatlantic travel – all courtesy of a fortune built, rather serendipitously for the present discussion, on milling wheat – would be anathema to the idealised bohemian pictured in Casas's and Rusiñol's portraits of Satie. But Casas himself was no such figure; his career was irreducibly international and took him to far more diverse locations than the Montmartre-Barcelona pairing implies.[313] Any attempt to localise his

[311] See 'Art in the Eloise W. Martin Reading Room'.
[312] Ibid.
[313] For more details of Casas's career, see Cristina Mendoza, 'Casas and Rusiñol: The Allure of Montmartre', in William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgas, and Carmen Bellon Lord (eds.), *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudi, Miro, Dali* (New Haven: Yale

creativity to an old mill in the north of Paris is thus as much an instance of bohemian mythology as the garrets and cold fires that feature in Satie iconography and biographies.

Of course, the record of ownership given above tells us nothing about Satie himself, a man who travelled famously little and certainly never visited the United States (despite once suggesting an American tour in a letter to a friend living in New York).[314] But it does tell us something about the way that Satie's image was used to package fin-de-siècle Montmartre for a range of overlapping and 'non-local' constituencies. Moreover, Satie made an active contribution to one document that encapsulates better than any other the conflicted status of fin-de-siècle Montmartre as an international symbol of localised creativity. Although Satie was not among the crowds at the 1900 Exposition, he did write an article entitled 'Musiciens de Montmartre' that appeared in a guide book made especially for the occasion, Victor Meusy and Edmond Depas's *Guide de l'étranger à Montmartre*.[315] The title translates literally as 'stranger's' or 'outsider's' guide, and the publication was explicitly designed to steal patrons from the official sites of that year's fair. This much is clear from the iconography of Jules Grün's striking front cover (see fig. 14) in which a beautiful woman in low-necked dress beckons visitors to the night-time entertainments symbolised by the red sails of a windmill (i.e., the Moulin Rouge). In addition to this visual enticement, there are practical directions on a special fold-out map informing the reader of the best transport routes from the sites of the exhibition to the principal

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University Press, 2006), 42-53 and Carmen Bellon Lord, 'Casas and the Chronicle of Social Life', in Robinson, Falgas, and Lord (eds.), *Barcelona and Modernity*, 120-124.

[314] As Robert Orledge records: 'Satie proposes [in a letter dated 1 December 1918] to give a lecture and concert tour of America to his friend, the author Henri-Pierre Roché, now working in New York. . . . It is to include *Socrate*, his "lucky star" in which he places his hopes for the future.' Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, xxxiv.

[315] Erik Satie, 'Musiciens de Montmartre', in Victor Meusy and Edmond Depas (eds.), *Guide de l'Etranger à Montmartre* (Paris: J. Strauss, 1900), 31-32

attractions of the Butte. Moreover, this map includes an advert for the *bals* and *point de vue* at one Moulin de la Galette.

It is tempting to imagine our tourists at the Grand Palais following up their viewing of *El bohemio* with a trip to the 'real' Montmartre. If considered in this manner, Casas's portrait of Satie not only signified the bohemian mills of northern Paris, but quite literally pointed the way there. Whereas Satie scholarship to date has successfully used *El bohemio* to position Satie in the localised context of fin-de-siècle Montmartre, we might now use it to situate fin-de-siècle Montmartre in a metropolitan, even international economy of leisure and tourism. To say the least, this has wide-ranging consequences for our understanding of the 'context' of Satie's early career – a context that that must include commerce and tourism as much as buffoonery and avant-gardism.



Figure 14. Front cover of *Le Guide de l'étranger à Montmartre* (1900).

There is, of course, a lot more that could be said about how the spaces, stories, and scenery of Parisian bohemia – not least the various spaces, stories, and scenery that revolved around windmills (real and fake) – have been used to construct and inflect the reception of Satie's creative identity. Indeed, it has been central to the argument of this chapter that accounts of Satie's early career have drawn heavily on the cultural caché of fin-de-siècle Montmartre, which – notwithstanding its undeniable historical and geographical specificity – might well be described as a merely one canonic passage in the long-running narrative of cultural bohemia. However, I have attempted to show that there is a considerable risk in allowing our focus to narrow too quickly to Montmartre and Montmartre only (or even to Montmartre as a token of the bohemian type). By using windmills as a springboard for discussion, it has been possible to cast new light on the scale and scope of fin-de-siècle Montmartre to the point that it is no longer easy to characterise this famous *(mi)lieu*. And by using Satie's symbolic and material mobility between the central city and a very different sort of suburb to Arcueil, it has been possible to challenge overly static notions of cultural context in historical musicology. Indeed, if there ever was such a thing as the esprit Montmartrois, it was more complex and conflicted than has hitherto been acknowledged. Moreover, if Satie is to be imagined as the conduit of that spirit there are a number of questions that need to be asked about the details of musical performance which have not been addressed in this chapter. It is to those questions we shall turn in chapter 3, which addresses the manner in which the meaning of Satie's musical humour was inflected by the spaces in which it was performed.

Chapter 3

Laughing in Paris

Intimacy and Intimation in the Pièces humoristiques

This chapter grew from a simple-sounding question: did contemporary audiences laugh at Satie's *Pièces humoristiques*, a series of piano miniatures published in Paris in the years immediately prior to the First World War?[316] The answer, to echo James Johnson's introduction to *Listening in Paris*, is anything but simple.[317] Indeed, Satie's pre-War musical humour merits close attention precisely because it condenses a range of complex and problematic issues in the wider study of his work, including the appropriation of popular materials in his compositional practice and the role of performance situation in shaping the meanings and affective impact of his music. By describing these issues as complex and problematic I do not mean to endorse the cliché that cultural history abhors simplicity; rather, I aim to draw attention to a specific and under-analysed theme in the early critical reception of Satie's mature piano works, especially those works advertised as 'humoristiques'. This theme is succinctly illustrated by the conclusion to an article on Satie published in *Music & Letters* in 1923: 'Truly, the man is a problem.' Despite seven pages musing on the matter, the writer could not get to the bottom of it: 'Solution will come, but the time is not yet.'[318] As we shall see, this puzzled, ambivalent attitude sums up much of the early writing on Satie's music for piano, and challenges us to better understand what about it contemporary

[316] The best modern edition, including an introduction by Ornella Volta, is Erik Satie, *Pièces humoristiques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions Durand, 2005). A note on translation: although there is some disagreement as to the English equivalent of 'humoristique' (Steven Moore Whiting, for example, opts for 'humoristic'), I shall use the more familiar adjective 'humorous' throughout.
[317] James H Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 1.
[318] W. Wright Roberts, 'The Problem of Satie', *Music & Letters*, 4/4 (1923), 320.

critics (Anglophone and Francophone alike) found so problematic. Humour, I hope to show, was no small part of the problem; what to make of it and, crucially, what to *do* with it were questions often without clear or satisfactory answers.

Yet my motivations for discussing the *Pièces humoristiques* are not entirely historical. You might say that I have my own, twenty-first-century problems with these pieces, foremost among which is the fact that I have rarely found them particularly funny. Though this confession may sound glib, it is not intended as an aside to the main argument. On the contrary, the nagging question of 'under what circumstances might someone laugh at Satie's musical humour?' animates much of the discussion in this chapter. Most importantly, it guards against the reduction of humour to a form of purely stylistic qualification, as if performance practice and audience engagement were somehow exterior or posterior to the humorous pieces themselves.[319] Moreover, by encouraging us to think of the *Pièces* in terms of praxis as well as poetics the question of laughter's circumstances places Satie's musical humour squarely within the province of urban geography: how, for instance, did the scale and character of Parisian performance venues inflect the subtle play of allusive musical parody that seems essential to the success of these works? And to what extent did the social space (re)produced by Satie's musical humour constitute a continuation, exaggeration or renunciation of other spaces in the contemporary city? In what follows, I seek to sound out these and other questions by drawing on reception texts, secondary literature and theories of (musical) humour. First, though, I shall offer a brief introduction to the *Pièces* in question, and underline their significance in recent Satie scholarship.

[319] The classic critique of reductive notions of 'the music itself' (whether humorous or otherwise) can be found in Richard Taruskin, 'A Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rite of Spring, the Tradition of the New, and "The Music Itself"', *Modernism/Modernity* 2/1 (1995), 1-26.

Cabarets and concert halls

Depending on who is counting, the *Pièces humoristiques* consist of between eight and ten separate albums, subsequently published in collected editions. Most of these albums contained only three short pieces – the notable exceptions are the 20 short *Sports et divertissements* (Sports and Amusements, 1914, reprinted with new illustrations in 1923) and the longer, standalone *Sonatine bureaucratique* (Petty Bureaucratic Sonata, 1917).[320] The most striking feature of these scores is the inclusion of text written between the staves; sometimes giving oblique performance instructions, sometimes suggesting a narrative, sometimes seeming to pass comment on the nearby music. Quite what is to be done with these texts is one of the problems I will come to later. The 're-discovery' of the *Pièces humoristiques* in the 1980s was very much part of the popular turn in Satie studies I described in the last chapter. In particular, Steven Moore Whiting has interpreted these pieces as ciphers for a particular form of cabaret entertainment (i.e., the 'esprit Montmartrois'). Whiting's study argues that Satie's pre-war musical humour exhibits many of the same stylistic and textual features as the parody songs Satie wrote and accompanied when working with singers such as Vincent Hyspa (1865-1938) in the *cabarets artistiques* of fin-de-siècle Montmartre. However, I propose that the similarities between musical humour in the work of Hyspa and Satie have been oversimplified and overstated, partly through a failure to acknowledge the importance of the real and imaginary spaces of performance. That is not to say there are no demonstrable biographical, cultural, and stylistic connections – there are many. But in the course of elaborating the creative exchange between a jobbing parody singer and a revered figure of the twentieth-century avant-garde, recent musicological accounts have

[320] For more on the larger album, see Mary E. Davis., 'Modernity à La Mode : Popular Culture and Avant-Gardism in Erik Satie's "Sports et Divertissements", *The Musical Quarterly* 83/ 3 (1999), 430–473.

tended to collapse the distinctions between a rich variety of artistic forms and performance situations, many of which involved some sort of humour. A joke plays rather differently in a crowded cabaret than it does in a quiet salon, which suggests that analyses of Satie's musical borrowings from popular entertainment ought not to stop with the notes on the page. In order to pursue this line of enquiry further it is necessary to understand a little more of the techniques with which Satie became familiar throughout his early career in Montmartre.

If Vincent Hyspa had had a passport, his job description would have been *chansonnier* – a rung above *chanteur* on the basis that he wrote a lot of the words, and occasionally the music, to the songs he sang. He is now best known as the man who wrote the words to 'Tendrement' (Tenderly, 1903), one of Satie's most commercially successful chansons. But this song's 'treacly poetry' (as Whiting describes it) is far from typical of Hyspa's output.[321] Though he sang, wrote, and acted in all sorts of styles throughout his long career, he was best known for his dry humour and pince-sans-rire (deadpan) delivery. According to Maurice Donnay's affectionate preface to Hyspa's 1903 collection of *Chansons d'humour*, just the slightest hint of a smile broke onto Hyspa's face during his first appearance at the Chat Noir, even as the audience 'burst out laughing.'[322] Part of the joke on that night (and many others) was that Hyspa, with his strong southern accent, was introduced by Rudolph Salis as 'le bon belge' (good Belgian). While that might seem a small detail, it is indicative of Hyspa's humorous technique, which generally worked by contradicting, parodying or otherwise deflating a pre-established scenario. For example, Hyspa was frequently booked to perform on the same night as Paul Delmet, a velvet-voiced baritone who specialised in sentimental airs

[321] Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 199), 220.
[322] Vincent Hyspa, *Chansons d'humour* (Paris: Enoch et Cie, 1903).

of love and nostalgia. The reason for this billing was Hyspa's skill in parodying the heartfelt crooner. Immediately after Delmet had performed 'La Femme qui passe' (The Woman who Passes By), singing from a weighty songbook in which he collected all his material, Hyspa would get up and sing – while pretending to read from a cigarette paper – 'Le Noyeau qui ne passe pas' (The Pip that Won't Pass). In terms of how that comic moment worked, the object of the parody (a woman passing by) and the parody thereof (a pip passing through) remain close together. The amusing disjunction is accessible to anyone with a broadly sympathetic sense of humour. The same can be said of Hyspa's take on Massenet's 'Les Enfants' (1891). Even though this widely circulated chanson was no-doubt familiar to much of his audience, the way Hyspa parodied the text made sure that he took his listeners along with him. Massenet's music – which sets the scene for an invocation of innocent youth – stayed the same. But by changing only a few words and syllables, Hyspa turned 'Les Enfants' into 'Les Éléphants', rendering the bourgeois imagery of gentle play quite literally laughable.

The examples of parody given above have already been documented by Whiting.[323] But there is more to Hyspa's elephants than has so far been acknowledged: for many who ventured to Montmartre for entertainment in the mid-1890s, the shadow theatre at the Chat Noir was a principal attraction, and at the time Hyspa began appearing on the bill one show in particular was something of an institution. By December 1896, Philip Cates explains, Henry Somm's 'thirty-second shadow sketch *L'Éléphant* . . . had been performed at least four thousand times.'[324] In this sketch 'there appears an Elephant who drops "an odifirous pearl" – in the words of the Gentleman

[323] Steven Moore Whiting, 'Erik Satie and Vincent Hyspa: Notes on a Collaboration', *Music & Letters* 77/1 (1996), 70 and 76.
[324] Phillip Dennis Cate, 'The Spirit of Montmartre', in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (eds.) *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996), 57.

Cabaret Owner – from which a flower springs up.'[325] For anyone attending to Hyspa's Massenet parody the reference was too obvious to miss. Performed in this context, Hyspa's re-texting did not only drag Massenet's children down to earth, but also through the muck, and this is crucial to an understanding of Hyspa's humour. A glance through his illustrated album of *Chansons d'humour* is enough to reveal an intriguing mix of political satire and digestive wit. While some songs mock the latest misadventure of President Émile Loubet (including 'Un Dîner à l'Élysée' with music by a novice cabaret pianist called Erik Satie), others remain firmly focussed on the intestinal tract. According to Cates, this sort of adolescent humour was standard fare at the Chat Noir in the period, and it should come as no surprise that Hyspa's greatest success at that cabaret came with his story of a lonesome tape worm.[326] None of this should be taken to imply that Hyspa's performances were crude or outlandish. Quite the opposite, he was known for his controlled delivery and limited vocal range, some of which is captured on recordings of his *Chansons d'humour*, which he made late in his career.[327] However, the combination of clearly signposted references ('La Femme qui passe', 'Les Enfants') and universally-understood subject matter (toilet humour and politician-bashing) made it easy for the paying audience to get the joke. It therefore seems fair to assume that this sort of cabaret humour was met (or at least was intended to meet) with audience laughter. Whiting certainly seems to think so: he points out that when Satie began arranging and composing Hyspa's material, his melodies left 'pauses

[325] The description of Somm's scenario is reprinted in Ibid.
[326] Ibid., 53. 'Le Ver solitaire', Hyspa's poem about a tape worm, is included in Hyspa, *Chansons d'humour*.
[327] See *Cabarets & Chansonniers: Enregistrements Originaux 1928-1937* [3CDs] (EPM, 1997).

for an audience to chuckle after Hyspa's gags.'[328] With that in mind, let us fast forward ten years or so to Satie's *Pièces humoristiques*.

As already mentioned, the publication dates of these albums are clustered around the early teens of the twentieth century, which is significant because this period marks something of a watershed in standard accounts of Satie's career. In the words of Ornella Volta: 'Towards 1910 . . . [Satie] was being unexpectedly celebrated by the already influential Maurice Ravel as a "precursor" of himself and also of Debussy.'[329] By all accounts this (re)discovery by a younger generation of composers had a profound effect on Satie's outlook and output. Not only did his financial and social situation improve, but his new admirers also exerted an indirect influence on his compositional practice. One of the reasons for this was that Ravel and his partners in the Société musicale indépendante praised and performed only a fraction of Satie's pieces, almost all of which were from the 1880s and 90s. According to Volta, Satie was:

> At first touched then disoriented by these twists and turns . . . Nonetheless, with a curious, inextricable mix of coquetry, reserve, good manners, pride and shyness, he thought it best to pretend he was the first person not to take himself seriously, and he did this by presenting his works henceforth under the guise of humour, a humour that in the end, paradoxically, led him, albeit in an overtly caricatural manner, to adopt an aggressive attitude towards those who did not understand him.[330]

'[A]n aggressive attitude towards those who did not understand him'? Alarm bells should be ringing. As described above, Vincent Hyspa rarely had trouble with people understanding him (aside from his thick accent that is). Indeed, it was in his interests to make sure his audience got the references and the joke. With musical humour in Satie, the idea that an audience should understand what is going on became increasingly problematic. However, let us not jump to conclusions. As Francis Poulenc was at pains

[328] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 218.
[329] Ornella Volta, introduction to Satie, *Pièces humoristiques*,1/ i.

[330] Ibid., 1.

to point out in an article he wrote regarding the work of his fellow composer, plenty of the *Pièces humoristiques* feature clearly signed points of reference to be sent up or deflated, with much potential amusement: '*Les Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)* aim at certain debussystes titles and *Les Valses du précieux dégoûté*, those of Ravel.'[331] It is not hard to find further examples: the third of the *Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois* (Sketches and Teases About a Big Wooden Fellow, 1913) bears a dedication to Mademoiselle Claude-Emma Debussy. For anyone acquainted with her father's *Préludes*, Satie's 'sort of waltz' with suggestions of exotic harmony was an obvious parody. The title in particular uses Hyspa's technique of adding an extra syllable. Whereas Debussy (or Chabrier) might have composed an 'España', Satie writes 'Españaña'. But before accepting this as an example of Satie using musical humour in the same manner as Hyspa's parody songs it is necessary to ask where and how these pieces were performed.

Contrary to Whtiting's snappy sub-title – *From Cabaret to Concert Hall* – Satie's music has never had a firm foothold in the latter sort of venue. With the *Pièces humoristiques* in particular, most of the early performances took place at small salons or soirées, often under the guise of private musical societies. Georges Auric, for example, lists three performances: at the Société nationale, the Société indépendante and the Salle Pleyel, noting as well that Satie finds most favour among a very aristocratic-sounding 'public of sincere amateurs.'[332] Furthermore, Poulenc records that: 'Erik Satie rarely played piano . . . More often Ricardo Viñes, Marcelle Meyer, Auric or myself offered him our services.'[333] This is backed up by Auric when he writes that '*Les Préludes*

[331] Francis Poulenc, 'La Musique de piano d'Erik Satie', in Rollo Myers (ed.), *Erik Satie: son temps et ses amis* (Paris: La Revue Musicale, 1952), 25.
[332] Georges Auric, 'Erik Satie: musicien humoriste', *Revue française de musique* 12/4 (1913), 142.
[333] Poulenc, 'La Musique de piano d'Erik Satie', 23.

flasques were encored when played at the Société nationale by M. Ricardo Viñes.' In fact, from roundabout this point onwards Satie was extraordinarily complementary of Viñes's playing and engaged the pianist whenever he could. Therefore, any attempt to reconstruct the early performance situation of the *Pièces* ought to take into account what is known of Viñes's style and technique.

On this point, Poulenc offers two details: firstly, he commends Viñes's pedalling, or rather the lack of it. Unlike in Debussy and Ravel, Poulenc believes that many sections of Satie's music need to be played 'dry', and 'when one does use the pedal . . . one must nevertheless play clearly; something which Viñes achieves brilliantly.'[334] Secondly, Poulenc addresses the specific issue of performing those parts of the music which spark off textual allusions. As he puts it, 'one must not wink at the audience . . . [nor] *anticipate* the musical citations, but leave [them] for the effect of surprise.'[335] Again, this is something Viñes seems to have instinctively understood, preferring to play the quotations 'as if completely unaware'.[336] Compared to Hyspa, who performed his own songs, Satie had already introduced a layer of complicating mediation by passing his idiosyncratic performance texts over to an independent interpreter. Add to this Viñes's inclination to deliberately underplay the musical punch lines, and Satie's model of musical humour seems to diverge considerably from that of Hyspa. Yet the real elephants in the salon (if you pardon the pun) are the words on the page. By which I mean the snippets of commentary written alongside the music in all the *Pièces*. Whether understood as 'suggestive narrations' or 'performance indications' (or anything else) Satie expressly 'forb[ade] reading the text aloud in the course of musical performance', adding that any 'failure to observe this requirement will incur

[334] Ibid., 26.
[335] Ibid. 25-26. Emphasis in the original.
[336] 'On la joue . . . en ayant "l'air", comme disait Ricardo Viñes, "de ne s'apercevoir de rien"'. Ibid.

my righteous indignation against the culprit.'[337] Despite the usual problem of not knowing whether to take Satie seriously, it has become absolute convention that the text is for the pianist's eyes only. 'It's the pianist's reward' Satie is reported to have said, and certainly, it does put the performer in a privileged position vis-à-vis the audience.[338]

Take 'Sur un Vaisseau' (On a vessel), the first piece in the *Descriptions automatiques* (Automatic Descriptions, 1913) album. Volta points out in her introductory notes a musical quotation from a nursery rhyme by Armand Foucher and Jean Cic:

> Mummy, the little boats / sailing on the water / do they have legs?
> Of course, you silly billy; / if they didn't have any / they wouldn't move…

Anyone listening might have picked up on this, especially when the title of the song indicates a watery theme, but only the performer is privy to the suggestion in the score that 'the vessel singgers' (page 2, there are no barlines) in response to the childish quotation. Similarly, in 'D'Edriophthalma' from the *Embryons desséchés* (Dried Embryos, 1913) album, the audience at a performance would have heard a quotation from Chopin's 'Funeral March' halfway through the piece. What they would not have been party to was the text on the page. Some of the comments – 'Gloomy', 'They're all together', 'How sad it is!', 'A father starts to speak' – merely reinforce the slightly pompous melancholy of the music, but one phrase in particular sets up a meaning thoroughly inaccessible to the audience. Written by the Funeral March quotation is the following: 'They all start weeping (quotation from Schubert's famous *Mazurka*).' For Volta, this constitutes 'another dig at supposedly well-informed concertgoers', but the

[337] 'Suggestive narrations' and 'performance indications' are two interpretations entertained by Volta in her introduction to Satie, *Pièces humoristiques*, 2/iv. Both volumes in this edition reprint Satie's warning before the start of the music.
[338] Poulenc, 'La Musique de Piano d'Erik Satie', 26.

'dig', or joke, is a private one, quite possibly at the audience's expense.[339] Indeed, I am reminded of Volta's words, which I quoted earlier: Satie developed 'a humour that in the end, paradoxically, led him, albeit in an overtly caricatural manner, to adopt an aggressive attitude towards those who did not understand him.' Far from adopting Hyspa's parodic technique unchanged, at times Satie's musical humour worked against the audience being in on the joke, which suggests very different sorts of audience response. This may go some way to explaining the 'problematic' reception these pieces have enjoyed, and it is that reception to which we shall now turn.

[339] Ornella Volta, introduction to Satie, *Pièces Humoristiques*, 1/iv-v.

Problems with Satie's humour

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, W. Wright Roberts concluded his essay on Satie by stating that, '[t]ruly, the man is a problem.' The problem, as the reader will no doubt have guessed, was humour. Despite seven pages musing on the matter, Roberts could not get to the bottom of it: 'Solution will come', he wrote, 'but the time is not yet.'[340] This ambivalent attitude sums up much of the early writing on Satie's piano music, and challenges us to better understand what about it Roberts and his contemporaries found so problematic. Fortunately, our critic was not short on specifics. 'In England,' he tells us, 'the chief idea current about Satie is that he is a musical humorist of a childish and affected type.'[341] As Roberts continues, it becomes apparent that this opinion is based on one particular body of work, which he refers to rather pejoratively as 'little sets of piano pieces with laboriously absurd titles; wisps of music plastered with facetious directions and descriptive comments.'[342] It is safe to assume that the pieces to which Roberts here refers are none other than the *Pièces humoristiques*, which, especially for English critics, served to lay the foundations for Satie's composerly identity and reputation. Since his earlier faux-medieval and cabaret music had made little impression outside of France – one might say outside of Montmartre – English audiences were unable to compare the composer of the *Gymnopédies* (1888) and *Gnossiennes* (1893) with the humorist of *Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)*. As a result, the *Humorous Pieces* came to occupy a central, even dominant position in the early English reception of Satie's work.

One persistent theme in this English reception – as exemplified by Roberts's article – is the alignment of Satie's humorousness with a putative national style. In an

[340] Roberts, 'The Problem of Satie', 320.
[341] Ibid., 313.
[342] Ibid.

attempt to define a specifically French musical aesthetic Roberts speaks of a 'revolt . . . against the excesses of Wagnerism, against "mighty contraptions", riots of emotion, eternal seriousness, humourless pedantry.'[343] In contrast to this thinly veiled caricature of late-nineteenth-century German Romanticism, our critic portrays French composers as 'given to pleasantry and wit; marshalling no great phalanxes of sound, but rather disentangling strands and colours, to mix them again, frugally, in the delicate record of an impression.'[344] While it is hard not to read 'Debussy' between the lines of this last description, the sweeping rejection of 'humourless pedantry' and obvious sympathy for 'pleasantry and wit' suggests that the writer was predisposed to look kindly on Satie's *Pièces humoristiques*. So what, to borrow the title of Roberts's article, was 'The Problem with Erik Satie'?

The (eminently sensible) explanation Roberts gives is that, when it comes to music, there is more than one kind of humour: 'Good humour', he writes, 'gaiety, joy in life, we can appreciate; say, in Chabrier, or in Haydn, or in much of Beethoven's earlier work.' However, as Roberts continues to paint his picture of musical humour he introduces more and more shades of grey: 'The wit of Ravel', he tells us 'the lighter moods of Debussy, we find more difficult, because here we detect an element of calculation, less of impulse and more of technical finesse.' Finally, we arrive at the principal offender: 'More puzzling still – if indeed, it be worth the puzzling over – do we find the deliberate banter, the fantastic clowning of Satie'[345] Aside from the simple observation that Roberts clearly *did* consider Satie's music worth puzzling over – otherwise he would not have written the article – we might note that his subtle distinctions between gaiety, joy, wit, etc., go some way to explaining how humour

[343] Ibid., 317.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid., 313.

could be both a fundamental facet of French musical taste and a thorn in the side of Satie reception. At the risk of stating the obvious, Roberts's problem with Satie's piano music was not humour *per se*, but the peculiar nature of Satie's musical humour; the particular quality he tried to enclose with reference to childishness, affectedness, banter, and clowning.

Only one year after Roberts's article, another English critic, W. Henry Hadow, raised similarly specific objections to Satie's brand of humorous music. Writing in the journal of the Royal Musical Association, Hadow complained that Satie was 'deliberately eccentric in small things which do not matter . . . In many of his works he writes between the lines directions to the pianist of which all one can say is that they are apparently intended to be funny.'[346] If we follow this line of reception a little further, it seems that by 1937 our French composer-humorist had become a recognisable point of reference for a certain species of musical buffoonery. Witness the following extract from a spoof article in *The Musical Times*:

> Our broadcast opens with the famous 'Rest' Symphony, one of [Kurt] Bang's characteristic practical jokes, in which respect he rivalled Erik Satie. This symphony (known affectionately to concert-goers as 'The Silly') consists entirely of rests: not a note is played from beginning to end.[347]

Five years later, the objections to Satie's humour had themselves become, at least in some quarters, objectionable. In an article entitled 'Satie and the "Problem" of Contemporary Music', Wilfrid Mellers, a young musicologist with an interest in twentieth-century composition, protested that humour and eccentricity had come to obfuscate the force and quality of Satie's work: 'no other figure in modern music has

[346] W. Henry Hadow, 'The Balance of Expression and Design in Music (III)', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 50th Sess. (1923-4), 91.
[347] Alan Jenkins, 'A Major Force in Music: A Short Survey of the Life and Work of Kurt Bang', *The Musical Times* 78/1128 (1937), 125. As far as I am aware, John Cage was unaware of this imaginary pre-cursor of 4'33".

been subjected to such persistently ignorant denigration as Erik Satie.' The root cause of this denigration was, in Mellers's analysis, clear enough:

> Fear of responding to something which is genuinely new or disturbing to their complacency has led people with only the most superficial acquaintance with his work to dismiss Satie as an incompetent blagueur, an eccentric who wrote odd sentences over his music.[348]

By now the refrain should be familiar; one way or another, Satie's humour is said to have 'got in the way' of his music. For the journal critics in the 1920s, it was an obstacle to appreciation; for the music historian in the 1940s, it was a blockage in the channels of fair evaluation. Satie's humour thus stands doubly accused: on the one hand, it seems to interrupt the pleasure audiences might otherwise take from his music; on the other, it prejudices any attempt to, as it were, take Satie's music seriously.

Satie's humour remained a fraught issue long after Mellers's above-mentioned intervention. As much as forty years later, the Canadian musicologist Alan Gillmor was still writing of Satie's humour as if it were not part of a balanced assessment of his work, but an impediment to it: 'By the standards of the great Austro-German tradition', Gillmor observed, 'Satie, in his lifetime, had to be considered a composer of little consequence, and unfortunately the type of buffoonery with which his name is irrevocably associated has long militated against his general acceptance by critics.'.[349] The key term here is 'the great Austro-German tradition'. This notion was present as the dominant partner in Roberts's early-twentieth-century opposition of Teutonic gravity and Gallic levity – the same binary has been a stubborn cliché in musicological discourse ever since. To take one example from the mid-1970s, Fred Fisher – in one of

[348] Wilfrid Mellers, 'Erik Satie and the "Problem" of Contemporary Music', *Music and Letters* 23/3 (1942), 210. Quoted in Alan M. Gillmor, 'Erik Satie and the Concept of the Avant-Garde', *The Musical Quarterly* 69/1 (1983), 104.
[349] Gillmor, 'Erik Satie and the Concept of the Avant-Garde', 104.

the rare articles directly addressing the aesthetics of musical humour – imbues the very same Franco-Germanic contrast with military overtones when he writes that:

> Erik Satie, the epitome of Gallic thinking, questioning the idea of seriousness during the greater part of his career, led a small army of other French composers to take a similar stand against the Germanic philosophy as represented by the span of composers from Beethoven through Wagner.[350]

More than anything else, it is the critique of a narrow, German-centred music historiography that has tipped the critical scales in favour of Satie's musical humour. As we have seen already in this thesis, there is now more than one book to turn to for an account of Satie's humorousness 'in context'. Whether that context is the bohemian counter-culture of fin-de-siècle Montmartre, or the nascent fashion industry in *haute-bourgeois* Paris is, to a certain extent, less important than the fact that Satie is no longer only measured against his German contemporaries.[351] His humour, in other words, is no longer immediately reduced to anti-seriousness. However, even if the problem of humour in musicology appears to have been, if not solved then perhaps dissolved into broader, more productive questions, there is still more to understand about the early reception of Satie's *Pièces humoristiques*, especially in his native France.

It was a fourteen-year-old Georges Auric who first took on the task of defending Satie as a 'musicien humoriste.'[352] After asserting the composer's 'rare genius' (of which 'the public at large are still unaware') Auric went on to acknowledge that 'not everyone goes in for M. Erik Satie's sutble and mocking [*narquois*] art.'[353] Much to Auric's chagrin, 'many of those who dismiss the witty little masterpieces with funny

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[350] Fred Fisher, 'Musical Humour: A Future as Well as a Past?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32/3 (1974), 381.
[351] I am thinking here of Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian* and Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[352] Auric, 'Erik Satie: musicien humoriste'. Satie did not know the author (or his age) at the time of publication, and was rather taken aback when he found out.
[353] Ibid., 138; 141.

titles warmly applaud the most boring sonatas.'[354] The problem, as Auric saw it, resided above all in the titles, which clouded an audience's judgement: 'They will praise, thanks to its title, a most conventional piece, while a ridiculous title will prevent them hearing a very logical plan.'[355] Forty years later, Auric's exact contemporary, Poulenc, was still apologising for Satie's troublesome titles. Judging by the opinion he reports of 'a well-known pianist', he certainly had his work cut out: 'Dear Poulenc, despite everything you tell me about Satie's pieces I can't possibly put these *unprintable* titles on my programme!'[356] While reiterating many of Auric's earlier concerns, Poulenc goes into greater detail with regard to what the disappointingly unreceptive public are missing out on:

> Unlike most people, I don't regret these charming and funny titles that put off the public and, alas, the majority of pianists. I don't think the music would gain anything if given less bizarre titles; on the contrary, some of the more allusive musical quotations would become completely unintelligible.[357]

For Poulenc, these musical references are decipherable and enjoyable:

> Isn't it lovely to listen to *The man who carries big stones* [a piece from *Chapters Turned This Way and That* (1913)] . . . whistle *It's a Trifle, a Puff of Air, a Trifle* [the 'Lazy Air' from Robert Planquette's operetta *Rip* (1884)], or to hear in *She who Talks Too Much* [also from *Chapters Turned This Way and That*] . . . the well-known tune *Don't speak Rose, I beg you* [from Aimé Mailart's comic opera *Les Dragons de Villars* (1856)].[358]

However, not everyone 'got' these references, as Poulenc implicitly acknowledges by drawing a distinction between the *Pièces humoristiques* and Satie's now well-known early work. For Poulenc, the *Gymnopédies* 'do not require any explanation', but the same cannot be said for what he calls Satie's 'prolific output beginning in 1912 with the

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[354] Ibid., 141.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Poulenc, 'La Musique de Piano d'Erik Satie', 24. The name of the pianist is not given.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid. Poulenc gets his albums muddled and claims the pieces mentioned are in *Heures séculaires et instantanées*.

Véritables Préludes flasques.'[359] And herein lies one of the problems with Satie's *titres humoristiques:* for those in the know, they held the key to a rich interplay of association and allusion; for the rest, their incomprehensibility – or, more precisely, their staging of restricted knowingness and inaccessible meanings – was all too often a source of frustration and annoyance.[360] In common parlance, we might say these pieces contained too many in-jokes. In the current musicological lexicon, one tempting – if well-worn – descriptor for this sort of music humour would be 'gnostic'; by which I mean that Satie's *Humorous Pieces* were arguably too secretive, too cryptic, too coded to offer all but the initiated any way in.

One noteworthy indication of the either-exclusive-or-inclusive effect of these pieces – as well as the *arrivisme* that characterised this phase of Satie's career – is the list of dedications which testifies to Satie's close acquaintance with some of the best-known and best-connected musicians in contemporary Paris. Take, for example, the first of the series to reach publication, the *Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)*: as well as being advertised 'for a dog', this album was dedicated to Viñes, who was one of the most sought-after performers of new French and Iberian concert music, and a regular fixture at the events of the Société musicale indépendante. In addition to being the first dedicatee in the series, Viñes was also the only person to receive a second mention – in the penultimate album, *Vieux Sequins et vieilles cuirasses* (Old Sequins and Shells, 1913). What's more, Viñes's niece and nephew, Mademoiselle Elvira Viñes Soto and Monsieur Hernando Viñes Soto, were also named, in the fourth album, *Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois*. Significantly, this instance of honouring more than one member of the same family was not a one-off; as we have

[359] Ibid., 25.
[360] For a discussion of 'knowingness' in relation to music-hall performance, see Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past and Present* 144 (1994), 138–170.

already heard, the third dedicatee in *Croquis et agaceries* – along with Viñes's neice and nephew – was Mademoiselle Claude-Emma Debussy, the daughter of one of Satie's oldest and closest friends. According to Ornella Volta, Satie's decision to dedicate these pieces to three children was, in part, a pre-emptive defence against Debussy senior's likely response to a trio of miniatures that 'teased' the exotic, atmospheric pianism with which he was closely associated:

> Satie no doubt thought he 'teased' the composer of Soirée dans Grenade and La puerta del Vino by poking fun at the Spanish traits that had for some time become fashionable in French music, just as he does above all in his performance instructions in the third part of this album ('Puerta Maillot . . . Plaza Clichy . . .). . . . In order to make sure that the 'teases' – of which he had no wish to deprive himself – did not ultimately give genuine annoyance to his friend Debussy (whose 'Zeus-like' rages he in fact feared), Satie made a point of emphasising their playful character by dedicating the first and second parts of the album to two children, the nephew and the niece of Ricardo Viñes (who were of Catalan origin, and in consequence totally in tune with the album's basic subject), and the third part to Claude-Emma Debussy, known as Chouchou, then aged seven.[361]

The chronological proximity of Satie's 'Españaña' (the third of the *Croquis et agaceries* to which Volta refers above) and Debussy's 'La puerta del Vino' (also the third of his *Préludes: Deuxième Livre*) certainly adds weight to Volta's argument; the former was dated by Satie to 25 August 1913, which was only months after Debussy had finished work on his second book of *Préludes*, in April of the same year. However, when it comes to the next Debussy dedication in the series, Volta suggests that Satie was motivated by something other than friendship and/or fear:

> In the third part [of *Chapitres tournés en tous sens*], the refrain of the song, *We won't go into the woods any more*, is intended to express the 'laments' of two famous 'Prisoners', the biblical prophet Jonah in the belly of a whale, and the adventurer Jean-Henri Masers de Latude imprisoned by Madame de Pompadour: identical laments for the two characters (who both think 'only of getting out'), despite the many centuries that separate them. A nod in the direction of [Monsieur Claude] Debussy, who had also quoted *We*

[361] Ornella Volta, introduction to Satie, *Pièces humoristiques*, 1/iv.

> *won't go into the woods any more* (in *Jardins sous la pluie*), 'The Prisoners' Laments' is dedicated to his wife.[362]

Here, Volta implies that Satie's published dedications might have been used as a sort of inter-textual prompt; in this instance, the mention of Madame Debussy (presumably any Debussy would do) would have predisposed the listener/performer to make the musical connection between 'The Prisoners' Laments' and 'Jardins sous la pluie' (Gardens in the Rain, 1903). Another example might be the second piece in the penultimate album, *Vieux Sequins et vieilles cuirasses*:

> The indication 'Greek period' that accompanies this highly particular dance ['Danse cuirassée'] aims no doubt at establishing a complicity with the dedicatee, the Greek musicologist Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, who had been Diaghilev's right-hand man in the early years of the Ballets Russes.

Once again, it is hard to argue with – and impossible to disprove – the linkage between Satie's personal dedications and the musical 'content', whether that content is given in the title of the piece (as in the 'Danse cuirassée (Période grecque)'), or established through recognition of a particular refrain (as in the case of 'We won't go into the woods any more'). But faced with these two interpretations of dedications – the one interpersonal, the other open to the public – it is tempting to consider what happens if we combine the two. In other words, there is another way of interpreting Satie's dedications that has a bearing on what I want to say about the socio-spatial function of the *Pièces humoristiques*: as well as documenting particular moments in Satie's relationships with other musicians, and offering potential clues to the many and demonstrable musical allusions 'contained' in these works, the attachment of personal names to almost every number in the series has the effect of enmeshing the *Pièces* in an implied network of intimate acquaintances – an effect that is only heightened by the fact these names are typically inter-connected by ties of friendship and/or kinship. This

[362] Ibid.

much has already been shown in the cases of the Viñes and Debussy families, but there are further examples that deserve a mention: Maurice Ravel might not be named directly, but his mother, Madame Joseph Ravel, does receive a dedication in the third album, *Descriptions automatiques*. And the woman who would soon become Ravel's 'marraine de guerre' (wartime godmother), Madame Fernand Dreyfus, was a dedicatee of the very same album, as well as the biological mother of the influential music critic Roland-Manuel, who was named – along with his stepfather Monsieur Fernand Dreyfus – in the penultimate album, *Chapitres tournés en tous sens*.[363] By now, the pattern should be clear. Taken as a whole, Satie's dedicatees can be said to constitute a 'textual milieu', an imaginary community of sympathetic appreciators whose relationship with the composer is taken for granted but never articulated clearly. This last point is especially important, since it keeps alive the impression of informal, interpersonal familiarity – a valuable commodity in an ever-growing metropolis. Of course it was the case that Satie and Viñes had a working relationship, but the inclusion of the latter's niece and nephew among Satie's list of dedicatees serves to soften the edges of what might otherwise look like an exclusively professional association.

As Henri Bergson commented in 1900 'laughter appears to stand in need of an echo . . . it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another.'[364] Hence the much-observed phenomenon that an audience laughs louder when an auditorium is full. By the time Hyspa reached Montmartre, the Chat Noir had moved from a room seating approximately 30 people to much larger, more accommodating premises. It was this space and others like it in which he plied his trade, inviting sizeable groups of people to

[363] Monsieur Edouard Dreyfus may be a play on the name of Ravel's brother.
[364] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1935).

laugh by organising their responses around punch lines and puns. By contrast, Satie's *Piees humoristiques* offer markedly few cues for audience behaviour, and it is no surprise that they have frequently been described as best performed in private. Not in the sense of invite-only recitals, but rather a pianist alone with the score and his imagination. This was not always the case with Satie's musical humour, as evidenced by Gustave Doret's recollections of the ballet *Uspud*. Back in the days of the fin-de-siecle cabarets:

> [T]he comic side of Satie was irresistible . . . He was an exceptional dry humorist who could have brought a dead man back to life through his extraordinary creations. Our laughter was as spontaneous as it was noisy.[365]

Despite, or perhaps because of their titles, the same has not been said of the *Pièces humoristiques*. One way of pursuing this line of enquiry further is to consider the pieces from a performer's perspective.

At a pre-concert talk in 1983, the Dutch pianist Reinbert de Leeuw, who has dedicated much of his career to performing and recording the music of Erik Satie – often at distinctively slow tempi – was asked by his interviewer why he chooses to play only Satie's early music. His response, transcribed and abridged from an audio recording, was as follows: 'The piano music from, let's say, about 1900 is very special and I shall try to explain why I can't play them [it].' As de Leeuw embarks on his explanation, some familiar tropes reappear: 'These are mainly very funny pieces', he tells his audience, 'with absurd titles. One for instance is called Dried Embryos. Or [another] The Waltzes of Variable Bad Taste. I don't know exactly what it means but that's the title.' After pausing for the audience to laugh along with his incomprehension,

[365] Gustave Doret, *Temps et contretemps* (Fribourg: Éditions de la librairie de l'Université, 1942), 98. Quoted in Robert Orledge, 'Satie, Koechlin and the Ballet "Uspud"', *Music and Letters* 68/1 (1987), 34.

de Leeuw then offers his own analysis of what makes these *Humorous Pieces* so special:

> The main thing in the music . . . is not only the music, but it's the combination with text. He [Satie] is using there all kinds of stories in between the notes. . . . Sometimes there is a kind of relationship . . . between the music and the text, but most of the time it has nothing to with the other. But . . . the artistic value of this – what do you call it? music and text, this combination – is just the combination of it and not only the music.[366]

So far, so simple. What our pianist is saying is that the *Pièces humoristiques* add up to more than the sum of their text/music parts; take either medium away and you are liable to miss the artistic point. What complicates matters, however, is the aforementioned performance instruction Satie included in the preface to *Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois*:

> To whom it may concern. I forbid reading the text aloud in the course of performance. Any failure to observe this requirement will incur my righteous indignation against the culprit. No exception will be allowed.[367]

Evidently, de Leeuw took the composer at his word:

> Satie has strongly forbidden that this text would be read loudly at the concert – and I think he's right, you can't do that because it's so subtle the text that you can't read it out like an actor – you have really to read them.[368]

The logical conclusion for this pianist is to restrict, radically, the circumstances under which Satie's *Humorous Pieces* can be satisfactorily performed: 'The real value', de Leeuw ultimately contends, 'is when you are at home. I have all the scores and it's very

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[366] 'Speaking of Music: Reinbert de Leeuw, 1983', *radiom.org*, http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=SOM.1983.11.10 (accessed 10 August 2012).
[367] 'A quiconque. Je défends de lire, à haute voix, le texte, durant le temps de l'exécution musicale. Tout manquement à cette observation entraînerait ma juste indignation contre l'outrecuidant. Il ne sera accordé aucun passe-droit.'
[368] 'Speaking of Music: Reinbert de Leeuw, 1983'.

nice to see them and to read them and to play them by yourself. But you can't play them in public.'[369]

I should make it clear that de Leeuw's position with regard to Satie's post-1900 piano music is by no means orthodox; there are plenty of pianists who include these pieces in their repertoire and plenty of recordings that do not make anywhere near as much of a problem out of the text and music connection as de Leeuw does (although he might argue they are therefore lacking in artistic value). Nevertheless, it is striking to hear a pianist describe music written for his instrument as effectively unfit for public consumption. If we accept, even for the sake of argument, that de Leeuw has a point, then part of the problem in performing Satie's *Pièces humoristiques* would seem to relate to the manner in which this music constructs, literally and figuratively, a privileged position for the performer, thus shrinking the ground on which any form of musical togetherness might be built. That is not to say that togetherness is unachievable, rather that there are practical limitations to establishing such a musical polity.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to add an anecdotal observation. As luck would have it, my doctoral supervisor, Peter Franklin, happened to be a student at the University of York when Wilfrid Mellers – mentioned earlier in this chapter – held a position there as Professor of Music. He recalls Mellers's fondness for Satie's *Humorous Pieces*, especially the *Sports et divertissements*. He also recalls how these pieces were performed; not in a public concert with an audience in rows, but informally, with a select few gathered round the piano so that everyone could share in the whimsical, fragile – dare I say smug? – musical humour. 'The lure of baffling exclusivity' is a phrase one writer has used in relation to the *cabarets artistiques* in which Satie learned much of his trade. Something similar might, with some

[369] Ibid.

justification, be said about the reception and performance of his still-problematic *Pièces humoristiques*.[370] In the final section of this chapter I would like to elaborate on the significance of an approach to musical humour that does not set itself the task of 'getting the joke' but instead attempts to understand the socio-spatial functions of a (potentially humorous) musical economy of signification.

Humour as a spatial practice

The difficulty in bringing serious thought to bear on the frivolous and ephemeral stuff of humour has been asserted many times: 'A joke explained', writes the philosopher Simon Critchley, 'is a joke misunderstood.'[371] In the specific case of allusive musical humour Critchley's general observation could be modified to state that no amount of footnotes will bring a dead reference back to life. Supposing this is the case, one might question whether the subtle pleasures of inference, association, and performative parody are not, in fact, beyond the reach of musicological knowledge.[372] After all, if to explain is – in the case of (musical) humour – to misunderstand, then accounting for lost laughter is necessarily a fool's errand. Moreover, 'what might make one laugh [in theoretical discussions of funniness]', Critchley suggests, 'is the audacity or arrogance of the attempt to write a philosophy of humour'.[373] Though this warning is not directed at musicologists, it does raise an important general point: even supposing footnotes are not required for an audience or readership to get the joke in a particular piece or

[370] Phillip Cate, 'The Spirit of Montmartre', 26.
[371] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.
[372] One obvious point of reference for a discussion of the problems inherent in dealing with music as experienced in the 'moment' of performance is Carolyn Abbate, 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry* 30/3 (2004), 505-536. See also, Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[373] Critchley, *On Humour*, 2.

performance, theories of how this humour works can still be met with scepticism and/or hostility. Critchley again:

> Persons who might not otherwise feel themselves to be experts in metapsychology or French spiritualism somehow feel confident in dismissing Freud's theory of jokes or Bergson's account of laughter because they are either not funny or miss the point. When it comes to what amuses us we are all authorities, experts in the field. We *know* what we find funny.[374]

What Critchley identifies is a widespread resistance to the interpretation of humour – a resistance rooted in the belief that 'when it comes to what amuses us' there is no better authority than ourselves. Once again, this claim passes the test of common sense, but there may be more to this resistance than an anti-authoritarian or anti-intellectual disposition: in part at least, the palpable hostility to the interpretation of humour may be motivated by a fear, justified or otherwise, of what retrospective interpretation costs.[375] Something of this fear is expressed in the title of a newspaper article by one twenty-first-century satirist: 'Jokes are funny. Picking them apart isn't. Witness my clown autopsy.'[376] Of course, the rhetoric here is exaggerated for comic effect, but the recourse to metaphors of mortality is telling and suggests that humour, by its very nature, will either evade enquiry in the first place or, more worryingly, fail to survive it.

But before asking why it is that humour is so hard to pin down – at any rate, without reducing it to the cold logic of the operating table – perhaps we should pause for a moment on the assumption of intractability. After all, even if we do accept there is something initially counter-intuitive – or worse, counter-productive – about 'taking laughter seriously' (as John Morreall, the founder of the International Society for

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[374] Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
[375] For the classic discussion of the costs of interpretation in literary studies, see Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966).
[376] Charlie Brooker, 'Jokes Are Funny. Picking Them Apart Isn't. Witness My Clown Autopsy', *The Guardian G2* (27 July 2009), 5.

Humour Studies, entitled his admirably thorough survey of the topic), it is not clear this problem is peculiar to the study of humour.[377] On the contrary, many academic disciplines, including musicology, have reflected upon the apparent disjunction between the style, tone, and form of scholarship, and the style, tone, and form of that which is studied. Furthermore, humour studies is by no means the only field of research to experience a sense of inferiority before lived experience and practical knowledge; on this point, we need only recall the old insult that musicology is to music what gynaecology is to love. For the philosopher Kendall L. Walton, the humour/music parallel bears closer investigation; in an article devoted entirely to this subject, he suggests the problems of understanding humour are remarkably similar to those of understanding music.[378] Yet Walton's novel and provocative analogy was not designed (and is not necessary) to justify the study of musical humour. Instead, I would simply ask whether humour is any trickier a topic for musicology than other, similarly broad and complex matters that have traditionally fallen well within the province of the discipline: beauty, the sublime, sentimentality, affect, to name only a few. Are humour's mechanisms so uniquely shadowy, its meanings so exceptionally fragile that we are duty bound to admit defeat before having begun? Is the anxiety about 'missing the point' of a humorous musical performance any more acute than it is with other,

[377] John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983). Morreall organises his summary of the existing work on humour around three main theses: the superiority thesis, the relief thesis, and the incongruity thesis, each of which is also rehearsed by Critchley in the introduction to *On Humour*. In addition to further academic publications on humour – John Morreall (ed.), *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), and *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) – Morreall has also developed an 'applied' theory of humour – see *Humor Works* (Amherst: Human Resource Development Press, 1997) and www.humorworks.com – and has commercial clients including AT&T and IBM.

[378] Kendall L Walton, 'Understanding Humour and Understanding Music', *The Journal of Musicology* 11/1 (1993), 32-44.

'non-humorous' sorts of singing, playing, listening, etc.? Given that the title of this chapter is 'Laughing in Paris', it will come as no surprise that I would answer 'no' to each of the above, albeit tentatively and for a variety of reasons. In order to explain why it will be instructive to offer a comparison with a topic that seems, if anything, even more resistant to explanation or understanding than musical humour. More precisely, I want to use Gary Tomlinson's well-known attempts at developing a historiography of *Music in Renaissance Magic* to re-frame some of the problems – and possibilities – relating to the study of Satie's *Pièces humoristiques*.[379]

Tomlinson's monograph is getting on for twenty years old. Doubtless, some readers would now wish to revise or 'update' his distinctive coupling of Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic method with Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. Nevertheless, Tomlinson's central concern with 'posit[ing] a space between ourselves and others where understanding comes about' has lost none of its currency – you might even say its urgency – for those engaged in historical as well as contemporary musical research.[380] To cut a long and complex story short, Tomlinson's 'space between ourselves and others' denotes that aspect of his interpretive project that strives for what Clifford Geertz once called the 'enlargement of the universe of human discourse'.[381] The same intellectual ambition is articulated elsewhere in the book as the pursuit, or

[379] Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[380] Ibid., 247. For a notable attempt to explore music (albeit from the twentieth century rather than the sixteenth) as something like a 'space of understanding' see David Clarke, 'Elvis and Darmstadt, or: Twentieth-Century Music and the Politics of Cultural Pluralism', *twentieth-century music* 4/1 (2007), 3-45.
[381] Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic*, 24. Quotation from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 14. Tomlinson notes on the same page that 'Paul Ricœur has summed up the historian's aim in words strikingly redolent of Geertz's: "Our ultimate interest in doing history", [Ricœur] writes "is to enlarge our sphere of communication."' Quotation from Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 295.

construction of 'a dialogical realm something like the "space of enunciation" that Homi Bhabha has described'.[382] While this is not the place for a thoroughgoing exposition of Tomlinson's historiographical practice, what matters for present purposes is the concerted effort to reach out, to understand, and – however stretched the analogy may become – to enter into 'dialogue' with a group of musical actors who have long since fallen silent.[383] In *Music in Renaissance Magic* these musical actors are, principally, Marsilio Ficino and Claudio Monteverdi; for the current chapter, let us substitute Erik Satie, Vincent Hyspa, and their various, more or less amused audiences.

Crucially, Tomlinson begins by locating his historical subjects somewhere *on the other side* of an as-yet-underdeveloped 'dialogical realm'; the very first line of his preface repeats Foucault's call to 'dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions.'[384] This call is then amplified by Tomlinson, who writes that his book is 'in large part an interrogation and challenge, by means of counter-examples, of the consoling and recognizable picture musicology has offered of music-making and -thinking in the Italian Renaissance.'[385] By way of pursuing the comparison with Satie, Hyspa, et al, it is worth considering to what extent musicology and related disciplines have offered similarly 'consoling and recognizable' pictures of fin-de-siècle Paris. Judging by some of the literature referenced in the last chapter it would seem that Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, no less than Italy in the sixteenth, has been imagined as inaugurating 'our' modern era: the back cover blurb for *Montmartre and*

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[382] Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic*, 247. See also, Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds.), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1989), 111-132.
[383] For a discussion of the 'dialogue' analogy in relation to reception studies and political theory, see Katherine Harloe, 'Can Political Theory Provide a Model for Reception? Max Weber and Hannah Arendt', *Cultural Critique* 74 (2010), 17-31.
[384] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 153.
[385] Tomlinson, 'Music in Renaissance Magic', ix.

the Making of Mass Culture, for example, advertises 'an exuberant mix of high and low – a breeding ground for what is today termed popular culture.'[386] Rosalind Williams's monograph on patterns of consumption in late-nineteenth-century France makes a similar argument for the 'birth' of mass-mediated entertainment in this place and period – as does Vanessa Schwartz in her study of diverse forms of Parisian leisure activities grouped, theoretically, under the notion of 'spectacle'.[387] Another cultural historian, Rae Beth Gordon, traces the emergence of what she terms 'vernacular modernity' in the *café-concerts* and music halls of early Third Republic Paris.[388] In fact, the words 'modern' and 'modernity' are nigh on ubiquitous in accounts of the period – not only those by cultural historians, but also urban geographers and scholars of visual culture.[389] Not to mention writers of music history such as Paul Griffiths:

> If modern music may be said to have had a definite beginning, then it started with this flute melody, the opening of the *Prélude à 'L'après-midi d'un faune'* by Claude Debussy . . . [which was] composed between 1892 and 1894.[390]

Later in the same book, at the start of a chapter entitled '[t]he genius of place', Griffiths identifies the French capital as one of the twin centres of musical modernism: '[a]lmost all the great strides in music before 1914 took place in two cities, Paris and Vienna.'[391]

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[386] Gabriel P. Weisberg (ed.), *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2001).
[387] Rosalind H Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[388] Rae Beth Gordon, *Dances with Darwin, 1875-1910: Vernacular Modernity in France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
[389] See Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* and T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[390] Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Modern Music from Debussy to Boulez* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 7.
[391] Ibid., 53. A very similar 'twin-poles' thesis is expounded in Eric Salzman, *Twentieth-century Music: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall,

Although Satie plays only a bit part in Griffiths's bi-polar narrative, he is one of the four central characters in an earlier account – Roger Shattuck's *Banquet Years* – that made similarly bold claims on behalf of Parisian (musical) modernity. Memorably, Shattuck began his discussion of the 'origins of the avant garde in France' with the assertion that '[t]he twentieth century' – by which, writing in the mid-1950s, he meant *his* and *our* century – 'could not wait fifteen years for a round number; it was born, yelling, in 1885.'[392] To be precise, Shattuck tells us that (his notion of) the twentieth century, in which Satie was to play such an important part, was born at the funeral of Victor Hugo, which took place – where else? – in Paris.

It goes without saying that the particular writers mentioned above have not had the last, or even the loudest word on the subject of fin-de-siècle Paris. Nor can I claim this small sample of historical and musicological writing is typical or representative in any rigorous or systematic sense. Nevertheless, there is something striking about the ease with which one can arrange a selection of diverse texts, each of which finds in this place and period some aspect of 'the way we are now'. With Tomlinson's preface in mind, one might cautiously conclude that when it comes to writing the history of fin-de-siècle Paris, familiarity has been emphasised over strangeness. Or, to adopt Ricœur's more stringent terminology, we might say that 'appropriation' – i.e., the tendency for writers to 'bring to themselves', or 'make their own' the subjects and objects of their enquiries – has been more prevalent than 'distanciation', whereby dissimilarity and inaccessibility are accepted as part of the historiographical process.[393] Faced with this very problem, Tomlinson's response was to seek some form of dialectical method

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1974). See esp. 'The Revolution: Paris', 16-30, followed by 'The Revolution: Vienna', 31-42.

[392] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I*, rev. ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969). 4.

[393] Tomlinson, 'Music in Renaissance Magic', 24.

suited to both enlarging discourse and acknowledging difference. However, this method was not without its limits:

> The many magical thoughts I have interpreted in the preceding chapters are all thoughts that it is still possible for us to think, if sometimes with difficulty. We can contest and unfold their meanings in an enunciative space somewhere between Ficino and us. We can ask *how* Ficino's songs worked, for his question inhabits the dialogical space between. But to understand simply *that* they worked, in all the bright efficacy he envisaged for them – this thought sits obstinately on Ficino's side of the space between us. Because it emerges precisely as an unknowable function of our knowledge, we cannot tease it into the liminal area where it could take on something of our meaningfulness, at least not without destroying it, dominating it, rendering it metaphorical (in a modern sense), making it the result of self-deception or an imaginative fancy with no truth value. This, then, is what no longer being able to think a certain thought means. It means being faced with the irreducibility of the alienation that is a part of dialogical understanding, living with this unbridgeable difference, and sensing and believing that what is on the other side must be as real as what is with us.[394]

Ficino's songs themselves may have little bearing on our understanding of fin-de-siècle Paris. And Satie, though many things, was no magician. Nevertheless, it is not hard to see how Tomlinson's reflections on musical magic might inform the present discussion of the *Pièces humoristiques*. Most obviously, his dialogical approach removes the curious burden of expecting to find Satie's music funny. Or rather, it teases out a distinction between asking *how* Satie's humourous pieces worked, and accepting simply *that* these pieces worked 'in all the bright efficacy he envisaged for them'. Moreover, Tomlinson suggests there is an ethical imperative in not arriving too quickly at the latter form of understanding since this may turn out to be nothing more than 'self-deception or an imaginative fancy with no truth value.'

Yet there is more to Tomlinson's dialogical discussion than perhaps even he realised. It is striking how often in the course of elaborating the positions of Ricœur, Foucault and himself that he is drawn to using spatial metaphors. To quote only from the passage in the paragraph above, we hear of an 'enunciative space', a 'dialogical

[394] Ibid., 247.

space', a 'space between us', a 'liminal area', an 'unbridgeable difference', and a belief in 'what is on the other side'. None of these turns of phrase is particularly unusual, but together they constitute an extended spatialisation of a theory of knowledge: Tomlinson, deliberately or otherwise, chose to articulate his ideas through the medium of imaginative geography. In concluding this chapter, I would like to turn that on its head: instead of thinking of (musical) knowledge spatially, I propose that we think of (musical) space in terms of knowledge. In particular, I suggest that more attention ought to be paid to the way in which performances of apparently humorous music took place in – you might say produced the space of – certain venues with certain characteristics. It is my argument that the effect of Satie's *Pièces humoristiques*, at least for its early audiences, is inseparable from the circumstances in which it was encountered and engaged with.

By imagining Satie's musical humour as a form of spatial practice, it is possible to gain a degree of purchase on an important development in recent Satie scholarship: unlike the early-twentieth-century critics mentioned above, a number of late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century writers have approached Satie's humour not as an interpretive problem, but as a possible solution to the 'enigma' of his creative personality. Take, for example, the following extract from a review of Mary E. Davis's *Erik Satie*:

> Satie's kind of musical modernism was not the self-serious artistic statement, but rather one which always included more than a note of irony, mockery, and humour . . . Drawing on his Montmartre cabaret training, he emphasized the blague, or joke, at the heart of much of popular culture.[395]

In light of the previous chapter's discussion of Satie's association with Montmartre, much of this quotation will no doubt sound familiar: notably, it recalls Steven Moore

[395] Jeffrey H. Jackson, 'Review: Erik Satie by Mary E Davis', *Modernism/Modernity* 15/2 (2008), 402.

Whiting's positioning of Satie as the latest in a long line of French (musical) humourists, and his contextualisation of Satie's humour in the 'popular milieux' of northern Paris. What interests me here, however, is not the grounding of 'irony, mockery, and humour' in the cabarets of Montmartre, but the linkage of these artistic traits with the broader notion of 'popular culture'. It is as if Satie's self-identified 'humorous' pieces might be read as an index of his anti-elitism, regardless of where, how, and with whom they were performed. At any rate, that is the conclusion drawn by the reviewer of Davis's biography, who moves from a discussion of the *Pièces humoristiques* to the assertion that Satie succeeded in 'collaps[ing] the boundaries between high and low art.'[396]

In fairness to the revisionist work of Whiting and Davis, neither scholar buys into the cruder versions of the blurred boundary thesis articulated above: Whiting, for his part, is specific about which hitherto separate constituencies were able to mix in the *cabarets artistiques* of fin-de-siècle Montmartre; Davis, in turn, is under no illusions that a stylised interpretation of popular culture – i.e., Satie's pianistic *blagues* – would have been confused for the 'real thing'. Indeed, when discussing one of Satie's collaborations in the period immediately following the publication of the *Pièces humoristiques*, Davis identifies a distinctly 'non-popular' audience for the new 'popular' aesthetic:

> The fruits of this collaboration [with Jean Cocteau] were few in number but bold in intent: the duo proposed to demonstrate that modernist art could be entertaining, fashionable, and fun. Modernism à la Cocteau and Satie drew its materials from the ephemera of everyday life, including fashion, advertising, cinema, and popular song, and expressed itself in a slangy tone that was both colloquial and sophisticated. Casual yet cosmopolitan, this mix matched the heady mood that prevailed after World War I and appealed to high-society patrons as well as avant-garde provocateurs.[397]

[396] Ibid., 403.
[397] Davis, *Classic Chic*, 117.

As Davis's account makes clear, no matter how 'entertaining, fashionable, and fun' Cocteau and Satie's productions might have been, they were enjoyed first and foremost by the social and cultural elites of the Imperial capital city. Since Davis argues elsewhere for the *Pièces humoristiques* as direct antecedents of Satie's collaborations with Cocteau, it is hard not to wonder whether these works also drew on 'everyday' materials primarily for the amusement of a 'high-society' audience. Far from a marker of Satie's anti-elitism, the *Pièces* were a carefully composed attempt to secure a sense of social and spatial intimacy and exceptionalism via the mechanism of a difficult-to-comprehend web of allusions. To bring this discussion back to the point of departure – Whiting's comparison of Hyspa and Satie – there may well be something of the esprit Montmartrois in the composition of Satie's *Pièces humoristiques,* but as I argued in the last chapter, that spirit is more conflicted than has hitherto been acknowledged. What Satie 'channelled' in these pieces was not only a sense of humour, but also a sense of exclusivity. By attending to the spatiality of musical performance it is possible to shed new light – and fresh doubt – on the common claim that Satie's music represents a dissolution of the boundaries between high art and popular entertainment culture.

Chapter 4

Composing the Quotidian

Stasis, transit, and the sound of circulation

The place is New York; the year, roughly, 1988. An emotionally sensitive robot called Johnny 5 has just crashed out of a high-rise boardroom. He made his accidental exit through a pane of glass after he discovered his friend plotting to sell him. For a second or so Johnny plummets through the air before he remembers his built-in kite wings and takes full advantage of his opportunity to glide over the streets of Manhattan. The scene in question takes place mid-way through Kenneth Johnson's 1988 film *Short Circuit* 2, an action comedy that tells the story of Johnny 5's coming of age. By this point in the narrative the robot protagonist has already devoured the contents of a bookstore and is hungry for more of what he calls 'input'. Soon he will make his way to a Catholic church for spiritual input, but first we see him land in a small urban park that happens to contain some sculptures – in Johnny's words, 'aesthetic input, modern art.' As the camera cuts to a shot of Johnny in the sculpture park, a well-dressed upper-class couple walk past and mistake the robot for one of the exhibits. 'Hmmm, an early Brancusi' the man ventures tentatively, before the woman quickly corrects him: 'Darling no, it's a hand-carving – gaunt, angular, repulsive.'

For copyright reasons, the distributers of this film do not credit Erik Satie for the music that is heard immediately after this hurtful encounter. It is, they say, an original composition by a man named Charles Fox.[398] As it happens, Fox was among the last generation of young American musicians to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, so we

[398] Fox is best known for penning the 1978 hit song 'Killing me Softly'. For more on his life and work, see 'Charles Fox', *allmusic.com*, http://www.allmusic.com/artist/charles-fox-mn0000805450 (accessed 10 August 2012).

can reasonably assume he was familiar with the repertoire of modern French piano music by the time he was working on *Short Circuit 2*. In any case, I am not alone in hearing Satie's first *Gymnopédie* in Fox's underscore to this scene; a number of YouTube comments attest to the strong affinities, or mistakenly claim that the soundtrack *does* include what is surely Satie's best-known composition. To run briefly through the comparison: Satie's piece begins in a slowed down waltz rhythm, rocking bar by bar between two major 7 chords rooted in G and D respectively; Fox's version is in the same time signature, has the same tempo, and the same crotchet-minim-crotchet-minim rhythm. Instead of two major 7 chords, Fox sets up a balance between Bflat minor and F minor, still a fourth apart. As for the melodic line: Satie's begins on an Fsharp on the second beat of the bar, rises a minor third then descends an octave from Fsharp; Fox's begins on a Bflat, again on the second beat of the bar, also rises a minor third and goes as low as a ninth (rather than an octave) below the first Bflat, with a very similar contour between the outlying pitches.

The reason for setting out these similarities is that I would like to use the vaguely *Gymnopédie*-esque soundtrack in *Short Circuit 2* as a way of introducing one of the key themes in the discourse on Satie's music, a theme to which I am responding in this chapter. This is the notion of stasis or immobility, which is aptly illustrated by the robot in the sculpture park. Compared to smashing through windows and swooping through the sky, Johnny's first aesthetic encounter is remarkably restrained and constrained. Of course, this could be interpreted in many ways: we might ask how the music assists in presenting Johnny's emerging sense of subjectivity and self-absorption; or whether it is a coincidence that we hear the name Brancusi, a sculptor who was not only good friends with Satie, but commissioned to make a bust for his grave. We might equally ask whether the association of the *Gymnopédie* with a very mid-twentieth-

century version of 'modern art' suggests anything about the chronology of Satie's reception in North America. However, I would like, in this instance, to be deliberately literal. What I find striking about the use of the Satie-ish music in *Short Circuit 2* is that on each of the three occasions we hear it, Johnny is conspicuously still, incapable of movement.

In the scene I have just described he is initially pegged to the spot by his contemplation of the barely mobile mobiles, and subsequently by his hurt, introspective gaze into the contorting mirror of the sculpture. It is no coincidence that the tempo/performance instruction for Satie's first *Gymnopédie* is 'lent et douloureux' (slow and painful). Later on in the film, when the stakes are higher, these words seem even more appropriate: after Johnny has been attacked with crow bars, his face and circuit boards all smashed up, it is the quasi-*Gymnopédie* we hear as he attempts, slowly, to pick himself up off the pavement. Later still, when our hero's battery acid is running perilously low, we hear the same melody for a final time. Now played on a cello, it articulates Johnny's struggle to grasp a piece of chalk and write the word 'DYING' on a brick wall.[399] Suffice to say, this is a moment of severely limited mobility – a stillness retrospectively heightened by the film's climactic chase sequence, which is driven along by the energised vocals and propulsive beat of nothing less than Bonnie Tyler's 1985 hit song, 'I Need a Hero'. It thus seems fair to say that Fox uses the characteristic features of the *Gymnopédies* at precisely those points in the film that require a suspension of action. In doing so, he builds on a well-established tradition of considering Satie to be the quintessential composer of stasis, of music that does very

[399] One video posted on 24 August 2010 features a midi version of Fox's score for this scene and attributes it to Satie. See Kingdom007Hearts, 'Short Circuit 2 - Johnny 5 Dying (Gymnopedie [*sic*] No. 1)' http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNGm4aMzydE (accessed 10 August 2012).

little, goes more or less nowhere, and takes its listeners to the brink – or beyond – of boredom.

In this chapter I seek to re-imagine the persistent trope of stasis in Satie reception – a trope that has played no small part in defining his aesthetic difference from other composers – by considering how it might relate to the movements of the modern city. Ultimately, I will conclude that this relationship is one of tension, between dynamism and rest, mobility and immobility. First, though, it is necessary to give just a few representative examples from the literature indicating how commonly Satie is described as a static composer. In the early 1960s, William Austin discerned in Satie's works:

> [A] simple rhythmic pattern [that] persists beyond the point of unintentional monotony to make a sort of hypnotic effect, yet without any dynamic emphasis. In the *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes* this trait of rhythm is exaggerated to an immobility that seems either sublime or maddening.[400]

Nearly two decades earlier, Satie's first English-language biographer, Rollo Myers, had made a very similar comment:

> The music of this period [late 1880s, early 1890s] was decorative, static, relied for its effect upon a certain hypnotic quality induced by repetition and the use of harmonies if not derived from, at least evocative of plainsong.[401]

For both Austin and Myers, Satie's music was distinguished by a peculiar sense of the passing of time, even of time becoming spatial.

In an attempt to account for this phenomenon, a number of analyses have drawn attention to Satie's economy of musical means and his apparent disinterest in motivic development. Roger Shattuck, for example, wrote in the mid-1950s that:

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[400] William Austin, 'Satie Before and After Cocteau', *The Musical Quarterly* 48/2 (April 1962), 220.
[401] Rollo H. Myers, 'The Strange Case of Erik Satie', *The Musical Times* 86 (1945), 202.

> The simplest of Satie's pieces . . . built out of a handful of notes and rhythms have no beginning, middle, and end. They exist simultaneously. Form ceases to be an ordering in time like ABA and reduces to a single brief image, an instantaneous whole both fixed and moving.[402]

Shattuck goes on to write that 'Satie's form can be extended only by reiteration or "endurance"'.[403] As recently as 2009 these comments were echoed by Jann Pasler in a passage discussing how Satie 'plays with simplicity and stasis and pushes listeners' tolerance for lengthy works to the limits.'[404] After outlining the motivic constitution of the first *Gnossienne* – again, note the focus on the fin-de-siècle period – Pasler remarks that:

> Just as none of the motives has any true 'middle', neither does the piece, every element of which is either a beginning or an end. Musical stasis arises when, with the same musical ideas penetrating every level of the work's construction, there is no conflict, no structural tension, and thus no structural motion.[405]

The result, according to Pasler, is 'a kind of musical décor as static as the paintings by Puvis de Chavannes he [Satie] so loved.'[406]

Without wishing to overstate the critical consensus on Satie's musical immobility, let me add simply that there are plenty more examples where these came from. On the one hand, we have a set of subjective or experiential accounts of listening to Satie, many of which emphasise a directionless and minimally-dynamic perpetual present. On the other is a set of analytical observations principally concerned with the formal construction of Satie's works, in particular with the manner in which his musical

[402] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France 1885 to World War I, rev. ed.* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 142.
[403] Ibid.
[404] Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music As Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 540.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid.

material is elaborated or 'reiterated'. Far from a minor issue in the reception of his work, Robert Orledge has argued that:

> The question of Satie's capacity for development is . . . a crucial one as far as his reputation as a composer is concerned, for to most Western critics a cellular composer whose cells do not generate momentum, or rigorously develop in any way, is deemed a failure.[407]

I would go along with this to the extent that a number of critics have used Satie's lack of structural development as a stick with which to wallop him. But it is equally important to acknowledge those for whom Satie's immobile structures were his greatest asset.

During a pre-concert talk at a Satie festival shortly after the Second World War, John Cage heaped praise on the man to whom he attributed a 'new contemporary awareness of form: It is static rather than progressive in character.'[408] The published version of Cage's talk went on to construct a formalist watershed dividing composers whose music develops from those whose music does not, with Satie predictably falling into the latter camp.[409] While it would be too simplistic to superimpose Cage's aesthetic distinction onto the geo-political map of old Europe and New World, it is worth noting that the Californian's essay 'in defense of Satie' is a tour de force of anti-Beethovenian rhetoric, which, as we have seen earlier in this thesis, is not so unusual in devotees of Satie's music. For the American experimentalists at mid twentieth century, Satie's static forms represented an attractive alternative to that other compositional inheritance habitually associated with German-speaking Europe. In a similar manner, historians of musical culture in turn-of-the-century France have often cast Satie in an anti-Germanic,

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[407] Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 161

[408] John Cage, 'Defense of Satie', in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 77-84.

[409] Ibid.

or more specifically anti-Wagnerian role.[410] Needless to say, inverting the evaluative hierarchy of progressive and static structures does very little to destabilise either of these terms. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, we need to find critical ways of interrogating the construction of Satie's difference, not merely celebrating his difference, which inevitably runs the risk of essentialising strangeness.

Given that the case for Satie as an anti-developmental and, by extension, anti-Germanic composer has been made repeatedly in the literature and is thus easy to identify, the question now is what to do about it. First, it is worth acknowledging that such characterisations are contingent upon a very selective hearing of Satie's musical activity. As I have already hinted, the early faux-medieval works – *Gnossiennes*, *Gymnopédies*, etc. – are frequently called upon in accounts of Satie's musical stasis, but there are one or two other pieces which also receive a disproportionate amount of attention. Most notoriously, *Vexations* (1893), which bears the inscription: 'To play this motif 840 times in succession, it would be advisable to prepare oneself beforehand, in the deepest silence, by serious immobilities.'[411] This is certainly an intriguing sentence, but for a piece with close to zero performance history until 70 years after its composition, *Vexations* looms large in the critical reception of Satie's work. Arguably too large – which is why Steven Moore Whiting's recent commentary on the piece is particularly welcome. Rather than conceiving of this single-page manuscript as a sort of minimalist message in a bottle to the 1960s – which is the story told by figures such as Philip Glass and Brian Eno – Whiting contextualises Satie's symmetrical harmonic

[410] In addition to the examples encountered in the last chapter on Satie's musical humour, see Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 539, and Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4/69. Here Satie is described as an 'anti-Teutonic modernist'.

[411] For a detailed discussion of the composition and reception of this short piece, see Robert Orledge, 'Understanding Satie's Vexations', *Satie-Archives.com*, http://www.satie-archives.com/web/articl11.html#5t (accessed 10 August 2012).

method in the word games of contemporary cabaret poets; specifically the *quatrain holorime* in which not only the ends of lines have to rhyme, but entire lines, word by word, with predictably nonsensical results.[412] Viewed in this light, Satie's inversion of his chord voicings in the second statement of the 13-bar motif seems relatively immobile, but not necessarily all that serious.[413]

Other titles among the usual static suspects date from much later, towards the end of the nineteen-teens; these include assorted short pieces collectively known as the *Musique d'ameublement* (Furniture Music, 1917) and, more curiously, *Socrate* (1919). It is not hard to see why the former suggests something less than dynamic; in a pamphlet introducing these pieces, Satie and Darius Milhaud describe a music that 'creates a vibration; it has no other goal; it fills the same role as light and heat – as comfort in every form'.[414] For what it is worth, as a listener, I recognise their description, but in terms of Satie's long and diverse career, the Furniture Music is an exception, not a rule. As for *Socrate*: in order for this 'drame symphonique' to appear lacking in formal trajectory it was necessary for John Cage to take some fairly drastic action. In the first instance, he made an arrangement for two pianos and no voices, thus stripping the work of its text – a text which, on account of describing the death of Socrates, is inherently goal-directed: 'When the poison reaches the heart', the women's voices sing, 'that will be the end.' Later on the same voices recount how 'Crito closed his [Socrates's] eyes and mouth. Such was the end.' The next time Cage got his hands on *Socrate*, he went even further by removing not only the text, but also the pitches,

[412] See Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179-180.
[413] An alternative interpretation, suggested by Robert Orledge, is that the 'vexations' relate to the beginning of the end of Satie's 'tempestuous affair' with the artists Suzanne Valadon, 'which lasted from 14 January to 20 June 1893'. The date of the composition is estimated at c. April 1893. See Orledge, 'Understanding Satie's Vexations'.
[414] Quoted in Paul Morley, *Words and Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 53.

keeping only what he called the rhythmic 'durations' for his 1969 work *Cheap Imitation*. It goes without saying that Cage was free to do what he wanted with Satie's music – that is not my point. Nor am I arguing that *Socrate* ought to be performed, à la Bonnie Tyler, with drive, propulsion, and a heroic climax – although it might be fun once in a while. I am simply curious as to how Satie's work would appear if we stopped assuming stasis and suspended our belief in suspension. By considering a chanson about a bus journey (1906), a *sonatine* describing the working day (1917), and an *entr'acte* featuring as many modes of transport as one could hope to fit on a cinema screen (1924), I seek to test the thesis that Satie's music engaged with, and occasionally critiqued, the contemporary experience of quotidian mobility. In order to set the scene for this discussion of the representation of urban movement in music, it is necessary to travel back in time even further than the first *Gymnopédie*.

Omni-mobility

Sometime in 1864, at a venue whose name history does not record, in the working-class suburb of Belleville, a young singer from a small town near Biarritz made what can only be described as an unremarkable Paris debut.[415] Prior to this appearance, Paulus (Jean-Paul Habans, 1845-1908), had had little experience of stage performance – only one brief stint with a touring group in the Bordeaux region the previous year – and was ill-prepared to make any immediate impact on the circuits of the Imperial capital. This initial obscurity would not last long; over the course of the next decade or so, Paulus went on to carve out a more-than-modest career taking in most of the major Parisian *cafés-concerts* (the Alhambra, Eldorado, and Ambassadeurs, to name only three) as

[415] For more information on Paulus's biography, one of the best, if imperfect, sources of information is his memoirs: Jean-Paul Habans (known as Paulus), *Trente ans de café-concert, souvenirs recueillis par Octave Pradels* (Paris: Société d'Edition et de publications, 1908).

well as a number of equivalent venues in large cities across France (including the Jardin Oriental and Eldorado in Toulouse, the Alcazar in Marseille, and the Casino in Lyon). By the mid-1880s, Paulus had not only found considerable popular success, but his fame had reached such a degree that he is now widely-credited with having reconfigured what popular success for a singer might mean. Derek Scott, for example, chose Paulus to illustrate the acceleration of the star system in his book-length account of the *Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution*.[416] Whiting also acknowledges Paulus's fame and places him alongside Thérésa as 'the archetypal *grandes vedettes*, big-name stars who commanded astronomical fees and cultic devotion among their public.'[417] Even greater plaudits come from the authors of an encyclopedic chanson fan-site, *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*, which describes Paulus as 'unquestionably the biggest of all the stars of the first era of the Café-Concert (1840-1900).'[418]

The reason for offering this rather exuberant résumé is twofold: first, to justify the present discussion of a now largely-forgotten, but once well-known, well-paid, and widely-imitated singer; second, to raise for a moment the deceptively simple question, 'why *was* Paulus so popular?' Judging by one of the more enduring tropes in accounts of the singer's career, the answer would seem to be that he was above all an opportunist: 'His biggest success', records one guide to the cemetery where his body is interred, was a song entitled 'En Revenant de la revue' (On the Way Back from the

[416] Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.
[417] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 20.
[418] 'Incontestablement la plus grande de toutes les vedettes du Café-Concert de la première époque (1840-1900).' See 'Paulus', *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*, http://www.chanson.udenap.org/fiches_bio/paulus/paulus.htm (accessed 10 August 2012).

Parade), which he first performed at the Eldorado in 1886.'[419] The guide goes on to explain that:

> On the evening of the 14th of July, when Paris was talking of nothing else but the Longchamps *revue* [parade], Paulus modified two lines in honour of General Boulanger. It is this detail that secures a place for the song in the history of 'la chanson française'.[420]

The truth of this last sentence is corroborated by the aforementioned fan-site, which places 'En Revenant' at number six in its 'histoire de la chanson française de 1870 à 1945 en (presque) 50 chansons' (history of French song from 1870 to 1945 in (almost) 50 songs). Echoing the cemetery guide, the site's text attributes the remarkable impact of Paulus's greatest hit not to the song itself (so to speak), nor to the manner of its performance, but rather to the singer's canny decision to align a song already in his repertoire with the man (then) of the moment, General Boulanger.[421] The fact that Paulus himself later claimed, in relation to this song, that he 'never did politics, but always kept an eye on the news' only reinforces the impression of someone on the lookout for any event to add currency – in both senses of the word – to his musical offerings.[422]

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[419] 'Son plus grand succès: En revenant de la revue, créé en mai 1886 à L'Eldorado. Au soir du 14 juillet, alors que Paris ne parle que de la revue de Longchamps, Paulus modifie deux vers en l'honneur du Général Boulanger. Ce détail permet à cette chanson d'entrer dans la petite histoire de la chanson française.' See 'Paulus', *SAINT-MANDÉ (94): cimetière sud*, http://www.landrucimetieres.fr/spip/spip.php?article1562#paulus (accessed 10 August 2012).

[420] Ibid.

[421] See 'En Revenant de la revue', *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*, http://www.chanson.udenap.org/50_chansons/05_en_revenant_de_la_revue.htm (accessed 10 August 2012). The small, but unmistakeable re-texting of 'En Revenant' – 'Moi, j'faisais qu'admirer / Tout nos braves petits troupiers' (I couldn't help but admire / all our brave soldiers) becomes 'Moi, j'faisais qu'admirer / Notr' brav' général Boulanger' (I couldn't help but admire / our brave General Boulanger) – is recorded, along with a transcription of the melody, in Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 17-20.

[422] 'Je n'ai jamais fait de politique, mais j'ai toujours guetté l'actualité.' See Paulus, *Trente ans de café-concert*, 13.

But does this picture of Paulus the opportunist amount to a sufficient or convincing account of Paulus the *grande vedette*? In some lights, the answer is a tentative 'yes': for example, his decision to follow up the success of 'En Revenant' with similar march songs on a military theme – notably 'Le Père la victoire' (Father Victory, 1888) – looks a lot like an attempt to cash in on his accidental status as a *revanchiste* cheerleader. From a methodological point of view, we might also note a certain appeal in the argument that Paulus, the 'archetypal' superstar, was only in possession of the legendary 'X factor' to the extent that he successfully exploited the x-in-relation-to-y factor. Nevertheless, there are a number of problems with viewing Paulus's career solely through the lens of opportunism: aside from the obvious complaint that any characterisation based on a single defining event is likely to be either reductive or simplistic or both, there is the small matter of chronology to deal with. As mentioned earlier in this chapter – and quietly acknowledged in each of the sources mentioned above – Paulus's success did not arrive overnight, but rather came gradually; 'En Revenant' may well have marked the high point of his career, but it would be misleading to present the song as a springboard to success since Paulus had been demanding 'exorbitant fees' even before his justifiably famous performance on Bastille Day 1886.[423] And on the subject of that performance: despite the singer's transparent gesture of identification with the embodiment of macho *revanchisme*, there are theoretical objections to pegging Paulus's fortunes too closely to those of the dashing (and ultimately doomed) General. For one thing, we ought to be wary about jumping to mercantile conclusions, and lazily assuming that popular performers were only 'in it for the money' or that bandwagon-jumping was necessarily first among their skills; for another, we would do well to remember that conflating narratives of popular song with

[423] 'Son succès vint progressivement: il en vint ainsi, et c'était une première, à demander des cachets exorbitants.' See 'Paulus', *SAINT-MANDÉ (94): cimetière sud*.

narratives of populist politics is one of the more stubborn clichés of chanson historiography. Decorating the stars of the café concert with the medals of nationhood has long been (amongst other things) a strategy of containment – an attempt to dress local, multiple, and potentially unsettling identities and narratives in the uniform of a singular French history.

So how else might we get to grips with the phenomenal success enjoyed by Paulus throughout much of the first two decades of the Third Republic – and in the course of so doing, find new sorts of questions to ask of popular song in the period, which will inform the discussion of Satie's engagement with contemporary urban life? At this stage in the present thesis, it will come as no surprise that my argument calls for an increased attentiveness to questions of urban space. But this term is far from self-explanatory. In the context of the present discussion, the most literal accommodation of the notion of urban space would be an expansion of the scope of enquiry from the *history* of song to the *historical geography* of song. We might ask, for example, 'where were the key venues in Paulus's career, and how might they be characterised?' or 'what were the main places of reference in his repertoire, and what clues do his songs give to the social identity of these locations?' Such questions are not, of course, either unhelpful or uninteresting, but there are certain limitations to conceiving of urban space exclusively in terms of measurable areas and well-labeled districts. Space, after all, should not be mistaken for a map any more than music for a score. Both forms of transcription are not only relied upon for what they include, but notorious for what they omit. By rendering the shifting multiplicity of Paris and its music as an aggregate of more or less fixed and locatable identities we surely omit more than I can begin to record here.

The point of voicing the above (well-rehearsed and rather tired) critique is not, however, to endorse some sort of highly intellectualised mourning for the irrecoverable, but rather to suggest alternative, more productive formulations of the notion of urban space and its relations to musical practice. In particular, I am interested in the imaginative possibilities that flow from thinking of urban space not in terms of objects, but in terms of processes and movement; hence the subtitle of this section of the present chapter. According to this line of thought, the Paris in which Paulus lived and performed ought not to be understood primarily as a 'thing' or even an assemblage of diverse things, but rather as a complex and ongoing process of accumulation and exchange. Urban space as circulation – or, indeed, circulation as urban space – is thus proposed as a novel heuristic for the study of chanson performance in late-nineteenth-century Paris. Moreover, the sheer effusion of meanings related to circulation – capital, traffic, blood, to name but three – is part of what makes the term so appealing. If such effusion proves excessive, that may in the end be no bad thing.

It is not by chance that the *grandes vedettes* of the late nineteenth-century have frequently been described as irreducibly urban. One reviewer of Scott's monograph, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, for example, opens with the arresting assertion that 'in its modern form, Western popular music is a product of bigness: big business, huge markets, vast cities.'[424] In the book itself, Scott offers the start of an explanation: 'The star system relies on the existence of similar performance spaces that can be visited by these artists; thus, the metropolis offers an ideal environment.'[425] It is not too much of a contrivance to re-state Scott's observation in terms of the star system as a system of circulation. A further point about the relationships between urban circulation and

[424] Peter Van der Merwe, 'Review: Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna. By Derek B. Scott', *Music & Letters* 90/4 (2009), 673.
[425] Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, 35.

popular song does not concern the efficient deployment of labour in late-nineteenth-century Paris (i.e., the movement of performers around the various urban venues) so much as the transportation of all manner of material things allied to the burgeoning entertainment industry: postcards, posters, sheet music, newspapers, even the pneumatic telegram network (the history of which is almost exactly contemporaneous with that of the café-concert). All of the above exemplify the powerful logic of urban circulation, wherein space and time (in David Harvey's famous formulation) are increasingly experienced as if 'compressed.'[426] It is not simply that performers became better advertised and more quickly reviewed, but rather – as the case of Paulus's reworded 'En Revenant' so clearly demonstrates – immediacy and proximity *themselves* attained ever heftier price tags. What was consumed at the Alcazar d'été on Bastille Day 1886 was not only Boulanger fever, but also the speed with which it reached there. Performers, songs and *actualités* were all simultaneously objects and emblems of circulation. To apply the same logic on a slightly larger scale: what we commonly call 'Paris', and imbue with a sense of rooted cultural identity, might very well be defined as the site and the product of circulation – as the result of the untiring propensity to accumulation and exchange. Bearing this in mind, let us now turn to the buses – specifically 'Derrière l'Omnibus' (Behind the Bus), first created by Paulus c.1878.

Though the performance history of this song began more than a quarter of a century before that of Satie's and Hyspa's own bus song, 'L'Omnibus automobile' (Automobile Omnibus, 1906), we would be wise to remember that publication dates say nothing about the length of time for which a song remained in a singer's repertoire. Indeed, 'Derrière l'Omnibus' is reputed to have been among the handful of

[426] See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

performances Paulus committed to both disc (c.1895-1901) and film (1897).[427] Despite the fact that neither of these recordings has yet been unearthed (if they ever existed), the inclusion of the song in lists of this sort suggests that it not only remained in Paulus's repertoire for as long as he remained on the stage, but was also one of the hits with which he was most associated. In terms of the content of the song, there is nothing out of the ordinary in a popular singer enacting some sort of encounter with his or her immediate environment. As Whiting observes:

> The repertoire of the café-concert drew continual stimulation from political and social events. Not only the Franco-Prussian War, but the Algerian conflicts, the opening of the Suez Canal, the construction of the Eiffel tower, the introduction of telephones, trams and subways, eventually automobiles – all were grist for the rhymesmith's mill.[428]

It is almost as if Whiting had Paulus in mind when he wrote this list: in addition to his aforementioned forays into anti-Prussian politics, we might also note two songs from 1889 – 'Je Viens Voir la Tour Eiffel' (I'm Coming to See the Eiffel Tower) and 'L'Amant de la Tour Eiffel' (The Lover of the Eiffel Tower) – as well as the obvious transport theme of 'Derrière l'Omnibus'. What is even more worthy of note is the qualification Whiting applies to all of the topics he had just described: 'In general, the tone of such *chansons d'actualité* was not satirical, as it would be in the cabarets, but amused (or bemused) and even laudatory.'[429] 'Amused (or bemused)' is the crucial phrase here. Aside from opportunism, the facet of Paulus's career most often singled out for attention is his baffled, stressed, flustered, and generally bewildered/bewildering

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[427] For more on the case of the missing recordings (including a wonderful, but so far unsubstantiated story about Paulus singing from behind a projection of himself produced by none other than George Méliès) see 'Paulus enregistrement', *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*, http://www.chanson.udenap.org/fiches_bio/paulus/paulus_enregistrement.htm (accessed 10 August 2012).
[428] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 20.
[429] Ibid.

style of performance. Scott is explicit in attributing Paulus's popularity to this 'unique jerky style'.[430] And Whiting is in agreement:

> Paulus had a powerful, brassy voice and kept up a frenetic dance as he sang, imitating the gesticulations and dislocations of a marionette puppet and making chanson performance a kind of gymnastic exercise. Within six months, everyone was trying to ape this style of perpetual motion – labelled variously as *gambillard*, *agité*, even *épileptique* – for it had a galvanising effect upon a crowd.[431]

There is much to comment on in this (admittedly second or third-hand) description of Paulus's performance style. For a start, Whiting's claim that 'Within six months, everyone was trying to ape this style of perpetual motion' suggests that 'style' could be added to our list of things in circulation in the late-nineteenth-century city. We might also wonder about the particular qualities of Paulus's voice, given that Whiting's 'powerful, brassy' has to be set against other descriptors such as 'suave' and 'masculine'[432] or 'clean' and 'vibrant'.[433] One thing that is clear, however, is that it was his movements that captured people's imaginations. As one contemporary put it: 'The audience listened to the voice but watched his legs.'[434]

There is some confusion about the point at which Paulus first created this *style gambillard*, but it certainly pre-dates 'En Revenant' and probably 'Derrière l'Omnibus' as well. In the account given on the aforementioned chanson fan-site, 1877 is the key year: we are told that, following a fruitless sortie into the chemical retail business in Marseille, Paulus moved back to Paris with a fresh repertoire and a frenzied look. When he returned:

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[430] Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, 35.
[431] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 18. The term *gambillard* may derive from 'the Picardy word *gambille*, meaning leg and, by extension, dance'. See 'En Revenant de la revue', *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*.
[432] Jean-Pierre Moulin, *Une Histoire de la chanson française: des Troubadours au rap* (Paris: Editions Cabédita 2004).
[433] See 'Paulus', *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*.
[434] François Caradec and Alain Weill, *Le Café-Concert 1848-1914* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 81.

> He was no longer the same: he had had his hair cropped (he later explained that he got hot walking from one end of the stage to the other!), he wore a top hat and carried a cane with which he juggled, fenced, pretended to fire shots, and throughout his 'tour de chant' he addressed himself directly to the public walking from one end of the stage to the other. The persona of the 'gambillard' was born.[435]

From the text of 'Derrière l'Omnibus' – a polka in F major – it seems highly likely that the song would have been performed in just such a style. In it, we follow a young man around Paris as he chases an omnibus in order to catch up with the pretty girl he had spotted getting on at the Place de la Bastille. The omnibus, however, is perpetually 'complet' (full), which – as the sheet music illustration confirms – invited a frustrated, energetic performance with abundant 'Tra la la la las!' At the conclusion, the girl finally gets off the omnibus only for the singing persona to be unceremoniously booted back to where he came from by her burly soldier boyfriend.

In terms of simple geography, the journey narrated in 'Derrière l'Omnibus' takes us from the eastern fringe of central Paris, to the Place la Trône (now Place de la Nation), then yet further east to the army barracks just beyond the Porte de Vincennes.[436] Given that the singer informs us in the second verse that he had been intending to travel in the opposite direction, to la Madeleine (which, not incidentally, was near to the Alcazar d'été in the Champs Elysées where Paulus then performed), we may surmise that part of the amusement in the song is derived from the singing persona being decidedly out of place in the working-class *faubourgs* beyond the city walls. Any audience member with a half decent knowledge of the layout of the city and the social profile of its environs would thus have known in advance the sort of trouble Paulus's

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[435] 'Il n'est plus le même : Ses cheveux ont été coupés en brosse (il expliquera plus tard qu'à force de se promener d'un bout à l'autre de la scène, il avait chaud !), il porte un chapeau haute forme et se présente avec une cane avec laquelle il jongle, escrime, tire des coups de fusil et pendant tout son tour de chant, il s'adresse directement au public se promenant d'un bout à l'autre de la scène. - Le personnage du "gambillard" est né.' 'Paulus', *Du Temps des cerises aux Feuilles mortes*.

[436] Incidentally, the site of the former barracks happens to be very close to the Saint-Mandé cemetery where Paulus is now buried.

character was getting himself into, and to that extent we might imagine an arc of expectation superimposed upon the otherwise repetitive verse-refrain structure.

Aside from the punch lines and class comedy, however, 'Derrière l'Omnibus' was also a vehicle (pardon the pun) for Paulus's 'idiotic', 'energetic' or, as it has already been described, 'epileptic' performance style. One cultural historian in particular, Rae Beth Gordon, has done a considerable amount of work relating to this last adjective. In her account Paulus is a pivotal figure precisely because he marks the beginning of a craze for hyperactive, even hysterical singers in the café-concerts of the early to middle Third Republic.[437] The use of language borrowed from the biological and psychiatric sciences is entirely deliberate here, since Gordon's thesis is concerned with the reception of primitivist, evolutionary, and pathological theory in the discourse and practices of popular entertainment. In this light, Whiting's suggestion that other singers 'aped' Paulus's performances seems doubly significant: not only does the notion of stylistic circulation now take on a contagious aspect – as in the *style gambillard / épileptique* 'caught on' – but the action of imitation is described by recourse to our close genetic cousins, the primates.

This is not the place for a thorough exposition of either Gordon's arguments or the remarkable material she has uncovered relating to performances that not only enacted the primitive and/or hysterical, but actually took place in institutions created to house and 'treat' those considered mentally or physically degenerate. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that the urban setting and subject matter of 'Derrière l'Omnibus' is more than a pretext for the non-place-specific 'dances with Darwin' Gordon describes. It is not so much that I take issue with her emphasis on the nervous economy or insist that she prioritise the 'hard facts' of traffic and money over the ephemeral stuff of

[437] Rae Beth Gordon, *Dances with Darwin, 1875-1910: Vernacular Modernity in France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

feelings; on the contrary, what is of real interest is better understanding how those classic urban pathologies of frenzy and distraction relate to the other kinds of circulation to which I have already referred. A discussion of Paulus's career offers one means of condensing this necessarily diffuse constellation of musical, spatial, and social dynamics. Another song, this time by Satie, offers yet another route through a similar field of possibilities.

'L'Omnibus automobile' is the name of a chanson published in Paris in 1906 with words by Vincent Hyspa and piano accompaniment by Satie. The title refers to a motorised form of public transport first introduced to the city in the previous year. Compared to the opening in 1900 of the underground *chemin de fer métropolitain* and the world-famous aviation achievements of the Wright brothers three years later, one might think that the arrival of the humble horseless bus – the *autobus* as it would soon be known – was nothing much to shout about. This moment in Parisian transport history was not considered a technological breakthrough on a par with subterranean or airborne travel. It was not even the first kind of horseless vehicle on the roads, not by a long chalk.[438] Nevertheless, the automobile omnibus had a significant impact on the organisation and experience of urban traffic – not least because it sometimes had an all-too-direct impact on other road users and pedestrians, as demonstrated by the following article from *Le Petit Journal illustré* in 1907:

> We have often complained, and not without reason, of the new Parisian autobuses, which are heavy, shaky and very dangerous for the circulation of cars and people. There have

[438] Since the middle of the nineteenth century there had been a city-wide network of steam-powered, then pneumatic, then electric tramways. Since the 1890s there had been a cable-car in Belleville. Also in Parisian circulation by 1905 were private motor cars, taxis, and, of course, bicycles. For a critical history of transport in Paris during this period, see Peter S. Soppelsa, *The Fragility of Modernity: Infrastructure and Everyday Life in Paris, 1870-1914*, PhD thesis (University of Michigan, 2009).

> already been several accidents caused by the difficulty the drivers of these monstrous vehicles have in crossing congested roads.[439]

On the front cover of the illustrated supplement of the *Journal* was a sensational drawing of the latest such accident, a cab for hire *écrasé* (crushed) on the rue d'Amsterdam (see fig. 15).

Evidently, a good traffic accident was a great opportunity to sell papers; a disruption in one form of circulation happily exploited for the benefit of another. No doubt this logic was partly behind the decision by Hyspa to write his own account of an errant autobus. More specifically, Hyspa chose to write an account of a trial run by a passenger-less autobus as witnessed by an *habitué* of the Place Pigalle. This explicit positioning of the singing persona in one of the best-known public spaces in the district of Montmartre is not without significance.

[439] 'On se plaint beaucoup, et non sans raison, des nouveaux autobus parisiens, qui sont lourds, trépidants et très dangereux pour la circulation des voitures et des piétons. Déjà, de nombreux accidents se sont produits par suite de la difficulté qu 'ont les mécaniciens à diriger, à travers les rues encombrées, ces monstrueux véhicules.' See 'Les Méfaits de l'autobus', *Le Petit Journal illustré* 863 (2 June 1907), 4.



Figure 15. Illustration of 'Les Méfaits de l'autobus', *Le Petit Journal illustré* (1907).

As we have already established, Montmartre is a hill, the martyrs mount. Even though Place Pigalle is nowhere near the summit of that hill, anyone familiar with the city's topography will know it's relatively hard to climb up to that point – the omnibuses used to add an extra horse en route – but all-too-easy to pick up speed on the way down. As we shall see, this most obvious aspect of Parisian physical geography underwrites much of the action in the omnibus song. It is also worth reiterating that, by 1905, Montmartre had long been associated with a particular form of high-brow yet foul-mouthed

entertainment most often performed in the *cabaret artistiques*. It was in one of these venues – le Chat Noir to be precise – that Hyspa and Satie had first met, in 1887. Since that time, both men had individually and collectively cultivated a strong sense of place-specific musical identity. Hyspa marketed himself as a 'chansonnier Montmartrois', and as we saw in chapter 2 Satie had written an article for a guide book on the history of the 'musiciens de Montmartre'.[440] The fact that the verses of their song describe a journey from the Place Pigalle to the Place de l'Opéra and back again thus suggests a narrative enfolding of geographic and generic associations. Finally, it just so happened that the first line in the Paris network to be served by the new motorised buses was a line running between Montmartre and St Germain-des-Prés.

One feature of the text worthy of note has to do with the first line of the first verse. 'C'était pendant l'horreur du Quatorze Julliet' (It was during the horror of the fourteenth of July) is an allusion, for those in the know, to a passage from Act 2 scene 5 of Racine's *Athalie* (1691). Specifically, 'C'était pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit' (It was during the horror of a deep night) is the start of a passage known as 'Le Songe d'Athalie' (Athalia's dream), in which the play's title character recounts a vision of her mother looking exactly as she did on the day she died. What begins peacefully soon turns abominable:

> Son ombre vers mon lit a paru se baisser,
> Et moi je lui tendois les mains pour l'embrasser;
> Mais je n'ai plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange
> D'os et de chairs meurtris et traînés dans la fange,
> Des lambeaux pleins de sang, & des membres affreux,
> Que des chiens dévorans se disputaient entr'eux.
> ---
> Her shadow seemed to bend itself, and I,
> Held out my arms in order to embrace it;
> But only found confusion horrible
> Of mangled bones and flesh dragged in the mud,

[440] See Erik Satie, 'Musiciens de Montmartre', in Victor Meusy and Edmond Depas (eds.), *Guide de l'Etranger à Montmartre* (Paris: J. Strauss, 1900), 32-33.

> And tatters soaked in gore, of hideous limbs,
> That dogs, devouring, fought for with each other.

Put that together with the image on the front of *Le Petit Journal* – plus a pinch of pince-sans-rire humour – and it is possible to see where Hyspa was going with this song.[441]

In terms of what happens in each verse: to begin with, the singing subject (let us call him Vincent) is in the Place Pigalle on a warm summer's evening; the sun is setting, the fountain is bubbling; all is well with the world. In verse two, round about 9.35pm a self-propelled omnibus tears through the Place with big owl eyes of green and red. In verse three, we hear that the bus is empty, but the sign says 'full'; Vincent follows the bus at a fair pace (a 'galop' to be precise); as the bus continues, Vincent sees it crushing 'women, children, dogs and sergeants, MPs and other animals'. In verse four the bus finally comes to a stop at the Place de l'Opéra; it is full of sacks of plaster, which, the driver says, are there in place of 'cantankerous passengers'. In verse five Vincent asks the driver why there are sacks instead of people; 'ah', the driver replies with the song's punch line, 'because people might get hurt'. Significantly, verse six takes us back to where we started with a repeat of verse one.

As I pointed out earlier, there is nothing out of the ordinary in a Parisian *chansonnier* singing about contemporary Paris. In fact, it is something of a cliché of chanson historiography to view this musical form as documentary or journalistic evidence of everyday life. However, what is interesting about a song like this is not the *fact* that it presents an episode of mobile urban experience, but the *manner* in which it

[441] However, it may not only be the mangled conclusion of Athalia's dream to which he is making reference, but also the rhetorical form of Racine's verse. Athalia's vivid, animated first-person recollection is, quite literally, a textbook example of a classical form of description known as *l'hypotypose*, which aims to bring past events to the fullness of presence in order imprint them – hence hypo*typ*ose – on the listener's memory.

does so. What distinguishes 'L'Omnibus automobile' is the extent to which it offers a rather detached observation on the rush of city life. Unlike 'Derrière l'Omnibus', this is not the sound of someone overcome by a new-fangled mode of transport.[442] Rather, it is a consummate performance of feeling slightly above it all, just as one might expect from a singer-songwriter who plied his trade in the *cabarets artistiques* of Montmartre. As for the piano accompaniment, Whiting has described Satie's work as 'unpretentious' and 'dashed off'.[443] Maybe so, but the fact that the keyboard part does not clatter and crash or provide obvious occasions to crescendo and accelerate sets some important parameters for the tone of the song and the character of any potential performance. What Satie does offer is a steady chord placement at the beginning of each bar that provides the necessary structure around which a relaxed and unflustered singer might deliver the text in a relatively free-flowing or 'patter' style. The only fleeting moments of rhythmic tension accrue on certain words suspended across bar lines. In the second verse we hear: 'Un omnibus auto-mobile entendez-vous' (An automobile omnibus you hear), which evidently draws attention to the title of the song. And, in the fourth: 'Ces sacs me dit le con-ducteur, ces sacs sont là' (These sacks, the driver tells me) puts the stress on the first syllable of the word *con*ducteur (driver), thus implying that the man is an idiot (or something a little ruder).

On this point, it is worth noting a contrast with the contemporary rhetoric of Futurism. It was barely three years after the publication of 'L'Omnibus' that Filippo Marinetti's famous manifesto appeared in *Le Figaro*, in French, in Paris, including these following items:

[442] For a discussion of the more 'rushing' forms of urban experience, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp (ed.), *Speed Limits* (New York: Skira, 2009).
[443] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 235.

> 1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness. . . . 3. Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist. 4. We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. . . . 5. We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along its orbit.[444]

What is important to note here is that Hyspa and Satie had their eyes and ears open to the same brave new world as Marinetti – same movement, same speed, same transport, same challenge to immobility – but their take on all this could scarcely have been more different: 'L'Omnibus automobile' is presented as an object of ridicule, not rapture; their song is bathetic not energetic; the return in the final verse to the Place Pigalle is a formal endorsement of civility and repose.

Routine Subjects

The next piece I want to discuss takes us even further away from the 'clamour of great modern cities' that so fascinated Marinetti and his Futurist colleagues. This is the *Sonatine bureaucratique*. Published in 1917, Satie's *Bureaucratic Sonatina* – or *Petty Bureaucratic Sonata* as I prefer to translate it – was his first work after the *succès de scandale* of the ballet *Parade*. Given that Satie had collaborated on *Parade* with not only Jean Cocteau, but also Léonide Massine and Pablo Picasso – all watched over by the impresario Serge Diaghilev – there has been no shortage of interest in this infamously irreverent wartime production. By contrast, the *Sonatine bureaucratique* has received relatively little attention. When it is mentioned it is typically as part of a narrative about the rise of Neo-Classicism. Arnold Whittall's Grove entry on that subject lists Satie's *Sonatine* alongside Prokofiev's first symphony as forerunners of

[444] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Le Manifeste du futurisme', *Le Figaro* (20 February 1909). Translation taken from Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 49-53.

Pulcinella.[445] Robert Orledge makes exactly the same argument, describing the piece as an 'anticipation of Stravinskian neo-classicism.'[446] Leaving the issue of stylistic teleology to one side, the basis of such claims is clear enough: Satie's *Sonatine* is directly modelled on the three movements of Muzio Clementi's *Sonatine* op. 36 no.1 – a keyboard piece first published in 1797 as a supplement to his best-selling *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Piano Forte*. According to Leon Plantinga and Alan Tyson, 'it is a tribute to the quality of these little pieces that after two centuries they still perform admirably the didactic function for which Clementi intended them.'[447] It is hard not to see Satie's re-working of the eighteenth-century *sonatine* as a send-up or spoof. Clementi's third movement *vivace,* for example, is even re-imagined as a *vivache* (which, as I discussed in the Preface, may have been what Satie was thinking of on his deathbed).

The obvious interpretative move here is to point out all those moments in the piece that seem to poke fun at the conventions of the classical sonata. I have already mentioned the bovine tempo marking; in the slower, triple-time middle movement, where one might expect a contemplative air of thoughtful reflection, what we read above the staves are mundane remarks on the subject of 'hopes for a promotion' and 'looking for a new flat'. No surprises there, perhaps. This is, after all, a *bureaucratic* sonatina; the most dramatic surtitles come near the end of the final movement when 'Alas! He must leave his office, his dear office'. Clearly, this is not a piece to be taken

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[445] Arnold Whittall, 'Neo-Classicism', *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19723 (accessed 10 August 2012).
[446] Robert Orledge, 'Satie, Erik', *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40105 (accessed 10 August 2012).
[447] Leon Plantinga and Alan Tyson. 'Clementi, Muzio', *Grove Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40033 (accessed 10 August 2012).

too seriously. At the same time, though, I suggest there is more going on here than plain mockery. At any rate, if daily routine is the butt of Satie's joke, he is surely also laughing at himself and other more famously well-heeled colleagues. In a much reproduced article from 1913, Satie described 'La Journée du musicien' (The Musician's Day):

> An artist must organise his life. Here is the exact timetable of my daily activities: Get up: 7.18 am; be inspired: 10.23 to 11.47 am. I take lunch at 12.11 pm and leave the table at 12.14 pm. Healthy horse-riding, out in my grounds: 1.19 to 2.53 pm. More inspiration: 3.12 to 4.07pm. Various activities (fencing, reflection, immobility, visits, contemplation, swimming, etc…): 4.21 to 6.47 pm.[448]

While this article is obviously written with tongue in cheek, it is nevertheless the case that its author was well known for his daily commute between the suburb of Arceuil and his workplace – first at the keyboard in Montmartre, and later in various venues on the Left Bank. Moreover, we know that Satie used specific times of day as terms of endearment: there is, for example, a dedication to the pianist Ricardo Viñes from 1912 that reads: 'très neuf heures du matin' (very nine o'clock in the morning).[449] This did not go unnoticed by the philosopher and critic Vladimir Jankélévitch, who wrote a book on piano nocturnes subtitled: *Fauré, Chopin et la nuit, Satie et le matin* (Fauré, Chopin and the night, Satie and the morning).[450]

If we take this line of thinking a little further, a number of the piano miniatures from roughly 1911 to the time of the *Sonatine bureaucratique*, suggest some kind of cyclical or at least familiar routine: the *Berceuse* (Lullaby, 1913), for example,

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[448] 'L'artiste doit se régler. Voici l'horaire précis de mes actes journaliers. Mon lever: à7 h 18; inspire: de 10 h 23 à 11 h 47. Je déjeune à 12 h 11 et quitte la table à 12 h 14. Salutaire promenade à cheval, dans le fond de mon parc: 13 h à 14 h 53. Autre inspiration: de 15 h 12 à 16 h 07. Occupations diverses (escrimé, réflexions, immobilité, visites, contemplation, dextérité, natation, etc.): de 16 h 21 à 18 h 47.' Erik Satie, *Écrits*, ed. Ornella Volta, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1981), 22-23.
[449] The dedication is given in the *Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)*.
[450] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Nocturne: Fauré, Chopin et la nuit. Satie et le matin* (Paris: A. Michel, 1957).

describes ‘little Peter’ going to bed at the end of the day; one of the *Pièces humoristiques* from the same year tells of an imaginary sea creature who takes a ‘morning outing’, then an ‘evening return’.[451] Yet another *Pièce* from 1914, ‘Obstacles venimeux’ (Venomous Obstacles) begins with ‘the sun rising early, in good spirits’. It seems that during this phase of Satie’s career, writing a piece of music very often involved organising or collating some aspects of everyday experience. The *Petty Bureaucratic Sonata* is only the most elaborate example of a compositional strategy employed by Satie again and again. This is what I mean by composing the quotidian, and crucially, the idea cuts both ways. Tia DeNora has spoken of music in everyday life as something that can be ridden, like a bike, or a bus – something that can be used to transport the sense of self.[452] So too the routines and habits of everyday life can be thought of as a complex set of patterns with which musical and poetic form might creatively and critically engage.

Overflow

My final example comes from later in Satie’s career. To be precise, Satie was working in 1924 on the score for a short film by René Clair to be projected in the Thèatre des Champs-Elysées during the interval or *entr’acte* of the ballet *Relâche*. The opening shots of the film (pictured in fig. 1 in the Introduction to this thesis) show Satie and Francis Picabia on top of that theatre jumping around in slow motion, playing with a cannon which is eventually pointed at the camera, i.e., the audience. There follow a number of set piece cinematic experiments – dancers filmed from underneath a glass

[451] The piece in question is ‘D’Holothurie’ from the *Embryons desséchés* album.
[452] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

floor, black face balloons inflated then deflated, and a few more of what now seem like avant-garde clichés. However, the part of the film I would like to focus on comes later, after a man shooting a pigeon is himself shot in the head. Before his funeral cortège sets off, there is stillness. The only disruption to the solemn atmosphere comes from a man taking a nibble from the *couronne* (circular baguette) attached to the hearse. As soon as the procession begins, accompanied, of course, by some knocked off Chopin, the boundaries between motion, commotion, and locomotion become conspicuously blurred. Soon we are witnessing a chase sequence in which the mourners attempt to catch up with the coffin that is running away from them at ever faster speeds. As if to supplement or augment this sense of rush, a huge variety of modes of transport are depicted on the screen: cyclists, motorists, pedestrians, makeshift go-karts, horses, and fairground rides – all accompanied by propulsive cells in Satie's score, which suggest motion not only through their motoric repetition, but also through the gradual increase in pitch and the filling in of textural density from one cell to the next.[453] The overall effect is almost too much to bear. Like the banks of the Seine in the great flood of 1910 this *entr'acte* threatens to burst its boundaries. Indeed, the very last shot symbolically breaks the fourth wall as a man jumps through a screen that says 'La Fin' (The End). Before we reach that end point, the only way the film can end is by evacuating the city. Not only that, but also eviscerating the logic of the city in its simplest form: traffic. The cortège continues its journey beyond the suburbs and into the countryside, at which point the coffin falls from the carriage; from road to field, from modern circulation to magical rest. It requires a *deus ex machina* in the shape of the conductor's baton to

[453] To add to the sense of circulatory motion, in the second act of the ballet there is a 'dance of the revolving doors' and one of the actors is instructed to ride across the stage in a motorised wheelchair.

force a narrative halt to proceedings when the occupant of the coffin awakes to cast his spell over the onlookers and make each of them disappear.

I ought to make it clear that I am not only trying to draw attention to the quantity and volume of repetition in Satie's score – however much these factors might contribute to the overall effect. Rather, I aim to foreground the gesture of circulation overflowed, which is achieved by the combination of music and moving image. Crucially, this same gesture can be achieved without all of the *fortissimos* and stabbing brass, as demonstrated by the first major sound film made by *Entr'acte* director René Clair: *À Nous la Liberté* (Freedom for Us). Clair's 1933 production tells the story of two escaped convicts: one gets lucky, makes a lot of money, and builds a small industrial empire founded on the production of phonographs – a technology which, in the decades to come, would make the circulating musical commodity iconic. The other has a tougher lot and ends up working in the phonograph factory, which the film makes abundantly clear is the mirror image of prison. Predictably, all of this leads to a dénouement in which the industrialist's real identity is revealed. During a ceremony for the opening of a new factory – a ceremony presided over by an elderly gentleman played by one Vincent Hyspa, as it happens – the forces of order are gathering. The police, the bankers, they all want to regulate the system. When the expected ingenious evasion finally arrives, it is not devised by either of the central characters; it is what insurers call an act of God. The wind picks up, top hats are flying, and a suitcase full of money is blown open to the wind. In the moments that follow it looks as if the attendant bureaucrats have gone crazy: they run and duck and dive and try to get their hands on the swirling, disorderly cash. They are, of course, just doing their job. This is business as usual merely speeded up, intensified, energised. That which is solid, as the old saying goes, first melts, then takes to the air. And what do we hear during this scene? What is

in the score composed by Satie's friend and self-described 'student' Georges Auric? Nothing. Or, more precisely, we hear only the sound of the wind; a rupture in one symbolic order marked by the resurgence of another. In *Entr'acte* it was magic – *À Nous la Liberté* reveals nature. Both offer a glimpse of overcoming circulation; of a revolutionary disruption in the capitalist everyday. For a brief moment, Erik Satie's Paris both performs and is subject to a radical critique. Then the curtain opens and the second act begins.

Conclusion

In Searching for Satie's Paris

New perspectives on old routes round music and the city

Erik Satie is routinely presented as a strange individual, but he is no longer considered especially controversial. At any rate, that is the conclusion I have drawn from four years' experience of introducing my research to colleagues, friends, and politely enquiring relatives. As one would expect, there are plenty of people outside of musical and musicological circles who have never heard of Satie, and plenty within who are familiar with only the smallest sliver of his large and varied output. What is remarkable, however, is that I have not once heard anyone utter the words 'I don't like Satie's music', and I am yet to encounter a single hostile response to the historical character at the centre of this thesis. In this respect at least, Satie can legitimately be described as the antithesis of Wagner. Yet his music has not always been treated with such welcoming acceptance. In the late 1910s, Satie's newest works for the stage and salon sharply divided critical opinion, while his reputation for grumpiness and irreverence made him one of the oldest *enfants terribles* in town.[454] Near to the end of his life, the critical scales had tipped so far against him that he was famously declared dead seven months prematurely in an article by the acerbic critic Alexis Roland-Manuel, who responded to Satie's latest (and last) collaborative ballet by waving 'Adieu à Satie':

> The premiere of MM. Picabia's and Satie's 'instantaneous-ist ballet' marks an important date, no irony intended, in the annals of French music. […] Let us thank it for

[454] The phrase *enfant terrible* was popularised by Cocteau's novel of the same name: see Jean Cocteau, *Les Enfants terribles* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1929). The first English version appeared the following year: Jean Cocteau, *Enfants Terribles*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York: Brewer & Warren, 1930). The novel was subsequently made into a film by Cocteau and Jean-Pierre Melville (1950) and a 'dance opera' by Philip Glass (1996).

> proclaiming its true bankruptcy, for committing suicide so well, and for dying without beauty, doubtless so as to deter later converts from martyrdom […] *Relâche* is the most stupid and boring thing in the world. […] Adieu *Relâche*. Adieu Satie.[455]

For a long time after his death, it seemed as if the excommunication advocated by Roland-Manuel had, in fact, come to pass. Public performances of Satie's music were relatively rare throughout the 1930s and '40s, and written discussions of his work were rarer still. It took an unlikely combination of American experimentalists (led by John Cage) and suburban socialists (galvanised by Henri Sauguet) to resuscitate Satie's reputation at mid-century and to rekindle an interest in his musical contribution that has lasted more or less unbroken to the present day. One measure of Satie's well-established profile is the quantity of scholarly research undertaken into his works, writings, and social milieux. It would be surplus to requirements to list here all of the studies mentioned in the course of this thesis, but it is worth underscoring that, in addition to complete collections of his correspondence and published texts, there have been numerous biographies, systematic sketch-book studies, critical editions of even his lesser-known works, and public exhibitions in Europe, North America, and Japan.

Notwithstanding the fact that Satie first made his name mocking the very sort of academic institutions that now devote time and space to his works, he has undoubtedly been well served by recent scholarship, and even his most ardent admirers would struggle to describe him as a 'neglected' composer. It is precisely this discrepancy between the avant-garde agitator of old and the easily-assimilated eccentric of present-

[455] 'La première représentation du "ballet instantanéiste" de MM. Picabia et Satie, marque une date importante, je le dis sans ironie, dans les annales de la musique française. […] Remercions-la de proclamer sa propre faillite, de se suicider aussi bien et de mourir sans beauté, afin sans doute de décourager du martyre ses dernier prosélytes. […] *Relâche* est la chose du monde la plus ennuyeuse et la plus sottement affligeante. […] Adieu *Relâche*. Adieu Satie'. Alexis Roland-Manuel, 'Adieu à Satie', *Revue Pleyel* 15 (December 1924), 21–22. Upon Satie's death in July 1925, Roland-Manuel felt sufficiently moved to write a follow-up article for the same review: see his 'Excuses à Satie', *Revue Pleyel* 30 (March 1926), 8-9.

day accounts that first drew me to the study of Satie's music. In particular, I was concerned with how Satie's status as an artist who appeared to challenge distinctions between elite and popular musics had been viewed differently throughout the course of the twentieth century. What, if anything, did this aspect of his creative practice have to do with the shift in Satie's reputation from an antagonistic figure loathed and praised in equal measure to an emblem of harmless and inoffensive idiosyncrasy?

My hunch – and 'hunch' is the most appropriate word in this case – was that our modern or postmodern interpretation of Satie as a musician who successfully 'blurred boundaries' between hitherto separate media, genres, venues, and audiences revealed more about the aesthetic ideologies of early twenty-first century commentators than it did about the performers, listeners, and critics of Satie's day. By projecting our own visions of flattened cultural hierarchies onto the creative production of an earlier age we were in danger, I speculated, of misrepresenting and misunderstanding the tensions and complexity of musical life in turn-of-the-century Paris.[456] It was in light of these anxieties that I turned to questions of urban geography and embarked on a project provisionally entitled 'Mapping the High-Low Divide in Satie and his Circle'. The aim of this project was to use the places of the city as a way of grounding – quite literally – the lived experience of Satie's music. By focusing attention on the specific locations in which Satie had worked and with which he was most frequently associated I hoped to apply some pressure to what I considered exaggerated claims about Satie's crossing of the 'great divide'.[457]

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[456] On the flattening of hierarchies in postmodern musicology, see Robert Fink, 'Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface', in Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (eds.), *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102-37.

[457] On the 'great divide' see Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). For a recent discussion of the importance of this divide to the discourse on a musical figure

However, the more I researched this project and the more I read of cultural and urban geography, the more it became clear that the ground beneath Satie's feet was not as stable or determinate as I had imagined. To borrow a phrase once borrowed by Susan McClary: when it comes to the study of music and place it is turtles all the way down.[458] What began as a search for fixity in response to postmodern claims about stylistic liminality thus became a very different sort of enquiry into the relations between Satie's music, his biography, and the spatial cultures of the city in which he lived. Far from a 'corrective' to existing trends in Satie reception, I was increasingly convinced that the dynamic processes of accumulation, exchange, and political struggle we have learned, euphemistically, to call Paris were always already bound up with the production of Satie's distinctive musical identity. The revised task for this project, therefore, was not only to use urban geography as a way of rebutting recent characterisations of Satie as the quirky great-uncle of modern music, but also to better understand what Adam Krims has called the 'mutual conditions of possibility' of musical and urban change.[459] As Krims puts it:

> Neither production (narrowly defined, unlike in Marx's writings), nor musical culture (again, narrowly defined) evinces either a self-sufficiency or a primacy that could be isolated or treated as determinative of the other; both find unity in the context of a *totality*, and only a fetishised approach would look for some instance such as 'culture' or 'economic production' to take precedence that could then be called upon for explanatory privilege.[460]

Urban geography, like the 'economic production' to which Krims (the Marxist analyst) refers, does not reside apart from or beneath a distinct, super-structural culture of

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often presented as an exception or outsider figure, see Christopher Chowrimootoo, 'Bourgeois Opera: *Death in Venice* and the aesthetics of sublimation', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22/2 (2011), 175-216.

[458] See chapter 1 'Turtles all the way down (on the "purely musical")' in Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 1-31.

[459] Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (London: Routledge, 2007), xxi.

[460] Ibid.

music; rather, the two co-exist in a state of complex interaction and inter-dependence. Contrary to my initial motivating instincts, any attempt to oppose the 'hard' facts of where and when to the 'soft' interpretations of post-hoc humanistic scholarship risks obscuring both the materialities of musical practice and the symbolic richness of landscape and place. As I have stated throughout this thesis, the search for Satie's Paris – at least as I conceive it now – is not an attempt to identify some illusory set of restrictive co-ordinates, but a search *through* Satie's biography and reception to a broader set of questions about historical musicology, the condition of (sub)urban modernity, and the shifting relations between the two. Running throughout these questions – like the writing through the proverbial stick of rock – is the issue of Satie's difference, the expectation of exception that I highlighted in the Preface and have been returning to ever since.

It was easy to identify the trope of Satie strangeness, but it was less easy to decide what to do about it. Time and again, I have been drawn to the idea that Satie was more typical of his day than is usually suggested, more conventional in his approach to composition than is generally acknowledged, and ultimately more of a 'normal' working musician than many have cared to admit. One way or another, each of the four preceding chapters bears the trace of this attempt to normalise a famously abnormal musical personality.

Chapter 1, for example, related Satie's much-discussed experience as a commuter to the contemporary expansion of the suburbs, thus drawing attention to the historical ordinariness of travelling a number of miles to and from work; chapter 2 then demonstrated how Satie's professional dependence on the tourist dollar was entirely typical of a period in which Paris was successfully marketing itself as the tourist capital of the world; chapter 3 took up the theme of Satie's writing for the domestic piano

market, which is hardly a by-word for musical radicalism; and chapter 4 showed how Satie's interest in everyday urban life was not a unique preoccupation, but an interest shared by a great many creative workers in Third Republic Paris (and beyond).

Yet every time I came to articulate the case for Satie's ordinariness, I witnessed my arguments shift, almost imperceptibly, into something rather different: Satie may have been a commuter, but the manner in which he conducted his journeys – leisurely, voluntarily, at any time of day except the rush hour – seemed to distance his experiences from those of his suburban neighbours; similarly, there is no doubt that Satie was at times reliant on the economics of tourism, but unlike other Parisians working in the hospitality and entertainment sector, he was in a privileged position to lampoon the cultures of travel through his collaborations with parody singers in Montmartre cabarets. When it comes to the observation that Satie wrote a good deal of amateur-friendly piano music, one can hardly ignore the fact that many of these pieces came with deliberately obfuscatory (and, for many, off-putting) titles and performance markings. As for the truism that Satie did not have a creative monopoly on the urban everyday: this does little to detract from the distinctive, even unique, manner in which he engaged the fashionable tropes of modern city life. After all, how many composers approached the representation of contemporary metropolitan experience via the daily routines of imaginary sea creatures or the bureaucratic fantasies of eighteenth-century sonata subjects?

By rehearsing these arguments against and for Satie's status as an exception, I am proposing that there is no getting away from Satie's difference. Not only did he deliberately cultivate an 'Ésoterik' persona based on his habits and clothing as much as his compositional practice, but the success of this persona has ensured that his music is rarely encountered without some expectation of eccentricity. Instead of trying to solve

or resolve the question of Satie's difference, I have argued that it is more productive to let it *dissolve* into an alternative set of questions. In particular, the enduring trope of Satie's (e)strangeness can be seen to open a window onto a key set of tensions at the intersection of historical musicology, cultural history, and urban geography.[461] By addressing and redressing the pervasive decontextualisation of Satie's work I have not only related the case of Satie's Paris to a much broader debate about the 'contexts' of musical practice, but have also argued that the production of place(lessness) is inextricably linked to mobility. Whether it is Satie's repeated crossings of the sub/urban boundary or the journeys taken by audience-members to arrive in the cabarets of Montmartre, Satie's Paris simply cannot be grasped when standing still. The imaginative transitions 'from cabaret to concert hall' in the *Pièces humoristiques* or the representation of circulation in the later compositions point towards the same conclusion: in order to counter the disemplacement of Satie's creative identity we need not only to re-situate his career in specific places, but also to address his material and symbolic movements between different places. While another study of music in the city would inevitably have its own preoccupations and methodological contingencies, the notion of a mobilised sense of place – of Paris as process, and music as a dynamic component in the shifting histories of urban experience – has potential applications far beyond the bounds of this study. For now, though, it seems appropriate to end with the image of Satie in motion, not because mobility must always overtake place, but because mobility – in music and biography – so often serves to *make* place. Nowhere is the idea better expressed then in the publisher's note to Ornella Volta's account of *la Banlieue*

[461] The 'tropes' and 'windows' are a deliberate reference to the first essay in Lawrence Kramer's *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1-20.

d'Erik Satie: 'In following his route a little, his back and forth, his in-betweens, we see how a space otherwise called the city takes shape.'[462]

[462] 'A suivre un peu sa route, ses va-et-vient, ses entre-deux, on aperçoit comment reprend forme un espace où se dit autrement la ville.' 'Note de l'éditeur' in Ornella Volta, *La Banlieue d'Erik Satie* (Arcueil: Editions Macadam & Cie, 1999), 9.

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