Why and where Satie composed

Chapter 2 of Robert Orledge's book *Satie the Composer*.

'**W**ork is not always as unpleasant as books maintain', Satie told André Derain in September 1921 (Vc), in an effort to stimulate some action on their ballet *La Naissance de Venus*. Since *Parade*, Satie had instigated numerous ballet projects with Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in mind, both because he was stimulated by the fusion of the arts in the theatre and because Diaghilev allowed him financial advances on projects in hand.

..... We know this through a letter from Satie to Diaghilev in April 1924 asking him when he can draw on the account for the ballet *Quadrille* (planned with Georges Braque) and how much the "advance" is likely to be. That few of his plans materialized was not Satie's fault, for he thrived on such projects and the artistic and social opportunities they provided. The fact that the majority of the letters concerning these projects come from the summer months shows that the annual exodus of his wealthier friends for the South of France left Satie lonely and depressed in dingy Arcueil. The demand for his music dried up and so did the loans he relied on to keep body and soul together. In such moments he often questioned why he composed at all and his anger at what music had done to him ofen bursts forth in his wartime summer letters. His morale reached its nadir on 23 August 1918 when he complained to Valentine Gross that 'I am suffering too much. It seems to me that I am cursed. I loathe this beggar's life. I am looking for and want to find a position, an employment, however manial. I *shit* on Art: it has "cut me up" too often. It's a mug's game - if I may say so... For the last months and more I haven't been able to write a note.' *(1)*

But if we compare this with Satie's frame of mind when he began *Socrate*, the picture on 18 January 1917 is altogether different, especially as the Princesse de Polignac had that day sent him an advance on her far-sighted commission. Again he writes to Valentine Gross: 'I'm working on the "Life of Socrates" [the original title]. I found a fine translation. Victor Cousin's. Plato is a perfect collaborator, very gentle and never troublesome. It's a dream!... I'm swimming in happiness. At last, I'm free, free as air, as water, as the wild sheep. Long live Plato! Long live Victor Cousin! I'm free! Very free! What happiness!' (Vl, 154).

These two letters should be taken as extremes of Satie's mercurial temperament. The intervening norm (if Satie could ever be described as normal) was one of constant hard work - drafting, honing down and polishing his music with meticulous care. For Satie composed from an inner necessity, because he never seriously considered anything other than a life devoted to music. All he wished for was the freedom to compose what he wanted when he wanted, without material constraints, though the coincidence of all these ideal factors in *Socrate* was a rare event. If his financial irresponsibility only made matters worse, his precarious situation channelled his inventive mind into numerous projects as a result, for he was only truly happy when he was creative and there was a demand for his music. In short, when the way forward was clear to him.

It might also be said that Satie composed to attract attention to himself, for he thrived on notoriety and the maxim that 'there is no such thing as bad publicity'. However much he put on a brave face in public, his letters show that he hated being completely isolated for even a few days, and his uncompromising independence was only maintained at great personal cost. He welcomed artistic liaisons with flamboyant catalysts like Péladan, Jules Bois, Cocteau and Diaghilev and was probably fascinated by their immorality however much he disapproved of it. When such links were not forthcoming, he generated his own publicity - as with the foundation of the Eglise Métropolitaine d'Art (1893-5) and his successful attempt to get his ballet *Uspud* considered for the Paris Opéra (by challenging the director, Eugène Bertrand, to a duel!). As a larger-than-lifes theatrical personality he always needed to have some stage project in the offing, and in the days before television and cinema the theatre offered the greatest source of potential income for a composed But together with his financial irresponsibility there was a bizarre streak of deliberate impracticality in Satie, and his refusal to compose descriptive music to correspond with given dramatic situations meant that none of his projects in the 1890s reached the stage. As his technique improved, it naturally became more flexible, but Satie still refused to allow the theatre to dictate terms to him and his prime concerns were the integrity of his own

contribution and that it should contradict traditional expectations.
Another potential source of income was the popular song. But despite his quarter-century association with the cabarets of Montmartre (and its continuing influence on his mature music), Satie wrote relatively few original songs for this medium. Such pieces as there are belong to the years of directional uncertainty between 1897 and 1910, and mostly predate his enrolment at the Schola Cantorum in 1905. Thus, as Steven Whiting has shown (1984, 200-2), out of around 100 songs in the Harvard sketchbooks, only 28 are even likely to be original creations. And despite Satie's literary talents, only one (*Sorcière*) has a text that could be by Satie. The rest of the songs are arrangements or transpositions of works by other composers (like Paul Delmet), or of the popular tunes to which Vincent Hyspa fitted his topical ditties. For when Satie accompanied Hyspa in his engagements around the turn of the century, he seems not to have trusted his pianistic abilities in the alcoholic ambience of the *Café-concert*. Indeed, it is reported that Satie had to be locked in his room before such performances so as to remain sober. When Hyspa published his collection of fifty-one *Chansons d'humour* in 1903, only one (*Un Dîner à l'Elysée*) had music by Satie (on pp. 107-13). Thus, fulfilling a demand for cabaret music does not seem to be a valid reason why Satie composed, and in my opinion it is of lesser importance than, say, the desire to be chic and 'Parisian' that recurs increasingly in his letters of the 1920s as he revelled in his new high society contacts.

Certainly, Satie found nothing in Arcueil to inspire him. While struggling with his opera *Paul & Virginie*, he again complained to Derain in September 1921 about the endless tedium of life in Arcueil; the daily routine of coming and going with nothing really interesting to nurture the original voice he was seeking. His depressing conclusions were that ignorance was bliss in bygone days and that progress was not necessarily beneficial.

So, to a large extent, composition must also have provided a means of escape for Satie; from everyday philistinism and all that he saw as being wrong in an i nmoral materialistic society, as much as from his own highly-principled, but miserable hermeticism. His ivory tower remained impregnable only at a terrible personal cost, and his exquisite calligraphy, his obsessional drawings and devising of compositional systems, must have arisen as much from a need to fill lonely hours as from a desire to create beauty amidst ugliness and squalor His frequent rages were, I suspect, the outward evidence of an inner compositional block - for the quantity of sketches he made far outweighs his published works. He found completing pieces far harder than starting them, and when his path forward became dear in composition after 1912, so his work rate intensified in parallel.

From the evidence of his pianist friend, Jean Wiener, we know just how slowly Satie

worked in producing calligraphic miracles that were designed as much for the eye as for

the ear. 'His writing is a testimony in itself: Wiener says (20 July 1945, 4).
Total perfection; but it took him a good twenty minutes to write a six-line post- card... It happened that Satie, being at my house, wanted to write something after dinner. I left him alone (with a bottle of fine champagne nearby)... Over half an hour afterwards, he had only started to write the address, and more often than not, it was only a question of a few lines to cancel a dinner engagement.

If fellow composers like Koechlin and Faure were proud of their increased speed of working in later life, Satie's concern for visual perfection remained with him to the end. He first met Wiener in 1919, so the incident he described must have talcen place when Satie was in his mid-fifties. The laborious production of his scores must have taken even longer and became an end in itself, inseparable from the minute care of the compositional process. Satie admitted his slowness of composition to Bertrand Guegan, the editor of the *Almanach de Cocagne*, in November 1919. When Guégan sent him a poem to set for publication in his journal, Satie had to disappoint him because such a deeply-felt piece required much time for contemplation and could not be composed according to the time-scale he imposed. *(2)* it must also be said that both Satie's letters and scores, however obsessional in their neatness, still contain both corrected and unspotted errors. The very last bar Satie wrote, for instance, in the November 1924 film score of *Cinéma*, *(3)* contains a glaring and unintentional

dissonance through a missing C# in the viola part in a chord of A major.
Other inner reasons why Satie composed will doubtless emerge as more is discovered about the workings of his intricate mind, but this question is far less problematic than unravelling the mysteries of where and how he composed. How Satie composed will, I hope, gradually become clear from the subsequent detailed examples which are the *raîson d'être* of this study, but the 'where' question will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Apart from his earliest composition, a brief Allegro for piano written on a return visit to Honfleur in September 1884, all Satie's works were written in Paris or Arcueil. The early works up to the *Sarabandes* of September 1887 were composed at his Parents homes in the rue de Marseille (1885) and the boulevard Magenta (1886-7). Both his father Alfred and his step-mother Eugenie Satie-Barnetche were salon composers of a reasonable standard, and Alfred Satie ran a small music-publishing business under whose aegis Satie's *Valse-ballet* and *Fantaisie-valse* for piano appeared in 1887. *(4)* Satie's brief flirtation with bourgeois salon music in 1885 may reflect a desire to please his parents. It was the sort of music he knew his father would publish, though, to give him his due, Alfred Satie also brought out Erik's five settings of the poetry of his friend Contamine de Latour *(5)* in 1887-8 and even the first *Gymnopédie*. *(6)* Here the widely-diverging opus numbers (19-20, 52 and 62 for the earliest *Valse-ballet*) should not be taken as deliberate hoaxes (see Gillmor, 1983, 109), for his step-mother displayed the same blithe disregard for chronology. Her Bnse do soir. Nocturne published in 1883, for instance, is 'Op. 87', whereas her *Rêverie* (1888) is 'Op. 66'. All the inflated opus numbers were probably Alfred Satie's responsibility, to make his family appear more prolific and experienced than they actually were.

As soon as he could, and reputedly in the wake of an affair with a family maid, Satie left home, probably in December 1887. With 1,600 francs from his father he rented a large room at 50 rue Condorcet, Paris 9, very close to the Chat Noir cabaret where he soon gained employment as conductor of the orchestra. At the rue Condorcet Satie certainly had room for a piano, for on 20 July 1889 he advertised as a 'past pupil at the Conservatoire' for pupils to participate in 'piano classes at his home'. *(7)* In later life, however, such piano lessons as Satie gave were all at the homes of his pupils. *(8)* Here, in the shadow of La Butte Montmartre, Satie composed his three Gymnopedies in

February-April 1888, spending much of the money his father had given him on private publications of his third *Gymnopédie* in 1888 *(9)* and his four *Ogives* in 1889.' *(10)* He must have retained fairly close links with his father at this time, for both editions employed his father's printers, the Imprimerie Dupre at 26 rue du Delta, Paris 9, who may also have offered him favourable terms.

Early in 1890, however, straitened financial circumstances forced Satie to move to a smaller second-floor room at 6 rue Cortot, high in La Butte Montmartre, and 'out of reach of [hisl creditors' (Latour, 3 Aug 1925, 2). Here, surrounded by only 'a bench, a table and a chest' (Templier, 1969, 13), his Rose-Croix compositions emerged, including the nine *Danses Gothiques* written between 21 and 23 March 1893 for the greater calm and tranquillity of my soul' during his tempestuous and brief affair with his neighbour, the painter Suzanne Yaladon. Satie's spartan domestic circumstances were hardly more conducive to romance than they were to composition, but on a clear day he claimed he could see as far as the Belgian frontier from his windows. He slept on a home-made bed consisting of three boards mounted on a trestle base (Latour, 5 aug, 3), and Santiago Rusiñol's painting of the room in 1890 shows an understandably despondent Satie sitting by an empty grate, 'au coin de son froid' as Satie put it. Accounts vary as to whether Satie took his piano with him to the rue Cortot. Latour (5 Aug 1925, 3) says he did, but never played it, whereas Florent Schmitt (1913, 11) claims he never had one at all during this period. Therefore

he usually went to his friends' homes to give himself the pleasure of hearing his music other than in his head after his long and studious composing sessions in his rooms. Thus it was that the Gymnopedies and Gnossiennes were revealed to me, and I was

present when he played his first sketches for Le Fils des étoiles [1891].

As Satie composed entirely in his head, and there is no evidence of his ever revising a composition to make it more pianistic, it is of lesser concern than one might imagine whether he had a piano or not. He may have used the instrument to explore chordal progressions, and he certainly seems to have been anxious to play through works to friends, but the only record of him using a piano at all during composition comes in 1924, as we shall see, and here it was probably more a question of trying out completed passages of *Relâche* than of actually composing at the piano à la Stravinsky. Although he must have had a reasonable technique, his unpleasant years at the Conservatoire resulted in his playing the piano as little as possible in later life. *(11)* No artist's impression of his room in the 1890s reveals a piano and the only picture of Satie playing in this period (Fig- 2.2) shows him at the harmonium: an instrument he probably preferred, and for which his block-like sonorities for *Uspud* may well have been devised in 1892.

In July 1896, financial problems again forced Satie into an even smaller room at 6 rue Cortot, for which he paid his landlord (M. Bibet) 20 francs a quarter instead of 35 francs 10 centimes. This tiny ground floor room Satie called the 'placard' or cupboard - or ironically 'Notre Abbatiale' when issuing his edicts as the self-appointed 'parcier' of the Eglise Metropolitaine d'Art. It measured a mere 6 feet by 4 feet 6 inches and was 9 feet high (Latour, 5 Aug 1925, 3), with only a tiny triangular skylight to illuminate it. Here there was certainly no room for a piano, and Satie's bed and chest even prevented the door from opening: indeed, such visitors as

Satie allowed to enter the room had to climb over the bed to get in. But Satie still took his portraits by zuloaga, Comte Antoine de La Rochefoucauld, Marcellin Desbou tin , Georges de Feure and Valadon with him, and gave pride of place to the gilded mirror that can be seen in Figure 2.1. 'At night' Latour recalls *(ibid.)*, 'Satie heaped all the clothes he had onto his counterpane to keep warm, and stayed dressed down to his boots.' There does not even seem to have been room for Satie's table, but he still did the bulk of his composition here, for Schmitt recalls that 'one of the shelves served him as a writing-desks and as an altar' for his Eglise Metropolitaine (see Vl, 69). Understandably, he wrote little during this period (1896-8) but it was in these circumstances that his *Pièces froides* were written, whose title was by no means inappropriate.

Given his domestic privations, it is easy to see why Satie spent so much time at the homes of friends, and he may even have composed there too. The painter Augustin Grass-Mick recalls (1950, 7) that Satie worked at his friend Henry Pacory's home at 22 rue la Boetie, Paris 8 during this period, when the trio were inseparable. Every Friday lunchtime in the later 1890s found Satie at the bachelor flat of his friend Debussy where he was often entertained with eggs and lamb cutlets. Debussy 'possessed' the secret (*the most secret*) of these preparations', Satie later wrote (Ve, 51), though satisfying Satie's prodigious appetite cannot have been an easy task.

As a gourmet, he preferred simple, well-cooked dishes, but according to his brother Conrad (with whom he dined on Sundays) he could demolish 150 oysters or an omelette made of 30 eggs at a single sitting! Afterwards Debussy 'would spend whole afternoons' studying Satie's tearless sketches in the 1890s, according to René Peter (1944, 71), and he frequently gave him advice about his work. Whilst Satie could in reality compose anywhere, as we shall see, the bulk of his composition before the move to Arcueil seems to have been done at his own homes in the 1890s, with visits to

friends providing vital diversion and a place to discuss his works in progress.
But by 1898 Satie knew that the temptations of Bohemian life in Montmartre were impeding his composing career, and he felt the need to 'withdraw completely and begin anew. So one afternoon in October 1898, Pacory, Grass-Mick and Satie travelled to the suburb of Arcueil-Cachan where his friends helped him rent a large second-floor room at 22 (now 34) rue Cauchy, which then overlooked 'a cottage and some trees' (Grass-Mick, 1950, 7). The location was not arrived at entirely by chance, for Pacory was born there, and the room was taken over from an alcoholic celebrity of Montmartre, Bibi-la-Purée (Andre Salis), a relative of Rodolphe Salis, the phlegmatic 'bonimenteur' of Le Chat Noir. Contemporary pictures in the Musée du Vieux Montmartre show a dignified trams with an umbrella, *(12)* but Bibi-la-Purée was a friend of Verlaine, whose portrait was painted by Picasso and Jacques Villon probably due to his notoriety as the 'rod de la Bohème'. He seems to have had some fairly disgusting habits, for Satie was forced into domesticity for the only known time in his life to make his new lodgings at the Maison des Quatres Cheminées habitable. As he told his brother Conrad on 8 November 1898: 'I'm here now to rub down the floor of my room with washing soda and anoint it with soft soap; when this task is completed I shall wax the aforesaid floor myself' (Vl, 71). At first, Satie only spent odd nights in Arcueil, when he was attacked by 'mosquitoes, certainly sent by the Freemasons' (ibid.). Later in November, his 'pictures, mattress, chest and bench arrived by handcart from Montmartre, with the 'precious' items following in December. But Satie was frequently back in Paris, collaborating on theatrical projects like Jack-in-the-Box with Dépaquit and Geneviève de Brabant with Latour, which occupied much of 1899.

Somehow, from somewhere, Satie acquired two grand pianos for his new room, which he placed one on top of the other, the upper one being used as a post-box for unsolicited letters and parcels. A narrow passage with a wash-basin led into the room, though Satie had to fetch any water he needed from 'fountain in the Place des Ecoles' nearby (Templier, 1969, 26), and he rather used the passage to store the gymnastic equipment he used to keep fit. Satie soon covered up his windows to keep out both the mosquitoes and the prying gaze of curious neighbours (with binoculars), and over the next quarter-century the only living beings to penetrate his bizarre sanctuary were the occasional

stray dogs Satie took pity on. No further cleaning seems to have taken place, and nothing was thrown out. As Satie was a compulsive hoarder, by the time of his death the room had become an indescribable, filthy labyrinth with enough rubbish to fill two cart-loads. To judge from the reports of those who entered it in October 1925, Bibi-la-Purée's occupancy must have been like the Ideal Home Exhibition by comparison! Although Satie's precious paintings were protected by bits of newspapers his images had become invisible beneath the grirne. There were canes, old hats, shoes, wing collars, newspapers, scores and books (with dedications from friends like Péladan, Debussy, Ravel and Cocteau) everywhere The seven identical dun-coloured velvet suits he had bought from a small inheritance in 1895 were piled on top of an empty wardrobe, whose significance in Satie's wierd existence is anyone's guess. Bredel (1982, 79) suggests that Satie may have meditated inside it, or that it was somehow linked to his fascination with magic, ritual, sorcerers and things occult that so often surfaces in his drawings and writings. The miracle is that Satie emerged each day immaculately dressed, 'as an actor steps out of the wings' (Shattuck, 1968, 181), and rumour had it that he enjoyed a long-standing affair with a laundress in Montparnasse and did not return to Arcueil as often as he claimed. Certainly it is difficult to imagine how he kept his scores and even his sketchbooks so clean if he did indeed work much in Arcueil, and the picture in reality was a sad and far cry from the cosy domesticity of Satie's drawing on a letter to Cocteau in 1917 shown on the cover of this book. The clean table must have been as much of a myth as the caged bird and the cat, though the last two may well have been symbolic. And even here Satie is dreaming rather than composing, perhaps of an ideal existence. For he often referred ironically to his servants and his estates in letters, and despite his extreme left-wing views his vision was of a luxurious, ordered existence. His drawings are full of chateaux and castles, worlds away from his self-imposed prison in Arcueil. When Georges Auriol met him in February 1924 and asked if he was still living there, Satie replied (1924, 216): 'Alas yes, my good friend... I am searching in vain in Paris. I need something enormous, you understand... 30 rooms at least. I have so many ideas to accommodate!' While Satie may have joked to the last, there is still a pathetic element in his intransigence; in his inability to realize even the least part of his escapist vision. One might say that he only ever travelled to Brussels and Monte Carlo because he was so poor and because his work always came first. But for so progressive a composer there was a curiously insular and conservative streak in Satie's mentality. He hated travel and upheaval as much as he hated the telephone and other modern inventions. He never sought to record his music for posterity (as Debussy and Faure did), he never possessed a radio or listened to one, and he even refused to use the Métro. In short, his essential world idealized the medieval past rather than the present or the future, and he showed an unexpected distrust of modern technology and the conventional concept of progress. Only as far as music was concerned did he have a futuristic vision, which more than compensated for his other deficiencies.

What then did Satie actually create in the squalor of his room in Arcueil? Firstly, his thousands of exquisite drawings on little cards, which he stored in old cigar boxes Secondly, his articles, for we know from a letter to Constantin Brancusi that he stayed

up all night recopying his article on Debussy for *Vanity Fair* on 24 August 1922. As he reckoned on finishing 'around 7 a.m.' on the 25th, and as the article covers only eleven small quarto pages (Me, 264), Satie could therefore still only produce about one page of calligraphed prose an hour, even when working flat out to gain money. Thirdly, some of the neat drafts of his scores, for several of these are signed and dated in Arcueil in the early 1900s. And this might well extend to the later theatrical scores written to meet deadlines on which he mentions working 'day and night' - like the orchestral scores for *Le Médecin malgré lui*, *Mercure*, *Relâche* and *Cinéma* in 1923-4. Indeed, we know he worked on Relache in Arcueil, for his converge was disturbed by Satie playing one of his apparently unserviceable pianos there during the night in the summer of 1924. *(13)*

So where did Satie jot down his initial ideas, and where did he work them into shape? One answer is during his daily six-mile walks from Arcueil to Paris and back - which included many stops in cafés *en route*. According to Apollinaire (cited in Volta, 1979, 128), Satie composed mostly at night, stopping beneath each street lamp to write down

the ideas that came to him, in pencil, in the little folded notebooks he carried in his overcoat pocket. As Satie's initial ideas (especially after 1913) often took the form of simple melodies or arpeggios in straightforward rhythms, this is perfectly feasible. The individuality, residing in the harmony and texture, could be carefully realized later on. In 1918, the *Mercure de France* even pained that Satie's musical productivity had been retarded during the war because most of the street lamps had been put out in the necessary restrictions (ibid.). Perhaps the most celebrated account of Satie's nocturnal creation comes from the poet Blaise Cendrars (1952, 209-10), who found the composer recumbent at the foot of the Obelisk in the Place de la Concorde during a night of heavy bombardment on 13 March 1918.

I stooped over him, thinking him dead. What are you doing there?' I asked him. He replied: 'I know very well that it's ridiculous and that l'm not in a shelter. But what do you know, this thing shot up in the air and I had the sensation of being at the shelter. Then I wrote some music for the Obelisk... It's music for the lady Pharaoh who is buried below. No-one ever thinks of her. It took this ghastly bombardment to bring me here; for the first tirne. Not a bad story, eh?' And he sniggered, with his hand over his beard, as he often did, his wicked eyes examining the monument... 'Do you know who is buried here?' I asked Satie. 'It seems it's the mummy of Cleopatra. At least, that's what I heard.' 'You don't say so', Satie replied. 'In that case I was right to write her a bit of music. Listen:
Ha, tara, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta,
Ta, tara, ta, ta, ta, ta...
Fa, do-o, sol, re, la, mi, si - Fa, do-o, sol, re, la, mi.'

The result may have been something like Ex. 1, if the story is true. I have found no sign of this little march in Satie's sketchbooks, but he was preoccupied with the perfect fourth and fifth at the time of *Socrate*, so this typically bizarre anecdote cannot be so easily dismissed.

Ex. 1 Music for the mummy of Cleopatra (1918)

If we consider the effect of walking on Satie the composer, some fascinating possibilities emerge Roger Shattuck, in conversation with John Cage and Alan Gillmor (Cage, 1982, 25), whilst discussing the effect of deliberate boredom in Satie's music, put forward his 'pet theory' that

the source of this in Satie, as it may have been in quite different terms in Wordsworth or Rimbaud, is the act of walking. Satie walked endlessly across Paris... Someone calculated that Wordsworth in his lifetime walked 24,000 good English miles... And Rimbaud walked everywhere; Vachel Lindsey, Mayakovsky, and there are many other instances. These are all poets or musicians who composed while putting one foot in front of the other in a fairly boring, if you want, physical act, which nevertheless has its relationship to the heart-beat and the universe. I think that the source of Satigs sense of musical beat - the possibility of varistion within repetition, the effect of boredom on the organism - my be this endless walking back and forth across the same landscape day after day, and finally taking it all in, which is basically what Thoreau did: the total observation of a very limited and narrow environment.

This line of reasoning has much to commend it, for almost all Satie's pre-Arcueil music has a slow, or very slow, pulse while the faster, more mechanical regularity all belongs

to the latter half of his career. *Parade*, with its constant pulse of seventy-six beats per minute, may thus reflect Satie's walking speed in 'slow. deliberate steps' (Templier, 1969, 56) as much as the human heart-beat if Satie rarely spoke about his music to others, it must have been constantly evolving and processing itself in his mind (I should love to know in how many parts), and its absence of expressiveness and sentimentality surely reflects the drab and often dangerous areas through which he walked - 'the uncivilized quarters of la Glacière and la Santé' (Auriol, 1924, 211), or the 'smelly tanneries of Gentilly' (Templier, 1969, 22-3). Satie had an intimate knowledge of the history of old Paris, and his varied music was at one with the environments in which he moved, from the Montmartre cabarets, through the cafés of Montparnasse, to the sheer ordinariness

of the long walk home through the industrialized areas in the early hours.
The elaboration of initial ideas with novel harmonic progressions must have taken place during the daytime when Satie's mind was fresheL The daily walk into Paris was a more leisurely affair, with extended pauses in favourite cafés for refreshment and composition, before Satie began the series of meetings, visits and meals in the afternoon and evening which he had arranged beforehand by letter. Much of his music was composed *chez* Tulard, a small, inexpensive café opposite the church in Arcueil. Satie transferred his allegiance there shortly after 1900 when the attentions of'old Mother Geng' at the first cheap restaurant he chose proved too distracting to his work (Templier, 1969, 26). Chez Tulard, Satie had a regular table set aside, complete with the red and black inks he used at this period, and here many of his works, from *The Dreamy Fish* onwards were composed. Indeed, the neat copies marked 'Arcueil' may have originated here too, or in the bistro below his room in the rue Cauchy. As far as the notebooks were concerned, Satie's first thoughts went down in penal, being inked over in black when Satie was sure of his inspiration. If the work was to be published he made a neat printer's copy, often in another notebook, for he preferred not to mix works from one book to another. Usually, only works for larger forces were copied on separate sheets of manuscript paper, as Satie's music was for the most part expressible on the six or seven staves his oblong notebooks offered (right up to the orchestral drafts of *Parade* and *Socrate*). The absence of food and drink stains throughout his manuscripts reflects their importance to him and the care he took over their visual appearance. *(14)* Templier (1969, 35), from evidence given him by Conrad Satie, says that most of the 1913-14 piano pieces (including the *Croquis et agaceries*, the *Embryons desséchés* and the *Sports et divertissements*) were composed here too, and
he implies that Satie sometimes stayed *chez* Tulard most of the day.
He would arrive at about eleven in the morning, drink a beer, smoke his cigars, chat with the other clients and suddenly bring from his pocket one of his little notebooks. Oblivious to all, he would slowly cover the score with well-formed notes. Friends would greet him, but he would not answer; yet the next day he would seriously accuse them of bad manners.

If Satie had afternoon appointments in Paris; he would move on more quickly. He

hated sunshine, *(15)* and bad weather was a positive encouragement to him.
At Verrieres, dufing a certain period of Satie's life, the owner of a wine shop would always say to his wife, whenever the weather looked bad: 'Today, it will rain all day; doubtless we shall see the gentleman of Arcueil. At noon, Satie would appear under his umbrella.

He may have composed here too.
Once in Paris, Satie patronized various establishments at different times, depending on his current friends and artistic interests. When he was not composing he was a lively conversationalist, and café society kept him up to date with the latest ideas and gossip. Although he died from cirrhosis of the liver and drank increasingly as he grew older, Cocteau rightly maintained that 'alcohol had no effect on his work' (Me, 262). The only

time he went 'over the top' was during New Year's Eve festivities in the 1920s. On 31 December 1921 he apologized to the Comte de Beaumont for missing his evening party, since post-prandial drinking at a Paris café had temporarily incapacitated him. But the fact that Satie carefully wrote the letter that evening means that he was never out of control, and the likelihood is that he preferred drinking informally with friends to a smart society party. He must have varied his drinks as much as his venues, for his favourite tipples vary between accounts. Auric says 'he boldly mixed beer and calvados' (1952, 122); Robert Caby says kirsch was his favourite (1929, 5); whereas Sauguet says it was mixing eau-de-vie and beer that killed him (1983, 248). Satie also liked cognac and wine, and his main lament was that 'one finds in every bar people willing to treat you to a glass, but none of them will think of lining your stomach with a sandwich!' (Lanser, 1925). Thus, although Satie maintained in his 1922 article 'Painful Examples' (Ve, 56-8; W, 121-2) that he preferred brasseries (pubs), and advised young people not to frequent cafés, he admitted that 'I have done a lot of work there.' And he listed creators like Villon, Boileau and La Fontaine amongst the 'many famous people who have not wasted their time there'. Racine, for instance, wrote *Les Plaideurs* in the tavern '*Bouteille d'Or* in the place du Cimetière- Saint-Jean (now the site of the Lobau barracks)', and if this sort of behaviour was good enough for Racine, it was certainly good enough for him.

The other locale where we know Satie composed was Le Lion, a café-tabac in the place Denfert-Rochereau in Montparnasse. Here, Pierre de Massot says (1952, 125-6), Satie wrote much of *Parade* in 1916-17, and Satie's letters to Jean Guérin imply that he also worked on his recitatives for *Le Médecin malgré lui* here in September 1923. So it is reasonable to suppose that Satie also composed there in the interim, and he may well have had a table ready prepared for him there too (as he had *chez* Tulard) Other favourite cafés in this period include Spielmann's (1914f.), La Rotonde (a meeting place for the Cubists around 1916) and, in the 1920s, *chez* Graff (rue Saint-Lazare) Les Deux Megots (place St-Germain-des-Pres), Le Boeuf sur le Toit (rue Boissy-d'Anglas) and Le Petit Napolitain (boulevard Montparnasse). But the list is endless and there is no specific information as to whether Satie composed in any or all of these. Understandably, he did not work in restaurants, but he often dined with friends like Pierre de Massot and his wife Robbie at venues such as the Grill-Room Medicis, Le Nègre de Toulouse (boulevard Montparnasse), Le Pied de Mouton (near the Gare d'Austerlitz) and *chez* Stryx (rue Huyghens), most of them appropriately near the Gare de Scéaux where Satie would try to catch his last (00.50) train back to Arcueil, if indeed he did always return there.

In reality, as we have seen, Satie could and did compose anywhere. In his pre-Arcueil years he wrote mainly in his lodgings, but after 1898 a pattern built up of notating ideas at night on foot which he then worked on in cafés during the daytime. Obviously, this is only a partial picture and I shall welcome more information on the subject. But it is safe to say that the café was the lifeblood of Satie's existence, rather than one of the 'seven deadly sins' that it represented for Péladan and his Rosicrucian circle. *(16)*

Notes:

1. Vc, original letter in the collection of Thierry Bodin.

2. Satie sent the little *Marche de Cocagne* for two trumpets instead for the first (1920) edition of Guégan's *Almanach de Cocagne*, where it appeared as the frontispiece.

3. OS in *US-AUS*, 56, bar 4, dated '[10] Novembre 1924'.

4. As musical supplements to Alfred Satie's *La Musique des familles* on 17 March and 28 July 1887 respectively. At that time the administrator of this revue was Edmond Bailly, who later founded the celebrated Librairie de l'Art Independant, under whose

auspices the esoteric journal *Le Coeur* was published (to which both Erik and Conrad Satie contributed in the 1890s).

5. A Spanish-born poet, whose full name was José-Maria Vincente Ferrer, Francisco de Paula, Patricio Manuel Contamine (1867-1926). He was known to his friends as Patrice Conta- mine, but signed himself Contamine de Latour or Lord Cheminot (around 1900). Satie was closest to him in the years 1886-92 and 1900-5, when they collaborated on numerous songs and theatrical projects.

6. In *La Musique des familles*, 18 Aug 1888. The origin of the title *Gymnopédie* may have come from a line in Latour's poem *Les Antiques*, published in the same issue.

7. I am indebted to Steven Whiting for this information, which comes from the journal *Le Chat Noir*.

8. Such as Mlle Berka, whose name and address Satie noted on the cover of Ho 9, probably in 1907, together with the time of her lesson (4 pm). In 1911 he told his brother Conrad that 'While I was studying I gave lessons and earned a royal living' (Vl, 28).

9. 'One of the most beautiful', as Satie described it in *La Lanteme japonaise*, 1/6 (1 Dec 1888), 3.

10. His amusing advertisement in *Le Chat Noir* of 9 Feb 1889 ran as follows: 'The indefatigable Erik Satie, the male sphinx, the composer with the wooden head, announces the ap- pearance of a new work which, henceforth, he holds in the highest esteem. It is a suite of melodies conceived in the mystico-liturgical vein that the author idolizes, with the suggestive title *The Ogives*.'

11. Whenever he played duets he preferred to be partnered by women. As he told Henri-Pierre Roché in 1918 (document in *US-AUS*), they were 'decidedly more intelligent than men'. He also requested '*one* female virtuoso of enormous malice' to play his piano pieces in America when trying to arrange a tour there in 1919, and he confided many of his later Premières to Marcelle Meyer. There may, however, have been other, less artistic, reasons behind his preference for lady pianists.

12. See Jullien, 1977, 168. La Purée is slang for poverty. Herbert (1962, 2; 1967, 279) says that he was a grocer from Lyon, a virtually illiterate hanger-on, who nonetheless wrote

some poetry. Vl, 70 says his portrait was also painted by Steinlen.

13. See Caby, 1950, 6. 'The other lodgers pardoned him' for this unusual disturbance, however. Satie's derelict pianos were bought by Derain and Braque after his death. Neither had been tuned in twenty-five years, and Satie's repairs consisted of tying on the pedals with string. How much use they were to him in composing *Relâche* is a moot point. The scores of *Jack-in-the-Box* and *Geneviève de Brabant* (which Satie thought
he had lost on a bus) were found behind these pianos in October 1925.

14. He was so worried about a tiny grease-mark on a letter to Roché in 1919 (*US-AUS*) that he wrote a special postscript laying the blame on the postman who delivered it! Even so, there is no visible blemish on the *pneumatique* in question, and Satie was probably more concerned about the way the ink had run on his signature.

15. In Conrad Satie's record of a conversation with his brother on 21 October 1914 (*US-AUS*) that he noted Satie's remark that he 'didn't like the sun [which] was his personal enemy. Brutal. He spoke ill of it.' In many ways Conrad's protective relationship with his eccentric and talented brother can be compared to that of Theo for Vincent van Gogh.

16. Cited in Ve, 262. The other deadly sins were clubs, newspapers, gambling, sports, brothels and the café-concert, from which the moralistic Satie only indulged in the second and the last (as far as is known).