Ambient Music as Popular Genre: Historiography, Interpretation, Critique

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ABSTRACT

In September 1978, Brian Eno coined the term "Ambient music" to describe a type of audio recording designed to create atmosphere. Ambient music, he proposed, should foster calm while registering doubt, and accommodate various different levels of listening attention. Since Eno's proposal, Ambient music has become a genre of drone- and loop-based electronic music within the popular music market.

This dissertation examines several key recordings in the formation of the Ambient genre of popular music, with focus on releases from the U.S. and England between the late 1960s and early 1990s. Through music analyses of these recordings, as well as media analyses of their promotional rhetoric, this dissertation traces the sonic tropes and social practices discursively organized by the "Ambient" label. It describes how Ambient music serves users as a means of relaxing, regulating mood, and fostering an atmosphere or sense of place. Unlike most extant accounts of the genre, it also explores how Ambient recordings reflect aesthetically upon their instrumentality through musical techniques, metaphors, and moods. A survey of approximately one-hundred Ambient listeners rounds out the study, illuminating from a diachronic perspective how reception practices relate to the production and interpretation of Ambient recordings.

Chapters 1 and 3 examine two proto-Ambient recordings from the *Environments* series of LPs (Atlantic, 1969–78), released by Syntonic Research, Inc. These analyses elucidate the aesthetics and technological uses that have since consolidated Ambient music as a genre, with special focus on shifting attitudes toward consumer technology in the Western environmental and countercultural movements. Chapter 2 compares and contrasts *Environments* with recordings from the concurrently emerging Acoustic

Ecology movement.

Chapters 4 and 5 investigate various artistic and conceptual practices that informed Brian Eno's conception of Ambient music. Chapter 4 identifies precedents for Eno's concept in the experimental avant-garde practices of Erik Satie, John Cage, La Monte Young, and Steve Reich. Chapter 5 analyzes the title recording on Eno's *Discreet Music* album (Obscure, 1975), placing its production in the context to 1960s and '70s English experimentalism, as well as the research field of cybernetics. It concludes with a media analysis of the record as a consumer product, illustrating how the elimination of authorial intention in experimental composition and cybernetics translates into popular art.

Chapters 6 and 7 outline Ambient music's explicit emergence as a term in the popular music market. Chapter 6 examines Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* (Editions E.G., 1978) through a comparative analysis with The Black Dog's *Music for Real Airports* (Soma Quality Recordings, 2010), illuminating the relevance of Ambient music's contexts of consumption to interpretation. It concludes with a brief reading of Eno's *On Land* (Editions E.G., 1982), which cemented Ambient music's significance within private, individualized reception. Chapter 7 concludes the study with an overview of various recordings by The Orb, KLF, Mixmaster Morris, and Pete Namlook in the "ambient house" subgenre of electronic dance music, illustrating their connections with the aesthetic themes and promotional discourses of earlier Ambient recordings.

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Ambient Music in an Age of Ubiquitous Listening

In the liner notes to his 1978 album, *Music for Airports*, experimental artist and pop musician Brian Eno coined the term "Ambient music" to describe a new type of recorded audio. Ambient music, Eno announced in the manifesto, would be music made for use as "an atmosphere, or a surrounding influence: a tint." Eno devoted the rest of the essay to distinguishing Ambient music from "conventional" background music, singling out the symphonic pop arrangements created by the Muzak corporation as a contrasting example. Ambient music, he famously concluded, should "accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting."[1]

Today, nearly forty years since *Music for Airports* first appeared, people throughout the industrialized world use recorded music of many different kinds as ambience. In public and private places alike, from shoe stores and gyms to bedrooms and bars, people program anything from classical concerti to Top 40, blues to *bossa nova*, electro-funk to hardcore punk. Inhabitants adeptly shuttle between more or less attentive modes of listening, often within a single song or piece. The practices of programming and reception for which Eno designed Ambient music seem to have become, in the portable and streaming audio environments of the 21st century, ubiquitous.

For this reason, some scholars have treated Eno's Ambient idea as divinatory. David Toop's monograph *Ocean of Sound* explores how atmospheric music like Ambient

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[1] Brian Eno, liner notes to *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, Editions E.G. AMB 001, 1978, LP.

prepared 20th-century listeners for "the electronic ocean of the next century." "As the

world has moved towards becoming an information ocean," Toop wrote in the early

1990s, "so music has become immersive."[2] Mark Prendergast has similarly asserted, in

his encyclopedic guide to atmospheric music's recorded history, that the availability of

practically any music in digital form has "rendered all recorded music, by definition,

Ambient."[3] Yet others have called Eno's Ambient idea obsolete for the same reasons.

Anahid Kassabian and Joseph Lanza, in particular, have dismissed or diminished the

relevance of the Ambient genre to contemporary listening practices, now that all kinds of

musical recordings serve both attentive and inattentive listening.[4] Because so many

different kinds of recorded music are now used and heard as atmospheres, the need to

identify a special sort of music for these uses and practices seems to have disappeared.

Despite all this, music listeners, producers, DJs, scholars, and journalists

throughout North America and Europe still identify Ambient as a specific musical genre.

Internet-based radio services like iTunes, Pandora, and Live365 have Ambient music

stations; streaming audio hosts like Soundcloud and Bandcamp allow producers and

distributors to tag music as "ambient"; writers for online popular music magazines like

Pitchfork, Resident Advisor, FACT, and XLR8R commonly use the term as a musical

descriptor; and record producers continue to release new music under the Ambient

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[2] David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), v.
[3] Mark Prendergast, *The Ambient Century: From Mahler to Trance: The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2000), 4.
[4] Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 5; Joseph Lanza, *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong* (New York: Picador, 1995), 197.

banner. London-based web magazine FACT even ran an article at the end of 2014 with

the headline, "When Did Ambient Music Last Have It So Good?"[5] Consumers from

around the globe also commonly identify as Ambient music fans, host Ambient music

parties and radio shows, attend all-night Ambient raves and "sleepovers," and participate

in online communities dedicated to the genre. Something called "Ambient music, in

short, is alive and well, nearly forty years since Eno's manifesto.

So what does it mean to typify music as Ambient at a time when people treat

many different types of music as both ignorable and interesting? To answer this question,

it is important to distinguish two ways in which English speakers typically use the word

"ambient" to describe music. The first usage, which I designate with the common, lower-

cased "ambient," addresses a reception condition in which music appears as "an

atmosphere, or a surrounding influence," and in which people accordingly treat music

with varying degrees of attention. This use of the word does not identify particular

aesthetic conventions or audiences, but instead describes a reception condition in which

music appears. Anahid Kassabian has usefully termed this condition "ubiquitous

listening," a social condition that has historically resulted from changes in global

capitalism and audio technology in the 20th century.[6] Thanks to mass audio reproduction

and distribution, music listening is no longer cordoned off through collective social ritual

from other habitual and workaday activities, but now accompanies daily living around the

clock. For Kassabian, ubiquitous music's everywhere-and-everyday pervasiveness entails

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[5] Joe Muggs, "Return to the Chill-Out Room: When Did Ambient Music Last Have It So Good?," *FACT Magazine*, October 9, 2014, http://www.factmag.com/2014/10/09/ambient-2014-round-up-joe-muggs/.
[6] Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, 1–19.

that it's never only listened to for its own sake, never taken in solely for aesthetic pleasure or cognition; rather, "There always is something else going on."[7] Ubiquitous listening, along these lines, refers to "a range of partially attentive listenings"[8] to musics that "take place alongside other activities."[9]

The second usage of "Ambient" to describe music, while related to ubiquitous music, is not equivalent. In this usage, "Ambient" identifies a musical genre. (Although people do not typically capitalize the word "Ambient" in this manner, I will do so throughout this study in order to clarify these different usages.) To call music "Ambient" in this way communicates something about sound, independently of the reception settings in which it appears—which may seem paradoxical here, since the Ambient label refers directly to a reception condition in which music appears to listeners as "ambient" (or "ubiquitous"). And indeed, as I explain throughout this study, the Ambient sound and its reception conditions are very much intertwined. Musical genres, however, also identify and extrapolate upon histories of aesthetic conventions, social uses, and cultural resonances. In the case of Ambient music, the genre names the reception condition of "ambient music" as a social and aesthetic theme, and responds to this condition in a culturally particular manner. In this way, the term "Ambient," as a name for a genre, not only performs a regulative function within the social and technological situations of ubiquitous listening, but also informs people's aesthetic expectations of sound apart from

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[7] Elena Boschi, Marta Garcia Quiñones, and Anahid Kassabian, "Introduction: A Day in the Life of a Ubiquitous Musics Listener," in *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don't Always Notice*, ed. Marta Garcia Quiñones, Anahid Kassabian, and Elena Boschi, Popular and Folk Music (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 7.

[8] Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, xxiv.

[9] Boschi et al., "Introduction," 7.

these situations. The following study, in its concern with Ambient music as a genre, establishes the aesthetic conventions and technological practices through which it has historically acquired these organizing functions.

Ambient Music as Popular Genre

This dissertation examines key recordings in the historical formation of the Ambient genre of popular music, with focus on releases from the U.S. and England spanning roughly twenty-five years, from 1969 to 1994. Ambient music has, since its inception, largely thrived on the mass production, distribution, and consumption of audio recordings, as well as the promotion of these recordings through mass media. Through music analyses of these recordings, as well as media analyses of their promotional rhetoric, this dissertation traces the sonic tropes and discursive terms through which the "Ambient" label emerged. Situated alongside related musical genres and cultural practices, these analyses also identify the social values and ideals articulated by Ambient music.

A survey of approximately one hundred Ambient listeners rounds out this study. This survey offers a present-day empirical basis for understanding how production and reception practices inform one another within the Ambient genre construction. I sent out this survey in August 2013, addressing Ambient listeners on online message boards and mailing lists dedicated to the genre. (The full results can be viewed in the Appendix.) In one open-ended question, I asked, "How would you define 'ambient music'?" Many respondents answered with descriptions similar to Eno's, with a few deferring to his original 1978 definition. Yet I also received all sorts of descriptors beyond this original

formulation: Ambient music is "experimental," "introspective," "spacey," "electronic," "beatless," "formless," "slow," "static," "mood enhancing," and "ego-free"; it is "music to chill to," "music to take you on a journey," and "a soundscape of a certain feeling or environment"; it is music that "de-emphasizes clear rhythms and quick-moving melodic lines," music "with an emphasis on texture, tone, and 'atmosphere,'" music with "constant tones" or with "elements of drone"; and it is music "that some might fail to classify… as music at all." Combined with Eno's description, these responses paint a provisional picture of the Ambient concept and sound: Ambient music is unobtrusive electronic music, made using sustained tones, that fosters an atmosphere, mood, or sense of place, often with a calming effect. In working from this present-day notion, my study offers a diachronic rather than synchronic narrative of Ambient music's formation, to find how the genre arrived at its contemporary conception.

That said, the purpose of this study is not to "define" or formally categorize Ambient music. Formal genre definitions are inherently limiting, as they inevitably exclude some music considered part of that genre, while also including music that has little to do with its particular contexts of circulation.[10] Instead, my analyses bring together significant historical, cultural, social, and aesthetic factors that have contributed to the genre's formation, and that have became potently articulated in particular recordings. By placing these recordings in a historical constellation,[11] this study illuminates the

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[10] Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 1–19.

[11] I borrow the notion of "constellation" from Walter Benjamin, for whom the constellation or "virtual arrangement" of empirical phenomena illuminates an organizing idea; see Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998), 34–35.

chronological development of the Ambient genre, as well as the cultural habits it encodes and mobilizes. My conception of genre thus follows Stephen Neale, who regards genres primarily as "systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject."[12] Musical genres do not exist to pin down sounds, but rather to put sounds into play via culturally learned practices and meanings. In the case of popular music, these practices and meanings necessarily arise within, and in relation to, the commercial markets through which it circulates. Popular music genres unite a conception of how music sounds with a notion of who will consume it, defining musician and audience jointly.[13] Accordingly, the studies that follow elucidate how Ambient music's market presentation integrated sound with sales pitch to secure a reliable consumer submarket. They show how Ambient producers created and sustained a consumer submarket not only with their recorded aesthetic designs, but also in the ways they recommended consumers use these recordings. Genres consolidate markets and music alike by instructing listeners in how to interact with the media they mobilize. Accordingly, I describe how Ambient recordings promote a range of appropriate settings, comportment, and modes of attention through which listeners might use and hear them.

Ambient music's instantiation and distribution through recorded media also informs why I identify Ambient music as a *popular* genre of music. "Popular," itself a

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[12] Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: BFI, 1980), 19.

[13] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 75–95; Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). These scholars also discuss how "genre cultures" or "genre worlds" arise out of the interaction between commerical institutions, promotional media, musicians, and listeners. Although this study includes a reception study, my main focus is on the role of aesthetics within these formations.

musical genre (or perhaps meta-genre), typically distinguishes music from "art" and

"traditional" musics based on its artistic conventions and primary modes of transmission.

Since the late 19th century, popular music has been produced, promoted, and consumed

through a globalizing capitalist marketplace of mass-reproduced commodities, and has

especially relied on audio recordings as a means of mass circulation since the 1930s in

the U.S. and Western Europe.[14] Because this study locates Ambient music as arising

historically, and sustained culturally, via the mass production, reproduction, distribution,

and consumption of recordings, it recognizes Ambient music as a popular genre.

This study brings together three sets of recordings in the formation of the

Ambient genre: 1) the *Environments* series of LPs released by Syntonic Research, Inc.

between 1969 and 1978; 2) three Ambient albums released by Brian Eno between 1973

and 1982; 3) various recordings in the "ambient house" subgenre of electronic dance

music released between 1989 and 1994. These studies, in addition to illuminating the

formation of Ambient, address some historiographic gaps in other musical histories: 1)

psychedelic music, which mainly focuses on rock and electronic dance music;[15] 2)

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[14] Philip Tagg identifies popular music primarily based on the mass distribution of recordings; see Tagg, "Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice," *Popular Music* 2, Theory and Method (1982): 41. Richard Middleton notes that mass distribution is not a sufficient condition for popular music, which must be understood (as it is in this study) as articulated within a particular historical-cultural field; see Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Bristol, PA: Open University Press, 1990), 3–16. On the early history of popular song's mass distribution in the U.S., see David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 18–55.

[15] On psych rock, see Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Ann Johnson and Mike Stax, "From Psychotic to Psychedelic: The Garage Contribution to Psychedelia," *Popular Music and Society* 29, no. 4 (October 2006): 411–25; Edward L. Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford

minimalist music, which largely focuses on concert music;[16] and 3) popular electronic

music, which focuses primarily on dance-oriented musics (e.g. trance, hip hop), and

occasionally electronica, industrial, and noise musics, but rarely Ambient.[17] The

dissertation, as with the Ambient genre, puts into dialogue different kinds of music and

audio that aren't normally thought of together (e.g. experimental music, nature sounds,

easy listening, house). At the same time, it bridges some historical and conceptual gaps in

scholarship on music and the counterculture in the U.S. and U.K., which generally skips

from rock to electronic dance music, deep ecology to technological utopianism, and

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University Press, 1997); Russell Reising, "Melting Clocks and the Hallways of Always: Time in Psychedelic Music," *Popular Music and Society* 32, no. 4 (October 2009): 523–47; Sheila Whiteley, *The Space between the Notes: Rock and the Counter-Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992). On electronic dance music as psychedelic music, see Matthew Collin, *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House*, rev. ed. (London: Serpent's Tail, 2009); Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (Berkeley: Soft Skull, 2012). Bridging both rock and electronic dance music is Jim DeRogatis, *Turn on Your Mind: Four Decades of Great Psychedelic Rock* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2003).

[16] One significant exception to this tendency is Robert Fink's cultural history of musical minimalism in the U.S., which addresses Ambient music in the context of 1960s and '70s record consumption; see Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 200–01. See also Jonathan W. Bernard, "Minimalism and Pop: Influence, Reaction, Consequences," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 337–55.

The full extent of scholarship on minimalist music is too wide to list here; the most comprehensive surveys of minimalist music's history include Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Richard Taruskin, "A Harmonious Avant-Garde?," in *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 6, Music in the Late Twentieth-Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 351–410.

[17] Ambient music receives short expositions in Nick Collins, Margaret Schedel, and Scott Wilson, *Electronic Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Joanna Demers, *Listening through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

modernist to postmodern value systems between the early 1970s and late 1980s.[18] This study suggests continuity between these genres and ideologies in the technologized practices of Ambient music production and consumption.

Each case study within this dissertation approaches Ambient music at the intersection of three contexts: 1) distribution context of commercial records made for selective, private, and individual consumption; 2) aesthetic context of minimalism, in which drone and/or looping repetition create musical consistencies that condition de-concentrated modes of listening; and 3) reception context of high-middlebrow (and/or "countercultural") consumers maintaining social identity and lifestyle through private record listening. These contexts for Ambient music have been observed and elaborated to a small degree by a handful of music scholars.[19] Just as often, however, one or more of these contexts is disregarded in scholarly narratives around Ambient music.[20] In the next three sections of this introduction, I address these three contexts, respectively, in regards to the historiography, interpretation, and critique of Ambient music.

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[18] Hicks, *Sixties Rock*; Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Macan, *Rocking the Classics*; Whiteley, *The Space between the Notes*; Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower, *Countercultures and Popular Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

[19] Eliot Bates, "Ambient Music" (M.A. Thesis, Wesleyan University, 1997); Demers, *Listening through the Noise,* 117–20; Joseph Lanza, *Elevator Music*, 194–202; Paul Roquet, "Ambient Landscapes from Brian Eno to Tetsu Inoue," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 21, no. 4 (December 2009): 264–83.

[20] Aside from those mentioned elsewhere in this Introduction, these include Jonathan W. Bernard, "Minimalism and Pop"; Timothy Richardson, "Brian Eno and the Music of the Spheres: The Possibility of a Postmodern Church," in *Medievalism and the Academy II: Cultural Studies*, ed. David Metzger (London: Boydell & Brewer, 1999), 216–31; Daniel Siepmann, "A Slight Delay: Agency and Improvisation in the Ambient Sound World," *Perspectives of New Music* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 173–99; Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988).

Historiography

My approach to Ambient music countervails two tendencies among music historians, both of which place Ambient music at a remove from its primary contexts of distribution and consumption. On the one hand, writers sometimes characterize Ambient music primarily as a compositional development or innovation in Western art music. On the other, some compare Ambient music with what sellers and scholars call "programmed music," or music used as "background" in public places.[21] Both of these historiographic tendencies align closely with Brian Eno's first stated intentions for Ambient music, as he initially placed his idea in alignment with art music composition, and in opposition to programmed musics like Muzak. Yet even as Ambient music responds to, and partakes in, aspects of these musical and technological practices, its most relevant contexts of distribution and reception lie instead in the popular music market. Hence, although this study pays close attention to Eno's art music affiliations (Ch. 4) and anti-Muzak distinctions (Ch. 6), it historicizes the genre from its present-day formation, rather than from Eno's at its inception. This study thus illustrates how Ambient music developed into a genre and global listening culture largely through the private, individualized, and selective consumption of recordings.

Ambient music indeed complicates the distinction between art and popular music, in particular due to the genre's aesthetic affinities with post-war U.S. and British experimental composition. Chapters 3 through 5 here, and in particular Chapter 4,

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[21] On programmed music, see Jonathan Sterne, "Sounds like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space," *Ethnomusicology* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 22–50.

identify various precedents for Ambient music in this field of avant-garde art music, with special focus on minimalism. Like the minimalist music that came before, Ambient music has attracted listeners with interest in both contemporary art and popular musics. The high-middlebrow "genre cultures" surrounding Ambient music throughout its history have accordingly preserved certain aesthetic and social values expressed in both.[22] In focusing on commercial recordings, this study emphasizes how Ambient music constructs and reproduces the values of the experimental avant-garde via commodities that inform consumers' everyday lives and identities.

A number of histories oriented primarily around Western art music instead treat Ambient's historical import as a compositional innovation or trend detached from the consumer marketplace. Such histories normally focus on Ambient music's concern with, or thematization of, the listening atmosphere. Thom Holmes's textbook history of electronic and experimental music, for instance, groups the Ambient work of Brian Eno and Harold Budd with the live electronic music compositions and improvisations of John Cage, David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, Robert Ashley, AMM, and Musica Elettronica Viva, as well as the "environmental" or nature-oriented electronic pieces of Max Neuhaus, David Behrman, Wendy Carlos, and Annea Lockwood. These artists' works during the latter half of the 20th century frequently explored the nature of acoustic spaces or environments in some manner or another. This grouping, however, fails to distinguish

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[22] This study thus expands upon existing research on avant-gardism in popular music such as Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Elizabeth Ann Lindau, "Art Is Dead. Long Live Rock! Avant-Gardism and Rock Music, 1967–99" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2012).

between music that utilizes improvised sound, unintentional "field" sounds, or the

ambience of particular spaces; and audio recordings designed to affect individual

listeners' atmospheres and/or moods. (I expand upon these differences in approach to

environments in Chapters 2 and 4.)

Mark Prendergast's and David Toop's histories of Western music in the 20th

century both use Ambient music to represent a trend away from temporal, linear, or

narrative musical form, and towards something more spatial, surrounding, or open-ended.

Both histories freely move across genre boundaries, which David Toop argues "lay claim

to the creation of order and sense but actually serve business interests."[23] Suspicious of

labels like "Ambient" as either "media shorthand or a marketing ploy,"[24] Toop instead

performs a freewheeling, non-chronological exploration of "ambient sound" in 20th-

century music—largely, but not exclusively, of the Western avant-garde.[25] Prendergast

similarly treats Ambient music as more of a meta-genre in which all sorts of art and

popular music developments played out.[26] Yet what these histories gain in lateral

aesthetic connections across genres, they lose in the ability to explain Ambient music's

emergence and persistence as a singular genre, among genres. In the process, they leave

unspoken their rationale for musical inclusion, instead defaulting to their personal critical

filters. In the absence of socially or culturally validating factors, they cannot well address

why their histories reproduce the patriarchal and Eurocentric biases of most art and

avant-garde music histories. Along these lines, Jason King chastises Prendergast for

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[23] Toop, *Ocean of Sound*, iii.
[24] Ibid., 22.
[25] Ibid., iii.
[26] Prendergast, *The Ambient Century*.

lumping together such widely varied artists as Sonic Youth, The Grateful Dead, and Karlheinz Stockhausen under the "Ambient" heading, while yet disregarding the smooth, atmospheric "Quiet Storm" soul records of black American artists such as Roberta Flack and Smokey Robinson.[27] This study, by maintaining a focus on Ambient music's emergence as a popular genre (business interests and all), narrows the aesthetic and cultural scope of Ambient as described by Toop, Prendergast, and King, while expanding upon its social relevance. It finds Ambient's aesthetics to be inextricably linked with consumers' lives in the ways they fashion technologies of user comfort, emotional edification, self-affirmation, and social withdrawal.[28]

For the same reason, this dissertation cannot claim to offer a comprehensive overview of Ambient music's aesthetic overlaps and interactions with other popular genres. In tracking the Ambient label closely through the promotional contexts in which it emerged, this study passes over several significant overlaps and parallels with Ambient aesthetics in the 20th century. Aside from those already mentioned, some especially relevant (and also mutually overlapping) categories of popular music mostly absent from this study include: 1) Film music, and other background music for the moving image, including television music, "library music," and music video; 2) Prog rock, space rock,

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[27] Jason King, "The Sound of Velvet Melting: The Power of 'Vibe' in the Music of Roberta Flack," in *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 172–99.

[28] Because of its focus on the private consumption of recordings, this study does not address Ambient music's circulation as a "live" improvised or performed music (aside from the reception study; see Appendix, 359–60.) It is also for this reason that I do not consider Ambient music in relation to non-recorded "functional" or "functionalist" musics, such as *Tafelmusik* or *Gebrauchsmusik*. On the latter, see Stephen Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik: Musical Aesthetics in the Weimar Republic with Reference to the Works of Paul Hindemith* (New York: Garland, 1989).

"Krautrock," *Kosmische Musik*; 3) Cool jazz, ECM jazz, "cosmic jazz"; 4) "Space music" in the tradition of *Music from the Hearts of Space*; 5) New Age music, "Fourth World" music, world music; 6) "Smooth" rock/jazz/R&B, lounge music. The relationships between these categories and Ambient music have been observed to some extent in the aforementioned histories, and await further research.[29]

This analysis also insists on Ambient music's separateness from music played in commercial spaces, a phenomenon Jonathan Sterne calls "programmed music."[30] Ever since Eno called Ambient music an improvement on "conventional background music" like Muzak, historians and critics have compared and contrasted Ambient with programmed music. Indeed, the comparison can be instructive. Historically, Muzak represents an early example of the explicit design of musical recordings for physiological and mood regulation, rather than for listening. Eno's claim that Ambient music would be "ignorable" like Muzak, but also "interesting" in ways that Muzak was not, served as a clever hook for selling this idea to high-middlebrow audiences. As I explore in Chapters 1 and 6, Ambient's descriptive and promotional gambit followed upon Muzak's branding strategy, even as it claims aesthetic difference.

The comparison, however, have led fans and critics alike to latch onto Eno's

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[29] Aside from those mentioned in this introduction, some investigations into these overlaps include Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock "N" Roll* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 156–227 (space rock); John Schaefer, *New Sounds: A Listener's Guide to New Music* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) (space music, new age, ECM jazz, world music, prog rock); Richard Williams, *The Blue Moment: Miles Davis's* Kind of Blue *and the Remaking of Modern Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009) (jazz, space rock).
[30] Sterne, "Sounds like the Mall of America."

claim to Ambient's aesthetic interest as though it were the sole means of distinguishing

Ambient from programmed music. Anahid Kassabian and Joseph Lanza, for instance,

have asserted that Ambient's fans name-check its avant-garde background to shore up the

claim that it better accommodates attentive listening than Muzak.[31] Timothy Morton and

Hervé Vanel have also described Eno's description of Ambient music as working

strenuously, and ultimately unsuccessfully, to police the boundary between the "high

environmental art" of records like *Music for Airports* and "kitsch" like Muzak and mood

music.[32] Yet only Lanza discusses the aesthetics of either Ambient music or Muzak, and

none discusses the social utility of this aesthetic distinction in the marketplace. The

oversight is common: historians comparing Ambient with programmed music habitually

ignore their distinct aesthetic conventions, contexts of consumption, and means of

functioning in everyday life. (I will address one major exception to this tendency, Joseph

Lanza's history of "moodsong," later in this introduction.)

When Muzak, Inc. invented programmed music (initially "functional music") in

the 1930s, they created and sequenced their instrumental arrangements of pop standards

to be piped into hotels and restaurants, and later stores, offices, and factories. The

company proposed that these programs would stimulate consumption, alleviate boredom,

and improve efficiency—and so they sold them as a service to businesses.[33] In this way,

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[31] Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, 5; Joseph Lanza, *Elevator Music*, 197.

[32] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 153–54; Hervé Vanel, *Triple Entendre: Furniture Music, Muzak, Muzak-Plus* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 80–81.

[33] On the history of Muzak, see Stephen H. Barnes, *Muzak: The Hidden Messages in Music*, vol. 9, Studies on the History and Interpretation of Music (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); Jerri Ann Husch, "Music of the Workplace: A Study of

programmed music, as most scholars understand it, stipulates external administration and

public space. Jonathan Sterne simply defines programmed music as "a way of organizing

space in commercial settings."[34] Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher elaborate

that programmed music is a "social technology in the control and regulation of work,

consumption, and public space."[35] Anahid Kassabian nicknames programmed music

"music not chosen."[36] Yet Ambient Music, unlike Muzak, turned out to be massively

unpopular with businesses (Eno's *Music for Airports*, as I discuss in Chapter 6, was

conceptually a bit of a false start for the genre), but became quite successful amongst

popular music consumers, especially adults seeking respite from the cultural mainstream.

Ambient music now mainly serves as programmed music only for listeners who program

it privately.[37]

Ironically, while Ambient music, like Muzak, is designed to be unobtrusive and

unimposing, most programmed music these days is not. This change began in the early-

mid 1980s, when businesses started switching out easy-listening instrumental

"background music" for "foreground music," or songs with vocals performed by original

recording artists.[38] Kassabian has hence argued that Ambient music has become mundane

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Muzak Culture" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1984); Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher, "Muzak: On Functional Music and Power," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9, no. 2 (June 1992): 156–69; Lanza, *Elevator Music*; Vanel, *Triple Entendre*, 46–83.

[34] Sterne, "Sounds like the Mall of America," 23.

[35] Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher, "Muzak: On Functional Music and Power," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9, no. 2 (June 1992): 156.

[36] Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, 1.

[37] One notable exception exists in the Light Tunnel connecting Concourses A with B/C at the McNamara Terminal of the Detroit Metropolitan Airport, opened in 2006, for which Victor Alexeeff composed two Ambient recordings totaling 27 minutes.

[38] Ibid., 1–9 and 84–108; Jones and Schumacher, "Muzak," 162–65; Sterne, "Sounds like

now that "background music has become foreground music"—despite Ambient music's

separate contexts of programming. Unlike foreground music, most Ambient listeners

choose to listen to Ambient—which is, undoubtedly, part of the reason its listeners find it

better accommodates different levels of attention than other sorts of music.[39]

Ambient music, unlike music programmed in commercial spaces, does not

organize public space so much as it informs listeners' private everyday lives and senses

of individuality. Whereas programmed music works as a "human management" tool in

public spaces, Ambient music records are "self-management" tools for individual

listeners (Chapters 6 & 7). Eno's Ambient recordings in the 1970s and '80s, like mood

music and nature sound records before them (see Ch. 1), carved out a niche within the

recorded music market by interpellating consumers as programmers of personal space.

The Ambient genre encourages consumers to use musical recordings as atmospheric

technologies, exploit their automated conditions of playback, and treat them passively as

though they were part of the place in which they listen. This consumer-oriented agency,

absent from the listening conditions surrounding programmed music, has been crucial to

the development of Ambient music.

Interpretation

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the Mall of America."

[39] To this day, it remains difficult to disentangle people's dislike for Muzak's aesthetics
with the futility of not being able to choose or control little-m "muzak" (i.e. programmed
music); however, various recent empirical studies have shown the control of musical
recordings to be a major factor in listeners' enjoyment. See Amanda E. Krause, Adrian C.
North, and Lauren Y. Lewitt, "Music Selection Behaviors in Everyday Listening,"
Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 58, no. 2 (2014): 306–23; Amanda E.
Krause, Adrian C. North, and Lauren Y. Lewitt, "Music-Listening in Everyday Life:
Devices and Choice," *Psychology of Music* 43, no. 2 (2013): 155–70.

The Ambient genre does not only identify music's functionality as ambience; it also consolidates a range of musical techniques and conventions that inform its uses and aesthetic appeal. One such technique to which I return throughout this study is the use of drones and/or loops over long stretches of time. This technique, a cornerstone of minimalist music since the early 1960s, allows listeners to treat Ambient music as a continuous, regular, and often predictable feature of their surroundings. Ambient music's overarching continuity partly functions to establish assurance, and perhaps even comfort, in its steady ongoingness. Drone and repetition also help to ensure the music's unobtrusiveness, as these sonic invariances over time can fade easily into the background of listeners' auditory fields as an atmosphere. As I elaborate across several chapters (mainly 3, 5, and 7), these techniques in the context of solitary Ambient consumption often combine to create a space for listener introspection and physical disengagement.

One might hence assume the study of Ambient music recordings should sideline questions of expression, representation, or form, and focus on their utility as "ubiquitous" or "functional" music technologies. Ambient music's arrangement, it appears, follows its "function" to enable activities other than listening, interpretation, and evaluation.[40] Cecilia Sun, in this spirit, asserts that "an Ambient record renders obsolete a number of traditional musicological concerns. Not only does it collapse all possible distinctions between score, performance, and recording (by eliminating the first two altogether), but it also obviates questions of interpretation, authorial intent, editorial decisions, and issues of performance practice."[41] Similarly, Eldritch Priest characterizes Eno's Ambient music as

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[40] Jones and Schumacher, "Muzak," 166n.
[41] Cecilia Sun, "Resisting the Airport: Bang on a Can Performs Brian Eno," *Musicology*

"abstract" music, one of only a few "un-thematic" musical forms in the Western world

"that express only their own occurrence and do nothing but relay potential."[42]

From here, one might imagine approaching Ambient music instead as scholars in

ethnomusicology, music sociology, media studies, and the relatively new field of "sound

studies" have approached the study of music and sound "in everyday life."[43] This body of

scholarship has elaborated how people use sound-based technologies for activities other

than listening, largely irrespective of musical genre, symbolic meaning, or aesthetic

evaluation.[44] Tia DeNora's monograph on music and everyday life, for instance,

describes how people use musical recordings of all kinds as "technologies of the self"

Australia 29, no. 1 (2007): 136.

[42] Eldritch Priest, "Felt as Thought (or, Music Abstraction and the Semblance of Affect)," in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 53.

[43] Beyond those mentioned in this introduction, relevant resources also include Elena Boschi, Marta Garcia Quiñones, and Anahid Kassabian, eds., *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don't Always Notice*, Popular and Folk Music (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (New York: Berg, 2000); Susan D. Crafts et al., *My Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993); Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mack Hagood, "Quiet Comfort: Noise, Otherness, and the Mobile Production of Personal Space," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 573–89; Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–17.

[44] This orientation follows from foundational sociologies of popular art consumption in the modern Western world such as Pierre Bourdieu and Janice Radway. Bourdieu's influential sociology of art identifies popular art as subordinating form to function, in opposition of an "autonomous field of artistic production" that emphasizes form over function, and requires reference to the history of an artistic tradition; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1979; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 3–4. Janice Radway's study of romance reading foregoes "textual" analysis and close reading in favor of understanding how romance reading, as an activity, performs a desirable social function for readers; see Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 8–9.

that, among other things, stabilize and regulate personal environments.[45] Michael Bull

has also analyzed how mobile sound media like iPods produce privatized "auditory

bubbles" that "enclose" and "isolate" users from potentially hostile surroundings.[46] And

such studies are not exclusive to music; Mack Hagood, for instance, is investigating the

social history of what he calls "orphic" media, devices like noise-canceling headphones

and white noise generators that people use "to create a preferred sense of physical and

psychological space through the mediation of sound."[47] Such studies typically bracket

aesthetic activities of contemplation, interpretation, and evaluation as extrinsic to

everyday life, and emphasize how people consume aural media through non- or semi-

attentive modes of listening. As David Hesmondhalgh parrots the justification for this

common methodological approach: "Isn't most contemporary experience of music too

casual and distracted to involve interpretation?"[48] These scholars explicitly counteract

musicology's and music theory's frequent focus on "textual" analysis, and its

concomitant concern with form, semiosis, expression, or narrative. Hagood, for instance,

emphasizes that "semiotics take a back seat to spatial resonance" in his study, because

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[45] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46–74.

[46] Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 3–14.

[47] Mack Hagood, "Sonic Technologies of the Self: Mediating Sound, Space, Self, and Sociality" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2013), 4; Mack Hagood, "Early Digital Waves: Irv Teibel's Environments and the Psychologically Ultimate Seashore" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music–U.S. Chapter, Chapel Hill, NC, March 2014). I'd like to thank Mack for sharing his dissertation with me prior to publication.

[48] David Hesmondhalgh, "Popular Music Audiences and Everyday Life," in *Popular Music Studies*, ed. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (London: Arnold, 2002), 125.

orphic media "are not used to represent social life."[49] Likewise, DeNora reminds us, "Music is not merely a 'meaningful' or 'communicative' medium…. Music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel—in terms of energy and emotion—about themselves, about others, about situations."[50]

Ambient music consumption, however, muddies the evidently clear separation between "aesthetic" listening, symbolic or semiotic apprehension, and "functional" application on a number of fronts. For one, as I discuss in Chapter 1, it can be difficult to distinguish contemplation and introspection *through* Ambient music from "aesthetic" or close listening *to* Ambient music. Aesthetic conventions and themes across Ambient music also challenge the assumption that aesthetic signification and functional applicability, or communicative expression and affective resonance, are mutually exclusive.[51] As I describe throughout this study, these aspects of Ambient music interlock, working on multiple levels simultaneously. Moreover, the rhetoric and culture surrounding Ambient music—as with various popular musics—often affirm contemplation, introspection, and "aesthetic" or close listening as intrinsic to many everyday lives, even though media scholars normally define "everyday life" in opposition to such "cerebral" activities.

For these reasons, this study resists the trend in sound studies to rule out musical

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[49] Hagood, "Sonic Technologies of the Self," 6; Ibid., 8.

[50] DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 16–17.

[51] One already finds a significant exception to this assumption in the work of Philip Tagg, who describes the ways in which musical structure communicates meaning, often whether or not the listener consciously apprehends them; see, for instance, Tagg, *Fernando the Flute: Analysis of Musical Meaning in an Abba Mega-Hit*, 2nd ed. (Creative Commons, 2000).

analysis and interpretation as inapplicable to the study of music or sound in everyday life. Musical analysis and interpretation of Ambient music can enhance our understanding of how sound works in "everyday life" in several ways: first, by allowing that aesthetic interpretations of music might be relevant to listeners' affective responses, whether or not listeners consciously seek out meaning in these sounds; second, by affirming reflective or introspective listening as one of many possible "everyday" contexts for music; and third, by articulating the symbolic and social meanings connected to "everyday" phenomena like musical identification, evaluation, enjoyment, attachment, selection, preference, and taste. Hence, this study does not resolve the tension between technology and text posed by Ambient recordings, but keeps both in motion as latent experiential and analytic possibilities.

Ambient music recordings, rather than obviating interpretation, reflect upon their own instrumentality by promoting technological utility as an aesthetic theme. Through musical techniques, metaphors, and moods, Ambient recordings reflect aesthetically upon the music's "hidden nature" as a disembodied, dehumanized, and discreet electronic mechanism. One production technique especially relevant to this interpretation is Ambient music's extended use of drones and loops. As I discuss throughout this dissertation, drones and loops not only ease the withdrawal of sound into the background of a listener's attention, but also double, on the level of musical form, the automatism of the audio playback technology that enables this withdrawal in the first place. Form here doesn't just follow function; it re-presents the concealed form of its functioning. Through continuous drones and invariant loops, Ambient music frequently belies its own technological inscription, while yet appearing "natural" in its remove from the expressive

intentions of its human creators and programmers.

This aesthetic thematization of technological utility also applies to Ambient, as a genre. "Ambient" does not just communicate functionality, but also aesthetic form and content—which, in turn, reflexively afford and promote particular uses. Ambient recordings may thus be understood as what Frow calls "metacommunications" about the mediations that they perform.[52] N. Katherine Hayles alternatively refers to this sort of mediation as a "technotext," or an aesthetic presentation that "mobilizes reflexive loops between its imaginative world and the material apparatus embodying that creation as a physical presence."[53] In this way, recordings perform their belonging to the Ambient genre not just through their atmospheric function, but also in the way their aesthetic designs maintain a dialogue with their means of functioning. By making technological automatism part of their aesthetic "worlds," Ambient recordings participate in a genre *about* the conditions of ubiquitous music.

Critique

When I asked survey respondents what appeals to them about Ambient music, several reflected upon their appreciation for Ambient's affective impersonality, and the personal involvement it allows. "In the ambient I prefer, at least, the intent of the music's creator is not overbearing," one writes. "There are no lyrics, no beats to regiment the piece's progression, and no overt melodies pulling at one's emotions. This makes the listening experience much more participatory." While this respondent attributes this

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[52] Frow, *Genre*, 17.
[53] N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, Mediawork (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 25.

"participatory" quality to a diminished authorial presence, another attributes it to an absence of personality. "I love the removal of personality that is central to ambient, as apart from almost every other kind of music," they write. "It allows each listener to put themselves in it and make the music their own personal soundtrack." Yet despite these characterizations, the presence of an authorial or performed "personality" in popular musical recordings often facilitates, rather than inhibits the sort of musical "participation" these listeners describe.[54] More accurately, it appears that the withdrawal or absence of human presence in Ambient music appeals to certain listeners as a means of making the music personal.

The social aspect of this personal appeal, however, tends to go ignored in most accounts of Ambient music. Such an oversight might be attributed to Ambient's nominal functionalism—in announcing the music's utility, the "Ambient" label naturalizes the genre's aesthetics as abstractly "following" from the function of conjuring space or atmosphere.[55] Ambient music's impersonal atmospheres complement this apparent functionalism by avoiding overt representations of human subjectivity. And yet, as with other popular genres, Ambient's aesthetics thread and pattern a web of cultural investments that reflect its consumers' social positions, preferences, and tastes. Because of Ambient music's apparently abstract utility, scholars, producers, and fans alike often overlook how Ambient music provokes social identifications, and articulates cultural ideals, that historically have engaged a particular submarket of music consumers. This

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[54] See, for example, Crafts et al., *My Music*, 85–89; DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 73.
[55] Ambient music might be, in this sense, considered as an extension of "functionalism" in architecture and visual design; see George H. Marcus, *Functionalist Design: An Ongoing History* (New York: Prestel, 1995).

study critiques this oversight, noting how, in the U.S. and U.K., Ambient has been

marketed toward, and continues to circulate within, a base of high-middlebrow

listeners—largely, but not exclusively college-educated, white, middle-class men—who

seek both social detachment and bodily disengagement through musical recordings.[56]

This study traces how Ambient producers have historically promoted particular

ideals of embodiment, styles of comportment, and models of sociality through musical

design. It investigates how Ambient recordings individuate and socialize consumers,

helping them articulate and realize their social identities.[57] Tia DeNora describes this

process as "identity work," a process of linking musical material with a concept of self-

identity. In "finding oneself" in music, one finds representations of the things one

perceives and values about oneself.[58] Music recordings, by using formal conventions and

stylistic techniques to articulate personal and social ideals, offer their owners a means of

conditioning their private environments to experience situations wherein they can "find

themselves in the music." Genre typifies these ideals. In observing Ambient music as a

resource for listener identity, this study critiques the notion that Ambient music exists

apart from social appeal or aesthetic conventions. This notion, while perhaps beneficial to

musical producers in a genre culture that values experimentation, risks reinforcing the

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[56] I use the term "high-middlebrow" in a similar manner as Bernard Gendron, who uses the term to classify cultural expressions within middlebrow culture that convey highbrow or art world values; see Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, esp. 161–97.

[57] My framework for understanding music as a social resource derives largely from the work of Simon Frith, Dick Hebdige, and Susan McClary; see especially Simon Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 133–49; Dick Hebdige, *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[58] DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 62–74.

social universalism commonly assumed of the upwardly mobile, socially unmarked individuals that predominantly constitute Ambient music's listenership.

One way in which the Ambient genre typifies the self-identities of its consumers is through the design of "head space." As I detail in Chapters 6 and 7, Ambient music's conventionally slow pacing, avoidance of obtrusive percussive kicks, and bass-oriented grooves inspires physical disengagement, as well as associations with mind rather than body. In its capacity for disengaging the listener's body and nurturing contemplation, Ambient music carries appeal for those whose intellect plays a dominant role in their self-identity.

Ambient music also fosters asocial environments, "virtual" acoustic spaces that afford listeners the opportunity for disaffiliation from others.[59] Whereas many popular recordings depict spaces inhabited by performers or musical "personae" within the stereo field, Ambient recordings conjure empty landscapes, often seemingly industrialized or natural spaces where people are notably absent. Moreover, Ambient's acoustic spaces are not designed to ease or facilitate cohabitation, unlike most programmed music or electronic dance music. As Stephen Barnes argues, Muzak's arrangements of pop standards aimed to "create an aura of interaction" and "establish the feeling of shared meaning where none exists," so to mitigate feelings of alienation amongst strangers in public.[60] Ambient music's vacant, impersonal environments, by contrast, do not inspire social belonging or participation. Whereas Muzak tried to produce "social space" in

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[59] On the production of "virtual" space through recording, see Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900–1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[60] Barnes, *Muzak*, 133.

public, Ambient music designs "asocial space" for the private listener. This dissertation discusses how Ambient music aesthetically reinforces the social withdrawal of private listening, thereby appealing to solitary, inward-looking types, while also resonating with the disaffiliative individualism typically prized by the high-middlebrow, hip, or "countercultural" consumer.

Ambient music also maintains a particular social appeal in its tendency to convey impersonal, ambivalent, and mixed moods. Joseph Lanza points this out in his monograph on 20th-century "moodsong," where he writes that Eno's Ambient music "play[s] havoc with the canons of harmony and melody in the service of bad vibes," opening the field of "easy" listening to "misanthropes" and intellectual types.[61] In recognizing the "bad vibes" sometimes fostered by Ambient music, Lanza is one of the few scholars to observe this facet of Ambient music—yet, ironically, from the position of someone who dislikes it. This dissertation reflects more sympathetically upon the strange affective mixtures fostered by Ambient music, particularly in Chapter 6, by describing how Ambient recordings create ambivalent musical moods. While in philosophy, mood or *Stimmung* is usually described as a pre-cognitive state, an unplanned disposition that arises out of being situated somewhere,[62] music recordings allow owners the capacity to modulate or amplify their own moods based on those engendered by large-scale structural devices and somatic cues.[63] In producing moods of melancholy, alienation, and

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[61] Lanza, *Elevator Music*, 196.
[62] For a concise overview of the philosophical literature on mood, see Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 21–25.
[63] Steven Brown and Töres Theorell, "The Social Uses of Background Music for Personal Enhancement," in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of*

uncertainty, Ambient recordings offer their listeners the unconventional pleasure of electing to feel ambivalent—perhaps a more appealing sort of mood enhancement for social skeptics, or critics of the idea that musical listening should be "easy."

In observing the social appeals of Ambient music aesthetics, this study adds a new dimension to the story of the avant-garde's integration into middlebrow popular music consumption in the U.S. and U.K. during the late 20th century. Bernard Gendron's monograph on this topic describes how the exchanges between high art and middlebrow pop over the course of the 20th century reflected popular music's "growing cultural power,"[64] and its becoming a "major player in the struggle for cultural capital."[65] The present study, without repudiating Gendron's narrative, finds that this intermixing of "high" and "middle" is not simply a story of power and legitimization, but also of middle-class consumer identification and self-recognition in the resultant forms. The formation of the Ambient genre shows how pop music's internalization of avant-garde aesthetics is not just a matter of accreditation or cultural capital, but also of social resonance, and the pleasures of individuation that these aesthetics afford.

Chapter Outline

Chapters 1 and 3 examine two recordings from the *Environments* series of LPs (Atlantic, 1969–78), released by Syntonic Research, Inc. Syntonic marketed the *Environments* series, featuring mostly long-playing nature sound collages, as

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Music, ed. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 126–60; Noël Carroll, "Art and Mood: Preliminary Notes and Conjectures," *The Monist* 86, no. 4 (2003): 521–55; DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 53–58.

[64] Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, 6.

[65] Ibid., 12.

"psychological sounds" for such uses as relaxation, concentration, and sleep. In their minimalist sound design, functionalist packaging, and countercultural marketing, these records augured the claims consolidated by the Ambient genre later in the decade. The analyses in Chapters 1 and 3 focus especially on the social utility consumer electronics like *Environments* held in the Western environmentalist and countercultural movements. Chapter 2 compares and contrasts *Environments* with recordings from the concurrently emerging Acoustic Ecology movement.

Chapters 4 and 5 investigate various artistic and conceptual practices that informed Brian Eno's conception of Ambient music. Chapter 4 identifies precedents for Eno's concept in the experimental avant-garde compositions and ideas of Erik Satie, John Cage, La Monte Young, and Steve Reich. Chapter 5 analyzes the title recording on Eno's *Discreet Music* album (Obscure, 1975), first by relating it to the techniques of 1960s and '70s English experimentalism, as well as concepts in the research field of cybernetics, before undertaking a media analysis in the context of popular music consumption. These chapters illustrate how the elimination of authorial intention in experimental composition and cybernetics translated into a new popular form.

Chapters 6 and 7 introduce Ambient music's explicit emergence as a term in the popular music market. Chapter 6 examines Brian Eno's *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (Editions E.G., 1978) through a comparative analysis with The Black Dog's *Music for Real Airports* (Soma Quality Recordings, 2010). This comparison illuminates the relevance of Ambient music's contexts of consumption to interpretation. It concludes with a brief reading of *Ambient 4: On Land* (Editions E.G., 1982), which cemented Ambient music's significance within private, individualized reception. Chapter 7

concludes the study with an overview of various recordings between 1989 and 1994 by The Orb, KLF, Mixmaster Morris, and Pete Namlook in the "ambient house" subgenre of electronic dance music. It traces musical metaphors of space and listener embodiment in these recordings, before illustrating these metaphors' connections with the promotional discourses and social uses of earlier Ambient music.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 1-3

Ambient Music as Popular Genre: Horizon

Exactly nine years before Eno put forward his "Ambient Music" manifesto, a company named Syntonic Research, Inc. released the first of what would be eleven LPs titled *Environments* on the Atlantic Records label. Syntonic sold the digitally enhanced field recordings as "psychological sounds" with subliminal effects, but their promotional rhetoric also drew attention to the recordings' sonic quality by depicting its users as inhabiting various modes of sonic awareness. In combining claims to the recordings' psychological efficacy with gestures to their aesthetic appeal, and in doing so through a seductively minimal sonic and visual design, these records anticipated the technological and aesthetic assertions made by Eno later in the decade.

Today, audio enthusiasts most popularly remember *Environments* as some of the first commercial nature sounds LPs. Media scholar Mark Hagood has additionally recognized the records as innovative "technologies of the self," sonic facilitators of disconnection and communication both social and spatial.[1] But *Environments* also represents a vanishing point on the horizon of the cultural, historical, and aesthetic landscape in which Ambient music took form as a genre. An examination of these records marks out this landscape, allowing the emergence of Ambient music to come into sharper historical focus.

The following three chapters take Syntonic Research's *Environments* series of LPs (1969–78) as a point of reference from which the Ambient genre formation can be

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[1] Mack Hagood, "Sonic Technologies of the Self: Mediating Sound, Space, Self, and Sociality" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2013).

elaborated. The first and third chapters center around two recordings in the series: *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore* from *Environments: Disc One* (1969), and *Tintinnabulation* from *Environments: Disc Two* (1970). These recordings situate the Ambient genre within a particular cultural-historical complex, while also clarifying the aesthetics and technological uses that have transhistorically consolidated Ambient music as a genre. An intervening chapter takes *Environments* as a means of comparison and contrast with the concurrent activities of the Acoustic Ecology movement, which also investigated and aestheticized environmental sounds through recordings.

CHAPTER 1

"Nature Abhors Silence": Selling Sensuous Seclusion with *The*

Psychologically Ultimate Seashore

Q: What are Environments, exactly?
A: *Environments* are not like any other phonograph discs ever released before. In essence, they are psychological sound designed to help people *do* things, rather than provide them with aural entertainment.
—liner notes to *Environments: Disc Two* (Atlantic, 1970)

Irving Teibel (1938–2010), chief engineer and businessman behind the

Environments record series, often commented that the idea to make nature sound

recordings for "psychological" use had so much potential, it was as if he had awoken on

top of an elephant.[1] The epiphany hit around the turn of 1969, at a time when Teibel

worked freelance as a writer, visual designer, and sound producer in New York City.[2]

Avant-garde film directors Beverly Grant Conrad and Tony Conrad had hired Teibel to

record ocean and bird sounds for use in their upcoming film, *Coming Attractions* (1970).

As Teibel recalls, he found himself concentrating unusually well when working on the

looping tape of ocean sounds, and it dawned on him that the recordings might have some

utility as a means of increasing one's attention span.[3] Teibel corroborated this idea with

some friends, including Bell Labs engineer and psychoacoustician Louis Gerstman, who

had experience working with white noise's various commercial applications.[4] Gerstman

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[1] Jennifer Teibel-Ballow, email message to author, May 3, 2013.

[2] Mack Hagood, "Sonic Technologies of the Self: Mediating Sound, Space, Self, and Sociality" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2013), 79.

[3] Irv Teibel, "Forum: Irv Teibel," interview by Eileen Remen, Longhorn Radio Network, February 5, 1983, UT KUT Longhorn Radio Network Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 2/25-83.

[4] Gerstman is best known for having pioneered a computer-based program to synthesize speech using filtered white noise, completed in 1961 in collaboration with John Larry

informed Teibel that most people who used white noise machines to concentrate or

sleep found the sound unpleasant. Realizing its marketability, Teibel relayed the idea for

Environments to the Conrads, but the couple had no interest in Teibel's proposed venture,

and so they parted ways.

Less than one year later, in September 1969, Teibel released *Environments: Disc*

One with *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore* on Side A, and *Optimum Aviary* on

Side B. By the time Teibel signed a distribution deal with Atlantic Records in June 1970,

the first disc had sold 40,000 copies, and a second disc was in the making.[5] Teibel's

name, however, was nowhere to be found on the packaging. Instead, the records appeared

to be issued by a company called Syntonic Research, Inc., who aside from a New York

postal address provided no other information about themselves on the packaging. Despite

the fact that Teibel handled the majority of tasks related to *Environments*'s creation,

including their recording, packaging, promotions, and merchandising, he released all of

Environments under the anonymity of Syntonic's corporate tag.[6]

Teibel's corporate pose as Syntonic Research, Inc. supported his claims to the

records' psychological efficacy by giving them the appearance of institutionalized

experimentation. According to the packaging of the first disc, *The Psychologically*

Ultimate Seashore resulted from "extensive research on auditory stimulation." The liner

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Kelly Jr. at Bell Labs. Max Mathews utilized the program in a recording of *Daisy Bell (Bicycle Built for Two)*, later made famous in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) when it was sung by the computer HAL.

[5] "Atl Distributes 'Environments,'" *Billboard* 82, no. 24 (June 13, 1970), 4.

[6] Jeff Burger, "Environments on Vinyl," *High Fidelity Magazine*, June 1975, 24. Besides Gerstman, the only personnel involved with Syntonic that I have been able to identify are Miriam Berman, who designed several of the record layouts, and Mike O'Neill, product manager.

Fig. 1.1. Syntonic Research, Inc.'s many logos.

notes guaranteed playback quality on the basis of extensive testing ("Over 3000 playbacks were obtained before noticeable wear occurred"). Technical and scientific claims like these littered the packaging of the first several *Environments* records. The testimonials taking up the back cover of every *Environments* release, labeled on several discs as "Listening Test Responses," most boldly embodied Syntonic's dubious scientific posturing. Visually accented with a rainbow of bright, vivid colors, testimony like, "Speeds up my reading!" and "I feel more relaxed" spoke loudly to the records' ease of use. The veracity of these responses remains dubious, at best. Teibel has alluded to one test performed prior to *Disc One*'s release run by Gerstman (also a psychology professor at CCNY) and an unidentified "Columbia University biologist."[7] He also maintained that "test copies" of each record were sent out prior to release, along with "feedback" forms for evaluation.[8] Media scholar Mack Hagood has confirmed the existence of these feedback forms, but was also told by a relative of Gerstman's that Teibel made up most

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[7] Gerald Walker, "The World Is Alive with the Sound of Sounds," *New York Times*, March 2, 1975, sec. D.
[8] Teibel, "Forum: Irv Teibel."

of the "Listening Test Responses."[9]

As shown in the Q&A exchange opening this section, Syntonic labeled the *Environments* recordings "psychological sound," or, as the subtitle to *Disc One* proclaims, a "totally new concept in stereo sound." Although the precise meaning of "psychological sound" remains vague throughout the packaging, the term chiefly refers to the recordings' purposeful design for relaxation and/or stimulation, and their utility for activities such as reading, meditating, studying, socializing, sex, or sleeping. But what about this concept was "totally new" in 1969? The idea of psychologically effective audio recordings was hardly unprecedented by the time Teibel released *Environments: Disc One*. Most infamously, U.S. businesses since 1936 had been programming instrumental arrangements of pop standards produced by the Muzak Corporation to stimulate consumer spending, while offices and factories used Muzak's recordings to combat boredom and boost production efficiency in the workplace.[10] Indeed, Muzak's so-called "functional music" could hardly be *better* described than as "psychological sound designed to help people *do* things."

Teibel's references to institutional research distinctly echoed Muzak's branding strategy in the mid-1960s, when the company began promoting their programming to businesses as the result of military-funded experimentation.[11] These studies, Muzak reported, resulted in a new "stimulus progression" technique of programming whereby several elements of musical "stimulus" (tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, and orchestra size) would build and wane over time in a way that would maximize auditors'

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[9] Hagood, "Sonic Technologies of the Self," 94–96.
[10] For sources on the history of Muzak, see Introduction, 17, n. 33.
[11] Jones and Schumacher, "Muzak," 159–60.

Fig 1.2. "Listening Test Responses" and other "user feedback," back covers for
Environments discs *One*, *Eight*, and *Nine* (Atlantic, 1969, 1974, 1978).

productivity.[12] The sleeves to Muzak's *Stimulus Progression* promotional LPs likewise

represented their contents as the result of unspecified "experiments" performed by a

"Board of Scientific Advisors," a group of "specialists in the physiological and

psychological applications of music."[13] As with Syntonic Research, not a single person

on Muzak's board of specialists is named on these records, conferring authority onto the

Muzak brand rather than any particular individual.

Muzak never made their records available for consumer purchase, but individuals

could still buy and own similar "psychological sounds" in the form of the mood music

album. Easy-listening mood music records attained tremendous popularity during the

1950s.[14] As with Muzak's recordings, these albums usually featured instrumental

arrangements of familiar tunes; but unlike Muzak, they more often advertised listener

relaxation than stimulation. Paul Weston and His Orchestra introduced mood music in the

latter half of the 1940s in the form of the "theme" album, whose *Music for…* titles

explicitly sold the music as accompaniment to mental activities like dreaming and

reminiscing (Table 1). The introduction of the long-playing record technology in 1948

helped the concept take off; although Weston's earliest theme albums appeared as albums

of 78-rpm discs prior to the LP disc's emergence, the idea caught on like wildfire once

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[12] Barnes, *Muzak*, 91.

[13] Muzak, *Stimulus Progression Number Three (Christmas)*, Muzak S-2563, n.d., LP.

[14] On the emergence of easy listening as a popular music genre, see Tim J. Anderson, *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Keir Keightley, "Music for Middlebrows: Defining the Easy Listening Era, 1946-1966," *American Music* 26, no.3 (Fall 2008); and Lanza, *Elevator Music*.

Record	Performer	Label	Year	Catalog #
Music for Dreaming	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Capitol	1945	BD-9
Music for Memories	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Capitol	1946–47(?)	BD-37
Music for Romancing	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Capitol	1948	H-153
Music for Easy Listening	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Capitol	1950	H-195
Music by Candlelight	Hollywood Studio Orchestra	Capitol	1950	H-207
Music for Peace of Mind	Dr. Samuel J. Hoffman, Billy May, and Harry Revel	Capitol	1950	H-221
Music for the Fireside	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Capitol	1951	H-245
Music for Reflection	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Capitol	1951	H-287
Melodies for Moonlight	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Columbia	1951	B-274/C-274
Melodies for Sweethearts	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Columbia	1952	B-275/C-275
Melodies for a Sentimental Mood	Paul Weston & His Orchestra	Columbia	1952	B-293
Moods for Candlelight	Francis Scott & His Orchestra	Capitol	1952	L-304
Moods for Twilight	Francis Scott & His Orchestra	Capitol	1952	L-331
Music for Lovers Only	Jackie Gleason	Capitol	1952	H/L-352
Quiet Music (series)	Various	Columbia	1952–53	GL-510 to 515, GL-517 to 519, GL-532
Music for Courage and Confidence	The Melachrino Strings	RCA Victor	1953	EPB-1005
Background Music (series)	Bill Loose et. al.	Capitol	1953–54	H-375 to 378, H-472 to 473
Moods for Starlight	Francis Scott & His Orchestra	Capitol	1953	H-446
Music to Make You Misty	Jackie Gleason	Capitol	1953	H/L-455
Late Music (series)	Various	Columbia	1954	CL-541 to 543
Piano Music for Parties	Various	Columbia	1954	CL-603
Moods in Music (series)	The Melachrino Strings & Orchestra	RCA Victor	1954	LPM-1000 to 1002, 1004 to 1006
Music for Two People Alone	The Melachrino Orchestra	RCA Victor	1954	LPM-1027
Music for Daydreaming	The Melachrino Orchestra	RCA Victor	1954	LPM-1028
Music to Work or Study By	The Melachrino Orchestra	RCA Victor	1954	LPM-1029

Table 1.1. "Theme" albums, 1945–54.

these environments for "easy listening" could be fostered with little user intervention.[15]

Indeed, mood music records weren't so much musically innovative as promotionally

inventive, since the style of music they featured had been sold for well over a decade as

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[15] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 175–79.

"semi-classical" or "light" music.[16] Mood music simply re-tooled, packaged, and marketed this music as a programmable consumer technology.[17]

Just as the innovations of the mood music "theme" album were technological and promotional rather than sonic, the same might be said of *Environments'* "psychological" re-purposing of the nature sounds recording. Most of *Environments*'s recordings, as seen in Table 2, feature nature sounds, but records of birdsong and thunderstorms had been commercially available for almost as long as phonograph discs themselves.[18] Moreover, for decades prior to 1969, record labels like Audio Fidelity and Folkways had designed and packaged album-length nature "field guides" as audio demonstrations for archival and educational purposes.[19] *Environments*, however, refashioned the nature sounds disc by creating long-playing sound collages taking up the entire length of the vinyl side, and packaging them according to the "psychological" design concept pioneered by mood music. As I discuss in the next chapter, Teibel felt that nature sounds

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[16] On the Viennese origins of light music (*leichte Musik*), see Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The 19th-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[17] Keightley, "Music for Middlebrows," 333, fn. 33. As Keightley further explains, mood music emerged around the same time as radio programs of "light music" marketed themselves as offering the listener familiar, intellectually undemanding background music. As one station manager put it in 1949, "You don't have to stop what you're doing in order to listen to our program." Ibid, 317.

[18] Commercial wildlife sounds recordings date back to 1910, when the German branch of the Gramophone company released Carl Reich's recording, "Actual Bird Record Made by a Captive Nightengale." Cheryl Tipp, "An Overview of Early Commercial Wildlife Recordings at the British Library," *IASA Journal* no. 37 (2011): 47–54.

[19] Whereas most field guides identified multiple different animal or nature sounds track by track, *Evening in Sapsucker Woods* (Cornell, 1958) was the first to include a montage of nature sounds on a full LP side, explicitly challenging listeners to "identify the species announced… on the first side of the record." For an extensive (though non-exhaustive) list of early commercial field guide recordings (along with other "sound effects" records), see Eugene Endres, "There's a Tweeter in my Tweeter," *High Fidelity Magazine*, June 1971, 61–65.

"NATURE" SOUNDS	Disc	Copyright Date	Sounds
"The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore"	1	1969	ocean waves,
"Optimum Aviary"	1	1969	birds
"Dawn at New Hope, PA"	2	1970	birds, insects, dogs
"Dusk at New Hope, PA"	3	1971	birds, insects, dogs
"The Psychologically Ultimate Thunderstorm"	4	1974	thunder, rain
"Gentle Rain in a Pine Forest (Synthetic Silence)"	4	1974	rain, birds, insects
"Wind in the Trees"	5	1974	wind, leaves rustling
"Dawn in the Okefenokee Swamp"	6	1974	insects, frogs, birds, water
"Dusk in the Okefenokee Swamp"	6	1974	insects, frogs, birds, water
"Summer Cornfield"	7	1976	insects
"Country Stream"	8	1974	rippling water, insects, birds
"A Wood-Masted Sailboat" *	8	1974	rippling water, creaking boards, wind on sails
"Pacific Ocean"	9	1979	ocean waves, gulls
"Caribbean Lagoon"	9	1979	rippling water
"English Meadow"	10	1978	birds
"Night in the Country"	10	1978	insects
"Alpine Blizzard" *	11	1978	wind, banging shutters
"Country Thunderstorm"	11	1978	farm animals, thunder, rain

OTHER SOUNDS	Disc	Copyright Date	Sounds
"Tintinnabulation (Low-Frequency Contemplative Sound)"	2	1970	bells
"Be-In (A Psychoacoustic Experience)"	3	1971	1969 gathering in Central Park featuring indistinct chatter, shouting, singing, drums
"Ultimate Heartbeat"	5	1974	an amplified human heartbeat
"Intonation"	7	1976	"Om" chant (male & female voices)

Table 1.2. *Environments* recordings, "nature" vs. other sounds.

recordings would be less offensive to potential listeners' tastes, and less tedious over

successive plays, than recorded music made and used for similar purposes.[20] His intuition

proved correct, as the long-playing nature sounds record concept took off in the late

1970s and '80s.

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[20] Teibel, "Forum: Irv Teibel."

* "A Wood-Masted Sailboat" and "Alpine Blizzard" uniquely feature the sounds of wind affecting human-made artifacts.

Making Sound Environmental

Teibel spent a good deal of promotional effort branding *Environments* as a

technology, rather than as a form of entertainment. Perhaps most indicative of this

intentional technologization of the *Environments* LPs was Syntonic's claim on *Disc One*

that the records were "designed to be heard, rather than listened to." The claim suggests

that *Environments*'s recordings should sound peripherally to users' direct attentive focus,

as auditory background rather than foreground. Their formulation echoed that of Bing

Muscio, president of the Muzak corporation from 1966 to 1980, who insisted on branding

Muzak as "non-entertainment" music, or music that does not require emotional and

intellectual involvement. "With Muzak," Muscio announced proudly, "you can hear

without listening."[21]

Implied in Muscio and Syntonic's turns of phrase is a distinction between

"hearing" and "listening" based on the auditor's level of conscious involvement with the

sound. In such ordinary uses of the words, "hearing" implies a physiological process that

may or may not involve conscious intention to hear, while "listening" describes an

intentional process of focusing on sounds. "Hearing," in this way, describes the passive

operation of a sensory faculty, and "listening" a relatively active process, since it requires

(more) effort on the part of the auditor to sustain focus on the sounds, or the messages

they communicate. This sort of distinction between "hearing" and "listening" gives the

impression that the two are mutually exclusive, separate activities, rather than fluid,

interactive modes of perceiving sound through varying degrees of conscious attention.

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[21] Derryn Hinch, "Hearing without Listening," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 17, 1972: 127.

Environments's promotional text betrays the fact that this distinction does not hold up especially well upon scrutiny of most sustained auditory experiences. Despite their claims to the contrary, Syntonic identifies throughout the packaging a vaster possibility of attentional modes for *Environments*'s listeners than "mere" physiological hearing.

For one, various instructions and technical notes in the packaging suggest that attentive listening might be a useful means of judging the records' quality. In the liner notes, Syntonic describes two aesthetic criteria by which the listener may evaluate the records' effectiveness. The first can be found in their claims to "realism" or *fidelity*, the recordings' closeness to an (imagined) original.[22] Various Listening Test Responses to *Dawn at New Hope, PA*, for instance, reflect this ideal:

> I could swear I smell new-cut grass….
>
> It's like a warm spring morning with the dew still on the grass….
>
> With it, I'm out in the open on a fine day, enjoying the air and the sounds….
>
> The realism of this recording is truly exceptional….

None of these claims to realism refers to a documentarian ideal of accuracy of reproduction to an original sound; rather, they describe how well the sounds simulate the environments represented in the title and liner notes. The most effective sounds, they claim, are not maximally beautiful, but rather maximally "real," or able to produce in the listener a sense of being physically elsewhere. As the liner notes for *Dawn* assert,

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[22] As Jonathan Sterne explains, standards of audio fidelity evolve historically according to the social configurations and rituals surrounding sonic reproduction. In all cases, fidelity is measured with reference to a "fictitious" external reality. See Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 215–86.

> Our objective was not to make an artificially "beautiful" recording, but a real sound…. On a good high-fidelity system, the sounds produced are so realistic that most people soon forget they are listening to a phonograph record…. Walk into a room where it is playing and you may feel the city had suddenly vanished—replaced by serene, verdant countryside.

In this sense, what Syntonic calls "realism" may be equally well described as "illusionism," since the sounds are so "real" they produce a convincing illusion of the depicted environment's unmediated presence.

Syntonic's reference here to high fidelity (or "hi-fi") further promotes the records' impressive realism/illusionism. The term "hi-fi" arose in advertisements for high-end audio technology between 1949 and 1953, serving as shorthand for the fulfillment of abstract, measurable standards such as frequency response, dynamic range, and signal-to-noise ratio.[23] Syntonic depicts *Environments* as cutting-edge in this regard, explaining that the records' realism would not have been possible prior to advances in high fidelity standards during the preceding decade. Advertisements of hi-fi rarely explicated these standards, instead leaving them up to the consumer to affirm through attentive listening. And while such technical affirmations were once the province of a sub-market of (mostly male) audio hobbyists who confuted the passivity assumed of mass audio consumers, the term "high fidelity" by the early '60s positioned the quality of audio spectacles like *Environments* as appreciable by a non-specialist middlebrow market.[24]

The second dimension through which Syntonic advertised *Environments*'s effectiveness was their *immersiveness*, or ability to produce dynamic spatial

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[23] Anderson, *Making Easy Listening*, 139; Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever: An Aural History of Recorded Music* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2009), 137–39.

[24] Anderson, *Making Easy Listening*, 159; Eric D. Barry, "High Fidelity Sound as Spectacle and Sublime," in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 135–36.

arrangements of sound in listening. Tim Anderson and Francisco López explain that

immersive sound environments do not normally reproduce the sounds of a place in an

accurate manner; rather, through heavy editing, as well as manipulation of sonic direction

and placement, immersive recordings generate "fantastic acoustic spaces" that would be

nearly impossible to find in unamplified reality.[25] The liner notes to *Disc One* conveyed

the immersive ideal by recommending a technological setup that would generate a sense

of being spatially encompassed by sound. Later *Environments* releases augmented such

claims with technical notes for quadraphonic, or four-channel surround-sound setups.[26]

Syntonic's two-pronged promotions for *Environments* as both "realist" (or

illusionistic) and immersive communicated that users would feel ensconced within the

sonically depicted environment. The promise of recorded audio simulating a physically

local, encompassing environment ties in with Syntonic's claim that the records were to be

"heard, rather than listened to," since the success of the illusion would presumably best

be judged indirectly, by how well the sounds "tricked" the inattentive ear into regarding

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[25] Anderson, *Making Easy Listening*, xliii, 139, 174; Francisco López, "Profound Listening and Environmental Sound Matter," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 82–87.
[26] Quadraphonic sound (alternatively "quadraphonics," "quadriphonic sound," or "quadraphonic stereo") was introduced to the general public in June 1969 when Seymour Solomon, president of Vanguard Records, announced plans to issue tape recordings in a four-channel format. Quadraphonics were widely hyped toward the end of 1969 and into the early '70s as making it possible to accurately replicate concert hall "ambience" by channeling delayed reverb into the two rear speakers. Later quadraphonic approaches, however, favored a "surround-sound" approach of 360° encompassing sources of sound. Robert Long, "Ping-Ping-Pong-Pong," *High Fidelity Magazine*, September 1969, 62–63; Larry Klein, "The Four-Channel Follies," *Stereo Review*, September 1970, 70–77; "Four-Channel Stereo," *High Fidelity Magazine*, January 1971, 48–54; Ralph Hodges, "The Home Experimenter's Guide to Multi-Channel Listening," *Stereo Review*, April 1971, 62–66; Robert Long, "Before You Buy Speakers, What About Quadraphonics?" *High Fidelity Magazine*, June 1972, 53–59.

them as authentically present. At the same time, however, Syntonic's many

instructions for creating and assessing ideal playback presents a more complicated

scenario in which the user constantly shifts their attention to and away from the sounds,

not only to optimize the results, but also to appreciate the high quality of Syntonic's

cutting-edge audio reproduction (and of their own playback technologies).

Environmental Affordances

While Syntonic's scientistic claims to psychological efficacy might raise some

eyebrows, the continued success of nature sound recordings, white noise generators,

sound-generating mobile apps, and "binaural beats" for meditating, concentrating, and

sleeping, give reason to believe that these claims may be grounded in some properties of

these electronically automated sounds.[27] Perception psychologist James J. Gibson's

theory of affordances gives reason to find some plausibility in these claims.

Gibson defines an affordance as an ability or behavior any environmental feature

offers, provides, or furnishes its inhabitant.[28] For example, air, in combination with other

environmental features, affords most mammals respiration, locomotion, visualization,

olfaction, and audition.[29] These affordances are not objective properties of air itself, but

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[27] On the history of white noise generators and "sleep engines," see Hagood, 25–64. On the creation and use of sound-based mobile apps for sleeping, see Anahid Kassabian, "Music for Sleeping," in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, ed. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 165–81. On binaural beats, see Gabe Turow and James D. Lane, "Binaural Beat Stimulation: Altering Vigilance and Mood States," in *Music, Science, and the Rhythmic Brain: Cultural and Clinical Implications*, ed. Jonathan Berger and Gabe Turow (New York: Routledge, 2011), 122–36.

[28] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), 127.

[29] Ibid., 130–31.

instead arise out of the inhabitant's relationship with the composition of the

environment.[30] From the point of view of the inhabitant, affordances are perceived as

possibilities latent "in" the environment, possibilities that invite certain activities (like

movement) and behaviors (like breathing) without demanding them. Recent

musicological and music-theoretical work has drawn fruitfully from Gibson's theory by

describing ways in which music might be understood as an environmental feature that

affords auditors both cognitive and semi-cognitive behaviors and activities.[31] To expand

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[30] Ibid., 129, 138. As Gibson notes, affordances might also derive from the cultural associations and perceptions of the environment's inhabitant. In the case of *Environments*, affordances work off of the subconscious associations users might have with the sounds at hand. To give some examples, *Intonation*, a recording of chanting on "Om," promises to facilitate meditation, *Ultimate Heartbeat* promises to enhance sex, and *Alpine Blizzard*, with its gusts of wind and banging shutters, even proposes to lower the perceived temperature of the room.

[31] The most substantial studies in this regard have been performed by Eric Clarke and Tia DeNora. Clarke explains how music, through its patterning of stimulus information, affords its listeners the activity of hermeneutical listening, as well as possibilities for certain interpretations over others. DeNora, by contrast, uses Gibson's theory to explain music's apparently non-hermeneutical affordances, for instance in the way percussive pop music might energize an aerobics class. Since most of *Environments*'s recordings are not patterned in a conventionally musical way, and do not seem hermeneutically accessible, it may appear that DeNora's approach would offer more insight into what *Environments* affords their listeners. However, as Clarke argues, DeNora's argument presupposes that determining meaning necessitates active, self-conscious reflection. This may not necessarily be the case, as several recent studies on timbre have shown. Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). (On timbre and meaning, see David K. Blake, "Timbre as Differentiation in Indie Music," *Music Theory Online* 18, no. 2 [June 2012]; Cornelia Fales, "Short-Circuiting Perceptual Systems: Timbre in Ambient and Techno Music," in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello [Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005], 156–80.)

Other studies of music that make use of Gibson's theory of affordances include Mark J. Butler, *Playing with Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 70–95; and Marta Garcia Quiñones, "Listening as Action: Movements and Gestures

these inquiries in the direction of non-musical sound, one might observe how the

design of *Environments*'s recordings might suggest for its auditors particular affordances.

The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore serves well as an example.

Teibel's first challenge with *Seashore* was to approximate the effects of the white

noise machine or generator, a product first made commercially available in 1962 with

Marpac Inc.'s Sleepmate.[32] Acoustically speaking, "white noise" describes a broadband

sound (a sound that covers multiple frequencies) with a flat spectral density, or uniform

amplitude across the entire frequency range. White noise machines do not actually

generate white noise, which sounds harsh due to its perceived intensity in the upper

audible frequency range, but rather pink noise, in which amplitude uniformly decreases

as the frequency increases. Since the human ear hears pink noise as evenly distributed

across the acoustic spectrum, pink noise effectively works like white noise.

As the spectrogram in Figure 1.3 illustrates, *The Psychologically Ultimate*

Seashore approximates pink noise, as can be seen by its weighted distribution of intensity

towards the lower end of the audible frequency spectrum. In this spectrogram, yellow

color represents higher amplitude, while dark red represents lower amplitudes. The y-axis

represents the full audible frequency range, while the x-axis represents time. Because the

color is distributed evenly across the x-axis, one can see that *Seashore* remains uniform

in its frequency distribution throughout. The sounds are loudest in the low to mid

frequency range (40–1000 Hz), curve down between the mid to high range (1–6 kHz),

and dip even lower between 6 and 10 kHz, with the quietest frequencies above 10 kHz.

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to Sound and Music in the Everyday Life of the City" (presented at Tuned City Tallinn
2011, Tallinn, Estonia, July 8, 2011).

[32] Hagood, "Sonic Technologies of the Self," 25–64.

This even distribution of energy across time, and throughout the frequency spectrum, would not have been possible without considerable manipulation of an actual recording. How did Teibel and Gerstman alter the original seashore recording to approximate pink noise?
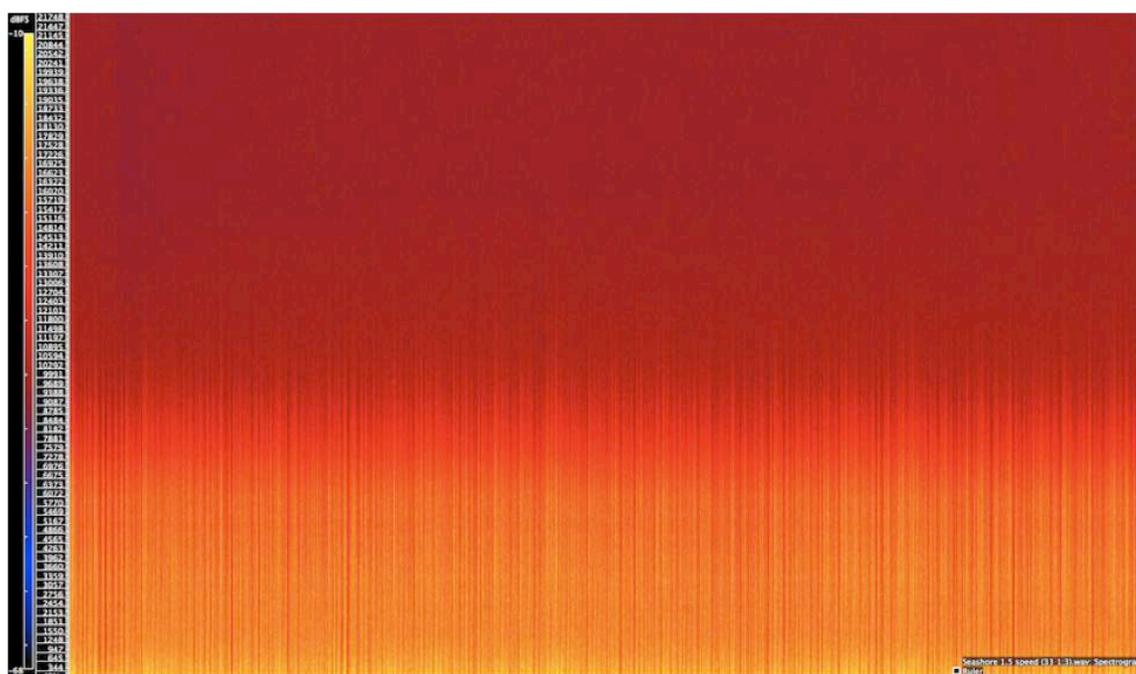
Fig. 1.3. *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore* spectrogram.

Teibel had initially set out to record ocean sounds from various locales, seeking recordings that would bring him the relaxation he had felt while working with the Brighton Beach loop. None, however, had the same effect, and so he returned to the Brighton Beach loop to see what could be done with it. As Teibel explains in a 1984 essay about the process, he produced *Seashore* digitally using an IBM 360, at the time a high-end machine to which Gerstman likely provided him access. The duo used a

program that, according to Teibel's somewhat obscure description, approximated an early vocoder. To vary the sound of the loop over the course of the full LP side, they used a random number generator to continually modify the filters on the vocoder. By adjusting the EQ, and adding a delay to simulate stereo separation, Teibel and Gerstman effectively composed a realistic ocean sound that spanned the audible frequency spectrum for the full length of an LP side.[33]

In listening, *Seashore*'s design effectively reduces the signal-to-noise ratio of any simultaneous discrete sound event by increasing the amount of "noise" these sound events would come up against (a technique colloquially referred to as "masking"). In doing so, the recording decreases the potential for unique sound events to be taken as salient affordances by an auditor. Whereas contingent sound events against a backdrop of relative silence might register as competing possibilities for action, the common denominator of *Seashore*'s waves over time, and across the frequency spectrum, reduces the probability that the next sound event will be unique, and thus worthy of attention and/or action. For such reasons, *Seashore*'s primary affordance is concentration.

Sides A and B of most *Environments* records contrast in design and affordances proposed. For instance, the masking sounds of Side A of *Disc One*, *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore*, are meant to invite calm conducive to reading or meditation; while the dynamic bird sounds of Side B, *Optimum Aviary*, are intended to promote alertness for the completion of menial, everyday tasks. The majority of *Environments*'s twenty-two original recordings can be said to take at least one of the two approaches to sound design

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[33] Irv Teibel, "Mother Nature Goes Digital," in *Digital Deli*, ed. Steve Ditlea (New York: Workman, 1984), 224–25.

exemplified by *Seashore* and *Aviary*:

1) Seclusive: The relatively "opaque," continuous sounds of recordings like *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore*, *The Psychologically Ultimate Thunderstorm* and *Gentle Rain in a Pine Forest (Synthetic Silence)* act as white noise. These recordings tend to afford privacy, withdrawal from one's local surroundings, and isolation from other sounding sources. Seclusive recordings might be understood to afford introspection by "masking" surrounding sounds.

2) Inclusive: The more "transparent," non-continuous sound environments such as *Optimum Aviary* and *Caribbean Lagoon* are intended to promote alertness. These more noise-permissive environments are made to afford sociality, as well as attentive awareness of one's local surroundings and other sounding sources. Inclusive recordings might be understood to afford extraverted activity by allowing the user to notice other sounds.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, but rather situated at two ends of a spectrum within which *Environments*'s recordings operate. *Seashore*, for instance, contains several moments of relative quiet, while *Aviary* has moments of timbral and textural constancy.

From these categories, it is tempting to extrapolate the following: masking recordings, thanks to their ability to shut out intrusive sounds, afford retreat from the outside world, while inclusive recordings afford interaction with the outside world. As I argue in the next section, however, these correlations between introspection and private

self-seclusion, and between extraversion and public connection, are less straightforward than they may first appear.

Ambience, Artifice, and Alienation

Environments's claims to realism and immersiveness play on the ambiguous dual meaning of its title. On the one hand, "environments" seems to refer to the environing function of its recordings, addressing their role in altering the user's surrounding auditory space. Yet it also identifies the type of sounds on the recordings as sounds of "the environment," an idiomatic expression that arose in the U.S. following World War II as a way of designating non-industrial "nature." These meanings play off each other in Syntonic's marketing of *Environments* as "stereo sound" and "psychological sound," rather than as nature or environmental sounds. These constructs conflate the records' artificial, illusionistic "environments-for" human listeners with the natural environments that most of their recordings reference. These meanings collapse in listening, too, as electronic automation makes the sounds seem "natural" in their ongoingness to the unfocused listener, while the focused listener marvels at the illusionistic sorcery of the sounding machine. This fusion of the artificial and natural would be aesthetically thematized in Ambient music for decades to come (see conclusion to Chapter 6).

As a reference to nature, the *Environments* title also capitalized the rise of the U.S. environmentalist movement that ramped up in 1962 with the mainstream success of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. As a protest movement, environmentalism hit its stride in 1970, the same year Earth Day was implemented nationwide. One can detect a strain of Carson-esque environmentalist rhetoric in *Environments*'s self-descriptions; Syntonic, for

instance, advertises *Dawn at New Hope, PA* as preserving sounds that "are gradually

vanishing from the North American countryside." One of *Dawn*'s Listening Test

Responses likewise poses a bleak response to the silencing of birds invoked in Carson's

book: "Well, when all the birds are dead of pollution… and when the cities have

swallowed the last lovely green woods in the population explosion… we can have

earphones in our gas masks and listen to the world when it was still young and fresh…."

As with *Silent Spring*, *Environments* attests to the deleterious effects of present-day

industrialization and urban expansion through dystopian imagery. Unlike Carson's

somber prose, however, Syntonic's tone is often playful, even jocular.

The claim to reconnect users with a rapidly disappearing nature is even more

central to a pair of nature sound LP records that were released following the Atlantic

releases of *Environments: Disc One* and *Disc Two*. *Ambience One* and *Ambience Two*,

both subtitled *An Adventure in Environmental Sound*, were released in August 1970 on

Audio Fidelity, a label that had made a name for itself during the '50s as a leader in high-

fidelity audio. The *Ambience* records were recorded "on location" by producer Eddie

Newmark, also the music director and head of A&R for Audio Fidelity.[34] Like

Environments: Disc One, *Ambience One*'s Side A, *Serenity: The Silent Surf*, features the

sound of ocean waves, while *Colloquy: Unruffled Feathers* on Side B features birdsong.

A spectrographic analysis of "Serenity" reveals a pink-noise like quality, although not to

the level of consistency and fullness of *Environments*'s "Seashore"; as Fig. 1.4 shows, the

track is unevenly dense in the middle frequency range, and rolls off almost entirely

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[34] "Audio Fidelity Plans Series on Environment," *Billboard* 82, no. 85 (June 20, 1970),
66.

around ~14 kHz. The touted affordances, however, strike a familiar chord with Syntonic's: the natural environments inside, Audio Fidelity claims, can be used for "relaxation and renewal," and can help users "talk, make love, eat, sleep, study, think…the uses are infinite."
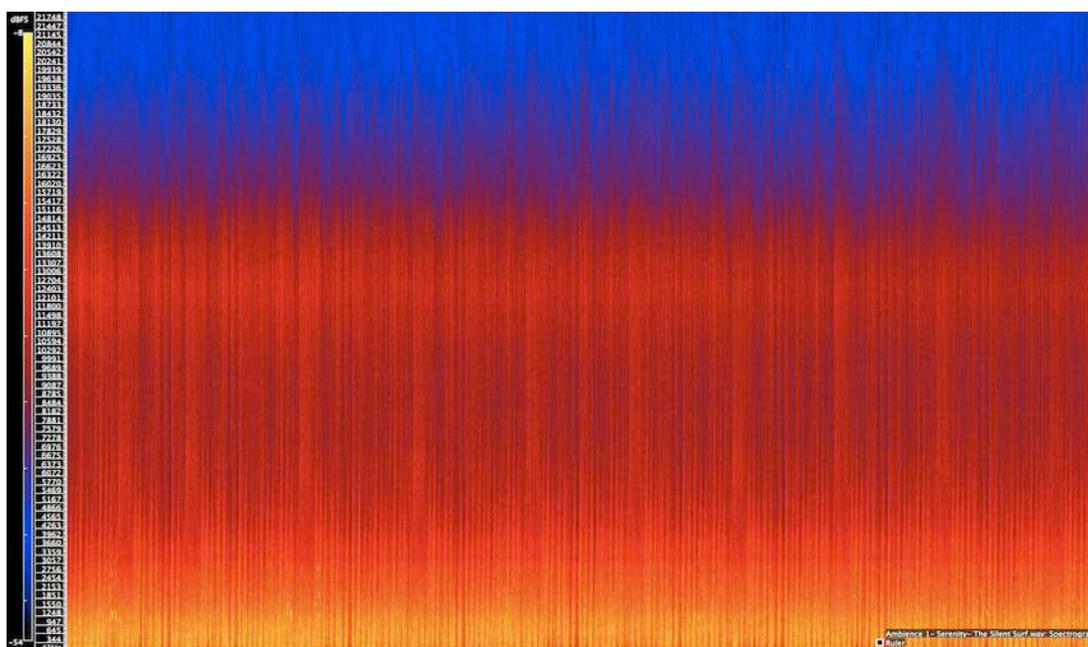
Fig. 1.4. *Serenity: The Silent Surf* spectrogram.

While the *Ambience* releases are virtually identical to *Environments* in both concept and sound design, their self-description leans harder on the environmentalist rhetoric of proposing to reconnect users with a disappearing nature. *Ambience*'s liner notes identify a "malaise" afflicting city dwellers, a problem Audio Fidelity attributes to the "ever-widening psychic as well as physical separation of man and nature and the increasing artificiality of his environment." The LPs offer themselves as a "respite" from this artificiality, despite their obvious artifice. "Technology is a major cause of the

contemporary predicament," the liner notes admit, "but is also capable of producing

ways of lightening the load." They go on to paint a grim picture of urban expansion,

engaging an extrapolative rhetoric used in '60s environmentalist literature and science-

fiction novels whereby a dystopian future is imagined as an intensification of present-day

social ills.[35]

> If population projections point to the very real possibility that before a century has passed America will no longer have a countryside, but will consist of a single city, megalopolis three thousand miles long, well, many of the hideous emotional and physical, not to mention social consequences of such an existence are already upon us. Living within a sunless and airless and continually expanding complex of high-rising concrete, steel, plastic and glass, one can only temporarily escape, and then only to an interminable nightmare of ranch houses, highways, gas stations, car lots and industrial sludge lying beyond each apparent exit. This constitutes only a difference in degree rather than kind. If, indeed, there is still a countryside to enjoy, and if one may count on two of every fifty-two weeks to take advantage of it, the conditionings of peculiarly urban exigencies make it immensely difficult for many city people to open themselves to the country. The country has become alien to them. The city has become their "natural" habitat. Still, the malaise gives demonstration that their adaptation to the city is not (cannot be) complete.

Ambience's fanciful conjuring of an oppressively industrialized globe picks up on what

Frederick Buell calls an "ecodystopian" strain of environmentalist discourse. Evident

especially in science fiction literature since *Silent Spring*, ecodystopian narratives

fantastically depict society's inevitable movement toward environmental apocalypse

through grim dystopian imagery. Buell notes how the genre in the 1970s played with

humor and irony, perhaps tonally evening out or mollifying the anxiety and fear that such

stories might generate.[36] Indeed, the cheekiness of *Ambience*'s proposition lightens the

dreariness of the future they depict, partly thanks to the record's obvious impotence in the

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[35] M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer, "*Silent Spring* and Science Fiction: An Essay in the History and Rhetoric of Narrative," in *And No Birds Sing: Rhetorical Analyses of Rachel Carson's* Silent Spring, ed. Craig Waddell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000): 174–97, esp. 180–82.

[36] Frederick Buell, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 247–83, esp. 248–49.

face of this future, but also because of its certain contribution to the junk heap in light of this inadequacy.

In advertising their recordings through the ecodystopian language of contemporary environmentalist fiction, Audio Fidelity represented open-air nature sounds as gradually eroding into the past, while suggesting that consumers might wish to design their local auditory environments in the image of this disappearing world. In this sense, although recordings like *Colloquy* might be described in design terms as acoustically "open" to, or inclusive of the present environment, they are at the same time seclusive in a metaphorical sense, as they shield their users from an undesired ecodystopia imagined to be latent in present day industry.

Syntonic similarly represents *Environments* as a means of sheltering users from a modernizing present. As the liner notes to *Disc One*'s 1987 CD pressing relate, "One of the things hardest to come by in this modern world is decent seclusion." Recordings like *Seashore*, the original LP notes claim, might present a solution to the intrusive nature of contemporary urban existence because of its pink-noise-like attributes. Perhaps it's no coincidence that *Environments*, a product clearly aiming at an upwardly mobile middle-class market, emerged at the tail end of the "white flight" of the U.S. American middle-class from urban centers to the much quieter suburbs. Given its orientation towards an urbane middle-class, the "white noise" represented by *Seashore* could be interpreted as a symbolic bulwark against the political "black noise" raised throughout the 1960s civil rights movement.[37] As a technologized substitute for white flight, *Environments*

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[37] I borrow the term "black noise" from Tricia Rose, who uses it to describe the way expressions of black youth (such as rap music) are othered as "noise"; see Tricia Rose,

preserved a "personal space" for white middle-class consumers within an increasingly

"noisy" public sphere that, like the rural nature represented in *Ambience*, may have

seemed increasingly crowded.[38]

  While some might regard such an interpretation a stretch, I believe that it's all too

easy to see *Seashore* as symbolically neutral, merely a pleasant wall of sound, rather than

as a cultural construction designed for a particular consumer market. The seashore carries

with it a set of cultural associations for most first-world users that are broadly reflective

of the *Environments* promise on the whole. As John Fiske explains in "Reading the

Beach," seashores symbolize in Western capitalism and post-Enlightenment bourgeois

thought the liminal zone between binarized constructs of "nature" and "culture."[39] Within

this cultural imaginary, the seashore partakes of the safety and comfort imagined of

suburban middle-class existence, while also representing a partial escape from cultured

existence in sitting at the edge of a vast, dangerous, uncolonized wilderness.[40] In

addition, the beach not only represents a liminal spatial territory, but also a liminal

temporal space outside quotidian living, outside the regime of the workday: the time of

the vacation or holiday.[41] *Seashore* reproduces for users this liminal zone within a

domestic setting by marking out a private space and duration for user relaxation or

concentration apart from physical labor and risk. The ritual of audio playback clears a

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Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America, Music Culture (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

[38] On the acoustic production of "personal space," see Mack Hagood, "Quiet Comfort: Noise, Otherness, and the Mobile Production of Personal Space," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 573–89. See also Gary Gumpert, *Talking Tombstones & Other Tales of the Media Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 76–100.

[39] John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 44–46.

[40] Ibid., 57–58.

[41] Ibid., 43–44.

space and time within the everyday for escape into an imagined nature (although one

clearly removed from the actual risks presented by the ocean). Accordingly, *Seashore*

also represents the escape that *Environments* offers, as the recording places its user at a

partial remove from an undesired environment, and nearer a more idyllic place and

temporality.

Yet as Teibel continued to release *Environments* records into the '70s, he not only

advertised the seclusive recordings' ability to fight unwanted noise, but their usefulness

for fighting unwanted *silence*. He proposed that the recordings would not only help block

out intrusive sounds, but also serve as a co-presence within listeners' *actual* physical

seclusion to keep them from feeling isolated. As the disc sleeves of these later records

explain, "In the last hundred years or so, mankind has become increasingly isolated from

the natural music of the earth. The sounds of wind, rain, the sea, and the creatures of the

wild have been replaced by machine noise, electronic noise, and silence." Replaced by

silence? It goes on:

> We mention silence as a form of technological noise. Think about it. Have you ever been out in the open, anywhere on this earth, and heard *nothing* for more than a few seconds at a time? *Nature abhors silence* and we, as an integral part of nature, also abhor silence. Yet, in most homes and offices, that is what we hear most often. *Silence*. When it is very quiet, *our hearing ability actually increases*, and every little noise becomes that much more apparent.… If your hearing is too sensitive, every little sound takes its toll on your psyche, and you usually find yourself tense and distracted.[42]

Through its simulation of nature sounds, *Environments* presents itself as a means of

coping with the uniquely modern problem of artificial silence, represented here as a type

of noise. For a modest price of $5.99, *Environments*'s users could take a psychological

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[42] Syntonic Research, Inc., sleeve notes to *Environments: Disc Seven*, Atlantic SD 66007, 1976, LP.

vacation from the sterile ambiance of the office or home without leaving it. Their

seclusive recordings, ironically, provided *openings* into unsheltered nature.

While Syntonic generally extended their invitation to urban and suburban

dwellers, Teibel at one point even described a scenario in which sheltered beach-dwellers

sought to connect to their surroundings via *Seashore*'s electronic wizardry:

> When the seashore record first came out, it seemed like everybody who lived by the ocean wanted
> a copy…. You can't leave your windows open all the time; the sea spray comes in, and the salt
> rots everything. So people build airtight, soundproof enclosures. They leave their windows open
> maybe four hours on a sunny day. And down in Florida, you hear nothing—even right alongside
> the beach—because almost everything is air conditioned.[43]

Bizarrely, Teibel here promotes *Seashore* through a scenario in which the oceanside

homeowner used *Environments* to connect to the outside world from which they

purposefully withdrew. In this scenario, *Seashore*'s digital rendering of the natural world

re-sutured the user to their surroundings, restoring their lost continuity.[44] Teibel's

anecdote dramatizes the irony of the disjuncture at the heart of recordings like *Seashore*:

while the recording simulates an artificially sundered nature in order to reunite the user

with what's been shut out, it at the same time accommodates the user to their isolation

from nature, and even reinforces it by providing immersive, more-than-real sonic

seclusion. Syntonic presented these recordings not just as shelters from city centers

polluted with noise, but also as escape hatches out of the self-imposed remove provided

by modern dwellings. While recommending electronic technology reconnect users with

unmediated nature, they unapologetically exploit the supposed source of users' alienation

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[43] Burger, "Environments on Vinyl," 25.

[44] On "rendering" as an element of eco-poetics, see Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 35–36.

from nature and culture alike. Instead of suggesting that the user take the record as a cue to reconnect with a physically (and perhaps also spiritually) separate world after the groove runs out, Teibel sold *Environments* as a temporally extensible and physically durable palliative for the consumer who's already accepted that Arcadia has gone out to sea, and that they are stranded on the shores of an endlessly modernizing present. The recordings accommodate their users to the ersatz world they create by affording users the opportunity to build against it their very own psycho/acoustic sonic moats.

Having excised all signs of human intervention or modern society from the sounds of the recordings, it seems at face like nature sound records such as *Environments* call for the return of nature lost, something that Timothy Morton notes has long served as a "catch-all for a potentially infinite series of fantasy objects" that propose to restore a lost unity of subject and object, a wholeness that has become irreparably damaged by modernization.[45] Yet the fantasy advanced by Syntonic's rhetoric and design leaves this Romantic vision behind, committing their users to a technologized world by fashioning their records as naturalizable technologies. The brash functionalism of *Environments*'s promotional language and aesthetic presentation serves as a drawbridge to the modernizing world from which the records come.

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[45] Ibid., 14, 22.

CHAPTER 2

Designing Acoustic Ecologies: Two Approaches

Environments's deployment of the nature sounds recording as a response to

modernization may be usefully contrasted with the applications of sound reproduction

technology in the contemporaneously emerging movement now known as Acoustic

Ecology. Just around the time Irv Teibel started *Environments*, a Canadian group called

the World Soundscape Project (WSP) proposed their own technological solutions to the

problem of urban and industrial noise within a field of research and composition they

named Acoustic Ecology.[1] Both the WSP and Syntonic expressed discomfort with

modernizing acoustic space, and shared an interest in beautifying these acoustic

environments. The WSP's applications of technology to acoustic design, however,

diverged considerably from Syntonic's. This divergence illustrates how and why

Acoustic Ecology developed during the 1970s and '80s in a trajectory parallel to, but

separate from that of Ambient music. A short history of the emergence and early

development of Acoustic Ecology clarifies the shared, as well as separate motivations

and methods behind these movements' design of audible environments.

Acoustic Ecology and the Sound Recording

The World Soundscape Project was founded in 1969 by R. Murray Schafer, a

composer and music professor in the Centre for the Study of Communications and the

Arts at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Schafer had been for several years

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[1] For a broad overview of the history of the WSP, see Barry Truax, "The World
Soundscape Project," *Barry Truax*, http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html.

concerned with the problem of noise pollution, and sought to draw attention to it. This

concern led to his organization of the WSP, who were initially focused on the abatement

of noise pollution. Their concerns, however, migrated during the early '70s toward

encouraging the proliferation of sounds that distinctly convey a sense of place and/or

local community.[2] For Schafer and the WSP, an ideal acoustic environment or

"soundscape" would be full of audible "soundmarks" and "keynotes" that consolidate,

organize, and guide a contiguous "acoustic community," much in the same way the

landmarks of landscape render a local place both recognizable and navigable.[3] Schafer

organized these goals around an ideal of *acoustic communication* whereby distinctive

sounds would both convey information within a regional community, and symbolically

represent this community to itself and others.[4]

Although he often voiced a marked aversion to mechanized and electronic sounds,

Schafer also described the communicative efficacy of the soundscape in terms borrowed

from consumer audio technology. Within a "hi-fi" soundscape, he explained, discrete

sounds can be heard clearly in the midst of surrounding sounds. Schafer and his

colleagues normally illustrated this ideal with the rural wilderness environments that

WSP members considered to be part of their Canadian heritage.[5] The high "signal-to-

noise" ratio of rural environments, due to their relatively low density of ongoing sounds,

presented within Acoustic Ecology an ideal situation for the discernment of acoustic

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[2] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 9.
[3] Ibid., 215–25; Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication*. 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Ablex, 2001), 65–66.
[4] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 66.
[5] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 43, see also 44–67; Stephen Adams, *R. Murray Schafer* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 30.

signals.[6] By contrast, the WSP found the "lo-fi" soundscapes of the city, on the whole,

aesthetically undesirable. The city's abundance of "flat line," or "low-information, high-

redundancy" sounds, Schafer argued, disturbs acoustic communication, and muddies the

auditory perspective of the listener.[7] Schafer, however, only ever understood these sounds

as interruptive or masking noise, rather than as acoustic signals or "soundmarks" in their

own right.[8] If the soundscape were a machine, Schafer argued, mechanical noise would

signal escaped energy, while the perfect, most efficient machine would be silent.[9]

Despite these ethical and aesthetic objections to the sounds of industry, Schafer's

casual use of technological and mechanical analogies to describe his ideal natural

environment reveals how such technologies were second nature for him as a means of

relating to his acoustic surroundings. His use of terms like "hi-fi" and "lo-fi" suggests

that his own interactions with mass-reproduced technologies conditioned his sense of

what counted as a signal, and what counted as noise. Yet Schafer never acknowledged

how his relationship with nature may have been mediated by ideals engendered through

the manufacturing industry, which up until the late 20th century idealized mechanical

silence as a sign of efficiency, power, and distinction,[10] or through audio engineering

discourses, which prized fidelity as a mark of presence.

Media theory also informed Schafer's thought and pedagogical practice.

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[6] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 43.

[7] Ibid., 78, see also 71–99.

[8] R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher* (Scarborough, Ontario: Berandol Music Limited, 1969), 17.

[9] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 207.

[10] On the idealization of silence in the history of car manufacturing, see Karin Bijsterveld et al., *Sound and Safe: A History of Listening Behind the Wheel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29–30 and 38–46.

Evidently influenced by Marshall McLuhan, with whom he had intermittent contact at Simon Fraser, Schafer sought to use audio technologies to stimulate his students' aural awareness, and to train his students to notice the balance of sounds they heard on an everyday basis.[11] To these ends, Schafer and the WSP used recording technologies to draw attention to the "form and beauty" of the soundscape through "a new science and art form" they called *acoustic design*.[12] Barry Truax, one of the WSP's original members, explains that the activity of the WSP was "fundamentally one of design,"[13] the outcome of which would ideally lead to the extension of human awareness, the beautification of the environment, and improvement of human communication.[14] Technology, Truax goes on to say, should be not be used as a "substitute for listening" by inspiring non-reflective, unfocused reception, but should rather "extend" listening, or help listeners consciously modify their perceptual habits.[15]

The WSP described their first major venture in acoustic design, *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP (1973), as a "field study" of various locales in the Vancouver area.[16] For Schafer, the term "field" suggested an objective representation of the soundscape, wherein the usual contrast between "figure" (focus of interest) and "ground" (setting) is obliterated, and all sounds are given equal footing by the undiscriminating microphone.[17] Sound reproduction technologies, as Schafer and Truax wrote, have the ability to "hear"

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[11] Adams, *R. Murray Schafer*, 25–26.
[12] Ibid., 35–37; Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 5.
[13] Barry Truax, ed., *The World Soundscape's Project's Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* (Vancouver: A.R.C., 1978), vii.
[14] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 243.
[15] Ibid., 14, 219.
[16] The World Soundscape Project, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape 1973 / Soundscape Vancouver 1996*, Cambridge Street Records CSR-2CD 9701, 1997, CD.
[17] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 152.

and reproduce sounds in a way that situated listener cannot.[18] The WSP represented the

recordings of the *Vancouver Soundscape* along these lines as "acoustic images" captured

by the "camera"-like recording equipment.[19] Audio reproduction technology, they say,

thus allows the listener to perceive the soundscape more accurately than if they were

actually within the depicted environment.[20]

 They also note that the repeatability of the recording allows the listener to adopt

an "analytical" perspective in which they are not beholden to the "immediacy of the

situation."[21] As Schafer sums in the liner notes,

> To record sounds is to put a frame around them. Just as a photograph frames a visual environment,
> which may be inspected at leisure and in detail, so a recording isolates an acoustic environment
> and makes it a repeatable event for study purposes. The recording of acoustic environments is not
> new, but it often takes considerable listening experience to begin to perceive their details
> accurately. A complex sensation may seem bland or boring if listened to carelessly. We hope,
> therefore, that listeners will discover new sounds with each replay of the records in this set.[22]

Schafer describes the WSP's immediate aim in recording as representing the acoustic

environment *as is* for examination through repeated listenings. Naturally, such careful

study would best be undertaken at a secluded remove from potentially distracting noises.

 The WSP obliged the acoustic designer of the soundscape recording to "let nature

speak with its authentic voices" by creating a framed sonic image of the soundscape in

question.[23] To achieve maximum transparency on the *Vancouver Soundscape*, Schafer

left several recordings continuous and unedited, while making others out of multiple

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[18] Ibid., 131; Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 165.
[19] The World Soundscape Project, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape*.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 165.
[22] The World Soundscape Project, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape*.
[23] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 247.

recordings, "mixed or spliced together arbitrarily for comparative illustration."[24]

Schafer's "arbitrary" approach takes a page from composer John Cage, an early influence

of his.[25] As I explain in more depth in Chapter 4, Cage used chance techniques in order to

eliminate the expressive intention of the composer from the final sounding result, in an

effort to "let sounds be themselves."[26] Similarly, Schafer worried that purposive

manipulation might "color" the soundscape according to the designer's aesthetic aims,

and so used arbitrary edits to bring the framed field closer to its natural state.[27]

The WSP's descriptions reflect Acoustic Ecology's documentarian aims in

utilizing sound recording to improve a place's acoustic environment. Such goals have

since been complicated and criticized by sound artists like Francisco López, who

questions both the "objectivity" of recording technology, as well as the ideal of

environmental verisimilitude that guides acoustic ecologists' uses of sampled sounds.[28]

As López explains, one cannot "let sounds be themselves" by recording them, not only

due to variances and idiosyncrasies in microphonic transduction, but also due to the

ineluctable singularity of any one person's listening experience to sound, reproduced or

otherwise.[29] Still, the impossibility of exact audio reproduction does not undo the value

of the field study altogether, which makes possible a documentary audio experience

given adequate preparation on the part of the listener. Placed at a remove from

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[24] The World Soundscape Project, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape*.
[25] On Cage's influence on Schafer, see Adams, 40–43.
[26] John Cage, "Experimental Music," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 10.
[27] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 219.
[28] Francisco López, "Profound Listening and Environmental Sound Matter," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 82–87, esp. 84–85.
[29] Ibid.

spontaneous interferences, and with the assumption of a documentary frame around recorded sounds, listeners may indeed hear these sounds "photographically" (or perhaps "phonographically") as the technology's impression or "memory" of an acoustic environment, and interpret them on this basis.

The impossibility of transparently documenting acoustic environments also indicates broader issues intrinsic to the very concept of soundscape. Tim Ingold has influentially contended that the concept of the soundscape falsely represents environmental sounds as material images that can be reproduced, rather than as events or experiences that are lived through. Sound is not *what* we hear any more than light is what we see, Ingold explains; sound "is not the object but the medium of our perception. It is what we hear *in*."[30] Steven Connor has similarly observed that reproductions or descriptions of physically or historically distant soundscapes cannot transparently guarantee the transmission of their original meanings to listeners, since we as listeners rely on our own cultural backgrounds to make sense of these sounds. The documentarian ideal of acoustic communication embedded in the term "soundscape" imagines cultures as "sense traps"; and yet cultures are also "sense multipliers" in that they provide "a repertoire of forms, images, and dreams whereby reflection on the senses can take place."[31] Unlike the original WSP, as I will explain shortly, *Environments* and the Ambient music that followed designed recordings to mediate and multiply listeners' senses in the ways that Ingold and Connor describe.

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[30] Tim Ingold, "Against Soundscape," in *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, ed. Angus Carlyle (Paris: Double Entendre, 2007), 11.
[31] Steven Connor, "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing," in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (New York: Berg, 2004), 156.

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As Acoustic Ecology diversified into the 1980s, several members of the WSP shifted their efforts from treating recording as a "sense trap," and began utilizing its capacity to act as a "sense multiplier" through the creation of *soundscape compositions*. As Barry Truax explains, soundscape compositions communicate something of the experiences, associations, and patterns of perception one might have within a soundscape.[32] While both the field study and soundscape composition aim to educate the senses of the listener, the soundscape composition achieves this goal through artistic, rather than documentary representation. According to Truax, a successful soundscape composition will a) use recognizable source material; b) respond to the context of this source material through its compositional form; c) encourage listeners to interpret what they hear in relation to this context; and d) influence listeners' everyday perceptual habits.[33]

Kit's Beach Soundwalk (1989), a soundscape composition by WSP member and Simon Fraser University professor Hildegard Westerkamp, nicely illustrates the aesthetic ideals communicated through soundscape composition during Acoustic Ecology's first decades. The titular "soundwalk" is based upon one of Schafer's "ear cleaning" exercises in which the acoustic ecologist (or a guiding map) leads listeners through an actual soundscape.[34] Westerkamp's piece similarly "walks" the listener through different

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[32] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 237.
[33] Ibid., 240.
[34] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 212–13. See also Andra McCartney, "Soundwalking: Creating Moving Environmental Sound Narratives," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies*, ed. Sumanth Gopinath and Jason Stanyek, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212–37.

perceptual orientations toward both natural and city sounds. The recording begins with the sounds of lapping water and gulls at Vancouver's Kitsilano Beach atop the steady, low hum of traffic and city noise from the urban area nearby. While Westerkamp narrates, alterations of the sound make it clear that what we are hearing is meant to reflect Westerkamp's own perspective. For example, towards the beginning, delicate trickling water sounds enter the sound field just as Westerkamp explains that she is standing among rocks full of barnacles that create trickling sounds as they feed. "The city is roaring around these tiny sounds," she says; yet the more she tries to hear the barnacles, the louder the city seems. To illustrate this shift in her perception, Westerkamp raises the levels of the city hum. She then explains, relieved, that studio techniques such as filters and equalizers allow one to pretend the city is far away; here, sound of the city fades out until we only hear the magnified high-frequency sounds of the barnacles. Westerkamp goes on to remark that she sometimes has "healing dreams" featuring such "energizing" high-frequency sounds as the barnacles. As she narrates these dreams, the barnacles morph into insects, twittering birds, quacking ducks, metallic clacks, and hollow, glassy chimes that drift in and out of the mix. These dreamed sounds, she says, give her the "strength" to imaginatively "play" with the sounds of the city. To illustrate this playfulness, Westerkamp erratically raises and lowers the noisy drone of the city. "Play with the monster," she says defiantly as the piece closes, "then I can face the monster." The piece ends ambiguously, however, as the sounds of crickets, birds, and water get buried under a heavy, whooshing wave of street noise.

The didactic aims of the soundscape composition can be observed in the way *Kit's Beach Soundwalk* models listening for the listener. At the beginning, the lively

sounds of the water and barnacles sparkle enticingly atop the distant broadband wash

of the city, which, as Westerkamp says, "doesn't seem that loud." Yet as she strains to

hear the barnacles—and as we, the listeners, strain alongside—the steady hum rises,

frustrating the aural desire stoked by Westerkamp's placement of the water sounds

moments earlier. Fortunately, the magic of sound reproduction technology comes to

nature's (and our) rescue, filtering out the hum of traffic and bringing us into the

microscopic sound world of the barnacles, and later Westerkamp's sparkling dream

world. Yet as the gray city roar inevitably returns, we learn that the "monster" can be

tamed without technology, too. *Kit's Beach Soundwalk* thus not only teaches how to

listen by showing what we should be listening *for* (small, intimate, high-frequency

sounds); it also affirms the efficacy of the soundscape composition in providing an

education of the senses, and a means of access to these sounds.

Didactic vs. Ambient Acoustic Design

Both the WSP and Syntonic Research used the sound recording as a solution to

the problem of an aesthetically unsatisfactory or noisy acoustic environment. These

institutions, however, produced and applied their recordings in different manners. The

early acoustic ecologists' field studies and recorded soundscape compositions exemplify

the WSP's *didactic* approach to acoustic design, in contrast with the *ambient* approach to

acoustic design exemplified by Syntonic's *Environments*.

In the WSP's didactic approach to acoustic design, the record "frames" a bounded

sound field for the listener to closely listen to. In successful instances, the listener will

draw out of their aesthetic experience of the framed sounds a model for everyday

perception of sound beyond the frame. By assuming the aural imagination of an ideally attentive, imaginative, or observant listener, the recorded study or composition instructs listeners both how to listen, as well as what to listen for. These recordings, however, do not directly adjust, manipulate, or add to existing soundscapes in the world. By contrast, *Environments*'s recordings are made to act as unframed sounds, loosed from the record unto the local listening soundscape, designing it much like wallpaper and lighting add to the design of a room. Ambient acoustic design shapes the space and temporality of the listening present by setting up the sonic coordinates of listening, while leaving possible perspectives on these sounds undetermined and open. While the didactic recording exists to instruct aural perception after the audition of the recording, recordings of ambient design aim to alter the settings in which audition occurs.

To extend this comparison, both the inclusive recordings of *Environments*, and recorded soundscape compositions such as *Kit's Beach Soundwalk*, are made to promote listener alertness and heightened awareness through stimulating sounds. Yet whereas the sonic sparseness of recordings like *Optimum Aviary* allow non-recorded sounds to be heard alongside those on the recording, the spaces in *Kit's Beach* support intensive focus specifically on the energizing high-frequency sounds of the recording to which Westerkamp draws attention. Westerkamp's montage-like melding of the beach and city soundscapes with those of her mind paves a clear path of audition for the attentive exploration of the listener. The aural terrain of *Aviary*, by contrast, is relatively homogeneous and unpaved, leaving the listener to navigate it on their own.

Through contextual information in titles and programs, Acoustic Ecology's didactic sound environments also invoke spatially and/or temporally distant places. In

this way, the acoustic ecologist seeks to mend the technological sundering of sounds from their original sources that Schafer deems *schizophonia*.[35] Both recording and broadcasting, laments Schafer, dissolve the relationship between a sound, and the being or thing making that sound.[36] The acoustic ecologist attempts to reinstate that bind by contextualizing the listener's experience with information about the time and place of the soundscape, and the makers of its sounds. With recordings of ambient design, on the other hand, the original contexts of sound reproduction tend to be obscured. On most *Environments* records, for example, exact origins are not advertised, and tend to be altered in post-production through editing and digital manipulation. Even when Syntonic specifies an original locale, such *Dawn at New Hope, PA* or *Dusk at Okefenokee Swamp*, they do not aim primarily to impart anything about these locations or their sounds, so much as they vaguely suggest how a user might imagine their transformed sonic environment. The *Environments* listener thus has a different spatiotemporal orientation toward sound than does the field study or soundscape listener, who hears the recording as a concrete trace of some distant and past reality. The *Environments* listener, by contrast, is positioned to regard the recordings as dynamic phenomena arising at the moment of audition. Whereas the acoustic ecologist seeks to repair the schizophonic break through heavy contextualization, Syntonic's sounds exploit and exacerbate the schizophonic condition for psychologically ameliorative purposes.

Both the WSP and Syntonic Research do rely on the authority of scientific rhetoric as a way of "selling" their projects to audiences, but they deploy this rhetoric to

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[35] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 88; see also Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 43–47.
[36] Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 44.

different ends. For the didactic designer, scientific rhetoric affirms the authority of the producer/designer/acoustic ecologist as someone particularly well equipped to listen to the world, thus supporting their aim of teaching listeners how to hear the world differently. Syntonic, by contrast, utilizes this rhetoric as a way of convincing listeners that the sounds will "do their job" on their own, without intervention on the part of the consumer. The vaguely defined, thinly veiled abstractions of corporate business and scientific research in *Environments*'s packaging work to convey the recordings' utilitarian design for even inattentive auditors. The recording of ambient design, in this way, is set forward as a "substitute for [focused] listening" in a way that early acoustic ecologists such as Truax and Westerkamp likely would not have approved.[37]

"The Music of the Future Isn't Music": Acoustic Designers against "Music-as-Environment"

Despite their differences in approach, both the WSP and Syntonic shared an aversion to the use of the music recording as background sound. They both singled out Muzak in particular, describing their own design work as alternatives to "music-as-environment,"[38] as exemplified by Muzak's recordings. These positions on the application of music-as-environment serve two purposes in historicizing Ambient music. On the one hand, both of their critiques of the aesthetic and practical shortcomings of music-as-environment prefigure Ambient producers' and listeners' dissatisfactions with

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[37] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 219; see also Hildegard Westerkamp, "Listening and Soundmaking: A Study of Music-as-Environment" (M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1988).

[38] I borrow this somewhat vague, but usefully concise formulation from Westerkamp's M.A. Thesis.

non-Ambient environmental musics. On the other, *Environments* sets the aesthetic

terms by which Ambient recordings represented an alternative to such environmental

musics as Muzak and mood music. In response to the perceived cultural uniformity and

homogeneity music-as-environment imposes upon its diverse inhabitants, Teibel and his

Ambient successors designed recordings whose uniform and homogeneous aesthetic

features represented an escape from culture.

In a 1984 radio interview, Teibel explains why *Environments* represents a

desirable alternative to Muzak:

> The main problem with music is that everyone has a different perception of how music is, what they like about it, and how effective it is. Just getting into an elevator in New York City and listening to Muzak for 30 seconds irritates me tremendously. I've known people who hate Muzak so much that they will actually stick pencils through the grille of the speaker and ruin the Muzak speaker just because they hate to listen to it! Now, that's not Muzak's fault so much as it's *music's* fault. The aspect of trying to tell a person what is good and bad about music turns out to be a big task. Music is man-made, and music started out as an emulation of nature. The reason why music existed was that you couldn't really deal with nature. If the crickets were chirping outside, or there was a windstorm or a rainstorm, or you lived by the ocean, you couldn't take the ocean with you, and you couldn't keep the thunderstorm for when you wanted it; you experienced it whenever it occurred. Now, suddenly, for the first time in the history of man, you can actually take these environmental sounds, and do things with them. It was an idea whose time had come. Once I came up with the idea, and started working on it, and seeing how effective it was with people, and how they really enjoyed it a thousand times more than listening to music that they didn't want to listen to, that they could listen to the same sound over and over and over again and not get tired of it— that was something that really, truly amazed me.[39]

Teibel proposes that music used as environmental sound can never adequately match the

"effectiveness" of nature sounds, since individual tastes inevitably get in the way.

Environments, he goes on to say, solves the impossibility of "trying to tell a person what

is good and bad about music." By comparing *Environments* with Muzak, however, Teibel

also compares music packaged and advertised for home listeners with programmed music

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[39] Irv Teibel, "Forum: Irv Teibel," interview by Eileen Remen, Longhorn Radio Network, February 5, 1983, UT KUT Longhorn Radio Network Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 2/25-83.

for public environments. *Environments*, in fact, would have more likely served as alternatives to the private, individualized use of music-as-environment—in which case the particularity of the listener's musical preferences would not be at issue.

Yet Teibel also suggests another advantage of *Environments* over self-owned musical recordings used as environments: that *Environments* holds up better to playback over long periods of time. In remarking that nature sounds can be heard "over and over and over again" without getting boring, Teibel affirms both the replayability of the recording, and the sustainability of the repetitive sounds within each recording. The *Disc One* sleeve notes elide sonic and technological repetition rhetorically in this way:

> Since they are sounds, rather than music, a person can enjoy hearing them for very long periods of time, as the sounds have subtle structures which are difficult to subconsciously memorize. Unlike playing a song over and over again, an *Environments* disc becomes more effective the more it is repeated.

Each sound of nature (each wave crashing, bird chirping, or thunder clapping), in this formulation, stands in for the whole recording, in that both are (ideally) endlessly iterable without becoming increasingly irritating. By repeating natural sounds at unpredictable intervals, Teibel imagined *Environments* as circumventing the disputability of cultural expression, and thus as a more durable technology for everyday domestic living.

Fig. 2.1. "The Music of the Future Isn't Music": Subtitle on *Environments*'s cassette re-releases (arrow added).

In contrast to Syntonic, the WSP took umbrage with the use of *any* recording of

ambient design, since such uses would necessarily isolate listeners from their local

acoustic communities. Schafer termed this application of music-as-environment

audioanalgesia: "The use of sound as a painkiller, a distraction to dispel distractions."[40]

The "wraparound of 'pretty'" provided by background music, Schafer argued, aims to

alleviate the tedium of everyday activities, but results in the disengagement of the listener

from their surroundings.[41] Truax further described the audioanalgesic use of music as an

artificial imposition of the recording's expressive character into the environment.[42]

Westerkamp, too, argued that music, when used as an environment, "reduces us to

passive listeners," and in doing so frustrates shared human activity and discourages

collective soundmaking: "It robs us of our desire to listen and to make sounds."[43] For the

WSP, music-as-environment transforms the collectivity of listeners from a community

based in shared, relational experience of sound, into a market of passive consumers.[44]

Underlying the WSP's critiques lie two interrelated assumptions common to

Marxist critiques of popular culture.[45] First, the WSP regards popular music recordings

and technologies as arriving to listeners from a centralized industry that's external to their

own authentic environment, and that exists only to sell commodities. Westerkamp, for

instance, argues that music-as-environment's sole purpose is "to promote and encourage

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[40] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 96.
[41] Ibid., 96–97.
[42] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 210.
[43] Westerkamp, 2–3, 27.
[44] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 171–78 and 205–06.
[45] This literature is vast and continues to grow; for a useful summary, see Lawrence Grossberg, "Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984): 392–421.

the exchange of commodities, [and] to speed up the process of commodity

production."[46] This music "determines the tone of commodity exchange" by creating a

"womb" of sweetly produced familiar tunes for the consumer, transforming their

environment into a self-contained emotional and cultural system, albeit one that cannot

provide the listener "basic physical spiritual nourishment."[47] While various scholars in

media and cultural studies have since questioned the relevancy and accuracy of similarly

centralized "culture industry" models of commodity production and distribution in our

postindustrial marketplace,[48] this model would have had special relevance to this

Canadian group for whom Muzak, as with most popular music on the radio, was literally

foreign. Schafer was especially critical of the cultural imperialism imposed upon non-

U.S. Americans by U.S.-based music distributors such as Muzak, whose "subliminal

advertising," he argued, reinforced U.S. and Western European cultural hegemony

globally.[49]

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[46] Westerkamp, "Listening and Soundmaking," 30.

[47] Ibid., 35.

[48] For a classic account of the "culture industry," see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Cultural Memory in the Present*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). A foundational critique of the centralized model of production and distribution can be found in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

For revisionary accounts specific to the popular music market, see Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007); Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Bristol, PA: Open University Press, 1990); Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996); Robert W. Witkin, "Why Did Adorno 'Hate' Jazz?" *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (March 2000): 145–70.

[49] R. Murray Schafer, "Music and the Soundscape," in *The Book of Music and Nature: An Anthology of Sounds, Words, Thoughts*, ed. David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 68. Canadian media scholar Jody

Secondly, the WSP assumes that music-as-environment "reduces" the otherwise active (attentive) listener to a passive (inattentive) auditor. This characterization of "music-as-environment" as a pacifying force resounds strongly with the cultural criticism of Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno, who decried the ways popular media promoted what he understood to be "regressive" or "infantile" modes of musical listening.[50] In a sociological conspectus of possible modes of musical listening, written in 1962, Adorno identified "deconcentrated" listening as the most regressive mode of all, one exemplified by the person who uses radio "as a comfortable distraction" in the background while working.[51] Adorno asserted that "the culture industry is made for" such listeners, whose "addiction" to background music gives them a means to cope with loneliness by turning domestic space into an "illusionary private realm."[52] Similarly, the WSP argued that the "audioanalgesic" use of music as environment "is like suffering from aural addiction,"[53] producing a "psychological dependence… a situation where the listener *needs* the background sound in order to

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Berland has importantly critiqued the imperialism of the U.S.-driven music market along these lines by describing how the international distribution of U.S. musical recordings, and the promotional power of these distribution channels, constricts the cultural resources from which listeners worldwide can readily choose, effectively reducing their opportunities to connect with their lived places and local communities; see Berland, "Locating Listening," in *The Place of Music*, ed. Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill (New York: Guilford, 1998), 129–50, esp. 134–39.

[50] Some of Adorno's most frequently cited texts in this regard are *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashton (1962; repr. New York: Continuum, 1976); "On Jazz," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 470–95; and "On Popular Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 437–69.

[51] Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 15.

[52] Ibid., 14–15.

[53] Westerkamp, "Listening and Soundmaking," 33.

function."[54] Truax further asserted that the culture industry has a stake in promoting inattentive listening, since "the distracted listener does not consciously screen and evaluate what is being heard, and therefore is a prime target for what might be termed the subliminal inculcation of values."[55] Such infantilizing characterizations of the inattentive inhabitant/listener, however, disregard the possibility that listener responsiveness or receptivity might be virtues, dismiss the ways even deconcentrated listeners can repudiate or ignore musically coded values, and deny the adeptness with which listeners might shift between attentional modes.

Through didactic musical design, the WSP aimed to change listener practices. By contrast, although Irving Teibel shared the WSP's disdain for Muzak and other conventional recorded musics, his ambient design of the sound recording responded by offering something other than these musics in their stead. Teibel thus affirmed consumers' ability to differentiate and program audio environments, based on their suitability for "background" use. What's more, some of his productions even metonymically and affectively reproduced those aspects of music-as-environment that the WSP found disturbing of Muzak. As Westerkamp complained, Muzak reproduces the "meaninglessness" and "redundancy" of the "flat line" urban soundscape, in contrast to the "complexities" and "richness" of the sounds of the wilderness.[56] "There is a *uniformity* about much of the music one hears in the public sphere," she wrote, "which gives one the sense of *endless repetition* of the *same* piece…. What we hear is a

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[54] Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 169.
[55] Ibid., 175.
[56] Westerkamp, "Listening and Soundmaking," 9, 28.

homogeneous music."[57] The Ambient genre later responded to this condition by

reflecting something of the modernized worlds from they come in their recordings'

electronic timbres, repetitiveness, and textural homogeneity. The next chapter analyzes

one *Environments* recording that preceded Ambient music in this regard, a recording

whose pitched electronic sounds, played "over and over and over again," may reasonably

have been heard as music.

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[57] Ibid., 25 and 33, italics added.

CHAPTER 3

Tintinnabulation and the Missing Countercultural Link between Minimalism and Ambient Music

Ambient Music is intended to induce calm and a space to think.
—Brian Eno, liner notes to *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (Editions E.G., 1978)

There was an Atlantic album about five years ago of a computer-generated piece to be played very quietly. The hall-like tones were supposed to calm people and make them relax. It made visiting children stop crying.
Eno is only five years late with this one.
—Miles, 1976 *New Musical Express* review for Eno's *Discreet Music* LP (Obscure, 1975)[1]

Although Irving Teibel advertised *Environments*'s recordings as alternatives to music, two of the twenty-two in the series' 1969-78 run featured pitched, human-made sounds that most Western listeners would probably find musical: *Disc Two*'s *Tintinnabulation* (1970), which features a set of unusually tuned bells softly clanging, over 30 minutes, in no apparent order or rhythm, and *Disc Seven*'s *Intonation* (1976), which presents a chorus of voices chanting, again for 30 minutes, on "Om." Teibel described the recordings "environmental sounds" rather than music, and sold them as psychological aids rather than entertainment. These recordings' uses of sonic drone and repetition, however, established aesthetic consistencies with several recordings of experimental music from the late '60s and early '70s that, like *Environments*, were packaged and promoted as psychoactive products to a market of hip middle-class consumers.

Over the course of the 1960s, a handful of experimental composer-performers in the U.S. became well known for writing and performing works comprised of continuous

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[1] Miles, "Brian Eno's Discreet Music," *New Musical Express*, January 3, 1976.

ostinato repetitions, and/or drones sounding continuously, for monumental stretches of

time. This technique formed the foundation for a musical aesthetic that critics began

identifying in the '70s as "minimalist."[2] Records of works by Terry Riley and Steve

Reich played particularly important roles in popularizing this music amongst popular

music listeners toward the end of the '60s.[3] While *Tintinnabulation* and *Intonation* had

little directly to do with these developments in the avant-garde, their overall design may

also be characterized, retrospectively, as minimalist. As I discuss in this chapter, Teibel

advertised the *Tintinnabulation* listening experience using rhetoric nearly identical to that

which advertised the records of Riley and Reich. This rhetoric, which described

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[2] I define minimalism as an "aesthetic" to broaden, historically and culturally, a term often strictly relegated to the music of this small set of '60s composers. At the same time, this definition narrows the range of "minimalist techniques" outlined by Kyle Gann and Timothy Johnson in their attempts to define musical minimalism; see Gann, "Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 299–303; and Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?," *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (1994): 742–73.

   For further discussions of minimalist music's definition, see Jonathan W. Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music," *Perspective of New Music* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 86–132; Robert Carl, "The Politics of Definition in New Music," *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989): 101–14; Kyle Gann, Keith Potter, and Pwyll Ap Siôn, "Introduction," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 1–16; Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass*, trans. J. Hautekiet (New York: Alexander Broude, 1983); Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996); and Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[3] Steve Reich, *Come Out*, *New Sounds in Electronic Music*, Odyssey (Music of Our Time series) 32 16 0160, 1967, LP; Terry Riley, *In C*, Columbia Masterworks (Music of Our Time series) MS 7178, 1968, LP; Steve Reich, *Live/Electric Music*, Columbia Masterworks MS 7265, 1968, LP; Terry Riley, *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, Columbia Masterworks MS 7315, 1969, LP.

minimalist musical recordings as providing listeners a controlled experience of self-dissolution, was made to appeal to a mass counterculture that, by the turn of the 1970s, represented a lucrative consumer market across the U.S. and Western Europe.

Through an exploration of *Tintinnabulation*'s sonic and promotional design, this chapter illustrates the alliance of minimalism, countercultural thought, and hip advertising in the early 1970s. In part, my analysis adds a colorful dimension to the sometimes unnecessarily drab history of minimalist music by drawing attention to the psychedelic rituals and styles that brought together minimalist aesthetics, U.S. countercultural thought, and audio recording at the turn of the '70s. Such practices are regularly passed over in scholarship on musical minimalism, despite minimalism's most famous composers' common participation in various countercultural milieux in the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City during the 1960s.[4] Through a comparison of *Tintinnabulation* and Columbia Masterworks's release of Terry Riley's *In C* (1968), this chapter takes one step towards correcting this regular historiographic erasure.

Tintinnabulation also bridges a presumed gap between avant-garde music and middlebrow culture that, in the later form of Brian Eno's Ambient music, was barely

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[4] Minimalist composers' participation with the San Francisco Bay Area counterculture is most thoroughly detailed in David W. Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). On Young's countercultural and psychedelic connections, see Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It: The Music and Mysticism of La Monte Young* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93-96; Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 4. On Reich's countercultural connections, see Ross Cole, "'Fun, Yes, but Music?' Steve Reich and the San Francisco Bay Area's Cultural Nexus, 1962–65," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 6, no. 3 (August 2012): 315–48; Sumanth Gopinath, "Reich in Blackface: Oh Dem Watermelons and Radical Minstrelsy in the 1960s," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5, no. 2 (May 2011): 139–93.

detectable. The sonic design and packaging of *Tintinnabulation* brought minimalist aesthetics to bear on the practices of introspection and social disaffiliation that accompanied middle-class countercultural identification at the turn of the 1970s. In these practices, countercultural consumers regularly turned toward technologies, including both psychedelic drugs and musical recordings, to alter their habitual perceptions. And while most associate rock music with these rituals, *Environments: Disc Two* and Terry Riley's *In C* proposed that their minimalist music recordings could similarly transform listeners' headspace. By the end of the 1970s, this combination of promotional strategy and minimalist musical design resurfaced—though with far less overtly psychedelic rhetoric—on Eno's Ambient recordings.

This analysis also illustrates an evolution in late what Thomas Frank and Joseph Heath have called hip consumerism, a mode of advertising the experience and expression of non-conformist identity through consumer choice.[5] More recently, Sam Binkley has theorized the progression of hip consumerism from the 1960s into the '70s as a movement toward lifestyle consumerism, a project of mediating and authenticating countercultural identity through commodities that promote "loosening" or self-release.[6] By linking *Tintinnabulation*'s design and marketing strategy to the experience of "loosening" these products enable, my analysis fleshes out the aesthetic dimension to these histories of hip consumerism at the turn of the 1970s. I examine how the design of *Environments: Disc Two* and *Tintinnabulation* facilitate the administered, monitored, and

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[5] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Joseph Heath, "The Structure of Hip Consumerism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 27, no. 1 (2001): 1–17.
[6] Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

controlled experience of sonic merging and transformation that they promote.

"Very Heavy Stuff": From Psychological to Psychedelic Sound

The *Environments* concept is far broader than the mere simulation of natural sounds.
—Syntonic Research Inc., *Environments: Disc Two* (Atlantic, 1970)

As with the first disc, one finds *Environments: Disc Two*'s packaging loaded with text that describes the two included recordings' sounds, as well as their intended effects on listeners' perception. In describing *Tintinnabulation*, the text suggestively conflates the two. "Imagine five different bells," it implores prospective listeners, "each as big as an average room, which are sounded very, very softly and reverberate for minutes afterwards. The sound seems to float in the air, slowly moving around the room as a physical presence." Listening to the recording's actual playback, this description can read as hyperbolic—it's difficult to imagine its bells as much larger than a small closet, no one bell sound reverberates for longer than ten seconds, and none changes position in the stereo field once struck. Strangely, though, as a way of capturing *Tintinnabulation*'s overall impression on the intermittently attentive auditor, the description is not far off the mark; after a long stretch of barely noticing the bells, it's not difficult to imagine that this had just transpired.

The description attributes the psychological effects of *Tintinnabulation* to an "oriental theory of harmonics" used in production. Much mystifies about this description, not least the lack of explanation about how one applies a theory of harmonics to a particular audio production. Its blanket reference to the Eastern world most obviously marks the bells' apparent deviation from Western tuning. This blunt evocation of the East

to vaguely mark difference from Western norms not only practically defines orientalism, but also would have been a selling point for the Western consumer seeking affirmation of their deviance.[7] By emphasizing the importance of "harmonics" to the sound, this description also conveys the ambiguity of the bells' pitches in relation to their inharmonic spectra. Throughout *Tintinnabulation*, the rich inharmonic upper partials of each bell sound loudly, leaving each fundamental tone either indistinguishable from the partials, or inaudible entirely.

Next to the title, Syntonic notes parenthetically that *Tintinnabulation*'s bells are "Computer synthesized." Teibel has left behind few clues as to his precise method of production, which is difficult to deduce based on the sound alone. Given the general inaccessibility of digital synthesis tools to mass-market consumers at the time, Teibel mostly likely created the recording, with the assistance of Lou Gerstman, on the same IBM-360 he used to create *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore* (Ch. 1). Judging from the impressive accuracy of the bell sounds, and given the limited capabilities of this early digital technology, Teibel probably recorded actual bells, then digitally re-synthesized them based on a spectral analysis of the bell sounds' constituent frequencies.

Teibel actually premiered *Tintinnabulation* not on the *Environments* records, but in an exhibition called Contemplation Environments, which ran at New York's Museum of Contemporary Crafts from mid-January to early March in 1970.[8] The American

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[7] On the relationship of Eastern exoticism in '60s psychedelic music to U.S. neocolonialist policy, see Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 52–90.

[8] The American Craftsmen's Council (later, the American Craft Council, or ACC) had founded the Museum in 1956 to foster public interest in contemporary U.S. American
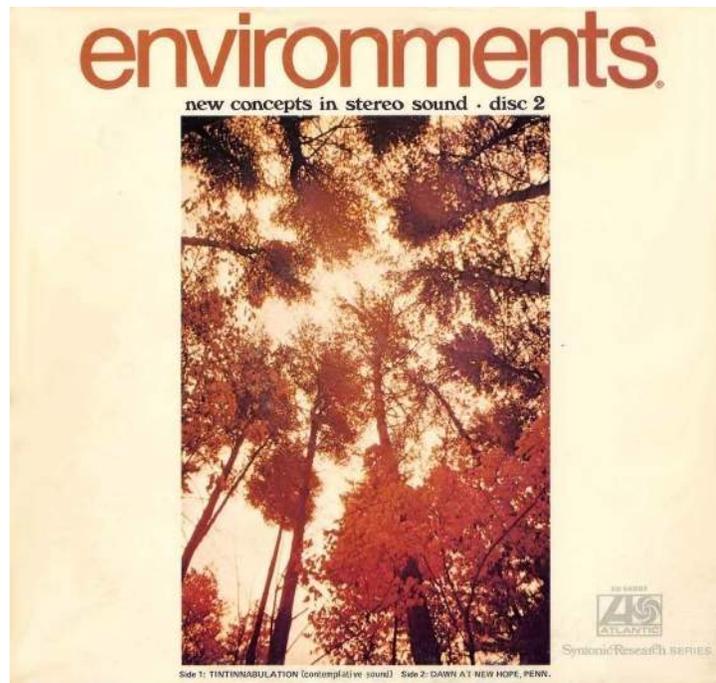
Fig 3.1. Album cover for *Environments: Disc Two* (Atlantic, 1970).

Craftsmen's Council publicized Contemplation Environments as "an exhibition of architectural structures and proposals designed to provide city dwellers with places for solitude and inner communion."[9] Paul Smith, in the catalogue, describes the exhibition as a response to the "crowded, noisy, dehumanized communities where there are few places ideal for contemplation."[10] Contemplation Environments, he goes on, "does not deal with

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craftsmanship; and Paul J. Smith, Museum director from 1963 to 1987, envisioned the Museum as a community center where visitors could come into direct contact with local art, design, and performance through exhibitions, concerts, educational seminars, and lectures. The museum reopened in 1979 at a different location, renamed the American Craft Museum; in 2002 the museum received its current name, Museum of Arts and Design. "Museum History," The Museum of Arts and Design, last modified July 1, 2014, accessed July 15, 2014, http://madmuseum.org/about/museum-history; American Craftsmen's Council, *Proceedings of The First World Congress of Craftsmen*, June 8–19, 1964 (New York City: Columbia University, 1964), 72.

[9] "Contemplation Environments," *ACC Outlook*, January 1970, 2.

[10] Paul J. Smith, *Contemplation Environments* (New York: Museum of Contemporary

the process of contemplation as such, but rather with physical surroundings which can be called contemplative."[11] Although he does not explain what it would mean to call an environment "contemplative," one might expect that these environments fostered meditative, relaxing, or thoughtful moods that would be conducive to contemplation. Sixteen artists total fabricated environments with physical materials and lights arranged to produce such introspective moods; Teibel, however, was one of only four who also contributed sounds. Visitors to Teibel's exhibit could enter one of four corridors playing either *Tintinnabulation*, *Seashore*, *Dawn at New Hope, PA*, or *Dusk at New Hope, PA*, and listen (or space out) to Syntonic's soothing sounds on a bed, while staring at the sky through the skylight overhead (Fig 3.2). Teibel later commented that the *Tintinnabulation* exhibit was so popular, the museum began charging people by the hour.[12]

In accordance with its inclusion in the Contemplation Environments exhibition, *Environments: Disc Two* advertises *Tintinnabulation* as a tool of contemplation and sedation. In a subtitle on the front, Syntonic calls *Tintinnabulation* "contemplative sound." The back of the LP record states, "We think you will find *Tintinnabulation* highly useful for both meditation and relaxation…. Many people report that they become completely relaxed within the first few moments of play." Various Listening Test Responses on the back, too, report on the calming effects of the recording.

> I simply found it impossible to think of the things that disturb me, which, to me, is a high form of inner peace.

Crafts, 1970), 3.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Irving Teibel, "Forum: Irv Teibel," interview by Eileen Remen, Longhorn Radio Network, February 5, 1983, UT KUT Longhorn Radio Network Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 2/25-83.
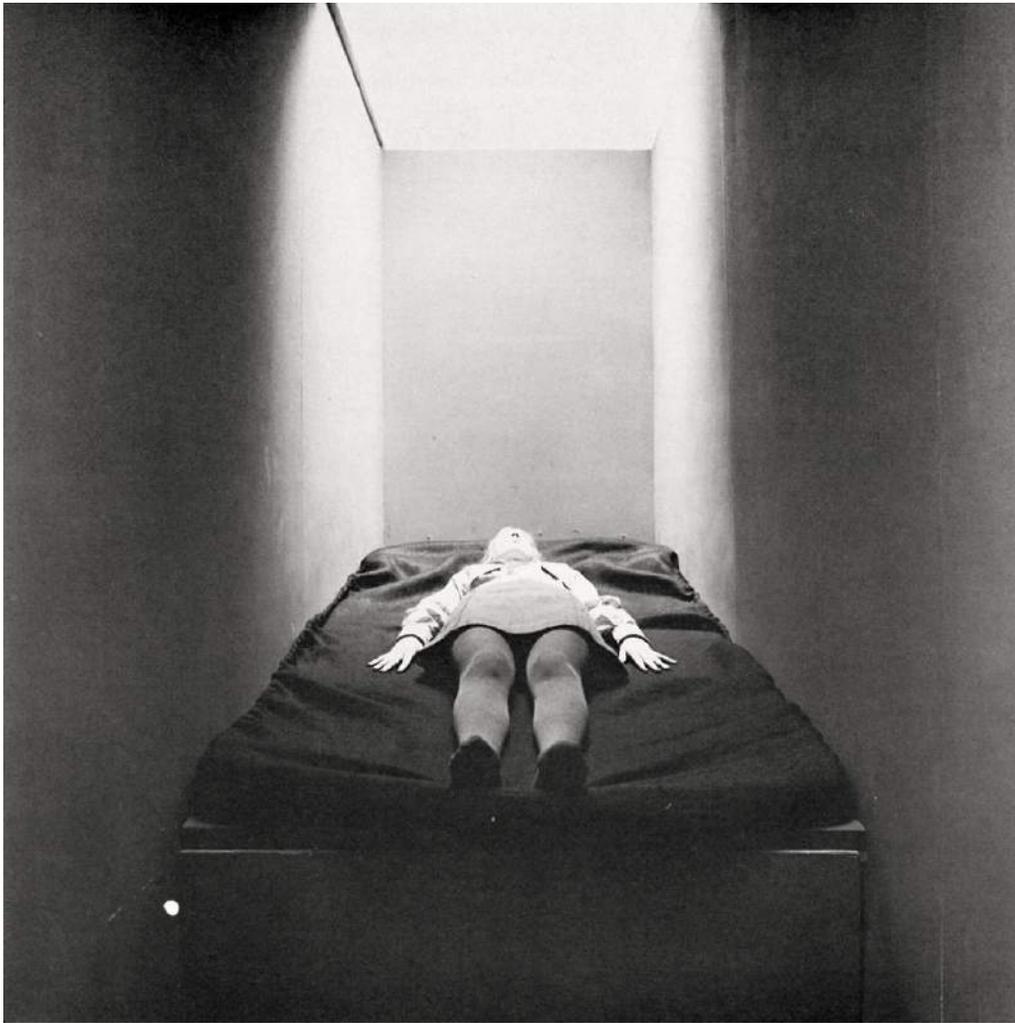
Fig 3.2. Advertisement for Teibel's Contemplation Environments exhibit.
(*Contemplation Environments* [New York: Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1970], 30.)

These Environments bring peace and serenity - not easy to come by and much appreciated.

Provides a mellow, relaxing atmosphere….

Very calming… helps me to sleep easier and speeds up my reading… I feel much more relaxed.

As with *Seashore*, *Tintinnabulation* proposes to afford the listener passive activities such as relaxing, resting, and reading, and promotes moods such as peacefulness and calm.

Yet relaxation isn't the only environmental affordance advertised by

Fig. 3.3. Back cover for *Environments: Disc Two* (Atlantic, 1970).

Tintinnabulation's Listening Test Responses:

> A surrealistic experience… the strange harmonics and "super-reality" of the sounds generate their own sense of reality… my friends came over and we just sat and listened for hours…
>
> I imagined shapes and colors I had never thought of before…
>
> The closest thing to real "head music" I've ever heard.
>
> The whole room seemed to change as the needle tracked the first groove. Very heavy stuff.

Through such testimonials, *Tintinnabulation* promises to animate perceptions that

consumers would identify as "psychedelic," a term invented to characterize the

perceptual alterations caused by hallucinogens such as marijuana and LSD.[13] Various

English and U.S. American popular media took on the "psychedelic" tag during the

1960s and '70s in relation to the perceptual effects of hallucinogens like the newly

invented LSD; psychedelic rock recordings, for instance, audibly mimic, through various

formal and studio techniques, the temporal and visual distortions these drugs tend to

cause.[14] The reference to "head music" in the Listening Test Responses associates

Tintinnabulation with psychedelic rock, a genre colloquially described as "head music"

due to its evidently mind-altering effects.

Yet as the liner notes further suggest, *Tintinnabulation* doesn't simply mirror

psychedelic effects—it supplants the very substances that produce them. The liner notes

to *Tintinnabulation*'s 1990 CD reissue make this proposition most plain, stating, "Many

people have compared *Tintinnabulation*… to a very pleasant 'recreational drug'

experience." Later in the decade, Syntonic even more overtly promoted several other

releases in the *Environments* series through drug references, such as the cheeky quote

from High Times Magazine on the front cover of *Disc Nine* calling the records "highly

addictive." In most of these comparisons, though, Syntonic took care to represent

Environments as a more responsible life choice than psychedelic chemicals. As they state

in the liner notes to *Disc Two*,

> Environments are psychologically-based sound, and this would put the series in the category of
> "head music," but unfortunately, "head music" today is synonymous with "trip music" and "drug
> music," which infers that a person can best appreciate the sound when he is "high" or "tripping,"
> which usually isn't the case. Many of the reply cards packed with the first album were returned to
> us with the notation that the ocean sound was the best "natural high" the person had heard. Sound

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[13] Humphrey Osmond, *Predicting the Past* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 81–82.

[14] Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 58–59.

can be a powerful tool, if a person can learn to use it, instead of subjecting himself to it in a passive manner.

Given the concomitant claim in the liner notes that *Environments*'s recordings should be "heard" rather than attentively "listened to" (Ch. 1), it does not seem that "using" sound responsibly necessarily entails "active" or attentive listening. Proper use of the record does, however, seem to entail some sort of activity or control on the part of the auditor that would be absent, as Syntonic implies, under the influence of drugs. Yet it is difficult to imagine what sort of control this would be, if not control over one's ability to focus on sounds.

Throughout *Environments*, Syntonic promotes the recordings' "realistic" sounds, their effects on the body, and their social affordances. The language around *Tintinnabulation* merges these proposed benefits to a considerable degree in promoting the recording as psychedelic technology. As the Listening Test Responses attest, *Tintinnabulation* is not just a psychological aid, stress-reducer, or mood-adjuster; it is also capable of transforming users' perceptions of themselves and the world around them, while serving as both cause and gauge of such perceptions. *Tintinnabulation*'s promotional texts thus represent the de-familiarization of auditory perception as an end in itself, rather than as means to a secondary mood or activity.[15] To this end, Syntonic

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[15] The notion of "defamiliarization" in art can be traced to Victor Shklovsky, literary critic and founding member of the poetry society ОPOJAZ (ОПОЯЗ) that was central to the development of Russian formalism. Shklovsky defined defamiliarization (остранение, or *ostranenie*) as the aesthetic technique of making familiar objects seem strange by conveying how an object might be perceived, rather than reflecting what the object "means"; see Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, 3rd ed. (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 775–84. I hyphenate "de-familiarization" in order to distance my use of the term from Shklovsky's, since the psychedelic process I describe

makes no clear distinction between listening to recorded sounds, observing their

intended effects, and doing something other than attentively listening.

Turn on, Tune in, Drift off: *Environments* and the Psychedelic Counterculture

The techno-psychedelic promise advertised with *Tintinnabulation* indicates a

broader connection between recordings of electronic environmental sound, and the

cultural rebellion that accompanied social protest in the urban U.S. and Western Europe

during the mid-late 1960s. *Environments* both extended the practices and resonated with

the ideals of a significant segment of this mass countercultural market.[16] Unlike their

leftist contemporaries protesting in the streets, many of these individuals favored

symbolic gestures of disaffiliation over vocal political activism as their primary mode of

dissent.[17] Some opted to perform the radical gesture of "dropping out" of bureaucratic

labor structures by participating in communal or cooperative housing. Many more

"turned on" to psychedelic drugs in order to "tune in" to different modes of seeing and

hearing, and to observe how habits of perception structured their experience of the world.

Psychedelics in this way instrumentalized an ethic of sensory de-familiarization that

developed alongside the countercultural politics of social disaffiliation. This ethic

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does not necessarily rely on the representation of objects to achieve its effect of making the familiar seem strange.

[16] I adopt the term "mass counterculture" from Phil Ford, "Hip Sensibility in an Age of Mass Counterculture," *Jazz Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (November 2008): 121–63.

[17] Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 31; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.

emerged with the belief, widespread among countercultural U.S. Americans during the late '60s, that new social relations could develop communally out of an individualized politics of perceptual self-transformation.

Like psychedelics, commercial musical recordings and electronic sounds were also made to serve as sacramental technologies in the ritual of altering reality as given. It is no coincidence that the slogan of countercultural disaffiliation "turn on, tune in, and drop out" so overtly collapsed human listener, electronic audio device, and countercultural subject. The phrase, coined by media theorist Marshall McLuhan and popularized by acid guru Timothy Leary, reflected what Leary called a "politics of the nervous system" that regarded humans and electronics as ontologically co-extensive.[18] Leary argued that LSD and electronic devices alike could reprogram humans on the "atomic-electronic level," thereby undoing the military-industrial hegemony's "sensory conditioning."[19] McLuhan, meanwhile, famously understood electronic media as extending the human nervous system beyond its inborn capacities, and into a "global village" of free-form sensational exchange.[20] Positioning a cybernetic worldview of technology (see Ch. 5) around countercultural ideals of non-competition and communal consciousness, these utopian-minded intellectuals represented both psychedelics and electronics as gateways through which, in the words of Theodore Roszak, the individual human being could enter "wholly into the grand symbiotic system of nature, letting its

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[18] Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*, 62.

[19] Timothy Leary, "The Seven Tongues of God," in *The Politics of Ecstasy* (Berkeley: Ronin, 1998), 33, 45. The version that appears in this collection is not identical to its original 1964 publication in *The Psychedelic Review*, which does not refer to electronic music.

[20] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 2nd ed. (New York: Mentor, 1964), 19.

currents and nuances flow through him."[21] This very idea of harmonization with an electronic environment is succinctly captured by the "Syntonic" in Syntonic Research, a word that not only means "in tune" with, or "tuned into" one's environment in a psychological sense, but one that also described, during the early years of wireless telegraphy, the mutual attunement of radio receivers and transmitters at particular frequencies.[22] These conceptions of symbiosis paint automated audio technologies and electronic sounds alike as having potential effects on human psychology. Yet Syntonic did not attach to their records any overt political agenda, as did Leary to psychedelics.

Syntonic Research did, however, attest to the agency of electronic environments to transform human perception in a manner similar to McLuhan. In his introduction to the 2nd edition of *Understanding Media* (1968), McLuhan recommended the strategic deployment of electronic "anti-environments" to retrain human perceptions of everyday reality.[23] Within the artistically designed anti-environment, electronics would appear in unfamiliar forms and contexts, "making us aware of the psychic and social consequences of technology" while "provid[ing] us with the means of perceiving the environment itself."[24] McLuhan's notion of the anti-environment provided a crucial corollary to his thesis that "cool" electronic media commanded the involuntary sensory participation of

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[21] Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*, 247. For more on cybernetics, see Ch. 5.

[22] Hugh G.J. Aitken, *Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), 39–43. The idea that one could, through musical recordings, "tune into" frequencies latent in the atmosphere or universe was also pervasive in the New Age music movement in the 1970s. Similar notions motivated U.S. avant-garde composers' experimentation with just intonation throughout the 20th century; see Colin Holter, "The Spiritual Construction of Tuning in American Experimental Music," *Journal for New Music and Culture* no. 5 (Summer 2009).

[23] McLuhan, viii–xi.

[24] Ibid., ix.

their users, as it advanced an ethic of fostering awareness of electronic mediation's

sensory effects within, rather than against, a technologically de-distanced world.[25] Rather

than calling for a restoration of the "distancing" eye that McLuhan saw as characteristic

of literate people prior to electricity, McLuhan suggests here a countercultural praxis of

de-habituating perceptions of the electronic media environment via its own means of

involvement.

       Whether or not Teibel had this very aim in mind, one may regard *Environments* as

a mass-produced variation on existing anti-environmental practices of the 1960s. The San

Francisco Bay Area experimental art scene during the late 1950s and throughout the '60s

was one notable locus of such practice. Within the Bay Area counterculture, multimedia

surround-sound environments of electronic sound and visuals regularly called upon their

inhabitants to contemplate the conditions of their altered perception. From spectacular

surround-sound performance spaces such as Vortex and Audium, to the light shows

accompanying electrified concerts like the Trips Festival and the Grateful Dead, the

happenings and performances put on by collectives like the San Francisco Tape Music

Center and USCO, and Ken Kesey's freak-out experiments with tape delay during his

Acid Tests, the Bay Area counterculture provided ample opportunities for sensory

revelation and wide-eared psychedelic wonder through electronic media.[26]

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[25] Ibid., 21. The notion of "de-distancing" or "de-severing" [*Ent-fernung*] is important in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. According to Heidegger, de-distancing abolishes the remoteness of an object, and makes the object useable or ready-to-hand [*zuhanden*]. Fittingly, his first example in *Being and Time* for the concept of *Ent-fernung* is the radio, which he argues has de-distanced the world for its listeners. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 138–44, especially H.105.

[26] On Vortex, see Cindy Keefer, "'Raumlichtmusik': Early 20th Century Abstract

One such occurrence, the Trips Festival, exemplified the electrified anti-environments arising in the Bay Area around this time. The event took place between January 21 and 23, 1966, at the dome-shaped Longshoremen's Hall in San Francisco's North Beach. It was conceived, promoted, and produced by writers Ken Kesey and Stewart Brand, and Tape Center composer Ramon Sender. The group initially imagined the Festival as an "acid test," albeit larger in scale than any of Ken Kesey's prior LSD-fueled gatherings. Like Kesey's acid tests, the Trips Festival was designed to storm inhabitants' perceptions with torrents of amplified sounds, including thunder machines, psych rock by bands such as The Grateful Dead, and improvisations by experimental electronic composer-performers such as Pauline Oliveros and Don Buchla. They also solicited the participation of the audience in the noisemaking, not only by recording, delaying, and amplifying ongoing acoustic sounds from the audience, but also in requesting individuals to bring their own electronic "gadgets" for amplification. Light projections, satirical theatre productions, beat poetry readings, film screenings, and dance troupes rounded out the spectacle. Not wanting to attract negative publicity beforehand, the production committee advertised the event as a "non-drug re-creation of a psychedelic experience." The handbill similarly announced, with McLuhanite flair, that "the TRIP—

Cinema Immersive Environments," *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 16, no. 6–7 (2009). On the San Francisco Tape Music Center, see David W. Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). On USCO, see Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 48–58; and Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 284–89. On the Trips Festival, see Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco, *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 94–97; and Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Wenner, 2005), 39–48. On Kesey, see Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Test* (New York: Picador, 1968).

or electronic performance—is a new medium of communication & entertainment."[27]

The event was massively popular, attracting over 6,000 admissions over the course of the weekend, as well as coverage in magazines such as *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Life*.

Fig 3.4. Stills from Ben Van Meter's film *S.F. Trips Festival, An Opening* (1966).

It may seem a stretch to compare *Environments*'s relatively tame sonic atmospheres to such audiovisual spectaculars as the Trips Festival. Whereas the latter bombarded listeners with searingly loud, spontaneous sonic eruptions, the former soothed listeners with softly bubbling brooks, or distant bells, that admitted no sonic assaults or surprises. And whereas the latter tended to distort and delay acoustic signals beyond recognition, the former molded digital sequences into ubiquitously recognizable sounds. However, both turned on the promise of electronic sounds to deliver safe and legal psychedelic experiences. By designing electronic sounds in the guise of "natural" acoustic phenomena, and commodifying the electronic sound environment as a personal technology of sensory awakening, Syntonic domesticated the artistic practices of the

[27] Pinch & Trocco, *Analog Days*, 95.

experimental counterculture for middle-class consumers nationwide.

Besides the necessary reduction in size and scope for the recorded medium, various other contextual factors account for the differences in tone and intensity between *Tintinnabulation* and Bay Area predecessors like the Trips Festival. In part, Teibel's approach may reflect a cooler, understated sensibility characteristic of various countercultural scenes on the U.S. East Coast, such as the experimental art and proto-punk scenes of New York City's late-'60s underground.[28] Tom Wolfe famously illustrated the temperamental discrepancy between East and West Coast countercultural groups in his description of the Merry Pranksters' visit to Timothy Leary's compound in Millbrook; evidently, the spontaneous, no-holds-barred freakiness displayed by Kesey's band of Californians was icily received by Leary's normally reserved, detached followers.[29] It should be noted that geography does not correspond precisely with countercultural mood, however, as evidenced by Teibel's recording of the 1969 third annual Easter Central Park Be-In on Side A of *Environments: Disc Three* (1971) (Fig. 3.5). The whoop-and-holler revelry audible in "Be-In (A Psychoacoustic Experience)," *Environments*'s most overtly countercultural release, reflects a wilder aspect to New York's countercultural milieux.

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[28] Thanks to Sarah Hill for suggesting to me the importance of geographical difference in U.S. countercultural scenes.

[29] West and East coast countercultural sensibilities are also contrasted in *The Cockettes*, directed by David Weissman and Bill Weber (2002, GranDelusion); and Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 16–18.

Fig 3.5. Album cover for *Environments: Disc Three* (Atlantic, 1971).

Tintinnabulation's restraint may also reflect its calculated appeal for an older, more formally-educated crowd than the famed teenaged counterculture of San Francisco's Height-Ashbury. Before Teibel signed to Atlantic, he distributed *Environments* primarily through college bookstores based on the popularity of *Disc One* at the Harvard Co-Op. Its success amongst college students may have led Teibel to exaggerate their youthful appeal; as Syntonic boasts, hilariously, on the LP's Atlantic release, "Teenagers are the record's biggest fans; they call it everything from 'the ultimate trip' to 'sensual rock.'" That Syntonic speaks here *about* teenagers, rather than addressing them directly, is telling: Teibel's aim, it seems, is not to sell *Environments* to teenagers themselves so much as to sell the product as youth*ful*. Such a promotional strategy characterized the dominant mode of advertising in U.S. media at the turn of the '70s, in which countercultural youth more often represented an attractive consuming

attitude for older individuals, rather than a teenage submarket.[30] *Environments*'s

sophisticated, sober youthfulness positioned the records for consumers who would have

simultaneously identified with, and yet felt distinct from, the more raucous and rock-

oriented teenage consumers of the time.

Perhaps most significantly accounting for their differences in anti-environmental

intensity, however, were the divergent conditions of their realization. Occurrences like

the Trips Festival were public events: one-time experiences, evidently administered by a

benevolent artist or collective, enabling shared wonderment in electronic sound.

Syntonic, by contrast, tailored *Environments* to the private ritual of home listening.

Recorded electronic sound, in this context, became a reliable opportunity for amplifying

individual solitude. *Environments* gave their owners the power to bolster the social retreat

and isolation already provided by their domestic settings, while also placing the control

of musical playback in the hands of the listeners themselves. This gave consumers a

means of extricating themselves from social activity at any time—perhaps in symbolic

accord with the commune dweller—through their property.

It's easy, of course, to find only contradiction or hypocrisy in the use of consumer

goods—in this case, home audio equipment and an LP record—toward the symbolic

gesture of ducking out from capitalist labor structures. Yet instead of simply framing

Environments as capitalist co-optation, or lambasting counterculturally minded

consumers for their naiveté, it would be more productive to investigate why and how

certain mass-manufactured and mass-distributed technologies became appreciated by

individuals largely antipathetic to the institutions within which many such technologies

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[30] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 118–21.

developed.[31] Toward the end of the '60s, the analogy between psychedelic

experience, and the experience of electronic sound, brought record producers and

listeners alike to apply consumer technologies to socially disaffiliative ends.

Tintinnabulation offers a glimpse into this ideological aperture.

Selling Minimalist Music as Psychedelic Technology

Although the mood music of the decades leading up to *Environments: Disc Two*

had already established the concept of relaxing, unobtrusive musical sounds for both

background and foreground listening (Ch. 1), *Tintinnabulation* anticipated Ambient

music's minimalist aesthetic in a way that previous recordings for background use did

not.[32] Although it's unknown whether Teibel was directly influenced by '60s avant-garde

minimalists such as La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich—certainly a

possibility, given his New York location and art world connections[33]—*Tintinnabulation*'s

musical invariabilities over the course of a full LP side places the track well within the

scope of a minimalist aesthetic. At the same time, these invariant musical features

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[31] For a sophisticated critique of the co-optation theory, see Richard Dyer, "In Defense of Disco," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 351–58. For research on the counterculture that likewise seeks alternatives to the co-optation critique, see Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*; and Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*.

[32] As per my earlier definition, a minimalist aesthetic in music derives from the technique of using ostinati and/or drones continuously over a long stretch of time, with the effect of frustrating or constantly deferring the listener's anticipation of tonal and/or formal resolutions.

[33] Tony Conrad, one of the directors of the film for which Teibel originally recorded the source material for *The Psychologically Ultimate Seashore*, was a member of La Monte Young's Theater of Eternal Music, and developed his own minimalist musical and visual practice. For more on Conrad, see Branden Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2008).

foreshadow Eno's minimalist (or perhaps post-minimalist) Ambient aesthetic.[34] In

this section, I analyze the minimalist aesthetic of *Tintinnabulation*, describing how

Syntonic's application of drone and repetition in the functional recording made way for

an expanded attentional mobility of the listener.

Within its first minute, *Tintinnabulation*'s bells establish a narrow dynamic range

and constrained repertory of pitches, as well as consistent speeds of attack, decay lengths,

and tone color, that persist throughout the track's considerable length. As the track

progresses, these parametric constraints and consistencies contribute to the perception of

a uniform composite texture, establishing in real time the track's overall homogeneity

and regularity. Such consistencies also limn listeners' expectations by reducing or

eliminating any potentially arising anticipations of dramatic change. Within these

horizons of expectation forms a duration wherein listeners might forgo interest in

potential future sonic events, and instead focus on ongoing occurrences, sonic or

otherwise. For instance, listeners might feel free to attend to local auditory phenomena

such as rhythmic displacement or beating frequencies; they may also notice their own

shifting perceptions of these phenomena as their horizons of expectation expand and

contract. In this way, *Tintinnabulation*'s musical invariants establish a controlled

temporal environment wherein an otherwise broadly anticipatory, or expectation-oriented

listener, might relax into an extended present.

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[34] I concur with Robert Fink that the term "post-minimalism" in the singular has limited usefulness as a descriptor, and that the plural better captures the variety of minimalism's offshoots following its spread in the late '60s and early '70s; see Robert Fink, "(Post-)minimalisms 1970–2000: The Search for a New Mainstream," in *The Cambridge History of 20th Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 539–56.

The spare uniformity of *Tintinnabulation*'s sound over its full length calls for a broader analogy between this recording and the avant-garde minimalism of the time. As with *Tintinnabulation*, the works of U.S. composers such as Young, Riley, and Reich during the '60s and early '70s commonly involved global musical consistencies that allowed listeners to disregard the invariant aspects of the sound and confidently place their focus elsewhere. Through relentless *ostinati* and drone, often played by amplified instruments at extremely loud volumes, minimalist music refocused listeners' attention toward acoustic, musical, or performed minutiae typically missed in anticipatory or expectation-oriented listening—what Reich notably called the "psycho-acoustic byproducts" and "mysteries" of the minimalist listening experience.[35] As Reich explains, the perception of such minutiae becomes possible not simply despite the composer's pre-determination of the process before it begins unfolding, but thanks to the precognition of its unfurled form that these predictable processes bestow upon their auditors early in listening.[36]

Some scholars have also noted how minimalist techniques might direct listeners' attention to their own bodily responsiveness to sound. This occurs through what Martin Scherzinger calls the "phenomenological reversal" characteristic of minimalist music listening, where one's attention shifts from an intellectualized discernment of musical form and/or signification to the visceral feeling of vibration; or, in Carolyn Abbate's terms, from "gnostic" reflection upon a musical work to the "drastic" sensory epiphany of

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[35] Steve Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process," in *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, ed. Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.
[36] Ibid., 36.

music's taking place through or upon oneself.[37] Not insignificantly, descriptions of minimalist listening tend to elide these sorts of focus commanded by minimalist music—both attention to psychoacoustic details of objectified sound, and awareness of one's subjective bodily response—to the point that these forms of attention appear indistinguishable from one another.

Syntonic, like Reich, calls upon *Tintinnabulation*'s listeners to recognize their own shifting perceptions while appreciating what one Listening Test Response calls the recording's "different type of sound." Yet Syntonic also emphasizes the control of the listener over this experience, packaging their minimalist recording as an introspective psychedelic journey that listeners can freely alter, or move in and out of. As the *Disc Two* CD reminds its users, "The problem with substances taken internally for relaxation purposes is that one often has no control over their effects once they are in the body."[38] With *Tintinnabulation*, on the other hand, "there are no unpleasant side effects and you are always in complete control. If the effect is too powerful, all you need do is reach for a knob or switch." The back of the LP accordingly explains that if you, the user, want to fine-tune your experience, you can simply adjust the playback settings according to your needs: "*Tintinnabulation* can be played at any speed, from 78 to 16rpm, in full stereo. At different speeds, the sounds change in tone and apparent size…. The effect, unlike real bells, is fully controllable by the use of your volume, bass, and treble controls." Syntonic's emphasis on commodity controllability aligned with countercultural attitudes

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[37] Martin Scherzinger, "Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich's 'It's Gonna Rain,'" *Current Musicology* 79 (2005): 213; Carolyn Abbate, "Music: Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505–36.

[38] Syntonic Research, Inc., liner notes to *Environments 2*, Atlantic 81765-2, 1987, CD.

at the time toward consumer technologies; as Fred Turner illustrates in his history of

countercultural techno-utopianism in the late 20th century, matters of distribution, scale,

and control proved decisive in the counterculture's alliance with personal electronics.[39]

Whereas the countercultural skeptic regarded industrial-scale technologies with suspicion

as "technocratic" agents of social engineering, self-administered small-scale technologies

such LSD and rock records could be seen as potentially useful agents of social

detachment and communal attunement.[40]

In so playing up the user's ability to control their experience of self-dissolution,

Syntonic's promotional language distinctly echoes that of the 1968 Columbia

Masterworks release of Terry Riley's *In C*, minimalism's first major success among

popular music audiences. The record appeared on Columbia Masterworks's *Music of Our

Time* series, one of several series on classical record labels that explicitly cross-marketed

avant-garde art music by artists like John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen to pop and

progressive rock "undergrounds."[41] This series' promotions targeted rock consumers not

only through FM rock radio, but also by appealing to potential consumers' hipness—"It

takes cool to appreciate today's 'new' music," as one magazine advertisement stated (Fig.

3.6). Although Riley's record never matched the unprecedented sales numbers of the

concurrently released Moog synthesizer LP *Switched-On Bach* by Wendy Carlos, *In C*

still sold in the tens of thousands,[42] finding such broad crossover appeal that Robert Carl

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[39] Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 11–102.

[40] Theodore Roszak coined the term "technocracy" to describe the organizational control of the military-industrial complex, against which the countercultural individual rebels; see Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 5–6.

[41] Hank Fox, "Serious Mod in Hip Boom," *Billboard*, August 10, 1968, 1, 37–38.

[42] Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music, and Culture*,

refers to it as the "second premiere" of the piece.[43]

To draw in rock listeners, the back of *In C* includes an extensive introduction to the piece by Paul Williams, editor-in-chief of seminal rock rag *Crawdaddy*. Williams begins by positioning himself not as an advertiser, but rather as an "experiencer" of music's drastic force:

> The experience of music is not fully in the ears. If it were, we could concern ourselves with sound and its permutations to the exclusion of all else that musicians might be interested in. Since it is not, we must realize that we listen partly with our memories, allowing what we hear to clash and sing with the patterns already established in our minds; that we listen somewhat with our bodies, responding to music's rhythm as a form to impose on the nervous energy and emotional energy within us, waiting to be released; that we listen mostly with our souls, music serving primarily as some sort of magical matrix that, passing over the scattered pieces of our consciousness, can bring us together, can make us as individuals (and groups) inexpressibly whole. A piece of music happens to a man.

Williams here differentiates, somewhat vaguely, two modes of concern with sound: listening to music solely "in the ears," and a fuller sense of listening with "memory," "body," and "soul." In a reversal of the Western stereotype of the "ear" as passive and exposed relative to the active, lidded eye, Williams's detached "ear" here represents a mathematical mode of abstract concern with the sound's patterning, a mode of concern not unlike that commonly attributed to the probing, discerning eye.[44] Williams describes fully embodied listening, by contrast, as more than just formal or objective discernment of sound; it's also an awakening of one's own mental, physical, and social capacities— subjective capacities that, arguably, make the sound's apperception as music possible.

3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 219.

[43] Robert Carl, *Terry Riley's* In C, Studies in Musical Genesis, Structure, and Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71–96.

[44] This contrast has most famously been made in the writings of Marshall McLuhan. Jonathan Sterne conveniently outlines these clichéd contrasts between audition and vision in what he calls the "audiovisual litany"; see Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

Fig 3.6. "It takes cool to appreciate today's 'new' music." Music of Our Time advertisement. (*Hi-Fi / Stereo Review*, March 1968, 118.)

This process, moreover, involves an involuntary or semi-voluntary responsiveness to patterned sound. Full listening turns out to be contingent upon the nature of one's individual potential; whether the music will activate and give release to one's memory, body, or soul is an uncertain prospect at the outset. "A piece of music happens to a man."

And yet, as Williams goes on to remind the reader, listening to the record doesn't just "happen" to the record owner—presumably, also the listener—since record listening is a selective and controllable technological experience:

> Yes, and *In C* will most certainly happen to you, probably as many times as you choose to play it, certainly as a fresh experience each time. It will transfix, arouse and awaken you. This may be true of the music of subways and garbage cans outside your window in the morning; but the virtue of the recorded performance is that it is subject to the will of the listener. It is good to have things done to one's head; it is not always pleasant to lose all control over what is done to you, or when and how it is done.

Although Williams here evokes a more transfixing listening experience than Syntonic does, both he and Teibel represent minimalist recordings as dissolving the boundaries of the listening self, while also certifying this dissolution as continuously controlled by the same self. Both represent their recordings as vehicles for "trips" into the inner space of subjective perception. And as with the terms "head music," "psychological sound," or "psychoacoustic sound" found on the *Environments* records, Williams characterizes the listening experience as a psychological merging with the objective sounds of the recording. Columbia's advertisers followed suit; see, for instance, the ad for Riley's 1969 Columbia Masterworks follow-up *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, which announced that "you get to hear your *own* music while you listen to his" (Fig. 3.8). Like Teibel's descriptions of *Tintinnabulation*, there is no clear difference here between paying attention to the music, and noticing your reaction to it. And yet, in the words of Williams, the "trip"

administered by the minimalist music record is "a voluntary, unpredictable, absorbing experience" lasting as long as the music sounds. By emphasizing the recording's controllability, both Syntonic and Columbia validate, and perhaps compensate for the loss of attentional control connoted by the introspective "trip" they purport the music will produce.

Fig 3.7. "Terry Riley gives music a chance." Advertisement for Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (Columbia Masterworks, 1969) (*Rolling Stone*, December 13, 1969, 53).

Yet unlike Williams, Syntonic recommended that their users may wish to direct their attention not only away from the sounds, but also away from their own responses to these sounds altogether. This expansion of attentional mobility, from sound and its internal effects outward toward non-sonic activities or occurrences, is partly a result of the manual control the recording permits listeners. Like the minimalist music listener who, assured of global parameters, relaxes into a diffuse awareness of localized psychoacoustic phenomena drifting in and out of focus, the record listener, assured of the global stability of automated playback, might also slip in and out of attention to sound and its effects entirely.

In short, as minimalist music began appearing on commercial records, the repetitive, reliable, and consistent *musical* experience of minimalism became also a repeatable, reliable, and consistent *technological* one. Irving Teibel was one of the first to take advantage of this doubling of assurance on both musical and technological levels by explicitly designing *Environments* for a listener whose attentional focus might extend beyond auditory perception entirely. This attentional freedom acquires special significance in light of the development of minimalist music into a recorded technology that Brian Eno, later in the decade, would call Ambient music.

Loose Control: Hip Consumerism and Minimalist Design at the Turn of the 1970s

In foregrounding the listener's technological and attentional control over the psychedelic experience it advertised, Syntonic's promotional rhetoric appealed to consumers' sense of responsibility for their own psychological well-being. At the turn of

the 1970s, roughly three years following the countercultural invasion in Anglophone

mass media and entertainment, this rhetoric would have contrasted with the brash

hedonism commonly associated with psychedelics and their younger users. Evidently,

Teibel imagined his users as both more mature and self-protective than the stereotypically

hedonistic hippie, and yet still antagonistic to normative conventions of social maturation

and adulthood.

In this section, I consider how Syntonic integrated this dual appeal into

Environments's packaging and sonic design. By stylizing *Environments* as a cool mass-

manufactured technology for the controlled, thoughtful consumer, Syntonic put a

different spin on the counterculturally inspired marketing strategy that Thomas Frank and

Joseph Heath have called "hip consumerism."[45] While *Environments* promoted an

immersive experience no less physiologically potent than that of psychedelic rock or

drugs, it at the same time interpellated a measured, self-contained media consumer with

its sleek, modern, and minimalist design. Combining looseness with austerity,

spontaneity with control, and excess with simplicity, *Environments*'s sonic and visual

design established an aesthetic means of attracting a mellower, more self-consciously

cautious countercultural consumer than commonly assumed in '60s hip advertising.

Hip consumerism, as Frank explains it, is essentially commodity consumption

rationalized as rebellion, an attitude towards consumption strategically promoted through

advertising that pivots around the image of the non-conformist ("hip") individual. Hip

advertisers in the 1960s exploited the dichotomy of the hip countercultural individual

versus the square conformist consumer by positioning their products as escapes from the

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[45] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*; Heath, "The Structure of Hip Consumerism."

stifling conformity that mass culture represented—"Break away from the silent

majority" and "Get away from the crowd," they urged.[46] Hippie teenagers in the '60s

served as avatars in the promotion of the countercultural lifestyle, a symbolic project of

realizing and conveying one's unique individuality through style and commodity choice.

And yet, as Frank explains, hip consumerism in the U.S. originated not so much

from the youth counterculture as it did from business culture, as mainstream advertising

in the early '60s rode on the spread of modernist individualism and mass culture

skepticism throughout the U.S. American middle class in the 1950s.[47] From this

perspective, advertisers in the 1960s did little more than rebrand, for a younger

generation, an individualism already popular amongst middle-class adults in the '50s;

hence, as Frank suggests, "The counterculture may be more accurately understood as a

stage in the development of the values of the American middle class, a colorful

installment in the twentieth century drama of consumer subjectivity."[48] A number of

historians have concurred with Frank that the '60s counterculture's most lasting legacy

has been the establishment of a reliably rebellious consumer base; San Francisco art

historian Thomas Albright, for instance, proposes that "the real revolution of the 1960s

was the transformation of practically everything—including the notion of 'revolution'

itself—into a merchandisable commodity, in the service of an omnivorous

consumerism."[49] While such statements cynically write off the utopian political, social,

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[46] Ibid., 138.
[47] Fred Turner traces this spread further back to mass media producers in the late 1930s; see Turner, *The Democratic Surround*.
[48] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 29
[49] Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1945–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 182. See also Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter,

and aesthetic investments of the '60s youth counterculture as a footnote to the "real story" of capitalist hegemony in the late 20th century, they also highlight the fact that these investments, at least to some extent, derived from and thrived within the consumer culture that they symbolically rejected.

Frank's history details how advertising executives in the '60s adopted the strategy of "anti-advertising," a rhetorical style that conveyed mistrust of mass industry, as a way of appealing to hip consumers' sense of individuality.[50] A good deal of Syntonic's promotional language exemplifies this strategy. For instance, the Q&A exchange in the liner notes of *Disc Two* assumes, openly, that potential users will likely recognize *Environments*'s Listener Test Responses as calculated advertising, or "hype."

> Q: Why all the "hype" on the back cover?
> A: … We have received quite a few comments that the "hype" on the back cover wasn't "hype" once the album was experienced. Environments are new concepts in sound and we want to make certain people know what to expect.

By acknowledging that the Listening Test Responses might come off as "hype," Syntonic positions their listeners as hip to the advertising game, while showing themselves to be "in the know," sharing with the consumer an awareness of the promotional context. Vaguely alluding to the newness and ineffability of the *Environments* audio experience, Syntonic subtly prolongs the message underlying the Listening Test Responses: expect the unexpected. Yet Syntonic's anti-advertising not only sells the consumer an audio experience, but also an image of themselves that's both deliberate and daring; careful, and yet open to the new and unfamiliar.

Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

[50] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 60.

Environments's visual and sonic designs contribute to this image. The records departed somewhat from the loose, sensuous hedonism represented by hippie youth and psychedelic music to which leading '60s advertisements aspired.[51] Madison Ave. execs encouraged their employees to tap into rock culture, which at the time conveyed authenticity largely through the spontaneity and directness associated with African-American and white working-class aesthetics.[52] Visual design moved away from the cleanliness and minimalism of early '60s design, borrowing more from the bold, image-centric, flowery visual style of the rock poster.[53] Companies like Pepsi sprinkled a little rock, folk, and soul into their jingles.[54] And admen reached out to artists themselves, fine and popular alike, as living exemplars of untamed self-expression, while moving away from the appeals to certainty and reason in advertising based around scientific and technological testing.[55]

Environments's packaging, by contrast, balanced the aesthetics of spontaneous individualism with a design that signifies the calculating instrumental rationality of mass culture's stereotyped organization man. While *Environments*'s references to psychedelic experience appealed to potential users' hipness, its instructional packaging more closely resembles Muzak's *Stimulus Progression* promotional LPs (see Ch. 1) than your average psych rock record. Packed with explanatory text and technical recommendations, *Environments*'s packaging sports the technocratic scientism that Muzak represented, and

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[51] Ibid., 106.

[52] Ibid., 114; Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 12–32.

[53] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 105–06.

[54] Timothy D. Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 155–56.

[55] Ibid., 138.

that the counterculture supposedly opposed, while still appearing slightly subversive as a novel experiment in audio technology. The clean rows of text and hard, right angles of its layout convey the sterility and calculation of a corporate-issued product, delivering a straight-laced sales pitch while winking at the customer with its bright, bold colors. With sumptuously large photographs appearing alongside titles in all-lowercase Helvetica—a corporate typeface if there ever was one[56]—and, of course, the seal of Syntonic Research, Inc.'s approval, the records literally wear on their sleeves their status as mass-manufactured product. Overall, *Environments*'s packaging more closely approximated a streamlined corporate approach to product packaging that, from the perspective of late '60s hip advertising, would have come off as a relic of the (supposedly) conformist 1950s and early '60s.[57]

While *Environments*'s scientistic, geometric packaging suggests a retreat from expressive design, perhaps in deference to the records' purported functional aims, these records' studied appearance might be more accurately understood as part of their expressive cachet as functional objects for hip consumers. The packaging confers upon the records a blank utilitarianism, adding a "hard" modernist edge to the "soft" romantic vision of nature simultaneously set forward by the records. Its visual aesthetic confounds the conventional alignment of instrumental reason with "square" conformism, on the one hand, and impulsive expression with "hip" individualism on the other.

These design elements add an aesthetic dimension to the historical transition

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[56] Design historian Lars Müller calls Helvetica the "ultimate corporate typeface of the '60s and '70s"; see Müller, *Helvetica: Homage to a Typeface* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2002), n. pag.
[57] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 50, 93.

detailed by Sam Binkley in his study of 1970s and '80s hip consumerism, *Getting*

Loose. Binkley's history moves beyond "the hedonistic legacy of the 1960s," and into the

technologized lifestyle consumerism that, in the 1970s, was mainly pitched to a market of

increasingly countercultural white middle-class adults.[58] An avalanche of therapeutic

products of self-management emerged in bookstores and drugstores that promoted a

lifestyle ethic of "practiced release," a process of "loosening" into a more natural, relaxed

state.[59] These "mediators of lived immediacy" promised to help users connect with

nature, and with their more authentic selves, while shaping their commitment to

immersion and spontaneity as a way of life.[60] Countercultural entertainment became

increasingly focused on politicizing the personal, promoting introspection as a continuous

process of self-development while prescribing media as aids to this process. As Binkley

puts it, this emergent lifestyle consumerism promoted a "softer mode of self-discovery"

through owned commodities than did the media and entertainment surrounding unruly

'60s youths.[61]

       Without much discussion of the aesthetics of this transition, however, and sticking

mainly to rhetorical analysis, Binkley's description of this phenomenon disregards these

commodities' primary mode of appeal. *Environments*'s minimalist visual and sonic

design, however, adds an aesthetically self-reflexive layer to the process of volunteering

control that Binkley describes. While their Listening Test Responses, descriptions of

effects, and technical instructions create room *before* listening for users to prepare their

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[58] Binkley, *Getting Loose*, 16.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 10.
[61] Ibid., 34.

future listening experiences, the overtly calculated sonic design of the recordings also

creates an aesthetic tier upon which the physiological and psychological experience

might register, immediately and subjectively *during* listening, as a mediated and

environmental one. *Environments*'s sonic design promotes an experience both direct and

yet monitored, visceral and yet technological, internal and yet atmospheric. While

listeners need not explicitly reflect upon the record's instrumentality during the listening

experience, the recordings' sonic designs convey enough restraint for their dis-immersion

and conscious aural attention to spring forth at any time.

Take *Tintinnabulation* as an example. Through the abstract impersonality

connoted by its subtle electronic timbres, and conveyed via its spare minimalism,

Tintinnabulation's sound expressively designs the aural experience as controlled and

controllable. This characterization might seem counterintuitive, since minimalist music's

avant-garde status was, in the 1960s, largely predicated on its purported rejection of

expressive signification. Through seemingly inexpressive techniques like drone,

musematic repetition,[62] rhythmic and melodic augmentation, or metric phasing, '60s

minimalist music assumed an impersonal or "dehumanized" character.[63] However, as

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[62] Richard Middleton defines "musematic repetition" as the repetition of short melodic units, in contrast to the repetition of longer phrases that he terms "discursive repetition"; see Middleton, "In the Groove or Blowing Your Mind? The Pleasures of Musical Repetition," in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee (New York: Routledge, 2006), 15–20. See also Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 144–46.

[63] During this early period, minimalist music prolonged the avant-garde modernist inclination to excise expressive subjectivity from the art music composition—an anti-Romantic shunning of naturalistic representation and human sentimentalism that José Ortega y Gasset once called the "dehumanization" of art; see Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," in *Velazquez, Goya and the Dehumanization of Art*, trans.

Rebecca Leydon explains in her typology of minimalist tropes, the dehumanized

character of minimalist music may be recognizable as such by virtue of a process of

identification with a passive musical subject or volitionless "persona" in listening.[64] In

minimalist pieces with "shallow" hierarchies (few or no overlapping structural layers),

ostinati and drone may, over time, signal to listeners a lack of subjective agency. Leydon

concludes, from this observation, that the listener may recognize in this music an

"automatized" subject, and identify with this subject in turn.[65]

Yet it also seems possible that the minimalist listener, following this subconscious

recognition of a non-agentive musical persona, might also recognize the music as a non-

human object or environment. (The "objecthood" of minimalism, it should be noted, has

been characterized by critics as the hallmark of minimalist painting and sculpture.)[66]

Tintinnabulation's minimalism may thus enable one to recognize the sound not only in

terms of an expressive musical agent or subject, but also as an impersonal, objective facet

of one's listening space. Such impersonality might lend the *Tintinnabulation* listener a

feeling of relative control—and, somewhat paradoxically, also facilitate the psychedelic

"loosening" of the boundaries of the listening self.

The bell sounds' remarkably slow, dull attacks and uncannily long, flat sustain

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Alexis Brown (New York: Norton, 1972), 65–83.

[64] Rebecca Leydon, "Towards a Typology of Minimalist Tropes," *Music Theory Online* 8, no. 4 (2002).

[65] Ibid.

[66] On the objecthood of minimalist visual art, see Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (New York: Routledge, 2009), 307–25. On the relationship between minimalist music and visual art, see Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and Music"; Ross Cole, "'Sound Effects (O.K., Music)': Steve Reich and the Visual Arts in New York City, 1966–1968," *Twentieth-Century Music* 11, no. 2 (2014): 217–44; Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*.

contribute to a "synthetic" sense of impersonality. The recording's textural uniformity

and absence of hierarchical layers lend the track an expressive austerity. And, absent of

tape hiss or room noise, the airless, digitally produced recording also lacks an ambiance

of its own. For purposes of ambient acoustic design (see Ch. 2), this choice allows the

sounds to blend seamlessly into the acoustic environment. Yet heard exclusively of other

sounds in the listening environment, the artificiality of the production can become

especially apparent. Even as an undertone largely ignored by the listener, the track's

subtle artificiality further "dehumanizes" the recording's sound, and contributes to

Environments's technologized, control-conferring aesthetic.

Yet at the same time as *Tintinnabulation* conveys impersonality, it also takes on

an expressively mild, relaxed, and "natural" character. The repeated pitches occur over

irregular rather than regular intervals, thus lacking the energetic, propulsive pulse of

much repetitive minimalist music. The intervals of time between each sonic event vary

from about ½ second to 5 seconds, but do not establish any regular pattern, instead

sounding spontaneously generated. The duration between each strike averages at around

1½ seconds, a leisurely pace that leaves plenty of time to observe the decay of each bell.

The avoidance of dynamic extremes conveys reserve and lack of impulsivity. Together,

these features might allow the listener to relax and "loosen," to use Binkley's

terminology, into the calm repose suggested by the environment, and become habituated

to it. This relaxation may prepare the listener to take on the impersonal qualities

mentioned before, leading to a felt loss of ego, volition, or selfhood.[67] Psychedelic

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[67] Sigmund Freud has described the experience of ego loss as an "oceanic" feeling in
which the subject reverts to a "primitive" or "infantile" state of narcissism; see Sigmund

experiences, it should be noted, have been understood, and even defined in similar terms.[68]

In these ways, *Tintinnabulation* is well suited to set off in the listener a complex dialectic of subjective identification with, and detachment from, the sounds of the recording. Via recognition of an apparently non-agentive sonic "persona," a listener might regard *Tintinnabulation* as an inhuman environment; yet, in mirroring the sounds' "loose" detachment from the overarching consistency of the recording, the listener might also come to take on its passive character. The listener's attention might similarly fluctuate between unfocused awareness of *Tintinnabulation*'s seemingly unplanned auditory presence, and focused attention on its artificial, carefully calculated sound. These fluid interactions between listener and recording suggest alternation between, or perhaps a mixture of, subjective merging with sound (as typically described of "psychoacoustic" phenomena) and instrumental use of an object. It is this very paradoxical experience—the controllable experience of non-control, or the personal experience of depersonalization—that Syntonic Research sold through *Tintinnabulation*'s aesthetic design.

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 10–21. David Toop uses the ocean as a central metaphor for the immersive quality of Ambient music, and relates it to this infantile state; see David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), 273.
[68] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (London: Thinking Ink Ltd., 2011), 8; Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Kensington, 1992). On depersonalization as an ideal effect of psychedelic rock, see Hicks, 63–65.

Conclusion

In the context of Ambient music's early history, *Tintinnabulation* represents an innovative turn in the application of a minimalist design aesthetic to the "environmental" or mood music recording. Seen alongside contemporaneous commercial recordings of minimalist music, the recording also fills in a small piece of the much larger, and still incomplete puzzle of the interactions between avant-garde music and popular culture, fine art and consumer technology, and minimalist music and psychedelic art during the 1960s and '70s. Yet it's little wonder that *Tintinnabulation*, despite *Environments*'s sales success throughout the 1970s and '80s, has been largely passed over by music and media historians alike. For one, the recording is an oddball among *Environments*'s other recordings, which are already historically significant in their own right as early instances of a genre of audio recording (the long-playing nature sounds recording) as well as audio production technique (digital signal processing). But it's also expected that the aesthetics of a musical recording, tucked away in a corporate-issued nature sounds series, would be disregarded by art music historians and listeners, since nature sound recordings are so commonly assumed to subsume aesthetics entirely to instrumental functionality. Aesthetic interpretation of these technologies can seem superfluous, secondary to their purported use value.

My analysis of *Tintinnabulation* contests this methodological assumption. Partly, I resist committing to a purely "technological" or media-oriented reading of *Tintinnabulation* for phenomenological reasons. While background sound recordings seem more significant for the environmental experience and psychological adjustment they enable, I have shown that sound does not simply disappear in these listening

situations, but rather remains an attentional possibility throughout. In this way, supposedly "functional" sound can be experienced, at any time, as a text or acousmatic object. Yet at the same time, as I have also shown, one does not need to closely focus upon expressively designed sound to recognize and appreciate the associations that this design makes possible; thus, certain "textual" aspects may register, even subconsciously, in the technological use of environmental recordings.

I also maintain interpretive flexibility for historiographic reasons. From the vantage point of the present day, *Tintinnabulation*'s significance lies more in its aesthetic anticipation of Ambient music's functional minimalism, than for its functionality as such. While various forms of recording had already purported to act as relaxants (mood music), psychedelics (psych rock), and environmental enhancer (any background music), *Tintinnabulation* was perhaps the first mass-distributed commercial recording to promote music with a minimalist design to such ends. For this reason, I not only consider *Tintinnabulation*'s aesthetics from the point of view of *Environments*'s historical consumer, for whom *Tintinnabulation*'s minimalism registered as part of its functional design, but also from the point of view of the music historian, for whom its functional design happens to be minimalist. A singularly historicist, reception-oriented reading of the recording cannot capture its present-day significance as a generic antecedent, any more than a singularly aesthetic, textual reading can describe its technological usefulness; rather, both work together to illuminate the significance of the recording to the Ambient genre formation.

Situated within its historical milieux, *Tintinnabulation* produces various social and (counter)cultural resonances with both minimalism and Ambient music that have

since faded in these categories' reification as generic types. Yet taken aesthetically, against the historical grain, *Tintinnabulation* can also be heard as realizing a technological possibility latent in the minimalist musical aesthetic. Betwixt these perspectives, one finds how *Tintinnabulation*'s promotional and audio design both framed and forged minimalist sound as functional technology during a time when minimalism passed as avant-garde art music. This aesthetic-promotional articulation would later become captured in the genre term "Ambient."

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 4-5

Ambient Music as Popular Genre: Background

Brian Eno's idea to make "music to be heard and not listened to" initially came to him in the middle of five formative years of post-secondary art education, first at the Ipswich Civic College from 1964 to 1966, then at Winchester Art School until 1969.[1] These educational environments provided Eno the conceptual frameworks and theoretical tools that he would later use to sustain an avant-garde art practice through the medium of the popular music recording. By the time he coined the term "Ambient music" in 1978, Eno was fluidly interweaving high concept art into a charismatic pop persona and practice. He had become one of many British art school graduates from the late 1960s on through the early '80s that, according to Simon Frith and Howard Horne, electrified popular music internationally by "apply[ing] high art skills and identities to a mass cultural form."[2]

In 1964, at the age of sixteen, Eno began attending Ipswich, near his Suffolk County home in Woodbridge. During his two-year tenure there, two key educational figures introduced Eno to the worlds of cybernetics and experimental music that conceptually fueled his later Ambient music practice. The first was cybernetician and department head Roy Ascott, whose game-based "Groundcourse for Art" taught students

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[1] Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-Model: Becoming Roxy Music* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2007), 184.

[2] Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 2. Amongst others, Frith and Horne also identify Pink Floyd, Pete Townshend, David Bowie, Human League, and ZTT as part of this group.

to place concept before technique, and emphasize process over product.[3] The second was painter Tom Phillips, a friend of various London experimental composers, who first introduced Eno to experimental music through John Cage's *Silence*.[4] The concept-driven, process-based, and amateur-friendly approach of experimental music appealed to Eno, who had no formal training in musical performance. By the end of his art education, Eno had developed the tape delay system that he would use on his earliest Ambient albums *(No Pussyfooting)* (1973) and *Discreet Music* (1975), as well as the theoretical tools to conceive these records as experimental.

The following two chapters explore the conceptual fields, artistic practices, and early Ambient recordings that led into Eno's 1978 declaration of Ambient music. Chapter 4 identifies several precedents for Eno's idea in the realm of experimental music composition. Chapter 5 focuses on *Discreet Music* (1975), Eno's first solo record of Ambient music, before he named the genre as such. It elaborates on the roles of British experimentalism and cybernetic theory on Eno's conception of the album, while also interpreting the album from the point of view of the popular music consumer.

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[3] David Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach: The Life and Times of Brian Eno* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 32.
[4] Ibid., 36–38.

CHAPTER 4

Ambient Music as Experimental Music: Precedents

In his foreword to the 2nd edition of composer/critic Michael Nyman's seminal

history of experimental music, Brian Eno wrote that Ambient music "aimed to use the

perceptions and understandings acquired from the experience of experimental music… to

make a new popular music."[1] This chapter outlines three important precedents in the

history of experimental music for Eno's idea of Ambient music: Erik Satie's *Musiques*

d'ameublement (Furniture Music), John Cage's philosophy of silence, and 1960s mixed-

means theater and minimalism. They presented alternatives to the approach of the

conventional Western music listener in which, as Nyman describes it, "Your method of

listening is conditioned by what went before, and will condition, in roughly the way the

composer intends, what comes next."[2] These alternatives led Eno to reconceptualize

music not as organized sounds, but rather as a "*process of apprehending* that we, as

listeners, could choose to conduct."[3] By encouraging audiences to broaden, narrow, or

shift their auditory focus at will, these precedents emphasized a sort of freedom in

listening upon which Eno's idea of Ambient music would later hinge.

Erik Satie's *Musiques d'ameublement*

I was trying to make a piece that could be listened to and yet could be ignored... perhaps in the
spirit of Satie who wanted to make music that could "mingle with the sound of the knives and

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[1] Brian Eno, foreword to *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed., by Michael
Nyman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xiii.

[2] Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25.

[3] Eno, foreword to *Experimental Music*, xii.

forks at dinner."
—Brian Eno, liner notes to *Discreet Music* (Obscure, 1975)

Of course, French composer Erik Satie (1866–1925) didn't just "want" to

compose *musique d'ameublement* ("furnishing music," or, as it's more commonly

translated, furniture music),[4] but did in fact compose four such pieces between 1917 and

1923. None of these pieces, however, ever actually mingled with the sounds of

silverware; at least, not in Satie's own lifetime. As a matter of fact, the idea that furniture

music should "mingle" with dinner sounds came to Eno indirectly, from a remembrance

about the composer in the 1952 memoir of artist Fernand Léger:

> We were having lunch, Satie and some friends, in a restaurant. The music was so loud we simply couldn't stand it and left. But Satie said:
> 'Even so, there's room for a 'musique d'ameublement,' that's to say, music which would be part of the noises around it and would take account of them. I think of it as being tuneful, softening the noise of knives and forks without overpowering them or making itself obtrusive. It would fill in the silences which can sometimes weigh heavy between table companions. It would banish the need to make banal conversation. At the same time it would neutralise street noises, which can be tactless in their behaviour.' It would, he said, be responding to a need.[5]

Eno's familiarity with this passage was likely filtered through the writings of U.S.

American composer John Cage (1912–92), who, in a 1958 essay on Satie, foregrounded

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[4] As this sentence illustrates, I leave *musique d'ameublement* (or "furniture music") uncapitalized to designate the general concept of furniture music, while reserving the proper noun to refer to the specific pieces Satie composed for this purpose.
[5] Fernand Léger, "Satie Inconnu," *La Revue Musicale* 214 (June 1952): 137–38: "Nous déjeûnions, des amis et lui dans un restaurant. Obligés de subir une musique tapageuse, insupportable nous quittons la salle et Satie nous dit: 'Il y a tout de même à réaliser une musique d'ameublement, c'est-à-dire une musique qui ferait partie des bruits ambiant, qui en tiendrait compte. Je la suppose mélodieuse, elle adoucirait les bruits des couteaux, des fourchettes sans les dominer, sans s'imposer. Elle meublerait les silences pesant parfois entre les convives. Elle leur épargnerait les banalités courantes. Elle neutraliserait en même temps les bruits de la rue qui entrent dans le jeu sans discrétion.' Ce serait, disait-il, répondre à un besoin." Translation reprinted from Robert Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, trans. Roger Nichols (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 74–75.

this remembrance in an imaginary conversation with the dead composer.[6] To Cage, Satie's furniture music was revolutionary for the way it let unintended ambient sounds "enter in" to the musical composition.[7] (I will discuss the significance of "ambient sound" to Cage's philosophy in the next section.) The idea of furniture music represented to Cage a music without "walls to defend itself" against sounds unintended by the composer, and thus a music which would pose the "question of bringing one's intended actions into relation with the ambient unintended ones."[8]

Yet Cage answered this question very differently with his own compositional practice than did Satie with his *Furniture Music*. Beginning in the early 1950s, Cage sought to compose music that would include and intermingle with the unintended sounds that permeate what most call "silence." By contrast, as Léger's account suggests, Satie's *Furniture Music* primarily aimed to fill up any silences between its auditors' intended sounds that might otherwise seem awkward, noisy, or empty.[9] (Léger's account also reminds that the root verb of "ameublement" is *meublir*, which can mean either to furnish or to fill a silence.) For Satie, unlike Cage, furniture music was not so much about setting the poetry of ambient sound as it was about furnishing acoustic ambience with music's melodious chatter.

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[6] As is well documented, Cage played a significant role in maintaining the relevance of Satie's music to the experimental avant-garde in the years following the Second World War. Matthew Shlomowitz, "Cage's Place in the Reception of Satie," *Erik Satie*, 1999, http://www.satie-archives.com/web/article8.html; see also Herve Vanel, "John Cage's Muzak-Plus: The Fu(rni)ture of Music" 102, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 183–84, fn. 63.

[7] John Cage, "Erik Satie," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 80.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Michael Nyman, "Cage and Satie," in *Writings about John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 70.

Satie biographer Rollo Myers claims Satie's idea came from Henri Matisse, who in 1908 dreamed of an art "devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter…a soothing or calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue."[10] Whether Satie indeed took inspiration directly from Matisse, he had been entertaining the idea of furniture music since the early 1890s when, inspired by the frescos of Puvis de Chavannes, he wrote the "decorative" preludes for Joséphin Péladan's play *Le Fils des étoiles* (1891).[11] Like the later *Musiques d'ameublement*, Satie's preludes generated non-motivic, static patterns out of rhythmic *ostinati* and unresolved harmonic progressions that did not develop progressively, but rather simply appeared sequentially. The result of such anti-expressive techniques, as Robert Orledge describes it, was to "render" the music "flat, pale and fresco-like in the manner of Puvis de Chavannes."[12] Satie further developed these techniques in the music for the 1917 ballet *Parade*, a collaboration with Jean Cocteau, who praised Satie for creating music like chairs, "music I can live in, like a house."[13]

By Satie's own account, the idea for furniture music was not entirely conceived in terms of sound in the first place. In a letter to *Groupe des Six* mentee Darius Milhaud,

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[10] Rollo H. Myers, *Erik Satie* (New York: Dover, 1948), 60: "Ce que je rêve, c'est un art… sans sujet inquiétant ou préoccupant, qui soit… un lénifiant, un calmant cérébral, quelque chose d'analogue a un bon fauteuil qui délasse de ses fatigues physiques." Translation reprinted from Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 38.

[11] Ornella Volta, introduction to *Musiques d'ameublement*, by Erik Satie (Paris: Éditions Salabert, 2010), iv.

[12] Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, Music in the 20th Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 207.

[13] Jean Cocteau, excerpt from *Cock and Harlequin*, 1918, trans. Rollo H. Myers, in *Source Readings in Music History*, rev. ed., edited by Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 1292.

Satie described furniture music as "decorative and sumptuous in appearance—meant to appeal visually."[14] Milhaud took Satie to be comparing seeing decoration with hearing furniture music, as though furniture music should have the same effect on the ear as would a pattern or mirror frame in the periphery of one's visual field.[15] Satie's description infers, however, that the scores themselves might, too, be decorative. The idea for furniture music did come off the heels of *Sports et divertissements* (1914), whose score had Satie playfully interweaving notation and ornamentation into visual metaphors, and accompanying his musical calligraphy with floridly handwritten programmatic text. Commissioned by one of Paris's most influential fashion publishers at the time, the piece's fashion-book-like presentation juxtaposed Satie's impeccable penmanship with full-page color illustrations by Charles Martin, resulting in what Mary E. Davis recognizes as a prototype of modernist multimedia art.[16] While the autograph scores for Satie's first two pieces of furniture music do not approach this level of detail, they are still drawn up with decorative flair. One finds, for instance, in the score for *Tapisserie en fer forgé* (Wrought-Iron Tapestry) (1917), a subtly proportioned weighting of note and staff size between the lower four parts and the upper three; note stems elongated to a near-crosshatch with the staves; and curved outlines in negative space against the left sides of the text, and the gradually extending lower staves on the right. (Fig. 4.1)

Satie completed his first two *Musiques d'ameublement* between 1917 and '18. He orchestrated both *Carrelage phonique* (Acoustic Tiles) and *Tapisserie* with strings, flute,

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[14] Alan M. Gillmor, *Erik Satie* (Boston: Twayne, 1988), 233.
[15] Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, 153–54.
[16] Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 62–92.

Fig 4.1. Erik Satie, *Tapisserie en fer forgé*, Autograph Score (1917).

and clarinet, with also an added trumpet in *Tapisserie*. On the scores, Satie specifies

particular situations for the pieces to be played; the first, "For a luncheon or marriage

contract," and the second, "To greet the arrival of guests at a grand reception. To be

played in a lobby." Despite these specifications, Satie first arranged for the pieces to

premiere at a public demonstration in Paris during the spring of 1918. Increasingly

frequent bombing raids, however, necessitated a delay.[17] Satie in the meantime wrote

to the *Groupe des Six*, calling on the young composers to follow his lead in composing

furniture music. Only one, Arthur Honegger, composed his own, premiering them in a

concert in April 1919.[18]

Two of Satie's *Musiques d'ameublement* finally received a premiere in March

1920 at the Galerie Barbazages in Paris. Like the preludes for *Le Fils*, Satie unleashed his

pieces of furniture music—*Chez un 'bistrot'* (At a "Bistro") and *Un Salon* (A Drawing

Room)—between the acts of a play, this time Max Jacob's *Ruffian toujours, truand

jamais*. Satie had composed the pieces with the aid of Milhaud, who also helped organize

their premiere performance. The pair positioned the musicians—two pianists, three

clarinetists, and the trombonist—in different corners of the gallery, so that the music

would come from all sides at once.[19] Before the performance, organizer Pierre Bertin

invited the audience members to stroll around, chat, and look at the exhibition of

children's art while Satie's music played. "We beg you to take no notice of [the music],"

he told the audience, "and to behave during the entr'actes as if it did not exist."[20] Yet

much to Satie's dismay, the audience, accustomed to respectfully paying heed to musical

performances, sat and listened, despite Satie and Milhaud's protests ("Go on talking!

Walk about! Don't listen!" Satie purportedly yelled).[21] The audience regarded the whole

thing an amusing charade. Satie considered the performance a failure.

Satie had more reasons for disappointment than that the pieces didn't fulfill their

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[17] Volta, introduction to *Musiques*, vi.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 153–54.
[20] Myers, *Erik Satie*, 60.
[21] Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, 160.

intended function as a sort of wallpaper or background to social activity. Partly, he probably relished the idea of an audience talking over these particular *Musiques d'ameublement*, because he had woven into them fragments of music by composers he especially despised: Ambroise Thomas and Camille Saint-Saëns. The snippets from Thomas's *Mignon* (1866) and Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre* (1874), Satie wryly reasoned, surely deserved ignoring. Yet while the audience recognized a joke was afoot, they apparently failed to recognize that their quiet listening ruined the punchline.

Even more broadly, Satie's presentation not only aimed to undermine the efforts of certain composers, but also its bourgeois audience's habits on the whole. In particular, they undermined the social custom of quiet, attentive concert hall listening, a practice that ascended in France with the rise of bourgeois individualism between 1770 and 1850.[22] By the end of the 19th century, most European and North American concert halls were treated by their musicians and patrons as "imaginary museums" in which art music's historical and cultural value would be discerned and honored—and listeners' cultivation, conspicuously displayed—through silent listening.[23] This practice arose alongside what Lydia Goehr calls the "work-concept" of art music composition, by which attentive listeners would ideally assess musical works in terms of their formal autonomy or self-

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[22] James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[23] J. Peter Burkholder, "The Historicist Mainstream in Music of the Last Hundred Years," *The Journal of Musicology* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 115–34; Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

sufficiency.[24] Yet the sort of reception Satie's *Musiques d'ameublement* called for

was incommensurate with the social practices in reception that separated "serious"

listening from "lower" forms of mass musical consumption at the music hall and *cafe-concért*.[25] Furniture music could not maintain the bourgeois respectability of art music, as

Satie stated in an advertisement tract, because it wasn't meant to be treated "respectfully"

as autonomous. "We want to establish a music designed to serve 'utilitarian' needs—

needs that have nothing to do with Art," Satie wrote. "*Musique d'ameublement* creates

vibration; it has no other purpose; it fulfills the same function as light, heat—and *comfort*

in all its forms."[26] And yet, for Satie's audience to treat the music merely as vibration

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[24] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum*, 170.

[25] As Stephen Hinton explains, the idea of "functional music" or "utility music" is historically specific, arising along the phenomenon of autonomous or "absolute" music. He traces the invention of the term "functional music" back to the musicological debate in Weimar Germany surrounding *Gebrauchsmusik* ("utility music"), a term that both described and prescribed an alternative to the concert hall paradigm of absolute music. The terms of the debate were prominently set in a polemical essay by Heinrich Besseler, who contrasted *Gebrauchsmusik* from the ideally autonomous *Vortragsmusik* ("presentation music") of the concert hall. Whereas *Vortragsmusik* demanded a distanced "aesthetic approach" of "immersing oneself in atmospheres of pure sound," *Gebrauchsmusik* would both accompany and spur action in "everyday" [*alltaglich*] life. Besseler's concept was both popularized and altered in the music and writings of composers Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill—music that can now be heard, on occasion, in the quiet concert hall. For reasons such as this, as Hinton makes clear, the notions of musical autonomy and musical functionality must be understood as manifesting independently on the different levels of production and reception; what is produced as absolute music may become "functionalized," just as intentionally functional music may become "autonomized." Stephen Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik: Musical Aesthetics in the Weimar Republic with Reference to the Works of Paul Hindemith* (New York: Garland, 1989), esp. 27–34.

[26] Ornella Volta, *Satie / Cocteau: Les Malentendus D'une Entente* (Bègles, France: Le Castor Astral, 1993), 112: "Nous, nous voulons établir une musique fait pour satisfaire les besoins 'utiles.' L'Art n'entre pas dans ces besoins. La 'Musique d'Ameublement' crée de la vibration; elle n'a pas d'autre but; elle remplit le même rôle que la lumière, la chaleur—& *le confort* sous toutes ses formes." Translation reprinted from Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (New York: Oxford

would have undermined the customary display of quiet listening so integral to the bourgeoisie's self-distinction from the industrialized masses. The attention accorded Satie's *Furniture Music* at its premiere represented, to Satie, a failure to disrupt bourgeois assumptions and habits around musical reception. As such, furniture music was not strictly utilitarian, but rather, as Jerrold Seigel writes, "an attack on the inherited hierarchies that consigned art to a separate sphere, outside of everyday existence."[27]

That Satie sought to upset bourgeois custom should not be controversial, as the performance of *Musique d'ameublement* was but one of many *scandales* engineered by the avant-garde prankster during his career. But Satie didn't only aim to undermine bourgeois elitism with furniture music; he also aimed to intervene in mass culture. As Léger's anecdote suggests, Satie's idea responded to the increasingly ubiquitous "light" background music being played in cafés, stores, and other public places.[28] Part of the problem with this music, Satie complained, was that this music was not originally composed for such occasions, locations, and uses: "Our habit, or custom, is to make music on occasions where music *has no place*," Satie writes. "And so one plays 'waltzes,' 'fantasies on operatic themes,' and other such things written for another purpose."[29] In an unpublished 1914 essay, Satie also riled against "grotesque

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University Press, 1999), 500.

[27] Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830–1930* (New York: Viking, 1986), 331.

[28] On the history of light music in France, see Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The 19th-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[29] Volta, *Satie / Cocteau*, 112: "L'habitude—l'usage—est de faire de la musique dans des occasions où la musique n'a *rien à faire*. Là, on joue des 'Valses,' des 'Fantaisies d'Opéras,' & autres choses semblables, écrites pour un autre objet." Translation reprinted from Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 500.

arrangements" of fine music piped into places like the Grands Magasins Dufayel, a

popular Parisian department store that specialized in furniture.[30] "In many places," Satie

groused,

> sweet and excellent silence has been replaced by bad music. It is thought smart by most people to hear falsely pretty things, and listen to silly, vaguely churchy ritornellos, while they drink a beer or try on a pair of trousers; to appear to appreciate the sonorous tribute of basses and bassoons, and other ugly-pipes, while thinking of nothing at all.[31]

In contrast to his self-proclaimed successor John Cage, who mourned the loss of "sweet

and excellent silence" and called for its return, Satie was less irritated by the loss of

silence than he was irked at the "bad," "falsely pretty" music chosen to replace it, and the

so-called appreciation this music inspired in *le commun*.[32] Satie accordingly advertised

furniture music as a corrective to this nauseating musical "dufayelization."[33]

Satie's vision of reform amplified a growing trend in European arts and

architecture criticism toward decrying decorative ostentation, as emblematized by

Dufayel's store. As Rosamund Williams explains, the Grands Magasins was designed as

a pre-Revolutionary palace outfitted with modern technological spectacles, thereby

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[30] Erik Satie, *A Mammal's Notebook*, ed. Ornella Volta, trans. Anthony Melville, Atlas Arkhive Five: Documents of the Avant-Garde (London: Atlas, 1996), 106.

[31] Erik Satie, *Écrits*, ed. Ornella Volta (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1977), 24–25: "Dans beaucoup de lieux, l'excellent et doux silence a été remplacé par de la mauvaise musique. Il est bien vu, par le commun, d'ouïr de fausses belles choses, d'écouter de sottes ritournelles, vaguement pieuses, en prenant un bock ou en essayant un pantalon; de sembler apprécer les dûs sonores des basses, contrebasses & d'autres vilains flûteaux, tout en ne pensant à rien." Translation reprinted from Satie, *A Mammal's Notebook*, 105.

[32] Pierre Bourdieu would later echo Satie in his extended critique of the petit-bourgeoisie's mistaken reverence for "legitimate" culture, an attitude exploited in mass culture by, among other things, "light" arrangements of classical music; see Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1979; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 326.

[33] Satie, *Écrits*, 25: "j'étouffe de cette dufayêlisation musicale."

representing the "democratization of luxury" through consumer goods.[34] Yet critics

like Camille Mauclair and Adolf Loos regarded this sort of mass cultural "moneyed

glamor" in bad taste, calling for a return to plainness, clarity, and simplicity.[35] Following

the Great War, an aesthetic of "functionalism" came to dominate elite bourgeois

sensibilities, and the fine decorative artists and architects eliminated "the ornaments and

imitations typical of the democratization of luxury."[36] Gurminder Kaur Bhogal traces a

parallel movement in Parisian art music following the turn of the century, after

composers like Debussy and Ravel had delivered ornate figural ornamentation through

the musical *arabesque*'s curved solo melodic lines, variegated motivic rhythms

comprised of short note values, and unstable metric implications.[37] Yet as the twentieth

century progressed into its second decade, composers and critics across Europe began to

shun this type of ornamental complexity, with some holding up Satie's sparer musical

designs as aesthetic ideals.[38]

Not all of Satie's pieces of furniture music reflect this shift: *Chez un 'bistrot'* and

Un Salon's appropriations more nearly parody the "marches" and "fantasias" that Satie

elsewhere advertised furniture music as replacing.[39] His first two, *Carrelage* and

Tapisserie, more nearly reflect the simplicity Satie became praised for. Each of these

pieces is comprised of a single four-bar melody made to be looped *ad infinitum* (and,

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[34] Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 93–94.

[35] Ibid., 98.

[36] Ibid., 164. Williams notes that the term "functionalism" didn't arise in France until much later.

[37] Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64–114.

[38] Ibid., 313.

[39] Satie, *A Mammal's Notebook*, 200.

perhaps, *ad nauseam*). Satie instructed players to repeat these phrases over and over, like a vamp, so that the music at length would come to resemble the repeated patterns of wallpaper, floor tiles, or tapestry. Over time, one might imagine, the repetitiousness would deter listeners from following the music.[40] The patterning effect is intensified as both phrases also loop internally, with the beginning of the third measure repeating the first, and the fourth paralleling the structure of the second. Each measure pair of this 2+2 structure displays a contrast between the first and second measures, which stiffly alternate between different motives, types of articulation, ranges, harmonies, and in *Tapisserie*, also textures. Neither phrase contains a cadence, with unresolved modal triads and a constant stream of eighth notes continually flowing into the next two-bar iteration. *Carrelage* proceeds at an "ordinary" pace, while *Tapisserie* is amusingly marked *très riche*—very rich. If Satie imagined his Furniture Music as democratizing luxury for the masses, it was not of the elaborate, effusive sort on display in the Grands Magasins's entrance hall, but something rather more economical, square, and rigid.

His last piece of furniture music, *Tenture de cabinet préfectoral* (Curtain of a Voting Booth) (1923), remains an oddball amongst the five pieces. Satie instructs performers to repeat this single lopsided 12-bar phrase "at will (but no more)." In its first 10 bars, a monotonous quarter-eighth-eighth motif oafishly lumbers on from one measure to the next—at first barging in with forte *sforzandos* in the initial four bars, then attempting discretion in the next six. The phrase cadences awkwardly on staccato eighths

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[40] Satie employed a similar strategy of melodic looping in composing film music for the "Entr'acte" of *Relâche* (1924), his final work. For more on this piece, see Martin Marks, "The Well-Furnished Film: Satie's Score for *Entr'acte*," *Canadian University Music Review* 4 (1983): 245–77.

that stumble unspectacularly *down* an ascending E melodic minor scale for the last two measures. There's nothing luxurious about *Tenture*, a fact underlined by Satie's expression marking over bar 5: "calme et sot" (calm and stupid), it reads.

Satie's scores, as this marking hints, also leave open the possibility that the pieces' self-effacement is, itself, a farce. The music's dynamic and articulation markings do not exactly lend the pieces to ignoring, whether the flat *forte* indications in *Tapisserie* and *Carrelage*, the *f*-to-*ff* crescendo in the last 2 bars of *Tenture*, or the accents and *szforzandi* peppered throughout. The ironic "Très riche" and "calme et sot" also indicate a mild absurdity, enhanced audibly in the music's delirious, merry-go-round repetitiousness. The pieces' avoidance of conventional expressiveness, neutered affective emptiness, and dumb monotony clearly detract from their attractiveness—and perhaps, also, their humanness—making them ostensibly fit for ignoring. But could these seemingly negative qualities also be heard as expressive, in their inexpressiveness, of the "calm and stupid" parade of consumer goods and extravagant furnishings lining the aisles of the department store? Perhaps, too, they metonymically represented the stereotypically blank, undifferentiated, lumpen masses, *le commun*, for whom such products were thought to be produced. To this day, it seems impossible to resolve the ambiguity Satie's *Musiques d'ameublement* set at the intersection of elegant, *moderne* functionalism and consumer culture send-up.

Whether or not one discerns satire in the sound, a smirk can certainly be detected in Satie's advertisements for Furniture Music, which included such over-the-top pronouncements as "Do not go to sleep without listening to 'Furniture Music' or you will sleep badly," and, "A man who has not heard 'Furniture Music' does not know

happiness."[41] Satie's "devious" sloganeering, as Steven Whiting points out,

masterfully parroted the style of advertising one might find in a typical Parisian

newspaper of the time.[42] Jerrold Seigel also observes that Satie's promotions gave the lie

to other composers' self-described imperviousness to the demands of the marketplace.

Rather than glorifying his own existence as a poverty-stricken artist, Satie dove headlong

into the self-promotional exercise, "absorbing and exploiting commercial relations"

within his own artistic practice.[43] Given his financial struggles, it's still likely that Satie

hoped his Furniture Music would catch on as a consumer product, even as his

advertisements implicitly posed a critique of consumer culture. Sadly, his only sale would

be his final piece of Furniture Music, *Tenture de cabinet préfectoral*, written for Mrs.

Eugene Meyer, an American friend of Milhaud's.

Several decades following Satie's death, Milhaud mused that Satie's final sale

predicted the eventual success of furniture music, though not in the format the composer

had originally planned.

> But for this *Musique pour un cabinet préfectoral* to have its full meaning, [Meyer] should have had it recorded and played over and over again, thus forming part of the furniture of her beautiful library in Crescent Place, adorning it for the ear in the same way as the still-life by Manet adorned it for the eye. In any case, the future was to prove that Satie was right: nowadays, children and housewives fill their homes with unheeded music, reading and working to the sound of the wireless. And in all public places, large stores and restaurants, the customers are drenched in an undying flood of music. Is this not 'musique d'ameublement,' heard, but not listened to?[44]

Well, no—at least, not in the sense that Satie envisioned it. Satie designed and advertised

furniture music as a stripped down, unserious, and custom-built *alternative* to the light

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[41] Satie, *A Mammal's Notebook*, 200.
[42] Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 102.
[43] Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, 334–35.
[44] Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, 153–54.

classical arrangements one might expect to hear on the radio, or in public places,

anticipating how Brian Eno would later distinguish his own music from "conventional"

background music like Muzak (see Ch. 6). Also in anticipation of Eno, Satie made this

music both ignorable and unusual through expressive detachment, melodic looping, and

textural consistency. Yet these self-effacing gestures never caught on with programmers

of music for public places; as I discuss in Chapter 6, public establishments to this day

overwhelmingly prefer to use music recordings bearing familiar styles and conventional

song forms. Satie's quirky, aloof compositional style, it seems, has since withheld appeal

for all but the most experimental of listeners.

John Cage's Ambient Sounds

For U.S. composer John Cage,[45] Satie's output hinted at the possibility of a music

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[45] John Cage is often seen as a central figure in the history of avant-garde experimental music; if not its originator, then the instigator of a "revolution" represented by the New York School (Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* [New York: Schirmer, 1997], 127). Michael Nyman's book on experimental music, for instance, begins with Cage's innovations before moving backward as well as forward chronologically (Nyman, *Experimental Music*). David Nicholls places Cage at the beginning of U.S. experimental music's "second wave," following the innovations of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, and others; see Nicholls, "Avant-Garde and Experimental Music," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 517–34. And Cage's name comes up more frequently than any other composer's in Thom Holmes's textbook on experimental music; see Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music, and Culture*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Several authors have contested the centrality of Cage to American post-war experimentalism, arguing that such "Eurological" historiographic approaches ignore the contributions of African Americans, particularly by jazz artists, to avant-garde music during the post-war years; see George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91–122; George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 20–54;

that would draw listeners' attention beyond itself, and toward its sounding settings. Part of this promise had to do with the music's impersonality, as Satie's compositions so often sounded detached from human ego and absent of human affect, evidently as irrelevant to Satie's communicative or expressive motives as the unplanned sounds of the listening environment. Cage believed that similarly impersonal music, unlike most other Western music, might avoid drawing attention to itself to the exclusion of other ongoing sounds. From the 1950s on, Cage's compositions and philosophy eagerly wrapped its ears around these ongoing sounds, or what he called "ambient sounds." But what exactly was ambient sound, to Cage, and why was it so important to his work?

The ascription "ambient" generally appeared in Cage's lectures and writings in tandem with his concept of silence. What we typically call silence, Cage emphasized, never lacks ambient sounds. Cage often related his experience inside an anechoic chamber at Harvard University in 1951 as an example of this. Although the chamber was soundproofed, and designed to absorb all internal sounds, Cage did not hear nothing inside the chamber—he heard his own tinnitus and circulatory system. Cage thence conceived of silence not as an absence of sound, but rather as a "sound-space" shot through with ambient sounds.[46] This discovery led to the composition of *4'33"* (1952), Cage's famous "silent" piece that was, in theory, at no point free of sounds. From then on, Cage's work sought to draw listeners' attention to the "interpenetration" of sound and

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and Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[46] Eric De Visscher, "'There's No Such a Thing as Silence...': John Cage's Poetics of Silence," in *Writings about John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 129.

silence.[47]

"People often ask what music I prefer to hear," Cage once remarked in a typical

formulation. "I enjoy the absence of music more than any other, or you could say silence.

I enjoy whatever ambient sounds there are to hear."[48] In this manner, Cage opposed

ambient sound to sounds produced and framed as music, and to sounds imbued with

meaning. Ambient sounds, by contrast, are sounds that "happen to be in the

environment."[49] Where human meaning or self-expression are absent from the production

of sound, Cage remarks in his 1958 essay "Composition as Process,"

> Silence becomes something else—not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds. The nature of these is unpredictable and changing. These sounds (which are called silence only because they do not form part of a musical intention) may be depended upon to exist. The world teems with them, and is, in fact, at no point free of them.[50]

From roughly 1958 on, "ambient" in Cage's writings connoted the absence of musical

meaning or communicative intention in sound. "[M]usic itself is an ideal situation, not a

real one," Cage writes later in the essay. "The mind may be used either to ignore ambient

sounds… and in general to control and understand an available experience. Or the mind

may give up its desire to improve on creation and function as a faithful receiver of

experience."[51]

To experience ambient sounds faithfully was to experience what Cage frequently

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[47] Cage borrowed the term "interpenetration" from the teachings of Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki; see John Cage, "Composition as Process," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 46.

[48] John Cage, *I-VI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 444.

[49] John Cage, "Experimental Music," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 8.

[50] Cage, "Composition as Process," 22–23.

[51] Ibid., 31–32.

referred to as "life." Cage opposed "life" with music or art, which amounted to idealizations of "life" in Cage's view. This conviction followed from Cage's reading and appropriation of various South and East Asian texts and philosophies since the late 1930s.[52] From these readings, Cage concluded that "life" was being neglected in the glorification of human ideals, desires, and intentions represented by art. Cage's overarching goal in drawing attention to ambient sounds was to dissolve the perceived boundary between art and "life."[53] Paying attention to the ambient sounds of the environment would be the first step in giving up "everything that belongs to humanity," including music.[54] For Cage, this abdication of desires and selfhood defined the aims of experimental composition, an activity in which the "final intention is to be free of artistry in taste."[55]

Cage at first did not outwardly question whether his idealization of a life devoid of musical expression was itself conditioned by his own personality, artistry, or taste. Yet he was forced to grapple with this issue in response to the increasing ubiquity of Muzak, which filled up what would otherwise be silence (or overrode ambient sounds, depending on your perspective) in more and more public environments during Cage's lifetime. Cage

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[52] Chief among these philosophers are metaphysician Ananda Coomaraswamy, Zen Buddhist master Huang-Po, and modern scholar of Buddhism Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. David W. Patterson, "Cage and Asia: History and Sources," ed. Julia Robinson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 49–72.

[53] I place "life" in quotations to signal Cage's specific conception of life as something freed from human desire.

[54] Cage, "Experimental Music," 8.

[55] Cage borrows this quote directly from New York School composer Christian Wolff; see John Cage, "History of Experimental Music in the United States," in *Silence*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 68; originally in Christian Wolff, "New and Electronic Music," in *Writings about John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 85.

relayed his early stance on the notion of music-as-ambience in a 1948 lecture/essay

titled "A Composer's Confession," in which he expresses the tricksterish, but seemingly

genuine desire

> to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to Muzak Co. (in manuscript:) It will be 3 or 4½ minutes long, those being the standard lengths of "canned" music (and) its title will be *Silent Prayer*. It will open with a single idea which I will attempt to make as seductive as the color and shape and fragrance of a flower. The ending will approach imperceptibility….[56]

Given its characterization as "a piece of uninterrupted silence," some scholars (including

myself, initially) have interpreted *Silent Prayer* as a premonition of *4′33″*. Douglas Kahn,

for instance, has discussed how Cage's plan evidently emerges less out of interest in

drawing attention to ambient sound, and more out of a desire to silence Muzak (and,

ultimately, all human sociality).[57] Yet others have noted that Cage's description of a

single, "seductive" idea that "approach[es] imperceptibility" suggests intended sound(s).

David Pritchett, for instance, imagines *Prayer* as a stretch of silence bookended by

opening and closing sounds,[58] while William Brooks, Kyle Gann, and David Patterson

forward that Cage likely had in mind something like his *Experiences No. 2* (1948) or the

Concerto for Prepared Piano and Orchestra (1950–51), which show Cage juxtaposing

sounds with long swaths of silence.[59] One might alternatively surmise that Cage had in

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[56] John Cage, "A Composer's Confession," in *John Cage: Writer*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 43.

[57] Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 180–82.

[58] James Pritchett, "What Silence Taught John Cage: The Story of 4′33″," The Piano in My Life, 2009, http://rosewhitemusic.com/piano/writings/silence-taught-john-cage/.

[59] William Brooks, "Pragmatics of Silence," in Silence, Music, Silent Music, ed. Nicky Losseff and Jenny Doctor (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 97–126; Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4′33″* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); David Patterson, email message to author, July 11, 2014. I'd also like to thank

mind something like Peter Winkler's captivating 1965 performance of La Monte

Young's *X for Henry Flynt* at San Francisco's Festival of the Avant-Garde, in which the

reverberations of single gong strikes hover in the air at great lengths, before dissolving

discreetly into nothingness.[60] Whatever Cage imagined, it seems clear that he wished

Prayer's "uninterrupted silence," whether literal or metaphorical, to interrupt the usual

flow of pop instrumentals issued by Muzak.[61]

In the 1950s, Cage continued to express his distaste for recorded music by

frequently recommending their wholesale deletion from existence. For instance, in

response to Satie's suggestion that music might function as ambience in consort with

other ongoing sounds, Cage wrote, "Records, too, are available. But it would be an act of

charity even to oneself to smash them whenever they are discovered. They are useless

except for that and for the royalties which the composer, dead now some thirty-odd years,

can no longer pick up."[62] In his 1959 "Lecture on Nothing," Cage jokingly proposed the

formation of a communist society called "Capitalists Inc." for which to join, "You must

show you've destroyed at least one hundred records or, in the case of tape, one sound

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Christopher Shultis for his additional insight regarding *Silent Prayer*. See also Hervé
Vanel, *Triple Entendre: Furniture Music, Muzak, Muzak-Plus* (Urbana, IL: University of
Illinois Press, 2013), 92–99.

[60] La Monte Young, *Forty-two for Henry Flynt*, performed by Peter Winkler, "Forty-Two
for Henry Flynt by La Monte Young performed by Peter Winkler (gong) at the Third
Annual Festival of the Avant Garde in San Francisco, 1965," *Other Minds Audio Archive*,
Internet Archive, streaming audio, https://archive.org/details/42forHenryFlynt.

[61] If Cage indeed conceived *Prayer* in terms of silence, as Hervé Vanel notes, then
ironically "Cage's prayer had already been answered" by 1948, when Muzak began
programming short blocks of silence every 15 minutes; see Vanel, "John Cage's Muzak-
Plus," 101.

[62] Cage, "Erik Satie," 77.

mirror [probably Cage's word for a tape recorder]."[63] He follows this with an anecdote redolent of John Philip Sousa's famous tirade against "mechanical music" half a century prior: "A lady from Texas said: I live in Texas. We have no music in Texas. The reason they've no music in Texas is because they have recordings. Remove the records from Texas and someone will learn to sing."[64]

In light of Cage's own compositions from the '50s that utilized recordings, these statements might appear disingenuous; clearly, Cage felt that recorded music, in the right hands, could be put to good use. (As David Grubbs puts it, the "major problem with records," for Cage, "is what people do with them.")[65] By using various techniques meant to frustrate communicative and expressive intention, primarily chance operations and indeterminate instructions, Cage utilized recorded music in his own compositions. Among his earliest were *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), which instructs 24 performers to "play" 12 radios according to a notated score; *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* (1952), which notates instructions for making a tape recording out of segments of 42 phonograph records; and *Williams Mix* (1953), which includes guidelines for splicing together tapes with particular sorts of sounds (e.g. "city," "country," and "electronic"). Given these techniques, it seems that the most offensive facet of music recordings was, for Cage, their use in automated, uninterrupted playback. Not only did automation make possible the delivery of a sequence of sounds (and, presumably, the composer's intention)

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[63] John Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 125.

[64] Ibid., 126; John Philip Sousa, "The Menace of Mechanical Music," *Appleton's Magazine* 8, no. 3 (September 1906): 278–84.

[65] David Grubbs, *Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 74.

into any listening environment, but it also allowed listeners to choose in advance what they wanted to hear.

However, toward the end of the '50s, Cage began expressing ambivalence about his distaste for recorded music, apparently in light of its contradiction with his philosophy that taste ought not dictate how one listens to the world. As he writes in a 1956 letter to musicologist Paul Henry Lang,

> Having written radio music has enabled me to accept, not only the sounds I there encounter, but the television, radio, and Muzak ones, which nearly constantly and everywhere offer themselves. Formerly, for me, they were a source of irritation. Now, they are just as lively as ever, but I have changed. I am more and more realizing, that is to say, that I have ears and can hear.[66]

Change was, in fact, a bit more slowgoing than Cage let on. In 1961 interview with Roger Reynolds, Cage expressed that he was still attempting to open up to Muzak's ambient music: "If I liked Muzak, which I also don't like, the world would be more open to me. I intend to work on it."[67] He did. Cage's 1969 piece *33 1/3* insisted on the use of randomly selected recordings to create ambient sound; the piece involves 8–12 turntables and over 300 records, placed around a location for audience members/performers to play as they saw fit. Nearer the end of his life, Cage seemed willing to hear music like Muzak's as one of many differentiated sounds that might fill the space of silence: "[Muzak] seems to me to be like ambient sound. And it's not very imposing. Those big boxes that young people carry through the streets with the radio or some other thing on, those are very imposing, and the Muzak is at the opposite end of the dynamic range."[68] Interestingly, Cage here

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[66] John Cage, Letter to Paul Henry Lang, in *John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger, 1970), 188.
[67] Quoted in Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 186.
[68] John Corbett, "John Cage: The Conversation Game," in *Extended Play: Sounding Off*

confesses his preference for "unimposing" music (like Muzak's) over "imposing" musical sounds. Yet even here, Cage regards the sounds of the music recording not as one of many ambient sounds, but rather more or less "like" ambient sounds depending on their prominence relative to them. Ultimately, Cage insisted that music should involve sounds that listeners might otherwise exclude from privileged consideration. He was far less interested in accommodating sounds that people already heard as musical into the unprivileged acoustic environments of everyday "life."

It should come as little surprise that Brian Eno found inspiration early on in the philosophy of John Cage. Retelling the story behind his first solo Ambient record, *Discreet Music* (see Ch. 5), in a 1988 interview, Eno explained that the idea of hearing music "not as the central focus of attention, but part of the context that you live in" had already been made familiar through his encounters with Cage's work, particularly *Silence*. For Eno, Cage had opened the conceptual possibility that music may be best enjoyed discreetly, as ambient sound. And yet, Eno recalls, Cage's idea of hearing music as just one of many ongoing sounds had been merely a theoretical curiosity, rather than something he had lived out, or ever experienced, at the time. "I knew about it as a theory," he recalls, "but I'd never felt it as a real way of listening."[69] Perhaps, to the younger teenage Eno at Ipswich, Cage's "ambient sounds" did not represent something to be experienced, but rather an idea that emblematically stood for an avant-garde artist who owed his success to a radical philosophy of listening. Eno took Cage's career as a model

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from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 188.
[69] Charles Amirkhanian, "Music for Earthquakes: Brian Eno at the Exploratorium in San Francisco," *Reality Hackers*, Winter 1988, 37.

for how to drive one's compositional practice conceptually. As Eno recalls in a later interview, Cage taught him that "if you wanted to be an artist there had to be a motivating force which was more than simply wanting to add attractive objects to the world."[70] Eno, however, seemed uncompelled to listen to ambient sounds without an attractive music to draw his attention to them.

Cage's corresponding lack of interest in Eno's idea of Ambient music might be extrapolated from his comments (or the lack thereof) on Eno's music during a 1985 interview that *Musician* magazine arranged with the two composers. Cage, for the most part, refrained from commenting on Eno's Ambient work, only remarking politely that he was "struck" by the incorporation of silence into the structure of Eno's *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1978).[71] Given a second opportunity by the interviewer to comment on the idea of Ambient music, Cage instead marveled at how audiences of his 1982 piece *Instances of Silence* could not distinguish between the music and the ambient sounds of the environment.[72] Cage's silence regarding Eno's unobtrusive musical sounds, intentionally or not, communicated that he only found interest in music that directed listeners' attention away from itself, and towards sounds not meant to be music in the first place. Even toward the end of his life, Cage had little patience for music that held special aesthetic appeal in itself, to the exclusion of ambient sounds.

As for Eno's attitude toward Cage—while acknowledging Cage's "liberating"

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[70] Brian Eno, "How We Met: Brian Eno and Tom Phillips," interview by Lucy O'Brien, *The Independent*, September 13, 1998, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/how-we-met-brian-eno-and-tom-phillips-1198029.html.

[71] Rob Tannenbaum, "A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage & Brian Eno," *Musician*, September 1985, 68.

[72] Ibid., 69.

influence as an artist, Eno in the same interview had to admit, prior to Cage's arrival, "I now disagree with nearly everything he said."[73]

1960s Experimentalism: Mixed-Means Theatre & Minimalist Recordings

As various historians of 20th-century art music attest, Cage's philosophy of music served as a reset button for the self-sequestered, ideologically embattled, and Eurocentric avant-garde of the postwar years.[74] From the 1950s on, Cage and his New York School peers[75] developed a repertory of techniques that would bring sounds unplanned by the composer into the musical performance. Through chance procedures, indeterminate notation, and the use of sounds outside the twelve equal-tempered pitches of European invention, these composers expanded the boundaries of experimental music so that practically any process of sound production might be regarded by listeners with interest. In so doing, they cleared a path for self-identified experimentalists to innovate well into the 1960s with little regard for the validating criteria of structural autonomy and/or complexity of a musical work.

Many such innovations arose in the wake of a course in experimental composition taught by Cage at New York's New School for Social Research between 1956 and '61.

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[73] Ibid., 66.

[74] Gann, *American Music*, 384; Nicholls, "Avant-Garde and Experimental Music," 518; Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Picador, 2007), 456.

[75] "The New York School" broadly applies to a network of visual, literary, and sound artists based in New York between the late '40s and early '60s. Musicologists normally identify the New York School as including Cage and colleagues Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and David Tudor; see David Nicholls, "Getting Rid of the Glue: The Music of the New York School," in *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts*, ed. Steven Johnson, Studies in Contemporary Music and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2002), 17–56.

Cage oriented these courses around ways of awakening audiences to "life," or what

he had begun to call "theatre." "Theatre takes place all the time wherever one is," as Cage

wrote, "and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case."[76] Following Cage's

lead, a number of class participants helped to establish a variety of new experimental art

forms, including happenings, conceptual art, Fluxus, performance art, and total

environments.[77] While a single descriptor does not well capture the diversity of

experimental forms proliferating at the time, the term "mixed-means theatre" (a variation

on Richard Kostelanetz's "Theatre of Mixed Means") suffices to encompass the range of

post-Cagean art forms that aimed to enhance or increase the audience's perception of the

everyday world.[78] For instance, as Hannah Higgins writes of Fluxus, these artists

substituted art with everyday-life-as-art, thereby creating special places and/or occasions

for sensitization to the "immediate quality" of prosaic things and experiences to occur.[79]

While these artists held varying and often incompatible opinions as to the political,

institutional, and canonical status of their work—some might even object to describing

their work as "theatre"—the term most succinctly encompasses the range of art forms

from this period that aimed to intensify audiences' experience of the ordinary.

It was largely by way of mixed-means theatre that Brian Eno, a self-professed

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[76] John Cage, "45' for a Speaker," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 174.

[77] These participants included George Brecht, Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Scott Hyde, Jackson Mac Low, Florence Tarlow, and La Monte Young. Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1. For more on these art forms, see Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (New York: RK Editions, 1980); on happenings and total environments, see also Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 261–83.

[78] Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 53.

[79] Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 12, 103–04.

"non-musician," found music to be an ideal realm for his avant-garde artistic practice.

By the time he began attending Ipswich in 1964, this orientation toward "theatre" had

taken hold among various English players in avant-garde music and art. Few of Eno's

peers cared to direct their work toward the realization of a final object; instead, as Eno

recalls, students regarded artistic production as a means to a more interesting procedure

or process.[80] Music appealed to Eno for this reason. As he came to understand it,

composers specialized in the creation of processes, not products; "A music score," as Eno

summarized, "is by definition a map of a set of behaviour patterns which will produce a

result—but on another day that result might be entirely different."[81] Eno's

characterization of the composer's activity here differs drastically from that of, say, Igor

Stravinsky, who famously deemed his *Octuor* a "musical object," or of Milton Babbitt,

whose compositions aimed at a "high degree of determinacy" between notation and

sounding result.[82] Instead, Eno's focus upon "process not product" arose from a theatre-

oriented experimental music, which as summed by Michael Nyman, consisted in

"outlining a *situation* in which sounds may occur, a *process* of generating action

(sounding or otherwise), [and] a *field* delineated by certain compositional 'rules.'"[83] Eno

later put this even more concisely when he described experimental composition as a

simple three-step process: "Create parameters, set it off, see what happens."[84]

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[80] Brian Eno, Russell Mills, and Rick Poynor, *More Dark Than Shark* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 41. See also Bracewell, *Remake/Remodel*, 250.
[81] Eno, Mills, and Poynor, *More Dark than Shark*, 41.
[82] Igor Stravinsky, "Some Ideas about My Octuor," *The Arts* 6, no. 1 (1924): 4; Milton Babbitt, "The Composer as Specialist," in *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, ed. Stephen Peles et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 50.
[83] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 3.
[84] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 40.

Eno had not thought of music in this way until around 1965 and '66, when he began making trips to hear new experimental music in London. Here, Eno's mentor Tom Phillips introduced him to a small, interconnected network of British composers like Cornelius Cardew, John Tilbury, and Howard Skempton.[85] Also frequenting the scene, Eno recalls, were composers Christopher Hobbs, Gavin Bryars, and Michael Nyman, with whom he'd collaborate some years later (see Ch. 5). Around this time, the London concerts mostly emphasized the works of the New York School, particularly Cage, Feldman, and Wolff.[86] By the time he graduated Ipswich, and departed for Winchester School of Art in 1966, his conception of what counted as "music" had been thoroughly altered. Thanks to Ipswich's technological reserves and second-hand stores, he had also begun experimentation with tape; his first recording showcased Eno striking a metal lampshade, multi-track recorded at different speeds to produce acoustical beating patterns.[87]

At Winchester, mixed-means theatre gave Eno an outlet to execute his own process-based compositions and performances. He staged various "happenings" around the school, developed "scores for painting," and set up "sound sculptures," all of which allowed mundane processes to be observed with special intensity. His "sound sculptures" included a ping-pong ball inside a speaker, which would bounce as the speaker played back the ambient sounds of the performance space. Upon several occasions, Eno also performed George Brecht's Fluxus piece *Drip Music (Drip Event)* (1959–62),[88] which

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[85] Ibid., 38–40.
[86] Bracewell, *Remake/Remodel*, 238.
[87] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 42.
[88] Ibid., 46; Eno, Mills, and Poynor, *More Dark than Shark*, 42.

instructs the performer to arrange the activity of "dripping" in some fashion (Figure

15).[89] In his execution of Brecht's simple event score at Winchester, Eno built a ten-foot

cube through which rainwater could pass along several different routes.[90] Within a couple

years, Eno had embraced the idea of being a "non-musician" who worked with sound,

even publishing a (now-missing) small batch of pamphlets in 1968 titled "Music for Non-

Musicians."[91]

DRIP MUSIC   (DRIP EVENT)

For single or multiple performance.

A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are
arranged so that the water falls into the vessel.

Second version: Dripping.

G. Brecht
(1959-62)

Fig 4.2. Event Score for George Brecht's *Drip Music (Drip Event)*, from *Water Yam*
(1959–63).

Eno had also begun to experiment with the tape-loop-based delay systems that

would later appear on his early Ambient records. In these systems, a single loop of tape

would pass through at least two tape recorders, with one recording the ambient sounds of

the environment, and one playing back the recording. In a short score published in a local

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[89] *Drip Music*'s score was part of *Water Yam* (1959–63), a "fluxbox" or "fluxkit"
consisting in a stack of cards. Each card contained an "event score" describing a simple
action or series of actions for the reader to take or arrange.
[90] Eno, Mills, and Poynor, *More Dark than Shark*, 42.
[91] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 54.

paper, Eno described such a system with two tape machines recording ambient sounds, and a third machine, after a delay, playing these sounds back to be re-recorded. As Eno explains it, these re-recorded sounds "will be recorded in a decayed state due to such factors as the imperfectability of tape recorders, the acoustics and natural echo of the room, the influx of incidental noises obscuring the original."[92] He imagined it as a "participation piece" in which listeners may take on the role of performers, and vice versa. The system bore some similarity to Terry Riley's "time lag accumulator" and Pauline Oliveros's tape delay systems created at the San Francisco Tape Music Center earlier in the decade.[93] (Eno claims to have had the idea before he became aware of Riley's tape work, which is entirely plausible, given Riley's somewhat obscure status in England at the time.)[94]

In early 1968, Eno and several other Winchester students formed a mixed-means theater troupe called Merchant Taylor's Simultaneous Cabinet. They performed sound-oriented pieces by experimental artists such as Wolff, Cardew, Phillips, and La Monte Young. Young's *X for Henry Flynt* (1960) made a particularly strong impression on Eno. The piece called for the performer(s) to repeat a single, loud sound, or cluster of sounds, X times as uniformly and regularly as possible. Over the course of performing *3600 for Henry Flynt* by sinking his arm into a block of piano keys, Eno discovered that minute errors and inconsistencies across repetitions became rather interesting over time, and that

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[92] Brian Eno, "Decay and Delay," *Clare Market Review*, Summer 1968, 32–33, http://www.moredarkthanshark.org/feature_clare_summer-1968.html.

[93] Jay Hodgson, "The Time-Lag Accumulator As A Technical Basis For Brian Eno's Early Large-Scale Ambient Repertoire, 1973–75," *The Art of Record Production*, 2008, http://www.artofrecordproduction.com/content/view/167/109/.

[94] Bracewell, *Remake/Remodel*, 185.

a heavy reduction of the means of sound production could form the basis of unexpected variety.[95] Repetition- and drone-based works like *Henry Flynt* led Eno to discover "whole worlds of sound" in endlessly repeated or sustained tones.[96]

Although Young initially developed works like *X for Henry Flynt* in the context of mixed-means theatre, historians commonly cite his experiments in the extreme repetition or sustainment of sounds as early instances of musical minimalism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the 1960s saw a handful of experimental composers and performers, particularly around the San Francisco Bay Area and New York, utilizing in performance drones and/or pulsed repetitions continuously over extreme lengths of time. Because this technique creates an extraordinarily high consistency and predictability of sound relative to duration, listeners of minimalist music (including the performers themselves) might become deeply accustomed to certain musical parameters such as pulse, texture, and mode over the course of a single listening. This habituation of musical perception can lead listeners' attention away from these stable parameters, and toward other aspects of sound, such as subtle shifts in rhythmic patterns and psychoacoustic details that might otherwise go unnoticed. Although composers and critics initially identified this type of music by its hypnotic effects and/or use of automated processes, they later assigned this music the name "minimalism," in parallel with the visual art movement. (I further explore this parallel in Ch. 5).

While Eno attests to the impact made early on by each of the "Big Four" minimalists—Young, Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass—he singles out his experience

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[95] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 51.
[96] Jim Aikin, "Brian Eno," *Keyboard*, July 1981, 60.

of one particular piece as especially revelatory: Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*

(1965). Reich created this two-part piece using loops from a field recording of a street

sermon delivered in San Francisco's Union Square by a Pentecostal preacher named

Brother Walter. For the majority of the piece's first part, Reich plays simultaneously two

identical loops of Brother Walter tunefully proclaiming, "It's gon' rain," with one loop in

each stereo channel. They begin looping in tandem, but because one loop is ever-so-

slightly slower than the second, they soon begin what Reich called a "phasing" process,

in which the sounds very gradually move out of sync with one another. Walter's voice

slowly splits from itself, first creating an odd echo effect, and later morphing into a

rhythmic parlay between the two segments. The loops eventually converge once again

toward the end. Part two of the piece features a longer collage of segments from Walter's

speech, again looped out-of-sync to create a phasing effect; only here the loops do not

converge again, but instead diverge and split entropically for the length of the piece.[97]

Although Eno knew of Reich's piece through his instructor Tom Philips, he

hadn't heard it until the release of Reich's *Live/Electric Music* LP (Columbia

Masterworks, 1968).[98] As with *X for Henry Flynt*, Eno found that as he continued to

listen to *It's Gonna Rain*, he "cease[d] to hear" the information common across

repetitions, and began to focus on the small changes occurring over time.[99] Unlike

Young's piece, however, he was not the one controlling the repetitions, nor for that

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[97] For an extended analysis and interpretation of *It's Gonna Rain*, see Sumanth Gopinath, "Racial-Allegorical Valences of Postwar Mass Religion in *It's Gonna Rain*," in "Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich, 1965–66" (Ph.D Dissertation, Yale University, 2005), 125–93.

[98] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 41.

[99] Lester Bangs, "Brian Eno: A Sandbox in Smallville," 1979, republished in *Perfect Sound Forever*, August 2003, http://www.furious.com/perfect/bangseno.html.

matter was any live, co-present performer. In a 1986 interview, Eno described by way

of a famous article in cybernetic theory (see Ch. 5) the piece's effects in listening, and

how his detachment from the sounding source affected his understanding of minimalism:

> There's an essay called "What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain" by Warren McCulloch, who discovered that a frog's eyes don't work like ours. Ours are always moving: we blink. We scan. We move our heads. But a frog fixes its eyes on a scene and leaves them there. It stops seeing all the static parts of the environment, which become invisible, but as soon as one element moves, which could be what it wants to eat—the fly—it is seen in very high contrast to the rest of the environment. It's the only thing the frog sees and the tongue comes out and takes it. Well, I realized that what happens with the Reich piece is that our ears behave like a frog's eyes. Since the material is common to both tapes, what you begin to notice are not the repeating parts but the sort of ephemeral interference pattern between them. Your ear telescopes into more and more fine detail until you're hearing what to me seems like atoms of sound. That piece absolutely thrilled me, because I realized then that I understood what minimalism was about. The creative operation is listening. It isn't just a question of a presentation feeding into a passive audience. People will sometimes say about Reich's piece, "Oh yes, that one with that voice which keeps hammering into your head," and indeed, if you're not especially listening to it that's exactly what it is.[100]

Although *X for Henry Flynt* similarly provokes the "frog eye" effect in listening, it relies

on a human performer to serve as a necessarily faltering source of unpredictable,

unintended variations. By contrast, both the composition and playback of *It's Gonna Rain*

were wholly automated, so any perceived detail or variation would be, in theory, wholly

intended and predictable. That this wasn't the case fascinated Eno, because it meant that

the listener could theoretically control how "interesting" their auditory experience could

be—even an experience that one would expect to be conspicuously lacking in interest due

to its totally automated nature. In contrast to Cage's suppositions about how recordings

should be used, Eno found that even the continuously automated playback of a record

could make compositional intentions irrelevant to the focus of the listener.

Eno's experience with *It's Gonna Rain* reoriented his existing interest in tape

recording. He had already been experimenting with tape delay systems as a way of

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[100] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 79.

generating unpredictable interactions between sounds, mainly by using them to pick

up unintended sounds that would later, through playback of the recorded loop, interact in

surprising ways with unrecorded sounds occurring at the time of audition. In this manner,

tape recording served to create transitory sound events, ambient sound-events that Cage

once called the "necessarily unique" outcomes of indeterminate composition.[101] The final

recording was simply the "residue" of the process that created such unique moments.[102]

Through *It's Gonna Rain*, however, Eno found that even a recording of a totally

controlled and delimited process could leave indeterminate the manner of its reception.

More than just the "residue" of an audible process, the finalized minimalist recording

could serve as the starting point for unpredictable processes of audition to arise. Reich's

piece had delivered to Eno what he later called experimental music's most "lasting

message": that "music is something your mind does."[103]

 It's Gonna Rain strongly appealed to Eno, in part because it gave him, as a

listener, a level of freedom in determining his experience of the sound. On the one hand,

the automated loops *within* the piece created sonic consistencies to which Eno, as a

listener, could become habituated; like Young's piece, these repetitions permitted him to

focus, at will, on normally unnoticed aspects of sound. On the other hand, Eno came to

find that the recording *on the whole* permitted an even greater range of auditory freedom

than Reich himself initially envisioned, since its playback, like the loop contained within,

was both consistent (repeatable) and constant (automated). An analogy thus lies between

the repetition and automation of the loops within *It's Gonna Rain*, and the repeatability

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[101] Cage, "Composition as Process," 39.
[102] Eno, Mills, and Poynor, *More Dark than Shark*, 41.
[103] Eno, foreword to *Experimental Music*, xii.

and automation of the full recording. Just as the voice's looping creates a predictably consistent bed of sound upon which one might discover surprising details, so does the record. And just as the automated process governing the recording's production guarantees a predictably constant bed of sound upon which the listener's attention might skate or shuttle, so does the automated playback of the finished recording. Eno's Ambient music would later rely on this multi-tiering of sonic consistency and sounding constancy as a means of withdrawing into the background of the listener's attentional field. While Reich utilized automation in his tape pieces primarily to relinquish control over the process of sonic production, Eno also relied on the automation of the *listener's* machine as a means of freeing up various possible modes of reception. As I will explain in the following chapter, this relinquishment of control over the conditions of his recordings' reception allowed Eno to maintain the experimental status of Ambient music.

As Eno developed the idea of Ambient music following his art education, he continued to refer back to *It's Gonna Rain* as a guide for what he wanted to achieve through recording. Reich's piece exemplified an approach to composition that appealed to the non-musician, showing him how interesting processes could arise out of seemingly simple, concrete products. Once drawn to music for its ephemerality, Eno also came to appreciate how tape machines "made music into a plastic art," and thus available to further uses, processes, or experiments beyond the initial recording process.[104] "That's a whole set of freedoms that you don't have as a performer," Eno would explain, "and

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[104] Stephen Demorest, "The Discreet Charm of Brian Eno: An English Pop Theorist Seeks to Redefine Music," *Horizon*, June 1978, 83.

those freedoms interest me."[105] Reich himself had previously described the benefits of

composing with automated processes in a similar way, only substituting "freedom" for

"control": "Musical processes can give one a direct contact with the impersonal and also

a kind of complete control, and one doesn't always think of the impersonal and complete

control going together."[106] Yet while both Reich and Eno had discovered that tape

recording could serve as one such impersonal process, only Eno would extend this

impersonal control/freedom to the record consumer's use of technology, fully realizing

the implications of what Mark Butler calls the "interplay between process and product"

set in motion by the record.[107] As I will discuss in the following chapter, Eno would turn

to the field of cybernetics to theorize how this sort of interplay worked.

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[105] Lee Moore, "Eno = MC Squared," *Creem*, November 1978, 68.
[106] Steve Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process," in *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, ed.
Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.
[107] Mark J. Butler, *Playing with Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and
Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014),
3.

CHAPTER 5

Locating Brian Eno's *Discreet Music*

Introduction

As Brian Eno tells it, his first and favorite record of Ambient music, *Discreet Music* (1975), was conceived by accident.[1] The catalyzing incident occurred in January 1975, when a taxi hit him as he was crossing the road. The second accident, in consequence of the first, took place while he lay in recovery. A friend of Eno's, artist and musician Judy Nylon, brought as a gift a record of some "18th-century harp music."[2] As Eno recalls, he put on the record with "considerable difficulty" after Nylon left.[3] Only upon reclining again did Eno realize that he could barely hear the harp over the speakers, with one stereo channel having dropped out, and the volume too low. Not wanting to go through the pain of getting up again to adjust the volume, Eno rested:

> So I drifted into this kind of fitful sleep, a mixture of pain-killers and tiredness. And I started hearing this record as if I'd never heard music before. It was a really beautiful experience, I got the feeling of icebergs, you know? I would just occasionally hear the loudest parts of the music, get a little flurry of notes coming out above the sound of the rain – and then it'd drift away again. And I began to think of environmental music – music deliberately constructed to occupy the background. And I realised that Muzak was a very strong concept and not a load of rubbish, as most people supposed.[4]

Eno latched onto the idea of music just barely surfacing in the listener's perceptual field,

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[1] Lester Bangs, "Eno," *Musician, Player & Listener*, November 1979, 44.

[2] Brian Eno, liner notes to *Discreet Music*, Obscure 3, 1975, LP. Nylon, a U.S. American artist, moved to London in 1970, and quickly befriended Eno and Brian Ferry. She performed vocals on recordings by Eno as well as John Cale, and formed an art punk duo called Snatch in the late '70s.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ian MacDonald, "Before and After Science: Part 1: Accidents Will Happen," *New Musical Express*, November 26, 1977, 33.

like the fraction of an iceberg seen from above.[5] Discreet music.

Eno related this story of Ambient music's birth-by-epiphany in the liner notes to *Discreet Music*. It has since been told and retold by fans and journalists as origin story for the Ambient concept. The seemingly unintentional nature of Eno's "discovery," however, obscures the conceptual fields and artistic practices that, in fact, directly informed his conception of *Discreet Music*'s aesthetic, and ultimately the Ambient idea. Eno's conceptual orientation and methods of production during this time were organized, on the one hand, by the theoretical framework set forth through cybernetics, and on the other, by concurrent compositional developments in English experimental music. Both of these fields generally de-centered the agency of human actors by disregarding conscious or communicative intentions, and focusing on externally observable processes or systems of behavior that involved humans and non-humans alike.

The first three parts of this chapter investigate *Discreet Music*'s title track, Eno's first major Ambient recording, in light of these contexts. Eno's involvement in the fields of British experimentalism and cybernetic theory largely explains his compositional ideas and their accompanying narratives as deliberately conceived, rather than the result of happenstance. Eno, however, did not release *Discreet Music* within these compositional and research fields, but rather within the commercial marketplace of popular music records. For this reason, Eno's narratives surrounding the record's making, rather than transparently reflecting his artistic orientation, play into a market construction that appeals to some consumers more than others. For this reason, I not only examine Eno's sounds and narratives within the conceptual paradigms that produced them, but also in

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[5] Gene Kalbacher, "Profile: Brian Eno," *Modern Recording & Music*, October 1982, 50.

light of the authorial and genre constructions these sounds and narratives developed.

To this end, I situate Eno's presentation in relation to other experimental tape composers' commentary *about* the music they make. I draw attention to how authorial intention frequently gets jettisoned in genesis narratives of minimalist tape music—often to the benefit of the author's claims to ownership. My conclusion proceeds in a manner similar to Anna Chave's critique of minimalist sculpture, in which Chave questions "what partisans of minimalism have had to gain by denying the art's identity as a private statement."[6] This question, I argue, can be directed to Eno's *Discreet Music*, and his later construction of "Ambient music," both of which might appear impersonal, objective, or neutral. I examine how these qualities might register, on a subjective, personal level, as attractive features of Ambient's aesthetic package, and a source of its sensuous appeal.

I. Musical Precedents

1970–75: Eno, from Roxy to Discreet Music

Although Eno already had the idea to write music "to be heard and not listened to" while in art school,[7] he would not start releasing such music until 1973, after leaving his post as synth wizard in the band Roxy Music. Eno joined Roxy toward the end of 1970, following his realization at Winchester that his artistic goals might be better achieved in the world of commodity culture than in the art institution. "Pop is where it's at," Eno jotted in a June 1969 notebook, just as his formal education was drawing to a

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[6] Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (January 1990): 52.

[7] Michael Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model: Becoming Roxy Music* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2007), 184.

close. "Stick to Pop unless necessity weans one away."[8] Eno's leap into the pop world

indicated a trend among U.K. art school graduates around this time, as Simon Frith and

Howard Horne document in *Art into Pop*. By the mid-late '60s, the modernist avant-

garde's abstention from engagement with commercial culture had hardened into an

orthodoxy of its own.[9] In response, British art students—inspired by Pop Art and rock

music—began to regard the marketplace of commodities as a possible realm of self-

realization, funneling their artistry into the packaging and promotional process.[10]

In Eno's case, it was the fusion of coy visual presentation, gritty pop, and

minimalist sound in the Velvet Underground's first album that triggered his realization

that rock music could be fruitful grounds for his artistic experimentation. The New York

band's penchant for utilizing drone and seemingly interminable riffs over the course of 6-

minute (or more) songs gained the group notoriety in the rock underground, and among

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[8] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 342.

[9] Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 62–64. A substantial and growing body of scholarship has more recently reassessed this presumption in light of the many fruitful interactions and overlaps between the modernist avant-garde and popular culture in the early years of the 20th century. In regards to these interactions and overlaps in music, see Mary E. Davis, *Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Elizabeth Ann Lindau, "Art Is Dead. Long Live Rock! Avant-Gardism and Rock Music, 1967–99" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2012); Ulf Lindberg, "Popular Modernism? The 'Urban' Style of Interwar Tin Pan Alley," *Popular Music* 22, no. 3 (October 2003): 283–98. Juan A. Suárez provides a fine overview of this scholarship across the humanities in his monograph *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

[10] Ibid., 103–04.

young artists.[11] The minimalism of the Velvet Underground's sound, however, did

not strongly manifest in Roxy Music's work, instead remaining dormant as an influence

upon Eno's later solo material. What the Velvet Underground did impress upon Roxy

was a sense of how art-world connections could position the band culturally. "We [Roxy

frontman Bryan Ferry & I] very much liked the idea of a band sitting on that line between

fine art and performance art and happenings, yet co-opting the pop audience," Eno

recalls. "We thought that was a very good position to be in."[12] Eno later famously

quipped that the first Velvet album, while only selling 30,000 copies in the first five

years, had a far profounder effect on musical culture than their sales indicated, since

"everyone who bought one of those 30,000 copies started a band!"[13] He was, of course,

speaking from experience.

Eno joined Roxy as a novice studio producer and synth player upon the

recommendation of his friend and woodwind player Andy Mackay. Led by singer Bryan

Ferry, the five-man band reinvented '60s Mod dandification through their flamboyant,

ostentatious costuming, pioneering the subgenre of "glam rock" in early '70s England.

Roxy's overt emphasis on glamour flew in the face of blues-rock-based notions of

expressive authenticity that prevailed amongst popular English bands like Cream, the

Rolling Stones, and the Yardbirds, whose performances of inner feeling symbolically

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[11] For more on the role of drone and repetition in the music of the Velvet Underground, see Lindau, "Art Is Dead. Long Live Rock!," 22–69; Barry Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 108–46.

[12] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 347.

[13] Brian Eno, "Eno: Voyages in Time & Perception," interview by Kristine McKenna, *Musician*, October 1982,
http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/musn82.htm.

drew upon black American oppression through blues tropes and performance styles.[14]

In contrast to this model of depth, Eno wanted to make overt the constructedness of the

rock band enterprise. "I liked very much the idea of synthesis—artificiality," Eno later

said. "We treated Roxy music like an art movement that had set itself up in contradiction

to what was going on at the time."[15] The band sported colorful, often outrageous outfits

onstage, with Eno playing the eyeshadow-wearing, long-haired peacock to Ferry's

coiffed and pressed dandy, making no mistake that Roxy was there to entertain, not

produce a window into anyone's soul. The band's musical performances backed this

notion, especially Ferry's arch, melodramatic vocal delivery. While also avoiding the

symphonic pretensions of up-and-comer progressive rockers like Yes and King Crimson,

Roxy's sound departed from what Eno considered an "old fashioned" model of

authenticity[16] through a cheeky, dance-friendly amalgam of bubblegum pop, rhythm &

blues, psychedelic rock, free jazz, and spacey synthesizer strangeness.

By the end of 1970, Eno was straddling both popular and avant-garde worlds,

which slowly fused in his work as a solo recording artist (as simply "Eno," at first) from

1973 on. Eno kept busy in the studio following his departure from Roxy in July 1973,

putting out three solo LPs before *Discreet Music*'s release in November 1975. The first

two of these, *Here Come the Warm Jets* (Island, 1974) and *Taking Tiger Mountain (By

Strategy)* (Island, 1974), featured mainly vocal-centric pop/rock tracks, and gave almost

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[14] Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 12–32.
[15] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 368–69.
[16] Ibid., 368.

no hint of the Ambient music that would follow.[17] Instead, Eno's minimalist

experimentation during this time found an outlet in his collaborations with King Crimson

guitarist Robert Fripp. In 1972, he enlisted Fripp to join him, and a tape delay system, in

the recording studio. The result of this initial collaboration became Side A of their *(No

Pussyfooting)* LP, the first commercial release of Eno's that featured the looping

techniques he had been experimenting with since art school (see Ch. 4). In the studio,

Eno utilized two reel-to-reel tape machines, one recording Fripp's electric guitar, and the

other playing them back at times of Eno's choosing; these playbacks would then get

recorded by the first machine at progressively lower volumes. Fripp took quickly to the

method, providing licks on his Gibson Les Paul that Eno would then weave into fuzzy

beds of thickly layered drone, upon which Fripp could improvise further. The duo later

recorded the B-side in a similar manner, with Eno contributing additional synthesizer

lines. The sessions resulted in recordings far more like Terry Riley's late '60s pieces or

Hindustani classical music than either of Eno or Fripp's previous work.[18] Without clear

markers of pop form—lyrics, repeated harmonic progressions, formal sections—the

recordings leave the listener little means of temporal orientation within their total

structure; one is largely left to observe Fripp's unspooling tendrils of sound as they pile

up, or float by. Eno and Fripp released the album in November 1973. The cover shows

the pair sitting in a hall of mirrors, reflecting visually the smooth, flat continuity of the

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[17] For an extended look at these albums, see Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988); Lindau, "Art Is Dead. Long Live Rock!," 127–69; Brian Eno, Russell Mills, and Rick Poynor, *More Dark Than Shark* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986).

[18] Hear, for instance, Terry Riley, *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band*, from *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, Columbia Masterworks MS 7315, 1969, LP.

musicians' dronescapes, and the fading repetitions of the loops therein.

In September 1975, Eno released the third of his solo LPs, *Another Green World*, which included a number of instrumental tracks that anticipated Ambient music's sustained tones, static loops, relaxed pacing, and contemplative moods. In "Becalmed," unmetered piano and synth strings wearily cycle through a varying four-chord progression in A major. In "Zawinul/Lava," Eno loops a bright, reverberant piano motif that distinctly foreshadows "1/1" on *Music for Airports* (Editions E.G., 1978). Finally, "Spirits Drifting" features a synth Rhodes and string/winds combination that oscillates between the tonic chord and various dominant substitutions, peppered with added ♭6 and #11s that anticipate the floating non-triadic tones of later Ambient works. While these pieces move through chordal progressions, they nonetheless convey stasis through continuous harmonic oscillation or motivic looping. They also lack any sudden or obtrusive changes.

"Becalmed" ‖: I-IV-vi-IV / I-V-vi-IV :‖ in A major

"Zawinul/Lava" $\hat{1}$ - $\hat{4}$ - $\hat{5}$ motif in D Mixolydian

"Spirits Drifting" ‖: i-[iv or ♭VII or ♭vii] :‖ in mixed-mode E Aeolian/Phrygian

Ex. 5.1. Loops in proto-Ambient recordings on Brian Eno's *Another Green World*
(Island, 1975).

The "New Consonance": English Experimentalism in the 1970s

Eno maintained contact throughout the Roxy years with the experimental musicians whose amateur-friendly activities encouraged him to take up music as an art student. Biographies and artist profiles often acknowledge the importance of U.S. minimalism for Eno's Ambient work, but most overlook the correspondences between Eno's early Ambient works and the compositional practices of other English experimentalist during this time. As experimentalism continued in and around London during the early '70s, it gained a distinctive national flavor with its full embrace of tonality, experimentation with pre-existing European classical musics, and "systemic" process techniques. These characteristics, which I touch upon here, would resurface on Eno's *Discreet Music*.

Especially prominent in accounts of the experimental movement in late '60s London is Cornelius Cardew (1936–81).[19] Cardew viewed composition less as a means of generating sound than as a way of getting people to socialize in harmonious ways.[20] Over the course of the 1960s, he increasingly felt that musical notation and formal training, traditionally the province of the educated middle- and upper-classes, should not hinder these aims. During this time, he gradually moved away from intimidatingly complex indeterminate notation, and worked on articulating musical procedures that could conceivably be approached by almost anyone.

In the summer of 1969, Cardew and his colleagues Michael Parsons and Howard

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[19] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 93–118; Benjamin Piekut, "Indeterminacy, Free Improvisation, and the Mixed Avant-Garde: Experimental Music in London, 1965–1975," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 769–824.
[20] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 97.

Skempton formed the Scratch Orchestra for people with any level of musical ability. The group was initially united by the idea that music is, as member Alec Hill put it, "first and foremost a social activity" that should not be relegated strictly to professional musicians.[21] Eno joined the group toward the end of 1970, shortly before the orchestra scattered the following year over ideological disagreements. The short-lived experience, however, gave Eno enough time to perform Cardew's *The Great Learning* (1968–71), a piece whose effect on Eno's conception of experimentalism I discuss later in this chapter.

Toward the end of the 1960s, some of the most audacious experimental activity in England involved new approaches to well-known classical pieces by European composers. This experimental interest in tinkering with the European classical canon was foregrounded in the activities of the Scratch Orchestra. As part of the group's mission to upend bourgeois tradition, the Draft Constitution included instructions for playing "popular classics" in which one member plays a part of a commonly familiar piece, while the rest of the performers contribute "whatever they can recall of the piece in question, filling the gaps of memory with improvised variational material."[22]

Eno does not appear to have undertaken any such performances in his time with the Scratch Orchestra; he was, however, involved with the similarly conceived Portsmouth Sinfonia. Composer Gavin Bryars in May 1970 had the idea to form an ensemble of amateur musicians, bringing together students of varying musical abilities from the Portsmouth College of Art to play "popular classics" such as Tchaikovsky's

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[21] Michael Nyman, "Believe It or Not Melody Rides Again," *Music and Musicians* 20, no. 2 (October 1971): 26.

[22] Cornelius Cardew, "Excerpt from *A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution*," in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler, Revised Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 1410.

1812 Overture and Rossini's *William Tell Overture*. In contrast to the mostly

musically trained Scratch Orchestra, whose members generally took their improvisational

approach to the canon seriously as an ideological statement, the Portsmouth Sinfonia

baldly presented their disingenuous attempts to execute notated music as humorous

amateurism. The group eventually billed as "The World's Worst Orchestra."[23] Eno took

part as clarinetist, and produced several records for the group through the early '70s. As

Skempton, one of the founding members of The Scratch Orchestra, later summarized the

trend, English experimentalists of the time were interested in "making the overfamiliar

sound strangely beautiful" by approaching canonic works with unfamiliar sounds,

techniques, and mistakes.[24]

Various experimentalists were also elaborating an English style of minimalism by

utilizing simple melodies with predictable chord progressions in homophonic textures—

almost as though they were lifted from forgotten classical or folk tunes—and repeating

them over great lengths. Skempton developed what Virginia Anderson calls a "sweet"

style of minimalism in the early '70s, in which he would repeat square, banal melodies

with rudimentary accompaniment at great lengths.[25] Gavin Bryars likewise found interest

in the repetition of simple, lyrical melodies, often quoting directly from older tunes. One

finds this technique, for instance, in *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969), in which a small

string ensemble repeats and slowly stretches out the Episcopal hymn "Autumn" as wind

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[23] "The World's Worst Orchestra!" *The Sunday Telegraph*, May 23, 2004,
http://www.portsmouthsinfonia.com/media/sundaytelegraph.html.
[24] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 138.
[25] Virginia Anderson, "Systems and Other Minimalism in Britain," in *The Ashgate
Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle
Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 90.

and bass string drones grow, ebb, and swirl around it. Bryars became well known for this piece, as well as *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971), in which Bryars created a loop of an elderly vagrant singing the religious song of the same name, and created a slowly thickening orchestral arrangement to accompany it. Michael Nyman in 1975 declared *Jesus' Blood* a shining example of the "new consonance" dominating British experimentalism since the early '70s,[26] and elsewhere called the scene a "cult of the beautiful."[27] As Bryars recalls the effect his and his colleagues' music had on Eno during this time, "[Eno] told me that the performances that I gave at the Purcell Room and the Queen Elizabeth Hall with John Tilbury had a profound effect on his musical development. His idea of ambient music grew out of the non-assertive nature of much of English Experimental Music, which was quite happy to stay in the background in an understated way."[28]

Although not directly associated with Eno, The Promenade Theatre Orchestra (PTO) likewise contributed to the English "new consonance." The group began in 1969, when composers John White, Christopher Hobbs, Hugh Shrapnel, and Alec Hill started performing weekly concerts at the New Arts Laboratory in London. Each performer had a toy piano, a reed organ, and their own wind instrument with which to perform their music. As White explained their motivation, "There was something sort of rebellious about the PTO writing non-harrowing, pleasant consonant music on, from a concert point

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[26] Michael Nyman, "As the Titanic Went Down," *Music and Musicians* 21 (December 1972): 14.
[27] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 135.
[28] Gavin Bryars, email message to author, October 22, 2014. The Purcell Room performance Bryars references took place on October 9, 1970. The performance at Queen Elizabeth Hall took place in 1972, and featured the premiere performance of *The Sinking of the Titanic*.

of view, substandard instruments."[29] Hobbs recalls that this rebellion wasn't just a matter of avoiding dissonance or complexity, but also about deflating the seriousness of new music ensembles such as Fires of London and Steve Reich Ensemble—"highly trained professionals playing slick, difficult music"—with simplicity and humor.[30] The humor not only came about in their music, but also through their promotions, which often bore a trace of Erik Satie's satirism. One advertisement devised by White announced that the group would play "Live Muzak!!!!";[31] another described the PTO with ironic flair: "Restful reed-organs, tinkling toy pianos, soothing psalteries, suave swanee whistles, jolly jew's harps—NO noisy electronics! (Just the job for that lazy Sunday afternoon!)."[32]

Like other experimentalists at the time, the PTO composers frequently toyed with pre-existing music. Hobbs, in homage to Marcel Duchamp, created "readymades" for the group by borrowing directly from other pieces of music. *The Remorseless Lamb*, for instance, scrambles bits and pieces of Bach's *Sheep May Safely Graze* according to chance procedures. *MacCrimmon Will Never Return* (1970–73) has its performers simultaneously play different slowed-down versions of a *piobaireachd* (bagpipe) tune on reed organs.[33]

In the early 1970s, other English composers took up various means of scrambling pleasant sounds in their own process-based music, and began calling it "systems" or

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[29] Virginia Anderson, "British Experimental Music: Cornelius Cardew and His Contemporaries" (M.M. Thesis, University of Redlands, 1983), 128.
[30] Christopher Hobbs, email message to author, October 13, 2014.
[31] Virginia Anderson, "British Experimental Music," 132.
[32] Michael Nyman, "Believe It or Not Melody Rides Again," *Music and Musicians* 20, no. 2 (October 1971): 28.
[33] Virginia Anderson, "British Experimental Music," 132.

"systemic" music.[34] John White was perhaps the first to use such techniques in 1967, when he began composing with algorithmic processes he called "machines." A machine, for White, designated "a consistent process governing a series of musical actions within a particular sound world."[35] This process normally involved using numeric permutations to generate compositional choices within a set of instrumental or performance parameters. As Nyman described the result of these processes, "The sounds tend towards a sort of ragged consonance, the procedures usually involve much repetition with changes happening almost imperceptibly over large spans of time, and the atmosphere is usually pretty calm and unruffled however fast the pace of the music."[36] White has explained the pleasure of this music as "about the delight in finding happy accidents among the numbers," always containing the possibility of a "happily indulged sentimentality."[37]

Much of the ensuing systems music grew out of the Portsmouth College of Art, where Bryars, Jeffrey Steele, and Michael Parsons worked, and Hobbs, White, and Skempton often visited.[38] While "systems" in the 1980s was sometimes generally used to identify minimalist or repetitive music, in the 1970s the term referred more specifically to the compositional techniques employed by this group of English composers. Steele described systemic music as "based on the choice of a limited set of elements and the use

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[34] The use of the terms "systems" to describe this music arose in response to the development of "systems art" in 1960s British painting; see Virginia Anderson, "Systems and Other Minimalism in Britain," 99–100.

[35] John White, liner notes to *Machine Music*, Obscure 8, LP, 1978.

[36] Nyman, "Believe It or Not Melody Rides Again," 27.

[37] Ibid., 28.

[38] Virginia Anderson, "British Experimental Music after Nyman," in *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies*, ed. Benjamin Piekut (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 168.

of consistent principles to determine how these elements are combined."[39] Hobbs,

meanwhile, defined it as "music in which the structure and note-to-note procedure are

dictated by a numerically expressible construct."[40] While these definitions do not strictly

indicate what counts as a system, the term may accurately refer to the random- and fixed-

number algorithms that generate a "note-to-note or bar-to-bar musical process" used by

this historical network of English composers.[41]

Musically, these processes tended to be "less restricted" in their note-to-note or

bar-to-bar predictability than those of their U.S. American minimalist contemporaries.[42]

Whereas the gradual processes of American minimalists like Reich and Philip Glass

tended to be mostly audible, systems-based processes were only partly audible—and their

discernment, perhaps, beside the point of listening. White's collaborator Brian Dennis

attempted to capture the experience of systems music listening as follows:

> For the listener the note-to-note experience of the music is impossible to define. The sounds are
> pleasant and the 'content' subdued. It is a music of discovery: from a myriad possible forms,
> structure and texture are interfused; new images are defined. Only the listener with a blissful
> disregard for all the numbers, structures and permutations which concern the compose can assess
> the quality of the image: the actual effect of the music.[43]

These different styles of minimalism also tended to have different physiological effects

on the listener: whereas groups like the Philip Glass Ensemble exhilarated audiences in

the early 1970s with their vigorous rhythmic pulsations and physically demanding

performances, these composer-performers played systemic music in a calm, emotionally

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[39] Ibid., 167.
[40] Brian Dennis, "Repetitive and Systemic Music," *The Musical Times* 113, no. 1582 (December 1972): 1037.
[41] Virginia Anderson, "Systems and Other Minimalism in Britain," 92.
[42] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 136.
[43] Dennis, "Repetitive and Systemic Music," 1038.

restrained performance style.[44] New York minimalists also generated psychoacoustic effects through constant pulse and gradual, continuous change, while the systemic minimalists had little interest in heightening such effects.[45] As Parsons explains, repetition and sustainment in systemic music were not meant to entrance listeners, but rather to act as a "ground for the creation of perceptible oppositions."[46] As will become apparent in later analyses, Eno's Ambient music similarly established global stable parameters through looping and drone, partly as a way of enhancing the interest of local level variabilities.

Obscure Records

In early 1975, Eno proposed to Island Records—his label at the time—the idea of a sub-label devoted to the new English experimentalism flowering around him. He sold the idea to Island as an inexpensive investment in research and development; the purpose of this new label would be to find, record, and release music from outside the progressive rock mainstream that would be otherwise difficult to find on commercial records.[47] Upon Island's approval, Eno called the label Obscure Records, and took up the role of label manager and record producer for each record. Eno's vision for the label was ambitious: he planned to release records devoted to Satie's music, Cage's percussion music, archived recordings of experimental music groups such as the Scratch Orchestra, and even a collage-style piece of fifty one-minute pieces, each made by a different

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[44] Virginia Anderson, "Systems and Other Minimalism in Britain," 100.
[45] Ibid., 91.
[46] Ibid., 100.
[47] Adrian Jack, "'I Want to Be a Magnet for Tapes,'" *Time Out*, 1975, http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/timeo75a.html.

composer.[48] Although Eno never fulfilled these visions, he did go on to release

recordings of music by English upstarts such as Bryars, Nyman, Hobbs, and White, and

U.S. American minimalists Harold Budd and John Adams, before the series folded in

1978.

In the months leading up to *Discreet Music*, Eno also helped record, produce, and

package pieces by Bryars and Hobbs for release on Obscure. In November, he released

the first four Obscure records simultaneously, which included these pieces—as well as

Eno's *Discreet Music*. Eno's album fit comfortably with the reverb-drenched prettiness of

Bryars's pieces, and the tonal music deconstructions of Hobbs and Bryars; together, these

recordings helped establish an overarching Obscure "sound." As Nyman characterized

the first handful of releases, many of the "melodic" compositions represented on the label

were "typically English" in their "gentle, casual, slow, unassertive" restraint.[49] For Eno,

the music on the label represented a middle road between the ascetic complexity of avant-

garde music, and the virtuosic bombast of the heavy metal and progressive rock that was

dominating the British rock scene.[50] He recalls his intention for Obscure Records to

represent music that would be "extremely beautiful but *unengaging*," music that retained

the possibility for the listener to "turn it down and let it sit in the background."[51] Eno saw

Bryars's *Titanic* as most compellingly representing this possibility, and for this reason

released it as the first record of the series.[52]

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[48] Michael Nyman, "Music [Obscure Records]," in *Michael Nyman: Collected Writings*, ed. Pwyll Ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 260.
[49] Nyman, "Music [Obscure Records]," 260–61.
[50] MacDonald, "Before and After Science," 33, 42.
[51] Ibid., 42.
[52] Ibid.

While all the composers represented were, from the art music perspective of Michael Nyman, part of the "experimental mainstream," their music had no traction in the contemporary music market prior to Obscure.[53] And although major labels in the U.S. had been for several years pitching avant-garde music to rock fans who might be looking for something different (see Ch. 3), nothing like this had existed for their "consonant" English contemporaries. For many of these composers, the opportunity to record their pieces at all was unprecedented. "No ordinary record company would have touched them," as Hobbs now recalls, and so they leapt at the chance to record when Eno presented the idea.[54] For some, it represented the possibility of connecting with audiences that might not otherwise encounter it; as Bryars once told Nyman, "I think it's very important that *Jesus' Blood* is easy to take on a popular level—it could go out on Radio 2 if they'd put it out for 30 minutes."[55] Island, however, scarcely promoted Obscure's records, and so the sub-label remained obscure for its duration. While one might consider Obscure's discreet positioning as "hip marketing" strategy, it may also reflect Eno's awareness that such a low-cost, small-market investment would have more worth as an historical document, and as an artistic niche for his own experimental work, than as a short-term money maker.

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[53] Nyman, "Music [Obscure Records]," 259.

[54] Hobbs, email message to author.

[55] Nyman, "As the Titanic Went Down," 14. More recently, both Bryars and Hobbs told me via email that they had no particular audience in mind for these releases ("That was entirely Brian's domain," Bryars says).

II. "Discreet Music": Analysis

Brian Eno released *Discreet Music* in November 1975 on Obscure. The record contained extensive liner notes describing how it was made, while also alluding to Eno's experimental background. Before examining the ways Eno framed his work, I will first analyze the production and sound of *Discreet Music*'s title track. Following this section, I will situate the recording's production in relation to Eno's cybernetic theory of experimentalism.

Eno created *Discreet Music*'s title recording in May 1975, while making tapes for Robert Fripp to play on top of during some upcoming live shows. He created a tape delay system similar to the one on *(No Pussyfooting)*, using an EMS Synthi AKS as his sound source. This analog modular synthesizer with a built-in keyboard had one feature that set it apart from most others of its time: a monophonic digital sequencer, which allowed Eno to program and automatically loop a sequence of pitches. The sequencer also included three layers (or tracks) that permitted Eno to play back multiple sequences simultaneously. This would prove useful on "Discreet Music," for which Eno created two separate melodic sequences of slightly different lengths, both roughly 30 seconds long, looped simultaneously for about fifteen minutes. Eno later slowed the recording down to half speed, thereby increasing the total length to thirty minutes.

In addition to the synthesizer, Eno's delay system included a Gibson echo unit, a graphic equalizer, and two Revox A77 tape machines. The audio signal issued from the synthesizer, then passed through the echo unit and equalizer, both of which altered the quality of the sounds leaving the synthesizer, with the echo unit's dirty playback heads

introducing an "organic"-sounding "degradation" or reverb to the synthesized sounds.[56] These sounds then became recorded on tape by the first of the two machines, before moving to the playback head of the second, taking about 2.8 seconds to pass between the two. This long delay created an "echo" of the sound when played back, an echo that then got recorded by the still-recording first tape machine onto the very same tape. This sound would then take another 2.8 seconds to move to the playback machine, and so on. Eno represented this system in the liner notes with a diagram (Fig. 5.1).
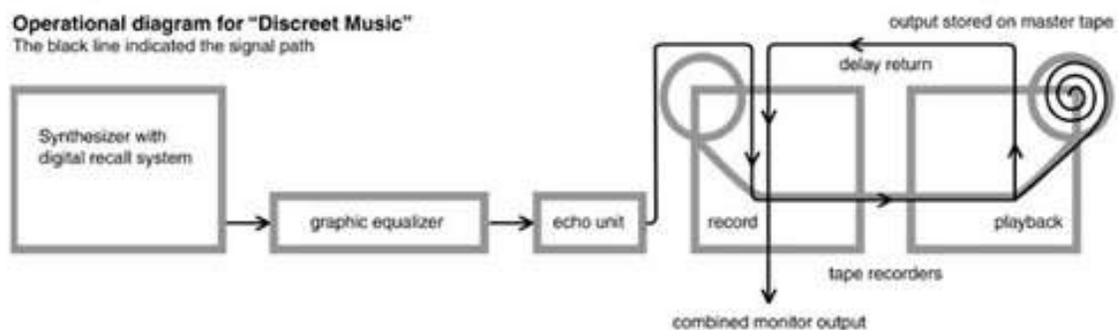
Fig. 5.1. Operational diagram for "Discreet Music" (back cover for *Discreet Music* [Obscure, 1975]).

Each of the two programmed sequences contained four short melodic fragments, with each fragment separated from one another by a lengthy pause. (I will describe these pitches as they appear on the final thirty-minute recording, rather than recreate those that Eno initially used before slowing the tape down.) One sequence, created using flute-like tones, contains the first four of the melodic fragments in Example 5.2, written from highest to lowest. The second sequence uses reedier sounds, and contains the melodic

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[56] Mark Prendergast, "Brian Eno: 'A Fervent Nostalgia for the Future' - Thoughts, Words, Music and Art. Part Two," *Sound on Sound* 4, no. 4 (February 1989), http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/sos2.html.

fragments 5-8 below. The first sequence mainly sits in the left stereo channel, while

the second sequence mainly sits in the right; generally, the higher pitched melodic

fragments sit farther to the left, while the lower pitched fragments sit farther to the right.
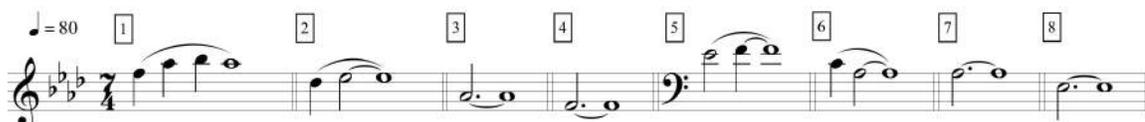
Ex 5.2. Melodic fragments used in "Discreet Music."

The recording begins with a very slow fade-in from nothing, with fragments 1, 6,

and 8 already audible, and fragments 3 and 5 appearing shortly thereafter. The delay

echoes of these fragments, and all others, repeat at regular intervals of approximately

5.65 seconds. As these echoes continue while fading, fragments newly emerge from the

sequencer at a higher volume. At any given time, then, several of the fragments appear

more prominently within the audio field than others. However, due to the similarity of

timbres and overlap of pitch content, these variations in volume do not necessarily dictate

or predict where one's attention goes in listening.

Each sequence of melodic fragments restarts at a regular rate throughout the

piece. However, for several reasons, it's difficult to predict in listening which melodic

fragment will emerge next, or when it will emerge. For one, the full sequences are of

slightly different lengths, with the first lasting approximately 1 minute and 3.6 seconds,

and the second approximately 1 minute and 8.8 seconds; and so, as the sequences loop,

the melodic fragments in the left channel appear in slightly different temporal relations to

the ones on the right in every successive repetition. Moreover, retaining the order of

melodic fragments does not come easily when the fragments emerge at such a slow

rate, and at such irregular intervals, with anywhere from 9 to 28 seconds between two

fragments in the same sequence.

Figure 5.2 graphs the first two minutes and twenty seconds of the piece. Time

appears horizontally, while the fragments are stacked vertically based on register. Each

rectangular bar represents a single iteration of a melodic fragment; each vertical line

represents the beginning of one iteration. The black circles represent the new entrance of

a fragment from the sequencer, and the density of color represents the volume, with

denser color showing higher volume.

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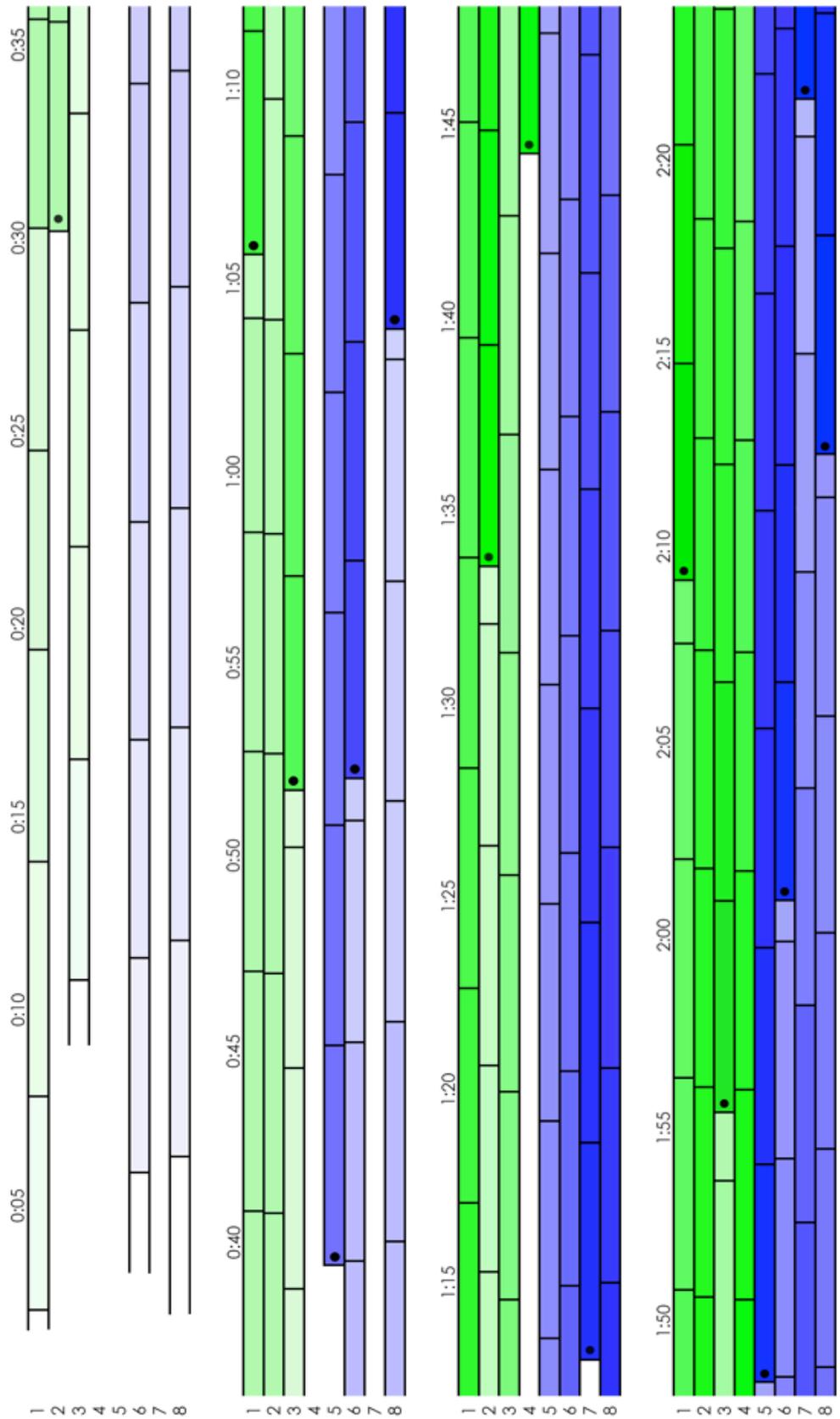
Fig. 5.2. Visual representation of "Discreet Music," 0:00–2:20.

Depending on the level of listening focus, ongoing pitch material can sound either like several interweaving melodic strands, or like a single unfolding chord. The perceived melodic linearity of each fragment might be directly proportional to the attentional focus: where an attentive or "zoomed in" listener might hear successive notes as a melodic sequence, a listener with "zoomed out" peripheral awareness of the music might register these successive notes as dynamic inflections of pitches within a static block harmony. At the same time, a fragment's perceived melodic linearity might be proportional to the fragment's volume relative to others', since a fragment's louder initial iteration might be interpreted as a melodic foreground, while its delay echoes can sound like its harmonic background. This lends the pitch material in "Discreet Music" multivalent functionalities; for instance, while the Bb in fragment 1 might at times sound like an upper neighbor to the Ab, it can also sound like an extended ninth above the Ab root. In my own close or "zoomed in" listening, this shift from melodic foreground to harmonic background does not occur until at least two other fragments enter, perhaps due to the stereo separation of fragments 1–4 from 5–8, which assists in preserving each individual fragment as a distinct linear unity as new fragments emerge. On the whole, "Discreet Music" globally registers as a slowly transmorphing Ab6/Eb chord; however, at certain times, one might hear it instead as an inverted Fm7/Eb chord, especially when fragments 1, 4, and 5 sound more prominently over the other fragments.

As the piece was being recorded, Eno changed the output by using the graphic equalizer, as well as the controls on the synthesizer itself.

> I was continually varying the waveform mix of the synthesizer: the old EMS synths offered two or three waveforms from each oscillator, so l was making a moving mix between square, triangle and sine waves. This resulted in a continuous timbral shift from the instruments, which I exaggerated

by altering the filter frequency a little every now and then. From the EMS, I went into a graphic equaliser for more sound-shaping.[57]

The waveform adjustments altered the quality of the sounds over the course of the recording, sometimes to the point of changing the associated "instrument" heard. To use one fragment as an example, Fragment 5 (as labeled in the preceding analysis) begins by sounding akin to an English horn. Around 5:15, the fragment's reappearance sounds fuller, something in between an English horn and alto saxophone; while the following iteration's emphasis on the triangular waveform gives it a more artificial sound, perhaps nearer an oboe. Then, around 11 minutes in, the fragment reappears sounding far mellower, closer to an alto flute than anything else. Two iterations later, the instrument takes on a synthesized, "space-age" clarinet character, before returning to its original state about halfway into the full piece. These timbral changes, as Eno indicates in the interview, are continuous across most instruments throughout.

The adjustment of the filter frequencies and/or EQ in the second half of the piece created some quite significant global changes, as well. First, around the 19-minute mark, the bass range below 280 Hz sounds "gutted," creating a lighter, thinner overall sound. (See the leftmost arrow in Figure 5.3, where the disappearance of red below the arc indicates the missing bass frequencies.) Following its return, at about 22:30, Eno lowers the low-pass filter to around 1200 Hz, giving the entire piece a mellower, duskier, and more "distant" feeling. (This is illustrated below the middle arrow in Figure 5.3, in which the thinning out of the green area indicates the lowering of the filter.) Finally, between 24:30 and 26:30 minute markers, the hi-mid range gradually re-emerges with increasing

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[57] Ibid.

luminance as the bass again disappears (third arrow in Figure 5.3, similar to the first),

timbrally evoking the trope of the sonic "sunrise." The re-entrance of the bass just before

the final fade-out gives the impression of returning to the fullness of the beginning. These

fairly substantial changes, taking up the final third of the recording, introduce a subtle

dramatic narrative arc into the composition, open-ended enough to be experienced and

interpreted by the listener in their own way. As indicated earlier, the metaphor of the

natural circadian cycle (day-sunset-night-sunrise-day) seems especially apt, given the

common associations between high/low filters and luminance or brightness, as well as

between wind and reed instruments and pastoral scenes.
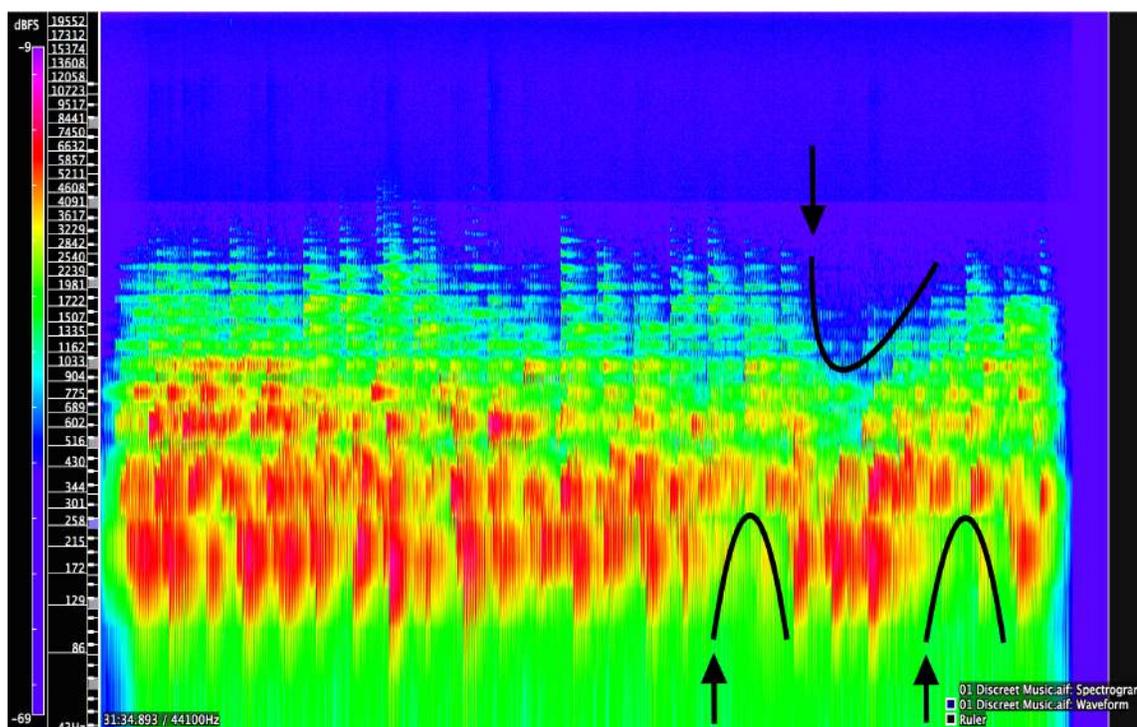
Fig. 5.3. "Discreet Music" spectrogram, marked to indicate filtering.

III. Studio Recordings as Experimental Media: Eno and Cybernetics

In a 1977 interview, Brian Eno ascribed "the most exciting bunch of thoughts I have at the moment" to the theoretical links he was making between a research field called cybernetics and studio-based composition.[58] To illustrate, he cited a recent studio recording he had made of five musicians improvising over an earlier studio improvisation they had recorded.[59] He discovered, in editing this recording, a two-minute segment of serendipitous interactions between the players. Though Eno could not have predicted these particular interactions in advance, he realized in listening that he got what he wanted from the studio situation he'd organized—a beautiful recording. Becoming animated, Eno explained that this method responds to the "central problem" of cybernetics: "How to organize systems toward goals you can't predict." "Everything I do," Eno proclaimed enthusiastically, "is connected with this."[60]

Indeed, Eno's theoretical ideas about artistic production, from the time of his earliest conception of Ambient music in the '60s to its explicit execution in 1978, wove dexterously within the frameworks of cybernetics first introduced to him at Ipswich. Part 3 of this chapter traces these ideas. The following primer briefly outlines the early history of cybernetics, and the related field of behaviorist art, highlighting theories particularly relevant to Eno's development. This introduction, while necessarily simplistic in its treatment of cybernetics, should suffice to sketch a conceptual background for Eno's

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[58] Frank Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," *The Village Voice*, March 1977, 69.

[59] Based on a similar description in his 1979 lecture, "The Studio as Compositional Tool," Eno seems to be describing here the creation of *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*'s "1/1" (recorded 1977, released 1978).

[60] Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," 69.

recording practice and ideas about experimentalism. Following this, I connect the ideas of cybernetics and behaviorist art with Eno's studio compositional practice, illustrating how cybernetics allowed Eno to theorize Ambient recordings such as "Discreet Music" as experimental in production, as well as reception.

Cybernetics & Behaviorist Art: Background

Cybernetics developed as a field of research through a loosely connected cohort of English and U.S. American scientific researchers in the years following the Second World War. Through this scientific paradigm, organic and inorganic materials alike were understood equivalently as mechanisms or *systems*, both in themselves and through their interactions with one another. On the most basic level, cyberneticians early on defined a system as an entity that behaves, or displays behavior. Behavior, as W. Ross Ashby defines it, is a regular, determinate, and reproducible sequence of states.[61] The term behavior, also important in the pre-existing field of behaviorist psychology as a way of excluding mental phenomena like intention, became useful for cybernetics because it allowed the scientific observer to isolate systems based on observable patterns of action, rather than on the assumption of consciousness or ontological unity. By isolating systems' behavior, and by decoupling their patterns of behavior from their material substrates, cyberneticians could observe, codify, modify, and organize into algorithms interactions between both inorganic and organic components.[62]

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[61] W. Ross Ashby, *An Introduction to Cybernetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1957), 5.

[62] Cyberneticians later understood these patterns in terms of "information," and systems in terms of what N. Katherine Hayles calls "information-processing entities." N.

Cyberneticians also regarded systems as more or less responsive to their environments, however materially diverse their environments' constitution. Systems may modify their behavior in response to the information they gather from the environment. Cybernetics's theory of information requires no theory of mental comprehension: *information*, or an abstract pattern that can be predicted and interpreted by a system, may trigger some sort of predictable response in that system. Thermostats, for instance, are programmed to anticipate changes in environmental temperature, and modify their readings in response to such information. Wiener shows human nervous systems as communicating with a materially diverse world in a similar manner to such mechanisms. Like thermostats and steam engines, which respond behaviorally to their external environments in a predictable fashion, the human nervous system receives inputs from its environment and discharges responses into the muscles in a regular, mostly predictable manner.[63] Normally, such systems will then return to a stable state, having adjusted their behavior to continue regularly within that environment. Wiener and later cyberneticians described these processes as "feedback loops" of informational transfer, system response, and self-adjustment to a stable state.[64]

In its earliest incarnation, cybernetics relied on the concept of *homeostasis*, meaning the tendency of any given system toward a regular, determinate state, to explain

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Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7 and 85.

[63] Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 2nd ed. (New York: MIT Press and John Wiley & Sons, 1961), 8 and 96–97. The nervous system, Wiener argued, cannot be wholly predictable due to the often contingent nature of personal memory; see Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 121.

[64] Ibid., 96–97; see also Ashby, *An Introduction to Cybernetics*, 53.

how systems maintain their self-identity as systems.[65] However, an early problem that

arose in cybernetics was how one could identify a system, prior to observing its behavior.

As these researchers would come to find, the scientific observer has to presuppose the

existence of a system, or beg the question of what counts as a system, in order to observe

and codify that system's behavior. A related problem arose in regarding systems as

somehow open to their environments, and yet unaffected by the fact of their being

observed. The conception of the non-interacting observer ultimately became untenable in

light of systems' responsiveness to environmental factors. For this reason, cyberneticians

around 1960 began incorporating the perception and activity of the observer into the

models of behavior they theorized. N. Katherine Hayles describes this paradigmatic shift

as a move from "homeostasis" to "reflexivity" as an organizing concept for systems

theory in the field of cybernetics.[66]

While cybernetics as a scientific research field did not directly respond to art or

culture, this shift within cybernetics mirrored a similar conversion in Western avant-

garde art earlier in the 20th century. Edward A. Shanken has observed how modernist

avant-garde artists—from the impressionists, cubists, and situationists up through the

work of Rauschenberg, Cage, and Fluxus—likewise reflexively anticipated the

perception of the observer in the conception and formal composition of the artwork

itself.[67] The conceptual parallels between cybernetics and avant-garde art made possible a

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[65] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 7–8; Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 114–15.
[66] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 8–9.
[67] Edward A. Shanken, "Cybernetics and Art: Cultural Convergence in the 1960s," in *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 262–65.

fruitful cross-pollination in the mid-1960s, when both converged around the principle

of reflexivity in the theories and teachings of Roy Ascott.

Roy Ascott served as headmaster of the Fine Art program at Ipswich, where he

put his cybernetic theory into pedagogical practice while Eno attended. Ascott's 1967

manifesto, "Behaviourist Art and the Cybernetic Vision," outlines his theoretical and

pedagogical plan. In the essay, Ascott proposes that works of art should be understood

not as objects, but rather as systems of behavior with the potential to respond to the

actions of the audience. Behaviorist art would foster participation by accommodating and

responding to the spectator's presence through feedback, thus allowing the spectator to

actively modify the system's behavior.[68]

Ascott's Groundcourse at Ipswich instantiated the principles of behaviorist art laid

out in his essay, training students to regard art as systems of behavior. Eno remembers

that his first Groundcourse directive was to invent a game that would generate some sort

of evaluation of its players.[69] From there, students designed "mind maps" based on their

received evaluations ("A kind of diagrammatic scheme of how you tended to behave in

lots of different situations," as Eno described it).[70] Students then created mind maps

antithetical to these initial ones. Placed in groups, the students ended up taking on group

roles according to these new mind maps for the remainder of the semester.[71] As Eno

recalls how this worked out,

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[68] Roy Ascott, "Behaviourist Art and the Cybernetic Vision," *Cybernetica: Revue de l'Association Internationale de Cyberne'tique* 10, no. 1 (1967): 25–56.
[69] Lester Bangs, "Brian Eno: A Sandbox in Smallville," 1979, republished in *Perfect Sound Forever*, August 2003, http://www.furious.com/perfect/bangseno.html.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Eno, Mills, and Poynor, *More Dark than Shark*, 40.

> The meekest person would be like the group policymaker, and the one who tended to talk most would be who got to do all the dirty work, like buying things from the shops. He would be the dogsbody; that was my job, actually…. There were some funny things (that) happened. There was one girl who was very timid, so part of her Mind Map stipulated that she had to walk this tightrope in front of the whole group every morning.[72]

Such projects as these, as Ascott explained, aimed to foster a "sense of flexibility of thought and attitude and an *open* quality of personal Identity."[73] Eno found the results of the mind-mapping project "extraordinary," and came to value highly the situational responsiveness encouraged by Ascott.[74]

As Eno went on to develop a conceptual framework for his artistic practice following his art education, he found another behaviorist theory of art that dovetailed excellently with Ascott's. In *Man's Rage for Chaos* (1965), U.S. American art theorist Morse Peckham proposed that society organizes artistic behavior into the performance of two conventional roles: artist and perceiver.[75] The artist's role, Peckham explains, is simply to "construct perceptual fields which occasion the role of the perceiver" (60), and art is any occasion in which an individual performs the role of art perceiver (68). The role of the perceiver, he goes on, is governed by cultural norms that allow people to recognize particular perceptual fields as art. Cultural norms sanction and designate situations for the activity of art perception (i.e. museums, concerts, etc.), situations that provide "psychic insulation" for the perceiver (64–65). Truly successful art, Peckham goes on, exposes the perceiver to disorienting situations within the insulation it provides them (76). The role of

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[72] Bangs, "Brian Eno: A Sandbox in Smallville."
[73] Ascott, "Behaviourist Art," 55.
[74] Brian Eno, Russell Mills, and Rick Poynor, *More Dark Than Shark* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 40.
[75] Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos* (New York: Chilton, 1965), 49, 60.

art, he concludes, is to rehearse individuals for situations in which learned patterns of behavior cannot meet the demands of the situation (313–14). "Art," as Peckham summarizes, "is the exposure to the tensions and problems of a false world so that man may endure exposing himself to the tensions and problems of the real world" (314).

For Eno, Peckham's insights clarified a phrase he had read in the writings of John Cage: "Art is a net."[76] Eno realized, following Peckham's theory and Cage's observation, that art created a "false world where you can afford to make mistakes."[77] In a way, art "rehearse[s] people in enduring uncertainty" in the world outside the art situation.[78] The "enclosed world" of art means "we can afford to surrender in it and take psychic risks without truly dramatic, life-threatening consequences. There we can endure uncertainty— not only endure it but be thrilled by it, and become able to use it as a creative basis for perception and action."[79]

While Peckham did not self-identify as a cybernetician, his behaviorist theory of art largely fit with Ascott's, and the cybernetic paradigm more broadly. Both Peckham and Ascott conceived art as systems that are open and responsive to the presence of observers. These behaviorist conceptions of art cohered both with the modernist avant-garde's insistence on awakening the audience to everyday perception and behavior, as well as the experimental procedures of Cage and his followers, in which the performed and perceptual processes set off by the composition held more value than the

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[76] John Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," in *Silence*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 100.

[77] Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," 70.

[78] Brian Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," interview by Anthony Korner, *Artforum* 24 no. 10, Summer 1986, 79.

[79] Ibid.

composition's formal integrity or expressive quality.

At the same time, Ascott's vision for art in a fully cybernated society parted ways with Peckham's theory, and Romantic ideals of art's autonomy, in maintaining that art's aesthetic field could be integrated into, rather than insulated from, its social and commercial environments. Citing McLuhan, Ascott proposed that behaviorist art could take on the social role of shaping human patterns of perception and activity within a "fully cybernated society where processes of retroaction, instant communication, autonomic flexibility will inform every aspect of our environment."[80] Although he cautioned against the seductions of fashion and marketing in commercially distributed art, Ascott argued that the avant-garde's hostility and opposition to commodity culture blocked the possibility of their mutual transformation. Cybernetic art, he argued, could counteract the mechanized, homogenizing tendencies of industrialized society, propagating artistic production and creative participation rather than "mere acceptance and consumption."[81] Although Ascott never entirely embraced commercial engagement, he, like Satie and the historical avant-garde before him, championed the political possibilities of an art in fluid exchange with systems of mass cultural production. Ascott's vision of artistic integration with mass culture turned out to be more in line with the postmodernizing trajectory of fine art in the 1960s than Peckham's.

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[80] Ibid., 25–26. Ascott also echoed McLuhan and Leary in proposing that technologized environments could extend perception and enable play for the artist-participant. He even suggests that chemical and electrical technologies, such as LSD, mescaline, and electrical stimulation, along with "Sensation Cabinets and zones for contemplation and meditation," could be useful technologies for the artist to work with. Ibid., 49.

[81] Ascott, "Behaviourist Art," 31.

Composer as Manager: "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts"

The notion that artistic reception could be understood as a form of social behavior not only influenced the way Eno thought about art reception, it also guided his activities in composition and recording. As Eno developed the Ambient concept and sound into the mid-1970s, he continued to ingest new ideas from the world of cybernetics, while applying these ideas in his engagements with music. Following the release of *Discreet Music*, Eno wrote an essay that investigated the overlaps between cybernetics and experimentalism, and laid the groundwork for theorizing Eno's activities in the recording studio (and the resultant recordings) as experimental. He published this essay, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," in *Studio International*, a British arts journal, in a 1976 special issue on English experimental music. Geared towards a readership of other artists and composers, the essay explicates the methods and aims of experimental music using the terms and concepts of cybernetics.

While it employs terms generally used across the field of cybernetics, Eno's essay is especially indebted to Stafford Beer's *Brain of the Firm* (1972), a book he frequently cited around this time as important to his conceptual development. Beer's book explains how cybernetics might inform a philosophy of business management. Treating the business as a system, Beer wrote that the *variety* of the business, or the number of its possible distinguishable states, is simply too large to comprehend from the point of the view of a manager. For this reason, the manager cannot plan for all possible states of affairs, but rather must organize the business in such a way that its components behave in a predictable and self-regulating fashion. Beer recommended creating *heuristics*, or rule-

based methods for reaching goals that cannot be precisely specified in advance.[82]

"Instead of trying to organize [the system] in full detail," Beer wrote, "you organize it only somewhat; you then ride on the dynamics of the system in the direction you want to go" (53). The role of the manager is simply to decide whether or not the organization is producing desirable results, and adjust accordingly (64). For this reason, the manager must welcome "error," or any unforeseen influence upon the system's functioning, in order to observe how a system handles change (62).

Eno's essay describes the role of the experimental composer similarly to how Beer described the manager, as someone who does not fully specify results in advance. According to the essay, classical compositions differ from experimental ones because classical scores provide instructions for generating highly specific musical results.[83] The results of experimental compositions, by contrast, cannot be known ahead of time; rather, these compositions provide instructions for generating unique, non-replicable sound events.[84] Although Michael Nyman defined experimental composition similarly, Eno avoids the language of determinacy to describe this difference, and instead distinguishes the two using the cybernetic term "variety." Citing W. R. Ashby's work, Eno defines

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[82] Stafford Beer, *Brain of the Firm: The Managerial Cybernetics of Organization*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1981), 52.

[83] Brian Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," *Studio International*, no. 984 (December 1976): 279. This description of non-experimental music is somewhat more historically specific than Eno lets on, since it is rooted in the 19th-century "work-concept" of composition, which prescribes a high degree of determinacy between score and performance. See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[84] Eno's definition, it should be noted, does not well fit a good deal of earlier music still widely considered to be experimental, including many of John Cage's works. Accordingly, Eno's "Generating" essay might be best regarded as narrowly descriptive of contemporaneous experimental practices that Eno found interesting.

variety as the range of a system's possible outcomes. Whereas non-experimental compositions constrain variety, allowing only a narrow range of possible outcomes in performance, experimental compositions aim to generate and exploit variety. "Instead of ignoring or subduing the variety generated in performance," Eno explains, the experimental composer "has constructed the piece so that this variety is really the substance of the music."[85] Experimental compositions do not generate limitless variety, however; they also maintain their identities by delimiting variety. It is for this reason that Eno finds Cage's term "indeterminacy" inadequate, since it disregards the ways experimental composers manage the range of their various outcomes.

Eno's essay also echoes Beer's insistence on the system's "flirtation" with error.[86] As Eno explains, experimental compositions generate and organize variety when interacting with different environments. A system's environments may include the physical environment of performance, the instruments or technologies used, the performers themselves, or their social or cultural backgrounds. Each of these environments encourages certain outputs or behaviors, while discouraging or subduing others. Eno illustrates this concept with Cornelius Cardew's "Paragraph 7" from *The Great Learning*, which calls for performers to begin singing the text on any pitch, then to move to the next pitch by singing a note that they already hear. In performance, the environment reduces variety through the resonant frequency of the performance space (physical environment), as well as the singing ability and ranges of the performers themselves (physiological environment), and their learned tastes or preferences

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[85] Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 281.
[86] Beer, *Brain of the Firm*, 62.

(social/cultural environment). At the same time, as the piece is performed, the environment generates variety through such factors as performer error, octave transposition, and beat frequencies. As with Cardew's piece, Eno explains, an experimental system will flexibly adapt to irregularities across different environments and performances, regarding these irregularities as "opportunities, around which it will shape and adjust its own identity."[87] While non-experimental compositions, by contrast, assume a neutral environment and ideally disregard the peculiarities of each performance, experimental compositions build in feedback mechanisms for monitoring and adjusting behavior in relation to any given environment. For Eno, then, experimental music *is* behaviorist art, and behaviorist art, experimental music.

Eno's essay partly explains what made "Discreet Music," to Eno, an experimental recording. As a "performer" of its sound, Eno acted as one of many environmental contingencies affecting an automatic or ongoing musical process with which he improvised and responded to, rather than controlled. This sharing of intent, purpose, or responsibility with the environmental (technological, cultural, acoustic) situations in which sound gets generated defines, for Eno, the activity of the experimental music performer. At the same time, as the planner of this piece, Eno also organized its variety by delimiting the processes and materials he could use.

However, given Eno's descriptions of experimental composition as producing variety, this conception may seem off. Aren't recording studios constructed for the very purpose of mitigating potential environmental irregularities? And aren't recordings made to guarantee maximal determinacy between a composition and its sonic realization? What

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[87] Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 283.

music could possibly be *less* adaptive to the peculiarities of an environment than the automatic playback of a sound recording? The following two sections address these questions by showing how Eno's behaviorist theory of experimental music played into his conception of the studio recording.

Oblique Strategies: Cybernetic Experimentalism in Eno's Recording Studio

> Sometimes, I have this yearning to be plunged into the unknown…. To *escape into* the unknown.
> —Brian Eno[88]

Although the sound recording might seem an unlikely medium for the experimental composer, Eno's behaviorist theory of experimental music undergirded both his method of record production, and his conceptualization of their reception. Eno explained his experimental approach to production in a lecture he gave at the 1979 New Music, New York festival, titled "The Studio as Compositional Tool." He discussed in the lecture how he often composes in the studio with no clear conception of what a finished recording will sound like. He called the process "in-studio composition," an "empirical" process of composing entirely in relation to the facilities the studio affords.[89] The studio, Eno found, could function as a controlled laboratory for experimental activity. It offers a space for the experimentalist to flexibly consort with all sorts of entities living and non-living, tangible and intangible: acoustic and electronic instruments, recording technologies, other performers, already recorded sounds. In this process, the realized sound never matches a determining "composition" in the classical

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[88] MacDonald, "Before and After Science," 42.

[89] Brian Eno, "The Studio as Compositional Tool," *Downbeat*, 1979, http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/downbeat79.htm.

sense; rather, the studio composer initiates a process of environmental feedback as s/he tries different things, listens, and adjusts. The studio composer, Eno says, may thus be compared to the painter: "He's working directly with a material, working directly onto a substance, and he always retains the options to chop and change, to paint a bit out, add a piece, etc." He describes this method of composition as "different in kind" from classical composition since recordings, unlike scores, involve no "transmission losses" between the studio composer's realization and the audience's playback. Moreover, because the studio composer directly works with the sound, they may be compared with the experimental music performer, albeit less concerned with notational interpretation, instrumental ability, or accuracy. Indeed, in the studio, Eno found that his amateur musicianship fortuitously generated a variety of unplanned sounds while recording.

The notion of the happy accident inspired Eno to devise procedures that would expose in-studio composition to variety. The phrase "Honor thy error as a hidden intention" became the first of many verbal heuristics that Eno wrote to introduce situational unknowns and inspire lateral thinking in the studio. He developed the list of aphorisms while working with Roxy Music, at a time when he found the "panic" brought on by expensive studio time to promote "rigid" and "linear" working conditions: "One becomes increasingly oriented toward results," he observed, "and progressively less inclined to engage in experimental activities that might not lead anywhere."[90] Eno's list reminded him, in these high-intensity situations, to "check the headlong flight down the

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[90] MacDonald, "Before and After Science," 42; Glenn O'Brien, "Eno at the Edge of Rock," *Interview*, June 1978, 31; Jim Aikin, "Brian Eno," *Keyboard*, July 1981, 55.

path of least resistance by suggesting side roads that might prove more interesting."[91]

He soon discovered that his friend Peter Schmidt, a painter, had developed a similar list, and the artists joined forces (and lists) to publish 500 sets of 113 "oracular" cards, titled Oblique Strategies, in January 1975. They recommended its users draw a single card when the creative process gets stuck, allowing phrases like "Repetition is a form of change," "Ask your body," "Don't be frightened of clichés," and "The tape is now the music" to inspire a shift in approach toward the work at hand. Like accidental sounds, other performers, or unfamiliar instruments, the Oblique Strategies cards dictated shifting environmental conditions to which Eno could adapt in the otherwise controlled studio environment.

As he reveals in one interview, Eno conceived the cards as a means of sidelining his own expressive or compositional intentions in a manner similar to Cage's chance techniques.[92] He draws an analogy between this impersonal approach to composition and gardening, in that both can be described as an "accretion of processes" in which the composer manages, rather than controls the outcome: "What you've done is partake in a process, you haven't really *controlled* the process... you didn't *make* the flower."[93] At times, it seems that Eno's interest in circumventing his own intentions in composition comes from an impersonal, objective consideration of what makes for successful art; as he once explained, "There has to be a period where you surrender your rational controls,

[91] Aikin, "Brian Eno," 55.
[92] O'Brien, "Eno at the Edge of Rock," 31.
[93] Alan Jensen, "The Sound of Silence: A Thursday Afternoon with Brian Eno," *Electronics & Music Maker*, December 1985, 22.

where you become a servant of the work rather than master of it."[94] At other times,
though, Eno's predilection for impersonal processes appears to arise from a deeply
personal enjoyment in relinquishing control: "I'm most excited when a piece of work
leads me along, rather than me pushing it along," he says in a 1983 interview.[95] Rock
critic Lester Bangs observed as much in commenting that Eno's 1978 album *Before and
After Science* "bespeaks a certain yearning for passivity, a desire to let some nameless
Other take creative control and dictate the resultant piece through its own mysterious
processes."[96] Yet in many instances this "nameless Other" would have been planned by
Eno himself—a card from the Oblique Strategies deck.

Eno's most important source of variety in the studio, however, was not Oblique
Strategies, but rather the presence of the recording tape. Thanks to its mutability and
editability, tape recording gave Eno the freedom to improvise with different materials and
methods throughout the compositional process. In a sense, the presence of the recording
tape acted as a safety "net" for Eno's studio explorations. Like Peckham's art situations,
the recording studio gave Eno a "rehearsal" space for dealing with the uncertainty of
experimental performance—albeit one that could at any moment, thanks to the
permanency of tape, become public. By way of recording, the studio contained and
stabilized Eno's experimentalism, while at the same time freeing him to enter into
unpredictable situations. Perhaps Peckham's "false world" theory of art resonated with

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[94] Caroline Coon, "The Brian Eno Interview," *Ritz*, 1977, Rock's Backpages, http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-brian-eno-interview.
[95] Stephen Demorest, "The Discreet Charm of Brian Eno: An English Pop Theorist Seeks to Redefine Music," *Horizon*, June 1978, 83.
[96] Lester Bangs, "Eno Sings with the Fishes," in *Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste*, ed. John Morthland (New York: Anchor, 2002), 243.

Eno because it so nearly resembled Eno's preferred creative environment. Like the situations of art perception that Peckham said provide "psychic insulation" for spectators' disorientation, tape recording cushioned the studio composer's insecurity with the awareness that the results would be repeatable and adjustable. Indeed, where Eno refers to Peckham's theory to describe art, one might easily replace "art" with "recording," and "artist" with "studio composer"; for instance,

> The function of being an artist [in-studio composer] for me is that it's an experimental area where I can test ways of thinking and operating and hopefully apply the results to real life. The advantage of testing them in an art [recording] context is that it doesn't really matter if you fail. You can afford to take risks that you wouldn't allow yourself in normal life. Having taken those risks and seen what freedoms they allow or what restrictions they impose, you are then free to extrapolate them into normal-life situation.[97]

Riffing off Peckham's theory, Eno reflects that rehearsing uncertainty as an artist can teach one to "improvise" when life presents confusing situations.[98] The studio, Eno found, offered one such rehearsal space.

The "improvisation" enabled by the studio tended to be, at least for Eno's solo recordings, a means of generating variety within his managerial process of composition, rather than a social end in itself. Eno rhetorically illustrates this conception while discussing recorded improvisation in his "Studio" lecture. "The interesting thing about improvisations," he notes, "is that they become more interesting as you listen to them more times. What seemed like an almost arbitrary collision of events comes to seem very meaningful on re-listening. Actually, almost any arbitrary collision of events listened to

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[97] Frank Rose, "Scaramouche of the Synthesizer," *Creem*, July 1975, 30.
[98] Demorest, "The Discreet Charm of Brian Eno," 83.

enough times comes to seem very meaningful."[99] One might glean meaning here from the way Eno moves from "improvisations" to "almost arbitrary collision of events" to "any arbitrary collision of events." Along with his characterization of an in-studio performance as a "collision of events," and of these events' interactions as "arbitrary," this description reveals how tape mediation allowed Eno to detach sounds from their possibly intentionally communicative origins. Tape, for Eno, universally anonymized and naturalized any sounds in play during performance as the variety of this compositional system. Yet this characterization also reveals how Eno took personal interest in sonic events that may have been unintended or contingent in the first place. His compositional process in the studio aimed at producing such contingencies.

Of course, Eno's predilection for happenstance was not unintentional, arbitrary, or unplanned, but rather the result of his personal, cultural, socialized preferences. Yet while Eno in his earlier essay reminds the reader that the cultural environment plays a role in filtering the results of experimental activity, he did not initially interpret his own biases toward sound in the same manner. Eno became progressively more outspoken about the cultural and political ramifications of his preferences, as I will discuss shortly, but his reflections on these ramifications for some time remained unincorporated into his own theorizations of studio composition. By "depersonalizing" the in-studio recording process through cybernetic terminology, Eno's activity appeared impersonal in a way that legitimized his compositional practice as experimental.

Eno's comments might be taken to reflect an orientation toward improvisation among Cagean experimentalists that George Lewis has termed a "Eurological"

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[99] Eno, "The Studio as Compositional Tool."

sensibility. As Lewis explains, various white improvisers in the '50s and '60s cultivated a practice around improvisation (Lewis singles out Cage as his primary example) that discounted or disregarded jazz's potential relevance to their own practice through the Eurocentric discourses and procedures of experimentalism.[100] Eno's descriptions of his studio work fit Lewis's characterization. At the same time, Eno's in-studio process reflects a social ideal of planned individual isolation and autonomy that differs from the dialogic sociality performed through jazz improvisation.[101] Whereas jazz improvisers normally perform improvisations within a communicative model of dialogue or conversation, Eno relies on an individualized model of improvisation in which a composer stops and starts sonic activity at will, testing and tweaking ongoing musical processes on their own time. Instead of articulating social agreement or difference through collective musical memory in real time, Eno relies on the memory of the tape to deal individually and extemporaneously with improvised material. In his solo work, the studio provided Eno an autonomous musical territory, giving him, alone, ultimate authority over the final musical realization.

Vertical Music: Recording Experimental Reception

Eno's theorization of experimentalism in "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts" also articulates the possibility that recordings, like pieces of experimental music, can both generate and organize variety in relation to their reception scenarios.

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[100] George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 109.

[101] On jazz improvisation as conversation or dialogue, see Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 348–86; Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 73–96.

This might seem counterintuitive, since playbacks of a single recording would

theoretically reproduce the same sounds over and over, thus rigidly delimiting rather than

generating variety. Recordings might for this reason seem even *less* experimental than the

traditional orchestral performance. However, this intuition relies on several interlocking

assumptions: 1) that the relevant outcomes of an experimental performance (or playback

of an experimental recording) are purely acoustic, rather than experiential or perceptual;

2) that the sounds of a single recording would produce similar experiential or perceptual

outcomes across playbacks; and 3) that the experiential or perceptual field of the listener

would remain limited to the sounds of the recording. Eno, however, came to realize that a

single recording could, in fact, produce variety across different listenings, provided: 1)

that the relevant outcomes of an experimental performance/playback included the

experience and perceptions of the listener; 2) that the recording produced different

aesthetic or perceptual experiences from playback to playback; and 3) that the listener's

aesthetic experience encompassed more than just the sounds of the recording. Such a

view is consistent with the terms of experimentalism laid out in Eno's essay, where the

interest in listening lies in the "dynamics" of the experimental system, i.e. "its interaction

with the environmental, physiological, and cultural climate surrounding its

performance."[102] To maintain this consistency, however, one cannot take "performance"

to mean only the *original* sonic event (imagined or actual) captured by recording, but also

possibly the machine's *playback* of the recorded sounds. The interest in listening lies in

the dynamics of interaction between these reproduced sounds, and the listener's

environment.

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[102] Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 281.

In a 2007 interview, Eno explained how recordings create a different sort of interest in listening than live performances, by way of a comparison between pop music and recordings of Steve Reich's music.

> [Pop musicians] knew that listening to a record was a different experience to a live performance. They realised that the record had to be a distinct, separate and satisfactory experience; it couldn't just be a memento of a performance. So pop musicians were way ahead of the avant-garde in terms of thinking how do you make a successful work of art on a piece of vinyl. You had Steve Reich for example—who made both a record that changed my life [*It's Gonna Rain*] and some really bad ones, as well—I think through not understanding what recording was about. Some of those very diagrammatic pieces of his, like "Drumming" (1971), just didn't work as a record. It was like seeing a sketch of a musical event; you didn't really want to listen to it more than once.[103]

To Eno, pop musicians were "ahead of the avant-garde" because they crafted recordings not to document musical events, but to enable unique listening experiences that worked independently of these original musical events. Pop producers, in other words, created recordings that might generate variety from playback to playback. As Eno describes it in the "Studio" lecture, recording puts, you, the listener,

> in a position of being able to listen again and again to a performance, to become familiar with details you most certainly had missed the first time through, and to become very fond of details that weren't intended by the composer or the musicians. The effect of this on the composer is that he can think in terms of supplying material that would actually be too subtle for a first listening."[104]

And yet, Eno was most inspired to create such subtle material not through pop music, but through his experience of *It's Gonna Rain*, suggesting that something about minimalism appealed to his sensibility in a way that pop music had not. His descriptions of the differences between traditional and experimental music in "Generating and Organizing Variety" hint at what that appeal might have been.

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[103] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 241.
[104] Eno, "The Studio as Compositional Tool."

In the essay, Eno describes traditional orchestras as organized hierarchically, with its members taking up various predictable behavioral roles. This ranking system, he argues, corresponds to the homophonic organization of most symphonic music, in which "high responsibility" events exist in the foreground, and "ambience or counterpoint" in the background.[105] The resultant music creates a "focus" or "point of view" that limits the "perceptual positions" available to the listener.[106] By contrast, the listener of experimental music is not usually drawn toward a focus predetermined by the composer; rather, they find a perceptual position suited to that moment of musical interaction with the environment. Eno's characterizations of the differences between traditional and experimental music recalls Michael Nyman's in *Experimental Music*, where Nyman explains that classical music establishes a "priority system" in which "your method of listening is conditioned by what went before, and will condition, in roughly the way the composer intends, what comes next."[107] The techniques employed by experimentalists, by contrast, result in a "flattening out" or "de-focusing" of the musical perspective.[108] Eno's theorization of experimental activity may have been directly influenced by Nyman's description, but it may also reflect a broadly shared ideology amongst composers working in the minimalist idiom, particularly in the English experimental scene during the 1960s and '70s.[109] As discussed earlier, composers in this scene generally rejected hierarchical models of group organization for social or political

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[105] Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 279.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 24–25.
[108] Ibid., 26.
[109] Virginia Anderson has argued that Nyman's view of experimentalism may be taken as representative of British experimentalists' views of the field in the '60s and '70s; see Anderson, "British Experimental Music after Nyman."

reasons. Eno likewise conceived his rejection of attentional hierarchy as anti-authoritarian.[110]

Eno appreciated minimalism, in part, for the way it could "de-focus" potential perspectives on the music, giving listeners more leeway to choose their own sonic adventure. Eno similarly created multiple perceptual positions with recordings like "Discreet Music," in part by eliminating the melody so often foregrounded in both classical compositions and pop recordings. As his interest in creating recordings with melodic vocals declined throughout the 1970s, Eno began describing his solo releases through reference to visual art, particularly painting. Likening pop vocals to the "figure" in a recording's "landscape" ("all questions of scale and depth are related to it"), Eno aimed to collapse the landscape into a unified sound picture by removing the figure.[111] Doing so, he reasoned, would "create many different foci of attention" for the listener.[112] Furthermore, such foci could conceivably lie outside the recording altogether. "I like the idea of my music being treated like sound pictures," Eno later explained. "You don't sit and stare at paintings for three minutes, you can turn your back. Painters are not insulted by lack of attention, why should composers be?"[113]

To complement this flattening of perspective, Eno eliminated the conventional formal schemas of development normally found in pop or non-avant-garde classical music. Rather than promoting, through sectional form or narrative, a "horizontal"

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[110] Ian MacDonald, "Another False World: Part 2: How to Make a Modern Record," *New Musical Express*, December 3, 1977, 33.

[111] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 77. See also Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 279.

[112] Gregory Miller, "The Arts: Video," *Omni*, June 1980, 111.

[113] Anthony Denselow, "Over and Over," *The Observer*, February 23, 1986.

progression of listening perspectives on an ongoing musical event, Eno produced a

"vertical" sound with his recordings, a "solid block of interactions" that one might enter

and leave at any point.[114] Music theorist Jonathan Kramer similarly theorized the concept

of "vertical music" in his work on temporality in art music. Although Kramer never

refers to Eno, his writing from the late 1980s aptly describes Eno's concept. Vertical

music, Kramer explains, replaces the temporal articulation of gestures or events (such as

musical phrases) with totally consistent, multi-layered sound. Such music creates a

"bounded sound-world" that defines its limits early on and "stays within the limits it

chooses."[115] Kramer likens vertical music listening to viewing a piece of sculpture, in that

the perceiver may at any time decide on their own sequence of observational postures

toward, or away from, the music: "For each of us, the temporal sequence of viewing

postures has been unique…. We can listen to it or ignore it."[116] Eric Tamm likewise notes

that Eno's "vertical" music promotes a "vertical mode of listening—a disposition of

one's faculties of concentration along the timbral rather than the temporal dimension."[117]

One might also imagine the listener's attention drifting to such aspects as texture, timing,

production effects, mood, or the ways sound interacts with non-musical factors both

external and internal to the listener. This notion of a multi-perspectival "vertical music"

not only had analogues in minimalist music, but also in the static, non-developmental

minimalist films of Andy Warhol such as *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964), which Eno

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[114] Frank Rose, "Scaramouche of the Synthesizer," 70.

[115] Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), 54.

[116] Ibid., 57.

[117] Tamm, *Brian Eno*, 141.

has acknowledged as similar in conception.[118] The idea of a music that could furnish

different observational postures over time within a single listening experience led Eno

down the path towards a conception of an Ambient music "as ignorable as it is

interesting."

Recorded vertical music, Eno found, was especially conducive to fostering

different perceptual experiences from playback to playback, or place to place. Because of

its relatively underdetermined form, as he says in a 1985 interview, "You can use

recordings as a way to generate unpredictability rather than repetition."[119] Because these

recordings would ideally accommodate and exploit the variety of its possible listening

environments, Eno also conceived of his music as experimental.

Eno's recordings might even be interpreted as framed microcosms of their open,

unpredictable conditions of reception. As "Discreet Music" illustrates, Eno arranged his

loops to generate a variety of hard-to-predict interactions between recorded sounds.

Through techniques such as the tape delay system, or the use of loops of different

lengths, Eno programmed and recorded an event in which technological playback

generated unpredictability rather than (just) repetition. By making the recording's sonic

organization contingent upon these de-personalized technological interactions, Eno

folded the idea of generating variety through audio playback into the form of Ambient

recordings themselves.

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[118] Rose, "Scaramouche of the Synthesizer," 70.
[119] Rob Tannenbaum, "A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage & Brian Eno," *Musician*, September 1985, 69.

IV. Accident, Automation, and Passive Authorship in *Discreet Music*

"Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts" and "The Studio as Compositional Tool" show how Eno responded conceptually to the ideas set forward both in English experimental music and in cybernetics, and offered these concepts to a social community of experimentalists. But given his traction in the rock market, most of Eno's listeners would have received exposure to the artist's ideas instead through the detailed liner notes accompanying albums such as *Discreet Music*. The notes accompanying this album illustrate, through parallel narratives of production and of conception, the accidental or contingent nature of the music's arising. They also emphasize Eno's passivity while recording, relative to independently operating technological processes.

In the fourth and final part of this chapter, I discuss how these narratives rhetorically instruct the reader to occupy a similar position as Eno describes himself occupying in production: "Planner and programmer… [and] audience to the results" of *Discreet Music*. I compare these narratives to other similar genesis narratives in minimalist tape music, before undertaking a cultural critique of their authorial constructions. The ideas of cybernetics and experimentalism explored earlier in this chapter run through these sections as undercurrents, rather than explicit themes. This section thus shifts the analysis from the "knowing" position of the producer to a "naïve" position of the consumer, with the understanding that most of Eno's listeners actually fall somewhere between these two positions.

Narrating "Discreet Music" as Automatic Music

The beginning of *Discreet Music*'s liner notes outlines the compositional

techniques that guided the title track's production. Eno starts by introducing his use of

systems in composition as a personal preference.

> Since I have always preferred making plans to executing them, I have gravitated towards
> situations and systems that, once set into operation, could create music with little or no
> intervention on my part.
>
> That is to say, I tend towards the roles of the planner and programmer, and then become an
> audience to the results.

Later, he describes a procedure he devised that allowed him to maintain this desired role.

> Having set up [the tape delay echo system], my degree of participation in what it subsequently did
> was limited to (a) providing an input (in this case, two simple and mutually compatible melodic
> lines of different duration stored on a digital recall system) and (b) occasionally altering the timbre
> of the synthesizer's output by means of a graphic equalizer.

Here, we see Eno refraining from altering the playback of recorded sound once that

playback is set in motion. He describes a "preference," "gravitation," and "tendency"

toward roles that require little authorial intervention. One might easily associate this set

of roles with scientific experimenters or researchers: planner, programmer, and observer

of "results."

Following this, Eno juxtaposes these roles with that of the artist, which he defines

as one who "dabbles" and "interferes" with the production of sound.

> It is a point of discipline to accept this passive role, and for once, to ignore the tendency to play
> the artist by dabbling and interfering.

Despite his earlier stated predilection for creating music without intervening, Eno also

calls it a "point of discipline" to "ignore the tendency" to do so. Eno's artistic

experimentalism registers here as a calling or vocation in conflict with a broader tendency—perhaps a personal one, but also perhaps a tendency of fine art, art music, or rock culture—to control or manipulate the recording process. Given John Cage's substantial influence upon avant-garde music in the 1960s, Eno's characterization of the artist appears somewhat disingenuous. In 1975, "playing the [fine] artist" may well have centrally acting as planner and programmer of impersonal systems, and being open to contingencies in the process of generating results.

Eno's juxtaposition of the non-interfering "audience" and interfering artist also recalls Cage's writings, such as his famous pronouncement in 1957 that "I have become a listener and the music has become something to hear."[120] As explained in the last chapter, Cage's polemic against so-defined "art" led him to develop compositional processes that would ideally free the music from the artist's taste. Cage wanted composers to ignore the tendency to control the actions of performers, a sort of control that could produce highly specified musical results. Eno similarly ignores here a tendency to interfere with an automated, loop-based technological system. Yet perhaps because the musical result of such a system could conceivably have been fully known in advance by an uninvolved planner, Eno here emphasizes his passiveness in the act of recording, rather than the openness of his plan. Eno, in fact, did build a degree of unknowability into the plan of "Discreet Music" by programming the sequencer to recall the melodies at slightly different intervals. He does not reveal this fact here, however. Rather, he depicts himself as open to contingencies during the automated process—despite the rather significant

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[120] John Cage, "Experimental Music," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 7.

timbral shifts that he actually executes throughout this process.

In interviews, Eno has also explained how the changes in timbre were made practically "by accident." He describes how, having set up a tape delay system, he set the recording in motion. Distractions ensued.

> Once I got it going the phone started ringing, people started knocking on the door, and I was answering the phone and adjusting all this stuff as it ran. I almost made that without listening to it. It was really automatic music. The next day Fripp came around and we were going through these things I'd made and I put that one on by accident at half speed and it sounded very, very good. I thought it was probably one of the best things I'd ever done and I didn't even realize I was doing it at the time.[121]

Fortunately, since he was "trying to make a piece that could be listened to and yet could be ignored," what better way to do so than by ignoring it in the process of making it? Interference in the listening and creative process, it turned out, was precisely what Eno needed to compose a track for ignoring. "If not for the interferences," Eno muses, "I would have been fiddling with it, but luckily I'd been totally preoccupied. I've tried to do it again—pretend I'm not paying attention—but I can't."[122] Ironically, the unintended interferences of everyday life helped him become a "passive" audience, rather than a dabbling artist, on the condition that he wasn't listening so closely to the results. What's more, not only had Eno made the recording with almost no conscious effort, but even its half-speed playback took the composer by surprise.

However, as indicated in the earlier analysis, the "dabbling" and "adjusting" that Eno did execute while recording led to fairly significant changes over the course of the recording. These adjustments were more involved than he states on the album's liner

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[121] Glenn O'Brien, "Eno at the Edge of Rock," *Interview*, June 1978, 31.
[122] Demorest, "The Discreet Charm of Brian Eno," 84.

notes, since Eno also manipulated the waveform mixture of each oscillator, as well as

the frequency of the filters. The variations in timbre do not give strong evidence of lulls

in Eno's attention given to their change; on the contrary, their continuous alteration

suggests quite meticulous dabbling on his part. While this doesn't discredit Eno's

narrative—it's quite likely that Eno was able to accomplish these changes without much

conscious thought—it's worth noting how the narrative of production in the liner notes

de-emphasizes his manual activity throughout the piece's recording.

Much as this first narrative of production paints Eno as passive and open to

contingencies during recording, the narrative of conception behind the music's idea

unfolds in a parallel fashion, with Eno exceptionally passive during listening:

> In January this year I had an accident. I was not seriously hurt, but I was confined to bed in a stiff and static position. My friend Judy Nylon visited me and brought me a record of 18th century harp music. After she had gone, and with some considerable difficulty, I put on the record. Having laid down, I realized that the amplifier was set at an extremely low level, and that one channel of the stereo had failed completely. Since I hadn't the energy to get up and improve matters, the record played on almost inaudibly. This presented what was for me a new way of hearing music—as part of the ambience of the environment just as the colour of the light and the sound of the rain were parts of that ambience. It is for this reason that I suggest listening to the piece at comparatively low levels, even to the extent that it frequently falls below the threshold of audibility.

One might be struck here by Eno's lack of agency in relation to audio playback

technologies. As discussed in Chapter 3, the controllability of these technologies

symbolically ensured, for middle-class adults, the ontological security of their bodies

otherwise dispersed by and through automated musical environments. The analogous

physical breakdowns of the human/technology pair in Eno's story—the inert limitation of

Eno's body, and the failing stereo equipment—give rise here to a situation in which

automated harp sounds meld seamlessly into the perpetuity of environmental sound, light,

and color. His lack of control over these limitations apparently prompted Eno to interpret

the domestic environment as "natured," or issuing spontaneously without human design.

Anyone familiar with Eno's work prior to *Discreet Music* might also be struck by something else—that a rock star sought interest at all in something so seemingly tame as "18th century harp music."[123] His anecdote introduces the idea of discreet music in an especially vivid, appealing, and instructive way to listeners who might find something so delicate and restrained as 18th-century harp music—or so simple, flat, and unassuming as "Discreet Music"—an unnatural or obtrusive environmental presence. Resist the urge to turn the volume up (or the stereo off), the story tells the listener; avoid trying to "improve matters," and you may find yourself able to appreciate it as discreet music.

Together, these framing narratives set up a circuit of identification between the consumer (i.e. the buyer, programmer, and listener) of the record, and Eno (i.e. the planner, producer, and audience of the recording process). In both these narratives, Eno announces, then disavows his identity as a planner and programmer of the sounds, placing agency in the automated mechanisms of playback as he switches over to the role of non-interfering listener. These narratives encourage the reader to act similarly. Once you program *Discreet Music*, these narratives tell the consumer, take advantage of its automation, and treat it passively as though the music were part of the place in which you listen. And a further message to the serious rock or avant-garde listener, who might regard, with disdain, its muted simplicity as aesthetic error: hear this music discreetly,

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[123] Although Eno has not since specified the music in question, one good candidate is an LP record by harpist Nicanor Zabaleta titled just that—*18th Century Harp Music* (Esoteric, 1957)—whose appearance on a label called Esoteric Records may also have inspired the name of Eno's Obscure imprint.

learn to improvise as a listener with the environmental sounds, and ignore the tendency to dabble and interfere.

Discreet Music's birth-by-epiphany has since become famed as Ambient music's origin story. Though recounted with varying details, the story nearly always represents Eno-the-thinker as a passive conduit in the circuitry between a harp record, broken speakers, and his own busted body. Judy Nylon, however, recalls events differently:

> I put the harp music on and balanced it as best as I could from where I stood; he caught on immediately to what I was doing and helped me balance the softness of the rain patter with the faint string sound for where he lay in the room. There was no "ambience by mistake." Neither of us invented ambient music; that he could convince EG Music to finance his putting out a line of very soft sound recordings is something quite different.[124]

According to Nylon, "discreet music" was not an accidental epiphany, but rather the deliberate execution of her pre-existing idea. The narrative behind its creation, Nylon suggests, made for good promotional fodder—a way of selling the idea to label Editions E.G., and a way of promoting the unglamorous, restrained music to potential buyers. One might dismiss Nylon's claim as bitter bile from a less famous musician (and possibly a scorned ex-lover). Yet a notebook from Eno's art school years also suggests that the idea had a longer personal history for Eno: "Make some music to be heard and not listened to," the teenage Eno wrote, nearly ten years before *Discreet Music* came into being.[125]

Despite these stated intentions, the narratives accompanying "Discreet Music" locate its realization in a realm of agency tangential to Eno's (and Nylon's) motives.

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[124] Judy Nylon, "Live Now, Wise Up, Die Well: An Interview with Judy Nylon, Punk Legend," interview by Bart Plantenga, October 2001, http://www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/oct2001/interview_judy_nylon.html. Thanks to Elizabeth Lindau for bringing Nylon's side of the story to my awareness.
[125] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 184.

With half-willed activities and happenstance events playing significant roles in both conception and production, Eno represents himself as a witness to, and organizer of sound events, but not as their source or author. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Eno's compositional decisions in *Discreet Music* quite intentionally drew upon concepts, procedures, and ideas from cybernetics and experimentalism alike. So what did he have to gain from representing himself as a passive agent in the compositional process? Partly, as I have proposed, such narratives would have had instructional merit for potential listeners. However, their similarities to some other genesis narratives in minimalist tape music give reason for further investigation.

Automation and Passive Authorship in Minimalism: Two Precedents

Throughout the 1960s and '70s, minimalist composers used audio reproduction technologies, and tape in particular, as creative agents in composition, performance, and audio production. Like Eno, several of these composers forwarded narratives of automated electronics displacing their intentions as executors or performers of recorded sound, putting them in the position of the unsuspecting listener. Here, I illustrate two mutually contrasting examples of minimalist composers' reflective statements about their tape music.

Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), as noted in the previous chapter, was instructive in Eno's artistic education and conception of Ambient music. Yet the reportedly accidental nature of *It's Gonna Rain*'s conception also exhibits some parallels with Eno's narrative behind *Discreet Music*. As Reich recalls, a technological mishap led to the discovery of the phasing effect between the tape loops of Brother Walter's speech.

He initially intended to have the loops proceed in lockstep, with one starting halfway into the other's length. The playback speed of one of the Wollensack tape machines, however, was slightly off from the other's, creating a hypnotic effect.[126]

Phasing later turned out to be an extremely fruitful compositional technique for Reich, becoming a trademark of the composer's. Yet ironically, the story of technological accident also validated Reich's disputable claim to authorship of the idea. As Martin Scherzinger has convincingly argued, Reich's idea to progressively change the length of the delay between the loops likely originated in Ghanaian Ewe music, which Reich studied through A. M. Jones's *Studies in African Music* (1959) several years prior to *It's Gonna Rain*.[127] Jones's research illustrated how Ewe drumming commonly staggers the downbeat through polymetric layering, and often by the difference of single beat.[128] Yet Reich later disavowed Ewe music as an influence on his phasing technique—or, for that matter, the technique of "resultant patterns" that likewise has analogues in West African improvisation—and instead claimed that his study of Ewe drumming, and his later visit to Ghana in 1970, simply "confirmed" what he was already doing.[129] In light of this commonality, Reich's narrative about technological accidents and automated playback both cleared and "whitened" the path of his musical influence.

In addition, Reich may have thought to experiment with tape delay in response to the music of his colleague and fellow San Francisco resident Terry Riley, whose "Time

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[126] See Reich, program notes for "It's Gonna Rain," in *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, ed. Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 20–21.
[127] Martin Scherzinger, "Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich's 'It's Gonna Rain,'" *Current Musicology* 79 (2005): 233.
[128] Ibid., 234.
[129] Steve Reich, "Non-Western Music and the Western Composer," in *Writings on Music*, 149.

Lag Accumulator" tape pieces such as *Music for The Gift* (1963) used different

lengths of decay throughout. Indeed, Riley's influence upon Reich seems undeniable

given *It's Gonna Rain*'s original, and now-missing subtitle: *or, Meet Brother Walter in*

Union Square after Listening to Terry Riley.[130] Reich, however, redacted the subtitle by

the end of that year, and later denied any claims to interest in Riley's tape pieces.[131] Riley

later reported feeling "ripped off"—not an unjustified response, given the attention

Reich's tape work received in New York, where Riley was relatively unknown at the

time.[132]

It's not particularly surprising that this authorship dispute arose, given the

emergent availability of tape technologies on the market during the late '50s and early

'60s. As experimental composers realized these mass-market technologies' abilities to

repeat and echo sounds at great length and precision, the more career-savvy of the bunch

began utilizing terms such as "phasing" as a way of claiming authorship over these

abilities. As Branden Joseph points out, minimalist works required unambiguous authors

because minimalist techniques' apparent autonomy from human intention made these

works "refractory to the conventional categories of authorship," not in spite of this

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[130] Thomas Welsh, "Chronology," in David W. Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 277.

[131] Reich says of his own tape pieces, "You're watching the minute hand on the watch. That's not the effect of Riley's pieces at all: there, you're taking a bath." He only acknowledges Riley's *In C* (1964) as influential on his own development. Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 165.

[132] K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 63. Ironically, this very scenario would be repeated four years later when Reich felt snubbed after Philip Glass removed the dedication from his *Two Pages for Steve Reich* (1969), shortening it to simply *Two Pages*.

fact.[133] Yet one must add that tape's mass-market availability played a significant role in these composers' claims to authorship. By giving the errancy of technological reproduction a creative hand in the process, composers like Reich could also both disavow and shore up such open claims to authorship.

In contrast with Eno and Reich, who framed their tape music as arising out of contingent environmental conditions through supplemental narratives, Alvin Lucier made the environmental contingency of tape composition the overt content of his *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969). The original recordings (Source, 1969/1970; Lovely Music, Ltd., 1980/1981) begin with Alvin Lucier recording himself speaking the following statement:

> I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but, more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.

Lucier then does just what he says, and plays back the recording of his speech. Following this, Lucier plays back the segment of tape that he had just re-recorded. He repeats this process of recording and playback multiple times (10 total iterations appear on the 1970 recording; 32 in the 1981 release). Not only do the resonant frequencies of the room influence the progressively changing sound of the playback, so do the pitch and volume of the tape hiss, the contour and rhythm of Lucier's speaking voice, and "irregularities" such as Lucier's stutter. Over time, recording smudges out the semantic content of

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[133] Branden Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2008), 37.

Lucier's enunciation, leaving as a remainder these planned, but not fully authored

facets of the speech situation.

Since a statement about Lucier's communicative agency serves as the sonic

material for the piece, its gradual semantic erasure might be interpreted as a commentary

on Lucier's material contingency to technological and environmental factors.

Alternatively, *Sitting* might be interpreted as a revelation of the contingency of Lucier's

communicative authorship once his statement is issued forth, illustrating Roland

Barthes's claim in "The Death of the Author" that "writing" (or, in this case, recording)

initiates the erasure of its issuer: "As soon as a fact is *narrated*…the voice loses its

origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins."[134]

Sitting's recording, however, throws into play a further uncertainty—is even

Lucier's *voice* fully authored by Lucier? To explain what I mean, I will mark the

speaking Lucier "Lucier^S," and the author of the statement "Lucier^A." Lucier^A's

statement about "irregularities," and his stated desire to "smooth" them out, suggests that

the anticipated irregularities of Lucier^S's speech are unwanted by Lucier^A, the seat of

semantic intention. Most critics have interpreted Lucier^A to be referring to his stutter, a

facet of his speech most notable on his original 1970 recording. Lucier^A, it seems, does

not recognize himself as the origin of Lucier^S's voice. While readings of the piece

commonly point out the rupture between Lucier^S's issued words and the acoustic sound

of his voice in the room,[135] Lucier^A also points out an unbridgeable gap between Lucier^A

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[134] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142.
[135] For instance, see Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters, and other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2014), 30; Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to*

and Lucier[S].[136] Perhaps what Lucier[A] is suggesting, by constantly recording and

replaying on tape his statement, is that there is something automated in himself—a ghost

in the "machine" that is Lucier. Lucier[S], it seems, can be planned and programmed, but

not fully controlled, by Lucier[A].

Not many readers of the piece have commented on Lucier's authorship as a

performer, nor on the fact that he wrote the text with himself as performer in mind. This

self-relation at display in Lucier's recordings can be unnerving while listening if one

recognizes the stutter as unwanted exposure. On the other hand, one might interpret the

piece as *wanted* unwanted exposure. As a listener, am I witnessing a bit of catharsis for

Lucier? While this question might seem irrelevant to most of *Sitting*'s interpreters, the

interpretative maneuver to ignore his intentions in performing leaves the compositional

agency of Lucier[S], the performer and programmer, unaccounted for. For Lucier, the

performance of *Sitting* may well have been therapeutic, transforming disability into

possibility by creating a safe situation in which he could be mindful of "his" stutter. This

technique of "voluntary" or "intentional stuttering" has been shown to have therapeutic

benefit.[137]

The fact that Lucier was planning his *own* performance, however, does not

become part of his planned statement, which is entirely about the execution and listening

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Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art (New York: Continuum, 2010), 127–28.

[136] Brandon LaBelle gestures to this gap in his reading of *Sitting* as "impelled by a certain relation to lack"; see LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 126–27.

[137] Charles Van Riper is normally credited with prescribing "voluntary stuttering" as a therapeutic strategy; see Van Riper, *The Treatment of Stuttering* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973); see also Heather L. Grossman, "Voluntary Stuttering: A Mixed Methods Investigation" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Louisiana at LaFayette, 2008).

of the recording at the highly present moment of enunciation and listening: "I am

sitting in a room different from the one you are in *now*." Because he deflects attention

away from his own intentions, it's easy to miss how Lucier marked his recordings as

definitive through the stamp of his stutter, the obtrusive irregularity of Lucier[5]'s voice.

By organizing the parameters of an unknowable process in advance, and letting

technology spontaneously execute these plans beyond their control, Reich and Lucier

both exhibit here the managerial role of the experimental composer, as Eno describes it in

"Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts." Their limited ability to control the

sound of the piece, once it begins sounding, is made evident through the spectacular

framing of automated playback in these works. By staging automated electronics as the

primary agents of sonic development, these composers find beauty in playback

technology's potential autonomy from communicative or expressive intention. At the

same time, these framings of playback technology deliver a tacit instruction to listeners

who might feel impatient at the slowness of the sonic development, or the seeming

inactivity of the music. As with *Discreet Music*, lengthy automated repetitions can

translate for listeners as a message to sit with the sound of the recording, and give time

for interest to bloom.

These composers' statements about their pieces—in Reich's and Eno's cases,

external to the recording's sonic frame, while in Lucier's case, internal—also depict their

authors as privy to the influence of unforeseen factors in the recording process:

technological imperfections (Reich), bodily irruptions (Lucier), everyday interruptions

(Eno). This openness to environmental "error" or "variety" displays these authors as good

Cagean listeners, respectful of the spontaneous nature of things "being themselves." At the same time, such presentations divert attention away from these authors' actual control as planners and programmers, as well as from the cultural and institutional authority that allows them to issue their experiments as worth hearing.

In the cases of both Reich and Eno, these narratives further allowed them to assert authorship of their techniques and ideas in light of similarly made music. For both composers, Terry Riley's time lag accumulator improvisations were especially close in conception, and to some extent sound; compare, for example, *Discreet Music*'s overlapping synth woodwind sounds to Riley's delay-echoed soprano saxophone and electric organ in *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* (1968; recorded for *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, Columbia Masterworks, 1969). Eno's *Discreet Music* recordings also bear similarities in their modal consonance, smooth textures, and irregular repetitions to other pre-existing compositions that appear on the Obscure Records series, such as Hobbs's *MacCrimmon Will Never Return* (1970–73) and Bryars's *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969). These composers, by showing themselves as uniquely witnessing technologies independently at play, rewrite their plans as emergent from personal circumstance, rather than from considered engagement with pre-existing and contemporaneous musical practices. Such narratives helped mobilize these recordings' techniques and styles as individually authored, rather than creatively appropriated, once Reich and Eno brought these ideas outside of the art institution into the market of popular music listeners.

Art into Pop: Locating *Discreet Music*'s Social Pleasures

> I was taught in art school that process is everything, which is another way of saying that having an idea is enough. Since I'm basically lazy, I liked that idea, but I no longer think it's true.

—Brian Eno, 1981 interview[138]

For Brian Eno, the popular music market represented and acted as a cultural environment wherein the concepts and techniques of experimental art could thrive. Consider this reflection in a notebook of Eno's during the Roxy period, dated 1972, titled "SERIOUS MUSIC BACKGROUND/ROCK MUSIC BACKGROUND":

> [Roxy Music] deliberately set out to construct music that wasted no facet of our different musical backgrounds. We wanted to operate primarily in the rock music context—that is, we wanted this music to be available through extended channels open to rock music which are not open to the more esoteric musics. We regard the rock idea as a system that can be programmed in many different ways—we choose to program it with not only the jazz, rock, blues tradition, but also with the less familiar 'serious' music tradition. We want to handle the visceral/physical as well as the spiritual and conceptual. As regards our musical backgrounds we split equally between the two areas.[139]

Eno imagined popular music as a cultural store of ideas and sounds that could serve Roxy Music as a "system" for "programming" with ideas and sounds from "serious" music. To recall Eno's phrasing from the "Generating" essay, rock acted as a "set of opportunities, around which [Roxy Music] will shape and adjust its own identity."[140]

Eno's earlier art school notebooks offered a more concise statement of purpose in this regard: here, Eno joyfully gushed, with cybernetic flair, that popular music could serve both as environment and source of dynamism for his musical systems: "Pop looks like / becoming my container, / not to mention contingent."[141] At times, he described this dynamism as a mutual overlap between the worlds of serious and popular music. Experimental composition, he now recalls, was full of "ideas there that were ripe for

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[138] Robert Palmer, "Brian Eno, New Guru of Rock, Going Solo," *New York Times*, March 13, 1981, sec. C.

[139] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 348.

[140] Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 283.

[141] Ibid., 343.

plucking;" at the same time, "there were so many practical approaches to music that

pop musicians knew about, that the avant-gardists didn't. And I really thought that my

mission was to get these two separate bodies of knowledge melded together in some

way."[142] Yet more often, Eno regarded his activity as importing the ideas of avant-garde

art into a pop music market. As he put it in 1977, "I know a lot of people think that I'm

trying to elevate rock into the Fine Arts…. Well, in fact I'm actually more interested in

doing the opposite. I'm more interested in relegating the Fine Arts from their sanctified

position into something that people enjoy doing and seeing, something which forms a

part of their social behaviour and social discourse."[143] As Eno describes it here, the

popular music market circulates on a sensuous and social sort of enjoyment that the

serious art world cannot well accommodate. Bringing the ideas of experimental music

into this market, for Eno, meant translating it into something that could produce pleasure,

and thereby carry social agency or power.

The British rock music industry in the mid-'70s made this possible, if only due to

the currency of Eno's authorship at the time. Eno's last name, by the time *Discreet Music*

came out, was already a successful brand. His time with Roxy Music brought Eno fame

on par with singer Bryan Ferry's, and his early records earned him clout as an art rock

auteur in the high-middlebrow rock underground.[144] Obscure Records could only have

been instantiated on Eno's backing; as Nyman wrote at the time of its release, "It's

obviously because he's a rock star that Island agreed to entrust him with a project like

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[142] Bracewell, *Re-make/Re-model*, 242.

[143] Caroline Coon, "The Brian Eno Interview," *Ritz*, 1977, Rock's Backpages, http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-brian-eno-interview.

[144] On the emergence of high-middlebrow rock criticism in the U.S. during the late 1960s, see Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, 190–93.

[Obscure Records]."[145] Because of this clout, Eno was able to import experimental

minimalism into the pop music market through both business and compositional

channels. He defends his appropriation of minimalism by deferring to pop convention:

"In pop nobody has any embarrassment about copying. In fact, that's how it works:

'That's a good sound. How do we do that?' They don't chuck one sound out to take

another. They let it in."[146] Eno consolidated these developments on *Discreet Music* and

the Obscure label, bringing to the pop market recordings of pieces such as John Cage's *In

a Landscape* (1948), John White's *Drinking and Hooting Machine* (1968), and Michael

Nyman's *1-100* (1975). Eno imagined these works as approachable for a broad popular

music audience; as Bryars explains, "[Eno] was convinced that the kind of music that had

affected him was completely approachable and was not at all alienating in the way that

much avant-garde music was at that time."[147] Perhaps Eno also thought that the works of

English experimentalists like White and Nyman would be better appreciated among

popular music audiences than they were within the international avant-garde; as he noted

of Nyman's piece in 1976, *1-100* is "extremely beautiful to listen to—a factor which

seems to carry little critical weight at present."[148]

  In various interviews, Eno has explained his switch from the art to the pop realm

as a process of translating the intellectualism of experimental art into sensuous feeling.

He attributes this shift in thinking to recordings by popular musicians such as Velvet

Underground and The Who, which helped him realize the importance of creating

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[145] Nyman, "Music [Obscure Records]," 259.
[146] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 79.
[147] Bryars, email message to author.
[148] Eno, "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts," 282.

"sensuous" art, or art that appeals to the senses, in a way that the experimental art of

his art school years didn't.[149] He attests to wanting *Discreet Music* to sit on the

"borderline" between strict avant-garde process and sensuous pop invitation to the

listener.

> I must say that I'd always go for a sensuous sound when making a piece. In *Discreet Music* I was very concerned to make something that wasn't uncomfortable. It's intended as music you don't have to concentrate on. It's like adding to your ambience, changing the condition of the room a little bit. If you want to focus on another level, there's a set of ideas that are interesting in terms of systems working like Steve Reich's piece *It's Gonna Rain*. And to stop it being monotonous— and, I suppose, completely ignorable—I did make changes during the piece. This touching up is very much a philistine idea in the experimental composer's terms; it's wanting to entertain. But I think that borderline area is a very interesting one.[150]

The "changes" he refers to, perhaps "philistine" from the point of view of the '70s avant-

garde, might include the variable and inviting shifts in timbre that Eno performed over

the course of the "Discreet Music" recording. Eno has often defended his abandonment of

strict process in this way, commenting that "if something doesn't jolt your senses, forget

it. It's got to be seductive."[151] Eno regarded his stance as a revolt against the hard

intellectualism of experimental composition. "I think the trouble with almost all

experimental composers is that they're all head, dead from the neck down," he said in

1979. "They don't trust their hearts, I think, and tend to take themselves with a solemnity

so extreme as to be downright preposterous. I don't see the point, really. I've always

abandoned pieces which succeeded theoretically but not sensually."[152] This stance

sparked controversy when Eno articulated it in his "Studio" lecture at the New Music,

New York festival in 1979; as Tom Johnson of the Village Voice wrote in his review of

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[149] MacDonald, "Before and After Science," 31.
[150] Jack, "'I Want to Be a Magnet for Tapes.'"
[151] Steven Grant, "Brian Eno Against Interpretation," *Trouser Press*, August 1982, 29.
[152] Bangs, "Brian Eno: A Sandbox in Smallville."

the festival, Eno "arrogantly" insisted that experimental music "involves too much intellect and not enough sensuality."[153]

Such statements might seem strange coming from one of rock's most notorious eggheads. Nevertheless, Eno has explained how his interest in minimalism arises as much out of personal taste as it does from conceptual intrigue. He has surmised, for instance, that the work of Young and Reich "produced in me a taste for simplicity, I think, rather than complexity," he explains, "a taste for repetition rather than variation."[154] In fact, Eno's taste for sensuous simplicity seems to have predated his encounters with Young and Reich; he has mentioned, for instance, how he wanted to be an artist at the age of 9 at the sight of a Piet Mondrian painting.[155] Such taste for simplicity was also observed by one of Eno's interviewers in 1977, when he noted the decoration of Eno's living space. "Everything about Eno's flat breathes a kind of sensuous asceticism," the interviewer wrote. "The colors are quiet blues and browns. Objects are at a minimum. Records and books are assigned three shelves…. Everything else is pallid, unobtrusive, and mutable."[156] For Eno, minimalism across visual art and music appears to have offered him a style, a way of projecting a sense of selfhood, through elegant simplicity.

However, it wasn't until the 1980s that Eno began reflecting upon minimalism's visceral, personal appeal as an aesthetic. By then, Eno had taken some flack from rock musicians and journalists who found the pacifying nature of his Ambient records unnerving. Lester Bangs, for instance, wrote that these recordings' calmness "makes you

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[153] Tom Johnson, "New Music New York New Institution," in *The Voice of New Music: New York City, 1972–1982* (Eindhoven, The Netherlands: Het Apollohuis, 1989), 398.
[154] Aikin, "Brian Eno," 60.
[155] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 24.
[156] Rose, "Scaramouche of the Synthesizer," 70.

sometimes wonder if [Eno] couldn't go merrily along creating his pleasant little

ambient tapes under the most totalitarian regime, which leads you to further speculate

that it might have been amoral in the first place."[157] Eno, in response, later justified his

actions as an antidote to the self-importance and narcissism he perceived in aggressively

political rock music. He explained how Ambient music, and the compositional strategies

of making it, resulted from a principled anti-individualism, a concerted effort to see

himself less as a self-contained author, and more as a product of his environment. This

way of working with one's environment "has political resonances," says Eno. "The

decision to stop seeing yourself as the centre of the world, to see yourself as part of the

greater flow of things, as having limited options and responsibility for your actions—the

converse of that 'me' generation, 'do your own thing' idea—that is political theory, and

it's what the music grows from."[158] Yet while Eno says this sort of music "grows from"

political theory, this growth seems to have initially come from an instinctive, rather than

considered place. "One of the nice things about the kind of music I'm doing now," as he

later put it, "is that it makes me feel quite unimportant. I like that feeling."[159]

Music to make you feel unimportant… discreet… obscure… could this be the sort

of sensuous appeal Eno was importing into the pop world with *Discreet Music* and the

rest of Obscure Records? Consider how so much of the systems-based music on the label,

including *Discreet Music*, involved some sort of independent technique or process that

organized the music, limiting the composers' ability to fully specify the sounding result.

Consider also how Eno conceived of his "vertical" music as anti-authoritarian in its non-

[157] Bangs, "Brian Eno: A Sandbox in Smallville."
[158] Mick Brown, "Life of Brian according to Eno," *Arts Guardian*, May 1, 1982.
[159] Jensen, "The Sound of Silence," 25.

hierarchical organization; rather than giving the listener an important "figure" to identify with, the music is all ground, emptied of overt subjective presence. And consider the narratives around "Discreet Music," in which Eno appears less agentive than the automated technologies that brought the recording into being. Eno, it would seem, had been working out "that feeling" for a while.

Over the next two chapters, I will identify some different ways in which feeling unimportant, anonymous, and immaterial manifests in Eno's and others' Ambient music, and how this affective ideal connects with the social positions and countercultural identifications of Ambient music's creators and listeners. Here, I will begin by noting how this feeling partly derives from what's commonly noted as a defining characteristic of minimalist art: its impersonality.

Barbara Rose, in her 1965 essay on minimalist visual art—she then called it "ABC Art"—found minimalist painting and sculpture interesting in their "blandness" and "neutrality," and argued that the "denial of content" in fact constitutes their content.[160] As Edward Strickland put it, minimalist visual art and music alike strike a "tone" of impersonality by "simulat[ing] an autonomy from the human will."[161] Richard Taruskin has similarly observed that minimalist music, in conspicuous contrast to the political

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[160] Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," in *Minimalism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 281.
[161] Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 7 and 292.

turbulence of its historical origins, maintains "coolness" and "detachment" throughout.[162] And indeed, "impersonality" appears as a refrain across Steve Reich's own writings and interviews, in particular "Music as a Gradual Process," in which he claimed that gradual processes give the listener "direct contact with the impersonal."[163]

It's understandable that one might feel unimportant or immaterial in response to the perceived impersonality, coolness, and detachment of minimalist art. It might be less obvious, however, why one would like this feeling. As Anna Chave reflects in her critique of minimalist sculpture, museum patrons have commonly perceived minimalist objects as arrogant, cruel, and impenetrable, due to these objects' evident disinterest in spectators' subjectivity.[164] I would like to suggest, however, that this impersonality and detachment of minimalist art may allow some audiences to feel affirmed by it, not despite the way it blocks empathy, but paradoxically thanks to this blockage.

As Chave explains, minimalist art's impersonality conveys the authority of the objective (51). Few critics have noted the authority that such impersonality carries, despite the fact that many have perceived "neutrality" and "unfeelingness" in minimalist works (Ibid). Impersonality implies objectivity, and objectivity carries authority; as an ideal of human feeling, impersonality is the legacy of the Enlightenment, the *modus operandi* of the experimental scientist, and historically the dominion of educated white men. Minimalist sculpture, she suggests, draws upon this authority with its repetition of simple forms, its clean and clear sense of proportion, and its austere design, all in keeping

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[162] Richard Taruskin, "A Harmonious Avant-Garde?," *Music in the Late Twentieth-Century*, Vol. 6 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 354.

[163] Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process," 35.

[164] Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 55.

with the norms of classical European architecture (53). Through its classicism, such work draws upon an artistic history promoted by European intellectuals, and upon their existing institutional support in both fine and commercial art. Yet by disavowing the social life of these forms, authors of minimalist art often hide "the mechanisms by which [minimalism] has been elevated or empowered as a public statement of the first importance"—partly financial and institutional, but also affective and experiential (52).

While Chave's critique of minimalist sculpture may not translate perfectly to minimalist music,[165] the affective dimension of impersonality remains an indissoluble component of the minimalist listening experience. This holds for *Discreet Music*, and a great deal of Eno's Ambient music since. Yet I point this out not only to illustrate how this impersonality buttresses Eno's integrity as an experimental composer, but also to show how the detachment demonstrated through his compositional techniques, and transmitted affectively by his Ambient recordings, provide listeners with an affective means of personal identification and attachment to this music. In short, Ambient music's impersonality provides an affective passage for listener self-recognition and identification.

It also appears that Ambient music's quiet coolness might provide an especially appealing route of identification for listeners who socially command, with or without

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[165] Along these lines, Chave argues, minimalist art is reminiscent of technocratic authority, masculine force, and violence. It is less obvious how this aspect of Chave's argument relates to the enveloping modal consonance of Riley's *In C*, or to the gentle, even vulnerable minimalist tape pieces such as Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room*, Bryars's *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, and Eno's *Discreet Music*. Yet one might equally well relate this part of her critique, as does Peter Shelley, to how blisteringly loud Reich's and Young's early concerts were; see Shelley, "Rethinking Minimalism: At the Intersection of Music Theory and Art Criticism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 2013), 322–23.

their consent, the authority of the objective. In the industrialized West, these people

overwhelmingly tend to be educated, white, and male. It is not surprising that Ambient

fans commonly carry two, and very often all three of these traits (see Appendix, 345–47).

To individuals for whom objectivity is frequently assumed—and social importance is

regularly affirmed—Ambient music may offer feelings of self-recognition in this

objectivity, and yet also an individual escape route from it, an opportunity to disavow this

importance and "drop out" from the social responsibility it carries through identification

with this art's detachment. In one sense, this observation aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's

observation that a bodily *habitus* of detachment, by symbolically demonstrating one's

distance from economic necessity, also shows one's taste as objective.[166] Yet while

Bourdieu emphasizes how taste manifests as a social attitude that covertly expresses and

legitimates the subject's importance, allowing them to maintain cultural capital and social

superiority in the social world, I would like to emphasize how minimalist art viscerally

appeals through a feeling of *withdrawal* from the social world. This appeal,

paradoxically, arises out of a social feeling of recognition in experiencing the object's

autonomy from the human. (I return to this idea in Chapter 7.)

These observations should not indict Eno, nor his fans, nor *Discreet Music*; nor

should they reaffirm the historical associations between the subject position of the

educated white man and authority. Rather, they emphasize the significance of subjective

identification and pleasure in the experience of artworks that assume neutrality,

impersonality, objectivity, and universality. By "subjectivizing" sounds that might be

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[166] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1979; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 53–54.

received as objective, I hope to decenter the authority these sounds carry, while yet

understanding their experience as a social pleasure. As Hazel V. Carby argues in her

critique of multiculturalism, discourses around socialization can only be equitable once

we recognize "the white point in space from which we tend to identify difference."[167]

Along these lines, I hope that emphasizing the pleasure of self-recognition in seemingly

impersonal sound destabilizes the assumption that such attachments arise solely from

objective "interest" in "the work itself," or from the historical legitimacy of this interest.

Such an understanding can illuminate how the desire to abdicate authorship might be

related to the inheritance of social authority. It also shows how the urge to suspend taste

might come from personal preference, and how austere art may be enjoyed, desirously

and sensuously, as self disappearing into the objective. In arguing that these desires may

derive, paradoxically, from the assumption of one's social importance, this argument

ultimately aims to particularize sounds assumed to be universal, familiarize sounds

assumed to be strange, and locate in social space a type of music assumed to be ambient.

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[167] Hazel V. Carby, "The Multicultural Wars," *Radical History Review* 54 (1992): 12.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 6-7

Ambient Music as Popular Genre: Foreground

Ambient was but one of many musical genres that emerged largely thanks to the mass availability of commercial synthesizers and samplers in the U.S. and Western Europe over the 1970s and '80s. As these technologies became more and more affordable and versatile, recordings of immersive drone- and repetition-based electronic music proliferated, a growth that still shows no signs of slowing down. The term "Ambient," however, has only accompanied a select number of musics in this wave, despite some authors' catchy-but-misleading tendency to describe this entire spread as such.[1]

These last chapters address two key points at which "Ambient" emerged in the popular music market as a way of denoting a specific type of music: 1) in 1978, when Brian Eno initiated his *Ambient* series of records for use as "atmosphere"; and 2) at the turn of the 1990s, when The Orb floated the term as a way of describing a new variety of house music for "chilling out." These analyses trace closely the musical and promotional terms through which "Ambient" emerged, as well as the contexts of reception wherein it gained currency, with the aim of narrowing the potentially nebulous, even limitless ascription of the genre term to most any "atmospheric" electronic recording.

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[1] Mark Prendergast, *The Ambient Century: From Mahler to Trance: The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2000); David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995). Jonathan W. Bernard bizarrely takes Prendergast's and Toop's assessments as evidence of avant-garde minimalism's universal influence on late 20th-century pop, with no consideration of the roles of technology or preexisting popular music on either; see Bernard, "Minimalism and Pop: Influence, Reaction, Consequences," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll Ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 337–55.

CHAPTER 6

Placing Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*

Although *Discreet Music* was Brian Eno's first solo Ambient LP, many now

consider his *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (Editions E.G., 1978) a watershed in the

development of Ambient music. For one, the album kicked off the four-part series of

Ambient LPs (1978–82) in which Eno and collaborators[1] sketched out several forms

Ambient music might take (Fig 6.1). It also included Eno's now-famous "Ambient

Music" essay in the liner notes announcing the new coinage. Ambient recordings, it

read, would serve as "original pieces ostensibly (but not exclusively) for particular

times and situations with a view to building up a small but versatile catalogue of

environmental music suited to a wide variety of moods and atmospheres."[2]

The concept and title of Eno's album played off common cultural associations in

the West between programmed music, industry, and "technocratic" human

management.[3] Not only did he promote its use in industrialized public spaces, but he

also presented it through contrast with Muzak—the music of the "Establishment" if

there ever was one.[4] The "music for" title also recalled the mood music records title

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[1] These include minimalist composer-performers Harold Budd and Laraaji, as well as
various other performers and producers on Eno's solo albums.

[2] Brian Eno, liner notes to *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, Editions E.G. AMB 001, LP,
1978.

[3] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic
Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5–
6.

[4] Consumers suspicious of industry likely would have seen Muzak as critic Stephen
Barnes described it: "A nonverbal symbol of scientific triumph and authority, of
technological power designed ultimately to maintain the present social order." Stephen

albums whose easy-listening recordings practically defined "square" for the '60s

countercultural consumer. And Eno's thoroughly un-hip proposal somewhat followed

on his (perhaps disingenuous) earlier intention to produce "disposable albums":

> I want to make records to get up with for a couple of weeks…. Just another level, like having nice curtains or nice lights in the room. I'd sell them very cheap in a plain package that says *Waking up Music, Breakfast Music*, that kind of thing. They'd be like ordinary records physically, they'd just not come with the aura of art, so one wouldn't be frightened of having the things for a couple of weeks and then getting rid of them.[5]

In this sense, *Music for Airports* turned on Roxy Music's prior aesthetic of superficial

disposability with its own overt functionalism, carrying an air of knowing irony. Yet in

its claim to aesthetic superiority over "conventional background music," as well as the

auteurisme carried by the Eno brand, the album also carried an air of distinction.

Anahid Kassabian, Joseph Lanza, and Timothy Morton have since have

contested Eno's presumption that Muzak, and other easy-listening musics made for

background use, were and are patently uninteresting.[6] From their perspectives, Eno's

claim to Ambient's aesthetic interest was self-inflated in relation to the broader history

of music used or heard as ambience. Ambient music has little practical relevance to

contemporary genre distinctions, they argue, other than to mark the superiority of its

listeners' (and Eno's) tastes to those of listeners who treat easy-listening musics as

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H. Barnes, *Muzak: The Hidden Messages in Music*, vol. 9, Studies on the History and Interpretation of Music (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 135.
[5] David Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach: The Life and Times of Brian Eno* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 243.
[6] Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Joseph Lanza, *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong* (New York: Picador, 1995); Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 152–53.

"interesting." Yet this critique, while rightly questioning Ambient music's exceptional

listenability, insinuates that Ambient music should sustain interest in the same

situations, in the same ways, and for the same audiences as other musics designed for

atmospheric use in public places. This idea is understandable, since the Muzak

comparison was initially made by none other than Eno himself—and on an album titled

Music for Airports, no less. Yet while Eno went on to produce and commercially release

many Ambient records beyond the introductory *Ambient* series, he would not again

release another title album "for" a particular space until the year 2000.
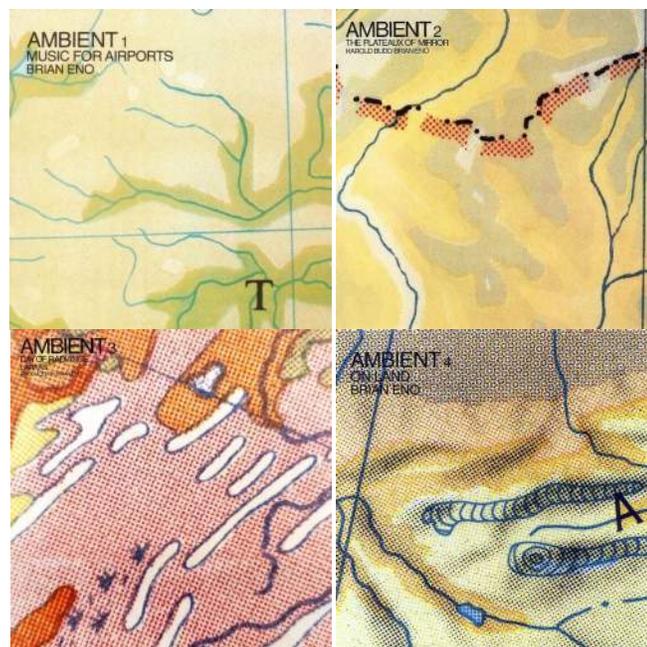
Fig 6.1. Brian Eno's *Ambient* series (Editions E.G., 1978–82).

In this chapter, I argue that Ambient music's aesthetic significance as a genre

would be best considered not within the reception context of music administered in

public places, but rather through the selective, individualized, and private practices of

record consumption. Heard in this context, certain themes and affective threads emerge from the music as uniquely important to the Ambient genre formation. Through a comparative diachronic analysis with Ambient group The Black Dog's 2010 release, *Music for Real Airports*, I illustrate how Eno's *Music for Airports* established these themes and moods, setting the terms by which Ambient music would continue its relevance as a popular genre into the present day.

Music for *Real* Airports?

On April 24, 2010, electronic musicians Martin Dust, Richard Dust, and Ken Downie, together known as The Black Dog, previewed their forthcoming LP, *Music for Real Airports*, to a sold-out gallery audience in their hometown of Sheffield, England. They treated the audience to a live mix of field recordings and musical snippets from the album, many of which were created on the musicians' smartphones, portable keyboards, and laptops in (real) airports as they waited to catch their next flight. The group presented their set in conjunction with live-mixed digital animations by Human, a local visual design team.[7] They released the album commercially two weeks later on Soma Quality Recordings, a Glaswegian independent label, to critical praise.[8]

As a description of the sounds involved, however, the album title is a bit

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[7] For a short video documenting the event, featuring a sampling of various tracks from the album, see "Music For Real Airports—Launch Event—Millennium Gallery, Sheffield," last modified May 20, 2010, http://vimeo.com/11892866.

[8] Daniel Petry, review of *Music for Real Airports* (LP), by The Black Dog, *Resident Advisor*, May 3, 2010, http://www.residentadvisor.net/review-view.aspx?id=7404; Robin Jahdi, review of *Music for Real Airports* (LP), by The Black Dog, *FACT*, July 14, 2010, http://www.factmag.com/2010/07/14/the-black-dog-music-for-real-airports/; Colin McKean, review of *Music for Real Airports* (LP), by The Black Dog, *The Quietus*, May 25, 2010, http://thequietus.com/articles/04326-the-black-dog-music-for-real-airports-album-review.

misleading, given that The Black Dog did not intend it to be played at or in actual

airports. As their promo notes asserted, "This record is not a utilitarian accompaniment

to airports, in the sense of reinforcing the false utopia and fake idealism of air travel."[9]

Rather than romanticize for travelers the flight experience (something commercial

airlines and airports do enough in selling their services, the group says), *Real Airports*

coldly reflects upon the calculative control and bureaucratic management airports

impose on their public. Their aim in making the record, as one member put it, was to

"create a really intense, enjoyable experience that reminds people of how they're

actually being treated and what they are being subjected to, and paying for."[10] The track

titles paint the musical progression from start to finish as a trudge through some of the

least appealing, yet common fixtures of airport experience, from information desks to

passport control, strip lighting, sleep deprivation, and nervousness over delays. The

album's successively apprehensive, nervy, tense, and weary electronica delivers as

disenchanting and dispiriting an experience as airports provide at their antiseptic,

authoritarian worst. The band's description of airports in promotions could as well

apply to the music it advertises: "Airports promise travel, exploration and excitement

but endlessly break that promise with their stale, tedious pressure. They are intense and

overwhelming environments."[11] No wonder when asked whether the album was made

for listening in airports, Ken Downie half jokingly answered, "Being in an airport is bad

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[9] The Black Dog, "Music for Airports - Please Wait Here," *Internet Archive*, last modified January 21, 2013, http://web.archive.org/web/20130121072521/http://www.musicforrealairports.com/live/index.php.

[10] The Black Dog and Human, "Music for Real Airports," *Article Magazine*, April 22, 2010, 58.

[11] The Black Dog, "Music for Airports - Please Wait Here."

enough. Listening to *Music for Real Airports* in a real airport would make me want to punch somebody."[12]

Although calling the album "for real airports" partly reflects this facetious attitude, the title's wording chiefly refers, of course, to Eno's *Music for Airports*. As The Black Dog's promo notes explain, *Real Airports* was intended as a riposte to Eno's project: "Unlike Eno's *Music for Airports*, this is not a record to be used by airport authorities to lull their customers."[13] The group's provocation serves as a foil for my analysis and interpretation of Eno's landmark album, since their charge illuminates several tensions regarding the uses, modes of application, sites of reception, and effects of Ambient music recordings more broadly. A comparative analysis illustrates how Eno's album not only evokes anxieties surrounding the administration of environmental experience, but also thematizes them in a way that is broadly characteristic of the Ambient genre.

Certain Uncertainties and Uncertain Certainties in *Music for Airports*

As Eno has explained in interviews, the inspiration for *Music for Airports* arose during a stop at Flughafen Köln/Bonn (the Cologne/Bonn Airport) on a clear, sunny Sunday morning in late 1977.

> The light was beautiful; everything was beautiful, except they were playing awful music. And I thought, there's something completely wrong that people don't think about the music that goes into situations like this. You know, they spend hundreds of millions of pounds on the architecture, on everything, except the music. The music comes down to someone bringing in a tape of their favorite songs this week, and sticking them in, and the whole airport is filled with

[12] Chris Hobson, "Music by Real People for Real People (in Real Airports)," *MNML SSGS*, June 8, 2010, accessed December 16, 2013, http://mnmlssg.blogspot.com/2010/06/music-by-real-people-for-real-people-in.html.
[13] The Black Dog, "Music for Airports - Please Wait Here."

this sound. So, I thought, it would be interesting to start writing music for public spaces like that.[14]

Over the next several months, Eno produced four tape loop-based tracks as alternatives to what he perceived to be a naïve or thoughtless approach to music used in airports. Unlike said music, as the liner notes explain, Ambient music is meant to be "ignorable as it is interesting," and should "induce calm and a space to think."

Given the slow to moderate pacing and overall sonic consistency of each of its recordings, one can easily imagine how the album would be heard as lulling from a critical point of view such as The Black Dog's. Each track establishes early on an invariant texture and melodic range, as well as a contained repertory of pitches, gestural shapes, and motivic content, which last throughout its entirety. Each recording also sits within a narrow dynamic range and avoids timbral distortion. In this way, the recordings on *Music for Airports* quickly instill certainty about how they will continue to sound over their entire course, and can seem unchallenging for this reason. Perhaps because of these consistencies, many of *Music for Airports*'s earliest reviewers derided the album as bland. *Rolling Stone*'s Michael Bloom called the album "unfocused… aesthetic white noise," and about "as utilitarian as they come"; while *New York Times*'s Ken Emerson quipped that its "hues are as faint as the flavor of those Japanese teas so

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[14] Brian Eno, interview by Martin Large, "Opening Holland Festival," NOS (Netherlands Broadcasting Foundation), June 5, 1999. It's unclear whether Eno's characterization of programmed music here is retrospectively projecting a more contemporary "foreground music" approach to programmed music onto that particular day.

delicate you're never quite sure you aren't just simply sipping hot water."[15] Lynden

Barber suggested that the "simply ignorable" album's "white-tiled atmosphere" could

have earned it the title "Music for Toilets"; and Robert Christgau registered it,

pointedly, "a bore."[16]

From the point of view of environmental music design for public spaces, such

"boring" consistencies make sense, as they allow passersby to enter and leave the field

of sound without leaving them feeling like they have missed out on anything. The

music's unobtrusive and predictable features also work together to assure auditors that

the music will continue in such a fashion, facilitating attentional freedom while

listening. Yet The Black Dog may have had a point—feelings of assurance are precisely

what market researchers in the 1950s and '60s found to be conducive to consumer

cooperation and the purchase of services and goods in commercial spaces.[17] In much

programmed music of the 20th century, this sense of security resulted from the

familiarity of the song, which signaled that the listener was "at home" in public; as

Ronald Radano describes of Muzak's instrumental standards, well-known tunes

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[15] Michael Bloom, "Ambient 1: Music for Airports," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1979, 80; Ken Emerson, "Brian Eno Slips into 'Trance Music,'" *New York Times*, August 12, 1979, sec. D.

[16] Lynden Barber, "Atmospheres in the Home," *NME*, 1982, http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/rvonland.html; Robert Christgau, "Christgau's Consumer Guide," *Village Voice*, August 31, 1982.

[17] Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 78; Adrian C. North and David J. Hargreaves, "Music in Business Environments," in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, ed. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 107-09.

functioned as a "security blanket" in public spaces.[18] Likewise, comfort may arise from the social identifications tied to musical preferences, and activated through stylistic conventions. Tia DeNora and Jonathan Sterne have explained how programmed music's stylistic associations regulate and program retail space by marking out social areas in which consumers may find their identities recognized and affirmed.[19] Yet while *Music for Airports*, too, works to soothe (perhaps even "lull") its listeners, it accomplishes this differently from most programmed music, not so much by sounding familiar as by reliably serving as a consistent feature of the auditory environment.

Despite *Music for Airports*'s recordings' exceptional consistency over time, however, various airport listener accounts give reason to question the extent to which Eno's album ameliorates anxiety and proffers a sense of security. When Eno's music was first installed in New York's LaGuardia Airport in 1980, some airport workers and travelers complained of the music inducing uneasiness.[20] As one reported, "It sounds like funeral music."[21] Its later installation in Pittsburgh International Airport allegedly garnered requests for the usual background music to be restored.[22] And if that weren't enough, in 1984 the music sparked protest from employees at Berlin's Tegel Airport

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[18] Ronald M. Radano, "Interpreting Muzak: Speculations on Musical Experience in Everyday Life," *American Music* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 456.

[19] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 109; Jonathan Sterne, "Sounds like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space," *Ethnomusicology* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 29.

[20] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 279.

[21] George Rush, "Brian Eno: Rock's Svengali Pursues Silence," *Esquire*, December 1982, 28.

[22] Lanza, *Elevator Music*, 198.

who were annoyed by the acoustic "interference."[23]

How are these decidedly non-calm reactions to be explained? A closer examination of *Music for Airports*'s recordings provides some clues. While these tracks promote an overarching feeling of stability by constraining the parameters of global, or long-term change, a number of local, or short-term variabilities keep the music from resting on certain ground. Although the sounds used in each recording remain within a single modal pitch collection, the irregular, seemingly unmotivated oscillations between major and minor sonorities within each collection lend the music an emotional mercuriality. And although the non-periodicity of repeated sonic iterations relieves the listener of expecting their metric placement, micro-variations in timing and timbre become progressively more and more evident in attentive listening as each sonic gesture dissipates into indefinitely long echoes. Such irregularities produce ripples and layers of uncertainty within an overall stable texture, generating just enough light turbulence to keep those on board with the music from nodding off. Though seemingly weightless and placid at a distance, the music remains astir and amiss, maybe fostering an uncanny sense that something isn't quite right underneath it all.

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[23] Ursula Frohne, "Brian Eno: Tegel Airport, Institute Unzeit, Berlin," *FlashArt*, May 1984, 43.

Ex. 6.1. Transcription of "2/1" [0:00–1:40].[24]

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[24] Open noteheads indicate pitches' initiation; closed noteheads indicate their ending; the bars in between indicate the length of their sustain. Open noteheads in parentheses indicate an overtone or "ghost" pitch; dotted lines indicate the length of their sustain.

Of all the *Airports* recordings, the ghostly "2/1" perhaps contributed most overtly to the discomfort expressed by airport workers and patrons (Ex. 6.1). For this track, Eno recorded onto tape three females singing notes from a D Ionian/F Aeolian pitch collection, in unison and *non-vibrato*, on the syllable "ah." Eno then edited these pitches into tape segments, with long gaps of "silent" tape about twice the length of each pitch, following end of each. The final recording is almost entirely automated,[25] with eight segments looping simultaneously. Due to the loops' irregular, uneven lengths, the voices overlap into slightly different configurations over the course of the piece. (Table 6.1 shows the approximate length of each loop.) At times, this results in silent gaps arising at unpredictable intervals between sounding "patches" of layered voices; the durations of sounding material in the first two minutes, for example, proceed as follows: 13″—25″—31″—5″—12″—37″. The pitches used also give reason for the "funereal" association; while the overall composition tends toward F Aeolian, due to the F3s in the bass, the occasional appearance of the Db can imply a major subtonic triad or seventh chord (VI or VI[7]) that usually proceeds back to the implied F tonic (e.g. 0:48; 1:20). Philip Tagg, who (after Alf Björnberg) termed this i-VI oscillation the "Aeolian pendulum," has noted its associations with ominousness, resignation, or death in

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[25] I say "almost entirely" due to Eno's editing in post-production. In addition to the added effects (slow decays, reverb), he occasionally adds tones (often tones an octave above the F3 or Ab3), and drops notes (e.g. the C5 that should sound around 2:55). As Eno comments in one interview, "A lot of the so-called systems composers have this thing that the system is always right. You don't fiddle with it at all. Well, I don't think that…. If for some reason you don't like a bit of it you must trust your intuition on that. I don't take a doctrinaire approach to systems." Glenn O'Brien, "Eno at the Edge of Rock," *Interview*, June 1978, 31.

European and U.S. American music.[26] (An Aeolian pendulum famously starts Chopin's *Marche funèbre*, or Funeral March.) Scott Murphy has more recently illustrated a corollary to Tagg's finding, as he has found the mirror-image triadic pairing of I-iii frequently accompanying scenes of loss or grief in film and television scores.[27] This movement might be observed in the slow movement from Db Major to F minor, if Db is heard as a temporary (or possibly global) tonic.

F3	Ab3	C4	Db4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	C5
24½″	21″	20″	31½″	16½″	19″	18″	31″

Table 6.1. Approximate length of each voice loop in "2/1."

Added sixths, sevenths, ninths, and elevenths above the bass also create mild harmonic dissonance in each recording on *Music for Airports*, perhaps also occasionally leading to feelings of irresolution. Take "1/1," for instance, a track largely constructed through the recurring use of two similar-sounding melodic themes in D Mixolydian (marked T1 and T2 in Ex. 6.2 below). Both themes melodically elaborate a D major triad, with non-harmonic tones G and E operating as incomplete neighbors or passing tones. These melodic lines alternate with shorter melodic fragments and chords that occasionally utilize the G4 eleventh above the D bass. While the G4, in these instances,

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[26] Philip Tagg, "'Universal' Music and the Case of Death," *Critical Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1993): 54–98. See also Alf Björnberg, "On Aeolian Harmony in Contemporary Popular Music" (Department of Musicology, University of Göteborg, 1984), English translation available at http://www.tagg.org/others/othxpdfs/bjbgeol.pdf.
[27] Scott Murphy, "Scoring Loss in Some Recent Popular Film and Television," *Music Theory Spectrum* 36, no. 2 (2014): 295–314. Murphy gives some explanation for why I-vi does not carry similar associations, but barely comments on the more closely related i-VI.

do not necessarily call for a resolution to the third below (F#4), they don't necessarily

persist independently of their potential to resolve, due to their proximity and similarity

to the more "classically" resolving T1 and T2. For this reason, when the G4 does appear

outside the context of theme, as it does at 1:45, and between 2:00 and 2:15, it may seem

expectant, even without necessarily calling for a "proper" contrapuntal resolution.

Ex. 6.2. Reduction of "1/1" [1:30–2:30].

As mood music-aficionado Joseph Lanza observes, Eno's Ambient music

produces "a kind of sonic ambivalence that encourages grave contemplation of feelings

of impending doom…. Behind all of Eno's cold, metallic engineering is a frightening

and moody world that is anything but emotionally neutral."[28] Lanza's intense

description of Eno's music, along with the comments of the airport listeners, contrast

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[28] Lanza, *Elevator Music*, 196.

starkly with the unimpressed assessments of The Black Dog and *Music for Airports*'s

reviewers. While the latter hear Eno's album as neutrally utilitarian to the point of total

blandness, the former are palpably discomfited by Eno's musical ambience. Are they

really all talking about the same music?

One possibility is that, simply, no—they are not talking about the same music

exactly, but rather responding to different recordings within the same album, and taking

their affective qualities to be representative of the whole. Tracks "1/1" and "2/2" imply

global D Mixolydian and A Ionian modal areas, respectively, while tracks "2/1" and

"1/2" globally imply the more dour F Aeolian modal area (Ex. 6.3). Each track also

enjoys different combinations of timbral characteristics (Table 6.2). Generally, "1/1"

and "2/2"'s combination of more uplifting global modes with warmer timbres can feel

more inviting than "2/1" and "1/2"'s darker global modes and cold, dark timbres.

Ex. 6.3. Pitch repertories used on *Music for Airports*.

	Temperature	Luminance
"1/1"	Warm & Cold	Bright
"2/1"	Cold	Dark
"1/2"	Cold	Bright & Dark
"2/2"	Warm	Dark

Table 6.2. Timbral characteristics of *Music for Airports*'s recordings.[29]

Given their drastically divergent criticisms, *Airports*'s naysayers probably find different aspects of the music discomfiting against different backdrops of expectation. To a rock critic or anti-authoritarian musician, *Music for Airports* might offend with its generally dispassionate pleasantness and overarching predictability, rather than generate interest for those features that undercut these auras of certainty. By contrast, to the average airport passenger or light-music enthusiast, *Music for Airports* might come off as alienating, icy, and eerie in expectation of the extraverted, peppy nature of most other programmed musics. Either way, for the album's critics, the most salient aspects of the music's ambivalent moods appear to be those aspects that counteract the moods they would prefer to sustain—whether from antagonistic to complacent, or from assured to uncertain.

Distinctions

With this ambivalence in mind, I turn to Eno's "Ambient Music" essay for a closer look at the three main ways Eno distinguishes Ambient music from Muzak's

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[29] My determination of timbral characteristics is based on the tracks' spectral frequency distribution. My use of "temperature" and "luminance" as axes of timbral description are extrapolated from R.L. Pratt and P.E. Doak, "A Subjective Rating Scale for Timbre," *Journal of Sound and Vibration* 45, no. 3 (1976): 317–28. I do not include these authors' third dimension of timbral description, wealth (described in terms of "purity" vs. "richness"), which seems irrelevant to the discussion at hand.

"conventional background music." In the process, I refer to the recordings on *Music for Airports* not to ask whether they fulfill Eno's criteria, but instead to help articulate them.

> **1) Whereas the extant canned music companies proceed from the basis of regularizing environments by blanketing their acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncrasies, Ambient Music is intended to enhance these.**

Eno's first distinction might read blurrily as generalities about two different types of mass-reproduced musics for "ambient" use. How would any type of mass-reproduced recording *categorically* "enhance" an environment's "acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncrasies" once incorporated into that environment's unique space? Could any one musical genre feasibly guarantee to enhance equally well the audio-spatial idiosyncrasies of such diverse environments as airports, living rooms, Zen gardens, and, say, fraternity parties? Even beyond genre, wouldn't any musical recording necessarily "regularize" an acoustic environment according to its own sound, regardless of its properties or location? It can be hard to imagine any recording neatly fulfilling Eno's description of Ambient music.

The distinction reads more plainly if one imagines a type of environment with predictable "acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncrasies" for each Ambient record's use. In creating *Music for Airports*, for instance, Eno took into account the sorts of non-musical sounds that might affect one's experience of music in an airport, such as PA announcements, reasoning that the tracks on the album should be able to be interrupted "without suffering."[30] The music's consistent, "vertical" sound allows for interferences

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[30] "Brian Eno – Music for Airports Interview"

to occur without disturbing listeners' sense of musical continuity. Eno also figured that

its recordings should not resemble voice sounds, announced or otherwise, so listeners

don't confuse the two. For this reason, he ensured that the recordings' melodic gestures

would arise at different rates from phonemic patterns in speech.[31] Through

considerations such as these, Ambient recordings might account for acoustic content

common to a particular setting.

One might also more clearly apprehend Eno's claim in light of his interest in the

work of John Cage. As discussed in Chapter 4, the word "ambient" in Cage's work

connoted a lack of communicative intention between transmitter and listener.[32] Roughly

from the early 1950s on, Cage aimed to draw attention to the "ambient sounds" running

through what most call silence as a way of "waking up to the very life we're living."[33]

Eno's first distinction, taken as an offshoot of Cage's philosophy, suggests that silence

assumes a starring role in Ambient musical production. The actual sound of *Music for

Airports* confirms this: on first listen, the album can seem genuinely (if gently) shocking

for the amount of breathing room Eno gives to the gaps between sound events. "2/1" is

most notable in this regard. For its nearly 9 minute length, voices continually enter and

dissipate into an indefinite nothingness, sometimes to the point where their

reappearances seem like intrusions on palpable quietude. Other tracks, while not quite

so sparse, do not rush to fill the sonic canvas. In each, sonic gestures patiently await

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[31] Brian Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," interview by Anthony Korner, *Artforum* 24, no. 10, Summer 1986, 77.

[32] Eric De Visscher, "'There's No Such a Thing as Silence...': John Cage's Poetics of Silence," ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 129.

[33] John Cage, "Experimental Music," in Silence: Lectures and Writings (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961), 12.

their turn, giving prior sounds room to hang in the air, reverberating. Actually, most of

the tracks' "silences" are not totally silent, but rather filled with the impossibly long,

distant remainder of sounds, infusing and illuminating the spaces between sound events

with their pale hues and soft, shimmering decays. These reverberations lend *Music for*

Airports a lofty air as they waft into the tracks' overhead space, uninterrupted—unless,

of course, one only hears these silences in the Cageian sense, as teeming with ambient

sounds.

At the same time, if it clarifies Eno's distinction to understand Ambient music's

spaciousness as "enhancing" the acoustic space of audition, then it also extends a blind

spot of Cage's philosophy. Cage's conception of silence as giving up "everything that

belongs to humanity" necessarily excluded the social codes of auditory conduct

involved in intentional communication.[34] Thus, as Douglas Kahn has argued, Cage's

philosophy of silence was also a "silencing" of the expressive "sociality" of auditive

culture.[35] Eno's use of the word "environment" here similarly betrays a conception of

the term that, like Romantic notions of "nature," exempts intentional expressions or

depictions of social human culture from the concept of environmental space.

Ultimately, however, Eno had less interest in silencing or ignoring expressive

culture in the same sense that Cage did. Perhaps he would now concede that Ambient

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[34] Cage, "Experimental Music," 8.

[35] Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 161–99.

George E. Lewis observes how seemingly objective terms to describe sound, among which "ambient" might be counted, have allowed Cage and other experimentalists to consistently avoid acknowledging the seat of social power from which they define music; see Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91–122, esp. 99–103.

music does, in fact, "regularize" its environments, not only by becoming a "regular" feature of the auditory environment, but also in acting as a modifier and stabilizer of *mood*, or the affective undertone of an environment (see distinction #2). To "enhance" an environment's acoustic idiosyncrasies might thus mean to amplify or modify a social mood appropriate to that setting. As it turns out, this is where Eno's essay would go next.

2) Whereas conventional background music is produced by stripping away all sense of doubt and uncertainty (and thus all genuine interest) from the music, Ambient Music retains these qualities.

Eno's second distinction reveals, perhaps more than anything else in the essay, the sort of "interest" he had in mind with the phrase "as ignorable as it is interesting." It is also, perhaps, his vaguest claim. Just what would it mean for a type of music to "retain" a "sense of doubt and uncertainty"—retain from what, and about what? How would it convey this sense of doubt? And what makes doubt and uncertainty more "genuinely interesting" than their absence, anyway?

Eno has described his compositional activity as a process of discovering musical textures that bring out in him a predetermined mood or feeling.[36] "A composer, or any artist really, is a kind of curator of feelings," he once stated.[37] On the simplest level, then, "doubt and uncertainty" seem to describe the sorts of feelings Ambient music might evoke in the listener. The connection between musical texture and mood, however, might seem too mysterious or subjective to substantively qualify. Possibly due

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[36] Lee Moore, "Eno = MC Squared," *Creem*, November 1978, 67; Glenn O'Brien, "Eno at the Edge of Rock," *Interview*, June 1978, 31.
[37] Robert Palmer, "Brian Eno, New Guru of Rock, Going Solo," *New York Times*, March 13, 1981, C17.

to its seeming vagueness, critics and scholars of Ambient music have often passed this distinction over, focusing on chewier concepts like attentional variability. But what would it look like to more deeply investigate Eno's claim that Ambient music evokes feelings of doubt and uncertainty?

We might start with doubt and uncertainty themselves. Commonly, doubt and uncertainty are delivered to experience as emotions rather than moods. As Noël Carroll explains the difference, emotions are intentional, or directed toward particular objects, whereas moods are objectless affective frames through which cognition and emotion operate.[38] Doubt and uncertainty, as emotions, combine cognitive assurance about a stated, expected, or ideal state of affairs with skepticism, distrust, anxiety, or fear that the real state of affairs does not match this ideal. Doubt gets sparked when something seems "off" about the thing or state of affairs at hand, and yet the cause for suspicion cannot be detected or confirmed. Within the affective space of doubt lies a gap between what's expected and what's given, a gap that cannot be totally bridged through observation. In short, doubt involves the perception of a false or illusory appearance of stability in some statement, thing, or state of affairs.

A musical evocation of doubt, then, would either have to create some sort of musical or lyrical "object" or state of affairs about which it conveys uncertainty, or it would somehow have to capture the affective shape or gist of uncertainty, but without

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[38] Noël Carroll, "Art and Mood: Preliminary Notes and Conjectures," *The Monist* 86, no. 4 (2003): 526–30.

the content. In the latter case, the music would set a doubtful or uncertain mood.[39] To

do so, it seems, the music would have to convey stability or assurance, while at the

same time hinting that this assurance might be a false pretense. As the earlier analyses

indicate, *Airports*'s recordings do just this by building a global sense of stability, while

introducing inconstancy on a local level.

It's worth investigating why Eno would be particularly interested in conveying

doubt through Ambient music. One might chalk it up to the composer's personal

preference, as Eno has admitted on a number of occasions his predilection for

affectively ambiguous art experiences, especially those tinged with melancholy.[40] Any

departure from certainty, he muses, calls "partly for celebration and partly for

melancholy. It's both exciting and unnerving."[41] As I discuss in Chapter 4, Eno had

developed various "oblique strategies" for infusing his compositional process with

situational variables or unknowns. Such impersonal techniques, he claimed, brought a

"certain mysteriousness," "strangeness," and "charmed" quality to his Ambient music.[42]

For Ambient music to "retain" uncertainty might be, in this sense, to reveal something

of the unpredicted conditions that brought it about.

Whether or not Eno's interest in doubt comes down to intuitive preference, his

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[39] For more on the musical conveyance of mood, see Eldritch Priest, "Felt as Thought (or, Music Abstraction and the Semblance of Affect)," in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 45–63.

[40] Lester Bangs, "Eno," *Musician, Player & Listener*, November 1979, 39; Stephen Demorest, "The Discreet Charm of Brian Eno: An English Pop Theorist Seeks to Redefine Music," *Horizon*, June 1978, 85; Ian MacDonald, "Another False World: Part 2: How to Make a Modern Record," *New Musical Express*, December 3, 1977, 33.

[41] MacDonald, "Another False World," 34.

[42] Jim Aikin, "Brian Eno," *Keyboard*, July 1981, 62; Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 78; Charles Amirkhanian, "Music for Earthquakes: Brian Eno at the Exploratorium in San Francisco," *Reality Hackers*, Winter 1988, 38.

theorizations of mood do fit well with the art theory of Morse Peckham that captured

Eno's interest in light of his study of cybernetics (Ch. 5). As Eno paraphrases

Peckham's theory of art reception,

> [O]ne of the functions of an art-viewing situation is to provide us with psychic insulation. An art gallery is an enclosed world, where nothing dangerous is going to happen (in the sense that we're not suddenly going to get shot), and therefore we can afford to surrender in it and take psychic risks without truly dramatic, life-threatening consequences. There we can endure uncertainty—not only endure it but be thrilled by it, and become able to use it as a creative basis for perception and action.[43]

Eno also argues that art creates a "safe" space for both artists and audiences to deal with

disorientation. "Good art," Eno summarizes, "forces people to either accept

disorientation or to retreat. If they retreat from life as they do from art, they eventually

come to live in the past."[44]

Eno's insistence on the primacy of art's disorienting function recalls a range of

aesthetic techniques and theories, from Victor Shklovsky's остранение (*ostranenie* or

defamiliarization) to Berthold Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect),

Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory, Walter Benjamin's "profane illumination," and

Guy Debord's *détournement*, that advanced modernist avant-gardism's goal of shocking

art's audiences out of habitual perception, and into a more active awareness of everyday

life.[45] Yet, as Daniel Barbiero puts it, Eno's Ambient music "sublimates" the alienating

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[43] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 79.

[44] Frank Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," *The Village Voice*, March 1977, 69.

[45] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, 3rd ed. (1917; repr. Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 775–84; Berthold Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (1947–48; repr. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 179–208; Sergei Eisenstein,

shock of modernist art "into a nuanced undertone."[46] In the form of the Ambient music

recording, this undertone may slip quietly into that realm of habit, home, and routine we

call "everyday life," where listeners might wake up to uncertainty on their own time.[47]

In retaining a sense of doubt and uncertainty, then, Ambient music sanctions a

space within everyday existence for self-conscious estrangement from everyday life's

familiar, stable appearance. In this sense, the moods of Ambient music may be

meaningfully contrasted with those of Muzak, which aim to mitigate anxiety and doubt

by assuring listeners of the familiarity of their surroundings. Muzak accomplishes this

through arrangements of what Ronald Radano calls "consensus songs," or familiar pop

songs that represent a collectively shared "middle American" history.[48] Muzak's use of

consensus music, Radano argues, works to conjure a sense of domestic comfort and

well being.[49] The unassuring moods of Ambient music, by contrast, reject these

idealizations of familiarity and pop-culture comfort, while yet accommodating

inhabitants with their overarching unobtrusiveness. Such moods, one can imagine,

might even bring comfort to audiences who find themselves more irritated than eased

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"A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (1931; repr. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1977), 45–63; Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 2 (1929, repr. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2004), 207–18; Guy Debord, "A User's Guide to Détournement," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb, rev. ed. (1956; repr. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 14–20.

[46] Daniel Barbiero, "After the Aging of the New Music," *Telos* 82 (Winter 1989–90): 148. Thanks to Sumanth Gopinath for this reference.

[47] Rita Felski, "The Invention of Everyday Life," *New Formations*, no. 59 (1999): 15–31.

[48] Ronald M. Radano, "Interpreting Muzak: Speculations on Musical Experience in Everyday Life," *American Music* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 454–56.

[49] Ibid.

by Muzak's claim to consensus.

> **3) And whereas their intention is to 'brighten' the environment by adding stimulus to it (thus supposedly alleviating the tedium of routine tasks and levelling out the natural ups and downs of the body rhythms) Ambient Music is intended to induce calm and a space to think.**

Eno's third distinction most explicitly focuses on Ambient music's physiological function for its auditors. In distinguishing between "brightening" and "calming" recordings, Eno appears to be drawing a line between stimulating (or engaging) versus pacifying (or disengaging) background music, placing Ambient music in the latter category. However, as with the first two distinctions, Eno's characterization of this difference can seem a bit specious under scrutiny. Surely, the introduction of *any* recorded audio to a space counts as an added stimulus? Aren't alleviating tedium and inducing calm totally compatible? And why should "brightening" music obscure thought any more than calming ones, anyhow?

Eno's characterization of Muzak is, at least, consistent with the Muzak corporation's own promotional rhetoric. From its earliest days, the company advertised their product as a stimulus for tedious everyday activities or work. The idea of the "stimulus progression" that Muzak pioneered in the 1960s proposed to increase efficiency and productivity by regulating intensity of work activity through progressive increases and decreases of "stimulation" over the course of the musical block (see Ch. 1). At the same time, however, Muzak advertised their stimulus progressions as compatible with, and even generative of listener calm. As the back of a 1978 promotional Muzak LP touted, "Muzak helps [listeners] to relax—to feel better, to work

better."[50]

A clearer distinction can be deciphered in Eno's characterization of Ambient music as creating a "space to think." Whereas Muzak aims to promote feelings of collective belonging through use of a shared pop repertory, Ambient music aims to create an asocial space for contemplation by promoting a sense of isolation and distance from others.[51] As Eno once explained his conception for *Music for Airports*,

> I guess what I want to do with this piece is give you the feeling of being alone again. Most of us spend nearly all our time with others. And we forget we're always tailoring ourselves for others, always adapting and modifying our behaviour. It means that parts of us don't surface because there are no social situations that demand time. I guess I'm looking for some feeling of luscious silence, a feeling of solitariness.[52]

In another interview, Eno described how he constructed *Music for Airports* while imagining "this ideal airport where it's late at night; you're sitting there and there are not many people around you: you're just seeing planes take off through the smoked windows."[53] If one takes this airport scene as illustrative of Eno's "space to think," then Ambient music may be understood as creating room for reflection by evoking asocial spaces of unimpeded acoustic vibration. Whereas Muzak and the like summon feelings of conviviality and warmth with their massed strings and hummable tunes, Ambient music dissolves the buzz and hum of the imagined crowd with the reverberations of solitary instruments in unoccupied space.

One could also read Eno's distinction in terms of how these different musics generally aid different sorts of activities. Whereas Muzak inspires arousal during

[50] Muzak, liner notes to *Caring for People*, Muzak MU-1978, LP, 1978.
[51] Radano, "Interpreting Muzak," 454–56.
[52] Miller, "The Arts: Video," 28.
[53] Jim Aikin, "Brian Eno," *Keyboard*, July 1981, 62.

"routine tasks," Ambient music lends itself both to the immaterial labor of concentrated

thought, and to the free play of de-concentrated contemplation. To the first end, this

division might reproduce a classed, gendered, and raced distinction between music for

physical labor that's historically relegated to the working classes, women, and racial

minorities; and music for the more prestigious immaterial labor historically reserved for

white middle- and upper-class men. Yet Eno has rarely described Ambient music as an

aid for work. Instead, he says, Ambient music assists the imagination outside the

constraints of productivity. He has expressed interest in freeing up and honoring "times

when you're apparently doing nothing…. the equivalent of the dream time, in your

daily life, times when things get sorted out and reshuffled. If you're constantly awake

workwise you don't allow that to happen."[54]

In a more recent interview, Eno characterizes Ambient music's function as

making room for "surrender situations":

> I think what happens with this kind of music and these kinds of shows is that you can stop trying to be in control of things and you can allow yourself to surrender. Now, I use this word "surrender" quite a lot. And it doesn't immediately have the right connotation, but there isn't another word for it. What I mean by "surrender" is a sort of active choice not to take control. So it's an active choice to be part of the flow of something. For instance, I think we certainly enjoy surrender situations, and the ones we typically enjoy are sex, drugs, art, religion. Those are all surrender situations, I'd say. They're all situations where you stop, where you deliberately let go of some control, to be carried along on something.[55]

Perhaps, if Eno were to have written his Ambient music essay more recently, he might

say that Ambient music is intended to induce surrender rather than calm. Ambient

music may be understood as promoting surrender, as opposed to "brightening"

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[54] Kristine McKenna, "Eno," *Wet*, July/August 1980, 44.
[55] Brian Eno, Red Bull Music Academy, interview by Emma Warren, 2013, http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/brian-eno.

background music that promotes a sense of control. (Notably, Eno's third distinction parallels his second, which describes Ambient music as relinquishing, rather than promoting a sense of certainty.) The recordings on *Airports* help us imagine how this might work, if one understands Ambient music to confer a sense of control by allowing listeners to anticipate how it might unfold. Without frustrating a listener's expectations of what they will continue to hear (pitch content, melodic gesture, etc.), these recordings' unpredictable loops can lead listeners to surrender any expectation of knowing when and how this content will arise.

This sense of surrender might be augmented by the music's stretched-out static parameters, which could expand a listener's sense of a musical "here" and "now," and accordingly contract one's sense of personal importance in relation to the present. Eno relates in another interview how this music might counteract a tendency of modern urban culture:

> In London when you say 'now,' it can mean a day or a week. Where I live, in the country, you mean this year…. In New York it's very difficult to retain an awareness of yourself located in a long period of time…. Another important point is that if your 'now' becomes shorter, you become bigger in relation to it. People do the same with 'here'…. We tend to locate our sense of 'here' around what we control, because we are a will-based culture…. We're reluctant to accept that there are parts of the world that we don't have control over and would have to be just a particle within.[56]

Part of inducing calm may thus have to do with making the listener feel "smaller," and more evanescent, in relation to Ambient music's expanded present.

Music for *Where*ports?

Airports's album title and concept, along with Eno's distinctions between

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[56] Don Watson, "Man out of Time," *Spin*, May 1989, 42.

Ambient music and "conventional background music," create the strong impression that

Ambient music should be understood as a variation on music made and used to aid the

production and consumption of commercial goods and services in public spaces.[57] The

term "ambient music" has since come to serve colloquially as a synonym for music

designed and/or programmed for public environments; such an understanding is

reflected, for instance, in Anahid Kassabian's characterization of Ambient music as

superseded in practice by "foreground music."[58] This usage of the term, however,

obscures the context of popular record production, mass distribution, and individual

consumption within which Eno's Ambient music, and music of the Ambient genre

since, has primarily circulated.

As a way of distinguishing the programming of music for social control in

public from programming for private use, Steven Brown and Töres Theorell helpfully

call the former application "milieu music," and the latter, "personal enhancement

background music" (or PEBM).[59] As Brown & Theorell found, PEBM is normally put

to use for purposes of emotional and motivational control, and the vast majority of

PEBM occurs in the context of individualized music listening in private settings.[60]

Notably, in saying that Ambient music is "not exclusively" for specified public spaces,

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[57] Such music has been termed, too generally, "functional music" or "programmed music"; see Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher, "Muzak: On Functional Music and Power," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9, no. 2 (June 1992): 156–69; Sterne, "Sounds like the Mall of America."

[58] Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, 5.

[59] Steven Brown and Töres Theorell, "The Social Uses of Background Music for Personal Enhancement," in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, ed. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 126–28.

[60] Ibid., 128. Tia DeNora speaks of these uses in the context of music as a "technology of the self"; see DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 46–74.

Eno's essay retains this possibility for *Music for Airports*'s use as PEBM. It's also

notable that Eno's characterization of "conventional background music" extends to the

light classical recordings found on "mood music" records, which sounded similar to

Muzak in style (see Ch. 1). While uses of easy-listening music for PEBM had its

earliest historical precedent in radio, mood music records allowed listeners to select and

program the recordings for this use themselves.[61] Eno's distinctions between Ambient

music and Muzak were thus not simply a matter of convincing listeners of Ambient's

superior suitability for public environments, but also of its preferability over any easy-

listening music for personal use in all sorts of spaces, domestic environments included.

The fact that Ambient music's private and self-administered reception has

tended to go overlooked in Ambient music historiography may largely be attributed to

Music for Airports, which construes Ambient music as site-specific genre. Yet although

Eno sold his album on the idea of its readiness to airport reception, it wouldn't be for at

least another year following its release before the album would be played in a real

airport; the documented instances of airport installations since then make up a short list

(Table 6.3). In the meantime, Eno's concept of Ambient music was publicized and

reviewed as a rock record in periodicals such as *Creem*, *Melody Maker*, *New Musical

Express*, the *New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Village Voice*. Given the record's

quarter-million sales numbers (and exceeding number of YouTube plays, in 2015), one

may assume that at least as many people have listened to *Music for Airports*

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[61] On the role of radio in practices of flexibly attentive listening, see Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1999), 6–8 and 27–30; David Goodman, "Distracted Listening: On Not Making Sound Choices in the 1930s," in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 15–46.

intentionally as have had it imposed upon them in public. Eno later admitted as much in

a 1984 interview when asked where he imagined his Ambient music being heard.

"Initially public places," he answers, "but when you make a record you are making it

for a living room."[62] This setting, as I argue in the next section, has implications for the

interpretation of Ambient aesthetics.

Year	Airport	City
1980	LaGuardia Airport	New York City, USA
1980	Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport	Minneapolis, USA
1982	Greater Pittsburgh International Airport	Pittsburgh, USA
1984	Tegel Airport	Berlin, Germany
unknown	Guarulhos International Airport	São Paulo, Brazil

Table 6.3. Documented airport installations of *Music for Airports*.

"You Are Now Going to Sit in Space": From Non-Place to Place of Passage

Eno has in interviews connected his aim of promoting surrender through *Music*

for Airports with the music's specific usefulness for the airport setting:

> I was thinking about flying at the time, because I thought that everything that was connected to flying was kind of a lie, you know. When you went into an airport, or an airplane, they always played this very happy music which is sort of saying, "You're not going to die! There's not going to be an accident! Don't worry!" And I thought that was really the wrong way around. I thought that it would be much better to have music that said, "Well, if you die, it doesn't really matter." You know? And so I wanted to create a different feeling that you were sort of suspended in the universe, and your life or death wasn't so important. So, rather than trivialize the thing, I wanted to take it seriously: the possibility that you *were* actually, now, going to sit in space. Which is what you do when you travel on an airplane.[63]

As Eno conceived it, *Airports* should enable nothing less than an existential epiphany

for the anxious air traveler. This would not be accomplished by imagining away the

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[62] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 77.
[63] Eno, "Opening Holland Festival."

source of their anxiety, but rather by sublimating it within the universal condition of transience. Through their unpredictable soundings and silences, the album's recordings leave uncertain one's immediate future—not unlike the prospect of flight delays, lost baggage, and plane crashes. Yet rather than dispel such irresolution, they contextualize it within a broader stability that renders instability "not so important" in the grand scheme. The music's global stability creates a "safe" space wherein one can become accustomed to consistent uncertainty.

For Eno, maintaining a mood of uncertainty in *Airports* was a way of "taking seriously" the existential suspension and loss of control both intensified and literalized by airplane travel. Yet for this reason, *Music for Airports* cannot be thought of as strictly utilitarian: a metaphorical suggestiveness *about* airports, however subtle, persists throughout. Christopher Schaberg suggests as much when he supposes that Eno's airport installations sparked protest because they "enhanced the peculiar feel of airport life: being in between."[64] The music, in generating localized rhythmic and tonal tensions within a static global framework, paradoxically conveys both movement and hesitation, and in doing so evokes what Schaberg calls the "elimination of speed" produced by airports, where one travels "even when standing in barely moving lines, or waiting for baggage to appear."[65] Like passengers at an airport, the sounds of Eno's album seem stationary while being yet carried along, both suspended and adrift, neither at home nor at their destination, but sitting in space somewhere in between.

As Cecilia Sun notes, Eno's austere, processed loops also map associatively

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[64] Christopher Schaberg, *The Textual Life of Airports: Reading the Culture of Flight* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 90.
[65] Ibid., 102.

onto the mass-produced abstractions of transitory space, vehicles of transport, and

commercial transactions that comprise what Marc Augé calls *non-place*, "A world

surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, temporary and ephemeral."[66] The

"evacuated world" of globalized circulation, consumption, and communication

represented in the concept of non-place disperses the social relations and collective

histories embedded in what Augé calls *anthropological place*.[67] One might find the

controlled environment of transient distractions represented in Augé's concept rendered

audible in the generic, sterilized ambiance of *Music for Airports*. Whereas milieu music

normally stages warmth and sociality through the familiar tune or conventional

instrumentation in order to make listeners feel "at home," Eno's album points away

from the anthropological places signified by well-worn pop styles, and toward the

"supermodern" non-place in its cool, detached repose.[68]

My interpretation of *Music for Airports*'s evocation of non-place also differs

from Sun's. For Sun, since non-places seem devoid of collective human significance,

Music for Airports should analogously be thought of as empty of meaning, a "non-

piece."[69] She asserts, along these lines, that Ambient music by definition "obviates

questions of interpretation… it is what it is."[70] Sun's understanding, however, suggests

a semiotic vacuity and value-neutrality about Eno's album that may be more inspired by

the notion of a strictly functional musical technology, than reflective of Ambient

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[66] Cecilia Sun, "Resisting the Airport: Bang on a Can Performs Brian Eno," *Musicology Australia* 29, no. 1 (2007): 135–59; Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2008), 64.

[67] Augé, *Non-Places*, 102.

[68] Ibid., 24.

[69] Sun, "Resisting The Airport," 152.

[70] Ibid., 136.

music's actual expressive implications and affective investments. As various unsettled *Music for Airports* listeners have suggested, the music's ephemeral emptiness is not simply an environmental frame or atmospheric tint, but also its expressive content. Rather than understanding *Music for Airports*'s evocation of non-place as obviating interpretation, then, I read this evocation precisely as the music's substance. This becomes most apparent when hearing the album outside of the airport space. The PEBM listener is thus most likely to find that *Music for Airports* reflects something of the discomfiting reality of airports no matter where it is played—and that Eno's album has more in common with *Music for Real Airports* than The Black Dog let on.

The term "Ambient" contributes to the idea that Ambient music obviates interpretation, since it seems to be neutrally descriptive of the music's function, and suggests an absence of expressive or representational content. Yet while the genre label implies both value-neutrality and all-purpose functionality, Ambient music is not and never was, as Thom Holmes describes it, "a blank canvas";[71] nor have its possibilities ever been, as Mark Prendergast claims, "endless."[72] My analysis of Eno's distinctions, as well as my comparison between Eno's and The Black Dog's album, aim to eradicate the notion that Ambient music, as a genre, might be expressively neutral, universal, or purely functional. These distinctions and differences illustrate how Ambient music recordings script listening experience not simply because of different utilitarian aims or reception locations, but also due to the sorts of (non-)places and social moods they aim to conjure.

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[71] Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music, and Culture*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 402.
[72] Prendergast, *The Ambient Century*, 4.

In The Black Dog's *Music for Real Airports*, the music's rigid rhythmic repetitions, nervous plodding, brittle percussion, and sprays of harsh high-frequency hiss palpably manifest the anxieties of the passenger beholden to the intensification of airport security since the 1970s, and especially following 9/11. Listeners today may well have reason to perceive these anxieties as more "real" or experientially authentic than Eno's, since calculative control is so much more iconic of airport space now than it once was. As Peter Adey points out, risk management has remained at the forefront of airport planning and design since the eruption of international aviation terrorism in the '70s.[73] Adey explains how such designs openly, blatantly reduce possibilities for movement, making inhabitants aware of the fact that they are in a highly controlled environment in order to best ensure compliance with airport security.[74] The oppressive moods invoked by these buildings, and The Black Dog's album, are thus likely more familiar to travelers nowadays than the spacious openness of airports like Flughafen Köln/Bonn (Fig 6.2).

As far as Eno's architectural muse goes, such open-ended designs as that of Flughafen Köln/Bonn exert what John Allen calls "ambient power," a "soft" power that works through seduction rather than domination, and inclusion rather than exclusion.[75] Conveying an aura of detachment through visual transparency and spatial accessibility,

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[73] Peter Adey, "Airports, Mobility, and the Calculative Architecture of Affective Control," *Geoforum* 39 (2009): 442.

[74] Ibid., 444–47.

[75] John Allen, "Ambient Power: Berlin's Potsdamer Platz and the Seductive Logic of Public Spaces," *Urban Studies* 43, no. 2 (February 2006): 443. Helmut Jahn, the architect who designed Allen's chief case study, the Sony Center on Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, incidentally also designed the terminal extension to Flughafen Köln/Bonn completed in 2002.
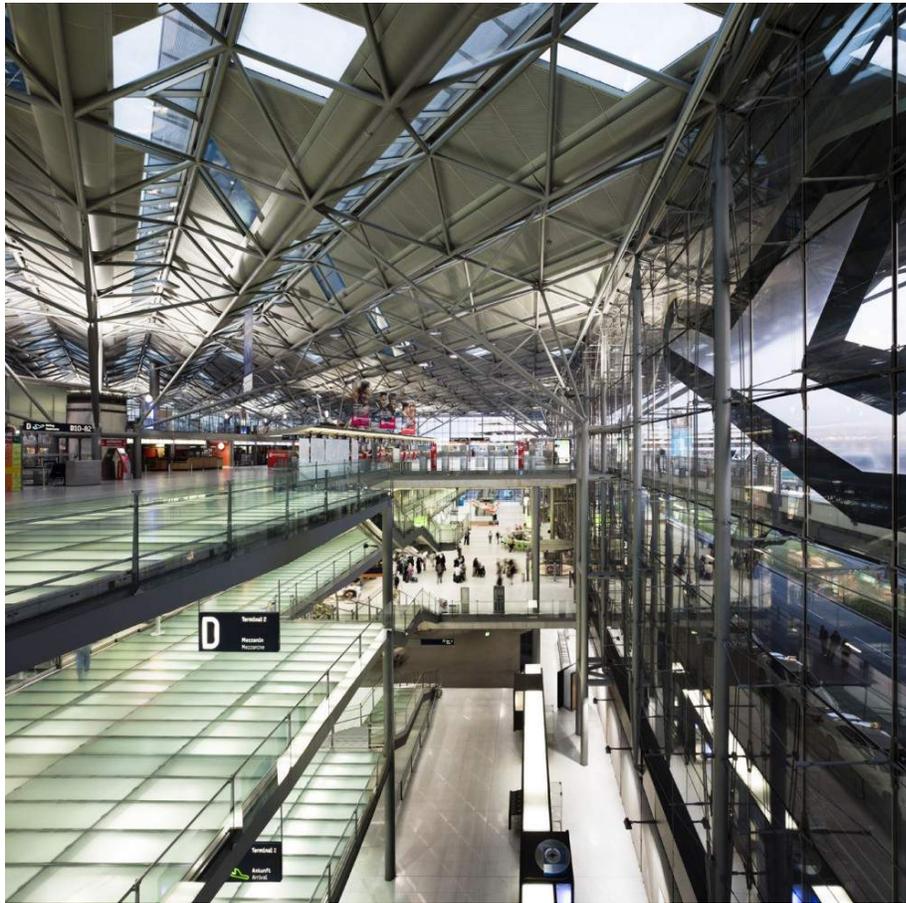
Fig. 6.2. Flughafen Köln/Bonn. Photograph from Murphy/Jahn.

such spaces appear to offer more choices for movement while being yet limited in broadly scripted ways.[76] *Music for Airports* might be understood to work similarly. Without the usual signposts of pop narrative or dance track structure, and using sparse textures, long silences, and heavy reverb to convey spaciousness, Eno's music evokes openness and transparency while yet imposing its own evocative agenda. Sleek, luminous, and yet avoiding the social assurances of intimacy or convention, Eno's *Music for Airports* invites the listener to dwell calmly and alone in a limbo where, as

[76] Ibid., 445.

Eno's collaborator David Byrne once described heaven, "nothing ever happens."

In coining the descriptively neutral, functionalist term "Ambient music" along with *Music for Airports*, Eno attributed his music's mobile stillness and cool fluidity to the idea of a widely adaptable "atmospheric" recording. Eno would later describe Ambient recordings' functional flexibility as PEBM in terms of the paradoxical dualities suggested by *Music for Airports*. The Ambient recording, he has attested, provides a "reliable experience" for the consumer; yet, at the same time, it "generates unpredictability rather than repetition" in being adaptable to various listening scenarios.[77] The stable indeterminacy rendered by Eno's Ambient recordings' expressive design gives shape to the concept of Ambient recording as a place that listeners can return to, again and again, regardless of the particularities of their actual physical environments.

In a sense, then, Ambient recordings reproduce aesthetically their own technological conferrals of a sense of place. By establishing musical consistencies to which listeners may become habituated, Ambient recordings provide contours of a virtual sonic place to projectively navigate and inhabit. These virtual locations alter the feeling of a physical location by providing their own regular, ongoing affective coordinates. Such coordinates, in their unique makeup, may also spark or stir associations with, or personal memories of, a particular place or social space.

If, then, there is something "placed" about Ambient music expressions, despite their "non-placed" distribution in the commercial marketplace, then perhaps Ambient

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[77] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 78; Rob Tannenbaum, "A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage & Brian Eno," *Musician*, September 1985, 69.

recordings offer a way of rethinking (or replacing) the concept of non-place. In contrast

to the grounding anthropological place of dwelling, or the anonymous "non-place" of

pure movement, the Ambient music recording may be regarded as what Henri Bergson

calls a *place of passage*, "A connecting link between the things which act upon me and

the things upon which I act—the seat, in a word, of sensori-motor phenomena."[78]

Ambient music, like the listening bodies it both contains and is contained by, affectively

stabilizes physical spaces of reception at the same time as it unsettles them, disposing

their inhabitants to arrivals to and departures from their given locations or moods. As

Edward Casey theorizes them, places of passage may simultaneously act as an *intra-

place*, an anchoring place (or mood) within which things move, and as *inter-place*, or a

transportive place (or mood) that sends masses into motion.[79] One might thus re-

imagine Augé's dichotomy of anthropological place and non-place as a dialectic

between intra-place and inter-place, which necessarily give rise to one another. If one

re-conceives the dichotomy of musical design and functionality similarly, then Ambient

music may be understood not simply as atmospheric or functional music, but music that

expressly thematizes the intra-place/inter-place undecidability of the places of passage

that recordings provide.

Music for Airports may not have inspired a trend in the programming of music

for public spaces, but it did ignite an aesthetic movement. Then and now, recordings

described as "Ambient" often evoke the impersonality, transience, and social alienation

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[78] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 145; as quoted in Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 195.
[79] Casey, *Remembering*, 196.

experienced in so-called non-places of commerce and transit. As privately owned and used objects, Ambient music ambivalently represents the experience of moving through these modern churches of capital and technology as equally inviting and alienating, connective and isolating, futuristic and nostalgic, moving and grounding. Yet Ambient recordings not only reflect upon living with technologies of transport, but also take part in it, since these objects count as one such technology. With this in mind, one might reverse the analogy I proposed earlier: perhaps airport experience, and the experience of passage more broadly, can be read as allegory for the equally comforting and unsettling experience of Ambient music listening.

Conclusion: Ambient Lands, Ambi(val)ent Moods

Eno found himself busy in the studio for the three and a half years between the first and last release of the *Ambient* series, putting out collaborations with Harold Budd, Jon Hassell, and David Byrne, and producing albums for zither atmospherician Laraaji, Ghanaian funk band Edikanfo, and new wave art-poppers Talking Heads, Devo, and Ultravox. He also found himself moving around a lot, now living in New York for long stints, while traveling to California, Canada, England, and Ghana. His increased mobility gave Eno more appreciation for recordings' ability to produce and confer an "instant sense of location" in any place. "When I was traveling a lot, I used to carry four or five cassettes that I knew could reliably produce a certain condition for me," Eno later recalled in 1984. "I realized that while I was living this nomadic life, the one thing

that was really keeping me in place, or giving me a sense of place, was music."[80]

Although he continued to use music in his audiovisual installations, his idea of Ambient

music shifted away from site-specificity, with the domestic environment imagined as its

most likely reception context. Developing musical atmospheres became less about

enhancing a given place, and more about delivering listeners away from their location

toward a "more desirable" world. "This is escapism in a sense," Eno reflects, "but it

isn't retreating from one world so much as advancing on another."[81]

Eno reinforced his revised expectations in the liner notes to *Ambient 4: On

Land*, the fourth and final installment of the *Ambient* series released in March 1982,

which included instructions and a diagram for arranging a quadraphonic "ambient

speaker system" in one's home. With this album, Eno sought to exploit the recording's

ability to create a "sense of place that complements and alters your environment."[82]

When Editions E.G. re-released the album on CD in 1986, Eno reflected that he had

been exploiting this ability for quite some time already:

> The idea of making music that in some way related to a sense of place—landscape,
> environment—had occurred to me many times over the years preceding *On Land*. Each time,
> however, I relegated it to a mental shelf because it hadn't risen above being just another idea—a
> diagram rather than a living and breathing music. In retrospect, I now see the influence of this
> idea, and the many covert attempts to realise it, running through most of the work that I've
> released like an unacknowledged but central theme.

Yet unlike the sterile, smooth-tiled atmosphere of *Airports*, or the luminous, high-

ceiling rooms of the Budd collaboration *Plateaux of Mirrors*, *On Land* conjures the feel

of natural landscapes in both the titles and sounds. Synthesizer *portamenti* and gradual

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[80] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 78.
[81] Mick Brown, "Life of Brian according to Eno," *Arts Guardian*, May 1, 1982.
[82] Steven Grant, "Brian Eno Against Interpretation," *Trouser Press*, August 1982, 30.

spectral filtering evoke the whimsy and warp of wind and earth, from the high wind-like moans of "The Lost Day" to the swampy gurgles running through "Tal Coat." The textures of the recording are much thicker than *Discreet Music*'s or *Airports*'s, all buzzing and heaving with echoing drones, and shot through with synthesized animal cries, and various loops of lonely pitches that return at remarkably slow intervals. Far unlike *Discreet Music*, *On Land* calls for intense, immersive, high-volume listening. At a low volume, "Unfamiliar Wind (Leeks Hills)" sounds simple, a cool, undulating hum; but amplified, one hears whimpering, hooting, croaking, and chittering through dense layers of pitched wind. "Lantern Marsh" similarly registers distant howling amidst a creaking fug of drones in F Aeolian; "Shadow" resounds with the chirping of night animals bouncing off a forest canopy. Throughout, one hears a wider variety of timbres than previous Ambient releases, from recognizable musical instruments to "noisier" and more sheerly synthetic sounds.[83]

      Eno became inspired to create *On Land* while in Ghana, through the experience of listening, alone, to the amplified acoustic sounds of the night. Although he had brought his audio equipment with the intention of recording indigenous music and speech, he found himself "sitting out on the patio in the evenings with the microphone placed to pick up the widest possible catchment of ambient sounds from all directions, and listening to the result on my headphones. The effect of this simple technological system was to cluster all the disparate sounds into one aural frame; they became music."[84] This did not have the effect of deepening Eno's sense of his present location;

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[83] Amirkhanian, "Music for Earthquakes," 39.
[84] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 351–52.

rather, Eno became interested in how the sounds filled a stereo "image," a framed psychological soundspace. As he recalls of the experience, "Listening to a highly-amped world is extraordinary, like looking at things under a huge microscope, and I am trying to work out ways of making music with that feeling of relatedness and unrelatedness."[85] One might imagine that by "relatedness," Eno was referring to the integration of elements within the framed sonic "image," and to "unrelatedness" as a sense of sounds' detachment from their original context.

While *On Land*, in this sense, was closer in conception to the "field studies" and "soundscape" recordings of acoustic ecologists than his earlier Ambient recordings (see Ch. 2), Eno's album did not depict specific places. Rather, his idea was to create climates, times, memories, and moods that suggested a feeling of place. Eno described this sort of production as "working on the edges of reality. You're working with things that are slightly familiar, but that are not real. They evoke, but they don't depict, exactly."[86] Eno imagined *On Land* as playing with this sense of familiarity. As he put it in one interview, "I want to take music away from being abstract collections of sounds, and I want to make it like places that you've been to; I want to make it sound like a place that you've experienced before."[87]

Recalling John Cage's proto-Ambient piano composition of the same name, Eno thought of these recordings as "imaginary landscapes."[88] The recording process would start with a "strong sense of mood or place. It's like a fetal idea at the time. I have to

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[85] John Orme, "Eno: The Electric Boogaloo," *Melody Maker*, February 14, 1980.
[86] Aikin, "Brian Eno," 55.
[87] Gabriella Cardazzo and Duncan Ward, *Imaginary Landscapes*, VHS (Eyeplugin Media Corporation, 1989).
[88] Ibid.

surround it with things that will nourish it."[89] For nourishment, Eno created sounds that sounded similar to known sounds (e.g. bells ringing, animals sighing), sounds that existed on "the borderline of familiarity."[90] Eno's personal memory also played a role in these conceptions. He harvested his own childhood memories for evoking a feeling of place in compositions such as "The Lost River," for which he recalled one day, in his town of Woodbridge, on one side of a river that opened into a harbor. "Throughout my childhood it was an evocative place for me. It was always empty, so whenever you went there, you were lonely. I got to like that feeling rather a lot."[91] This sense of moody loneliness resurfaces on the final track, "Dunwich Beach, Autumn, 1960," whose droopy, detuned warbles lend the atmosphere a palpable gloom, while a misty layer of reverbed drones evoke the gauzy haze of temporal distance.

Most would probably not be surprised to find that the album had the working title "*Empty Landscapes*":[92] *On Land*'s imaginary landscapes evoke open, unoccupied environments through heavy reverb, low volume, and slow attack transients, often rendering certain sounds distant or occluded. Eno coupled this sense of detachment with an aching, romantic sense of wonderment in nature ("I want to make things that put me in the position of innocence," Eno later commented, "that recreate the feeling of innocence in you").[93] Yet at times, Eno's landscapes also stir a sense of haunting or

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[89] Grant, "Brian Eno Against Interpretation," 29.
[90] Eno, "Aurora Musicalis," 79.
[91] Gene Kalbacher, "Profile: Brian Eno," *Modern Recording & Music*, October 1982, 47.
[92] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 355.
[93] Phil South, "The Sound of Silence: A Thursday Afternoon with Brian Eno," *Electronics & Music Maker*, December 1985, http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/emm85.html.

dread through the use of ominous bass drones and figures. Eno has described *On Land*

as depicting "psychological cataclysm," representing a "disturbed landscape": "You get

the pastoral prettiness on top, but underneath there's a dissonance that's like an

impending earthquake."[94]

More recently, Eno has observed this affective ambivalence or mixture as

constant across his oeuvre of solo recordings:

> I suppose that one of the things I was often doing in music was trying to recreate that sense of being wide-eyed in a surrounding that was both familiar and new, where there was just enough unknown to stay alert, the consciousness of the passage of time and change. These feelings are always going to be joyous and regretful at the same time: but for me the interesting feelings are complicated ones, blends of bitter and sweet, of familiar and strange, new and old.[95]

While emotionally poignant, Eno's Ambient compositions can at the same time come

off as distant, synthetic, devoid of human compassion. (As Frank Rose put it presciently

in 1977, Eno's music "reflects warmth but does not seem to generate it.")[96] These

moods expand upon Eno's original conception of the Ambient genre as both "calming,"

and yet retaining a sense of "doubt" and "uncertainty." In many ways, Eno's early

Ambient music set the tone for the genre's development over the next several decades,

which saw subgenres like "dark Ambient" and "isolationism" emerging during the mid-

1990s. Ambient music, to this day, continues to deliver technologized sounds to moods

of loneliness and wistfulness; more often than not, Ambient music produces calm yet

registers doubt, sponsors detachment while triggering melancholy, and continuously

vacillates between shades of feeling.

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[94] Watson, "Man out of Time," 42.
[95] Sheppard, *On Some Faraway Beach*, 357.
[96] Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," 72.

Ambient's affective insistence on retaining something of the "dark" side of human feeling partly explains its persistence as a separate genre from new age, which saw great success across middlebrow audiences in the 1980s. Although these genres enjoyed significant aesthetic and market overlap, the new age thematization of spiritual oneness with nature and/or the cosmos was most often delivered through less ambivalent musical moods, with its recordings commonly exuding uncomplicated serenity, peace, and consonance. Ambient producers and listeners have sometimes dismissed New Age on these grounds; Eno collaborator Harold Budd, for instance, once commented that the problem with new age music was that "it had absolutely no evil in it." By contrast, he says, his music "comes from a rather unpeaceful sort of place. I think an element of danger and a kind of unsettled quality. Unresolved issues. I don't find it meditative at all, just the opposite. If that were meditation, I for one would give it up immediately."[97] Eno found it less important to involve negativity for the sake of it; rather, he thought mixtures of affect were truer to moods as they were lived. This attitude emerged in one interview when Eno, asked to reflect upon industrial music, responded that the genre's focus on decadence and death was "an easy cliché, and it's no more convincing to me than the New Age cliché of everything being harmony and unity—they both make me sick with their over-simplification."[98]

On Land's ambivalent musical moods, objectless as moods tend to be, allow listeners to imagine them as emerging from their personal thoughts, memories, and

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[97] Holmes, *Experimental and Electronic Music*, 401. Although Budd does not strictly consider his music "Ambient," many listeners do; see, for instance, Appendix, 352.
[98] Andy Gill, "Brian Eno: Towards an Understanding of Pop Past and Present," *Q*, November 1993.

situations. (Ambient's openness to individual "interpretation" or circumstance, many listeners reflect, is one of its most attractive features.)[99] What's more, as a "framed" expressive sonic image, these moods can also be heard as sending the listener somewhere else in time and space—perhaps a night in a Ghanaian forest, or morning on a gray English countryside. Yet a third, "meta" sort of reading of the album is also possible, for one could interpret *On Land*'s eerie moods, like the cool detachment of *Music for Airports*, as *about* the design of solitary space and experience through electronics. Recall how Eno conceived *On Land* via his experience of Africa, isolated and mediated by the workings of electronic amplification. Perhaps paradoxically, by bringing the sounds "closer" to Eno, electronic amplification took Eno out of his living context, and into an imagined sonic "picture" of such a context. (One might recall the similar image, from Chapter 1, of the "Seashore" owner listening—next to the actual seashore—to their *Environments* record.) In this sense, the album's mood of aloneness or detachment from nature might be taken as reflecting upon the engineered solitude of Ambient record listening. This reflection doubles on the level of timbre: while its moods discomfort, *On Land*'s sounds also subtly convey the falseness of their imaginary worlds. Smooth, periodic waveforms betray the recordings' electronic artificiality, while impossibly thick reverb defamiliarizes the natural landscapes, muddling them with the strangeness of indistinct aural perspective. This treatment makes audible the music's hidden nature as a disembodied, dehumanized, and discreet electronic mechanism. It expressively conveys what it's like, according to Anahid Kassabian, to notice ubiquitous music: "It comes from everywhere and nowhere—its

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[99] Appendix, 351.

projection looks to erase its production as much as possible, posing instead as a quality of the environment."[100]

Eno's work powerfully demonstrates how Ambient aesthetics thematize the audio recording's underlying materiality as an automated and mass-reproduced technology. Their aesthetic designs translate the functioning of the technological medium that makes musical recordings ubiquitous and ignorable—a function upon which the idea of Ambient music is founded—into moody musical atmospheres. As "metacommunications" about their mediation,[101] *On Land*'s musical environments reflect ambivalently upon the way their sounds get "naturalized," or assumed by the listener to be part of their environment. One might interpret Ambient (or any "functional") recordings, then, based on the ways they translate their technologized mediations into musical moods, those undecidable mixtures of designed affective surrounding and aroused internal feeling. And, as Eno's recordings illustrate, Ambient music might be the moodiest sort of mood music, since it so often calls for detachment from one's surroundings, and perhaps also a bit of doubt.

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[100] Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening*, 9–10.
[101] John Frow, *Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17.

CHAPTER 7

"Traveling without Moving" through Ambient House

This final chapter addresses Ambient music's expansion and renewal at the turn of the 1990s in the subgenre of electronic dance music known as "ambient house."[1] Prior to this moment, English-language media mainly applied the term "ambient" to the music of Brian Eno, Harold Budd, and their collaborators, while giving other similarly "atmospheric" music other names: most prominently, "space music" through the San Francisco-based radio program Music from the Hearts of Space, and "new age" through most other U.S. and U.K. industry outlets.[2] Yet toward the end of the 1980s, as electronic dance music's popularity surged in England, the media and a handful of electronic music producers and DJs floated the term "ambient" in connection with a new style of house music.

In this chapter, I address the re-emergence of Ambient in this form and cultural context. Ambient house's percussive layers, rhythmically regular loops, and heavy use of samples made the music of this subgenre stylistically distinct from Eno's earlier music. However, its name suggests a continuity of expectations and associations with the Ambient that came before. This chapter seeks to bridge this apparent gap; first, by addressing the a set of musico-thematic tropes shared by both styles of Ambient; and secondly, by connecting these tropes to the common conditions of listening that made

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[1] Because this subgenre name does not carry the same ambiguity with the definition of "ambient" as "surrounding," I do not capitalize "ambient house" as I do with the term "Ambient music."

[2] The history of these genre labels' overlaps and differences with Ambient music remains to be systematically explored. I plan to address this in future research.

Ambient music mass marketable over the years.

Starting with *Music for Airports*, various high-profile Ambient releases both before and after the emergence of ambient house thematized the inactive traveler in flight, or the airborne body "traveling without moving." This chapter compares albums by Ambient record producers Brian Eno, The KLF, The Orb, Mixmaster Morris, and Pete Namlook that represent the listening experiences they afford through metaphors of the passive or disengaged body being transported through vast open spaces. I contend that the metaphor of the transported body not only thematizes and frames the subjective experience of private Ambient listening in terms of flight, but also consolidates the genre as a self-reflexive cultural expression. This chapter concludes by imagining how this cultural expression might both symbolize and structure the social lives of its producers and listeners.

A Short History of Ambient House

September 1989: the "Second Summer of Love," also known as the "Summer of Rave," has been underway in England since the previous year. Prior to 1988, house music and its primary cousins—techno and disco—had been largely the domain of African Americans, gay clubbers, and Ibiza vacationers. Yet house and techno became exponentially more popular in 1988, especially in London and Manchester, where white working- and middle-class kids began turning on to electronic dance music via ecstasy, an MDMA-based drug.[3] Simon Reynolds places ecstasy at the center of his history of

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[3] Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (Berkeley: Soft Skull, 2012). See also Matthew Collin, *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997).

electronic dance music, noting that when the drug became immensely easier to get a hold of that year in London, the popularity of the dance party quickly surged amongst young people.[4] When combined with music at raves, he explains, ecstasy stimulates locomotion, dissolves inhibition, creates euphoria, and intensifies sensation to the point of synesthesia and hallucination.[5] Within the fluid space of social dance, it also has the effect of promoting energy, empathy, and amiability between strangers.[6]

And now, at the crest of rave's wave, Paul Oakenfold and pals have just launched Land of Oz, a Monday night party at Heaven in Trafalgar Square. Upstairs from where Oakenfold and others are spinning acid house, select clubgoers enter the White Room to relax on couches and beanbags, rehydrate, hang with friends, or maybe come down from an ecstasy high while zoning out to one of the videos projected on the sheets hung about. And in this particular "chill-out room"—reportedly the first to pop up at raves across England—DJs LX-Dee (Alex Paterson) and Rockman (Jimmy Cauty), together calling themselves The Orb, are mixing house and techno with tracks of such disparate styles as psych rock, soft soul, and dub, as well as animal sounds, spoken children's stories, and other odd samples. They, along with friends like DJ Youth (Martin Glover), call this heady, psychedelic brew "ambient house," partly in reference to the music of Brian Eno, whose floaty, ephemeral synth recordings also find their way into the duo's mixes.

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[4] Ibid.,43.

[5] Ibid., xxx.

[6] Ibid., xxxi. On "liquid" sociality in clubbing and EDM culture, see Luis Manuel Garcia, "'Can You Feel It, Too?': Intimacy and Affect at Electronic Dance Music Events in Paris, Chicago, and Berlin" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2011).

Fig. 7.1. Martin Glover, AKA DJ Youth, spinning in the White Room. (Photograph courtesy of Dave Swindells.)

The Orb aren't the first to mix dance beats with soft, reverberant musical samples to the effect of relaxation or entrancement. The year prior, a group of British DJ/producers called 808 State had begun closing out their sets with "Pacific State," a cut in which loons hoot over lush jazz organ, and lyrical riffs on sax and clarinet ride on a particularly mellow groove track. The recording, released commercially in early 1989, earned the tag "new age house" in some music magazines, a label that stuck both with 808 State and one of its solo-going members, A Guy Called Gerald.[7] The term "new age house" was also being used to describe a style of Chicago-based house flowing in from across the Atlantic that later earned the tag "deep house," a style generally characterized

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[7] Paul Oldfield, "A Guy Called Gerald, ULU, London," *Melody Maker*, February 24, 1990, http://homepages.force9.net/king1/Media/LiveReviews/1990-02-09-LiveReview-ULU-London-England.htm; Tim Jeffrerys, "Back in the DHSS," *Record Mirror*, March 25, 1989, 34.

by soulful vocals, luxuriant jazz harmonies, and smooth synth organs and pads. An
advertisement in British magazine *Blues & Soul*, for instance, called the deep house
album *Ammnesia* by Chicago producer Mr. Fingers (Larry Heard), "New age house
with the jazz touch…."[8] Yet one member of 808 State, Martin Price, bristled at the new
age label as an attempt of "big business" to market electronic dance music in familiar
terms:

> A lot of people are looking to bracket it, and they think that if they take it down the Sixties'
> road, you know—coming down music, a sound for when the sun's coming up and the trip's near
> its end—then they make the scene to be more important than the actual music. I think there's
> music for all moods, and why can't it just be left as dance music? To me, all the "new age" thing
> boils down to is that there's a gentler sound available.[9]

Price became more heated when asked whether acid house parties were reviving '60s
counterculture for the '80s generation. "The more the Sixties thing gets attached to it,
the worse it gets," he ranted. "I don't want to go to a club and see someone sitting cross-
legged on the floor seeing doves coming out of the fucking speakers, cos that's what
they've been programmed to fucking believe."[10]

The programming of music for the sit-down crowd, however, had just gotten
started. Parties devoted to chilling and chatting, rather than dancing, began appearing in
late 1989, including Jonah Sharp's Spacetime party in the East End of London, Steve
Strange's Dream Age at London's Hippodrome, and Spice at Richfields in Manchester.
These parties were partly for cooling down and coming down, but they were also
promoted as responses to increasingly aggressive, and increasingly fast acid and

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[8] *Blues & Soul* no. 532, April 4–17, 1989, 19.
[9] Simon Reynolds, "808 State: New Bold Dreams," *Melody Maker*, November 18, 1989, 42.
[10] Ibid.

"hardcore" house music. Dream Age mainly featured space music, while space rock, jazz, indie rock, and Euro dance-pop were mixed together at Spice. Meanwhile, air-conditioned chill-out rooms and areas were popping up at more and more at raves and dance parties, such as Konspiracy in Manchester. More house DJs, accordingly, began producing "downtempo" tracks—house recordings with slow tempi and smooth grooves designed for respite from the intensity of the dance floor.

Fig 7.2. Partygoers at Dream Age. (Photograph courtesy of Dave Swindells.)

The Orb, however, were the first house DJs to commit to the "ambient" tag alongside groove-oriented electronic music that frequently occluded or dissolved rhythmic percussion and/or bass. The first production the duo released in this style was a remix of a house music track originally produced by Jimmy Cauty's other project, The

KLF (or just "KLF"), his duo with rock musician and A&R man Bill Drummond.[11] The

Orb's "Blue Danube Orbital" remix of The KLF's "3 A.M. Eternal" appeared,

originally uncredited, on a 12" single in September 1989. The remix opens with delay-

echoed birds, a synth chorus, and a woman singing wordlessly. A soft percussion

groove enters later, about a minute and a half in. Two minutes after this, the groove

fades out to the sounds of Strauss's "Blue Danube Waltz"—likely an allusion to

Kubrick's use of the tune in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A man then announces, through

heavy delay echo: "Our space cadets have finished their nap, and have one hour before

landing…." The percussion groove and synth chorus fade back in.

The Orb's first public use of the "ambient" label appeared on a monster 12"

single titled "A Huge Ever Growing Pulsating Brain That Rules From The Centre Of

The Ultraworld." Recorded in October 1989, and issued in December of that year, the

record bears the subtitle "ambient house for the e generation." The title track, appended

as "Loving You (Orbital Mix)," is a 19-minute-long, sample-rich odyssey notable not

only for its extreme length, but also for its scarcity of percussion, and almost total lack

of a kick drum. The music constantly hints at the entrance of a dance groove that never

quite gets going, conveying the pulsating headspace of a listener drifting light years

away from a party right around the corner.

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[11] "KLF" stands for "Kopyright Liberation Front," a name the duo came up with when
their project largely consisted of very long uncleared samples of pop music recordings.
For more on the KLF's history and symbology, see JMR Higgs, *KLF: Chaos Magic
Music Money* (The Big Hand, 2012).

Fig. 7.3. Vinyl disc sticker (*left*) and back cover (*right*) of packaging for The Orb's "A Huge Ever Growing Pulsating Brain..." (WAU! Mr. Modo Recordings, 1989).

"A Huge Ever Growing Pulsating Brain" opens with a stuttering synth choir, synth pads arpeggiating an Ebm9 chord, and ocean waves crashing.[12] For the first four minutes, one hears nothing but these sounds and an intermittent i-III-♭VII-i bass progression. The choir and waves flow in and out; the arpeggios are slowly filtered. At around four minutes in, almost everything falls away but the synth arpeggios, and the sound of cascading water moves to the front of the mix. Only after the water recedes, and another choral interlude passes, do we hear the faintest percussive sound at 5:15— perhaps a cymbal, but maybe just a shortened attack—tapping out the eighth note pulse along with the arpeggio. A muted tom joins the arpeggio about 30 seconds later, and it sounds like a full-textured groove will finally land once the tom rises in volume… it rises… but instead, at about 6:40, a heavily delay-echoed sample of Minnie Ripperton's "Loving You" enters the mix. Faint birdsong in the background. The tom exits,

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[12] The synth choir was created using samples from Grace Jones's "Slave to the Rhythm."

Ripperton sings, and then near 8:00 the introductory synth material enters once again.

The track continues in this gradually surging fashion for the next six minutes, with

various samples entering and exiting—an engine rumbling here, a clock alarm going off

there, a rooster crowing—all appearing and disappearing around the undulating filtered

arpeggios. Finally, 14 minutes in, a percussion groove builds up—and a muted 4-on-

the-floor kick drum lands! It's sampled, and somewhat muffled—and then, after barely

30 seconds, the kick disappears to the synth arpeggios and choir… samples of planes

whoosh overhead… a minute later, church bells clang… then ocean waves crash… the

track fades out….

So why the term "ambient house" to describe this music? It doesn't sound much

like Eno's Ambient music; it doesn't even sound like Eno's Ambient music with a

dance groove. Paterson, however, was quite the fan of Eno's—as well as a business

associate, having worked as an A&R scout for Eno's home label Editions E.G. earlier in

the decade. To Paterson, the term "Ambient" captured what made The Orb's music an

intriguing "alternative" to other dance music of the time: "We were playing rhythm-

orientated tracks but with no beats," Paterson later recalled.[13] If "A Huge Ever Growing

Pulsating Brain…" is any indication, "no beats" here seems to identify the lack of a kick

drum-based groove. (I will further explore the idea of ambient house's "beatlessness"

later in the chapter.) The term "ambient" also allowed Paterson to mark relaxing,

"beatless" music without invoking that other related term "new age," which over the

last half of the decade had been well worn as a marketing category for middle-aged

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[13] Jack Barrow, "The Orb," 120, in accompanying booklet, *Trance Europe Express*, various artists, Total Record Co. via BMG (UK) Ltd., TEEX 1, 1993, CD.

hippies. For the more studied young music fans of the time, "new age" suggested "world music" simplification, pseudo-spirituality, and formulaic pap. As John Rockwell in 1986 characterized the genre, new age overtly borrowed "third-world" and "folk music," equated relaxation with "meditation," and largely relied on conventional song structures.[14] As Paterson later told it in 1993, "new age" was exactly what he had been trying to avoid with the name "ambient house." "Now we've watched [ambient house] develop and we've seen other people take over," he lamented. "It's quite sad, really, in the sense that it has become exactly what I didn't want ambient house to become—new age rubbish…."[15]

The music press, at first, did not make the same distinction between "new age house" and "ambient house" that The Orb did. Paul Lester, in a December 1989 Melody Maker review, referred to 808 State's "Pacific State" as "ambient New Age House."[16] In February 1990, Paul Oldfield described the music of A Guy Called Gerald as "'New Age,' aka 'ambient' house, the phenomenon that emphasises the trance in trance dance, and should reconcile House music with 'head' rock."[17] Overseas, *Spin* reviewer Frank Owen referred to "New Age house" in March 1990 as "highly energized, ambient Muzak," and in May, reviewed the music of Larry Heard (aka Mr. Fingers) with the following description: "New age house, ambient house, abstract house, whatever you call his music, Heard… has created a distinctive body of work characterized by an eerie,

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[14] John Rockwell, "New-Age Music Searches for Its Proper Niche," *New York Times*, June 22, 1986, 25, 29.
[15] Barrow, "The Orb," 120–21.
[16] Paul Lester, "808 State '90' (Review)," *Melody Maker*, December 9, 1989, 34.
[17] Oldfield, "A Guy Called Gerald, ULU, London."

environmental feel."[18] The *Chicago Tribune* in July similarly equated Ambient house with new age house, calling the genre "house with a mellower melody."[19] Yet by the end of 1990, the term "new age house" had largely disappeared from the media. In an end-of-year dance music roundup, *Spin* identified The Orb as inventors of ambient house, called 808 State "ambient-house masters," and gestured to Manuel Gottsching's 1984 "E2E4" as "one of the earliest ambient house records."[20] As a musical descriptor, "ambient" had stuck, while "new age" fell to the wayside.

Fig. 7.4. Mr. Fingers, from "NEW AGE HOUSE" to "AMBIENT HOUSE" in eight months. (*Blues & Soul* no. 532, April 4–17, 1989, 19; *Blues & Soul* no. 555, Feb 27–Mar 12, 1990, 16.)

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[18] Frank Owen, "Big Beats," *Spin*, March 1990, 78; Frank Owen, "Environmental House," *Spin*, May 1990, 84.

[19] Marla Donato, "A Lesson on House Music," *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1990, sec. 7, 20.

[20] Bob Mack, "Flash: House Music Map of the Western World," *Spin*, December 1990, 33.

In March 1990, Paul Oldfield wrote the first comprehensive journalistic account of ambient house for *Melody Maker* at a time when most equated the genre with new age house. At times, the article reinforces this equation, while at other times it distances "ambient house" from earlier new age music. Oldfield disavows the domesticated "ease" associated with new age listening, assuring the reader that, despite its new age associations, "The best cuts… aren't the anodyne aural equivalent of a Radox bath."[21] As verification, Oldfield finds predecessors of ambient house in music that would have been approved by Britain's hip, white, and mostly male rock intelligentsia: ECM jazz, krautrock such as Tangerine Dream, and the "oceanic rock" of Pink Floyd and The Cocteau Twins. Anticipating Simon Reynolds and Joy Press's analysis of "oceanic rock" as pursuing an idealized mother/cosmic-sanctuary, Oldfield explains that ambient house recordings "are about sinking back into an undifferentiated, inarticulate condition, about being embraced in maternal flesh and blood again."[22] And while ambient house "fetishises… mother Nature," it also, unlike new age purists, "embrace[s] a high-tech future" that's more about "starting afresh, rather than conserving." Ambient house, it seems, was new age house's hipper, more tech-friendly younger brother.

Following The Orb's debut album's #29 appearance on the U.K. Billboard charts in April 1991 (more on this album in the following section), demand for electronic music suiting the recumbent listener rose. Many still regarded it as music for

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[21] Paul Oldfield, "Ambient House: The Ecstasy Fantasy," *Melody Maker*, March 10, 1990, http://www.808state.com/various/interview/1990-03-10-MelodyMaker-Article.html.
[22] Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock "N" Roll* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 191–227.

the ecstasy comedown. The comedown is "the highpoint of most people's nights," as

Warp label founder Steve Beckett attested. "That's when you start hearing the really

interesting, mindblowing stuff. If you're coming down off [drugs], you can get really

lost in your own thoughts and concentrate on the music, pay more attention to detail."[23]

Yet electronic music records for home listeners in most any state of mind—"electronic

listening music," as it was deemed by the Warp label—grew into a profitable submarket

that included ambient house. By the end of 1992, European artists such The Irresistible

Force, Biosphere, Aphex Twin, Future Sound of London, Ultramarine, and System 7

had contributed productions waving the "ambient" banner, and record labels were

touting new electronic genres for listening such as "ambient dub," "downtempo," and

"intelligent dance music." By the end of 1994, Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works

Vol. II* had cracked the U.K. Billboard chart, and compilations such as *Excursions in

Ambience*, *A Brief History of Ambient* (vols. 1-4), and *Chill Out!* had flooded the

electronic music markets in the U.S., U.K., and Western continental Europe. By mid-

decade, many electronic and non-electronic music listeners alike were equating

"ambient" with "marketing gimmick."

Yet a number of dance music fans had since its inception regarded the idea of

"ambient house" as equal parts promotional fad and piss-take. Jimmy Cauty already had

a widespread reputation as a prankster, having had reached #1 on the U.K. singles chart

in 1988 with the novelty song "Doctorin' the Tardis"—a satirically bone-headed mash-

up of Gary Glitter's "Rock and Roll" with the *Doctor Who* theme. Moreover, in the

context of a scene built around the bodily display of ego loss and extraverted

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[23] Reynolds, *Energy Flash!*, 158–59.

camaraderie, The Orb's revival of prog rock through their samplings of Pink Floyd and Steve Hillage, as well as the "symphonic" length of their recordings, may have signaled an ironic pretentiousness. Even aside from these gestures, the whole idea of dance music "without a beat" reads as an oxymoronic, self-conscious marketing gimmick. Cauty affirmed this in a February 1990 interview:

> We're dead serious about the music, but the name was a joke. It was never intended to be played in a club—it was for when you got home afterwards. But then suddenly everyone wanted to interview us about it. I don't know what it is they're latching onto, because there isn't a "scene." There isn't anything at all. People keep ringing me to ask if I want to DJ at their New Age night, but I've only got four records![24]

When The KLF released *Chill Out*, their own ambient house album, that same month, the Pink Floyd-referencing album cover—sheep lounging in a typically English pastoral field—not so subtly suggested an analogy between the album's listeners and the animals depicted on the cover (Fig 7.5).

At the same time, as the earlier chapters of this dissertation illustrate, the term Ambient was never *not* a marketing tool. Given the tenacity of the label beyond ambient house's peak moment in the early-mid 1990s, it's worth revisiting the terms by which The Orb, The KLF, and other adopters reestablished Ambient's import around this time.

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[24] Sheryl Garratt, "Welcome to the *Hippydrome*," *The Face*, February 1990, http://testpressing.org/2013/05/the-face-welcome-to-the-hippydrome/.
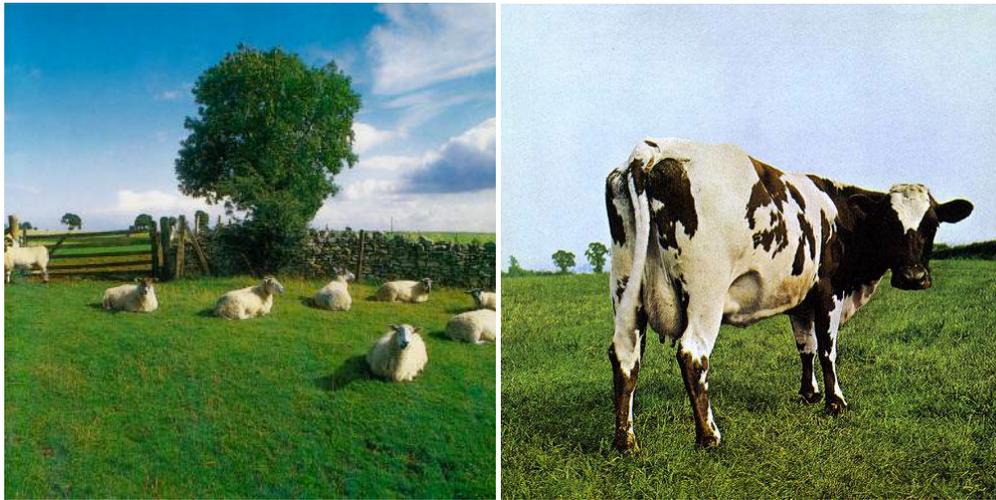
Fig. 7.5. Album covers for The KLF, *Chill Out* (Wax Trax!, 1990) (*left*); Pink Floyd, *Atom Heart Mother* (Harvest, 1970) (*right*).

Ambient House, Making Space: Five Cases

Following several joint sessions in early 1990, Alex Paterson and Jimmy Cauty split up following a dispute over label ownership of the duo's releases.[25] While Paterson hung onto "The Orb" moniker, Cauty shifted his focus onto his pre-existing project, The KLF. Cauty took the material he composed in these early Orb sessions, and released it in July 1990 on The KLF's album *Space*. Describing the album in the press release as a "rollercoaster ride around the solar system,"[26] Cauty titled the eight tracks after the eight planets (excepting Earth), with each successive track moving farther away from

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[25] According to Kris "Thrash" Weston, who joined Paterson in The Orb following the breakup, Cauty had wanted the "Huge Ever Pulsating Brain" release to appear on his label, KLF Communications. Paterson's label partner, Martin Price, put it out through Big Life Records instead. Paterson and Cauty then split when Big Life's owner insisted that The Orb's first album also appear on Big Life. Kris Weston, "a (rewritten) history from the past," *Internet Archive*, last modified June 26, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140626033214/https://krisweston.com/index.php/rant/.
[26] KLF Communications, "K.L.F. COMMUNICATIONS INFO' SHEET NINE," June 1990, http://www.libraryofmu.org/display-resource.php?id=509.

the sun. Over the course of the 40-minute long journey, one hears again and again the

muffled sound of a rocket blasting, as though it's being heard from inside the rocketship

itself. One also hears, sprinkled throughout, sounds of airborne objects, careening from

one side of the stereo field to the other, and clips of women singing in the distance—

wordless choral soprano and operatic mezzo-soprano vocalises that might typically be

described as "heavenly" and "angelic" (and commonly found in sci-fi film and

television soundtracks). One also hears a smattering of samples from such disparate

sources as an Ennio Morricone soundtrack, Snap!'s pop-house hit "The Power," and a

version of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" creepily pitch-shifted up (think the Wizard of

Oz's lollipop guild). Stringing these samples together throughout are gently chugging,

mid-tempo rhythmic arpeggios from Cauty's Oberheim keyboard.
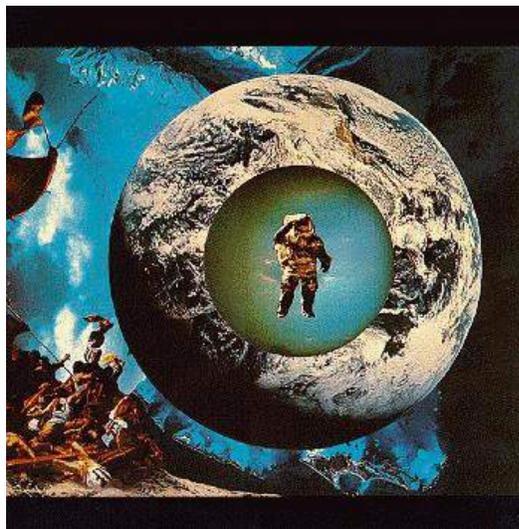
Fig 7.6. Album cover for The KLF, *Space* (KLF Communications, 1990).

Paterson likewise maintained a connection with space travel in his work as The

Orb. With a huge roster of producers, engineers, and writers behind the album project, The Orb released in April 1991 ambient house's first LP to land a spot on the U.K. Billboard albums chart. Over the next several years, *The Orb's Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld* attained acclaim among popular music critics for its creative use of samples and high production value. Much like *Space*, *Ultraworld* is a concept album that moves from little fluffy clouds outward into the galaxy unknown; in The Orb's case, this excursion lasts for nearly two hours. Also similarly to Cauty's album, one hears the sounds of sequenced synth arpeggios and looping pads intermixed with heavenly choirs, snatches of tunes by artists such as Kraftwerk and Lee "Scratch" Perry, and NASA-derived samples. Not coincidentally, Paterson took many of these NASA samples from a documentary film about the Apollo moon missions, *For All Mankind* (1989), for which Brian Eno composed a likewise inspiring soundtrack.

Eno composed and produced this soundtrack, released with the title *Apollo: Atmospheres and Soundtracks* in 1983, partly with the help of his brother Roger Eno and producer/guitarist Daniel Lanois. He issued the album when the release of the film (originally titled *Apollo*) became stalled indefinitely. Eno's music sought to capture the "grandeur" and "strangeness" he imagined of the moon missions, qualities that he felt were lost in the hyped-up news coverage of the event.[27] The music's airy, glassy string pads; gentle harp and piano; and distant echoes of uncertain origin contribute to an impression of weightlessness in vast space.

On the second half of the LP, Eno prominently evokes country-western music

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[27] Brian Eno, liner notes to Brian Eno with Daniel Lanois & Roger Eno, *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks*, Editions E.G. EGCD 53, 1990 (originally released in 1983), CD.

with pedal steel guitar licks and glides, processed heavily with reverb and delay to create shimmering effects. Eno had found it appropriate that many of Apollo's astronauts took country records with them for their exploration of the so-called final frontier, and sought to create a "frontier space music" to accompany this exploration.[28] "[Country's] sound is the sound of a mythical space, the mythical American frontier space that doesn't really exist anymore," Eno explains. "That's why on *Apollo* I thought it very appropriate… it has all the connotations of pioneering, of the American myth of the brave individual, and that myth has strong resonances throughout American culture."[29] The associative link between outer space and the U.S. American West was not circumstantial—throughout the twentieth century, the U.S. Western frontier has served internationally as a metaphor for sky and outer space, zones of increasing travel (and prospective settlement) by humans.[30] What's more, as Peter Doyle has detailed in his study of record production between 1900-60, echo and reverb in mid-century country-western music often connoted the "inner" space or "mindspace" of the lone cowboy.[31] The same might be said of Eno's echoing cosmos, connoting a psychological frontier space for the album's listener-travelers.

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[28] Andy Gill, "To Infinity and Beyond," *MOJO*, June 1998, http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/mojo98a.html.

[29] Mark Prendergast, "Brian Eno: Breaking the Silence," *Sound on Sound* 5, no. 12 (October 1990), http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/sos90b.html.

[30] David T. Courtwright, "The Routine Stuff: How Flying Became a Form of Mass Transportation," in *Reconsidering a Century of Flight*, ed. Roger D. Launius and Janet R. Daly Bednarek (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 209. On the overlap between science fiction and Western genres in literature, film, and television, see Carl Abbott, *Frontiers Past and Future: Science Fiction and the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); David Mogen, *Wilderness Visions: Science Fiction Westerns* (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo, 1982).

[31] See Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900–1960* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), especially 105–19.

Eno's use of country-western sounds to evoke frontier space on *Apollo* evidently made its mark on Cauty, who did the same on The KLF's first ambient house album, *Chill Out* (1990). Recorded with Bill Drummond in a live take at Cauty's South London studio, *Chill Out* depicts an imaginary journey from the southern tip of Texas up the Gulf Coast to Louisiana. Unlike *Apollo*, which utilizes country-western sounds to depict spacebound manifest destiny, *Chill Out*'s prominent pedal steel is connected specifically to the U.S. American terrain. Many of the album's other sonic signifiers, however, are only sometimes specific to the cultural geography of the U.S. South, and not by way of Texas or Louisiana: "Dream Time in Lake Jackson" showcases heavily echoed Tuvan throat singing, "Elvis on the Radio, Steel Guitar in My Soul" includes a sample of Tennesseean Elvis Presley singing "In the Ghetto" over Graham Lee's pedal steel, and "3AM Somewhere Out of Beaumont" goes from tropical birdsong and ocean waves crashing to sheep bleating and… Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross"? "I've never been to those places," Drummond reflects, referring to Texas and Louisiana. "I don't know what those places are like but in my head, I can imagine those sounds coming from those places, just looking at the map."[32] The results are fantastical and eccentric, conjuring a hallucinatory U.S. South with a musical history only conjecturally connected to its spatial and cultural makeup.

So far, I've discussed several Ambient and ambient house albums with overlapping thematizations of space: on the one hand, these albums sonically and visually metaphorize open or outer spaces as traversable locations or places, while they

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[32] Ian Roullier, "Spotlight: The KLF, Chill Out," *Clash Magazine* 2, issue 5, November 2006, http://www.ianroullier.com/interviews_and_features/klf_chillout.htm.

at the same time use disparate, often non-native musical signifiers to convey a sense of

connection across great distance. Much as the airport and airplane served Eno and The

Black Dog as metaphors for passage through space (Ch. 6), distant or outer space

operates similarly in these albums as metaphorical zones of listener movement and

occupation. Yet unlike the albums discussed in the previous chapter, in which the

airport and airplane represent potentially stagnant places of containment or stasis in

travel, these albums emphasize distant space's potential limitlessness as a zone of

outward movement. And whereas the earlier albums might trigger doubt or uncertainty,

these albums more often deliver outer/frontier space to moods of grandeur and wonder.

The thematizations of these latter records are combined in a 1994 album by Pete

Namlook, German producer and owner of the Ambient label FAX. *Air II*, the second

album in a series of five released under Namlook's pseudonym Air, is an ambient house

album alternately titled *Travelling without Moving*. The LP is composed of 11 tracks

titled as "trips" (Trip 1, Trip 2, etc.). Depending on which "trip" you listen to, you may

hear synth drones and loops interacting with throat singers (Trip 1), tabla (Trip 2),

gamelan loops (Trip 6), twinkling mbiras (Trip 7), didgeridoo (Trip 8), oud (Trip 9),

and various other "exotic" musical signifiers unbeholden to physical contiguity. As with

Chill Out, Namlook uses the music of distant places to convey the sense of a grand

journey, movement across distant space, and ultimately a fluid global totality. And like

The KLF and The Orb, Namlook plays on visual tropes of space travel, with the album

cover depicting an astronaut floating in outer space, apparently hovering above the

earth's atmosphere, gazing down. The compilation album art also invites an analogy

between this space-borne astronaut on the back cover and a young clubber, lying prone

in what appears to be a domestic setting, perhaps after a night out, on the front.

Fig. 7.7. Album cover for The Air Collection (Fax +49-69/450464, 2007) (*left*);
back cover (*right*).

"Time to Lie Down and Be Counted": Domesticating the Chill-Out Room

At about 2½ minutes into the track "Madrugada Eterna" on The KLF's *Chill Out*—about 12 minutes into the entire trip—one hears a sample of a man, enthusiastically yelling, "Come back fat as a rat! All the way down the East coast! Get ready. Get ready. Get-get-get-get…." He returns about a minute and a half later, jogging from stereo right to left: "Youth! Get-get-get-get-get ready. Get ready." The "get ready" mantra is reprised a little over 15 minutes later, this time within its full original sample: an Evangelical Baptist pastor summoning patrons from Atlanta to the Bronx for a "big money blessing."[33] The refrain adds a curious twist to the surrealistic trip put together

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[33] The exact identity of the man hasn't been confirmed, but various sources speculate that the pastor is Newark, NJ-based Reverend Doctor James C. Wade, a nationally known television and AM radio evangelist during the 1960s and '70s.

by The KLF, since although the listening experience seems to be one of ongoing travel, it suggests that the listener has yet to get a move on. "Get ready." The pastor's demand for preparation echoes The KLF's warning in a 1989 press release advertising *Chill Out*: "Don't bother trying to listen to this LP if you have neither first switched off the lights and then laid your body to rest on the floor," it reads. "Hopefully then the trip will be complete."[34]

The listener's immobilized body, both in anticipation and at ease, seems part and parcel with the ambient house trip. One can observe this in The KLF's press release accompanying *Space*'s promotional copies. The advert tells the story of a "Distribution Girl" who receives the record (and the very communiqué she's reading) on a night in June 1990. "The Party is over," it begins. "What is left of the E Generation have all gone off to Glastonbury." Distribution Girl, wondering whether the "Party" had any purpose in the first place, reads the accompanying sheet. "AMBIENT HOUSE SPECTACULAR…," it announces. "THE ULTIMATE TRIP…." She expresses disdain at the pitch ("As if anybody is going to be interested") before putting on her headphones anyway. She turns off the lights, and lies in bed; 35 minutes later, she's "hurtling through the Void" toward Earth at terrifying speed.[35] Much like Syntonic Research's "hip" anti-marketing,[36] The KLF's text reflexively anticipates the reader's

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[34] KLF Communications, "K.L.F. COMMUNICATIONS INFO' SHEET NO.7," December 1989, *Internet Archive*, last modified February 4, 2012, accessed December 30, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20120204050408/http://www.libraryofmu.org/display-resource.php?id=507.

[35] KLF Communications, "K.L.F. COMMUNICATIONS INFO' SHEET NINE."

[36] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997), 55; see also Chs. 1 and 3.

identification with the "knowing" reader by cynically recognizing itself as empty hype, while also insisting that they shelve the cynicism and immerse themselves in the music. Relax in your bed, it tells the listener; shut out the world, be on your own. The viscerally riveting, hallucinatory experience that follows, I promise, will offer the thrill of lost control. The means and surroundings may have changed, but the Party continues.

The listening conditions described by The KLF—lights off, body recumbent, distractions minimized—work together to reconstruct the chill-out room within the home, away from strangers. *Chill Out* asks the listener to prepare themselves for total immersion in music that, as Paul Oldfield writes of ambient house, "Simply un-focuses your perceptions, absorbs you utterly, so that you lose all consciousness of yourself, all sense of being apart from what you're listening to."[37] Oldfield attributes these effects to the sound of ambient house music, but one could equally well imagine them arising in response to symphonic music in the concert hall, or acid house in the club. Such effects commonly arise when visual distractions are minimized and sound floods a room; what differs for *Chill Out*'s listener is their ability to select, prepare, and control this experience themselves. As with the Ambient recordings explored earlier in this study, *Chill Out* sells itself on the environmental control that comes with private electronics.

Unlike earlier Ambient recordings, however, the rhetoric around ambient house usually expected the fullness of listener's attention. While the Ambient label initially implied flexible listening conditions, inattention to the music does not seem to be the best option for the ambient house traveler. Likely, this results from its origins in the chill-out room. The attention of the ambient house listener, as Oldfield remarks of its

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[37] Oldfield, "Ambient House: The Ecstasy Fantasy."

original public context, should be fixed upon sound, while remaining unfocused or diffuse—perhaps drifting from one sonic layer to another, or simply letting sounds float by without tracking their progression.[38] Pauline Oliveros has usefully termed this less concentrated sort of attention "global attention," meaning an impartial presence of mind and body to sound that, in opposition to "focal attention," is more inclusive than exclusive, and more impressionable than discerning.[39]

Another useful point of comparison appears in the therapeutic practice of Helen Bonny. Developed in the early 1970s, Bonny's practice, now called the Bonny Method, utilizes a combination of music recordings and guided imagery in a meditational setting. In these sessions, listeners (or "travelers") listen to a pre-selected sequence of musical recordings (normally classical) while sitting or lying quietly with eyes closed. Total physical relaxation and unstrained aural concentration, as Bonny explains, are ideal conditions for travelers to achieve "new dimensions of awareness" during these sessions.[40] As travelers listen, the leader (or "guide") suggests actions and environments for the traveler to imagine, such as walking through a forest into an empty house. The goal of this practice is for travelers to access personal memories, feelings, or thoughts they might not normally access in daily life. Within this "inner space," Bonny writes, travelers "will discover a vast terrain with many areas to explore. The mind is still

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Pauline Oliveros, *Software for People* (Baltimore: Smith, 1984), 138–57, 165–67, 185–86, 214–25; Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), 1316.

[40] Helen L. Bonny and Louis M. Savary, *Music and Your Mind: Listening with a New Consciousness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 25.

largely uncharted territory; we are all pilgrims there."[41]

As with ambient house, the Bonny Method calls upon listeners to relax and allow the music to carry them into imagined spaces. Yet while the "traveling" rhetoric surrounding ambient house listening carries similarities, ambient house is less overtly oriented around therapeutic purposes. Whereas Bonny describes listening as a meditational practice of self-betterment, ambient house depicts its aural journeys in terms of self-departure, as though listening were a flight of the mind leaving the person behind. Both, however, rely on a conception of listening that is, in some sense, removed from the physical world. They propose a departure from lived place into abstract time, from the corporeal self into seemingly immaterial, transcendental inner space.

Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: Tracking Metaphors of Transport in Ambient House

Ambient house dualistically conjures a presence of mind and withdrawal of body through sonic contrasts. As with The Orb's "Pulsating Brain," the rhythmic flow of high-pitched percussion with looped or improvisatory melodies recalls something of the dance groove's "head space," yet largely lacks its usual percussive kicks and bass attacks. The air-travel thematization of these dualities may be observed on British producer Mixmaster Morris's first LP as The Irresistible Force, *Flying High* (1992).

The album opens with the sound of a plane flying overhead, followed by a sample of a man narrating a meditational exercise. "The first phase of our exercise is relaxing through concentration," he says softly, his words blurred by heavy echo. "Place

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[41] Ibid., 33.

a thin mat upon the floor. Or, if your floor is carpeted, this will do as well. Now, stretch

out on the floor, lying flat on your back. Close your eyes, and let them remain shut

during this portion of the exercise….” The music swells: a melodic harp looping

alongside a drone rhythmically gated to produce a gently chugging sixteenth-note pulse.

These sounds are continually filtered across the mid to upper-mid frequency range, with

instrumental entrances rather than percussive snares or kicks defining its metric profile.

Only about 11 minutes into the album, in the second track, does one hear the faintest of

kick drums skittering across the smooth rhythmic groove—a light, syncopated tapping

that disappears one minute later. It’s not until 40 minutes into the album that one hears a

four on the floor beat, a rarity in an album that largely rides by on cymbals high. For the

supine listener, the effect is hardly a call to the dance floor, but instead presents itself as

a climactic plane of intensity in the album’s full unfolding. In the sleeve notes, the

phrase “*I THINK THEREFORE I AMBIENT*” appears upon the backdrop of a serene,

sunny sky (Fig 7.8). The phrase took off amongst ambient house fans, as the manifesto

began appearing on t-shirts and fan mixtapes. Morris, ever the sloganeer, continued

pushing the Ambient genre with another accompanying phrase: “It’s Time to Lie Down

and Be Counted.”[42]

Ambient house, like early Ambient, metaphorically connected air travel with

bodily stillness and mental activity. These recordings employed samples and musical

mimeses of vehicular travel to assist listeners’ mental departure from a material, bodily

ground. The KLF’s *Chill Out*, for example, illustrates these correlations with samples

and simulations of moving vehicles shooting through the sonic field. The record opens

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[42] Reynolds, *Energy Flash!*, 173.
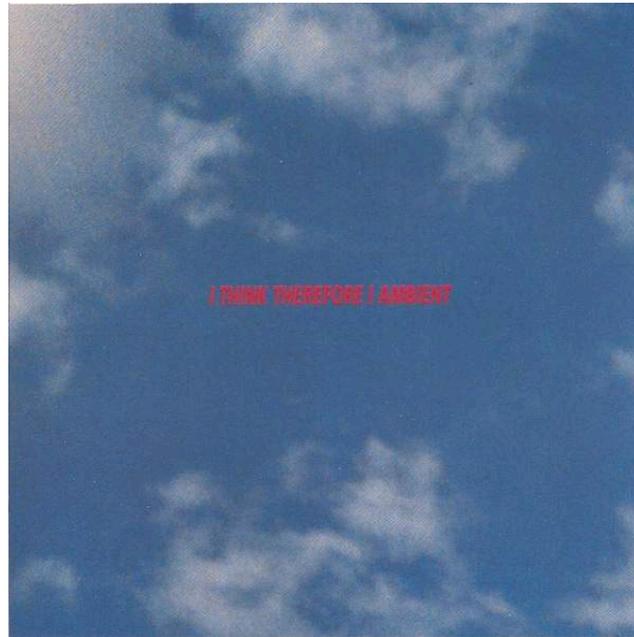
Fig 7.8. "I THINK THEREFORE I AMBIENT." Liner notes to The Irresistible Force, *Flying High* (Rising High, 1992).

with the rumble of a train and a clattering railroad, samples that recur throughout the album. The sounds of planes also recur, shooming distantly overhead. The juxtaposition of grounded transportation with flight confounds the idea that *Chill Out* straightforwardly depicts the sounds of an imaginary U.S. journey. (Wouldn't the sounds of planes be inaudible from a train car? Why do the train sounds disappear almost as quickly as they enter?) *Chill Out* does not literally depict or document the sounds of an imaginary journey, but rather uses music and sound to affectively and metaphorically re-produce the mental space of the traveler. The album's listener enters the "head space" of The KLF's depicted traveler, taking on a sort of "first-person" perspective that might be understood analogously to an extended point-of-view camera shot. From this perspective, the listener-cum-traveler might hear the disappearance of

the train's rumble as the sound's phenomenological withdrawal into the background of their perspective, as their attention drifts towards the "scenery" outside. The planes shooting overhead might be taken as one of various aspects of this scenery, but they also metaphorize the traveler-listener's attention, taking flight from awareness of their own physical grounding and technologized transport. At the same time, the listener's identification with a persona traveling by vehicle makes it possible to extend this interpretation to the programmer of the recording, with the train standing in for the technology that makes the musical journey possible, and planes representing the programmer's awareness detaching from this technology as they begin listening.

The KLF's train samples extend a long history in Western music and literature in which trains symbolize the technologization of the modern Western subject. Michael Jarrett argues that music in the 20th century reflects this human conditioning in both content and form, a phenomenon he calls "the railroading of music."[43] Electronic dance music and Ambient both, he proposes, summon in the listener a "deconcentration" not unlike that of the train traveler. Borrowing from Wolfgang Schivelbusch's writings on train travel in the 19th century, Jarrett describes how travelers were once disturbed by the "mechanization" of visual perception that occurs on trains. Unable to focus on nearby entities, travelers were forced to adopt a "panoramic" gaze by observing distant scenes, and the wash of colors and textures passing nearby.[44] The noise of the railroad, Jarrett argues, imposed a similarly "deconcentrated" quality of perception upon the train

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[43] Michael Jarrett, "Train Tracks: How the Railroad Rerouted Our Ears," *Strategies* 14, no. 1 (2001): 38.

[44] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century*, trans. Anselm Hollo (New York: Urizen Books, 1979), 58–60.

traveler's ear: "Encased in a womb of steel, a sonorous envelope, the chronically distracted rail passenger bathes in patterned noise."[45] 20th-century traveler-listeners, unlike their forebears, came to regard this automation and blurring of sensory experience an enjoyable facet of travel, as The KLF's "uplifting" journey illustrates.

Unlike most other electronic dance music, though, the clanking rhythm of the railroad in ambient house often disappears beneath the slow motion drift of sonic plateaus, or recedes with their lack of bass presence. When trains and cars do appear, as in The KLF's *Chill Out,* they serve mainly as figures of contrast to the unrooted sounds that take up most of the album's recorded space. This point is illustrated best in "Madrugada Eterna," a track that prominently features stock cars racing in and out of the stereo field. It opens with the sound of a car zooming by, followed by furious honking. Fifty seconds later, following a dreamy pedal steel and electronic organ interlude, one hears another "doppler-effect" car zoom across the stereo field from left to right [0:57]. Unlike the opening sample, however, this sound is chopped up into a whirring rhythmic pulsation, and appears to be synthetically generated rather than sampled. The zoom repeats [1:03], and then passes by again—but now chugging, slowed down to half speed [1:09]. Was that a techno track going by? The slowing effect makes a connection between the grounded vehicle, the grounded body, and electronic dance music, as this slowing of the racecar zoom reveals itself to be a hi-hat and low-pitched synth lead that would not be out of place in a booming acid house or techno track. The momentary appearance of this bass-heavy pulse in The KLF's trip sharply contrasts with the laziness of the drift that surrounds it; the listener is briefly called to

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[45] Jarrett, "Train Tracks," 35.

labor in tandem with the motorized sound, only to be released again to floating. Bubbling up like a repressed memory of the all-night rave, the gesture toward house music's imperative to dance reveals the listener's still body as the unacknowledged vehicle grounding ambient house travel.

In most house music, as with many musics with roots in the African diaspora, motorized vehicles commonly serve as figures of bodily participation and mimesis, rather than as vessels of passive occupancy. As Joel Dinerstein shows in his study of African-American musical modernism during the interwar period, African Americans "techno-dialogicically" responded to industralized labor and electrified urban life by making the rhythms of modernity something pleasurable to physically inhabit.[46] In the 1920s, the train became a regular figure in blues lyrics, while the jazz groove took on the clickety-clack of the railroad track—a sound later approximated timbrally and rhythmically in the shuffle of the tap dancer. The train symbolized not only national unity and industrial power, but also escape from hardship. The grooves established through these symbolic appropriations invited audiences to feel power and freedom through social dance.

Popular music critic Kodwo Eshun has likewise described the enlivening effect of the electro-funk groove through the metaphor of the train:

> Groove is when overlapping patterns of rhythm interlock, when beats syncromesh until they generate an automotion effect, an inexorable, effortless sensation which pushes you along from behind until you're funky like a train. To get into the Groove is to lock into the polyrhythmotor,

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[46] Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 5.

to be adapted by a fictionalized rhythm engine which draws you on its own momentum.[47]

The effect in listening to groove-based musics is a brief call to hop on board with the heavy pulse that *entrains* the body, pulling it in lockstep with its regularity.[48] To call pulsed rhythm "groove" is to mark the way it calls upon the listener's body to move along and participate, in Anne Danielsen's words, in "marking time with movement."[49]

Fig. 7.9. All aboard the "Trancentral" train! Advertisement for The KLF.

The ambient house listener, by contrast, is not invited to "do time" with the music, at least not through physical motion. Although house music does nominally receive a nod in the "ambient house" label, signifying the pulsed rhythms that

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[47] Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet, 1998), 82.

[48] Barring the many and increasing cognitive studies of the phenomenon of entrainment in musical listening, significant studies of musical entrainment include Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager, and Udo Will, "In Time with the Music: The Concept of Entrainment and Its Significance for Ethnomusicology," *ESEM CounterPoint* 1 (2004): 1–82; Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 78–96.

[49] Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 203.

occasionally weave through its textures, these rhythms tend to be strongly quantized to the pulse, largely lacking the "participatory discrepancies" with the pulse that Charles Keil finds essential to groove feeling.[50] Ambient house rhythms also tend to distribute stress evenly across the subdivisions of the meter, minimizing or eliminating the cross rhythms that often propel the house groove.[51] And perhaps most overtly, the percussive groove generally occupies less room in the virtual acoustic space of the recording than in non-ambient house tracks. The "ambient" in ambient house thus seems to signal, in part, a departure from house music's Afrodiasporic aesthetics in its elimination of house music's bodily groove—dance music off the rails. It's no coincidence that metaphors of travel by air are more common to the ambient house drift than journeys by road.

Rethinking the "Beatlessness" of Ambient Musics

Ambient music is often described in terms of the lack of a "beat" or "beats." Alex Paterson of The Orb once submitted that Ambient is latent in Chicago house to begin with—listen to Fingers, Inc. "minus the beats," he suggests, and you get Ambient music.[52] Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson similarly propose that "the presence of a beat defines dance music; the absence of one defines 'ambient' proper."[53] Marc Weidenbaum has observed that Ambient fans in the 1990s often referred to Ambient

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[50] Charles Keil, "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music," *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 3 (August 1987): 275–83.

[51] Marc Weidenbaum notes the relative scarcity of cross rhythms in Aphex Twin's Ambient music in *Selected Ambient Works Volume II*, 33⅓ Series (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 23.

[52] Oldfield, "Ambient House: The Ecstasy Fantasy."

[53] Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson, *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 94. Online fans continue to puzzle over whether Ambient music with "beats" should be understood as "proper" or "pure" Ambient, as some do—and over whether the distinction matters!

music as "beatless" in internet forums, despite the presence of looped, pulse-based rhythm in many well-known Ambient recordings. My own survey of Ambient listeners finds this formulation lingering today; when I asked fans to define Ambient music, 13% referred to it as "beatless" or lacking "beats."

So, what do people mean when they say that Ambient music is dance music without "the beats"? Weidenbaum surmises that "beatless" is a way of describing songs that are missing the conventional "lattice" of pop song structure.[54] In this conception, the "ambient" of ambient house signifies the individuating material of a song, the flesh that fills out the rhythmic "skeleton" and formulaic structure of a pop recording. This way of demarcating what counts as "ambient," however, risks dismissing the groove as a standardized element of electronic music, as though it can be excised without sacrificing what makes the music "intelligent" or musical. It may be closer to the mark to say that "beatless" or "ambient" simply means a relative lack of percussion, but as my earlier analyses of The Orb's "Pulsating Brain" and The Irresistible Force's *Flying High* illustrate, ambient house generally lacks a physicality, rather than density of percussive sounds. And although both Ambient and ambient house generally forego bass-oriented, cross-rhythmic grooves, the subsequent development of subgenres like "ambient dub" and "ambient jungle" show how even these elements can have a "beatless" effect when washed out with reverb, or pushed to breakneck speed, becoming enveloping as much as impelling to movement.

One might thus imagine that when people describe Ambient music as "beatless"—or house music as "ambient"—they are primarily identifying the relatively

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[54] Weidenbaum, *Selected Ambient Works Volume II*, 31.

passive embodied response that the music affords when compared with dance music. Whether or not "beatless" or "ambient" music has a pulse or groove, these terms are generally attached to electronic musics more suited to chilling out than dancing. "Beatless" may signify a lack of "drive" to physical movement, and perhaps a tendency to relax, disengage, or "de-activate" the body.[55]

Ambient house's maintenance of the percussive groove subtly infers that disengaged listening, though sometimes considered dispassionate, disembodied, or "cerebral," is no less physical or embodied than other modes of listening that involve movement. As Gilbert and Pearson explain, "Although ambient has often been thought of as 'head music' in comparison to 'body music' (which is for dancing to) this is a naïve formulation. Ambient music is not an object of contemplation: it is a source of affect. It may not make us dance, but its effects are just as directly physical as those of other dance musics."[56] In fact, by staying still in listening, it's quite possible that Ambient and ambient house listeners are responding mimetically to the passive or inactive style of physical embodiment suggested by the musical texture. Philosophers of music such as Arnie Cox and Naomi Cumming, and more recently researchers of the auditory-motor and mirror neuron systems, have developed a "mimetic hypothesis" that suggests music listeners subconsciously hear music as if a human body were creating it, and interpret the music by internally imitating the gestures or comportment necessary to

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[55] Thanks to Yvonne Liao for suggesting to me the term "de-activation" to describe this tendency of the Ambient listener.
[56] Gilbert and Pearson, *Discographies*, 94.

create its sounds.[57] At times, these imitations manifest overtly, as in the case of dancing

and singing along, but this is not always the case (for instance, through subconscious

"vocal simulation").[58]

While Western listeners are generally accustomed to associating percussive

sounds and rhythms with physicality, and non-percussive sounds and harmony with

thought,[59] the mimetic hypothesis suggests that these associations have less to do with

level of complexity than they do with the sorts of physical comportment or action they

afford or command. Sharp percussive sounds and bass frequencies may be heard in

terms of the laboring physical body because our internal "mirroring" systems interpret

them as requiring more physical speed and force. Perhaps, then, because our auditory-

motor systems interpret sounds in the middle and upper frequency ranges, or sounds

with long attacks (like the synth pads that pervade Ambient music), as automatic and

effortless, we "mirror" these sounds in kind by staying in place. These sounds may be

associated with thinking or sensory perception because, like mental activities, they do

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[57] Arnie Cox, "The Mimetic Hypothesis and Embodied Musical Meaning," *Musicae Scientiae* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 195–212; Naomi Cumming, "The Subjectivities of 'Erbarme Dich,'" *Music Analysis* 16, no. 1 (1997): 5–44.
  Empirical research on music listening and the auditory-motor and mirror neuron systems remains in an exploratory phase, but is growing. For some approachable overviews, see Joyce L. Chen and Virginia B. Penhune, "When the Brain Plays Music: Auditory-Motor Interactions in Music Perception and Production," *Neuroscience* 8 (July 2007): 547–58; Istvan Molnar-Szakacs and Katie Overy, "Music and Mirror Neurons: From Motion to 'E'motion," *Scan* 1 (2006): 235–41; Zachary Wallmark, "Appraising Timbre: Embodiment and Affect at the Threshold of Music and Noise" (Ph.D. Dissertation, UCLA, 2014). Thanks to Zachary Wallmark and Marco Iacoboni for their helpful input on this material.

[58] Ian Cross, "Listening as Covert Performance," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, no. 1 (2010): 67–77.

[59] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 125.

not necessitate physical movement. The mimetic hypothesis of musical listening might thus explain why Ambient music is associated with cerebral activity: the conventional association arises from the mimetic response provoked by Ambient music. The distinction between "head" and "body" music, or "beatless music" and "music with beats," may not be so much a matter of non-embodied versus embodied music, but rather disengaging versus rousing.

Toward a Social Phenomenology of Ambient Consumption

Simon Reynolds, in his history of electronic dance music, describes the rise of popular electronic music "for listening" during the early '90s as a response to the increasing physical intensity of dance music in the U.K. around that time. As "hardcore" rave music got ever faster and harder, pummeling listeners with flurries of percussion at breakneck tempi, "electronic listening music" such as ambient house responded by excising dance music of its black and working-class appeal: the physically activating elements of hip-hop, funk, and punk. Beneath its accompanying rhetoric of "intelligent" and "progressive" music, there "lurked the bourgeois-bohemian impulse to delineate a firm border between discerning few and undiscriminating masses."[60] In short, chill-out music was a phenomenon "founded on exclusions."[61] Although Reynolds praises artists like Mixmaster Morris and Aphex Twin, he mostly criticizes ambient house as pretentious, describing the subgenre as a "glut of melodious, middlebrow 'mindfood' that neglected dance music's proper priorities, rhythmic

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[60] Reynolds, *Energy Flash*, 157.
[61] Ibid., 158.

complexity and kinetic urgency."[62]

Populist authentications like Reynolds's have become typical in pop cultural studies and criticism ever since Pierre Bourdieu famously analyzed dispassionate art reception as the display and legitimization of elite taste. "The body," Bourdieu asserted, "is the most indisputable materialization of class taste,"[63] and "legitimate" consumption, he noted, most plainly manifests as "ease" or "facility" in the face of the "autonomous" artwork (55, 71). In this way, dispassionate contemplation symbolically affirms one's distance from economic necessity (5). "Popular" aesthetics, by contrast, reflect the working and lower-middle classes' "deep-rooted demand for participation" with art in its physical and social utility (32). Bourdieu's "middlebrow" consumer is stuck between these two poles, seeking legitimacy by mimicking the reception habits of the elite, albeit within a mass market of "controlled transgressions" (326).[64] Reynolds's assessment reflects Bourdieu's logic: by chilling out, the inactive ambient house listener refrains from physical participation, marking the moral superiority of their taste; and yet, outside the sanctioned institution of "high" art, this mode of consumption ultimately reflects a middle-class striving for cultural legitimacy through opposition to the "lower" classes.

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[62] Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 204. Reynolds modifies his language in *Energy Flash!* (the updated edition of the U.S. version of *Generation Ecstasy*), calling electronic listening music "a glut of melodious, middlebrow 'mindfood'—music hedged on one side by its disdain for the functionalism of 'rave fodder', and on the other by its reluctance to really explore the extremities of mindfuck texturology." Reynolds, *Energy Flash!*, 186.

[63] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (1979; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 190.

[64] See also Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult and Midcult," in *Masscult and Midcult: Essays against the American Grain*, ed. John Summers (New York: New York Review Books, 2011), 3–71.

Under this sociological lens, all styles of art reception come down to the display

of taste, while the display of taste boils down to the assertion of social legitimacy; and

as Bourdieu argues, one can only justify one's taste "purely negatively, by the refusal of

other tastes" (56). Various popular music studies have since relied upon Bourdieu's idea

of symbolic exclusion to explain high and/or middlebrow taste as *dis*taste for art of the

"masses" or socioeconomic underclasses.[65] Such explanations of elite taste illustrate

how discourses of artistic preference reproduce hierarchies of social power by

systematically discouraging middle-class identification with the social underclasses.

Based on my survey, this sort of analysis could be provisionally extended to Ambient

music fans, whose musical dislikes most reflect antipathy toward musics culturally

associated with the working classes (country, rap, metal) and mass publics

("mainstream" or "commercial" music).[66] The demographics of the survey correspond

with these rejections, as Ambient listeners surveyed were overwhelmingly white, male,

middle class, and college-educated.

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[65] Scholarship on musical taste that follows in this vein include Bethany Bryson, "Anything but Heavy Metal: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 5 (October 1996): 884–99; Wendy Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006); Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Leslie M Meier, "In Excess? Body Genres, 'Bad' Music, and the Judgment of Audiences," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 20, no. 3 (2008): 240–60; Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste*, 33⅓ Series (New York: Continuum, 2007). For a general sociological analysis of middle-class identity as founded in social exclusion, see Stephanie Lawler, "Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities," *The Sociological Review* 53, no. 3 (August 2005): 429–46.
[66] Appendix, 363. Surveyed Ambient fans also commonly convey antipathy toward musics culturally associated with girls, women, and gay men, namely pop and opera (Ibid.).

However, the analysis of middlebrow taste as social exclusion is conspicuously one-sided, for it only ever adjudicates its legitimizations from a birds-eye point of view of the hierarchical social field. Ethnographies of "elite" or high-middlebrow music cultures similarly often highlight performers' and audiences' imputed drive to status, ideological domination, or cultural capital, while eschewing subjective accounts of personal recognition, familiarity, and attachment.[67] Yet subjective accounts almost always compare asymmetrically with descriptions of taste as social exclusion, since living out one's cultural preferences doesn't usually appear to oneself as legitimization. 9.2% of survey respondents, when asked to reflect upon Ambient's appeal, made a point of comparing Ambient favorably to other sorts of music or "convention"; but they more often noted its calming nature, its unobtrusiveness, or its openness to personal experience or interpretation.

So what is the "cultural and experiential passage" that connects Ambient reception with the social values of its listeners?[68] A key can be found in the trope of "traveling without moving" in ambient house. Ambient recordings afford their listeners disengagement both literally and symbolically, depicting virtual detachment from social or cultural belonging just as listeners' audio devices conjure it in real time. In designing experiences of travel through uninhabited space—whether this space looks like nature,

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[67] Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt*; Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998); Thornton, *Club Cultures*. One notable counterexample can be found in Claudio E. Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).
[68] Paul E. Willis, *Profane Culture* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 178.

or an airport, the sky or outer space—ambient recordings symbolize withdrawal from the interactive, participatory realm of movement into a comfortably asocial space for de-concentration. From their earliest conception, Ambient recordings have afforded listeners opportunities to escape the social demands of public life, and slip into spaces imagined to be free from societal belonging or obligation. Accordingly, both Ambient and ambient house were created as escapes from the demands enforced by publically programmed music—whether the social "consensus" symbolically assumed of Muzak (Ch. 6) or the shared participatory space of the rave (Ch. 7). Ambient recordings, in this way, trade the pleasures social disaffiliation—a mark of the countercultural or high-middlebrow consumer—for the pleasures of solitude through private technologies. Ambient recordings both promote and reinforce social detachment and retreat into a potentially expansive personal or inner zone. This imaginary exodus from social life, and retreat from communicative significance more broadly, symbolically affirms the utility of audio recordings as vehicles of social and corporeal disengagement. These technologized exits from the social environment make room for what Philip Koch calls the "virtues of solitude": a freedom to cogitate and reflect, and time to access the "revelations" of self and nature.[69]

Ambient music has been, and continues to be historically aligned with markets of consumers who experience their social and bodily disengagement via technology in terms of an escape into mental space. From *Environments* to ambient house, the rhetoric of the musical "trip" runs through Ambient recordings—even Eno's relatively sober

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[69] Philip Koch, *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1994), 99–135.

claim that Ambient music provides a "space to think." Ambient recordings generally afford listeners realms of introspection, imagination, and self-projection. Drones and loops line the edges of the listener's mental space, blocking out potentially intrusive noises while flooding their own atmosphere with reliably regular sound. The "beatlessness" of Ambient music creates an mimetic grounds for participation in this inward-turning, as it establishes a resource for stilling the body and imaginatively leaving it behind. It symbolically rewards the unmoving home traveler who traverses inner space on the wings of their private playback technology by recreating the security of the cocooned private vehicle.[70] Ambient music, through this trope, re-creates the high-middlebrow/countercultural pleasure of disaffiliation as a pleasure of "surrender" to technologized disengagement, "loosening" the body, and "traveling" into a "head space" disconnected from one's inert materiality.

Are these not social pleasures? Perhaps not if one imagines social pleasure only as feelings of belonging or togetherness with other humans in common physical space. Yet Ambient's listeners, in preparing and technologically programming individualized private space, nonetheless use technology in the social acts of exercising taste and experiencing art. Such activity, in this case, is not directly about display, but rather about choosing media that will dispose the self to enjoyment. As Antoine Hennion writes, taste is "a reflexive, instrumented arrangement to test our sensations."[71] Genre,

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[70] On the aural cocooning of the private vehicle, see Karin Bijsterveld et al., *Sound and Safe: A History of Listening Behind the Wheel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 87–107.

[71] Antoine Hennion, "Loving Music: From a Sociology of Mediation to a Pragmatics of Taste," *Scientif Journal of Media Education* 34, no. 17 (2010): 27.

accordingly, is a guide or legend in the symbolic or virtual space of popular aesthetics.

Ambient's consumers, by selecting their listening as such, consciously volunteer or

elect their social participation within this symbolic cultural space.[72] The election of

impersonal detachment afforded by Ambient's aesthetics of departure from the cultural

"commons" constitutes the very form of Ambient consumers' social participation.

As I've suggested at various points across this dissertation, Ambient enables

involvement by virtue of identification with its composite "background" spaces, and

mimesis of their objective detachment. And when Ambient music makes its

technological origins explicit through synthesized sounds, periodic waveforms,

production effects, loops, and drones, this detachment from humanity is conveyed

symbolically and affectively through electronic sound. Ambient recordings create

spaces for syntonic attunement to, and mimesis of electronics, via the listener's self-

recognition in electronics' symbolic distance from nature. In contrast with electronic

dance music, this musical mimesis of automated technology is disengaged in its

automaticity, high tech rather than machinic in the way it interprets electronic

automatism as a quiet, passive operation of the nervous system, rather than visible

activity of the moving muscular body.[73] Ambient listeners, in this way, socialize both

through *and* with their own privatized, easily hidden, and seemingly inert consumer

technologies. And in return for listeners' identification with electronic automatism,

Ambient recordings aesthetically recreate personal-connection-through-technological-

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[72] Theodore Gracyk, "Listening to Music: Performances and Recordings," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 147–48.

[73] Barry Brummett makes the "high tech" versus "machinic" distinction in terms of "electrotech" versus "mechtech" rhetoric and aesthetics; see Brummett, *Rhetoric of Machine Aesthetics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

disconnection by representing vehicular movement through the vast spaces of earth, sea, sky. The metaphor of the aeronautical vehicle gains another analogy here, since since movement through space appears so effortless for airplanes and space shuttles in comparison to grounded vehicles. Not do these vehicles represent the technologization of listeners' attention, or the means of their social detachment, but also the immobilization of their bodies, "traveling" through ambient sound.

In promoting better living through technology, Ambient music preserves the utopian impulse of Western countercultures and avant-gardes to create spaces within everyday life for defamiliarizing and transcending reality as given. Ambient recordings, in their immersive asociality, offer mostly middle-class consumers resources for imaginary disaffiliation from capitalist labor structures through mass-reproduced technology, and from cultural hegemony through aesthetic experimentation. At their best, Ambient recordings represent social technologies in the service of non-instrumentality, affording consumers opportunities to symbolically, affectively, and physiologically disarticulate themselves from a patriarchy that exploits human labor.[74] They expose the listening self to doubts and disorientations, potentially dispossessing them of the certainty that their participation in such a society is rational. They also dispose the listener to bodily disengagement, putting them in the position to withdraw from the "constant continuity" of "producing, consuming, and discarding" ubiquitously enforced by "24/7" neoliberal capitalism.[75] To recall Brian Eno's observation from

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[74] Elisabeth Le Guin has praised Ambient music in these terms; see Le Guin, "Uneasy Listening," *Repercussions* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 5–19.
[75] Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013; repr. New York: Verso, 2014), 126; Ibid., 17.

earlier, people in the West (including himself) tend "to undervalue the times when you're apparently doing nothing… the dream time, in your daily life, times when things get sorted out and reshuffled."[76] Ambient recordings, although enabling listener productivity in their unobtrusiveness, nonetheless preserve the promise of nothing-doing as they quietly, noiselessly work in consort with playback technologies to infuse waking life with the rhythms and imaginings of sleep. Ambient music affirms the value of this operation, beckoning listeners to ride on the automaticity of technology's dreaming, and travel through its inner spaces without moving.

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[76] Kristine McKenna, "Eno," *Wet*, August 1980, 44.

Ambient Music as Popular Genre: Conclusion

Exit Music: "It Must Be Obvious (UFO Mix)"— The KLF vs. Pet Shop Boys

In the left channel: A studio-miked man converses with a woman, heard through a telephone. It sounds like a call-in radio show. In the right channel: a percussive fluttering sound—a distant jazz trumpet enters and exits—the voice of a male TV announcer pops in and out. In the middle: a hollow, bassy rumble slowly fades in, like the sound of an aircraft getting closer.

15 seconds in, the sounds of The Pet Shop Boys' "It Must Be Obvious" fades up, loud and center by 0:30. As Neil Tennant sings of unrequited love, the radio voices continue their chatter at the far left and right. The bass rumble of the first aircraft fades, and then distant airplane sounds begin whooshing quickly in and out of the left and right channels. The song, basically untouched, has a new ambience.

At 45 seconds, one hears cartoonish, video game-like "bomb-dropping" sounds gliding down from overhead in pitch space. The telephone chatter continues. Shortly thereafter, the bass rumble from the beginning returns, getting louder and louder, eventually overwhelming Neil Tennant's voice, which fades ever quieter into the distance. A male voice, speaking through a transmitter, asks from the right channel, "What am I supposed to do now?" The bass rumble rises and falls in volume. Radio voices appear and disappear all over the stereo field. Planes whoosh in and out. What happened to the Pet Shop Boys? The rumble fades.

A wet LFO wobbles up from below. The throats in the women's radio voices

disappear, leaving only sibilants and fricatives. A spot of slowly filtered white noise floats up into the stereo field, joined from above by a high tinny pad. "Are you ready for this, Julia?" asks the radio man. The rumble re-emerges in the far right. Is that a distorted telephone ringing, or an alarm going off, in the left channel? [loud transmitter static] "HELLO?" [loud transmitter static] "WH-WH-WHERE ARE YOU?" Where *am* I? (I'm in a spacecraft, evidently—but why? What happened to the Pet Shop Boys?) An LFO descends from the left, lands on the right. Barely audible, in the left: "Even when the darkest clouds are in the sky / You mustn't sigh and you mustn't cry…." It's Sting, "Spread a Little Happiness" (!?). A sharp intake of air. Revving, or zipping, or something. The bass rumble fades in and out. More radio sounds. "HELLO? WH-WH-WHERE ARE YOU?"

The texture thins out considerably. A faint LFO flutter, a robot speaking, and then machine noises dropping in from right to left, left to right. Sound events are occurring less and less frequently now. Faint hissing. "Prepare to activate…." The static ambience fades out entirely: I am now in a vacuum-sealed aircraft, disembodied noises beeping and buzzing intermittently from all around…. A pulsating beep floats in from the left, and a rising Shepard tone joins in…. Another airborne object suddenly careens down and in from above. More beeps and bloops, a synthesizer poem…. Then, unexpectedly, birdsong. And then, also unexpectedly, a drum machine rhythm track… a man singing, "Tell me why"…. It's distant, tough to make out. (It is, in fact, "So Hard" by the Pet Shop Boys—the A-side!) The Shepard tone returns, as does the engine rumble…. More bleeps and bloops accumulating…. Radio voices appearing… disappearing… the bass rumble fades in… and out… and in again… like my attention amidst these transient

spacecraft sounds… my focus now floating somewhere between these sounds and my own thoughts… or, perhaps, wandering through where my thoughts should be, but where instead strange sounds are floating about ("Where are my thoughts right now?," I wonder)….

And then, at 7:00, about the least expected sound of all comes in: "It Must Be Obvious," by the Pet Shop Boys, fading up, loud and center. Of course! It should have been obvious that this would happen—but, of course, it isn't at all, until it returns. The effect is startling, funny. But as the pop song continues, unabated, a slight melancholy sets in that's not dissimilar to the feeling of returning to earth at the end of a roller-coaster ride. Is it over already?

"It must be obvious," Neil Tennant deadpans, unremixed. The song fades out.

Critique

Today, depending on who you ask, the term "Ambient music" can mean anything from Muzak to mood music, furniture to film music, music for shopping to music for sleeping, meditation, or massage. Those familiar with its existence as a genre can have entirely different ideas about whose music "Ambient" designates: from John Cage to John Williams to Jean Michel Jarre, from The KLF to Kitaro, Eno to Enya. Even among fans, Ambient music eludes easy definition. Through the public and private spaces of ubiquitous musical transmissions in the 21st century, it's not at all obvious what Ambient music, as a popular genre among genres, really is.

The preceding study should, without inhibiting Ambient's possibilities, clarify and ground a common understanding of 1) how the term came into circulation as a genre

label, 2) what sorts of sounds the label accompanies, 3) the markets and promotional discourses the genre organizes, and 4) the social practices that Ambient recordings put into play. Brian Eno's constructions are central to these understandings. He established the "Ambient" label in relation to several aesthetic-discursive meanings: 1) an unconventional music-for-programming designed to accommodate different levels of listening attention; 2) music designed to provide calm, and a space to think; 3) music that both creates and reflects an uninhabited place or asocial space for solitary being; and 4) music that utilizes automated playback, in production and reception, as tool, technique, and theme of environmental design. One can find each of these meanings foreshadowed by the *Environments* series, and extended in the ambient house subgenre. The reception study in the Appendix to this dissertation also shows these qualities of Ambient music continuing into the present day.

Yet there persists, amongst critics and fans alike, a tendency to characterize Ambient as entirely absent of conventions or "rules." Consider the following survey responses to "How would you define 'ambient music'?":

> Ambient isn't restricted to a certain structure (e.g. choruses or verses) or rythm [sic] (jungle-beats or 4/4) it seems there aren't any rules in ambient music: An ambient-track can be 1 minutes or 1 hour long and it can consist of electronic soundscapes, piano-musings, industrial noise, etc… it doesn't matter.

> There are timeless sounds and infinite ways to process them. Synthesizers, pianos, strings, and dsp/fx processing, etc. fascinate me.

Or, responses to the question, "What appeals to you about Ambient music?":

> the lack of definite rules (e.g. four to the floor is not as commonplace as it is for, say, techno).

> No rules. No melody hooks to get stuck in my brain.

Yet even these few responses hint at musical conventions consistent across the genre: the common use of synthesized and processed sounds; the circumvention of song structure, meter, or melody. Survey respondents also commonly identified multiple other conventions consistent to the genre: Ambient music often lacks lyrics, moves at a relaxed pace, utilizes sustained tones, and tends toward quietness.[1] Although Ambient recordings, like those of most musical genres, continue to experiment and intermix with conventions and styles of other genres, the genre label codifies the conventions from which individual Ambient productions depart. Ambient music's non-adherence to pop structure, rejection of virtuosity, and uses of electronics give amateur producers latitude to experiment, but these tendencies toward experimentation are themselves conventional aspects of the genre. As Jason Toynbee writes of free jazz, even seemingly rule-"free" musics cannot escape "the inevitability of genre," the codification of processes of regularity and difference.[2]

The tendency to characterize Ambient as "without rules" can also be observed in a 2014 feature on Ambient music, published in the British electronic web magazine *Quietus,* titled "Nothing Is True, Everything Is Permitted." Here, Patric Fallon investigates what seems to be a recent boom in the production of Ambient records. Interviewing various Ambient artists, label owners, and promoters, Fallon gathers that the "amorphous definition" of Ambient "gives it nearly limitless applications." Golden Retriever's Matt Carlson, for instance, muses, "I'm drawn towards the ambient because

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[1] Appendix, 349.
[2] Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108.

of its openness: its flexibility, adaptability, and malleability. It can be almost

anything." Producer Christopher Willits echoes this sentiment, commenting that Ambient

music is "so dynamic that we can't even define what it is." Fallon concludes by noting

that "the apparently limitless possibilities of ambient music are at the core of its

expansion."[3] In another 2014 article, Joe Muggs muses that Ambient music "dissolves the

relationship between past and present, between rhythm and melody, between tension and

relaxation, between musical right and wrong." He concludes, like Fallon, by marveling

how Ambient reveals "the wonder of music when standard structures are dissolved: it can

pretty much be anything you want."[4]

And yet, if Ambient is indeed "limitless" in its possibilities, one has to wonder

why the genre culture these articles represent is so socially homogenous. Of the 12

individuals Fallon interviewed for the article, and the 13 featured in Muggs's Ambient

retrospective, 100% are white men. (Of the additional 18 artists mentioned in Fallon's

article, only 2 are women.) This demographic skew holds up amongst core fans, if my

survey is any indication: those who converse online about Ambient music in English

language forums are about 80% white, 75% college-educated, and 97% (!) men.[5]

Historically in the U.S. and U.K., music discourses encouraging innovation and

experimentation in production, and disengaged listening in reception, have been

[3] Patric Fallon, "Nothing Is True, Everything Is Permitted: Wolfgang Voigt, Lawrence English, and Others Ponder the State of Ambient Music," *XLR8R*, August 13, 2014, http://www.xlr8r.com/features/2014/08/nothing-is-true-everything-is-permitted-wolfgang-voigt-lawrence-english-and-others-ponder-the-state-of-ambient-music/.
[4] Joe Muggs, "Return to the Chill-Out Room: When Did Ambient Music Last Have It So Good?," *FACT Magazine*, October 9, 2014, http://www.factmag.com/2014/10/09/ambient-2014-round-up-joe-muggs/.
[5] Appendix, 345–47.

dominated by those assumed to uphold "rational" objectivity,[6] often reproducing this cultural correlation as a social fact. The Ambient label, in appearing neutrally functional, unwittingly signs off on these tendencies of art and experimental music discourses; the communities around Ambient often (though less and less so) seem to attract those who enjoy "unmarked" or neutral social status.[7]

Hence, this study, while combating the supposition that, in an age of ubiquitous music, "anything can be Ambient," also rejects Ambient fans' and producers' inversion of this claim: that "Ambient can be anything." The Ambient genre both draws upon and reproduces aesthetic conventions that have developed historically within particular cultural brackets and submarkets. Its aesthetic norms do not operate independently of their social environments, the personal identities of its authors and audiences, but rather pattern and nurture them by affording the subjective pleasures of individuation: detachment, disengagement, and disaffiliation. One's attunement to environments that seem detached from social and cultural space might, paradoxically, be primed by one's "givenness" to social hegemony, since these detachments derive from the assumption of one's co-extensiveness with, and "familial" belonging within, the dominant faction of that very society in the first place.[8] By discarding the notion that Ambient is free from

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[6] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[7] Wayne Brekhus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus," *Sociological Theory* 16, no. 1 (March 1998): 34–51.

[8] As Robin James notes, white embodiment and hip taste alike operate along similar lines of identification, since both dispose the individual or self to be felt as a "subjective universal," or a means to the common space of rational discourse about the world; see James, "In but not of, of but not in: On Taste, Hipness, and White Embodiment," *Contemporary Aesthetics* Special Volume 2 (2009), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=549.

cultural convention, and by locating and placing Ambient music's pleasures within

social space, I hope to frustrate the genre's blind reproduction of social hegemonies, and

pull some of these discourses around it "down to earth." Ideally, grounding the discourses

around Ambient music will open the genre to new social and aesthetic vistas, giving its

countercultural promise wider purchase in the marketplace.

APPENDIX

Reception Study: Ambient Music Listenership and Modes of Consumption

The data here represents the results of a survey I conducted online between August and October 2013. I conducted the survey using SurveyMonkey®, an online survey host and software provider. I distributed the survey by searching for active English-language message boards or mailing lists on Ambient and/or Ambient-related music, and posting a message or sending an email with a link to the survey. The message reads as follows:

Subject: Academic Research Survey on Ambient Music

Hello,

I am a PhD student at the University of Virginia starting my dissertation research on the history and uses of ambient music recordings. Part of this research involves understanding how listeners, producers, performers and fans define ambient music, and how people interact with ambient music recordings.

You are invited to complete a survey I've created for these purposes. Your participation would contribute to one of the first English language academic studies on ambient music, which will (hopefully) be published as a book by the end of the decade. You can fill it out on your own time; it will probably take about 30-60 minutes on the whole. Filling out the survey is completely voluntary and anonymous.

Survey URL: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ambientmusic

Your contribution is appreciated! Don't hesitate to contact me with comments or questions about the survey.

Thanks,

Victor Szabo

These are the forums and lists through which I posted this message:

Message Boards & Mailing Lists: Host – Board/List (Host URL)
Ambient Music Forum – Ambient Music Chat (www.ambientmusicforum.com)
Ambient Online Forums – Ambient Chat (www.ambientonline.org)
Discogs – Ambient and Experimental Discussion (www.discogs.com/groups/114)
Hyperreal – Ambient List (ambient@hyperreal.org)
Hypnos Forum – Other Ambient (and related) Music (www.hypnos.com)
IDM Forums – Ambient & Soundscape Forum (www.idmforums.com)
Steve Hoffman Music Forums – Music Corner Board (forums.stevehoffman.tv)
Except where indicated as multiple-choice, all questions had an open-answer format.
(This includes requests for demographic identifiers like gender and race/ethnicity.)

I grouped answers into categories through an open coding process, in which I created categories based on commonalities within each data set. I permitted respondents to skip questions if they wished.

Based on my research of Ambient music culture, these findings are largely consistent with broader trends in Ambient music production, promotion, and consumption. However, there may be a sample bias towards older male participants, due to a general male-orientation in online communities devoted to rock music, and a movement away from mailing lists and message boards in new online social media.[9]

The questions or prompts below next to each number (written in all caps) are worded to reflect the same questions/prompts that survey participants would have seen. Sections marked "ANALYSIS" indicates a separate breakdown of the data, based on the responses to the prior question.

Frequency of responses is designated under the column marked "Respondents" (or "Resp."), or marked with the pound sign (#). Relative frequency of responses is designated under the column marked with the percentage sign (%).

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. AGE

Responses: 111

By Half-Decade			By Decade		
Age	Respondents	%	Age	Respondents	%
15–19	3	2.7%	Under 20	3	2.7%
20–24	16	14.4%	20–29	33	29.7%
25–29	17	15.3%			
30–34	20	18.0%	30–39	36	32.4%
35–39	16	14.4%			
40–44	14	12.6%	40–49	22	19.8%
45–49	8	7.2%			
50–54	7	6.3%	50–59	14	12.6%
55–59	7	6.3%			
60–65	3	2.7%	60+	3	2.7%

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[9] On the male-orientation of online music forums, see Norma Coates, "Can't We Just Talk about the Music?: Rock and Gender on the Internet," in *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*, ed. Thomas Swiss, John Sloop, and Andrew Herman (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 77–99.

2. OCCUPATION

Responses: 109

Occupational Area	Resp.	%	Sub-Area	Resp.	%
Arts / Design / Entertainment / Media	18	16.5%	Music / Sound	11	10.1%
			Visual	7	6.4%
Computer / IT	18	16.5%	Software Engineer	7	6.4%
			Other	11	10.1%
Education / Library	11	10.1%	Teacher	7	6.4%
			Other	4	3.7%
Engineering / Technical	9	8.3%			
Office / Administrative Support	6	5.5%			
Writing	5	4.6%			
Business / Financial	4	3.7%			
Management (general)	3	2.8%			
Sales / Marketing	3	2.8%			
Transportation / Materials	3	2.8%			
Healthcare	2	1.8%			
Social Work	2	1.8%			
Government	1	0.9%			

Other Responses	Resp.	%
Student	13	11.9%
Non-Descript Response	8	7.3%
Retired	2	1.8%
Unemployed	1	0.9%

3. CURRENT LOCATION

Responses: 105

Location	Resp.	%
U.S.A.	47	44.8%
Continental Europe	31	29.5%
U.K.	12	11.4%
Canada	8	7.6%
Australia / New Zealand	4	3.8%
Middle East	2	1.9%
East Asia	1	1.0%

ANALYSIS: Within U.S.A.

Location	Resp.	%
Midwest	17	36.2%
Northeast	9	19.1%
Mid-Atlantic	7	14.9%
Northwest	5	10.6%
Rockies	3	6.4%
Southeast	3	6.4%
Southwest / California	3	6.4%

ANALYSIS: Within Continental Europe

Location	Resp.	%
Germany	7	22.6%
Belgium	5	16.1%
France	4	12.9%
The Netherlands	3	9.7%
Hungary	2	6.5%
Russia	2	6.5%
Sweden	2	6.5%
Other *	6	19.4%

* 1 of each: Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Switzerland.

4. RACE AND/OR ETHNICITY

Responses: 95
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Race / Ethnicity	Resp.	%
White / Caucasian	77	81.1%
British / Anglo	6	6.3%
European	5	5.3%
Mixed	2	2.1%
Other *	16	16.8%

* Other race/ethnicity responses that had no more than 1 entry: American Indian, Australian, Chinese, East Asian, European American, French Canadian, German, Hispanic, Irish, Italian, Malagasy, Mid-East European, Nordic, Polish and Vietnamese, Russian, Scottish

5. GENDER

Responses: 103

Gender	Resp.	%
Male	100	97.1%
Female	3	2.9%

6. SEXUALITY

Responses: 88

Sexuality	Resp.	%
Heterosexual / Straight	77	87.5%
Homosexual / Gay	5	5.7%
Queer	3	3.4%
Primarily Heterosexual	2	2.3%
Bisexual	1	1.1%

7. RELIGIOUS / SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

Responses: 91

Religion/Spirituality	#	%
None	27	29.7%
Atheist	21	23.1%
Christian	13	14.3%
Agnostic	4	4.4%
Buddhist	4	4.4%
Pagan	2	2.2%
Hindu	2	2.2%
Other organized religion / Mix of religions	7	7.7%
Other spirituality or belief system	11	12.1%

8. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND (Last level or degree completed)

Responses: 94

Educational Level	Resp.	%
Bachelor's Degree	31	33.0%
Master's Degree	14	14.9%
College (level/degree unspecified)	11	11.7%
Some College	10	10.6%
Secondary Education / High School	7	7.4%
Ph.D.	5	5.3%
Trade/Vocational School	4	4.3%
Associate's Degree	3	3.2%
Other/Unclear	9	9.6%

9. FAMILY'S CLASS BACKGROUND

Responses: 93

Class	Resp.	%
Middle class	60	64.5%
Working class	18	19.4%
Upper-middle class	8	8.6%
Lower-middle class	6	6.5%
Upper	1	1.1%

10. ANNUAL INDIVIDUAL INCOME (ESTIMATE)

Responses: 70

US Dollars	Resp.	%
Less than $10K	2	4.7%
$10,000–19,999	6	14.0%
$20,000–29,999	7	16.3%
$30,000–39,999	1	2.3%
$40,000–49,999	6	14.0%
$50,000–59,999	7	16.3%
$60,000–69,999	5	11.6%
$70,000–79,999	0	0%
$80,000–89,999	2	4.7%
$90,000–99,999	0	0%
$100,000–149,999	5	11.6%
$150,000–199,999	1	2.3%
More than $200K	1	2.3%
TOTAL	43	100%

Pounds	Resp.	%
Less than £10K	1	12.5%
£10,000–19,999	0	0
£20,000–29,999	3	37.5%
£30,000–39,999	2	25.0%
£40,000–49,999	2	25.0%
TOTAL	8	100%

Euro	Resp.	%
Less than €10K	1	14.3%
€10,000–19,999	0	0%
€20,000–29,999	1	14.3%
€30,000–39,999	2	28.6%
€40,000–49,999	2	28.6%
€50,000–59,999	0	0%
€60,000–69,999	0	0%
€70,000–79,999	0	0%
€80,000–89,999	0	0%
€90,000–99,999	1	14.3%
TOTAL	7	100%

Canadian Dollars	Resp.	%
$30,000–39,999	1	25%
$40,000–49,999	0	0%
$50,000–59,999	1	25%
$60,000–69,999	2	50%
TOTAL	4	100%

11. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE "AMBIENT MUSIC"?

Responses: 105
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than 3):

Functional definitions

Characteristic	Resp.	%
Accommodates both attentive and inattentive listening	19	18.1%
Doesn't demand attention / Not intrusive / Not distracting	19	18.1%
Calming / Relaxing	15	14.3%
Atmospheric / Creates atmosphere	12	11.4%
Creates space or mood for listener	8	7.6%
Creates soundscapes or landscapes	8	7.6%
Stimulates imagination, thoughts, images	5	4.8%
Affects state of mind, mood, or emotion	4	3.8%
Alters mood of a space	4	3.8%
Furniture music / "Wallpaper"	4	3.8%
Music for "chilling"	4	3.8%

Musical Definitions

Characteristic	Resp.	%
Usually "beatless" or "without beats" (Lacks percussion, pulse, and/or rhythmic definition)	14	13.3%
Focus on texture, tone, timbre, mood, or space (rather than melody, harmony, rhythm, or lyrics)	12	11.4%
Instrumental / No lyrics	11	10.5%
Non-melodic / Non-rhythmic	11	10.5%
Slow or relaxed pace	9	8.6%
Uses sustained tones or drones	7	6.7%
Electronic, predominantly	6	5.7%
Experimental	4	3.8%
Unconventional or non-traditional in formal structure / Unstructured or Fluid	4	3.8%
Quiet	4	3.8%

Other Responses

Characteristic	Resp.	%
Ambiguous / Difficult or impossible to define	5	4.8%
"Emotional"	4	3.8%

12. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH AMBIENT MUSIC? (SEVERAL OF THESE MAY OVERLAP; CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

Multiple-choice question; choices are non-exclusive.

Responses: 114

Role	#	%
Frequent listener	89	78.1%
Fan	81	71.1%
Frequent user (for sleep, study, etc.)	51	44.7%
Producer	48	42.1%
Recording artist	42	36.8%
Instrumental performer	30	26.3%
DJ	29	25.4%
Sound Engineer	24	21.1%
Occasional user (for sleep, study, etc.)	22	19.3%
Casual listener	19	16.7%
I only hear ambient music when I'm in public places	0	0%

13. HOW DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER AMBIENT MUSIC?

Responses: 67
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than one):

Situation	#	%
Specific Ambient recording(s) or artist(s)	26	38.8%
Via related artist/genre	17	25.4%
Internet	11	16.4%
Friends or family	9	13.4%
Film/TV score	7	10.4%
Record store	3	4.5%
Music video	3	4.5%
Rave / Chill-out room	3	4.5%
Radio	3	4.5%
Video game	2	3.0%

ANALYSIS: Artists, of the respondents who mentioned specific artists or genres.

Responses: 42
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Artist	#	%
Brian Eno	17	40.5%
Robert Fripp	3	7.1%
Tangerine Dream	3	7.1%
Aphex Twin	2	4.8%
Jean Michel Jarre	2	4.8%
The Orb	2	4.8%
Pink Floyd	2	4.8%
Radiohead	2	4.8%
Steve Roach	2	4.8%
Other	15	35.7%

14. WHAT ABOUT AMBIENT MUSIC APPEALS TO YOU?

Responses: 76
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than 2):

Reason	#	%
Relaxing / Calming / Relieves stress	24	31.6%
Good for background listening	12	15.8%
Open to various ways of perceiving or experiencing it / Participatory	8	10.5%
No boundaries or rules / Unrestricted structurally and/or rhythmically	7	9.2%
Unobtrusive / Not distracting or intrusive	6	7.9%
Ignorable yet interesting	5	6.6%
Dynamic / Evolves over time	5	6.6%
Non-narrative / Lacks lyrics	5	6.6%
Provides sense of space or place	5	6.6%
Introspective / Stimulates thought	4	5.3%
Meditative / Good for meditation	4	5.3%
Unconventional	4	5.3%
Wide range of expression or emotion	4	5.3%
Variety of instrumentation	4	5.3%
Transforms mood	3	3.9%
Stimulates imagination	3	3.9%
Alternative to mainstream music	3	3.9%
Gives sense of being transported	3	3.9%

15. WHO ARE YOUR FAVORITE AMBIENT MUSIC PRODUCERS AND
PERFORMERS? LIST UP TO 10 (THOUGH ONE OR TWO IS FINE), AND WHY
THEIR MUSIC APPEALS TO YOU.

Responses: 75
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than 3):

Artist	#	%
Brian Eno	29	38.7%
Pete Namlook	15	20.0%
Steve Roach	15	20.0%
Biosphere	14	18.7%
Stars of the Lid	10	13.3%
Aphex Twin	9	12.0%
Harold Budd	9	12.0%
Robert Rich	9	12.0%
Boards of Canada	8	10.7%
Alio Die	7	9.3%
Oophoi	7	9.3%
Carbon Based Lifeforms	5	6.7%
Lustmord	5	6.7%
Tetsu Inuoe	5	6.7%
Tim Hecker	5	6.7%
William Basinski	5	6.7%
Rod Modell	4	5.3%
Thomas Köner	4	5.3%

16. IF YOU ARE AN AMBIENT MUSIC PRODUCER, WHAT SORT OF AMBIENT
MUSIC DO YOU MAKE?

Responses: 34
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Common descriptors (more than one):

Descriptor	#	%
drone / uses drones	6	17.6%
dark	5	14.7%
experimental	4	11.8%
soundscapes	4	11.8%
uses samples / field recordings	3	8.8%
beatless	3	8.8%

improvised / involves improvisation	3	8.8%
light	3	8.8%
minimal / minimalist	3	8.8%
resembles movie soundtracks	3	8.8%
textured / layered	3	8.8%
uses beats / rhythmic	3	8.8%
atmospheric	2	5.9%
melodic	2	5.9%
noise	2	5.9%

17. IF YOU ARE AN AMBIENT MUSIC PRODUCER, MIXER, OR DJ, WHAT IS YOUR ROLE? WHAT SORT OF AMBIENT MUSIC DO YOU PLAY, MIX, OR RECORD? WHERE DO YOU PLAY OR RECORD IT?

Responses: 20
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Role	#	%
DJ for parties/events	7	35%
DJ on the radio	5	25%
Live performer	3	15%
Create mixes	2	10%
Blogger	2	10%
Host Ambient parties	1	5%
Podcaster	1	5%

18a. IF YOU MAKE AMBIENT MUSIC, DO YOU SHARE IT WITH OTHERS?

Responses: 38

Response	#	%
Yes	35	92.1%
No	3	7.9%

18b. WITH WHOM DO YOU SHARE IT?

Responses: 30
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than one):

Outlet / Person	#	%
Online for streaming or download	11	36.7%
Friends	11	36.7%
Everyone / the public / "the world"	5	16.7%
Internet labels	4	13.3%
"Whoever's interested" (online)	4	13.3%
Family	3	10%
Online music forums	2	6.7%
Creative Commons	2	6.7%

Site / Retailer	#	%
Soundcloud	6	20.0%
Personal Website	6	20.0%
Relaxed Machinery	2	6.7%

19. IN WHAT FORMATS DO YOU LISTEN TO AMBIENT MUSIC? (CHECK ALL)
20. IN WHAT FORMAT DO YOU PRIMARILY LISTEN TO AMBIENT MUSIC? (CHECK ONE)

Both multiple-choice questions; choices are non-exclusive in #19, exclusive in #20.

Format	All formats listened to		Primary format for listening	
	Resp.	%	Resp.	%
Self-Owned Recordings	75	93.75%	60	78.95%
Internet Streaming Services (e.g. Spotify, SoundCloud)	44	55%	12	15.79%
Live Performances	39	48.75%	0	0%
Installations	29	36.25%	1	1.32%
Internet Radio (e.g. Pandora)	28	35%	3	3.95%
Podcasts	23	28.75%	0	0%
Broadcast Radio	13	16.25%	0	0%
Satellite Radio	5	6.25%	0	0%
TOTAL	80	100%	76	100%

21. WHAT TYPES OF AMBIENT MUSIC RECORDINGS DO YOU OWN OR LISTEN TO? (CHECK ALL)
22. WHAT TYPE OF AMBIENT MUSIC RECORDING DO YOU PRIMARILY OWN OR LISTEN TO? (CHECK ONE)

Both multiple-choice questions; choices are non-exclusive in #21, exclusive in #22.

Format	All formats listened to		Primary format for listening	
	Resp.	%	Resp.	%
Digital File (.mp3, etc.)	74	89.2%	40	48.8%
CD	67	80.7%	28	34.2%
Vinyl	46	55.4%	13	15.9%
Cassette	24	28.9%	0	0%
Other *	2	3.6%	0	0%
TOTAL	82	100%	81	100%

* Specified: DVD, VHS

23. APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY AMBIENT MUSIC RECORDINGS DO YOU OWN? SPECIFY TYPE OF RECORDING IF POSSIBLE (EXAMPLE: ABOUT 20 ALBUMS ON VINYL, AND ABOUT 400 MP3 FILES).

Responses: 63

By Format:

Number of Vinyl Records	Resp.	%
1–10	13	37.1%
11–25	4	11.4%
26–50	10	28.6%
51–99	1	2.9%
about 100	2	5.7%
200 or more	5	14.3%
TOTAL	35	100%

Number of CDs	Resp.	%
1–10	5	10.9%
11–25	8	17.4%
26–50	3	6.5%
51–99	2	4.3%
100–199	6	13.0%
200–299	6	13.0%
300–399	5	10.9%
400–499	3	6.5%
500–999	4	8.7%
1000 or more	4	8.7%
TOTAL	46	100%

Number of digital albums	Resp.	%
1–10	1	11.1%
11–99	1	11.1%
100–199	3	33.3%
200–499	3	33.3%
500 or more	1	11.1%
TOTAL	9	100%

Number of digital files	Resp.	%
1–49	2	5.4%
50–99	3	8.1%
100–199	6	16.2%
200–299	6	16.2%
300–499	4	10.8%
500–999	3	8.1%
1000–1999	3	8.1%
2000–4999	3	8.1%
5000–9999	3	8.1%
10,000 or more	4	10.8%
TOTAL	37	100%

Number of cassette tapes	Resp.	%
1–9	5	62.5%
10 or more	3	37.5%
TOTAL	8	100%

ANALYSIS: By individual:

Number of albums (CDs / tapes / records assumed to be albums)	Resp.	%
1–10	7	12.3%
11–49	11	19.3%
50–99	5	8.8%
100–199	7	12.3%
200–299	6	10.5%
300–499	8	14.0%
500–999	8	14.0%
1000 or more	5	8.8%
TOTAL	57	100%

24. WHERE AND HOW DO YOU ACQUIRE YOUR AMBIENT MUSIC
RECORDINGS? (CHECK ALL)
25. LATELY, WHERE AND HOW DO YOU ACQUIRE MOST OF YOUR AMBIENT
MUSIC RECORDINGS? (CHECK ONE)

Both multiple-choice questions; choices are non-exclusive in #24, exclusive in #25.

Place	All places		Primary place	
	Resp.	%	Resp.	%
Online purchase of physical recordings (vinyl, CD, etc.)	63	77.8%	30	38.5%
Online digital file purchase	47	58.0%	18	28.1%
Record store	43	53.1%	8	10.3%
Online file-sharing	36	44.4%	20	25.6%
Blogs	21	25.9%	2	2.6%
Bookstore	5	6.2%	0	0%
TOTAL	81	100%	78	100%

26. HOW REGULARLY DO YOU LISTEN TO AMBIENT MUSIC YOU OWN?
(EXAMPLES: 5-10 TIMES A WEEK; 2-4 HOURS/DAY)

Responses: 66

ANALYSIS: Of those who mentioned number of times listening per day/week/month:

Median times per week	Resp.	%
Less than 1	4	23.5%
1–3	5	29.4%
4–6	4	23.5%
7–9	3	17.6%
10 or more	1	5.9%
TOTAL	17	100%

ANALYSIS: Of those who mentioned minutes or hours listening per day/week/month:

Median hours per week	Resp.	%
Less than 1	4	8.2%
1–4.5	6	12.2%
5–9.5	8	16.3%
10–14.5	13	26.5%
15–19.5	3	6.1%
20–24.5	2	4.1%
25–29.5	4	8.2%

30–34.5	3	6.1%
35–39.5	2	4.1%
40–49.5	2	4.1%
50 or more	2	4.1%
TOTAL	49	100%

27. DO YOU MOSTLY LISTEN TO YOUR OWN AMBIENT MUSIC ON SPEAKERS, OR ON HEADPHONES?

Multiple-choice question; choices exclusive.

Responses: 82

Listening Method	Resp.	%
Always, or almost always on speakers	15	18.3%
Usually on speakers	20	24.4%
Equally on speakers and headphones	23	28.1%
Usually on headphones	13	15.9%
Always, or almost always on headphones	11	13.4%

Average Rating: 2.82 / 5 (1 = always speakers; 5 = always headphones)

28. DO YOU FIND YOU LISTEN TO AMBIENT MUSIC MORE IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS THAN OTHERS? WHEN? BE AS GENERAL OR SPECIFIC AS YOU LIKE.

Responses: 80
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than 4):

Situation	Resp.	%
Working	28	35.0%
Before bed / Going to bed / In bed	17	21.25%
Home	14	17.5%
Travelling	14	17.5%
Evening / Night	12	15.0%
Sleeping	10	12.5%
Reading	10	12.5%

Computer	8	10.0%
Morning	7	8.75%
Relaxing	7	8.75%
When alone	5	6.25%

ANALYSIS: Of those that mentioned or implied a location:

Location	Resp.	%
At home (often implied; e.g. "sleeping")	47	58.75%
At work	8	10.0%
Own vehicle	6	7.5%
Public transit	5	6.25%
Travelling (general)	3	3.75%
Public situations	1	1.25%

29. DO YOU ATTEND SOCIAL GATHERINGS BASED AROUND AMBIENT MUSIC? (AMBIENT SHOWS, PARTIES, ETC.)

Responses: 81

Response	#	%
Yes	34	42%
No	47	58%

30. HOW DOES THE EXPERIENCE OF LISTENING TO AMBIENT MUSIC WITH OTHERS COMPARE TO SOLITARY LISTENING? DESCRIBE ANY SIMILARITIES OR DIFFERENCES.

Responses: 34
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Comparison	#	%	Qualification	#	%
One or another affects ability to concentrate	12	35.3%	More difficult / less likely to concentrate on sound when with others	8	23.5%
			More difficult / less likely to concentrate on sound when alone	2	5.9%
			With others, level of concentration varies depending on venue, crowd, or event	2	5.9%

One or another is more intense, stimulating, or relaxing	8	23.5%	Live performance is more intense or stimulating	4	11.8%
			Listening alone is more relaxing	3	8.8%
			Live performance is less stimulating	1	2.9%
With others, music permits socializing beyond the act of listening	6	17.6%			
Both solitary and collective listening similarly foster deep focus on sound	4	11.8%			
Live performance offers a different audio/visual experience	4	11.8%			
One or another is categorically better	3	8.8%	Listening alone is better	2	5.9%
			Listening with others is better	1	2.9%

31. DO YOU LISTEN TO AMBIENT MUSIC MORE THAN YOU LISTEN TO OTHER TYPES OF MUSIC?

Multiple-choice question; choices exclusive.

Responses: 80

Response	#	%
Yes	33	41.25%
No	26	32.50%
I listen to ambient and non-ambient music equally, or almost equally	21	26.25%

32. WHAT TYPE OF MUSIC DO YOU LISTEN TO MOST?

Responses: 71
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.
Only logged responses that mentioned 4 or fewer genres.

Most common responses (more than one):

Genre / Style	#	%	Subgenre	#	%
Ambient	26	35.6%			

			Rock (general)	4	5.5%
Rock	13	17.8%	Alternative	2	2.7%
			Other rock*	6	8.2%
			Techno (general)	6	8.2%
Techno	11	15.1%	Dub Techno	3	4.1%
			Minimal Techno	2	2.7%

Electronic (general)	5	6.8%
House	4	5.5%
Downtempo/Chillout	3	4.1%
Psychedelic	3	4.1%
Trance	3	4.1%
Jazz	2	2.7%
IDM (Intelligent Dance Music)	2	2.7%
Other **	15	20.5%

* 1 type each: Dark wave, Garage rock, Indie rock, Post-Punk or Goth, Post-Rock, Progressive Rock
** 1 type each: Acid, Art music, acoustic instrumental music, Berlin Electronic, Czech and Hungarian Beat Music, Classical, Disco, Electro, Electronic Dance Music, Experimental, Folk, Lounge, New Age, Progressive Electronic, soothing instrumental music

33. OTHER THAN AMBIENT, WHAT TYPES OF MUSIC DO YOU ENJOY LISTENING TO, PRODUCING, AND/OR PERFORMING (IF ANY)?

Responses: 76
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than 3):

Genre / Style	Resp.	%
Rock	19	25.0%
Jazz	18	23.7%
Classical	15	19.7%
Techno	12	15.8%
House	10	13.2%
Folk	9	11.8%
Hip-Hop	9	11.8%
IDM (Intelligent Dance Music)	9	11.8%
Experimental	8	10.5%
Industrial	8	10.5%
Metal	8	10.5%

Electronica	7	9.2%
Progressive (or Prog) Rock	6	7.9%
Trance	6	7.9%
World	6	7.9%
Alternative Rock	5	6.6%
Blues	5	6.6%
Goth or Gothic	5	6.6%
Indie Rock	5	6.6%
Soul	5	6.6%
Classic Rock	4	5.3%
Country	4	5.3%
Disco	4	5.3%
Downtempo	4	5.3%
Dub Techno	4	5.3%
Funk	4	5.3%
Punk	4	5.3%
Synth Pop (or Synth Wave)	4	5.3%

34. WHO ARE YOUR FAVORITE NON-AMBIENT MUSICIANS, ARTISTS, AND/OR COMPOSERS? LIST AS MANY AS YOU LIKE.

Responses: 65
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than 2):

Musician / Artist / Composer	Resp.	%
Miles Davis	8	12.3%
Pink Floyd	7	10.8%
Autechre	6	9.2%
Kraftwerk	6	9.2%
The Beatles	5	7.7%
Depeche Mode	5	7.7%
Radiohead	5	7.7%
Björk	4	6.2%
Coil	4	6.2%
David Bowie	4	6.2%
Aphex Twin	3	4.6%
Boards of Canada	3	4.6%
Claude Debussy	3	4.6%
Cocteau Twins	3	4.6%
Genesis	3	4.6%
Jeff Mills	3	4.6%

Jimi Hendrix	3	4.6%
Johann Sebastian Bach	3	4.6%
John Coltrane	3	4.6%
King Crimson	3	4.6%
Moritz von Oswald	3	4.6%
Pixies	3	4.6%
Richie Hawtin / Plastikman	3	4.6%
Sigur Ros	3	4.6%
Talking Heads	3	4.6%
Yes	3	4.6%

35. WHICH TYPES OF MUSIC DO YOU DISLIKE THE MOST (IF ANY)?

Responses: 70
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Most common responses (more than one):

Genre/Type	Resp.	%	Subgenre	Resp.	%
Country/Western	21	30%	Country/Western	17	24.3%
			Pop Country	3	4.3%
Hip-Hop/Rap	20	28.6%	Hip-Hop/Rap	16	22.9%
			Gangsta Rap	4	5.7%
Pop	18	25.7%	Pop	16	22.9%
			Boy/Girl Groups	2	2.9%
Popular / "Commercial" / "Mainstream"	18	25.7%	"Commercial"	10	14.3%
			"Mainstream"	4	5.7%
			"Hits" / Top 40	3	4.3%
Metal	10	14.3%	Metal	4	5.7%
			Heavy Metal	3	4.3%
			Death Metal	2	2.9%
Opera	4	5.7%			
R&B	4	5.7%			
Dubstep	3	4.3%			
Jazz	3	4.3%			
Techno	3	4.3%			
Disco	2	2.9%			
Hard Rock	2	2.9%			
Punk	2	2.9%			
Showtunes	2	2.9%			
Trance	2	2.9%			

36. HAVE YOU EVER STUDIED OR PERFORMED MUSIC IN SCHOOL, OR THROUGH SOME OTHER COMMUNITY FUNCTION?

Response	#	%
Yes	35	53.0%
No	31	47.0%
TOTAL	66	100%

37. HAVE YOU EVER STUDIED MUSIC PRIVATELY? WHAT DID YOU STUDY? HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED, AND FOR HOW LONG DID YOU STUDY?

Response	#	%
Yes	39	57.4%
No	24	35.3%
Strictly self-taught	5	7.4%
TOTAL	68	100%

ANALYSIS: Instruments/Subjects, of those who responded in the affirmative:

Responses: 39
One response can generate multiple tallies; categories are non-exclusive.

Instrument / Subject	#	%
Piano / Keyboard	23	59.0%
Guitar	12	30.8%
Voice	5	12.8%
Music Theory	4	10.3%
Bass Guitar	3	7.7%
Trumpet	3	7.7%
Saxophone	2	5.1%
Other *	6	15.4%

* Other Instruments/Subjects (1 each): Bassoon, Cello, DJing, Drumming, Flute, Violin.

38. IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO EITHER QUESTIONS 36 OR 37, DO YOU STILL STUDY AND/OR PERFORM MUSIC?

Response	#	%
Yes	33	61.1%
No	21	38.9%
TOTAL	54	100%

Recordings found on the listed records received special analytic focus in this study.

Air (Pete Namlook). *Air 2: Travelling without Moving*. Included in *The Air Collection*.
　　　　Fax +49-69/450464 MP3 008, 2007, MP3-CD. Originally released in 1994.

Ambience One (An Adventure in Environmental Sound). Audio Fidelity AFSD 6237,
　　　　1970, LP.

Black Dog, The. *Music for Real Airports*. Soma Quality Recordings CD083, 2010, CD.

Eno, Brian. *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*. Editions E.G. AMB 001, 1978, LP.

———. *Ambient 4: On Land*. Editions E.G. EEGCD 20, 1987, CD. Originally released in
　　　　1982.

———. *Another Green World*. Island EGCD 21, 1987, CD. Originally released in 1975.

———. *Discreet Music*. Obscure 3, 1975, LP.

Eno, Brian, with Daniel Lanois & Roger Eno. *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks*.
　　　　Editions E.G. EGCD 53, 1990, CD. Originally released in 1983.

Fripp & Eno. *(No Pussyfooting)*. Editions E.G. EEGCD 2, 1987, CD. Originally released
　　　　in 1973.

Irresistible Force, The. *Flying High*. Rising High RSN CD5, 1992, CD.

KLF, The. *3 A.M. Eternal (The UK Mixes)*. KLF Communications KLF 005R, 1989, LP.
　　　　12″ vinyl.

———. *Chill Out*. Wax Trax! WAX 7155, 1990, CD.

———. *Space*. KLF Communications SPACE CD 1, 1990, CD.

KLF, The vs. Pet Shop Boys. *So Hard*. Parlophone 12RX6269, 1990, 12" vinyl.

Lucier, Alvin. *I Am Sitting in a Room*. Lovely Music, Ltd. LCD 1013, 1993, CD.
　　　　Originally released in 1981.

———. *I Am Sitting in a Room*. Included on *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde Issue
　　　　Number 7/8*. Source SR 15/16/17/18, 1970, LP.

Orb, The. *A Huge Ever Growing Pulsating Brain That Rules From The Centre Of The Ultraworld*. Big Life BLR270T, 1990, 12″ vinyl.

———. *The Orb's Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld*. Big Life BLRDCD 5, 847963-2, 1991, 2 CDs.

Reich, Steve. *It's Gonna Rain*. Included on *Early Works*. Electra Nonesuch 9 79169-2, 1987, CD. Originally released in 1968.

Riley, Terry. *In C*. Columbia Masterworks (Music of Our Time series) MS 7178, 1968, LP.

Syntonic Research, Inc. *Environments: Disc One*. Atlantic SD 66001, 1970, LP. Originally released in 1969.

———. *Environments: Disc Two*. Atlantic SD 66002, 1970, LP.

Westerkamp, Hildegard. *Kit's Beach Soundwalk*. Included on *Transformations*. Empreintes DIGITALes IMED 9631, 1996, CD.

The World Soundscape Project. *The Vancouver Soundscape 1973 / Soundscape Vancouver 1996*. Cambridge Street Records CSR-2CD 9701, 1997, CD.

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