

## CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

In interviews, Eno has discussed his musical influences and ideas on a sizeable array of intellectual topics repeatedly and in considerable detail, while he has been guarded, if not positively secretive, about his personal life – relationships, day-to-day movements, personal habits. In the published forms of interviews, the journalists do not even *ask* personal questions, so it is likely that among Eno's ground rules for interviews is a prohibition on delving into purely biographical matters. While such guardedness is certainly refreshing enough when seen against the backdrop of scandal and confessional that typifies the press's treatment of popular musicians, it leaves us at a bit of a loss in terms of portraying Eno as a human being.

Nevertheless, the basic outlines of Eno's life, or at least of his public life, are well known. Born on May 15, 1948, at Woodbridge in Suffolk, he was christened Brian Peter George St. John le Baptiste de la Salle Eno. His early education (1953-64) was under the nuns and brothers of the de la Salle order, Ipswich. Although brought up Catholic, he does not practice the religion, and in fact his main references to this aspect of his background have to do with the guilt feelings the church succeeded in instilling in him at a young age – feelings that even as an adult he has not fully exorcised. From 1964 to 1966 he pursued foundation studies at Ipswich Art School, and in 1969 received his Diploma in Fine Art from Winchester Art School. That is the extent of his formal education, we shall return to his art school experiences below, as they decisively shaped his musical outlook. Throughout most of the early and middle 1970s, Eno lived in London, working in recording studios, though he travelled and was on tour frequently. In 1978 he moved to a loft in New York City's Greenwich Village and made himself very much a part of the vital new downtown music scene. Subsequent travels took him to San Francisco, among other places, where he lived for six months around 1980. During this period he spoke of the psychological wear and tear of frequent travel and moving, and eventually he moved back to England, where he lives to this day, although since 1979 he has continued to pursue a rigorous regimen of almost bi-monthly trips to countries all over the world, setting up his audio-visual installations.

Eno's personality is complex. While he is capable of expounding at length and in a seemingly authoritative fashion about musical and philosophical subjects, many interviewers have noted a certain self-effacing quality that comes across when one talks to the man: he needs to be sure that his interlocutors are following him, that his ideas are not sounding too pompous or outrageous, he blushes easily. Although his ambient music is quiet and contemplative, he has been described as an extrovert, a sociable person who is able to make friends easily and take on new situations confidently. Eno speaks in long yet clearly structured sentences, and his easy sense of humor comes through by means of varied inflections of his voice.<sup>1</sup> As an artist, and perhaps as a person as well, one of his primary assets is a profound capacity for wonder:

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Amirkhanian, interviewer, "Eno at KPFA: 2 Feb. 1980, 13 March 1980, and 2 April 1980," seven 10-inch reels of 1/4" tape (private collection of Charles Amirkhanian, Berkeley, Ca.). A typescript was made of the first of these interviews: "Brian Eno interviewed 2/2/80 for KPFA Marathon by C. Amirkhanian, transcribed 10/29/83 [by] S. Stone." In future references I shall cite the typescript as Amirkhanian, "Eno at KPFA."