

CHAPTER FIVE: LISTENERS AND AIMS

Eno's Audience

Judging by sales figures of his recordings, Eno's audience is not very large by rock standards, compared with composers of avant-garde or contemporary fine art music of the academic variety, however, he has a substantial following. According to George Rush, Eno's progressive rock albums have each sold between 100,000 and 150,000 copies, as has *Music for Airports*; his other ambient music albums have all sold around 50,000 copies.¹ Although Eno has said he receives "encouraging letters from listeners, whose ages range from twelve to sixty,"² the drop-off of record sales represented by his ambient music indicates that there are many young listeners who found his brand of progressive rock exciting and worth buying, but who have not been willing to follow his career closely as it has gone into the realms of the ambient.

Eno has constantly searched for a kind of middle ground between the rarefied realms of high art and the everyday ephemera of popular culture. It stands to reason that he would view his audience as people interested in that same territory. He tries to make his music accordingly, making pieces that "seduce people to the point where they start searching." If a piece of music has a seductive sounding surface but no real content, or conversely, if the content of a piece is obscured by complicated and unattractive procedures on the surface, Eno believes the music has failed. What interests him is "sitting on that line" between seductive surface and meaningful content.³

Although Eno has made few concert appearances over the last decade, the sense of making music for an audience, however abstract, is important to him: "If I ever found I was doing work that nobody was interested in, I would seriously doubt it. I wouldn't want to be in the position of not feeling *connected* anymore."⁴ Thus unlike Milton Babbitt⁵ and many another contemporary composer who sees his work as a kind of research and development in the cause of the advancement of music, not needing the approval or feedback of the public or any particular segment thereof, Eno is unable to be quite so detached about his work – his position is more traditional, in the sense of an artist doing work that his audience can appreciate and

¹ George Rush, "Brian Eno: Rock's Svengali Pursues Silence," *Esquire* 98 (Dec. 1982), 132. Eno remarked in 1982 that his records "don't sell terribly well – around 100,000, I suppose, which is enough to make some money from. My music is used in quite a lot of films, TV things, other uses. That's strictly bonus income, because they use stuff that already exists." Steven Grant, "Brian Eno Against Interpretation," *Trouser Press* 9 (Aug. 1982), 29.

² Rush, "Eno: Rock's Svengali," 132.

³ Jim Aikin, "Brian Eno," *Keyboard* 7 (July 1981), 64.

⁴ John Rockwell, "The Odyssey of Two British Rockers," *New York Times*, 23 July 1978, II:16.

⁵ Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?," *High Fidelity* 8 (Feb. 1958), 38.