

The last paragraph in this quotation ties in with Eno's many reservations about rock in general. Clearly, his ambient music has been aimed at a different audience than his progressive rock music, or at least at a different mode of receptivity. With his ambient works, Eno has explicitly tried to make music that is not too self-assertive, that does not intrude too much, that does not dare its audience to listen nor threaten them if they choose not to – yet at the same time, music that is complex and deep enough to sustain and reward close listening. His ambient music is designed to be played at low or medium volume, high volume settings do violence to the sense and spirit of the music. Close listening reveals a constantly changing soundscape, yet paradoxically the same music can seem static and uneventful, though benign enough, if one is not really paying attention. Critics of Eno's ambient works have often complained that nothing much happens in the music. He answers such criticism by comparing his musical works to paintings, in their aspect as “a sort of continuous part of the environment” that one can choose to notice or to ignore:

If a painting is hanging on a wall where we live, we don't feel that we're missing something by not paying attention to it ... Yet with music and video, we still have the expectation of some kind of drama. My music and videos do change, but they change slowly. And they change in such a way that it doesn't matter if you miss a bit ... The conventional commercial notion that people want a lot of stimulus and constant change simply isn't true. In the world I come from, the pop world, there's always this notion that the public is basically very lazy and has to be prodded all the time. So everything is loaded with so-called surprises and changes.¹³

Eno's Artistic Intent

The question of “artistic intent” is always a slippery one when dealt with in the verbal mode, for there is a significant sense in which the artist's intent is fully evident only in the art-works themselves, furthermore, it is not even logically or philosophically necessary to posit the concept of a linear, clearly formulated intent at all.¹⁴ Added to these difficulties is the fact that Eno has spoken unsympathetically about music that “comes so heavily laden with intention that you can't hear it for the intentions.”¹⁵ In spite of all this, Eno has frequently addressed the issues of what it means to him to make music and what sorts of meaning he hopes his music is able to convey to his audience.

¹³ Anthony Korner, “Aurora Musicalis,” *Artforum* 24:10 (Summer 1986), 78.

¹⁴ See W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 54 (1946). In the words of Philip Gossett, Wimsatt and Beardsley “attack as irrelevant to criticism questions, such as ‘What was the poet's intention in writing this poem?’ or ‘What did he mean by this allusion?’, whose answers must be statements divorced from a reading of the poem itself and usually expressed in language not derived from it.” Gossett, “Beethoven's Sixth Symphony: Sketches for the First Movement,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 28 (Summer 1974), 260.

¹⁵ Rob Tannenbaum, “A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage and Brian Eno,” *Musician* 83 (Sept. 1985), 70.