

tude of accessory motives and sonic patterns. Ambient music was decorative, rather than expressionist, if not completely free of individual taste, memory, and psychology, as in Cage's ideal, it nevertheless lacked the bathos of self-importance and confessional displays of open psychic wounds. It seemed to rotate around certain central issues, never approaching them directly.

Between 1978 and 1982 Eno produced four albums that he called the Ambient series. They make a handsome set, their covers sporting similar artwork, layout, and typography. Of these four, however, only the first, *Music for Airports*, and the last, *On Land*, contain music that is mostly by Eno, *Ambient 2: The Plateau of Mirror* is a collaborative effort between Eno and composer Harold Budd, and *Ambient 3: Day of Radiance* consists of compositions by hammer-dulcimer player Laraaji. These four albums comprise the Ambient series proper, but the term "ambient" Eno himself has extended to cover the music of a number of albums released both before and after the Ambient series proper. We shall thus take the concept of ambient music to denote a broad approach to composition as well as a certain concept of the music's appropriate mode or modes of reception.

The music to be discussed in this chapter is firmly attributed to Eno alone, having been composed, produced, and arranged solely by him unless otherwise noted. Other musicians do play instruments on some of Eno's ambient pieces, and in the absence of a written score, we are often not quite sure what or how Eno told his musicians to play, or coaxed them into playing. But from *Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)* of 1974 on, statements like "All compositions written by Eno" begin appearing on his solo albums, indicating that he had final authority over and responsibility for the creative decisions leading to the finished product. It is not unreasonable, then, to attempt here an appraisal of Eno's own personal compositional style.

Certain traits characterize most pieces composed in the ambient style: quietness, gentleness, an emphasis on the vertical color of sound, establishment and maintenance of a single pervasive atmosphere, non-developmental forms, regularly or irregularly repeating events or cycles of events, modal pitch-sets, choice of a few limited parameters for each piece, layered textures tending towards an even balance of tone and noise, and a pulse that is sometimes uneven, sometimes "breathing," and sometimes non-existent.

Long Ambient Pieces

The long signal loop pieces that Eno made with Robert Fripp in the mid-1970s (to be discussed in the next chapter), though repetitive in their way, were strongly developmental: things happened in linear time, and these pieces have beginnings, middles, and ends. But Eno was also interested in making non-teleological music, music that would seem to be "just a chunk out of a longer continuum."⁵ With his progressive rock music of the early 1970s, he was still engaged in assaulting the audience at musical, visual, and conceptual levels. But simultaneously he was getting tired of "wanting to shock and surprise and take people by the lapels and shake them all the time with music. I decided I wanted to do something that is extremely calm and delicate and kind of invites you in rather than pushes itself upon you."⁶

⁵ *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "ambitendency."

⁶ Amirkhanian, "Eno at KPFA," 6.