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## **Playing the Gallery. Time, Space and the Digital in Brian Eno's Recent Installation Music**

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**Abstract:** This essay considers the sound installation work of the British multimedia artist Brian Eno. Focussing on Eno's so-called ambient music, the essay asks to what extent this work can be read as an aesthetic intervention in contemporary cultures of musical listening that are driven and shaped by the instantaneous availability of music in digital formats. His sound installation '12 Seasons', written for the 'Great Gallery' of the Palace of Venaria Reala in Turin, is marked by slowly evolving melodic structures and textures that imply a culture of sustained listening. However, the installation process also saw Eno personally involved in the adaptation of the pre-recorded music to the acoustic properties of the gallery: this created a listening experience that could only be fully appreciated in the space for which the music was composed, given that the sound evolved as visitors moved through the gallery. Examining Eno's compositional technique, installation practice and its underpinning musical theory, the essay asks to what extent '12 Seasons' and similar works offer a spatially variable listening experience, which critiques the present trend of accessing music through lo-fidelity digital files and re-enforces the need for attentive listening over extended time. It asks, further, whether Eno is thus making a wider artistic protest against the contemporary hyper-consumption of cultural products, criticized by contemporary sociologists, which seems to value the acquisition of new aesthetic material over sustained engagement with it.

**Keywords:** Eno – music – ambient – installation – digital – speed – immediacy – spatial – temporal – slow.

The British multimedia artist, composer and record producer Brian Eno cuts an enigmatic figure in the world of contemporary art and music, and continues to fascinate and divide musicologists and cultural commentators alike.<sup>1</sup> Turning his back on rock stardom in the mid 1970s, he dedicated himself to experimental composition. This essay examines Eno's compositional work, specifically his so-called 'ambient' music often written for installation in prescribed physical spaces, and

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<sup>1</sup> Eno and his works have received all manner of treatment from critics, including descriptions of his music as 'bland' or superficial. See: Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (Boston, MA and London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 13-14.

explores ways in which it can be read as a critical response to the ‘fast access’ listening culture of downloadable music files and online streaming music that have grown from the digital revolution and the aesthetic values often associated with these developments.

The essay first outlines recent sociological critiques of the culture of immediacy and consumption in the digital age. It then offers a potted history of the role played by temporal and spatial concepts in modern musical composition, recording and performance, asking how Eno’s work builds on these traditions. This, in turn, informs an in-depth analysis of the temporal and spatial properties of one of the composer’s recent sound installations entitled *12 Seasons. Music for the Great Gallery of the Palace of Venaria*: here I examine the extent to which the installation produces a listening experience that invites prolonged attention over time and depends upon the acoustic properties of the installation space to realize itself fully. In the light of this, the essay asks if Eno’s temporal-spatial approach can be read as a consistently critical response to the aesthetic values associated with digital music downloads and contemporary cultures of listening, and more generally to the wider developments thought by sociologists to characterize our relationship with culture in the digital era – namely the move away from sustained engagement with a more select corpus of artistic products, and the move towards the acquisition of those products not only *en masse* but also at ever greater speed.<sup>2</sup>

### **I. Fast Culture and Slow Music in the Digital Era**

What does the concept of a ‘culture of immediacy’ mean for the world of music? In *The Culture of Speed* John Tomlinson characterizes the immediacy of digital culture more generally as a function of so-called ‘fast capitalism’.<sup>3</sup> The instantaneous availability, sale and consumption of products in the digital world has marked a shift in consumer behaviour from the volume to the speed of consumption and has – in the words of Zygmunt Bauman – ‘degraded duration and elevated transience’.<sup>4</sup> In the digital age cultural products are not only more immediate in the temporal sense, however, for the emphasis on the speed of acquisition has also diminished the importance of mediality, that is the aesthetic qualities associated with cultural products as embedded in the physical material of production. This pertains not least to the world of music, particularly to the

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<sup>2</sup> On this see John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed. The Coming of Immediacy* (London: SAGE, 2007). See also Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook. Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009). Duffy argues that the technological advances of twentieth-century modernity not only facilitate speed but nurture the desire for the pleasure speed brings and that this becomes a defining feature of the modern subject. Duffy, pp. 1-16.

<sup>3</sup> Tomlinson, pp. 81-89.

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 83-84.

advent of the infamous MP3 music file. This digital format has meant that the era of compact discs is at an end, as music can be compressed into a relatively small amount of digital data and moved cheaply and within seconds via the internet.

The MP3-centred download culture has sharply impacted on the music industry and consumer behaviour.<sup>5</sup> Particularly in the early history of the format, low-data MP3s also brought radical change to the aesthetics of the listening experience enjoyed by digital music consumers. When accessed through most musical devices these files offered a very different listening experience to analogue recordings or even data-rich digital music files.<sup>6</sup> Using a range of algorithms to sample selectively from the digital data of recorded music, MP3s used (and continue to use) less data to produce an approximative listening experience.<sup>7</sup> Historically, this resulted in what many musicians and acoustic scientists have come to see as a sonically inferior or 'lossy' approximation. Listeners have typically perceived been a number of areas of noticeable loss. MP3s have traditionally been associated with a loss of frequency resolution, especially evident in higher frequency ranges, which results in a loss of 'sharpness' or clarity. The MP3 has been found to be lacking in dynamic range, with more subtle shifts in dynamics being lost to the listener, who experiences a flatter 'volume' profile and also the 'masking' of softer sounds by the louder components in the recording. Crucially, MP3s have exhibited a loss of spatial spread, or that part of the recording that helps position sound components in three-dimensional 'stereo image' recreated by recorded music: this has detracted from the listener's sense of spatial 'envelopment' by the music.<sup>8</sup> It has almost become common practice to view these developments, together with commensurate shifts in listener tastes and behaviours, as negative: indeed, some critics refer to the advent of a post-fidelity era.<sup>9</sup> However, this thinking has been challenged in more recent

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<sup>5</sup> The digital revolution has seen the meteoric rise of online music sellers or providers. In the last decade, the rise of online streaming services such as Spotify, iTunes and the file-sharing platform YouTube has further changed patterns of music consumption: for digital listeners, these forums are becoming the main point of access for music, new and old. As these services do not always release purchased files to listeners, the traditional ownership of music, even in digital format, has been subject to erosion.

<sup>6</sup> The prime example would be WAV files, which are used on full resolution Compact Disc recordings.

<sup>7</sup> For a balanced discussion of the format informed by the history of sound compression technologies see: Jonathan Sterne, *MP3. The Meaning of a Format* (Durham & London: Duke University press, 2012), pp. 1-31.

<sup>8</sup> For a concise diagnosis of the listening experience offered by MP3 files and an argument asserting that the ubiquity of the format is undermining the listening sensitivities of a generation see Pantelis Vassilakis, 'MP3s and the Degradation of Listening,' <http://www.iddblog.org/?p=82>. This and all subsequent online references last accessed 22.09.15. See also Jeroen Breebaart and Christof Faller, *Spatial Audio Processing: MPEG Surround and Other Applications* (Chichester: Wiley, 2007) for a particular focus on how modern musical formats grapple with the listener's sense of spatial 'envelopment' by sound.

<sup>9</sup> See: Daniel Guberman, 'Post-Fidelity: A New Age of Music Consumption and Technological Innovation', *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23/4 (2011), 431-54.

journalism and scholarly writing, which has sought to debunk myths about the wholly negative impact of the MP3, its degraded aesthetic qualities, and emphasized instead the development of higher fidelity versions of the format.<sup>10</sup>

Wherever we stand on the debates surrounding the MP3 and the listener practices and aesthetic values that have rightly or wrongly been traced back to the format, there has been an undeniable range of critical responses by composers, performers and consumers alike to the *perception* of an easy-access, post-fidelity era of music. The resurgence in the sales of vinyl records is often seen as a passing trend, lampooned as a fetishist sub-culture with a quaint nostalgia for analogue forms, or could even be seen to mark a conscious re-embracing of material artefacts in a dematerialized era. Either way the phenomenon does mark a self-conscious attempt by groups of music consumers to access a very different listening experience through physically more cumbersome recorded media and playback technologies that are precisely not portable, require a certain 'fixed space' within which to function and are less immediate and more time-consuming.<sup>11</sup> In the world of musical performance, a group of German conductors known as 'Tempo Giusto' have committed themselves quite literally to performing works from the classical canon at a slower and, in their view, historically authentic speed.<sup>12</sup> Equally, musicians of various persuasions have responded to the speed of musical culture and sound of the digital world through composition: Anglo-German composer Max Richter has produced a nocturne for piano, strings and electronic instruments entitled *Sleep*, which can be listened to as a one hour version, though in its full glory lasts eight hours: conceived of as a musical 'place to rest, a point of repose', the live debut in Berlin was played to an audience lying in bed.<sup>13</sup> During 2015 the rock musician Thom Yorke of the band Radiohead, who has railed publicly against the music streaming service Spotify, installed an eighteen-day long, constantly evolving atmospheric electronic soundscape entitled

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<sup>10</sup> Guberman (2011) also emphasizes the creative potential unlocked by the MP3. See also Peter Kirn, 'The Myth of Falling Fidelity, and Audio History Unburdened by Fact'. Create Digital Music, 2010 at: <http://createdigitalmusic.com/2010/05/the-myth-of-falling-fidelity-and-audio-history-unburdened-by-fact/>.

<sup>11</sup> On the resurgence in vinyl record sales in the context of slow cultural movements, see Jennifer Rauch, 'Slow Media as Alternative Media. Cultural Resistance through Print and Analogue Revivals', in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. by Chris Atton (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 571-81.

<sup>12</sup> See John Tomlinson, pp. 146-47. See also: <http://www.tempogiusto.de>.

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.deutschegrammophon.com/gb/cat/4795267>, especially the interview with Richter in the embedded video, entitled: 'Max Richter - Sleep (Trailer)'. My thanks go to Dr. Brian Haman for this reference.

*Subterranea* to accompany the 'Panic Office' art exhibition at the Carriageworks multi-media arts entre in Sydney.<sup>14</sup>

There have also been responses to trends in the digitized music market from digital musicians. Here the term digital refers not to the culture of accessing music through MP3 files but to the use of digital technology to create music that cannot be recreated through acoustic performance and pre-digital analogue recording and playback technologies. In many cases digital music has provided composers and installation artists with the opportunity to manipulate sound and music with great temporal and spatial flexibility and to produce recorded musical works and installation art that, ironically enough, offer a challenge to the sonic values associated with digitized music and its patterns of fast, hyper consumption.

## II. Eno and the Tradition of Space and Time in Modern Music

In the last two decades musicology has experienced its own version of the 'spatial turn' that has reached across the humanities. Scholars have sought to modify the notion of music as a solely temporal medium by showing how it relies upon and manipulates notions of space at the levels of composition, recording and performance. Gisela Nauck, for instance, opened out a complex taxonomy of spatial concepts inherent to musical composition, performance, theory and reception from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. She detects an underlying binary of 'internal' spaces which exist as musical space in the composer's imagining of the work, in musical notation awaiting performance and in recorded music awaiting playback on the one hand, and the physical space of music as it is realized through performance and playback on the other.<sup>15</sup> Nauck sees a renewed, conscious engagement with space in mid-twentieth-century avant-garde music, which was driven by advances in multi-track recording studio and loudspeaker technology.<sup>16</sup> These advances made possible the recording of spatially complex music and equally 'spatial' playback performances of the pieces to live audiences through multiple loudspeakers, whereby 'the movement or

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<sup>14</sup> See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/thom-yorke-has-written-a-song-that-is-18-days-long-10275785.html>. See also Yorke's comments on streaming music here: <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/oct/07/spotify-thom-yorke-dying-corpse>.

<sup>15</sup> Gisela Nauck, *Musik im Raum – Raum in der Musik. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der seriellen Musik* (Stuttgart: Seminar, 1997), esp. pp. 12-29.

<sup>16</sup> On the role of technology see Richard Zvonar, 'A History of Spatial Music. Historical Antecedents from Renaissance Antiphony to Strings in the Wings', at: [http://cec.sonus.ca/econtact/7\\_4/zvonar\\_spatialmusic.html](http://cec.sonus.ca/econtact/7_4/zvonar_spatialmusic.html).

distribution of sounds in the space around the listener play[ed] a role in the structure of the work itself':<sup>17</sup> composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage were pioneers in this area.<sup>18</sup>

More recently, the sound analyst and practitioner Brandon LaBelle has charted the 'spatial' properties of twentieth century sound art, focussing on musical space in material, architectural, acoustic and sociological senses.<sup>19</sup> LaBelle moves beyond the spatially conceived yet abstract sonic sculpture of Stockhausen, Cage and others to focus on site-specific musical practice from the 1960s onwards.<sup>20</sup> Rather than 'separate itself from the space of its presentation,' this school re-embraced in various ways the idea of music as written for a prescribed location or space.<sup>21</sup> Site-specific music sought to 'incorporate it [the site, JH] into the work, from material, such as architectural features' though also to have impact upon 'the governing curatorial premise behind an exhibition or larger social and cultural conventions'.<sup>22</sup> These sound installations were designed to interact with specific sites in two broad senses: *acoustically*, by utilizing the acoustic properties and ambient sounds of a physical space to realize particular listening experiences, and in a *socio-cultural* sense by placing a sonic work of art in a particular site so that it in some way it enriches, alters or comments upon the experience of inhabiting that space. In the following it will be argued that Eno's ambient work, particularly his installation pieces, set up the following dialectic of spatial and temporal properties: the deployment of sound in space is used to maintain the listener's interest in often melodically sparse music that unfolds over extended time, which, in turn, heightens interest in the physical playback space, extending an invitation to the listener to remain there for longer.

'Ambient music' describes an approach to composition, recording and playback performance that Eno pioneered from the mid 1970s. The term, coined by Eno himself and reflected upon in interviews, notebooks and essays, describes his extended pieces of sound that

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<sup>17</sup> This usefully concise formulation can be found in Paul Miller, 'Stockhausen and the Serial Shaping of Space,' (PhD, University of Rochester, NY, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Key examples of avant-garde spatial music would be Cage's 'Williams Mix' (1952-53) in which eight separate tape loops are played back through as many loudspeakers, enabling atonal sounds to be 'moved' around an auditorium, and Stockhausen's 'Gesang der Jünglinge' (1955-56), which deploys a whorl of vocal and electronic sounds across five speakers arranged in a ring in order to emphasize the movement of continuous sounds across the physical listening space. Following Stockhausen's death in 2007, Eno reflected on his relationship to these composers in a piece for *Prospect Magazine*, in which he cited both as hugely influential though aligned himself more with Cage's attempts at strategic randomness, than with Stockhausen's drive to 'cosmic control'. *Prospect Magazine* January 20 (2008) at: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/regulars/9952-newsandcuriosities>.

<sup>19</sup> Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise. Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> See: LaBelle, pp. 167-182.

<sup>21</sup> LaBelle, p. xi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

were usually written with an acute awareness of how they would sound within different physical spaces and which exhibited conventionally harmonic tonality, though only ‘minimalist’ melodic detail and change. Eno was influenced by the 1960s Minimalist School of composition, which included artists such as Phillip Glass, Steve Reich and Terry Riley. These composers experimented in ‘the auditory and psychological effects of certain static or slowed down phenomena,’ by creating music that denied devotees of western classical, jazz and pop music the expected frequency and range of musical ‘events,’ or changes within a song or symphony, leaving listeners with ‘few clues [...] as to where we are in the piece’.<sup>23</sup> Thus Eno self-consciously conceived of his ambient work as a temporal endeavour in that it was part of a tradition of ‘slow’ treatments of musical time, as a spatial endeavour in that the music explores how sound behaves in particular ways within various types of physical space, and as a study in the dialectic interaction of both the space and time of music and how they combine to influence how a listening public feels and behaves in a given environment.

Eno’s first ambient composition was *Ambient 1. Music for Airports* (1978). The album was designed for loudspeaker playback at various venues around the world. It offered a soothing sonic backdrop to both the frenetic movement and frustrating inertia of enforced waiting that make up time spent in airports. In his sleeve notes to the album, outlining his manifesto for ambient music, Eno contrasted the use of contemporary ‘piped’ music in public spaces, where the ‘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)’ with his own aim to ‘induce calm and a space to think.’<sup>24</sup> From its inception ambient music showed a marked ambivalence towards the duration of listening: rather than arresting all listeners equally, it was intended ‘to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting.’<sup>25</sup>

The four sections of *Music for Airports* are all built out of a series of tape loops, themselves drawn from sequences of short, harmonically simple musical phrases recorded by instrumentalists and vocalists. The various parts or voices are spliced together with a careful attention to timing

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<sup>23</sup> See: *Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. by Keith Potter, Kyle Gann and others (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 3-5. Minimalist techniques included ‘harmonic stasis’ (the use of few notes), repetition, the use of continuous ‘drone’ sounds and an interest in slowly cumulative development or ‘gradualism’ (p. 7).

<sup>24</sup> For an accessible online version of Eno’s comments see: <http://www.indiana.edu/~audioweb/T369/eno-ambient.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

that determines when different sound elements can be heard alone, when they coincide and when there are brief soundless pauses. The result is four extended sound sequences that never surprise with radical tonal or dynamic shifts or changes of instrumentation, but evolve slowly through subtle melodic changes. Key to the installation of this music was its playback volume: this was meant to be pitched carefully to accommodate listeners moving through the airport at differing speeds. The music was not played back at concert volume and, as such, was discernible as a general wash of sound to transient airport visitors moving between the speakers, but did not demand their attention as a live musical performance would have. However, the music was just loud enough for slowly unfolding changes to be heard by attentive listeners who remained nearer to the loudspeakers for longer periods. *Music for Airports* was in some ways spatially conceived at the point of composition and the musical arrangements themselves show some interest in the movement of sound components around the stereo image of the recording. The two pianos of the first section are separated across the stereo recording, for example, whilst the continuous tapestry of vocal sound created from tape loops of recordings of female vocalists in the second piece '2/1' also contains a sense of stereo 'panning' or the positioning of sound within the stereo image. In practice, the airport speaker systems played back a rich stereo mix of the pieces. However, the resultant gatherings of stationary, attentive listeners that sometimes occurred in the airports was to do with the location of the loudspeakers rather than a result of how the composition moved sound around and reflected the specific properties of the installation space.

Eno approached the notion of space in music differently in his album *Ambient 4: On Land* (1982). With its extended drone sounds and pieces that fade in and out, the gradualism of this album marks a continued focus on a slow temporality that allows for different levels of attentiveness. The album also seeks to evoke a sense of a geographical space that hovers between the literally representational and the figurative, combining genuine recordings of natural sounds with the artificial sounds of synthesizers recorded in the studio. The musical pieces are named after rural locations in the United Kingdom, though the album's sleeve art represents an indistinct cartographical landscape overlaid with abstract lines and patterns resulting in a fascinating mesh between real and imagined geography. Thus the album represents a kind of audio-visual landscape painting that retains distinctly spatial qualities without evoking any stable sense of place. *On Land* marks one other key aspect of Eno's ambient work: this was not music that had been composed for installation in a particular space but one that was conceived for release as a recording. The sleeve notes acknowledge that the music's spatial qualities could not be fully realized through

most domestic stereo systems and contain Eno's hand written notes and diagrams for a more cost-effective way of integrating and physically positioning a third speaker into a typical home stereo system of the time so as to further enhance the spatial quality of the listening experience.<sup>26</sup> The work therefore marks his attempt to extend ambient music both to the domestic environment and the market place of recorded music.<sup>27</sup>

This survey points to a fascinating set of apparent tensions in Eno's work. His music appears to restrict itself to a minimalist deployment of melody across musical time and marks a particular form of musical slowness that demands and rewards sustained attention over long periods, though, equally, allows for less attentive, transient listening. This is music that is composed with a strong sense of its behaviour and purpose in space, whether as a physical-material, acoustic, social or cultural construct. But Eno seems equally comfortable composing or reworking music for commercial release and listening in generic, often domestic spaces. Whilst Eno's ambient pieces often encourage people to hear 'slow' music attentively or to do so solely in carefully curated spaces, then, his work does not seem to represent a consistent and ongoing crusade to achieve those artistic goals.

### III. Playing the Gallery: Eno's *12 Seasons*.

When they commissioned Eno to provide a piece of installation music, the curatorship of the Palace of Venaria had long been considering how they could better utilize the Great Gallery.<sup>28</sup> Their idea was to transform it from a visually remarkable though functionally transitional space, which linked the palace's established exhibition areas and their collections, into a place of interest in its own right, with the sound installation encouraging visitors to slow their transit through the

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<sup>26</sup> A convenient online source for Eno's comments is: [http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian\\_eno/onland-txt.html](http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/onland-txt.html). See also Paul Roquet, 'Ambient Landscapes from Brian Eno to Tetsu Inoue,' *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 21:4 (2009), 364–83 (esp. 369-72).

<sup>27</sup> Building on the French modernist composer Erik Satie's notion of *musique d'ameublement*, Eno had been experimenting with published, purchasable sound recordings that were meant to blend into the atmosphere of domestic environments. His 1975 album *Discrete Music* exemplifies this approach, which occurred before his strictly ambient phase.

<sup>28</sup> The palace as a whole was traditionally the seat of residence for the Royal House of Savoy. It was designed and built from 1675 by Michelangelo Garove and was used for a variety of purposes, functioning as the headquarters of the Italian Army before it was bought by the Italian Ministry of Culture in 1978, restored and opened in 2007. The 'Great Gallery' was part of the extension designed and built by Filippo Juvarra in the first half of the eighteenth century to connect the chambers of the king to those of the Crown prince.

gallery and remain there for longer.<sup>29</sup> Eno began composing in isolation in his London studio only to find that, upon his first visit to the gallery, he felt the music to be wrongly conceived: he had created sound for a generic internal space rather than for the gallery in particular.<sup>30</sup> Fifteen metres in height at the centre of the vaulted ceiling, eighty metres in length and twelve in width, the gallery is a vast space with strong and complex patterns of acoustic resonance. The range of elaborate stuccowork on many of its walls and ceilings, including numerous hollowed inlets and alcoves as well as the sonically reflective solid marble slab flooring and plate glass windows imbue the hall with further, unforeseen patterns of sound reflection. Eno also remarked on how the array of forty-four tall windows and twenty-two smaller oval-shaped apertures or 'eyelets' allowed a huge amount of light into the room. In interviews he described how this renders the gallery particularly sensitive to changes in external lighting and weather: the gallery had been built seemingly to 'invite the world to get in.'<sup>31</sup> The installation, he felt, also needed to reflect subtle shifts in mood brought about by changing light. As an artist who has always retained an eye for the visual and physical as well as an ear for the acoustic properties of his installation spaces, Eno realized he needed to write music that in some way exploited and reflected the way the gallery looked and sounded to the visiting public, whilst also elevating its social and cultural purpose beyond that of a space between art galleries.

Eno composed and recorded two one-hour pieces that were to be played consecutively over a two-hour period, each comprising six movements of around ten minutes. With these distinct movements and their different moods the installation marks an oblique acknowledgement to symphonic form, which Eno deemed appropriate given the late baroque/neo-classical setting. However, a close reading of the music's minimalist and cumulative-cyclical patterns of melodic development demonstrates that the gallery piece owes little else to the classical symphonic tradition. Each of the sections was composed within a simple set of parameters. Eno began by recording passages of sound created by himself and two other musicians playing individual notes, short phrases and simple variations on those phrases using a range of electronic and acoustic instruments. All of the passages are built only from the seven notes of the C major scale. Whilst Eno did not use computer software to vary the music's parameters randomly as he had done in

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<sup>29</sup> See the illuminating analytical case studies on how soundscapes alter visitor behaviour in galleries and museums in Robert D. Jaukubowski, 'Museum Soundscapes and their Impact on Visitor Outcomes' (PhD Thesis, Colorado State University, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> See Eno's comments: <http://www.lavenaria.it/web/en/calendar/details/123-brian-eno-music-for-the-great-gallery.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the past in his other great innovation, namely 'generative' music, the compositional process reflected elements of that technique:<sup>32</sup> in writing and recording Eno used music software called 'Logic' produced by Apple Inc. to experiment with different combinations of the recorded components within each of the individual sections, cutting, pasting, repeating and varying phrases, often randomly, until he had achieved arrangements that he liked.

Typically, one instrument – be it piano, strings or synthesizer – opens out a section. Then, over a typically Enoesque 'underlay' made up of a continuous drone note or chord, overlaying motifs are deployed. These comprise simple sequences of between one and five notes and are used with relative economy, leaving a great many musical 'spaces' in which no further melodic detail is introduced and in which the preceding phrase can be heard to reverberate at length: each motif is left to resonate as the next begins so that that the listener experiences an overlapping rather than a purely sequential effect. Change does occur, though only gradually. As each motif returns it does so with slight melodic variations, or is played on different instruments. Occasionally, the underlying drone notes alter, pulling the harmony subtly from a major to relative a minor chord, or from minor to major, although this process is again gradual and unlike the overt and sudden modulations to be found in western classical symphonies or song. On occasion relative major and minor harmonies could be heard by listeners to coexist in the gallery. The work's individual sections were set up to interleave, creating an almost continuous, though slowly changing listening experience over a two-hour period. Thus the gallery visitor encountered a highly arranged recording that invited extended listening through minimalist experiments in theme, variation and modulation, conducted at a slow pace over an extended period. On one level, then, the piece is a typically Enoesque investigation into slow musical time.

What, then, of the music's spatiality? Eno waited until he could spend further time in the gallery itself before putting the finishing touches to the music, allowing numerous days for this installation process. The idiosyncratic acoustics of the gallery, which Eno has described as an acoustically resonant 'secular cathedral,' played a large part in the final stages of his compositional

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<sup>32</sup> Derived from his dual interest in John Cage's experiments in musical randomness and in the work of Stafford Beer, who pioneered in the trans-disciplinary study of organizational and regulatory systems known as 'cybernetics', Eno has sought to implement alternative ways of organizing musical composition, including disrupting the conventionally linear, hierarchical model of composer, composition, musical notation, musician and performance. The advent of computer programmes such as Koan allowed Eno to generate unique musical pieces that altered each time they were played back by producing variations upon a series of simple musical variables within set parameters. This 'generative music' was sold commercially for the domestic market and used to make installations. See, for instance, Eno's *Generative 1* (1996).

process.<sup>33</sup> Eno listened to the music being played back through a set of four loudspeakers positioned in the top corners of the room, which allowed for the musical phrases and parts to be projected acoustically so that they sounded to the ear as if they occupied different vertical heights within the room or different positions from left to right. Noting how the recording sounded within the gallery space, Eno made use of the software to alter the panning and reverberation effects within the digital files that made up the recorded music, manipulating the position of the piece's musical components as they played out in the gallery's idiomatic acoustics.

For listeners in the gallery musical phrases seemingly 'descend' from above, move 'towards' or 'away' from them at ground level or seemingly 'rise upwards' from the ground. The gallery website describes this in a somewhat idealistic but informative manner:

Visitors walking down the gallery are wrapped into two distincts [sic] sound flows: as they approach the center of the hall, echoes of the sounds behind turn into a memory that blend in the soft reverberations of the sounds that lay ahead. The two movements that are complete when they meet at the heart of the Gallery [sic]. [...] The sounds are remarkably persistent before dissolving into the space, each engaged in a potentially endless chase, floating in the air, altering the perception of the Great Gallery, expanding its volumes and filling it with a different light.<sup>34</sup>

In more sober terms, Eno's installation technique led to unexpected, 'happy' coincidences which he sought to preserve: during certain sections of playback the frequency of the recorded string sections appeared to resonate with materials in the ceiling, whereby sounds appeared to emanate from above and move downwards to the listener. On other occasions Eno explored more consciously how the spatial characteristics of the recorded music could be developed within the physical gallery space. The opening piece of the recorded cycle, for example, made use of simple, recurring piano phrases of three and four notes, which were treated with digitally generated reverberation and panning effects so that recurrent phrases moved around the stereo image of the recording relative to each other. This spatial quality, already inherent in the recording, was then mapped onto the physical acoustics of the gallery during installation to modify the spatial spread of the piano notes. Not only was the space of the gallery altering how Eno's music sounded during playback, but Eno was also manipulating those changes, effectively 'playing' the acoustics

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<sup>33</sup> See Eno's interview with Laurie Anderson here: <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/brian-eno/> and also his comments on the gallery's acoustics: <http://www.lavenaria.it/web/en/calendar/details/123-brian-eno-music-for-the-great-gallery.html>.

<sup>34</sup> See again: <http://www.lavenaria.it/web/en/calendar/details/123-brian-eno-music-for-the-great-gallery.html>.

of the gallery as an extension of the compositional process.<sup>35</sup> Since individual notes appeared to be located in mutually distinct spaces, listeners felt that they could not have been generated by a single piano in any one fixed location. This effect led to a strangely disconnected listening experience, disrupting pre-existing associations of how and where familiar instrumental sounds are generated. This is one example of Eno's attempt to heighten the listener's awareness of how sound behaves in space and, conversely, how space alters the way in which we hear and perceive sound – all facilitated by digital technology.

Although he foregrounds the role of space in his history of sound installations, LaBelle emphasizes the inescapable dialectical relationship between space and time that remains at the heart of the genre. Whilst site-specific sound installations tended to shift emphasis 'from the "time of music" to the "space of sound,"' the experience of installation music in space is nonetheless inherently temporal or, as LaBelle writes, 'To encounter sound installation, one spends time within space, immersed in a listening that brings one to space through an acoustical unfolding wedded to movement and duration.'<sup>36</sup> Eno's installation illustrates this well. The music provides sonic content for the gallery space that neither sits as a sound sculpture detached from its surroundings nor as a tone poem that evokes an alternative, imagined spatial environment within the gallery but rather 'plays' the acoustics of the gallery. The bespoke listening experience that results explores how simple, melodically connected sound patterns are given new interest by being reconfigured across space and, crucially, by playing off the acoustic idiosyncrasies of a particular structure. This spatial play requires temporal extension so that its internal components – be they individual notes or melodic sequences – can unfold throughout the gallery. This means that the music's dimension of physical movement requires not only space but also time within which to move. The music's deployment across space and during time appears to invite concomitant physical movement in the listener who moves around the gallery listening to different parts of the music and to how the whole of the music sounds at differing locations – the gallery website describes the effect of three temporal zones, one at either end of the gallery and one field containing overlapping fields of sound. This rich spatialization, in turn, implies extended and even repeated listening.

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<sup>35</sup> Eno has long reflected on how to treat the acoustics of physical performance and recording spaces as an extension of instrumentation. In an unpublished lecture of 1979, for example, he spoke on the recording studio as a compositional tool: [http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian\\_eno/interviews/downbeat79.htm](http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/downbeat79.htm).

<sup>36</sup> LaBelle, *Background Noise*, p. 162.

In his discussion of how sound art seeks to redefine space, LaBelle contends that, by remaining in a place to listen to how sound installations play out, we alter our perception of that space, both by exploring its aesthetic properties and seeing how its expected socio-cultural functions are transformed.<sup>37</sup> His ideas build on Elizabeth Grosz's work on the socio-cultural properties of space, particularly her exploration of how architectural structures are given meaning by forms of 'inhabitation.' For Grosz, space is co-determined by the temporal category of 'duration': she argues that our sustained presence in a space opens out the continuing possibility of reactivating that space in sociocultural terms. And so it is that inhabiting space becomes a matter of 'the ongoing possibility of a different inhabitation.'<sup>38</sup> By using sound art to invite listeners to explore the space at length Eno's *12 Seasons* extends the invitation to inhabit the gallery in new and different ways, which is also an invitation to slow down and to remain for longer.

#### IV. Conclusion

Eno's *12 Seasons* sets up a dialogue between pre-recorded sound and the physical playback space for which it was written, whereby the music is transformed by the acoustics of gallery. This, in turn, lends new significance to the space by making it not only a site but also a constituent medium of musical production. Rather than an example of the more radical social commentaries made by other spatially aware sonic artists working over the last decades,<sup>39</sup> Eno is seeking to modify in more subtle terms the way in which a predominantly highbrow public experience an under-used space within a set of buildings already dedicated to artistic exhibition. *12 Seasons*, then, is a work that is transformative of the gallery's function, whilst remaining socially and culturally sympathetic to its function within the traditional setting of the palace.

The gallery music is not without its aesthetic tensions. Eno's own comments on this apparently 'slow' and spatially structured piece reveal the same relaxed and pluralistic attitude to temporalities of listening that informed his earlier ambient work: the gallery piece was meant to

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<sup>37</sup> LaBelle, *Background Noise*, pp. 163-65.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 9. In a similar vein, Doreen Massey argues that space is 'always under construction [...] a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded in material practices which have to be carried out.' Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 9. This model of space also lends itself to the notion of artistic practices that exploit the instability of space by repurposing it.

<sup>39</sup> A radical contrast can be found in the work of the musical collective 'Test Department,' who physically occupied disused buildings across the UK in the 1980s, using the structures and waste materials found there to create their own brand of 'industrial music' as a form of political and aesthetic protest. See: [www.testdept.org.uk](http://www.testdept.org.uk).

‘detain’ and ‘slow down’ visitors, to ‘reward an hour of attention,’ and remain ‘interesting [...] and not get annoying,’ though also to allow for the ‘different anticipated speeds of people using the place.’<sup>40</sup> Again, careful attention to volume levels in the gallery ensured the audibility of the music for ‘faster’ transient listeners without raising the profile of the music to that of a concert, though also rewarded the ‘slow’ attentive listener with musical content that evolved over extended time spent in particular locations throughout space. The overarching theme of this volume – ‘Ästhetische Eigenzeiten’ – has at its heart the idea that modern culture has a ‘polychronic’ character and that modern artworks allow us to experience complex and multiple modes of temporal experience.<sup>41</sup> Eno’s gallery piece speaks to this theme in two ways: it shows how music can function within multiple temporalities, rewarding both transient and attentive listeners. Through its conscious use of the gallery as a medium of co-production the music also unlocks the dual temporal possibilities of that space, allowing the gallery to function simultaneously as a space of transition and duration.

Perhaps problematic for this discussion, though, is the fate of this music after it left the gallery. A piece of music based on *12 Seasons. Music for the Great Gallery* has been released in the form of *Lux*, an LP or CD, or, significantly, as downloadable MP3 files of four extended sequences of music closely based on the music for the gallery.<sup>42</sup> When listened to on any reasonable stereo sound-system or headphones the four pieces constitute a rich stereo mix in which the notes of the piano motifs resonate in different permutations across an imaginary, three-dimensional space. Even in the purchasable MP3 format, which is only available as a relatively data-rich high quality file, the listener finds a fair approximation of spatial envelopment. Yet the space in these recordings is merely an evocation of space that does not involve the creation of sound within and through the physical medium of the playback environment: however ‘enveloping’ the music is, in the dislocated form of a purchasable recording it will never emulate the experience of the gallery music.

How are we to view Eno’s ambient music in the light of this? Is he, after all, being led by the fast economics of the download culture? He was one of the first musicians of the digital revolution to maximize his income by selling his music directly in digital formats to customers

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<sup>40</sup> Eno’s comments are again taken from his interview with Laurie Anderson:

<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/brian-eno/>.

<sup>41</sup> See: Michael Gamper and Helmut Hühn, *Was sind Ästhetische Eigenzeiten?* (Hanover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2014), pp. 19-37.

<sup>42</sup> See: <http://www.enoshop.co.uk/shop>.

online, though this has proven to be a common strategy for many musicians at a time when traditional income streams from recording contracts were drying up. Furthermore, Eno's income is generated far more by his work as a record producer than by the modest sale of his own releases.<sup>43</sup> Speculations about Eno's financial motivations and their ideological implications are less important here. More crucial is the fact that he continues to produce audio-visual installations that function as acoustically engaging experiences for listeners present in curated performance environments, whilst consciously reworking and remixing this music for release, rendering it instantly accessible for portable consumption in, at best, acoustically approximate forms. This all appears to be compounded by the fact that works such as *Lux* are marketed as derivatives of works such as *12 Seasons*. This, arguably, blurs the lines separating two qualitatively different cultures of listening. Seemingly Eno risks undermining the ideals of an experience that was tied so closely in aesthetic, cultural and social terms to the unique space for which it was designed.

Such objections would certainly nonplus the artist himself, however. Whilst Eno has been highly critical of much recorded popular music, its associated cultures and values, he has never professed to be the unquestioning ideologue of any 'slow' musical movement nor sought to turn his art into a sustained political response to the modern music industry in which he works. He views his installations, recordings of this work, and even his ambient musical applications for smartphones as part of an aesthetic continuum that was long underway since before the digital revolution. He has sought to offer rewarding listening experiences in *differing* contexts, both formal and less formal, as fine-tuned pieces for galleries, or for listening to in trains and taxis, without one form seeming to be a corruption of the other. The apparent contradictions in Eno's work arise in the light of contemporary critical thinking that regards with cynicism the instantaneous availability of cultural products in a global economy and condescends to contemporary musical production values and listening behaviours. To judge Eno's ambient work wholly in terms of its relative conformity to highbrow, counter-commercial aesthetics risks imposing a limiting set of normative demands upon a commercially active, socially engaged multi-media artist. It seems more fitting, then, to allow Eno's music to inhabit a fascinating field of tension: it represents a critical, aesthetic response to the fast culture of digitized music and yet is also caught up in its economic and technological imperatives. As such, its significance for us

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<sup>43</sup> See: Eric Tamm, *Vertical Color of Sound*, p. 51.

derives not least from the fact that it reflects our own ambivalences, as we seek alternatives to the immediacy of digital culture whilst remaining caught up in its ever-quickening pace.

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