

technical terms in a popular periodical, reviewers and editors balked. Michael Davis, however, bravely set down his impressions of *Music for Films* for *Creem*'s readers:

Begin with a dazzling quartz crystal. Fade up to soft focus on a warm bed being made warmer. Soft sighs heard from beneath the covers are transformed into space meows somehow sensed through the windows of a 747. The plane glides to earth, eventually disappearing into the Bermuda Triangle, where you are seductively attacked by the stewardess in Jamaican chainsaw rhythm. She is easily eluded, however, and you swim to the surface just in time to see your purple-haired secretary teaching the switchboard nursery rhymes. The typewriter on her desk retorts with a funky clavinet imitation. You walk out the door and are immediately sizzled by a sunshower. When your eyes can focus again, you're back at home, staring at your smiling turntable as the needle returns to play the side over again, refusing to reject the record ... If you want logic, go carouse with Kraftwerk.<sup>33</sup>

*On Land*, the final album in the Ambient tetralogy, released in 1982, contains eight compositions, all but one of them by Eno alone. Five musicians contributed synthesizer, guitar, bass, trumpet, guitar, and "live equalization." What sets *On Land* apart musically from most of Eno's quiet, contemplative music is that here, the element of timbre takes over to the point of there being very few pitches in use, and often nothing that could really be called harmony. For instance, consider "The Lost Day," a fairly extensive (nine and a half minutes) piece. Throughout, one hears an ominous, indefinable, very low sound that varies slightly in its color and dynamic intensity. An eerie muted metallic clinking that sounds like ropes hitting the mast of a sailboat at rest in the water comes and goes, as do stray blows on a xylophone, a haunting phrygian-mode synthesizer melody in the tenor range, and indefinable noises, often reminiscent of collective natural phenomena like swarming insects, the baying of cattle, or the sound of a flock of ducks taking off from a body of water. Sonic edges are blurred, events occur in a non-linear, non-narrative fashion, and electronically-generated sounds mingle, merge, and blend with instrumental and found sounds to the extent that the impression is one of a continuous tableau, with no real distinction between human, animal, insect, or mechanical sound-sources.

The critical response to *On Land* – the last Eno solo ambient album to generate much attention in the press – was split along the lines I have already described. Jon Pareles continued his love-hate relationship with Eno's music and ideas, chastizing him for theoretical unoriginality while grudgingly admitting to being impressed by the music, though longing for Eno to return to the progressive rock style.<sup>34</sup> Mark Peel offered the condescending put-down: "Brian Eno's 'ambient music' is certainly ambient ... but it's certainly not music ... I'll bet plants love it. As for me, I'm just going to let it lull me to sleep."<sup>35</sup> George Rush, while rendering an enthusiastic account of Eno's career, thought that at times, the music "narrowly escapes schmaltz ... In several places he employs the worst B-movie sound effects – the ominous ~~haunted-house drone, bird squawks,~~ and frog croaks."<sup>36</sup> Robert Payes and Glenn O'Brien

<sup>33</sup> Michael Davis, "Records: *Music for Films*," *Creem* 10 (Apr. 1979), 61.

<sup>34</sup> Jon Pareles, "Riffs: Eno Uncaged," *Village Voice* 27 (4 May 1982), 77-8.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Peel, "Disc and Tape Reviews: *Ambient #4 – On Land*," *Stereo Review* 47 (Nov. 1982), 105.