

MUSIC BEYOND AIRPORTS
APPRAISING AMBIENT MUSIC

Edited by Monty Adkins & Simon Cummings

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AMBIENT HOUSE

DR JUSTIN MOREY

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study of perhaps The Orb's best-known release, "Little Fluffy Clouds".¹ Building on Kevin Holm-Hudson's² previous work, I argue that the use of multiple copyrighted samples from a range of sources, times and locations, allows the record to function at different levels of listener attention, and, moreover, allows the listener to construct different narratives and connections depending on their personal sociocultural and musicological knowledge and perceptions. With reference to the work of Jean-Jacques Nattiez³ and Philip Tagg⁴ on musical communication I will argue that Brian Eno's original intention for ambient music to create a "sense of doubt and uncertainty"⁵ is maintained in "Little Fluffy Clouds" through use of the sampler as a time machine that presents multiple realities simultaneously, and thereby allows multiple levels of symbolic meaning to be created. Some thought is also given to the ability of both ambient music and ambient house to create emotional effects through the power of memory and nostalgia.



This collection of essays has been assembled and developed from papers given at the Ambient@40 International Conference held in February 2018 at the University of Huddersfield. The original premise of the conference was not merely to celebrate Eno's work and the landmark release of *Music for Airports* in 1978, but to consider the development of the genre, how it has permeated our wider musical culture, and what the role of such music is today given the societal changes that have occurred since the release of that album.

In the context of the conference, ambient was considered from the perspectives of aesthetic, influence, appropriation, process, strategy and activity. A detailed consideration of each of these topics could fill many volumes. With that in mind, this book does not seek to provide an in-depth analysis of each of these topics or a comprehensive history of the last 40 years of ambient music. Rather it provides a series of provocations, observations and reflections that each open-up seams for further discussion. As such, this book should be read as a starting point for future research, one that seeks to critically interrogate the very meaning of 'ambient', how it creates its effect, and how the genre can remain vital and relevant in twenty-first century music-making.

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