

in interviews in recent years. Random selection of a card and reflection on its message often provided fresh and unexpected resolution of a compositional quandary.

The *I Ching* was a partial inspiration for the deck of *Oblique Strategies*, Eno called the latter “an attempt to make a set that was slightly more specific, tailored to a more particular situation than the *I Ching*, which is tailored to cosmic situations, though I suppose that with sufficient skill one could use the *I Ching* in the same way.”⁵⁵ Eno pointed out that it was not necessary to believe that anything supernatural or paranormal was taking place in the use of the *Oblique Strategies* in order to derive creative benefits from using them: “you can believe that they work on a purely behavioral level, simply adjusting your perception at a point, or suggesting a different perception.”⁵⁶ The concept behind the *Oblique Strategies* fits smoothly into Eno’s overall empirical, in-studio compositional approach: the aphorisms enabled him to get beyond his linear thinking process, especially in the early, formative stages of a work, and provided an aura of a sensation that he was indeed riding on the dynamics of some greater system that logic alone could not penetrate.

Verbal Expression and Lyrics

As the many quotations from his interviews have demonstrated, Eno is well-practiced and accomplished at the art of verbal expression. He uses interviews deliberately as opportunities to straighten out and refine his thinking in the verbal mode. When he has a point to make, he is capable of making it in general, abstract terms, of citing specific pertinent examples, and of constructing elaborate, often striking metaphors to illustrate his train of thought. His published essays and lectures offer further proof that Eno knows what verbal logic and exposition are all about. When he was called upon to discuss painter Peter Schmidt’s watercolors and his own reasons for including them on the cover of his album *Before and After Science* for the journal *Arts Review*, however, he prefaced his remarks with a disclaimer:

Because art criticism is a verbal activity, I write with the consciousness that my language is being evaluated in that context, and knowing that certain words and phrases will assume overtones that were not intended. I choose to ignore this hazard by reassuring the reader that art-criticism is not my primary (or even secondary) occupation in life, and that my intention is to write about these works simply, and because I want to. I hope that by doing this I can assume a level of trust on the part of the reader that might otherwise not be afforded me.⁵⁷

Even if this boils down to Eno’s nervousness at the prospect of his thoughts appearing in the context of a critical journal, it is his “consciousness of the hazard” of his language being misinterpreted or over-interpreted to which I would like to draw attention here. Elsewhere as well, Eno has shown signs that he is all too aware of the ways that language, even ordinary spoken or written prose, can work on a multitude of levels, not all of which were intended by

⁵⁵ O’Brien, “Eno at Edge of Rock,” 31.

⁵⁶ O’Brien, “Eno at Edge of Rock,” 31.

⁵⁷ Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, “Peter Schmidt and Brian Eno,” *Arts Review* 29 (9 Dec. 1977), 737.