

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE MUSICIAN AS PHILOSOPHER

The content of Eno's ideas and his consistently stylish, eloquent way of expressing them make him the most articulate theorist to emerge from the world of rock musicians. Along with all his other activities, he has devoted considerable time to reading. Considering his love of systems and his tendency to see things in abstract terms, it is no surprise to learn that his favorite books – books he not only reads but rereads – are about ideas, for instance, H.G. Barnett's *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change*, Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chogyam Trungpa's *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism*, and C.H. Waddington's *Towards a Theoretical Biology*.¹ Through such studies, Eno has linked himself to some of the most compelling trends in modern intellectual history.

Ultimate Realities

An interviewer asked Eno in 1981, "Do you think there's a God?" After pausing for a moment, he replied, "I don't ever use that word."² In spite of, or more likely because of, his Catholic background, Eno has systematically avoided using Christian mythology as a conceptual framework, at least in public. On the other hand, he has been open to certain oriental religious ideas. If he rejects the idea of God in the abstract, the idea of a spiritual aspect of life is not entirely foreign to his way of thinking:

Spiritualism is not the promise of a better life but the highest level of discussion one entertains in life – an agreement to partake of a discussion of the largest and most difficult problems. My main problems are, "What is really happening? How inaccurate am I? How inadequate am I?" I realize my map doesn't fit the real world. Spiritualism is the agreement to deal with this problem.³

Eno characteristically poses the question of personal "inaccuracy" as a "spiritual" matter. The tone of his language when dealing with such matters is decidedly cool and detached. Indeed, "fervor" is a word that one would find singularly inadequate to describe most of Eno's music, the phrase he prefers, when dealing with his more agitated progressive rock music, is "idiot energy," which seems entirely more fitting. Eno has come close to expressing something similar to the conventional religious image of awakening to a greater reality:

All the musical experiences that have had an important effect on me have prompted the same feeling, of being faced with this strange connection of familiarity and mystery embodied in the same source, as if a

¹ Brian Eno and Russell Mills, *More Dark than Shark*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 73.

² Mark Howell, "From a Strangers Evening with Brian Eno," *Another Room* (June/July 1981), n.p.

³ Frank Rose, "Four Conversations with Brian Eno," *Village Voice* 22 (28 Mar. 1977), 70.