

Yet the theoretical tradition has had little direct impact on the way most people perceive music. Although theory and analysis certainly represent a continuous conversation – and probably an indispensable one – in the totality of the world’s musical discourse, I doubt whether a precise measurement of the tape-loop lengths of Eno’s “2/1” is likely to hold any greater sway over most listeners’ reaction to the sounding surface than is an explanation of the operation of tone row forms in Webern’s Symphony, Op. 21. A suggestion that recurring cycles underlie the piece’s structure is enough, and Eno knows it.

The Music’s History

If we ignore for the moment all the discussion and debate revolving around popular music and art music, originality and epigonism, we may be struck by the fact that most Western music of all kinds since 1950 has indeed found something to rally around, something that is deeply symbolic and symptomatic of our culture and its values. I am referring to electronic technology, the sound recording, and the attendant transformation of the listening experience. Though value is granted to “live” music, and to the vitality of direct participation in musical events, whether as performers or as audience, the rise of electronic technology has affected the meaning of music in ways still only dimly guessed at. Even when electronic amplification is not used in the concert itself (and it must be, if more than about 3,000 people are going to hear what is going on), one almost inevitably sees the dangling microphones with wires leading to hidden tape recorders that are engaged in preserving the music – if only for the contemporary composer, who may never otherwise hear his piece again. It is as though the event is not real unless frozen on tape.

In one form or another, the image of technology is a central icon in contemporary culture, and that image has profoundly affected the ways in which music is perceived, used, and thought about.⁷ Brian Eno can be singled out as a musician who has taken serious stock of technol-

⁷ The cultural symbolism or mythology behind this state of affairs is so involved that I can do no more here than point the reader in its general direction. Among the works that have helped to guide my own thinking on this vast topic are Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964), a classic statement of the pervasiveness of efficiency-engendering yet creativity-strangling “technique” in every aspect of modern life, Carl Sagan, *The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Rise of Human Intelligence* (New York: Random House, 1977), which includes a discussion of “information” as a biological, genetic phenomenon that spilled over first into the brains of the higher mammals and is now filling up libraries and computer tape at an exponentially growing rate, John Shepherd, Phil Virden, Graham Ulliamy, and Trevor Wishart, *Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Languages* (London: Latimer, 1977), a multi-pronged set of Marxist arguments concerning, among other things, the relationships between media, social process, and music, culture-specific oral and visual orientational modes, tonality’s encoding of the industrial world sense, and the social stratification of 20th-century music, Carl Jung, *Civilization in Transition*, 2nd ed., *Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 10, Bollingen Series 20 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), a probing series of essays in which the author applies to a wide range of modern issues and problems his insights and theories having to do with the functioning of the personal and collective unconscious, and E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), a plea for social, political, economic, and cultural decentralization in an age of dangerously powerful, technologically based modes of organization.