

giving the impression of hopping gracefully from the progressive rock genre to the new wave, without making any great changes in his essential approach to music. All along, of course, Eno was coping, on both conceptual and practical levels, with entirely different musical genres, notably minimalism and post-Cage experimentalism, the overtly “classical” aspects of progressive rock never interested him much. The term “progressive rock” is not without its ambiguities, since for some its progressivism was a political or philosophical matter, and for others a purely musical tendency or ideal, furthermore, unlike many of rock’s sub-genres, progressive rock does not denote a specific musical style so much as a complex of styles, united, if at all, only through a common interest in musical experimentation and diversification. Progressive rock musicians were interested in playing about on the borderlines between musical genres, notably those between classical music, jazz, avant-garde music, non-Western music, and rock.

Thus in spite of the problems associated with the term, progressive rock must be viewed as the generic background for Eno’s first recorded musical efforts. The term “art rock” is less suitable, primarily because of the inevitable association of the word “art” with the Western European classical music tradition. The leading proponent of the term “art rock” is John Rockwell, who in his fine article of that title in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* found the distinguishing feature of the genre in the self-consciously artistic attitude of its diverse practitioners.<sup>11</sup> Self-consciousness is what makes Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* not a primitive, but a primitivist piece, a similar act of removal or distancing is what made the mid-1970s performances of art-rockers like Patti Smith, or of Talking Heads who followed, not simply primitive rock shows, but statements about primitive rock shows. This sort of detachment, according to Rockwell, is one of the things that makes art rock “art.” Eno’s primacy of place in Rockwell’s scheme of things is shown by his placing Eno, along with Frank Zappa, the Velvet Underground, and Pink Floyd, in their own separate, unqualified discographical categories, all other art-rockers are grouped by subject-headings, some of them slyly derogatory – “Chart-Topping Classical Bombast” (Moody Blues, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Yes), “Arty Primitivism” (John Cale, Terry Riley, Patti Smith). The catholicity of Rockwell’s point of view, which deserves close attention by anyone interested in the shifting and blending of popular, art, and folk genres in the world of twentieth-century music, is also evident in his book *All American Music*, which finds Neil Young’s “rock populism and transcendental primitivism” alongside Milton Babbitt’s serial structuralism, and Keith Jarrett’s “mystical fusion romanticism” rubbing shoulders with Laurie Anderson’s performance art.<sup>12</sup>

Brian Eno began his public career in the early 1970s working primarily within the genre of progressive rock, toying with the expectations that are part of the listener’s experience of any genre. In ways that we shall examine fully in Part II, he pushed back the boundaries of progressive rock until much of his music could not be called rock at all by any stylistic criterion, lacking, as it did, drums, a steady pulse, and vocals.

Most of Eno’s music is characterized by a certain simplicity of conception, a sense of confidence in making a simple thing work. This, along with a preoccupation with the formal elements of music, is reminiscent of Mozartean classicism, certainly romantic breast-beating of

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<sup>11</sup> John Rockwell, “Art Rock,” in Jim Miller, ed., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Rolling Stone/Random House, 1976), 322-6.

<sup>12</sup> John Rockwell, *All American Music: Composition in the Late 20th Century*, (New York: Knopf, 1983), table of contents.