

Part of Eno's criticism of rock doubtless stemmed from the fact that after his collaborations with David Bowie and Talking Heads in the late 1970s, he found himself personally less drawn to rock as a medium. With those collaborations, he felt, at least temporarily, that he had taken rock as far as he wanted to go with it. He began to draw less sustenance from the types of sound that rock had to offer. In 1982, he said:

Effectively, what I've done is abandoned rock music, because, for me, rock isn't capable of producing that spiritual quality anymore. And, in fact, I don't really hear anything at the moment that disputes my feeling. Despite all the criticism that's been made of psychedelic music, it certainly was committed to the production of an expanded awareness.⁷

And a year later:

I don't get the feeling of discovering new worlds from pop music that I used to get, just of being shown old ones over and over. One automatically thinks that's because I'm getting old, which is true but that doesn't mean one is getting jaded. I still get feeling and experience from other areas, but not rock.⁸

More recently, Eno made the following personal observation:

One of the nice things about the kind of music I'm doing now is that it makes me feel quite unimportant. I like that feeling. Rock music, on the other hand, tends to make you feel *very* important.⁹

How much of Eno's loss of interest in rock music is due to personal factors – his own musical background and development – and how much may be attributed to a real stagnation in the field of rock music itself? The question is a complex one, and there is no simple answer. Some rock critics have tended to extol the music of the 1950s and 1960s, and to denigrate the 1970s and 1980s as a time of homogenization, commercialization, and creative stagnation. The late 1960s are frequently portrayed as a kind of golden age of experimentation, variety, and intense musical ferment, in contrast with the following period of bland corporate rock. The critics who make such statements are of course themselves children of the 1950s and 1960s, inevitably tending to see the music of their youth as belonging to a kind of golden age. Many who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s on the music of the big bands, Broadway, and Tin Pan Alley lost all interest in the development of popular music beyond those particular halcyon days.

Critics with a sociological bent like Simon Frith go so far as to define rock as the music of youth, and make no further bones about it.¹⁰ There is plenty of statistical data on age-linked patterns of music consumption to back him up. After reaching the age of thirty or so, people in

⁷ George Rush, "Brian Eno: Rock's Svengali Pursues Silence," *Esquire* 98 (Dec. 1982), 132.

⁸ Mick Brown, "On Record: Brian Eno," *Sunday Times Magazine*, 31 Oct. 1982, 10.

⁹ Jensen, "Sound of Silence," 25.

¹⁰ Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).