

The apparent contradiction between this statement and Eno's own criticisms of the trap of repetitiveness that befalls rock musicians may be partially resolved if we recognize his position as a straddler on a fence between two worlds: "I have different circles of friends, and some of the people I know come from so-called serious music backgrounds and others are from popular music backgrounds. And whenever I'm with one group, I'm always defending the other."<sup>13</sup>

Out of the vast array of rock musicians active in the 1960s, Eno has found only a handful interesting enough to bring up in interviews. In 1980 he wished to set himself apart from what he called the "cultural myth" represented by groups like the Rolling Stones – a myth that

has to do with the view of the musician or artist as an impulsive, drug-taking romantic. I don't reject that view, I know some artists like that and they do good work as well. But there's another kind of artist who thinks about what they're doing and talks about what they're doing and wants to articulate it and who doesn't believe as some do that talking about it reduces its mystique or deflates the work ... I think you can make a work richer by seeding it with a number of connotations, which you can do by talking about it. I suppose my difference from [groups like the Rolling Stones] is that one has the sense they improvise at almost every level. I don't – except at certain levels.<sup>14</sup>

Onstage, especially during the 1970s when they increasingly played to audiences numbering in the tens of thousands, the Rolling Stones' musical act was notoriously unpolished – but this was part of the whole myth: the Stones were cultural symbols who just happened to sing and play instruments, and they played out of tune, played sloppily and lost the beat, almost with a vengeance. They were allowed to, because part of the whole idea of rock music at that level was that it was music that anybody could play. When Eno would say he was not a musician, however, he meant something quite different, as we shall see later in this chapter, he resented the kind of musical thoughtlessness epitomized by the Rolling Stones. He indeed used improvisatory techniques himself, but always in the context of a larger plan – in the context of the process of shaping an immaculately polished musical product. His interest in improvisation was reflected in his appraisal of Bob Dylan albums like *Blonde on Blonde* of 1966. He suspected that Dylan had used a technique of writing lyrics rather like his own: "When I've got a set of sounds that I think works musically in an interesting way, then I listen to those sounds and try to make them into words. It's a bit like automatic writing, the way you scribble until words start to appear."<sup>15</sup>

Eno has singled out a number of musicians whom he feels consciously sought to realize the potential of that grand new musical instrument – the recording studio: Glenn Gould (whose technique of recording many performances and editing them together Eno greatly admired), Jimi Hendrix (who would fill as many as twenty-six separate tracks on a thirty-two-track tape

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<sup>13</sup> Rob Tannenbaum, "A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage and Brian Eno," *Musician* 83 (Sept. 1985), 106.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Amirkhonian, "Brian Eno interviewed 2/2/80 for KPFA Marathon by C. Amirkhonian, transcribed 10/29/83 [by] S. Stone," unpublished typescript, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Rose, "Eno: Scaramouche of the Synthesizer," *Creem* 7 (July 1975), 70.