

few years since his death, there has been a major shift of values in the painting world. One of the results of this has been, in my opinion, to relocate Peter's work: it now looks very prophetic.

Perhaps this reassessment wouldn't have made much difference to Peter anyway. For someone who watched many conspicuously lesser talents rise to positions of respect and influence, he was remarkably free of envy. His work was very much a personal inquiry, a continuous questioning of deeper and deeper assumptions, a delight in finding himself in new territory without answers, and thus innocent. We are always innocent, unless, from laziness or for convenience, we decide to overlook the novelty of the moment, this particular now. It seemed to me that Peter was more capable than anybody else I have ever known of following that understanding through in his actions. He was always alert to those little byways of thought that might open out onto whole new vistas, and he followed them with a quiet kind of courage and with the very minimum.

He wrote to me once, "In a roomful of shouting people, the one who whispers becomes interest

ition), sometimes they were identified as they were happening, sometimes they were formulated.

They can be used as a pack (a set of possibilities being continuously reviewed in the mind) or by drawing a single card from the shuffled pack when a dilemma occurs in a working situation. In this case, the card is trusted even if its appropriateness is quite unclear. They are not final, as new ideas will present themselves, and others will become self-evident.

In the recently published diary "A Year With Swollen Appendices," [Faber and Faber, 1996], Brian describes the Oblique Strategies as follows:

"...The original box, which we published in 1975, contained 113 cards, but since they some have been omitted and new ones have been added.

Peter Schmidt died in early 1980, and since then I've been the curator of the Oblique Strategies. They have been published three times in English and also in French and Japanese. They have also

ing." By the mid to late seventies, voices were being raised. The streamlining of the art-world's selling machinery and the general Schnabelization of artistic behaviour was in full cry. Paintings and artistic egos were growing by the acre, and the business of marketing them had crossed over into real estate.

Peter seemed to pay very little attention to this cacophony. His work was changing too, becoming smaller, crisper, more alive. And as everyone else seemed to be switching back to oils and canvas (the guarantee of "real art."), Peter became fascinated by watercolours and paper (a certain sign of dilettantism). In the short term, such an unfashionable decision firmly located Peter among the Sunday painters. From today's perspective, that assessment seems about 180 degrees off: his work is full of seeds, any one of which could form the basis of a healthy artistic career (and many of which probably have).

As with many good artists, one's admiration for Peter's work increases with familiarity. To follow the threads that are woven through his work, to watch the way that they cross and mesh

First Edition Strategies 1975:

- Abandon normal instruments
- Accept advice
- Accretion
- A line has two sides
- Allow an easement (an easement is the abandonment of a stricture)
- Are there sections? Consider transitions
- Ask people to work against their better judgement
- Ask your body
- Assemble some of the instruments in a group and treat the group
- Balance the consistency principle with the inconsistency principle
- Be dirty
- Breathe more deeply
- Bridges -build -burn
- Cascades
- Change instrument roles
- Change nothing and continue with immaculate consistency
- Children's voices -speaking -singing
- Cluster analysis
- Consider different fading systems
- Consult other sources -promising -unpromising

with new threads and with older ones picked up again is to see a graceful and brilliant dance in motion. That this same pace and brilliance characterized his everyday life came, at first, as something of a surprise. He never raised his voice.

-BRIAN ENO, MAY 1987

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been produced as a floppy disc. No two releases are exactly identical - cards come and go."

The untimely death of Peter Schmidt while on holiday in Spain in 1980 meant that no later versions of the *Oblique Strategies* could be made as a collaborative activity between Eno and his friend and teacher.

Eno offers the following appreciation of his friend Peter Schmidt:

Looking back now at Peter Schmidt's work, I find myself thinking "This looks very contemporary" and "How did he cover this much territory this quickly?" And, inevitably, I ask "Why didn't anyone really notice?"

Well, I know that the 'neglected genius' is a mythical character. It's very unusual for real talent to be completely ignored. Peter was a real talent, and he was not completely ignored. Instead, he was regarded as something of an interesting curiosity, even a gifted eccentric, but certainly somebody at the margins of culture rather than at its centre. However, even in the

Convert a melodic element into a rhythmic element
Courage!
Cut a vital connection
Decorate, decorate
Define an area as 'safe' and use it as an anchor
Destroy -nothing -the most important thing
Discard an axiom
Disconnect from desire
Discover the recipes you are using and abandon them
Distorting time
Do nothing for as long as possible
Don't be afraid of things because they're easy to do
Don't be frightened of cliches
Don't be frightened to display your talents
Don't break the silence
Don't stress one thing more than another
Do something boring
Do the washing up
Do the words need changing?
Do we need holes?
Emphasize differences
Emphasize repetitions
Emphasize the flaws
Faced with a choice, do both (given by Dieter Rot)
Feedback recordings into an acoustic situation

cards, and they're now used by quite a lot of different people, I think.

An introduction to the *Oblique Strategies* can be found in the deck itself. This is how each of the first three decks labels and describes itself:

(card one)
OBLIQUE STRATEGIES
Over one hundred worthwhile dilemmas
by BRIAN ENO and PETER SCHMIDT
(signatures, if your copy is signed)
Printed January 1975 in an edition of 500
of which this is number (your number, circled)

(note: later versions note that the deck has been revised, and include the date of publication - either 1978 for edition two, or 1979 for edition three)

(card two)

These cards evolved from our separate observations on the principles underlying what we were doing. Sometimes they were recognized in retrospect (intellect catching up with intu

results Of course, that often isn't the case - it's just the most obvious and - apparently - reliable method. The function of the Oblique Strategies was, initially, to serve as a series of prompts which said, "Don't forget that you could adopt *this* attitude," or "Don't forget you could adopt *that* attitude."

The first Oblique Strategy said "Honour thy error as a hidden intention." And, in fact, Peter's first Oblique Strategy - done quite independently and before either of us had become conscious that the other was doing that - was ...I think it was "Was it really a mistake?" which was, of course, much the same kind of message. Well, I collected about fifteen or twenty of these and then I put them onto cards. At the same time, Peter had been keeping a little book of messages to himself as regards painting, and he'd kept those in a notebook. We were both very surprised to find the other not only using a similar system but also many of the messages being absolutely overlapping, you know...there was a complete correspondence between the messages. So subsequently we decided to try to work out a way of making that available to other people, which we did; we published them as a pack of

Eno's "Before and After Science" and also appeared as full-size prints in a small number of the original releases) tended to keep a set of basic working principles which guided them through moments of pressure - either working through a heavy painting session or watching the clock tick while you're running up a big buck studio bill. Both Schmidt and Eno realized that the pressures of time tended to steer them away from the ways of thinking they found most productive when the pressure was off. The Strategies were, then, a way to remind themselves of those habits of thinking - to jog the mind.

It is not clear from any sources I've run across whether the cards were explicitly intended to be oracular at the outset - that is, whether or not Peter Schmidt and Eno necessarily saw them exclusively as a "single instruction/single response" kind of "game". The introductory cards included in all three versions of the first versions of the Oblique Strategies suggest otherwise. It seems clear, also, that the deck was not conceived of as a set of "fixed" instructions, but rather a group of ideas to be added to or modified over time; each of the three decks included 4 or 5 blank cards, intended to be filled and used as needed.

Fill every beat with something
Get your neck massaged
Ghost echoes
Give the game away
Give way to your worst impulse
Go slowly all the way round the outside
Honor thy error as a hidden intention
How would you have done it?
Humanize something free of error
Imagine the music as a moving chain or caterpillar
Imagine the music as a set of disconnected events
Infinitesimal gradations
Intentions -credibility of -nobility of -humility of
Into the impossible
Is it finished?
Is there something missing?
Is the tuning appropriate?
Just carry on
Left channel, right channel, centre channel
Listen in total darkness, or in a very large room, very quietly
Listen to the quiet voice
Look at a very small object, look at its centre
Look at the order in which you do things
Look closely at the most embarrassing details and amplify them

Tape your mouth (given by Ritva Saarikko)
The inconsistency principle
The tape is now the music
Think of the radio
Tidy up
Trust in the you of now
Turn it upside down
Twist the spine
Use an old idea
Use an unacceptable color
Use fewer notes
Use filters
Use 'unqualified' people
Water
What are you really thinking about just now? Incorporate
What is the reality of the situation?
What mistakes did you make last time?
What would your closest friend do?
What wouldn't you do?
Work at a different speed
You are an engineer
You can only make one dot at a time
You don't have to be ashamed of using your own ideas
[blank white card]

Lowest common denominator check -single beat -single note
-single riff
Make a blank valuable by putting it in an exquisite frame
Make an exhaustive list of everything you might do and do
the last thing on the list
Make a sudden, destructive unpredictable action; incorporate
Mechanicalize something idiosyncratic
Mute and continue
Only one element of each kind
(Organic) machinery
Overtly resist change
Put in earplugs
Remember those quiet evenings
Remove ambiguities and convert to specifics
Remove specifics and convert to ambiguities
Repetition is a form of change
Reverse
Short circuit (example; a man eating peas with the idea that
they will improve his virility shovels them straight into
his lap)
Shut the door and listen from outside
Simple subtraction
Spectrum analysis
Take a break
Take away the elements in order of apparent non-importance

Eno discusses the Oblique Strategies at greatest length
in an interview with Charles Amirkhanian, conducted at
KPFA in Berkeley in early 1980:

“These cards evolved from our separate working
procedures. It was one of the many cases during
the friendship that he [Peter Schmidt] and I
where we arrived at a working position at almost
exactly the same time and almost in exactly the
same words. There were times when we hadn’t
seen each other for a few months at a time
sometimes, and upon remeeting or exchanging
letters, we would find that we were in the same
intellectual position - which was quite different
from the one we’d been in prior to that.

The Oblique Strategies evolved from me being
in a number of working situations when the
panic of the situation - particularly in studios
- tended to make me quickly forget that there
were others ways of working and that there were
tangential ways of attacking problems that were
in many senses more interesting than the direct
head-on approach. If you’re in a panic, you tend
to take the head-on approach because it seems to
be the one that’s going to yield the best

The Oblique Strategies

Over One Hundred Worthwhile Dilemmas

The Oblique Strategies are a deck of cards. Up until 1996,
they were quite easy to describe. They measured about
2-3/4” x 3-3/4”. They came in a small black box which
said “OBLIQUE STRATEGIES” on one of the top’s long
sides and “BRIAN ENO/PETER SCHMIDT” on the other
side. The cards were solid black on one side, and had
the aphorisms printed in a 10-point sans serif face on
the other.

The deck itself had its origins in the discovery by Brian
Eno that both he and his friend Peter Schmidt (a British
painter whose works grace the cover of “Evening Star”
and whose watercolours decorated the back LP cover of