

Leslie Ullman

[FROM] OBLIQUE STRATEGIES

*In 1975, musician Brian Eno and artist Peter Schmidt created the original pack of over 100 “Oblique Strategies” cards, designed to help composers get unstuck by encouraging lateral thought. The titles of poems in this sequence refer to individual “strategies.”*

“Abandon normal instruments”

Sing through a grass blade,  
hum under water, draw breath  
across the ribs, try five seconds  
of vibrato through soles of the feet,  
let the tiny ear-hairs separate  
and re-work a hesitant riff into surprise  
and glitter—who needs the flute  
with its polished keys, or the baroque  
burnished cello with its moan  
of catgut?—test blade, breath,  
and the ground underfoot in registers  
never attempted, a chamber-blend  
of difficult passages working  
their way nearly by accident  
to perfection. They will make  
a theatre of you, all chandelier  
and red plush—every seat sold out—  
no room for the critic  
who once kept a box there.