

CHAPTER THREE: ON OTHER MUSIC: ENO AS CRITIC

Eno's impressions of the world of music were gathered primarily in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. During those years, he was exposed to a great deal of rock and other popular music, a good deal of experimental and avant-garde music, a fair quantity of non-Western music, and some traditional Western art music. Since reaching the age of thirty-two in 1980, however, Eno has evinced less interest in keeping up with contemporary trends and with listening to other people's music in general. The club scene had begun to pall on him, as he explained in 1986:

I used to go to clubs now and again, but I gradually stopped going because I couldn't find one that did the kind of thing that I wanted. The accent of a club is towards somehow speeding you up, presumably with the idea of obliterating what is assumed to be an otherwise average existence. Well, I wanted the opposite of that. I wanted to find places that would actually be slower, bigger, more open and would make me think in some interesting way. Clubs, in fact, prevent me from thinking.¹

It is a fairly common phenomenon among composers that after a certain point in their creative lives, they lose the desire or will to listen to a great deal of other music. In 1985, Eno said: "I don't listen to records much." The interviewer asked, "Is that a deliberate thing, or do you find you just don't want to?" Eno answered:

I don't think about it. I don't have a record player, funnily enough. I think life's too short to listen to records, at the moment. Well, I do listen to *some* things, but I usually like to listen to the same thing over and over for months.

I'm quite happy to accept that I don't know most of what's going on in the world of music. I never have done. You have a choice when you get interested in culture. You have a choice of trying to absorb it all, the American style of "doing the sights" in two days, or else you can just decide: "I'll stay in this one place, because I like it here anyway, and I'll really understand this. I'll really find out about it." That's what I do.²

In 1982, Eno was pessimistic about the public value of airing his views on music (after having done precisely that for a decade, it should be added). He felt that he had run out of interesting things to say about pop music, and that whenever he started talking about it, people stopped

¹ Brian Eno, "Works Constructed with Sound and Light: Extracts from a talk given by Brian Eno following the opening of his video installation, Copenhagen, January 1986," color brochure (London: Opal, Ltd., 1986), n.p.

² Jensen, "Sound of Silence," 25.