

and audiences finding some sort of meaning in expressing solidarity with the Third World through the reggae beat – Bob Dylan’s use of a Jamaican rhythm section on his 1983 album *Infidels* being a typical case in point. Eno’s interest is in the sound of the music, in the engineering point of view, in what the music can teach him as a composer, if a “political” meaning of music is important to Eno at all, it is restricted to the local level of interaction between musicians and between musicians and audience.

In addition to reggae, other non-mainstream black music has consistently commanded Eno’s favorable attention. In 1977 he remarked that the highlife music of Fela Ransome-Kuti and Africa 70 was “the only music that makes me want to dance.”<sup>42</sup> The experience of working with the Ghanaian group Edikanfo was simultaneously inspiring and depressing: “All the interactions between players and all the kind of funny things going on with the rhythm ... When I started listening to the stuff that we did with the Talking Heads, it was just so wooden by comparison. I couldn’t get very excited by it anymore. I could still get excited about it in other terms, but not in rhythmic terms any more. It seemed to be really naive.”<sup>43</sup>

We have seen that Eno is familiar with Western art music at least to the point of criticizing the academic serialist tradition of the twentieth century and the pyramidal organization of the classical orchestra. Such sweeping judgements aside, he has rarely talked about actual pieces from the classical repertoire. Curious exceptions to this rule are various slow movements from Haydn string quartets and Mozart concertos. Eno explained in 1986 what he found attractive about such music: it “didn’t produce emotional surprises, [but rather] presented an emotional situation that held steady for quite a long time. In other words, a ‘steady-state’ kind of music.”<sup>44</sup>

An interviewer recently asked Eno to define his relationship to the English classical tradition of composers like Elgar, Delius, and Vaughn Williams. He expressed guarded admiration for it, but quickly moved on to his own agenda:

They didn’t interest me for a long time, but recently I found that I actually like them ... As I grew up I saw a lot of people taking very extreme positions, like “Let’s make a piece of music eighteen hours long,” or “Let’s make a piece of music that has only one note and lasts for six years,” – that kind of thing. It’s all interesting, and it’s nice to know that these possibilities exist, but I don’t want to listen to them or at least not more than once. I found that the artists I liked were aware of these possibilities, but had taken up less extreme stances – usually one which, given the tastes of the contemporary art world, made them look as if they were playing it safe.<sup>45</sup>

Whether in recent English classical music or Haydn slow movements, it is evidently the sensuous quality that appeals to Eno, as well as the sense of restraint and balance, the drawing back from an extreme position, whether intellectual or emotional. It is on somewhat similar grounds that Eno has criticized recent experimental music. Tom Johnson, reporting in the *Vil-*

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<sup>42</sup> Frank Rose, “Four Conversations with Brian Eno,” *Village Voice* 22 (28 Mar. 1977), 67.

<sup>43</sup> Milkowski, “Brian Eno: Excursions,” 57.

<sup>44</sup> Hutchinson, “Eno: Place #13,” n.p.

<sup>45</sup> Hutchinson, “Eno: Place #13,” n.p.