

with a very young, loud, and primarily male audience, with whom neither Fripp nor Eno were especially keen on cultivating a continuing relationship.

Pop Songs

“Pop” is a term that has been used with many different shades of meaning. It does not translate well to or from languages other than English, it carries different connotations whether used in reference to Anglo-American art or music, and in England, the conceptual split between pop and rock seems somewhat more pronounced than in the United States. A workable definition of “pop” for our purposes, however, is provided by the reference work endorsed by one of pop/rock’s enduring publishing institutions:

Pop is the melodic side of rock – the legacy of show tunes and popular songs of the prerock era. Pop’s standards of what makes a well-constructed song still apply to much of rock, which strives for memorable tunes and clear sentiments, the tension between pop virtues (such as sophisticated chord structures and unusual melodic twists), and incantatory, formulaic blues elements animates much of the best rock, like that of the Beatles. “Pop” also connotes accessibility, disposability and other low-culture values, which rockers have accepted or rejected with varying degrees of irony.⁴

There is a further stylistic distinction to be made between pop and rock: pop songs tend to be based on more “realistic” instrumental sounds than rock – that is, sounds less manipulated or distorted through electronic processes. In terms of production values, the formula rock=dirty while pop=clean may be oversimplified, but has a certain validity. While absolute volume levels can be determined by the listener on his or her stereo system, pop will sound psychologically softer than rock played at the same level. Rock is aggressive, sometimes even assaultive, in pop, the tendency is toward a more intimate, confidential tone. Obviously the potential for irony is high if what is being confided by the singer is of a non-personal, incomprehensible, ambiguous, or even slightly perverted nature.

Some such irony is usually what Eno was after in the pop songs on his progressive rock albums, an effect evident even in some of the titles which cover music of a deceptively innocuous sort: “Burning Airlines Give You So Much More,” “Back in Judy’s Jungle,” “Mother Whale Eyeless.” One is reminded once more of Satie, with his penchant for absurd titles.

“Cindy Tells Me” (*Warm Jets*) by Eno and Manzanera is a Beatlesque example of musical irony. While a poppish backing track replete with falsetto “oohs” and a tinkling piano runs through a clichéd set of chord changes, slightly spiced with a treated electric guitar, the singer tells a sad story of modern times in which affluent housewives cannot cope with “their new freedoms”, although they have supposedly chosen their fate, it turns out that it is just a “burden to be so relied on.” The British pop/rock tradition of lightly lampooning the middle class was well established when Eno wrote this song, going back to songs like the Kinks’ “Well

⁴ Jon Pareles and Patricia Romanowski, eds., *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll* (New York: Rolling Stone Press/Summit Books, 1983), 437.