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“New Wave Rock and the Feminine” (1980-4)

Rock is a group situation, both for the audience and for the performers. Originally a music of adolescent males, its form is comparable to such teenage male-bonding groups as youth gangs, sports teams, or informal groups of "buddies":

Four men. Three guitars.... Jules, dressed in dark slacks, a black leather jacket, white shirt and tie, reaches for the bottle of Locker Room and hands it to Robert, who lifts it to his nose then hands it to Rhys, who takes it while continuing to play with the other hand. Wharton, sitting in the back wearing a plaid shirt, smiles unabashed, but does not indulge.... Robert is dressed in a dark suit, his guitar blends into his torso, giving the appearance of one object instead of two ... he plays a traditional rock bass line and turns to face the drummer, Wharton, jumping into the air to give momentum to monumental baselines. For a minute Jules seems overwhelmed by the density as he watched Rhys, intently rocking back and forth towards the audience, and Robert, who seems to have taken Wharton on as a partner in crime.'

Males in these groups, when performing on stage (or in a sports arena), are usually unproblematically identified with by both male and female audience members. But a female-bonding group in a performance situation- for example, an "all-girl" basketball team or an "all-girl" rock groups- seems more problematic for an audience to identify with. Female rock groups such as the Slits or the Raincoats, in their reference to an overt female specificity, are usually identified with more by female audience members than male ones. Women in the audience tend to either identify positively with members of an overtly female rock group or to reject identification with them altogether. Male audience members, on the other hand, seem to have a less resolved initial identification with all-female rock groups.

During the performance, female group members may appear to refer only to themselves- not acknowledging the audience's looks- or they may achieve what is read as "male" proficiency and power in their playing, making it difficult for male viewers to see them as a representation of difference. In either of these cases, male audience members may find it difficult to project identification onto the performers. But, interestingly, if the all-female group plays in a way that can be read as stereotypically female (either by standards defined by females or by conventional male standards), or if they play in a manner that attempts to match the behavior of male rock musicians, they represent male difference and desire.

Party line of the late Sixties ("Revolution for everyone who's not a woman, man") women who played the role of victim-in-long-skirt sitting on a kitchen stool crying into a strictly non-electric guitar.... Punk rock in 1976 was the first rock and roll phase ever not to insist that women should be picturesque topics and targets of songs.²

For two decades rock was a ritual affirmation of adolescent male sexual identity. As opposed to the heroic male rock star, the somewhat rare female performer, like Linda Ronstadt, would present herself as a spectacle for passive male contemplation. Woman's satisfaction was

assumed to be one of being looked at by men; Lacan also refers to "the satisfaction of a woman who knows she is being looked at." Taking this psychoanalytically based assumption as a starting point, Laura Mulvey, in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," investigates the respective roles of male and female performers in the classical Hollywood film. She suggests that the male star is more readily identified with by the spectator because he is the one who is in control of events and thus provides a "satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are ... those of a more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego." By contrast, "the meaning of women [to the spectator] is [that of] sexual difference,"³ a difference that represents a threat to the man's sense of ego wholeness. Due to her body's lack of a penis, a woman symbolizes, for the man, the threat of castration. Her potentially threatening look-what Freud calls her symbolically castrating look-can only be sublimated in a performance in one of two ways. Either she can make herself into a fetish for the male gaze-a purely iconic, masklike object (for example, Garbo's face or Bette Davis's eyes)-or she can play out the role of a satisfying and reassuring image for the male spectator to comfortably rest his eyes on. Mulvey notes that pleasure in looking at a Hollywood narrative film "has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness."⁴

In the filmic performance, the shifts of the eyes of the characters, and more specifically, the look of the man in relation to the image of the woman, are the symbolic representations of sexual difference. It is sexual difference that provides the basis for the narrational resolution of the film's story line: the lure of the woman arouses the male character and leads him on, but at the same time threatens his ego-identity, his completeness. Freud would say that the woman's glamorous characteristics have taken on the aspect of a fetish object:

In his mind the woman has got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor. But this interest suffers an extraordinary increase as well, because the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute ... [The fetish] remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it.⁵

Thus, in the plot of the traditional Hollywood film, the woman's presence threatens to freeze the flow of the narrative action. This threat-a threat to the actual patriarchal order upon which the narrative system itself is based-is resolved in various ways by the plot. In a film with a "happy" ending, she may end up married to the leading male character. In a "tragic" film, the woman may be lloled, go insane, or fall from her previous station-or she may simply get old and lose her allure. A final solution is to acknowledge her power, but to contain it within itself as a frozen fetish object, unlinked to the real time of the narrative structure-the faces of Dietrich or Garbo.

Musical performance follows a similar scenario, with one exception: its order is less that of the visual, and more that of the oral and aural. The voice expresses a more heterogeneous regime of sexuality than that of the ear-but one to which rock music as an institution must still

refer back, the patriarchal division of the sexes, defined by the presence of the male gaze in relation to the female form.

From the beginning of the 1970s, a newly "liberated" female with sexual and aggressive drives equal to those of the male was represented in rock, particularly in the "macha" pose of performers such as Suzi Quatro. "Macha" seemed a simple inversion of the male "macho" principle, basing itself on male identification. "Macha" performers asserted that they have the penis, or that they were the penis. The Runaways, four sexy-tough teenage girls outfitted in leather, packaged like Charlie's Angels, and performing songs written by their leader, Joan Jett, took the image to its *reductio ad absurdum*.

The fact that as a simple inversion "macha" lacked irony and was essentially exploitive caused later New Wave female performers to scorn it. An alternative—the potential irony present in a self-parodying, early sixties, stereotypically feminine pose—was the goal of the lead singer of Blondie, Debbie Harry. The comic-strip character she played was used by the group as a hook upon which to hang their early sixties rock imagery (which, like that of the Ramones, was actually a comment on the late seventies). Although in real life Harry may be much like the character "Blondie" (hence the nickname), in performance it was apparent that she was playing the character at a distance. Like the concept behind the early sixties all-girl group the Shangri-Las, Blondie was a fabricated stereotype. But the difference is that whereas the Shangri-Las were created by Shadow Morton, who wrote their songs and staged their act, Debbie Harry wrote much of her own material and used her persona as a way to express her real emotional identity (a reverse irony given the distancing that the songs undergo by their stereotypical treatment). The character Blondie appeared to be a false fetishization, a decoy, put before an audience that was to a large extent in on the joke.

An interesting comparison might be made between Patti Smith and Debbie Harry. Smith represented a free woman's access to essentially male passion, or teenage romanticized passion—the passion of Jim Morrison via the Symbolist poets via Arthur Rimbaud. She represented herself—as did Rimbaud (but not Morrison)—as androgynous. Debbie Harry, on the other hand, seemed to submit herself to the male gaze and the position of the traditional feminine film star—she projected glamour, a doubly ironic glamour when considered alongside the irony that was represented (gender reversed) by the strategy of pre-punk "glitter" performers such as Gary Glitter, David Bowie, Bryan Ferry, and Lou Reed. But like Patti Smith's "androgyny," Harry's role was essentially masklike, a camouflage.

The Female Front: Repression and Androgyny

Patti Smith was the first rock singer-writer to front an otherwise all-male band. Later there were Poly Styrene's X-Ray Spex, Siouxsie Sioux's Siouxsie and the Banshees, and Lydia Lunch's Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. Styrene's first song, "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!" was performed in 1977, when she was eighteen. As she recalled, "There were these girls that used to chain themselves together with cuffs and things ... I just used that kind of bondage to express repression. When people see people wearing bondage they think they're for bondage—but they're not. Because by wearing it or singing about it, you're against it. You don't pretend that you're not chained up and everything. You admit that you're repressed."⁶ The English press, as in the case of other politically motivated punk, deliberately misread this song as pro-bondage.

Bind me tie me chain me to the wall
I wanna be a slave to you all

Oh Bondage! Up Yours!
 Oh Bondage! No More!
Oh Bondage! Up Yours!
 Oh Bondage! No More!
Chain store chain smoke I consume you all
 Chain gain chain mail I don't think at all
Trash me crash me beat me till I fall
 I wanna be a victim for you all
Oh Bondage! Up Yours!
 Oh Bondage! No More!
Oh Bondage! Up Yours!
 Oh Bondage! No MORE!

Where previously rock had been associated with the adolescent's sexual identity, Poly Styrene referred to punk as "sexless": "It is sex, [but] ... on the other hand it is not." Rock music is not equated, one hundred percent, with sex. A performer, she asserted, "doesn't play off of sex ... you don't use it."⁷ Thus rock was no longer a signifier of sexual difference, of male identity in opposition to female identity.

The early-seventies bisexual personas of David Bowie, Elton John, Gary Glitter, Alice Cooper, and Bryan Ferry had already prepared the way for the breakdown of a fixed notion of sexual identity. The Kinks' song "Lola" articulated this new ethos:

I met her in a club in old Soho
 Where you drink champagne and it tastes just like Coca-Cola
She walked up to me and she asked me to dance
 I asked her her name and in a baritone voice she said "Lola"
el-oh-el-aye Lola la-la-la-la-Lola

Well I'm not the world's most physical guy
 But when she squeezed me tight she nearly broke my spine
Oh my Lola la-la-la-la-Lola
 Well I'm not dumb but I can't understand
Why she walked like a woman and talked like a man ...
 Well I left home just a week before
And I never kissed a woman before
 But Lola smiled and took me by the hand
And said dear boy I'm gonna make you a man
 But I know what I am and I'm glad I'm a man
And so is Lola

Siouxsie Sioux, singer-songwriter of Siouxsie and the Banshees, was called, due to her aloof, unsexual mannerisms, the "Ice Queen," although she sang with hyperemotionality. Perhaps her "frigidity" was a defense against the "psychotic" intensity of her lyrics. Her songs suggest a fragmentation of everyday self-identity, revealing a self that is ultimately absurd, since it is filled, in the words of artist Eva Hesse, with "contradictions and oppositions ... the most absurd opposites or extreme opposites."⁸

One day I'm feeling total
 The next I'm split in two
My eyes are doing somersaults staring at my shoe
 My brain is out of my hand
There's nothing to prevent
 The impulse is quite meaningless in a cerebral non-event
So I sit in reverie getting on my nerves
 The intangible bands that keep me
Sitting on the verge ... of a breakdown
 of a breakdown
of a result
 Complete me ... maybe ... defeat me.

-Siouxsie and the Banshees, "Jigsaw Feeling"

Could the place of "breakdown ... reaction ... impulse" be identified with what Julia Kristeva has termed the "semiotic chora?"⁹ Kristeva equates this prelinguistic realm of primary drives and feelings with the period when the child identifies with the mother-before the fixed, social, "stable" ego necessitated by symbolic language and produced by the castration complex forces conscious denial of these primary drives. The movements of the chora are not between positions of the speaking ego, as in rational discourse, but between fragmented zones of the body, expressed in heterogeneous gestures and feelings-especially in vocal intonations like "the babbling of a child or musical rhythms."

In music, the feminine is located in vocal expression more than the overtly comprehensible lyrics and melody. Examples can be found in the songs of the Swiss all-female group Kleenex (e.g., the sibilant insertions in their song "U"), and the British group the Raincoats. Throughout the Raincoats' song "In Love" (1979) the polyphonic counterpoint-an indistinguishable babble-nearly cancels out the meaning of the lead vocal. This lead vocal itself breaks down at the chorus phrase "this is love" at the end of each stanza, enunciating the line like this: "This/is/es/ee/lo/la/love/la/ov/oh/ho/ha/ha/hey/this/is/love/ha/ha/ha."

Lydia Lunch of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks used a hysterical pitch that rose upward to place screeching emphasis on the tags of key lines. She said, "People never understand ... [that] it's right there in your throat. It's all in your joints. It's annoying because it's physically uncomfortable."¹⁰ French theorist Helene Cixous has argued that feminine pleasure is linked to the stage when the voice of the mother was seen as an extension of her flesh, for feminine texts are "very close to voice, are very close to the flesh of the language," and the infant identified with the mother's voice, and later its own voice. "To write in the feminine is to put over what is cut off by the symbolic, the voice of the mother."¹² This repressed "feminine" has the power to subvert the logical and egocentric categories of social speech. As the order of social speech is dependent upon the construction of a singular, unified identity for the individual subject, it must deny the shifting and heterogeneous impulses and feelings of the body reflected in Kristeva's semiotic chora. An art that is plurivocal, heterogeneous, and polymorphous can liberate the level of the chora and create a place "where the social code is destroyed." The danger of such art is its fissuring of the artist's ego, which unleashes anarchic, unsocialized pleasure on the side of the "death drives" and in turn runs the risk for the artist of psychosis.¹³

Lydia Lunch formed Teenage Jesus and the Jerks when she was seventeen. Although its personnel changed, they were always all-male-except for Lydia. Their music had an advanced, neo-minimal primitivism; her lyrics were about her flesh, and contained a hint of "auto-affection" (Luce Irigaray), which unfortunately hardly communicated to the audience.

My eyes are gripped	Across the window
My fists are clenched	Under the curtain
My brain open	Break the glass
My mouth rips	Feel the air
I woke up dreaming ... My wrists are split	My guts in knots
My elbows twisted	I convulse
My shoulders bent	I fall on the floor.
My knees arthritic	-Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, "I
I woke up bleeding ...	Woke Up Dreaming"

The label of Lydia Lunch's "Baby Doll" states that it is published by "Infant Tunes" and recorded in "biting stereo." The singer's desire here is clear: to regress to the time when "the body and the world were confounded in one chaotic intimacy which was too present, too immediate ... an erotic of which nothing can be said, exceeding all meaning." As in "the form full of interpretation," it is "close to madness."¹⁴

Little girl	Love me please?
In your little girl world	Can I please, just once
Just a baby doll	Once is not enough
In your baby doll pram	Now your super touch
Watch me babysit	Daddy, clasp my hand
I'm your little girl	He's the only man
In your little girl world	I'm his little girl
And I -	And he...

Michele Montrelay believes that feminine erotic drives somehow resist the process of repression (which befalls the male drives during the Oedipal stage). This means that they are not fully symbolized; the achievement of total female pleasure leads toward a regression to infantile eroticism. Lunch said that her music was "how I physically feel. That's how my body functions ... [the music's] impact is how I like to fuck. Bam bam bam."¹⁵ Curiously, Lunch's attitude to the audience was one of masklike frigidity. She said, "I am frigid, but it's not a sexual frigidity, if you know what I mean ... It's not that I can't be touched, but it's that can't be satisfied ... I'm very open, very naked. I do give everything, but it's going to hurt them more than it hurts me ... What I do is self-hurt without the masochism."¹⁶ Her persona of frigidity, in psychological terms, served as a defense to dissociate her conscious person from the *jouissance* the music exposed; presumably, if she had identified fully with this, she would have risked psychosis.

One reason Lunch gave for her stage indifference was that she refused to be a passive receptacle of the audience's desire (preferring to contain herself within her own insatiable desire—a desire that could not be satisfied by the audience's applause). She said, "The fact that I don't

actually move, is because I'm so selfish."¹⁷ Lunch refused to evoke the mystery, the sexual difference, which reassures the audience of its own identity. She was only concerned with her sexual identity for herself. "I don't have to shake my hips to prove a point... Why do stand still? Because, rather than make a fool of myself ... I stand still and try to maintain some dignity ... I refuse to fall to the floor and have some guitar player pick me up like some other female performers we know."¹⁸ As she would not allow herself a split between her outer self (for the audience, a nonpersona) and the contents of her songs, the outward aspect of Lunch that the audience saw did not open itself for communication or autobiographical speculations.

When Lunch reached twenty, her posture shifted from frigid teenage brat who nevertheless exuded sexuality to big-band singer vamp. In her first post-Teenage Jesus album, *Queen of Siam*, her former refusal to be the object of male desire had been reversed: she now openly expressed her desire to possess teenage boys.

You've got to understand, you see. He had this walk down pat. I just kind of turned around. I had to. I was really kind of possessed. I mean, wasn't myself. He was so young. Such innocence. If I had control, I didn't feel any yet. I couldn't be hurt. Not one sound did I make. If this is the real thing, there is just no need to fake. If I had to do it, it would be with a smile. A tap on his back, a slip of my neck; he turned round and I knew that the ground would melt. I put on the ice, his smile was gone. Hey, baby, you're under arrest.

-Lydia Lunch, "Lady Scarface"

Whether vamp or self-enclosed nonpersona, Lunch's "personality" as manifested on stage did not open itself to autobiographical speculation. This was a typical punk strategy. In breaking with the convention of passive audience reaction to performance, she also expressed contempt for the so-called autobiographical singer/songwriters of the early seventies, such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Van Morrison, or Bruce Springsteen, whose lyrics rested on self-revelation of personality. When they performed live, the success (plausibility) of their acts necessitated an exploitation of the audience's belief in both their personas and their private lives. But this "honesty" was more likely a dramatic quasi-fiction, invented as a hook on which to hang their songs' narrative "I." More theatrically sophisticated performers such as David Bowie, Bryan Ferry, Iggy Pop, or Alice Cooper played with the artifice (or complexity) behind the device of the performer-songwriter's "I," making the entire pose dubious or unnecessary. Punk performers, in rejecting stardom, chose to give the audience nothing of their so-called self.

Another obvious danger for the autobiographical star, which the punk performer in her or his less personal approach avoided, was overexposure. Overexposure can lead ultimately to an audience's loss of interest. A case in point is John Lennon's primal scream-inspired album, *Plastic Ono Band*. Such personal revelations feed the public's desire to know increasingly more about the performer, to link this revealed "inner self" with the outer personality it feels it already possesses. This desire becomes an impossible demand. The autobiographical mask is often sex-defined; females may identify Joni Mitchell's "personal" lyrics as archetypically representing female experience, especially in terms of socially defined sexuality; the reverse might occur with the lyrics of Bob Dylan. Bowie and others proved, however, that an androgynous identity could create charisma equally for spectators of either gender. Some female performers have desired to eliminate the symbolic order of sex entirely, believing that when the audience projects a sexual

identity on the performer and the contents of her message, this symbolic classification of "female experience" places her sexuality within patriarchal predefinitions.

Groupie/Lead Singer

When they started out in 1977, the B-52s consisted of three men and two women, with the women and one of the men alternating as lead singers. The song, "Hero Worship," was written by Ricky Wilson (male) and a friend (from outside of the group) for his sister, Cindy Wilson. It's about a sixties groupie's relation to the male star she idolizes. But when Cindy Wilson as the lead singer rendered the song, the hero-worshipping groupie has the upper hand, the power of emasculation, over the one she idolizes. Of course, who has the power in a sexual relationship depends on one's perspective. Cindy Wilson's passionate singing expressed eroticism not through theatrical gesture (designed to be seen by men or merely to represent sexuality) but through the quality of her vocal intonation alone. The voice is the site of feminine eroticism.

Heroes falling to the ground
Like Hell's magnet
Pulls me down
On my knees
I try to please his eyes
His idol eyes

Jerking motions won't revive him
Mouth to mouth resuscitation
I just lay down beside him
And idolize

Motor, Motor
Broken hearted
Rusted, Rotted
Falling apart
A lock of hair

A belt he wore
It's not enough
I WANT MORE
God give me his soul
God give me his soul

Heroes falling to the ground
Like Hell's magnet
Pulls me down
On my knees
I try to please his eyes
His idol eyes
I hero worship
He deserves it
I DESERVE IT!

Feminism: Male Marxists: The Gang of Four

The change will do you good
I always knew it would
Sometimes I'm thinking that I love you
But I know it's only lust

Your kiss so sweet
Your sweat so sour
Your kiss so sweet
Your sweat so sour
The sweat's running down your back
The sweat's running down your neck

The sins of the flesh
Are simply sins of lust
Sometimes I'm thinking that I love you
But I know it's only lust ...

Damaged goods
Send them back
I can't work
I can't achieve
Send me back

Open the till
Give me the change

You said you would do me good
Refund the cost
You said you're cheap
But you're too much . . .
-The Gang of Four, "Damaged Goods"

The Gang of Four, like the Mekons and Scritti Politti, were all male ex-students of the Marxist art historian T. J. Clark, from the University of Leeds; they were also self-conscious leftists and feminists. Former members of the university's film club and readers of Screen magazine, they believed that the personal was inevitably the political, and that the private realm dealt with in "autobiographical" rock music constituting the public domain of real political choice. The song "Damaged Goods" was constructed from only a male's pragmatically realistic position. But a meta-text, one of Marxist realism, sees love and lust as capitalist exchange values or as sexual commodities on the market that have a certain exchange value. Unsatisfactory or no longer satisfying partners are "damaged goods" to be exchanged for other partners or other added values (such as having more time to achieve something through work). Capitalism sees change (exchange) as "progressive" and inherently good for society: it keeps the circulation of currency moving and it defines the needs of the individual (in terms of self interest as the ultimate criteria).

For the Gang of Four, leisure wasn't "private" but social; even people's "personal" lives were seen as public, prestructured for them by the consumer and entertainment industries. Thus, insofar as rock music-as a form of consumer bought escapism-was part of the larger entertainment industry, the Gang of Four's songs and their political views constituted an analysis of the group's dilemma as part of the "industry."

All communications media, including rock 'n' roll, are agents of social control and domination. The earliest male, Marxist, feminist, punk group was the Desperate Bicycles, whose "Housewife Song" (1978) dealt with women's domestic oppression in a tragicomic manner:

Isolated cause
Imprisoned by their house
And four angry walls . . .

He said "move in"
I took his advice
If I'm not satisfied
Then I'd do it twice
A cup in the hand is worth two in the sink
guard

I don't have time to think
Vacuums rush in,
where people fear to tread
Manners come down to
wrapping a loaf of bread

Every coat its holy lining,
every crease means extra ironing
Hoover, Hoover, Hoover
Journey down the stairs ...

Life's not bad, just so unkind
What a lover, what a dream
Robert Redford
So lean
Hoover, Hoover, Hoover
Kids get on my nerves

Never had a quiet life
Because I'm a housewife
Today, the doorstep
Tomorrow the world

Ideologically, the family is viewed by a social consensus as a bulwark against the evils of the rest of society. The family is also the prime area of "personal life"- where the search for "subjective" happiness and fulfillment takes place. These (subjective) concerns, with no relation to the rest of society's concerns, must be protected from social demands. With the dependence upon mass consumption for maintenance of the economy, the family is also identified with a "lifestyle" based on consumption of products, whose enjoyment can lead to the "good life."

Belief in an internally emancipated family unit also gives rise to the idealization of children and childhood; children are the main (ideological) rationale for maintenance of the family structure. By the late nineteenth century, childhood was coming to be seen as an end in itself. The late Victorians seem also to have invented the concept of a new zone of life half-integrated with and half-antagonistic to the adult social order. Adolescents were believed to be at a "passionate stage of life," according to one Victorian expert. Adolescents and females had been linked in "the qualities of moral idealism and intense emotionality that the Victorians had assigned to upper-class women, isolated within the home"; for "Woman at her best never outgrows adolescence as man does, but lingers in, magnifies and glorifies this culminating stage of life with its ... convertibility of emotions, its enthusiasm."¹⁹ Patriarchy is founded on the hierarchical ordering of age, as well as the hierarchy of equal divisions within age and, most importantly, class.

All-Female New Wave Groups: Feminine Essentialism

The year 1979 saw the emergence of several all-female New Wave bands, including the Slits, the Raincoats, Ut, and Kleenex, all without lead singers, basically heterogeneous in musical style, and multinational in composition (the Slits and the Raincoats were London-based, Kleenex was from Zurich, and Ut from New York). Characteristically, these groups disdained harmony singing for polyvalent and interchangeable vocal lines between all members of the group. Ut took this deconstructive strategy one step further, with each of the original four members exchanging their instruments (and roles in the group) after every song. The audience was thus not able to identify individual performers with a particular instrument, role, or hierarchical position relative to the group's identity.

Conventionally, the specific instrument a female or male artist uses to perform, vis-à-vis other musicians in a group, gives them a consistent, sexually coded identity. For example, a woman playing a violin suggests the metaphor that "a woman is like a violin"; or a woman playing an electric guitar might be seen as a woman struggling to be as aggressive or tough as a male rock guitarist. With Ut, due to the changes in their set-up and the initial awkwardness as each member adapts to her new instrument/role in the reformed group, no fixed or cohesive image was given to the audience. "We do not choose to be charming," said Jackie Ut.²⁰ So it was difficult for male viewers to see them as a representation of difference. Instead, the dominant image was one of internal democracy in a nonhierarchical structure. Mistakes were allowed to enter as each member struggled to (re)learn her instrument and role in the course of each new song. Because of the difficulty in switching instruments and assimilating each "new" member into each "new" band, communication was directed internally among the band members and was not for/to the audience. The group avoided the audience's gaze and expectations of a defined style. This was a deliberately avant-gardist and feminist approach.

Despite their struggle against being read as characteristically (essentially) "female," all-female groups continued to be read as "female," though perhaps in a slightly modified and more fashionable sense of the word. As defined by several of these groups themselves, "female"

specificity was musically evidenced by use of continuous (Mother Earth) rhythmic forms: a cosmic rhythm. Such rhythmic forms "go on and on ... [for] a rhythm never stops, you know ... silence is a rhythm, too" (the Slits). Or, in the words of Helene Cixous, "A feminine textual body can be recognized by the fact that it is always without end, has no finish."²¹

In general, these all-female groups approached playing as a nonperfectionist and not so tightly ordered system. Where male groups tended toward an all-over and orderly sound, the approach of groups such as the Slits made deliberate use of mistakes, silences, and personally motivated or arbitrary shifts of pattern/feeling. The sense of the musical texture is of a continually shifting, polyvalent, nonhierarchical pattern. Phrasing overlaps and often contradicts the main vocal line of the "lead singer"; individual pitch and style of phrasing may also run counter to the main narrative flow. The Slits' sound evolved in this way toward a freely improvised reggae with arbitrary percussive and vocal textural counterpoints woven throughout the song's rhythmic structure. Their first album used popular clichés from advertising concerning "womanhood." These are contrasted with personal emotional narrative in such a way that the two levels, pop and real emotion, subvert and contradict each other. "Typical Girls" is typical:

Typical girls	Typical girls fall under a spell
Get sad so quickly	Typical girls buy magazines
Typical girls	Typical girls eat like hell
Who's bringing out the new model?	Typical girls
And there's another model to employ	Worry about spots a lot
Typical girl gets the typical boy	Unnatural smells
Typical boys and typical girls ...	Too fake smells
Typical girl gets the typical boy	Typical girls
That typical boy gets the typical girl	Try to be typical girls, very well
Typical girls want you to help them	Don't create
Typical girls are so confusing	Don't rebel
You can always tell	And don't drive well
Typical girls don't think too clearly	Typical girls
Typical girls are unpredictable	Try to be typical girls, very well
Typical girls try to be	It's hard to decide
Typical girls ...	What typical girls are— Insensitive
Are looking for—something	Typical girls are emotional ...

Subsequently the Slits' imagery evolved into a notion of woman as pre-patriarchal, African tribal deity—a race of woman uncorrupted by urban civilizations. This is suggested by the cover photograph for the album *The Cut* (1979), which shows the group posed boldly, warriorlike, caked in mud from the neck down, and naked except for small loincloths.

The Raincoats, like the Slits, from which some of their original members derive, kept a deliberately amateur quality, allowing mistakes to enter honestly into their phrasing. This heterogeneous approach also encompassed differing political views by members. While others in the group were less clearcut, even romantic, in their attitude toward sexuality, Vicki Aspinall was originally a member of a feminist group that played only for other women. Subsequently she recognized this strategy as impractical: "You have to play to men; you can't cut yourself off from half the human race." But she remained "sympathetic to [the original group's] feminist views."

One of her songs, "Off Duty Trip," was based on a news account of a British soldier involved in a violent rape who received leniency from the court:

Just a couple in the park
 Pounding out those games in the dark
Those who walk past her screams
 Are only reminded of love's young dreams
Seaside town, off-duty trip
 Taking flesh, going to let it rip
With rings on his finger, sharp.
 Flavor of his mouth—center spread
S-7, three varieties in his head . . .
 Join the professionals, save one of the professionals,
No, no jail for the professional.

Something like the early Slits song, "Love and Romance," the Raincoats ironic "In Love" was sung with hints of sarcasm. It placed the sentiments of the normal "pop" love song (which usually celebrates love as a transcending of the everyday "self ") in decidedly ambivalent terms.

I can't do a thing today
 I can't see anyway
I haven't eaten all day
 In love is so tough, on my emotion

I can't listen to what you say
 I can't understand you anyway
I haven't spoken all day

Feelin' good, feelin' bad
 Feelin' happy, feelin' sad
I'm so happy, happy, sad

(Other women singing in polyphonic counterpoint; then under the polyphony, a woman's voice is faintly discernible: I don't need your feelings I don't need you)

The problem with the all-female group was that this "sound" simply became a musical cliché identified in the public's mind with the category "female." An obvious way out of this bind, first utilized by the Slits, was to replace one female member with a token male. In the Slits' case it was Budgie, who in 1978 became the new drummer. Drummers are traditionally placed at the lowest intellectual position of a band, but are considered, at the same time, to be its most primordial element, its core. The Slits effected a role reversal, placing the man in this "elevated" position. But regardless of the drummer's status, the group's music could not be characterized as exemplifying only "femaleness"—it was a mixed group which asserted the *dominance* of female ideas.

New York's Bush Tetras had a set-up similar to the Slits, consisting of a female vocalist, two women guitarists, and a younger male drummer, Dee Pop, whose Ramones-style "machismo" complimented the women's "tough" ambiguous sexuality. The Bush Tetras often

denied to the press that their sexual identities had anything to do with their music, but it was well-known that the group's sexual preferences ranged from lesbian to bisexual to heterosexual. Their songs at first appear devoid of specific female content. Their first single, "Things That Go Boom in the Night," does not imply a specific gender viewpoint.

Do you want it right
Are you scared
That things go boom in the night
To know how to fight Are you scared
When there's no one in sight
No one's touch ...

The Bush Tetras did not appeal specifically to women; rather, their songs allow a heterogeneity of conflicting, ambivalent, shifting identifications for either male or female listeners. A spectator's first identification is inevitably the conventional one that rock sets up—identification with the physicality, prowess, and potency of the player and the amplified sound. Curiously, young male fans seem to find the image of unfettered female assertiveness liberating; it gives them self-confidence in their own often ambivalently felt sexuality. This is common in rock 'n' roll: for instance, the Rolling Stones' use of mascara to simulate bisexuality functioned in the same way for adolescent males. Both the Stones' and the Tetras' exploitation of black music and an ambivalently "macho" bisexuality allows the male audience member a polymorphously perverse fantasy identification with members of the group. Through their bisexuality, the Stones allowed male (or female) spectators to project themselves into the position of the pleasure of the male bonding experienced by the group in playing its music. Similarly, women viewing the Bush Tetras were allowed the fantasy involvement with a specifically female sexual bond. The male spectator had a double pleasure, he could fantasize that he was intimately observing a lesbian scene-performed explicitly for him, and also, as the group's heterosexuality wasn't denied, he might construct a fantasy of his own sexual involvement with an individual group member. (He could, in a sense, identify with Dee Pop's position.) These "readings," or fantasy identifications, were feasible because the group's women did not play out any one specific, conventional female stereotype—they could equally well be heterosexual or lesbian or bisexual. This made the audience's imaginary projections the issue.

Au Pairs had two women guitarists, one of whom functioned as both lead vocalist and lead guitarist, and two men, who made up the background rhythm section. This deliberately inverted the stereotype of male dominance. The group's lyrics dissolved any explicitly female point of view into the connection between the separate but different ways in which sexual stereotypes affect women and men. Opposite to the Bush Tetras, whose words were ambiguous and existed in relation to the flow of the music's power, Au Pairs verbally foregrounded the explicit content-sexual politics.

In the early seventies there was a recognition of an aspect of female sexuality which had previously been hidden—the orgasm. "Come Again" is about the way in which this was re-taken and redefined in male terms, so that giving a woman an orgasm has become a new standard for male performance in sex. Then it's no longer female sexuality—the pressure is on the woman to please the man by faking it.²²

Leslie Woods strums a chord, eyes up the audience, and announces, "This one is the one about faking orgasms."²³

It's frustrating! aggravating! so annoying! pretend
you're enjoying it
It's your turn now! But do you want to:
I don't know if you want to
It's inhibiting/restricting/so confusing/now I'm
losing count can't concentrate it's another way to take
Mustn't think about it/Free and at ease
You're not selfish/You're trying hard to please—
please, please me
Is your finger aching/ I can feel you hesitating
Is your finger aching?
Yes, thank you/ I got one
Yes, it was nice/ Yes, we should go to sleep now
Yes, yes it was fine
We must, we must do it again sometime
We must—yes, but I'm tired
Cum again, wot?-we need to ... etc. etc.
Shit I forgot to put my cap in ...

-"Come Again," from the album *Playing with a Different Sex* (1981)

Au Pairs exemplified the self-consciousness and pessimism of the post-Frankfurt School left that still wanted to use the media for self-expression despite their awareness of its ultimate power to co-opt all radical strategies or "solutions." As they recognized that rock was part of the media's hegemony of control—"the culture industry"—their approach took the form of a self-critique. But this "modern" self-consciousness/self-reflective morality became, itself, insidiously part of the problem, rather than its solution.

NOTES:

First published in Dutch as "'New Wave' Rock en 'Het Feminie'" in *Museumjournaal* (Otterloo) 26, no. 1 (1981), pp. 16-32; later published in English in abbreviated form as "Semio-Sex: New Wave Rock and the Feminine" in *Live* (New York), no. 617 (1982), pp. 12-17, and in complete form in *Open Letter* (Toronto), no. 516 (1984), pp. 79-105. This essay began as a lecture accompanied by appropriate audio clips; it was first given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1980. In 1981, Graham was asked to expand the text for *Screen* magazine by its editor, Mark Nash. The expanded text was rejected by the journal's board of advisors.

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22. Martin Culver, quoted in Graham Lock, "Come Out and Do the Sexual Dance," *New Musical Express*, November 10, 1979.
23. Ibid.