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### **Unprecedented access? Women instrumentalists in punk bands 1976-1984: an exploration**

**Helen Reddington**

School of Media, Arts and Design

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**Unprecedented access?  
Women instrumentalists in  
punk bands 1976-1984: an  
exploration**

**Helen Reddington**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements of the University of  
Westminster for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**June 2004**

# Unprecedented Access? Women Instrumentalists in Punk Bands 1976-1984: an exploration

## Abstract

Helen Reddington 2004

This study has been undertaken because of a gap in popular music and subcultural history. The significance of the first large influx of women into rock music, as punk instrumentalists in the late 1970s, has been underplayed; instead, women punks have been stereotypically documented. Girls' and womens' roles as producers of music, and their consequent contribution to the sound of punk music, have been subjected to a collective amnesia.

Four areas of literature have been reviewed to clarify the reasons for, and extent of the gap: writings on subcultures and scenes, writings on women in rock and pop, writings on the socio-political context, and writings on punk.

One of the main foci of the study has been to identify the reasons for the fading away of the presence of women instrumentalists in the early 1980s. I wanted to discover why this phenomenon had such a short time span.

The primary research involved a newspaper survey (300 local papers were contacted across Britain) from which 24 useful questionnaires were gleaned; I interviewed 15 women who were in bands at the time, as well as a radio DJ, record company owner, band manager, and several male band members and political activists from the scene. Fanzines, music papers and the feminist magazine Spare Rib have also been referred to extensively. I have also had my own recollections of the time to draw upon.

Following the literature review, the study is divided into sections on Access (enabling and empowering factors), Media Gatekeepers and Cultural Intermediaries (external controls and filters), The Brighton Scene (a case study of my own local punk environment), Noise, Violence and Femininity (the practice of music making by these women, and the resistance to it), the Aftermath (exploring factors contributing to the ending of the moment), and Conclusions.

# Unprecedented Access? Women Instrumentalists in Punk Bands 1976-1984: an exploration

Helen Reddington, June 2004

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With thanks to the University of Westminster, and to my tutors Dave Laing and Jean Seaton: thanks also to Alison Sorrell.

Thanks are also due to all those who agreed to be interviewed for this work, and to those who helped me to find 'lost' musicians.



**Unprecedented access? Women  
instrumentalists in punk bands 1976-  
1984: an exploration**

## Introduction

*The location was the Music and Power Conference at Brunel University in 2001. I had just presented a paper relating to this study, and I was taking questions. A male member of the audience asked the following question: "I have a friend who plays in an all-girl band. On their posters they have a photograph of the band. Why should they resort to a gimmick like this if they want to be taken seriously?" The fact that an all-girl band should still (26 years after The Equal Opportunities Act) be regarded as a gimmick, and that their use of a photograph on their posters (as many male bands do), should be regarded as an attempt to cash in on this gimmick did not strike him as remarkable at all.*

This study has been undertaken because, as one of the participants in what I had thought was going to be a revolution in rock music, I became more and more frustrated at the lack of documentation about what actually happened at the time from the point of view of its *female* protagonists. Histories of punk are often personal and metrocentric- from John Savage's 'England's Dreaming'<sup>1</sup>, to Malcolm McLaren's many versions of events (in particular his film, 'The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle'<sup>2</sup>) in which he is the star, and everyone else, supporting players. One of Punk's myths is the metrocentric focus of some histories: the enduring version of punk as described by some sources, started in 1976 and ended in 1977. I contend that punk, by its anarchic nature, existed in many forms long before and long after this; it existed and continues to exist as a self-definition by certain people regardless of location. In the period covered by this study, it was a sort of voluntary therapy invented and undertaken by an 'unwanted' generation. This work is a social and cultural study that relies heavily, in places, on my personal memories and involvement, and oral sources; there are therefore tensions between my own involvement in the history and its narrative and the other sources that are drawn upon. These tensions are acknowledged and assessed where appropriate.

In this study, I will show how a particular community of people in Brighton ( who formed what I refer to in places, a 'micro-subculture') customised punk in 1977 to create a musical and political interpretation of the punk idea which embraced a wide variety of people of varying genders and ages. Within this community, a platform was created for women to pick up traditionally male rock instruments (in particular electric bass and guitar) and learn how to play them while performing on stage. The case study of Brighton is written in such a way as to try to reconstruct a dynamic scene from the interviewees' recollections, fanzines and so on.

My main intention, however, has been to bust a stereotype: that of young punk women in fishnet stockings with panda-eyes, stilettos and spiky blonde hair. There were some punk women like this, but for many, the ideology counted more than, or as much as, the fashion. This has not been explored in such depth as this before; a different sort of

<sup>1</sup> Savage, Jon, *England's Dreaming*, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1991

<sup>2</sup> McLaren, Malcolm (dir) *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*, Universal Films, 1982

moral panic would have ensued had it been so. I felt indignant that the image of punk being set in stone was not what I had experienced firsthand; I was aware that if I did not undertake this work, the experiences of a whole generation of women instrumentalists might disappear from history.

As many of those involved in punk and punk rock music reach their late 30s and early 40s, nostalgia for their youth inevitably leads them to explore the relevance to their current status of the experiences that they had at that time, and to start to recall those aspects of punk that have left them with some sort of legacy, whether musical, political, moral or entrepreneurial in nature. It is at this point, where there is a convergence of autobiographical material not only in the media but also in academic and public services environments, that given histories of the moment start to be questioned and revised. One facet of this moment has been acknowledged by some but never investigated in depth: that of the importance of young women, and in particular, women musicians, to the punk subculture. I have a particular qualification for undertaking this study; not only was I part of the punk subculture in Brighton in 1977, but I also became a bass guitarist in a local band, encouraged by my peers.

The heart of this work is an analysis of the role of female instrumentalists in punk and rock bands during the socio-political changes that happened in Great Britain during the period from 1976 (the last throes of 'old' Labour Government) to 1984 (the consolidation of Thatcherism as a political force with the beginning of the Falklands conflict). It examines their relationship to the Punk subculture, and has been prompted by my own perception of a current revisionist version of events during the time in question (when I became a bass player in a punk band in Brighton); this led to further questioning: why did this influx of women rock instrumentalists apparently come to a halt, and not lead to a revolution in rock band personnel, with mixed-gender rock bands becoming the norm in Britain as opposed to the exception? Why has rock music been the slowest of all cultural creativities to incorporate the female creative producer?<sup>3</sup>

One of my intentions is to reveal and reconstruct a subcultural history that has almost disappeared, but which ran parallel to the exclusively male account which has hitherto been accepted as complete; for in addition to the maleness of rock music, street subcultures have traditionally been observed as male. Punk was notable for a distinct difference that marked it from previous identified subcultures; this difference (consisting of the involvement of women in the subculture not just as observers or consumers, but as visibly active protagonists in production) is still not universally acknowledged. In this respect, studies like this one are essential, to counter sweeping comments such as Stanley Cohen's, in the introduction to the new edition (1993) of 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics':

'...to re-examine the subject of post-war British youth subcultures is not quite the same as constructing, say, a

---

<sup>3</sup> It is not the intention to ignore or belittle the contribution of female folk rock singers from the mid-70s onwards, but rather to describe the atmosphere of maleness in rock music and maleness-of -definition in pop at this time, in order to show the extraordinary nature of the phenomenon explored in this thesis.

revised historiography of World War 11: there are no new archives to be opened, no secret documents to be discovered, no pacts of silence to be broken. There are just the same (rather poor) sources of information from the same (often inarticulate) informants. The question is what new sense can be made out of this same data.<sup>4</sup>

Any exploration of women's contribution to (what are assumed to be) men's discourses will involve disentangling attempts to rationalise suppression (and occasionally oppression<sup>5</sup>) from empirical observations, and discussion of the nature of an objective viewpoint. Observations made by sociologists such as McRobbie<sup>6</sup> and Walkerdine<sup>7</sup> have prompted others (such as Nehring<sup>8</sup> in his study of the Riot Grrrl phenomenon) to acknowledge that the notion of objectivity is itself subjective. This attitude came about largely as a result of the application of the theories of philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault and Lacan to their own analytical methods. Although some (notably Rowbotham, 1981)<sup>9</sup> find great difficulty in applying what they regard as 'men's revolution' to the feminist discourse with which they are involved, this has been a problem at every stage of the women's movement as women contextualise their attitudes and experiences (e.g. see Diethel, 1996)<sup>10</sup>. There is no doubt that the 1975 Equal Opportunities Act made women understand that they had statutory *rights* in the workplace, whereas before this they had been merely tolerated; this, combined with the unprecedented increase in unemployment amongst school- and college-leavers of both genders at this point, resulted in a shift in attitudes 'on the ground' or 'on the street', which according to some of my informants, resulted in a reassessment of women's and men's roles in society. Without occupations (that were still largely gendered), both sexes experienced the same feelings of exclusion and the same freedom from routine. The re-articulation of women's rights undoubtedly affected the expectations of both young men and young women. This introduced a tension into the phenomenon of 'girl' instrumentalists, who sometimes found themselves to be unwilling spokespeople for the phenomenon itself, when they aspired to no more than participation, or at most, a role as non-confrontational pioneer.

The residual impression of punk rock today has become that of the Sex Pistol's notoriety, (overlooking the politicisation of the movement as a whole and its involvement with Rock against Racism, etc) and the fetishistic garb worn by some of the young female punks. Malcolm McLaren's determination to (re)write history around his own contribution has some validity, but a comment by writer Caroline Coon emphasises

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<sup>4</sup> Cohen, Stanley, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, revamped 1980, reprinted 1993, introduction p(ii)

<sup>5</sup> See Sanjek, D, *The Wild, Wild Women of Rockabilly*, in Whiteley, Sheila, (ed), *Sexing the Groove: popular music and gender*, Routledge, London, 1997, for a discussion about the 'disappearance' of female rockabilly performers caused by the lack of, or destruction of vinyl recordings.

<sup>6</sup> in Frith, Simon, and Goodwin, Andrew, (Eds), *On Record*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, pp 66-67

<sup>7</sup> Walkerdine, Valerie, *Daddy's Girl : Young Girls and Popular Culture*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 1997

<sup>8</sup> Nehring, Neil, *Popular Music, Gender and Postmodernism*, Sage, California, 1997

<sup>9</sup> Rowbotham, Sheila, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981

<sup>10</sup> Diethel, Carol, *Nietzsche's Women: Beyond The Whip*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, 1996

the relevance of my study: “It would be possible to write the whole history of punk music without mentioning any male bands at all- and I think a lot of them would find that very surprising”.<sup>11</sup>

However, it can not be denied that the band The Sex Pistols were the primary catalyst for the whole punk movement, and this is why the time parameters of the study have been set according to the first ‘overground’ appearance of the band in 1976, and the onset of the Falklands war in 1984. It would be naive to suggest that history is naturally divisible into neat chunks<sup>12</sup>, but during this period there was a concentration of media interest not only on punk itself but also (in the music press) on the sudden appearance of girl instrumentalists in the new bands in Britain. There was also an increase in interest in local music (in 1982 the *Melody Maker* visited a series of towns around Britain to investigate their music scenes) that was probably due to the increase in small label activity that followed the DIY ethic espoused by punk. A selection of music papers (*New Musical Express, Sounds, Melody Maker, Music Week*) have been examined for their attitudes to female instrumentalists, and the debate on their pages is compared with that of *Spare Rib*, whose feminist agenda reflects another facet of the subject.

The aim is to explore *British* punk and British musicians, as punk manifested itself differently in other countries at this time,<sup>13</sup> with an acknowledgement that certain US acts (in particular, The Velvet Underground, Talking Heads, Blondie and Patti Smith) had a powerful influence in Britain, not only because their strong woman performers were role models for women who could now aspire to be player-participants in music-making, but also in ‘preparing the ground’ for the young male rock audiences to appreciate woman guitarists, bass players and so on. Rather than basing the study on London’s Chelsea, which for the tabloid press was the epicentre of punk, I have drawn interviewees from the east-London scene (Canning Town) the west London scene (Notting Hill), Manchester, Oxford and others in addition to the case study of the punk scene in Brighton.

For another respect in which punk was very different from earlier subcultures (or at least those examined by the Birmingham CCCS) was in its full-time nature. Although writers have focused on the styles, the music, and the politics of punk, it had significance amongst some of its protagonists as a sort of ‘life-concept’. Many were unemployed, and the idea of ‘buying-in’ to a lifestyle via its discs, clothing and club entrance fees, was beyond their financial capability. It therefore supplied an alternative validation for some of those rejected by the system, and this is when the customisation process- where the phenomenon devolved to the provinces and was tailored to the needs and desires of local participants- evolved the original burst of energy from Chelsea in London, into a

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<sup>11</sup> No Future? Conference, University of Wolverhampton, September 2001

<sup>12</sup> Penny Rimbaud, drummer and founder-member of Crass, says the the Sex Pistols were no more than a ‘blip’ in pop music, and claims that punk existed in Britain long before they appeared on the scene; it has long been accepted that the origins of British punk music may have been CBGBs in New York, but Rimbaud claims the attitudes were here already, having developed from those of the alternative society of the late 1960s. Coon’s comments from author’s interview, date 24/1/02

<sup>13</sup> Female rock and pop musicians in the U.S. have a much longer ‘shelf-life’ than those in Britain, which tends to be limited to (passing for) 17-23; this has a strong bearing on the nature of my work.

sometimes more politicised, and often more diverse, version of Punk. Michael Bracewell (1998) notes the importance of the portability of the Punk ethic for those (young men) ready for change in the late 1970s: '... it was the regional experience of punk-as opposed to its metropolitan base in media, arts and fashion- which really galvanised the search for the young soul rebels'<sup>14</sup> Punk had a uniquely therapeutic nature as a subculture for a generation of unemployed people: it provided them with a reason to get up in the morning. It was also accepting of difference: for instance, Helen of Troy, an ex-girlfriend of catalyst Malcolm McLaren, was a dwarf-lady, and one of Brighton's prominent punks had thalidomide syndrome, and possessed a pair of Doctor Marten's boots (part of the punk 'uniform' for many) with zips at the back to allow him to remove them without undoing the laces.

There were several distinct groups of music-makers in Brighton at the time of this study, some of which overlapped musically, politically, or accidentally; there was a very active woman-only live music scene. Bayton<sup>15</sup> has explored the nature of women-only music making in more detail than is possible here, although I have included interviews with women whose musical activities overlapped those of the punk bands. The distinctions I have made here are subjective, and necessary in order to relate those musicians I have spoken to in Brighton to those who played in bands with similar attitudes elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> As with the general political overview discussed above, information will be included that provides a context for the primary material.

## Methodology

In order to contact women who had been in bands but who did not achieve fame or notoriety in the national press, whether music- or otherwise, letters were written to more than 250 local newspapers around the UK requesting women who had played in bands to contact me<sup>17</sup> (see Appendix (i)). The letters were sometimes adapted into editorial, unfortunately with misleading headlines, which rendered them useless; however, there was one very useful result, in that a journalist from *The Independent* newspaper made contact, wrote an article very closely based on our discussion, and this led to further information and interviewees, as well as enquiries from two documentary film production companies. Unfortunately, further journalistic enquiries resulted in the reduction of this research to tabloid caricature and misrepresentation, and I decided not to speak to or contact mainstream press again<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Bracewell, Michael, *England is Mine; Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie*, Flamingo, London, 1998, p 93

<sup>15</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000

<sup>16</sup> My appeals for interviewees led instrumentalists in jazz, funk and other genres to contact me; a surprising number of these women claimed the attitudes of punk were of importance to them

<sup>17</sup> Letters printed were sent to me via Durrant's Press Cutting Agency. Although Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were included in the survey, I received no enquiries from these areas; perhaps if the request for questionnaire subjects had taken the form of an advertisement the exercise would have been more successful: a letter to this effect from The Yorkshire Evening Post leads me to believe that this is a possibility. The survey was therefore limited by the interests of the Letters Page Editor in each case.

<sup>18</sup> a journalist from the *Daily Mail* refused to print my request for interviewees, after asking me for contact details of those I had spoken to already, because I would not tell her my husband's name and occupation.

INTERNATIONAL PRESS-CUTTING BUREAU  
224-236 Walworth Road,  
London SE17 1JE

Extract from  
Lincolnshire Daily Echo - Lincoln  
(Circ: 30,750)

OCT 1998

## Ladies: Were you Punk Rockers?

I AM a lecturer on the BA Hons Commercial Music course at the University of Westminster.

I am about to commence a PHD on the women who played in bands around the time of Punk Rock (roughly 1977-1983) and would be very grateful if readers could contact me in order to fill in a short questionnaire and possibly be interviewed.

It is very important that I speak to women all over Britain, which is why I have contacted your paper.

**HELEN REDDINGTON**

Lecturer in Commercial Music,  
University of Westminster,  
Harrow Campus,  
Northwick Park,  
Harrow,  
HA1 3TP.

The author's letter re-written, asking for ladies to respond

INTERNATIONAL PRESS  
CUTTING BUREAU

Extract from:  
SUNDAY SUN  
-Newcastle-  
(circ: 123, 962)

12 OCT 1998

## Punkette call

★ I AM a lecturer on the BA Hons Commercial Music course at the University of Westminster.

I'll soon be starting research for a PhD based on women in Punk Rock bands between the years 1977 and 1983.

I'd love to hear from former punkettes who would be prepared to

fill in a short questionnaire and possibly be interviewed.

They can write to the address below or e-mail me at [redinh@wmin.ac.uk](mailto:redinh@wmin.ac.uk).

Thanks in advance for everyone's help —  
HELEN REDDINGTON,  
University of Westminster,  
Harrow Campus,  
Northwick Park, Harrow,  
Middlesex.

The author's letter re-written, calling for Punkettes



I prepared a questionnaire to send to anyone who responded to my letters (see Appendix (ii) for questionnaire sample). I received fifteen requests for questionnaires (see Appendix (iii) ), and also various letters offering to share memories, or expressing support, and one piece of anonymous hate-mail (illustration at the end of this introduction).

The press interest led to some women contacting me via the University of Westminster ; some of these women's careers were of great interest and I interviewed them directly. As the research progressed I realised the value of 'word of mouth' as a means of finding women to interview, and spoke to fifteen women musicians about their involvement in punk music (see Appendix (iv) for a list of women musicians interviewed, and details of how they were contacted). In addition to this, and in order to help to provide a context, I interviewed male band members who had been in bands with female players, music business 'gatekeepers' and some men who were prominent in the Brighton punk scene. (These people are listed in Appendix (v) alongside those whom I tried to contact but who did not participate in my research).

It was also important to examine the way women instrumentalists were portrayed by the music press; their shifting and different attitudes would have had an effect on the way their readers perceived this phenomenon, in spite of the fact that there was an increasing use of fanzines produced from within the subculture, as sources of information and 'attitude'. Research has therefore been undertaken into these publications, as well as, when available, fanzines published at the time.

The enduring tabloid version of the female punk consists of a young woman in fishnet tights with spiky hair and extreme black eye make-up. Laing<sup>19</sup> discusses the difference context makes to the viewing of photographs, with particular reference to female punks; I have chosen in this instance to avoid lengthy analysis of the tabloid attitude to the punk women in bands, as the primary mediated step is of more relevance. A choice has been made to explore the 'entry level' of women into the mediated rock discourse as, for many of the women discussed or interviewed, this was as far as they got. The feminist press ( represented by Spare Rib) is introduced to give a more rounded, if necessarily sparse, perspective. My own primary research is integrated here with secondary research that includes academic sources, general music histories, music periodicals, and fanzines, in order to reassess the period in as complete a way as possible. Conflicting accounts are acknowledged where they arise, and are included to show the subjectivity inherent in all such studies.

## **Problems**

There have been several obstacles that have hindered or altered the progress of this research. The most frustrating problem was the difficulty of contacting women punk musicians active at the time. Sometimes it was possible to locate them, but they were

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<sup>19</sup> Laing, Dave, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1985, p 97

unwilling to participate in the research (Gaye Advert claimed to be 'interviewed out', for instance), or the trail 'ran dry' (Tasha Fairbanks, a Brighton musician, appears on a website but messages sent there were not replied to). For this reason I have provided an appendix detailing who was contacted, how they were contacted, and the point at which I was unable to proceed further. There is undoubtedly suspicion surrounding academic research (one interviewee 'accused' me of being a sociologist!) but also, I believe, an unwillingness to consolidate personal memories for analysis and transcription by another person. This has affected the outcome of the research and I have sometimes been working against the denial of some interviewees that there was anything different about the moment at all. This is probably a by-product of the very diverse and inclusive nature of regional punk, which defied stereotype; it is probably also a manifestation of 'cynical chic' as described by Buckingham.<sup>20</sup> Related to this, some of the information given to me is confidential, or disputed. This causes a moral dilemma especially when it has a strong bearing on my hypothesis. This information has been included only when deemed essential, and using anonymity.

Other problems are the lack of feminist writing about females in subcultures and female rock instrumentalists, and a corresponding lack of writing by men about females in subcultures and female instrumentalists. As the Cohen comment above shows, women's history is invisible to some analysts. Many aspects of punk were transient anyway: for instance, although there was a well-documented increase in independent record label activity at the time, not all of the bands made records, and when they did, they may not have been reviewed. This reflects Bradley's comment about an earlier period in the history of rock'n'roll:

I would argue very strongly that the view which sees the period 1955-63 in Britain as a mere 'background', to later Beat and other later styles, is heavily distorted by an almost fetishistic attention to the charts (i.e. the successes of The Beatles, etc.) and that, sales of records notwithstanding, the development of a 'youth culture' in Britain, and of a music of that youth culture, can only be understood by reversing that process. In a very real sense, there is an element of *myth* in the way rock histories skip from one commercial peak to another, or from one 'great artist' to another, ignoring almost totally the social roots of both the music making and the listening, which ought to be among their objects of study'.<sup>21</sup>

Again, this was an example of 'entry level' restriction. Sanjek<sup>22</sup> discusses the way in which female rockabilly singers in the USA were forgotten due to the lack or destruction of vinyl evidence, and I feel this makes the primary research here all the more valuable. However, there is an inevitable problem of contextualising this work- is it a feminist analysis, a subcultural analysis, or a rock music analysis? The gaps in all of these areas need to be filled in greater detail, and all that is possible in this piece of research is to

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<sup>20</sup> Buckingham, David, *The Making of Citizens*, Routledge, London, 2000

<sup>21</sup> Bradley, Dick, *Understanding Rock'n'roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, OUP, Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1992, p 12.

<sup>22</sup> op cit Sanjek, 1997

make the first move in what I hope will be a much wider discourse about the issues raised here.

An unanticipated problem was that of my own anger, brought on gradually as the tapes of the interviews were transcribed. It is tempting to blame the self-deprecation of some of the subjects for their lack of success, but the environment further afield than the punk world in which their music developed will be shown to have caused this. Attitudes of the music press and the record business, while scornful of male bands often as a matter of course, veered from the patronising to the outright abusive in the case of female musicians. It became difficult not to interfere in the replies of the interview subjects, and this was a downside of having been involved in the scene myself.

Finally, when deconstructing a stereotype, the resulting conclusions should not be expected to be tidy. The two main stimuli for the phenomenon I am exploring appeared to be the Equal Opportunities Act and the atmosphere it generated for young women, and the enabling environment of the punk subculture. The reasons for its demise were far more complex and varied, and reflected the variety of personalities, backgrounds and ages of the women I interviewed. However, I will show Stan Cohen's remarks quoted at the beginning of the work to be premature, and Cohen himself to be a proponent of the sort of institutional misogyny that contributed to the demise of the activities of the women studied here. There *are* gaps in subcultural histories, histories of women in rock, and histories of punk. This study is not intended to be a definitive work; ideally, it will stimulate further discussion and debate, which in turn will achieve my intended outcome- to reinstate a lost part of women's social history.

What is presented here is a literature review, a chapter exploring access to the new music-making facility via the punk subculture, an examination of the cultural intermediaries who brokered punk and post-punk music, a case study of my own punk environment in Brighton, a section that explores noisemaking and aggression in rock music, and a discussion of the reasons for the fading out of the phenomenon of female instrumentalists in the punk and post-punk scenes given the changing commercial and political context. These sections are followed by an analytical conclusion.

9:1

NOV 24

TO M/S REDDINGTON

I'm not writing to request your questionnaire, indeed the reason I am putting my pen to paper is to register my disgust at the silly, <sup>ROCK</sup>absolutely useless subject of your <sup>ROCK</sup>Pink Ph.D. What on earth is the use of it?

I've personally worked and grafted hard for forty years - from the age of fourteen - paying lots of income tax for every one of those years.

A large portion of which was spent on sending people like you to University, which I have willingly paid and on the whole agreed with. But a Ph.D. on Punk Rock - well I'm speechless with disgust.

Yours faithfully  
Ruben Wright  
BLACKPOOL

# **Chapter One- Literature Review**

## **Literature Review: the context for female punk musicians<sup>1</sup>**

Punk was more than a style of music accompanied by a fashion style; there was a deviant movement that followed on from the original King's Road genesis, eventually outstripping it politically and going underground as the political climate changed in the 1980s. The following literature review will consider authors who try to place punk in the context of other youth subcultures both previous and following, and will then go on to examine the literature about the place of young women in these subcultures, and the musical milieu that identifies them, and how they are written about, particularly relating to punk rock. The tensions between music-makers and the recording industry have a profound effect on gender perceptions amongst music fans of all ages and I hope in this review to show how many writers in the academic field unwittingly subscribe to gender-hegemonic assumptions and values. All too frequently, new eras for women in rock are discovered<sup>2</sup>, but I will show that the inroads made by women into this genre of music are temporary, and always on male terms.

The literature review will cover four main areas of relevance to my thesis, although I will be demonstrating that little of the work reviewed here makes a *direct* contribution to it; these areas are subcultures and punk; youth un(der) employment and the socio-political context of 1976-84; musical 'scenes' and locality; and histories of women musicians .

### **(i) Subcultures and Punk: Issues of Gender and Writing Styles**

This section will start with an exploration of attitudes expressed by writers in various relevant fields who explore youth subcultures, deviance and moral panics- the rules and actions of young people that differentiate them from their elders, and the attempts by their elders to define, control and assimilate these differences, generation upon generation. It will be noted by the reader that these studies focus almost completely on the activities of young men, probably because the writers are young men themselves.

Where lone voices such as Angela McRobbie's appear in the discourse, they therefore have a significance, which as Cohen's statement in my introduction shows, was effectively ignored until much later on. McRobbie made an observation that now seems obvious, but at the time was quite unique:

Although few radical (male) sociologists would deny the importance of the personal in precipitating social and political awareness, to admit how their own experience has influenced their choice of subject matter (the politics of selection) seems more or less taboo... The point is that this absence of self (this is quite different from the authorial "I" or "we") and the invalidating of personal experience in the name of the more objective social sciences goes hand in hand with the silencing of other

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<sup>1</sup> the word musician is used here to include vocalists although the main focus of this thesis is female instrumentalists

<sup>2</sup> see Thomson, Liz, *New Women in Rock*, Omnibus, London, 1982, for example.

areas, which are for feminists of the greatest importance.<sup>3</sup>

The texts below are relevant for two reasons, in spite of the fact that they speak so little of women; firstly, the aspects of 'being apart from society' that they describe apply as much to the women that I have interviewed as they do to the young men that form their focus. Secondly, by giving the reader an impression of the volume and variety of these texts (needless to say it is impossible to review each and every one of them) the monstrous 'silencing of other areas' as described by McRobbie will, I hope, become more apparent.

It has also been interesting to observe the gradual infiltration of her observations on partiality into studies of young people, to the extent where some later writers, notably Neil Nehring<sup>4</sup> and David Rowe, acknowledge their gender bias at the beginning of their studies. For instance, Rowe states:

'Authors... as historically constituted human subjects, can hardly be exempt from the kind of explanatory framework they seek to impose on their research objects. The tension between writing and being history must be recognised rather than tranquillised.'<sup>5</sup>

Psychologist Valerie Walkerdine<sup>6</sup> takes this even further, incorporating biographical details and empirical observation alongside meticulous sociological research based on young girls' relationship to pop, into a refreshing, if challenging, style of analysis.

The specificity of women's writing on women in subcultures, women in employment, women in rock and indeed any of the texts referred to in this review, is inevitable, since all previous historical studies (pre-1980s) have not only referred to men, but also to a male environment in which women were a mere side issue, at most facilitators, occasionally agitators, at least a hindrance to male advancement. Rosalind Miles reminds us that, even in the developed Western world:

'Traditionalist arguments of masculine supremacy have been remarkably resilient over time- all democratic experiments, all revolutions, all demands for equality have so far stopped short of sexual equality- and women, seen as biologically determined, continue to be denied the human right of full self-determination.'<sup>7</sup>

Womens' writing therefore has to provide a sort of 'potted context' for itself

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<sup>3</sup> McRobbie, Angela, *Settling Accounts with Subcultures: a Feminist Critique*, in *On Record*, Eds Frith, Simon and Goodwin, Andrew, Routledge, London and New York, orig. printed 1990, reprinted 1998, p 68.

<sup>4</sup> Nehring, Neil, *Popular Music, Gender and Postmodernism*, Sage, California, 1997. Nehring's work explores in depth the gender tensions implicit in rock music, its criticism, and the greater philosophies that are used to interrogate the links between musical creativity, the emotions and political change.

<sup>5</sup> Rowe, David, *Popular Cultures: Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 1995, p 2

<sup>6</sup> Walkerdine, Valerie, *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 1997

<sup>7</sup> Miles, Rosalind, *The Woman's History of the World*, Paladin, London 1990, preface p 14

whatever its focus, given the fact that the hegemonic historical context is male. The excitement surrounding the ideas of Postmodernism, for male writers, must have provided a welcome diversion from feminism during the 1980s and 1990s; however, for some female writers it tempered one of the acknowledged drawbacks of the feminist movement in the 1970s, as Barbara Bradby remarks: 'Postmodernist theorising has certainly sharpened awareness of the need to... avoid 'speaking for' other groups of women, and to be aware that one's analysis is only ever partial'<sup>8</sup> Bradby thus not only furthers McRobbie's remark about male writers, but also reminds us that any analysis must always acknowledge the drawbacks of personal bias; this being established, the literature review follows.

## (ii) Interest in the Power of the Adolescent Male

The first major post-war study of teenagers and their habits was 'The Teenage Consumer', written by Mark Abrams in 1959.<sup>9</sup> This heralded the concept of the teenager as a separate entity from their parents, with their own income, making decisions about what they spent this income on during their leisure time. Since then, studies on young peoples' leisure activities have generally swung between market-research orientated Cultural Studies (e.g. Abrams, through Lewis, to Thornton) and left-leaning Sociology (e.g. Becker through to Walkerdine), and conclusions have been made about what young people think, and their social groupings, according to the agendas of those who are making the study. There have also inevitably been changes in what society accepts as normal behaviour. For instance, later it was suggested by Abrams et al<sup>10</sup> when analysing data collected in 1981, that the word 'deviant' should now be applied to those who had traditional values; the word now applied to the *opposite* attitude to Becker's original study of jazz musicians, 'Outsiders', in 1963:

'The 'conformists' (those holding anti-traditional values) were more prone than the deviant, traditionalist minority of younger people to question authority; to approve of cheating and lying when these served their own self-interest; to denigrate respect for parents; to disavow any pride in being British; to regard the maintenance of public order as of little consequence; to refuse to accept the idea that there is a clear-cut difference between what is good and what is evil, and to have very little contact with organised religion...'

This is quoted for two reasons: partly to show how 'rock'n'roll' attitudes have now become hegemonic, and partly to reiterate the subjectivity and transience of studies like mine, and to remind the reader that many of the theories explored in this literature

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<sup>8</sup> Bradby, Barbara, *Sampling Sexuality: Gender, Technology and the Body in Dance Music*, in *Popular Music*, 1993, Vol. 12/2 Cambridge University Press. The implications of the embracing of postmodernism as an academic theory will be explored in later chapters.

<sup>9</sup> Abrams, Mark, *The Teenage Consumer*, The London Press Exchange Ltd, London, 1959. I returned my copy of this to the library, thinking that the section on young women was missing, and had accidentally been torn off the laser copy that I'd been given. It was only later that I realised that there had not been a section on young women in the first place.

<sup>10</sup> Abrams, Mark, Gerard, David, and Timms, Noel (Eds), *Values and Social Change in Britain*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 44



review have been written in different socio-political environments, sometimes with hindsight gained from previous studies of subcultures. Becker (jazz), Cohen (Mods) and Willis (Bikers and Hippies), were observing phenomena in new ways in their own contexts, and although they are criticised here for aspects of their research, it has to be acknowledged that had their respective studies not existed, several histories of marginalised groups would not have been recorded and analysed, and their lives and lifestyles may well have disappeared in the metanarrative of 20th century war/peace/industry/high culture. Here I will explore different definitions of what specific subcultures are, and more importantly, different understandings of 'the purpose' (or lack thereof) of a subculture. For instance, to Stan Cohen, Hebdige<sup>11</sup> and later Thornton<sup>12</sup> the purpose of participants in a subculture appears to be to draw attention to themselves and their activities; Howard Becker's earlier study of 1963, however, implies greater passivity, and perhaps even fatalism, in those involved in subcultural activity. In Becker's analysis, subcultures are formed when groups of potentially lone deviants find each other and redefine themselves according to what they have in common- this is as likely to be an inability to relate to the hegemonic culture as a desire to disrupt it:

'Many people have suggested that culture arises essentially in response to a problem faced in common by a group of people, insofar as they are able to interact and communicate with each other effectively. People who engage in activities regarded as deviant typically have the problem that their view of what they do is not shared by other members of the society.... Where people who engage in deviant activities have the opportunity to interact with one another they are likely to develop a culture built around the problems rising out of the differences between their definition of what they do and the definition held by other members of the society. They develop perspectives on themselves and their deviant activities and on their relations with other members of the society.'<sup>13</sup>

Becker's study was, of course, made in the U.S., but it is interesting to note that at the time of Cohen's work on the Mods in the 1960s, the British tabloid press were beginning to feel the effects of television news on their circulation, and sensationalist headlines were seen to be an antidote to this problem. It is likely that this factor, twinned with the social visibility of the Mods (like their predecessors the Teddy Boys they were readily identifiable by uniform, albeit different, garb), that led to the 'moral panic' that Cohen describes.<sup>14</sup> However, it is Becker's understanding of a deviant subculture that is applicable to the phenomenon that I am studying- the simultaneous desire by certain young women all over Britain to assume their right to participate in activities in a way normally associated with a world of maleness. With no precedent to follow, the rules of both fashion and music were bent and broken in order to defy classification. There was not a master plan: as Paul Willis says,

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<sup>11</sup> Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London, 1979

<sup>12</sup> Thornton, Sarah, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Polity, Cambridge, 1995

<sup>13</sup> Becker, Howard, *Outsiders: studies in the sociology of deviance*, The Free Press, New York, 1963, p 81

<sup>14</sup> The difference between the 'last resort' nature of the punk subculture as a result of feelings of rejection, and this manipulation of subcultural styles to draw attention to oneself and capitalise on this will be clarified later.

‘Cultural expressions are even likely to be displaced, distorted or condensed reflections of barely understood, or ‘misunderstood’, knots of feeling, contradiction and frustration- as well as forms of action on these things... we learn from the culture, not from its explicit consciousness’.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, in this study I can only hint at ‘explicit consciousness’. To summarise: there are two different definitions of what subcultures are- roughly they divide into studies of social deviance, and studies of style statements (leading to media interest and possible moneymaking opportunities).<sup>16</sup>

The unemployment that straddled gender divides also dissolved boundaries between classes. The luxury of rejecting work became a more risky enterprise. One of the most influential studies of post-war youth was made by members of the Birmingham CCCS and published as 'Resistance Through Rituals' in 1975<sup>17</sup>. Included in their discourse on subcultures, Hall, Jefferson et al had discussed the lack of faith working-class youth had in what they perceived to be the 'thinly-disguised middle-class elitism'<sup>18</sup> in ideas of cultural revolution; the luxury of the middle classes taking this attitude was dependent on the security of access to paid work and spending power for the working class youth. The lack of this in the late 1970s had a profound influence on the DIY culture of punk, and also to attitudes to gender differences within the subculture.

### **(iii) Recuperation and Commodification: the Transformation of the Subculture into Separate Product and Activity**

Hebdige's study had been an original attempt to examine subcultures through semiotics and literary theory. Although there are many interesting observations in his work, there are major problems with his approach: the most glaring omission must be noted here, and will be returned to; women and girls are hardly mentioned or acknowledged at all throughout. There is also a problem with his interpretation of *motivation* through surface appearances. It is very much an outsider's study, and indeed he is wont to sound positively paternal in places (p139 'After all, we, the sociologists and interested straights, threaten to kill with kindness the forms which we seek to elucidate'). Throughout the work, he shows a need to project his ideas on to the three main subcultures he has chosen-Teds, Mods and Punks- and, as a projectionist, becomes an auteur, seeking to display his grasp of semiotics without the grounding of primary evidence that would put his study into a historical context. These shortcomings are all the

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<sup>15</sup> Willis, Paul E, *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 5

<sup>16</sup> It would be easy to dismiss girls' involvement in punk rock as the latter. In the summer of 2000 a journalist on 'The Independent' newspaper made contact with the author having read one of the appeals for interview participants in his local paper. The resulting article led to a flurry of interest and 'Where Are They Now' -type articles in several newspapers, including the 'News of the World', who wrote a small piece in their 'Bizarre' column as well as constructing an article several weeks later from other reports. Almost all of the interest (which included three calls from documentary makers) centred on what girl punks wore, rather than what they did. Undoubtedly, punk *could* be about style statements: but to the ex-punk women I interview later, it was an active philosophy and way of life. The later analysis of my findings will bear this out.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, Stuart and Jefferson, Tony, (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals*, Hutchinson, London, 1975

<sup>18</sup> Irwin Silber quoted by Hall and Jefferson et al, op cit p 68

more disappointing (especially the first), because of his skill in acknowledging the purpose of subcultures in relation to society, and the function of the media in mythologising them through their:

'...continual process of recuperation... (in which)...the fractured order is repaired and the subculture incorporated as a diverting spectacle within the dominant mythology from which it in part emanates: as 'folk devil', as Other, as Enemy. The process of recuperation takes two characteristic forms:

1. the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form)
2. the 'labelling' and redefinition of deviant behaviour by dominant groups- the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the ideological form).<sup>19</sup>

Sarah Thornton takes Hebdige's ideas further when she describes 'The Media Development of Subcultures' thus:

'Youth resent approving mass mediation of their culture but relish the attention conferred by media condemnation. How else might one turn difference into defiance, lifestyle into social upheaval, leisure into revolt? 'Moral panics' can now with retrospect, all be seen as a culmination and fulfilment of youth cultural agendas in so far as negative newspaper and broadcast news coverage baptise transgression'<sup>20</sup>

To Thornton, the 'labelling' described by Hebdige provides a handy trademark for the attention-seeking youth generation- perhaps to take control of the 'subcultural signs' described by Hebdige, and capitalise on them: this is indeed what has happened in the Dance culture described in her book, and falls very much within the category of the 'commodity form'. This impression of superficiality can be contrasted with what Paul Willis (the 'ideological form') said about the hippies:

'the sense of community was the sense of others being engaged in a similar experiment, enjoying similar insights, sharing common, though often unexpressed, views on the nature of interaction. Only with people who shared the same symbolic atmosphere could there be meaningful interaction. Only with the *sharing* of assumptions could those assumptions be exquisitely shaped and presented as style.'<sup>21</sup>

This implies that the *meaning* of the word subculture has changed over time, just as much as the *meaning* of the word deviance: perhaps in the almost twenty year gap between these two studies, a 'knowing', self-conscious (therefore postmodern) participation in subcultural activity has developed- the young person has a relationship to the subculture, rather than 'being' it; the idea of subcultures being worked up from the street has increasingly been sidelined in favour of a bias towards *lifestyle*.<sup>22</sup> While creating a subcultural community has always relied on a visible sense of difference from the

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid* Hebdige, 1979, p 94

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* Thornton, p 129

<sup>21</sup> Willis, Paul E., *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 113

<sup>22</sup> see Muggleton, David, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2000, for a full exploration of this concept.

mainstream, cultural commentators now expect new subcultures to form regularly, and are ready with their definitions and analyses, which feed straight back into the subcultures themselves. It is now understood that youth subcultures constantly shift in focus and degree of involvement, and that it is almost impossible to create an accurate snapshot of what happens in the world of the subculture. Hebdige regards that subcultures develop as a result of:

‘The twin concepts of conjuncture and specificity (each subculture representing a distinctive ‘moment’- a particular response to a particular set of circumstances) <sup>23</sup>

and understands that ‘..different youths bring different degrees of commitment to a subculture’<sup>24</sup>. But still, he writes about subcultures as though they are created from the outside- of course they will ‘catch on’ and ‘encapsulate a mood, a moment’! They spring from the mood and moment, and catch on because that is the mood at the moment. This point is constantly being worried over in writing about rock music too: Frith asks ‘What is the relationship between rock as a style and rock as an activity?’<sup>25</sup> He reiterates Hebdige’s observation as he continues: ‘For every youth ‘stylist’ committed to a cult as a full-time creative task, there are hundreds of working-class kids who grow up in loose membership of several groups and run with a variety of gangs’.<sup>26</sup> A remark by Keith and Pile on the fleeting nature of identity explains the near impossibility of defining what *really* constitutes a subculture:

‘...identity is always an incomplete process. At times, in order to make sense of a particular moment or a particular place (synchronic analysis), this process is stopped to reveal an identity that is akin to a freeze-frame photograph of a race-horse at full gallop. It may be a ‘true’ representation of a moment but, by the very act of freezing, it denies the presence of movement... synchronic analysis is necessarily a process of sometimes justifiable misrepresentation. That is why identity is always incomplete, always subsumes a lack, perhaps is more readily understood as a process rather than an outcome’.<sup>27</sup>

Although pop and rock music are regarded as a major indicator of subcultural identity, they are not generally an indicator of class background in Britain.<sup>28</sup>. The study by George H Lewis of music tastes in the USA defines clear gender and class differences in music preferences from the consumption point of view with the categorisation of listeners/consumers according to their musical taste, with reference to their demographic, aesthetic or political background, comparing the focus of sociologists with that of marketing experts. He sees beneath the consumer-based categorisation of music preferences a ‘coded battle for validity’:

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid* Hebdige, 1979 (used with reference to the Teds and Mods), p 84

<sup>24</sup> *ibid* Hebdige, 1979, p 122

<sup>25</sup> *ibid* Frith, 1981, p 219

<sup>26</sup> *ibid* Frith, 1981, p 220

<sup>27</sup> Keith, Michael, and Pile, Steve (eds) *Place and the Politics of Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 28

<sup>28</sup> for instance, the original mods were young middle class Jewish men from North London, in contrast to the stereotype of the East-end working class lad.

'The politics of music takes on new meaning when one can interpret clashes in the political arena or the commercial marketplace to represent conflicts among various cultural groups over legitimacy of their musical tastes, values and moralities. Musical artefacts symbolise the group that identifies with them and its style of life. Hostility towards musical symbols, then, can be interpreted as hostility towards those whom these symbols represent'.<sup>29</sup> ,

But these rules (whether or not they apply to British consumers) do not appear to apply to production; as Ruth Finnegan in her study of music-making in Milton Keynes discovered, music *production* involved young people from all backgrounds (although the subjects of her study are '... almost always male....'), 'The players' ages, educational backgrounds and occupations were more varied than most of the generalisations about modern rock music and youth culture might suggest.'<sup>30</sup> Even in London, acknowledged as the epicentre of punk, the audience for punk gigs was not, as media reports would have it, exclusively made up of young men with mohawks and safety pins through their faces; the film *The Filth and the Fury*<sup>31</sup> shows that this was not the case; and for every report such as Charles Shaar Murray's of a young girl piercing her cheek at a Sex Pistols gig in Sweden<sup>32</sup> , there is photographic evidence that punk gigs belonged to a variously-dressed audience from different ethnic, cultural and demographic backgrounds . The London punk scene is fairly well documented, (later, where appropriate I will use material from the diaries and memoirs of its protagonists, such as Johnny Rotten,<sup>33</sup> Nils Stevenson, who managed the band Siouxsie and the Banshees,<sup>34</sup> Chris Sullivan, a Welsh punk who later opened night-clubs in London<sup>35</sup> , journalist Caroline Coon<sup>36</sup> , and George Gimarc<sup>37</sup> ) and most of these people acknowledge that at the beginning, members of the punk subculture were autonomous in their attitudes and dress. Thus we have to acknowledge a subcultural 'grey area' that applies to every subculture, even the most intense and visually and musically recognisable, that is especially noticeable at related musical events, because of the part-time nature of some participants.

The recuperation process undertaken by the media and business exploitation of new ideas generated from 'the street', will be discussed next; it usually provides a bridge between the creators of subcultural icons and those who wish to identify with the feelings articulated by these icons but who do not have the wherewithal to articulate these feelings themselves. This bridge is not confined to the working classes; Frith acknowledges the fact that: "Part of the middle-class use of music ... is as a way into working-class

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, George, *Who Do You Love? The Dimensions of Musical Taste*, in Lull, James, (ed), *Popular Music and Communication*, 1992, p 134

<sup>30</sup> Finnegan, Ruth, *The Hidden Musician: music making in an English town*, CUP, Cambridge, 1989, p 109.

<sup>31</sup> Temple, Julien (dir), *The Filth and the Fury: a Sex Pistols Film*, dir. Julien Temple, Filmfour, 1999

<sup>32</sup> Shaar Murray, Charles, *Shots from the Hip*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p 212

<sup>33</sup> Lydon, John, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, Coronet, London, Picador, 1995

<sup>34</sup> Stevenson, Nils and Stevenson, Ray, *Vacant: a diary of the punk years 1976-79*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1999

<sup>35</sup> Colegrave, Stephen and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell and Co, , London, 2001

<sup>36</sup> Coon, Caroline, *1988: The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion*, Omnibus, London, New York, Sydney, Cologne, 1982

<sup>37</sup> Gimarc, George, *Punk Diary: 1970-1979*, St Martin's Press, London, 1994

adolescence; rock offers the fantasy of a community of risk...'<sup>38</sup> However, the articulation of common feelings is a concept very much in keeping with that attributed to folk music; what was originally expected of rock musicians was very similar to what was expected of folk musicians, but according to Frith: 'Folk performers *represented* the people, both instructing and learning from them. Popular interests were thus *mediated* through folk performers, who were expected to operate anonymously, impersonally, as a sort of musical instrument- played *by* their audiences.'<sup>39</sup> For Frith, the difference between folk and rock is the personalising of issues in rock lyrics; he defines authenticity as 'truth to self rather than truth to a movement or an audience'. Therefore in this respect, punk music is more characteristic of folk than rock.

#### **(iv) Authenticity, Aesthetics and the Street- the Implications of Recuperation; Music as a Subcultural Tool ; Customers and Punk**

By far the most challenging debate for rock critics and fans alike is this question of musical authenticity<sup>40</sup> , and this will have great relevance to the analysis of punk and its attitudes later in this study; it is very rare for authenticity to be ascribed to a female rock artist, and this is probably because, as Angela McRobbie points out, male subculture writers see *themselves* as escaping from families and the 'trap' of romance- thus over-romanticising the male resistance and escape element of the subcultures they study.<sup>41</sup> Female musicians such as Joni Mitchell and Joan Armatrading were regarded as the female equivalent to male rock artists, using their lyrics to express personal desires that would liberate them from the humdrum<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the inherent sexism in all of these studies is not surprising; as Dick Bradley points out, '...the standard notion of 'the teenager' is usually of a boy, not a girl, and that the 'threat' of sex is a threat of boys against girls, as seen by parents, teachers etc.' He acknowledges that this is never mentioned in rock histories<sup>43</sup> *Pop* belongs to girls and gay men; it is passively consumed, in spite of McRobbie's own recuperation of the word

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid* Frith, 1981, p 217

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* Frith, 1981, pp 31/32

<sup>40</sup> Ross (in Ross, Malcolm, *The Arts and Personal Growth* (Ed), Pergamon, London, 1980, discusses the point in their development at which the young person tries to control the world by manufacturing interpretative objects:

'By using the stratagem of the holding form it may be possible to keep the affective element alive at the moment that it is most threatened. To become conscious of art is to become conscious - self-conscious- about feeling. Older children are tempted either to run from the expression of feeling altogether (and for ever) as childish (and therefore contemptible, or to reach for the well tried feeling formulae of the adult world. In either event their work loses authenticity- they fake it and soon become convinced that faking it is what it's all about, which means it's a waste of time' pp 106/7

<sup>41</sup> McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Second Edition, 2000 (first published 1991), Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, p 29

<sup>42</sup> Chambers discusses Christgau, 1973, on Joni Mitchell's self-absorbed lyrics, noting that they are an 'act of defiance' in a woman. See Chambers, Iain, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 121

<sup>43</sup> Bradley, Dick, *Understanding Rock'n'roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, OUP, Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1992, p 11; since McRobbie's precedent, however, many male writers do acknowledge this fact.

'teenybopper'. Rock is lived by its male (or honorary male) audience, to the exclusion of girls and women. Within these parameters, the authenticity debate centres on the contrasts between songwriting as a craft (for instance, the Tin Pan Alley manufacture of popular songs for all occasions) and songwriting as self-expression, in other words, art (and, implied, expressive of adolescent male dissatisfaction with their lot).

Running alongside this debate is another consideration- that of songwriting as politics. Roughly speaking, pop as we know and define it today, fits into the 'craft' category. Rock music aims to fit into the 'art' category. Folk music should fit into the 'politics' category, but in actual fact politics, and in particular, gender politics, is a major hidden factor in all forms of music.<sup>44</sup> The self-expression of rock must articulate the emotions of its (male) audience, with a strong feeling for the zeitgeist. Lawrence Grossberg identified the necessity of rock culture to the 'meaning of life' for young (male) people in the USA :

'... rock's authenticity was defined not by any claim to historical origins or ideological purity but by the very conditions which enabled its particular forms of aural, visual and behavioural excess. It was defined by rock's ability to articulate the historical condition to the experience of postwar youth. Only by making youth belong somewhere could it speak to both the identity and the difference of its audience. Because it mattered, rock constituted a generational identity and empowered that generation to define its own ways of articulating meaning into its mattering maps. A differentiating machine is deployed in the service of rock's territorializing work'.<sup>45</sup>

Grossberg's description of generational identity and empowerment define the nature of the politics of rock music. As Jacques Attali has remarked, all music reflects the rules of society; so when the rules of society are redefined, new music is created as part of that redefinition; if music is created in an oppositional environment, its aesthetic rules will run counter to those of the mainstream: 'Its order simulates the social order, and its dissonances express marginalities. *The code of music simulates the accepted rules of society*'.<sup>46</sup> Thus rock breaks the aesthetic rules of mainstream music, to the extent that as Foucault says: 'Rock offers the possibility of a relation which is intense, strong, alive, 'dramatic' (in that rock presents itself as a spectacle, that listening to it is an event and that it produces itself on stage), with a music that is itself impoverished, but through which the listener affirms himself; and with the other music, one has a frail, faraway, hothouse, problematical relation with an erudite music from which the cultivated public feels excluded'.<sup>47</sup> Here we see debate in which the hegemonic music is assumed to be conformist (i.e. classical) and the oppositional music, nonconformist (i.e. rock) that runs parallel to the findings of Abrams et al (see this work, p 12). But rock has arguably become the most popular as well as conservative force in Western society, particularly, but

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<sup>44</sup> Feminist writers discuss this in depth, and these discussions will be examined later.

<sup>45</sup> Grossberg, Lawrence, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992, p 206

<sup>46</sup> Attali, Jacques, *Noise: the political economy of music*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis/London, 1985, p 29

<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, quoted in Kritzman, Lawrence D., *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1894*, Routledge, New York and London, 1988, p 316

not exclusively, in terms of gender politics. As the later chapters will show, there is enormous resistance to change in the consolidated world of authentic male rock anger.

The foremost voice in the 'authenticity debate' in Britain is that of Simon Frith, because he is a rock fan who progressed to journalism, and from there to academic research. He therefore can claim a sort of 'rock writer authenticity' for himself, and hence becomes a gatekeeper of rock history, analysis and sociology in exactly the same way that a record business representative, say an A&R man, is a gatekeeper for the band or artist themselves (in spite of the fact that later he appeared to attempt to co-opt a little bit of gender-cred by working with Angela McRobbie<sup>48</sup>) Frith articulates the concept of rock (as opposed to pop) as a genuine art form in *Sound Effects*:

'Rock, in contrast to pop, carries intimations of sincerity, authenticity, art-non commercial concerns. These intimations have become muffled since rock became the record industry, but it is the possibilities, the promises, that matter... Rather than deducing the meaning of rock from the processes of its production and consumption, we have to try to make sense of rock's production and consumption on the basis of what is at stake in these processes- the meanings that are produced and consumed.'<sup>49</sup>

He continues: 'The implication of this argument is that rock operates as counterculture only at moments. There are creative breakthroughs, when the music does express the needs of real communities, but it never takes the industry long to corrupt the results'. Industrialisation has had a constantly rocky relationship with art, music and the written word: Theodore Adorno pre-mourned the effect of the industrialisation of music production on the audience: 'In the sphere of luxury production, to which popular music belongs and in which no necessities of life are immediately involved... Pseudo-individualisation... keeps them in line by making them forget what they listen to is already listened to for them, or "pre-digested".'<sup>50</sup> In other words, once music becomes a commodity by becoming a desirable vinyl object, Adorno believes that the fetishisation of the commodity itself becomes more important than its content. He also discusses the 'handicraft' nature of early recordings, predicting the transformation of listeners from audience to consumer. Adorno's despair can be applied in many different contexts: the reality for artists is that the element of communication in their artefact, whether visual, conceptual or sonic, communicates marketability to those willing and able to exploit it.

Howard Becker gives a wide-ranging account of the predicaments and resolutions of artistic practice and its dissemination in 'Art Worlds'; although he discusses mainly the visual arts, several of his observations apply to the professional choices made by the previously amateur musicians in my study,<sup>51</sup> and the aesthetic judgement of their work. Punk music and its production and consumption can be thought of as a lived debate about

<sup>48</sup> from *Rock and Sexuality*, with Angela McRobbie, in McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991 and 2000, pp 137-158

<sup>49</sup> Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects*, Pantheon, New York, 1981, p 11

<sup>50</sup> Adorno, Theodor, *On Popular Music*, (1940), in Frith, Simon and Goodwin, Andrew, (eds), *On Record*, Routledge, London, 1990

<sup>51</sup> Becker, Howard S, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1982, pp 131-164



the dilemmas that Adorno analyses, because there is general agreement that a pivotal point in a pop or rock musician's attitude occurs on signing a recording contract. For instance, Iain Chambers also implicates recording itself as the factor that commodifies the experience of the originating community in the creation of new forms in Black music in the USA (in the 1950s):

'The resulting music was an expression held together and concretised in the shared cultural and social context of audience and performer... In other words this music is worked up in a living social and cultural context that may later be 'captured' on record.'<sup>52</sup>

The word 'captured' is well-chosen, for the mysterious element that guarantees authenticity must be present in the recording in order for it to break commercially; ironically, it is this 'capture' of the essence of the music's 'worked-upness' that may eventually divorce the music from its original context, leaving behind a dry and indigestible idealism for the original fans to choke upon. Sheila Whiteley clarifies the importance of aesthetics ('art') in communicating authenticity in progressive rock, and the fate that befell the countercultural element of the music:

'...the emphasis on *meaning* in music which was not simply tied to the lyrics, but spilled over into the sound itself... it seems that there were correspondences between musical practices and social relationships and the way these were lived out at the level of cultural symbols. Progressive rock, like all music, relied on communication and positive identification. As such, it had an intrinsically collective character which suggested that it was capable of transmitting the affective identities, attitudes and behavioural patterns of the group(s) identifying with it.'<sup>53</sup>

Sheila Whiteley explores the results of the eventual disconnection from the counterculture of the band Pink Floyd:

'Political and social confrontation had become fragmented; subjective experience had degenerated into *play power*, which had little purchase other than an irreverent and often irrelevant questioning of authority, materialism and capitalism'<sup>54</sup> .

Progressive rock therefore developed into an alternative form of entertainment rather than an oppositional 'weapon'. This breaking down of a subculture-based music happens all too frequently: Dave Laing discusses the detachment of the innovative and marketable ideas from the subcultural whole of Punk, leaving behind the politics and shifts in behaviour, commercialising these ideas and selling them not only to the public at large, but also to the originators, in their more polished form. It is Dave Laing who explores the internal struggle of the punk movement, whose 'open membership' embraced diverse individual ethics:

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<sup>52</sup> Chambers, Iain, *A Strategy for Living: Black Music and White Subcultures*, in op cit Hall and Jefferson (eds), 1975, p 164

<sup>53</sup> Whiteley, Sheila, *The Space Between the Notes*, Routledge, London, 1992, p 2

<sup>54</sup> *ibid* Whiteley, 1992, p 118

'...it is important to distinguish the tendency towards independence in punk rock from that towards separation from the mainstream. The distinction is that while 'independence' (expressed mainly in the production and distribution of records) may be concerned to reach the same people as are reached by the musical mainstream, but by a different route, 'separation' is concerned with consolidating a special community of punks, to whom punk rock will have special meanings'<sup>55</sup>

The implication of this is that however much political change is intended or desired by rock bands and their followers at the moment of creation, eventually the different intentions of those involved, combined with external interest and exploitation, will divert the energies of those people into diverse goals at odds with their original intentions.<sup>56</sup> To return to Laing's statement, the process of alienation from the safe, local environment is part of the rock band experience. The relevance to my study here is that this factor worked to the disadvantage on many of the women I have interviewed. This is what Sara Cohen found in her study of a male band in the music scene in Liverpool in the 1980s:

'Each move away from the band's original locality marked another rung on the ladder: from music making within a close circle of friends and relatives; to performing in front of strangers outside the locality: to London, the record industry, and contact, through the media, with a nation-wide audience... Each stage or rung might also involve a change in attitude of bands' members towards music and music-making, representing a gradual transition from music performed largely for self-indulgence in a live, social context, to music and band as commodities to be bartered over and sold to a mass audience'.<sup>57</sup>

Later, the implications of Cohen's observations will be applied to the women that I interviewed; accusations of 'selling out' are something many rock bands have to deal with; for girls in mixed bands or all-women bands, there was/is potentially the additional responsibility of being regarded as a pioneering female role model in a small locality, and carrying the expectations of those who have invested time and energy into your career with you as your career progresses. Condemnation by fans for 'selling out' could be an embarrassment, especially in a climate of anti-establishment feeling. This was hotly debated by punk fans, for whom Malcolm McLaren's anti-major label stance was part of a general 'package' of dissent and opposition.

Frith blames the dependence on technology that urban music forms have, for punk's break with the 'folk' ethos in music: music making the break from 'local' to diasporic needs a cash input which frequently results in loss of contextual relevance:

"...punk musicians made the same communal claims for themselves in the 1970s that hippie musicians had made in the 1960s; the problems arise when such 'authentic' musicians achieve commercial success and are charged with 'selling out'. The technology of rock has contradictory implications: amplification and recording, the basic means of rock expression, enable the businessman to take control. As local live

<sup>55</sup> Laing, Dave, *One Chord Wonders*, OUP, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1985, p 37

<sup>56</sup> and the implications of this for female instrumentalists are therefore severe.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen, Sara, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: popular music in the making*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, p 132

performers, musicians remain a part of their community, subject to its values and needs, but as recording artists, they experience the pressures of the market... The recording musician's 'community', in short, is defined by purchasing patterns.<sup>58</sup>

It must also be noted that the effects of the the recuperation of psychedelic music perhaps had been observed by Malcolm McLaren, for according to Sadie Plant,

'... there is also a sense in which McLaren's tactics can be read as a rather more astute response. Aware that punk would be in any case recuperated, his own anticipation of its commodification did at least ensure that punk had some control over its own recuperation. By the time the dissatisfaction it expressed had grown into a marketable force, it had already been marketed. And if punk did recuperate anything, it was not situationist theory, but the possibility of effective dissent, a danger which, as 'The End of Music' points out, punk shares with the spectacle of revolution presented in reggae and any other rebel music.'

Plant remarks that although entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson and Manchester's Tony Wilson<sup>59</sup> made relatively large amounts of money by exploiting punk music,

'... punk's do-it-yourself ethic also produced a host of self-published fanzines and autonomous organisations, and the observation that fortunes were made cannot belittle the sincerity, anger, and achievements of those involved in punk and its later manifestations'.<sup>60</sup>

A punk musician's autonomy depended on disrupting several factors that were controlled by major record companies; one of these was the record distribution system. As Paul Taylor remarks:

'Malcolm McLaren knows that the distribution of art in the post-Pop era is the secret to greatness, just as the town-planners who redesigned London's Oxford Street after the Gordon Riots knew that power lay in a web of invisible control over the masses'<sup>61</sup>

Inevitably, characteristic of its stance as a self-defining subculture, punk inspires defiance in some writers, notably Stuart Home<sup>62</sup> who articulates a marked distaste for anyone (except himself) who tries to write about punk. Home finds Laing tolerable as a commentator, and Greil Marcus, (who became terribly excited by British Punk and tried to

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<sup>58</sup> op cit Frith, 1981, p 51

<sup>59</sup> Although Richard Branson was running Virgin Records at this time, his activities predated the proliferation of small label exploitation of punk music, and instead he became involved with the Sex Pistols when Virgin had already become a successful record company.

<sup>60</sup> Plant, Sadie, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in the Postmodern Age*. Routledge, London and New York, 1992, p 74

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, Paul (Ed), *Impresario: Malcolm McLaren and the British New Wave*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass and London, 1988, p 30. The move to independence of record distribution was spearheaded by Geoff Travis at Rough Trade Records in London, who identified similar small labels all over Britain and joined them in an alliance to form the 'Cartel' of independent record distributors.

<sup>62</sup> Home, Stuart, *Cranked Up Really High: genre theory and punk rock*, CodeX, Hove, 1995

contextualise it in his book *Lipstick Traces*<sup>63</sup> ) completely intolerable. Penny Rimbaud, of the long-established Crass Collective, although himself critical of Stuart Home, has expressed similar misgivings about the academic community's efforts to place punk within their discourse.<sup>64</sup> The moment begs analysis however; Burchill and Parsons were the first to attempt this<sup>65</sup> , albeit from a journalistic standpoint. Fred and Judy Vermorel published their memoirs the same year<sup>66</sup>. Mark Perry, publisher of influential punk fanzine 'Sniffin' Glue', has recently published a collection of issues combined with a commentary about how he felt and what he was doing at the time<sup>67</sup>. Academics themselves (ourselves?) form an odd, highfalutin' subculture that continually bites chunks out of social phenomena to chew over; it is inevitable that as we 'come of age' some of us revisit our youth and write about it in our own language. It is quite possible that many of the ideas and attitudes that are described in this study would be regarded as inauthentic by their very articulation, in spite of the fact that it would appear that authenticity is very much in the hands of those who are able to articulate it. However, for the purposes of this study, the account given by Laing<sup>68</sup> of the punk moment gives a balanced analytical view of the concerns and issues that arose at the time, and is referred to later during the conclusion of this work.

#### **(v) Recycling , Responses to Youth Un(der)employment, and Other Social Factors.**

Notwithstanding the rueful nature of the above comments by Frith, Whiteley et al, it must be noted here that there is two-way traffic in the capitalist exploitation of music and musicians. While old music styles (and often, consequently, lifestyles) are discarded by the record business in order to pave the way for new styles for new generations of young consumers, Paul Willis notes that:

'Commodities can be taken out of context, claimed in a particular way, developed and repossessed to express something deeply and thereby to change somewhat the very feelings which are their product. And this can happen under the very nose of the dominant class- and with their products... it is sometimes the dispossessed who are best placed to exploit the revolutionary double edge of unexplored things around us'.'<sup>69</sup>

Willis refers here (it says in a footnote) to black musicians using discarded white people's instruments to make music; his comment has much relevance to this study. Punk started and continued to exist with little or no capital investment by either the artists or external business; instruments were often borrowed, stolen at gigs from bands who were

<sup>63</sup> Marcus, Greil, *Lipstick Traces*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1990

<sup>64</sup> For instance, at the No Future? Conference at the University of Wolverhampton, September 2001 where he was a keynote speaker.

<sup>65</sup> Burchill, Julie, and Parsons, Tony, *The Boy Looked at Johnny: the Obituary of Rock'n'Roll*, Pluto Press, London, 1978

<sup>66</sup> Vermorel, Fred and Vermorel, Judy, *Sex Pistols: the inside story*, Omnibus, London, 1978

<sup>67</sup> Perry, Mark, *Sniffin' Glue: the essential Punk Accessory*, Sanctuary, London, 2000

<sup>68</sup> *ibid* Laing, 1985

<sup>69</sup> *Profane Culture*, Paul E Willis, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 6

perceived to have 'made it', or bought second-hand.<sup>70</sup> This recycling of obsolete objects did not stop at equipment: the clothing worn by most punks was also second-hand<sup>71</sup>, in spite of the tabloid interest in ready-made bondage gear from outlets like 'Seditionaries', 'Boy' and 'Acme Attractions', shops on London's King's Road. Most punks could not afford to pay what were, in effect, high-fashion prices to look anarchic (although some did, and the implications of different dress codes were heavily debated at the time but did not lead to exclusion from the scene).<sup>72</sup> It would be hard to discover exactly where the recycling aspect of punk came from- it was probably a combination of necessity, defiance, hippyish ideas (although most punks seemed to hate hippies) about anti-capitalism, and a sense of adventure. This inventiveness, partly the result of a lack of disposable income, was what made punk so different from other youth groupings labelled as subcultures. The sartorial styles favoured by the Teddy-boys and the Mods as 'identity trademarks' were acquired from specialist tailor shops; part of the statement was 'being in the know' about where these shops were, and about where to purchase the records, and how to appreciate the music. Sarah Thornton would describe such knowledge as 'subcultural capital', after Pierre Bourdieu's term 'cultural capital'.<sup>73</sup>

Peter York, who documented London punk sardonically and perceptively from its inception to its premature death-by-media, identified the retail outlet Rough Trade (which was based in Ladbroke Grove), as being an important exponent in the debate about commercialisation of the phenomenon:

'Rough Trade has the look of a head shop- which indeed it once was. The more *oppositional* sixties type, but a head shop nonetheless. You feel there could be discussions on elitism in the new wave and how the groups should relate to the record companies: the whole issue of *selling out*. . It is here you begin to think the *politics* could be for real.'<sup>74</sup>

York calls this 'Radical Displacement'.<sup>75</sup> Some commentators, perhaps optimistically, interpreted this resurgence in political debate about commercialism as part

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<sup>70</sup> This will be further explored in the primary research

<sup>71</sup> see McRobbie, Angela, (ed), *Second Hand Dresses and the Ragmarket*, in *Zoot Suits and Second-hand Dresses*, 1989, where McRobbie underlines the fact that selling was often a women's occupation.

<sup>72</sup> The fact that there was a wide variety of dress in the punk subculture is borne out not only in photographic records of the time, (see Anscombe, Isabelle, *Not Another Punk Book*, Aurum, London, 1978, and and Colegrave, Stephen, and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell, London, 2001, amongst others.), but also in the film *The Filth and the Fury*, one can observe a combination of bought (first and second-hand) and improvised/made clothing worn by male and female punks. About hippies' escapism, Johnny Rotten commented: 'It was an escapism that I resented... wear the garbage bag and then you'd be dealing with it... I would wrap myself in trash'. From *The Filth and The Fury: a Sex Pistols Film*, dir. Julien Temple, Filmfour, 1999

<sup>73</sup> see Thornton, op cit, 1995

<sup>74</sup> York, Peter, *Style Wars*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1980, p131, (orig. published in Harpers and Quccn, 1978, as 'Post-Punk Mortcm')

<sup>75</sup> Later in the analysis of my primary research I will describe some of the different types of localised scene that provided a performance environment for the subjects of my research.

of a 'last post-materialist thrust'<sup>76</sup> before Thatcher's materialist influence took effect:

The unexpected re-emergence of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the growth of the environmental movement and the more general adoption of conservationist goals may indeed point to an underlying shift in the focus of political values. The change is not dramatic or universal and whether one regards it as a move away from materialist, economic preoccupations towards post-materialist concerns, or as some broader change in values is open to debate.<sup>77</sup>

Others, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, defined this feeling as a symptom of the postmodern condition:

'Since we are beginning something completely new, we have to re-set the hands of the clock at zero.<sup>78</sup> The idea of modernity is closely bound up with this principle that it is possible and necessary to break with tradition and to begin a new way of living and thinking. Today we can presume that this 'breaking' is, rather, a matter of forgetting or repressing the past. That's to say of repeating it. Not overcoming it'<sup>79</sup>

Neil Nehring critiques Fredric Jameson's view that that postmodernism is the ideology of late capitalism and comments on the many discrepancies thrown up by theorists of postmodernity, concluding that their main weakness is the attribution of a complete lack of agency to 'the masses' and the choices they make<sup>80</sup>. There are other views on the ever-increasing commodification of rock:

'the point the mass culture critics miss is that rock isn't just a commodity- it is a leisure commodity. Leisure is the context of its use value, and to understand how leisure goods signify we have to refer them to meanings which have their own processes of construction and dispute: the cultural meaning of rock comes from a relationship between form and use'.<sup>81</sup>

What York, Phillips, Lyotard and Nehring are all acknowledging is that there were questions being thrown up in this period that were not being addressed either culturally or politically. The world-wide recession affected all aspects of life, whether through unemployment, the effects of strikes (in public services as well as industry), or even patterns of consumption- the world oil crisis in the late 1970s caused panic in the Record Industry, who saw their profits disappear as home taping began to emerge as a response to spiralling vinyl record costs. This was compounded further by the stimulation of small labels as a result of Malcolm McLaren's active philosophy. John Street succinctly remarks on the impact of the disruption caused by the activities of McLaren on the

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<sup>76</sup> Post-materialism- reference to phrase coined by Ronald Inglehart in 1976, in Abrams, Mark, Gerard, David and Timms, Noel, (eds), *Values and Social Change in Britain*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 169

<sup>77</sup> Phillips, David, *Participation and Political Values* in Abrams, Gerard and Timms, ibid, 1985, p 172

<sup>78</sup>(sic) Consider the 'World's End' clock above Westwood and McClaren's clothing shop, whose hands travelled anticlockwise, in the light of these observations

<sup>79</sup> Lyotard, Jean Francois, *Defining the Postmodern*, in *Postmodernism: ICA Documents*, Ed Lisa Appignanesi, Frc Association Books, London, 1989, p 8

<sup>80</sup> Nehring, Neil, *Popular Music, Gender and Postmodernism*, Sage, California, 1997

<sup>81</sup> op cit Frith, 1981, p 261

mainstream labels and artists:

'The proliferation of independent labels, inspired by the DIY ethos, disrupted the complacency of the majors who had got rich on glam-rock and superstardom. Less tangibly, punk exposed rock's rules. It poked fun at ideas of romantic love; it celebrated boredom and mocked the idea that being a teenager meant perpetual pleasure; it forced the pop business, its controllers and its motives, into the limelight.'<sup>82</sup>

Although Simon Frith seems to have regarded punk rock as a welcome return to something the (male) rock fan could believe in ('From the progressive point of view, the point of punk was its threat to established means of consumption. Traditionally, 'accessible' pop gave access only to a void, to social habits that made no sense of people's needs at all.'<sup>83</sup> . *Really* accessible music reaches the parts that other musics can't'<sup>84</sup> ), Street goes on to claim that there was no real political motivation behind the Punks: 'the point was to have a good time. This meant causing havoc, not reading Marx; it meant celebrating the moment, not the future; it meant mocking the established order, not working for a new one'.<sup>85</sup>

Paul Taylor, in contrast to John Street, believes that there *was* a socialist ethic, a sense of continuity, behind McLaren's activities, quotes him as saying :

'Punk rock couldn't be sold... It was too much to do with Do-It-Yourself. As soon as you get a Do-It-Yourself force out there, you spawn 5,000 other groups. The record industry never wanted 5,000 groups. They only want one group. One group is more manageable. It's one dictator telling you what the culture is all about rather than 5,000. They don't like the socialist idea that everyone can do it.'<sup>86</sup>

From my own empirical observation, in a sense both critics are correct. It has already been established that subcultures rarely consist of identikit members who all subscribe to the same ideology, wear identical clothing and are all seventeen years old. The small Brighton punk subculture was vociferously oppositional in nature: there was much discussion and argument about the meaning of our lives and what we were doing; this will be explored later.<sup>87</sup> Angela McRobbie, in the introduction to 'Feminism and Youth Culture', describes the empowering environment of a shared house in which she lived in the Birmingham, where students mixed with musicians, artists and writers who were all concerned with punk as a political force<sup>88</sup> Peter York articulates the resurgence of self-worth in London's young people thus:

<sup>82</sup> Street, John, *Rebel Rock*, Blackwell, London, 1986, p 176

<sup>83</sup> This point is arguable: surely pop fans need their 'fix' of music just as much as rock fans need theirs.

<sup>84</sup> Frith, Simon, *Music for Pleasure*, Polity, Cambridge, 1988, p 174

<sup>85</sup> op cit Street, 1986, p 176

<sup>86</sup> op cit Taylor, 1988, p 24

<sup>87</sup> in fact, the first person I went to interview in Brighton gave 'fun' as the only reason she joined a band! This was later contradicted by other musicians I spoke to, but the variety of views of people involved in punk can not be overestimated.

<sup>88</sup> see the introduction pp 1-8 to McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991 and 2000, for her personal memoir that includes the crossover between Kristeva-reading students from Birmingham University, and girls from working-class backgrounds in a shared house.

'What was 'new', in the stifling summer of 1976, was Rotten's moral authority... the extraordinary behaviour, the splendour of their small group of dedicated followers, and the collective depth of information that went into their creation'.<sup>89</sup>

There was indeed a feeling of duty within some of the punk communities; Frith and Horne's observations about the 'art school experience' not only give an insight into the way punk worked, but also, I believe, show how much the art-school ethos fed into punk: 'The art school experience is about commitment to a working practice, to a mode of learning which assumes the status of a lifestyle.'<sup>90</sup> Later, they quote the artist Richard Hamilton, who says: 'As more people become unemployed, the more of them that become artists the better...'<sup>91</sup> . As Hebdige concludes,

'... punks were not only directly *responding* to increasing joblessness, changing moral standards, the rediscovery of poverty, the Depression, etc., they were *dramatizing* what had come to be called 'Britain's decline' by constructing a language which was, in contrast to the prevailing rhetoric of the Rock Establishment, unmistakably relevant and down to earth... The punks appropriated the rhetoric of crisis which had filled the airwaves and the editorials throughout the period and translated it into tangible (and visible) terms'<sup>92</sup> .

#### **(vi) Retrospective 'Wisdom': Local Scenes are Replaced by Territories; Audiences Replaced by a World-wide Marketplace; Subcultures Replaced by the Global Village**

One of the purposes of a local case study is to establish whether the existence of local scenes facilitated the flow of young and inexperienced women into performing in rock bands. This has necessitated a familiarity with writing on scenes and 'territories', (Finnegan<sup>93</sup> , Cohen<sup>94</sup> , Straw 1991<sup>95</sup>Swiss, Sloop, Herman 1998<sup>96</sup> , Lesley C Gay Jnr<sup>97</sup> , Shank<sup>98</sup> ) some of which is recent and reflects globalization issues: however, I believe it is possible to 'work backwards' from these texts and thus identify characteristics of the moment to be studied that may not have been apparent at the time. Finnegan's study in

<sup>89</sup> Savage, Jon, *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*, in Taylor, Paul (Ed), *Impresario: Malcolm McLaren and the British New Wave*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass and London, 1988

<sup>90</sup> Frith, Simon and Horne, Howard, *Art into Pop*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, p 28

<sup>91</sup> Frith and Horne, *ibid*, p 36

<sup>92</sup> *op cit* Hebdige, 1989, p 87. Note, however, that Hebdige never mentions the fact that engagement with production differentiates it from other subcultures.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid* Hebdige, 1989.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid* Cohen, 1991

<sup>95</sup> Straw, Will, *Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music*, *Cultural Studies* 5(3):368-88, 1991

<sup>96</sup> Swiss, Thomas, Sloop, John, and Herman, Andrew, *Mapping the Beat*, Blackwell, Oxford and Massachusetts, 1998

<sup>97</sup> Gay, Leslie C. Jnr, *Rockin' the Imagined Local: New York Rock in a Reterritorialized World*, in Straw, Will, Johnson, Stacey, Sullivan, Rebecca, and Friedlander, Paul (eds), *Popular Music: Style and Identity*, The Centre for Research on Canadian Cultural Industries and Institutions, Montreal, 1993, 123-126

<sup>98</sup> Shank, Barry, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover and London, 1994



particular shows the different scenes in operation at a given locality at one time; this has encouraged a focus in this study on mainly punk bands as opposed to women's bands in general.

An underlying theme in the development of rock music sociology is the concept of local 'scenes' that act as greenhouses, where new bands are nurtured and fine-tuned in an almost cosy environment, formed by friends, surrounded by friends, and 'rooted for' as they progress through ever-increasing circles of success. Much research has been undertaken both in Britain and the USA on local scenes, and it is my intention later in this study to show how the security provided by friendly local audiences was one of the factors that led to the confidence of young women instrumentalists in taking to the stage with electronic instruments and making noise like their male counterparts. In the USA, Barry Shank's study of the music scene in Austin, Texas, describes the thriving live music scene in the city, and explores the gradual movement of popular music making in Austin away from live performance to recording, and the effects of the industrialisation process which means that this musical excess:

'... escapes the encoding structures of everyday life and represents the possibility for the return of the repressed, those elements of the human overlooked in the enforcement of industrial organisation. In the inexpressible nature of collective musical pleasure can be found an implicit promise of something more, a potential that exceeds the competitive struggle for individual gain.'<sup>99</sup>

These comments bridge the concepts of authenticity described earlier by rock critics such as Frith and the ethnographic work of not only Shank himself, but also other American and British ethnomusicologists. In Britain, perhaps one of the most well-known studies is that of Finnegan, who identifies 'Musical Worlds', 'distinguishable not just by their differing musical styles but also by other social conventions: in the people who took part, their values, their shared understandings and practices, modes of production and distribution, and the social organisation of their collective musical activities.'<sup>100</sup> Her prototype is Howard Becker's 'Art Worlds'<sup>101</sup> and the way he describes the rules and manners of being a productive artist, included in a group of like-minded people, and communicating with (including selling to) a group of like-minded people. She is as cautious as Will Straw (below) regarding the reading of the relationship between rock music and politics. Straw describes the 'traps' that one can fall into when balancing the tensions between the acquisition of individuals' status within a musical community of any definition, and the assumption of the creation of new and noticeable musical movements in contemporary urban situations; these potential pitfalls are:

'...on the one hand, privileging the processes within popular music culture which most resemble those of an 'art world' and overstating the directive

<sup>99</sup> Shank, Barry, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover and London, 1994, p 251

<sup>100</sup> op cit Finnegan, 1989, pp 31/32

<sup>101</sup> op cit Becker, 1982

or transformative force of particular agents within them; on the other, reading each instance of musical change or synthesis as unproblematic evidence of a reordering of social relations'<sup>102</sup>

However, the scene that Finnegan describes does not have a time parameter as such: the concept of 'moment' is not vital to her study as it is to this one, since her work is spatially based rather than temporally based. The importance of Brighton as locality for the case study is that it bears out comments by Keith and Pile about the non-exclusivity of subcultures, while responding to the national phenomenon of punk, and nurturing a particular sort of creativity- as Andy Bennett says,

'The same music and style will often produce not one but a variety of responses on the part of young people to the particular local circumstances in which they find themselves, each response being underpinned by a common set of base knowledges relating to the local but using this knowledge in different ways and to different ends.'<sup>103</sup>

I also believe that the 'transformative force of particular agents' referred to by Straw was present in the period and in the locality I am studying. Straw's comments are valid in the post-globalisation context of today, but my primary evidence will suggest that in the late 1970s, changes occurred in the alternative arts and media that had a direct effect on the contemporary order, and their legacy is still felt today.<sup>104</sup>

Straw links changes in the generation of new styles of rock music, and the stagnation of 'New Wave' to the effects of globalisation. But the usage of rock and the creation of rock is multifaceted: Lesley C. Gay, jr asserts that there is still a concept of small-scale local rock music-making linked to particular venues in particular urban centres, with a particular identity (or identities) specific to that place. He says:

'Assumptions equating physical space and culture fail to acknowledge the complexities of contemporary life and the 'local' as a social construction... New York rock musicians live local lives in a globally interconnected world where the local exists through their actions and interactions'<sup>105</sup> ;

Thus he reminds us of the important point that rock music making *can* still be a way of life as opposed to a lifestyle, with its participants embedded in a social structure that valorises their activities. Many of Gay's ideas seem situationist in origin, as he describes the 'maps' his interviewees have of their daytime activities and their location in New York. Although they travel considerable distances to rehearse, their 'world' is small and defined by friendships as well as sometimes fierce rivalry. He does note, however, that one of his interviewees, '...is, significantly, a woman musician where there are few. Despite several important women musicians in rock, and some important changes in

<sup>102</sup> op cit Straw, 1991, p 275

<sup>103</sup> Bennett, Andy, *Popular Music and Youth Culture: music, identity and place*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 2000, p 67

<sup>104</sup> Basically, a decade of Conservatism converted the idea of 'artisan' capitalists (see John Clarke et al, in Hall, S, and Jefferson, T, (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals*, Hutchinson, London, 1975 p 66), through Small Business, into the concept of and valorisation of The Creative Industries. Nehring, more optimistically, refers to 'petit entrepreneurs', op cit Nehring, 1997, p 29

<sup>105</sup> op cit Gay, 1993, p 123

attitudes toward including more women in rock bands, this music remains mostly a male form of expression'<sup>106</sup>

Sara Cohen's 'Rock Culture in Liverpool'<sup>107</sup> is another landmark in the study of local music-making. Her methodology involved 'hanging out' with two bands, 'The Jactars' and 'Crikey It's The Cromptons!', and observing the minutiae of their existence; rather than becoming irritated by her, they grew to trust her, and consult her opinion on occasion. Written in 1991, her work is interesting and relevant for many reasons; firstly, there is a debate about Liverpool's validity as a 'punk city'. Secondly (as Gay also found), women are very much a side-issue to the (male) band scene in Cohen's study:

'Sometimes women were also used by bands (as well as other gimmicks such as leaving unusual objects scattered around on stage) to enhance their visual image, usually as backing vocalists dressed in glamorous outfits'.<sup>108</sup>

Cohen's study also details very effectively the daily grind of being in a band. Other, more autobiographical, memoirs, such as that of Frank Cartledge<sup>109</sup>, give a very evocative account of the moment, which emphasises the importance of punk to different areas of the UK, but again, the memoir is male and does not engage with the female experience.

Finally, it is interesting to compare the comments of Olson regarding scenes, to those of Debord, regarding dissatisfaction, for it is between these two ideas that we find a reason for the re-casting of subcultures (in this case, the punk subculture and its music and politics) into a palatable and marketable form, even in retrospect. As Olson says:

One effect desired by multimedia industries... is to deterritorialize scenes once they are produced, severing them from any origin, historical or geographical, that would hinder their mobility across media and across time'.<sup>110</sup>

to which I add Debord's observation that dissatisfaction 'itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material'.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid* Gay, 1993, p 124

<sup>107</sup> *op cit* Cohen, 1991

<sup>108</sup> *ibid* Cohen, 1991, p 81. It is rather sad to see women reduced to being nothing more than unusual gimmicks, but there is a rather unfortunate truth in this comment (see anecdote at start of thesis). Later, the re-relegation of women to backing vocalist roles (albeit prominent ones) will be discussed.

<sup>109</sup> Cartledge, Frank, *Distress to Impress*, in Sabin, Roger (ed.) *Punk Rock: so what?*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999

<sup>110</sup> Olson, Mark J V, *Everybody Loves Our Town: Scenes, Spatiality, Migrancy*, in *Mapping the Beat*, Ed. Swiss et al, Blackwell, Oxford and Massachusetts, 1998, p 274

<sup>111</sup> In Plant, Sadic, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in the Postmodern Age*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992 p 69, quoting Guy Debord from 'The Society of the Spectacle' p 59

The strong postmodern sheen that pervades much of the writing on globalisation and its diasporic effect on music scenes is, I believe, part of a general malaise in cultural writing- that of a strong desire not to acknowledge feminism and its impact (or not) on the music business and how it treats female artists. The rise of feminism in the mid 1970s (one of many 'rushes' of legislation and empowerment that occurred during the 20th century) was an 'ism' that occurred at the same time as the identification of postmodernism as a concept. I do not believe this to be a coincidence. There is an interesting critique of Grossberg's acceptance of the submissive and hopeless relationship citizens have with capitalism by Melisse Lafrance in her analysis of female pop musicians, *Disruptive Divas*. She takes issue with his attitude, while accepting that there is a complex problem regarding consumption (being exploited by capitalism) and the fact that 'we win because these musicians ignite us, educate us and infuse us with a sense of oppositional solidarity'.<sup>112</sup> However, it is important to note here that at street level, possibly with all forms of new music, the point at which the music becomes commodified is always distressing for its primary audience, and for punks at least, the delays and obstructions put in place by the bands along this route to commodification were greatly appreciated by their audiences.

### **(vii) The Role of the Rock Press**

The rock press had a vital role in the bestowing of authenticity to music, as well as its role in publicising new musical styles, and as taste-makers. After the *New Musical Express* advertised for new, younger writers, and employed Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill, who both lauded punk and scorned other, older forms of rock through their aggressive writing styles, other music papers followed suit. The principal three papers that wrote about punk music were *Sounds*, *New Musical Express*<sup>113</sup> and *Melody Maker*; these papers had a strong influence in the promotion of punk music as a countercultural force. Helen Davies<sup>114</sup> discusses the male bias of the music weeklies and later I will apply this to the experiences of the primary sources. A summary of the general feeling, though, was that men who wrote (and write) about rock music are 'wannabe' rock stars, secondary to those who do it. How could women (secondary citizens) get up and do what they could not?

Information directly from the weekly papers will be referred to during the section on the media, as will as tabloid reports and interview material from *Spare Rib*, whose writers frequently championed music made by women, punk or not. The glossy lifestyle magazines picked up on the tail-end of punk, and *The Face* has provided some interesting material that throws light on the demise of interest in punk music.

A study by Elizabeth Nelson of the underground press in the late 1960s and early 1970s highlights a major issue concerning cultural radicalism. Although this refers to

<sup>112</sup> Burns, Lori and Lafrance, Melisse, *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity & Popular Music*, Routledge, New York and London, 2002, p 18

<sup>113</sup> In this work, I rely mainly on the *New Musical Express* as a source of information; this is because, amongst my peers at the time, this paper had the most credibility, and, we believed, the most lively journalists.

<sup>114</sup> Davies, Helen, *All rock and roll is homosocial: the representation of women in the British rock music press*, in *Popular Music*, Volume 20/3, Cambridge University Press

hippies, there is enough relevance in her observations to apply them here. In her discussion of the counter-culture's attitudes to women she remarks that the protagonists basically had a lot in common with mainstream culture and thus were not challenging hegemony in a very important area:

'The question of women's liberation was not only grasped too late and inadequately, but more importantly, women were apparently never considered as suitable candidates in the search for allies...Even if the countercultural revolution had been 'won', it would, judging from the evidence presented in the underground press, have been a revolution achieved by and on behalf of men'.<sup>115</sup>

Oz magazine regularly featured pictures of naked women, alongside, it must be said, articles by feminist radicals like Germaine Greer, who also appeared naked. Whether tokenism in the form of inclusion of feminist articles in a publication later prosecuted for obscenity was of any lasting benefit to the Women's Liberation Movement is not my remit here; but it may draw an interesting parallel in terms of the anarchic atmosphere at the time and that at the moment of this work. When 'anything goes' culturally, there is an opportunity for women to make their voices heard; historically, however, it is not unknown for progress made by women to be entirely reversed.<sup>116</sup> Later, the pioneering work by Sheila Rowbotham<sup>117</sup> will be discussed in relation to this and my primary sources; the problem, also acknowledged by Elizabeth Wilson<sup>118</sup> is that the rules of Bohemia dictate that women must ultimately suppress their creativity in preference to that of a male partner: this point also will be returned to later in this study. It will have some relevance to the fact that punk as a subculture had so many female protagonists, and why their profile diminished later.

### **(viii) Women and Research: a Brief Discussion**

The last part of the literature review is focused not only on research and histories of women in music but also on the way that women's research is perceived and received. It carries forward McRobbie's influential comments at the beginning of the review, and prepares the reader for the primary research to follow.

Sociologist Ann Oakley produced one of the first purely female-oriented sociological research documents in 1974, and identified a major problem:

'Male orientation may so colour the organization of sociology as a discipline that the invisibility of women is a structural weakness, rather than simply a superficial flaw. The male focus, incorporated into the definition

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<sup>115</sup> Nelson, Elizabeth, *The British Counter-culture 1966-73: a study of the underground press*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1989, pp 138-140

<sup>116</sup> For instance, Lesley Ferris' history of theatre in Europe describes a time when women were regular stage performers; 100 years later, the Pope had massacred the Cathars, who had permitted this activity. Ferris, Lesley, *Acting Women: images of women in theatre*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1990

<sup>117</sup> Rowbotham, Sheila, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981

<sup>118</sup> Wilson, Elizabeth, *Bohemians: the glamorous outcasts*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2000

of subject-areas, reduces women to a side-issue from the start'.<sup>119</sup>

Nearly twenty years later, Jenny Garber found a similar gap in her research on girls and youth culture:

'Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings. They are absent from the classic subcultural ethnographic studies, the pop histories, the personal accounts and the journalistic surveys of the field... The objective and popular image of a subculture is likely to be one which emphasises male membership, male focal concerns and masculine values.'<sup>120</sup>

It is hardly surprising that girls are seen as consumers of pop whereas boys are seen as connoisseurs of rock, for as Garber remarks when talking about images of motorbike girls used in soft porn and advertising, '...girls and women have always been located nearer to the point of consumerism than to the 'ritual of resistance'<sup>121</sup> : and as Barbara Hudson observes, there is no perception in the male world of girls being adolescent anyway: '... adolescence is a 'masculine' construct'.<sup>122</sup>

Christine Griffin remarks that there is no such thing as a typically deviant young woman:

'It was not always possible to identify a particular group of girls as 'deviants' or troublemakers who were also opposed to school and academic work, *and* destined for factory jobs. It was equally difficult to find "good girls" who were pro-school *and* hoped to go on to college or office jobs. The situation was far more complex than analyses of male counter-school cultures might lead one to expect'<sup>123</sup>

As a young girl in the north-east of England in the 1960s, I was not aware of Mods- but I was aware of the many women in their late teens with towering platinum-blonde or jet-black beehives or buns, wearing chiffon headscarves, three-quarter length leather jackets, miniskirts and kitten-heeled sandals, even in midwinter. Perhaps all they were doing was waiting for men to notice them, as Frith would have us believe '...all this female activity, whatever its fun and style and art as a collective occupation, is done, in the end, individually, for the boys' sake. It is the male gaze that gives the girls' beauty work its meaning'. John Berger articulated this in 1972 in the book 'Ways of Seeing'. The book focuses on the visual arts, but there is a section of the book that specifically discusses the objectification of women. Although Berger begins this section with the following: 'According to usage and conventions which are at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome...' (p 45), the concluding paragraph appears to be

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<sup>119</sup> Oakley, Ann, *The Sociology of Housework*, Basil Blackwell, 1974, 1985, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts, p 4

<sup>120</sup> McRobbie, Angela, and Garber, Jenny, *Girls and Subcultures*, in op cit McRobbie, 2000 and 1991, pp 12-15

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*, p 19

<sup>122</sup> Hudson, Barbara, *Femininity and Adolescence*, in McRobbie, Angela, and Nava, Mica, *Gender and Generation* Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1984, p 35

<sup>123</sup> Griffin, Christine, *Typical Girls? Young Women from School to the Job Market*, Routledge, London, 1985, p 15

have by no means been overcome...' (p 45), the concluding paragraph appears to be written very much in Berger's voice rather than that of the 'conventions' he mentions:

'...men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.'<sup>124</sup>

Laura Mulvey asserts that this attitude in film is inherent to maleness:

'Woman... stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other... bound to her place as a bearer of meaning, not a maker of meaning'<sup>125</sup>,

which is why (as will be explored in greater depth later) when women use creative technology, they are regarded as non-feminine: as Lucy Green writes:

'...women's instrumental performance threatens to break out of patriarchal definitions and offer a femininity which controls, a femininity which alienates itself in an object and impinges on the world'.<sup>126</sup>

Judith Butler's influential essay of 1985 articulates the deeply ingrained rationale behind the differences in gender that society creates: for Butler,

'...gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*<sup>127</sup>. This would imply that masculinity is as constructed as much as femininity, and neither has anything to do with a person's sex.'<sup>128</sup>

But as Bourdieu says, the status quo appears 'natural' and any challenge to it, 'unnatural'<sup>129</sup>, and the responsibility of challenging the status quo is fraught with difficulties. Margaret Marshment asks:

'...should we aim to appropriate the definitions and qualities assigned to men, in attempt to prove women's ability to participate equally at all levels of society? Or should we concentrate on presenting a re-evaluation of existing definitions of femininity? Either strategy lays us open to reappropriation through stereotyping, or to validation of masculine

<sup>124</sup> Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC and Pelican Books, London, 1972, p 47

<sup>125</sup> Mulvey, Laura, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Screen, 1975

<sup>126</sup> Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p 54

<sup>127</sup> Butler, Judith, *Performative Arts and Gender Constitution: an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, *Theatre Journal*, Dec 1985, Vol 40 p 519

<sup>128</sup> *Sound Effects*, by Simon Frith, has two pages on women, pages 86 and 87. On page 162 manages to say this without specifically mentioning women ;" The challenge thrown up by the punk vanguard was to develop a general account of rock's means of signification. Musical effects are not biologically given, even if in a particular culture people communicate through music as naturally as they communicate through language.'

<sup>129</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Masculinities*, Polity, Cambridge, 2001, p 8

values'.<sup>130</sup>

Later, we shall see how this translates into a practical difficulty for female musicians in the world of rock music. Women simply can not win, even in the field of research: the 'natural' male researcher may come across mistrust due to his social class or possibly his age, but for women, there is an additional problem. Christine Griffin discovered that she, herself, unwittingly became an obstacle in her own research:

'I was assumed to be a feminist on several occasions before people had even seen me, because of the predominantly 'female' nature of the research. This assumption had positive connotations for women and negative ones for men... The main point here is not whether my approach was biased, political or subjective, but that I was *seen* as biased regardless of my appearance or political perspective, whilst far larger and predominantly male studies are presented as objective and value-free (e.g. Halsey et al, 1980)<sup>131</sup>

This, together with a reminder of McRobbie's observation about the alleged neutrality of many studies of subcultures, ends the discussion on women and research.

### **(ix) Writing on Women in Rock and Pop Music**

There is now a reasonably large body of work dedicated to women in rock and pop music, and that that assert women's right to appear in histories of rock music<sup>132</sup>; the unfortunate fact is that the male nature of rock fandom means that as these deal exclusively with women artists, this allows for the possibility that they will be regarded as an irrelevance to the rock discourse, and left on the shelves by men. As comments made by Caroline Coon will later confirm, male gatekeepers are mainly interested in disseminating ideas about a particularly limited range of stereotypical female forms, especially if they are tragic.<sup>133</sup> The two types of work exist as though in different worlds. There is also a marked difference in the type of experience performers have in the two main English-speaking rock music-producing countries, the USA and the UK. Australia makes continual inroads into rock music production (and benefited from the same opening in markets as did the bands and musicians I write about here) but rock music is 'old' in Britain and the US; Sir Paul McCartney is of pensionable age and rock has developed enough over a lifetime to be able to draw some conclusions.

Although most studies on women in rock have been undertaken by journalists

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<sup>130</sup> Marshment, Margaret, *Substantial Women*, in *The Female Gaze: women as viewers of popular culture*, in Gamman, Lorraine and Marshment, Margaret, (eds), The Women's Press Limited, London, 1988, p 27

<sup>131</sup> op cit Griffin, 1985, p 5

<sup>132</sup> such as O'Dair, Barbara, (ed), *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997

<sup>133</sup> It is interesting to observe a parallel between this phenomenon and the penchant of male opera-writers to concentrate almost exclusively on tragic female heroines in their storytelling. See Clement, Catherine, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, Virago, London, 1989



(such as Lucy O'Brien<sup>134</sup>, Gillian Gaar<sup>135</sup>, and Barbara O'Dair<sup>136</sup>), academics such as Lucy Green and Mavis Bayton ('Music, Gender and Education' and 'Frock Rock' respectively) also have contributed valuable work to the genre. Additionally, writers who normally specialise in exploring classical music, such as Susan McClary<sup>137</sup>, Carol Neuls-Bates<sup>138</sup> and Marcia Citron<sup>139</sup>, have valuable insights into women's cultural position as producers of rock and pop music. There is an on-running debate regarding Madonna (is she a disgrace to the female gender or the first truly liberated woman? Writers from Camille Paglia<sup>140</sup> to tabloid journalists find her a constant source of inspiration), and there are many studies that either affirm or deny stereotyping in the music industry. Recent books have often taken the form of series of interviews such as Amy Raphael's 'Never Mind the Bollocks'<sup>141</sup> or collections of essays, such as Sarah Cooper's 'Girls, Girls, Girls'<sup>142</sup>.

The marginalisation of women's musical activities that occurs in rock literature reflects the debate regarding separatism that is constantly being played out and possibly even starts at gatekeeper level, just as it does in the music business itself, from reviewers in rock magazines being predominantly male, onwards. Just as with an all-female band, a decision has to be made by a female writer as to whether they are writing for a female audience, a mixed audience, or a male audience; this in turn will inform the writing style and the facts disseminated (sic) about the artists they are writing about. As Rumsey and Little say:

'Feminists know that if rock/pop was really revolutionary, they would be embraced as the greatest rebels of all- real rebels, the genuine article, not just another piece in the jigsaw of popular ephemera... When they're fourteen, girl fans attract a lot of study and analysis... But what happens when we grow up and become a minority in the audience for "serious music"?'<sup>143</sup>

Should the writer 'scare away' the male audience by refusing to pander to misogyny, or write like men do and embrace the ethos of rock writing? Most of these writers adopt a neutral tone, allowing their enthusiasm for their subjects to drive their writing; occasionally, there is a disappointing evasion of issues that arise. For instance, in

<sup>134</sup> O'Brien, Lucy, *She-Bop: the definitive history of women in rock, pop and soul*, Penguin, London, 1989

<sup>135</sup> Gaar, Gillian G., *She's a Rebel*, Blandford, London, 1993

<sup>136</sup> op cit O'Dair, 1997

<sup>137</sup> McClary, Susan, *Feminine Endings: music, gender and sexuality*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991, and McClary, Susan, *Afterword* in op cit Attali, 1985

<sup>138</sup> Neuls-Bates, Carol, *Women in Music*, North-eastern University Press, Boston, 1996

<sup>139</sup> Citron, Marcia J, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,, New York and Melbourne, 1993

<sup>140</sup> Paglia, Camille, *Madonna 11: Venus of the Radio Waves?* in *Sex, Art and American Culture: Essays*, Vintage, New York, 1992

<sup>141</sup> Raphael, Amy, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, Virago, London, 1995

<sup>142</sup> Cooper, Sarah, (ed) *Girls! Girls! Girls! Essays on Women and Music*, Cassell, London and New York, 1995

<sup>143</sup> Rumsey, Gina, and Little, Hilary, 1989, *Women and Pop: a Series of Lost Encounters*, in *Zoot Suits and Second-hand Dresses*, Ed Angela McRobbie, p 244

Charlotte Grieg's 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow', which details a history of the 1960s girl groups in the USA<sup>144</sup> there is no real analysis of the fact that nearly all of the lyrics sung by the so-called empowered women she talks about are attributed to (and therefore royalties are paid to) men.<sup>145</sup>; although these women provided inspiration for a generation of fans<sup>146</sup>, the reality of their lives, dominated by svengali figures such as Phil Spector, was far from empowered.<sup>147</sup> When women did become involved in songwriting, it was common that their royalties did not get paid to them.<sup>148</sup> Although this undoubtedly happened to men too, there is something particularly poignant about one of the least empowered sections of American society, black women, singing songs that empower others, while becoming disempowered themselves. This phenomenon of men articulating what they think women (should) feel, is a constant feature of pop and rock; when it does not occur directly in 'first person' lyric-writing, it occurs in description (for instance in The Rolling Stones' 'Some Girls' Album, discussed at length by Reynolds and Press<sup>149</sup>) It is this empowering/empowered dichotomy that was breached by the women in my study.

One of the most interesting and unusual studies is that of Sue Steward and Sheryl Garratt in 1984<sup>150</sup>. Steward and Garratt talk to women involved in almost every part of the music industry and in doing so, demystify parts of the process of record-making. Although Negus<sup>151</sup> later explores the way that record companies work as vertical organisations, examining womens' roles therein, Steward and Garrett<sup>152</sup> go beyond the boundaries of the companies themselves, describing the whole 'machine' behind a record release, and how women may be involved in this process, and their study provides an interesting complement to mine.<sup>153</sup> Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital, as discussed by Thornton<sup>154</sup> will also be applied, not only to the research materials but also to the research itself.

In their book 'The Sex Revolts', Simon Reynolds and Joy Press explore the history of recent rock music through an exploration of its relationship to aggression, revolt

<sup>144</sup> Grieg, Charlotte, *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow? Girl groups from the 50s on...*, Virago, London, 1989

<sup>145</sup> See Leigh, Spencer, *Baby, That is Rock and Roll: American Pop, 1954-1963*, Finbarr International, Folkestone, Kent, 2001

<sup>146</sup> e.g. see Gaines, Donna, *Girl Groups: a ballad of co-dependency*, in O'Dair, Barbara, *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997, p 103

<sup>147</sup> Spencer Leigh's book contains interview material from singers of this era that throw light on the commodity nature of their personae and vocal skills. op cit Leigh, 2001

<sup>148</sup> ibid Leigh, 2001.

<sup>149</sup> Reynolds, S, and Press, J, *The Sex Revolts: gender, rebellion and rock'n'roll*, Serpent's Tail, London, 1995

<sup>150</sup> Steward, Sue and Garratt, Sheryl, *Signed, Sealed and Delivered: the life stories of women in pop*, Pluto, London and Sydney, 1984

<sup>151</sup> Negus, Keith, *Producing Pop: culture and conflict in the popular music industry*, Edward Arnold, London, 1992

<sup>152</sup> op cit Steward, and Garratt 1984

<sup>153</sup> For instance, the women at EMI's pressing plant who refused to pack the Sex Pistols' single because of their objections to its cover, pp 63/64, ibid Steward and Garratt, 1984

<sup>154</sup> op cit Thornton, 1995

and reaction.<sup>155</sup> Their discussion makes many valid points (many of which are discussed later) but is often marred by their own anger, and a lack of analysis that makes the text difficult to read. However, it does reinforce the maleness of rock and helps to contextualise punk rock within the rock discourse; both Deena Weinstein's study on Heavy Metal<sup>156</sup> and Robert Walser's<sup>157</sup>, were also very useful in understanding the way a rock subculture with different values is engaged with by its fans.

The two writers whose work is of most relevance, however, to the study presented here are Mavis Bayton<sup>158</sup> whose collection of interviews with women instrumentalists spans more than 15 years, and Lucy Green,<sup>159</sup> whose research on the perception of women instrumentalists has been of great use when analysing the data I have collected myself.

Again in the interests of context, some studies on women in punk subcultures in the USA have been referred to here. These include studies by Roman<sup>160</sup>, Miles,<sup>161</sup> and Leblanc<sup>162</sup>, who mainly discuss female fans of punk rock. However, their observations on alienation and class difference within the punk subculture have provided interesting reading.

The male memory of the punk moment is no more 'true' than the female memory; it is the latter that is likely to dwindle. Malcolm McLaren's assertions have already been debunked by writers such as Jon Savage, but Savage has not explored the female aspects of the subculture, and his study is also very much metro centric. Punk bands tried to create a new 'pathway'<sup>163</sup> at odds with that of previous rock forms and there was constant soul-searching about the degree of involvement they should have with traditional music-business discourses and by definition, the attitudes they had towards female artists.<sup>164</sup> As Johnny Rotten said at the time: 'During the Pistols era, women were out there playing with the men, taking us on in equal terms... It wasn't combative, but compatible.'<sup>165</sup> This remark will be returned to later.

Finally, I would like to include a quotation used by Dick Hebdige which I believe

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<sup>155</sup> op cit Reynolds and Press, 1995

<sup>156</sup> Weinstein, Deena, *Heavy Metal: the music and its culture*, Da Capo, 2000

<sup>157</sup> Walser, Robert, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover and London, 1993

<sup>158</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999

<sup>159</sup> op cit Green, 1997

<sup>160</sup> Roman, Leslie G, *Double Exposure: the politics of feminist materialist ethnography*, in *Educational Theory*, Summer 1993, Volume 43, No 3, Roman, Leslie G, *Intimacy, Labor and Class: Ideologies of Feminine Sexuality in the Punk Slam Dance*, in Roman, Leslie G, and Christian-Smith, L K, (eds.) *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture*, Falmer Press, London, 1988

<sup>161</sup> Miles, Cressida, *Spatial Politics: a gendered Sense of Place*, in Redhead, S, Wynne, D, and O'Connor, J, (eds), *The Clubcultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997

<sup>162</sup> LeBlanc, Lauraine, *Pretty in Punk: girls' gender resistance in a boys' subculture*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London, 2001

<sup>163</sup> op cit Finnegan, 1989, p 304

<sup>164</sup> e.g. see op cit Laing, 1985

<sup>165</sup> op cit Lydon, 1995, p 378

summarises the position of any woman who makes artefacts in the 'male domain'; it has an additional irony given Hebdige's exclusion of punk women from his study:

'It is perhaps a new source of anguish for the black man to realise that if he writes a masterpiece, it is his enemy's language, his enemy's treasury, which is enriched by the additional jewel he has so furiously and lovingly carved.'<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Jean Genet, 1971, quoted in Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London, p 135

**Chapter Two- Access: enabling and empowering  
factors**

## **Access: enabling and empowering factors**

*'...these success stories had ambiguous implications. As with every other 'youth revolution' (e.g. the beat boom, the mod explosion and the Swinging Sixties) the relative success of a few individuals created the impression of energy, expansion and limitless upward mobility.'*<sup>1</sup>

Hebdige is talking about the music press rejoicing in punk bands getting record deals, bank clerks metamorphosing into fanzine editors and then into music journalists and so on; he claims that that subcultures become reduced to 'a handful of brilliant nonconformists'; however, the view of Hebdige gleaned from the music and tabloid press is not a true impression of the experience of the participants in the subculture themselves. This was a revolution, albeit a small one, and there were many attempts to suppress it, as will be shown later.

To begin with, however, this chapter will follow the progress of a group of contemporaries who were in bands in East and West London, Cambridge, Brighton, Oxford, Southampton and Manchester; will include information from questionnaires that were filled in by women instrumentalists from other areas in the UK. What these women have in common is that they started playing instruments in bands around 1976-77, during the moment that punk first became a major youth subculture; their mass-cultural reference points are therefore very similar, although at the time their ages would have varied from 16 to 45. Some of these women (for example, Lora Logic), made recordings and were quite prominent musicians at the time, with reviews and interviews in the music press. Others made no recordings and gave no interviews, but were just as deeply involved in the production of music and living in the punk subculture.

First of all, it is of interest to identify the factors that enabled the women I have interviewed to begin a career/hobby as rock and pop instrumentalists. Bayton<sup>2</sup> has already identified many of these factors; it is my thesis that the moment of punk rock resulted in a higher visibility of female instrumentalists in bands and an acknowledgement (sometimes grudging and misogynistic in tone) by the music papers normally targeted at a young male rock audience, that some women were becoming present in more 'male' roles in bands on the entry level circuit of pubs, clubs and student venues. The punk moment, and its attraction for the unemployed, provided a unique context for changes in music-making.

### **(i) Extended Childhood and Creative Opportunities: a short discussion**

Virginia Caputo's study of the 'transformation, through various processes, of the child into a competent member of adult culture.' describes childhood itself being regarded as of no real consequence by adults- it is merely a stage during which the child makes up for what they 'lack' in order to grow up: 'This conceptualisation depicts children as

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<sup>1</sup> Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London, p 99. The 'energy, expansion and upward mobility' aspect was later capitalised upon by Thatcher and presented in its recuperated form as enterprise culture.

<sup>2</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999

'partially cultural'.<sup>3</sup> This is useful in discussing what could be described as the permanent childhood state of punks which was a feature of the subculture, as they were unable or unwilling to undertake the rite of passage provided by employment. Sue Glyptis confirms that:

'One of the main confirmations that adulthood had been reached was the attainment of full-time employment, which signalled the beginning of 'real' adult life, in an adult world and on adult terms, with concomitant financial independence'.<sup>4</sup>

The 'look' of punks was often infantile- Vivienne Westwood's 'Nappies' attached to bondage trousers, the unsophisticated pogoing<sup>5</sup>, the blank white-faced makeup, the references to the Velvet Underground, protégés of Andy Warhol in the 1960s, whose attachment to ideas of polymorphous perversity are documented elsewhere<sup>6</sup> all point to a dislike of, and a desire for the lack of, responsibility. Caputo provides another useful insight in her essay, commenting:

'With regard to the issue of time, this element is significant for both youth and children. While one could argue that, for children at least, it appears that there is a connection between the loss of control over their time and a decrease in the production of culture, it cannot be substantiated.'<sup>7</sup>

Were this to be true, however, there is a logical link between 'control over their time' and the fact that the infantilised (by unemployment) punks developed a productive subculture to continue and replace that of their childhood in a reversal of what happens to a child as school absorbs more and more of their time. This productive involvement, whether musical, political or otherwise, in the creation of their subculture would have been psychologically rewarding. Stephen Harding's study, *Values and the Nature of Psychological Well-being*, investigates what people do when they have nothing (compulsory) to do- for instance those who are retired, or unemployed. People can achieve worth through activity- and he concludes that activity- whether socially useful or personally fulfilling (for instance, sports) makes people happier than inactivity.:

The evidence... points to the role of social interaction and voluntary activity as a means of enhancing personal well-being... whilst the eradication of dissatisfying social conditions may not be achieved overnight, and may be to an extent beyond the individual's direct ability to control, the finding that affective experience is related to voluntary social activity suggests that, at least as far as this component of the model is

<sup>3</sup> Caputo, Virginia, *Anthropology's Silent 'Others', a consideration of some conceptual and methodological issues for the study of youth and children's cultures*, in Amit-Talai, Vered, and Wulff, Helena (eds), *Youth Cultures: a cross-cultural perspective*, London and New York 1995, p 29

<sup>4</sup> Glyptis, Sue, *Leisure and Unemployment*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1989, p 21, from the 1983 Department of Education and Science Survey.

<sup>5</sup> A style of dancing invented by punks that was completely unsensual: it involved jumping up and down, often not in time with the music, with the arms pressed to the sides of the body, unsynchronised with other members of the audience. 'I invented it because I hated the Bromley contingent. I invented a dance that would involve me being able to knock the all over the fucking 110 Club'. Sid Vicious, *The Filth and the Fury: a Sex Pistols Film*, dir. Julien Temple, Filmfour 1999

<sup>6</sup> Koch, Stephen, *Stargazer: Andy Warhol's World and his Films*, Calder and Boyars. London, 1973

<sup>7</sup> op cit Caputo, 1995, p 37

concerned, an individual's well-being may well be in his own hands'.

The fact that the labour market could not absorb large numbers of young people in the late seventies could have been disastrous for British society; what the punk subculture did for many of them was to valorise them and their activities, whatever their gender. As Glyptis says,

'The 'gains' of unemployment are tempered by circumstance. Free time will be a gain for those who are able to use it in ways that are personally satisfying. Freedom from obligations will be a gain for those who can thrive without external demands. But even in these circumstances, neither is likely to be a gain unless those affected by it are cushioned financially, *or have access to something equivalent to the financial and social rewards of work*'<sup>8</sup> [my italics]

She discusses people's need for daily structure, and their need to be needed, in the context of youth unemployment at this time: 'The unemployed do not only feel different and useless. They often feel deviant and stigmatized...'<sup>9</sup>. Punks *needed* each other, and used these feelings of deviance and stigmatization to create their own equivalent to the 'social and financial rewards of work', creating their own 'voluntary social activity' to enhance their personal well-being.

Within a relatively short period of time, the boundaries of leisure and work time had been blurred for many young people; pre-recession, those involved in the counter-culture had *chosen* to opt out of the mainstream; their working occupations were often closely interwoven with their 'own' time and interests. They had had the choice of redefining the organisation of their time:

'The counter culture's rejection of work involved a rejection of the division between work and leisure, as well as a rejection of the concept of leisure as something earned by the worker in compensation for the loss of freedom caused by work.'<sup>10</sup>

## **(ii) The Bohemian Lifestyle and Punk- a 'different' destiny**

For whatever reasons, though, ownership of time was one of the things the hippy subculture had in common with punk and, of course with the state of childhood; and with time comes a consolidation of the beliefs and identity of the subculture itself, therefore, according to Paul Willis:

'If we can supply the premises, dynamics, logical relations of responses which look quite untheoretical and lived out 'merely' as cultures, we will uncover a cultural politics- although, of course, disjuncting what is most characteristic about it: its detailed incorporation and synthesis with a life-

<sup>8</sup> Harding, Stephen, *Values and the Nature of Psychological Wellbeing*, in Abrams, Mark, Gerard, David and Timms, Noel, Eds, *Values and Social Change in Britain*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 73

<sup>9</sup> op cit Glyptis, 1989, p 77

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, Elizabeth, *The British Counter-culture 1966-73: a study of the underground press*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1989, p 86



style and concrete forms of symbolic and artistic production.’<sup>11</sup>

As Frith, during a discussion on Marx’s views of the leisure time permitted to the worker as part of the capitalist ethos, remarks:

‘...bohemians articulate a leisure critique of the work ethic. They are cultural radicals not just as the source of the formalist avant-garde, but also in institutional terms- they don’t work (and thus outraged bourgeois moralists have always denounced successful bohemians who, it seems, make their money out of play).’<sup>12</sup>

Bohemia tended to cast women as the muse, rather than the protagonist; but in spite of this, Elizabeth Wilson, when discussing the rejection of male definition by feminists in the 1970s, observes that:

Women as bohemians were outside the remit of this feminist re-evaluation of art history. This was ironic, given that the women’s movements of the Western world came with all the trappings of bohemian lifestyle... The connection between ‘lifestyle politics’ and an earlier bohemianism was never made.’<sup>13</sup>

It is hardly surprising that there was a bohemian element in the customised punk rock that found its way into the lifestyles of unemployed youth in Britain. Enforced leisure makes the temptation of cultural radicalism more appealing than giving in to feelings of rejection. One can be defined as ‘unemployed’ or, euphemistically, ‘looking for work’; punks ‘worked at’ the subculture twenty-four hours a day, creating a space for themselves that was outside the definition of mainstream society, whether official (the Department of Health and Social Security) or mediated (principally, the tabloid press). It is often claimed that unemployed people identify with extreme left or right politics, and are particularly drawn to youth subcultures.<sup>14</sup>

I believe that the extension of the childhood state brought about by unemployment provided an opportunity for young women not to ‘grow up’, but to reassess their future with a degree of equality that had not been present during times of full employment. Walkerdine describes the ways ‘through which the modern order, patriarchal and capitalist as it is, produces the positions for subjects to enter.’<sup>15</sup> citing Foucault’s views of ‘technologies of the social’,

‘scientific knowledges, encoded in practices which define the population to be managed- not through simple and overt coercion, but by techniques which naturalize the desired state in the bourgeois order: a rational citizen who rationally and freely accepts that order and obeys ‘through his own free will’, as it were. Those knowledges, apparatuses, practices, seek

<sup>11</sup> Willis, Paul E, *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 172

<sup>12</sup> Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects*, Pantheon, New York, 1981, p 266

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, Elizabeth, *Bohemians: the Glamorous Outcasts*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2000, p 134

<sup>14</sup>c.g. Glyptis, op cit 1989, p 85, says people are drawn to youth subcultures, or extreme left or right politics in particular in areas with high unemployment.

<sup>15</sup> Walkerdine, Valerie, *Counting Girls Out: girls and mathematics*, Falmer Press, London, 1998, p 163

constantly to define and map the processes which will naturally produce this subject. They constantly define girls and women as pathological, deviating from the norm and lacking, but they also define them as necessary to the procreation and rearing of democratic citizens.’<sup>16</sup>

Playing in a band provided a wonderful opportunity for the rejection of this definition. Several of my interviewees described their need for an alternative destiny. For instance, lesbian musician/writer Liz Naylor:

“I had a really strong sense of not being in the straight world. I was listening to some punk record the other day and I was thinking (that) I really identified (it) as ‘us’ in some way. When I was on my own in my bedroom, I knew what I was against: my cousins, and the girls at my school. I went to an all-girls school, and they were so square I just thought they were awful. I had this real sense of the other world. I thought there’d be some kind of revolution in some way. I wanted to destroy it, I really wanted to destroy it.”

She continued: ‘My mum would say things like why don’t you go to secretarial college, shorthand is always useful. And I thought ‘I want to be Janis Joplin, I don’t want to go to fucking secretarial college’<sup>17</sup>. Mavis Bayton told me: ‘...they kept dragging us round factories saying ‘This is your future’ and I was getting quite upset because I hadn’t envisaged my future working in a factory. I didn’t know what my future was, but it wasn’t working in a factory’<sup>18</sup> Gina Birch said:

‘... I never felt that I was going to be a lady... I probably always had a fear of growing up, and getting old and I still do. I don’t have a handbag... I don’t have the accoutrements of being a woman, and I am completely label-phobic about being Mrs, or a woman- not woman, but what woman represents...’

There was a frustration with the idea of growing up to be a ‘lady’ with all the implications associated with such a destiny. Sheila Rowbotham had observed in 1973 that her ‘...own sense of self as a person directly conflicted with the kind of girl who was sung about in pop songs’<sup>19</sup>. Although Walkerdine has claimed that: ‘Middle-class girls... do not need to fantasize being somebody, they are told clearly at every turn that they are: it is simply not a battle to be entered into’<sup>20</sup>, is possible to speculate that across class boundaries at this time, there was a redefinition of femaleness *in certain women drawn to*

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid* Walkerdine, 1998

<sup>17</sup> Liz Naylor, interview date 7/9/00

<sup>18</sup> Mavis Bayton, interview date 14/7/00

<sup>19</sup> Rowbotham, Sheila, *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth and New York, 1973, 1981 p 13

<sup>20</sup> Walkerdine, Valerie, *Daddy’s Girl : Young Girls and Popular Culture*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 1997, p154

*deviant behaviour through lack of future employment prospects.*<sup>21</sup> I interviewed women from many different backgrounds, and all of them were quite clear about the opportunities to engage in a different world provided by the upheavals in the late 1970s. My findings are supported by research done by Abrams in the late 70s, which found that:

'Among those aged 18 to 34 anti-trationals outnumber traditionals by 5 to 1 in all three social classes- though ambivalents predominate numerically in all but class DE.... Looking at all three age groups, what predominates is the fact that in their values, young middle class people have much more in common with young working class people than with their middle class elders.'<sup>22</sup>

The fantasies many of them had had as girls about making music were now on a par with the fantasy jobs created by the Government during this recession in an attempt to stimulate the economy: rather than competing with men for 'men's jobs' they could create 'employment' (though often unpaid) for themselves. The rite of passage into adulthood provided by entry into the labour market was no longer relevant: 'Special measures for training and work experience do not fill this role. They tend to be seen as second best. In a sense they are make-believe...'<sup>23</sup>; unemployment was as much a reality for middle-class graduates as it was for the school-leaver who had previously gone straight into the labour market. The introduction of the Government's Enterprise Allowance Scheme in 1983 encouraged 'accidental musicians' to opt in to the scheme (business plans, guaranteed income of £40 per week plus rent, and no DHSS hassles for a year) or remain external and excluded; this led to a degree of soul-searching regarding the oppositional nature of music making later in their 'careers'.

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<sup>21</sup> McRobbie criticises Angela Carter for assuming that only 'rich girls' can afford to look poor, noting that many female students were 'barely scraping along on their grants with no parental backup', and noting also that 'In the 1980s, for old and young alike, the discipline of the factory clock no longer prevails. The unemployed and the semi-employed have been cast adrift, and for many young men and women their attention has turned inwards towards the body.' McRobbie, Angela, *Second Hand Dresses and the Ragmarket*, p 47, in *Zoot Suits and Second Hand Dresses: an anthology of fashion and music*, ed McRobbie, Angela, Macmillan, London, 1989. See pp 39-48 for a discussion of androgynous clothing and extended childhood.

<sup>22</sup> Abrams, Mark, *Demographic Correlates of Values*, in Abrams, Mark, Gerard, David and Timms, Noel, (eds) *Values and Social Change in Britain*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 29. It could be argued that eventual employment destiny defines class, but from my sample interviews and questionnaires, this also would appear to be untrue: see appendix (ii). This was also found by Finnegan, (Ruth, *The Hidden Musician: music making in an English town*, CUP, Cambridge, 1989), p 105 '...the widely assumed national associations of musical with social categories did not always fit in with the Milton Keynes situation. Thus the classification of a performance as say, 'punk' depended as much upon the image developed by a *particular* local band as on nationally detectable differences in musical style, general behaviour or class background ... however, (p 119) 'The predominance of male players was striking: out of 125 players in the 1982-3 survey only 8 were women. In the bands in which women *were* included, however, they mostly took part on equal instrumental terms with the men rather than merely being just the front singer- the 'sex symbol' role so castigated by feminist critics.' And as Chambers rightly says, '...it must not be overlooked that, when the accounts are settled, after the negotiations and local victories noted, the wider choices and possibilities- from the macho heavy metal guitar hero through the glitter androgynoid to the gay disco star- stubbornly remained with the boys.' Chambers, Iain, *Urban Rhythms*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 128

<sup>23</sup> op cit. Glyptis, 1989, p 85

The apparent gender-levelling effect of mass-unemployment and the do-it-yourself nature of the punk ethos would prove to be both an advantage and a disadvantage to the girl instrumentalists; what was regarded as an advantage for male musicians was often a disadvantage for women, just because of assumptions based on their gender. For instance, Cohen describes how a certain degree of musical incompetence in the bands she studied was seen to be almost endearing<sup>24</sup>, yet in a conversation I had with bass-player Suzi Quatro, Quatro cited the incompetence of female instrumentalists in punk bands as being one of the major reasons why their profile in the rock world was not sustained<sup>25</sup>. The Velvet Underground, a band with a female drummer, Mo Tucker, was cited by many of the women who wrote to me as a strong influence<sup>26</sup>. As John Cale remarked at the time of the band's performing life:

'We had so much trouble with drummers but Mo was good at being basic so she was brought in. Actually, Lou was always saying, 'Sterling can't play guitar and Mo can't play'. He kept saying, 'But man, she can't play.' My idea was to keep the sound simple, but by overlaying the instruments' simplistic patterns the accumulative effect of the sound would be incredibly powerful.'<sup>27</sup>

This respect for the 'can't play' musician was definitely a factor that encouraged young women to play in bands; it is interesting to note that in response to Suzi Quatro's comments, Geoff Travis articulated the ethos of the moment thus:

"I just see it as a really interesting moment in time that certainly empowered a lot of people to make music who probably would not have made music, if Suzi Quatro's definition of who should be allowed to play music was the overriding rule. She probably prides herself in making her way in a men's game and beating the men at it. Whereas those rules went out the window really during the punk era, because it wasn't really a competition to see who could be the biggest and best, or the fastest. It was just, who could do something interesting."<sup>28</sup>

Some of the musicians I interviewed did indeed fall into the category of 'one chord wonders' but others had been trained at school or at home to a high degree of musicianship, as Bayton also discovered. Often, those who had started off knowing little about their instrument became relatively competent relatively quickly. It is also hard to decipher from the reportage of live performances how much of the incompetence was assumed and expected and how much of it was genuine. There is one fact that is incontrovertible: almost all of the young women that I interviewed felt that their involvement in punk music was facilitated by the anarchic ideals of punk, and although there had been no specific mention of girls and young women in any of punk's 'manifestos', this and the atmosphere of enablement in the mid 1970s that was formally

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, Sara, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: popular music in the making*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991

<sup>25</sup> interview/conversation BBC Radio 4, 'You and Yours', 19/7/00

<sup>26</sup> I found this interesting, as Malcolm McLaren's version of punk rock music has The New York Dolls, a band he managed for a while, at the epicentre of influence on British punk bands' music

<sup>27</sup> John Cale, April 1974, in *Beyond the Velvet Underground* Omnibus Press, London, New York, Sydney, Cologne, p9

<sup>28</sup> As the driving force behind Rough Trade Records, Geoff Travis was a major intermediary in the spread of DIY culture in the record industry. Interview date 1/2/02

created for women by the Equal Opportunities Act, provided an additional force to their feeling that they were entitled to their position on stage alongside young men of their generation. Christine Robertson (manager of The Slits) told me:

“When punk happened it broke down gender roles, not because women had the feeling ‘Oh we must do it for our sisters, but [because] women were emerging as strong individuals; they’d been through an education system and a culture that was telling them that they were now equal- the Equal Opportunities Act had been passed, and your work could now earn the same as a man. A lot of stereotypes for roles had been broken down. And punk just exploded on to the scene. The reason so many women were involved was that it liberated them from predefined roles that society might have in mind for them... It also broke the rules of how things should be done. Previously if you were a band you had to be virtuoso, you had to do years and years of touring, gigging, being ripped off by record companies to get exposure. But then suddenly, punk’s on the scene and anybody can get exposure.”<sup>29</sup>

The chains of empowerment, one band helps another band, who in turn help another band, and so on, that will be described in the later chapter on Brighton, will be seen to apply to many of the women I spoke to, or who responded to the questionnaires that I sent out.

### **(iii) Fantasies and Reality: motivation and role models**

Valerie Walkerdine<sup>30</sup> describes household and playground scenes that are familiar to many girls and women: the fantasy pop band, singing current chart hits and imagining themselves to be on stage, performing to an audience. Singing and dancing are part of childhood’s rites of passage, as documented by Iona and Peter Opie<sup>31</sup>; Virginia Caputo also notes the importance of song-making to children as a method of defining and controlling the adult world:

Themes of songs dealing explicitly with issues such as female fear, females as property, physical abuse, control of the State, and traditional female and male roles, abound in the children’s repertoire. Songs that carry these messages are repeated over and over again by children in predominantly ‘chant’ form. The chants indicate that they are not merely reflective of the surrounding adult world, but that children are actively engaged in the process of shaping their worlds<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to compare this with Jacques Attali’s remarks about the correlation between music and violence:

‘This channelization of childhood through music is a politically essential substitute for violence, which no longer finds ritual enactment. The youth see it as the expression of their revolts, the mouthpiece of their dreams and needs, when it is in fact a channelization of the imaginary, a pedagogy of

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<sup>29</sup> Interview 9/10/01

<sup>30</sup> op cit Walkerdine, 1995

<sup>31</sup> Opie, Iona and Peter, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, Paladin, St Albans, 1977

<sup>32</sup> op cit Caputo, 1995. This study refers to Canadian children but I believe there to be a parallel with British children.

the general confinement of social relations in the commodity.’<sup>33</sup>

It is important to realise that it is not unusual for girls to express themselves in song; making the transition into bands is therefore a cultural issue rather than one of ability; I found that the idea of forming a band was not problematic: what was difficult was the identification, mostly by men, of playing in a rock band with adolescent male territory. Previously, if Attali’s theory is correct and applied to the male-gendered rock discourse, only young men had the right to express revolt through the consumption and creation of music.

The following letter to *Sounds*, written in 1976 before punk had really taken off nationally, expresses the frustration of a woman instrumentalist, and possibly predicts the influx of girls into rock bands:

‘... I’m a bass guitarist who would like to play good, heavy rock (ie Sabs, Fairies), but because I’m a girl, no one’s interested.... You see I just want to stand on stage and play bass and that is (at the moment) unacceptable because I know (from experience) that men don’t like the idea that girls can play as well, if not better, than them (I’m no women’s libber- I’m talking about musical ability). I don’t believe I’m the only person who feels this way, but if I am, surely I’ve not been devoting my life to an ambition which is doomed to failure just because I’m “the wrong sex” for a bassist? Maybe the answer lies in mixed bands...’ Joy (the ferret), Carpenders Park, Watford, Herts.<sup>34</sup>

The coming-into-existence of the punk ethos made it easier for women like Joy to form bands; there was a cultural shift away from the idea that ‘only a special (usually male) person can be in a band’, and this directly affected the way some young women perceived themselves. Previous to this period, women’s contact with the rock world was often to take on the role of groupie, providing sex for rock stars after the show. Although Chrissie Hynde declined to take part in my study, she articulates the frustration that was in evidence at the time, according to Amy Raphael, who mentions that Chrissie Hynde gave Johnny Rotten guitar lessons, and later tried rock journalism as a career, but:

‘... Hynde had an epiphany: she had no desire to live her life through others. She was more concerned with her own experience than writing about others’ and intent upon not being regarded as a Pistols’ groupie<sup>35</sup>; she later said of the period, ‘Everyone had a band except me and it used to make me cry’.<sup>36</sup>

This shows a sharp transition from the activities of the younger adolescent females

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<sup>33</sup> Attali, Jacques, *Noise: the political economy of music*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis/London, 1985

<sup>34</sup> *Sounds*, letters, page 42, July 10th 1976

<sup>35</sup> ‘not being a groupie’ was a wonderful side-benefit of playing in a band- you could participate in all the excitement without being scorned as a lesser being by men in rock bands! At an interview by a local paper in Brighton, which a male band tried to hijack by showing off, I was asked by the journalist, in their hearing, if they were my groupies (see Brighton chapter).

<sup>36</sup> Raphael, Amy, *Chrissie Hynde*, in in O’Dair, Barbara, *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997, p 304

at the time. McRobbie and Garber, writing on teenybopper culture, say:

‘There seems little doubt that the fantasy relationships which characterise this resistance depend for their very existence on the subordinate, adoring female in awe of the male on a pedestal... The small, structured and highly manufactured space that is available for ten to fifteen year old girls to create a personal and autonomous area seems to be offered only on the understanding that these strategies also symbolise a future general subordination- as well as a present one’<sup>37</sup>

Some of the women I spoke to had had fantasies of being in bands (similar to those described by Walkerdine) with siblings or friends, and later made what must have seemed a natural transition into the real thing, pushing aside the ‘fantasy relationships’ of their earlier years, claiming the pedestal for themselves. This early and easy transition from fantasy to practice was common to several of them:

Zillah Ashworth, Rubella Ballet (vocalist): “My dad had been drafted into the army. He pretended he could play trombone. They did ask us if we wanted to have music lessons. We [would have] had to have free lessons [but] they didn’t do free lessons. Playing instruments was seen as a middle class thing to do. It was still seen as a posh thing to do. I did want to be in a band from the beginning. I used to watch Top of the Pops and dress up as Pan’s People with my sisters.”<sup>38</sup>

Hester Smith, Dollymixture: “Me and Debsey already had a pretend band of our own... it sounds so childish ... so obviously it was exciting to be in a real band, even if we were just backing singers. Then we decided to form our own... You know what it was, it was Rock Follies<sup>39</sup>. That was really exciting! We used to watch it every week and found it really thrilling. It would look so tacky probably now, but at the time, yeah!”<sup>40</sup>

During the research I did of music papers, I was interested to find that Tina Weymouth, bass player with new-wave US band Talking Heads, described a similar feeling amongst all of the band members, male and female: ‘There was a time... when we felt like people pretending to be a band. Then all of a sudden we were a band’.<sup>41</sup>

Others needed a catalyst- and seeing other women play live made performing seem easy enough to try, sometimes as a transition from political activity with a group of peers:

Lucy O’Brien, The Catholic Girls: “Well, we first formed the band in about 1978. We were all at school and we were very bored. We were good friends, there was four of us who were really good friends in the Sixth Form. We got into punk, we’d been on demonstrations together, we’d got involved in things like hunt saboteurs, with the Anti-Nazi League, and we’d just got very fired up by seeing Gang of Four and the Delta Five on the

<sup>37</sup> McRobbie, Angela, and Garber, Jenny, *Girls and Subcultures*, in McRobbie, Angela, (ed) *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991 and 2000, p 221

<sup>38</sup> Interview date 8/9/00

<sup>39</sup> *Rock Follies* was an ITV series that followed the career of three female rock singers as they tried to forge careers in the music business; it achieved cult status in the 1976-7. Other influences cited include Julie Andrews (Gina Birch)

<sup>40</sup> Interview date 26/1/00

<sup>41</sup> *New Musical Express*, February 4th 1978, p7: Paul Rambali interviews Talking Heads

back of a lorry at pro-Abortion march in London. We just thought they were having so much fun, and punk is about do it yourself, and why don't we just go out and get some instruments and form a band? So that's how it started."

Away from the larger urban centres like Cambridge or Southampton, it was more difficult to join or start a band: Sue Bradley had to wait until she left home to attend Brighton Polytechnic, before she could play with other musicians:

"... at school I always knew I wanted to play in bands. I came from a very small village. The boys tended to get together and play guitars but there wasn't any thing for the girls at all. The girls just didn't do that. The girls just spent most of their time getting themselves ready to go out with boys, they didn't have group activities like that."<sup>42</sup>

#### **(iv) Choice of Instrument and Learning to Play**

I found a variety of attitudes and abilities here; some women ( for instance, Enid Williams, Lora Logic, Karen) were dedicated from their early teens to a particular instrument and were therefore 'raring to go' when the opportunity arose to join or form a band. Their reasons for becoming involved in bands were positive, and they were ambitious to have careers in music; Rachel, on the other hand, was actively against the idea of being a musician:

"It was accidental. I didn't want anything to do with music. That was the one thing I said I'd never do, because my parents were both musicians. I thought I'd go to art college, that was the only thing I had in mind. It was only because Debsey and Hester had to get this band together for a party that I got involved."<sup>43</sup>

For others, in particular Liz Naylor, it was a way out of a claustrophobic upbringing, as her previous comments have shown (p 41). Palmolive, drummer with The Slits, originally wanted to be a mime artist or street clown. She had been living with Joe Strummer (later of The Clash) and dancing at gigs by the 101ers, before deciding to try something on her own:

'I met these people... they said 'Yeah, you can join us, but we only need someone to play drums when someone does something difficult'. I didn't get on with the guy, I didn't like him, so I had a fight with him and left. But I had already kind of played the drums, and I thought 'Ahhh! That's not hard! I can do this! So I started going 'mm-cha, mm-mm-cha.' It went from there. And I really wanted to change, really wanted to do something different.'<sup>44</sup>

Whatever the skills or motivation of the women I interviewed, they all displayed an extremely self-effacing attitude to their abilities as musicians. Gina Birch, bass player and guitarist with The Raincoats, articulates feelings that describe the combined insecurity and

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<sup>42</sup> Interview date 20/11/01

<sup>43</sup> Interview date 2/2/00

<sup>44</sup> From interview with Mike Appelstein, *Caught in Flux* website, [www.appelstein.com](http://www.appelstein.com)



excitement of the pioneer :

“In spite of my feeling things were not difficult, I had a certain sense of modesty and I thought that one note was easier than chords... so I started to play ... I actually put a lot into it, but I always thought that I was terrible. And when people said they thought what I did was interesting and good I didn't really believe them. And yet part of me did and part of me didn't.”<sup>45</sup>

The retrospective attitude of some women was that the ‘package’ of skills they had was worth more than their mastery (sic) of one particular instrument. Enid Williams, the bass player with Girlschool told me:

“I played bass guitar. I listened to some records and tried to copy them. I had a few music lessons from some guy, but not very much. The thing is that we were never ‘musician’ musicians, we were always performers. The musicality was of a reasonable standard, but we weren't musos. We were always band members, so we were entertainers, songwriters, musicians, all rolled into one. It was always, ‘Yeah, let's give that a go, lets see how it works, pick up a bit here, pick up a bit there, it was never a case of ‘Lets study an instrument’.”<sup>46</sup>

Some women were almost reluctantly propelled towards playing:

Mavis Bayton, The Mistakes (guitar): “When I came into Oxford I was a bit depressed and alienated from the city and looking for something to do. And a friend said to me ‘you've always wanted to play guitar, why don't you have some lessons? And I found somebody in the scene who I think gave me six lessons. I think I learnt how to do a bar chord- I think it was the ‘f’ shape. After six weeks of me, he just said: “Look there's this ad in The Backstreet Bugle.’ And it said that they wanted women to get together to be in a band and he said, ‘Why don't you go along?’, and I said, obviously, ‘I can't play the guitar.’ His response was ‘Well they won't be able to play either.’ I think he wanted to get rid of me!”<sup>47</sup>

Choice of instrument was often dictated by the limitations of other band members:

Rachel, Dollymixture (guitar): “My parents were both musicians and we'd always played instruments. I played piano and cello and taught myself guitar. I started learning chords and things when I was about twelve... Debsey and Hester had been in a band together . We just picked our instruments and I was the only one who could play anything so I played the guitar.”<sup>48</sup>

Sometimes, choice of instrument was by default:

Hester Smith, Dollymixture (drums): “I learnt piano outside school ... it was one of those flukes; it wasn't one of those things I'd thought of doing, ever, although I'd seen Karen Carpenter play on TV and I remember thinking ‘that looks fun’. A load of people just seemed to be in bands- not girls though, only blokes. A friend of ours was a singer and she and a couple of friends had formed this band. She asked me and Debsey to do backing vocals. There was me, Debsey and Rachel... Rachel could play a bit of guitar, Debsey wanted to play bass and my hands were quite small so

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<sup>45</sup> Interview date 23/6/00

<sup>46</sup> Interview date 30/11/99

<sup>47</sup> Interview date 14/7/00

<sup>48</sup> Interview date 2/2/00

they said 'you can play drums'. This was a big thing... Rachel said 'You can use my brother's drums'. Rachel's brother was in Cambridge's only punk band and Rachel said 'and he'll teach you'. Really I should never have been a drummer, I never got on with it that well, but that's how it happened. I fell into it."<sup>49</sup>

Punk violin player Sue Bradley, of Brighton band The Reward System, appeared to have no choice but to find a band that would include her skills, after discovering that her environment was not supportive of girls who wanted to play rock instruments; her rural upbringing meant that she had no contact with the DIY ethos and its application to music-making:

"I decided that I really wanted to learn the guitar. The only way that I could think to do this was to have guitar lessons. And of course the only lessons that were offered at school were classical guitar, and classical guitars have got a very wide neck. And I've got very small hands and so I just didn't get on with it at all<sup>50</sup> so I gave up on that. Which is a real shame because in retrospect, I think I'd have liked to play the bass, if I'd known any other girls that were doing it, ... It just didn't occur to me, oh yeah, buy a bass and just copy it off other bands, listen and play by ear. No-one had introduced me to that and if they had, I'd have been off!"<sup>51</sup>

For Karen, drummer with the Gymslips, encouragement came from her family, who refused to subscribe to the gender conventions of 'the outside world'. Karen's father is a musician, and was more than happy to encourage his daughter in her choice of instrument:

"I never had any training, I never had any lessons. I just taught myself by playing along with records and things like that, although my family are musical. But I never learnt any other sort of instrument. My dad is a folk musician, English folk music. I can't say that I was given any confidence generally but on the other hand it was helpful. It's quite unusual that girls would play drums, and part of it, any kid who says "Oh mum I wanna play drums' their parents would say "no, because they're so noisy" and if you're a girl you'd get laughed at. At school I got laughed at by teachers, but at home it was different. My dad did encourage me. My dad helped me when I was 16 to buy a second-hand drum kit. So in that way it was very helpful".<sup>52</sup>

The contrasting abilities of three keyboard players show how difficult it is to stereotype the women I spoke to. Firstly, Lucy O'Brien described how she transferred the piano-playing skills she already had, to synthesiser:

"I had learnt the piano, I was up to about Grade 4 on the piano, I'd had lessons since I was about 13 so I was already quite au fait with that and also with music theory. So it wasn't too hard to transpose and to actually

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<sup>49</sup> Interview date 26/1/00

<sup>50</sup> Bass guitar is also easier to play if you have small hands- bar chords are difficult. This may be one reason why it is used so much by women rock musicians: the most comprehensive study on women bass players is by Clawson- see Clawson, Mary Ann, *When Women Play the Bass: instrument specialization and gender interpretation in alternative rock music*, in *Gender and Society*, 1999, 13, 2

<sup>51</sup> Interview date 20/11/01

<sup>52</sup> Interview date 13/7/00

play the keyboards. What I loved was all the extra bits, playing around with all these sort of psychedelic sounds, with these different knobs. I don't think I used the synthesiser to its full capacity at all, but it was really nice to have a piano with all these effects".<sup>53</sup>

Julie Blair, from The Mockingbirds, practised her parts on the piano at home before playing a borrowed Vox organ at rehearsals:

"I had a Vox organ, and (partner) Rick just showed me a few chords, literally. We've always had a piano at home, so I used to practice a few chords on the piano, then just fiddled around: it was very simple, what we did. I think I added to that and learned how to play a 12-bar blues on the piano, and learned how to play reggae sort of rhythms, but they were never really kosher".<sup>54</sup>

The Gay Animals' keyboard player, Liz Naylor, fits in more with the stereotypical punk player. She had no familiarity with playing an instrument, but she was carried away with the idea of being in a band, and she went ahead and joined one anyway:

"[Previous to this time] It just seemed you could never do that, it was something boys did, and I had no musical ability, I wasn't at all gifted in any way in music, and didn't own any instruments. I didn't own an instrument and I just answered this advert which is a great indication of how great punk was. I thought: Well I'll just form a band, and I played keyboards... Really I can't play, all the keys had stickers on, like C, A, D and all my keys had C, C, C".<sup>55</sup>

'The boys' were not always encouraging, as this experience by Sue from Prag Vec shows: a normal rite of passage for boys was ridiculed when practised by a girl:

"I had a guitar when I was about 15. I had a copy of 'Highway 61 Revisited', and I learned to play 'Tambourine Man'. I remember sitting in my bedroom playing and I could hear my brother and his friend outside the window. They were laughing at me".<sup>56</sup>

From the above, it can be seen that there was a considerable determination to participate in bands regardless of skill, instrument played or expectation; these young women were energetic and resourceful and had put inherent political message of punk into practice: participation and action, rather than watching and absorbing.

#### **(v) Acquiring the First Instrument**

Purchasing an instrument implied a commitment to learning the instrument, and at this particular time, to performing live with it, straight away. The nature of the punk scene was that bands were often performing their first gigs within weeks, or even days, of forming; often there was little rehearsal. Therefore borrowing was very common, particularly for the first few gigs, and this was one of the elements of informal mentoring

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<sup>53</sup> Interview date 6/12/01

<sup>54</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

<sup>55</sup> Interview date 7/9/01

<sup>56</sup> *New Musical Express*, June 16th 1979, interview with Prag Vec by John Hamblett, pp 7/8

that enabled women to join bands:

Rachel: "I borrowed it off somebody and it was a Woolworth's guitar. It had a great name...it was a Thunder something or other. Every rehearsal I had to solder it back together again. This little wire inside it was getting shorter and shorter. We learnt quite a lot as we went along."<sup>57</sup>

Julie Blair, The Mockingbirds: "It was James's keyboard from The Parrots. I think everyone borrowed instruments, as far as I can remember".<sup>58</sup>

However, the spectacle of punk gigs and the energy of the moment meant that a band could become busy very quickly however inexperienced they were, and this could cause problems with conflicting gig engagements: a shared guitar could not be in two venues at the same time. It would become necessary to buy an instrument of one's own<sup>59</sup>. Because most of these bands (even Girlschool, a heavy metal band) were actively against 'musos' (see Enid Williams, above), the quality of the instrument did not matter. Cheapness was essential, unless a parent could be persuaded to pay for the instrument- more likely in the case of instruments perceived to be jazz or classical in nature, less likely if the instrument was a rock instrument. Karen's father's empathy with his daughter's musical ambitions meant he helped her to purchase her first drum kit:

"I got my first kit from a drum shop in Stratford. It was an very old jazz kit. I only had £100. The bloke in the shop was really helpful in trying to get something together for little money... When I was 16 I had an endowment- they (parents) had been putting a bit of money away for me every year. Also I was working in Sainsburys on a Saturday".<sup>60</sup>

Lora Logic's parents were keen at first to support their daughter's musical ambitions and bought her saxophone for her when she was fourteen; when asked what instrument she'd like to play, she asked for one "half thinking they'd never buy me a saxophone because it was so big and so expensive, but they did."

Liz Naylor had had a difficult relationship with her mother, but still managed to persuade her that she should buy her first keyboard for her:

"I actually did make my mum buy it; I must have guilt tripped her; it was from A1 music in Oxford Street in Manchester ... it sounded like Una Baines's from the Fall and it kind of some plinky piano thing and it was about a hundred quid... and then I came across a second-hand Vox Jaguar. I signed on during this time (so) God knows how I got the money!"<sup>61</sup>

Although some of the younger instrumentalists could persuade their parents to buy their instruments, this was not a possibility for older girls. Some of the younger ones also

<sup>57</sup> Interview date 2/2/00

<sup>58</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

<sup>59</sup> Unless, like Siouxsie and the Banshees, you played support acts to the same bands all the time; the band are documented as borrowing equipment mainly from New York band Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers, until they signed a record contract- almost two years. See Colegrave, Stephen and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell and Co, London, 2001, pp 332-333

<sup>60</sup> Interview date 13/7/00

<sup>61</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

had to buy their own equipment, and could be naive about what to expect:

Enid Williams, *Girlschool*: “I bought it (bass guitar) second-hand out of my paper round, it was thirteen pounds, I was very shocked that it only had four strings, ’cos I thought that all guitars had six.”<sup>62</sup>

Gina Birch’s first purchase was spontaneous:

“I bought my first bass guitar in the beginning of 1977. I had no musical education... there were very few female bands around but a band called The Slits had started to play and I was so amazed and so wanted to do this. When I saw them I was at an Art and Politics conference at the A Gallery and it was just near Charing Cross Road where all the guitar shops are. So at lunchtime I went for a couple of drinks and when I came out of the pub I just walked straight into a guitar shop and bought a really cheap nasty brown bass guitar, took it home, and sprayed it with some sparkly car spray paint.”<sup>63</sup>

There was a considerable degree of determination and initiative present in Southampton’s sixth-form band *The Catholic Girls*, as Lucy O’Brien explains:

“My keyboards were actually assembled from a kit that was made by the keyboard player from another punk band (who had a bit of a crush on me at the time). I’d saved up, I had a Saturday job and I’d saved up for this new synthesiser, and it was really exciting because synthesisers were just coming into play then, synthesisers were the new big thing.... One of the big instruments was the drum kit. Cos we were all in the sixth form we didn’t have a lot of money between us so we used to make cakes and earrings and things at school and sell them and with the money from that we got a drum kit on hire purchase and paid I think it was about nine pounds a week, or maybe it was less. So we gradually assembled our instruments”<sup>64</sup>

Bands whose members had jobs had more money to spend on musical equipment; some felt embarrassed by this, due to the poverty ethos of punk, and would go to great lengths to disguise their relative wealth, as Mavis Bayton reveals:

“Within a few weeks we said ‘Let’s get equipment’. We looked at the ads in the paper. We bought a whole band’s equipment- it was really rubbish- for a hundred pounds. Mic stands, harmonicas, everything, it was really rubbish. Me and the mandolin player shared an amp together, it was an old valve amp. It was really difficult sharing. Then after six months we thought ‘Let’s get our own gear then’. I remember I went from this really crap guitar to a Les Paul. I was kind of embarrassed to have a Les Paul, and that was ’cos I had a job, I was teaching and I had the money to do it. I had the definite impression that a Les Paul just wasn’t very punk. So I put elastoplast all over the Les Paul and sort of stuck stickers on it so it looked a bit nasty cos I thought it looked too posh”.<sup>65</sup>

From the respondents to the questionnaire I sent out, the following replies show the variety of sources that supplied instruments for women players; the gift from a friend:

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<sup>62</sup> Interview date 30/11/99

<sup>63</sup> Interview date 23/6/00

<sup>64</sup> Interview date 6/12/01

<sup>65</sup> Interview date 14/7/00

Sue Ballingall, Autonomy, North of England: “Mostly the drum kit was given by a friend- a very old, knackered Salvation Army drum kit. I bought a few bits for it from local musicians, classifieds, etcetera.”

Diversion of savings intended for another purpose:

Suzanne Long, Gateshead: “We were planning to get married and we had saved £100 and he insisted I bought a bass with the money as there was one in a sale for £112. It was an Ibanez Blazer bass.”

Factory work at unsocial hours:

Martine Hilton, The Passage, Manchester: “ I bought my first bass guitar by working nights in a factory, chosen with Gus Gangrene of the Drones (ugh!)”

Bought second-hand and borrowed:

Lorraine Hilton, synth player, The Passage, Manchester: “Bought the Vox (amplifier) and borrowed the synth from Dick Witts”

Poor-quality equipment bought cheaply:

Eliza Taylor, The Syphletix, Hounslow: (bass) “Bought for £5!”

Bought in instalments:

Sian Treherne, Scream and Scream Again, Gloucester (bass): “A catalogue! Needless to say it was not a ‘name make’ but I could pay weekly!”

Made by an enthusiastic friend:

Vi Subversa, Poison Girls, Brighton (guitar): “I bought it second-hand in Brighton. I don’t recall it particularly- I remember it was too heavy for me and I eventually found a guitar comfortable for me. Richard (Famous) *made* me a superb one which accommodated my curves.”<sup>66</sup>

Thus it would seem that the women involved in music production displayed considerable resourcefulness in order to obtain instruments, not only borrowing but also trawling second-hand shops, mail-order, hire purchase, and self-assembly.

## **(vi) The First Gigs**

Like the idea of musical amateurism, finding gigs was an issue that held both advantage and disadvantage for girls in bands. Girls playing instruments in bands have continually been seen as a novelty by promoters and indeed almost all facets of the music industry, and at the time being studied within punk there was a dual ethic of promoting bands with women personnel because they would draw crowds (men perhaps to gawp, women perhaps to admire) and promoting bands with women personnel because of the ideological clout one would acquire. The supportive nature of local scenes, whether through Women’s Centres (Bayton), sibling encouragement (Rachel), mentoring (Vi Subversa and various women), or just being ‘on the punk scene’ (Liz Naylor) meant that the first step to live performance often bypassed the normal way of getting a live gig, that

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<sup>66</sup> see appendices for further details

of sending a demo tape. There was an atmosphere of facilitation that was quite different from the competitive situation that exists when venues are scarce and audiences for live music dwindle. An important potential hurdle, that of getting past the entry-level live gatekeeper, which will be shown in a later chapter to be a problem for some punk bands in Brighton prior to the opening of the Vault, was thus avoided. Much has been made of Siouxsie and the Banshees' first gig, in which they performed an extended version of The Lord's Prayer, and it is tempting in retrospect to regard this as part of punk mythology- but my own experience (see Chapter Four: The Brighton Scene), and those described below, show how frequently the rules of access were broken or pushed aside. As punk poet Attila the Stockbroker told me, it was expected that a band would ask to perform at another bands' gig, and to refuse was to be seen to be unreasonable. Hester Smith's comments about the Dollymixture bear this out:

“We didn't really need a lot of help (to get gigs), we found it quite easy... We used to go to gigs and then just go up to the bands and say ‘Can we support you?’ and they usually said yes- I think they were just intrigued. Or we would go to colleges if we heard of any students who had bands, we'd go and visit them and say ‘Can we play with you?’ . We were quite, you know, forward in that way. Just anyone, we'd ask if we could play”.<sup>67</sup>

Stuart Home has commented that he was often unaware of the line-up of bands before he went to a gig- he just went along for the experience.<sup>68</sup> This attitude was typical of people attending gigs at this time, and was displayed by the promoters I spoke to. For instance, Christine Robertson, who started promoting punk gigs at various venues in Reading when she was at University there, describes the nature of gigs in Reading at this time:

“The reason I was promoting concerts was because there were no good concerts being put on in our locality, it was just stuck in a time warp, and this was a way of addressing my need for good music.(how did you find bands?) I used to come to London a lot. It was more something that was in the air- there were a lot of people thinking along similar lines somehow; and it didn't matter whether it was a successful punk band or something that was unknown. It was whether a band was available for the gig and if they were someone you'd vaguely heard of in that scene- so it was very much events based”.<sup>69</sup>

Attila the Stockbroker promoted gigs at the University of Kent, and describes the young promoters' willingness to gamble at the time:

“The scene in Canterbury was mainly based at the University because we had the venues. I'd go to London and see bands and it would be their first gig and I'd ask them to play, and I booked them. (Once) the Gay Society

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<sup>67</sup> Interview date 26/1/00

<sup>68</sup> *No Future? Conference*, University of Wolverhampton, September 2001; reiterated by Adverts' bass-player Gaye Advert, when describing London venue the Roxy ‘You didn't just go when there was a band you wanted to see, you just went there’, in Stevenson, Nils and Stevenson, Ray, *Vacant: a diary of the punk years 1976-79*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1999, p 84

<sup>69</sup> Interview date 9/10/01

asked me to organise something. I booked this band for 50 quid to play one of the venues. By the time the gig arrived they were on the front page of the Melody Maker and NME. The Gay Society were really chuffed with it, they made loads of money".<sup>70</sup>

Christine Robertson continues:

"I can't remember a lot of the bands that I saw. You always remember the key ones that went on to be famous. I saw *loads* of bands, *loads* of bands; some of the support acts we had were really, really good and perhaps never got the audience they deserved.... There was a real proliferation".<sup>71</sup>

It can be surmised from these comments that there was no preconception about what band would sound like or look like, so long as they could provide an experience for the audience. Musical competence, gender, style and content were arbitrary: the audience was assumed to be open-minded. This was very much a feature of early punk (the so-called 'first wave') and allowed unusual bands to take to the stage.<sup>72</sup>

Sometimes, a party would provide the setting for the first gig, and this would lead to not only other bookings, but also provided the vitally important factor for any successful band at the time- a local following:

Hester Smith, Dollymixture:" It was at a party in a hall. I don't know if it was like this when you were growing up but there just seemed to be parties every weekend. Somebody would hire a hall, you wouldn't necessarily have to know them but everybody went. It was one of those. When this woman heard that we were going to form a band she said 'Oh, you can play at my party'. So we had two or three weeks to get ready to play our first gig. Just this hall in Cambridge, a Church Hall"<sup>73</sup>

Mavis Bayton, The Mistakes:" The first gig we did was the party of a friend and we thought that would be a safe environment to come out as a band in. We had a following from day one, there were just so many people. The women's centre in Oxford was quite big. There was a women's cafe, a women's food co-op, and there was a women's centre, it was all on a shoestring. There was an advice centre, there was a big space, but largely we found other spaces. What was important was the following. We were a breath of fresh air, within 8 weeks of forming we played outdoors to one and a half thousand people in the open air festival the annual Mayfly. Down by the river, and the organiser of that had heard about us, so we were catapulted on to that, really".<sup>74</sup>

Frequently, the first gig provided the stimulus for formally writing the first songs, taking the band from being just an idea to the reality of live performance:

Lucy O'Brien: "The first gig was sort of by accident as often happens with punk things. We'd just about scraped together all the instruments between us. I think Judith had just bought her bass guitar from

<sup>70</sup> Interview date 15/1/01

<sup>71</sup> Interview date 9/10/01

<sup>72</sup> Later, bands became much more stereotyped along aesthetic and political lines, resulting in everything from right-wing skinhead involvement to separatist feminist gigs

<sup>73</sup> Interview date 26/1/00

<sup>74</sup> Interview date 14/7/00



Woolworth's really cheap. There were some male friends of ours who had heard that 'there's this all girl band, we'll get them to support us', 'cos they had a gig at a place called The Joiners Arms, (which actually I've noticed is still on the circuit). So they just rang us and said "We've got a gig for you", and we thought, 'Oh shit we'd better write some songs!', so we just got about three songs together in as many days and just got up on stage and it was the most frightening experience of my life- but I was hooked from then on".<sup>75</sup>

Bands would do gigs further afield from their local area en masse, sharing transport, equipment and moral support, as Lucy continues:

There were about four or five local bands in Southampton and we all would do gigs together and support each other, and gigs around the south coast and a maybe a few in London; it was quite a tight-knit little scene really.

There was an advantage to shared gigs for the beginner bands- three songs are not enough for a full band set, as Gris Sanderson (bass player, Meleta Bean), acknowledges:

We shared some equipment, like P.A. systems, with other local bands, and did joint gigs, which helps when you don't have much material!<sup>76</sup>

The smallness (and sometimes the oppositional nature) of the scene, even in a large city like Manchester, often meant that bands clumped together and encouraged each other almost as a show of strength:

Liz Naylor, The Gay Animals: "Manchester at that time was really small, it was a tiny musical community and if you say to people, "Of course I knew Joy Division", it's nothing- they were just blokes you sat with. So we supported The Fall on lots of dates, it didn't mean anything to us. In a way we took it seriously because we thought we were great- I mean we were appalling but we didn't think of it as a career, it was just an experience, and we were there. Me and Cath [Carroll, later to become a journalist] thought we were kind of somebody in this tiny Manchester scene and our band was just the thing we did".<sup>77</sup>

For Girlschool, their recognisably Heavy Metal style meant that a gig circuit already existed, and this gave them a great advantage over punk or new-wave bands whose music may have challenged the ears of promoters (see later comments by Brighton venue promoters) :

Enid Williams: "It was a big help being female in the sense of getting gigs -because it was like, great! women on stage, or girls on stage as they would see it, we'll pull the punters in, you know, it was a little bit of a novelty; it made us stand out. It was definitely a help in terms of getting work and in terms of getting publicity in the music press. But it was a hindrance in terms of being taken seriously. We got an agent in 78 who got us lots and lots of gigs. So he was helpful in the sense of we wouldn't have been working if he hadn't been getting us gigs... , but it was just business; he

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<sup>75</sup> Interview date 6/12/01

<sup>76</sup> from questionnaire reply

<sup>77</sup> Interview date 7/9/00

wasn't pro female bands or anything like that. It was just that he thought he could sell us, we were sellable<sup>78</sup> and he thought he could get us work. I don't think that was any different to a male band that would have an angle or something".<sup>79</sup>

The above quotation shows the fact that promoters were keen on the 'sellable' (gimmicky) aspect of all-female bands. For some bands, early exposure to the music press accelerated their progress from a local to a national profile within a matter of weeks:

Hester Smith, Dollymixture: Our fourth gig was at the Cambridge Corn Exchange.<sup>80</sup> I think it was The Fall and Kevin Rowland's band and the Nips. Somehow we got on the bill and the NME were there and they gave us a really, really good review and after that it was really really easy- there were a lot of people interested in us in Cambridge, interested in managing us. There just seemed to be a lot of interest in what we were doing, everywhere. We were very, very lucky; it was easy.<sup>81</sup>

Other were propelled even further: as Gina Birch told me, after a few gigs playing local pubs 'treading where the 101ers<sup>82</sup> had played before', the Raincoats played a pub in West London called The Chippenham:

There was this guy over from Warsaw who was organising this international performance art festival... they liked us so much they invited us to go to Poland... so off we go... the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh gig I ever did were in Warsaw<sup>83</sup>

Joining a band could be as easy and direct as an invitation from the stage, as in the case of the Thompson Twins:

At Thompson Twins' gigs people are nearly always invited up on stage to participate, to bang or blow something and contribute to the music... It was by clambering on stage that two new members, Joe Leeway (congas and percussion) and Jane Shorter (sax and keyboards), came to join recently.<sup>84</sup>

Brighton band The Mockingbirds described a similar convention:

We had this brilliant song called I Like Boys that just lent itself to a reggae rhythm, and it left lots of space. We had all these percussion instruments, so we used to get people to come up and sort of bang lots of different percussion things to fill all this space that we, as inadequate musicians, couldn't fill.

*Q. Like a collaboration with the audience?*

Yes<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> this perhaps contrasts with the punk ethic mentioned earlier.

<sup>79</sup> Interview date 30/11/99

<sup>80</sup> The capacity of the Cambridge Corn Exchange is 2000- a relatively large venue

<sup>81</sup> Interview date 26/1/00

<sup>82</sup> An early incarnation of male punk band The Clash

<sup>83</sup> Interview date 23/6/00

<sup>84</sup> *The Face* No 11 March 1981 Deanne Pearson *Twins: how to tell them apart*

<sup>85</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

Therefore it can be seen that a combination of circumstances- the 'time being right', easy access to equipment and gigs, and a continued interest in and support for new bands from an eager and tolerant audience, elevated these women to an unprecedented level of self-expression in musical performance. The national memory of punk is very simplistic; female punks are remembered as wearing dramatic makeup and fishnet stockings. Some of the women I spoke to fitted in with this category; others did not, but still saw themselves as punks. It is interesting to note how few of the women I spoke to had *no* musical skill: some of them, such as Lucy O'Brien, transferred existing skills to a similar instrument. Others had picked up skills, or at least enabling ideas, from the school system or home musical environments. Some of the bands were 'user-friendly' (see above); others' music, for instance that of the Slits, was downright aggressive, but just as inspirational to the women (and men) who came to see them. The attitude of the press, in particular the music press- the 'inkies'<sup>86</sup> - was to play an important part in the way bands with women players were received. As the punk bands moved from subcultural to mainstream consciousness, from local to national audiences, they began a real engagement with national media institutions.

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<sup>86</sup> A slang term for the triumvirate of weekly rock newspapers: *Sounds*, *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker*, all of which targeted the young male rock fan.

**Chapter Three- Media Gatekeepers and Cultural Intermediaries: the positive and negative implications of publicity and “success”**

## **Media Gatekeepers and Cultural Intermediaries: the positive and negative implications of publicity and ‘success’.**

*Page 3(sic), New Musical Express, June 29th 1978, ‘News Desk’, features separate photographs of three female bass players, Gaye Advert, Tina Weymouth and Gislaine of the Killjoys, whom it says has split up; all are playing bass guitars. These are the only photos on this page.*

*‘...all this female activity, whatever its fun and style and art as a collective occupation, is done, in the end, individually, for the boys’ sake. it is the male gaze that gives the girls’ beauty work its meaning’.*

Simon Frith’s comment above explains the bafflement with which some male commentators regarded the influx of high-profile women into their rock world of gigs, music radio, music print, and recording. These women did not seek male approval for their activities: such approval was a necessary evil in order to pass through the various stages that led to a platform for expression of musical and political ideas, for in order to be consumed, disseminated (sic), publicised, or in any way to communicate, youth music must pass through a filter; this may take the form of a media or record company gatekeeper, in which case, aesthetic decisions are involved, or a potentially less-judgemental intermediary. This chapter will examine the unusual engagement of these gatekeepers and intermediaries at this time with the musicians being discussed, with reference to the weekly music press, small record labels and the John Peel show. One of the industrial hazards of being a female in the music industry is also explored at the end of this chapter, as there is more to gatekeeping than simple aesthetic judgement in print and other media: sexual availability is an implicit concern in the promotion of female artists. Later in this work, the idea of ‘appearance’ will be investigated further.<sup>1</sup>

### **(i) The Rock Press**

The authenticity endowed on punk musicians by the audience perception of them as ‘learning on stage’ and just like me’ (and, in some cases, their ‘refusal of expertise’<sup>2</sup>) could help female instrumentalists greatly- although this was often misinterpreted by rock journalists. For instance, during my research I found that both Tina Weymouth (from U.S. band Talking Heads) and Gaye Advert (from U.K. band The Adverts) were alternately patronised and scolded for the simplicity of their playing by rock newspapers such as Sounds, Melody Maker and The New Musical Express; gradually, over a series of gigs by each of the bands, journalists began to realise that not

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<sup>1</sup> Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects*, Pantheon, New York, 1981, p 229. Speaking as a woman, (but not for all women), I have *always* worn make-up (if I wear it) for fun, perfume because I like the smell myself, and clothing to play with the ideas associated with it. Neither Frith nor Berger, whose ideas I take issue with later, are female. As an academic gatekeeper, Frith’s work in retrospect is grossly insulting to any woman undertaking the adventure of participating in bands.

<sup>2</sup> this term was coined by Reynolds and Press to describe the attitude of The Slits. Reynolds, S, and Press, J, *The Sex Revolts: gender, rebellion and rock'n'roll*, Serpent's Tail, London, 1995 pp 307/8

only were the simple bass lines intentional, but they were an integral part of the music that the band was playing, and that the reviewer was enjoying.<sup>3</sup> It is also interesting to follow the reassessment of musical skills according to the gender of the reviewer, (although sometimes female reviewers were tougher than males). For instance, the patronising male reviewer, writing about Talking Heads' bass player, Tina Weymouth:

'Tina has short blonde hair and black jeans and looks sexy like a girl on a tennis court.' 'Its only Tina who fills out the sound with her strong bass line. She has a nice new red and white bass and jerks her head with every beat, worriedly checking first her fingering and then making sure she is playing the correct string. Sometimes she glances anxiously over to David to make sure everything's okay... When Tina left the stage her blouse was sticking to her back- a sign of something'.<sup>4</sup>

The 'We can tolerate incompetence if the woman is sexy' style of review was very common and was often applied to Gaye Advert,<sup>5</sup> who played bass for the Adverts. Her photograph would often appear next to small news items or gig dates (often without her bass guitar, thus rendering her a less threatening pin-up punk). For instance, there are marked similarities between the above review and this one about Gaye Advert:

'Gaye Advert-a far more appealing punkette than any of the Slits-provides point of visual attention (A). Oh to be gazed upon by those sultry, tempting eyes which Gaye fixes on the audience at least two or three times during every number. No more than two or three times mind you, because Gaye likes to look at her bass very hard because she doesn't know how to play it very well yet, and so it helps if she watches where she puts her fingers. Her playing is just about okay.'<sup>6</sup>

Compare this with the more thoughtful female reviewer, who has reassessed Gaye's playing abilities:

'...which brings me to my biggest realisation of the gig- that Gaye's bass playing is far from the hilarious joke one has been led to believe, since she's graduated from her initially fearful and delicate finger placement to an adequately ballsy attack.'<sup>7</sup>

In order to retaliate, the female reviewer has had to pull Gaye into the male arena- rather than discuss her musicianship, by describing her playing style as 'ballsy' and using the word 'attack' she is praising the fact that Gaye has transcended her

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the American Weymouth had followed the classic British punk trajectory, moving from being a fan to playing in the band, and co-wrote their first British hit, 'Psycho Killer'.

<sup>4</sup> *New Musical Express*, April 2nd 1977, Miles review of Talking Heads at CBGBs

<sup>5</sup> Gaye Advert talks about the Roxy Club in London: 'I wasn't made to feel conscious of the fact that I was female there as I was by the music press-a band full of Martians could have played there and no one would have batted an eyelid'. Stevenson, Nils and Stevenson, Ray, *Vacant: a diary of the punk years 1976-79*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1999, p 5

<sup>6</sup> from the *New Musical Express* June 11th 1977 p 44 review of The Adverts by Chris Salewicz.

<sup>7</sup> *New Musical Express*, Angie Errigo, September 24th 1977, p 7

gender to achieve, through aggression, the status of honorary man! Lucy Green has noted the advantages the punks' 'disdain for musical technicalities' had for female instrumentalists<sup>8</sup>; however, Gaye Advert was expected by many reviewers to be technically better at playing bass than a male player in the same context, since she had the audacity to appear on stage alongside male musicians, to whom they thought punk rock belonged.<sup>9</sup> She is described as a 'punkette' by the male reviewer in order to reinforce the impression that she is trespassing on male territory. She was not the only female instrumentalist to be denigrated in this way; Manchester band The Passage at Goldsmith's College were reviewed by Geoff Hill thus:

'As for the punkette on keyboards- she looks a bit of a goner. Poker face, poring over a musical score on the dashboard; limp-wristed, decidedly non-percussive perusal of the ivories...It gives the whole sound an erie quality however which presumably matches up to their intentions.'<sup>10</sup>

As Dale Spender says:

'Masculinity is the unmarked form: the assumption is that the world is male unless proven otherwise...(a woman) must signify that the norm, the positive, does not apply and so she becomes a *lady* doctor, a *female* surgeon, a *woman* lawyer, or else, in less prestigious occupations, a *waitress*, a *stewardess*, a *majorette*.'<sup>11</sup>

Zillah Ashworth, who still performs with punk band Rubella Ballet, articulates her feelings about the way the press stereotyped male and female roles in the punk scene:

"they changed the word 'punk rocker' to 'punkette' for girls. None of us were 'punkettes'. They tried to devalue the whole thing by trying to split it into punk girl and punk men, whereas everybody was just in the same scene.... when I was becoming a punk in '75, people were unconsciously...(there was) a sort of universal mind.'<sup>12</sup>

Whatever was happening 'on the street', the bands came up against mostly male gatekeepers in the form of music press journalists<sup>13</sup>, or sometimes even female

<sup>8</sup> Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997, p 76

<sup>9</sup> Green calls this 'listening out' for playing skill. Ibid Green, 1997, p 55

<sup>10</sup> *New Musical Express*, May 27th 1978, p56. Other examples include the *New Musical Express* April 16th 1977 p 41; a bad review of the Adverts by Tony Stewart with a sultry photograph of Gaye, described as a 'pretty bassist'; and *New Musical Express*, 10th February 1979, p46, a review of The Tourists at the Hope and Anchor, London, by Rick Joseph: '...and curvaceous Scotette Ann Lennox on vox, larynx, flute, sax and industrial stoppage whistle.' ( photograph of Annie Lennox playing keyboards at the gig). This trend has continued to this day with the branding of honorary males as 'ladettes'.

<sup>11</sup> Spender, Dale, *Man Made Language*, Pandora, London, 1990, p 20

<sup>12</sup> Interview date 8/9/2000

<sup>13</sup> Davies, Helen, *All rock and roll is homosocial: the representation of women in the British rock music press*, in *Popular Music*, Volume 20/3, Cambridge University Press, pp 295-313

gatekeepers who wrote in malespeak. An example of this is the following review of Lesser Known Tunisians at Dingwalls in London by Sue Denom: 'This is a band that attempts to shock shock shock- their girl lead guitarist has even grown a moustache'<sup>14</sup>; she carries on to review the band Babylon, playing on the same bill as follows:

'Babylon used to be The Sadista Sisters. Lady bass player, lady vocalist/front woman. Male guitarist, male keyboards, and I couldn't see the drummer.... If you want to see The Little Ladies<sup>15</sup> live go to see Babylon. Tough little woman, you're almost a man. I'm getting sick of female musicians trying to play like men... -good musicians though.'

There was a strong element in the rock newspapers, (New Musical Express, Sounds and Melody Maker), who felt that female instrumentalists were just a gimmick<sup>16</sup>. This was part of a continuous debate in the music press during the early months of punk, in which both male and female reviewers adopted challenging stances regarding the 'girls in bands' issue. For instance, Julie Burchill (NME) was against; Vivien Goldman (Sounds) was for; Phil McNeill (NME) was for; Gary Bushell (Sounds) was against. After 1979 the whole scene fragmented into a 'second wave' of proto-skinhead punk (dubbed 'Oi' by its champion Gary Bushell), art-punk bands such as The Raincoats, Gang of Four and Scritti Politti, feminist separatist bands such as Jam Today, and the more mainstream 'new wave' bands such as Elvis Costello and the Attractions and Squeeze. This fragmentation of subcultures had happened before- Hebdige documents the breakdown of the Mod subculture into smaller scenes with different taste characteristics.<sup>17</sup> In the case of punk, the separation of the different elements later allowed the 'rock' part to be reclaimed by adolescent males.<sup>18</sup>

A debate was also being held in each paper at editorial meetings about the worth of punk rock itself. Caroline Coon describes the difficulties she had in persuading her colleagues at Melody Maker that something new was happening in music:

'...not only I was a woman (and therefore they weren't taking me seriously), but I was telling them there was something quite threatening occurring. I thought this was going to be the new defining counterculture, which was coming after hippies; it was the cultural dialectic, the reaction against the perceived failure of hippiedom.'

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<sup>14</sup> *New Musical Express*, September 10th 1977, p 46

<sup>15</sup> This is a reference to popular ITV series 'Rock Follies' broadcast in 1976/77. The series followed the careers of four fictional female rock singers and was cited as an inspiration by some of the people I interviewed, although it was heavily criticised by rock bassist Suzi Quatro.

<sup>16</sup> Things have not changed, if the quotation at the beginning of my study is representative of the general view.

<sup>17</sup> Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London, pp 54/55

<sup>18</sup> Punk 'metamorphosed misogyny into militancy' according to Reynolds and Press, op cit 1995, p 68. This phenomenon will be discussed in a later chapter.



Within this debate, which essentially reflected the hippy generation's realisation that they had now become the establishment, there was therefore an added discomfort about the influx of women into punk and new wave. In an attempt to put women in their place, editors would sometimes go to extreme lengths to 'undo' the appreciation a female artist had earned; for instance, the *New Musical Express* included a couscous recipe by respected rock poet Patti Smith (it had never published a recipe before), and finished the feature with the following: 'Joe Stevens, our man in New York, pronounced the couscous delicious and added that Patti could roast his raisins anytime'.<sup>19</sup> She therefore exists as defined by male journalists and editors, for the consumption of the male reader, who can rest assured that she possesses culinary skills as well as revolutionary ones. As Sally Potter observes:

'Femininity' demands the appearance of lack of skill and emphasises nurturance and appreciation of the skills of men... success for women often means gaining the precarious position of token achiever in a male-dominated profession. This position is circumscribed in such a way that as more women achieve in a given area they are forced to compete with each other for the same space rather than the space itself expanding'.<sup>20</sup>

The 'lack of skill' of these punk instrumentalists did not always go hand in hand with femininity, however. (And the competition for 'space' caused problems which will be discussed shortly). Many of these women did not care about being sexually alluring. Rock journalist Viv Goldman took the Slits album (on the cover of which they were photographed naked from the waist up, and covered in mud) to Richard Williams, her editor at *Melody Maker*, because she wanted to write about it; his response was to declare: 'Take it away from me. How can they do that? They look so revolting and so fat'.<sup>21</sup> However, there was also a strong groundswell of writing that criticised the macho attitudes of rock that were being carried forward into punk music. The band The Stranglers in particular were singled out for criticism; they were slightly older than many of the other punk bands, and used the standardised rock rebellion of misogynistic lyrics to make their statement.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of how male reviewers felt, the foregrounding of women musicians in the music press provided instant role models for girls who had had none beforehand; In the case of *Girlschool*, who played 'male' music in a recognisable and less aurally-

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<sup>19</sup> *New Musical Express*, 16th April 1977, p 11. A later NME interview 'with Patti Smith' by Paul Morley consisted mainly of quotations from Lenny Kaye *about* her, her music and what it's like to be in a band with her. *New Musical Express*, 1st April 1977, p 7.

<sup>20</sup> Sally Potter, *On Shows, Framing Feminism*, Pandora, London, 1987, p 30

<sup>21</sup> from *Punk. A Life Apart*, Stephen Colegrave and Chris Sullivan, Cassell and Co, , London, 2001, p 206

<sup>22</sup> Phil McNeill quotes the 'Strangled' Magazine review of *Rattus Norvegicus* 'About giving the woman some stick' in his strongly-worded critique of their lyrics, but remarks that the group possesses the aggressive stance that is 'today's currency'. *New Musical Express*, April 30th 1977, p 35

challenging style than some of the bands at the time, reviewers were aware that they were writing about a band who played a recognisable genre of music very competently. The writers must have enjoyed being part of the band experience:

Enid Williams: 'We had quite a few journalists who gave us some great reviews. They liked the band and hopefully wrote what they thought. One of the reasons that people liked us was that we were very friendly with journalists, it wasn't some kind of political manoeuvre or anything, it's just that we were young, outgoing ... it was like a big family thing, like let's have a laugh, everyone can join in; journalists would just jump in the back of the van with us, have a few drinks and let's have a party. Robbi Millar liked the band and wrote good things about us and there were other male journalists, although with her it was slightly different cos she did have a female perspective on it. We did have other male journalists, perhaps for slightly different reasons, that were equally supportive.'<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes, it was difficult for bands to manage the effects of media coverage internally, and this could lead to jealousy and sometimes exclusion.<sup>24</sup> The tensions of being in a band are great enough without external judgements upsetting the balance of power in a band, and this is exacerbated when there are gender issues to take into consideration as well as 'normal' tensions. Lora Logic experienced the ill-effects of excessive media praise, when Poly Styrene could not cope with sharing the limelight with another woman:

'....power went to her head. And then sometimes somebody would write something about me; if they wrote anything else, that wasn't about her she couldn't handle it. Once this journalist called Jane Suck in Sounds, she wrote 'Lora Logic is X-Ray Spex' and that was it- I had to go after that one. The manager just wanted to keep her happy; it was

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<sup>23</sup> interview date 30/11/99

<sup>24</sup> I was aware, playing in a mixed band, that the band received a certain amount of extra attention because of my presence. This led to jealousy and sometimes physical aggression, at the same time as rudeness from some quarters: for instance, Sounds sent a photographer to our house for a shoot. He referred constantly to 'the girl' without ever talking to me directly or using my name. None of the members of my band took him to task for this. Playing band members off against each other was a constant tactic of the press especially, it seems, with mixed-gender bands, and often led to such tensions within the band that it split up: other examples I found were Nico, from the Velvet Underground: 'They had some personality problems, they wanted to get rid of me because I had more attention in the press. Well, that's how it went.' March 1975 in *Beyond the Velvet Underground* Omnibus Press, London, New York, Sydney, Cologne, 1989; a review of Damned/Adverts Fruit Eating Bears by Kim Davis in the *New Musical Express*, August 27th 1977, p 40 (about TV Smith) '...and he has to keep moving, otherwise Gaye Advert, in precarious black jacket and glowing trousers, smouldering motionless beside her amp at the back of the stage, would be the focus of attention'; a review by Tony Parsons in the *New Musical Express*, April 8th 1978: '... Patti Smith is still unable to stifle her tiresome predilection for indulging in lengthy bouts of flagellatory calisthenics (sic) on that dreaded instrument of hers, her wretched guitar. Crouched over her dull axe like Quasimodo on a Bert Weedon course for butter-fingered beginners, Patti sadistically scrubs the cursed frets with such obsessive frenzy that... you conclude she's not trying to affirm her undisputable (sic) virtuosity, she's merely making sure Harry Debbie don't get too far ahead in the glamour stakes by having a manicure'. In the rest of this article Parsons goes on at length about Smith's attire.

working, it was a happening band, and I was quite dispensable. So they replaced me with a male saxophone player, and I was devastated. It was my whole life. I was very, very upset, and so I was not going to have anything more to do with this horrible music business, so I went to St Martin's College of Art to study photography'.

This is an illustration of Potter's observation about competition for space. Gender politics are such that it is possible that Jane Suck may have known what the result of her review might have been; there is a very controlling relationship between rock reviewers and the bands they review, particularly when the band is relatively inexperienced. It often seemed to me at the time that the people who came to interview the band I was in wanted to actually be involved in the music itself as much as mediating it; perhaps the number of journalists who became performers reflects this factor.(amongst others at this time, Chrissie Hynde, Giovanni Daddomo, Mark Perry).

### **(ii) The Radio: Radio Play by John Peel Leads to Record Deals/Record Deals lead to Radio Play by John Peel**

After gaining attention by the music press, the next step for most bands was to make a record, and then try to attain radio play. Making a record, even on a small label, brought bands to a new audience and was a seal of approval that allowed them to move a stage further, whether this was more gigs, or radio play; there is a symbiosis between music radio and records. In order to achieve radio play, a recording must be made, whether this takes the form of a session (which may lead to a recording deal, as it did in the case of Siouxsie and the Banshees) or a record on a small label. Recordings were the passport to radio play, which would increase live audiences, and therefore offers of gigs<sup>25</sup> :

Enid Williams: "We had an old friend who we met down the local youth club a few years earlier who started a little record label, as happened at that time, and he was very helpful in the sense that if we hadn't of had that first record we wouldn't've gone on tour, but again it was kind of a business thing, it wasn't that he was rooting for us."<sup>26</sup>

The influence of Radio 1 DJ John Peel was tremendous for all punk and proto-punk bands and especially so for the girls. John Peel and his producer John Walters regularly attended punk gigs at venues such as The Vortex and the Roxy, and were both aware that there was an unusual tolerance and audience for girl bands at this time:

John Peel: "You were aware that it was the first time that it was possible for women to be in bands for reasons other than the fact that they looked cute. I mean obviously there had been women in bands prior to that but they'd been there for novelty reasons as much as anything else

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<sup>25</sup> Sometimes, a band would not possess the financial resources to provide what a potential label required in order to consider signing them, for instance Rubella Ballet's Zillah Ashworth told me: 'EMI asked us to send a demo tape and we thought 'How are we going to record that then?'. I don't know why but we sent them a really crap recording we'd made at a rehearsal.' Interview date 8/9/00

<sup>26</sup> Interview date 30/11/99

I think. I suppose it was really seeing the Slits a couple of times, where you just thought... It was quite exciting really, not exciting in a sexual way, you just thought about time too, really.”<sup>27</sup>

The music policy of the BBC as a publicly funded station had to be incorruptible, according to Peel. It was not linked to the market and did not have to show commercial success, did not have to please advertisers, and by playing minority-interest music, Peel and Walters were fulfilling a remit *not* to follow market forces:

“We were lucky and remained lucky because of the BBC’s strange position within the market: we’ve never had to worry about whether things were commercially viable or not. We just put them on because we thought they were worth hearing. So a lot of the things we put on you’d know perfectly well they’d got no commercial potential whatsoever. Whereas Capital or somebody would have to take that into consideration.”<sup>28</sup>

There was opposition to their choice of music:

“The controller of Radio One at the time, Derek Chinnery, called John Walters in... to get an assurance from him that we weren’t playing, or had any plans to play, this punk music that he’d read about in the tabloids. Walters was very happy to tell him that the last two programmes we’d done had been devoted to nothing but!”<sup>29</sup>

However, Derek Chinnery was well aware of John Peel’s cult status; Peel was actually being paid a loyalty payment at this time to prevent him from leaving the station. Many of the women I interviewed would not have had any sort of radio exposure had it not been for Peel and Walters. Even high-profile bands like The Slits found their music effectively censored in the UK by being ignored in playlist terms, as Christine Robertson told me:

“The only person that would play their records was John Peel. None of the other so-called liberal stations in this country would play them. The minute it got on to the continent it was a different matter. Then the records were played. And even more when you got on to America, the records were played. OK it might have been on college radio stations and so on initially, but they were exposed.”<sup>30</sup>

Once, Peel and Walters, by ‘plugging’ a band they liked, became actively involved in getting the band signed. The band was Siouxsie and the Banshees:

“It was Walters and myself, particularly Walters, really that got Siouxsie and the Banshees signed. They’d done two sessions for the programme before Polydor signed them. I always wondered whether their reluctance to sign the band was because it was fronted by a rather stropky woman, (I mean albeit one with good legs which would have

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<sup>27</sup> Interview date 20/10/01

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Interview date 9/10/01

been of interest to the tabloids). We just kept putting them on the radio and saying 'This is a band that should be signed'. Whenever we talked to people from record companies we'd say there must be somebody at your company who's got sound judgement. And just mentioning their name and probably giving them copies of the sessions on tape. We did play our part in that respect as well. [We didn't do it with other bands because] it wasn't necessary... they [The Banshees] didn't want to bring out their own records, and they quite wanted record company support."<sup>31</sup>

This degree of power within the BBC organisation gave Peel and Walters the confidence to allow bands to record whole series of sessions without breaking into the mainstream charts. However, their support for female bands was not unremitting, as the Dollymixture discovered:

Rachel: "...we did a John Peel roadshow with my brother's band; from there he gave us a session which didn't get repeated because John Walters hated it; he said he thought we were a mixture of the Slits and the Nolans. It wasn't very cool at the time."

Naturally, if bands were receiving a vote of confidence by DJs on a national radio station, there will be interest from smaller record companies even if the larger ones do not have the courage or inclination to enter into a working relationship with them. This is where the independent labels came into their own, and they were given a particular boost by The Cartel, a distribution network set up by Rough Trade Records, which facilitated access to radio-play.

#### **(iv) Record Distribution and Production: Pros and Cons**

The Cartel was set up by Geoff Travis as a national association of like-minded small record labels, who agreed to distribute each others products as well as other small label records and imports:

'.... it just seemed that the way to organise that was to develop a distribution system where you could, in a countrywide way, give people access to this stuff. That was a clear, plain plan really. And that's what we started working on. The way that we did that was we just identified, if you like, our kind of 'allies' around the country, the people who had a very like-minded vision... It became obvious because, for example if we bought 200 copies of a single- if we bought the Pere Ubu singles in, say, they would call up and say, could we get some of those, and by the fact that they were communicating with you you knew they were interested in the same things. And so it was five or six people. So people at Rough Trade, Richard Scott had the idea that why don't we try to encourage people to be regional distributors, not try to make it London-centric. Try to make it very regional and empower the regions and create the possibility that bands in those regions could have somewhere relatively local that they could go and say, look we need help, can we plug into the system, rather than, say, if you're in York, it's a long way to London, it would be impossible to get someone to listen

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<sup>31</sup> Interview date 20/10/01

to you , and its an bit of an expensive journey if you can't get in at the front door.'<sup>32</sup>

This encouraged local music-makers to become even more productive: the 'outreach' attitude of Travis was unprecedented in Britain. Travis 'joined the dots' of the local companies to create a national profile for independently-produced music. It meant John Peel

'... got sent an enormous number of records because people realised that you didn't have to come down to London, or come up to London, to sign up with a record label and place your future completely in the hands of some bloke that you'd never met before.'<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to compare the attitudes of John Peel and Geoff Travis, because so many of the later all-female bands (such as The Raincoats, The Mo-dettes, The Bodysnatchers and the Marine Girls) had taken the punk ethos and moved on with it. Travis and Peel respect each other but there are differences in their musical taste that enabled a broadening of the genre that further increased access to the dual exposure of recording and broadcasting:

John Peel: I've never been that impressed by musical competence anyway. We'd gone through that whole progressive rock period with all those awful people like ELP and Yes, people when they reviewed them would emphasise their enormous musical skills but frankly I think they were grossly exaggerated. What they did with those theoretical musical skills is make pompous, overblown, and extraordinarily boring music.<sup>34</sup>

Travis agrees, though he stresses the difference in taste between the two:

Geoff Travis: I think the bane of music is that most of the worst music is played by the people who think they can play the best. It's a kind of punk principle which is just not accepted by the normal world. It's much more interesting to be able to play three chords well - or even three chords badly- than to be able to play thirty nine chords perfectly... I like to do my A&R as a fan really; if I think it's exciting and I would pay money to go and see this a lot. I'd definitely listen to that record loads. And that's my main criteria. John Peel is a lot more obscurantist than I am- I think I've got a lot more populist streak in me. I'm just a normal English bloke, its just having belief in your own judgement. Not many people have belief in their own judgement.<sup>35</sup>

Both Travis and Peel are far from being 'normal English blokes' and it is arguable that Geoff Travis is just as obscurantist as John Peel; however, since both men have achieved almost iconic status with regard to their support for more unusual bands it is not surprising that they might want to differentiate their respective tastes in music from each other.

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<sup>32</sup> From interview with Geoff Travis, 1/2/02

<sup>33</sup> From interview with John Peel, 20/10/01

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Interview date 1/2/02

There was a non-geographical problem with distribution- that of quantity. The inability of the small labels to manufacture enough records to meet demand was a constant problem and one that I had personal experience of.<sup>36</sup> A band could go so far independently, with media interest and potentially high promotional possibilities, but if the company was not capable of pressing and distributing the records, the media interest would recede: most journalists and DJs do not want to be seen to have failed by promoting a record that does not achieve chart success:

Karen: "It was a bit of a struggle at the beginning. We had four John Peel Sessions. When we released a single it was played on Radio 1 quite a lot and we had a lot of interviews- one in the Guardian, quite a few in the music papers, and they were generally quite good. The thing that let us down was the record company, because the first single that we had was on Round Table, and they were playing it quite a lot on Radio One in the daytime, but it just wasn't in the shops because the record company just wasn't big enough and didn't have enough money to distribute it properly".<sup>37</sup>

The Au Pairs resorted to label-hopping in an effort to sustain their careers by charting a single, alongside retaining a degree of autonomy. As Lesley Woods commented, it was difficult to achieve a balance between the control a small label allowed artists to retain and their distribution problems, and commitment demanded by the majors who had much more marketing power:

".... most record companies offer only one-off single deals or else sign you for five years and everything. We knew what we wanted in a contract, and I don't think many major labels would have been prepared to do that sort of deal. When the last single started selling we suddenly got all these phone calls from major record companies who two months previously wouldn't touch us with a barge-pole"<sup>38</sup>

The band's first single sold over 30,000, but they still did not manage to make an impact on the singles charts; asked by Tony Fletcher if he thought the charts were important, Chris Youle of their record company, Human Records, replied:

"Yes, and I think the Au Pairs think so too. Many record shops only order what's in the charts, which is fair enough, but it means that once you're in the charts you sell more; and then you get more airplay"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> One had to employ an 'agency' ('Bullet') that cost £5000, in order to get records into chart return shops; without this help, the band's single sales did not appear on the Gallup computer. My band could not afford this.

<sup>37</sup> Interview date 13/7/00

<sup>38</sup> from interview with Fletcher, Tony, Campaign Strategies, *The Face*, Number 21, January 1982, pp 44/45

<sup>39</sup> *ibid The Face* January 1982

The necessity for a record producer caused other problems. Band psychology is defensive; generally bands are close knit groups of people who have defined roles within the group. Many, though not all, record producers regard themselves as auteurs, and this attitude is not surprising given the inexperience and lack of confidence in the studio of young bands. A record label making a gamble, and believing that records have to have a particular 'sound' to get airplay, would pressurise the band to use a producer. Sometimes, the ambitions of the manager would manifest themselves in this situation:

Mavis Bayton: "We were trying to do this recording. Initially we had a recording contract with Oval Records and then with Twist and Shout. The manager, Jill Posner, wanted to be the producer. There was division within the band: we were all arguing about producers, and we were all arguing about sound; there was a degree of dissension. Jill Posner actually just left- she just stomped off but myself and Judy Parsons (her husband was a sound engineer) ... did the final mix and it got played by John Peel".<sup>40</sup>

For the producers, the experience could be challenging, even if they had a long-standing relationship with the band. This is what Geoff Travis found:

"Some of the Raincoats, the Ana Da Silva part of it, was really hard to deal with. Although some of Ana's things are very powerful, some of the tunelessness to my ears was quite difficult to take. It worked because it was counterbalanced by Vicki's violin and by Gina's more melodious tones... perhaps that was a chance for Ana to make her way in a context where perhaps in a more conventional group she would not have been allowed in. Her input was very, very important. Obviously that's what made it magical. When we were making that record, because Mayo<sup>41</sup> and I produced it, it was quite difficult some of the time, because of that."<sup>42</sup>

However, Travis' attitude was very different from the 'auteur' producer that other groups had problems with- his attitude was very much in keeping with the independent label ethos:

"The thing is that also it was two sets of amateurs next to each other, we weren't professional producers: that was why people asked us, so there wasn't any kind of mystification by speaking in technical language to try and bamboozle them. We were doing what they wanted, we were trying to get their sound, rather than trying to change them."<sup>43</sup>

Bayton concluded from her research that for a woman in the studio, '...lack of confidence may cause her to lose heart since a lack of technical knowledge and techno-jargon puts her in a position of relative powerlessness in a world where strange

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<sup>40</sup> From interview date 14/7/00

<sup>41</sup> Mayo Thompson, co-producer of The Raincoats' album, and founder member of experimental band Red Crayola.

<sup>42</sup> From interview date 1/2/02

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*



abbreviations abound'<sup>44</sup>. As an area of traditional male preserve, the recording studio can be an area actively delineated by 'Man Made Language'; therefore the active rejection of jargon by Travis had a direct effect on the production relationships in the studio. In contrast, The Dollymixture had a rude awakening when they came to make records. They had previously been in control of their activities, but found that once they signed with Chrysalis, which was a major label, their producer was chosen for them and they were not permitted to release one of their own songs:

Rachel: "We got signed to Chrysalis in 1980 and we did one single which was disastrous and they dropped us. They wouldn't let us do one of our own songs it was a bit weird because we were *just* doing our own songs really. It was produced by Eric Faulkner from the Bay City Rollers, and he wanted us to do 'Baby it's You'. So we recorded it just 'cos he wanted us to, and they bunged that out and it was just horrible. We realised that we had no control over it and they wanted us to be sort of glamorous and do covers. We had our own style and we just liked writing pop songs and we didn't really think about the direction or anything because we were just being what we were and enjoying what we were doing and so when people started saying you have to be like this or we're gonna drop you it's like 'No thanks'"<sup>45</sup>.

It is hard to work out whether young women had worse experiences than young men because the (predominantly male) record company personnel they were dealing with expected them, because of their gender, to be malleable as well as inexperienced. The Dollymixture, alongside many of the less aggressively-presenting female bands, had a strong streak of irony throughout their lyrics, image and general presentation that was simply not understood by many of those men who worked with them. The degree of toughness that it had taken to remain focused on their band was overlooked.

Hester: "Basically we demanded so much and we were quite stropky... We did have managers but we fell foul of them because we wanted to do it all on our own terms. We would insist on going to the record company and saying we want total artistic control, no we're not doing covers, no we don't want our photographs on the front, no... I think we just blew a lot of things by being like that. We were so wary of being taken for a ride because so many people would warn us about being taken for a ride. It seemed so ridiculous really, because at the same time as we were doing all this and sort of blowing our chances, we were getting all this stuff in the press about the Dollymixture were a disgrace to women in music because of the way we looked, and 'cos we were writing pop songs and things like that- so we absolutely couldn't win."<sup>46</sup>

Repeated attempts by The Dollymixture to release what they wanted eventually led to the demise of the band, which obviously still rankles its members today:

Rachel: "After that we just carried on loads and loads of gigs and doing supports and tour supports and we met the Jam, and Paul Weller really liked what we were doing and said he was starting up a label so we

<sup>44</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p 6

<sup>45</sup> From interview date 2/2/00

<sup>46</sup> Interview date 26/1/00

signed to him. We met Captain at the same time and he wanted to produce us, and we did two singles on Respond Records which was our own thing but it didn't work for some reason. We got a bit of radio play but I think we were probably a bit difficult as well. We didn't get on very well with John Weller<sup>47</sup>. So that didn't go anywhere. Perhaps he just didn't like what we were doing. Our songs were quite commercial but our style and everything... maybe it wasn't what a big record company would want and he couldn't see it going any further. After that we signed to a distributor who paid for us to do another single with the Captain and they also put out a double album of all our demos, which was really fun to do but that didn't go anywhere and the distributor folded, went bankrupt or something, and that was the end of that really... and that was the end of our career."<sup>48</sup>

Lucy O'Brien also felt that lack of planning was an inevitable consequence of the sudden nature of success at this time:

"We did a few interviews with local fanzines and I think we got one review in Sounds- we had a couple of songs on a compilation album called City Walls. We were very unsavvy about things like that. If you were seventeen, eighteen, today you'd be much more aware of how to work it all but we weren't, it was all just sort of by accident really, and getting gigs through a friend of a friend. We didn't have a business plan or anything like that: it was much more spontaneous really."<sup>49</sup>

Siouxsie and the Banshees, however, managed to remain aloof from the machinations of record companies, largely because Siouxsie herself refused to set foot in their offices.<sup>50</sup> However, most women artists therefore faced the same problems of artistic control and lack of planning as many of the male groups who started performing as a result of the punk moment, compounded by the fact that they always had to pass male gatekeepers as they progressed upwards through the hierarchy of the record business. John Peel's support in providing a broadcasting platform and Jeff Travis' support in terms of recording were unusual; both men showed a strong degree of independent thinking, and Peel in particular was mentioned by almost every woman artist I interviewed or who responded to the questionnaire, as a DJ whose radio show they listened to, and was the only DJ who offered support in the form of playing their records and offering sessions. Only one woman instrumentalist reported that he did not help her band- Poison Girls' Vi Subversa said that "he did not like the band". Radio 1 eventually adopted the independent sector and for a while provided daytime radio access to the post-punk bands who released material on small labels. Even this had been debated at management level; when Tony Blackburn was replaced as Breakfast Radio DJ in 1980, either Dave Lee Travis or Mike Read was to be given the job. Dave

<sup>47</sup> John Weller, Paul Weller's father, managed The Jam

<sup>48</sup> Interview date 2/2/00

<sup>49</sup> Interview date 6/12/01

<sup>50</sup> I worked for a while for the independent PR company that acted as press agents for Siouxsie and the Banshees and although Polydor were desperate for Siouxsie to grace their premises, she flatly refused, being fully aware of the delicate balance of power between the artist and their record company.

Lee Travis was a fan of US disco music, and the big record labels in the States were poised to release a large quantity of disco music in Britain if he should be appointed. Read, on the other hand, took his lead from John Peel and had been presenting an early evening show on Radio 1 that featured many of the more musically conservative of the punk-influenced bands, most of whom recorded on small British independent labels. According to Pete Waterman, it was the appointment of Read that led to the burgeoning of the small label share of the market at this time- and the continued interest in the more unusual bands that released their material via this outlet<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the position of the female performer in relation to the media can be summed up in these words from classical composer Nancy Van Der Vate:

‘ When you are young and unknown you don’t get knocked down by the press, and of course you have all sorts of hopes. On the other end of the spectrum, if you are well established, the critics can be very chary. But in the middle ground... you don’t have a big enough name yet that critics feel they have to treat you with any particular respect. So the increased attention not only is sometimes uncomfortable, it can even be devastating. You may decide it was better being anonymous.’<sup>52</sup>

And the relationship between the cultural intermediaries that facilitated the spread of the punk music ideal across the British Isles, and the bands they promoted can be summed up by the following, as observed by Deena Weinstein (albeit describing the U.S. scene):

‘It is not punk music but punk mediators that deconstruct the art-commerce binary: record labels giving total autonomy to their musicians, enabling them to record with the content and in the style that they choose, not what some suit thinks will sell. The free-form, underground FM stations in the United States in the mid-sixties, and their college-radio offspring, are another example of such pure mediators, playing music that did not follow a format designed to grab a large demographic... Genre mediators share the artists’ own standards and thus erase the binary opposition between art and commerce’<sup>53</sup>

#### **(iv) Industrial Hazards: Sexual Harassment**

Q. Did you ever get hassled for being a woman in a band? If so, what form did it take and how did you deal with it?

A. One memorable gig at the Resource Centre, Peter and the Test Tube Babies got very abusive about lesbians and feminists and started wanking on stage! So we switched the electricity off.

(Susy Taylor, *The Bright Girls*, by e-mail, 2/12/02)

<sup>51</sup> The author’s band The Chefs was helped by Pete in the early stages of their career, and this point was discussed at one of their meetings.

<sup>52</sup> in Neuls-Bates, Carol, *Women in Music: an anthology of source readings from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1996, p 330

<sup>53</sup> Weinstein, Deena, *Art Versus Commerce: Deconstructing a (Useful) Romantic Illusion*, in Kelly, Karen, and McDonnell, Evelyn, *Stars Don’t Stand Still in the Sky*, Routledge, London, 1999 pp 61-62

This incident displays a feisty attitude by an older woman towards on-stage harassment! Although sexual harassment is not solely directed at females in the pop and rock world (there is a persistent rumour that the Bay City Rollers had to sleep with the male producer of Top of the Pops before they were allowed to perform on the programme, and Jonathan King's activities would appear to be the tip of an iceberg), the importance of sexual availability is another area of the lucrative music business that is under-documented. The attempts by the press and the industry to negotiate the new-found power of female artists at this time need to be documented here, as this was a moment at which the established mores could have been re-negotiated to the artists' advantage; however, sexual control is embedded in the industrial structure of the music business to such an extent that this aspect of the business did not change during the gender renegotiations that appeared to be happening during this period.

By 1976, pictures of John Peel draped with naked women had stopped appearing in *Sounds*<sup>54</sup>, although the paper made much of reporting in a titillating fashion the advertisements for heavy metal band The Scorpions (whose album sleeve featured a naked female child with a cut across her genitals)<sup>55</sup> and *Boxer*, an album that featured a naked woman whose parted legs straddled a boxing glove that appeared to be heading towards her vagina.<sup>56</sup> Advertisers leapt at the chance to use images of females to sell their latest guitars; *Sounds* reported on the Frankfurt Trade Fair of 1977 using an image of a model (Deborah Vaughan) in leathers playing a Gibson guitar, with the guitar lead draped round her neck, under the heading 'Hardware'<sup>57</sup> In the same issue, there is a photograph of two naked girls with guitars, one black, one white, entitled 'Ecstasy at your fingertips', used to advertise Kasuga electric guitars.<sup>58</sup> In other words, as soon as guitar girl bands appeared, the idea was exploited in a sexual context by admen, and the unusual achievement of becoming an instrumentalist in a rock band was recuperated and sexualised. The stereotyped female punk image was also recuperated by the very sources that had amplified the moral panic aspects of punk: page three girls band *Blonde on Blonde* was launched in the summer of 1977, its cover featuring two blonde models wearing dog collars and studs; although record reviewers were not particularly impressed with the music, the currency of the 'punk' presentation alongside the sexuality of the women ensured press coverage.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the most well-documented instance of violent imagery used to advertise punk music was the 'Ripped and Torn' advertisement, in which Debbie Harry of Blondie appeared next to the slogan 'Wouldn't you like to rip her to shreds?'. This had not been approved by Ms Harry and was later withdrawn; however, some journalists appeared puzzled by what they seemed to regard as a mixed message; Tony

<sup>54</sup> *Sounds* October 30th 1976

<sup>55</sup> *Sounds* December 8th 1976, p 7

<sup>56</sup> *Sounds* January 24th 1976, p 8

<sup>57</sup> *Sounds* February 26th 1977, p 46

<sup>58</sup> *Sounds* February 26th 1977, p 55

<sup>59</sup> *New Musical Express*, July 16th 1977 featured a review of the *Blonde on Blonde* single (p 23); the same paper on July 23rd 1977 featured the official launch of the band by Mick Farren, p 15

Parsons challenged her in an interview, calling her current stage persona 'cutesy' whereas before this, when she first played in Britain in 1976 she had : '... sneered at the Man Must Have His Mate misogyny, her voice thick with vitriolic contempt, proud and feisty as she rejected the servile role expected from her gender.' Debbie replied:

'The difference in the media's attitude to a boy or girl on stage infuriates me... If a a band full of men is on stage and an audience of girls are screaming at them then everything's as it should be... but if it's a girl on stage, then suddenly everything is cheap... I was *furios* when I saw that fuckin' ad! I told them not to put it out anymore- and they didn't.'<sup>60</sup>

Gaye Advert had a similar problem on a smaller scale, mentioned earlier, when Stiff records attempted to advertise The Adverts by pasting a photograph of Gaye's head on to a picture of a naked body. Mark Perry, author of the prototype fanzine *Sniffin' Glue*, recalls:

'To show you how far the music scene had not progressed [in 1977], Stiff wanted to put an ad for the album in the *Glue* featuring a picture of a topless girl with Gaye Adverts head stuck on top of it. This was their idea of a laugh. I refused to print it, obviously, and was accused of all sorts of malpractices, including having an affair with Gaye.'<sup>61</sup>

Perry's comments reflect a change in his own thinking, however; in the first issue of *Sniffin' Glue* he starts his review of US all-female rock band The Runaways debut album by remarking: 'I've always hated girl bands, singers, etc. Rock'n'roll's for blokes and I hope it stays that way'.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, journalist Julie Burchill attempted to articulate the commercial exploitation of the sexuality of young women musicians, with reference to the same band:

'The Runaways are presented as sex-zombies whose every breath is drawn solely to screw with, the music the mere cherry on top. They come across as acting not like teenage girls, but as how dirty old men would like teenage girls to act.... Veteran blondies guitarist Lita Ford and drummer Sandy West prove that anything boys can do, we can do better... The blame for their 'jailbait morons' image, which sets them up for such easy dismissal and ridicule, lies not with them but with old man Fowley.[manager Kim Fowley] He has already said 'rock and roll is dead'- so he has no business mucking around with youngsters for whom playing clean rock and roll is possibly the most life-affirming experience known. He can only contaminate them with his own

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<sup>60</sup> *New Musical Express*, February 4th 1978, p25, Interview with Blondie by Tony Parsons

<sup>61</sup> Echenberg, Erica and Perry, Mark, *and God created Punk* Virgin, London, 1996, p 27

<sup>62</sup> Perry, Mark, *Sniffin' Glue: the essential punk accessory*, Sanctuary, London, 2000, no page numbers

cynicism'.<sup>63</sup>

In the rock world the position of young women was as objects of desire; in reality, their function was to sexually satisfy the rock star after a gig. The pop world was more secretive about these activities. One young woman I spoke to was propositioned by a DJ well known as a family man, and later discovered that this was a common occurrence. This belies Suzi Quatro's comments when reviewing TV series 'Rock Follies' which had featured attempts to seduce the 'little ladies':

We love what we do and struggle for at least 10 years to get that first 'shot at the top' and when we see a movie about ourselves that's as phoney as this, it gets on our collective TITS... It reconfirms all the mug's fantasies of dirty ladies, casting couches and sex, without ever letting them know the real truth.<sup>64</sup>

Sometimes the benefits and drawbacks of being 'available' are only hinted at; for instance, a female interviewer (still a relative rarity) picked up on comments made by the Adverts' drummer, Laurie Driver, about possible reasons for the insulting comments made by other journalists about Gaye's playing abilities:

'Gaye kept leaning out of the loo to direct drummer Laurie Driver's doodlings on her bass-"From the fifth to the third! Right." -and retreating back... Laurie's convinced some of the slagging originated in one well-known punk commentator's failure to have his evil way with Gaye...' <sup>65</sup>

The punk subculture itself was supposed to change the environment for girls and young women but in fact it did not. Johnny Rotten recalls:

'I don't think anybody actually looked down on women. They were equal, and everybody was as stupid as each other. You would sort of hit women the same way you would a guy if she was taking the piss at you (sic) or spilled your drink. But it wasn't an antisex attitude or a matter of acting puritanical. People just didn't give it the same importance as it had before.... It was a rebellion against the lad ethic- get drunk, pull a bird, and get around the back, wherever. The punks believed they had some sort of intellectual capacity- each and every one of them- and didn't want to slip back into that rock thing.'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> November 12th 1977, *New Musical Express*, p 45. In *Sounds*, January 27th 1977, Barry Myers writes: 'The cover pics are far more flattering than previously. Cherie, Joan, Sandy, Jackie and Lita are caught by the camera, decked out in black,, clinging to long, metallic shafts'. *Orgasmic Review Dept. Runaways: getting better all the time*, p 21. One does not have to be a rabid feminist to understand the attempts to appeal to male adolescents using photographs of young women clinging to long metallic shafts.

<sup>64</sup> *New Musical Express*, May 21st 1977 Suzi Quatro on Rock Follies. The situation was not helped by the wilful naivety of artists such as Kate Bush (from interview with Kate Bush by Steve Clarke): 'I suppose the poster is reasonably sexy just 'cause you can see my tits, but I think the vibe from the face is there'. *New Musical Express*, March 18th, 1978, p 16

<sup>65</sup> *New Musical Express*, September 24th 1977, p 7, Adverts feature by Angie Errigo.

<sup>66</sup> Lydon, John, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs, Coronet, London*, p 259

Despite the fact he is reported as having beaten up Vivienne Westwood<sup>67</sup>, later in the same book he says 'During the Pistols era, women were out there playing with the men, taking us on in equal terms... It wasn't combative, but compatible.'<sup>68</sup>. This betrays a similar sentimental memory as that of Mark Perry; for some women, the memory is rather different. When the tape recorder was switched off, one woman reported a violent rape by her manager, who then had her sectioned and managed to secure her publishing rights while she was detained in hospital<sup>69</sup>; another reported that her sister had been raped by thirteen skinheads after a gig at the Bridge House pub in Canning town, because she was a punk rocker. The debate was alarmingly physical on the ground. Caroline Coon reported an attempted rape<sup>70</sup> and demeaning assaults were common, such as that reported by Sue Bradley:

"I remember one gig in Holland or Germany and we were walking through a seated audience, who were sitting on the floor, and I had quite a short skirt on, it was summer, an open air gig sort of thing. And somehow this bloke sitting on the floor managed to get his hand not only up my leg, but also right under my knickers. It was appalling. It got to the stage where I just couldn't handle it and I started really creating a fuss. And they [the band] were just really belittling this, just don't be so stupid and we'll talk about it afterwards. But I was feeling really violated! It was awful, really".<sup>71</sup>

Attempts to be assertive could be foiled by simple insulting acts: The Dollymixture were able to appear on Top of the Pops when Rachel's then partner, Captain Sensible<sup>72</sup> released a version of Happy Talk, a song from the musical South Pacific. He had asked them to sing backing vocals on the recording, and when his single charted, they were asked to accompany him to Top of the Pops to perform it on television. Because the record company asked them to wear grass skirts, they insisted on wearing their guitars so that they could show the audience that they were more than backing singers for a novelty single. The presenter, DJ Dave Lee Travis, approached

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<sup>67</sup> see op cit Savage, 1991. He is also reported as 'throwing Jordan across the floor' (Jordan was a female shop assistant in the shop Sex) by Nils Stevenson, in Savage ibid p 151

<sup>68</sup> op cit Lydon, 2000, p 378

<sup>69</sup> This woman concluded that her manager was jealous of her success and had resorted to sexual violence for this reason. Violence resulting from jealousy happens in other genres of music, too- for instance, the following incident between country performer Carleen Carter and her partner: 'The rift between them widened when both he and Carleen were scheduled to play three of their songs in front of Nashville businessmen at a local event called Songwriters Night. At the last minute, he got cold feet, but that wasn't stopping Carleen getting out there and performing.' I said, "Well if you don't feel like singing, just come and watch me do mine". He said "You can't do it". I said "Why not?". Anyway, I just got in the car and left him with the kids and went and did it, and he threw rocks at me while I was going out the driveway.... Emmylou's managers approached Carlene with a record deal. My husband said, "If you do that, it's over". He was so scared that I would do better than him. And the whole male ego thing ..... After that, it was pretty much downhill.' in Balfour, Victoria, *Rock Wives: the hard lives and good times of the wives, girlfriends and groupies of rock and roll*, Beech Tree, New York, 1986

<sup>70</sup> interview date 24/1/02

<sup>71</sup> Interview date 20/11/01

<sup>72</sup> Previously bass player with punk band The Damned

Rachel as she was miming a chord and said 'That's an F'; Rachel corrected him, 'No, it's a G'. Travis insisted that she was playing an F, and when she refused to capitulate, he put her hand inside her skirt and pinched her backside.<sup>73</sup>

It is not surprising that throughout the history of women instrumentalists strange strategies have been developed; trumpeter/pianist Billy Tipton who died 1989 had pretended to be a man all her life:

'Some male musicians felt that Billy Tipton didn't have to pose as a man with a wife and adopt children to get work. But his one-time "wife" referred to an unwritten code of ethics in the jazz world as the unequivocal reason for Tipton's masquerade.'<sup>74</sup>

The consequences of violent and misogynistic bullying could be dire: during a dispute in a cafe with a record producer, one woman reported him throwing a pot of very hot coffee over her pregnant belly; her son was born with epilepsy, and she has always blamed his disability on this incident.

The complex relationship between the selling of sexuality and the selling of pop and rock music is almost impossible to disentangle. Caroline Coon feels that women are justified in using their sexuality to sell music, because men do, but that *not* using it then becomes a hindrance:

'It was easier for the solo woman artists, adopting an acceptable sexy guise was easier than if you were going to be part of the group of musicians... you can be really sexy if you're the front singer, [but] if you're going to be the lead guitarist or the bass-player you're not necessarily going to want to show too much flesh. Being the band, you're going to present yourself slightly differently. And that's absolutely unacceptable... Men would accept women who negotiated sexism by being sexy. And that is valid.... I'm never going to put women down for using their sexuality as a negotiating tool in the workplace. But for the musicians who weren't going to go in that direction because they were playing guitars, then they were absolutely going to be excluded'<sup>75</sup>

Finally it is interesting to note that the liberating power of punk did more than to liberate young women to pick up instruments: for some, the 'lad ethic' dismissed by Johnny Rotten was newly valorized by the changes in society that were affecting the 70s teenagers, here described by Greil Marcus:

Leeds is also the home of the fascist British Movement, which is distinguished from its more famous parent, the National Front, by a complete lack of embarrassment at its Nazi origins. Unemployment and

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<sup>73</sup> Conversation with author, 2/2/00

<sup>74</sup>Gourse, Leslie, *Madame Jazz: Contemporary Women Instrumentalists* OUP, New York, Oxford, 1995, p 19

<sup>75</sup> Interview, 24/1/02



the dole underlie not only bohemia, but also the great no-future trumpeted in 1977, and the ideology of no-future has made it easy for the British Movement, setting up drinks all around, to recruit plenty of punks specifically to harass 'Communist' bands. Add an extremely well-focused consciousness of sexism on the left and a bitter reassertion of male dominance among threatened young men on the right, and the result is violence'<sup>76</sup>

During the interviews I held, I had a strong feeling that I was not being told everything about the women's experiences of sexual harassment: for who wants to go down in history as an abused woman? As 'survivors', it is better to remember (and be remembered for) a positive personal history rather than a negative one; incidents of harassment and violence are often overcome as part of the experience of pioneering a new 'world'.

The next chapter describes the Brighton scene, and explores the context for music-making using a customised version of punk in a local setting.

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<sup>76</sup> Marcus, Greil, *It's Fab, It's Passionate, It's Wild. It's Intelligent! It's the Hot New Sound of England Today!*, in *Ranters and Crowd Pleasers*, p 156 Delta 5 were beaten up by eight British Movement men who followed them from a bar- they recognised Ros as a 'Communist Witch'.

## **Chapter Four- The Brighton Scene**

## The Brighton Scene

*A vandal ain't no scandal  
No matter what you think  
It's pretty hard to handle  
In a town that stinks*

*We haven't any money  
We have to steal and cheat  
Scrawling our graffiti  
Up and down the street*

*A menace to the homeless! A menace to the students! A menace to pensioners!*<sup>1</sup>

*'The same music and style will often produce not one but a variety of responses on the part of young people to the particular local circumstances in which they find themselves, each response being underpinned by a common set of base knowledges relating to the local but using this knowledge in different ways and to different ends.'*<sup>2</sup>

### (i) Context

The shrinking-of-scale brought about by the punk ethos greatly benefited young women who wanted to break out of their stereotyped existence. The appropriation of punk values in other localities, 'customised' to the needs and attitudes of young people further afield, became an important and creative by-product of the original subculture, and the study of one of these micro-subcultures will add a different perspective to this work—especially since the music associated with punk did not generally translate accurately to recording, and what we hear as permanent records of the moment may not reflect what was actually happening at the time. This chapter will, as well as giving an impression of the Brighton scene, show how the increased access to recording and performing applied to punks in a particular locality in the late 1970s.

It is easy to identify the beginning of the Brighton music scene that I am studying as it began with the dissemination of punk music and ideas across the UK from late 1976 onwards; it is less easy to identify the end point for my study, but this is one of the tasks I have set myself, and at the very least the study covers the 'teenage' years defined by Abrams as being between 17 and 25 years old<sup>3</sup>. Although music scenes in local towns are continuously evolving, there was a particular, almost desperate political flavour to the scene in Brighton in the late 1970s. This is in contrast to Ruth Finnegan's work in Milton Keynes which is of a more picaresque nature, because the 'moment' she describes is not unique; arguably, one would find a similar set of activities occurring in Milton Keynes now, over ten years later. However, some of Finnegan's findings are applicable to Brighton, for instance, '...the somewhat startling fact that one of the interesting characteristics of local music organization is precisely the absence of an absolute

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<sup>1</sup> The lead singer of my first band (alternately known as BBC Phil, Joby Visigoth or Joby Jackson), was pictured in the local paper, the Evening Argus, captioned a 'menace to the homeless'. This was one of our first songs, and described what Joby considered the principal elements of the population of Brighton at the time.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Andy, *Popular Music and Youth Culture: music, identity and place*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 2000, p67. The punk umbrella covered many different styles of music and political attitudes in Brighton: aurally, in the context of their time, they are all recognisable as punk music.

<sup>3</sup> Abrams, Mark, *The Teenage Consumer*, The London Press Exchange Ltd, London, 1959

distinction between 'the amateur' and 'the professional'<sup>4</sup>. Some of the musicians in the older rock bands in Brighton deliberately changed their musical and visual style in order to be incorporated into the new punk scene; others followed the more usual punk route of picking up instruments before they had learned to play them. There was mutual scorn: the former saw the latter as incompetent musically; the latter saw the former as bandwagon-jumpers. However, none of the bands in Brighton were fully professional at this time. The dole was a necessary part of every musician's income, however they defined themselves, and all of the bands had an interest in playing with each other at the same events in order to create the scene that justified their existence.

In Brighton; the politicised 'flavour' of the music making I am investigating was finite, although a thriving music scene still exists in Brighton today. Punk arrived in Brighton in late 1976, when it had already been declared 'over' in Chelsea<sup>5</sup>. Previously, the music scene in Brighton had been dominated by small heavy metal bands and blues bands, and the occasional Irish folk band. The audience size for these gigs would be around 10-30 people depending on the night of the week; but as punk was 'being declared dead in London... [it was] springing to life in the provinces.'<sup>6</sup> Professor George McKay describes how it '... brought life to the countryside and market towns'<sup>7</sup>

In Brighton, one appealing factor of punk was that it was possible to attend gigs free- either by volunteering to collect money at the door of the venue, by sneaking in through the lavatories (a common trick at pub venue The Buccaneer) or simply, by being in a band, being a fanzine writer, or generally being a 'face' on the scene. Bands rarely expected to be paid, particularly earlier on in their career. They often accepted their lack of musicianship and, in Brighton at least, it was only when bands such as The Piranhas and The Chefs started recording sessions for John Peel's Radio 1 show, and discovered that they had to be Musician's Union members in order to do so, that the concept of being paid for performance and recording was even taken into consideration. There was little understanding (or premeditation) by the bands of their value as entertainment, as a live experience, yet this was an area where punk was at its strongest.<sup>8</sup> Finnegan's findings point out the value of the status of being a band-member:

... even if they earned quite substantial fees and spent most of their time on

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<sup>4</sup> Finnegan, Ruth, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p 15

<sup>5</sup> a visitor to our house in Brighton observed, on being told we had a band, 'Punk's over in London, you know. I don't know why you're bothering'.

<sup>6</sup> Colegrave, Stephen, and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell, London, 2001

<sup>7</sup> Professor George McKay, University of Central Lancashire, quoted in Colegrave, Stephen and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell and Co, London, 2001, p 227. See also McKay, George, *I'm So Bored With the USA*, in Sabin, Roger, (ed) *Punk Rock: So What?*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999, p 58

<sup>8</sup> This was pointed out by rock critics at the time- as is shown by part of a review of The Slits by Tony Parsons:

'These four girls make the Runaways look like Girl Guides. I means, who cares about such trivialities as staying in tune, playing together or striking the right chords when one possesses such a sense of *theatrics*?' from *New Musical Express*, April 9th 1977, p 35

activities related to their music, they could still end up substantially out of pocket and perhaps engaged in musical performance as much as for the enjoyment and the status of 'musician' it gave them as for money'.<sup>9</sup>

For unemployed punk band members, the difference between being 'unemployed' and 'in a band, but unpaid' was of tremendous importance<sup>10</sup>. With time on their hands, some took part in direct political activity, for instance, squatting an empty office building, Britannia House, in central Brighton to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. Others wanted fun; there were also people who had a determined and formal political agenda, amongst them Attila the Stockbroker<sup>11</sup> and members of the Women's Group based at the Brighton Resources Centre, who had personnel in several bands. Generally there was resistance from band members to joining formal political groupings, who were regarded as predatory. The attitude of punks in Brighton was genuinely anarchic with all its ironic implications- they were a group defined by their differences, who had frequently to operate collectively as a defence against the police, rogue landlords, Teddy Boys' violence, and so on. So in Brighton, the independent nature of the groups involved in the scene meant that some groups wrote overtly political songs (Poison Girls, Brighton Riot Squad, Joby and the Hooligans, Devil's Dykes) and others wrote whimsical songs (The Piranhas, The Golinski Brothers, The Chefs, Peter and the Test Tube Babies). It was not uncommon for a variety of local bands across these parameters to appear together on stage to support (most frequently) Rock Against Racism, or another more local cause. The whole scene involved activity and action, as punk scenes did across the country, that included everything from fanzines which may or may not have had overtly political content, through attendance at Rock Against Racism marches, through music, to simple attendance at gigs; the common factor for most of us was a feeling of personal pride and responsibility that had not been there before.

The Brighton *punk* scene, as opposed to the general music scene, evolved from a combination of smaller communities of young people that loosely revolved around several music venues in the centre of Brighton (see map). In 1976, the Buccaneer hosted small bands and 'fading stars' such a pre-comeback Shakin' Stevens; the Alhambra hosted Irish bands, blues revivalists and R&B bands in the style of The Rolling Stones. The promoters of these venues were eventually to allow punk bands to play, driven by commercial necessity. Apart from the small-band community that was already in existence, there were groups of art students and ex-art students, itinerant workers who had settled in Brighton because of its proximity to the sea and the seasonal work it afforded, a very politically active squatters movement, and a women's group based at the Resources Centre in North Road. Later, local record shop Attrix started up its own label, also called Attrix, and released three compilation albums, Vaultage 78, Vaultage 79 and Vaultage 80, that

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<sup>9</sup> Finnegan, Ruth, *The Hidden Musician: music making in an English town*, CUP, Cambridge, 1989, p 13

<sup>10</sup> Glyptis, Sue, *Leisure and Unemployment*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1989, p 73

<sup>11</sup> '... we were all highly politically motivated, anti-fascist, communist, I was in the Socialist Workers Party, very involved with Rock Against Racism.' Interview with Attila the Stockbroker, 15/1/01, originally bass-player with Brighton Riot Squad, now an internationally- acclaimed punk poet. Later, we will see the variety of attitudes displayed by Brighton bands.

showcased some of the local bands and gave Brighton a collective musical identity. They also released singles by The Parrots, The Piranhas, The Chefs and others. Punks congregated in The Windsor Tavern, a tiny pub near the Resource Centre run by two elderly ladies until the sight of punks eating their beer glasses when they had finished their pints, and sitting there with blood running down their chins put them off.<sup>12</sup>

Because of Brighton's relatively small centre and its relatively small population, it has been relatively easy to delve into the nature of the Brighton scene even now, twenty five years later. The following account consists of personal recollections interspersed with those of other participants in the scene, located mainly through Internet searches and word of mouth; there are also excerpts from local fanzines (spelling errors intact). Sometimes different versions contradict each other, but history has already been established as being subjective. Starting from a general discussion about the experience of punk music and the punk scene in Brighton, I will go on to explore how bands were formed, the venues, getting gigs, negative aspects of the scene (jealousy and opposition within the scene, stealing, violence), subject matter, and politics, aesthetics and just having a good time. It is intended to reconstruct the variety of the Brighton scene, and to pinpoint the enabling factors for women instrumentalists, but also to identify aspects of the scene that made the environment difficult for them.

In early 1977, as I was working as a glass-collector in the disco Sherry's in Duke Street, the punk attitude became apparent. Two underage girls started appearing regularly on the dance floor, and regardless of the bpm's of the chart disco records played by the DJ, they would strike poses and hold them for almost the whole length of the track without moving. This game of musical statues had an unnerving effect on those dancing energetically beside them and led to a lot of angry cursing by the chief bouncer, Harry. In contrast to the other customers, these girls, one white and one mixed-race, exposed no flesh; they wore brightly coloured berets, drainpipe trousers and baggy jumpers. They weren't actually *doing* anything wrong: but they were *being* extraordinary, and in their self-awareness, infecting those around them with self-consciousness.

## **(ii) Personal Circumstances**

This section describes my personal situation in Brighton at the time of punk; the following section describes how I joined a punk band, and later, how other women in Brighton joined bands. Because it is not possible to write objectively about my own involvement, I have tried gradually to merge my own experiences with those of my contemporaries, until these experiences appear as quotations alongside those of the interviewees I spoke to. In several places it is therefore possible to note that our experiences were contradictory in nature; in others, they were similar. I believe the tension between the similarities and differences of experience and memory add value to my thesis,

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<sup>12</sup> The Brighton punk scene was criminal and violent: once I had to bind the arm of a girl who had slashed her arm with a razor blade during a concert at the Resource Centre; another time a young woman was thrown to the floor and kicked in the face by her boyfriend. More comically, the Windsor Tavern was frequented by a fence trying to offload such things as bananas.

showing in particular how important it is not to stereotype those involved in subcultural activity.

I was in the second year of a degree course in Fine Art Printmaking at Brighton Polytechnic. It had been a shock to arrive at the college from my foundation course in the north east of England and find that so many of my fellow students appeared to be heiresses. I was living in a squat off the Brighton sea front that was populated by amateur antique dealers, art students, drug addicts and so forth; I was struggling with depression. Our house was lovely and warm all winter because one of the inhabitants of the basement was an electrician, who bridged the meter. My partner worked in a supermarket and brought home a huge box of dented and unlabelled tins each Saturday which fed us for the week. There was a lot of late night screaming, cat excrement, heroin dealing, and a nocturnal stabbing which left a feeling of uncertainty amongst the residents. There were more than 17 official residents, although more than that unofficially. Apart from Tony Greenstein, who is still a political activist in Brighton, and who attended Brighton Polytechnic, I was the only student there. There was no bath, no hot water and no telephone. Once, the upstairs toilet collapsed into the downstairs kitchen. An occasional resident, Smiley Geoff, who came from somewhere in Africa, was cooking some supper. He just carried on stirring, once he'd shaken the dust and lath from his shoulders; from then on, small electric shocks emanated from the handle of the upstairs toilet.

My own experience as a squatter/punk in Brighton in 1978 reveals the variety of people who made up the punk scene in Brighton; there were possibly two hundred people who regularly attended punk gigs by local bands in the main venues (The Alhambra, The Buccaneer, The Vault and The Richmond). Of these, around fifty were 'full-timers'; around fifty were in bands; around twenty-five worked in 'alternative' professions. Around fifty were students (school, college and university), although generally there was little overlap between the University and Polytechnic students and the local punk community; the rest were mainly shop-assistants, nurses, and technicians. Some of the remainder were slightly odd people who sensed an accepting community. Visually, extraordinary-looking people rubbed shoulders at gigs with relatively conservative-looking people. Punks occasionally attended the more upmarket discos; when the 'big-name' punk bands played at venues such as The Kingswest Centre or the University of Sussex, the audience was even more mixed. As far as gender was concerned, the Brighton scene did not display the characteristics of Brake's comments regarding working-class and middle-class punk women; Brake talks of working class women 'being punk' and middle class women 'dressing punk'<sup>13</sup>; my empirical view of this was that in Brighton, exactly the opposite was the case. The punk women I knew who wore clothes from Seditonaries were working class; in the bands, it was more common for the girls, regardless of class, to have come from disturbed or difficult family backgrounds, and for them to be involved in the scene because of its willingness to accept them regardless of this, than it was for them to belong to a particular social grouping. McRobbie's interview with Michelle<sup>14</sup> is

<sup>13</sup> Brake, Michael, *Comparative Youth Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1985/93, p 177

<sup>14</sup> McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991 and 2000, p 9

representative of the experience for young women *and* young men in Brighton: ‘Why was punk important? For me it was like going to university. I got all my education there... there was so much mixing, people from different backgrounds...’<sup>15</sup>

### **(iii) Forming a Band**

In late 1977, the occupants of the basement of the squat started to become rather noisy. Two girls (they were very young, probably about fourteen) had moved in. They had run away from a children’s home. One of them wore a dog-collar, a corset and suspenders: the other wore an old black jacket and a miniskirt. they both wore lots of black eye makeup. A band had been formed and these girls were the backing vocalists, and the name of the band was descriptive rather than ironic. They called themselves The Molesters. The only times the band stopped playing was when the social services came round looking for the girls (they all sat in total silence behind the net curtains until they went away) and when someone wired up their door handles to the mains to give them a fatal electric shock as they entered their rehearsal room. They remained alive and noisy... we used to sit and bang the floors with a hammer to try to shut them up.

They told us they were rehearsing until they were good enough to get a some gigs. My partner started a new job working in Brighton and Hove Resources Centre, a community organisation based in an old church hall. We’d been to some strange parties in the crypt beneath the hall (transvestites in Alice-in Wonderland drag mixing pancakes) and we knew that bands had started playing down there, playing punk music, loud and unsettling. My partner arranged for The Molesters to play at the next gig, but they chickened out. So that is how we formed a band.

*“What do you want to be?”*

*“I want to be a guitarist.”*

*“So do I.”*

*“I want to be the lead singer.”*

*“But you can’t sing .”*

*“So?”*

*“Helen, you can play bass.”*

*“But I haven’t got a bass guitar.”*

*“That doesn’t matter.”*

*“All we’ve got to do is find a drummer.”*

*“Let’s ask that boy from Punctuation.”*

*“OK.”*

*“We’d better write some songs then.”*

*“OK.”*

The the first punk band I had really noticed was Poison Girls. They were very different from the other bands and I didn’t like their music much although I did like watching them. Lead guitarist and singer Vi Subversa was an engaging performer and they had a girl bass player called Sue who had really long hair, and who played a semi-acoustic bass (good provenance- used to belong to the Buzzcocks). It was this that she lent me for

<sup>15</sup> It could be argued that middle class women were more capable of using the opportunities provided by punk in the fallow unemployment years to built lucrative careers post-punk. However, my research belies this also; see Appendix (ii)



our first couple of gigs. Punctuation's 13 year old drummer sat in, and we played a bunch of songs composed from a copy of *The Sun* that we bought; our first gig was therefore a defiant two-fingers to the cowardly Molesters in the basement of our squat. After the first gig we were offered more straight away. I had been saving from my job as a glass-collector in Sherry's to buy a BSA Bantam motorbike, but as soon as possible I went out and bought a small, cheap Jedsen bass, an amplifier and a very basic speaker. I used to tape the set-list along the top of the body of the bass, a strip of masking tape with the titles of the songs written in black felt pen. One of the guitarists in the band tried to tell me how to play bass but what he said sounded wrong so I worked it out myself. It was a matter of days before the Molesters too were performing on the Brighton circuit, and recording a John Peel session as well.

The Dandies, who were a sort of glam/punk group, used to help other bands to start up, in a similar way to Poison Girls. Tom Maltby, the lead singer of Wrist Action commented:

'We were the first punk band in Brighton and it was hard getting started- the Dandies were the only band that helped us- so now we like to help these new bands that are getting going- we've played with most of them y'know...'<sup>16</sup>

Spontaneity was a common factor in the generation of Brighton's' bands. There *were* bands who had a 'career plan' and who worked on their set and their song writing skills from the start; it did not appear to matter to the audience whether the band they were watching was motivated by a desire to communicate, or a desire to make a career. Many of the instrumentalists had little or no experience. Julie Blair, organ player in The Mockingbirds, recalled:

'I joined a band called The Mockingbirds' in I think 78 or 79. I can't quite remember. We were four women... I was on keyboards, my friend Shirley was singing, another friend Rose played drums, a friend Hilary was playing bass. And I'm afraid someone's boyfriend played... But we did write our own material. And none of us had ever played an instrument before. We decided to form it one night in The Richmond having watched The Piranhas, I think, and Nicky and the Dots. I thought, 'We can do this, we can write songs, we can play a chord or two.' It just seemed like a really inspiring thing to do at the time.... I think it was a combination of things. I mean, obviously I was married to Rick and he was playing in a band and I've always enjoyed that. He encouraged me, or encouraged us. And I thought it was about time women got up and did it. So many subjects to talk about as a woman, to sing about.'<sup>17</sup>

Kate Hayes, a guitarist who sang with the Objeks, took part in a 17-day sit-in at Brighton Art College when she was a student there and:

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<sup>16</sup> from *Spitting Blood*, September 1977

<sup>17</sup> interview date 7/10/99. Julie was married to Rick Blair, who started the local label Attrix. His band The Parrots played regularly at the Vault in Brighton. Julie was slightly older than some of the punks and seemed responsible- she had two children at this time; however, she was very friendly and knew most of the people in the Brighton punk bands.

‘... during the occupation we decided to make this band called the Objeks and I sort of managed to muscle in as a sort of co-singer cum backing singer- I don’t think they would have liked the idea of anyone as a backing singer because it wouldn’t have been particularly equal, so we were co-singers although Dawn was the main singer. Paul couldn’t play the guitar before he joined the Objeks- he had no idea how to play the guitar. He had no idea! And Dave didn’t- he just went and bought a bass and decided to play it! We were art students, we weren’t musicians at all apart from Heather and Stella. So we really were pick’n’mix, let’s just do this, cos we’ve got something we want to say’.<sup>18</sup>

For some musicians, there was a completely ‘chance’ relationship with a performer; a technician at the University of Sussex who called himself Dick Damage used to phone round to get a band together before his gigs. One of the occasional bass players told me that their rehearsals consisted of Dick reading the chords out to him over the telephone about half an hour before he left for the gig. However, Dick’s gigs were immensely popular- he was funny, amiable and unsophisticated (or a master of irony), and every person I spoke to in conjunction with this work used to attend his gigs regularly. One of these was Sue Bradley, who played violin with The Reward System and any other band who asked her to; here she describes the beginning of what was to become a serious 20-year career, (in this, she was unlike many of the other women I interviewed):

‘I moved to Brighton in 1979 to come to Art College and joined The Reward System pretty quickly. I met Adam who was the keyboard player, at a Rock Against Racism gig in the Sallis Benney Hall. I can’t remember who was playing... Adam was telling me he was forming a band and I sort of said hopefully ‘I don’t suppose you want a violin player by any chance?’, and he said ‘Yeah, great’, and I was really surprised, shocked in fact, it was extraordinary, and he took me really seriously as well. It wasn’t that he wanted a sort of girly, backing-singer, show violinist at all so it was absolutely brilliant. That was the first band. I also went on to be in the New Objeks which was Dawn on vocals, Heather on drums, Dave Roughton on bass, Jeanie, she used to have lots of ribbons in her hair, on Sax. I’m actually on the Vaultage album twice, once with the Reward System and again with the Objeks. I did a lot of guesting as well, with people like Dick Damage, and things like that.’<sup>19</sup>

The ethos of the time is summed up by the fact that a friend of Jamie Reid’s came down from London and met us in a pub; he had a bag full of new Sex Pistols albums which he gave out to each of us. I took one but later sold it; I did not want a Sex Pistols album because I was in a band myself.

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<sup>18</sup> interview date 8/6/02. Kate was a good friend of my brother’s and we often used to go to see the Objeks play.

<sup>19</sup> interview date 20/11/01. I was aware of The Reward System but did not know Sue to talk to at the time.

#### (iv) The Venues

When punk music first started being played by Brighton bands, there was a dearth of venues:

G: Why do you think it's so difficult to get venues in Brighton?

DB: Well the whole town's run by a few old geezers who want to present Brighton in a different image to what's really happening. They want it to be a holiday town. Not much fun for those who live here. They don't want to see scruffy guys playing in bands, they want 'em smart with dickie bows y'know?<sup>20</sup>

'I told lead guitar player Dan Dadandan that Flesh were fast becoming known as a good punk band particularly in view of the fact that Keith Hurley, of Alhambra fame, told us when approached about Flesh doing a gig that they were a punk band and people who claimed to have seen them had said they were outrageous & obscene and he didn't want that. 'People who come into the Alhambra want to listen'.<sup>21</sup>

At one point, the local council tried to restrict live music in many pubs.<sup>22</sup> However, promoters soon realised that putting on punk bands would draw crowds. There was always a 'circuit' of sorts: two sea front pubs, The Buccaneer and The Alhambra, put on bands already and had to be persuaded that punk music was viable. Eventually their promoters realised that the best way to pack their venues out with people was to accept punk bands whether they liked them or not<sup>23</sup>. The music was not regarded as aesthetically pleasing and the local press also did not understand the attraction of the new sounds. The Molesters were described thus:

'They have been reported as sounding like a pub brawl, but they have been voted one of Britain's top 12 new bands'<sup>24</sup>

And Fan Club's music aroused similar sentiments:

'Friends say their original style is sixties pop with the added energy of the seventies. Enemies say it's a loud, horrible noise'.<sup>25</sup>

The Buccaneer was 'rough', featuring boxing as a regular attraction; it often had

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<sup>20</sup> from *Graffiti* (15p) Depressions interview with Dave Barnard, (The Depressions) 1977

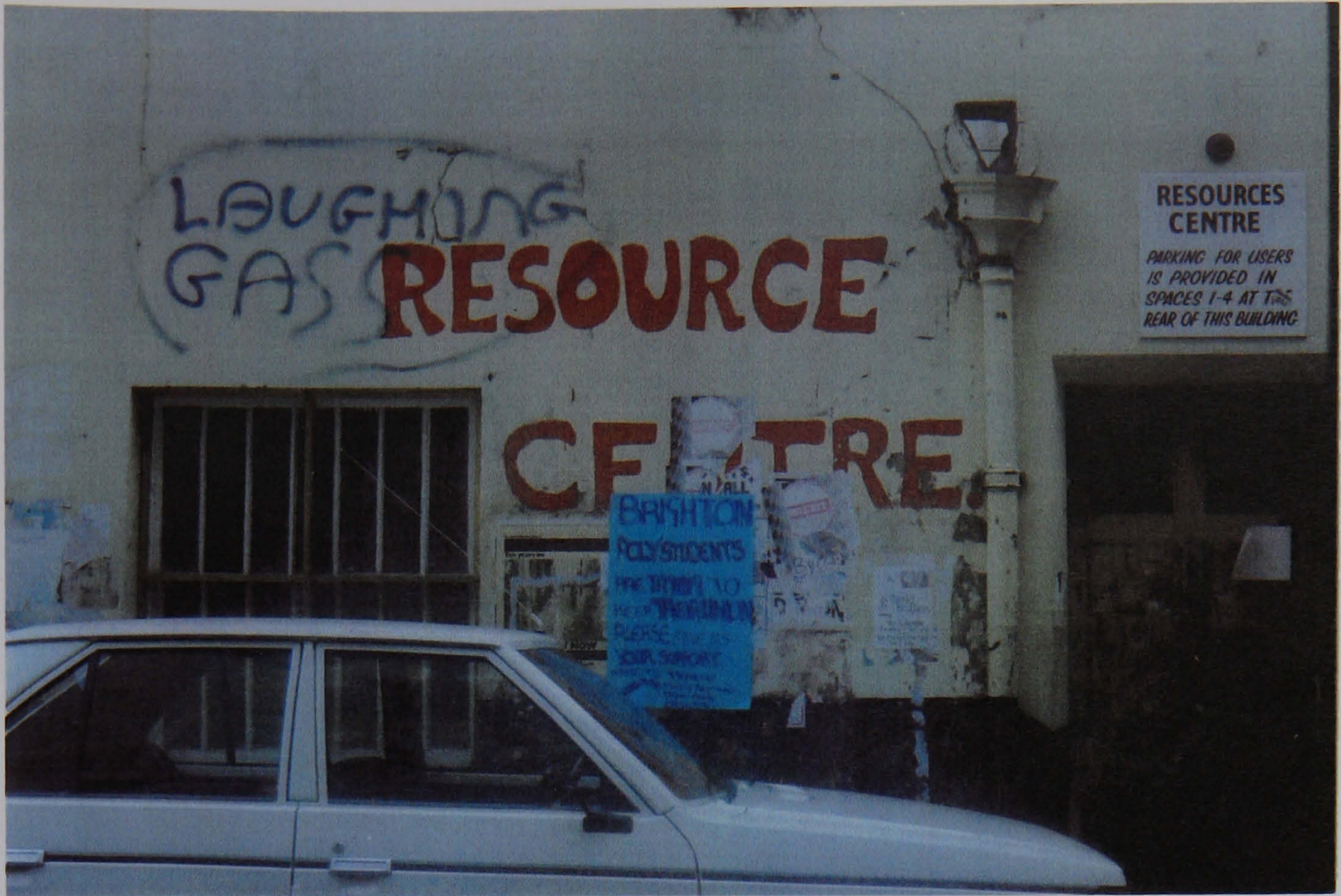
<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, interview with 'Dan Dadandan' (dole evasion name!) from Flesh

<sup>22</sup> Part (iv) of the Public Health Acts (amendment) of 1890 was introduced to allow late-night drinking in some pubs, and the resulting increase in health and safety regulations meant that 32 applications by licensed premises for certificates were adjourned by magistrates pending further works in order to comply with the act; local musicians took this to be an attempt to prevent them from playing at their regular venues. *Evening Argus*, 18/1/79

<sup>23</sup> Although my band Joby and the Hooligans never made any recordings (we were a bit too anarchic for Attrix at that stage) the live gigs always drew large audiences. The promoter of The Alhambra, Keith Hurley, once said to me: 'I fucking hate your band Helen, but every time you play here it's packed, and that's why I keep booking you'.

<sup>24</sup> From *The Evening Argus*, Friday February 23 1979 'With this pin .. punks wcd for bct', front page, Andrew Partington

<sup>25</sup> From *The Evening Argus*, March 31 1979





The Smartees Rehearse in the Vault



trouble between Punks and Teds.<sup>26</sup>; the Alhambra was more relaxed and it was possible to make a few quid by 'doing the door'. It was very dilapidated: an audience member at the time recalls that she; '... never paid to get in cos the windows were always broken so you could hear the bands from outside'.<sup>27</sup> The Concorde, formerly a sea front soul club, joined the circuit, as did the Crypt, a bar at the University.<sup>28</sup> The Basement bar of the Art College had been a disco, and put on the odd gig; later, a large pub called The Richmond became a regular venue. Later still, around 1979, other venues opened- for instance, The Bombay Bar, a 'tropical paradise' in Kemp Town, the Ice Rink and the Cage (a skate park on the sea front). There was a constant stream of new venues opening, as others closed due to bad relationships with punk audiences:

'I (also) promoted bands at the Sussex Sports centre in Queen Square above the Ice Rink. We had such gems as The Chefs, The Vandells, The Golinski Brothers, The Vogue, Woody and the Splinters and loads more until Dame 'someone or other' had us shut down. After that I put on the Piranhas in their 'Tom Hark' era at the Cinescene cinema at the top of North Street, supported by Daddy Yum Yum. We had several more planned in the following weeks at the Cinescene including Wreckless Eric and Bad Manners, but there was some minor vandalism and the owner lost his bottle'<sup>29</sup> .

By far the most memorable venue, however, was The Vault, originally set up as a venue by Vi Subversa, guitarist and vocalist with the band Poison Girls:

'There was a lively music scene in Brighton. The Amazorblades and the Dandies were the best known initially. Neither of these were known as 'punk', but subsequent bands were more or less 'punk'. I moved to Brighton in 1972. My active years were 1972-1977, in the Brighton scene, laying some of the foundations for what happened later. For me the 'punk' scene began when we got permission from the church elders to run rehearsal rooms in the vaults {of the Resources Centre}. (I got on to the management committee of a community group involving the church elders ) And perhaps because I was middle aged they trusted me! The Brighton Resources Centre (above The Vault) was a political community project and housed many groups such as Shelter (housing) Gay Rights, Women's Centre, and offered practical help and resources such as screen printing. I was the first employed member of this project and the main link between the political community groups housed on the ground floor of the church and the Vaults, which were, of course, below ground.'<sup>30</sup>

The Vault attracted punks from London as well as hosting a gig by Manchester band The Buzzcocks. Although it had no mod cons- no toilet, no bar, no fire escapes- it

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<sup>26</sup> one night we had to escape through the toilets because we were wearing plastic sandals, and Teds would sometimes beat punks up for wearing plastic sandals.

<sup>27</sup> www.punkbrighton.co.uk, e-mail from Carmen, undated

<sup>28</sup> This was promoted by Adrian York, who was elected unopposed as Social Secretary; he booked local bands to support big name bands, and employed Hell's Angels as bouncers until their alcohol consumption became a problem. Interview 14/3/02

<sup>29</sup> www.punkbrighton.co.uk, e-mail from Russell Pointing, October 10, 2000

<sup>30</sup> personal communication; Vi (real name Frances) was a lynchpin of the early punk scene in Brighton. She was at least 40 years old, but was totally at ease with anyone she came into contact with. She encouraged many young people, both male and female, to join bands- even if she did not agree with their personal politics. I regard her with retrospect as a subtle and wise mentor!

was easy to run a gig there- you just carried the P.A. downstairs from the Resource Centre, brought your equipment through from your rehearsal room and asked a couple of people to take money on the door, with or without a knife to persuade punters to part with (not very much) cash. It was a centre for gigs, borrowing and lending of equipment, and a place to go if you wanted to find out what was happening that night; it was centre for anarchy, but also had a macabre charm:

‘We used to get cans of beer from the off licence over the road and get pissed- also remember the old bill raiding it one night, cause we were letting off fire extinguishers from the car park next door. They took a look at us inside sweatin’ drunk and the noise from the band and just left.’<sup>31</sup>  
‘We did about 4 gigs altogether, the main one was supporting Poison Girls at the Vault. It must have been June 77. When I was around we’d rehearse in the Vault regularly... the amazing thing about the place was it was a burial vault with Huguenot graves boarded up with hardboard round the sides and with all the jumping around and things the vibrations caused the boarding up bits to move and the hardboard to come down and by ‘77 there were literally bodies coming through the wall. I remember there was this little baby’s lead coffin just lying there with all these bones in one end, no inscription or anything, and reverentially I pushed the bones up the other end and used the other end as a till to collect the money.’<sup>32</sup>

There is no doubt that the grim aesthetics of performing in an environment such as the Vault had an effect on the type of music and behaviour that emanated from it: the music performed by many Brighton bands became notably more cheerful as the scene eventually moved to other venues. For the bands themselves, however, there was one crucial fact about the Vault, and the staff of the Resources Centre upstairs, as Julie Blair remarks:

‘That is one of the most crucial things, affordable rehearsal space. I think we shared our arch with three bands. Several bands had one arch, didn’t they. And we knew all the people in the Resources Centre anyway, so it was always, ah, we owe you a couple of quid, pay you at the end of the month, you know.’<sup>33</sup>

This was confirmed by Steve Bassam, later leader of Brighton Council (‘Basso’) and now a member of the House of Lords: ‘I don’t remember any money entering the accounts’.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [www.punkbrighton.co.uk](http://www.punkbrighton.co.uk): e-mail from Chris Nicholls, May 7, 2001

<sup>32</sup> Attila the Stockbroker (Brighton Riot Squad), 15/1/01. Attila encouraged local bands to gig further afield, taking some of the Brighton bands to the University of Kent to play Rock Against Racism gigs. Joby and the Hooligans did this on at least one occasion.

<sup>33</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

<sup>34</sup> Interview date 23/3/03



Richmond

Bombay Bar

Sallis Benney Hall

Basement

Buccaneer

Concorde

Vault

Ice Rink

Cinescene

Top Rank

Alhambra

Skate Park

West Pier

Landing Stage

# Brighton Punk Venues, circa 1977-80

1:64



## (v) Getting Gigs

Christine Robertson sums up the importance of small scenes to aspiring musicians:

OK, your audience may not be global, it may not be national, but you can get an audience locally in your club and it can grow and be bigger. I think it [punk] broke down a lot of things, and it freed a lot of people to believe that other things were possible.<sup>35</sup>

Once the Resources Centre had established a community printing press upstairs, it became a thriving venue with publicity assets. Bands could rehearse, hang out, argue and help each other out in an uninterrupted, private way. The whole ethos of punk, the 'do it yourself' part of it and the 'encourage others to do it themselves' was taken on board fully, and the resources of the Resource Centre facilitated this.

'... we used to hang out together and when punk started, we formed a band, and as soon as we did, Joby did our posters for us without a question, the Poison Girls gave us a gig without even hearing us. If you turned up at a punk gig and said I'm a poet, can I do 5 minutes between the bands and the bands wouldn't let you they were an arsehole. It was the other way round from now. The unwritten law of punk was that if there was a little bit of space and someone wanted to do something you would let them do it and that was absolutely tailor-made for me.... The most fundamental thing was not the music or the politics, it was that simple fact that everybody felt that they could get up and do something, and not just that; if you were denied the opportunity, then the people who were organising the gig weren't true punks.'<sup>36</sup>

'Attila the Stockbroker had a band named Brighton Riot Squad who had a gig upcoming at the Btn Resource Centre. I produced posters and they needed a support band. A bunch of art students (plus me) got together and threw a few songs into a set 3 days before the gig. I worked just as Mark P had stated 'Here's a chord, here's another, now form a band'. There was great rivalry between the bands because some had commercial aspirations and others remained true to an anarchic ideal (mainly due to lack of lucre). Slurs such as 'why don't the Depressions appear with their wives and kids' etc. were rife.'<sup>37</sup>

Attila's technique of getting to perform did not just apply to relaxed venues like the Vault:

'We supported Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers at Sussex University; we just went along to the gig with our guitars and begged the manager to let us play. When he said no, we got drunk to drown our sorrows; later, he changed his mind. I remember standing on stage being too drunk to see the strings of my bass guitar, and being vaguely aware of Joby howling wildly off-key even for him: they pulled the plugs on us.'<sup>38</sup>

Most importantly of all was the affordability of the rehearsal spaces in the Vault:

<sup>35</sup> Christine Robertson, interview date 9/10/01

<sup>36</sup> Attila the Stockbroker, interview date 15/1/01

<sup>37</sup> Joby Jackson (Joby and the Hooligans), by e-mail

<sup>38</sup> Personal memory, 'Helen McCookerybook', nom-de-dole of the author.

bands shared 'arches' with each other and divided up the weekly rate, usually not paying at all. Stith Bennett discusses the ingenuity required to find a suitable rehearsal space<sup>39</sup>. He remarks that the physical constraints that rock rehearsal demands '... actually determine the scheduling and total amount of practice time, the ability to chemically alter the consciousness, and most importantly the sound power which is available during practice'. The amount of access to rehearsal time seemed infinite; some band members actually lived in the Vault, sleeping on an old doctor's examination couch, and rising for band rehearsals when the rest of the band turned up. It was possible for anyone to 'hang out' in the Vault all day, watching bands and sharing cider, amphetamines and gossip during breaks.

#### **(vi) Jealousy and Inter-Band Rivalry Within the Scene**

There was a volatile atmosphere:

I myself would get quite aggressive-not towards other people, but things-I'd smash things up, generally by accident, but there was an awful lot of pent up feelings. Brighton seemed like an absolute cauldron- whatever emotion you were experiencing, it would get completely exaggerated so if you were in love, it would just be amazing, or if you were sad you'd be absolutely devastated. Nothing ever seemed to ever find a balance, everything was exaggerated, wherever you were in yourself, it would get completely amplified by everything around you. It made it a very creative place to be, but also potentially very, very dangerous.<sup>40</sup>

There were arguments about authenticity: who was a true punk, the person who bought clothes from the King's Road the London epicentre of punk style, or the person who played in a punk band, inspired by The Sex Pistols and The Clash, whose exhortations were encouraging bands all over Britain?<sup>41</sup> For instance:

'At a punk gig at the University of Sussex a very large punk girl ('Debbie') came up to the band and started 'slagging us'. She picked on me particularly, saying what a poseur I was in my leather jacket and sunglasses. I pulled the tag out from her t-shirt and the label read 'BOY', which was a sub- Seditonaries shop on King's Road. Shouting ensued and as she flounced off I kicked her in the backside, prompted by our lead singer, Joby. Two or three days later, her transvestite friend I went into a shop worked in by Joby's girlfriend, and said that Debbie was going to kill me. Later that week, some friends who lived in a squat on the other side of Brighton, where Debbie thought I lived, said that she had sprayed some graffiti about me opposite their house. I went up there to take a look. 'I'm going to kill that fucking tart Helen from Joby and the Hooligans' I started carrying a small knife in my pocket. Then one day at a gig at the Resources Centre she came up behind me and started trying to pull off the rubber

<sup>39</sup> Stith Bennett, H, *On Becoming a Rock Musician*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1980, pp 59-66.

<sup>40</sup> Kate Hayes, interview date 8/6/02

<sup>41</sup> This argument continues to this day; at the *No Future?* conference in Wolverhampton, author and campaigner Caroline Coon, author Stuart Home, anarchist writer/musician Penny Rimbaud and musician Gary Valentine all mentioned their experience of Punk as being the authentic one; Chris Sullivan does this also in Colegrave, Stephen, and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell, London, 2001

dinosaurs I'd sewn on to the fur shorts I'd made to wear at our gig that that night. I turned round and shouted 'Why don't you just FUCK OFF'. And she did.<sup>42</sup>

We had a huge row with the Molesters: those two girls, they came down and said 'How can you be a punk band? You've got a Ted drummer' (He was a right wing Ted as well, he wasn't a fascist or anything, his parents were Hungarian émigrés or something and he'd grown up with that whole right-wing attitude.) I'd say "Leave it out, it doesn't affect our music".<sup>43</sup>

There were disagreements within bands, with personality clashes:

'Basically, I know Steve thought I was a prat and couldn't stand to be in the same room as me. I thought Joby was a prat and could have done without seeing his bollocks through his stage tights. It was a relief all round when Chris Dousley dragged me away to be in a more middle-of-the-road pop group'<sup>44</sup>

Joby and the Hooligans had a strong rivalry with the Molesters for a long time; we hated them because they had kept us awake night after night (there is no official bedtime in a lawless squat) but also had smashed our guitarist's window by throwing a brick through it, as they were angry that we had shown them up, and they particularly did not like him. One of the Molesters 'stole' this guitarist's girlfriend, who was one of their backing vocalists, and married her, 'just to get my own back'.<sup>45</sup> The glass in the window was never replaced. The Molesters were never part of the Vault scene, and had their sights set very much on success in London.

Local drug dealer Pete King started the Anti-Piranha League (or APL) as the Piranhas became successful outside Brighton.<sup>46</sup> He made badges which he pressurised people to wear. Some were slightly scared of him, others relied on him to score speed, and the movement took off. In retrospect, this was part of a 'big fish in a small pond'- type power struggle for control of the scene; the Piranhas' manager was involved in many of the venues by now as local bands began to have a radio and recording profile.

Whether male or female, geographical distance added to psychological detachment and alienation from the original audience. Sometimes, this could result in a jealous possessiveness on the part of the early fans.<sup>47</sup> Pete manufactured badges and a sizeable proportion of the audience at local gigs by other bands could be seen wearing these. In

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<sup>42</sup> Personal memory of the author

<sup>43</sup> Attila the Stockbroker, 15/1/01

<sup>44</sup> Nick Dwyer, personal communication, 14/6/02. Nick was originally a guitarist in Joby and the Hooligans but he left; he did not like our involvement with politics.

<sup>45</sup> conversation with the author, 1979. This wedding was reported on the front page of the Brighton Evening Argus,

'With this pin... punks wed for bet', *Evening Argus*, Friday February 23 1979.

<sup>46</sup> The Piranhas were one of the first bands to incorporate reggae rhythms into punk music; the band Madness used to attend their gigs in London on a regular basis before they became a performing entity. The Piranhas had chart hits with the singles Tom Hark (Sire, 1980) and Zambezi (Dakota, 1982), before splitting up

<sup>47</sup> noted in Cohn, Sara, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: popular music in the making*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991,

p 11; In Brighton, possessiveness began as soon as a band started recording for single release or sessions

spite of the fact the Piranhas remained loyal to Brighton, this would contradict Ian Chambers' findings regarding the '... forms of local pride [that] are also attached to local bands and musicians who have become internationally established artists and who rarely, if ever, return to their original locality'.<sup>48</sup> Jealousy was not uncommon in local music making; Hester Dollymixture reported that the group lost their friends as they became more successful outside their locality, and they became isolated:

We were loathed in Cambridge by most people once we started getting somewhere- really badly, it was horrible. I think it was partly jealousy. It's pretty horrible when it happens. So very quickly we became our own best friends sort of thing, and just seeing people who were to do with the music business.<sup>49</sup>

Lucy O'Brien's local scene did not include any other girls in music-making, and this too led to a feeling of isolation:

I think we felt that we were a bit isolated. It was quite different being in the regions, and being in a town that was off the map. We were just very aware that we were the only girls doing it for miles around. We would have loved for there to be other girls on the scene, because we did find it quite difficult at times- difficult to be taken seriously, and we did encounter quite a bit of opposition and aggression from different subcultural tribal groups.<sup>50</sup>

### **(vii) Stealing**

There was as much stealing as there was lending. Bands regularly lost smaller items of equipment, especially guitar leads,<sup>51</sup> but sometimes larger items. In 1979 The Chefs played an open air gig at Sussex University in aid of RAR. The band Gong were also performing and their performance went on interminably. Our guitarist, who was rather hot-headed, leapt up on stage to tell them to get off. It looked as though there was going to be a fight, so I leaned my new second-hand semi-acoustic bass on to a nearby car and followed him to try to pull him away. When I returned the bass was gone. Other bands were supportive; The Golinski Brothers' bass player offered to lend me his. Someone called the shop where I was working to say that the police had accused him of stealing it, because he had an identical one. Eventually, Dougie, a local drug dealer, told me he thought the Hells Angels had it, and if I had not reported it to the police I could get it back. I pretended that I'd not told the police, and started hanging around outside the bikers' pub in Kemp Town. I told Dougie to pass it through the grapevine that not only had I practically starved myself to pay for the guitar (£85 was a lot of money to me) but it would be impossible to sell, as it was so distinctive. We had a gig at the Art College Basement

<sup>48</sup>Bennett, Andy, *Popular Music and Youth Culture: music, identity and place*, Andy Bennett, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke and London, 2000, p 193

<sup>49</sup> Hester Smith, drums, The Dollymixture, interview date 26/1/00

<sup>50</sup> Lucy O'Brien, synthesiser, The Catholic Girls, interview date 6/12/01

<sup>51</sup> I remember doing a gig with the Depressions. I had bought an Electrovoice microphone as my singing voice was not up to much, and had to also buy an impedance converter in order to use it. At the end of the gig I could not find it (it was only about 8 centimetres long). Someone said they had seen the bass guitarist from the Depressions put it into his pocket. I could not afford to lose it, and went round to his house. 'I think you may have accidentally put my impedance converter into your pocket.' He sheepishly returned it to me.



Above: Cliff and Russell outside the Windsor Tavern: their clothes came from Boy in the King's Road. They were both in employment and could afford to buy clothes there. Below: badges, some home-made.



Club one night soon afterwards, and I was sitting and sulking in the Norfolk pub next door when my brother walked in, holding my guitar. He'd been on his way home before the gig to get changed, and had seen a woman walking into the police station with it. He rushed up to her, persuading her not to hand it in so I could use it that night. She had been sunbathing in the park and had found it in a bush.

Sometimes bands would capitalise on the misfortunes of others; eccentric band Fan Club was always on the lookout for a way to appear in the local press. When the band who shared their arch (where they rehearsed at the Vault), The Dodgems, had a break-in and lost all of their equipment, reports in the Evening Argus said that both Fan Club and the Dodgems had had gear stolen. Fan Club had somehow intercepted the press report and managed to include themselves in the story, although they had lost nothing. They achieved the desired effect of being mentioned in the article:

'Brighton rock bands could play benefit concerts to raise cash for Fan Club and The Dodgems who this week had equipment worth more than £3000 stolen. The Dodgems were hardest hit and lost almost everything when raiders forced their way into the basement at the Brighton Resource Centre and carried away drums, keyboards, guitars, amplifiers, speakers and lighting gear.'<sup>52</sup>

A riot at The Buzzcocks 1979 gig at Brighton's Top Rank Suite provided an amplifier for University-based band EMil and the Detectives and cymbals for the drummer of town-based band Midnight and the Lemon Boys, after a large-scale fight erupted in front of the stage halfway through the gig. Another incident involved the roadie of my band (Joby and the Hooligans) stealing our amplifiers and selling them to a local second-hand musical equipment store while we were away for a few days. He enthusiastically joined in our search for our gear, and was arrested while eating dinner at our house. Due to other offences, he was sent to Borstal, from where he wrote to us asking if he could roadie again for the band on his release.

### **(vii) Politics**

The Brighton scene embraced every sort of punk from the hyper-political to fashion-followers, sometimes within the same band, and always within the same pub. Whether or not you thought someone was an idiot, the scene had moved on before you had time to consolidate an opinion. The amount of talking was incredible- this must have been partly to do with the amount of amphetamine sulphate we consumed, but a considerable amount of this talk was productive, leading to fanzines, records, political demonstration, and high-profile activities like the Jubilee Squat in 1977, in which a combination of squatters and punks moved into an empty office building close to the station, Britannia House, just for the day. There seemed to be a mixture of disaffected middle-class students, waiters (Tom Maltby from Wrist Action, Dave MacDonald and Pete Smith from Fan Club), community workers and girls who had run away from care homes in the bands. Political involvement would vary according to the beliefs and feelings

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<sup>52</sup> From *The Evening Argus*, April 28th 1979, Spin-Off, edited by Peter Archer

of the band members. For instance, the Hooligans did squatters, RAR, gay and local community benefits but did not play women's benefits. Some bands did every benefit going; others did none.

One of the earliest punk bands in Brighton was The Depressions, whose album is cited by Stuart Home as 'simply brilliantly empty 'teenage' posturing.'<sup>53</sup> He divides punk music into 'Punk Rock' and 'punk rock', the former being the type of music being made by those who would have been in bands anyway, whether or not the punk moment had happened, and the latter being the type of music made by enthusiasts, carried away by the excitement of the moment (Home's punks are rarely female). An interview from a local fanzine illustrates the priorities of bass player Dave Barnard:

G: What about your involvement in your lyrics, you write about doll (sic) queues and youngsters but how much do you really care about that?

DB: My part is to write about it. I'm not a member of the Squatters (sic) Union or anything like that, I couldn't be an active member of that, I don't have the time because I play my music. My involvement is to write about it. I don't think we are accepted as a punk (sic) band in Brighton by other bands. I don't know why, I think we are nearer to it than other bands in the way we are. I have been through it and still am, contract or not,<sup>54</sup>

Another early Brighton punk band, Wrist Action, was fronted by Tom Maltby, who was clearly into it for a good time:

'At the Art College gig I looked round and found the rest of em were playing a different song- but people seemed to enjoy it tho-by the way I got 7p from the Art College gig, enough to buy a pack of peanuts-playing for peanuts ha!-we're different tho-politics is shit-the last thing we want to do is preach politics-...'<sup>55</sup>

This was a great contrast to Attila the Stockbroker, who was committed to the extreme left:

Q: Did you feel there was 'No Future'?:

'For me it was absolutely the opposite. There were two sorts of punks- there were Clash punks and Sex Pistols punks. The Sex Pistols punks were precisely ones who thought no future; and we were all highly politically motivated, antifascist, communist, I was in the Socialist Workers Party, very involved with Rock Against Racism. Red Saunders actually recorded one of my very early gigs and I said who's going to listen to that? and he sent it to John Peel and he played it hundreds of times. I was terribly involved in the Rock Against Racism. At University I was involved in putting on all sorts of gigs not just your lot. We put on Misty and the Black Enchanters, and Steel Pulse. For me, one of the great things about punk was the Punk/Reggae crossover. The day I saw the Clash I knew exactly what I wanted to do, when I saw them on stage I thought 'That's me'. That just focused everything; everything culturally made sense. I saw them about 25 times that year, and it literally changed my life.'<sup>56</sup>

The lead singer of Joby and the Hooligans, Joby Visigoth, was involved in

<sup>53</sup> Home, Stuart, *Cranked Up Really High: genre theory and punk rock*, CodeX, Hove, 1995, p 70

<sup>54</sup> from local fanzine *Graffiti* (15p) Depressions interview with Dave Barnard, 1977

<sup>55</sup> from local fanzine *Spitting Blood*, September 1977 (20 p), interview with Tom Maltby from Wrist Action

<sup>56</sup> Interview date 15/1/01

squatting, and enthusiastically embraced the idea of performing:

Q: How did you become involved in punk?

'It was the socio-political aspect of a subculture that kicked ass & disrupted a complacent music scene but was also perceived as a threat by the political establishment. This was later realised by SWP who organised "Rock Against Racism" gigs to further their objectives but also provided an opportunity for bands to be heard. As a careerist squatter the ethos suited my anarchic lifestyle. Until that time my greatest achievements had been cracking squats & a band would be a great medium for egotistic expression particularly if named Joby & the Hooligans.'<sup>57</sup>

There was a strong political element in music that was made by some of the 'Art-College' punks, as Kate Hayes observes:

Q. Did you do benefit gigs?

'Yeah, always- that was mainly what the gigs were that we did. I don't think we ever got paid for a gig. Rock Against Racism, we'd do benefits for community based stuff, for the nurses. We were hugely politically motivated. We didn't quite fit into the norm in that way- we did care about what we were singing about hugely, and we did care about what we aligned ourselves with, cos as a group, those of us who were at Art School, our work was very political... we were very much wanting to make a statement with our work. So we wouldn't probably have seen making money as a good thing to have done, in our naive approach to what we were doing- we really thought we were at the heart of a revolution; we wanted to really change how people thought and felt about things, which may explain why I wasn't that interested in what other bands were doing, because the industry bit of it wasn't the language I was speaking at the time. It was much more about supporting things that we wanted to add our voice to'.<sup>58</sup>

Sue Bradley, another of the art-school punks<sup>59</sup>, when asked if she thought music and politics were tied to each other in Brighton at this time, replied:

'Yes they were tied, in a way that it doesn't seem to be now. I got into my first band because I was at a Rock Against Racism gig, and I think there were ever such a lot of political viewpoints being expressed through the songs- people like the Golinski Brothers. Just indirectly generally left-wing politics were going on. You just would know that none of these bands would ever be playing the Conservative club- it would just not be done. In fact I remember the Pookies being offered a gig at the Conservative Club and not doing it.

However, one of the most successful bands in Brighton, The Piranhas, were cynical about 'good cause' gigs:

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<sup>57</sup> E-mail interview

<sup>58</sup> interview date 8/6/02

<sup>59</sup> Frith and Horne discuss 'art school punks' (see Frith, Simon and Horne, Howard, *Art into Pop*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, discussed elsewhere); Mark P writes: 'In many ways the punk scene gave kids a chance to realise their dreams without going to college or art school. Those who were or had been at college soon changed their perceptions, and it was their input allied with that of working class kids like myself which made punk so diverse' (from *And God Created Punk*, Eichenberg, Erica and Perry, Mark, Virgin, London, 1996, p 119)





Above: Britannia House is squatted for the day by various punks and squatters.  
Below: graffiti in Kensington Gardens. Dick Damage, in common with many other punks, sprayed his band name wherever he could (usually tongue-in-cheek)



JOHNNY: The point is, before the tour, we'd already done about twenty RAR gigs in Brighton, which nobody outside the area would have even heard about

BOB: I think that, as a band, our first thought was that it was a gig. We wouldn't have done it if it had conflicted with our beliefs, but I must admit I never thought about it consciously. Racism was a new word to me: I've never had anything against anybody. We're not into RAR just because it's a fashion

ZOOT: RAR's UNfashionable in a way now and we're still doing it. All the little bands do it just to get their names heard.

+: That's why I asked the question

BOB: Well, as I said, we did it for the gigs, but we wouldn't have if it was in support of something against our principles.

Mick Dwyer : 'There was ... an agreeable lack of carefully thought-out collective world-view... During the interview they frequently disagreed with each other and argued amongst themselves, and that can only be a good thing the way I see it.'<sup>60</sup>

The ambivalence shown by the Piranhas may have been a 'front' for the interviewer; as Bob says above, nearly all of the bands had principles that guided their choice of audience. Sometimes, the level of political activity of certain members of a band would cause others to feel uncomfortable, and they would leave; Nick Dwyer told me his reasons for leaving Joby and the Hooligans:

'(It was) a lot to do with you and Steve going to Grunwick<sup>61</sup> and living in the squat at Lansdowne Place. All too political and right-on working class for a typical middle-class dreamer like me. I just wanted to be in the Talking Heads while the Hooligans wanted to be The Ramones!'<sup>62</sup>

Sometimes, a band's name alone would cause controversy. Brighton was a conservative town with a Conservative council, and this was reflected in the attitudes of some of the local promoters; the musicians themselves were defiant, however:

'Brighton rock band The Lilletes refuse to change their name. Some agents and landlords will not book them because it's risqué. But the five-piece neo-punk outfit say the name must stay. 'Those people who know us and like us would see it as a piece of blatant commercialism if we were to change the name to suit the establishment', said manager Steve Hall.<sup>63</sup>

Other aspects of the subculture were found objectionable by the council; all of the gigs were promoted by flyposting, nearly all of which were printed on the presses at the Resource Centre. A local fanzine urged bands to poster over the council's stickers, and had this to say about flyposting:

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<sup>60</sup> from *Rapid Eye Movement*, Winter '70, (30p) published by Rough Trade

<sup>61</sup> The Grunwick dispute happened in the summer of 1977; it centred on the treatment of Asian workers at the Grunwick photographic plant in North London. Various punks and squatters travelled to the picket line, organised by Steve (now Lord) Bassam, who told me 'I've always had this thing of wanting to expand the world of people in left of centre politics. Grunwick was a big issue at the time; it seemed important to me that we all played a part in showing some solidarity. It woke a lot of white middle class people up to some fairly political issues. Steve Bassam was heavily involved in the squatting community at the time.

<sup>62</sup> Nick Dwyer, personal communication, 14/6/02

<sup>63</sup> from the *Evening Argus*, Saturday July 21 1979

'It's illegal but the police can only prosecute after a complaint from the offended party (ie property owners) But the Council threatened the Alhambra because bands playing there had fly posted the town, and a friend was heaved by some over zealous officers with threats of ripping his coat to bits in search of drugs (!!??) The council inspired "Bill Posters will be Prosecuted" stickers that are providing a more frequent eyesore to the town, is an attempt to stop us communicating; cover one over tonight; right!!'<sup>64</sup>

By the time Attrix Records began in 1979, the relationship between bands and radical politics had mellowed, and is best described by Julie Blair, as she describes her attitude to her band The Mockingbirds, and their attitude to politics:

'It was purely for fun- I always knew that it would be short-lived. And it was an intense and very enjoyable time. If they can do it, we can, in the sense of one chord wonders. A lot of people started to do things musically because they could see it was possible. I don't think many of the bands were politically motivated. There was a lot of political interest skirting round it... I don't think even in terms of having a political message. Often the gigs were CND and things like that, often they had a political resonance. A lot of people in the bands were political animals but I don't think it affected the music. I don't think that the music reflected that political interest. There was an overall sense that we all had sort of, political beliefs along similar lines, demos, antiestablishment. Attrix was so much the heart of music at the time. Rick had done so much to encourage young bands.'<sup>65</sup>

#### **(ix) Attrix Records**

Attrix Records was set up by a local musician, Rick Blair, in 1979, initially to release recordings by his band (also named Attrix).<sup>66</sup> In 1978, Attrix released a compilation LP of Brighton bands who were based at the Vault, entitled *Vaultage 78*. The album had a real 'home-made' feel with a silkscreened cover designed by the Piranha's sax player, Zoot. Rick Blair was a natural facilitator rather than a pushy businessman, and this made local bands trust Attrix as a conduit for their material. Rick's family had a continuous financial struggle that matched that of their protégés (their flat was often lit by candlelight when they could not afford to pay their electricity bill) and he understood the underlying desperation of many of the punk musicians in Brighton.<sup>67</sup> In 1979 he opened a record shop in Brighton's Sydney Street to sell records from other independent companies. Staff member Stuart Jones recalls his involvement with the first Attrix release, and the release of the second compilation, coinciding with the opening of the shop:

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<sup>64</sup> from *Spitting Blood*, September 1977 (20 p)

<sup>65</sup> Interview date 7/10/99. This was the first interview I did when I sought out Brighton band personnel, and I had assumed that all of the bands were as involved with direct politics as Joby and the Hooligans. I therefore learned from the start that there were many different experiences of the Brighton punk scene apart from my own.

<sup>66</sup> Rick died of a brain haemorrhage in 1999. I am grateful to Julie for her articulation of the ethos of Attrix, and her help in this research.

<sup>67</sup> Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects*, Pantheon, New York, 1981, p 156: 'At a time when British rock companies were in trouble, the punk independents, however small, had the authority of their own idealism'. with '....a concern for music as a mode of survival rather than as a means to profit'.

For me, it was amazing: I was chatting to Someone Who Had Made A Real Record! Who had put the whole thing together! Who played fantastic guitar, wrote fantastic songs, who sang just like Lou Reed! That night I helped them sleeve-up hundreds of copies of Vaultage 78. I was in heaven! I felt I had become Part Of The New Wave!

(in 1979) We all stayed up for most of that first Friday night, still painting the shop! The second compilation album, Vaultage 79, was released that very Saturday the shop opened it's doors the local press arrived, pictures were taken, and we sold hundreds of copies of the album.<sup>68</sup>

I asked Julie whether she felt that the bands on these albums had anything in common:

It was very open (as a scene). You think of the range of stuff that was on the Vaultage albums- it was very hard putting those together and sorting out a running order, because there wasn't a definable type of music. But in common- only that they sang about what mattered to them.<sup>69</sup>

When asked if she thought that the output of the Brighton bands on Attrix Records seemed lightweight in comparison to other post punk bands (often, the music seemed comical while the lyrics contained a serious message), she answered:

'I'm not sure how that would have panned out from other record companies or from the listening public but I've got a whole folder of letters that we used to get from running Attrix from all over the place saying how fantastic they thought this song was or that song was, and how it meant so much to them and how they could relate to this. There was one referring to your Twenty Four Hours one that brought a couple together from out of nowhere. I always thought that was the fantastic thing about the lyrics, although the music was so catchy and poppy. I've always gone for lyrics and I wondered if that was what made the Brighton sound so interesting. It was always called the Brighton Sound but I don't think there was such a thing really- it was a sort of job lot of individuals. Which is a contradiction in terms. But the lyrics were always important, and interesting.'<sup>70</sup>

#### **(x) Opportunities for Female Instrumentalists**

Any entry in my diary of April 22nd 1977 describes my friend Barbara's all-female band, No Man's Band, playing what must have been one of the very first gigs in the Vault. They had formed because Barbara was fed up with following her partner's band, the Irish folk band Moonfleet, and wanted to do something herself. This was before punk had stamped a seal of approval on the participation of women in rock music making, but No Man's Band had a punk sound, a feisty attitude, and enough friends to create a sizeable audience for their gigs: they were also all squatters, and several of them were involved in light criminal activities; their drummer, Mufti, made regular trips to Amsterdam

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<sup>68</sup> From [www.punkbrighton.co.uk](http://www.punkbrighton.co.uk)

<sup>69</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*

in which she 'lost' a suitcase and claimed insurance money.<sup>71</sup>

As with the London scene, the willingness to lend equipment, offers of gigs and general encouragement that was part of the punk mentality directly affected the gender make-up of the bands in Brighton. I can recall very little active exclusion of women by male musicians, and as above, a considerable amount of informal mentoring, alongside an 'I can do this' feeling by women who might previously have been put off by the level of skill required to take on the mantle of, say, Joni Mitchell, or even the level of coyness (for instance, Karen Carpenter). The bravery of Vi Subversa can not be underestimated; in effect, Poison Girls were a whole punk family (at least three of them were related sexually or genetically), and although their lifestyle had a hippyish flavour, their punk attitude was apparent in their actions. They did not want to include other musicians in their 'family'; instead, they encouraged other people to set up their own bands, whether or not they agreed with their political views, and in this they were anarchic. It would have been unlikely for them to have come across extreme right views amongst the bands, and I assume that this is where they would have drawn the line. However, the sight and sound of loud, raw, aggressive (and amateurish) music coming from a family was very impressive; how could one not want to be involved in this outlet for one's anger, whatever their gender? As Frances says:

'In those days, the sound of a power chord-the buzz of the live gig (were) heady thrills-compared to having to explain myself or even making sense'<sup>72</sup>

Frances was hassled from time to time for being a woman in a band. She continues:

'I ignored it as much as I could. I got to be very 'assertive', but I actually hated having to deal with it. By nature I am quite sensitive and rather reserved, but I felt I needed to 'come out' as a woman and not just be supportive. Other members of the band were encouraging me as well. Actually, I was hassled as much for my *age* as for being a woman in the band. Cries of 'get em off' were heard, interspersed with references to 'old age pensioner'. It seemed that to start, as I did, aged 40 was more unacceptable than my gender.'<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The importance of squatting to pop and rock music making continued well into the 1980s: people such as Boy George, Marilyn, and other less well-known New Romantic band members lived in London squats. It was a legacy of the 1960s alternative culture, which had itself spawned many bands. The combination of cheap, large, empty living spaces and squalor (which was an undeniable aid to ambition, as anyone who has lived in a house with no bath and no hot water will tell you) provided an ideal environment for artists and musicians whose activities were often deemed antisocial by more 'normal' members of society. See *The Face*, March 1983, No 35, p 18; David Thomas and Patrick Lilley write about the squats in North London where Boy George and other New Romantic and post-punk artists lived 'Meanwhile, from day to day, life in both houses continues in its own sweet way. Up at mid-day, tea parties in the afternoon and out all night. At Oxford University people live like this, with college rooms and banquets, and they're called Bright Young Things.' They talk about stealing of food from supermarkets, and having a bath at the Oasis Baths (this was familiar- we had no bath or hot water in our squat at Lansdowne Place in Hove, and went to the public baths en masse every Friday). They continue: '... almost all the people who ever lived in any of these houses have gone on to achieve some sort of public success'. The University analogy is interesting in the light of Michelle's comments cited in McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991 and 2000, p 9.

<sup>72</sup> Letter to author, 1/12/01

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*

Visual image, of course, was an issue. For the lesbian bands, who developed as a consciousness-raising expression from the Brighton Women's Centre (based in the upstairs part of the Resources Centre), there was a deliberate decision to 'dress down'.<sup>74</sup> Others, like Sue Bradley had difficulty in making the transition from punk neutrality to 'new wave' gender issues:

'I always found the sexuality thing difficult. I never knew whether I was supposed to be a boy or a girl clothes-wise and looks-wise. It was quite easy when it was punk because you had a very particular style and makeup which wasn't to do with looking attractive, it was to do with a particular look. But once that started to die out a bit in 82, 83, I started thinking: 'Should I be wearing a dress to gigs, should I be wearing trousers, do I want to look attractive or not?' Usually, it was safer to *not*. It was to do with my own confidence, and also to do with being taken seriously.'<sup>75</sup>

There was an understanding amongst those in the punk subculture that sexualised clothing was worn as an ironic statement. However, in Brighton there were 'hangers on' who were intrigued by the scene for various reasons, and the non-exclusive nature of the scene could lead to misunderstandings. An elderly man started 'hanging out' with my band and although we did not like him, we tolerated his presence, until there was a sudden power cut in the vault, at which point he took the opportunity to sexually assault me. After that, I chose to wear cheap spray-painted boiler suits instead of short skirts and fishnets. It was actually more comfortable to wear 'male' clothing, particularly when setting up the gear, and one was not excused from this activity on account of one's gender. Bayton discusses aspects of this in 'Frock Rock'<sup>76</sup>. Guitars are heavy and large, made for men's bodies and men's arm-span; playing in a dress can be a nuisance. My personal dilemma was this: should I look 'sexy' and feel uncomfortable, and alienate women in the audience by drawing attention to my appearance, or should I look 'butch' as though I was trying to look like a boy in order to concentrate on playing, and push my sexuality to one side?<sup>77</sup>

Women instrumentalists had an uneasy relationship with the lesbian community, also based at the Resources Centre. There was an attempt by the lesbian community to co-opt the visible empowerment of playing an instrument on stage. This is later referred to as 'colonising' by Steve Beresford.<sup>78</sup> Some of the women from the Women's group drew me aside after one of the gigs and asked me if I knew what I was singing, and how the lyrics degraded women. I did know what I was singing- I sang the degrading lyrics in

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<sup>74</sup> There is a quotation attributed to John Peel in which he is alleged to have praised the music-making opportunities of punk for allowing 'fat girls in dungarees' to take to the stage. See this work p 154, footnote 60

<sup>75</sup> Interview date 20/11/01

<sup>76</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999

<sup>77</sup> Sexual jealousy was an important issue- see Lora Logic's comments earlier. I regard this problem as insoluble; in my later band 'The Chefs' all of us, male and female, dressed in checked shirts and trousers. I was described as a 'little girl' by someone at a gig, although by then I was 22.

<sup>78</sup> See this work p 164: Steve Beresford played various instruments with The Slits when they toured.

unison with Joby; this made them utter nonsense<sup>79</sup> There was an element of out-machoing the male members of the group in this, but I was so angry about everything that I did not care. I knew how to change fuses in my amplifier, change the strings on my bass, and tune it; many of those in the women bands did not know these things, and I did actually see one woman bass player hand her guitar-lead to a man, for him to plug it into the amplifier. It seemed that an element of the audience wanted a parallel to the band hierarchy in the 'real world'. My experience was echoed by that of Julie, who told me, when I asked her about whether the Mockingbirds attracted a good audience at all-female gigs:

'Yeah. We had a lot of feminists who were deeply disappointed to find out that I was married with two children and Shirley was married with one.'<sup>80</sup>

One of the best things about being a girl in a band, however was the fact that nobody could accuse you of being a groupie. Previously, if you had shown a strong interest in bands and gone backstage, the etiquette of rock'n'roll dictated that you were there to service the band members sexually.<sup>81</sup> This point was noted by French all-female band The Lous in 1977, who were interviewed for *Sounds* by Caroline Coon:

'Women are much more curious about us than men. They like what we're doing. We're showing them another aspect of living and they are encouraged to take up instruments themselves. Before, they couldn't believe women were capable of playing rock'n'roll. But if we can do it in France, then women over here, with all the opportunities, have no excuse. Groupies must become musicians'<sup>82</sup>

Most of the younger female participants in Brighton bands took on the role of backing singer: The Molesters, The Accents, and the Smartees all had at least one female backing singer. The Lillettes were led by a woman who played guitar on their recordings but restricted herself to vocals on stage until she gained enough confidence to play keyboards as well<sup>83</sup>. However, after Frances on guitar and Sue on bass in Poison Girls, came myself on bass (in Joby and the Hooligans, The Smartees and The Chefs), The Devil's Dykes (all-female band), The Bright Girls (all-female band), Sue Bradley on

<sup>79</sup> Joby's ideal in life was the 'wind-up' and he was prepared to go to any lengths to anger people. Verse one went as follows:

Got myself a girlfriend  
Skinny Little runt  
Took her down the sea front  
Screwed the silly cunt.

<sup>80</sup> Interview date 7/10/99

<sup>81</sup> In my later band The Chefs, a journalist from a paper in Worthing came over to do an interview. The band we shared rehearsal space with, Midnight and the Lemon Boys, were determined to muscle in on the interview, as they felt they were more seriously ambitious than The Chefs. They showed off, interrupted, and so on until the journalist turned to me and asked ; 'Are these your groupies?' A few weeks later, in a reversal of the rock'n'roll norm, Robbi Millar, a female journalist from Sounds came to see them play at the Richmond. Both Robbi and their lead singer Marcus disappeared early in the evening, and the rest of the band were frantically looking for them so they could go on stage. Robbi and Marcus returned from the beach, where Robbi had taken Marcus to have sex, as he was young and relatively good-looking. After the gig, the band looked for Robbi to find out if she would be giving the gig a good review. She had returned to London before they began to play, having had a satisfactory evening already. Although these appear to be funny anecdotes, at the time they seemed to affirm a change in the whole rock and roll idiom!

<sup>82</sup> Coon, Caroline, 'Groupies must become musicians', in *Sounds*, December 31 1977, p 6

<sup>83</sup> From questionnaire reply, Barb Dwyer, 2/1/03

violin/keyboards, (in *The Reward System*, *The New Objekts* and *Pookiesnackeburger*), Laurie on sax (in *Birds with Ears*), *The Mockingbirds* (all female apart from male guitarist), *The Objekts* (female guitarist, female sax-player, two female lead singers), and other younger bands, who played non-licensed venues such as the Skate Park on the Brighton sea front. Being able to play an instrument did not necessarily mean that the instrument was played on stage; Kate Hayes told me:

My confidence was not very good at all, even though I could play guitar and had played guitar for years even before going to Brighton. I could probably play guitar better than anyone else in the band to be honest cos I'd had more practice and used to play more songs and things.<sup>84</sup>

Groups of musicians have to negotiate the distribution of power within their bands, and in Kate's case, she felt the necessity to 'fit in' was more important than asserting her right to play an instrument.

### **(xi) The Disintegration of the Brighton Punk Scene**

The burning-down of the Resources Centre in October 1980 had a profound effect on the morale of the band scene in Brighton. The *Evening Argus* reported the number of bands who had been rehearsing there:

"One of the worst affected sections will be the 64 punk, new wave, mod and rock bands which use the centre for rehearsals and performances. Firemen saved thousands of pounds worth of equipment from serious damage by moving it away from flooded areas of the basement'.<sup>85</sup>

Attila the Stockbroker told me:

'I remember.... hearing on the radio, that there was a fire. Nobody actually knew who burnt it down. The police said they didn't know. I mean Beaky, he was a fascist, he was a skinhead who still goes to Albion. He used to boast about it, I don't know if he actually did it: various people claimed to it. The police knew all about it but didn't do anything because the place was a thorn in their side.'

Kate Hayes had temporarily left Brighton to try to find work in New York, but the news reached her there:

'I remember when I was in New York, I'd got through on the phone to Paul, and being absolutely despairing that the Resources Centre had been firebombed by the National Front. And for me that was like the end of the world- what's happened? that's where everything creative came from, that's where I believed all of the revolutionary stuff, all of the hope for change, was focused there. And to have it firebombed by the National Front, that was the end of the music scene for Brighton, that people wouldn't be able to share their equipment and spaces any more. It felt very destructive and depressing when that happened. I found the fascism the most depressing thing in Brighton.'

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<sup>84</sup> interview date 8/6/02

<sup>85</sup> *Evening Argus*, Tuesday October 7th, 1980, p 10



The Vault had allowed for a mixture of ideologies, genders, genres and communities; rumour had it that the National Front had burned it down because of the Anti-Nazi benefits it supported. The Resources Centre itself had provided a venue for the local Tory councillors surgery as well as tap-dancing classes (Dawn Jordan's School of Dance), keep-fit and various left wing and anarchic activities. As Steve Bassam told me:

'(It was) more of a gathering point for people who were political: it didn't have an overarching political ideal- I think in it's constitution it wasn't allowed to. Some of the people in bands were involved in squatting and social action; some were artists; it also inspired this whole poster culture.'<sup>86</sup>

By the time the Vault was burned down, the Piranhas were relatively successful and had shown that there was a way of translating a local audience into a national one, if a band could use the interest in punk bands and local music-making to their advantage. However, the self-deprecating humour of the Piranhas defined the expected style of the Brighton bands, who came to be seen as twee in the 'outside world' of the music business.<sup>87</sup> Throughout, they had been amongst the most well-organised and musically competent of the bands, with a persistent manager, enough band members earning money to ensure that their equipment worked, and generally good relationships with other bands. They were not overtly political, their personnel was relatively stable, and they must have seemed marketable. An unwritten contract must have existed between their manager, Tony Byford, and Attrix Records' owner Rick Blair, for as soon as The Piranhas made contacts in London that led to their leaving Attrix for Sire Records<sup>88</sup>, other bands on Attrix started to have meetings with record labels that had been set up by Tony.

Basically, the Brighton punk music scene had developed as a customised version of what had happened in London: it developed out of a need for activity for a pool of unemployed and dispirited young people (that included a small group of students and low-paid workers), and a parallel need for somewhere for their friends and contemporaries to go in order to 'belong'. In this respect, the micro-subculture of Brighton punk very much follows Willis's observations in *Profane Culture*;

'Having posited itself, shown its existence, manifested an identity in concrete worldly items, the social group has a degree of conscious and unconscious security. It does not have the same struggle with the void of possibilities its culture and identity might have been. And with this stored and coded image safely locked up within cultural items the social group can then, in a reverse dialectical moment, learn from and be influenced by

<sup>86</sup> Interview, 20/3/02. Steve Bassam is now Lord Bassam. He used to drive the squatters and punks to demos such as Grunwick and the Lewisham anti-racist march. He lived in a squat, and was a friend (the squatting community was a close and supportive community in spite of its varied and volatile personnel).

<sup>87</sup> Julie Blair: It got toy towny, Noddy- that's how it came over in the media. John Peel latched on to that wacky thing about it. He really liked us, and he played our song that was on the Vaultage album loads of times. He rang me up a couple of times to tell em how much he liked it, cos he did a lot of studio work with the Attrix bands.' There was a definite attempt to 'brand' local bands, that seems like the eternal quest by the music industry for the elusive second 'Mersey Beat'; for instance, Frith asks the question: 'what is the Sheffieldness of Sheffield groups?' in Frith, Simon, *Popular Music and the State* in Bennett, Tony, Frith, Simon, Grossberg, Lawrence, Shepherd, John, Turner, Gracme, (eds) *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 22

<sup>88</sup> Their single 'Tom Hark' went to no 12 in the National Charts in 1980

its own cultural field and develop its feelings, attitude and taste in relation to perhaps a widening circle of art forms, cultural items and objects- in particular directions first instituted by itself and its own needs.<sup>89</sup>

The 'widening circle' that resulted in local customisation also resulted in the commercialisation process that eventually destroyed not only the political element of the new music (albeit after its development into Two-Tone with its high profile for anti-racist songs in terms of radio play and chart placings) but also its local identity in many cases. This was particularly apparent in Brighton, whose bands included very few indigenous personnel. As a seaside town, it was prone to an itinerant population (indeed Thatcher later was to pass a bill preventing people from moving to seaside locations and claiming the dole) and this, in conjunction with the shifting student population, meant that the town did not inspire the same loyalty in its bands and their audiences as, say, Manchester or Liverpool.

Finally, although the Brighton band scene had many women protagonists right from the start, this did not necessarily give them any advantage over men. In a small town, it is easy to overestimate the importance of any activity. Carola Dibbell, writing about the U.S., comments that even over there,

'It may well have been at the local level that women in punk or punk-influenced bands, some of whom were even less than sidemen and many of whom never even made records, had the most impact.'<sup>90</sup>

And local music-making, in spite of all the attempts by its supporters not just at local level but also at national level (John Peel and Geoff Travis) sometimes remained stubbornly local, in spite of frequent gigs in London, as Pauline Murray of Durham band Penetration observed: 'It was frustrating. Bands were getting on on London and we were working harder and not. It was basically geography'.<sup>91</sup> I was very aware of the 'pull' of the Brighton audience to remain local and to 'belong'; this became stifling and in 1979 my band The Chefs moved to London, although we continued to release material on Attrix Records. We did lose a proportion of our local audience when we returned to play gigs in Brighton.

To conclude this chapter, it is revealing to report the fact that when I approached the local studies library in Brighton to seek information for my research, I was directed to a male member of staff 'who had been to loads of Brighton punk gigs at that time'. He assured me that 'There were no women in punk bands in Brighton- if there were I would have known about it, because I went to see bands all the time'. This authoritative reply indicates how complete the 'forgetting' of women's roles in male-gendered activities can be. It is perfectly possible that he was not aware of female bands in Brighton, given the parallel nature of musical activities, but it is most unlikely that he never saw a punk band with a female presence in it.

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<sup>89</sup> Willis, Paul E., *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 4

<sup>90</sup> Dibbell, Carola, *Inside Was Us: Women and Punk*, in O'Dair, Barbara, 1997, op cit. p 287

<sup>91</sup> New Musical Express, December 17th 1977, interview by Paul Morley, p 14

# Workers see a dream end

by Jon Buss

**WORKERS** at Brighton's fire-ravaged Resource Centre have begun the long, hard task of rebuilding a dream.

Flames ripped through the community centre in the early hours of yesterday, causing thousands of pounds of damage.

Today, police are continuing an investigation into the cause of the fire at the North Road building.

## Non-political

The centre, used for meetings by several Left-wing groups, has already been a target for demos and attacks in the past.

A smoke bomb was thrown during a meeting of the anti-Nazi League last month. Last week raiders broke in and scrawled: "We don't need you" in one of the offices.

But police are keeping an open mind as to the cause of the blaze until investigations are complete. An electrical fault is one theory being examined.

The centre was the focus for a vast array of activities, most of them non-political. The building had been booked by playgroups, Alcoholics Anonymous, community

## We'll try again, they vow as police probe blaze

associations and adult education classes as well as for meetings.

A centre spokesman said today: "We have been threatened in the past, but it is too early to speculate. The police and fire brigade are continuing their investigation."

Immediate problem for the eight workers on the centre committee is to try to keep dozens of groups together without a headquarters.

Last year, 77 different organisations made a total of 502 bookings.

Two of the centre workers co-ordinate seven youngsters who are attached to the Youth Opportunities Scheme. Two others are concerned full-time with printing leaflets, community magazines and T-shirts.

"The printing brings in vital cash," said the spokesman. "Many communities use our facilities for their own magazines and things are going to be difficult for them."

"We are desperately looking for other premises where we can have office

space and an opportunity to resume our print work."

One of the telephone lines to the centre, 698219, is still open despite the fire. A crisis meeting at the Institute in Queen Square, Brighton, has been organised for Wednesday at 7.30 p.m., and centre workers are asking for any offers of help to be made then.

"Before the fire we were poor and now we are even poorer," said a statement issued today by the Resource Centre staff.

"Our main income for funding community work was from the rent we were paid for the rooms which are now completely gutted. Our major priority is to find new premises."

## Moving

Workers hope the printing equipment may be repairable and could be operated again at new premises.

"People have been calling in with offers of help and we would really like to thank them," said the statement.

Helpers said they had no in-

tention of letting the ideal of an "open for all" centre in Brighton die because of the fire.

"We were going to have to move anyway because the area was going to be redeveloped," said one worker. "It just came a bit sooner than we expected."

## Mourning

One of the worst affected sections will be the 64 punk, new wave, mod and rock bands which use the centre for rehearsals and performances.

Firemen saved thousands of pounds worth of equipment from serious damage by moving it away from flooded areas of the basement.

"They will now have to find somewhere else along with all the other groups and organisations," said the spokesman.

Community organisations were quick to mourn the loss of the centre.

Mrs Cella Mather, secretary of the Preston Circus Association, said: "We used the centre for printing our community newsletter and they always did a very good job for us. The loss will be quite a blow."

Mr Tim Curran, of the North Laine Community Association, said: "We print more than 1,000 copies of our newsletter each month and the centre provide the service at a very reasonable cost."

"Other printers will probably charge a lot more."

**Chapter Five- Noise, violence and femininity:  
aggression and reservation of male space in the rock  
world**

## Noise, violence and femininity: aggression and reservation of male space in the rock world

*Go 'way, I hate you, hate you, hate you  
Go 'way I hate you, far across the sea!*<sup>1</sup>

### (i) The Maleness of Anger

When Hebdige writes 'Subcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound) ...'<sup>2</sup>; he is referring to the way that subcultures at their point of inception, before assimilation, grate on the consciousness of mainstream society. Sound can be interpreted; noise annoys. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which this subcultural noise has manifested itself in rock music, and how this noise and music are identified with maleness to such an extent that women have difficulty in using the 'enemy language' in a coherent way in order to externalise their inner noise. Rock music started as a male youth form of expression; what is interesting is that it is still one of the last bastions of inequality, a symbolic resistance to change in the gender relations of young people, perhaps a rather depressing thought considering the fact that young people are often charged with the responsibility for social progress. The moment under scrutiny appeared to be heralding change in the way rock music 'worked'. But as Holly Kruse remarks in her essay *Abandoning the Absolute*,

The problem we encounter is in fact the way popular critics define rock, because hand-in-hand with intimations that rock *is* primarily a mode of male expression and understanding is the assumption that rock is governed by a more or less transcendental aesthetic, which, it therefore follows, only men can comprehend.<sup>3</sup>

Mediated by predominantly male critics, it is not surprising that male values are to the fore. However, a remarkable number of female writers at the time took on 'male' attitudes when reviewing female artists<sup>4</sup>

Male/female writing teams also reiterated the girls-in-a-men's-world stance, for instance Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons:

'Rock is a pedestal sport, as is being a Monarch- wherever possible a boy inherits the throne-females are not thought of to be the stuff worship/idols are made for/of. Girls are expected to grovel in the mezzanine while the stud struts his stuff up there, while a girl with the audacity to go on stage is jeered, sneered and leered up to- rock and roll is very missionary, very religious, very repressive. A guitar in the hands

<sup>1</sup> Song sung by two little girls draped in Union Jacks, *The Filth and The Fury: a Sex Pistols Film*, dir Julien Temple, Filmfour, 1999

<sup>2</sup> Hebdige, Dick *Subculture: the meaning of style*, Methuen, London, 1979 and 1994, p 90

<sup>3</sup> Kruse, Holly, *Abandoning the Absolute: transcendence and gender in popular music discourse*, in *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. Jones, Steve, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2002, p 136

<sup>4</sup> See p 66 for Sue Denom's reviews as an illustration of this tendency

of a man boasts 'cock'- the same instrument in female hands ( to a warped mind) screams 'castration'<sup>5</sup> .

Burchill and Parsons thus identify rock fandom as being akin to the worship of a deity, a ritualistic, ceremonial system that reflects the natural order of gender relations as we know and accept them<sup>6</sup> . Reynolds and Press, another male/female team, reiterate the castration theme:

'Punk, in fact, was a sort of asexual relative of metal: cock-rock, with the cock replaced by a sort of castration-paranoia (society's to blame). Musically, punk suppressed the remnants of R&B's syncopation that endured in heavy metal, and turned rock into a martial beat for those at war with the status quo.'<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Reynolds and Press examine at great length the military imagery and attitudes taken on by young (and not so young) rock musicians in their historical account of rock attitudes; they scorn what they see as half-hearted attempts by female punk rock musicians to counteract the misogyny and sexism of rock bands and their lyrics.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, they trounce the macho posturing of male rockers, and emphasise the differences between rebellion, which they say is ultimately self-serving and futile, and revolution, which they claim is rarely associated with rock music<sup>9</sup> , discussing the '... wartime settings and martial imagery' used by The Clash<sup>10</sup> and continuing:

'Forming a rock band or joining the Army are often the only alternatives to a service sector job or unemployment. Like rock'n'roll, the military offers a life of adventure, the chance to live like a man rather than a minion'<sup>11</sup> .'

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<sup>5</sup> Burchill, Julie, and Parsons, Tony , *The Boy Looked at Johnny*, Pluto Press, London, 1978, p 86. Burchill retained this attitude; in 1994 she told Amy Raphael: "I know it's a sexist thing to say, but women aren't as good at making music as men- like they're not as good as men at football. A girl in a dress with a guitar looks weird. Like a dog riding a bicycle. Very odd. Hard to get past it. It's OK on the radio, because you can't see them. Chrissie Hynde is an exception. Very few of them are exceptions. And if they don't have a guitar, they become the dumb girl in front of the band. I'm not a great fan of girls in pop'. This quotation will be referred to again later, with particular reference to Chrissie Hynde. From Raphael, Amy, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, Virago, London, 1994, Introduction, p (xi)

<sup>6</sup> see Eisenberg, Evan, *The Recording Angel: music, records and culture from Aristotle to Zappa*, Picador, New York, 1987, for a discussion of the Futurists' love of war and machinery and Sibelius' appreciation of the 'crescendo' of guns that 'ended in a fortissimo I could never have dreamed of'. (p 194)

<sup>7</sup> Reynolds, S, and Press, J, *The Sex Revolts: gender, rebellion and rock'n'roll*, Serpent's Tail, London, 1995,

p 23

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 311 'As with a lot of the demystification bands (see also the Au Pairs' Sense and Sensuality), the Raincoats' discovery of desire and the pleasures of the body couldn't escape being rendered dull and worthy by the programmatic nature of their politics'.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid* Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 3

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 71

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 74 (after Gaines, Donna, *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead-End Kids*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1990, p 168)

In interview, John Peel told me how well boarding school had prepared him for National Service, and how National Service provided him and his contemporaries with 'scam' skills that proved to be very useful in later life: he regarded the similar skills necessary to start, and keep a band going during the punk moment as being akin to this<sup>12</sup>. Does this mean that being in a band is akin to warfare for young western men, with all its implications of male camaraderie, risk-taking and survival? What are the implications, if this is so, for the rebellious or restless young woman whose rite of passage now includes similar freedoms to that of her male contemporaries; what is it that has prevented them from achieving parity of protest?

The pure *volume* of rock music is an oppositional weapon, according to Lawrence Grossberg, who writes this about Bruce Springsteen:

'Rock and roll substitutes style for authenticity (making the latter into another style), finds pleasure in the very structures of noise and repetition that are so oppressive in the straight world. Quite literally, somehow, noise feels good rather than painful. Rock and roll takes its content and form from outside of its own boundaries and in the very process of appropriating them (for instance in its musical practices, its fashion statements, and so on), it forces the straight world to organise itself in opposition to the rock and roll culture'<sup>13</sup>

The noise of rock music encapsulates the anger of young men, packages it and uses it as a weapon against the older generation- in particular their mothers<sup>14</sup>, according to Frith, who believes that: 'Youthful bohemia begins... as a revolt against women, who are identified with the home as mothers, sisters, potential domesticators'.<sup>15</sup> This causes the first problem for young women who want to articulate their own anger through rock music; rock speaks out against society, it is loudly oppositional, but it is lyrically, and some would claim, sonically, misogynistic<sup>16</sup>. The male version of the role of women is sometimes overtly, often blatantly, embedded in rock; for instance, to return to the

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<sup>12</sup> 'A lot of people got into it almost like an equivalent to National Service... Punk as a replacement for National Service! The great things it taught you were petty theft and evasion, so it made you kind of cunning in a way that I'd not been before. I would imagine that being in a band would give you similar skills.' John Peel, interview date 20/10/01. Simon Frith, in *Sound Effects* (op cit 1981), comments that (male) teenagers' lack of obligations increased after the end of National Service (p 183). There is much to be said for a theory that rock music replaced it in the national male adolescent psyche, and this factor will be returned to at other point of the thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Grossberg on Bruce Springsteen 'Rock & Roll in Search of an Audience' in Lull, James, (ed) *Popular Music and Communication*, p 172

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds and Press also explore issues surrounding the term 'mom-ism' coined by Philip Wylie in 1942. Wylie, Philip, *Generation of Vipers*, Larlin Corporation, 1979

<sup>15</sup> op cit Frith, 1981, p 241

<sup>16</sup> Arlene Stein describes the dilemma she found herself in as a fan of rock music: 'I didn't necessarily want to be a guy, or even want to date one, but I did fantasize, perhaps unconsciously, about possessing their power. If my embrace of rock was at least partly a revolt against my mother, it was also a revolt against the gender system that trapped her'. From *Rock Against Romance: Gender, Rock'n'Roll and Resistance*, in Kelly, Karen, and McDonnell, Evelyn, *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky*, Routledge, London, 1999, p 221

example of Springsteen<sup>17</sup> :

'Springsteen's women do not exist as characters in their own right but as signifiers of domesticity and commitment against which men define their masculinity. Men's right to 'fool around' becomes part of their self-definition. The good times are celebrated in numbers like 'Sherry Darlin' and 'Born to Run' which show women offering sensual delights. Here Springsteen expresses a true blue-collar authentic sexuality-'Lovin' you is a man's job' In these moments the hero is at one with a million rock stars demonstrating their commitment to a primitive model of sexual politics. At the risk of overstating the case, when Springsteen is rockin', his lyrics display increasing levels of crudity. It's almost as if the crowd-pleasers are designed with simple pictures in mind. Simply wrapping this up in a humorous package smuggles in the mythology propelling it.'<sup>18</sup>

Gareth Palmer's use of the word 'smuggling' sums up the way in which rock music perpetuates misogynistic values and entrenches them in the minds of young music lovers. Springsteen's pedagogical approach to songwriting (educator of the white working-class American male) displays a disheartening attitude towards women in his underlining of male-defined attitudes to them.

There is an acceptance, therefore, that rock music affirms gender relations in a conservative reflection of mainstream society, hidden beneath a cacophonous shield that coerces listeners into a 'with us or against us' stance. Some writers believe that this oppositional position is defensive; as Deena Weinstein observes about the Heavy Metal scene and its associated subculture:

' In light of the fact that music-based masculine subcultures came into their own at approximately the same time as the late-twentieth century women's movement was reaching its peak, one should not dismiss the idea that these subcultures have a defensive nature... heavy metal music celebrates the very qualities that boys must sacrifice in order to become adult members of society.'<sup>19</sup>

She continues '...although behavior changes, the same patriarchal ideals are largely held in common by both 'boys' and 'adult members of society'<sup>20</sup>. While Heavy

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<sup>17</sup> although Springsteen is not regarded as a punk rocker, he is used here because of his symbolic place as an authentic rock'n'roll male.

<sup>18</sup> Palmer, Gareth, *Springsteen and Authentic Masculinity*, in Whiteley, Sheila, (ed), *Sexing the Groove: popular music and gender*, Routledge, London, 1997, p104. hilariously, Keith Negus provides a coda to the above observations about Springsteen, describing his chat between songs at a live gig: '... "Springsteen went on to tell his audience about how men are afraid of their mothers, and how this fear informs the relationship between men and women. Exposing his anxieties about his own 'macho posturing' he concluded that he was 'man enough' to sing about his own mother, and then performed the song ' (Mrs Springsteen's Boy). In Negus, Keith, *Producing Pop: culture and conflict in the popular music industry*, Edward Arnold, London, 1992, p 75

<sup>19</sup> Weinstein, Deena, *Heavy Metal: the music and its culture*, Da Capo, 2000, pp104/105

<sup>20</sup> Robert Walser disagrees with Weinstein, citing the immense amount of discussion about gender, race, and homophobia in the metal community, Walser, Robert, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover and London, 1993



Metal plays with the male gender stereotype, challenging images of female sexuality in dress codes and even singing styles<sup>21</sup>, 'blue collar' rock music such as Springsteen's, confirms it.

From an aesthetic point of view, philosopher Jacques Attali equates all music with the position that ritual sacrifice used to take in primitive societies; the power of noise in rock music certainly appears to bind the aggression of its audiences into a therapeutic and oppositional whole, and the following passage seems apt:

'Music responds to the terror of noise, recreating differences between sounds and repressing the tragic dimension of lasting dissonance- just as sacrifice responds to the terror of violence. Music has been, from its origin, a simulacrum of the monopolization of the power to kill, a simulacrum of ritual murder. A necessary attribute of power, it has the same form power has: something emitted from the singular center of an imposed, purely syntactic discourse, a discourse capable of making its audience conscious of a commonality- but also of turning its audience against it'.<sup>22</sup>

## (ii) Women Like Rock Music

However, although male commentators and consumers alike define the world of rock music as being a male one, the sounds and excitement generated by the music has often appeal(ed) to girls and young women. There is a well-known passage in Sheila Rowbotham's account of her gradually-emerging feminism in which she describes the physical effect that rock music had on her:

Every rock record simply was. The words were subordinate to the rhythm and the music went straight to your cunt and hit the bottom of your spine. They were like a great release after all the super-consolation romantic ballads'<sup>23</sup>.

Barbara O'Dair, editor of *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, writes of her own difficulty in rationalising how she *felt* when she listened to rock music, and how she *thought*:

'I include myself among the legions of female fans who empowered male rock stars for embodying our own wild desires... it became less accessible to me... as I grew older, as it grew clear that much of the grittier stuff I loved was not meant, or at least not made, for me. As I tried to shake off adolescence, it seemed strange to stay fixated on the guitar gods of my youth.'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Shepherd for an analysis of 'cock-rock' singing styles and their shunning of social relations, Shepherd, John, *Music as Social Text*, Polity, Cambridge, 1991, Chapter 8.

<sup>22</sup> Attali, Jacques, *Noise: the political economy of music*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis/London, 1985, p 28

<sup>23</sup> Rowbotham, Sheila, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981, p 14

<sup>24</sup> O'Dair, Barbara, *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997, *Introduction*, p xx

The lyrics and attitude behind male rock music thus engendered a sort of admiring indignation in some women. Mavis Bayton gave me an account of the inappropriateness of rock lyrics to the new social situations of the early 1970s;

'... since the early 1970s the Womens Liberation movement had had women-only socials. They played records initially. I remember there was one when we were all having a jolly dance to the Rolling Stones and I remember thinking, hold on, look at that stupid girl dancing to 'Under my Thumb'... The contradictions of dancing to those lyrics!' <sup>25</sup>

There was therefore a *need* for a different sort of rock music; this need had been overlooked by Angela McRobbie as she identified teenyboppers with pop music in their home environment, and was pointed out by Rumsey and Little in 1979:

'Feminists know that if rock/pop was really revolutionary, they would be embraced as the greatest rebels of all- real rebels, the genuine article, not just another piece in the jigsaw of popular ephemera... When they're fourteen, girl fans attract a lot of study and analysis... But what happens when we grow up and become a minority in the audience for "serious music"?' <sup>26</sup>

In other words, the assumption made by rock critics that all girls liked pop and did not like rock, and all boys liked rock and did not like pop, was too simplistic. As Kembrew McLeod succinctly puts it:

'...what is talked about and how it is talked about influences who feels comfortable enough to come out and play- how certain cliques form.' <sup>27</sup>

McLeod discusses violence, maleness and aggression in music and how the very language used by rock critics bestows approval or disapproval on the music reviewed, placing it in the 'male' or 'female' domain. <sup>28</sup> Whereas Susan McClary had written an optimistic afterword to Attali's book, in which she placed great faith in what she described as 'New Wave' music and its openness to female rock instrumentalists:

'The music is often aggressively simple syntactically, but at its best it conveys most effectively the raw energy of its social and musical protest. It bristles with genuine sonic noise (most of it maintains a decibel level physically painful to the uninitiated), and its style incorporates other features that qualify as cultural noise: the bizarre visual appearance of many of its proponents, texts with express political

<sup>25</sup> Mavis Bayton, interview with the author, 14/7/00. The Rolling Stones frequently crop up in critiques of rock attitudes, notably in Reynolds and Press, op cit 1995. It was Dave Laing, however, who underlined the *sincerity*, or authenticity, of their misogyny, Laing, Dave, *One Chord Wonders*, OUP, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1985, 1985, p 64

<sup>26</sup> Rumsey, Gina, and Little, Hilary, 1989, *Women and Pop: a Series of Lost Encounters*, in McRobbie, Angela (ed) *Zoot Suits and Second-hand Dresses*, Macmillan, London, 1989, p 244

<sup>27</sup> McLeod, Kembrew, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Gender and Rock Criticism*, in *Pop Music and the Press*, ibid, p 93

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on the inclusive/exclusive nature of 'language communities' see Pinker, Steven, *The Language Instinct*, Penguin, London, 1995

content, and deliberate inclusion of blacks and of women (not as the traditional “dumb chicks” singing to attract the libidinous attention of the audience, but- taboo of taboos-as competent musicians *playing instruments*, even drums).’<sup>29</sup> ,

Bayton commented: ‘The problem was that so much music had been labelled ‘male’ that only the folk area was considered ideologically safe. Paradoxically, then, the feminist challenge looked likely to result in retreat from rock and amplified music altogether.’ There was, continued Bayton, a continuous debate about noisy music and women:

‘This debate, which came to the boil in the early 1980s and which still lingers on, is an interesting manifestation of the wider contradiction within feminism of, on the one hand, wanting to do what men do, and, on the other, wanting to create something altogether different, which expresses women’s ‘femaleness’. This is currently called the ‘sameness/difference’ or ‘equality/difference’ debate ( see, for example, Bacchi 1990 and Scott1990).’<sup>30</sup>

### (iii) Punk’s “Responsibility” to Women

According to Lucy Green, the concept of rebellion in the mid-70s was still defined by male ideas of girls and sexuality: the task of punk was therefore to define this for girls who wanted to join in. Even today:

‘Girls are... seen to avoid performance on electric or very loud instruments, especially those associated with popular music, most notably electric guitars and drums. Contrastingly, boys are depicted as flocking to these instruments, and to active involvement with popular music.’<sup>31</sup>

Punk music was therefore entrusted with a socio-political responsibility that was to be tremendously difficult to exercise. Dave Laing noted the low incidence of love, or ‘love’ , songs in punk music.<sup>32</sup> Although they were often replaced by polemical hate songs, also arguably using aggressive and male-associated vocabulary, I believe there was enough of a shift towards gender-neutrality in these lyrics *not* to exclude female listeners and participants. Burchill and Parsons, however they felt about female instrumentalists, pointed out at the time that there was a shift away from defining girls and women as ‘picturesque topics and targets for songs’<sup>33</sup>.

In critiques such as *The Sex Revolts*, the authors fail to underline the difference

<sup>29</sup> McClary, Susan, *Afterword* in Attali, 1985, p 156/7

<sup>30</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Feminist Musical Practice*, in Bennett, Tony, Frith, Simon, Grossberg, Lawrence, Shepherd, John, Turner, Graeme, (eds) *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 186

<sup>31</sup> Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997, p 167

<sup>32</sup> op cit Laing, Dave, 1985, p 68

<sup>33</sup> op cit Burchill, Julie and Parsons, Tony, 1978, p 78

between the stereotyping of males (who are operating from a position of relative power in society) and stereotyping females (whose relative power is much less, particularly because the access they have to communication opportunities is controlled by the other gender). Their disgust at some women's attempts to rework pop (as opposed to rock) in order to empower themselves within what is assumed to be the more feminine commercial music form, is palpable. For Reynolds and Press, there is 'a no win situation' for women. Here, they amplify a comment made by Frith and McRobbie:

'We should probably admit that we don't find representations of 'strength' in pop particularly compelling. The autonomy of figures like Lennox and Joan Armatrading has the reek of mental hygiene and health-and-efficiency. As Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie wrote of the soft-core feminism of Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman": 'What you hear is the voice of the idealised consumer, if the commodity for consumption in this instance is a packaged version of women's liberation'. The posture of tyrannical, marauding omnipotence is pure rock'n'roll; benign self-empowerment isn't.'<sup>34</sup>

Reynolds and Press fall into the trap of reinforcing stereotypes rather than exploring different grades of sexuality and their book is a fine example of the rock ethos, being presented through an aggressive style of writing.<sup>35</sup> As they assert, rock's attitudes have become entrenched and made into rules, and this makes it difficult to revolutionise.<sup>36</sup>

The bias against women's musical activities is infinitely older and broader, however. From George Upton<sup>37</sup>, who asserted that

'Man controls his emotions, and can give an outward expression of them. In woman, they are the dominating element, and so long as they are dominant she absorbs music'

through Adorno, criticism of women who move across the amateur/professional divide is rife. Barbara Engh discusses Adorno's assertion<sup>38</sup> that a woman's singing voice can not be recorded well because it demands the presence of her body, whereas a man's can

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<sup>34</sup> op cit Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 296; quotation from McRobbie, Angela and Frith, Simon in *Rock and Sexuality* eds Frith, Simon and Goodwin, Andrew, p 385

<sup>35</sup> Underneath the 'shouting' text there are interesting observations about, for instance, the chastity of The Clash's lyrics (p66) the potential implications of which are not explored in any depth, and this is a wasted opportunity. Perhaps the volume(sic) of artists they have chosen to cover(sic) prevents them from analysing them in greater depth.

<sup>36</sup> One has an amusing visualisation of an adolescent's parents looking at their watches and calendars waiting for the moment of rock rebellion to begin.

<sup>37</sup> Upton, George, *Woman in Music*, J.R.Osgood, Boston, 1880, pp 21-28

<sup>38</sup> (in *The Curves of the Needle*, trans. Thomas Y Levin, October 55 (Winter 1990) 48-55)

because 'his self is identical to his voice; his body disappears'<sup>39</sup>; this early prejudice carries on today, and is analysed at length by John Shepherd in 'Music as Social Text'<sup>40</sup>; Shepherd identifies the stereotypes in rock and pop to which women (and men) conform in order to sound 'good' on record, but also discovered that girls he researched in fieldwork which 'examined moments of individual music consumption as experienced and interpreted by four English-speaking, middle-class girls'<sup>41</sup> in Montreal in 1986 and 1987 were conservative themselves: this point will be returned to later in this thesis.

However in punk, female singers dispensed with the 'female in rock' and 'female in pop' stereotypes, and the rules of skill and stereotype that applied to each; *different* vocal style were presented on stage and on record; Dave Laing labels the two main styles of vocals as 'confidential' and 'declamatory' modes of singing in 'One Chord Wonders'<sup>42</sup>: punk singing was almost exclusively declamatory, as practised by Poly Styrene, Siouxsie, Ari Up of the Slits, Pauline of Penetration, and many others. The emphasis was not on craft, but on feeling.<sup>43</sup> Artists such as The Slits, Delta 5, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and many other bands with a strong female presence, featured vocal performances that consisted of screeching, shouting, and chanting reminiscent of girls' playground rhymes (in particular The Slits and Delta 5) that bore no relation to the myth of the Siren. The following exchange between Lucy Toothpaste and Siouxsie of the Banshees illustrates the confidence that Siouxsie had in her role as vocalist with her band, (and her own negative attitude to female instrumentalists!):

Can you play any instruments, Siouxsie?

Siouxsie: I played the piano on 'Staircase' (their latest single)

Lucy: But you don't play it on stage.

Siouxsie: I 'play' the vocals

Lucy: There aren't many women instrumentalists and I think that's because of women's general lack of confidence- there aren't any models. It's much easier for a woman to visualise herself as a singer than as a guitarist or drummer...

Siouxsie: I don't like females emulating a male instrumentalist. There have always been female instrumentalists, but it's always been a male interpretation. then female singers have to be soft, enticing, with the spotlight...

Lucy: So they're not expressing their own experience, but just the male fantasy<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Engh, Barbara, *Adorno and the Sirens: tele-phonographic bodies*, in Dunn, Leslie C. and Jones, Nancy A., *Embodied Voices: representing female vocalicity in western culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p 120

<sup>40</sup> Shepherd, John, *Music as Social Text*, Polity, Cambridge, 1991, Chapter 8: Music and Male Hegemony, pp152-173

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* Shepherd, 1991, pp 177/179

<sup>42</sup> *op cit* Laing, 1985, p 57

<sup>43</sup> The timbres utilised by many female punk singers are close to the 'hollerin' practised by early hillbilly singers, who had to make themselves heard over loud bands. It was not until radio became ubiquitous that crooning regained popularity.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholls, Jill and Toothpaste, Lucy, *I Play the Vocals*, Spare Rib, Issue 83, June 1979, p 16

In addition, the subject-matter of their songs did not lend itself to any of the stereotyped vocal timbres observed by Shepherd; Joy Press describes the Au Pairs as 'didactic'<sup>45</sup> ; whether this is an accurate description or not probably depends on one's political convictions; Greil Marcus admires the very characteristics that Press finds objectionable.<sup>46</sup> , and Angela McRobbie, who knew the band in Birmingham, also admired and understood the rationale behind their attitude: 'The idea was to create a band which injected into traditional left and feminist politics a sense of pleasure, mystery and eroticism.'<sup>47</sup> This revolution in the sound of female vocals was to be short-lived but the shock of the sound of these voices, even heard out of context today, shows how oppositional they were. Simon Frith had written in 1975 that, even in U.S. protest music in the 1960s, unfair rules applied:

'Of the newly furrowed genres, folk was the most accessible to a young white woman- she could do it by herself. But there were special rules here too: in one corner we had Joan Baez, pure voiced, classical, cool, in the other sat Bob Dylan, impure, clumsy, and full of anger... Guess who was the genius... and who the lovely lady'<sup>48</sup>

Angry women, according to Frith, still had to sound nice as they made their political protest. He talks in the same article about Joni Mitchell's 'chopped, emotionless' style of singing that '...isn't easy on the ear' and this style of singing was adopted by Siouxsie in punk.

The voices of punk women and the music that accompanied them were not *for men*. They were *from women*. As such, they communicated in a different way from rock vocals (*from men for men* or *women for men*) or pop vocals (*women for women* or *men for women*). They bore an oblique relation to Hall and Jefferson's definition of female defence/aggression, where '...both the defensive and the aggressive responses are structured in reaction against a situation where masculine definitions... are in dominance'<sup>49</sup> . In their research, they report girls giggling in groups as defensive, and inappropriate sexual titillation (for instance, at school with male teachers) as

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<sup>45</sup> Press, Joy, *Shouting Out Loud: Women in UK Punk*, in O'Dair, Barbara, *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997

<sup>46</sup> Marcus, Greil, *Ranters and Crowd-Pleasers: punk in pop music 1977-92* , *Doubleday*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland, 1993, pp 188/9

<sup>47</sup> McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Second Edition, 2000 (first published 1991), Macmillan, Basingstoke and London

<sup>48</sup> Frith, Simon, *What Can a Poor Girl Do?*, in *Let it Rock: Women and Rock, a Special Issue*, July 1975, pp 20/21

<sup>49</sup> Hall, Stuart and Jefferson, Tony (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals; youth subcultures in post-war Britain*, Hutchinson, London, 1975, p 210

aggressive.<sup>50</sup> The punk bands presented a confusing text regardless of their gender, none more so the The Slits, whom Caroline Coon described as a 'radical step forward for women in rock'n'roll'<sup>51</sup> The review below shows how a male reporter on the NME rationalised a performance by The Slits:

'St Trinian's tantrums dubbed over an oblique, hippy-ish malevolence... Rock has traditionally denied women certain positions through an inbuilt, narcissistic, repressive apparatus which wields stereotype and asinine implication, but in performance, the Slits suggest a new space; potential' 'The degree of control over the meaning of what they're doing and what they're coming up against (press, managers, clubs, etc) is minimal. The onstage music maximises minimalism; the offstage manner minimalises the implications of the music.'

Penman is uncomfortable as the group '... parody sexuality to the point where it becomes a '... teasing, inverted approximation of the norm'. They refuse to engage with the audience<sup>52</sup>:

'Such wilful detachment sets up the conditions for violence, profit and apathy- as bad as The Clash 'Who care about their fans' continuing to play the Music Machine time after time'.<sup>53</sup>

Arguably The Slits, for Penman at least, have succeeded in creating anarchy on stage; the inappropriate sexual titillation that they engage in leaves him mystified. Later, the same reviewer follows up this point as he reviews one of The Raincoats' first gigs at the Acklam Hall in Notting Hill, saying the group were '... playing music and not male-comforting roles.'<sup>54</sup>

Many women were conscious of breaking away from how music played on electronic rock-defined instruments should sound, and this was a feature of the Raincoats' music. As Gina Birch commented:

(We were) pretty cut off from the mainstream at that time. I think I despised anything that wasn't what I was doing because what I was

<sup>50</sup> What constitutes sexual titillation, of course, is defined by men, especially in rock. '... The Monster of Sexual Discrimination. Inevitably, in response to this lousy situation, the lady hangs her tits out over the boardroom table, she is accused of using her sexuality instead of her credentials. Of course, the Catch 22 is that it is not woman, but caddish men who have turned her tits into her credentials... We have all been turned into whore by the male's refusal to credit us with any more valid reason for existing than to please him. This sad state of affairs is nowhere more blatant than in the very place which, as the vanguard of the Bright and Hopeful New Age, should be seen to be setting some kind of enlightened example to the rest of us drogos. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you... Rock'n'Roll'. Hamilton-Des Barres, Wendy, *The Big Lie* in *Let it Rock, Women and Rock, a Special Issue*, July 1975, pp 36/37

<sup>51</sup> Coon, Caroline, interview with The Slits, in *1988: The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion*, Omnibus, London, New York, Sydney, Cologne, 1982

<sup>52</sup> this refusal to 'be stars' or even to 'be seen to be trying' has been described by other reviewers- see *Spare Rib*, for example

<sup>53</sup> Ian Penman reviews The Slits, Liverpool Eric's, *New Musical Express*, 13th January 1979, p 35.

<sup>54</sup> *New Musical Express*, 27th January 1979, p 43

doing was a revolution. We were revolutionaries as far as I was concerned and we were on a mission and what was going on outside was really just irrelevant'.<sup>55</sup>

Frith's definition of authenticity cited earlier ('truth to self rather than truth to a movement or audience') should be applied to the way women performers operated in punk and post-punk, but the sort of authenticity Frith means only applies to men, as it is defined by men. Caroline Coon talked to me about the attitudes of the (male) journalists amongst whom she worked:

I'd noticed the way the music press was treating women. The women that the music press liked were the tragic victims- Billie Holliday, Mama Cass, any of the women that had tried to break through into the system who actually had died, that was legitimate.<sup>56</sup>

It is not surprising therefore that music with vocal performances like this could not survive long in the mainstream. With male gatekeepers in control, unsexual female vocalists were unengaging; male concerns were not being addressed or nurtured. The different aesthetic rules they made meant that oppositional music made by females was doubly oppositional- against hegemony (as was male rock sound), and offensive to aesthetic ideals (there was no sonic oppositional ideal for women<sup>57</sup>). While not being deliberately exclusive (and thus stirring up some sort of oppositional furore that could be capitalised upon), the male viewpoint was negated.

In our society girls are expected to be respectable. Iain Chambers tries to pinpoint the reason why 'The concept of 'romance' is obviously central to the *whole cultural economy of pop.*' and speculates that for teenyboppers, the gap between being '...trapped between the sexual brutality of boys their own age and the seeming unavailability of future domesticity...' <sup>58</sup> has to be filled by some sort of fantasy. This fantasy is not permitted to be physical; it has to be cerebral. Barbara Bradby attributes the belief that girls can't rock to the fact that:

'Rock's rhythmic insistence can be heard as a sexual insistence, and girls have always been thought by mass moralists to be especially at risk; the music so obviously denies the concept of feminine respectability.'<sup>59</sup>

Susan McClary also modified her views on the liberation of women musicians,

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<sup>55</sup> From author's interview with Gina Birch, 23/6/00

<sup>56</sup> Interview with the author, 24/1/01. The most desirable women in all forms of music often seem to be dead ones. See Clement, Catherine, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, Virago, London, 1989, for a critique of the tragic heroines of classical opera.

<sup>57</sup> Punk, however, provided a sonic oppositional precedent for the Riot Grrrl movement that appeared around ten years later, but which has also disappeared.

<sup>58</sup> Chambers, Iain, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 127

<sup>59</sup> Bradby, Barbara, *Sampling Sexuality, Technology and the Body in Dance Music*. Popular Music 1993, Vol. 12/2 Cambridge University Press, p 156



and warns of the dangers of succumbing to the dominating and containing beat of male producers:

‘The options available to a woman musician in rock music are especially constrictive, for this musical discourse is typically characterised by its phallic backbeat. It is possible to try and downplay that beat, to attempt to defuse that energy- but this strategy often results in music that sounds enervated or stereotypically “feminine”. It is also possible to appropriate the phallic energy of rock and to demonstrate ( as Chrissie Hynde, Joan Jett and Lita Ford do so well) that boys don’t have any corner on that market. But that beat can always threaten to overwhelm: witness Janet Jackson’s containment by producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis in (ironically) her song “Control”’.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore there are assumptions to do with lyrics and also, sound, that a female rock instrumentalist must overcome in order to undertake and enjoy her experience in a band. There is also a much more difficult problem to engage with- that of visual image and stereotype, explored with great skill by Bayton in *Frock Rock*<sup>61</sup> For as Green observes,

‘The sight and sound of the woman singing... affirms the correctness of the fact of what is absent: the unsuitability of any serious and lasting connection between woman and instrument, woman and technology... her real ability to manipulate technology is temporarily effaced.’<sup>62</sup>

#### **(iv) Aggression and Exclusion/Exclusivity**

There is a determination by young men to exclude women from their activities; Mica Nava describes a youth club where there was a strong hostility to the attendance of girls; girl-only nights, (held once a week only) were started to allow the young women in the community to attend the club themselves because male hostility was preventing them from doing so. These nights in turn were castigated by the boys and men, leading to their cancellation.<sup>63</sup> Nava articulates the dilemma that young women face and perhaps in doing this, identifies why punk’s opportunities for young women were embraced so avidly: she comments that 15-year-old girls,

‘... experience the fact of being judged by two, incongruent sets of expectations as the feeling that whatever they do, it is always wrong; a correct impression since so often if they are fulfilling the expectations of femininity they will be disappointing those of adolescence, and vice versa.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991, p 154

<sup>61</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp 107-122

<sup>62</sup> Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997, p 29

<sup>63</sup> Nava, Mica, *Youth Service Provision, Social Order and the Question of Girls*, in McRobbie, Angela, and Nava, Mica, *Gender and Generation*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1984, p 25

<sup>64</sup> op cit Nava, p 25

This form of gatekeeping was much more direct than the 'filtering' activities of the press; and the violence that attached itself to the punk scene rapidly after the tabloid reaction to it, was not exclusively directed towards male bands. Skinheads, in particular, took on the role of 'gender-guardians' in addition to their racist disruption of gigs, and are often mentioned by reviewers and bands alike.<sup>65</sup> For instance, The Bodysnatchers, an all-female mixed-race band (some of whom later became The Belle Stars) were interviewed for *Spare Rib* by Lucy Toothpaste, who reported:

'.. when I saw them at Dingwalls... it was very noticeable that the burly male skinheads commandeered most of the area just in front of the stage. Nearly all the women gradually got pushed back or to the sides... With monotonous regularity, every time they play, like the other racially mixed bands on the Two-Tone label, they have to put up with a handful of skinheads Sieg-Heiling. "It's best to ignore them and in between numbers take the mick out of them" says Nicky'<sup>66</sup>

Lucy O'Brien, keyboard player of all-women Southampton band The Catholic Girls, experienced direct physical opposition to what the band were doing, after a gig at a skinhead pub,

'We had no idea before we got there that it was a skinhead pub... skinheads just hated us; it ended in complete disaster because they were throwing cans and bottles at us when we were on stage and when we came off stage they followed us round to our van where we were loading up instruments and just collectively beat everyone up...'<sup>67</sup>

Even older female artists respected as precursors of punk were unsafe on stage. Mark Ellen reported the following during a performance by Nico, the ex-singer from The Velvet Underground, now touring as a solo artist and playing harmonium on stage:

"Had she ended with 'Deutschland Uber Alles', and not kept going, we would have been spared the spectacle of a bunch of barbaric jerks driving her off stage by lobbing beer mugs'.<sup>68</sup>

This was quite apart from the heckling reported by many of the women I spoke to. Violence against women by men could also be of a sexual nature<sup>69</sup>. This did not happen to every woman band-member I spoke to but it was a common enough phenomenon to cause disquiet; evidently the co-option of sexual clothing that was

<sup>65</sup> often, this trouble would be mentioned in passing- for instance, in the *New Musical Express* on February 18th 1978 there is a review of the Adverts at the Roundhouse by Adrian Thrills. He reports trouble with skinheads at the beginning of the gig, largely because Sham 69 were playing, and they had a large skinhead following. p 43

<sup>66</sup> *Bodysnatchers*, by Lucy Toothpaste, *Spare Rib*, Issue 100, November 1980, pp 13/14. The article continues that a female skinhead climbed up on stage, Sieg Heiling, until she was pushed off by a band member. '... from then on the band didn't look as if they were enjoying themselves very much, and I didn't feel as if I was'.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Lucy O'Brien 6/12/01

<sup>68</sup> *New Musical Express*, May 6th 1978, p 51, review of Nico at the Music Machine, playing between the Killjoys and the Adverts, by Mark Ellen

<sup>69</sup> see p 82 this work

claimed to be empowering by Caroline Coon<sup>70</sup> was not always seen as an ironic statement, particularly in the less sophisticated provinces.

There is also the issue of male violence within punk subculture to consider. Most of the sociological work in this area seems to have taken place in the USA and Canada, where the punk subculture is still very much in evidence. This research concentrates on the situation of young women as outsiders; in the case of Lauraine Leblanc<sup>71</sup>, who put herself outside the world of her school contemporaries in what can be defined as a deviant way, auto-ethnography combines with a similar type of research to that done by Cohen in the Liverpool music world, although Cohen was much more an observer and less embedded in the culture of her subjects. Leblanc discovered stories of abuse in the home; other researchers, such as Roman<sup>72</sup>, describe how young women join in the 'slam dancing' in the 'mosh pit' at gigs, a violent but, it seems, cathartic experience. Eventually, they often have to create their own spaces for slam-dancing at the peripheries of the male 'mosh-pit'. However, the levels of group violence that included women described in particular by Roman have not been reported in the British punk scene in the period of this study; the violence experienced by my interviewees or their associates was much more personal in nature, as noted in the earlier section on *Industrial Hazards*<sup>73</sup> and will be also be explored in later sections of this work. Another aggressive activity was spitting, purported to have been started by The Damned's drummer, Rat Scabies: women were not excused from being the targets of 'gobbing'<sup>74</sup>.

Rock music has many of the characteristics of National Service: leadership, noise, 'desirable' phallic weapons, male camaraderie, capture of and expansion of territory<sup>75</sup>, power struggles and a distant relationship to the opposite sex (women); it also takes on the role of expressing anger for *all* young people, just as war consists of national representatives sent to vent anger on other peoples in other locations. As with warfare, the representatives of dissatisfaction were predominantly young men; in rock music terms young men signify anger and unrest, and young women signify peace and tranquillity. Margaret Thatcher's Britain of 1983 had a new, militaristic set of values,

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<sup>70</sup> Interview date 24/1/02

<sup>71</sup> Leblanc, Lauraine, *Pretty in Punk: girls' gender resistance in a boys' subculture*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London, 2001

<sup>72</sup> Roman, Leslie G, *Double Exposure: the politics of feminist materialist ethnography*, in *Educational Theory*, Summer 1993, Volume 43, No 3, and Roman, Leslie G, *Intimacy, Labor and Class: Ideologies of Feminine Sexuality in the Punk Slam Dance*, in Roman, Leslie G, and Christian-Smith, L K, (eds.) *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture*, Falmer Press, London, 1988

<sup>73</sup> op cit this work pp 78-82

<sup>74</sup> The fanzine *Guttersnipe* reported '...on came The Slits all the lads were shouting abuse, the wankers were making me sick. The Slits started... They all started spitting and Ari told the band to stop. She told one of the audience to come and get on stage and when he did she gobbled a greenie right on his face.' Good one Ari' he almost fell off the stage with shock I don't know what he was expecting'. From Issue no 7, undated

<sup>75</sup> the word used by record companies to describe the areas where they sell their products

with Thatcher herself as the 'Britannia'-style figurehead, as Marina Warner observes:

'The identification of the Prime Minister with the renewed military grandeur of Great Britain was accomplished in part through the language of female representation; it was natural, as it were, to see Mrs Thatcher as the embodiment of the spirit of Britain in travail and then in triumph, because of the way that spirit of Britain has been characterized, through its famous great queens on one hand, and the convention of Britannia on the other.'<sup>76</sup>

Did the Sex Pistols clear the way for the anarchic and anti-royalist thought that allowed Margaret Thatcher to take on the iconic role of queen? Was traditional maleness reinstated by the Falklands war and pop music relegated to the feminised pursuit of showbiz?

Chambers writes that:

'Punk proclaimed the necessity of violating the quiet, everyday script of 'common sense'. It proposed a macabre parody of the underlying idealism of 'Englishness' - that dour pragmatism that sees no future beyond the present, and no present except that inherited, apparently unmodified, from the past'.<sup>77</sup>

The chaos symbolised by punk and the disruption caused to 'common sense' was superseded by the 'principled nationalism'<sup>78</sup> of the Falklands War. Ironically, the army-chic promoted by The Clash may have prepared a section of the unemployed British youth for army life; as Reynolds and Press observe,

'Perhaps the Clash's real lament was that they longed for a Britain that was truly Great, a country that deserved their pride and fervour, a country worth dying for'.<sup>79</sup>

It is interesting to note that as synthesiser pop developed in the early 1980s (a feminised male performance genre, sans-phallus), and the Falklands War began, 'real men' went off to fight the 'Argies'. The influx of women into rock bands that had appeared to both terrify and sexually excite male commentators began to ebb, and they returned to their decorative roles as vocalists, allowing men to claim back their technology and the power that went with it. In a stroke of genius, Thatcher had already co-opted the entrepreneurial part of punk, detached it from its political meaning, and recreated it as enterprise culture, as Jon Savage observes:

'The Conservatives' victory did mark an end to the period of social unrest which Punk had charted so intimately. The post-war consensus was now over. 'Try it': now people had. The very freedom which Punk

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<sup>76</sup> Warner, Marina, *Monuments and Maidens: the allegory of the female form*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1985, p 41

<sup>77</sup> Chambers, Iain, *Urban Rhythms: pop music and popular culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p185

<sup>78</sup> *ibid* Chambers, 1985, p 185

<sup>79</sup> *op cit* Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 73

had not only sung about, but enacted in every possible sense, was now hijacked by the New Right to mean something quite different: an inequality that was not only institutionalised but installed as a ruling cultural and social principle.<sup>80</sup>

Under Thatcher, the Conservative Party had been changed to appeal to a populace who regarded themselves as estranged individuals rather than a body of the discontented working class.<sup>81</sup> The increasing violence of punk gigs, fuelled by tabloid ‘moral panics’<sup>82</sup>, proved divisive for the punk subculture. It became necessary for some bands to rationalise their activities as a small businesses, with self-employed personnel, and as such to focus on moneymaking over communication, on giving pleasure rather than provocation. As Punk developed into more commercial forms of music, women were pushed aside and their disturbing presence was almost eradicated from the market. Punk rock, which for many men had been just another development of the rock genre, had for women given unprecedented access to a voice and a platform. Willis observed that the hippies did not ‘secure the conditions for their own continuance’<sup>83</sup> and that is why their longed-for revolution did not happen; the same could be said of the girls who joined bands at this time, probably because they carried responsibility for social change alongside their awareness of their marginalisation in ‘outer’ society; the boys could ‘have a good time’ with one eye on a deal; and this in addition to the ‘social responsibility’ mentioned earlier.

Finally, Lucy Green points out that musical meanings are gendered, not only in the outside world, (society) but in the inside world (here she cites school; I suggest also the home):

‘Gendered musical meanings are not only handed down through history; they persist in the organisation of musical production and reception in present-day society at large, and they are also re-enacted daily in the life of the music classroom as a dynamic, microcosmic version of the wider society.’<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Savage, Jon, *England's Dreaming*, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1991, p 541

<sup>81</sup> ‘The party appealed not so much to the rich as to those with little or no capital of their own, and who, therefore, were frightened of losing what little they had. It was the small employers and the self-employed such as the small shopkeepers who saw themselves as the prime victims of Edward Heath’s economic policies; and it was this section of society which felt most frightened by the seeming triumph of the trade unions in 1974 and by the *grande peur* of the 1978-79 ‘Winter of Discontent’. Not belonging to one of the great estates of the realm which the postwar settlement had legitimised, the petty bourgeoisie seemed bereft of any organisation by which to defend its interests. Only a Conservative Party purged of its corporatist heresies could undertake that role.’ Bogdanor, Vernon, *The fall of Heath and the end of the postwar settlement*, in Ball, Stuart, and Seldon, Anthony (eds.) *The Heath Government 1970-74: a reappraisal*, Longman, London and New York, 1996, p 386

<sup>82</sup> Cohen, Stanley, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the creation of the mods and rockers*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1972, 1980, 1993

<sup>83</sup> Willis, Paul E, *Profane Culture*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 6

<sup>84</sup> op cit Green, 1997, p 229

So from the classroom to the mediated outside world (as Kruse observed at the beginning of this chapter), the impact of gender determinism is impossible to escape for female players. To this can be added another observation by Attali about music, that:

*'Its order simulates the social order, and its dissonances express marginalities. The code of music simulates the accepted rules of society'.<sup>85</sup>*

If we apply Attali's words to the 'dissonance' of rock music, we could infer that rock fans see themselves as belonging to the margins of society; but still, this society has rules, and these rules often apply as much at the margins as they do in the centre. Changing the rules of music at the margins, where there are stress points with hegemonic culture, is as difficult as changing those at the centre of society, and this will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

To close this chapter in a way that will return us to the moment in question, I will return to the vernacular, and include the exchange between a female bass-player (used in an earlier chapter), and the reply by a female rock fan printed in *Sounds* in 1976:

*'... I'm a bass guitarist who would like to play good, heavy rock (ie Sabs, Fairies), but because I'm a girl, no one's interested.... You see I just want to stand on stage and play bass and that is (at the moment) unacceptable because I know (from experience) that men don't like the idea that girls can play as well, if not better, than them (I'm no women's libber- I'm talking about musical ability). I don't believe I'm the only person who feels this way, but if I am, surely I've not been devoting my life to an ambition which is doomed to failure just because I'm "the wrong sex" for a bassist? Maybe the answer lies in mixed bands...' Joy (the ferret), Carpenders Park, Watford, Herts.*

And the reply:

*'...the reason why all-female rock bands have not yet made it in the business is*  
1. because rock music has always been associated with lads therefore all-female bands are regarded as a joke.  
2. because 90% of rock audiences consist of male chauvinist pigs who are not prepared to give such bands a chance'  
*Margie, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear<sup>86</sup>*

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<sup>85</sup> op cit Attali, 1985, p 29

<sup>86</sup> *Sounds*, July 10th 1976, p 42

## **Chapter Six- The Aftermath**

## The Aftermath

*'Pop's anti-intellectualism, it's rejection of a cultural heritage in favour of instant creativity, means that its executants rely entirely on their instincts... given such inspiration, it can move brilliantly and rapidly along a path but eventually it finds itself facing a brick wall without the means to climb over it'*<sup>1</sup>

Already, we have seen that the political mood of Britain changed immensely with the election of Margaret Thatcher's government in 1979, and how this affected the context of the subcultural activity surrounding punk. We have also seen how violence within the scene directed not just at women in bands and in the audience, but also at punks in general (the burning-down of the Brighton Resources Centre, for instance) was successful in suppressing and containing changes that the subculture could have brought about in the mainstream, particularly in terms of empowerment of female instrumentalists in the music industry.

The ending of the moment is as difficult to pinpoint as the beginning. Muggleton describes how one of his 'subculturalists' infers that the moment of punk began with the infamous interview of the Sex Pistols by Bill Grundy on Thames Television on December 1st 1976, in which the band and their followers swore on live TV, goaded by a drunken Grundy.<sup>2</sup> Before this, Muggleton quotes his source who claims, ' "nobody knew what a punk was" '. The phenomenon had begun months before this, underground; the end of punk happened just as gradually, and with it, the end of the subcultural-social privileges enjoyed by participants in the scene. The music press, in particular The New Musical Express, was acknowledging feminism and bands with strong female participants to a degree never previously seen; 'post-punk'<sup>3</sup> bands such as The Au Pairs and Delta Five were articulating new attitudes to music-making in interviews that were respectful rather than mocking in tone.

However, I found much evidence in the press of the assimilation of the palatable elements of the subculture without its revolutionary core. For Laing, the 'exclusivist' tendencies of punk meant that any music produced under its umbrella risked becoming alienated from new audiences unless a positive attempt was made to engage with them<sup>4</sup> Laing, Hebdige and Frith are unanimous in their observations regarding the recuperation of street lifestyles and music by the mainstream and their conversion into commodities. While I would not go so far as the writers of the pamphlet 'The End of Music', which blamed Malcolm McLaren himself not only for

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<sup>1</sup> Melly, George, *Revolt into Style*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p 254

<sup>2</sup> Muggleton, David, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2000 p 133

<sup>3</sup> Though these bands are officially dubbed 'post-punk', essentially the rawness of their sound and the intent behind their music defines them as punk in retrospect.

<sup>4</sup> see his comments quoted in the literature review p 18



the emasculation (sic) of the Situationists but also for the perpetuation of the pop myth through punk<sup>5</sup>, the activities of McLaren after the demise of The Sex Pistols, which will be discussed later in this chapter, certainly signalled a 'separation' from the ideology of punk. Ironically perhaps, there were elements of Thatcher's ideology that struck a chord with those of the punks who valued independence over separation; the 'independence' Laing describes was identified by Margaret Thatcher as 'enterprise'. Part of Thatcher's plan concerned the importance of small businesses as a route out of Britain's economic recession and ever more visible unemployment problem that for some was embodied in the visibility of the punk subculture on the streets of every town in Britain. It was almost as though she was inspired by the shake-up that McLaren's activities had given the major record labels, and used the model of the independents to develop the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which formally recognised and rewarded those who wished to start up small businesses of their own. If this was the case, her skills of incorporation and the accompanying 'emasculation' of subcultural meaning were consummate, as Jon Savage has noted.<sup>16</sup>

Punk, in common with other subcultures, had stressed individuality as well as independence. The time had been right for a seemingly oppositional youth movement: a general weariness of young people with formal politics and culture seems to have been in the air towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. To the young unemployed person, the battles between the Trade Unions and the Heath and Callaghan Governments meant nothing; disengagement from politics resulted from a feeling of rejection from society. Both the Unions and the Government ignored the frustrations of the unemployed, proposing crisis-management strategies rather than long-term solutions. It was an environment in which pressure from parents to conform made little sense, especially if those parents were also unemployed.<sup>7</sup> Peter York remarked on the confusion of subcultural styles caused by this blurring of distinctions between parent and offspring. : 'A substantial group of teenagers... no longer believed in the future, but they'd lost any real links with the past. There weren't any *real* traditional

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<sup>5</sup> *The End of Music*, pamphlet, Glasgow, 1978 pp32-3; this pamphlet 'suggested that McLaren had helped to recuperate the situationist critique which, 'after being suitably doctored', was used as a force able to keep pop and music kicking as pacification agent of the young proletariat both in terms of channelling energy into hierarchical aspiration, fake liberation from drudgery and the goal of a higher level of wage slavery with all its alluring but alienated sexual appeal'. T-shirts bearing slogans like 'Be reasonable, demand the impossible', now meant 'buy some of my kinky gear... and help make me a rich man'. In Plant, Sadie: *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in the Postmodern Age*. Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp 145-146

<sup>6</sup> op cit this work, pp 126-127

<sup>7</sup> '... (in 1981) the average 1955 baby was aged 26 and large numbers of them were trying to cope with conditions that were entirely new to them. A hitherto unbroken diet of rising expectations easily and quickly gratified suddenly came to a halt. 60 per cent of the men and 75 per cent of the women were by then married, and a majority of those married couples had at least one dependent child. By August 1981, 12.2 per cent of the nation's working population were registered as unemployed, and 50 per cent of the nearly 3 million unemployed had been out of work for over six months. The crock at the end of the rainbow turned out to be full of woodworm.', op cit Abrams, 1985, p 24

styles left. The fact that you could 'revive' a style meant that it was dead at the roots.<sup>8</sup> Punk provided a nihilistic novelty of style that matched the mood of its participants. Punks tended to be either anarchic, or apolitical: it was these apolitical punks, unaligned to concepts of working class struggle, whose activities were 'recuperated' into Thatcherite ideology.

**(i) Equality in Unemployment Equals Equality of *Lack* of Opportunity; Issues Surrounding Gender and Employment in the Late 1970s.**

The recession in the United Kingdom in the 1970s particularly affected young people of school-leaving age. Later it was to gather pace, resulting in 3 million unemployed people of all ages by 1981. It had an oddly levelling effect across gender boundaries; Michael Brake discusses the effect of this unemployment on young working class women with reference to an Australian study made by Presdee in 1982; the girls displayed resentment at being forced by patriarchal assumptions into a subordinate role in the home:

'They presented the same contradictory sentiments found in studies of their young working class male counterparts. Fatalism was mixed with anger, resignation with revolt, ignorance with worldly wisdom, all "underpinned by a deadening material poverty"... Young women are not only infantilised by unemployment, but become forcibly recruited into the domestic labour role of housewife'.<sup>9</sup>

Frith reiterates this:

'...mass youth unemployment has been, unexpectedly, a more aggravating problem for girls than boys: working class girls, leaving school at sixteen, have always used full-time work as a means to temporary independence, a way of getting out of the home during work and leisure; on the dole, they find themselves still treated by their parents as dependent, expected to work in the home instead. Boys, by contrast, get the freedom of the streets whether they're working or not.'<sup>10</sup>

However, the situation was hardly more tolerable for young men. The implications of the recession on the rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood, pinpointing the raising of school leaving age in the early seventies as an additional factor in the frustration of young people, were described thus by Mica Nava:

'The decline in the material power of young people has led to a decline in their importance as consumers. Since so few jobs are available, 'adult' comportment and 'respectable' appearance become increasingly

<sup>8</sup> York, Peter, *Style Wars*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1980, p 48

<sup>9</sup> Presdee, M, *Invisible Girls-a study of unemployed working class young women*, Tenth World Congress of Sociology, unpublished paper, Mexico City, 1982, p 13, cited in Brake, Michael, *Comparative Youth Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p 195

<sup>10</sup> Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects*, Pantheon, New York, 1981, p 225

irrelevant... Not only are people increasingly disassociated from the culture of employment and from financial resources of their own, they are confined to the local street and family culture of their schooldays. This process of infantilisation which has occurred over recent years has increased the relative importance of the informal activities and relations of the street, of leisure, the youth club and the domestic sphere'<sup>11</sup>

## **(ii) Individualism as Personal Politics**

As Muggleton observed with all of the 'subculturalists' he interviewed, 'Subcultures can... be understood, somewhat paradoxically, as collective expressions and celebrations of individualism'.<sup>12</sup> The lack of a plan for the future (for there was 'no future') allowed the reinterpretation of so many of its characteristics to be kidnapped by Thatcherism. The incorporation of style that had happened in the world of pop music, as described by Laing above, now happened to the ideals and outlook of those who lived the life: this had happened before, although not perhaps in such an extreme way; but Paul Willis, who studied hippy culture, remarked of the ending of its influence:

'The detailed, informal and lived can enjoy its victory in a larger failure. The reproduction of more complex forms of social organization may even take the form of ideological inversions and experimentations in local cultural politics. If it is to even maintain its own existence, never mind its subversion into complex forms of its opposite, the detailed dialectics of cultural transformation and personal liberation must also stretch to a dialectic with political and material structures.'<sup>13</sup>

The hippies rejection of and lack of engagement with the world at large had led to complete introversion and no 'strategies of passage from one to the other'<sup>14</sup>. The situation regarding punk was slightly different, in that it's DIY ideology apparently became transformed by Thatcher's policies into enterprise culture. Additionally, the effects of moral panic meant that in order to be in a punk band, and in particular, a female in one, you had to make a decision: to carry on as a sort of outlaw (which had always been the case with the Crass Collective that included Poison Girls, Rubella Ballet and Honey Bane), or to attempt to assimilate (as did Gina Birch, who signed to a major label ): some decided to give up altogether (as did The Au Pairs and Delta 5 and many of the instrumentalists in the local bands I spoke to).

After the Sex Pistols ceased to exist in 1979, there was still an upsurge of visible strong female performers, but the debate and friction became polarised. Because

<sup>11</sup> Nava, Mica, *Youth Service Provision,, Social Order and the Question of Girls* in McRobbie, Angela, and Nava, Mica, (eds), *Gender and Generation* , Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1984, p 3

<sup>12</sup> op cit Muggleton, 2000, p 79. Muggleton says people can be members of several subcultures either at once or serially; he was a serial subculturalist himself.

<sup>13</sup> *Profane Culture*, Paul E Willis, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1978, p 176

<sup>14</sup> *ibid* p 179

there was no longer a high-profile anti-major stance in the music business (the small labels had set up an alternative business that catered for many different types of music and their small audiences) this was an alternative arrangement and not an oppositional one, and all sides could feel they had won; each major label had a moderate stable of 'punk' acts as well as new-wave groups who were less abrasive; naturally, the investment by the majors came to favour the less controversial acts. The small labels were 'preaching to the converted' rather than evangelising to the many, presumably a condition of the essential small-business work ethic. With the ending of the enabling ethic of punk came the ending of the progress of female instrumentalists as anything other than a novelty. Instead, new technology became the gimmick, both on and offstage.

### **(iii) The Excitement Wanes**

In the early 1980s, there was a change in the scene that led to the disintegration of many of the bands with strong female personnel. For Gina Birch, this was brought about by a marked change of attitude by a band at the heart of her world, Rough Trade Records:

'I remember Green from Scritti Politti declaring that the group was no longer a democracy: he was in charge, and for me that was an enormous turning point. We made a big deal about equality within the group, and everybody contributed, everybody took credit, payment exactly the same. At Rough Trade, for example, whatever job you did, you got the same salary. And then Scritti Politti changed their way, and of course Gang of Four, heart of the beast, they signed to EMI. I suppose the Pistols had done that already, but we were in a more left field area'<sup>15</sup>

With commercialisation of music comes the demand from the record company for standards that will place the music in an arena that the public can evaluate according to precedent. Enid Williams found herself sacked from Girlschool because she was too fat; I was asked by Graduate Records to start wearing make-up; 2-Tone band The Bodysnatchers metamorphosed into the more showbiz Belle Stars. In a classic example of hegemonic assimilation the commercial aspects of punk were severed from the grass roots. Then, as Gina says:

"Everyone just started to fade away, and I'm not sure if they faded away or the opportunities for them to be visible disappeared. But this kind of huge power and passion just kind of fizzled out. I remember taking all of my punk rock records, all the ones that people had personally given to me and done drawings on, down the Record and Tape Exchange<sup>16</sup> I just felt that this is a phoney load of crap: I came

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<sup>15</sup> Interview date 23/6/00

<sup>16</sup> This was a second-hand record store in Notting Hill, famous for providing income for hard-up musicians and collectors from their second-hand vinyl. It worked almost like a pawn shop; in better times one could return to replace the recordings sold in hard times.

down to earth with a bang. I really felt this sense of being conned'<sup>17</sup>

This exhaustion of energy was echoed by Miranda, of The Bodysnatchers: 'The whole idea of 2-Tone was to break down all the barriers imposed by big rock bands. But now it's (sic) energy has gone- it's like flogging a dead horse'<sup>18</sup>. Even the Slits, who had a good relationship with their major label CBS, found that the realities of being female caught up with some of the personnel in the band, just as their years of work were about to consolidate. Asked if she ever advised the band against anything, their manager Christine replied:

Yes, I advised them against splitting up. They split up in early 82. but they were in a uniquely strong position at that point, even though they'd released the LP on CBS that wasn't particularly commercially successful. But CBS were totally into them. They'd got the top man at CBS and Muff Winwood thinking the sun shone out of their arses. Their next LP, they could have taken six months off, they didn't have to just say 'It's over'. They had been touring too much- fatigue, Ari was pregnant, I was pregnant. The other sad thing about that was that they were going to go to South America to record, somewhere they hadn't been. They were going to be produced by a Salsa producer, and CBS were going to pay for it. To me this was just the maddest thing really: they were already into world music and they had a few songs and hopefully they could bring something up while they were there. So that went, and so did all the visits to the Far East.<sup>19</sup>

'Burnout' was cited over and over again as a reason for quitting. In Lora Logic's case, a mistrust of the music business led to her doing everything for the band, and she became overwhelmed by the responsibilities. An alternative way of life was offered to her, and she decided to stop:

'My best friend at school moved into the Krishna temple in Soho Street. One day she came to see me and she told me about her new life. One day I went to visit her and I thought, this is what I want. I want to live like this too. Its not that I wanted to give music up altogether, but I needed a break; I'd been doing it night and day since I was fifteen. I was very young and it was a lot to take on my shoulders. I was managing the band, and writing all the songs, and keeping the boys together. .... there was five boys and me... I just thought it's time for a big change and so I split the band up, which they didn't like at all, because we'd worked so hard and we'd got to a certain stage and there was a tour of America in the pipeline. We'd worked so hard to get where we were and then I just said 'OK, that's it'. I don't think they were very happy with me.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting how this mirrors Kate Hayes' remarks about her experience of the hippy subculture prior to punk : 'I'd been in this love and peace thing and had got really fucked over by it and was angry and wasn't sure where to place it; feeling that I'd been sold down the river somehow but wasn't sure why or who'd done it or whose fault it was. It was a very confusing period.' Interview, 8/6/02

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Martin, Peter, *The Face*, No 41 September 1983, p 9

<sup>19</sup> From interview date 9/10/01

<sup>20</sup> From interview date 18/10/01

Hester Dollymixture describes the constant round of disappointment and hope that eventually ground down her optimism:

‘I wouldn’t go through that again. It does your head in ...the worst thing about it is the constant being disappointed, the constant raising your hopes, things coming up that raise your hopes and then just not working out. I couldn’t go through that. All that pushing yourself at people you have to do, I’m so squeamish about that. Trying to get gigs, trying to get people interested in you, all that being dependent on someone else liking you... . or they do like you and then suddenly they just don’t. All that stuff, it’s horrible.’<sup>21</sup>

For some of the other women I spoke to, their environment changed as they moved away; Lucy O’Brien left Southampton to go to Leeds University to study Journalism, and it was not until she got there and played in other bands that she realised ‘just how good the Catholic Girls had been’.<sup>22</sup> Kate Hayes from Brighton band The Objeks explained that her band had been very much a product of the Art College:

‘We’d finished- we’d finished our courses, we’d finished *why* we were in Brighton. Paul was going to London. It was through lack of knowing where to go with it really. Either we were going to all live together and make this thing a happening thing, where we were always in a group, or it was going to fall apart.. And it fell apart because we weren’t going to be living together. We weren’t going to be thrown together in that way.’<sup>23</sup>

The music environment became too violent and sinister for some; the industrial hazards described earlier took their toll . In spite of the equality *within* the punk scene, traditional male attitudes prevailed as soon as one entered the ‘outside world’ of mainstream pop. Poly Styrene told me about her attempts to get a record deal in the USA; she speculated whether if she had taken part in a casting couch session, she would have been more successful; when the head of WEA records in the USA asked her to visit him in his hotel when he came to England, she did not go, and the deal fell through. She realised afterwards that she should have asked to meet him at their UK headquarters<sup>24</sup> . I found an early interview with Siouxsie in Sounds, in which she describes the way a singer could be used as ‘bait’ to acquire success for a band, regardless of her talent or lack of it:

‘I went to some interviews from *Melody Maker* ads, record producers looking for singers, and it really put me off. They made me think I’d have to be a classical-type singer to be popular... so that the general public would like you. They gave me the impression that everyone who makes it has to sleep around.... The fact that I could get work by that

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<sup>21</sup> From interview date 26/1/00

<sup>22</sup> From interview date 6/12/01

<sup>23</sup> From interview date 8/6/02. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the assumption of free sexual favours is part of the music business for young men as much as it is for young women, and that this side of the business is suppressed until cases such as that of Jonathan King come to light.

<sup>24</sup> Telephone conversation, 27/8/00

and be paid for it and nothing be expected of me (professionally), that was, you know...'<sup>25</sup>

These incidents are mentioned here because they were an additional pressure to the women I interviewed; most of them wanted to remain anonymous when discussing serious sexual assault, which I believe reflects the fear that these assaults engendered in the victims.

Another problem that occurred was addiction to drugs: Lora Logic cited overuse of cannabis as one of the reasons she withdrew from the music business. I was also told of heroin addiction by one interviewee; the invasion of heroin as a preferred recreational drug, replacing amphetamine sulphate, is regarded as 'the beginning of the end' for the punk scene.

#### **(iv) Reversion to Stereotype: the Industry Recuperates**

Malcolm McLaren had diverted his attention to the potential of the Sony Walkman, and the issue of home taping that was troubling the majors, with the romantic notion of piracy as a new political polemic. It is hard to overestimate the difference this small device made to the consumption of music. Previously, portability meant hoisting a beat box on to the shoulders and broadcasting one's taste in music to surrounding people; the 1982 debut of the Walkman enabled the 'closing-off' of personal space and a marked increase in music-for-me as opposed to music-for-sharing. As Judith Williamson wrote at the time:

'The Walkman is primarily a way of escaping from a *shared* experience or environment. It produces a privatized sound, in the public domain: a weapon of the individual against the communal'<sup>26</sup>

McLaren leapt on this new technology and the record industry's panics about home taping<sup>27</sup> and formed Bow Wow Wow, a band whose claim to controversy was the fact that their lead singer Annabella LeWin was fourteen, and was photographed naked for the album sleeve in a mock-up of Monet's painting, 'Le Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe'.<sup>28</sup> Annabella also made many pseudo-sexual vocal noises on the band's recordings and appears to have been very naive about what she had been asked to do, as the following exchanges from an interview in style magazine *The Face* imply. One of

<sup>25</sup> Ingham, Jonh, *Rock Special, Sounds*, October 2nd 1976, p 22

<sup>26</sup> Williamson, Judith, *Urban Spaceman in Consuming Passions: the dynamics of popular culture*, Marion Boyars, London and New York, p 209

<sup>27</sup> The relationship between Sony and the record industry regarding their 'rubber-stamping' of home taping by the introduction of the Walkman will not be discussed here, although it is interesting to note the parallels between this and the current MP3 debate

<sup>28</sup> According to a mutual friend of Jamie Reid and Sophie Richmond, McLaren had gone to Paris and attempted to start a paedophile magazine called 'Chicken' (the slang term for underage sexual partners). They had told him this was too risky, and I believe Bow Wow Wow to be the more 'tame' expression of his sexual curiosity.

their songs was entitled 'Sexy Eiffel Tower', and LeWin's mother was reportedly shocked on hearing her daughter gasping in such a way:

'..I explained to her that I was meant to be falling. I know everyone thinks it was Malcolm's idea to get a sexual kind of turn on because I was breathing like having orgasms or something, but the actual thing is that I was supposed to be falling off the Eifel Tower. That's what I'm actually singing about. Truthfully... I get a real happy feeling 'cos I imagine how I'm falling.'<sup>29</sup>

The interviewer then goes on to enquire about songwriting royalties in order to inform the reader that Annabella is being exploited in this way too, for without songwriting credits she will stand to make less money than other members of the band, or their manager if he has contributed to the songs:<sup>30</sup>

Q. But if you're into gold, you're not going to get as much as the others, because you don't have any songwriting credits, do you?

A. No, not as far as the songwriting goes. I've written lyrics myself, poems, right?... When I joined the group I used to say "How about singing this poem that's about me? But that's the whole thing [what] you have to do is include everybody. You want everyone to join in and that's how I began to realise that the songs were done to aim not just at one person but at quite a few people.'

The message from McLaren had therefore changed dramatically from exploiting what he implied was the pomposity of the established music business, to exploiting a young and vulnerable girl. This was not the first time McLaren had tried to exploit female sexuality in pop music; Reynolds and Press describe an attempt to make a semi-porn film starring the Slits, in which they would have become striptease dancers in Mexico after finding themselves unable to perform as musicians due to Mexican misogyny, eventually marrying and becoming disco stars.<sup>31</sup> This was revealed by McLaren in an interview in *Melody Maker* in 1979; McLaren '... still gets excited as he outlines his idea'. It is not surprising that the band rejected his management advances.

Other bands, too, encouraged their women personnel into more traditional roles, albeit less controversially, notably the Human League, a band who had only moderate success until they introduced to young women to the band, who according to Jon Savage, acted as taste arbiters, bringing the dance floor to the band.

<sup>29</sup> *The Face*, May 1981 No 13 p 45

<sup>30</sup> This is a frequent bone of contention in bands and is only rarely dealt with democratically. A common way of working is described here by non-instrumentalist Debbie Harry: Glenn O'Brien: Did you ever write the music for any of your songs? Deborah: Sometimes. I wrote the music for *Little Girl Lies*. Mostly I don't write tunes, but little lines that are expandable. *Little Girl Lies* was a total composition. Chris developed the chord changes and the figure in the beginning. I think it's really necessary to write with an instrument. You really have to play a piano or a guitar. It's virtually impossible even on a bass guitar. You have to play an instrument that you can make chords with. You can only hum one note at a time... It's not easy to envision a sound.' *Interview Magazine* June 1979 Vol (ix) no. 6

<sup>31</sup> op cit Reynolds and Press, 1995, p 38



The girls had been 'discovered' (a clever marketing ploy which would appeal greatly to other young girls) dancing in a night-club. Savage describes them 'dancing and singing with the gleefulness of the suddenly empowered'.<sup>32</sup> However, in an interview (again in *The Face*) Joanne Catherall and Suzanne Sulley report the conditional nature of their empowerment:

S (Suzanne) 'The thing is with the Human League- nobody's really delegated to do anything. Nobody has said to us that we've got to sing and dance. If we wanted to play keyboards, we could...

J (Joanne): "If we learned how" ...

... 'The obvious question- don't they want to write as well?

J: I don't know. It frightens me, the thought of having to go to Philip or Ian or Jo and say "I've got this idea". They're all so "we know it all because we've been in the business three years" and they've got this attitude that we can't really know anything yet because we've only been in the group a year and we can't *really* know what we're talking about... Like Philip said, they do know a lot more because they've worked at it, and they've had failures.

S: It's very difficult for us because we're in a position where we don't really have to learn. We don't have to do anything if we don't want to, except look nice...'<sup>33</sup>

By the early 1980s, feisty girls were acceptable in chart terms<sup>34</sup> so long as they were 'pop' rather than 'rock' orientated, and their lyrics did not deal with 'sensitive' issues.

The Au Pairs experienced censorship; Martin Cloonan reports an interview in the NME with BBC producer Roger Casstles after they recorded two songs for BBC 2's Look Hear programme which was broadcast in the early evening. One of the songs was 'Come Again', a song about faking orgasm, and this song was barred from broadcast. Casstles' concern was that parents would understand the lyrics and cause the programme to be taken off the air. As Cloonan writes,

'... it is not that the song causes harm to children, but rather their **parents** complaints, that is the worry. The fact that the lyrics would have probably passed the vast majority of the audience by was unimportant- the **potential** response was enough to get the song censored'<sup>35</sup>

Casstles later in the same interview has the following exchange with journalist

<sup>32</sup> Savage, Jon, *The Sound of the Crowd*, in Kelly, Karen and McDonnell, Evelyn, *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp 146-147

<sup>33</sup> Cranna, Ian, *In Time with the Rhythm and Rhyme*, *The Face* No27 July 1982, p 24

<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that even the most 'blokeish' of the music papers, *Sounds*, published an article entitled 'Sexism is No Joke' by female journalist Robbi Millar in 1980, which criticised the attitudes, lyrics and artwork of bands such as The Scorpions and Sniff and the Tears; *Sounds* had championed Heavy Metal and its attendant attitudes for years, and this appeared to be a major change in attitude at the time. Millar, Robbie, *Sexism is No Joke*, in *Sounds*, September 20th 1980, pp 31-34

<sup>35</sup> Cloonan, Martin, *Banned: Censorship of Popular Music in Britain: 1967-92*, Ashgate, Aldershot and Vermont, 1996, p 140

Graham Lock:

‘The popular media just aren’t ready for those kind of lyrics yet. Look, we need *support* from you people. All we’re trying to do is provide a platform for young people to air their views’

‘But not about sexual problems, presumably?’

‘If we’re gonna get this sort of hassle from you people, I’m gonna play safe and only book bands from big labels: is that what you want? I mean, we’re trying to *help* local bands’<sup>36</sup>

Cloonan notes that this implies that bigger labels are more likely to be able to ‘bring bands into line’ and that the BBC is only likely to televise bands that are not too ‘independently minded’ to control. Although it would be naive to suggest that the BBC ended the Au Pairs’ career (Cloonan’s book deals overwhelmingly with censorship by the media of *male* rock bands), songs dealing with subjects that concerned women (and that did not romanticise their relationship with men) were still being suppressed by this action.

Later, The Au Pairs had trouble again with their song ‘Armagh’, which dealt with the poor treatment of women in prison in Northern Ireland; this led to the refusal of major distributors in Northern Ireland to handle the album ‘Playing With A Different Sex’, that ~~the~~ track was on.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the strongest *visible* barometer of the change in mood was the evolution of The Bodysnatchers into The Belle Stars. Although both bands were exclusively female and therefore featured women playing every instrument in their line-up, The Bodysnatchers had a political edge that was entirely lacking in the later band. Their second single, ‘Too Experienced’ featured a track in which the band changed the lyrics of a cover version so that it was sung from a woman’s point of view, ‘Too experienced to be taken for a ride’, making the lyrics empowering rather than derogatory. Their lead singer Rhoda Dakar, (who left to join 2-Tone band The Specials AKA) was taken to task by the music press for her rendition of a song about rape, entitled ‘The Boiler’, which was later released as a single in 1982.<sup>38</sup> This song had originally been part of The Bodysnatchers’ set. As Lucy Toothpaste, who interviewed the band for Spare Rib pointed out, ‘It’s very disconcerting at a live performance, because you’ve been dancing around to all their other numbers, and you suddenly find you’re dancing to a horror story’.<sup>39</sup> In 1983, one year later, The Belle Stars had a hit with ‘Iko Iko’, the well-known good-time song, thus proving that you could succeed as female instrumentalists if your material was uncontroversial and you looked pretty; this

<sup>36</sup> Lock, Graham, *Censored! The Au Pairs, The Beeb and The Orgasm*, *New Musical Express*, 2nd February 1980, p 13. Later in the same issue (p 42) Lock says the Au Pairs, ‘...epitomise the perfect marriage of punk and pop...’ at the steelworkers benefit at the Notre Dame Hall.

<sup>37</sup> op cit, Cloonan, 1996, p 55. Source of information *New Musical Express* 11/7/81

<sup>38</sup> This single was played on Radio 1 in the evening a few times before being dropped ‘... in the wake of a judge’s remarks that a rape victim had been guilty of contributory negligence by hitch-hiking alone at night.’ Cloonan, Martin, *ibid*, p 114. Source of information *New Musical Express* 16/1/82.

<sup>39</sup> Toothpaste, Lucy, *Bodysnatchers*, in *Spare Rib*, Issue 100, November 1980, p 13.

was in spite of UB40's string of more political hit songs at the same time. Essentially, the metamorphosis of the canny, feminist informed Bodysnatchers ( who recorded for 2-Tone, the record label famed for its multiracial attitude and politicised artists) into the glamorous and flirtatious Belle Stars (who made hit records on novelty label Stiff Records), was an embodiment (sic) of the recuperation of women instrumentalists by the mainstream industry for popular consumption.<sup>40</sup>

I asked Christine Robertson whether she thought the Slits had been *deliberately* excluded from the normal routes to success provided by British TV and radio, and her answer was emphatic:

In this country there was an absolute media block, or brick wall, which could not be penetrated, because they were girls, and because they were outrageous, because their sexuality was confrontational . Because the name of the group was semi-rude-confrontational although it was never named with that in mind: that was something that other people put on to it. . The reputation which preceded them which in a lot of cases was not actually accurate, i.e. that they were wild, wild, wild. Well yeah, they were wild but ... so were the Rolling Stones<sup>41</sup> ... And I think there was a media bar because they were too dangerous to be exposed... We got top name pluggers that could get your record on to Radio One, on the Breakfast Show. Did it work for them? No, it didn't work for them! Were they ever invited on to any BBC music shows? No! Is there much film footage of the Slits being filmed as a subsequent of media companies asking for it to be filmed? No! It speaks for itself.<sup>42</sup>

Also, notably, there was apparently only space in the nation's heart for one all-girl group at a time; all-girl Hillbilly band the Shillelagh Sisters fell foul of record company manipulation as their label tried to transform them into a soul band, jettisoning those band members who were not willing to comply with their plans<sup>43</sup> . This very much fits in with Sally Potters' observation, quoted earlier, that '... as more women achieve in a given area they are forced to compete with each other for the same space rather than the space itself expanding'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1980s there was a series of all-female rock bands- for instance, the reggae-based Amazulu, who seemed to take on the role of tokens in the pop/rock world. The 'survivors' as far as profile and longevity on the music business tended to be keyboard players in mixed bands, such as Gillian Gilbert of New Order and Una Baines of The Fall. Interviews with these bands would predominantly concentrate on their male members of the band: their skills were

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<sup>40</sup> Judy Parsons expresses her regret that the Bellestars were so amenable to the fact that their record company would only release covers- see Bayton, op cit 1998, p 163/5 and for a general discussion of the 'artistic control' issue.

<sup>41</sup> and so is every male rock band, almost by definition

<sup>42</sup> Christine Robertson, manager of The Slits, interview date 19/10/01

<sup>43</sup> The author regularly played gigs on the same bill as The Shillelagh Sisters in the early 1980s and saw the band disintegrate at first hand. The Lead singer went on to replace Siobhan Fahey in Bananarama.

<sup>44</sup> The author's manager, Claudine Martinet-Riley, was told by A&M Records that 'We already have a woman artist', (Joan Armatrading) when approached by her.

very much downplayed when they were acknowledged by the press and other members of their bands as the following exchange from 1983 shows:

‘Gillian Gilbert, whose only previous brush with the stage was in a short-lived punk escapade called The Inadequates, was at Stockport Tech doing graphic design at the time. “But I didn’t want to be a graphic artist. It was just something to do. I didn’t really have any ambitions. I didn’t want to be in a group- it was just a dream. They approached me.”

Did she have to audition?

“Yes!”

“We won’t tell you what she had to do!”

“She had to play Stairway to Heaven... backwards!”

“I think I’m still auditioning, really...”<sup>45</sup>

Given the fact that the piano (hence keyboards) is very much perceived to be a ‘female’ instrument<sup>46</sup>, one would expect that the replacement of guitar-based bands with bands that used new technology propelled by keyboard players would automatically include more women players, given the ‘space’ created for them in public awareness (or at least, inky weekly press awareness). The ‘problem’ of ‘unnatural’ female guitar players should no longer exist; women should have taken up their ‘natural’ places in the New Romantic bands as a matter of course. However, this was not to be the case; what actually happened was not women’s liberation, but more men’s liberation. It became more acceptable for men to display femininity and indeed to dress as women, as did Boy George and Marilyn; this has never been noted as a distraction from the potential new roles for women in bands. In ‘Rebel Rock’, for instance, John Street includes a discussion about The Mistakes and the Au Pairs, and on the next page continues:

‘Post-punk electronic technology, for example, has allowed for the emergence of a new type of performer. The posturing guitar hero, wrestling his guitar in phony sexual passion, was replaced by the computer operator, standing studiously over the keyboard.’<sup>47</sup>

He fails to note the abrupt ending of his section on women instrumentalists and its supersession by writing on yet more music controlled by and fronted by men, this time ‘playing with sexuality’<sup>48</sup>; his explanation for this is that performers like Marc Almond and Boy George ‘wanted popular success’ whereas for band like The Mistakes, the ‘restrictions and conditions imposed by the musical form, the industry and the broadcasters... was an unacceptable cost’<sup>49</sup>. It is surprising that this does not warrant further analysis in an otherwise thoughtful book, because once more not only gender, but also capital cost, had become part of the creation and performance of pop and rock music. This cost was not only monetary, it was also temporal, for in order to

<sup>45</sup> Rambali, Paul, interview with New Order, *The Face* No 39 July 1983 p 30

<sup>46</sup> Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997, p 75

<sup>47</sup> Street, John, *Rebel Rock*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p 181

<sup>48</sup> *ibid* Street, 1986, p 181

<sup>49</sup> *ibid* Street, 1986, p 182

learn how to operate new technology, one must have a teacher, however informal, and time in which to learn, both of which (as Bayton has noted) are usually in short supply for women performers. Andrew Goodwin explores the impact of new technologies on rock and pop in his essay *Rationalization and Democratization in the New Technologies of Popular Music*, and addresses the issue that the supposed democracy instigated by the influx of cheap(er) technological inventions did not extend to women, remarking that he has only seen 'one major female star who appears to operate the technology itself: Betty Boo'. he goes on to say:

'For now, it needs to be said that... the democratizing function of the new technologies of pop seem to stop short of opening up the new forms of composition and engineering to women- probably for socially complex reasons having to do with the identification of technology with masculinity. In other words, it is the boys, still, who are playing with the toys'.<sup>50</sup>

The milieu of sharing skills diminished with the rapid recuperation of bands, who sometimes moved from shaky first performances to recording contracts before they had completed a set of self-composed material- this is what happened to The Bodysnatchers. For some players, this was successful; although Chrissie Hynde had a (it has been suggested hyped) hit with the Pretenders' first album, the live performances of the band were often heavily criticised by the press; however, she has managed to sustain her career and remain an interesting performer. She reported her misgivings about her playing ability in interviews, specifically with the NME; however, her co-guitarist, James Honeyman Scott, praised her skills publicly, thus validating her role as a guitarist. Other, later bands, notably the Bodysnatchers, suffered in the press because of their lack of playing skill; it appears from music press reports of female instrumentalists that the writers became *bored* with the concept of women players and lack of skill, simultaneously praising the lack of skill of The Slits (who had the advantage of being relatively established) and criticising the lack of skill of The Dollymixture, or The Bodysnatchers.

More important, though, was the reintroduction of camp into emerging pop bands. Jon Savage's article on androgyny in *The Face* in 1983 pointed out that punks concerns were so sternly political that there was no place for camp:

'What the punks were concerned with- at first rightly, and later to their cost- was a moral, political view of a world that was rotting and on the edge of collapse: love, gender and matters of sex were simply not an issue- what with all the amphetamine, there was simply not time nor inclination for it (although, paradoxically, it was through this lack of stress that a rash of gender integrated groups occurred).'<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Goodwin, Andrew, *Rationalization and Democratization in the New Technologies of Popular Music*, in Lull, James, *Popular Music and Communication*, 1992, p 92

<sup>51</sup> Savage, Jon, *Androgyny: Confused Chromosomes and Camp Followers*, *The Face*, No 38 June 1983, p23. Reynolds and Press remark on the chaste lyrics of The Clash (p 67), but interestingly, the Au Pairs lyrics dealt specifically with sexuality.

Savage omits to mention in this article the debates about sexuality and gender that the mixed-gender and all-female bands generated both amongst themselves and their audiences, but the concerns with realism in the lyrics of even spectacular bands like The Slits precluded their performances from being regarded in any way as camp<sup>52</sup>; even bands who visually possessed sartorial style, such as the Mo-Dettes, had a roughness of sound that belied their arch appearance.

The vocal timbres of punk and post-punk singers were unappealing to those expecting entertainment rather than proselytisation from their pop music<sup>53</sup>. Lyrical content often challenged male hegemony or conversely, concentrated on the female experience, which may have included subjects that men found distasteful. For an audience perhaps desiring escapist pop to distract them from the realities of the recession and the Falklands war this was not apt. Some performers delighted feminists ('You hear this *sound* on the radio often. But these kind of lyrics? Not often enough')<sup>54</sup> and critics such as Greil Marcus:

'The music wasn't aimed at a mass audience, and it didn't seem likely to reach one. It did speak with a disoriented passion and an undisguised critical intelligence strong enough to lead new audiences to identify themselves with it: ideally, audiences sufficiently passionate and critical to keep the musicians questioning their work'<sup>55</sup>

'... verbal slap in the songs- most of them constructed like quarrels... there's hardly a line in their tunes that suggests a given character is male or another female.... there's not a hint that the songs are confessional- that is, in pop terms, heartfelt statements protected by the high school homily that if what you say is an expression of your own feelings, no-one can criticise it. Delta 5 make critical music, and it is precisely this assumption the band criticises'<sup>56</sup>

However, Savage correctly identifies punk's seriousness as a factor that '...boxed it(self) into a corner'. Savage also reiterates a point discussed in the last chapter, commenting:

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<sup>52</sup> I believe also that the experience of their audience, watching with bated breath in case the whole performance fell apart, was directly opposite to that of the styled artifice of camp acts. See Sontag, Susan, *Notes on 'Camp'* in Sontag, Susan, *A Susan Sontag Reader*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982 for definitions of camp. As Adrian Thrills once wrote, 'The Slits- in some ways to their credit- could never *fake* a Good Professional Show.' Thrills, Adrian, *Up Slit Creek*, *New Musical Express*, 8th September 1979, p 28

<sup>53</sup> see Shepherd, John, *Music as Social Text*, Cambridge, Polity, 1991, Chapter 8, for discussion about vocal timbres and gender implications.

<sup>54</sup> Spedding, Carole, *Spare Rib*, no 107, June 1981. Review of the Au Pairs' single Diet/It's Obvious

<sup>55</sup> Marcus, Greil, *It's Fab, It's Passionate, It's Wild. It's Intelligent! It's the Hot New Sound of England Today!*, in *Ranters and Crowd Pleasers: punk in pop music 1977-92*, Doubleday, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland, 1993, p 110; Gang of Four, *Raincoats and Essential Logic* tour of the U.K.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* Marcus, pp 151, 153, *Suspicious Minds*, Delta 5

'... it was as heartening as it was amusing to see Marc Almond and Boy George mincing about all over the nation's TV screens- with as much courage as self-absorption- at a time when 'Our Boys' were warring with the 'Argies'. Small beer, yet their manifest camping was a relief from all the bellicosity that I, for one, refused to believe in... Punk's furious belligerence was a direct response to the cultural and social vacuum it appeared to face under the Callaghan government. Now we have the strong, rigidly masculine government of Thatcher, it's perhaps not surprising to find feminine virtues being reasserted in pop music, not least the quasi-feminine image of the love object, whatever the gender.'<sup>57</sup>

He does not, however, mention the implicit misogyny of transvestism and the implications of the fact that the female presence in rock was overshadowed by an influx of male cross-dressers.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Williamson writes of the

'... imbalance of power in both sexual relations and society at large, which makes the equation of men dressing up as women, and women dressing up as men, less even than it may seem: drag is not simply a reversible phenomenon.'<sup>59</sup>

Savage mentions Annie Lennox and Grace Jones, both of whom had a strong impact at the time, but for both of these artists their strength was as much visual as conceptual: the debates around the sexuality of their presentation were a distraction from the sonic and lyrical inroads made by artists like The Slits, The Raincoats, The Au Pairs and Delta 5<sup>60</sup> who existed in the smaller and more politicised sphere. As Gina Birch remarks:

I do know when it was all over there was a sudden sense of deathly silence... you know, there was Madonna and Annie Lennox, kind of Cindy Shermanesque, 'I can be who I choose to be, with my leather pants on one day and my overalls on another day'<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> op cit Savage, 1991, pp 20/21, 23. Wendy Webster describes the campaign song by Ronald Millar which said of Thatcher that there was 'not a man around to match her'. She continues: 'This was the main basis of the cult of Mrs Thatcher. She was celebrated as a gender bender, although not in the most obvious form in which other female stars, from Vesta Tilley to Marlene Dietrich and beyond had played with notions of gender- by cross dressing. Mrs Thatcher produced a different play which was to do with the contrast between the femininity of her outward appearance and the masculinity of her inner qualities, a synthesis of opposites'. Webster, Wendy, *Not a Man to Match Her: The Marketing of a Prime Minister*, The Women's Press, London, 1990, p 73.

<sup>58</sup> For instance, Patti Smith, a symbol of powerful female rock guitarists, was frequently mimicked by Wayne County (later "Jayne County"); one headline, placed on a double-paged spread that included a live review of one of her concerts, describes County thus: 'Patti Smith impersonator makes good'. *New Musical Express*, August 6th 1977, p 37. There is a short discussion about the implications of male-female cross-dressing in the film *Some Like It Hot*, in Green, 1997, pp 70-71, remarking on the ability of Tony Curtis and Gene Kelly to blend in with the plain women instrumentalists, who are 'sufficiently like men for the two impostors not to be identified'.

<sup>59</sup> op cit Williamson, 1980, p 47

<sup>60</sup> '... a sobriety that excludes not laughter but romanticism', op cit Marcus,, p 152

<sup>61</sup> Gina Birch, bass player and guitarist, The Raincoats, interview date 23/6/00. Cindy Sherman is a performance artist whose work involves photographing herself in many different guises, both male and female, to reveal how much one's identity is conferred by one's clothing.

There is a difference between male-female transvestism and female-male transvestism, since female-male transvestites are enabled to operate in a world of greater power by cross-dressing, but it should be noted that aside from the early punk uniform of jackets and ties adopted by both genders as a parody of the business establishment at the beginning of the punk moment, most of the female instrumentalists discussed in this study did not use transvestism as a style statement: they were visually anti-style in dress. To reiterate John Peel's alleged comment that 'punk opened the door for fat women in dungarees to get up on stage and play in bands'<sup>62</sup>; it certainly allowed *some* women to be 'neutral' for a short space of time, but as the subculture petered out, so did the lack of self-consciousness of female performers, as Sue Bradley pointed out (Brighton chapter, p107).

Some artists tried to adapt to the new pop mentality. Gina Birch describes how, after the final Raincoats album was finished, she tried to rethink her career and signed to a major label:

'I turned the screw in my own destruction, really. In 1985-6, Vicky<sup>63</sup> and I formed Dorothy and did the total pop bit. It was quite a trauma though, 'cos I thought I could handle pop culture, that we could have some kind of control over it and be whatever we wanted to be... In fact you get very consumed by it, [the idea of] selling records. It was a nightmare'<sup>64</sup>

The triumvirate of music papers that had incorporated punk rock were slow to appreciate this return to pop values; demographically it was inevitable that the new young generation would want music of their own; they also wanted music press that reflected their escapist taste, and the new paper *Smash Hits* capitalised on glossy new acts that had, in some cases, evolved from the old ones.<sup>65</sup> *Smash Hits* soon overtook the *NME* in readership.<sup>66</sup> This leads on to the role of music video in 'weeding out' subversive ideas from pop music. The focus was not on activity or beliefs but on

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<sup>62</sup> this comment may be apocryphal; I asked him whether he had said this and he admitted he probably had. It 'did the rounds' around 1980/81.

<sup>63</sup> Vicky Aspinall was the Raincoat's violinist/guitarist, who Gina credits with raising the bands' awareness of feminism; she had previously been a member of all-women band *Jam Today* and had become frustrated by their insistence on playing all-women gigs; see Conclusion.

<sup>64</sup> Raphael, Amy, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, Virago, London, 1995, p 109

<sup>65</sup> As well as the *Belle Stars*, bands such as the *Thompson Twins*, originally a collective of various numbers of people, *Culture Club* (drummer Jon Moss had played with punk band *London*) and, especially, the newly-pantomimic *Adam and the Ants*, all had their roots in punk.

<sup>66</sup> 'Just after its launch, in January-June 1979, *Smash Hits* boasted a circulation of 166,200 as against 202,000 for the *NME*, 120,000 for *Sounds*, 149,600 for the *Melody Maker*, and 107,000 for *Record Mirror*. By July- December 1984, *Smash Hits* was selling just over half a million, while the circulation for all its original competitors had plummeted: 123,192 for the *New Musical Express*, 89,398 for *Sounds*, 71,485 for *Record Mirror*, and 68,217 for the *Melody Maker*.' Source: Rimmer, Dave, *Like Punk Never Happened: Culture Club and the New Pop*, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1985. The triumvirate I refer to excludes *Record Mirror*, which was mainly concerned during this period with chart pop and disco.



appearance. Bands that included older or less physically attractive members were less appealing to record companies, who now knew that the medium of video, with its facility for repeated viewing, would not forgive artists who were not glamorous or who could not convey some sort of mystique to the camera. Enid Williams was thrown out of her band for being overweight:

It was all quite nasty at the time. They didn't want me to be in the band any more because I was very different to them. I put on a lot of weight and there was all sorts of pressure about us not selling records because I didn't look right. I didn't look skinny and anorexic.<sup>67</sup>

At rock gigs, particularly since the 'it could be *me* up there!' ethos of punk, an audience would forgive a nervous or clumsy performer; even Debbie Harry was noted for her apparent physical stiffness at early gigs by Blondie.<sup>68</sup> The shambolic nature of the bands discussed here was a badge of authenticity. Pop video, particularly the cheaper performance video, required choreography, self-awareness and an ability to 'act' the rock star that was anathema to some artists.

#### **(v) Pop Video: the return of the showbiz ethos and gender delineations**

As Kaplan says, 'The creation of a marketable self has been a primary reason for the production of music videos by record companies and performers'<sup>69</sup>. Artists had started making videos before MTV became so influential in the USA and, later, the developed world, but it was the expansion of MTV in the 1980s that has cast the role of youth music in the mould of 'showbiz' versions of itself, saleable to a wide audience. The profile of the punk mediators and their role in drawing the public's attention to this genre of music diminished.

As Weinstein remarks,

It is not punk music but punk mediators that deconstruct the art/commerce binary: record labels giving total autonomy to their musicians, enabling them to record with the content and in the style that they choose, not what some suit thinks will sell. The free-form, underground FM stations in the United States in the mid-sixties, and their college-radio offspring, are another example of such pure mediators, playing music that did not follow a format designed to grab a large demographic'<sup>70</sup>

MTV also contributed to the cycle of stereotyping and role models which

<sup>67</sup> Enid Williams, bass player, Girlschool: this is all the more ironic since she was involved with such a male-identified genre.

<sup>68</sup> for instance in the *New Musical Express*, December 3rd 1977, there is a bad review of Debbie Harry at the Rainbow by Julie Burchill, noting her lack of movement, p 56

<sup>69</sup> Kaplan, E Ann, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1987, (xi)

<sup>70</sup> Weinstein, Deena, *Art Versus Commerce: Deconstructing a (Useful) Romantic Illusion*, in Kelly, Karen, and McDonnell, Evelyn, *Stars Don't Stand Still in the Sky*, Routledge, London, 1999 pp 61-

maintained the status quo of gender representation; for women instrumentalists, pop video with its emphasis on physical beauty, and its requirement for financial investment, became the equivalent of progressive rock with its emphasis on technological expertise and financial investment. The stereotyping factor is explored by Kaplan, who puts even US rock instrumentalists such as Pat Benatar into groupings within a very small percentage of females who appeared in rock videos as 'central figures' in the mid-1980s.<sup>71</sup> She also describes what she call the 'postmodern feminism' of Madonna:

' In some sense... Madonna represents the postmodern feminist heroine in that she combines unabashed seductiveness with a gutsy kind of independence. She is neither particularly male or female identified, and seems mainly out for herself'.<sup>72</sup>

This, of course, perfectly reflects Thatcher's well known dictum about there being 'no such thing as society'. Robin Roberts criticises Kaplan, claiming that 'her pessimism is part of a postmodern cynicism about resistance'.<sup>73</sup> However, Roberts works on McRobbie's assumption that 'postmodernism helpfully diverts us away from canons'<sup>74</sup>, and continues, 'Herbert Marcuse's notion of recuperation simply does not apply to a self-reflexive fluid postmodern text like a music video'<sup>75</sup>.

Roberts ignores the fact that the music reflected in pop videos of the early 1980s had already been recuperated, through the gatekeeping process described earlier. Those more feminist in appearance (she cites '*Sisters are Doing it for Themselves*' which features Annie Lennox and Aretha Franklin and was made exclusively for MTV in 1985) merely fit into the small allotted space given to strong female acts as part of the recuperative act. Pop video recuperation presents the glamour of 'women in rock' minus the politics- the gimmick minus the commitment to change practised by the female instrumentalists of the period I have been studying. An ex-punk remarks 'If you see the girls in the pictures, they were all tremendously ugly; it was a great refuge for the plain girl. That's what was so good about it'<sup>76</sup> While his bluntness is insulting, there is an element of truth in the fact that punk was not a subculture that prioritised looks over 'be-ing'. The effects of the re-glamourisation of pop and rock and the shift in focus of the music media towards this and away from 'authentic' music-making led

<sup>71</sup> White male artists, 83% of 24-hour flow. Only 11% have central figures who are female. Figures from Kaplan, op cit 1987, p 115

<sup>72</sup> ibid Kaplan, 1987, p126

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, Robin, *Ladies First: Women in Music Videos*, University of Mississippi, Jackson, 1996, (xvi)

<sup>74</sup> McRobbie paraphrased by Roberts, ibid p 14. From McRobbie, Angela, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1994. Although Roberts put up an admirable argument for feminist postmodernism, histories of postmodernism are likely to ignore feminism, as current writing shows. See Massey, Doreen, *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity, London, 1994, whose chapter 'Flexible Sexism' discusses the ignoring of feminism by postmodern theorists Harvey and Soja ( p 212) and the fact that Harvey does not 'get' the work of postmodern photographer Cindy Sherman (p 238).

<sup>75</sup> ibid Roberts, 1996, p 14

<sup>76</sup> Jock Scott, in Colegrave, Stephen, and Sullivan, Chris, *Punk. A Life Apart*, Cassell, London, 2001, p 352

to the reintroduction of a 'service-with-a-smile' ethos to music for female artists. pop and rock, in common with other industries, follow the dictum that 'The more a woman is perceived as entering male space, in fact, the more she has to conform to standards of dress that enforce gender difference'.<sup>77</sup> Surely it is not too ironic to sum this up with a parallel from the world of the office, from Christine Griffin's study:

The non-technical aspects of office work are concerned with women's appearance and manner, and with their servicing role, and they are not confined to office jobs. Waitresses, air stewardesses, hairdressers, prostitutes and some shop assistants are all required to develop particular styles of 'service with a smile' as part of their jobs. This non-technical side of women's office work was important to many male managers, and it influenced their criteria for selecting female office staff<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Smith, Joan, *Taking up the Slacks*, *The Guardian*, Tuesday June 5th 2001

<sup>78</sup> Griffin, Christine, *Typical Girls? Young Women from School to the Job Market*, Routledge, London, 1985, p 127

## **Chapter Seven- Conclusion**

## Conclusion

*'When I took up the banjo, d'you know what I was told? "That's a boy's instrument" and that's exactly why I took it up. Because I was a tomboy and I wanted to play it.*

*Q. Did you wish you were a little boy, like in your song 'I'm gonna be an engineer'?*

*No, I never wished I was a boy. But I wished I had a boy's privileges...'<sup>1</sup>*

*'... gradually it became something you can't put your finger on: it's an unnamed source of grief in your life which... becomes too unbearable if you acknowledge it. I don't want to know. Yes, the music industry is like any other industry, like the car industry or whatever... it's ultimately a cynical machine. but most of the people involved in it are totally besotted by music and you get very emotionally involved in the job, so the last thing you want to know is how shitty and sexist it is'<sup>2</sup>*

When I began this study, an element of vanity motivated me. How could the music I had been involved with have felt so important and revolutionary at the time, yet have made no impact at all on the history of rock'n'roll? This conclusion, as well as attempting to analyse the information presented in this work, will refer once again to primary sources, and include my constructed 'running commentary' (primarily using music journalists' comments as source material) to endeavour to show the role of gatekeepers (particularly those of the music press) in the demise of what was to have later appeared to be merely a fashion for female instrumentalists in bands; when the next fashion, for drag-garbed singers and electronic music, caught the imagination of the music press, all the issues associated with female instrumentalists, such as women's place in the 'rock world', ceased to be of interest to papers such as the *New Musical Express*, which had seemed to take a genuine interest in feminism in the early 1980s. Because the bands that included, or consisted of, female rock instrumentalists did not establish themselves to any great degree in the mainstream charts, the impression that they were a passing phase was underlined. Some of the points made in this conclusion have already been explored in-depth earlier, but their importance will be reiterated in relevant places. Throughout, I have included the commentary of media gatekeepers to emphasize the importance of pleasing these gatekeepers who were, of course, most frequently male, and if they were not, they were rare females in a male-centred environment, who were themselves in the position of pleasing males. As Dale Spender observed of women writers:

*'Since women have been able to write, women have written; some of them have achieved publication particularly in specific areas... and some who have been published have enjoyed prestige. But this does not constitute a denial that women are a muted group in terms of writing: it*

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<sup>1</sup> Interview (uncredited) with Peggy Seeger, *Folk With Feeling*, Spare Rib, Issue 48, July 1976, p 41

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, Sarah, interviews Liz Naylor, *Access Some Areas: PR in the Music Industry*, in Cooper, Sarah, (Ed), *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, Cassell, London and New York, 1995, p 151

may be nothing other than an indication that some women writers have been able to please some influential men'.<sup>3</sup>

Practically speaking, a woman gatekeeper also had a double problem: both of asserting her own views, and also asserting the right of women to perform at all in the rock environment, let alone as equal instrumentalists. Caroline Coon describes this experience:

'... no women were taken seriously in the music press, or a very limited selection of women were even considered worth writing about... the reason that I had difficulty in persuading the Melody Maker that what I saw happening in counterculture was important was because as a woman, and the only woman at that meeting, I was having to overcome a huge amount of sexual prejudice to consider myself, my work as important. So if I would suggest something it would be automatically laughed out of the way. You have to understand that also those environments are very competitive, the men also are competing for space... So it was doubly loaded against what I was saying.'

However, in this conclusion I will attempt to explain firstly the unusual circumstances that led to the refusal of some young women to engage in the 'real world' of jobs and homemaking, and then to examine the many different reasons their progress (and that of other women who followed them) was stopped in its tracks.

### **(i) The Limits of Possibility**

The glass ceiling my subjects hit came about partly through loss of interest by the media and industry as the novelty of women players in punk wore off; few of them 'performed male' like Chrissie Hynde or Suzi Quatro. Those who spoke to females as much as males, who experimented with the form of rock music, became sidelined as 'avant-garde'; this is what befell The Raincoats, who had deliberately looked away from rock music in spite of their rock line-up<sup>4</sup> :

'The basic theme in rock'n'roll is what goes on between men and women' said the Raincoats, each one chipping into the conversation. 'Rock'n'roll is based on black music. And it's based *in* the exclusion of women and the ghettoisation of blacks. Which is why we want to put a bit of distance between what we do and the rock'n'roll tradition'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Spender, Dale, *Man Made Language*, Pandora, London, 1990, p 191

<sup>4</sup> There is a constant debate within womens' music making about issues to do with process versus product and innovation versus assimilation. Reynolds and Press discuss this with regard to Riot Grrrl music for instance. Bayton in particular (1998) is concerned by this issue. Frith's discussion of van der Merwe's theories (from *Origins of the Popular Style*, p 3) in *Performing Rites* debates the values ascribed to expressive ability versus technical skill. This is an important issue to women learning a 'language' for the first time.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, Greil, *It's Fab, It's Passionate, It's Wild. It's Intelligent! It's the Hot New Sound of England Today!*, in *Ranters and Crowd Pleasers: Punk in Pop Music 1977-92*, New York London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland, 1993, p 113

Christine Robertson reveals how, with hindsight, she can understand the way many of the male punk rock bands fitted into the existing rock discourse in spite of (or even because of) their revolutionary stance, and the importance of their skills in playing music that fitted into the existing rock style to their shelf-life:

The Slits had an ability to play together but often it would almost fall apart and then it would come back even better together- but The Clash could play together all the time and I was quite impressed by that. Of course, looking back now I see what they were, they were just a rock band and they are successful like a rock band. So The Clash earn millions of pounds now and the Slits earn a few thousand every year. It's no measure of the quality of the music at all, but they fit in to the male rock thing and the Slits didn't fit into anything.<sup>6</sup>

Her description of the practical experience of The Slits' career drawing to a halt as they desperately tried to become more accepted by mainstream TV and radio channels in the UK rang very true:

We tried *everything*. A lot of our meetings would be 'What should we do next, who should we try next?' *We tried everything*. Their greatest desire was to go on Tiswas, maybe with a birthday cake, and have a cake fight, you know, the sort of thing they did on Tiswas anyway. Could we? No- we couldn't get *near* it!<sup>7</sup> No real anarchy on there at all I'm afraid, they couldn't get near it. There was a block. I don't want to get into a syndrome of 'Oh it's all the men's fault, they were threatened by the women' but I'd have to say that all the media industry, apart from record pluggers, were men. By the time you got to somebody who was gonna make a decision, like a radio producer, it was a man. And I think they threatened men, or their reputation threatened men.<sup>8</sup>

The responsibility to bring about change was left in the hands of women, who seemed to have the the choice of either charm or anger to energise them. In spite of/because of 'Women's Lib' and the 'Spare Rib' ethos, there was, and remains, little will by men to change popular culture at this time. Bayton ruefully observes:

' ... it is from the start an unequal race, set up in a way that favours men rather than women. Some individual men do nothing to either help or hinder individual women and may think that the whole issue is irrelevant to themselves, but they are (unwitting) beneficiaries of a set-up that is skewed in their favour, in terms of a whole range of material and cultural resources'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> People like to know what they're buying: is it a female rock'n'roll band? If it had been a female rock and roll band I think they would have been more successful, cos people would have known what they were buying.(Girlschool) But they are parodies of a male rock band, aren't they, Girlschool, and they fit in neatly.

<sup>7</sup> Tiswas was an 'anarchic children's' television programme broadcast on ITV from 1977 to 1981, which featured a puppet 'punk' dog called Spit operated by comedian Bob Carolgees, and which helped to launch Lenny Henry as a comedian.

<sup>8</sup> Christine Robertson, manager of The Slits, interview date 9/10/01

<sup>9</sup> Bayton, Mavis, *Frock Rock*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p 205

Ironically, the unemployment that had equalised some sections of society polarised others; given the collapse of British industry and the sudden increase in unemployment, there was sometimes a feeling that women were not wanted in the workplace, where they were taking employment that was a working man's entitlement.<sup>10</sup> This resentment channelled itself into many areas with a hitherto unfelt female presence, and by default into youth culture. However, opposition by peers, especially men, is not a new concept for female instrumentalists in spite of the fact that as young women, even those who plan careers of this nature feel free to choose their occupation. Caroline Coon spoke of the naive optimism of young women who have not yet experienced the realities of competing against men in a world formed for their own convenience<sup>11</sup> :

Its interesting because when you're in your own skin, you look outwards, you don't see yourself 'as a woman'. You see yourself as a *person*, and as a *person* you can do anything. When you're seeing a great rock'n'roll band, you want to be in a great rock'n'roll band. You are unaware at that point of the politics of it. It's not surprising that women want to do anything, because it's there to do. You want to be like the rest of the world. You want to have the same opportunities as the rest of the world. Just because you don't see women guitarists, it doesn't enter your head that the reason you don't see women guitarists is a political issue. You think, oh maybe somebody just didn't have that idea, but I have that idea, (and) I want to do it.<sup>12</sup>

It must be noted here that even in the past women with a musical 'calling' encountered obstruction from their male peers; Carol Kaye, who played bass on many of the Motown hits and was described as the 'chick with a pick', had to develop a

<sup>10</sup> McRobbie describes women in rock as 'unskilled rock workers' who 'are a source of cheap labour'. McRobbie, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1991 and 2000, p 145. No wonder males were threatened when we became skilled! The interest in not promoting skilled women is rooted in the fact that men think they will be squeezed out by the combination of appearance and skill that they can not compete with; they are therefore not prepared to take the consequences of their emphasis on women's appearance as a selling point.

<sup>11</sup> Recent feminist debates have used psychoanalytic theory to explore why the 'male gaze' is dominant in mainstream cinema. But there may be a more concrete (if related) explanation: that the masculine point of view is prevalent simply because men control the industry'. Comment by Muir, Anne Ross, *The Status of Women Working in Film and Television*, in *The Female Gaze: women as viewers of popular culture*, Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds), The Women's Press Limited, London, 1988, p 143. She also remarks that Richard Attenborough was moved to tears by racism when filming *Gandhi*, not noticing that women in the film industry are more likely to be cleaners than directors, as on the set of the film itself.

<sup>12</sup> Interview date 24/1/01. Unfortunately, there is hidden discrimination at grassroots level even today. Sue Bradley told me: 'Interestingly when I trained as a music teacher we had these things that Herbie Flowers runs, and I went to the very first one that he had, and since then I've dipped into a couple. And it's, like, 99.9% boys go on this thing. They get sent from school. And I was trying to work out how was it that it was nearly all boys. It seems to be something to do with the word 'rock' and the schools say oh it's rock, we'll send all the people that play guitars and it's always the boys: it's exactly the same as it was when I was at school. I noticed that there were three girls who had arrived with instruments- one was bass, two were brass players. They described themselves, oh, I'm a bass player, I'm a saxophone player. About two hours later the instruments had totally disappeared and the girls were now describing themselves as backing vocalists. It was astonishing- because that was the only way that the boys would accept these girls into the groups they were forming on this rock weekend.' Interview date 20/11/01



strategy to deal with male musicians who opposed her. Like many ‘pre-feminist’ female instrumentalists, she is vague about the nature of this opposition<sup>13</sup> :

‘ “They [the male players] did their best to break me, because they don’t believe in women, but I proved to them that I could play my instrument. I stuck up for myself, but in a nice way, without destroying the man’s ego. Once I established my playing abilities, it was easy. I was no longer a female oddity. I was a musician, commanding \$70,000 a year” .’<sup>14</sup>

## (ii) Responsibility for change: a poisoned chalice

There was a political burden carried by female band-members, regardless of whether (like the Au Pairs or Delta 5) they wanted to acknowledge this. The argument about the right of women to be performing in traditionally male territory was (and still is) debated from many different standpoints. It is as difficult to describe the ‘cutting edge’ of the debate as it applied to rock music at the time, as it is easy for the women involved to explain with hindsight what was actually going on. It is important to remember that there were two general types of musical ethic that most women players subscribed to: broadly, the competent and equal, and the incompetent and feisty. Both types, however, were perceived to have the same responsibilities *to* their gender and problems *because of* their gender, and in this section I shall explore what these were. It will help the understanding of the former to describe the experience of the iconic US female performer Joni Mitchell. Lisa Kennedy here explains the projection of male desires on to Mitchell:

‘ Far too often, Mitchell’s critics had located her gift (her peers were better at recognising her discipline) in the deep recesses of feminine power. In fact, in promoting Mitchell as the quintessential feminine poet in the wilderness of a vigorous seventies feminism, her astounding craftsmanship and musical ambition were side-stepped. One writer put it this way in 1974:’ Her disarming intelligence had special appeal for men bored by the dull polarity of beach bunnies and hard-line feminists’<sup>15</sup>

There was a stigma attached to being a feminist and a musician, and especially, a feminist musician (let alone a lesbian musician, whether feminist or not). The idea of banding together for solidarity that had been so empowering for Mavis Bayton’s band

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<sup>13</sup> Denial of, or ‘forgetting about’, instances of opposition seemed to be a common factor in my research too; often, when the tape recorder was switched off, a flood of revelations would be unleashed, with requests for the information either to be off-record, non-attributed, or, occasionally, not used at all.

<sup>14</sup> Dahl, Linda, *Stormy Weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, Quartet, London, 1984 , p 178. For Karen Carpenter, *fronting* The Carpenters had been the ‘unnatural’ act; her skill was playing the drums, but she was ‘pushed into the spotlight of singing lead to complement her brother’s skills’ Cummings, Sue, *Karen Carpenter*, in O’Dair, Barbara, (ed) *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997, p 240

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, Lisa, *Joni Mitchell*, in O’Dair, Barbara, *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, Random House, New York, 1997, p 175

The Mistakes, for instance, was deeply unappealing to the women in some other bands, and was seen as commercial suicide; often band members within the same band would have differing views about this issue. Here is an example, from an interview that feminist separatist band *Jam Today* gave to *Spare Rib*:

Deirdre: ... Look at the impact Fanny<sup>16</sup> had though they weren't feminists- they reached thousands of women, which Jam Today can't, by being commercial and getting publicity.

Terry: How have Fanny reached more women- by saying 'you too can be a superstar'? Most women who started playing an instrument as a result of seeing Fanny will have ended up being exploited and demoralised by the commercial music business...

Angele: But Fanny actually showed the record buying public, who'd only seen male bands before, that there were women who could 'do it'- by going commercial. Jam Today, by not doing so, runs the risk of providing an 'in-service' for feminists and the converted left'.<sup>17</sup>

Jam Today were a band of older women who were technically very competent as instrumentalists<sup>18</sup> ; in contrast, Poly Styrene displays an attitude that was very common amongst younger female band members<sup>19</sup> :

*You'd rather have a mixed band*

Yea, (sic) 'cos if you think you're as good as guys, then you should be able to work with them on an equal level. Sex isn't an issue, maybe it has been in the past but there should be a new approach. Forget you're a girl, just think of it from a music point of view. I think all girl bands are sort of woman chauvinist, bit women's lib. Women's lib is changed now, it was necessary before, but I feel equal now.<sup>20</sup>

*Have you had to cope with violence?*

No, the nearest I got to it was when Arianna of The Slits tried to pull the

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<sup>16</sup> Fanny were a four-piece all-female US rock band that were operational between 1969 and 1975. In spite of being described by George Harrison as 'the female Beatles', drummer Alice De Buhr remarked in a 'Where are they now?' article that 'Articles about women in rock still don't mention us, which tends to reaffirm my feelings after I quit'. 'Q' Magazine

<sup>17</sup> Charles, Barbara, *Jam Today*, Spare Rib, Issue 66, January 1978, p 29

<sup>18</sup> Violinist Vicky Aspinall left Jam Today to join The Raincoats because she felt their attitude was too strict; however, even the more relaxed all-female bands had ethical difficulties, articulated here by Georgina Born:

'She <Bayton> shows how many feminist rock musicians, in trying to maintain control over the production and dissemination of their music, have found it necessary to work outside the dominant structures of the music industry, and are therefore able to connect with only a limited audience. Here a politicized context of production, whatever the character of the resultant texts, leads unavoidably to confrontation with, and disengagement from, corporate capitalist power.' Born, Georgina, *Afterword: Music Policy, Aesthetic and Social Difference*, in Bennett, Tony, Frith, Simon, Grossberg, Lawrence, Shepherd, John, Turner, Graeme, (eds) *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, pp 274/5

<sup>19</sup> Poly Styrene expressed an admiration for Margaret Thatcher when I spoke to her: this may well have influenced her feelings. Conversation/interview, 3/9/00

<sup>20</sup> 'I feel equal'; this could be an example of narrow horizons, or perhaps misguided optimism!

mike wires.<sup>21</sup>

Even at this time, feminism was regarded by both men and some women, like Poly, as no longer necessary. If you 'feel equal now' as an individual, then surely women's liberation has succeeded! Caroline Coon was frustrated by the lack of awareness of these younger women; she told me:

Sitting here interviewing the Slits,... having them say 'We have nothing to do with Women's Liberation', I have to just take a deep breath and say 'I'm not going to challenge that' because that's just a normal part of the process of consciousness-raising. There's nothing you can say to young women at that point. I understood it, because the way feminism was presenting itself was, even to me, pretty horrendous. I remember going with a girlfriend of mine who was in a little band to a feminist benefit, and they weren't allowed in because they were wearing dresses and lipstick. So there was all that going on. So this was a group of young women, who wanted to be sexually attractive, assertive... naming yourself as a feminist would be a very brave and difficult thing to do.<sup>22</sup>

Steve Beresford has another perspective on their attitude:

There were ironies, like there was a kind of absolute cliched feminist who showed up from the Morning Star; they were deeply insulted that she was only interested in them because they were women. They said, 'We're not interested in talking to you, 'cos you just want to talk to us because we're women. We want you to talk to us because you like the music.' I was much more sympathetic to her, all the women I went out with at that time were pretty hardline feminists to the point where some of them stopped going out with me cos they weren't supposed to go out with men... I knew this thing backwards, I'd read all the books, I knew this stuff, and of course the Slits hated feminists. They felt it was patronising. The whole contradiction of the British left is that it constantly acts like a colonising power<sup>23</sup>

This has a parallel with the observations made above by Lisa Kennedy; in spite of the importance of the music to the band (and regardless of their alleged competence/incompetence instrumentally), they are still perceived by elements of the media as protagonists in the 'sex war' - this time, ironically by a publication that should have given the band more respect for their musical achievements. Some bands deliberately tried to identify with the promotion of women artists and the creation of a 'space' for them on the rock circuit; but women's bands who were involved with Rock Against Sexism (formed as an offshoot of Rock Against Racism in 1979) got short shrift from rock journalists, who could easily identify the futility of the exercise:

'Taken on the most fundamental level, to completely eradicate sexism

<sup>21</sup> interview with Denom, Sue, *Women in Punk*, Spare Rib Issue 60, July 1977, p 48. Note that the opposition she cites here is female, not male. Other bands, especially the Mo-dettes, criticised feminism in a very similar manner, appearing to assume that because they were aware of many female instrumentalists in bands at this time, that this was a permanent change, proof that feminism had worked and was now unnecessary.

<sup>22</sup> Caroline Coon, journalist, interview date 24/1/02

<sup>23</sup> Steve Beresford, session player with The Slits, interview date 4/4/01

would mean tampering with the whole structure of modern day music.’ ‘Certainly the most uneasy implication lies in RAS’s hope of getting participating bands to sign an ‘anti-sexist’ contract clause before each gig. Whatever that might mean, its inherent censorship is a frightening thought. Big Sister is watching, and wearing no dancing shoes- otherwise she’d know rock music is all about outrage, and outrageousness. No way can you kick ass with a contract clause, however well intentioned’.<sup>24</sup>

It was rare for female rock and pop acts to speak out in favour of other female artists<sup>25</sup>; in this they echoed what many felt was a ‘*special woman*’ syndrome much practised by Thatcher. There was an implied ‘I am as good as a man’ thought behind this. This is demonstrated best by this exchange between Chrissie Hynde and interviewer Andrea Juno:

AJ: Did you have a support system with other women in the London scene?

CH: No, there wasn’t a support system... But I never thought there was anything to distinguish a female guitar player or a male guitar player any more than you can distinguish a male cellist or a female cellist. Other than the fact that chicks never seemed to be nearly as good at guitar.

AJ: Why do you think that is?

CH: I think that, inherently, they don’t have the aptitude for it, like men do.

AJ: Do you think that inability might be self-imposed- that women just think they can’t do it?

CH: Yeah, I think it’s self-imposed. When I say aptitude, I don’t know if it’s the way our brains are wired up, if it’s biological, or what it is. All I know is that since I got interested in rock’n’roll music, and up to this present day, I’ve never heard a woman be an innovator on the guitar, like Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, or any of the great guitar players. I’m not concluding anything from that other than what’s obvious: they’re not as good at it. I’m not saying why, or for what reason. It’s just that so far,

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<sup>24</sup> Zaenfell, Martha, ‘*Love Sex, Hate sexism? ...*’, report on Rock Against Sexism gig, NME, April 7th 1979. The difficulties of this concept were also articulated in the feminist press. ‘Many feminists felt the event was out of their control: the Roundhouse ruled, men guarded the doors, put on the records, brought on the bands. I felt that too, but would have been glad that the music wasn’t ‘ours’, the audience not just ‘us’- if only we’d made clear who ‘we’ were. Nicholls, Jill, *Review of National Abortion Campaign Benefit at the Roundhouse, Camden, Spare Rib*, March 1978, Issue no 68 (gig headlined by X-Ray Spex)

<sup>25</sup> Caroline Coon told me that this phenomenon was not purely British: “I interviewed Talking Heads but David Byrne absolutely would not allow anyone else in the band to be interviewed. So it was very difficult to get to Tina although I did speak to Tina. Tina Weymouth was one of those women who to enable her to maintain her position there, absolutely did not want to talk about being a feminist.” Hynde declined to be interviewed for this work. (24/1/02)

no girls have done it.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the fact that Hynde was supported largely by male musicians leads her to subscribe to the idea that women 'don't have the aptitude' to play guitar.<sup>27</sup> For her, possibly, it may have been more important to have the self-image of a maverick, rather than as a woman involved in a macho culture, tolerated or celebrated as a token.<sup>28</sup> She had, after all, encountered personal opposition from Vivienne Westwood when she first arrived in London from America, and this may have led her to withdraw from participating in a female music ethos; about them she remarked:

'I always admired and looked up to Malcolm and Vivienne- to the point where I thought, Why should they like me? Maybe I am a despicable piece of shit<sup>29</sup>. Look at my clothes. I've got no style. On the other hand, I was the girl who was musical. Vivienne was shocked when she saw me play a guitar.

"You really can squeeze some chords out of that thing, can't you, Chrissie?" They were all surprised that a low-life like me could actually do something.<sup>30</sup>

Hynde's remarks about the reaction, even by supposedly avant-garde colleagues, reflect the 'front-line'; her experience was (probably voluntarily) solitary. There was not a supportive 'movement' of women in London's punk scene to compare

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<sup>26</sup> Chrissie Hynde, interview by Andra Juno, in Juno, Andra, *Angry Women in Rock, Volume One*, Juno Books, New York, 1996, p 193. Hynde here ignores Maybelle Carter's famous "Carter Scratch", an innovative guitar picking style, amongst other respected female guitar innovators: 'Perhaps the most remarkable of Maybelle's many talents was her skill as a guitarist. She revolutionized the instrument's role by developing a style in which she played melody lines on the bass strings with her thumb while rhythmically strumming with her fingers. Her innovative technique, to this day known as the Carter Scratch, influenced the guitar's shift from rhythm to lead instrument.' (In 1993 *Musician* magazine chose Maybelle Carter one of the top guitarists of all time). George-Warren, Holly, *Hillbilly Fillies: The Trailblazers of C&W*. In op cit, O'Dair, 1997, p 46. Hynde's views echo those made by Burchill, quoted earlier, in the preface to *Never Mind the Bollocks*.

<sup>27</sup> I was frequently told (as a 'compliment') that I was 'more like a bloke than a girl'. There appears to be a general belief that even a modest level of competence in music is a by-product of maleness, let alone Hynde's 'innovators'. Christine Battersby 'Great artists and scientists have *male* sexual drives, whether or not they are biologically female. males can *transcend* their sexuality; females are *limited* by theirs- or, if not, must have *male* sexual energy' - the assumptions of her male colleagues. Battersby, Christine, *Gender and Genius: towards a feminist aesthetics*, The Women's Press, London, 1989, p 18

<sup>28</sup> Wendy Webster's book about Thatcher's self-creation as a 'special woman' gives an insight into the type of focused professional denial of the influence of feminism that both Hynde and Poly Styrene subscribe to; Webster quotes the famous *Woman's Own* article of 1987 where Thatcher declared 'There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families' (p57) and reports on Thatcher's refusal to acknowledge need for more women in parliament; it was women's own fault if they didn't 'get on', pp 66/7. Webster, Wendy, *Not a Man to Match Her: The Marketing of a Prime Minister*, The Women's Press, London, 1990. This individualism struck a chord with some punks: anarchy is arguably the most extreme form of it.

<sup>29</sup> this is what she claims Vivienne Westwood once called her

<sup>30</sup> Lydon, John, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs*, Coronet, London, 1995, p 95

with the local situation in Oxford, experienced by Mavis Bayton<sup>31</sup>, or with the later Riot Grrrl phenomenon.

Gina Birch articulated the frustration she felt at being lumped together with others as a sort of 'female band' paradigm:

When you compare the Riot Grrrl movement to seventies punk, I don't remember us being very supportive of each other. I adored The Slits but didn't take much interest in some of the other groups that were going around like the Mo-dettes, the Delta Five, the Au Pairs... I liked them, but I didn't go crazy about them. We were constantly being thrown together in articles and compared to the point at which it divides you. We never went out with a sense of sisterhood, we never toured together. The idea never entered our heads. We were as supportive of male groups that we liked as female groups. Gender wasn't an issue for us, which perhaps it should have been.<sup>32</sup>

Gina describes almost being defeated by the pressure to 'come out' as a feminist, in spite of the stigma attached to the term:

'... we finally decided it was important to have a positive attitude towards women- although the word feminism seemed to inspire fear and loathing in people. I mean I didn't want to be associated with some of the people who claimed to be feminists, but at the same time it began to appear to be cowardly not to. In the end we used to spend most of our interviews discussing feminism'<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, lesbian keyboard player Liz Naylor felt that feminists were a middle class confection, although her attitude has since changed:

We hated women musicians. I remember going to see the Raincoats and the Au Pairs at the Polytechnic and me and Cath were at the back going, 'Pah, pah, these feminists', there was a real tension between myself and feminism at the time. In Manchester, Whalley Range and Charlton and Didsbury, where all the feminists lived, that was everything punk wasn't'<sup>34</sup>

The Mo-Dettes prided themselves on their femininity because they considered their deliberately sexualised, feminine visual image as a reaction to the low-key presentation of The Raincoats, attempting to reclaim the 'girly' pop image for themselves, while simultaneously playing 'male' instruments onstage:

Jane: We just go out as ourselves; we're all pretty, vain girls

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<sup>31</sup> 'We had a following from day one, there were just so many people. The women's centre in Oxford was quite big. There was a women's cafe, a women's food co-op, and there was a women's centre, it was all on a shoestring... There was an advice centre, there was a big space... What was important was the following... within 8 weeks of forming we played outdoors to one and a half thousand people in the open air festival, the annual Mayfly.'

<sup>32</sup> Gina Birch, interview, in Raphael, Amy, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, Virago, London, 1995, p 98

<sup>33</sup> Gina Birch, bass player and guitarist, The Raincoats, interview date 23/6/00

<sup>34</sup> Liz Naylor, The Gay Animals, interview date 7/9/00

Kate: There's a bit of a reaction against girls like The Raincoats, who try to cover it up... even though that's part of their lifestyles and they don't really go out of their way to dress like *that*, it's just a way of saying: just because I'm a girl, don't *expect* me to do anything'.<sup>35</sup>

However, this did not prevent them, also, from hitting the glass ceiling patrolled by male rock critics. It seems that whatever tactics the bands with a strong female presence employed, they were still not able to attain long-term success of the type that male bands had. The sophisticated tensions between representing womankind, the realities of press hostility and the exaggerated focus of being a novelty female drummer proved almost too much for Hester Smith:

If I felt like I'd had a calling to play the drums then it would have been different. I got more embarrassed about that as time went on I went to have drum lessons... and desperately doing these drum exercises every day. Particularly when I felt I had to be representing female drummers, and I knew how people would be taking the piss anyway before I even started. And I knew there were some really really good female drummers around and I didn't want them to think that I represented them. That sort of thing was a real burden actually. That's why I think it would be different now, I don't think there would be that kind of political consciousness... having to represent the vanguard of females in music. I really felt that strongly at the time, that we weren't political enough or that we were kind of letting the side down by not being like the Slits or something...<sup>36</sup>

Gina Birch describes her practical experience of the situation noted by Sally Potter<sup>37</sup>, in which 'as more women achieve in a given area they are forced to compete with each other for the same space rather than the space itself expanding':

There was a kind of competition and a kind of war between each other [Mo-dettes, Delta Five] and we were pitted against each other, by the press and also a bit probably by ourselves. I remember when I was doing Dorothy with Vicky [Aspinall]... there was this group, a model and a make-up artist or something, and I remember feeling very competitive with them. There wasn't room for both of us; it wasn't like, well they're doing it therefore if people like them they will like us. I used to think, well, if they're being successful, somehow it's to our detriment<sup>38</sup>

Gaar has a more positive view, talking about a 'specific realm in which to create their opportunities'<sup>39</sup> but in light of the constant 'forgetting' of women's inroads into

<sup>35</sup> Penman, Ian, *Mod, Mode, Mo-dettes*, NME 18th August 1979, p25. This is a perfect example of Sheila Whiteley's 'play power', mentioned op cit this work p 18, Whiteley, Sheila, *The Space between the Notes*, Routledge, London and Boston, 1992, p 118

<sup>36</sup> Hester Smith, The Dollymixture, interview date. After the interview, Hester told me how relieved she was when she found that she was ill, and thus unable to continue drumming; she now has a flute, which she delights in carrying around in its small case.

<sup>37</sup> Potter, Sally, 'On Shows', *Framing Feminism*, Pandora, London, 1987 and op cit this work pp 67/68

<sup>38</sup> Gina Birch, bass player and guitarist, The Raincoats, interview 23/6/00

<sup>39</sup> Gaar, Gillian G., *She's a Rebel*, Blandford, London, 1993, p 272

rock musicianship by rock historians, this seems a romanticised evasion of reality.

Finally, male journalists of course were only too delighted if they could deny the necessity for further debate. The following review sums up an attitude that started to become more common towards the end of the 1970s. Admittedly, the musicians reviewed here were older and perhaps rather simplistic in their rejection of the approach of male bands, but there is a hint of triumph in the reviewer's delight in giving them a bad review:

'They seem too conscious of competing in what they evidently regard as a male-dominated system. It's a redundant attitude given that we are beyond the stage of regarding women rockers solely as jail-bait or white-garbed fantasy princesses... It's because I believe that the female group is on the verge of becoming more substantial that I refuse to patronise a rock band purely because of its feminine content. Actually, I didn't like Tour De Force.'<sup>40</sup>

How easy for a male reviewer to reject the fact that some groups (particularly the previously-established ones) still perceived a gender bias in the music business and still wanted to critique the stereotypes so beloved of the rock press! Meanwhile, at the more academic end of the spectrum, Kaplan perceives a strategic move by scholars to avoid engagement with feminism:

'Is it possible that the postmodernist discourse has been constructed by male theorists partly to mitigate the increasing dominance of feminist theory in intellectual discourse?... I am suggesting that certain theorists are drawn to postmodernism (rather than struggling against it) precisely because it seems to render feminism obsolete- because it offers a relief from the recent concentration on feminist discourse.'<sup>41</sup>

Collusion by women in this process (and arguably Madonna is the arch-colluder!) meant that any sort of solidarity could be perceived from the womens' point of view as weakness, according to Caroline Coon:

It's also in art that that happened too, because many women artists didn't want to be grouped together as women because 'women are second rate'.

'I don't want to define myself in a group show of women artists because they think we're all second rate, so I'm not going to be anything to do with women's liberation, or feminist'. But the way *I* see it is that actually where women are is the avant-garde.'<sup>42</sup>

Green writes that collusion happens '...through willingness to conform, through reluctance to deviate, through embarrassment and, extremely, fear'<sup>43</sup>; the attitudes of

<sup>40</sup> Norman, Neil, review of Tour De Force, 'A Rock Folly', Deirdre and Bernice Cartwright's band. *New Musical Express*, 24th November 1979 p 70

<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, E Ann, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1987, p 150

<sup>42</sup> Caroline Coon, journalist, interview 24/1/02

<sup>43</sup> Green, Lucy, *Music, Gender, Education*, CUP, Cambridge, 1997, p 57



bands like the Mo-Dettes, and Chrissie Hynde, very probably reflect this.<sup>44</sup>

### (iii) The Gimmick

As the conference delegate cited at the very beginning of this work commented, women instrumentalists have a great 'novelty' appeal, but as with anything concerned with 'difference', the debate engendered by this novelty was a mixed blessing. Linda Dahl's interview with jazz drummer Dottie Dodgion illustrates not only a reluctance to playing with other women ascribed to the novelty factor, but also a wry stoicism in her awareness of her position:

'Women are still in the minority in the music business. I think you'll find there are a lot of lady musicians who never wanted to work with other women because you just didn't feel they were serious enough about it. They were sold like they were a bag of meat and potatoes, strictly because they were women... It's just a natural selling point. Of course, we women never make any money off it, only the promoters. And nobody likes to be sold because of their gender. It's an understandable tendency and you can't help it, but you don't have to go along with it.'<sup>45</sup>

Enid Williams brings the situation up to date:

It was a big help being female in the sense of getting gigs -because it was like, great! women on stage, or girls on stage as they would see it, we'll pull the punters in, you know, it was a little bit of a novelty; it made us stand out. It was definitely a help in terms of getting work and in terms of getting publicity in the music press. But it was a hindrance in terms of being taken seriously.

Ironically, perhaps, the 'easy' access to certain aspects of the business for certain women at certain times could be touted as proof that women were now equal in rock music, for as Griffin says:

'Debates about women's position in non-traditional jobs have been dominated by the ideology of equal opportunities, particularly since the sex discrimination legislation was passed in 1975. In these terms, both women and men can be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, since there is no concept of differential power. Lone 'token' women (and men) in non-traditional occupations can then be presented as evidence that particular jobs are equally open to women and men.'<sup>46</sup>

Julie Burchill twists the 'token' achievement of Gaye Advert into an overt

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<sup>44</sup> See Pearson, Deanne, *Women in Rock*, in *New Musical Express*, 29th March 1980, p 27, for a collection of interviews with 'electric girls' the Passion, The Raincoats, The Mo-dettes, Girlschool and the Au Pairs. This article gives a very strong insight into the variety of attitudes of female band personnel at this time.

<sup>45</sup> Dahl, Linda, *Stormy Weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, Quartet, London, 1984, interview with Dottie Dodgion, p 222

<sup>46</sup> Griffin, Christine, *Typical Girls? Young Women from School to the Job Market*, Routledge, London, 1985  
p 155

criticism of her band, implying that not only does she fulfil this role, but that she provides a novelty aspect for the Adverts that they could not survive without:

‘..without little Gaye’s wide, frightened eyes, luscious lips and batman ring, what are The Adverts but a gaggle of noise-merchants, no worse, no better than all the others?’<sup>47</sup>

This serves to reiterate the divisive nature of journalism, from the addition of the diminutive ‘ette’ to female punks by the tabloids mentioned by Zillah Ashworth earlier, to the attempts to engender jealousy not only amongst those of the same gender, but also between male and female musicians, in the rock press.

#### **(iv) The Shelf-life Question: the Duration of the Pop/Rock Career**

Simon Frith has rightly pointed out that

‘Pop music is created, however successfully, for a large audience and is marketed accordingly by the record industry... The record industry depends on constant consumer turnover and therefore exploits notions of fashion and obsolescence to keep people buying.’<sup>48</sup>

Given that many of the artists in my study entered the arena of rock and pop along the lines of ‘Art as free practice versus art as a response to an external demand’<sup>49</sup> it is perhaps not surprising that they did not sustain the interest of the music press. The life span of a female artist in the UK roughly corresponds to (passing for) the ages 17-23; after the 5 year shelf-life, the business wants a new gimmick, technology, and new ‘women’- pantomime dames and female-female impersonators- ‘male’ heads in female bodies- Annie Lennox, Grace Jones, Tracey Ullman, Toni Basil, Madonna. Women instrumentalists returned to the keyboards/ironing board; this, after all, was an instrument that they were more likely to have spent their adolescence playing. Mary Ann Clawson offers an argument that, coupled with the short attention span of the British record industry, means that it remains unlikely that female guitarists and bass players will have an impact on British rock music; she discovered that for the young women in her study, ‘... rock musicianship was more frequently a phenomenon of young adulthood than a product of early adolescence. Aspiring women rock musicians are thus often denied the years of teenage apprenticeship and skill acquisition experienced by male counterparts’<sup>50</sup>. Although some of the respondents to my study did start at school, (and sometimes, such as in the case of Sue Bradley, had their choice

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<sup>47</sup> Burchill, Julie, *New Musical Express*, July 2nd 1977 p 33: Adverts review with picture of Gaye *without* guitar.

<sup>48</sup> Frith, Simon, *Sound Effects*, Pantheon, New York, 1981, pp 6, 8

<sup>49</sup> Frith, Simon and Horne, Howard, *Art into Pop*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, p 30

<sup>50</sup> Clawson, Mary Ann, *When Women Play the Bass: instrument specialization and gender interpretation in alternative rock music*, in *Gender and Society*, 1999, 13, 2, p 200. Clawson’s study was undertaken in Boston in 1990 and 1991, but has much to offer this study. She writes ‘Women respondents in the Rumble sample began to play their rock instruments at the median age of 19, followed by participation in a first band at the median age of 21. This was in marked contrast to male respondents, who began to play at 13 and joined first bands at the median age of 15.3.’ pp 199/200

of instrument dictated by this circumstance) others had to wait until the enabling factor of punk started their music-making. Ironically, it was one of the school band guitarists, still trying to continue her career, who told me that although record companies still liked her music, once they discovered her age (late thirties) they were not interested; indeed, one A&R man told her 'We never sign girls over the age of 23'.<sup>51</sup> Given the fact that young women have not tended to spend their adolescence in bands working on their guitar-playing skills, and by the time they have acquired such skills they are likely to be in their early twenties, the ageism/sexism of the British music industry will constantly close the gates of access to any sort of long-term rock music career to young women. It is also interesting to note the results of research by Michael Fogarty, carried out in the late 1970s:

'... at a number of points the Study suggests that hard-edged attitudes on work or work-related issues develop later among women than among men, so that women are at a disadvantage where career opportunities and patterns tend to be determined early in life. At age 18-24 women express much less interest than men in a job with opportunity for initiative and one which fully uses their abilities, but at age 25-34 their interest in these features of a job rises sharply and catches up with men's'.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, by the time a woman realises that she has potential, and wants to use this in her work, it is too late for her, should her interests lie in the direction of becoming a rock or pop performer.

#### **(v) The Boyfriend Factor**

I first played bass in a band because my boyfriend at the time (along with some friends) persuaded me to. This was a common factor, particularly in mixed bands- such as the Adverts. It could also be a factor in the exit of young women from the band scene- though often not their men:

Q. What did your partner think?

A. He was the singer!

Q. Why did you stop?

A. Split up with the singer!<sup>53</sup>

But if Hugh Cornwell's comments at the time are representative of how male rock performers feel, it is the women's emotions that ruin the band, not the men's:

Would he ever consider giving a woman the opportunity to play alongside him in a band?

'No, I don't think so. I don't think I really want to play music with women. They always end up getting involved with someone in the band and then the band is finished. Why? Because then two people have got

<sup>51</sup> Conversation with Rachel Dollymixture, 2/2/00

<sup>52</sup> Fogarty, Michael *British Attitudes to Work*, in Abrams, Mark, Gerard, David and Timms, Noel, (eds) *Values and Social Change in Britain*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1985, p 196.

Fogarty also concludes that women collude in the unsatisfactory work/home situation.

<sup>53</sup> Sian Trehearne, bass guitar, 'Scream and Scream Again', Gloucestershire, questionnaire

something that the others haven't got. It's lost its democratic feel. I think women are more emotional than men. And emotional people are very difficult to work with. I'm a real chauvinist. Totally'.<sup>54</sup>

However, this is contradicted by the comments of one of the women who replied to my questionnaire who told me how the *emotions* of her new boyfriend prevented her from performing any more:

Q. Why did you first form a band?

A. My partner at the time was in a band and I got the bug from him.

Q. Do you still play in a band?

A. I dabbled for a while in 85/86... by this time I had a new partner who was insanely jealous of my success in my previous band and he refused to let me talk about it.<sup>55</sup>

Another told me how her boyfriend's emotions led to him trying to prevent her from joining a band in the first place:

Q. What did your partner think?

A. He hated it! I think he was jealous. He wouldn't look after the babies, so I took them with me to rehearsals.<sup>56</sup>

Sexual relationships between the opposite sexes within bands are not always destructive: Suzi Quatro toured for years with her partner, although she was occasionally criticised in the music press for this. Neither are same-sex relationships within bands necessarily constructive.<sup>57</sup> Bands can split up for many reasons, and tend to encourage factions and strong emotional feelings purely because of the intensity of the experience (Cohen?). Female performers are unique in one way, however, and when most of the members of the Slits found themselves pregnant, this signalled the end of their careers:

They had been touring too much- fatigue, Ari was pregnant, I was pregnant.

At that point I think Viv really decided she'd had enough. I did try to talk them out of it. But there was no way to talk Viv out of it; she'd made her mind up and that was it, and everybody else just had to fall in line.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Coon, Caroline, *The Stranglers*, in *The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion*, Omnibus, London, New York, Sydney, Cologne, 1982, p 97

<sup>55</sup> Suzanne Long, bass guitar, band name unknown, Gateshead, questionnaire respondent

<sup>56</sup> Gris Sanderson, bass player, 'Meleta Bean', Devon, questionnaire respondent

<sup>57</sup> Rimmer describes the constant arguments between the various members of Culture Club as making it difficult for the band to write songs, for instance. Rimmer, Dave, *Like Punk Never Happened: Culture Club and the New Pop*, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1985. Bayton (op cit 1999) also discusses the constraints applied by boyfriends and husbands, pp 36/8

<sup>58</sup> Christine Robertson, 9/10/01

**(vi) Musical Confidence and Competence: a Short Shelf-life or a Chance for Longevity?.**<sup>59</sup>

When asked on Radio 4's *You and Yours*,<sup>60</sup> Suzi Quatro cited lack of musicianship as the major reason for the short-lived careers of many of these musicians. Ultimately, as we have seen, many of the women involved in bands as instrumentalists at this time had simply not had time to plan careers as musicians, and the very ordinariness that made their activities so appealing in the first place became a burden to them as the opposing poles of business and political concerns removed them from the environments that had 'grown' them.<sup>61</sup> They had not all intended to become 'stars', although some women did come to experience the trappings of stardom; the whole tradition of 'genius' musician was an alien concept, even to a respected guitarist like Chrissie Hynde. What happened at this time was an odd sort of accident, a type of 'action research' that was unsophisticated, often maverick, occasionally corruptible, and constantly debatable.<sup>62</sup>

Often, the practitioners had no understanding of their 'fellow travellers' in this experience, like Liz Naylor, previously quoted, who found a class issue difficult to empathise with, or Karen from the *Gymslips*:

The band I really liked was the Mo-Dettes. There were a lot of others that I thought 'what the fuck is going on'. Like the Raincoats and the Slits, that were very popular, and I couldn't see why because to me it seemed that they couldn't really play at all.<sup>63</sup>

Strangely, women who *were* competent were criticised for this, too:

Frankie: we have been criticised for being too professional  
Alison: Yes, its absurd when women are taking something seriously.  
This criticism is directed at the arts more than at mechanical things.

<sup>59</sup> even the Devil's Dykes, a Lesbian, separatist band, had to be shown where on their amplifiers to insert their jack-plugs at a gig I attended.

<sup>60</sup> Broadcast date 19/7/00

<sup>61</sup> It was purely for fun- I always knew that it would be short-lived. And it was an intense and very enjoyable time. If they can do it, we can, in the sense of one chord wonders. A lot of people started to do things musically because they could see it was possible. Julie Blair, keyboards, *The Mockingbirds*, Interview Date 7/10/99

<sup>62</sup> op cit Green, 1997, p 190 Green discusses the admiration of incompetence in young men's musicianship, and how they use pop music as an escape from this and a justification for their involvement in it instead of classical music. Several issues arise from this that are of relevance: one, the 'folk' nature of some rock bands, which does not necessarily involve skill- this should be an advantage to women instrumentalists; secondly, the feeling by female jazz musicians that they need to be ultra-skilled to get on in the male world: perhaps the relative maturity of the jazz scene has taught them something that the female punks did not learn; thirdly, Green comments about punk scorning the pomposity that had become attached to the world of pop and rock music: ultimately, this factor reasserted itself. Mick Jagger and Rod Stewart have as high a profile as ever; only Chrissie Hynde survives in the rock world of today, and it is arguable that she never identified herself as a punk musician. Finally, jazz bears a resemblance to classical music in its requirement for measurable skills, knowledge of repertoire, and so on.

<sup>63</sup> Karen from *Gymslips*, interview 13/7/00

Why are all male professional standards supposed to be completely thrown out for music and not for, say, plumbing?<sup>64</sup>

There was a subtext to many of the reviews, even those which superficially celebrated the influx of women into bands, that was patronising and paternalistic. This could appear whether or not a band was 'angry' or 'decorative'. This attitude is demonstrated here by Steve Beresford, who later joined the Slits to play various instruments with them on tour:

They were very funny. Some of the funniest things were the accidentally funny things, like the first time I saw them when they were still a punk group, I don't think they thought they were funny at all but I was just rolling about laughing. It had this intensity... it was a bit like the Just William books, William never does anything that he thinks is funny but his sheer intensity and actually lack of perspective on what he's doing makes him funny, that's the whole point of it.<sup>65</sup>

A performance by a band with female instrumentalists would therefore be read entirely differently according to the gender affiliation of the audience member, regardless of their sex. The Slits, for instance, were 'dramatizing' female concerns, in a reflection of the punks dramatization of Britain's decline.<sup>66</sup> So while Karen believed that bands like the Raincoats 'couldn't play at all', Paul Morley praised their EP 'Fairy Tale in the Supermarket' under the title: <sup>67</sup> 'Singles of the Week: Exhilarating.', continuing: 'The two barbed ballads 'In Love' and 'Adventure Close to Home' are not normal, and expose a new kind of gentleness. They will not remind you of anything'. Other reviewers would cover themselves- such as in this review of Essential Logic by Paul Du Noyer:

'They're fooling around with the boundaries of rock music dancing on a tightrope. If they ever fell off I'd hate to be there, because the mess could sound so unpleasant. But right now they're walking the line stylishly.'<sup>68</sup>

Many other reviews of female bands by male journalists displayed a voyeuristic thrill in waiting for things to go wrong; women felt differently, as they often related to the performers.

The reputation of The Raincoats as an avant garde group was vindicated when Kurt Cobain invited the group to tour with Nirvana, one of the most influential US alternative groups of the 1980s, in 1994. This would have raised their profile in rock histories without a doubt; the unfortunate suicide of Cobain before the tour took place resulted in a return to the margins for the band and their reputation. Susan Suleiman identifies the margins as a place of relegation for women artists, regardless of whether

<sup>64</sup> Charles, Barbara, *Jam Today, Spare Rib*, Issue 66, January 1978, p 26

<sup>65</sup> Steve Beresford, session player with The Slits, interview 4/4/01

<sup>66</sup> see Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London p 87

<sup>67</sup> *New Musical Express* April 28th 1979, p 17.

<sup>68</sup> *New Musical Express* June 2nd 1979, p 52 Essential Logic, The Nashville.

they have chosen to belong to the avant-garde or not:

‘... avant-garde movements have willfully chosen their marginal position, the better to launch attacks at the center, whereas women have more often than not been relegated to the margins: far from the altar as from the marketplace, those centers where cultural subjects invent and enact their symbolic and material rites.’<sup>69</sup>

### (vii) Skills

In spite of Cohen’s observations about the value attributed by young male rock musicians to *not* having musical skills, and Green’s comments about the alternative values about musicianship that they posit in their own rock world, we have seen that lack of skill became a major reason for the demise of female rock musicians at the end of this moment. I believe this to be in part due to the redefinition of skill in relation to rock musicianship, and that this is in part to do with the necessity by young males to reiterate the male identification of their music.<sup>70</sup> Hartmann (paraphrased by Phillips and Taylor) remarked that

‘... capitalism in its historical development encounters individuals who are already sex-stratified, and this pre-existing sexual stratification-patriarchy- then becomes harnessed to capital’s need for different types of labour’.<sup>71</sup>

It seems that in peacetime there must be non-military sites for the expression and dispersal of surplus male energy<sup>72</sup> and in the late 1970s the cultural phenomenon of punk emerged for this purpose; the difference from other such ‘sites’ was the awareness of equal opportunities brought about by changes in the law, and also because of the unemployed and bohemian nature of the associated subculture, unlike most earlier subcultures which were based in the leisure-time of employed male and female young people. This is what gave punk its unusual and radical elements. When the Falklands war began, militarism returned as the repository for male energy and aggression, and punk was consequently replaced as a musical trend by what Savage identified as the return of the feminine in New Romanticism- although it was a femininity reserved for males.

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<sup>69</sup> Suleiman, Susan Rubin, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-garde*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1990, p 14.

<sup>70</sup> ‘The conditions of production are just as much determined by social, ideological and broad cultural structures as the conditions of consumption. The artist/cultural producer is confronted with certain materials with which to work- existing aesthetic codes and conventions, techniques and tools of production- and is, moreover, himself or herself formed in ideology and in social context... The political consciousness of, and the possibilities of aesthetic innovation for, the artist are constructed in the social historical process. Wolff, Janet, *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan Education, London, 1981, p 94

<sup>71</sup> Phillips, Ann and Taylor, Barbara, *Sex and Skill: Notes Towards a Feminist Economics* in *Feminist Review* 4-6, London, 1980, p 82

<sup>72</sup> especially given the equation of rock music to National Service

Clawson cites skill-shortages as a reason for the incorporation of women into rock bands as bass-players, and remarks that generally both male and female rock musicians regard bass-playing as a lesser skill once it is perceived as a 'female instrument'.<sup>73</sup> I know in my case that none of the men in my band wanted to play bass: it was not a 'fronting' instrument, and I happily took to the back of the stage in order to learn to play while gigging in front of an audience, in spite of the fact that I too had some very rudimentary guitar-playing skills.

In the case of the British punk bands, the sheer speed of creation and quantity of bands was a factor in the inclusion of women; the relative ease of access to punk music-making described by so many of my interviewees, added to the need for band personnel who did not desire traditional male roles such as that of 'rock star guitarist', probably explains the tendency of women to play bass guitar... The next musical trend towards a respect for electronic technology in music-making, and the emphasis on the skills of 'the producer' as auteur should have been no excuse for the exclusion of women. This music was keyboards-based (conventionally associated with women) and should therefore have encouraged women to participate.<sup>74</sup> However, it was also based on electronic innovation, conventionally associated with male technical mastery. The coincidence with this new music and the repositioning of masculine energy into war, 'drained' rock music of this energy, and the patriarchal solution was to recruit feminised men as practitioners of the new genre.

Ironically, given the many comparisons between rock music and warfare, there has not as far as I am aware, ever been a guitar or bass specifically designed for women, although women's guns are common in the United States!<sup>75</sup>

This thesis has described an important historical moment when women instrumentalists established themselves in an influential new rock music genre, and how they were finally excluded from participation. The thesis also represents a process of rescuing this moment from the amnesia of conventional popular music historiography in the same way that other 'histories from below' have been written about the achievements and experiences of other excluded or marginalised social groups. The

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<sup>73</sup> op cit. Clawson, 1999, pp 200-203

<sup>74</sup> Particularly perhaps because some earlier singer-songwriters such as Carole King and Laura Nyro were also pianists. However, even in New Order and The Fall, the women keyboard player's voices were rarely heard in interviews.

<sup>75</sup> see McKellar, Susie, *Guns: the 'last frontier on the road to equality'?* in Kirkham, Pat, *The Gendered Object*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1996. Since the original writing of my work, I have become aware of the 'Daisy' and 'Heart' shaped rock guitar ranges, available in blue, pink and yellow, and made for girls.



mechanism of exclusion is not unique to the early 1980s<sup>76</sup> and it is likely that it will continue to operate in the future, particularly if such histories as this are not brought to light. We should regard this as cautionary as we congratulate ourselves for progress made in the 20th century<sup>77</sup> ; Moe Tucker, drummer with The Velvet Underground, who influenced many female instrumentalists, has this to say:

‘Now, there’s a thousand times more women musicians than when I was around, but even so, there’s very few women *players*. When you think of every culture, when you see a documentary, for instance, on Africa, it’s always the men playing the drums and the women dancing. Dancing requires rhythm so why can’t they play the drums?’<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> We have in the past been devalued in and excluded from writing (Spender), radical politics (Rowbotham), avant-garde art movements (Suleiman), and Bohemia (Liz Wilson). There have been other false dawns for women performers as far back in history as the 13th century when the Cathars accepted female actors on stage until they were exterminated by the Pope in 1209 (see Ferris, Lesley, *Acting Women; images of women in theatre*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1990)

<sup>77</sup> Sara Cohen, for instance, shows that in 1996 rock music is ‘actively produced as male’ in Liverpool, and in spite of activities by women on the scene, it is still very much a male-dominated arena; Cohen, Sara, *Men Making a Scene: rock music and the production of gender*, in Whiteley, Sheila, (ed), *Sexing the Groove: popular music and gender*, Routledge, London, 1997, p 17

<sup>78</sup> O’Brien, Karen, *Hymn to Her: women musicians talk*, Virago Press, London, 1995, p 109

Joby and the Hooligans pose for a photographer in the Vault



## **Appendices**

## **Appendix (i) Letter to the Press**

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a lecturer on the BA Commercial Music course at the University of Westminster. I am about to commence a PHD on the women who played in bands around the time of Punk Rock (roughly 1977-1983) and would be very grateful if you would be prepared to print a request in your newspaper for people to contact me in order to fill in a short questionnaire and possibly be interviewed. It is very important that I speak to women all over Britain, which is why I have contacted your paper. My contact address and e-mail address are above. I do hope you can assist me in this,

Many thanks.

Helen Reddington

## Appendix (ii) Questionnaire

*This questionnaire changed as I received the replies, because I found I had not worded some questions adequately. I also found that there were areas that respondents brought up that I had not originally considered. The interview questions usually followed this format although other subjects were talked about as the interviews progressed.*

Can you describe your musical activities during the period 1977-1982?

How old are you?

When did you first form a band and why?

Did you have any formal musical training? If so to what level and on what instrument?

What instrument did you play in the band and how did you learn to play it?

Where did the first instrument you played on stage come from?

During the period 1977-1984, which other bands with female instrumentalists were you aware of

a. in the current scene at the time

b. in previous musical period (like the 1960s for instance)

c. in other areas of music e.g. pop charts?

Who were your favourite chart groups at the time and why?

What records did you listen to?

Did you listen to the radio? In what context?

Which fanzines or newspapers did you read and why?

Did your band write its own music/lyrics, and if so, how were you involved?

Did your band do well- good reviews, radio play, sessions, record deals, chart success, live gigs, notoriety, make lots of money?

Did you have a stage name? Why/why not?

What did your friends think about you being in a band?

What did your partner(s) think? Did you initially intend to make a career out of music or was your involvement with the band scene accidental?

Later did you begin to feel like a 'serious contender' or was your intention just to have some fun?

Why did you stop?

What is your occupation now and does it owe anything to your participation in the band scene at that time?

Do you still play in a band? Why/why not?

If you still buy records, what music do you buy and why?

Do you go to see live bands? Any in particular?

What do you feel now about your involvement with music at that time?

Do you think you could have done the same thing in the current climate?

Would you be prepared to give me a more detailed interview at a later date?

## Appendix (iii)

### Responses to questionnaires: instrument, location, current age and occupation:

#### Vocalists

Susan Acton- vocalist, Chester- 38- staff nurse

Maria Biggart- vocalist/percussionist, Glasgow-45-office administrator

Jaki Florek- vocalist, Runcorn- 50- music writer

Julie- vocalist- 38- receptionist, law firm

Linda Marshall- vocalist, Leeds-40- administrator, film school

Susan Mirrey- vocalist, Fife- 36- housewife

Jan Jackman- vocalist/percussionist, Huddersfield- 40- healing practitioner<sup>1</sup>

#### Saxophone players

Carol Otter- saxophonist, Derby- 35- administrator

Caroline Jones- vocalist/saxophonist, Surrey-37- mature student, archaeology

#### Drummers/percussionists

Sue Ballingall- drummer, Kingston- 33- musician

Heather Thomas- percussionist, London- hypnotherapist

#### Guitarists

Caroline Davis-guitarist and drummer, Otley-36- radiographer

Cathy Crabtree- guitarist and keyboards, Otley- 37- counsellor and lecturer in counselling

#### Bass guitarists

Sian Treherne- bass guitarist, Gloucester- 42- BT operator

Gris Sanderson- bass guitarist, Dartington- 41- PHD student

Eliza Taylor- bass guitarist, Hounslow- 35- just finished BSc Psychology

Suzanne Long- bass guitarist, Gateshead- 37- care assistant

Martine Hilton- bass guitarist, Manchester- 40- writer

Gaye Black- bass guitarist, London- 43- local government officer

#### Keyboard players etc

Lynn Cunningham- keyboards/flautist, Chard- 41- instrumental teacher

Robina Baines- piano, Brighton- 41-music lecturer

Susy Taylor- keyboards, Brighton-50- health professional

Caroline Hilton- synthesiser, Manchester-42- retail jeweller

#### Strings

Lindsay Aitkenhead- viola, York- 41-lecturer

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<sup>1</sup> my advertisement specified instrumentalists, but was not always translated thus in the newspapers; also, some vocalists contacted me because they wanted to take part; Poly Styrene and Zillah Ashworth (overleaf) also contacted me spontaneously, and Kate Hayes was interviewed as she was prominent in the Brighton scene.

**Interviewees (instrumentalists): instrument, location, current age and occupation, and how I contacted them:**

**Vocalists**

Zillah Ashworth, London- 38- lecturer in catering

(Zillah contacted the author after *The Independent* published an article about her research. she originally offered to contact Ploy Styrene for the author but agreed to be interviewed herself: an aim of this research was to find women who did *not* become famous)

Poly Styrene, London- 40- songwriter

(Poly contacted the author via Zillah Ashworth)

Kate Hayes, Brighton- 40- arts therapist

(contacted via an email address on the punkbrighton website; interviewed in Norfolk)

**Saxophone player**

Lora Logic, London- 38- mother

(contacted via Lucy O'Brien)

**Drummers**

Nora Normal (Karen), London- 39- painter and decorator

(contacted via Hester Smith, the Dollymixtures)

Hester Smith, Cambridge- 38- unemployed

(technician at the University of Westminster mentioned that Hester's sister worked in the University library: contacted via Ros Smith)

**Guitarists**

Mavis Bayton, Oxford- 54- lecturer in sociology

(contacted via Ruskin College)

Gina Birch, London- 43- musician/film-maker

(contacted via an ex-student Raincoats fan)

Rachel, Brighton- 38- care assistant

(contacted via Hester Smith)

Vi Subversa, Brighton- 66- unemployed

(contacted via Penny Rimbaud from Crass, speaker at the *No Future?* conference, Wolverhampton)

**Bass guitarist**

Enid Williams, London- 39- astrologer

(contacted via the Musician's Union magazine, *Musician*)

**Keyboards/synthesiser players**

Julie Blair, Brighton- 53- gardener

(contacted author to tell her of Rick's death)

Liz Naylor, Manchester-38- writer/student  
(wrote to author after *The Independent* article)  
Lucy O'Brien, Southampton- 38- author  
(contacted via PHD supervisor Dave Laing)

### **Strings**

Sue Bradley-violinist, Brighton-40- music teacher  
(contacted via web search for current band, The Blue Hearts)

### **Other interviewees and questionnaire respondents, past and current occupations, and how I contacted them:**

Christine Robertson, manager of The Slits- web designer  
(contacted via Geoff Travis, Rough Trade Records)

Attila the Stockbroker, punk poet- punk poet  
(contacted via punkbrighton website)

John Peel, DJ- DJ  
(knows author from Radio 1 sessions)

Geoff Travis, record company and shop owner- record company and shop owner  
(contacted by email)

Steve Beresford, keyboard player- keyboard player and composer  
(colleague)

Caroline Coon, journalist and temporary manager of The Clash- artist/painter  
(speaker at *No Future?* conference, Wolverhampton)

Joby Jackson, lead singer, Joby and the Hooligans- local councillor  
(contacted via websearch)

Nick Dwyer, guitarist, Joby and the Hooligans- artist/painter  
(contacted via websearch)

Steve Bassam- Resources Centre worker- Brighton Council leader, now Lord Bassam  
(contacted at House of Lords)

Adrian York, entertainments officer, Sussex University  
(colleague)

### **Foiled Attempts to Interview...**

Jeanette Lee (keyboards, Public Image Limited): Geoff Travis suggested an interview, but she said she had never done an interview and had decided that this was a good thing.

Gaye Advert (bass, The Adverts): I was sent her email address by a man who had heard the Radio 4 'You and Yours' interview, but when contacted, she said she was 'interviewed out' (this was shortly after the 25th Anniversary of Punk and Gaye was appearing in newspapers from *The Sun* to *The Daily Mail*).



Lesley Woods (guitar, The Au Pairs): I contacted Angela McRobbie, who I had been told was still in touch with Lesley. She kindly offered to forward an email, but there was no response.

Chrissie Hynde (guitar, The Pretenders): Chrissie's agent's address was published in the Musician's Union Directory. I emailed the agent but the reply was that Chrissie was too busy to answer any questions.

Stella Anscombe (guitar, The Objekts): I searched for Stella on the web and eventually located a woman I thought was her- until we spoke by telephone and I realised she was someone entirely different!

Tasha Fairbanks (guitar, The Bright Girls): there was information about Tasha available on the web; I discovered she is now a playwright, but emails remained unanswered.

I also advertised by placing a postcard in Infinity Foods, a wholefood shop in Brighton with a prominent noticeboard in a busy street. Two men who had been in punk bands telephoned me (one from The Molesters, the other from The Dandies) but although I sent them questions and stamped addressed envelopes these were never returned.

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