

Can I Have A Taste of Your Ice Cream?

Lucy O'Brien, Goldsmiths College, University of London

This article will explore the gender politics of post-punk in Leeds in the early '80s. It links the brutalist architecture of the university (now listed buildings), with the rigorous sound of Gang of 4 and Delta 5, and how that reflected the austere mood of the late '70s/early '80s. It will also look at how radical feminism flourished in a post-industrial city affected by the NF, the Yorkshire Ripper, and an aggressive male culture, and how it found a soundtrack in female post-punk bands like Delta 5 and the Au Pairs.

'We weren't trying to be 'natural'. We embraced artificiality. We were undecorated and raw (personal communication),' says Andy Gill, guitarist with the Gang of Four. Leeds bands in the post punk era had a very distinct identity. This article explores how much the Leeds sound was influenced by environment, culture and the charged sexual politics of the time.

Why was the gender war so sharp in Leeds? Why did the city spawn a very particular radical feminism and identify itself with a distinctively fractured sound? In his book *Rip It Up And Start Again*, Simon Reynolds suggests there was a "unisex" brand of feminism in vogue on the Leeds scene (which) meant that women became tough, assertive and "dry". (Reynolds 2005: 127). Rather than 'unisex', I would argue that Leeds women embraced a feminism that was defiantly separatist, decidedly unimpressed with conventional male attitudes and philosophies.

The background to this was that West Yorkshire in the late '70s was dominated by the actions of Peter Sutcliffe, the so-called Yorkshire Ripper. Between 1976-1980, this serial murderer killed thirteen women in the Leeds/Bradford area. He killed students as well as

prostitutes, and his crimes brought into focus deep issues of sexual politics and women's rights.

A post punk feminism was expressed, not just in political literature and direct action, but also in music. In exploring this idea I will look in detail at the Gang of Four and Delta 5, two Leeds bands who filtered so well the paranoid atmosphere of gender warfare that played itself out in 'Ripper territory'. If post punk was about articulating the true narrative of place, these groups were the sound of collective trauma.

In their book *Sound Tracks*, Connell and Gibson argue that local sounds can be captured and mythologised in 'narratives of place' (Connell & Gibson 2003: 14). British post punk music established a narrative of particular towns and cities - whether it was the boomy garage sound of The Fall in Manchester, Prefab Sprout's plaintive, intricate, folk-inspired ballads from Newcastle, or Sheffield's avant-funk in early Human League and Heaven 17. Created with a consciously anti-corporate DIY approach, often via a network of local record labels, post punk was a music counterculture that could articulate the truth of a place with more accuracy than was often possible in the more general global pop market.

'Leeds was an incredibly uncomfortable place. It was tough, fairly grim and politicised,' recalls Andy Gill. 'It was one of those northern towns that attracts the activities of the BNP and National Front. Being an industrial city in decline, it crystallised a lot of the ideologies that were forming and clashing at the time. It was the perfect storm for us' (O'Brien 2009). In the 1970s the clothing and manufacturing industries that had kept Leeds' economy buoyant for many years were in decline. At the same time immigrant groups constituted a significant minority in the city – for instance, 6.4% of the population in Leeds is Asian, nearly 2% higher than the national average (KSO6). Leeds

also has the third largest Jewish community in the UK (Freedman 1988: 161). Back in the late '70s the debate about immigration was fuelled along with racial and religious tensions by the growing National Front movement.

Post punk embodied a rhetoric about regional Britain when traditional certainties were breaking down. Stories of race, class and gender were funneled through post punk, not just in agit-pop lyrics, but in the textures of the music itself - in the sound of clashing voices, stripped-down beats and fractured guitar. This idea is developed in the concept of embodiment, what Lisa Blackman defines as the 'lived body', the notion that 'the body and one's biological or even psychological processes are never lived by the individual in a pure and unmediated form' (Blackman 2001: 210).

Post punk artists echoed the cultural tension of cities in transition, their lived experience resonating in music that was a conscious break with the past. We were *trying* to do things differently, trying to faithfully record our emotion as we experienced it. I played keyboards and sang in all-female Southampton band The Catholic Girls. We sounded like our physical selves - young, angry teenage girls getting to grips with feminism, driven by a charged energy. It was a point of principle not to make music that had been done before, to write lyrics devoid of romantic cliches, to express the truth of fraught sexual relations. Many other bands were engaged in a similar 'project', but it was the Leeds crew - Gang of Four, Delta 5, and the Mekons, along with their Birmingham cousins the Au Pairs - who really crystallised that gender war, fighting to define this postmodern vision of romance.

Damaged goods...send them back

In 2010 the Roger Stevens Building at Leeds University was made a Grade II listed building. Its tough, concrete breeze blocks and sci fi skyways are a perfect example of British brutalist architecture. Built in 1970 by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, it housed thirteen lecture theatres seating over 1500 students - a forceful expression of Le Corbusier-inspired socialist utopia. There was something both repellent and compelling about this design, about the way the wind whipped round the buildings and the desolate concrete square in the middle that looked like a set from *Clockwork Orange*.

When post punk bands Gang of Four and Delta 5 emerged from university Fine Art department in the late 1970s, their music echoed the stark campus architecture. There was a similar angular, repetitive geometry in their guitar lines and chanting choruses. Brutalist design exposes a building's functions; likewise, these bands deconstructed love and romance with an unblinking eye.

In 2009 David Uskovich presented a paper in the post punk day seminar at Leeds University entitled 'Gang of Four and the Dystopian Post-Punk Guitar' (Uskovich 2009). He argued that Andy Gill's guitar style was essentially presenting a feminist argument. The warm, bluesy solos of artists like Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck were associated with cock-rock posing, whereas Gill's stark sound ran counter to that and 'de-machoed' the lead guitar. 'I didn't think of it like that,' says Gill, 'I was just using transistor amps instead of valve amps. Transistor amps were cheaper, and had a cold, crisp sound, not fluid and muddy. I cut out the lower frequencies. When you're putting across a rhythm you want it to be bright and trebly and to work.' The main thing he was conscious of avoiding was the 'muddy, soulful sound that in the late '70s everybody worshipped (personal communication).'

There was a sense that these over-ornamented musical ideas had become dated, communicating little more than clichés. This chimed with Gang of Four's experience as students in the University Fine Art department, where their tutors included Tim Clark, a 1968 member of the Situationist Internationale, Terry Atkinson (co-founder of the Art & Language group), and radical feminist thinker Griselda Pollock. 'These people were all troublemakers, fun and immensely stimulating,' says Gang of Four vocalist Jon King. 'Making trouble is entertaining (personal communication).' Like their tutors, the band took a deconstructivist approach to art, music and, in turn, gender politics.

'Feminism then was undiluted, with some extreme ideas. You couldn't be in Leeds at that time and not take a view on it,' recalls Gill. 'Feminism isn't just about women, it's about the cause of fairness and equality. To us it wasn't an option *not* to write about this, we *had* to have a position. That was the Gang of Four - talking about aspects of romance in a matter-of-fact, bald, analytical way. It was refreshing, partly inspired by the debates going on around us (personal communication).'

Gang of Four expressed post punk disaffection with traditional ideas about love and romance. Reynolds observes that by the late 1970s 'the Hollywood ideal of romantic love had gradually replaced religion as the opiate of the people' (Reynolds 2005: 126). And honorary feminists, the Gang of Four, seemed to deconstruct these myths as they sang. The song 'It's Her Factory', for instance, dissects media sexism, 'Contract' looks at marriage as a business arrangement, and 'Damaged Goods' links sexual desire with consumerism.

As Greil Marcus wrote:

Discontinuities and dislocations strike the mind: at home you feel like a tourist; sex becomes a contract; history feels like a trick. You try to get a fix on the 'real world' - consumer society, the class system, the romantic myths one was raised on....Every thought now produces a contradiction, and the distance between what you thought you knew and what you know you must know... is palpable - as palpable as a hole in the Gang of Four's sound when the guitar and drums go dead. (Marcus 1993:129)

As active members of the University Film Society, Jon King and Andy Gill were enamoured of Godard's split screen techniques, and applied that to their music. This is best illustrated on their 1979 debut album *Entertainment*, in the song 'Anthrax', where guitar feedback and distortion is juxtaposed against tribal drumming. A dialectic is also set up with the vocals. King sings the main lyrics: *'Love'll get you like a case of anthrax/And that's something I don't want to catch'* while Gill mutters technical recording jargon into another speaker. On later editions of the album, Gill's words have been replaced with a critique on love songs, that *'...we don't think that what goes on between two people should be shrouded in mystery.'*

This sexual tension is also played out in the track 'Damaged Goods', where percussive guitar is scratched across stripped-down disco beats. *'Damaged goods,'* sings King,

'Send them back

I can't work

I can't achieve

Send me back...

You said would do me good

Refund the cost

You said you're cheap but you're too much'

Here, relationships are part of a commodity exchange. The band's bare Marxist analysis is echoed in the music - in Dave Allen's percussive bass, in the chanting chorus and in the abrupt ending. The band have been criticized as sounding cold and unemotional, but on the contrary, there is an intense passion to their delivery. Their world is combative yet engaging, inclusive rather than aloof. In 1979 our band The Catholic Girls went on a National Abortion Campaign march from London Hyde Park in protest against the Corrie Bill. John Corrie was a Scottish MP seeking to restrict abortion rights with his Abortion (Amendment) Bill, and was gaining a worrisome level of support in Parliament. During the demonstration, we fell into step behind a lorry on top of which the Gang of Four and Delta 5 were playing riotous chords. Their raw collision of punk and R&B was an inspiration to us. 'Delta 5 were good friends and troublemakers,' recalls Jon King. 'All you could want from a woman (personal communication)!'

Can I lick the crumbs from your table...?

'There was a strong National Front contingent in Leeds, and there was a lot of violence and aggression and a few ugly fights. I remember a gang trying to disrupt a Mekons gig by goosestepping toward the front of the stage, clearing the dance floor and Seig Heiling at the front of the stage...wankers...I got called a Communist witch by one of them and took it as a compliment.' (Appelstein 1996)

So says Ros Allen, bassist with Delta 5, recalling the atmosphere of their early Leeds gigs. Although there were a number of mixed gender bands on the Leeds scene, including Girls At Our Best and The Straits, it was the openly left-wing views of 'University' groups like Delta 5 that made them clear targets for the hostility of a faction of locals.

Hailing from the same Fine Art department as Gang of Four and the Mekons, Delta 5 sang anarchic anti-love songs, with Julz Sale's dry lead vocal echoed by the double punch of Allen and Bethan Peters' basslines. Their voices combined with the discordant guitar cut pop down to its bare essentials, and in so doing distilled the sense of alienation felt by young women keen to break away from restrictive models of femininity. The band took the feminist view that 'personal is political'. 'I'm really into breaking down the barriers between the sexes,' Sale said at the time (ESN 1981). And Allen emphasised this later, saying: 'We definitely stood for equality regardless of race or gender...egalitarianism with the odd flash of radicalism.' (Appelstein 2006)

Their 1979 debut single 'Mind Your Own Business' featured a funky bass groove, garage guitar and playground vocals. Sounding like Giorgio Moroder meets the Fall, it took the call-and-response sound of the '60s girl group era and deconstructed it with caustic humour. '*Listen to the distance between us,*' they sang, and much of Delta 5's oeuvre was about the gulf between expectation and reality, the hit and miss nature of relationships, a sense of estrangement from the romantic ideal. Using sarcasm and playful vocals they made their lyrics deliberately dry and mundane.

'Can I have a taste of your ice cream?,' they sang, impersonating a geeky man.

'Can I lick the crumbs from your table

can I interfere in your crisis

no, mind your own business

no, mind your own business!'

Like Gang of Four, Delta 5's choruslines were often based on repetition. Instead of harmony following melody, the girls' voices made bald statements and affirmations. In the same way that Gang of Four's mantra '*Two steps forward/(Six steps back)/(Six steps back)*' sounded like a political chant, so the exuberant repetition on 'Mind Your Own Business' and Delta 5's follow-up single 'You' forced the listener to pay attention. The band used words as signs - there were no pretty choruses or easy resolutions.

This didn't endear them to the more macho contingent of the punk audience. They were also active members of Rock Against Racism, and a target for white power movements like the National Front and Rock Against Communism. 'Leeds was a dark, depressed city, there was lots of youth unemployment, and the Ripper was still on the loose,' said Paul Furness, organizer of the Leeds Polytechnic Rock Against Racism club, which put on weekly gigs in the Poly Union (Manzoor 2008). Gigs could be chaotic, with the women regularly threatened by hostile members of the audience. Their drummer, Kelvin Knight noticed the girls' chutzpah some time before he joined the band. 'When I was in the Germs, we supported the Gang Of Four at Leeds F Club and the NF sieg heilers were in,' he told *Sounds* journalist Phil Sutcliffe. 'Bethan, Ros and Julz were down at the front of the stage holding them back off the band. I was thinking "God, I wouldn't do that"' (Sutcliffe 1980).

Jon Langford from the Mekons and later the Three Johns saw this violence as endemic to the Leeds scene. Delta 5 often played gigs with Gang of Four and the Mekons, and there was a sense of the Leeds bands being an embattled, self-contained unit. He recalls:

London was the centre of punk's first wave but it was very fashion based and tied into the existing music industry. The north of England (Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield) and Scotland was much less fashionable (apart from Phil Oakey's fringe) and there was a

real feeling of distance from the south and a grim, gritty sense of independence. The Clash were singing 'White Riot' down in London to pledge their solidarity with West Indian youth rioting in Notting Hill, but up north it was very different and that song became an anthem for brain-dead street Nazis. The Mekons first single was called 'Never Been In A Riot', and it was a proud manifesto of our art school wimpiness (O'Brien 2009).

The Mekons' sound was more loose-knit than the Gang of Four, ranging from thunderous noise punk to country influences. The band also ran as a left wing democratic collective, including female musicians such as Mary Jenner, and later Sally Timms. 'It was incoherent, tribal and emotional,' recalls former member Kevin Lycett. 'We let people get up on stage with us, we wanted to remove the barrier between the band and the audience (personal communication).' Sometimes the inspired anarchy resulted in rowdy, volatile gigs and unwelcome conflict.

The tensions of this scene created what Helen Reddington has described as 'industrial hazard' for female performers. As well as sexual harassment, there was heckling and violence from skinheads and, particularly in Leeds, football hooligans who were loosely termed 'Tetley Bittermen'. The politics of punk and football in Leeds was affected by Eddy Morrison's BNP and the far right. Anti-Nazi League activist Anthony Clavane wrote:

...the National Front, moving easily between anti-Semitism and anti-black racism, established a presence amongst (Leeds United) supporters. My job in the Coalition against Racism and Fascism, and then the Anti-Nazi League, was to talk to NF supporters while others gave out our propaganda. These Nazis took the unity out of United...In these heated discussions with young white men from south Leeds I learnt

a lot. They had a thirst for knowledge...but as they morphed into the ultra-violent Service Crew it became impossible to engage in debate (Clavane 2010).

Reddington quotes Simon Frith in his view that the noise of rock music is a 'youthful bohemia' beginning as a 'revolt against women...(the) potential domesticators'. The average rock gig, then, has much in common with a football match, 'reminiscent of football games and other occasions of male camaraderie - the euphoria experienced depends on the relative absence of women' (Reddington 2007: 102).

Reddington goes on to say that this causes a 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.' (Reddington 2007: 102). As a result there was often a form of gatekeeping at gigs and a strong determination by young men to exclude women, particularly by skinheads, the self-appointed 'gender-guardians'.

Most female punk performers felt that they had to be tough to survive and be heard in such an environment. Round the country female performers were singing about feminist concerns - whether it was The Slits' 'Typical Girls', The Raincoats anti-rape song 'Off-Duty Trip', or Poly Styrene bemoaning the 'pretty girl' imperative in X-Ray Spex's 'Artificial'. With her metallic rage and freewheeling dance, Siouxsie Sioux sang with a diamond hard voice that went right against the grain of the traditional female pop vocal. 'It was a protest voice, shouting as loud as possible over other people,' she once said. 'Everything felt so uptight and abrasive then. Every time you went out on stage you put your head on the block; you'd get missiles thrown at you, you had to be hard to survive within that' (O'Brien 2002: 138).

There was also Bradford's flame-haired spoken word artist Joolz, one of the few female performance poets on the punk circuit, reciting powerful poems like 'Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know'. According to Linder Sterling, visual artist and former lead singer with avant punk Manchester band Ludus: 'We were trying to find a new vocabulary' (O'Brien 1999: 186). And female audiences were drawn to a new kind of rock that addressed them. Punk women, though, were often seen as disturbing because they performed in a deliberately asexual way. 'Unsexual female vocalists were unengaging,' suggests Reddington, 'male concerns were not being addressed or nurtured' (Reddington 2007: 110).

Opposition to such self-defined female power was particularly pronounced in Leeds, not only at punk gigs. Delta 5 were attacked coming home from the pub, my lesbian friends were harassed and abused by macho male groups of so-called 'Tetley Bittermen' as they walked through the town centre. Many women in the city felt under threat. This was part of what Nicole Ward Jouve describes as 'a society in which contempt for women, and violence to women, are the norm' (Ward Jouve 1986: 91). And in the late 1970s, this was brought into sharp focus with the case of the Yorkshire Ripper.

Not mad, male...

'There was a girl who drank at our local pub, The Fenton, who'd been murdered. I lived in Harehills (near the red-light district) and the walk back late at night was very frightening. Police did a whole series of interviews up and down our street, and some guys in our house were interviewed. It was a really difficult time (personal communication),' recalls Emma Biggs, a Fine Art student who was part of the Mekons' collective.

In the post punk era Leeds was at the heart of 'Ripper country'. If the Gang of Four and Delta 5's music had the same stark quality as the Brutalist architecture of the University, it also conveyed a sense of alienation and decay. In her groundbreaking book *The Streetcleaner*, Nicole Ward Jouve describes in detail the urban blight of the late '70s West Yorkshire landscape, the 'socio-economic dereliction which much of the geography expressed' (Ward Jouve 1986: 18), from the bleak, bare moors to the rusted Victorian architecture of empty warehouses, waste grounds and heaps of broken rails. Lorry driver Sutcliffe would drive up and down the M62, picking off his victims in Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Manchester. 'Perhaps when you're surrounded by dereliction you feel like inflicting it too?', she suggests (Ward Jouve 1986: 24).

It was the Gang of Four and Delta 5 that drew me to Leeds University in 1980, to read English. Their music articulated a tension that was soon realised in a shocking way when Jacqueline Hill, a student in my English Department, became Sutcliffe's thirteenth victim. From then on it was as if a black cloud descended over the University. As the police tried to catch Sutcliffe - in a bungled investigation that had already been going on for five years - all the authorities were drawn in. My Dialectology tutor was asked to decipher the Ripper tape (the chilling hoax tape that began with the words: 'I'm Jack'). In a throwback to the Victorian era, there was a curfew on women. We weren't allowed to go out on our own after dark, we had to be escorted everywhere by men.

Joan Smith, author of *Misogynies*, recalls working as a journalist in Manchester in the late '70s and reporting on the Ripper investigation. 'I remember going to work at Piccadilly Radio and being in the newsroom. You'd get a call, "another murder's happened". All women went completely ashen. There was a wave of horror (personal communication).'

Ward Jouve sums up the atmosphere of paranoia in the region:

One of the worst things about the panic that had set in was that, instead of feeling self-righteous, as you should have done...you felt...guilty. Apologetic. About going out in the dark. About wearing attractive clothes. Being out in the streets. Almost, about being a woman. Being a woman meant that you were murderable, and it was wrong of you so to be. In order to make up for it, you had to be specially good. Stay indoors. Not wander away from the protective side of a man: your man. For no other was safe and perhaps even he? (Ward Jouve 1986: 25)

Most women stayed indoors after dark, but you'd hear of those who 'broke out'. There was a female student who said, 'Fuck it', and walked across Hyde Park in the pitch blackness. People considered her foolhardy, but her anger was understandable. 'It didn't seem like the curfew and the endless playing of the Ripper tape was about making women safe. I felt it was just about scaring women, scaring them for no good reason (personal communication),' says Sue Rylance, editor of *Leeds Student* newspaper from 1982-3.

There was a feeling that the macho male society which spawned Peter Sutcliffe tacitly condoned his activities, that there were 'innocent' women and prostitutes, the deserving and undeserving (Yallop 1981: pp 270-8). In his book *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son*, Gordon Burn presented an accurate picture of a brutalised 1970s working class male culture (Burn 1984: 32, 80, 185). Amongst the Leeds United supporters who harassed Anti-Nazi League demonstrators, or the Friday night drinkers who abused feminist Reclaim the Night marchers, there was a belligerent, confrontational stance. Joan Smith recalls 'an adversarial, tough Northern male working

class culture that was predicated on quite a high degree of gender separation. This came out of years of heavy industry where men and women led very separate lives. There was hostility to gender stereotypes breaking down, and a contempt for women (personal communication).’

Theirs was an exaggerated version of masculinity, an elaborate theatre. Ward Jouve quotes Andrew Tolson on the construction of masculinity and how sometimes a working class boy, ‘expresses himself, not so much in an inner, competitive struggle for achievement, as through a collective toughness, a masculine “performance”, recognized and approved by his “mates”...In effect, working class masculinity becomes a kind of “performance”.’ (Ward Jouve 1986: 69).

This kind of ‘performance’, as it was expressed in Leeds in 1979-80, worked to intimidate women. Sarah Ahmed writes about how ‘fear works to align bodily and social space’, and Leeds town centre on a Friday night was a good example of how ‘the uneven distribution of fear...allows spaces to become territories, claimed as rights by some bodies and not others’ (Ahmed 2004: 70). As the number of Peter Sutcliffe’s victims grew, so did the culture of fear. Ahmed notes that fear is an embodied experience: ‘fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space.’ She quotes Elizabeth Stanko, who argues that women’s mobility and access to public space is restricted by ideas about feminine vulnerability, with the implication that if they are to have feminine respectability they must either ‘stay at home (femininity as domestication), or be careful in how they move and appear in public (femininity as a constrained mobility)’ (Ahmed 2004: 69). Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish* that hierarchical monitoring of prisoners, ‘fixing them in time and space...training their bodies’ rendered them ‘docile and useful’ (quoted in Blackman 2001: 212). In the same

way, through discourses about vulnerability and respectability, women have been trained to limit their social freedom.

This kind of restriction was present in an exaggerated form in the Leeds/Bradford area, particularly in the months following Jacqueline Hill's death, when women were chaperoned by men after dark. Sarah Ahmed has written eloquently about the affects of terrorism after 9/11, saying that 'terrorists are immediately identified as agents of extreme fear', leading to a culture where people's mobility is both contained and defended. Sutcliffe's murders had a similar affect in this local area. In 2010, nearly three decades after Sutcliffe was imprisoned, an application for parole was rejected by High Court judge Justice Mitting. He stated: 'This was a campaign of murder which terrorised the population of a large part of Yorkshire for several years....Apart from a terrorist outrage, it is difficult to conceive of circumstances in which one man could account for so many victims' (EWHC 1741 (QB) 2010). Sutcliffe was the 'agent of extreme fear'. In fact, he had a 'jokey' notice propped up against the windscreen of his lorry: 'In this truck is a man whose latent genius if unleashed would rock the nation, whose dynamic energy would overpower those around him: better let him sleep?' (Ward Jouve 1986: 72).

Not surprisingly in this threatening atmosphere, Leeds radical feminism became combative. Women leafleted sex shops, picketed cinemas, and took to the streets. A Reclaim the Night demonstration ended with red paint being thrown at a cinema screen showing *Dressed To Kill*, a Brian de Palma film about a woman with violent erotic fantasies who ends up being murdered (controversial because it implied that women *desire* sexual violence). Then as a protest against heavy metal sexism, 300 women stormed the University Refectory when Iron Maiden were playing, and when the police tried to make arrests, women blockaded their van. As Robert Walser observes, heavy

metal performers and fans don't simply *express* their sexuality, they are involved in what he calls 'identity work' (Walser 1993: 134). Through their musical codes and music videos they are forging masculinity, creating a picture of essential maleness that tends to exclude women. The young male gang behaviour of heavy metal creates the sense of a segregated culture – one that provided more fertile ground for Leeds radical separatism. No wonder the Refectory became a site contested by feminists when Iron Maiden arrived.

The sense of a separate male and female culture was entrenched, particularly when young women stepping out of line drew the wrath of men roaming the city centre, including many National Front-inspired Leeds United supporters. 'How could you go through that and not be a radical feminist?' says Smith, 'Police were drawn from this male working class culture and reflected it. There was a failure to protect women. They thought it was perfectly all right for women to stay at home – but they were dealing with young women who were educated and knew what was going on (personal communication).' As a response, walls and cars were daubed with slogans like 'CASTRATE ALL MEN' and 'DISARM RAPISTS'. On a wall opposite the University in huge black letters, someone had painted: 'NOT MAD, MALE.' Strong links were made between organisations like Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Rape Crisis. The University funded a women's centre and after-dark minibus service. Violence, or the threat of violence, was constant. 1980 was a turning point, not just for music, but for feminism, and many post punk performers embodied that tension.

Music and live gigs in particular became an important channel for the city's anger and fear. Ahmed says how after 9/11, patriotic flags on private houses became 'sticky signs' of coherence and the nation 'sticking together' (Ahmed 2004: 74). Home could be mobilised as a defence against terror. In the same way songs were our 'sticky signs',

and gigs became safe, warm collective experiences. Here the darkness wasn't something to fear, it was a secure haven. In the late 1970s/early 80s Leeds had over twenty live venues, catering to the voracious musical appetite of thousands of students and 'townies'. There were a bewildering array of options, from the subterranean Fan Club, where a young Spandau Ballet played all kitted out in tartan and Soft Cell sang 'Tainted Love', to The Warehouse which featured breaking post-punk bands like Bow Wow Wow and the Cocteau Twins, to Elland Road stadium and that cavernous tramshed the Queens Hall.

One of the key venues, though, was the 2,000-plus capacity Leeds University Refectory (where The Who recorded their classic 1970 album *Live At Leeds*), which drew top punk and new wave acts from The Clash and Siouxsie & The Banshees to Iggy Pop, Ian Dury and Elvis Costello. 'By default we were the equivalent of Newcastle City Hall or Manchester Apollo', says DJ Andy Kershaw, who was then Ents Secretary (O'Brien 2009). Performers enjoyed the atmosphere, the low ceiling, and the balcony that came to the end of the stage - they felt enveloped by the crowd. The audience, likewise, felt pretty cosy. 'It was so packed and fire limits weren't always observed,' recalls BBC 6 DJ and former Leeds student Liz Kershaw. 'Human sweat would evaporate, condense on the ceiling and come down as rain' (O'Brien 2009).

Leeds Refectory concerts were about including everyone; it was a place of release, of celebration, of catharsis. When the Gang of Four played there three weeks after Jacqueline Hill's murder, as well as being a home-coming gig after signing to EMI and touring America, it was a focused, charged performance that brought them back to base and somehow made sense of the alarm and paranoia dominating the city. Likewise when Siouxsie and the Banshees performed there not long after Sutcliffe's arrest in

1981, Siouxsie Sioux's hard-edged, high-energy expression of female empowerment resonated with the crowd.

But one of the most powerful gigs around this time was by the Au Pairs, a band whose political rigour and musical force perfectly captured the prevailing mood. 'They were in a different city, Birmingham, but they were definitely part of our thing,' said Gang of Four drummer Hugo Burnham (Reynolds 2005: 125). I saw them at Leeds Warehouse in 1981, in the months after Sutcliffe's arrest and imprisonment. Although he had been caught the city was still in a state of post-traumatic stress, with factional fighting between university feminists and male students, and tension in the town with WAVAW activists still picketing cinemas and sex shops.

The Au Pairs' show perfectly dramatised this bitter tension - from Lesley Woods' bluesy, hard-edged vocal delivery to Jane Munro's relentless bass, and Paul Foads' questing guitar and querulous vocals. '*We don't torture/ We're a civilised nation*,' Woods intoned on their stand-out song 'Armagh', a tribute to women hunger strikers in Armagh Prison in Northern Ireland.

Their charged lyrics and rigorous performance embodied feelings closer to home. Although women's experience in Leeds was not the same as the Armagh prisoners, there was deep sympathy for them. As I discussed earlier with reference to Sarah Ahmed, themes of imprisonment and terror had resonance for women in 'Ripper territory'.

More than the Gang of Four or Delta 5, the Au Pairs' music embodied early '80s feminist struggle. The cover of their debut album *Playing With A Different Sex* featured a woman running into battle carrying her gun. Lesley Woods was one of the most prominent 'out'

lesbians and outspoken feminists on the post punk scene. 'I don't think my songs make men out to be villains... (but) I do think that the majority of men are pretty shitty...' she told *NME*'s Paul Morley. 'I'm not anti-men...But I'm anti the male dominated society' (Morley 1980).

The Au Pairs managed to combine commercial, chart-friendly funk punk with hard-hitting, witty lyrics - not just about wider political issues, but the gender war in personal relationships. Their song 'Come Again', for example, was about women feeling the pressure to fake orgasm. *'Is your finger aching / I can feel you hesitating*

Is your finger aching!?!'

Yes, thank you / I got one

Yes, it was nice / Yes, we should go to sleep now...'

Also 'We're So Cool' was about the perils of non-monogamy, 'Dear John' the limitations of male sexual fantasy, and 'Love Song' deconstructed Hollywood-style romance... *'rinse out the dream...washing machine'*. Many dubbed the band dour agit-pop, but their vision was expressed with humour and verve. To the Au Pairs' Jane Munro they were just part of a post punk scene: 'At the time – to me anyway – the stuff that we were doing didn't seem that out of the ordinary, because most of the bands we were gigging with or who were influential at that time also had political and/or feminist lyrics – the Gang of Four, the Slits, the Clash, the Raincoats, the Mekons, to name but a few,' she later recalled (Gunnarsson 2008). And guitarist Paul also felt that their music chimed with the times: 'I think Gang Of Four have made it easier for people like us. The paranoia surrounding so called political bands is lessening...People are becoming more politically aware; they're having to' (Barber 1982).

To Lesley Wood, the driving force behind their charged lyrics, it was a case of the personal is political. 'You can't split the two things up,' she said. 'If you're going to have any kind of social change, personal relationships in society have got to change...It is really important to feel free. Especially for women, because there's this morality that operates, these notions of 'bad women' if they don't conform and stay in their role' (Barber 1982).

Every self-respecting Leeds feminist in the early '80s had a copy of *Playing With A Different Sex*. The band took the same basic politicised funk approach as the Gang of Four, but from Woods' view, were less intellectual Marxist, more instinctive female agitators. Her stance chimed with the Leeds feminist audience partly because it seemed so uncompromising. And part of the reason Leeds post punk took on such a severe identity was because of its cultural isolation. Now it is a cosmopolitan twenty first century city, but back in the 1970s it tended to be inward-looking, and like a battleground.

'A few of my women friends were elective lesbians (ie, they'd decided not to go out with men because men are the enemy),' recalls Gang of Four's Jon King. 'Leeds at the time was full of extreme people, like Berlin in the Cold War. Our rehearsal room was in a falling-down warehouse full of anarchists and communists (personal communication).'

In 1983 I moved down to London after graduation. Feminists there seemed more laid-back, less fired by a sense of urgency. It frustrated me at the time, but with hindsight I can see that I'd come from a war zone. Leeds, Manchester, Bradford - these were all Northern cities that had been deeply affected by Peter Sutcliffe and the brutal macho

values he acted out. As Simon Reynolds writes: 'Leeds was on the frontline of this cultural war' (Reynolds 2005: 123), and post-punk music from the city reflected that.

Since then those taut chords and deadpan vocals have become a kind of punk shorthand - part of a new female generation's rebellion and inquiry - from 1990s Riot Grrrl bands Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear, to Le Tigre and Chicks On Speed. It came through in Yorkshire girl groups like Scarborough's Delicate Vomit and Wack Cat from Leeds. That post punk influence has also reverberated through cultural events like Ladyfest, and the bolshy, confident young feminism of current bands - it's there in the percussive bass and compelling vocals of Robots in Disguise, for instance; in the analytical lyrics and spitfire cabaret of Boston duo Dresden Dolls. It also echoes in the shouty, minimalist indie funk of Sheffield band Long Blondes and the insouciant electro pop of New Young Pony Club.

Post punk featured a myriad of styles, but what stands out about groups like Gang of Four and Delta 5 is their political focus and stripped-down musical approach. Like the brutalist buildings on Leeds University campus, their sound has endured, and is a thing to be celebrated.

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