Music: Women Rewriting Punk Performance Politics

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Abstract and Keywords

A number of women who made their name as punk musicians and experimental performers have published their memoirs in quick succession. Taken together these books offer a rescripting of the dominant narrative of punk and related independent—indie—music scenes. The memoirs considered here—by Viv Albertine, Carrie Brownstein, Kim Gordon, Chrissie Hynde, Patti Smith, Brix Smith Start, and Cosey Fanni Tutti—go some way in challenging androcentric stereotypes in the "story of punk," its politics and furious male icons. These memoirs provide rich insights into the complex, underground sexual politics of making it in a male-dominated industry. In so doing they rewrite the official record of punk registers of musical and political protest as groundbreaking experimental artists who also excel at playing fast, loudly, and with the libidinous energy usually attributed to masculine performance.

Keywords: punk, musicking, third wave feminism, sex-gender politics, politics-performance nexus

Introduction

> Yes, I'm sensitive to sound, I think I have a good ear, and I love the visceral movement and the thrill of being onstage. And even as a visual, conceptual artist, there's always a performance aspect to whatever I do.
>
> —Kim Gordon, *Girl in a Band: A Memoir* (2015)

WHATEVER its status as entertainment, music—also one of the performing arts—can become a means for both resistance and oppression; characterized as high or low culture, avant-garde or commercial, decadent or authentic through not only any lyrical content but also the associations that become attached to any sonic repertoire. This malleability of use and multiplicity of meanings arises from the polysemic nature of how any sort of music works, what it is taken to mean, and for whom. Writing (about) and making music thereby occurs within shifting historical and geopolitical debates about the social role or cultural significance of all forms of music-making: as sacred and creative practice, ex-

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pression of artistic singularity, vector of civilization, signifier of cultural heritage or national identity.

There is a long-standing literature in the classical music tradition in which artists—composers, performers, and conductors—consider these complexities through reflections on their work and times (Barenboim and Said 2003; Cage 1973; Adorno 2002). In popular music, such reflections are performed in the so-called rock memoir. In both cases practitioners offer perspectives on a domain in which not only music scholars but also journalists and critics define the terms of reference and hierarchies of value. In recent years women who made their names as proponents of punk music have been publishing their memoirs in quick succession. When considered as contributions to an emerging, multifaceted public archive of women in music, a rich vein of inquiry opens up into the sonic—musical, audiovisual—dimensions of "politics and performance as inter-related discursive and (p. 486) embodied practices" (Reinelt and Rai 2014, 4). The memoirs considered here—by Viv Albertine (2014), Carrie Brownstein (2015), Kim Gordon (2015), Chrissie Hynde (2016), Patti Smith (2010, 2015), Brix Smith Start (2016), and Cosey Fanni Tutti (2017)—mount a challenge to dominant narratives of (mainly male) musicians' engagement with the political and social concerns of their day. As women in punk—a term encompassing a particular constellation of explicitly transgressive music-making and related subcultures, sartorial practices, lifestyles, and gestures of nonconformity—these musicians-turned-memoirists recollect experiences of making music in a period marked by "collective concrete struggles" (Reinelt and Rai 2014, 10); antiwar, civil rights, women's rights, and antiracism.

These firsthand accounts offer alternative perspectives on punk, a musical form and subculture defined by a theatricality of confrontation in the lyrics, production values, and demeanor. They depict respective comings-of-age, creative practices, and political viewpoints in a period spanning the 1960s to the present day. Featuring as walk-on parts in the standard historical narrative of punk as a quintessentially masculinized act of heroic musical transgression (Harris 2010; Morley 2008; Marcus 1989), these women are now also authors in their own right. In this way their memoirs can be considered for their contribution to the trade and scholarly literatures as, by virtue of their publication in rapid succession, they expose the structural gender, class, and race imbalances in (writing about) the performing arts (Reddington 2007; Moisala and Diamond 2000; Saha 2012).

Now center-stage and in control of their respective approaches to rescripting the narrative of punk's sociopolitical significance forty-odd years on, these authors express a range of attitudes to the cultural and sexual politics of their generation, providing a diversity of insights into the visceral masculinities representing punk as music, lifestyle, and performance culture (Gordon 2015, 173, 202–3; Albertine 2014, 79-80, 201; Hynde 2016, 257–8, 278; Tutti 2017, 408–9). This master narrative, as it pertains to punk music since its public entrée in the 1970s, focuses on the onstage shock antics of first-generation punk bands such as the Sex Pistols or Iggy Pop and the Stooges, and the larger-than-life personalities of band members from bands such as Joy Division, Toy Love, and Birthday Party, or the high-profile political personae and lyrical content from bands such as the Clash

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and the Fall. For this reason alone these memoirs constitute a significant revision of received wisdom about the relationship between making music—as art form, entertainment, or political stand—and musicians as agents in how any music emerges as incipient if not explicitly performed politics. The bands that these women cofounded and led straddle this spectrum within the ever-widening category of punk music, effectively rescripting the standard narrative of punk music lived and/as politics through its male protagonists.

After an overview of the relevant literature at the intersection of critical schools of music research, sociology, media and cultural studies, and politics and international relations, the rest of this chapter considers the memoirs of these women who made their name in punk scenes as a case in point. The last section analyzes three of the many tracks that feature in these "femoirs" (Fontana 2012: Edgers 2015). Music-making as a collaborative and experimental process, and what to make of the outcomes in retrospect, are central in all these accounts that rescript the historical record, headline acts, and public playlist of how punk—reconstructed here in all its multifariousness—is made manifest as real-life counterculture, politicized pop musicality, and a performance code based on a Do It Yourself (DIY) ethos.

(p. 487) Mapping the Field

Studying how to compose, perform, and analyze music is based on the theoretical canon and concert repertoire of the Western, classical art music tradition (Pasler 2008; Barrett 2016: Franklin 2021). The practices and discourses constituting the standard historical arc of Western music, and predominantly Franco-Austro-German expressions thereof, serve as a mimesis of the history of Western modernity (Attali 1989; Adorno 2002; Berger 2007; McClary 1991, 1992; Regev 2013). Along with its counterpart for non-Western music—ethnomusicology—this literature is considered disciplinarily distinct from popular music theory and research. This more recent domain of inquiry, straddling several disciplines, pivots on the predominantly Anglo-American music industry, with its global market reach and diverse genres (country, pop, folk, jazz, rock, rap, electronic). Studies of the formative influences of music-making from African, African-American, and other, non-Western cultures tend to fall under the rubrics of "world music" or Black culture, and ensuing debates over classification, covered as part of globalization studies (White 2012) or critical literature on the racial dimensions and legacy of slavery and colonialism in the political economy of the popular music market under the aegis of American economic and geopolitical hegemony (Dorsey 2000; Gilroy 1995; Spicer and Covach 2010; White 2010). Concerns about the geopolitical implications of US corporate ownership and control, along with the perceived detrimental sociocultural and depoliticizing effects of the mass consumption of popular—commercial—music and/as (now global) entertainment are of long standing. This literature goes back to the culture industry critique made famous by Horkheimer and Adorno ([1944] 2002) in the early years of the popular music industry and its concomitant technologies of recording, broadcasting, and distribution.

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This divide, disciplinary and aesthetic, persists today. It still defines the terms of reference in music scholarship, criticism, and journalism, notable exceptions notwithstanding (Ross 2010, 2011). Nonetheless, like their colleagues in the Western classical music tradition, popular music scholars have also looked to capture the spectrum of (predominantly Anglo-American) popular music as not only entertainment but also a globally significant art form and political platform (Frith 2007; Marcus 1989; Morley 2008; Street 2012; Hesmondhalgh 2013). Frith (2007), for instance, looks to develop a sociological framework for articulating an aesthetics of popular music, while Gracyk (n.d.) considers from a philosophical perspective how ascertaining the "value of popular music" relates to long-standing debates in Western thought about "art and aesthetic value" (see also Bleiker 2009). These studies have emerged as the bifurcation between "classical" and "popular" music scholarship. Performance cultures have been thoroughly deconstructed from both sides of this disciplinary divide, exposing the ethnocentrism, methodological parochialism, and cultural bias—masquerading as aesthetic judgment—that perpetuate these lines of demarcation, lines that are, in practice, porous, to say the least, for many musicians.

Barrett (2016) takes a much more radical perspective by advocating a shift away from the ontological centrality given to sound, the sonic-aural dimension, to any conceptualizations of *music* as a universally understood domain of inquiry and creative practice. He argues that there needs to be a move to generate "both a new concept and context … a (p. 488) music beyond the limitation of sound" (7) in order to reengage scholarship with the ways in which music is put to work—by musicians and other artists—as a "critically engaged art form in dialogue with contemporary art, continental philosophy and global politics" (citing Mockus, 167). These reconceptualizations of music as object and domain of analysis have been influenced by the work of Christopher Small (1998, 13), who coined the term *musicking* in order to reposition the heretofore abstract notion of music as a domain of inquiry based on aesthetics, theories of form, and virtuosic performance cultures. Small inverts these conventions by positing that the artifact cannot be separated from its concomitant communities of practice, networks of supportive relationships, and sociocultural and thereby political contexts of performance and reception (Franklin 2020, 2021).

Splicing through both these debates are those literatures based on feminist politics and accompanying projects of historical recovery, public visibility, personal empowerment, and representative equity. Studies of famous female musicians (e.g., Billie Holiday, Janis Joplin, Madonna) address these agendas, while considering whether these artists, as women, make music differently from men (Moisala and Diamond 2000; Peraino et al 2013). Others have revisited the classical canon from a feminist analytical perspective (McClary 1991). For instance, Peraino (2001) reconsiders Susan McClary's (1992) pioneering feminist reading of Bizet's opera *Carmen*; Jann Pasler (2008, 213–48) looks at how nationalistic fervor is part of the compositional strategies of the French composer Augusta Holmès; and Mavis Bayton (1998) studies a number of "exceptional" women and their bands across a range of popular music scenes, including those in which the memoirists considered here made their name. The rise of Third Wave studies of gender and sexuality, dissatisfied with the conceptual and political limitations of literature focusing on women musicians as exceptional, iconic artists (Bowers 1989; Koskoff 2000), has

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looked to deconstruct essentialist, heteronormative frameworks pivoting on studies of how male musicians embody either traditional sex-gender stereotypes of cock rock (Frith and McRobbie [1978] 1990) or its androgynous male Other. Peraino (2001, 694) argues that "rock no less, and perhaps more—demarcates a space and time wherein gender and sexuality lose clear definition. … [This is] part of music's appeal and cultural work. The fact that men dominate the world of rock and pop does not mean that music itself uncomplicatedly represents masculinity, as many 1970s feminists held."

Reconsiderations of the audiovisual back catalog and archival and scholarly literature can further such an agenda by highlighting the "gender and sexual [and racial] unruliness" of women as political actors, artists, and performers (Peraino 2001, 694). Taken together these punk-rock memoirs go some way in responding to this Third Wave critique of feminist research agendas for the study of women in music that critics argue have led to a "homogeneous approach in gender studies" that blurs class, race, and ethnicity distinctions (Koskoff 2000, 2–3). Rap and hip-hop are cases in point in that studies of the sex-gender dimensions and feminist politics of classical art and popular music literatures have yet to fully engage with the art and music of not only non-Western musicianship but also African American women, a literature that is nonetheless staking its claims on the musical and scholarly canon (Jones 2015; Magrini 2003; Malott and Peña 2004; Queen Latifah 2000, 2010; Rabaka 2012: Tinsley 2018; Rose 1994; Feldstein 2005).

(p. 489) "Punks and Poses"

> Much of it boiled down to identity, a way of differentiating punk from the rest of the world, making it subversive, confrontational. Whether quiet or loud, fast or slow, pretty or ugly—it was not about a sound or a look—punk was about making choices that didn't bend to consumptive and consumerist inclinations and ideologies, that didn't commodify the music or ourselves.
>
> —Carrie Brownstein, *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* (2015)

Definitional issues notwithstanding, *punk* has become shorthand for a diverse group of acts, sounds, and musical attributes that rose to prominence in the 1970s as a visceral and audible rebellion against the way the music industry, and global acts of the day, were premised on high thresholds of entry and investment for performing live and in recording studios (Davies 2005; Dunn 2016; Marcus 1989; Malott and Peña 2004; Reddington 2007). Refusing to conform to industry moguls' punitive contracts, touring and marketing obligations, and production values of the by now lavishly produced pop song and stage act, first-generation punk acts inverted these hierarchies of value and sonic artfulness. Lyrics and interviews covered taboo topics and did not flinch from using expletives or challenging performance mores by insulting audiences and critics in equal measure. Punk songs are known for being very short, fast, loud, and simple to learn, using three-chord guitar progressions. Bands comprised for the large part three to four members on drums, bass, guitar, vocals, and sometimes keyboard. Key to the punk ethos, if not its subsequent

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branding, has been its DIY approach: the conviction that making music should resist the profit principle, the need for technical virtuosity, high-end production recording techniques, or showing any particular deference to fans, the general public, and arbiters of good taste. As a musical genre and counterculture, punk has undergone numerous permutations and critical reconsiderations around its legacy as the sonic protest of choice for marginalized, disaffected youth and, more recently, high-profile agitprop around the world, from Indonesia to Russia (Davies and Franklin 2015; Dunn 2016). This archetype of punk as a countercultural, anti-aesthetic of music-making and performance is distinct from how punk has been studied as part of the history of youth cultures, fashion lines, and streetwear based on the look that fed media panics at the time.

While first-generation bands in the UK (e.g., the Clash in London, Stiff Little Fingers in Northern Ireland) saw their music as integral to their political views—on poverty, racism, police brutality, military occupation, and imperialism—it was not until the US-based and feminist-inspired form of punk-inflected music known as the Riot Grrrls phenomenon in the 1990s brought the *gendered* power hierarchies of the pop music business centerstage (Marcus 2010; Howe 2009). These bands, like Sleater-Kinney (Brownstein 2015), challenged the sexual stereotype of punk as a music and subculture of rebellion, physicality, and declamatory poses represented as *ipso facto* a male preserve (Reddington 2007; Malott and Peña 2005). The music press and television lavished attention on the first and second generations of punk musicians who were predominantly Anglo American, white, male, and (nominally) working class. Female punk band members or producers were few, as were (p. 490) Black British, African American, Asian American, or British Asian performers (Stratton and Zuberi 2014; Saha 2012). As for prominent female punk artists of color in the UK, the career and legacy of Poly Styrene (1957–2011), lead singer of X-Ray Spex, encapsulates these gaps in the record.

Women Rewriting the Punk Playlist

> I wanted to play rhythm, not so much because I thought it was easier than lead, but because rhythm turned me on. I'd never once been tempted to play a single note. Chords for me, three; less is more.
>
> —Chrissie Hynde, *Reckless: My Life as a Pretender* (2015)

An autobiography or memoir resides at the interstices of the literary genres and writing conventions that traditionally separate fiction from nonfiction (McKeon 2015; Smith 2010, 3). The use of the first person conveys an intimacy that is both spontaneous and contrived. Experimenting with a range of forms and voice, these accounts are necessarily incomplete, performances unfinished, re-presenting well-known playlists open to further reshuffling. As literary performances, memoirs are also constructed reconstructions, based on selected material from early diaries, family and press photos, and recalled conversations. Approaching these texts as primary material offers an invitation to consider lives and artistic output that, by virtue of being idiosyncratic, challenge stereotypical ac-

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counts of (high-profile) women in music (Peraino 2001, 709; Bowers 1989; Simone 2003). While not setting out to do so, memoirs such as these underscore the aforementioned moves to consider more methodically the study of (any) music as socioculturally embedded (Small 1998) and, thereby, less as a reified—and rarefied—object of analysis than as "a process engaging bodies, time, and space" (Barrett 2016, 167).

The personal and public political dimensions to these recollections also show women striving, thriving, and holding their own in a domain that remains deeply skewed in favor of male experiences and musical articulations, exemplified by the critical acclaim given to the male memoir (Sheffield 2012). Yet, as Brownstein (2015) notes, drawing on her time with Sleater-Kinney, there is an underlying pressure to make overt, *literally* political music. This has creative and aesthetic implications for how an artist perceives her work as alternative, a creatively political and politically creative act: "We had spent years attempting to exist free of excess and arbitrary labels that were not descriptions of our music: female, indie, queer, Riot Grrrl, post–Riot Grrrl music. Now here we were with the potentiality of being a 'political' band" (185). Brownstein is the most explicit in how she reflects on her life with Sleater-Kinney and their role as exceptions to the rule:

> What does it feel like to be a woman in a band? I realized that those questions—that talking about the experience—had become part of the experience itself. … There is the music itself, and then there is the ongoing dialogue about how it feels. The two seem to be intertwined and inescapable. … I don't know what it's like to be a woman in a band—I have nothing else to compare it to. But I will say that I doubt in the history of rock journalism and writing any man has been asked, "Why are you in an all-male band?"
>
> (111)

(p. 491) Kim Gordon, Viv Albertine, Patti Smith, Brix Smith Start, and Cosey Fanni Tutti are less forthcoming about their political viewpoints, ambivalent about being branded feminists (Coen 2012). For these are authors who write not only as groundbreaking musicians, once budding and now experienced producers, but also as visual artists, fashion designers, scriptwriters, poets, and television personalities with ongoing careers and creative interests. And to confound another stereotype about women who become public figures, high-profile artists, these authors see their lives as parents, partners, and private citizens as integral to rather than a negation of their lives as public figures, punk rock "icons" (Smith 2015). These books defy another essentializing trope in this respect: that making it as a female musician must entail conforming to the usual sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll clichés of life on the road. Hynde (2016) and Tutti (2017) pull no punches in this regard, albeit in different registers of detail, defiance, humor, and regret. Patti Smith (2010) is discrete and sparing in her references to past lives and to loves such as Robert Mapplethorpe. Gordon (2016) bases the narrative arc of her memoir on the creative impact of her breakup with the cofounder of Sonic Youth, Thurston Moore. Brix Smith Start (2016) is generous in her assessment of life and music with her ex-husband and founder

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of the Fall, Mark E. Smith, while Albertine (2014, ix) provides page numbers to passages on sex, drugs, and punk rock "for those in a hurry."

With these caveats in mind, I turn to three examples of music revisited in these memoirs in more detail, as discussed by the authors and based on an adapted musicological analysis, organized in order of their release.

The Slits, "So Tough" (*Cut*, 1979)

> We were trying to write great pop songs, but ended up creating something new by accident.
>
> —Viv Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys* (2014)

Albertine devotes several chapters to how the Slits' first album, *Cut* (1979), was made; groundbreaking musically for their use of reggae and African beats, improvised instrumentation, lead singer Ari Up's vocals and onstage moves (Inayatullah 2016; Stratton and Zuberi 2014). These rhythms and styles for a "girl band" labeled punk drew on different musical and cultural sensibilities to the loud thrashing, three-chord, very short songs of their contemporaries. This sound was due in no small part to the formative roles that the reggae and dub pioneers Dennis Bovell and Don Letts played in producing the album and the band's first videos. But it was also the effect of Ari Up's creative vision—she was only sixteen at the time—and unmitigated confidence about how the album should sound, insisting that session musicians should follow her lead (Albertine 2014, 213–4).

"So Tough" is a good example of the Slits' speaking-singing style, that is comparable to what is called *Sprechstimme* in modern classical music, based on their stylized screaming-yelling of the words. This track draws on a conversation between Albertine and John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten, frontman of the Sex Pistols and Ari Up's stepfather) about Sid Vicious (Sex Pistols bassist) and his deteriorating well-being. Albertine (2014, 217–8) recalls fondly how (p. 492) she was trying to make a guitar riff fit the words until Sid himself suggested repeating "the first part of the riff, do it twice … a great idea and I liked that he contributed to the song about himself." The track opens with voices (Ari Up and Albertine) muttering and then half-humming the refrain to create a sort of buzzing over the drumbeat; "He had fun experience / Nothing he does ever makes sense / He is only curious / Don't take it serious." Then the Albertine riff enters (20 seconds into the track). This first of three verses has four lines, interspersed with two backing-vocal phrases: "so tough" (twice) and "so hard" (twice). The second verse has eight lines, more snippets from the Lydon-Albertine conversation, punctuated with "so strong" (twice), "too long" (twice), "too much" (twice), "too fast," and "slow down," all spoken-sung in a descending scale—a conversation with a sort of punkish Greek Chorus.

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The guitar riffs link in to, and build from the chorus “He had fun experience / Nothing he does ever makes sense / He is only curious / Don’t take it serious.” Each of the four repeats differ in their rhythmic and vocal shaping as the last phrase repetitions (“Don’t take it serious”) build up and then release into the next verse. The song draws to a close with a section combining lines from chorus and verses that culminates by repeating “Don’t take it serious”; Albertine’s (on the off beat) reggae-strum builds in intensity until the abrupt ending at the end of the third, loud repetition, “DON’T TAKE IT SER-I-OUS.” The track then fades out with a recapitulation of the muttering voices from the intro. This ode to Sid Vicious, one of Albertine’s favorite tracks, presents the contradictions between his public and private personae (his losing struggle with drug addiction, alleged role in the violent death of his girlfriend Nancy Spungen, and his own death at the age of twenty-one) through the irony of the reference “so tough.”

The Fall: “U.S. 80’s–90’s” (*Bend Sinister*, 1986)

> Being a woman and playing bass guitar, or any guitar, seemed about the coolest thing in the world to me. Too bad I couldn’t *really* play. I didn’t realize that it didn’t matter. Punk had changed all of that. In less than a year I’d be writing my own songs, and playing in my own band. In three years’ time I would be in England recording the first song I’d ever written.
>
> —Brix Smith Start, *The Rise, the Fall, and the Rise* (2016)

This album is one on which Smith Start talks about working with her ex-husband, Mark E. Smith, founder of the Fall (he died in 2018 age sixty-one), particularly on his singular vision and approach to writing—as someone who did not play any of the instruments, and then recording songs as live improvisation. This aspect of the sound and effect of the Fall tracks as conscious “first takes,” the mistakes not edited out of the final mix, is integral to what Smith Start considers the essence of the Fall’s sound. It is also, to her mind, integral to the continuity of Mark E. Smith’s hold on the band despite innumerable changes in lineups: “Leaving in the mistakes, insisting on first takes, simplifying arrangements to the most elemental, tribal cacophony … aren’t recipes for brilliance, but herein the magic lies”(Smith Start 2016, 224).

(p. 493) She then recalls how the lyrics of “U.S. 80’s–90’s” draw on an experience of being interrogated about prescription pills at US Customs in Boston, generating their “own version of a hip-hop track” in which “Mark proclaims ‘I am the original white (big shot) rapper.” This track is based on a repetitive, “blistering and hypnotic” (Smith Start 2016, 222) combination of rhythms that open with a standard rock-drum intro; two main riffs from both lead and bass guitar back the style that characterizes Mark E. Smith’s vocals as he recounts, metacomments on this episode. He never sings in the conventional sense of the word; he intones, languidly slurs over the music backing in all the Fall’s lineups, ones that include two drummers, bass guitar, keyboards, lead and rhythm guitar, and (Smith Start often singing) backing vocals in various combinations and registers. Smith Start consid-

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ers her part on this track a heavier example of her riff-writing, based on what she considered would go “really well with what [the Fall] were doing and develop this kind of lead guitar technique—very hooky, simple, powerful, leads” (182). The hook in the song is the title, sung as refrain with a two-tone bass rhythm. The riff that Smith Start speaks of enters at 10 seconds into the track, a rocky, melodic lead-guitar line that provides the hook. Additional sound effects are provided by Mark E. Smith’s “idiotic megaphone” (225), discernible toward the end of the track at 3:33. Four minutes and forty seconds of ironic self-deprecation and geopolitical sardonicism held together by bass-guitar and lead-guitar riffs, said “idiotic” megaphone vocals, and a rock-steady drumbeat.

Sleater-Kinney: “Faraway” (*One Beat*, 2002)

> Mostly, I didn’t want to be a girl with a guitar. “Girl” felt like an identifier that viewers, especially male ones, saw as a territory upon which an electric guitar was a tourist, an interloper. I wanted the guitar to be an appendage—an extension even—of a body that was made more powerful by my yielding of it. … The archetypes, the stage moves, the representations of rebellion and debauchery were all male. … We wrote and played ourselves right into existence.
>
> —Carrie Brownstein, *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* (2015)

Part 2 in Brownstein’s *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* opens with an analysis of how her band Sleater-Kinney, affiliated with the aforementioned Riot Grrrl movement (Marcus 2010; Bayton 1998), worked. A three-piece, drums and two guitars (no bass), neither Brownstein nor Corin Tucker “were interested in playing too many bar or power chords. So my chords were half-formed; I was always trying to leave room for Corin … a story that on its own sounds unfinished, a sonic to-be-continued, designed to be completed by someone else” (Brownstein 2015, 87). As with the experimental punk rock pioneered by Kim Gordon’s (2015) band Sonic Youth, their guitar tunings were not standardized but instead tuned to fit Tucker’s vocal range. Brownstein notes how tuning “her guitar … [for example] in C-sharp … one and a half steps below standard tuning … creates a sourness, a darkness that you have to overcome if you’re going to create something at all harmonious and palatable. So, even when we’re getting toward a little bit of catchiness or pop sheen, there’s always (p. 494) an underlying bitterness to it. The tuning also forced Corin to sing differently—it pushed her into her higher registers, into a wailing, the outer edges” (Brownstein 2015, 87).

With the power of Janet Weiss as drummer, Brownstein (2015, 87) notes, there was no longer a need for a bass player to provide the obligatory “depth and low end.” Brownstein writes eloquently about how Sleater-Kinney refined ways to “sound like a full rock band” (87) despite the lack of a bassist, working to eschew any sense of a “lo-fi trebly noise … [learning to become] used to compensating yet unafraid of space or discord” (87). To the listener these subtleties, and the labor involved, may not be apparent given the full-throttle sound that this three-piece achieved through “ways of playing that

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were very compatible with each other" (87) as interwoven guitar lines playing in unison. Brownstein goes on to recall that another facet to "the uniqueness of our sound is that we rarely land on a basic chord—the music stays somewhere in between, it's always not quite right, which of course can sound more right than anything, or at least like nothing else" (87).

How does this work out for the album *One Beat* (2002) in the three minutes and forty-five seconds of "Faraway"? The lyrics here evoke first reactions to hearing about the 9/11 attacks: "Why can't I get along … with you." The first verse goes like this: "Seven thirty a.m. / Nurse the baby on the couch / Then the phone rings / Turn on the TV / Watch the world explode in flames / And don't leave the house." There is no musical intro in this track, as convention could dictate; the first line begins on the fourth beat of the first bar, both guitars in unison with drums in full throttle and Tucker's "wailing" vocals around two-three notes. The second verse follows the first after a brief link with guitar (1:02), which follows the same intervals of this melodic line. The song takes off in the middle section (1:14), upping the tempo with the two vocal lines separating into lead and backing to come together again on the main refrain: "Why can't I get along / Why can't I get along / Why can't I get along with you?" (sung twice). The last minute, a third of the song, consists of repeated variations of the main riff, to finish off with a return to the second part of the main verses (3:11): "Standing here on a one-way road / And I fall down, and I fall down / No other direction for this to go / And we fall down, and we fall down." And four bars of guitars in unison to the end. This track exemplifies their punk-based yet original sonic art, their political concerns being both lyrical and instrumental, as antiphonies of drive, build, call and response, and release.

Conclusion

> Since our music [Sonic Youth] can be weird and dissonant, having me center-stage also makes it that much easier to sell the band. Look, it's a girl, she's wearing a dress, and she's with those guys, so things must be okay. But that's not how we had ever operated as an indie band, I was always conscious not to be too much out front.
>
> —Kim Gordon, *Girl in a Band* (2015)
>
> I wanted to infuse the written word with the immediacy and frontal attack of rock 'n' roll … strong rhythmic chords and electric feedback.
>
> —Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (2010)

(p. 495) This contribution has considered how these artists' memoirs inform inquiries into the musical dimensions of the politics-performance nexus in three ways: (1) for their rewriting of the history of punk—music and politics—as a male domain in light of how subsequent generations consider its global significance and cultural legacy as a particular musicality of dissent; (2) as overdue contributions of the experiences and contribu-

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tions of women (straight, queer, working class, middle class) who co-created punk then and there; (3) as an emerging primary source, archival scripts that can address the restrictive lexicon for considering "female" rock, pop, punk personae and "feminine" modalities of performance (e.g., girl in a band, girl band, woman-with-guitar, backing vocalist, tortured star). Although written for the general public—fans and pundits—rather than an academic readership, these memoirs dovetail feminist and critical music scholarship looking to deconstruct the ethnocentrism and heteronormative and androcentric preoccupations that have characterized mainstream classical art and popular music scholarship and criticism to date. In terms of punk as a performance style and a politics of aesthetics (Bleiker 2009: Regev 2013) based on an antagonistic approach to both the classic pop song and stadium rock, what binds the Slits, Sonic Youth, the Fall, and Sleater-Kinney beyond the presence of these women is their experimental impulse. Not just reducible to respective levels of (lack of) technique or musical training but in terms of their commitment to an avant-garde or punk aesthetic to push the boundaries of the verse-chorus conventions and acoustics of the popular song. Where we can hear the differences from what is now regarded as a classical punk or pop song is in terms of the mix, e.g., inversions of the balance between instruments and vocals, different sorts of guitar tuning, unconventional time-signatures, instrumentation through other sorts of sound effects (e.g., glasses, matches, spoons), rhythmic combinations, and how these elements all came together (or not) in the studio from the point of view of production values.

The anecdotes, reflections, and personal recollections contained in these books resonate with critical debates on the sex-gender politics of performing—and writing about—experimental and politically conscious music that consciously defies mainstream conventions. Hadley Freeman (2016) puts her finger on the issue for where they will be allowed to reside in the burgeoning "rock memoir" literature: "How narrow the parameters still are for women in the public eye, who are expected to be exceptional but also an everywoman." As "truthful" these memoirs may or may not be, for fans or historians, here they are considered a timely contribution to the rescripting of punk's contribution to the range of musicalities that can be deployed as form of audiovisualized resistance to incumbent forces of social, cultural, and political order. Punk artists (choose) not only (to) die young; they also age, settle down, and move on to other creative pursuits.

Differing in the weight they give to these sorts of metalevel analyses, these authors also provide many ways to reconsider underlying essentialisms and determinisms of another sort: those that reduce the political legitimacy of socially engaged art and culture to whether they function for formalized politics, along the lines of scholarly and institutionalized discourses about what counts as politically "sovereign" or "dissident" terms of engagement, affiliation, or historical significance. In considering the musical dimensions of politics and/as performance, including how states might opt for one sort of musical soundtrack over another to assert and accompany their military or cultural power at home or abroad, transgressive music-making continues to trouble the status quo, in theory and in practice. These authors' reconstructions of their lives and artistic endeavors on the margins of the musical (p. 496) mainstream are, at the very least, testimony to how

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women have always been present, formative creative—and political—forces, equals to male colleagues who still get star billing.

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