

Towards a Feminist Analysis of "Women in Rock Music": Patti Smith's "Gloria"

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ABSTRACT

Within contemporary social theory, there is a developing literature which analyzes the position of women within various cultural practices such as literature, film, and the visual arts, and the beginnings of a critical cultural analysis of rock music. However, there are very few discussions of the position of women within the rock music industry. The goal of this article is to attempt to articulate one way feminists can understand rock music, women's participation in the genre, and the relationship of this cultural practice to the ideological production of gender. This paper is divided into two sections. First, I examine how even a critical feminist content analysis forecloses interrogations of "entertainment industries" or popular culture because of its uncritical assumption of a referential theory of language. To demonstrate this, I analyze one of the few articles on women in rock music: Deborah Harding and Emily Nett's "Women in Rock Music," which appeared in *Atlantis* in 1984. I conclude with a reading of Patti Smith's version of the rock and roll classic "Gloria" to emphasize the need for more detailed analyses of the subject positions assigned to women within rock music lyrics using feminist deconstructive and psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity. Contrary to Harding and Nett's position, "Gloria" demonstrates that it is possible for women to participate in rock music without acting as "male-identified women."

RÉSUMÉ

Dans les théories contemporaines sur la société et la culture, il existe un nombre croissant d'articles qui analysent la position des femmes dans la littérature, le cinéma, et les arts visuels. Peu à peu, on commence aussi à voir des articles critiques sur la musique rock. Cependant, il existe très peu d'articles qui étudient la position des femmes dans le rock and roll. Cet article se propose donc d'examiner la participation des femmes dans l'industrie du rock and roll, et la notion du genre de cette musique. Je me penche d'abord sur la position de Harding et Nett, exprimée dans leur article "Women and Rock Music," (qui parut dans la revue *Atlantis* en 1984) qui suggère que la participation des femmes dans cette industrie est impossible, puisque le rock and roll est du genre masculin. Ensuite, je discute la ré-écriture de la chanson "Gloria" par Patti Smith, afin de montrer les possibilités qu'ont les femmes de redéfinir le genre. J'utilise des théories contemporaines de psychanalyse, de déconstruction et de féminisme afin d'aborder cette question. En effet, malgré la position de Harding et Nett, j'avance que la chanson "Gloria" arrive à montrer aux femmes les possibilités qu'elles ont de participer dans la musique rock, sans qu'elles aient besoin d'agir, pour autant, comme des "femmes définies par les hommes."

Part I—The Limitations of Content Analysis: A Critique of Harding and Nett

The trap of representational coherence

Although the title of this paper is "Towards a Feminist Analysis of 'Women in Rock Music': Patti Smith's 'Gloria,'" I would like to begin my analysis by deconstructing the title "Women in Rock Music" because its use of terms is paradigmatic of the view of language implicit in a sociological content analysis.¹ This view of language succumbs to what Teresa de Lauretis calls the "trap of representational coherence" and it weakens Harding and Nett's feminist analysis of women's participation in, or absence from rock music and the rock music industry.² By the "trap of representational coherence," I mean our propensity, as academic critics, to collapse distinct and hetero-

geneous phenomena into a single term. The existence of this term is then explained by a single cause so that the multiple meanings of the term, as well as the historical production of its significations are believed to be resolved under the same sign. The terms, which I have borrowed from Harding and Nett's title, but which need deconstruction are "women" and "rock music": and the single cause which explains both of these terms in their article is sexism.

While sexism exists, and is one of the conditions which explains the present situation of both women and rock music, we must be certain that our analysis is not making a historically produced condition into a metaphysical or ontological necessity. Thus, although the intention of *this* article is to understand the ways women participate in or are prohibited from participating in rock music because of

patriarchy, I am not interested in uncovering a specifically female *jouissance* or femininity — that is, a type of feminine pleasure that is specifically inherent to women *per se* — as an alternative strategy. Rather, I want to analyze the “technologies of gender,” such as rock music, which reproduce both men and women as gendered subjects with specific behaviours and pleasures appropriate to each gender.³

In other words, I am interested in the *social* construction of our *natural* self-understanding of our sexuality; a social construction of sexuality which is constantly reproduced for subjects in signifying practices, such as rock and roll. This naturalization hides what is essentially the process of semiosis; that is, when the processes within culture produce attributes or meanings to both signs and subjectivities.⁴ The question that I pose as a feminist is how can women articulate sexual desire/pleasure within symbolic systems such as rock music, that encourage active sexual desire/pleasure for men, while women’s sexuality is normalised as passive, subservient, non-existent, or insignificant? What interventionist possibilities exist for women writing within traditional male genres?

Deconstructing “Women”

Analyzing rock music as a possible zone of intervention for women provides a challenge for feminist theory because of rock’s reputation as “a frenzied celebration of masculine potency.”⁵ According to Harding and Nett, the lyrics of 40 songs bear this out. They conclude that rock music is inherently sexist for several reasons: its origins as a *male* working class challenge to the established symbolic order; the unequal distribution of the sexes within the industry; the predominance of male listeners and consumers; the dearth of women performers within the genre; and finally, because the lyrics and the album covers depict women in purely biological roles as submissive nurturing mothers or submissive nurturing playmates. Harding and Nett argue that these dual images themselves have two aspects to them, which reflect men’s ambivalences towards women, depending on what needs they need satisfied; the nurturing mother can be sexually uninteresting, demanding, and enslaving; the sexually exciting woman can also be a dangerous castrating bitch. Because “music is a direct expression of ideas,” rock music, as a manifestation of this behaviour, provides a “wealth of information” about the domination of men and the subordination of women in our culture.⁶ Thus, it is argued, rock music is important to study, but it is not a conducive genre for women to express their needs, desires, or experiences.

This last objection is the primary focus of Harding and Nett’s analysis. It is also the most flawed: not perhaps in terms of its conclusion that there are primarily two images of women circulating in our culture, but in terms of its method, and the political message implied by this method. While I agree with Harding and Nett that women and men are portrayed differently and unequally within images — generally, men are represented as the active subjects, while women are represented as passive objects — I disagree with their view of how this process occurs. In fact, they do not really ask this question, taking instead the differences and the dichotomy between men and women as self-evident. Harding and Nett’s analysis goes awry because it lapses into a notion of these subject positions as essential or natural behaviours for each sex. Their concept of gender identity is simplistic, and unconsciously reduces man and woman to biological categories, prior to their positioning within cultural, linguistic or economic practices. This is an important point to consider when contemplating the possibility of a specifically female, feminine, or feminist culture, and warrants a close examination of their article.

As Harding and Nett note, it is precisely the limited view of women as biological beings that contributes to sexism: “Male-identified women are always defined and understood within their biological capacities, either of reproduction or sexual arousal and gratification.”⁷ However, within their analysis, sex and gender, as well as sex and sexism, are continually equated so that the biological, sociological and psychological are collapsed into single terms. These are treated as analogous, when in fact, they are not. This is belied in such sentences as “...*men* define the *female* as they define everything else”⁸ and “patriarchal socialization has deprived them of a *feminine* consciousness.”⁹ While sex and gender are not completely separable, it is curious that “men,” a social category, define “the female,” a biological category. Surely more attention would be paid to this distinction if the issue of sexuality and the process of engendering had been more clearly articulated. Surely the consciousness to be striven for is a *feminist* consciousness, a political and social consciousness of woman’s position in patriarchal culture, not a *feminine* consciousness. Without more precise terminology, Maribel Morgan or Phyllis Schafly might be said to be representatives of a feminine consciousness, because they have a clear notion of what “the feminine” is and should be, in relation to “masculine” behaviour: or a female singer, such as Sheena Easton might be said to have a feminine consciousness because she sits at home happily awaiting her man who works all day. While I am sure this is not what Harding and Nett desire, for they criticize the

female singers of Heart in this way, the question remains: if women can act in male identified ways, then what is a "feminine," or more importantly, a *feminist* consciousness?

Within Harding and Nett's article, woman or the feminine, is in danger of becoming a reified term equivalent to all that is victimized; this becomes most clear in their conclusion that feminist musicologists should investigate "the belittled role of women in the development of woman-defined styles of music and the takeover by dominant men..."¹⁰ Thus, their language, which is meant to be descriptive, continually, unwittingly and conservatively ontologizes woman as the belittled object of male definitions. The value of the terms is simply reversed, so that woman becomes the positive term, while man becomes the negative, without questioning the unified coherence of male and female sexuality implied by this polar oppositioning or its hierarchical structure of value.

Harding and Nett develop the equation of "woman as victim" by decontextualising lyrics from the songs in order to make the data conform to their thesis. This is a crucial point in our discussion of how feminist sociological content analysis approaches culture and language, as opposed to an analysis of language and culture from a critical feminist semiotic or discursive point of view.

Harding and Nett are so eager to prove that "The only sense that can be made of the representations of women found in this music which is created by and distributed by men for men's taste and consumption is in terms of the sexual and sexist fantasies so blatant in its lyrics" that they ignore or distort all evidence to the contrary.¹¹ Thus, they completely miss the critical moment in Rough Trade's "Physical Violence." In fact, their paraphrasing reverses the meaning of the lyrics to insinuate that Carole Pope of Rough Trade has internalized the "victim mentality." I quote from Harding and Nett: "The victim theme is also found among the female singers...she describes his hands on her throat, her face turning red, and feeling like a punching bag." The original lyrics are: "I can feel your hand on my throat. Face turning red. I am *not* your punching bag."¹² Paraphrasing one line of a song decontextualizes and distorts the lyrics, whose meaning is never fully explained in one line, but must be analyzed in relation to the rest of the tune. Within these lyrics, violence is "rampant," but it is not advocated — it is brought to the surface as an unwanted part of many sexual relations. Thus, while on the one hand, they criticize the depiction of violence, assuming that its depiction encourages violent practices, on the other hand, Harding and Nett criti-

cize rock for removing women from the practices of everyday life: "The exotic, wishful fantasy surroundings and nudity or dramatic clothing removes the woman in the pictures for rock music records from the everyday world of work in the home in which real women move."¹³ In other words, they want a more realistic portrayal of the lives of everyday women, while retaining the power to decide which experiences are real for women and which are not: aesthetic realism is thus condemned and advocated within the same article.

This type of empirical sociological study is concerned with being realistic or representative. However, it does not interrogate the notion of representation, which is problematic, and even within the accepted sociological quantitative standards of representation, Harding and Nett's analysis falls short.¹⁴ For example, in their analysis of rock album covers, they explicitly disregard album covers in which "the representation was of a band member or lead singer portrayed as herself."¹⁵ This biases their sampling towards those images which have a metaphorical dimension, which they then criticize as objectionable because they are not realistic. As well, in order to make the claim that rock and roll depicts women exclusively in biological or sexual roles, it would have been useful to compare these images with the depiction of men to strengthen their argument; for, if they admit that "there is no doubt that rock music is erotic music," then it is obvious that when women are portrayed, they will be portrayed sexually.¹⁶ The question is, how are the sexes portrayed in an intertextual relationship to each other that assigns a fixed, unified and differential value to each sex?

This typical content analysis misunderstands much of rock music, even the musical mainstream, because it treats language as literal, rather than having a poetic, metaphorical or connotative potential. Thus, the use of animal metaphors for women is condemned because it implies that men think we are subhuman, and "because they are not quite human, they must be controlled and dominated by men, not only for male benefit, but for her own good."¹⁷ The problem is not that animal metaphors are used, but that they continually inscribe women as "the hunted," while men are portrayed as "the hunter" — it lies in the relation of metaphors to each other, rather than in the use of metaphors. The problem with this stereotyping is not that it is distorted or distorting, but that it continually anchors practices and meanings as the absolute meaning, rather than as a process of semiosis.

Thus Harding and Nett decontextualize in order to criticise and believe that language can be fully representa-

tional and without metaphors. This position on language leads to a critique of patriarchal domination based on a problematic set of assumptions about sexuality. A critique of sexism reverts into a critique of sex through a specious chain of reasoning. Rock and roll, it is said, is bad because it excludes women and because it proselytizes derogatory and violent images of women. Rock preaches that sex is fun only if it is illicit. Sex is used to sell rock, and women are what is being sold. They insinuate that it is no coincidence that rock and roll's rise occurred after the proliferation of pornography. Furthermore the presence of pornography in our culture proves that bourgeois sensibilities have been thrown off. Thus, rock's image as a challenge to bourgeois cultural norms cannot be sustained.¹⁸

However, privileging sexual activity that is for procreation but not pleasure is still a part of our sexist culture so that many forms of sexual behaviour, such as lesbianism, sodomy, bisexuality, transvestism, *are* considered illicit. Bourgeois sensibilities have not been cast away; in fact, I would argue that pornography is symptomatic of a bourgeois culture where everything, including sexuality, is a potential commodity. Finally, what is a completely realistic or transparent portrayal of women? Is the objection to fantasy? For Harding and Nett's analysis potentially bars women from expressing sexual desire or lust in anything but rigidly realistic terms. They even explain away the success of women in "asexual" folk music as a sign of women's inability to express themselves sexually within patriarchy: "it is harder for a woman than a man to portray her sexuality in a way that contributes positively to her image..."¹⁹ While I agree that within patriarchy, women's sexuality is always in danger of being coopted, they fail to recognize that women have portrayed their sexuality in ways that are not male-defined; thus, participation or the sexual expression of female sexuality is implicitly discouraged — in their eagerness to portray women as the victims of men, sex and sexism become more and more synonymous throughout the article. In the end we are left in a world without sex, the "real" world — the world of the home, which has not been a particularly liberating space for women.

This brings us to the problem of an analysis which attempts to analyze sexism or judge images in terms of their positive or negative images of women. While Harding and Nett admit that male-defined images of women are ambivalent, their notion of ambivalence and the instability of these meanings does not go far enough: they simply lapse into simplistic dichotomies of two images, each divided by two sides, both good and bad. To use another example from *Rough Trade*, the lyrics of the song

"High School Confidential" are said to be sexist because they stereotype women as being erotic and feared (she makes his body twitch) and portraying a sexual coldness — two ambivalent images in the song. However, as an example of sexism based on their criteria of the male-defined woman, this is problematic because of Carole Pope's androgynous sexual image, as well as her publicly lesbian position. Harding and Nett's continual interpretation of lyrics as sexist reveal their own heterosexist bias. Is she singing the song as a "male-defined woman," or a lesbian who is both attracted and in admiration of female teenage sexuality? The song does not have one clear interpretation, and far from being an ambiguity that should be resolved, it is an ambiguity which gave the song popular commercial success, while containing a potentially subversive message about proper female sexual behaviour.

Images cannot be analyzed for their content, which can be separated from their context, but must be interpreted semiotically, or in relation to other systems and images of meanings. In Harding and Nett's litany of single lines from rock lyrics, examples of sexism are unambiguously portrayed. Not only does this produce specific distortions, such as the above mentioned example of Carole Pope, but images never have a completely homogeneous content or meaning which can be taken as given: they can be recontextualized to give them another meaning. As Elizabeth Cowie states: "the image means not only in and of itself but also connotes its place in other discourses."²⁰ To give another example of how this makes Harding and Nett's interpretation of their data inadequate, consider their interpretation of the "bad" or "negative" image of woman and their conclusion that "...in her place in bed a woman is something to be feared."²¹ Rather than concluding that these male-defined lyrics may recognize either consciously or unconsciously the power of female sexual difference, Harding and Nett interpret all instances of representation as sexist, and in fact, reinscribe the notion of female sexuality as submissive. We must be careful how we use the terms "man" and "woman," for masculinity and femininity are not simply oppositional qualities or biological attributes, but positions in the symbolic practice of representation and self-representation. Meaning is dependent upon context, and it is precisely the context that is destroyed in their content analysis.

Yet, as Cowie warns, while the image does not enclose a homogeneous meaning, neither is it permanently open; readings remain in the production of the intertextuality, as well as the intratextuality of the image. We can judge images, but only with care, and in a fashion that is sensitive to the historical contingency of this interpretation.

Thus, there is neither a given unity of meaning to enable this, nor a simple evaluative system for defining sexism; nor is there a reality separable from language or ideology, completely free from possible misuse for sexist ends. To give another example, a picture of a mother and child is neither negative nor positive. It can be understood as a stereotype of all women as mothers (negative), or as depicting one aspect of a woman's experience (positive). Alternative readings are not just a question of new content, but the result of a different strategy of production of the image in relation to its intertextual space; this is precisely what Patti Smith's rendition of "Gloria" does. Analysis such as Harding and Nett's delegitimizes their own legitimate criticisms of performers such as Scorpion, or Ted Nugent, by assuming that all references to women or sexuality are sexist.

Analyzing "Rock music"

This brings me to my second objection with Harding and Nett's other term—there is no such thing as rock and roll *per se*; that is, rock music is not the uniform or homogeneous musical experience that academic critics outside of the genre assume it to be. Critics such as Harding and Nett do not acknowledge distinctions in the genre which are important differences to listeners of rock and roll; there are significant differences within rock's subdivisions, such as heavy metal, psychedelia, punk, cow punk, reggae, ska or rhythm and blues—and each of these different rock traditions has a particular signification in different regions. As McRobbie and Frith point out, we cannot distinguish between the Stranglers and Souxie and the Banshees, or in this case, Carole Pope of Rough Trade and Ted Nugent, if we approach rock's ideological content as just another commodity form within the patriarchal capitalist mass entertainment industry. In fact, "the problem of analyzing the particular ideological work of a particular piece of music is avoided with the assumption that all commodities have the same effect."²² This homogenizing effect seems intrinsic to the study of popular culture undertaken within sociological analyses, such as those of Harding and Nett. Furthermore, in the case of Harding and Nett, they borrow their definition of rock from the definition of the CRTIC without analyzing that definition, or supplying it to the reader.

Rock music, like other forms of entertainment or popular culture, suffers from an academic elitism that separates high culture or art from mass culture or entertainment, and sociological content analyses such as Harding and Nett's share this elitism. Unlike literature or classical music, the entertainment industry is not perceived as hav-

ing any specific aesthetic qualities that make it worth analyzing in any detailed fashion. It is treated as generalizable, the same, representationally coherent. Universal claims, such as rock is "probably the most blatantly misogynistic and aggressive form of music currently listened to..." are then made based upon these absences of distinction.²³ By assuming that the high turnover of songs in the industry means that we cannot learn how patriarchal ideological effects work on consumer listeners in particular songs, we *do* ignore a valuable source of information about the transmission of patriarchal values—and women's participation in rock becomes a homogenizing, ahistorical experience. There is no one singular experience of women within rock music, there is not a uniform genre we can call "rock music." The phrase "women in rock" collapses both the terms "women" and "rock music" and women's participation in rock music to one standard, uniform category—regardless of the differences in their music, race, class, nationality, or time of their historical participation in the music industry.

Within Harding and Nett's analysis, this leads them to dismiss women who participate in the industry as women whose socialization has deprived them of a feminine consciousness: either they are male-defined because they portray themselves as subservient to men or they front all-male bands, or, it is even suggested, women's increased participation may be a sign of the industry's decline. Instead of celebrating women's resistance to patriarchal definitions, or their participation as active subjects, woman becomes further inscribed as "object, the defined, the follower, the passive recipient to be used and abused."²⁴ They contradict themselves by pointing out that Pat Benatar, Deborah Harry, Carole Pope and Marianne Faithfull are "producing lyrics as sexual and intimidatingly aggressive as any currently marketed by men," and then citing these same lyrics as sexist.²⁵ Thus, the use of these uniform categories such as "women" and "rock music" imply that subjects are interpellated into singular subject positions. I would argue that they are themselves sexist because they assume that all women are doing essentially the same thing. "Women's music," like other large sociological terms such as "black music" then becomes a vague and nebulous undifferentiated other. Thus the very methodological structure, and epistemological presuppositions within this sociological content analysis guarantees, in advance, that what is transgressive, counterhegemonic, or transformative will be ignored, or in this particular case, cited as a sign of the industry's decline and eventual downfall.

The final question asked is “what do women have to gain in entering into a stage that is largely the innovation of a subculture of working class men, and is now part of the culture industry of late capitalism?”²⁶ The answer of course, has already been predetermined by the analysis — nothing. Women should avoid rock music and stick to woman-defined music and woman-defined styles.

While I do believe it is important that women struggle for self-representation and that genres exist that are predominantly female, contrary to Harding and Nett, I do not believe that women can find a genre that “authentically” represents their desires and is specifically unique to women. The idea of an exclusively feminine genre that can authentically represent the female voice is predicated on a conception of a female subject that does not challenge the dominant representation of woman as a purely biological being, but in fact reinscribes this biological representation within the terms of its discourse; it depicts a feminine nature prior to its socio-cultural positioning and it draws a necessary causal relation between genre and gender. Although empirical analysis can be used to document how the culture industry is circulating images at any point in time, it is even more important from a political perspective not to assume that genres or genders are fixed into such homogeneous, unequivocal, ontological categories; for what possibilities of intervention exist if all intervention is automatically branded as some form of cooptation?

In summary, it is my contention that Harding and Nett’s analysis is riddled with theoretical difficulties and political traps for women. It presupposes that aesthetics should be realistic and that all images portrayed should represent a reality; yet when it is portrayed, they tend to depict it as advocating this condition. It assumes that there is a natural female sexuality that male sexuality represses essentializing a historical condition into an ontological position; men dominate and will always dominate women, thus they are the aggressors and we are the victims. It then draws specious causal connections between musical styles and this essentialized version of sexuality. It conceives of all aspects of the music industry as exploitative, and subsequently analyzes all lyrics, and all participation within the industry as some form of false consciousness. Finally, because it draws a picture of the totality that is homogeneous, seamless and undifferentiated, the only intervention possible is one that can claim to have an entirely separate and untainted origin outside of the present system and history. It thereby places feminist theorists in the position of critics rather than as practitioners of a “critique” of culture, and as a result, feminism becomes the censor of

pleasure and sexuality. It thus reinstates itself in the place of patriarchal moralism, which it wishes to condemn. As I have argued, this is because it is based on a problematic notion of gender identity, which in itself is linked to a particular view of language — one which falls into the “trap of representational coherence.”

Part II — The Politics of Pleasure: Patti Smith’s “Gloria”

The reason I raise these issues is not simply for the perverse pleasure of disagreement, but because these theoretical questions are also strategic questions. The point of course is that one cannot transcend one’s condition completely. There is nothing outside patriarchy or capitalism that is somehow unsullied. Although there are margins, they are never completely free from that which is dominant or hegemonic; indeed, perhaps we should stop using these terms as if there were only two positions, margin/centre, in/out, woman/man. We only ever operate within complex matrices of power; and it is the way we construct our symbolic relationship to the world that constitutes ideology and language as a *lived* relationship; hence the battle for the control of meaning — the battle around discourse — are economic, social and political questions.

To show how ideology is inscribed in lyrics, and to understand one strategy that women can employ to subvert their positioning in this system, I will focus my analysis on a specific song: Patti Smith’s 1975 version of the rock classic “Gloria” originally recorded by Van Morrison and Them ten years earlier.²⁷ Smith’s brilliant rewriting of this song intervenes into the original text, interrupting its placement of woman as a fetishistic object of male desire, produced by and for a predominantly male listening audience, reinscribing, in fact, what it means to be a sexually active fe/male in our culture. Recognising that the generic woman, Gloria, is also herself and a metaphor for her own suppressed sexual pleasure, she gives a voice to this woman; a woman who was originally spoken of by Morrison, and not an active speaking subject. Smith does not simply insert a “woman’s point of view” into the song, nor does she replace a “negative image of woman” for another more “positive image of woman”; she displaces her original subject position, thereby questioning the notion of a static or fixed male or female gender identity with a set of corresponding characteristics and behaviours.²⁸

Recent French feminist criticism, and the work of British feminists centered around the now defunct journal *m/f*,

have brought to our attention that what is problematic about patriarchy is not simply the stereotypes it portrays of women, but the hierarchical relationship it establishes between the sexes in social institutions and the very structure of our language; hence, the term “patriarchy” has become usurped by the neologism “phallogocentrism.”²⁹ This leads to analyses not simply of the content of images, but the structure of narratives to understand the way subject positions are constituted within the lyrics and in the larger social field. This provides feminist musicologists with valuable tools for analyzing the way that images “position,” rather than “represent” women — it is within this context that we can then decide whether these images are restricting or harmful to women — that is, if they are sexist.

Their original version of “Gloria” provides some important methodological lessons for feminist analyses of rock music. In comparison to other rock songs, it is not overtly sexist; that is, it does not depict explicitly degrading or harmful images of women; yet it is paradigmatic in other respects. This specific song is part of this larger intertextual/sexual network of oppression that Gayatri Spivak characterizes in this way:

...the patrynomic...keeps the transcendental ego of the dynasty identical in the eye of the father. The irreducible importance of the name and the law in this situation makes it quite clear that the question is not merely one of the psycho-social-sexual behaviour, but the production and consolidation of reference and meaning. The desire to make one's progeny represent his presence is also the desire to make one's words represent the full meaning of one's intention. Hermeneutic, legal, or patrilineal, it is the prerogative of the phallus to declare itself sovereign source...³⁰

Because it is based on an identification with the symbolic power that the penis represents in patriarchal culture, “phallogocentrism” is not a position restricted to biological men: it is also a position that women can take up and identify with; it is a position of power which privileges the phallus. This text, Morrison's “Gloria,” with its linear narrative of desire, its positioning of the phallus as the determining moment, the point towards which the narrative moves, is indeed phallogocentric, constructed around a teleology of male conquest over woman. Within the narrative, she is both present and absent: present as that which is to be captured, possessed and controlled; absent as self-determining subject.³¹

Morrison begins by describing Gloria's bewitching physical attributes: “five feet four,” “hair of dark brown,” she is the woman of his dreams who “comes around”: a euphemism for her sexual availability. Part of the effectiveness of this rock song, like many other rock songs, is its use of repetition. To create an air of suspense, and to suspend the climax, Morrison repeats the message that she not only comes around, but that she comes around *here* “at about midnight” to make him feel “so good” and “so fine.”

He spells her name. This is the well-known chorus of “Gloria”. G-L-O-R-I-A, Gloria: derived from the religious term “Glory”: to give exalted praise, honour or distinction; resplendent beauty or magnificence; state of absolute happiness or contentment; the splendour and bliss of heaven; to go to glory; to die. His fulfillment. His ecstasy. His transcendent moment. The subsumption of her identity and her pleasure to his — at the same time her name is invoked precisely to represent this pleasure. Gloria. A name aptly chosen to represent all women, for as a sign of sexual pleasure she is every woman, Sherry, Wendy, Sandy, Susie, who has ever been named as a male fantasy within the narrative rock and roll.

She is a fetish object in both the Freudian and Marxist sense: a way of controlling his fear and anxiety of her and the threat of potential castration that Freud says women pose to men: “a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it.”³² However, both Freud and Marx did not adequately theorize the position of women within the process of this fetishization — this has been the important contribution of feminist theory of spectatorship, which has developed primarily within the context of film theory. To briefly summarize, as Laura Mulvey shows in her analysis of fetishism, women occupy three relations to the phallus in most images: they are portrayed with phallic substitutes, such as whips, or spiked heels, and in this case they are dominant and represent a threat; or they are being punished with a phallic object, in which case they are subordinate; or they themselves are portrayed as phallic objects of male desire through the positioning of their bodies, or in this case, the invocation of their names.³³ Continually figuring women as a sexual object to be captured is perhaps a sign of male fear and anxiety about their own sexuality as it is defined within patriarchy. In this sense (and there may be others), fetishism and sexism are the turning away from woman's sexual difference and the failure to comprehend it from any perspective other than in relationship to male sexuality — the presence or the absence of a penis. It is a fixation with “woman” which upholds a patriarchal system out of

a look of disbelief. Paradoxically, it oscillates between an exalted fascination of woman as other, and the degradation of this sexual difference; thus, woman's sexuality is often given a mystical, supernatural force at the same time it is seen as a threat to be controlled.³⁴

However, it is a sexual economy that is tied to the economic and social reality of male ownership and control of women's bodies and our sexuality; and the confusion of exaltation and degradation often produces our own complicity with this system. Devoid of any reality in this male economy of desire, we women become, as Marx says, fetishistic commodities; our sexuality is given a mystical origin and nature, divorced from a life process and the process of (re-)production within social practices. We become things to be bought, sold, and circulated; an endless circulation of infinitely replaceable women's names.³⁵

The second verse after the first chorus conveys the dual aspects of suspense and conquest by incorporating a military marching rhythm as a musical code to indicate her arrival: we follow her movements as she walks down *his* street, to *his* house, she knocks on *his* door to make *him* feel all right. The narrative celebrates *his* sexuality, which is emphasized by the use of the first person possessive "my" at the beginning of street, house, door, and room. The sequence does not *reflect* a male sexual ontology, but *normalizes* it as active. She is drawn to the song from his perspective. Her sexuality exists only in relation to his prick, the phallus, which is literally the point on the horizon to which she moves. She does not forthrightly express her desires or needs. To do so would challenge the privileged position of the phallus — it would be "unlady-like."

However, the song itself remains a celebration and encouragement of sexual pleasure through its techniques of repetition, meter, rhyme, and rhythm. It is compelling, danceable, fun; thus, in relationship to its lyrics, we, as women, are placed in a contradictory position. Men can identify with, indeed sing the lyrics without upsetting any heterosexual cultural norms. However, if women listen to the lyrics and sing them, they can do so only from two positions: either they identify with "Gloria" and accept their positioning as passive objects; or if they decide to sing of sexual pleasure, in patriarchal culture, they first do so from the position of the male voice before they can move beyond this position.

This is the paradox explored by Patti Smith. Her version of "Gloria" displaces the phallogocentrism of the original narrative through her occupation of a series of subject positions, sung in a polyphony of voices: the son,

the female hysteric, the generic woman, a specific woman, the lesbian woman. To correspond to these different identifications, Smith breaks apart the linearity of the musical structure into four different movements: the introductory narrative; her moment of transgression as she masquerades as the son; her moment of recognition that she and Gloria are "the same," leading to their climax in an autoerotic or lesbian encounter outside of patriarchal law; and the denouement where she is reminded of her sin and re-enters "normal culture," albeit simultaneously transformed and transforming the boundaries of normality.

It is Smith's genius that she makes clear the connection between male privilege, the modern rock and roll tale and biblical myth; she subtitles her version of "Gloria," "In Excelsis Deo: Glory to God on Highest," the great doxology in Christianity exclaimed by the shepherds at the moment of Christ's birth. Immediately she challenges the Christian belief that God gave the world his only son for our salvation. "Jesus died for Somebody's sins," she says, "but not mine." Because accepting this myth means that one accepts its hierarchical privileging of sons over daughters, Smith replies that salvation will have to wait; "my sins they belong to me, me."

Smith understands the possible consequences of her rejection and instead of atoning, complying, she pushes her sin even further. "People say beware, but I don't care; their words are just rules and regulations to me, me." Rejecting these rules and regulations which confine her, the position that Smith first adopts is that of a male figure, perhaps Christ, the son. Her vocal position is that of a cocky, self-assured male. This is marked by both a tempo and rhythm change, from the dirge of the narrative to a jazz tempo and swing. Like the phallic mother who recognizes the power of male sexuality but does not challenge its position, she is content to appropriate its power for herself. She walks into a room, proud, ignoring her fears, moving beyond what is appropriate sexual behaviour for women. She feels that anything is allowed.

However, her journey within, and then outside of this symbolic universe has just begun; phallic mothers or wayward daughters masquerading as sons face punishment and social recrimination for their hubris. Smith holds this position until, as she says, "she looks out the window and sees a sweet young thing", "leaning on the parking meter". This window is not simply a window to an external world where she encounters another separate being: it is also a mirror which reflects her personal and social position back to herself and forces her to recognise her subject position within this patriarchal order.

This is an important moment in the song, for it is at this point of her rejection of her disguise as a “son of the father” that also marks her inability to hold the phallic position as the point from which her desires circulates. It is her own image as other that she sees; thus she shifts from a masculine position to the comprehension that this other is herself; in psychoanalytic terms, it is the point of identification and transference. However, it is also a reversal of Lacan’s mirror stage; instead of linking her “i” to a socially elaborated situation (the symbolic), her eye/i has entry out of this social symbolic order. The desire that she has is no longer to occupy the position of the son, but for this other who is split off from herself, denied to her—woman.³⁶ One of the contradictions within patriarchy and in the process of the fetishistic commodification of women’s bodies, is that it makes both men and women desire women’s bodies—although for women, the consummation of this desire is short circuited because of taboos against homosexuality.

Although at this point in her musical text, Smith has not made any explicit musical references to the original, it is at this point of transference that she recalls Morrison’s words. She repeats the lines from the original, “O she looked so good, o she looked so fine, and I’ve got this crazy feeling that I’m going to make her mine.” This second move, the movement outside of the symbolic netherworld into the presymbolic, the unconscious or the semiotic is again marked with a tempo change; the calm, collected imitation of a jazz style is replaced with the fast and frenzied pace of a typical rock song. Corresponding with this tempo change, there is also a change in the tenor of Smith’s voice; she sings in a higher, more sexually charged pitch. It is also worth noting, that unlike Morrison, Smith defers the moment of naming; she does not name “her” until the moment of recognition and merger of the two personalities; it is at this moment that the repressed voice of “Gloria” will be brought into the song.

Smith loses control at this point, her voice containing resonances of hysteria. She imitates/mocks the degradation that she, as all women, has suffered through countless rock songs, recounting it in order to move beyond it: “Then I step on her, here she comes.” Her confusion in this section of the tune expresses her anger and resentment for having been made the passive object of his gaze, and the vacillations between subject positions that she is experiencing as she recognizes herself as her own object of desire. Smith recreates this primal scene of Gloria’s entry into the masculine economy of desire. She repeats Morrison’s progression of movement; down the street, through the door, up the stairs, through the halls. She repeats the

chorus “she was so good, she was so fine,” changing the declaration that she will make Gloria hers into the present tense.

At this point in the narrative, Smith hears knocking on her door: she looks up, and like Morrison, she sees that it is midnight, the hour of magic, transformation, metamorphosis — the witching hour. “Gloria” leans on the couch, whispers to her and they take the big plunge, which she substitutes for Morrison’s coming. Gloria tells Smith her name; Smith indicates the consummation of their desire by replacing the verb “to look,” in the phrase “she looked so good,” to “she was so fine”. It is a shared moment of pleasure, not simply an appropriation of the experience of pleasure by the other, which would repeat the pattern of sexuality as possession and ownership; not ecstasy as transcendence outside of the body, “the splendour and bliss of heaven,” but the ecstasy of experiencing sensation without every part of one’s body — full embodiment.

This pleasure is not something that Smith wants to hide: she will tell the world “that I made her mine.” She brings to the surface the connection between sexuality and possession; but while in Morrison’s text “woman” is positioned as the object and possession of male desire, in Smith’s text, the desire is the desire of woman for woman; thus, it is a form of self-possession. At this point, the song’s narrative is punctuated with Smith’s verbalization of Gloria’s name. She repeats the mode of the spelling of the name inaugurated by Morrison, paying particular attention to the repetition of the letter “i” to underscore the point that she/Gloria are one and the same. The music reaches a crescendo, as she/Gloria climaxes.

Their mutual pleasure is interrupted by “knocks on the door.” She cannot remain outside the phallic order without once again being punished for her rejection of “natural” heterosexual relations. Guilty: for rejecting her position as passive, non-speaking subject within the original song; guilty: for rejecting the phallus as the point from which pleasure is generated, either through auto-affection or lesbianism; guilty: for wanting to make her knowledge of this pleasure public.³⁷ She references another Morrison song, “Brown-eyed Girl” at this moment of confused frenzy: “Who’s at the stadium? Twenty thousand girls are coming after her”; she hears the bells chime, reminding her that ordinary time ultimately governs. As she reaches the final scene, the pace again slows and as she is brought to consciousness, she ends the song with her first words, “Jesus died for somebody’s sins...but not mine,” leading into the chorus of Gloria; ultimately rejecting the guilt she is supposed to feel for her displacement of man as active

subject, woman as passive object, not in their simple reversal but by shifting between these subject positions within the narrative of the song.

Smith's re-writing of Morrison's song succeeds in capturing and replicating the vitality of a rock and roll song; it is urgent, simple, moves the body to dance, and the lips to sing. Yet around these elements she constructs a beautifully woven narrative that does not suppress the original, but uses an already familiar tune within the history of rock to over-write, over-lay the original with a lesbian story of female desire, seduction and sexual pleasure. It is a complex sexual/textual subversion which displaces the name of the father, breaking apart, rupturing the original rhythm allowing her own economy of desire to circulate.

This method of over-writing breaks down the musical structure of the original by implementing tempo and rhythm changes that are used to mark shifts in the subject positions that she plays with in the narrative. She does not simply reject the original as if she could reject the history of patriarchy, which has sculpted the language within which we speak and the genres within which we write. She appropriates its power, not in a simple reversal of subject positions, but she transforms it while refusing the attempt to fix her as a passive, fetishized object devoid of subjectivity, devoid of sexual desires. Her own subjectivity is constantly displaced from one place to another; from a socially identifiable masculine position to the recognition of the exclusion of female desire. She challenges the fixity of these socially circumscribed identities so that the ahistorical immutability of sexual identity is itself challenged.

In conclusion, the feminist concern with language is not simply a game of the insertion or substitution of pronouns (he/she) into sentences. It encompasses a larger issue, as it is through the ideological myths of a fixed social/symbolic identity, and the privileging of the phallus, not just in terms of content, but in terms of structure, that patriarchal ideology is perpetuated. As Teresa de Lauretis says, although we might feel annoyance at having to participate in this game, language and metaphors do not inherently belong to one sex; signs can be detached from their original meanings which are never completely anchored.³⁸ This is an important point, for it helps us to understand the difference between and analysis which looks at language from a deconstructive/discursive point of view, and an analysis of language performed by a traditional content analysis in sociology: the former understands the language as having a poetic, metaphorical, parodic or social dimension; the latter treats linguistic meanings as literal, fixed, not subject to the processes of

historical and cultural transformation; the former sees the critic as always participating and hence complicit in this language and this culture; the latter grants the educated critic omniscience in relation to society; s/he can see what the rest of mass culture only consumes.

This unfixing requires both theoretical labour and a concerted political effort by feminists. For one person to choose to transform language is not enough; meanings are beyond the grasp of any one individual. However, they are not necessarily beyond the control of collective political and cultural action by individuals who choose to engage in this transformation. Thus we must move beyond the polarities of fatalism and idealism: fatalism which accepts immutability of all meaning, and idealism which believes that individual, personal transformation is tantamount to social change.

Although her version of Gloria never made *Billboard's* top 100, its impact should not be dismissed. It is an important example of how women can employ traditionally male genres of music, dislodge male hegemony within them, and find a voice that speaks by and for women.³⁹

NOTES

1. Deborah Harding and Emily Nett, "Women and Rock Music," *Atlantis*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Autumn, 1984), pp. 61-76. One of the few sources on women and music is Sue Steward and Sheryl Garret, *Signed sealed and delivered: of Women in Pop*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984). See also Elizabeth Wood "Women in Music," *Signs*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1981).
2. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 163.
3. This phrase is used by de Lauretis in *Alice Doesn't*, p. 9. The idea of sexuality as produced by different social technologies is taken from Michel Foucault's work on sexuality, see: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: vol. 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Although indebted to Foucault, I find that Foucault's work does not pay adequate attention to the different engendering processes for men and women, and it tends to reduce the subject to a receptor of discourses dismissing the psychoanalytic dimension which makes our acceptance and possible resistance to different discourses possible or impossible. As I will explain, Foucault's writings on sexuality as they are being revised and re-thought by women allows us to go beyond conceptualizing our ontological differences from men as based ultimately on women's biological difference from men. While one cannot dispense with the importance of biology as a marker of sexual difference, recent feminist literature shows how the body has become invested with meaning. See two recent anthologies, Susan Rubin Suleiman ed. *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1986) and Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Lacquer eds. *The Making of the Modern Body: Sex and Sexuality in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Other interesting feminist work is being done on the problem of this relationship between identity and politics. See Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Post-modernism" *Communication*, vol. 10, (1988), pp.345-366. As well,

- see anthologies by Teresa de Lauretis ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), and Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell eds. *Feminism as Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
4. de Lauretis, *Alice*, p. 165.
 5. Harding and Nett, p. 64.
 6. *Ibid*, p. 61.
 7. *Ibid*, pp. 64-5.
 8. *Ibid*, p. 64.
 9. *Ibid*, p. 65.
 10. *Ibid*, p. 69.
 11. *Ibid*, p. 64.
 12. Rough Trade, "Physical Violence," *Avoid Freud* (CBS, 1980).
 13. Harding and Nett, p. 67.
 14. The notion of representation is problematic because it assumes that there is an originary point that is the base from which the reflection takes place. I have discussed this problem in "Tales of Inscription/Fashion Statements," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, vol. 11, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring, 1987), pp. 60-3.
 15. Harding and Nett, p. 66.
 16. *Ibid*, p. 63.
 17. *Ibid*, p. 65.
 18. *Ibid*, pp. 68-9. Women performers such as Lydia Lunch, Karen Finley and Nina Hagen use their sexuality to challenge the dominant cultural representations of female sexuality. While their music is played primarily within the musical underground, these undercurrents are important as an alternative to the mainstream, and have an important impact on what becomes the mainstream. Within country music, Canada's k.d. lang has achieved an enormous popularity with her strategy of parodying the genre that allows her to play both inside and outside its codes. Lang's energetic and challenging on-stage antics, choice of costume, refusal to wear make-up, and powerful renditions of country classics is another interesting example of ways in which women can change or challenge the musical mainstream.
 19. *Ibid*, p. 63. It is interesting to note that within the music industry, there has been a recent resurgence of the tradition of "folk music" by performers such as Tracey Chapman and Suzanne Vega. While neither Chapman's and Vega's approach is explicitly sexual, they are still playing with the sensuality of lyrics, music and image. The acceptance of their work within the musical mainstream is interesting. In particular, Chapman's work does this while still putting forth strong political messages about race, class, and gender relations, although Vega's hit song "Luka" is about wife beating.
 20. Elizabeth Cowie, "Women, Representation and the Image," *Screen Education*, no. 23 (Summer, 1977), p. 18. See also Griselda Pollack, "What's Wrong with Images of Women?," *Screen Education*, no. 24 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 25-33.
 21. Harding and Nett, p. 65.
 22. Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," *Screen Education*, no. 29 (1978-79), p. 4.
 23. Harding and Nett, p. 61. On this point, see Lawrence Grossberg's article "'I'd Rather Feel Bad Than Not Feel Anything At All': Rock and Roll, Pleasure and Power," *Enclitic*, vol. 8, nos. 1-2, (Spring-Fall, 1984).
 24. *Ibid*, p. 65.
 25. *Ibid*, p. 68.
 26. *Ibid*.
 27. Patti Smith, "Gloria In Excelsis Deo," *Horses* (Arista, 1975). Them featuring Van Morrison, "Gloria" (Polygram, 1983).
 28. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, eds., N.O. Keohane and M.Z. Rosaldo, and B.C. Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 31-54. Another interesting way to consider "Gloria" would be in relation to Kristeva's discussion of the "third" feminist moment, which she outlines in this essay. It seems to me that this "third" position, which incorporates aspects of the first two positions described by Kristeva, while at the same time moving beyond them, has a similar conception of historical time as that played out in Smith's "Gloria," although I am not implying that Smith is intentionally a feminist. While biographical details can contribute to our understanding of intratextual conditions of production and reception, I have avoided biographical details in this essay because of lack of space. I feel comfortable in omitting them because once a work is produced and put into social circulation, it has a life and acquires meanings that may be beyond the author's expressed intentions. For a discussion of this theory of authorship, see Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Margins of Philosophy* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp. 307-330.
 29. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, "Interview-1984" *m/f*, nos. 11-12 (1986), pp. 5-16. See also the volume *New French Feminism: An Anthology*, eds., Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).
 30. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 169.
 31. de Lauretis, *Alice*, pp. 12-36.
 32. Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927), *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* ed., Phillip Reiff (New York: Collier Books, 1978), p. 216.
 33. Laura Mulvey, "You Don't Know What is Happening Do You, Mr. Jones," *Framing Feminism* eds., Griselda Pollack and Roszika Parker (Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 127-131.
 34. Kaja Silverman discusses women's ambivalent relationship to the concept of fetishism in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
 35. Karl Marx, *Capital: vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 164-65. See also Michael Taussig's explication of the concept of fetishism in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 3-12. Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes toward a Political Economy of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210, is a classical analysis of women within this system of exchange.
 36. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" *Ecrits: A Selection* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), pp. 1-7.
 37. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 174. Derrida makes an important distinction between auto-affection as "self-love" and the "love of self," or an individualistic self-centeredness.
 38. de Lauretis, *Alice*, pp. 34-6.
 39. I would like to thank Kathy D. for her support and enthusiasm. This essay is the result of her love, friendship, and patience in listening to its many permutations, and is dedicated to her.