

“FIRE OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN”: PATTI SMITH, ANDROGYNY, AND THE NEW  
YORK UNDERGROUND

by

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## ABSTRACT

Patti Smith's androgynous gender performance is often cited as one of her defining performance characteristics. This thesis aims to determine whether Smith's androgyny might be conceptualized as a subversive tactic to either the masculinist ethos of rock 'n' roll, or the limitations of prescribed femininity in general society. To draw a conclusion, it analyzes primary sources of the written, musical, and video variety from the first three years of Smith's career as a rock 'n' roll performer. This thesis traces the influences in her musical and performance characteristics to determine to what extent they inform her performance of androgyny. Furthermore, it locates her performance strategies within both the overall trajectory of rock 'n' roll, and her specific New York City context.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

*OGWT*

*Old Grey Whistle Test*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1967, Patti Smith pocketed her \$16 in savings, bought some art supplies, and caught a train to New York City to pursue a career as an artist and poet. There, she found work in bookstores, formed an important bond with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, and moved with him into the legendary Chelsea Hotel. She joined the community of struggling artists, actors, writers, and musicians who made their home at the Chelsea, and who encouraged her development as a spoken-word poet, and, later, a rock singer. Scholars and historians cite Smith's first live poetry reading, staged by the St. Mark's Poetry Project on February 10, 1971, as the beginning of her transformation into a rock 'n' roll icon.<sup>1</sup> The audience in attendance at this reading, comprised of publishers, musicians, rock journalists, photographers, poets, models, and actors, is a good example of the blending of fields, artistic movements, and ideas that would inform Smith's own artistic persona and her performance strategies.

Smith's poetry reading, and its diverse audience of trendsetters, artists, and writers, demonstrates the development of a scene that scholars refer to as both the New York new wave or the New York underground, which developed out of an East Village network of interdisciplinary artistic production and influence. Bernard Gendron explains:

As the New York new wave developed, young painters, filmmakers, and performance artists, mostly from the nearby East Village, were increasingly showing up at CBGB's and fraternizing with the musicians, many of whom reciprocally took a strong interest in the doings of the art world. Rock musicians went to their friends' art shows, took part in their independent film or performance projects, and began explicitly to appropriate devices of the musical avant-garde, just as art musicians were appropriating rock devices or even forming rock bands.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Bockris and Roberta Bayley, *Patti Smith: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 228.

This thesis aims to locate Smith's blend of poetry and rock 'n' roll within this context. In it, I will discuss Smith's incorporation of influences as diverse as the audience of her poetry reading: Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs of the Beat movement; Lenny Kaye and Lester Bangs, rock critics for *Creem* magazine; Andy Warhol's Factory and its denizens, including Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground; Jimi Hendrix and the blues; 1960s garage rock, and others. In doing so, I will also explore the way Smith's work integrated several countercultural philosophies of the 1960s and early 70s, such as Lester Bang's "punk" ideals, and the Beats' deliberate breakdown of the high-brow/low-brow dichotomy in poetry and literature. I will posit that this blend of philosophies and influences was at the heart of both the New York underground during the beginning of Smith's career and her early musical and written material, and that it played an important role in the development of punk rock's characteristic ethos of rebellion and subversion.

Scholars frequently explore the environment of individualism and gender experimentation of the New York scene.<sup>3</sup> Sheila Whiteley, for example, examines the numerous instances of "play on gendered identity" which occur within the facets of the New York new wave, including Mapplethorpe's photographic images exploring sexuality, Warhol's use of drag and camp elements in his own pop art, and the queer activism of Beat poets Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs.<sup>4</sup> Within this context, Smith developed her distinctly androgynous persona, her own "play on gendered identity," which is often regarded as integral to her development into an enduring rock 'n' roll icon. However, scholars are frequently puzzled by the intention and function of Smith's androgynous gender performance. Richard Middleton questions whether it is

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<sup>3</sup> Sheila Whiteley, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire," in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 256.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

a function of “appropriating the phallus” of male-centric rock ‘n’ roll performers.<sup>5</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press similarly question whether Smith’s androgyny is a form of “female machisma,” which, they posit, may have developed because the only models of rock ‘n’ roll performance available to her in the mid-to-late 1970s were male.<sup>6</sup> However, the lyrical content of many of Smith’s songs, which address the limitations of prescribed femininity head on, as well as her association with the subversive genre of punk rock, leads me to wonder whether Smith’s androgyny might be conceptualized as a strategy to subvert the gendered societal status quo, rather than simply a signification of her primary rock ‘n’ roll influences such as Jim Morrison, the Rolling Stones, and Jimi Hendrix.

In the following chapters, I focus on musical, video, and literary material from the first three years of Smith’s career, 1974-1976, the time during which she developed her characteristically androgynous persona. Each of the musical examples that I discuss exemplifies what might be called Smith’s “musical androgyny.” In each song, Smith extensively incorporates music from 1960s songs by male artists, such as THEM’s “Gloria,” “Hey Joe” of Jimi Hendrix fame, and Wilson Pickett’s version of “Land of 1000 Dances,” into her own original works. This strategy foregrounds the intertextual relationship between Smith and the musical traditions she draws from, opening a field for extensive analysis.

My exploration of Smith’s androgyny as a potentially subversive tactic is informed by a *performative* conceptualization of gender and sexual identity. As influential performance theorist Philip Auslander explains, “this approach, articulated in sociology by Ervin Goffman (1979) and

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Middleton, “Appropriating the Phallus? Female Voices and the Law-of-the-Father,” in *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 91.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, “One of the Boys: Female Machisma,” in *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236.



Candace West (1987) and in theory by Judith Butler (1988), refuses essentialism by insisting that social and aesthetic performances of gender and sexuality do not reflect foundational identities; rather, those identities are constituted through such performances and have no existence prior to them.”<sup>7</sup> He usefully continues:

Popular music performances are always double-coded with respect to gender identity and sexuality since they refer both to general social codes and to genre-specific codes that signify within particular musical and cultural categories. While I am somewhat sceptical as to the degree to which counter-normative performances of gender or sexuality can actually help to undermine deep-seated social norms, I do believe that popular music is a realm in which performers can challenge those norms by using familiar codes to construct – and thus make visible – unconventional representations of gender and sexuality.<sup>8</sup>

Auslander also conceptualizes androgyny valuably, writing that androgyny results when both masculine and feminine coded performance characteristics – clothing, vocal timbre, musical material or gestures, for example – occur at the same time, on the same body. Because neither the feminine nor the masculine negate one another, the resulting tension provides the possibility for signification and subversion.<sup>9</sup> Stella Bruzzi has explored the subversive potential of k.d. lang’s performative enactment of androgyny. “Androgyny, because it refers to the smudging of difference between male and female but does not specify whether this is occurring on and through a female or a male body, is fraught with ambiguities,” Bruzzi states, explaining as well that a “positive reactive response to the radical potential of androgyny” might occur if androgyny is conceptualized “as a psychological and poetic ideal, a transcendence of sex, self, and

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Auslander, “I Wanna Be Your Man: Suzi Quatro’s Musical Androgyny,” *Popular Music* 23, no. 1 (2004), 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

language.”<sup>10</sup> However, as Marion Leonard reminds us, “implicit within the concept of subversion are the issues of intent and effect. The subversive act is intended to mock and undermine or overturn well-established or dominant modes of thought, power or behaviour.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the simple performance of androgyny is not sufficient to be defined as subversive; subversion requires purposeful intent on the part of the performer. This thesis will consider Smith’s characteristic performance of androgyny within the framework of subversion defined by Auslander and Bruzzi, and will locate it within the context of the interdisciplinary New York underground.

This thesis is divided into an introduction, a conclusion, and three body chapters. The first chapter explores several examples of Smith’s written material, relevant when one considers the intermingled elements of Smith’s joint career as an author/poet, and rock ‘n’ roll singer. This chapter considers how an artist’s written works, like their song lyrics, might reveal aspects of their inner selves, and that an analysis of these works might help us better understand that artist’s experiences, philosophies, or intentions. The 1974 poem “Piss Factory” provides the opportunity to consider the impact of the Beat poets and their ethos on Smith’s own work and philosophy. An excerpt from her 2010 memoir *Just Kids* recalls the circumstances under which Smith came to be called “androgynous.” A review of the Velvet Underground’s *1969 Live*, published in *Creem* in 1974, reveals Smith’s Romantic rock ‘n’ roll philosophy, but also locates her within the emerging “punk” discourses of fellow *Creem* writers Lester Bangs and Lenny Kaye, among others.

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<sup>10</sup> Stella Bruzzi, “Mannish Girl: k. d. lang – From Cowpunk to Androgyny,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 200.

<sup>11</sup> Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007), 95.

The second chapter of this thesis deals with two of Smith's early song recordings, "Hey Joe" and "Gloria: in excelsis deo." Both songs participate in the well-established rock 'n' roll tradition of covering other people's songs. Cover songs are unique vehicles for analysis because they unavoidably invoke the history and meaning of the original recording of the song and all its previous cover versions, and require the cover artist to engage intertextually in some manner with the original.<sup>12</sup> The two cover songs in question, both of which have a long and diverse recording history, illuminate Smith's relationship with the tradition of rock 'n' roll music. "Hey Joe," made famous by Jimi Hendrix, and "Gloria," originally by Van Morrison's group THEM, both feature narratives about male liberation and sexuality which Smith re-interprets for her own purposes. However, because both of these songs incorporate lengthy sections of original material, they also have the potential to reveal elements of Smith's own song-writing and performance strategies.

Finally, the third chapter of this thesis looks at video footage of Patti Smith performing live and participating in a press interview. The visual component of video enables a more thorough application of gender theory and analysis. In an interview with Swedish radio personality Lennart Wretling, Smith discusses her musical philosophies and answers, at length, the question of "what freedom means" to her. The latter section of this chapter analyzes Smith's live performances, using the Patti Smith Group's 1976 appearance on the BBC-2 program *Old Grey Whistle Test* as a case study. This performance includes the Smith Group's song "Horses," which derives some of its material from the R&B standard "Land of 1000 Dances," and is consistent with Smith's habit of appropriating and reworking material from a variety of sources. Throughout, my analysis of Smith's literary, recorded, and live performance material is guided

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<sup>12</sup> Auslander, 8.

by the question of whether her characteristic performance of androgyny is intentionally subversive, either to the specific traditions of rock 'n' roll music, or to the greater limitations of societal gender norms in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2: PATTI SMITH'S WRITTEN WORKS

Patti Smith's literary career preceded her foray into rock 'n' roll, and Smith's identity as a writer is fundamental to her performance persona. Since 1972, Smith has authored more than ten books of poetry and two memoirs, among several other literary projects. While each of these works demonstrate Smith's philosophies, influences, and style, I have selected three specific works to discuss in this chapter because of their underlying thematic connection. I use the 1972 poem "Piss Factory" to explore Smith's adoption of Beat philosophy, style, and strategies; it serves as an example of Smith's Beat-inspired navigation of the literary and poetic high-brow/low-brow dichotomy. Smith's review of the Velvet Underground's *1969 Live* for the rock 'n' roll magazine *Creem* demonstrates her emergent appreciation for the music of the Velvets, which would inspire her to incorporate aspects of their musical and performance styles into her own. It also reveals that Smith, in 1972, was experiencing the current tension in rock 'n' roll criticism between the high-brow, Romantic attitudes of magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, and the emergent low-brow "punk" ethos of *Creem*'s writers. This review demonstrates Smith's synthesis of both strains of thought into her own rock 'n' roll philosophies. Finally, while the entirety of Smith's first memoir, *Just Kids*, is relevant to my understanding of her development into a rock icon, and excerpts of it appear throughout my thesis, I look at one thematically relevant short section from the book in this chapter. I use this excerpt to explore Smith's navigation of the gendered division between high and popular cultures – in which popular culture is the disparaged feminine Other to high culture's conceptualized masculinity – and the perpetuation of this division within popular music, in which pop and folk are the feminine Other to rock 'n' roll. Each literary example allows me to consider Smith's strategies for addressing

these various but overlapping high-brow/low-brow dichotomies, and the influential origins of her strategies.

## **2.1 “I’m gonna be a big star and I will never return never return never return”: “Piss Factory” and Patti Smith’s Beat Influence**

As a teenager, Patti Smith spent her summers working at a factory that specialized in the making of baby buggies.<sup>1</sup> She found this work dull and depressing, and spent much of her time at the factory reading Arthur Rimbaud and day-dreaming about moving to New York to become a poet.<sup>2</sup> In 1974, following her relocation to New York, Smith retrospectively composed the poem “Piss Factory,” which the Patti Smith Group recorded as the B-side to their first single later that year. Smith’s early poetic material has often drawn comparison to the Beat Generation poets, and their influence is plain in the material of “Piss Factory.” Though scholars have cited Smith’s Beat influence by referring to her variably as a “Beat,” a “belated Beat,” a “current Beat,” and a “post-Beat,” the specifics of her incorporation of Beat themes and literary strategies are rarely analyzed in any depth.<sup>3</sup> The orality of Smith’s poems, their themes of transcendence of the mundane everyday, her interest in the blending of high-brow and low-brow literary influences and techniques, and her appropriation and idealization of black culture, recall the work of two of the founding Beats in particular: Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs.<sup>4</sup> Some

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<sup>1</sup> Pat Pemberton, “Piss Factory,” *RollingStone.com*, June 8, 2012, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/piss-factory-patti-smith>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Warner, *Text, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Beats and Rock Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 364.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

analysis of the poetic material of Smith's "Piss Factory" simultaneously demonstrates the impact of Smith's Beat influence on her early material, and reveals how she has come to be so consistently associated with the poets of the Beat Generation.

Like Patti Smith's own literary career, those of the core figures of what would come to be termed the "Beat Generation" began in New York City. In the 1940s, university students Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac made the acquaintance of William Burroughs, who had graduated from Harvard seven years prior. In their collective apartment, the three shared long conversations about life, poetry, art, and philosophy out of which developed a creative manifesto the three called the "New Vision." Simon Warner describes the "New Vision" as "a radical statement of artistic intent which praised experiment, discounted conventional morality and, at heart, responded to the psychic crisis of a world torn by conflict."<sup>5</sup> Kerouac's restless lifestyle eventually led him away from New York City, but Ginsberg and Burroughs remained for the majority of their careers, creating a circle of poets and authors around them who would come to be called "the Beats," and becoming mentors, editors, and friends to the next generation of aspiring artists and poets. Through her engagement with this community at the Chelsea Hotel, Smith began to experiment with poetry as her own form of self-expression while incorporating poetic strategies from her Beat mentors.

Central to the Beat ethos was the re-conceptualization of poetry and literature as a "low-brow" art form meant not for the societal elite, but for the popular masses. Warner refers to this as a paradoxical "intersection of creative practices that had been traditionally divided by a long-evolving and essentially solidified arts hierarchy: that established code that saw certain artistic activities as the preserve of the elite and learned and a distinctive brand of pursuits that were

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<sup>5</sup> Warner, 364.

regarded as strictly for the proletarian and less-educated masses.”<sup>6</sup> To ensure that their poetry was as accessible as possible, the Beats focused on the orality of their poems by composing pieces that were meant to be read aloud in public spaces such as cafés and bars. Smith’s “Piss Factory” shares this characteristic with Beat poetry; its short, staccato phrases and casually conversational language – “hey hey sister” and “they look pretty damn free,” for example – evoke a form of spontaneous storytelling, of one blue-collar worker speaking informally to another about a familiar place, experience, or situation.<sup>7</sup> Structured around a steady pulse, “Piss Factory” incorporates pop culture references and song lyrics, such as those from the Beatles’ early single “Twist and Shout” and Wilson Pickett’s “Mustang Sally,” in its drawling expression of working-class dissatisfaction. Lines like “And I’m gonna go I’m gonna get out of here I’m gonna get on that train and go to New York City and I’m gonna be somebody I’m gonna get on that train and go to New York City and I’m gonna be so bad” use repetition and a lack of punctuation to express Smith’s urgent desire to take control of her life, and to reject the drudge of blue-collar work. Furthermore, this section abandons literary rules and conventions, instead conveying her resolution in the language of those who might identify strongly with it: blue collar, working-class Americans.

Warner reminds us that, with “Piss Factory,” Smith joined the ranks of New York-based artists who were continuing a Beat tradition by composing poetry that was meant to be read aloud with the accompaniment of music; these ranks were comprised of Smith’s friends and immediate influences, such as Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground and Richard Hell of

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<sup>6</sup> Warner, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Patti Smith, “Piss Factory,” *Early Work 1970-1979* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 38-39.



Television.<sup>8</sup> However, scholars Greg Smith and Carrie Jaurès Noland argue that “Piss Factory” was also the launching point for a new genre and tradition: punk rock.<sup>9</sup> The Smith Group’s recording of “Piss Factory” became, arguably, the first punk-rock record, and, with its release, Smith began to establish a hybrid genre she termed “rock poetry” which, Noland argues, “implicitly aligned the techniques of poetry with a socially deviant lifestyle involving drugs and the performance of gender ambiguity.”<sup>10</sup> The Beats used their medium as a means of blurring the high-brow/low-brow artistic hierarchy, and Patti Smith’s early work, along with the development of the New York punk scene, further subverted the traditional lines between the elite and the popular, blending characteristics of the “low” genre of rock music with those of the “high” genre of poetry.<sup>11</sup> Thus, with the recording and release of “Piss Factory” as the B-side for the Patti Smith Group’s first single, “Hey Joe,” Smith elevated to the next level the work that the Beats had begun two decades prior.

Beyond their interest in disrupting literary hierarchies, the Beats were preoccupied with upsetting the social status quo by rejecting the American values of work ethic and capitalistic consumption. Barbara Ehrenreich identifies the two simultaneous and related strands of protest within the Beat ethos: “one directed against the white-collar work world and the other against the suburbanized family life that work was supposed to support.”<sup>12</sup> By rejecting “the entire round of work and consumption,” Ehrenreich states that the Beats offered “a vision of human adventure

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<sup>8</sup> Warner, 356.

<sup>9</sup> Greg Smith, “‘And All the Sinners, Saints’: Patti Smith, Pioneer Musician and Poet,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2000), 175.

<sup>10</sup> Carrie Jaurès Noland, “Rimbaud and Patti Smith: Style as Social Deviance,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 3 (1995), 587.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Kane, “‘Nor Did I Socialise With Their People’: Patti Smith, Rock Heroics and the Poetics of Sociability,” *Popular Music* 31, no. 1 (2012), 106.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Press, 1983), 52.

beside which the commodified wonders of an affluent society looked pale and pointless.”<sup>13</sup> In “Piss Factory,” Smith expresses a desire to reject factory work in exchange for the human adventure that Ehrenreich describes, represented in this case by the unknown of New York City. The “Piss Factory” becomes a metaphor for the drudgery of working life, and the factory itself represents the depersonalized processes of the assembly line and the lifelessness of the cold, cement gray work space. In this sense, Smith’s “Piss Factory” compares to the themes of Ginsberg’s “Howl,” which utilizes the biblical figure of “Moloch” as a metaphor for American industrialized capitalism. In “Howl,” “Moloch” is used to convey Ginsberg’s philosophy that industrialization and working culture are fundamental reasons for the evaporation of the American imagination.<sup>14</sup> Both Smith and Ginsberg demonstrate a desire to transcend the limitations of everyday life, a characteristic which, according to Hans Weisethaunet and Ulf Lindberg, instills both poets with a distinctive form of authenticity.<sup>15</sup>

In the article “Authenticity Revisited: The Rock Critic and the Changing Real,” Weisethaunet and Lindberg explore the multiple definitions of “authentic” as it pertains to popular culture and, in particular, to rock ‘n’ roll. Several of their definitions, such as “body authenticity” and “authenticity as self-expression” will appear later in this chapter, but their definition of “authenticity as transcendence of the everyday” pertains directly to the Beat theme of rejecting work and consumption. “At stake is a temporary transcendence of everyday boredom,” Weisethaunet and Lindberg explain, “[and] the realization of a ‘utopian’ longing that

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<sup>13</sup> Ehrenreich, 171.

<sup>14</sup> Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956), 21-23.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Weisethaunet and Ulf Lindberg, “Authenticity Revisited: The Rock Critic and the Changing Real,” *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 4 (2010), 476.

may be satisfied by constant change and by energetic stasis.”<sup>16</sup> “Piss Factory” reveals Smith’s desire for this form of authenticity, as she longs to transcend her everyday by traveling to the unknown of New York City to “be a big star.”<sup>17</sup> This form of authenticity, which “stresses a mental rather than a physical experience,” is inherent in the Beat ethos.<sup>18</sup> It applies almost universally to the Beat writers, from the restless wanderlust that Jack Kerouac demonstrates in his novels *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums*, for example, to the bizarrely surreal, semi-biographical narratives that Burroughs constructs in novels like *Junkie* and *Naked Lunch*.

The cut-up or *pastiche* technique that Burroughs began to explore in *Naked Lunch* and which he used extensively throughout the late 1950s and early 60s also influenced Smith’s compositional style. Using the cut-up technique, which he derived from the Dadaists of the 1920s, Burroughs would dissect an existing text, and rearrange it to produce something new.<sup>19</sup> In *Naked Lunch*, his first foray into this technique, “what is metaphorical, factual, narrated and imagined are jammed together without pointers or hierarchy,” according to Geoff Ward.<sup>20</sup> Edward S. Robinson states that this strategy was “fitting for a writer so involved in the questioning of the role of the author, notions of fixed authorship and the immutability of textual documentation.”<sup>21</sup> Patti Smith employed this tactic, not by physically cutting up existing texts and literally rearranging them, but by extensively reworking existing songs, adding material from news headlines, drawing from her own life experience, incorporating elements from a variety of artistic movements, and learning from the wide variety of her personal and artistic influences.

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<sup>16</sup> Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 476.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, “Piss Factory,” 40.

<sup>18</sup> Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 476.

<sup>19</sup> Edward S. Robinson, *Shift Linguals: Cut-Up Narratives from William S. Burroughs to the Present* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 347.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

Like many of Burroughs' novels, Smith's song reworkings also invoke questions of authorship and, and of the potential for popular culture and media convey hold a multiplicity of meanings to the listener, rather than simply those that the creator intends. The New York underground scene might also be conceptualized as a sort of cut-up of artistic mediums and disciplines, each drawing influences from the others, and subverting traditions by blurring lines between art forms, genres, and styles. However, there are those figures, such as the much romanticized 19 century countercultural poet Arthur Rimbaud, whose influences manifest proportionately across the work of Patti Smith, many of the Beat writers, and several of Smith's musical predecessors (Jim Morrison and Bob Dylan) and New York contemporaries (Tom Verlaine of Television). This unites the various works of these diverse writers and musicians under the umbrella of "countercultural" and helps to create a through-line of philosophy and style across decades of artistic tradition, even while each of these countercultural artists poses their own unique challenge to the social and artistic status quo.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond Rimbaud, Smith and the Beats share a fascination with black culture, each drawing heavily from blues and jazz, respectively. Specifically, Warner states that the Beats

were drawn to a new and exciting brand of jazz – the sound of bebop, a style sufficiently radical to resist easy incorporation by the mass media. Its cerebral density, its rejection of accessible melody and standard rhythms, set it apart from jazz's earlier incarnations – forms such as ragtime and tailgate, then swing – which had, by the 1930s, been gradually adopted and integrated into mainstream popular culture and, as importantly, appropriated and, some would argue, diluted by a generation of white musicians.<sup>23</sup>

This penchant for bebop's inaccessibility exposes one of the contradictions of the Beat philosophy; despite their ideas about artistic democratization, the Beats were also preoccupied with performing their own outsider sensibilities. However, it also reveals the Beat ethos of

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<sup>22</sup> Pemberton, "Piss Factory."

<sup>23</sup> Warner, 5-6.

resisting consumption, and the way that the Beats' distaste for anything that might be co-opted by the mainstream informs their style and aesthetic. Weisethaunet and Lindberg refer to this phenomenon as "authenticity as negation," in which "authenticity" corresponds with "the idea of artistic independence as 'refusal' or 'purity.'" It defines itself against that which it thinks it is not: commerce; standardization; schmaltz; a general suppression of the darker sides of human experience."<sup>24</sup> Chafing against their own whiteness, the Beats viewed Black culture and style as a means of achieving this authenticity, which led Norman Mailer to write "The White Negro" in 1957 about the relationship between "hipsters" and black culture. In it, Mailer attempts to justify the hipster appropriation of black culture, arguing:

Any Negro who wished to live must live with danger from his first day, and no experience can ever be casual to him, no Negro can saunter down a street with any real certainty that violence will not visit him on his walk. The cameos of security for the average white: mother and the home, job and the family, are not even a mockery to millions of Negroes; they are impossible. The Negro has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger. In such a pass where paranoia is as vital to survival as blood, the Negro had stayed alive and begun to grow by following the need of his body where he could. Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation, it had the communication of art even where it was watered, perverted, corrupted, and almost killed, it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, "I feel this, and now you do too."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 472.

<sup>25</sup> Norman Mailer, "The White Negro (Fall 1957)," *DissentMagazine.org*, June 20, 2007, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957).

Thus, in their search for authentic experience, the hipster “absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro,” appropriating the immediacy of the black experience to transcend the banality of their own daily lives.<sup>26</sup>

Mailer views this as entirely natural and overlooks the issues of racial hegemony and privilege that permeate his conceptualization of the “White Negro.” While he argues explicitly that African Americans have no choice but to live this way, due to the nature of being black in the 1950s, he fails to problematize the appropriation of black culture and lifestyle by white, middle-class men who have the social privilege to opt for this lifestyle. Mailer ignores the fact that this appropriation is inherently inauthentic in that it will never be entirely true to the lived experience of the white hipster. Instead, he celebrates this appropriation, exploring at length the hipster utilization of black slang language and cultural characteristics as means of indicating “their success or failure in the competition for pleasure,” rather than their success or failure in the competitive, systematically predetermined economy, or in simply surviving.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Mailer problematically romanticizes the “primitiveness” of 1950s black culture, conceptualizing the “negro” as closer to an authentic form of artistic expression because of his “less civilized” state of being, and consequently perpetuates these damaging stereotypes in American culture.

Just as the white hipsters and Beats of the 1950s emulated black culture to signify their outsider status, Smith incorporates material from black sources into her music and poetry to the same effect. In line 68 of “Piss Factory,” Smith insists that she is “gonna be so bad... gonna be a big star,” incorporating the “bad black man” myth into her own material.<sup>28</sup> In his *Stagolee Shot Billy*, Cecil Brown traces the Stagolee myth through black culture from the late 1800s onwards,

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<sup>26</sup> Mailer, “The White Negro (Fall 1957).”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, “Piss Factory,” 40.

and describes the role of the “bad black man” myth, derived from the story of Stagolee, in blues music and culture. Citing a 1939 article by H.C. Brearley, Brown explains that “bad” has become “an epithet of honor,” placing “emphasis on heroic deviltry.”<sup>29</sup> The identification of “bad” corresponded with a man’s ability to make white people nervous, and a man earned the label of “bad n\*\*\*\*\*” when he “welcomed and often instigated direct confrontations with white society’s stereotype of the Negro’s role and place in American life.”<sup>30</sup> Being “bad,” then, corresponds to the Beat ethos of being outside of American society, and their proposition of explicit challenge to American values of consumption and work. Smith’s “Piss Factory” identifies the label of “bad” as something to aspire to, as something that will signify her successful construction of an outsider persona. Scholars have extensively explored rock ‘n’ roll’s own appropriation of black culture, and Nick Bromell goes as far as to refer to “the birth of rock ‘n’ roll out of the blues” as “a kind of original sin.”<sup>31</sup> Alice Echols not only explores the intricacies of racial appropriation and exchange in rock ‘n’ roll music, but celebrates them, arguing that “white rock ‘n’ rollers’ revolt against domesticated masculinity, by leading them to identify with black men whom they perceived as both unencumbered by domesticity... may have contributed to a shift in America’s color line.”<sup>32</sup>

Echols, like Mailer, recognizes masculinity and the flight from domesticity as a factor in the appeal of black culture to white men of 1950s America, and the subsequent development of

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<sup>29</sup> Cecil Brown, *Stagolee Shot Billy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 149.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 200), 48.

<sup>32</sup> Alice Echols, “‘We Gotta Get Out of This Place’: Notes Toward a Remapping of the Sixties,” in *Shaky Ground: The ‘60s and its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 73.

the rock 'n' roller/hipster figure. However, both scholars ignore the problematic of the female Beat or rock 'n' roller, and the question of why, if a fantasy of masculinity is the pinnacle of Beat celebration, women such as Patti Smith continue to participate in this tradition of masculine bohemianism. The Beats themselves frequently devalued and ignored the presence and contribution of women to their movement. Kerouac and Beat philosopher Neal Cassady thrilled at the conquest of young virgins, and Ginsberg's *Howl* views women as interchangeable and irrelevant.<sup>33</sup> Ehrenreich argues that the adventures of the Beat writers "did not include women, except, perhaps, as 'experiences' that men might have. And in their vision, which found its way into the utopian hopes of the counterculture, the ideal of personal freedom shaded over into an almost vicious irresponsibility to the women who passed through their lives."<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, there were numerous female writers of the Beat movement, and their works garnered particular interest in the late 1990s. Brenda Knight's *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (1996) compiled works and biographical information regarding not only female Beat writers and their female precursors, but the wives, lovers, and muses of the men of the Beat movement, such as Burroughs' common-law partner Joan Vollmer Adams Burroughs, whose accidental death at the hands of her husband haunt the pages of his semi-biographical novels.<sup>35</sup> Amy Friedman explores the distinctly female experiences of Beat writers such as Diane di Prima, Anne Waldman, Hattie Jones, and several others, and the manifestation of those experiences within the characteristics of their literature and poetry. Friedman describes di Prima's unconventional move to New York City to be a writer

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<sup>33</sup> Amy L. Friedman, "Being Here As Hard As I Could": The Beat Generation Women Writers," *Discourse* 20, no. 1 (1998), 231.

<sup>34</sup> Ehrenreich, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Brenda Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* (Berkeley, California: Conari Press, 1996), 49.



despite her middle-class background. This experience mirrors Smith's own eventual move to New York, which she recollects in "Piss Factory."

However, though Smith's lived experience more directly recalls one of the female Beats, rather than Ginsberg and Burroughs, the themes and characteristics of her poetry are inconsistent with those that Alicia Ostriker has observed in the work of female Beats. "It is evident," Ostriker argues, "that an assertive desire for intimacy looms very large" in the poetry of Beat women and others of the period.<sup>36</sup> She continues:

Second, the poems tend to stress female power as against feminine passivity, and the possibility or actuality of pleasure as against the older tide of suffering and victimization. This need to be remembered because much feminist criticism rests on the assumption that female authors write from a position of powerlessness. Third, while these poems on intimate topics are necessarily personal, relying on what feminist critics have come to call the authority of experience as against traditional forms of authority, they are nonetheless transpersonal and principled.<sup>37</sup>

While Smith's poetry does emphasize its author's own power, as demonstrated by Smith's assertion in "Piss Factory" that she would control the trajectory of her own life by deciding what would come next, this power comes, not from a place of femininity, but from a place of individualism. Rather than locating herself within a gendered collectivity, Smith's authority is self-centered and single-minded. Any transcendence of the everyday that Smith achieves will not be for her gender, but for herself. Furthermore, rather than dealing with issues of the personal, much of Smith's poetry is preoccupied with the myths and experiences of others, particularly those whose art, music, and poetry have inspired her outsider sensibilities, rather than with her own internal and personal experiences. In the place of the Eastern spirituality that permeates the

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<sup>36</sup> Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1986), 168.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

poetry of those female Beats such as Anne Waldman and Elise Cowan, Smith constructs a rock 'n' roll mythology in which Jim Morrison, Brian Jones, and others take the place of spiritual leaders.

Though the women of the Beat movement did eventually develop their own defining literary themes, characteristics, and strategies, it was the ethos and lifestyle of the male Beat that originally appealed to white, middle-class American girls. The teenage Patti Smith of "Piss Factory" was attracted, not to the themes of female power and personal experience that define female Beat poetry, but to the rebellion to middle-class conventions that the male Beats represented. Mavis Bayton explains that "from the 1940s on, bohemianism has provided an alternative self-image and the promise of a future beyond locally available options which did not depend on being a member of a large group. You could be a bohemian by yourself, drawing on films, records, and books."<sup>38</sup> Such was the case with Patti Smith, reading Rimbaud in the factory basement, listening to Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones on vinyl in her bedroom, and generally viewing the bohemian, or Beat, lifestyle as an attractive alternative to the strict confines of domestic femininity.

However, while the Beat lifestyle provided her with a desirable alternative to the confines of feminine propriety and respectability, the sheer male-ness of the Beats, rather than their bohemianism, may have played an important role here. Smith's rejection of feminine propriety is apparent in "Piss Factory," where she derides the simplicity of the other women who work at the factory: "You could faint in the heat but these bitches are just too lame to understand too goddamn grateful to get this job to know they're getting screwed in the ass."<sup>39</sup> Instead, she

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<sup>38</sup> Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, "Piss Factory," 38.

expresses envy for and a desire to be more like her male peers, who, while not necessarily bohemians or Beats, still experience more social freedom and privilege than her due to their gender: “I would rather smell the way boys smell – oh those schoolboys the way their legs flap under the desk in study hall.”<sup>40</sup>

Not only did the Beat ethos have an impact on the themes and material of Smith’s poetry and lyrics, but several of the Beats themselves became her personal friends. In her first memoir, *Just Kids*, Smith recalls meeting Allen Ginsberg in a deli when he offered to buy her a sandwich. She writes, “Sometime later Allen became my good friend and teacher. We often reminisced about our first encounter and he once asked me how I would describe how we met. ‘I would say you fed me when I was hungry,’ I told him.”<sup>41</sup> She recalls her friendships with Beat poet Gregory Corso, who could “enter a room and commit instant mayhem,” but was “easy to forgive because he had the equal potential to commit great beauty,”<sup>42</sup> and claims that he, Ginsberg, and William Burroughs became her teachers, and the Chelsea Hotel her “new university.”<sup>43</sup> Victor Bockris recalls Smith’s presence at Ginsberg’s death bed decades later, “sitting in tears.”<sup>44</sup> In the more recent years of her career, Smith has demonstrated what Sheila Whiteley calls a “continuing commitment to queer politics,” inspired by the activist work of Allen Ginsberg.<sup>45</sup> Whiteley argues that this commitment is “evidenced in her tribute to William Burroughs at the June 2005 Meltdown Festival. Reading Burroughs’ *The Wild Boys* and climaxing with his

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, “Piss Factory,” 39.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Victor Bockris, *Beat Punks: New York’s Underground Culture From the Beat Generation to the Punk Explosion* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>45</sup> Sheila Whiteley, “Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire,” in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 256.

moving, retrospective introduction to *Queer*, she ended on her knees, bellowing disjointed phrases with a spaced-out, shamanistic quality Burroughs would undoubtedly have approved of.”<sup>46</sup> Each of the major Beats, then, with their distinctive literary and personal qualities, directly influenced the content of Smith’s musical and literary material, the trajectory of her performance career, and her continued success as a rock ‘n’ roll outsider and icon.

## **2.2 “Dig it submit put your hands down your pants and play side C”: Patti Smith Reviews the Velvet Underground’s 1969 *Live* for *Creem***

The same year that Patti Smith and her band released their first independent single, “Hey Joe b/w Piss Factory,” Smith published a review of the Velvet Underground’s *1969 Live* in *Creem* Magazine. *Creem*, based out of Detroit, referred to itself at this point as “America’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll Magazine,” despite the growing commercial success of its competitor, *Rolling Stone*.<sup>47</sup> To differentiate itself from *Rolling Stone*, *Creem* developed a “faux-lowbrow,” often humorous strategy to rock ‘n’ roll criticism. Smith’s review of the Velvets’ *1969 Live* in *Creem* rejects the “high-brow” style of criticism that had developed in the 1960s, yet it maintains rock criticism’s ethos of Romanticism in its description of the Velvet Underground’s Lou Reed, his authenticity and his lyrical and performance prowess. The review, which abstractly locates *1969 Live* on the cusp of change between the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrates the shift that was occurring in both rock criticism and the genre of rock ‘n’ roll music, away from commercialized

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<sup>46</sup> Whiteley, 256-7.

<sup>47</sup> Michael J. Kramer, “‘Can’t Forget the Motor City’: *Creem* Magazine, Rock Music, Detroit Identity, Mass Consumerism, and the Counterculture,” *Michigan Historical Review* 28, no. 2 (2002), 42.

arena rock and towards the moment of DIY punk rock, of which Smith herself would be an integral part. With this review, Smith's content and literary strategies participate directly in this shift, just as her musical material would begin to do later that same year.

"I love this record so much," Smith writes enthusiastically of *1969 Live*.<sup>48</sup> "When the musics over and you turn out the lights its like ... coming down from a dream [sic]," she concludes, after also describing this record as a drug-induced high and invoking countercultural figures as diverse as Jean Genet, Arthur Rimbaud, Steve McQueen, Mick Jagger, and her close friend Robert Mapplethorpe, in her celebration of the album's merit and impact. In doing so, she combines figures from the high-brow traditions of poetry and literature, and the low-brow traditions of film and rock music in her celebration of the universality of the Velvet Underground live album.<sup>49</sup> Matthew Gelbert's summary of the Romantic and modernist rhetoric of rock criticism reveals the elements of these traditions in Smith's review. He explains:

The critics and cultural arbiters who brought 'rock' to respectability in the late 1960s were invested, albeit quite ambivalently, in the long-standing rhetoric that the Romantics and modernists had used to establish cultural capital for their music. Rock critics internalized and exploited a language of 'authenticity,' 'genius,' 'masterpieces,' musical 'development' within a work and between works, scepticism about musicians 'selling out,' even a belief in aesthetic autonomy (music as outside history and politics) and art for art's sake.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Bernard Gendron argues that this doctrine "has been a mainstay of modern art since the heyday of romanticism – thus, the apparent paradox that the rock critics' very assertion of

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<sup>48</sup> Patti Smith, "Untitled (Review of Velvet Underground's *1969 Live* from *Creem*, September 1974)," *A Patti Smith Babelogue*, accessed February 24, 2018, <http://www.oceanstar.com/patti/poetry/velvet.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Gelbart, "A Cohesive Shambles: The Clash's 'London Calling' and the Normalization of Punk," *Music & Letters* 92, no. 2 (2011), 231.

aesthetic autonomy is deeply rooted in the ‘outsider’ values of modernist high culture.”<sup>51</sup> That Smith would draw comparison between high culture literary figures such as Genet and Rimbaud in a review of rock music, then, confirms Smith’s own philosophical roots in the post-modernist “outsider” values that Gendron is describing, and demonstrates the persistence of her tendency to blur the traditional boundaries between high-brow and low-brow literary genres.

Smith’s account of *1969 Live* as a dream or a high relates to the conceptualization of an album as a “masterpiece,” and she imbues the Velvet, and particularly Lou Reed, with a form of authenticity that Weisethaunet and Lindberg refer to as “authenticity as self-expression,” in which “truth is conceived in terms of the degree to which a representation is taken to offer access to the inner world of an exceptional subject.”<sup>52</sup> Weisethaunet and Lindberg explain that the roots of this form of authenticity “are found in the legacy of Romanticism and its notion of the artist as a creative genius,” and continue that “as rock is rendered ‘serious’ in the 1960s, attention to authorship is pushed to the forefront.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the two concepts share close ties to one another, and Smith’s assertion that “The boy in this record [Lou Reed] was riding a wave – seeming in a state of suspended joy” draws influence from this Romantic tradition by describing Reed’s songwriting and singing as a manifestation of this form of authenticity. Reed’s lyrics are characterized by his ability to observe and describe those who might otherwise have been overlooked by popular culture and art – such as the drug addicts and drag queens of New York City – and his aptitude for using simple language to convey rich, poetic thought.<sup>54</sup> That Smith would view Reed’s lyrics as an indicator of his authenticity is consistent with her cynicism of

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<sup>51</sup> Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 216.

<sup>52</sup> Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 471

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Witts, *The Velvet Underground* (London: Equinox, 2006), 43.

American societal mores and her preoccupation with her own outsider sensibility. On the other hand, the simplicity of Reed's lyrics functions much like the orality of Beat poetry, making them accessible to a diverse audience of American listeners and consequently challenging the Romantic philosophies or rock 'n' roll that Smith employs.

Interestingly, Smith all but ignores the other four members of the Velvet Underground, including drummer Mo Tucker, who would be one of her few female "proto-punk" predecessors, and John Cale, whose compositional and production styles are largely responsible for the perception of authenticity and the overall success of the band. In 1975, only one year following this review, John Cale produced the Patti Smith Group's first full-length LP, *Horses*, and his production style had an equally profound impact on the perception of Smith's musical "authenticity as self-expression." Bockris and Bayley posit that "Cale's association with the Velvet Underground, the sound of his own solo albums, and his production work with Nico and Iggy Pop were ... likely reasons behind her choice" of having him produce her band's first record.<sup>55</sup> The collaboration between Smith and Cale over the production of *Horses* became what Bockris and Bayley refer to as "a battle of wills" between the two artists.<sup>56</sup> Cale, influenced as he was by Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound" and the ground-breaking experimentalism of composer John Cage, contributed what guitarist Lenny Kaye refers to as a "psychological aura" to the project by insisting that the band rethink all of their material from scratch, forcing them to develop and further understand their own philosophies.<sup>57</sup> That Smith would overlook Cale's

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<sup>55</sup> Victor Bockris and Roberta Bayley, *Patti Smith: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 123.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>57</sup> Witts, 66 and 124.

input on *1969 Live* demonstrates her own naïveté regarding the rock ‘n’ roll process at the time – in 1974, Smith was still very much a consumer and fan of rock ‘n’ roll, not yet an artist herself.

Smith’s review, as Gelbart and Gendron observe of the Romantic ethos of rock criticism, is devoid of political insight, and instead preoccupies itself with the concept of “art for art’s sake” and the capacity for rock ‘n’ roll music to transcend mundane reality through its complex layering of in-knowledge and influence. Rather than locate the work of the Velvet Underground within its historical or political context, Smith focuses on drawing comparisons between Reed’s works and those of relatively obscure 1960s songwriters and groups such as Tim Hardin and the Bell Notes.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, she draws effortful parallels between Reed’s song-writing and the poetry of Rimbaud, the novels of Genet, and the still-life photography of Mapplethorpe, implying that she views rock ‘n’ roll as an art form which draws influence from literary and visual artistic works as well as musical ones. This stance would inform the production and subversive potential of Smith’s own rock music, which drew heavily from her literary and poetic influences, and drew comparisons from rock critics like Greil Marcus to art movements such as surrealism, Dadaism, Warhol’s pop art, and others.<sup>59</sup>

However, despite Smith’s association with the Romantic and modernist philosophy of rock criticism, her publication of this review in *Creem* places her also within the shifting landscape of rock criticism and its ethos. *Creem*’s content reacted particularly to the confusing manner in which “a supposedly alternative rock-music culture overlapped with mainstream consumer culture,” according to Michael J. Kramer; “*Creem* suggested that the inauthentic *kitsch*

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, “Untitled (Review of the Velvet Underground’s *1969 Live* from *Creem*, September 1974).”

<sup>59</sup> Greil Marcus, “*Horses: Patti Smith Exposes Herself*,” *The Village Voice*, November 1975, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/horses-patti-smith-exposes-herself>.



of rock music's most cacophonous, unsophisticated bands might serve as a viable source of identity and community for young people who felt adrift in mass-consumer society."<sup>60</sup> In a description that recalls the anti-consumer, anti-work philosophies of the Beat poets, Kramer continues that "*Creem's* content suggests that the counterculture was not solely a *rejection* of mainstream life in the United States but an important *response* to everyday experiences in a commercial mass society,"<sup>61</sup> Like the Beats, writers for *Creem* utilized an accessible, "low-brow" writing style to represent their alignment with the working-middle class, or those lost in the sea of capitalism. Smith's review of *1969 Live* reads more like a Jack Kerouac novel than a critical album review, forsaking conventions of punctuation and sentence structure in its celebration of the power and beauty of the Velvets' recorded sound. Much like Reed's simplified lyrics and democratized selection of song subjects, Smith's writing style draws equally from the pre-existing Beat ethos of accessibility, and the developing "punk" philosophy of *Creem's* more popular writers.

Among the writers at the forefront of change at *Creem* magazine, Lester Bangs lead the charge. Bangs' vision for rock music positioned it "as a trashy consumer commodity whose impermanent and derivative sounds could, out of a seeming superficiality, make the kinetic, life-affirming, and joyful energies of creative expression widely available for both individual and communal use," Kramer explains.<sup>62</sup> Bangs' philosophy was a major force in rock music's shift away from commercialized arena rock, and towards punk rock. He was troubled by the counterculture's growing pretentiousness, and, according to Kramer, "felt that the gravity with

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<sup>60</sup> Kramer, 46.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 63.

which rock fans” such as Patti Smith “were investing the music was problematic.”<sup>63</sup> Together with fellow critics Dave Marsh and Greg Shaw, Bangs introduced “punk” and its perspective into rock ‘n’ roll discourse and criticism as early as 1971.<sup>64</sup> “Alienated by the fashionably ‘arty’ records of James Taylor, Led Zeppelin, and Elton John,” Gendron explains that these writers “developed a counteraesthetic of rock that stressed its unpretentious, unadorned, and pugnacious pop roots. They introduced the label ‘punk’ into the rock discursive stream to identify what they thought to be the paradigms of ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ rock ‘n’ roll.”<sup>65</sup>

Though in many ways Smith’s review remains preoccupied with the Romantic perspective of 1960s rock criticism, its “low-brow” writing style and appreciation for the rough edges of *1969 Live* demonstrate her intimate knowledge of the changing landscape of rock music. She writes, for example: “The Velvets winding up the Sixties laying one long rhythmic fart across the West called Live in Texas; with Lou Reed winking right in the eye of that fart.”<sup>66</sup> That preliminary “punk” music might be called a fart would undoubtedly please Bangs, whose writing reveals three themes of a punk aesthetic, outlined succinctly by Gendron: “sheer aggressiveness and loudness, the element of physical shock”; “minimalism”; and “defiant rank amateurism.”<sup>67</sup> Originally, the term “punk” was used by Bangs and his cohorts to describe a group of lesser known bands from the 1960s, bands with single hits who had previously been neglected by critics, and who, Gendron explains, “combined rank amateurism with a certain pugnacity – bands such as Count Five (‘Psychotic Reaction’), Question Mark and the Mysterians

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<sup>63</sup> Kramer, 64.

<sup>64</sup> Gendron, 228.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, “Untitled (Review of the Velvet Underground’s *1969 Live* from *Creem*, September 1974).”

<sup>67</sup> Gendron, 233-4.

(‘96 Tears’), the Seeds (‘Pushing Too Hard’), and the Troggs (‘Wild Thing’). Today we refer to them as ‘garage bands.’”<sup>68</sup> Fellow *Creem* writer Lenny Kaye compiled the double album *Nuggets*, a now-legendary compilation of recordings from the mid- to late-60s that he explicitly referred to as “punk”; Kaye’s liner notes described the “punk” elements of these bands and their music, and praised what Gendron calls the “berserk pleasure that comes with being on-stage outrageous, the relentless middle finger and determination offered only by rock and roll at its finest.”<sup>69</sup> Within the next three years, Kaye became the first member of Patti Smith’s rock ‘n’ roll band, where he incorporated the “punk” philosophies of *Creem* into his guitar performance style and encouraged Smith to do the same.

In the midst of what Gendron calls Bangs’ “punk campaign,” the critic also took up the cause of Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, Smith’s interest in the Velvets and their role in the shifting tides of rock music was not novel among *Creem* writers. Gendron writes that, through Bangs’ interest in the Velvet Underground, “the discourses of punk got infused with the imagery of New York bohemianism and Lou Reed became the ‘godfather’ of punk.”<sup>71</sup> Under Bangs’ watchful eye the Velvet Underground developed a cult following; at this point, Smith was introduced to the band, and became convinced of the importance of their sound.<sup>72</sup> Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground shared a number of influences in common with Smith, including an explicit incorporation of Beat philosophy and style. The group formed in 1965, a decade before Smith’s own group would come together, and it rose to popularity as the in-house rock group at Andy Warhol’s Factory, which was, at the time, the artist’s studio and

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<sup>68</sup> Gendron, 232.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

headquarters. The Factory became infamous among the members of the New York underground for its cast of bizarre characters, which consisted on any given day of film-makers, photographers, dancers, models, artists, and musicians, as well as drag queens and professional societal outsiders of all variety.<sup>73</sup> Simon Warner also posits that the themes of the Velvet Underground's first album, *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, such as narcotics, sado-masochism, and death, could not have been created "without the new and liberated climate that the Beats had helped to construct with their own candid expressions."<sup>74</sup> Thus the music of the Velvet Underground, which would heavily influence that of Patti Smith, shared with hers an interdisciplinary array of artistic and musical influences, derived primarily from the members of the uniquely diverse New York underground. The interdisciplinary strategies of artists such as Reed and Smith undermined and subverted the traditions of rock 'n' roll, which was carried forward into the visual, literary, and musical culture of punk rock.

The Velvet Underground continued to build on the foundation of the Beats, developing their own brand of anti-rock, anti-countercultural idealism similar to that of Bangs and the writers of *Creem*. Matthew Bannister explores the Velvet Underground's tense relationship with the 1960s counterculture, explaining:

The Velvet Underground represented the antithesis of West Coast counterculture, emerging in 1966 like a hideous carbuncle on the face of a beautiful hippie child... The points of difference with [*The Velvet Underground & Nico* and] the counterculture were almost endless – psychedelic drugs/heroin and amphetamines; free love/S&M; good times/bad times; West Coast optimism/Eastern cynicism; heterosexuality/homosexuality; transcendence/negation; community/alienation; popularity/obscurity.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Warner, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>75</sup> Matthew Bannister, "'I'm Set Free...': The Velvet Underground, 1960s, Counterculture, and Michel Foucault," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 2 (2010), 164.

In the midst of the Summer of Love, the Velvet Underground were already prophesizing the emergence of punk rock as a response to countercultural idealism. Similar to Bangs' own ethos of rock as a "trashy consumer commodity," the Velvets viewed "feedback, distortion, and multimedia" not "as a means to a higher truth," but as "material technological practices that can be used strategically to create effects and interventions which will differ according to how they are employed, who employs them, and what the cultural context is."<sup>76</sup> Bannister argues that Warhol's "materialist insistence" informed the Velvets' philosophy that "rock and roll is only 'stuff' to be reshaped as the artist sees fit."<sup>77</sup> Finally, he posits that the Velvets might be "the most influential band to come out of white rocking America ever," but wonders if "they even count as rock and roll," concluding that this ambiguity is exactly what makes their work so important.<sup>78</sup> This theory might equally be applied to the work of Patti Smith, whose unconventional combination of musical influences from 1960s rock 'n' roll with her literary and poetic inspirations laid the groundwork for the punk rock movement alongside the previous work of the Velvet Underground.

"Not 70 still 60 on the tail where its dirty [sic]" Smith writes of *1969 Live*'s historical context, and the shifting tide of rock music that the album represents. While she recognizes this changing tide in the music of the Velvet Underground, Smith also prophesizes her own role in advancing this changing tide toward the impending punk rock movement of the late 1970s. Informed by the philosophies of fellow *Creem* writers such as Lester Bangs and Lenny Kaye, Smith would participate directly in the development of a punk rock ethos, earning herself the title of "Godmother" to Lou Reed's "Godfather."

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<sup>76</sup> Bannister, 166.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

However, Smith's artistic output continued to be informed by the Romantic ethos of rock criticism on which she was raised as a writer and artist, and her debut full-length LP, *Horses*, remains a prime example of the album as an entire piece of work, one which is meant to represent the authentic self of its creator, and which does not preoccupy itself with politics, instead allowing the concept of "art for art's sake" to prevail. Her relationship with several of the members of the Velvet Underground continued throughout her career, though she formed a close personal connection with Lou Reed; in 2015 Smith posthumously inducted Lou Reed into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and in her speech, she recalls the complexities of their decades-long friendship, and many of the lessons that he taught her about poetry, performance, and music. In summary, Smith states in her induction speech: "Everything Lou taught me, I remember."<sup>79</sup>

### **2.3 "Whatever it meant, with just a haircut, I miraculously turned androgynous overnight": Patti Smith, *Just Kids*, and the Construction of Androgyny**

Patti Smith's memoir *Just Kids* focuses on Smith's relationship with artist and photographer Robert Mapplethorpe during her early years in New York City. Smith recalls her early career as an artist and poet, celebrates the cast of characters at the famous Chelsea Hotel who influenced her artistic philosophies and the trajectory of her career, and describes her eventual growth into a rock 'n' roll artist. Published in 2010, *Just Kids* is the first of a host of memoirs published by female rock 'n' roll performers in the past decade; the same year, Cherie Currie of the Runaways published *Neon Angel: A Memoir of a Runaway*. Viv Albertine of the

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<sup>79</sup> "Watch Patti Smith's Poignant Lou Reed Rock Hall Induction Speech," *RollingStone.com*, April 19, 2015, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/read-patti-smiths-poignant-lou-reed-rock-hall-induction-20150419>.

Slits, the first all-female punk band, released her *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes, Music, Music, Music, Boys, Boys, Boys* in 2014, and Kim Gordon's *Girl in a Band*, Chrissie Hynde's *Reckless: My Life as a Pretender*, and Riot Grrrl Carrie Brownstein's *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* all followed in 2015. The publication of these memoirs by key female rock artists is helping to shed new light on the female rock experience.<sup>80</sup> Memoirs like these provide an important alternative to the dominant rock 'n' roll narrative and work to undermine the masculinist rock 'n' roll canon which has been upheld by the publication of male rock memoirs such as Keith Richard's *Life* or Pete Townshend's *Who I Am*, for example.<sup>81</sup> Memoirs such as *Just Kids* present an opportunity for readers to consider the personal experiences of female rock 'n' roll performers, but also provide those performers the opportunity to differentiate themselves from one another as a means of avoiding the essentialist label of "women in rock." One particular excerpt from Smith's *Just Kids* informs a more well-rounded understanding of the deliberate origins of Smith's androgynous gender performance and its relationship to her artistic philosophies.

About halfway through *Just Kids*, Smith describes an interaction which, though fleeting, would have a lasting impact on the development of her rock 'n' roll persona:

As we were leaving in the elevator, Fred Hughes, who managed the Factory, addressed me in a condescending voice. "Ohhh, your hair is very Joan Baez. Are you a folksinger? I don't know why, as I admired her, but it bugged me.

Robert took my hand. "Just ignore him," he said.

I found myself in dark humor. One of those nights when the mind starts looping bothersome things, I got to thinking about what Fred Hughes had said. Screw him, I thought, annoyed at being dismissed.

I looked at myself in the mirror over the sink. I realized that I hadn't cut my hair any different since I was a teenager. I sat on the floor and spread out a few rock magazines I had. I usually bought them to get any new pictures of Bob Dylan, but it

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<sup>80</sup> Lucy O'Brien, "I'm With the Band: Redefining Young Feminism," in *Voicing Girlhood in Popular Music: Performance, Authority, Authenticity* ed. Jacqueline Warwick and Allison Adrian (New York: Routledge, 2016), 18.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

wasn't Bob I was looking for. I cut out all the pictures I could find of Keith Richards. I studied them for a while and took up the scissors, machete-ing my way out of the folk era. I washed my hair in the hallway bathroom and shook it dry. It was a liberating experience.

When Robert came home, he was surprised but pleased. "What possessed you?" he asked. I just shrugged. But when we went to Max's, my haircut caused quite a stir. I couldn't believe all the fuss over it. Though I was still the same person, my social status suddenly elevated. My Keith Richards haircut was a real discourse magnet. I thought of the girls I knew back in high school. They dreamed of being singers but wound up hairdressers. I desired neither vocation, but in weeks to come I would be cutting a lot of people's hair, and singing at La MaMa.

Someone at Max's asked me if I was androgynous. I asked what that meant. "You know, like Mick Jagger." I figured that must be cool. I thought the word meant both beautiful and ugly at the same time. Whatever it meant, with just a haircut, I miraculously turned androgynous overnight.<sup>82</sup>

Two of the locations that Smith mentions in this excerpt, the Factory and Max's, were the frequent haunts of pop art pioneer Andy Warhol and his followers. In these spaces, the who's who of high society, commercial art, and the New York underground came to mingle and be seen, and Patti Smith attended for several months before she began to feel accepted, or even acknowledged, in these spaces.<sup>83</sup> The Factory and Max's are example of what Sarah Thornton terms "undergrounds," spaces that she defines as "fashionable or trendy," and as "exclusive worlds whose main point may not be elitism but whose parameters often relate to particular crowds," except in the case of the Factory we see that elitism does, in fact, play a key role.<sup>84</sup> Fred Hughes, the manager of the Factory, acted in this case as a sort of gatekeeper to this underground, assigning degrees of "hip-ness" to those present and dismissing those, like Smith, who do not meet his standard of fashionable or trendy. Hughes actively maintained a high bar of

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<sup>82</sup> Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 140.

<sup>83</sup> Ann Powers, *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in American Music* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 200.

<sup>84</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 117.



“hip-ness” at the Factory and ensured that the space did not become watered down, or in any way associated with the dominant culture of the time. As Thornton observes, “[t]he underground espouses a fashion system that is highly relative; it is all about position, context and timing.”<sup>85</sup> The “built-in obsolescence” of these signifiers of “hip-ness” requires that this standard must be actively maintained and regularly reinvented, to ensure that an underground does not become out-dated or diluted with mainstream culture.<sup>86</sup> Hughes’s gatekeeping encouraged Smith to reinvent her own appearance in order to meet the standard of the Factory. By taking strides to meet, or surpass, the bar of “hip-ness” at the Factory, Smith consequently elevated her own status among the denizens of this underground.

Despite her admiration for Joan Baez, Smith was displeased with being compared to the folk singer, and took action to ensure that the comparison was not reiterated. Though she was not yet a rock singer at the time of this interaction with Hughes, Smith recognized the limitations of the female folk singer category, and understood that this sort of comparison undermined her authority as an artistic participant in the New York underground. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press describe “the singer/songwriter/folkie lady – long-haired, pure-voiced, self-accompanied on acoustic guitar” as one of the few success routes available to women within the subgenres of rock music.<sup>87</sup> However, Frith and McRobbie lament that “whatever the ability, integrity, and toughness of Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Sandy Denny, and the others, their musical appeal, the way they were sold, reinforced in rock the qualities traditionally linked with female singers – sensitivity, passivity, and sweetness.”<sup>88</sup> The traditionally female characteristics of these folk

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<sup>85</sup> Thornton, 117.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Routledge, 1990), 377.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

singers linked them with the dominant, or “mainstream,” culture of the time, which continued to privilege traditional performances of female subservience. Thus, these female folk singers, as well as their look-alikes, had no place in the spaces of the New York underground, such as the Factory and Max’s. Furthermore, Smith’s very presence in New York came about because of her dissatisfaction with the ideals of conventional feminine domesticity, so any of her conventionally feminine characteristics may have felt like ties to the domestic life in which she had refused to participate. The shedding of her hair, an experience she describes as “liberating,” was, much like her move to New York City, a step towards leaving conventionality and domestic femininity behind. That her social status would be elevated with the detachment of her ties to conventionality demonstrates the very ethos of the New York underground of which she was now a part.

Frith and McRobbie argue further that “[f]or women rockers to become hard aggressive performers it was necessary for them... to become ‘one of the boys.’”<sup>89</sup> Smith did exactly this, shedding her feminine locks and styling herself after rock ‘n’ roll prototype Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. Smith was an avid Stones fan, and had been from her teenage years, but her selection of Richards as a model for unconventionality also demonstrates an intuitive understanding of the role of authenticity in the New York underground, and the role of gender ambiguity as a marker of that authenticity. Keith Richards, whose clothing, jewellery, and eye-liner destabilize gender norms when considered in the context of his aggressive heterosexuality, is the ultimate example of what Wiesethaunet and Lindberg refer to as “body authenticity.” This “version of ‘authenticity’ relates to bodily aspects of music reception and performance,” Wiesethaunet and Lindberg explain, and it draws from the “impact of a performer’s physical

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<sup>89</sup> Frith and McRobbie, 377.

presence, which, of course, allows for styling as well as what ‘comes natural’ – race, gender, age, etc.”<sup>90</sup> Richards’ full-scale embodiment of rock culture, innate performance skill, perpetuation of rock ‘n’ roll’s androgynous trends, and incorporation of them into his a performance of “cool,” result in a listening and viewing experience that, for rock ‘n’ roll fans, transcends the banality of everyday life. Sarah Thornton describes two facets of a similar definition of authenticity as they apply to music, though her concepts can also be used to understand the perception of a performer’s authenticity. The first aspect of authenticity that Thornton defines “involves issues of originality and aura,” which is similar to Wiesethaunet and Lindberg’s description of “what ‘comes natural’” as it relates to body authenticity.<sup>91</sup> “The second kind of authenticity,” Thornton continues, “is about being natural to the community or organic to subculture. These two kinds of authenticity can be related to two basic definitions of culture: the first draws upon definitions of culture as art, the second relates to culture in the anthropological sense of a ‘whole way of life.’”<sup>92</sup> This latter form of authenticity sheds light on the question of why Smith would style herself after Keith Richards; Richards’s embodiment of rock ‘n’ roll’s ethos of unconventionality and authenticity made him the perfect icon for someone whose intention was to be perceived as “hip” or alternative through their own experimentation with gender norms and expectations.

This tension between Joan Baez and Keith Richards, the folkie and the rock ‘n’ roll icon, the feminine and the masculine, demonstrates what Thornton refers to as “the traditional divide between virile high art and feminized low culture” as it “is replayed within popular culture itself.”<sup>93</sup> Here, she draws from Andreas Huyssen’s arguments “about how mass culture has long

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<sup>90</sup> Wiesethaunet Lindberg, 475.

<sup>91</sup> Thornton, 30.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 104.

been positioned as feminine by high culture theorists” and modernists to argue that, “even among youth cultures” such as rock ‘n’ roll, “there is a double articulation of the lowly and the feminine: disparaged *other* cultures” such as pop and folk music “are characterized as feminine and girls’ cultures are devalued as imitative. Authentic culture is, by contrast, depicted in gender-free or masculine terms and remains the prerogative of boys.”<sup>94</sup>

Smith navigates this tension not by challenging it, in this instance, but by intentionally co-opting it and participating in its perpetuation. Her appropriation of Keith Richards’ haircut demonstrates Smith’s essential understanding of feminine culture as the disparaged other in the contexts of both rock ‘n’ roll and the New York underground scene. Because she was introduced to the concept while being compared to rock icon Mick Jagger, Smith assumed that “androgynous” must be a good thing, and in fact it did turn out to be so, as it helped her to carve a distinctive space for herself within the very subcultures that she sought to infiltrate.

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<sup>94</sup> Thornton, 104-5.

### CHAPTER 3: RECORDINGS OF EARLY SONG REWORKINGS

Like Patti Smith's written material, the early music of the Patti Smith Group is rife with influence and layers of meaning. The two songs analyzed in this chapter, "Hey Joe" and "Gloria: in excelsis deo" take Smith's signification of her influences to its extreme; both songs are imaginative covers of popular 1960s songs by male rock performers. Furthermore, Mike Daley argues that Smith's versions of these songs are not simply covers, but "reworkings," because Smith "adds a great deal of text and performs the song in a quite different manner from the original version."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, these songs provide opportunity to analyze both Smith's intertextual engagement with the original versions, and her own songwriting strategies. "Hey Joe," the flip-side to the Smith Group's musical recording of "Piss Factory," is not only the first example of Smith's ability to reimagine the work of others, but also the initial instance of her frequent incorporation of current events and media headlines into her musical material. On the other hand, "Gloria: in excelsis deo" – arguably one of Smith's more enduringly popular songs – combines her own poetic material with THEM's "Gloria" in an extensive reconstruction of the song's style and meaning. Smith's poetic identity, then, informs the material of both reworkings, but her other literary influences are also present. Before Patti Smith's versions appeared in the mid-1970s, featuring Lenny Kaye on guitar, both "Hey Joe" and "Gloria" had been extensively covered by bands that appear on Kaye's *Nuggets*, for example. Thus, the dynamic histories of these songs provide Smith a unique opportunity to interact directly with the history of rock 'n' roll music while simultaneously constructing her own rock 'n' roll philosophy and persona.

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Daley, "Patti Smith's 'Gloria': Intertextual Play in a Rock Vocal Performance," *Popular Music* 16, no. 3 (1977), 236.

### 3.1 “Now here she is with a gun in her hand”: “Hey Joe” and Female Liberation

The Patti Smith Group released their first single, “Hey Joe,” independently in 1974.<sup>2</sup> This song, with its complex performance and recording history, provides the initial example of Smith’s habitual appropriation and reworking of male rock ‘n’ roll standards for her own purposes of social criticism and self-expression. “Hey Joe” was first written by Californian folk blues balladeer Billy Roberts, who sold it to Dino Valenti of the Quicksilver Messenger Service for a quick pay day.<sup>3</sup> Valenti copyrighted the song under the pen-name Chet Powers and taught the song to his friend David Crosby of the Byrds, who began performing it in 1965, though fellow LA band the Leaves beat the Byrds to the punch when they became the first to record the song that same year. By the time “Hey Joe” entered the rock ‘n’ roll canon by way of Jimi Hendrix, it had been rearranged into its now recognizably down-tempo, bluesy iteration by folk singer Tim Rose. In 1966, “Hey Joe” became the first song to be recorded by the Jimi Hendrix Experience, who included it on the initial USA release of their debut album *Are You Experienced*.<sup>4</sup> At its heart, “Hey Joe” is a classic example of genre-crossing collaborative exchange of artistic ideas that would become fundamental to Patti Smith’s successful career. The track’s connection to Jimi Hendrix, as well as its incorporation of a variety of popular music aesthetics such as blues, folk, and garage rock, made it the ideal song through which to express Smith’s musical influences and social commentary. The Patti Smith Group recorded “Hey Joe” in Jimi Hendrix’s Electric Ladyland studio as a tribute to Hendrix’s influence on Smith and her

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Bockris and Roberta Bayley, *Patti Smith: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Doggett, *Jimi Hendrix: The Complete Guide to His Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2011), 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

artistic community.<sup>5</sup> Smith's choice of the song reveals the impact of her influences on her performance decisions and provides some insight into the values inherent in the development of her rock 'n' roll persona.

Smith recalls her introduction to Jimi Hendrix at the opening celebration of his Electric Ladyland studio in New York and his impact on her musical philosophy. "He dreamed of amassing musicians from all over the world in Woodstock and they would sit in a field in a circle and play and play," Smith remembers fondly.<sup>6</sup> "It didn't matter what key or tempo or what melody, they would keep on playing through their discordance until they found a common knowledge... 'The language of peace. You dig?' I did."<sup>7</sup> At the time of this meeting, Patti Smith was not a musician herself, but rather a spoken-word poet with a fully realized passion for rock 'n' roll music, and so it may be inferred that Hendrix's vision of music as a vehicle for social change, regardless of the technical skill of the musician, encouraged Smith to take up rock 'n' roll as her own blunt tool of self-expression. What better material to rework into her first single, then, than the first song recorded by the Jimi Hendrix Experience, and where better to record it than Hendrix's own Electric Ladyland Studio?

The musical material of Smith's "Hey Joe" demonstrates further the impact of Hendrix on the development of her rock 'n' roll aesthetic. The Smith Group originally recorded their version of the track as a piano ballad, rhythmically conventional and harmonically straightforward, with an emphasis on Smith's additional lyrical material and her striking vocal timbre. However, Smith felt as though this version failed to convey the desperate desire for freedom inherent in the narrative of the fugitive murderer, Joe, and so requested that Tom

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<sup>5</sup> Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 241.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

Verlaine of the CBGB band Television overdub two tracks of solo guitar over the Smith Group's recording.<sup>8</sup> The result is a cacophonous climax during which Smith yells "I feel so free!" over a guitar solo performed entirely in the instrument's upper range. Verlaine's solo directly recalls Hendrix's signature guitar sound, one that was characterized by "bent, distorted notes teetering over the edge of tonality and feedback shrieks struggling to avoid the inevitability of sonic decay," as Steve Waksman eloquently states.<sup>9</sup> To Smith, then, the experience of freedom becomes synonymous with musical expression, and that musical expression is immediately informed by the performance strategies and signature styles of those who have influenced her: in this case the hyper-masculine, black, countercultural figure of Jimi Hendrix.

The music of Jimi Hendrix is equally steeped in cultural reference and aesthetic influence. In "Got My Own World to Look Through: Jimi Hendrix and the Blues Aesthetic," Charles Gower Price locates Hendrix's work within the American blues tradition, and explores the artist's myriad of musical inspirations and inputs, "from B. B. King to Muddy Waters, Bach to Eddie Cochran."<sup>10</sup> Music historian Nick Bromell also considers at some length the role of the blues in Hendrix's music, particularly his first album with the Jimi Hendrix Experience, the very album on which "Hey Joe" appears. On it, "Hendrix returns again and again to the blues idiom, throwing in blues licks and chord changes that ballast his most exuberant experiments in electronics with the centripetal return home that characterizes the blues," Bromell argues.<sup>11</sup> It

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<sup>8</sup> Patti Smith, *Just Kids*, 241.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Waksman, "Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness," in *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 182-183.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Gower Price, "Got My Own World to Look Through: Jimi Hendrix and the Blues Aesthetic," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 25, no. 3-4 (2002), 442.

<sup>11</sup> Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 105.



was not Hendrix's incorporation of the blues that drew Smith to his aesthetic, however, but a characteristic performance style that Bromell describes as "uncompromising, determined, rebellious."<sup>12</sup> In a brief description that makes the reason for its appeal to Smith apparent, Bromell asserts that "In song after song on *Are You Experienced?* [Hendrix] recommits himself to the breakthrough experience, to going beyond, getting out of what he dismisses as *your little world*."<sup>13</sup> Hendrix's own resistance to the society's limitations would no doubt have appealed to Smith's rebellious sensibilities, thus making "Hey Joe" an increasingly relevant choice for Smith's initial foray into the field of defiant self-expression.

Price's analysis of Hendrix's blues influences also contends that, through his study of the path-breaking material of Bob Dylan, Hendrix learned that if he did not make the sounds in his head into music, the way Dylan did with words, then nobody would.<sup>14</sup> The influence of Bob Dylan is shared between Hendrix and Smith, as it is amongst many rock 'n' roll performers of the 1960s and '70s. Bockris and Bayley describe Smith's introduction to Dylan through her mother, Beverly Smith, and depict his impact on Smith as similar to that on Hendrix. "One day," Smith is quoted recalling, "she brought this record home and said, 'I never heard of the fellow, but he looks like somebody you'd like,' and it was *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. I loved him. I've always loved singing, but I never knew how to approach singing out of my poems. Dylan released that in me."<sup>15</sup> Dylan, already her poetic and musical influence, also became a close friend of Patti Smith's in the later years of her career, and that connection endured until Smith's relatively recent re-emergence into the public sphere. Smith and Dylan toured together in 1995,

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<sup>12</sup> Bromell, 105.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 37.

following Smith's several-decade hiatus from public life,<sup>16</sup> and in 2016 Dylan chose Smith to perform "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" at the Nobel Prize Ceremony in his place when he declined to accept the award.<sup>17</sup> Bromell explains:

Dylan turned to a strongly blues-based rock following his shift in musical aesthetic away from acoustic Appalachian folk towards electric blues "because he felt that the condition named by rock – that he too would call 'loneliness' – was personally more compelling and disturbing than political injustices he had witnessed."<sup>18</sup>

As a self-identifying outsider of society, Smith's attraction to the musical aesthetic of Dylan was surely informed by his ability to articulate the loneliness that she, too, experienced. It becomes clear that the Patti Smith Group's "Hey Joe" is directly informed by Hendrix's aesthetic and performance style. This, in turn, reflects the broad range of Hendrix's own musical and aesthetic influences, among them Bob Dylan. Smith's "Hey Joe," then, contributes to a rock 'n' roll culture which is continuously self-referential and steeped in shared traditions. Rather than subverting these traditions, Smith's selection of "Hey Joe" as her group's first single confirms her deliberate participation in the subculture of rock 'n' roll. Price reiterates this inference with his assertion that "[t]he double strands of post-war R&B and the folk-blues revival of the late 1950s and 1960s [in which Dylan participated] provided conduits to the sound and soul of early rock and roll."<sup>19</sup> Smith's selection of "Hey Joe" further links her performance devices not only to Jimi Hendrix and to Bob Dylan, but to the overarching tradition of rock 'n' roll as a whole.

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<sup>16</sup> Kirk Elder, "Dark Eyes and a Sardonic Smile: Patti Smith on Working with Bob Dylan," *Alternatives to Valium*, March 3, 2009, [https://alternativestovalium.blogspot.ca/2009/03/dark-eyes-and-sardonic-smile-patti\\_03.html](https://alternativestovalium.blogspot.ca/2009/03/dark-eyes-and-sardonic-smile-patti_03.html).

<sup>17</sup> Patti Smith, "How Does It Feel," *New Yorker.com*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/patti-smith-on-singing-at-bob-dylans-nobel-prize-ceremony>.

<sup>18</sup> Bromell, 129-130.

<sup>19</sup> Price, 443.

However, Smith did not earn herself the moniker ‘The Godmother of Punk’ by simply maintaining the rock ‘n’ roll status quo. Her incorporation of rebellious poetic material into a murder ballad of the folk tradition complicates this reading by upending the gendered traditions of American popular music. Using “Hey Joe” as scaffolding, Smith reinvents the narrative of “Joe” into one about the topical, enigmatic social figure Patty Hearst. Patty Hearst, socialite and granddaughter of infamous publisher William Randolph Hearst, was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army in 1974.<sup>20</sup> On April 15 of that year, Hearst was spotted on a security camera wielding a gun and assisting her captors in the robbery of a San Francisco bank. A subsequent tape was released on which Hearst declared her allegiance to the SLA and issued the following statement: “Tell everybody that I feel free and strong and I send my greetings and love to all the sisters and brothers out there.”<sup>21</sup> In *Just Kids*, Smith explains: “Something in these words, magnified by our shared first name, drew me to respond to her complicated plight. Lenny [Kaye], Richard [Lloyd], and I merged my meditation on her situation with Jimi Hendrix’s version of “Hey Joe.” The connection between Patty Hearst and “Hey Joe” lay within the lyrics, a fugitive crying out ‘I feel so free.’”<sup>22</sup>

And Patty Hearst  
You standing there in front of the  
Symbionese Liberation army flag with your legs spread  
I was wondering were you gettin' it every night  
From a black revolutionary man  
And his women  
Or were you really dead  
And now that you're on the run what goes on in your mind  
Your sisters they sit by the window  
And all your mama does is sit and cry  
And your daddy

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<sup>20</sup> William Graebner, *Patty's Got a Gun: Patricia Hearst in 1970s America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Patti Smith, *Just Kids*, 241.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Well you know what your daddy said Patty  
You know what your daddy said Patty?  
He said, he said, he said  
Well, sixty days ago she was such a lovely child  
Now here she is with a gun in her hand<sup>23</sup>

This, the final stanza of spoken word before the introduction of the musical material, introduces the parallel between the two women, the subject and the artist, through the repetition of their shared first name. In it, both women can be understood as resisting the limiting characteristic of “loveliness” applied to them by a patriarchal figure. In Hearst’s case, the figure is her own father, and perhaps also her grandfather, a man whose legacy includes cut-throat publishing policies such as the manufacture of sensational stories and faked interviews as an illicit means of selling more newspapers, and whose cruel and misogynistic nature has been immortalized in the classic film *Citizen Kane*.<sup>24</sup>

Several scholars have argued that widespread media attention developed Hearst’s case into one about the tension between traditional feminine domesticity and radical feminine agency, an issue that was already on the minds of many Americans due to the prevalence of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the media. Literary scholar Christopher Castiglia, for one, insists that “in popular media, [Hearst] became the central figure in an allegorical war over innocence, in which the ‘good guys’ (the police and the wealthy) battle with the ‘bad guys’ (the poor, the black, the sexually ‘liberated’) over the body of a young, white woman.”<sup>25</sup> Laura Browder’s

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<sup>23</sup> “Hey Joe Lyrics,” *Genius.com*, accessed October 12, 2017, <https://genius.com/Patti-smith-hey-joe-lyrics>.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Feuerheard, “Why William Randolph Hearst Hated *Citizen Kane*,” *JStor Daily*, April 29, 2017, <https://daily.jstor.org/why-william-randolph-hearst-hated-citizen-kane>.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Castiglia, “That Was Not My Idea of Independence: The Captivity of Patty Hearst,” in *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 88.

essay about armed, radical women in 1960s and '70s America argues that Hearst's "trial and the widespread media attention it attracted became a public forum on the cultural meanings of women's revolutionary violence."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps due to the media's preoccupation with Hearst's gender and its revolutionary implications, Smith equates her armed robbery with a reclamation of her own agency from the hands of a patriarchal society and conceptualizes Hearst as a sort of sister in arms against the limitations of femininity. Rather than experiencing patriarchal domination at the hands of a capitalistic father figure, however, Smith experiences this authority more abstractly through the pressures of social expectation and feminine propriety, which she resists through her insistent participation in the masculinist subculture of rock 'n' roll.

In the early pages of *Just Kids*, Smith recounts her discomfort with the confines of feminine propriety of which her mother "was the messenger and also the message."<sup>27</sup> She recalls her feelings of betrayal at being told that the boys could go shirtless in the heat but she could not, her revulsion at "the heavy scent of perfume and the red slashes of lipstick, so strong in the fifties," and her discomfort with the female tasks and female body of her mother that seemed entirely against her nature.<sup>28</sup> Her experience, according to feminist social historian Wini Breines, was not unique, but relatively common amongst the young, middle-class women who were entering adulthood in the 1950s. Breines maintains that "[m]any girls knew that they did not want to reproduce their mothers' lives. Some girls," like Smith, "managed to construct their own, often secret, strategies for exploration, often identifying themselves as outsiders."<sup>29</sup> These

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<sup>26</sup> Laura Browder, "Radical Women of the 1960s and 1970s," in *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 137.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Just Kids*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 12.

women, Breines explains, “were curious about and tested the borders of respectability” that limited their social behaviour.<sup>30</sup> In Smith’s case, not only does she identify herself as an outsider, but she appears to also form intense emotional connections to those who she views as successful in their challenge to the social limitations that she experiences, such as Allen Ginsberg and Robert Mapplethorpe. In “Hey Joe,” Smith uses Hearst’s story as an opportunity to explore her own subversive tendencies, which, Breines explains, girls in the 50s accomplished by drawing influence from a variety of countercultural sources, including the Beats and rhythm & blues music and culture.<sup>31</sup> Smith’s participation in rock ‘n’ roll music, and her passionate preoccupation with the rock ‘n’ roll subculture originate from just such a subversive intention, and she identifies Hearst as an ally in her struggle against society’s effort to constrict her identity and behaviour.

The climax of the Smith Group’s “Hey Joe” is performed in an adamant cry of protest to the confines of feminine respectability, and in it, Smith’s own position within the complex Patty Hearst/Joe metaphor is made explicit.

But daddy, daddy, you’ll never know just what I was feelin’  
But I’ll tell you  
I am no little pretty little rich girl  
I am nobody’s million dollar baby  
I am nobody’s patsy anymore  
I’m nobody’s million dollar baby  
I’m nobody’s patsy anymore  
And I feel so free<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Breines, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Hey Joe Lyrics,” *Genius.com*.

Here, the women's shared first name morphs into "patsy," someone who lacks authority over a given situation. With her refusal to identify this way, Smith asserts autonomy over her own life, an autonomy that she would maintain over her musical performance and persona construction even after being signed to Arista Records by Clive Davis.<sup>33</sup> In "Hey Joe," Smith equates the experience of freedom to the resistance of feminine respectability, subverting the masculinist ethos of rock 'n' roll even while simultaneously appropriating one of its male subjects, the girlfriend-shooting-character "Joe," for her purposes of social criticism. Through her exploration of the Patty Hearst/Joe metaphor, Smith effectively androgynizes Joe and universalizes his quest for liberation from societal confinement. For Smith, it seems, the potential for rock 'n' roll as a vehicle for self-expression is not defined by the subculture's explicitly masculinist ethos. Instead, as suggested by her blending of the narratives of Joe and Patty Hearst, Smith recognizes the potential for rock 'n' roll to explore the limitations of feminine propriety. The Smith Group's utilization of a rock 'n' roll standard as a scaffolding for their own celebration of the experience of liberation implies that Smith views her gendered social criticism as consistent with rock 'n' roll's ethos of social rebellion, rather than subversive to its gendered traditions.

Like Hearst, Smith takes up arms against the limitations of "loveliness," except the gun in her hand is a guitar. Mavis Bayton defines the electric guitar as "the instrument which most epitomizes rock," and explains that "for a man, a good performance on the electric guitar is simultaneously a good 'performance' of 'masculinity'."<sup>34</sup> Thus, in her rejection of the confines of feminine respectability, Smith takes up an instrument which signifies masculinity within the

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<sup>33</sup> Gillian G. Gaar, *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock n' Roll* (New York: Seal Press, 1992), 196.

<sup>34</sup> Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whitley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 43.

tradition of rock ‘n’ roll, and which has been utilized as a tool of subversion and expression by several of her most important musical influences, including Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix.

Whether this is a subversive strategy, or instead a means of further channeling her musical influences, is not entirely clear, though Bayton has argued that, for a woman, simply performing on a masculine coded, rock ‘n’ roll instrument is sufficient evidence of subversive intent.<sup>35</sup>

Smith’s inherent knowledge of the electric guitar as a symbol of masculine authority is prevalent, not only in her musical material, but in her early poetry as well. The 1976 poem “babelfield (version),” for example, describes a scene of war, a stage that has historically been reserved for men. On this violent stage, the unnamed actors struggle desperately to produce worthwhile art and to enact social change, with Smith among their ranks. In “babelfield (version),” Smith equates herself to a warrior and says of her guitar “it weighs less than a machine gun/ and never runs out of ammunition.”<sup>36</sup> It is apparent in these words that Smith’s experience of autonomy and freedom are coupled with her ability to produce meaningful art in the form of rock ‘n’ roll music.

The first instance of the word “guitar” on the Smith Group’s recording of “Hey Joe” occurs immediately at the beginning of the piece, in the first stanza of Smith’s spoken word material.

Honey, the way you play guitar makes me feel so  
Makes me feel so masochistic  
The way you go down low deep into the neck  
And I would do anything, and I would do anything<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65.

<sup>36</sup> Patti Smith, “babelfield (version),” *Early Work 1970-1979* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 115.

<sup>37</sup> “Hey Joe Lyrics,” *Genius.com*.



Here, Smith compares technical skill on the electric guitar to sexual prowess. As Bayton alleges, “[t]he electric guitar, as situated within the masculinist discourse of rock, is virtually seen as an extension of the male body. (Male) musical skills become synonymous with (male) sexual skills.”<sup>38</sup> Jimi Hendrix, whose musical and aesthetic influences are at the heart of the Patti Smith Group’s reworking of “Hey Joe,” so epitomizes the metaphor of guitar as phallus that musicologist Steve Waksman coined the term “technophallus” to describe Hendrix’s manipulation of the electric guitar as a “technological extension of his body.”<sup>39</sup> Smith’s heteronormative physical response to the electric guitar, then, problematizes the subversive content of her lyrics. By adapting the electric guitar as her weapon of resistance, but also responding sexually to its playing, Smith simultaneously adopts the masculine and the feminine, incorporating both voices into her own resistant narrative. “I imagined myself as Frida to Diego, both muse and maker,” Smith writes in *Just Kids*,<sup>40</sup> indicating her desire to simultaneously make the rebellious art of her male influences, but also to reserve her right to respond to it in a heterosexual manner.

The theme of feminine rebellion at the core of Smith’s “Hey Joe” is further complicated by the girlfriend-shooting character of Joe, and his representation of the inherent misogyny that permeates black blues ballad culture in America, the tradition from which this song is derived. In his landmark exploration of the origins of the black blues tradition in America, Alan Lomax defines the key characteristics of black ballads. “In them ... an individual stands up for what he or she feels or believes and then faces the tragic consequences of this act,” Lomax explains.<sup>41</sup> He

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<sup>38</sup> Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” 43.

<sup>39</sup> Waksman, 187.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Just Kids*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 204.

locates these ballads within an early shift of racial consciousness in America, arguing that they represent a resistance to black social status: “In their ballad making, Southern blacks had moved past the biblical heroes of the slave songs and were celebrating blacks who were not passive, nor anonymous, but persons to be reckoned with.”<sup>42</sup> Hearst’s behavior, located within a shift of social consciousness regarding gender and sexuality in America that occurred during the 1960s and early ‘70s, maintains the ethos of resistance to the social order that is explicit in the black ballad tradition. From this perspective, Smith’s incorporation of the Patty Hearst narrative in “Hey Joe” is also a maintenance of the genre’s tradition.<sup>43</sup> However, Lomax continues that many black ballads are recognizable by their “constant refrain of . . . the faithlessness of lovers,” and explains that, for many black American men in the 1920s, ‘30s, and ‘40s, their experiences of being displaced and disrespected by society were often equated with “the heartbreaking fickleness of women.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, many of their folk ballads include narratives, such as that at the heart of “Hey Joe,” of a man murdering an unfaithful woman, and living with the negative consequences of his actions. The protagonist of “Hey Joe,” for example, flees to Mexico to avoid the law after shooting his girlfriend, whom he heard was being unfaithful. Whether the faithlessness of the girlfriend is ever confirmed remains irrelevant, because she is merely a symbol of the larger systems of oppression that have worked to emasculate the narrator throughout his life.

Smith’s reworking of a song from this tradition into a work of feminine resistance may be read in several ways. It may simply be that Smith chose to overlook the inherent misogyny of the ballad tradition in her desire to incorporate its ethos of social rebelliousness into her own work,

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<sup>42</sup> Lomax, 204.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 381.

much in the way she does with many of the traditions of rock 'n' roll. On the other hand, Smith's incorporation of Hearst's narrative into that of Joe may be read as an active challenge to the masculinist ethos of a tradition that conceptualizes women as no more than a hurdle to be overcome in the pursuit of sexual fulfillment. In Smith's "Hey Joe," women are also "not passive, nor anonymous, but persons to be reckoned with"; rather than a plot feature in a narrative about men, Hearst is an actor in her own resistant narrative. Just as Hearst's behavior might be read as refusal to be complacent in a life of feminine domesticity, Smith's Patty Hearst narrative refuses to be overshadowed by the masculinist ethos of the murder ballad tradition.

"Hey Joe" is, at its core, an exploration of the many facets of identity, or, perhaps, a multi-faceted exploration of a single identity, that of Patti Smith herself. The song, with its varied recording and performance history, is a conglomerate of rock 'n' roll influence that combines elements of folk, rock 'n' roll, and blues traditions. In "Hey Joe," Smith fuses the identities of Joe, a fugitive on the run for shooting his girlfriend, and Patty Hearst, a socialite turned bank robber, and she uses their combined narratives to explore her own feelings toward the constraints of feminine propriety and her ongoing quest for the experience of liberation. Smith draws influence from the memory and legacy of Jimi Hendrix by incorporating musical elements into her version of the track that directly recall the musical aesthetic of Hendrix and going so far as to record the song in Hendrix's own Electric Ladyland. At the heart of this recording is Smith's ability to channel her influences into the production of a singular persona that would be at the cutting edge of the next major thing in rock 'n' roll.

### **3.2 "The words are just rules and regulations to me": "Gloria: in excelsis deo" Reworks the Rock 'n' Roll Tradition**

Van Morrison wrote “Gloria” for his Belfast R&B group THEM in 1964 and, like “Hey Joe,” THEM’s “Gloria” became a rock ‘n’ roll standard not long after its release, inspiring hundreds of cover versions and re-recordings throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>45</sup> THEM’s “Gloria” consists of a male-coded rock ‘n’ roll narrative in which a man celebrates his sexual conquest of a woman named Gloria over top of an aggressively repetitive three-chord rock ‘n’ roll guitar riff.<sup>46</sup> Patti Smith’s selection of this track as the scaffolding for the first single from her debut LP *Horses*, produced by John Cale of Velvet Underground fame and released by Arista Records in 1975, affords musicologists a bevy of analytical material. Many existing musicological studies of this work are preoccupied, as I am, with the question of Smith’s subversive intentions toward both the gendered traditions of rock ‘n’ roll and the limitations of prescribed femininity within society. Through analysis of two unique and vastly differing examples of such scholarship, “Patti Smith’s ‘Gloria’: Intertextual Play in a Rock Vocal Performance” by Mike Daley and “Appropriating the Phallus? Female Voices and the Law-of-the-Father” by Richard Middleton, I explore in this section the methodologies of these two scholars in their own research about Patti Smith’s “Gloria: in excelsis deo,” while simultaneously utilizing their studies to supplement my own conceptualization of the potentially subversive intention of Patti Smith’s androgynous musical performance and persona construction.

At the centre of Mike Daley’s analysis of Patti Smith’s “Gloria” are “questions of meaning in a rock vocal performance,” and so his attention is focused primarily on the technical

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<sup>45</sup> Daley, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Middleton, “Appropriating the Phallus? Female Voices and the Law-of-the-Father,” in *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 98.

elements of Smith's vocal performance, including its range and timbral manipulation.<sup>47</sup> Daley uses this strategy, alongside extensive comparison between the two versions of the song, and some lyrical analysis of the additional poetic material that Smith has added to her version, to consider the underlying narrative of Smith's "Gloria" and its function within a broader rock 'n' roll context:

[Smith] retains some of Morrison's text (playing up the sexual angle somewhat without changing the male perspective), and simply by singing this text in a female voice, Smith creates another dialogic layer... Her added text expands on some of the implied meanings of Morrison's song, adding new dimensions of meaning, but this has the effect of rendering the song itself as a two-dimensional cipher. Smith's technique of juxtaposing 'Gloria' with [her own version of the song] thus fundamentally alters the signification of 'Gloria' for her immediate expressive purposes.<sup>48</sup>

These purposes, Daley concludes, are to use "gender ambiguities to parody the seriousness and 'maleness' of Morrison's song," and to use an already recognizable rock 'n' roll standard to simultaneously criticize and celebrate "the musical tradition that preceded her."<sup>49</sup> Just as I maintain that the characters of Smith's "Hey Joe," Patty Hearst and Joe himself, serve as metaphors for liberation from the confines of societal feminine respectability, Mike Daley argues that "the Gloria character becomes more metaphorical in Smith's hands [than in those of Morrison]"; in the hands of Patti Smith, Gloria "comes to signify that which is generally desired and eventually conquered," such as Smith's own success as a rock 'n' roll artist.<sup>50</sup> "By decentring the dominant male rock singer, she opens space for herself (and, as history would have it, a procession of other women) as a rock artist," Daley concludes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Daley, 235.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 239.

According to Daley, Smith chooses THEM's "Gloria" to experiment with "because she can – 'Gloria' was a rock standard soon after its release, and hundreds of recorded and unrecorded cover versions by garage bands from the late 1960s on had transformed it into a kind of public property." Thus, "the idea of an authoritative version of 'Gloria' was weak even by 1975," and Smith felt unrestrained by questions of artistic authority to reinterpret the track for her own purposes of self-expression.<sup>52</sup>

Song-writing as a signification of identity is a facet of a much larger discourse regarding authenticity in rock 'n' roll performance, at the heart of which is a dichotomy in which pop music functions as the female Other to rock's explicitly masculine ethos. Andreas Huyssen has described at length the modernist tendency to equate mass culture with femininity while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men.<sup>53</sup> Sarah Dougher describes this dichotomy's manifestation within popular music, in which rock 'n' roll represents masculine authenticity and is inherently more valuable, while pop is the musical embodiment of feminine social fakery.<sup>54</sup> Philip Auslander further clarifies: "The ideological distinction between rock and pop is precisely the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the sincere and the cynical, the potentially resistant and the necessarily coopted, art and entertainment."<sup>55</sup> As a superfan of rock 'n' roll culture and its performers, there is no question that Smith would have been aware, at least inherently, of rock's preoccupation with authenticity, and its relationship to gender. "The

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<sup>52</sup> Daley, 239.

<sup>53</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47.

<sup>54</sup> Sarah Dougher, "When Loud Means Real: Tween Girls and the Voices of Rock Authenticity," in *Voicing Girlhood in Popular Music: Performance, Authority, Authenticity*, ed. Jacqueline Warwick and Allison Adrian (New York: Routledge, 2016), 191.

<sup>55</sup> Philip Auslander, "Seeing is Believing: Live Performance and the Discourse of Authenticity in Rock Culture," *Literature and Psychology* 44, no. 4 (1998), 4-5.

concept of rock authenticity is linked with the romantic bent of rock culture,” Auslander continues, “whose adherents want to imagine rock music as truly expressive of the artists’ souls and psyches, and as consistently politically and culturally oppositional,”<sup>56</sup> all but describing the philosophies apparent in Smith’s musical and written material, as have been previously discussed.

However, despite her deep immersion in rock ‘n’ roll culture and its subtly implied rules for the creation and expression of authentic art, Smith selects rock ‘n’ roll standards, songs written by other prominent artists, as the vehicles for her original thoughts. Perhaps, like Auslander, Smith views authenticity as an ideological concept, or “a matter of culturally determined convention,” rather than “an essence that is either present or absent in the music itself.”<sup>57</sup> Smith’s selection demonstrates her deep awareness of the culture of rock ‘n’ roll and her own context within it, as she has selected songs that are not simply popular within that culture, but have been reworked and reinterpreted countless times, until their ties to the discourse of authenticity in rock music have been all but severed. By incorporating her own provocative poetic material into a song as removed from the discourse of authenticity as Van Morrison’s “Gloria,” Smith sidesteps this discourse altogether, and produces instead a statement about how the traditions of rock ‘n’ roll might be co-opted and expanded upon to include a space for female voices of resistance outside of the confines of the gendered rock/pop dichotomy.

The poetic material, derived from her 1970 poem “oath,” that Smith incorporates into her version is fundamental to the track’s overall effectiveness, yet Daley discusses it only briefly in his analysis of the song. Furthermore, he is not at all interested in the historical relevance of

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<sup>56</sup> Auslander, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 6.

Smith's bridging of the poetic and musical divide, and the impact that this pastiche technique, derived from the literary influence of William S. Burroughs, would have on the emergence of punk rock. The scope of Daley's argument – explored in admirable depth— is limited to the technical facets of the musical material, which produces only a fraction of the much larger picture. Richard Middleton, on the other hand, takes strides to locate Patti Smith's "Gloria" within the larger context of the New York underground rock scene, and investigates, albeit briefly, the original material of "oath."

Jesus died for somebody's sins  
but not mine  
melting in a pot of thieves  
wild card up my sleeve  
thick heart of stone  
my sins my own  
I engrave my own palm  
sweet black X  
Adam placed no hex on me  
I embrace Eve and take full responsibility  
for every pocket I have picked  
mean and slick  
every Johnny Ace song  
I've balled to  
long before the church  
made it neat and right  
So Christ  
I'm giving you the good-bye  
firing you tonight  
I can make my own light shine  
and darkness too is equally fine  
you got strung up for my brother  
but with my I draw the line  
you died for somebody's sins  
but not mine<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Patti Smith, "oath," in *Early Work 1970-1979* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 7.



Some analysis of “oath” reveals that it consists of several of Smith’s characteristic poetic techniques. In it, Smith allies herself with the downtrodden outcasts of society, the pick-pockets and the gamblers. Literary scholar Greg Smith posits that the “sweet black X” which “she engraves on her palm may possibly be a reference to the method of signing official documents traditionally associated with oppressed members of society who have denied writing instruction (most notably enslaved African-Americans and women).”<sup>59</sup> This fierce identification with society’s oppressed, perhaps expressed at its utmost in the song “Rock N Roll N\*\*\*\*r” from her 1978 album *Easter*, is prevalent throughout much of Smith’s work, despite her own conventional, safe, middle-class upbringing. In “oath,” several underlying Rolling Stones allusions occur. Line 5, for example, makes obvious reference to the Rolling Stones’ “Heart of Stone,” the single that was climbing the charts on the day that Smith observed her father’s displeasure at the sight of the Stones on *The Edward Sullivan Show*.<sup>60</sup> In so doing, Smith not only recognizes Jagger’s influence on her own defiance, but also demonstrates her own deep attachment to countercultural icons and her desire to emulate them.<sup>61</sup> After witnessing the Rolling Stones on *Sullivan*, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, and Brian Jones replaced the poet Arthur Rimbaud and the artists Amedeo Modigliani and Chaim Soutine as her primary idols and role models.<sup>62</sup>

The fusion of Smith’s “oath” with THEM’s “Gloria” feels nearly seamless due to the poem’s rhythmic lyrical cadence. However, when merged with the original song, “oath” takes on new meaning. At the heart of the material, now, is Smith’s reclamation of her own agency,

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<sup>59</sup> Greg Smith, “‘And All the Sinners, Saints’: Patti Smith, Pioneer Musician and Poet,” *Midwest Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2000), 183.

<sup>60</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 40-41.

<sup>61</sup> Greg Smith, 183.

<sup>62</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 43.

sexual and otherwise. Though Van Morrison's "Gloria" constitutes a loose, first-person narrative in which the singer relates the story of his sexual conquest of "Gloria," Mike Daley argues that "a closer look... suggests that it is Gloria who does the seducing, and that the male protagonist is in fact passive as he voyeuristically watches his own seduction. He recounts her journey to his room in careful detail... Thus what seems to be a straightforwardly male-coded narrative is already shaded with traditionally female-coded sexual passivity."<sup>63</sup> Smith's lyrical material resists this passivity altogether, as in the bridge material in which she states "People say 'beware!'/ But I don't care/ The words are just/ Rules and regulations to me."<sup>64</sup> It is clear from this that Smith is entirely aware of the negative potential of her actions, but that she claims full responsibility for these possible outcomes. A similar message is expressed in the opening verse, derived entirely from the first stanza of "oath," in which she refuses to be held responsible for the death of Christ, and instead claims fully her own sins, but not those of others. While in "oath," Smith is reclaiming her own agency from the constricting hand of the Catholic church, in "Gloria" she instead reclaims her sexual agency, resisting gendered tropes and experiencing empowerment at her sexual deviance. In both cases, Smith's agency reclamation occurs through her participation in the subculture of rock 'n' roll, and her emulation of its iconic figures.

For Middleton, the most challenging aspect of Smith's rock 'n' roll persona is its femininity, or its appropriation of a rock 'n' roll masculinity onto a female body. He accounts for her problematic femininity by locating Smith within the trajectory of Second Wave Feminism. "The women's movement, intricately related to New Left politics and the civil rights struggles, was in ferment, especially in the United States," Middleton reminds the reader, "and [it] was also

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<sup>63</sup> Daley, 236-237.

<sup>64</sup> "Patti Smith: Gloria (in excelsis deo) Lyrics," *Genius.com*, accessed November 5, 2017, <https://genius.com/Patti-smith-gloria-in-excelsis-deo-lyrics>.

entwined with the gay rights movement: the Stonewall Riots had taken place as recently as 1969; in 1972 David Bowie came out as a self-proclaimed bisexual, and by the mid-'70s an image of bisexuality was decidedly cool.”<sup>65</sup> Middleton, I believe, is mistaken in his assertion that Smith’s femininity must be resolved. Instead, I posit that it is her heteronormativity, rather than her femininity, which consistently conflicts with the subversive content of her poetry and song lyrics. The prevalence of androgyny and male bisexuality in popular culture in early years of Smith’s career make it easy to conceptualize Smith’s androgyny within that subversive landscape; Smith’s maintenance of the “she” pronoun in “Gloria: in excelsis deo,” for example, strengthens these analyses.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the persistent, explicit desire for the masculine that infuses her work, and her incorporation of narrative elements from both sides of the subversive/normative dichotomy create a tension that scholars such as Middleton have a difficult time reconciling.<sup>67</sup>

From a retrospective viewpoint, however, it is easy to see why Smith’s characteristic rebelliousness and her position on the forefront of punk, when combined with her preoccupation with the themes of autonomy and female liberation, make it possible to read feminist objectives into her work. The moment of punk rock, after all, saw what was possibly the single largest increase in the number of women making rock ‘n’ roll. This occurred primarily because punk

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<sup>65</sup> Middleton, 101.

<sup>66</sup> Sheila Whiteley, “Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire,” in *Queering the Popular Pitch* edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 255.

<sup>67</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, too, are interested in the tension between Smith’s rebelliousness and her heteronormativity, as explored in their article “All Fluxed Up: Rebels Against Structure,” which appears in *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996). They argue that this state of “flux” or confusion is both the underlying force behind the more rebellious characteristics of Smith’s music, and the reason that she eventually left rock ‘n’ roll to pursue the traditionally domestic roles of wife and mother.

challenged and altered many of rock 'n' roll's gendered performance conventions which insisted that women be attractive and glamorous, and very little else.<sup>68</sup> To conceptualize the trajectory of Smith's artistic career, however, biographers Bockris and Bayley have asserted that Smith was much more preoccupied with "art for art's sake," as we have seen, than with politics. They state, for example, that in the 1960s she was "so caught up in rock 'n' roll and art that she was unaware even that the country was involved in a war."<sup>69</sup> In fact, before she became aware of the potential for her own art to have any impact on the realms of art and music, of which she desperately wished to be a part, Smith believed that her best course of entry would be to associate herself with a male artist as his mistress and muse.<sup>70</sup> Her concern appears to be with her own participation in the overlapping fields of music and art, which she intended to access through typically heteronormative channels, rather than with the potential for her participation in those fields to positively impact other female artists. From this material, it is evident that the assigning of a feminist intention to Smith's music does not consider her multi-faceted relationship with her own gender and sexuality, and their roles in her music and the development of her persona.

At the conclusion of his analysis, Middleton is left with still more questions. "We are left wondering whether the glimpses of object voice mark a *subversion* of the phallic order; or rather an attempted *theft* of the phallus, an *appropriation*," he concedes.<sup>71</sup> Though his methodology differs starkly from my own, the question at the heart of both studies is much the same. Do Patti Smith's reworkings of "Gloria" and "Hey Joe" demonstrate Smith's subversive intention to the masculinist ethos of rock 'n' roll, or is she simply appropriating the macho stylings of her rock

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<sup>68</sup> Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music*, 63.

<sup>69</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press "One of the Boys: Female Machisma," in *Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n' Roll* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 237.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

'n' roll idols in order to produce her own form of self-expression in a combination of the means most attractive to her: rock 'n' roll and poetry? Are her selections of rock 'n' roll standards as the scaffolding for her musical reworkings the result of her desire to continue and maintain the tradition of rock 'n' roll of which she is so fond, or does she instead appropriate these songs with the intention of challenging their male-centric narratives? It appears that, at her core, Smith is a composite of rock 'n' roll influence who co-opts the genre of rock music as her own form of gender subversion. She is not interested in subverting the masculinist ethos of rock 'n' roll, however, but rather in participating in rock 'n' roll's tradition as a form of rebellion against social mores of feminine propriety and respectability.

## CHAPTER 4: PATTI SMITH ON VIDEO

By 1976, Smith's development into a rock 'n' roll star was all-but complete. Rather than limiting her work to New York City, Smith began expanding her popularity by traveling with her band throughout Europe and North America. Though a range of video footage of Smith with her band exists from this period, the two examples that I analyze in this chapter share a common purpose: to introduce Smith to an international audience, an audience unfamiliar with her background and New York City context. Smith's interview with Lennart Wretlind precedes a performance of the Smith Group, and was developed by director Urban Lasson as an introduction of Patti Smith to a Swedish audience. The Patti Smith Group appeared on BBC-2's *Old Grey Whistle Test* several times throughout the band's career, but in this chapter I focus on their first *OGWT* performance, which was also an introduction of the band to British viewers. Because these audiences were unfamiliar with Smith, she uses the performances in these videos as opportunities to carefully construct her rock 'n' roll persona, and to express her ideas on a range of topics.

### 4.1 "Break on through to the other side, and the other side, and the other side":

#### Lennart Wretlind Interviews Patti Smith

The Patti Smith Group toured extensively following the 1975 release of *Horses*, developing a fan base in the United Kingdom and across Europe. During this time, Smith solidified her persona as a female rock 'n' roll icon through the continued channeling of her rock icons and the persistent performance of their various influences. On October 3, 1976, a Swedish film team headed by director Urban Lasson documented a live performance of the Smith Group

at the Stockholm Concert Hall.<sup>1</sup> The set list of this performance, quintessentially Patti Smith in its compilation of musical influences, is comprised of Smith's interpretations of Lou Reed's "Pale Blue Eyes," the Rolling Stones song "Time is On My Side," and the Smith Group track "Land," which includes material from the R&B standard "Land of 1000 Dances."<sup>2</sup> While nearly every aspect of this documentary supports an analysis of Smith's persona development and the stylistic appropriation of her musical influences, I am particularly interested in the interview that precedes the musical material on this documentary film. Conducted by popular Swedish radio producer and host Lennart Wretlind, the purpose of the interview is to introduce Smith's approach to rock 'n' roll to a Swedish audience, and in it Smith discusses her influences and provides insight into her rock 'n' roll philosophy in a carefully stylized fashion.

Participating in a press interview, Marion Leonard asserts, is as much a performance as appearing on a stage, in a music video, or in a photo shoot because, during an interview, "musicians are given the opportunity to project an image of themselves, to cite their influences, and to describe or situate their work within a particular personal, cultural or political context."<sup>3</sup> In her interview with Wretlind, Smith uses the opportunity to do several of the things that Leonard has described. At the opening of the interview, Smith lists several of her influences: "I like Bob Marley; Bob Marley I think is real sexy. I like Blue Oyster Cult, Television. I like Leo Fender for inventing the Fender guitar. Dylan's a sexy guy. He's alright."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Patti Smith Group Stockholm 1976," *IMDb.com*, accessed December 11, 2017, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5894020>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 105.

<sup>4</sup> "Patti Smith – Interview, Stockholm October 1976," YouTube video, 5:36, posted by "AssGrassProduction," January 29, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37w96lUcjmY>.

Of the many influences that Smith channels in her music and written material, her selection of these particular examples is curious. She appears to use the opportunity to promote the bands Blue Oyster Cult and Television, lesser-known New York-based groups, to a Swedish audience. I posit that it is no coincidence that Smith also had personal romantic relationships with a member of each of these two groups: Allen Lanier of Blue Oyster Cult and Tom Verlaine of Television. Thus, it could be argued that, even while promoting her own music and solidifying her status as a rock 'n' roll icon on a global scale, Smith's persona remains compelled by the persistent desire that Bockris and Bayley describe: to be the mistress and the muse of a rock 'n' roll star and to promote the careers of the men who have believed in her and compelled her to produce her own art.<sup>5</sup> This, then, would be an example of what Alicia Ostriker refers to as "[t]he tendency of feminine identity to dissolve into its relationships," be they with men, or their own mothers.<sup>6</sup> The tendency of Smith to conflate her own identity with those of the men in her life is a theme that occurs frequently in her writing.

However, Smith complicates this analysis by listing her influences in a disinterested drawl. Dressed ambiguously in denim, combat boots, and a men's button-down shirt in brown, and surrounded by the silent members of her band who appear almost uncomfortable with the casual cool that Smith is actively projecting. The Smith of this interview is authoritative and defiant.<sup>7</sup> She heightens the stylish masculinity of her interview persona by citing Leo Fender, the inventor of the Fender guitar, as one of her influences, which offers up a casual challenge to the masculinist status quo of rock 'n' roll. Rather than dissolving her own identity into those of the

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Bockris and Roberta Bayley, *Patti Smith: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 44.

<sup>6</sup> Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> "Patti Smith – Interview, Stockholm October 1976."



men she discusses - Bob Marley, Bob Dylan, the men of Blue Oyster Cult and Television - Smith dissolves their characteristics into her own identity, objectifying them as they might a woman.

Rather than describing the music of Bob Marley or Bob Dylan with the literary capacity that her poetry and memoirs exhibit, Smith relies instead on the word “sexy” to summarize their meaning to her. Not only does she perform stylized masculinity in her dress and body language, but she appropriates masculinity’s aggressive libido into a context of female desire. Throughout the interview, Smith downplays her own capacity for articulate exchange and critical thought, relying instead on a William Burroughs-esque pastiche of thoughts and metaphor that require effortful interpretation on the part of the audience. For instance, as part of a follow-up to the question “What does freedom mean to you?” she replies:

There’s a lot of movements  
Whether it was like beatniks, hippies, women’s lib  
They’re all just new political structures  
They’re all new dogma  
They’re just to me  
As soon as we wanna initiate change  
But as soon as you get it you structure your change  
As soon as you start writing patterns  
As soon as you write some political order  
You write dogma  
You’re right there with Catholicism  
You’re right there with Communism  
Anything<sup>8</sup>

This interview material flows like a spoken-word poem, indeterminate and rhythmic, and is preoccupied with several of the themes that obsessed the poets of the Beat movement, such as the liberation of society from the political structure. She makes a point of informing the audience that her father “was a sort of a beatnik” and pointedly locates herself “outside of society, ... an

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<sup>8</sup> “Patti Smith – Interview, Stockholm October 1976.”.

artist” who is not hung up with “like, anybody’s idea of how I should be.”<sup>9</sup> Projecting cool so actively that she nearly slides from her stool and must be propped up by the member of her band seated behind her, Smith takes great pains to ensure that she exudes casual confidence. She utters loosely grounded, left-leaning philosophy about self-fulfillment that would hypnotize many of Europe’s youthful rock ‘n’ roll consumers much in the way that Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* had captivated young, liberal American audiences a generation before.

With hindsight, we may draw on Gillian Flynn’s conceptualization of the “Cool Girl” as it appears in her 2012 bestselling novel *Gone Girl* to understand Smith’s performance here. In the place of adoring “football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping,” however, Smith expresses interest in rock ‘n’ roll music, mysticism, and Beat poetry.<sup>10</sup> Rather than the girl who “plays video games [and] drinks cheap beer,” Smith projects herself as the kind of girl you might find at a gallery opening or a poetry reading, seeking an artist who might be in search of a muse to support him in his artistic endeavours. Flynn’s protagonist, Amy Dunne, makes two important points regarding the impact of a woman’s performance of the “Cool Girl.” First, she insists that, when women continually perform this ‘ideal’ woman, the result is a decreased tolerance among men for the unique characteristics that comprise each woman. Men become convinced, Amy laments, that “this girl exists.”<sup>11</sup> Secondly, and more importantly, Amy explains that a woman must take active steps to become a “Cool Girl” by sanding down any of her sharp edges and adopting the interests and personality traits that appeal to the male gaze. Just as Smith draws attention away from her own literary prowess by expressing her ideas in a stylistically inarticulate manner, Flynn’s Amy “drank

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<sup>9</sup> “Patti Smith – Interview, Stockholm October 1976.”

<sup>10</sup> Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 222.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

coke and didn't worry about how to recycle the can or about the acid puddling in my belly."<sup>12</sup> In adapting the carefully constructed persona of the female beatnik, Smith sands down the edges of her own feminine power, detracting from the impact that this interview might otherwise have had on young, female fans of rock 'n' roll who had very little opportunity until that point to observe a female performer of the genre.

Though the beatnik "Cool Girl" that Smith projects appears to be a deliberate construction on her part, her answers are also informed by the questions of Lennart Wretlind. "The way in which a journalist uses [interview] material may alter or shift the emphasis given by the performer in interview," Leonard states, thus reminding the reader that the nuances of an interview are informed both by the artist being interviewed, but also by the interviewer.<sup>13</sup> Wretlind makes a point of comparing her rock 'n' roll philosophy to that of Jim Morrison of the Doors by observing that the freedom Smith describes recalls the Doors lyric "break on through to the other side." However, Smith is not satisfied, in this interview, nor in her career, to simply break on through to the other side one time, but insists that this practice must be ongoing. To Wretlind, she retorts:

Yeah and then after you break on through to the other side  
Then you break on through to the other side and  
The other side and the other side  
And our point is that you can spend your whole life  
Keep breaking on through  
You can't just break on through once and think  
'well I've made it I broke through'  
There's a million membranes to break through  
There's a million places to go<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Flynn, 223.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard, 105.

<sup>14</sup> "Patti Smith – Interview, Stockholm October 1976," YouTube video.

While she recognizes that importance of using the work of artists such as Jim Morrison as launching points for her own ideas, Smith also demonstrates her appreciation, early in her career, for the importance of continuous growth and change. Furthermore, she resists being simply aligned with the philosophies of Morrison, who was limited by his own aggressive, unstable, and often violent tendencies, and whose preoccupation with his own male subconscious both attracted an ardent following and, eventually, resulted in his own demise.<sup>15</sup> Instead, she asserts her own autonomy by foreshadowing her own long term success, maintaining that true success is achieved when one continues to “break on through to the other side and the other side and the other side” by continually reimagining and challenging social and genre-specific mores, ideals, and trends.

Smith’s assertion of her own autonomy in this interview, and her refusal to be strictly aligned with Morrison’s influence, may also be derived from her experiences in Paris, during which time she visited Morrison’s grave. The Doors first began to influence Smith when Robert Mapplethorpe bought her tickets to their performance at the Fillmore East in 1968, after which she bought all their records and began to recognize a kindred spirit in Morrison, in his use of language and beat.<sup>16</sup> “She read his lyrics and learned from his style,” biographer Dave Thompson explains; “she built on his vision and saw her own taking shape.”<sup>17</sup> Smith’s preoccupation with the mythological lives of her influences, such as Jim Morrison, found her standing for several hours in a Parisian rainstorm before Morrison’s grave, waiting for him to reach out to her and acknowledge their shared connection. Upon becoming discouraged, Smith experienced a sort of

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Powers, *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in American Music* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), 169.

<sup>16</sup> Dave Thompson, *Dancing Barefoot: The Patti Smith Story* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

epiphany; no longer would she wear the cloaks of those who had influenced her, but instead, Thompson asserts, she would become “the only idol she would ever need.”<sup>18</sup> She would “break on through to the other side, and the other side, and the other side,” instead of depending solely on her influences for support. Though the development of her persona would be ongoing and effortful, it was at this point in her life that she began to reinvent herself and to embrace her own unconventional femininity, which she continued to develop throughout her performing career. In her interview with Wretlind, Smith is still experimenting with her own feminine persona, and augmenting it with the characteristics of her Beat influences, but she is striving for growth and transcendence that is apparent in her insistence that evolution is a continual process and her refusal to simply accept Morrison’s word as gospel. Instead, she uses Morrison’s ideas as a launching point, as she would continue to do in her musical and poetic career, but acknowledges that to remain in the shadow of one’s influences is limiting and counterproductive.

This interview, with its goal of introducing Smith and her philosophies to a European audience, provides her with the opportunity to deliberately construct her rock ‘n’ roll persona. Though the material of the interview is informed by the questions of Lennart Wretlind, Smith takes the opportunity to project herself as a female Beatnik, casually disinterested in politics and preoccupied with themes of liberation and mysticism. In this interview, Smith downplays her own literary intelligence, instead focusing her efforts on the development of her own “Cool Girl” appearance. Though Wretlind locates her philosophies alongside those of her rock ‘n’ roll predecessor Jim Morrison, Smith takes strides to distance herself from this comparison, instead using her male influences as a launching point in the development of the distinctly female rock ‘n’ roll idol that she would become. This interview is rife with contradictions; at the same time

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<sup>18</sup> Thompson, 72.

that she expansively describes her own sense of freedom, Smith states that “talk[ing] about anything too much” means that “obviously you’re not free.”<sup>19</sup> While performing the philosophies of the Beatniks, a subculture informed by inherent misogyny, Smith simultaneously resists the masculinist ethos of 1960s and ‘70s rock ‘n’ roll. An analysis of this interview reveals both the performative nature of Smith’s persona development, and exposes the contradictions of Smith’s early rock ‘n’ roll philosophies.

#### 4.2 “The time is now, the time is now”: The Patti Smith Group on *Old Grey Whistle Test*

Six months following the 1975 release of *Horses*, a self-assured Patti Smith appeared with her band on the BBC-2 television program the *Old Grey Whistle Test (OGWT)*. With an audience made up of two thirds young men, *OGWT* was a program preoccupied with a rock ‘n’ roll canon comprised almost entirely of 1960s and early ‘70s male rock groups, as well as other mainstream artists and bands. The Smith Group’s landmark performance allowed them the opportunity to challenge the prevalent canonized status quo of both the show, and of rock ‘n’ roll in the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> This television appearance, a video recording of a live musical performance, combines two of Marion Leonard’s proposed four sites of performance: the live performance and the promotional video. The former, Leonard argues, is “a crucially important performance site as it is from here that musicians are challenged to entertain or overpower an audience, build a fanbase, impress an A&R scout or inspire a journalist to write a favourable

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<sup>19</sup> “Patti Smith – Interview, Stockholm October 1976.”

<sup>20</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written*, edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Routledge, 1990), 376.

review.”<sup>21</sup> Smith’s careful selection of repertoire for this performance, her band’s original “Horses” (derived from the much longer album track “Land”) and their reworking of the rock standard “Hey Joe,” is consistent with Leonard’s observation that “the success of a live music event crucially depends on the positive reception of the performance by the assembled audience. In selecting and ordering the songs they play live, musicians are aware of the need to entertain and communicate effectively.”<sup>22</sup> The music video, Leonard argues further, “is a performance site where an artist or band’s image is enacted, reinforced, developed or reinvented.”<sup>23</sup> Originally scheduled as an opportunity to promote the Smith Group’s recently released *Horses* to a British audience, Patti Smith’s appearance with her band on the *OGWT* instead solidified Smith’s place within the history of the punk rock revolution.

The performance opens with the camera closely focused on Smith’s face, which is obscured by large dark sunglasses and pressed closely to the microphone before her. Because the audience is able only to hear Smith, but not to see her entirely, the ambiguous character of her voice is brought into focus early in the performance. Even when the camera pans back to show her full face, her dark sunglasses make it nearly impossible to assign her a gender. Before moving in to “Horses,” she softly chants:

Allah Kiss  
Oscar Wilde  
Jah Lives  
Mr. Thorpe  
The time is now, the time is now<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Leonard, 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>24</sup> “Patti Smith – Horses (Old Grey Whistle Test 1976),” YouTube video, 4:24, posted by “RollingStones50yrs3,” August 26, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5pU1LPpyfQ>.

This chant serves as a dedication to those who have influenced Smith's outsider sensibilities. Sheila Whiteley argues that it "provides a specific contextualization for the 'outsider,' linking Johnny (the heroin addict antihero of 'Land') to others who have experienced both condemnation and alienation by a judgmental society."<sup>25</sup> Like Smith's incorporation of Patty Hearst's story into her band's reworking of "Hey Joe," her inclusion of "Mr. Thorpe" draws directly from news headlines, this time British in origin. Rock 'n' roll historian Dave Thompson describes the situation of "disgraced English politician Jeremy Thorpe" as "the kind of sex scandal that only the truly righteous ever get mixed up in," consisting of "hunky male models, murdered dogs, and fevered denials."<sup>26</sup> This time, rather than focusing on Patty Hearst's story of female rebellion as a form of societal commentary, Smith emphasises a British public figure whose disgrace is, at least in part, a result of his homosexual practices. She then chants his name alongside that of Oscar Wilde, whose prison sentence for indecency cost him his personal and professional life, thus situating Thorpe within the longer British history of homosexuality and its resulting oppression and scandal. Furthermore, Wilde's imprisonment made him a sort of patron saint in the gay community of New York.<sup>27</sup> New York glitter-rock bands such as Ruby and the Rednecks, Wayne County, and the New York Dolls, all of which included cross-dressing men in their lineups, and – in the case of Wayne County – a transgender woman, played frequently at the Oscar Wilde Room, one of several performance spaces that made up New York City's

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<sup>25</sup> Sheila Whiteley, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire," in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 254.

<sup>26</sup> Dave Thompson, *London's Burning: True Adventures on the Front Lines of Punk, 1976-1977* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Bristow, "The Blackmailer and the Sodomite: Oscar Wilde on Trial," *Feminist Theory* 17, no. 1 (2016), 45.



Mercer Arts Center in 1972 and 1973.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Smith's combined reference to "Mr. Thorpe" and "Oscar Wilde" is simultaneously topical and referential to the New York art community of which she was an active member. Sheila Whiteley insists that Smith's incorporation of these names alongside the phrase "the time is now" is an "inferred homosexual address" that encourages "a sense of action" on the part of the listener.<sup>29</sup> Not only is Smith aligning herself with such societal outsiders as Wilde and Thorpe, she is calling for change in the treatment of those people by a judgemental society.

This strategy of namechecking, in which Smith lists off prominent societal outsiders as a way of asserting her own outsider-ness, is also prevalent in her early poetic and musical material. The 1973 poem "picasso laughing," written just following the death of painter Pablo Picasso, predates Smith's appearance on *OGWT* and appears in the poetic anthology *Early Work: 1970-1979*. The poem is at once a eulogy for those countercultural icons who have informed Smith's art-rock persona, and a meditation on what remains in the physical world following the death of those icons. The poem uses a different form of namechecking, listing the possessions of her influences that might remain following their deaths in a short, detached fashion. For example, in what functions as the fourth stanza of the poem, Smith writes:

april is the cruelest month etc. what remains?  
brian jones bones. jim morrison's friend.  
jimi hendrix bandana. sweatband angel.  
the starched collar of baudelaire.  
the sculptured cap of voltaire.  
the crusader's helmet like a temple itself  
carole lombard's handmirror.

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<sup>28</sup> Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 37.

<sup>29</sup> Sheila Whiteley, "Patti Smith: The Old Grey Whistle Test, BBC-2 TV, May 11, 1976," in *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, edited by Ian Inglis (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 88-89.

brancusi bird brain.  
the prodigal kiss.  
judies garland. rimbaud's valise.  
rothko's overcoat. surreal space.  
the black knit dress of piau.<sup>30</sup>

This stanza layers meaning through a combination of namechecking and wordplay, as in the case of “brian jones bones” and “judies garland,” which play with grammatical rules of possession and beg the question of who, if anyone, these objects belong to.

By listing rock ‘n’ roll icons such as Jimi Hendrix and Brian Jones alongside names of philosophers such as Baudelaire and Voltaire, Smith compares rock ‘n’ roll’s canonized figures to thinkers of the Enlightenment and writers of 19<sup>th</sup> century French poetry, blurring the line between high-brow and low-brow culture and asserting rock ‘n’ roll’s place of relevance within cultural history. In this poem, Smith both celebrates those who she perceives to have altered the trajectory of cultural history, and marvels at the fleeting nature of their lives, and, consequently, her own. However, at the heart of “picasso laughing,” as in many of Smith’s early works, is an esteem for those who she perceives as “outside of society,” as having laid the groundwork for Smith’s own social rebellion. This same esteem presents itself in a similar form, through the strategy of namechecking, in many of Smith’s musical recordings from the late 1970s. A stark example of this is “Rock ‘n’ Roll N\*\*\*\*r,” the sixth track on Smith’s 1978 album *Easter*. In this song, the use of namechecking is explicitly employed, and its intention of aligning Smith with her outsider icons is blatantly apparent. “Outside of society/ they’re waiting for me/ outside of society/ that’s where I want to be” Smith announces, listing countercultural figures as diverse

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<sup>30</sup> Patti Smith, “picasso laughing,” *Early Work 1970-1979* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 50.

and wide-ranging as Jesus Christ, Jimi Hendrix, and Jackson Pollock as her countercultural predecessors.<sup>31</sup>

Simon Reynolds and Joy Press explore another, similar form of namechecking that Smith incorporates into her performance of “Horses” on *OGWT*: that of 1950s dance moves.

“Namechecking the dance crazes of the ‘50s and early 60s – the Watusi, the Mashed Potato, the Alligator – Smith harks back to the primal dervish-whirling delirium of rock ‘n’ roll,” Reynolds and Press assert, taking strides to locate Smith’s work within a trajectory of rock ‘n’ roll which saw the punk movement as a return to rock’s early simplicity and vital, celebratory nature.<sup>32</sup>

Reynolds and Press write that “Smith returns to the non-sense and glossolalia of Little Richard’s awopbopalobop” in this section of the performance, which places her within the combined R&B/rock ‘n’ roll tradition. However, Reynolds and Press overlook the racial intricacies of Smith’s incorporation of this specific material, originally derived from the R&B standard “Land of 1000 Dances.”<sup>33</sup> Originally written by lesser-known R&B singer Chris Jenner in 1963, “Land of 1000 Dances” entered the R&B canon through its rerecording by more than thirty artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Roy Orbison, and the Kingsmen in the early and mid-1960s.<sup>34</sup> Soul singer Wilson Pickett made the song a hit with his recording of it in 1966. Smith incorporates the material from this R&B dance number into a meditation on drug use and the experiences of a social outsider, the rock ‘n’ roll prototype Johnny, thus continuing with her habit of using well-known songs from the 1960s as scaffolding for the expression of her own thoughts and opinions

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<sup>31</sup> “Rock N Roll Nigger by The Patti Smith Group,” *Genius.com*, accessed January 11, 2018, <https://genius.com/1477830>.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 357.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Oscar Garza, “Land of a Thousand Dances: An R&B Fable,” *Popular Music* 24, no. 3 (2005), 429.

regarding the state of rock 'n' roll music, popular culture, and society as a whole. In this case, the inclusion of "Land of 1000 Dances" in Smith's "Horses" harks back to the 1950s, at which point rock 'n' roll dance was the epitome of social rebellion for American teenagers in white suburbia, and marked a shift toward greater social freedom of expression. Smith's namechecking of the 1950s rock 'n' roll dance crazes is a celebration of that freedom of expression, hard earned by 1950s teenagers and young adults.

However, Smith's reworking of a major R&B hit into a song about white rebellion also attempts to construct a parallel between the experiences of the heroin-addicted Johnny to those of African Americans, all of whom "have experienced alienation by a judgmental society, dedicated to upholding the status quo of so-called normality," as Sheila Whiteley argues.<sup>35</sup> Somewhat colour-blind in her sentiments, Smith conceptualizes societal outsider-ness as a sort of blanket concept, under which all who experience any sort of alienation are equal in their experiences of oppression. Comparable in sentiment to rock 'n' roll's own appropriation of black music and culture as a form of white expression, Smith's incorporation of "Land of 1000 Dances" into a song about a white drug addict ignores the fundamental differences between her own experience and those of African Americans. While Smith is a middle-class, white woman whose feelings of alienation stem from a dissatisfaction with societal expectations of her, African Americans did not have the leisure of this form of social dissatisfaction due to their lower standing within the hegemonic structures of American society. Just as she and the Beats do in their literature, Smith appropriates the outsider status of black Americans in this song, but is either unable or unwilling to recognize that her ability to do so stems from a place of racial and social privilege.

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<sup>35</sup> Whiteley, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire," 254.

Smith's preoccupation with the perception of her outsider-ness is signified not only by the musical material of "Horses," but also by the visual performance strategies that she employs on *OGWT*. Though Smith's face remains obscured by her dark sunglasses for the first minute of the performance, the camera continues to focus there, superimposing it over Lenny Kaye's guitar and Jay Dee Daugherty's drum set. It is not until the racing of "horses, horses, horses, horses" subsides and the verse of "Land of 1000 Dances" takes hold in countercultural celebration that Smith strips herself of her sunglasses in a stylized, rock 'n' roll fashion. At this point, the audience sees the entirety of her face for the first time, comprised as it is of dark, thick brows, strongly defined nose, chin and cheek bones, and entirely unadorned by makeup. This face, combined with Smith's broad-shouldered suit jacket, electric guitar, and snarling vocal technique, result in a unique blend of feminine characteristics and masculine context and behaviour. Regarding the ambiguous gender that Smith is performing, several feminist scholars provide useful, if somewhat conflicting, insight. Judith Halberstam argues that the kind of female masculinity performed by Patti Smith often "codifies a unique form of social rebellion" and "represents the healthful alternative to what are considered the histrionics of conventional femininities."<sup>36</sup> Halberstam's conceptualization of female masculinity as a form of social rebellion fits with Smith's own ethos of defiance, and it is conceivable that Smith viewed her gender performance as yet another plane on which to deliberately showcase her sense of outsider-ness. Biographical information regarding Smith's formative years also tells a story of a young woman struggling with the limitations of prescribed femininity. This experience manifested itself in her adult life as a disdain for many other women and their hyper-feminine

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<sup>36</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), 9.

behaviour: “the histrionics of conventional femininities” to which Halberstam refers.<sup>37</sup> Smith’s performance of “female masculinity,” then, may certainly have provided her an alternative to the conventional femininity that she found frustratingly limiting. Conveniently, it also allowed her to create a space for herself within the conventional masculinity of rock ‘n’ roll, a gendered arena in which she felt inherently more at ease, as demonstrated by the uniformity of her appearance with her male band members.

To explore the difference between my conceptualization of Smith’s gender performance as an example of female masculinity and her frequent characterization as “androgynous” by scholars, I turn to Sheila Whiteley’s “Patti Smith: The Old Grey Whistle Test, BBC-2 TV, May 11, 1976” as an example of the latter. Whiteley dedicates a third of her essay to an analysis of what she refers to as Smith’s androgyny, its relationship to Smith’s New York City origin, and its relevance to the trajectory of rock ‘n’ roll culture. She insists that Smith’s incorporation of masculine performance characteristics into her persona “offered an androgynous subversion of gender fixity.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, Whiteley reminds the reader that, while it has been thoroughly argued that punk provided women with a vehicle through which to challenge gender boundaries, Smith “was the instigator, the sexy androgyne whose extraordinary stare and lithe, sensual body challenged the sexual certainties of mainstream femininity.”<sup>39</sup> Regarding the androgyne broadly, Halberstam argues that she “represents some form of gender mixing, but this rarely adds up to total ambiguity; when a woman is mistaken consistently for a man, I think it is safe to say that what marks her gender presentation is not androgyny but masculinity.”<sup>40</sup> During the band’s

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<sup>37</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 90.

<sup>38</sup> Whiteley, “Patti Smith: The Old Grey Whistle Test, BBC-2 TV, May 11, 1976,” 86.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Halberstam, 57.

appearance on *OGWT*, Smith's femininity, though present in the cut of her jacket and the presence of her skirt – shown comparatively briefly throughout the video – is largely dominated by her masculine characteristics. Otherwise, her hairstyle, suit jacket, facial expressions and body movements recall the performative personas of her male predecessors, such as Mick Jagger and Jim Morrison. Furthermore, Smith was regularly mistaken for a young man during her early years in New York City. In one such instance, Beat poet Allen Ginsberg offered to buy Smith a meal in exchange for her company, only to be surprised to learn that he was, in fact, dining with a young woman.<sup>41</sup>

For these reasons, and in consideration with Halberstam's observations regarding female androgyny, I posit that Smith's gender performance might better be conceptualized as a female performance of masculinity, rather than as an archetype of female androgyny. This is particularly the case for the early years of her musical career, at which time her persona and appearance were still very much informed by her observations of and adoration for 1960s and 70s rock 'n' roll icons. Similarly, Kathleen Kennedy argues that Joan Jett's performative identity might be conceptualized as a form of female masculinity. However, unlike Kennedy's assertion that Joan Jett developed her own form of female masculinity "not by subverting masculine power or taking up a position against masculine power, but by turning a blind eye to conventional masculinities and refusing to engage,"<sup>42</sup> I posit that Smith's performance of female masculinity originates from a place of recognition and knowledge of the mores of masculinity and the privileges it allowed men, especially in comparison to the constrictions of traditional femininity. Furthermore, while Jett's female masculinity developed out of the shifting landscape of rock 'n' roll and the

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<sup>41</sup> Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Ecco Books, 2010), 123.

<sup>42</sup> Kathleen Kennedy, "Results of a Misspent Youth: Joan Jett's Performance of Female Masculinity," *Women's History Review* 11, no. 1 (2002), 91.

subsequent emergence of punk rock, in 1975 and '76 punk was not yet a fully formed movement, and so Smith did not have access to its alternative gender conventions. Instead, her rock 'n' roll performance style was constructed primarily on the backs of conventionally masculine rock 'n' roll performers from the 1960s and early '70s.

As a woman performing masculinity in a very public forum, Smith's gendered performance strategies might be conceptualized as a manner of cross-dressing, a form of performance that Marjorie Garber explains may "offer a critique of the binary sex and gender distinctions."<sup>43</sup> Cross-dressing "denaturalizes, destabilizes, and defamiliarizes sex and gender signs," Garber asserts, which makes it a practice that is inherently subversive to the gendered status quo.<sup>44</sup> Garber goes on to define drag, a particularly performative mode of cross-dressing, as "the theoretical and deconstructive social practice that analyzes these structures from within, but putting in question the 'naturalness' of gender roles through the discourse of clothing and body parts."<sup>45</sup> Within this framework, Smith's performance of masculinity has the potential to upset the gendered expectation of popular music performance, in which the woman is allotted one of the limited roles of the acoustic guitar-playing folk singer, or the sexy frontwoman, among few others, rather than the cool, authentic, and authoritative rock 'n' roll visionary that Smith embodies. The subversive potential of drag, however, is limited to male drag performance of femininity, according to Garber, because, in a culture that values masculinity above femininity both inherently and explicitly, "to wish to be a man is perfectly 'normal,' and indeed, culturally speaking, perfectly logical."<sup>46</sup> Smith's performance of masculinity, her appropriation of the

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<sup>43</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 147.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.



behaviours and characteristics of her male rock icons, when evaluated through the lens of drag, thus pose an unsuccessful challenge to the masculinist status quo of the genre in which she is participating. Rather than an act of subversion, Smith's performance of female masculinity might instead be read as a performance of "female machisma," which is defined by Simon Reynolds and Joy Press as an imitation of masculinity on the part of women who had very few feminine role models from which to draw inspiration.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Smith appears to be preoccupied, not with subverting the masculinist ethos of rock 'n' roll, but with being perceived as one of its "Cool Girls," as we've seen. Thus, she assumes the characteristics of those male icons she considers the fullest embodiment of rock 'n' roll's masculine authenticity and "cool-ness."

Despite the unrealized subversive potential of Smith's performance of masculinity on *OGWT* and elsewhere, there are elements of this performance that pose, at the very least, a challenge to the gendered societal status quo. Smith's namechecking of Jeremy Thorpe and Oscar Wilde, her celebration of sexual freedom with the phrase "if you're male, and choose other than female, you must take the responsibility of holding the key to freedom," and her performance of a distinctly rock 'n' roll female masculinity, invoke what Emma Mayhew terms "a queer sensibility." Regarding a queer aesthetic in popular music, Mayhew argues the following:

Playing with sexual mores and norms has been one way of signaling rebellion in rock and pop from Little Richard and David Bowie to Annie Lennox. Although many 'queer' rock stars turn out to be conventionally heterosexual in their personal lives, a queer aesthetic or sensibility has often been a hallmark of an artistic and transgressive identity in rock. Thus a queer/artistic nexus has existed in rock that has not necessarily been associated with the personal sexual practice of the subject, but rather has been about challenging the normal common sense understanding of gender – aligned, unproblematically, with a

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<sup>47</sup> Reynolds and Press, 236.

biological and anatomically defined sex. This is done by invoking a different way of listening, a queer sensibility, which does and can exist alongside a heterosexual reading.<sup>48</sup>

Patti Smith fits relatively comfortably within Mayhew's queer framework; her performance of masculinity functions as a signal of her rebelliousness, and this occurs regardless of Smith's own heterosexual preferences. Resisting the feminist preoccupation with subversive potential and intent, as I think must be done in the case of Patti Smith, Mayhew argues instead that, by blending a variety of distinctly gendered characteristics, artists may contribute to the "theme of indeterminacy that challenges the dichotomous labels of male/female and feminine/masculine" which permeates popular music.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, Mayhew reminds readers that Smith's queer sensibility fits comfortably within the history of rock 'n' roll. This sensibility is also found specifically within the context of individualism and playful identity construction that characterized the New York underground scene in the 1960s and early 70s.<sup>50</sup>

Smith's persona development is not only infused with the characteristics of the New York scene, but is immediately influenced by New York artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, the photographer responsible for the famous cover photo of Smith's *Horses*. In fact, Bockris and Bayley refer to Smith's initial meeting of Mapplethorpe as "preordained."<sup>51</sup> In her examination of the strategies employed by female rock musicians to construct their public images, Leonard insists that scholars and critics not overlook the performative nature of the photo shoot. "While a photographic print of a performer or band is a frozen image, it has been realised through the

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<sup>48</sup> Emma Mayhew, "I Am Not in a Box of Any Description': Sinéad O'Connor's Queer Outing," in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 169.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Whiteley, "Popular Music and the Dynamics of Desire," 256.

<sup>51</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 49.

process of enactment. The gaze of the performer, their attire and pose may all be understood as performances for an imagined viewer,” Leonard maintains, her work on the constructedness of social image explicitly informed by Judith Butler’s landmark theory on gender performativity.<sup>52</sup> On the *Horses* cover, Smith’s expression is a direct and unrepentant performance of self-assurance, haughty in the tilt of her chin and the narrowness of her eyes. In this photo, as in her performance on *OGWT*, she performs the rock ‘n’ roll idol within the subversive capsule of the female body, taking deliberate strides to embody the casual cool and defiance of Frank Sinatra by nonchalantly tossing her jacket over her shoulder.<sup>53</sup>

The history of the cover of *Horses* also symbolizes Smith’s insistent autonomy over her performance choices. Smith insisted on maintaining full control of her public image even after signing to Clive Davis’s Arista Records. In fact, Davis hated Smith’s *Horses* cover, and fought to have Smith’s moustache airbrushed out. Smith, however, insisted on the maintenance of her artistic control on all fronts, and so the photo remained unretouched.<sup>54</sup> The *Horses* cover, then, is a deliberate challenge to the cultural status quo in which women were expected to be glamorous sexual objects, rather than serious artists of the anti-establishment. By insisting her mustache remain untouched, Smith demonstrates that communicating a sense of authenticity is a driving force in her performative decision making. The depiction of her authentic self on the cover of *Horses* signifies Smith’s desire for listeners to understand the album as a representation of her inner, artistic self.

Not only does Smith draw from the New York music and art scene in her persona formation, she also incorporates the lyrical themes and musical elements of fellow New York

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<sup>52</sup> Leonard, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 131.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

performers into her own musical compositions. Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground, for example, frequently explores themes of drug use and addiction, and Smith's incorporation of themes of drug use into songs such as "Horses" demonstrate her participation in this New York tradition. Tricia Henry looks closely at the musical characteristics of "Heroin," a Velvet Underground song from the band's first album, *Velvet Underground & Nico*, and considers the song's musical representation of heroin use. Several of the characteristics that Henry outlines are also present in the full, album version of "Land," Smith's own meditation on drug addiction, which demonstrates the influence of Lou Reed's song-writing style on Smith's own work. Like Reed's "Heroin," which "departs from the strict strophic form popular in 1960s rock-and-roll" with its lengthy stanzas and "uneven and unpredictable" musical phrasing as a means of signalling the instability and uncertainty of heroin use, Smith's "Land" forsakes the predictability of the standard verse/chorus form, instead ebbing and flowing between nonrepeating sections of spoken word poetry and storytelling, at times contrasted with the catchy musical material of the R&B hit "Land of 1000 Dances."<sup>55</sup> "Technically, Reed accentuates the theme of heroin use by employing a rhythmical structure which imitates the heroin rush experienced by a user," Henry continues.<sup>56</sup> "The song begins at a moderate tempo, then accelerates in the second verse. The lull/rush/lull theme is repeated several times throughout the song."<sup>57</sup> The heroin induced rush that Henry is discussing also appears in "Land" with the rush of "horses, horses, horses" that occurs following the first section of downtempo, quietly spoken poetic material. This is accompanied by only minimally strummed chords on the electric guitar.

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<sup>55</sup> Henry, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

This combination of strummed guitar and spoken word poetry harks back to Smith's first performance with Lenny Kaye, during which he improvised strummed chords and guitar riffs over her incendiary spoken-word poetry. Historians and biographers insist that Smith's first performance with Kaye was the beginning of Smith's career as a rock 'n' roll icon.<sup>58</sup> For Smith, the racing of "horses, horses" is not heroin induced, but an exhilarated response to her own developing fame; her band (made up entirely of traditional rock 'n' roll instruments) joins the mix at the very moment that this exhilaration takes hold. Furthermore, at the point in "Land" at which the heroin takes hold, both the intensity and tempo of the song increase and the refrain from "Land of 1000 Dances" is introduced as a bizarre representation of heroin-induced (or fame-induced) euphoria. All the while, Smith appropriates what Henry describes as the "bohemian gangster" appearance of the members of the Velvet Underground, their "cool detachment, the minimal communication effected by sunglasses" which is "reinforced by body language," as a signification of the impact of her fellow New Yorkers on both Smith's musical material and performance strategies alike.<sup>59</sup> Again, Smith's preoccupation with the characteristics of "cool," rather than her interest in subversive gender performance, becomes apparent. Smith's own appearance, informed by the aesthetics of bands such as the Velvet Underground, has often been mistaken for that of a junkie. In *Just Kids*, however, she addresses this, writing "Everyone took it for granted that I did drugs because of the way I looked. I refused to shoot up."<sup>60</sup>

Rock 'n' roll critic Greil Marcus also views Smith's preoccupation with horses as a link between Smith's work and the avant-garde art movements of New York City. Not only do horses

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<sup>58</sup> Bockris and Bayley, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Henry, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, *Just Kids*, 161.

function as a metaphor for drug induced euphoria in the song “Land,” (“horse” is also street slang for heroin) but Smith also uses it as the name of her first album, *Horses*, as a means of signifying her own power and autonomy. In his review of *Horses* for the New York-based *Village Voice*, Marcus calls “Land,” the much longer track from which “Horses” is excerpted, “Smith’s most ambitious number,” one which “take[s] one right back into the terminal violence best represented by Buñel and Dalí’s [surrealist film] *Un Chien Andalou* – you might even think that on some level the horses of the title are the same horses that were stuffed into Dalí’s piano.”<sup>61</sup> Despite the image of the hyper-masculine cowboy alongside which the horse is often portrayed in American popular culture, Marcus chooses to regard the horse imagery in Smith’s music as a participation in the surrealist art movement of New York. By doing so, he claims her art as yet another success for the artistic network of New York City, of which he is also a part.

Smith’s work appears almost inextricable from its New York context in the eyes of many critics and scholars. The construction of her gender ambiguous persona and her embrace of a queer sensibility, as well as her incorporation of themes and musical material which draw heavily from her New York-based influences, all of which are evident in the Patti Smith Group’s performance on *OGWT*, make it easy to focus on the ways that Smith channels her influences and incorporates their characteristics and strategies into her own performances. However, this preoccupation with the analysis of Smith’s influences, of which I am also guilty, does her a disservice in that it disregards the singular impact of her work on the historical trajectory of rock ‘n’ roll music and the development of punk rock. With the performance of only two songs, the Patti Smith Group’s appearance on *OGWT* served as a rallying cry, or, as Dave Thompson

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<sup>61</sup> Greil Marcus, “*Horses: Patti Smith Exposes Herself*,” *The Village Voice*, November 1975, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/horses-patti-smith-exposes-herself>.

argues, “a rebel yell, defiant and daring in the face of ... received musical history.”<sup>62</sup> The Group’s performance of “Horses,” followed by a stripped-down version of Smith’s reworking of “Hey Joe,” posed a challenge to the rock ‘n’ roll canon of which Jimi Hendrix was an integral part. “Jimi Hendrix was God back then,” Thompson writes. “Six years after he choked his final breath, the British rock cognoscenti were still casting around for somebody to take his throne.”<sup>63</sup> Not only did Smith rework “Hey Joe” in a way that shocked rock ‘n’ roll aficionados in the UK, but her performance demonstrated Smith’s unique ability to simultaneously incorporate her influences into her music making, and to challenge the masculinist canon of which those influences were a part. Thompson refers to this performance as “the first shot in the rebellion that Smith was so joyously leading,” and insists that it played a primary role in encouraging others to reject the performative and musical status quo, thus sparking the British punk revolution of 1977.<sup>64</sup> With it, Smith carved out a place for herself within the very canon that she sought to upend, creating a space for herself and, consequently, other women in a genre that had previously overlooked and excluded them.

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<sup>62</sup> Thompson, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 10.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Patti Smith's performance of female masculinity results from a combination of her influences, her New York City context, her preoccupation with her own sense of "cool," and her intimate knowledge of rock 'n' roll music and culture. Rather than subverting the masculinist nature of rock 'n' roll, Smith participates directly within it, incorporating characteristics of her masculine influences into her own performance strategies to make a space for herself in rock. Smith partakes in rock 'n' roll culture by utilizing its forms and strategies in her own resistance to conventional femininity; she uses rock 'n' music as a framework for her own rebellion, challenging social mores of feminine propriety and respectability by insistently participating in the masculinist culture of rock. The problematic of her gender, I believe, stems from her performance of female masculinity alongside her explicit and often aggressive heterosexuality, and her occupation of both positions within several interconnected and interrelated dichotomies. Smith insistently performs both sides of the divide: the male and the female, the high-brow and the low-brow, the artist and the muse, the groupie and the rock 'n' roll star.

Examples of her poetic material reveal the impact of the distinctly-masculine Beats on her outsider sensibility. In her 1974 review of the Velvet Underground's *1969 Live for Creem*, Smith reveals the intersection of her rock 'n' roll philosophies between the Romantic ethos of early rock 'n' roll criticism, and the shifting landscape of rock 'n' roll thought and culture towards punk rock, which would inform the stylistic elements of her early records. The impact of the frontmen of the Velvet Underground on Smith's rock 'n' roll philosophies and strategies is confirmed by this work. The excerpt from *Just Kids* in which Smith recounts her transition toward androgyny exposes the constructedness of her persona development, which occurred in response to Smith's implicit knowledge of the New York underground, its gendered codes and



norms. In this excerpt, the New York underground as a whole is represented by Andy Warhol's Factory, and Smith abandons her feminine characteristics to be taken seriously by the Factory's denizens. Smith's extensive reworkings of "Gloria" and "Hey Joe," both of which incorporate themes of feeling limited by societal expectations, reveal how Smith's androgyny might have been conceptualized as subversive due to the challenge to social mores that is present in her lyrics. Furthermore, both songs provide Smith the opportunity to incorporate influence from the traditions of blues (in the form of Jimi Hendrix) and 1960s garage rock into her own musical identity by using the intertextuality of the cover song, or song reworking, to her advantage. "Hey Joe," as well as the Patti Smith Group's live performance of "Horses" on *Old Grey Whistle Test* draw directly from news headlines, and reveal the immediacy with which Smith drew influence from the world around her in the early days of her career. Both Smith's appearance on *Old Grey Whistle Test* and her interview with Lennart Wretling provide opportunity for close gender analysis of Smith in the early years of her performance career, as well as some analysis of her physical performance strategies and styles. These performances lead me to conclude that Smith's gender performance aligns most closely with female masculinity, as defined by Judith Halberstam, because it results from Smith's desire to signify her masculine influences.

However, Patti Smith is not simply "one of the boys." Rather, she is the embodiment of the system of artistic styles, philosophies, and strategies which permeated the New York underground scene in the years directly preceding the emergence of punk rock. The signification of her influences, such as Jimi Hendrix, Lou Reed, Jim Morrison, and others, is an example of punk's nostalgia for the 1950s and 60s, which Jacqueline Warwick describes.<sup>1</sup> Warwick traces

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 214.

this nostalgia through the work of several of Smith's New York peers, such as Blondie and the New York Dolls, and argues that, "born between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, punk artists like these ... were just old enough to look back fondly on the heyday of the girl groups and 60's rock 'n' roll in general. Their efforts to recapture the effervescence of that sound indicate a longing for a hazily remembered time when life, like rock 'n' roll, seemed to be simpler."<sup>2</sup> Smith goes so far in her expression of nostalgia as to rework entire songs from the 1950s and 60s into her own vehicles of self-expression. However, it is clear that Smith's nostalgia for the 1950s is not a singular event within the New York underground of which she is a part, but rather one instance of a nostalgic trend. Again, we see that Smith engages extensively, not only with her own musical and literary influences, but with the trends, philosophies, and characteristics of the developing New York underground or new wave scene.

Retroactively, it is relatively easy to locate Smith's androgyny within the subversive tendencies of the punk rock movement as a whole. Regarding punk rock, Tricia Henry, for example, assertively argues:

Punk performance, like punk fashion and art, is subversive. It is an assault on the senses. Though it underwent considerable refinement, in the early days (mid-1970s) performances took place in small, crowded, low-budget spaces in notoriously rough neighbourhoods. Performers, for the most part, had little or no technical training and possessed only very cheap and unsophisticated equipment. The decibel level was brutally high, and the attitudes of both performers and audience members were aggressive and often verged on violence. As part of the punk policy of provocation, performers were known to include in their performances behaviour such as vomiting on stage, spitting at the audience, and displaying wounds which were the result of self-mutilation – having cut and bruised themselves with objects such as broken bottles, fish hooks, and knives.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Warwick, 214.

<sup>3</sup> Tricia Henry, *Break All Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 3-4.

It is certainly possible to recognize the seeds of these punk rock behaviours within the performance strategies of Patti Smith, particularly in her distaste for all things mainstream and conventional, and her resistance to the limiting structure of feminine propriety. For example, Smith's gender performance, as well as her progressive incorporation of poetic material into the framework of the rock 'n' roll song, lead Caroline O'Meara to locate Smith's work within what she calls "punk's female avant-garde," which, O'Meara explains, also consists of the Slits and the Raincoats, among others.<sup>4</sup> However, while both the Slits and the Raincoats are explicitly punk in both style and substance, and use their appearances to explicitly subvert the patriarchal bent of mainstream society, Smith's music and persona serves more so as a bridge between punk rock as it came to be recognized, and the rock 'n' roll music of the 1960s and early 70s from which is developed.

While Smith's own characteristic androgyny may not be conceptualized as a subversive strategy, its impact on the subsequent female performers of punk rock is plain. Lucy O'Brien argues that punk rock provided women the opportunity to "overturn the pastel shades of post-60s femininity and make an overt statement on a newly emerging, more aggressive understanding of female sexuality," for example.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, O'Brien explains that punk, under the influence of women like Smith, "gave women a place to rage."<sup>6</sup> She continues: "[b]efore the mid-1970s women who expressed seething anger were ostracised as misfits."<sup>7</sup> Punk's unique sexual codes provided women with the liberation of choosing how to best represent their own gender and

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<sup>4</sup> Caroline O'Meara, "The Raincoats: Breaking Down Punk Rock's Masculinities," *Popular Music* 22, no. 3 (2003), 303.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy O'Brien, "The Woman Punk Made Me," *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, ed. Roger Sabin (New York: Routledge, 1999), 188.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

sexuality, O'Brien asserts, and this influence "resurfaced in the 90s with grunge and Riot [Grrrl], and still has an impact on the way women operate, not just in music, but in culture generally."<sup>8</sup> While Smith may not have intended for her androgynous gender performance, or, alternatively, her performance of female masculinity, to be read as subversive tactic, it nevertheless provided a framework upon which women in punk and subsequent rock subcultures could build and develop their own subversive strategies and personas. By actively incorporating influence from a wide range of sources, Smith served as the female punk rock prototype, and became an influence herself for a variety of performers across a wide spectrum of rock 'n' roll subgenres, thus successfully solidifying her mark on the trajectory of rock 'n' roll history, and fulfilling her dream in "Piss Factory" of being a "big star."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 197-8.

<sup>9</sup> Patti Smith, "Piss Factory," *Early Work 1970-1979* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 40.

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