Quand la guitare [s']électrise !

Benoît Navarret,
Marc Battier,
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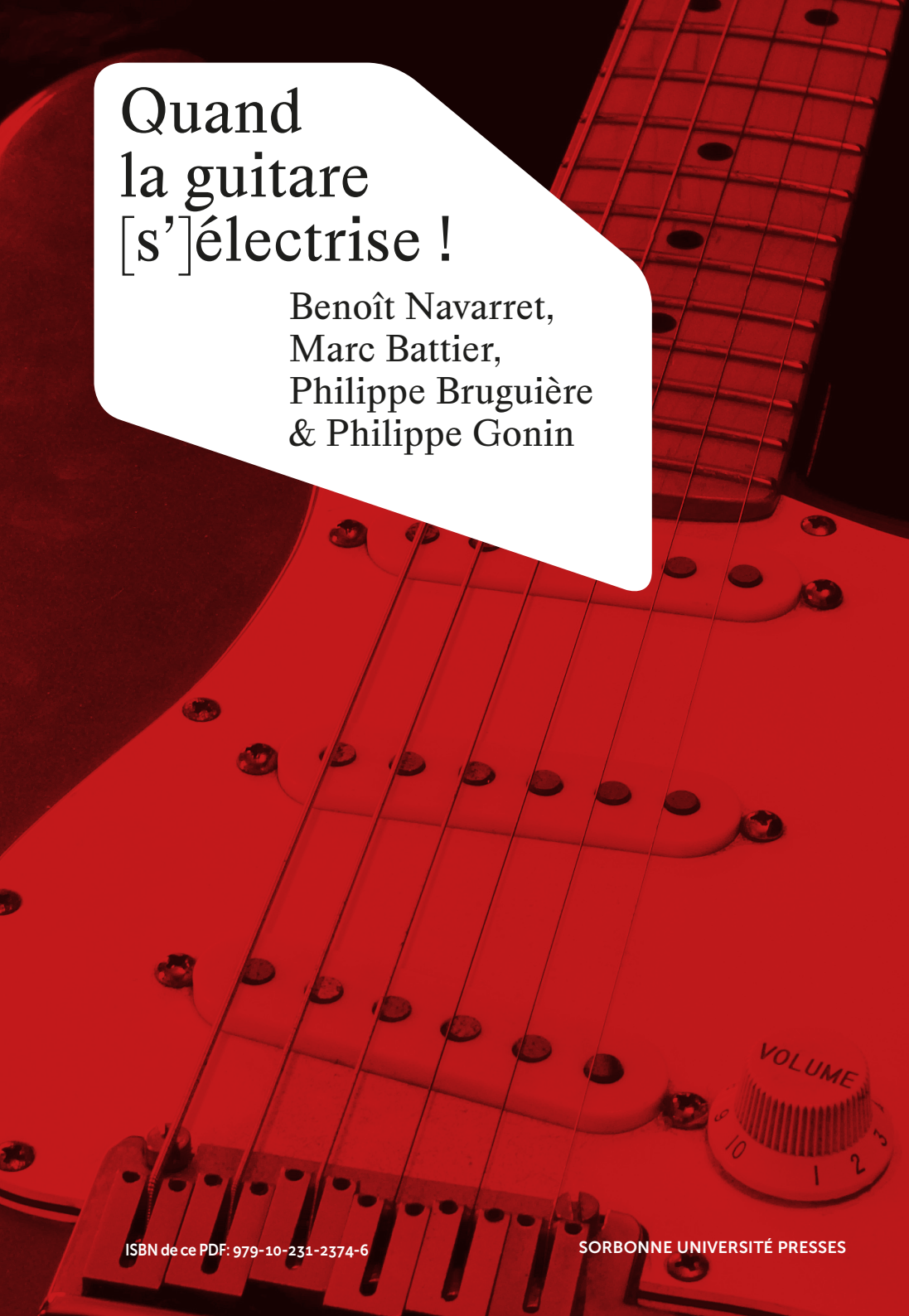
& Philippe Gonin



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MusiqueS

La guitare électrique serait-elle l'instrument emblématique du XX^e siècle ? Son histoire a marqué plusieurs générations de musiciens et d'auditeurs : sa sonorité et sa puissance (qu'elle doit aussi à ses composants externes : pédales d'effets, amplificateurs et haut-parleurs), sa versatilité, son impact visuel et toutes les significations qui lui ont été associées en font un objet incontournable, une véritable icône planétaire.

Et pourtant l'étude scientifique de son histoire, de son répertoire ou de sa technologie n'a fait que commencer, tout en allant en s'amplifiant. Peu connue, la recherche menée autour de cet instrument mérite qu'on s'y attarde, tant les approches possibles sont riches et variées : car l'instrument ne peut s'étudier en-dehors de son contexte, ni sans raconter l'histoire de ces pionniers qui se mirent à bricoler des formes hybrides d'instruments, puisant dans l'organologie classique en la mêlant aux techniques de la radio, du microphone et de tout ce que « la fée électricité » a pu apporter en matière d'innovation sonore. L'on ne peut aussi ignorer la construction symbolique de ces figures mythiques, les *guitar heroes*, qui font rêver les foules et alimentent les fantasmes de nombreux amateurs. Sans oublier la multiplicité de ses usages, du club intimiste aux gigantesques stades ou festivals, de son expérimentation dans la musique contemporaine au refus délibéré de la virtuosité dans des genres plus nihilistes, et même dans certaines pratiques religieuses !

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QUAND LA GUITARE [S']ÉLECTRISE !

À la mémoire d'André Duchossoir (1949-2020)

MusiqueS

Série « MusiqueS & Sciences » – Instrumentarium

Issue des travaux interdisciplinaires soutenus par l'Institut Collegium Musicæ de l'Alliance Sorbonne Université depuis sa création en 2015, la série « MusiqueS & Sciences » est une collection dont le but est de susciter, développer et valoriser les recherches ayant pour sujet les musiques, passées et présentes, de toutes origines. Elle invite ainsi à mêler les disciplines des sciences humaines et des sciences exactes telles que l'acoustique, les technologies de la musique et du son, la musicologie, l'ethnomusicologie, la psychologie cognitive, l'informatique musicale, mais aussi les métiers de la conservation et de la lutherie.

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Le Collegium Musicæ – institut de Sorbonne Université – regroupe des organismes de recherche et de formation spécialisés dans le domaine musical. Il favorise, depuis sa création en 2015, les travaux menés en interdisciplinarité entre sciences exactes, sciences humaines et pratiques musicales. La collection « Instrumentarium », consacrée aux instruments et familles d'instruments, est la première des séries de publications issues des travaux scientifiques du Collegium Musicæ. Suscitant le croisement des regards entre acousticiens, musicologues, musiciens et luthiers, ces travaux permettent la confrontation inédite de données et analyses acoustiques, organologiques et techniques, historiques et culturelles, ainsi que celles relevant de la création et de l'innovation.

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Philippe Bruguière & Philippe Gonin (dir.)

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CHAPITRE 8

INSTRUMENTS OF WHOSE DESIRE? THE ELECTRIC GUITAR AND THE SHAPING OF WOMEN'S MUSICAL EXPERIENCE

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L'INSTRUMENT DE QUI ? QUI DÉSIRE ? LA GUITARE ÉLECTRIQUE ET LES CONTOURS DE L'EXPÉRIENCE MUSICALE FÉMININE

Steve Waksman
Professor of Music and American Studies at Smith College

ABSTRACT

In *Instruments of Desire,* I wrote of the electric guitar as an instrument with long-standing and almost inescapable associations with men and masculinity, using the term "technophallus" to explain the depth of the cultural patterns that connected the electric guitar to masculinity. Although this approach was designed to call into question the idea that these connections were natural or inherent, in practice it led to the virtual exclusion of female guitarists from my survey of the electric guitar's cultural history. For my presentation, I want to undo this exclusion, building on the work of Mavis Bayton, Mary Celeste Kearney, Kevin Dawe, and others who have written of the cultural contradictions of being a female electric guitarist and thus have broadened our understanding of how the electric guitar works in relation to questions of gender. Specifically, I will briefly analyze the work of three female guitarists whose careers took shape during the 1970s: June Millington, Viv Albertine, and Lita Ford. All three of these artists have recently published memoirs of their lives and careers that have much to tell us about the value that the electric guitar has held for female artists. My goal is not to suggest that there is some distinctive female approach to playing the electric guitar. Rather, I will examine how women have had to negotiate a complex field of cultural pressures that extend from the moment they decide to play the instrument, to their decision to try to make a career out of playing, and then to the establishment of reputation and the effort to find an unique voice with and through the electric guitar.

BIOGRAPHIE

Steve Waksman is Professor of Music and American Studies at Smith College, Massachusetts, USA. His publications include the books *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (1999), and *This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk* (2009). With Reebee Garofalo, he is the coauthor of the sixth edition of the popular rock history textbook, *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the U.S.A.*, and with Andy Bennett, he co-edited the *Sage Handbook of Popular Music*. Waksman's writing on

the electric guitar and guitar-related topics includes chapters in the books Guitar Cultures, The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar, and the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* (for which he wrote the main entry on "Guitars"). Currently, he is writing a new book on the cultural history of live music and performance in the U.S., tentatively titled *Live Music in America: A History, 1850-2000*.

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans *Instruments of Desire*, j'ai évoqué la guitare comme un instrument associé depuis longtemps aux hommes et à la masculinité, utilisant le terme de « technophallus » pour expliquer le poids des modèles culturels associant guitare électrique et masculinité. Bien que cette approche cherchât à remettre en question l'idée que ces connexions étaient naturelles ou intrinsèques, elle m'a conduit dans la pratique, à la quasi-exclusion des femmes guitaristes de cette étude de l'histoire culturelle de la guitare électrique. Je voudrais, dans cet article, gommer cette exclusion en m'appuyant sur les travaux de Mavis Bayton, Mary Celeste Kearney, Kevin Dawe, et d'autres encore, qui ont travaillé sur les contradictions culturelles que recouvre le dait d'être une femme guitariste et ont ainsi élargi notre appréhension de la façon dont fonctionnent les relations entre la guitare électrique et la question du genre. Plus précisément, j'analyserai brièvement les œuvres de trois guitaristes féminines dont la carrière a débuté dans les années 1970 : June Millington, Viv Albertine et Lita Ford. Ces artistes ont récemment publié leurs mémoires qui nous en disent long sur l'importance, pour elles, de la guitare électrique. Mon objectif n'est pas de démontrer qu'il y a une approche spécifiquement féminine pour jouer de la guitare électrique. Je vais au contraire examiner comment les femmes ont dû aborder un champ complexe de pressions culturelles devenant plus fortes dès lors qu'elles avaient fait le choix de jouer de cet instrument, qu'elles avaient pris la décision d'en faire leur carrière, et des efforts qu'elles avaient fournis pour se construire une réputation et trouver une voix unique avec et grâce à la guitare électrique.

BIOGRAPHIE

Steve Waksman est professeur de musique et d'études américaines au Smith College, Massachusetts, États-Unis. Parmi ses publications, on trouve les ouvrages *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (1999) et *This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk* (2009). Il est, avec Reebee Garofalo, le co-auteur de la sixième édition du manuel d'histoire de rock populaire *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA*. Avec Andy Bennett, il a coédité *Sage Handbook of Popular Music*. Les travaux de Waksman sur la guitare électrique et les sujets liés à la guitare figurent dans plusieurs chapitres des volumes de *Guitar Cultures, The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, et dans *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* (il est l'auteur de l'entrée principale « Guitare »). Actuellement, il écrit un nouvel ouvrage sur l'histoire culturelle de la musique live et de la performance aux États-Unis, provisoirement intitulé *Live Music in America: A History, 1850-2000*.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the things that I seem to be best known for, for better or worse, is having coined the word, "technophallus". The term is meant to connote the degree to which the electric guitar has been defined through most of its history through its association with men and masculinity, and often – as with rock guitarists like Jimi Hendrix – with a particularly demonstrative and flamboyant sort of masculine sexual display. In *Instruments of Desire* (Waksman, 1999), I made a deliberate decision to focus on the relationship of the electric guitar to masculinity, strongly inspired by Robert Walser's (1993) important discussion of heavy metal masculinity and guitar virtuosity. As Walser wrote in his analysis of the work of Eddie Van Halen (1993, p. 76): "Virtuosity... has always been concerned with demonstrating and enacting a particular kind of power and freedom that might be called 'potency'. Both words carry gendered meanings, of course; heavy metal shares with most other Western music a patriarchal context wherein power itself is construed as essentially male."

Building on this foundational insight in my own study of the electric guitar, I generally neglected the many female electric guitarists who have taken up the instrument throughout its history. This essay is an attempt at a sort of auto-critique that also serves to fill what remains a substantial gap in the scholarly literature on electric guitars and guitarists.

Mavis Bayton (1997), in an influential essay on *Women and the Electric Guitar*, emphasized the social factors that discouraged female players from taking up the instrument. The guitar's well-recognized association with masculinity was itself a discouraging factor but was compounded by its association with technology which also functions as a cultural sphere that aligns core values such as inventiveness and technical mastery with masculinity and the prevalence of overt sexism in many of the social worlds within which the electric guitar has been dominant. Bayton's stress on the relative inaccessibility of the electric guitar as a vehicle for feminine performance downplayed the achievements of female guitarists but did recognize their efforts in combating gender exclusion, voiced most pungently by punk musician Vi Subversa who opined: "All of technology is dominated by men... but I'm fucked if I'm going to say it belongs to

them. It's ours! Right?" (Bayton, 1997, p. 49.) Subsequent studies of women electric guitarists have continued to strike a balance between acknowledging the exclusionary character of the ways in which gender has been constructed in relation to the instrument, and highlighting the manner in which female guitarists have actively gone against the grain of such constructions in seeking to claim the instrument as their own.[1] Yet this literature remains underdeveloped and, outside the realm of specialist publications like the pioneering *She Shreds* magazine – a U.S. publication dedicated, as the cover announces, to "women guitarists and bassists" –, the work of female guitarists is a decidedly secondary feature of writing on the electric guitar, whether scholarly or popular.

One significant area in which representations of female guitarists have shown notable growth is in the realm of published memoirs. The past few years have seen the publication of four memoirs by prominent female electric guitarists whose careers range from the 1960s to the present: June Millington, best known as lead guitarist for the groundbreaking all-female rock band Fanny; Lita Ford, who played lead guitar for the controversial band the Runaways before enjoying considerable success as a solo artist; Viv Albertine, a leading participant in the British punk scene through her membership in the band the Slits; and Carrie Brownstein, guitarist for the influential post-riot grrrl band Sleater Kinney. Collectively, these works allow us to view the electric guitar not only through the playing of these musicians but as part of their life stories. Reading them together, we can better grasp how the decision to play the electric guitar and the effort to make a career from doing so, assumes a distinctive shape

1 Relevant works on women and the electric guitar published since Bayton's essay include Strohm, John. "Women Guitarists: Gender Issues in Alternative Rock", *The Electric Guitar: A History of an American Icon*, ed. Andre Millard, Baltimore (MD), Johns Hopkins UP, 2004, p. 181-200; Dawe, Kevin, *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance*, Farnham (UK), Ashgate, 2010, p. 129-150; Bourdage, Monique. "'A Young Girl's Dream': Examining the Barriers Facing Female Electric Guitarists", *IASPM@Journal*, vol. 1, nº 1, 2010; Kearney, Mary, "Pink Technology: Mediamaking Gear for Girls", *Camera Obscura*, vol. 25, nº 2, 2010, p. 1-39.

for women due to the ways in which the instrument – and the rock music culture surrounding it – have been defined according to masculine norms.

Carrie Brownstein, the youngest of these four guitarist autobiographers, captures the paradox that so often hovers over the figure of the female electric guitarist in an evocative passage from her memoir, *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl*. Here, she begins by describing her fashion choices and the sense of style she seeks to project onstage, but moves into a consideration of what it means to play electric guitar as a woman (or, in this case, a girl):

> I wore business-casual clothes onstage, dressed up as if for a job... What I was actually trying to do was pull off a Mod look from the '60s or '70s... but instead of buying the clothes at cool London vintage stores, I was purchasing them...from a shopping mall in Olympia... Mostly, I didn't want to be a girl with a guitar. "Girl" felt like an identifier that viewers, especially male ones, saw as a territory upon which an electric guitar was a tourist, an interloper. I wanted the guitar to be an appendage – an extension even – of a body that was made more powerful by my yielding it. (Brownstein, 2015, p. 101.)

In effect, Brownstein's wish, as she articulates it in the last sentence here, is precisely to have access to the electric guitar's status as what I have called the "technophallus", which I defined through my analysis of Jimi Hendrix: "The electric guitar as technophallus represents a fusion of man and machine, an electronic appendage that allowed Hendrix to display his instrumental and, more symbolically, his sexual prowess." (Waksman, 1999, p. 188.)

For Brownstein the sexual component of the guitar's appeal is less prominent than its ability to symbolize a kind of power; yet this power is itself encoded in the electric guitar's conventional role as something that "amplifies" the physical presence of the performer. That power is typically denied to female guitarists, whom Brownstein perceptively describes as "tourists" on the instrument, people who are just passing through and to whom the guitar does not belong on a symbolic and cultural level.

FIRST GUITARS

Given how strong these tendencies have been, it is striking to read the stories that each of these guitarists tell about having acquired their first guitars. All of these writers give priority to accounts of their first guitars. Lita Ford and Brownstein recount these stories within the first ten pages of their respective books, and Viv Albertine portrays her first guitar as a major turning point in her life. June Millington spins less drama around the event of her first electric guitar but includes the story nonetheless, and even then, the sheer ordinariness of the purchase in many ways stands out. In no case do these guitarists give a sense that they felt excluded from owning an electric guitar or learning to play one at the point of first acquisition. Rather, getting an electric guitar is a moment of self-definition, much as it has been for legions of male guitarists.

For Lita Ford, her first electric guitar marked the culmination of a process of discovering a sense of musical personhood. She obtained her first guitar, an acoustic nylon-string instrument, from her mother for her eleventh birthday, but immediately felt like it was not the right choice for her: "That kind of guitar was mostly for classical-style playing", she writes, "it didn't make the right kinds of sounds. I was looking for a rock-and-roll sound... I wanted something with balls, with some aggression, and hard rock offered that. "(Ford, 2016, p. 7.)

A particular epiphany came two years later, at age thirteen, when Ford went with an older cousin to see Black Sabbath perform in concert and was so struck by the playing of Tony Iommi that she decided she needed to acquire a guitar just like his – a chocolate colored Gibson *SG*. She lied about her age to get a job at a local hospital where her mother worked, and saved up until she could afford to buy the guitar on her own: "I went to a local guitar store and picked it out. I knew exactly what I wanted. I paid $375, which was cheap for a Gibson *SG*. I took it home and plugged it into my father's Sony reel-to-reel tape player. I slapped on the echo and it sounded like God." (Ford, 2016, p. 15.)

Viv Albertine did not get her first guitar until she was twenty-two. While Lita Ford was motivated to purchase an electric guitar by her

exposure to Black Sabbath, for Albertine it was the Sex Pistols who provided principal inspiration. The money came from a small inheritance left by her grandmother. A fashionable and adventurous young woman, Albertine was dating another guitarist, Mick Jones of the Clash. With Jones, she went to the guitar shop, where he helped her sort through the different options and also to negotiate around the sexism of the salesperson who treated her with indifference. A complete beginner, Albertine was determined to buy an electric guitar rather than "pay her dues" by starting with an acoustic – like Ford, her attraction to the electric guitar was paramount. And also like Ford, she portrays her purchase of the instrument as a major moment of self-realization:

> Eventually I buy a single-cutaway sunburst 1969 Les Paul Junior. I love its simplicity, the two gold knobs, the single pickup, the curves… My new guitar costs £250. I can't afford a proper case so they find a grey cardboard one out the back… I carry my guitar through the streets of central London, prop it against the bus stop in St Martin's Lane… heave it onto the bus and sit with the case wedged between my knees, thinking to myself, "Nobody knows I can't play it. At this moment in time, I look like a guitarist."… For the first time in my life, I feel like myself. (Albertine, 2014, p. 92-94.)

LEARNING TECHNIQUE, FORMING STYLE

Ford already knew how to play guitar when she acquired her first electric instrument; Albertine did not. Yet for both, and for June Millington and Carrie Brownstein as well, the electric guitar prompted a process of sustained learning and experimentation to develop a personal style of playing. Through this process the need to negotiate with established paradigms of guitar playing, including the dominant association of the instrument with male players and masculine norms of performance comes more into focus. For June Millington, a major turning point along these lines came around the moment that her existing band Wild Honey was about to mutate into the band with which she came to greater notoriety, Fanny. Until that time Millington had occupied the rhythm guitar role, with her band mate Addie Clement playing lead. When Clement left the

band, Millington's remaining band mates – drummer Alice de Buhr and bassist Jean Millington, June's sister – confronted her with the notion that the lead guitar role was hers. As Millington recalled the moment: "I think I stopped breathing, it was like being struck by lightning… My personality is such that I didn't want to expose myself, and hey, lead guitar? Totally exposed position, especially for a girl in 1969." (Millington, 2015, p. 235.)

Yet Millington took to her new role with intense commitment, and developed not just a style but an ethos of lead guitar playing that put her in tension with many of the dominant tendencies of the era. She explains: "A lot of playing lead guitar is having an idea of what to do, I've found. That comes before, or at least along with, technique as far as I'm concerned. Otherwise you come up with what I call 'pedestrian' guitar parts… Jean calls it noodling. We came to hate it when guys, especially, would want to sort of challenge us by asking to jam, then noodling ad infinitum." (Millington, 2015, p. 235.)

"Noodling" is the term June and her sister Jean applied to playing without any clear sense of direction. Yet it is also clearly a gendered style of playing in her account – it is what guys do when they want to challenge her abilities. For June, to avoid "noodling" was to avoid unnecessary competition, and to define her playing not by someone else's standards but by her own.

Lita Ford had no such ambivalence seeking to approximate standards of guitar virtuosity typically identified with male performers. Of all the guitarists here surveyed, she expresses the greatest desire to become a "guitar hero" in her own right, and used such figures as Jimmy Page, Tony Iommi, and Ritchie Blackmore as her models for what excellence in musicianship should be. Her learning process was furthermore, very much akin to that described by some of her peers such as Eddie Van Halen, whose band Van Halen came up alongside Ford's band the Runaways on the L.A. scene of the mid-1970s. As Van Halen has described in various interviews his process of learning to play by listening to records by Eric Clapton and Cream and slowing them down to better discern each note, so Ford used her parents' stereo system to similar effect.[2] Playing the songs

2 As Van Halen explained in a 1984 feature, "My biggest influence was Eric Clapton when he was with Cream and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

at low volume allowed her to better attune her ears to hear the individual notes and also the mistakes that each of her role models made in their solos. She recalls:

> I would quietly start dissecting the song. I love Jimmy Page, but I gotta say, he had the most mistakes. I learned his solos note for note. If it went by too fast for me, I would gently slide the needle on the turntable back in the grooves of the record, over and over and over, until I had pieced together an entire solo or song. By the time I was thirteen I had mastered them all. (Ford, 2016, p. 8.)

Ford further emphasizes that while learning to play in this way, she never had the sense that she was doing something out of the ordinary as a female guitarist. She acknowledges no female role models – if she was aware, for instance, of June Millington, she does not admit as much. But what stands out is her assertion: "No one told me girls can't do this".

Viv Albertine also proceeded with little sense of inhibition due to her gender, but in keeping with her involvement with the British punk movement of the late 1970s, she was far more inclined to question the dominant principles and standards of rock guitar. Unlike Ford, who carefully studied the styles of her male guitar influences, Albertine bluntly rejected such methods:

> I don't want to copy any male guitarists, I wouldn't be true to myself if I did that. I can't copy Lita Ford from the Runaways, or the guitarist from Fanny: they don't sound like women, they sound like men. I keep thinking, "What would I sound like if I was a guitar sound?" It's so abstract. (Albertine, 2014, p. 104.)

Even those female guitarists who preceded her, then, had absorbed too much male influence in Albertine's judgment. Paradoxically, though, Albertine received significant mentorship from her male peers, including

I learned his solos to 'Crossroads'...and 'Sitting on Top of the World'... note-for-note by slowing them down to 16 RPM on my dad's turntable." (Van Halen, Eddie, "My Tips for Beginners", as told to Jim Ferguson, *Guitar Player*, vol. 18, nº 7, July 1984, p. 53.)

the aforementioned Mick Jones and also Keith Levene, another member of the Clash who would later be part of the post-punk band Public Image Limited. Accepting instruction from Levene on "how *not* to play guitar", Albertine was soon building her own style "from scratch":

> I twang away every day, trying to find my way around the guitar, to understand what pickups do, what setting to put my amp on, trying desperately to hear... I decide that I want a thin buzzsaw-ish/mosquito type of sound. That's what I'm aiming for. "Why?" says Keith. "I like that it sounds annoying and dangerous and it's industrial", I reply. I keep twiddling the knobs on the amp and my guitar to try to find the right combination that will lead me to THE SOUND. (Albertine, 2014, p. 102.)

For Carrie Brownstein, whose musical coming of age occurred more than a decade later, female role models were not so scarce, nor were they to be so roundly criticized. Brownstein came up in an Olympia, Washington, music scene that was full of female performers, many of whom were continuing the challenge that punk had posed to conventions of electric guitar virtuosity. Her early band, Excuse 17, and the later group Sleater-Kinney shared one unusual characteristic: both bands had no bass player. In Sleater-Kinney's two-guitar lineup this gave rise to a distinctive sound in which the two guitarists, Brownstein and band mate Corin Tucker, worked with and against one another to fill up the space left by the absent bass guitar. As Brownstein explains:

> We weren't into a lo-fi trebly noise; we weren't interested in accentuating or exaggerating the fact that we didn't have a traditional bass player. We wanted to sound like a full rock band... Additionally, neither Corin nor I were interested in playing too many bar or power chords. So my chords were half formed; I was always trying to leave room for Corin. My entire style of playing was built around somebody else playing guitar with me, a story that on its own sounds unfinished, a sonic to-be-continued, designed to be completed by someone else. (Brownstein, 2015, p. 86-87.)

The style that evolved from this give-and-take was neither rhythm nor lead guitar but something in between. More to the point, Brownstein's

description evokes a critical departure from the individualistic character of electric guitar playing. Solos as such were largely to be eschewed. Instead, guitar lines were to be fitted into the sonic tapestry of the song as a whole; while at the same time standard chord structures were broken into their constituent parts and reconstituted in highly mobile formations.

PERSISTENCE AS RESISTANCE

Across the experiences and the styles of these four guitarists we see a complex constellation of directions pursued. June Millington did not reject the status of lead guitarist but decisively worked to define it in her own terms. Lita Ford embraced the lead guitar role and sought to acquire the requisite technique through careful study of her primary influences. Viv Albertine downplayed all influences, male or female, and wanted most to create a sound that was definitively hers. Carrie Brownstein developed a style that was defined through musical partnership, in which her guitar was one-half of an equation.

What connects these performers, then, is not something essentially feminine that manifests itself through some shared set of stylistic qualities. It is rather the ways in which their work as guitarists and development of a style occurred in a context in which they faced resistance to their efforts on the basis of their gender. This resistance could take many forms and asserted itself in disparate contexts. The recording studio was one space in which gender could become the basis of conflict. June Millington recalls a telling clash with her longtime producer, Richard Perry. According to Millington:

> My guitar levels were always a point of tension between me and Richard [Perry]. He perpetually assumed it was fine to come up to my amp and turn me down, which drove me wild. (Millington, 2015, p. 399.)

Only after famed recording engineer Geoff Emerick intervened on Millington's behalf did Perry back off and allow Millington to set her own levels. Although such conflicts between musician and producer may be routine, Perry's willingness not just to ask Millington to turn the volume down but to forcibly adjust her amp settings suggests a denial of her authority,

as a woman, over the technological tools of her craft. Lita Ford experienced an even more profound sense of disempowerment in the studio in her post-Runaways solo career. Working on her second solo album, *Dancin' on the Edge*, producer Lance Quinn insisted that a friend of his be allowed to record the guitar solo for the album's lead single, "Gotta Let Go". Rather than include his friend's playing with Ford's approval, Quinn surreptitiously inserted the solo without Ford's knowledge. As Ford recounts:

> Personally, I don't think Lance would have done that if I was a dude. In my opinion, he had his mind set on his buddy playing on my record, and because I was female, he took advantage of me. Even Lance Quinn couldn't wrap his head around the chick who played guitar. (Ford, 2016, p. 129.)

Other sorts of conflicts emerged in the live music setting. Ford describes the most flagrant efforts to undermine her abilities to play at top form by musicians in other bands and their stage crews:

> Sometimes guys from other bands or their crew would pull a tube out of my amp after sound check or mess with my monitor settings. We wrote the settings on duct tape so we could easily reset the amp without taking too much time. We were constantly dealing with this kind of bullshit. Some bands didn't want to be blown away by a girl, so they would try to screw me up any way they could. (Ford, 2016, p. 114.)

In Sleater-Kinney's case, Carrie Brownstein recounts an incident during the band's tour with the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion in which their standing as musicians was denied due to the typical way of "reading" the presence of women backstage. By Brownstein's account:

> One evening we were mistaken by a backstage security guard as groupies and nearly not let into our own dressing room. When we took the stage that night, Corin said, "We're not here to fuck the band, we are the band." (Brownstein, 2015, p. 143.)

At a subsequent show, the audience's indifference to her band led Brownstein to kick her microphone stand into the crowd, acting out her wish to "destroy the room… to disappear into the sound and the music."

Perhaps the most poignant such story comes from Viv Albertine. When her band, the Slits, broke up in the early 1980s, Albertine entered some semblance of normal adulthood: she met a man, fell in love, got married, pursued a career that took her away from making music, and had a daughter. She also had some severe health struggles, including a battle with cancer and a series of torturous setbacks in her effort to conceive a child. Her marriage began to fall apart, and in the midst of it all she returned to the electric guitar. Relearning the instrument was a struggle made no easier by the resistance of both her father and her husband, the latter of whom stated his opposition in no uncertain terms:

> Husband issues an ultimatum, Give up the music or that's it. I tell him he's not asking me to choose between music and marriage, but life and death. So there is no choice He thinks that by playing music I'm abandoning my family... The two most important men in my life want me to deny who I am. As if it's shameful. (Albertine, 2014, p. 355.)

As a young woman Albertine received more encouragement than not from her peers when seeking to take up the electric guitar. But as a grown adult woman, she faced pressure of a different sort. She was made to feel that playing guitar was not a "proper" thing to do for a woman, and perhaps especially a mother. Yet she persevered – it was not the guitar she gave up, but her husband. And her daughter became her biggest fan.

One final common denominator between these four guitarists is that, for at least some part of their careers, they played within all-female bands. Those bands often provided a shield from the pressures that these musicians faced, but also could serve as a medium for further heightening the awareness of the ways in which gender framed their experiences as musicians. I want to close this paper with a series of quotes that outlines, through the voices of these artists, how the format of the all-female band provided a vantage point for confronting the limitations faced by female rock musicians from the 1960s through the 1990s. First, from June Millington, discussing her experience with Fanny:

> Make no mistake about it: that is what the industry wanted when we started recording in Hollywood, and was about all it could take: women

> playing like guys was the frame, beginning to end. There was no horizon. Or rather, everything was an event horizon: an all-girl band in the mid-'60s couldn't escape the gravitational pull of peoples' prejudices, although we tried: the best we could do was to fiercely, constantly ignore them. (Millington, 2015, p. 198.)

Next is Lita Ford, who describes one of the earliest shows played by the Runaways on their first tour outside of their hometown, Los Angeles:

> The second show of the tour took place at Cleveland's famed Agora, and that's when we really saw the pandemonium that an all-girl rock band could cause... The audience was nearly all guys and they were going crazy... We walked out onstage and looked out into a sea of teenage guys beating the shit out of one another to get closer to the front of the stage. They were screaming our names. They were there for the fucking fantasy... I stared back in their faces and showed them the truth: a chick who could shred. (Ford, 2016, p. 42.)

Viv Albertine recalled her decision to join the Slits in the following terms:

> I'm going to play with the Slits... I've seen the Slits play and I know they aren't musical virtuosos, but it's still daunting as I'm very new to guitar playing... I want boys to come and see us play and think I want to be part of that. Not They're pretty or I want to fuck them but I want to be in that gang, -in that band.I want boys to be us, not have the usual response. (Albertine, 2014, p. 155-157.)

Finally, from Carrie Brownstein, her reflections on playing with Sleater-Kinney:

> We were never trying to deny our femaleness. Instead, we wanted to expand the notion of what it means to be female... We were considered a female band before we became merely a band; I was a female guitarist and Janet was a female drummer for years before we were simply considered a guitarist and a drummer. I think Sleater-Kinney wanted the privilege of starting from neutral ground... Anything that isn't traditional for women apparently requires that we remind people what an anomaly

it is, even when it becomes less and less of an anomaly. (Brownstein, 2015, p. 168.)

CONCLUSION

To acknowledge the electric guitar's role as "technophallus" is to acknowledge that the power invested in the instrument has typically been reserved for men. Female artists have not been fully excluded from laying hold to that power but they have had to struggle against significant structural and cultural impediments to do so. At the same time, the efforts of the four guitarists profiled here and many others like them, allows us to bear witness to what media studies scholar Mary Kearney (2010) has called "the transferability and plasticity of the guitar as technophallus" (p. 19). The "girl with the electric guitar" has indeed become less of an anomaly in recent years and yet as Carrie Brownstein rightly asserts, we keep reminding ourselves of what an anomaly it is. Perhaps we need to wake up to the "truth" as articulated by Lita Ford: a "chick who could shred" is not a poser, or an imposter, or someone suffering from false consciousness. Neither does she exist primarily as an object of male fantasy. She is, above all, a guitarist.

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