

November 13th - December 19th 2015

Cut

Annie MacDonell

Lis Rhodes

The Slits

Elizabeth Zvonar

Cut

The Slits

Cut

Some incomplete liner notes

Side one. Track one. “Instant Hit”

This song never sounded right to me at first. As the lead track on the band’s first LP, its spare, restrained sound is unexpected. It lacks the disjointed guitar lines, frenetic beats and guttural shrieks which characterized their live shows, and is a departure from the earlier recording of this song made for a radio session with John Peel. For their first time working in a studio, Island Records hired reggae musician Dennis Bovell as producer, and his influence is clear here from the start. On *Cut*, “Instant Hit” rolls out slowly, with dampened guitar strums and a rhythm section that is precise and economical. Whereas the band’s sound had already begun to show the influence of the parallel reggae scene in London at the time,¹ it is here that they more fully embrace that influence. On top of all of this is the recurring South American pan flute, which really has no business being in this song, but somehow makes the whole thing come together in what is simultaneously the most and least punk sound on the whole record. The more I listen to this version of the song, the more I hear a band consciously trying to distill and compress the raw, punk essence of their sound, retaining

little of what one would expect to hear from a bunch of young punk women.

Lis Rhodes made *Light Reading* in 1978, following an earlier period of films which explored sound/image relationships in optical soundtracks on 16mm film. As structural works, these films eschew language, or at least language in its spoken, comprehensible form.² This period of work culminated in the dual projection work *Light Music* from 1975-77 which was made from a series of line drawings to generate a rhythmic visual pattern of scrolling line, as well as a shifting series of tonal noises that can be read by a projector and was made as a response to the lack of attention paid to women composers. In *Light Reading*, the question of female representation is furthered, but the structure is turned inside out. It is a film that behaves completely different from *Light Music*, yet is in every way a direct companion to it. Here, sound and image are divided: a voice narrates a black frame, and images only appear when the narration ceases. The narrative centres on a character referred to only through the use of female pronouns. Elliptical and repetitive, the narration provides only clues as to how to piece together the spoken and the visual.

Side One. Track Three. “Spend, Spend, Spend”

Albertine took this song’s title from a headline in the papers about a woman

who won the lottery and, making no illusions about doing anything worthwhile with the money, told the press she was just going to blow the whole lot. The song sets up this feeling of an empty life against the desire to have things. As one can glean from the title of her 2014 memoir *Clothes Clothes Clothes Music Music Music Boys Boys Boys*, Viv Albertine's role in London's 1970s punk scene was coupled with a love for fashion—in particular the clothes of Vivienne Westwood made for the bondage, fetish and punk clothing boutique SEX.³

Elizabeth Zvonar has spent the last several years building a body of collage work which draws on a vocabulary of fashion magazine advertisements, art history textbooks, and lifestyle and luxury goods magazines from the mid to late 20th century. Her works don't take on the obvious role of critiquing or analyzing the source images from which she draws—rather, they are assemblages which recontextualize the sources into new images. Zvonar often focuses on the body, cutting away at the figure and the surface of advertisements to transport the viewer into a different metaphysical plane.

Entering the gallery, we're confronted with three works by Zvonar: collages that have been scanned and printed onto large, hanging silks. In *The Challenge of Abstraction* (2015), a

classical painting depicting a lecherous old man clutching a porcelain-skinned young woman hangs on a green wall. The painting is poorly exposed and misaligned; a small area of the painting's surface is washed out from a flash. In front of the painting stands a woman with a model-like demeanor, wearing something that looks like a couture dress with a droopy-necked, oversized T-shirt on top. The woman's face is a void, collaged alongside a phallic-shaped cutout. A writer more astute than I recently did the legwork to identify the painting as Albrecht Altdorfer's *Lot and his Daughters* from 1535, and the woman as model Kate Moss wearing a Vivienne Westwood T-shirt that reads, "Climate Revolution."⁴

Though the base image Zvonar is working from already seems so ripe with complex layers, Zvonar's interruptions here extend the awkward figure-ground composition in this grim and dark museum. From the image of Lot and his daughter being transposed onto Moss' cut out face, to the vaguely-phallic abstraction over Moss' right side, Zvonar both accentuates a fraught and complicated relationship between sexual desire and rarified objects in the source image while also neutralizing them with an abstraction that is wryly humorous.

Side Two. Track One. "Newtown"

The Roland Space Echo is a tape

delay unit which uses a loop of ¼ inch recording tape spooled around a series of magnetic tape heads. The speed with which the tape passes over the play and record heads is variable, altering the length of the delay between when a sound is played in real time and when its echo reverberates out of the Space Echo. Put simply, the effects unit is one that allows a musician to bend time, to cut out a phrase and let it repeat, layering what has already happened with what is happening at any given sonic moment. Though you might not be familiar with this particular breed of sound gear, it's an effect you'd likely recognize from a lot of songs, and one that has come to characterize reggae and dub music in particular. It's presence is not as pronounced on "Newtown" or in the other tracks on Cut as it is in something like Lee Perry's *Super Ape* (1976), but the influence and use of that echo/reverb sound is there all the same.

Annie MacDonell's film *The Fortune Teller* (2015) uses the restoration of a cast resin hand from an old fortune telling arcade machine as a starting point to explore time outside of the linear, forward-progressing structure we know it to function in. For some years now MacDonell has rooted a large portion of her research in the Picture Collection at the Toronto Reference Library. The collection consists of over a million images taken from magazines, books and other print

sources, selected and organized into subject headings such as "teenagers" or "mirrors" by library staff. Think of it as an offline, physical google image search. *The Fortune Teller* begins with a slow pan across a series of photographic images arranged on a white studio wall. A narrator speaks. "Object assessment. The object is a cast resin hand from a fortune teller machine. The resin substrate has been covered, first with a peach tone paint, and then a white paint with purple painted nails. Overall condition is poor." The narrator goes on to detail all the damage, wear, and deterioration of this object, but as the photograph comes into focus, it shows none of the broken fingers, adhesive residue or cracks described in the narration.

Nestled amongst the archive of "hand" images in this opening sequence, the fully restored hand appears here out of time. As the film continues, we travel back in time, to watch the process of the hand being restored from its deteriorated state. All these moments are plucked out of a chronology: layered, repeated, forwards and back. Time collapses in on itself. Halfway through the film, an organ punctuates the ambient scrapes of the conservator's tools as she works to repair the hand. It plays a segment of Bach's *The Musical Offering*, a crab canon, which is a kind of musical palindrome where a sequence of notes is played simultaneously forwards

and backwards.

Side Two. Track Four. “Typical Girls”

The Slits recorded *Cut* over a period of several weeks in a converted barn at Ridge Farm on the outskirts of London. In the middle of these sessions, a photographer came out for a day to shoot a cover photo. The band had an idea that they wanted to pose as “wild animals, warriors, woodland creatures,”⁵ and after spending some time taking shots of them crouching and crawling around in the woods (one of these shots was used on the back of the LP cover), they ended up in the Rose Garden smearing mud on their arms and legs and eventually stripping naked and donning loincloths. As guitarist Viv Albertine has recalled, we “knew, since we had no clothes on, that we had to look confrontational and hard. We didn’t want to be inviting the male gaze.”⁶

I was texting with a friend about this show a couple of weeks ago and she commented, “So, I’m just looking at the cover of *Cut* for the first time. You sure it’s not just a bunch of white girls miming native?” In Albertine’s book she acknowledges that the band was aware that the image could be misconstrued. I keep coming back to this passage in the book, trying to read between the lines to find evidence of this awareness, but I’m not sure it’s actually there.

For The Slits, these images were about subverting power dynamics and expectations and gender roles. These were three young women (Ari Up was 17 when they recorded *Cut*) in a punk scene that had only a handful of other women making music (Siouxsie Sioux, Chrissy Hynde, The Raincoats and Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex). They were also performing an attitude that aimed to represent the band’s sound. But it’s hard to refute my friend’s observation, and Albertine’s book further corroborates this when she explains how the whole idea for the loincloths came from a friend of their manager who had just returned from Africa. Certainly, the 1970s London punk scene was a different place than the present, but as an image that I’ve chosen to recirculate here, for this exhibition, it would be wrong not to delve into its complexities. Inasmuch as it’s emblematic of three young women subverting a power dynamic, looking at this record cover now, it’s also clearly indicative of the pervasiveness of colonial mindsets and how troublingly easy it is to reinforce a colonialist hierarchy even when trying to undermine other ones. Can one reading of an image ever be isolated from another? Can we ever fully remove an image from its context? I guess that’s the challenge of representation.

-Pablo de Ocampo

¹ Cut was recorded in 1979, at which point the confluence of punk and reggae in the London music scene was already firmly established. Don Letts, The Slits' manager early on, had been doing regular DJ gigs where he alternated punk and reggae tracks. The Slits also had close relationships with other musicians that were mixing the punk and dub/reggae sounds, most notably The Clash as well as John Lydon, in his post-Sex Pistols band Public Image Ltd.

² An earlier film, *Amenuensis* (1973) was made by exposing typewriter ribbon onto film stock to expose fragments and traces of words. Some of this footage was later worked into *Light Reading*.

³ SEX was run by Vivienne Westwood and her boyfriend Malcolm McLaren. McLaren is known for being the brainchild behind the Sex Pistols: the group a result of the connections he cultivated between customers at his store, which the band even referenced in their name.

⁴ Dagmara Genda. "Elizabeth Zvonar" *Border Crossings* August 2015, Volume 34, Number 3: 135 - 137

⁵ Viv Albertine, *Clothes Clothes Clothes Music Music Music Boys Boys Boys*. London: Faber and Faber (2014), 222.

⁶ Viv Albertine, "How We Made Cut (The Slits)". *The Guardian*. 24 June 2013. Web.

Artist Biographies

Annie MacDonell is a visual artist working with photography, film, sculpture, writing, performance and installation. MacDonell's work often begins in appropriation and spirals off into critical and self-reflexive meditations on the constitution, function, and circulation of images in the 21st century. She received a BFA from Ryerson University's School of Image Arts in 2000, followed by graduate studies at Le Fresnoy, Studio National des Arts Contemporains, in Tourcoing, France. Recent performances have been presented at le Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Scotiabank Contact Festival in Toronto. Recent solo shows have been held at Mulherin New York, The Art Gallery of Ontario, The Art Gallery of Windsor and Mercer Union in Toronto. She has participated in recent group exhibitions at la Bibliothèque National, Paris; The Power Plant, Toronto; MOCA Cleveland; the Daegu Photo Biennale, South Korea; and Le Grand Palais, Paris. In 2012 she was shortlisted for the AGO AMIA Prize for Photography, and in 2012 and 2015 she was longlisted for the Sobey Art Award. She teaches in the photography program at Ryerson University and her work is represented by Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art.

The Slits were a punk band from London active between 1976 and 1982 then again between 2005 and 2010.

Lis Rhodes is a major figure in the history of artists' filmmaking in Britain and was a leading member of the influential London Filmmakers' Co-op. In 1979 she co-founded Circles Women's Film and Video Distribution, the first British organization to distribute the work of women film and video artists. She currently lives and works in London, where a survey exhibition of her career, *Lis Rhodes: Dissonance and Disturbance*, was held at the ICA in 2012. Her films are distributed by LUX.

Elizabeth Zvonar graduated from Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design in 2001. She has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Canada at Artspeak, Western Front, Contemporary Art Gallery, Mercer Union, Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery, Oakville Gallery, and Presentation House, among others. She has exhibited internationally in New York, Australia, Japan and Belgium. In 2008, Zvonar was the inaugural artist at the Malaspina Print Research Residency and was an Artist in Residence at the Banff Centre for the thematic residency Cosmic Ray Research. Zvonar received the 2009 City of Vancouver Mayor's Award for Emerging Visual Artist; in 2011 she was presented with the Emily Award for outstanding achievement by an Emily Carr alumna. From 2012-15 Zvonar held the post of City of Vancouver Artist in Residence. Most recently, she presented the solo exhibition *The Challenge of Abstraction* at Daniel Faria Gallery in Toronto. Zvonar was the 2015 recipient of the Shadbolt Foundation's VIVA award.

Gallery List of Works

1. Elizabeth Zvonar

The Challenge of Abstraction

collage printed on silk, 36 x 62 in, 2015

2. Elizabeth Zvonar

Doubleheader

collage printed on silk, 39 x 60 in, 2015

3. Annie MacDonell

Fade/Wipe/Dissolve

Super 8 transferred to video, 8 min, 2015

4. The Slits, Cut

Vinyl LP, 1979

5. Elizabeth Zvonar

Happy Together

collage printed on silk, 38 x 62 in, 2015

6. Annie MacDonnell

The Fortune Teller

16mm film and digital video, 16 min, 2015

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Screening

Saturday, November 14th @ 2pm

Grand Luxe Hall, Western Front

Lis Rhodes

Light Reading

16mm film, 20 min, 1978

