

POPULAR

INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

Volume 2 / 2022

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AND THE “POWER OF THE BODY”
IN THE PERFORMANCE:
SOME REMARKS ON ADORNO,
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Stefano Marino

University of Bologna, Italy

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Abstract

In this article I investigate the relation between popular culture and feminism through the specific example of popular music (and more precisely, within this field, pop-rock music). In the first two sections of my article I mostly focus on such aspects as the form/content relation in an artwork, the commodity status of contemporary popular culture, the role of standardization in the musical material used by pop-rock musicians, and the relation between aesthetic dimension and political potential, drawing on the stimulating insights offered by the critical theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse but also trying to critically rethink some of their ideas. In the third section, shifting my attention from Adorno's critical theory to Richard Shusterman's pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics, I introduce the theme of the important role played by the dimension of performance in pop-rock music and, within the musical performance, by the somatic component of the musician's use of his/her body, sometimes also to spread certain politically committed messages, as in the case of songs that aim to support feminist ideas and struggles. In the fourth and final section I try to exemplify some of the ideas emerged in the previous sections through a selective and specific reference to the grunge subculture of the 1990s and its relation to feminism, with a special focus on the rock band Pearl Jam and also in connection to some ideas expressed by the feminist theorist Angela Davis.

Keywords

Aesthetics. Popular music. Feminism. Theodor W. Adorno. Richard Shusterman. Herbert Marcuse. Angela Davis. Pearl Jam.

For Karin Enrica, my mother, with love and gratitude:

Everything I feel returns to you somehow.

Sufjan Stevens, *The Only Thing*

1

The domain of *popular culture* is very broad, complex and articulated. It includes a variety of different aesthetic practices and experiences, ranging from photography and film to commercial fiction novels and comic books, from fashion and design to videogames and popular music. In the present contribution, as already happened in some of my previous works on this topic, I will focus my attention more specifically on *popular music* and try to exemplify in this way (namely, by focusing on this particular and delimited field) some of my ideas about popular culture, in general, and about the relation between popular culture and *feminism*, in particular. The guiding

question at the center of my article is whether popular culture (and, in the specific case examined here, popular music) can address in a serious way important and urgent ethical-political issues such as those concerning feminism, and whether it can contribute in a positive and non-superficial way to draw the people’s attention to such issues, thus offering a potential contribution to the development of a critical consciousness and a more feminist-oriented worldview.

Of course, depending on one’s views about feminism and especially on one’s views about popular culture, the possible answers to the abovementioned question can be different, ranging from an enthusiastic and doubtless “Yes” to a disappointed and resolute “No.” In my view, the most promising and, so to speak, well-balanced answer to the abovementioned question is a sort of pondered, cautious and reasonable “Yes, but it depends.” As we will see, my use of the simple words “it depends” in this context is referred, among other things, to such factors as: the different ways in which different artists may use even the same musical materials; the different kind of performances that it is possible to experiment and develop; the manifold and complex relations between form and content that may characterize even in radically divergent ways different works of art. From a theoretical point of view, my ideas about this aesthetic question mostly derive from my interpretation of the different (but nonetheless, in my opinion, comparable and to some extent compatible) accounts of popular culture offered by Theodor W. Adorno and Richard Shusterman, influenced by their general aesthetic theories that are respectively connected to the philosophical traditions of critical theory of society and pragmatism.

In short, and anticipating now some of the ideas that will be furthered and deepened in the next sections, I think that we can agree with Herbert Marcuse (another outstanding critical theorist) in claiming that perhaps “[a]rt cannot change the world,” but anyway “it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world” (Marcuse 1979, p. 32). As Marcuse also argued elsewhere, “[a]rt itself, in practice, cannot change reality” (i.e., it cannot make a revolution, even when it talks about a revolution, as in the famous song by Tracy Chapman *Talkin’ ‘Bout a Revolution*), but anyway “art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very form, from the then-prevailing revolutionary movement – for revolution is in the substance of art” (Marcuse 1972, p. 116). However, if this is a real potential that, *in principle*, artworks surely have, the question concerning whether this potentiality is able to realize itself and become actual or not is a question that, as I said, *depends* on many factors. Among these factors, following Adorno, one may legitimately mention fundamental moments and dimensions of the artwork such as form, content and what he called – with reference to both “serious music” and “popular music” (Adorno 2006, pp. 280-284) – the “musical material”. In short, influenced by Adorno’s aesthetics, what I would like to suggest is that a work that aims to offer an adequate expression of a certain content should be also adequate at the level of its form,

and reciprocally a work that aims to reach a high formal level should also pay attention to the contents that it expresses. In fact, as Adorno explains, “[f]orm is mediated in-itself through content [...] and content is mediated by form” (Adorno 2002, p. 356).

Anyway, for Adorno (and also for some contemporary critics of popular music who apparently aim to follow in his footsteps but, unfortunately, are not equipped with the unsurpassed musicological knowledge that Adorno could benefit from, as a pupil of Alban Berg and a composer himself), *all* popular music is undeniably and unavoidably defined *only* by negative features such as commodification, standardization and pseudo-individualization. For Adorno, these features radically condemn popular music to be a sort of “social cement” (Adorno 2006, pp. 315-319). Like *all* other products belonging to the “culture industry,” also popular music is understood by him as a sort of agent of “mass deception” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 94-136). As has been noted, “[p]opular art has not been popular with aestheticians and theorists of culture”: “[w]hen not altogether ignored as beneath contempt,” it has been “typically vilified as mindless, tasteless trash” (Shusterman 2000a, p. 169). Indeed, “until recently, the interdisciplinary field of aesthetics [...] was either silent about, or hostile to, popular culture,” on the basis of the predominant – and often merely prejudiced – idea that the latter “is aesthetically impoverished” (Gracyk 2007, p. 6). However, the fact that probably “an enormous quantity of popular music is precisely what Adorno claimed” (Leppert 2002, p. 345), does *not* imply that *all* popular music, with no exceptions, corresponds to what Adorno claimed – also considering that, for Adorno, even *all* jazz music belonged to the field of standardized and pseudo-individualized popular music, apropos of which he even dared to speak of “pseudo-improvisations,” thus assimilating jazz music to a form of *pseudos* (see Marino 2018).

Philosophizing in a dialectical and critical way *with* Adorno but at the same time *against* Adorno, I rather tend to think that a vast and not at all irrelevant part of the catalogue of songs in the popular music of the last decades has been capable to develop brilliant musical solutions with regard to both form and content, notwithstanding its status of commodity and notwithstanding its use of musical materials that, in principle, can be probably defined as “standardized” (major/minor chords; regular time signatures; habitual structure of the song and instrumentation; etc.). Drawing on some stimulating insights offered by Shusterman’s pragmatist and melioristic account of popular culture, I thus suggest that it is worth defending “the aesthetic legitimacy of popular art”: the latter “deserves serious aesthetic attention” and is often able to offer “a radically revised aesthetic with a joyous return of the somatic dimension which philosophy has long repressed” (Shusterman 2000a, pp. 177, 184). On this basis, in some of my previous contributions on this topic I have suggested to use the notion of “self-transcending commodities” (Marino 2019, p. 53) to basically account for what I define the non-standardized

use of standardized musical materials in songs or recordings that are surely characterized by a commodity status but are also capable of immanently transcending this status by virtue of their aesthetic quality. This is something that, in my view, one can find in many artists and many works in contemporary popular music.

Despite what recent critics of mass culture and popular music have polemically claimed – such as, for instance, Alva Noë (2015, p. 172), according to whom “pop music [...] looks like music, but it isn’t” – the history of popular music in the last fifty or sixty years shows that many musicians, many songs and many events have been capable to escape what Adorno called the “power of the banal [that] extends over the entire society,” and have been capable to fulfill the “flight from the banal” (Adorno 1991, p. 34) that he considered the task of *all* music in our age. In certain cases of radical experimentation by some unique figures in the recent history of popular music, my interpretation key based on the idea of a non-standardized use of standardized musical materials can be also connected to what the musicologist Richard Middleton once recognized as the seemingly paradoxical but nonetheless real existence of “avant-garde commodities – a combination which, according to Adorno, is impossible” (Middleton 1990, p. 43). Indeed, musicians and bands like The Velvet Underground, Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, King Crimson, Brian Eno, Frank Zappa, Laurie Anderson, Sonic Youth, Einstürzende Neubauten and many others have probably proved to be capable “to bring chaos into order” (Adorno 2005, p. 222) – which Adorno considered the task of *all* art in our age.

2

As I said, *popular music* is only one among the various fields that form the constellation of contemporary *popular culture* in general – and, together with cinema, it has surely been one of the most representative and most successful fields in this context, at least since the beginning of the 20th century. In turn, however, also the field of popular music is not narrow and simple, but is vice-versa broad, complex and articulated, as simply testified by the well-known existence of a great variety of different genres and subgenres that form the realm of contemporary popular music. In this realm, what we may generally call *pop-rock music* has surely represented since many decades one of the leading trends and traditions.

A quick look at the history of popular music in the last decades shows how the question concerning ethical and political commitment (that also includes the phenomenon of feminism, which is of our specific interest here) has played a relevant and sometimes absolutely decisive role. In this context, let me simply remind the readers of such events as the festival of Woodstock (1969), the *No Nukes* concerts (1979), the *Live Aid* (1985) and *Live 8* (2005) benefit concerts, the *Human Rights Concerts* in favor of Amnesty International (1986-88), or the *Tibetan*

Freedom series of concerts (1996-2012). In the same context, it is also possible to mention famous and useful examples such as the several *engagé* pop-rock songs written and/or performed by relevant musicians like Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Jefferson Airplane, Peter Gabriel, Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Simple Minds, U2 and many others. In a previous contribution of mine, entitled *Writing Songs after Auschwitz* (Marino 2016), I had examined the case of System of a Down, a famous heavy metal band that, through some of their songs (characterized by an original mix of different musical styles), has proved to be able to spread information and raise the awareness in a very broad audience about the 1915-1916 Armenian genocide, succeeding in the achievement of this aim through a well-balanced combination between the aesthetic potential and the political dimension of those songs.

On the basis of what has been said until now, how should we conceive of those popular culture products (like songs, recordings or concerts, in the specific field of popular music) that dare to confront themselves with dramatically serious problems like war, misery, genocide or, in the particular case that is of our interest here, the oppression of women (and of *all* the subjectivities that suffer from gender-based discrimination and violence) in a patriarchal society? Does the commodified status of these products and their use of standardized materials necessarily imply that also the content or message of the song will be commodified, and hence that a tragic event (which, as such, would deserve the most serious and tactful attention) will be reduced to a purchasable commodity that is only good for consumption and “reception in distraction” (Benjamin 2008, p. 40)? If so, what are the implications and consequences of such a problematic process? Once again, I think that a well-balanced, reasonable and defensible answer to such questions is an answer that, following a suggestion by Shusterman (2000a, p. 177), avoids “the [opposite] poles of condemnatory pessimism and celebratory optimism,” and rather admits that “it depends.” Namely, an answer that does *not* take the form of totalizing claims, but rather aims to differentiate between various combinations of form and content in different works that may thus lead in different directions and arrive at different achievements on an aesthetic level and also an ethical-political level (conceiving of these levels as intertwined with each other, and not as abruptly separated from each other).

Anyway, let us first take a look at a potential Adornian answer to the abovementioned questions. Due to biographical reasons (Adorno, as is well-known, died in 1969), we don't have at our disposal explicit statements of Adorno on the specific examples that I have made (and I will make) reference to in this contribution. However, beside the traces that he left in many of his writings on popular music, we can also hear from his own voice his thoughts about some politically committed rock songs that dealt with a question that was of the greatest interest and of tragic actuality in the 1960s: the Vietnam war. In fact, a short fragment of an interview with

Adorno, apropos of a certain kind of *engagé* popular music that was typical of the 1960s, is highly representative of his position, for example when he argues that *all* attempts

to bring political protest together with “popular music” – that is, with entertainment music – are [...] *doomed from the start*. The *entire sphere* of popular music, even there where it dresses itself up in modernist guise, is to such a degree inseparable from the *Warencharakter*, from consumption, from the cross-eyed transfixion with amusement, that [all] attempts to outfit it with a new function remain *entirely* superficial. And I have to say [Adorno adds] that when somebody sets himself up, and for whatever reason [accompanies] maudlin music by singing something or other about Vietnam, [...] I find this song *unbearable* (*nicht zu ertragen*), in that by taking the Terrible or the Horrendous (*das Entsetzliche*) and making it something *consumable*, it ends up wringing something like consumption-qualities out of it.²

For Adorno, a popular music hit song, with its commodity character, was a merely “consumable” – and, in his own words, “unbearable” – product, due to its standardized musical *form* (which, in its dialectical relation with the dimension of the artwork’s *content*, represents one of the most important aspects of Adorno’s entire aesthetic theory) and to its standardized musical material, eventually undergoing the process of manipulation by the culture industry known as “plugging” (Adorno 2006, pp. 290-298). For this reason, according to him, a work of this kind eventually proved to be capable of turning *everything* it delivered as content or message into something consumable: that is, capable of extorting consumption-qualities from *everything*, be it the Vietnam war, a genocide, global hunger or, in the specific case that we are examining here, also feminist struggles. So, from what we may call an orthodox Adornian perspective, writing one of those “unbearable” pop-rock songs on serious issues like the abovementioned ones logically implied to make those issues run the risk of being commodified and thus falsified, deprived of their seriousness and of their power to shock us and to enhance our critical consciousness and critical attitude towards the real. In my essay “*Angela Davis as a Commodity?*” (Marino 2019) I examined the particular example of songs written and performed in the 1970s by The Rolling Stones, John Lennon and other musicians in support of the critical theorist and feminist activist Angela Davis, who had been unjustly imprisoned in 1970. In that context, focusing my attention on that particular example, I had argued that, from an orthodox Adornian perspective, one should draw the conclusion that writing a pop-rock song on someone, like Angela Davis, who aims to protest against the growing commodification of culture and life, actually commodifies the critical theorist’s figure and eventually deprives her thinking of what we may define its negative-critical potential and its truth content, turning it vice-versa into an affirmative-apologetic and untrue product.

However, as I have explained before, I rather tend to favor what we may call an unorthodox Adornian approach. Although Adorno was surely one of the greatest philosophers of music of the 20th century, it must be admitted that his “critique [of popular music]” is probably “less dialectical than is the case when he addresses art music” (Leppert 2002, p. 331) – as happens, for example, when he addresses in a masterful and rigorous dialectical way the different phases of Beethoven’s or Schönberg’s musical *oeuvre*. In his relevant *Briefwechsel* with Benjamin in the 1930s, Adorno sometimes raised the objection of “loss of dialectical consistency” and “simplification which undermines [...] its fundamental truth” (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, pp. 105-106) against Benjamin’s concept of image and aura. As Adorno critically wrote to Benjamin in his famous letter from March 18, 1936: “What I should like to postulate [...] is *more* dialectics” (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, p. 131). Anyway, also Adorno’s treatment of the serious music/popular music distinction sometimes seems to suffer from a similar loss of dialectical consistency and simplification. In fact, Adorno meritoriously set free this distinction from the mere “complex music/simple music” criterion (Adorno 2006, p. 284), and he also offered some of the most penetrating analyses of the use value/exchange value relation, the commodity character and fetishism in contemporary culture: nonetheless, his distinction between serious music and popular music was often traced back by him in a reductive way to the sole criterion of standardization, i.e., to the idea of popular music’s (and, in general, mass culture’s) *totally* standardized character. This unfortunately prevents Adorno from recognizing that, just like we usually differentiate “good serious music” from “bad serious music” (Adorno 2006, p. 284), in a similar way we should be able to “distinguish better from worse instances of popular music” (Gracyk 2007, p. 133). As I said, sometimes the same problem also occurs with contemporary critics of pop-rock music who dualistically and dichotomously claim that, “[w]hereas the classical musician displays the music in his or her performance, the pop musician displays himself or herself” (Noë 2015, p. 182), as if *all* classical music and *all* popular music were of the same kind and same level.

As noted by Shusterman (2000a, p. 231), much popular music “claims to be creative” and, contrary to what Adorno would accept, it rightly “insists that originality can be manifested [also] in the revisionary appropriation of the old,” and not only in the avant-garde search for *das Neue*. A search that anyway, after Duchamp and Warhol, has perhaps reached today the stage of what has been emphatically called “the end of art” (Danto 1997) or the mere triumph of “art in a gaseous state” (Michaud 2003). By the way, also critics like Noë must eventually admit the existence of at least some phenomena in the field of pop-rock music that cannot be adequately grasped if we limit ourselves to the abovementioned dualistic and reductive interpretive patterns. With regard to this, the fitting example used by Noë is that of Radiohead, a pop-rock band that for him – and also for me (see Marino and Guzzi 2021) – fascinatingly occupies “a sort of

in-between place, a position in the world of pop while at the same time consistently concealing themselves behind their music, creating music that commands attention and fascination *as music*” (Noë 2015, p. 175). However, if this is true in the case of Radiohead (and of course it is, so that I fully agree with Noë on this point), then it is hard to find plausible reasons to limit this observation only to Radiohead and not consider it equally valid for (and extendable to) other significant pop-rock musicians, such as David Bowie, Peter Gabriel, David Byrne and many others, in their most fruitful attempts to combine commercial success and musical experimentation.

3

Let us now focus on feminism. *Flawless* is a Billboard top-peaking song by Beyoncé from 2013. The song is structured in two parts, divided by some passages from the speech *We Should All Be Feminists* delivered by the renowned Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie at a conference (and later published as a book-length essay in 2014). The example of Beyoncé’s song – although to some extent problematic and controversial, as the critical opinions of Annie Lennox, bell hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself testify – is just one among the many examples that one can mention apropos of the relation that popular music may establish with feminism. A relation that is arguably aimed to support the struggle for a progress in women’s emancipation and to provide these struggles with a wider audience, a broader accessibility and an enhanced visibility.

In this context, the example of a great songwriter, poet and also feminist activist like Ani DiFranco is surely a significant one: many of her songs deal with the exploration and explanation of difficult and problematic aspects that characterize the women’s condition in the present world, aiming to contribute to the development of a critical consciousness towards this situation. A critical consciousness that, following Marcuse’s maxim that I cited before, perhaps cannot lead to a revolution, but nonetheless can have the power to change some sad and deep-rooted stereotypes and attitudes in our society. The underground, subcultural “Riot grrrl” movement from the 1990s, that originally combined feminism and punk music, is surely another famous example in this field (see McDonnell and Vincentelli 2019). A recent article published on the Italian edition of the famous magazine *Rolling Stone* has also recalled the importance and impact of some songs and records from the 1960s-1970s on the Italian feminist movements of that time (Zuffanti 2022).

These are some examples (indeed, just a few) among the many different examples that could be mentioned to document the relation between pop-rock music and feminism. However, as I said, a pop-rock song is basically a commodity (produced and sold by the culture industry, and often composed with standardized musical materials): so, following Adorno, it is legitimate to ask oneself if, despite their best intentions at the level of the contents and messages expressed,

such products of mass culture do not run the risk of commodifying feminism itself, ultimately reducing it to a cliché, a momentary trend, or a slogan to be sung and then to be quickly forgotten. Faithful to the open and pragmatic way of thinking that I summarized in the first section with the simple formula “It depends,” I would like to answer the abovementioned question – i.e., the question if, despite their best intentions, the products of mass culture do not run the risk to commodify feminism itself and reduce it to clichés or slogans – by suggesting: (1) to differentiate (in a very Adornian way, in a sense) between the figure and personality of the artist himself/herself, on the one hand, and the specific features and aesthetic qualities of his/her artwork as such, on the other hand; (2) to differentiate between different products or works that, due to their different aesthetic level, are also capable to achieve different results at the level of their ethical and political implications.

So, for example, I personally tend to be skeptical about the aesthetic quality and artistic merit of Beyoncé’s song *Flawless*, and I fear that, despite the singer’s intentions, it may contain the danger of turning the feminist message into a mere form of harmless MTV-entertainment.³ Vice-versa I greatly admire DiFranco’s poetic achievements throughout the decades and, at the level of the musical material, her experimentation with an original kind of folk-rock style that, in various records, has also incorporated punk, alternative-rock, funk, hip hop, jazz, soul and electronica sounds. In a comparable way, notwithstanding her great difference from DiFranco or the “Riot grrrl” punk bands in musical terms, it is also possible to cite the outstanding singer, pianist and songwriter Tori Amos, who offers a highly relevant and representative example in the present context, because she is undoubtedly a significantly original (and hence definitely non-standardized) artist in the field of recent pop-rock music, with different influences incorporated in her compositions that range from classical music to jazz to pop, and because of the relevance of her music and her figure in terms of the relation between popular music and feminism (see Roberts 2020). Beside this, the examples of DiFranco and Amos are significant in this context because of the fact that they first came to prominence in the early 1990s: namely, exactly in the same years in which, as I will explain later with reference to such (male) bands as Nirvana and Pearl Jam, certain forms of connection between pop-rock music and feminism became clearly visible and influential, also in relation to a critique, by those male musicians, of a certain usual but sad idea of men’s identity (“I’ve always had a problem with the average macho man – they’ve always been a threat to me. [...] I definitely feel closer to the female side of the human being than I do the male – or the American idea of what a male is supposed to be,” reportedly said Kurt Cobain [cited in Howden 2014]). So, in a recent article on Tori Amos’ last record (*Ocean to Ocean*, from 2021) it has been observed:

The music industry has always had an issue with women who know their own minds. And those coming through in the 1980s and 1990s had it as tough as anyone. [...] [Tori] Amos was at the forefront of a generation of female artists who broke through in the 1990s talking frankly about their sexuality and the patriarchal forces that had shaped their world. [...] “There can be with women in music this double standard, where, when we are doing something, they call it ‘cathartic.’ And then guys are unzipping their skin, it’s called poetry and art.” [...] But perhaps things have changed. It is just about possible to imagine an audacious record such as *Boys for Pele* receiving a fairer hearing today. It must give her hope to see artists such as Phoebe Bridgers, Billie Eilish and Annie Clark, aka St Vincent, take on the entertainment industry on their own terms? “Of course, it gives me a lot of hope. I know Annie personally. Her position wasn’t given to her. She had to work very hard to be where she is. And to stand her ground. It’s not right for me to tell her story. She’s had to make her choices, decide who is on her team, who will help convey her vision. That hasn’t changed since the women in the 1990s. We’ve had to work to be where we are” (Power 2021; the words cited in inverted commas are by Amos).

As I tried to briefly explain in the previous sections, the approach that I tend to favor in my analysis of the aesthetic level of pop-rock music is an approach that, with Adorno/against Adorno, mostly concentrates on the *form/content* relation and on the *non-standardized* (i.e., original, unusual, not banal) use of musical materials that may also be standardized in principle. In this context, it is important to add that an important role in pop-rock music is played by the component of *performance* and, within the performance, of what I like to call the “power of the body.” My investigation of this feature of popular music is not theoretically indebted with Adorno (as happens with other aspects of my conception), but is rather guided by some stimulating insights that can be derived from Shusterman’s pragmatist and somaesthetic approach to art and aesthetics – including popular music (Shusterman 2000b, pp. 35-95).

As has been observed by Erika Fischer-Lichte, the theorist of “the aesthetics of the performative (*die Ästhetik des Performativen*)” (Fischer-Lichte 2004), a performance comes into being through the bodily co-presence of “actors” and “spectators.”

Performances, thus, essentially differ from texts and artifacts. The latter are products that exist separately from their creator(s); they are not tied to the bodily presence of their creators. [...] In contrast, a performance has very different *medial conditions*, stemming from its reliance on bodily co-presence. [...] [Especially] improvisational performances require the willingness and openness of spectators to experience others and themselves as *embodied minds*, strongly present in the here and now. This is [a] *radical concept of*

presence. It emerges when a performer brings forth their phenomenal body and its energy, so that they appear as an *embodied mind*. In the presence of the performer, the spectators experience both self and other as an *embodied mind*. The circulating energy is perceived as a transformative power. [...] The energetic exchange between performers and spectators affects everyone present and, thus, creates the performance (Fischer-Lichte 2021, pp. 160, 163).

In my view, it is *firstly* impossible to understand a great part of the value and fascination of our aesthetic experience with pop-rock music without adequately taking into consideration the centrality of the dimension of “embodied performance” in it. *Secondly*, it is also important to take into account the fundamental role played by the “power of the body” in order to properly understand the relevance and efficacy of the message conveyed by certain forms of politically committed pop-rock music of our time that aim to protest against oppressive political regimes, violations of human rights, racism, sexism, etc.

Paying attention to the somatic dimension of aesthetic experience is obviously interesting in itself, but I think that it becomes especially important when one stops limiting the aesthetic discourse to the sole paradigm of a philosophy of the fine arts (a paradigm that had been predominant from Hegel to Danto, in short [see Andina 2012]) and rather rediscovers a broader idea of aesthetics as a philosophical theory of the aesthetic as such. Namely, a philosophy of the *aisthesis* that focuses on the realm of the sensible, the perceptual and also the affective (see Matteucci 2019). From a certain point of view, this reevaluation of the sphere of the *aisthesis* in its broadest sense corresponds to a rediscovery of some of the original impulses that had led Alexander G. Baumgarten, in the 18th century, to found a new philosophical discipline, precisely baptized by him with the name *Aesthetica*. However, “in pursuing Baumgarten’s broad practical vision of aesthetics,” Shusterman’s pragmatist aesthetics surely goes a step further, “by also embracing a crucial feature that Baumgarten unfortunately omitted from his program,” namely the “cultivation of the body” (Shusterman 2000a, p. 263). This, in turn, can easily and coherently lead (1) to a development of this theme on the specific field of the significance and value of performance, and (2) to a rediscovery of (and, indeed, a new and intensified philosophical interest in) the human body, viewed as the original source and root of the sphere of the *aisthesis* in its complete significance for human life. As noted by Shusterman in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*,

the senses surely belong to the body and are deeply influenced by its condition. Our sensory perception thus depends on how the body feels and functions; what it desires, does, and suffers. [...] Concerned not simply with the body’s external form or *representation* but also with its lived *experience*, somaesthetics works at improving awareness of our

bodily states and feelings, thus providing greater insight into both our passing moods and lasting attitudes (Shusterman 2000a, pp. 265, 268).

Shusterman’s pragmatist and somaesthetic rediscovery of the aesthetic dimension in all its breadth and significance – thus including sensory perception and also such fundamental components of human life as emotions and feelings, understood as related to the body as their original locus – is obviously based on a philosophical idea of the body that does not conceive of it in a scientific and reductionist way, but rather conceives of it “as both subject and object in the world,” as a *soma* phenomenologically involving the aspects of both *Körperhaben* and *Leibsein* (Shusterman 2019, p. 14). Such a pragmatist and somaesthetic idea of the body can be stimulating and fruitful also for the specific and limited purposes of the present contribution. In this context, a passage from Shusterman’s book *Body Consciousness* can be especially interesting and useful. In the fourth chapter of *Body Consciousness* Shusterman quotes a long passage from Wittgenstein on the crucial role of the body in music, and then adds that this recognition would need “to be taken a step further in a pragmatic direction”: in fact, “if one’s body [...] is capable of being more finely tuned to perceive, respond, and perform aesthetically,” then it is probably reasonable to try “to learn and train this ‘instrument of instruments’ by more careful attention to somaesthetic feelings” (Shusterman 2008, p. 126). For Shusterman, “[m]ore than guitars or violins or pianos or even drums, our bodies are the primary instrument for the making of music,” and also “more than records, radios, tapes, or CDs, bodies are the basic, irreplaceable medium for its appreciation”: in general, “our bodies are the ultimate and necessary instrument for music” at all levels (Shusterman 2008, p. 126), both in theory and practice.

In my view, although (as Shusterman rightly observes) the body is *always* involved in *all* kinds of musical creation and musical enjoyment, nonetheless in the case of certain forms of musical performance the crucial role of the body appears in a particularly evident and powerful way. This is the case, for example, of pop-rock music, whose aesthetic experience “can be so intensely absorbing and powerful that it is likened to spiritual possession,” up to the point that “[e]ven rock’s severest critics recognize the passionately real potency and intoxicating satisfactions of its experience” (Shusterman 2000a, p. 178). Beside this, it must also be noted that the defining nature of pop-rock music has always been characterized by the equal importance, beside the purely musical dimension, of the component of behavior, attitude, style, physical presence and use of one’s body in the performance – ever since the time of Elvis Presley, the founding father of the aesthetics of pop music (Mecacci 2011, p. 147). This aspect is also important for the aims of a philosophical reflection on the relation between aesthetic dimension and political potential in pop-rock music. In fact, in the context of musical performances of this genre, if the aim is to express the need and the struggle for some form of liberation and emancipation (as

happens, for instance, in the case of songs concerning feminist issues), then the achievement of this aim also passes through a specific use of the performer's soma ("our bodies are the primary instrument for the making of music," as argued by Shusterman).

For this reason, I suggest that especially (although obviously not only) in pop-rock music what I called the "power of the body" has often proved its aesthetic force and, at the same time, its socio-political relevance. There are countless examples of self-conscious, careful and often strategic use of the body, by many great performers and politically committed artists in pop-rock music, that can clearly testify this fact. Limiting myself to just one example, it is probably impossible to conceive of the efficacy of Rage Against the Machine's radical political commitment (as expressed in their powerful songs that originally mix hard-rock, funk and rap, and in their electrifying live performances) without associating a part of their impact to Zack de la Rocha's and Tom Morello's physical presence on stage and their captivating use of the body during the performance. Such songs by Rage Against the Machine as *Bombtrack*, *Killing in the Name*, *Bullet in the Head*, *Know Your Enemy*, *Wake Up*, *Freedom*, *Testify*, *Guerrilla Radio*, *Sleep Now in the Fire* or *Born of a Broken Man* – songs that have had the meaning of veritable hymns to emancipation and resistance for more than one generation – would not have had the same impact without this somatic and performative component. Although with differences due to their different "somatic styles" (Shusterman 2011), *mutatis mutandis* this holds true also in the case of many other pop-rock performers, such as Patti Smith, Bruce Springsteen, The Clash, Sting, Bono, Nick Cave, Michael Stipe, Thom Yorke, Tori Amos, PJ Harvey and many others. It is probably impossible to dissociate the ethically and politically committed contents of some songs by these and other musicians – and hence their attempt to express, through their songs and/or their live performances, some ideas and feelings that aim to protest against oppressive social conditions, forms of control of our bodies, limitations or repression of human freedom, etc. – from their particular and indeed strategic use of the body.

If viewed from this perspective, I would even suggest that at least a part of the tradition of pop-rock music, on the basis of the important role played in it by the dimension of physical performance, could be included in contemporary "body art" broadly understood: namely, in the group of those modern artistic practices that are based on a specific use of the performer's body to achieve certain expressive aims. Just like some "body artists" and "actionists" have pushed the experimentation with one's body to its most extreme limits, in a different but nonetheless comparable way some performers in pop-rock music have radicalized the use of one's body in the performance, for example in those (sometimes extreme and even dangerous) practices such as "stage diving" and "body surfing," in which the musician's body actually arrives to merge with

the thousands of bodies of his/her fans in order to symbolically form a sort of unique dancing and pulsing organism of huge dimensions.

Of course, appreciating the variety of uses of the performers’ bodies in pop-rock music must *not* lead us to be naive, so to speak, and to deny that such transgressive uses of one’s body can sometimes be only functional to the commercial purposes of the culture industry. From this point of view, it is surely possible to raise some criticism and to observe, with Marcuse, that pop-rock music often “loses its radical impact” and “tends to massification [...]. True, in this spectacle, the audience actively participates: the music *moves* their bodies, makes them ‘natural’. But their (literally) electrical excitation often assumes the features of hysteria. [...] And the identical gestures, the twisting and shaking of bodies which rarely (if ever) really touch each other – it seems like treading on the spot, it does not get you anywhere except into a mass soon to disperse” (Marcuse 1972, p. 115). However, an honest recognition of this fact must *not* necessarily lead us to accept the Adornian idea of “popular music, in all of its many varieties,” as being only “a somatic stimulant” (Adorno 2002, p. 116), in a superficial meaning of this term. In fact, as observed by Shusterman:

Critics of popular culture are loath to recognize that there are humanly worthy and aesthetically rewarding activities other than intellectual exertion. So even if all art and aesthetic enjoyment do indeed require some active effort or the overcoming of some resistance, it does not follow that they require effortful “independent thinking.” There are other, more somatic forms of effort, resistance, and satisfaction. Rock songs are typically enjoyed through moving, dancing, and singing along with the music, often with such vigorous efforts that we break a sweat and eventually exhaust ourselves. [...] Clearly, on the somatic level, there is much more effortful activity in the appreciation of rock than in that of high-brow music [...]. The much more energetic and kinesthetic response evoked by rock exposes the fundamental passivity of the traditional aesthetic attitude of disinterested, distanced contemplation – a contemplative attitude that has its roots in the quest for philosophical and theological knowledge rather than pleasure, for individual enlightenment rather than communal interaction or social change. Popular arts like rock thus suggest a radically revised aesthetic with a joyous return of the somatic dimension (Shusterman 2000a, pp. 183-184).

4.

In the fourth and final section of my article I would like to exemplify some of the ideas that I have tentatively sketched in the previous sections by making reference to the specific example of a famous pop-rock band of our time and, in particular, to one of their performances from the early 1990s that was characterized, in my opinion, by a high musical quality, a powerful somatic-

performative component, and an emphatic expression of feminist contents. As some readers might have noted, the subtitle of my article is: *Some Remarks on Adorno, Shusterman and Pearl Jam*. So, after having mostly focused my attention on Adorno and Shusterman in the previous sections, it is now arguably the time to talk about Pearl Jam. In fact, the particular pop-rock performance that, as I said, I will use here to exemplify some of my ideas, is a famous live version of Pearl Jam's song *Porch*: a song originally included in the band's first album (*Ten*, 1991) that is still present in a regular way in the band's setlist for live concerts.

Pearl Jam have been defined sometimes as the “grunge survivors,” “the only major Seattle band to survive the '90s intact” (Ridder 2002). In fact, the history of pop-rock music has been surely an exciting history of joy, energy, power, success, satisfaction, enthusiasm and happiness, but at the same time (and unfortunately not to a lesser degree) a tragic history of sadness, misery, weakness, failure, dissatisfaction, addiction, excesses, suffering and death. These general observations are particularly true and tragic in the case of the “season” of grunge and the so-called “Seattle-style,” as the existential vicissitudes and tragic deaths of the lead singers of some of the most iconic and famous grunge bands clearly and dramatically testify: Kurt Cobain (1967-1994) of Nirvana, Layne Staley (1967-2002) of Alice in Chains, Scott Weiland (1967-2015) of Stone Temple Pilots, Chris Cornell (1964-2017) of Soundgarden, Mark Lanegan (1964-2022) of Screaming Trees. However, quoting the refrain of the band's first hit single (*Alive*, 1991), Pearl Jam are luckily “still alive,” have been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2017 and have undoubtedly established themselves as one of the greatest rock bands of the last 30 years, recently returning to live concerts with their exciting American and European tour in 2022.

Beside being famous for their recordings and for their captivating and engaging live concerts, Pearl Jam have also acquired a widespread notoriety and reputation at a global level thanks to their commitment to ethical, social and political awareness campaigns ranging from feminism to environmental issues, up to anti-war stances – especially during the George W. Bush presidencies (see Moulton 2021). Every fan of Pearl Jam knows the famous version of *Porch* recorded for their MTV Unplugged concert from March 16, 1992. The relevance of the performative component, in this case, is particularly evident, not only with regard to the aesthetic power and success of the musical performance, but also with regard to the efficacy in spreading a precise political content or message. In fact, during the long and partially improvised instrumental section of the song, at the end of a mind-blowing guitar solo by Mike McCready, Eddie Vedder suddenly stands atop his stool, pulls out a marker, writes an explicit “Pro Choice!!!” message on his arm, and eventually introduces a new section of lyrics in order to further emphasize his point. These added lines were probably improvised by Vedder during the performance (or simply written soon before the concert) and, to my knowledge, they are neither

available in Pearl Jam’s official website nor in the liner notes of their CDs. However, after a repeated listening of the 1992 unplugged version of *Porch*, and on the basis of a comparison of the suggestions of various fans that can be found on Internet, it seems reasonable to suggest that Vedder’s added lyrics to that section of *Porch* are: “There’s something / There’s something in my mind / There’s a choice in our time / I don’t think we’re changing it / And I could die to make a change for it / There is something else to do / I know how I want to dress / I want to live / I want to choose” (or, alternatively: “There’s something / There’s something I don’t mind / There’s a choice / In my time / I don’t think / Changing it / I could die / To make a change for it / There is something that’s different / I know how I want to dress / I don’t want to live / I don’t want to choose” see Givony 2020, p. 110). After thirty years, precisely in the year in which the US Supreme Court has sadly upended the landmark “Roe vs. Wade” case and has ruled that there is no constitutional right to abortion in the US (Glenza, Pengelly and Levin 2022), Vedder’s explicit “Pro Choice!!!” message, transmitted by using his own body as a somatic-performative medium, still keeps on reminding us that there is always “much to be done” in many fields of our life, including the defense of women’s rights (“This is no time for depression or self-indulgent hesitance / This fucked up situation calls for all hands, hands on deck / [...] Much to be done,” as Pearl Jam’s recent song *Seven O’ Clock* emphatically claims).

In this context, it will not appear surprising that Vedder, during Pearl Jam’s recent European tour (in the Imola concert from June 25, 2022), has explicitly mentioned and criticized the US Supreme Court’s overturning of the “Roe vs. Wade” case⁴. Previous examples and proofs of Vedder’s commitment to feminist ideas and struggles include, for example, his support to the movement “Ni una menos” that campaigns against gender-based oppression and violence, during a Pearl Jam concert in Argentina, delivering a short speech before playing the song *Leaving Here*. A song, the latter, whose lyrics say: “Hey, fellas, have you heard the news / Yeah, the women in this town have been misused [...] All you fellas better change your ways / Yeah, leaving this town in a matter of days [...] The love of a woman is a wonderful thing / Yeah, the way you treat ’em is a crying shame” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-Clqsy7P3Y>). In the first months of 2022 there was also a short controversy and heated exchange between Vedder and another rock star, Nikki Sixx, after Vedder had attacked Sixx’s band (Motley Crüe) in an interview to the *New York Times* for both musical and feminist reasons. In fact, in his interview Vedder explained that the heavy metal bands “that monopolized late-’80s MTV,” like Motley Crüe, were bands that “[he] despised”: “I hated it,” Vedder said, “I hated how it made the fellas look. I hated how it made the women look. [...] [O]ne thing that I appreciated was that in Seattle and the alternative crowd, the girls could wear their combat boots and sweaters, and their hair looked like Cat Power’s and not Heather Locklear’s – nothing against her” (Lewry 2022).

Beside this, at a purely musical level, every fan of Pearl Jam knows that it has always been characteristic of this band (which is formed by five male musicians) a form of songwriting that also includes a few important songs narrating the stories of female figures and/or written from a woman's perspective. These songs typically focus on the troubles that affect the female protagonists of the song in their relations with family members, partners, and society as a whole. Songs like *Why Go*, *Leash*, *Daughter* and *Better Man* can be mentioned in this regard, and especially *Better Man* is highly significant in this context, because of the particular relation between form and content (i.e., between music and text) that characterizes it. In fact, as has been noted,

[t]he woman at the heart of Pearl Jam's "Better Man" is trapped. She has committed herself to a relationship that makes her miserable, but she can't seem to escape it. [...] The song's lyrics present a psychological vignette in which a woman contemplates the trap her life has become for her in the context of an abusive relationship. While she waits anxiously for her man to return, she "practices [the] speech" she'll use to leave him, but she never gives it – when he finally comes home, she pretends to sleep instead and avoids confrontation. The chorus is a repeated expression of despair that also hints at a complex set of emotions ranging from the hopeful to the violent [...]. Musically, after its instrumentally simple opening, the song bounds into an energetic, up-tempo rocker that ends in a playfully extended jam. While the bouncy ending might seem to be at odds with the story the lyrics tell, the sheer joy of it speaks to the possibility of a dangerous sort of hope. [...] The lyrics tell the story of someone who is trapped, but the music is the sound of the trap opening, with all of the hope and fear that might entail (Bernhardt 2021, pp. 79-81).

Returning to the abovementioned unplugged version of *Porch*, it has been observed apropos of the effect that Vedder's performance had on the audience in 1992:

As the band eases into the briefly mellow bridge, Vedder flips himself and his stool over onto the floor. He laughs at himself, turtled on his back, then rights it, first balancing on his stomach like he's paddling out to catch a wave, then clambering up to stand on the padded seat. He pulls out a Sharpie as the band kicks into overdrive, writing in bold letters on his bare left arm the words PRO CHOICE!!! (yes, with three exclamation points). He ends the song with added new lyrics about the "choice in our time." Like a lot of kids whose first exposure to grunge came via MTV, I was only vaguely aware of riot grrrl bands, and I certainly had never seen a dude so determined to make a point about abortion rights in the middle of what might otherwise merely have been a proto-coffeehouse acoustic rock performance. To put this now almost ancient history in context: In 2020, Vedder joined Instagram to encourage mail-in voting. In 1992, the year *before* Ruth

Bader Ginsburg was named to the Supreme Court, he was standing on a stool in a Queens soundstage, ruining the curve for white male feminist rockstars. This was the beginning of Pearl Jam’s career, and like their Seattle comrades Nirvana, they were less concerned with risking a big commercial radio success than challenging the first Bush presidency conservative politics – or being branded sell-outs. Both bands played Rock for Choice benefit concerts, started by L7, that raised money for abortion-rights organizations. [...] Vedder even wrote an essay for *Spin* magazine a few months after the *Unplugged* performance that detailed the larger political landscape of international abortion access and the threat groups such as Operation Rescue posed to *Roe v. Wade* (Krochmal 2020).

More in general, apropos of the relation between the grunge subculture and feminism, one of the things that have been emphasized is the important role played in the early 1990s by such (male) bands as Nirvana and Pearl Jam to support feminist struggles (in close connection with the abovementioned “riot grrrl” movement) and to promote a change in the traditional conception of men/women relations and in certain usual views about men’s own identity. The significance of this cultural change in the world of pop-rock music can be stimulatingly connected to the idea of what Angela Davis called “alternative forms of masculinity” (Davis 2016, p. 28), and is probably revealed in a very clear way by a critical comparison between, on the one hand, Cobain’s or Vedder’s unmasked manifestation of a male identity that is also characterized by fragility, emotionality and vulnerability, and, on the other hand, the infamous “macho man” model of male identity that had been sadly predominant in the pop-rock scene of the previous decades (especially the 1980s). As has been noted,

[f]eminism and rock music always had, at best, a spotty relationship. There was the horrific Led Zeppelin “mud shark incident,” 1980s hair metal (all of it), and even punk – with its ideal of complete inclusion – has had an awful history of misogyny. Unfortunately, there hasn’t exactly been a ton of music that counteracts this ugly strand of rock’s history. Very few rock songs that have championed women’s empowerment have become bonafide hits. [...] What’s often forgotten, however, is that Nirvana and Pearl Jam were feminist through and through. As the years go by, their very public attacks against sexism in the early 90s look even more remarkable than they did at the time. They were the two biggest bands in the world and they stood up for feminism in ways that today would set the internet on fire. And they were men! But they welcomed the challenge, practically egging on anyone who disagreed with them. Although they’re mostly remembered for destroying hair metal and making mainstream rock respectable again, they should be recognized for using their platforms as the two biggest bands in the world to stand up for

women's rights. No one else on that big of a stage has come close in rock history. [...] Pearl Jam's performance of "Porch" on MTV's *Unplugged* is one of the most famous moments in the series' legendary history. [...] Eddie Vedder made one of the most famous pro-feminist proclamations in popular music history by writing "pro-choice" on his arm in magic marker. This may not seem like a big deal, but remember the absolute media sensation Beyoncé caused by simply having the word "feminist" displayed behind her at the 2014 VMAs? Imagine how impactful Vedder's performance was 25 years ago, when abortion was infinitely more taboo than it is now. Equally important as the *Unplugged* moment were Vedder's lyrics themselves, which regularly dealt with feminist issues. As one writer puts it, "songs such as 'Why Go,' 'Daughter,' and 'Better Man' are as feminist as anything Bikini Kill ever put to tape." Vedder was known for singing songs from the perspective of women, as he tried to present their point of view in an empathetic light. Even though men trying to tell the stories of women can be problematic – and this was a point of contention around the Riot Grrrl movement – Vedder's sensitivity to feminist issues and his desire to place them in the public eye should be applauded (Reyes 2016).

In conclusion, after having attempted to provide in the previous sections some basic notions that may be useful for an aesthetics of popular music (form/content relation; question of standardization and commodification; role of the performance and somatic component in it), in the last section of my article I have referred to various features of the music and activities of Pearl Jam to try to exemplify some of my ideas. Although I recognize that, as mentioned in the last quotation that I have just cited, the example of "men trying to tell the stories of women" – and hence of an entirely male band, like Pearl Jam, committed with feminist struggles – "can be problematic" for many people (Reyes 2016), nonetheless it is also true what a leading feminist thinker and activist like Angela Davis says: "With respect to feminist struggles, men will have to do a lot of the important work" (Davis 2016).⁵ If feminism, as I believe, is a project and movement of real and universal *human* emancipation, this means that, of course, *women* (and more generally, as I said, *all* the subjectivities that suffer from gender-based oppression, discrimination and violence in patriarchal societies) are in the first instance the interested subjects and the protagonists of this form of social and cultural change; however, it also means that the *humankind* as a whole may benefit from this development and change, and hence *every* human being (including *men*) has an interest in, and a duty to, the actualization of these potentialities. Having started my reflection on these topics with a quotation from Marcuse about the political potential of art and aesthetics, it is probably not a bad idea to also end my article with another quotation from Marcuse – who, by the way, was famously the teacher of Angela Davis (see Zampaglione 2022) and who wrote in *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*:

Aesthetic qualities are essentially *non-violent, non-domineering* [...] – qualities which, in the domain of the arts, and in the *repressive* use of the term “*aesthetic*” as pertaining to the *sublimated “higher culture” only*, are divorced from the social reality and from “practice” as such. [...] The faculty of being “receptive,” “passive,” is a *precondition of freedom*: it is the ability to see things in their own right, to experience the joy enclosed in them [...]. This receptivity is itself the soil of creation: it is opposed, not to productivity, but to *destructive* productivity. The latter has been the ever more conspicuous feature of male domination; inasmuch as the “male principle” has been the ruling mental and physical force, a *free society* would be the “definite negation” of this principle – it would be a *female society*. In this sense, it has nothing to do with matriarchy of any sort; the image of the woman as mother is itself repressive; it transforms a biological fact into an ethical and cultural value and thus it supports and justifies her social repression. At stake is rather the *ascent of Eros over aggression*, in men and women; and this means, in a *male-dominated civilization*, the “*femalization*” of the male. It would express the decisive change in the instinctual structure: the weakening of primary aggressiveness which, by a combination of biological and social factors, has governed the patriarchal culture. [...] [T]he woman holds *the promise of liberation* (Marcuse 1972, pp. 74-78; my emphasis).

¹ This work represents one of the outcomes of my participation – as a member of the Research Unity based at the University of Bologna – to the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) entitled “Italian Feminist Photography: Identity Politics and Gender Strategies,” funded by the Italian Minister for University and Research (MUR), and guided by Prof. Federica Muzzarelli as Principal Investigator.

² See www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd7Fhaji8ow.

³ Beside this, the example of Beyoncé may also appear controversial and problematic for other reasons, especially in the context of a potential analysis developed from the point of view of anti-capitalist feminism. In saying this, I refer, for instance, to some critiques that have been raised against Ivy Park – the athleisure clothing line owned and managed by Beyoncé through Parkwood Entertainment, her management company – because of the poor working conditions of the women who produce the company’s sportswear line in Sri Lanka (Cherrington 2016), despite the universal feminist slogan that Beyoncé had used to emphatically describe the spirit of her company: “It’s really the essence: to celebrate every woman and the body she’s in while always striving to be better” (cited in Gottesman 2016). Ivy Park has subsequently replied to these critiques and has defended itself against these allegations (see Conti 2016). I am grateful to Ines Zampaglione for having informed me about these facts and, more generally, for having read with great attention a first version of my article and having offered me some valuable suggestions and some constructive criticism that helped me to improve my argumentation.

⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvsFoCWUjGw>.

⁵ As a complementary counterexample to Pearl Jam’s songs written from the standpoint of women (and also to the Seattle band’s tendency to sometimes reinterpret songs originally written and sung by women, as in the case of their wonderful version of Victoria William’s song *Crazy Mary*), it is perhaps possible to cite again Tori Amos. Amos has been emphatically defined as a “feminist pop icon” (<https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/tori-amos-talks-about-feminism-and-her-new-album>) and as “an awesome feminist activist,” whose “music [is] totally empowering and bad-ass,” and who has also “use[d] her success in the music industry to raise funds for the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)” (Benjestorf). In her LP *Strange Little Girls*, Amos “brought a female perspective to rock anthems originally written and sung by men” (Power 2021): in fact, *Strange Little Girls* is “a cover album comprised entirely of songs by men, about women” (PopMattersStaff 2012), reinterpreted in a fascinating and original way by a woman, namely Amos.

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