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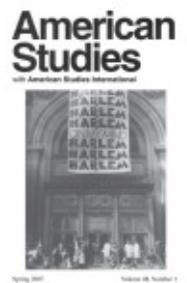
*Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture* (review)

Jacqueline Warwick

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readers of William Sims Bainbridge's *The Spaceflight Revolution* of 1976 will find much of DeGroot's argument familiar. The Apollo program was a "brilliant deception" and "glorious swindle," created by "a gang of cynics, manipulators, demagogues, tyrants, and even a few criminals" (xi, xiv). "Scheming politicians," "tricksters" (i.e., Wernher von Braun), and profit hungry aerospace managers cooperated with a "weapons industry" that was "an octopus whose tentacles held politicians, academics, and financiers in a steely grip" and created a "meaningless contest" that "fleeced" citizens for an "ego trip to the Moon" (xii, 87, 98).

Obviously, conspiracy is at the center of DeGroot's argument. This is a corrective to standard technoutopian triumphalisms. The author, however, too often tries to substitute literary flourishes for sustained research. The military-industrial complex point above, for instance, is affirmed, not discussed. Corruption in aerospace contracting, meanwhile, merits half a page; DeGroot then concludes "And you thought Apollo was a story about heroes" (153). Rhetorical?, yes; persuasive?, no.

The same characterizes the discussion of popular attitudes. For the first 9 chapters, "public opinion" is a monolith reflected (or, more often, created) by journalists. "A hysterical public, egged on by an ignorant and irresponsible media, engaged in an orgy of fear" after Sputnik (62). Rhetorical orgies aside, DeGroot does not mention polls or how "fickle" or "hard to measure" opinion actually was until page 188.

DeGroot's critiques are also familiar. (Monolithic) "science" was sacrificed on the altar of politics and prestige. Earth-focused weather, communication, navigation, and spy satellites had far more important and enduring effects than astronauts. The first point is simplistic. Space scientists in new specialties (i.e. geologists who became "comparative planetologists") "raced" to get robotic spacecraft to Mars, Venus, and beyond before the Russians, and spent billions doing it. The latter point is very true (but, again, left undeveloped).

DeGroot too regularly over-reaches in his arguments. Saying that "for most Americans, the [thermonuclear weapons] 'missile gap' and the [Cold War prestige-based] space race were two sides of the same coin" is a big, bold generalization (92). It also needs substantiation the author does not provide. Saying that space was an "all-consuming [cultural] distraction" and that "America was lost in space" in the 1960s equates young white males in high school and college with technical interests with everybody of every race, age and gender (183). Accuracy takes second place to simplicity. Sixteen pages later, DeGroot admits "enthusiasm for NASA was a manifestation of socioeconomic standing" (199).

DeGroot's book will puzzle or infuriate space advocates. Accordingly, it will also be a good text to use in advanced courses and graduate programs. At its best, it strikes right to central points. At its worst, it is overblown phrasing masquerading as analysis. Used carefully, DeGroot's book helps clarify how transcendent, prestige-based, space projects can get lavish funding for very short periods; while pragmatic programs providing clear and immediate Earthly benefits enjoy enduring popularity.

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ELECTRIC LADYLAND: Women and Rock Culture. By Lisa L. Rhodes. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2005.

The word "groupie" is commonplace, a derisive term used to describe a particular kind of female fan assumed to be more interested in sex with rock stars than in their music. Groupies are understood to be "easy," with low self-esteem, and too stupid about

music to be proper fans, but also—paradoxically—predatory and exploitative of the hapless musicians whose artistry they cruelly ignore in their lust for celebrity sex. For anyone casually acquainted with rock culture, the term describes the most usual position of women in the music of the 1960s and 1970s.

In *Electric Ladyland*, Lisa Rhodes disrupts this assessment and reveals the diverse, creative and important roles of women in rock that have been obscured in sexist accounts of rock culture. She examines the work of women who were fans, rock critics, and musicians during the tumultuous years when rock dominated popular culture. Most importantly, she sheds new light on the fascinating, complex, and contradictory experience of the groupie.

The book tackles three main areas of rock culture where women's involvement has been obscured: performance, journalism, and fandom. In the first category, it contributes usefully to the dialogue about and history of female musicians, an area already explored in such books as *She Bop*, *She's a Rebel*, and numerous articles and books about individual rock stars. Rhodes's discussion is doubtless informed by her own professional experience as a rocker; her 1986 album *Shivers* led to collaborations with the likes of Aaron Neville, Joan Jett, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, and she was featured in *Billboard* magazine and the television show *American Bandstand*.

Nevertheless, Rhodes's original and interesting book draws on archival research, interviews, and thoughtful scholarly analysis, rather than memoir. In its second section, *Electric Ladyland* presents sustained discussion of the lives and work of women rock critics Ellen Willis and Lillian Roxon, who penned some of the most creative and original rock criticism of the rock era; Roxon compiled, edited, and herself wrote most of a *Rock Encyclopedia* (1969), and Willis wrote for publications such as *The New Yorker* and *Ms*. The work of these two critics indicates the importance of rock music and culture to the serious press during the 1960s and 1970s. In the first serious published analysis of these writers' work, Rhodes deftly deconstructs the sexist, even misogynist, values and ideology of rock journalism in magazines such as *Rolling Stone*.

In 1969, that magazine published a special issue on groupies, and their prurient interpretation of the groupie's role and function came to be definitive. As Rhodes demonstrates, however, groupies themselves understood their experiences and importance in very different terms, both before and after *Rolling Stone* gave them notoriety. The third and most exciting part of *Electric Ladyland* concerns itself with groupies, contextualizing them in the upheavals surrounding sex roles and sexual relations of the 1960s and 1970s. Giving voice to former groupies as well as musicians, Rhodes helps the reader reassess easy assumptions about the role of women in rock, and, indeed, in contemporary culture.

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SEEKING REFUGE: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada. By María Cristina García. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2006.

In this clearly written and engaging treatise, García posits that the United States, Mexico, and Canada reacted to the Central American refugee crisis (1974–1996) on the basis of each state's interest, as well as a consequence of each others' actions. She also pays substantial attention to the grassroots movements and advocacy networks that pushed the agenda on the table in each of these three countries.