



Resilience & Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism

Robin James

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When most people think that “little girls should be seen and not heard,” a noisy, riotous scream can be revolutionary. But that’s not the case anymore. (Cis/Het/White) Girls aren’t supposed to be virginal, passive objects, but Poly-Styrene-like sirens who scream back in spectacularly noisy and transgressive ways as they “Lean In.” Resilience is the new, neoliberal feminine ideal: real women overcome all the objectification and silencing that impeded their foremothers. Resilience discourse incites noisy damage, like screams, so that it can be recycled for a profit. It turns the crises posed by avant-garde noise, feminist critique, and black aesthetics into opportunities for strengthening the vitality of multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy (MRWaSP). Reading contemporary pop music – Lady Gaga, Beyonce, Calvin Harris – with and against political philosophers like Michel Foucault, feminists like Patricia Hill Collins, and media theorists like Steven Shaviro, */Resilience & Melancholy/* shows how resilience discourse manifests in both pop music and in feminist politics. In particular, it argues that resilient femininity is a post-feminist strategy for producing post-race white supremacy. Resilience discourse allows women to “Lean In” to MRWaSP privilege because their overcoming and leaning-in actively produce blackness as exception, as pathology, as death. The book also considers alternatives to resilience found in the work of Beyonce, Rihanna, and Atari Teenage Riot. Updating Freud, James calls these pathological, diseased iterations of resilience “melancholy.” Melancholy makes resilience unprofitable, that is, incapable of generating enough surplus value to keep MRWaSP capitalism healthy. Investing in the things that resilience discourse renders exceptional, melancholic siren songs like Rihanna’s “Diamonds” steer us off course, away from resilient “life” and into the death.

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