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More than They Bargained For

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Rush often incorporated the technical mastery, virtuosity, formal constructions, and metrical complexities of progressive rock. However, the band then also began to modify and extend its techniques to include synthesizers and related performance devices. It did so fairly gradually from 1976 to 1981, but the band then engaged with music technology at a considerable level of saturation from 1982 to 1987. In *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991), Judy Wajcman indicates that:

New technology emerges not from sudden flashes of inspiration but from existing technology, by a process of gradual modification to, and new combinations of, that existing technology. . . . Innovation [involves] extending the scope of techniques successful in one area into new areas.¹

Rush already consisted of highly-regarded performers on each of drums, bass, and guitar, but how would such musicians necessarily be able to bring hi-tech instruments into such a context? The answer to this quandary may be found in *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping in Touch* (1988), in which Cheris Kramarae suggests that technical complexities reflect the "male domination of skilled trades that developed under capitalism."² Rush's technology-obsessed, late-capitalist approach throughout the 1980s perfectly

¹ Judy Wajcman, "Feminist Critiques of Science and Technology," Chapter 1 in *Feminism Confronts Technology* (Polity, 1991), p. 21.

² Kramarae, *Technology and Women's Voices*, p. 2.

exemplifies Wajcman's idea of "gradual modification" and Kramarae's concept of "male domination of skilled trades." Bassist-singer Geddy Lee is not a "keyboardist" (by his own admission, in a 1984 *Keyboard* magazine interview), but he nonetheless felt strongly compelled to work with synthesizers and similar tools.

From 1976 to 1978, Rush occasionally used keyboard and foot-pedal synthesizers. However, five of the six songs on *Permanent Waves* (1980) and all seven songs on *Moving Pictures* (1981) each use at least some synthesizer elements. These include elements played by Lee on a Minimoog, Oberheim OBX-a, or Roland Jupiter-8 (see Figures 13.1, 13.2, 13.3).

Figure 13.1. Minimoog

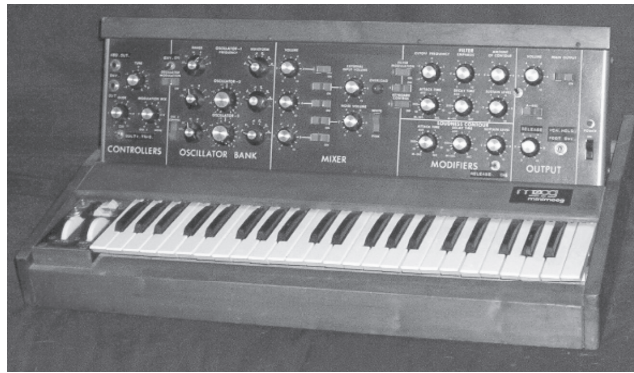


Figure 13.2. Oberheim OBX-a



Figure 13.3. Roland Jupiter-8

As microcomputers then began to flourish throughout the 1980s, so did digital synthesizers, melodic sequencers, and electronic percussion. In the wake of such developments, Rush made its four most “technological” albums. In this period, a few of Neil Peart’s lyrics addressed technology, but Rush’s use of certain instruments and related hi-tech techniques (such as music videos, electronic percussion, and sampling) did so to a much greater extent.

“Subdivisions” (*Signals*, 1982)

“Subdivisions,” the opening track of *Signals*, begins with the first of several brassy synthesizer patterns that underlie nearly the entire song. No earlier Rush song used a synthesizer to this extent, and it is present for 72 percent of the song’s duration, including two “solos.” Thus, the song contains nearly as much synthesizer “air-time” as is found in all of Rush’s previous work combined.

Not surprisingly, Lee wrote the song on keyboards, and he especially refers to the wide frequency range and “organic punch” of the Roland analog (JP-8 Jupiter) synthesizer he used.³ This direction resulted in Lee’s own historiographical confusion over this album, in 1982 calling it “definitely the direction that we’ve wanted to go,” in 1984 “confusing,” and in 1991 “a failure in getting the right balance.”⁴ The later comments suggest that Lee wished to apologize for

³ Greg Armbruster, “Geddy Lee of Rush,” *Keyboard* (September 1984), pp. 56, 60.

⁴ Pete Makowski, article-interview with Rush, “Adrenalin Rush,” *Sounds* (18th December 1982; <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>. Derek Oliver, article-interview with Lee, “Rush Release,” *Melody Maker* (5th May 1984), p. 12.

the shortcomings of *Signals*, especially that it often buried Alex Lifeson's guitar. Lee's comment from 1982 suggests that the band thought of its recent music as comparatively accessible and that "big points" (such as 1970s-style individualism) and "weird times" (such as complex metrical constructions) no longer mattered. On the other hand, "Subdivisions" still addresses relatively serious issues, and it certainly does still use complex time signatures.

Despite the song's extensive engagement with synthesizer technology, the lyrics of "Subdivisions" do not address technology. The song describes the desire of restless young persons, especially "dreamers and misfits," to escape from suburbia, which "sprawl[s] on the fringes of the city . . . in between the bright lights and the far unlit unknown." The music video for "Subdivisions" portrays a solitary, male teenager (a "loser") playing video games and wandering around the downtown area of a major city: Rush's hometown of Toronto, Ontario. The young man endures the ridicule of "cooler" students, and, intertextually, watches a video of Rush performing this song. An annoyed parent turns off the TV and rudely flings his homework on top of him (see Figure 13.4).

Figure 13.4. Teenage misfit from "Subdivisions" (*Signals*, 1982)



Schulte, "Rush: Straight from the Heart," *Canadian Musician* 13:5 (October 1991), p. 36.

Rush had earlier experimented with music videos, such as for 1977's "Closer to the Heart" and for concert backdrops, but it was in the "MTV" era of the 1980s that the band sometimes explored relatively mainstream "concept" videos such as this.

"Subdivisions" partly conforms to early Rush's frequent "progressive" 7/8 time signature, as in the beginning of the song's introduction. Also, the middle portion of each half-verse switches from 4/4 to 7/8 (0:58–1:10, 1:20–1:32, 2:51–3:03, and 3:12–3:24). This metrical change underscores lyrics about the suburbs' "geometric order, [functioning as] an insulated border in between [city and country]", with its "Opinions all provided . . . the future pre-decided . . . detached and subdivided." Later, the same metrical shift inscribes the cities' "timeless old attraction," with individuals "cruising for the action" and "lit up like a firefly" at night, but losing "the race to rats," getting "caught in ticking traps," and, ironically, starting to dream of the suburbs.

The musical-lyrical parallel recalls the band's use of the same music to represent both Apollo and Dionysus in 1978's "Hemispheres" and both London and New York in 1981's "The Camera Eye." The song's title references the suburban subdivisions with which the song concerns itself lyrically (and in the video), but it also references the metrical subdivisions that musically underscore Verse 1's dislike of the suburbs and Verse 2's ambivalence about having left them. In beginning to use music technology so extensively, Lee probably recognized an ironic parallel of Peart's urban "ticking traps."

"Countdown"

Like "Subdivisions," "Countdown" (*Signals*' closing song) uses a "brassy" synthesizer sound. Lyrically, it uncharacteristically bridges the band's enthusiasm for general technology (NASA's space shuttle program) with its use of music technology. In 1981, the band had attended the first space shuttle launch (the Columbia), and their enthusiasm in the song parallels Ayn Rand having attended—and then enthused about—1969's launch of Apollo 11.

Grace under Pressure (1984)

In a controversial move, Rush abandoned its long-time associate Terry ("Broon") Brown and engaged former Supertramp producer

Peter Henderson to co-produce *Grace under Pressure*. The band wanted a change in production approach, but its desire for a renewed balance in technology and co-production resulted in a difficult recording period. The band took three months to write the album and five months to record it. The album title, its inner photo of an egg precariously lodged in a C-clamp, and Hugh Syme's cover art (see Figure 13.5) reflect the stylistic difficulties of this period.

Figure 13.5. *Grace under Pressure* (1984), cover art by H. Syme



On the evocative album cover, an android observes a circuit board (?) suspended between ominous storm clouds (pressure, abbreviated “p”) and a shimmering oceanic liquid (grace or “g”).

Geddy Lee mused in interviews about his mid-1980s approach to synthesizers:

I look at myself as . . . a melodic composer with the synthesizer. . . .
I can't play a lot of complex chord changes or move through a very
complex structure, but I can find lots and lots of melodies. I can write

lots of songs on a synthesizer. I can zone in on the sound that I want and make it speak for the mood I want to create.⁵

In addition to his bass guitars, from 1982 to 1988 Lee used as many as five keyboards on stage. Later selections in that period also included a PPG Wave 2.3 (see Figure 13.6) with Waveterm digital sampling, Emulator II, Yamaha DX-7, Roland D-50, Prophet VS, and Yamaha KX-76 controller. In addition, in the 1980s Lee continued to use pedal systems, initially Moog Taurus and Taurus II units (Figure 13.7) and, later, a Korg MIDI unit. He also used melodic and/or rhythmic sequencers, including an Oberheim DSX, Roland TR-808 (Figure 13.8), and/or Yamaha QX-1.

Figure 13.6. PPG Wave 2.3



Figure 13.7. Moog Taurus II pedals



⁵ Armbruster, "Geddy Lee of Rush," pp. 63–65.

Figure 13.8. Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer

“Distant Early Warning”

A high-concept music video was made for *Grace under Pressure*’s opening song, “Distant Early Warning.” Directed by David Mallet and filmed in front of a stylized map of the world, it borrows from Stanley Kubrick’s film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). The song and video update the context from the earlier days of the Cold War to the height of the conservative era (Thatcher and Reagan) of exactly twenty years later. The imagery includes flight control instrument panels, a bomber jet, a melting wax mock-up of Geddy Lee’s face (“destroyed by acid rain”), and a young boy riding the bomb over nature and cities (similar to *Dr. Strangelove*). The set aesthetic presents a hi-tech vision. In addition, Lee plays a compact Steinberger bass (and wrote the song on a keyboard) and Peart’s Simmons electronic drums appear prominently (see Figures 13.9-13.10).

Figure 13.9. Lee, with Steinberger bass**Figure 13.10.** Peart, with Simmons drums (1984)

Peart had earlier rejected electronic drums as insufficiently visceral but by 1984 had changed his mind. Also, the song's instrumental introduction includes the sounds of static, suggesting radiation or perhaps a Geiger counter measuring it. In part of Lifeson's solo (3:15–3:28), he uses a Delta Lab Harmoniccomputer to play in octaves. The song's main instrumental hook (initially at 0:28–0:39) is in 7/8 with some 5/8. Lee uses keyboards and bass pedals for that section.

Paul Théberge points to H. Stith Bennett's discussion of the disparity between recorded music and its live performance.⁶ By introducing bass pedal units, synthesizers, sequencers, arpeggiators, triggers, effects boxes, and samplers within its live performances between 1977 and 1988, Rush acknowledged this potential disparity. Indeed, the band chose to recreate its studio creations through a meticulous application of such technology. Later, the band concerned itself less with this disparity. In 2002, Lee included only two keyboards on stage, and he rarely played them. When the band performed its keyboard-heavy songs from 1982–87, it allowed off-stage computers and samplers to play most of those sounds, although these elements were always subtly triggered by the three band members on-stage.

“Red Sector A”

The music video for *Grace under Pressure*'s song “Red Sector A” shows four synthesizers and Moog Taurus pedals on Lee's part of the stage. Notably, he does not play bass at all during the song. By 1987–88, Lee's off-stage equipment also included as many as four synthesizers (including two Roland modules), seven samplers (Akai 900 modules), and two Yamaha QX-1 sequencers.⁷ The video shows that Lifeson also sometimes used Moog Taurus pedals (see Figure 13.11).

By 1985, Lifeson also used a pair of bass pedal units, two off-stage Emulator II keyboards, and a digital sequencer. In addition to his early-1980s guitar pedal effects (including MXR, Delta Lab,

⁶ See Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine*, p. 109 and Bennett, “Notation and Identity in Contemporary Popular Music,” *Popular Music* 3 (1983), p. 231.

⁷ See Robert L. Doerschuk, “Geddy Lee: Rush to Perfection on ‘A Show of Hands,’” *Keyboard* (March 1989), pp. 16–17 and Stern, “Rush,” *Canadian Musician* 10:1 (1988).

Figure 13.11. Lifeson, with Moog Taurus I pedals

Roland, Yamaha), he added numerous ones in 1985 (including Loft, Ibanez, Boss, Scholz-Rockman).⁸ For his part, Peart wore headphones in concert for certain songs around 1984–88, so that his drumming could match the tempos of electronically-generated sequences and arpeggios. Also, Peart's drumming continued to involve Simmons electronic drums, as well as samplers and other electronic equipment (see Figure 13.12).

On tour, Peart combined his 1982 Tama Artstar prototype drums (plus Avedis Zildjian cymbals, and so forth) with a satellite set largely involving electronics. In 1987–88, he replaced his glockenspiel with a KAT electronic MIDI mallet unit. He also used Akai sampling modules and various additional electronic triggers.⁹

“The Body Electric”

“I Sing the Body Electric” (*Leaves of Grass*, 1855) by Walt Whitman (1819–92) involves a wide-eyed enthusiasm for the physiology of the human body. Neil Peart used this inspiration as his lyrical starting point for *Grace under Pressure*'s “The Body Electric.” However, the song more closely recalls *Star Wars* creator George Lucas's

⁸ Anonymous article-interview with Lifeson, “Alex Lifeson: *Grace under Pressure*,” *Guitar Player* (August 1984), pp. 44–51. Also see Jas Obrecht, article-interview, “Alex Lifeson of Rush: The Evolving Art of Rock Guitar,” *Guitar Player* (April 1986), <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>.

⁹ Banasiewicz, *Rush Visions*, pp. 65, 86. See also the *Rush Backstage Club newsletter* (March 1990).

Figure 13.12. Peart, with headphones and Simmons drums

early film *THX-1138* (1971), with lyrics referring to a “humanoid escapee,” an “android on the run . . . trying to change its program.” The song later expands the computer imagery with references to “data overload,” “memory banks unloading . . . bytes break[ing] into bits,” and, especially, to the binary code sung during the chorus (though already implied in the song’s main drum pattern): “1-0-0-1-0-0-1” (which also represents the decimal number 73 and, more importantly, the letter—or word—“I”). The paranoid and panicky situation of the song’s lyrics recall the film through words such as: “S.O.S.,” “in distress,” “trouble,” “break down,” “struggle,” “resist,” “a pulse of dying power,” “a hundred years of routines,” and “pray[ing] to the mother of all machines.” The song’s music video also uses *THX-1138* imagery, combined with Plato’s less-technological cave.

After the song’s initial drums/bass/guitar groove, Lee uses synthesizers in 72 percent of the song, although he often provides them simultaneously with bass guitar. These synthesizers provide voice-like or “crystalline” timbres, via a recently acquired PPG digital synthesizer. Lee sometimes played the PPG via a melodic

sequencer or foot-pedals. The keyboard parts support the central rhythms up into the higher frequencies. This approach also corrects one of the most common complaints about *Signals* (1982): that the keyboard-oriented songs on that album often diminished, or at least substantially veiled, the band's traditional instrumental interplay of guitar, bass, and drums. Further to this point, the song's guitar solo features only guitar, bass, and drums, in a highly contrapuntal ("traditional Rush") texture. Overcoming these sorts of "balance challenges" resulted in the album's title: *Grace under Pressure*, which derives from the definition of "guts" that Ernest Hemingway (one of Peart's favourite authors) provided to Dorothy Parker in an interview in 1929.

Interlude: Influences, 1984–86

In a 1984 interview in *Keyboard*, Geddy Lee referred to inspiration from current pop-rock, such as Peter Gabriel (including synthesist Larry Fast and various drummers), Simple Minds, Ultravox, Eurythmics, Howard Jones, and King Crimson (its recent album *Three of a Perfect Pair*). Around the same time, Alex Lifeson mentioned his appreciation for the album *Win This Record* (1982), by the extremely eclectic California musician David Lindley (bluegrass, world beat, blues, rock'n'roll, among others). In a 1986 interview, Neil Peart mentioned his enthusiasm for big-band music and its drummers (such as Gene Krupa), jazz-rock fusion (Weather Report and various drummers), other progressive-influenced rock drummers, and world music. He also discussed how Rush's music had progressed from being "progressive:"

We think that the face of our music is changing from having been progressive to not being progressive. For us, we're progressing. That's all that progressive music can be, and it's just as difficult for us to think of and to play. To us, it's totally satisfying and progressive. Perhaps from the view of an outsider who judges only on the superficiality of technique, it might seem simpler. Believe me, it's not.¹⁰

Peart's childhood piano lessons probably explain his predilection for melodic percussion (such as chimes, glockenspiels, marimbas,

¹⁰ See Scott K. Fish, article-interview with Peart, "Neil Peart," *Modern Drummer* (January 1986), <<http://yyz.com/NMS/HTML/artindex.html>>.

and, later, MIDI- or sample-based instruments) as well as his ongoing interest in jazz drumming.

***Power Windows* (1985)**

Starting with *Power Windows*, Rush achieved a renewed level of comfort in producing its music along with an outside co-producer: Peter Collins. Collins's background included writing and producing jingles as well as producing techno-pop recordings. However, his production associates would hardly have dissuaded Rush's use of hi-tech equipment in 1985 and 1987. These included programmer/keyboardist Andy Richards, who had recently contributed to the UK dance pop sensation Frankie Goes to Hollywood. For its two 1985–87 albums with Collins, the band also recorded mainly in the UK (plus Montserrat and partly in Toronto), after five years recording at Le Studio near Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Hugh Syme's cover art for *Power Windows* (see Figure 13.13) shows a teenaged boy apparently using a remote control to open his bedroom window. Behind him, three televisions that do not quite look like televisions—presumably one for each member of Rush—stand askew in the middle of the room.

Figure 13.13. *Power Windows* (1985), cover art by H. Syme



The boy stares at us, as if to solicit our blessing for him to explore the brave new world (adulthood?) outside. A lightning flash shows through the window, recalling the storm imagery of part of Syme's album cover for *Grace under Pressure* (1984). On one of the television screens, a faint doppelganger of the same boy stares at us through binoculars. The remote-controlled bedroom window, the televisions, the binoculars, the lightning flash, and the electrical outlet below the window all provide visual puns for the album title.

"The Big Money"

Power Windows's opening song, "The Big Money," picks up on the band's ongoing ambivalence about media and industry contexts, and, appropriately, the band performs the song's music video mainly on a large "Monopoly"-like set. The "TV boy" from the album cover appears in a number of sequences and the band members themselves also seem to get sucked into TV screens, but otherwise in the video the band somewhat downplays its use of technology. For the song's main synthesizer line, Lee simultaneously plays a keyboard and the Moog Taurus I pedals at the base of the keyboard stand (Figure 13.14).

Figure 13.14: Geddy Lee, still shot from the video for "The Big Money" (1985)



Parts of the song feature Peart's electronic drums or voice-derived samples, including some played by drums, which decidedly blurs the categories of electronic drums, samples, and background vocals and makes them quite difficult to differentiate aurally. The song's second introduction uses real drums (which the song's video shows Peart playing), but it also includes keyboard parts and sample-based orchestral hits. This approach contrasts the prominent display of Peart's Simmons electronic drums in certain 1984 videos. The chorus (in 4/4) features Lifeson's raw guitar sound, Peart's aggressive drumming (on a traditional, if large, rock kit), and Lee's active/"popping" bass guitar. By comparison, parts of the verses (in 6/4) include voice-like synthesizer sounds, duplications of Lee's voice, and also samples of Lifeson's guitar played on keyboards. The verses of Peart's lyrics refer to "Sometimes pushing all the buttons; sometimes pulling out the plug," but the song also inscribes this musically.

"Manhattan Project"

The activities of rock musicians and fans in the post-counterculture resemble the tendency among twentieth-century males to produce technically compelling inventions first and ask questions later. Brian Easlea quotes the US nuclear weapons coordinator J. Robert Oppenheimer as saying that "when you seen something that is technically sweet you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success."¹¹ The *Power Windows* song "Manhattan Project" concerns the drive for Oppenheimer and others to display this kind of technical prowess in the context of nuclear weaponry. Feminist Simone de Beauvoir, as paraphrased by Judy Wajcman, suggests that "male accomplishments in the field of science and technology serve to bestow a virile status on the respective male achievers and thereby underwrite a claim to masculinity" (p. 139). Related to this, but also largely contradicting it, male and female hardcore Rush musician-fans valorized Lee, Lifeson, and Peart's technical abilities, powerful playing, and songwriting in order to underwrite their virility as musicians, not as men or women.

"Manhattan Project" inscribes Peart's ambivalence about the inevitable "big bang" (nuclear weaponry) having produced "more

¹¹ J. Robert Oppenheimer, quoted in Judy Wajcman, "Technology as Masculine Culture," *Feminism Confronts Technology*, p. 138.

than they bargained for.” The song thus reflects a critically ambivalent worldview, not an apocalyptic one. The verses consistently include synthesized and sampled sounds and thus convey a sense of technological irony. In a related matter, Lee points out that keyboard associate Andy Richards contributed a “fretless bass” part on a synthesizer which Lee then had to replicate with an inferior sample-based method in order to play it live.¹² On the other hand, the chorus features a more traditional Rush sound: a complex rhythm featuring guitar. A later instrumental section (3:20–3:45) incorporates a string section (along with extensive wordless vocals) playing a vaguely Russian-sounding string arrangement by Anne Dudley of the UK, postmodern techno band Art of Noise. (Like Richards, Dudley had contributed to recordings by Frankie Goes to Hollywood. She later wrote scores for the 1992 UK film *The Crying Game* and the 1997 UK film *The Full Monty*, winning an Oscar for the latter.) “Manhattan Project” ends with a fade-out featuring a reflective distillation of Lifeson’s main earlier guitar part and a similar reprise of Peart’s opening “military” (cautionary?) snare roll.

“Mystic Rhythms”

The eighth and final song of *Power Windows*, “Mystic Rhythms,” also fits the album’s themes of power and of the blurring of technology. As Geddy Lee explains:

Everything in it is going through a synthesized something. We spent a day sampling African drums, tablas, roto-toms, and all kinds of bizarre sounds. We found four appropriate ones, locked into four different AMS’s [delay units with sampling capabilities] that were triggered by Neil playing his Simmons kit. There’s a very unique guitar sound, too. It’s an Ovation acoustic guitar going through amplification and it comes off with a very synth-like sound.¹³

The song’s video also participates in these types of ambiguities: unlike the modern TV screens in the video for “The Big Money,” the video for “Mystic Rhythms” incorporates old-fashioned variants

¹² Tom Mulhern, “Geddy Lee,” *Guitar Player* (April 1986), p. 86.

¹³ Perry Stern, article-interview with Lee and Lifeson, “Rush: Baroque Cosmologies in Their Past, the Boys Focus on ‘the Perfect Song,’” *Canadian Musician* 7:6 (1985).

of projection technology, thus somewhat reminiscent of the trio of odd-looking TVs on the album cover. Images of water, reflection, and light (and nature generally) contrast with an elaborate mechanical toy, glowing spheres, a Claymation-like Godzilla, nautical-like portholes looking in on Rush, and a skeleton containing other beings. The skeleton and toy reflect the “embedded” nature of the song’s sampled/synthesized soundscape, which comprises, for example, electronic drums consistently triggering sampled percussion, twice as much synthesizer “airtime” as bass guitar (83 percent versus 41 percent), and a few “seagull” noises reminiscent of the electronic bird sounds (a.k.a., the “music score”) of Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The Birds* (1963). The melodies and chords favor pentatonic elements (thus referencing “non-western” constructions), and the lyrics refer to the natural/mystical world outside:

The more we think we know about, the greater the unknown.
We suspend our disbelief, and we are not alone. . . .
We sometimes catch a window: a glimpse of what’s beyond.
Was it just imagination stringing us along? (“Mystic Rhythms” excerpts,
Power Windows, 1985)

Music technology can embed such “unknown” things, and, paralleling its gradually-building introduction, the song ends with an extended fade-out to a virtually inaudible—and thus technologically deceptive—synthesizer “real ending” to conclude the album. As Neil Peart put it (more succinctly), the song provides a “good marriage of lyrics and music.”¹⁴

“Force Ten” (*Hold Your Fire*, 1987)

Hold Your Fire continued Rush’s experiment in bridging music technology and hard rock. The opening song, “Force Ten,” uses the maximum level of the Beaufort wind velocity scale as an analogy for the storms of life. Neil Peart based his lyrics on something provided by Pye Dubois, thus paralleling the origins of Rush’s best-known song (“Tom Sawyer,” *Moving Pictures*, 1981). The Hemingway-like lyrics encourage listeners to transcend not only their inability to predict things but also the powerful forces that

¹⁴ Neil Peart, *Guitar for the Practicing Musician* (1986).

they cannot control. Sampled choir, crowd, and guitar sounds begin the song, followed by jackhammer samples (later reprised to end the song) and a woman's laugh—powerful forces comparable to the force ten wind storm of the song's title.

Lee's open fifth-centred main riff (C/G and D/A above an A pedal) and Lifeson's related guitar derivations join Peart's aggressive rock drumming. This underscores the vocal introduction: "Tough times demand tough talk, demand tough hearts, demand tough songs . . ." The verses (in 4/4) feature a call-and-response pattern between Lee's vocals and Lifeson's guitar gestures (recalling "Afterimage," 1984), as the lyrics oscillate between extremes: "We can rise and fall like empires, flow in and out like the tide . . ." (recalling the lyrical ambiguity of "The Big Money," 1985). A middle section returns to open fifths (but now in 6/4), and it features ethereal-sounding synthesizers for a kind of mellow chorus: "Look in to the eye of the storm. Look out to the force without form. . . ." The instrumental "solo" section (2:51-3:26, in 4/4) at first features Lifeson's atmospheric guitar gestures over Lee's open fifths, but this gives way to a rhythmically eccentric section (derived from cross-rhythms) featuring keyboards, bass, guitar, and drums. The song ends with additional 6/4 choruses and then material reprising the song's introduction (back in 4/4).

"Time Stand Still"

Hold Your Fire's "Time Stand Still" features guest backup vocals by Aimee Mann (recently of the band 'Til Tuesday). This produces an emotional resonance for some of the song's lyrics:

Time stand still: I'm not looking back, but I want to look around me now.

Time stand still: see more of the people and the places that surround me now.

. . . Experience slips away. . . The innocence slips away. ("Time Stand Still" excerpts, *Hold Your Fire*, 1987)

It also suggests Rush's "progressive" desire to look outside itself and to a wide variety of colleagues and influences, including a female singer-songwriter who also appears in the song's video as a movie camera operator and backup singer (see Figure 13.15).

Figure 13.15. Lee, Peart, and Aimee Mann, “Time Stand Still” (1987)

The video makes pervasive use of “blue-screen” effects, where separate video elements can be spliced and moved around separately, so that the individual band members (with their instruments) and Mann (with the camera) often float around on a set or outside in nature. As a supporting singer on the song itself (sometimes contributing short passage of “lead” vocals), Mann’s presence in the video also provides realistic supporting images. When the “innocence slips away” at the end of the song, Mann pleasantly waves goodbye and she and her movie camera magically disappear off into the background. Her pleasant departure and the band’s apparent lack of concern about this suggest fleeting influence rather than a lasting collaboration.

Peart reports that he sampled Asian temple blocks in order to use them at pitches other than their native ones.¹⁵ The song uses non-subtle keyboards mainly in the comparatively gentle chorus that also features Peart’s sampled temple blocks (47 percent) and Mann’s vocals. The instrumental middle section features semi-virtuosic guitar, bass, and drums, a certain degree of sampled sound effects, and the 7/4 time signature that comprises over one-quarter of the song. Lifeson’s guitar (98 percent) and Peart’s drums (99 percent) participate almost constantly throughout, but the song forgoes

¹⁵ See William F. Miller, article-interview with Peart, “Neil Peart/Rush,” *Modern Drummer* (December 1989).

a guitar solo in favour of short, virtuosic bass flourishes in between various sections.

“I Want to Look Around Me Now”

In its music and concert tours from 1980 to 1988, Rush expanded its ongoing strategy of “permanent change” by including influences from post-punk/new-wave rock, post-progressive hard rock, and jazz/rock fusion. Lyrically, the band addressed a wide spectrum of the human condition, including: pride, freedom, fame, self-doubt, war, ambition, conflict, originality, burning out, vulnerability, outside forces, and loneliness. Rush’s music exemplifies Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus: a “system of structured, structuring dispositions.”¹⁶ For Rush and its fans, this system involves the virtuosic interaction of guitar, bass, drums, and voice. In the 1980s, Rush’s habitus provided the band, to use Bourdieu’s terms, with “relative autonomy” from the “external determinations” of the “immediate present” of music technology. Rush snatched music technology away “from the contingency of the accidental and constitute[d] it as a problem by applying it to the very principles of its solution” (p. 55).

Instead of abandoning synthesizers, samplers, and sequencers as a problem, the band worked through certain timbral and textural possibilities and added these to its “embodied history.” However, in its new music from 1989 to 1996, the band then gradually decreased the sounds of music technology. It did so while applying related techniques (i.e., computers and recording software) within its songwriting and arranging. By the time of its studio recordings of the 2000s, Rush had reinvented itself, according to a new version of a “minimal technology” power-trio aesthetic.

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Polity, 1990), p. 52.