

Rock for Beginners – Miguel Amorós

Shake, Rattle and Roll

“Rock”, properly speaking, refers to a particular musical style created by Anglo-Saxon youth culture that spread like wildfire to every country where the modern conditions of production and consumption had reached a certain qualitative threshold, that is, where capitalism had given rise to a mass society of socially uprooted individuals. The phenomenon first took shape after World War Two in the United States, the most highly developed capitalist country, and then spread to England; from there it returned like a boomerang to the country of its origin, irradiating its influence everywhere, changing people’s lives in different ways. To get a better understanding of rock, we will first have to review the concepts of subculture, music and youth.

The word “subculture” refers to the behaviors, values, jargons and symbols of a separate milieu—ethnic, geographic, sexual or religious—within the dominant culture, which was, and still is, of course, the culture of the ruling class. Beginning in the sixties, once the separation was imposed *from above* between elite culture, reserved for the leaders, and mass culture, created to regiment the led, to coarsen their tastes and brutalize their senses—between *high culture* and *masscult*,¹ as Dwight McDonald called them—the term would be used to refer to alternative consumerist lifestyles, which were reflected in various ways in the music that was at first called “modern” music, and then pop music. The mechanism of identification that produced youth subculture was ephemeral, since it was constantly being offset by the temporary character of youth. In this volatile stage of life, without either responsibilities or economic functions, with a proletariat that was giving no signs of combativeness, the notion of subculture was easily conflated with that of fashion, and of freedom, with that of the *look*. The role of the communications media, which had previously hardly shown any interest in traditional subcultures, would be decisive in the spread of juvenile fashions. However, these fashions harbored a more disturbing reality. While opposition to the adult world took the outward form of a generation gap, it was in fact an unresolved social crisis. As it turned out, the “age-old crisis of youth” ended up converging with crises of other kinds—students, labor, race, politics—and forging an authentic ethical, artistic and social alternative to the values and lifestyles of domination. Rock was its soundtrack. It could no longer be called a subculture, since it did not seek accommodation within the dominant culture like its predecessors—such as, for example, the American existentialists (*hipsters*), the neighborhood and biker gangs of the United States, or the *teddy boys* and *mods* of Great Britain—but rather sought to subvert it and overthrow it: it was a true “counterculture”, only much more dangerous, because its popularity was not restricted to young people.

¹ These two terms, and all subsequent italicized words and phrases in this text, except for titles of books and record albums, are in English in the original [American translator’s note].

Pop music, on the other hand, has almost nothing to do with what we understand as music. While, technically speaking, it may be considered to be an organization of sound in time, it is not an art, but instead a product of the entertainment industry, a commodity of *show business*. We would prefer call it “light music”, as opposed to great music or genuine music (which began to be known as “classical music” after the onset of “pop music”). It was characterized by simplification and standardization; it was created as an accompaniment to dancing and to serve as entertainment and means of escape. Its compositions were short, repetitive and syncopated, predictable, without any aesthetic pretensions. It did not claim to reveal the essence of reality at the immediate level, like art, but to stimulate and amuse. It sought to entertain, not to challenge the status quo. It was therefore a music for passing, and killing, time, for consumption rather than for thinking. It was a genre of music that became a Trojan horse for the rationality of the commodity in everyday life. Theodore W. Adorno said that, “One is forced to have fun in order to be well adjusted”, and that was just what this kind of music essentially did: dance tunes represented the musically sublimated rhythms of labor and of everyday misery. They promoted conformism rather than revolt. Nor was the mass culture of which it formed a part really a culture, either, but rather a particular industry that infiltrated everyday life through the mass media. Those who called the shots in the media played the leading role in that culture which, far from spotlighting and exacerbating the contradictions of capitalist society, obscured and blurred them, making them more endurable. This was the principal characteristic of the new capitalism based on consumption, that is, on the industrialization of life. Thus, although *pop music* was by no means an expression of the social situation of the exploited class, it could at any given moment and under certain circumstances be transformed into a vehicle for expressing the demands for freedom manifested by the least domesticated sector of the population, the sector that was most aware of the crisis, the youth. It therefore became the vehicle of truth, which, according to Hegel, is also beauty, and spontaneously manifested, in a subjective and incomplete form, appealing to the senses—or “good vibrations”—more than just reason, the spirit of the modern social revolution.

Thirdly, youth, that period between infancy and adulthood, which lasted longer among the offspring of the bourgeoisie, but was very brief among the offspring of the workers, did not play any special role in classical capitalism. Then, it was a period of initiation to “responsible” life in which no other principles or tastes found a place beyond those that were already established by tradition. The discovery of the existence of a rebellious and combative youth that questioned the rules of the world of its elders was traumatic not only for the ruling class but also for the submissive members of the other classes, since these elements were all in favor of patriarchy. For a few years, the movie industry allowed a few intellectually honest directors to address some of the disagreeable aspects of the cold, hard reality. World War Two was followed by the “Cold War”, an era of political tension exacerbated by the Russian manufacture of the atomic bomb, Mao’s seizure of power in China and the beginning of the Korean War, events that unleashed a wave of patriotism and anticommunism in the United States that was capitalized on by Senator Joseph McCarthy, the organizer of a “witch hunt” that profoundly affected intellectual and artistic work. The years of “McCarthyism”, between 1950 and 1956, were disastrous for the formal liberties that had once prevailed in the culture of a State

that, by becoming the leading world power, felt threatened domestically by a wave of dissent led by intellectuals. In this suffocating climate, any display of dissidence was tarred with the brush of communism and treated with the utmost severity. Edward Abbey, however, an anarchist in the tradition of Thoreau, a pacifist and practitioner of civil disobedience, dared to publish an indictment of the horrors of industrial civilization in those dark times, calling for desertion from that civilization, *The Brave Cowboy* [1956], which was adapted for the screen in 1962 by Dalton Trumbo, the most subversive screenwriter of his time. In movie industry, the condition of the working class was taboo; trade unionists could only be depicted as gangsters, and anarchists as solitary fugitives and outlaws, while informers and snitches were portrayed as heroes, as in Elia Kazan's film, *On the Waterfront*. The race question would not be portrayed for a broad public audience until 1960 with the release of John Ford's film, *Sergeant Rutledge*, and Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, released as a film in 1962. The youth problem, however, ignored by the new inquisitors, was openly addressed in the public arena. In 1953, Laszlo Benedek's *The Wild One* made its debut in movie theaters, based on a true story: the invasion of a peaceful small town by a violent motorcycle gang on a rampage. The contrast between the townsfolk's respect for law and order and the disrespectful and lawless behavior of the young gang members reached its climax when, asked just what he was rebelling against, the star of the movie, played by Marlon Brando, replies, "Whadda you got?" The nihilism of the message scandalized respectable opinion leaders; the motorcycle manufacturer, Triumph, protested against the negative image associated with its product, and the British government would not allow the film to be shown in movie theaters until 1967; and even then it could only be shown in X-rated theaters! In 1955, another film, entitled *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray, gave a new twist to the youth culture theme, bringing it from the margins to the center of American society: a middle class youth, played by James Dean, bored and dissatisfied, lost in a social milieu that did not understand and did not want to understand why he found it absurd, reacted by allowing himself to do just anything, without any apparent reason, only because, "You've gotta do something". The image of a violent and wayward adolescent, convinced that he had no future worth living and that all he could do was live intensely in the moment as if he was going to die that very same day, turning his back on the adult world that was insensitive to his anxieties, reflected the moral decadence of a class society that offered dollars instead of answers. The older generation, self-satisfied and resigned, incapable of seeing anything beyond its own nose, had become alien to the younger generation. The picture would be completed by *Blackboard Jungle*, directed by Richard Brooks, which was also released in 1955 (in Spain its title was "Semilla de maldad" [Bad Seed]). The action of the film takes place in an inner-city school, where young people from working class homes, which we would now call "broken homes", trapped in an educational system that taught them nothing useful for the hard life that they could look forward to when they turned eighteen, turn against their teachers and the school. Indiscipline and delinquency were their response to the lack of perspectives and the fate reserved for losers. Its soundtrack would distinguish this film from its two predecessors mentioned above. The soundtracks of *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* were written by classical composers in the tradition of Schöenberg. In *Blackboard Jungle*, however, the students destroy the record collection of a math teacher because his music means nothing to them. What they wanted to listen to were songs like "Rock

Around the Clock”, a kind of *swing* tune with a negro rhythm performed by Bill Haley, catapulted to instant success by the movie. A new style was born, unknown to the older generation, but which created a great stir among their children, *rock and roll*, and which was therefore a sign of a profound generation crisis, or, more accurately, of a social crisis that would have its greatest impact among the young people, to whom the blacks had brought soul.

There Ain't No Cure for the Summertime Blues

Willie Dixon, musician, composer, and *blues* singer, as well as boxer and negro civil rights activist, once said, “The blues are the roots and the other musics are the fruits”, condensing the history of *rock* into a single sentence. The source of *rock and roll* was the American negro. It was created in 1955 by a *rhythm and blues* guitarist named Chuck Berry, when he recorded the hit song “Maybellene”, an adaptation of a *country music* song. Rock was therefore born, as everyone knows, from a fusion of rhythm and blues with American “country” music. The year before, Elvis Presley had recorded “That’s Alright (Mama)”, a version of the song first performed by the Delta blues singer Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup, but it seemed that most people were not aware of this. The same was true of “Shake, Rattle and Roll”, recorded by Bill Haley & His Comets. What were the preconditions that paved the way for the appearance of rock music? First of all, obviously, the social and moral crisis referred to above, manifested primarily among the youth. Secondly, the music of a minority that suffered from discrimination, the Afro-Americans. In 1947 the journalist Jerry Wexler had christened as *rhythm and blues* a new style of boogie that was more well known among its performers as *jump blues*, which was a best-seller on the “race” record charts and had the peculiarity of attracting white record buyers. In 1951, a Cleveland radio program aimed at the youth market broadcast this music, calling it *rock n’ roll*, an expression that would often appear in the lyrics of these *jump blues* songs. Young white people had discovered a whole new world in negro music. The blues provided a simple and effective musical matrix in which feelings, desires, hopes and frustrations could be expressed. A perfect combination of howls, moans and loud strumming on the guitar, often arranged around a single musical phrase (*riff*) that put some spirit into the pop rock inspired by it. As John Sinclair says in his book, *Guitar Army*, the black musicians were the “freedom riders” who infiltrated the homes of white people and seduced their children by attacking every taboo. These children then felt much closer to the people of color than to their white parents. Their music taught them a new way of love and behavior, less inhibited, more fraternal and, above all, much more erotic; it showed them an open sexuality and (it was this that was so intolerable) it incited them to smoke pot. There was more to life than work, more than school and more than sitting on the couch watching television. In fact, this was real life, which, philosophically speaking, erased the distinction between subject and object. *Rock n’ roll* was more than just entertainment; it was the music of refusal; the refusal of the hypocritical morality and culture of the status quo, of extreme individualism, of no-holds-barred competition and of the endless changes determined by the iron laws of the commodity. By putting the accent on rhythm rather than on harmony, it made the antagonism between the passion to live and everyday boredom more apparent, an antagonism that young people had tried to escape by way of violence and transgression,

but without ever grasping their situation rationally and objectively. It was the music of protest against alienation, the music of awakening (many blues songs began with the words, "I woke up this morning"), the music of movement in search of meaning, but not of revolutionary catharsis. The youth identity that it provided was not enough to provoke social change, but it timidly pointed in that direction. A contradiction prevented the awakening of social consciousness. The rebellious young people despised work, but nonetheless participated in consumption: they rejected the office and the factory, but not the commodity, as the quest for an identity based on music, clothing or a car, was simply fulfilled with an image whose content was its exchange value. Young people really constituted a new, expanding market. We must recognize that *rock n' roll*, its musical standard, was still a product of the culture industry, of hit records, of new record companies like Modern, Atlantic, Chess and Sun Records, of movies and radio; of the latest inventions in music technology, the 45s and LPs, jukeboxes, record players and amplifiers. This was the third precondition that brought rock to the bar, to the living room and to the bedroom, that is, which introduced it to everyday life. For the first time ever, one could listen to music at any time, anywhere, at any volume, music whose main instrument was the guitar, not the piano or the human voice, thanks to Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis. For Leni Sinclair, John's wife, "The turning point in the history of western civilization was reached with the invention of the electric guitar". It was the instrument of change. The first Gibsons and Fenders became phallic fetishes suitable for composing short musical phrases or *riffs* like those of that memorable electric blues song, "Mannish Boy", recorded in 1955 by Muddy Waters. The guitar rendered the orchestra unnecessary; at most, three or four musicians were sufficient for accompaniment. Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley were the first rockers who wrote their own songs to be played on guitar because they did not know how to play any other instruments; they were models for their white imitators and provided them with manifestos like the very emblematic "Rock and Roll Music" and "Who Do You Love?" One of them, Buddy Holly, performed to the accompaniment of a rhythm guitar, a bass, and a drum kit, creating the basic quartet that would set the standard for most of the *pop rock* groups of the sixties. Other, Afro-American, artists, like Little Richard and Larry Williams, for example, went even further, in "Lucille" and "Bony Marony", paving the way for the prohibited display of sensuality; Elvis Presley and independent local radio stations did the rest. Elvis had the advantage of being white in a racist society that could hardly tolerate negro success, which is why he was the leading figure of the rise and subsequent fall of rock.

Rock preserved a certain degree of creative independence that protected it from the manipulation of the spectacle, but not for long. *Show business* got big enough to annihilate rock n' roll's negative power and forced it to maintain a cordial relation with the status quo. The movie industry was very attentive to this development. Beginning in 1957, rock n' roll was corrupted and transformed entirely into show business. All kinds of rock musicians performed in banal Hollywood movies like *Rock, Rock, Rock*, *Let's Rock* and *The Girl Can't Help It*. The rebel attitude was replaced by a sociable identity that reconciled a juvenile audience with the dictates of fashion instead of fostering the development of an independent collective subject. The sentimentalism and melodrama of the past expelled dissident attitudes. A gallery of interchangeable adolescent "idols", for which Pat Boone served as the prototype, were pressed into its service with teams of

producers, songwriters, composers and sound engineers in order to create a perfect product for consumption. Well-groomed, neatly-attired and cloyingly sweet, they sang unimaginative and sentimental songs that, together with the fashion of the dance styles that made their debut with the *twist*, dominated the scene at least until the appearance of the Beatles. Rock returned to the fold of fun-loving, entertaining commercial *pop music*, obscuring social inequalities, unrest and dissatisfaction, moderating its language in order to be acceptable to the dominant taste, the taste of domination. Adorno said that “amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work”. Thus, from being the thorn in the side of mass culture, rock became the rite of passage of youth in the capitalist system. Elvis returned to civilian life from the army a changed man, transformed into a grotesque caricature of his former self. *Viva Las Vegas* had nothing in common with “Heartbreak Hotel” or “Jailhouse Rock”. The main figures of rock disappeared; in February of 1959, Buddy Holly and Richie Valens died in a plane crash; one year later, Eddie Cochran died when he crashed his car into a lamppost. As John Derek said in Nicholas Ray’s film, *Knock On Any Door*, “Live fast, die young, and leave a good-looking corpse”. Rock had burnt its candle at both ends and was literally dead, but it was not allowed to rest in peace. A step forward for business had the virtue of being a step forward for contradiction by allowing a new, less complacent music to emerge from thin air: a second generation of young people found in it sufficient stimulus to avoid being imprisoned in mere identity and to carry on the battle against the old world, more prepared to face a bigger crisis incubated in the preceding period, but also more decomposed, more irrational and more unacceptable. With the coming of the sixties, rock recovered its lost element of subjective freedom that once again situated it as the antithesis of the statist mass culture.

You Really Got Me

For rock, with the start of the sixties, the American scene saw new contributions. On the one hand, there was a new crop of talented songwriters, sound engineers and composers. And *rhythm n’ blues* had acquired a complexity that gave rise to *soul* music, combining with the rhythms and cadences of religious music, but with precise notes, and without the flourishes of *jazz*. Performers like Ray Charles, Otis Redding, James Brown, Wilson Pickett and the great Aretha Franklin soon made their debuts. A toned-down version for white people, the music of the Detroit-based label, *Tamla Motown*, acquired a spectacular notoriety. Songs like “My Girl”, “Dancing in the Streets”, “Money” and “Louie, Louie” were indispensable for any *party*. Finally, *folk* music underwent a resurgence thanks to Woody Guthrie, who inscribed on his guitar the words, “This Machine Kills Fascists”, and Pete Seeger, who made the song “We Shall Overcome” famous. Due to its association with ideological radicalism it gave rise to the “protest song”, ideal for performing at the pacifist civil rights and anti-racial discrimination marches of the era. A long list of politically engaged singer-songwriters participated in the emerging social struggles, but Bob Dylan, who seemed least likely of all to be a political figure, was by far the greatest influence. Some of his songs, from “Blowin’ in the Wind” to “Like a Rolling Stone”, and from “The Times They Are A-Changin’” to “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue”, became timeless anthems. What really revolutionized the music scene, however, was his controversial appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 with a

Stratocaster electric guitar instead of an acoustic guitar, together with Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper. When they began to play the first notes of “Maggie’s Farm”, it was like a performance by a Chicago blues band. His music built bridges connecting with sixties rock, like Jimi Hendrix, Manfred Mann, Julie Driscoll, The Band, and especially The Byrds, who took up the standard, and even with the mellow pop of the Walker Brothers, and spread the spirit of dissent beyond the politicized university milieu and its devotees of the *folk song*. His songs were not “fun”, but shocking, because they clashed with every conventional standard. They were not made to be consumed, but to be the object of intense focus, on their poetry and on their message. Dylan’s poetry linked up with the writers of the *beat* generation like Kerouac and Burroughs, who began to attain some popularity. The poet Allen Ginsberg was a bridge between them. *Folk* music elevated the supremacy of the lyrics over the music to its highest level, and led its audience towards social critique. In its convergence with rock it politicized it, turning it into an instrument of non-conformism.

In Europe, which was still undergoing post-war reconstruction, the social crisis that was taking place in America remained in an incipient stage, although it did give some unmistakable signs of life. In the United Kingdom, the novels, *Absolute Beginners*, by Colin MacInnes, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, by Alan Sillitoe, *Baron’s Court*, *All Change*, by Terry Taylor, and *Lucky Jim*, by Kingsley Amis, were better introductions to the sixties than any sociological analysis. The high demand for labor put money in the pockets of the suburban youth who gladly spent it on clothing, shoes, motorbikes and *blues*, *rhythm n’ blues*, *soul* and *rock n’ roll* records. Consumption was extended to younger teenagers because of the influence of television, which replaced radio as the leading vehicle for mass communications. Black musicians, still mistreated in their own country, gladly traveled to England, where they were treated as geniuses, and the habitués of the music scene dressed like them and imitated them. British rock rapidly took shape on this basis, represented by groups of four or five members rather than by solo guitarists who cultivated the image of misfits in the American style. During the course of this transformation, rock lost its rural roots and became entirely urban. In 1963, one of these groups, the upbeat and likeable Beatles, were transformed overnight into an unprecedented mass phenomenon, which the media dubbed “Beatlemania”. The nearest approximation to this phenomenon, Elvis, was completely overshadowed. “Singles” featuring trite songs like “Please, Please Me”, “She Loves You”, and “I Want To Hold Your Hand”, all released during the same year, were sold in unimaginable quantities. In the following year, another group, this one with an aggressive and rough image, the Rolling Stones, added fuel to the fire. Its music was more arrogant, its lyrics more provocative, and its attitude more contrary to accepted standards of behavior. If the Beatles represented the Yin of British rock, the Stones were the Yang. The “fans” of the former were high school students, teenagers addicted to fashion, glossy illustrated magazines and television programs, prone to herding together in their thousands to get a glimpse of their idols, screaming like lunatics, which really shocked the world. The spectacle of masses of hysterical children was too tempting for a medium like television, and a TV show on this phenomenon had an enormous impact in the United States, in anticipation of a U.S. tour by the Beatles. In February 1964, their appearance on the “Ed Sullivan Show” was watched by 74 million people, that is, by half the population of the

United States. The door was thrown wide open for all the others, too: first the Rolling Stones, then the Animals, the Yardbirds, the Kinks, the Who, the Hollies, the Spencer Davis Group, Van Morrison's Them, and many others, were disembarking on the other side of the Atlantic and revolutionizing musical styles and ways of thinking with their reinterpretations of black music. During this same period, the doors of Britain and Europe were opened wide to brilliant *bluesmen* who were almost unknown in America because they were black, like John Lee Hooker, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, etc. Any English rock group would have considered it an honor to play on the same stage with such incomparable masters without whom they would literally never have existed (the Rolling Stones, who had taken the name of their band from a Muddy Waters song composed by Dixon, recorded their second or third album on Chess Records in 1964, and chose B.B. King, who called all his guitars "Lucille", to accompany them on their U.S. tour in 1969). Meanwhile, British pop music received a powerful impulse in limiting the field of influence of the conservatism that dominated the media executives of that country, which led to the appearance of pirate radio stations installed on ships that broadcast rock music twenty-four hours a day. The best example was perhaps Radio Caroline, created in March of 1964. Three years later, in another somewhat different situation, that of the "Summer of Love" in San Francisco, California, the first "free radio" station appeared, an experiment that was destined to have a very long life.

The so-called "British Invasion" unleashed a wave of "garage bands" that obtained a public audience, and therefore a market, for the first time ever. Rock returned to its dissident origins by providing a platform for non-conformists. The success of a song like "Satisfaction" has no other explanation. Two details not directly related to music played a part in this. In Europe, the use of hashish, a concentrated form of marijuana that encouraged sociability; the Beatles smoked their first joint in a hotel in New York with Bob Dylan. In America, the longhairs so scandalized the law-and-order types that, as Jerry Rubin claimed in *Do It!*, long hair was for white rebels what skin color was for the negroes. There was also a bad side to all of this, however; rock drove the culture industry's sales to new highs, generating huge profits, as was verified by the recognition it obtained from the established hierarchies, symbolized by the awarding of medals of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire to the Beatles. In Europe such commercial imperatives were never so dominant, but it was otherwise in the United States, the privileged scene of the revolt against consumer society.

On the Road Again

The March on Washington of August 1963 for negro civil rights had such an impact that in less than one year, despite the assassination of President Kennedy, legislation was passed that put an end to racial discrimination, at least on paper. Economic and social discrimination, however, continued, protected by the white police, as the preacher Malcolm X had announced, assassinated in February 1965, and as the riots in Watts demonstrated in August of the same year, which led Frank Zappa to write a song about the days when people who were not black were attacked for being white, "Trouble Comin' Every Day", which was later released on the Mothers album, *Freak Out!*

Norman Mailer, in “The White Negro”, pointed out: “Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day, and no experience can ever be casual to him, no Negro can saunter down a street with any real certainty that violence will not visit him on his walk.” The need for self-defense led to a radicalization of Afro-Americans, and the formation of the Black Panther Party in October 1966. The marijuana used in the ghetto, the rebirth of black pride and the new tactics of black self-defense had an enormous influence on the white rebels of the sixties. Furthermore, the civil rights struggle was reinforced by opposition to the War in Vietnam. By rebelling against the war, young people were also protesting against the society that provoked it, and indicting the class interests that lay behind it. The demands for racial equality, peace, free dialogue, the decriminalization of drugs and uninhibited sexuality, clashed with a hypocritical morality created to defend inequality, exploitation, political authoritarianism and the patriarchal family, the foundations of the system. If anarchism and Marxism in their many versions were insufficient to explain the modern revolt, Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, advocated by the non-violent, socially self-marginalized types that began to be called *hippies*—in the sense of Bohemians, followers of the *beat* tradition and readers of Alan Watts—offered ways to disconnect from the system, internally and externally, and to simultaneously seek harmony with the universe, ideas that were not very congenial with the idea of revolution preached by anarchism and Marxism. This contradiction was not a cause of factionalism during the period of the build-up to the crisis, when its exacerbation was assumed to necessarily lead to less confused and more efficacious theoretical-practical perspectives. The spread of Maoism, Fanonism and Guevarism, the outcome of the identification of the dissidents with the false enemies of the system, that is, communist China, the Castro regime and the national liberation movements, helped prevent this confusion from being dissipated. There were musicians like Country Joe [of Country Joe and the Fish] who fell into the trap, as “Country Joe” was the *nom de guerre* used by Stalin; or like Joan Baez, who paid homage to La Pasionaria, the worst kind of Stalinist sleazebag; there were others, however, who did not fall into the trap, like the sardonic Frank Zappa, who referred to both left wingers and right wingers as people who were “prisoners of the same narrow-minded, superficial phoniness”. For many people, however, spiritual experience was more important than political experience. This is why social liberation was reduced to “freeing your mind”, as William Blake advocated in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, a poem quoted in 1954 by the essayist Aldous Huxley: “for when the doors of perception are cleansed, ‘everything appears to man as it is—infinite’.” After reading Huxley’s book about his experiences with peyote, *The Doors of Perception*, Jim Morrison was inspired to call his group “The Doors”. Morrison himself discussed the impulse that led him to explore what he understood by the limits of reality: “I used to think the whole thing was a big joke. I used to think it was something to laugh about. And then the last couple of nights I met some people who were doing somethin’! They’re tryin’ to change the world! And I wanna get on that trip!” The grass, the LSD, the mescaline and the mantras were more appropriate for this kind of liberating change, understood as a mental “trip”, than the classic methods of agitation. This is why the ritual good times of festivals were preferable to protest marches. The counterculture press spoke of a “new concept of celebration” emerging from within people in such a manner that the revolution could be conceived as “a rebirth of compassion, conscience, love and the revelation of the unity of all human beings”. This is the path that rock

followed. LSD, still legal, popularized by Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters (the author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) and Neal Cassady (the Dean Moriarty of *On the Road*), produced in vast quantities and distributed for free at the big hippie festivals, was the vehicle that got musicians and their audiences—which were at first not strictly separated, since the community environment was standard in these milieus—high. The Grateful Dead, the death that announced rebirth—and therefore something to be grateful for—were “the group” of the hippies *par excellence*. In *The Electric-Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe described the band through the mouth of one of his characters: “The Dead’s weird sound! Agony-in-ecstasy! Submarine somehow, turbid half the time, tremendously loud but like sitting under a waterfall, at the same time full of sort of ghoulish vibrato sounds as if each string on their electric guitars is half a block long and twanging in a room full of natural gas, not to mention their great Hammond electric organ, which sounds like a movie house Wurlitzer, a diathermy machine, a Citizen’s Band radio and an Auto-Grind garbage truck at 4 A.M., all coming over the same frequency....” Eric Burdon ironically dedicated one of his songs to Sandoz, the multinational corporation that manufactured acid (its current name is Novartis). In January 1966, psychedelic music lifted off with the LP, *You’re Gonna Miss Me*, by the garage band, the 13th Floor Elevators, the first band to refer to their music as psychedelic, created under the influence of hallucinogens. It should be noted, by the way, that the letter, “M”, the first letter in the word, “Marijuana”, is the 13th letter of the alphabet. Drugs would not be mentioned in the band’s lyrics, however; similarly, during the same period, another trailblazing band, The Charlatans, saw how their record label would not allow their version of the song, “Codeine”, written by the folk singer-songwriter Buffy St. Marie, to appear on one of their albums because it was about codeine addiction. The new philosophy was summarized by Timothy Leary at the big hippie gathering in 1967 in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, the *Human Be-In*, with a laconic phrase: “Turn on, tune in, drop out.”

Acid was the ingredient that made the fusion of rock, folk, blues, soul, free jazz and country possible, producing the music of the American revolution. It purged the frustrated urban middle class of its negativity, giving the fugitives from the complacency which that lifestyle offered a positive, simple and free vision of the future, but which seemed to function in homogeneous, relatively small, collectives that fed on the scraps of the empire. The radical *yippie* Abbie Hoffman, in his book suggestively entitled, *Steal This Book*, recounted hundreds of alternative experiences that functioned outside of the circuits of money. In a leaflet entitled, “Plans for the Destruction of the Universities”, reproduced in his other book, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, he recommended building a radical community, while simultaneously claiming: “Our message is always: Do what you want. Take chances. Extend your boundaries. Break the rules.” Young musicians, both British and American, were not far behind and sought new sounds to express previously unexplored states of mind. To convey these states of mind, two- or three-minute long songs were insufficient, as were the little 45 rpm singles; the big LPs were more suitable. In 1966, “Good Vibrations”, by the Beach Boys, was released as part of an unfinished LP [*Smile*]; that same year, “Paint It Black” was released on the American version of the Rolling Stones album, *Aftermath*; and finally, that same year, the Beatles LP, *Revolver*, was released; seeking to cultivate a less frivolous image, the Beatles

abandoned their pop orientation and decided not to perform at any more live concerts. Technology had a major impact on the listening experience. Recording studios facilitated all kinds of mixing. New sound effects for guitar were made possible by pedals that the performer operated with his feet, producing the sounds referred to as *wah-wah* and *fuzz*, as exemplified in the songs, “Voodoo Child” and “Purple Haze”, by Jimi Hendrix. The Mellotron, the predecessor of *samplers*, allowed the musician to use a keyboard to reproduce sounds that had been previously recorded on tape (the trumpets of “Strawberry Fields Forever” were produced in this way). We could recite a whole list of various instruments like electric violins, twelve-string guitars, various keyboard instruments, the theremin, banjos, sitars, bongos, bottles, etc., which added their grains of sand to the forge of psychedelic rock. One band, Lothar and the Hand People, which produced an extraordinary *Space Hymn*, listed its Moog synthesizer (“Lothar”) as the leader of the group. The main characteristic of psychedelic music was improvisation. Songs were subject to momentary invention, live, on stage, and gave way to long, spontaneous guitar solos, expressing an escape with acid from the neurotic life of the city that absorbed everyday reality. We may randomly cite as examples: “Eight Miles High”, by The Byrds; “The Pusherman” by Steppenwolf; the album, *East West* by The Paul Butterfield Blues Band (the whole album is one long instrumental song); “The End”, by The Doors; and all the live performances of the Grateful Dead, from “Viola Lee Blues” to “Morning Dew”. We could also cite the eerie song, “Sister Ray”, by the Velvet Underground, but this band was situated at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum from the world of the hippies, belonging instead to a pessimistic and self-destructive scene that substituted heroin for acid. Although Canned Heat and Janis Joplin instilled acid into the blues more effectively than any other bands, and the Jefferson Airplane captured the hippie spirit in memorable songs like “Somebody to Love”, it was the charismatic performers of the Dead, a group whose members displayed incredible musical talents, that served as the models for psychedelic creation and music par excellence during the generalized decline of the genre at the end of the decade. Listening to them these days, one understands that without rock, life would have been a mistake.

We Are the Volunteers of America

San Francisco, and particularly the Haight Ashbury district, full of dilapidated mansions where various well-known rock groups lived, became a pole of attraction for the hippies. John Phillips, of The Mamas and the Papas, composed a song for Scott McKenzie that began with the verse, “If you're going to San Francisco/Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair”, perfectly capturing the beauty of the moment. The local authorities were alarmed over the prospect of a possible invasion of vagabonds and bohemian *freaks*, in expectation of which about thirty counterculture collectives, including the Family Dog commune, the Diggers, the Straight Theater and the underground newspaper, *The San Francisco Oracle*, with the assistance of local churches, organized a “Summer of Love”, a summer festival where everything would be free: music, food, acid, medical care, clothing, sex.... The Monterey Pop Festival attracted a huge crowd. San Francisco filled up with adolescent runaways, curiosity-seekers, people with nowhere else to go, drug addicts, drug dealers, small-time crooks, freeloaders.... The success of the Summer of Love surpassed the expectations of even the most optimistic of its organizers, threatening

the very existence of the Haight Ashbury community to the point that it staged a “Hippie Funeral” in October, a festival where it was insistently recommended that the dropouts should stay home and carry out the revolution in their own home towns because the revolution in San Francisco was already finished. Now it was the turn of the Flower Children, the children of the comfortable classes who dressed up in garish multicolored flowery shirts on the weekends and wore headbands in their hair. A rudimentary Zen for idiots served them as a sort of alibi. The Seeds wrote an anthem for them. The hippie style was transformed into a fashion and the *freaks* abandoned the city, leaving it to the tourists. Music lost its soul, and once again became entertainment. Concert organizers began to charge for admission. The free and disorderly counterculture was transformed into a planned product of consumption. The industry of the spectacle accumulated more power, buying off the best artists in every band in order to turn them into pop stars at the beck and call of the almighty dollar. If the Airplane’s *Surrealistic Pillow* represented the face of psychedelic music, the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* represented its demise, its well remunerated rise to official status. The Mothers of Invention depicted a grotesque parody of this Beatles album cover on the cover of their own album entitled, *We’re Only In It For the Money*. We would have been more forgiving of the Beatles if they had not accepted the BBC’s invitation to write a song reflecting all the flower power themes, “All You Need Is Love”, broadcast for the first time to the whole world via satellite. Those were bad times for real peace and love; the hawks who wanted to escalate the war in Vietnam were not impressed by the hippie incantations. Deserters, however, were organizing, racial minorities were engaging in armed self-defense, demonstrations were organized to march on the Pentagon and Wall Street, the universities were being occupied, and initially peaceful demonstrations ended in violent confrontations with the police. In 1968, non-violence seemed to lose its purchase on reality, following events instead of leading them. The streets were in turmoil. In March, a huge anti-war demonstration in peaceful London in front of the American embassy ended with many of the demonstrators being beaten by the police. The Rolling Stones released a single, “Street Fighting Man”, with an image of police violence on its cover. The cover of the LP that included the song, *Beggars’ Banquet*, featuring a photograph of a wall with offensive graffiti, was also censored. A good background for what was probably the best song of the decade, “Sympathy for the Devil”, the bastard offspring of “The Flowers of Evil” and “The Master and Margarita” by Baudelaire, and Bulgakov, respectively, the latter work having appeared posthumously in 1966, a merciless denunciation of the bureaucratic paranoia of the Stalinist regime, which for its part had silenced Bulgakov throughout his entire life. The Rolling Stones was the only rock group that paid any attention to the French May, and obviously that month did not serve as a theme for any rock n’ roll repertoire.

In the United States, a police patrol opened fire indiscriminately in Orangeburg, South Carolina, on a demonstration of black students, killing three and wounding twenty-eight. Martin Luther King was assassinated by a sniper. The FBI was engaged in its criminal enterprise to put an end to what was designated as Public Enemy Number One of the State, the Black Panther Party. With so many killings, the days of the tactic of non-violence were numbered. Many people concluded that the system could not be changed by way of good deeds, and began to plan instead to change it by way of bad ones. The

anti-war movement played its last trump card in Chicago, however, where the National Convention of the Democratic Party was scheduled to take place in August to select the party's presidential candidate. The radicals convoked a demonstration of a festive type. Graham Nash, of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, later wrote a song about the events. No radio station in Chicago dared to play "Street Fighting Man", which had just been released prior to the Convention, for fear of inciting violence, although no one had called for any fighting. As usual, the demonstrators put their faith in the media impact of alternative actions as an instrument of political pressure. Various rock groups had indicated their intention to attend the demonstration, but in the end only the MC5, the vanguard of the White Panther Party, which considered rock music as a revolutionary weapon, showed up. Norman Mailer covered the events for *Harper's* magazine and William Burroughs covered it for *Esquire*. At first everything proceeded peacefully; the pig, Pegasus, was named as presidential candidate amidst great merriment, but the repressive zeal of the democratic mayor exacerbated the situation and the war against the war ended in street fighting. There were large numbers of injured persons and many people were arrested, leading to a trial of the most famous radicals. In November, Richard Nixon won the presidential election, which made it very likely that there would be more repression and zero tolerance not just for radicalism, as was demonstrated by the assassinations of Black Panther militants, but also of ordinary delinquency, as was demonstrated by the sentencing of John Sinclair to ten years in prison for the possession of two joints. With tempers still running high, the Woodstock Music Festival was announced for August 1969 in New York State, with an impressive lineup of rock groups. Approximately half a million people attended, many more than were expected. The organization of the concert was chaotic, it rained the whole time and some of those who showed up to see the show, including the Motherfuckers, "a gang with an analysis", were furious because they were denied entry. They broke down the fences and everyone occupied their couple of square feet in the mud. The monetary losses were subsequently recouped by the sales of the record album and the box office receipts from the movie. The radicals distributed their propaganda, spoke of peace and love, and called for the release of Sinclair; all with a sense of déjà vu. Jimi Hendrix "deconstructed" the Star-Spangled Banner before an audience that was half-asleep. Woodstock represented the new conformism of the American youth, comprised for the most part of white people without any economic problems, incapable of doing anything but keeping quiet, "going with the flow", while watching musicians who had been turned into stars by those who felt a fetishistic devotion towards them, with the good conscience of just being there: "There is never anything but the present", as Alan Watts would say. Herding together passed for fraternity, and getting high passed for liberation. These "beautiful people" would commit themselves for nothing in the world, nor would they participate in anything more serious than a rock concert. Woodstock reproduced the spectacular separation between audience and actors, between reality and image, the one being as irrelevant as the other is profitable. It was nothing but a sum of acts of no subversive importance at all in an atmosphere of cliché rebelliousness and fictitious ecstasy, an apparent ruin that would later give way to a real coup de grace, as if to confirm the pessimistic vision of the film released that same year, *Easy Rider*, directed by Dennis Hopper, which concludes with its hippie protagonists being gunned down by "real" Americans. A little cross-country tour that ended badly. A premonition. In September the

Chicago Eight were brought to trial, charged with conspiracy and incitement to violence. There was a great deal of concern that the trial would prove to be an occasion for rioting, and Nixon sent the National Guard to suppress demonstrations at gunpoint. In court, the defendants took advantage of the opportunity to turn the tables on their accusers and ridicule the American justice system. Bobby Seale, the leader of the Black Panthers, called the judge a fascist pig, which caused him to be tried separately and to be sentenced to four years in prison for contempt of court. The other defendants, without any convincing evidence of wrongdoing on their part, were released. That same month, the apostle of LSD, Timothy Leary, pursued his own private grudge against the government of the United States by running for governor of California against the ultra-conservative Ronald Reagan. The Beatles wrote the song, "Come Together", for his bizarre campaign. The song was boycotted by the BBC because the censors thought that the line, "he shoot Coca-Cola" was a reference to cocaine. Leary, who had in the meantime publicly repudiated drugs, was later sentenced to ten years for two marijuana "roaches" found in his possession during a police search.

This Is the End, My Only Friend, the End

Since bad things always come in threes, some geniuses thought there should be a repeat of the Woodstock Festival on the west coast. The San Francisco police had already closed off the city to any more festivals, so that in the end the Altamont Speedway, in northern California, was chosen as the site for the next Free Festival. The Rolling Stones were the lead act at this festival, whose security was supposed to be handled by the Hell's Angels, a motorcycle gang that was an inveterate enemy of the whole hippie scene. As it turned out, both the audience and the Hell's Angels were kept busy. Alcohol mixed with amphetamines, a psychotropic drug that causes hyperactivity, was consumed in addition to LSD, and this led to stampedes and fights that affected musicians as well as members of the audience. Four deaths marked the end of the "Woodstock Nation" only four months after its inauguration. And so the *groovy* good-times scene came to an end. At Altamont, the drugged and enraged creeps attending the festival could not even endure each other's presence and in their hysterical breakdown they suffered the consequences of the lack of self-control of a security team that performed its task in the same way that the police would have. It was not just the worst day of rock, it was the death of rock as it had existed up until that time. It was being transformed into just another component of mass culture and a real business capable of profiting from any situation. When, on March 4, 1970, the National Guard opened fire on college students at Kent State University, in Ohio, killing four of them, the cycle of the American revolution came to a close. Neil Young, of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, wrote a moving protest song entitled, "Ohio". It was a hit, but it did no good; the murderers were never brought to justice. Young later expressed his regret that in the end the deaths of the students had only made money for him. On May 15 of the same year, police opened fire on students at Jackson State University in Mississippi who were protesting against the American invasion of Cambodia, killing two and wounding fourteen. And on June 10, after months of rioting, police sent by governor Reagan brutally attacked students at the University of California at Santa Barbara who were demonstrating in the Perfect Park of Isla Vista against the imposition of martial law in the area, which was a major hotspot of radicalism. After

serious fighting, hundreds were arrested. A formerly clean-cut, preppy beach-culture band whose music was improved by drugs produced a song based on “Riot in Cell Block #9” [a 1954 R&B number one hit song] and called it “Student Demonstration Time”, dedicating the song to the rebel students, with no repercussions: a whole year had already passed since the riots at Santa Barbara, the song was not released as a single and ... the group that recorded the song was the Beach Boys, the group that, it should be recalled, got its start with another remake in a totally different sense than the original, when it transformed Chuck Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen” into the cloyingly sweet “Surfin’ USA”. *Show business* and the record industry had boldly stolen a march on the dissidents (the forces of law and order and hard drugs had, of course, already cleared the way for its success). That same month, in June 1970, the *Cincinnati Summer Pop Festival* took place in Ohio, featuring such cutting-edge bands as The Stooges and Grand Funk Railroad. In August 1970 there was an attempt to reprise the “magic” of Woodstock at Goose Lake, Michigan, sponsored in part by the White Panthers and the STP Coalition—Serve the People or Stop the Pigs, depending on who was asked—that were working for the release of Sinclair and all other political prisoners. The date chosen for the festival was not mere coincidence; it was the 25th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that is, the ostensible idea of the festival was to protest against nuclear war. But this message was nothing but a decorative excuse. Both old and new groups performed at the concert, all composed of white band members, among which we will mention in particular, besides the militant bands from Detroit, Chicago and Ten Years After, before a crowd of two hundred thousand people, most of whom were stoned and provided few opportunities for action on the part of a friendly police force. The presence of heroin was notorious; drugs like heroin seemed to bring about the virtual unification of everything that in reality was separated. Oddly enough, people smoking joints, which were visible in abundance during the marijuana harvest, were not bothered by the police. Even for the least perspicacious individuals, this gave the event a bitter overtone of a circus environment, of a ghetto, of some kind of set-up, which without the slightest doubt marked the end of an era. Such festivals followed in rapid succession, in Toronto, on the Isle of Wight, and elsewhere, without causing the least concern among the forces of order. This was not because Power retreated before a fighting force that was itself not particularly avid for a fight, but rather because Power had modernized its tactics. For many people, hallucinogens were the only way to turn their backs on the values inculcated by the system, the road to the unity of the liberated individual, conscious of his innermost being, with the cosmos, and so it seemed at one time that the system was also aware of this, since it punished the individual’s transgression with fury. From the moment that the system itself transformed its values and adapted those of its critics, however, the function of drugs also changed: they were part of the mechanism of escape, and not only the opiates and the amphetamines, but also the sacred plants and mushrooms of the Indians, responded to a perverse desire for intoxication, not for consciousness, and were therefore so many tools of re-adaptation. The call to “*drop out*” was an invitation to turn one’s back on conventions and mores, leading to passivity, rather than to the revolutionary transformation of society. The venue of the outdoor festival, tolerant towards narcotics, served as an escape valve, a ceremonial of docile indifference, a relaxing pause between two moments of submission. On the one side the performer, on the other the drugged audience, and between them the bouncers. The stoned audience was limited to

reproducing stereotyped patterns of virtual rebelliousness, foreshadowing models of integration that would later be implemented by the cunning merchants of culture.

Advanced industrial society began to practice a kind of laissez-faire that it called tolerance, which was more suited to its interests. It was the kind of repressive tolerance that favored the tyranny of the status quo, since it corresponded to the necessary capitalist transition from conservatism to permissiveness. Consumer society is not ascetic and regulated, but hedonist and transgressive. With unusual haste, the spectacular-market society finally adopted a lax and utilitarian morality that was more in accord with its developmental needs and was no longer scandalized by anything. It did not even respect the dead: the corpses of Brian Jones, Keith Moon, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison were mercilessly transformed into mythic figures. Live fast, die young and leave a beautiful poster. And the system that had absorbed rock, transcendental meditation, psychoanalysis, sex and marijuana, did not have any trouble at all putting up with the messages of disillusionment and the histrionic and self-destructive behavior of the new rockers immersed in a rude and noisy musical style. Songs like Iggy Pop's "T.V. Eye" and Alice Cooper's "School's Out" no longer triggered censorship. The system, up to a point, looked the other way. There is no future, meaning no revolutionary future. If there were any events that clearly revealed the true face of the concealed fascism presided over by Nixon, they were the assassination of George Jackson, one of the "Soledad Brothers", at the hands of the prison guards at San Quentin on August 21, 1971, and the massacre of rioting prisoners at the prison in Attica, New York, ordered by governor Rockefeller a few weeks later. Bob Dylan recorded two acoustic versions of a song entitled, "George Jackson", and released them on a single, but they were never included on an LP. Tom Paxton called attention to the events at Attica with a ballad in the finest tradition of folk music, "The Hostage", and John Lennon himself composed a catchy little tune preaching an idealistic and outmoded pacifism for those who remained unconditionally faithful that dogma. It might have been the case that this was no time for singing, but with hundreds of militants turning to urban guerrilla warfare, it certainly was no time for upbeat pep-talks urging people to "come together, join the movement, take a stand for human rights" ["Attica State", 1972]. Dylan's advice from "Subterranean Homesick Blues" was more appropriate: "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." And in fact, "Weathermen" was the name chosen by the largest armed organization in America during the seventies.

The higher you go, the harder you fall. Like every epochal transition, the early years of the seventies saw the most authentic rock bands reach the peak of their creative powers during the worst years of the counterrevolution, producing works that satisfied the tastes of the moderately rebellious masses that comprised their fan base, before deciding to form part of the "silent majority" of Nixon and Agnew. Many of them refused to accept the role of idol which reflected the new conformist values, so they had no other recourse than to break up (The Beatles, The Doors) or become parodies of their former greatness (the Temptations, Sly and the Family Stone). The Rolling Stones, after *Exile on Main Street*, never stopped repeating themselves. Heroin, consumed by the ton, did not help much in this regard. Heroin elbowed acid out of circulation. There were some bands that gradually faded away, went into decline or ran out of steam (The Band, The Byrds, The

Kinks, The Who), not to mention others that bequeathed to posterity a boring and pretentious “opera rock”. Finally, there were groups that radically changed their style; as in the case of the Jefferson Starship, the shameful wreckage of the crash of the Airplane. On the other hand, legitimate rock music, whose representatives include Captain Beefheart (“Electricity”), Tom Petty, Lou Reed, Pattie Smith and the New York Dolls, went into decline and gradually became depoliticized. In a destructive, nihilist and angry context, where Chaos was the most appealing goal, the very word, “hippie”, acquired connotations of senility, idiocy and impotence. Beyond certain narrow circles of resisters, rock had lost its aura and, whether it remained faithful to its former commitments or yielded to escapism, was becoming predictable and routine, ostentatious and theatrical; a decadent music performed by narcissists for the entertainment of an onanistic youth that demanded its dose of symphonic alienation, or indeed alienation of any other kind. There was a total break with the blues, a loss of the connection of rock music with its negro roots, and consequently a complete dissipation of the rock n’ roll identity. The result was a certain kind of optimistic, intellectualized music, a music that tranquilized and relaxed the listener, the kind of music that exactly suited the new order. The mass concert was revealed to be the ideal way to congregate masses of young spectators prepared to rally around any progressive stupidity. Then, noble causes took the stage (like the concert to raise funds to help the massacred population of Bangladesh, organized by the former Beatle, George Harrison), where they were transformed into so many spectacles, allowing a passive audience to exhibit its hypocrisy and its fake commitment for the modest price of a concert ticket. The technological innovations of the seventies, such as samplers, synthesizers, and drum machines, swallowed the guitar, the bass and the drum kit. “Family Affair”, by Sly and the Family Stone, was the first song to be made with these drum machines, which became very common a few years later with the onset of *disco*. The new rock, moreover, was not so much music as circus: it established a relation with its audience mediated by the image and *glamour*. The *rock star* [*vedette*] relied on hairstylists, make-up artists, costumers, canned gestures, and television, more than on his or her talent. Separation is the rule in the spectacle that is preserved in the holy communion with the image of the “idol”, whether by way of staged sensationalism [“*shock*”: in English in the original] or by *getting high* on drugs. At home, the promotional music video acquired great importance; at live performances, the show was revolutionized with all kinds of special effects, logos, light shows, fireworks, fog machines, visual projections, cranes, catwalks, platforms, choreography.... The “fan” became the perfect domesticated animal. The deafening noise of the increasingly more powerful speakers combined with the drugs, the pills and the mineral water to induce a kind of autistic frenzy in the audience, a masturbatory form of stupefaction. This self-induced masochistic frenzy became generalized with the resurgence of discotheques, only now bigger and more well-designed than their predecessors, which gave the coup de grace to live music in pubs, theaters and music halls. A repetitive and simple kind of music emerged that became enormously popular, *dance music*, organized by a new master of ceremonies, the DJ. Lyrics and chords were reduced to a minimum. The rhythm was simplified as much as possible and replaced the melody, which degenerated into a monotonous drone. A new audio device called the cassette tape promised to democratize the recording industry by making it accessible to any group, but it did not turn out that way because the function of pop music had changed. Now, the least important factor in

pop music was creativity; now pop just filled the vacuum of a life that was subject to the imperatives of consumption. The final result was always the same: conformism. In fact, the cassette constituted just one more step towards enclosure in private life and *cocooning*, bringing this kind of music where vinyl could not go, especially to the automobile, the prosthesis of the modern alienated individual and the symbol of his overwhelming powerlessness. Audiences became fragmented, diversifying the markets according to the age group and the type of consumer. It was the apotheosis of the hedonism and the permissiveness of the commodity: of the “rave”, of *fun*, of *cool* poses, of *hip* clothing. In short, the complete epiphany of the spectacle. Television increasingly performed the function of promoting this whole pile of musical trash. Authenticity came only at the cost of marginalization. This was the power of mass society. No alternative with pretensions of integrity could escape the narrow circle in which it was inscribed, succumbing to repetition and triviality at the hands of its followers, who were transformed into urban tribes. This is what happened to *heavy metal*, *reggae*, and *punk*. Rock music no longer served as a bulwark against modernized barbarism: it was a dead genre, a sterile medium, a ghost, a relic, a fraud. It was the music of the other side. Rock music used to exist because there were once many other interests at play, born in the shadow of the industry of escapism. The revolution and entertainment no longer walk hand in hand, the former having lost its playful-popular dimension and the latter having lost its subversive character. To be convinced of this you need only watch the incredibly mind-numbingly silly and superficial movie, *Rock ‘n’ Roll High School*. The failures of the revolutionary movements of the recent past can be more readily understood with reference to the regression that affected rock music, which reflected the victory of spectacular culture and the dissolution of the dangerous classes into masses of consumers. It is true that all the basic elements of this transition were already present in the sixties, but it was only in the subsequent decade that it developed exponentially. Since then, many musical styles with better or worse intentions, or with better or worse luck, have come and gone. None have broken out of their particular ghettos, because none were able to express the universal hopes for freedom and self-realization like the rock music of the sixties; none have taught us how to unlearn so much, or to so effectively question the status quo, or spurred so much protest. Rock caused two or three generations to stray from the beaten path all over the world by serving as the vehicle for a vital rebellion that was capable of leaving an indelible mark on the culture of a whole epoch.

Miguel Amorós, for *MISC*.
August 5, 2013

Translated in January 2018 from a revised copy of the original text entitled, “Rock para principiantes”, obtained from the author in December 2017. Published in Spanish in a paperback edition by Ediciones el Salmón /Argelaga, 2014.

The original Spanish text may be consulted online at:

Part one: <http://kaosenlared.net/rock-principiantes-primera-parte/>

Part two: <http://kaosenlared.net/rock-principiantes-segunda-parte/>