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The Rock Counterculture from Modernist Utopianism to the Development of an Alternative Music Scene

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Overcoming Rock's Resistance to Academic Enquiry

- 1 Academic rock criticism struggles with a perennial paradox: it targets an object that draws its legitimacy from rebellion and therefore resists academic enquiry (Glass 1992: 94–8). In *The Blackboard Jungle*, a film that served as promotional vehicle for Bill Haley and the Comets' 'Rock around the Clock', rebellious students shatter the jazz records of a teacher who misguidedly seeks to connect to their popular-music interests. Similarly, rock has generated anti-school anthems – Chuck Berry's 'School Days' or Alice Cooper's 'School's Out'. Such songs pre-emptively disqualify observers who claim to view the music with critical distance or who avail themselves of a theoretical apparatus external to it. Nevertheless, academic studies devoted to rock have developed since the 1970s, particularly in the Anglo-American world. Yet, compared for instance to film studies, their methodology remains tentative: there is no consensus about the aesthetic function of the practices they study or about the latter's social role. Artistic excellence is still an object of internal debate within rock itself. For a limited period of rock's history – the late 1960s and early 1970s – musicians made technical and aesthetic achievement a requirement for rock musicianship, thereby laying the foundations of a culture of professionalism. Still, numerous fans, musicians or academic pundits privilege the opposite option: they single out non-art and raw entertainment as the proper terrain for rock music (Shumway 1990: 122). It is therefore difficult to elaborate a critical discourse about rock whose legitimacy is anchored in the analysis of musical codes and techniques of artistic production.
- 2 Similar uncertainties affect the music's social impact. While rock's definition always includes the display of rebellious behaviour and values, the nature and social function of the rebellion thus implied are not easily circumscribed. Rock has admittedly been a catalyst for political and social movements with an emancipatory momentum: anti-Vietnam war protests, the construction of new gender roles or the struggle against segregation (Pratt 1990: 1–3). Counterexamples abound, however. Feminist critics have pointed out that emancipation in rock music mostly fulfils the aspirations of a predominantly masculine audience. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber point out that rock marks itself out from pop according to a gender barrier. Rock fans and critics predictably favour the masculine pole of this binary – rock itself (1976: 220). Simon Reynolds and Joy Press underscore the misogyny of rock lyrics (1995: xiii–xvii), a phenomenon also expressed, as Sheila Whiteley indicates, in the phallic display of instruments (1997a: xix). Beyond sexism, rock has also served the needs of extreme-right-wing cultures (the racist component of Oi! and of the skinhead subculture). As Michael Moore points out in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, it can act as a soundtrack for military operations (2004). Above all, rebelliousness itself might only be a smokescreen concealing a tacit assent to capitalist mass culture. The music would in this case be a mere propaganda channel. It would deserve the stringent criticism Theodor Adorno, the leading figure of the Frankfurt School, targeted at the musical idiom he derogatorily called 'jazz' (1994: 206).

- 3 From the perspective of cultural studies, the semantic instability of rock rebellion is symptomatic of the music's wavering between several modes of social insertion. Rock hesitates between three planes of social practice: its capacity to act as the voice of counterculture, as the fabric of subcultures and, less glamorously, as purveyor of standardised mass entertainment. Counterculture, Andy Bennett writes in the present volume, promises 'a fully-fledged alternative lifestyle' leading for instance to the creation of a 'physical, alternative community' (Introduction 'Reappraising "Counterculture"': XXX). Subcultures have a more limited scope: their social base is narrower and their practices, however oppositional, cannot define an alternative to dominant society able to confederate substantial segments of any given population. Ironically, the limited ambitions of subcultures have made them more compatible with academic study than counterculture. Researchers who offer a sympathetic account of counterculture must endorse a political programme whose legitimacy lies beyond the supposedly neutral scope of the social sciences: the sweeping change promised by counterculture is more the object of a teleological philosophy of history than of sociology. Worse, since the hippie movement serves as anchorage point for the rock counterculture, researchers in this field act as covert champions of a revolutionary agenda that, contrary to their own methodology, disregards rational argumentation. Subcultures, on the contrary, are manageable research objects in so far as they can be documented without subscribing to the group's own aims. Still, rock academics – in particular the neo-Marxists who pioneered the scholarly study of this mode of expression (Simon Frith, Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie, Lawrence Grossberg, Andrew Goodwin) – seldom settle for this distanced approach. They entertain the hope that rock might play a role similar to proletarian struggles: it should rank among the modes of expression carrying out, to paraphrase the title of a famous collection of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 'resistance through rituals' (Hall and Jefferson 1976). In other words, academics' relation to rock is informed by the implicit hope that, 'depending on local socio-economic, cultural and demographic circumstances', the music may turn out to be countercultural after all (Bennett, 'Reappraising': XXX). Beyond the plurality of subcultures, there is the lingering hope that counterculture might coalesce again, endowed with the momentum attributed to previous revolutionary movements.
- 4 The present argument re-examines these issues along two interrelated axes. On the one hand, it situates rock rebellion in the framework of twentieth-century modernist artistic protest and on the other it specifies how rock's countercultural aspirations have in spite of their ostensibly ephemeral nature durably reconfigured the social field. Against the temptation of rock musicians, fans and reviewers to confer to music an aura of exceptionalism defying academic rationality, it is indeed useful to point out that comparable forms of cultural rebellion have been attempted earlier, both within popular culture and outside of it. Secondly, one must determine how even practices that disown any social and aesthetic appropriation prove meaningful. Rock's anti-theoretical gestures, however resilient, cannot help generating socially significant behaviours and codes. The topic of the present chapter is therefore the swing of the pendulum between the rejection of any mode of social inscription and the construction of a field of alternative practices: one must think out how rock's centrifugal gestures leave their mark in the cultural field in the form of musical pieces, but also practices, territories and institutions. The corpus on which these reflections are based stretches

from the 1950s to the 1980s, comprising early rock and roll, classic rock (psychedelic and post-psychedelic music), punk and post-punk.

The Transfiguration of Everyday Life: Rock's Utopian Discourse

- 5 In order to carry out the theoretical agenda outlined above, I anchor counterculture in the concept of utopia as it was elaborated by (post)modernist theoreticians Fredric Jameson and Ihab Hassan. Utopia, in this logic, refers to the desire to transfigure everyday life. The present argument builds on the premise that, in the field of rock, the refusal of co-optation (social, academic, even artistic) gives voice to the resolution to transcend alienation, thereby opening a perspective that is utopian in the literal meaning of the term. Several academic critics have given heed to this aspect of rock music (Grossberg 1983–84: 111; Pratt 1990: 21). Even 1950s rock and roll nurtures ambitions to go beyond mere entertainment: the affective intensity surrounding this music suggests that it carries the hope to access a field incommensurable with past or present. Chuck Berry claims that rock and roll must 'deliver [us] from the days of old', and lead us to the 'promised land' (1957, 1964); Eddie Cochran states that the music opens the gates of a 'teenage heaven' (Cochran and Capehart 1959). This teenage mythology prefigures the central utopian moment of rock's counterculture – late-1960s psychedelic music. At that time, the hope to transcend everydayness was voiced through images depicting the end of alienation as a magical metamorphosis – a 'secular illumination', to take up the term used by Walter Benjamin in reference to surrealism (Benjamin 1986: 179). In George Dunning's *Yellow Submarine* cartoon (1968), the Beatles' beneficial influence restores the colourful scenery of Pepperland, a country that had lost all pigment when it came under the sway of a caste of music-hating dictators – the 'Blue Meanies'. Joni Mitchell's 'Woodstock' utters the hope that the collective fervour of the famous festival might turn US Vietnam War bombers into 'butterflies' (1970). In 'Purple Haze', Jimi Hendrix claims he can 'kiss the sky' in a mist of dreams and hallucinogenic drugs (1967). Like many of his contemporaries, Hendrix implements thereby the programme previously sketched out by the members of the Beat movement (Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs) or by Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary and Carlos Castañeda – authors who looked to drugs for a shamanistic transcendence of everyday experience. Beyond their glowing accents, these emancipatory visions are apocalyptic in the religious meaning of the term: achieving revelation requires the annihilation of the present. Rock's utopian discourse therefore develops a darker side, more obsessed with destruction than with the hopeful outcome of transfiguration. In the late 1960s, the latter accents were sounded in the music of the Doors and the Velvet Underground (see Warner in this volume), and worked their way into late-1970s punk and post-punk. Punk's nihilism as well as post-punk's apparent surrender to alienation give voice to utopian desire by some sort of mirror logic: they gesture toward the possibility of a non-alienated existence by highlighting the latter's absence from the actual state of society (Reynolds 2005: xxi).
- 6 Ironically, if utopian desire legitimises fans' and musicians' distrust of all co-optation, it also enables academic researchers to position the rock counterculture within twentieth-century art: utopian aspirations have their own ascertainable history. Taking this historical narrative into account makes it possible to analyse rock in a broader

frame than the customary US or British context. In so far as it seeks to transfigure everydayness, rock appropriates a key component of the aesthetic programme of modernism (Bradbury and Macfarlane 1976: 13). Egyptian-American theorist Ihab Hassan – who was with Leslie Fiedler, Charles Jencks and Daniel Bell one of the first to elaborate the concept of postmodernism – ranks among the definitional features of early-twentieth-century art the desire to free oneself from a round of life perceived as inauthentic (Hassan 1987: 35–7). Hassan's reading grid is representative of the analysis of modernism developed by Anglo-American critics: as far as artistic and literary production goes, some of the most influential figures of Anglo-American modernism – W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis – were innovative in the field of aesthetics yet fiercely critical of the social reality of modernity – a stance that drove them paradoxically toward political conservatism. As they lived in a world subjected to what Marxist theoreticians such as Georg Lukács and Theodor Adorno call reification and alienation, high modernist artists tried to reach for aesthetic absolutes outside of everyday life – in fields such as the unconscious, archaic civilisations and geometrical abstraction (Hassan 1987: 36; Lukács 1971: 110; Adorno 1984: 39). Hassan adds that, with the advent of postmodernism in the late 1950s, the aesthetic rejection of the social world lost its radicalism. The artistic practices that emerged at that point – the neo-romanticism of the Beat movement, John Cage's happenings, Pop Art – no longer disown everyday life but greet it instead as a field of artistic experimentation (Hassan 1987: 91). In our perspective, what Hassan interprets as an artistic about-turn – the passage from modernism to postmodernism – only designates a shift in the initial modernist project: the aspiration to emancipation is voiced as clearly in the newer as in the older movements, yet in a more pragmatic and optimistic fashion.

- 7 It is not necessary in these pages to determine how exactly the labels modernism or postmodernism apply to rock music. Suffice it to note that rock has its place in this cultural grid. It is crucial, however, to take stock of the fact that the struggle against alienation has been as relevant to mass culture as it has been to canonical art: this existential issue manifests itself in total disregard of barriers of cultural capital. Utopian desire, shared by both modernist art and rock music, has informed phenomena as diverse as all variants of the star system – nineteenth-century operatic divas, the Wagner craze, Hollywood films – or, in less commendable fashion, sectarian cults and the collective spectacles of totalitarianism. Each of these movements gives voice to the aspiration to transfigure and transcend modernity.
- 8 Admittedly, the above list mentions cultural practices alien to the supposedly emancipatory impulses of counterculture. Utopianism can, however, be defined so as to negotiate this paradox. American neo-Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, taking his cue from German philosopher Ernst Bloch, contends that the term utopian may designate cultural phenomena that are nefarious in appearance, yet that still give expression to legitimate aspirations if they are given their righteous place in the history of human emancipation (Jameson 1992: 30; 1971: 133, 156). If we follow Jameson's argument, the counterfactual claims of occultism must, for instance, be weighed against the laudable aspiration to a holistic world view informing the latter doctrines. Likewise, rock's violence may be interpreted as an alienated expression of the desire to cope with the industrial environment, which sets similarly violent energies in motion. On this basis, Jameson demonstrates that mass culture, contrary to what Frankfurt School theoreticians alleged, manifests a desire for emancipation comparable to what Bloch calls the 'Principle of Hope' (Bloch 1976: iii; Jameson 1992: 31). In this light, the most

objectionable aspects of the politics of rock – sexism, extreme-right-wing sympathies – amount to signs of an unfulfilled project. They are symptoms, to take up Jameson's terminology, of the impact of 'symbolic containment structures'; concessions to hegemonic social discourses that artists simultaneously contest (Jameson 1992: 25).

The Practical Legacy of Utopia: Rock's Field of Restricted Production

- 9 Under the term 'containment', Jameson designates both explicit censorship procedures as well as structural constraints interiorised by cultural producers. Typically, containment manifests itself within works in the form of contradictions expressing the conflict between emancipation and repression. One thinks for instance of the last scene of Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991), where the two heroines enjoy their first homosexual kiss at the very moment when their car flies off the road and tumbles into a canyon: no sooner does the emancipatory gesture flicker on screen than it is annihilated, sparing the director the task of representing a lesbian relationship of long standing in an everyday context. However productive this reading method, it has to be completed with an approach that takes into account containment factors unrelated to conservative cultural politics. Overall, rock's momentum is bounded by the horizon of social reality – by the various obstacles (empirical, political, social) against which aesthetic projects contend. One must reckon with the fact that utopian impulses only enjoy partial fulfilment in the field of practice. They must therefore be evaluated as a function of the residual accomplishments they leave in their wake – the practices, works and social changes their empowering momentum makes possible.
- 10 Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of the cultural field does justice to the double movement depicted above – the centrifugal, utopian momentum and its residual sedimentation. As he investigates modern art, Bourdieu focuses less on what creators sought to achieve in purely aesthetic terms than on the social changes issuing from their practice. Bourdieu's admiration for Charles Baudelaire, for instance, does not target the poet's idealistic aestheticism: the latter only fuels what Bourdieu calls 'charismatic ideology' – the parasitical worship of great artists (1993: 34). Baudelaire's genius, according to Bourdieu, resides instead in his capacity to remodel the social field: the poet inaugurated a new space for artists, which Bourdieu calls the field of 'autonomous' or 'restricted production' (ibid.: 53, 58). This space obeys a paradoxical logic, opposite to that of the economic field. Against the bourgeois criteria of social ascension, the prestige afforded by restricted production is measured not by the pursuit of, but by the degree of autonomy achieved with regard to financial success – by 'disinterestedness' (ibid.: 40). Only recognition by one's peers – respect among the community of artists – provides validation for success (ibid.: 116). The legacy of artistic utopianism is therefore not to be found in artistic works themselves: it manifests itself in the emancipatory gestures that redraw the social and cultural field – gestures made possible by artists' capacity to evaluate the 'system of *objectively possible cultural positions*' available at a given period (ibid.: 385, emphasis in original).
- 11 Bourdieu's model, which was elaborated for the analysis of canonical modernism, seems difficult to transpose to mass culture. In Bourdieu's perspective, commercial art is by definition 'heteronomous' (1993: 129): it subjects its practices to economic imperatives alien to autonomous creation. But in the same way as Jameson discerns

utopian aspirations in commercial art, an observer intent on broadening the scope of Bourdieu's theory will discern in rock music practices equivalent to restricted production. The development of a field of artistic autonomy – indeed of a popular avant-garde – within American music is admittedly older than rock and roll itself: it dates back to 1940s and 1950s experimental jazz (Charlie Parker, Miles Davis), which served as soundtrack for the Beat movement (Stowe 1994: 224–6). A similar phenomenon within rock emerged in the mid-1960s, when Bob Dylan chose to go electric, the Beatles progressed toward psychedelic music, and Jimi Hendrix released his first recordings. Mid-1960s rock musicians created a field of restricted production through their claims to musical excellence, originality and radical behaviour (Walser 1993: 61). By rejecting the censorship bearing upon commercial music, they traced out the line between autonomous and heteronomous practice. As in the avant-garde, the divide between leisure music and rock was defined by a constant struggle pitting musicians and fans against production companies and the media – conflicts over songwriting, sonic texture or the artwork of LP covers (Scaduto 1975: 220). What Andrew Goodwin calls the artists' 'star text' (1993: 98) – the narrative out of which their public image is constructed – feeds on this struggle, and makes it possible to position musicians in the cultural field, or to sketch out their itinerary towards a higher or lower level of autonomy (Walser 1993: 61–3). One of the durable achievements of this bid for empowerment exactly fulfils the criteria of restricted production defined by Bourdieu: as of the late 1960s, rock developed its own culture of professionalism, generating a specialised media sphere that confers to musicians, fans and journalists the prerogative to act as arbiters of musical autonomy (Frith 1981: 228; Théberge 1991: 272).

- 12 To most rock historians, the mid-1960s artistic shift evoked above marks the birth of the rock counterculture: rock and roll's naïve celebration of teenage pleasure gave way to politically resonant, artistically ambitious 'progressive' rock (Frith 1981: 21). Yet in the present perspective, the field of restricted production taking shape at this landmark moment overlaps with, yet does not entirely merge with counterculture itself. It constitutes instead the fabric of practices out of which a countercultural moment may emerge when artistic choices interlock with counter-hegemonic determinants from outside the musical field. This implies that rock's field of restricted production obeys principles of development partially distinct from the concerns of counterculture. On the one hand, the scene of restricted production is stabilised by a utopian thematics mostly compatible with countercultural values – an agenda of empowerment agenda kept alive within rock even during periods when the countercultural moment is played out. On the other, the dynamic of restricted production is determined by the urge to foreground cultural autonomy by means of variable and mutable practices, sometimes reaching beyond the commonly accepted range of countercultural protest.
- 13 Giving due attention to the variability of the claims to autonomy is essential because rock's utopian project does not express itself through one single, stable gesture of rebellion. Out of personal preferences, I would be tempted to conflate autonomy with rock musicians' claims to artistic excellence and professionalism – with the elaboration of a popular form of art for art's sake that manifested itself in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) or *Electric Ladyland* (1968). Yet I would thereby ignore one of Bourdieu's most important caveats – the realisation that artistic autonomy is conquered differently in different contexts (Bourdieu 1994: 28; 1993: 58). The metamorphoses of

the cultural field obey a dialectic of defamiliarisation and standardisation whose paradigm Bourdieu derives from the Russian formalist theoretician Yuri Tynjanov (Bourdieu 1993: 180). Tynjanov's thesis corroborates one of Bourdieu's key assumptions: the same social function manifests itself through different practices at different historical periods and in different geographical areas; conversely, the same practice may be endowed with variable functions in different contexts (Bourdieu 1994: 20). On this view, rock's struggle for autonomy must have assumed various guises in the music's history, giving rise to conflicts among the practices endorsed by various generations of musicians.

- 14 Markers of autonomy in rock music have indeed followed an itinerary made up of successive reversals. Empowerment in 1950s rock and roll was voiced through the celebration of rhythm and blues sensuality, but also through the flaunting of consumerist pleasure. Appearances notwithstanding, the latter claim was in the 1950s context not a sign of commercial co-optation (of heteronomy, to take up Bourdieu's terminology). When Eddie Cochran includes in his teenage heaven the ownership of 'a house with a pool' and when Chuck Berry sings the praise of the Cadillac Coupe de Ville (1955), they make a bid for a mode of empowerment American teenagers (in particular African-Americans) had only recently secured. On the contrary, as of the Vietnam War and the hippie movement, autonomy is signalled through opposite channels – through the satire of conspicuous consumption voiced in Janis Joplin's 'Mercedes Benz' (1971), for instance. Similarly, musical excellence served as a marker of autonomy for a limited period only. When late-1960s musicians chose to produce music with a degree of cultural capital comparable to that of classical music, they carried out a gesture suited to their own context: their aesthetic ambitions made possible the conquest of a field of restricted production within a musical medium hitherto deprived of this prerogative (Walser 1993: 61–3). This gesture gave rise to artistic successes such as the Beatles' 'Eleanor Rigby', yet also led to the rigid professionalism of the post-psychedelic era, generating in the best of cases concept albums such as Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* and, at worst, Emerson Lake and Palmer's aimless virtuosity. Post-psychedelic music therefore laid itself bare to an iconoclastic rebellion: mid-1970s punk rock, with its genuine or feigned ethos of musical crudeness, reinscribed rock's autonomy through cultural means opposite to those developed 10 years earlier.
- 15 Beneath this shifting trail of emancipatory gestures, rock's enduring thematics define areas of cultural intervention within which the practices depicted above are acted out over long periods of time. One of these themes – arguably not the most familiar to the rock audience – is discussed in the third section of the present chapter: an examination of rock's capacity to depict musicianship as a field of non-alienated labour. Far more visible have been rock's contribution to the construction of an autonomous sphere of adolescence and its development of culturally hybrid musical idioms, transgressing ethnic boundaries and distinctions of cultural capital. The teenage sphere, I point out above, was staked out by the bid for sexual freedom, access to consumption and, in more negative terms, the celebration of violence. Whatever the fans' actual age, the space thus created served as psychological and social buffer area – a space of latency allowing fans to distance themselves from a world bearing the negative marks of adulthood, or, in the hippie project, to secure the groundings for a radical alternative (Grossberg 1983–84: 112). The social changes effected by rock's construction of adolescence may be gauged by the fact that, before the Second World War, young people were offered leisure opportunities mostly within youth movements structured

according to a military model (boy scouts, leisure camps, the socialist Red Falcons or, in the worst of cases, the Hitlerjugend).

- 16 The second thematics – the cultivation of musical hybridity (tapping the resources of black music, in most cases) served as a rallying sign of teenage rebellion in the 1950s and acquired an autonomous existence as of the 1960s. One of its landmark moments was the development of soul music, where black and white musicians collaborated for the creation of the same musical corpus (Gillett 1983: 233). This crossover thematics also experienced its own reversals: rock has gone through moments of cultural resegregation: it occasionally turned its back on interethnic exchange (punk, hardcore heavy metal) (Reynolds and Press 1995: 80) or foregrounded a non-ethnic type of hybridisation, as in the appropriation of classical music by post-psychedelic musicians. Overall, the field of restricted production has had to balance the perpetuation of its long-term thematics with the preservation of the music's autonomy. This has given rise to apparently incompatible gestures: early-1960s British rhythm and blues musicians (the Rolling Stones, the Who) appropriated black idioms nearly unknown to European audiences in order to distance themselves from commercial teenage-oriented rock and roll (Cliff Richard or even the early Beatles). (Post-)punk, on the contrary, discarded blues out of disgust for the trivialised appropriation the latter had been the object of in early-1970s heavy metal and pub rock.
- 17 In a materialistic perspective, rock's field of restricted production has maintained its stability by developing its own production and distribution structures: in its bid for autonomy, music sets up an alternative scene. From an economic point of view, rock's history unfolds as a competitive process pitting independent producers against the corporate giants of the culture industry (Peterson and Berger 1990: 156). In this logic, corporate conglomerates are constantly driven to appropriate the novelties introduced by their smaller competitors. Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis started recording with Sam Phillips's Sun label whose headquarters fitted in a modest-sized building in Memphis (Gillett 1983: 92). Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley were signed by independent label Chess, where they enjoyed a working environment comparable to that of early-1950s rhythm and blues artists. Black music in the 1960s developed in comparable structures – Tamla Motown in Detroit, Stax in Memphis. Early-1970s post-psychedelic rock was hatched in small or medium-sized structures – labels such as Island, Virgin, or Brian Eno's Obscure records. Punk and post-punk witnessed the development of a permanent alternative scene possessing not only its own record producers – labels such as Stiff (the Damned, Elvis Costello), Mute (Depeche Mode), Fast Product (Gang of Four), Fiction (the Cure), or Factory Records (Joy Division) – but also independent distribution networks – Rough Trade, Play It Again Sam (Reynolds 2005: 92–108; Taylor 2010: 5–7). Those smaller structures fitted in the margins of a record industry that, in the 1980s, enjoyed the most profitable decade of its history (Goodwin 1993: 38). The later evolution of the music scene, as it was remodelled by digital technologies and computer networks, has unfolded according to a similar topography: on the one hand, new means of production – home studios and the exchange of digital files – confer to musicians a higher control over creation and distribution, fostering the perpetuation of the scene of restricted production (Den Tandt 2004: 145); on the other, the works thus produced reach a sizable audience only through the intermission of large-scale corporate actors, whose role is sometimes exclusively limited to online distribution.

- 18 Musicians and fans often perceive the distinction between independent producers and corporate conglomerates – the so-called majors – from the perspective of romantic rebellion, locking these two poles in a stable opposition: the status of independent producer is viewed as a natural attribute of counterculture, whereas corporate structures are synonymous with commercial co-optation. When Siouxsie and the Banshees signed with a major (Polydor), they had to placate their sceptical fans, claiming that their contract safeguarded their creative freedom (Thrills 1978: 16). Before them, the Sex Pistols had on the contrary loudly slammed EMI's door in order to sign with Virgin, still an alternative label at the time (Reynolds 2005: 10). For academic researchers, it seems less simple to distinguish autonomous from heteronomous practice: a few small labels (Motown) pursued similar ambitions as their corporate competitors; several bands created their own record companies (Apple, Rolling Stones Records, Swan Song) in order to maximise their profits. On the contrary, a major (Columbia) offered Bob Dylan the opportunity to record his first songs – a gesture that from the company's perspective had the value of a low-budget experiment (Heylin 1991: 46). Overall, the stability of creative autonomy exists at a more abstract level: it resides in the very possibility to carve out within the cultural field the status of restricted production. The latter exists as a virtuality that manifests itself through various practices at different periods.

The Utopia of Non-Alienated Work: Rock Music as a Meta-Industrial Practice

- 19 Among rock's thematics, I mentioned above the culture of professionalism aiming at a mode of social integration characterised by non-alienated labour. As it evokes this utopian possibility, rock avails itself of the meta-industrial or meta-professional dimension of mass culture. The latter is often blamed for foisting on its audience escapist fantasies obscuring social realities. However, instead of encouraging its audience to ignore everyday conditions, mass culture has paradoxically elaborated narratives and characters depicting the subject's anchorage in the professional world. This thematics has often been investigated in studies on crime fiction: Sherlock Holmes, Philip Marlowe, Hercule Poirot and Jules Maigret are figures of identification for readers subjected to the constraints of industry and bureaucracy (Kracauer 1981: 53; Denning 1987: 14; Mandel 1986: 49). Similarly, the Hollywood western, in spite of a fictional context seemingly remote from the twentieth-century job market, develops what Will Wright calls 'professional plots' – narratives depicting possibilities for autonomy offered by various labour environments (1975: 85).
- 20 Wright's analysis suggests that westerns are informed by the utopian logic sketched out above: they give voice to the desire for a professional life freed from capitalist alienation. Similarly, hard-boiled detectives – Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade – preserve their economic and existential autonomy with regard to political and economic authorities. Yet, in accordance with the logic of containment outlined by Jameson, this utopian promise is counterbalanced by concessions to conservatism: the endorsement of upper-class norms (Holmes, Poirot), the celebration of aggressive masculinity, homophobia and racism (hard-boiled novels, the western). The gendered discourse developed in the framework of this thematics constitutes indeed one of its most visible strategies of containment – also one of the most relevant to rock music. The figures of

identification offered by these popular fictions have with only few exceptions been masculine. The rebellion against professional subordination and regimentation they express is portrayed as resistance against feminising constraints: the rationalised economy appears as an environment that restricts an inherently masculine mode of freedom (Rotundo 1993: 251–2).

- 21 Rock and roll in the 1950s revolved almost exclusively around teenage leisure, and therefore excluded any positive representation of work. It took the mid-1960s reversal evoked above for rock to venture into this thematic field. The genres now lumped together as classic rock – folk rock, British rhythm and blues, psychedelic and post-psychedelic music – developed not only the practices that make up the material basis of musical work (multitrack recording, extended studio sessions) but also the media tools that confer public visibility to this labour (sleeve notes, specialised press, documentaries). The figure of the rock musician thereby gained a public presence it had hitherto been deprived of. Up to the early 1960s, the place in the spotlight was reserved either to individual performers (Elvis Presley, Eddie Cochran) supported by anonymous musicians or to bands (the early Beatles) profiled according to the promotional strategies of teenage pop, namely as objects of desire for a female audience (Frith 1981: 227). By the mid-1960s, a new set of stereotypes was deployed. In this new configuration, a contrast opposes, on the one hand, a front man whose provocative behaviour perpetuates the stardom function on the mode of transgression, and, on the other, the person guaranteeing the band's technical and musical integrity. The Jim Morrison/Ray Manzarek binary is the clearest illustration of this pattern. The pairing of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards or of John Lennon and Paul McCartney-George Harrison obeys the same logic. Sometimes, the polarity cuts across one single musician: on the cover of *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), Bob Dylan appears as a haughty, intellectual front man; on the back cover he is the musical expert, playing piano and guitar. Similarly, there are two sides to Keith Richards: on the one hand, the rock and roll outlaw, on the other, the rhythm and blues erudite, passing on the traditions of black music to white musicians.
- 22 The classic-rock musical expert is a figure of emancipation in so far as he or she perpetuates the ideal of the autonomous craftsperson. In this logic, photographs on LP sleeves featuring musicians, roadies and gear – the back cover of Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* (1969); the inner sleeve of Joe Jackson's *Night and Day* (1982) – are comparable to photos of craftsmen in their workshop. This iconography is reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts movement of socialist aesthete William Morris, who opposed craft to industrial practice. Classic rock is therefore bound to a nostalgic utopia – a feature defining both its attractiveness and its limits. It pits against the corporate context a craft-based countertype anchored in an economic model that might already be obsolete. In this, it follows the logic of crime fiction: the latter celebrates the private investigator's individualistic ethos – a profile that may already have been marginalised by the development of bureaucratic structures.
- 23 The evolution of the music market and the inherent limitations of classic rock's craft-based utopia have generated more oblique professional profiles. One of them expresses aspirations to creative and economic invisibility. Its logic is evocatively depicted in William Gibson's post-cyberpunk novel *Zero History*. In this work, the Canadian writer describes fashion designers who, even though they work at the heart of the consumerist apparatus, produce utterly anonymous avant-garde creations marketed

through clandestine channels (Gibson 2010: 337). As of the late 1960s, rock music has developed comparable strategies. One thinks of record sleeves featuring little if any information about musicians or product – the Beatles' so-called 'White Album' (1968), Led Zeppelin's fourth album (1971), or Pink Floyd's early-1970s albums, which featured particularly austere art work (1973, 1975). Post-psychedelic musicians such as Robert Fripp and Brian Eno explicitly advocated this interstitial positioning (Eno 2009, Fripp 1979). In so doing, they laid the foundations for a central tendency of post-punk. The Cure's first four albums only feature blurred photographs making it impossible to identify musicians visually (1979, 1980, 1981, 1982); alternative label Factory Records privileged anonymous designs in dark colours, sometimes only featuring a serial number. These gestures express the refusal of personalised stardom. They foster the creation of paradoxical products eschewing the music market's customary markers: there is up to this day no consensus about the title of Led Zeppelin's fourth album.

- 24 A third professional profile implements a strategy comparable to what postcolonial theoretician Homi Bhabha calls tactical 'mimicry' (Bhabha 1994: 265): instead of opposing a counter-model to the music market (classic rock's craft-based practice, for instance) or to seek to vanish from its radar (post-punk anonymity), musicians mimic its strategies with some degree of ironical distance. Musicians from the electronic scene as of the 1980s have cultivated this gesture. They no longer use the means of production of classic rock, whose craft-oriented configuration foregrounded an anchorage in working-class labour. On the contrary, they handle computer tools whose basic operations are similar to gestures of bureaucratic management: their musical practice is anchored in the white-collar world. In technical magazines intended for musicians, this corporate profile gives rise to a utopian discourse offering the prospect of incorporating obsolete modes of production by computer technology: the gestures and sounds of the past are simulated by means of digital sampling or software-generated sequences. In so doing, corporate musicians avail themselves of the prerogatives of managers mastering a multitude of resources and interfacing systems (Den Tandt 2004: 150).
- 25 With this corporate profile, one fears that the internal dynamics of musicianship may drive rock's scene of restricted production to separate off from counterculture altogether. Performers simulating technocapitalist procedures to the point of identifying with corporate culture (DJs such as David Guetta and Martin Solveig, say) seem unlikely to perpetuate rock's critical dimension. These concerns are worth bearing in mind: it would be naïvely non-historical to assume that rock will indefinitely maintain its emancipatory momentum, let alone its central role in youth culture. Still, it is equally rash to pin rock's whole utopian project on its single meta-industrial thematics, ignoring thereby that recent musical movements adjacent to rock (world music, electro dance music) have remained faithful to other countercultural themes inherited from the 1960s (ethnic and gender equality, particularly). Similarly, the present argument is to a large extent pegged to the hope that the material configuration of the rock scene may act as custodian of the countercultural moment. If the autonomy of distribution networks is maintained, the possibility of oppositional gestures is preserved. Foregrounding a corporate musical profile amounts in this case only to an ironical postmodern gesture with a critical edge, exposing market practices. On this reading, the creation of a popular field of restricted production ranks as one of the most valuable legacies of rock's utopian discourse.

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ABSTRACTS

This essay analyzes rock music's countercultural status from the perspective of musicians' and fans' aspirations to a utopian transfiguration of everyday life. Relying on Fredric Jameson's and Ihab Hassan's reflections on (post)modernism, the present argument locates rock among the movements within modern culture seeking to counter alienation and reification. On this basis, the article investigates how aspirations to utopian transfiguration may empower rock to develop

a full-fledged alternative to dominant culture. Taking into account the difficulties involved in using counterculture as a socio-historical keyword, this argument acknowledges that rock cannot fulfill its utopian promise. Yet the music makes possible the development of what Pierre Bourdieu calls a field of restricted production: musicians, fans, and journalists define codes and practices tracing out a perimeter of autonomy differentiating rock from commercial mass culture. This social space may in specific contexts serve as hub for a counterhegemonic coalition aiming to redraw the social field according to goals broader than those pursued by fragmented subcultures. The final section of the article investigates one of the channels through which rock's sphere of restricted production gives a durable shape to its empowering agenda: the representation of labor practices eschewing the alienation of professional life. Rock, it is argued, stakes out its autonomy with regard to the capitalist labor market by making musical labor an area of personal fulfillment.

Cet article analyse la musique rock comme une pratique visant une transfiguration utopienne du quotidien. Invoquant les réflexions de Fredric Jameson et Ihab Hassan sur le (post)modernisme, l'argument situe la musique rock parmi les mouvements de la modernité qui cherchent à contrer l'aliénation et la réification. A partir de cette prémisse, l'article évalue l'impact que le rock a exercé sur les pratiques culturelles et sociales — un impact qui par définition ne peut remplir les promesses du projet initial. Cette approche révèle que la dynamique utopienne du rock a eu comme conséquence résiduelle le développement de ce que Pierre Bourdieu appelle un champ de production restreinte : musiciens, fans et journalistes ont défini les pratiques permettant de tracer un périmètre d'autonomie artistique séparant le rock de domaines commerciaux de la culture de masse. Ensuite, l'article s'intéresse à un aspect spécifique du processus qui mène de l'utopie à sa concrétisation sociale : il décrit le rôle joué par le rock dans la représentation de formes de travail qui échappent à l'aliénation de la vie professionnelle. Dans cette optique, le rock a offert une représentation valorisée du travail musical qui permet une critique des rôles imposés par le marché capitaliste.

INDEX

Chronological index: 1950-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979

Keywords: modernity / postmodernity, counterculture / resistance, work / employment / wage labor, capitalism, utopia / dystopia, protest / transgression / revolt

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