

## REVOLUTION OR REPETITION: WOODSTOCK'S ROMANTICISM

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If we try to understand global history by pointing to revolutionary moments we would probably mention 2001, 1989, and 1968 as the most striking years in the postwar Western world. And if we discuss utopian thought and the quest for “alternative realities,” the year 1968 comes to the fore, more than the years 1989 and 2001, which might be seen as more important turning points in political history.<sup>1</sup> As the writer Mark Kurlansky puts it in his book *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*: “There has never been a year like 1968[...]. At a time when nations and cultures were still separate and very different — and in 1968 Poland, France, the United States, and Mexico were far more different from one another than they are today — there occurred a spontaneous combustion of rebellious spirits around the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Even for historians less focused on specific years than journalists and writers like Kurlansky it seems hard to deny that the late 1960s are often regarded as the most revolutionary years of the postwar period. However, if we take a closer look at the changes of that time, the question emerges in how far the cultural revolution of those days represented a shift in cultural values that was completely new. So in *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1985), Richard Holmes describes how he tuned in to Radio Luxembourg in the spring of 1968 and heard a live report on the storming of the Bourse in Paris: crowds shouting, the crack of tear-gas grenades, breaking glass, and cheers. An authority on Romanticism and eminent biographer of Shelley and Coleridge, Holmes then claims he was suddenly gripped by “the Revolution”:

It was not the destruction that excited me but the sense of something utterly new coming into being, some fresh, immense possibility of political life, a new community of hope, and above all the strangely inspired note — like a new language — that sounded in the voices of those who were witnessing it. It was a glimpse of “the dream come true,” the golden age, the promised land.

Moreover, I identified it — immediately, naïvely — with that first French Revolution as seen by the English Romantics ....

1 This article and my presentation at the conference “Alternative Realities” are based on the second chapter of Maarten Doorman, *De romantische orde* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2004/2012), 49–71.

2 Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York, 2004), xvii. Kristin Ross tries in *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago, 2002) to restore the political relevance of the revolution of these days.

For what I was feeling, what my friends were feeling, seemed to be expressed perfectly by the Romantics, and by no one else.

He then quotes lines written by Wordsworth on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille: “’Twas a time when Europe was rejoiced, / France standing at the top of golden hours / And human nature seeming born again.” He thus draws a parallel between the revolutionary events of the Romantic era and those of that legendary May of 1968 in Paris. Graffiti on the walls of the faculty of medicine declared “Imagination au Pouvoir” — power to the imagination — in glaring red, and though this time there was no Robespierre, there was many a rabble-rouser who resembled his right-hand man, the youthful and long-haired Saint-Just.

Holmes thinks that the whole ethos of the 1960s, of the counterculture, “was based on a profoundly romantic rejection of conventional society, the old order, the establishment, the classical, the square.”<sup>3</sup> That hypothesis was perhaps not at all original in 1985, but it can still inspire further inquiry into the romantic heritage of that era, particularly for those who prefer to consider the counterculture in its broader cultural context and not simply from the traditional politically revolutionary perspective of Paris ’68.<sup>4</sup> After all, these political aspirations were imbued with the desire for a different conception of society and a different way of life, for a humanity and a utopian way of living inspired by the ideals of authenticity and self-realization.

A look at the most renowned pop festival of all time, held at Woodstock in the United States a year later, might explain such aspirations. Which conventions were rejected at this focal point of the 1960s? What values stirred the imagination of the new generation? What was the role of the imagination itself? If one ignores the immediate and different political dimensions between the Paris student movement and Woodstock, which in Paris was largely embodied in the longing for democratization of the universities and in worker demands, and at Woodstock in protest against the war in Vietnam, a number of striking commonalities stand out that pertain to the entire generation.

### Primacy of Youth

To start with, there was the primacy of youth: previous generations have had their day, so the thinking goes, and their ideas are

3 Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London, 1985), 73–75. See Richard Holmes, *The Romantic Poets and Their Circle* (London, 1997), 7.

4 See Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters, eds., *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Bern, Oxford 2010); Eric Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968–1981* (Berkeley, 2012); Lessie Frazier and Deborah Cohen, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke, 2009); Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, ed., *A Revolution of Perception?: Consequences and Echoes of 1968* (New York, 2014); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (New York, 2008).

outdated; moreover, the new generation is unquestionably right simply because it is young. And visitors to Woodstock were indeed young, as a documentary by Michael Wadleigh about this muddy festival shows. Was it not the very child-like spontaneity of this unexpectedly



**Opening ceremony at Woodstock, August 15, 1969. Wikimedia Commons.**

massive gathering that lent it the character of an almost unreal Utopia?<sup>5</sup> The four organizers were also young, the oldest being twenty-six. Some of the people involved did deign to make compassionate comments about older people and about their parents in Wadleigh's documentary. Most of the musicians were under thirty. The Who played "My Generation," with the following lines, to enthusiastic applause: "People try to put us down / Just because we get around / Things they do look awful cold / I hope I die before I get old." Music was the great divide between young and old. Even an advocate and theoretical designer of the counterculture, Theodore Roszak, was unable to identify with the new generation. In 1968 he was ready to admit that "the pop and rock groups ... [were] the real 'prophets' of the rising generation," but he could not stand "the raucous style of their sound and performance", much of it being "too brutally loud ... too electronically gimmicked up."<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the Woodstock generation, the age of musicians had not mattered so much in music — even in popular music. Elderly

5 Michael Wadleigh, director, *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace, Music ... and Love*, 1970 (Warner Bros. home video, 1989). See Andy Bennett, "Everybody's Happy, Everybody's Free: Representation and Nostalgia in the Woodstock Film," in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Andy Bennett, 43–54 (Aldershot, UK, 2004). The spontaneity of the

mass gathering has often been highlighted after the fact, but it was relative, as there had been a long-running advertising campaign beforehand. See, for example, Alf Evers, *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock* (New York, 1972), 711–12, 714. For a statistical impression of the opinions held by the American Woodstock generation, see Rex

Weiner and Deanne Stillman, *Woodstock Census: The Nationwide Survey of the Sixties Generation* (New York, 1979). A manageable account of the Woodstock festival is Elliot Tiber (1994), "How Woodstock Happened ...", from *The Times Herald Record* at <http://www.geocities.ws/curlybraces/Music/woodstock69.html>.

6 Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London, 1970), 291. For the role of protest in pop music, see Dario Martinelli, *Give Peace a Chant: Popular Music, Politics and Social Protest* (Berlin, et al., 2017).

soloists or jazz musicians were nothing exceptional, nor are they now, but something seemed to change forever at that moment in time. Woodstock was youth, and youth was the criterion. In the twenty-first century, the age of pop idols has sometimes fallen to under fifteen. But at the same time it doesn't seem quite new. The fact is that the first generation of Romantics — in both England and Germany — was young and all too conscious of its own youthfulness, even considering it a positive quality. On his years spent in Jena around 1800, Henrik Steffens wrote: "A new era dawned and manifested itself in the spirit of all the young people who were receptive to it (*in allen empfänglichen Jugendgemütern*). — We beheld the blossoming spring of a new spiritual age, which we jubilantly welcomed with youthful élan."<sup>7</sup>

This high esteem for youth was already foreshadowed in two eighteenth-century best-sellers: Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) and Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'Éducation* (1762, *Émile, or On Education*). Both books are testimony to an unprecedented attention to the brittle disposition of the adolescent, to deferred adulthood and budding sexuality. Moreover, Rousseau's influential work explores the emotional world of the earlier years of youth, and advocates allowing the child to develop in as natural a manner as possible, an argument that was applied and elaborated by Romantic pedagogues like Pestalozzi and Fröbel.

Romantics did not shine the spotlight on youth merely as a phase in life distinct from adulthood; they also held the young in high esteem because, in the words of Rousseau, they were not yet tainted by culture. In Europe after the French Revolution, where the twenty-something Napoleon held sway, the ambivalent interest in the youthfulness of a suicidal Werther turned into admiration for young people who were decisively energetic and vital, and among youngsters themselves into a mood of self-assuredness and power. According to Novalis, the French Revolution and the conflicts that followed were actually a struggle about what should prevail: the ripeness of adulthood or the blossoming of youth. And for the Romantics, at least while they themselves were still young, the preference lay with the latter, as Wordsworth waxed lyrical in *The Prelude* (1805): "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!"

From a societal perspective, the triumph of youth in the Romantic era was for the time being perhaps limited to the upper crust — in the nineteenth century student movements burgeoned everywhere, with far-reaching consequences in the political sphere — but it seems that

7 Qtd. in Eduard Engel, *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und der Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1913), 23. See Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago, 2002), 18, 193–94.

something definitively changed across a broad front in the perception of youth. And then it was not merely a case of what Anita Brookner terms in her book about Romanticism “the right to earn disapproval from one’s elders.”<sup>8</sup> The censurable naïvety, fantasy and impulsiveness of the child now specifically gained the much more positive overtone of open-mindedness, of imaginative power and of spontaneous creativity, character traits that were also regarded as marks of genius. Therefore even among students, Schopenhauer wrote, it was still sometimes possible to descry some spark of brilliant eccentricity. Yet as soon as these youngsters become adults, “they pupate and are then resurrected as obdurate Philistines (*eingefleischter Philister*), who shock one if one comes across them later.”<sup>9</sup>

This could well have come from *Émile*, just like Novalis’s lament that “*Wo Kinder sind, da ist ein goldenes Zeitalter*” (“Where children are, there is a golden age”) or, in the words of the painter Runge, “*Kinder müssen wir werden, wenn wir das Beste erreichen wollen*” (“We must become children, if we want to achieve the best”).<sup>10</sup> And Schiller went considerably further in his *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795–96, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*), comparing children with fauna and flora and peasants and so-called primitives, all bearing witness to a natural state. “Children *are* what we *were*,” he wrote, “they are what we should become once more. We were nature like them and our culture should lead us back to nature.”<sup>11</sup>

### Free Love

What else was remarkable about Woodstock? Many have mentioned “free love” with varying degrees of enthusiasm or indignation. There is, however, little to suggest a three-day orgy, though the *idea* of liberated sexuality hung in the air. For example, there was public skinny-dipping engaged in on a large scale, which participants experienced as liberating but conservative critics perceived as a threat. It caused almost as much brouhaha as the Broadway production *Oh! Calcutta!*, which had its premiere that same year, with naked actors indulging in erotic acts on stage. In the documentary by Wadleigh, two cohabiting youngsters arrive at the festival and explain with barely concealed pride that they will hanging out there independently. It is obvious they have no desire to be forced into the straitjacket of a marriage devoid of fantasy.<sup>12</sup> New York’s radical weekly, the *Village Voice*, commented more sympathetically on Woodstock: “Public nudity was also pretty cool and by Saturday couples were swimming together in the lake

8 Anita Brookner, *Romanticism and Its Discontents* (New York, 2000), 56; cf. Gerald N. Izenberg, *Romanticism, Revolution, and the Origins of Modern Selfhood, 1782–1802* (Princeton, 1992), 51–52.

9 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zurich, 1977), 4:469.

10 The quotes from Novalis and Runge are cited in Eckart Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik* (Cologne, 1987), 161. See also M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York et al., 1973), 413–15.

11 Qtd. in Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (Harmondsworth, 1991), 311.

12 See Weiner and Stillman, *Woodstock Census*, 163–77.

without anyone stopping to gawk. [...] By Monday a few couples were making it in public, guys were walking round with unembarrassed erections.”<sup>13</sup>

In respect to this “free love” aspect, it is also tempting to draw a parallel with early Romanticism, if only because of the similarities to a long literary tradition that contrasts oppressive marital ties with true and spontaneous love, taking as its springboard Rousseau’s *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761 *Julie, or the New Heloise*) and, once again, Goethe’s *Werther*. The spontaneity of romantic love forces a surrender that has little to do with the harmonization of passion and reason — the classic convention that prevailed far into the eighteenth century and lent the institution of marriage its enduring resilience.<sup>14</sup> The new, boundary-breaking love can be detected in the sometimes exultant but fleeting alliances of the English poets, and even more so in the relationships within the Romantic circles in Jena and Berlin. The commencement and breaking of relationships evident there might at first appear to be a kind of eighteenth-century hedonism, but that soon pales against the backdrop of profound seriousness with which those relationships start and end, a gravitas that is rooted in the desire for authenticity and mutual self-actualization. The novel *Lucinde* (1799) by Friedrich Schlegel, then considered scandalous, also originated in this milieu.

*Lucinde* is a hybrid and almost plotless book, part epistolary, part fantasy, dialogue, allegory, autobiography, and polemic. This experimental work, described by Schlegel’s critical brother, August Wilhelm, as an *Unroman*, a “non-novel,” portrays the love between Julius and Lucinde, who is betrothed to another. It was scandalous because unlike *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or *Werther*, it is not the traditional marriage that eventually triumphs, but romantic love. Liberated Lucinde has no sense of guilt, and the two protagonists’ mutual self-fulfillment is taken to such an extreme in the romantic *Verwirrung* — confusion — that the polarity between male and female no longer pertains, the man displaying feminine traits and vice versa. That is sexually exciting, Schlegel explained, and is at the same time “an allegory for the completion of masculine and feminine in the unified fullness of humanity.”<sup>15</sup> That hybridization of gender is highly reminiscent of the androgyny that is brought to the fore in so many Romantic portraits and in the supposedly feminine traits of the predominantly male Romantic genius.<sup>16</sup>

Even looking beyond the controversy-sparking personal outpourings and Schlegel’s implicit reference to his adulterous relationship with

13 Qtd. in Bennett, *Remembering Woodstock*, 66.

14 Cf. John Armstrong, *Conditions of Love: The Philosophy of Intimacy* (London, 2002), 1–7.

15 Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik*, 165.

16 See Friedrich Overbeck’s portrait of Franz Pforr from 1810 in Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik*, 119, or Pforr’s *Allegorie der Freundschaft* (1808), idem, 147.

Dorothea Veit, the book was scandalous for another reason. Sensual and spiritual love are present in equal measure, and the former was described without the usual scruples. Despite the alternation with lofty passages about love, the book was deemed pornographic. However, was this intense and multifaceted love not in fact true marriage, Schlegel teased his critics, when compared with the loveless traditional marriage driven by self-interest that they were defending?<sup>17</sup>

### Return to Nature

A third striking theme that surfaces repeatedly with Woodstock is the return to nature and the unsullied countryside. “I wanna leave the city ...,” sang the singer with the not so subtle name of Country Joe, and Canned Heat’s “Going up the Country” had a similar thrust. And when Max Yasgur — a dairy farmer and the owner of the land where the festival was held — was brought on stage to speak to the hundreds of thousands, the rhetoric of his opening sentence was hardly devoid of craftiness in playing up to this theme. “I’m a farmer,” he proclaimed, and the cheers rang out.<sup>18</sup> The organizers had deliberately chosen a rural setting, about one hundred miles from Manhattan, since this tallied with the “back-to-the-land spirit of the counterculture.” (The area was hardly farmland pure and simple: besides “country bumpkins,” musicians such as Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin were already living there.)

The glorification of the countryside as opposed to the unpleasant and noxious life in the big city is a theme that is perhaps as old as the city itself. From Virgil’s *Georgica* to the bucolic poetry and Arcadian painting of the Renaissance, the nostalgia for simple country life returns time and again. At Woodstock, though, the desire for natural simplicity acquired typically romantic traits, since it not only centered on the simplicity of the farmland but looked to a more radical back-to-nature lifestyle, one which flew in the face of societal conventions in a way similar to those described by Rousseau. Woodstock’s visitors longed for nature and authenticity — in themselves and their surroundings; they longed for their natural roots. The spontaneous youngsters losing themselves in free love also cast off society’s imposed prudishness by stripping bare, exchanging artificial, feminine make-up for a natural look, and a smooth-shaven face for manly stubble, as well as the unnatural bra and off-the-rack suit for loose and fanciful clothes. This generation also looked up to the natural

17 Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford, 1995), 33–34; Lillian R. Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective: A Comparative Study of Aspects of the Romantic Movement in England, France and Germany* (New York, 1970), 224; Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, 2013), 131–32.

18 See video footage of his appearance at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Hfzv04sx4E>.

primitive man: the Native American, the long-haired, wise, close-to-nature, drug-using variant of Iron Eyes Cody, who would re-emerge in Carlos Castaneda's cult books.<sup>19</sup>

This matches the romantic ideal of the all-natural man still wholly at one with himself. Rousseau, one of the founding fathers of Romanticism, adored the wealth of what grows and flourishes in nature, as captured wonderfully in his *Les reveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782, later translated as *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*), which portrays a philosopher wandering in the fields and admiring the flora. The love of nature — which lent “nature” its present-day meaning, as in terms like “nature conservation” or the expression “untouched, open nature” — is a sentiment that resonates loudly in the work of the English Romantic poets, for example, in Wordsworth, as restless and as great a devotee of flora and wandering as Rousseau. He, or at least his poetic alter ego, settles down beneath a hazel tree. “Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played,” he writes in *Nutting*, continuing,

... And — with my cheek on one of those green stones  
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,  
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep —  
I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,  
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay  
Tribute to ease ...<sup>20</sup>

19 Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Berkeley, et al., 1968).

20 William Wordsworth, qtd. in R. S. Thomas, ed., *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse* (London, 1971), 27–28. (The poem goes beyond merely singing the praises of nature, since in the following lines the “I” attacks the hazel tree and later regrets it.) On the “gaze” of the English Romantic poets, see Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, 1991), 110–21; cf. Alan Day, *Romanticism* (London, 2001), 39–64. On the relationship between city and countryside, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London, 1983), 243–45. On the representation of nature in the landscape, see Honour, *Romanticism*, Ch. 2.

21 Qtd. in Klessmann, *Die deutsche Romantik*, 79.

The relaxation in the bosom of nature that these lines capture still falls under the classic opposition of town and country, but the poet's childlike receptiveness is already less classical, as he lays his cheek against the moss and feels sheltered and secure under the shade of trees. It becomes truly romantic when the stones seem to metamorphose into sheep and nature becomes animated, foreshadowing the last line of the poem: “Touch — for there is a spirit in the woods.” In the holistic words of Novalis, “People, animals, plants, stones and stars, flames, tones, colours ... must act and speak together, like a single family or community, as a single race.”<sup>21</sup>

### Spirituality

The surrender to nature touches on a fourth remarkable issue of Woodstock: a general leaning towards spirituality and mysticism, in which the bounds between imagination and reality are stretched. One of the opening speakers of the festival was the Indian religious teacher Swami Satchidananda. Joe Cocker, as a preacher-like bard,



eventually had no real-world contact with his audience and dissolved into a kind of trance, while the public at the performance by Santana seemed to become hypnotized by rhythmic clapping.<sup>22</sup> As the fences around the grounds were broken down and thousands entered the festival for free, the organizers shrugged their shoulders. For them it was not about the money, though this would certainly hit their takings hard, but that mattered little at this celebration of communality: “People communicate!” one of them exclaimed, and that spiritual experience was clearly enough. The sense of community took all of them to a higher plane — and the music helped in this, for example, when Sly & the Family Stone drove the crowds ecstatic with an infinitely spun-out rendition of “I Wanna Take You Higher.”

Such a shared, mass experience of “spirituality” was foreign to the Romanticism fixated on the subjective individual. Yet the substance of that transcendental experience calls to mind the thinking of the Romantic era, in which the interest in theosophy, pantheism, magnetism and somnambulism that had already existed in the eighteenth century now flourished. Romantics’ aversion to financial matters and worldly possessions, to a way of life focused on the material, was as strong as their predilection for the inexplicability — the enigma — of another, spiritual world filled with mysterious forces. These forces manifested themselves in ways that could be terrifying and represent the “dark side” of existence, like the ghost ship in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), countless scenes from the “gothic novel,” and the supernatural phenomena in tales by the musician, painter, and writer E.T.A. Hoffman.

The enigmatic forces could, however, also exercise a more salutary influence, as in *Hymnen an die Nacht* (*Hymns to the Night*, 1800) by Novalis, in which night-time actually provides solace from “the other side,” or with the German physician, philosopher and painter Gustav Carus, who established a link between spirituality and health that has experienced a recent popular revival. This is also true of work by the visionary poet and painter William Blake, which certainly conjures up threatening forces but, in imitation of the writings of the Swedish theologian, philosopher, and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, in the first place has Christ, angels, and less well-defined forces offer hope or other forms of succor. The supernatural alarmingly stirred the imagination of many of the Romantics. “I have very little of Mr Blake’s company,” his wife Catherine once said, “he is always in Paradise.”<sup>23</sup>

22 See Bennett, *Remembering Woodstock*, 82–83.

23 Holmes, *The Romantic Poets*, 17. Cf. Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution* (London, 2010), Chapter 2; Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background* (Oxford, 1981), 41–53; Richard T. Gray, “Introduction,” in *Inventions of the Imagination: Romanticism and Beyond*, ed. Richard T. Gray, Nicholas Halmi, Gary J. Handwerk, Michael A. Rosenthal, and Klaus Vieweg, 3–14 (Seattle, 2011), 6–7; Honour, *Romanticism*, 286–93; Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 58–59; Joseph Viscomi, “The Lessons of Swedenborg; or, The Origin of William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,” in *Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Compendium*, ed. Thomas Pfau and Robert F. Gleckner, 173–212 (Durham, 1998). See also Gerhard Schulz, *Romantik. Geschichte und Begriff* (Munich, 1996), 119–25; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 169–71; Paul Kluckhohn, *Das Ideengut der deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen, 1966), 31–34, 50–54, 135–37. On the spiritual interest of the Romantics in France, see Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme – Théosophie 1770–1820, Deuxième Partie, La génération de l’Empire (1800–1820)* (Paris, 1979).

## Drugs

From these penchants to surrender to nature and engage in spirituality, it requires no great leap of the imagination to arrive at the next thing that was remarkable at Woodstock, namely, the openly professed use of drugs. Besides marijuana, a whole medicine chest of psychedelic drugs was consumed. Tens of thousands of people sat and lay there tripping or half-stoned around the immense stage, and many of the musicians were patently under the influence. At Woodstock, this widespread use of drugs was not so manifest in a demented, bacchanalian ecstasy, since these spiritual youngsters — devotees of free love longing for a return to nature — were more into relaxation, wholly in keeping with the renowned motto of the drug guru Timothy Leary: “Turn on, tune in, drop out.”<sup>24</sup>

They probably identified closely with what Jimi Hendrix sang on Monday morning, at the end of three days of “love, peace and ... music”: “Purple haze all in my eyes / Don’t know if it’s day or night / You got me blowin’, blowin’ my mind / Is it tomorrow, or just the end of time?” And while “the end of time” might have been understood as an allusion to the end of the festival by the odd soul who was not too hazy, there were even fewer people who interpreted it as the biblical “Day of Judgement,” which had exercised its threatening influence for so many centuries. “The end of time” here, rather, points to the experience of rapture, the feeling of no longer belonging to a world in which Monday mornings exist, the trip through a different region of reality, the kingdom of the imagination, “The Other Side of This Life” (Jefferson Airplane).

This escapist longing is not far removed from the Romantics’ interest in dreams, hypnosis, and sleepwalking. The gateway to the other side can be accessed in the dream state and in ecstatic rapture or being “high,” and the latter is induced by alcohol and drugs, which were used by many a Romantic as a means to broaden the mind. Though it is true that Thomas De Quincey started out using opium as a painkiller, he soon cultivated an addiction that offered him a glimpse of another world, as recorded in his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) which has seen a resurgence in interested readers since the late 1960s.

Coleridge, De Quincey’s contemporary and spiritual kinsman, also experienced the double-edged blessings of the medicine, which was then easy to procure and usually imbibed as laudanum, a concoction

24 Weiner and Stillman, *Woodstock Census*, 73–74. Cf. Joel Makower, *Woodstock: The Oral History* (London, 1989), 263–70.

of wine and opium. The creation of his fragmentary and unfinished poem, *Kubla Khan*, is often attributed to an opium-induced high. Charles Rosen notes that this strange work is the embodiment *par excellence* of Novalis's methodology for the writing of poems and stories "without sense or logic, but only with associations like dreams or music."<sup>25</sup> Coleridge's and De Quincey's use of drugs predated Prosper Mérimée's, who perhaps knew better how to handle it — partly thanks to his Oriental travels — as well as Baudelaire's drug experiments (and later Rimbaud's). Sometimes you have the feeling that you are evaporating, wrote Baudelaire about his opium experiences, "and you will attribute to your pipe ... the strange faculty of *smoking you*." He was deeply curious about other, exotic worlds, which he was able to conjure up with hashish, though he repeatedly warned of the addiction that "the transient Paradise of the pharmacy" might lead to.<sup>26</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe, so deeply admired by Baudelaire, was no less colorful an example, and in the midst of his turbulent life he regularly set aside objections to opium and drink. Poe's *Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) ends with a pointless description of a journey by canoe on the Southern Ocean, which is difficult to interpret as anything other than an opium-induced vision. In this vision, the company of the protagonist glides across a milky white ocean, from which a wild flare of vapor arises, and they are overwhelmed by a white, ash-like shower. A gigantic curtain of vapor spreads out in front of them, behind which indistinct images flit, and gigantic, pallidly white birds continuously fly from behind this veil. A chasm throws itself open and a giant, shrouded human figure arises, with skin as white as snow ...

### It's Just Music

The intoxicating, rapturous dream has also, of old, been fed by music, and the important role of that music is, in the final analysis, perhaps still most remarkable in the case of Woodstock and in the pop culture of recent decades for which Woodstock was a model. It is the music that drives all these hippies and youngsters into their altered state and helps them to escape their everyday existence and societal conventions. "You know," declaims Janis Joplin in typical 1960s vernacular, "I mean you don't have to go take anybody's shit, man, just to like music .... You know, it's just music." The music was the element that bound together the counter-culture, which rapidly

25 Charles Rosen, *Romantic Poets, Critics, and Other Madmen* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 47.

26 Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York, 1986), 116. See also Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 416; Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution*, 86-88; Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics 1500-2000* (London, 2001), 35-47.

became a worldwide youth culture. At the pop concert the music culminated in an overwhelming experience for various senses: thanks to new technology it became loud, encouraged dancing without the restrictions of a concert hall, and induced a mental trance. It appealed to unrealized emotions, to feelings of solidarity and to a longing for transcendence. Music opened *The Doors of Perception*.<sup>27</sup> And it became a means of expression for political protest and utopias.<sup>28</sup>

Music was the most important art form for the Romantics, because it could express the inner world of emotions in the most immediate way, without the intercession of language — a necessity in literature — and without the distanced and static character of the visual arts. Music is the ultimate expression of the imagination: just like mind-altering substances, it offers a portal to “the other side of this life.” It is an emotional language, August Wilhelm Schlegel noted, and is independent of all extraneous objects. It is, to quote E.T.A. Hoffmann, the most romantic of all the arts, perhaps the only one that is “purely romantic.” Among the Romantics, music enjoyed a nearly religious significance; Ludwig Tieck called it “the last secret ... the wholly revealed religion.”<sup>29</sup> It is remarkable, in retrospect, that the art song genre, notably the German *Lied*, gained in status during the Romantic era, while at the same time the Romantics were starting to perform and arrange folk songs from the past, in a manner that is not so far removed from the folk and country revival that started in the 1960s and was also a major element at Woodstock.

It is tempting to extrapolate these parallels and compare the long hair of poets like Shelley, Coleridge, Keats, Novalis, Rückert and Hölderlin, of composers like Schumann and Beethoven, of writers like Gogol, Chamisso, Wackenroder, Heine, Constant, and Balzac, or painters like Millet, Gros, and David, with the hairstyles of the male heroes of Woodstock, or to pay more attention to clothing and appearances. Although there is something intriguing about these parallels, something else is important here: it is about a way of understanding and experiencing life and reality that is expressed in these fashions.

### The Myth of a Revolution

Since the foregoing comparison does at least suggest that the cultural revolution of the late 1960s was composed of romantic tendencies, it prompts the question of the extent to which those changes actually signified a break with previous decades or whether it was more like the revival of a more comprehensive and more extended period.

27 “The Doors of Perception” alludes to William Blake’s statements: “In the universe there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and between them there are doors,” and “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.” *The Doors of Perception* is also the title of Aldous Huxley’s book from 1954 about experiences with drugs. Robert C. Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Rise of America’s 1960s Counterculture* (Lanham, et al., 2015), 12–13. The name of the band The Doors is an abbreviation of Blake’s “The Doors of Perception.” For the role of music in U.S. counterculture, see Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Ch. 7.

28 Sheila Whiteley, “‘1, 2, 3 What Are We Fighting 4?’ Music, Meaning and ‘The Star Spangled Banner,’” in *Remembering Woodstock*, ed. Bennett, 18–28; cf. Detlef Siegfried, “Music and Protest in 1960s Europe,” in *1968 in Europe*, ed. Klimke and Scharloth, 57–70.

29 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London, 1971), 50–51, 91–95; Paolo d’Angelo, *L’estetica del romanticismo* (Bologna, 1997), 186–88.

Michel Foucault argues that the standard historical periodization based on political upheavals is not always the best way to understand the past, and that insight has proven to be a fruitful line of inquiry.<sup>30</sup> A long period in history can be understood as an “episteme,” a whole set of ideas and experiences that (mostly unconsciously) determine what is accepted as knowledge in a specific time. For historians, revolutions often appear to be not so revolutionary as contemporaries perceived them since the deeper structure of the period has hardly been changed.

It can therefore do no harm to turn one’s attention to the supposed discontinuities. Did the 1960s represent a revolutionary change? To what extent did Woodstock simply fall out of the sky? Though there had been pop concerts before, and with very similar components, Woodstock was much more large-scale, and recordings were made that would become a great commercial success. That musical (and visual) registration meant that the festival could become the myth that it still is. One is still left with the question of whether one can talk about a revolutionary transition in culture during these years. Thanks to the rich diversity of history, such revolutions are always accompanied by a series of phenomena that casts doubt on the apparent break with the preceding decades. The rise of youth culture and a new self-awareness among young people had already been seen on the West Coast of the United States in the late 1940s, for example. Beat poets such as William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, who looked up to Baudelaire and Rimbaud, shaped this culture and were the mouthpieces of a counterculture that saw a revival from about 1950, a counterculture in which young people experimented with alcohol and drugs and free love, and protested against bourgeois lifestyles. Spontaneity, imagination, and new “spiritual” values were almost as important then as at Woodstock.<sup>31</sup>

Various avant-garde circles of the twentieth century briefly displayed the same anti-bourgeois and romantic traits, as already demonstrated by the Dada movement. In *Children of the Mire* (1974), Octavio Paz points out the many similarities between the Romantic era and the avant-garde, and he also clarifies to what extent thinking in terms of watersheds in history is *itself* a romantic artifact. The early Romantics were initially profoundly impressed by the French Revolution, and it was already evident that their thinking was permeated with a keen desire to definitively break with the past.<sup>32</sup> In his classical *Naturalism Supernaturalism* (1971) M. H. Abrams presents six fundamental

30 Michel Foucault, “Sur les façons d’écrire l’histoire,” in *Dits et écrits I (1954–1969)* (Paris, 1994), 585–600, 586. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris, 1966), 64–65.

31 Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman, *Seeds of the Sixties* (Berkeley, 1994), 152. Cf. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1989), 268–70.

32 Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde*, trans. Rachel Phillips (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

characteristics of this influential romantic idea of revolution, of which three are particularly relevant here. The revolution will

(2) bring about abruptly, or in a remarkably short time, the shift from the present era of profound evil, suffering, and disorder to an era of peace, justice, and optimal conditions for general happiness; [...] (4) though it will originate in a particular and critical time and place, it will by irresistible contagion spread everywhere, to include all mankind; [...] (6) it is inevitable, because it is guaranteed either by a transcendent or by an immanent something, not ourselves, which makes for the ineluctable triumph of total justice, community, and happiness on earth.<sup>33</sup>

One can, however, pinpoint a number of features of the counterculture even before the avant-gardist revivals. In France, or rather in Paris, the tradition of an artistic Bohemia started to define itself in the mid-nineteenth century. In its “adolescent rebellion and withdrawal,” this group of young artists, journalists, and dropouts taunted the bourgeoisie with a lifestyle that ranged from dandyism to the anti-social.<sup>34</sup> It is true that this circle usually lacked the admiration for nature and the countryside, the use of drugs was mostly restricted to alcohol, and music was not the only “chosen” art form. However, they demonstrate an anti-bourgeois stance that corresponds with much of the youthful rebelliousness noted above.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to all this, there is a long tradition of youth movements from the first half of the twentieth century. This ranges from youngsters motivated by political idealism who were affiliated with revolutionary parties (communists, fascists, and socialists) to the scouting movement of Baden-Powell and many national variants of youth organizations that focused on the appreciation of nature. Many of the above-mentioned traits can be found in these youth movements: anti-bourgeois sentiments and rejection of prudery, and idolization of nature, dance, and music, albeit in the form of folk music, folk dancing, and campfire songs which have been considered old-fashioned since the 1970s<sup>36</sup>

In this light Woodstock is indeed subversive, but not so revolutionary as it seems. Put differently, it was revolutionary in its scale and in the influence that it had in the dispersion of a counterculture that, because of increasing prosperity and the technological capability to

33 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, 62–63. Cf. Maarten Doorman, *Art in Progress. A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam, 2003), 46–47.

34 Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*, 270; Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1989), 195–97.

35 Malcolm Easton, *Artist and Writers in Paris: The Bohemian Idea, 1803–1867* (London, 1964).

36 See Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875–1945* (London, 2007).

broadcast that culture (radio, vinyl albums, and television), would eventually become mainstream. The massiveness of the resistance was undoubtedly threatening to traditional faith-based values and the family. However, with the advantage of hindsight, one can say that Woodstock was hardly revolutionary in its ideas, which had a respectable and widely dispersed prehistory, nor in the desire for a new way of life. The six points mentioned above can be found everywhere, in the twentieth *and* the nineteenth centuries, though perhaps not in so concentrated or innocent a form as in the pure culture of the three-day pop festival. The illustrious 1960s, in short, have the character of a romantic revival rather than demarcating a break with the past.

### The Birth of the Imagination

In their concentration of romantic ideas, Woodstock and Paris 1968 present a useful panorama of Western culture. They blow the dust off a whole array of this culture's by no means outdated clichés, a culture which displays a remarkable stability in its desire for change and the accompanying revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> It is a culture that was driven by a dynamic of resistance and aspiration for about two hundred years. This may easily be said of the eighteenth century and, ultimately, of other periods and cultures. However, the enduring force behind this dynamic resides in something that emerged in the course of the eighteenth century and only began to manifest itself fully in the Romantic era: the imagination. At that time, the idea gradually dawned that it was possible to invent a different world and a new life — one that did not lie “on the other side,” as Christian precepts would have it, but was also accessible in other ways. This newness was also deemed attractive rather than corrupting, implying that reality would be perceived differently from then on. With the aid of the imagination, one can potentially transform the world into something different. That is what science and politics achieved at the dawn of the nineteenth century, and what the arts achieved: they all present us with a structurally different and better world thanks to the imagination. The proclamation daubed in red in the Paris of 1968, the call to give power to the imagination, was therefore a fairly hollow slogan: the imagination had been the leading light for almost two centuries already.

The birth of the imagination, a revolution in the understanding and perception of the world that was as complex as it was wide-ranging, occurred across epistemological, aesthetic and ethical domains.<sup>38</sup> It

37 Cf. Doorman, *Art in Progress*, 45–47, 54–56.

38 James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981). Cf. J. J. A. Mooij, *Fictional Realities: The Use of Literary Imagination* (Amsterdam, 1993). Cf. Doorman, *Art in Progress*, 36–43.

began to manifest itself in a poeticization of the world — romanticizing, as the German Romantics called it — striking to the heart of the Romantic program. Novalis put it as follows in these well-known lines:

The world must be romanticized if we are to rediscover its original sense. To romanticize is simply to potentialize qualitatively. In this operation the lower self is identified with a better self [...] By giving a lofty sense to what is common, a mysterious aspect to the everyday, the dignity of the unknown to the familiar, the appearance of infinity to the infinite, I am romanticizing these things.<sup>39</sup>

Such grandiosity seems to detach itself from reality, but is in fact permeated through and through by the way in which Westerners perceive and understand the world to this day. The idiom of Novalis and his contemporaries marked the dawn of a duality that has dominated life ever since, structuring the way in which we still approach the world.

It is a duality that may well be inherent in the world, but is above all attributed to it by mankind. It is an equivocality that, philosophically speaking, can be traced back to the epistemological precepts of Immanuel Kant and of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. In the parallel between the “infinite striving” of the I as formulated by Fichte and the view of the Romantics that the imagination is the progenitor of all things lies the crucial similarity between Germanic idealism and Romanticism: in the creative faculty that inevitably “animates” the world, culture, and politics, and, in fact, *must* animate them. That is why art became so important, because it is the ideal vehicle for this. In the winged words of Blake, the ultimate goal is “To see a World in a Grain of Sand: / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.”<sup>40</sup>

39 Novalis, *Fragments I* (Kap. 24), <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/fragmente-i-6618/24>. Translation cited in Gerald Gillespie, Manfred Engel, and Bernard Dieterle, eds., *Romantic Prose Fiction* (Amsterdam, 2008), 479. Cf. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 200.

40 René Wellek, “The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History,” in *Romantic Writings*, ed. Stephen Bygrave, 326–35 (New York 1996). On the transition from imagination in German Romanticism to that of English Romanticism, see Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford, 1995), 6–10.

Since the dawn of Romanticism, the imagination has formed one of the main features of human experience in the West, yet this fact does not have a wholly auspicious significance. The spaces of the imagination are filled with fears and horrific fantasies, as Goya illustrated with his monsters, and as were also evident in the improvised medical facilities at Woodstock, where many a “flipped-out” hippie had to be treated for the horrors an imagination speeding on amphetamine. Here, too, lies the basis of what has come to be



known as the “romantic agony,” thanks to the English translation of Mario Praz’s standard work about the secretly admired offshoots of Romanticism: the mixture of decadent debunking and exuberant erotic desires, of Satanism, the death urge, sado-masochism, spleen and *femmes fatales*.<sup>41</sup> However, for most of the Romantics the longing inspired by the imagination was first and foremost an expression of optimism, hope of the kind that Holmes characterized so tellingly.

In the years after the French Revolution, the imagination conjured up “a visionary world,” to quote the writer Robert Southey, Coleridge’s brother-in-law and friend. Southey echoed the lines of Wordsworth quoted above: “Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race.” In short, it was the dawn of an era of a “dizzying sense of total possibility,” as George Steiner would later describe it.<sup>42</sup> Though the enthusiasm for the Revolution among the German and English Romantics quickly waned during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and eventually disappeared, political aspirations for a better world were an enduring component of romantic thinking. Woodstock and Paris 1968 display the rebelliousness and aspirations — utopian and personal, in politics, and in affairs of the heart and love of nature — which were ignited by the imagination.

Now, a few decades on, this hope sometimes evokes compassion, since various aspects of the ideals of Romanticism that were reformulated during those years now seem naïve and sometimes even to have been corrupted. Is it not true that a good few of the above-mentioned aspirations for freedom have degenerated into a frenetic pursuit of self-fulfillment and pleasure, in the same way that Horkheimer and Adorno saw the Enlightenment craving for freedom and emancipation transform into its very antithesis, into an ever-stricter control of the subject?<sup>43</sup>

The Frankfurt School’s struggle to achieve the emancipation of the subject might have contributed to this dialectical development. For example, the appeal by Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm for the sexual liberation of mankind, for mankind’s liberation from the oppressive structures of a capitalist, performance-driven society, was an important impulse for the sexual revolution. This revolution seems not only to have been a romantic emancipation but also the harbinger of a new hedonism, in which consumerism and eroticism have become interchangeable, and in which the individual’s pursuit of romantic love is perverted by the culture industry, symbolized by

41 Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford, 1970).

42 Both quoted in David Duff, “From Revolution to Romanticism: The Historical Context to 1800,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu, 23–34 (Oxford, 1999), 25.

43 Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2002 [1944/1947]).

44 Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley, 1997), 7, 145-47; Ellen Willis, "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism," in "The 60's without Apology," ed. Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, *Social Text*, nos. 9/10 (1984): 91-118.

45 Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1989), 88-90, 190-92; cf. Lilian R. Furst, *Romanticism: The Critical Idiom* (London, 1971), 2, 64. For a critique of this view, see Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York, 1996), 16-21. Critique of a suspect utopianism nourished by the Romantic imagination can be found in Forest Pyle's study of the ideological content of the imagination in the works of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and George Eliot (Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination*).

46 Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 201.

a deluge of commercials broadcast on television and ubiquitous soft porn. Feminist critique added arguments to the skepticism about what first was understood as unequivocal emancipation.<sup>44</sup>

In that sense the revolution of the late 1960s might not only be understood as repetition of romantic values, but also as a disenchantment with those values. The imagination has always (that is, in the last 250 years) been seen as a positive human faculty. But what if, as suggested above, the reign of the imagination were not an unqualified positive power, because it also generated the "romantic agony" of Mario Praz, because it was the core reason for Goethe judging the Romantic as "sickly," because it appeared to be a prerequisite for today's hopeless consumerism and the foreshadowing of the post-truth era?<sup>45</sup> What if there were to be a dictatorship of the imagination, a tyranny of romanticizing? What if, to quote the sociologist Colin Campbell, Romanticism has mainly served "to provide ethical support for that restless and continuous pattern of consumption which so distinguishes the behavior of modern man?"<sup>46</sup> For the time being, it can at best be concluded that the revolutionary and emancipatory character of the late 1960s from the perspective described here was more limited than might be expected. It only became truly revolutionary when graffiti, instead of calling for imagination's elevation, declared war on it.

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