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'A Change Is Gonna Come': Emancipation through Rock Music at the Woodstock Festival



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Introduction

Woodstock remains for many Americans a defining moment of the 1960s, mythologised as a weekend where socio-cultural divisions and conflicts were set aside in the name of peace, love and music. Considering that not even the attendance is agreed upon – estimates ranging from 300,000 to 500,000 – Woodstock ‘exists in many incarnations’, a historically contested ‘multiplicity of signs and symbols’.¹ To understand Woodstock’s socio-cultural influence, it must be viewed within the context of the late 1960s, existing within a counterculture that aimed to subvert the accepted, to deny the importance of, as one activist surmised, ‘categories of social worth’ and ‘the possession of the things and people’ in favour of a ‘style of life that has dignity’.² Arising from the ‘breakdown of a seemingly stable system’, the counterculture contributed to cultural fragmentation, young people ‘expressing alternative values and attitudes through the rituals of daily life’.^{3 4} It must also be viewed within the understanding that its mythologisation resides partly in its existence as the antithesis of the Altamont Speedway Festival, where violence and unrest combined to, as Don McLean immortalised it, define the ‘day the music died’.⁵

Firstly, the rationale for this project must be made clear in order to contextualise in what light the questions have been asked and the answers sought. The primary rationale is to address a contested area of historiography. Historians disagree whether Woodstock was emancipatory or simply hedonistic, if rock was an agent of change or

¹ Andy Bennett, *Remembering Woodstock*, (London, 2016), p.29.

² Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution*, (Oxford, 1998), p.498.

³ George Lipsitz, ‘Who’ll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock ‘n’ Roll, and Social Crises’, in David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), pp.219-220.

⁴ William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*, (Oxford, 1986), p.326.

⁵ Don McLean, ‘American Pie’, on *American Pie*, United Artists Records, 1971.

a mirrored reflection, and whether it achieved anything of significance. Some historians suggest not; Peter Doggett has, for example, characterised rock as vacuous by nature, 'compromised and sold in the very instant it was made'.⁶ Robert Pattison is more damning in his criticism, terming it the 'music of triumphant vulgarity', of having achieved little else but hedonism and noise.⁷ William Chafe has dismissed rock as having a minor role in the counterculture, with only a narrow, hedonistic approach to discussing key issues.⁸ On a similar note, William O'Neill has criticised rock as 'tiresome', 'less a movement and more a business', fitting in with the 'vague and elastic' counterculture.⁹ This project ultimately disagrees with these findings, advocating instead for a more positive interpretation of rock's influence, denying that it was narrow or hedonistic and disagreeing that culture matters little. It therefore finds commonality with the more positive historiographical school. It finds more similarities, for example, with George Lipsitz, who credited rock with raising 'profound challenges' to the dominant culture, and with Michael Kramer when he presents rock as a 'crucial cultural form', central to personal experiences and identities.^{10 11} Yet it assigns rock a more influential role than these histories; it agrees with John Street that music was a means of 'expressing private frustrations', but does not agree that 'no collective or political action was implied', similarly seconding Dominick Cavello's construction of rock as the 'backbeat for youths cultural dance', but going further than crediting it only as a 'medium through which one could let go in public'.

⁶ Peter Doggett, *There's A Riot Going On*, (Edinburgh, 2008), p.10.

⁷ Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, (Oxford, 1987), p.9.

⁸ Chafe, *Unfinished*, pp. 409-412.

⁹ William O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of American in the 1960s*, (Chicago, IL, 1971), p.245.

¹⁰ Lipsitz, 'Stop the Rain', p.227

¹¹ Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (Oxford, 2013), pp.7-8.

¹² ¹³ It finds most similarities with Gretchen Lemke-Santagelo's work, which presented rock music as 'breaking the consensus that all was right', revealing how culture can 'reshape' and 'transform society'. ¹⁴ Her vision of rock as transformative is a view that this paper echoes in its findings.

Furthermore, the specific rationale of 'Woodstock' as a case study of the counterculture is due to its historical richness, the festival residing simultaneously as an arena of contested historical memory and as a distillation of the key aspects within rock's dynamic relationship with the wider counterculture. As Bob Spitz has argued, the 'roster of performers' at Woodstock remain the 'essence of sixties rock', and the range of songs performed represent many of the countercultural themes embedded in rock music. It therefore is a readymade cross-section, an accessible starting point, through which wider questions about the counterculture can be asked. Woodstock is also a contemporary cultural reference point. History matters because it is used to structure contemporary narratives and informs how Americans understand, engage with and interpret the consequences of the past. Newt Gingrich, for example, has used Woodstock and the counterculture as an example of the opposite of 'American Civilisation', decreeing it as a major contribution to the 'thirty-year pattern of social and moral decay'. ¹⁵ Mitt Romney did similarly more recently in his 2012 election campaign, presenting his religious views as the dialectical opposite of the moral and structural decay of the counterculture. ¹⁶ This project thus additionally wants to gain

¹² John Street, *Rebel Rock: The Politics of Popular Music*, (Oxford, 1986), p.74.

¹³ Dominick Cavello, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History*, (New York, 1999), p.148.

¹⁴ Gretchen Lemke-Santagelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, (Lawrence, KS, 2009), p.182.

¹⁵ Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, eds., *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America*, (Minneapolis, MN, 2012), p. xi.

¹⁶ Maureen Dowd, 'Mitt's Big Love', *New York Times*, January 14th, 2012.

a stronger insight into how history is used and misused, providing insight into the truth and accuracy of contemporary interpretations of Woodstock rock.

This project intends to primarily investigate the concept of emancipation and how rock contributed to this. Emancipatory, in this context, means to give freedom or encourage liberation; if something oppressive in nature is reconstituted to become less oppressive or increasingly permissive, then it can be said to be emancipatory. This paper seeks to investigate and analyse how rock influenced emancipatory trends and what problematic elements it still held. Chapter one discusses the impact of rock on societal conceptions of love and the self, additionally reviewing the role that hedonism played. Chapter two looks at the political aspect of rock, particularly focusing on its anti-war discourse, whilst chapter three reviews how rock worked alongside countercultural conceptions of communality to physically create and define new communal possibilities. These three chapters are deliberately designed within a wider view to look at how rock influenced the makeup of humans; the personal, the communal and the political, or the mediating force between the self and other. In short, it will seek to provide an insight into rock's dynamic relationship with the counterculture and to understand its achievements and limitations. It will use a multi-textual range of sources, including written memoirs, oral histories, contemporary reports, song lyrics and film. To gain an insight into its impact, it uses the testimony of both active and passive [e.g. those not in attendance but affected by its effects] persons, with the sources designed to allow for cross-referential analysis, thereby allowing the project to consider the nuances of the relationship and reach a stronger evaluative conclusion on rock's emancipatory effects at Woodstock.

The project will argue that in sum, rock was emancipatory because it undermined and challenged oppressive structures, additionally constructing alternative structures that were significantly more emancipatory. It provided a common language and experience, creating a forum for the discussing, debate and rethinking of contemporary issues. Rock therefore was the 'producer and product of the politics that coexisted with it', creating 'physical and figurative spaces' for emancipatory transformation.^{17 18} Yet it will also recognise rock's weaknesses. Hedonism, for example, was for the most part a method to subvert the commonly accepted perception of 'normality', yet contributing to 'dropping out', rock proving itself unwilling to engage with issues in which it was complicit. Equally, rock failed to extend its emancipatory impulses fully to women and African-Americans, resulting in emancipatory structures that, whilst bringing more freedom to all, benefited white men considerably more so than other groups. Rock, therefore, was emancipatory, but its limitations should be understood and kept in sight when assessing its overall contribution.

¹⁷ Bennett, *Remembering*, p.38.

¹⁸ Lipsitz, 'Stop the Rain', p.209.

'Take Me Higher': Refashioning the Self and Love at Woodstock

Rejecting contemporary moralities and limitations on sexuality and individuality, the counterculture defined itself as an oppositional force to societal constructions of the self and love. Integral to each other, the self and love became inseparable as an emancipatory construct, so that one activist declared; 'We assert the right to enjoy ourselves, which is the right to love'.¹⁹ Rock identified, problematised and refashioned existing constructions, providing a common language and discussion forum for new normative visions on the self and love. In turn, rock's accessibility and popularity disseminated these new structures, gaining public awareness and popular usage. Therefore, rock was emancipatory because it contributed to creating and dispersing permissive societal structures that legitimised individual experience and choice, but emphasised responsibility. Furthermore, there is little evidence to support critiques of rock of being hedonistic; where pleasure-seeking was a primary motivator, this was in itself emancipatory, subverting notions of 'normality' by creating a critical discourse on whether the current normal-acceptable axis was, in fact, either. Yet, Woodstock was primarily emancipatory for men. Women found themselves objectified, eroticised and denied agency, ultimately unable to fully deconstruct oppressive structures or shape new constructions, leaving plenty to achieve for future individuals and social movements.

¹⁹ William J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, (Cambridge, 2015), p.67.

Defeating the Plastic Relationship

Rock music at Woodstock identified and problematised contemporary structures on love, arguing that their perception as 'normal' was neither natural nor desirable, and constructed alternative structures that legitimised and normalised multiple forms of love and sexual experience. The wider counterculture found man alienated from love, Philip Slater attacking pleasure as 'allowable only as a means to an end', problematic in that it must 'yield energy for the economic'.²⁰ Lyrically and performatively, rock drew on these ideas, interpreting current constructions as 'warped and twisted', forcing man to live in a 'plastic world where honest human relationships [are] impossible'.²¹ Musicians rejected the idea that in love humans should be strong, unemotional and internal, instead presenting love as a multitude of experiences, forms and identities that should be publicly celebrated and shared, lyrics exemplifying these ideas therefore serving a 'functional role in the world of youth'.²² When John Sebastian longed in *Darlin' Be Home Soon* for 'my darling, be home soon / I couldn't bear to wait an extra minute', he embodied this vision, rejecting humans as strong, atomistic and private individuals, instead identifying and celebrating the emotions, vulnerabilities and desires of each in the lived emotions of love.²³ Likewise, Santana and the Grateful Dead simultaneously identified, problematised and refashioned conceptions of love, celebrating man as emotional, complex and irrational. Santana embraced the irrationality that the 'plastic world' had forgotten by evoking the

²⁰ Philip E. Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness; American Culture at the Breaking Point*, (Boston, MA, 1970), pp.102-3.

²¹ Robert A. Rosenstone, "'The Times They Are A-Changin'": The Music of Protest," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382 (March 1969), p. 139.

²² Ibid.

²³ John Sebastian, 'Darlin' Be Home Soon', on *You're a Big Boy Now* by The Lovin' Spoonful, Kama Sutra Records, 1967.

supernatural in *Persuasion*, comparing love as ‘this spell you put on me’, so that ‘I can’t help myself’.²⁴ They legitimised the primacy, rawness and complexity of emotions and therefore identified previous behaviour controls enforced by ‘normality’ as wrong. The Grateful Dead in *Turn On Your Lovelight* presented humans as vulnerable in love, singing that ‘without a warning you broke my heart, takin’ it baby, tore it’.²⁵ Echoing Santana’s identification and problematisation of existing structures, they instead constructed an alternative vision that legitimised the multiplicity of emotions, irrational experience and desires as an appropriate and desirable individual experience, a new vision for love.

Through accessible lyrics and music, rock condensed difficult ideas into a common language, allowing people to understand and critically engage with these new ideas. Furthermore, rock’s provision of a shared language and experience provided a common denominator between people, promoting and stimulating debate on current and new structures. As Paul Kantner of the Jefferson Plane commented, rock was ‘the new form of communication for our generation’, *Woodstock* director Michael Wadleigh explaining this as a result of lyrics being ‘truly emotional [and] moving’.^{26 27} Thus, as Jim Morrison of the Doors surmised, concerts became ‘sexual politics’, where the ‘music we make.... interacts with [the audience]’, a theme more coarsely surmised by Janis Joplin, who declared her music was ‘supposed to make you fuck’.^{28 29} In turn, *Woodstock* shows how discussion turned into emancipatory action, the new

²⁴ Santana, ‘Persuasion’, on *Santana*, Columbia Records, 1969.

²⁵ The Grateful Dead, ‘Turn On Your Lovelight’, on *Live/Dead*, Warner Bros. Records, 1969.

²⁶ Miller, *Hippies*, p.84.

²⁷ Michael Wadleigh, quoted in Pete Fornatale, *Back to the Garden: the Story of Woodstock*, (London, 2010), p.215.

²⁸ Jim Morrison, quoted in O’Neill, *Coming Apart*, p.24.

²⁹ Janis Joplin, quoted in Cavello, *Fiction*, p.149.

permissive freedoms of individual sexual experience a well-documented part of the weekend. Carl Belz remembers Woodstock as a 'world filled with music... and love, most of which were free', in which fans 'roamed' the site, 'bathing in the nude'.³⁰ Limited by editorial guidelines, Griel Marcus inferred similarly in *Rolling Stone*, commenting that people stayed to 'dig... the people', whilst *Time Magazine* explicitly commented that Woodstock was awash with 'unashamed nudity' and 'open and casual sex'.^{31 32} In her memoirs, Joan Baez described Woodstock as 'sex and rock and roll', highlighting the sexuality of 'Janis 'coitus interruptus' Joplin [and] the gorgeous sweating chest of Roger Daltry'.³³ Baez identified, like Belz and Marcus, a new permissive construction of sexuality in action, highlighting additionally the importance of performers physically deconstructing sexual taboos. Performers publicly celebrated and therefore legitimised individual sexuality and expression. Baez identified The Who's Roger Daltry in particular, but others remember Janis Joplin 'sang really sexy' and Grace Slick of the Jefferson Airplane as 'radiant, unobtainable beauty and raw sexual energy.'^{34 35} The film *Woodstock* documents this performative sexuality; in particular, Sly Stone, who in *Love City* declared 'everybody's free' in a 'love city', performed with heavy sexual inference, physically rejecting behaviour deemed 'normal' and showing that ultimately what was normal and acceptable was the

³⁰ Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock*, (New York, 1972), p.210.

³¹ Griel Marcus, 'The Woodstock Festival', September 1969, reprinted in Jann Wenner, ed., *20 Years of Rolling Stone: What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been*, (London, 1987), p.55.

³² 'The Message of History's Biggest Happening', *Time Magazine*, Vol 94, Issue 9, August 29, 1969.

³³ Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With: A Memoir*, (London, 1988), p.163.

³⁴ Gillan Gaar, quoted in Santagelo, *Daughters*, p.29.

³⁵ Santeglo, *Daughters*, p.28.

individual freedom to express sexuality.³⁶ It is unsurprising then that Anne Bell remembers Woodstock as an ‘outpouring of joy, humour, sex... love’.³⁷

Feed Your Head

Like with love, rock drew upon wider countercultural thought to reimagine the self. Countercultural writers such as Theodore Roszak argued that the American ‘technocracy...fostered a myth of objectified consciousness, which produced and justified incessant warfare, unequal distribution of wealth, racial conflict, pollution and... coercion of citizens.’³⁸ The individual – therefore – was not free but limited by the societal structures around them. Woodstock rock rejected these structures, instead emphasising the primacy of individual freedom, endorsing drug usage because change came primarily through ‘self-knowledge’, the ‘policeman inside their heads’ being the principal barrier to social change.³⁹ Thus sang Sly Stone when he told the crowd on *I Want To Take You Higher* to get ‘Higher! Higher! Higher!’, the music being ‘there to help you groove’; they should focus on themselves and find personal freedom in the cathartic fusion of music and drugs.⁴⁰ Similarly, Jefferson Airplane on *White Rabbit* urged people to focus on the self, to ‘feed your head’, whilst Jimi Hendrix in *Purple Haze* asked ‘Excuse me while I kiss the sky’, presenting the joy and creativity of the ‘trip’ as a means to experience individual oneness and discover meaning and

³⁶ Sly & The Family Stone, ‘Love City’, on *Life*, CBS Records, 1968.

³⁷ Anne Bell, quoted in Dale Bell, *Woodstock: An Inside Look at the Movie That Shook Up the World and Defined a Generation*, (Los Angeles, 1999), p.114.

³⁸ Theodore Roszak, quoted in Michael Doyle, ‘Debating the Counterculture: Ecstasy and Anxiety Over the Hip Alternative,’ in David Farber and Beth Bailey, eds, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s* (New York, 2003), p.149.

³⁹ Lipsitz, ‘Stop The Rain’, p.218.

⁴⁰ Sly & The Family Stone, ‘I Want To Take You Higher’, on *Stand!*, Epic Records, 1969.

freedom.⁴¹ ⁴² This focus on drug usage reconstituted the search for meaning as a legitimate, desirable but ultimately individualistic journey. Abbie Hoffman described Woodstock as ‘the first attempt to land a man on the earth’, indicating that it was a wide festival aimed at promoting the individual as supreme.⁴³ Graham Nash recalls that the new structure of individual freedom ensured that people ‘finally realis[ed] that... they were a force to be reckoned with’.⁴⁴ New perspectives on the self fused with new notions of individual sexuality to promote the doctrine of individuality, rejecting the ‘technocracy’ by promoting happiness as individual freedom.

Performance was an important form for promoting new ideas about the self. Michael Wadleigh recalled Joe Cocker in particular embracing individualism, his behaviour rejecting performance norms. He got ‘completely carried away... playing his air-guitar, he’s pigeon-toed nearly falling over, staggering everywhere, sweat just flying off him’, providing a ‘truly emotional, moving’ performance.⁴⁵ Joe Cocker was defining himself as an individual; he would provide his own meaning and behaviour, rejecting expectations of propriety enforced through ‘normality’, thus contributing through action to the simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of the individual as prime. Hendrix and Grace Slick used clothing to express and legitimise this new vision of individual expression. Hendrix wore brightly coloured clothes, a shaman-like beaded, tasselled but revealing shirt and a purple bandana; Grace Slick chose ‘white pants and a white leather dress’ to celebrate the purity of the ‘first gathering of the

⁴¹ Jefferson Airplane, ‘White Rabbit’, on *Surrealistic Pillow*, RCA Records, 1967.

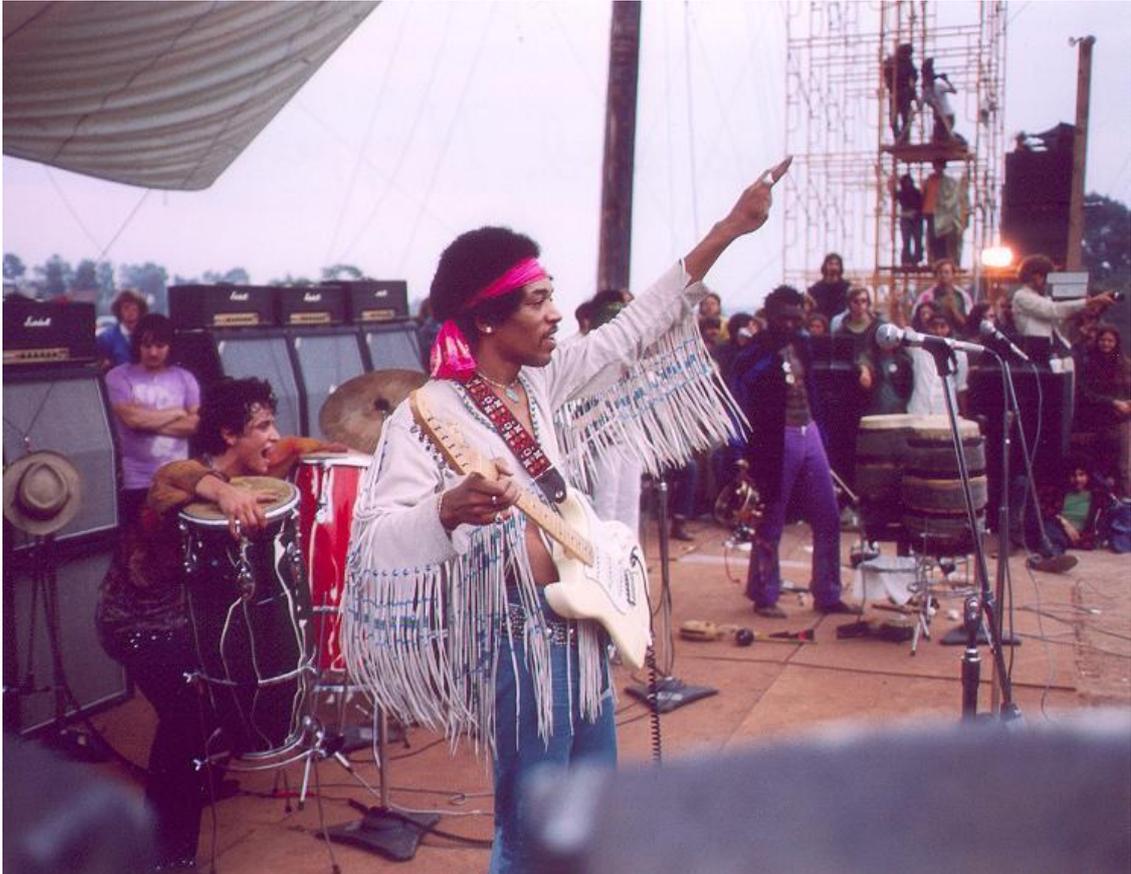
⁴² Jimi Hendrix, ‘Purple Haze’, on *Purple Haze* (Single), The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Reprise Records, 1967.

⁴³ Abbie Hoffman, *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album*, (New York, 1971), p.13.

⁴⁴ Graham Nash, *Wild Tales: A Rock & Roll Life*, (London, 2013), p.231.

⁴⁵ Michael Wadleigh, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.215.

tribes'.⁴⁶ In this they mirrored the 'psychedelic' dress seen at Woodstock.⁴⁷ Rejecting societal norms and expectations of fashion, both intertwine sex and the self, emphasising individual sexuality and style, creating, as they did with music, an emancipatory structure that emphasised the primacy of the individual in creating meaning and normality.



Hendrix at Woodstock⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Grace Slick, *Somebody To Love? A Rock and Roll Memoir*, (London, 1999), p.138

⁴⁷ Time, 'The Message'.

⁴⁸ Hendrix at Woodstock, found at 'Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock', *All Dylan Blog*, available at <http://alldylan.com/august-18-jimi-hendrix-at-woodstock-1969/>, accessed 29/03/18.



Grace Slick at Woodstock⁴⁹

There is little evidence that hedonism became problematic at Woodstock, despite drugs and casual sex being by their nature self-indulgent. In his urging of 'Higher!', Sly Stone was undoubtedly pushing people to the limit, to involve themselves completely in an altered state, whilst Jimi Hendrix's questioning 'Are You Experienced?' presented

⁴⁹ Grace Slick at Woodstock, found at 'New York Times Style Does It Again', *I Mean...What?!? Blog*, available at <http://imeanwhat.com/people-we-lerve/the-new-york-times-style-does-it-again/>, accessed 29/03/18.

being ‘experienced’ [read, being high] a desirable and necessary step towards greater fulfilment of the self.⁵⁰ There were, of course, some dangers to this self-indulgence; overdose and excess can cause damage, even death. Yet, excess was carefully limited by the emphasis of personal responsibility in new constructions; regular stage announcements stressed personal and communal responsibility, setting up a system to pass on medicine, warning about bad acid, and reminding the crowd to look after each other, whilst the strong sense of community created – discussed in chapter 3 – entrenched a notion of wider responsibility.⁵¹ Ultimately, self-indulgence held a simpler message: normality was individualistic and self-discovered. When rock prioritised or promoted hedonism, this clashed and caused friction with definitions of ‘normality’, undermining and encouraging a critical discourse on the previous normal-acceptable axis, contributing to the new emancipatory structures. This contributed significantly to Time Magazine reporting Woodstock as producing a ‘new set of values... a new morality’, Life Magazine adding that it created a ‘sense of exhilaration and freedom’, views expressed by many participants.⁵²⁵³ Woodstock denied that normality was ‘common sense’, instead freeing the individual to discover what they wanted to be; it was a ‘special community where... you couldn’t separate the idealism from the irreverence’, Janis Joplin summarising this feeling when she told the crowd ‘you don’t have to take anybody’s shit, man, just to like music’.⁵⁴⁵⁵ One police officer commented that this sense of individual freedom and responsibility ensured that

⁵⁰ Jimi Hendrix, ‘Are You Experienced?’, on *Are You Experienced?*, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Reprise Records, 1967.

⁵¹ Bennett, *Remembering*, p.38.

⁵² Time, ‘The Message’.

⁵³ ‘The Woodstock Music Festival’, *Life Magazine Special Edition*, 1969, p.6.

⁵⁴ Paul Krassnaer, quoted in Michael Lang, *The Road to Woodstock*, (New York, 2009), p.198.

⁵⁵ Janis Joplin, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.139.

'countless' people 'exhibited generosity, cooperation, a willingness to help and kindness'.⁵⁶ Time Magazine opined that Woodstock was an attempt to 'live by a different ethical standard', the embodiment of new views on love and the self, with music being an undeniably essential part of this attempt; as Michael Shrieve remembers, the music 'transport[ed] you into different areas emotionally'.^{57 58} Rock became a common language, a platform through which the self and love were reconstructed to promote individuality both in thought and action, a significant emancipatory outcome.

Emancipation for whom?

Yet, for all the emancipatory outcomes that a new focus on the individual permitted, rock at Woodstock failed to extend to women the same freedoms. Music reduced women to passive, sexual objects; they were unable to express themselves as unique individuals, as Jimi Hendrix did for example, limited instead to serving as a sexual image for male consumption. Abbie Hoffman was typical of the rock scene when he objectified Janis Joplin, commenting that he 'love[ed] her swingin' her Southern comfort ass'.⁵⁹ Janis, as a result of ongoing objectification, felt restricted to appearing on stage as vulnerable yet sexual, primarily singing about love whilst her 'dual persona' presented her as 'lusty hedonist and suffering victim'.⁶⁰ As her former partner remembered, 'everybody wanted this sexy chick who sang really sexy... that's real sexist bullshit'.⁶¹ The same was true for Grace Slick, who on stage was depicted as a

⁵⁶ Daniel Carlson, *Dear Hippie ... We Met at Woodstock*, (Self-Published, 2016), p.22.

⁵⁷ Michael Shrieve, quoted in Bell, *Woodstock*, p.265

⁵⁸ Time, 'The Message'.

⁵⁹ Hoffman, *Woodstock*, p.119.

⁶⁰ Ellen Willis, 'Janis Joplin', in Jim Miller, ed, *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*, (New York, 1976), p.258.

⁶¹ Gillan Gaar, quoted in Santagelo, *Daughters*, p.29.

'heady, unforgettable combination of radiant, unobtainable beauty and raw sexual energy'.⁶² This sexualisation was in itself a form of power to attract and therefore gain a voice, explaining partly the common use of sexual imagery in lyrics and performance. Yet, as Ellen Willis pointed out, ultimately a women's individuality and image was restricted strictly to being in sexual terms, that she 'must serve some male fantasy to love'.⁶³ Women, like Joplin, often 'sang out of her pain as a woman... yet it was men who caused the pain'.⁶⁴ As Santagelo has argued, 'forced to conform to male-generated images', female artists merely 'reinforced' problematic structures; rock's own contradictions in its conceptualisation of individuality ensured that emancipation was not fully extended to women.⁶⁵

This denial of individuality came about partly because women were denied voices in the reconceptualisation of love, instead presented in rock primarily as an eroticised objective of desire, much to their detriment. Country Joe & The Fish exemplified this trend on *Friend, Lover, Women, Wife*, singing 'She's a woman, she's a wife... she's a temptress, she's a lady / she's the mother of my baby', the woman in question being unheard and instead reduced to a passive, sexual object.⁶⁶ Joe Cocker did similarly when he sang on *Something To Say* that 'There's something in the way she moves / That attracts me like no other lover'.⁶⁷ These songs exemplify the typical content of songs performed at Woodstock about love, in which women are presented as objects and little else is seen about them aside from their sexuality, eroticism, with none of

⁶² Santagelo, *Daughters*, p.28.

⁶³ Willis, 'Janis', p.258.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.260.

⁶⁵ Santagelo, *Daughters*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ Country Joe McDonald, 'Friend, Lover, Women, Wife', on *Tonight I'm Singing Just For You*, Vanguard Records, 1970.

⁶⁷ Joe Cocker, 'Something To Say', on *Joe Cocker*, A&M Records, 1972.

their nuance, complexity or difficulties presented. Men were represented as irrational, emotional, complicated, ultimately a little fragile, and certainly, in its own right, this was emancipatory. Indeed, it was emancipatory to even acknowledge women's sexuality as existent such as The Band did in *Loving You Is Sweeter Than Ever*, swooning that 'Discovering love could be so true / When shared by two'.⁶⁸ Yet, it was oppressive to deny women a voice and present them as something to be acted upon, as Jimi Hendrix did in *Fire*, ordering his love to 'let Jimi take over / yeah, you know what I'm talking 'bout / Yeah, get on with it, baby'.⁶⁹ Equally, it was oppressive when women were presented as objects to be collected and not let go, as Creedence Clearwater did when telling the audience on *Suzy Q* that 'you'll be mine, baby all the time'.⁷⁰ Furthermore, who is seen and heard matters in emancipation; Woodstock failed to promote female artists in their own right, thereby entrenching the problem. Of the three standalone female artists at Woodstock, only two – Joan Baez and Janis Joplin – were well-known. Sly & The Family Stone had female singers, but they worked primarily behind the main attraction of Sly. The Jefferson Airplane had Grace Slick but she was part of a large band and was often reduced to providing a sexualised image and edge to their music. This lack of representation was despite there being a plethora of female talent who sang about countercultural issues; Dusty Springfield, Aretha Franklin, Donna Summer, The Supremes, to name but a few. Underrepresentation ensured that women could not challenge their objectification and sexualisation, nor claim their own agency, unable in turn to contribute to new conceptions around love that with their input could have extended the same emancipatory individualism to

⁶⁸ The Band, 'Loving You Is Sweeter Than Ever', cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

⁶⁹ Jimi Hendrix, 'Fire', on *Are You Experienced?*, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Reprise Records, 1967.

⁷⁰ Creedence Clearwater Revival, 'Suzy Q', on *Creedence Clearwater Revival*, Fantasy Records, 1968.

them. Thus, women's individualism was reduced to being sexual only in nature, and they were denied voices or agency to both take part in the reconceptualisation of love or challenge their sexual portrayal, a less than emancipatory outcome.

Limited Emancipation

Rock music at Woodstock, therefore, was simultaneously an agent of change and a reflector of wider countercultural trends. It identified, problematised and refashioned constructions of the self and love, providing a common language and forum for the discussion of and dissemination of new ideas. In its limited self-indulgence it never reached the excess of hedonism that it is often critiqued for, instead creating a friction that revealed the normal-acceptable axis to be neither. Yet, it was less emancipatory for women, simultaneously objectifying them and denying them agency, underrepresenting them both in voice and stage presence, so that they could ultimately only serve male fantasies in their individualism. Rock music at Woodstock was therefore both powerful and emancipatory but limited in the scope of emancipation.

'Gimme an F': Embracing the Political at Woodstock

Although not as overtly radical as other 1960s political movements, the counterculture nonetheless was a powerfully critical movement, critiquing and re-envisioning societal norms and structures around issues such as race, economics and government. Rock music retained an important role in this criticism because, as countercultural icon Jerry Rubin surmised, 'our politics is our music'.⁷¹ At Woodstock, rock challenged and dismantled oppressive structures, offering its own permissive alternatives that balance communality and individualism to solve human alienation as it saw it. By offering a common language and a collective set of experiences, rock created a venue for protest and debate, in turn disseminating and popularising new critiques and structures. Its emancipatory outcome, therefore, lies in its meaningful contribution to the creation of newly permissive societal structures and visions. Furthermore, despite identifying as 'non-political', musician's subversion of normality and legitimisation of alternatives was in fact a significantly and overtly political act, supporting these emancipatory outcomes. Yet, limited by prejudice, rock undermined its own emancipatory abilities by simultaneously ignoring and appropriating African-American culture and artists, ensuring that the minority struggle for greater freedom went mostly unsupported and unrepresented at Woodstock.

⁷¹ Jerry Rubin, *Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution*, (London, 1970), p.24.

Alienation Abound

Challenging and reconceptualising societal structures, Woodstock, as Michael Wadleigh recalls, became a celebration of the 'richness of alternatives', in which people were encouraged to 'question everything'.⁷² In the eyes of Dale Bell, this was a patriotic reformation of the nation, 'doing for our country just as we had been mandated by JFK to do'.⁷³ Rock not only, as discussed in chapter one, emancipated love and the self, but rethought a society which it saw as one that 'makes war on peoples abroad and acts repressively towards helpless minorities... a land of people whose lives are devoid of feeling... a country whose institutions are crumbling away'.⁷⁴ It therefore, as Lipsitz has surmised, created 'physical and figurative spaces for cultural transformation'.⁷⁵ The 1960's were a time of 'resistance and radical dissent', a time of 'profound upheaval' in which 'traditional values of every kind – machismo, monogamy, patriotism - [were] rejected'.^{76 77} Young people critiqued and rejected the oppressive world they perceived they were inheriting. Rock reflected the heady unease with current societal structures and norms, putting the young 'in touch with serious, intellectual critiques of American life'.⁷⁸ Thus sang Creedence Clearwater on *Bad Moon Rising*; 'I see the bad moon arising/I see trouble on the way/I see earthquakes and lightnin'/ I see bad times today'.⁷⁹ Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young imagined alienation as a *Sea Of Madness*, singing 'How can I bring you to this sea of madness? / I love you so much it's gonna bring me sadness', critiquing society as a

⁷² Michael Wadleigh, quoted in Bell, *Woodstock*, p.13.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.66.

⁷⁴ Rosenstone, 'The Times', p.142.

⁷⁵ Lipsitz, 'Stop the Rain', p.209.

⁷⁶ Bennett, *Remembering*, p.20.

⁷⁷ George Nelson, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, (London, 1988), p.106.

⁷⁸ Rosenstone, 'The Times', p.143.

⁷⁹ Creedence Clearwater Revival, 'Bad Moon Rising', on *Green River*, Fantasy Records, 1969.

failure that produced unhappiness.⁸⁰ Tim Hardin presented the American dream as a lie on *How Can We Hang On to a Dream?*, conceptualising it as ‘walking away’ and condemning the lack of opportunities his generation had.⁸¹ In turn, Richie Havens identified society as coercive and repressive on *Freedom (Motherless Child)*, using a traditional African-American spiritual to highlight specific black experiences and demand communal and personal freedoms.⁸² Havens made a political statement by encouraging the large audience - estimated at 500,000 – to sing ‘Freedom’ with him, recalling how people ‘came together because of like-minded problems we were all having’, so that ‘freedom was created right there on stage...the vibration which was freedom... we had already accomplished’.^{83 84 85} As Cavello has pointed out, rock was a ‘medium through which one could let go in public and... make a political statement’.⁸⁶ Janis Joplin and Sly Stone took a similarly active approach to politics; Janis sang ‘you’d better get up... and raise your hand’, whilst Sly counselled active agitation against society, urging ‘Don’t let the plastic/ bring you down/you can make it if you try’.^{87 88} Jefferson Airplane envisioned the attendees as the ‘volunteers of America’, echoing Bells’ identification of Woodstock as a patriotic reformation.⁸⁹ Joan Baez and Canned Heat promised freedom for their generation. Baez sang *We Shall Overcome*, a Civil Rights anthem that promised freedom through justice, whilst Canned Head on *A Change Is Gonna Come* presented communal and individual freedom as inevitable

⁸⁰ Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, ‘Sea Of Madness’, cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

⁸¹ Tim Hardin, ‘How Can We Hang On to a Dream?’, on *Tim Hardin 1*, Verve Forecast Records, 1966.

⁸² Richie Havens, ‘Freedom (Motherless Child)’, cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

⁸³ Bennett, *Remembering*, p.30.

⁸⁴ Richie Havens, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.17.

⁸⁵ Richie Havens, quoted in Joel Makower, *Woodstock: The Oral History*, (London, 1989), p.189.

⁸⁶ Cavello, *Fiction*, p.148.

⁸⁷ Janis Joplin, ‘Raise Your Hand’, cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

⁸⁸ Sly & The Family Stone, ‘You Can Make It If You Try’, on *Stand!*, Epic Records, 1969.

⁸⁹ Jefferson Airplane, ‘Volunteers’, on *Volunteers*, RCA Records, 1969.

reforms.^{90 91} For Hendrix, this music mattered because ‘the listener can be taken somewhere’, where a ‘new sense’ was opened in people’s minds; it was ‘art and music’ that was ‘going to change the world’.⁹² The critique and reconceptualisation of societal norms and structures had a potent effect on the audience. Danny Turbeville recalls a ‘euphoric “Keep Feeding Each Other” utopian sensibility’, whilst David Meyers credited the music as a ‘distillation of... the whole political importance of Woodstock... idealistic citizens fighting LBJ and the generals’.^{93 94} The strongest summation came from Ted Lewis, who wrote in the New York Daily News that music at Woodstock was ‘a chance [for the young], perhaps, to express their emotional outlook on life which society fails to understand’.⁹⁵

Whoopee! We’re All Gonna Die!

This rejection, critique and reconceptualisation is best seen through rock’s anti-war discourse, in which performative and lyrical methods formulated a common language and forum for protest. In particular, Country Joe and Jimi Hendrix both protested and reconceptualised conceptions of ‘normality’ about war.

Country Joe & The Fish performed *The “Fish” Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag*, a powerful combination.⁹⁶ In the Fish Cheer, the audience shouted back letters [‘Gimme an F!’], culminating in a repeated shouting of ‘Fuck!’. This was a powerful protest; as John Morris recalls, it was ‘one of the most political moments’ at

⁹⁰ Joan Baez, ‘We Shall Overcome’, cover for Woodstock, 1969.

⁹¹ Canned Heat, ‘A Change Is Gonna Come’, cover for Woodstock, 1969.

⁹² Jimi Hendrix, quoted in Braunstein & Doyle, *Imagine*, p.209.

⁹³ Danny Turbeville, quoted in, Bell, *Woodstock*, p. 132.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁹⁵ Ted Lewis, quoted in “Woodstock: ‘It Was Like Balling for the First Time’”, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 20th September, 1969.

⁹⁶ Country Joe & The Fish, ‘The “Fish” Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag’, on *I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die*, Vanguard Records, 1967.

Woodstock, because, in the word of Joe McDonald, 'it established a mood... prior to that the attitude was 'try and be polite about it' with protest movement'.⁹⁷ ⁹⁸ Bob Santelli outlines how in 1969, 'you couldn't just say fuck'; it was the 'ultimate word you could use to demonstrate your anger, your frustration, your refusal to accept what's going on'.⁹⁹ Country Joe, therefore, challenged and undermined conceptions around individual behaviour, rejecting the norms of protest and instead promoting a more permissive range of behaviour. This created a conflictual mood, a declaration that the new generation would say and act differently and would, by extension, live how they wanted - an unequivocally emancipatory vision. Country Joe then focused on Vietnam, satirising the war by asking 'What are we fighting for? / Don't ask me, I don't give a damn', darkly portraying it as a pointless death trap, singing 'Open up the pearly gates, / Well there ain't no time to wonder why'. Finally, he critiqued the pretext for the war, satirising Cold War visions, singing 'Cause the only good commie is the one that's dead / And you know that peace can only be won /When we've blown 'em all to kingdom come.'¹⁰⁰ Bon Santelli recalls this as a song which 'shined a flashlight on society's ills, opening up the contradictions, ironies and problems with a society that deemed such a venture as Vietnam necessary'.¹⁰¹ Country Joe questioned not only the motives behind Vietnam and the Cold War, but behind deeper societal obsessions with warfare and conflict, highlighting the contradiction of achieving peace through war. Ultimately, McDonald embodied the alienation many felt due to the perceived futility of Vietnam, the only material consequence being the avoidable

⁹⁷ John Morris, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.38.

⁹⁸ Joe McDonald, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.38.

⁹⁹ Bob Santelli, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.38.

¹⁰⁰ Country Joe, 'I-Feel-Like'.

¹⁰¹ Bob Santelli, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.40.

deaths of fellow citizens, Michael Lang recalling that ‘hundreds of thousands of people singing along... made quite a statement against the war’.¹⁰² This criticism was sharpened by the arrangement of the song as a jolly ‘rag’, a traditionally accessible tune that used rhythmic lyrics, aiding it in becoming memorable and popular. To Stan Schnier, the song was a summation of inter-generational conflict; ‘it was only the kids [that questioned Vietnam] ... the music is just a reflection of that’.¹⁰³ Country Joe asked serious and difficult questions about a society driven by war, constructing an alternative that did not prioritise, as he saw it, senseless sacrifice.

Jimi Hendrix’s set at Woodstock is remembered for its re-envisioning of the *Star-Spangled Banner* as a conflict-ridden, question-seeking ‘state of the nation’, criticising and reconstructing societal values about warfare.¹⁰⁴ Hendrix launched a ‘sonic assault’, ‘howling guitar riffs, modulated and distorted with feverish feedback’ re-envisioning the national anthem as an impassioned, emotional vision of an alienated, post-conflict America.¹⁰⁵ It was a formidable political statement; Grace Slick recalls that it ‘showed us... the truth about our beautiful but fucked-up nation’, whilst John Binder recalls it representing ‘every tortured, blood-dripping experience of sixties America’.¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷ The *Star-Spangled Banner* was designed originally to be a unifying, communal hymn that drew together the American body politic in a vision of self-sacrifice and commitment. America is the ‘land of the free’ and the ‘home of the brave’, a nation of possibilities, intended to inspire devotion and admiration amongst all. Yet

¹⁰² Lang, *Road*, p.206.

¹⁰³ Stan Schnier, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.41.

¹⁰⁴ Jimi Hendrix, ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’, cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*, (New York, 2001), p.190.

¹⁰⁶ Grace Slick, *Somebody*, p.141.

¹⁰⁷ John Binder, quoted in Bell, *Woodstock*, p.82.

by merging this utopian vision with the gritty reality of Vietnam – explosions, fighter planes, and funeral sounds – Hendrix critiques current society as having lost its purity, presenting it instead as oppressive and violent, alienating to the extreme; ‘the connotations of heroism... are undercut by a mood of devastation’.¹⁰⁸ At Woodstock, Michael Lang recalls how it powerfully ‘plugged into our collective experience... his song takes us to the battlefield... to demonstrations and marches... it’s a powerful rebuke of war’.¹⁰⁹ Billy Altman agrees, recalling that ‘It sounded like the Vietnam war. It sounded like a firefight. It sounded like helicopters.’¹¹⁰ However, it went further than criticism; it called for America to fix its wrongs and rework its vision. Lang remembers it as ‘a wake-up call to fix the things that are broken in our society’, Ellen Sander specifically feeling as though ‘patriotism was being defined’ for her generation, a new vision for what it meant to be American.^{111 112} Michael Lang interpreted it as a ‘message of joy and love of country’ that understood ‘all the conflict and turmoil’ within America, echoing Hendrix’s later reasoning that ‘we play[ed] it the way America is today. The air is slightly static’, reflecting on societal corruption and alienation.¹¹³

¹¹⁴ With the *Star-Spangled Banner*, Hendrix defined political rock at Woodstock, critiquing Vietnam as a symptom of the malaise of society, rebuilding the national anthem not as a utopian vision but a call to arms rooted in American history, a vision of the quagmire and conflict that would ensure if patriotism was not redefined and society recreated. This state of the nation provided the basis for societal self-reflection,

¹⁰⁸ Bennett, *Remembering*, p.26.

¹⁰⁹ Lang, *Road*, p.2.

¹¹⁰ Billy Altman, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.271.

¹¹¹ Lang, *Road*, p.2.

¹¹² Ellen Sander, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.271.

¹¹³ Lang, *Road*, p.238.

¹¹⁴ Jimi Hendrix, quoted in Braunstein & Doyle, *Imagine*, p.222.

opening up the possibility for new visions and structures; the most emancipatory of acts.

The Volunteers

Woodstock was not envisioned as political. Michael Lang recalled that Woodstock aimed to ‘focus... energy on peace, setting aside the onstage discussion of political issues to just groove on what might be possible’.¹¹⁵ Similarly, many artists did not believe that music was necessarily political per se. Pete Townshend of the Who argued rock ‘won’t get rid of your problems’, only ‘let you dance all over them’, this vision of apolitical music endorsed by Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead, who commented ‘we’re musicians, and there’s just no way to put that idea, ‘save the world’, into music’.^{116 117} Yet, organising a festival in which protest music conceptualised an alternative vision of individuality and communality was in fact an immense political statement. Lang continued his apolitical theme, adding that Woodstock wanted to be ‘a testament to the value of the counterculture’, to prove that ‘that peace and understanding were possible’.¹¹⁸ This vision is inherently political; Lang, in effect, wanted to critique society by showing that an alternative vision was not only legitimate, but also ‘normal’ and achievable. Similarly, Jerry Garcia noted additionally that ‘music is a yoga...truth is something you stumble into when you think you’re going someplace else, like those moments when you’re playing’.¹¹⁹ As with Lang, this was an inherently political statement; Garcia rejects not only accepted ‘truths’ – such as

¹¹⁵ Lang, *Road*, p.53.

¹¹⁶ Pete Townshend, quoted in Lawrence Grossberg, ‘The Politics of Youth Culture: Some Observations on Rock and Roll in American Culture’, *Social Text* 8, Winter 1983, p.108.

¹¹⁷ Jerry Garcia, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.157.

¹¹⁸ Lang, *Road*, p.53.

¹¹⁹ Jerry Garcia, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.157.

the current formulation of society as normal and natural – but embarks on a highly personalised, individualistic and nonconventional search for his own truth, promoting an alternative behaviour; a radical notion that went against accepted norms and societal structures.

Rock music at Woodstock therefore was inherently and relentlessly political. Griel Marcus remembers that the music ‘was an essential component, the trigger and the soundtrack for everything that went down’, subverting societal norms and structures and promoting alternatives.¹²⁰ When the Jefferson Airplane sang ‘Look what’s happening out in the street/Got a revolution, got to revolution/Hey, I’m dancing down the streets’ on *Volunteers*, they were merely identifying and reinforcing the vision and power of music creating and supporting alternatives.¹²¹ Time Magazine reported that the music at Woodstock created ‘a political forum for the young... The spirit of community created... the young in touch with themselves.’¹²² Likewise, Jimi Hendrix noted the importance of music to the political: ‘the only way for kids to make the older generation understand is through mass gatherings like Bethel’ and the New York Times called it a ‘symbolic protest against American Society’.¹²³¹²⁴ Even Janis Joplin’s onstage proclamation that ‘you don’t have to go take anybody’s shit, man, just to like music’ was a political statement that the individual experience was paramount, and that ultimately, each should find out for themselves about their own self and life.¹²⁵ So significant were these acts of subversion and creation that Time Magazine labelled

¹²⁰ Griel Marcus, ‘Woodstock Remembered’, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 24th August, 1989.

¹²¹ Jefferson Airplane, ‘Volunteers’.

¹²² Time, ‘The Message of’.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ ‘A Joyful Confirmation That Good Things Can Happen Here’, *New York Times*, August 24, 1969.

¹²⁵ Janis Joplin, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.139.

Woodstock a moment that would affect the ‘minds and values of a generation or more’; the most political of emancipatory outcomes.¹²⁶

Conspicuous By Its Absence

Yet, as with female artists, Woodstock failed to meaningfully engage with racial issues, neither supporting black talent nor the black struggle for freedom. Rock existed as a predominately white musical experience, doing little more than highlighting – not interrogating- the racial ‘axis of power’.¹²⁷ Rock’s political focus was about freeing the individual from the technocracy, celebrating personal and communal freedom. Black emancipation could not be found simply through individualism; victims of institutionalised racism and socioeconomic denigration needed wider, systematic emancipation. It is telling, for example, that the only effort to understand and raise specific African-American concerns with the Vietnam War came from Jimi Hendrix, despite the importance of Vietnam as an overarching theme. His ‘Star-Spangled Banner’ critically interrogated American society whilst highlighting specific black concerns; disproportionate suffering in Vietnam; the racism that murdered black leaders; the differing consequences for white and black draft dodgers. Rock failed to challenge institutionalised racism, failing to offer a ‘ideological critique of racism’.¹²⁸ Whilst artists such as Joan Baez and Canned Heat engaged heavily with societal issues, they only highlighted in passing the racial issues that society faced, failing to provide the same interrogation.

¹²⁶ Time, ‘The Message’.

¹²⁷ Lipsitz, ‘Stop the Rain’, p.224.

¹²⁸ Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place*, (London, 1992), p.147.

Equally, black artists could not make their own case for racial reform. Despite Motown enjoying its 'Golden Decade', the likes of Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross and Steve Wonder enjoying considerable success, only Sly Stone and Hendrix provided a black perspective, so that soul was 'conspicuous in its absence'.¹²⁹ This was problematic as rock borrowed heavily from black music and sang critically about society as black music often did. Writing in *Rolling Stone*, Jan Hodenfield noted that 'As with most festivals, white was right', arguing that whilst this was 'perhaps understandable when the audience is largely white', it was not 'explicable when a darkie show such as provided by Cocker is offered as the forgivable alternative.'¹³⁰ Hodenfield deftly identified the problematic relationship between black music and white rock, recognising that the majority white audience was only searching for somebody who, as Dave Marsh noted, could make race 'a safe issue'. The audience refused to interrogate their own role in the asymmetry of racial relationships that existed within society and within rock, instead enjoying the safety provided by supporting black emancipation as Joe Cocker appropriated black music, not having to face more difficult direct challenges by black musicians.¹³¹ Pete Townshend's comments that he never felt 'perfectly natural with [the] adoption of blues music' nor 'comfortable with black musicians' is an embodiment of rock's problems with race; it drew heavily upon the ideas, rhythms and themes of the black experience, but did little to support, understand, engage with the black experience.¹³²

¹²⁹ Craig Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race & the Soul of America*, (New York, 1999), p.93.

¹³⁰ *Rolling Stone*, 'It Was Like Balling'.

¹³¹ Dave Marsh, 'Sly and the Family Stone', in Miller, *Rolling Stone*, p.292.

¹³² Pete Townshend, quoted in Werner, *Change*, p.93.

Undeniably Political

Despite self-identification as apolitical, Woodstock was an inherently political statement. Rock was an important political tool, challenging and dismantling oppressive structures before offering emancipatory alternatives, particularly criticising society malaise it perceived as an essential cause of the Vietnam War. By creating a common language and a shared set of experiences, it produced both protest and discussion, contributing meaningfully to emancipatory social structures. However, rock failed to promote black emancipation, with its inability to interrogate racial relationships reflecting itself in the appropriation without representation of black music, therefore limiting the scope of emancipation through political rock music at Woodstock.

Creating a New Utopia: Community and Rock at Woodstock

More than simply a protest, the counterculture constructed new normative visions for America, particularly stressing the importance of community as a method to redeem societal malaise and personal alienation. Accordingly, Ralph Gleason observed in 1967 that hippies were 'not just dropping out' but building a 'new society', a society identified by John Sinclair as one where people 'live together, work together, share all things... through our dress, our freedom of movement... our human social forms, through our every breath on this planet.'¹³³ ¹³⁴ Drawing on countercultural ideas, Woodstock rock realised these visions, providing a common denominator between different people so that a 'Woodstock Nation' community became a reality. In turn, as with love and politics, it provided a common language and acted as a forum for discussion of ideas, being a microphone through which ideas were disseminated and popularised. In this simultaneous act of creation and dissemination, rock played a significant role in creating emancipatory forms of societal structures. However, where hedonism previously acted as a subversion of normality in love, it proved more problematic for communal ideals, holding back emancipatory possibilities by encouraging people to 'drop out' rather than face the hard tasks involved in spreading community ideals. Additionally, rock music often appeared hypocritical, its off-stage actions not matching its onstage rhetoric and discourse, these elements of hedonism limiting the scope provided by emancipatory rock.

¹³³ Ralph Gleason, quoted in Auther and Lerner, *West*, p.365.

¹³⁴ John Sinclair, quoted in Timothy Miller, *Hippies and American Values*, (Knoxville, TN, 1991), p.75.

Brothers and Sisters

Rock called for a reformation of social relations, believing that current societal conceptions of communality were flawed, serving only to create conflict and alienate people from each other. As Jimi Hendrix noted, the coming generation were 'tired of this, tired of that' and wanted to 'find a different direction', one that Rosenstone envisioned as finding root in 'the search for a kind of mystical unity, an ability to feel a oneness', with the music 'condemning the fragmentation of the individuals life'.¹³⁵

¹³⁶ Importantly, this was both a material and a spiritual desire, a belief that only through human connection could the individual prosper and become truly happy. Benjamin DeMott has observed this phenomenon, outlining a countercultural desire to 'slide free from the restraining self and from the pretences of a private 'unique' rationality'.¹³⁷ Rock music fulfilled these visions, creating a common language and vision for future, significantly more emancipatory by virtue of its communal vision and promotion of a range of permissive possibilities. It achieved this firstly through practical methods; bands and musicians with supporting groups effectively worked as communal units, often in groups of four or more, each individual essential to the production of the music that framed Woodstock. Yet singers, guitarists and drummers all had individual moments of greatness, thus physically intertwining communal relations within the wider countercultural focus on individual emancipation, highlighting and legitimising the idea of mutual support and communality in the production of creations greater than the individual. This rejected previous conceptions of limited community and limited self, instead arguing that both could be

¹³⁵ Jimi Hendrix, quoted in Tony Brown, *Jimi Hendrix: Talking*, (London, 2003), p.45.

¹³⁶ Rosenstone, 'Times', p.144.

¹³⁷ Benjamin DeMott 'Rock as Salvation', quoted in Millier, *Hippies*, p.75.

strengthened and widened, and would intertwine in a mutually supporting structure. As Timothy Miller noted, rock bands were 'super-families', 'far more intimately interrelated and integrated than any corporate ensembles'. The Grateful Dead could not perform without its individual members, but equally, each individual member could not perform without the others; rock's fusing of individual and group embodied a wider perceived possible normative equilibrium between individual and community. In this same vein, Janis Joplin could not shine individually without her support musicians, and Michael Shrieve of Santana could not gain musical notoriety with his now famous drum solo without the support of the rest of Santana.¹³⁸ Rock therefore physically created, presented and legitimised the countercultural ideal that 'two can live more better than one... so can three or four', revealing it as an achievable and desirable goal.¹³⁹

Music not only realised countercultural visions of communality but imagined and popularised it lyrically. Richie Havens most explicitly called for new communal relations on *Get Together*, an impassioned plea for peace, brotherhood and communal love, singing 'come on people now / Smile on your brother / Everybody get together/ Try to love one another right now' and 'You hold the key to love and fear/ All in your trembling hand / Just one key unlocks them both/ It's there at your command'.¹⁴⁰ Rooting the possibilities of the future in numerous individual choices to unite and create community, he thus fused the individualism of the counterculture into the wider mesh of the communal ideal, rejecting previously negative constructions of

¹³⁸ Miller, *Hippies*, p.75.

¹³⁹ Tuli Kupferberg, 'The Coming Catastrophic Age of Leisure', in Joseph Berke, *Counter Culture*, (London, 1969), p.82.

¹⁴⁰ Richie Havens, 'Get Together', cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

private individualism and alienating rationality of the technocracy. Similarly, Sly & The Family Stone asked the audience on *Love City* to 'Look into the future / Tell me what you see / Brothers and sisters holding hands/And you sitting next to me', whilst reminding them that this future was theirs to create; 'Another generation / Who do you wanna be? / Get into your own thing / Everybody's free'.¹⁴¹ Like Havens, Sly encouraged each to make real their own interpretation of this new communal future, thus identifying thousands of individual choices as being the primary way through which community could be built. This further enmeshed individualism into the wider communal idea, additionally presenting cohesive communality as an emancipating force that would leave everybody freer. Joe Cocker went further, covering the Beatle's *With a Little Help from My Friends*, emphasising the role of community and comradeship, singing 'Oh, baby I get by, (Ah, with a little help from my friends) / All I need is my buddies, (Ah, with a little help from my friends)'.¹⁴² The Who divided the old and young, delineating and proudly presenting the new communal visions as a youthful endeavour, helping to shape the notion of communality as an idea and concept. On *My Generation* they proudly noted that 'this is my generation, baby', before rejecting the old - 'Why don't you all fade away / And don't try to dig what we all say'.¹⁴³ Most importantly, The Who embraced new normative visions as the as the only way to be, rejecting previous conceptions and rooting the future as in visions of the young, singing 'I hope I die before I get old', not so much a material comment on old age but a yearning to avoid the alienation and conflictual mistakes of the previous, older generation. These visions for the future provided a common language to express

¹⁴¹ Sly & The Family Stone, 'Love City'.

¹⁴² Joe Cocker, 'With a Little Help from My Friends', cover version for Woodstock, 1969.

¹⁴³ The Who, 'My Generation', on *My Generation*, Brunswick Records, 1965.

and popularise normative visions, so that as Abbie Hoffman recalled, Woodstock felt like a 'phenomenal burst of human energy and spirit... I took a trip to our future... welcome to the Aquarian age'.¹⁴⁴ Rock music embraced emancipatory individualism in a communal context, delineating youthful visions as unique, different, revolutionary and progressive, reinforcing and bringing into existence through ideas the practical 'Woodstock Nation' community that was found during the weekend. This achievement not only promoted communal ideals, but showed that they could exist alongside individualism, and were both practical and achievable, an idealistic but realistic utopia, rejecting contemporary criticism it faced.

The Altar

The counterculture feared that man had become disconnected from his own humanity, 'alienated from his fellows, fearful and alone', the modern technocracy having removed the communal linkages that held together society.¹⁴⁵ Rock, through its ability to provide a shared language and experience, provided a common denominator between different people, an essential tool through which the 'Woodstock Nation' came into existence. Music was unique in that it could distil collective ideas into a commonly heard and received form of communication, allowing people to share in common experiences and views, forming in turn a new type of community. As Michael Lang noted when asked, music was unique in that it was a 'major point of communication... it's about what's happening now'.¹⁴⁶ Fellow organiser John Roberts argued that 'with music, kids could fulfil their fantasies.... The performers and the

¹⁴⁴ Hoffman, *Woodstock*, p.13.

¹⁴⁵ Rosenstone, 'Times', p.136.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Lang, interviewed on Michael Wadleigh, dir., *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music*, (Burbank, CA, 2000).

crowd became almost one' this common denominator creating, as Time noted, a unique situation in which a 'sense of community... seems to exist among the young', a 'feeling for themselves as a special group, an 'us', in contrast to a 'them''.^{147 148} Music helped to delineate and create this group by functioning as a common denominator. It must be remembered firstly that Woodstock was primarily a festival aimed at attracting people through music; the line-up held some of the largest names of the time, including Jimi Hendrix, Credence Clearwater Revival, The Who, Jefferson Airplane and The Grateful Dead. People came *for* the music, and the music helped them to find each other, the 'ritualised sharing' of public space affirming a 'cultural unity'.¹⁴⁹ As one attendee noted, 'I went rather casually... because I wanted to hear the music', whilst another remembered that the 'only reason' they wanted to go was 'the music', it being the 'most fantastic line-up of stars'.^{150 151} This sentiment was reported by the New York Times, which noted in articles across the weekend that 'the young came in droves', 'drawn by such performers as Joan Baez, Ravi Shankar... Jimi Hendrix', and that 'music was the focus of the festival'.^{152 153} It is clear that music was the reason for all these people coming together. But, once gathered, it helped them to realise that they were not so different, and that by sharing something in common were part of a community; as Todd Gitlin surmised later, 'music made up a collective ritual' in which attendees 'open[ed] up a new space' for the 'celebration of our

¹⁴⁷ John Roberts and Joel Rosenman, *Young Men with Unlimited Capital*, (London, 1974), p.211.

¹⁴⁸ Time, 'The Message'.

¹⁴⁹ Lipsitz, 'Stop the Rain', p.214.

¹⁵⁰ New Yorker Magazine, 'A Fleeting, Wonderful Moment of Community', reprinted in Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, eds, *Takin' It To the Streets: A Sixties Reader*, (Oxford, 2003), p.509.

¹⁵¹ 'Woodstock: Like It Was', *New York Times*, August 25, 1969.

¹⁵² Barnard L Collier, '300,000 at Folk-Rock Fair Camp Out in a Sea of Mud', *New York Times*, August 17th, 1969.

¹⁵³ New York Times, 'Joyful Confirmation'.

collective'.¹⁵⁴ Performance reinforced this notion of communal feeling, Sly & The Family Stone in particular showing how music could practically create community. Before singing *Higher*, Sly encouraged the crowd to 'Get up off your feet and say 'higher' and throw the peace sign up. Still again some people feel that they shouldn't, because there are situations where you need approval to get in on something that could do you some good... if we can get everybody to join in, we'd appreciate it.'¹⁵⁵ In effect, Sly was encouraging the crowd to abandon their social expectations and behaviour norms guarding interactions and to join as a collective whole; he was urging the formation of a community and was intending to use music as the main linkage between these previously unconnected people. Bob Santelli remembers the crowd did just this, going higher 'physically, emotionally and spiritually', to form a new joint connect that each recognised as a bond between humanity.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, as Michael Lang recalls, the common language and experience of music worked to 'show that there was this community that existed in America, that was tied together, and that was so large and so strong and so positive'.¹⁵⁷

Throughout Woodstock, the stage acted as a centre point – near high altar - for the 'Woodstock Nation' community that coalesced around it. Grace Slick of The Jefferson Airplane likened the bands as 'shamans of equal power, channelling an unknown energy, seeking fluidity.'¹⁵⁸ Personally, she 'felt like a princess in a benign court – one without thrones or crowns. I could see 'royalty' in every direction. The audience was

¹⁵⁴ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (London, 1993), p.201.

¹⁵⁵ Sly Stone, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.174.

¹⁵⁶ Bob Santellei, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.173.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Lang, quoted in Bell, *Woodstock*, p.251.

¹⁵⁸ Slick, *Somebody*, p.140.

just more of us. The performers were just more of us.’¹⁵⁹ This powerful vision of a dynamic relationship between music and community, forming and being informed by the crowd, and helping to create a wider community, was noted in equally prosaic formation by Joan Baez, who remembered her performance as being ‘in front of the residents of the golden city who were sleeping in the mud’. It struck her as a ‘humbling moment’, because she’d ‘never sung to a city before’.¹⁶⁰ Graham Nash of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young equated it less as a city and more as an ‘original’ community, rooted in human nature, presenting it as ‘tribal. Fires were burning, smoke was rising, a sea of hippies clustered together... the focus of it was a well-lit stage. We could see it all from up there.’¹⁶¹ Music therefore played a central role in refashioning communal ideals and practically creating these visions, providing a common denominator, language and focal point around which a community formed, Grace Slick noting this when she commented that the music had ‘formed from the energy of the invisible collective consciousness’.¹⁶² Nash also pointed out that the music had formed such bonds, arguing that Woodstock rock represented ‘Five hundred thousand people in the rain and mud soaking up all that music, having a great time, and perhaps finally realising that together they were a force to be reckoned with.’¹⁶³ One attendee noted that Woodstock had a ‘spirit of cooperation that touched everyone who was there’; music, by acting as a centre around which the festival congregated, enabled the ideals of community as envisioned by countercultural idealists to become a reality.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Baez, *A Voice*, p.165.

¹⁶¹ Nash, *Wild*, p.321.

¹⁶² Slick, *Somebody*, p.140.

¹⁶³ Nash, *Wild*, p. 321.

¹⁶⁴ Bennett, *Remembering*, p.30.

Community for all, Community for some

Whilst creating new forms of community on stage, not all musicians acted with as much integrity off stage, undermining rock's ability to contribute to new communal forms. One such example of this was the contradictions between the conditions of the artists and the concert attendees. Musicians proffered the sense of one 'Woodstock Nation', but whilst festival goers camped out in the mud and suffered from a shortage of supplies, Lee Mackler recalls the accommodation for artists as a 'wonderful dream'. He remembered 'ordering a banquet, seven courses, which we simply signed for', highlighting Janis Joplin and Grace Slick as 'the revolutionaries dining on T-Bone steaks and French champagne'.¹⁶⁵ Yet, as Mackler notes, 'come Saturday or Sunday night, these people would change into their oldest torn jeans and sing to the people about poverty and starvation. It was absolutely decadent.'¹⁶⁶ The issue is not inherently in this lifestyle but arose when artists proffered to be *like* the audience, to share a set of common experiences, despite these separate existences; as O'Neill has discussed, rock 'wanted to be rich and famous, whilst also radical and culturally momentous' and failed to mediate properly the two.¹⁶⁷ This weakened communal cohesion and threw into sharp vision the inherent power hierarchies and wealth divides that undermined and fractured the relationship between artist and fan, undermining the social criticism of the communal movement. In other words, as one anonymous artist recalled; 'We had heard about the pitiful conditions out at the site, how the food was low, and the medical tents were bursting with patients... but nobody gave a shit. We were on an

¹⁶⁵ Lee Mackler, quoted in Bob Spitz, *Barefoot in Babylon: The Creation of the Woodstock Music Festival*, (New York, 2014), p.375.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ O'Neill, *Coming Apart*, p.245.

expense account, and that was really all that mattered to most of the people in that dining room... so when I was told there was no way I'd get back to White Lake that night, I submitted without a whimper.'¹⁶⁸ This was endemic of a wider problem, in that those involved in rock at Woodstock had a tendency to 'drop out', therefore ensuring that many ignored important but difficult issues in favour of simple self-indulgence and pleasure. The heavy use of drugs and self-indulgence had important roles, as discussed; but when pushed too far, it resulted in the difficulties as seen above. John Roberts noted this tendency in his later recollections, with John Sebastian noticing the drugs played 'heavily' into the mood of the festival, which as discussed above, often avoided difficult conversations on race and gender, whilst still involving itself in important but more straightforward conversations about Vietnam, government and alienation.^{169 170} In this, rock found itself keen to address problems it faced, but less keen to engage with issues that affected other members of a self-defined community, or to interrogate issues it may be complicit in, throwing into question the fullness of vision it held about community. Double standards and a tendency to avoid difficult conversations somewhat undermined the core protest messages about community that rock offered.

Whilst understandable that Woodstock became a free festival due to the organisational problems, the self-identified motivation to inspire and lead a revolution is somewhat undermined when an assessment of the monetary incentives are considered. Grace Slick noted that 'Woodstock clearly wasn't about the money', but

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.376.

¹⁶⁹ Roberts and Rosenman, *Young Men*, p.211.

¹⁷⁰ John Sebastian, quoted in Fornatale, *Back*, p.52.

in the same breath remembered that her promoter, Bill Thompson, 'went to the wire in demanding that his bands be paid before they performed' and threatening to withdraw the likes of Jefferson Airplane and The Who if they were not paid.¹⁷¹ As Abbie Hoffman noted, rock often appeared as if it existed in an 'uptown plastic dome' that at Woodstock meant 'living at the Concord hotel or the Holiday Inn in Liberty and buzzing in stoned out of your head in a helicopter. It meant being hustled under guard to a secluded pavilion to join the other aristocrats who run the ROCK EMPIRE. There one could dig the whole spaced-out scenes and dine on California grapes and champagne, just forty yards below the Field Hospital where a thousand screaming freak-outs were happening'.¹⁷² The contradictions of rock – simultaneously preaching new moral values whilst failing to properly contribute to their production as reality – undermine its emancipatory claim and should be remembered when considering rock's full contribution to this communal ideal.

Rock played an important part in creating and promoting the ideas around a new form of community and physically constructing these visions, demonstrating that they were a realistic goal for the counterculture. In turn, by providing a common denominator and language between people, it disseminated and popularised these ideas, thereby promoting an emancipatory version of a community that was aware of the importance of individualistic acts and agencies. Yet rock music's emancipatory ability must be tempered by its shortcomings, in that the artists who professed on stage values were often found lacking in them off stage, and that there was a tendency to drop out rather than have difficult conversations, undermining claims that it was creating an inclusive

¹⁷¹ Slick, *Somebody*, p.137.

¹⁷² Hoffman, *Woodstock*, p.5.

community. Therefore, it becomes clear that even with emancipatory communal ideas and actions, existing hierarchies and structures are difficult to break down, even from the inside.

Conclusions and Reflections

This paper has argued that, in sum total, rock was emancipatory, constructing emancipatory alternative structures and legitimising and promoting more permissive social frameworks. Rock's ability to build a common language and experience enabled people to debate, criticise and ultimately, reconceptualise societal structures, so that it, in the words of Elen Orson, 'united us, reminded us, helped us along'.¹⁷³ Rock worked as both producer and product of countercultural ideas, a simultaneous agent of change and a mere reflection. Yet, it noted that rock often 'dropped out' of difficult conversations and failed to extend its emancipatory impulses quite as far to women and African-Americans, so that its primary beneficiaries were white men. Rock, therefore, was emancipatory, but faced significant limitations that should be kept in mind when talking about, assessing and using rock as an emancipatory framework.

This project was an interesting but difficult task to grapple with. The evidence, whilst being able to produce a strong and clear conclusion, required significantly more cross-referencing and interpretative work than perhaps most historical projects undertake, particularly because rock is, ultimately, an art form, one whose attraction and strength rests in its ability to speak widely and differently to many people. Equally, subjective interpretations of events – especially so for festivals as Woodstock – are dictated by the numerous personal experiences and preconceptions that many of the participants held and still hold. Woodstock's mythologisation has resulted in more recent evidential sources proving somewhat 'celebratory' in nature, in that the history is owned by those who ultimately triumphed culturally. Many 'invoke the decade as if it

¹⁷³ Elen Orson, quoted in Bell, *Woodstock*, p.96.

was a dream', a natural and inevitable part of the historically progressive curve towards today's mainstreaming of core countercultural ideas on sex, music and individuality. ¹⁷⁴ It therefore required significantly more effort to breakdown and understand the steps through which was achieved, and the specific role for different subparts of the counterculture.

Furthermore, this project has thrown into question some of the assumptions made by historians. It clearly disagrees with the likes of Doggert, Pattison and Chafe, assigning rock more importance in its impact they credit it with being. Most significantly, the project has gone further than historians who, whilst agreeing with many of the points raised, do not present it as conduit for emancipation. It, for example, goes further than Lipsitz and Kramer, agreeing that whilst it was central to the experience arguing that it was more active than simply an aspect of experience, presenting it instead as an active agent of change. On reflection, whilst it certainly disagrees with no part of Santagelo's analysis, it perhaps maybe goes further in crediting rock with active emancipation, a vehicle through which people found themselves with a greater range of choices and abilities. This project was a specific case study of one part of the counterculture, and further interesting historical analysis could look at changing impact, positive and negative, of rock throughout the counterculture and at the respective evolutions of rock and countercultural thought, seeking to understand if the two hold any causal relationship. These avenues of research would provide interesting answers and open up avenues for debate on the power of culture within

¹⁷⁴ Cavello, *Fiction*, p.10.

society, revealing further the amount of power that culture holds on shaping people's views and decisions.

Most importantly, this project has shown that history can be misused for the purposes of power. The French philosopher Michel Foucault distilled the importance of history in his power-knowledge concept, the notion that power is premised on the ability to shape discourse through creating 'truth'; 'truth' is created through the interpretation of historical events.¹⁷⁵ Woodstock is a prime example of an historical event that has been used for political purposes, to create 'truth', as Newt Gingrich used it to define and demarcate a section of America as corrupt. This project has revealed, perhaps most importantly, that rock is, in no way, a casual mechanism through which perceived moral decay and contemporary American problems are rooted. Rock was emancipatory, and freed people to be more comfortable in their individuality. Ultimately, Woodstock rock reminds us that history can be misused, and that its usage must always be ruthlessly, vigorously and critically examined, to provide a counterweight to incorrect 'truths' in the service of questionable powers.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Rouse, 'Power/Knowledge', in Gary Gutting, *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, (Cambridge, 2006), pp.114-119.

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