The Future of Rock: Discourses That Struggle to Define a Genre

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The future of rock: discourses that struggle to define a genre

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Time shifts increase our sensitivity to birth and death, to the rise and fall of cultural epochs, by drawing attention to all sorts of changes. When years, decades or centuries turn, there need not necessarily be any corresponding great shift in society and culture. What does 'real' history care about dates and years? But our way of measuring time produces a sort of numerical magic that sometimes makes us extra sensitive to collective cultural mobility. In aesthetical production and cultural debate, each time turn induces a wish to reflect upon where we stand and what is happening. This sharpened time consciousness may accelerate or consolidate certain changes, if sufficiently many and strong social forces engage in the reflection to transform prophecies into effective mechanisms of change, by the material power of self-definitions.

All this reflexive preparedness is particularly sharpened as we now, after some decades of speculations about post-industrialism and post-modernism, are to leave a whole millenium and enter a new one. This millenial finale makes the long accelerating erosion of traditions evident, and may also make it easier to formulate something of the era whose introduction is already fading in.

It is principally impossible to foresee the future. The only prophesy that can be made is to calculate the consequences of tendencies that can already be discerned and extrapolate them forward in time. The creative opportunity is then only to choose which of the contradictory tendencies of the present to bring into the calculation. I will here take part in this play by discussing some aspects of the possible tomorrow of rock music in relation to how rock is discursively defined.

The rock/pop-field

Like all other genre concepts, rock is very hard to define. A genre is a set of rules for generating musical works.[1] Using such conventional sets of rules in producing or interpreting musical pieces can give rise to classifactory systems, but actual musics do not in themselves fall unambiguously into any simple classes. It all depends on which rules are used, and this choice is situationally bound. Genres are, however, more intersubjective than subjective phenomena. In each temporal and spatial context, there are certain genre definitions that are relevant and used by the most important groups of actors in the musical field: musicians, producers, marketers and audiences.

There are innumerable possible ways to define rock, but not all of them are meaningful in a given context. On the other hand, there is no consensus around

one single definition. I see rock/pop as one single, continuous genre field rather than as distinct categories. This field contains a wide and open range of sub-genres, moving within certain similar economical and social frames and circuits. Common, ideal-typical musical features are *often* electronic sound manipulation, a clear and steady pulse, even times, certain syncopations and back-beat, songs with lyrics, and settings within relatively small ensembles with some soloistic-improvisatory elements within a broadly collectively composed form. There are innumerable variants here. Some artists emerge as individual soloists, like Madonna, Prince, Sinéad O'Connor or Bruce Springsteen, backed by more or less anonymous musicians. Others appear as small and tight ensembles, from girl groups to black/death/trash metal bands – particularly but not exclusively at the rock end of the spectrum.

Music-making necessarily involves co-operating human beings in certain institutional settings and with specific subjectivities. Rock is, therefore, also defined through social and psychic aspects determining its production and use. The musical generic system is spun like a web of aesthetic rules undissolvably tied to social and psychic factors. In discourses where rock is defined, various aspects can be stressed. Some focus on the strictly musical aspects of how the sounds are organized, while others stress the social aspects of how their organising is structured. In fact, both sounds and human beings (both musical and social factors) are possible and indeed necessary elements of any genre definition.

Another polarity concerns process versus structure. Some definitions stress historical tradition lines while others employ structural categories. Again, both diachronic and synchronic aspects should be relevant. Diachronic processes produce synchronous relations between elements, that in their turn get their meaning through interpretations relying on those historical processes.

A third polarity is between wide and narrow definitions. The wide definition outlined above is inclusive and imprecise. The narrow definition is strictly exclusive, and constructs rock as a definitive tradition with certain central actors and key works in a chain from early rock 'n' roll through British beat to punk. Springsteen, Guns 'n' Roses and grunge. All else is non-rock, or maybe semi-rock, living on the margins of true rock. This view is very important today, and it exists within and outside of rock. But it is not the only one. Variations abound, and rock actually seems to be more of a family of genres than a homogeneous category.

The rock/pop-field is a contested continuum. Authenticity is frequently used to distinguish rock from pop, as rock ideologists defined the values of the folk and/or art genuine against commercial substitutes. Since the 1960s, a network of institutionalised voices (critics, journalists, writers, media people and producers) have asserted and administered the sincerity, legitimacy and hegemony of rock in opposition to the vulgarity of pop. Some critics of this rock establishment have on the other hand turned the same dichotomy upside-down while allegedly dismissing it, as they deride the authenticity illusions of the rock establishment and elevate the honest construction of the pop machinery. In both cases, authenticity is debated, but in different ways. To value the sincerity of artists, the social roots of the genre, or the bodily presence expressed or experienced in the particular performance, are some of the possible criteria.

There seems to be a continually regenerated need for such distinctions, resulting in an ongoing struggle in discourses on musical aesthetics. Still, I think it is impossible to uphold any clear dichotomy between rock and pop. The shifts

of the meanings of these terms between countries and times bear witness to their ideological character. Rock/pop is a spectrum with a range of focal points in highly complex relations to each other as well as to other (super) genres of (more or less popular) music. The relevance of certain forms of authenticity arguments is a common feature. Rock/pop is basically a music conceived in and for a mass media context, with a group of electrified instruments, vocal song and lyrics, and identifiable artists with carefully constructed personae, images and cultural identities. There are important differences within the rock/pop world, but there are also fundamental continuities.

Rock/pop thus contains a historically and institutionally anchored tension between rock (in the most narrow sense) and something else, like pop, rap, house or other subgenre labels. Sometimes these other genres are accepted within rock, sometimes they are excluded. Rock is a 'supergenre' whose totality is not delimited to any specific subculture. Some of its subgenres are subculturally related (punk, heavy metal), others are much more diffuse. Sometimes these subgenres are separated in record catalogues, radio programmes or journal reviews. Sometimes rock/pop is instead treated as a unity, associated with modern youth culture (i.e. as cultural expressions of and/or for all young people, not only youth subcultures). A continuous definitional struggle is going on among the interpretive communities of listeners and musicians. As long as this struggle is not settled, it seems reasonable not to exclude any of the participants, but treat rock as an open and unfinished category.

Transformations

Since almost its very birth, rock has been haunted by judgements of its occurred or imminent death. Fans of classical music, folk music or jazz now and then hail the rumours of pop's allegedly diminishing sales figures or of young musicians' rising interest in their own respective genres. Young spokesmen of 'newer' subgenres like rap or house may also be heard to rejoice at the death of ageing parent-generation rock and claim the new hegemony of their own genre. Also, within the rock world itself, debates are sometimes carried out around the technological, economic, social and aesthetic changes that seem to threaten what rock used to be. Older purists despair of shallowness and shattered ideals, while more dynamic voices long for a deeper change.

With the millenium turn in sight, invitations to celebrate the death of rock have become a standard theme in popular music disclosure. There are certainly many historical changes that make such a celebration plausible. Simon Frith mentions some of them:

> In the last ten years or so the organization of popular music production and consumption has changed sufficiently to invalidate most of the assumptions on which rock culture rests. Commercial popular music no longer depends on the sale of *records*; it can no longer be understood in terms of a *fixed sound object*; it is no longer made in terms of a particular sort of audience, *rebellious youth*. In short, the *rock* system of music making no longer determines industry activity. (Frith 1989, p. 129)[2]

The transformations concern many different aspects and levels of music and music-making. I will in turn overview some technical, economic, institutional, affective, social and aesthetic aspects.

Technologies, markets and institutions

One of music's *'external'* conditions is the *technology* of instruments, studios, recording, distribution and media. Rock used to circle around the electric guitar, the electric bass, the drum kit and the singer. Suddenly, synthesizers and computers have invaded the scene, and induced similar reactions to rock from its own camp as formerly from the jazz camp. If the authentic musicality of the saxophone was then contrasted to the brute machinery of the electric guitar, the same guitar has now come to symbolise the living authentic core of rock, in opposition to the technocratic artificiality of the synthesizer. In both cases, musical technology has been seen as a killing threat to authentic expressivity.

This polarity has been well refuted by Simon Frith (1986), who has shown that technology is a prerequiste for authenticity, rather than its enemy. It is microphone techniques that have enabled us to listen intimately to artists' voices. And the interest in live performances has not diminished; in Sweden, a rising consumption of media music has been paralleled by a likewise rising level of concert-going as well as of amateur music-making.[3] Finally, as much musical competence (if of another type) is needed to be an MC or a DJ at a hip hop jam as to sing or play the guitar in a rock band.

It is interesting to note that digital technology has hitherto mostly been absorbed within a general rock aesthetics. The importance of studio work has grown, as has the range of available sounds, and the symbolic role of the guitar has been somewhat lessened. But even purely computerised groups like Kraftwerk have chosen frames of group image, song structures and musical textures that do not differ that much from traditional rock. The narrow rock tradition may have been somewhat broken, but the wide rock/pop-field has got yet wider creative possibilities.

The musical use of computers, synthesizers, sequencers, sampling and MIDI has enabled experiments with montage techniques, with wide-ranging legal, economic and aesthetic implications (c.f. Goodwin 1988/1990, 1992, 1992; Redhead 1990; Reynolds 1990). Again, techniques of traditional rock and late modern bricolage have more often been mixed than opposed to each other. 'Live' musicians often play together with pre-recorded sounds, and the new montage genres have in fact made it possible to re-use jazz and other older genres in hyper modern pop, thereby offering them a sort of new life.

As for the media channels for the distribution and consumption of music, their digitalisation may increase active audience interaction with the media. Karaoke is but one early example of this. Video, cable and satellite channels have already increased the scope of visual forms of expression. And people will probably have much easier access to music that was hard to reach before. But it seems premature to state that records have lost their importance. The single musical act and its star artist will not cease to fascinate. There will be changes in how musical creation is organised and mediated, and most certainly in the ways in which it is commented and reflected upon in music journalism, but again, this seems more to affect the narrow rock genre than the wide one.

Another set of 'external' conditions for the music use of individuals and groups are produced by the twin *systems* of the capitalist market and state institutions. *Market economy* mechanisms have continuously accelerated monopolisation, concentration and centralisation trends. Through strategies of 'narrow-casting' in

phonogram industries and broadcasting media, these trends have lately broken the law of increasing standardisation and homogenity (Burnett 1990). New, large media conglomerates operate in new forms of symbiosis with small, sectoralised units. This makes it hard to revitalise the clear polarity between dominating main-stream and subversive alternatives/indies that was earlier so predominant. As rock has lost its marginality and entered the main-stream of late modern popular music, these market changes may be problematic. But it has to be remembered that rock has never as a totality been rebellious and that its cultural centralisation does not necessarily diminish the importance of its radical fringes. As in other genres, among the increasingly differentiated plurality of subgenres in rock, new niches for subversion can always be reconstructed as the old ones are co-opted. As for the economic effects of sampling, the fierce battles around copyright legislation show that here new technology is shaped by profit interests but at the same time threatens the private ownership rules that are the basis of capitalist commodity production. These effects are not specific to rock, but apply to all popular genres.

The other large system, the *state* and its political-bureaucratic institutions, has traditionally been rather marginal to rock, but not anymore. Formal institutions have entered the arena as a third pole, beside the music industry and the youth cultural peer groups. Local authorities, established youth organisations, social workers and schools have been increasingly active in this field, offering new resources (localities, gigs, instruments and education) but also advancing new demands. At least in the Nordic countries, rock playing has become more formalised and institutionalised, resulting in ambiguous tendencies. Firstly, there is an increasing bureaucratisation, where rock playing has become part of hierarchical and formalised institutions close to the state apparatus instead of just depending on the market. Secondly, there is a continuous pedagogisation, a new apparatus for rock education, which makes rock learning more similar to the learning processes at school than youth cultural activities used to be. Thirdly, through new forms of instrumentalisation the pleasures of rock are used for various extra-musical – political, social or therapeutic – purposes, like keeping young people off the streets or counteracting drug use (c.f. Fornäs *et al.* 1990, forthcoming; Fornäs 1990b, 1993).

There is also an increasing interdependence of the two systems, market and state. The days when state support was a weapon against commercialisation are gone. All these systemic changes have certainly changed the conditions of rock use, but it is too early to conclude that it has been destroyed. Instead, new alliances and oppositions are shaped, opening other possibilities for identity and resistance in music.

Subjectives, communities and styles

There are also internal, *subjective* conditions for music use: individual desires produced by processes of socialisation, care and education. The rise of rock has built upon certain new psychic structures, emphasising narcissist desires through the self-mirrorings in peer groups, audiences and sound/beat-webs. Later developments have rather expanded than abolished these desires, as can be heard in the intense play with devotion and distance in house and techno music. The history of rock passes through a series of phases of gendered identity forms, where the

relationships between adolescent individuals and peer groups are continuously modified. In an early phase, oedipal rebellion against authoritarian father-figures was important; in the 1960s, the id/superego-conflict seemed to be surpassed by deeper narcissistic dilemmas related to the first formation of the ego and the self. Changing subjective need and desire structures have met changing aesthetic forms, related to the formation of a gendered personal identity. Experiments with new gender roles and images will continue to be of great importance in future popular musics. But the fixed male peer group may be mobilised and partly dissolved into a floating cluster of differentiated relations. This may be one reason for the looser artist constellations within some rap and house styles. But the small group collectivity does not lose its fascination just because it becomes more dynamic (more mobile and open groups) and differently composed (less male and misogynist).

These subjective conditions are closely connected to *social* aspects like intersubjective norms and group relations. Here, late modernity has accelerated the mobility, multiculturality, individualisation and reflexivity of the modern epoch. Individual and collective identities have been increasingly problematised through a higher differentiation and a self-mirroring in cultural texts and images. When normality becomes more diffuse and open, it is also more difficult to be deviant. The borders of subcultures dissolve in a complex mess of more or less diffuse style markings. This erodes some of the subversive ideology of marginality that has been central to some parts of the rock tradition. If Madonna can be on top of the charts at the same time as advocating sexual perversity, what is then normality and what is opposition? But there have in fact always been subgenres that less rebelliously have played with normality, and there is still room for resistance against certain normalising forces in the market, public institutions and private spheres (family, religion, etc.). The static dichotomies between the normals and the rebels may dissolve, but the result is not any homogeneous mass, but rather a wide spectrum of shifting and conflicting subcultural alliances, and interpretive communities. It is yet hard to say if this will increase or diminish the scope of rock, i.e. how the loss of absolute dichotomies is balanced by a widened field of collective identity-offers.

A second subaspect of this intersubjectively shared level consists of the *cultural* genres and forms of expression themselves, the network of genres and styles, images, words and music. New aesthetic conventions develop new expressive forms. Some examples of such new aesthetic tools are speech song and sampled sound collages in rap, deep male chanting in death metal, and post-tonal harmonic structures in pop. New stylistic means produce new sounds and new narrative forms. But again, only certain phases and subgenres of rock have been bound to fixed formal and stylistic models, so this can be as much a sign of transformation as of death. Similar ambivalent conclusions can be drawn from the crossing of historical epochs, genre boundaries and the high/low-distinction through sampling, 'world music' and nostalgic pastiche, camp or retro styles. It is particularly important that a heightened reflexivity has problematised more naïve versions of authenticity discourses. Authenticity can hardly be defended as a pure and natural origin anymore, but this does not mean that this concept has lost all relevance. There can still be a thematisation of 'social authenticity', i.e. an anchoring of a voice (work, style, genre) in a collective community, and a 'subjective authenticity', i.e. a legitimation through references to individual bodies and minds. But these forms have been increasingly often accompanied by a third one, 'cultural authenti-

city', as a meta-honesty that stresses the self-reflexive consciousness of one's place within a symbol-making process. Authenticity can remain as an important theme, but only if it is de-naturalised and demystified, reconstructed as a socio-cultural and mediated construction, rather than as a simple and immediate destiny. Not all music use makes authenticity an important theme, but it can always be activated again in reflexive discourses (cf. Grossberg 1993; Fornäs 1994).

Use values

It is not possible here to make any complete presentation of all the aspects of rock's transformation that have been under debate, but it might be useful to sort out the arguments along the mentioned dimensions. The conditions of rock are changing, on many levels. Peer groups have been opened and dynamised, identities have become more individualised and heterogeneous, the body has become more problematic, and authenticity discourses have been reconstructed by an increasing reflexivity. On the other hand, important stable structures persist.

The relative quantity and prosperity of young people may decrease, and youth subcultures have been radically displaced and modified, but this should not lead us to any too quick conclusions. First, these demographic, economic and subcultural factors are very different outside of Northern America and Western Europe. In great parts of the world late modern youth culture has only recently began to flourish, and it is hard to foresee its future development. Second, the particular openness of adolescence is not so easily dissolved – filled with intense learning, separation, individuation and identity work. I therefore doubt that young people will lose their centrality in the cultural field. It is simply not a product of conjuctural coincidences, but a structural effect of very basic socialisation patterns and the continuing processes of modernisation, none of which will disappear tomorrow. And the use values of rock for young people seem also to be reproduced. These can be summarised under three labels: collective autonomy, alternative ideas and narcissistic enjoyment (c.f. Fornäs *et al.* 1990, forthcoming; Fornäs 1990b, 1993; Roe and Carlsson 1990; Berkaak and Rund 1992).

As for collective autonomy – doing something on your own, with your best friends – it is obvious that both collectivity and autonomy are still sought. While individualisation has to some extent dissolved the experience of being born into natural collectives, there are lots of examples of how people long for and seek occasionally constructed collective experiences, on dance floors, in rave-parties or at giant gigs (cf. Hebdige 1990). If the fixed peer group is being differentiated and mobilised, rock bands may also do likewise, crystallising either around looser constellations or close friendship dyads, hiring other musicians at special occasions. And while the intrusion of state institutions and the educational sphere may threaten the autonomy of rock, this autonomy has always been fought for against systemic market forces. It may even become an advantage now to be able to play with both the systemic poles, using them against each other in more complex types of resistance against domination and goal-rationality. The problem with systemic demands in institutions of socialisation will not melt away with the old millenium, and there will still be a need for cultural forms to handle and counteract such demands. Rock has never been a pure non-systemic forum for communicative action – instead, its very mixture of manipulation and communication is what keeps it moving.

The second type of use value concerns the alternative ideals rock offers its users, opening up the immediate context of parents, teachers and neighbours. As the normality/deviance polarity is becoming slightly blurred, the need for alternative ideals are rather increasing than diminishing. Instead of being grouped in a single polarity, they form complex clusters. And basic social differences that fuel and direct this search for alternatives also persist. Gender roles and dominance patterns are changing, but far from disappearing, and the same can be said of class and ethnic differences.

Thirdly, rock offers many opportunities for narcissistic enjoyment, temporarily dissolving fixed ego-boundaries and touching deep, pre-verbal psychic levels of experience. This is effected by the power of volume, beat and sound, as well as by the intersubjective mirrorings within and between bands and audiences. Nothing implies that these desires are diminishing, it would be more reasonable to suggest that they are more and more general in the population of late modern societies.

On many levels, the arguments about the conditions of rock do not come to any clear conclusion. New cultural forms may fill its functions and it must surely change, but no univocal evidence appears to prove that it has to die from vanishing external, internal or socio-cultural prerequisites. Some conditions are pretty stable, others have been radically transformed, but it seems hard to conclude that any necessary requirement is definitely being lost today.

A genre and its 'Others'

The future of rock may, however, not be a question of objective, subjective or intersubjective conditions. It might be more fruitful to study its discourses. Its future is influenced by developments in technology, economy, institutions, subjectivities, social norms and aesthetic styles, but it is decided by the ways its meanings are negotiated by various discursive agents in the musical field.

Three of the contested borders of rock are with the genres of pop, rap and house/techno. In all cases, some think of them as different from a more narrow definition of rock, while others include them in a wider rock/pop-field. None of these definition issues are as yet resolved, but I want to make a proposal, as a stake in this struggle of interpretations.

The happy or sad statements of the death of rock seem to me to be based on a very narrow genre definition and to hide a certain essentialism. Genres are not fixed essences that can evaporate. They are dynamic sets of generic rules for the shaping of musical works, and as such they are continuously transformed, according to the contexts and conditions that frame them, and the interpretations they are given. If rock is not an essence living its own life, but a set of authorised rules for the construction of music, then how can it die, as opposed to develop and transform?

If what is called rock changes so much that no important structural essence binds new rock to its predecessors, then only an essentialist genre definition would claim rock to be dead. A more constructivist view would instead claim that a 'family likeness' – an historical continuity and a cluster of interrelated but varying elements – is enough. This would then be in line with the actual praxis in music discourses, but it implies a break with essentialist notions that seek a definite 'ethos' of rock. It is this constructivist genre definition that leads me to prefer the

wide rock definition to the narrow one, and yet accepts both as two interacting discursive labelings that together form the dynamics of the genre.

However, if the same genre developments instead lead its actors to leave the label 'rock' in exchange for another one, then rock might disappear, however little the sound difference between the new pop and the old rock. Has that happened?

Historically, this is not the first time the death of rock has been prophesied. When the pioneers of the 1950s suddenly left the scene to softer teenage pop idols and girl groups, many believed that rock 'n' roll would only be a parenthesis in music history. Similar fears or hopes appeared when glam and disco seemed to have won the battle with rock in the 1970s. On both these occasions rebuttals soon came in the British beat wave and in punk/metal, respectively. And in both cases, as now in the years around 1990, it is interesting to note that it was an advance of 'feminine' and 'black' elements and subgenres that made the old rock defenders despair, while the subsequent triumphant discourses of a rock 'recovery' were often based on young white males recapturing the initiative (even if other voices were in reality strong even at the peak of these revivals).

It is true that some protagonists of recent dance music, notably within house and techno, have explicitly defined their music as non-rock. House music is often seen as part of the same camp as rap and hip hop music, and there are parallels in the sampling techniques, rhythmic beats and generational settings. But in many ways house/techno is musically and aesthetically much further removed from the conventional rock/pop-field. Moore (1993, p. 60) mentions that house music is not accepted by its fans as rock, which is supported by many interviews and articles from within this scene, while rap is much more ambiguous in this respect. Bloomfield (1991, p. 77) writes that young dance music sees 'the whole point of the new technology as challenging the ethos of ''guys and guitars''. A new Swedish dance music journal, *NU NRG*, introduces itself in the summer of 1993 by asking: 'Do you want not to have read about r**k?', and then writes at length about precisely (the presumed and wished death of) rock – again a gesture of father-murder that as such bears witness that the label of rock at least carries life enough to make people want to kill it.

From the other camp, rock musicians defend their separateness from pop and dance music. When Guns 'n' Roses – together with Nirvana and Seattle 'grunge' the praised flagship of a recent male white rock revival – were interviewed at the MTV awards event of 1992, Axl Rose finished by declaring 'This has nothing to do with Michael Jackson!' They could as well have mentioned Madonna.

> 'Rock' is art. Madonna, in contrast, is 'pop' – juvenile, formulaic, artificial, shallow, self-centred, escapist fantasy, committed to making a profit. Madonna is a commodity produced by industry. Clearly, pushing Madonna to the bottom rungs of the pop cultural ladder makes a space at the top for pop music 'art'. Furthermore, despite the fact that Madonna is located in opposition to female singer-songwriters, it is Madonna and pop that are feminized. . . . A number of music critics link Madonna, pop, and 'feminine' qualities (using adjectives like fluffy, coy, bubbly, etc.) to construct a transcoded version of the art versus mass culture distinction within the domain of popular music. (Schulze *et al.* 1993, p. 18)

Rock/pop is a genre-field of conflicting interpretations, related to age, gender, ethnic and class conflicts. Young generations have a need to define themselves against parents and their tastes, but can also be fascinated by the styles of yesterday. Male and female positions are confronted and exchanged. 'Black' and 'white' cultural traditions meet and interplay by means of identifications and

delimitations. Working-class life styles are colliding with those associated with economic or cultural capital. Distinctions within a genre are often made in efforts to excommunicate others from it. Some restrict rock to a male white canon of heroes, marginalising women, African-Americans or other groups and subgenres as deviant Others. Some respond by avoiding the rock label, while others fight for the right to rock. Such discursive struggles over the definition and borders of a genre are a sign of its creative life.[5]

While some house, rap or pop voices distance themselves from a narrowly conceived rock genre, others fight for their right to take part in the wider rock field. Hence the many crossovers between subgenres. On the partly gendered rock border with pop, for example, it is interesting to note that in the Swedish tour package called 'Rocktåget' (the Rock Train), the famous pop singer Eva Dahlgren was the 1992 main attraction. It is harder and harder to see the precise difference between groups nominated as best 'rock' bands and best 'pop' bands of the year.

On the more ethnically encoded border with rap, many black hip hop artists have worked with hard white rock bands, as when Run-D.M.C. and Aerosmith made 'Walk This Way', or when Public Enemy used Anthrax on 'Bring Tha Noize'. Ice-T's move from rap to hardcore punk with the band Body Count in songs like 'Cop Killer' is another example of the continued attraction of rock on its margins. Like rock, rap depends on a vocal performance backed up by instruments often played by an ensemble of musicians and/or DJs. Sections with song might alternate with the rhythmical rap speech. There is today a sort of continuum between hardcore rap/metal, purist rap, toast and pop/soul-rap, part of it loosely associated with hip hop subculture. It is really a sign of heterogeneity that two musics so close to each other in sound and spirit as the L.A. rage against the machine and the Swedish/Norwegian Clawfinger have put opposite claims on their latest releases: 'No samples, keyboards or synthesizers used in the making of this recording' (*rage against the machine*, 1992), and – ironically – 'This record is loaded with samples, loops, and no guitar amps' (*Deaf Dumb Blind*, 1993). This opens up a very complex discussion around the relations between ideologies, genres, instruments and technologies.

In a book about rappers as 'a generation of black rockers' (!), the following statement can be read:

> Then again, rap is rock, after all, and rock has *always* been at least incidentally about pissing off the old folks. . . . Of course, all of this is predicted on an Afrocentric understanding of the history of rock. If, like the whitebreads who program AOR radio, you believe that rock proceeds from Elvis to the Beatles and the Who to Led Zeppelin and Elton John and finally Bon Jovi and Phil Collins, then rap is not only not going to fit your definition of rock, it likely won't even qualify as music. On the other hand, if your hall of fame runs from Little Richard and Bo Diddley to James Brown and Jimi Hendrix and Sly & the Family Stone, to Kool and the Gang and Parliament/Funkadelic and finally to Prince and the heroes of hip hop, then you're going to understand that rap is strictly *in the tradition*. (Alder and Beckman 1991, p. xviii)[6]

Here genre definitions appear as arenas of a cultural power struggle, where oppositional agents mobilise alternative canons against a dominating position. Each such reconstructed chain is problematic in trying to establish a single, clean and unitary tradition line instead of accepting the hybridity and crossings that give a genre life. A series of genealogies coexist, pointing out quite different legitimate 'origins' (in country or blues, America, Africa or Europe; cf. van der Merwe 1989).

All such genealogies are stakes in a power game, where their coexistence indicates that none of them alone can be more than locally correct.

'I've seen the future of rock and it sucks', sings Graham Parker on 'Love is a Burning Question' (on *Burning Questions*, 1992). This can be read as a general pessimistic rock-prophesy or a specific ironic reference to the famous statement about Bruce Springsteen as the incarnated future of rock.[7] A more optimistic interpretation, might, however, say that rock will continue to attract interest, or that its sucking in of various new and non-orthodox tendencies is indeed what will keep it alive into the next millenium. Its hegemony as youth music might be broken, but the present fragmented pop music field will probably not again rise to one single heir to its throne, and neither will rock die just because it is not alone or has become reflexively aware of its history.[8]

The efforts of a strong rock establishment to claim hegemony for one tradition line covers and hides various sub- and side-traditions that compete within the genre and in fact gives it dynamics and life. Periods of increasing openness (the explicit transgressions of gender, sexuality, age, class, ethnic and genre borders by artists like Madonna, Michael Jackson or Prince) may alternate with phases where dominant forces try to reinforce strict boundaries. It is then that the definition struggles intensify, as threatened positions defend their legitimate rights. But no such purist movements can avoid late modern flexibility and reflexivity: it is essential to grunge, heavy metal and trad rock as well, as these subgenres foster new types of hybridity in style and identity. In beat, punk and grunge-metal, the claims of white male bonding were in fact immediately crossed by other lines: black sounds in the 1960s, female voices in the 1970s, complex crossovers in the 1990s.

Rock will die (petrified into a cliché) if its hegemonic line is strong and stiff enough to repress all Others in its efforts to establish a pure origin and canon. If and when rock can be unambiguously defined, then it will be dead. But as long as various Others ('Afro-American' soul, reggae and rap, 'female' pop, non-Anglo-American voices, etc. fight stylistic wars with the male, white, Western rock heroes for the right to rock, the genre will survive as an open and unpredictable field. No one yet knows the result of its discursive struggles. They are decided by no single actor, but in a polyphonous process among unpredictable alliances among listeners, subcultures, musicians, journalists and music industry professionals.

Late modern tendencies have problematised one rock ideology, that which formulated a bohemian, male father rebellion through ageing images of lonely marginality and raw naturalness. The space may have shrunk for such melancholian macho-rebels. But whatever its claims, this ideology has never been the whole truth about the 'essence' of rock. Its current weaking – in spite of the recurrent efforts to revive it – may open a larger scope for other subcurrents, other definitions. Important conditions still exist for some sort of aesthetic activity with at least some of the functions, use-values and characteristics of rock. What name it will have is not decided by whether this future music-making will adhere to or deviate from any once-and-for-all given rock-essence. It is instead the result of as yet undecided struggles of genre definitions and rights of interpretation.

This constructivist view is also congruent with a general problematisation of earlier ways of looking at subcultures and other cultural phenomena, in which 'homologies' were sought. Looking for regular patterns may be necessary for any theoretical understanding, but they do not have to be homogeneous and univocal.

Instead, cultural studies have become more and more interested in what can be called 'heterologies': contradictions and tensions within cultural phenomena.[9] Applied to rock and pop music, we might today prefer to see these genres as internally contradictory, carrying important tensions that define them and propel their diachronous developments. Instead of trying all the time to pinpoint a single and uniform essence, ethos, foundation or homology within rock as a genre (emphasising consistencies between various subgenres; between musical parameters; between musical, verbal and visual levels of styles; and between cultural forms and social formations), I would now prefer to look for the most important sets of internal contradictions and fractures that drive the genre forward.

I would for my part bet that come the millenium no single label will be able to claim to stand for youth music, the way rock once did. That way, rock will lose its hegemony – which is not the same as its life. I expect to experience a more open field of rock/pop/rap/house or whatever the new subgenres will be called. In such a situation, it may be better to return to 'popular music' (or, once again, 'pop') as the unifying concept.

But my reluctance to leave 'rock' behind derives from a belief that the specific dialectics around the narrow/wide rock-definition will be relevant and interesting enough for years to come. If the ethos of rock is interpreted as white and male, its disintegration could be welcomed. But is it really necessary to surrender to the hitherto dominating ideology of rock? If the genre is instead constructed as a more open field of tension between different positions, it can be understood and used not only to express but also to thematise and problematise the complex forms of hegemony surrounding gender, ethnicity and class. And this is exactly what has been happening in what I perceive as the most interesting developments within rock, where the male white position has been turned inside-out in the confrontation with various Others.

Rock has from its very beginnings developed through a young male white position meeting and breaking through the prisms of a series of 'others': blacks, women, homosexuals or older tradition-bearers from other genres (blues, jazz, music-hall, raï and various other popular genres). Much traditional rock and young white male culture is certainly soaked with romantic misogyny, and a longing for a unisexual homosocial world where mothers are kept away, or for lost, fixed patriarchal norms in what is perceived as a too chaotic and floating late modern world. But the history of rock has also always been nourished by inflows from Afro-American, female and other alternative expressions.

It may be possible to think of the narrow rock concept as a semi-subcultural and socially defined stream within the open, fluid and more clearly musically defined wide rock/pop field. Maybe, then, it is rock as a socially and functionally defined genre with certain institutions, values, etc. that has come to an end, while rock as a musical genre is still usable. If rock was once a leading rebellious genre with almost a subculture of its own, it is now not much more than memories of that era and a fragmented prism of various stylistic elements. But then, the talk of its death can only resonate in those who once believed in the highest hopes of its proponents. Like the death of the subject, of the author or of history, the death of rock can only be perceived by those who have formerly shared an exaggerated belief in rock as a super-fetish, carrying the load of being the high-road to revolution, freedom and utopia. To others, who do not share the disappointment over the disenchantment of this subcultural ideology, the present state of the genre as

one among others may only appear as a highly reasonable and even fruitful form of necessarily contingent, hybrid and contradictory life.[20]

Whatever, I predict that the dethroning of rock will not be at all like its first break-through, when in some ways it seemed to replace jazz. It will be, rather, a diffuse process of fragmentation and hybridisation, in which rock will in fact not die (anymore than jazz died in the 1950s), but become one of several elastic threads in the increasingly motley web of popular music.

The future will be

What has changed within rock/pop is ambivalent. New technologies may have threatened older forms of music-making, but have also enabled a growing global communication and plurality, as well as an increasing interactivity in media forms like karaoke or digital sound systems.[11] Sampling and eclecticism have not only expanded commercial markets but also questioned the foundations of capitalist production in private ownership. The expansion and differentiation of media in everyday life has increased the potential of both power and resistance.

All these ambivalent developments vibrate in the discussion of the future of rock. Metamorphoses are continuous and the past lives on in undercurrents of the present. Nothing will become either totally new or totally the same in the year 2000. The metaphors around death and birth, fall and rise, hide many different motives. Ageing rock journalists mourn their lost youth. Young generations emphasise the decay of parental genres in order to open spaces for their own new beginnings. At the bottom, there is a fundamental human desire for narrativity, to understand life as a (hi)story, with a beginning, a climax and an end.[12] The metaphysical discourse of lost innocence, departed glory, a passed Golden Age, a vanished Eldorado – all this is not limited to the rock discourse, to the 1990s or to the already obsolete 'post-isms' (headed by postmodernism). It is instead a particularly stubborn line through human history.

By our prophecies, we shape the millenium shift as a mega-event. It might, therefore, be strategically important to formulate self-reflective counter-visions, in spite of all doubts of their validity. I do not hope for any new uniformity or strict dichotomies. What I hope for is a growing space for differences and pluralities, for communication and creativity, for resistance against systemic demands and for as domination-free dialogues as possible. I look forward to musical currents that experiment with the potentials of modernity for self-reflection, dissolution of suppressing traditions, individualisation of life choices and mobilisation of identity, while at the same time resisting its negative risks for ecological collapse, social control, commercial cynicism and the broken conversations of cultural conflicts. Popular music can be predicted to find new ways of voicing oppression and injustice on many different frontiers, of which the age and generational one will be of crucial importance in the face of the ways in which young people are hit by ecological, psychological, social and cultural problems in late modernity. The twenty-first century and our third millenium will need broad and deep cultural dialogues and music will be an important means of communication across and underneath borders: between people and deep under the level of verbal discursivity. Here is a continuing mission for rock and its growing number of companions and competitors. The music of tomorrow – and future rock as a rich subfield within it – will

hopefully be anti-, poly- and heterophonic! Only then will the words of Prince in 'The Future' (Batman, 1989) be applied to rock:

I've seen the future and it will be
I've seen the future and it works

In any case, the future is already working in and on the present – through our discourses on what will be.

Endnotes

1 A style is a particular formation of formal relations in one single work, in the total work of an artist, or in a group of works across many genres (cf. Ricoeur 1976, 1981).
2 Cf. also Frith (1981, 1986, 1988), Grossberg (1986/1990, 1993) and Ihlemann (1992).
3 Figures can be found in Roe & Carlsson (1990). According to Gottlieb (1991), the US population spends more money on musical scores, software and instruments than on phonograms.
4 For example, punk obviously opened crucial new spaces for female voices, but the early comments of how punk had revitalised the decaying rock field usually stressed the return to male roots. Only later it was the new diversity of voices celebrated. Thanks to Hillevi Ganetz, who is presently writing a dissertation on female Swedish rock lyrics, for making me think about these gendered historical perspectives. Wise (1984/1990) discusses the repressed female aspect of Elvis Presley. Cohen (1991) describes the misogynist elements of the indie rock culture of Liverpool. Compare also how Andreas Huyssen (1986) analyses literary modernism as a reaction towards the feared femininity of mass culture.
5 Middleton (1990) has a similar view of rock as a discursively contested and dynamic field. Ricoeur (1981) discusses the necessity and productivity of conflicts of interpretation.
6 Swedenburg (1992, pp. 55, 65) also stresses the continuity between rap and rock and sees these genres as open discursive fields.
7 'I saw rock and roll's future and its name is Bruce Springsteen', wrote Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* in 1974.
8 Moore (1993, p. 179) underlines that self-references and pastiche forms are not necessarily signs of decay, but rather of continued vitality.
9 The concept of 'heterology' derives from Michel de Certeau (1986).
10 '[W]hat has "died" is the ability of the discourse of "rock' to impose a unity in the form of the white, male subject/author upon the heterogeneity of "other' racial, sexual and gendered identities and musics on which rock music itself fed' (Bradby 1993, p. 163).
11 Bloomfield (1991, p. 76) optimistically hopes that 'the proliferation of a karaoke-style-do-it-yourself rap may in the future allow for a combined political and aesthetical break with commodity culture'.
12 Ricoeur (1983-5/1984-8, 1991) discusses the close relation between life, time, history and narrative. My view of the life of genres as an openness towards conflicting interpretations are inspired by Ricoeur (1976). Compare Fornäs (1990a) on rock, youth and late modern time experience.

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