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“Play it yourself”

Swedish music in movement

Johan Fornäs

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In Sweden, rock music has in many different ways and phases moved young people into action. Listening to music, and making rock, induces new thoughts that can inspire social and political activity, as is well known in the general mythology of rock-as-rebellion. In the 1970s, an “alternative”, “non-commercial” or “progressive” music movement was born, and it is informative to study how and why it formed, developed and (at least in some ways) faded away. It can be studied as an interesting historical example of a new, youthful social and cultural movement, and its history mirrors the general changes of late modern society and culture. This history also contains clues to the understanding of music’s moving potentials, in opposition to dominant norms of society, to outdated traditional authorities, to adult institutions and to power interests based on market, state, class, gender, ethnicity or geography. This text will deal with these issues. In what way has the Swedish music movement experimented with organizing alternatives to dominant market and state mechanisms, with resisting external pressures and with formulating progressivity and emancipation in terms of cultural policy? How does it illuminate the mobilizing potentials of music?

American rock’n’roll had become popular among Swedish youth already back in the 1950s, when domestic artists more or less faithfully copied or even parodied Anglo-American models. The British beat invasion in the 1960s gave rise to some Swedish rock bands and new local arenas and clubs, but still with limited competences and no strong sense of identity. The dependence upon imported popular music from the commercial music industry was overwhelming, and while the domestic popular music was still dominated by older schlager traditions, the young rock scene did not yet have any strong political edge, nor did it contain any influential and self-conscious public networks.

It was the years around 1970 that a comprehensive grass root music movement was born, with groups playing their own music mostly in Swed-

ish language, expressing their experiences and dreams, and joining to form networks of clubs, “progressive” organizations and “alternative” companies of various sorts around the music and the subcultures it united. This music movement was extraordinarily strong, well organized and eloquent, compared to precursors as well as to international parallels. It was deeply marked by its time and partly fragmented towards the end of the 70s. But it shaped experiences and public forms that are still important today, even though ideologies and styles have changed. I will examine the history of its constituents and discuss the changing conditions for empowering relations between popular music and music movements.

By the end of the 1960s, Sweden had a powerful central state apparatus, strong and institutionalized leisure associations, a rapidly modernized welfare system and a comparatively weak national music industry, unprepared to meet the sudden and unexpected rise of young domestic bands and their curious audience. The music movement therefore quickly became unusually strong and highly organized on a national basis. The vacuum in the Swedish music industry created a space for the rise of self-organized alternative structures, and this space was quickly filled by a sudden flow of youth subcultures and progressive movements that experimented with new forms of political and musical expression. A counterpublic sphere with music as its focal point was thus constructed. It developed, not as the autonomous alternative it sometimes thought it was, but in a close negative relation to the music industry and to exactly those general trends within popular music, everyday life and overall society which it sought to resist and shape alternatives to.¹

This was related to parallel phenomena in domestic and international youth culture, such as the hippie or student counter cultures. But the Swedish movement was unique in its stability and organizational growth. It built up an apparatus of oppositional bands, music festivals, local clubs, record companies and a music press. It interacted – though not always without tensions – with other new social and political movements, as the new left, the international solidarity organizations, the ecological movement, the peace movement and the women’s lib. It was the strongest of the alternative cultural networks of its time, though it had parallels mainly among the independent theatre groups. Progressive film makers, visual artists and writers also mobilized, radicalized and organized, but it was the music movement that took the lead in creating national initiatives and developing ideological platforms.

The goals of the music movement were at the time often summarized in the catchword “spela själv” – “play it yourself”, making one’s own music on

one's own terms. New types of collective organizations and projects were united with new expressions in sounds and texts. Music making and politics thus came together in an explosive way. Let me quote at some length a key statement by several central music activists and musicians, published in the movement's journal *Musikens Makt*. It discusses concepts like progressive and non-commercial, while rejecting others like people's culture (inspired by maoist folk-front ideas), revolutionary and proletarian (suggested by other militant new left groups).

What is then meant by the *progressive* music movement? [... It is] an organized wave of music that is *cultural-politically progressive*. [...] What we compare ourselves with – and always attack – is *the commercial music culture*. With schlager music as its clearest musical expression. [...] Progressive music ought to be the opposite of all that: *it is thus as important to break with musical clichés as with textual contents*. [...] *It is important to remember that progressive music is no special 'musical form' – it is the nuances, the abundance of styles, that is a strength, not the uniformity!* [...]

We also use the concept non-commercial music. It tangibly means that our musicians and record companies don't make music out of profit principles, but out of the idea of communication. [...] *But:* this doesn't mean that our music movement is socialist or communist. [...] The ideological, conceptual basis of our movement can therefore be summarized thus: self activity, new musical forms, concrete texts about Swedish everyday life, about human joy, work, struggle and dreams, non-commercialism, anti-capitalism, cultural-political progressivity (including the demand for control over the conditions of music [...]).

But: our movement is no party! [...] Our task is instead to advance a new musical culture that communicates reality. In opposition to the musical littering that the privately owned music industry is busy with. We should build our own market, in order to, in the long run, stand free of both commercial and state-local government interests. We shall cooperate with similar movements within other cultural sectors (i.e. theatre) in the country, and with corresponding movements in other countries. And bloody well not forget that music is fun! [...]

We should be a culturally progressive movement on a broad basis, that fights for inserting everyday life in music (and music in everyday life) [...] We also must build a cultural self-confidence. That results from oneself practicing various forms of culture. [...] We must tear down the

barriers between 'just' playing and 'just' listening people. By making as many as possible into both! Our music is an expression of ourselves, and not of the fully automatic, profit-chasing plastic industry. (*Musikens Makt*, 10, 1974: 3, 18-19.)

The movement had a great scope and contained contradictions that later proved hard to handle. Politically there was a spectrum from revolutionary left wing radicalism, socialism, communism and anarchism, to liberal populism. For example, in the issues of *Musikens Makt* immediately before the one with the above quoted passage, an internal debate contained statements as diverse as: "We want a whole body, not only a head. We don't want only a body either, without a head. [...] For a union of the proletarian and the occult left! Away with the superego, authoritarian institutions and puritanism!", and "The ideal should be a combination of class-bound music, conscious text and progressive context. [...] Have no illusions of the power of music! Forwards towards the dictatorship of the proletariat!"

Socially young people clearly dominated, but their class background varied. Middle class boys dominated in central organizations and ideological debates, but there were also many working class kids and girls being engaged as musicians and local activists.

Aesthetically, the picture was even more heterogeneous: the movement had no unified style, in spite of what its critics have afterwards tried to assert. It included a dynamic mixture of most contemporary genres within rock, pop, ballads, folk music and to some extent also jazz and experimental music. It was defined primarily in terms of cultural politics rather than musical or subcultural styles. It was not a homogeneous youth subculture, even though the hippies, the so called green wave and the red student activists were important ingredients. It must instead be understood as a mixture of several styles meeting in a common counterpublic sphere.

Popular music here thus was the ultimate focus of an organized counter movement with its own alternative public arenas, forms and expressions. It was a network of expressive forms of counterpublic spheres for the collective production, distribution and use of young, oppositional music. Here, musicians searched for more democratic working conditions, meeting an alert and active audience that tried to shape contexts for more intense music use. This network of counterpublic spheres made possible new learning processes in youth culture. It was itself also a reaction to problems and crises within what I call the late modern Swedish society, i.e. Sweden during our recent and intensified phase of cultural modernization, starting about three

decades ago. Which were the constituents of this network, and how did they develop?²

Bands

In the summer of 1970 some open air music festivals made people aware of the wealth of new, young music groups that for the first time seemed really to fuse rock influences from the United States and Britain with domestic traditions in a provocative and productive way. Small bands, often formed on the basis of teenage peer groups, translated Anglo-American rock and pop into a Swedish idiom, and amalgamated it with folk music, cabaret and ballads. To all this was added developments of jazz, blues, reggae, heavy metal and (from 1976) punk. During all of the 1970s, texts in Swedish on political and everyday issues were generally preferred. "Play it yourself" also meant preferring lyrics in Swedish and a promotion of amateur music making, clearly heralding what several years later was happening in punk.

These issues were always the focus of harsh debates within the movement. There was much discussion on how texts should be written, to avoid what was seen as commercial superficiality as well as a too sterile propagandist demagogy. It is of course easy to find examples of both extremes in the output of the time, but there still seemed to exist a broad consensus on the need to avoid these dead ends and try to find ways of expressing everyday experiences in a way that combined political with poetic force. Demagogic lyrics hardly exist anymore, and the debate of the ethics of rock lyrics is not very intense. Lyrics in English are more dominant today than in the 70s, but this is very much genre-bound. Heavy metal and hip-hop most often use English, while Swedish is more common in pop and post-punk. There are also a number of groups that lovingly joke with Swedishness in their images of everyday Swedish rural and small-town life.

Another common subject of conflicts concerned amateurism and professionalism, where several lines emerged. Some attacked professional musicianship, and argued for the right of all to make their own music. Others advocated maximal professionalism on all levels, to spread as (aesthetically and politically) good music as possible to as many as possible, and attacked the disdain for knowledge, skills and craft in the making and spread of music. Still others tried to find formulas for letting the grass roots and the elite interact in more democratic and fruitful ways than before. The general tendency was towards more and more professionalization, and some group got a strong position in the national market. In the 1980s, this was not anymore

any subject of debate, since there has been much support given to amateur bands, no subculture seem to defend amateurism for its own sake, and the professionalism of the elite is not felt as a threat anymore.

A third, much debated issue was the ideological value of musical genres. Here, the main camps were rock versus folk music. Many musicians never saw any real conflict here, but were glad to meet and let these genres and traditions interact. But there were young urban rock fans that just found the folk traditions outdated, petty bourgeois or simply dull. And rock was several times fiercely attacked, not least by people with maoist or stalinist sympathies, for being an indoctrination instrument of cultural imperialism. This issue still has some actuality, even though the extreme positions have mouldered. There are still groups trying to get a revival of folk traditions, Swedish composers sometimes attack the Swedish broadcasting corporation for not playing enough of Swedish music, and the World music wave has reminded of our dependence of the Anglo-American music industry. But since the rock tradition has today been firmly anchored among our youth, partly by the music movement itself, there is no longer any ground for seeing it as only an external imperialist threat. The rock-pop-continuum is in many ways today an established and truly Swedish youth music, and a necessary point of reference for oppositional movements as well.

The debates of the 70s were never unequivocally resolved, and they were very often felt as meaningless quarrels, but they were still important as new forms of discussing the changing relations between music and politics. All the time, music making had its basis in the small groups and bands of 3-8 people, even though there were also some solo artists and bigger ensembles. These bands were locally anchored but many of them found the possibilities to reach a wider audience through music festivals, the network of clubs, and the record companies associated with the movement.

From about 1977 punk introduced new means of expression and gave rise to a new wave of rock playing bands.³ They sometimes reacted against the alternative music of the preceding generation, but were often integrated in the music movement, took over its organizations, and revitalized the “play it yourself”-spirit. One Stockholm punk band, Grisen skriker (The pig shrieks), for example sung (in Swedish) in 1979: “it’s folk music / – the folk music of our time / It’s in the tempo of the time / to be passively aggressive / Music is our own way / to be active / Never so many bands as now / – good or bad, does that matter / when they anyhow exist!” But the collective identity of the movement had already began to dissolve. Many networks and organizational forms continued to be of importance, but the limits between mainstream and

alternative, inside and outside of the movement, were not so easily identified anymore. Contradictions within the movement fragmented it, while the development of some of its constituents and changes in the commercial sector had made the front lines much less clear than before.

By the turn of the decade more bands than ever played rock and pop, the folk wave had lost much of its attraction, and the political unity of the movement had largely disappeared. One can estimate the number of bands having made records and identifying with the music movement to at least around 500 in the 1970s; 250 are listed in an overview of one year, 1981 (Håkanson, 1981). In the 1980s heavy metal was by far the greatest genre among amateur bands, even though listening habits were much more varied, and a series of different musical styles succeeded each other among different subcultural groups. Today, more than 100,000 people play in tens of thousands of rock bands in Sweden, out of a total population of 8 million. Almost ten percent of Swedish teenagers play rock, 85% of them boys, rather evenly distributed over social classes. There had been a few women in the music movement from its start, some as solo singers and some in female bands, but punk gave female rock groups a much more recognized position than before. Rock playing, however, continues to be a predominantly male affair, as opposed to rock and pop listening, which is important for both genders and for all classes – in fact, girls listen even more than boys do.⁴

Today, many bands continue to work in similar ways as before, even though their contexts and subjective motives may have changed.⁵ Hip-hop, house, mixing and rapping have for some meant radical changes, making studio work more central and partly changing instrumentalists to deejays in live performances (see e.g. Hebdige, 1987, and Frith, 1988). But even on that scene, the peer group is often emphasized as the basis of music-making. Almost all teenagers like and listen much to rock and pop music, and when they start playing themselves, making their own songs, learning processes are induced where new and important competences are developed, including verbal expression, theatrical performance and administrative self-management. Echoes of a similar self-confidence, but in new modes and contexts, can be heard among young rap artists like Papa Dee demanding “Give them the real thing!” or, in “Microphone poet” (1990):

I’m a poet – don’t treat me like a clown / Critics – don’t fight me down /
 Don’t categorize, don’t criticize / Huh! Give me respect, stop spreading
 your lies // I’m the microphone poet on the MC throne / I got style, and
 the style I got is my own // Every good MC is a microphone poet /

Although some people don't seem to know it / Teachin' and preachin' –
 that's our mission / This is the way to make the youths listen / If you read
 them a poem, they get bored / The message in the poem gets ignored /
 But like when we shout, without no doubt / Make them all listen and
 scream and shout / I can teach, I can preach, I can entertain / Make my
 letters go straight to the brain / That's why the MC business is what I
 choose / The microphone's a thing I like to abuse.

Rock has always been a commercial commodity and it would be naïve to believe that its commodity form does not affect what it stands for. It would however be quite as unwise to imagine that the commodity form would destroy rock music's utility as an expression of needs shared by masses of people throughout the world, or that it would compromise its criticism of dominating forms of rationality and life conditions. Rock has a crucial ability to combine areas of life which are normally split in modern everyday life. Its strong rhythmic beat is the physically perceptible pulse which harkens back to primeval drums or the mother's heart beat, but it is also associated with city sounds, the working rhythm of machines and other mechanical sounds. Thus the beat seems to mediate between the body's own rhythms and the forced, dehumanizing rhythms of the modern world. The peculiar "dirty" sound of rock fulfils a similar function; singing voices and instrumental timbres are plain or rough rather than trained and polished. What is important is intensity rather than a pleasant or pleasing sound, and the instruments' acoustic sounds are modified through various kinds of electronic effects. On the one hand, reminiscences of shrieks of children and strong parental voices; on the other, artificial everyday sounds which may recall everything from racing motors to computers.⁶

In their activities, the peer group bands use resources and respond to demands from their external, objective world of material, economic and social conditions, from the inter-subjectively shared social world of norms and symbol systems, and from each individual's internal subjective world of psychical experiences, structures and needs. Playing rock music, then, leads to learning processes and competences along the same dimensions. These competences can be used in oppositional movements. The skills of handling electronic equipment, constructing a stage or furnishing a rehearsal room, arranging concerts, handling the group economy or dealing with the formalities of associations are of course useful for any movement. When bands deal with conflicts of interest and seek collective solutions to keep the group together, or learn verbal, musical and visual symbolic codes, this is also a

potential for the formation of counterpublic spheres. Finally, rock practice help individuals to develop an understanding of their own identity and ideals, their resources and their limitations, as well as tools for reaching and expressing deep inner desires and feelings, and without this subjective fuel any movement would quickly fade away.

Let me summarize the use-values of rock-related music for adolescents and their peer groups in three main points:

1. *Collective autonomy*. One can do something together with one's best friends on one's own terms. This concerns the need for autonomous play, for a *free space*, separated from adults in family and school. In its activities, the peer group establishes an autonomous sociality which defensively sets limits for the encroachments of demands from family and school. Choosing to gather around rock has the function of delimiting this group of the same age against surrounding adults and against other youth styles, regardless of whether you play yourself or only have a tape recorder on full volume, to create a territory of your own and provoke reactions from surrounding adults. No outsider tells you what to do in a rock band – there you can feel freer than elsewhere.

Rock music fits and strengthens peer groups, especially the normally larger groups formed by boys (the traditionally tighter and smaller girlfriend units are not as easily transformed into rock groups). The need for *group community* is met by music through its collective form (visual arts or writing cannot really offer the same possibilities). Group collectivity is obvious in playing, in that rock is based on the band rather than on soloists or big orchestras. And rock reception is also mainly associated with peer relations, as peer groups use references to rock in their internal communication and social interaction. These needs are increased in late modernity because of rapid generational changes and increased system demands e.g. in and from school.

2. *Alternative ideals*. One can find different stylistic models and even become something, namely, a rock musician, via other means than the ordinary. The socio-cultural world of rock offers alternative ideals to the ones offered by family and school, and rock playing can channel a problematic relation towards achievement demands for which there is no suitable outlet within the framework of a "normal" career – e.g. in school. Like sports, music can give (chiefly male) working class youths who dislike or do badly in school an emergency exit, an alternative opportunity for success and recognition. Of course most amateur rock players never fulfil such careers, but they are at least able to play with the thought and get inspired by that

socio-cultural field. Rock represents a great contrast to European art music and the popular songs of older generations, which is often a crucial quality for young people in their efforts to build an independent identity. It also carries strong associations to black subcultures which in the same way can become important points of identification in the adolescent process, when you have to separate yourself from the parents. And in general, pop idols are important transitional objects in adolescent identity work between parents, school, peers and the opposite sex.

The need for such alternative ideals might increase as cultural erosion of traditions render normal or ordinary careers and conventional ideals less safe and widens the expectation gap between wishes and reality. And they are certainly strongly needed in the adolescent testing of ideals that help breaking away from adult domination in family and school and forming one's own identity.

3. *Narcissistic enjoyment.* In music one can express things that cannot be said in other ways, have fun and create something, and express one's feelings and one's identity by standing in focus, mirrored and amplified by band and audience. Through several conjunctive symbolic channels – *words, tones and visual styles* – adolescent conflicts can be symbolized, partly in opposition to system-tinged verbal language. Individuals use rock as a means of expressing and communicating hidden inner desires. The restricted instrumental rationalization of late modernity increases these needs, since the communicative aspects of life are forced out of school and work, and this must be compensated for during leisure, e.g. in youth cultural activities. This aspect is perhaps most vital for boys, who are allowed in rock to display feelings of weakness, tenderness, intimacy, sorrow and frustration which would otherwise be shut off.

There are three sub-aspects here. Music making as an aesthetic activity in general gives *creative pleasure* by making it possible to leave some trace of oneself in the world. Further, the *volume, beat and sound* of the music are parameters that facilitate both for listeners and musicians a temporary and voluntary dissolution of ego-boundaries and a “regression” to pre-verbal, “narcissistic” forms of experience, feelings of life, involvement and wholeness in one's own body, which can have a therapeutic effect. Thirdly, the individual self is experienced as grossly enlarged by merging with the teamwork of the band and being mirrored by the response of the *audience*. The more and more rapidly the world changes, the more the young feel unproductive and anonymous in their own modern environment and hence the stronger are the needs for creative pleasure. Both the creative, the expres-

sive and the reflexive aspects of self-expansion respond to the increasing late modern needs for self-reflection and self-appreciation, caused by changes in socialization and in everyday life. The high interest in and use of music (and some other aesthetic forms like diary writing) in adolescence is proof that such needs are strong in that phase of life, where the rapid identity development produces an insecurity that has to be countered by temporary self-confirming experiences.

Peer groups are today more often gender-mixed, and we find more all-female groups as well. In the 1950s, peer groups tended to be strictly hierarchical and competitive in their inner organization. Today, gangs often have no fixed leaders, nor any clear internal division of functions. This is a defence against internal conflicts and as a distrust or perhaps rather a disinterest in authorities, that can be read as a sign of new personality traits, resulting from late modern socialization patterns. The individual feels insecure and has a troubled identity, which has to be strengthened from outside, from belonging to a supportive and confirming peer group. The group often functions as a symbiotical “social uterus”, that gives its members the community and expanded identity they so badly need. Music can help strengthening this narcissistic group mirroring and create sensual self-expanding experiences, acting as a symbolic or “cultural uterus”.⁷

Rock is thus important for growing up in late modernity, for enrichening the quality of late modern life, and for inspiring opposition towards oppressive power structures. Rock music still moves. Music movements get their strength out of the use values and learning processes of everyday rock practice, and use these potentials for collectivity, autonomy, alternative ideals, emotional expression and self-expanding fun to form both critical and utopian forces of legitimate aggressivity and open communities.

Music festivals

The bands are the musical basis of every movement, and rock playing is mostly based on spontaneous youth peer groups. But musicians and other interested activists sometimes unite in greater projects of various kinds. Since the 1970s, a most influential international form is music festivals, inspired by Anglo-American examples. In fact, two outdoor music festivals in Stockholm in 1970 first signalled the existence of this movement.

Such festivals are often outdoor.⁸ They can be occasional events, but many are repeated in the same park or field, so as to become a local tradition. They are an important meeting point between bands and their audien-

ces. There was in the beginning mostly no entrance fee, which meant that bands often had to pay for free. Later more closed festivals became more common, and local authorities could also give economical support. The festivals first typically mixed many different musical styles; by the end of the 1970s festivals of one type of music, such as reggae, punk or garage rock were more important. Festivals also included lots of other activities than just music. The music could be interspersed with short theatre performances or political speeches, health food, psychedelia, books and papers were sold, and money collected for various political and social purposes.

A more typically Swedish climax of the 1970s movement was the Alternative Festival in 1975, arranged in opposition to the Eurovision Song Contest being held in Stockholm, after Abba's "Waterloo" had won that contest the year before. This festival was partly shown on TV and documented in a film titled *Vi har vår egen sång*, (We have our own song, 1976) that helped spreading knowledge of the movement abroad. Its most typical song was "Doing the omoralisk schlager-festival" with its slogan "We have our own song, we don't care a damn about them".

Sometimes music groups worked with theatre groups, as, for example, in the so-called Tent Project of 1977, where an ensemble of eighty actors and musicians toured the country in a large circus tent with a three hour music theatre show called *Vi äro tusenden* (We are a legion). Its subject was the history of the Swedish working class; its aesthetics joined imaginative circus elements with realistic everyday melodrama and Brechtian agitprop; its music was a mixture of symphonic and heavy rock, blues, jazz, ballads, film, folk and cabaret music. It was seen and heard by 100,000 people, issued as an album and presented in a film (cf. Fornäs, 1985 and 1988b).

The music of the show made it clear how deeply Afro-American idioms had become part of the musical identity of the younger generations. The musicians expressed their identification with fighting Swedish workers in the 19th century by projecting on them their own blues-oriented musical basis. The type of music they named "timeless", or "their own", was blues-based rock with some jazz elements. Whereas the jazz saxophone players in the ensemble preferred to establish purely instrumental spaces free from verbal language, the rock musicians were not afraid to let music interplay intimately with words, in songs and opera-like dramatic scenes. And the most rock oriented composer loved using music as "film music", i.e. as a mood-creating and "invisible" background music that underlined the emotions shown on stage. This broke with a strong Brecht-Eisler tradition in political theatre, with its ascetic fear of bodily expressivity and the seducing

power of music. The Tent Project was much closer to late modern youth culture, where strong emotional acting out from the rock stage is central.

The Tent Project had a collective heterogeneity that was typical for the alternative movements. People with different experiences and backgrounds met and tried out new and democratic forms of cooperation across different boundaries. There were not one, but three or four composers, writers, directors etc, and the participating individuals and groups were thus allowed to add their own ideas to at least some parts of the show. The result was a montage form where various styles and traditions were mixed, far from any high cultural aesthetics and instead firmly anchored in modern popular culture, with roots in carnival culture. There were serious shortcomings in the project, partly caused by difficult economic conditions, partly a result of the prominent ideologies of its time. What was meant as an igniting manifestation soon was felt as an awkward tombstone. But the disrespectful collage forms, resulting from the efforts openly and without any centralized hierarchic leadership to cooperate across various borders, contains a valid utopian germ and critical edge against dominating cultural traditions.

This relates to general aesthetic and political views on popular music. The Tent Project, as the music movement in general, can be read as a testing out of an aesthetical model for unrestrained communication, where expressivity and interaction are merged into a richer, communicative rationality. The meeting of popular music and an active and creative audience creates possibilities for transgressing dominant norms and power structures in dynamic, unexpected and impure mixtures of traditions, in open and poly-dimensional encounters between subcultures and generations, groups and individuals, genres and styles.

The Tent Project was soon felt to be the final manifestation of a movement dissolving in a multitude of different directions, rather than a beginning of something new, as it had hoped itself. Changed conditions for free groups as an effect of the economic crisis and of an ideological crisis within the new left movements, the emergence of local historical amateur theatre plays in the Swedish countryside, the punk explosion and the internal problems of the music movement combined to prevent a direct continuation of what had been started. The unity of the movement was sincerely threatened by internal conflicts on issues of cultural politics. Tendencies towards commercialization and institutionalization increased, blurring the borderline between alternative and mainstream, while the commercial sector found new offensive strategies to incorporate domestic rock. The collective identity was broken up and splintered into fragments. Today almost no festivals are

directed against the commercial music industry anymore – the front lines have moved elsewhere. Music festivals still persist, however, in a range from the very local to the national ones; from the ones only about music to the ones combining rock with political or social causes, like in the Swedish ANC gala and national variants of the Live Aid “mega events”; and from the specialized to the stylistically heterogeneous ones.

Clubs

Music festivals were only the most extrovert and open performance spaces. More closed, but also with more stability and continuity, were the growing number of local independent clubs, first often called “Music forum”. In 1974 about 60 of them formed a national umbrella organization called The Contact Network for Non-Commercial Music (Kontakt nätet). This network still exists and today organizes more than twice as many local clubs, though with a less explicitly ideological programme.

In music clubs, young people joined to arrange concerts for their new favourite bands. They often had to fight hard against local authorities and private property owners to get their own premises. Through such struggles, many clever young people learned lots about politics and the difficult art of cooperating. Many clubs also engage in other types of leisure or cultural activities, and by the end of the 1970s, the setting up of rehearsal rooms for bands was a task of increasing importance.

In the 1980s, the context of youthful music has become considerably more complex than before. The music clubs had filled an empty space between garage bands and the music industry. Rock was positioned in a battlefield between subcultural peer groups in garages and streets on the one hand, and the commercial music industry on the other. Today, there is in Sweden a rapidly growing sector where the state, local authorities, social welfare institutions, schools, study organizations and established youth associations have invaded the rock scene as never before. A third pole, the state, has now intervened in a much more active role. Music clubs that started “from below”, by local enthusiasts or musicians, now compete with localities (rehearsal rooms, studios, venues and discos) organized “from above”, with support from the state system. This is welcome as a contribution to resources that young people need for music-making and listening. But it also gives rise to new problems and struggles. State intervention in rock makes youth cultural activities steered by demands and rules from outside, resulting in tendencies towards institutionalization, bureaucratization, pedagogization

and instrumentalization of rock. Rock activities are much more than before used as a tool for social control, for educating problematic youth and keeping them away from drugs, criminality and the streets, and for supporting other goals than just rock. Such goals can be good or bad, but the effect is a greater complexity of forces around the music. Teenage rock bands in Sweden increasingly have to formulate specific prior goals, use textbooks and report to those who control the money and the venues. These trends deeply affect popular music on a grassroots level.

I have myself experienced this when rehearsing with an (unfortunately never publically performing) amateur band in various settings. To get subsidies, we formed a study circle and thus had to fill in weekly reports on which tunes we were going to play the next twenty-or-so meetings. This was mostly fantasy, but we had to do the job and it removed a bit of the spontaneity. We had to be at least five participants each time, which forced us to fake a bit when someone was ill. We were forced to buy handbooks with names like *Rock – beat by beat*, which contained pedagogic advices on how to play in a band, but which we never even bothered to open. One of us had to be elected “group leader” and get leader education in a study organization once a year. All that gave us part of the money needed to pay the rent, but it also made our playing a little bit more boring, and it integrated us in an institutional frame imposed from outside and from above, largely motivated by the need of the state to control that money were spent as intended.

The music movement and its clubs formerly met mistrust from the authorities and saw the industry as their enemy. Today a much more complicated trickery and play is needed to navigate under these new conditions. And the institutionalized organizations once born by the movement are not “clean” or innocent: the Contact Network today canalize rather big state youth subsidies to its membership clubs. Bureacratization has come to join commercialization as threats towards the vitality and political impact of rock, while, on the other hand, rock can now also use resources from the state as well as from the music industry. This is an additional reason why there is no anti-commercial music movement anymore.

Partly, this development was started because the music movement had had an impact on young radical social workers, teachers, local administrators and politicians. For them, rock was a natural environment in their professional work with younger generations, and they were as inspired by counter cultural experiences as they were tired of the stiff and old fashioned ways of working in the public sector. This began to make the borders between integrated and alternative music-making more diffuse.

A vanguard in this direction was an organized movement of rock-playing youth called “Let a Thousand Stones Roll”, that existed from the beginning to the end of the 1980s in Gothenburg, a city on the west coast of Sweden, with half a million inhabitants. It had its roots in a project started by some social workers employed by the local community, together with a group of young people who hanged around in the city centre of Gothenburg. At its maximum in the mid-80s this movement engaged several hundreds of boys and girls, most of them in the age of 15-20 years, forming more than one hundred rock groups. It was inspired by the international punk wave with its explosion of rock bands and other cultural activities (clubs, record companies, fanzines, etc), and by the wave of semi-anarchist youth squatting and rioting movements in the European urban areas from around 1980. It was also related to the motives of social workers: how to help disempowered youths to regain a less self-destructive identity.⁹

The social workers offered them a rehearsal room with instruments to play on, and basic lessons in playing rock. Rock groups were formed, who soon wrote their own songs. The movement grew, and several associations were formed in different suburbs of the city. A record was made with some of the groups, music festivals were held, a music house was opened in the city centre, a special magazine was produced. The project got media coverage, and similar activities were started elsewhere as well. Young kids obviously could learn things, skip drugs and crime and form a collective force. And social work need not necessarily split and crush the gangs or the unrealistic ideals of the young, but could also work with them.

Let a Thousand Stones Roll no longer exists, but many of the associations formed within it still thrive. It was a fresh proof of the force of collective music making in expressing political critique of society as well as having fun and working on unconscious desires, organizing collective resistance movements and aiding individual development.

Not all new pedagogic-therapeutic projects in the 1980s were as sensitive to the delicate dynamics of peer group rock playing. In some instances, local authorities, schools and established institutions subsumed rock under external demands, related to systemic needs of the state apparatus, aiming for social control and integration of disturbing youth groups. Local authorities organize drug free rock concerts on those especially “dangerous” evenings when young people often tend to be out drinking and causing trouble in the streets, like right before school start in August. These events are often invaded by commercial sponsoring and anti-deviance messages that make rock seem to be totally subsumed under market and state interests – if it were not

for the various defense mechanisms exhibited by some bands and most young people, showing that integrity and fun-seeking can survive many externally imposed normalizing pressures. When the government's minister of youth praises rock playing as an important creative leisure interest, this is a welcome victory, but it also shows that the image of rock as subcultural rebellion has been eroded.

There is always a danger of being caught between the logic of market competition on the one hand and the logic of surveillance and control on the other. This has to be counteracted by conscious strategies aiming at letting the young musicians take over responsibilities and form their activities according to their own specific experiences and needs, rather than to the abstract rules of markets or authorities. This makes such initiatives bound to particular individuals and its organizational forms are less continuous and lasting, but it also gives them a momentaneous strength and vitality. The social-pedagogic goals that adult professionals impose on rock playing change its context and functions, and sharpen the tension between the hedonist and ascetic sides of rock. But it would be foolish to think that they totally destroy the communicative and expressive potentials of rock. Systemic demands from state and market are never to be escaped in rock, but neither do they totally determine its use-values.

Much of youth culture is related to school. Peer groups and rock bands are often brought together by school, but they also often openly or unconsciously react against it. School leaves little space for expressiveness or for the testing of right and wrong that shapes well anchored norms. It is also important that group activities are self-selected and autonomous, which is considered extremely important by young people themselves. The teenage group's learning processes are much more open than those of school in the sense that there is no given or preordained curriculum and no answer books. Instead of receiving knowledge which is already produced by others (teachers, textbook authors, etc) groups undertake investigations in the modern conditions of life.

The bureaucratization and strategic pedagogization of rock playing is a threat to this. The pressure from market or state authorities can make rock's learning processes more similar to those at school, and diminish their poly-dimensionality, openness and flexibility. But this doesn't mean that rock has totally sold out, or that no intervention by the state-related sphere should be accepted. What is needed is an awareness of these forces, and effective counter-strategies to hold back systemic demands and maintain or develop the communicative or even emancipatory potentials of music-making. No

form of activity can totally escape systemic demands and build alternative free spaces of their own. The best thing is to try and see these tendencies as clearly as possible instead of hiding away or pretend they don't exist.

Record companies

From the very start of the music movement, there was a growing number of record companies identifying with its goals and forming one of its most important elements. These “progressive” or “alternative” companies also in the beginning of the 1970s formed two independent record distribution networks which are still active. The common organization for the companies was called NIFF, the Nordic Association of Non-Commercial Phonogram Producers. In 1978 their market share was 7 percent of all phonogram releases. In 1981 more than 70 smaller and bigger companies could be listed, but by then the punk wave had made the definitions less clear (cf. Wallis & Malm, 1984, and Håkansson, 1981).

These companies spread music that would never have been published without them. They helped spreading the music of the bands and giving them a collective identity by collecting them under identifiable labels. They tried to give musicians better working conditions and more power over the means of production than the established companies, though that showed not to be quite an easy affair in the face of harsh economic realities. Many of them had contacts with other young movements and initiated cooperations between musicians and activists in environmental groups, solidarity groups etc.

There were also several internal conflicts between different companies, and the dividing line was extra deep between a group of companies centered on Gothenburg and another one based mainly in Stockholm. The main issues concerned organizational forms: should the musicians or the company workers have the power, and to what degree should the distribution networks be decentralized and anchored among local activists? The conflicts were partly a result of personal antagonisms and competition in too small a market, partly of political discord between a communist-socialist and an anarcho-liberal wing, but it never seemed quite clear what was the ultimate reason for the fierce struggle over all these years. Today these oppositions seem far away, and the picture is much more diversified.

During punk, singles rose to a new importance, and while many old independent companies issued younger bands, a flow of small new companies flourished. Every new musical trend gives birth to new constellation, as for

example the couple of independent rap and house producers cooperating in Nordik Beat. The development of record and disc production (in Sweden, vinyl has been much more slowly replaced by CDs) is always extremely sensitive to the state of the market, stylistic trends and changes in media technology. If the Swedish 1970s seemed totally divided in a commercial and an alternative sector, in the 1980s the separation of majors and independents has not at all been as marked and noted in the public discussion as it has been in many other countries, notably in Britain. New media industrial strategies have changed the relations between big and small companies, and there isn't much that ideologically unifies the independent producers any longer. But this does not mean that record companies are no longer part of any processes of political mobilization through popular music. The Swedish versions of mega events have often been closely interrelated to some independent companies, and there are subcultural milieus with critical potentials formed around others. The house, mix, sampling, rap and hip-hop experiments seem for example to give phonogram producers and studios a new importance and new possibilities, of which the outcome is yet difficult to foresee, but where the fights around copyright legislation and the control over music technology also means new areas for the activities of future music movements.

Music press

The alternative music press of the seventies was dominated by one magazine, called *Musikens Makt* (The Power of Music, 1973-80). It was a forum for the music movement and its primary face towards the world. There, all the debates that have been mentioned above were fought out: on rock versus folk music, how to write a good text, the meaning of words like "alternative" and "progressive", the ownership forms of the record companies, and so on. It was of course also and primarily the site of interviews and reviews of new records and groups, plays, films and books with relevance to the movement. All in all, it was extremely important to produce the feeling of a unified movement in the public sphere.

In its start *Musikens Makt* drove several other, non-movement music papers out of business, often through a high pressure of solidarity among music journalists. But after a continuous decline it finally died from its difficulties in adjusting to the economic, ideological and musical developments after punk. Some of its former journalists then started other magazines, that were no longer coupled to the feeling of any movement, but rather copied the Anglo-American music press. There are also explicitly commercial

music papers for younger (pre-) adolescents, as well as special magazines for certain genres and groups of musicians and fans. In the late seventies, the punk wave gave rise to a multitude of small “fanzines”; after a few years there were almost 50 of them. Some such small and amateurish subcultural fanzines still exist, but much more rarely. Rock and pop music has instead got a much more important position within daily and evening papers, youth and cultural magazines, radio and television programs etc. The need for a special music press has thus diminished, as a result of the more fragmented and complex situation today, where front lines have been multiplied and blurred.

Looking back on the 1970s, it is very easy to see the debates as highly outdated and hopelessly unproductive. The closeness and strict walls built around the movement today seems almost insane, with its too simple dualism between good and bad. Its longing for homogeneous totalities led to frustrating internal quarrels over the “correct line” and to a rigid and destructive “camp mentality”. Every counter-movement probably has to start with some elements of closedness: to start moving they have to define themselves as subjects in contrast to something else. However, this position becomes dangerous if it is frozen and made permanent. Movements die when they continue to build walls around themselves for too long.

Punk and other movements of the eighties tried desperately to avoid such stiffness, and, today, rock and youth culture are arenas which are highly differentiated internally. It has become impossible to reduce all to a simple opposition between we and them, progressive and commercial. Nevertheless, some collective institutional forms built in the seventies are still important objective potentials for a creative and oppositional Swedish musical life, and new counter-structures have been shaped in the eighties.

What can be seen as modern and still valid was not only some organizational and practical solutions, but also the high degree of what can be called reflexivity. If the debates on cultural policy and choice of musical genre often were stupid and narrowminded, they expressed the start of a new epoch. After all, the many times tiresome argument for or against rock or folk music showed that a traditionalist innocence in the choice of musical means of expression had definitely eroded. It was no longer possible to take any style or genre as natural and self-evident. Musical genres had become a store to choose from, and one’s own music became a product of such creative choices, rather than any unreflected heritage, masked as naturalness. Today people don’t discuss “right” and “wrong” so much in the young rock scene, but hip-hopers, post punks and heavy metal makers and users are in

this sense reflexive, as we all are in late modern times. They construct their cultural expressions in a far more self-conscious and open manner than most did before; the production of music, style and lifestyles is today much more often understood as the montage and bricolage that it has perhaps always been. The old debates in the Swedish music movement were an early sign of that change.

Moving popular music

What the Swedish music movement accomplished was only possible on the basis of its communicating network of counterpublic spheres, that also opened itself towards free theatre groups, the left and new alternative movements. These public spheres, using bands, festivals, clubs, companies and the press, where everything from third world imperialism to musical ideologies could be discussed, made possible a high degree of collective self-reflexion. They built upon and helped produce a stock of shared experiences of collective production and intersubjective communication, with the use of popular music as its basis.

This exemplifies how forms of resistance can develop through popular music, and on different levels. On an external or objective level, resistance takes the form of objectivized organizational structures built up as counter powers or counterinstitutions organizing material production and restructuring spaces for oppositional social and cultural practices. Music movements shape counterpublic spheres where systemic pressures, like profit orientation and/or bureaucratic authority, can (temporarily) be resisted and where the critical and mobilizing potentials inherent in youth cultural practices such as playing rock can be strengthened. The counterinstitutions shaped by the music movement in the 1970s are splendid examples of this. Since then more mixed and ambivalent counterinstitutions have been formed. Instead of being totally autonomous, they often combine initiatives of young people with those of for example social workers, in a less straightforward way characteristic of the complex and floating post-punk period. Official institutional structures can be changed and used in a more radical way, at least temporarily, and social work does not have to be repressive. If social workers refuse only to be tools of control, by finding inspiration in existing social movements and connections to them, public institutions can be used as resources for resistance and radical learning in more ways than might at first be imagined.

On a social level, concerning norms, groups and relations, resistance is developed through counter-values in counter-groups, through collective experimentation with non-traditional norms, and new ways of interacting in modern multi-cultural society. Repressive norms and relations in society, in the dimensions of gender, class and ethnicity, are opposed and restructured in social groups trying out more democratic modes of sociality. Moral critiques of dominant ethics, and utopian germs of a richer justice, exist in the cross-cultural solidarity of hip-hop peer groups and on dance floors, where contacts are made across traditional social borders. Without such social levels of resistance counter movements would be empty shells. The Swedish music movement of the seventies was a transitory case in this process. It built up solidarities and norms that broke with earlier traditions but it also tried to reconstruct a rather rigid normative and relational universe. Today the scene is much more fluid and differentiated, not least owing to the increasing ethnic multicultural character of Swedish society. In the 1980s, different relations, norms and political views developed in various groups and associations. Though no common normative programme can now be codified, intense debates are taking place all the time, in the daily interaction of bands as well as in the various other activities.

The cultural level of symbols and aesthetic expressions is also a site of contradictions and struggles, and resistance to the dominant symbolic order takes the form of counter languages and counterculture that is, forming critical meanings, playing with the limits of ordinary (musical) language, and striving for more intense symbolic forms. In the 1970s this level of resistance was explicitly debated, but the idea that one single cultural bloc of resistance could be shaped, in the name of the working class, the people or the marginalized, still advanced by internationally famous leftist strategists of popular culture, proved to be a mistake. As on the other levels, cultural resistance is not to be homogenized in that way, but has to move along several intersecting frontiers at the same time. The last decade clearly shows how increasingly important cultural forms are today in the formation of oppositional identities of groups and individuals.

Subjective learning processes through musical activities potentially lead to resistance in the form of counteridentities: an emancipatory hope for, and will to, personal autonomy and authenticity. The subjective micro-processes of creative music use and production contain contradictions and openings essential for the development of large-scale movements and radical social changes. What individuals experience and learn in bands, festivals and clubs

give them inner, subjective potentials of the greatest importance for subsequent macro-political praxis.

In our time, music has an ever-increasing role in everyday life, especially through the growth of mass mediated popular music. It has been estimated that an eight year old child today has heard more music than our grandparents did during all their lives, and we know that music is the greatest leisure interest of Swedish teenagers, who are surrounded by it more than five hours a day (Roe & Carlsson, 1990). Music has increasingly also become the basis of subcultures, social movements and political events. Of course, far from all pop and rock is rebellious or radical, but the amount of political relevance in popular music seems to be rising, and we witness more and more examples of music mobilizing protests and political actions, especially among the young. The differentiation and reflexivity of musical culture is continuously increasing, and it is no longer possible to think of power and resistance, establishment and alternatives, mainstream and subcultures, cultural industry and counter movements, as two clearly separated and internally homogeneous blocs. But movements keep getting rolling with music-use as ignition, motor, fuel, and sometimes also as an important goal. And the everyday interplay of creativity, identity and resistance is as intense as ever. There is an almost magical microphysics of music and resistance in learning processes ranging from pop use in everyday life to participation in collective manifestations. Swedish experiences from the late 1960s to the early 1990s have taught us the great importance of playing oneself and the impressive capability of rock music to make us move.

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Notes

¹ The concept of a (bourgeois) public sphere derives from Habermas, 1962, discussing how salons, press and other arenas for public communicative interaction, in principle open to all, together formed a network of public discussion and opinion formation. The

idea of counterpublic spheres, forming alternative arenas developing and criticizing the dominant public sphere, was developed by Negt & Kluge, 1972. This set of concepts explicitly stresses the communicative praxis, intersubjective relations and organizational forms that make symbol formations possible, thus enabling a less reified, more processual approach to (counter-) cultural groups and movements. The concepts of (youth) subcultures and countercultures that I use derive from British cultural studies (for early versions, building upon Chicago criminology, Lévi-Strauss' structuralist anthropology, poststructuralist semiotics and Gramsci's hegemony-concepts, cf. Hall & Jefferson, 1976, and Hebdige, 1979). A theoretical elaboration of how to combine these two conceptual traditions with theories of communicative action and similar thoughts from Bakhtin, Melucci and others, into a multi-dimensional theory of culture, movement and resistance, will have to be put aside for the moment. The scope here is rather to trace some historical transformations of youthful cultural movements in the last decades.

² Cf. Lønstrup & Nilsson, 1980, and Fornäs, 1979, 1988a and 1990. For international comparisons, see Stroh, 1984, and Street, 1986. Extensive historical comparisons with for example modernist youth cult of Afro-American jazz or the agitprop music theatre movement in the 1920s and 1930s could also be made, but have to be postponed here.

³ Punk is analyzed by Laing, 1985.

⁴ The figures derive from Roe & Carlsson, 1990. On women in rock, cf. Steward & Garratt, 1984, and Cohen, 1991.

⁵ The functioning of rock bands are depicted in Bennett, 1980, Spengler, 1987, Fornäs et al, 1988, and Finnegan, 1989.

⁶ Other analyses of rock as a genre can be found in Willis, 1978, Frith, 1981, 1988 and 1989, Frith & Goodwin, 1990, and Thiessen, 1981.

⁷ This discussion is more fully carried through in Sernhede, 1984, Fornäs et al, 1988, 1990a and 1990b, influenced especially by Thomas Ziehe & Herbert Stubenrauch, 1982, and Ziehe, 1991, but also by other psychoanalytical theories of Heinz Kohut, Julia Kristeva, Alfred Lorenzer and others.

⁸ The dynamics of English music festivals are described in Clarke, 1982.

⁹ I am grateful to my friend and colleague Ove Sernhede for sharing his rich experiences from this project (cf. Sernhede, 1984).

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