Writing Local Histories within Transnational Frameworks

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In August 2005 I travelled around the United States to visit popular music museums in Seattle, Cleveland, Nashville, and the Memphis area. Although I should have known better, I was surprised by the way the exhibits retold very traditional narratives about canonized and 'authentic' genres and stars. Also, the exhibits excluded most women, a lot of African-Americans, and everybody else not Anglo-American. I was not taken by surprise or inspired by the arrangement of artefacts or the stories told about them at any time during the four weeks of museum visits.[1] These observations made me rethink my understanding of the demise of traditional rock ideology which I had taken almost for granted after having read some of the many criticisms of this narrative coming from nearly all positions within popular music studies in recent decades. Despite such criticisms, despite the fact that hip hop has been making fun of rock for 20 years, and despite more recent genre cultures like electronica tend to ignore it entirely, it still looms large over the field popular music as a hegemonic, homogenizing, and excluding narrative.

In this article I would like to contribute to the criticisms of rock ideology advanced by popular music studies by focusing on a few aspects of rock historiography. First, I will discuss briefly how Anglophone rock history writing has contributed to the structuring of the rock field by developing into a grand narrative. The second part will touch upon how theories of globalization may help in offering historical narratives different to the ones related to existing writings on rock history, and the third part will exemplify this using the advent of rock'n'roll in Denmark as a case.[2]

1 Among the museums visited were Experience Music Project (Seattle), Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame + Museum (Cleveland), Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (Nashville), Stax Museum of American Soul Music (Memphis), Mississippi River Museum (Memphis), Memphis Rock'n'Soul Museum (Memphis), Graceland (Memphis), Delta Blues Museum (Clarksdale), Elvis Presley Birthplace and Museum (Tupelo), and National Museum of American History (Washington, DC).

2 This article is a revised and extended version of the opening key note address presented at the conference *The Local, the Regional, and the Global in the Emergence of Popular Music Cultures* (University of Copenhagen, 24–26 October 2005) arranged by the research project *Danish Rock Culture from the 1950s to the 1980s*. I would like to thank my project colleagues for discussions and inspiration in relation to this article, especially Annemette Kirkegaard and Henrik Bødker. Further information about the project can be found at www.rockhistorie.dk.

Rock ideology and rock historiography

Numerous authors have argued that it is impossible to define rock as a genre on the basis of musical similarities. Instead, the word rock is taken to indicate a certain ideology formulated for the first time in connection with some ruptures within youth-oriented music in the second part of the 1960s that resulted in the split between rock and pop. In this cultural construction pop became ostracized by rock as the latter came to consider itself a more 'serious' music that made 'a difference'. Notions of authenticity, oppositionality, revolt, community, marginality, anti-commercialism, freedom, and originality became attached to rock and came to constitute central elements in a rock ideology whose textual manifestations circled around such notions in ever-changing patterns depending on time and place.[3]

An important part of rock ideology is its self-conscious relation to its own historical dimension. Often, the history of rock has been – and is – written intentionally as contemporary history, sometimes only a few years after the fact. This happened in the late 1960s, and 1990s' music magazine articles about acts like Nirvana in North America and the Blur/Oasis Britpop controversies in England are more recent examples. As such rock has been one of the most history-aware genres within popular music because the historicizing process itself is part of its history and an active and integral part of rock ideology.

Historical writing on rock saw the light of day in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the music acquired the contours of a specific genre among other youth-related genres. Its main function was to explain the new music-cultural phenomenon as a historical consequence of earlier popular music genres and in the process contribute to a legitimization of the music. From 1966 the quickly expanding North American rock press (*Crawdaddy!*, *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*) became the primary institutional agent in this development, while a few journalists and a few academics published books on the subject before 1970.[4] Despite a few efforts from academics in the early 1970s rock-historical writing, lexicography and biography became the turf for journalistic endeavours,[5] especially after English magazines *New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker*

3 Keir Keightley, 'Reconsidering Rock', in Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (Cambridge, 2001), 109; and Richard Middleton, 'Rock', in L. Macy (ed.), *Grove Music Online* (www.grovemusic.com, accessed 7 Jan. 2007). Middleton even views rock as 'a particular category of pop music'. For general discussions of the development of and changes in the ideology of rock see Motti Regev, 'Producing Artistic Value: The Case of Rock Music', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 35/1 (1994), 85–102, and Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Gudmundsson, Morten Michelsen, and Hans Weisethaunet, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers, and Cool-Headed Cruisers* (New York, 2005), and for a critique of its role in popular music studies see Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes* (New York and Montreal, 2003), 57–88.

4 Among the journalists are Nik Cohn, *Pop from the Beginning* (London, 1969) and Arnold Shaw, *The Rock Revolution* (New York, 1969). Among the academics are Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock* (New York, 1969) and Dave Laing, *The Sound of Our Time* (London and Sydney, 1969).

5 The academic sample consists of Richard Middleton, *Pop Music and the Blues: A Study of the Relationship and its Significance* (London, 1972) and, partly, Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (London, 1970). The journalistic one is quite large, for example Jerry

and *Sounds* joined the ranks of *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* at the beginning of the 1970s. The (very) few academics studying popular music could simply not keep up with the enormous amount of words being published.

Surprisingly fast, a number of successive genres and important bands came to make up *the* structure for all historical representations.[6] At first the narratives were plainly evolutionary. 1950s' rock'n'roll was presented as a birth and the 'child' slowly developed towards manhood, and to authors around 1970 the best of times were the present. Through the 1970s this changed as the 1960s began to appear as a lost 'Golden Age' to several authors using the Altamont festival and the Beatles split as proof of the fall from grace.[7] Both the evolutionary and the nostalgic narratives and the succession of genres as historical structures had their parallels in the histories of the arts. To the authors, most of whom had frequented a university for at least a brief period, rock histories had to be written that way, it was *the* model for art historiography and for them a logical way to legitimize rock. Also, the authors were no strangers to canonization as an integral part of most rock journalists' work was to write reviews. But apart from a few acts like Bob Dylan and The Beatles, the canon was continually up for discussion. The discussions had their limits, though, and a picture quickly emerged, namely that male, white, English-singing songwriters and guitar players were at the top – either as individuals or as groups.

What was probably most important to the general field of popular music was that the appearance of a rock-historical narrative sedimented the split between pop and rock that had slowly emerged since the mid-1960s. Also, it contributed to a split between genres associated with African-Americans and Anglo-Americans.[8] Contemporary pop and soul were not the stuff that histories were made of, except as precursors or 'sidelines' to what was thought of as 'authentic' rock. Such processes of exclusion of the 'bad' helped immensely in defining and legitimizing rock as a primarily white, proto-art form.

As mentioned in the beginning, the basic principles for rock-historical narratives laid down around 1970 are still part of different media representations of rock history. A few examples might support this claim.

An obvious example of exclusion is the Cleveland Rock and Roll Hall of Fame + Museum's representation of the history of soul. It is told using a 20–25 yards long,

Hopkins, *The Rock Story* (New York, 1970); Ken Barnes, *Twenty Years of Pop* (London, 1973); Jeremy Pascall (ed.), *The Story of Pop* (London, 1974); Lloyd Grossman, *A Social History of Rock Music: From the Greasers to Glitter Rock* (New York, 1976).

6 Even though the names for each single genre might vary, they would run something like this: rock'n'roll, schlock rock, the British invasion, folk rock, psychedelia, singer/songwriter, heavy rock, punk, new wave.

7 For example Tony Palmer, *All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music* (New York, 1976) and Jim Miller (ed.), *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York, 1976).

8 For early formulations of this, see Belz, *The Story of Rock* (1969; 2nd edn., New York, 1971), 197; Cohn, *Pop from the Beginning* (1969; rev. edn. *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom: Pop from the Beginning*, London 1970, reprint 1996), 123. In the US, Cohn was published as *Rock from the Beginning* (New York, 1969).

full-wall exhibition case, containing one (1) artefact out of 85 related to a woman (Aretha Franklin), and out of 18 songs on the listening post one was sung by Franklin. The supreme irony of it was that the exhibit case's main title was 'Respect'. Another example is that while text books lay out their narratives as one linear, chronologically organized narrative, the museums avoid presenting such narratives, and they do not state any intentions as to the exhibits covering everything. Instead there are several semi-independent narratives or exhibits which the spectator may choose at her own leisure. The result is the exclusion of whole genres like heavy metal and in the case of Cleveland, hip hop. In most cases the organizing principle is a band, a musician, a genre, or a place. A third and completely different example of exclusion is that of the present day music industries. They are completely invisible in the museums, maybe in order to avoid a clash with notions of rock's authenticity or simply because they are too powerful. Contrary to the old independent record company 'heroes' (e.g., Sun's Sam Phillips and Atlantic's Ahmet Ertegun who were canonized in the first wave of rock histories) Sony and Warner are beyond the canon even though they have immense economic interests in its continuing dominance as it creates at least some sort of stability in the market.

Another and more subtle example of the museums' underpinning of rock ideology is the Seattle-based Experience Music Project's Bob Dylan exhibit. The narrative of his childhood years in Hibbing, Minnesota is told using pictures and text mounted on a wall clad with iron ore from Hibbing (one of the largest iron ore mining districts in the world). In this way it is suggested (but not explicitly stated) that Dylan rose from American soil. He was not only born there, but represents nature and man's use of it.

During the last 15 years or so the English rock press has developed a new genre, a sort of monthly rock history digest, which focuses on bands from the 1950s to the 1980s. *Mojo* and *Uncut* are among the most successful as their circulation is only topped by *Q Magazine*,[9] and the most frequent act on their covers is The Beatles *in toto* or as individuals. Television is another medium for rock-historical narratives stamped by rock ideology. Time–Warner and the BBC have each produced a 10-episode series while North American MTV has promulgated it through the 1990s.[10]

A final example is the writing and publication of undergraduate textbooks on rock history which has become a lucrative market as the many editions attest to.[11]

9 The circulation numbers for first half of 2006 were *Q* (158,271 copies), *Mojo* (121,746 copies), and *Uncut* (88,756 copies). *New Musical Express* was down to 74,206 copies. About one third of *Mojo* and *Uncut* copies are sold outside Great Britain (Audit Bureau of Circulation, www.abc.org.uk, accessed 6 Nov. 2006).

10 *The History of Rock'n'Roll* (Warner Bros., 1995); *Dancing in the Street: A Rock and Roll History* (BBC, 1996); Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders, 'Introduction', in Beebe, Fulbrook, and Saunders (eds.), *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture* (Durham and London, 2002), 5–6.

11 The quality of these is varying. Some continue in the slipstream of rock ideology, for example Paul Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: A Social History* (Boulder, CO, 1996; 2nd edn., 2006); Katherine Charlton, *Rock Music Styles: A History* (Boston, 1989; further edns., 1994, 1998, 2003, 2006); Joe

John Covach's recent *What's that Sound: An Introduction to Rock and its History* can be taken as an example. It is probably intended as a rock parallel to Grout's and Palisca's 'classic' *A History of Western Music* from the same publishing company (W.W. Norton) and Mark Gridley's *Jazz Styles: History & Analysis*.[12] Like Grout's and Palisca's, the Covach book is backed up by an internet site (www.wwnorton.com/college/music/rockhistory/) and by various teaching materials available from the publishers.

The book is divided into decades with the 1960s and 1970s taking up a bit more than half of its 555 pages, a rough indication of a notion of a rock 'Golden Age', and of course the Beatles is mentioned in most detail (the 1960s are even interpreted as a 'short' decade lasting from 1964 to 1969). Even though African-American popular music is acknowledged as an integral part of rock and as a seminal influence (a very important word in Covach's narrative) on most other genres, it only takes up a bit more than 20 per cent of the text devoted to the 'Golden Age' – and the development of hip hop in the 1980s takes up eight pages! Apart from a series of British bands 'invading' North America, his approach is very US-centric. London and Jamaica are the only places of any importance to his narrative outside North America, while Kraftwerk is only mentioned in passing and ABBA is not mentioned at all. Covach's background in music theory makes him discuss about 70 songs in some detail. This is a good idea if only he did not solely focus on musical form. Form is of course one central element but there are many others which are sadly missing. And it becomes quite quaint when the Monkees are somewhat rehabilitated due to musical-formal complexities and when a formal overview claims to make sense of James Brown's 'Papa's Got a Brand New Bag'.[13]

From a methodological perspective his use of charts as one factor in deciding what to include and what to exclude from the narrative seems rather naive, especially as they are used in order to 'guard against presenting biased accounts of rock history'.[14] Such notions of objectivity might be the reason why *What's that Sound* ends up being a compilation of facts, of innumerable musicians' names and album titles at the expense of explanations or interpretations of musical and cultural changes within rock. By basing the structure of his narrative on more conservative, musicological art music narratives and that of traditional rock history he manages to make

Stuessy, *Rock and Roll: Its History and Stylistic Development* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1990; further edns., 1994, 1999, 2003, 2006). See Morten Michelsen, 'Histories and Complexities: Popular Music History Writing and Danish Rock', *Popular Music History*, 1 (2004), 23 for a short discussion of these. To my knowledge no scholars based in Great Britain have written such text books for a long time, and nobody within English-language journalism has written general historical accounts of rock or popular music in the last decade. Today, the 'overview', or rather, the holding together of the entire field of rock in the broad sense is left to magazines, to encyclopedias, and to US text books.

12 John Covach, *What's that Sound: An Introduction to Rock and its History* (New York and London, 2006); J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (7th edn., New York, 2006); Mark Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History & Analysis* (7th edn., Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2006).

13 Covach, *What's that Sound*, 212 and 251.

14 Ibid. 7.

knowledge about the two look alike but to the benefit of no one – maybe except those teachers who have to grade the classes that have to read the book.

All in all, the Covach book represents a condensation of most of the criticisms aimed at the ideology of rock above, and it demonstrates how the narrative structure, the canonization and exclusion processes, and notions of authenticity have combined into an ideology of rock that has proven incredibly resilient – although always contested. It has withstood changing musical tastes and generational conflicts. It has survived despite different musical and cultural practices by some musicians and some audiences and despite harsh critiques from the academy. Part of its resilience may stem from the fact that the generation who formed the narrative was quite young at the time of construction. They have kept it alive through diverse career paths which have led some of them to very influential posts within different kinds of institutions. Another reason for its resilience is that the narrative structure is flexible, like mythical structures. Genres and bands go through birth, blossoming, and decay, and the hierarchical structure distributes value. In Bourdieuian terms rock ideology still constitutes the basic rules for the power plays in the field of rock-related popular music genre cultures.

Judging from the museums, the magazines, and the text books, public interest in rock history is quite impressive. Each of the two largest North American museums have 400,000 visitors per year, *Mojo* and *Uncut* combined sell more than 200,000 copies each month, and some of the older text books have had several impressions. So, although we may laugh at, criticize, or try to ignore this rock-historical grand narrative, it is alive and well. Apart from writing text books the interest in rock or popular music historiography (here understood as the academic writing of history) in popular music studies has, on the other hand, not been great. Among the exceptions are books by Peter Wicke, Lars Lilliestam, and Motti Regev (they are all situated outside England and North America).[15] The reasons why only few have involved themselves in historical work can only be guessed at. Maybe the many results of popular music studies do not so easily lend themselves to historical presentations? Maybe historiography itself is considered problematic? Nevertheless, the vacuum caused by the academic critiques of grand narratives has been left to itself, but the time might be right to take on the challenge of discussing even the macro levels of popular music history. As the museum examples demonstrate, we need them in order to tell different, better, and maybe even more true stories.

In theoretical arguments Richard Middleton, Peter Wicke, and Keith Negus have argued for what I would like to call a complexification of popular music history.[16] Such complexification does away with simplistic chronological divisions, with legi-

15 Peter Wicke, *Von Mozart zu Madonna: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Popmusik* (From Mozart to Madonna: A Cultural History of Pop Music) (Leipzig, 1998); Lars Lilliestam, *Svensk Rock: Musik, lyrik, historik* (Swedish Rock: Music, Lyrics, History) (Gothenburg, 1998); Motti Regev, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley, 2004).

16 Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia, 1990), 1–100; Peter Wicke, 'Heroes and Villains': Anmerkungen zum Verhältnis von Popmusik und Musikgeschichtsschreibung' ('Heroes and Villains': Remarks on the Relation between Pop Music and Music

timizing accounts, with canons of great male musicians, and with a concept of music that focuses on works/songs and on artists/musicians. Instead, music is to be historicised within its cultural and societal contexts leaving room for the multiple meanings produced by musicians, industry people, and audiences, and it is important to acknowledge that the field of study is in constant change, driven on by the partial and ever-changing dichotomies inherent within it. Such complexifications are necessary in order to offer different models and different results. Local and national studies may be one important way to do this, because the comparatively small field of study makes it possible to do thick descriptions of individual parts of music cultures. Such descriptions are important in order to find alternatives on which to base other historical narratives.

A related issue is 'the history of what'? Music, popular music, rock, pop? Traditionally, popular music researchers do popular music, historical musicologists do unpopular music, ethnomusicologists do music out there, and jazz scholars do their thing. It is, however, problematic to accept this division of labour because popular music goes back way before the split between art music and popular music was of much relevance; because popular music as a delimited tradition only makes sense in some ways – in other ways understanding only comes when popular music is seen in a broader and relational perspective; and because accepting the great divide makes a genre like jazz an odd bedfellow. It is wiser to follow Richard Middleton's advice that concrete studies must take place within the continuously moving 'whole music-historical field'.[17] Not every study should be that broad, but it is a basic frame of reference. This is not to neglect differences within a field which is still hierarchically organized but to suggest that music-cultural changes affect more than one genre as for example the continuous development of technology shows.

It would be wrong to view rock-historical writing as merely a commercial hoax and a hegemonic discourse. It is, but it serves a real purpose as well to all those who use it some way or another. It may be pure entertainment; it may help changing sound into verbal discourse in order to caress your favourite music with words; it may help understanding some way or another the music better by grounding it in more or less fictive persons or places and make the musical experiences more nuanced and rich. A great part of rock ideology has to do with coping, with individual existence and identity (especially authenticity), with making sense of the workings of power structures (especially canons), and with grasping the immense complexity of modern everyday life. This grand narrative is one frame among several within which to understand these social workings, and the music that it is related to makes the understanding affective.

Historiography), in Nico Schüler (ed.), *Zu Problemen der "Heroen"- und der "Genie"-Musikgeschichtsschreibung* (On Problems of 'Hero' and 'Genius' Music Historiography) (Hamburg, 1998); Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1996), 136–65. See Michelsen, 'Histories and Complexities', for a more detailed discussion of the term complexification.

17 Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 11.

The actual products of the grand narrative tend to reify the narrative. The structure is frozen and the same stories are retold in still greater detail, stories about the Beatles being the prime example. This is not a call for the banishment of the great narratives (it is probably not possible, anyway), but for a deconstruction of the present structure, which holds on to existing distributions of power. Power-sensitive reinterpretations of the stories and the writing of new stories might break up the structure. For the present they will probably serve as counter-narratives, narratives that do not homogenize the battles and changes within music cultures, narratives that relate the micro *and* the macro levels, and narratives that are sensitive to the ways music produces meanings and the ways music is enjoyable or horrible in an ever changing reality.

Transnational cultural flows

The discrediting of grand narratives has helped lay bare many ideological constructions and point to the actual complexities inherent in the cultures and machinations studied. Theories of globalization might be yet another example of a grand narrative, but the many debates surrounding it make it much less monolithic and much more contested, at least until now. Nevertheless, a few aspects of globalization theory will be discussed in the following in order to suggest a way to shed light on the cultural complexities lying behind the homogenizing discourse of rock history.

In the museums it was obvious that although rock and other popular music genres have been central agents in globalization processes throughout the previous century, such aspects of the narratives were not important to American curators or (presumably) audiences. Instead, a formal difference was made between national and local levels, the national being (North) American music (and thus, in a strangely local way, global to Americans?) and the local being the music of the area in which the museum was situated (several exhibit cases devoted to popular music in the North West Territory (in Seattle) and to rock in the two largest Ohio cities (in Cleveland)). The difference was not complete, though, as a certain amount of national popularity or notoriety was necessary in order for musicians and bands to be admitted to the local exhibit cases. Thus the exhibits supported a grand narrative about North American music, even though small parts of the exhibits were taken up by local narratives. Covach's text book, on the other hand, does hardly focus on place at all, thus implicitly stressing the national level.

Even though the North Americans mentioned tend to ignore transnational aspects of rock, globalization processes seem central, and globalization theories might be one important way to challenge the structure of the rock-historical grand narrative. During the last 50 years or so several theories of globalization have been developed in close relation with the changes in the actual processes of globalization. More recent changes in the globalization processes have resulted in the concept of transnational flows of culture in order to highlight that culture is appropriated differently

in diverse local contexts and that these flows and the relations of power between them are immensely complex.[18] Using the flow of a river as basic metaphor Ulf Hannerz defines cultural flow in this way:

> The cultural flow thus consists of the externalizations of meaning which individuals produce through arrangements of overt forms, and the interpretations which individuals make of such displays – those of others as well as their own. … More precisely, the flow occurs in time and has directions … In one way or other, the flow is everywhere … .[19]

Social anthropologists have begun to talk about transnational cultural flows instead of globalization processes, partly to avoid the neo-liberalistic connotations, partly because flows 'have origins and destinations, and the flows are instigated by people. The ideational and institutional framework of the flows may be 'placeless' or global in principle … , but their instantiation necessarily involves situated agents and delineated social contexts'.[20] Simple models of understanding, often linked to colonialism, have been superseded, sometimes helped by different kinds of post-structuralist theory which have undermined earlier models by destabilizing centres, deconstructing narratives, and pointing to the mechanisms of old and new power relations.

The intensification of the rock cultural flow because of the media developments tends to complicate Danish rock culture still more as the old national borders become more blurred as well as strengthened. For example, in the last decade European MTV has become still more regionalized and Danish rock bands have been able to enter the flow to become hugely popular in South-East Asia. On the other hand local artists basing their musical style on North American styles have been immensely popular within the national borders and have succeeded in contributing to the understanding of what popular music means within a national discourse. Also, very early on, the channels through which rock'n'roll arrived in Denmark were not only simply as American import. Much of the actual music (live performances and records) were filtered through mainly English traditions, but also through Norwegian and Swedish musical traditions. Such examples show the complexity of the workings of transnational cultural flows. The riverbed only seldom leads the flow in clear directions, the flow is never solely inscribed with imperialistic power, often it is understood and used in oblique ways compared to their sources, and sometimes it does not influence local cultures to any important degree. Thus narratives of local cultures may be used, among other things, to present alternatives to the grand narrative, always remembering that there are similarities as well as differences. The grand narrative is not right, but it is not always wrong either.[21]

18 Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York, 1992), 4–10.

19 Ibid. 4.

20 Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Introduction', in Eriksen (ed.), *Globalisation: Studies in Anthropology* (London and Sterling, VA, 2003), 4.

21 The Beatles' global breakthrough in 1963–64 might be an instance were the grand narrative is the most appropriate way of understanding what was going on at the time.

To many, the analysis of centre–periphery relations are still important in globalization processes, and Hannerz points to their complex workings while at the same time stressing that the relation is asymmetrical with regard to power.[22] Arjun Appadurai, on the other hand, contests such an analysis and claims that the 'new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center–periphery models (even those which might account for multiple centers and peripheries)'.[23] Such messy (or complex) descriptions of centre–periphery relations are appropriate when analysing the spreading of rock music and rock history, even though Appadurai's claim might be too radical in this concrete analysis.

Anglo-American rock culture – including its history of itself – has worked and still works as a major cultural flow influencing musicians, the music business, and audiences in many parts of the world. They use it in different ways, and some of the musical results are recirculated within the flow, thus making the centre less dominant. Although local music is recirculated, some of the basic structures seem to remain quite stable as in the case of the rock-historical narrative. This means that the flux of the cultural flow is based on quite stable and strong premises, probably especially with regard to rock history as music is easier to circulate for different uses than verbal flows.

On the one hand, the sheer size of North America and the many local scenes taking place in numerous cities indicate that it is hard to think of the whole country as one centre. On the other hand, the industries and agents who turn a small part of North American rock into a transnational cultural flow are situated in a few city centres, mainly New York, Los Angeles, and London (England). This does not make one centre, but a few which are related, and they do not qualify as centres in every way. For example, they might act as media 'shipping ports' for musical practices taking place within and outside the centres. Also, other alternative centres have been able to connect into the flow (e.g., the Danish music export to the Far East) or even create their own (e.g., Brazilian music in Europe). In this way, the traditional Anglo-American centres are contested even if they are still the main centres.

With regard to rock history it might be easier to point out a centre, not a localized one, but a discourse regulated by Anglo-American writers.[24] There are no studies of the spread of rock histories, but in a recent study of a related topic, that of Nordic rock criticism, Lindberg et al. concludes:

> The dynamics of the relations between centre and periphery are indeed complex. When globalization only indicates that impulses from the centre are given a local outlook, the old one-directedness is still at work. On the other hand, British/American rock 'imperialism' has supplied new forms of cultural expression that have helped to change

22 Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity*, 217–67.

23 Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London, 1996), 32.

24 As it is done in Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism*.

> power relations in the periphery. When globalization indicates that localized variations of global culture bounce back into global circulation the centre–periphery model seems less viable as an explanatory thesis. This stage of the process has been going on for a while in rock music, but not in rock writing.[25]

Also, 1970s and 1980s Danish music journalists have used North American magazines like *Rolling Stone* as a key inspiration for both writing style and music aesthetics,[26] and they have received the structural backbone for a narrative of Danish rock from Anglo-American journalists. Radio journalist Palle Aarslev wrote one of the first sketches for a national narrative, a squarely evolutional one like the ones mentioned earlier, that did not touch much upon foreign influences but articulated a succession of local, male musicians (except for Annisette, vocalist in the beat group Savage Rose).[27] Since then, only few book-length historical presentations have appeared and they only deal with a limited span of years. Narratives of 1960s' 'Golden Age' have been the most common: In 1981 Beate S. Piil lamented the missing fulfilment of the alleged socialistic promise of late 1960s beat, 20 years later Niels Martinov did much the same and stressed the ruining consequences of big business, while Peder Bundgaard's book is a personal memoir, the pages being filled with sweet nostalgia.[28] Also in Anglo-American mode, Jakobsen et al. interpret Danish rock'n'roll as a forerunner to 1960s' youth revolts by focussing on its protest character and to a large extent ignoring its homely qualities.

Instead of using the Anglo-American template for writing rock history, and thus reproducing rock's grand narrative as Danish writers tend to, it seems wiser to take the consequences of the theories of cultural flows. First, they may work as theoretical basis for critiques of existing music-historical writings and dominant ideologies. Second, they indicate a contested and complex centre–periphery structure through which a focus on both cultural differences and similarities may be established. Most local cultures, however they may be defined, are in contact with others in some way or another. They are partly determined by other local cultures and by global developments in often asymmetrical meetings. Meetings and borders are important to investigate, as meanings often become visible in the interstices in between. This goes

25 Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Gudmundsson, Morten Michelsen, and Hans Weisethaunet, 'Critical Negotiations: Rock Criticism in the Nordic Countries', *Popular Music History*, 3 (in press).

26 Lindberg et al., 'Critical Negotiations'.

27 Palle Aarslev, 'Den danske beatscene 1954–69' (The Danish Rock Scene 1954–69), in Derek Johnson (ed.), *Beat musik* (København, 1969). The article is based on a radio series aired in 1968. See Morten Michelsen and Annemette Kirkegaard, 'Introduktion: historier, kulturer, genrer, geografier' (Introduction: Histories, Cultures, Genres, Geographies) (in press) for a more detailed assessment of Aarslev's article.

28 Beate S. Piil, *Beat på dansk* (Rock in Danish) (Århus, 1981); Niels Martinov, *Ungdomsoprøret i Danmark. Et portræt af årene, der rystede musikken, billedkunsten, teatret, litteraturen, filmen og familien* (The Youth Rebellion in Denmark. A Portrait of the Years that Shook Music, Arts, Literature, Theater, Film, and the Family) (København, 2001); Peder Bundgaard, *Lykkens Pamfil: Dansk rock i 60erne* (Lucky Chap: Danish Rock in the 60s) (København, 1998). Also, recent years have seen an impressive amount of small and large books dealing with 1960s music in specific parts of Denmark being published (see www.rockhistorie.dk for a full list).

for small subcultures (say, electronica), broader taste cultures (say, rock culture), and national cultures (say, Denmark) although the concrete relations might be very different. In this way, understanding the local and the regional has changed as well because the dominance of the global over the local is always contested.[29] Clear cut definitions of centres and peripheries are often hard to make, even though centres still exist – just think of the transnational music and media corporations.

The meeting of the local and the transnational: Rock'n'roll in Denmark

As mentioned, the narrative structure of rock-historal writing lends itself to many things. Among these are that they have been used to structure narratives in other places, in this case Denmark. This does of course make perfect sense in some ways, as Anglo-American music and culture has meant and means a lot to most people living in Denmark. It has influenced the local ways of making and understanding music. But in other ways the transnational narrative has distorted what happened. For example, the advent of rock'n'roll or punk was quite different compared to similar situations in North America and in England. Likewise, left wing politics influenced rock to a much greater extent in Denmark than in Anglophone countries. Some of the meanings that emerged were comparable, others were not, but in Danish rock narratives local meanings tend to equal those of English or North American narratives.[30] In the following, I will take a closer look at the advent of rock'n'roll in Denmark in order to highlight the differences compared to North America.

There is hardly any doubt that North American youth culture and music came to constitute a transnational cultural flow in the later half of the 1950s. At the time it was quite unclear to most – Americans as well as Danes – what was happening, but later historical narratives has seen to it that it has become clear. I will not repeat this narrative here, assuming the reader's acquaintance with the general contours of it. The point is that Anglo-American history writing as part of a later wave in that flow came to structure local narratives in ways that are not fully consistent with what actually happened (and it may be questioned as well if the North American narrative is an accurate picture of what happened there).

A brief sketch of Danish events would run like this: As jazz earlier and rap later, rock'n'roll was introduced by Danish entrepreneurs and media as a dance, a new variation of the Lindy Hop, and not as a new musical genre in the autumn of

29 In this context the local and the regional are regarded as the smaller and the larger within an overall global frame. While the global is fixed (in principle, the whole world), the local and the regional change according to perspective. The local may be a specific locality or a subculture within the regional, say, a nation state. Nation states as well might be considered local within a group of nation states, e.g. Denmark within the EU or the Nordic countries.

30 Cf. Michelsen and Kirkegaard, 'Introduktion', and Morten Michelsen, '"Hver eneste gang en ungdom …": Rock'n'roll og ungdom i dansk underholdningsmusik i 1950'erne' ('Everytime Youth …': Rock'n'Roll and Youth in Danish Popular Music in the 1950s) (in press).

1956.[31] First at a high end dancing restaurant and a few days later at 'The People's House', both situated in Copenhagen. A fortnight later a large rock'n'roll dance was held in a sports facility, and afterwards a news journalist paid a few youngsters to stir up trouble. These hit the front pages next day and made the expected connection between rock'n'roll and riots.[32] After touring the dance show to a few Danish cities not much was heard about the new phenomenon for nearly a year. In August 1957 five days of riots broke out in connection with the premiere of the film *Rock Around the Clock*. This time at such a level that social researchers were asked to investigate it. Some years later they concluded that hardly any of the riot participants had seen the movie. They joined because of the press reports.[33]

Rock'n'roll as a musical style came about slowly. The record 'Rock Around the Clock' had been available since 1954,[34] the sheet music since 1955, and it was possible to buy foreign rock'n'roll records released at major labels. One exception was Elvis Presley as RCA did not have a distributor in Denmark until 1958. Even though a few Danish records from 1956 used the tag rock'n'roll, it was left to a new generation of teenage amateurs to take up the new style and slowly learn it. They performed in Copenhagen working class areas and the first records were released in 1959. It is estimated that the number of groups in this Copenhagen phenomenon did not exceed 20.[35] None of these bands with their new musical style and practice made a mark in their time.

A youth-oriented music inspired by Anglo-American ideals only became broadly popular when Danish musicians and svengalis took inspiration from teenage singing stars related to production centres in Philadelphia and New York. The young crooner whose core audience consisted of young girls was a figure more familiar to Danish audiences and foreign inspiration could blend with this. The singers stayed within known musical patterns and played concerts in the usual places, but at the same time they became a new type of musical idol to be adored and, not least, by singing in English they signalled a clear fascination with all things English and American.

31 Niels W. Jakobsen, Jens Allan Mose, and Egon Nielsen, *Dansk Rock 'n' Roll: Anderumper, ekstase og opposition. En analyse af dansk rockkultur 1956–63* (Danish Rock'n'Roll: Duck-Tails, Ecstacy, and Opposition. An Analysis of Danish Rock Culture 1956–63) (Tappernøje, 1980) is a detailed study of the arrival of rock'n'roll in Denmark and most of the following facts are taken from it.

32 While earlier studies of the Danish reception of rock'n'roll tended to stress negative press accounts recent studies have shown that quite a lot of relatively positive newspaper stories downplay the foreignness and look upon the rock'n'roll phenomenon as yet another youth folly. See for example Sissel Bjerrum, 'Rock'n'roll: mødet mellem dem og os' (Rock'n'Roll: The Meeting Between Them and Us) in Klaus Petersen and Nils Arne Sørensen (eds.), *Den kolde krig på hjemmefronten* (The Cold War on the Home Front) (Odense, 2004), 81–93.

33 John Andersen, '"Rock and Roll"-begivenhederne i København 5.–10. august 1957' (The 'Rock'n'Roll' Occurrences in Copenhagen 5–10 August 1957), *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Kriminalvidenskab*, 52 (1964), 175–226; Britt-Mari Persson Blegvad, 'Newpapers and Rock and Roll Riots in Copenhagen', *Acta Sociologica*, 7/3 (1964), 151–78.

34 Jakobsen et al., *Dansk Rock 'n' Roll*, 97.

35 Ibid. 125.

In this way, apart from the moral panics about youth riots, the introduction of rock'n'roll into the Danish popular music field was not spectacular in any way. Actually, it was only clear to a minute minority of Danes at the time what rock'n'roll was in North American terms. Thus the traditional narrative of the North American rock'n'roll period from 1955 to 1958 with its flamboyant performers and million-selling stars does not sit well with Danish realities. There are of course similarities but in this context it is more illuminating to notice what some of the differences that met the transnational flow were.

In general, North American rock'n'roll met with a local culture in which an influential cultural elite, whether left or right wing, was anti-American and criticized heavily the consuming of American popular culture (mainly comics and pulp literature), while a non-elite, many of whom were pro-American, took it to heart.[36] The meeting took place between a North American culture whose main dividing line was that of race (which was even inscribed in the music) and a Danish one where class distinctions were still central (probably inscribed in the music as well, but that remains to be investigated). Danish journalists vaguely sensed this difference, but their only means of articulation was to use the racial stereotypes used in connection with jazz 30 years earlier, first and foremost indicating exoticism rather than actual racial conflict.[37]

For some years, a few North American cultural products were banned as Danish cinema owners boycotted movies from over there from May 1955 until May 1958 when the owners accepted the raised cost of film rent. Only two Copenhagen cinemas (and a few provincial ones) ignored the boycott and showed North American movies, thus making the premiere of *Rock Around the Clock* possible at all.[38] Not being able to see what rock'n'roll looked like before mid 1958 might be one reason why most Danes did not take to the new music in the same way as the Swedes.[39] As mentioned, RCA records did not have a local distributor between 1956 and 1958, which made Elvis Presley recordings scarce, and no distribution channels existed for most North American independent companies (Dot being an exception). Thus it is hard to tell which musicians Danish listeners actually heard. For example, going through various materials from the 1950s I have found no mention of Sun or Chess recording artists.

What this new North American music culture met was not a resolutely local music culture but, among other things, earlier appropriations of genres of North American popular music. In the 1950s Danish popular music culture was slowly turning away from a continental European schlager tradition towards a North Ameri-

36 Hans Hertel, 'Kulturens kolde krig: Polarisering, antikommunisme og antiamerikanisme i dansk kulturliv 1946–60' (Culture's Cold War: Polarization, Anti-Communism, and Anti-Americanism in Danish Cultural Life, 1946–60), *Kritik*, 35/158 (Aug. 2002), 18–21.

37 Erik Wiedemann, *Jazz i Danmark i tyverne, trediverne og fyrrerne: en musikkulturel undersøgelse*, vol. i–ii (Jazz in Denmark in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s: A Music-Cultural Study) (København, 1982), i, 11–30.

38 Jakobsen et al., *Dansk rock'n'roll*, 48.

39 Local rock'n'roll was immensely popular in Sweden, see Lilliestam, *Svensk rock*, 75–79.

can Tin Pan Alley tradition. This meant that rock'n'roll met with vocal performance ideals related to crooning (in Danish or English) or to music hall belting, and both traditions were dependent on Danish meta-linguistics. The turn towards North America also slowly made the local music business realize the economic potential of recording stars in contrast to live performing stars thus promoting young singers that had not proven their worth through years of performing with bands or in theatrical productions. Being a recording star became an option – if only for few. Also, Danish musicians' version of swing jazz were extremely popular. With regard to age the audience was broad, but jazz must be considered the most widespread (but not the only) music among Danish youth throughout the decade whether for dancing, for listening to, or for playing yourself. Large parts of the Danish jazz scene consisted of amateurs playing in youth clubs, students' clubs, or regular jazz clubs. And eventually, it was amateurs who took up rock'n'roll as well.[40]

In order to show in more detail what happened when young Danes began to play rock'n'roll, a few analytical remarks about Melvis Rock Band's recording of 'Jailhouse Rock' are relevant using the Presley recording as reference.[41] Presley's recording was made in 1957 at Radio Recorders' studio in Hollywood with a band of professional studio musicians including Scotty Moore and Bill Black, while Melvis' was made two years later in the back room of a Copenhagen church at a day when the room normally used as echo chamber was not available.[42] Melvis' recording may be heard as a meeting or a dialogue between existing Danish music conventions and the new American music and as a local appropriation of a concrete item in the transnational rock'n'roll flow recorded more than three years after Presley's North American national breakthrough with 'Heartbreak Hotel'.

Presley's voice and arrangement is clearly present in the Melvis recording but the track is also different in important ways. Melvis Rock Band is quite close to a sort of 'hard' North American rock'n'roll style, but the over-all groove is split between swing,

40 1950s music-cultural changes are discussed in detail in Michelsen, '"Hver eneste gang en ungdom"'. Jazz writer Thorbjørn Sjøgren describes the 1950s as 'the decade of the amateurs', cf. 'Jazzen i Danmark 1950–2003' (Jazz in Denmark 1950–2003) in Peter Larsen and Thorbjørn Sjøgren (eds.), *Politikens jazzleksikon: udenlandske og danske jazzbiografier* (København, 2003), 1–50.

41 Melvis (Ivan Haki Haagensen, 1941–1999) grew up in a small village north of Copenhagen. He quickly became interested in jazz and a bit later in rock'n'roll because of the Tommy Steele movie *The Tommy Steele Story* (1957) and his concerts in Copenhagen. The line ups of Melvis' backing groups changed continuously but at least in 1959 the number of musicians remained five. That year the group received its break-through at a rock'n'roll-extravaganza at Bellahøj, one of the Northern suburbs of Copenhagen, which resulted in a recording contract. In the second half of 1959 they recorded eight songs: three from the repertoire of Presley ('Jailhouse Rock', 'Troubles', 'King Creole'), one rock'n'roll standard ('Rip it Up'), two less well known songs ('Rock Pretty Baby', 'Goodness It's Gladys'), and two original songs by Melvis ('Beth's Rockin' blues', 'It Knock Down in my Head'). Keld Jakobsen and Thomas Gjurup, *Melvis Anthology 1: The Rock'n'Roll Years 1959–1963* [liner notes] (Frost, [2004]), is the most detailed account of Melvis' carreer so far.

42 Ernst Mikael Jørgensen and Erik Rasmussen, 'Sessionography' and 'Discography', in *The King of Rock'n'Roll: The Complete 50's Masters* [text book] (RCA, 1992); Jakobsen and Gjurup, *Melvis Anthology 1*, 8.

boogie and rock'n'roll. The marked amateur singing indicates a new type of voice in Danish popular music culture different to the well-known crooners and actors. Melvis tends to ignore the semantic meaning of the lyrics, which he probably did not understand much of, in order to focus on and experiment with his vocal expression as such. His vocals are dominated by Danish meta-linguistics but the foreign language makes it possible to include sneering and long drawn out, out of tune notes which were otherwise not possible within Danish vocal conventions. The sung and shouted word rock becomes an over-all signifier for newness.

Another point is that many of the cultural references in North American rock'n'roll pointed to by many commentators do not surface here, one obvious thing being the question of race, another that of difference between North and South, country and city. Instead a class distinction is probably at work. I cannot deduct that from the actual performance, only from its context, i.e. the places the music was played and the general class associations connected with the use of American popular culture in the 1950s.

The results of Melvis' negotiations with a North American musical genre are representations of *both* Americanness and Danish working class culture. On the one hand it contains the security of a local history and the promise of an open (North American?) future, on the other hand, the reality of the local and the promise of the global. All of it placed in the fusion of the local and the global in the now of the musical performance – here recorded for posterity.

Conclusions

Melvis is one concrete example of negotiations within a transnational cultural flow. Others took place with varying results. The most popular and profitable before 1960 was the one that happened between Anglo-American teenage stars and their Danish equivalents. Negotiations are also appropriations, a grounding of a diffuse and mediated music culture with no clear point of origin. I have not named all of the complexities surrounding Melvis – the name being one more. But I have pointed to some of them in order to underline that the practices and cultural contexts of Danish rock'n'roll are somewhat different to that of their North American and English equivalents.

Also, I would like to think, that such analyses and perspectives can become part of a historiography that is not only rock's, but popular music's within the whole music-historical field. And if so, that the academy might pave a road for alternatives to journalistic rock history writing, an alternative that accepts Anglo-American music's part in globalization processes and its partial domination at times. And an alternative that highlights local audiences' and musicians' use for their own purposes, which are sometimes a par with Anglo-American purposes, sometimes not. An alternative that suggests a different narrative structure where the focus keeps changing between the stars as musicians, the industry, the audience, and the everyday uses of music.

I have not been arguing for *an* alternative to Anglo-American rock-historical narratives, and not for a historiography of difference, but for one of difference *and*

similarity. For a historiography, that accepts the coexistence of the transnational cultural flows in local spaces and which analyses their impact on the local – and the local talking back, when necessary. I am arguing for historical work being done at local and regional levels that contests such narratives. One aim would be to demonstrate that Anglo-American popular music makes sense both as a localized music and as a transnational phenomenon, but that the two may imply quite different cultural meanings. Only then will we reach a better understanding of the music-cultural practices inherent in different notions of globalization. When such work has been done, it will be appropriate to consider if it is possible to do historiography at an even more general level that may seriously challenge the existing, global rock-historical discourse.

Summary

Using examples from rock museums, from the rock press, and from text books on the history of rock I establish that the rock ideology first articulated in the late 1960s is alive and well in the 21st century. One aspect of this ideology is the rather self-conscious relation to history writing which has resulted in a grand narrative based on traditional art music historiography complete with a canon of white, male, guitar-playing singer-songwriters. This narrative even seems to dominate history writing in other places than England and North America, in this case Denmark. Theories of transnational cultural flows – including their focus on centre–periphery relations – are suggested in order to analyse this domination and to articulate other narratives that do not mirror the structure of the Anglo-American narrative. The article closes with some remarks on the differences between rock'n'roll in Denmark and North America using the Danish musician Melvis' recording of 'Jailhouse Rock' as an example.