Making Music Work

Culturing youth in an institutional setting

Konstantin Economou
MAKING MUSIC WORK
Culturing youth in an institutional setting

This book is a study of an activity; playing rock music in the setting of a municipal youth club in a city suburb. This Swedish institution, its visitors and its staff, has been studied, through participant observation, during a two-year period of its life.

The focus is on a group of boys, aged 14–19, who come to the club to play in the "music workshop" that the club provides, developing different styles in playing music. Their different approaches, "having fun" and "going for it", are described and seen as a part of the youth club practice which involves them in a context where relations to the staff, as well as to their peers, are important. Music-playing is seen as a communicative process in which these relations are dealt with in everyday interaction.

The youth club, a social institution dealing with the organizing of leisure, has a certain kind of pedagogy displayed through the staff's ways of relating to the "visitors". Notions of becoming an extra buddy, or parent, as well as the ideal of solving every problem by having a talk about it, are studied and seen as a kind of democratic dilemma involving, for example, the ideal of creating "the meaningful leisure time". Activities should be created "for" the visitors, on their terms, but should also work to keep them "off the streets". Free time should be controlled.

Both groups, the staff and the visitors, jointly shape and recreate a practice through interaction, albeit from different objectives and with different ends. With inspiration drawn from notions developed by, among others, Giddens, Sennett and Goffman, music-playing in the youth club context is examined as a possibility to master relations and overturn hierarchies. But, at the same time, as an entanglement in those very relations and hierarchies.