

Petter Dyndahl & Live Weider Ellefsen:

**Music education as a socio-culturally charged field
of power, meaning and identity**

What is "culture"?

Culture as something extraordinary

"The best which has been thought
and said in the world"

Matthew Arnold (1882)

Traditional aesthetics,
Arts philosophy

Culture as everyday life

"Culture is ordinary"

Raymond Williams (1958)

Sociocultural theory,
Cultural Studies

Culture as something extraordinary

- Culture: Aesthetic objects («the best that has been said and done»)
- Immanuel Kant (1790/1990): aesthetic experiences as contemplative, disinterested and functionless
- the work of Art: an autonomous object that apparently transcends the subjective, the social and the contextual.

- Objects do not have a value which is inside waiting to be discovered: evaluation is what happens when an object is consumed. Aesthetic approaches make a fetish of value: what derives from practices of human perception is magically transmuted to become a fixed property of an object. Against this, I would insist that the value of something is produced in its use (the coming together of subject and object); it is not in the thing itself. The trouble with aesthetic approaches is that they drain the world of both the activity and the agency which goes into the making of evaluations; they inevitably reduce culture to a property of objects. Inevitably, 'textual fetishism' produces two things: an imaginary museum of objects to be preserved, and a pedagogy which insists that people have to be trained to recognize the intrinsic values of selected objects, which invariably leads to a division being drawn between the minority who can and the majority who cannot. In this way, aesthetic value can be used as a mechanism to exclude (Storey 2003: 105).

Dichotomized discourses

- Dichotomies: dualistic, contradictory pairs
- Dichotomies in music and music education:
content/form, art/entertainment, serious/popular, Western/the Other,
pure/hybrid, original/imitation, authentic/fabricated,
professional/amateur, aesthetic/functional
- Jacques Derrida: what appears like binary oppositions should be regarded
as arbitrary relations between components in a sociocultural system

Approaching music-education as a socio-culturally charged field of meaning, power and identity

- *Deconstructing music education binaries*
- *Didactic identity*, Lars-Owe Dahlgren (1989)
- *Cultural didactic studies*

Questions of identity

- An increasing interest in identity issues within research, politics and the media
- A massive critique of the concept of "identity"
- Identity: a paradoxical notion, both dependant of and articulated as a critique of normative designation

The paradoxality of identity

Essentialism

- Identity: the stable, differentiated and coherent truth about the subject
- Something by which the subject appears to be distinctive and unique.
- Comprehension and presentation of oneself and the world around one through coherent narratives

Anti-essentialism

- Identity: unstable, contingent and negotiable discursive connections
- Accordingly, we are constituted as subjects by fracture, disagreement and inconsequence just as often as by coherence.
- Provisional articulations performed in practice rather than ultimate, closing truths concerning the self.

The hermeneutics of the self

- Michel Foucault (2000): ethical, self-interpreting and self-constituting practices making people able to perform reasonably within, and understand themselves in relation to, various discourses.
- The hermeneutics of the self as subjectivizing practices: the subject submits to control, simultaneously achieving subjective existence and agency

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The paradoxality of identity

A discursively constructed stabilization of meaning or “truth about ourselves”

a potential repertory of connection and self-comprehension

the subject’s uninterrupted descriptions, definitions and experiences of itself as an individual

the subject’s identification with available social positions, roles and patterns of behaviour within a field of power regulations and structures

Identity and discourse

- Articulations of identity will always constitute discourse as well as subjectivity
- the subjects' negotiation of identity should not be regarded as separated from the formation and negotiation of the identity of discursive categories and phenomena, for instance like educational matters

Didactic identity

- Legitimization: justifying school subjects and teaching methods
- Selection: educational content and activities
- Communication: methods of teaching and learning
- *Identity: what distinguishes a certain field or subject of knowledge, skills and practices in a specific educational situation at a certain moment in time*

Dahlgren (1989)

The metaphor of "identity"

- Analogous to human subjects' constructions of identity, the didactic identities of school subjects are also created and negotiated by means of, and in relation to, culture, meaning and power.
- Music educational practices negotiate didactic identity in much in the same way as do individuals, achieving subjective existence and agency through discursive subjugation, at the same time identifying, reiterating, challenging or even subverting the discursive categories responsible for its suppression.
- The formation and negotiation of the identity of discursive categories and phenomena like educational matters should not be regarded as separated from individual subjects' negotiations of identity.

Didactic identity: the cultural dimensions of music education

- Didactic identity: investigating both individual and groups of subjects' identity projects within the school subject music as well as the didactic identity of the school subject music itself
- *Didactology* (Nielsen, 1994): a reflexive interpretation of subject didactic conditions and presuppositions

Aesthetic / functional discourses

Kunnskapsløftet (2006), the current Norwegian curriculum for primary, secondary and upper secondary education:

- aesthetic experience
- artistic judgment
- musical sensibility
- the use and function of music
- cross-cultural cooperation and multi-cultural tolerance
- cultural identity questions

material / formal *Bildungstheorien*

High and low listening

- Traditional culture sociology interprets aesthetic listening as a social process belonging to high culture, while the value and significance of popular music are explained in terms of social functions and the listener's call for entertainment
- Simon Frith (1996a): All cultural life involves the constant activity of judging and differentiating

Aesthetic functionality

- The aesthetic and the functional are inextricable from each other in the way we respond to and make sense of music
- “What I want to suggest, in other words, is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities (the assumption of the homology models) but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. Making music isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them” (Frith 1996b: 111).

- “[...] technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 2000a: 225).
- Musical practices form particular aesthetic processes of negotiation of the self, through which we challenge and transform available subject positions and categories. At the same time, we are subjectivized into acting, ethical, comprehensible individuals within normative discourse.

- Aesthetic experience always involves the implementation and negotiation of subjective as well as collective identities, or ‘ways of being in the world’: “[...] music, the experience of music for composer/performer and listener alike, gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it” (Frith 1996b: 114).
- Aesthetic processes are never ‘pure’ in the Kantian sense. What seems ‘pure aesthetic’ must necessarily include subjective and collective ‘interests’, i.e. values, ontologies and identities.

Music as a technology of the self

- Tia DeNora (2000): Human beings are active social agents who, by means of music, form and regulate their human agency, understood as: “[...] feeling, perception, cognition and consciousness, identity, energy, perceived situation and scene, embodied conduct and comportment”.
- “Music is one of the resources to which actors turn when they engage in the aesthetic reflexive practice of configuring self and/or others as emotional and aesthetic agents, across a variety of scenes”
- “As this music happens, so do I”

- Aesthetic autonomy / functional contextuality?
- All music – and music-making – is functional in the widest sense of the word.
- Music constitutes a multifaceted aesthetic-functional field for the construction of cultural meaning and identity.

The cultural dimensions of music education

- Music education practices take place always-already in culture.
- Music didactic phenomena and practices inevitably also construct culture.
- In so doing they contribute to the constitution of their own sociocultural foundations.

Formal/informal learning in music

- “Popular music is already present in school, brought there by the students, and in many cases also by the teachers, as part of their musical experience and knowledge” (Folkestad 2006).
- Swedish music teacher education programme *SÄMUS* (Olsson 1983)
- “How popular musicians learn” (Green 2002).

Music education as a field of sociocultural formation and identity construction

- No matter what didactic identity it claims for itself or is interpreted as conveying, the educational subject music is unavoidably obliged to constitute an aesthetic-functional field of constructing, performing and negotiating meaning and power, most notably relating to certain nodal points of subjectivity and identity.
- However, different didactic identities are significant with respect to *which* meanings and *whose* power are becoming dominant or marginal respectively.
- Thus, as part of its didactic – and *didactologic* – reflexivity, music education should be aware of what kind of cultural meaning and power it is dealing with in different situations and contexts.

Music and Identity

- Different subject matter didactics of music are constituted through continuous processes, situated in communities of practice operating within cultural institutions (Johansen 2006).
- Even Ruud: *Music and Identity* (1997): The personal room, the social room, the room of time and place, as well as the 'transpersonal' room.
- "They are loaded with power, values, emotions and moods. They are experienced as real and embodied, not as accidental representations of things in the world or phenomena we encounter" [op.cit.]

“By that I mean that when music production as a social, cultural and technological practice, we might as well say discursive practice, is transferred from its traditional institutional setting and is situated in a totally different setting, for instance a home, and entirely different categories of creating subjects who previously did not have access to the means of production, such as female musicians and artists for example, this implies a transformative process with the potential to change both the subjects involved, the collaborative relationship between them, the technology (its use, significance and framing), and also the music itself” (Lorentzen 2009).

Ethical dimensions of cultural didactic studies

- central
- marginal
- the taken-for-granted
- the Other

Social justice, inclusion, human rights of the Other

Questions to the reflection groups:

The subject of music – both in its aesthetic and cultural aspects, and within a formal/informal continuity – work as a field of education where pupils and students negotiate, renegotiate and possibly identify with narratives of themselves as male/female, straight/queer, white/black, native/foreign, local/cosmopolitan, novice/expert practitioners and participants of musical activities and communities, where they might experience social class and cultural connection/rejection as well.

- Do you agree with these assertions?
- If not, why?
- If so, what may be the consequences for music education, concerning social justice and inclusion?

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