Susan McClary and the epistemology of “new” musicological narrative, 1983-2007

by

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Abstract

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The aim of this research is to show how the “new” musicology differs from the “old” with regards to the creation of knowledge about music, which I refer to as “musicological epistemology”. If epistemology is described in the contemporary era as “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435), this dissertation discusses how McClary, acting as a “new” musicologist, has justified her “true beliefs” in order to create postmodern knowledge about music in the contemporary era, and how these “true beliefs” differ from “old”/modernist musicological opinions concerning the meaning of music.

In this dissertation I have included short descriptions of how I believe the various categories of “old” musicology functioned epistemologically. In order to demonstrate how musicological epistemology has changed in the contemporary era, I have undertaken an epistemological analysis of four of McClary’s core articles/musicological narratives included in *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007). I have chosen one article from each of McClary’s main subjects of discourse from 1983 to 2007, namely “interpretation and polemics”, “gender and sexuality”, “popular music” and “early music”, in order to ascertain the “nature, scope and limits” of the knowledge she creates through the writing of these narratives.

I have found that McClary has incorporated a variety of postmodern debates into her musicological writing, which separates her, epistemologically, from the “old” musicology. This “old”/“new” musicological split is particularly established in my epistemological analysis of “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year” (1987) in which McClary vehemently criticizes key aspects of the “old” musicology, as well as enunciates how she believes the
“new” musicology should function epistemologically. The epistemological analysis of “The cultural work of the madrigal” (2007) shows McClary’s epistemology in its mature form.

With regards to McClary’s epistemology, I have discovered that the knowledge she is creating is subject to the reader’s acceptance of the postmodern debates that inform her postmodern intellectual context (relativism, identity and deconstruction for example), which establish the conditions under which her work can be considered as knowledge. I have referred to this type of knowledge as “conditional knowledge”, specifically in the epistemological analysis of “Living to tell: Madonna’s resurrection of the fleshly” (1990). McClary’s knowledge is also subject to the contexts in which she situates these essays (a feminist context, for example), which I have referred to as “context-based knowledge” in my epistemological analysis of “Construction of subjectivity in Schubert’s music” (1994). These forms of knowledge admit a subjective viewpoint and are generally of a socially responsible nature.

These elements clearly articulate McClary’s acknowledgement of her postmodern intellectual context with regards to Lyotard’s call for greater toleration and sensitivity in his seminal work *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979) (The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge), the essential aspects of which are also discussed in this dissertation. The micronarrative format of her knowledge also relates to Lyotard’s theories, as well as McClary’s open avoidance of grand narratives in her writing.

Through my analyses I have affirmed that McClary has produced these postmodern forms of knowledge whilst adhering to the accepted principles of epistemic rigour. Postmodern theory has revealed a relativistic and subjective view of human language and knowledge. McClary, acknowledging this postmodern realization, has taken control of the production of musical meaning and is creating musical knowledge that is meaningful and useful to marginalized groups in the social and musical world.
Key words

Epistemology
Susan McClary
“Old” musicology
“New” musicology
Grand narrative
Metanarrative
Micronarrative
Modernism
Postmodernism
Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?

Jean François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition (1984: 9)
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The questions that have provoked this enquiry into the foundations of contemporary musicological epistemology are as follows: What is musical knowledge? How is musical knowledge obtained? How do musicologists extract meaning from musical knowledge, what methods do they employ, how do they “operate” (and thereby dissect the experience of music in its many guises)?

Epistemology, with regards to music, is not a finite field in the contemporary era. There is no epistemology of “new” musicology that contemporary musicologists follow; they define their methods as they go along. There are methods of extracting musical knowledge that are a result of long musicological tradition, such as the “historical, analytical and theoretical modes of enquiry” (Hooper 1974: 1), all of which have strictly defined epistemologies. But what Hooper described in 1974 (1) as an “increasing number of interpretive or methodological approaches that resist such easy categorization”, may have been prophetic of the unpredictable direction the discipline was taking, due to the influence of certain intellectual currents that will be discussed in later chapters (specifically concerning postmodernism).

The question remains, are these indefinable methods of generating knowledge effective? And if so, how do they generate knowledge? Essentially: what is their epistemology?

The chief difference between the “old” and contemporary (“new”) musicological epistemology is that, since the generally accepted date of about 1985 (Middleton 2003: 1), the Enlightenment ideals of the “old” musicology, with its inherited positivistic, empiricist, autonomous and objectivist claims, have gradually been shed. This is discussed at length in Chapter 3. What is of primary importance to this dissertation is, as Lochead and Auner state
in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (2002: 6), that the epistemology of musicology has changed in the contemporary era as “conceptions of perspectival knowledge have called into question the idea of truth and more generally the binary nature of all understanding.”

Our definition of knowledge has changed in essential ways, and so has the type of knowledge that we produce as a result. In Chapter 2 I will describe how contemporary scholars view the subject of knowledge, and in Chapter 3 it is my intention to show how this subject has influenced the writing of “old” as well as “new” musicological narratives.

Through my research I have discovered that one of the chief preoccupations of the “new” has been to dissect the epistemology of the “old” musicology. Although postmodernism can never constitute a replacement for the “pursuit of totality” (Kramer 1995: 8), which is the beautiful yet supposedly flawed concept at the heart of modernist/“old” musicology, it has proved necessary to relinquish some of our most cherished belief structures in order for the discipline to progress. Any aspect of contemporary musicology that alludes openly to any of the artifices of modernism has become a target for criticism from the main proponents of the “new” musicology.

However, postmodernism (and postmodern musicology) has yet to provide something as comparably substantial as the yields of the modernist era, especially with regards to epistemology. When it comes to openly stating the aims and intentions, the “new” ways in which musical knowledge shall henceforward be extracted, the actual epistemologies of the “new” musicology is fairly vague. This is partly due to the complexity of postmodern narrative structures and concepts, as well as the resistance within the discipline for creating new orthodoxies and grand narratives (the implications of which are discussed in Chapter 4).

In this dissertation, I will attempt to show an interpretation of the underlying epistemology of the “new” musicology through a textual and conceptual analysis of four essays from Susan McClary’s *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007). These essays will be examined in light of the intellectual context “new” musicology finds itself in, namely postmodernism, highlighting changing definitions of knowledge and truth that exist within that context.
The reason why I have chosen Susan McClary requires a short explanation. During the course of my research I came across the newly published *Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Critical Musicology* series. These extraordinary collections consist of essays, articles and papers by eleven of the most important and critical “new” musicologists, those most actively engaging with current musicological debates, and representative of the discipline in its present state: Scott Burnham, Nicholas Cook, Tia DeNora, Simon Frith, James Hepokoski, Lawrence Kramer, Richard Leppert, Susan McClary, Richard Middleton, Derek Scott and Gary Tomlinson.

An immense variety of topics are included in the work of “new” musicologists. Notable examples include Susan McClary’s connection with feminism, gender and music, or Simon Frith’s with popular culture and music (Beard & Gloag 2005: 65, 188). As Beard and Gloag’s book *Musicology: Key Concepts* (2005) will attest, these topics have become key concepts in the discipline of musicology through the evolution of interdisciplinarity.

I consider the books of the *Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Critical Musicology* series, of which McClary’s *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007) is one, to be epistemologically significant because these authors have been given license by Ashgate to select and order what they consider to be their most important essays in the discipline. This is unusual as, in my experience, in volumes of selected essays such as these, the editor usually chooses the material to be included, but in the *Ashgate* series these selections have been made by the authors themselves. In addition, each volume contains an introduction in which the authors stipulate what they feel are the central aims of their work in the discipline of musicology. This has helped me greatly because the introductions and selections provide clues (if not outright statements) as to their epistemology and intellectual trajectory. These introductions have served as valuable starting points for my theories concerning contemporary musicological epistemology, and the type of music knowledge produced through the writing of these musicological narratives.

I have chosen Susan McClary’s collection in the *Ashgate* series as representative of the epistemological state of the “new” musicology, because her work contains overtly postmodern attitudes and debates which I believe will provide insight into “new”/postmodern musicological epistemology.
I have chosen McClary also because I believe that her work has received much ungrounded criticism. She has been one of the main pioneers of the “new” order of musicology that has emerged since about 1985 on account of her obvious and consistent connection with postmodern theory (deconstruction, interdisciplinarity, gender and a variety of other postmodern debates), despite the difficulties inherent in such an enterprise.

I believe that most of the criticism aimed at her could be shown to be of no consequence, if I can show that her epistemology is sound, and that within her postmodern intellectual context she is producing knowledge that follows the rules of epistemic rigour that would be acceptable to that context.

This dissertation is designed to outline the intellectual currents that support McClary’s claims, as well as describe our understanding of knowledge in the postmodern era. It is also designed to show how the writing of a narrative creates knowledge about the subject it discusses, and how we can classify the knowledge within our contemporary (postmodern) understanding of the definitions of knowledge.

The clarification of this intellectual context is necessary because there is a considerable overlap in the contemporary era between old and new viewpoints and scholarship. For this reason I have included a short description and discussion of all debates relevant to my deconstruction of McClary’s epistemology in order to make sure that readers of this dissertation cannot claim ignorance of the quantity of scholarship that influences postmodern (“new”) musicology, perspectives of which musicologists like McClary are painfully aware. Because of the re-evaluation of concepts like truth and knowledge, it is little wonder that a “new” musicologist like McClary, perceiving the necessity and burden of change more keenly than others, feels the need to pioneer the critique and transformation of perspectives that are no longer applicable or useful to her intellectual context.

In the Introduction to *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007), McClary divides her work into four categories of overall importance, through which she has helped to define the nature of “new” musicology: interpretation and polemics; gender and sexuality; popular music; and early music. Using this as a guide-line, I will take one essay from each section and attempt to
analyse it with regards to the postmodern debates that infuse these texts as an obvious result of McClary’s postmodern intellectual context. I believe the postmodern intellectual context is at the root of her inclusion of the topics and perspectives that define contemporary musicology as “new”. I also believe that her criticism and re-evaluation of the discipline of musicology is due to changing notions that are shared by all other disciplines, under the umbrella of this homogeneous intellectual context of postmodernism. We know these changing notions by already familiar terms such as relativism, sexuality, deconstruction and subjectivity, which commonly circulate in scholarly work of the present day. But I would like to provide specific reference to these and other postmodern concepts in four of McClary’s essays in order to show how these currents in thinking have infused the discipline of musicology through scholars such as McClary.

To summarise briefly, the most important consequence of this influx of postmodern theory in the discipline of musicology, and the main reason why inclusion of such viewpoints has led to such contention within the discipline, is that these currents have affected traditional musicological epistemology. Prior to this, there was an existing framework for generating acceptable and, most importantly, satisfying knowledge about music. How these traditions functioned to produce musical meaning will be explained in Chapter 3. But unfortunately for the “old” musicology, the intellectual and epistemological scaffold of this musicology was removed during the transition from modernist thinking into postmodern thought.

Core defining principles have been re-evaluated and our understanding of them reconfigured. Foremost would be our understanding of truth and language. I do not even need to go further than this at present; it is enough to say that our understanding of truth has been reconfigured, the implications of which are vast. I believe that the fundamental implication of this is that meaning is not passed down from “above”, and knowledge is never considered absolute within a postmodern context. We define, through our language and through our ideas and opinions, what the nature of meaning is. These definitions are transformed over time, as new information and perspectives emerge and evolve.

Musicology is no different, and will have to weather this transformation like all other academic disciplines, and somehow incorporate what is useful to it in the production of
meaning. Rejection of an entire set of principles that is reshaping the intellectual world, however, is not the answer. That is why I support McClary’s enterprise, and wish to show its validity within the context of postmodernism, which I believe to be the only context capable of validating and defining her work with regards to its intellectual trajectory. Although the tenets of the “old” musicology should not be wholly rejected either, this process of transformation requires that we criticize the bastion of cultural power represented by the “old” musicology. McClary recognizes this, and although she argues against many of the ideological biases and structures within the discipline, especially in the article analysed in Chapter 6 entitled “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year” (1987), she still relies heavily on “old” musicological traditions such as that of music analysis in her articles in order to create knowledge.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Creswell (1994: 90) states that a theoretical framework exposes the overarching theory that “explains the central hypothesis or research question in the study”.

The theoretical framework that is most applicable to this research is postmodern theory, because the dissertation is structured as an interdisciplinary micronarrative concerning “new” (contemporary) musicological epistemology, which is postmodern owing to its intellectual context. This theoretical framework (postmodern theory) describes the location of my research in academia, as well as the theories that inform, shape and constitute this dissertation. In other words, they are the theories that have the most influence on me, the author, as a result of my intellectual context.

My theoretical framework also includes the following sub-theories, specifically the aspects of those theories which relate to the modernist/postmodern dichotomy. Philosophies concerning epistemology are discussed in Chapter 2 in an attempt to clarify the concept of musicological epistemology. Certain aspects of literary theory concerning narrative, as well as metanarrative and micronarrative are considered in Chapter 4, with regards to how their involvement in a narrative affects the underlying epistemology, and as a result the type of knowledge produced.
Theories concerning the “old” and “new” musicology are described in Chapters 3 and 4 in order to clarify the difference between these two opposing camps of the discipline, which are epistemologically extremely different with regards to the way in which they generate knowledge (and what they consider musical knowledge to be). Certain aspects of modernism and postmodern theory are also discussed during the course of these chapters, where applicable, in order to define the intellectual context of these pivotal subjects, specifically: epistemology, narrative and musicology.

1.3 Research questions

This leads to the following main research question:

- How does Susan McClary’s contribution to the “new”/postmodern musicology differ from the tradition of modernist/“old” musicology with regards to epistemology, narrative and the intellectual context of postmodernism?

In order to answer this main research question, the following sub-questions will first be answered:

- What is our contemporary understanding of epistemology, knowledge, and musical knowledge (Chapter 2.1 – 2.3)?
- What is musicological epistemology, and how does musicology generate knowledge (Chapter 2.4)?
- How has the implication of narrative affected musicological epistemology and knowledge, past and present (Chapter 3)?
- What is the difference between “old” and “new” musicology with regards to epistemology and intellectual context (Chapters 3.2 and 4.1)?
- How does McClary extract meaning and generate knowledge about music in the four essays chosen from Reading Music: Selected Essays (2007) (Chapters 5 to 9)?
1.4 Aims of the study

The main claim of my research is as follows: I would like to show that contained within Susan McClary’s collected essays in the *Ashgate* series, there is an epistemic model of how postmodern/“new” musicology extracts meaning and knowledge from music.

I believe that McClary’s epistemic model is wholly different from that of the “old” musicology because of the entirely different intellectual context in which the discipline finds itself in the contemporary/postmodern era. As a result, I would like to analyse the epistemological aspects of McClary’s narratives in order to further and expand our understanding of the meaning of musical knowledge in the present epoch.

McClary’s epistemic model is also bound to and shaped by its linguistic idiom. Through the writing of this dissertation I also hope to make it clear that I do not feel that “new” musicology can ever truly escape certain aspects of thinking that relate to narrative, despite postmodern reactions to the notion of the “grand narrative” and gravitation towards the writing of “micronarratives”. I believe that an escape from the “grand narrative” is impossible because any attempts to evade the grand narrative directly attack the logical structures that support the creation of meaning and knowledge, and paradoxically constitute new grand narratives in themselves (for example, they are grand narratives concerning the rejection of grand narratives).

I also aim to investigate how certain postmodern debates (other than those concerning narrative) are incorporated in the “new” musicology of McClary, and what effect these have on McClary’s epistemology. For example, how the inclusion of feminist theory affects musicological epistemology and the type of knowledge about music produced as a result.

1.5 Rationale for the study

In the place of a belief, I have a doubt which is at the foundation of my rationale and research. This doubt informs the course of action that I have taken in the writing of this dissertation (which is described in detail in Chapter 1.6) and the clarification of this doubt
also serves as the main reason for the writing of this dissertation. I suspect this doubt is not mine alone, but also in the back of the minds of many contemporary musicologists who are confronted with postmodern theories that challenge the core principles and belief structures at the heart of the discipline of musicology.

My doubt is as follows. There is a possibility that the “new” musicology is no closer to discovering meaning and meaningful debate concerning music than the “old” musicology, which the “new” musicology criticizes on the grounds of its modernist tendencies. An attempt to document the present epistemology of the discipline, such as this dissertation, is necessary in order to determine whether “new” musicology’s claim to knowledge is any more valid than its heavily criticized predecessor. Will the “new” musicology be able to withstand the same critique it has directed towards its predecessor? I certainly hope so.

I cannot balance my argument with any more criticism toward the “new” musicology until I have taken the reader through the process of epistemologically analysing McClary’s articles. But, I believe it is enough to state that my doubt concerning the validity of the “new” musicology is the foundational rationale of this entire dissertation.

In order to clarify this doubt, for myself and others, this dissertation will eventually reveal, at least in the case of McClary, an interpretation of the nature of the knowledge that is being produced by “new” musicologists, and how this type of knowledge is different from that which is now considered redundant and “old” in the current intellectual context of postmodernism. “The nature and scope of justification and knowledge” (Huemer 2002: contents page), otherwise referred to as epistemology, will be assessed and subjective conclusions will be reached to determine the validity of McClary’s claims to knowledge. I personally believe that a lack of understanding the validity of “new” musicology’s epistemologies is a result of an ignorance of the core principles of postmodernism, in which the “new” aspect of the discipline is grounded.

I am anxious to repeat that my conclusions are bound to be wholly subjective and interpretive, and do not claim to produce some form of objective truth. In this way my conclusions are entirely postmodern, according to tenets of relativism (discussed in Chapter
4.6), tenets which are wholly relevant to the work of all “new” musicologists because of our shared postmodern intellectual context. Whether the form of knowledge produced by this type of narrative and interpretation is acceptable or satisfactory enough will hopefully be the subject of future dissertations.

1.6 Methodology

How I intend to conduct my research is as follows: This dissertation is primarily a literature review combined with a textual and conceptual analysis of the musicological narratives written by McClary in *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007). According to Mouton (2001: 167), a textual analysis is an “analysis of texts (religious or literary) in order to understand the meaning of such texts”. My methodology includes conceptual analysis because the “clarification and elaboration of the different dimensions of meaning” (of words and ideas) will take place (Mouton 2001: 175).

By using these methodologies I will be able to situate McClary’s work in the context of the subjects most relevant to this dissertation (epistemology, narrative, relativism and so on), as well as show how and why her epistemology differs from that of the “old” musicology.

I will now summarise the route I will follow via this methodology, for added clarification.

In Chapter 2 the subject of epistemology will be clarified and then expounded upon with regards to its relationship to musicology “old” and “new”.

In Chapter 3 I will be describing the intellectual context of modernism, which has great bearing on the beliefs of the “old” musicology. The “old”/“new” musicology dichotomy will be discussed, outlining and comparing the main tenets and differences of each. Finally, the various categories of “old” musicology are expounded upon with regards to their respective epistemologies.

Chapter 4 contains current perspectives on narrative, as well as my personal interpretation of how narrative becomes implicated in “old” and “new” musicological knowledge and
epistemology (the formation of that knowledge). The interdisciplinary nature of musicological narratives will also be discussed. Interdisciplinary ideas are central to this study. I will explain how they have been used to extract knowledge and meaning from music.

The research included in Chapter 4 also concerns postmodern perspectives on language and epistemology, and how these subjects have been affected by recent theories on various subjects (including critical theory, post-structuralism, “genealogy”, intertextuality, relativism, absurdity, deconstruction, feminism, humanism, posthumanism, identity, “place” and “landscape”). A discussion of these subjects is included because I believe them to be interwoven into the musicological narratives of Susan McClary (and other “new” musicologists) because of their effect on the intellectual climate within which these narratives are produced in the postmodern era. They are important because of the way they affect language, and consequently musicological writings such as those presented in Reading Music (2007), from which I will take my main examples of co-relation between these subjects and their effect on musicological discourse.

Chapter 5 offers an analysis of McClary’s own introduction to her selection of articles, which I regarded as important for the purpose of clarifying her own views with regards to her own work. This introductory chapter, rather than forming a fully-fledged chapter, serves as a preamble to the following four chapters, in order to ascertain McClary’s present perspective on her past work and establish her own views regarding her epistemology. These views will then be incorporated into my own epistemological analyses of her work.

Chapters 6 to 9 contain textual analyses of four of Susan McClary’s articles, ranging from 1983 to 2007. I aim to show how the epistemology of “new” musicology has changed from that of the “old” musicology through the inclusion of postmodern debates, and that this change can be seen through textual and epistemological analyses of McClary’s articles.

The inner structure of each chapter concerning McClary’s articles have been kept the same as the structure of the articles under analysis. I have done this because the trajectory of my discussions of McClary’s articles are not topical and sectional, for the most part, but are dependent on her own narratives for aspects of form and topic. In the articles without
subsections, I chose to avoid compartmentalising information into pre-existing categories, and to encourage freedom in my own thinking and free-flowing micronarrative. Consequently, Chapter’s 7 and 8 are without defining sub-sections. Similarly, the lengths of the chapters were determined by the corresponding lengths and content of the articles under debate. Furthermore, the sequence of chapters is not presented in order of importance but in the order in which they appear in McClary’s volume *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007).

With regards to the concluding chapter, the polemical nature of my topic requires that it be presented in essay format. This also accentuates the subjective nature of my conclusions, which I believe is in congruence with the postmodern intellectual context described throughout this dissertation. It also emphasizes the micronarrative aspect of this dissertation, which further confirms that none of my findings pretend to be absolute in nature.

### 1.7 Literature review

In this section I will be discussing some of the main sources that form the textual foundations of my dissertation.

My research into the realm of epistemology begins with Klein’s article entitled “Epistemology” in *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005). In this source, Klein’s views on epistemology are expressed with regards to its “nature, sources, and limits” (2005: 224). Another source is *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (2010) edited by Frodeman and Klein, in which aspects of constructing a postmodern musicological epistemology are discussed, especially with regards to the difficulty of such a task. Other sources on epistemology will be considered, such as Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (1984), which is also extremely important to other aspects of postmodernism.

My main source concerning epistemology will be Huemer’s tome, entitled *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (2002). The source readings are extremely diverse, traversing
philosophical history from the Greeks to contemporary philosophers. It would appear that Huemer (2002: 435) considers the core concept concerning epistemology to be the justification of knowledge (“justified, true belief”), with regards to the sources, structure and nature of knowledge. Audi, in the introduction to Huemer’s collection, states that they both wish to present epistemology not only as “the theory of knowledge but also as the theory of justification” (2002: 1). Epistemology has a metaphysical and linguistic dimension also, as well as a psychological one, on account of its connection with perception, inference and memory (Audi 2002: 1).

With regards to narrative, I will be focussing on the following: Beard and Gloag (2005) claim that people (and musicologists) have a tendency to construe information in story format, which follows a causal or temporal sequence. The psychological implication of this is discussed in Bruner and Kalmar’s article “Narrative and Metanarrative in the Construction of the Self” (1998), along with the main aspects of metanarrative. Heinen and Sommer’s volume Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research (2009: 1-10) contains a valuable elucidation of the concept of micronarrative, as well as information useful to understanding narrative trends in postmodern epistemology.

Lyotard described the grand narrative as an artifice of modernity (Lyotard 2004: 123), characterized by an attempt to create a link between the past, present and future, and as such will also form a source of information concerning narrative structures. Malpas states that a grand narrative “tells the story of the progress and development of narratives” in a way that “tie[s] everything together under a scheme that sets out to explain the world and people’s place in it” (2001: 7). He mentions the grand narrative of Christianity, also Marxism, fascism, Darwinism and the Enlightenment as examples of grand narratives (Malpas 2001: 7).

There are many useful articles on modernist and postmodern thought available in the monstrous volume From Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology (2003), edited by Cahoone, which contains chronological extracts that shaped intellectual life from Descartes to Habermas. This will be invaluable in my research, as well as Lochead and Auner’s Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought (2002). By far the most important source on postmodernism is Lyotard’s The Postmodern Condition (1984), which is discussed in detail in
Chapter 4. Modernism and postmodernism’s relationship to music is discussed in many music sources, but my points of entry are the extensive articles entitled “Modernism” and “Postmodernism” by Botstein and Pasler in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001), as well as the articles of the same name in Beard and Gloag’s *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (2005).

Susan McClary’s contribution to the *Ashgate* series entitled *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007) will be my primary source for the literary and conceptual analysis, and all four of the essays I will be analysing come from this source. I have selected to analyse four essays because McClary has divided the book, on methodological grounds, into four fairly chronological sections, each of which deals with a different aspect of her musicological perspective:

- **Section A (Chapters 1 – 4)** is called “Interpretation and Polemics”, and involves interpreting canonical works in “cultural terms”;
- **Section B (Chapters 5 – 7)** is entitled “Gender and Sexuality” and shows an engagement with these topics in the context of music, and her interpretation of works from a feminine (*writing “as a woman”*) rather than entirely feminist perspective;
- **Section C (Chapters 8 – 10)** is called “Popular Music”, depicting McClary’s attempts to reconcile popular music criticism with musicology; and
- **Section D (Chapters 11 – 12)**, entitled “Early Music”, is an evaluation of tonal and cultural aspects of Renaissance and Baroque music, with regards to concepts of body, sociology and time.

She aims to “bridge the gap between historical context, culture and musical practice” (McClary 2007: v). Her work is extremely interdisciplinary, and other topics include narrative, ideology, absolutism, the *avant-garde* and identity (McClary 2007: ix). With regards to the interdisciplinary aspect of the “new” musicology, which is the main focus of her work, she would like to “deal with music as cultural texts, just as literary, art, and film critics engage with novels, paintings, and movies as a matter of course”. This is rooted in her early musicological preoccupations with Renaissance and Baroque music and their association
with “structures of language change” (linguistics), which is clearly interdisciplinary. McClary regards her initial work as “specifically for interdisciplinary readers” in the fields of cultural theory and criticism. Citing the influence of Adorno and Foucault on her work, she lists her main interdisciplinary directions: feminist theory, narratology, postcolonial studies, and postmodern aesthetics.

McClary (2007: xi) believes that her theoretical framework has remained almost constant since her graduate days, and her contemporary work is only different in that she has had more exposure to “interdisciplinary conversations”, and substituted her more “objective” prose for a “vivid, often comic style”. Although the truth of this self-description is evident in her writings, I believe that there have been significant changes in her theoretical framework also, changes that are imbedded in her narrative formulations and epistemology, and obviously emerge as she comes to fully inhabit her postmodern intellectual context between 1983 to 2007. These aspects are discussed at length during my analyses of her articles in Chapters 5 to 9.

1.8 Value of the study

The value of this study is that it will provide an epistemological analysis of Susan McClary’s contribution to “new” musicology, with reference to specific texts to show how these methods are used to create knowledge about music. As postmodern/“new” musicology is epistemologically extremely diverse (Frodeman et al. 2010: 142) and there are so many complex ideas at work in musicological narrative, I believe that it is valuable to ascertain if and how these diverse ideas are being used to procure musical knowledge and meaning. I have no doubt that a greater clarification of the confusing (and often repellent) subject of postmodernism, and its relationship to the changing face of musicology, will yield interesting realizations and perspectives for the discipline of musicology.

1.9 Notes to the reader

In this dissertation I will be using the original dates of publication for the articles I have selected for epistemological analyses in Chapters 6 to 9, even though they are all included in
McClary’s selection of essays in *Reading Music: Selected Essays*, which was published in 2007.

Because of the amount of condensed factual information presented in Chapters 2 to 4, summaries are provided at the end of each chapter in bullet form. Hereafter, in Chapters 6 to 9, the summaries are presented in the form of prose abstracts because the information contained in these chapters is of a polemic rather than factual nature and can be summarised more effectively through short descriptions than bullet-point reductions.
Chapter 2

Epistemology and the creation of musical knowledge

2.1 What is an epistemology?

The concept of epistemology is used to describe a “theory of knowledge”, and more specifically, a philosophical (theoretical) theory of knowledge (Quinton 2000: 279).

In Huemer’s tome entitled *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (2002), Huemer divides the contents of the collected readings into three main categories, and these are listed here to give some indication of the range of debates with which epistemology is concerned:

- **“Sources of justification and knowledge”, with sub-categories of “Perception”, “Memory”, “Reason and the *a priori*” and “Testimony”;**
- **“The structure and growth of justification and knowledge”, with sub-categories “Inference in general”, “Inductive inference” and “The architecture of knowledge”;** and
- **“The nature and scope of justification and knowledge”: with sub-categories “The analysis of ‘knowledge’” and “Scepticism”.

The source readings are extremely diverse, traversing philosophical history from the Greeks (Plato and Empiricus) to contemporary philosophers. This indicates that epistemological theorising has a long history in the field of philosophy.

It would appear that Huemer considers the core concept concerning epistemology to be the justification of knowledge, with regards to the sources, structure and nature of knowledge. This position is clarified by Audi, the author of the introduction to Huemer’s collection. Audi states that they both wish to present epistemology not only as “the theory of knowledge but also as the theory of justification” (2002: 1), and that it has a metaphysical and linguistic dimension, as well as a psychological one, on account of its connection with perception, inference and memory (Audi 2002: 1).
This begs two further questions, namely, what is knowledge? And, more specifically, what is musical knowledge? Only once we have answered these two questions can we ascertain which theories are at work behind the acquiring of musical knowledge, and what methods are employed by musicologists to produce this knowledge in the field of musicology.

The debate surrounding epistemology is concerned with knowledge in a general sense, and focuses on “the nature and derivation of knowledge, the scope of knowledge, and the reliability of claims to knowledge” (Speake 1984: 109). This describes how one could potentially expose the underlying methodology behind musicological discourse and knowledge with regards to its process, scope and validity. Or, as it was mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, with regards to its “nature, sources and limits” (Feldman 2005: 224).

Knowledge of any kind can only be understood within Feldman’s terms, because here they are contained within the rational sphere of reason (a priori knowledge) and empiricism (interpretation of sensory data) (Speake 1984: 109).

Despite the fact that discourse concerning epistemology is still highly debated in the intellectual and philosophical world (specifically in the work of Gettier), the definition of knowledge as “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435), the conception of which is reputed to have originated with the ancient Greeks, specifically Plato (2002: 131—142), I believe still defines our contemporary understanding of the subjects of knowledge and epistemology in the postmodern era despite the ongoing discourse. This definition is also useful because it appears that it depicts a repetitive sequence embedded in most knowledge formations (as one might observe in my epistemological analyses in Chapters 6 to 9). This simplistic sequence is as follows: One has a belief that one believes is true (and is, hopefully, true also), which one then attempts to prove through the varieties of justification available and acceptable to us, predominantly empirical observations and a priori reasoning. This concept is no absolute, but merely an expression on how things are generally done within most academic enterprises, following the dictates of logic as we experience it.
For the sake of intellectual cogency, I would like to focus this dissertation around my understanding of epistemology as “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435), which, even after my research into the theories of Gettier, I still believe is the most useful in assessing the nature of the knowledge I will be analysing in this dissertation (specifically “old” and “new” musicological knowledge formations discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapters 5 to 9).

However, in an attempt to be adequately critical of this definition, I would like to raise the following question: Because the concept of “truth” is at question in postmodern theory, leading to subsequent movement away from claims to objectivity, how does this reflect on the notion of “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435) as the foundation of knowledge? The implication is that, when a belief is justified, it becomes “the truth” (with the inherent claim of objectivity), which is the realm of the grand narrative, an abhorred modernist concept.

So, if the principle of knowledge, as obtained through the justification of “true belief”, leads to a claim of objectivity, can the subjective micro-narratives of the postmodern era actually produce knowledge? In other words, if the truth is impossible in the context of postmodern endeavour, which denies the principle of objective truth, then knowledge by way of “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435) seems impossible within a postmodern context. The subject of truth in a postmodern context will be discussed more thoroughly throughout Chapter 4 in connection with “new” musicology and various postmodern debates.

2.2 What is knowledge?

Four kinds of knowledge have been ascertained: “knowledge-how”, “knowledge-that”, “knowledge-of” and “knowledge-about” (Quinton 2000: 279).

“Knowledge-how” is procedural knowledge, knowledge of a process such as speaking a language, or playing an instrument. The proof of such knowledge is that one can physically or mentally do those things.
“Knowledge-that”, otherwise known as propositional knowledge, is concerned with the varieties of *a priori* knowledge such as the intuitive, derived and inferred types (deductive reasoning), as contrasted with empirical knowledge which is generated by inductive reasoning (Quinton 2000: 279). With regards to “knowledge-of”, also called acquaintance knowledge, Quinton claims this variety is almost indistinguishable from various types of “knowledge-how” and “knowledge-that”. “Knowledge about” is theoretical knowledge, that is knowledge “concerned with or involving theory rather than practical application” (Soanes & Stephenson 2004: 1495).

More importantly, these types of knowledge can be linked to the idea of “true belief” and its justification, otherwise referred to as “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435; Nozick 2002: 486), the notion of which is essential to this dissertation. Huemer notes that for one to know anything, one must first have a supposition that one believes to be true, and is also true (2002: 435). These two ideas are the basic conditions of knowledge, but they are not the only necessary conditions. One must be able to justify this true belief with sound reasoning or empirical evidence for it to become actual knowledge. As I have already mentioned, this is not merely an instruction on how to make knowledge but I have also used it as a guideline on how to assess existing knowledge throughout this dissertation.

Van Dijk (2005: 77-83) describes the “strategies” that particular forms of knowledge follow, with reference to personal, interpersonal, group, institutional/organizational, national and cultural knowledge. It is clear from his list that not all forms of knowledge need empirical evidence in order to function. For example, personal knowledge “is autobiographical knowledge about personal experiences” (Van Dijk 2005: 77). Van Dijk refers to this type of knowledge as “private” because it can only be shared through communication, the act of which could be variable, primarily depending on the context in which it is communicated and the extent of what is remembered by the subject.

In contrast, “cultural knowledge” is something that one need not even communicate, because all of the members of that culture presuppose it (Van Dijk 2005: 79). Van Dijk states that “if the recipients [of cultural knowledge] are believed to be members of my own epistemic community (culture, country, group, etc.), [I must] presuppose all socially shared
knowledge of this epistemic community to be known by the recipient(s)” (Van Dijk 2005: 80). The critique of cultural knowledge and other inherited concepts seems to be one of the core aims of postmodernism, as will be explained in later chapters. Reconceive reconceive

2.3 What is musical knowledge?

Now I would like to bring these theories into the domain of music and musicology. By the above definition of epistemology as “justified, true belief” which is predominantly agreed upon as the basic conditions of knowledge in the epistemological community (Huemer 2002: 435), we can deduce that musicological knowledge would have to consist of “justified, true beliefs” about music also, using empirical evidence and a priori deductions as a means to justification.

Musicological discourse is filled with justifications of beliefs. Often these claims are substantiated by references to examples of form, and melodic and harmonic behaviour, which have become the empirical (a posteriori) data of musicology, “facts” on which the metaphysical/theoretical deductions (a priori) rest.

2.4 What is musicological epistemology?

My argument is as follows: For every musicological narrative, the musicologist has pursued (or invented) a “theory of knowledge and justification” in order to acquire musical knowledge. This is fairly obvious in some cases, especially in “old” musicological narratives, where musicologists embraced epistemological traditions and tried to keep Adler’s categories of musicology intact. These formulaic traditions will be described and discussed in Chapter 3.

But it is the intellectual trajectory of the postmodern/“new” musicology that I would like to examine, to see how epistemic thinking has been affected by changing conceptions of truth, time, reality, language, and a whole host of concepts that the “new” musicology is faced with which challenge traditional epistemological thinking, musicological or otherwise. This will be done through a brief discussion of the postmodern grand narratives (post-
structuralism, and so on) in Chapter 4, followed by an examination of McClary’s contribution to the *Ashgate* series, in the light of these postmodern debates, in Chapters 6 to 9. Because of the interdisciplinary aspect of postmodern musicology, and the complexity of the debates surrounding all of postmodernist thinking, I expect to encounter many problems in defining “new” musicological epistemology.

2.5 Summary

**Epistemology**

- An epistemology is a theory of knowledge, and also concerns the methods of justification used to produce knowledge, otherwise called “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435). This perception of knowledge began with Plato, and is the traditionally held view most relevant to this dissertation.
- Epistemology has metaphysical, linguistic and psychological dimensions.

This chapter intended to clarify the following three questions with regards to epistemology:

- What is knowledge, with regards to its “nature, sources and limits” (Feldman 2005: 224)?
- What is musical knowledge, with regards to its process, scope and validity?
- In the context of postmodernism, is the notion of “justified, true beliefs” as the foundation of knowledge still acceptable when one takes into consideration the changing notions of the concept of “truth”?

**Knowledge**

- All knowledge is the product either of empirical data (interpretation of sensory data), reasoning (*a priori*), or both.
- There are three categories of knowledge:
  - “knowledge-how” or procedural knowledge,
  - “knowledge-that” or deductive reasoning, and
  - “knowledge-of” which includes elements of the previous two combined.
• The basic condition for knowledge is “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435; Nozick 2002: 486).

• All forms of knowledge (personal, interpersonal, group, institutional/organizational, national and cultural knowledge) follow “strategies” of justification.

• Not all forms of knowledge need empirical evidence to support their claims and “strategies”; often reasoning alone is enough.

• Musicological knowledge consists of “justified, true beliefs” about music, using empirical evidence and/or *a priori* deductions as justification.
Chapter 3

Modernism and the epistemology of the “old” musicology

3.1 The intellectual context of modernism and the “modernist identity”

In the following chapter, I embark on a broad discussion of debates relevant to the intellectual context of postmodernism. This is undertaken so that the reader can identify, as I have done, the various postmodern debates that infuse McClary’s work, which is discussed in Chapters 5 to 8.

The current chapter predominantly discusses the epistemology of the “old” musicology, and this too must be placed in its intellectual context, which has been identified as modernist by most “new” musicologists (Beard & Gloag 2005: xii). Modernism had its own set of debates to which the “old” musicology adhered in the same way that McClary does to her own context, and these are also clearly definable through an analysis of the “old” musicology’s epistemology, and approach to discourse. However, in this sub-section I would like to discuss briefly the modernist context, and the “modernist identity” which I believe typifies the artists and intellectuals of this time.

Modernism (circa 1883-1914) as the “cultural dominant” of its time seriously affected the identity of Western culture during this time, defining itself with an outlook characterised by positivism, realism, structuralism and autonomy (Botstein 2001: 868). These characteristics have generally been associated with The Enlightenment, the ideals of which greatly influenced modernist ideology. Within the historical era of Modernism, the concept of identity (which is applicable to almost everything in existence that can be referred to) both on a personal (“self”) and collective level (“other”), underwent rapid and revolutionary changes that distinguish it from other eras. The artistic concerns of the Modernist period among Western musicians reflect the deeper changes and concerns at work in Western society.
The concepts of “otherness” and modernism are inextricable. Modernism, as the cultural dominant with accompanying attitudes and values represented an “other” to the individuals (“selves”) of its time. Dahlhaus claimed that music at this time began to position itself as an “alternative world”; a process that can be seen, in its earliest form, emerging in the music dramas of Wagner (Beard & Gloag 2005: 111).

According to the “new” musicologist Gary Tomlinson (2007: 189), the “other” is not only society but societal constructs such as language and music also. Anything that sets up a “reflexive relationship” with the “self” may represent an “other” to the “self” (Beard & Gloag 2005: 88). Language achieves this by becoming an “intersubjective force” that mediates our communication with the Other, and also determines “I” by presupposing certain codes, rules and symbolic patterns (Tomlinson 2007: 189).

The psychoanalytic theorist Lacan based his view of the “other” on Žižek’s “big Other”, otherwise termed the unconscious mind, which is “not closed within the psyche but extending between subjects”, hence intersubjective (Tomlinson 2007: 189). The relationship the individual has with the “big Other” through language takes the form of signifiers (Tomlinson 2007: 189), such as sounds, printed words or images (Soanes & Stephenson 2005: 1341), which remain uniform throughout that society, although interpretation of what is signified is a matter of personal subjectivity. Once this process of signification becomes disrupted and the relationship between the individual and the “big Other” breaks down, “subjective destitution” occurs (Tomlinson 2007: 190). This could also be referred to as a crisis of identity.

Art, according to Theodor Adorno, is as important to the self as society is, for art is both a reflection of society and a diversion from it, a crystallization of that society’s present ideals and future goals (Beard & Gloag 2005: 111). Christopher Butler (1994: xv) points to the idea that artistic endeavour at this time was “related to profound shifts in intellectual assumptions” and “dominant states of mind and feeling”. During the modernist era, these shifts were toward a positivistic way of thinking dominated by realism. Such shifts led to the emergence of the historical and systematic musicology of Guido Adler, as well as atonal music of Schoenberg, and later both serialism and neoclassicism (Beard & Gloag 2005: 111).
Modernists in general were greatly affected by the philosophies of Nietzsche, and phrases such as “what is needed above all is an absolute scepticism toward all inherited concepts” are typical of Modernist ideology (Butler 1994: 2). Unlike the contemporary era, intellectual life during this period was as important as political and economic factors in shaping the art of the time. In the contemporary era, utilitarian and economic factors are far more important than intellectual movements with regards to the production and consumption of art.

From the time of Monteverdi onwards, circa 1600, the trend towards definition of self as a “godlike hero or heroine” can be seen in the treatment of the solo voice (Howell et al 1992: 7). This ideal of individual identity as the focal point of society is taken to its height in the romantic era, but during the modernist period, a fast disintegration of this ideal occurred. The work of Schoenberg and Stravinsky at this time typify this disintegration, as they deliberately attempted to deconstruct the subjective nature of music by denying the importance of the subjective role of the performer and interpretation (Beard & Gloag 2005: 111).

An important element of modernist art was the avant-garde, a term reserved for referring to only the most progressive modernist art and artists, those taking up the vanguard of the modernist onslaught. Barthes says that in response to the avant-garde’s lack of popularity and alienation from society, the modernists attempted to “retreat ahead of it” (Dahlhaus 1987: 24).

It would appear that the modernist identity in Western art music is typified by a serious identity crisis, defined by the individual’s artistic estrangement from its society and sense of self, the “subjective destitution” referred to by Žižek as the signified order of things was purposefully brought tumbling down by artists and intellectuals of the time (Tomlinson 2007: 190). This had the effect of a loss of identification between art and the public, identification being the process by which the listener locates or finds his or herself in music, which led to further unpopularity and alienation (Beard & Gloag 2005: 89). The aesthetic ideas which create a sense of uniformity between “self” and “other”, the subjective and the collective, continued to disintegrate as the intentions of Western art music began to contrast
too greatly with the desires of the public domain which was becoming steadily commercialized (Slobin 1993: 41).

3.2 The difference between “old” and “new” musicology

The nature of musicological knowledge has been defined in the previous chapter. Now I would like to pursue a line of inquiry into what methods are employed to extract knowledge from music. Two have already been mentioned, that of the *a priori*, which is especially important in a contemporary/“new” musicology that does not want to depend on so-called empirical data. The other is *a posteriori*, empirical knowledge in other words, which was more important during the modernist era alongside preoccupations concerning the scientific legitimacy of musicology (Beard & Gloag 2005: 110).

But first, a more detailed distinction must be made between the different types of musicology and the cultural contexts they find themselves in. By this I am referring to the modern/postmodern split in musicology, which has led to the present “old”/“new” musicology dichotomy.

Unfortunately, modernist theory is not as simple as “new” musicologists would like it to seem. On the one hand the modernist period is marked by the concerns of the Enlightenment, a positivistic way of thinking dominated by realism and rationality (Holborn 2000: 540). On the other hand modernism is “related to profound shifts in intellectual assumptions” and “dominant states of mind and feeling” (Butler 1994: xv), in much the same way as the postmodern.

Although the modernist sub-movement termed *avant-garde*, spoken of earlier in this chapter, was considered to be the very forefront of progressiveness (Willett 2000: 60), it was as experimental and open-minded as anything postmodernism has produced. Under the sway of Nietzsche’s writings and philosophies, *avant-garde* ideology was also extremely skeptical towards “all inherited concepts” (Butler 1994: 2), which sounds suspiciously like the tenets of postmodernism.
Another contentious, anti-Enlightenment aspect of modernist thinking is the Frankfurt School, led by Adorno and Horkheimer, which will be discussed in the following chapter during the discussion of critical theory. “Old” critical theorists like Adorno were against traditional notions of thinking, and were particularly influenced by Nietzschean philosophy (Hanssen 2004: 281). These are only two of the many contradictions to the postmodern view of the objectivist, positivistic, Enlightenment-fuelled modernist past. However, Adorno’s endeavours were still Modernist in the sense that he was “still operating within and on behalf of the autonomous German canon, which he continued to regard as a repository of truth” (McClary 2007: 61).

In order to define this modernist/postmodern dichotomy, I would like to describe one of the most heated debates in musicology that I have come across, which occurred in the period of transition between what is termed the modernist/”old” musicology as opposed to the postmodern/”new” musicology. This debate between Kerman, Kramer and Tomlinson concerned the prevalence of “modernist” ideology in the discipline, beginning with Kerman’s article “How We Got into Analysis and How to Get Out” (1980). This discussion was driven by a desire to shed the preoccupations and conservative viewpoints of modernist musicology, and give room for a “new breadth and flexibility” within the discipline (Kerman 1994: 30).

Tomlinson believes that “a postmodern musicology will be characterized most distinctively by its insistent questioning of its own methods and practices” (1993: 21), which he believes is precisely the opposite of what the “old” musicology attempted to do. The most obvious manifestations of this opposite are clearly defined in the grand narratives of modernism, which attempted to create “a frame of reference in which people have faith” (Lechte 2008: 324). The effect of abandoning this pursuit in favour of “insistent questioning” is to effectively destroy the concept of objectivity.

What this modern/postmodern dichotomy essentially points to is an epistemological split in the discipline, not merely an ideological split but a methodological split. How knowledge is extracted from music is changing, as well as our understanding of the nature of that knowledge, and the importance of that knowledge. Lochead and Auner (2002: 6) state that postmodern epistemology is “non-foundational”, that “no single perspectival knowledge is
privileged and hence no particular way of understanding the world is true in any absolute sense”.

The epistemological methodologies of modernist/“old” musicology, predominantly concerned with music analysis, ethnomusicology, aesthetics and historical musicology, are entirely different from those of the postmodern/“new” musicology. The “new” musicology is primarily concerned with the justification or rejection of the “old” musicological traditions, as well as engaging in “self-reflective discourse” (“talk about talk”) in an attempt to redefine almost every aspect of our understanding of music (Hooper 2006: 1, 6).

The *Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Critical Musicology Series*, to which McClary has contributed, and which otherwise forms a large part of the textual basis of this dissertation, is an example of how the “new” musicology is redefining itself. The field of “critical musicology” is synonymous with “new” musicology, although the use of the word “critical” points to the discipline’s association with critical theory (Hooper 2006: 9). This is one example of the discipline branching out to include others, in what can be termed “interdisciplinary movement”, mostly into the fields of sociology, linguistics and the humanities (Beard & Gloag 2005: 122).

Beard and Gloag (2005: 38) describe critical musicology as an attempt to continually rethink musicology “to avoid establishing new orthodoxies and grand narratives”, and generally attempts to do this through finding connections between analysis and sociological aspects surrounding music. Critical musicology is also engaged in a critique of the musicological conventions of the past. Key ideas that critical musicology tackles are: the role of the body in music; “fetishizing music as text”; re-evaluation of the concept of genre; the role of the subject in music, as performer and listener; economic aspects of music production; the effect of politics on music; and aspects of music education. (Beard & Gloag 2005: 38.)

This interdisciplinarity within the discipline reflects the heterogeneity of the postmodern, alongside the anti-Enlightenment stance of the period (Best & Kellner 1991: 35). This stance was taken because, as Horkheimer and Adorno wrote, the “dialectic of the Enlightenment”
led to a situation in which “reason turned into its opposite and modernity’s promises of liberation masked forms of oppression and domination” (Best & Kellner 1991: 3).

This is only a very brief overview of the primary differences between the two historical/stylistic epochs of modernism and postmodernism and how these differences have come to bear on the discipline of musicology. What follows in the next section is a more in-depth analysis of the sub-disciplines of the “old” musicology, and how they generate musical knowledge (that is, what is their epistemology?).

3.3 Epistemological deductions concerning the “old” musicology

Before I begin analysing the “old” musicology in terms of the previously discussed definitions and descriptions of epistemology, knowledge, and the nature of the “old” musicology, I would first like to speak about generalization.

We all have the capacity and tendency to generalize. It is convenient to elevate certain fashionable notions above others to prove some or other point in research. Not all musicological writings that predate the postmodern era depict a rigidly positivistic point of view inspired by modernist tradition, as the prevailing opinions would suggest. There are always exceptions, and in this regard, I ask the reader to take into account that I must make generalizations concerning the “old” musicology because this dissertation is not an in-depth study of the “old” musicology, and I am relying on secondary texts for my research in this regard.

However, these second-hand generalizations are useful because they show how musicologists of the past categorized their field, and also how contemporary musicologists have chosen to describe this musicology now termed “old” by the “new”. Especially evident in the following discussions of music analysis, historical musicology, the aesthetics of music and ethnomusicology, are aspects of the “old” musicology that are currently being criticized, rejected and reacted against in the work of “new” musicologists. In this regard my accounts of these sub-disciplines of musicology are genealogical (the subject of genealogy is explained more thoroughly in Chapter 4.5).


3.3.1 Music analysis

Music analysis formed an important part of musicological enquiry during the modernist era, and was indicative of certain structuralist and positivist concerns that typify that period, concerns which are no longer considered valid. Music analysis has a clearly defined epistemology as it is currently perceived, and will now be discussed in more detail because it is one of the fundamental methods musicologists have used, and still use, to create and define musical knowledge.

Music analysis generally seeks to expose the underlying harmonic structure of a musical work, and to show that it is organicist and unified as a result, which in turn proves the value of the work according to “normalized structures observed and codified in music theory” (Beard & Gloag 2005: 14). The final product of music analysis is considered to be empirical data, following a “scientific mode” of enquiry, although that is now contested (Samson 1999: 45, 46).

Articles by “new” musicologists such as Samson’s “Analysis in Context” (1999) and Kerman’s “How We Got into Analysis and How To Get Out” (1980), Kramer’s “The Musicology of the Future” (1992) (a response to Kerman’s article), and Tomlinson’s “Musical Pasts and Postmodern Musicologies: A Response to Lawrence Kramer” (1993) are evidence of the contemporary debate over the nature and value of music analysis (Beard & Gloag 2005: 14, 122, 123). The problem they feel the need to address is that music analysis has been used to aesthetically validate a musical work, and consequently it has been used to steer value judgments that lead to the work’s exclusion from or acceptance into the musical canon (Cook 1998: 95). I agree that something that holds such an excess of cultural power over the shape and future of music, like music analysis, ought to be thoroughly questioned.

The epistemology of music analysis is to analyse a musical text in terms of certain formal, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic tendencies which substantiate/justify the “true belief” that a valuable piece of music exhibits organicist and unifying elements. This produces musical knowledge in the form of an analysis which can then be used by musicologists to
substantiate further claims about the nature of the musical work, as well as be used in comparison to other such analyses and their accompanying works.

For this knowledge to serve a purpose, it must substantiate some claim to musical meaning. Once this claim has been made, any of the work’s attributes could supposedly be used to substantiate it. But is the initial claim correct? Does the work’s harmonic structure expose anything valuable about the work? Does the presence or absence of “germ” motifs, or even unifying elements, have any intrinsic meaning?

In my opinion, what we encounter here is a self-creating system or “autopoietic system” in which “the critical variable of the system that is held constant is that system’s own organization” (Beer 2000: 59). Because people intrinsically know when hearing certain music that it is of value, musical knowledge must be generated somehow in order to justify that “true belief” and produce evidence of what we have experienced. So musicologists are needed to create believable justifications.

In the words of Samson, analysts create a “theoretically predetermined and pre-analytic concept of the object to be analysed” (1999: 46), and analysis is “bound to substantiate the conventions/claims of its historic and traditional context” (1999: 45). It would appear that because of the power generated by musical analysis and its pre-determined concepts, one cannot question analytical claims without also being accused of scepticism towards the associated conventions and claims, which have entered the realm of belief already. Perhaps that is why any attempt to discredit or disprove the knowledge created through analysis is bound to meet a strong outcry in the scholarly community.

However, I believe that the essential realization is not that analysis is unable to create anything meaningful, but that people have always created meaning for themselves when discourse enters the conceptual and artistic realm. Analysis is a self-creating system, and within a self-creating system, the search for meaning, especially the meaning of something as intangible as music, is bound to be participated in at the very borders of what we consider to be empirical.
It appears that the majority of musical knowledge is built on *a priori* discourse, with musicologists desperately clinging to the vestiges of empirical data and trying to build some kind of sense out of music that can stand up to the review of a scientifically minded culture and society. This is an opinion that this dissertation is geared towards explaining, and the justification of which will be done, ironically, through *a priori* methods, which are essentially the only methods outside of empirical musicology that can be used to generate musical knowledge.

### 3.3.2 Historical musicology

Any account of historical musicology must necessarily begin with the mention of Adler’s treatise, *Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft (The Scope, Method and Aim of Musicology)*, published in 1885, in which he attempted to categorize the discipline, with historical musicology as one main category alongside systematic musicology (Williams 2001: 1).

Historical musicology, like all historical accounts, attempts to take facts, like the details of a composer’s life, and convert that information into an interpretive narrative. As Haydon (1941: 251) says, “[e]very historical account is narrative insofar as it attempts to relate events in a temporal sequence”. Despite the age of this source, our perception of historical accounts has not changed since 1941, and historical narratives are, to this day, bound to fulfil the conventions (such as temporal sequence) dictated to them by the narrative structures they employ.

Furthermore, these narratives are hermeneutically inclined because there is no “God’s eye view” of what really happened in the majority of history, especially prior to the twentieth century. History is cobbled together by historians out of disjointed information, and as such is open to all and any of the author’s weaknesses or biases through the hermeneutic process. But because of the foundation of history writing in supposedly “hard facts”, these ideological leanings are often overlooked, and historical accounts are incorporated into the sphere of belief in a society on a “reductive” level (Best & Kellner 1991: 35).
In the writing of history, there is always some motive, a “true belief” which the historian/historical musicologist wishes to enunciate and justify via the narrative. This is evident in most texts through a tendency towards “a certain bias, whether nationalistic, religious, racial, or otherwise” (Haydon 1942: 251). However, this bias is often misrecognized as the historian’s “desire for correct interpretation” (Beard & Gloag 2005: 78). Sometimes, as in the postmodern era, this bias is directed towards a subjective or post-structuralist point of view, as opposed to more traditional viewpoints. But a bias it remains, no matter how sound the reasoning behind such a bias is embedded in postmodern theory. It would seem that there is no escaping the tendency toward metanarrative formation.

It should be made clear that modernist musicologists were aware of these biases that become enmeshed in the process of history writing. For example, Dahlhaus tried to move away from the use of biographical information to justify musical meaning. He did this in order to avoid the “construction of history as a selective process[,] whereby certain facts are given more priority than others” (Williams 2001: 14).

What occurs in such narratives is referred to as the “hermeneutic circle”, a term first developed by Heidegger in his work *Being and Time* (2005 [1927]) and developed also in “The origin of the work of art” (2009 [1935]). Bowie describes the “hermeneutic circle” as “the attempt to understand the part via the whole and the whole via the parts” (1993: 157). Again, through the discovery of circular reasoning, we encounter the idea of self-creation or autopoiesis, which seems to point to the fact that meaning in such a situation is only meaningful (and believed to be expressive of actual knowledge) as long as it partakes in an agreement among historians over the dominating bias (or “justified, true belief”) (Huemer 2002: 435). In such an autopoietic system, when the “intentionality of the author” comes into question through the emergence of new perspectives, biases and “true beliefs”, criticism and disavowal of past interpretations closely follows (Beard & Gloag 2005: 78). As long as those interpretations and biases are maintained, the product is considered and accepted as knowledge.

Therefore, the epistemology (theory and justification of knowledge) behind the branch of musicology termed historical, is to take factual information, and incorporate it into a
narrative in order to substantiate/justify some bias (belief) regarding the manner in which this information should be interpreted. Such a narrative is a mixture of empirical data and *a priori* reasoning. In my view, this is the manner in which historical musicology produces knowledge.

I believe that once this knowledge is incorporated as part of a belief-system concerning the subject of discourse, it becomes “general knowledge”. In order for such a belief to then be dislodged once it has reached this elevated status, another narrative needs to compete with it for believers, and essentially “win” the argument. Then this knowledge will replace the previous kind.

When we consider that knowledge is “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435), it does indeed seem that “the truth” in this situation is entirely relative and subjective. Not surprisingly, this is one of the major claims of postmodernism and the “new musicology”, which has begun to move away from the idea of facts “speaking for themselves” by making “a clear distinction between subject and object” (Lechte 2008: 299).

**3.3.3 The aesthetics of music**

Although aesthetics is called “the philosophical study of art” (Speake 1984: 6), it is no formless enterprise. It aims to find the value of a work, or justify a “true belief” of value (or lack thereof) (Quinton 2000: 12). As Beard and Gloag (2005: 4) remark, aesthetics “is also associated with ideology in that specific sets of beliefs situate specific aesthetic responses and interpretations”.

What is restricted under such a condition is the type of knowledge produced. Musicology is, in this regard, epistemologically conditioned to produce only what it wants to see. If musicologists, under the sway of ideology, need to find value to support their “true beliefs”, they have *a priori* reasoning and the tool of narrative at their disposal to justify their claims.

The philosophers Baumgarten and Kant, and later Schiller, Hegel and Schopenhauer, were mainly responsible for the understanding and traditional views of aesthetics of the
modernist period (Speake 1984: 6, 7). Aesthetics grew out of the evaluation of taste and beauty in art to include concepts such as its moral and social value (Speake 1984: 7).

Although it may seem barbarically simplistic to reduce the entire field of aesthetic enquiry to a value judgment of good or bad, unfortunately aesthetic claims from the modernist era support this good/bad dichotomy of value. For example, in Lee’s *Perception and Aesthetic Value* written in 1938 (p. 88), aesthetic value is described as “a property attributed to an object by virtue of the fact that it may be perceptually apprehended with pleasure or displeasure”. Haydon wrote in 1941 (p. 147) that “the measure of aesthetic value of a work of art is *the pleasure arising in the aesthetic experience*”.

Essentially, aesthetic valuations are created on an emotional level, and as such are based on intuitive judgment (Haydon 1941: 145). Art that is aesthetically appealing, according to Kant, is connected with the ideology of genius, and gives rise to a chain of “aesthetic ideas” which can only be felt, not expressed, referred to by Kivy (2002: 57, 58) as “representational deep content”. But Kant also believed that form gave rise to beauty, and consequently proved the inherent genius and value of a work of art (Kivy 2002: 58). This provided further credibility and justification for the precepts of music analysis, which was not difficult to achieve considering that aesthetics is more a collection of opinionated ideologies than a field of actual research. Were aesthetic valuations to be based on empirical data rather than *a priori* reasoning, popularity would become the gauge of value. Interestingly enough, this is what has occurred over the last century alongside the development of the culture industry (specifically in the field of popular music), the success or failure of which is measured according to the music’s popularity, or lack thereof, in the marketplace and on the charts.

The impact of the economy and industry on the field of aesthetics in the modernist era should not be underestimated. Economic aspects shaped what type of art was produced (reactionary or popular), and this resulted in the control of what would be considered aesthetically viable. Reactionary elements formed organizations such as Schoenberg and Berg’s *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*, or Cowell and Varèse’s *Pan American Association of Composers*. These composers defined themselves by upholding the opinion
that modernism was an “aesthetic strategy that fought against the domination and corruption of taste by business interests” (Botstein 2001: 868).

Groups and composers most notable for their endorsement of a reactionary ethos were: the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg, Berg and Webern), the “French-Russian axis” (Stravinsky), German Expressionism (Busoni and Hindemith), as well as “indigenous modernisms” (Bartók and Janáček) (Botstein 2001: 868). Concerning the scope of music history and aesthetics, the culture industry clearly had extremely far-reaching consequences.

If we take for granted that the field of aesthetics has produced knowledge, what then is its epistemology?

A musicologist takes a musical experience, evaluates it from the perspective of concepts of beauty of form, genius and emotion, and comes to a conclusion based on his judgment of these properties. If the context is modernist Europe, and the work is Berg’s Wozzeck, the avant-garde musicologist might feel inclined to support such a work as aesthetically pleasing because of his or her ideology and context. This will then form the basis of a critical dissertation in which a “true belief” is justified, and will lead to the work’s inclusion into the musical canon if the musicologist’s reasoning is compelling and influential enough. As the narrative is involved in similar discourses, it becomes culturally powerful and begins to exert its own influence over the shape and future of art. The more cultural power it holds and imitators it gains, in a self-similar system it becomes a truly valuable and necessary part of human history regardless of its original or intrinsic worth. It has now become the yardstick against which future art is compared.

I find this realization of the relativism inherent in musicological thinking past and present entails a certain measure of discomfort, as it is realized that previously unquestioned processes of ascertaining value have been discovered to be essentially flawed subjective, human creations wielding vast amounts of power over the success and future of art.
3.3.4 Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is a form of comparative musicology that incorporates the discipline of anthropology as well as national folklore movements which aim to preserve forms of national heritage such as music (Williams 2001: 104). It has been referred to as a form of “comparative” musicology on account of the fact that the primary focus of ethnomusicology, prior to the advent of the “new” musicology, is the comparison of “folk music and non-European musical systems” to Western art music (Haydon 1941: 216).

Alexander Ellis (1814-1890) was considered, by contemporaries such as Haydon, Hornebostel and Lach, to be the founder of comparative musicology because “he consciously employed comparison, and […] he applied objective, scientific methods” (Haydon 1941: 217). Famous for their contribution to the field, Bartók and Kodály engaged in “scientific” research into the structural principles of folk music, and incorporated formal, rhythmic and melodic aspects of folk music into their compositions (Morgan 1993: 14). Janáček’s collection of folk-material through fieldwork included the transcription of over a thousand songs, however, Janáček falls outside of the category of comparative musicology because he believed folk-music should be understood “on its own terms” (Beckerman & Samson 1993: 136). Failure to view folk-music “on its own terms” leads to comparison and unfair value judgements, and even racism in some cases.

Adler defined the epistemology of ethnomusicology as “the comparison of the musical works – especially the folksongs – of the various peoples of the earth for ethnographical purposes, and the classification of them according to their various forms” (Haydon 1941: 217). Comparative aspects take the form of narratives such as Bartók’s “The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music” in which he analysed influence of peasant and folk idioms on certain composers, and the use of folk music in their compositional practices (Beckerman & Samson 1993: 136).

The knowledge produced by comparative narratives is often considered redundant in the contemporary era because the musicologists that produced them were of the opinion that Western art music was somehow intrinsically more valuable and “tasteful” than these
“lesser” and “primitive” forms of music. Such viewpoints infiltrate the discipline, and have been criticised from a variety of levels pertaining to the racial and ideological dimensions of comparative musicology by musicologists such as Radano and Bohlman (2000: xi) in their book *Music and the Racial Imagination*.

### 3.4 Summary

The historical context of modernism and the “modernist identity”

- Modernism as an historical epoch occurred from about 1883 to about 1914.
- The modernist outlook was characterised by positivism, realism, structuralism and autonomy, which were also the ideals of the Enlightenment, which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century.
- The concept of identity refers to “self” and “other”.
- Discourse (modernist), society, language and music represented “others” to the individuals of its time by creating “reflexive relationships” with them. Disruption of this relationship could lead to “subjective destitution” and identity crises.
- In the realm of music, modernism is typified by the historical and systematic musicology of Guido Adler, the atonality and serialism of Schoenberg, and the neoclassicism of Stravinsky.
- The term *avant-garde* is used to refer to the most progressive of the modernist arts and artists.
- The “modernist identity” was characterised by “subjective destitution” and identity crises because of alienation from its society which was steadily becoming popularised.

The difference between “old” and “new” musicology

- *A priori* knowledge (created through the faculty of reason), is especially important in contemporary musicology, while *a posteriori* knowledge (empirically based knowledge), was more important during the modernist era alongside preoccupations concerning the scientific legitimacy of musicology, which are less important to the discipline of “new musicology”.
• The debate over “old”/ “new” musicology’s modernist foundations was primarily discussed by foremost “new” musicologists: Kerman, Kramer and Tomlinson.

• I believe the difference between “old” and “new” musicology can be traced to an epistemological split in the discipline, which was brought about by a shift from modernism to postmodernism as cultural dominant.

• The “new” musicology is primarily epistemologically different from the “old” because it includes other disciplines in musicological debate, called “interdisciplinarity”.

Music analysis

• Music analysts find the underlying harmonic structure of a work to expose its organicist origins, which in turn proves the value of the work and substantiates its inclusion into the canon.

• Music analysis was considered a “scientific mode” of enquiry.

• I believe that the epistemology of music analysis is as follows: The musical text is analysed in terms of certain formal, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic tendencies which substantiate/justify the “true belief” that a valuable piece of music exhibits organicist and unifying elements. This produces musical knowledge in the form of a musical analysis which can then be used by musicologists to substantiate further claims about the value and meaning of music.

• This is a “self-creating” system (called an autopoietic system, according to Maturana) that creates a “theoretically predetermined and pre-analytic concept of the object to be analysed”. It does not discover “the truth”, it creates “truth”.

Historical musicology

• Historical musicology originated in Adler’s treatise, The Scope, Method and Aim of Musicology (1885), alongside the second category of systematic musicology.

• The epistemology of historical musicology is as follows: Music historians take facts, such as the details of a composer’s life, and convert that information into an interpretive narrative. These interpretations are subjective and “reductive”, and used to legitimize the historian’s bias as to how the composer/subject should be viewed.
The aesthetics of music

- Aesthetics is “the philosophical study of art”, pioneered by philosophers Baumgarten and Kant, and later Schiller, Hegel and Schopenhauer. The field of aesthetics includes concepts such as the moral and social value of art.

- The epistemology of aesthetics of music aims to find the value of a work, or justify a “true belief” of value (or lack thereof), as well as the “genius” of the artist.

- In the modernist era, economic aspects influenced what was considered aesthetically valuable, giving birth to early popular music (which pandered to popular tastes). Modernist (primarily avant-garde) composers of Western art music fought against this by creating the opposite of what society expected of them, specifically those belonging to the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg, Berg and Webern), the “French-Russian axis” (Stravinsky), German Expressionism (Busoni and Hindemith), as well as “indigenous modernisms” (Bartók and Janáček).

Ethnomusicology

- Ethnomusicology has also been called “comparative musicology” because the sub-discipline was mainly engaged in comparing “folk music and non-European musical systems” to Western art music. Ethnomusicology began with Bartók and Kodály, who engaged in “scientific” research into the structural principles of folk music. Janáček also collected and documented folk music, and is considered to be one of the first ethnomusicologists.

- Adler describes the epistemology of ethnomusicology as “the comparison of the musical works – especially the folksongs – of the various peoples of the earth for ethnographical purposes, and the classification of them according to their various forms”.

- Comparative musicology has been criticized as racist and culturally biased towards Western art music tradition, which has been viewed as superior.
4.1 The state of critical/“new” musicology in the context of postmodernism

My analysis of four of McClary’s texts included in *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (2007) will attempt to define the epistemology of “new”/postmodern musicology. I would prefer not to rely on secondary texts for epistemological analyses of the “new” as I did for the “old” musicology because of the complexity of the discipline in its contemporary state. For this reason I have chosen a representative for the “new” musicology, Susan McClary, whose texts I will analyse in the following chapters, once relevant postmodern debates have been discussed.

What I would like to describe in this chapter is the cultural dominant of postmodernism (which is the intellectual climate Susan McClary and other “new” musicologists and thinkers find themselves in) and explain how this might affect knowledge formation with regards to musicology. An evaluation of my forthcoming analyses of McClary’s texts in the following chapters will provide substantiation for these claims.

In the discussion of interdisciplinarity in this chapter, I have quoted Leeuwen, who said that “in pluralist models [of interdisciplinary narrative] issues and problems are central, and it is recognized that these may rightfully belong to a number of different disciplines” (2005: 6), such as the issues and problems of modernism and postmodernism for example.

This dissertation aims to show how the “new” musicology differs from the “old” with regard to the creation of knowledge about music, which I have referred to as “musicological epistemology”. The “old” musicology was intellectually situated in modernist discourse, which provided a strong foundation epistemologically. In the previous chapter I included
short descriptions of how the various categories of “old” musicology function epistemologically.

By way of contrast, I have undertaken an epistemological analysis of four of the core articles/musicological narratives of interdisciplinary, “new” musicologist Susan McClary, in order to ascertain the “nature, scope and limits” of the knowledge she creates through the writing of these narratives. If epistemology is described in the contemporary era as “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435), I attempt to investigate how McClary has justified her “true beliefs” in order to generate knowledge about music, within the intellectual context of postmodernism.

What I have learnt as a result of my research is that through the inclusion of postmodern debates into the field of musicology, this modernist/“old” musicological epistemology has been deconstructed in light of various discoveries about the nature of truth and reality (relativism, subjectivity, and so on). Many of the “old” modes of thinking have been found to be susceptible to paradoxes of logic (aporia) because of their dependence on narrative habits and structures (such as the grand narrative and metanarratives, discussed in Chapter 4.3.2 and 4.3.3) imbedded in pre-existing discourse.

Essentially, the entire context that gave meaning to certain presumptions about music has changed through the inclusion of core postmodern debates and theories, particularly (although not exclusively) those of Lyotard and Derrida which concern the effect of language on discursive disciplines, and the thought structures that underpin our approaches to knowledge within these disciplines. How these and other postmodern theories have affected the construction of musical knowledge in the work of “new” musicologist Susan McClary is discussed in detail in the four chapters that directly follow this one.

The “new” musicology, in pitting itself against modernism and the “old” musicology, has pigeon-holed itself in the postmodern category. Regardless of this self-categorization, these musicologists would have found themselves engaging with postmodern debates nonetheless, especially in a heterogeneous context where intellectual life and art freely mingle, as they do in the context of musicology. A discussion of postmodern debates will
make up the bulk of this chapter because I believe that knowledge of these ideas is pivotal to understanding the intellectual context of McClary’s writings, as well as her motives for writing such narratives.

Fundamental to the contemporary context is the field of critical theory. McClary is considered a critical musicologist, and consequently forms part of the *Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Critical Musicology Series*. Considering that many of the topics discussed in this chapter directly or indirectly relate to the field of musicology, it may be safe to assume that many of the “new” musicologists are critical theorists, and that an understanding of critical theory is pivotal to understanding their work. The word “critical” is specifically used to categorize the musicological writings included in the *Ashgate Series* in relation to (and in opposition to) the “old” musicological categories such as systematic or historical musicology, which may be critical towards their subjects, but are not self-critical of their own fundamental beliefs.

Critical theory is described by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (2004: 131) as a theoretical standpoint in opposition to “traditional theory”, which appeals to the notion of absolute truth, and is consequently used as a tool of performativity. Critical theory is “based on a principle of dualism and wary of syntheses and reconciliations”, which makes it impervious to performative ends. In the words of Lyotard, critical theory cannot be used for “programming the system”.

The Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Pollock, Marcuse, Adorno and Habermas) is the main source from which critical theory stems (Lopez & Potter 2001: 14; Rush 2004: 1), however, there seems to be no consensus definition of what critical theory is exactly (Held 1980: 14). Although this lack of definition is really one of critical theory’s defining attributes, there are certain tendencies that can be recognized in the work of the Frankfurt School, such as the move away from empirical analysis (especially in the work of Adorno) (Ingram 1990: 137).

Adorno and Horkheimer are representative of the “pessimistic phase of the old Critical Theory” according to Hanssen, in which they espoused the ideas of Nietzsche, specifically those relating to the abandonment of reason (2004: 281). Considering that Adorno
contributed significantly to the field of musicology, his ideas have had a marked effect on the writing of musicological critique. For example, “new” musicologist Subotnik has engaged in musicological discourse based on an “Adornian framework” (Beard & Gloag 2005: 41). As the analysis of McClary’s article “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year” (1983) in the following chapter will attest, so has McClary.

Ingram describes recent critical theory (second generation Frankfurt School, most notably the work of Habermas) as “an interdisciplinary synthesis of philosophy and science” (1990: 137), and this reflects Habermas’s desire to retain certain aspects of the Enlightenment in critical thinking (reason, for example), a sentiment which he expressed in the writing of “Modernity: An Unfinished Project” (1980) (Hanssen 2004: 280).

Simons considers that almost all of the icons associated with postmodern debate are critical theorists, and the field of critical theory is invariably connected with the concepts of “Marxism and post-Marxism, semiotics and discourse analysis, structuralism and post-structuralism, ideology critique of all varieties, deconstruction, queer theory, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, postmodernism, as well as the descendants of Frankfurt School Critical Theory” (2004: 1). Perhaps that is why the field resists strict definition. However, we see all of the above-mentioned debates emerging in the field of “new” musicology, and so I consider “new” to be synonymous with “critical”.

4.2 The theoretical basis of postmodernism: Lyotard’s The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge (1984)

A study of the subject of postmodernism in almost any context invariably leads back to Lyotard’s book La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir (The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge), first published in 1979. This book is especially important to my dissertation because it concerns the nature and function of postmodern knowledge, and therefore, postmodern epistemology. It has also been used as a veritable textbook on how to be postmodern, and what postmodern thinking entails. As Sim (2001: 3) states in the very first paragraph of the Routledge Companion to Postmodernism, Lyotard’s La condition postmoderne (1979) “is widely regarded as the most powerful theoretical expression of
postmodernism”. I have not come across a single book through my research on postmodernism that does not agree with this notion.

I would like to make it clear that I find the intellectual world’s dependence on this singular text personally unnerving. What if Lyotard was wrong? (And by Lyotard’s own standards we should assume that he is wrong, in order to remain sufficiently critical of inherited ideologies.)

Modernist discourse constructed systems and rules for the generation of knowledge under claims of rational consensus, based on the objectivist discoveries of the Enlightenment era discussed in Chapter 3 and summarised in various places throughout this dissertation. Almost all postmodern debates refer back to Lyotard’s book because it is primarily concerned with the discourse on knowledge. As a result, postmodernism is essentially a movement that aims to re-evaluate the ways in which we have generated knowledge up until this point in the various disciplines, and this is especially true of Lyotard’s approach and understanding of what it is to be postmodern.

Lyotard’s discourse concerning the subject of knowledge no longer simply concerns a discipline as a “thing in itself”, but focuses on why we have chosen these various things to define our worldview as an act of choice, and not based on concepts of universal truth. The reason why the “thing in itself” (whether it is, for example, science, philosophy or musicology) inherently concerns language is because all constructions of “things in themselves” are constructed, defined and legitimized through the act of communication. Whether it is the language in which we describe and explain the thing to ourselves, or the language we use to describe and explain it to others, every “thing” is ultimately mediated by language. Not even language itself is exempt from this: language is used to explain language, albeit a paradoxical notion. These paradoxes can be referred in terms of autopoiesis, hermeneutic circles, or strange loops, such as the “liar paradox”, in which the Cretan Epimenides claimed that “All Cretans are liars” (Hofstadter 1980: 17). This paradox inherent in language is a clue as to how meaning is generated, and the acknowledgement of this paradox is at the heart of our postmodern distrust of the knowledge generated in the past.
“Postmodern knowledge”, Lyotard (1984: xxv) remarks, “refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.” The incommensurable must be tolerated or else we are destined to cling to the redundant ideologies of the past, now condescendingly termed “modern”, and redundant in light of our relativist knowledge. We must be sensitive to differences because of our realization that objectivity is impossible, and “the truth” is a subjective creation. Toleration and sensitivity have become postmodern catch-words. The modernist era had no need of these attributes because its theories and beliefs were backed by an almost divine universal structure, not to mention universal agreement among theorists and thinkers with regards to knowledge. Anyone truly engaging with postmodern discourse will sooner or later find themselves needing vast supplies of tolerance and sensitivity, as our greatly valued and deeply imbedded belief systems are exposed and violated.

Central to Lyotard’s discussion is the concept of legitimacy, and the “apparatus” of legitimization is the metanarrative (which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.3.2). I believe that in the context of epistemology this idea of legitimacy finds its synonym in “justification”. As will be seen in the following chapters, at least with regards to postmodern musicology, justification surely is assured through the writing of legitimizing narratives, especially those that make reference to pre-existing, acceptable narratives. But unlike the musicology of the past, what Susan McClary and other postmodern writers are dealing with is a situation in which “the narrative function is losing its great functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (Lyotard 1984: xxiv).

In the following chapters I discuss McClary’s narratives as generating what I refer to as “context specific knowledge”, and in this regard Lyotard has said that contemporary narratives “only give rise to institutions in patches – local determinism” (1984: xxiv). The interrelations between these institutions are not always so successful, because the language games that legitimize one are not necessarily communicable to another. This is not because of some linguistic dysfunction that, once solved, will lead to discovery of the rational system or structure that unifies everything. The dysfunction that we are encountering is in our own thinking, that there has to be some sort of unified, rational basis for everything we discover.
This is “the great goal” referred to by Lyotard (1984: xxiv), a goal that we are sacrificing out of necessity in the light of postmodern knowledge.

If I analyse Lyotard’s own narrative with regards to how it legitimizes itself, it is clear to me that he has resurrected a new metanarrative with its own rules of legitimization, one that specifically applies to the generation of postmodern knowledge. Lyotard’s text is a manifesto on how we are to generate postmodern knowledge. It stipulates exactly what postmodern knowledge is, and what it is not. However, it is considered to be different in that, supposedly, he makes no appeal to universals. What is postmodern, as defined by Lyotard, seems to come directly from Lyotard himself, and not some outside source. What he describes in *The Postmodern Condition* has the appearance of being prescriptive and prophetic, and especially so because of the type of language he uses; however, his stance and perspective is totally subject to the context in which he finds himself. This text has consequently been used as a guide to future behaviour instead of being seen as a description of epistemological activity during the time it was written. What postmodernism was to Lyotard in 1979 when the first edition of *The Postmodern Condition* was published is not what postmodernism is today. Lyotard described his interpretation of his context, but postmodernism today is built on an interpretation and actualization of Lyotard’s interpretation of events in 1979. This realization invariably leads to a feeling of deflation, and I have found that the proceeding epistemological analyses often lead to this sensation.

Whether or not we would like to admit it, the obsessive reliance on Lyotard’s text has constructed another universal.

Even texts that are inherently postmodern, and make continuous reference to postmodernism, are riddled with submerged universals, subtextual references for the sake of legitimacy. Right or wrong, the burden of noticing and questioning these universals in our own written work is part of the “Postmodern Condition”. Lyotard openly states that he has no solution to this problem of legitimacy other than to suggest a spirit of tolerance and sensitivity towards one-another’s views.
Lyotard’s first chapter is called “The field: knowledge in computerised societies”, and concerns the effect that the computer age is having on knowledge and epistemology. “Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange” (Lyotard 1984: 4). This “mercantilization of knowledge” is essentially utilitarian, and in the proceeding discussion of McClary’s epistemology, I have adhered to a similar view of her work. The worldview with regards to knowledge has fundamentally altered from a search for truth, to a search for usefulness and commercial viability. One may ask, how is McClary’s musicology affected by the “mercantilization of knowledge”? In which case I would argue that academia and the production of research papers is also an economic activity, financially lucrative for both the researcher and the institution in which he or she works. McClary has remained intellectually credible through her acts of intellectual rebellion in the field of musicology. However, she has behaved in accordance with the times in this regard, even if she was one of the first in her discipline to do so. As Lyotard says, reflecting the attitudes of his (and McClary’s) intellectual context in 1984, “invention is always born of dissention” (1984: xxv).

In the section concerning the legitimation of postmodern knowledge, Lyotard expresses the sentiment that all forms of knowledge (including scientific knowledge) legitimizes itself through some form of narrative. This is because a statement must fulfil specific recognizable conditions (“in general, conditions of internal consistency and experimental verification”) (Lyotard 1984: 8) in order to be considered an accepted contribution to a discipline. Lyotard (1984: 9) raises a fearful question at the end of the section on legitimacy: “who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?” This question is the opening quotation of my dissertation, and lies at the heart of my research.

What is constant in all fields of knowledge, is the creation of knowledge through engaging with some form of linguistically based narrative. As such, my discussion of postmodern debates, after this introduction to the theories of Lyotard, will continue with the subject of narrative, which was central to his work, and which Lyotard refers to as “the quintessential form of customary knowledge” (Lyotard 1984: 19).
4.3 Postmodern narratives: grand narrative, metanarrative and micronarrative

4.3.1 Defining narrative

Narrative can be described as “the linguistic recounting or telling of events” (Prince 2003: 58) in a temporal sequence (Abbott 2008: 16). Discourse is described by Benveniste (1971: 209) as taking place in the present tense, assuming “a speaker and hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the hearer in some way”. This “disembodied voice”, confidently proclaiming the truth, has added much to the seemingly objective nature of narrative discourse (Cobley 2001: 175).

Postmodern theorists like Jameson consider narrative formation to be the “central function or instance of the human mind” (1981: 13). Cobley (2001: 183) also states that the concept of “narrative is absolutely crucial to an understanding of postmodernism”. Contemporary narrative discourse (and consequently musicological narrative) is the resultant coalescence of several factors. Each has affected and added to the way in which narratives create knowledge.

These embedded notions about how a contemporary narrative should be construed are the result of millennia of cultural tradition, beginning with the initial tendencies inherent in human language formation, encompassing the entire tradition of story-telling (myth, religion, novel and poetry writing), philosophical introspection, argumentation, philosophical argumentation (rhetoric), and many more aspects (Abbott 2008: vii).

It would be impossible to account for all the influences, but all form a part of the overall epistemology of musicological narrative, via the medium of “narrative” itself. The most obvious components of contemporary narrative will now be discussed separately, with regards to how they have affected certain facets of musicological epistemology.
4.3.2 Grand narratives and metanarratives

Grand narratives can be described as an artifice of modernity (Lyotard 2004: 123), and are characterized by an attempt to create a link between the past, present and future, a “definite rational plan” in the words of Kant (1963: 12). Despite this being an artifice of modernity, we are not suddenly outside of the realm of the grand narrative just because we have entered a postmodern era, even though the subject has drawn much attention and criticism.

Malpas states that a grand narrative “tells the story of the progress and development of narratives” in a way that “tie[s] everything together under a scheme that sets out to explain the world and people’s place in it” (2001: 7). He mentions the grand narrative of Christianity, also Marxism, fascism, Darwinism and the Enlightenment as examples of grand narratives (Malpas 2001: 7). In this sense, grand narratives most often reach the status of belief, and cross over into the realm of ideology (Beard & Gloag 2005: 90).

A metanarrative is different from a grand narrative in that a metanarrative gives “the formal rules for the legitimation of narratives” whilst “grand narratives legitimate their contents in relation to an overarching theme or idea” (Malpas 2001: 7). A metanarrative describes a certain set of rules, principles, or laws which the grand narrative follows, such as “the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth” (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Lyotard also states that all sciences legitimate themselves through their relationship with discourse, specifically by association with a grand narrative (Lyotard 2004: 123).

What this means is: a metanarrative tells one how to think about a certain thing (musicology, for example), and does so uniformly and universally because of the stable rules, principles and laws that the metanarrative constructs around the subject (musicology). This in turn creates a uniform sense of what a thing is, how it should be perceived and how it should behave. Once this is universally accepted, it becomes a grand narrative. Through
association, this framework provides a field of reference in which something, such as a
science, may legitimize itself because of the inference of already accepted and trusted rules,
principles and laws on itself. How this inference occurs is through narrative discourse, the
intention of which is to justify the connection (through a priori and empirical evidence)
between the grand narrative most likely to provide legitimacy, and the science which desires
legitimation.

The problem with the concept of the grand narrative, other than its objective claims and
falsely authoritative voice, is that it can be used to control people, ostensibly as a “tool of
the authorities” (Lyotard 2004: 124). Lyotard, in The Postmodern Condition, justifies that
“the decision makers” of our society, the people that run our governments and political
institutions have been controlling grand narratives in order to mobilize the populace and
achieve the goal of optimum “performativity” (1984: xxiv). As a result, everything we are
told to believe as legitimate knowledge is geared towards satisfying this aim of “maximum
[economic, performative] performance”, which he believes (and so do I) that the realization
of which “entails a certain level of terror” (Lyotard 1984: xxiv).

How this controlling element over metanarratives (and consequently grand narratives)
functions will now be described in terms of Wittgenstein’s theories concerning “language
games” and “phrase regimens”.

The “language game”, which Lyotard believes is the method by which metanarratives
function (2004: 128), is the system of rules, principles and laws that dictates how the
metanarrative will inform the grand narrative. In philosophy, for example, the “language
game” dictates the use of logic. In the writing of history for example, “temporal
development” is the defining law that such a narrative follows (Malpas 2001: 4). If these
constraints are not adhered to, the knowledge produced by such narratives will not be
considered legitimate. Because of a dependency on these underlying “language games”, and
thereby the universal stipulations of the (now suspect) grand narratives, it would appear
that contemporary science is “no longer a coherent, truth-oriented pursuit of knowledge”,
but more an attempt to substantiate pre-existing grand narrative formations (Heise 2004:
148).
A science, in this respect, is anything that claims to be empirical, and legitimizes itself by association with a grand narrative. In this sense, musicology can be compared to science. This may be difficult to digest because we have been conditioned to think that science is purely factual, and have forgotten that this information has only become knowledge through a long process of reasoning and justification in narrative form, all of which are subservient to the “language games” and narrative traditions to which they must adhere. If the knowledge produced takes place within this rigidly controlled framework, what is essentially conditioned through this process is epistemology. This is what I hopefully exposed in my analysis of the epistemology of the “old” musicology in the previous chapter.

This epistemic conditioning is often controlled by “phrase regimens”, which will now be discussed. Lyotard refines the idea of “language games” even further by discovering “regimes of phrase”, or “phrase regimens” within all genres of discourse (2004: 219). “Phrase regimens” create what Lechte (2008: 327) refers to as a “sentence universe”, and as such can be “prescriptive, performative, exclamatory, interrogative, imperative, evaluative, nominative” among many others. Lyotard describes these linguistic tendencies as holding “phrase-power”, shaped by the biases of the interlocutors (2004: 212). This is the same process inherent in musicological discourse, as will be described in the next paragraph through the concept of Lyotard’s “differend”.

Essentially, what has occurred is a linguistic shaping and control of epistemology and knowledge through “phrase regimens” and “language games”. This has resulted in the inability to create new idioms (a form of expression natural to a language, person, or group), a state which Lyotard refers to as “the differend”, which is described as “the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be” (2004: 213). With regards to this state of feeling unable to express words to describe new ideas, Lyotard claims that much “searching must be done to find new rules for forming and linking phrases that are able to express the differend disclosed by the feeling”, otherwise, he claims, the initial feeling is “useless” (2004: 213).

Although I do not agree that feelings are useless unless expressed linguistically, the field of musicology grapples with this problem continuously. Claims, such as Stravinsky’s statement
that “music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all” (1936: 53), are
depictive of the extent of the trouble that musicians and musicologists have encountered in
trying to define the nature of music and expression. In this instance, I have taken Stravinsky’s
quote at face-value, as an example of how musicologists of the past have grappled with the
“differend”. In order to fully uncover the meaning of this statement, one would need to
deeply examine the notion of “expression” in this context, as well as Stravinsky’s own
perspectives on music, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The creation of knowledge outside pre-existing idioms, comprising of “phrase regimens”
subservient to a “language game”, represents the core problem to expressing new ideas
about music. It would appear that, through the linguistic process, our responses, thoughts
and knowledge on a particular subject are conditioned down to the very sentence structures
that make up the greater conditioning structures that inform the metanarratives, and
thereby the grand narratives. In such a condition, the “differend” must be fought for and
won, or all is lost and one must resort to “Stravinskyesque” nihilism.

“Language games” and “phrase regimens” particularly control the type of knowledge created
by empiricist, positivistic and “old” musicological writing. As Lechte describes it, “any
statement which lays claim to universality can be quickly shown to be only part of the
universe it claims to describe” (2008: 327). Lechte’s notion finds agreement in Heidegger’s
concept of the “hermeneutic circle”, which is defined as “the attempt to understand the part
via the whole and the whole via the parts” (1993: 157). Both Lechte and Bowie’s ideas find
reoccurrence throughout the proceeding chapters as they are an intrinsic part of all
narrative formations because of the foundation of narrative in language.

4.3.3 Micronarratives

One of the defining statements concerning narrative and postmodernism, is Lyotard’s
the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives”. The reasons for this
“incredulity” are many and varied, but most appeal to a relativistic view of the concept of
truth (Cobley 2001: 188).
Baudrillard muses that ideas in the contemporary era are not valuable in themselves but only valuable in relation to each other, which he calls the process of “simulation” (Cobley 2001: 189). This process of simulation is occurring in “a closed system which risks imploding” (Lechte 2008: 305). Reference to a “closed system” in Baudrillard’s work is reminiscent of Maturana’s “autopoietic system” (refer to Chapter 3.3.1) and Heidegger’s “hermeneutic circle” (which has been discussed in Chapter 4.3.2). I believe these ideas are the fundamental paradoxes of human knowledge and epistemology which postmodernism is assimilating, and must somehow overcome through the micronarrative process. In Lyotard’s *Postmodern Condition*, he states that “the little narrative [micronarrative] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention” (1984: 60).

Hutcheon describes the “rupturing effect” of postmodern micronarratives as “the simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions of narrative” (1989: 49). This is the essentially paradoxical condition under which contemporary narratives are constructed, and may account for the multiplicity of narrative forms and methodologies which we encounter in the field of postmodern theory. When convention is being both inscribed and subverted, something must be done to counteract this confusion, but what? With regards to the inscription and subversion, Jensen (1995: 11) makes the ironic claim that “postmodernism is itself a grand narrative, announcing the death of another grand narrative in its rear-view mirror”.

There is no single concept of what a postmodern narrative should be, and any attempt at recognizing a pattern of practice would most certainly incur the wrath of the postmodernist scholarly community, especially in light of post-structuralist knowledge. This sentiment is clearly expressed through the opening quotation of Drolet’s *Postmodern Reader* (2004), from Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*: “I mistrust all systematisers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.”

However, especially in the field of musicology, a system of behaviour can be observed through methodological similarities, alongside a desire to create the type of knowledge that is produced as a result of this behaviour. The “system” or methodology that I believe defines almost every category of postmodern musicological narrative can be referred to as cross-
disciplinary or interdisciplinary research and narrative. Whether or not cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary movement creates knowledge is one of the aims of my dissertation.

4.4 Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity

A key factor in the multiplicity of narratives that resist definition is interdisciplinarity, especially in the field of musicology. Interdisciplinarity, in the context of this dissertation, refers to discourse in which fields or disciplines (outside the core discipline being researched) are engaged and combined in the search for knowledge and meaning. How this occurs will be seen through the analysis of McClary’s self-proclaimed interdisciplinary essays in Chapters 5 to 9.

On the one hand, this type of movement is the result of the death of the grand narratives which created a sense of uniformity within disciplines, erecting clearly defined parameters that could not be crossed. On the other hand, I believe interdisciplinary movement is a convenient way of confusing the postmodern reader into believing that something new is taking place, when it is more a case of “hybridity” – “degrees of cultural exchange” (Beard & Gloag 2005: 84), although this term is usually employed in a post-colonial context. How interdisciplinarity functions with regards to epistemology will now be discussed. But first I would like to make it clear that the assumption of all interdisciplinary movement is that such movement creates knowledge. But is this correct?

Leeuwen (2005: 3) notes that there are three models of interdisciplinarity: centralist, pluralist and integrationist. The “centralist model” is described as the way in which two or more “autonomous” disciplines chart their relationship to one another through concurrent or “overlapping subject matter”, although one discipline is usually central to the research (Leeuwen 2005: 3). Evidence for this model can be seen in the tradition of mind-mapping of fields of knowledge, such as Halliday’s “centralist model of interdisciplinarity” map (1978: 11), in which Halliday has cast the discipline of linguistics in the centre, and defined other disciplines in relation to it. The model is also at work in my dissertation, in which other disciplines are used as introductions in order to provide context to what comes after (Leeuwen 2005: 4).
The “pluralist” model is evident in the structure of this dissertation also. Leeuwen says that “in pluralist models issues and problems are central, and it is recognized that these may rightfully belong to a number of different disciplines” (2005: 6), such as the issues and problems of modernism and postmodernism. This model is less centralist, and brings both elements into discussion on equal terms, and can be referred to as “pluridisciplinary” (Leeuwen 2005: 6).

The “integrationist” model completely abandons the idea of autonomy, even in a “pluridisciplinary” manner, and “distinct epistemological perspectives and professional identities” are done away with in favour of a state of interdependence between researchers of different subjects (Leeuwen 2005: 8).

Transdisciplinarity is different from interdisciplinarity in that it asks “how a dialogue between two disciplines or frameworks may lead to a development of both through a process of each internally appropriating the logic of the other as a resource for its own development” (Fairclough 2005: 53).

I believe this is relevant to musicology both past and present. In embracing an empirical stance initially, it appears that the field of musicology was already acting in a transdisciplinary manner, because it appropriated some of the facets of scientific thinking (specifically empiricism) as a tool for describing musical knowledge. It also inherited many of the tenets of philosophical tradition, specifically the aspect of a priori reasoning as a means of justifying knowledge gained through scientific/empirical methodology.

Considering that postmodernism and the “new” musicology are hostile to positivist tradition, which it views as an unwanted inheritance of the Enlightenment (Lyotard 1984: xxiv), this “transdisciplinary” aspect of musicology (with its inherited, or stolen epistemology from science and philosophy) could be the cause of our postmodern difficulties. Had musicology confronted Lyotard’s “differend” and not simply borrowed its epistemology because of an implicit trust in scientific method, a wholly different condition for the discipline of musicology would have resulted.
What has essentially happened is that “new” musicology has inherited its epistemology from a source, namely science, that it no longer believes to be worthy of the creation of legitimate knowledge (from the perspective of postmodern theory). Science is no longer worthy because it claims objectivity in a context that challenges conventional notions of truth. Therefore science’s applicability to music (via empirical musicology and empiricist methodology) has outrun its use.

To bring this back to Fairclough’s theories: what Fairclough thinks will lead to the development of disciplines, namely “transdisciplinary” movement, has already occurred in the field of musicology, and has led to the demise of musicology in its present condition.

### 4.5 Post-structuralism, “genealogy” and “intertextuality”

The first postmodern debate that I will discuss, in order to define the intellectual context in which postmodern theorists (including musicologists) find themselves, is post-structuralism, which is also linked to two neologisms: Foucault’s notion of “genealogy” and Kristeva’s “intertextuality”.

What Roszak refers to as “the myth of objective consciousness” and the lack of “validity of the conventional scientific world view” (1972: 205) has already been discussed as an extremely important part of the postmodern perspective (especially when criticizing the “old” musicology). The anti-Enlightenment aspect of the postmodern has also been described, and in some way this anti-Enlightenment stance has given rise to post-structuralism, considering that form and structure were Enlightenment preoccupations, and therefore inherently modernist. “Structural analysis aimed at objectivity, coherence, rigor, and truth, and claimed scientific status for its theories” (Best & Kellner 1991: 19), all of which are Enlightenment concerns also.

Post-structuralists such as Barthes and Derrida (Lechte 2008: vii) turned to the linguistic theory and semiology of Saussure for their inspiration, realizing that “the subject itself was constituted by its relations within language,” and that language essentially gave “presence to the world” (Best & Kellner 1991: 19, 20).
This vein of thought contributes to theories of subjectivity and hermeneutics in postmodern musicology, as well as to the “new” musicological critique of the field of music analysis (Beard & Gloag 2005: 145, 147), which is very much entrenched in the “old” musicology. Although predictions are unwise in such an era as this, Beard and Gloag (2005: 144) claim that “a postmodernist musicology will deconstruct the boundaries between the internal and external natures of music, a move that displaces the claims of a formalist musicology and the related concept of the autonomous musical work while retaining a focus on the music itself”.

Post-structuralism also includes a re-evaluation of the writing of history, which of course has great bearing on the field of musicology. Intellectually foremost in this aspect of postmodernism, Foucault has also been highly influential through developing some of the theories of Nietzsche, especially that of “genealogy”, which is a “continual re-evaluation of the past” from the perspective of the concerns of the “present moment, and as such it intervenes in the present moment” (Lechte 2008: 139). As a result of the continually changing state of history, epistemologies, “frameworks of knowledge and modes of understanding are themselves always changing”, and are riddled with epistemological “discontinuities” (Lechte 2008: 140).

The epistemological activity of the “new” musicology resists summarization in the manner of the “old” musicological epistemologies which were analysed in the previous chapter. Williams (2001: 29) reiterates this idea by saying that “[postmodern] musicology starts to look more like an ensemble of discourses of varying compatibility”. Musicologists in the contemporary era have made no particular attempt to follow an epistemological consensus because this would be at odds with postmodern intellectual currents such as post-structuralism.

The last idea I will discuss that is closely entwined with that of post-structuralism, and also has direct bearing on the subject of music, is Kristeva’s neologism “intertextuality”. Kristeva explains that a literary text “is constructed from a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Poole 2000: 42).
Beard and Gloag (2005: 142) claim that intertextuality in music is related to Eco’s “postmodern attitude”: “accepting the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated”. Because of the text-based nature of a music composition, as well as the use of quotation (“borrowing” and “sampling”) in traditional and popular music, it is not difficult to find musical applications for this notion, as contemporary musicologists have. All manner of comparisons have been discovered because music texts and other texts (literary or otherwise) can be seen as being inherently intertextual. In Chapter 7, I discuss McClary’s article on gender and sexuality in the work of Schubert, in which she has taken the work of the literary theorist Earl Jackson and drawn intertextual parallels, parallels between literary texts and musical texts, and between Schubert’s music and Jackson’s insights into the narrative conventions of Schubert’s literary contemporaries. McClary adopts intertextual stances unselfconsciously and naturally because she is an interdisciplinary musicologist, and intertextuality and interdisciplinarity are inseperable notions.

4.6 Relativism, absurdity and deconstruction

The key propounder of postmodernism’s anti-objectivist stance is the extremely important concept of relativism, which has consequently had, in my opinion, the greatest effect on “new” musicology and “new” musicological epistemology (as well as epistemology in general). “Relativism is the view that cognitive, moral or aesthetic norms and values are dependent on the social or conceptual systems that underpin them, and consequently a neutral standpoint for evaluating them is not available to us” (Baghramian 2004: 1).

Referring to the work of contemporary philosophers like Derrida, Habermas, McDowell, Putnam and Rorty, O’Grady (2002: 2) states that the implications of their ideas is that “truth, meaning, ontology and knowledge are no longer best regarded as stable, unified concepts”, and that any attempt to view them otherwise can be viewed as “cultural or intellectual imperialism”.

O’Grady speaks of the “Linguistic Turn” in philosophy during the last century, in which language was discovered to be at the root of almost everything we experience (2002: 2). “Can there be complex, conceptual thought without language?” is the question O’Grady
(2002: 2) asks, to which Derrida answers that without language, the process of differentiation would not be possible, and there would be no separation between the self and what it perceives as “other” through the notion of “*différance*” (Derrida’s neologism incorporating the words and concepts of deferral and difference) (Lechte 2008: 132). Saussure would affirmatively add that “in language, there are only differences” (1974: 120). Wittgenstein was one of the initial key figures in relativist thinking regarding the “Linguistic Turn”, the most influential aspect of which is the “language game” which was discussed earlier in this chapter within the context of metanarrative (and also arises as a fundamental concept in the work of Lyotard).

In light of this “Linguistic Turn”, everything that “is” can be seen as relative to linguistic constructs. Consequently, the principles discussed in the section on narrative (Chapter 4.3) have far more weight and bearing on the intellectual and scholarly proceeds of the contemporary era than it may have seemed at first, because language infuses all the disciplines in the manner described by Lyotard concerning the subject of legitimation (discussed in Chapter 4.2). This fact provides justification for postmodern theorist Jameson’s statement that narrative is the “central function or instance of the human mind” (1981: 13), as well as justification for many of Saussure, Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Derrida’s congruent statements.

If all that “is”, is relative to language, and language is without “a single determinate essence” according to Wittgenstein’s notion of the “language game”, the implication is that even language is relative to itself (O’Grady 2002: 15). A simple way of grasping the way in which language is relative to itself is to remember that we use language to describe language and words to describe other words. In addition, our habitual ways of referring to and quantifying the world we experience is entirely relative to the “modes of representation” we have chosen for those tasks (O’Grady 2002: 15).

When confronted with relativistic theories, most are inclined to follow Gellner’s (1982: 181) train of thought when she says that “if truth has many faces, then not one of them deserves trust or respect”. And although this is “true” (so to speak) we need not hold such a pessimist outlook. What relativism is exposing is an extremely meaningful realization, the same
concept at the heart of the “hermeneutic circle” and the “autopoietic system”. We create the meaning that we find in the things we examine. In this regard, the “new” musicologist Lawrence Kramer has written a book entitled *Musical meaning: toward a critical history* (2002). In Kramer’s essay (2007: 237) entitled “Haydn’s chaos, Schenker’s Order; or, musical meaning and musical analysis: can they mix?” (1992), Kramer points out that, in the past, the meanings ascribed to music by listeners and performers were “not recognized as an intrinsic and legitimate part of musical experience.” He notes that the “new” musicology, by grappling with the social dimension of music and the notable influence of critical theory on the discipline, have allowed for the serious and critical discussion of musical meaning to continue.

This relativistic realization, that we create the meaning that we find in the things we examine, entails far too much responsibility for most to accept. So long as the creation of meaning is mediated by chaos, or fallacious notions of objectivity and autonomy (metanarratives) that are greater than man (or controlled by others), mankind seems happy enough even though the proceeds of its search for meaning are less meaningful, and inherently paradoxical. Consequently, their search for meaning is absurd (referring to absurdity in an existential context).

As Camus (1975: 64) states, what is necessary is that one counteracts this absurdity by constantly creating meaning for oneself with the resources, courage and reasoning at one’s disposal. What this means is that the realization of relativity should not cause us to give up on meaning, but to create meaning that is satisfying, beneficial and useful to us. If we do not take hold of our right to meaning, it will be governed by those with power and turned towards economic and “performative” ends by the “decision makers”, as Lyotard warns in the introduction to *The Postmodern Condition* (1984: xxiv).

In relation to musicology, the concept of relativism is also entwined with that of subjectivity, which has bearing on the study of music reception, hermeneutics, aesthetics and value, as well as inclusive of many other musically related subjects. I believe its most obvious manifestation is in the discourse of musicologists trying to justify the function and future of
musicology in the contemporary era. If one is aware of the epistemological implications of relativity, how does one choose to create musicological knowledge?

The field of deconstruction is a symptom of relativistic thinking (Baghramian 2004: 114) and the “Linguistic Turn”, and has become implicated in postmodern musicology in the work of “new” musicologists such as McClary, Subotnik, Street and Ayrey (Beard & Gloag 2005: 53). Norris states that the deconstruction of a text (such as a musical composition or musicological narrative) is to expose paradoxes of logic and meaning, in order to show that “the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means” (2000: 109).

What is generally questioned is the value of such an endeavour, which is considered by many to be destructive. To this I would answer that, in a practice (deconstruction) that is questioning existing notions of value, I believe deconstruction creates something that falls outside our understanding of value. Its function is to expose the relativity of interpretation, context and meaning in a text. In this regard it is highly “valuable”.

4.7 Feminism

Feminism, gender studies and aspects of sexuality have influenced “new” musicological narrative through the “feminist musicology” of Abbate, Citron, McClary and Solie, among others. However, because of the ahistorical and apolitical stance of the postmodernist movement, many feminists have considered postmodernism and feminism incompatible (Michael 1996: 1).

It is important to note that the postmodern debate takes two directions, the reactionary and the continuation of modernist tradition. Feminist debates stem from the Enlightenment, the first sign of which (so the narrative goes) was Wollstonecroft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women, published in 1792 (Holmstrom 2000: 281). As a result, feminist notions permeate modernist thinking.

By stating the following, Michael (1996: 2) provides an adequate definition of general feminist ideology:
Feminism in all its variants is an active political stance; it critiques the dominant male-centred culture from a particular position and viewpoint, which takes into consideration the complex of power relations – particularly gender/sex relations – between people, institutions, ideologies, languages, and other systems that function within culture at large, and aims in various ways (depending on the type of feminism) to end women’s oppression.

In many respects this statement calls up reminiscences from post-structuralism and relativist thinking; the questioning of power, systems and language. However, because of the practical application of such thinking, namely to end the oppression of women, feminists are clearly reluctant to align their theories with the uncertainties of the postmodern and for good reason. Perhaps this is because such theories could be used to discredit and criticize the feminist movement by the agencies of female oppression.

Feminist movements initially attacked legislation that put women in a state of inequality, and consequently won the right to vote in Western society (Great Britain, Europe and America) between 1918 and 1971 (Held 2000: 500). Since then, feminist philosophy which began in the 1970s, is intent on exposing the hidden value of women in many disciplines (such as musicology). In most cases, the contributions of women in the past were overlooked on account of patriarchy and gender bias (Jaggar & Young 2000: 1).

Artistically, and hence musically, this has implications with regards to canon formation, which has been extremely gender-biased in the past. This position was justified by the sexist ideas of Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Sartre, who considered women to be incapable of rational thinking in a rationalist era (Jaggar & Young 2000: 1). Cultural sexism was strengthened by the social contract theory of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant (Nagl-Docekal 2000: 58). Feminist theory and feminist musicology is predominantly concerned with readdressing these cultural concerns, as can be seen especially in the musicological writings of McClary and Subotnik, both of whom are part of the *Ashgate* series and core representatives of the “new” musicology.

However, these musicologists are considered second- and third-wave feminists, and indeed any feminist that makes the distinction between biological (sex) and cultural (gender) distinctions that became pivotal in feminist debate during the 1970s, is placed in this
category (James 2005: 273). Second- and third-wave feminists are engaged in the rewriting of history (“genealogy”), reconfiguring the “facts” to reflect the concerns of the present, and to expose the “social arrangements of power and privilege” embedded in grand narratives and metanarratives, by which they legitimate the experiences and values of “mature white men” (Code 2005: 275). McClary’s article entitled “Constructions of subjectivity in Schubert’s music” (1994), epistemologically analysed in Chapter 7, is a good example of such a genealogical account.

4.8 Humanism, posthumanism (the “post-human”) and changing technology

The term “humanism” has been used to refer to theories or doctrines “which take human experience as the starting point for man’s knowledge of himself and the work of God and Nature” (Bullock 2000: 406). A brief explanation of the tenets of humanism will more clearly expose how postmodernism differs through the conception of posthumanism.

Although the humanist movement continued well into the postmodern era (ending with the advent of posthumanism in the 1970s), the term itself dates back to 1808, and was initially used to describe the world-view associated with the Italian Renaissance (Bullock 2000: 406; Milner 2000: 671). In the subsequent re-examination of history in the light of humanist ideas, “secular humanism” emerged in philosophy (Voltaire and Hume), and “scientific humanism” in the sciences (Newton) as men moved further away from Christian and religious ideology as a source of meaning.

Humanism is based on two main ideas (Bullock 2000: 406):

- Humans are valuable in themselves by way of their creative abilities (art, language, science, etc.) and their will to free choice; and
- Nihilistic, enslaving, determinist, reductionist, or performative systems of thinking are rejected.

Posthumanism is a term coined by Ihab Hassan in 1977, and is used in cultural theory to refer to the end of humanism. His work concerns the effect of discourse structures (such as
Wittgenstein’s “language games”) on subjective valuations and interpretations. Hassan’s work has also sparked debate concerning “technologies for re-embodiment and disembodiment” which have found artistic application under the concept of the “post-human”, culminating in “extremely positive accounts [in art] of what it could mean to be post-human”. (Milner 2000: 671.)

Badmington (2000a: 9) believes that posthumanism is linked to Derrida’s concept of deconstruction. By pointing out the essential paradox underlying all language-based systems (through the identification of *aporia*, which is described in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* as an “irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument or theory”) and, resultantly, human(ist) thinking of all types, Derrida was indirectly supporting posthumanist claims. Essentially, according to Badmington, Derrida was asking an important posthumanist question: If we believe all of humanity to be subject to *aporia*, how can we “take human experience as the starting point for man’s knowledge of himself and the work of God and Nature” (Bullock 2000: 406)?

Issues of disembodiment and re-embodiment are wholly linked to changing technology, especially the addition to our world of “cyberspace” (Higham 2001: 164) and the idea of the cyborg (Badmington 2000b: 85). We have entered an era where the concept of body becomes increasing relative to the “space” one is occupying, and this has ramifications that affect concepts of gender, body and identity (Higham 2001: 164, 165). With regards to this, technology has altered the “space” we occupy and communicate with each other through the addition of cyberspace. Bolles refers to this as an “intangible arena” which “links a global community of users”, although the word is also synonymous with the internet (2000: 193). This is just a small (and extreme) example of the way in which changing technology has affected culture and human experience over the last half-century.

In cultural terms, by way of the music industry (music production and consumption), the influx of new technology has greatly influenced the sphere of popular music. In this regard, the critical musicologist Simon Frith, a contemporary of Susan McClary that has also contributed to the *Ashgate* series, has pursued research into how music has become a
commodity through the creation of a music industry, and examined the ramifications of this with regards to social and cultural practices surrounding music.

4.9 Identity, “place” and “landscape”

The notion of identity has found an obvious foothold in much postmodern theory, as well as the field of musicology. This is because of our changing understanding of the concept of identity in the postmodern era due to several factors. Higham states that “the physical body is transcended” through technology such as the computer and cyberspace, and that through this process, the self becomes “merely data, a simulacrum of oneself, and as such can be constructed in multiple ways” (2001: 160, 161). This is just one example of how notions of personal identity and collective identity are being reconfigured in the contemporary era, with repercussions in both the intellectual world and the arts.

Another aspect of identity is enunciated in the work of Foucault regarding the concept of genealogy. He stipulates that history, seen in the light of genealogy, leads to a “systematic dissociation of our identity” (2004: 83). This occurs, because in an attempt to construct a unified genealogical account, we discover that “it is plural; countless souls dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and dominate one another” to produce a “complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis” (Foucault 2004: 83). According to Foucault, this is not the fault of language, but of the plurality and “carnivalesque” nature of identity which was presumed to be unified and singular.

Lyotard (2004: 132) states that, in the postmodern era, “a self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before”. It would seem that the “self” only exists because of its relationship with an “other(s)” with which the “self” must identify (Jameson 2004: 195). This notion echoes through the work of Lacan, Althusser and Foucault, and represents a postmodern perspective by going against orthodox notions of identity as something autonomous, stable and independent (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008: 167, 170).
In light of this type of thinking, Frith has discussed the concept of “identity as music” in his article “Music and Identity” (2007: 293) in Taking Popular Music Seriously (2007). He describes the way in which music becomes an “other”, in relation to which the “self” is constructed. In the view of Said, national and cultural identity is constructed, articulated and represented through narrative (Simons 2004: 278). How, then, does musicological narrative aid the construction of national and cultural identity? Music, through its various social, political and economic applications has long fulfilled this function, and the manner in which musicology aids in this type of identity construction is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 7 with regards to the discipline of “gay musicology”. In Chapter 7, the analysis of Susan McClary’s article entitled “Constructions of subjectivity in Schubert’s music” (1994) is a good example of how musicology is used to aid in identity construction (especially the identity of previously marginalized groups in McClary’s work and, more specifically, women and homosexual persons).

Musicology is increasingly concerned with subtler aspects of identity in music, such as “subject position”, which is especially relevant to popular music discourse. Although the term is derived from its application to film and the “viewpoint that a film encourages a viewer to adopt towards its content”, music can be interpreted in a similar way, especially when it is lyric-based (Beard & Gloag 2005: 177, 178). Subject position is discussed in Susan McClary’s investigations concerning the pop-star Madonna, specifically in the article “Living to tell: Madonna’s resurrection of the fleshly” (1990) which is epistemologically analysed in Chapter 8.

With regards to subject position, Kramer states that “a song will typically seek to manage the interplay of text, voice and musical technique in order to privilege one of the available positions” (1995: 147). One’s personal identity would certainly depend on which position was privileged. However, this would depend on how one wished to be positioned in the first place, because this choice would reflect in the music selected, and the position that was privileged as a result.

How one constructs one’s position, I believe, is often determined by elements of “place”, that is, what landscape they feel most “at home in” (Philo 2000: 652). For example, if one
grew up in the “projects” in the USA, one might feel inclined to adopt a subjective position that reflected this “place”.

Music is also specific in that it often mirrors the context in which it was produced, which makes this sort of positioning even simpler. The reflection of certain “landscapes” in music, such as Charles Ives’s *Central Park in the Dark* or Sibelius’s *Finlandia*, are similar to notions of “place”, and also encourage identity formation through subject positioning.

4.10 Summary

The state of critical/“new” musicology in the context of postmodernism

- Postmodernism is the cultural dominant of the “new” musicology, and these musicologists (such as Susan McClary) actively engage with postmodern debates through writing musicological narratives.
- These narratives are “critical” and pertain to the field of critical theory, which refers to the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Pollock, Marcuse, Adorno and Habermas). Critical theorists are “wary of syntheses and reconciliations”, in opposition to traditional theory, and are characterised as moving away from empirical analysis.
- Current critical theory can be described as “an interdisciplinary synthesis of philosophy and science”.


- Lyotard’s book “is widely regarded as the most powerful theoretical expression of postmodernism”, and is primarily a discourse on the changing state of knowledge in the contemporary era.
- All knowledge is fundamentally paradoxical because of its relationship to the self-referential system of language. Therefore, knowledge is in-absolute, something we choose to believe, not “the truth”. This understanding of knowledge is referred to as “postmodern knowledge” and requires sensitivity and toleration of the subjective perspectives of others.
Legitimacy, in the past, was conferred on the narrative through its association with previously-existing narratives (grand narratives and metanarratives). This is no longer possible in a postmodern context, because previously-existing narratives are being questioned on a vast scale.

There is, possibly, no unified, rational basis for everything we discover.

I believe that the postmodern intellectual world’s reliance on Lyotard’s book has created another universal, grand narrative.

Postmodern narratives: grand narrative, metanarrative and micronarrative

- Narrative is described as “the linguistic recounting or telling of events” in a temporal sequence.
- Postmodern theorists like Jameson and Lyotard consider narrative to be of foremost importance to our understanding of knowledge and the human mind.
- The most important types of narrative are: grand narrative, metanarrative and micronarrative.
- A grand narrative “tells the story of the progress and development of narratives” in a way that “tie[s] everything together under a scheme that sets out to explain the world and people’s place in it”.
- A metanarrative describes “the formal rules for the legitimation of narratives”, i.e. a certain set of rules, principles, or laws which the grand narrative follows, which are also referred to as “language games”.
- Micronarratives are typified by their avoidance of the grand narrative and metanarrative processes, “the simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions of narrative”. Micronarratives are subjective, imaginative, interdisciplinary and make no claim to autonomy or objectivity.

Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity

- Interdisciplinarity is the combining of two or more disciplines in an attempt to broaden the search for knowledge and meaning of those disciplines.
- There are three models of interdisciplinarity: centralist, pluralist and integrationist.
• Transdisciplinarity occurs when a discipline appropriates the logic of an outside discipline “as a resource for its own development”.

Post-structuralism, genealogy and intertextuality

• Post-structuralism is an anti-Enlightenment movement that rejects the notion of structure as a meaningful indicator of value.
• Derrida and Barthes were key post-structuralists, inspired by the work of Saussure in the field of linguistic theory.
• Foucault was a post-structuralist, and Nietzsche’s concept of “genealogy” is central in his work. Genealogy involves a “continual re-evaluation of the past” from the perspective of the concerns of the “present moment”.
• Kristeva’s “intertextuality” is a post-structuralist notion. “Intertextuality” shows that a literary text “is constructed from a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another”.

Relativism, absurdity and deconstruction

• Relativism acknowledges that all “truths” are relative (and dependent) on the “social or conceptual systems that underpin them”. As a result, “all truth, meaning, ontology and knowledge is subjective”.
• The “Linguistic Turn” in philosophy refers to the realization that language is at the root of almost everything we experience. Everything is relative to language (including language itself).
• Philosophers such as Derrida, Habermas, McDowell, Putnam and Rorty are relativist philosophers.
• I believe that the fundamental relativistic realization is that we create the meaning that we find in the things we examine. Failure to acknowledge this means continuing absurdity for man’s search for meaning.
• Deconstruction, central to the work of Derrida, is the height of relativism and subjectivity. The process of deconstruction aims to expose paradoxes of logic and meaning (aporia), in order to show that “the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means”.
Feminism

- First- and second-generation feminism criticises male-centred/patriarchal attitudes and structures in culture (such as those voiced by Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Sartre) that have been used to marginalize the contribution and rights of women in the past.
- Feminist philosophy began in the 1970s and aims to expose the hidden value of women in many disciplines.

Humanism, posthumanism (the “post-human”) and changing technology

- The term “humanism” has been used to refer to theories or doctrines “which take human experience as the starting point for man’s knowledge of himself and the work of God and Nature”.
- Voltaire, Hume and Newton were foremost humanists.
- Posthumanism is a term coined by Ihab Hassan in 1977, and is used in cultural theory to refer to the end of humanism. Hassan’s work concerns issues of disembodiment, re-embodiment in the computer age, and what it could mean to be “post-human”.
- Cyber-space is an example of how our experience of being human, and the “space” we occupy as humans, is changing through technology.

Identity, “place” and “landscape”

- Subject position is a form of identification derived from its application to film (although it is valid to other contexts), and refers to the “viewpoint that a film encourages a viewer to adopt towards its content”. How one positions oneself relies on elements of “place” and “landscape”.
McClary’s epistemology according to her “Introduction: the life and times of a renegade musicologist”, in Reading Music: Selected Essays (2007)

This investigation into McClary’s Introduction to Reading Music: Selected Essays (2007) will be undertaken in order to ascertain four things which will give me the information needed to describe how McClary produces musical knowledge through her writings (specifically those discussed in Chapters 6 to 9):

- What was, in her view, the purpose of the “old” musicology?
- What does she think is the purpose of the “new” musicology?
- What are the aims and intentions of her musicological endeavours, and how do these intentions contribute to the “new” musicology? And
- What is her methodology and epistemology?

With regards to the “old” musicology, McClary states that when she first began working as a musicologist in 1968, the discipline was dominated by “archival research, the production of scholarly editions, and quasi-mathematical formal analysis”. According to McClary, what the “new” musicology wishes to do is to reverse this understanding of the musical text as divorced from historical contexts and musical practices, which are mutually influential and inseparable. This musicology also tries to draw performers and listeners into the realm of musicological debate. The “new” musicology endeavours to move away from score analysis and instead focus on ideas concerning the performer and listener, such as how the body produces and interprets the musical text, and how listeners perceive the music they hear.

With regards to the interdisciplinary aspect of the “new” musicology, which is the main focus of her work, she would like to “deal with music as cultural texts, just as literary, art, and film critics engage with novels, paintings, and movies as a matter of course”. This is rooted in her early musicological preoccupations with Renaissance and Baroque music and their association with “structures of language change” (linguistics), which is clearly interdisciplinary. She regards her initial work as “specifically for interdisciplinary readers” in
the fields of cultural theory and criticism. Citing the influence of Adorno and Foucault on her work, she lists her main interdisciplinary directions: feminist theory, narratology, postcolonial studies and postmodern aesthetics.

McClary believes that her theoretical framework has remained almost constant since her graduate days, and her contemporary work is only different in that she has had more exposure to “interdisciplinary conversations”, and substituted her more “objective” prose for a “vivid, often comic style”.

McClary divides her set of essays into four fairly chronological sections on methodological grounds:

- Section A (Chapters 1 – 4) is called “Interpretation and Polemics”, and involves interpreting canonical works in “cultural terms”.
- Section B (Chapters 5 – 7) is entitled “Gender and Sexuality” and shows an engagement with these topics in the context of music, and her interpretation of works from a feminine (writing “as a woman”) rather than an entirely feminist perspective.
- Section C (Chapters 8 – 10) is called “Popular Music”, depicting McClary’s attempts to reconcile popular music criticism with musicology.
- Section D (Chapters 11 – 12), entitled “Early Music”, is an evaluation of tonal and cultural aspects of Renaissance and Baroque music, with regards to concepts of body, sociology and time.

The rest of this dissertation will be an epistemological critique of one article from each of these sections in order to show, as clearly as possible, McClary’s epistemology with regards to these interdisciplinary categories.

In my critique I will be following a very specific methodology: first I will pinpoint areas of “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435) about music expressed by McClary in the narrative. I will discuss how this knowledge is being produced with reference to the information presented in Chapter 2 concerning epistemology and musicological
I will try to show how this knowledge is meaningful in the context of postmodernism, with reference to Chapter 4, and that it is McClary’s intention to produce knowledge that is meaningful to this specific context, which can only be considered meaningful if this context is taken into account.

I would also like to discuss briefly McClary’s description of herself, in the title of this introduction, as a “renegade musicologist”. By this, I believe she is referring to the rebellious tone of her work, which is especially evident in her earlier essays, of which “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year” (1987) is a prime example. This article will be discussed in the following chapter. However, McClary’s later articles also retain a measure of the renegade as she continues to question conventional cultural meanings surrounding music and “old” musicological practices, even if her prose becomes progressively less confrontational in my opinion.
Chapter 6

Interpretation and polemics: an epistemological critique of McClary’s “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach year” (1987)

6.1 “Introduction”

In the title “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach year”, McClary’s perception of herself as a critic of preconceived ideas, and a subversive musicologist, is already clear. What is important is that this rebellious stance is entirely in line with the underlying critical ethos of postmodernism. She intends to talk about the subject of politics in connection with Bach and his music, which she believes would be considered “blasphemous” by her contemporary musicologists (1987).

The concept of blasphemy used in this context is not idly chosen, nor meant to refer to a mildly unacceptable viewpoint, but has far stronger connotations. The use of this word, and the open challenge of certain religious notions, suggests that McClary views herself as a heretical outsider, and sees the musicological establishment of 1987 as an institution much like the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, with the power to condemn and oppress free thinkers in order to preserve its right to authority.

This standpoint is reinforced by several further statements in the Introduction and in later sections of the article. McClary believes that the greatest contribution to the last great Bach Year (1950) was Adorno’s essay “Bach defended against his devotees”, which is the most subversive contribution of the ones she mentions. Adorno, like McClary, also stood at the fringe of the musicological establishment, hoping for his narratives concerning the social dimension of music to be recognized. McClary, with extremely emotive language, describes how Adorno’s attempt failed, and that by 1985 (the tercentenary of Bach’s death), the “old” musicology was even further from recognizing the true value of his contribution than it ever had been.
McClary imagines that Adorno “would recognize [this] with the ironic satisfaction a paranoid derives from seeing worst-possible scenarios fully realized” (McClary 1987: 14). She considers her work to be a continuation of Adorno’s, and that the discourse under discussion will concern the past and present social dimensions of Bach’s work.

McClary claims that this article is a response to criticisms levelled at her by the musicological establishment at several different Bach Year panel discussions held in 1985. She notes that the criticism, “to my overwhelming joy”, aligned with the general view that “new” musicologists hold of the “old” musicology. The criticism levelled at her served the function of confirming her intellectual context, which is clearly postmodern. I believe that it also aided in the construction of a new epistemology with regards to the production of knowledge through the writing of musicological narratives.

The modernist ideologies that emerged through those criticisms are described by McClary (1987: 14) as follows:

- The “old” musicology’s belief in the divine as a source of (Bach’s) musical genius;
- The associated ideology of “genius” (which makes composers like Bach exempt from criticism); and
- The way that (Bach’s) music is associated with ideas of “perfect, universal order and truth”.

All of these criticisms are significant in their association with what I would refer to as the “grand narrative” of “new” musicology, which is entwined with its postmodern context. More specifically, they seem to reoccur throughout the “new” musicological writings of McClary’s contemporaries. The above-mentioned beliefs concerning music (in bullet-form) when analysed singly, can be reduced to an essential ideological difference, an expression of the split between the followers of modernism and those of postmodernism, the “old” and the “new” musicologists.

The first ideology that is being questioned is the concept of divinity and its link with music, an extremely outdated idea in the contemporary era, but one that still, I believe, persists in the present human unconscious, even if only as a possibility. When confronted with
something as vast and magnificent as Wagner’s “Flight of the Valkyries” played live by a colossal orchestra in Bayreuth (or even just on YouTube), it is difficult not to become swayed by grand notions of divinity, however groundless they may appear in the light of science or modernist/postmodern theory.

Although modernism, on the one hand, is a reappraisal of Enlightenment tradition (the elevation of reason and rationalism) there are aspects of “old” musicological ideology that are extremely at odds with modernist beliefs, such as the view of music as divine, which McClary claims persisted at least until the writing of her article on Bach.

The notion of divinity and its association with music is not so much a modernist view but a view that actually dates back beyond the Romantic Era. McClary’s criticism of Bach’s music representing “perfect, universal order and truth” (1987: 14) is reflected in the words of one of the first musicologists, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Dictionnaire de musique*: “The musician of genius encompasses the entire universe within his art” (Le Huray & Day 1981: 108-9). He and other nineteenth-century musicologists (such as Johann Georg Sulzer) were reflecting the Romantic views of their times when they came to view the genius “composer as hero”, and also as one with “spiritual insight” (Beard & Gloag 2005: 70, 71).

Because of the inexplicable effect of music on the listener, specifically the evocation of emotion, ideas and creativity, it is not surprising that such an unscientific notion as divinity withstood both the attack of reason and modern science and technology, persisting into the postmodern era. But, McClary seems to think that this is where such nonsense should stop, because such a notion is meaningless when used as a scaffold for long-held biases and beliefs concerning Bach’s music. And especially meaningless when the notion of divinity is used to stifle new criticism levelled at established ideas and beliefs concerning music, such as those raised by McClary at the Bach Year panel discussions in 1985.

Unfortunately, through this process of analysis it becomes clear that the “old” musicology is not simply modernist, but pre-modernist in some aspects of its thinking. Prior to the “old” musicology there was no “even older” musicology. That is why some of the beliefs that are held by the less critical musicologists of the “old” musicology are almost archaic, and more
akin to the dogma of a religious institution. This analogy is even more applicable when one realises how much of musicological dogma is essentially of a religious nature, such as the examples cited above by McClary. Because of the foundation of all music in vocal music (the voice was considered to be innately divine, “God’s instrument”), and the long-lasting patronage of the arts by the Church, this is hardly surprising. But is it still relevant, and why does something that has been accepted for so long suddenly cause such consternation?

It would seem that the critique of this religious-musical/musicological connection began in the 1950s (forming part of the “old”/modernist musicology). Evidence for this can be seen in something as simple as the title of Adorno’s essay cited by McClary: “Bach’s music defended against his devotees”. A “devotee” can mean an enthusiast, but it has a religious connotation also. The *Oxford Dictionary* (2004: 393) describes this second meaning as “a follower of a particular religion or god”. The Hare Krishna movement describes its followers as “devotees”. It seems fairly clear that Adorno felt that his contemporary musicologists were pursuing their beliefs with a pseudo-religious zeal, and wanted to defend Bach from this misguided onslaught.

McClary also mentions in the introductory section of this article that one of the key discoveries about Bach during the reappraisal of his contribution that occurred after 1950 was that he was “far more ambivalent about his position as a church musician than had previously been recognized” (McClary 1987: 13). If we take the multiple references to religion, blasphemy and divinity that fill the first two pages of the essay under consideration, it is not hard to see that McClary’s criticism is heavily immersed in scepticism concerning this quasi-religious aspect of the “old” musicology.

We might ask, in what way is this scepticism a reflection of her postmodern intellectual context? I believe that it most certainly is a reflection of this context, as can be seen in McClary’s criticism of Bach’s music representing “perfect, universal order and truth”. In this regard, “truth” is the operative word. The postmodern doctrine of relativism describes “the truth”, knowledge and morality as relative constructs, relative to “culture, society, or historical context”, and these subjects are consequently “not absolute” (Soanes & Stephenson 2004: 1214). When one supports this relativist doctrine, it would certainly be
difficult to accept religious fundaments into the sphere of academic understanding. I believe McClary can very much be situated inside the intellectual framework of postmodernism, specifically regarding her relativist viewpoint with regards to truth. Those that do not share this viewpoint, and still regard “truth” as an absolute, would definitely be considered outdated by a relativist thinker like McClary.

Despite present summaries of the “old” musicology such as the one provided by McClary, we still do not know what the institution of the “old” musicology actually meant to its contributors when separated from the interpretive bias projected onto it by “new” musicologists. It is true that certain ideologies are repeated through these texts, and certain correspondences can be found between the sub-disciplines of the “old” musicology. But was this the product of a conscious process?

However, we now know what the “old” musicology represents to McClary through these criticisms in her work. This may not tell us what all of the “new” musicologists think about the “old” musicology, but it will help us to understand McClary as one of the foremost “new” musicologists, and to gain some insight into how her beliefs reflects the main currents of her postmodern intellectual context. Once that is established, I can delve further into how McClary’s “new” musicology differs from what she perceives the “old” musicology to be, and perhaps discover her underlying epistemology. It may be said that the “old” musicology is based on flawed principles in light of our postmodern intellectual context, but there is much to be said for a discipline, in this case the “old” musicology, that thoroughly knows its own epistemology and accepts the products of that epistemology as producing meaningful knowledge.

In the final paragraph of McClary’s Introduction, she outlines the structure of her narrative, which will give us clues as to the type of knowledge she is hoping to acquire through the writing of this narrative. The first section is an inquiry into “why music is treated differently than the other arts in our culture”, as well as an examination of “our preconceptions and ideological uses of eighteenth-century music, Bach’s in particular” (McClary 1987: 14).
If knowledge is “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435), according to our definitions of epistemology in Chapter 2.1, the “true beliefs” that she intends to justify are extremely clear in this regard. McClary’s first “true belief”, as stated in the previous paragraph, is that “music is treated differently than the other arts in our culture”. McClary also believes that eighteenth-century music, specifically the music of Bach, has been subject to (misguided) “preconceptions and ideological uses”. So we can assume that any knowledge produced through the writing of her introductory section would serve to substantiate these theories, and would take the form of a justification.

“[T]he second section will present a sketch of Bach’s social context and discuss two of his compositions in order to demonstrate the kinds of insights that can be gleaned from socially grounded interpretation” (McClary 1987: 14). In this case, “a sketch of Bach’s social context” refers to a historiographical narrative based on factual information of the time, much like the historical musicology of the “old” musicology, the epistemology of which is described in Chapter 3.2.2. McClary’s social and biographical “sketch” differs from one an “old” musicologist would have produced because it combines the two sub-disciplines of music analysis and historical musicology. She analyses the work in the light of its social context and biographical details concerning Bach.

In the final section, McClary wishes to “consider what is to be gained by dealing with Bach in political terms”. This means that she believes that something might be gained from dealing with Bach in this way, and I believe that this should be considered as knowledge because it fits the pattern of “justified, true belief” (Huemer 2002: 435) as described in Chapter 2.1. What type of knowledge is produced through this interdisciplinary movement between the seemingly disparate elements of music and politics will be discussed in this chapter. But will this knowledge be satisfying and useful to the reader?

6.2 “The Pythagorean dilemma”

It would seem that McClary’s standpoint as a musicological outsider in 1987 is based on several assumptions and premises that have emerged as the core motivation for writing her article, namely that she views herself as ideologically different from her contemporary
musicologists. And that this difference in ideology specifically has to do with those aspects of musicological dogma that relate to a non-social interpretation of musical phenomena.

In this sub-section of the article, she enunciates exactly how she believes the two hostile camps differ. This “irreconcilable” debate between music as “a human, socially grounded, socially alterable construct”, and music as understood in “non-social, implicitly metaphysical terms” goes back to the Greeks, and can be seen in the differing interpretations of Plato (who preferred the social interpretation), and Pythagoras (who took a metaphysical and quasi-religious stance) (McClary 1987: 15). Pythagoras’s interpretation is referred to as the “Pythagorean model”, which leads inevitably to “The Pythagorean dilemma” after which her sub-section is named (McClary 1987: 14, 16). The expression “Pythagorean model” is used by McClary in order to legitimate her opinion of the opposition, and her belief that they are affected by a dilemma of logic and meaning as a result of their Pythagorean-based opinion of music.

McClary believes that the Pythagoreans, namely professional musicians and “old” musicologists, otherwise referred to as “the priesthood” (1987: 15) are manipulating the consumer into believing in a metaphysical interpretation of music because this “abdicates responsibility for its [music’s] power” over the listener, which is mainly through emotional means. In order to manipulate the listener, “the priesthood” takes advantage of the complexity of music symbolism, and the vulnerability of the listener’s hearing apparatus and emotions, in order to purposefully hide the “social grounding of that magic” (McClary 1987: 17).

I believe that the knowledge McClary is generating here, the “true belief” that she is trying to justify, is that the world of “old” musicology is perpetuating “pseudo-religious rituals and attitudes” (1987: 15). She is trying to define a new musicology in her own work that rejects these rituals and attitudes and exposes her opinion of the reality behind the situation, namely its social basis.

“Opponents to reigning order, however, rightly seek to deconstruct its social ideology” (McClary 1987: 17). This is an extremely important statement, and sounds more like a
rallying-call, or more importantly, a manifesto, than a simple justification of the subject under discussion. It also gives evidence for her intellectual context, namely through the concept of deconstruction, which alludes to the postmodern intellectual current associated with Derrida (see Chapter 4.6).

More importantly, the previously quoted sentence is an open statement of musicological epistemology. What this means, epistemologically speaking, is that she is generating knowledge concerning the shape and focus of the “new” musicology, stating that such a musicology supports the social interpretation of music, and emphatically rejects any other interpretation as an attempt to manipulate and mislead the listening public. As the “old” musicology created and legitimated their own form of knowledge based on their Pythagorean ideological fundaments, the “new” musicology will generate its knowledge based on social interpretations.

However, there is also a deeper issue imbedded in this epistemological divide. Social versus absolutist interpretation of music is essentially “a political issue”, political in the sense of each position’s association with power and status. McClary believes that the dominating (Pythagorean) viewpoint of the “reigning order” is simply a device used to perpetuate an “implicit social agenda” and stifle all criticism, and that this quasi-religious viewpoint is totally meaningless in itself.

McClary, in my view, is not trying to hide that her interpretation has all the hallmarks of a conspiracy theory, and even refers to herself as a “self-proclaimed paranoid” (1987: 14). Unfortunately her subversive and emotive criticism of the “old” ways of thinking takes the spotlight away from an extremely interesting point that she is about to make concerning her justification of why a social interpretation is meaningful to the study of music, and capable of providing insightful information and knowledge.

In defence of this proposition, McClary (1987: 17-18) states that:

[b]y understanding as ideological constructs both the norms of a repertory and also the deviations against those norms in particular compositions, one can begin to discern the most fundamental principles of social order of a period as well as individual strategies of affirmation and opposition.
This is another epistemologically clear statement: musical knowledge can be found through an interdisciplinary, socially orientated analysis of a music text, by analysing the repertory for ideological constructs of a sociological nature, as well as the deviations from those constructs. This is McClary’s justification for an actual correlation between elements found within a music text and the values of its society.

For example, bourgeois values are responsible for eighteenth-century music’s concept and creation of music in terms of perfection, organicism, unity and structure, as opposed to seventeenth-century music’s reflection of the bourgeois struggle through “fragmented structures, illegitimate dissonances, [and] ornate, defiant arabesques” (McClary 1987: 18).

These examples are a summarised form of the type of knowledge that McClary will be generating through her analysis. Essentially, she is taking historical grand narratives (such as the rise of the bourgeoisie), and looking for musical evidence to substantiate these grand narratives. This social perspective does eventually expand to include more complex sociological aspects.

6.3 “Bach’s music as social discourse”

If we accept, as McClary does, that the great movements of history described and concocted by historians are acceptable, and we agree that composers, listeners and critics must have been influenced by these overall sociological discourses (including intellectual currents, events, tastes and values) then it would be likely that some of these ideas have bled through into the creation and construction of music. The sub-section entitled “Bach’s music as social discourse” in McClary’s article, is, I believe, an attempt to justify the “true” beliefs stated in the “Introduction” and sub-section called “The Pythagorean Dilemma”. McClary’s evidence for this includes a combination of empirical evidence (the music texts of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, first movement and Wachet auf), and a sequence of interpretive narratives concerning these scores, which will now be discussed.

McClary’s stance is taken against the established views on Bach, as she generally interprets them. These are: that Bach is widely considered by musicologists to “transcend the
conditions of his time, place, career, and personality” (McClary 1987: 19), and that his music appears as “pure mathematical order often suggested by theorists” (McClary 1987: 20). Her viewpoint opposes these beliefs. She maintains that Bach cultivated a “marginalized position” in order to allow him to express a multitude of styles and accompanying ideologies through his music. “Bach’s genius lies in his ability to take these components that are highly charged – both ideologically and with respect to dynamic musical impulse [time] – and to give the impression of having reconciled them” (McClary 1987: 20).

6.4 “Examples”

In the examples McClary has chosen, it is her intention to highlight stylistic conventions and the deviation from these norms. She claims her approach is not the same as a conventional music analysis, because the field of music analysis seeks “deep-structural universals” (1987: 20). This is an interesting acknowledgement of the epistemology of music analysis which I have described in Chapter 3.3.1. It also highlights the fact that the “new” musicological epistemology does not believe that this approach is capable of producing “adequate” knowledge any longer, that it is epistemologically unsound because it continually tries to reduce the structure of a composition back to these “deep-structured universals”, however idiosyncratic the work appears to be.

6.5 “Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, first movement”

6.5.1 “Tonality”

After a discussion of how tonal compositions are generally constructed, McClary states her “true belief”: that tonality is a reflection of middle class values of progress, expansion, rationality and defiance. In this regard, she considers this movement to be a representative of these values through its use of tonality, as she has described the movement in terms of similar values in the sphere of music. It is through the correlation of these ideas in the music, and in the society that formed the social context of this music, that she has justified and produced this knowledge.
However, to be critical: Can the concept of “expansion”, as it was applied in society through war and commerce, really be considered as having a connection to the expansion of harmonic or melodic movement within a work of music? Is the defiance of people subjected to the financial, spiritual and physical oppression of the Church and aristocracy really comparable with that of stylistic defiance? McClary claims that this is prevalent in the music of Bach, resulting in “eclectic hybrids” (1987: 20).

If these questions have been answered in the affirmative, surely we could interpret our current music trends along the same lines? The cult of “the star” which infuses our modern popular music scene may be a reflection of capitalism’s elevation of the individual consumer, a result of the continual appeals to the human ego made in the market-place encouraging us to conform to certain trends rather than others in order to define and confirm our identities.

What is important is that, epistemologically, McClary claims that the “old” musicology rejects such interpretations as unable to produce musical knowledge because a work is viewed as an autonomous entity, divorced from its context. Conversely, the “new” musicology considers such interpretations capable of producing knowledge within a postmodern context because a work and its context are wholly integrated and inseparable.

6.5.2 “Concerto grosso procedure”

This section is a perfect example of this inextricability and essential connection between the work and its context. McClary claims that the concerto grosso (as well as the sonata) is representative of the individual’s (soloist’s) dialectic with society (the orchestra) during the political and intellectual struggles of the eighteenth century. More specifically the form indicates an “agenda” through the way in which the form is generally applied by composers, namely that “individual expression and social harmony will finally be demonstrated to be compatible” (1987: 24).
6.5.3 “Harpsichord”

However, McClary believes that Bach’s use of the harpsichord in this work, beautifully described as the “Revenge of the continuo player” which emerges as the “darkhorse competitor” for the role of soloist (which originally appears to be the flute and violin) and finally hijacks the piece, represents something deeper that Bach was trying to express through his music. “The harpsichord is the wild card in this deck that calls all the other parameters of the piece – and their attendant ideologies – into question” (McClary 1987: 26). McClary suggests that this may indicate that Bach was not always happy with his servile role as accompanist, and attempted to bring himself into a more prominent position than was usual in harpsichord performance.

I would like to draw attention to the way in which McClary’s socially-grounded interpretation is, in my view, slowly transforming into a direct view of the orchestral and solo voices as social phenomena. Whereas her socially-grounded interpretation began by viewing the larger social context as reflected in the stylistic and procedural norms of the music text, her current course is more an act of personification than of comparison.

In the following “Discussion”, McClary vividly describes the different sections’ personalities and behaviours in essentially human terms. I am not criticizing this approach, which I personally find creative and invigorating, but I feel it important to note that this view of direct social correlations in the music has suddenly shifted to viewing the soloists and orchestra as direct representatives of society, “characters in Bach’s narrative” as she calls it. These personifications are in agreement with semiotic interpretations (“doctrine of the affections”) of Bach’s time, as well as her statement in the Introduction that the component parts of the work will be discussed “in the abstract” (McClary 1987: 21).

6.5.4 “Discussion”

Essentially, the harpsichord’s compositional treatment creates a total upheaval of the concerto’s usual behaviour, and as a result the reconciliation that usually ends such a work is not possible. “[I]t unleashes elements of chaos, irrationality, and noise until finally it blurs
almost entirely the sense of key, meter, and form upon which eighteenth-century style depends. Finally, it relents and politely (ironically?) permits the ensemble to re-enter with its closing ritornello” (McClary 1987: 36).

In this regard, McClary views Bach as predicting the revolutionary violence that was soon to affect German society as a consequence of the social and political climate of his time. The concerto’s idealistic and ideological view of society as supportive of the individual so long as that individual does not become too individualistic, wild and uncontrollable was perceived as a reflection of the same social dilemma by Bach, according to McClary’s interpretation. The work’s ending, a return to convention, could be viewed as the individual’s “simultaneous desire for and resistance of concession to social harmony” (1987: 41).

6.6 “Wachet auf”

Because Wachet auf is a cantata, it is linked to a literary tradition with a slightly more obvious and well-known system of meanings. McClary believes that this piece, through “particular choices and juxtapositions” (1987: 41), enunciates issues concerned with the subjects of nationalism, religion and gender. These “true beliefs” are consequently justified in polemic form.

6.6.1 “National identity”

McClary states that a national style (the Italian, French or German styles specifically) is encoded with the beliefs, tastes and values of its times, particularly through the emotional contents displayed as well as the overall teleological motion of the style. Whereas the Italians exaggerated emotion and pursued “goal-oriented motion”, the French style rejected and opposed all Italian notions of style because of an anti-Italian sentiment. German style, although influenced and accepting of both to a certain extent, was clearly recognizable through its connection to Lutheran chorale tradition (although this is an extremely simplistic definition of the German style). McClary believes that Bach’s music is particularly evident as a form of reconciliation between these three styles, producing a German hybrid style, and that Wachet auf is a good example of this.
McClary believes that her analysis of *Wachet auf* carries a deeper patriotic message. Throughout the work the French and Italian styles become subservient in the musical dialogue to that of the German chorale melody, with which the piece climaxes, which represents the Lutheran Church, and more specifically the “German plan of salvation” (McClary 1987: 51).

In this section McClary begins with the “true belief” that Bach’s manipulation of style in this work carries a nationalistic message. Through an analysis of the score, she has isolated the different styles and noted their interaction. She has shown that the German style has been placed in strategic positions of prominence, and that its connection with Lutheran liturgical tradition enunciates the message that Bach’s music has a (purposefully) nationalistic dimension. Whether this was purposeful is debatable, but McClary’s interpretation of the stylistic interactions is extremely concise and accurate.

**6.6.2 “Orthodoxy/Pietism”**

By way of continuation, this nationalistic agenda is closely linked with the Lutheran church, but also to its sub-divisions, namely the more orthodox strains versus the pietistic, both of which served as patrons of Bach’s art. These strains of Lutheranism had their own irreconcilable musical tastes and values based on their differing conceptions of the Christian religion. McClary sees Bach’s treatment of these tastes in *Wachet auf* as a “reconciliatory” fusion, and she suggests that he brought together these two forces musically in order to enact something that could never be achieved in the real world (1987: 50).

The knowledge McClary has produced in this instance is more of a personal nature. Her inferences are drawn from the knowledge of Bach’s employment history within various divisions of the Lutheran Church and the well-known stylistic particulars of each with regards to music (1987: 51).

McClary also states in the opening paragraph of the Introduction that, according to scholars such as Robert Marshall and Friedrich Blume, it has come to light that Bach “was far more ambivalent about his position as a church musician than had previously been recognized”
(McClary 1987: 13). This perspective is particularly mentioned, in my opinion, in order to fortify McClary’s more secular view of how Bach may have perceived his own work, which in turn may serve to further displace the “pseudo-religious attitudes and values” of Bach’s “devotees” (the “old” musicologists).

6.6.3 “Gender”

In this section McClary calls the reader’s attention to the way in which men and women are represented in a musical text, specifically a language-based musical text like Wachet auf. Because Bach was a man, his representation of female characters in his music can be interpreted as typifying the view that men had of women during his time, which adds another social dimension to his music.

McClary believes that during the dialogue between the Soul and Christ, the Soul is generally represented with feminine attributes. There is not only musical evidence for this, but this representation of the Soul and Christ also has religious foundations in Pietist poetry, where the “Mystical Union between the Soul as Bride and Christ as Bridegroom” (McClary 1987: 51), with which Bach would have been familiar, mirrors this representation.

McClary views the soul (die Seele) as “a nagging, passive-aggressive wife, insecurely whining for repeated assurances of love and not hearing them when they are proffered” (1987: 51). Furthermore, through this expression of his stereotypical notions of gender, Bach has proven himself to be exactly situated within a specific and “non-universal” social discourse. Acknowledgement of this shows McClary’s preoccupation with disproving the absolutist notions associated with Bach and his music.

The “true belief” that McClary is trying to justify here is that gender-based social constructs infuse the composition of music as much as any other kind of social construct or ideology, and, as such, a musical work can be susceptible to almost any form of sociological critique: in this case, feminist critique. This, she has proven unequivocally, through both her reasoning and interpretation of Wachet auf.
The only problem seems to be that “old” musicologists find this type of music knowledge uncomfortable. I believe it is comparable (and quite possibly related) to the discovery of the function of the libido in psychoanalytic theory, which obviously links with notions of gender and sexuality also. The libido is something that is undeniable as a biological imperative and foundation of all life, and yet it is excluded and pushed out of almost any discourse because of its “inappropriate” and tabooed nature. By broaching the uncomfortable subject of gender in music, musicologists like McClary have discovered one of the blind-spots of the “old” musicology, and an almost entirely unexplored area of intrigue and information that throws many accepted notions into question. Such an interpretation is also capable of producing new and unexpected knowledge, and has epistemological ramifications.

What McClary is suggesting is epistemologically significant to the “new” musicology in terms of its fundamental principles. What a critique like this seems to be saying is that the “new” musicology considers feminist critique capable of producing knowledge about music with regards to composers’ conceptions, constructions and expressions of gender, and the treatment of those issues in a work. Such an endeavour would be considered valuable within a postmodern context despite the opinions of the proponents of the gender-blind “old” musicology.

6.6.4 “Bach reception”

McClary draws attention to the fact that this absolutist view of Bach as representing “pure order” and “universality” was not shared by his contemporaries. What the “old” musicology did was to create “a politically neutralized cultural figure whose opus signifies greatness while none of the events in particular pieces can be said to mean anything at all” (McClary 1987: 57).

McClary points out that because Bach has been used as an educational tool, the strategies he employed that now are considered to define tonality are passed on as “truth” instead of a single composer’s ideas and opinions. Furthermore, by divorcing his music from its social context, interpreters have been forced to create the perspective that his music is only capable of referring to something divine and beyond our mortal comprehension (which is
essentially, even metaphysically speaking, akin to nothing). McClary feels that in iconizing and attributing to Bach our highest accolade (the association with divinity) musicologists have robbed his music of meaning for all but the most zealous religious fundamentalists. And it is particularly this pseudo-religious viewpoint, with its roots in the “Pythagorean model”, which is responsible for that.

However, this pseudo-religious notion is open to sociological interpretation, and thereby meaningful, even if one disagrees with the concept in itself (as McClary does). The tonal procedures are presented by Bach in his works as “eternal, universal truths”, dedicated to “the Glory of God”, which McClary refers to as a “sleight of hand” on the part of the composer. Because of the certainty of his procedures and the pedagogical thoroughness, Bach’s methodology and procedures were taken up and copied so explicitly in the rest of German canonical tradition that they did become absolutes in a sense, as compositional models, reinforcing this perception of universality and divinity in the tradition.

The “true belief” here is that past and present reception of Bach’s work has created the perspective of his music that McClary is now criticizing. The projection of concepts of divinity and universality onto Bach’s music are the product of sociological forces, and do not necessarily relate to intrinsic factors in the music itself. All of the elements that reinforce these concepts are also sociologically linked: for example, the pedagogical use of Bach’s works which led to his (allegedly divine) tonal procedures being embraced by an entire group of prominent composers, or his link to religion thorough the patronage of the Lutheran Church.

6.7 “Bach in today’s cultural politics”

This section concludes the article, summarising and clarifying McClary’s epistemology and deconstructive methodology, both of which are perceived by her as postmodern.

McClary declares that this article is an expression of “deconstruction as a political act” (1987: 60). (See Chapter 4.6 concerning deconstruction.) The article under discussion is an example of her attempt to deconstruct the canon, in order to diminish its cultural power and
strangle-hold over contemporary music, which is the political dimension of his music to which she is referring.

McClary explicitly states that her work is not entirely a continuation of Adorno’s enterprise (as stated in the Introduction), because Adorno was still attempting to link his work to notions of autonomy associated with his nationalistic perceptions of the German canon, “which he continued to regard as a repository of truth” (1987: 59). In this case, we cannot assume Adorno to be a part of the “new” musicology, even though he favoured socially-grounded interpretations. This adds clarification to the dimensions of the “new” musicology, essentially stating that “new” musicology aims to deconstruct from a social dimension, not merely to gain a different viewpoint or expand the discipline into other fields, but specifically as a political act in defiance of outdated ideological traditions.

In “producing socially grounded meaning” (1987: 61) through this deconstructive process, McClary has defined the type of knowledge that she wishes to generate (in other words: her epistemology). The function and relevance of this type of knowledge is to increase admiration for Bach’s music as well as to enhance the field of historical performance practice with deeper and more “dramatic, musically compelling” performances through an understanding of the ideological connotations of his works.

This concluding section of the article is extremely significant with regards to the assumptions made by myself above about McClary’s epistemology. She states openly that she has imposed her postmodern viewpoint onto Bach, viewing him as “the post-modern eclectic, the ideologically marginalized artist empowering himself to appropriate, reinterpret, and manipulate to his own ends the signs and forms of dominant culture” (1987: 62). Through this statement, if the word artist is substituted for musicologist, I believe that she also clarifies her view of herself and the aims of her work in the context of postmodernism.

6.8 Summary

In this article I have discussed McClary’s views concerning Bach’s music when viewed from a social and political perspective. She argumentatively discusses the “old” musicological
establishment, which she regards as perpetuating “pseudo-religious rituals and attitudes” in an attempt to dupe the population into ignoring their “implicit social agenda”. This agenda is aimed towards retaining the cultural power that the discipline has held over music and musicology alike. Embedded in McClary’s is debate the postmodern tenet of relativism, as she questions notions of truth. She has established her attitude as a rebellious and ruthlessly critical musicologist, which is in line with her postmodern context. Epistemologically, her article is replete with descriptions of her “true beliefs” about the social dimension of Bach’s music, as well as the musicological ideologies relating to divinity, genius, and “perfect, universal order and truth”, which she then justifies through a socially-grounded interpretation of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 (first movement) and Wachet auf, both of which are interpreted through various sociological lenses. Her aim is to show that Bach’s music entirely inhabits and expresses its sociological context, both in terms of musical procedures as well as greater social movements and perspectives in the society in which he functioned, rather than representing ideals of divinity and universality.
Chapter 7

Gender and sexuality: an epistemological analysis of McClary’s “Constructions of subjectivity in Schubert’s music” (1994)

In the Introduction to Sounding Values (2007), McClary splits up her work into four categories which are listed in full in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In the previous chapter, her desire to provide a socially-grounded interpretation of music, and her epistemology for producing socially-grounded musical knowledge, was discussed. In the present chapter I will be looking at the way in which the subjects of gender and sexuality have been incorporated into her musicological discourse, and the strategies McClary uses in order to generate gender and sexuality-based musical knowledge as a result.

In the opening paragraph, McClary explains that her aim, through the writing of this essay, is to show “how a composer’s sexuality might be relevant to the music itself”. Her activity in this area was inspired by fellow musicologist Maynard Solomon, who had written about Schubert’s sexuality prior to McClary’s article, and she found this to be an interesting and frequently considered topic on account of “the sensibility projected in his [Schubert’s] music”.

McClary admits that this paper was written primarily for gay and lesbian scholars. I believe this is of extremely pivotal importance because that context makes this endeavour epistemologically relevant. A heterosexual group would have less interest in gay or lesbian interpretations, and justifications of “true beliefs” in that regard. But a homosexual audience would find such knowledge extremely satisfying, useful and interesting for a variety of reasons concerning identity formation.

One may feel inclined to say that if such knowledge is not relevant for everybody, then it cannot be knowledge. But postmodern knowledge does not have to be universal or objective, as has been shown in previous chapters. And “new” musicological knowledge, as in the case of the knowledge produced in the article “The blasphemy of talking politics
during Bach Year” (1983) specifically criticized the pseudo-religious viewpoint of music upheld by the “old” musicology as no longer valid in a postmodern context, and especially invalid in a “new” musicological setting.

In the same way that spiritual knowledge is irrelevant to the scientist, so scientific knowledge is irrelevant to the priest, although both produce knowledge valid to their context. In the same way, McClary believes that gender and sexuality-based interpretations of music are primarily valid to gay and lesbian scholars, audiences and musicologists (referred to by McClary as “queer musicology”), even though this type of knowledge may be considered uncomfortable and incomprehensible to other communities.

Proof of this incomprehensibility occurred to McClary after she was asked to give a presentation of this paper at a community event in New York City called the Schubertiade in 1992, where the paper was received by, what McClary believed to be, a primarily heterosexual crowd. This belief was based on the incredulity of the listeners towards her suggestions of Schubert’s sexuality. Consequently her interpretation was heavily criticized in defence of Schubert’s heterosexuality, both at the presentation and in the *New York Times*.

McClary states her “true belief” that Schubert’s music was composed during a time (in the early 19th century) when contemporary artists considered personal expression, and direct expressions of self (such as sexuality and gender), an integral feature of their art. Sexual behaviour is therefore imbedded into their music and can be discerned by analysts. In this regard she cites one of Schubert’s younger contemporaries by way of example, the French homosexual writer Théophile Gautier (1811-1872). It is conceivable that Schubert may have implanted similar notions into his music. However, it is far more difficult to prove such notions exist in a work of music than it is to find such notions in a written text. Regardless, this is her belief, which she consequently justifies using a formal analysis of some of his compositions as her empirical evidence during the course of the essay.

In order to justify this perspective of Schubert’s music reflecting a representation of sexuality, McClary believes that a socially-grounded interpretation of Schubert’s music will be necessary. In other words, an interpretation that does not consider the music to be
autonomous and self-contained. This is important from an epistemological dimension because she has stated the pre-requisites for gender-based or sexuality-based musical knowledge: socially-grounded interpretations of the musical text rather than interpretations based purely on music analysis. This standpoint has been thoroughly examined and justified in various places in Chapter 6 with regards to Bach’s music, but here she adds that her “methods involve paying attention to semiotics, narrativity, genre, reception history, and cultural theory”. Her main interest in exposing the social dimension of music is to imbue music with an even greater sense of meaning than that which can be provided by traditional pseudo-religious, absolutist interpretations discussed and criticized in the previous chapter.

McClary now presents historical evidence for her social interpretation. McClary’s reinterpretation and recontextualisation of this well-known history relates to the post-structuralist concept of “genealogy” (previously discussed in Chapter 4.5), through which history is rewritten as a “continual re-evaluation of the past” from the perspective of the concerns of the “present moment, and as such it intervenes in the present moment” (Lechte 2008: 139).

McClary explains that the notions of identity and masculinity that we now take for granted were being constructed during Schubert’s time (the rise of the middle class in the 1800s), primarily through the arts, and especially through literature, for example Austen’s and Dickens’s Bildungsromane (coming-of-age novels), which focus on character development and transcendence. She draws a parallel between literature and music, between the Bildungsromane and the sonatas of this time, with their focus on character and motive/subject development. In the same way that David Copperfield struggles to transcend the vicissitudes of life, so does the sonata motive/subject battle through the keys to eventual resolution and success in the tonic.

Schubert has often been paired with Beethoven as the latter’s antithesis, both in stature and masculinity. Sir George Grove even wrote that “compared with Beethoven, Schubert is as a woman to a man” (Grove 1951: 238). Consequently, Beethoven’s aggressive and masculine model has been totally absorbed into our gender-based interpretations of music. But, as McClary points out, “Beethoven was scarcely a champion of heterosexuality, even if he did...
succeed in constructing what has been accepted as an ideal of masculinity in music” (McClary 1983: 214). It would appear that there are more to our gender constructions than a few sparse biographical details of the composer’s life, considering that Beethoven’s failure of a love-life, recorded in a series of sentimental and weepy letters, did not seem to alter our perception of his music as ultra-masculine.

I believe that gendered interpretations of music, especially that of Beethoven and Schubert, have been rife in musicology “old” and “new”. What has changed is the hierarchical structure that underpins them, and the ideologies that this structure supports. For example, in “old” musicology it was fine to interpret Beethoven in terms of gender, so long as one follows accepted conventions in this regard. He could be regarded as aggressively masculine, so long as nobody dared to say that this facet of his music was an “overcompensation for fears of [sexual] inadequacy – fears that not only influenced Beethoven’s self-image, but that plague bourgeois masculinity in general”, as McClary has suggested.

However, McClary’s entire epistemology with regards to producing gender-based musical knowledge in the work of Schubert is based on a fundamental point which she stated near the beginning of the article. Namely, that Schubert intentionally created a sociological sub-text and commentary through his composition, as did many artists of his time (such as Gautier). Therefore we must ask, was the aggressiveness and masculinity we perceive in Beethoven’s music intentionally included in the composition in the same way that Schubert purposefully deviated from this tradition?

In the case of the Eroica Symphony (1803-4) which McClary uses as her prime example of a masculine subject (supposedly representing Napoleon, if we adhere to conventional interpretations based on Beethoven’s crossed-out dedication to the emperor), we can assume that this work is representative of the masculinity and aggressiveness of a “heroic identity”. In time, this work became “the model of German manhood”, and from then on Schubert was considered to be the antithesis of this model.

McClary and Solomon, among others involved in “queer theory” and “gay musicology”, may consider that the answer to this is to construe Schubert’s work in the light of a homosexual
perspective. But I believe there is another interpretation as well. Schubert is either cast as a tragic effeminate soul living in Beethoven’s shadow, or as some sort of early musicological gay activist through his implanting of narrative-based homosexual sub-text into his music. That his libido must somehow be implicated in his work may provide meaningful interpretations for those that wish to consider Schubert a contrasting prop for Beethoven’s immense and overbearing sexuality, or as a homosexual icon. But I believe that musicologists such as McClary and Solomon are biased towards sexuality-based interpretations because of the influence of the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung on the discipline of musicology, which is undeniable especially in the contemporary era, and because of which lingams and yonis are glimpsed around every corner.

Having recently read Jung’s *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916), I would like to note that his psychoanalytical narrative is a micronarrative in that it is wholly a subjective interpretation of certain mythological texts, something which he admits in the Introduction. Those texts, primarily the Greek myths, were specifically chosen (intentionally or unintentionally) by the author on account of their numerous sexual references. Their applications to dream theory and psychology, however fascinating and reasonable (although many would disagree), are still, unfortunately, subjective interpretations and entirely theoretical (some would say metaphysical even) in this regard, despite Jung’s claims that the analytical yields of his forays into dream theory constituted empirical evidence (1916: xix). I believe that the emerging field of psychoanalysis during Jung’s time was actually confronted with a similar problem to that which the “new” musicology is experiencing. Being theoretical fields, both are confronted with the need to legitimize themselves in a world that mistrusts the metaphysical, the subjective, and the non-empirical. Both search deeply for something in their context that can pass as scientifically viable. For Jung it is the supposed symbolic contents of his patients’ dreams. For musicologists it is the harmonic, melodic, formal and stylistic procedures in the musical text. Both can be considered flimsy when viewed from a scientific perspective that favours hard and unequivocal evidence. Perhaps that is why, in this instance, psychoanalysis and musicology are clinging to one another in order to produce something slightly more substantial.
In the footnotes to McClary’s essay, she mentions a musicological article by Edward Rothstein, who writes for the *New York Times* and favours musicological interpretations that are not sexuality- or gender-based. One of his articles that criticizes McClary’s view is entitled “Dr. Freud, is it true that sometimes, tea is only tea?” (1992), and another is called “Was Schubert gay? If he was, so what?” (1992). These articles arose in response to McClary’s essay, and I mention these articles here in order to make it clear that some people in the field of musicology may also be aware of the influence of psychoanalysis on the field of “new” musicology, which is especially influential with regards to sexuality-based interpretations.

The reason why I bring this to light is to show that part of the epistemology of the “new” musicology is the creation of new paradigms and contexts under which certain types of knowledge can be considered meaningful. If everybody forgets that Freud and Jung are at the source of our gender- and sexuality-based interpretations, then we automatically take up such interpretations as universal without considering why we accept them as fitting into a pre-existing paradigm (which appears to be universal because we do not recognize its source). Prior to Freud and Jung, a sexuality-based interpretation would have appeared ludicrous and outlandish, entirely incapable of creating knowledge. However, because of the grand narrative of psychoanalysis pioneered by these figures and developed over the past century into a form of common-knowledge, sexuality-based interpretations have grown rife in all areas of critical discourse, including musicology (especially if we take composers such as Beethoven and Schubert as examples).

My argument is as follows: Sexuality-based interpretations like the one under discussion produce a particular type of knowledge that ultimately serves to reinforce the psychoanalytic grand narrative. Although Jung points out in his “Introduction” to *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916) that a libido-based interpretation of the psyche is subjective and shocking, it has prevailed because it has been found to be a *useful* model through which to understand the mind, human activity and impulses. In the same way that alchemical experiments eventually led to modern chemistry, early psychology and psychoanalysis aided the field of psychiatry, which has since become considerably more successful. Somewhere
along the way the metaphysical dimension became subservient to the empirical. Ultimately this was a battle for legitimacy, in a world which values the a posteriori over the a priori.

Musicological narratives, because of the significant lack of scientifically viable empirical data that can be gleaned from a musical text, balance delicately upon the tightrope provided by various legitimizing narratives in an on-going critical polemic that includes grand narratives and metanarratives concerning the meaning of music. McClary is attempting to erect another legitimate narrative, that of “queer musicology”, through the writing of essays such as the one under discussion.

As McClary states after presenting this essay to the American Musicological Society in 1990, “it seemed that queer musicology had finally arrived” (2007: 170). This is not really McClary’s attempt to express a subjective viewpoint, but forms part of a greater movement ("queer musicology") that aims to construct a discipline with its own rules of legitimization, its own metanarrative (as discussed in Chapter 4.3.2), and most importantly, its own epistemology.

Now I have discussed to whom this sort of musical knowledge would be meaningful and useful (those that favour sexuality-based interpretations, gay and lesbian scholars, among others), and what the accepted source and context of such information is (psychoanalytic theories, and those that favour or accept such theories). I will now delve more deeply into McClary’s interpretation of how the epistemology of “queer musicology” functions in order to produce knowledge about music in this context. What follows in the article is McClary’s sexuality-based interpretation of Schubert’s Unfinished Symphony. If one understands both the context that has produced sexuality-based musical knowledge, as well as the spheres in which this type of knowledge is meaningful and useful (the discipline of “queer musicology”), it should not pose a problem to accept this narrative as producing valid knowledge, even if one happens to disagree with everything in it.

What is also of importance is the conventional perception of Beethoven’s music that McClary keeps referring to, which has a well-documented history in musicology. Through associating with this pre-existing narrative, McClary infers legitimacy on her own as a result of that association, even if her opinion it is at odds with the original perspective. I believe
that opposing opinions have the effect of reinforcing the legitimacy of that which they oppose simply by furthering the debate surrounding the particular cultural meaning in question. This is interesting because McClary’s entire interpretation comes across as something revolutionary, shocking and new, when actually it is just a repeat of the Beethoven/Schubert masculine/feminine dichotomies which have already been discussed at length and are now well established as common knowledge among musicologists. By placing this information in a new guise, and giving it relevance to the gay community, McClary has managed to immediately attach this well entrenched aspect of musicological discourse (the masculine/feminine dichotomy) to the relatively new discipline of “queer musicology”, and consequently has strengthened its foundations. This sort of transdisciplinary behaviour brought about by interdisciplinary movement (in this case, interdisciplinary movement between the field of “queer theory” and the discipline of musicology) was discussed in Chapter 4.4. The resulting discipline has been called “queer musicology”.

I believe that this is how any grand narrative begins to grow into a self-sufficient entity, by adopting aspects of other grand narratives that lend their legitimacy to it. For example, if the grand narrative of Marxism evolved without the grand narrative of feudalism, or economics, it would have been entirely meaningless. Now all this narrative needs is an epistemology, a manner in which it can generate feasible knowledge, acceptable to its context, and the grand narrative of “queer musicology” is born.

McClary situates her proof of Schubert’s sexuality within pre-existing sexuality-based interpretations of music and the psyche: Beethoven’s heroic model, and theories of identity that concern subjectivity and constructions of self. A discussion of the subject of identity in the context of music is included in Chapter 4.9. Within this context, further sexuality-based and identity-based assumptions can be made by musicologists.

McClary begins by pointing out that the *Unfinished Symphony* is “a musical narrative that does not enact the more standard model in which a self strives to define identity through the consolidation of ego boundaries”, the implication being that Beethoven’s music would have been defined in such a way. Numerous references to Schubert’s formal deviations from Beethoven’s model are made, and McClary describes the critical theorist Adorno’s feeling of
McClary describes the second key area as creating a “stable identity” for its motive. “Stable identity and the security of tonal centre are here presented as a kind of prison from which subjectivity cannot escape, regardless of how much it strains” (McClary 2007: 179). Sentences like this are bound to create confusion if one does not see how these claims and comparisons are built on the characterisation and personification of musical motives, the act of which is referred to as “narrativity” and has a long history in musicology. As Maus (2001: 641) states, “often the interpretation of musical narrativity has been offered as an alternative to purely technical description and as a key to musical meaning”. McClary’s initial description of the Unfinished Symphony as “a musical narrative” also shows that she favours such an interpretation in the generation of musical knowledge.

If we are to analyse McClary’s epistemology thus far, I believe that the platform from which she generates her knowledge, firstly, incorporates existing musicological interpretations of gender constructs inherited from the “old” musicology, evolving through the work of Adorno and other critical theorists into its present form which incorporates less conventional interpretations such as those provided by a “queer” perspective. Secondly, the meaning she creates is dependent on aspects of identity that emerge through the process of narrativity. Maus (2001: 642) asks the following question with regards to narrativity: “[w]hat are the constraints on such descriptions, and how do such descriptions contribute to knowledge about music?” This is an extremely poignant question.

I believe that in order to derive musical and sociological meaning from a musical composition, it is necessary to provide something symbolic and representational. Symbols of
representation and semiotic systems are never considered as “things in themselves”, but are meaningful in relation to one another. The expression of music itself (excluding the musical text) cannot create its own means of visual representation because it exists in a non-visual sphere, and so it must evolve some sort of association with the real word in which it exists and is considered meaningful. Epistemologically, it is important that narrativity in musicology is meaningful and useful to those that apply a narrative-based interpretation of music in the generation of knowledge about music. However, that knowledge will be of a specific type, relevant to a specific context, as well as appeal to a specific readership (i.e. those that are informed and supportive of that context). This should be perfectly acceptable in a postmodern context, as well as open to critique and other perspectives. An understanding of these specific contexts seems to be the prerequisites of musical knowledge in McClary’s context.

An aspect of the “old” musicology that McClary incorporates is that of music analysis, which she meaningfully enhances through the application of the concept of narrativity. Through this process the act of music analysis becomes anthropomorphic (Maus 2001: 641), and allows for an even greater inclusion of sociological aspects into McClary’s micronarrative, thereby strengthening her socially-grounded interpretations of music (which includes sexuality-based interpretations). Narrativity in music analysis creates a direct link between the human realm and the musical sphere, bypassing the coldly scientific, objectivist connotation that the “old” musicology attached to the discipline of music analysis, and yet retaining the analytical and empirical data.

For example, when McClary describes the second key area and its principal motive, she describes its behaviour anthropomorphically, as characterised by “timid quaking [...] to greater confidence [...] to violent Sturm and [sic] Drang”, and claims that its stagnation on the key of C sharp or D flat creates an imprisoning yet “stable [key] identity”. This identity which imprisons the motive’s subjective nature is then abandoned as the motive travels through D, G and C major. What McClary has achieved here contains many of the aspects of a formal analysis, and yet through anthropomorphic characterisation, narrativity, she has achieved a far superior narrative of the events occurring in the second key area than could have been achieved otherwise.
I believe that that this sort of enhancement of descriptions of musical activity through anthropomorphization has a longer history in the field of music analysis than contemporary descriptions of narrativity would have us believe. Both Maus’s article entitled “Narratology, narritivity” in the *New Grove* (2001: 641) and Beard and Gloag’s contribution entitled “Narrative” in *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (2005: 114) claim that such activity began in the 1980s, which supports the use of narrativity as being a part of the “new” musicology. However, to quote Tovey writing in 1936 (67) about Beethoven’s *Piano Concerto in C Major, Op. 15*: “Beethoven’s third cadenza storms away in magnificent Waldstein-sonata style, at first apropos of Ex. 3, then apropos of figure (α), which starts on a voyage round the solar system.”

“Storming away” and “voyages around the solar system” can be viewed as characteristics of human behaviour, even if they are hyperbolic and much less personalised than McClary’s descriptions. These descriptions are also indirectly anthropomorphic: storms are an attribute of nature (even though “storming away” is a description of something a person might do), and a “voyage around the solar system” is something that a spaceship or satellite is capable of, not necessarily the person steering the vessel. I do not claim that narrativity was frequently or directly used in the past, but there is ample evidence of its origins in “old” musicology, and especially in the field of music analysis through the descriptions of musical behaviour given by analysts like Tovey.

McClary goes on to describe in detail how Schubert’s harmonic movement in the rest of the work *deliberately* subverts convention as established by Beethoven. She mentions that both Adorno and Dahlhaus recognized these resistances towards the Beethovinian model, which they each describe in their own manner.

The second movement deviates even more overtly from the tonal model in that Schubert begins to explore chromaticism as an alternative, and consequently this affects the subject of identity (and gender) inherent in the use of tonality. McClary (2007: 187) describes the link between Schubert’s music and his identity as follows:
On some level, centred key identity almost ceases to matter, as Schubert frames chromatic mutation and wandering as sensually gratifying. [...] Schubert tends to disdain goal-orientated desire per se for the sake of a sustained image of pleasure and an open, flexible sense of self – both of which are quite alien to the constructions of masculinity then being adopted as natural, and also to the premises of musical form as they were commonly construed at the time.

The “goal-orientated desire” McClary is referring to is that of the Beethovinian hero, as represented by specific teleological activity in the plot of the narrative, activity that is a direct representation of masculine identity (which is penetrative, stable and aggressive), ever reaching towards accomplishment of the musical goal. Contrastingly, Schubert’s music deviates from those narrative procedures. McClary now combines research on narrative organization by the literary theorist Earl Jackson, who has typified the way some gay writers and critics formulate their narratives, and interposed this information to support her beliefs concerning Schubert’s sexuality, and the portrayal of this sexuality in a musical narrative.

This “queer” aspect of literary theory is a perfect addition to the field of “queer musicology” as McClary refers to it, because it adds legitimization from another discipline, and thereby strengthens and deepens the epistemology of the discipline of “queer musicology”. The bridge McClary has used between these two disciplines is narrativity, which pivots on acceptance of the belief that there are narrative structures inherent in a musical work, and especially in a musical work from Schubert’s era. If the reader is convinced of this belief concerning narrativity, accepts the tenets of “queer” literary theory as devised by Earl Jackson, and agrees with McClary’s incorporation of these beliefs into musicological narrative concerning the work of Schubert in order to substantiate her “true belief” that Schubert was gay, then what McClary has created is a perfectly substantiated epistemology that creates knowledge in the context of “queer musicology”.

It is becoming clearer that what I am discussing here is context-specific knowledge as opposed to universal knowledge, and McClary’s epistemology in this article is particularly exemplary of this sort of knowledge creation. The aim of such knowledge is not to discover “the truth”, but to create meaningful subjective truths relevant to particular contexts. In other words, knowledge that is meaningful and useful to the people that associate
themselves with these contexts. This is especially true of “queer theory” and “queer musicology”, and aids in identity formation and consolidation for marginalized groups.

Nobody, least of all McClary, would openly state that Schubert was homosexual based on the evidence of her narrative. However, the discourse concerning his sexuality gives room for disciplines such as “queer theory” and “queer musicology” to develop their grand narratives and metanarratives, and establish identities in relation to which others can then position their own identities. Academics like McClary are facilitating this process of identification in the knowledge that the musicological grand narratives of the past, with their exclusion of topics such as gender, and claims to universality, were simply crushing anything that did not fit in with their cultural norms and preconceptions. Clearly, this is not a process that should be allowed to continue in a postmodern era that recognizes the relativist nature of truth and knowledge, as well as the need for knowledge that is meaningful to the people it caters to, rather than being universal, exclusionary, and only of use to certain powerful groups. If the relativist nature of knowledge is understood, then both gender-based perspectives can co-exist, the heterosexual alongside the homosexual interpretation, and both gender groups can be satisfied to accept the knowledge that they feel is the most meaningful and useful to them. If one cannot help but ask the question, “who is right?”, then be prepared to accept the answer: both are right. Alternatively: there is no right and wrong, only differing interpretations. As long as both perspectives have established “true beliefs” which are then backed up by a priori and a posteriori arguments, they have both followed the rules of epistemic rigour and must both be considered as producing knowledge worthy of our acceptance and appreciation.

Summary

McClary aimed, in this article, to show “how a composer’s sexuality might me relevant to the music itself”. In this case she speaks about Schubert, often viewed as a “feminine” composer and contrasted with Beethoven in this regard. I have taken this as her “true belief”, that a composer’s sexuality might indeed be relevant to the music itself, for it is a claim that the rest of the article attempts to justify, again following the model of “justified, true belief”. However, because McClary openly states that the paper would mainly be of interest to gay
and lesbian scholars (“queer musicologists”), this specific demographic has been taken into account because it seriously affects the purpose of the knowledge she is creating through writing this article, in this case, to support marginalised groups such as the homosexual community. Her intention is also to help legitimise “queer musicology” by the creation of this knowledge and thereby strengthening its foundations. By comparing narrative structures within Schubert’s music to similar structures uncovered in literature by the queer (literary) theorist Earl Jackson, McClary believes she has substantiated her claim that a composer’s sexuality might be relevant to the music itself, specifically in Schubert’s *Unfinished Symphony*. Formations of identity (hence: subjectivity) within this work are also described by McClary to substantiate her viewpoint and link the music more closely with the composer on a sociological level, opening the work up to a sexuality-based interpretation.
Chapter 8

Epistemological conditions: an epistemological analysis of McClary’s “Living to tell: Madonna’s resurrection of the fleshly” (1990)

In McClary’s introduction to “Living to tell: Madonna’s resurrection of the fleshly” (1990), I believe that her first step in the generation of musical knowledge with regards to Madonna, has been to establish a set of conditions under which this knowledge can be legitimised. I am highlighting these conditions because they are epistemologically significant. They establish a context within which McClary’s beliefs can be justified and consequently accepted as knowledge. These conditions also reflect postmodern and “new” musicological debates such as those primarily concerning identity (Aristotle, Derrida and film theory), gender (feminist theory), deconstruction (Derrida) and intertextuality (Kristeva). On closer examination, this is actually a vast and elite series of topics that validate her work, but yet can only be understood if one is familiar with their history and how they have been integrated into musicology in the past, which would mean familiarity with the work of Aristotle, Derrida and Kristeva in the very least (summaries of which are obviously not included in the article), including aspects of film theory such as subject position which have been applied to music.

The conditions are as follows:

- The first condition is that we regard Madonna’s music, for arguments sake, as not merely a “conventional backdrop to her visual appearance”, as critics and musicologists have done in the past, but as musically significant to a variety of discourses (1990: 148). The relevant discourses are included in the following conditions.

- The second condition is that we will view Madonna’s music through a gender-based interpretation, “within a history of gender relationships in the music world”. Fundamental to establishing these relationships would be feminist interpretations, especially those concerning the matter of feminine identity (such as subject position established through her music videos, interviews and lyrics). (McClary 1990: 148, 149.)
• The third condition includes the notion of intertextuality. Madonna’s creative output is intertextual in that her medium is a conglomeration of audio and visual components. Although the concept of intertextuality is not used by McClary in this instance, she claims that Madonna’s “music and personae are produced within a variety of social discursive practices. Her style is assembled from the musics of many different genres, and her visual images draw upon the conventions of female representation that circulate in film, advertisements, and stage shows” (1990: 150). This paragraph lists a variety of texts that intersect in order to produce the final text.

• The fourth condition is a repetition of ideas presented in the previous chapter to do with the way in which non-masculine music subverts masculine musical conventions, such as the deconstruction of “the traditional notion of the unified subject with finite ego boundaries” (McClary 1990: 150), which were described and codified in the work of Beethoven. The identity constructs McClary identifies with feminine and homosexual archetypes resist stability and definition. Her conception of this behaviour as a form of deconstruction refers to the work of Derrida, especially the aspects of deconstruction that criticizes the basis of human thinking in the “logic of identity” and encourages “the redefining of borders” (Lechte 2008: 130).

• The fifth condition is that we accept a culturally-grounded interpretation of music, and particularly of Madonna’s music as engaging with “ongoing cultural conversations about gender, power, and pleasure” (McClary 1990: 150).

• The sixth and final condition which is overtly stated in McClary’s introduction is that we accept that Madonna is almost solely responsible for almost all aspects of her product, based on McClary’s “true belief” that Madonna is Wagnerian in her control of her work, as well as Madonna’s claim that this is so during interviews quoted in McClary’s text. In this regard, McClary wishes Madonna to be perceived as “head of a corporation that produces images of her self-representation” and not merely a “puppet” (McClary 1990: 149).

These preconditions provide what I refer to as the “specific intellectual context” of the narrative, which is clearly strongly associated with postmodernism. However, it is more complicated than merely accepting these aspects of the intellectual world as validating
McClary’s narrative. Before we can accept McClary’s narrative as producing knowledge about music, we must agree with McClary’s interpretation of these subjects also, as well as her application of these subjects to the field of musicology. This is what makes interdisciplinary musicology such an incredibly complicated process, as well as so vulnerable to criticism. When there is such a large volume of metaphysical and context-dependent ideas included in a narrative, the stability of such a narrative is bound to be continually threatened. If a critic were to disagree with one element of McClary’s narrative, Madonna’s control over her own work for example (which McClary claims is extremely important with regards to “intentionality, agency, and authorship”), then Madonna would be seen less as a feminist icon and more as the puppet of an industry that is exploiting her sexuality for record sales.

McClary also finds herself in a paradoxical loop because of her intellectual context. “I do not want to suggest that she (of all artists!) is a solitary creator who ultimately determines fixed meanings for her pieces” (McClary 1990: 150). If McClary were to do this, she would be ignoring the influential field of post-structuralism, particularly the work of Roland Barthes, whose concept of “the death of the author” highlights the aspect of multiple interpretative possibilities for any work of art (Barthes 1977: 142-8). McClary’s sensitivity to the claims of her intellectual context (postmodernism) is particularly obvious through statements such as the one quoted at the beginning of this paragraph. And yet, despite her desire to the contrary, autonomy is exactly what is being claimed, both by Madonna in her interviews (“while it seemed like I was behaving in a stereotypical way, at the same time, I was also masterminding it”), and through McClary’s view of her as a feminist projecting feminist values, as well as representing certain musical identities that are anti-masculine. Conditions such as these must be made in order to provide McClary with a platform from which to voice her perception and views concerning Madonna.

In this regard I believe that McClary, in much the same manner as the “old” musicologists, is biased towards a particular interpretation. She does not want Madonna to be reduced “once again to a voiceless, powerless bimbo” (McClary 1990: 150), even when there are many good reasons to believe that she might be just that. McClary’s “true belief” to the contrary will be justified at any cost as a result, and the narrative produced will be insubstantial and
unstable. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. In this regard, McClary may be proving that the same ideas that are reflected in Madonna’s music that make it particularly feminine may also be imbedded in McClary’s narrative, considering that she approaches her writing “as a woman” (2007: xiii).

I would like to put forward the possibility that the gradual weakening of the patriarchal grand narrative and metanarrative over the last century, finally giving way in the contemporary era to the micronarrative, may be due to the increased inclusion of feminist and feminine discourse within the intellectual world.

In the article discussed in the previous chapter, McClary spoke of the literary theorist Earl Jackson, who defined the more masculine types of narrative organization. These are conventions which gay writers apparently tend to subvert. These masculine aspects are “clear dichotomies between active and passive roles, constant reinforcement of ego boundaries, and avoidance of experiences such as ecstasy or pleasure that threaten to destabilize the autonomous self” (McClary 2007: 188). I presume that not all but many female writers would also subvert these conventions in the natural expression of their gender in writing. McClary (1990: 150) claims that similar instances of subverting these traditions are at work in Madonna’s music, for example, that she “repeatedly deconstructs the traditional notion of the unified subject with finite ego boundaries”.

McClary states that Madonna’s music engages “provocatively with ongoing cultural conversations about gender, power, and pleasure” (McClary 1990: 150). It is my argument that McClary’s narrative follows the same course. If McClary is seeing these anti-masculine narrative conventions in music, it is conceivable that the same conventions would also be embedded in McClary’s musicological narratives, which she claims have been written “as a woman”.

McClary enunciates the three aims of her essay on Madonna: to “locate her within a history of gender relationships in the music world”, to “examine some of the ways she operates within a persistently repressive discourse to create liberatory musical images”, and to
“consider the interactions between musical and visual components” in Madonna’s music videos.

From this short summary it is clear that the structure of this article is very different from McClary’s previously analysed essays. For example, “The Blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year” (1983) was almost a manifesto of the “new” musicology’s system of values. “Constructions of subjectivity in Schubert’s music” (1990) was a manifesto for “gay musicology”. Both of these writings aimed to prove something epistemologically concrete, even if the end product was not expressly considered to be “the truth” in a relativistic postmodern context. I suggest that both of these previous articles followed conventional masculine narrative structures, which were incorporated in an attempt to produce authoritative work of epistemological legitimacy. It is interesting to note that both of these articles were produced under conditions of adversity, in the knowledge that they would be met with harsh disagreement. Under these circumstances of musicological warfare (a terribly masculine habit), McClary’s narrative voice became authoritative and declamatory, and the narratives produced were well-structured arguments with an almost heroic identity (she even refers to herself as a “renegade musicologist”).

But in “Living to tell: Madonna’s resurrection of the fleshly” (1990), I believe that what I am encountering is an intrinsically feminine epistemology. Essentially, this is a subjective narrative built on a series of subjective conditions for knowledge. The overall aim is to justify McClary’s view of Madonna as a feminist icon, and of her work as a reflection of feminist values.

What this article essentially does is to provide an example of feminist musicology, and how feminist musicological knowledge can be achieved. Both of the previous articles dealt with male subjects. It is interesting to note that McClary’s narrative and epistemological approach for a feminine subject is entirely different. Perhaps this is possible because there are far less archaic patriarchal influences attaching themselves across the centuries to a discussion of Madonna as there are to a discussion of Bach or Schubert.
In the introduction to Reading Music (2007), McClary states that “Living to Tell” (1990) is her most reprinted article. This popular response indicates that there are many who have considered this knowledge interesting, meaningful and useful (or readable and publishable at the very least). I have established that this work is produced in a feminist context, by McClary, a radical feminist musicologist. Therefore it has probably been produced to be received by a context that would agree with its claims to knowledge and would find that knowledge interesting, meaningful and useful (used in the construction, formation and definition of the previously repressed and marginalized female identity).

One may disagree with all of the conditions McClary states and with the knowledge-value of the article, but one cannot disagree with the value of this article in the formation of feminist identity. But even with regards to epistemological rigour, one may be hard-pressed to find this article wanting in a postmodern context, especially in the light of micronarrative theory discussed in Chapter 4.3.3. Hutcheo describes the “rupturing effect” of postmodern narratives as “the simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions of narrative” (1989: 49). McClary is subverting conventionally masculine narrative tradition, and at the same time inscribing a new convention that also has its own rules of conduct, rules which emerge through the writing of the micronarrative.

I have elucidated this behaviour in Chapters 4.3.3 in terms of the “autopoietic system” (Maturana), otherwise called a “self-creating system”. If McClary is creating knowledge within the “autopoietic system” of the relativistic micronarrative, then within this system of self-creation, McClary is perfectly entitled to subjectively define the conditions of her own knowledge. The acceptance of this knowledge is dependent on our understanding of the postmodern context she is writing in, as well as our recognition of this context as our own, and the incorporation of this context into our own narratives and thinking. For postmodern feminists, feminist theorists and feminist musicologists, this process is simple, second nature. For those outside of these disciplines that do not want to miss out, it may involve a little more perceptive and intellectual effort before we can understand the relevance of these discourses, and how we are contextually positioned in relation to them in our present cultural and intellectual capacity. However, at no point can we merely write-off the proceeds of the micronarrative, especially if we find its content unnerving or contentious.
For example, considering that I am a heterosexual male in my mid-twenties, one would assume that feminist musicology bears little relevance to my life (unless it could somehow enable me to achieve some insight into the behaviour of my mother, sister and girlfriend). Were I to have been born a hundred years ago, my opinion would have led me to a rejection of this debate, especially once I found alien narrative and epistemological behaviour. In this regard I have been forced, through the study of these articles, to examine the in-depth intellectual and gender-based contexts in which they are situated. As a result I have developed new perspectives and positions in relation to this information. I feel as if I have grown intellectually. I will never be the same again, and the world is now a different place because of it. Clearly I have found it meaningful. I have found it useful in relation to my own writing on postmodern musicological epistemology. As I have stated many times, I believe that knowledge must be meaningful and useful, as well as following the rules of epistemic rigour, taking the form of justified, “true belief”. In this regard, McClary’s narratives have fulfilled all categories in relation to myself as a human being, despite our entirely different contexts. I may never become a feminist, but at least I now know a little more about the relevance and context of feminist knowledge.

The crux of the matter is that understanding contemporary knowledge is no longer as simple as accepting something that comes across as “true”. As we now believe, the “truth” of the past was merely authoritative voices following hierarchical structures and patterns of thinking, manipulating language, emotion and interpretations in order to annex our opinions. In the postmodern era, it is no longer good enough to form an opinion of present discourse without doing a large amount of research and thinking. Postmodern knowledge is context-specific knowledge; the meaning is embedded in the context. This is what allows for myriad interpretations, because everything is inter-contextual (all contexts are intertwined). That is how feminism can reveal knowledge about music, and music can reveal unconsidered aspects of feminism. That same piece of music can be viewed also from a hyper-masculine or gay perspective and we can still find something meaningful to that context. The reason why we do not have to go to war over it is because these perspectives can co-exist in a relativistic intellectual setting (postmodernism) where we understand that hierarchical binary distinctions and dichotomies are resigned to a context that is no longer relevant, an artefact of the past, and were used as justification for destructive acts of cultural power. Now, having
seen the tyranny these modes of thinking produced, the intellectual and creative oppression, the political upheavals and bloodshed, we proudly embrace the multiplicity of truth as an act of self-preservation. What use is the truth if we are slaves to it, controlled by it? Meaning should be something that all of humanity share in whatever capacity we can, and that can only be achieved if we all consciously contribute to its creation and evolution (and evolution implies change).

McClary’s aim in this article is to engender such change, to provide meaning and context to an aspect of present discourse that she believes needs to evolve and change. As McClary (1990: 150) claims, “I will focus on how a woman artist can make a difference within discourse”.

Madonna, according to McClary, has problematized the conventional notion of female musicians as being available sex objects, an idea which reverberates throughout the history of Western art music. McClary sees the exclusion of women from the field as being a reflection of a deeper human notion, the mind/body dichotomy, which can be represented by the masculine and the feminine respectively. By cutting the body off from expression through music, patriarchal control can be maintained. Ultimately what is being articulated in these masculine creations is a “fear of female sexuality and anxiety over the body” (McClary 1990: 152).

Furthermore, by manipulating female roles in operatic settings, masculine perspectives and sexual hierarchies are reinforced through these productions. Even in operas starring powerful women (Carmen, Lulu and Salome for example), the strong, sexually assertive female character is eventually killed by the passive male in order to restore traditional notions of social normality. Madonna has questioned these notions through her impersonation of historical characters in her music videos in order to draw attention to this. Particularly notable are her impersonations of Carmen and Marilyn Monroe (McClary 1990: 155). McClary (1990: 152) notes similar domination of femininity in “absolute” music, where feminine themes are also “domesticated or eradicated for the sake of narrative closure”. What McClary believes Madonna has done is to “create images of desire without the demand within the discourse itself that she be destroyed”, by engaging with the genres of
dance music (disco) and African-American music, both cultural discourses that have some autonomy from masculine-dominated Western music and have comfortably incorporated and fostered a connection with the physical body (feminine) rather than the intellectual sphere (masculine).

McClary considers African-American music to be an area that Madonna can safely inhabit (1990: 153), presumably because the genre is less infused with “patriarchal narratives, images and agendas” and has also accepted female participation. (In this regard Bessie Smith and Aretha Franklin are cited as examples.) However, in the following section she mentions the “phallic backbeat” that characterises rock n’ roll, and considers this genre to be especially impervious to female participation, despite its connection with African-American music (McClary 1990: 154).

I believe that what McClary has highlighted here is epistemologically significant and that both McClary and Madonna have engaged in the creation of context-specific knowledge. Madonna believed certain things about the body, femininity and sexuality, saw how past contexts had treated such beliefs in the past, and found a context in which her particular brand of knowledge about what it is to be a liberated woman could be passed on. Had she attempted to spread her knowledge within other contexts, such as a Western classical music context, it would have been oppressed or considered redundant or meaningless because the contextual structure would not be able to support such knowledge. As McClary (1990: 154) says, Madonna avoids the elite aesthetic musical domain because that domain is “saturated with hidden patriarchal narratives, images and agendas”. It is precisely to these aspects of musical and musicological discourse that McClary has been drawing our attention throughout her writings. It is also a condition she continually confronts in her own work.

This is McClary’s personal context, and by taking into account our understanding of relativism (discussed in Chapter 4.6), we know that she can only create knowledge as relative to a specific context (defined as meaningful and useful by that context). The knowledge creator is also defined by his/her context; that is why the knowledge generated is only applicable to that specific context. In other words, “There is no perspective-free analysis
of knowledge and value [...]. All that we have are cognitive perspectives whose validity does not outreach the interests and prejudices of those who formulate them” (Crowther 2003: 1).

The reason why McClary is reaching out into the world of music and finding a structure or personality there that somehow reflects her own personal struggle is that her epistemology is self-referential. We already know that postmodern theory rejects the notion of universal knowledge, and that McClary has also, as a by-product of this intellectual context. I have discussed the possibility of knowledge being a product of autopoiesis, or “self-creation” (Lechte 2008: 339), an aspect of Maturana’s work discussed in Chapters 3.3.1 and 4.3.3., and I believe this essay to be a particularly obvious example of this act of “self-creation”.

McClary’s work was discussed in the context of the feminist movement previously in this chapter, and the manner in which she is creating (interdisciplinary) feminist knowledge about music. In her attempt to give this context more credibility, McClary has contributed to both first-generation and second-generation feminist discourse. First-generation feminism aimed to expose the marginalized contributions of women in the arts and other areas. If one is not aware of the importance of this particular discourse in artistically related fields such as musicology, one may view McClary’s historical recapitulation of the marginalization of women in music as superficial (especially in the context of someone as little marginalized as Madonna). However, McClary recites this history in order to draw attention to the fact that Madonna was not marginalized because she specifically engaged with the discourse on sexuality and desire that has been articulated throughout the history of music, and used to subjugate feminine contributions.

McClary’s realization is more an aspect of second-generation feminism, “which challenges the gender bias in language, law and philosophy”, and can be associated with the work of second-generation feminists such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Michèle Le Doeuff (Lechte 2008: 184-206). Debates concerning sexuality and desire in feminist discourse only emerged during the 1980s in musicology (in other words during the postmodern era) when musicologists began to analyse the social and cultural contexts of music, whereas first-generation feminist musicological discourse began in the 1970s as “old” musicologists started to uncover female composers and performers that had been ignored in the
formation of the canon of Western art music (Beard & Gloag 2005: 64). This distinction between first and second-generation feminism is important because first-generation feminism is a part of modernist tradition, whilst second-generation feminism is postmodern.

I believe that McClary is firmly rooted in the second-generation. Generally speaking, “new” musicological epistemology that includes interdisciplinary movement into feminist discourse does so in the context of second-generation feminism, which is not merely a tirade about the marginalization of women and female rights, but an analysis of the imbedded patriarchal structures inherent in language and other areas of discourse (although language infuses all of these areas). What McClary claims of Madonna in the rest of her article, is that Madonna is also engaging with these imbedded patriarchal structures through music and visual means. The patriarchal structures in music that McClary refers to have been discussed in both of the previous epistemological analyses in Chapters 6 and 7.

McClary notes that in the song “Live to Tell” Madonna’s music deflects the “desire-dread-purge” sequence which infiltrates masculine music, especially this sequence as enacted in rock music such as that of Led Zeppelin, The Cult, Dokken and Whitesnake. What is created in such a musical structure is a “detail to be problematized – to be constructed as Other and as an obstacle to the configuration defined as Self or identity” (McClary 1990: 156). This structure has been noted in the work of critical theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis, Susan Bordo and Mieke Bal, in which it is seen to inhabit literature, film, philosophy, theology and science (McClary 1990: 158). McClary, as with the article on Schubert that incorporated the literary theory of Earl Jackson, is again engaging in interdisciplinary movement by incorporating the views of these critics, the “desire-dread-purge” sequence, and trying to locate it in the field of music. This method seems to be a part of McClary’s private epistemology, her personal approach to the generation of knowledge.

McClary discusses the images displayed in the two music videos, “Open Your Heart” and “Like a Prayer”, and how these images are linked to subversion of patriarchal conventions in the music. In the case of “Live to Tell”, Madonna is the star of a seedy “peep show”, and eventually escapes from this pornographic image (which is a patriarchal construct) through a transformation of her gender and sexuality (she becomes a transvestite and disappears into
the distance). McClary believes that Madonna escapes the stereotype of her sexuality by disappearing into “a realm where the feminine erotic need not be the object of the patriarchal gaze, where its energy can motivate play and nonsexual pleasure” (McClary 1990: 162-3).

With the video of “Like a Prayer”, Madonna posits herself as a spiritual mystic in the tradition of Saint Teresa, whose mystical union with God was described by Saint Teresa in erotic terms. This representation is reminiscent of Bach’s treatment of the parts representing the Soul and Christ in Wachtet auf discussed in Chapter 6, and the foundations of this view of the “mystical Union between the Soul as Bride and Christ as Bridegroom” finds its origin in Catholic Pietist poetry (McClary 1987: 51). The character that portrays Christ in “Like a Prayer” is an African-American, and at certain points in the video Madonna kisses him passionately. The same African-American is also seen inhabiting a secular setting during the video, in which he is falsely accused of an attempted rape, the perpetrators of which were white men. From the context, it is obviously a racial statement, as is the positioning of the same African-American as Christ. The fact that Madonna’s testimony at the end of the video leads to his release shows that the video has a social agenda, which is in line with feminist epistemology (described as being of a “socially responsible epistemic agency”) (Code 2005: 275). What Madonna is challenging is the patriarchal institutions of authority that have been used to oppress and suppress women and African-Americans, namely the Church and the governmental authorities.

When McClary harmonically analyses the music of the songs “Open Your Heart” and “Like a Prayer”, she does so with a view to expose the masculine and feminine musical subjects and identities that specific key areas hold in order to show how Madonna treats these identities, which are more obviously reflected in the plot and characters of each video.

In “Live to Tell”, Madonna subverts both the domination of the supposedly masculine key area, and also confronts patriarchal notions of feminine sexuality and eroticism in her video, finally escaping domination from this patriarchal settings as well, i.e. the “peep-show”. In “Like a Prayer”, McClary believes that Madonna’s key identities, as representative of “self” and “other”, finally co-exist in a way that reflects the interracial message of the video.
Neither song follows the masculine “desire-dread-purge” sequence, contains any form of climax, or contains a definitive ending (both end with a fade rather than a cadence).

McClary, through her analysis of Madonna’s compositions and videos, has produced a conception of knowledge that is “specifically contextualized and situated, and of socially responsible epistemic agency” (Code 2005: 275). This is totally in line with feminist epistemology.

I will refer to this type of knowledge as “feminist musical knowledge”, and it is useful and meaningful to those that support and value feminist discourse. After reviewing Madonna’s videos, if one is still tempted to view her as “a porn queen in heat” (McClary 1990: 149), one need only think of Lyotard’s call for greater sensitivity and tolerance towards the newly emerging positions and discourses that infuse our postmodern intellectual context (1984: xxv). It may be easy to quash Madonna’s engagement with issues of sexuality and gender, to view them as inappropriate, uncomfortable, blasphemous, and from a host of other negative perspectives. But if Madonna’s art, as McClary claims, attempts to lessen the effect of the misery that (predominantly white) men have inflicted, psychologically and physically, on marginalized groups, then what is the value, comparatively speaking, of those negative perspectives?

In watching these videos and analysing McClary’s text, I felt affronted, offended, challenged, and sometimes disgusted. Considering that I am a heterosexual white male with a Western education, this should say something, albeit anecdotal evidence, about the success of both Madonna and McClary’s endeavours. For their entire epistemic trajectory is bent towards challenging ideals and ideas that would be imbedded in the world-view of someone like me. By their challenging of these notions, I find myself a little closer to understanding the spirit of postmodernism, the toleration and understanding necessary. I have seen the welling up of negative emotions in myself when examining these music videos, which involve hyper-sexualised, blasphemous religious imagery, and watered-down pornographic content. I have felt myself very much inclined to support the perspective of Madonna as “a porn queen in heat”, regardless of the imbedded message, which I found to be extremely superficial in its attempt at social responsibility, and more of a wish-fulfilment fantasy concocted by
someone with extremely convoluted and stereotypical ideas about the nature of society, and men in particular.

But could this perspective I hold just be my attempt to perpetuate the views and patriarchal structures that have created the need for critics such as McClary and Madonna? I can, with almost certainty, say that McClary and Madonna would both answer in the affirmative. If I must conclude something, then I hope that it will be something positive. And so I will relent and say that, within the creation of meaning, it is only that which is useful that is of any value to humanity. And if Madonna’s music and music videos have aided the identity construction of women, and can be used by critics like McClary to enhance the intellectual world whilst adhering to all the formal rules of epistemic rigour that I have established in this dissertation, perhaps it is time for my own perspective to shift significantly into this “brave new world”, so that I may come to inhabit my own intellectual context more authentically.

Summary

In this article, I believe that McClary’s first step in establishing an epistemology is to highlight a set of conditions under which her knowledge can be accepted as knowledge and validated. These conditions provide what I have referred to as the “specific intellectual context” of the narrative. It is necessary to describe this context because McClary is pursuing a socially-grounded, gender-based interpretation, and only a postmodern intellectual context could validate such an interpretation which, in this case, necessarily assumes familiarity with theories concerning identity, gender, feminism, deconstruction and intertextuality.

Furthermore, it is also necessary for us to agree with the conditions as McClary sees them, that is, her interpretation of this context, if we are to accept the knowledge she has produced. As a result, I believe her epistemology in this article is far less stable than her previous narratives. With regards to the narrative, I believe that the purpose of this lack of stability is to allow for greater freedom of interpretation and subjective viewpoints in her argument. It also may display an attempt to subvert masculine conventions in her narrative, which is written “as a woman”. McClary states her true beliefs that Madonna can be located “within a history of gender relationships in the music world”, and that she creates
“liberatory musical images” within a persistently repressive discourse. The underlying message here is feminist in tone, and therefore the knowledge created here is also “context-specific” (used in the construction, formation and definition of the previously repressed and marginalized female identity). In this regard, McClary is perfectly entitled to define the conditions of her own knowledge within the structure of a relativistic micronarrative, because her interpretation never claims to represent a universal truth, but a truth relative to a specific context.

This sort of toleration and co-existence was not possible within the framework of the masculine narrative, with claims of truth and objectivity. Madonna has also created “context-specific” knowledge because she has found a musical context to inhabit that will accept her beliefs about the body, femininity and sexuality. McClary’s engagement with Madonna may show McClary’s attempt to find someone in the music world that reflects her personal struggle with the musicological establishment, an act of self-reference. McClary’s epistemology, in this article, is uniquely depictive of the tenets of second-generation feminism, which analyses imbedded patriarchal structures inherent in discourse, and can also be described as being of a “socially responsible epistemic agency” (Code 2005: 275). Madonna can be seen in a similar light, especially with her confrontation and subversion of the masculine “desire-dread-purge” sequence in her music. Her sense of social responsibility echoes through her depictions of gender and racial groups in her music videos.

9.1 Introduction

The musicological narrative under discussion in this chapter is different from the previous three articles by Susan McClary that I have analysed in this dissertation. It is not an article but the introduction to a book by McClary, which was released in 2009, called Modal Subjectivities: self-fashioning and the Italian madrigal. This introduction, like her introduction to Reading Music (2007), is extremely rich in statements which give insight into McClary’s epistemic process. Because this introductory chapter is McClary’s most recently written document (at the time of the publication of Reading Music: selected essays), and an overt statement of her epistemology, it neatly sums up and includes most of the debates that infuse the “new” musicology, thereby exposing the postmodern intellectual context and epistemic behaviour that makes it so different from the “old” musicology. But the article is interdisciplinary, and primarily concerns post-structural aspects such as genealogy, as well as the subject of identity.

This article begins with what I would refer to as a Foucaultian genealogical account of the madrigal, genealogical in the sense that McClary re-evaluates this past tradition in the context of present knowledge, which is a post-structuralist approach to knowledge (see Chapter 4.5).

McClary draws parallels between major twentieth-century literary and musical figures that engaged in indeterminate/aleatoric/stream-of-consciousness musical and literary writing (James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and John Cage specifically) and the literary theory of Julia Kristeva, who, in her article “Stabat Mater” (1987), describes this style (indeterminate/aleatoric/stream-of-consciousness) in terms of contrapuntal procedures. Then McClary returns to Claudio Monteverdi’s madrigal settings of Giovanni Battista Guarini’s oxymoronic
verse, showing a similar relationship in this context between the contradictory verse and its musical setting, which because of contrapuntal possibilities, was able to express these contradictory sentiments simultaneously in the music. (McClary 2007: 279-280.)

The genealogical account continues as McClary contrasts Monteverdi’s contrapuntal setting with popular music tradition, including gospel, doo-wop and vocal based boy bands, which also feature “simulations of complex interiorities” which are considered unitary identities. She makes this comparison in order to invalidate Monteverdi’s antagonists, such as the sixteenth-century music critic Vincenzo Galilei, who believed that contrapuntal settings were incapable of expressing the sentiments of a unitary identity, especially when there were five conflicting voices all representing different states of mind, as in Monteverdi’s five-part setting of Mirtillo’s lament in *Ah, dolente partita*. (McClary 2007: 282.)

Unitary identity through vocal music was achieved later through the *stile recitativo*, most obviously in the aria, which became an extremely successful idea (as the three-hundred year domination of the operatic repertory can attest). However, McClary (2007: 282) notes that the *stile recitativo* involves “harnessing music to the linear imperatives of language”, invoking the same restrictions inherent in language which authors such as Joyce and Woolf were trying to overcome in the twentieth century.

In the following section, McClary (2007: 283) affirms my interpretation of her article as genealogical in the mould of Foucault, who she then refers to with regards to epistemology. I believe this to be acknowledgement of both her understanding of her own process and her understanding of the postmodern intellectual context she is clearly inhabiting.

Another postmodern debate that becomes involved in the same paragraph is that of “new technology” (McClary 2007: 283). The technology McClary refers to is two-fold. The first reference is to the *basso continuo* in the seventeenth century, the beginning of tonal tradition and the century from which the first opera, oratorio and solo sonata emerged. In this instance the “new technology” was new for Monteverdi and his contemporaries. The second reference is to the technology of film, advertisement and popular music, which still
incorporates the tonal tradition that started with the *basso continuo*. McClary refers to this technology as “interdisciplinary resonances”, and it has already been seen in the other analyses that McClary uses interdisciplinarity to substantiate her “true beliefs”.

McClary’s “true belief” is that “the early seventeenth century *seems* [but is not] irrefutably the dawn of modern subjectivity”, the musical expression of which is the appearance of opera, oratorio and the sonata. However, this view may be mistaken if we take the madrigal as an example of subjectivity stemming from an earlier date. In this regard she states that from “around 1525 the Italian madrigal serves as a site – indeed, the first in European history – for the explicit, self-conscious construction *in music* of subjectivities” (McClary 2007: 284).

McClary cites Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1973) as an example of this mistaken viewpoint concerning the early seventeenth century. McClary then incorporates postmodern debates into the justification of her “true belief”, specifically the debate concerning identity, which she views within a postmodern historical context (which is not necessarily Foucaultian/genealogical), relying on Eric Wolf’s understanding of history in *Europe and the People Without History* (1997). McClary uses Wolf’s work to criticize the common conception, shared by Foucault, of the beginning of subjectivity around 1600, which has been shared by musicologists on account of the emerging opera, oratorio and solo sonata. Wolf acknowledges that a description of “beginning” such as this is a symptom of our ascribing “Selfhood and complex sequences of significant events to those we choose to regard as ‘us’” (McClary 2007: 283).

This deconstruction of her view and the self-criticism it entails is important. As I mentioned in Chapter 4.3.3, Hutcheon describes the “rupturing effect” of postmodern micronarratives as “the simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions of narrative” (1989: 49). Although McClary’s narrative inscribes the convention of considering the “Cogito” in the 1600s, or merely perpetuating the notion of a dawning “Cogito” (which is an historical construct), she also simultaneously subverts this convention by suggesting that madrigal composers anticipated subjectivity (“Cogito”) circa 1525, long before Descartes’s famous aphorism, “Cogito ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”). Composers pre-empted Descartes
by “break[ing] with traditional epistemologies, plunging musical style and thought into an extraordinary crisis of authority, knowledge, power, and identity” (McClary 2007: 284). The self that madrigal composers hoped to portray through this break is a “morbidly introspective and irreconcilably conflicted Self”, but a self nonetheless.

McClary’s justification for assigning Cogito in music to the 1500s rather than the 1600s is that she is analysing aspects of “self” traceable in accounts not written in words (such as music). The music itself can yield as much information as any historical document, however, she does describe this reliance on “nonverbal media for historical data” as “notoriously difficult” (McClary 2007: 285).

McClary’s genealogical reinterpretation of an entrenched aspect of historical narrative shows her attempt to break away from preconceived historical grand narratives that mutually support one another, in order to forge a meaningful interpretation that is relevant to the present debate rather than universal. In this case, it is clear that assigning the emergence of the self (“Cogito”) to the time Descartes inhabited, and finding its parallel in the musical procedures already mentioned, may not be part of a patriarchal agenda but more a case of trying to impose an interpretation of history as being constructed out of uniform developments that do not necessarily neatly overlap in reality. McClary (2007: 285) refers to these as “incomplete accounts of the past”.

McClary (2007: 285) circles around the topic, and only openly states her epistemology and the true purpose, referring to her book *Modal Subjectivities: self-fashioning and the Italian madrigal* (2009), on the seventh page of the article:

> At the very least I want in this book to shake loose a version of early modern subjectivity too neatly packaged in recent studies and to encourage a process of historical revision that takes music as a point of departure. I also wish to treat in depth a repertory too long neglected as a site of crucial cultural work: the sixteenth-century Italian madrigal.

In a footnote, McClary (2007: 285) remarks that her approach to the development and evolution of musical meanings, as a “new” musicologist, is more aligned with musicologists
such as Lawrence Kramer and Rose Rosengard Subotnik, than musicologists such as Carolyn Abbate and Mary Ann Smart who adopt a “more postmodernist approach”.

Although I agree with her in the sense that her work does not redefine the parameters of its postmodern intellectual context, it is my “true belief” that “new” musicologists cannot help but be a product of their context, which is intrinsically postmodern. To justify this belief, I have analysed McClary’s narratives in order to show that McClary can be noted for the variety of postmodern debates that infuse her work. Through my analysis of her articles, I have already encountered reference (in the text) to a wide variety of postmodern theorists, as well as certain postmodern narrative conventions: interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, as well as debates such as post-structuralism, genealogy, intertextuality, relativism, deconstruction, second-generation feminism, changing technology, identity, “place” and “landscape”.

These debates have been described in Chapter 4, and all have already been discussed in relation to the texts I have analysed in Chapters 6 to 8. The obvious interpenetration of these debates into McClary’s text confirms that she is inevitably linked to her intellectual context. This may affirm postmodernism as a grand narrative in the sense that it has a system of rules and ideologies that penetrates all aspects of contemporary discourse, regardless of the intentions of the author (as in McClary’s case). It would seem that, as musicology’s intellectual context shifted (a factor determined by the outside world, the “other” to which musicologists position themselves as intellectuals and academics), so too, automatically, shifted the epistemology of musicology. And if these two components change, the entire structure and dynamic of the discipline changes and evolves.

A good example of the changing face of musicology is the sub-discipline of critical musicology. McClary (2007: 286) states that, with regard to madrigal tradition, the main aim of her book, to which this article serves as an introduction, is to critically interpret the “formal details through which the selected compositions produce their effects – structural, expressive, ideological, and cultural”. She openly states that the musicology of Kerman, Newcomb, Tomlinson, Chafe, Feldman and Einstein predates her own in this regard, providing a stable context of pre-existing debates. How McClary’s contribution differs,
however, is through her use of alternative approaches to “theory, analysis, and interpretation”.

The second aim of this book is to “strengthen the intellectual connection between musicology and scholars in the other humanities” (McClary 2007: 287), specifically the “New Historicists” (authors like Foucault for example), who are postmodern in their approach to the writing of historiographical accounts. The New Historicists view “the text as a participant in a historical or political process that it ‘reconceives’”, and place no distinction between the text and its context (Quinn 2006: 286). A similar way of approaching musicology is found in McClary’s article concerning Bach in which she tries to show aspects of Bach’s socio-political context within his music. McClary has noticed that “New Historicists” seldom make reference to music because of the level of specialization the subject of music entails. McClary’s inclusion of their ideas is clearly an interdisciplinary move, and as we have seen in previous chapters, the purpose of interdisciplinarity is to, simultaneously, mutually reinforce these disciplines as well as acknowledge the nature of cultural relativity, which is especially pertinent in the context of contemporary discourse. Interdisciplinary movement is epistemologically significant because it creates interdisciplinary knowledge, in other words, “context-specific” knowledge, such as feminist musicological knowledge, or gender- and sexuality-based musicological knowledge which have been discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

“[A]lthough my work is indebted to Foucault and others, I cannot subscribe in advance to any master narrative against which to map my history of subjectivity”, McClary (2007: 288) claims. She has already questioned the master/grand narrative of the “Cogito”. However, by merely setting the date back seventy-five years, McClary has not convinced me that she has sufficiently unsubscribed to this grand narrative, even if she has altered it slightly. In this instance, it is her reinforcement of the postmodern grand narrative that I would specifically like to draw attention to. As stated in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Lyotard 1984: xxiv): “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives”. This incredulity is openly stated in the quotation at the beginning of this paragraph, and reaffirms her postmodern context (and acceptance of that context).
McClary (2007: 288) justifies her interpretation through relativist and New Historicist thought when she openly states that neither music nor historical documents “can deliver anything approaching truth”, and that texts such as these rely entirely on contextualization in order to create meaning. Her interpretation is based on a totally different set of precepts than those of the sixteenth century, and this is a genealogical observation. We can never escape our context, and our view of history is always distorted and refracted through the lens of the present moment. As such, any history can only follow the form of an interpretive narrative, a retelling, but McClary argues that the telling itself is contained in the actual thing under discussion, not in the retellings, which tend to underestimate the importance of non-verbal sources.

McClary (2007: 289-290) states that her final aim in the writing of *Modal Subjectivities* (2009) was to explore the transition to tonality that occurred at an unspecified time during the 1600s, and to discuss why composers chose to redefine their musical manifestations of time and identity (self) without any fundamentally obvious reason for doing so (considering that the musical procedures of their time were, in McClary’s opinion, entirely adequate).

9.2 “How to do things with modes”

McClary’s narrative continues with a reinterpretation of “old” musicological knowledge concerning the transition from modality into tonality, in which she questions the standard historical development described by historical musicologists of the past. She also questions the relationship between the music of the sixteenth century (the High Renaissance), with regards to modes, and the Greeks, an association which was established in the late sixteenth century by the “music theorist” Giosseffo Zarlino. (McClary does not use the word *musicologist* to describe Zarlino and instead describes him as a “music theorist”.) McClary prefers to refer to the music of the sixteenth century as “neomodal”. (McClary 2007: 291-293.)

It seems that McClary’s main reason for believing that subjectivity emerged in music prior to the advent of tonality is that the affective states expressed in the music could be seen as “representations of interiority”, or “inwardness” (to use the literary theorist Stephen
Greenblatt’s term), and that these affects were particularly a reflection of “the fundamentally unstable status of the Self” (McClary 2007: 294). However, because the affects conjured by these modes do not fit the tonal major/minor, happy/sad dichotomies, and represent different subjective states of feeling, McClary claims they have been misrecognized as emotionless and not sufficiently expressive of selfhood.

It is salient to note, with regards to the happy/sad dichotomy, that such notions are not universally acknowledged principles inherent in the music but certainly products of cultural meanings that developed around these major/minor formations. I often have encountered the subjectivity of these responses to major and minor as a music teacher when I first expose my students to major and minor scales and chords, and find that they cannot fathom why one is considered happy and the other sad. (I then proceed to take them through the process of cultural indoctrination necessary for fulfilment of their musical education.) Therefore, this perspective of pre-tonal music as emotionless would have been retrospectively cast without considering how this music was perceived prior to the advent of tonality and the cultural meanings that developed thereafter.

McClary elucidates, in eight detailed points, how modality functions in a sixteenth-century context, and thereafter reminds the reader that her epistemology has always been to lead the cultural discourse back to the music itself, and not simply operate in a metaphysical dimension, “talk about talk”. What follows is her in-depth critical music analysis of *Ah, dolente partita* by Monteverdi, providing an interpretation of the composition in light of McClary’s conception of modal identity as expressed through the work, and various emotional portrayals in the music. Her aim is to justify the complexity of emotional states represented in Monteverdi’s setting through the variety of modal techniques explained in her eight previously mentioned points. These are the conditions under which her analysis can be accepted as truth, and in this regard she displays a high degree of epistemic rigour and authority.

In McClary’s proceeding analysis of *Ah, dolente partita*, it is obvious that Monteverdi accurately articulates the character Marillo’s emotional states in both the compositional procedures, as well as in the extremely emotional, beautiful and tragic music itself. This work
shows clearly the beginnings of the happy/sad dichotomy soon after to be epitomised in the repertory of tonal music. McClary considers these representations of subjectivity and emotion in Monteverdi’s music as proof that madrigal composers were cognisant and expressive of their subjective natures long before Descartes formulated his aphorism “I think therefore I am”, published in 1637 (McClary 2007: 289). The main flaw in McClary’s epistemology in her article is that she uses Monteverdi (1567 – 1643) as her primary (and only) example of a pre-tonal madrigal composer, but Monteverdi was a contemporary of Descartes (1596 – 1650). As such, he does not make a very good example of someone that was cognisant prior to Descartes aphorism, even if he still represents a tradition that began prior to the “Cogito”.

9.3 Summary

This article is the introduction to a book released by McClary in 2009 called Modal Subjectivities: self-fashioning and the Italian madrigal. It contains references, mainly, to the postmodern debates concerning post-structuralism (genealogy) as well as theories of identity, all of which have bearing on her epistemology in this introduction. Furthermore, she openly states that she has been taking a “more postmodernist approach”, confirming my perception of her work as inhabiting this context. The musical focus of this introduction is McClary’s discussion of literary-musical interactions of style in the modernist era, which she compares to the relationship between Guarini’s text and Monteverdi music in Ah, dolente partita. She also examines expressions of identity both in the music and the text. Her argument is intended to convince the reader of her “true belief” that the commonly held date of the “Cogito” in literature and art (the seventeenth century) is a century after madrigal tradition began, and yet there are expressions of fully-formed cognisance, emotional and intellectual, in the pre-tonal era that Monteverdi represents. McClary (2007: 285) refers to prior interpretations of history as “incomplete accounts of the past”. McClary (2007: 297) also states that she aims to “strengthen the intellectual connection between musicology and scholars in the other humanities”, specifically the New Historicists, that favour sociologically-contextualised interpretations of texts. This is a practice that McClary has followed since her earliest articles, and her interdisciplinary connection to the New
Historicists serves to legitimise and validate her epistemology with regards to sociologically-contextualised interpretations of *musical* texts.
Chapter 10

Conclusions

The book on musicology that has been contributed to from the time of Adler (circa 1885) has long needed to be rewritten as a result of the changing space that humanity now inhabits, which has led to a marked transformation of intellectual contexts. The discipline of musicology’s attempt to grapple with this changing world (and the new technology that has emerged in the production and consumption of music over the past century) has been a struggle alternating between alienation and acceptance.

Nowhere is the split between the “old” and “new” musicology more clearly enunciated than in the discourse on popular music that has emerged in musicology on a critical and serious level. One may even describe the “new” musicology as a popular musicology, or at least the aspects of the “new” musicology that deal with popular music. Articles such as the one discussed in Chapter 8, namely “Living to Tell: Madonna’s Resurrection of the Fleshly” (1990), alludes to this musicological dilemma. In no other area of musicological writing do the biases and preconceptions about music emerge so obviously as in the musicological discourse concerning popular music; and the moment musicological endeavour becomes a mere act of comparison, of value judgement, all is lost.

However, musicologists such as McClary must use everything in their musicological arsenal, the pre-existing forms of musicological enquiry, in order to successfully situate themselves within the context of this discipline, and adhere (at least superficially) to the grand and metanarratives that have created legitimacy and epistemological rigour since Adler’s time. They must also subvert and criticize these established conventions during the course of their writing.

What I can perceive in McClary’s work, if we trace through the four categories that she defines for us in the “Introduction” to Reading Music: Selected Essays (2007), is a slow progression from the music of the eighteenth century towards the sphere of popular music,
the most risky area of enquiry (especially for a classically trained music analyst). Thereafter she retreats to the pre-tonal era, which McClary (2007: x) describes in the “Introduction” to Reading Music: Selected Essays as her main area of interest as a graduate student at Harvard in 1976, which she found a very unpopular area of social-grounded enquiry at that time.

First, in the article on Bach (Chapter 6), McClary begins the process of questioning – subversive and at the same time extremely conventional in both her narrative structure and subject matter (and procedures – music analysis for example). One may almost say, as I have, that this is a masculine narrative, for it is argumentative and authoritative in tone.

The following article, which was published in 1994, seven years after the Bach article, involves the discourse concerning Schubert (Chapter 7). Here she has exposed a not entirely new association, invoking the “femininity” and “weakness” of this composer, although she has given it a feminist flavour through alluding to the discipline of “queer theory” and even proposing a “queer musicology”. This is an important step into acknowledging and incorporating her intellectual context, in this case the aspect of postmodernism that relates to second-generation/wave feminism. Specifically, she is defining her work in the context of feminist epistemology, which involves “conceptions of knowledge that are quite specifically contextualized and situated, and of socially responsible epistemic agency” (Code 2005: 275).

In this regard, I believe that because McClary had already assessed the nature of the “old” musical knowledge and epistemology, and seen how the structures imbedded in this discourse were used and the power that they held, she became increasingly aware that, as she is responsible for the creation of musicological knowledge and not just a critic of already existing knowledge, it was her responsibility to create something that would positively affect the world that received it.

In the article on Madonna, “Live to Tell”, written in 1990, this need to positively redirect the discipline of musicology becomes pungently clear. McClary identifies with Madonna on the level of identity, in the context of subject position: like Madonna, McClary is a woman, a feminist, a musician, and a contributor to the signification of music. Madonna also shares McClary’s fascination with blasphemy, is also dubious of religious structures (something that
becomes clear in the viewing of the video “Like a Prayer”, which involves an African-American Jesus as well as several burning crucifixes). However, McClary strategically avoids all of these similarities except the most basic association, that of their shared womanhood, and instead focuses on aspects of meaning in Madonna’s work that are of a socially responsible nature, for the sake of epistemic rigour.

To summarise, what McClary did not do was turn this article into another tirade concerning the religious institution of the Catholic Church (although all the fodder for such a church “burning” would have been readily available to her). She subverted the obvious route, questioned the basis for anti-Madonna sentiment in a world consisting of women that adore Madonna and consider her the queen of popular music, and contributed to the vision of this admittedly remarkable woman as a feminist icon and a source of empowerment for women.

I also believe that the narratives on Schubert and Madonna are peculiarly feminist with regards to an intrinsically feminine structure. If a masculine narrative argues its point authoritatively (such as the article on Bach), making no room for the opposing view (i.e. quasi-religious musical opinions), McClary’s articles on both Madonna and Schubert are reconciliatory in tone. This brings to mind the concept of the feminine idiolect (private language), a concept proposed in the work of Luce Irigaray, in which she attempts to construct “feminine forms of symbolisation and language – forms based on aspects of female experience” (Lechte 2008: 193). Although McClary’s articles do follow an obvious introduction, body and conclusion structure, which could be considered masculine/patriarchal, its application is neither authoritative or overt. The introduction asks many questions instead of making declaratory statements, and the conclusion is a perfect example of a so-called “feminine ending”. Nothing can truly be concluded if the research question is metaphysical and of a subjective nature, such as “what if Schubert were gay?”, or states the condition that “I will be writing of Madonna in a way that assigns considerable credit as a creator of texts” rather than a “mindless doll fulfilling male fantasies of anonymous puppeteers” (McClary 1990: 149).

The automatic question one may feel impelled to ask would be: what if Schubert was not gay? And what if Madonna is just a co-creator of texts that fulfil male fantasies that have
chosen to portray her as a “porn queen in heat” (McClary 1990: 149) to boost record sales and further perpetuate the sexualisation, objectification and subjugation of women? However, following either one of these routes would be, as I have stated before, out of line with our postmodern intellectual context, the grand narrative of which is fixated on the work of Lyotard, and stipulates that we need to be tolerant and sensitive to the subjective views of fellow human beings, considering the relative nature of truth and what this has exposed to us about the nature of knowledge.

McClary’s final article, which is actually an introduction to her book concerning the composer Monteverdi, Modal Subjectivities: self-fashioning and the Italian madrigal (2009) shows a return to her first principles. As she states in the “Introduction” to Reading Music, this was actually her original area of interest as a student, and was the subject of her final graduate dissertation at Harvard. However, in this regard her work was rejected, and this is possibly what led to the conception of herself as a “renegade musicologist”, a title which she ascribes to herself in the introduction to Reading Music: Selected Essays (McClary 2007: ix, x). As can be seen in the concept of the “modernist identity” that I posit in Chapter 3, alienation from society leads to a state of subjective destitution, and what follows is an identity crisis. It took McClary almost the entire duration of her career to return to her first principles after this alienation from her context first occurred. Only once her context had caught up with her and reinvested her with a stable sense of identity, through the advent of postmodernism and its effect on musicology and epistemology, did she feel safe enough to reinvestigate this topic.

McClary’s study of the work of Monteverdi also shows a marked reversion to the masculine narrative structure of, for example, the article on Bach. Her conditions are authoritative, and the analysis is extremely thorough and complex. However, much of the “renegade” in her work is gone (although she still tackles contentious issues). In its place is a masterful analyst, fully inhabiting and understanding her intellectual context as well as openly referring to it. Through cultural discourse, she has justifiably reshaped the model of music analysis enough for it to allow a subjective quality to infuse the analysis on more than just a descriptive level. A cultural interpretation now drives these analyses rather than a search for the divine and deep-set structural paradigm.
It has been a privilege to watch McClary’s intellectual trajectory unfold through the process of writing this dissertation. I feel confident that she has been a model representative of the “new” musicology, and that her work displays the core epistemological differences between the “old” and the “new” musicologies, as well as exemplifying her intellectual context through the narrative formations used and the debates and issues included in her writings. With regards to these aspects, I feel confident that my main research question has been satisfactorily answered through the writing of this dissertation. Namely: How does Susan McClary’s contribution to the “new”/postmodern musicology differ from the tradition of modernist/“old” musicology with regards to epistemology, narrative and the intellectual context of postmodernism?

Although the “new” musicology resists classification as a grand narrative, unlike its predecessor, it can be considered as legitimate if we understand the contexts in which it creates knowledge, and in this way we can prepare ourselves to understand the multiple meanings of postmodern knowledge.

Lyotard (1984: 9) asks, “Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?” This is the opening quote of my dissertation, and for the sake of cyclic unity (an abhorred, patriarchal, modernist concept), I feel impelled to return to this question as I near the end of my narrative. After this journey through postmodern debate and “new” musicological epistemology, hopefully I have convinced the reader that knowledge is not decided for us by the “decision makers” of our society any longer, but by musicologists and thinkers like McClary who are prepared to lead the way by asking the questions that nobody else is prepared to ask.

In answer to Lyotard’s question, I will say that we all know what type of knowledge is the most useful and meaningful to humanity. It takes a significant amount of self- (and other-) analysis. But Lyotard’s fearful question is now bereft of fear. Epistemological studies, like this dissertation, show that we are our own “decision makers”, and we control our own performative ends, whatever they may be, when we fully and truthfully inhabit our postmodern intellectual context. It is up to us to make that which we control and create, within this context, of a responsible agency, meaningful and useful to humanity.
And, in the end, I believe that it is not the truth that we search for, but the truthfulness, albeit gloriously paradoxical, that makes us knowledgeable. It is not the questions we answer, but the ones we ask, that separate us from the old ways, transforming us, invigorating us, and reinvesting our discourses with a youthfulness that should be more highly prized than any supposed truth.
Sources


Music videos
