



Baroque music, postmodern knowledge: an epistemological analysis of Susan McClary's article "The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year" (1987)

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An epistemological analysis is used to discuss the manner in which Susan McClary has constructed meaning around music in her article "The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year" (1987). McClary's article shows the transition between modernist ('old') to postmodern ('new') musicology through a socially and politically grounded interpretation of Bach's music, in which she engages with earlier viewpoints and legitimises her own through the construction of a micro-narrative that incorporates postmodern debates. This epistemological analysis challenges the reader to think critically about how musicological epistemology changed at the end of the previous century in order to gain insight into how the meanings that surround music are being formed in the present day, and to decide whether or not that meaning is legitimate and satisfactory.

In his seminal book, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge* (1979), the French intellectual Jean-Francois Lyotard poses the question: What is knowledge, and how is it created, justified and legitimised? Lyotard's question is an old one, the ancient origins of which can be traced back to Plato who first described an epistemology (theory of knowledge) by means of the formula "justified, true belief" (Huemer 2002: 131-41). In more recent intellectual history,

Kant's *Critique of pure reason*, a key text of the Modernist Era, addressed this question, establishing the limits of human knowledge and reasoning while developing his own theory of knowledge as a central argument of the text (Bird 1947: ix). Since the advent of postmodernism, there have been more radical attacks on epistemological definitions and methods, ancient and modern(ist) alike, notable examples being Gettier's article entitled "Is justified true belief knowledge?" (1963), which describes the so-called "Gettier problems" (Gettier 1963, Zagzebski 1994) and Feyerabend's "Against method", subtitled "Outline of an anarchist theory of knowledge" (1975), which signals shifting approaches to both the conception and the production of knowledge in the aforementioned era, including early arguments for interdisciplinary methodologies.

Even if long-held beliefs have changed radically in a postmodern context and their justifications have become infinitely complex in their methods, the basic reasoning behind a theory of knowledge remains "justified, true belief", because of its essential basis in logic and perhaps also because of its elegant simplicity. As a result, the concept of "justified, true belief" can still be used to adequately examine the subjects of knowledge and epistemology in the Postmodern Era. One has a belief that one believes is true (and *is*, it is hoped, also true); which one then attempts to prove by means of the various available and acceptable justifications – predominantly (*a posteriori*) empirical observations and (*a priori*) reasoning.

Susan McClary is a foremost musicologist of our time. Her standing in the musicological community as a creator of musical knowledge is emphasised by her inclusion in the list of foremost musicologists in the *Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Critical Musicology Series*. In establishing this series, each musicologist chose to compile a selection of articles, essays or chapters that most accurately represented the intellectual trajectory of his/her academic work from past to present. As such, their choices reflect their present conceptions of what is important in both musicology and, specifically, in their own work. McClary's *Reading music: selected essays* (2007) came fifth in this series, and the article examined in this epistemological analysis, entitled "The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year" (1987), was the second article chosen by McClary to represent her early intellectual grounding.

McClary's early work and, in particular, the article under analysis, draws an interesting parallel with Lyotard in the sense that she also wanted to report on knowledge as she perceived it, as well as question its legitimacy and validity. In addition, Lyotard (2004: 141) proposed an understanding of critical theory as "based on a principle of dualism and wary of syntheses and reconciliation", which makes it impervious to performative ends. This is also true of McClary's work, the implications of which will be discussed in the conclusion.

This epistemological analysis was undertaken in order to determine how postmodern musicologists like McClary laid the foundations for the diverse discipline that we know today, which operates within a postmodern context that is often distinguished from its predecessor, the so-called 'old' musicology, based on the intellectual currents that helped form these eras within the discipline of musicology. Postmodern ('new') musicological epistemology differs from that of the modernist ('old') musicology in a number of ways, and an epistemological analysis of McClary's article reveals this difference, because her dominant intellectual context is reflected within the narrative. Modelled on ideas voiced by Adorno in his article "Bach defended against his devotees" (1950) over a quarter of a century earlier, "The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year" directly attacks what she perceived to be an archaic, modernist wing of the musicological establishment of her time, in which, to quote Adorno's article, "Bach is degraded by impotent nostalgia to the very church composer against whose office his music rebelled and which he filled only with great conflict" (Adorno 1982: 135). By ignoring Bach's sociological context, interpretations of Bach continued to exist in the sphere of the "theologically vaulted cosmos", expressive of "the order of Being" (Adorno 1982: 135).

Unfortunately, modernist and postmodern perspectives are not as dichotomous as postmodern theorists would, perhaps, like them to be. On the one hand, the Modernist Era was marked by the concerns of the Enlightenment, a positivistic way of thinking dominated by realism and rationality (Holborn 2000: 540), which became reflected in the musicological approaches of this era. 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. This may explain why certain views expressed by Adorno are not entirely conducive to his modernist context. The anti-Enlightenment stance of the Frankfurt School, led by Adorno and Horkheimer, showed that critical theorists such as Adorno were against traditional notions of thinking, and were particularly influenced by Nietzschean philosophy; to "philosophise with a hammer", so to speak (Hanssen 2004: 281, Nietzsche 1896). 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). Regardless, his critical ideas in some respects heralded the beginnings of a great intellectual shift that has been viewed as the advent of postmodernism. In addition, the modernist sub-movement termed *avant-garde* was considered to be the very forefront of progressiveness (Willett 2000: 60) and was as experimental and open-minded as anything postmodernism had produced. Under the sway of Nietzsche's writings and philosophies, *avant-garde* ideology was also extremely sceptical towards "all inherited concepts"

(Butler 1994: 2), a critical ethos adopted by postmodernism. These are only two of the many contradictions to the – considerably negative – postmodern view of the objectivist, positivistic, Enlightenment-fuelled modernist past.

In order to define the modernist/postmodern dichotomy in musicology more clearly, I will refer to one of the most heated debates in musicology to date, 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 1980: 331). Tomlinson (1993: 21) retorted that “a postmodern musicology will be characterized most distinctively by its insistent questioning of its own methods and practices” which, he believes, is precisely the opposite of what the ‘old’ musicology attempted to do. The most obvious manifestations of this ideological difference are clearly defined in the grand narrative of modernism, which attempted to create “a frame of reference in which people have faith” (Lechte 2008: 324). The effect of abandoning this security in favour of “insistent questioning” is to effectively destroy the concept of objectivity. This modern/postmodern dichotomy essentially points to an epistemological split in the discipline, not merely an ideological split, but a methodological split.

Lohead & 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 ‘new’ musicology was often involved with the justification or rejection of ‘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). Although musicology has long since integrated and has perhaps even reached beyond the threshold of postmodernism, there was a key time in the history of musicology when progressive ideas were still staunchly by what McClary perceived as a culturally powerful musicological establishment, the so-called ‘old’ musicology referred to repeatedly in this analysis. Perhaps it was due to the outspokenness of musicologists like McClary, the self-proclaimed “renegade musicologist” (McClary 2007: ix), that this split between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ musicology is no longer present; however, it is also likely that a general infusion of the prevailing intellectual context, along with concepts such as relativism and deconstruction, through its infiltration of musicological thinking, slowly made older viewpoints intolerable within the cultural dominant.

To summarise, the present analysis aims to provide some indication of how postmodernism affected musicology near the generally accepted time of the conception of the so-called “‘new’ musicology” (*circa* 1985), concerning the generation of knowledge within musicology, by analysing the discourse of one of musicology’s chief proponents of the emerging era, Susan McClary. By showing that some of the debates specific to the postmodern context are found to be imbedded in McClary’s article, it can be considered an important example of the emerging new ideas, methods and philosophies in musicology at this historically significant time within the discipline.

This epistemological analysis examines the manner in which McClary has justified her beliefs and the conditions under which her knowledge can be accepted and validated in order to provide a detailed picture of her epistemology regarding the integration of postmodern ideas into a musicological context. This article also discusses several key aspects of musicology that the postmodern musicology necessarily rejected in order to define itself. In this way, one can consider McClary’s text as exemplifying a fairly homogeneous contemporary perspective because, at the time of its writing near the end of the 1980s, it made manifesto-like predictions about the manner in which the ‘new’ musicology was to function in the future. Many of McClary’s viewpoints were shared by her contemporary ‘new’ musicologists, particularly those engaging in critical musicology and associated with larger intellectual shifts within the discipline, especially shifts eschewing the modernist (Enlightenment) tradition that the ‘new’ musicologists believed typified the ‘old’ musicology (Beard & Gloag 2005: xii). This homogeneity, based on the espousal of new ideas and related to the interdisciplinary movement within the discipline, has led to a wholly ‘new’ musicology since 1985, one that remains respectfully yet critically alongside more antiquated approaches within the discipline. This article presents a study of that transition by means of an epistemological analysis of a single text, a unique yet inescapably general product of its sociological and intellectual context. This analysis should magnify the greater epistemological shifts of this important period in the history of musicology that are so essential to understanding the nature and purpose of the knowledge produced within post-1985 musicology.

The structure of this article is similar to that of McClary’s in order to facilitate a simultaneous joint reading of these articles. The headings will also remain the same as in McClary’s original article, taken from Leppert and McClary’s volume *Music and society: the politics of composition, performance and reception* (1987).

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. In her article, McClary intends to discuss Bach’s music from a variety of sociological and political perspectives, an activity which she suggests would be considered blasphemous by her contemporaries, who are of the view that Bach’s music is “divinely inspired” (McClary 1987: 14). McClary’s sceptical and rebellious stance to preconceived notions is entirely in line with the underlying critical ethos of postmodernism, which will be discussed in more detail.

The concept of blasphemy invoked in her title is not idly chosen, nor meant to refer to a mildly unacceptable viewpoint. Her open challenge of certain religious notions associated with Bach suggests that McClary views herself as a heretical outsider, and regards the musicological establishment of 1987 as an institution analogous to the Catholic Church from the Middle Ages onwards, with the power to condemn and oppress free thinkers (who are equated with blasphemers) in order to preserve its right to authority. This persisting opinion of herself as a subversive musicologist is reflected in McClary’s introduction to her volume *Reading music: selected essays* (2007), entitled “Introduction: the life and times of a renegade musicologist”. This standpoint is reinforced by several further statements in the “Introduction” and in later sections of the article.

It is assumed that McClary’s article was written in response to the prevalence of views stemming from theological Bach research/*Theologische Bachforschung* that originated in theological circles and held some influence over conceptions of Bach’s autobiography and music in the work of musicologists that upheld a less critical ethos towards inherited concepts than the emerging critical/‘new’ musicologists. However, there is no direct reference to this theological/musicological movement within her or Adorno’s complementary article. Johann Sebastian Bach’s large output of religious music and patronage by the Lutheran Church facilitated easy adoption of quasi-religious associations with his music for those who wished to do so. Whether or not these views were represented by the musicological community as a whole is doubtful, and no amount of polemic, well-substantiated or otherwise, could allow such a generalisation. McClary (1987: 58) later directs readers to the musicologist Wilfrid Mellers’ book entitled *Bach and the dance of God* (1981), an extreme contemporary example (at the time of McClary’s article) of the persistence of this vision of Bach’s music as having “simultaneously musical, theological and philosophical” meanings without any reference to Bach’s socio-political context which, as will be discussed later in the analysis, both McClary and Adorno believed showed a disquiet between the composer and his Lutheran patrons. However, by the time of Adorno’s article, direct allusions to

divine absolutes were already unpopular within the musicological community, and what remained was a quasi-religious subtext in which Bach himself is raised as a demigod. In the words of Adorno (1982: 135), “[t]his conception of Bach draws all those who, having lost either their ability to believe or the desire for self-determination, go in search of authority, obsessed by the notion of how nice it would be to be secure”. Anecdotal quotations by famous composers on Bach compiled by David Gordon for the 2004 Carmel Bach Festival include Hector Berlioz’s statement that “Bach is Bach as God is God”, and Claude Debussy’s claim that Bach was “a benevolent god to which all musicians should offer a prayer to defend themselves against mediocrity”, as well as Robert Schumann’s assertion that “[m]usic owes as much to Bach as religion to its founder” (Gordon 2013). McClary’s view is that the 1985 Bach Year Panel and indeed the musicological community at large were fairly unanimous in their upholding of this type of quasi-religious viewpoints associated with Bach. McClary responded to this by writing the article under analysis.

What is of epistemological import is not to discuss the “truth” of these relative viewpoints, as McClary and Adorno intended to do (fairly emotively) through their articles, but to examine the reasoning process behind McClary’s article. The latter clearly draws on intellectual currents that are determined by the fundamentally secular ‘new’/critical/postmodern musicology, in which context the conventional reception of Bach would have been unacceptable. The fact that neither McClary nor Adorno sufficiently develop a view of the opposition within their articles by naming specific musicologists or references (with the exception of Mellers) threatens the legitimacy of their claims from an epistemological standpoint; such substantiation would be necessary for legitimate knowledge formation, which requires that all “true beliefs” are adequately “justified”. To speculate, perhaps they did not feel that it was necessary to establish this, because these conceptions were as prevalent in 1987 as they were in 1950. It is more likely that they did not want to directly attack colleagues (again, with the exception of Mellers).

McClary states that Adorno’s essay, “Bach defended against his devotees”, is the most subversive and the greatest contribution to the last great Bach Year (1950). Like McClary, Adorno also stood at the fringe of the musicological establishment, hoping for his narratives concerning the social dimension of music to be recognised. More specifically, “Bach defended against his devotees” was criticism levelled at the composer Hindemith who, in a speech given at the Bach commemoration in Hamburg in 1950 entitled “Heritage and obligation”, alluded to Bach’s music as “perfect”, and totally isolated from its social context (Hinton 1998: 148). In the opening line of his article, Adorno (1982: 135) states that “[t]he view of Bach that prevails in musicological circles corresponds to the role assigned to him by the stagnation and industriousness of a resurrected culture”.

McClary describes how Adorno's attempt failed to have an impact on musicology, and that by 1985 (the tercentenary of Bach's birth), the musicological community was even further from recognising the true value of Adorno's contribution than it ever had been. She imagines that Adorno "would recognize [this] with the ironic satisfaction a paranoid derives from seeing worst-possible scenarios fully realized" (McClary 1987: 14).

McClary considers her article to be a continuation of Adorno's, and highlights that the discourse under discussion will concern the past and present social dimensions of Bach's work. McClary claims that her 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 so-called 'old' musicology, and served the function of confirming her intellectual context, which is clearly postmodern, as will be evident from certain references to postmodern theories in her text. One can surmise that this criticism also aided in the construction of a new epistemology concerning the production of knowledge through the writing of musicological narratives. McClary (1987: 14) describes the modernist/'old' musicological ideologies that emerged through those criticisms as follows: belief in the divine as a source of (Bach's) musical genius; the associated ideology of 'genius' (which makes composers such as Bach exempt from criticism), and the way that (Bach's) music is associated with ideas of "perfect, universal order and truth".

It is theorised that these viewpoints towards composers concerning notions of genius form an integral part of the grand narrative that has been termed the 'old' musicology, and through much debate has come to possess its own set of rules of agreement much like any political or religious order. McClary's criticisms are significant in their association with what one would refer to as the grand narrative of 'new' musicology, which is entwined with its postmodern context. Grand narratives can be described as an artifice of modernity (Lyotard 2004: 123), and are characterised by an attempt to rationally create a link between the past, the present and the future. Despite this description of grand narratives as being an artifice of modernity, we are not suddenly outside the realm of the grand narrative just because we have entered a Postmodern Era, even though this subject of the grand narrative has drawn much attention and criticism since the advent of postmodernism. Malpas (2001: 7) 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". He mentions the grand narrative of Christianity, 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, thereby becoming deeply rooted posits of musical thinking (Beard & Gloag 2005: 90).

The above-mentioned beliefs concerning music, when analysed singly, can be reduced to an essential ideological difference, an expression of the split between the so-called 'old' and 'new' musicologists. The first ideology that is being questioned is the concept of divinity and its link with music, an outdated idea in the contemporary era, but one that still persists because of the ability of music to invoke transcendent emotions which are greatly misunderstood from a psychological standpoint, although a great deal of work is being done in this regard (Juslin & Västfjäll 2008: 559-621). Considering that the Modernist Era was defined by a reappraisal of Enlightenment tradition (the elevation of reason and rationalism), this ideological leaning is quite at odds with modernist beliefs. McClary's claims that such views persisted in musicology at least until the writing of her article on Bach show that, in certain aspects, the 'old' musicology was influenced by pre-modernist traditions, for the notion of divinity and its association with music predates even the Enlightenment. McClary's (1987: 14) criticism of the view that Bach's music represents "perfect, universal order and truth" 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 eighteenth-century musicologists such as Johann Georg Sulzer were giving voice to the Romantic ideology 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). Meanwhile, the cult of the "genius" continued to evolve.

Music has always been associated with emotion, arguably the most fundamentally important human experience. In his seminal text entitled *The varieties of religious experience* (1907), the psychologist William James stated that without emotion "[n]o one portion of the universe would then have importance beyond another; and the whole character of its things and series of its events would be without significance, character, expression or perspective" (2008: 78). Because of the inexplicable emotional effect of music on the listener, giving rise to ideas and creativity, it is not surprising that such an unscientific notion as divinity withstood the attacks of reason, modern science and technology, persisting into the Postmodern Era. However, McClary states that this is where such a belief should stop, if such a notion is merely to be 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. McClary insinuates that some of the beliefs held by the less critical musicologists are archaic and more akin to the

dogma of a religious institution. This analogy is even more applicable to those aspects of musicological dogma that are fundamentally religious, such as the examples listed by McClary and summarised in this analysis.

Adorno's title "Bach's music defended against his devotees" is indicative of agreement that his article was aimed at a pseudo-religious group of some kind. A "devotee" can mean an enthusiast, but it also has a religious connotation. The *Oxford Dictionary* (Soanes & Stephenson 2004: 393) describes this second meaning as "a follower of a particular religion or god". It is clear that Adorno believed that his contemporary musicologists were pursuing their beliefs with a pseudo-religious zeal, and wanted to defend Bach from the misguided onslaught of these often misguided beliefs. As stated, McClary also mentions in the introductory section of her 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 easy to note that McClary's criticism is heavily immersed in scepticism concerning this quasi-religious aspect of the 'old' musicology. In response to this, one might feel inclined to ask: In what way is McClary's scepticism toward divinity in music a reflection of her postmodern intellectual context?

During McClary's criticism of Bach's music allegedly representing "perfect, universal order and truth", "truth" becomes 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). Relativism is an extremely important concept in postmodernism which has consequently greatly affected '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" (Baghrarian 2004: 1). O'Grady (2002: 2) states that the implications of relativism are 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 regarded as "cultural or intellectual imperialism". O'Grady (2002: 2) speaks of the "linguistic turn" in philosophy during the last century, in which language was proposed to be at the root of nearly everything we experience. O'Grady (2002: 2) asks: "Can there be complex, conceptual thought without language?" The foremost postmodern philosopher, Derrida, suggests 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*” (Lechte 2008: 132).¹

Saussure (1974: 120) believed that “in language, there are only differences”. Wittgenstein was one of the initial key figures in relativist thinking deriving from the “linguistic turn”, the most influential aspect of which is the notion of the “language game”, which establishes the rules whereby the metanarrative must function.² In light of this “linguistic turn”, everything that “is” can be perceived as relative to linguistic constructs. Jameson (1981: 13) stated that narrative is the “central function or instance of the human mind”, in agreement with Saussure, Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Derrida. However, 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).

Of course, this process of self-reference is absurd. However, 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 realisation of relativity should not cause us to give up on meaning, but to create meaning that is satisfying, beneficial and useful to us. Lyotard (1984: xxiv) warns that, 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”.

It should now be obvious that, within the scope of McClary’s intellectual context (which includes relativism), it would certainly be difficult to accept religious fundamentals into the sphere of academic understanding. As such, those who did not share this viewpoint and still regarded the “truth” as absolute rather than relative, despite persuasive contemporary (in 1985) arguments to the contrary, would generally and fairly be considered outdated in their thinking by a postmodern musicologist such as McClary.

Although it may be true that certain ideologies are repeated through ‘old’ musicological texts, and that certain correspondences can be found between

1 Derrida’s neologism incorporates the words and concepts of deferral and difference.

2 The “language game” also arises as a fundamental concept in the work of Lyotard.

the subdisciplines of the 'old' musicology, was this the product of a conscious process? Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered: because of a lack of self-reflective discourse within the 'old' discipline, we will never know what the institution of the 'old' musicology really meant to its contributors when separated from the interpretive bias projected onto it by the 'new' musicologists. From the criticisms in McClary's work, we only now know what the 'old' musicology represents to McClary. This may not tell us what all of the 'new' musicologists think about the 'old' musicology, but it will help us understand McClary as one of the foremost 'new' musicologists, and gain some insight into how her beliefs reflect the main currents of her postmodern intellectual context. Once that is established, one can delve further into how McClary's 'new' musicology differs from what she perceives the 'old' musicology to be, and perhaps discover the nature of her epistemology. It may be mentioned that the 'old' musicology is based on flawed principles in light of our postmodern intellectual context. However, there is much to be said for a discipline, the 'old' musicology, which thoroughly knew its own epistemology and accepted the products of that epistemology as producing meaningful knowledge.

In the final paragraph of her "Introduction", McClary outlines the structure of her narrative, which will give us clues as to the type of knowledge she is hoping to acquire by writing 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), then the "true beliefs" that McClary intends to justify are extremely clear in this regard. Her 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 that of Bach, has been subject to (misguided) "preconceptions and ideological uses". We can thus assume that any knowledge produced by her writing the 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 instance, "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. McClary's social and biographical "sketch" differs from one an 'old' musicologist would have produced, because it combines the two subdisciplines of music analysis and historical musicology. She analyses the works in light of their 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; this should be considered knowledge, because it fits the pattern of “justified, true belief”. Yet to be discussed is the type of knowledge produced through interdisciplinary movement between the seemingly disparate elements of music and politics.

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 in 1985-1987, and that this difference is grounded in aspects of quasi-religious musicological dogma that relate to a non-social interpretation of musical phenomena.

In this subsection of the article, McClary enunciates 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, as evident 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 subsection is named (McClary 1987: 14, 16). McClary uses the expression “Pythagorean model” in order to legitimise 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 perspective on music.

McClary (1987: 15) believes that the Pythagoreans, namely professional musicians and some of her contemporary musicologists, otherwise referred to as “the priesthood”, 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).

The knowledge McClary (1987: 15) is generating in this instance, the “true belief” that she is trying to justify, is that this older form of musicology is perpetuating “pseudo-religious rituals and attitudes”. She is attempting 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 a crucial statement, and sounds more like a rallying cry, a manifesto or an instruction for like-minded contemporary musicologists. In addition, McClary's reference to the concept of deconstruction, which is strongly associated with Derrida, alerts us to the postmodern intellectual currents that inform her work. Norris (2000: 109) states that the deconstruction of a text (such as a musical composition or musicological narrative) has the central aim of exposing paradoxes of logic and meaning, in order to show that "the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means". Deconstruction is a symptom of relativistic thinking (Baghrarian 2004: 114) and the "linguistic turn", and has become implicated in postmodern musicology through the work of 'new' musicologists such as McClary, Subotnik, Street and Ayrey (Beard & Gloag 2005: 53).

More importantly, the sentence quoted at the beginning of the previous paragraph is an open statement of musicological epistemology. Specifically, McClary 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 its own form of knowledge based on 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 (1987: 17) 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.

It is obvious that McClary (1987: 14) is not trying to hide the fact that her interpretation has all the hallmarks of a conspiracy theory, and she even refers to herself as a "self-proclaimed paranoid". 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: 17-8) 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: postmodern musical knowledge can be found through an interdisciplinary, socially oriented 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 seeking musical evidence to substantiate these grand narratives. McClary's socially grounded perspective eventually expands to include more complex sociological aspects later in the article.

3. Bach's music as social discourse

If we accept, as McClary does, that the great movements of history (such as the rise of the bourgeoisie) 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 subsection entitled "Bach's music as social discourse", in McClary's article, is an attempt to justify the "true" beliefs stated in the "Introduction" and subsection called "The Pythagorean dilemma". McClary's justification of this includes a combination of empirical evidence, in the music texts of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No 5* (first movement) and the cantata *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, namely 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).

4. Examples

In the examples McClary has chosen, it is her intention to highlight stylistic conventions and the deviation from these norms. She (McClary 1987: 20) claims that her approach differs from a conventional music analysis, because the field of music analysis seeks “deep-structural universals”. This is a telling acknowledgement of the epistemology of music analysis. It also highlights the fact that the ‘new’ musicology believes that this approach is no longer capable of producing “adequate” knowledge, 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.

5. Brandenburg Concerto No 5, first movement

5.1 Tonality

Following a discussion of how tonal compositions are generally constructed, McClary states her “true belief”, namely that tonality is a reflection of middle-class values of progress, expansion, rationality and defiance. In this respect, she considers this movement of the concerto to be representative of these middle-class values through its use of tonality, as she goes on to describe the work in terms of analogous values in the sphere of music. By correlating these ideas in the music and in the society that formed the social context of this music, 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 to have a connection to the expansion of harmonic or melodic movement within a work of music, as McClary describes? 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 (1987: 20) claims that this is prevalent in the music of Bach, resulting in “eclectic hybrids”.

If these questions have been answered in the affirmative, surely we could interpret 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 marketplace, encouraging us to conform to certain trends rather than others in order to define and confirm our identities.

In this instance, it is important to note 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.

5.2 *Concerto grosso* procedure

This section is an illuminating example of the inextricable and essential connection between a work and its context. McClary claims that the *concerto grosso*, as well as the sonata, are 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 as it is generally applied by composers, indicates an "agenda", namely that "individual expression and social harmony will finally be demonstrated to be compatible" (McClary 1987: 24).

5.3 Harpsichord

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 the norm in harpsichord performance.

Attention should be drawn to the way in which McClary's socially grounded interpretation is 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.

5.4 Discussion

In the “Discussion”, McClary vividly describes the different sections’ personalities and behaviours in essentially human terms. Without criticising the creative and invigorating approach, it is 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 (McClary 1987: 26). 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).

Essentially, the harpsichord’s compositional treatment creates a disruption 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 respect, McClary views Bach as predicting the widespread revolutionary violence that was soon to affect German society as a consequence of the social and political climate of his time, eventually splitting the area now known as Germany into 1800 individually administered territories over the course of the eighteenth century (Gagliardo 1980: 12). The concerto’s idealistic and ideological view of society as supportive of the individual, as long as that individual does not become too individualistic, wild and uncontrollable, was perceived as Bach’s own reflection of his social dilemma, 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” (McClary 1987: 41).

5.5 *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 (1987: 41) believes that this work, through “particular choices and juxtapositions”, enunciates issues concerned with the subjects of nationalism, religion and gender. These “true beliefs” are consequently justified in polemic form.

6. Nationalism, religion and gender

6.1 National identity

McClary states that a national style (the Italian, French or German styles, in particular) is encoded with the beliefs, tastes and values of its times, especially 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 recognisable through its connection to the Lutheran chorale tradition (although McClary’s is an extremely reductive 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 description of *Wachet auf* reveals 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, representing 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. By analysing 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.

6.2 Orthodoxy/Pietism

By way of continuation, the nationalistic agenda mentioned in the previous section is not only closely linked to the Lutheran church, but also to its subdivisions, namely the more orthodox strains versus the pietistic, both of whom 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 (1987: 50) regards 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.

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 concerning music (McClary 1987: 51).

As quoted previously in this article, McClary also states in the opening paragraph of her "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). It seems that this perspective is particularly mentioned in order to fortify McClary's more secular view of how Bach may have perceived his own work. This, in turn, may serve to further displace the "pseudo-religious attitudes and values" of Bach's "devotees" (presumably the 'old' musicologists).

6.3 Gender

In this section, McClary draws the reader's attention to the way in which men and women are represented in a musical text, specifically a language-based musical text such as *Wachet auf*. Because Bach was a man, she believes that 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.

For example, McClary believes that, during the dialogue between the Soul and Christ, the Soul (*die Seele*, a feminine word in German) is generally represented with feminine attributes. There is not only musical evidence for this feminine depiction of Christ, the archetypal male. The 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. In addition, McClary (1987: 51) views the soul as "a nagging, passive-aggressive wife, insecurely whining for repeated assurances of love and not hearing them when they are proffered". 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, in this instance, 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 is that this type of musical knowledge was not easily digested at first, although it is currently commonplace. By broaching the uncomfortable subject of gender in music, musicologists such as McClary have discovered one of the blind spots of her less critical predecessors, 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. Such a critique appears to be saying that the 'new' musicology considers feminist critique capable of producing knowledge about music regarding 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 McClary's rather gender-blind predecessors.

6.4 Bach reception

McClary draws attention to the fact that her contemporaries did not share the absolutist view of Bach as representing "pure order" and "universality". The 'old' musicology created "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 widely as an educational tool, the strategies he employed that are currently considered to define tonality are passed on as "truth" instead of a single composer's ideas and opinions. In addition, 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; this is essentially, even metaphysically speaking, akin to nothing). McClary is of the opinion that, in iconising 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. 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. Bach's devotees claim that Bach presents the tonal procedures in his works as "eternal, universal truths", dedicated to "the Glory of God", which

McClary (1987: 58) refers to as no more than 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 compositional processes were taken up and copied so explicitly in the remainder of German canonical tradition that they did become absolutes through perpetuation as compositional models, reinforcing this perception of universality and divinity in the tradition.

In this instance, the “true belief” is that past and present reception of Bach’s work has created the perspective of his music that McClary is now criticising. The projection of concepts of divinity and universality onto Bach’s music is the product of sociological forces, and does 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 through the patronage of the Lutheran Church.

7. Bach in today’s cultural politics

This section concludes the article, summarising and clarifying McClary’s epistemology and deconstructive methodology, both of which she perceives as postmodern.

McClary (1987: 60) declares that this article is an expression of “deconstruction as a political act”. The article under discussion is an example of her attempt to deconstruct the canon, in order to diminish its cultural power and stranglehold over contemporary music, which is the political dimension of Bach’s music to which she is referring.

McClary explicitly states that her work is not entirely a continuation of Adorno’s enterprise (as mentioned in her “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” (McClary 1987: 59). In this instance, 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 it 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” (McClary 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 (McClary 1987: 61).

This concluding section of the article is extremely significant in respect of the assumptions made earlier 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" (McClary 1987: 62). With this statement, if the word "musicologist" is substituted for "artist", she also clarifies her view of herself and the aims of her work in the context of postmodernism.

8. Conclusion

Musicology prior to 1985, which is generally considered to be the approximate advent of 'new' musicology, is seen to have rested on Enlightenment thinking and the absolutes of the grand narrative (Beard & Gloag 2005: xiii, 60). So-called modernist musicology, now termed the 'old' musicology, was epistemologically stable and its approach to knowledge consistent and predictable, resting on the solid grand narratives and associated meanings that surrounded the subject of music. It is thought that the belief structures which underpinned these musicological endeavours were hardly criticised in the Modernist Era, and subsequently their cultural power was immense.

When the article under consideration was written in 1987, the process of self-evaluation within the discipline of musicology, although very much under way in the previous work of Adorno and Dahlhaus for example, was still in its beginning stages (Beard & Gloag 2005: 110, 111). Susan McClary was confronted with the many cherished and archaic perspectives of what is now called the 'old' musicology, particularly concerning the music of Bach. From her article, it is not clear to what extent McClary began to question these ideas as a result of a shift in her intellectual context (the cultural dominant of postmodernism), which surely must have been shared by some of her less critical contemporaries. It is clear that a variety of postmodern positions, such as relativism and deconstruction, for example, inform McClary's criticism. These viewpoints substantiate her altered perspective, and a degree of sympathy with them are clearly crucial to recognising and accepting the knowledge that she has created through the writing of her article. These debates can often be perceived as disconcerting. When confronted with relativistic theories, we may be inclined to follow Gellner (1985: 83) in thinking

that “if truth has many faces, then not one of them deserves trust or respect”. Although this may be “true” (so to speak) for someone like Gellner, it may be intellectually dangerous to hold such a pessimistic outlook. Perhaps relativism is exposing an extremely meaningful realisation. We create the meaning that we find in the things we examine. In his essay entitled “Haydn’s chaos, Schenker’s Order; or, musical meaning and musical analysis: can they mix?” (1992), the self-proclaimed ‘new’ musicologist Lawrence 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” (Kramer 2007: 237). He notes that the ‘new’ musicology, by grappling with the social dimension of music and the notable influence of critical theory on the discipline, has allowed for the serious and critical discussion of musical meaning to continue. This reference leads directly back to McClary and her progression towards a social rather than religious interpretation of Bach’s music in her article.

Unfortunately, the epistemology of the ‘new’ musicology is far more complex than its predecessor, because its rules of legitimation have not been securely established, and may never be, because such an endeavour would be considered extremely un-postmodern. Even an epistemological analysis such as the one offered in the present article can only reveal a small part of the discipline, perhaps only illuminating Susan McClary’s work, or her perspective on the subjects and debates that are discussed in this article and approach to knowledge formation within those contexts. In light of postmodern theory, this should not be a discouraging realisation, as movement towards localised, context-specific perspectives rather than grandiose, universal perspectives can be far more inclusive, useful and meaningful to society. Such knowledge allows us to take control of the production of meaning, and move away from the self-serving entities that, it is believed, have transformed our artistic endeavours into commodities, turning them to performative ends. Lyotard (1984: xxiv) forewarns us against becoming the tools of performativity. McClary endeavours in her work to confront the consensus reality and, as Nietzsche put it, to “philosophize with a hammer”, even at the expense of her career and popularity within her discipline.

Fortunately, this had the opposite effect, for “socially grounded meaning” may not be capable of producing universal knowledge of a deeply simplistic or satisfying nature, but it can be extremely useful, especially in the contexts mentioned by McClary (performance practice and identity formation, for example). This approach to meaning is also useful to the discipline of ‘new’ musicology, because it gives a new standpoint from which to continue the process of questioning ideas and criticising beliefs. Although such a standpoint is often associated with postmodernism, this process of self-criticism has always been a key aspect of the intellectual development of humankind.

Lyotard (1984: 9) asks the following question: “Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?” After this examination of Susan McClary’s article and the postmodern debates that contextualised it in 1987, it can be concluded that the conditions of epistemic legitimacy transform from era to era. The process of “justified, true belief” provides only the formula for production of knowledge, whose purpose and meaning change as societal values change. In the Postmodern Era, cultural knowledge is no longer a finite process decided for us by the “decision makers” of our society, but by individualistic thinkers who are prepared to lead the way by openly criticising long-cherished conventions and asking the questions that nobody else is prepared to ask.

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