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In his book *'Democracy and Music Education: Liberalism, Ethics, and the Politics of Practice'* (2005, p. 165) Paul Woodford issues an invitation for shared dialogue and debate regarding the state of music education in developed countries. Through an appropriation of John Dewey's thoughts regarding a democratic society, Woodford sees great hope for the position and function of a democratic type of music education, with wider implications for a more democratic society. This essay explores what democracy in music education means for Woodford via Dewey, and the extent to which music education is democratic in contemporary societies. A postmodern counterpoint is then contrasted and woven between the notions of 'performativity', and of *ethical judgment* as the nominal condition in which to orchestrate a democratic music education. A deliberately ambivalent stance is taken regarding Woodford's book as finished and static. Instead, this essay illuminates and extends mobile conceptual threads drawn from Woodford and extended through the insights of the French cultural theorist Jean-François Lyotard, that critique music education through its own conditions of existence. The intention is to contribute to this conversation, and further conversations, for a democratic music education.

Paul Woodford weaves the current issues of music education through the work of the American educationist John Dewey to provide a democratic vision of music education. Dewey's democratic philosophy of education is applied by Woodford to both critique and construct a re-visioning of the field of music education. Woodford outlines what he considers to be the main tenets of Dewey's views as the conceptual basis of the rest of his argument. According to Woodford, Dewey "reconceived education as a form of embryonic democracy … in which the aim was to produce mature thinkers capable of participation as full fledged members of democratic society" (Woodford, 2005, p.5). The school, for Dewey, was of the utmost importance for a healthy democratic society where students learnt to participate in a

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democratic community "and thereby contribute to the common good" (p. x). A democratic character had to be cultivated, and for Dewey, the full development of human beings was only possible through active participation in the affairs of the community to give reality to the lived ideals of democracy. For the school this meant an active social awareness of the community from which it emerged, and from wider national and international issues in which democratic ideals could be applied from the outside, and brought in to the micro level of democratic citizenship within the school. Woodford explains how Dewey conceived of the school as the locus for expanding democratic society, and society as the democratic model for the school in which a holistic cognition could be developed and cultivated. Woodford explains:

> Given Dewey's faith in the native intelligence of the common man and woman, and his democratic principle of participation by individuals in the institutions governing them, the challenge for philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals, including teachers, was to become more inclusive with respect to the ethical, moral, political, and other forms of decision making affecting society. (Woodford, 2005, p. 5)

The cultivation of democratic character had to be approached within open and respectful dialogue in order to reach some consensus for societal structures so that democratic principles could be adhered to and developed. Woodford explains Dewey's impetus on conversation, and the need for democratic education to be constantly open to, and inviting of, communicative action to "prevent closure" (p. 22) and avoid oppressive "forms of dogma and ideology" (p. 47). Dewey found both these tendencies to be anathema to the ideals of democracy. As such, Woodford charts Dewey's use of "reflective thinking" (p. ix) (now known as 'critical thinking') that was constantly needing to be reworked "as a socially situated, flexible and fallible way of thinking that varied according to the nature of the problem and needs of the individual" (p. 3).

Woodford's theoretical trajectory then spans the site of music education specifically, within a 'Deweyan' frame in order to inform Woodford's democratic vision of music education. Described as his "manifesto" (p. xii), Woodford makes explicit his intentions for the purpose of his study as an invitation to "music educators to begin reclaiming a democratic purpose for music education by contributing to wider intellectual and political conversations about the nature and significance of music in our lives and those of our children" (p. xi). As such, Woodford aims to develop a vision of music education that explicitly channels Dewey

for inspiration, whilst singling out music as a site that intrinsically exemplifies Dewey's democratic ideals. Woodford points out that like Dewey's democratic educational framework, music has great potential to contribute to the expansion of democratic ideals in wider societal contexts. With this point advanced from Dewey, Woodford further states that for Dewey, "the arts were not luxuries 'but emphatic expressions of that which makes any education worth while'" (p. 10). As an extension of the democratic project then, music education is, according to Woodford, "a form of ethical encounter involving the application of reason and consciences, [that] can contribute to that project" (p. xvii). Viewed as a site of political, moral and ethical action explored through Dewey's ideas on democracy, Woodford defines his book as a reflection of "a growing awareness of, and concern for political, moral, and ethical issues in music education philosophy and practice" (p. x).

With Dewey's principles outlined, Woodford then fashions the argument to a detailed critique of the current state of music education. This state is one of disrepair, shot through with anti-democratic practices and largely infiltrated within a context of wider anti-democratic discourses of oppression. Dewey's emphasis on open dialogue to reinforce democratic principles is little adhered to within the music education community, and as such music education is losing support and ground in government decision-making processes. We need, Woodford warns, "to pay more attention to music while engaging in public conversation and criticism about its imputed nature, uses, and abuses" (p. 81). This lack of conversation has dire consequences, in that music education not only loses its democratic purpose, but also stops contributing to the greater good of society. This is an unforgivable bind for Woodford, who sees music's reason for existence as its capacity to function as society's conscience, as a powerful democratic tool.

Music, it seems, cannot survive as an activity within education systems when it neglects its democratic role. Woodford explains:

> My own view is that the survival of the profession depends in significant part on music teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, becoming much more involved in the wider musical and social worlds.
> (Woodford, 2005, p. 81)

Through conversation music educators pass on Dewey's version of 'intelligence' to their students so that they in turn are able to contribute to wider conversations of music. However, Woodford finds a "lack of intelligent conversation about political issues that really matter" (p. xii.). Without such dialogue in political areas outside of music education,

Woodford believes students are ill equipped to identify moments when music has been "deliberately distorted for commercial purposes" (p. 76).

Music teachers too often are reluctant to talk about politics in music, preferring instead to stick to the 'tried and true' methods, and resulting in a lack of interest "among advocates and pedagogues or their followers in engaging in public conversations about educational ethics" (p. 29). This does not bode well for a profession that is inherently conservative and intellectually passive, Woodford claims, a profession unable to bridge gaps between different generations, or between popular and classical genres. Without democratically-framed communicative action, "autocratic educational models and methods continue to prevail in music teacher programs and in public school music programs" (p. xi).

Woodford further stresses Dewey's democratic ideal of an open-ended system that avoids dogma and closure. Pointing to the tensions between popular and classical traditions, and between 'left' (liberal) and 'right' (conservative) philosophical orientations, he asserts that neither side has successfully implemented a more 'democratic' music education. Woodford also decries music education's apparent fondness for technical rationality that manifests itself in dogmatic and slavish pedagogical approaches that have little relevance to the lived world.

Music Education and the Postmodern Condition

For this reader (and music teacher) perhaps the most useful idea raised in Woodford's book revolves around the notion of music education as a site of complexity, paradox and even contradiction. Woodford sees the shift in political orientation towards the 'far right' as "a reaction to the complexity, diversity, and confusion of the postmodern world" (p. 65). He then goes on to argue "the need for reform so that music education *better reflects the postmodern condition*" (p. 97, my emphasis). In view of Woodford's apparent ambivalence or reluctance regarding 'the postmodern world', and in the spirit of contributing to broadened conversations in music education, I want to explore postmodernism a bit more here.

There are two interweaving leitmotifs that resound very clearly for me throughout Woodford's book resulting directly from his observation of music education as encompassing such 'complexity, diversity and confusion' in the postmodern world. The first is the notion of the 'postmodern condition', and the second is the concomitant necessity in this condition for *ethical judgment*. While Woodford uses a brand of liberal democracy excavated from Dewey

to view, analyze and critique music education explained in the previous section, I would like to contrast this view with some insights from the cultural theorist Jean-François Lyotard.

Incredulity Towards Metanarratives

Let me first begin with Woodford's assertion that music education needs to better reflect the postmodern condition (on grounds, apparently, that doing so will make it more democratic), despite the complex state of the postmodern world. Lyotard articulated the very tensions described by Woodford in his now famous book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard, 1984). In that book he describes what he sees as a general feeling of exhaustion with both the 'modern era' and what counts as 'modern'. As the title suggests, Lyotard was interested in the *changing state* of knowledge and education in advanced societies where technology, globalization, and capitalism have radically transformed the emergence, transference, delivery, and even the presumed nature of knowledge. Lyotard shows how 'grand narratives' legitimate the certainty and rationality so revered since the Enlightenment, and which mark the modern epoch. He states:

> I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse… making explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxi)

Postmodernism, for Lyotard, is simply an acknowledgement that these grand narratives no longer warrant the claims to certainty on which they have relied for their persuasive power. Among the most significant casualties of this "incredulity toward metanarratives" (p. xxii), have been the ideas of *speculation* and *emancipation*. The philosophical sciences Lyotard follows, can no longer reveal the deep, inner meanings of society or the 'real' reasons things happen. As a continuing array of human rights catastrophes make evident (Lyotard cites Auschwitz, May 68, and Hungary among others, and I'll add the American invasion of Iraq as another potent example) there is no longer any justification for the belief that humankind will 'naturally' progress towards freedom and peace *as a matter of course*. Instead, what we have is a society that situates itself within "clouds of narrative language elements" (p. xxiv). Rather than a unified and unifying narrative thread, we have many differing narrative fragments and languages contingently knitted together. Advanced societies, it appears, don't have all-guiding, or all-knowing

insights that are capable of dictating and legitimating a definitive account of human progress. For Lyotard, grand narratives are sinister and terrifying: they act as 'Final Solutions', whether intentional homage is to be paid to this signifier or not. Grand narratives, says Lyotard, have encountered an insurmountable crisis in legitimization.

Music education also has suffered a crisis of legitimization in terms of its own metanarratives, a crisis alluded to throughout Woodford's book. Among its more recurrent themes is the proliferation of differing pedagogical approaches. Woodford is critical of what he takes to be the performance-based approach music education championed by David Elliott, an approach that, Woodford alleges, privileges performing over "children and teachers publicly criticizing musical or educational values, practices, and standards of excellence" (Woodford, 2005, p. 32). The grand narrative of performance can be extremely un-democratic, inculcating children (and teachers) into "preexisting musical cultures and communities of musicians, which is said to be humanizing, but there is all too much emphasis on congruence with 'authentic,' 'real,' or 'genuine' existing traditions and practices" (p. 32).

Woodford further points to the privileging of the Eurocentric classical canon in pedagogical approaches, appealing to Bennett Reimer's claim that popular music in American schools is "seldom … represented … with anything like the presence and seriousness of western classical music, or even jazz and, now, various cultural musics" (p. 115). Thus, so-called 'serious' music constitutes the legitimate field of inquiry in music education. According to Woodford, the prevalence of this grand narrative in music classrooms widens the gaps between (or among) different generations of music listeners, seriously compromising possibilities for democratic exchange. "What we have," writes Woodford, "are two generational groups with their respective musical belief systems living side by side, in the same classroom, in splendid cultural isolation" (p. 25).

The postmodern proliferation of differing languages, differing pedagogies, and differing musics, is seen by Woodford as potentially very harmful to music education—if certain musics or pedagogies are privileged in ways that foreclose possibilities and opportunities for democratic debate.

Another of Woodford's recurrent criticisms of music education concerns ways music educators seek to justify their instructional efforts to society—to establish their professional legitimacy. Woodford calls for a more "socially proactive approach," arguing that "the pursuit of a wider and more democratic sense of musical community is more likely to

contribute to the profession's intellectual, political legitimacy in the eyes of the public and government than are any advocacy efforts" (p. 74). It appears to me that what Woodford is describing is the gradual realization that attempts to justify music education in terms of its cognitive efficacy – a grand narrative in itself, and this simply will not suffice.

What these examples offered by Woodford depict in music education is analogous to Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition as a break with grand narratives—a splintering into 'little narratives' as a proliferation of different languages. In postmodernity, narratives *act* as if they are grand narratives, but in crisis mode because they can no longer sustain the absolute certainty upon which they formerly relied for their authority. It is to Lyotard's notion of the legitimization of knowledge and society through the principal of optimal performance—a dominant language game in advanced societies, and in music education as well—that I now turn.

Performativity

Lyotard recognized the way technology has transformed human existence in advanced societies. He also recognized that technical devices (such as computers) existed at first as extensions of the human body and mind—as means of storing and retrieving data that were not 'sullied' by human emotion or labor. Technology, then, was regarded as a highly efficient tool that yielded the best ways and types of information. Lyotard named this type of logic of efficient performance as 'performativity'. Lyotard's performativity follows "the principle of optimal performance: maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expended in the process)" (1984, p. 44). The logic of performativity *compels* all discourses in education to conform to a logic of efficiency. It is but a short conceptual leap from this principle to societal constructs and the reorganization of social systems along lines of *efficient* agency.

Transformed into a commodity, 'knowledge' revolves around issues of information storage (as data), ownership (access to data) and legitimization (the act of 'proving' data are valid). The consequences of this logic of performativity are profound and far-reaching, since knowledge that can't be transformed into easily digestible bytes is generally abandoned: as Lyotard (1984) puts it, "the pragmatics of scientific knowledge replaces traditional knowledge or knowledge based on revelation" (p. 44). Instrumental reason is thus validated by its utility, which in turn serves to validate instrumentality in general. "It is self-

legitimating, in the same way a system organized around performance maximization seems to be" (p. 47). Thus, performativity is coupled to the grand narratives of efficiency, reason, and instrumentality that have come to define modernity. Capitalism, globalization and technology come to full fruition in capitalist societies that embrace the logic of performativity to justify their own social organization.

The effects on education (Lyotard was himself a secondary teacher at one stage in his career, and continued to work within the education system for most of his life) have been well documented in recent years (see Peters, 1995 for a seminal example). The optimization of performance within the developed world's education systems has had a direct impact on music education. Woodford is careful to note Dewey's strong "distaste of technical rationalism" (p. 6) in teacher education, and Dewey's conviction that education needs to resist such seductive social trends. Woodford blames the "lack of democratic vision and pedagogical models" in music education on the increased influence of technical rationality in the North America. He even goes as far as to suggest that an "epistemology of technical rationalism" (p.115) has all but eliminated reflective judgment in teacher training.

The fact that performativity is tied to the optimal performance of the economic system is also evident in Woodford's concerns about the increased commodification of "popular music and culture," which, he believes, serve "the interests of corporations and not children and society" (p. 68). Woodford's skepticism suggests a need to explore indeterminate or ethical judging if music education is to be more democratic. Again, I turn to Lyotard.

Ethical Judgment

Lyotard held a positive, creative view of what postmodernism entails. For him it is not an historical epoch as such, but a *figure* or event. To understand this aspect of Lyotard's thought, it is necessary to understand something of his own epistemological influences. One such influence was Wittgenstein. Following Wittgenstein's analysis of language games, Lyotard argues that the loss of grand narrative implicates an ethical and democratic approach for the postmodern condition.

In the essay 'Wittgenstein 'After'' Lyotard (1983) describes the way Wittgenstein's idea of 'language games' serves as a tool to separate language and meaning. Lyotard comments:

> The examination of language games, just like the critique of the faculties, identifies and reinforces the separation of language from itself. There is no unity to language; there are islands of language, each of them ruled by a different regime, untranslatable into others. This dispersion is good in itself, and ought to be respected. (p. 20)

Lyotard's use of narratives earlier in his career leads him to emphasize the multiplicity and heterogeneity of language games. Intrinsic to this approach is his insistence upon the pragmatic specificity or singularity of phrases that function in a "manner analogous to the little narratives" (Readings, 1991, p. 106). As such, they resist incorporation into 'grand narratives' or metalanguages. Lyotard draws on Wittgenstein's idea of language games to draw a distinction between genres or *families of phrases*. In Lyotard's words:

> The free examination of phrases leads to the (critical) dissociation of their *regimes* (the separation of the faculties in Kant, the disentanglement of language games in Wittgenstein). They prepare the way for the dispersion (diaspora, writes Kant) that …forms our own context. (cited in Carroll, 1987, p. 165)

Lyotard's use of 'language games' departs significantly from Wittgenstein in some ways. The major difference appears in his later works when that term is inter-changed with, and then superseded by, the 'phrase'. According to Carroll (1987), "the phrase is, for Lyotard, what little narratives and language games were also supposed to be: a minimal, self-presupposing, 'purely analytical' entity" (p. 164). That is, unlike Wittgenstein's (1976) approach which is in constant suspicion of being subject-centered in that it needs a subject to stand aside the universe of language games to play them, Lyotard situates "all players, all addressees, all referents, within the universe they present" (p. 164). This shift from grand narratives to language games is at the heart of Lyotard's analytics, and is central to the idea of indeterminate judgment as ethical action. Lyotard's appropriation of Wittgenstein's analysis enabled him to conceive of the way we live in a world with no *absolutely infallible* grand narrative on which to base our existence. Instead, we are all based at the locus of many little narratives that have their own sets of rules that may be radically different (heterogeneous) from each other. As such, no one language game can override or legitimate the other. We are instead compelled to an indeterminate mode of ethical judgment, on a case-by-case basis, to navigate the tensions of our postmodern condition.

After Lyotard's analysis, what might an indeterminate mode of ethical judgment mean in relation to music education? Lyotard certainly offers an interesting perspective on the way that despite our best efforts, there can never be a totally, absolutely, and concretely

'right' way, or metanarrative, of teaching music. Indeed, there can never be any definitive statements drawn on what music is best to use, how to use it, or how best to re/create it. However, I think this provides an interesting challenge to music teachers both in the classroom, and in the musical action that they initiate. Indeterminacy in music education might allow for differing approaches to teaching music, differing ways of playing music, and a constant awareness of the educative potential both in and of the music in each musical encounter. Enabling the conditions in which to navigate the proliferation of differing pedagogies, music, and cultures, seems to me to be of paramount concern in an ethics of judgment in music education. We as music teachers need to be able to have the freedom to choose what is most suitable to our own teaching contexts and cultural backgrounds, and this requires the development of an ethical approach to the decisions we make as musicians and teachers.

Woodford's appeals to ethical judgment in his book are generally concerned with the ethics of practice. As indicated above, for Woodford music must be an ethical practice that enhances democracy through conversations between musicians and society. Woodford considers it an ethical move to advance "inclusivity, diversity, and criticism" (p. 74) in the way teachers are trained. For this he draws upon Dewey's appeals to open-ended approaches to teaching, and teacher training. Though the acquisition of performance skill is indeed desirable, Woodford considers it a narrow aspect of music education if it is not endowed with the (particular) ethical perspective "to reengage and reconnect with the public" (p. 36). Woodford sees music education as "a form of ethical encounter" (p. xvii) that is both musically and socially democratic.

As Woodford acknowledges, Wayne Bowman has also dealt directly with the ethical implications of, and within, music education, and the increasingly urgent recognition this deserves in re-visioning and revitalizing the field. Like Woodford, and in accordance with my views of performativity in music education broadly, Bowman (2001 and 2002) criticizes the hegemony of technical rationality that seems to be all encompassing when it comes to music education specifically, and indeed the entire realm of education. Bowman also points out the often counter-intuitive emphasis of relying on a certain 'method' or technique, that only serves to increase music's distancing from human endeavors. Importantly, this is a matter of ethics for Bowman, who insists recognizing musical agency as ethical agency "offers to broaden and enrich how we music educators understand what we do and how we do it"

(2001, p. 11), and further "imputes to musical endeavors a social significance often regarded as marginal" (ibid).

The points of convergence within a Lyotardian perspective with these views of an ethical musical education are clear: music is itself open ended and indeterminate, and as such teaching methods and approaches need to be as well. There are many, many differing types of music and cultures, and teaching prescriptions need to have a sense of indeterminacy and contingency in dealing with them. Lyotard's point of difference is perhaps most effectively felt in the emphasis through the act of *judging* that enables and encompasses ethical action. Lyotard points to the proliferation of little narratives; of the explosion of choice that is so much a part of our condition, but importantly he urges us not succumb to a laissez-faire type of decision-making. Instead, ethical judgment can be seen as the antidote to performativity in music education through an acknowledgment of the temporal dimension of music as an ethical encounter that involves the temporal necessity of judgment. Ethical judgment unfolds through time, aside and in contrast to Lyotard's technoscientific analysis of performativity. Further, musical action via Lyotard, can then be seen as the very embodiment of the unfolding of time, and a very unique realization of ethical judgment.

Implications for Democracy in Music Education

The tenor of the postmodern condition resonates in certain ways with Woodford's call for a more democratic vision for music education. The explosion of music technologies, and the ease with which we can obtain, listen, and compose have not necessarily meant that democracy has deepened. Music has never been easier to manipulate with the array of software applications that take away the necessity of years of training by supplying sound and technical aptitude with a click of the mouse. Music has never been so ubiquitous, with technology that brings music from many, many different places, times, and contexts into our sitting rooms and into the public sphere.

More ethical questions arise with major corporations recognizing that it is not in their best interests to veer away from the highly reductive three minute pop-song or to encourage innovation and experimentation, because it might not garner a large profit. The public has an unprecedented say in what it listens to, but not necessarily more discernment toward blatant commercialism. Ipods, mp3s, and other technical devices are associated with a life style that encourages private, passive listening both as connoisseur and consumer. Schools rely heavily

on recorded, highly polished, and amplified renditions of songs which become aurally and emotionally overbearing when compared with 'live' acoustic instrumental arrangements.

What does the contemporary prevalence of the culture of performativity mean for how we consider democracy in music and music education? I maintain that the postmodern context as a vision of democracy within music education, and outside, calls for ethical judgment *now more than ever*. With no definitive pedagogical approach, no definitive political doctrine to explain what must be taught, no definitive account of what music actually *is* or what counts as music in postmodernity, we are left with nothing to guide us but the 'ground zero' of action that is ethical judgment. Democracy in music education, then, can only be worked towards and worked through when the ideal of democracy is not one of doctrine, but one that embraces an ethics of judgment that is indeterminate.

On a purely practical level in music education, an acknowledgment of the temporal unfolding of musical action need not be atomized in order to assess an end product of educational skill. A pedagogical approach that embraces the new technologies and the worlds these can open up in a considered and critical way, would encourage ethical judgment in students who are still grappling with decisions concerning their right to download music irrespective of copyright. Incorporating technology both new and historic might go some way to broadening and inciting exploration and experimentation with soundscapes that can be produced from both electric and organic sources. Furthermore, a democratic music education might (might) go some way to acknowledge that there are ethical needs and reasons aside from economic imperatives in ensuring that the world's environment provides a renewable and brilliant source of sound, and that as the natural environment diminishes, so too does the breadth and depth of the sonic spectrum. Finally—and this is certainly no exhaustive list—musical action itself could be considered in its many forms, an inherently ethical act intrinsic to its own being, which calls upon an ethics of judgment in terms of conceptualizing both the musical and extra-musical phrase of what might come next. Performativity, as a logic and culture, and as a spurious grand narrative, takes away the need to judge this next phrase by providing its own narrative of phrases and rules that belong to the games of economic rationalism and efficiency. This is the case in music education, and it is the case in contemporary democracy.

Concluding Comments

In my view, Woodford is on the mark with his claim that music education faces many challenges in the postmodern condition, and with his call for more debate about the ethical dimensions to music education pedagogy and practice. I have chosen to extend Woodford's argument through utilizing the work of Jean-François Lyotard to consider the many tensions that Lyotard himself identified as part of the postmodern condition. Through Dewey, Woodford stresses that we must 'breathe new life' into democracy. I believe Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition extends a certain hope and provides resistance to many of the oppressive tendencies in music education, and wider, communities. My view is that questions regarding ethical judgment in music education contribute to democratic conversations in music. We must not let music education be dominated by capital, but be open to the kind of questioning and ethical judgment amidst indeterminacy that deepens democracy. The postmodern condition is not always an easy one in which to live, let alone to teach, play and learn music. Woodford is right to urge for more conversation regarding the position and function of music education in contemporary society.

This conversation has only just begun.

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