

A Note from the Editor

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As I was preparing this issue for publication—my first as the new Editor-in-Chief—I was struck by two subjects that appear in almost all of the articles: the first is a crisis of knowledge that manifests in “fake news” and “alternative facts,” and the second is an appeal to critical pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire as a corrective. In the special section of this issue, devoted to information literacy, these themes are clearly and logically at the center; but even Marianna Ritchey’s article on teaching aesthetically challenging music to non-music majors, which stands alone outside the special section, addresses the problem of what it means to *know* music and argues that a critical pedagogical approach can empower students to trust their own interpretive skills and “take an active approach to building knowledge.”¹

In various ways, each of the authors in this issue is struggling to address the epistemological crisis in our field. We have witnessed radical changes to how we approach issues of authority, expertise, and even how we define facts in the past few decades. A discussion about the limits and bias of the Western European canon has now gathered momentum as more programs are revising curricular requirements and more professors are dropping physical textbooks in favor of open source materials.

Traditional sources of knowledge like books, encyclopedias, and textbooks are designed to filter content, for better or for worse. They offer the strength of being well-vetted while also imposing limits due to publishing costs. But as we rely less and less on physical resources and more on digital and online resources, social networks have become the new filters—at least for our students. According to media theorist Clay Shirky, we can no longer rely on the “filter-then-publish” strategy of the past that was necessitated by the economics of publishing. What we now have is a “mass amateurization” of content

1. Mariana Ritchey, “‘What Does This Artwork Ask of Me?’ Using Challenging Music To Teach Empathy and Empowerment,” this *Journal* 9, no. 1 (2019): ??.

creation.² Authority has shifted from experts in the ivory tower to people we know or interact with via social media.

The upside of this revolutionary change, arguably, is that it has opened up our field in unimaginable ways. We now have the ability to study music from a far greater number of places, times, and traditions than ever before—music studied by heterogeneous authorities, people that are “other-credentialed,” including performers and fans. We also have access to areas of research that are unsettled and to debates that rage.

The downside of this revolution, however, is that authority no longer resides solely with scholars or within the pages of peer reviewed journals, and facts are facts only when we want them to be or when we agree with them. We have access to lots of facts, but no *truth*—no agreed upon body of knowledge, little or no context in which to understand or evaluate all these facts, no pantheon, no canon.

The internet has changed the scale of the study of music history and, like the internet itself, our field no longer has “edges within which knowledge has to squeeze.”³ To imagine that any one of us alone has a comprehensive knowledge of music history is folly, and it is equally foolish to imagine that what we teach is somehow comprehensive. As teachers in the field, we are just now coming to terms with the idea that, as technologist David Weinberger puts it, “No edges mean no shape. And no shape means that networked knowledge lacks what we have long taken to be essential to the structure of knowledge: a foundation.”⁴ For Weinberger this lack of foundation is not a doomsday scenario, but rather an exciting opportunity to redesign what we mean by knowledge. To negotiate this new terrain, many of the authors in this issue turn to Freire—a scholar who understood that there have always been people on the outside of epistemological structures and that a fundamental rethinking of authority was one way to empower those who were excluded.

The field is currently responding to a clear charge to be more inclusive, more diverse, and to engage students more actively in the classroom. But without a shared pedagogical canon, without clearly defined, common student learning outcomes, what exactly are we supposed to be teaching? We have been given considerable freedom to invent something new, but as we begin to explore this relatively uncharted and unstable territory many of us are experiencing a vertiginous giddiness, stunned by the possibilities open to us as pedagogues

2. Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (London: Penguin, 2008), 98.

3. David Weinberger, *Too Big to Know: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren't the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room is the Room* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 17.

4. Weinberger, *Too Big to Know*, 17.

but unsure of how to move forward. What I find exciting, especially as editor of a pedagogy journal, is that this reorientation of our field presents *problems*, and good problems are at the heart of good research.

Before closing, I want to offer a deep thank you to my predecessor, Stephen Meyer, who brilliantly guided the *Journal* as its Editor-in-Chief for the past three years. When he assumed the editorship from the founder of the *Journal*, Matthew Balensuela, he did so with a mission to continue to publish scholarship in all areas of music history pedagogy. Building on Balensuela's successes with the *Journal*, Meyer intentionally moved away from publishing "Reports and Practices" in favor of scholarship based on systematic inquiry into the principles of teaching and learning, both practical and theoretical. The growing readership of the *Journal* and the highly engaged community that has emerged around a passion for excellent pedagogy attest to Steve's exemplary leadership over the past three years. I look forward to continuing the work that Matthew and Steve started, and I invite you to join the conversation that explores our dynamic field.