Issues in Teaching Music Theory Ethically: Reframing University Directives of Antiracist and Decolonized Curricula

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Discussions of antiracism and decolonization in music theory pedagogy have taken on new urgency in recent years. Key scholarship on these issues include Attas (2019a, 2019b, 2020), Ewell (2020a, 2020b, 2021), Hisama (2000, 2018), and Lumsden (2018). In addition to this research, theory scholars are collaborating to create pedagogical resources such as the Composers of Color Resource Project and Music Theory Midwest's Inclusive Music Theory Pedagogy Resource. This article first restores the university's conception of "care" to its institutional, neoliberal context and links both concept and context to the raced and gendered dynamics of labor. This argument builds on Gopinath (2009), which positions music theory teaching within the neoliberal university and its use of diversity and (contingent) labor toward capitalist ends, as well as Vágnerová and García Molina (2018), which considers academic service itself a curricular issue. The second part of this article offers a set of pedagogical questions and relational lenses through which to reevaluate one's own music theory teaching, occasionally drawing on examples from the author's experiences.

I am currently an assistant professor of music theory at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), a public "Doctoral University: High Research Activity" (its former classification of R2 is probably better known), which is on land that long served as the site of meeting and exchange among a number of Indigenous peoples, including the Keyauwee and Saura. Before taking this position, I was a graduate student and worker at the Eastman School of Music, and I held one-year appointments at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Music. I am also an early-career, cisgender, Asian American woman. Having grown up in the United States as a settler-arrivant, with my particular racial and gender identities, I have long been interested in racial and gender difference—and racial and gender justice. The equally complex issues of difference along the lines of labor only came to the forefront of my thinking in recent years. I attribute this more recent interest to my experiences as a contingent worker, to the state of academic labor more generally, and to my remarkable colleagues at Project Spectrum.[1]

Teaching and care in the university

Since beginning my tenure-track position in August 2020, I have been struck by contradictions in the language that universities use to describe COVID-related stresses

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1   Project Spectrum (https://www.projectspectrummusic.com) is a graduate student–led coalition of which I am a founding member. It is committed to increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in music theory, musicology, and ethnomusicology. Its committee has organized preconference symposia, which were attached to the joint annual meetings of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory in 2018 and 2020, and published a colloquy in *Current Musicology* (2021).

and by the way they expect us as teachers to adapt. In particular, universities justify the increase in teachers' workloads in the emotionally affective language of "care," especially "care" for our students. As an associate vice chancellor and dean of students at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro announced to the school community in October 2020, "Our students need us now more than ever. . . . We are creating a culture of care, which in turn motivates our students to become their best selves."[2] Faculty and staff are frequently tasked with caring for their students, but many of my supervisors and colleagues have acknowledged that in order to create a community of care, we also need to care for our colleagues, our families, and ourselves.[3] We might respond to this language with a variety of emotions, including surprise that the institution verbalizes the deeply personal challenges that the pandemic poses and gratitude that it exhorts us to care about others, even ourselves. Does the university care?[4]

The unique challenges of the pandemic have had an outsized impact on people who care for children or adults while also working full time. Faculty and staff of the UNCG Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) program wrote about this issue in a July 8, 2020 open letter to the university's chancellor, provost, and deans:

> The crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inextricable links between employees' abilities to thrive on the job and their responsibilities for caretaking in their households and communities. Since caretaking tends to fall disproportionately on women and since those with the fewest resources will find it most difficult to simultaneously fulfill their responsibilities in the home and at their jobs, the pandemic is deepening existing inequalities of gender, race, and class.

Feminist writers have, for decades, drawn attention to the myriad, quiet, and uncompensated ways in which care props up societies.[5] Often, as the faculty and staff of the WGSS program describe here, this labor is unequally distributed along the

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2   This statement was used in an article on UNCG's Student Assistance Fund for Emergencies (Danner-Groves 2020); these funds are intended for students' groceries, gas, or airfare home.

3   See Michael Berry's essay in this volume, which speaks to these issues more fully.

4   Here and henceforth, my use of "the university" refers to its structures and those agents who work on its behalf. "Care," "antiracism," and "decolonization" are all ubiquitous terms across US college campuses; see, for example, statements from the UNCG College of Visual and Performing Arts' Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (https://vpa.uncg.edu/home/cvpa_edi/statements-from-the-cvpa-edi/) and the University of California's April 2021 report "Imagining an Anti-Racist UC" (https://www.ucop.edu/human-resources/coro/2020_forms/coro_nor-cal_2020_full_report.pdf). Corporations and advertising also frequently adopt the language of care, with recent examples documented in Dowling (2021; see especially pp. 161–64).

5   Carol Gilligan's ([1982] 2003) "ethic of care," which prioritizes the feminized values of empathy and compassion in contrast to values of fairness and logic, has had widespread influence in philosophy, education, public policy, and more. Additionally, Heidi Hartmann ([1981] 2021) discusses the fraught relationship between feminist and Marxist theories, noting that women and women's labor have been a part of Marxist thought since its inception.

intersecting lines of gender, race, and class. The university's disposition toward care is fundamentally different. Appropriating feminist language and ideas, it seeks every effective tool to continue business as usual. Ultimately, "care for our students" is more accurately construed using Wanda Vrasti's (2011) critical interpretation of "caring capitalism," in which neoliberal ideology puts forth "credible affective structures" in order to self-perpetuate.[6] Under the cover of "care," the university asks its faculty and staff to work longer hours at unfamiliar tasks with little additional support.[7]

The politics of care are also fraught with the complex structures of intersectional power in the academy. That is, we know that much of the invisible labor of advising, creating more inclusive pedagogies, and educating white male colleagues is shouldered by women and people of color.[8] The inequality of labor along these lines is magnified when the university asks its faculty to increase the amount that we care for one another *and* to refocus our efforts on antiracist efforts in addition to our actual job responsibilities.[9]

There is no way around it: The simultaneous directives of fixing racial injustice in our universities and decolonizing our curricula are inextricably linked to the directive of "care." In addition, these directives call for ever more uncompensated and taxing labor that is not optional for those who hold minoritized identities, especially since they usually play no clear role in tenure and promotion. Any efforts toward antiracist music theory teaching must account for the facts of our unequal labor along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity, as well as how unequal labor relates to unequal power.

It should be no surprise that the university does not care for us, or that our work does not love us, even when many of our colleagues, students, and supervisors do.[10] The university is an institution that approaches a corporation, and its primary goal is not to care for anyone but to survive: institutions are incapable of caring.[11] As long as the university retains its neoliberal agenda, it will continue appropriating the word "care"

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6   In addition to Vrasti (2011), see also Boltanski and Chiapello ([1999] 2018).

7   Or even with reduced support: institutions of higher education are reducing faculty salaries and not renewing faculty lines, instead asking the existing faculty members to take teaching overloads. In my experience during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years, my university encouraged faculty to "care" for students by increasing "flexibility" regarding due dates, modes of instruction, incompletes, and grading standards.

8   See Bodovski (2018) and Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017).

9   For example, the Eastman School of Music's Action Commission for Racial Justice, whose membership includes students, faculty, staff, alumni, and Rochester community leaders, published a report and recommendations in October 2020 (https://www.esm.rochester.edu/diversity/report); and the faculty of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music announced a racial equity plan in September 2020 (https://www.oberlin.edu/dean-of-the-conservatory/racial-equity-diversity-action-plan).

10   See Jaffe (2021).

11   See Kelley (2016).

to its own ends of faculty productivity, in both responding to COVID-19 and the rising demands for racial justice in 2020 and 2021.[12]

Institutions may not be able to care, but we can. Returning to the concept of "care," and in view of the university's neoliberal agenda, I ask: As university faculty, for *whom* are we caring? Are we caring for the *university*? Are we uncritically equating the needs of the university with the good of our individual students? With the good of those it employs? With the good of the community within which it is embedded? Before the pandemic, Lucie Vágnerová and Andrés García Molina laid out many of these issues with respect to music curricula, writing from their perspectives as contingent faculty that academic service should be considered a curricular issue (2018, 93). They link academic service to contingent labor and the "gendered, racialized, and classed seniority gap" in higher education (95). Vágnerová and García Molina's intervention is crucial for music theory pedagogy scholarship, which does not typically engage with questions of labor.[13]

This article builds on the work of Vágnerová and García Molina (2018) as well as other significant interventions on antiracism and decolonization in music education, including work by Robin Attas (2019a, 2019b, 2020), David Chavannes and Maria Ryan (2018), Philip Ewell (2020a, 2020b), Ellie Hisama (2018, 2000), and Rachel Lumsden (2018). In the first part of this article, I have restored the university's conception of "care" to its institutional, neoliberal context and linked both concept and context to the raced and gendered dynamics of labor. Below, the second part of this article offers a set of pedagogical questions and relational lenses through which to view and reevaluate one's own music theory teaching, occasionally drawing examples from my own experiences. These questions interrogate curricular design (the materials and content of teaching), pedagogy (the methodology of teaching), and building communities both inside and

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12   Another example is the way in which the university "cares" about the environment. Eve Tuck contends that environmental consciousness "should be linked to the drive for productivity—universities are now setting the dual aims of shrinking footprints and increasing (faculty) productivity, not willing to see how those two goals materially compete" (2018, 157). Relatedly, Vrasti expands upon Slavoj Žižek's concept of "liberal communists," including within this category those individuals "who hope to earn money as an unintentional, almost accidental, side-effect of doing good works," such as "the environmental pragmatists who understand that going green is the way to gold, and the creative workers who derive so much enjoyment from their work that they forget to ask for remuneration" (2011, para. 10).

13   One notable exception is Sumanth Gopinath's 2009 article "Diversity, Music, Theory, and the Neoliberal Academy." Drawing from his own experiences taking qualifying exams as a Yale PhD student, Gopinath reflects on music theory's disciplinary boundaries with regard to both its practitioners' ethno-racial identities and the subject matter of research and pedagogy. He goes on to position music theory teaching within the neoliberal university, which instrumentalizes diversity and (contingent) labor toward capitalist ends. In addition, although they do not explicitly foreground labor, both Robin Attas (2019a) and Philip Ewell (2020b) self-consciously examine their own positionality with respect to their students and/or institutions. The former article is explicitly about teaching; the latter article includes a significant component on textbooks and curricula.

outside the classroom. Furthermore, even though the work of gender and racial equality is a universal responsibility, it is not work that can be done without sustained self-reflection—work that goes beyond the first step of acknowledging privilege.

Instructors have numerous implicit biases that they are conditioned to ignore. Thus, the lenses I propose are consciously instructor centered, considering the instructor, the relationship between instructor and student, and the relationship between instructor and institution. I also suggest and cite counterhegemonic pedagogical practices that may be fruitful in a variety of theory classes. By centering the instructor's subjectivity, I expand and reframe the scope of music theory pedagogy to include crucial and interlinking questions of race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and labor. Finally, I conclude with several reflections about the relationship between the individual (instructor or student) and the institution, with reference to recent articles by Sandy Grande (2018) and Eve Tuck (2018).[14]

I acknowledge fully that reading this article and asking oneself these questions are challenging acts of labor. The anti-Asian racist attacks in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021—which are part of a long history of anti-Asian violence and sentiment in the United States—have reminded me that the stakes, the anger, and the labor are exhausting to the bone.[15] But anti-oppression work is the only ethical response to injustice. It is hope work, it is love work, it is community work, and it is a *genuine* form of care work—work that is soul giving and fulfilling. As bell hooks writes, "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (1994, 12). I say this both as a reminder to those who are weary from this labor and as encouragement to those who have not yet tried.

Antiracist curricula and pedagogies

> Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. . . . Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.
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> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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14   Grande is an Indigenous scholar who works on Native American and Indigenous studies and critical theory. Tuck is an Indigenous scholar whose work is primarily in Indigenous studies and educational research.

15   See Brumback (2021), Chotiner (2021), and Whitehurst and Price (2021).

> A decolonizing education, not a decolonized education.
> Not a decolonial education, but an education that helps us
> to decolonize the land, our relationships. So, I sort of joke
> around, like the TV series *Blackish*, some activities are
> decolonial-ish.
>
> —K. Wayne Yang, conversation with Jack Tchen

In the introduction to their 2018 manifesto on decolonizing the music survey, David Chavannes and Maria Ryan ask: "How can we create learning environments that, to use Paulo Freire's formulation, help to make us more fully human?" They imagine the music classroom as "a space in which we not only learn information but also learn about ourselves, about each other, and about how to live in the world" (sec. I). In my reading of the manifesto, the authors' generous use of "what if" imposes an epistemological, ethical, and imaginative force, and it demands responses. Indeed, *what if* it is not an indulgence to ask these questions but a necessity? *What if* we recognize the need for nonviolent approaches to music theory pedagogy for the sake of our students? *What if* we reimagine what music theory teaching *can be* rather than limit ourselves to what it currently *is* in the name of "being practical?" *What if* it's not just for the sake of our students but for our own sake, too? *What happens if* we examine our own teaching principles from many different angles? In this second section, I raise questions about curricular design and pedagogy as they apply to teaching music theory in higher education. In the third and final section, I raise questions and explore issues outside the walls of the college classroom. These questions provide an opportunity for critical, imaginative reflection as well as offer some ways to take action.

Before launching into this discussion, I wish to name two kinds of necessary *slowing* that inhere in the work of antiracism and decolonization. First, I acknowledge that most readers will experience resistance to engaging with some, many, or most of these questions.[16] This resistance might take many forms, including but not limited to the reflexive "what about *x*," moves toward innocence,[17] and even outright dismissal, either in the form of "this doesn't have anything to do with me/my teaching/my department/ my university" or "I don't have the time or energy to deal with these questions."

Second, there is a different form of slowing that comes from exhaustion: It takes time and emotional energy for us to recognize and unlearn racist, settler-colonial, and

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16   One common reason for resistance is the fact that recognizing our own privilege is uncomfortable and takes extra effort; see McIntosh (1989) and Pratto and Stewart (2012).

17   Citing Janet Mawhinney's (1998, 17) theorization of white privilege and "moves to innocence," Tuck and Yang identify *settler* moves to innocence, defined as "those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (2012, 9–10).

other oppressive values, and for us to confront our own complicity. Ryan describes the "overwhelming weight" that comes from confronting the violent histories of settler-colonialism and slavery in the United States and how it can be "debilitating" (Chavannes and Ryan 2018, sec. II). Attas notes the "emotional processing time" required after participating in open discussions after the 2015 mass shooting in Charleston, South Carolina (2019b, para. 4.3). The personal work of self-education is urgent, but it is not easy and cannot be done overnight. I encourage readers to respect this process, acknowledge their own abilities and limitations, and be wary of underestimating the time and energy it will require.[18]

What are the course's "theoretical, ideological, and ontological assumptions?"[19]

In the place of "course," one could insert a number of other teaching-related items, such as curriculum, textbook, repertoire, class format, and more. While there are many directions that one could take this question, in this section I discuss three corollary issues that pertain to antiracism in teaching.

Philip Ewell addressed the first issue in his plenary talk at the Society for Music Theory's 2019 annual meeting by asking, "What does music theory have to do with race?"[20] He provided a clear response to this question: music theory operates within a white racial frame. The first "mytholog[y] of music theory's white racial frame" is that "the music and music theories of white persons represent the best, and in certain cases the only, framework for music theory" (Ewell 2020b, para. 2.4). In his comments on undergraduate music theory instruction, Ewell shows that both the compositions and the theories in seven leading undergraduate theory textbooks are overwhelmingly white (3.1–3.5).[21] Ewell cautions that locating and using some musical examples by black composers is not a true solution, as it can be a means of reinforcing the white racial frame (3.4).[22]

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18   Finally, I note that my questions in this section focus primarily on *racial* justice within a settler-colonial framework. This framework reflects my own history with activism; while I have much to learn as a racial justice worker, I have comparatively much more to learn about my role in settler-colonialism in the United States. Therefore, I encourage readers to treat this list as a starting point.

19   Here I adopt language from Chavannes and Ryan (2018, sec. IV).

20   See also Ewell (2021, 325).

21   In my own practice, I capitalize "White" and "Whiteness," just as I do "Black," "Asian," and other racialized terms; see the National Association of Black Journalists' (NABJ) "Statement on Capitalizing Black and Other Racial Identifiers" (2020) and Appiah (2020). Ewell consistently does not capitalize these terms; I follow the author's conventions when discussing his work.
    The textbooks in Ewell's (2020b) study include Aldwell and Schachter (2011), Benward and Saker (2015), Burstein and Straus (2016), Clendinning and Marvin (2016), Kostka, Payne, and Almén (2018), Laitz (2014), and Roig-Francolí (2010).

22   Ewell also invokes Ta-Nehisi Coates's term "solutionism," which assumes racism is a "disease that can be

He suggests that one productive path forward is teaching "nonwestern and nonwhite forms of music theory" (3.5).[23]

If one commits to learning and teaching new music theories in the undergraduate classroom, the question then becomes: How do these "new" theories and repertoires fit into the typical theory sequence? How do they fit into the school of music, department, or conservatory where I teach? These second and third issues are institution specific and best negotiated locally. One possible solution might be to adopt a "desequenced" music theory curriculum, as described by Andrew Gades (2019) and Megan Lavengood (2019).[24]

How do the course topics, learning outcomes, reading lists, and musical selections engage with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, citizenship, economics, and politics?[25]

Ellie Hisama "proposes that music theory courses can and should grapple with issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom and in student assignments," and her essay "offers suggestions situated in the practicalities of teaching music theory based on [her] own experience" (2018, 252). Part of her suggestion is rooted in the traditional dichotomy of music theory versus music history: "Music theory as a field is often regarded as neutral, technical, and formalist, . . . exempt from discussions of issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, citizenship, economics, politics, and so forth," whereas music history is more "about elements supposedly apart from 'the music itself'" (252).[26] One cannot help but wonder: When adopting the language and ideology of music theory's neutrality, are we impoverishing our students and their educations? Do we also impoverish ourselves?

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cured, rather than . . . a structure that needs dismantling (racism is a structure, not a disease)" (Ewell 2020b, para. 1.5). I discuss this issue in more detail below. Relatedly, Palfy and Gilson (2018) elucidate a "hidden curriculum" that can belie the diversity of musical examples used in the classroom.

23   Hisama (2018) provides additional suggestions for music theory instructors, as discussed below, and Robinson (2019) offers nine "instructions for structural change" for music faculty, staff, and administrators. Ewell's (2020a) "New Music Theory" blog post also expounds on teaching nonwestern and nonwhite music theories, and he cites many resources that will be of interest to music theory instructors. That said, I do not doubt that the list of resources may be daunting to nonexperts in such theories, but as Attas notes, "I firmly believe that not being an expert in something should not stop one from teaching it, or at least including it in the classroom" (2019b, para. 5.3).

24   Gades's model suggests a format for a liberal arts school; Lavengood's curriculum is implemented at George Mason University. I thank Adam Ricci for prompting me to read these articles.

25   I borrow much of this wording from Hisama (2018, 252).

26   The supposed neutrality of music theory resonates with the tension Attas senses between her attachment to music theory and social justice (2019b, para. 1.1). Here Ewell's third myth also pertains: "The institutions and structures of music theory have little or nothing to do with race or whiteness, and that to critically examine race and whiteness in music theory would be inappropriate or unfair" (2020b, para. 2.4).

Schools, curricula, disciplines, and canons cannot be value neutral—it is only possible to see them neutrally by ignoring their contexts. The ethical question emerges: in what ways does music theory's myopic methods "other" certain people, communities, and identities? Hisama quotes bell hooks: we must "teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students . . . if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (hooks 1994, 13; quoted in Hisama 2018, 254).[27]

By employing noncanonical repertoire, such as popular music, jazz, and non-Western music, as Hisama suggests, we can engage with two of Attas's three possible models for integrating social justice topics into the music theory classroom. These different models—"plug-and-play," "concept," and "social justice"—engage with questions about racial and other identities to different extents.[28] Attas uses intriguing section titles in her article that intersect with the three models: "within" versus "expanding" versus "outside (?)" the theory core. In teaching "core" courses within the required undergraduate music theory sequence at several different institutions, I have found success with incorporating a wider variety of musical examples to illuminate particular harmonies or forms. I have engaged with the "concept model" and "social justice model" mainly in my elective and seminar courses.

To what extent are the course topics, learning outcomes, reading lists, and musical selections counterhegemonic? What are our personal aesthetic investments in music and how do they manifest?

When laypeople ask me about music theory as a profession, I often say, "Music theory is about how music works." My interlocutor will often follow up by enthusiastically asking what *kind* of music I'm talking about. After I clarify that I have specialized in early Romantic instrumental music written in German-speaking lands (specifically form and aesthetics in that repertoire), their enthusiasm unfailingly transmutes into politeness.[29] Unless they already enjoy nineteenth-century European art music, their primary associations with the names "Mendelssohn," "Hensel," and "Schumann" are the staid, elitist, and self-important customs of the classical concert

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27   hooks's genuine conception of "care" here contrasts with the hollowed-out version described in the first part of this article. Both hooks's "care" and corporate "care" require labor, but the former recognizes the humanity of both student and teacher, whereas the latter is disinterested in both.

28   See Attas (2019b, para 1.4). The "plug-and-play" model is minimally intrusive, allowing for diverse examples to teach standard topics without any other changes. The "concept" model requires some rethinking about "current analytical approaches in the undergraduate music theory core." The "social justice" model asks students to engage with topics related to social justice—topics that may be deemed "non-musical."

29   See Kim (2020, forthcoming).

hall. Perhaps they wonder if my aesthetic investments translate to condescension toward the music *they* love.

This exchange is not fully generalizable, but I find it instructive nonetheless. For example, I have realized that the statement "music theory is about how music works" can be misleading in its broadness when compared to what card-carrying music theorists actually research and especially what they teach. What counts as "music?" Typically, the answer has something to do with "great" or "canonic" music, justified in that it has "stood the test of time." We can recognize that this is not a sufficient answer;[30] in fact, I have heard this argument much less frequently than the statement "I study and teach the music that I love." For someone—like myself—who has personal attachments to the canon, this statement is truthful. However, its sincerity belies the racist and colonialist attitudes that continue to justify and perpetuate European concert music's supremacy.

Even when we retreat to the safe, subjective haven of personal musical taste, our "music loving" as instructors actively privileges certain musical objects over others.[31] If we find ourselves teaching the canon out of aesthetic attachment or a belief in its greatness, *what if* we still overturn the canon completely in our teaching?[32] Hisama writes of lessons learned in a seminar with Bruno Nettl:

> One need not focus one's attention on what some would consider the "greatest" examples of music in a musical culture. Rather, one could work to understand the relationship between music and a group of people without dividing music into "masterworks" and everything else. . . . Music could be connected to culture, to many people rather than to a single listener-analyst. (Hisama 2018, 259)

By letting go of our investment in the "masterworks," "greatness," and even music that most music theorists "love" most of all, we can be free to seek to understand the relationships between music and entire communities.

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30   See Anne Shreffler's "The Myth of the Canon's Invisible Hand" (2017).

31   See the work of Marion Guck (1996) and Vivian Luong (2017), who think through the agents, power dynamics, and ethics involved in "music loving." I do not discount these important ideas; rather, my critique is centered on the defensive posture used to engage with music in traditional ways. Like Luong, I characterize "mainstream" music analysis as a kind of "privileged method of loving [that] limits music theorists to repeating the same kinds of relations over and over again: immediate loving followed by reflective sublimation followed by immediate loving followed by reflective sublimation, *ad infinitum*" (Luong 2017, para. 3.4).

32   Hisama entertains this possibility with several examples, including teaching a class for nonmajors titled Listening to Hip-Hop and asking, "Can one leave traditional notation aside in a music theory course?" (2018, 259). Are we in a postliterate musical future? That said, she does not advocate for a wholesale abandonment of the canon but for a curriculum presenting a greater *range* of music to students (258).

Do the counterhegemonic elements of the curriculum tip into alibi or solutionism?

One significant way that the music theory community has responded to the Whiteness of its pedagogy is by coming together to create and/or curate resources. For example, explicitly antiracist and inclusive forthcoming textbooks and other resource-based initiatives are ongoing, such as the Composers of Color Resource Project (CCRP).[33] I am optimistic that within the North American music theory community there is a new and sustained interest in both scholarship and teaching that features BIPOC musicians.

At the same time, I acknowledge Ewell's point that searching for new examples to "plug and play" into existing molds can get close to Coates's "solutionism." If we treat these initiatives as successful end points, we find ourselves committed to what I might call "performative alibi," in which both individuals and institutions engage in visible diversity work toward two goals: (1) external validation; and (2) a means to avoid more difficult work. Sara Ahmed (2012) writes about how this takes shape in organizations, which tend to accept certain forms of diversity as "digestible," thereby rejecting others as "indigestible."[34]

Attas makes a similar observation when discussing responses to the College Music Society's "Manifesto" (2014), which "have come more in the realm of repertoire than in analytical or epistemological approach" (2019a, 128–29). Nonetheless, the dangers of alibi making and solutionism should not be used as excuses to avoid diversifying examples when it is an option. It is important for instructors to simultaneously address the contexts and structures that produce the lack of diversity; the insertion of "more diverse things" does not in itself address the systemic problems of racism. In a forthcoming article, Kristina Knowles and Nicholas Shea write, "there is a problematic assumption that popular music is often considered de facto diverse," noting too the "over-representation of all-White ensembles in existing popular-music scholarship."[35] In other words, including American popular music in the classroom, for example, does not obviate the need to think critically about race and racism.

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33   The Composer of Color Resource Project maintains a website with examples, annotated scores, and lesson plans (https://composersofcolor.hcommons.org).

34   Ahmed notes, "Those who enjoy diversity have good taste. But if diversity is digestible difference, then other forms of difference become indigestible, as that which the organizational body cannot stomach. The sweetening of diversity . . . might thus be a means of establishing the limits of what an organization can take in" (2012, 69–70). Tuck affirms that "those faculty and administrators who point this out are often people of color and are often explicitly or tacitly punished for suggesting that meaningfully increasing faculty diversity by race requires big moves and big investments" (2018, 152).

35   See also Shea (forthcoming).

Does the curriculum or course aim primarily toward job training?

Often when teachers discuss curricular change, they start with the question, "What do our students need?" This question can act like a mirror for faculty and administrators, who may gravitate toward thinking about what aspects of their own educations prepared them for their jobs as well as identifying how current careers in music might require curricular revision. But there is an additional and more fundamental question: Should we equate our students' needs with preparation for paid work after college? Relatedly, is the value of what we teach solely (or mostly) determined by its market value?

In a recent Zoom webinar with Jack Tchen, K. Wayne Yang problematized universities' adoption of communication technologies: "Even now, we are communicating across thousands of miles to each other. This is a superpower. . . . But what do we use it for? We use it to do work, from home, to save capitalism during COVID-19. . . . And we do that because we're in debt" (Tchen, Kohl-Arenas, and Hartman 2020, 61). If we find satisfaction in simply preparing students to become dutiful, musically capable, and well-informed members of society, then that is one thing. If, however, we also find racial and other social injustices in need of change, job training cannot be the central pedagogical goal. Here is one place we might start: add one learning outcome that centers students' humanity and relationship to society and observe how this addition reverberates into the course topics, lesson plans, and assignments. To return to a question posed by Chavannes and Ryan (2018, sec. I): "What if [our learning environments] helped us see how practices like music making embody and reproduce core beliefs about the world and the way it should be?"

Who is in the classroom? How do our teaching methods relate to the concerns and interests of the students present in class?

How many students of color sit in our classrooms? How many students are English language learners? How many are international students? How many are first-generation students? How might these students' experiences impact their sense of belonging and their ability to learn?

Two practices I have learned from colleagues illuminate how these students may feel included or excluded from class activities. First, the instructor may call on students equally, for example, by marking names on a class roster in real time, using a random name selector app, or asking a teaching assistant to help track participation. I am sometimes surprised that a student whom I perceive as reserved or not engaged had spoken more than I remembered, which leads me to wonder why this might be the case. Second, once an instructor feels well acquainted with their students—perhaps midway

through the semester—they may go through the class roster and summarize what kinds of interactions they have had with each student. Do any patterns emerge?

There are, of course, many reasons why a student might feel disengaged in class. As teachers, some of these factors are outside our control—but some of these factors are within our control. Rachel Lumsden writes that homophily, in which "individual students tend to be more engaged when they believe they have something in common with their instructor," can play a significant role in student participation during class discussion (2018, 321). She offers an example from her own teaching: a Black female student who was formerly reserved during class became very engaged in a class discussion of a song by Florence Price. This classroom anecdote reminds us "of just how much power we hold as pedagogues" (322).

How are diverse voices framed in the classroom? What practices are used?

When I employ "common-practice" musical examples by composers of color, I have generally found that students are unfamiliar with the music and the musicians; at both private conservatories and a public university, my students rarely know the names Margaret Bonds, Joseph Bologne, or Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, much less their music. Should an instructor provide some historical or biographical context for some composers who are less well known if this isn't already typically done with canonic composers? If the composer is BIPOC and/or female, do we show our students a photograph or portrait of them?

There are some advantages to drawing attention to an unfamiliar composer's minoritized identities. Students will likely remember these composers better if we provide a visual representation of them, as well as some biographical information. Students might then feel motivated to learn more about these composers and perhaps play some of their music. At a minimum, they will gain some awareness of the idea of canonicity and some of the historical reasons for exclusion from the canon based on race, gender, and geography. There are also disadvantages, however, particularly if an instructor does not regularly provide biographical information and photographs about canonic composers with whom they assume students are familiar. Giving unusual attention to composers who are less well known may be interpreted as "othering" them and risks giving them the status of tokens among the "normal" White male composers studied in music theory.

It is also possible to "other" nonstandard music-theoretical topics in class. For example, a hypothetical music analysis class might have a unit titled "world music," in which students sample two or three different non-Western musical cultures, and another unit titled "form," which focuses on eighteenth-century sonata form in

German-speaking lands. The former topic is extremely broad, whereas the latter topic is extremely focused with a misleadingly broad title. Or, zooming out to the level of the whole curriculum, reserving "world music" as a special topics course—that is, outside the music theory core—is itself a kind of othering. As Lumsden notes, music written by women and composers of color "should be used as an integral part of a course—not just a token event that occurs once or twice a semester," and it is important to contextualize such music with critical questions like "*Why* aren't these works discussed more frequently by scholars? *Why* are theoretical approaches grounded in feminist, race, and gender studies still not considered mainstream?" (2018, 322; emphasis original).[36] Furthermore, I echo Hisama's call for "*sustained* attention to diverse examples," as doing so "can serve as a form of respect and care for our students" (2018, 258; emphasis mine).

To what extent do we foster student agency in classroom activities and evaluation practices?

In her chapter, Lumsden notes bell hooks's observation from *Teaching Critical Thinking* that students do not always feel comfortable speaking up in class; hooks states that this situation often pertains "in classrooms where teachers claim that they want to hear students talk, but in actuality they dread having to listen to students" (hooks 2010, 57; quoted in Lumsden 2018, 326). This observation stuck me as a hard truth that I had never before identified within my own teaching: I often dread hearing my students speak (or grading their work) because I fear that they will be wrong. I am afraid of their wrongness because I believe it is evidence of my own failure as a teacher; and, sometimes, I call on particular individuals or design my lesson plans in such a way as to solicit the "correct" responses. While these practices might be expedient at times, I realize now it is precisely in these moments of dread that I need to recognize my own reactions and remind myself to center my students' agency.

There are also structural ways to center student agency, and here I return to Lumsden's (2018) strategies for classroom discussions, drawing from feminist pedagogy. Her chapter is roughly divided into two parts: (1) "communities of learning" and practices in fostering such communities; and (2) "voice and student empowerment in classroom discussions." Both parts include practical tools that I have adopted in my teaching. In the first section, she suggests small group work aided by representatives, collaborative discussion leading, panel discussions, and team teaching. Small group work allows more student engagement, but the energy often fizzles out when moving from the small groups back to the whole class. In addition, small groups are sometimes dominated

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36   See also Lumsden's "gender and music questionnaire," which may be implemented in the classroom to spur discussion on these critical questions (2018, 323, ex. 20.1).

by a single, very vocal person. Assigning a group representative to report back to the class ahead of time addresses both of these concerns (317–18).[37] Other formats such as collaborative discussion leading and panel discussions center student agency even more by asking *them* to structure class discussion (318–19), and team teaching allows instructors to model collaboration themselves (319–20). But not all students feel equally empowered to exercise their agency during class, and this is the heart of Lumsden's discussion of issues of inclusion and the canon, as well as the idea of "developing an 'ethic of care'" (324–28). Lumsden develops the ACT method for responding to student comments that might be incorrect, banal, or somewhat confused: *acknowledgment* of the student's contribution, a *caring* response, and a *transition* into more thinking and discussion (326–27). This clear and widely applicable strategy has helped me counter my feelings of "dread" and increase student engagement in discussions.

How do we respond to missteps or challenges in the classroom, both our own and those of our students?

When I first began discussing the opening movement of Fanny Hensel's String Quartet in E♭ Major with friends, I misgendered Hensel more than once, with comments such as, "Consider his counterpoint in this passage." My misgendering of Hensel was an innocent mistake—but it is still significant since I have never accidentally misgendered a male composer. My error was likely due to the fact that I have studied and played music by White male composers to the virtual exclusion of music written by anyone else. My habituation to male pronouns for composers showed me that I need to consciously undo some of my implicit biases against women composers.[38]

A colleague who taught this movement in a graduate analysis course shared the following anecdote: This work is radically adventurous, both from a harmonic and a formal standpoint, and one of the many techniques that Hensel employs is a "swaying" between E♭ major and C minor as tonal centers. The movement's opening offers a clear example (see Example 1). It begins with a C minor triad, but as a submediant in the key of E♭ major (the global tonic), before veering quickly to the key of C minor, which is confirmed by a perfect authentic cadence in m. 5.[39] In other words, Hensel frames

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37   I have found that using group representatives extremely helpful for Zoom breakout meetings, particularly in classes with more than fifteen students.

38   The same is true of implicit bias against BIPOC composers, but I mention gender here because of the direct link to pronouns.

39   There are only two PACs in this movement: the first one occurs in m. 5 in the key of C minor; the second one occurs in m. 20 in the key of F minor. The only authentic cadence in the global tonic key of E♭ major occurs in the final measure (m. 77), and it is an imperfect authentic cadence that is further attenuated by a 4–3 suspension. A fuller analysis of this movement is found in Kim (forthcoming).

Adagio ma non troppo

Example 1
Fanny Hensel, String Quartet in E♭ Major, first movement, mm. 1–5.

the movement's opening theme with C minor triads, but these triads hold two different identities—first as a submediant harmony, then as a local tonic. (In the first instance, E♭ major is clearly the key, even in the absence of a tonic opening or a V–I confirmation.) When confronted with the idea that Hensel treats this theme with harmonic subtlety, one student asked my colleague, "Couldn't she have just been a bad composer?"

Students, just like teachers, will sometimes resist when we confront them with challenges to their existing preconceptions and biases.[40] In this case, a graduate student's resistance was triggered by being asked to engage seriously with music that they did not know, composed by a woman musician whom they did not already respect. Things came to a head when their teacher posited that Hensel's compositional talent, rather than what they presumed was her incompetence, might explain a harmonically subtle moment.

It is both difficult and instructive to confront our own bias, as well as those of our students. Attas details an in-class incident in which a White student used a stereotype about African Americans, and in so doing, offended a Black student (2019b, para. 5.1). As we open up our music theory classes to topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, we will have to learn how to handle such incidents. This is part of the necessary and difficult self-education inherent to socially engaged pedagogy, and Attas reminds us that students are often hungry for opportunities to discuss these complex issues and connect them to their musical studies (5.2).

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40   bell hooks writes about this phenomenon, stating that one "major difficulty is sharing knowledge from an unbiased and/or decolonized standpoint with students who are so deeply mired in dominator culture that they are not open to learning new ways of thinking and knowing" (2010, 27).

Conclusion

But what if we—as communities, as collectives—were to disbelieve awareness as change? What if we, as Indigenous peoples, as people of colour, as disenfranchised peoples, believed that our own awareness, our own knowing, is enough to make change? What if we did not wait for others to also know but are inspired by our own knowing? What if we hold true that we are the ones who need to know, and not others? What if we believe that we are the ones who can make change, and that others are not more powerful than us to effect change?

—Eve Tuck, "Biting the University that Feeds Us"

Any institution of higher education possesses many different internal structures with diffuse and sometimes contradictory charges, activities, and agencies. Recognizing systemic oppression as intersectional has an important converse: institutional power, which confers advantages to a global and national minority of individuals, is itself intersectional. In other words, there are numerous junctures in the assembly of institutional power, which open up numerous opportunities for disrupting that power.[41] Individuals working within the university have different perspectives and are motivated by different things, a fact that opens up possibilities for unsettling institutional power. Writers Sandy Grande (2018) and Eve Tuck (2018) separately take up the question of our relationships to the university and name strategies of refusing the university's settler-colonialist and neoliberal impulses. To conclude, I highlight themes and actionable ideas that emerge from this pair of writings, which share a decolonizing impulse and offer political reimaginings in relation to the university.

In "Refusing the University," Grande distinguishes between the analyses of power that emerge from decolonial and antiracist frameworks, while also working toward "greater possibilities for co-resistance" (2018, 173). Toward this productive end, she poses three questions, which I cite here in full:

- What kinds of solidarities can be developed among subaltern groups with a shared commitment to working beyond the imperatives of capital and the settler state?

- What are the critical distinctions between sovereignty and social justice projects, which is to say between those shaped by genocide, erasure, and dispossession and those by enslavement, exclusion, and oppression?

- What kinds of generative politics can be developed from the synergies among Black radical notions of abolition/fugitivity/liberation and Indigenous notions of refusal/resurgence/sovereignty? (Grande 2018, 171)

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41   See Vágnerová and García Molina (2018, 107) and Born and Devine (2016, 8).

Building on Robin D. G. Kelley's work, Grande considers the ways in which we might work "within, against, and beyond the university-as-such" (171, quoting Kelley 2016). She posits three strategies for refusing the university: *collectivity* against the university's mandate to self-promote and brand oneself as an individual (183); *reciprocity* with communities we serve and to which we belong (183); and *mutuality*, meaning "the development of social relations not contingent upon the imperatives of capital—that refuses exploitation at the same time it radically asserts connection, particularly to land" (184).

Tuck (2018) also argues that the aims of the university are fundamentally separate from and often opposed to the needs of all communities. Tuck's focus on theories of change offers one additional lens by which to view refusal. She shows how institutional change is often predicated on a kind of social science research as personal invasion, which Tuck and Yang (2014) have argued should be refused. The first axiom is that the academy invites the subaltern to "*speak her/our pain*"—related to what Tuck has previously called the "documenting damage" theory of change (2018, 156, 158–61; emphasis original).[42]

Tuck reimagines theories of change and finds three compelling examples that step beyond documenting damage: (re)mapping, mapping place-worlds and place-making, and shell mound work.[43] These theories share commonalities:

> [They] are anticipatory and proactive (not reactive). They interrupt existing knowledge hierarchies, taking seriously the expertise that is derived of lived experience. They require humility and vulnerability, contestation and creative production. They make space to speak what is otherwise silenced, make transparent that which is otherwise concealed, and make meaningful that which is otherwise forgotten or devalued. (Tuck 2018, 165)

What kinds of rhetoric does your university use about antiracism, decolonization, and gender justice? How does this language align with its actual actions or initiatives? If you have participated in or observed an initiative, what are the possibilities and limitations of its parameters?[44] Despite the conflict between abolitionist, community-

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42   See also Tuck (2009). Tuck's naming and critique of this theory of change resonates strongly with Kelley's (2016) naming and critique of the lens of trauma in student protests.

43   "Shell mound work" recognizes the burial grounds of the Ohlone peoples' ancestors. Developers excavated hundreds of remains—without notifying the Ohlone peoples—in order to create a shopping mall in California. In response, "every year, IPOC [Indian People Organizing for Change] organizes a protest on Black Friday" and "began organizing shell mound walks to educate themselves, other Ohlone, Bay Miwok, and Indigenous peoples, and allies about the shell mounds, their locations, and their continued presence even beneath the asphalt, shopping centres, and condominiums" (Tuck 2018, 164–65).

44   Decolonizing actions can happen in many different spaces and in many different ways, but we would do well to remember two "truisms" about this work: Tuck writes, first, that "there are parts of the higher-education project that are too invested in settler colonialism to be rescued"; and second, "there are parts of academic labour that might be refused in order to generate new possibilities" (2018, 149).

first, collective organizing and the goals of the capitalist university, it is worth noting that, in many cases, the contradictions of the first-world university make this kind of work easy to justify.[45] For example, UNCG's mission statement describes the university as, among other things:

- A source of *innovation and leadership meeting social, economic, and environmental challenges in the Piedmont Triad, North Carolina, and beyond*; and
- A global university integrating intercultural and international experiences and perspectives into learning, discovery, and *service*.[46]

One major theme across UNCG's mission statement is service to various communities, including but not limited to students. It also describes UNCG as inclusive and accessible; while there is no specific mention of race, gender, or social justice, structural racism and sexism are certainly among the most significant and visible "social, economic, and environmental challenges" in Greensboro (as well as other cities across the United States).

The university's "assemblage-like" quality is therefore an opportunity for assembling coalitions of refusal, adopting an ethic of incommensurability as a sort of North Star while seeking ways of leveraging resources for subaltern communities. If the university itself is not equipped to move beyond anything more than basic institutional management of its students and workers, we can still find productive paths forward by finding those other agents who pursue ethical work. Rather than only looking outside the university, however, I will continue to search for ways to pursue diversification, decolonization, and antiracist efforts within and across all the spaces that I operate. I invite the reader to do so, too.

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45   K. Wayne Yang uses the term "first world university" to describe a university that is interested in, among other things, "patents, publications, and prestige" (Tchen, Kohl-Arenas, and Hartman 2020, 61). His discussion of this type of university resonates with la paperson's discussion of "first worlding universities," which are intended "to actualize imperialist dreams of a settled world" (2017, xiv–xv).

46   UNCG Mission Statement (https://www.uncg.edu/inside-uncg/mission/index.php; emphasis mine).

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