

Making a Home of The Society for Music Theory, Inc.

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Steve Lett

**Abstract:** This article studies the values animating the profession of music theory in the North American academy. Focusing on the creation and development of the field's institutional home, the Society for Music Theory, Inc., I show how professional music theory's homemaking project was first built—and continues to operate—on exclusionary and assimilationist world-building practices. To conclude, I ask how we might pursue homemaking and world-building otherwise in coalition with contemporary abolitionist scholarship.

**Keywords:** history of the SMT, professionalization, research, pedagogy, service, diversity, coloniality, Black study, abolition

In 2017, the Society for Music Theory celebrated its fortieth birthday. At the plenary session of that year's meeting, Steven Rings opened his contribution by characterizing the Society and its membership: "We are, on the whole, a rather wide-eyed, enthusiastic bunch, eager to get some music in our ears and figure out how it works its magic. ... The Left melancholy that blankets so much of the academy seems not to cast a shadow over our field."<sup>1</sup> The SMT, he continues, supports an atmosphere where we may collectively "relish [the] masterful deployment [of melodies, chords, and rhythms] in exemplary musical works."<sup>2</sup> Even after decades of critique, he notes, "the affect that circulates in meetings like these has hardly changed: ours remains a stubbornly blissed-out little academic glade."<sup>3</sup>

Two days earlier, on the opening night of the meeting, the SMT held an event to celebrate the anniversary. It consisted of fifteen SMT members briefly reflecting on their experiences in the Society. While my recollection is that many of the speakers offered a picture of Rings' blissed-out—though hard-won—academic glade, the less

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I began drafting this article in June 2020 after attending my first Engaged Music Theory Working Group meeting, and amid a surge of abolitionist activism in the wake of the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. At that time, I was between homes due to complications arising from an international move during a pandemic. I thank Dorian Mueller for offering her COVID-vacated apartment for a couple months while I dealt with institutional bureaucracy and immigration law(yers). Thanks also to Patrick Harlin and Audrey Kelley for letting me use their home as a delightful, cat-filled workspace during that time. Finally, thanks to everyone who read and commented on this piece in its various stages. Early drafts of this article found generous and encouraging readers in William Cheng, Rowland Moseley, and Alexander Rehding. Randeep Hothi offered critical and generative feedback as I began revising. The article took its current form based on feedback from and conversation with Scott Hanenberg and Caitlin Martinkus. M. Leslie Santana and Kerry P. White offered invaluable suggestions as it was finally coming together. Thanks also to the two initial reviewers who first helped me expand my sense of what this article could be, and to these as well as a third reviewer for further critique and strategic suggestions. Readers of nearly every draft, who offered critique and care throughout, were Nathaniel Gallant, Vivian Luong, and William van Geest. Responsibility for this piece's flaws and harms, of course, is mine.

<sup>1</sup>Rings (2018, [1.2]).

<sup>2</sup>Rings (2018, [1.2]).

<sup>3</sup>Rings (2018, [1.3]).

idyllic effects of the SMT's homemaking practices were also on display. Later reflecting on the short remembrances, then-chair of the SMT's Committee on the Status of Women Jennifer Bain writes, "I was delighted to see a balanced gender ratio [among the speakers], but, along with many other people, I was disappointed by the lack of ethnic diversity. I also know scholars of color who were very disheartened by the lack of representation and wondered what kind of message it sent to the junior members of the society."<sup>4</sup> The message it sent, of course, is that the SMT is a very white institution—an accurate message, though a strategic misstep in the Society's continuing attempts to attract and retain a more diverse membership. What this celebration of the SMT at once elided and further perpetuated, as we see in Bain's comments, were the negative affects that circulate on the underside of the SMT's glossy image of bonhomie: feelings of exclusion and alienation for those that don't fit the image on display.

How did the SMT come to be such a stratified space? What institutional practices maintain these diverging experiences? And how might we reorient practices to build an institution otherwise?

In this article, I study the creation and operation of the SMT before suggesting a potential future for the organization. Bringing musicologist Tamara Levitz's decolonial agenda to bear in the SMT, the purpose of this article is to research "how structures of white supremacy became instituted in [the SMT] with the goal of dismantling them."<sup>5</sup> In particular, I focus on how the logics that oriented the building and that animate the operations of our professional home enact ongoing world-building projects premised on coloniality.<sup>6</sup> What I present throughout, however, are not ostentatious acts of violence, but the less spectacular, everyday operations of our institutions—what Saidiya V. Hartman calls "the terror of the mundane and quotidian."<sup>7</sup> In the first section, I analyze correspondence in the SMT archives to elaborate the values leveraged to build this organization. Turning to its operations, the next section studies the SMT's bylaws to illuminate why the organization struggles, even more than its peers, to prove a hospitable home to marginalized individuals. In the third, I sketch a project for making a home of the SMT otherwise.

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<sup>4</sup>Bain (2017).

<sup>5</sup>Levitz (2017, 7). In this article, Levitz addresses the Society for American Music. See also her study of the formation of the American Musicological Society, "The Musicological Elite" (2018).

<sup>6</sup>In referring to "colonality," I follow, among others (Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2000; Wynter 2003), Nelson Maldonado-Torres, who writes, "Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (2007, 243).

<sup>7</sup>Hartman (1997, 4).

## BUILDING

*There is a real need for the professional theorist and a real need, on the part of such members of this species as already exist, for a professional home.*

—William E. Benjamin<sup>8</sup>

By the early 1970s, though they had two major journals and some regional organizations,<sup>9</sup> music theorists had yet to consolidate their status as a nationally recognized, independent profession in the North American academy. They operated, rather, within and across professional spaces for composers, musicologists, and umbrella organizations for music educators in higher education. While the American Society of University Composers (ASUC) allotted time for music-theoretical talks at their conferences, its membership was “more preoccupied with the exigencies of [composers’] professional lives[:] the problems of getting their music written, played, distributed and published.”<sup>10</sup> The American Musicological Society (AMS) supported some music theory research, though, as one music theorist recalls, “anything mathematical or formal was, back in those days, anathema to the [AMS]—a reflexive, existential hostility.”<sup>11</sup> And while the College Music Society (CMS) offered support for the emerging field, the organization was built to “gather, consider and disseminate ideas on the philosophy and practice of music as an integral part of higher education” rather than support the advancement of any discipline in particular.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while benefitting from previous organizational pushes that developed venues for publishing,<sup>13</sup> graduate programs,<sup>14</sup> and the very idea of the “professional music theorist,”<sup>15</sup> the field had yet to complete its professionalization project insofar as there was no national society to promote the profession—no place for music theorists to call home.

In this section, I sketch a narrative of the building of the SMT. Previous scholarship has elaborated the general trajectory of this story. Drawing on a Foucauldian framework, for instance, in “Rethinking Contemporary

<sup>8</sup>Benjamin (1975, 220).

<sup>9</sup>The Yale-based *Journal of Music Theory* began in 1957, and the Princeton-based *Perspectives of New Music* began in 1962. Then-active organizations include: Alabama Teachers of Music Theory, Michigan Music Theory Society, Midwest Theory Society, Music Theory Society of New York State, Ohio Theory-Composition Teachers, and Wisconsin Theory Teachers Association.

<sup>10</sup>Benjamin (1975, 217).

<sup>11</sup>Rahn (2012, 39).

<sup>12</sup>College Music Society Bylaws, art. II.

<sup>13</sup>Aside from the two mentioned above, more then-recent additions included *In Theory Only* (a publication of the graduate students at the University of Michigan) and *Theory and Practice* (the official publication of MTSNYS), both beginning in 1975.

<sup>14</sup>Universities offering (or effectively offering) Ph.D. programs in music theory by this time included at least: Eastman School of Music, Florida State University, Indiana University, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Princeton University, SUNY Binghamton, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Texas, and Yale University.

<sup>15</sup>Kraehenbuehl et al. (1960).

Music Theory” Patrick McCreless shows how music theorists claimed a particular piece of disused epistemological territory that they then leveraged into disciplinary power within the academy.<sup>16</sup> A central part of this strategy, he demonstrates, involved the marginalization of and the usurpation of the teaching positions of “music theory pedagogues.” Indeed, as Aaron Girard writes, with the emergence of the SMT, the “historical role of music theory as a paradigm of education” was “all but vanquished.”<sup>17</sup> Drawing on correspondence in the SMT’s archive,<sup>18</sup> I explore tensions among the organizers and potential constituents of the eventual Society. As these materials demonstrate, there were individuals that resisted this outcome, envisioning a national society that would value rather than marginalize the music theory pedagogue. In the end, however, these voices were sidelined as the organization coalesced around the values of “advanced research.” Thus, in building a home our founders created an image of who belongs within the SMT, thereby also delimiting what it means to be a “music theorist.” And this image of the music theorist privileges, I demonstrate, a colonial/capitalist disposition towards knowledge-production and accumulation over an orientation of service to others.

At the 1975 joint meeting of the ASUC and CMS, diffuse interest in building a national society for music theory began to coalesce. Writing about his co-presentation at that meeting on “the background, activities, and growth of the [Music Theory Society of New York State],” then-MTSNYS President John R. Hanson reported to his constituency: “[t]he issue of a national theory organization was raised on an informal basis, and now work is being done to establish a discussion group to share experiences and explore possibilities in this area.”<sup>19</sup> This remote discussion group began pitching ideas to each other in letters from at least April 1975 and, out of these conversations, a de facto committee emerged that would organize the first National Conference on Music Theory.

Since this conference would center on forming a national organization for music theory, the question arose in the committee correspondence as to how such an institution would operate. Tensions quickly emerged over whom this national society would serve. The argument turned on the distinction that David Kraehenbuehl, founding editor of the *Journal of Music Theory*, had drawn in 1959 between the “professional theorist” and the “theory pedagogue.” For Kraehenbuehl, the professional theorist was a then-“rare bird” who “spends the major portion of his time

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<sup>16</sup>McCreless (1997).

<sup>17</sup>Girard (2007, 382).

<sup>18</sup>Society for Music Theory Records, Special Collections in Performing Arts, University of Maryland Libraries, <http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/19223>, hereafter cited as SMT Records. Many of the documents I cite from this collection may be found on the SMT’s “Various Archival Materials from the Early Years of SMT” webpage, <https://societymusictheory.org/archives/early>. Archival documents also available on this website are cited as SMT Records/Website.

<sup>19</sup>Hanson (1975, 4). Hanson presented with James Harrison, who I introduce in the next section.

thinking about music, searching out the clues which will lead to the development of new and useful theoretical systems.”<sup>20</sup> Kraehenbuehl sketches two kinds of theory pedagogue—the professional’s “more common distant relative.”<sup>21</sup> First, there were those professionals in some other field of music who were hired to teach courses in theory in addition to their professional focus, often performance.<sup>22</sup> Second, there were those he also calls “amateur theorists,” who self-identify as “music theorists” and teach music theory in the university, but believe that “‘the facts of music theory’ [are] virtually God-given,”<sup>23</sup> etched in the method-books on “species counterpoint, tonal counterpoint, harmony, ... and form and analysis.”<sup>24</sup> Whereas professionals orient to the field as a site of ongoing, creative research befitting the twentieth-century academy, the pedagogues only find in this field skills to acquire or a set of given commandments.

John Rahn—Princeton-trained composer-theorist and soon-to-be professor at the University of Washington—initiated the committee’s extant correspondence by suggesting that a national society “concentrate on advanced research.”<sup>25</sup> Its “primary purpose,” therefore, would be to support “the presentation (at conference) and publication (in a proceedings or journal) of creative and original research in Music Theory.”<sup>26</sup> Second, Rahn proposed that the national society “coordinate and provide communication among regional societies,” which would “concentrate more on problems of pedagogy, curricula, etc. as they arise in each region.”<sup>27</sup> His reasoning for this institutional distribution of theory and pedagogy followed from his sense that “pedagogical problems [are] regional in character,” whereas advanced research was of more general, national interest.<sup>28</sup> In this way, the national society Rahn imagined would operate as an institution to foster the advancement of music theory research and therefore also professional music theorist, while leaving to a more local realm the work of theory pedagogy and the theory pedagogue. Rahn saw the purpose of such a society, that is, as continuing to build the institutional infrastructure to grow the ranks of Kraehenbuehl’s “rare birds.”

The committee did not unequivocally endorse Rahn’s vision. Hanson countered that both research and pedagogy ought to be concerns of the national society. Rebutting Rahn’s sense that pedagogical problems are

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<sup>20</sup>Kraehenbuehl (1960, 67).

<sup>21</sup>Kraehenbuehl (1960, 62).

<sup>22</sup>Kraehenbuehl (1960, 69–70).

<sup>23</sup>Kraehenbuehl (1960, 67).

<sup>24</sup>Kraehenbuehl (1960, 69). He later references the textbooks of Charles Herbert Kitson and Percy Goetschius, seemingly as examples of such works (1960, 70).

<sup>25</sup>Rahn to Hanson, 14 April 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>26</sup>Rahn to Hanson, 14 April 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>27</sup>Rahn to Hanson, 14 April 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>28</sup>Rahn to Hanson, 29 May 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

regional, he argued that “problems tend to break down more by type of institution: i.e., within music schools of universities, music departments of private liberal arts colleges . . . , music department of ‘open-enrollment’ state colleges, etc.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Hanson identified pedagogy as a significant gap in national music-theoretical conversations: “At least journals now exist for scholarly, theoretical problems and articles; this is barely true for pedagogically-oriented information regarding college-level theory courses, and the latter point seems to me to be one of the strongest reasons for even considering a national organization.”<sup>30</sup>

Gerald Warfield, member of the ASUC Executive Committee and Associate Director of the Index of New Music Notation,<sup>31</sup> proposed two “more-or-less compromises” to “the pedagogy versus theory issue which is turning out to be the major ideological schism in our ranks”—compromises that he “hope[d] [would be] considered for any operational structure” of a national society:

1. No matter what other subjects enter into our fiel[d]s of investigation, an effort will be made to give equal time to pedagogy and theory (insofar as they can be separated) in all conference planning.
2. No pedagogical issue merits attention at our conferences or in our publications unless the underlying theoretical principles are of interest as well. In most cases pedagogical presentations will require the articulation of those principles.<sup>32</sup>

Warfield’s compromise lends pedagogy and theory equal time so long as the pedagogical issues merit attention; and to merit attention, pedagogy must articulate the “underlying theoretical principles that are of interest.” The merit of “theory,” on the other hand, is assumed.

No extant correspondence directly responds to Warfield’s proposal. The committee instead turned attention to logistical matters for the meeting—matters that became more complicated in light of another of Warfield’s proposals: to organize “the presentation of substantive papers” in addition to organizational discussions on founding a national society.<sup>33</sup> The proposal was met with support.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Hanson to Rahn, Richmond Browne, James Harrison, Marshall Bialosky, and Gerald Warfield, 6 June 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>30</sup>Hanson to Rahn, Browne, Harrison, Bialosky, and Warfield, 6 June 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>31</sup>The Index of New Music Notation was one of the contemporary music initiatives funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations (Malsbury 2012; Uy 2020). The initiative was disbanded later in 1975. From 1976–77, Warfield worked in the Notation Project for Contemporary Music at the University of Illinois. From 1976–85 he served as editor for the Longman Music Series, overseeing, among other works, the publication of Ernst Oster’s translation of Heinrich Schenker’s *Free Composition*. According to his website (Warfield n.d.), in the mid-80s Warfield changed careers to become a writer of fiction, while remaining general manager of the Society of Composers, Inc. (previously ASUC) until his passing in 2020 (Glasscock 2020).

<sup>32</sup>Warfield to Bialosky, Browne, Hanson, Harrison, and Rahn, 17 July 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>33</sup>Warfield to Bialosky, Browne, Hanson, Harrison, and Rahn, 17 July 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

Warfield and Richmond Browne—professor at the University of Michigan and member of the ASUC Executive Board—took the lead organizing the paper presentations. Browne initially pitched three ideas, all research-oriented: a “principal speaker,” a “professional colloquium” consisting of research presentations, and “an analysis symposium.”<sup>35</sup> The analysis symposium was soon scrapped in favor of a panel Warfield pitched on pedagogy: “I don’t have a good title yet, but how about something like ‘The Teaching of Unfamiliar Concepts,’ or ‘Difficult Concepts at Beginning Levels,’ or for a fancier title ‘The Pedagogy of Unfamiliar Concepts.’”<sup>36</sup> In his pitch, Warfield does not indicate how this proposal relates to his earlier suggestion that “[n]o pedagogical issue merits attention ... unless the underlying theoretical principles are of interest as well.” Browne supported the idea,<sup>37</sup> though not everyone on the committee was convinced of its value.<sup>38</sup>

In late November 1975, the committee went public with their plans. They mailed an announcement about the meeting that extended the intra-committee conversations to all interested parties by soliciting proposals for presentations as well as ideas about the operations of a national society.<sup>39</sup> Not all were in favor of creating a national society. Mary I. Arlin—professor at Ithaca College, then-MTSNYS Secretary, and in 2017 awarded an SMT Lifetime Membership—responded, for instance, “I am unalterably opposed to a national organization until such time as there are state or regional theory meetings throughout the country.”<sup>40</sup> But the responses of those who were in favor of a national organization reflected the tensions among the committee. Bruce Benward—professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and prominent pedagogue—mapped the terrain of “music theory” in his response to the call: “The theory ‘crowd’ is divided into those who are interested in substantive or speculative theory, those who have a historical or stylistic bend, and those who simply teach undergraduate theory and may not be very interested in research. ... This dichotomy makes it hard to figure out who will show up for a convention.”<sup>41</sup> While there is a general consensus among the extant responses that the society should include a diversity of research

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<sup>34</sup>See Rahn’s letter to the committee dated 25 August 1975 as well as Richmond Browne’s dated 23 August 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>35</sup>Browne to Warfield, 23 September 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>36</sup>Warfield to Browne, 24 October 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>37</sup>“Gerry: your idea for a panel on ‘Hard Ideas for Soft Minds’ is excellent—please proceed with it!” Browne to Warfield, 30 October 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>38</sup>In personal correspondence to Browne, Rahn writes: “I am puzzled about Warfield’s panel. What music theory is inherently ‘hard’? What music theory is not? I may have some nasty questions at the session, depending (‘Set Theory’ ??? [*sic*]). After all, notions among theorists as to what ‘Schenker material’ is (form example) vary so widely that a discussion of how to teach ‘it’ boggle my mind a bit.” 2 January 1976, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>39</sup>Announcement of National Conference on Music Theory, October 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>40</sup>Arlin, Response to Announcement, ca. December 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>41</sup>Benward to No Name ASUC, December 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

approaches, the split Benward notes between research and teaching was borne out in other responses. On the one hand, David Lewis, a clarinetist who chaired the music theory department at Ohio University, writes, “I feel the organization should concentrate on pedagogy (as opposed to research) since this seems to be the main thrust of today’s theorist.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, William Poland, professor at Ohio State University, writes: “far too many, including those who call themselves music theorists, think only or primarily in service terms. By ‘service role’ I really mean the standard, mostly didactic courses, in undergraduate music curricula.”<sup>43</sup> Here we see that “music theorist” remained an identity claimed both by Kraehenbuehl’s “professionals” and “pedagogues.” In organizing a meeting to pursue a national society for music theorists, then, the committee could steer interested parties, through their programming, towards either a more inclusive understanding of music theorists as comprising both identities or a more exclusive approach that invests in one over the other.

The program of the first National Conference on Music Theory included Warfield’s proposed panel on pedagogy,<sup>44</sup> a panel of research papers,<sup>45</sup> and a keynote lecture by Benjamin Boretz.<sup>46</sup> In his review of the proceedings from which I drew the epigraph for this section, William E. Benjamin—then-Ph.D. candidate at Princeton and professor at the University of Michigan—compliments the quality of Boretz’s talk, noting, however, that “the standard of discourse that he set was not met by all the remaining participants.”<sup>47</sup> While Benjamin does not clarify which papers did not meet the high Boretzean bar, further correspondence offers evidence that he was referring to Warfield’s panel. In a letter to Browne after the conference, Bryan Simms—then-professor at Yale University, editor of the *Journal of Music Theory*, and chair for the panel of research papers at the conference—writes,

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<sup>42</sup>Lewis to ASUC, December 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>43</sup>Poland to Browne, 4 December 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>44</sup>The final program makes no mention of pedagogy or teaching, titling the panel “Introductory Techniques and Modifications.” The papers included: Robert Gauldin on “Introduction to Set Theory”; Barry Vercoe on “Music and Technology: Breaking the Language Barrier”; Warfield on “Introduction to Schenker Analysis”; and Harold Lewin on “Permutational Aspects of the Twelve-Tone System.” Rather than the Lewin talk, Warfield initially planned for Liselotte Schmidt to present on teaching sixteenth- and seventeenth-century counterpoint. Warfield writes, “Schmidt’s approach is to teach counterpoint via other composers as well as Palestrina (e.g., English and Italian Madrigalists). It’s the most original approach I have found so far but I haven’t seen her abstract. This is still tentative.” Warfield to Browne, 18 December 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>45</sup>The research panel consisted of three papers: Robert Cogon on “Carter’s ‘Pair o’ Diamonds””; Robert P. Morgan on “Reduction Theory: An Historical View”; and Charles Shackford on “Resolution and Progression in Complex and Ambiguous Harmony.”

<sup>46</sup>Boretz’s keynote, “What Lingers on (, When the Song is Ended),” was later published in *Perspectives of New Music* (1977).

<sup>47</sup>Benjamin (1975, 220).



If I might venture an opinion, I thought that [Warfield's] session ..., while a good idea, was the least successful. In spite of Warfield's telling everyone that the papers were not intended to be "research," that still seemed to be people's expectations. A lot of the Yale crowd was mumbling about the papers being unoriginal, etc.<sup>48</sup>

Based on this assessment, while the organizers sought to program the proceedings so as to include both professionals and pedagogues, the culture of the emerging national society appears to have already been consolidating around the values of Kraehenbuehl's professional music theorist. Though Warfield perhaps could have done a better job of setting expectations, the fact that expectations must be set at all is telling of the supremacy of the values of "advanced research."

Considering Warfield's proposed theory vs. pedagogy compromise in light of the proceedings, then, we see an attempt to lend pedagogy papers a significant role in the meeting—comprising one of the three substantive sessions. While his equal time provision was not met, this proportion is likely higher than at any national meeting since. The disappointment some expressed in Warfield's panel, however, demonstrates an enduring difficulty for those invested in pedagogy as a site of research: pedagogical presentations, as Warfield's compromise indicates, are often measured through the values of the professional's advanced research agenda.

In addition to the panels and keynote, two organizational meetings rounded out the proceedings of the first National Conference on Music Theory. Benjamin reports,

What revealed itself was interest in the formation of a national society coupled with reluctance to move too quickly in this direction. ... A positive outcome of the discussion was the formation of a steering committee, charged with exploring theory activity in other societies, planning another national meeting, and making concrete proposals regarding the structure and modes of functioning of a possible society.<sup>49</sup>

Following this charge, Browne organized a panel for the November 1976 joint meeting of the CMS and AMS titled "Music Theory: The Art, the Profession, and the Future."<sup>50</sup> And a committee made plans for a second National Conference on Music Theory to be held alongside the CMS meeting in Evanston, Illinois in November 1977.

In preparation for the second National Conference, the organizers returned to logistical matters regarding the creation of a possible national society. Wallace Berry—CMS Member at Large for Music Theory who took a leading role organizing the meeting and then-professor at the University of Michigan—solicited ideas from the

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<sup>48</sup>Simms to Browne, 23 March 1975, box 43, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>49</sup>Benjamin (1975, 220).

<sup>50</sup>CMS published these papers as a symposium in a 1977 issue of *College Music Symposium*. The panel consisted of papers from Peter Westergaard, Allen Forte, Carl Schachter, Carlton Gamer, and Vernon Kliever with an introduction by Browne.

committee about plans for the conference's organizational meetings.<sup>51</sup> Responding more broadly, Allen Forte—member of the Advisory Committee for the second National Conference and professor at Yale University—offered his thoughts on the society's scope and purpose, returning to a topic that had caused tension among the committee two years earlier.

I do not feel that it is necessary to try to outline the possible activities of such a society. I believe that we all (that is, those of us who have been active in this movement) have quite a good idea of the kinds of activities, especially at national meetings. There is a sufficient background of experience to be able to predict what a society of this kind might do that would be of interest to itself.<sup>52</sup>

Here Forte indicates a self-recognition and mutual understanding among those “in this movement”: those in the know *know* for whom this national society is being built and what kinds of activities it would carry out. And indeed, the program for the second National Conference on Music Theory clarifies who these people are and what they do. Though Warfield served as the program chair for the meeting and some pedagogically-oriented proposals were submitted,<sup>53</sup> as Robert Gauldin and Mary Wennerstrom recall, “the six theory sessions ... did not include a single paper specifically on theory pedagogy.”<sup>54</sup> Here we see a fuller realization of Rahn's initial vision for a national society—a society that would serve to advance the professional music theorist.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Berry to Advisory and Program Committees, box 1, folder 7, SMT Records.

<sup>52</sup>Forte to Berry, 16 June 1977, box 1, folder 6, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>53</sup>The only pedagogy paper considered by the program committee was Roman Lavore's titled “A philosophy of Education: do we have one in music theory; do we need one?” (Lavore to Berry, 8 February 1977, box 1, folder 3, SMT Records), which he outlined in later correspondence (Lavore to Warfield, 21 April 1977, box 1, folder 7, SMT Records). Other responses to the call for suggestions indicated interest in pedagogical representation in the meeting activities. For instance, Stephen Adoff asked the program committee to consider three possible topics for panels: “the Comprehensive Musicianship Program, as practiced in various schools,” “Kodály's contributions to the teaching of aural skills,” and “Discussions and demonstrations on the CAI (Computer-Assisted- Instruction [*sic*] program)” (Adoff to Browne, 12 April 1977, box 1 folder 3, SMT Records); and Thomas M. Stone asked that the organization “not exclude the input from Community College teachers,” and volunteered both to “share my quarter of a century of teaching experience” and to assist more generally in any way (Stone to Berry, 17 February 1977, box 1, folder 3, SMT Records).

<sup>54</sup>Gauldin and Wennerstrom (1989, 66). Announcing the conference, Berry and Warfield write: “Paper topics include Langer, Var[è]se, Schenker, phenomenology, rhythm, the articulation of tonal structures, atonal pitch structure, pretonal analytic method, and more.” Berry and Warfield to Colleague in Music Theory, 25 July 1977, box 1, folder 7, SMT Records/Website. The program committee did discuss adopting a pedagogy session on the CMS program titled “Implications of Current Learning Theory” by “NOT schedule[ing] against it” (Browne to Berry, 24 March 1977, box 1, folder 7 SMT Records). In the end, however, they scheduled a competing session.

<sup>55</sup>Indeed, in 1988, the SMT's ad hoc Committee of Review, charged with “study[ing] various aspects of the Society and its programs” (Guck et al. 1988, 5), found that “the Society's attitude about pedagogy is perceived as condescending” based on member and non-member responses to a questionnaire. The Committee's final report recommends, “The Society must improve the level and quality of attention it devotes to theory pedagogy” (Guck et al. 1988, 5). To do so, the Committee recommended that “the Program and Publications Committees should solicit conferences papers and articles concerned with pedagogy from well-known scholars, particularly scholars involved in advanced research” (Guck et al. 1988, 5). In their deliberations on this recommendation, the Board took the stance that “Pedagogy topics at national meetings [are] welcome by general solicitation, but not requiring an automatic

At the business meeting of the second National Conference on Music Theory on 19 November 1977, the meeting minutes indicate that “approximately 200 persons present” voted “overwhelmingly” to organize a national society for the field of music theory. Announcing the formation of the SMT to the National Association of Schools of Music, Browne writes, “In my opinion, the major result of the Society’s emergence should be a strengthening of the notion of music theory as a serious, necessary, and ‘politically’ defensible part of higher music education.”<sup>56</sup> Throughout his announcement Browne outlines the political project undertaken to render the field defensible. First, professional theorists differentiated themselves from related fields: “The natural solipsism of composers, the historicism of musicologists, the relativism of ethnomusicologists, while quite understandable, does seem to leave room for other kinds of discussion, for systematic description of logical relations.”<sup>57</sup> Second, he shows that this potentially vibrant field was “[f]or many ... a relatively unchanging body of precepts.”<sup>58</sup> Professional music theorists, however, were developing “serious and imaginative” knowledges on this land left fallow by their colleagues—musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and music theory pedagogues.<sup>59</sup> Third, by producing this knowledge, professional theorists would prove more deserving recipients of the teaching positions previously received by theory pedagogues.<sup>60</sup> As Browne announces: “No one wants the [SMT] to sponsor dreary show-and-tell sessions on ancient pedagogical routines, but the dissemination of the most up-to-date and informed teaching practices must be a primary concern of many members.”<sup>61</sup> Rather than teaching outdated knowledge, professional music theorists would, through their research agenda, develop “grammars modeled on newer understandings of the learning strategies of musicians.”<sup>62</sup> In this way, Browne concludes, professional music theorists would be “persistent

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inclusion involving invitations by a group other than the Program Committee.” SMT Board Meeting Minutes, November 1988, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>56</sup>Browne (1978, 179).

<sup>57</sup>Browne (1978, 176).

<sup>58</sup>Browne (1978, 176).

<sup>59</sup>Browne (1978, 178).

<sup>60</sup>In fact, with the 2013 adoption of its “Statement on Professional Standards,” the SMT made the professional’s superior claim to teaching positions its explicit policy: “Those who are best positioned to help students develop in [music theory and musicianship skills] are those who themselves have advanced training in the current theories and methodologies.” This statement first appeared on the SMT website in October 2013, though there appears to be no record of the motion to adopt this statement in the SMT’s meeting minutes (Jennifer Diaz, email message to the author, 13 September 2021). As McCreless notes, however, this professional project has not been successful across all institutions of higher education throughout North America (1997, 38–39).

<sup>61</sup>Browne (1978, 178).

<sup>62</sup>Browne (1978, 176).

in arguing the worth of their special endeavor” to university administrators and deans who want “their various faculties to be energetic [and] well-defined.”<sup>63</sup>

As Browne elaborates, then, making a home for oneself in higher education involved political maneuvers. And the strategy he outlines likely appears natural within our current economic and political milieu: in doing this disciplinary jockeying to take over the jobs of pedagogues we are, as Browne insists, just “do[ing] what needs doing” to build a place of community and security—that is, a home—in this world.<sup>64</sup> However, like all colonial projects, its underside—or, rather, its very condition of possibility—is the subjugation and assimilation of life otherwise. Here, in the building of the SMT, we see that the “service orientation”<sup>65</sup> of the pedagogue within the academy was marginalized as the SMT facilitated the ascendancy of the professional and their disposition towards producing “advanced research.”

In his analysis of the emergence of the field, Patrick McCreless frames these dynamics in Foucauldian terms of knowledge/power. Although he notes in passing that Foucault situates our disciplinary institutions as emerging in “close association with the rise of capitalism,”<sup>66</sup> McCreless leaves this line of inquiry—as well as the academy’s relationships to (and global capitalism’s founding in) colonialism and the Transatlantic slave trade—unexplored.<sup>67</sup> Whereas Foucault historicizes the logics animating our institutions in order to denaturalize them so that we may conceive of life otherwise,<sup>68</sup> McCreless appears to naturalize these logics, asking us to “wisely accept the reality that no knowledge or power is ever pure, and revel in [our] accomplishments anyway.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, he concludes with the hope that a future “music theory would see itself . . . as participating in an ongoing play of knowledge and power in which disciplinary spaces open up, are appropriated to amass power, produce knowledge, and create practicing disciplinary individuals, only to open up still other disciplinary spaces that establish yet newer

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<sup>63</sup>Browne (1978, 179).

<sup>64</sup>Browne (1977, 137).

<sup>65</sup>Poland to Browne, 4 December 1975, SMT Records/Website

<sup>66</sup>McCreless (1997, 35).

<sup>67</sup>The North American academy has never been an innocent bystander to these projects. See, for example, the recent “Land-Grab University” project that tracks the capital accumulated by “land grant” universities based on expropriated Indigenous land (R. Lee and Ahtone 2020), the recent *Native American and Indigenous Studies* issue on the topic (Lomawaima et al. 2021), as well as la paperson’s *A Third University is Possible* (2017). For studies on how universities leveraged slavery to their enduring benefit, see *Ebony and Ivy* (Wilder 2013) and *Slavery and the University* (Harris, Campbell, and Brophy 2019).

<sup>68</sup>For instance, Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose write, “in anatomizing the detailed ways of thinking and acting that made up our present, and constituted ourselves in the present, Foucault asked us to consider the possibility that we might invent different ways of thinking about and acting on ourselves in relation to our pleasures, our labors, our troubles and those who trouble us, our hopes and aspirations for freedom” (2003, ix).

<sup>69</sup>McCreless (1997, 48).

configurations of knowledge and power.”<sup>70</sup> While this archival study supports McCreless’s narrative, through a study of the SMT’s operations in the next section, I further thematize the coloniality of these logics and propose that rather than “wisely accept th[is] reality,” we contest it.

## OPERATING

*The general understanding of home in America is like your home is your castle—it’s your sovereign space. You put a fence around it. And barbed wire if you can get some. And you get some goddamn surveillance equipment. And some dogs. And whatever the hell you can do to make sure that nobody comes up in your home.*

—Fred Moten<sup>71</sup>

In 2002, the SMT held a banquet to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. While he celebrated the institution’s resilience so far, Richmond Browne concluded his banquet address with a warning for the future:

A theorist is a master analyst—certainly of tonal music, preferably also of 20<sup>th</sup> century music, and preferably of some other historical or contemporary genre. The proliferation of worthy topics like jazz, feminism, world music or cognition is welcome and adds to the value of music education in itself—but the rock of theory is analytic mastery. To the extent that the SMT as a group, or individuals who call themselves theorists, walk away from the analytic agenda, so much do they and we risk marginalizing ourselves. Diversity cannot be a cover for the SMT becoming an orphanage.<sup>72</sup>

While alarmist, Browne’s stance is not unreasoned. As we have seen, music theorists constituted their profession, in part, by taking over the service role of those who taught courses in musicianship, harmony, and counterpoint. These courses, in turn, emerged out of conservatory-style training for musicians and liberal-arts education for appreciators of a particular kind of music: what Browne calls “tonal music,” by which he means concert music in the European tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his analysis, the profession of music theory depends on this “classical” tradition and the institutions that support it. Therefore, if we fail to maintain our “analytic mastery” of this particular repertoire, we loosen our claim to the service role that supports our profession’s sustainability.

While Browne’s institutional analysis led him to admonish attempts to diversify the field, he seems to have underestimated the longevity and influence of already long-standing institutional investments in “diversity.” Not only is diversity now a safe resource to invest in, we must diversify to remain, in Browne’s words, “‘politically’

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<sup>70</sup>McCreless (1997, 48–49).

<sup>71</sup>Briond and Ware (2020).

<sup>72</sup>Browne (2003, [13]).

defensible.”<sup>73</sup> As musicologist Matthew D. Morrison writes, “If our fields, societies, and institutions of higher education are to remain relevant, our approaches and policies must embrace the diverse and lived experiences of the entire population.”<sup>74</sup> With the degrowth of institutions devoted to the classical tradition that we staked our expertise on,<sup>75</sup> we are being asked to articulate our value in relation to musicianship more broadly construed—beyond the confines of the classical tradition.<sup>76</sup> We must, that is, become experts in other musics. Glancing through the publications and presentations within the SMT, the membership seems to be expanding its research interests in this direction. While this is good for the field’s defensibility in terms of “relevance,” the SMT has had much less luck so far on the flipside of the diversification project: demographics.

Since its creation, the SMT has been overwhelmingly male and overwhelmingly white. As Philip A. Ewell notes, this demographic stagnation is not due to a lack of diversity initiatives.<sup>77</sup> The SMT has formed standing committees on the Status of Women (in 1986),<sup>78</sup> on Race and Ethnicity (1994),<sup>79</sup> on Disability and Accessibility

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<sup>73</sup>Browne (1978, 179).

<sup>74</sup>Morrison (2019, 818).

<sup>75</sup>Expression of anxiety over the waning influence of classical Western music institutions pre-dates the SMT. In 1970 for example, Donald M. McCorkle, then-editor of *College Music Symposium*, writes: “For certainly we are well within a period of serious trouble for music as we have known it. Whether it is a transition to a new ethos in which the arts will find a new meaning and significance, or to a dissolution of the arts, in the company with the political, social, and other cultural orders of Western Civilization, only time will tell. One does not need to enumerate the evidence; the picture of declining symphony orchestras, of audiences generally and of the young general particularly, the movement of recording companies more noticeably away from serious music, the alienation of the artist (or read intellectual) further from the center of society, the rejecting student population—one can continue indefinitely” (McCorkle 1970, 14–15). As is apparent from his mention of the “rejecting student population,” the proximate cause for this reactionary editorial appears to be the widespread student protests, such as the 1969 San Francisco State University student strike advocating, as Roderick A. Ferguson writes, “a ‘Third World revolution’ that would displace and provide an alternative to racial inequality on campus” (2012, 5).

<sup>76</sup>Although an initiative approached with renewed vigor over the past decade or so, the push to develop pedagogical approaches in music theory that decenter the classical canon (and reactionary aversion to doing so) are also not new and may be seen in the wake of student protests of the 1960s. See, for example, Thompson (1970), Howard (1974), and Schachter (1977).

<sup>77</sup>Ewell (2020, [1.2]).

<sup>78</sup>At their 7 November 1986 meeting, the SMT executive board formed the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) as an ad hoc committee “to address the concerns of women in the Society and in the field of music theory.” The CSW became a standing committee at the November 1995 SMT Business Meeting (“From the Bylaws Committee” 1995, 5).

<sup>79</sup>Upon its formation as the Committee on Diversity, then-SMT President Patrick McCreless writes: “The newly appointed Committee on Diversity will address such issues of diversity with respect not only to gender and race, but also to cultural backgrounds, values, and points of view” (1995, 3). In 2019, the Executive Board changed its name to the Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CoRE) in order to clarify its focus (Stoecker 2020, 4). In 2007, the then-Committee on Diversity hosted a panel titled “Ethnic Diversity in Music Theory Voices from the Field,” which sought “to foster a discussion on the wider problems of diversity within the [SMT]” (session abstract quoted in Cimini and Moreno 2009, 188). Moderated by Jeanie Ma. Guerrero (2009), the still-resonant stories, provocations, and interventions by Sumanth Gopinath (2009), Youyoung Kang (2009), Horace J. Maxile, Jr. (2009), and Jairo Moreno (Cimini and Moreno 2009) were later published in *Gamut: Online Journal of the Music Theory Society of the Mid-Atlantic*.

(2014),<sup>80</sup> and on LGBTQ+ Issues (2020)<sup>81</sup> in attempts to create supportive spaces where marginalized scholars might better gain their professional bearings. But the demographics have scarcely budged.<sup>82</sup> Many have convincingly argued that a central cause for this demographic stagnation may be located in the epistemological values of music theory. Such critiques argue that the heuristic distinctions that orient music-theoretical method privilege a particular kind of disciplinary production that, in turn, privileges of a particular subject position: a hetero- or homonormative white masculine subjectivity.<sup>83</sup> One of these frequently critiqued heuristics is the discipline's foundational distinction between "the music itself" and its "social foundations",<sup>84</sup> or the music's "text" and its "context"<sup>85</sup>—what McCreless calls the field's "aesthetic ideology."<sup>86</sup> Extending these critiques, in this section I explore how this aesthetic ideology orients the operational structure of the SMT. That is, beyond the epistemological investments that inure to the benefit of white cisgender masculinities, I argue that the organization's institutional policies prove another site of music-theoretical operations that render the SMT less hospitable to "diversity."

When the SMT was voted into existence in 1977, those present adopted a set of bylaws for the organization. James Harrison—professor at Hunter College, member of the National Conference on Music Theory organizing committees as well as the MTSNYS Board of Directors—was recruited to draft the document based on his experience incorporating MTSNYS.<sup>87</sup> Though the SMT's bylaws have been amended since their adoption, a

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<sup>80</sup>In 2014 the Executive Board transformed an ad hoc Committee on Disability into the standing Committee on Accessibility (Kleppinger 2015, 3). At this time its role was limited to minimizing accessibility problems in the Society. In November 2019, its name was changed to the Committee on Disability and Accessibility and its mission expanded to "[support] and [foster] deeper engagement with the cultural study of disability as it relates to music theory" ("Disability and Accessibility" 2019).

<sup>81</sup>With the explicit limiting of the focus of the Committee on Diversity to race and ethnicity, there was a push to form this committee focused "to complete our Society's umbrella of diversity standing committees" (Hatten 2020, 2). Interestingly, class is not an axis of difference explicitly represented under this "completed" umbrella.

<sup>82</sup>The SMT began issuing annual demographic reports in 2014 (though there is also data for the years 2009 through 2011). In 2014, 83.1% of the SMT identified as white, and 69.4% male. In 2019 it has shifted to 83.7% white and 63.8% male (Society for Music Theory 2019, 4–5).

<sup>83</sup>Cusick (1994), Sofer (2020), Ewell (2020), Guck (1994), and Maus (1993).

<sup>84</sup>McClary (1985, 150).

<sup>85</sup>Krims (1998, 6–7) and Korsyn (2003, 79–88).

<sup>86</sup>McCreless (1997, 48).

<sup>87</sup>In his 16 June 1977 letter to Berry, Forte "suggest[s] Jim Harrison as an appropriately experienced person to make a presentation" describing "what such a society might be like in terms of articles of organization" (box 1, folder 6, SMT Records/Website). Upon delivery of the document, Harrison writes, "Gerald Warfield and I have gone over this draft in some detail. It has also been seen by an attorney who is experienced in such matters. This draft should represent, therefore, somewhat more than the perversions of a single individual. ... You will notice that this draft is a relatively simple document. My intention was to provide only that which would be necessary in the early stages of organization, without elaborate administrative encumbrance" (Harrison to Berry, 30 September 1977, box 1, folder 6, SMT Records). In his remembrance of Harrison, who passed in April 2020 (Tommasini 2020), Poundie Burstein (2021) discusses his role in forming MTSNYS and the SMT.

significant part of them remains today.<sup>88</sup> Of particular interest for my purposes is one unchanged sentence in the second paragraph of the second article of the bylaws: “No part of the activities of the Society shall consist of carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation.”<sup>89</sup> While this sentence appears to simply replicate the legal language elaborating the restrictions for organizations formed as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code,<sup>90</sup> the SMT’s bylaws actually omit key elements. If they were to follow US law, in fact, the SMT bylaws would read (with necessary additions in brackets): “No [substantial] part of the activities of the Society shall consist of carrying on propaganda[,] or otherwise attempting[,] to influence legislation.”<sup>91</sup>

What effects have these omissions had for the operations of the Society? In an open letter following the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the U.S Presidency, then-SMT President Dora Hanninen indicates how the removal of “substantial” from the bylaws affects the SMT’s operations:

Over the past few weeks, members of the SMT Executive Board have engaged in substantial discussion about how current events may affect the Society, and how we might best respond ... As a non-political non-profit organization, we will continue to refrain from any direct involvement in lobbying for or against any legislative action.<sup>92</sup>

Whereas according to the law, 501(c)(3) non-profit corporations may be directly involved in lobbying so long as it is not a substantial part of its operations,<sup>93</sup> in removing the word substantial the SMT bylaws completely prohibit the organization from doing so.

The operational effects of omitting the two commas are more complicated. This is because the removal of “substantial” raises the stakes of what exactly the sentence predicates, while the removal of the commas leads to ambiguity about what precisely it is that is predicated. I will show that the peculiarly abstract nature of SMT’s responses to events during the Trump presidency follow from this ambiguity, but first I’ll elaborate this textual issue. If the SMT bylaws were to incorporate the commas present in the Internal Revenue Code, then the sentence would unambiguously predicate (and, with “substantial” removed, entirely prohibit) two nested things. The first is

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<sup>88</sup>An original bylaws draft is included as an appendix to the meeting minutes of the Second National Conference of Music Theorists, box 1, folder 8, SMT Records/Website.

<sup>89</sup>Society for Music Theory Bylaws, art. II (amended 2007). A similar (and similarly problematic one, as we will see) paragraph appears in the MTSNYS bylaws, similarly unchanged since the adoptions of the bylaws.

<sup>90</sup>Indeed, in 2007 the ad hoc Bylaws Committee said of this language: “The last paragraph of this section has been retained, as it fulfills various legal requirements; this is boilerplate legal language vis-à-vis our 501(c)(3) non-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service” (London 2007, 7).

<sup>91</sup>Cf. 26 U.S.C. § 501(c)(3) (2018), originally enacted as Act of August 16, 1954, ch. 736, 68A Stat. 163.

<sup>92</sup>Hanninen (2017a, 1).

<sup>93</sup>The IRS offers extensive guidance on how such organizations may lobby without losing their non-profit status. See, in particular, Rev. Rul. 2007-41.



“the carrying on of propaganda . . . to influence legislation.” The second concerns the same matter but casts a broader net: any other act (beyond the carrying on of propaganda) that attempts to influence legislation. Here, both predicates clearly center *influencing legislation*. Without the commas, however, there are two plausible readings of the sentence. One reading is precisely the one made clear through the use of commas.<sup>94</sup> The second reading predicates two slightly different things: “attempting to influence legislation” and “the carrying on of propaganda.”<sup>95</sup> Without the commas, that is, a plausible reading of the SMT’s bylaws prohibits the organization from carrying on propaganda—not just propaganda seeking to influence legislation, but propaganda for any purpose whatsoever. This reading, however, leads to further complications, for in United States law, the word “propaganda” is intended in its most expansive sense: “[a]n organization, scheme, or movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine, practice, etc.”<sup>96</sup> Following this expansive meaning of the word “propaganda,” if the SMT bylaws fully prohibit all forms of propaganda, then the Society is prohibited from undertaking any action that seeks to propagate a cause, point of view, or practice. Given the fact that the object of our society is the “advancement of teaching and research in all the various fields of music theory,”<sup>97</sup> the Society has always been carrying on propaganda insofar as its purpose is to propagate the practice of music theory. Based on this reading, it is arguable, ironically, that the SMT has always been operating in violation of its bylaws—and its violation is precisely the object and purpose of the institution.

Oddly, rather than opting for the first reading of this ambiguous sentence (which prohibits activities only if they seek to “influence legislation”) the SMT Executive appears to have been operating under the second reading, which prohibits “propaganda” in general. Rather than effecting a wholesale stoppage of its operations, however, SMT leadership had to draw an arbitrary line between what constitutes “propaganda” and what does not—a line that we find orienting its public statements about current events.

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<sup>94</sup>Rewritten, this might read: “No part of the activities of the Society shall consist of (1) attempting to influence legislation through (1a) the carrying on of propaganda or (1b) in any other way.”

<sup>95</sup>This second reading, rephrased, would read: “No part of the activities of the Society shall consist of (1) carrying on propaganda or (2) attempting to influence legislation in any other way.”

<sup>96</sup>*Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (2007) s.v., “propaganda, n.” This is, of course, the literal meaning of the term as derived from gerundive form of the Latin verb *prōpāgāre*, meaning to propagate. See Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (1879), s.v. “prōpāgo.” As gerundives express an obligation or necessity to undertake the verb’s action, “propaganda” refers to the necessity or obligation to propagate something. And that something in the original formulation is “the faith”—from the Roman Catholic institution *Congregatio de propaganda fide*. United States law does not intend the narrower sense of the term that attributes malevolent intent to such propagation—the way in which the word is most commonly used nowadays.

<sup>97</sup>Society for Music Theory Bylaws, art. II (amended 2007).

Before elaborating how the SMT Executive Board reckoned “propaganda,” let’s first examine an example of a statement issued by the SMT Executive Board in light of this reckoning. The following statement was issued after the “Unite the Right” rally of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia on 11–12 August 2017 that led to the murder of counter-protester Heather Heyer:

Recent events in Charlottesville have served as a reminder that institutions of higher education can become the very stage upon which forces of hatred and violence play out. The Executive Board of the Society for Music Theory reaffirms the Society’s values of open and respectful dialogue and our commitment to ideals of justice, dignity, and equality for all peoples. The hatred that we witnessed directed against those who acted in defense of these values contradicts and threatens our core principles. We stand together for inclusivity, diversity, and the free exchange of ideas.<sup>98</sup>

For a statement about a particular event, it is incredibly abstract. “Recent events” stands in for any description. And instead of referencing a particular group of people, we hear only of “forces of hatred and violence” and “[t]he hatred we witnessed.” This stands in stark contrast to the statements of SMT’s peer organizations.<sup>99</sup> The American Musicological Society issued a statement condemning “neo-nazis, white supremacists, Ku Klux Klan members, white nationalists, and fascists.”<sup>100</sup> And the Society for Ethnomusicology wrote that they “reject the rhetoric and hateful ideologies of anti-Semitism, white supremacy, nativism, and homophobia.”<sup>101</sup>

In 2019, then-SMT President Robert Hatten connected the abstract nature of such statements to the SMT’s governing documents, indicating that the Executive Board was working to “[craft] responses hewing to our bylaws.”<sup>102</sup>

Though we are enjoined by the SMT bylaws not to participate in any political activity, the Board will continue to respond in ways that express our intention to preserve and protect the basic human rights and dignities of our members whenever and however they may be threatened (for example, by bans on travel). We consider the values in our mission statement to be above politics.<sup>103</sup>

Here Hatten illuminates how the SMT Executive Board at the time interpreted this bylaw. Instead of prohibiting all “propaganda” in the broadest sense, they construe this ambiguous sentence as prohibiting the organization from “participat[ing] in any political activity.” Propaganda, that is, becomes political activity. Under this interpretation, the SMT cannot make concrete statements regarding the political dynamics in the world as its peer organizations do—for this may be considered “political activity.” In order to hew to its bylaws under this interpretation, then, the

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<sup>98</sup>Hanninen (2017b).

<sup>99</sup>Gavin Lee (2017) makes a similar observation regarding an earlier statement of values released in the wake of the Trump administration’s plainly Muslim-targeted travel ban. Exec. Order No. 13,769, 82 Fed. Reg. 8977 (1 February 2017).

<sup>100</sup>Quoted in Gordon (2017).

<sup>101</sup>Society for Ethnomusicology (2017).

<sup>102</sup>Hatten (2019, 1).

<sup>103</sup>Hatten (2019, 1)

SMT needs to operate according an ontological distinction that enacts at the institutional level the heuristic distinctions music theory researchers often apply at the epistemological level: as music theorists operate by distinguishing social context from musical text, so too does the SMT operate by distinguishing things “political” and things “non-political.” In order to operationalize this distinction, which has no definition in US law, however, the SMT must draw on a conceptual apparatus outside of this legal regime. And Hatten helpfully clarifies this apparatus: the non-political is constituted by the international legal concept of “human rights” that renders certain values “above politics.” Through the concept of “human rights,” that is, the SMT, under this interpretation, may respond to immanent political events by issuing ostensibly non-propagandizing statements of transcendent, “non-political” values—those abstract affirmations and reaffirmations of values the SMT issued following concrete white-supremacist violence.

While the SMT here uses the concept of human rights to render its actions non-political, this concept—like that of a transcendent musical work object—is the product of European cultural and political institutions. While the concept *per se* only came into widespread use in the twentieth century,<sup>104</sup> as historian Anthony Pagden notes, “rights, ... and in particular those rights which were to become ‘human rights,’ ... were developed in the form we understand it today[] in the context of *imperial*, legislative practices.”<sup>105</sup> Premised on values first articulated in “natural law,”<sup>106</sup> such rights included “the right to punish those who transgress the law of nature” and “the right to the use of ‘vacant’ lands.”<sup>107</sup> Such rights, furthermore, privilege a particular image what it means to be human and were leveraged to legitimize the conquest of communities that live otherwise. For instance, as we saw it play out in the building of our Society, deciding whether or not land was “vacant” turned not only on that land’s occupancy, but also on whether those occupying the land made proper *use* of it.<sup>108</sup> In particular, if a people did not exploit the potential of the land like a proper (European) “human,” they had no right to it. Central to this image, then, is an

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<sup>104</sup>Samuel Moyn writes, “while it percolated in diplomatic and legal circles beginning in the 1940s, it was not until the 1970s, with the emergence of dissident movements in Eastern Europe, that it entered common parlance” (2014, 15).

<sup>105</sup>Pagden (2003, 173; emphasis in original).

<sup>106</sup>See in particular, *ferae bestiae*, which “states that any thing, such as a wild beast, that has not been taken by anybody becomes the property of the first taker” (Fitzmaurice 2007, 6).

<sup>107</sup>Pagden (2003, 181). As Fitzmaurice notes, this natural law was leveraged both in favor of and against imperial conquest and conolonization. Francesco de Vitoria, for instance, famously “used *ferae bestiae* to argue that the Spanish conquests were unjust because the land and property of the ... American civilizations clearly had not been in a state where they could be appropriated by the first taker” (Fitzmaurice 2007, 6–7).

<sup>108</sup>As Fitzmaurice writes, “The ideas that ownership of property is based upon use ... and more broadly that we demonstrate that we are human through the exploitation of nature (or that we are not human if we fail to do so) are fundamental to European history” (2007, 7).

economic disposition: to be human one must, as Pagden writes, “stead[ily] improve[] the means of production.”<sup>109</sup>

While significant transformations occurred between such uses of natural law and natural rights and those used today under the banner of “human rights,” as critics of contemporary articulations of human rights argue,<sup>110</sup> liberal institutions (like the SMT) continue to leverage the concept to enforce and entrench a particular image of the human and their preferred economic and governmental institutions—in particular, capitalism and democracy.<sup>111</sup> Human rights, that is, does not put anything above politics. Instead of disarticulating the SMT’s operations from the political, what this history helps us see is how the operations of the SMT continue to enact a colonial project that subjugates human life otherwise—particularly, Black and brown, fem and trans, queer and disabled life.

While the story of SMT’s building and operations are, of course, particular to its contexts, the structural dynamics are not. And as I mentioned to open this section, a part of these structural dynamics currently is a pressure to “diversify” our institutions. Sumanth Gopinath writes, for example, “universities are battling with increased intensity over the rising exchange value of melanin content in their efforts to demonstrate compliance with the now-longstanding dictates of diversity and accessibility.”<sup>112</sup> Diversity, that is, has become a commodity to exchange and leverage for power as is the natural right of what Sylvia Wynter calls “*homo oeconomicus*” and his colonial institutions.<sup>113</sup> And while other academic institutions have at least made some gains through these diversity missions, this has not been the case for the SMT.

Why, then, is the SMT particularly recalcitrant to demographic diversity? As Robin D. G. Kelly critically observes of college and university campuses, rather than making structural changes, a central part of the operations of institutions seeking to diversify involves enacting “measures that would make campuses more hospitable to students of color” by, among other things “foster[ing] supportive educational environments” where one may “find[]

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<sup>109</sup>Pagden (2003, 183).

<sup>110</sup>Maldonado-Torres (2017), Mignolo (2011), Williams (2010).

<sup>111</sup>While they may be understood, following Audre Lorde’s turn of phrase, as one of the master’s tools (Lorde 2007), “human rights” also offer leverage to marginalized communities. As Maldonado-Torres writes, “To the extent that European powers were committed to it, it was important for the colonized to infuse the *Declaration* with ideas that would make it appear incompatible with segregation and colonialism” (2017, [15]). Though here Maldonado-Torres refers to the United Nations’ 1948 *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, following Sylvia Wynter, he situates the “declaration” (including the *Declaration of Independence*) as a genre in contradistinction to that of the “oration” (exemplified by Pico’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*): “the work of figures such as [Aimé] Césaire and [Frantz] Fanon is characterized by the effort to engage in a new ‘oration,’ that is to say, a new reflection on and a new practice of being human. This is different from the idea of making a ‘declaration’ or wanting to be included in one” (Maldonado-Torres 2017, [15]).

<sup>112</sup>Gopinath (2009, 77).

<sup>113</sup>Wynter (2003; 2007), Wynter and McKittrick (2015).

a home and a community.”<sup>114</sup> Some of these measures comprise forms of “public relations,” such as the issuing of statements in light of events affecting an institution’s membership. And while other institutions more effectively advertise a somewhat more supportive and hospitable environment by regularly issuing concrete statements, the SMT’s PR only offered liberal platitudes that, for many, rang hollow—signaling its lack of hospitality.

More recently, only following upheaval in the Society itself, the SMT began to speak more concretely. Effectively endorsing Ewell’s argument,<sup>115</sup> for instance, the Executive Board issued a statement in February 2021 “acknowledg[ing] that since the inception of our Society, a white racial frame has played a significant role in shaping discourse, teaching, and demographics. We deeply apologize to our BIPOC members, whom we have excluded in many ways, and to whom we have caused immeasurable pain.”<sup>116</sup> Here the SMT officially recognizes the harms it perpetrates through its homemaking practices. Indeed, by conceding its grounding in whiteness, the SMT appears to situate itself as having always been a political operator—never “above politics.” As such, this indicates a shift in interpretation of the bylaw analyzed above. Now, it seems, the SMT Executive construes the bylaw as simply prohibiting legislative advocacy. With this shift, then, it seems that any previously perceived prohibition from engaging in the political writ large had less to do with bylaws themselves than with the will to do so.

While some might find hope in the SMT’s recent acknowledgement of harm, I’m less optimistic. Indeed, I already see fractures in the SMT’s solidarity within its apology. In particular, after acknowledging that it has caused “immeasurable pain” to its BIPOC colleagues, the SMT states that it “will continue to nourish ... the collegiality that has always characterized our academic Society.”<sup>117</sup> The SMT, that is, at once recognizes its lack of collegiality and insists that the SMT will continue to nourish this very (lack of) collegiality. Here, in my reading, the statement accidentally makes explicit the implicit intentions of organizations that issue such statements: to change its operations as little as possible beyond developing, as Sarah Ahmed argues, a ritual of issuing statements that affirm and reaffirm its abstract investment of diversity and inclusivity.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Kelley (2018, 155). See also Levitz (2017, 10–11).

<sup>115</sup>Ewell (2020).

<sup>116</sup>Society for Music Theory (2021). In July 2020, following publication of the “Symposium on Philip Ewell’s SMT 2019 Plenary Paper, ‘Music Theory’s White Racial Frame’” in the *Journal of Schenkerian Studies*, the SMT Executive Board issued a statement in a similar vein: “We humbly acknowledge that we have much work to do to dismantle the whiteness and systemic racism that deeply shaped our discipline” (Society for Music Theory 2020).

<sup>117</sup>Society for Music Theory (2021).

<sup>118</sup>Ahmed (2012, 57–58). Furthermore, by retrenching in “collegiality” and “respectful dialogue” this statement valorizes a particular image of how one ought to relate in professional spaces: by sublimating emotional expression

Although our field has recently come under fire its spectacular lack of hospitality under the guise of scholarly engagement,<sup>119</sup> what I am arguing here, following Saidiya V. Hartman, is that we must also grapple with how our quotidian operations of making a home perpetuate an unabated “diffusion of terror” for those living otherwise, whom it ostensibly wishes to include.<sup>120</sup> As Fred Moten interprets her turn of phrase, this “diffusion” does not signal a “dilution”—“[t]he concentration is ... constant”; “[i]t is a pouring forth, a holding or spreading out, or a running over that never runs out and is never over.”<sup>121</sup> And this terror is diffused through the homemaking practices Moten describes in this section’s epigraph. After claiming this terrain as their profession’s property, their sovereign domain, professional music theorists—themselves terrified of losing this ground—needed to protect it. So we put a fence around it to demarcate our property, and barbed wire for good measure to keep out the service mentality of the pedagogues, historicism of musicologists, and the relativism of ethnomusicologists. To further secure the land from intruders, we have guard dogs that bark—interrupting what was otherwise a polite conversation—“But what does this have to do with the music itself?” And our surveillance mechanisms of peer review continually monitor production to contain the infiltration of foreign epistemological agents or mere pedagogues. And after all this, finally, we place a tattered and askew mat at our doorstep reading: WELCOME.

While I do not find much hope in the SMT’s recent reforms, I am not, nonetheless, entirely pessimistic. Rather, my optimism resides elsewhere—in the otherwise.

## ABOLISHING

*Home is where you give home away.*  
—Fred Moten<sup>122</sup>

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into discourse palatable to the maintenance of a collegial atmosphere (for whiteness). However, as philosopher Aimé Césaire writes, we must locate the barbarism of white supremacy not only in ostentatious acts of violence epitomized by its infamous individuals, but also that of the “decent fellow” and the “respectable bourgeois” ([1950] 2001, 47).

<sup>119</sup>I am, of course, referencing the aforementioned symposium (to which, I should note in full disclosure, I was a contributor) in the *Journal of Schenkerian Studies* that garnered international attention. Though such reactionary ire has focused its energy on Ewell’s contribution to the SMT’s 2019 plenary session, “Reframing Music Theory,” I sense that this is a response to the traction broader interventions for diversity, equity, and inclusivity have gained in music studies, particularly following the success of Project Spectrum’s 2018 AMS/SMT pre-conference, “Diversifying Music Academia: Strengthening the Pipeline”—one sign of this increased traction being that SMT plenary, which comprised an introduction by Marvin (2021) and presentations by Everett (2021), Hisama (2021), and Straus (2021) in addition to Ewell (2021).

<sup>120</sup>Hartman (1997, 4).

<sup>121</sup>Moten (2017, xi).

<sup>122</sup>Briond and Ware (2020).

“Otherwise,” Ashon T. Crawley writes, “bespeaks the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped.”<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, for Crawley, the word “underscore[s] the ways alternative modes, alternative strategies, alternative ways of life *already* exist, indeed are violently acted upon in order to produce the coherence of the state.”<sup>124</sup> At once, that is, “otherwise” signals the potential for creating worlds otherwise, while also drawing our attention to the presence of the otherwise—violently subjugated—within this world. In this final section, I offer an initial proposal for a music-theoretical otherwise, ultimately arguing, as the section title indicates, for the abolition of the SMT. In saying “ultimately,” however, I signal that my argument orients to an abolitionist *horizon* where our current institutional forms that diffuse terror are replaced with otherwise, life-affirming ones. That is, I am not arguing for abolishing the SMT while leaving its aiding and abetting institutions unchanged. Following Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition requires that we change one thing: everything.”<sup>125</sup> I will further elaborate on abolitionist praxis below, but first let’s return to the concept of home—considering the making of home otherwise as one line of flight towards this horizon.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten invite us to reorient to how we make our home by adopting a “homeless” disposition.<sup>126</sup> Explaining what they mean, Moten said in a recent interview:

... home is not this sovereign place/space where everybody had a fence and you kept motherfuckers out. It was this constantly violated thing. So even if we want to maintain some kind of a commitment to home, we do so by way of this constant questioning and violation of the rigidity of the boundary that it is supposed to represent. That’s what it means to be homeless. In other words, homelessness is not the condition in which you ain’t got no place to stay. Homelessness is not the condition in which you ain’t got a house. Homelessness is the condition in which you share your house. ... It’s the condition in which you give your house away constantly as a practice of hospitality. So the homelessness that we’re trying to talk about is precisely this interplay of this practice of hospitality. Home is where you give home away.<sup>127</sup>

Homelessness, that is, orients to home not as property to be claimed, protected, and exploited, but as a place of caretaking, traversal, and generosity. It’s a place where the gifts of the home are given away rather than stockpiled. Homelessness, we might say, is a disposition that centers our “service role” to those with whom we relate within and across homes. In terms of our lives as academics, then, homelessness is a disposition anathema to the professionalization project I detailed in the first part of this article. While this project enacted the institutional logics of Moten’s “American home” by staking a claim to particular epistemological territory, homelessness orients us to the effects of our practices and the services we offer through them. Homeless academic production, then, is

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<sup>123</sup>Crawley (2016, 24).

<sup>124</sup>Crawley (2016, 6–7; emphasis in original).

<sup>125</sup>Gilmore (2022).

<sup>126</sup>Harney and Moten (2013).

<sup>127</sup>Briond and Ware (2020).

premised not on the production of disciplined knowledge but on the proliferation of homelessness as an ethos and praxis oriented towards abolition.

Before elaborating how this disposition might orient our lives as music theorists, I should elaborate further on what I mean by “abolition,” since this term does not have wide currency in the music theory literature. On the abolitionist project writ large, Harney and Moten write: “What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and *therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.*”<sup>128</sup> This new society, as the Abolition Collective insists, is the utopian horizon of “antiracist, decolonial, anticapitalist, feminist, and radically queer” struggle.<sup>129</sup> Thus, while the word “abolition” centers the act of putting an end to something, the praxis of abolition is just as oriented to the creation of otherwise worlds.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, though oriented to an “impossible” horizon, Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade also insist that “Abolition is not some distant future, but something we create in every moment when we say no to the traps of empire and yes to the nourishing possibilities dreamed of and practiced by our ancestors and friends.”<sup>131</sup> As a project pursued within and in relation to this world-to-be-abolished, moreover, abolitionist praxis strategically leverages resources from within this world to build towards abolition—hence such praxis being referred to as “fugitive.”<sup>132</sup> Or put another way, as the title of Bassichis, Lee, and Spade’s piece indicates, abolitionist movement building involves working “with everything we’ve got.”

As someone with a Ph.D. in music theory, part of what “I’ve got” is knowledge of and skills to intervene in this discipline’s institutions. Thus, I write here within the SMT, using its resources for the purposes of organizing towards the otherwise—an abolitionist horizon where the SMT and music theory as we know it (but also the

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<sup>128</sup>Harney and Moten (2013, 42; emphasis added).

<sup>129</sup>Abolition Collective (2020, 3–4). Abolition Collective is a group of scholars and activists who edit *Abolition: A Journal of Insurgent Politics*. The members of the collective for the issue cited are: Kevin Bruyneel, Jaskiran Dhillon, Andrew Dilts, Erin Hoekstra, Paula Ioanide, Brooke Lober, Brian Lovato, Naveed Mansoori, Eli Meyerhoff, Amanda Priebe, and Dylan Rodríguez.

<sup>130</sup>In their introduction to *Otherwise Worlds*, Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith seek to bring abolitionist and decolonial projects into dialogue beyond the white “settler epistemologies and ontologies of being, autonomy and humanity” that render them incommensurable (2020, 8). Rather than seeing these as well as other political projects as separate and incommensurable, I follow the Abolition Collective who writes, “*the abolitionist struggle [is] the struggle against patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, abelism, colonialism, the state, and white supremacy.* . . . [T]hese institutions and practices operate together and must be abolished together” (2020, 2; emphasis in original).

<sup>131</sup>Bassichis, Lee, and Spade (2011, 36–37).

<sup>132</sup>Harney and Moten (2013). Although not an explicitly abolitionist intervention, see also Hannaford’s elaboration of “fugitive music theory” (forthcoming).



university, and the academy, along their intertwined structuring logics of racism, colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy) do not exist. My primary purpose in taking up space here, then, is not to use these resources for the advancement of the research in the field (though I have done some of this work to gain a foothold here). Rather, I am writing to enact a service role that researchers and educators often offer in abolitionist organizing: the political analysis of this world's institutions in order not only to "cultivat[e] critical consciousness" but also to activate readers to take up abolitionist work.<sup>133</sup> Through this article, my purpose, then, is to extend an invitation to join the broader and ongoing abolitionist struggle and to insist that we can pursue this struggle together where we are—within the SMT.<sup>134</sup> Though I make a proposal below as to how we might do so, it is only one strategy for intervening in order to building both the SMT and our worlds otherwise. In the spirit of abolitionist community building, I look forward to difficult, emotional, contentious, and transformative conversations—even uncivil arguments—with colleagues who might wish to build coalition with me, but who deeply criticize this proposal and the flaws of this piece. That is, I look forward to being held to account and working to remediate the harms this article causes through its tactical errors and strategic blunders. I am new to abolitionist community building and have much to learn and unlearn.

With this spirit in mind, I will now turn to how we might begin to make a homeless home of the SMT. In particular, I will sketch a "non-reformist reform" that we might enact within the SMT—that is, a reform that, as Charmaine Chua writes of abolitionist resistance to the Prison Industrial Complex, enacts "gradual effort[s] to erode power and decrease the harm of carceral institutions on the long road toward an abolitionist future."<sup>135</sup> To illustrate the difference between a non-reformist reform and a "reformist reform," however, I'll actually start by advocating for what I view as a reformist reform that I am pursuing with colleagues in the organization Engaged Music Theory Working Group<sup>136</sup>: amending the bylaws so that the SMT is hindered in its operations no more than is legally

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<sup>133</sup>On the limits of strategies oriented only to the cultivation of critical consciousness, see Tuck and Yang (2012, 19–22).

<sup>134</sup>For a broader invitation to "Abolitionist University Studies," see Boggs, Meyerhoff, and Schwartz-Weinstein (2019).

<sup>135</sup>Chua (2020, S-130).

<sup>136</sup>As the group introduced itself in a 31 October 2020 letter to the SMT Executive Board, "The Engaged Music Theory Working Group was formed in 2019 to deepen members' approaches to cultivating inclusive research, teaching, and service within music theory." Michèle Duguay, Marc Hannaford, and Toru Momii initially organized the group as the New York Diversity in Music Theory Discussion Group before changing its name in reference to "Naomi André's vision of an 'engaged musicology'" (Engaged Music Theory Working Group 2020; André 2018).

required.<sup>137</sup> This is “reformist” insofar as amending bylaws in this way does not, in fact, erode the institution’s power, but increases its capacity to act. Such amendments will not necessarily lead the organization to materially change its homemaking practices so as to decrease the harms the institution perpetrates. Indeed, as I argued above, the SMT’s newly issued “Ethical Affirmations”—evidence of a shift in bylaw interpretation in the direction of such an amendment—reinscribes its investment in coloniality. I advocate this reform, nonetheless, because it paves the way for a non-reformist reform.

The premise of an earlier version of this article was the non-reformist reform (though I didn’t have this language for it at the time) I propose here: that the SMT recognize, take responsibility for, and work to remediate the affects that circulate within music-theoretical spaces. This proposal originated from my research with therapists who practice a form of music-centered psychotherapy called the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music.<sup>138</sup> For these practitioners, central to music’s therapeutic effects is its capacity to both evoke and hold emotion so that a listener may work through trauma, depression, and anxiety, among other indications.<sup>139</sup> Thinking along these lines, I developed this proposal in light of how poorly the SMT performed its “holding function” following “political” events. This poor performance, in turn, affects the emotional atmosphere of the institution and, thereby, who feels safe and welcome within it. If the SMT wished to “diversify” its demographics, it would need (among other things) to remedy this situation (and thereby *perhaps* prove more deserving of the diversity it desires).<sup>140</sup> From this starting point, my argument in the earlier draft was that we must transform SMT so that it may operate more generously, generatively, and in life-affirming fashion by attuning to the affective atmosphere of the space it holds. To do so, we would first need to change the bylaws so that the institution may better perform its holding function. But this would just be the start, as affects are not bounded within institutions—they traverse and are informed by our connections to all of the institutions in which we dwell. As Amy Cimini and Jairo Moreno write, “We [in the SMT] are linked, fundamentally, to [a] whole range of institutions, political practices and economic forces” (2009, 182). In order to effectively undertake my proposed reform, then, we would actually need to transform that whole range of

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<sup>137</sup>Pursuing this is a peculiarly complicated task for the SMT, as became apparent in a 2017 attempt by the Executive Board to change this very language (“Notice of Motion to Revise Article II, Paragraph 2 of the SMT Bylaws” 2017; Hanninen 2017c). The problematic language I outlined above is, in fact, in the SMT’s Certificate of Incorporation, so the amendments actually must begin with amending this certificate.

<sup>138</sup>Bonny (2002), Grocke (2019).

<sup>139</sup>D. W. Winnicott (1960) brought the concept of “holding” to prominence in psychoanalytic discourse. For an application of this concept in Guided Imagery and Music, see Summer (1995).

<sup>140</sup>I thank William Chang for posing to me the question of whether our institutions *deserve* the diversity they seek.

institutions—that is, entire world—in which we dwell. Through this “reform,” that is, we might begin to build an abolitionist world.

Though I have decentered this proposal, I still stand by it and think it could prove a non-reformist reform. Interestingly, however, one of the reviewers of that earlier version of the article responded that this proposal was impractical. Not because it was the premise of an “impossible” abolitionist argument,<sup>141</sup> but because it would require the SMT to “police our entire field” and “sanction” all bad behavior. This reader, that is, construed my proposal as a “law and order” proposal. What this reader misses (and, to be fair, I was *much more subtle* about the strategic intentions behind my language in that earlier draft) is that we need not construe “taking responsibility for” and “working to remediate” as requiring policing and sanctions of “bad behavior.” Indeed, my proposal is much less about individual behavior than it is about how our institutional logics coerce/afford particular modes of relating. My proposal, instead, asks the institution—that is, us collectively—to recognize and seek to remediate the bad affects our institutions foster through its operational logics. That is, the purpose of this proposal is to push us to reimagine the very relations our institutions foster—to jog us into recognizing that there are modes of living not premised on the individualizing, colonial logics of the settler legal system that currently prevails. This reader’s response, however, helpfully illustrates how pervasive these logics are, and how hard it can be to imagine otherwise.

Turning to how such a reform might be operationalized within the SMT, I envision it as necessarily affecting how scholarship is valued in the field. Instead of fixating on epistemological production in the service of disciplinary logics, the SMT would reckon value by also asking after the quality of relations our research fosters. We would always ask, following Alissandra Reed’s recent keynote, “Who does our scholarship serve?”<sup>142</sup> Research, therefore, would be valued more for its services performed than its knowledge accumulated. In following this alternative evaluative logic, what the SMT would advance might not be academic “research” at all, but what Harney and Moten call “Black study,” or simply “study.”<sup>143</sup> Whereas research within the disciplinary confines of the university is pursued to advance an epistemological mandate to accumulate knowledge/power so that we might

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<sup>141</sup>Instead of shying away from what liberal reformists will call “impossible,” Bassichis, Lee, and Spade propose embracing the impossible as a strategic site of generative refusal they live everyday: “As trans people, we’ve been hearing [that our demands are impossible] for ages. After all, according to our legal system, the media, science, and many of our families and religions, we shouldn’t exist! ... And yet we exist, continuing to build and sustain new ways of looking at gender, bodies, family, desire, resistance, and happiness that nourish us and challenge expectations .... [B]eing impossible may just be the best thing we’ve got going for ourselves: *Impossibility may very well be our only possibility*” (2011, 36).

<sup>142</sup>Reed (2020).

<sup>143</sup>Harney and Moten (2013).

enjoy a secure professional career through these colonial institutions, study is a collective pursuit oriented to the abolition of such institutions as well as the reconstitution and development of life-affirming ones. In this way, as Harney writes, such study is not only “within and against” the university but also “with and for”: “When I say ‘with and for,’ I mean studying with people rather than teaching them, and when I say ‘for,’ I mean studying with people in service of a project, which in this case I think we could just say is more study.”<sup>144</sup> In calling for more study, furthermore, as Robin D. G. Kelly insists, we are also calling for its attendant practices of love and struggle.<sup>145</sup> This is what we might coalesce our energies around—these practices written off as “service,” as the excess to the “important” work of knowledge production and accumulation for the tenure file. Study refuses the logics that capture knowledge within the well-defined contours of this world, so that we might instead leverage our insights in the pursuit of struggle towards the abolitionist horizon.

But where is the *music* in such study? It can be just as present as it is now—we would just continually recognize the worlds we build through our study and spend a great deal of time asking after their effects on our collectives. In an announcement for a study group on poetry titled “Reading as World-Building,” for example, the organizers, Claire Schwartz and Chase Berggrun, propose that group orient their close reading of texts with such questions as: “How might deep study of a text function as an act of world-building? How might the poem be an instrument by which we can recalibrate our attention to tend to the possibilities of an otherwise? What can study as a collaborative act yield?”<sup>146</sup> For us, such study would necessarily grapple with how our current professional music-theoretical habits function to build and buttress *this* colonial world. But it would also embrace the deep study of musical (and music-theoretical) texts as a springboard to the otherwise. And, indeed, both of these aspects of study have been around, if not in abolitionist form, for decades within the SMT. For instance, the work of feminist music theory is a long-standing site of study, critique, and practices otherwise. These practices have always also entailed organizing, including the creation of the SMT’s Committee on the Status of Women, which has pursued strategic

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<sup>144</sup>Harney and Moten (2013, 147–48).

<sup>145</sup>Kelley (2018, 164–67). For Kelley, “Black study and resistance must begin with love ... For my generation, the formal classroom was never the space for deep critique precisely because it was not a place of love. The classroom was—and still is—a performative space, where faculty and students compete with each other. Through study groups, we created our own intellectual communities held together by principle and love” (2018, 164–65).

<sup>146</sup>Claire Schwartz (@23cschwartz), “dreamt up a little dream of a deep reading class with @patriphobe in May. Come join us! More info here ...” Twitter, March 4, 2021, <https://twitter.com/23cschwartz/status/1367577756855382018>.

institutional interventions throughout its existence.<sup>147</sup> Ellie M. Hisama, for example, continues to inspire a new generation of students pursuing deep critical study and strategic intervention.<sup>148</sup> More recently, explicit political projects pursued through music-theoretical study have come to include decolonial, disablist, antiracist, and queer of color interventions.<sup>149</sup> It is these projects that I hope to further and with these scholars whom I hope to build some coalition across our divergent strategies of intervention. As I see it, their study refuses the cloistering of domains of knowledge, recognizing that in talking about music, we are always building a world. Where academic research refuses to take responsibility for its world-building, such study orients to this ever-present reality and holds the collective to account for the worlds wrought.

While its founders built the SMT for the purposes of advancing research by colonizing vacant land, policing its boundaries, and forcing assimilation, I invite us to remain cognizant of the agency we collectively possess to practice abolition within our professional lives. This is a question of our methods as music theorists, so we may ask, in dialogue with K’eguro Macharia:

[W]hat if method assembles us *not* to define borders around objects and scenes and situations and archives, and *not* even to break borders between and across fields and disciplines.

What if method calls us to assemble so we can be curious, so we can share wonder, so we can muse on possibility, so we can follow the generosity of the call—all such calls must be generous—and so, having learned from the call to be generous, we can extend similarly generous calls?

I’m trying to think beyond “what is your method?” to “who is gathered by your invitation?”<sup>150</sup>

We know who has been gathered by the SMT’s invitation (as well as the academy’s, capitalism’s, etc.)—an invitation that was always simultaneously a disinvitation. With Macharia, however, we may ask: might we assemble not for the purpose of defining or breaking borders in order to “make our pile,” but instead to begin building through our music-theoretical assemblies a world otherwise—a world not premised on paranoia, scarcity, and accumulative (in)security, but grounded in generosity, abundance, and care?

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<sup>147</sup>The CSW would prove a fruitful site for further study. Amy Marie Cimini offers a great starting point in “Music Theory, Feminism, the Body.” As she notes, “Since its founding in 1986, the CSW agitated to change gendered language in the profession . . . , advocated for graduate students to take leadership roles in the Society . . . and pushed for curricular revision and diversified repertoire” (Cimini 2018, 666).

<sup>148</sup>Hisama (1993, 2000, 2006, 2018, 2021).

<sup>149</sup>Attas (2019), Straus (2018), Ewell (2020), Conlee and Koike (2021), Hannaford (forthcoming), Sofer (2020).

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