Teaching Statement Michael Winter

My teaching methodology is diverse and holarchic. I encourage students to learn through practice, situate their ideas in broader historical and sociological contexts, and find novel solutions to problems they encounter in their creative practices. The subjective nature of music presents one of the greatest challenges of teaching it: how can one effectively speak to the diverse aesthetic interests of a group of students so that the individual interests of each student are also satisfied? The way I achieve this is by exposing students to as many different ideas as possible without aesthetic bias, while at the same time determining the intentions and motivations of each student so they can achieve their individual goals. I also try to impart to my students that in the arts there is no objective right or wrong or good or bad in order to promote constructive dialogue even among groups of students with wildly varying interests. Finding solutions to the challenges of teaching music and sound art has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my artistic life.

Teaching new technologies presents further practical and philosophical challenges. Students often conceive of ambitious ideas that are intractable. I always try to work with them to define projects that both satisfy their ambitions and result in work that they can realize and include in a creative portfolio. I augment this practice-based approach by encouraging students to contextualize their work. I typically do this by recommending philosophical and theoretical texts. For example, when teaching artificial intelligence, I complement coding exercises with discussion of readings on complexity and ethics. This contextualization is particularly critical in the digital humanities. Given the algorithmization of social, political, and economical relationships in our current society, students should always be encouraged to consider the ethical consequences of evolving technologies: how they amplify or mitigate status quo and conditional biases, enhance or erode civil liberties and personal privacy, and centralize or decentralize power and wealth.

I also try to demonstrate how taking risks is an important part of the creative process. One way I do this is by experimenting with different lecture formats. As an illustration, I once gave a lecture with composer Robert Blatt named "This talk has a high chance of failure: performer, score, environment, and listener as algorithmic systems". For the format, I wrote a computer program that would randomly allot three to ten minutes for one of us to discuss a given topic before switching. While admittedly a somewhat chaotic format, the lecture was successful in several ways. First, it demonstrated in practice how experimentation can engender new ideas. When allotted a short amount of time for a given topic, the current speaker was forced to synthesize their ideas, often finding new ways to articulate them and making previously unknown connections. On the other hand, longer time allotments allowed for reflections and insights that might not have come about without the frenzied nature of the format. Second, it captured the students' attention. Years later, a student who attended the lecture told me how it inspired them to learn more about the people and ideas Robert and I discussed and how they would never forget it. Despite the somewhat theatrical nature of the presentation, it was ultimately the content they remembered.

Another format I find effective is the lecture-performance. In 2016, I was invited to give a lecture about Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's music-related writings in a symposium on the 300th anniversary of Leibniz's death to a group of philosophy of law students. I presented my research showing how Leibniz predicted James Tenney's theory of harmonic distance in harmonic space followed by a performance of my work *preliminary thoughts*. The piece sets to music the reading of a letter I wrote to my friend, the mathematician Gregory Chaitin (who was also at the symposium), reflecting how many of Leibniz's ideas, both musical and more generally philosophical, can impact an artistic discourse. I often incorporate Leibniz in my lectures because he is a prime example of a polymath who traversed different intellectual domains freely. This is especially important in what I sometimes refer to as 'the age of specialization'. When students are encouraged to explore and connect different fields, they are more likely to innovate within and beyond their specialization. The lecture-performance format demonstrated this very principle. The performance portion emphasized that I was a practicing musician with interests in mathematics and epistemology and that a connection from Leibniz to Tenney might not have been made otherwise.

I have also had the opportunity to work with many students on an individual basis. Recently, I have been tutoring students who have reached out to study with me. In the past, as cofounder and codirector of *the wulf.*, a non-profit organization with the mission to present experimental arts in Los Angeles, I mentored several students attending universities in southern California who were selected as interns through a grant that we applied for and received from the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture. They worked directly with me to help run every aspect of the organization. Even when

the mentor-mentee relationship is clear and well-defined, I treat students with the same respect I give my own contemporaries and mentors. I think one of the best ways to do this is to work on projects *together*, where the student is as much of an author as the teacher. As an example, I collaborated with one of the interns to build a content management system for the large archive of recordings of events *the wulf.* has organized. Prior to the internship, the student did not even know how to program. They went on to become codirector of the organization for several years and are now a senior software developer who maintains an active artistic life. As a teacher, I would help students organize and participate in performances and exhibitions, empowering them to be in control of their own artistic lives and champion the work of their influences.

It can be challenging for students to understand how to navigate our world as an artist, especially in times of so much social injustice. How can an artist contribute to the greater good of our society? I believe that exploring art and learning should be intrinsically connected to all aspects of life. An artist has the responsibility to live a life that they feel is more just and more humane, where the state of art and technology is one of the primary indicators of the health and wellness of a society and community. It is only through devoted practice and action that such a world—even if only on a relatively small, local scale—can blossom. Art and technology develop in their most radical and innovative forms through all forms of diversity, including diversity of perspective, diversity of background, and diversity of what is both taught and created. Only then will conventional wisdom be challenged in favor of a constantly evolving discourse that is collaboratively driven.

Similar to how I encourage students to contextualize their practice and consider ethical implications, I also try to show that art itself can be a form of activism. For many years, I traveled the Americas south of the US border teaching and performing. In 2020, I was appointed as a Visiting International Professor at UNIRIO in Brazil. As I could not commence employment in person due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I conducted online seminars with Professor Paulo Dantas focused on sound art and acoustic ecologies, during which we invited artists from around the world to present their work. Many of the invited guests were composers and sound artists who were also feminist activists and who have been central in helping bring attention to a very strong community of women and queer Latin American musicians and sound artists whose recent recognition has been long overdue. Learning about and meeting artists for whom activism is integral to their work helped the students understand how their creative endeavors can also advocate for social justice.

As this was a public university with a socioeconomically diverse student body, demonstrating such agency was particularly powerful, especially during a time when the students' struggles were amplified by a pandemic. In a forthcoming publication resulting from this experience, "Evolving curricula: reflections on The Quarantine Seminars", Paulo and I address ethical dilemmas of accessibility in higher education and propose ways to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational environment. I would extend the attitude reflected in the article to my role as a teacher and work to further realize such an environment. I would try to recruit a diverse array of students especially from marginalized groups and the Global Majority. And, just as in the seminars at UNIRIO, by inviting guest artists and lecturers from around the world, I would introduce and connect the students to a network of people with whom they could later collaborate.

While I am always humbled when a student asks to study with me, one recent case was particularly notable. I worked with them to define a project that was sponsored by the European exchange program Erasmus+ which has resulted in numerous presentations with several ensembles and presenting organizations around the world. What was initially a request for tutoring evolved into a large-scale collaborative project. They have been very thankful. I told them that while I appreciate the gratitude, there is no need to thank me, as we are part of a teaching tradition that some day they will contribute to by helping younger artists interested in their work. Through innovative teaching methodologies, generosity, and selflessness, my mentors shaped me as a person, as an artist, and as a teacher. I am completely committed to this teaching legacy and will always evaluate and reevaluate the ways in which I can equip each student with the knowledge, confidence, and community to achieve their goals.