White Affectivity, Distraction Tactics, and the Crisis of Thought in the Western Classical European Music Industry

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Introduction

The “current crisis in global thought” (Jenkins 2024) through the context of western European classical music (WECM) may help to reveal some of the underlying mechanisms sustaining this crisis and perhaps suggest a way to navigate through it. In this article I will be focusing specifically on how the crisis in WECM thought is impacting BIPOC practitioners by discussing three pieces from my PhD portfolio. For centuries, WECM has had an undeniable relationship to white domination and colonialism – being used as a tool to reproduce whiteness, middle/upper-class values, and assimilative violence (Bull and Scharff 2021; Agawu 2016; Bull 2019; Wright 2012). These relationships can be seen through orchestral programming statistics (Equality & Diversity in Global Repertoire: Orchestras Season 2023-2024, Deemer 2022), WECM’s use of colonial slave orchestras (Silpayamanant 2023), and the ways in which WECM has been weaponised to assimilate and extinguish local culture (Agawu 2016, Robinson 2020)**.** These studies and others point to a historical and contemporary concentration of whiteness in WECM caused by intentional epistemic white ignorance (Ewell 2023). It is this concentration of whiteness that**,** I argue, defines the cause of the “thought crisis” in WECM and the way in which we engage with it – or *rather the way in which we are forced to engage with it.*

In the background of WECM’s whiteness has been an erosion of democratic values. In my home country of the US, we can trace this erosion to Ronald Reagan’s administration. Today the National Endowment for the Arts’ budget is about $207 million which amounts to about $0.62 per person (National Endowment for the Arts Appropriations History 2024). Adjusted for inflation, their budget at the beginning of Regan’s presidency was about $590 million. Subsequent US administrations from either of the two dominating parties have defunded or underfunded education, health

care, and deregulated pro-worker laws and unions' power at the state and federal levels. These actions have contributed to *Herrenvolk* and white supremacist systems (Steedman 2011; Beltrán 2020). Part of what likens American democracy to a *Herrenvolk* democracy is its need to be sustained by the deaths, exploitation, and suffering of BIPOC people as Alcoff (2005), Beltrán (2020), and Sharpe (2016) have all written about extensively. While George Floyd's murder in 2020 may have been an awakening (for some people) and a reawakening (for other people) of the ongoing US state sponsored BIPOC murder, the truth is that our murders have been an integral part of US political, social, and economic life since and before its founding – from the slave labour of plantations, the genocide of Indigenous people, to today's exploitation of migrant agricultural, hospitality, and construction workers (Beltrán 2020; Waxler 2024).

In other words, whiteness did not concentrate in WECM on its own *accidentally but rather as an effect of white domination's hold over the West – as an effect of choices made by whites and those living in whiteness.* WECM has developed in a type of white echo chamber which continues to suffocate and exclude the perspectives of BIPOC artists. For me, then, it is no surprise that in WECM there also exists a "thought crisis". Amongst the concentration of whiteness is also an implied white universalism which in WECM (Thurman 2021) translates to specific affective mechanisms. It is through these white affective mechanisms that I wish to investigate the state of thought in WECM and to use as guidance through it.

Below, I will first give a brief overview of white affectivity and its mechanisms in WECM composition before showing how this manifest in my composition practice through three compositions. Through these works, I will show how white affectivity in some cases controls how and what I can and cannot compose. It is these restrictions

that cause one of the main choking points in WECM discourses which contributes to the thought crisis. At a micro-level, I will show how white affectivity controls what happens between me and my music score – how my body is controlled in private settings. At a macro-level, I will show how the ramifications of these seemingly small actions accumulate to epistemic violence and epistemic self-harm – gravely impacting my musical phenomenology (and that of other minoritarian composers).

While I have been quite interested in engaging with the idea of "the crisis in global thought" (Jenkins 2024). I will also suggest in my conclusion that more work should be done in defining what the crisis is exactly. To proclaim that there is a crisis in global thought in some ways dismisses the work of many scholars in the global majority south and minoritarian scholars working in the global minority north. In WECM (though some of these artists may not call themselves WECM artists!) we have the work of Anthony R. Green who uses site and person-specific compositional methods to address radical Black joy, oppression, and belonging. Renee Baker's work has reintroduced Oscar Micheaux's films to contemporary audiences through her work with graphic scores and improvisation. Wadada Leo Smith continues to push the boundaries of graphic scores in large ensemble contexts (Smith n.d.). Kofi Agawu (2016) has written extensively on WECM's white universalism by questioning its relationship to colonialism. Hannah Robbins's (2023) musicological work in musical theatre continues to rewrite history through a critical intersectional lens – working to acknowledge the racism Lena Horne faced throughout her career, for example. And so, is the crisis actually in the making of "thought" or is the crisis about where the "thought" is occurring? Is our "post-dialectic melancholia**"** (Jenkins 2024) a reaction to the white spaces we inhibit and therefore a consequence of being oppressed, rather than a reaction to a stasis in the development of "thought"?

I will argue that the crisis is not in the making of thought but rather in the spaces we do the making in. Furthermore, I will argue that this is a sign of an intentional and perpetual crisis and that this *perpetualness* is a part of the very fabric that makes up our contemporary social, political, and cultural livelihoods. The crisis is a form of oppression, a tool meant to sustain "the master's house" (Lorde 1984) and used to hide the house's grotesque reality – a key tool of neoliberalism and a textbook example of a *Herrenvolk* democracy characteristic. For oppression to be successful in the West, in WECM, *we all must be fooled into thinking that we are overcoming the crisis when in reality we are feeding into the crisis' parasitic existence.* We must be evermore critical of our relationship to the crisis and ensure that it does not define what we mean by success while still navigating through it. We must ensure that whiteness is not centred in the work we do navigating the crisis.

From this, a key question arises: How do we move through this? Not just move through, but survive? Is there an "after" that does not involve a melancholia or the exploitation or destruction of the BIPOC Self? I will suggest that there is a way out of this mess, this concentration of whiteness in WECM, which may work for some but not for others. The process I suggest is rooted in a compositional method *rooted in liberation* which centres the minoritarian lived experience. By using Sarah Ahmed's (2006) notions of queer phenomenology as a guiding method, I propose to use feedback from the creative process to measure epistemic violence as a way to re-orient my Self through whiteness and to help me locate a type of exit. Ahmed's method inspired my liberatory compositional method by providing a way for me to incorporate reflection into my research work. Form this, I may choose *how* to go about composing (thought making) and to inform *where* I compose and *with whom* I compose. By bringing these concerns to the forefront of an arts practice, my

intersectional identifications and social worlds, I can begin to decentre the white universalism in the WECM compositional process and begin to address the blinding affective mechanisms that contribute to the seemingly perpetual thought crisis in WECM. From this I will draw broader conclusions which may aid in addressing the wider crisis in global thought.

To summarise, I do not intend to destroy whiteness or its affective mechanisms, or to solve the so-called thought crisis, but rather, will suggest a creative method that may help to mitigate the effects of it on the BIPOC Self – or at the very least, I hope to provide a way for other people to become aware of how whiteness is impacting their livelihoods. At this moment, because I have situated the thought crisis as an integral part of larger social, cultural, and political oppressive systems, my suggestion here is about cultivating a space for ourselves outside of the logic of the crisis. I accept, rather assume, that we cannot fully escape or be in a space that is completely outside of the crisis – of whiteness. What I do know is that when I have experienced an event or meeting that is for a specific community, such as an all-BIPOC event or an all-queer performance space, something occurs through the affectivity of that community which briefly provides enough relief to recalibrate and recharge my Self. In a way, I will be arguing that we consider boycotting spaces that are white, academic, echo chambers where the crisis is an expected part of our minoritarian Selves and a part of how thought is made by us in these spaces. Instead, we should focus on the communities that love us and support our livelihoods outside of this cycle of oppression and pain.

White Affectivity in WECM

Throughout my PhD project, titled *A violent accumulation of identifications: the impact of white affectivity on the practices of seven brown composers*, I used my portfolio of compositions to investigate different aspects of scores used in WECM to locate specific white affective mechanisms that impact my process. Outside of WECM, these mechanisms tend to be deployed within a universalist, white, culture which may be called white affective neutrality (Ozias 2023, 37-42). One of the reason why it may be difficult to identify these mechanisms is because of how "normal" they may seem to us. Zeus Leonardo and Michalinos Zembylas (2013) write, "Affective technologies include the mechanisms through which affects and emotions come to be instrumentalized, containing certain social norms and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion with respect to one's self and an Other" (151). They continue writing, "whiteness can be understood as a form of affective technology, an affective mode of self-practice situated in a circuit of social and political meaning" (159). In other words, the action within "the dis-identification of those one wants to exclude" is what constitutes a white affective mechanism (160). Actions that help to delineate your Self from another in an attempt to reach a racial moral superiority, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a white affective mechanism. For BIPOC composers, it is an attempt to assimilate into whiteness – to make your Self white.

Recontextualising Ozias, Leonardo, and Zembylas' work into WECM, we can begin to see how, for example, the exclusion of BIPOC music from concerts is a white affective mechanism meant to protect the white fundamentalist canon and differentiate it from BIPOCness. As Green (2018) has noted, the optics of an all-white concert program, and the frequency at which all-white concert programs occur in the industry situates whiteness and white composers as morally superior. This

constructs all-white programs as normal and adds to WECM's white universalism. Green writes, "I often feel as though the presence of people who look like me is not wanted or is merely tolerated". His comment points to the effects of white affective mechanisms on the belonging of BIPOC composers. In other words, a BIPOC person is expected to participate in an industry that is quite literally excluding them and reminding them of their inferiority. As I discuss later in this article, the results I have seen in my PhD study point to how difficult it is for BIPOC composers to engage with their full Self in WECM. In several of the case studies of my project, many of the participants have resorted to assimilative tactics such as racial coding for inclusion.

Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) also point to "white alibis" as affective mechanisms which white people and those living in whiteness create to build an "anti-racist understanding that construct the racist as always someone else, the problem residing elsewhere in other Whites" (151). We see these alibis deployed by concert programmers time and time again by avoiding responsibility and accountability for change. The ABRSM's early history played an important role in British colonisation abroad (Wright 2012) and helped to spread white, upper-class morals and values as a method of social control (Bull 2019)**.** As a senior manager at the conservatoire reminded me, "Change is slow." These mechanisms, and others, are necessary to uphold white supremacy in WECM. Consequently, I argue that BIPOC oppression is an integral part of maintaining "the master's house" in WECM.

Whiteness, as Cobas et al. (2021, 4) suggests,

> Extends beyond just skin colour; it involves a social advantage that is safe for those who exercise it, often claimed through their racial heritage. White

> privilege relies on clear distinctions between whiteness and non-whiteness, which are frequently enforced through violence.

These constructs have been sustained for centuries by white-dominated WECM institutions and organisations and, as I have previously shown, we can see the distinction between whiteness and non-whiteness in WECM through programming statistics (Díaz 2023; Díaz 2024), the "colonising force of classical music" (Agawu 2016), and in how WECM helps to reproduce whiteness (Bull 2019). In every single one of these instances (as well as many others) we can see how white affectivty played a key role in situating WECM within white affective neutral space.

The thought crisis, then, occurs when we come into contact with this supposed neutrality and experience double-consciousness. Double-consciousness, to me, may be understood as a moment, or series of moments, in which one becomes aware of how white domination has inscribed its violence on one's consciousness. For this to happen, one must look at "one's self through the eyes" of the white, dominant, hegemonic gaze (Du Bois 2015 [1903], 5). Du Bois defines this as, "One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (ibid). Frantz Fanon ([1952], 2008) complicates this through what Homi K. Bhabha calls a "psychoanalytic explanation...[on] the perverse reflections of 'civil virtue' in the alienating acts of colonial governance...[that] drive Fanon to describe the splitting of the colonial space of consciousness and society as marked by a 'Manichean delirium'" (xxvii). Within this splitting, Bhabha argues that Fanon problematises double-consciousness by analysing the psychoanalytic desire Black people may have for whiteness by asking, 'What does a black man want?'

(xxx). Through this question, we can begin to look at how BIPOC composers are *forced to engage with a desire for whiteness in the act of composing*. Furthermore, we can begin to analyse what occurs when we reject this desire for whiteness or replace it with a desire for a BIPOC Self.

A consequence of asking this is that double-consciousness is not just an effect of colonial white supremacy, something that colonial minoritarian subjects experience, but a tool of oppression for the white coloniser. It is a means to welcome the minoritarian Black subject into whiteness. DuBois (2015 [1903]), through his metaphor of "the veil," poignantly articulates that this transition into whiteness, into the veil, is ultimately unachievable. I argue that double-consciousness is one of the primary tools used to build and repair "the master's house" (Lorde 1984) and this has specific implications when contextualised within WECM which I discuss in the next section – it is a powerful form of distraction keeping us from finding true liberation.

To summarise, white affectivity can be seen in WECM through the naturalisation of all-white composer concert programs, all-white ensembles, and all-white conservatoire and university syllabi. It can also be seen in token programming conventions where a BIPOC composer's piece is included as the short introductory piece of a concert. This framing of BIPOCness in a concert hall is white supremacy's attempt to control how an audience engages with minority composers by restraining the number of performance minutes. This exclusionary action, which Ewell (2023) calls "epistemic ignorance", then has the effect of making whiteness morally superior which presents phenomenological barriers for the minoritarian Self in and outside of the creative process. These barriers are an organic manifestation of how white affectivity in WECM operates within white supremacy. As we navigate these barriers in and outside of the creative process, double-consciousness may occur which may

then lead to epistemic self-harm. In the next section I discuss in depth white affectivity in my creative process.

White Affectivity in My Compositional Practice[1]

I have always been aware of small tensions between my identifications and my practice, though I have not always been able to articulate these struggles logically – especially regarding racism in composition. My positionality includes being a neuroqueer, nonbinary, 1st generation US-born Mexican. As a young composer I was very interested in trying to compose who I was. I grew up surrounded by the usual US-Latin milieu including Celia Cruz, Selena, Juan Gabriel, "norteño" bands like Los Tigres del Norte (though I'm not the biggest fan of them!), as well as baile folklorico Mexicana. In other words, I had a good mix of pop, folk, salsa, cumbia, and country music from México, Cuba, and Columbia. But as a WECM composer, I struggled to incorporate these aspects of my Self into my practice. I often felt like I had to leave my Mexicanness at the door when I walked into a WECM space.

After hearing the premier of my 2016 piano solo, *moon cat* (link to performance recording above), I knew I had concerns about how in my creative practice I could be racialised or deracialised without my consent. *moon cat* utilises Mexican Mariachi performance techniques, the Mariachi scream, and loosely references Mexican folk songs like *Guadalajara*. At its premier, I knew that something was happening and making me feel like my Self was being split. I could recognise that the pianist performed the piece brilliantly and yet in his brilliance I could not sense my Self. It was as if the piece and I were staring at each other as broken simulacra with no

[1] Link to performance of *moon cat*: https://youtu.be/cZ9hFAL1hog?si=huAL0JnBGYsCsTpE.

capacity to become whole and what remained was only a semblance of a memory of my selves – none of which felt true but rather like distorted facsimiles. On top of everything, there was this overwhelming guilt, this feeling that I had utterly failed to assimilate into any one of these pathetic and surreal realities in my past, present, and subsequent future.

In retrospect, I now recognise that in *moon cat's* premier WECM's "white racial frame" (Ewell 2023) had stripped away my racial and cultural identifications and transformed the piece and my compositional Self into a stereotype situated amongst white affective neutrality – an object robbed of personhood. It was not an intentional act done by any one person but rather a historical and institutionally sanctioned act supported by hundreds of years of white domination and epistemic exclusion (which I discussed above) *aided by the whiteness embedded in the performance space, the composing, and the performer's own education within WECM.* Sarah Ahmed (2006) recognises this transformation via Merleau-Ponty and Fanon as a type of, "…disorientation, as the experience of being an object among objects, of being shattered, of being cut into pieces by the hostility of the white gaze" (159-160). This experience, and others like it in my career, have created a silent echo of white affectivity that has rung through time and space and permeated my practice. The result being that I engaged less and less with my Mexican identity in my music as time went on.

I identify the transformation I describe above as an affective mechanism in the WECM compositional process. The transformation accomplished splitting my racial Self away from me and situating it as inferior within the WECM compositional context. It caused me to think of my Mexican Self as "less than" at a subconscious level. I argue that the transformation caused a disorientation in my practice. I was

aligning my Self with whiteness while simultaneously distancing my Self from my brown racial identifications.

This occurred due to several factors notwithstanding the accumulation of whiteness in WECM. As I noted in previous sections, the exclusion of BIPOC composers from the canon, including Mexican composers, has led to an industry in which WECM musicians simply are not trained in Mexican performance practices. Programs tend to rely heavily on the musical aesthetics of the white, male canon. What this means in practice is that even if I were to compose a score that I felt was my "true" racial Self, as with *moon* cat a performance would likely cause moments of identity splitting and double-consciousness due to the whiteness of the performer and audience members, the whiteness in the space, our indoctrination into whiteness via WECM.

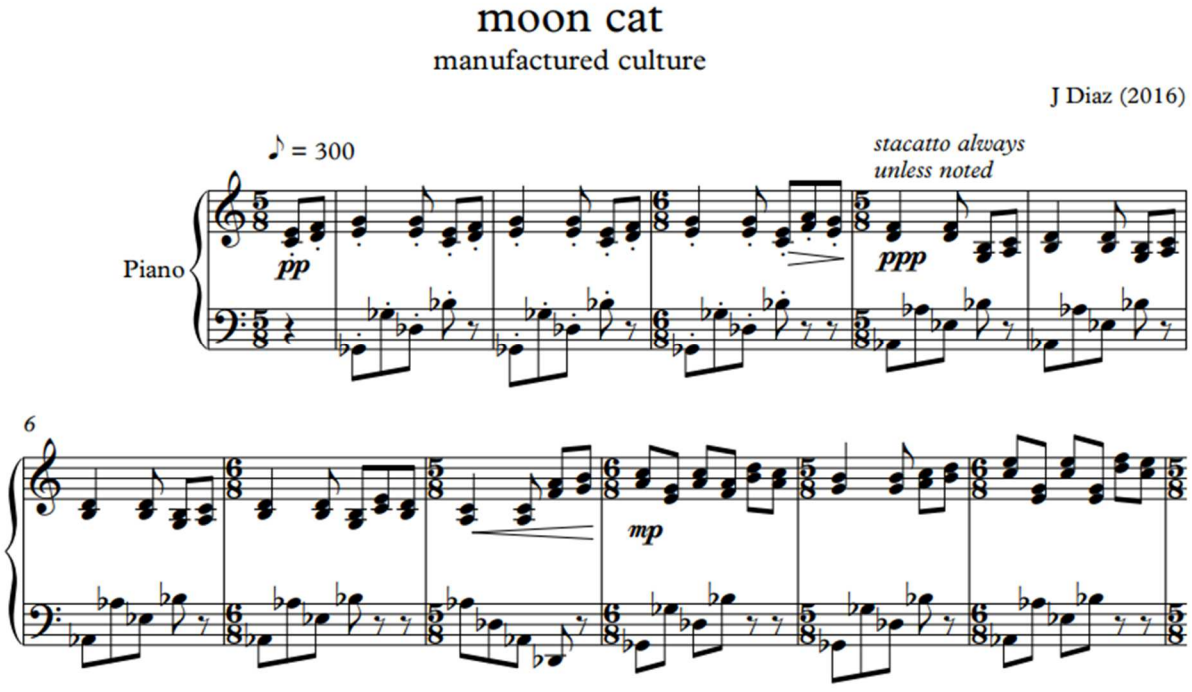

Figure 1: Excerpt from the introduction to *moon cat.*

There are a few points to discuss here. First, this is a consequence of the staff-based score's structure which represents white universality so that anyone with the "right" and "white" training can play the music. But because of how staff-based scores have operated within white domination, there is a lack of communal knowledge in WECM about non-white music performance practices. Staff-based scores only capture specific sets of pitches which through historical mechanisms have led to a connection with white purity. Additionally, there are many types of west central African and Latin rhythms which staff-based scores are incapable of capturing. The result being a bias toward European pitches and rhythms. Second, there is nothing in the staff-based score's structure to help me find the right performers and audiences for my music. Staff-bases scores primarily operate in white WECM spaces, ensembles, and institutions. This means that if I want to have my music performed, I have to work through and with whiteness instead of with whom I consider to be in my community.[2] In other words, staff-based scores force me to consume whiteness.

I have in the past attempted to restrict the performance of certain pieces to only BIPOC performers. This was met with backlash and bullying online primarily from senior, white, male colleagues with accusations of reverse racism. Of course, what I was attempting to do was to create my own community in which my authentic composer Self could exist. But this, again, is not an inherent part of the staff-based score's structure as it operates within white domination. This is why I continue to argue that for a cis, het, white male composer, composition is experienced as an activity that reinforces their identity while a minoritarian composer who uses the

[2] Even all-BIPOC ensembles like Chineke! struggle with this. Their programs tend to rely on the white, male, European canon.

same staff-based score may experience identity-splitting. This leads to my third point, that staff-based scores do not include in their structure any type of care for the concerns of minoritarian identities. Its only goal is assimilation.

After this realisation, I began to use less Mexican musical performance practices in my compositions because I did not want to experience the transformation I described above again. Not only did I feel guilty, but I was also embarrassed. Compositions including *three distant moods* (2020)*, an incomplete autobiography* (2018)*, unclaimed* (2017)*, xenoglossia* (2016), and others did not include any references to my racial or cultural selves. I found myself assimilating into whiteness to be included, programmed, and to attempt to make a living as a composer. Dharmoo (2019) writes about this type of forced assimilation when discussing the new music scene of Quebec. He writes,

> People of colour or Indigenous people who self-identify as part of the scene tend to employ an artistic discourse that serves, caters to, or is compatible with the dominant culture's perspectives or interests. Cultural differences tend to be assimilated, adapted or reformatted to better fit the genre's definitions and boundaries.

When I heard how the Mariachi scream from *moon cat* had transformed the piece into a stereotype, I unconsciously decided to adapt my compositional style to better fit "the dominant culture's perspectives" and the "genre's [white] definitions and boundaries." I also came to an important yet banal question: If our music, our perspectives, and our voices are perpetually silenced in WECM, do we even exist? How does the cumulative effect of moments like I experienced in *moon cat* define our becoming? These questions are at the crux of how I have chosen to define the thought crisis in WECM because I believe these questions to ultimately be a white supremacist distraction from our liberation.

As I identified more affective mechanisms in my practice, I wondered if the thought crisis existed as an effect from wanting to be included in whiteness rather than purely being about the exclusion of us. This is what led me to investigate a compositional method steeped in liberatory logics with BIPOC care, interdependence, and integrity embedded in the method. If I centred my identifications, my values, and my health, what would a compositional method look like? In other words, what possibilities lie in moving away from WECM staff-based score's whiteness?

Composing Liberation: *Violent Accumulation*

In the previous section I outlined the consequences I faced when engaging with WECM staff-based scores in my creative practice. The result was experiencing double-consciousness and the destruction of my Self through assimilative white affective mechanisms. This then affected how and what I composed in subsequent pieces. Whiteness very much determined my practice until about 2022. Beginning in 2023 I worked to centre my identifications in my creative process, resulting in an organic text-based score, rather than letting the logic of staff-based scores determine the boundaries of my selfhood. A significant shift in agency occurred which resulted in power shifting from the score to me as the composer. I now had a score which let me create the community I wished to be a part of – a community with similar values in politics, society, and culture as well as a deep respect for BIPOC self-care within white domination.

Violent Accumulation is a text-based score embedded in a zine that I constructed in 2023. The zine's covers (Fig. 2) includes portraits of Haydn along with the concert program from the 1 November 2023 Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's (RCS) chamber orchestra performance. The back cover features the indomitable drag

queen, Divine. The words on the front cover read, “RCS Presents: An all-white male concert!” The inside of the zine contains statistics of orchestra concerts from the 2021-2022 Donne report. In that year non-binary composers received 0.1% of performances from a total of 20,400 works. Black women received 1.02% of performances. Black men received 2.37%. In a separate report I conducted surveying the programming data of the RCS large ensembles from the period 2001-2024, I found that out of the scheduled roughly 740 pieces only 40 pieces were by BIPOC composers (Díaz 2024). For RCS, the all-Haydn program on 1 November 2023 was very much the norm.

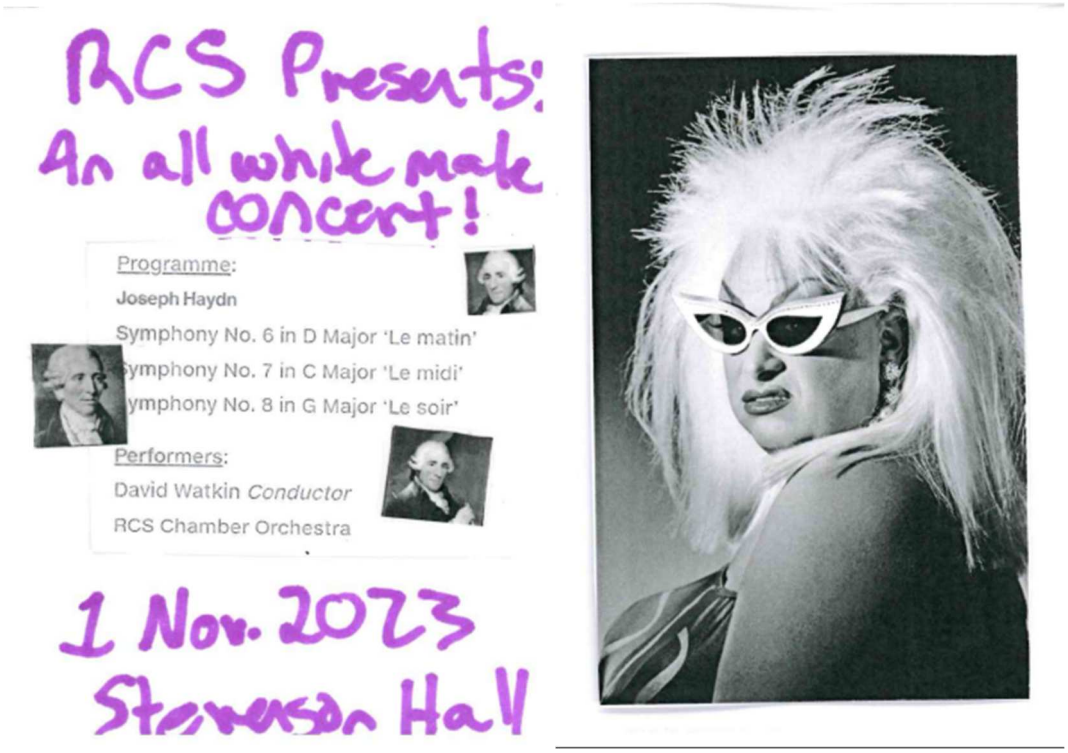

Figure 2: Front cover (left) and back cover (right) of the zine *Violent Accumulation.* Link to full zine: https://archive.org/details/violent-accumulation-1/whiteness%20back.PNG

This historical and ongoing accumulation of white supremacy at RCS is what I aimed to disrupt with the score (Fig. 3) in *Violent Accumulation.* In it I call on anyone to interrupt all-white, male concerts “during the quietest movement” and to “read from

James Baldwin's 'Nobody Knows My Name' until the whiteness has been destroyed!!!". In doing so, I centred my values of racial inclusion and used protest and notions of disruption as musical organising principles. This would not be possible to do with staff-based scores because staff-based scores are a type of "master's tool" (Lorde 1984). In order to begin to address white supremacy and the subsequent crisis in thought, we have to acknowledge this and construct tools outside of the logic of "the master's house". The zine score allowed me to work with people who are not "trained" in WECM, bypassing its inherent BIPOC epistemic ignorance. Theoretically, participating performers would also have closely aligned values. Thus the score's structure depends on the formation of a temporary interdependent community rather than the values of the majority white audiences of WECM. This is different from WECM which heavily relies on an intimate knowledge of white canon fundamentalism, aesthetic values, and the recreation of white, middle/upper class values.

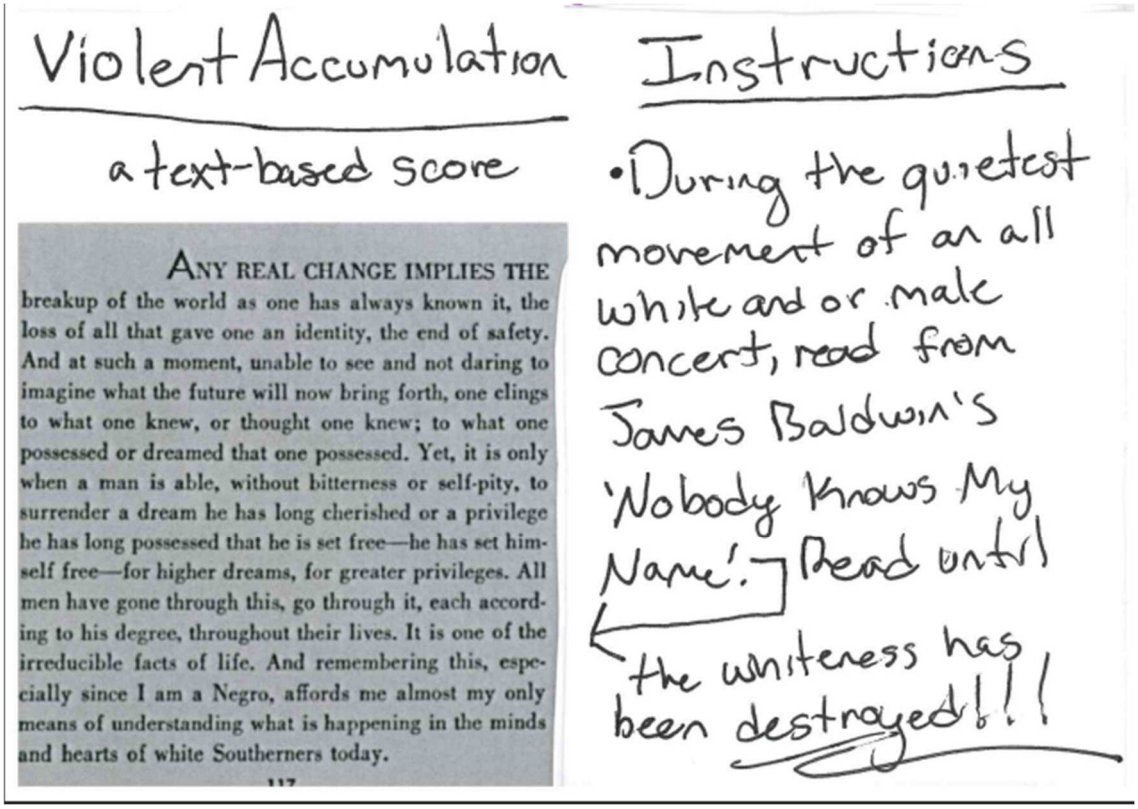

Figure 3: The text-based score in Violent Accumulation.

This piece was never performed. In fact, I had a disciplinary meeting at RCS with program leaders and a member of senior management where it was made clear to me that the piece was banned from the conservatoire. Should I had followed through with a performance, there would have been consequences which would have threatened the completion of my PhD. I was accused of disrupting the learning environment (by threatening to interrupt an orchestra concert) and of abusing my power as a doctoral student by inviting undergraduate and master's students to participate in the performance of *Violent Accumulation*. In this meeting I realised that the conservatoire valued white supremacy more than equity and inclusivity. I have argued to the conservatoire's EDI forum that the institution's understanding of EDI is within a framework of "white inclusivity." It is through this frame that I can understand how my piece presents a danger to what the conservatoire stands for. Conversely,

senior management could have looked at the institution's programming statistics (Díaz 2024) which I provided to the EDI forum, including senior management and realised that change was needed and that my piece was a valid way through which we could have rectified the institutional affinity for white supremacy. Instead, they chose to view my piece as an attack on their white supremacy. I argue that this is a text-book case of institutional oppression.

While *Violent Accumulation* was not performed, the experience I had constructing it and attempting to perform it did confirm a few important points which has led to a newfound creative practice. First, by not relying on the logic of WECM staff-based scores and its organising principles of specific types of pitches and durations,[3] I was able to construct an organic text-based score that centred my values. These values included but were not limited to inclusion, equity, self-care, and reparations. This made possible to search for a community of like-minded people to perform the piece with rather than relying on a superficial connection that lies in being a trained WECM musician. I say this having had to have worked with many transphobic and racist WECM musicians. As I stated previously, this is an effect of the staff-based score being a product of white affective neutrality. *Neutrality in white domination, as constructed by whites, is happy to harbour transphobic and racist people.* The zine format has a long history of being a part of minoritarian communities' political and social *organising* (Kero 2021)**.** I mirrored this at the conservatoire and shared about 40 copies of the zine in specific locations in hopes of connecting with other students and staff who were sensitive to the institution's whiteness and wanted to do

[3] Staff-based scores only capture specific sets of pitches which through historical mechanisms have led to a connection with white purity. Additionally, there are many types of west central African and Latin rhythms which staff-based scores are incapable of capturing. The result being a bias toward European pitches and rhythms.

something about it. This allowed me to bypass the inherent white domination of staff-based scores and to connect with people who may share a type of scepticism in WECM. I was looking to collaborate with people who were also anti-assimilationists and saw a problem with the *white supremacy* in concert programs.

I know that a performance of *Violent Accumulation* would have felt beyond amazing. It would have reinforced my Self – my identities – and contributed to my becoming as an artist and perhaps also given these positive experiences to the other participants. This is in stark contrast to my experiences with staff-based scores which have largely led to identity splitting through assimilative white affective mechanisms. The cumulative effect being the destruction of my Self and a construction of a white simulacrum. Even after having the piece banned by the conservatoire and experiencing racism at the hands of white senior management, I still feel more like my true Self than I ever have with pieces I composed using staff-based scores.

This is what leads to me to theorise that the WECM crisis in thought is entirely a distraction and a fundamental part of WECM's white supremacy. Earlier, I stated that WECM composition is experienced by white, cis, het, men as an activity that reinforces their identity while minoritarian composers may experience identity splitting using the same staff-based score. I see the act of banning my piece as a natural part of the conservatoire's need to protect its white supremacy. For that to be true, there needs to exist a larger apparatus that ensures its supremacy through space and time – the white, male, canon. In other words, I was not the first to experience this type of oppression nor will I be the last. The perpetual splitting of the BIPOC Self is an integral part of RCS and WECM white supremacy.

From this realisation I refocused my attention away from primarily white institutions (PWIs) and instead focused on composing for and with my own communities. *Violent Accumulation* I see as a consequence of both me trying to exist in WECM's whiteness but also as a thing that WECM's whiteness needs from me. It is a parasitic relationship and while WECM can survive without me I cannot survive without it – that is, unless I choose to leave. This is the thought crisis in its simplest form – a hidden master-slave relationship that can be ignored via performative EDI narratives and actions. It is what makes me question whether my conservatoire's duty of care is to me or to its white supremacy. Its actions suggests that its duty of care is to white supremacy.

Violent Accumulation allowed me to create a creative process that meant the liberation of my Self – the liberation of my thought. But because I produced it within the white institutional logics of the conservatoire, I was still a part of the white echo chamber I had sought to free my Self from. The final step I took to move through the strangulation of WECM's whiteness was to move my creative process outside of this white echo chamber – outside of "the master's house".

Conclusion: Liberatory Composition

we don't know the number (2024) is a new piece I am in the middle of making. It is an audio-visual work with no score and can be seen as a film of about 50 minutes or as a live performance. To access it, I ask that readers contact me directly at diazsounds@gmail.com. This is, again, a part of my new creative process where I restrict the experience of my work through interdependent actions. In other words, unlike WECM compositions which are meant to be universal and accessible to anyone, I want to first form a connection with potential audiences before sharing a

piece with them. My new creative practice is not situated within universalists logics. It is for specific people from specific communities. What I can share here, is that piece is about the number of people who die at the US-México border. It is about mourning and honouring them. The music for the film is improvised (having no score) and poetry from many different BIPOC poets is featured. These poems centre on narratives of migration, death, systemic racism, rape, abuse, joy, love, queerness, misogyny, and sex. In restricting access, I am attempting to confront the white gaze of the WECM concert hall. I do not want my pieces to be presented through the typical white museum gaze of concert halls, but rather through the gaze of an interdependent relationship based in liberation and care. These ideas partly stem from Robinson's (2020) book *Hungry Listening: resonate theory for indigenous sound studies* where he outlines the effects of encounters between Indigenous and Western music making, epistemologies, and ontologies.

By taking these actions I have begun to break the cycle of the perpetual thought crisis in WECM. Perhaps this may also serve as guidance for us in addressing the global crisis in thought. I argue for a wider movement of minoritarian artists and scholars to move away from PWIs and for us to begin to invest in our own spaces on our own terms. Conferences such as Shared Narratives and the F-List Music Research Conference are examples of such spaces though arguably, these still exist with the help of PWIs. The Transmission Gallery in Glasgow regularly features performances for all-BIPOC and or gender non-conforming audiences. Events such as these that are led by and for minoritarian organisers I think are an important investment for our communities. They offer a space for us to breathe outside of whiteness even if just for a moment.

Violent Accumulation helped me to realise that it is not my job to help address the WECM thought crisis. WECM's actions, from the banning of my piece at RCS to other racist interactions I have had in the field, have shown me that my perspectives, music, or thought are not respected. WECM demands that I assimilate and submit to its white supremacy. It does this at a micro-level when I am composing in the privacy of my own home and at a macro-level when I engage with WECM audiences and organisations. Why be a part of that parasitic cycle and continue to experience and experience the death of my Self? I have tried to explain to many (usually white men) in charge of PWIs about the violence behind the thought crisis – about the violence of white domination. I have used statistics, made presentations, and attempted to speak with white, British politeness. The only response I get is, "change is slow". I will be damned if I invest any more of my time to WECM.

I reiterate: I am not the first to do this and am certainly not the last. But I want to begin to suggest that we must extract our Selves from whiteness and the spaces it inhibits in order to even begin to address the so-called "crisis in global thought". We cannot do this from within it. Nor can we use any of its tools. This will only lead to the feeding of the parasitic relationship we hold with whiteness. We must work to centre our minoritarian experiences and to be unapologetic about it. We must stop letting whiteness distract our Selves with promises of a false liberation which will never come. *Violent Accumulation* showed me that even with the best intentions, statistics, and theory to back an argument, whiteness will vilify you and convince you that you are not white enough. Liberation does not exist in whiteness. The global crisis in thought is just a distraction keeping us from engaging with each other – a carrot posed in front of us to keep us drowning in whiteness. What might happen if we were to centre our Selves as a community? What might it mean to completely say no to

whiteness? Would it mean working elsewhere? Would it mean a realignment of values and priorities in your politics, culture, and economics? While Beltrán (2010) rightly articulates “the trouble with unity” amongst Latina/o/x communities, surely we can work past these differences and unite behind the consequences whiteness has had and continues to have on us?

Answering these questions may feel scary or terrifying – especially if you identify or are unconsciously an assimilationist. Early on in my life I was taught to “act white” to survive and to go through life unnoticed. I have since become a staunch anti-assimilationist though I fully acknowledge that we currently cannot completely live outside of whiteness. To do so would require an immense amount of privilege. However, by engaging with the questions I have asked above we may be able to at least begin to acknowledge that the crisis in global thought is a parasitic joke. Admitting this may allow us to begin to reorient ourselves closer to our minoritarian communities – the very same ones we have been taught are inferior. There is tremendous power in allowing ourselves to love our selves – this, I believe, is the ultimate thing we are being distracted from doing in whiteness and it is this distraction which I believe to be sustaining the perpetual crisis in global thought.

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