

*An Analysis and  
Discussion of  
Gregory J. Watson's  
"four textures for  
orchestra"*

Watson, Gregory James  
4-10-2020

*four textures for orchestra* was composed in the fall of 2018, which was my first semester as a Doctor of Musical Arts student in composition. This piece was also my first real attempt to compose for orchestra, assignments in orchestration classes aside. It is composed for a full symphonic orchestra and is approximately thirteen minutes in duration. There are four continuous movements, titled *one*, *two*, *three*, and *four* respectively. In Part I of this paper I will discuss the inspirations for and context of the piece. In Part II I will discuss the texture and orchestration of each movement. In Part III I will discuss the pitch and melodic content of each movement.

*four textures for orchestra* might have been called “*hommage a Mark Rothko*”. Like many other composers, I often turn to art forms other than music when looking for inspiration. In the case of *four textures for orchestra*, I turned to the visual arts. Specifically, I turned to the paintings of the abstract expressionist Mark Rothko. Each of the four movements of this piece takes inspiration from a separate Rothko piece. Rothko portrays in his works an aesthetic that I wanted to capture in *four textures for orchestra*. Researchers in the visual arts have written entire books detailing aesthetics in Rothko’s work, so instead I will express what his aesthetics mean to me. In Rothko’s paintings I find an aesthetic of quiet intensity, powerful yet reserved emotion, and a profound economy of material. These aesthetics are achieved in *four textures for orchestra* through the use of low dynamics (the strongest dynamic is mezzo-piano), extremes of range and duration, and a high contrast of consonance and dissonance. The extremes of range and duration will be explained further in my discussion of orchestration, and the high contrast of consonance and dissonance will be explained further in my discussion of pitch material.

Were Rothko alive today, and were he presented with this piece of music, he may find the aesthetic similarities to be relatively shallow. Rothko would refer to a very deep expression of human emotion in his work. Rothko is quoted saying:

... only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on. And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I can communicate those basic human emotions ... The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationship, then you miss the point.<sup>1</sup>

This quote contrasts with my intentions in composing *four textures for orchestra*. There is no greater point to be missed by solely focusing on color relationships. The various textures, colors, and motives do not represent anything deeper than the sounds themselves. While this expression of deep emotion and spirituality is common among abstract expressionists, a term Rothko rejected, it is not such a concern among their musical contemporaries. By musical contemporaries I am primarily referring to The New York School of artists. While not all abstract expressionists were a part of The New York School, the abstract expressionists of 1950’s New York are represented within this group. Among these artists are Philip Guston and

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacob Baal-Teshuva, Nicholas Levis, and Mark Rothko, *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: Pictures as Drama* (Köln: Taschen, 2017)

Rosemarie Beck.<sup>2</sup> There is also a group of composers and musicians included in The New York School. This group of composers included Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and Morton Feldman. All three of these composers have been influential to me, and all three had an impact on *four textures for orchestra*. Feldman found a similar aesthetic value in the work of Mark Rothko which can be seen in his work *Rothko Chapel*, written in 1971. Unlike Rothko, Feldman rarely used any influence from extramusical material in his work. *Rothko Chapel* seems to be the only work in which Feldman allowed this to happen. He is quoted saying:

...the only score where other factors determined what kind of music it was going to be, the only piece—and it will never happen again—when all kinds of facts, literary facts, reminiscent facts, came into the piece.<sup>3</sup>

Here, Feldman makes it clear that he is focused exclusively on the sounds themselves in his own compositions. However, the relationship to Rothko's work is still present through general temperament. The works of both artists are meditative and ethereal. Much like Rothko, Feldman found a signature style and used it repeatedly. This style was centered on low dynamics, often imperceptible meters, and sparse textures.<sup>4</sup> And yet, while Feldman had a signature style that is recognizable, he intentionally avoided specific compositional systems. These systems, such as serialism and its derivatives, allowed for elements of the music to be explained in an empirical way. Feldman actively strived to avoid these systems. In an interview with Francesco Pellizzi, he is quoted saying:

But he [Stravinsky] does it there are in such a magnificent way, in a sense, as a virtuoso. Strangely enough—it is something I never wanted to face and something I avoided even thinking about, and I'm going to see to it after I mention it now that I'm going to continue to avoid thinking about it — is that I appear to have much more virtuosity than I would like to admit to in terms of being able actually to write and complete a piece without a system. The onus of a composer in a sense is that there are no models and no examples that give you the security of music, which is not complete in itself in terms of some system. Consider just the way we would go to a craft show, a country fair... and we see people who are just painting in terms of a look, they never even heard of a light structure, and they're absolutely oblivious. You know, they have a blue background, they have a nice cheery face, and that's painting. While in music, in a sense, no matter what it might sound like, just to have that blue background, that nice cheery... it is impossible.<sup>5</sup>

Here Feldman acknowledges that not only does he not use a system, he considers himself to be quite adept at it. The process of composing *four textures for orchestra* was

---

<sup>2</sup> Mario Naves, "In the Know, and In the Thick Of It," *Observer* (Observer, November 13, 2007), <https://observer.com/2007/11/in-the-know-and-in-the-thick-of-it/>

<sup>3</sup> Gavin Bryars and Fred Orton, "Interview with Morton Feldman". *Studio International*, November 1976.

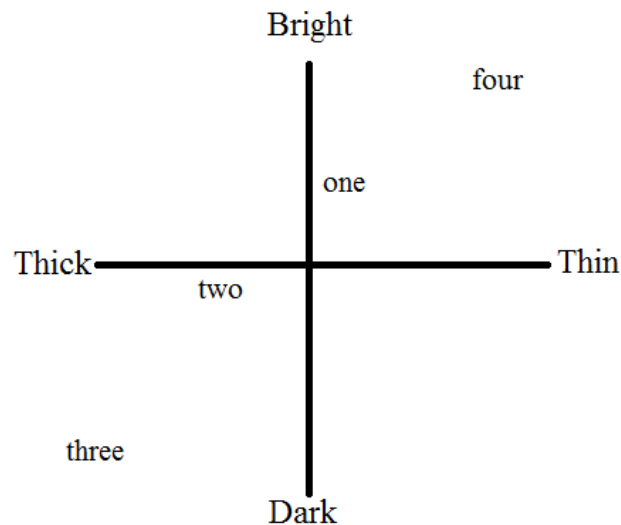
<sup>4</sup> Steven Johnson, "Rothko Chapel and Rothkos Chapel," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (1994): p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Morton Feldman and Francesco Pellizzi, "A Conversation on Music and Art: February 16, 1986," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 59/60 (2011): pp. 363-372

somewhere in between that of Feldman and that of someone like Boulez. While some of the decisions about the music were determined before any notes were on the page, some decisions were quite intuitive. I will begin the discussion of the music with the aspect of the music that was perhaps the most predetermined, which is the form.

## Part I

Form is generally the first aspect of a piece that I seek to understand, both in my own compositions and in the analysis of other pieces. The form of this piece was determined primarily by texture and color. In the initial stages of planning, I was thinking of each movement on a continuum from bright to dark in terms of color, and thin to thick in terms of texture. Example 1 shows approximately where each movement fell on that continuum in the stages of planning.



### Example 1

#### Texture and Color Relationships in *four textures for orchestra*

The continuum of bright to dark generally moves from bright to darker to darkest to brightest. Similarly, the continuum of thick to thin generally moves from thin to thicker to thickest to thinnest. Once this decision was made, I began the process of seeking artwork or other media that I could use as a source of inspiration. I was not looking for visual art necessarily, though I did want a separate source of inspiration for each movement and I wanted each source to be of the same medium. I quickly settled on the works of Mark Rothko, whose work I have enjoyed for many years. I searched through various online sources to find four of his works that I felt generally fit the

continuum of each movement. The painting that was decided upon for *one* was *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*, see Example 2. This painting was created in 1950 and features the most colors of any of the other paintings chosen for this piece. It is perhaps Rothko's most famous work and certainly his most lucrative. In 2007 *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)* sold at auction for 72.84 million United States dollars.<sup>6</sup>



Example 2

Mark Rothko, *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*<sup>7</sup>

The most prominent color in this painting, in my opinion, is pink. The choice of having a single prominent color for each painting will become significant in my discussion of pitch material. *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)* seemed to be an appropriate choice for *one* for several reasons. The combination of pink, white, and yellow seems to portray a tone that is slightly brighter than it is dark. The blocks of color are also relatively consistent. The pink block is nearly the same shade of pink throughout. This consistency of color, to me, portrays a texture that is thinner than it is thick. While it is thin, it is still does not portray the transparency I would be looking for with *four*.

The painting that was chosen for *two* was *Untitled (Blue Divided by Blue)*, see Example 3. This painting was created in 1966 and utilizes only different shades of blue. These shades of blue are a brighter and more optimistic counterpart to some of the dark

---

<sup>6</sup> TodayShow, "Rothko Painting Sets Postwar Record," TODAY.com, May 16, 2007, <https://www.today.com/popculture/rothko-painting-sets-postwar-record-wbna18688425>

<sup>7</sup> Mark Rothko, *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*, 1950, acrylic paint on canvas, The Royal Family of Qatar.

color palettes used by the artist around this time.<sup>8</sup> This optimism is portrayed through the motivic material presented in *two*, which will be discussed later.



Example 3  
Mark Rothko, *Untitled (Blue Divided by Blue)*<sup>9</sup>

While there are multiple shades of blue in this painting, I used the generic term “blue” as the most prominent color. I found this painting to be a good choice for *two* because it is a clear departure from *one*. The abundance of one general color suggests a continuity of material. As blue is considered by many people to be a calming color, this painting also suggests an overall feel that is less abrasive.

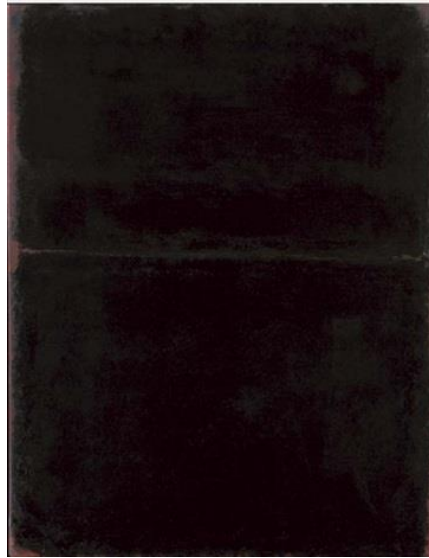
The painting that was chosen for *three* was *Black, Black on Wine*, see Example 4. *Black, Black on Wine* was completed in 1968, shortly before Rothko’s suicide. It features two large black squares that cover the majority of the canvass. The two squares are slightly blended together at their top and bottom edges, respectively. The edges feature a subtle, deep red. From a distance, this painting appears to be completely black. The monolithic darkness that is exuding from this painting is in clear contrast to the previous two works. It is by far the darkest and features the smallest number of distinguishable colors. The darkness in this painting is deeper than a simple color choice. Rothko committed suicide in 1970, and his last series of paintings have been dubbed the *Black Paintings*. As the name suggests, this series of paintings consists of works that feature the color black most prominently. Jennifer Blessing, on the *Black Paintings*, has stated, “The

---

<sup>8</sup> “Now Contemporary Art Evening Auction,” rothko, mark untitled ( ||| contemporary art ||| sotheby's 107024lot3kr5ben, accessed April 1, 2020, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2007/contemporary-art-evening-auction-107024/lot.45.html>)

<sup>9</sup> Mark Rothko, *Untitled (Blue Divided by Blue)*, 1966, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas.

Black Paintings, begun in the year before the artist's suicide, confirm Rothko's belief that his work encompassed tragedy. The desolation of canvases such as *Untitled (Black on Gray)*, drained of color and choked by a white border—rather than suggesting the free-floating forms or veiled layers of his earlier work—indicate that, as Rothko asserted, his paintings are about death.<sup>10</sup>



Example 4  
Mark Rothko, *Black, Black on Wine*<sup>11</sup>

I used black as the most prominent color in this painting. *Black, Black on Wine* is a good source of inspiration for *three* because it is thick with one color and significantly darker than any of the other paintings used for this piece. While *four textures for orchestra* does not reference any extra-musical ideas about darkness, the severity and weight of Rothko's mental illness and addictions are shown in this painting. As such, dark timbres, thick orchestration, and low voices are all used to show the weight of such a piece of art.

The final painting, and the one chosen for *four*, was *Untitled (1947)*, see Example 5. Should one simply do a google search for a Rothko painting of this title, they would likely find many other paintings as well. Rothko created multiple works simply called *Untitled* in 1947. In fact, Rothko gave the *Untitled* moniker to many works throughout his life. Perhaps this started because of the transitional nature of these works. It was around 1947 that Rothko began painting in what would become his signature style, using various blocks of color throughout the plane.<sup>12</sup> *Untitled (1947)* features two large blocks

---

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Blessing, "Untitled (Black on Gray)," Guggenheim, January 23, 2020, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3535>

<sup>11</sup> Mark Rothko, *Black, Black on Wine*, 1968, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas.

<sup>12</sup> "Untitled (#17), 1947 by Mark Rothko," Mark Rothko - paintings, prints, biography and Mark Rothko Artwork, accessed April 3, 2020, <http://www.markrothko.org/untitled-17/index.html>

of varying shades of grey which are divided by a bar of gradually changing shades of grey.



Example 5

Mark Rothko, *Untitled (1947)*<sup>13</sup>

I used grey as the primary color in this painting. *Untitled (1947)* is by far the palest of the works used for inspiration for *four textures for orchestra*. If one references Example 1, they will see that *four* was in the top right corner of the diagram, indicating a bright color and a thin texture. A more accurate descriptor for my intentions with this movement, however, would be pale. The consistency of color palette with few breaks across the canvass are represented with sustained pitches, an economy of pitch material, and thin orchestration. Again, all of these will be discussed further in their respective places in this paper.

## Part II

These paintings were represented primarily through texture and orchestration. I used texture and orchestration in *four textures for orchestra* to convey my perceived moods from the paintings and my expressions of color. These colors are not objective in the same sense that bright and dark sounds are, which can be measured empirically.

---

<sup>13</sup> Mark Rothko, *Untitled (1947)*, 1947, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas.



These are the primary colors I had decided upon for each painting and, as such, are more subjective. In *one*, I wanted to express my musical conception of the color pink for *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*. Refer to Examples 1 and 2. Pink is represented in *four textures for orchestra* almost exclusively through high strings and high woodwinds. Bowed crotales are also used to blend with the high strings in touch fourth harmonics. The specific woodwinds used are flutes one and two, oboes one and two, and clarinets one and two. While the woodwinds and strings are all working together as one entity, they are two separate sonic areas. Even within the woodwinds used, there are many timbral differences. This creates layers within the orchestral colors. The first layer is the string section. The string section of an orchestra, much like a string quartet, is known for its homogenous sound. This is amplified by the fact all the strings are using harmonics. See Example 6. If only the lower strings were using harmonics it would be easier to keep all the strings in a similar range but it would create timbral differences. By having all strings use the same kind of artificial harmonic, timbral unity is achieved within the section.

The image shows a musical score for four string instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The music is in 4/4 time. A box labeled 'A' is placed above the first measure of the Violin I staff. The score illustrates staggered and pointillistic entrances, where notes are often separated by rests, creating a fragmented texture. The Violin I part starts with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest. The Violin II part starts with a half note, followed by a quarter rest, and then a half note. The Viola part starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note, and then a quarter rest. The Violoncello part starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note, and then a quarter rest.

Example 6

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, mm. 11-14

In Example 6, one can already see the pointillistic entrances of the strings. This staggered and pointillistic texture is reflected throughout the ensemble for this movement. These entrances create harmonies that slowly fade in and out of existence and are generally separated by rests. Separate harmonies that are separated by rests are indicative of the sound blocks present in *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*. While the blocks of sound are clearly their own entities, the gradual entrances and fades of these blocks make the exact boundaries fuzzy.

The use of these fuzzy boundaries is present in the form as well. The second movement, *two*, has no distinct beginning or ending. This movement is gradually introduced through new instruments and a new motive at the end of *one*. The first introduction of this motive is heard in the bassoons, see Example 7. This introduction to



Example 7

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, mm. 36-38

the motive is only a fuzzy representation of the motive as it is used in *two*, but that will be discussed later in the sections on pitch material. The first indicator that the piece is moving to a new section is the introduction of brass instruments. Horn and trumpet enter the texture in m. 35, signaling that *one* is nearing an end. Regardless of where the boundary between *one* and *two* is, a listener will understand that the piece is firmly in the second movement after the horn plays the melodic motive in mm. 39-40. The final pitch of this motive is articulated by flute two. Flute two enters on an accented, mezzo piano E4. This is significant for several reasons. The flute in this lower register is a new color for the piece, it is articulated with a flutter tongue, and it is the first time a dynamic higher than pianissimo has been used. The flute then decays to a pianissimo. This attack and decay is paired with bassoon and trombone, which use the opposite dynamic envelope. The bassoon enters on a pianissimo E4 with the trombone on an E3. These two instruments then swell to a mezzo piano. The effect of the bassoon and trombone paired with the flute in a unison and an octave is that of a gradual change of color. This color changing gesture soon becomes more prominent in the movement.

As Horn 1 repeats this motive, Horn 2 joins with the same motive separated by an eighth note. The horns consistently repeat this motive, always separated slightly by time. The amount of time by which they are separated is never consistent, however. This rhythmic inconsistency is mirrored by durational inconsistency. Occasionally one voice will sustain a particular pitch of the motive a bit longer, or a bit shorter. These inconsistencies become more pronounced as more instruments begin playing the motive. This creates what Gerard Grisey would call fuzzy periodicity.<sup>14</sup> The listener can generally tell what will happen, but they are not able to detect specifically how or when it will happen. Though as more instruments are added to the texture, this periodicity becomes a bit less fuzzy. Eventually Trombone 1, Bassoon 1, Bass Clarinet, and Bb Clarinet 1 all join in playing the motive at various time intervals. Once all these instruments have joined in playing the motive, rhythmic regularity begins to take over. This is because the focus is now beginning to shift to color, rather than motive and rhythm. This shift to focusing on color becomes more apparent as other instruments join in the crescendo and

<sup>14</sup> Gerard Grisey, "Tempus Ex Machina: A Composer's Reflections on Musical Time," *Contemporary Music Review* 2, no. 1 (1987): pp. 239-275.

decay idea of the flute, bassoon, and trombone from earlier. Flutes, oboes, Clarinet 2, Bassoon 2, Trumpet 2, and Trombone 2 all begin entering on single pitches. Each instrument is paired with another instrument of similar range but contrasting color. Within each pair, one instrument begins with a sharp attack and a quick fade and the other begins softly and quickly fades into a higher dynamic.

All these sharp entrances and quick dynamic and color changes eventually begin to mask the motive being played underneath. The motive, while having dynamic swells, begins with a soft attack. The rhythmic displacement of the motive begins to be masked, and the result is closer to a wash of sound and color. This is emphasized by the string drones that enter in mm. 53-54. The resulting texture is one continuous block of sound that is constantly shifting and evolving. This could be likened to a body of water. The body of water is continuous, yet always moving. The water constantly has waves and ripples. The comparison of *two* to a body of water is emphasized when one returns to the painting by which it was inspired.

Much in the same way that the activity began increasing in *two*, it begins to slow. The sharp attacks and color contrasts begin to occur less frequently, and the staggered entrances of the motivic material begin to fade away. Soon only drones are left, and these drones are the connective tissue to *three*. The drones occur in the low strings, low brass, and low winds on C3 and C2. This low, soft, octave drone is meant to evoke a feeling of emptiness. I find this same feeling of emptiness to be evoked in Rothko's *Black, Black on Wine*. This feeling of emptiness is also evoked in the melodic material. Soli violin 2, soli viola, bassoon, and marimba have an interplay of quickly moving passages that are separated by significant amounts of space. See Example 8.

The image shows a musical score for strings and percussion, labeled as Example 8. It consists of six staves. The top two staves are for strings, with the second staff marked 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The bottom two staves are for percussion. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure shows a string entry with a sharp attack followed by a quick fade, and a percussion entry with a soft attack followed by a quick fade. The second measure shows a string entry with a soft attack followed by a quick fade, and a percussion entry with a sharp attack followed by a quick fade. The third measure shows a string entry with a sharp attack followed by a quick fade, and a percussion entry with a soft attack followed by a quick fade. The overall texture is one of continuous, shifting sound.

Example 8

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*  
mm. 104-106, strings and percussion

This emptiness soon gets filled in with thicker drones. While no new voices are added to the drones, close dissonances are added in low registers to make the orchestration sound thicker. See Example 9. This low dissonance does not affect the melodic lines other than by helping to fill the gaps in between the gestures. As the

Example 9

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, mm. 107-110

movement continues, higher voices are eventually added to the drones. This is done solely to connect *three* and *four*. While the connective tissue between *three* and *four* is the use of drones, they are used in a much different way. The drones in *four* are exclusively in a high register. Much like *three*, these drones are in unisons and octaves. Unlike *three*, however, this is not meant to evoke a feeling of emptiness. Rather, this is meant to convey spaciousness. The drones in *four* are comprised of high strings on touch fourth harmonics, Flute 1, oboes, clarinets, and eventually trumpets with cup mutes. While these instruments all fade in and out of the texture, affecting the color, the primary color that is meant to be heard is the high strings. The “glassy” sound of the high strings on harmonics is the color that is meant to define the movement. Like *three*, *four* uses melodic interplay between instruments. The instruments used in this interplay are piccolo and crotales. The piccolo and crotales contrast in articulation. The piccolo uses more sustain while the crotales are choked, creating a more staccato articulation.

### Part III

In the beginning of Part II, I say that the paintings are primarily represented through texture and orchestration. While this is true, it is not to say that the paintings are only represented in this way. The pitch material for each movement is derived, at least in some way, from these paintings. Specifically, the primary color I assigned to each painting played a large role in the pitch material used. To find pitch material out of these colors, I looked to each color’s respective RGB numbers.

In *one*, based on Rothko’s *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*, I used pink as the primary color. When looking up the RGB numbers for pink, I found the color that was used to demonstrate light pink was more fitting for *one*. As such, I used the

RGB numbers for light pink, being rgb (255,182,193). My conversion of these numbers was not complex. Ignoring duplicate numbers, the numbers in ascending order are 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9. Following the most basic principles of set theory, these numbers would translate to the pitch classes C#, D, Eb, F, G#, and A. I did not adhere to these pitches strictly. I simply used them as a base from which I could create more musical material. These pitches also do not carry equal weight, at least not at the beginning of the movement. The first two clusters<sup>15</sup> highlight a minor third between D and F. This minor third is prominent in the clusters from mm. 1-17. The minor third of D and F begins to feel a bit like a tonic dyad. Throughout the movement, however, new pitches are introduced to destabilize this perceived tonic.

In m. 20, the first pitch class that is not a part of the original set is introduced. This pitch class is C natural. See Example 10. Keep in mind that the score is transposed. This C natural was chosen for several reasons. The first was for the “melodic” line in that instrument (Bb Clarinet). This melodic line (up a perfect fourth, down a major second) is an allusion to the melody in *two*. Another purpose for the C natural is to act as a dissonance against the previous C#, which has become a prominent pitch by m. 20. The first G natural to appear in *one* occurs in m. 24 in Oboe 2. The inclusion of this pitch was much more intuitive. To my ear, a G natural just sounded better in that sonority than a G#. While it does contrast with the G#s that precede and follow it, the dissonance against these pitches was not the reason for inclusion. The final melodic cells in *one* follow a similar contour to the melody in *two*. However, these utilize more primary pitches from *one*, being C#, F, and D. See Example 7.



Example 10

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, mm. 19-21

The pitch material for *two* used the RGB numbers much less strictly. The RGB numbers for blue are rgb (0, 0, 255). Using the same methods as before, these numbers translate to the pitch classes C, D, and F. I wanted to use the minor third as a prominent

<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this movement, I will use the word “cluster” to refer to vertical groups of pitches that are separated by rests.

interval again but wanted variance from the D-F dyad used in *one*. I transposed the D and F down a semitone, resulting in the pitch classes C, C#, and E. To this set I added the pitch class F# to create the melody of C#-F#-E. See Example 11. Keep in mind, the instruments shown are Horn in F and the score is transposed. This melody is a variant of a prominent melody in a piece I composed in 2011, called *Aeternum Vale*. This piece has not been performed since the premier and at this point even the performers would likely not recognize the melodic reference. However, that melody became a favorite of mine and was used in *Aeternum Vale* to reflect placidity. A similar state of being is meant to be evoked in *two*.



Example 11

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, mm. 41-42

The non-melodic instruments that are used to create changes of color use the same pitch material as the melodic elements. In m. 62, a C natural is introduced in the viola line. This provides an unexpected dissonance to the prominent C# and F#. The melodic instruments gradually begin introducing C natural as the first note of the melodic line. Quickly following this, the melodic instruments begin replacing F# in the melodic line with F natural. By m. 69, all melodic instruments are playing the melody of C-F-E, and the non-melodic instruments have begun playing C and E, as opposed to C# and E. The F was included as a part of the melody because the intervallic structure of up a fourth, down a minor second is the exact quote of the melody used in *Aeternum Vale*. This consonance of this melody, which outlines a major third, is made even more striking by the dissonant transition that precedes it.

The prominent color in Rothko's *Black, Black on Wine* is black. The RGB numbers for black are rgb (0, 0, 0). This would translate solely to pitch class C. I had sketched some ideas that only used pitch class C, but ultimately decided against it because I felt they did not accurately convey the weight and darkness of *Black, Black on Wine*.<sup>16</sup> However, given the RGB numbers for black, I still felt that pitch class C should be the basis for this movement. For that reason, *three* contains a constant C drone throughout the movement. To create the thick and dark texture that I wanted, two dissonant pitch classes are used against the drone. These two pitch classes are Db and Gb.

<sup>16</sup> The idea of composing with a single pitch class is one that I explored later in my piece *quartet no.1 for strings*.

Db and Gb are gradually inserted into the drone, though never at the lowest octave. While I wanted the dissonance to be low to create a muddy sound, reserving the lowest pitch for C allows that pitch class to maintain its place in the hierarchy of pitch classes. The melodic interplay in *three* also uses pitch classes C, Db, and Gb. However, in these melodic parts, a fourth and final pitch class is introduced, being Ab. The addition of the Ab allowed me to create more interesting contours and melodies. See Examples 12 and 13.



Example 12

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, m. 116

Example 13

Gregory J. Watson, *four textures for orchestra*, mm. 124-127

In *four*, Rothko's *Untitled* (1947) served as the inspiration for the textures. I chose grey as the most prominent color in this painting. The RGB numbers for grey are rgb (128, 128, 128). These numbers would represent the pitch classes C#, D, and G#. However, after sketching ideas for this movement, I found myself dissatisfied with the results. As I have used the word "pale" as a descriptor for this movement, I chose instead to use the RGB numbers for white. The RGB numbers for white are rgb (255, 255, 255). These numbers would represent the pitch classes D and F. These two pitch classes are the only pitch classes used throughout the movement. The use of only these two pitch classes, both melodically and in the drone, creates a feeling of stasis. The dyad of D-F is also referential to *one*, where D-F is viewed as a temporary tonic dyad. The minor third drone is present throughout the movement until the very end. After a period of rest, violins and violas sustain octave Ds. The following silence is the longest silence in the piece, which is interrupted by a single D in the crotales. This final D finishes the piece.

## **Part IV**

This paper has demonstrated the aesthetic influences surrounding *four textures for orchestra* and how those influences impacted and shaped the form, orchestration, and pitch content of the piece. The influence of The New York School of composers helped guide stylistic decisions and led me to the abstract expressionist art of Mark Rothko. These paintings became the basis for the overall mood of each movement, the orchestration and textures, and the pitch content for each movement. Each movement is connected to the others in some way. These connections are present through the use of drone, pitch content, and treatment of melodic material. These movements are also, more literally, connected by the continuous nature of the form. The continuous form is a representation of the connectivity of all forms of art, and how expression transcends medium.



## Works Cited

- Baal-Teshuva, Jacob, Nicholas Levis, and Mark Rothko. *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: Pictures as Drama*. Köln: Taschen, 2017.
- Blessing, Jennifer. "Untitled (Black on Gray)." Guggenheim, January 23, 2020. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3535>.
- Bryars, Gavin and Fred Orton. "Interview with Morton Feldman". *Studio International*, November 1976.
- Feldman, Morton and Francesco Pellizzi, "A Conversation on Music and Art: February 16, 1986," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 59/60 (2011): pp. 363-372.
- Grisey, Gerard. "Tempus Ex Machina: A Composer's Reflections on Musical Time," *Contemporary Music Review* 2, no. 1 (1987): pp. 239-275.
- Johnson, Steven. "Rothko Chapel and Rothkos Chapel." *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 2 (1994): 6.
- Naves, Mario. "In the Know, and In the Thick Of It," *Observer* (Observer, November 13, 2007), <https://observer.com/2007/11/in-the-know-and-in-the-thick-of-it/>.
- "Now Contemporary Art Evening Auction." hockney, david li ||| contemporary art ||| sotheby's 107024lot3ds7cen. Accessed April 9, 2020. <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2007/contemporary-art-evening-auction-107024/lot.29.html>.
- Rothko, Mark. *Black, Black on Wine*, 1968, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas.
- Rothko, Mark. *Untitled (1947)*, 1947, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas.
- Rothko, Mark. *Untitled (Blue Divided by Blue)*, 1966, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas.
- Rothko, Mark. *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*, 1950, acrylic paint on canvas, The Royal Family of Qatar.
- TodayShow. "Rothko Painting Sets Postwar Record." TODAY.com, May 16, 2007. <https://www.today.com/popculture/rothko-painting-sets-postwar-record-wbna18688425>.
- "Untitled (#17), 1947 by Mark Rothko." Mark Rothko - paintings, prints, biography and Mark Rothko Artwork. Accessed April 9, 2020. <http://www.markrothko.org/untitled-17/index.html>.