
Towards ‘a beautiful land’: Compositional strategies and influences in *Five Panels (no.5)*

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Abstract

Five Panels (no.5) is an experimental electronic composition that takes as its starting point the classic (post-1949) abstract paintings of Mark Rothko. As a result, and in contrast to my previous works, *Five Panels (no.5)* is more minimal regarding its gestural content and makes less use of teleologically oriented structuring processes. The work focuses more on the details within each sound and on subtle shifts in timbre and acoustic space. This article will cover the influence of Rothko and abstract expressionism more broadly on the work. The spiritual quality of Rothko’s paintings is also investigated. As essentially abstract works, I am keen to understand how Rothko’s works, and, as an extension to this, abstract music can communicate a sense of spirituality with specific reference to *Five Panels (no.5)*. Finally, the immersive quality of Rothko’s classic paintings, due both to their size and the painters obsessive control over the conditions and placement of the paintings in galleries, is discussed in relation to the use of surround sound in *Five Panels (no.5)*.

The Influence of Abstract Expressionism

The influence of painting on my previous compositional work has at times been quite direct and literal¹. The Futurist techniques of divisionism and dynamism have played a particularly significant role in determining how I process and structure elements within a composition. Whilst my appropriation of these techniques is a personal one, the influence of visual art on composers is not. A diverse range of composers have noted the influence of visual art on their music. Bryn Harrison has extensively documented the influence of Bridget Riley on his instrumental work, and the microsound composer Taylor Deupree often cites Hiroshi Sugimoto, Donald Judd and Tadao Ando as important figures that inform his approach to sound. Perhaps of most pertinence to this article is the influence of Mark Rothko and Philip Guston on the work of Morton Feldman. Feldman often used references to the visual arts in order to elucidate his own music and himself stressed his connections with abstract expressionism. Feldman considered that his music lay ‘between categories, between time and space, between painting and music,’² and wrote that ‘the score is my canvas, this is my space. What I do is try to sensitize this area – this time-space...’³ In *Five Panels (no.5)* the concepts of both time and space are particularly important. I regard the use of surround sound as means of sensitizing the acoustic space for the listener to inhabit, just as Rothko hung multiple paintings in close proximity (as in Tate Modern, London) in order to fill the viewer’s gaze as well as their peripheral vision. Similar sentiments concerning the relation between painting and music are expressed by Rothko who said ‘I became a painter because I wanted to raise painting to the level of poignancy of music and poetry.’⁴ Though Rothko’s aspirational credo contains echos of both Kandinsky, who stated in ‘Concerning the Spiritual in Art’ that he wanted to translate the emotional impact of music into his art and even, to an extent Aristotle, who asserted in *De Sensu et Sensibilibus* that ‘we may regard all colours as analogous to the sounds that enter into music,’⁵ the constant aesthetic dialogue that went on between Feldman, Guston, Rothko and other composers and artists in New York in the 1940/50s is perhaps unparalleled. This kinship was perhaps nowhere more clearly articulated than in Feldman’s *Rothko Chapel* (1971), to which I will refer to in more detail later.

¹ Adkins, M., ‘The Influence of Futurist Painting Techniques on My Music’, in *Proceedings of the Digital Music Research Network*, Leeds Metropolitan University, July 2007

² Feldman, M., ‘Between Categories’ in *The Composer* (Vol 1 No 2, September 1969) pp 73-77. Reprinted in *Contemporary Music Review* (Vol 2, 1988) p.1-5

³ Feldman quoted in Brian O’Doherty, *Feldman Throws a Switch*, *New York Times* (2 February 1964) p11

⁴ Rothko quoted in Breslin, J. *Mark Rothko*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.173

⁵ Aristotle, *De Sensu et Sensibilibus*, trans. Art Ross, New York: Arno Press, 1973

Towards the end of the 1940s the paintings of both Rothko and Guston moved from symbolic realism to abstraction. When referring to the early abstract paintings of Guston, John Cage considered them examples of 'a beautiful land'⁶. For me, Cage's comment seemed particularly apt as I have moved in the past few years, from an interplay of found sound objects typical of musique concrète to a more abstract and minimal musical syntax. This change in style is not merely a desire to use different sounds but a deeper recognition that abstraction has the ability to encourage the listener to become involved with a work in a very different way from one that uses fragments of environmental or other referential sound. Rothko and other abstract expressionists, particularly Barnett Newman also recognised that abstract painting encouraged a different form of engagement with the viewer than representational or figurative art. In their lack of any figurative content the paintings of Rothko, Guston and Newman engender a completely different emotive response on the part of the viewer. Rothko, when discussing the rectangular colour forms that are characteristic of his classic style, observed that,

every relationship implies an anecdote, not in the sense of a story which is simply an anecdote of human action, but in the sense of a philosophical narration of bringing all the related elements together to some unified end.⁷

This statement could equally be applied to *Five Panels (no.5)*. Whilst each sonic layer remains timbrally and spatially differentiated, there are relationships, however abstract, between them. Newman's awareness of this difference in perception of abstract art on the part of the viewer is expressed in his writings on his work *Onement I* (1948). Newman was also aware of the more minimal surface content in the paintings that both he and Rothko were creating as they more further and further into the realms of abstraction. Newman realised that prior to painting *Onement I* he was

filling the void with forms because he took for granted that the atmospheric approach was a prior condition of pictorial space. Much like Rothko, he had been occupying this space with gestures and marks that functioned like actors.⁸

Having read this, I realised that I too, had also taken for granted certain approaches to the production of electroacoustic music and electronica. In *Five Panels (no.5)* I see myself moving away from filling my compositions with numerous sonic actors that interact in various ways with their references to the everyday and also eschewing the overt teleological gestural language I have previously employed in my compositions. This shift away from the representation in sound of the everyday or concrete results in a different form of perception on the part of the listener. In *Five Panels (no.5)* the lack of concrete figuration or sonic references encourages a contemplation of 'otherness'. Michael Bridger considers this change in perception as a move from musique concrète's essentially metonymic mode of communication to the metaphoric mode of abstract music. Through his move to abstraction Rothko wanted 'to destroy the finite associations with which our society increasingly enshrouds every aspect of our environment.'⁹ The implication here and in Michael Bridger's writings, is that abstraction can encourage a deeper contemplation of the artwork. Like Newman, Rothko wanted the viewer to experience his pictures not just look at them. He wrote that,

the subject matter of abstraction is not familiar objects but quite real experiences and relationships of a more general kind. [Abstract works] use abstracted notions of shapes and emotions in plastic terms to establish unity in a superior category...¹⁰

For Rothko, abstraction did not imply a cool detachment. On the contrary, it allowed for a more direct communication of universal emotions. Death, ecstasy and tragedy were the emotive forces Rothko most often referred to in his writings and interviews. Sheldon Nodelman writes that Rothko,

insists on the experiential concreteness of abstract art and its capacity to meaningfully address the human condition. Moreover, he identifies the work's distinctive operative mode as that of generalization from particular things, events or feelings to broader, more universal relationships.¹¹

⁶ Cage quoted in *Philip Guston Retrospective*, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Thames and Hudson, 2003, p.45

⁷ Rothko, M., *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, ed. Christopher Rothko, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2004

⁸ Clearwater, B. ed., *The Rothko Book*, Tate Publishing, 2006, p.79

⁹ Rothko, M., 'The Romantics were Prompted', in *Possibilities no. 1*, Winter 1947-48, p.84

¹⁰ Nodelman, S., *Reading Rothko*, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1248/is_9_93/ai_n15734353/print

¹¹ *ibid* 9

The way that these universal relationships and emotions are communicated according to most critics is through Rothko's use of colour. Nodelman continues,

Rothko regards colour, with its inherent properties of projection and recession, as the most powerful formal agent for the realization of tactile plasticity. He contrasts the illusory plasticity achieved by the graying of colour to cause the represented objects to appear to recede into the distance (with the blurring of edges as a necessary corollary) with the more powerful effect conveyed by colors, which do not lend themselves to the representation of atmosphere at a distance but manifest an inherent dynamic of projection and recession that can be given unencumbered play. The latter generates a space invested with what he calls a 'tangibly mucous' character, a substantialized space that strengthens the tactile sensation by seeming to resist motion in any direction within it, thus causing the motion itself to be perceived by contrast as more powerful.¹²

Rothko, however, always maintained that his paintings were not about colour. This statement becomes somewhat clearer when one looks at three related paintings from the mid-1950s: *Untitled* (1955), *Yellow and Gold* (1956), and *Untitled* (1956). All three are made of yellow and orange/gold. The different emotive responses engendered by these three paintings are due to their varying degrees of colour saturation. The idea of *Five Panels*, as a complete cycle, is similar to the three paintings mentioned above from 1955/56: that is to take similar sonic material and through different sound processing and spatial manipulation to create five different but clearly related panels of sound. This concept and approach is somewhat akin to Feldman's description of his music as 'rearranging the same furniture in the same room'.¹³ In *Five Panels (no.5)* the varying degrees of 'saturation' are translated onto the timbral manipulation of sound, and colour to pitch. This correlation between timbre/saturation and colour/pitch is not merely a subjective response to the paintings. Ann Sarno's article concerning cross-modal approaches to Rothko's work highlights a number of scientific studies that ground these connections in concrete practice. Sarno clearly argues for a cross-modal approach where musical and colour/saturation effects have their pairs. This theory is further supported by Timothy Hubbard's article 'Synesthesia-like mappings of lightness, pitch and melodic interval'.¹⁴

As well as a synesthetic mapping of colour to sound, *Five Panels (no.5)* also employs a similar structure to Rothko's classic paintings. Rothko's superimposed rectangular blocks become blocks of sonic material, each with its own 'saturation' value and timbral colour. Though Rothko's work presents a flat pictorial surface, something Feldman himself talks of in relation to his own music in the notes to *For Frank O'Hara*, such titles by Rothko as *Black on Deep Purple* (1964) and Nodelman's discussion of 'projection and recession' clearly imply a hierarchy of layers. Yet this hierarchy still does not pertain to classical notions of perspective. It is a layering in, and through space, rather than perspective. Anne Chave recognises the kinaesthetic properties of these later paintings. Chave writes that Rothko's

rectangles did not simply define the picture plane: they may be seen as floating parallel to that surface, but they are also locked into spatial struggles both against the picture plain and against each other, as variously obtruding from and receding into space.¹⁵

Similarly Stephen Johnson writes of Rothko's work as,

an immobile procession [that] suggests the contradictory principles of stasis and movement, elements which permeate Rothko's classic paintings. Stability arises from rectangular shapes and symmetrical arrangements, flux from the ambiguous relation between the rectangles and the surface plane. Movement occurs not from side to side, but from front to back, as rectangles appear simultaneously to advance or recede.¹⁶

In *Five Panels (no.5)* there are five identifiable layers:

- 1) a continual sustained guitar harmonic 'ground'
- 2) processed guitar harmonics
- 3) sine-based sustains
- 4) individual guitar harmonics

¹² *ibid* 9

¹³ Feldman quoted in Peter Dickinson, 'Morton Feldman Explains himself' in *Music and Musicians 14*, no.11 (July 1966) p.22

¹⁴ Hubbard, T., 'Synesthesia-like Mappings of Lightness, Pitch and Melodic Interval' in *American Journal of Psychology* vol.109, no.2 Summer 1996, p.219-39

¹⁵ Clave, A., *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989

¹⁶ Johnson, S., 'Rothko Chapel and Rothko's Chapel', in *Perspectives of New Music*, vol.32, no.2, 1994, p.30

5) 'glitch' elements

What is important however, is not just the recognition of these sonic layers but also their relationship. Apart from the paintings produced for what was to become known as the Rothko Chapel, Rothko never used tape to delineate one block of material from another. In many instances in his work it is this lack of delineation combined with saturation of colour that creates the organic, intangible quality in his work. Rothko's style in the classic paintings is all to do with soft edges, blurring the boundaries between one horizontal bar and the next. The bars dematerialize at the edges. They are not independent entities they exist in relation to their surroundings. Stephen Johnson writes that, 'in some places they vaporize so unevenly and indeterminately that the viewer has difficulty distinguishing where one surface leaves off, and the other begins.'¹⁷ Johnson continues, 'rectangles are created from paint applied so thinly that in places the ground shows through. This often stimulates a pulsation between surfaces...'¹⁸ Instances in which the atemporal 'ground' (layer one) shows through in *Five Panels (no.5)* occur at 0'45, 4'10 and 6'15 where harmonic changes, glissandi, or slow melodic figures permeate the foreground layers.

Throughout *Five Panels (no.5)* sections, such as they exist, are either elided or drift into one another. On only one occasion is material starkly juxtaposed: the harmonic change at 3'30 (and only in layer four). Long-range connections between various types of sonic material throughout the composition recall instances in Rothko where a particular colour will mix with others in one surface layer, then disappear beneath one or two denser surfaces before re-emerging in a more concentrated form in a third. This happens in numerous instances as material comes to the fore only to become the background for the following section. This creates a timbral friction between layers. This is strengthened through correspondences in pitch as well as local gestural profile, particularly between layers two and four. In the *Five Panels (no.5)* each layer progresses at its own rhythmic pace. Layers occur (not 'progress') autonomously, only occasionally do they intersect at nominal section points. One example of such an intersection occurs at 3'30 where the glitch material comes to the fore, permeates the pitch layer and eventually triggers a harmonic change. In the composition there is both stasis and flux recalling Jonathan Kramer's discussion of eotemporality in music.

Immersion in the Sonic Space

A further characteristic of Rothko's classic paintings apart from their presentation of vertically stacked colour rectangles, is also their size. Rothko said,

I paint very large pictures... I realise that historically the function of painting large pictures is painting something grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them... is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However, you paint the larger picture, you are in it.¹⁹

In *Five Panels (no.5)* the desire to place the audience 'in' the piece is not only achieved through the use of surround sound but also by removing all visual cues by playing the work in as near darkness as possible. The idea of the transcendental and the direct relationship between the viewer and a painting or a listener and the sound is also strongly expressed in the live performances of Francisco López. López removes all references to the visual in his performances thereby removing the notion of a physical mediation and immediately creating a sense of 'otherness'. Francisco López in 'Against the Stage' writes that he persistently refuses to play on stage, even hiding his diffusion console in a small tent in the middle of the auditorium. López performs as much as possible in complete darkness. He writes,

Having nothing to contemplate visually in the traditional sense makes possible the departure from frontal sound. As opposed to the directionality of visual elements, sound is perceived coming from every direction.... In a live event this allows immersion, intensified phenomenological experience, to 'be inside' the sound instead of listening to it... Visual darkness lights up regions of the mindscape and the spirit that are normally dormant and darkened by visual light. The ear not only hears but also decisively influences our spatio-temporal perceptions. The combination of visual

¹⁷ ibid 15, p.36

¹⁸ ibid 15, p.38

¹⁹ Rothko quoted in Ross, C., ed., *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990, p.172

darkness and being ‘inside’ the sound (instead of listening to it) creates a strong feeling of immersion where your own body moves into the perceptive background.²⁰

Rothko had the desire to place the viewer in a very close physical relationship with the painting. In the Rothko Chapel, Rothko created a hermetic environment in which the paintings dominate, free from outside visual distractions. Feldman wanted to achieve a similar result in his work *Rothko Chapel* writing that ‘Rothko’s imagery goes right to the edge of his canvas, as I wanted the same effect with the music – that it should permeate the whole octagonal-shaped room and not be heard from a certain distance. The result is [that] the sound is closer, more physically with you than in a concert hall’²¹ Stephen Johnson writes that ‘Sensing that the room required sound to come from the sides, Feldman deployed his chorus antiphonally, forcing the listener to become ‘involved with the tonality’.²² Johnson writes that as the two choirs present different material and ‘By dividing this music into multiple layers – separated in physical space as well as by their musical content – Feldman achieves an effect akin to Rothko’s vibrating surfaces.’²³

Five Panels (no.5) attempts to simulate these vibrating surfaces through the use of surround sound. The listener is placed inside the acoustic space of the piece in order to achieve a sense of musical intimacy by means of sonic immersion. Each of the five layers of sonic material is projected in musical space in a different way. These differing trajectories are outlined below (fig.1):

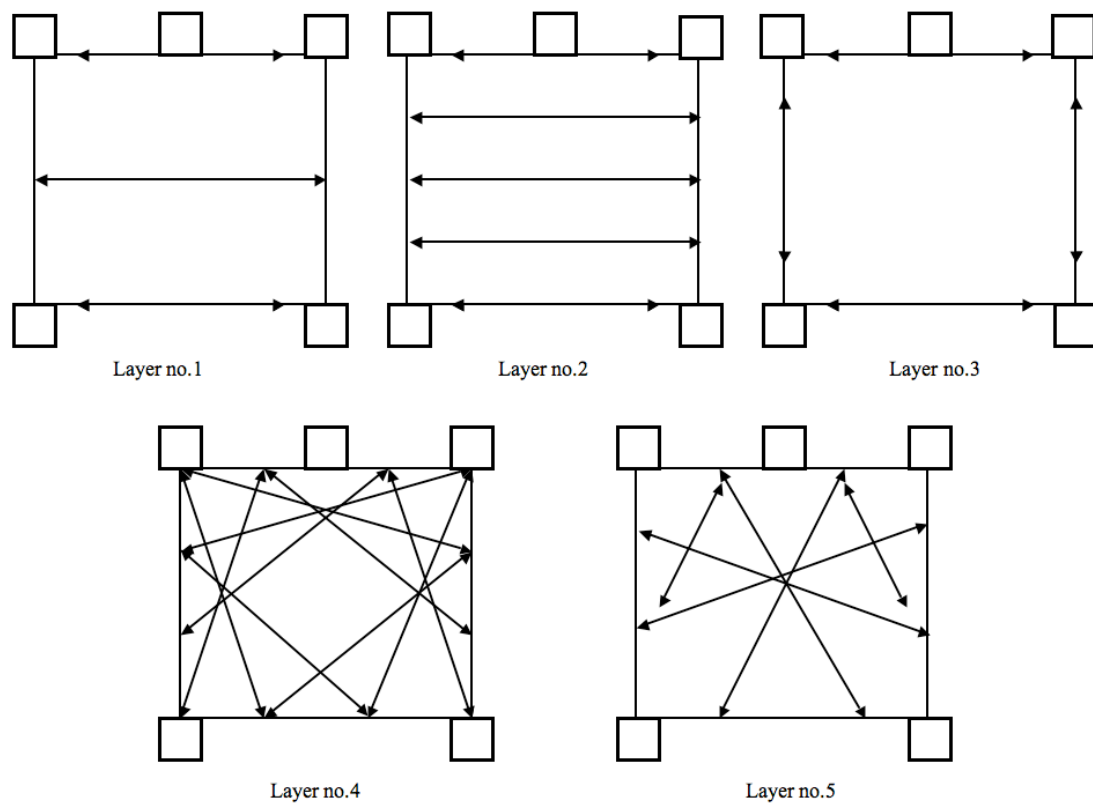


fig.1

Layer one provides the backbone of the entire work and is static in its spatial projection. This layer comprises a simple harmonic progression that has been extended to almost four minutes in length. As a result all functional harmonic movement becomes irrelevant. In Jonathan Kramer’s terms, this layer is atemporal and thus an example of vertical music. This first layer has elements of verticality within it on several levels:

- 1) the local harmonic activity focuses on the upward movement from a starting pitch

²⁰ López, F., *Against the Stage*, <http://www.fransiscolepez.net/stage.html>

²¹ Feldman, M., notes to *Rothko Chapel* (1971)

²² *ibid* 15, p.29

²³ *ibid* 15, p.39

- 2) at 4'10ff an extended glissandi leads to the same harmonic progression but at a higher pitch
- 3) the final glissando at 7'40ff continues until the end of the piece and gives the impression of the piece continuing to rise rather than stopping.

Layer three provides a counterpoint to layer one throughout the second half of the work. The overall contour of the two layers is very similar. In layer three, however, various types of rotational movement are implemented to provide a slow sense of movement providing a sense of 'pulsation' between the two layers. Similarly, layers two and four work in conjunction with one another. Layer four provides the sonic equivalent of Rothko's rectangular blocks of colour whilst layer two, in its distortion and blurring of this material, provides the 'Rothko edge' that separates the differing layers. The distortion, at its most extreme, also links timbrally to layer five – the glitch layer. For me, this layer represents the fine brushstrokes, the extreme fine detail on the surface of Rothko's paintings. These brushstrokes are most evident in the transparent areas that occur at the outmost edges of the rectangular blocks in the transition from one colour area to another.

In *Five Panels (no.5)* each layer is given a clear spatial trajectory. As layers one and three deal with bass frequencies and extremely pure tones they encircle the listener with little directional information. Layer four comprises the most complex layer in which ten sub-layers of guitar harmonics are distributed around the listener in an attempt to simulate Rothko's desire to draw the viewer into the picture. The frontal image is given over to higher pitches. Progressively lower tones are placed further and further towards the back. This process is repeated in layer two where the processed guitar harmonics again move from high to low as they move from front to back. This again provides an implied sense of verticality. The glitch layer works on a different axis, essentially left to right and front to back. A sense of proximity is further heightened by the lack of reverb. Overall, the conjoining of these layers results in a work that is immersive in which sounds emerge rather than moving in dramatic and dynamic ways. In this way, the listener is placed at the centre of the sonic space that the work inhabits and given time to reflect upon this. As is evident from the diagrams above, the use of spatialisation is essentially isotropic, that is each sound source is treated equally. Unlike a conventional 5.1 surround system, the left surround and right surround are not merely used for effect but are an integral part of the spatialisation process.

Spirituality and Time

In *Five Panels (no.5)* the soundworld is deliberately non-declamatory and the use of spatialisation is subtle. The piece is not intended to proceed on its own journey as an autonomous work, taking the listener along if they so choose. Rather the listener has to create their own journey through their own engagement with the work. Rothko expressed a similar sentiment concerning the role of the viewer. Rothko believed that artworks were not to be thought of as objects but as ongoing processes of communication, in which the participation of the spectator was vital. 'A picture lives by companionship...expanding and quickening in the eyes of the sensitive observer. It dies by the same token.'²⁴ The work was thus to be fulfilled in the observer's existential encounter with it. Ann Sarno writes that 'without figurative representation, onlookers do not merely observe but experience.'²⁵

Similarly in *Five Panels (no.5)*, I do not want the audience merely to listen. I want them to experience. What this experience is will obviously depend on an individual's level of engagement with the music. One of the reasons, or need, for this increased level of engagement on the part of the listener is that I am trying to direct them as little as possible. Although *Five Panels (no.5)* has recognisable sound objects, textures, and timbres that come to the fore, disappear, and return this process is cyclical and essentially non-teleological. Jonathan Kramer in *The Time of Music* maintains that,

If a nonteleological piece is to be appreciated and enjoyed, the listener must become a creative participant in making the music... the listener can thus become *more* important to the music than the composer. In this way he or she becomes a part of the music, and thus the distinction between the self and the other, the listener and the music, is minimized.²⁶

The last part of this quotation is of particular interest to me as it goes some way to begin to explain how Rothko's paintings and indeed *Five Panels (no.5)* can be interpreted as 'spiritual'. The loss of 'self' is a part of many religions path to transcendence or enlightenment. Yet how do we communicate

²⁴ Rothko, M., article for *Tiger's Eye*, no.2, 1947, p.44, quoted in Clearwater, B. ed., *The Rothko Book*, Tate Publishing, 2006

²⁵ Sarno, A. 'Mark Rothko: A Cross-Modal Approach', in *Elements*, Spring 2006, p.64

²⁶ Kramer, J., *The Time of Music*, Schirmer Books, New York & London, 1988, p.384

spirituality in art? Rothko always maintained that his art was not really abstract, that it dealt with primal human emotions. He was also keen to emphasize the spiritual content of his work maintaining that 'people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them.'²⁷

Whilst Western music has up until the mid twentieth century concerned itself with an increasingly teleological linear complexity in which motivic argument, progression and resolution battle it out, renaissance, medieval music and plainchant clearly work at a different level. Jonathan Harvey when talking about Bernard of Clerveaux comments that

Plain Chant is a sea. Your past is still present while going into the future. The monks would sustain this sea of sound for maybe 24 hrs in shift. People at that time lived in sound as a physical substance. It bound a community together and music was not about performance but was an inward meditation... there is even the ancient notion that matter can be transformed through music, and that particular types of music, or chants have a particular correspondence to the body, and to states of spiritual elevation²⁸

Elevation here is an important concept as it implies verticality. Rothko's vertically stacked rectangles also imply elevation or grounding. The sensation is achieved through colour and saturation. Ann Sarno and the scientist Bulat M. Galeyev have written about this sensation regarding the cross-modal effect of colour on our perception of gravity. This vertical arrangement is an important element in the iconography of western religion. Christ, as the light of the world, is often represented physically in the western church through the candle. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard dedicated three books to the image of fire and wrote a separate one on the flame of a candle. In that book, his focus is on the vertical nature of the flame. The heaven to hell of the vertical connection is emphasised. In 'The Future of Beauty: Gaston Bachelard as Guide', Joanne Stroud writes,

The beauty of the universe can pull one in a horizontal awareness but more often into a verticalizing mode, leading to an invitation to transcendence. Through making an imaginal connection, through an upward vertical movement...²⁹

Bachelard himself writes,

All upright objects point to a zenith... Living at the zenith of the upright object, gathering reveries of verticality, we experience a transcendence of being. The image of verticality brings us into the realm of values. In communing through imagination with the verticality of an upright object we experience the beneficial influence of lifting forces, we participate in the hidden fire dwelling in beautiful forms, forms assured of their verticality³⁰

There is a strong connection between the vertical presentation of the sonic layers in *Five Panels (no.1)* with the essentially non-teleological form of the work. This relationship between the non-teleological, verticality and time is something also important to Jonathan Harvey who writes,

you can't get into this [spirituality] if you are involved in the traditional argument and tensions of Western music, or into melody, because it moves too quickly. But you do find tension in the nature of the sound's radiance. It is not rhythmic. It's not pounding, not arguing. It is a dwelling in sound, a being rather than a becoming. You lose the duality between you and the music... This study of sound in itself has long existed in the East. Japanese flute players practice on a single note for hours. They listen to the spirit of the sound. This becomes the universe; they don't have to move with melody. It becomes very delicate. It's a different metaphysics of time; it is moving to medieval music and on before that.³¹

Harvey here identifies an interesting concept: a different sense of time. Does our sense of spirituality have its origin in the manipulation of time? Is spirituality merely a construct that through its manipulation of our everyday linear notion of time manifests a sense of 'otherness'? Bachelard in *La*

²⁷ Rothko quoted in Rodman, S., *Conversations with Artists*, New York, The Devin-Adair Co., 1957, p.93-94

²⁸ Peat, D., Interview with Jonathan Harvey, 24th May 1996, <http://www.f davidpeat.com/interviews/harvey.htm>

²⁹ Stroud, J. *The Future of Beauty: Gaston Bachelard as Guide*, <http://www.dallasinstitute.org/Programs/Previous/FALL00/talktext/jstroud.htm>

³⁰ Bachelard, G., *The Flame of a Candle*, The Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas, 1988, p.39

³¹ *ibid* 27

Dialectique de la durée (1936) considers duration a construct and argues for a plurality of times. Mary Jones when critiquing Bachelard, writes that,

As a dreamer too, he knows that time is discontinuous and plural: in the dream he recounts, incoherencies due to the dislocation of verbal and visual time... Bachelard argues that the different, discontinuous times the dream reveals are still there in waking life, superimposed the one upon the other in what he calls vertical time.³²

Bachelard was not the first to connect the realm of dreams with timelessness. Freud similarly maintained that both dreams and the unconscious were timeless. Freud wrote that,

the processes of the [unconscious]... are timeless; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all.³³

However, it is not just in the realm of dreams that we experience timelessness. The psychoanalyst Peter Hartocollis writes that,

when a person becomes preoccupied with the idea of time, he is no longer able to experience affects in a meaningful way.... On the contrary, when one is not concerned with time, one is likely to see oneself as happy – timelessness or the sense of eternity being identified with the condition of ecstasy... The essence of [this] mystical experience... is in its complete freedom from any sensual or aggressive wish, the freedom from internal pressure and perception of the surrounding world as devoid of any exciting elements, threatening or promising possibilities. The concept of time as a dimension of reality that defines self from object... is cancelled and replaced by a sense of unity... The remarkable thing about such a condition is that the person who experiences it does not lose consciousness of either himself or the surrounding reality... On the contrary, he is allegedly able to have a broader sense of reality concerning himself as well as the world around him.³⁴

When listening to a piece of music, a loss of personal identity or focus on the self has to do with the temporary dislocation with our processing of musical information and our memory, and identification with this sonic information. In his article ‘The Auditive memory and its function in the late works of Morton Feldman’, Bryn Harrison discusses how duration relates to human experience. In the article Harrison quotes Mary Warnock who writes that,

Memory and personal identity are inextricably linked, neither concept being prior to nor separable from the other. The sense of personal identity that each of us has is a sense of continuity through time.³⁵

Harrison goes on to quote George Rochberg in his 1960 essay *Duration in Music*, in which Rochberg maintains that ‘the power of return in music serves much more than a purely formal function... return in music has something of the force of the past suddenly illuminating the felt present as a real element in the present.’³⁶ Therefore there is the idea of a self- returning reaffirming past memories. In *Five Panels (no.5)* the return of sonic material does occur but it is essentially non-developmental it is non-functional.

Harrison closes by writing of Feldman’s disorientation of memory through constant changes in short fragments of material that,

What we are left to speculate on are the intricate fragments of uncertain design; it is through a conscious attempt at the disorientation of memory that the composer is able to direct the listener towards a more abstract, intangible experience³⁷

So, we could hypothesize that this intangible experience or ‘otherness’ can manifest itself as a kind of spirituality in music, stimulated by a loss of identity of the self through time. Jonathan Kramer refers to this type of music as displaying vertical tendencies. Kramer writes that,

³² Jones, M., ‘Bachelard’s Metaphors of the Self’ in *French Studies*, Vol. LIV, No.1, 2000 p.45-53

³³ Freud, S. (1984), ‘Beyond the pleasure principle’, in Strachey, J. (ed.), *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, Harmondsworth, (original work published 1920), Vol. 11 pp.269-338, p.299

³⁴ *ibid* 25, p.377

³⁵ Warnock, M. quoted in Harrison, B., *The Auditive memory and its function in the late works of Morton Feldman*, <http://www.cnvill.net/mfbrynh.htm>

³⁶ Rochberg, G., quoted in Harrison, B. *ibid* 35

³⁷ *ibid* 33

vertical music denies the past and the future in favor of an extended present. The past is defeated because the music is in certain fundamental ways unchanging, nonlinear, and ongoing... there is little implication toward the future in this music, other than that it will continue, largely as it has been... this kind of music tries to create an eternal now by blurring the distinction between past, present, and future, and by avoiding gestures that invoke memory or activate expectation... Music in vertical time can provoke intense and unusual responses... it gives us the means to experience a moment of eternity, a present extended well beyond normal temporal horizons...³⁸

Whilst Kramer recognises the link between nonteleological art and music in the 1960s and a cursory link to drugs he writes,

Another relevant feature of some drug intoxications and certain mental illnesses is the fusion of the self with the environment. The person feels a unity with his or her surroundings, a mystical oneness with the Universe. This experience is common in certain Eastern religions, but in Western culture it comes more often from chemicals, mental problems, and nonteleological art.³⁹

The implication here is that the 'self' is less important in vertical music. Kramer's writing opens up another means by which a sense of 'otherness' is created and concerns the study of which parts of our brain are processing the sonic material we are listening to. Kramer identifies how much Western teleological music is left-brain dominant and that much of our culture is dominated by left-brain processes. Kramer writes that,

we are often uneasy with holistic music. Other societies, however, favor the right brain... The nonlinear mode of thinking is present to some degree in everyone and in every culture. Our left-brain society has tried to suppress it. But, in reaction against the excessively linear values of our technological society, vertical music has become an important force in recent years. It is a holistic music that offers a timeless temporal continuum, in which the linear interrelationships between past, present, and future are suspended.⁴⁰

Kramer uses J.T. Fraser's hierarchical theory of time: atemporality, prototemporality, eotemporality, biotemporality and nootemporality to objectively place non-teleological and teleological music in relation to one another. Fraser's notion of 'times' progress from atemporality, which engenders a sense of being, to nootemporality, which engenders a sense of becoming. Whereas for most Western music it is the latter, nootemporality, that governs music for *Five Panels* the most significant of these is the third – eotemporality (and aspects of the first two), in which direct causation does exist. Kramer writes that

Two events can be in a cause and effect relationship, but this relationship is symmetrical. In other words, it is impossible to tell which of two events, linked as cause and effect, is the cause and which is the effect. Thus succession is meaningful, but direction is not... The musical analogue of eotemporality is multiply-directed time, in which the order of events is important, but several different successions, moving in different directions are presented as it were at once, in the same composition. There is no single present, since position on a temporal continuum may be denied, for example, by absolute-time progression and by gestural profile...⁴¹

In *Five Panels (no.5)* eotemporality is produced through an integration of these different 'kinds' of time creating a continuum of different states. This is deliberately akin to the horizontal layers of Rothko. Whilst each layer, apart from the first, shifts between being atemporal and eotemporal, these shifts are not inherent within the material itself, rather it is manifested through the relationship between one layer and another. At no point can any of the sonic material be said to aspire to the nootemporality of traditional western music and of music electroacoustic music. As a result the listener has to engage in different way with the work which becomes less about performance and more about inward meditation.

In this article I have given an overview of the many thoughts and ideas that have informed the composition of *Five Panels (no.5)* following the initial inspiration of Rothko's 'classic' paintings. However, I have at no point attempted to describe the subject matter of the piece. To paraphrase

³⁸ *ibid* 25, p.375-376

³⁹ *ibid* 25, p.382

⁴⁰ *ibid* 25, p.387

⁴¹ *ibid* 25, p.395

Rothko's own comment quoted by Katherine Kuh in the Chicago Art Quarterly of 1954: to tell the listener how the music should be listened to and what to listen out for results in paralysis of the mind and imagination. I would rather the listener makes their own way to 'a beautiful land'.

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