

# The Feldman-ness in Rothko Chapel: Context, Emphasis, and Meaning

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**Abstract.** Rothko Chapel is Morton Feldman's most distinctive piece. The processes of musical development in this work also deviate from traditional Feldman. Contrary to the emphasis on the uniqueness of Rothko Chapel that several scholars have explored. Firstly, this paper provides a detailed account of Feldman's oeuvre and its analytical difficulties, followed by an overview of existing approaches to the analysis of Rothko Chapel. And finally, this paper selected fragments from Rothko Chapel and analyzed the compositional techniques of Rothko Chapel and its Feldman-ness.

**Keywords:** Rothko Chapel; Morton Feldman.

## 1. Introduction

*Rothko Chapel* is often considered the most famous piece by Morton Feldman. It also stands as the most distinctive piece by Feldman. Unlike any other Feldman pieces, which are notable for their abstractness and their lack of preconceived form or extra-musical references, it directly relates to the physical entity of the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas. The processes of musical development in this work also deviate from traditional Feldman. Contrary to the emphasis on the uniqueness of *Rothko Chapel* that several scholars have explored, this paper examines the Feldman-ness in this work that has received little scholarly attention, or in other words, how it shares many compositional techniques, such as the preeminence of context in the creation of meaning, with other works by Feldman. To start with, I will provide a detailed account of Feldman's oeuvre and its analytical difficulties, followed by an overview of existing approaches to the analysis of *Rothko Chapel*. My analysis will come in the form of three selected fragments chosen from different parts of the piece, and it contributes a new understanding to this famous work by Feldman and illustrates how, unique from his oeuvre as it might seem, *Rothko Chapel* in fact demonstrates more similarities to Feldman's other pieces than what other scholars have put forward.

## 2. Feldman's Oeuvre and Analytical Difficulties

Feldman's oeuvre is notoriously difficult to analyze. In her essay "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," Dora Hanninen lists a number of reasons.[1] To briefly summarize, these include his use of indeterminate notation, the lack of musically and analytically significant units in his early works, the challenge of segmentation and the unusual length of his late works, the problems with identifying salient features to help one's memory, and the issue of finding the appropriate analytical tools and methods. This list of hindrances to analytical approaches to Feldman's music is by no means complete: one can also describe how his multitude of methods of development within a piece render it almost impossible to immediately decide on which approach to carry out and to which aspect of the music one should dedicate time and effort to analysis. Examples of methods of development can be found in a number of his works that scholars have given significant analytical attention, and a couple will be mentioned here. Textural development, specifically the number of notes played in a chord at the same time, is used in his *Last Pieces* #3.[2] Development through the myriad ways of pitch organization is found in *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello* and in *Last Pieces* #3, the former demonstrating the trajectory of groupings of segments, or "associative sets" created by certain musical contexts and the latter witnessing the creating of an intervallic "language" through the use of the interval 3.[1] Development of timbre and range with their respective trajectories governs Feldman's early *Projection I*. [3] Qualitative changes in rhythm generates motion and momentum in *For Christian*

Wolff[4]. There are also more traditional methods of development in regards to pitch sets, timbre, texture, and register in his other pieces such as *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* and *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*. [5]

In addition, scholars have recognized Feldman's pieces as developing internally and below the surface without obvious traces and standard forms. In an interview with Paula Ames, Feldman claims that "musical forms and related processes are essentially only methods of arranging material and serve no other function than to aid one's memory," and that they do not constitute "the [primary] hierarchical aspect of the piece." [6] Analysts have used similar wording to describe a process where "order is not sought in a priori systems of mental logic, but in the tendencies inherent in a materials/process interaction." [7] This manner of organization, already apparent in the New York School of Abstract Expressionist painters, is adapted by Feldman in his music to assist in eliminating much of its extra-musical references, especially in regards with pre-conceived form or developmental techniques. His music is to be structured by its own material and not by such external factors, and thus context becomes increasingly significant: what comes before and after a musical entity (a tone, a chord, a melody, a section) generates meaning and significance to the entity. It is important to note that what comes before and after a musical entity does not mean a linear progression of some sort in Feldman; in contrary, his music is also characterized by a lack of progression in most aspects of the music, thus context is created from other factors in its proximity. It is this ideology that made much of his music appear spontaneous with no apparent structure of sound, a music that seems "free of rhetoric" and which allows the listener "an opportunity to organize events for himself." [2] The above-mentioned organizational process leads to a sense of immediacy for both the composer and the listeners: for himself a piece is immediate because it does not have preconceived ideas and is internally significant, while for the listeners he offers an opportunity for the discovery and perception of connections in his music as they listen. Maybe this is what Feldman means when he writes that he desires "a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore." [2]

### 3. Uniqueness and Feldman-ness in Rothko Chapel

If part of Feldman's style and aesthetics can be described by the words above, then one cannot fail to see that his piece *Rothko Chapel* stands out strikingly among his works. It has numerous qualities that make it, in the views of many analysts, the epitome of the opposite approach, of Feldman being un-Feldman. It is almost common knowledge that "*Rothko Chapel* stands out as the only piece by Feldman that bears a relationship to a specific work of art." [8] Even though Feldman composed a couple other pieces to his New York School Abstract Expressionist friends such as Franz Kline, De Kooning, and Philip Guston, he recognizes those pieces as dedications that do not intend to signal connections between the piece and the painter. [9] *Rothko Chapel* is different: in an interview Feldman acknowledges its special character as "it is the only score where other factors determined what kind of music it was going to be." [9] To be more specific, he writes in an essay with the same title that

There are a few personal references in *Rothko Chapel*. The soprano melody, for example, was written on the day of Stravinsky's funeral service in New York. The Quasi-Hebraic melody played by the viola at the end was written when I was fifteen. Certain intervals throughout the work have the ring of the synagogue. There were other references which I have forgotten. [10]

These extra-musical references can be easily discovered; unsurprisingly most scholarly work on this piece focuses on this unique feature in *Rothko Chapel*. [8,9,11] *Rothko Chapel* thus consists of violations of "Feldman-ness" mentioned above: it is structured by its own material with meanings generated by its inherent context and refuses any extra-musical references.

But what about the Feldman-ness in *Rothko Chapel*? Is it possible for this piece to be so completely alien to the rest of Feldman's oeuvre that it is almost unrecognizable as one of his works? Or is it still Feldman at its core? It must be acknowledged that the second section of the piece, the "more stationary 'abstract' section for chorus and chimes," does exhibit quite a bit of Feldman's typical

surface characteristics such as the omnipotent stasis of harmony and texture, yet the strong sectionality of this piece (and the distinctly different sections) makes applying the same claim to the other three sections, or the whole piece in general, impossible.[10] Nevertheless, the “Feldman-ness” in *Rothko Chapel* can be found elsewhere, in places deeper under the surface. The rest of this essay will analyze specific fragments of this piece, two of which is located in section 1 (mm. 1–210) and the other one in section 3 (mm. 243–313), to show how the same machinations that appear in other works by Feldman are retained in this seemingly unique composition, especially how context generates meaning and gives emphasis to certain musical entities in this piece.[10] Connections will also be drawn between a number of Feldman’s other pieces and *Rothko Chapel*.

### 3.1 Completion of 12-tone Cycles: Context-oriented Creation of Meaning and Emphasis

In the first section of *Rothko Chapel*—the “longish declamatory section” according to Feldman, a couple of places stand out with a unique character: the Gb–A augmented second in the viola in measure 20, the descending three-note leap in measure 33, and the Ab harmonic in measure 63.[10] In the first instance (m. 20), part of its unique character can be attributed to the range that these two notes occupy, compared to what comes before and after: both notes that come before and after the Gb–A second are significantly lower in range, leading to a large upward and a lower leap that frames this Gb–A third and gives it some local emphasis.



**Figure 1.** The viola melody, mm. 15–21

Source: Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel* for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments (Universal Edition, 1971), 2.

With some careful studying, one might also be able to notice something deeper below the surface: the pitch classes Gb has only appeared once before measure 20 and that appearance was very different—it is in a dyad and played by the vibraphone in measure 11. Pitch class A, on the other hand, never appears before measure 20; it is a completely new pitch class up to that point. Thus, the Gb–A second in the viola in m. 20 reveals itself as a newcomer. This sense of novelty is a possible explanation of its uniqueness.



**Figure 2.** Vibraphone dyads F/Gb, m. 8–11

Source: Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel* for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments (Universal Edition, 1971), 2-3.

There is still one level of connection here, a long-term connection that traces its origin to the beginning of the entire first section of *Rothko Chapel*. The piece begins with timpani trills on B and D, while in m. 4 a declamatory viola melody is played, constantly drifting upwards until m. 11 where it swiftly reverses its motion downward. All the pitch classes from the beginning of measure 1 to the end of measure 12 consist of all chromatic notes but A[9]. Pitch class A, surprisingly, does not appear until the abovementioned location: measure 20 in the viola. Thus, as the other pitch classes repeat themselves in various registers in different shapes and forms, Feldman keeps completion one step away, holding it back until its long-awaited release that renders it a new quality. This is what ultimately gives the Gb–A second its unique place in the beginning of piece. Interestingly, a similar

usage of chromatic pitch class sets (not all twelve pitch classes are contained, unlike in *Rothko Chapel*) as basic building blocks, and later as materials for subsequent transformation, is found in one of Feldman's works *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* (1971), largely contemporary to *Rothko Chapel*, suggesting a possible similarity in compositional material and method.[5]



**Figure 3.** Material k (mm. 11–12), instruments include celesta, vibraphone, and viola from top to bottom

Source: Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel* for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments (Universal Edition, 1971), 1.

It is important to note that in this analysis, I follow the traditional way of dissecting the piece, as mentioned by Johnson, by dividing the first section of the piece into “viola declamation,” chorus, and the timpani/chorus “ostinato passage” derived from pitch classes Bb and C first seen in measure 48 and later in an altered form in m. 135–171 (this I call material z).[9] My definition of the completion of the twelve-note pitch class set would only apply to the “viola declamation” part of the 1<sup>st</sup> section only, that is, the measures where the viola melody leads and subsidiary instruments like the celesta, the timpani, and the vibraphone supports. This is not merely because of the dualism and dichotomy that the chorus and the viola parts represent, as argued by Hilewicz, but also because of the fact that listening for discrete pitch classes or the lack thereof becomes increasingly difficult in a much denser texture, as exemplified by the chorus and the latter part of the ostinato material z.[8] Thus, there is much reason to believe that this process that applies to the viola would not bleed into the chorus or the ostinato section.

After the first completion of the twelve-note “cycle,” it seems that another effort to bring a new completion begins. Pitch classes are introduced in the viola, which plays intermittently with the percussion, until material k appears again in measure 27, and in measure 29 a three-measure choral interlude is introduced. Then, the vibraphone plays a dyad (F/Gb) and then we get a descending three-note leap in measure 33. This is the second point of interest previously referred to as having a unique quality. This unique quality likewise comes from multiple places; Feldman once again chooses to give several unique attributes to a certain location to emphasize its uniqueness. Firstly, the viola has by far followed an ascending trajectory until that point. With the exception of material k, Steven Johnson notices a strong organicism appearing in the first two viola melodies (mm. 4–10, 16–28), exhibiting a pattern of “ascending register, interval expansion, and progressively elongated gestures.”[9] This organicism and similarity in pattern is broken exactly in measure 33: while previously the ascending pattern is disrupted by material k, inherently material k is a different phenomenon that to some extent excuses it from being an outlier, but not measure 33. Here the genuine descending three-note leap signals the end of the two ascending phrases in the viola and the beginning of something new in the piece. Secondly, we have arrived at the location of the second completion: without counting the pitch classes in the chorus, every single pitch class has appeared between the first completion in measure 20 and measure 33, the last being the Eb in this measure.

Apart from being the last note to completion, the Eb carries another unique character: Eb's previous appearance was in fact in measure 8, 24 measures ago! This renders appearance of the Eb is a huge unique phenomenon by itself and adds to the uniqueness of this descending three-note leap.



**Figure 4.** Measures 29–35 of the viola

Source; Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments* (Universal Edition, 1971), 3.

So far, we have seen two completions of a 12-tone cycle, each occupying a similar amount of space: the first being 20 measures and the second being 13 measures. The third completion, however, would be more distant and would take longer to reach. Starting from the second note of measure 33, the 12-note chromatic scale seems to fill in rather quickly: after measure 43, a mere 10 measures later, only Ab and D are the only ones left. Yet these two notes would take far longer to attain. The piece continues by presenting a shortened version of material z in measure 47–62 that would gradually dissolve while incorporating new sonorities, and at measure 62 this iteration of material z reaches its most heterogeneous point. Then, a stark change occurs: the dense vocal texture instantly dissipates, and we get a sole Ab harmonic in the viola at the start of measure 63 that is almost inaudible in contrast to the previous material z. Thus, Feldman presents the Ab in such a way that it almost resembles the outstanding-ness of the previous two completions, as if to misguide the listener into believing that the third completion has arrived. But the D is still absent. In fact, it would take a very long span of time for D to appear, only after the piece indulges itself into the final transformations of material k (to be elaborated in detail below). After that event, the viola plays a solo melody, until, on the last note of measure 120 (57 measures after we get our penultimate pitch class Ab), we finally get our long-awaited D. At the onset this D betrays our expectations: it seems far less unique than the previously significant note Ab as it is only a triplet quarter note that acts as a last note of a viola melody fragment, although it is a rare dynamic of *forte*. Only after careful examination one would realize that the D is in fact special. The pitch class D does not only include the last note of measure 123, but also continues into the first note of measure 125, the space between which is occupied by a chord in the chorus and unpitched rolls in the wood block, both of which are merely disruptions that do not count according to our standards. The first pitch class D in measure 125 is also significant in that it is two octaves lower than the previous D and it is on the other end of the dynamic spectrum: *pianissimo*. Moreover, this D has a length of four measures, and the fact that it connects a disrupted viola melody makes it special and significant: one has never encountered a similar event in this piece before. At this point, the third twelve-tone pitch class set finishes itself with a bang.



**Figure 5.** Measures 120–126 of the viola

Source: Steven Johnson, "Rothko Chapel and Rothko's Chapel," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no.2 (1994): 7.

As if to extend the pattern of stretching out the distance between the penultimate note and the last note of a completion so obvious in the third completion, Feldman does this to the extreme in the fourth attempt at completion: the last note F# never appeared as section 1 transitions into section 2 of

this piece at measure 210. The third completion would be the last completion in section 1 of *Rothko Chapel*.

To sum up the process described in the pages above, Feldman develops his material inherently without an external predetermined structure. Each note with unique qualities has its richness conferred upon and emphasized by its musical context—the construction of a completion that includes all twelve pitch classes, among other more traditional devices. There are no traces of formal organization: Each of the three completions does not follow a pre-existing rule saying that it must be achieved at a certain point to give way to another, it just continues on until it chooses the location of the last remaining pitch class. There is no sense of progression either: a completion does not progress towards a different method of organizing pitch class material, and nothing before each completion would have suggested that it is inevitable, unlike in tonal music a V64-53 would expect a tonic resolution. A completion would just complete itself when it wants to.

This context-oriented creation of meaning and emphasis on a certain musical identity has a close parallel found in some of Feldman's earlier works, notably his *Last Pieces* #3. Context in that piece is not based on a pitch class set created by a certain number of pitch classes but by interval classes, among others. In Catherine Hirata's essay "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves: Analyzing the Early Music of Morton Feldman," she presents an instance where the dominance of interval classes 4 and 5 in a local area result in the emphasis of a note not related to the rest by those interval classes.[12] Even if the parameter determining the context is different, the process here is similar enough. Adding to this example the fact that the usage of chromatic pitch class sets has been found in one of his other works, one can see that the Feldman-ness is not discarded, but rather strongly present in *Rothko Chapel*.

### 3.2 Development of Material k: How Development Creates Context

Another example of the importance of inherent musical context is connected to the abovementioned material k. One can find its first appearance at mm. 11–12: the opening viola melody attempts several times to rise (first to Eb4 in measure 5, then to F4 in measure 7, and Ab4 in measure 9), but this rising process ends abruptly once the viola melody reaches Ab5 in m. 10, a place of highest intensity in terms of both pitch level and dynamic (the *forte* and the following *crescendo* in m. 10). Then the melody crumbles down in a rapid succession of downward leaps, meanwhile the dynamic changes quickly to a *ppp*. This descending viola fragment (designated as k2 here), along with the quiet celesta and vibraphone chords above (named k1), marks the first occurrence of material k as well as the end of the viola's first attempt to rise, an ending or a calming down of sorts (see Figure 4, mm. 11–12). Yet, the rapid changes of dynamics—a "targetless" crescendo from the original *piano* in measure 11 followed by a decrescendo towards a very weak *ppp*—convey a sense of potential liveliness: material k seems to possess a possibility to grow and transform. As the viola melody attempts to rise again starting in measure 16, first reaching C#4, then E4 and A4 in mm. 19–20, and ultimately Ab5 in measure 21, it stops temporarily to give way to the percussion, before evolving into a rapid accession in measure 25, reaching an unprecedented D6 albeit in *ppp*. Then, similarly, the energy soon dissipates, first contributed by a three-beat rest and then with the onset of dyads in the celesta and the vibraphone as well as the descending viola fragment (see Figure 5, mm. 27–28). This is the second appearance of material k. Both its first and second appearances consist of the same process of winding-down of the energy of the previous rising melody, functioning as a postscript or an ending rather than an exposition. Yet, as we will see, its role will change as it gains an increasing independence and significance.

In its next appearance (m. 66), material k occurs only partially at the beginning: while k1 (the celesta and vibraphone parts) stay the same, k2 (the descending viola fragment) is absent and replaced by a sole Ab harmonic. What further distinguishes this occurrence of k1 is the musical passage that precedes and succeeds it. An extended and developed form of material z (mm. 48–62), first seen in mm. 29–30, is now superimposed on the altered entity of material k in mm. 69–75, the latter repeated three times. This partial yet expanded presentation of material k—highlighting the vertical sound



rather than its previously prominent horizontal aspect—eventually develops its own path to a completion in mm. 76–77: the sole Ab harmonic in the viola now returns to the descending viola fragment (k2), with rhythmic augmentation in the last four notes. Thus, k1 and k2 conjoin to form a complete presentation of material k. This time, unlike the previous two iterations of material k at the beginning of the piece, it no longer serves as the ending of the rising viola melody but rather acquires a more independent role and becomes more full-fledged.[9] In general, the third iteration of material k gains more agency by both dissembling and reassembling itself, and simultaneously incorporating new materials from other sections. In other words, material k allots space for its own development, which allows itself to acquire more weight or authority of its own. This change of character and acquisition of agency are subsequently manifested in a more pronounced manner.

The image displays a musical score for Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*. It features staves for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Mixed Choir (Ch.), Tenor (T), Bass (B), Percussion (Perc.), and Viola (Via.). The percussion part includes T. Dr., T. Bk., and Vib. The score is marked with dynamics like *mp*, *mf*, *pp*, and *ppp*. A measure number 60 is indicated at the top. The score shows the third occurrence of material k, with various rhythmic and dynamic markings.

**Figure 6.** The third occurrence of material k and its preceding context

Source: Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel* for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments (Universal Edition, 1971), 6.

After material k presents itself in a complete form in mm. 76–77, it soon gives way to a tone cluster, a musical entity texturally, timbrally, and registrally similar as k1, which I will name it material k1' (m. 79). Material k1' is repeated three times before another choral part is superimposed on it in mm. 84–93; this progression mirrors the layout of k1 and chorus part in an earlier section (mm. 69–75, see Figure 8). The longer presence that material k1' has than the chordal harmony forcefully announces an argument: material k1' occupies a more significant place in this section. But the fourth iteration of

material k is by no means complete yet. Just like the third iteration of material k discussed above, so far only one part of material k has appeared—a variation of k1, or namely k1'. The other component of material k—i.e., k2—has not shown yet. As the listener is expecting the appearance of k2 following the chorus part, one hears only some hints of this descending viola fragment. The tail of k2 (the last three notes) presents itself in measure 99 in augmented note values, alternating with combined fragments of k1', Eb harmonic in viola, and chorus. Thus, k2 is presented as broken and fragmented, but also is k1 at roughly the same location! Material k's process of development can therefore be put into sharp relief: fragmentation follows further fragmentation. First, material k breaks into k1 and k2, both of which each fragment into smaller parts of itself, developing variations along the way. The narrative of k2 continues with its last 2 presentations. Its penultimate presentation at mm. 110–112 (with slight alterations such as the added g and the rhythm changes) overshadows the chorus and the percussion that comes before it in terms of both duration and dynamics, showing that there is no question of it becoming an important independent material with an even stronger presence than its previous iterations. Its exact repetition at mm. 114–116 demonstrates a desire to further strengthen the moment and a reluctance to cede occupied space. It is a huge emphasis on its own right, and it occupies a large amount of space both in the music and in the listener's consciousness: this *forte* is one of the strongest and most powerful yet in this piece, not to mention its rarity in Feldman's oeuvre. Material k has evolved into a different form, the path of its evolution is unique, almost harkening back to the classical sonata's exposition-development model.

The image displays a musical score for Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*, specifically measures 70 through 75. The score is arranged for a mixed choir and instruments. The vocal parts include Soprano (S), Alto (A), Chorus (Ch), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The instrumental parts include Cello (Cel), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vbr). Measures 70 and 75 are circled at the top of the page. The music is written in 4/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings such as *pp* and *ppp* are present throughout the score. The Viola part shows a descending line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 70 and a triplet of quarter notes in measure 75.

**Figure 7.** The third occurrence of material k (k1) and its succeeding context  
Source: Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel* for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments  
(Universal Edition, 1971), 7.



The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Cello (Cel), Vibraphone (Vibr), and Viola (Via). The score is for measures 79 and 80 of Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel*. In measure 79, the Viola plays a melodic line marked *mp* (mezzo-piano), while the Cello and Vibraphone play sustained chords. In measure 80, the Cello and Vibraphone play chords marked *ppp* (pianissimo), and the Viola continues its melodic line. A circled '80' is positioned above the Cello staff in measure 80.

**Figure 8.** Complete presentation of material k and the appearance of material k1' (m. 79)  
Source: Morton Feldman, *Rothko Chapel* for Soprano, Alto, Mixed Choir and Instruments  
(Universal Edition, 1971), 8.

This sense of change in identity, primarily in terms of function and importance, but also less pronouncedly in pitch and rhythm, exemplifies the transformation of material k. These changes based on inherent developments of an original material and its interactions with different musical contexts is comparable to Feldman's application of "associative sets" in *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello*, where a specific chord associated with one associative set (a grouping of segments of music based on parameters, such as pitch class content) can later belong to another associative set with only slight changes or even no changes at all, based on the location of the chord within the first set which might emphasize its similarity with the other set, or the ordering of the chords within the first set that can bring out certain parameters that is more conducive to the other set. In other words, musical context suggests that there is "another way to hear the same notes." [1] There are again no extra-musical processes at work here, and the listener's experience of a musical entity is created purely by its context, which when changed, acquires the ability to change how we perceive the entity even if the entity remains largely same. The pitch classes and its order of material k, arguably the single most defining character, has not changed much between its first iteration and its fourth iteration, but the various manipulations of these same pitch classes grant material k more agency which changes its identity.

### 3.3 Organization and Reorganization of Material

One last demonstration of the importance of context can be located in section 3 of *Rothko Chapel*, the "motivic interlude for soprano, viola and tympani", another section marked by its lyricism and lack of "Feldman-ness" on the surface (mm. 243–313) [10]. Here, inherent musical context works in a slightly different manner—it no longer emphasizes a certain point of the music or changes the meaning of a certain entity over time; rather, context becomes the origin of the piece's development. This example will show how musical context can be reorganized and repartitioned to create new material. Pitch class material, and texture to a lesser extent, is the focus here.

The third section begins after a pizzicato rising gesture (designated as segment 1) on the viola that appears both before and after the static section 2 (m. 210 and 243, respectively). In m. 244–253, the solo soprano melody, first appearing in m. 180 a semitone lower, begins to play a double leap downward thrice in total with added grace notes attached to the later Ds. With each iteration the durations stretches and in its third iteration the D is played four times instead of two. This is named segment 2. Then, in mm. 254–256, a three-note group (segment 3) in the viola leads to rolls in the timpani, reminding the listener of the very beginning of the entire work. Next, in mm. 257–259, the 9th leaps (segment 4) remind us of the beginning of the second viola melody (m. 16) in section 1. In mm. 260–264, an incomplete retrograde of segment 1 (segment 5) is introduced in the soprano. The next segment (segment 6, mm. 265–271) contains the exact notes of the viola melody starting in m. 171. Then the timpani rolls and the viola zigzags come again, this time with two timpani fragments

surrounding a viola fragment (segment 7, mm. 272–277). Segment 1 comes back exactly (mm. 278–279) and will be named segment 8. Segment 9 is an almost exact copy of segment 2 (mm. 280–289). Segment 10 is only rhythmically different from segment 3 (mm. 290–292). Segment 11 is the (not exact) retrograde of segment 9, similar to the relationship between segment 2 and segment 5, with some out-of-place material in mm. 296–298. Segment 12 (mm. 299–301) is a shortened transposition of segment 4. What follows is the choral interlude of section 4, or it can also be interpreted as a transitional section towards section 4, and thus it is out of the scope of this discussion.

If one counts a unique segment as one unit, and those related to the segment by transposition, retrograde, rhythmic changes, or near-exact copy as belonging to the same unit, then the following units can be introduced. Unit I: segments 1 and 8; unit II: segments 2, 5, 9, 11; unit III: segments 3, 7, 10; unit IV: segments 4, 12; unit V: segments 6. A paradigmatic chart looks like this (the order goes to the right and downwards):

**Table 1.** Paradigmatic chart of segments and units in the 3rd section

Units: I	II	III	IV	V
1				
	2			
		3		
			4	
	5			6
		7		
8	9	10		
	11		12	

One can compare this chart with the chronological sequence in which the original material of these units is first introduced in *Rothko Chapel*: III (1st viola melody and timpani rolls, m. 1), IV (viola melody at m. 16), V (m. 171), II (m. 180), I (m. 210). It is thus clear that Feldman is revisiting previous material in a unique way: he chooses material very selectively, and introduces them in a different, improvisatory, almost spontaneous order, with transformations and inversions that further complicate the result. In other words, he is partitioning material in a certain order in sections 1 and 2, and then taking some of it and repartitioning it in a different way in section 3. This is the source of the feeling of “immediacy” mentioned at the beginning of this essay—there is no organizational logic or form on the surface. Musical material that becomes context for other musical material is reorganized and repartitioned, giving birth to new contexts and meaning. This method is reminiscent of his *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, where pitch sets, timbre, texture, and register undergo a similar process of organization and reorganization.[5]

## 4. Conclusion

This essay has thus tried to prove, through the three examples that directly engage with the details of the music, that the Feldman-ness in *Rothko Chapel* is, if not omnipotent, at least prevalent. Material in this piece still follows his style where “systemic modes of organization are avoided so that sonic materials alone may act as source and catalyst for a composition’s evolution.” This quote, used to describe the characteristics of his other works, applies no less appropriately to *Rothko Chapel*. No matter how much analysts and even Feldman himself emphasizes the uniqueness and differentness of *Rothko Chapel*, it is clear by now that Feldman can never betray his own style. This might provide us an insight into how the subconsciousness affects a composer and marks his “style”: Feldman might be consciously discarding all his previous styles and processes when composing *Rothko Chapel*, but his subconsciousness that stems from all his previous experiences of composition can never be changed.

## References

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