Analysis of *I AM FUCKING ZEN* and *Mind Bloom*

by

Myles Kennon Kellerman

A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved November 2025 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Jody Rockmaker, Chair
Alex Temple
Gabriel Bolaños

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2025

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a comparative analysis of two saxophone quartets: Osnat Netzer's *I AM FUCKING ZEN* and my own composition *Mind Bloom*. The study begins with a surface-level examination of *I AM FUCKING ZEN*, focusing on the structural role of its final gesture and how it retrospectively informs the preceding material. Attention is given to Netzer's treatment of rhythm and texture—specifically, how metric misalignment, dense counterpoint, and textural contrast between sections generate a sense of organic evolution throughout the piece. The analysis explores how these aspects converge in the closing gesture and how it is interwoven into the work's material.

The second half discusses *Mind Bloom*, a piece that draws inspiration from *I AM FUCKING ZEN* while establishing its own musical language. The discussion traces the evolution of two central motives that underpin the work's structure and expressiveness. It examines how integrating spoken text extends these ideas into new contexts.

By situating *Mind Bloom* in dialogue with *I AM FUCKING ZEN*, this dissertation highlights how my own analysis and interpretation of *I AM FUCKING ZEN* inform and impact my work. The influence of Netzer's approach—their use of rhythm, textural contrast, and a memorable climax—can be heard as an undercurrent shaping my own formal and textural decisions. Together, these case studies illuminate my own experience in the dialogue between influence and originality, demonstrating how analytical reflection on contemporary repertoire can catalyze one's own composition.

DEDICATION

To Kenny, JoAnn, and Molly.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family, friends, and committee members for their constant support throughout my studies at Arizona State University. I am deeply grateful to Osnat Netzer for their blessing to analyze *I AM FUCKING ZEN* and for connecting me with Alex Temple, which paved the way for me to study at ASU. I would also like to thank the Kodachrome Saxophone Quartet: Calvin Wong, Jade Deatherage, Siobhan Plouffe, and Bonson Lee for their extraordinary work in bringing *Mind Bloom* to life.

My sincere thanks to Nicholas Shea for the many teaching opportunities across the theory sequence and for the feedback that has shaped my approach to instruction. I am equally grateful to Alex Temple for encouraging me to apply to ASU and for fostering a sense of welcome and belonging from my first interview onward. Thank you as well to Gabriel Bolaños for offering new perspectives on composition, listening, and analysis. Without spectralism, I would not be the same. And to my chair, Jody Rockmaker, whose encouragement and thoughtful advice—both musical and personal—have kept me motivated and joyful throughout this journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

LIST OF EXAMPLES

CHAPTER 1

I AM FUCKING ZEN

Introduction

Osnat Netzer's *I AM FUCKING ZEN* (abbreviated IAFZ in this paper) was completed in 2020. Its title was inspired by a painting of the same name by Liron Cohen. The pitch content in the piece presents major and minor triads as a semblance of wholesomeness, while the narrow-ranged microtonal lines signify confinement and stress. These contrasting musical ideas mirror the painting's exploration of tension and release, serving as an expressive foundation for the work's unfolding narrative (Netzer 2020). Written and completed during the pandemic, the musical material portrays the stress, confinement, and attempt to remain tranquil during quarantine. *IAFZ* can be divided into four large sections (Figure 1). The first section (mm. 1-100) is then subdivided into two smaller subsections. The first subsection (Section 1-1, mm. 1-47) is characterized by bisbigliandos (tone-color trills), rapidly repeated notes, sustained tones, and a lack of ensemble alignment. The second subsection (Section 1-2, mm. 48-99) has the ensemble gradually aligning across multiple gestures that lead into the second large section. Within Section 1-2, there are no bisbigliandos or rapidly repeating notes. Instead, the music gradually shifts towards harmonic and rhythmic unison. The second large section of the piece (mm. 100-130) features a range of unison rhythmic and pitch content throughout the ensemble. This rhythmic structure gradually dissolves into the third section (mm. 131-187), developing into a texture characterized by fewer quarter-tone harmonies and brief moments of complete silence. This section culminates in a second build-up towards a final alignment of rhythm and harmony in the fourth section. The

fourth section (mm. 185-211), reminiscent of the second, syncs the soprano, alto, and tenor parts. The main difference from Section 2 is that the musical material consists of one measure that is repeated eleven times. Throughout the work, highly complex rhythmic gestures and triads consistently serve as the focal point of each extremely volatile gesture, which are presented in a variety of ways until the end of the piece. This analysis views the final repeated gesture as the primary material that informs everything that precedes it. These influences are evident in the moments of unison, where their rhythms and contours resemble the final gesture. The triadic material found throughout the piece contributes to the melodic construction of the final gesture.

Section	1		2	3	4
Measure #'s	1-47	48-100	101-130	131-187	185-211
Defining Features	Bisbig., repeated notes, lack of ensemble alignment		Rhythmic and Pitch Unison	Textural Changes	Final Gesture

Figure 1. Form of *IAFZ*.

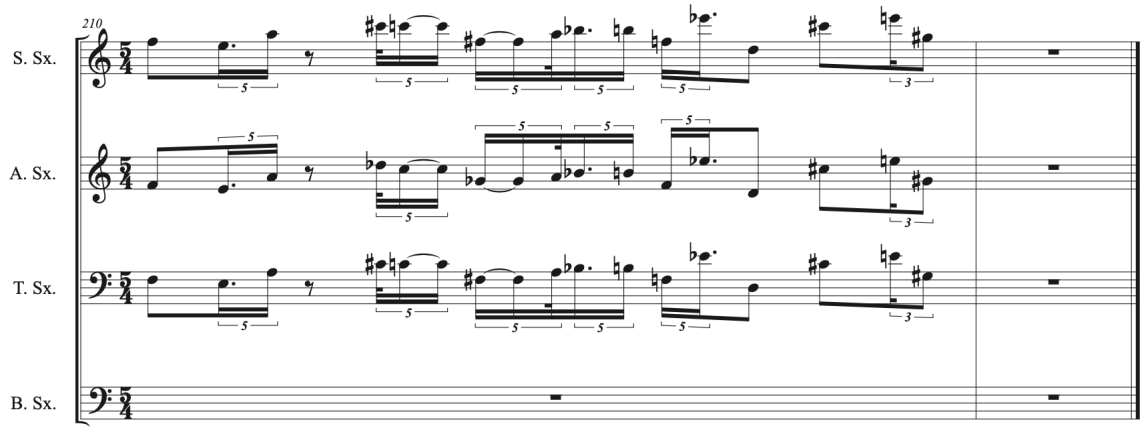
Netzer's program notes offer a helpful lens for understanding how the piece's formal, rhythmic, and timbral elements are meant to register in the listener's ear. In describing the motivations behind these materials, Netzer highlights the specific perceptual pathways the work aims to activate—how certain gestures are intended to draw attention, how textures shift our focus, and how processes unfold over time. The statement below reflects the composer's view of that relationship between intention and aural experience. IAFZ's program notes:

> I wrote I AM FUCKING ZEN in Lincolnshire IL for ~Nois saxophone quartet. The title was inspired by a painting of the same name by artist Liron Cohen. It was completed in May 2020.
>
> I AM FUCKING ZEN is a process-based composition, wherein a short musical idea undergoes gradual transformations, mutating from one state to another over time, not unlike a raging viral pandemic.
>
> The musical theme showcases major and minor triads – the semblance of wholesomeness – and narrow-ranged microtonal lines – signifying confinement and stress. Though both materials live together in the same theme, the piece undergoes musical processes that winnow one of these elements at a time, highlighting the internal battle of trying to maintain Zen, and feeling the stress and confinement of quarantine and the global pandemic.
>
> The piece is also inspired by the extraordinary virtuosity of ~Nois, allowing the group to showcase their complete mastery of extreme groove, rhythmic complexity, and ensemble playing (Netzer 2020).

These program notes extend into Netzer's general philosophy of energy within music. During my master's degree at DePaul, I took the course *Kinetic Approach to Composition and Analysis* with Dr. Netzer. In this course, we read Arnie Cox's *Music and Embodied Cognition: Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking* (Cox 2016), a text that frames musical experience through various forms of perceived energy and motion. Given this background, I imagine the ideas explored in the course—particularly the relationship between physical gesture, perceived motion, and listener expectation—were integral to Netzer's compositional process. It is entirely possible to approach the piece through this

kinetic and embodied framework; however, for this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on a different set of analytical priorities, focusing on the relationship between the ending of the piece and its various manifestations throughout the work, as well as the organization of musical material on the micro and macro levels.

Upon first listening, IAFZ's final gesture (Example 1) sounds and appears to be a culmination of the ever-evolving gestures heard throughout the piece. What I will argue in this research paper is that the final gesture of the piece influences the work much further than the final section. I believe this is manifested in two main ways: first, because rhythmic subdivisions are typically two, three, or five, it is very easy to locate examples of this final gesture throughout the work and its various presentations. Second, after a first hearing, it is impossible to revisit the piece without the ending in mind. Its presence looms over the work, influencing every subsequent hearing. With this in mind, this research paper will analyze each of the four sections of the piece to determine how the final gesture manifests in the first three sections.



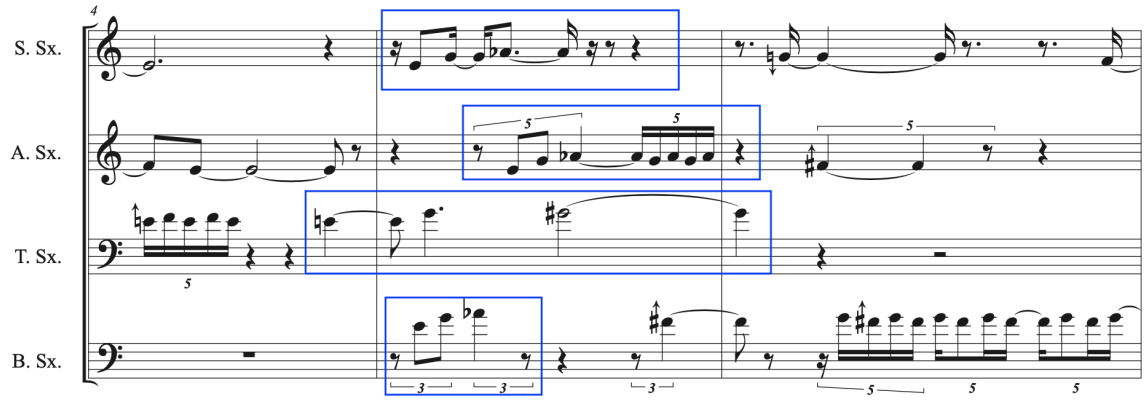
Example 1. The final gesture of *IAFZ* in concert pitch.

Section 1

IAZF initially presents the listeners with instruments that are out of sync both rhythmically and harmonically. The very first sound heard, however, is the ensemble entering together on a concert D. This opening is immediately followed by each instrument descending away from D at its own, varied rate. The opening section of *IAFZ* largely follows this pattern: each instrument is performing the same set of notes at its own rate. These independent rates are determined by the rhythmic subdivision each voice uses. For example, the soprano may be presenting a line with the beat subdivided by two, with the pitch class set consisting of eighth notes and quarter notes. In contrast, the tenor is presenting the same pitch class set instead, subdividing the beat by three and presenting the pitches with eighth note and quarter note triplets. Each voice has its own trajectory in presenting a set of pitches. The trajectory does not align rhythmically between instruments, and the presentation of these notes varies across instruments. For example, some sustained notes are instead performed as bisbigliando or as a series of notes played in quick succession around a given pitch. Throughout the entire opening of the piece, each instrument presents this ever-evolving series of notes, and the general trajectory between instruments roughly aligns horizontally, as each instrument presents the same pitches around the same time; however, there is no vertical alignment. Two specific examples from Section 1-1 will be discussed: mm. 4-7 and mm. 28-29.

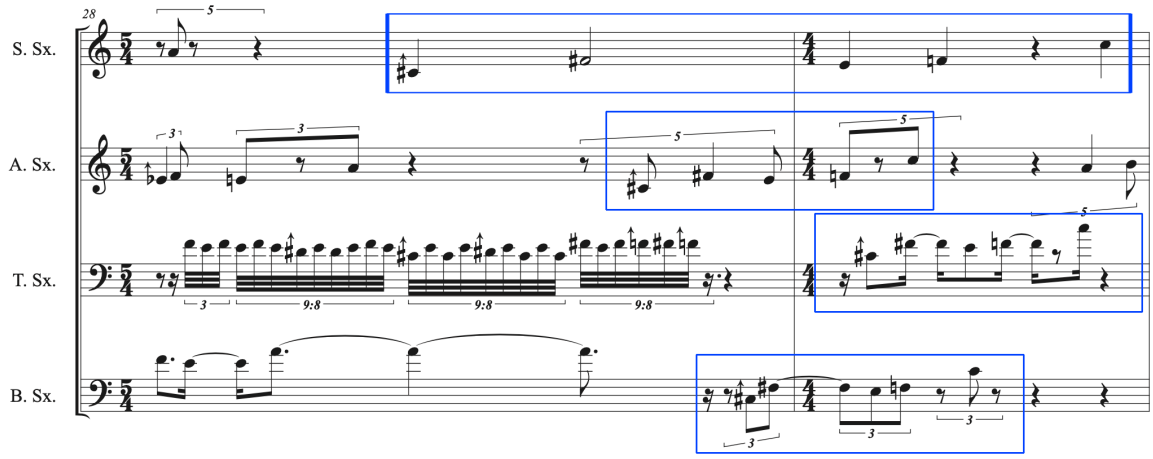
This first example, unfolding from mm. 4-7, uses just three pitches: E, G, and Ab (Example 2). These pitches are presented in four different variations across the ensemble. They are related proportionally, with the E and G of equal length within a given voice and Ab held for a longer duration. Except for the soprano saxophone, the other

instruments hold Ab for twice the duration of E and G. This example also demonstrates that most rhythmic values in the piece, beyond quarters, eighths, and sixteenths, are subdivided into triplets and quintuplets. The only other rhythmic variation is a septuplet figure.



Example 2. E, G, and Ab presented across the ensemble in concert pitch.

The second example in mm. 28-29 exhibits a similar phenomenon, only with a larger group of notes. Concert pitches: C quarter sharp, F#, E, F, and C-natural. Each voice presents its variation of the notes using a specific rhythmic denomination: soprano saxophone has quarter/half notes, alto saxophone has quintuplets, tenor saxophone has eighth/sixteenth notes, and the baritone saxophone has triplets (Example 3). With the distribution of a larger set of pitches, it is also clear that rests as well as pitches are part of the gesture. There is a rest within each presentation across the instruments before the C# and before and after the final C in the pattern. Each of these iterations, including the rests, is proportionally similar. In the soprano, alto, and baritone saxophone, F# is held for twice the duration of C quarter sharp. Each rest is held for the same duration as C quarter sharp and C. This pattern can be observed throughout the opening section as the instruments weave through pitches that are out of sync with each other.



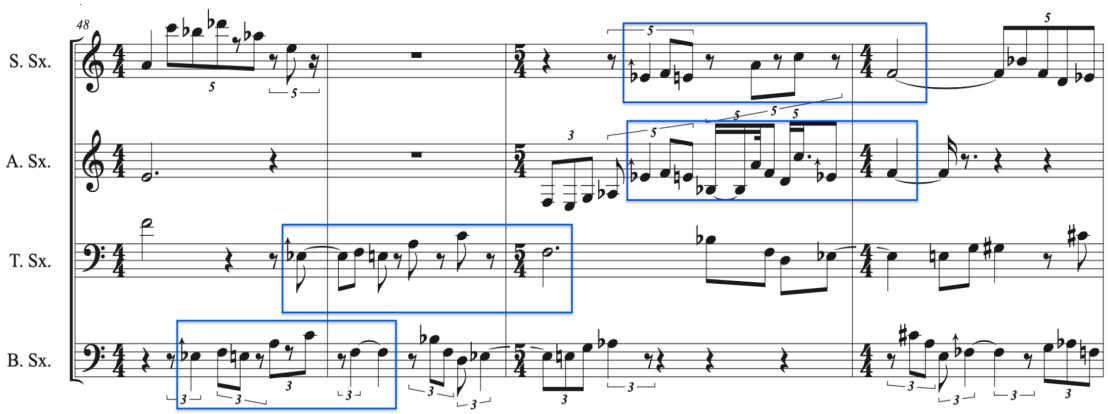
Example 3. C quarter sharp, F#, E, F, and C-natural presented across the ensemble in concert pitch.

This first section of the piece, mm. 1-47, includes several elements that are not found later in the work. This distinction helps to reinforce the sectional divides I have established for this research paper. The use of bisbigliando and the 32nd-note "repeat note as fast as possible" technique, accompanied by a gradual glissando gesture, defines this portion of the piece. It is also the only instance where boxed notation is used. There are only three examples of boxed notation, and they aurally resemble the quickly repeated notes found throughout this first section. Section 1-1 concludes with a series of septuplets in the baritone saxophone. It is also the last example of a rhythmic subdivision that is not eighth, triplet, or quintuplet. The ending of *IAFZ* can be understood as a culmination of many rhythmic and gestural ideas introduced earlier in the piece. Because the rhythmic language is built almost entirely on subdivisions of two, three, and five, the number of possible permutations is inherently limited. These rhythmic patterns appear in nearly every conceivable configuration throughout the work, creating a sense of constant variation within a constrained system. As a result, the final gesture—where this rhythmic evolution comes to rest—serves as a lens through which earlier moments can be

reexamined. Although the precise materials of Section 1-1 do not reappear later, echoes of this final repeated figure can be found elsewhere throughout Section 1-1, foreshadowing the conclusion and unifying the work's rhythmic design. These specific examples will be discussed in the last section of the piece.

Section 1-2, mm. 48–100, begins as the tone-color trills conclude. The texture created by out-of-sync shared pitch content across instruments persists. However, this section differs from the first by incorporating moments of rhythmic and pitch unison, enabling the instruments to expand on the shared musical material from Section 1-1. Within Section 1-2, clear instances appear in which each instrument presents and follows the same ordered set of pitches, played at its own independent rate. Layered presentations of shared pitch material emerge within the measures between the first and second halves of the opening section (mm. 37–52) and at the beginning of the second section (mm. 48–51). Within each of these presentations, the pitch content for each instrument can again be broken down into smaller motives, identifiable by the rhythmic values used. The musical material can be easily traced through the soprano and tenor saxophones. There are still examples of pitch content being shared between other members of the ensemble that can be found all over Section 1-2; for instance, the alto saxophone repeats its pitch content twice: Bb, F, D, Eb, D#, F#, and G, once in quarter notes and eighth notes, and once in triplets. The baritone saxophone performs this same collection only once in quintuplets. During this same stretch of music, the soprano and tenor saxophones are presenting a shared collection of pitches in subdivisions of three and two, respectively. Shortly thereafter, the tenor and baritone saxophones align their pitch content with the alto and baritone in mm. 48-51 (Example 4). The tenor saxophone presents its pitch

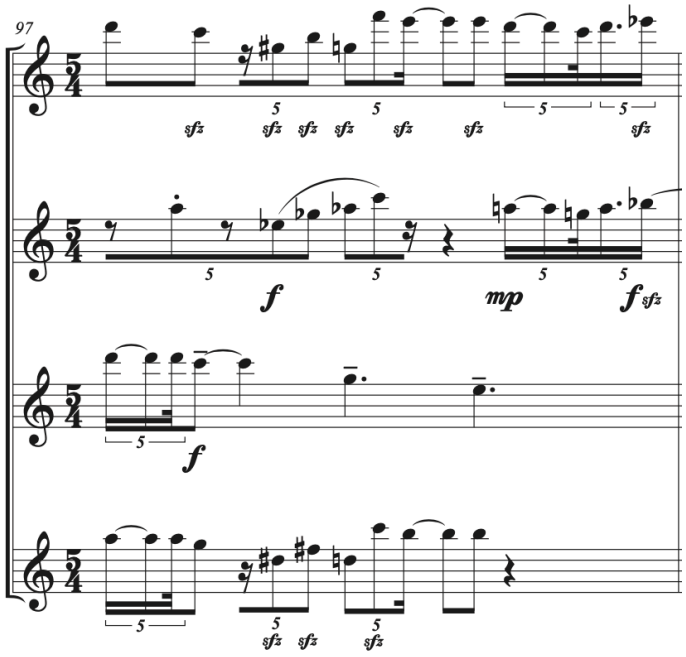
variation in eighth, quarter, and dotted half notes, while the baritone saxophone presents the same pitches with triplets. The relative duration between each of these iterations remains the same, e.g., beginning with an eighth rest, an eighth note tied to an eighth note (to create the durational length of a quarter note), a staccato eighth note, and so on. This shared pitch content across the ensemble gives the impression of an ensemble that is out of sync but still closely related to one another. We can actively hear the relationships between the voices and their imitations, but they have yet to bridge the gap to a unified sound.



Example 4. Shared pitch content across the ensemble in concert pitch.

Another identifying feature of Section 1-2 is the rhythmic unison of the instruments. This phenomenon occurs sporadically throughout mm. 48-100 and gradually becomes the texture for the second section of the piece. The first example, mm. 56-59, showcases subtle alignment on beat three and the anacrusis of beat four in m. 56 between the soprano and tenor saxophone. The tenor and baritone saxophones align rhythm and pitch in mm. 57-58. Within each of these moments of unison, there is also a greater variation in the rhythmic durations. This rhythmic variety also allows other instruments

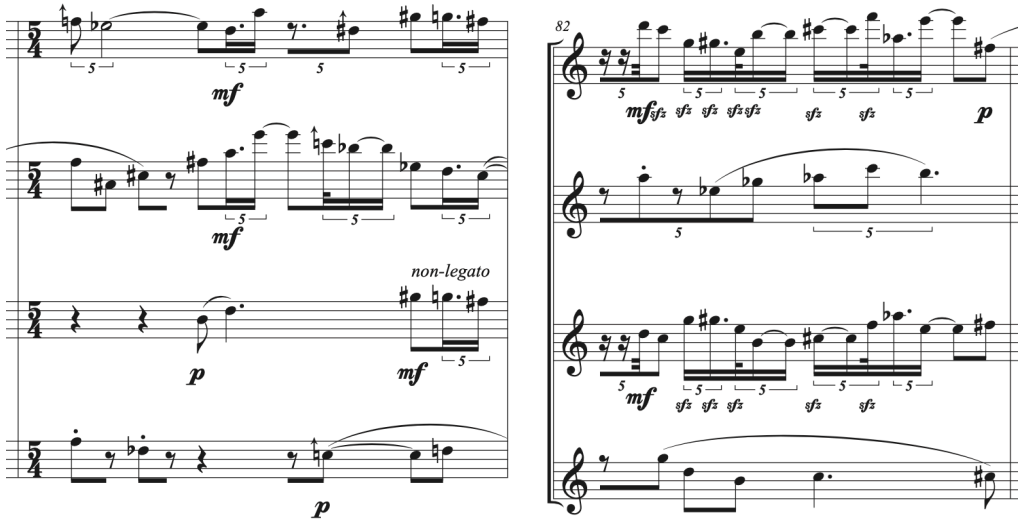
to align within these moments. The soprano saxophone aligns with the tenor and baritone saxophones in m. 58. A similar occurrence is found in m. 97. Within one measure, there is a different combination of instruments aligning with one another on each beat (Example 5).



Example 5. Rhythmic similarities across the entire ensemble on each beat. Transposed score.

When relating these first two subsections to the piece's final gesture, their rhythmic similarities become most apparent. Moments influenced by the final gesture surface throughout the texture, often emerging at points of alignment between instruments. Two clear examples occur in m. 68, between the soprano and tenor saxophones on beat three, and again in m. 80, where the soprano, alto, and tenor saxophones converge on beat three (Example 6). While similar rhythmic correspondences

appear elsewhere in the opening hundred measures, these particular instances stand out because they occur within a section defined by the absence of consistent rhythmic alignment. Their sudden coordination highlights the subtle but persistent presence of the final gesture, even before it appears in its complete form.



Example 6. Final gesture rhythms that exist in section 1 during moments of rhythmic alignment in transposed score.

Section 2

The rhythmic and pitch alignment across the ensemble characterizes the second section of *IAFZ*, from mm. 100 to 130. The rhythmic presentation of the material no longer divides it into smaller sections. There is a healthy mix of eighth notes, triplets, and quintuplets, as the pitch content aligns completely across various combinations of the ensemble. The second section gradually increases and then decreases in alignment. The greatest tutti across instruments occurs in the middle of the section, from mm. 108-120, and a gradual increase and subsequent decrease in alignment are observed at either end.

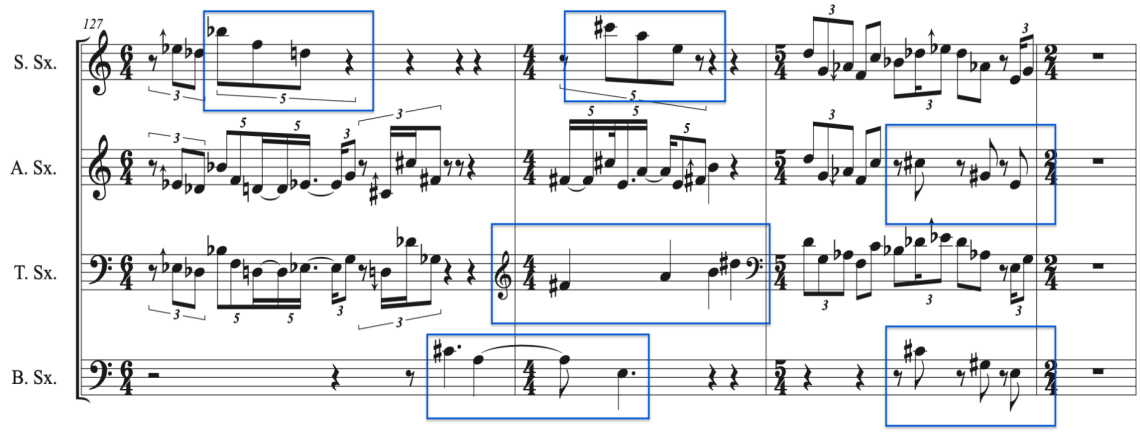
Similarly, the alignment across Section 1-2 of the piece's opening alludes to the alignment that dominates this section. Here, *IAFZ* features gestures that counter the texture created by the homophony of the other instruments to outline major and minor triads (Example 7). These moments can be found throughout this segment of the piece and are easily identifiable by a few factors:

- A voice outlines a triad (sometimes in inversion)
- The same voice is not aligned with the other voices
- That same voice is presenting material in a rhythmic pattern where each note is held for the same duration, and the material begins with a rest of said duration

Here is a list of some of these moments:

- m. 109 the soprano
    - A minor triad in second inversion
- m. 119-121 the baritone
    - A minor triad in second inversion
- m. 127-129 every saxophone
    - Soprano
        - m. 127 Bb Major triad in root position
        - m. 128 A Major triad in first inversion
    - Alto
        - m. 129 C# minor triad in root position
    - Tenor
        - m. 128 B Dominant Seventh in second inversion
    - Baritone
        - m. 127-128 A Major triad in first inversion
        - m. 129 C# minor triad in root position

These moments are essential, as they highlight another key aspect of the piece, much like the moments of unison within Section 1. They underscore the significance of triads in the harmonic and melodic material of the piece, particularly in the final gesture.



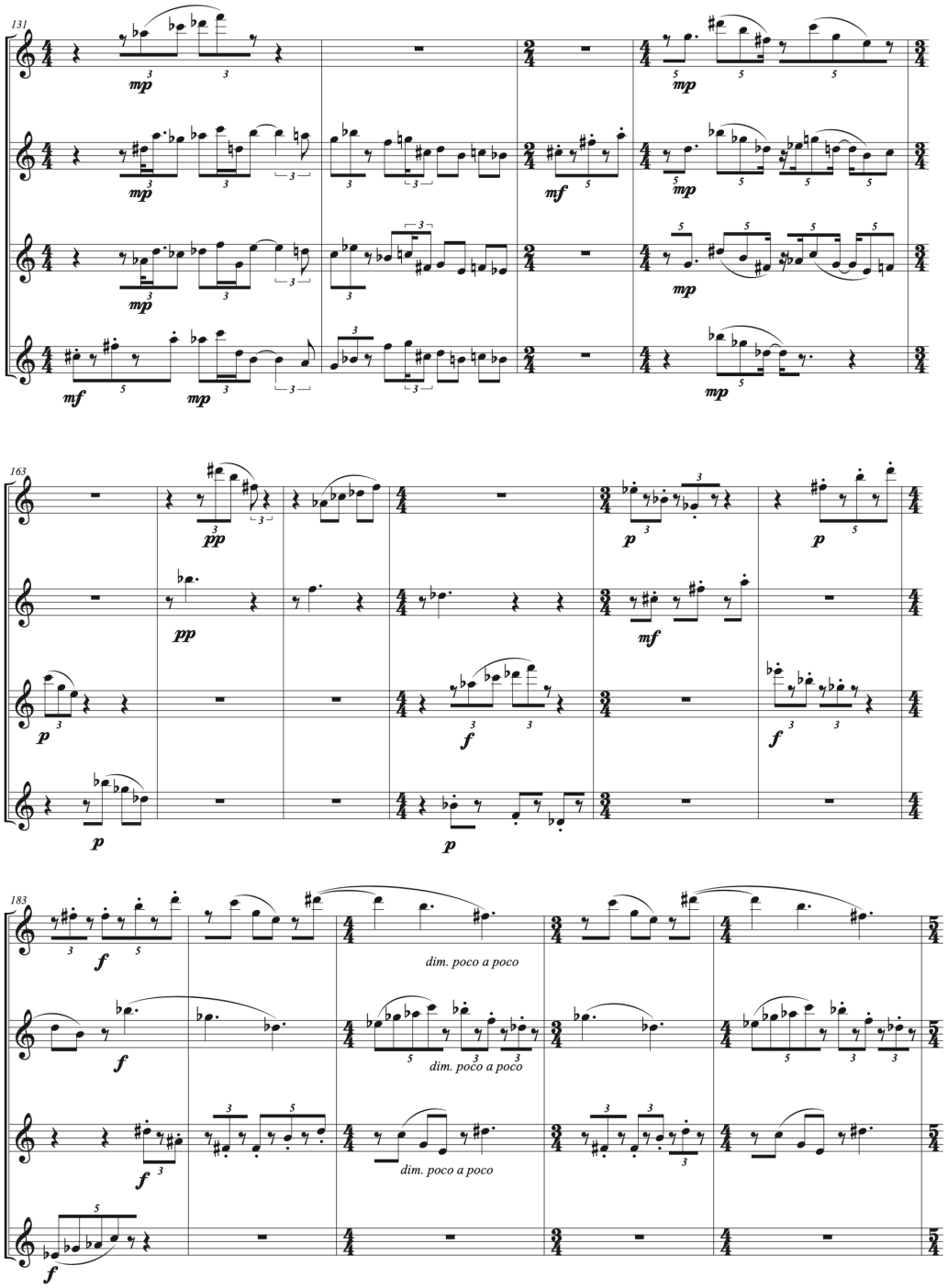
Example 7. Each saxophone presents triads in inversion in concert pitch.

In the tenor example, there is a dominant seventh chord that goes against the previously established pattern of triads. Still, this dominant seventh chord can be divided into B Major and an F# minor triad. The rhythmic and pitch content of the second section of *IAFZ* recontextualizes the opening's rhythmic content, featuring a mix of eighths, triplets, and quintuplets. The pitch content remains consistent throughout the opening, but the exposed triads are now part of the texture. While these triads are not as openly exposed within the final gesture, outside of the final three notes spelling a C# minor triad, traces of these triads can still be built within the final gesture. I view the relationship between Section 2 and the final gesture of *IAFZ* through the use of triads. Within Section 2 is the first and most stated triadic material, and its use within this section helps to construct the melodic contour of the final gesture.

Section 3

The mood of the piece changes relatively quickly in the third section of *IAFZ* (mm. 131–187). For the first time, there is a rest. The silence initiates the break between the second and third sections. These full-measure rests are an identifying feature of this

portion of *IAFZ*. They are presented similarly to their initial presentation —with complete silence or with an arpeggiated triad in first inversion. Rhythmic and pitch alignment continue to be part of the texture, except during these breaks. As the section unfolds, these silences influence the musical material around them, making the texture itself more spacious. A comparison of segments from the beginning, middle, and end of this third section reveals a change in textural density (Example 8). The opening is full of these interruptions; the middle is spacious yet without complete silence; and the final portion begins to rebuild in density, with triadic material woven into the texture as the piece moves into Section 4 (mm. 185-211). Many of the observations from earlier in *IAFZ* can be applied to the third section. Rhythmic content continues to combine eighths, triplets, and quintuplets. Triadic material can be found not only in the texture but also in the gaps of silence. These triadic gestures filling the silence become the basis for the spacious middle section. From roughly mm. 144–178, the texture is almost entirely built upon triads and arpeggios. With this shift to total triadic material, microtonal harmonies are removed from the musical language of the piece from here on out. The last five measures of the third section serve as transitional material into the final segment of the piece, and both their rhythmic and pitch content are closely aligned with the final gesture. As each passing measure, the final gesture is slowly constructed both melodically and rhythmically.

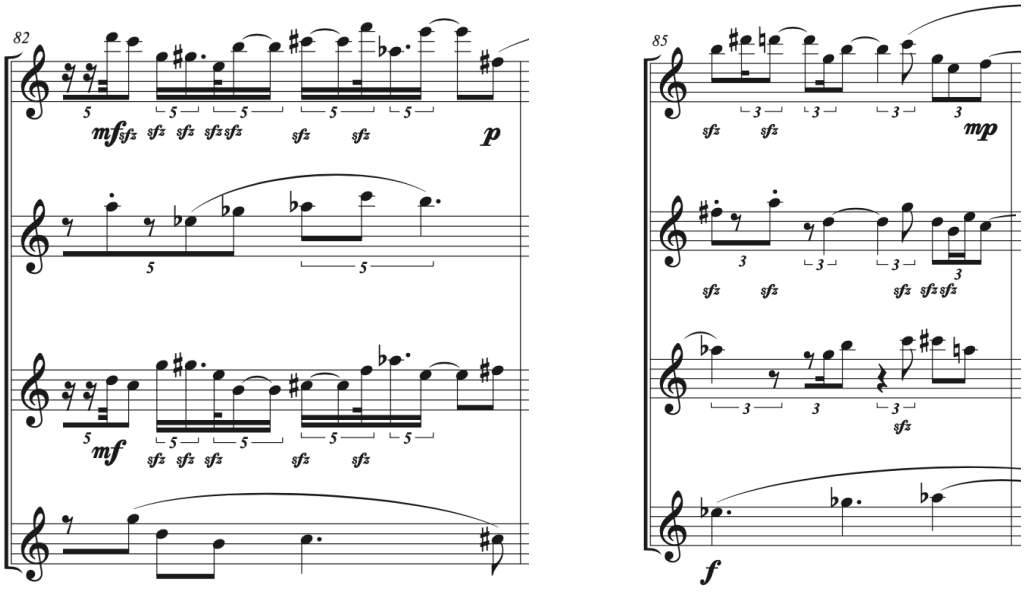


Example 6. mm 131-134, 163-168, and 187. From high, low, back to high-density musical material. Transposed score.

Section 4

The fourth and final section of *IAFZ*, mm. 185-211, offers a welcome release from the tension built up over the previous eight minutes. The mood is tense, but cathartic. This change of tone can be attributed partially to the extended use of a 5/4 time signature. The piece up to this point has been constantly changing meter. A highly angular and rhythmically jaunty gesture takes over the piece and repeats itself eleven times as a final statement. While this development can be easily traced from the end of the third section into the beginning of the final section, the ending motive has been implied throughout the entire piece. Any given moment of alignment from the first two sections of the piece can be related to the ending in some way:

- m. 68, beat five: the soprano and tenor saxophones present beat one of the final gesture.
- m. 80, beat three: the soprano, alto, and baritone saxophones play beat two of the final gesture in retrograde. An eighth note is played instead of an eighth note rest.
- m. 82, repeated beats two and three: the soprano and tenor saxophones perform beat three of the final gesture (Example 9).
- m. 85, beat two: the alto and tenor saxophones have beat four of the final gesture (Example 7).
- m. 119, beat two: the soprano and tenor saxophones play beat five of the final gesture.

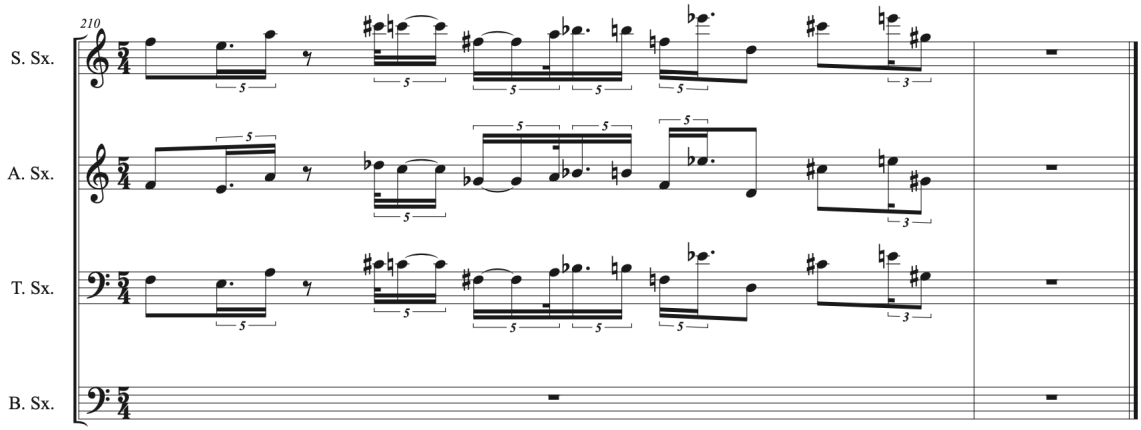


Example 9. Examples of the final gesture's rhythmic content from earlier within *IAFZ* in transposed score.

There are numerous rhythmic examples throughout *IAFZ*, as the ending gesture clearly influenced all the musical material preceding it. The rhythmic language of *IAFZ* utilizes primarily divisions of two, three, and five. There are only so many ways the rhythmic material can be presented; however, moments of alignment across the first two sections specifically highlight rhythmic cells from the final gesture.

The pitch content of the final gesture can be broken down into an amalgamation of all the previous major and minor triads highlighted in the piece (Example 8). While not an aggregate, the only missing pitch from the 15-note gesture is a concert G. When breaking down the pitch material, there are several different triads, both major and minor, that can be constructed from the final pitch collection. The clearest example is the last

three notes, which create a C# minor triad. The narrow-ranged microtonal lines from section 1 can be seen as related to the minor seconds of the final gesture.



Example 10. The final gesture of *IAFZ* in concert pitch.

Conclusion

Osnat Netzer's *IAFZ* demonstrates a highly structured approach to rhythm, pitch, and texture, in which triads, microtonal lines, and complex gestural patterns are systematically developed throughout the work. The piece's four sections exhibit a continuous negotiation between alignment and divergence: the first section establishes shared pitch content with out-of-sync trajectories, the second section introduces rhythmic and pitch alignment, the third section emphasizes textural contrast through silence and triadic material, and the fourth section consolidates prior material in a final repeated gesture. This concluding gesture functions not only as a formal endpoint but also as a generative principle, with preceding material consistently anticipating, reflecting, or deriving from its rhythmic, harmonic, and textural content. When revisiting *IAFZ*, it is impossible not to listen to the first three sections of the piece without the final gesture in

mind. The highly volatile, seemingly ever-changing presentation of the material connects to the culminating gesture in both rhythm and pitch.

The structural design emphasizes the interdependence of rhythmic, harmonic, and textural elements across multiple scales, from isolated gestures to broader formal spans. Silences, textural openings, and shifts between density and spaciousness shape perception and highlight key structural moments. These processes guide the listener's sense of motion, tension, and release, creating an experience in which the piece's energetic trajectory becomes a central expressive feature. In this way, *IAFZ* exemplifies a composition in which formal rigor and expressive pacing converge, with the final gesture serving as the work's generative and referential core.

CHAPTER 2

MIND BLOOM

Introduction

Mind Bloom can be divided into two large parts. The second half distinguishes itself by incorporating speech as an intrinsic component of the musical texture, altering the reiterated instrumental material from the first half with spoken word. Each of these two large sections can be further divided into four subsections each (Figure 2). Both sections and each subsection will be analyzed. Ostnat Netzer's *IAFZ* inspired several aspects of *Mind Bloom*. Those elements will also be described. A score written in concert pitch is available in the Appendix. The second half of *Mind Bloom*, which recontextualizes previously heard musical material, incorporates text by the composer, as well as short phrases from Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, specifically the translation by Gregory Hays (Aurelius 2003). From this text, the words "dreams," "ideas," "life," and "soul" are repeated often and help to shape the central thesis of *Mind Bloom*. Applying text to previously heard musical material provides listeners with a new context in which to approach and listen to the music, while simultaneously questioning how the piece will continue to unfold with the addition of text to the musical language.

My decision to incorporate Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* into *Mind Bloom* stems from the personal significance this text has had in my own life. Throughout my time reading and revisiting *Meditations*, I have found its quiet clarity, introspection, and focus on intentional living to be a steadying and affirming influence. Using excerpts from Aurelius's journal allowed me to highlight specific reflections that resonate most deeply with the piece's themes. The line "The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts,"

which I have adapted as “Your life is colored by the dye of your thoughts,” serves as the conceptual anchor: a reminder that one’s inner landscape gradually shapes one’s outward experience. Through *Mind Bloom*, I aim to contextualize my own spiritual journey with the help of *Meditations*.

The influence of *IAFZ* on Mind Bloom manifests in several ways. For one, each instrument within the ensemble shares pitch content but completes it at different rhythmic durations, directly inspiring the eight-measure counterpoint of Sections D and D’. The drastic change in texture within Section 3 inspired the shift to an aleatoric texture in Section B of *Mind Bloom*. Lastly, *IAFZ’s* final gesture, the build-up to it, and its influence throughout the piece directly influenced the gradual takeover of speech during Section D’, as well as repeating gestures multiple times at the end to make the ending even more impactful.

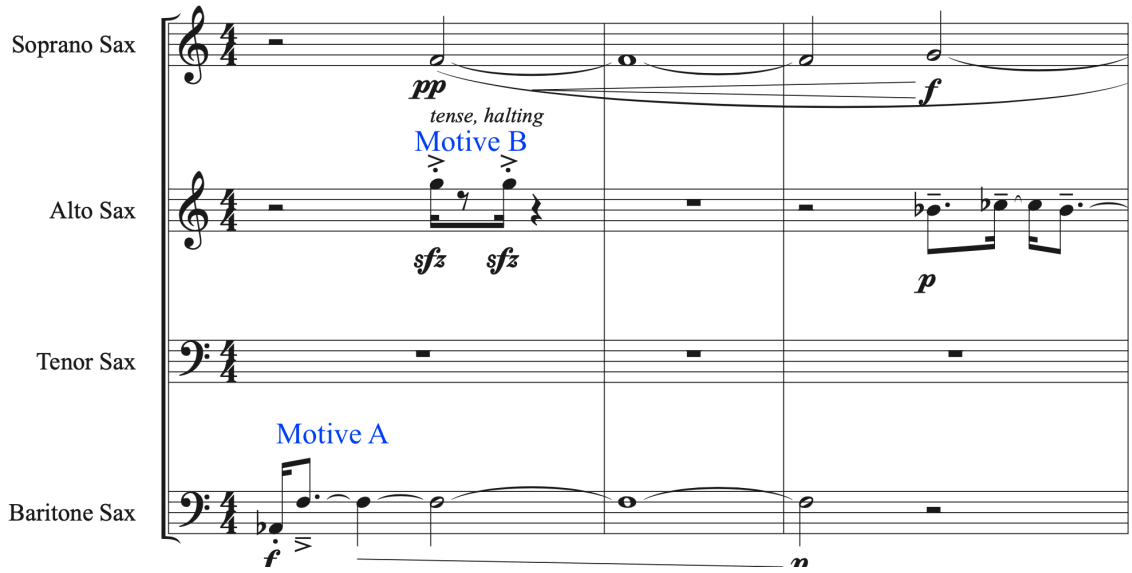
Section	I				II			
m. #’s	1-20	Aleatoric	24-45	46-57	58-74	75-101	102-108	109-130
Name	A	B	C	D	A’	B’	E	D’

Figure 2: Form of *Mind Bloom*.

Section A

The A section immediately introduces two of the recurring themes heard throughout the piece: a short note followed by a long, held note and two staccato notes. These two gestures will be referred to as Motive A and Motive B, respectively (Example 11). Motive A initiates many of the dovetail effects throughout the piece. The evolution of Motive B throughout the work can be traced most easily by looking for rhythmically

palindromic groupings. Rhythmic and pitch alignment begin almost immediately in *Mind Bloom*. This level of interplay between the instruments can be traced from nearly the beginning of the piece. By m. 3, the initial attack of both the soprano and alto saxophones aligns. In m. 5, dovetailing initiates another transfer of gestures, which by m. 9 has transitioned into rhythmic alignment. This pattern continues and builds towards a deceptive climax (m. 18) that leads the piece into Section B.



Example 11. Motive A (Short note, long note). Motive B (Two short, staccato notes) in concert pitch.

Major seconds immediately become a critical part of the vertical harmonic texture. Linear elements of the opening section of the piece feature fragments of the (1,2) octatonic scale, specifically with Bb as a pitch center. The pitch collection unfolds between the instruments as the soprano saxophone introduces F, G, and Ab while the alto saxophone has Bb and C. The tenor saxophone takes the pitches from the soprano saxophone and builds upon the collection by adding E. The baritone saxophone completes the collection with C# and D in m. 5. The combination of the octatonic scale

unfolding linearly and major seconds forming the vertical harmonies establishes the piece's harmonic language. Other octatonic collections are explored throughout Section A. For instance, in m. 17, the alto and baritone saxophones outline a different set of half- and whole-steps. The baritone then plays G-natural, a pitch outside the current octatonic collection, to maintain the major second harmony against the alto saxophone's F.

The octatonic scale provides a connection to the other essential harmonic feature of *Mind Bloom*: the minor second. The opening section frequently emphasizes both minor and major seconds to help reinforce the relationship between the musical material and the octatonic scale. For example, the final cadence of the opening section, mm. 19-20, includes several minor seconds within the melodic lines of the alto and baritone saxophones. The alto moves between a concert Db and D natural before leaping a minor seventh down to play an E and F. These two intervals, the major and minor seconds, combine to create the penultimate gesture within the alto and baritone saxophones, just as the soprano saxophone's multiphonic takes over.

There are several examples of motivic development in Section A. In the baritone saxophone, m. 5, the original eighth note rest is filled in with a pitch a half step away. In m. 8, the soprano saxophone alters the phrase even further with the addition of one note. While the original palindromic shape is no longer a distinguishing feature, this gesture will recur later, accompanied by an added note that creates a palindrome again. The three-note pattern in which the first and last notes are the same held for the same duration remains. The next variation occurs in the soprano saxophone, mm. 12-13. This variation replaces the final beat of the palindrome with a triplet figure. It not only breaks the pattern but helps to establish triplets as part of the rhythmic language of the piece. The

idea of a constantly evolving motive is directly inspired by *IAFZ*—especially by the transformation of the final gesture of that piece across its numerous iterations.

In terms of rhythmic material for Section A, Motive B acts as the initial cell for many of the syncopated rhythms and their variations throughout the piece. As mentioned previously, this gesture typically serves as a rhythm or pitch palindrome. What begins as a two-note gesture quickly evolves and expands. This procedure includes reshaping the phrase's contour, augmenting or diminishing its rhythmic durations, or adding notes to construct a more complex palindrome. The alto saxophone introduces this staccato gesture and then immediately provides a variation of it from mm. 1-3, respectively. This second iteration of Motive B still contains the two notes. Still, instead of separating each note with a rest, the silence has been replaced by a pitch, and the original rhythmic durations have been augmented. The opening section of *Mind Bloom* concludes with multiphonics on the soprano saxophone, played against a triplet figure on the alto and baritone saxophones.

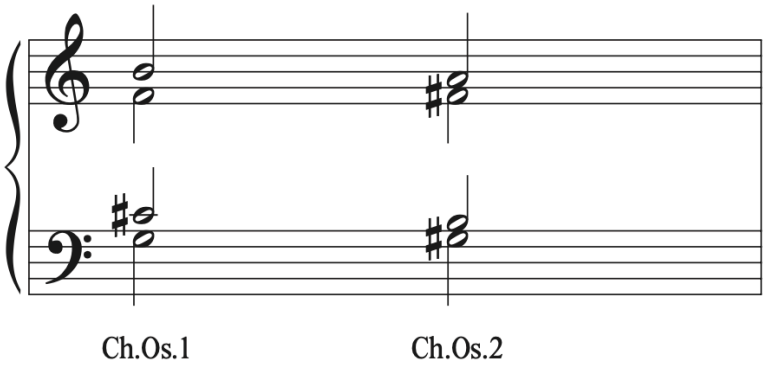
Section B

The second section features multiphonics. Their presence provides an immediate contrast to Section A, helping to define the boundaries of Section B. This section provides the ensemble with considerable freedom. There is no tempo marking. Instead, each musical system lasts roughly 20 seconds. The rhythmic texture of the second section is primarily aleatoric, with sustained gestures interrupted by brief, more rhythmic phrases. These few rhythmic gestures consist of fragments of material heard in Section A or foreshadow material to be developed later. Most notably, triplet figures return, and there is one palindromic rhythm in the soprano saxophone in the second system of page

11. The other rhythmic gestures are an eighth plus two sixteenth notes or two sixteenth notes plus an eighth. The first system on page 11 outlines these rhythms in the alto saxophone and foreshadows the rhythmic focus of the third section.

The multiphonics of Section B, as well as a sizable chunk of the pitch content of *Mind Bloom*, can be attributed to a two-chord ostinato that has been part of my harmonic language for several years now. Although these two chords do not function directly as an ostinato in this piece, in my other works, they do, so the label has stuck. Constructed out of two pairs of tritones and two pairs of minor thirds, the progression appears in a variety of ways throughout this piece (Example 12). Its first iteration is within the multiphonics. Although this exact harmony is not generally audible, since the two chords in the multiphonic texture are not distinct, preserving its essence provided a guide for finding interesting multiphonics. The presentation of the chordal ostinato is less obstructed later. Each of the multiphonics was selected under two general criteria: does it emphasize one of the pitches from the chordal ostinato, or is there beating between the other multiphonics/pitches from the chordal ostinato. Beating was an important sonic aspect I wanted to achieve because I like how it sounds. I have always found its properties interesting, especially when the beating between instruments is approached and explored in varying ways. In this case, through either multiple instruments performing multiphonics or a multiphonic(s) against a single sustained pitch. This sonic element was primarily accomplished by trial and error. One factor that helps ensure the presence of beating is the inclusion of notes normally played within the texture. With a specific note present, beating can occur against another, more consistent source instead of a second multiphonic. There are, of course, examples of two or more multiphonics creating

beating. Subsequently, Section B explores these multiphonics within an aleatoric texture, combined with intermittent, more rhythmic gestures, as a contrast to Sections A and C, which are more rhythmic and lively.



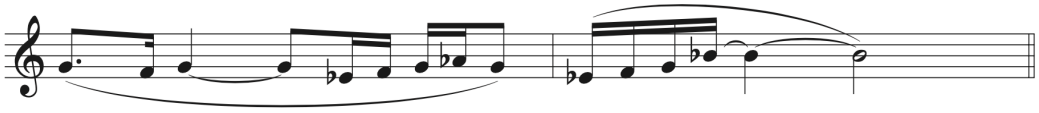
Example 12. The chordal ostinato in concert pitch.

Section C

Section C (mm 24-45) begins with transitional material that starts at the end of Section B in the baritone saxophone. This two-note staccato gesture is an extension of Motives A and B. However, the eighth-note rest has been moved to the end of the gesture, instead of its usual placement between the eighth notes. The line concludes in m. 26 with another gesture reminiscent of the opening. The melody that begins in m. 27 in the alto saxophone becomes the focus with harmonic and rhythmic variations for the remainder of the section.

The melody that begins in m. 27 features an opening gesture easily recognizable within the texture, a noodly middle section, and a sustained note that invites further variation (Example 13). Its rhythms and its stepwise motion help it stand out against the held-over textures from Section B (multiphonics and sustained pitches). While the

opening of each melodic variation remains the same, the middle and end portions are constantly altered. As the melody is passed around the ensemble, each member gets a new variation. The first variation in the tenor saxophone (m. 30) begins with the same rhythmic and pitch content. Still, instead of continuing with the stream of sixteenth notes, the melody shifts to a syncopated eighth-note gesture. This syncopation is picked up by the baritone saxophone in the next variation (m. 31). The alteration takes the stream of sixteenth notes to the extreme before returning to the two staccato-note gesture. Each of these deviations from the original melody increases tension and sustains harmonic interest as the melody evolves across the various instruments. All the while, each variation maintains the Bb mixolydian mode in the melody.



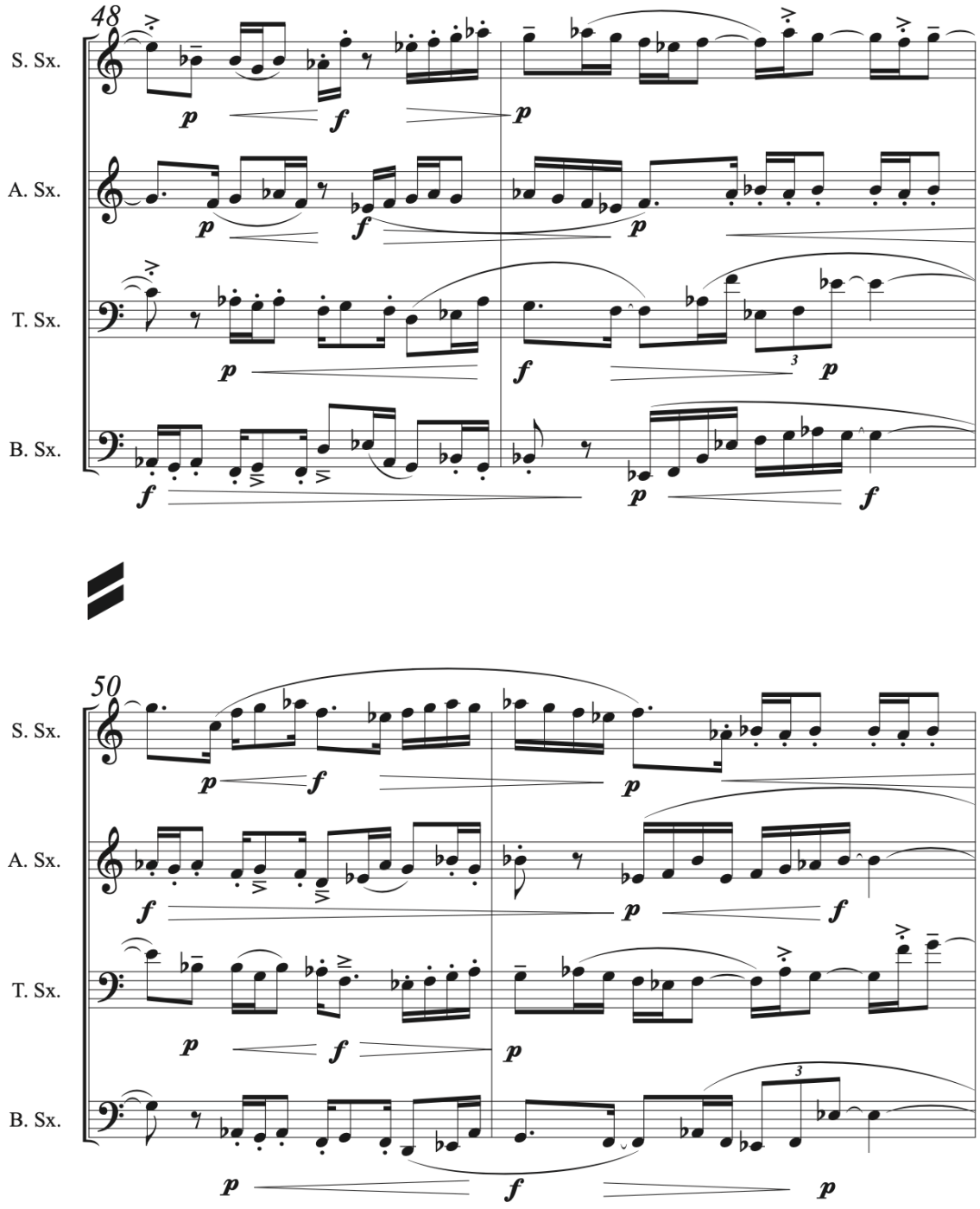
Example 13. Melody from Section C in concert pitch.

One or more instruments sustain a note or multiphonic in the background, forming a consistent background against the melody (mm. 24-36). This sustained sonority helps create a layer of sound that not only supports the melody but also serves as a textural link to the previous section of the piece. Members of the ensemble who are not playing sustained notes but are still part of the background texture are actively contributing to the piece's texture through performing various iterations of Motive A or Motive B. The two motives occasionally combine, such as between the soprano and alto saxophones in m. 38. A string of Motive B gestures is punctuated by the large leap

reminiscent of Motive A. The energy builds throughout Section C, paving the way for the dense counterpoint of Section D.

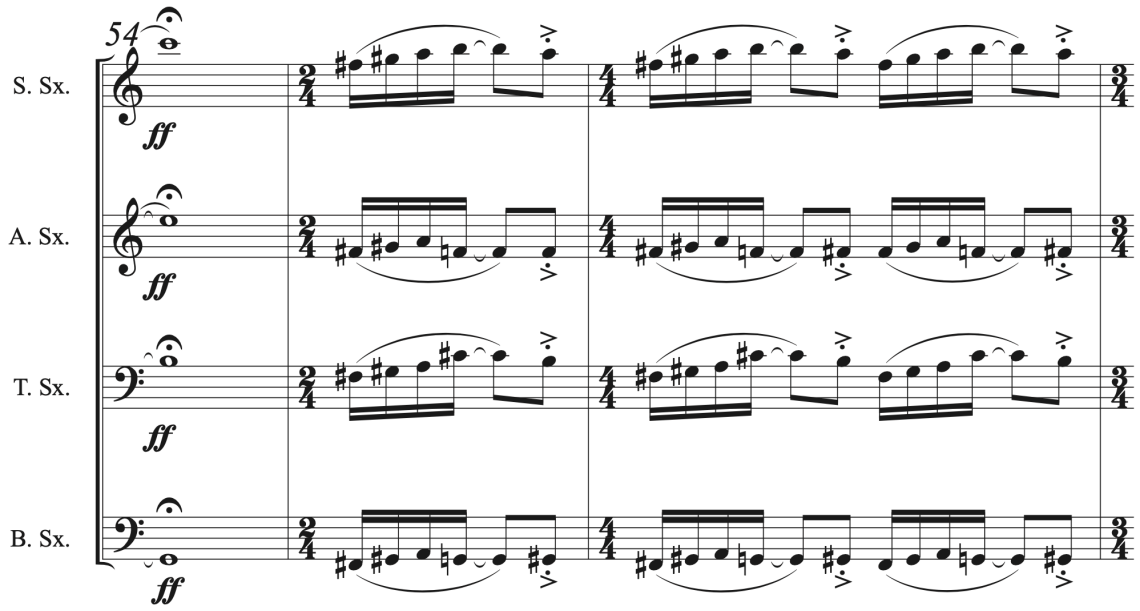
Section D

Section D (mm 46-57) consists of four two-measure phrases wherein each member of the ensemble gets their own two-measure phrase before switching to a different two-measure phrase (Example 14). From this example, we can see that the two-measure segment given to the soprano saxophone in m. 48 is passed to the tenor saxophone in m. 50. This pattern continues across the ensemble as they cycle through each of the two measure phrases. While there are registral changes, the pitch and rhythmic content remain consistent across iterations. These two measure phrases were directly inspired by *IAFZ's* shared pitch content being presented at different rates. During the compositional process, I had a few short phrases written out and was trying to develop a similar texture to that of Section 1-1 of *IAFZ* by shifting gestures out of sync. These four two-measure phrases are a product of that initial inspiration. This pattern continues until the dense counterpoint culminates in the first unobstructed presentation of the chordal ostinato. The first half of *Mind Bloom* concludes with transitional triplet material reminiscent of the passage between Sections A and B in m. 20.



Example 14. The eight-measure phrase is divided into two-measure segments among the ensemble in concert pitch.

The first half of Mind Bloom concludes with a rhythmic variation of material found in Sections A and C, combined with the chordal ostinato from Section B (Example 15). This variation is also heavily inspired by a quote from The Rolling Stones *Can't You Hear Me Knocking* both rhythmically and with its contour. The chordal ostinato is stated clearly across the ensemble as the fourth and fifth notes of the repeated gestures in mm. 55-56.



Example 15. The chordal ostinato at the end of Section D in concert pitch.

Section A’

Section A’ (mm 58-74) begins similarly to the opening of the piece. However, now the tenor saxophone assumes the role of a narrator, with every other member of the ensemble having a supplementary speaking role. That player serves as the lead speaker, while the rest of the ensemble provides either additional spoken interjections or background music. Speech not only adds another layer of textual depth but also provides context to the recurring gestures throughout the piece. For example, the rhythmic profile of the words “bearer” and “Seek! Seek!” roughly aligns with Motives A and B. Each of these figures coincides with the opening of Section A’ to reinforce this relationship with the text. The remainder of the piece explores the various ways in which text can be integrated into motives and gestures from the first half, culminating in the text taking over.

With text now tied to speech elements, the original musical material and initial gestures are being perceived in a different light. The previous motives now have textual meanings attached to them, and the growth from cells Motive A and Motive B, bearer and seeker, can follow its own trajectory, in which the unfolding of melodic and harmonic gestures unfolds sentences as well. These begin as fragments of sentences and as complete sentences with just one speaker, the tenor, before influencing the rest of the ensemble to speak and form their own sentences at the conclusion of the piece. Additionally, I love the sound of spoken word with instrumental accompaniment, and these moments aim to orchestrate a few of the various ways speech can be presented in this context.

Following this opening statement, the soprano saxophone reiterates a modified version of the opening phrase at the beginning of the piece. At the same time, the rest of the ensemble repeats the words “dreams,” “ideas,” “life,” and “soul.” These four words distill the piece's textual context to its simplest form: the text revolves around the impact of dreams and ideas on one’s life and soul. These all-important phrases are repeated ad libitum, ironically, as a jumbled cloud of nonsense until the soprano saxophone snaps the ensemble back into reality with Motive B. Ideally, the speech is intelligible to some degree and if a listener is only able to discern a few of the spoken words, I believe the impact and message is still conveyed given each of the words contribute towards the larger narrative meaning put forth by the tenor in the phrases to come.

While the opening section of the piece is repeated, the tenor saxophone recites the two longest phrases from Meditations. “Colored by the dyes of my thoughts!” and “Flowing like water from the same spring!” (Aurelius 2003). Two different versions of the first phrase are presented. First, the tenor saxophone is given the exact rhythms by which the text is performed within the phrase. In the second phrase, the tenor saxophone is given only the downbeat on which to begin. The delivery of the rest is up to the performer, with whatever rhythm they choose, and only the expression marking “rushed, exclamatory” is provided as a guide. This approach is taken to the extreme with the following phrase, which employs the expression marking, “grand, prophetic, and exclamatory.” The opening of the piece is again recontextualized under this text to reflect the words. Adding the element of speech to the texture of the piece provides different means by which the music is to be understood. Suddenly, the music gains text and meaning through the addition of spoken word. The tenor’s last word is “bearer” before

the A' section concludes identically to its first presentation. The presentation of spoken word and text throughout the piece combines several different ways I have experimented with presenting text in previous works. *Mind Bloom* includes specific syllabic breakdowns tied to a given rhythm. At the same time, other instances are provided only with a starting point, with the exact delivery left to the performer. The purpose of the varied presentation was to allow listeners to hear the spoken word again while also varying its delivery. A more detailed description of each of these variations can be found in the performance notes of *Mind Bloom*, within the appendix.

Section B'

B' (mm 75-10) of *Mind Bloom* reuses the originally aleatoric material in a metered context. This restatement of material follows the same general principle from Section A', wherein the presence of the spoken word adds a dimension of sound to the texture. Additionally, moving aleatoric material into a metered context allows greater control over its presentation. I aim to create an interesting interplay between the spoken word, multiphonics, and sustained notes within a metered context. This is reflective of the bisbigliandos from *IAFZ* in Section 1, where a given pitch is presented in multiple contexts: as a sustained note, rapidly repeating notes, or as a bisbigliando.

At m. 75, the tenor saxophone poses a question to the aforementioned "bearer" asking: "Bearer of memory, whatever is this?" The once aleatoric material now gives the tenor saxophone ample time and space to execute these spoken phrases. With each phrase, tension rises and is ultimately cut off again by the two-note staccato gesture. I attempt to create tension by giving the listener a sense of expectation about where the text

is going narratively and where the music is headed, because musically, it is in a state of stasis. To accompany the spoken word, many fermatas are used to ensure the text is performed as intended and that the multiphonics are produced as intended. The text within this section is also from Meditations: “Many grains of incense fall upon the same altar” (Aurelius 2003). With my own variation to follow: “Many motives fall upon the same stave”. And ending with a final phrase that is cut off early: “Many lives fall upon the same”.

The harmonic and rhythmic material of this section closely mirrors the aleatoric section, with only material derived from the opening section elaborated. For example, see the tenor saxophone, mm. 96-97, and alto saxophone, m. 99. There are two related rhythmic palindromes that most closely resemble the opening of *Mind Bloom*. Similar to the previous aleatoric section, the sustained notes and gestures support the multiphonics, create a beating effect, and provide an element that holds the desired texture together. The final rhythmic motive is again Motive B in m. 101.

Section E

Following this interruption, the two motives, which have been consistent parts of the piece, get their own moment to shine in Section E (mm 102-108). The soprano, alto, and tenor saxophones perform a mixture of Motive A with both notes and spoken word (beginning in m. 102). This repeated ad-lib gesture is similar to the collection of words the ensemble repeats at the beginning of the second half of *Mind Bloom*. Additionally, the combination of text with sounding notes adds another layer, hinting at material to come. Underneath this chaotic buildup of outbursts—vocal and instrumental—the baritone saxophone repeats Motive A, culminating in an outburst that combines spoken word and

performed notes. The outburst serves multiple purposes. It provides a transition into the final section.

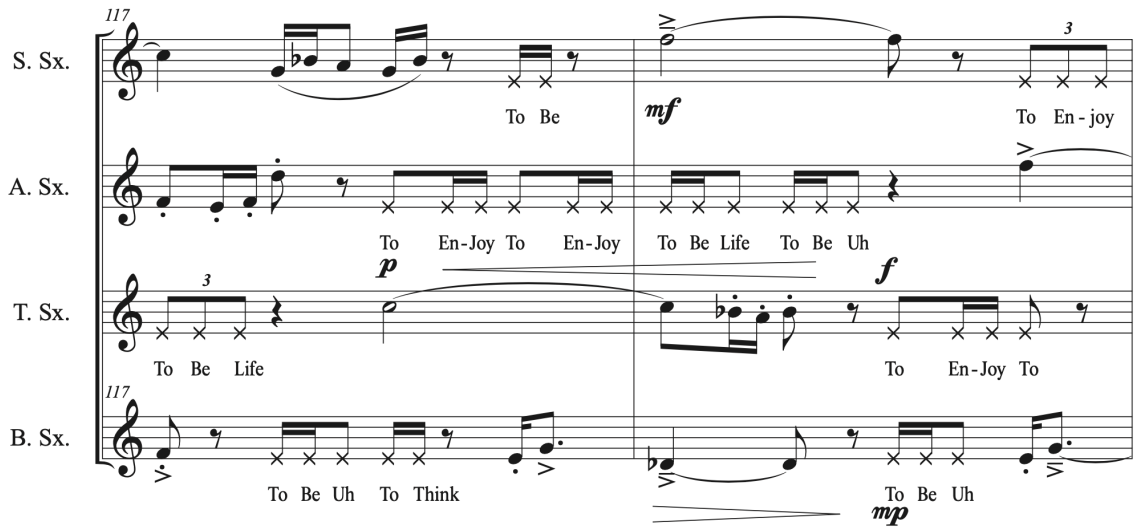
Furthermore, it serves as the emotional climax of the piece, while also clearing the sound from the sustained aleatoric material. Additionally, while rehearsing with Kodachrome, Bonson Lee, their incredibly tall and vocal baritone saxophonist, stood up and shouted over the ensemble, creating a memorable, dramatic gesture that was too great a moment to pass up. This physical gesture impacts the work in that not only is it memorable, but the idea that text takes over the piece foreshadows Section D', where spoken word does take over. Additionally, it reinforces the power of words, demonstrating that when they are brought to the forefront of the musical texture, they take over the piece and serve as a direct statement to the audience. Lastly, it communicates to the audience that if I wanted to have spoken word as an isolated element that is easily understood, I can do that, and here it is. With that, I hope that a listener will consider this and, if they haven't already, begin to listen to the text as an integral part of the music's texture and how it affects the music they are hearing.

While in the score, there is no indication to stand up, Lee took the opportunity to add his own flair to the moment. It is a shocking, striking act that creates a stark contrast between the first and second halves of the piece. It also serves as a testament to the impact of text, the significant influence it can have on music, and the importance of collaboration in music. Motive A builds to this intense outburst, culminating in a vocal outburst. The vocal outburst is punctuated by Motive B, presented with the words "IT IS!" and with the soprano saxophone playing staccato notes.

Section D’

Section D’ (mm109-130) of *Mind Bloom* is again closely related to the dense counterpoint of Section D in the first half of the piece. It also shares a very similar construction. There is one eight-measure phrase, divided into two-measure cells, which are passed around among the instruments (Example 16). The main difference in this second iteration is that the spoken word gradually becomes the dominant texture as the sounding notes recede. To compensate for this takeover, this ultimate section is significantly longer. It ends once the spoken word becomes the sole remaining element and is performed as an ensemble in unison. The text again comes from Marcus Aurelius (Aurelius 2003). It is a syllabic breakdown of the phrase “to be alive”, as “to be uh”, as well as fragmentary phrases such as “to enjoy”, “my life”, and “to think”.

The ending fuses spoken word with instrumental sound, as the ensemble performs the final statement: “Your life is colored by the” (Aurelius 2003) chordal ostinato 1 “of your” (Aurelius 2003) chordal ostinato 2, in which chords and speech intertwine—each interrupting, obscuring, and completing the other.



Example 16. The eight-measure phrase is divided into two-measure segments among the ensemble, with spoken word as part of the texture in concert pitch.

Conclusion

Mind Bloom was an engaging and rewarding piece to compose, and I am deeply grateful to Kodachrome for their exceptional premiere. Tracing the evolution of Motives A and B throughout the work provided a structural throughline that remains perceptible across its unfolding. These motives also allowed me to experiment with several compositional approaches I continue to explore—most notably, octatonic collections and motivic development in both instrumental and spoken contexts. The recurring chordal ostinato has become an integral part of my musical language, shaping how I think about texture and harmonic grounding. Both the chordal ostinato and speech have been central to my musical explorations over the last few years, and Mind Bloom felt like the first time they worked together to present the listener with clear ideas, intention, and a sense of presentation. Other examples, including a piece for chamber ensemble that used the text from a sound poem, prompted many questions, as listeners are often more focused on

discerning the words being spoken than on listening to how the instruments sound when someone is talking over them.

IAFZ remains a continual source of inspiration for me. I am drawn to the way its opening resists metric alignment across instruments, creating a flexible rhythmic counterpoint that challenges performer coordination and heightens musical tension. This idea directly influenced the dense contrapuntal writing in both D sections of *Mind Bloom*. Likewise, Netzer's contrasting textural third section, with its striking contrast between dense and open textures, informed my own treatment of space and pacing, particularly in moments that reintroduce familiar material through the B section motives and multiphonic timbres. The memorable closing gesture of *IAFZ*, in which earlier materials converge into a climactic synthesis, also guided my thinking about culmination and transformation in *Mind Bloom's* conclusion.

Netzer's ability to interweave pitch, rhythm, and gesture across instruments—both locally and on a larger formal scale—continues to captivate me. The piece's balance between intensity and serenity perfectly embodies its title, maintaining composure amid rhythmic and textural complexity. Although this analysis cannot uncover every facet of *IAFZ*, the work continues to challenge and inspire me, enriching my understanding as both listener and composer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aurelius, Marcus. 2003. *Meditations*. Translated by Gregory Hays. New York: Modern Library.

Cox, Arnie. *Music and Embodied Cognition: Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016.

Kellerman, Myles. *Mind Bloom.* Score, 2025.

Kodachrome. *Mind Bloom.* Performance recording, 2025. [https://youtu.be/Y-uIj7lGBuk]

Netzer, Osnat. *I Am Fucking Zen.* Score, 2020.

Nois~. *I Am Fucking Zen.* Performance video, 2020. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7bZPdCLuy4&t=208s&ab_channel=ConstellationChicago]

Wishart, Trevor. *On Sonic Art.* London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.

APPENDIX A

COMPOSER PERMISSION

Zen Analysis Inbox ×

Myles Kellerman Thu, May 1, 8:13 AM
Dr. Netzer, I hope this email finds you well. I am in the process of finalizing my proposal for my dissertation. The dissertation is in two parts: writing a pie

6

Myles Kellerman Thu, Nov 13, 9:22 AM (2 days ago)
Dr. Netzer, I successfully defended my paper last week and am now working on the revisions. The graduate college has asked me to include a screenshot from an em

Osnat Netzer Thu, Nov 13, 10:55 AM (2 days ago)
to me

Dear Myles Kellerman,

Thank you so much for digging into my piece I AM FUCKING ZEN! You have my explicit permission to use excerpts from the score in your research paper.

All the best,
Osnat Netzer

Osnat Netzer, dma
Associate Professor and Coordinator of Musicianship and Composition
DePaul University School of Music room 315
804 W Belden Ave, Chicago, IL 60614
onetzer@depaul.edu | www.osnatnetzer.com

APPENDIX B

MIND BLOOM SCORE

[Consult with Attached Files]