

white writing
for large ensemble

Andrew Crossley
(2015)

white writing

Instrumentation:

Flute (doubling Alto Flute/Piccolo)

Oboe (doubling Cor Anglais)

Clarinet in B flat (doubling Bass Clarinet in B flat)

Bassoon (doubling Contrabassoon)

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Percussion (2 players) – for instrumentation details, refer to performance notes

Harp

Piano

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Electronics (optional)

Duration: c. 10'

Score is in C.

Standard octave transpositions are observed.

Commissioned by the Royal College of Music for the New Perspectives Ensemble; Timothy Lines, director.

The American painter Mark Tobey (1890-1976) is perhaps best known for having developed a unique technique, which he termed 'white writing'. White writing is characterized as an overlay of swift calligraphic symbols, reminiscent of various techniques of Oriental calligraphy, placed on an abstract field – a prepared canvas consisting of thousands of small interwoven brushstrokes in various subtly different hues of white and grey. For him, this type of painting had a distinctly spiritual goal – it was a form of meditation, rather than action.

Tobey was well acquainted with John Cage, on whom he would be a great influence. In Tobey's paintings and his interest in Eastern philosophy and aesthetics, Cage saw a way forward in his quest for an art freed from what he called 'ego-noise'. Reflecting on one of Tobey's exhibitions (where with characteristic enthusiasm he decided to buy one of the white writing paintings even though he couldn't afford it) he recalled:

"It was a canvas that had been utterly painted. But it had not been painted in a way that would suggest the geometrical abstraction that interested me, so it brought about a change in me [...] and in my relation to art, such that when I left [Tobey's] exhibition, I was standing at a corner on Madison Avenue waiting for a bus and I happened to look at the pavement, and I noticed that the experience of looking at the pavement was the same as the experience of looking at the Tobey. Exactly the same. The aesthetic enjoyment was just as high... So, you have a change then in my view."


My piece seeks to explore in musical terms Tobey's idea of the 'prepared canvas' and the calligraphic following-of-the-brush that occurs thereon. By leaving a number of important musical decisions up to the performer, *White Writing* is also my way of engaging with some of Tobey's (and Cage's) aesthetic ideas.

-A.C.





Mark Tobey - *White Journey* (1956)
© Fondation Beyeler


 Gradual accelerando/ritardando  Gradual change between one technique and another

 Gradually start gravitating the material's range towards and around the specified pitch


Wind instruments:

flz. - fluttertongue


 Exhale (or blow air) audibly through instrument.  Inhale audibly through instrument.

 Breathe in and out at a normal rate audibly through instrument.

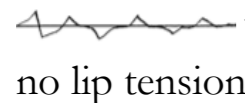
(Note: Where trills or grace notes appear in conjunction with these symbols they denote key clicks. In cases where a phoneme is included, whisper the given sound through instrument.)

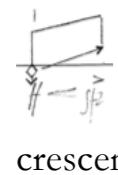
 Denote different amounts of breathiness.

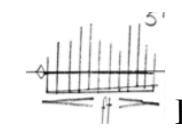
 Multiphonic on given fundamental (fingering not given – if given fundamental is not available, find an alternative one that's as close as possible)

 Slow and widely undulating vibrato, very breathy.

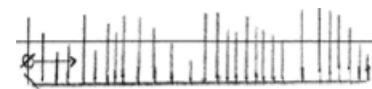
Flutes:

 Whistle tones on given fundamental – produced by turning the flute slightly outward and blowing across the embouchure hole with almost no lip tension, with a constant air stream (the tones will be irregular, but fluctuation is desired)

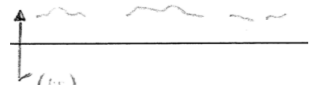
 Jet whistle – completely enclose the sound hole with the lips and blow with sharply increasing pressure, so that a glissando occurs simultaneously with the crescendo.

 Fingering as indicated, lip position normal. Increase wind pressure according to shape so that the upper overtones sound together with the crescendo

Alto Flute / Clarinet:

 Slap-staccato – push the tongue between tightly pressed lips and pull it back quickly to produce as much tongue noise and as little pitch as possible (vary fingerings according to shape)

Oboe/Bassoon:



Extremely high and irregular sounds produced by pulling air inwardly through very tightly shut lips (similar to the sound of smacking the lips)

Brass instruments:



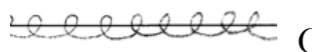
Slap palm percussively on mouthpiece

Harp:

(The harp is bowed at various points in the piece. A baroque violin or viol bow is ideal for this, although a modern violin bow can also work on certain harps.)



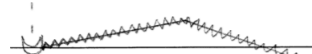
Hold fingernail to vibrating string and let rattle



Circular bowing – alternate between bowing close to the soundboard and up towards the middle of the string as much as possible



(While bowing) touch the upper half of the string with light pressure and slide up and down, touching various nodes along the way



Scrape string along its vertical axis with fingernail



Harmonics – follow the approximate position along the string (favoring nodes with more irregular partials)



Slap the soundboard percussively  Pedal buzz

Piano:

(Sustain pedal should always be held down, except when attacks are marked staccato.)



Mute specified string at its base inside the piano, while playing it on the keyboard



Touch approximate harmonic node on the string while playing it on the keyboard (favoring nodes with more irregular partials)



Touch narrow end of a plastic CD case to vibrating string and let rattle



Pluck/strum string inside the piano



Slide finger along the length of the string, passing through various nodes



Mute strings in the highest register so that only the action of the hammers is audible

White writing section – alternate freely between playing on the keyboard and strumming and plucking the strings themselves

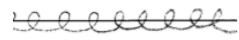
Strings:

sp/msp – sul ponticello / molto sul ponticello

st – sul tasto

 snap pizzicato

 Indicates speed and amplitude of vibrato




Circular bowing – alternate bow between sul pont. on the upbow and sul tasto (high above fingerboard) on downbow, keep the tempo of bowing flexible and constantly expanding and contracting.





Slap palm on all four open strings percussively (let ring)




Slap body of instrument percussively

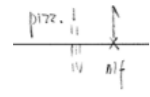
 Microtonal glissandi around given pitch, according to shape of line

 Indicates bow pressure


 Very rapid slide from given pitch down to the open string

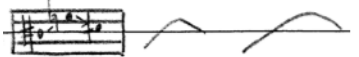
 Very high harmonic glisses alternating with open string


At minute 5 and cue 2 choose one of the given pitches for each subsequent attack, don't repeat pitches.



Muted pizzicato (no pitch) – pick one of the four strings for each subsequent attack, don't repeat strings.

 Touch an artificial harmonic over fingered pitch and slide according to shape

 Slide between given pitches, varying dynamic according to the speed of the slide (faster = louder)

 Random pizzicato in the highest register of the instrument

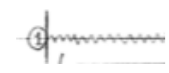
Percussion

The players should choose their own setup of instruments. Player 1 may only use five short-resonance instruments (i.e. temple blocks, bongos, cowbells), and Player 2 may only use four long-resonance ones (i.e. gongs, singing bowls, cymbals).

Once the setup is decided, number the instruments and play score accordingly. (NOTE: Player 2 should use a large tam-tam as instrument number 1.)

Player 1: Where no number is specified, play freely between all five instruments. More than one instrument can be struck at once. Preferably, no pitched instruments should be used.

Player 2:



Scrape tam-tam with a coin or other metallic object



Hold coin or other metallic object to vibrating tam-tam and let rattle

Electronic Specifications

Technical requirements:

- MacBook Pro (Mac OSX version 10.9.5 and up)
- Max/MSP (version 6.1.8 and up)
- Tablet with touch screen for spatialization interface
- Mixing desk
- Audio interface (at least 4 mic inputs)
- Four microphones
- 4-6 channel speaker system

The piano, harp and double bass are all individually mic'd and subtly amplified. The rest of the ensemble is picked up by a fourth microphone for spatialization and subtle reverb.

Frequency data from the three instruments is used to tune virtual resonators that are diffused around the hall, creating different areas of 'colored resonance' depending on where the sound is spatialized. Numerical markers in the score indicate where the resonators are set to the frequencies obtained from the live instruments, and alphabetical markers indicate preset chords.

Apart from these pre-defined settings, the operator is free to diffuse the sound around the hall how he sees fit, playing with the combination of colors the resonators offer. The speed of sound movement could be proportionate to the structure of the piece and the density of the textures.

Care should be taken to balance the electronics with the ensemble's sound, and the role of the electronics should be as much an organic outgrowth of the live ensemble's soundworld as possible.

Complete technical documentation and necessary Max patches are available from the composer on request: andrew@andrewcrossley.com

to Kenneth Hesketh, in gratitude

white writing

for 16 players and electronics

Andrew Crossley
(2014-15)

white writing

The score is written for a full symphony orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Flute, Alto Flute, Piccolo
- Oboe, Cor Anglais
- Clarinets in B flat, Bass Clarinet in B flat
- Bassoon, Contrabassoon
- Horn in F
- Trumpet in C
- Trombone
- Percussion 1 and 2
- Harp
- Piano
- Violin 1 and 2
- Viola
- Violoncello
- Double Bass
- Electronics

Key features of the score include:

- Section markers 1 through 6, indicated by vertical dashed lines.
- Time markers at 1'00'' and 2'00''.
- Dynamic markings such as *mp*, *ff*, *p*, *ppp*, *mf*, and *sp*.
- Articulation and performance instructions like *gliss.*, *arco*, *tr*, and *To Contra*.
- Handwritten notes and markings throughout the staves.

2'00" 3'00"

white writing

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦

Flute
Alto Flute
Piccolo

Oboe
Cor Anglais

Clarinets in B Flat
Bass Clarinet in B Flat

Bassoon
Contrabassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Harp

Piano

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Electronics

mp

f

p

sfz

fz.

ard.

slap

Wah-wah ad lib.

ppp

mf

f

arco

pp

ppp

mf

f

ppp

mf

ppp

ppp

A **B**

white writing

4'00" 5'00"

① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Flute
Alto Flute
Piccolo

Oboe
Cor Anglais

Clarinets in B flat
Bass Clarinet in B flat

Bassoon
Contrabassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Harp

Piano

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Electronics

white writing

7'00" 8'00"

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

Flute
Alto Flute
Piccolo

Oboe
Cor Anglais

Clarinet in B flat
Bass Clarinet in B flat

Bassoon
Contrabassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Harp

Piano

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Electronics

mf, p, sfz, mp, f, (p), (p-mf), (f), sfz, mf, p, mp, f, arco, mzz. IV, Te Piccolo

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

white writing

9'00" 10'00"

The score is divided into four sections marked with circled numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Flute:** Flute, Alto Flute, Piccolo. Part 1 starts at 9'00" with *p*. Part 3 includes a complex passage with *p*.
- Oboe:** Oboe, Cor Anglais. Part 1 starts with *f*, then *p*.
- Clarinet:** Clarinet in B flat, Bass Clarinet in B flat. Part 1 starts with *p*, then *f*, then *p*.
- Bassoon:** Bassoon, Contrabassoon. Part 1 starts with *(p)*, then *f*, then *(p)*.
- Horn:** Horn in F. Part 1 starts with *p*, then *sfz p*.
- Trumpet:** Trumpet in C. Part 1 starts with *p*, then *sfz p*.
- Trombone:** Trombone. Part 1 starts with *(p)*, then *sfz (p)*.
- Percussion:** Percussion 1 and 2. Part 1 includes *sfz* and *f*. Part 2 includes *mf* and *sf*.
- Harp:** Harp. Part 1 includes *f* and *sfz*.
- Piano:** Piano. Part 1 includes *ff* and *mf*.
- Violin:** Violin 1 and Violin 2. Part 1 starts with *p*.
- Viola:** Viola. Part 1 starts with *p*.
- Violoncello:** Violoncello. Part 1 starts with *p*, then *sfz p*. Part 3 includes a complex passage with *sfz p*.
- Double Bass:** Double Bass. Part 1 starts with *(p)*, then *sfz (p)*.
- Electronics:** Electronics. Part 1 starts with *(1)*, Part 2 with *(2)*, Part 3 with *(3)*, and Part 4 with *(4)*.

London - Feb. 2015