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Morton Feldman in Three Senses

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Morton Feldman in Three Senses

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“I'm involved in a political life. I'm involved in a revolutionary life... I'm into a continual perpetual revolution in my own personal response to my work, which means action, immediate action, immediate decision that only I can make, and that I have to be responsible for. I don't like hiding behind issues, running to society...”

—Morton Feldman in conversation

with Walter Zimmerman, November 1975

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother, Miriam,
who continues to teach me about perseverance.

*“... So let’s link arms, sisters and brothers,
and let’s promise not to retreat.
There is glory in our failure,
so let’s march to the rhythm of fatigue —
to live our lives without leaders,
to live in joy without fear.
Let’s walk together, to the valley,
and let the light redeem our tears...”*

—Thee Silver Mountain Reveries,
from “There’s a River in the Valley Made of Melting Snow”

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Abstract

Morton Feldman in Three Senses

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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“It’s very difficult for us to listen to something, or to look at something, outside of its *style*,” Morton Feldman told an audience in 1986. “We don’t know the *skills* that went into it... Until we’re reeducated not to think of art in terms of aesthetics or style, we really don’t know what it is.” The three chapters of this thesis attempt to capture Morton Feldman’s thought and music in three different ways: addressing, processes of thinking, feeling, and doing (or, analogously, the subjects of historical context, experiential aesthetics, and material practices). The first chapter provides an intellectual history of modern music, c.1950 through a comparative study of writings and interviews with Pierre Boulez, John Cage, and Feldman. Drawing analogies between specific aural and visual sensations, in the second chapter I use the work of abstract painters and sculptors including Jules Olitski, Donald Judd, and Morris Louis to illuminate the effects of silence, surface, space, and saturation in Feldman’s music. In the third chapter, I bear down on Feldman’s last decade, highlighting a shift in the composer’s late style, around 1985. I look at certain aspects of his late compositions relative to the composer’s interest

in nineteenth-century nomadic Turkish carpets, emphasizing aspects of patterning and asymmetry in each. Finally, I discuss the radical compositions of Feldman's last years, using Jules Olitski's 1970s paintings, in their relation to earlier gestural abstraction, to illuminate issues of scale and naturalism.

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Introduction: “To be clear at all costs!”

“I really don’t think that I make a contribution. I am not confusing people, especially those that like and react to my music, with issues that don’t belong in my music. I think that’s my contribution.” - Morton Feldman, 1986.¹

The three chapters of this thesis attempt to capture Morton Feldman’s thought and music in three different ways. Broadly, and in a sense, the chapters address themes of thinking, feeling, and doing; or, analogously, the subjects of history, experience, and practice.

Throughout this project, I take my methodological cues from the composer himself. “The chances of you actually making a contribution are not good,” he warned a group of young musicologists in 1986. “Your contribution is not confusing people. That’s a very *important* contribution.”² Lecturing in Germany a few years earlier, Feldman explained that the techniques behind his compositions “as a way of saying it in different ways in order to be clear—to be clear at all costs.”³ This isn’t a theory of interpretation, or even a method of writing—perhaps only an attitude or outlook.

In the first chapter, I attempt to reconstruct the intellectual climate of experimental modern music in the 1950s, examining the writings and compositions of Pierre Boulez, John Cage, and Feldman. This chapter is the most obviously historical. Through an investigation of mostly primary sources, I attempt to describe some of the originary concepts and contexts that spurred the development, in a relatively short period

¹ Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman in Middelburg: Words on Music: Lectures and Conversations* vol. 1, ed. Raoul Morchen (Köln: Edition MusikTexte, 2008), 134.

² Feldman, *Words*, vol. 1, 134.

³ Morton Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 195.

of time between 1950 and 1952, of Boulez's total serialization, Cage's chance procedures, and Feldman's graphic notation.

In the second chapter, Feldman's distinction between "ideas" and "materials" guides my discussion about the effects of silence in music by Cage and Feldman. I employ the work of visual artists exemplifying these aesthetic attitudes to describe the compositional techniques and phenomenological effects of both composers' music. My observations are rooted only in my personal experience of the works in question; all of the artworks discussed in the chapter are works I have seen many times over several years. My experience and judgment alone inform this chapter. In this sense, chapter two is the most "critical"—which is not to say that I attempt to impose criteria or adjudicate the relative quality of the works in question. On the contrary, my strategy is to try and see past the layers of meaning and interpretation that have accumulated upon the work of these artists; to see through to the material realities of the works and their concrete effects.

The subject of the third chapter is Feldman's late style, from about 1978 to the composer's death in 1987. In this chapter, I draw analogies between these late, long compositions on the one hand, and the composer's interest in Turkish rugs as well as the context of gestural abstract painting on the other. My emphasis in all of these examples is on working methods, artistic practices, and material techniques. Feldman's late insistence on "concentration" and "sublimation" through the material practice of one's art is a subtext of this chapter; my own work in the visual arts informed my discussion of extended discussion of Olitski's naturalistic paint handling.

A great deal of the existing literature on Feldman and the visual arts focuses on the painters that the composer knew personally; those whom the composer spoke and wrote about—Jackson Pollock, Philip Guston, and Jasper Johns, for example. But Feldman’s music doesn’t strike me as more or less *morphologically* similar to any particular visual artist. I believe, more generally, that close attention and sensitive investigation into the effects of one art form can help illuminate the effects of another art form. In contrast to the bulk of the existing literature on this topic, I look at four artists—Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, and Donald Judd—that the composer neither knew personally nor discussed in print.

What to my mind links all of these artists was their interest in experimentation and practice, intuition and action, sensing and feeling, “an image” Feldman described, “of action and thought as a simultaneity.”⁴ In the work of these artists, I intuit the transit of sensations across the senses: a vivifying aesthetic experience that sharpens the senses as it satiates them. While Noland spoke of wanting to represent “those things only the eye can touch,”⁵ Feldman described the “surface aural plane” of his music, describing his compositions as “time canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall hue of the music.”⁶ Another point of interest and emphasis in my discussion is that for these artists, the pursuit of abstract sensations was rooted in the specificity of the artistic medium they practiced.

⁴ Feldman, “Speaking,” 140.

⁵ Noland quoted in Robert Godfrey, *Music without Words* (Greenville, NC: Greenville Museum of Art, 2006), 20.

⁶ Feldman, *Regards*, 84, 88.

Chapter One: “Strong Alternatives”

“The history of music has always been involved in controls, rarely with any new sensitivity to sound. Whatever breakthroughs have occurred took place only when new systems were devised. The systems extended music’s vocabulary, but in essence they were nothing more than complex ways of saying the same things.” – Morton Feldman, 1986⁷

INTRODUCTION

Histories of mid-century modern music pit the European serialists—Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen most prominently among them—against the New York School of experimental composers: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and Earle Brown. With their positivistic research into algorithms to determine the organization of a composition, the European view seemed quite at odds with the principles of chance and indeterminacy developed by the Americans. Boulez’s serialism was characterized by strict control, analyzable relationships, and determinate structures; Cage’s “chance” compositions, systematic in their own right, widened the definition of music to include the contingent aural phenomena surrounding us at all times. “Noise” and “sound” became equivalent and both were, to Cage, synonymous with “music.”

Feldman, by his own admission, could not “relate or identify with any system whatsoever,” he explained, “not even that which I make myself.”⁸ Influenced by the materiality of contemporaneous abstract painting, striving to handle sounds in a more direct, less mediated manner, he circumvented the serialism/chance dialectic, developing

⁷ Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman in Middelburg: Words on Music: Lectures and Conversations* vol. 1, ed. Raoul Morchen (Koln: Edition MusikTexte, 2008), 284. The title of the chapter is taken from an interview with Feldman by Tracy Caras and Cole Gagne in 1980, in which explains, “That’s what I’m interested in; very strong alternatives... If you think I can sit down and write a piece and not be worried about Steve Reich, John Cage, Pierre Boulez, and Xenakis, you’re nuts. I worry about these people. I worry about strong alternatives.” Feldman, *Says*, 93. This attitude, I feel, typifies mid-century American modernism.

⁸ Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 32.

instead an idiosyncratic approach to notation. Specifying aspects of the music's density and register, Feldman's graphic notation left crucial aspects of the composition, such as the selection of pitches and rhythms, to the performer. Feldman resisted using history to justify his compositions or systems to rationalize their organization. He stood apart from those historicizing dialecticians for whom "composing...is just an incidental activity in the power struggle of ideas."⁹ From a vantage point outside the dominant dualism of the era, Feldman commented on both Boulez and Cage, occasionally calling attention to the underlying attitudes they shared. Diverging in what they believed music could be or should be, the methods developed by those two composers nevertheless betray a common historical imperative.

Feldman's skeptical resistance is the lens through which I look at Boulez's unequivocal writings on the evolution of modern music, and the demonstration of his ideas in his piece *Structures I*. I then turn to Cage's first indeterminate composition, the *Music of Changes*, highlighting its aspects of systemization and control. Examining the composer's statements around the work, and contrasting them to Feldman's aesthetic sensibility, I emphasize Cage's dualistic thinking and historical position-taking, arguing that in all of these aspects, Cage's project runs parallel to Boulez's. Finally, I move onto the graphic notation of Feldman's *Projections* and *Intersections*, suggesting that these works propose a way out of the Boulez/Cage opposition. All of the music and most of the writing discussed herein dates from the years 1950-1952.

⁹ Feldman, *Says*, 16.

BOULEZ

With a series of compositions and essays written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Pierre Boulez asserted himself at the forefront of European avant-garde music. In the mature work of Viennese composer Anton Webern, Boulez observed the innovative effects of an organizational principle that became, for him as well as many European composers of his generation, the crux of modernist music. The twelve-tone technique developed by Webern's teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, involved the use of tone "rows"—predetermined series of pitches used to organize the music in the absence of functional harmony. To Boulez's ear, Webern's use of this technique was more radical and thoroughgoing than Schoenberg's; his pointillistic music was "totally stripped of allusion."¹⁰ Webern's discipline—his rarified refinement of the serial technique—remained for Boulez "the threshold of the new music."¹¹

Unlike Feldman, who would look back to Webern's example primarily for its aural effect, Boulez emphasized its underlying cause—serial organization. Webern's "use of the series unifies his vocabulary, gives it a more assured cohesion," Boulez asserted.¹² He felt that the composer "organized [his music] through a larger coherence, a stricter usage and a thoroughgoing control of technical means" after adopting tone rows, series, and systems.¹³ Having himself studied higher mathematics before he studied composition, the algorithmic accuracy of serial organization appealed to Boulez's

¹⁰ Pierre Boulez, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 298. A previous translation, *Notes from an Apprenticeship* (New York: Knopf, 1968), had appeared in the late 1960s.

¹¹ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 303.

¹² Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 296-297.

¹³ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 297.

sensibility.¹⁴ From Webern's tone rows, he conceived of an overarching system of total serialization, organizing not just pitch, but all possible parameters of notation—intensity, attacks, duration, etc. (fig. 1). Boulez called this top-down organizational principle “the dodecaphonic language,” after the twelve tones of the octave. With this system, Boulez asserted, “it is possible to justify an entire musical organization...from the tiniest component up to the complete structure.”¹⁵ Structure and justification—specifically structure *as* justification—was a concept common to mid-century modernists across disciplines; it was a rationale central to Boulez's dialectical understanding of modern music's evolution.¹⁶ The *a priori* systemization of material took composition from a subjective, expressive realm to the rational and autonomous, for Boulez conditions essential to fulfilling the evolutionary demands of history. Intellectual formulation was needed to legitimate a composition; it ensured that the composer's project was a “constructive research,” relevant to the historical dialectics of his time.¹⁷ “We assume our responsibilities unflinchingly,” he exclaimed, “the evolution of musical thought is called upon to rush onward.”¹⁸

An early Boulez composition determined by total serialization, *Structures I* of 1952, is scored for two pianos. Its musical material was generated, randomly, as it were, by series and rows of notational elements placed in rigorous mathematical relationships (figs. 2, 3). Differentiation is a primary quality of this method; the music leaps among

¹⁴ See the author's note in the first American edition of *Notes of an Apprenticeship*.

¹⁵ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 177.

¹⁶ This criterion was fundamental, for example, to Michael Fried's art criticism of the 1960s, as well as to the practices of several artists he wrote on. See “Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) as well as the titular essay of that volume.

¹⁷ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 177.

¹⁸ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 115; *Notes*, 230.

registers and dynamics, its texture alternately dense and clustered one moment, spare and quiet the next, never lingering in any formation for more than a few seconds. There is neither a rhythmic nor a melodic focus: the rate of change is rapid and ceaseless, an unpredictable onrush of abbreviated fragments. Material comprised only of fits and starts darts among extremes from measure to measure, sometimes within a measure; changes in density and direction are abrupt and constant throughout (fig. 4). Boulez's manner of writing in *Structures I*, like the rhetorical style of his essays and articles, is aggressive and direct.

In 1952, as Boulez was completing the first book of his *Structures*, he published a long, didactic essay elaborating the historical precedents and contemporary necessity of his dodecaphonic language.¹⁹ Amidst an array of compositional charts, graphs, grids, and equations, Boulez happened to include an affirmative elaboration of John Cage's techniques, noting with approval the American's interest in "a priori musical structure."²⁰ In Cage's use of "numerical relationships in which the personal element plays no part," Boulez saw a parallel to his own practice.²¹

Structure in Cage's music, as in Boulez's, was autonomous and inflexible, operating independently from the material it organized, yielding music rationally but impersonally, the composer's conceptual formulation ("determining a structure") decidedly unresponsive to the process of composing (choosing "materials").²² Cage, on a Guggenheim grant in Europe, met Boulez during the spring of 1949, and soon after began

¹⁹ "Eventuellement..." originally published in *Revue musicale*, 1952, and translated as "Possibly..." in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, 111-140.

²⁰ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 135.

²¹ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 135.

²² John Cage, *Silence* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 19. The full quote is referenced below, see note 19.

an intense correspondence with the composer.²³ Drawn to each other's music by the intellectual rigor common to both, their letters to one another are littered with long passages of analytical description and diagrams. Before Cage introduced chance procedures into his music, he had already earned a reputation as the *enfant terrible* of American experimental music, owing among other things to the shock of his writing for a battery of unusual “found” percussion instruments—tin cans, aluminum sheets, jawbones, and conch shells—in his *Constructions* of 1939-42.

In a letter dated 17 January 1950, Cage described the formulas underlying his composition for a seemingly random array of pitched instruments and un-pitched metal objects in the *First Construction (in Metal)* of 1939:

The rhythmic structure is 4, 3, 2, 3, 4. (16x16). You can see that the first number (4) equals the number of figures that follow it. The first number is divided 1, 1, 1, 1, and first I present the ideas that are developed in the 3, then those in the 2, etc. Regarding the method: there are 16 rhythmic motives divided 4, 4, 4, 4, conceived as a circular series....²⁴

In the 1940s, Cage carried his mathematical method to a sound-source of his own invention, the prepared piano. In his concert-length work for that instrument, the *Sonatas & Interludes* of 1946-48, Cage formulated *a priori* proportional relationships to shape the composition, noting that “nothing about the structure was determined by the materials which were to occur in it.”²⁵

Listening through Cage's unusual instrumentation, Boulez caught the composer's underlying motivation: the elaboration of overarching mathematical structures to determine the composition. Cage later said of his work from this period, “it had nothing

²³ This history is recounted in the introduction to *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3-24.

²⁴ Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 49.

²⁵ Cage, *Silence*, 19.

to do with the desire for self-expression, but simply had to do with the organization of materials.”²⁶ Boulez intuited this in 1952, writing, “The tendency of these experiments by John Cage is too close to my own for me to fail to mention them.”²⁷

Cage’s introduction of chance operations into his music in the early 1950s signaled the end of his correspondence with Boulez; more familiar than their brief commonality of purpose is the polar opposition of their ideologies.²⁸ For Cage, chance was yet another way of organizing his music systematically and impersonally; it had the benefit of undermining the composer’s authorial role more completely than his earlier practice. To Cage it was of little consequence whether the materials of the composition were “either logically related or arbitrarily chosen.”²⁹ Equations and proportions or coin flipping over charts—such means were expendable so long as a system was in place and was followed through dispassionately. These methods of organization were their own justification, no matter whether the operative principle was rationality or randomness, mathematical or indeterminate. For Cage, the source of interest in Boulez’s music had not been its commitment to the historical imperative of serialism, but merely in “the *thoroughness* of the method’s application.”³⁰

Boulez was a more thoroughgoing Hegelian in his sensibility; for him, a composer’s system was always indicative of an ideology. Chance was unacceptable, not necessarily aesthetically—the *sound* of Cage’s music had not changed very much—but as an ethical position. “It is the passive acceptance of what is,” Boulez explained, “a concept

²⁶ John Cage quoted in James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 17.

²⁷ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 135.

²⁸ More familiar if only because it persisted for decades.

²⁹ Cage, *Silence*, 18.

³⁰ Cage, *Silence*, 53, emphasis added.

of abandonment.... I find it a truly repulsive state of mind.”³¹ Cage’s shift to chance-determined writing struck Boulez as an irresponsible refusal to address the problems inherent to his work. “Cage reached an impasse, and instead of solving the problem, he just accepted the problem as it was.”³²

The models developed by Boulez and Cage became the opposing poles of mid-century avant-garde music. Steve Reich, an American composer of the subsequent generation, observed that by the 1960s, serialism and chance were “the dominant musical directions of [the] time.”³³ Both composers counted legions of disciples in Europe and America, Boulez having established the research institute IRCAM³⁴ with the funding of the French government, Cage ceaselessly lecturing and touring his music around the world. The schism between these two composers was then and remains representative of the competing ideologies of late modern music. As recently as 2007, critic Alex Ross, in his historical survey of twentieth-century music, framed their opposition as indicative of the “sociological differences between the avant-garde cultures of America and Europe.”³⁵

Yet, underlying their contrasting methods is a shared temperament, a remarkably similar set of assumptions informing each composer’s practice. Utilizing analogous means for irreconcilable ends, Boulez acknowledged the peculiar distinction between the two composers, claiming “I like John’s mind but I don’t like what it thinks.”³⁶ In their commitment to systemization each composer constructed rigorous schemes to determine the parameters of his compositions. Both tended to define or characterize musical

³¹ Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 23.

³² Rocco Di Pietro, *Dialogues with Boulez* (London: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 22.

³³ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music 1965-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

³⁴ Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique.

³⁵ Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 370.

³⁶ Morton Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 27.

phenomena in stark, binary oppositions. They shared a sense of personal responsibility to determine and address the historical imperatives of their time. Composition became for each of them a polemical exercise; the aim of their art was to demonstrate ultimate ends, aesthetic ideologies, social interventions. These four tropes—systems; dialectics and dualisms; historical necessity; and ideological positioning—are broadly correlated with the residual Hegelian idealism common to histories and practices of modern art in the twentieth century. Though more typical of manifesto modernism in 1910s Europe, certain artists and commentators gradually assimilated idealism into American modern art.³⁷ This aesthetic disposition, the motivating factor of Boulez’s project, is operative throughout John Cage’s 1950-1952 body of work, albeit used for different ends; while Boulez utilized control for its own sake, Cage employed control to rationalize what he called “chance.”

CAGE

The liberating quality of Cage’s chance music has obscured the fact that both before and after the introduction of chance procedures, his compositional practice involved strict adherence to rigorous *a priori* systems of organization. In a statement written in 1952—the year following his first entirely chance-determined compositions, *Imaginary Landscape no. IV* and the *Music of Changes*—Cage described in mechanical detail the series of coin flipping campaigns that determined the organization of each work from their broadest to their most local levels (fig. 5).³⁸ For the *Changes*, Cage created twenty-six parameter charts—specifying broad notational categories like dynamics,

³⁷ As in, for example, Alfred Barr’s 1936 history of *Cubism and Abstract Art*, the 1950s and 1960s writings and paintings of Ad Reinhardt, and the 1960s art criticism of Michael Fried.

³⁸ “Composition: To Describe the Process of Composition Used in *Music of Changes* and *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*” in *Silence*, 57-59.

durations, tempi, and “sounds” (those being pitches, chords, and “noises,” the latter identified as “sounds of indefinite pitch”). The sixty-four squares of each chart were then drafted with possible configurations of material—local elements like the twelve notes of the octave, the dynamic markings *fff* to *p*, blank spaces to indicate no change or silence, all likewise determined systematically.

With these charts in place, Cage continued flipping coins, now to determine which charts would be employed and the terms, as it were, of their employment—local elements being added, subtracted, or re-arranged following subsequent coin flips. Coins, then, to determine which elements to notate, coins to determine their audibility. As if to demonstrate the thoroughness of his method, Cage notated articulation markings for patterns determined to be silent. Feldman described this curious situation to a group of students in the mid-1980s as an example of Cage’s temperament: “There is the time but there are no sound events. But underneath, there is the pedaling of the three pedals.... There was nothing going on. Yet, there is the pedaling. So recently, after thirty years, I pointed this out to John Cage.... And he said, ‘Well,’ he says, ‘you know how didactic I am.’”³⁹

Cage’s systemization of musical parameters in the charts for *Music of Changes* was more thorough and determined, its effects more universal in scope, than the simple rhythmic arithmetic he developed in the preceding decade. Amidst a flurry of work produced during his gradual shift to chance procedures in 1950-51, Cage wrote to Boulez, describing in minute detail, and with evident enthusiasm, the structures and systems of his recent work. A turning point in the conceptual basis of his work occurred,

³⁹ Feldman, *Words on Music*, vol. 1, 178.

Cage explained to Boulez, when he reached a synthesis between the opposing forces of mobility and immobility in his thought.⁴⁰ Cage's thought was consistently dualistic, characterized by binary concepts such as intention and non-intention, sound and silence, and art and life. In his work he sought to isolate, emphasize, juxtapose, or subvert these dualisms. Seeking to bridge the gap between opposing terms, he exacerbated extreme tendencies of each—the rapt attention and focused intention of “art,” for example, against the banal routines and charming serendipities of “life,” presenting them sheerly juxtaposed, firmly incongruous—as if bringing transistor radios into the concert hall, changing “life's” venue to that of “art,” might dissolve the distinction.⁴¹ Though Cage's work had the messianic effect of a historical synthesis on par with that of Boulez's, his real example was in leaving incompatible terms absurdly juxtaposed; this perhaps explains the preponderance of artists across disciplines who have spoken of Cage as giving them “license” or “permission.”⁴²

In a statement elaborating the chance determinations employed to compose the *Music of Changes*, Cage asserted: “It is thus possible to make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory,” finally concluding that subjective “value judgments are not in the nature of this work as regards either composition, performing, or listening.”⁴³ The composer's blindness to shades of gray

⁴⁰ Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 94.

⁴¹ The practice of reconciling conceptual categories through one's work varies in many ways from that of mediating physical material; an obvious but perhaps underappreciated difference is that while material is real, ideas are imagined. Accordingly, one can dissolve the tensions and distinctions between conceptual categories by thinking alone. “I saw one day that there was no incompatibility between mobility and immobility,” Cage writes, and “life contains both.” And like that, the distinction was gone. Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 94.

⁴² Richard Taruskin discusses this phenomenon in *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76-77.

⁴³ Cage, *Silence*, 59.

betrays the grip of dualistic thinking on his thought. Value judgments not only persisted in his music, but determined it to a greater extent than ever before. Diminishing the role of “individual taste and memory” (that is, active intuition) in his practice, Cage situated the extent of his judgment above or outside the composition itself, making one single conceptual decision at the outset before leaving the process of composition to the discretion of his pocket change.⁴⁴ The decision-making aspect of his work was no longer a process of successive “value judgments” but instead a polemical act of positioning; having shifted decision-making from the local to the universal level, Cage’s intellectual program of indeterminacy consolidated moment-to-moment intuitive decisions into an overarching system of determination.

Achieving a detached, historicizing position in relation to his practice, Cage dictated the terms of its reception. In 1958, he offered (omnisciently in the passive voice) the perspective with which his development toward chance ought to be understood. “The deduction might be made that there is a tendency in my composition means away from ideas of order towards no ideas of order,” Cage suggested.⁴⁵ “Recent works, beginning with the *Music of Changes*, support the accuracy of this deduction.”⁴⁶ Proposing this idea from the point of view of an unidentified subject, Cage’s rhetorical move mirrors his use of charts and chance to compose music. In both cases, his method seems to have blinded him to the fact that it was still *he* who was organizing the charts and penning the thoughts. Leaving behind his earlier use of rhythmic and metrical proportions (“ideas of order”), Cage crafted a top-down, totalizing method; but far from “no ideas of order,” his

⁴⁴ Taruskin has noted the irony of the title *Music of Changes*.

⁴⁵ Cage, *Silence*, 20.

⁴⁶ Cage, *Silence*, 20.

practice had hardened into a program. He did not or could not recognize that for one precisely fixed system of order, the rhythmic structures of his earlier work, he had substituted another—that of structured disorder, controlled chaos. Feldman, sensitive to rigidity in thought, unable to “relate or identify with any system whatsoever,” observed this coincidence in 1965, noting that “[Cage’s] self-abolishment mirrors its opposite – an omniscient dogma of final things.”⁴⁷

As Boulez had done that same year, Cage in 1952 staked an omniscient position in relation to his compositional practice (fig. 6). The safety of conceptual certitude, of an aesthetic program, was preferable to the perpetual confrontation of choosing one’s material, crafting its relations, contending with its consequences. “By making moves on the charts,” Cage wrote to Boulez, “I freed myself from what I had thought to be freedom.”⁴⁸ He now recognized the earlier freedom as “actually only the accretion of habits and tastes.”⁴⁹ He was finally answering the needs of history, in the same extreme manner and with the idealist resolve of both Schoenberg, the teacher he “worshipped,”⁵⁰ and Boulez, to whom he wrote, “I have the feeling of just beginning to compose for the first time.”⁵¹

In his “History of Experimental Music in the United States,” Cage sought to legitimate his practice before the judgment of history, writing, “One does not then just make any experiment but does what must be done.”⁵² Fixated on the rationale of

⁴⁷ Feldman, *Regards*, 28-29.

⁴⁸ Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 94.

⁴⁹ Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 94.

⁵⁰ Pritchett, *Music of John Cage*, 9.

⁵¹ Nattiez, *Correspondence*, 96.

⁵² Cage, *Silence*, 68. See also Richard Taruskin’s essay “No Ear for Music: The Scary Purity of John Cage,” which casts the composer as “a self-appointed Hegelian protagonist on whom History made

historical necessity to justify one's work, Cage repeats the phrase "what must be done" again and again, five times in the essay, contrasting it with the merer temptation of "providing pleasure to the senses."⁵³ Throughout his writings, Cage often declared what he believed to be "relevant to present necessity."⁵⁴ Like any self-professed agent of aesthetic change, Cage had only arbitrary criteria—that is, his subjective judgment—to adjudicate what was and what was not "finally urgently necessary at this point in history."⁵⁵ But unlike Boulez, whose issuance of final pronouncements on the character of recent history was pugnacious and direct, Cage's oracular style seemed to place his ideas omnisciently above the fray. Though his directives were as brazen as Boulez's, Cage delivered them with studied neutrality and an unemotional evenness of tone, sublimating his public persona more thoroughly to the dictates of history. Taking the position of having no position—"I have nothing to say and I am saying it"⁵⁶—Cage's Hegelian move outdid Boulez's; in its universalizing potential, Cage's response to his moment, "everything we do is music," had the effect, if not necessarily the intention, of neutralizing alternatives.⁵⁷

With the entirely chance-determined *Music of Changes*, Cage corroborated Boulez's dialectic of modern music. To the French composer's thesis of over-determined series, rows, and mathematical integration, Cage offered its antithesis: systems to produce non-intention, the over-determination of randomness, what the composer called "chance."

demands," in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 268.

⁵³ Cage, *Silence*, 68.

⁵⁴ Cage, *Silence*, 69.

⁵⁵ Cage, *Silence*, 70.

⁵⁶ Cage, *Silence*, 109.

⁵⁷ Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (London: Routledge, 2002), 69.

A paradoxical “synthesis” emerged from their efforts—the stultifying fact that their musics looked and sounded virtually identical (figs. 4, 7) Nevertheless, their opposition typified avant-garde music at mid-century, the examples of rigid order and total chaos—polar opposites, systematically composed, aurally indistinguishable.

In the final analysis, *Music of Changes* is as much an example of its underlying ideology as was Boulez’s diametrically opposed *Structures I*. Understanding modernism as a group research project, each composer proposed a dual function for the composition in question—a piece of piano music, but also a polemical assertion, representing a critique of contemporary music’s history and a program for its future. In works like Cage’s *Music of Changes* and Boulez’s *Structures I*, the trajectory of the composition is, from the outset and at every step along the way, at once a consequence and an example of the intellectual, ideological determination that brought it into being.

FELDMAN

“If anyone negates my music,” Feldman wrote, “it is Boulez. With Boulez you have all the aura of a right or righteous gesture. [T]here is about it no creative pressure that makes a demand on me. It lulls me to sleep with its own easily acquired virtues.”⁵⁸ From his earliest published statement, “Sound, Noise, Varese, Boulez” of 1958, in which Feldman asserted that “Boulez has neither elegance nor physicality,”⁵⁹ to the lectures he delivered in Middelburg in the last two years of his life, when he concluded “Boulez certainly hasn’t invented anything,”⁶⁰ the American composer had few kind words for his French contemporary. It was not Boulez’s music per se, which in any case he claimed to

⁵⁸ Feldman, *Regards*, 29.

⁵⁹ Feldman, *Regards*, 1.

⁶⁰ Feldman, *Words on Music* vol. 1, 70.

know “inside out,”⁶¹ nor even the “international consensus” of institutions and academics that coalesced around it, that Feldman found objectionable.⁶² What bothered him was the European composer’s strategic positioning, his self-aggrandizing mythology, the sense of historical necessity that Boulez, like Cage, employed to justify his work.⁶³ The moralizing tone of Boulez’s appeal to dialectical rationales and historical imperatives covered for a lack of nerve—an unwillingness to offer his art without the cover of “rationalizations” both psychological and intellectual.⁶⁴

“Most music is metaphor,” Feldman told a student in the late 1960s.⁶⁵ Or, as he told Dore Ashton in 1986, “Ninety percent of music is literary, programmatic.”⁶⁶ Metaphor and literary concerns, like “issues,” “society,” “systems,” and “history,”⁶⁷ were conceptual considerations far removed from Feldman’s practice. Cage’s interventions into the broader social context never interested him; while the older composer “went into the environment,” Feldman, by his own admission, never left the medium.⁶⁸

In his *Projections* and *Intersections* of the early 1950s, the composer sought a more direct, unmediated realization of aural phenomena; unlike Cage, Feldman’s means lay entirely within the material aspects of composition—specifically its notation. In his graphic notation of 1951, he attempted to capture the density, mass, and frequency of

⁶¹ Feldman, *Words on Music* vol. 1, 68.

⁶² Morton Feldman, “Speaking of Music at the Exploratorium,” (San Francisco: KPFA, January 30, 1986, <https://archive.org/details/MFeldmanSOM>), author’s transcription, 118 .

⁶³ “The fact,” as Feldman put, “that it [purports to be] prophetic about modernism.” “Speaking,” 118.

⁶⁴ See *Morton Feldman Says*, 16. Elsewhere Feldman explained that “the reason my music is [thought to be] limited is because I don’t believe in Hegel.” Charles Shere, “Interview with Morton Feldman,” (Berkeley: KPFA, July 1, 1967, <https://archive.org/details/MortonFeldmanInterview1967>).

⁶⁵ Feldman, *Says*, 36.

⁶⁶ Feldman, quoted in Dore Ashton’s “No Way to be Mortified,” *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 80.

⁶⁷ Feldman discussed these topics in an interview with Walter Zimmermann in 1975. See *Morton Feldman Says*, 60.

⁶⁸ Feldman, *Says*, 70.

sound outside any conventional framework. Feldman's graphic notation approached these abstract aural sensations by specifying certain aspects—the numbers of notes to be played at a time and their register, for example—while leaving others, like the selection of pitches and rhythm, to the discretion of the performer. Without precedent, arriving as if from nowhere, Feldman's graphic notation was the first of its kind.⁶⁹ His graphic scores brought a sense of indeterminacy not just to composition, as Cage's *Music of Changes* had, but to performance practice as well. The anxious, imminent energy of the performer reading through these scores runs parallel to, and is the immediate consequence of, Feldman's interest in achieving unmediated aural effects.

Though Feldman maintained a lifelong friendship with Cage, his occasional criticisms of the composer are striking not only for their consistency of their content, but also in how they parallel Feldman's objections to Boulez. "Cage is conceptual! ... He does it for that...orderliness, for that neatness—to organize everything."⁷⁰ Conceptual concerns of any sort were alien to Feldman's sensibility; from his graphic scores of the early 1950s to his chamber pieces of extreme duration in the 1980s, he resisted historical rationales, *a priori* structures, and social issues. Just as Feldman resisted fitting the ad hoc arrangements of material that comprise his compositions into linear musical forms, so too did his body of work develop quite apart from the historical narrative of his time. "Every composer—regardless of who they are—copes with beginning something, getting into a middle and then it ends," Feldman explained.⁷¹ "The kind of music we're used to,

⁶⁹ Brett Boutwell's "Feldman's Graphic Notation: Projections and Trajectories," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 6, no. 4, 457-482 recounts the chronology of Feldman's and Cage's early 1950s compositions in detail.

⁷⁰ Feldman, *Says*, 213.

⁷¹ Feldman, *Words on Music* vol. 1, 336.

whether it's Boulez or Cage is more an aspect of process...an aspect of beginning, middle, and then end."⁷² Feldman's music, ignoring "ideas" like systematization, and "issues" like its relation to the audience, seems by comparison inconclusive, open ended. Series of analyzable relationships do not obtain among elements in his music. Local elements, such as pitches and rhythms, as well as broader elements, like the duration or instrumentation of a piece, are arrived at rather than formulated.

Like the abstract expressionist painters whose work he admired, Feldman tried to remain responsive to the shifting focus of the piece as it developed, following the material rather than controlling it, searching for means rather than asserting ends. "I differ from Cage in that I have no need for 'ideas,'" Feldman said, before adding, "[Cage] agrees on our differences."⁷³ On the contrary, Feldman's characterization of his practice emphasizes the intuitive journey of making something: "The whole idea is to get lost and then come out, you know, come out of it alive."⁷⁴ Feldman's practice of composition resembled the process of painters like Jackson Pollock and Jules Olitski, who worked on unsized, unprimed canvas, painting across and into an indefinite space, finally choosing the size and proportions of a painting from within the larger zone of activity (figs. 8, 9). In contrast, to use serial or chance structures to organize a composition was like making a preparatory sketch before working on the canvas—the enclosure of the canvas's scale and proportions, like compositional systems, would determine at the outset the nature of the relationships inside of it. A narrative process emerges; the activity of painting or composing is reduced to the filling in or covering of space.

⁷² Feldman, *Words on Music* vol. 1, 336.

⁷³ Feldman, *Says*, 40, rearranged for clarity.

⁷⁴ Feldman, "Speaking," 146.

Without recourse to history, system, concept, or formula, Feldman found that “sound *in itself* can be a totally plastic phenomenon, suggesting its own shape [and] design.”⁷⁵ Drawing on the example of abstract expressionist painting, Feldman in the early 1950s at the time of *Structures I* and *Music of Changes*, was “desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore.”⁷⁶ In his first graphic score, *Projection I* for solo cello, written in December 1950, he organizes sounds by their register and inflection: high, middle, and low pitches articulated pizzicato, arco, or as a harmonic (fig. 10). Feldman indicates tempo, using the proportion of the square units in relation to the implied grid to vaguely imply beats. Defining the silence around each sonic event with blank paper—the negative space of the grid—Feldman rendered more of the grid empty than filled. These silences in the music isolate each sound from the next; every note emerges completely distinct, autonomous, out of context, or, perhaps, providing its own context. Silence in *Projection I* is the music’s equilibrium; tones relate not to one another but to the stasis from which they arise. The music stays close to silence, never departing far from it; a sheer fabric of distinct isolated aural incidents, the music’s diaphanous texture verges on nothing at all.

Notes in *Projection I* do not follow one another in sequence so much as they occur on the same “aural plane.”⁷⁷ The pizzicato notes land on that surface like droplets of water falling onto the surface of a pond. Each pizzicato attack is abrupt, the plucking of the string infinitely brief in duration. The color of the note, its pitch, is abbreviated, heard only after the attack, in its decay, its resonance like ripples on the water’s surface.

⁷⁵ Feldman, *Regards*, 19, emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ Feldman, *Regards*, 5.

⁷⁷ The metaphor is Feldman’s; it is a main subject of chapter two.

“I remember now that Feldman spoke of shadows,” Cage recounted. “He said that the sounds were not sounds but shadows.”⁷⁸ The pitch of each pizzicato tone resonates as a trace, a shadow swiftly submerged into surrounding silence. Arco tones define the aural plane more clearly, sustaining the color of their pitch throughout their duration. The attack of the note and its color are coterminous; their weight is more variable, depending on register rather than articulation. Harmonics render a glassy, quivering tone, the pitch sounding tautly and tenuously, as if situated at an angle oblique to its source.

Later that year, in *Intersection 2* for solo piano, Feldman modified the parameters of the graph, using numbers to signify notes and clusters of notes (fig. 11). The grid of *Intersection 2*—comprised of long rectangles three units high and forty-three across—is more defined, completely articulated in both its horizontal and vertical axes. As in the earlier *Projection 1*, the vertical axis signifies register, but here Feldman denotes silences by empty squares rather than negative space. One and the same number has a different aural density in each register; clusters with the same number of tones increase in weight as they move through registers; a number 5 in the high register is thinner, brighter, and more transparent than a 5 in the low register. Feldman compounds the density in the horizontal axis by numbering several units in a row. In other places, several units are bounded with only one single number, indicating to the pianist to depress the sustain pedal. In still other places, a single tone or cluster resounds in the midst of silence, a number flanked by empty squares in all registers. Notes in the high register seem to have a more pronounced attack, while those in the low register are more resonant, sustaining a longer decay. Feldman’s graphic scores allowed him to handle these aural qualities—

⁷⁸ Cage, *Silence*, 131.

texture, density, decay—in the most direct manner possible, without the mediation or interpretive cues of traditional notation. His manner of notation presented these qualities abstractly, without the historical context of familiar organizational schemes.

CONCLUSION

Feldman's thought and music in the 1950s was distinct not only from the European avant-garde at large, but also from that of his friend and colleague John Cage. His practical, pragmatic approach ran counter to that of the European serialists: "[Karlheinz] Stockhausen asked for my secret," Feldman recounted.⁷⁹ "And I said, 'I don't have any secret, but if I do have a point of view, it's that sounds are very much like people. And if you push them, they push you back. So, if I have a secret: don't push the sounds around.' Karlheinz leans over to me and says: 'Not even a little bit?'" Motivated by dialectical rationales, the European composers asserted control over their material, subjecting the aural qualities of their compositions to intellectual processes of organization and systematization. Feldman's practice was open-ended, experimental; "I'm not looking for another element in which to make my synthesis," he told an interviewer in 1967.⁸⁰

Rejecting the rarified dialectics of serial organization, Feldman also refused to open his compositional world to the environment around him, as Cage had. He pursued not just a more direct contact with acoustic qualities like mass, transparency, and luminosity, but also the material, notational means of realizing them. Finding the fixed control of traditional notation too remote for this concern, he devised an entirely new means of realizing aural phenomena. Capturing acoustic sound in as unmediated a

⁷⁹ Feldman, *Regards*, 157

⁸⁰ Feldman, "Interviewed by Charles Shere," <https://archive.org/details/MortonFeldmanInterview1967>.

manner as he could get down on paper, his graphic notation afforded both he and the performer a more imminent exercise of intuition and judgment than had yet been realized in composition or performance.

Chapter Two: Varieties of Silent Experience

“Unfortunately for most people who pursue art, ideas become their opium... There is no security to be one’s self.”— Morton Feldman, 1964⁸¹

INTRODUCTION: “WHAT IS MATERIAL?”

“There is a crucial discrepancy,” Morton Feldman wrote, “between having ‘ideas’ and [having] a sense of what the material is in one’s own music.”⁸² Feldman observed the trend common to disparate compositional practices in the post-war period: that of subjecting material to a process of conceptual controls or systematic procedures. These techniques explored what he called “the implications of material,” rather than the material itself.⁸³ For example, a melody suggests development, a theme implies variations, a tone row yields potential inversions and transpositions. Used in this manner, material becomes arbitrary grist for the compositional mill. “Most composers are involved with the potential of the materials, and they milk it; and they milk it ingeniously,” he explained.⁸⁴ In the 1950s and 1960s, seriality and systematization—a research approach in general—characterized the theory and practice of modern music, and, increasingly, that of abstract painting and sculpture. These techniques were thought to afford a work of art its historical justification to the continuing narrative of modernist art. By the 1980s, in the wake of Cage’s worldwide reception, Feldman observed that conceptual approaches had usurped seriality as the dominant academic principle plaguing music composition.⁸⁵ To his ear, the two processes shared a common effect: that of

⁸¹ Feldman, *Says*, 16.

⁸² Feldman, *Regards*, 131-132.

⁸³ Feldman, *Says*, 92.

⁸⁴ Feldman, *Says*, 92.

⁸⁵ On John Cage in 1985: “I think that a lot of his position on music is a little too pedantic.” *Words on Music* vol. 1, 82.

extracting from sound “all its properties.”⁸⁶ “When I was growing up in music,” Feldman lamented in 1983, “we would hear a new piece and say ‘What terrific material, boy that’s terrific material.’... Now my students will talk about a piece and they’ll say ‘What a terrific *idea*,’ you see.”⁸⁷

Ideas and materials were not mutually exclusive; they gave way to one another, and either could be used toward a variety of ends. Handling material is inescapable in music composition; the pertinent question for Feldman became: What to do with it? How? Like the architect Louis Kahn, who is said to have asked a brick what it wanted to be, Feldman’s method involved “getting the point of view from the material that we use rather than superimposing our own point of view on [it].”⁸⁸ Feldman never hesitated to acknowledge that he found his way to such an unmediated, materialistic approach from the example of the New York painters with whom he maintained close personal friendships, and whose work was a lifelong source of inspiration and enchantment.⁸⁹ One lesson the composer spoke of learning from painters was “to *find* your structure and your subject by becoming involved with the material rather than [creating a structure] a priori.”⁹⁰ Finding a structure meant *arriving* at order, achieving the efficacy of organization and establishing a sense of cohesion based on the necessities of the material itself, rather than fixing or imposing order beforehand. “Material suggests a certain

⁸⁶ Feldman, *Regards*, 12.

⁸⁷ Feldman, *Says*, 162, emphasis added.

⁸⁸ Feldman, *Words on Music* vol. 2, 774.

⁸⁹ See his second published statement, the “Liner Notes” of his 1963 Time Records split LP with Earle Brown, his lecture “Between Disney and Mondrian” given three months before his death in 1987, or virtually any statement, essay, or interview in between.

⁹⁰ Feldman, *Words on Music* vol. 1, 254, emphasis added.

treatment,” Feldman observed.⁹¹ As in the work of the painters Feldman admired, this pursuit, this *searching*, was, to some extent, the substance of his music. For Feldman, as I hope to demonstrate for the visual artists Jules Olitski (1922-2007), Donald Judd (1928-1994), and Morris Louis (1912-1962), intuition persists over systems or concepts. Using intuition, these artists addressed the practical considerations imposed by their interaction with materials. Feldman’s description of his experimental process accurately characterizes that of each of these artists—“just an investigation of material, giving free vent, and not having a vested interest in a sense, that material should go either this way or that.”⁹²

Feldman’s identification with the visual arts ran deep. He likened his approach to that of the painters he knew personally, and he characterized the effects he sought in his music in terms borrowed from the language of abstract painting. In an essay he called “Between Categories,” Feldman wrote, “My compositions are really not ‘compositions’ at all. One might call them time canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall hue of the music. My obsession with surface is the subject of my music.” In this chapter, I take Feldman at his word, using his notion of music’s “aural surface” as a means of associating the effects of his work with that of visual artists, shifting fluidly between the two, locating analogous effects in works comprised of disparate materials. This chapter focuses on silence, a central element of both Cage’s and Feldman’s music. Recognizing both composers’ interest in the visual arts, my analysis of their respective uses of silence is refracted through the lens of paintings and sculptures by contemporaneous artists. Tracing each composer’s use of silence via Feldman’s

⁹¹ Feldman, *Words on Music*, vol. 2, 632.

⁹² Feldman, *Says*, 145.

distinction between idea and material, I look first at Cage's "silent piece," 4'33" (1952), in relation to the 1910s ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp. I then turn to the construction of silence in Feldman's music, looking at pieces early and late and describing the phenomenological effect of silence variously—as surface, in relation to a representative mid-1970s painting by Jules Olitski; as space, in relation to a 1981 wall piece by Donald Judd; and as saturation, in relation to the 1960s stain paintings of Morris Louis.

My point is not to show that silence is or has just one quality, but that when used as an aural material rather than a conceptual proposition, its effect bodies forth different degrees of many qualities together. Those qualities that I describe—surface, space, saturation—are more fluid than distinct; their effects are reciprocal and responsive, and descriptions of one drift seamlessly into that of another, between categories. Exploring a range of effects elicited by an array of works, I seek to elucidate some of the material considerations and phenomenological effects of the works at hand, suggesting that Olitski, Judd, and Louis each practiced their art in manners parallel to Feldman. I hope to illuminate by example Feldman's own answer to the practical consideration he confronted each time he sat down at the piano to begin writing: "I don't ask many questions—but one of the questions I do ask myself as a composer...when I begin a piece is: What is material?"⁹³

"SOUND"

John Cage's 4'33" consists of three movements, each marked "tacet" (fig. 12). The sequence of movements is indicated by the performer's opening and closing of the piano lid; absent any musical material, the unintentioned aural environment surrounding

⁹³ Feldman, "Speaking," 134.

the performance constitutes its musical substance. *4'33"* functions as a proposition as much as it does a music composition. Through the work, Cage demonstrates a series of reorientations, which, taken together, elaborate his understanding of the tradition of aural communication in music. The silence of the instrument undermines the established roles of captive audience and virtuosic performer; sitting quietly at the piano, the soloist's presence compels the audience to listen intently—not to the fabrication of music, but to whatever incidental sounds happen to occur during those passing moments. The role of the composer and performer seem humbled before that of the audience; all become equivalent as their attention is focused on a common inactivity. Following Cage's score, the performer becomes himself not more than a listener, separated only by stage setting, by appearance, from the listeners filling the concert hall.

In the decades since *4'33"*'s 1952 premiere at Maverick Hall in Woodstock, the composer's originary concept has, to some extent, taken leave of his actual work. Criticism and academic interpretation of Cage's work seem perpetually to outnumber concert performances of his music. The result is that Cage's body of work has been largely explained and understood in terms of the social and cultural propositions it put forth. The specific propositions that the work is taken to define, shift according to the ideological interests of the commentator. The spirit of Cage's *4'33"*, as well as its critical reception and outsize influence, mirrors that of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades (figs. 13, 14). Cage himself recognized the relevance of Duchamp's ideas to music composition, issuing this directive in 1963: "One way to write music: study Duchamp."⁹⁴ Cage gravitated toward Duchamp's late in the artist life, learning to play chess from him,

⁹⁴ Cage, *A Year from Monday* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 72.

referring to him frequently in interviews, writing short essays on his work and mesostics in his memory.⁹⁵ The sensibility behind Cage's silent piece indeed runs parallel to that of Duchamp's readymade objects; *4'33"* shares the condition that Feldman observed in the latter's work: "What you see or hear is not as important as the historical stance that brought it about."⁹⁶

Like Duchamp before him, Cage in his silent piece eschewed an organic process of aesthetic decision-making. The work instead took root as a concept, an idea requiring material actualization to become efficacious. The means of realization suggested themselves before the fact, telegraphed by the notion to be demonstrated. The constituent materials of each artist's readymade—the metal of the drying rack, the durations of silent movements—seem particular, but are diminished in consequence relative to the epistemological impact of the whole. Utilizing an intellectual act of selection, both artists avoided the physical resistance of handling actual material. As the physicality of the work is dissolved, its status as a conceptual proposition becomes plainer.

In the spirit of Duchamp's example, Cage formulated his aesthetic position and demonstrated it through polemical work, ensuring that his provocation wouldn't go unrecognized. To make an idea available, each artist addressed his work to the merest conventions of its medium—that is, audience expectations and historical conventions. Utilizing a tacit cultural context, Cage conscientiously situated *4'33"* at an extreme end of the spectrum of established practice. Like Duchamp's ready-mades, Cage's silent piece was conventional enough to be understood, but arbitrary enough to seem radical. Both

⁹⁵ "26 Statements re Duchamp" in *A Year from Monday*; "James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Erik Satie: An Alphabet" in John Cage, *X* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

⁹⁶ Feldman, *Regards*, 22.

artists sensed that the most effective way to assert an aesthetic ideology through a work of art was to do so through an explicit (and explicitly comprehensible) provocation of the work's medium-specific conventions.

Like Duchamp's ready-mades, Cage's silent piece evinces not only an *a priori* formulation of the work's context and content, but also its creator's assumptions as to the limiting conditions and characteristic tropes of his medium. These works demonstrate by negative example each authors' circumscribed conception of his medium, informed by an omniscient sense of what constituted "acceptable" artistic activity and what they presumed would be received as radical or subversive. But inasmuch as *4'33"* is Cage's dialectical response to the conventions circumscribing music in his historical moment, it betrays an acceptance of those conventions as hegemonic. The susceptibility of Cage's disciplined aesthetic posturing to interpretation and theorization, that is, its aptness as an example to be generalized, testifies as much to its creator's historical prescience as its latent conventionality. In this sense, Cage's silent piece, like Duchamp's found objects, remains deeply conventional.

Cage's knowing assumption of historical conventions and his strategically formulated challenge to them betray the composer's conception of historical evolution, different in tone but identical in spirit to the work of his European serialist counterparts. Taking refuge in the certitude of pre-compositional structures, strictly adhering to arbitrary conceptual formulations, the European composers maintained that art ought to be evidence of intellectual determination, even if it came at the cost of the sensational, material interest of the work. Silence in *4'33"* functions similarly: as a concept, an epistemological tool, a proper noun. In contrast, Feldman, throughout his body of work,

utilized silence as *material*, exploring a range of its phenomenological effects: as surface, as space, as saturation.

SURFACE

Triadic Memories was, at the time of its premiere in October 1981, Feldman's longest composition for solo piano, at about an hour and a half.⁹⁷ Silence in *Triadic Memories* constitutes the music's aural ground, its surface, what Feldman referred to as its "time canvas."⁹⁸ The first completely silent measure of music occurs on the fifth page of the score. By the thirteenth page, measures of silence and sound are alternating, one to the next. Gradually through the duration of the piece, silence becomes a more palpable element as the aural scale of the composition shifts. Near the opening of the piece are spacious three-stave patterns traversing several octaves (fig. 15). These patterns, found throughout pages 5-12, flex through minute shifts in detail, their register and rhythm changing slightly measure to measure, with silent measures fitted occasionally between them (fig. 16). The vast registration of the tones in these patterns yields a rich, full resonance that imbues the silent measures with the triadic memories of the title; that is to say, given the depth and buoyancy of the low tones, and the bright, hard-edged attack of the high tones, the silent measures near the opening of *Triadic Memories* remain resonant, permeated with sound. In the last third of the piece, meandering chromatic patterns, like those introduced on the bottom of page 34, seem closer to the music's surface (fig. 17). Notated on a single staff, in a single register, and played with one hand, they seem just barely to emerge from the silent aural ground. In this section of the piece,

⁹⁷ No tempo is specified. Performances vary in length from just over one hour to just under two.

⁹⁸ Feldman, *Regards*, 88.

silences loom, and the patterns, as if responsive to the music's increasing silence, are flattened and prolonged, stretched across the music's surface.

Within this particularly spare section of music, Feldman introduces a five-note pattern, an ascending scale in 4/32, varying it as he reiterates it (fig. 18). A few pages later, Feldman takes the pattern and fixes it, reiterating it four times from between silent measures of expanding duration; each notated with a whole rest, they lengthen in time as their meter shifts from 2/4 to 3/4 to 4/4 to 5/4 to 6/4 (fig. 19). Silence here impresses itself sensorially, as a kind of undulation or swelling that gradually engulfs the pattern; it seems to recede further in space after each iteration. The elastic expansion of silent measures yields increasingly larger zones of unprimed aural surface. The active, shifting proportions of silence have the effect of returning the pattern's five-note ascent to its ground, bringing it back flush with the music's surface, each time from a different distance, creating a complex play of ambiguous space on a persistently flat surface.

A similar effect can be observed in Kenneth Noland's 1961 painting *October* (fig. 20). In this painting, as in the example from *Triadic Memories* above (see fig. 19), a single motif, the circle, is repeated through zones of raw canvas varying in area.⁹⁹ Each colored iteration establishes a different spatial plane, even as all are applied in the same manner, and to a common surface. The black circle at the painting's center seems at one moment to be situated at the farthest end of an optical tunnel, receding deep in space as the medium blue and green bands pop forward; from this forward position, at the next moment, those bands read outward, the green one seeming to define the circumference of a sphere, the top of which is black and gray. In the first reading the empty, raw canvas

⁹⁹ The association between the unprimed, raw canvas that stain painters Noland and Morris Louis utilized, and measured silences in Feldman's music is explored at length below. See "Saturation."

reads like a vacuum, its unfixed space directing the eye inward to the painting's core; in the second, it becomes volumetric, ballooning with mass and pressure as it pushes the black center of the painting outward, toward the viewer. Each iteration of the form reestablishes the painting's flat surface, at the same time as it creates a different degree of spatial projection and recession. The relationship of the bands to one another and to the raw canvas surrounding them is one of unresolved ambiguity; all of the forms captured at the moment of maximum tension. This tension floats persistently, a focus of the painting.

In *October*, as in the pattern from *Triadic Memories*, it is immediately clear what is where; silence and sound, like color and canvas, are distinct enough to be recognized separately. But in utilizing both as material, Noland, like Feldman, complicates their respective effects. In each work, material integration yields a phenomenological disjunction; one and the same material is used to define contradictory parameters simultaneously. In a more physical manner, Jules Olitski plays material against surface in his flesh-colored and pockmarked painting *Yarmuk Wall – 6* of 1975 (fig. 21). Across a gessoed surface, Olitski has sprayed coat after coat of heavy, translucent beige paint. The several beiges are all roughly the same gloppy viscosity; each is neutral and close in hue and value, making them difficult to differentiate. Together the colors coalesce into hazy, atmospheric zones, graded by color and texture. Where the painted surface is thickest, the color is darkest, most opaque; those aspects determine one another reciprocally. Together they yield palpable albeit shallow space. The painting's white ground is prominent near the center of the canvas and at its edges, particularly the top left. Whereas in that corner and generally around the edges the white paint constitutes the gessoed ground, mostly unmarked by successive spray campaigns (fig. 22), down the left edge the same opaque

white has been sprayed back into and atop the paint surface, spattered into the diaphanous zones of beige before they dried (fig. 23).

At a distance, it is virtually impossible to distinguish accurately where white paint comprises the bottommost ground or the topmost face of the painting; together both whites come into the painting's center. This disrupts the painting's spatial continuity. Constituting different layers, relatively far from each other materially, (that is, the first as well as the final paint applications), the central sprays of white paint flatten the painting's space. They reassert its ground from within, pushing the painting's optical space into the distance at the same time as they lay atop the thickest areas of the surface. The effect this yields dissolves Olitski's rugged paint handling into zones of distant, volumetric space. It is as if Olitski sprays surface back into and through the painting, using one and the same color to fix and disrupt the painting's atmosphere. Surface reenters Olitski's painting, disjunctive and oblique, as neither a material nor its support. It is instead an effect: unfixed, shifting, transitory, a sensation of obdurate flatness one moment, of ethereal openness the next. White paint is surface at the same time that it is space. The distinction between the two becomes fluid, the sensations of each encroaching upon the other, like the play of fixed patterns and shifting silences in *Triadic Memories*.

SPACE

In spatial terms, Feldman's construction of silent measures seems to illuminate deep recesses in the music. At the top of the page featuring the five-note motif discussed above is an instruction for the pianist to half depress the sustain pedal at all times. The long resonance of each tone blends into a thin aural haze, the music's memory, a diffuse after-image, suspended as if in a cloud. This resonance pervades the work throughout its

entire duration. As the five-note motif resonates within a longer silence after each reiteration, it illuminates increasingly vast spaces, its brightness lingering after the fact like the flash of a camera.

Explained another way, the silent measures of *Triadic Memories* create a not only a temporal surface, but also a sense of space for the “hue of music,” to resonate, reflect, and cast a glow.¹⁰⁰ Feldman’s construction of silent measures recalls the shifting rhythms of interior planes in Donald Judd’s *Untitled* (1981) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in which one and the same material seems alternately to define or dematerialize the interior space (fig. 24). Identical in their enclosing dimensions and materials, the four units of *Untitled* seem varied in their openness, volume, and color. Each unit, open at the front, features a single interior aluminum plane set at a different height and receding at a different angle, toward the back panel of opaque dark teal Plexiglas.

In the third unit from left, the interior is open, deep, and intangible, as the aluminum plane is angled downward from the middle front to one-quarter the box’s height at the rear. Shadows cast by the green Plexiglas obscure the aluminum plane’s bottom edge as it reaches the rear of the piece. A regular rectangle, the unit’s interior sheet of aluminum seems trapezoidal, its sides gradually and increasingly dissolved by shadow. Its recession is ambiguous. The angle of the interior division leaves much of the rear Plexiglas plane visible; the inside of the unit seems airy, without mass, the aluminum plane hovering inside, floating within its open space.

In the second unit from left, an interior plane recedes from the same point on the front, but terminates instead at the rear bottom edge of the box. The contrast between the

¹⁰⁰ Feldman, *Regards*, 88.

top and bottom halves of the open box is stark. Meeting aluminum rather than Plexiglas at the back edge of the unit, the interior plane becomes more integral to the box's enclosing shape, dividing and defining its space rather than dissolving it. The interior of the box is more tangible, more physical, foreshortened by the aluminum plane, dense and heavy to the eye.

As in the alternating measures of silence and sound in *Triadic Memories* (fig. 19), Judd contrasts a shifting element with a selfsame element. The piano motif in Feldman's piece is engulfed in the space of silence; the silent measures are shifting and active, their emptiness becoming focal (aural) in contrast to the motif. Silence functions at once as a hollow, resonant spatial interior, and as an undulating temporal drift. Similarly, the space inside the units of Judd's *Untitled* shift in color and volume as one element stays the same and another changes. In one instance, the rear wall is deep and green; in the next, it is near and silver. The unit's interior space is indeterminate and ambiguous here, physical and literal there.

SATURATION

Another consideration informing Feldman's music was the composer's interest in saturation. He discussed saturation in a variety of contexts: to explain his working process, (writing for an hour, copying for an hour); to describe the effect of time on the listener; to characterize the atmospheric sense of certain paintings; to explain the techniques used in making the 19th-century nomadic Turkish carpets he collected. "The only way you can get sensational colors like a deep blue is that you have to dip it many times," Feldman explained, "and it's the same thing with the whole experience of

listening to [my music]. You're just *saturated*.”¹⁰¹ The drift of Feldman's thought from the rug maker's repetitious ritual of dipping and dyeing to the meditative effect of his music on the listener, finds an analogue of sorts in the practice of painter Morris Louis, who, in the 1950s, was one of several artists experimenting with the earliest acrylic paints, developing techniques for mixing and applying the new material.

The material practice of saturation became a generative impulse for the painter as he capitalized on the solubility of acrylic paint to saturate or “stain” the weave of unprimed canvas. The flow of paint into, through, and down the canvas surface interested Louis; from the outset, he understood saturation as a means of painting in which the impersonal and organic effects of the painting process and paint itself were isolated and emphasized.¹⁰² Louis's images emerge from the specific, incidental interactions of viscous paint saturated into porous cotton duck. In many of his paintings, the saturation process is presented just as itself: large, diaphanous zones of color bounded on several sides by raw, unpainted canvas, as in *Russet* of 1958 (fig. 25). In these veils of the late 1950s, cascading paint billows and blends as it descends the surface. A peculiarly naturalistic quality emerges from the obviousness of the process, its quality as evidence, as when a pigment's granular sediment trails the liquid flow of its hue, both sensibly descending (fig. 26). Many if not most of Louis's paintings retain some sense of organic processes and natural effects at work; his images are not static. In its absence of external, depictive references, Louis's paint handling resembles processes of nature. The availability and integrity of his process creates an organic unity, not a “balance” or “composition,” from the various colors, zones, and applications.

¹⁰¹ Feldman, “Speaking,” 140.

¹⁰² This “naturalism” is a subject of the third chapter.

Like Pollock's large-scale, legibly composed drip paintings of the early 1950s, Louis's paintings foreground their indexical aspects, the artist's particular manner of handling materials yielding an image finally comprised of little other than its generative gesture (fig. 27). In Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* and *One: Number 31*, 1950 (figs. 28, 29), as in Louis's *Russet*, the artist's mediation of paint and canvas is palpable and physical; the artist's reckoning with their properties and effects constitutes the substance of the painting. Feldman described the clarity of making that persists through Pollock's drip paintings: "There are no other allusions to get in the way of the action of what has happened. I don't want to use 'action' in terms of 'action painting.' It's just very clear what he is doing and what he's doing is, in a sense, what the thing is."¹⁰³ Louis's manner of handling, like Pollock's, ensures that the painting appears transparent to the processes that yielded it. Saturation makes the paint in Louis's veils transparent to its surface.

Feldman also utilized saturation as a working method and for its sensational effects. Describing his music, he spoke variously of saturating himself, the listener, experience, and memory. To these ends, Feldman employed a constellation of related techniques; many can be heard in his composition *de Kooning* (1963), one of the composer's free-duration chamber pieces of the 1960s, in which the vertical element, pitch, is specified while the horizontal, temporal elements of rhythm and duration are not. In *de Kooning*, the sequence of instrumental entrances is rendered with a broken line angling between notes (fig. 30). This linear sequence, "each instrument enter[ing] when the preceding sound begins to fade..., each sound with a minimum of attack," maintains an even surface, slow chromatic tones meandering among timbres, quietly following one

¹⁰³ Feldman, *Says*, 67-68.

another, sometimes overlapping, without any sense of beat.¹⁰⁴ Rhythmic relationships are found not in motifs or patterns but in the slow succession among instruments of quiet, sustained sounds. All of these aspects together—the slow tempo, quiet dynamics, and long tones—converge on the aural plane, yielding a flat, attenuated surface.

In *de Kooning*, single notes or clusters of notes are separate and sequential rather than interlocking and contrapuntal. This manner of composing, in which pitches are presented discretely, almost in isolation, Feldman called “vertical.” Composing vertically does not conflict with the establishment of a flat aural surface for the music; it refers rather to the choosing of a certain pitch, on a certain instrument, in a certain register, and to the total, local specificity of the tone thus chosen.¹⁰⁵ Feldman’s vertical writing stands in contrast to the temporal, narrative structures that connect pitches on the horizontal axis; the primary distinction is between zones and proportions of tone color (vertical) on the one hand, and the linear contour of melody (horizontal) on the other.

European serialism was based on the principle of polyphony, in which an ensemble of instruments integrated on the horizontal axis creates a dense mechanism of interconnected voices. Serialists employed polyphonic structures to orchestrate and extend their systems of investigation into every compositional parameter. A tone row or series differentiates its elements (pitch, dynamics, etc.) across horizontal frameworks, so that each moment in the music, each vertical sliver of the composition, represents some general component of the overall structure. The gradual unfolding of these structural devices constitutes the total fabric of the music; the composition is comprised only of its own organizational scaffolding. “The work resulting from this approach,” Feldman

¹⁰⁴ Feldman, “de Kooning” score, p. 8

¹⁰⁵ Later, Feldman would use the term “orchestration” to describe this approach.

explained, “can be said not to have a ‘sound.’”¹⁰⁶ These horizontal devices were unnecessary armatures that stripped sound of its inherent sensory qualities (fig. 31). “What we hear,” Feldman said, “is rather a replica of sound...startling as any of the figures in Mme. Tussaud’s celebrated museum.”¹⁰⁷ Writing vertically, Feldman presented sounds as flat zones of color, surrounded by resonant areas of silent space. To his ear, a sound in isolation, resonating within the expanse of a silent ensemble, provided ample evidence in itself of all those parameters of specification isolated by the European serialists.

By issuing sounds from stillness, articulating them with a minimum of inflection, and allowing them to resonate within silent space, Feldman renders the abstract aural plane of *de Kooning*. This aural plane, in its stillness, scale, and richness of color, resembles neither the stately fixity of classical forms, nor the thematic narratives of Romantic music, nor the incongruous collage of serial construction. At each point where an instrument or group of instruments intones, the rest are silent; one sourceless sound follows another, without contextualization. The music’s flat surface precludes at every moment a sense of the overall scale or shape of the composition, as might be gleaned from the memory and recognition structures inherent in horizontal schemes like sonata form. In contrast, the tones on *de Kooning*’s surface impress themselves without metaphor or function; they are immediate and direct, implying nothing.

In an essay written in the same decade as *de Kooning*, Feldman described his compositions as “time canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with an overall

¹⁰⁶ Feldman, *Regards*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Feldman, *Regards*, 12.

hue of the music.”¹⁰⁸ Feldman’s priming of his time canvas with hues of music finds a close parallel in Louis’s 1961-62 stripe paintings (figs. 32, 33, 34). The composer’s directive to articulate tones “with a minimum of attack” makes each note seem to float without source, so that the tone’s color is heard more acutely. Louis, too, wanted to remove arbitrary autographic gesture from his pictures, so that color would radiate without any depictive function. The development of his work, from the veils of the late fifties to the stripes and unfurleds of the early sixties, shows the artist achieving increasing control over the saturation and flow of paint seemingly unguided by his hand.

In Louis’s stripe paintings of 1961 and 1962, verticality was a main compositional principle. Like Feldman, Louis wanted to present colors as palpable, separate, and sheer; to that end, he rendered each in an uninflected manner, sequentially, and in identical orientation. Feldman’s use of silence for its qualities of surface and space runs parallel to Louis’s use of unprimed raw canvas. In his stripe paintings, Louis situates a sequence of colors in a field of empty canvas, often utilizing unpainted canvas as an active pictorial element, its bright pale color another stripe amidst the stained hues. In *Split Spectrum*, *Number 30*, and *First Coming*, all of 1961, Louis situates vertical swaths of raw canvas equivalent to the width of one, two, and three stripes respectively (figs. 32, 33, 34). The painter’s rhythmic distribution of canvas amidst saturated vertical color resembles the silent measures of *de Kooning*. In a piece where no rhythmic cues—note values, meter, bar lines—are given to describe the contour of tones, Feldman is exceedingly precise in his notation of silence. *De Kooning*’s silent zones are the only discretely notated measures of music in the piece, with duration, meter, and tempo all specified. On the

¹⁰⁸ Feldman, *Regards*, 88.

third page of the score are three silent measures, each in a different meter, each a different duration (fig. 35). These areas, in which Feldman has left his time canvas unprimed, without a local hue of music, are like Louis's raw canvas stripes—active elements of the composition. They heighten by contrast the luminosity of the tone colors they separate at the same time as they establish and articulate the music's ground.

Silence permeates *de Kooning*. The composition's flat, uninflected sounds issue from its stillness and resonate within its space. Presenting tones or clusters in succession, one at a time and slowly, and exploring the far registers of each instrument, Feldman establishes a glacial temporal pace and a vast aural scale; each isolated event, local and specific, surrounded by silence, activates a different range within the total aural scale of the ensemble. Within the first few moments of *de Kooning* the composer illuminates shimmering heights with crotales and the high registers of the piano; casts a refracted light with glassy, attenuated mid-range violin harmonics; floats the warm, buoyant low end of the cello; and obscures the surface with the rippling sheen of quietly rumbling bass drum rolls. Where symphonic writing would navigate all of these ranges simultaneously (polyphonically) for dramatic effect, establishing immediately a top-to-bottom sense of the music's instrumental scale, Feldman explores each instrument's extremities slowly and singly, so that one senses more palpably the stillness and space surrounding each sound. The aural space of the music is cavernous: its vast proportions become known gradually, as the shadow of silence perpetually engulfs each incident. Though silence and sound are polar elements, in *de Kooning* their effects are made mutually responsive.

Feldman's aural integration of these elements runs parallel to the material integration of paint and canvas in Louis's paintings. Though the boundaries between

color and its ground in an exemplary stripe painting, *Water-Shot* of 1961, are clearly delineated, the saturation of the one into the other yields a fluid integration of the two; the elements become synonymous, interpenetrating (fig. 36). Color and surface in *Water-Shot* are indissoluble aspects of one another, just as silence pervades the tones of *de Kooning*. In both works, “positive” and “negative” elements are integrated materially. As silence resides within sound on Feldman’s time canvas, so does surface reside within color on Louis’s cotton duck canvas. The saturation of tone color into its silent ground yields a sense of stasis; the flatness of *de Kooning* is an aspect of this integration.

Feldman blends tone colors in the piece by using numbered vertical lines to indicate points when two or more instruments are to intone at the same time (fig. 37). Simultaneous tones from multiple instruments are not contrasted or juxtaposed; rather, they’re overlaid, as if transparent—two colors mixed to produce a third. Sharing the flat shape and sustained duration of individual tones, clusters in *de Kooning* differ from individual tones just as the latter differ from one another—that is, in their weight, density, light, and transparency. Number 11 shows a C in the violin blended with the low D-flat in the cello. In the next moment, the violin C is again blended with a D-flat, though this time the latter note is played in the mid-range of the horn. The pitch element remains the same as the aural quality is disparate. While the two strings together articulate thin, tenuous harmonics, the violin and horn blend into a warm, volumetric timbre; it is as if the same interval is seen through refracted light.

Feldman’s blending of tones resembles the manner in which Louis creates tints and shades, by saturating different colors into a fixed color. In *Water-Shot*, a yellow stripe, flanked by stripes of ultramarine blue and cadmium red light, gives way to hazy

zones of intermediary colors, varying in their luminosity and texture (fig. 38). Laying the yellow stripe down first, Louis let neighboring colors bleed across its edges. The dark blue maintains a steady but soft edge atop the yellow as both descend the canvas; a hazy deep green emerges from their overlay, more opaque than the primaries but glowing subtly. On the other side of the yellow stripe, cadmium red is dematerialized in a more dramatic manner; particles of sediment have broken away from the mainline of the hue, giving way to a feathery zone of red-orange. The green and red-orange hues emerge almost incidentally, a physical consequence of Louis's paint handling; they resonate like overtones through neighboring colors. Like the sequential tones of *de Kooning*, Louis's colors shift spectrally as their material context changes; hue and texture are made integral to one another, fluidly interpenetrating, their material properties made into sensory effects.

CONCLUSION: "WHAT IS MATERIAL?"

Disparate though the objects considered in the "Surface," "Space," and "Saturation" sections may be, at least one feature is common to them; each was made by an artist pursuing the actualization of feeling through material mediation. Wedded to no particular material practice, each of these artists, in his intuitive pursuit of sensation, explored an array of means and materials. Such a pursuit is experimental in practice if not in appearance. While Cage and Duchamp asserted their ideas through a conceptual challenge to aesthetic convention, Feldman, Olitski, Judd, and Louis challenged their individual habits and assumptions through their open-ended, experimental working practice. They too asserted ideas and upset conventions, but they did so with another language, a material syntax foreign to Cage and Duchamp. Feldman's work, like that of

the visual artists discussed above, offers its meaning through experiential example rather than didactic demonstration. Returning finally to the composer's generative question—"What is material?"—Feldman's answer echoes and amplifies the practices of these artists: "I'm very curious in understanding it as phenomena."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Feldman, "Speaking," 134.

Chapter Three: “A Life of Small Moves”

INTRODUCTION

Around 1978, after several years of accepting European commissions and writing a number of pieces for soloist and orchestra, Feldman began composing chamber pieces of increasing duration. His trio *For Philip Guston* of 1984 runs just over four hours; his infamous second string quartet of the previous year, about six hours. What the composer took as his material, that is, specificities of orchestration and parameters of notation, shifted as his works expanded in length; at the same time, his approach to material—what he did with it and how—shifted as well.

Though Feldman’s material and his handling of it continued to develop throughout his late style, certain characteristics persist among many of these works: each is in a single uninterrupted movement, written for one to five performers; many were written for soloists and ensembles with whom the composer had a working relationship, such as the pianist Aki Takahashi or the Kronos Quartet. Composing with the individual peculiarities and temperaments of specific musicians in mind, Feldman described these late works as “casted pieces.”¹¹⁰ In contrast to the vast “anonymous” orchestral forces of his 1970s music, Feldman’s focus in the 1980s became more local, more concentrated.¹¹¹

Repetition and variation characterize his late compositions; Feldman’s concentration on these techniques, often crafted as a simultaneity, reflects his interest in nineteenth-century Persian and nomadic Turkish rugs. His attention to these rugs resembled his attention to abstract painting. In both, Feldman admired their technical and material aspects, “the skills that went into it,” as much as he did their visual qualities of

¹¹⁰ Feldman, “Speaking,” 129.

¹¹¹ Feldman, “Speaking,” 129.

abstracted imagery and patterning.¹¹² Though commentators have associated Feldman's late work to both the composer's interest in Turkish rugs and to his personal friendships with abstract expressionist painters, the nature of the association is often either obscured, taken as a matter of course, or flattened into anecdotal detail. A long passage from Wilfrid Mellers' essay "Panic or Paradise: American Abstract Expressionism and the music of Morton Feldman" is worth quoting in this regard for its equation of unlike phenomena and its reduction of specific phenomena to poetic generality:

There is often a startling resemblance between Feldman's oriental carpets and rugs and his carpet-inspired late compositions on the one hand, and on the other hand Pollock's mid-twentieth century dribblings and doodlings, such as the wondrous *Lavender Mist*. The quotation from Henry James that stands as epigraph¹¹³ to this essay makes a valid comment both on Pollock's *Lavender Mist* and on Feldman's *Coptic Light*, in which Feldman's usually isolated tones merge into an ancient carpet's repetitious flow. The sounds are unbroken, if beatless: sustained drones and clusters on wind and strings, normally very soft, with no harmony (at least in the grammatical sense), no melody, no preordained form, only a sometimes flawed pattern in an aural carpet that, being at once 'timeless and immediate', is for that reason, in Rothko's sense, 'tragic'.¹¹⁴

In this chapter I untangle the works conglomerated in Mellers' description, drawing new lines of association between Feldman's late work, Turkish carpets, and mid-century American gestural abstract painting. Broadly, I suggest a distinction between two periods of the composer's late music: the earlier period, from roughly 1978-1984, is marked by his interest in patterning, asymmetry, reiteration, and variation techniques—in short, a principle of differentiation through repetition. In the first three sections of the

¹¹² Feldman, "Speaking," 130.

¹¹³ "Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silk threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue."

¹¹⁴ Wilfrid Mellers, "Panic or Paradise: American Abstract Expressionism and the Music of Morton Feldman," *Modern Painters* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 73. <http://www.cnvill.net/mfmellers.htm>

chapter I describe this period, looking at examples of Feldman's notational figuration and at two of the composer's late nineteenth-century carpets. His last period begins with the composition *For Bunita Marcus*, completed in March of 1985 and ends with the composer's death in September 1987. During these last years, his music became more extreme in its concentration, more unequivocal in its expression. The patterning and differentiation of the earlier period gives way to dense, droning textures, ambient time, and a peculiar type of naturalism. The final three sections focus on the latter period. Looking at Feldman's penultimate composition, *For Samuel Beckett* (1987), I describe the increased scale of his instrumental gestures, likening his shift in scale to that of painter Jules Olitski in relation to the work of the abstract expressionist generation of painters that preceded him. Characterizing tropes of gestural abstraction in the 1950s and 1960s, I distinguish Olitski's work from the earlier vocabulary of abstract painting. I describe how scale operates similarly in Olitski's paintings and in Feldman's very late work, concluding with an extended section on the nature of the naturalistic qualities their work shares.

In the middle section of the chapter, "The saturation of experience," I describe Feldman's working method, his practical means of handling material, as a way of implying the continuity the earlier and later periods of his late music. The distinction I make between the two periods of Feldman's late music is real, but subtle; many qualities of Feldman's music stayed in place. The shift I describe was gradual, seemingly unselfconscious. "After all," Feldman said, "art is a life of small moves [but if] one has the kind of tolerance to watch...[t]here's unbelievable change."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Feldman, *Says*, 83-84.

PROBLEM SOLVING WITHOUT PROBLEMS

“I don't begin with problems; if you begin with a problem, you'll *solve* it.”—
Morton Feldman, 1980¹¹⁶

In many of Feldman's late, “carpet-inspired” compositions, the grid of the staff paper became a generative material for the composer. Considering each measure as a somewhat autonomous module of the page's regulated grid, he filled each unit with silences, chords, and patterns. These minute figures are subject to slight variation and slow repetition, creating larger notational patterns on each page (fig. 39). The gradual procession of these figures constitutes the fabric of the music. Feldman cited Jasper Johns's working method as an inspiration: “[Johns] says, ‘I do it one way, and then I do it another,’ as simple as that. [I can] do it with four notes, do it with three notes, do it slower, put it here, put it there, this can go on for a long time!”¹¹⁷ Feldman might, for example, saturate one rhythmic construction in varieties of color and texture (fig. 40), as in the repeated scales on page 15 of *For John Cage* (1982). Though the violin and piano both repeat a five-note scale, it is perpetually shifting in its register, articulation, and quantity of repetition. He could articulate the same color chords in shifting proportions, as in the opening of *Patterns in a Chromatic Field* (1981) (fig. 41). That piece opens with the pianist playing two chords varying both individually and in relation to one another. From measure to measure, Feldman shifts the duration of each chord as he alters the rhythmic relationship between them. He crafts these rapidly changing rhythmic proportions by alternating the placement of dotted and double-dotted notes; changing durations of silent beats; and alternating between sixteenth- and thirty-second notes; all

¹¹⁶ Feldman, *Says*, 90.

¹¹⁷ Feldman, “Speaking,” 141.

while the chordal material remains static. He could achieve an effect of acceleration using meter as well, as in *Triadic Memories* (1981), where a particular rhythmic contour is reiterated in different colors and speeds (fig. 42). In the specificity of notation, Feldman found a seemingly inexhaustible means of exploring material.

Comparing a page of his late composition *For Philip Guston* (1984) to a late nineteenth-century Baluch rug the composer bought in Turkey in 1978, one sees in both an overall grid, with self-contained patterns filling each unit (figs. 43, 44). For each artist, this regularity serves as a point of departure. In both works, the rigidity of the grid is partially dissolved or undermined by variations in local detail; though similar patterns comprise each unit, a principle of differentiation obtains among them. Each module's color and figuration varies, unsystematically, one to the next. In his late pieces, Feldman crafted abbreviated rhythmic constructions and intervallic patterns, notating them with minute shifts in detail, color, and emphasis. "The compositional concentration is solely on which pattern should be reiterated and for how long," Feldman explained, "and on the character of its inevitable change into something else."¹¹⁸ Through a simultaneous process of repetition and variation of material, the composer creates an aural analogue to the patterned and colored grids of hand-woven rugs.

Though Feldman crafts his patterns, pauses, and arabesques as individual moments, yet their family resemblance and self-similarity imparts a sense of continuity within each piece. Wandering and meandering, the succession of these patterns drifts through time, as if self-perpetuating. Their progression has neither the narrative structure common to Romantic-era symphonies, nor the developmental character of a mid-century

¹¹⁸ Feldman, *Regards*, 140.

serialist composition. Listening to a late Feldman composition, one hears instead a slow procession of patterns and tones, a gradual accumulation in time and in memory of self-similar material, concentrated and perpetuated.

UNFIXING TIME

Throughout the 1980s, Feldman used notational parameters such as repeat bars, silent beats and measures, and metrical modulation as possibilities for creating an aural asymmetry similar to the asymmetrical patterning of his rugs (fig. 45) Feldman unsynchronizes aurally the precision of the notational grid by making subtleties of rhythmic notation a subject of his composition. On the opening page of *Crippled Symmetry* (1983), for example, each of the three instruments begins playing in a different meter (fig. 46). Since each meter contains an unequal number of beats, the instruments progress through the score at varying rates of speed. Immediately departing from synchronization with one another, the three instruments also drift away from the coordinated appearance of the notational grid. Metrical modulation continues in each measure, among all of the instruments, as some players repeat phrases while others continue onward. “[This] is not a synchronized score,” Feldman cautions on page 14 (fig. 47).

By the time of the piano’s repetition at mm. 5, the flute, having no repeats, is playing at mm. 10, while the vibraphone is nearing the end of a brisk sixteen-measure module comprised entirely of a repeated five-note pattern.¹¹⁹ While the vibraphone’s pattern remains static, its meter and the duration of the silent beat preceding it shift through time. Both of these elements expand to maximum duration at mm. 7 (a quarter rest preceding the pattern in a measure of 11/16), before gradually contracting to mm. 13,

¹¹⁹ I refer to the 1995 Hat Hut recording by Nils Vigeland, Eberhard Blum, and Jan Williams.

in which there is no silent beat and the meter returns to the 5/16 that opened the piece. The material then expands again to its maximum length, but more hastily. In the final four measures of the line, mm. 13-16, Feldman extends the durations of silence and meter in a more steeply graduated form: the meter of the measures jumps from 5/16 to 7/19 to 9/16 to 11/16 with silent beats shifting accordingly. Finally, this entire construction—the opening sixteen measures of the vibraphone part—is repeated. By using repeats, silent beats, and meter in this manner, Feldman dissolves the synchronizing temporal function of the score’s notational grid. The aural reality of the music is immediately and perpetually dissociated from its visual, notated analogue. The elasticity of time, its expansion and contraction, yields a sense of time unfixed, drifting and billowing.

“CURIOUS MOVES”

One element of Turkish rugs that Feldman singled out for discussion was their preponderance of “imperfections”—the various irregularities of color and asymmetries of design that the composer understood as conditions of the rug maker’s craft. The slight deviations in a rug’s design and execution were a kind of collateral damage from the practice of working gradually through its fabrication without being able to correct earlier work. In these rugs, he recognized a kindred artistic process: if serialization is akin to mechanized production, Feldman’s music, as the composer described it, “is handmade; it’s not a calculated dialectic.”¹²⁰

In the 1980s, Feldman began to conceive of the rug maker’s temporal, repetitive process—first of dipping and dyeing yarn, then of weaving it into the patterns that comprise the rug’s design—as analogous to music composition. He crafted his long

¹²⁰ Feldman, *Says*, 208.

compositions in a gradual, cumulative manner similar to the rug maker's. Each pattern, every iteration or arrangement of material, remains provisional. The hours of a composition are as many as it took for the composer to exhaust his interest or satisfy his curiosity in the material. "[I]n writing a long piece," Feldman explained in 1980, "I would make curious moves but only for the *moment*, decisions I would never think of."¹²¹ The "moves" Feldman found himself making would not have been arrived at by decision or thought; they are the composer's intuitive responses to the shifting material circumstances of his work. "Making moves" instead of setting up structures or controls, the composer wrote in ink, assembling patterns and arranging their sequence without revision. In his late work, Feldman's working method itself became his primary means of establishing the continuity of a composition.

"SATURATION OF EXPERIENCE"

In 1985, the composer described his compositional practice: "working for an hour, and then I copy, then I work for an hour, and then I copy."¹²² This method kept his hands "in" the material. His attention remained perpetually focused on the local level of the composition—on the modular units of the notational grid, on the particular notes and rhythms of the patterns comprising those units. Though the temporal scale of an individual measure is relatively slight, Feldman flexes other dimensions of the material, using leaps in registration and a seemingly inexhaustible procession of rhythmic variation (fig. 48). The composer's navigation through these techniques of differentiation and reiteration is decidedly unsystematic. Working then copying, he handled the material

¹²¹ Feldman, *Says*, 93.

¹²² Feldman, *Words*, vol. 1, 136.

over and over again, shifting its color and proportions through endless reiterations drifting through time. “A modular construction...could be a basic device for organic development,” Feldman wrote in 1981.¹²³ “However, I use it to see that patterns are ‘complete’ in themselves, and in no need of development—only of extension.”¹²⁴

“Development,” in an 18th-century symphony as in 20th-century serialism, involves the use of overarching structures or conceptual envelopes to guide the listener through a temporal narrative of form; the programmatic function of these tropes inevitably blunt the specificity of material.¹²⁵ The continuity of a late Feldman composition emerges instead from “extension”—from the persistence of the composer’s intuition and judgment as he crafts each individual moment of material. “[W]hen you copy, you’re thinking about what you just did. You are not in some kind of conceptual delusion.... [It’s] also a compositional procedure. That’s more important to me than forms.”¹²⁶ This working method yielded the cohesion of Feldman’s late compositions; their continuity is “ad hoc,”¹²⁷ analogous to that of Frank Stella’s stripe paintings, as described by Donald Judd: “not rationalistic and underlying, but...simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another.”¹²⁸

“Time is the only thing that could saturate experience and actually make it more comprehensible, what you’re doing,” Feldman explained to an interviewer in 1987, without specifying whether this saturation affords comprehension to himself or to his

¹²³ Feldman, *Regards*, 142.

¹²⁴ Feldman *Regards*, 142.

¹²⁵ In any case, the material in this type of composition always maintains some auxiliary function.

¹²⁶ Feldman, *Words*, vol.1, 136.

¹²⁷ Feldman, “Speaking,” 143.

¹²⁸ Donald Judd, *The Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 184.

listener.¹²⁹ As he composed, Feldman subjected himself to a similar gradual, temporal saturation of experience as a listener of his music would have. The composer Gavin Bryars remembers Feldman working in the late 1960s, “sitting at the piano, his head very close to the keyboard, playing a mildly dissonant chord very quietly, and then holding down the notes with one hand while he wrote them directly into the final score, often in ink, with the other.”¹³⁰ For Feldman, the process of composing was tantamount to listening. As he wrote, he followed no other stimulus; he allowed no other devices to control the development of the composition (fig. 49).

Eschewing systems and formulas, the composer’s experimentation with material—“just an investigation, giving free vent,” “doing it one way, doing it another”—corresponds with the listener’s sense of discovery.¹³¹ The listener follows the activity of Feldman’s mind, experiences the concentration of his thought, becomes saturated in the same experience that generated the piece. A transparency of thought characterizes Feldman’s experimental practice; as in the 1970s paintings of Jules Olitski (discussed below), the process of Feldman’s materialistic investigation—the artist’s handling of material—remains available not merely *in* the work, as if incidentally, but often *as* the final work itself. The composer described this indexical quality as an “image of action and thought as a simultaneity.”¹³² A simultaneity of action and thought is synonymous with the exercise of intuition: “making moves” without conceptualizing before the fact or applying a retrospective justification after. The formulation of an artwork as evidence of

¹²⁹ Feldman, *Says*, 238.

¹³⁰ Gavin Bryars and Michael Tilson Thomas, “Feldman at the Piano.”
<http://www.cnvill.net/mfatpiano.htm>

¹³¹ Feldman, *Says*, 145.

¹³² Feldman, “Speaking,” 140.

experimental intuition is reflected by the clarity and availability in the work of the artist's process and judgment. This aesthetic outlook is characteristic of both Feldman's work and Olitski's, among other mid-century American abstract artists.¹³³

Reflecting on his work, Olitski wrote "there is nothing—either in the making of it, or the experiencing of it—that is known by me and not known by you."¹³⁴ Olitski's equation of making and experiencing is a product of his active engagement with materials; his paintings evince his responsiveness to the shifting material circumstances presented by his mediation of paint, canvas, and vision. In his late work, Feldman's practice developed similarly: when the composer speaks of time saturating experience and revealing the clarity of what he's doing, he's likely to have had both himself *and* the audience in mind. "Remember, I'm the listener as I'm writing it," he said. "I don't feel that I'm a composer; I *do* feel that I'm a listener."¹³⁵

"AN INWARD ARCHITECTURE"

Broadly, techniques of variation and repetition characterize Feldman's late work. In the first period of his late work, from 1978 to 1984, the principles of differentiation and change are emphasized. As described above and shown in examples, Feldman in these pieces crafted patterns individually, setting them apart from one another by variation, and from the music's "background" by silent measures. Beginning with *For Bunita Marcus*, his first piece completed in 1985 and continuing until his death in 1987,

¹³³ For example, Kenneth Noland and Steve Reich.

¹³⁴ Undated, unpublished note by Jules Olitski in the archives of the Jules Olitski Estate.

¹³⁵ Feldman, "Speaking," 140.

the principle of repetition and the quality of stasis are foregrounded.¹³⁶ In this last period of his work, 1985-1987, successions of patterns give way to increasingly flat surfaces. These dense textures and droning chords are more flatly planar, more monolithic, than the flexing figures of his “earlier” late music.

Feldman had experimented with flat, even surfaces in several of his free durational pieces of the 1960s, *de Kooning* (1963) (fig. 31) and *Numbers* (1965) (fig. 50), for example. But the aural textures of those works are thin and attenuated; in them, sustained notes and resonant chords succeed one another singly and sequentially. Though Feldman creates an unbroken aural surface, the persistence of moment-to-moment timbral variation yields a texture shifting in its color and mass, as tones and clusters are passed from one instrument or a set of instruments to the next. By contrast, the all-over, even surfaces of the composer’s very late music are characterized by the relative density of sustained tones, the orchestration of droning chords across several timbres simultaneously. The rhythmic specificity of these chords—their temporal proportions—as well as the extreme durations of the works they comprise, reflect the composer’s increasing interest in time as a tangible, palpable material for his composition. In these pieces, Feldman uses aspects time to saturate himself, the material, the listener, and experience, all fluidly and reciprocally. “I wanted to saturate time in a deep sense,” he said of one of his very late compositions: time in the past tense as memory, in the present as experience, and in the future as anticipation, “the anxiety of art.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ The distinction is not nearly as hard and fast as my schematic depiction might suggest. Repetition and variation were aspects of Feldman’s music from the first, and both persist in degrees throughout most of his music. Moreover, these are only two among the many material means Feldman employed.

¹³⁷ Feldman, *Words*, vol. 1, 214; the last quotation is the title of an essay, written by the composer in 1965, and published in *Art in America* (vol. 61, no. 5, pp. 88-93) in 1973.

Time is flattened and extended, a texture shifting, as in *Violin and String Quartet* (1985), at a glacial pace (fig. 51).¹³⁸ The evenness of the music's constant aural surface makes time less graspable in its passing. The all-over similarity of droning colors and gestures suspends time, precluding the listener's gradual sense of the music's scale; the temporal proportions of the piece are perpetually obscure. The sustained texture and surface envelops the listener; both the scale of the piece and its material are immersive, environmental. "What I am really experiencing" Feldman said of composing/listening to these works, "is a kind of architecture, an inward architecture."¹³⁹

SCALES OF GESTURE

In his late period, Feldman accepted only two commissions for large instrumental forces. In these pieces, the composer's exploration of saturated time and droning textures has its most unequivocal expression. The first, *Coptic Light*, commissioned for the New York Philharmonic, was completed in December 1985 and premiered the following May. Its surface constancy was new to his music; Feldman described the aural texture of the piece as "monolithic orchestration, no solos, everything is going on at the same time" (fig. 52).¹⁴⁰ These qualities are extended in the latter of his two late large ensemble works, *For Samuel Beckett*, commissioned for the Schoenberg Ensemble and completed in March 1987. The penultimate piece of the composer's career, it was premiered that summer in Amsterdam.

¹³⁸ The *Violin and String Quartet* is a singularly extreme example of Feldman's very late style. The composer never had the opportunity to hear the piece. Completed in the first week of June 1985, it was not premiered until October 1990, three years after Feldman's death, by Saschko Gawriloff and the Arditti String Quartet in Cologne.

¹³⁹ Feldman, *Words*, vol. 1, 330.

¹⁴⁰ Feldman, *Words*, vol. 1, 218.

For Samuel Beckett's time canvas is saturated edge-to-edge with hues of music—from the opening gesture of the piece until the final measure, the ensemble's large wind, brass, and string sections (with piano, vibraphone, and harp) maintain a consistent, unbroken surface; there are only six full-ensemble silences among the piece's six hundred measures. While the string section stays close to synchronization throughout the piece, the entrances and durations of the winds and brass are staggered (fig. 53). These instruments play sustained tones individually, long in duration and steady in articulation. The evenly textured, monolithic, all-over composition of *For Samuel Beckett* is comprised of the repetition of a gesture—the gesture of the performer's breath. Throughout the hour-long duration of the piece, each wind and brass player articulates only static, uninflected sustained tones; the persistence and regularity of these tones resembles, and of course the means of playing them, are analogous to breathing; these tones accumulate into larger droning gestures, deeper breaths, varying in their degree of orchestral saturation (fig. 54). Figure 53 shows a dense gesture, figure 54 an attenuated one.

In the passage quoted in the introduction, Wilfrid Mellers connects the “sustained drones and clusters” of *Coptic Light* with both “an ancient carpet's repetitious flow,” and the “dribblings and doodlings” of Pollock's *Lavender Mist*. A distinction lost in Mellers' pooling of observations is the increased scale of material in *Coptic Light* and *For Samuel Beckett* relative to that of the compositions from the 1978-1984 period. In his last period, Feldman increasingly explored larger-scaled material—massive monoliths of aural material, tirelessly repeated, shifting slowly. The shift in Feldman's material, from the patterning and figuration of his early-1980s compositions, to the flattened lines and

drones of *For Samuel Beckett* runs parallel to shifts in the gestural abstraction of the 1950s, like that of Jackson Pollock, to that of the 1970s, as in the work of Jules Olitski.

In the mid-1970s, Olitski began using tools such as rollers, industrial brooms, and squeegees to make paintings. While several abstract expressionist painters had gotten away from using traditional oil paints and fine art brushes, the scale of the gesture in paintings by Jackson Pollock and Clyfford Still remained miniscule relative to the scale of the painting itself, especially as these abstract expressionist painters began to work on canvases of increasing size. Even as Pollock used industrial color and unconventional handling to create mural-size abstract paintings, his manner of dripping paint retained the relatively small scale of the paintbrush. In many of his drip paintings, Pollock still utilized the brush, opting instead to paint with the “wrong” end of it, the stick instead of the bristles.

Olitski’s *Rephahim Shade – 2* of 1974 is comprised almost entirely of a repeated gesture—that of vertical, raw umber strokes swept up and down the surface with an industrial broom (fig. 55). The paint is translucent, glazing the surface thickly in patches of dark brown made opaque by its accumulation, and thinly elsewhere, where the painting’s cream-colored ground shines through the translucent brown glaze (fig. 56). The trace of the broom’s bristles remains evident across the painting in the form of thin, fibrous lines, an innumerable amount to each broad broom stroke (fig. 57). In its all-over, edge-to-edge gesture, the pictorial syntax of *Rephahim Shade – 2* resembles that of abstract expressionist paintings; but Olitski’s painting extends that vocabulary, capturing a range of effects not often seen in the paintings of the earlier generation.

In *Rephahim Shade – 2*, and throughout his body of work in the 1970s and early 1980s, Olitski increased the scale of his gesture to match the increased scale of his canvases; the two senses of proportion are integrated rather than disparate, as in Pollock's work. The scale of Olitski's gesture affords a greater degree of gradation and variety, a range of broader, more available effects, as the constituent bristles of the broom are larger and more in number than that of a paintbrush. Spreading translucent acrylic glazes rather than opaque oil paint, the virtually microscopic particularity of bristle trails remains readable as gradations of light and shadow (see figs. 56, 57). In *Rephahim Shade – 2*, Olitski capitalizes on this effect, organizing the palette around basically two colors, umber and cream. His paint handling opens the two colors open up into a value scale with an infinitely varied range of intermediary tones. This, together with the indexical quality of his mark marking, yields an organic, naturalistic effect.

NATURALISM

The droning, breathing gestures of *For Samuel Beckett* are spread across its aural surface in a similar manner, saturating it with densely orchestrated color in some areas and with thin, attenuated color in other parts. In both *For Samuel Beckett* and *Rephahim Shade – 2*, the monolithic surface is inflected by zones greater or lesser accumulation of material, gradations of saturation. The naturalism of Olitski's 1970s paintings resembles that of Feldman's *For Samuel Beckett*. In both works, "intentioned" aspects, like the crafting of a musical pattern, or the placement of forms on a background, are kept in abeyance by an onrush of organic effects—transparency, density, spreading, gradation. These sensations emerge from the clarity and integrity of the material, and the artist's practical, impersonal handling of it. The impact of naturalistic effects in Olitski's painting

and Feldman's very late composition is visceral; it corresponds with specific material properties. I use "naturalism" to describe the quality, present in the work of both artists, of phenomenological effects not depicted or represented, but bodied forth by the artist's handling of material itself. As in Feldman's composition, the naturalism of Olitski's painting emerges from the persistence of a repetitive, indexical gesture.

Gesture in abstract expressionist paintings tended to be expressive, subjective, referential—a metaphor in one sense or another, and not necessarily an obdurate material reality. An underlying arbitrariness underlies Franz Kline's gestural abstraction. In *Untitled #2* (1957) the artist's gesture, centered and set off from its background, evinces an autographic quality (fig. 58). The sense of Kline's broad, black and white brushstroke as a "signature" gesture is heightened by its repetition, not within a painting but among his paintings, one to the next. The same composed and controlled gesture that characterizes 1957's *Untitled #2* can be found seven years earlier in *Chief* (fig. 59) four years later in *Merce C* (fig. 60) and in virtually any of Kline's paintings in between. The arbitrariness of Kline's autographic composition, the tightrope balance of his subjective calligraphy, precludes the naturalistic effects found in Olitski's *Rephahim Shade – 2*.

Willem de Kooning, working contemporaneously with Olitski, utilizes repetitive gestures in his work, but to an entirely different end. Without locating the precise placement of the figure in de Kooning's 1972 *Woman in the Water* (fig. 61), the viewer can immediately glean the degree of differentiation in color, texture, and finish among the artist's brushstrokes. Though his gestural handling is spread evenly across the surface, it is used in a variegating capacity. De Kooning asserts different material properties in each gesture as a means of distinguishing aspects of the scene. Thick, oily brushstrokes,

for example, run into brittle painted areas sanded to a matte finish; the trail of de Kooning's meandering hand figures a preponderance of gestures into an abstract representation. In de Kooning's painting, gesture is used as a depictive or referential cue.

The broom strokes in *Rephahim Shade – 2* are broad and readable. As in the work of Kline and de Kooning, they remain available as a trace of the artist's hand; but in Olitski's painting, this indexical quality is unimpeded by arbitrary placement or depictive differentiation. *Rephahim Shade – 2* has neither the careful balance nor the studied composition of earlier gestural painting. Olitski's gesture is more practical, a sheer covering of the surface rather than a figuration upon it. Indexical without an external referent, Olitski's utilitarian paint handling has the impersonal quality of a natural process.

The scale of Olitski's gesture heightens the impact of local detail, making such detail broader, more available. As in nature, the array of effects that arise are as diverse and multitudinous as they are particular and miniscule. These two senses of scale—broad gesture and infinitesimal detail—operate simultaneously, each reinforcing the other by coincidence and contrast. The naturalistic surface of Olitski's painting does not reduce itself to a readable image as do earlier abstract expressionist paintings like Adolph Gottlieb's "Bursts" or Robert Motherwell's "Elegies" (figs. 62, 63). Owing perhaps to those artists' concern with abstract imagery, their oil paint surfaces are hurried and flat, basically uninflected. Olitski's rugged paint surfaces of the 1970s are more physical; they preclude imagery. The sensations that issue from them—of cascading, of luminosity, of massiveness, of pressure—correlate both with the artist's broadly readable gesture and with the tangible material properties of the paint itself. As in one's perception of nature,

causes and qualities directly correspond. Effects are indissoluble from the processes that yielded them; one does not experience the effect without sensing that process. Everything visible seems at once incidental and inevitable, random and utterly specific.

A play of large-scaled gesture and specific local detail also characterizes Feldman's *For Samuel Beckett*. The irregularly pulsing individual drones swell into broader gestures swaying in time. These broad gestures gradually swell and tense as Feldman orchestrates their sustained tones through changing combinations of winds and strings; they comprise the entire duration of the piece. The music's aural texture constantly expands and contracts: tense chords in the winds and reeds intersect thin, transparent string chords; they float upon the massive rumblings of the low brass instruments. Though Feldman maintains a static, droning texture throughout *For Samuel Beckett*, its moment-to-moment characteristics remain transitory, swaying and drifting. His gradations of orchestration yield waves of sound that wash up gradually and recede slowly (fig. 54).

Near the end of the piece, Feldman slows this procession of drones. On page 53, he begins crafting them singly, using repeat bars to separate each one from the next. In contrast to the blending of tones and gradation of timbres that opened the piece, near the end of the piece the material itself becomes more chordal, with families of instruments synchronized vertically. The staggered, swaying entrances of individual tones give way to slowly shifting, densely clustered droning waves. Each of these long droning gestures is more monolithic—articulated and repeated with an increasing amount of silence separating one from the next. Feldman's separation of the gesture from its all-over texture has a curious parallel in Olitski's *Rites of Desire – One* (1981), which is comprised

entirely a single oblique broom stroke (fig. 64). Like Feldman's patterns, Olitski's broom stroke is "complete in [it]self, and in no need of development—only of extension."¹⁴¹

While in *Rites of Desire – One* Olitski presents complete the gesture in itself, *Rephahim Shade – 2* shows its extension.

By way of conclusion: nearing the end of a lecture in Middelburg, after speaking for several hours longer than anyone had anticipated, Morton Feldman told the group of young musicologists and composers, "Maybe the whole things has to do with certain attitudes, rather than any kind of information I could bring, or insight I could give; just basic attitudes..."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Feldman, *Regards*, 142.

¹⁴² Feldman, *Words*, vol. 1, 134.

Figures

for the intensities, I take:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
pppp | *ppp* | *pp* | *p* | *meno p* | *mp* | *mf* | *più f* | *f* | *ff* | *fff* | *ffff* |

for attacks:

> | v | . | - | — | > | > | τ | ∩ | $\frac{9}{8}$ | $\frac{9}{8}$ | *normal* |
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

for durations:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

So I have the possibility of relating the 3 structures to the serial structure proper.

Figure 1: Pierre Boulez, *Structures I* (1952): Serial definitions for intensities, attacks, and durations.

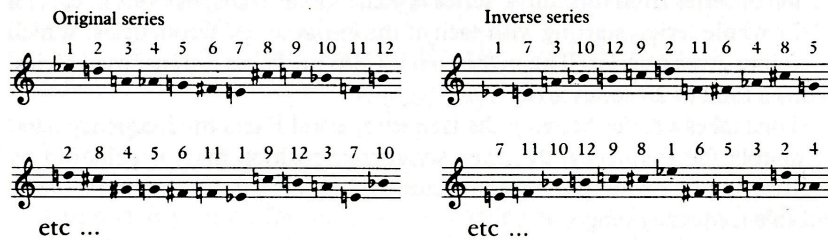


Figure 2: Pierre Boulez, *Structures I* (1952): Series and permutations.

A											
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
2	8	4	5	6	11	1	9	12	3	7	10
3	4	1	2	8	9	10	5	6	7	12	11
4	5	2	8	9	12	3	6	11	1	10	7
5	6	8	9	12	10	4	11	7	2	3	1
6	11	9	12	10	3	5	7	1	8	4	2
7	1	10	3	4	5	11	2	8	12	6	9
8	9	5	6	11	7	2	12	10	4	1	3
9	12	6	11	7	1	8	10	3	5	2	4
10	3	7	1	2	8	12	4	5	11	9	6
11	7	12	10	3	4	6	1	2	9	5	8
12	10	11	7	1	2	9	3	4	6	8	5

B											
1	7	3	10	12	9	2	11	6	4	8	5
7	11	10	12	9	8	1	6	5	3	2	4
3	10	1	7	11	6	4	12	9	2	5	8
10	12	7	11	6	5	3	9	8	1	4	2
12	9	11	6	5	4	10	8	2	7	3	1
9	8	6	5	4	3	12	2	1	11	10	7
2	1	4	3	10	12	8	7	11	5	9	6
11	6	12	9	8	2	7	5	4	10	1	3
6	5	9	8	2	1	11	4	3	12	7	10
4	3	2	1	7	11	5	10	12	8	6	9
8	2	5	4	3	10	9	1	7	6	12	11
5	4	8	2	1	7	6	3	10	9	11	12

Figure 3: Pierre Boulez, *Structures I* (1952): “Double serial organization.”

69

3 HEADS = ☰ ; 2 HEADS AND A TAIL = ⚊ ; 2
 TAILS AND A HEAD = ⚋ ; THREE TAILS = ☷.
 — AND — ARE UNCHANGING, WHILE ☰ IS
 READ FIRST AS —, THEN AS —; AND ☷
 FIRST AS —, THEN AS ——. SIX TOSSES PRO-
 DUCE A HEXAGRAM WHICH IS READ FROM ITS
 BASE UP.

UPPER TRIGRAM →
 LOWER ↓

☰	1	34	5	26	11	9	14	43
☷	25	51	3	27	24	42	21	17
☱	6	40	29	4	7	59	64	47
☲	33	62	39	52	15	53	56	31
☴	12	16	8	23	2	20	35	45
☵	44	32	48	18	46	57	50	28
☶	13	55	63	22	36	37	30	49
☳	10	54	60	41	19	61	38	58

KEY FOR INTERPRETING THE HEXAGRAMS.

FOR EXAMPLE: ☱ IS 7; WHEREAS ☱, 36,
 CHANGES TO 2.

Figure 5: John Cage, *Music of Changes* (1951): Charts for coin-flipping.

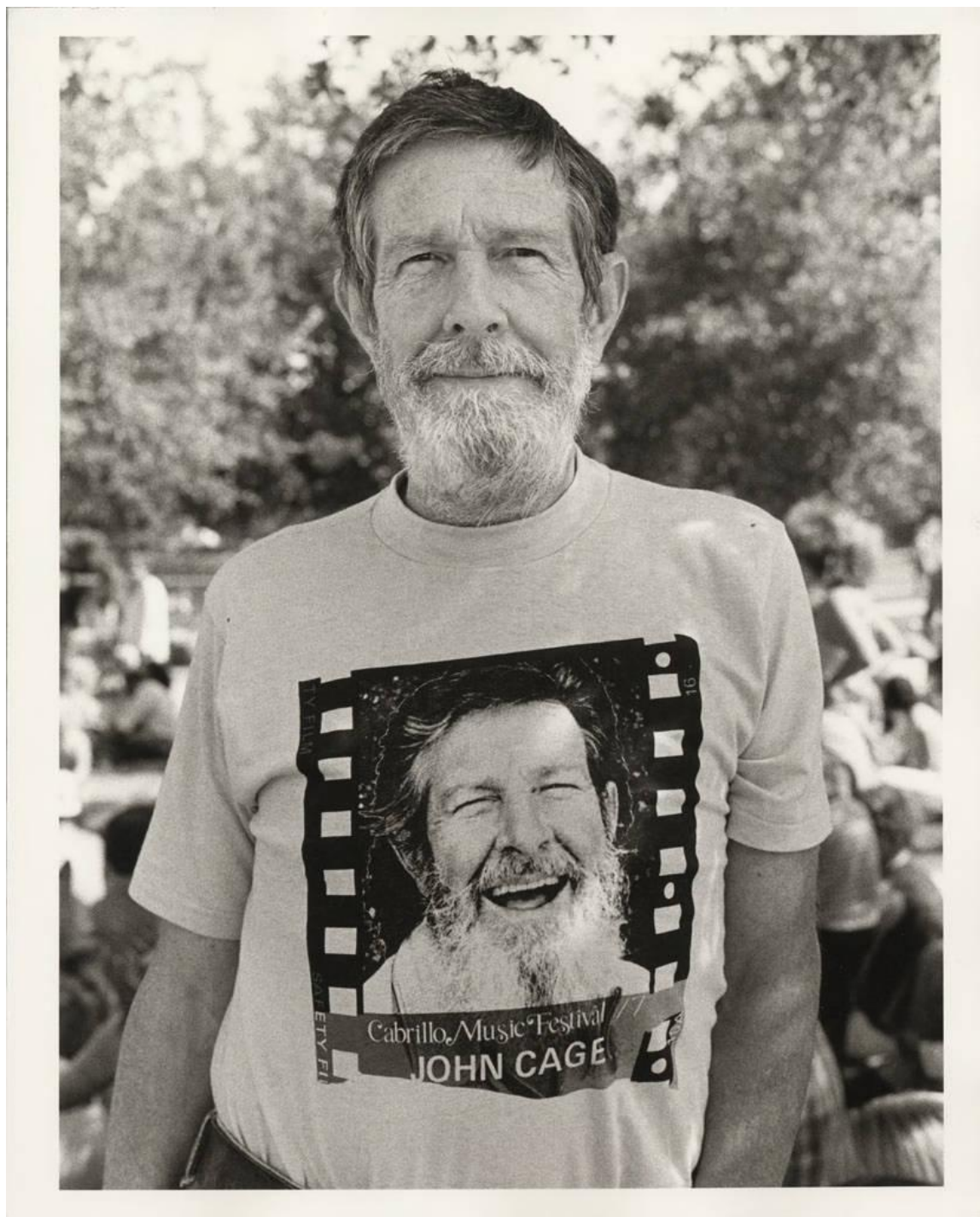


Figure 6: “Cage staked out an omniscient perspective...”

-41-

The image shows a handwritten musical score for John Cage's *Music of Changes*, page 41. The score is written on five systems of staves. The first system shows a piano part in treble and bass staves and a string part in a single staff. The second system includes a tempo marking of 184 and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The third system includes a tempo marking of 184 and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The fourth system includes a tempo marking of 184 and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The fifth system includes a tempo marking of 184 and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The score is annotated with various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key annotations include "184" and "STRINGS PITCHES- STUCK".

Figure 7: John Cage, *Music of Changes* (1951): page 41.



Figure 8: Jackson Pollock painting, 1950. Photo by Hans Namuth.



Figure 9: Jules Olitski painting, 1971. Photo by Dawn Andrews.

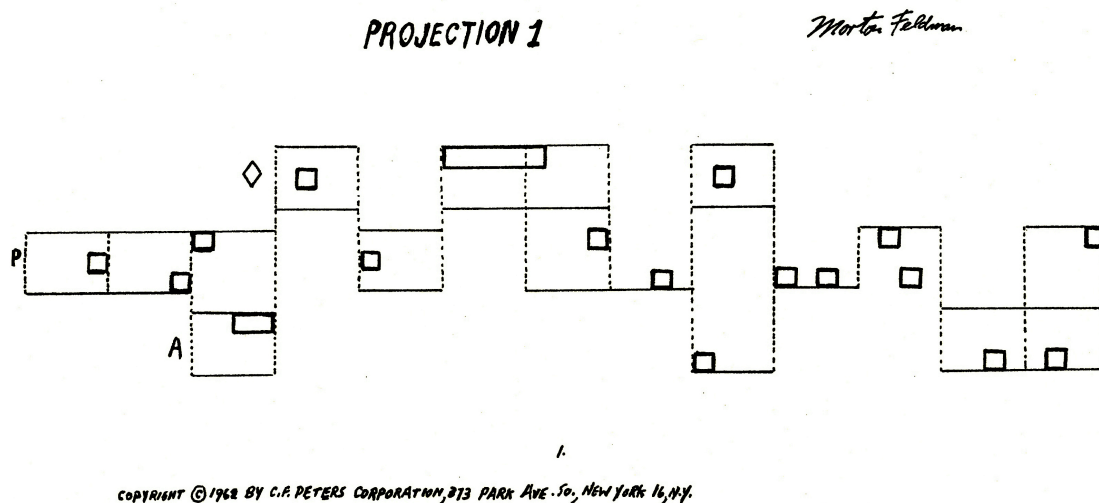


Figure 10: Morton Feldman, *Projection 1* (1950): page 1.

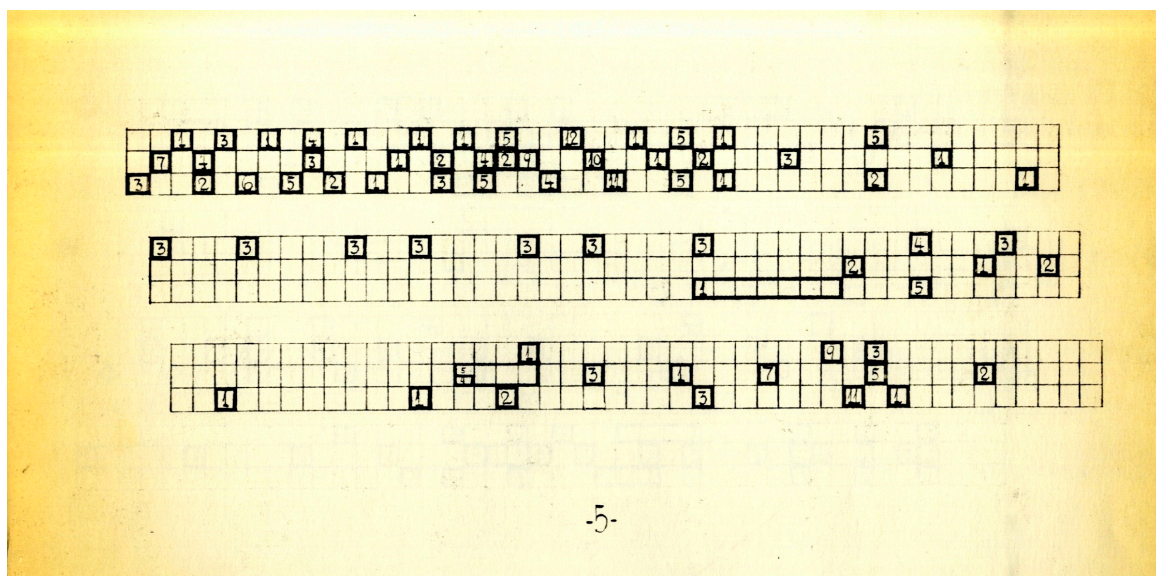


Figure 11: Morton Feldman, *Intersection 2* (1950): page 5.

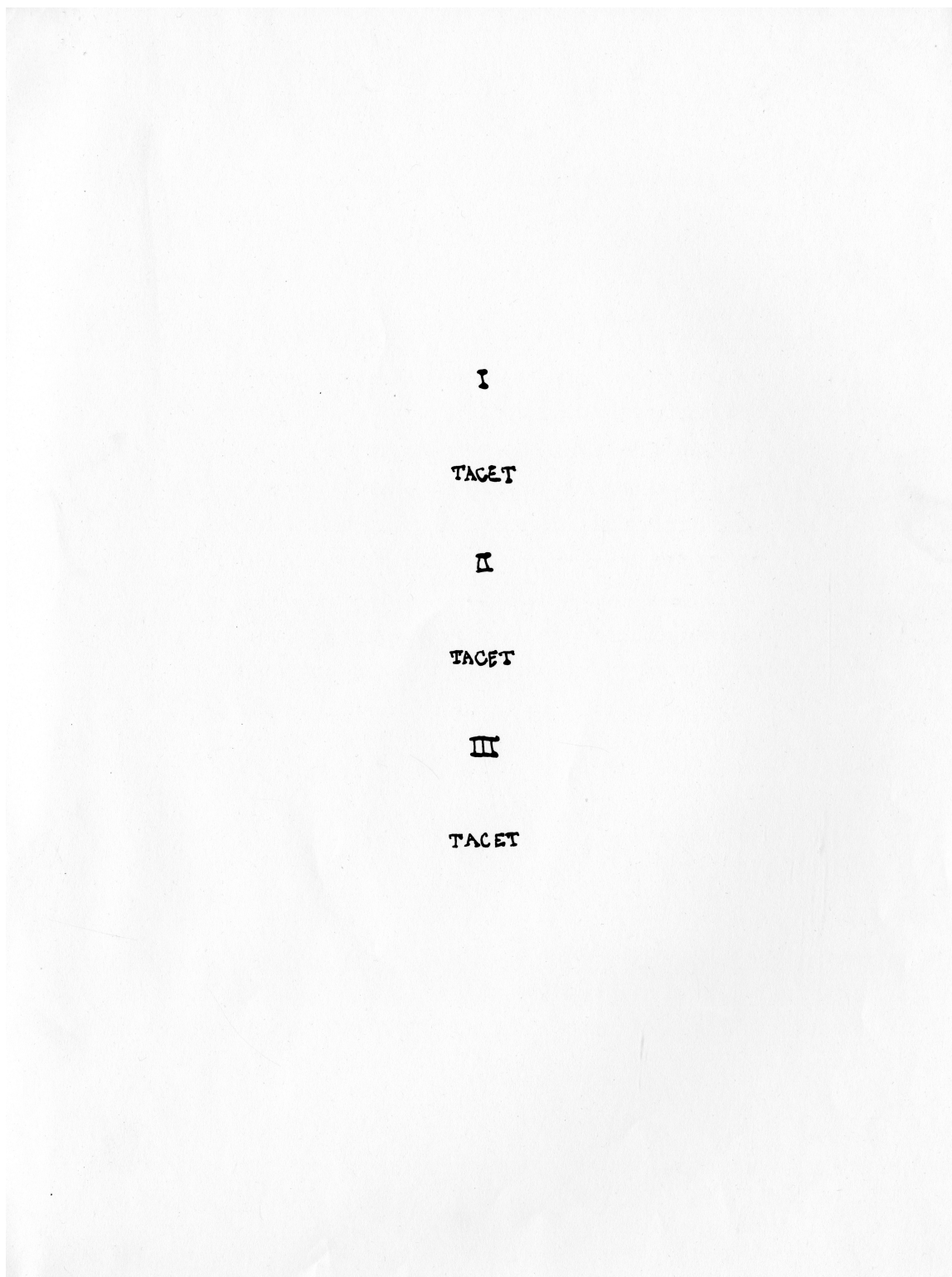


Figure 12: John Cage, 4'33" (1952).

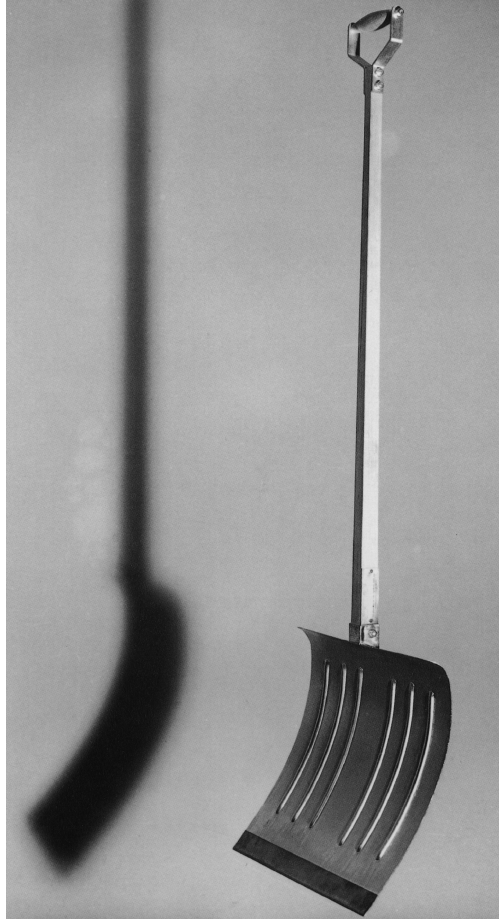


Figure 13: Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1964 (fourth version, after lost original of November 1915). Wood and galvanized-iron snow shovel, h: 52''

Figure 14: Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Rack*, 1914 (editioned by Galleria Schwarz, Milan, 1964, authorized and signed by the artist). Galvanized iron bottle dryer, h: 25''

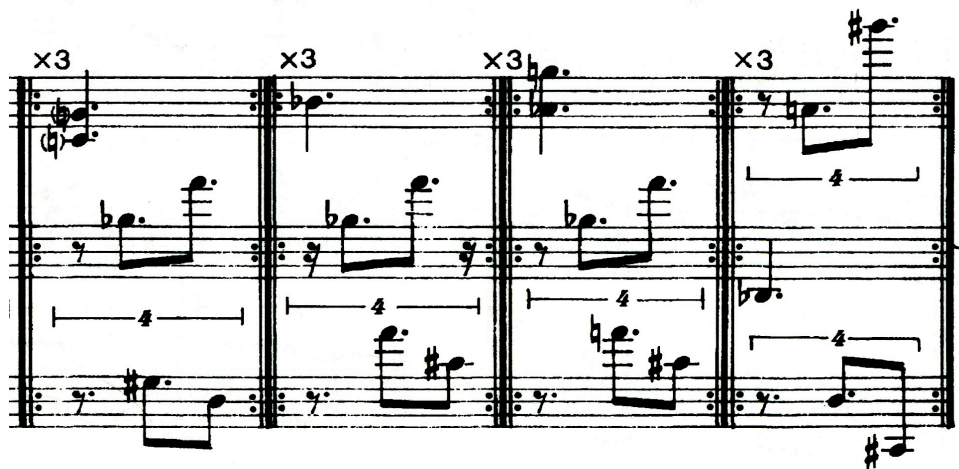


Figure 15: Morton Feldman, *Triadic Memories* (1981): page 5, system 2, mm. 3-6



Figure 16: Morton Feldman, *Triadic Memories* (1981): page 12, system 3, mm. 3-7

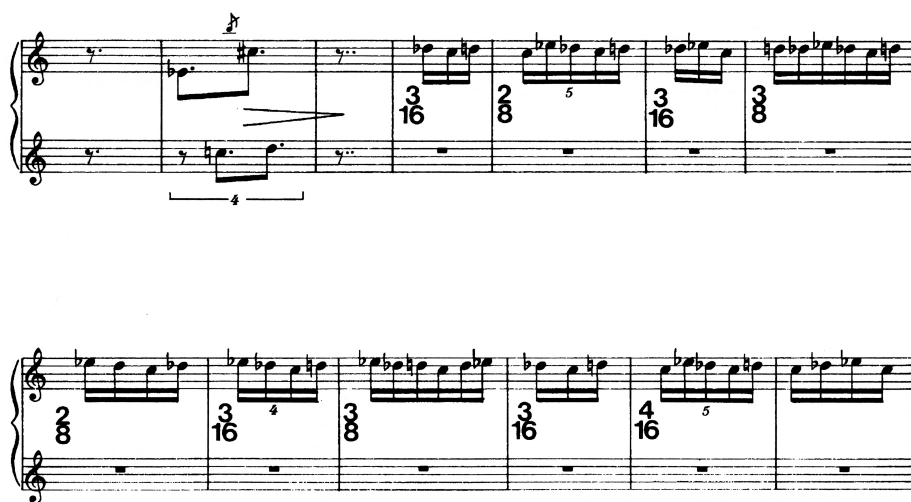


Figure 17: Morton Feldman, *Triadic Memories* (1981): page 34, systems 3 and 4



Figure 18: Morton Feldman, *Triadic Memories* (1981): page 36, systems 3 and 4

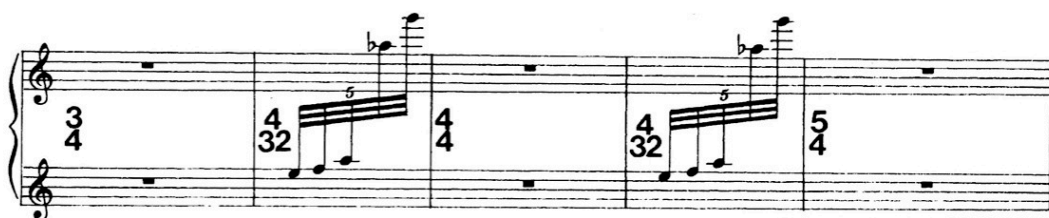


Figure 19: Morton Feldman, *Triadic Memories* (1981): page 38, systems 2-4

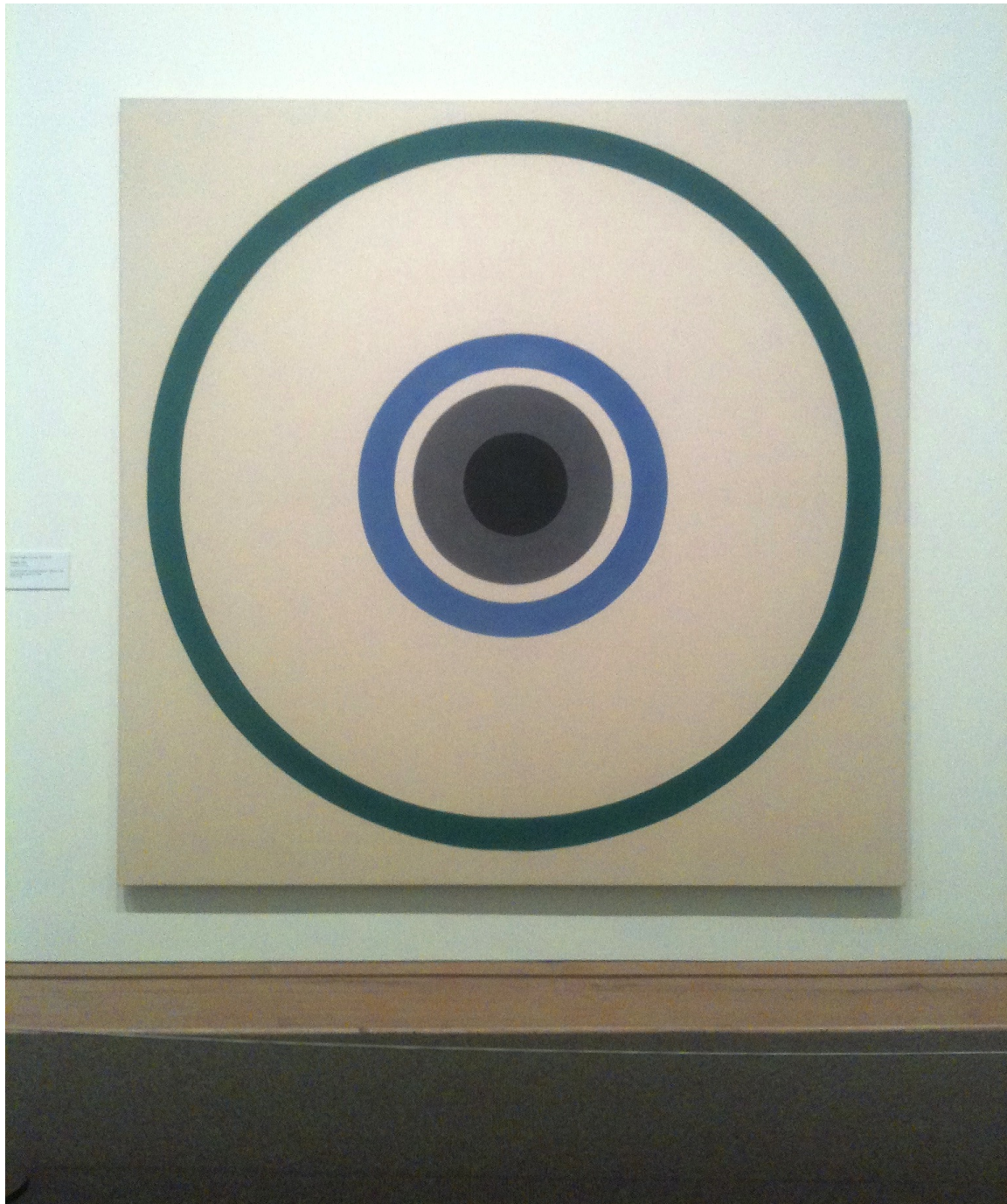


Figure 20: Kenneth Noland, *October*, 1961. Acrylic on canvas, 94 x 92"



Figure 21: Jules Olitski, *Yarmuk Wall – 6*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 85 x 55"

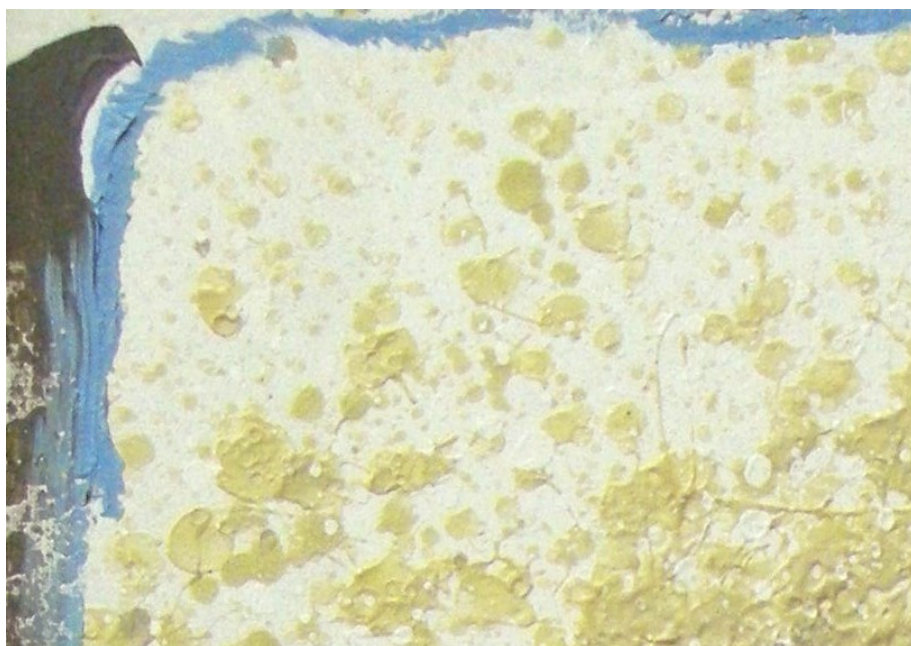


Figure 22: Jules Olitski, *Yarmuk Wall – 6*, 1975: detail of white ground.

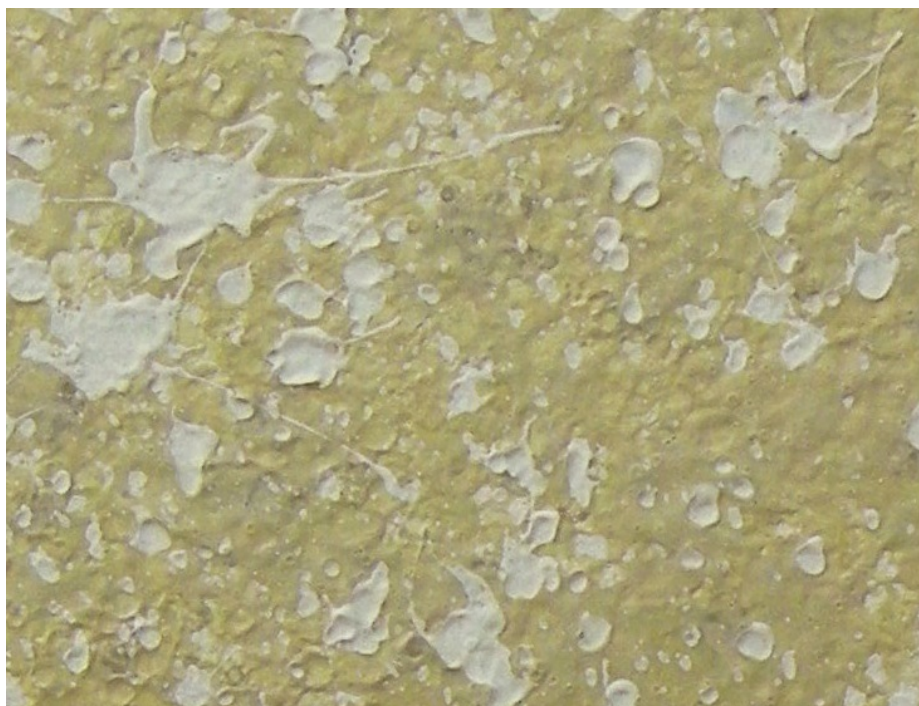


Figure 23: Jules Olitski, *Yarmuk Wall – 6*, 1975: detail of white spray.



Figure 24: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1981. Brushed aluminum and Plexiglas, four units, ea: 50 x 100 x 50cm.



Figure 25: Morris Louis, *Russet*, 1958. Magna paint on canvas, 7'9" x 14'5"



Figure 26: Morris Louis, *Russet*, 1958: detail of sediment.



Figure 27: Morris Louis, *Untitled*, 1958. Magna paint on canvas, 11'7" x 7'7"



Figure 28: Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950. Enamel on canvas, 8'9" x 17'3"



Figure 29: Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31*, 1950. Oil and enamel on canvas, 8'10" x 17'5"

DE KOONING

Morton Feldman
(1963)

The musical score for Morton Feldman's *de Kooning* (1963) is presented on page 1. It is a chamber work for Horn (HN), Percussion (PERC.), Piano (PN), Violin (VN), and Viola (VC). The score is divided into two systems, each with measures numbered 1 through 7. The notation is complex, featuring many accidentals, dynamic markings, and performance instructions. Dashed lines connect notes across staves, indicating intricate textures. Performance instructions include 'Sord.' (Sordano), 'A.C.' (A.C.), 'CH.' (Chimes), 'B.D.' (Bells), 'CEL.' (Cello), 'VIB.' (Vibraphone), 'PN.' (Piano), 'VN.' (Violin), 'VC.' (Viola), 'Pizz.' (Pizzicato), and 'Arco' (Arco). The score is written in a style that emphasizes timbre and texture over traditional melody and harmony.

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Edition Peters 6951

Figure 30: Morton Feldman, *de Kooning* (1963): page 1.

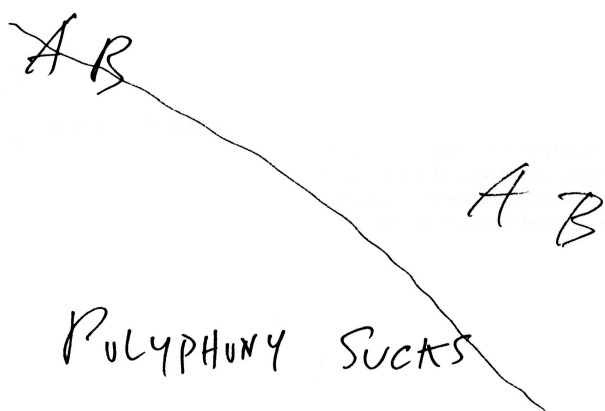
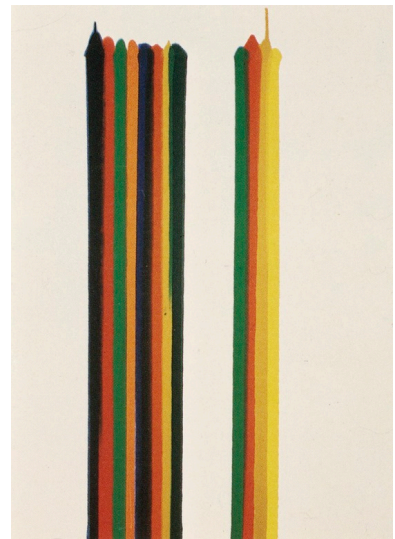
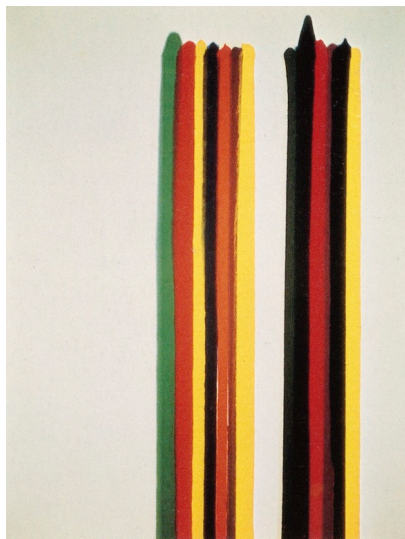


Figure 31: Morton Feldman, “Polyphony sucks,” doodle.



(l to r)

Figure 32: Morris Louis, *Split Spectrum*, 1961. Magna paint on canvas, 80 x 48"

Figure 33: Morris Louis, *Number 30*, 1961. Magna paint on canvas, 88 x 68"

Figure 34: Morris Louis, *First Coming*, 1961. Magna paint on canvas, 88 x 66"

3

16 (♩=52)

HN.

PERC.

PN.

VN.

VC.

14

15

CEL.

PN.

Pizz.

Arco

Pizz.

Arco

(♩=76)

(♩=52)

HN.

PERC.

PN.

VN.

VC.

A.C.

T.D.

Figure 35: Morton Feldman, *de Kooning* (1963): page 3.



Figure 36: Morris Louis, *Water-Shot*, 1961. Magna paint on canvas, 82 x 53"

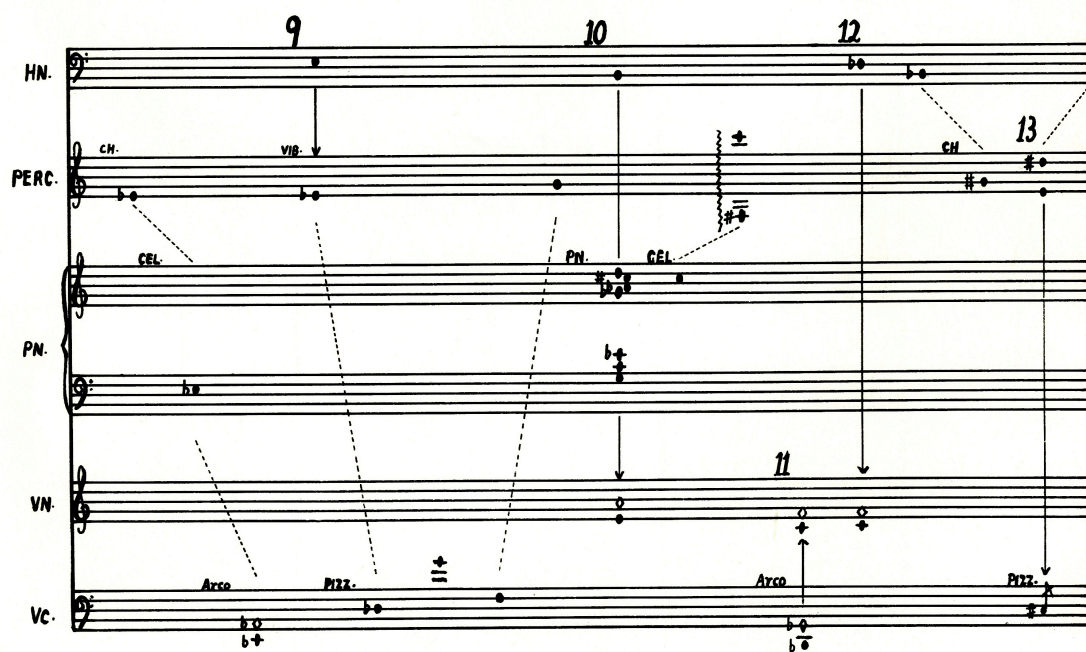


Figure 37: Morton Feldman, *de Kooning* (1963): page 2, bottom system.



Figure 38: Morris Louis, *Water-Shot*, 1961: detail of blending.



2.

Figure 39: Morton Feldman, *Patterns in a Chromatic Field* (1981): page 2.



Figure 40: Morton Feldman, *For John Cage* (1982): page 15, systems 3-5.

Figure 41: Morton Feldman, *Patterns in a Chromatic Field* (1981): page 1, system 1.

Figure 42: Morton Feldman, *Triadic Memories* (1981): page 37, system 3, measures 1 and 2.

PICC. — 4x5 — 3x5 —

VIB.

CEL.

PICC.

VIB.

CEL.

PICC. — 3x5 — 4x5 — 3x5 — 4x5 — 3x5 — 4x5 — 3x5 —

VIB.

CEL.

PICC. — 4x5 — 3x5 —

VIB.

CEL.

31.

© 1984 PANOPUS SCORE SYSTEM

Figure 43: Morton Feldman, *For Philip Guston* (1984): page 31.



Figure 44: Anonymous, Baluch Rug (Persia/Afghanistan), c.1890. Wool, 64 x 46"



Figure 45: Anonymous, Kazak Diamond Rug (South Caucasus), c.1880. Wool, 74 x 49"

CRIPPLED SYMMETRY

Morton Feldman

63-66

FL.

VIB. (no motor)

PF.

ped. →

1/2 ped. →

FL.

VIB.

ped. →

CEL.

ped. →

Figure 46: Morton Feldman, Crippled Symmetry (1983): page 1, systems 1 and 2.

it should be understood that this page
(like the others) is not a symmetrical score.

Figure 47: Morton Feldman, Crippled Symmetry (1983): page 14, note above system 1.



Figure 48: Morton Feldman, *For Bunita Marcus* (1985): page 26, systems 4 and 5.

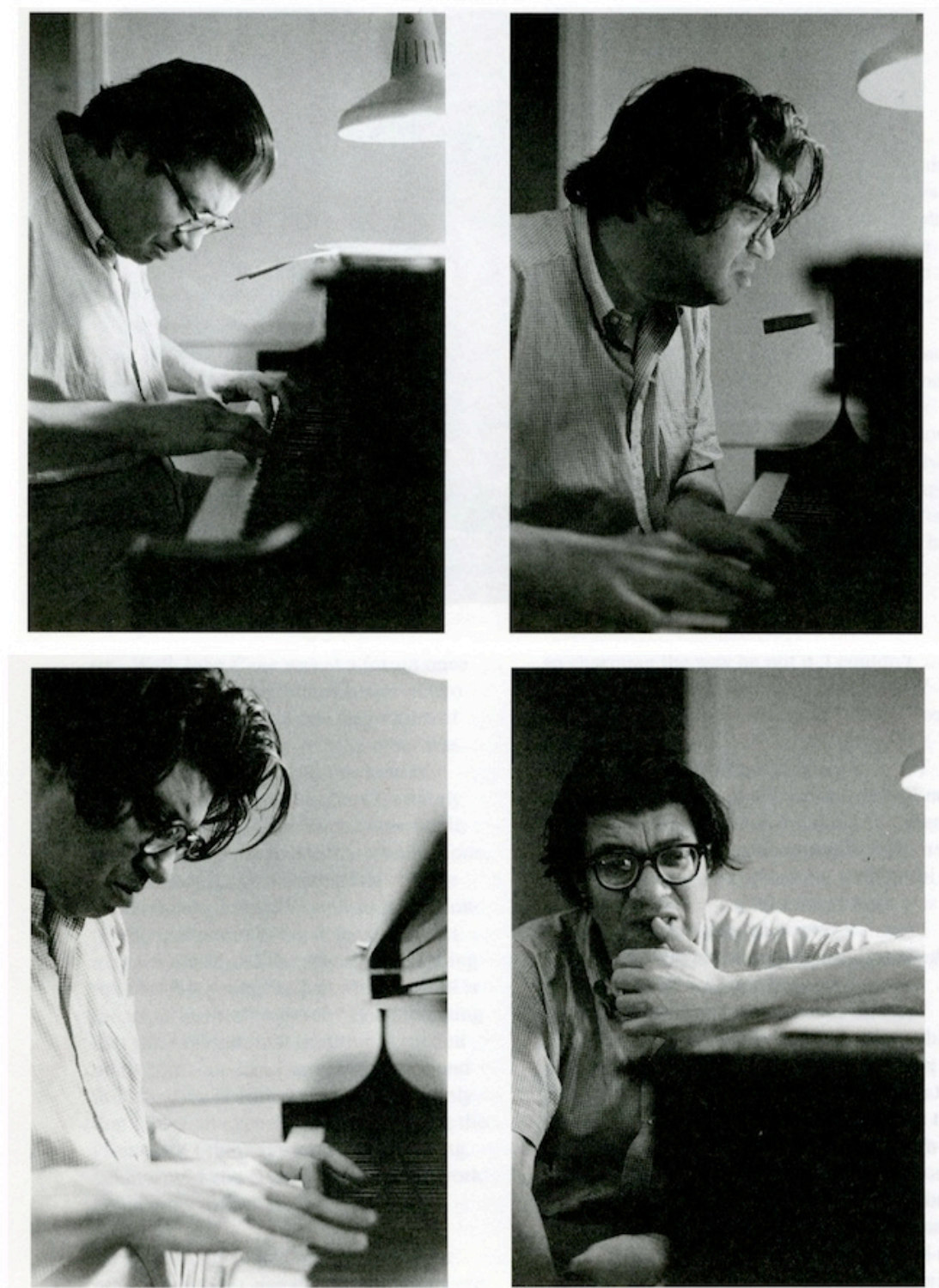


Figure 49: Morton Feldman composing in his Buffalo apartment, 1977. Photos by Irene Haupt.

NUMBERS

Morton Feldman

The musical score for Morton Feldman's *Numbers* (1965) is presented on page 1. The score is for a chamber ensemble and includes parts for the following instruments: Flute (FL), Horn (HN), Trumpet (TRB), Trombone (TBA), Clarinet (CL), Cello (CEL), Violin (VN), Viola (VC), and Cello/Double Bass (CB). The music is written in a minimalist style, characterized by a high density of rests and specific performance instructions. Key markings include 'Sord.' (Sordano) for the Horn and Trumpet, 'CH.' (Chamber) for the Clarinet, 'PF.' (Piano) for the Cello and Violin, 'CEL.' (Cello) for the Cello, and 'PIZZ' (Pizzicato) for the Cello/Double Bass. The score is written in a single system with multiple staves, and the notation is primarily composed of whole and half notes, with some rests indicated by a '0' or a '15'.

Figure 50: Morton Feldman, *Numbers* (1965): page 1.

730

730

730

730

730

739

739

739

739

739

748

748

749

748

748

28.

Figure 51: Morton Feldman, *Violin and String Quartet* (1985): page 28.

FL

OB

CL

BN

HN

TRP

TBN

HP

TBA

PF 1

PF 2

TIMP

VIB

VN

VLA

VC

CB

15

Figure 52: Morton Feldman, *Coptic Light* (1985): page 15.

64

FL.

OB.

CL.

BN.

HN.

TRP.

TBN.

TBA.

HP.

PF.

VIB.

1.

VN.

2.

VIA.

VC.

CB.

8.

Figure 53: Morton Feldman, *For Samuel Beckett* (1987): page 8.



Figure 55: Jules Olitski, *Rephahim Shade – 2*, 1974. Acrylic on canvas, 7'6" x 10'



Figure 56: Jules Olitski, *Rephahim Shade – 2*, 1974: detail of gradation



Figure 57: Jules Olitski, *Rephahim Shade – 2*, 1974: detail of broom strokes



Figure 58: Franz Kline, *Untitled #2*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 65 x 39"



(l to r)

Figure 59: Franz Kline, *Chief*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 58 x 73"

Figure 60: Franz Kline, *Merce C*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 93 x 74"



Figure 61: Willem de Kooning, *Woman in the Water*, 1972. Oil on canvas, 59 x 54"

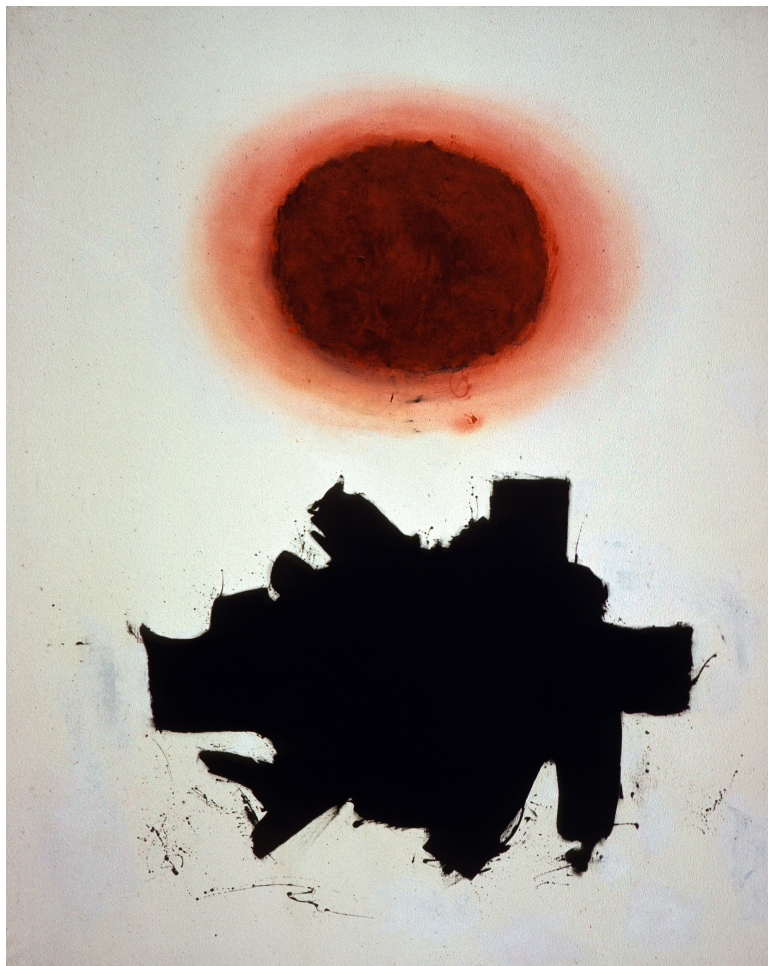


Figure 62: Adolph Gottlieb, *Cool Blast*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 90 x 70"



Figure 63: Robert Motherwell, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, 1960. Magna on canvas, 72 x 96"



Figure 64: Jules Olitski, *Rites of Desire - One*, 1981. Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 29"



Figure 65: Morton Feldman with Rodin's *Monument to Balzac*, Paris, 1968. Photo by Earle Brown.

Appendix: Morton Feldman, Speaking of Music at the Exploratorium in
1986. Transcription and annotation by Alex Grimley.¹⁴³

Charles Amirkhanian: I've been looking forward to this evening for a long time because I've been reading Morton Feldman's writings and hearing his music since I was in high school and I've often wondered why it is that we don't hear his music more often in live performance in San Francisco. Maybe by having closer contact with him now that he's here at CalArts for a semester and going to be spending some time in San Francisco we can encourage some of us who are active in the music scene to bring out his music in this area. The Kronos Quartet, of course, has played his music frequently and so there have been performances of some of his recent works but the major four-hour string quartet piece¹⁴⁴ which he's done has only been done in excerpt here so far. Tonight we're going to hear *Violin and Orchestra*¹⁴⁵ which is a piece running over an hour in duration. We'll hear excerpts from it, and also excerpts from his *Piano and String Quartet*,¹⁴⁶ which I greatly admired and which was played at the New Music America Festival by Aki Takahashi, the great Japanese pianist, and by the Kronos Quartet in November, I think it was. Wasn't it? November? It seems like it....

Morton, you said that the fifties gave composers like yourself not the freedom of choice, but the freedom to be yourself. And I've often wondered if maybe one of the

¹⁴³ Streaming audio of this 97-minute interview with Morton Feldman is found at <https://archive.org/details/MFeldmanSOM>. This website explains that "Morton Feldman [was] interviewed by Charles Amirkhanian at the Exploratorium's Speaking of Music Series in San Francisco, January 30, 1986."

¹⁴⁴ *String Quartet no. 2* (1983)

¹⁴⁵ Completed in 1979, *Violin and Orchestra* was given its first performance in Frankfurt, with Paul Zukofsky as soloist, in 1984.

¹⁴⁶ Completed in September 1985 and premiered on November 2 of that year as part of the New Music America Festival at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

reasons that the music that you've composed isn't played as widely as it should be is the sort of hermetic quality of it. Do you consider yourself a hermetic composer in any sense?

[Long pause]

Morton Feldman: Charles Wuorinen¹⁴⁷ isn't here this evening. Only reason I'm mentioning it is because recently I'm hearing that Charles says I'm one of the best serialists around. I mean, so to be called a surrealist—a *serialist*—is surrealist in relation to... [laughter]

No, I never figured that I'm hermetic. Maybe the audience is hermetic. [laughter] I see it in a more paranoid and less classy way than you're presenting it here. I just feel... that for some particular reason, they don't want to give it to me.

Now what that reason is, I don't know. I have a good friend, owns one of the big galleries in New York, we're talking about a mutual friend, and we're talking about why there were some avenues open to him and yet there were some avenues absolutely closed. Why would London be totally open, but Paris closed? And so forth, and so on. And it was a complete mystery, you see, he has all these museum people coming in all the time and he would try to sell them a show and either they said, "Oh, we must do it at the Tate," and they did, or, "We're not interested in him in Frankfurt," or something like that. If anything, I think my—this is not in the nature of a compliant or even an analysis—I think my reputation unfortunately was like Charles Bronson. [laughter] And there was just something about my music in Europe. For example, we're doing excerpts; the Stockholm radio did eight hours. Or Frankfurt radio would do four hours, and then five hours, and

¹⁴⁷ American composer, born 1938.

then two hours and three hours—and they were never really set up for that either, you see. Even the *Canadian Broadcasting Company*, and you know how chauvinistic they are up there about their art, had a show called One Hour then they extended it to Two Hours, and then they did it for Three Hours.

CA: On your music.

MF [*laughs*]: Yea, with the Kronos playing my big string quartet.

CA: So Europe has been more open to your music than American in fact, outside of New York.

MF: Well I wouldn't even say New York. New York is not my town. I don't have any town in America, really, I...

[*A pause*]

There's usually some kind of consensus arrived at, very much like you were voting for president or something, you know. I really got to know John Adams¹⁴⁸ quite well. We saw each other for breakfast, both he and Mrs. Adams, at New Music America, and he was asking me about how I feel about things on the west coast. And I said, "Well, as far as I could see, it's either Boulez or fun and games."

I feel in a sense that Boulez,¹⁴⁹ for whatever the reason, in a sense, is a consensus type of music—even in terms of the fact that it's prophetic about modernism, or the fact that it is just *wonderful* to begin with—seems to be an international consensus and I don't think just because he's a great conductor or anything. I really meant that even before he started conducting, especially with young people in Europe. On the other hand, I mean I

¹⁴⁸ American composer, born 1947.

¹⁴⁹ Pierre Boulez, French composer and conductor, born 1925.

have no complaints about my career, but I always wondered why it really doesn't take hold.

Now, for example, Ives¹⁵⁰ is someone else, for example, that they don't want to give it to. I know that seems a little silly, being that we all recognize him as a great—perhaps the greatest American composer we ever had and maybe, as Tolstoy might put it, ever will have. And at the same time, I remember having conversations with Boulez.... [He was] very disturbed that Ives was in the insurance business. I mean how that could.... My early reputation, I was in the garment center...and if anyone is vaguely anti-Semitic, that didn't help me.

So it's very difficult to talk about this subject without sounding to some degree unattractive. [*laughter*] And one could go either this way or that way, but I like the mood of the audience here, and I'm gonna go in the middle.

CA: I remember in Stockholm, I was talking to some students and they complained vehemently that to be an American composer who has become famous like Nancarrow¹⁵¹ or Cage¹⁵² or Feldman, you have to do something so incredibly personal and hermetic that you stand out just because you're so odd. And Boulez, on the other hand, takes everything and puts it in—has a sort of worldly vision.

MF: Well I don't think he has a "worldly vision." I was talking somewhat on Boulez in a seminar at CalArts and I was saying that as a kid when I saw his first, not the

¹⁵⁰ Charles Ives, American composer, 1874-1954.

¹⁵¹ Conlon Nancarrow, American composer, 1912-1997.

¹⁵² John Cage, American composer, 1912-1992.

famous sonata,¹⁵³ and the slow movement *for years* there was something bugging me and then I thought maybe seven years of this earlier being bugged about, I really caught it: that he took the same amount of attacks from a piece by Webern which was also two pages—one of his religious songs—and he used the same amount of attacks. Then the *Structures*—you teach, you know, the *Structures* with the Messiaen row, his ex-teacher.¹⁵⁴ And there was something about it, you know, the way cannibals would eat their enemy.... He tried to eat America in terms of, say Earle Brown¹⁵⁵ and open structure, but it didn't work out. He got indigestion on that. [laughter]

I have to watch out I'm going the other way now. [Feldman laughs, laughter]
You see, I'm very articulate. I'm out here for about two months, and you caught me at a good time because I'm not as articulate as I might have been if I was here, say, six months ago. The weather is getting to me. In fact, I might even settle out here in San Diego. [laughter]

CA: What do you like about California?

MF: Oh, I had an uncle, an uncle Dave, that was totally unemployable in New York, totally unemployable. And his brother, he was the millionaire in the family, and in some way we all worked for Uncle Joe, finally decided to send him out to L.A. and sell the coat business. But he was perfect for Los Angeles. He's the kind of guy that would drink a glass of water and just look and smile and he'll say, "I'm living." [laughter]

¹⁵³ Boulez's first piano sonata was completed in 1946. The "famous" sonata is Boulez's second, written between 1947-48 and premiered by Yvette Grimaud in Paris in 1950. David Tudor gave the U.S. premiere of the work in the same year.

¹⁵⁴ Olivier Messiaen, French composer, 1908-1992. "The structure of Boulez's *Structures* is based entirely on the basic row from Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs*," Jonathan Cross observes in "Composing with numbers: sets, rows and magic squares." (*Music and Mathematics: From Pythagoras to Fractals*, ed. Favuel, Flood, and Wilson. London: Oxford University Press, 2006, 137.)

¹⁵⁵ American composer, 1926-2002.

CA: This is spoken by a man who spends his summers in New York City.

MF: But on 38th St. and Eighth Avenue, no one had any patience to hear even the *end* of that remark. [*laughter*] He came out here and he opened up an office in Los Angeles on South Hill Street. Everybody decided that they wanted him to represent them. In one year, he was a millionaire.

[*A pause*]

Now that I don't have to become a millionaire, I might come out here, and say, "I'm dying."

Look, I think the whole problem is very simple. I was staying in the home of a very close friend who was an anthropologist and he had his students from Cooper Union come in and he asked me to talk to them. And I did, and he has fabulous Oceanic stuff, really fabulous museum pieces, and we were talking about tribal art and various things, and he had some Frank Stellas on the wall. And I finally said, "And that's New York tribal art."

I never realized it at that time, to the degree that culture was so tribal—that they have their indigenous music, their indigenous names, you know? You ever go to Budapest and meet the most famous composer? What are you gonna do with his music, I mean, when you hear it?

And I think that's one of the problems, essentially. And I think it's becoming more tribal as every, you know—no city, no state, no university, no country can say to themselves that they have nothing. I was in Darmstadt¹⁵⁶ for the first time, actually, and

¹⁵⁶ The Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music, founded in 1946, became a hub for serialist composers. Feldman's *String Quartet no. 2*, completed in January 1983, was given its European premiere by the Kronos Quartet at the 1984 Summer Course.

they're feeling badly that they haven't taken better care of me, even though I was the Charles Bronson of Europe, I wasn't Humphrey Bogart. So they're making it up to me now. And I see all these independent young kids, each one their own man or their own woman. I met this very gifted Italian composer and I said to her, "Well, what interested you here? What was the most important...?" She said, "Well, the *Italian* evening, of course." The Polish kids—there's a very nice little nightclub, bar there—and at night they're [*sings drunkenly*]. We're in Warsaw. The French kids were, characteristically, revolting [*laughter*] with their booing and their hissing. I got a twenty-minute standing ovation...on a very long piece.

But I said to friends when I left that I never understood—reading the newspapers, knowing people that were thrown out of Hitler Germany—I never understood the nature of wars until I went to Darmstadt. And I had a very nice lunch with some of the younger "leading" German composers—some of them you might not know, I think, the Kronos plays Rihm. Wolfgang Rihm. And he was one of them, Walter Zimmermann, there was about three others, we had a little lunch. And I just said to them, I said, "Don't let Germany take over this place." And they said, "Don't worry, we'll see to it that it doesn't happen."

That is, the whole idea of *cashing in*, like they're cashing in on Rihm, you see, that they have a *Germanic* composer. The way we try to sell that we have a classy New England WASP tradition with Elliot Carter, you know? What if his name was Elliot Ginsburg? I don't know if the English [publishers] Faber and Faber, would be that interested in Elliot Carter. And that's the big problem that we have, in a sense, is that

there is this nationalistic problem of countries, pushing Germans, pushing Americans... and it's a very serious cultural problem.

I still cry when I read Allen Ginsburg's *Kaddish* to his mother. I think it's one of the greatest poems written at any time. I mean it has the pathos, the language of a Heinrich Heine, I feel. These are problems, in a sense, which you'd feel are not related, say, to composition, but I do want to get back to the whole idea of what's hermetic.

CA: I just wanted to ask you first, if his name had been Allen Carter, would you have read the book? [*laughter*]

MF: Well I think that's a fair question. It's very interesting, it's very interesting that, for whatever reason I picked up *Time* magazine and it had John Updike on the cover and *Newsweek* had Norman Mailer on the cover. [*Feldman laughs*] I mean, I don't think it was an accident that John Updike was on the cover of *Time* magazine. But I think it's a very, very serious problem. It's a very serious problem. Look, it's a problem, I have a student, he was a gifted student. He got his doctorate. He was marvelous and wonderful, and I said, "Did you ever try to write with your right hand?" He was left-handed. The scores look lousy. And I think, in a sense, if he sends in, he wants to send something to Gunther Schuller,¹⁵⁷ I said, "I don't know..." I kind of discouraged him from sending it because it doesn't look good—he's left-handed—doesn't look, you know, it looks very amateurish because there's no manuscript. And I feel this guy, because he's left-handed, his whole career is gonna suffer. He should get the things printed immediately. I couldn't tell him that, it was just my.... I mean you're on a committee, and you're looking through

¹⁵⁷ American conductor and musician, born 1928.

a lot of scores, you know, you can't really look at something that looks so awkwardly... done. But this whole business of being hermetic is....

Teaching at CalArts, teaching for a long time, and talking in a lot of different places, the kids go in there and they think it's a profession. You know, "I mean, if Frank Sinatra could win them over, I mean why can't I?" they say. They got a Chinaman's chance, ten years after the gold rush. The fact that anybody could have a career in music is doubtful. But the whole thing is taught, and the whole thing is activated, as if a career is possible. And to have a career, you think about important issues: audiences, this and that. I said something that a lot of young composers in London were very upset about because the English have a terrific democratic heritage in relation to communication. That's one of the problems about Albert Hall. They wanted everyone to hear the music so you can't hear anything because it's so big.

I gave an interview and I said, they were talking about audiences, and I said, "Look, if you need an audience, we don't need you." And I really believe that, from the bottom of my thirty-five years of practically going blind writing music. I mean that has no hostility against an audience, but I think the thing that really phases out most young artists, young composers, and a lot of older ones, is that they think there's some kind of magic formula that they're gonna arrive at, in a sense, to capture them. And they do it, Superman once, twice, three, four times, forget it.

Either you have that—either you yourself *are* the audience, and triumph with a music that is absolutely, totally accessible with being very, very real. The way Sibelius¹⁵⁸ is real, the way John Adams' music is very, very real—John has it. There's no formula,

¹⁵⁸ Jean Sibelius, Finnish composer, 1865-1957.

he's not interested in the audience. He's as elitist as anybody else, he went to Harvard, but he has it. And this is something that you cannot.... You can't manufacture it, and also you can't complain, for example, why your music is then considered hermetic. I don't consider my music hermetic.

CA: There's been a change in your music, though.

MF: Oh, they always say that. They always say that.

CA: It's easier to listen to the piano and string quartet piece than *Durations I*,¹⁵⁹ for most listeners.

[*Long pause*]

MF: Well, Djuna Barnes once had some marvelous insight about an elderly decadent character, and she said, "Well, you know, as types like him become older and older, what was deplorable now seems charming." [*Feldman laughs, laughter*] And I think that what happened to my music, in a sense, is that if someone never heard my *Durations*, they would feel the same thing about my new music, too.

[*Long pause*]

What I'm worried about is not the question of the audience and the composer, and those big issues and all those. That's not what bothers me. What bothers me is the fact of that kind of consensus about what music could be or should be. And there isn't that consensus about literature or the visual arts. And in my Darmstadt lecture that you mentioned that you liked, I just asked all the young composers in the audience, "Why don't painters get together in a congress like this? What is there about music, in a sense, as if you're in some kind of *scientific* congress?" And you know what it is about music?

¹⁵⁹ Feldman wrote five chamber pieces entitled *Durations* (I-V) between 1960-61.

That it's nearly *impossible* to have an idea that's your own. That's why they get together, in large classrooms—that perhaps by analysis, in a sense, they're gonna learn the secret. But did you ever take a recipe and try to—you know? The water's not the same... something is there that's not the same, no matter how you do the recipe.

Let's take a fugue. Only God could make a tree? Why is it only Bach could make a fugue? In the *Bach* sense of a fugue, I'm not talking about a late Beethoven fugue, which was something else. Why is it after millions and millions—you know how many fugues? Now with the computer, I think, [*laughter*] we can find out how many fugues were written in those times. Either they're too "fuguey." [That is,] the material—it's just not flexible. Or they always come in at the wrong place. Only Bach could make a fugue, and what a recipe!

[*A pause*]

My concern these days is whether music is an art form to begin with. I think those are more scary questions that I'm asking—that both John and myself might have been kidding ourselves all these years. That is, music...it's a music form, not an art form per se, that one could explore and be flexible with. And we lost that sense of the music form, so for a composer to feel, in a sense, that they're gonna capture something from the past.... Well, this comparison might seem unattractive but like a Buffalo militant black learning Swahili, out of nostalgia, out of identification, but can't, can't get back to Africa in 1850 or 1830.

CA: So you're saying that because we had the enormous revolution in music, where anything seemed possible for a while, that we've come to this point?

MF: I think we've come to this corner. I mean, I'm only concerned with one thing. I see every student practically that I teach is dying of cancer, some kind of terminal patient, that I'm trying to at least get through, get them out of college. One basket case, I was just *nuts* about this guy. He couldn't put a sentence together in any language, and he loved music, and he wasn't a dope, but very, very primitive. And I wanted to—in my university at that time, all I had to do was sign a paper and he got his M.F.A. There were no committees, nothing. I just sign my name, he got his M.F.A. But I had to have some conscience about it. But there was no piece in a kind of number five pencil, if there is such a [thing], he used it. [*Feldman laughs, laughter*] You know, notes like this, you know. [*laughter*]

CA: Really big.

MF: I didn't know what to do with the guy, I said, "Look, go down to the library," I said, "Messiaen wrote a good cook book. Bring up the Messiaen book and we'll see what we could do with it." Well, he brought it up and we discussed it. We discussed it about two weeks, and I just wanted him to use all the recipes that Messiaen gives in this book. Even that didn't help. He just couldn't cook. The recipe didn't even mean anything.

Ah, but there's a bright side! There's a bright side. [*laughter*] Keeps you out of trouble... I didn't want it to go like this, see I'm going to that other side.

CA: Let's play some music. Let's talk about the piece.

MF: Alright, but... I would like to ask you why you feel, for example, that *Piano and String Quartet* is easier listening than *Durations*?

CA: For me, it brings back the kind of consonance that was in your music only once in the earlier pieces that I know of, which was in the *Piece for Four Pianos*.¹⁶⁰ It has a kind of prettiness to it—and I didn’t know the pieces just preceding this composition—I haven’t heard the long string quartet so I didn’t know it was in that vein.

MF: I think that was, I think that coexisted at all times. There were some pieces that were more gritty. What you call “consonance,” I would say more elegant. They’re not consonant. But I think it always—there was always a gritty side to me, and there was always that other side. And I think what I’m really gonna do with the few excerpts, I think they really demonstrate those two sides. The violin and orchestra piece—I just want to say something very quickly before we go into the music. I think a lot of that perception that you have has a lot to do with who’s playing the music now.

I don’t write a piece, unless it’s a large orchestra piece—I just did a piece for the New York Philharmonic¹⁶¹ and I just forgot about myself and said, “It’s a great orchestra,” and I wrote a piece for them. I didn’t even think about myself. But, in a sense, I don’t think about myself when I write for Paul Zukofsky, or Aki [Takahashi], or the Kronos either.¹⁶² So what I do now more than I ever did as a young composer—I mean we all write these pieces, you know. We don’t realize that all these other people had the Esterhazy Orchestra. They all heard everything they did, you know, always on Sunday as I used to say. I used to just write one piece after another, just like everybody else. But I wasn’t thinking of any groups, they were just pieces. Now I can’t write a piece unless I’m

¹⁶⁰ (1957)

¹⁶¹ *Coptic Light*, 1985.

¹⁶² Paul Zukofsky, American violinist, born 1943; Aki Takahashi, Japanese pianist, born 1931.

thinking of Aki, or Roger Woodward.¹⁶³ Aki plays my music like Satie, Roger plays it like Beethoven. I'm trying to find one that goes right down the middle. And then there's Henck¹⁶⁴ who's fabulous but he plays my music too slow, and too soft. But the fact that I'm writing "casted pieces" now is very, very important. I write for Aki's unbelievable devotion. She plays my music as if she's praying, and I love and thank her for it. And then Paul, he's craggy, crotchety, and it went into the violin concerto. The orchestra is anonymous; it's just an orchestra. But Paul, I felt, he was doing things that only he could do.

Like *spelling*. By spelling, I mean, that you would have a pitch in a violin, say like an E-flat, and I could spell it—E-flat is not a good pitch for that, I would say a D. You could spell it as a D. You could spell it as a C-double sharp. You could spell it as an E-double flat. Sharp is more directional, flat is less. And this piece, he is not playing out of tune, but he's trying to keep the focus going so it doesn't become a quartertone. And you don't lose too much of it. And that's throughout the piece. Occasionally, it might go into the orchestra, just for a moment. And he does that beautifully. In fact, anyone who's interested in some of his ideas—I didn't finish the article—but he wrote an article years ago for *Perspectives of New Music* on tuning.¹⁶⁵

But it's been six or seven years I've been working with Paul on a lot of important violin music. And I still haven't found a way, how to give the directions in the [score]—because E-double flat or something, or C-double sharp, especially in Europe are leading tones. They think of them as leading tones, or *expressive* tones, you know, to get

¹⁶³ Australian pianist, born 1942.

¹⁶⁴ Herbert Henck, German pianist, born 1948.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Zukofsky, "On Violin Harmonics," *Perspectives of New Music* 6, no. 2 (1968).

something. So I really haven't found a way of notating it, actually. But this is pretty good, the way it's going. But no one but Paul could just pick notes like that out of the...you know, just fabulous. So he's responsible for this piece. I probably wouldn't even have written a piece for violin and orchestra if there wasn't Paul.

So that's the way things are going now—casted pieces. No longer that kind of marvelous anonymity that any great cellist could play [*hums*] but in the casting of Vienna, [*Feldman laughs*] you see. And that's, to some degree, something that we don't have... I knew somebody [who] got disappeared between New Orleans and Chicago tracing some minor development in Dixieland, you know. Just got *lost* someplace, I don't know where. And we don't have that—we don't really have that. And I think again, getting back to Boulez. I think what reassures us about Boulez is that it's *style personified*.

It's very difficult for us to listen to something, or to look at something, outside of its *style*. We don't know what went *into* it. We don't know the *skills* that went into it. We're looking at—we don't know how Rothko bled his edges, you understand, as good as Rembrandt. We don't know the *skills* that gets into it. But we know the style of it. And that's the disaster area. That's the disaster area. That until we're reeducated not to think of art in terms of aesthetics or style, we really don't know what it is—very difficult to know what it is.

Naturally, the iconography of a Renaissance painting helps. But someone like Bellini, for example, in *St. Francis*, that fabulous painting at the Frick,¹⁶⁶ paints a blade of grass with the same type of religiosity as he's painting *St. Francis* looking up at the

¹⁶⁶ Giovanni Bellini, *St. Francis in the Desert*, c. 1475-78.

Heaven and that little, what is it? A little goat? Or a little sheep standing there, also looking like a saint, you know. But even the blade of grass was trembling with religious fervor. And that has nothing to do with...that has nothing to do with communication, in that sense. You know Malraux said something fabulous about Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, he said, when they would talk about Rome being like Hollywood, dictating how to do things, he said, “Tell me,” he said, “what pope taught or told Michelangelo how to paint the Sistine chapel, and what to put in it?”

I think we lost that religiosity about music, and the sound itself. I mean we’re not—we don’t want to live in a convent. We don’t wanna get involved. Nevermind aspects of hermetic contemporary music, such as myself, but London is the only community in the world that I know that continually, where you can go and hear just *fabulous*—the Elizabethan, the Renaissance, that kind of music. Nevermind playing me, how about William Byrd in San Francisco? De Lassus and all these fantastic people? I once wrote someplace that on a modern concert, if you really would put on a mass of Machaut, people would start to boo.¹⁶⁷ Because it goes *on* and *on* and *on* and they don’t want to know some isorhythmic aspects in the piece, you know. I mean it’s not a very exciting, it’s not a very exciting, he’s not a very exciting composer.

CA: When they opened the music center in Los Angeles, that was the first piece that was played.¹⁶⁸ And Harry Partch¹⁶⁹ was sitting next to me, and then the Boulez piece came on, and he left in the middle of that piece—got up and walked through the hall.

¹⁶⁷ William Byrd, English composer, c.1540-1623; Orlande de Lassus, Netherlandish composer, c.1532-1594; Guillaume de Machaut, French composer, c.1300-1377.

¹⁶⁸“On March 26 [1965], Monday Evening Concerts celebrated the first concert in its splendid new home, the Leo S. Bing Center of the recently completed Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with a special program that also marked, albeit late by one day, Pierre Boulez's fortieth birthday. Boulez conducted the

MF: Oh, they were making a historical connection between Machaut and Boulez.

CA: We're going to hear your music now.

MF: Yes.

CA: Do you object?

MF: Not at all.

CA: Good.

MF: Let me just tell you how it, how it ends. We're only going to hear the beginning. What happens in this piece is that—we'll hear about fifteen or twenty minutes of it—what happens, unknown to me, I just don't know how a piece is gonna develop, actually. I'm just following in through, I don't start with any plans whatsoever. I agree, and I hope he would agree with me, Debussy, that you develop rules as it happens rather than beginning with them. And what fascinated me in this piece was when you see a broken chord, say in an early piece of Webern's, say that short cello and piano piece, and you'll notice that broken chords in that particular period in history, that a symmetrical chord like six is—you row it and it sounds fantastic. What I was interested in here was after a while going from six to five to four to three, seven, two—just two broken notes—then I found what a broken one-note is. Just a repeat.

CA: A gracenote.

MF: Just a gracenote. And what happened, in a sense, that's what was happening in this piece—that I was just going with these various amounts. And they're changing in every register. I mean, we're not going to hear much low because it took a long, it took

Machaut Mass, Jean-Claude Eloy's *Equivalences*, and the first performance of his own *Eclat* in a program that included both books of *Structures* for two pianos." Karl Kohn, "Current Chronicle: Los Angeles," *The Musical Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (October 1965), 702.

¹⁶⁹ American composer, 1901-1974.

about forty minutes actually to get into the lower register because it just disturbs the surface too much. That became the exploratorium of this particular piece and I followed it through. It gets faster, in the part we're not going to hear, and it gets out of sync, and then it comes back again—not like an A-B-A—but it just comes back in sync again.

By the way, I give six hour seminars, so you'll have to forgive me—[*laughter*]

[*An excerpt of Piano and String Quartet is played.*]

MF: Actually I've had a lot of pieces of mine played and I think that was one of the most memorable performances I've ever had anywhere, with this performance.

CA: It was exciting also to have been there at the concert, and then to hear it on the radio as I was driving to CalArts afterwards. It was being broadcast on the satellite and to hear it in an automobile in pitch-blackness driving down the freeway was an unbelievable experience. I think I told you afterwards, I feel that this is the kind of music that can be very effective over the radio—these long pieces that really draw you in.

MF: Just another technical detail is that again, and it really is not that subtle, what I—the other technical aspect of the piece that interested me was the rate of changing of speed that would you hear this material. And these broken chords finally come back for about twenty minutes, very slow, and then I could utilize the bottom of the piano, just going all the way up the.... So that was a very important aspect of the piece, the rate of speed of this. What was also very interesting was that I never thought I could make a piece out of this. When I opened up the piece, I said, "Alright," and I just—I had no idea that I was gonna be involved with the same format seen through different light and—

CA: Because of the length of the piece, you didn't think it was sustainable—?

MF: No, I had no idea. I had no idea. One of the questions—I don’t ask many questions—but one of the questions that I do ask myself as a composer is not how to do it or things like that. I always had a knack of doing the appropriate thing, you know, doing the appropriate thing means that you can’t choose everything. But now, in a sense, I don’t have those particular type of problems—I don’t think “How should it go?” or “What should it do?” What I do ask myself when I begin a piece is: What is material?

CA: So you limit yourself at the outset?

MF: Well I’m very curious in understanding it as phenomena, in a sense. Every composer, in a sense, does it as well on every level, it’s just a question of what metaphor you would settle for, in a sense, is what materials is it. There’s a very charming story about Stravinsky sitting at his piano, and Mrs. Stravinsky comes in, you know, the great man, “What’s the matter, you’re not working?” He says, “I’m waiting for the right note.” And that, to him, was where the material began. Unless you write music, it’s very hard to understand that—what a note might do, how it could trigger off a rhythm, an instrument, something.

CA: Are there questions for Morton Feldman at this point?

[One audience member comments for two minutes and forty-four seconds]

MF: Thank you. I was speaking to some musicians in the break, and...

[Long pause]

...and why it’s so difficult to do something... in music. An old friend of mine once defined tragedy as when two people are right. *[laughter]* He was another very articulate New Yorker, his name is Lionel Abel. In art, everybody is right. Systems are right. Tonality is right. Functional harmony is right. It’s all right.

How can you say that it's wrong, unless again you're just gonna attack it aesthetically, and then you're up the creek, you see. If I was to say that I too hear the circle of fifths, that I too hear chords or harmony, in a sense, the way Charles would talk about this "consonance" in my piece. But Charles, if I would use the word "consonance" as I'm writing something, I would go quietly down into the basement and hang myself.
[laughter and applause]

I stopped giving things a name...and I stopped giving things a name a long time ago. A student would come and they'll say "I got involved with this imitation," and I said, "Don't call it imitation because look at the way you got out of it, that it didn't become formula." And I would say take a—I showed them some scores I remember that you admired Bunita Marcus¹⁷⁰ when she was at CalArts and I showed a new score of hers where she's really *ghosting* these voices, that it wasn't done conventionally, as imitation. Or Jo Kondo,¹⁷¹ for that matter.

So, I really don't know if music could become an art form because all these things work. I mean if you, I notice that if I'm giving up—and we don't alternatives, or that is, we don't wanna say to ourselves, "Well every thing works, then what do we do?" If every thing works, what do we do? But that's when that's the fun, you see, that's the fun, when you know that everybody is right.

You certainly feel that when you go into history, and you go in again, into the Frick and you see those fabulous little Pieros and this one and that one and each one and everyone and they're all right, you see. That's where the fun begins. But music? Those circle of fifths? How *pleasant* tonality is? How *seductive* Stravinsky referred to variation?

¹⁷⁰ American composer, born 1952, a student of Feldman's at the University of Buffalo in the late 1970s.

¹⁷¹ Japanese composer, born 1947.

how interesting repetition is, and so forth and so on. So you have to fight against it essentially, as if, say, the overtones didn't work or this didn't work. You really have to fight against it and I find when I'm working, in a sense, I just more or less pray for the moments when I'm free not to be seduced by the successes of history. Listen, I mean, after all we don't go to school to study the failures of history; so it all has to do with success.

I don't know if music is that flexible to make a metamorphosis into something that does not have formula, like improvisation, which is a big con job—it's formula. Anything that's successful is formula. John Cage is not formula. And I learned a lot from Cage where he taught me the distinction between conceptualization and formula. But the minute you don't get in formula, you're considered a third-world artist, like Ives is, you see. We understand things—we have to add another thing to that curse of aesthetics, formulas.

Stuck in a snowstorm in Pittsburgh, I picked up a paper. I think he still has a studio there, di Suvero.¹⁷² He's having problems in Pittsburgh because he can't give them the exact dimensions of the sculpture, and they never had, you know, they never had anybody come in, gonna build a sculpture, without giving this mockup, you see, and he can't give them this mockup. He wants to go and take a look at it and the whole city planning, even the most *generous* people, can't understand it, you see, can't understand how he can't give the mockup. Everybody else has. The fact that he works by his eye? He's a kook! You're not suppose to work by your eye, you're supposed to have it on the drafting board.

¹⁷² Mark di Suvero, American sculptor, born 1933.

So I'm very interested if music is an art form rather than a music form, because of this terrific problem of not being seduced by systems because they work and formulas because they appear to work. However, getting back to the *American* way of life, I once hung out with a bunch of characters in the Russian Tea Room in New York and there was this fabulous stage designer, Boris Aronson, and there was always a very terrific left-wing contingent sitting at the table, and he got fed up one day, and he got up and he says, "*The reason I love America is because it doesn't work.*" [laughs, audience laughter] Maybe music could become an art when it doesn't work.

But you need a lot of skills, and the kids don't have those skills. And you can't define what those skills are.

CA: What led us to the point where students don't find those skills anymore? I mean there were a lot of people who said you didn't have those skills too, when they heard your music for the first time.

MF: Not the three or four people that were worried about me. [Feldman laughs] They know you just can't do anything without skills, and I don't know what the skills are, I don't...

CA: But why is it that the students that you see now when you're teaching don't have those skills. What's brought us to this point?

MF: Well, even as a *music form* it's remote to them. They don't know the jack-in-the-box forms of late Webern, that seems to make it work, this kind of Rube Goldberg fabulous machinery that's going on there. And who knows why these people in the Viennese school were so fabulous at these things, maybe because they were giving up something and they had to become overcompensated. You know, a very charming

example of this is in Vienna when you see the Secession building, the Loos building there, and you take a look at the Hapsburg palaces and they have the cupola, and then you see this Secessionist building—how they got real estate facing the Hapsburgs is a story in itself—and then you see in this square building, this new modernist, formalist building, a little... on top, [*Feldman laughs*] you know.

CA: An arch?

MF: Yea, a little cupola on top just like all the other conventional buildings.

[*Feldman laughs*] They had to put it on, this little arch thing, they had to do that, you see.

[*A pause*] Yes?

Audience: I'm a sculptor, and it seems like there's a lot of club-footed art, *visual* art, out there as well, that a lot of artists who make paintings are steeped in formulas of the past... Do you think it's just that, I'm not quite sure what my question is, but I think it's also attached to your statement about—

MF: Well let me just modify it. Maybe I'm not against formulas, but maybe I feel that one has to invent one's own. In other words, after all, who are those guys out there, for the past three hundred years? I think it was the most glamorous workshop imaginable and they certainly didn't want to waste any time, and it was the best talent around, and that's why it's so fabulous, in any discipline. Los Alamos, instead of building the bomb, they all got together and they built art, the best minds, the best talents, so there's nothing wrong with it, that's the tragedy—it works.

The only way you could take to think about it is kind of live in a kind of dream-like hallucination. Every time as a kid, when I visited Varese, he would always tell me, he had this term about, "This *necrophiliac* came to see me today," he continually,

everybody was a necrophiliac, and that's the way he dismissed all this talk, you know, [laughter] that he was just *surrounded* by necrophilia. I mean what are you gonna do? Heine has a gorgeous poem where he admonishes the public, and telling them that what they're doing to art is that they're smothering it with their love. So of course they love it, and of course they don't want to lose it. Why should they?

I'm very interested in the whole problem. My students are very upset with my long pieces. I hope they don't take that up as an influence, they're never gonna get performed. [laughter] But actually, you know the world, you know, this whole idea of a better mousetrap, actually maybe a bigger mousetrap, which is my music. The longer they're becoming, the more they want to play them. Not as a kind of upmanship, or "We could sit through it too." [laughter] The joke about this is I always felt it was an eternal punishment when I went with the Kronos and I had to hear my five-hour string quartet three places. I was on tour with them and I said, "Oh my god." [Feldman laughs, laughter] All within two weeks, you know! And I said, "This is my revenge."

The reason I like a long piece, though no one asked me it. It's become very, very important is—

CA: No one's asked you anything so far. [laughter]

MF: Well maybe I'm asking the questions, leading, leading the area, in a sense, the referential aspect. I haven't been here in twenty years, so....

Audience: Why do you like the long pieces?

MF: I like the long pieces for the same reason you like Proust—is that you don't drink it, you sip it. And you get into it—just *saturated*, more and more and more....

I'm a closet rug collector. San Francisco, very famous, one of the very few places in America that has the kind of rugs I like, unfortunately. And the only way you can get sensational colors like a blue, a deep blue, is that you have to do it, dip it many times. Just like a more prosaic example. The difference between the surface color of a Pontiac in relation to a Rolls Royce. No cheap car can get that fabulous putty color that I love, you know, on those expensive Jaguars years ago. And it's the same thing with the whole experience of *listening* to it. You're just *saturated*. Remember, I'm the listener as I'm writing it. I don't feel that I'm a composer; I do feel that I'm a listener. And my music makes some kind of compromise between performance and making something. That's part of my tradition; I'm a great Mozart lover, and I feel that's what he did, where you don't know where the composition began, and where the performance was.

After all, you are involved with thought. You *are* pulling things, you *are* getting ideas. But you don't have to be an American pragmatist to voice these opinions. Someone, strangely enough, like Goethe dreamt of action and thought as a simultaneity, and I always loved that image—of action and thought as a simultaneity. And I really feel, you know, we all hear, we all have our own definition of history and tradition. My tradition and my history, say with Beethoven, was the concentration of his thought. That taught me more than anything he did because anything he did, in a sense, cannot help what I do, you see. But the thought of him thinking, and you see his mind going here, there, is very, very important, which perhaps I don't find that, for example, in Brahms. I find a more systematic construction, very noble and wonderful. I understood Brahms for the first time [when] I was in Hamburg recently, and it's a very classy, stately, open city, and you really—very Brahmsian in its look. But let's get on to the violin concerto, ok?

CA: Sure.

MF: Let me tell you another composer who has influenced me tremendously, and of course, he's not a composer, Samuel Beckett. And in recent years, in certain pieces, the way he works, I borrowed, and that's another reason the pieces are long. Now, in some things that he does—I'm not talking about the short things, I'm just talking about his method, not how long or short his work is—is that he, living in Paris, being so involved with French for the past fifty years, he would write something in English then translate it into French, and then he'd translate it back into English, and of course it's not the same. Then he'd translate that English back into French, and he's just continually retranslating. In music perhaps we might call it variation, but I don't think of it that way.

Jasper Johns also had a very similar explanation for the way he works, he says, "I do it one way, and then I do it another," as simple as that. Jasper has helped me also, of doing it one way and doing it another, do it with four notes, do it with three notes, do it slower, put it here, put it there, this can go on for a long time.

CA: It's kind of a modular approach, isn't it?

MF: *Very modular*. And then when you're really saturated, and then I can take Z and I put it against A and it sounds like a million dollars. But you can't do it in ten minutes! You can't put Z against A in ten minutes. It takes the saturation, and time is the liberator. Time creates that saturation of the experience. Of course I'm no different than anybody else. I'm only interested in communication. That's the only thing I'm interested in.

CA: Now your approach in this concerto is not the same kind of piece exactly as the *Piano and String Quartet* at all.

MF: Well, first of all we don't have Aki praying, we have Paul kretching—we have another kind of personality, also with great patience. That's why I would have long interludes. That's a very interesting thing, how long a performer could stand there before he comes in and out. I always marvel at the opening of the Beethoven violin concerto, what the violinist must be going through before they come in.

Let me tell you just a tiny bit about the spelling. So we're involved with the spelling and then I take the metaphor on every level. If I'm involved with the spelling of a pitch, I'm involved with the spelling of a rhythm, so I would notate the same imagery maybe six or seven different ways. Remember I don't think of it as variation, I'm just doing it another way. Then I'd do the same thing with time worlds.

Most music is like, in inches. You're going along in inches. I go along with millimeters and centimeters and inches simultaneously and I could shift from one time world to another, in a sense. That all came from the spelling. So as the kids would say, I carried it into the parameters, you see, every aspect that I could think of. And it created this monster of which you'll only hear about twenty minutes. It's quite different.

[An excerpt from Violin and Orchestra is played.]

CA: That's an excerpt from a piece that lasts about an hour and ten minutes.

MF: Actually, this was just the introduction, actually.

CA: Are there any questions for Morton Feldman?

Audience: Charles was saying earlier that it seems so different but my first acquaintance with your music was in Columbia's modern American music with a lot of David Tudor on it and stuff like that, and this has that same quality of—what's gonna happen next? And I really like that, little things coming down the pipe after another.

MF: Yea, that's referred to in the trade as ad hoc. [*Feldman laughs, laughter*]

CA: Any other questions?

Man in audience: Where can you buy the music?

CA: Buy the printed scores?

Man in audience: No, the recording.

CA: The recording.

MF: You can't, they're not.... They're not commercially recorded.

Woman in audience: Why not?

Man in audience: People don't want to.

MF: Why not?

Second man in audience: Would they buy four records of Philip Glass or would they buy four records of that?

MF: You said it, not me. [*laughter*]

Woman in audience: Columbia records does want it? I can't believe it.

MF: Well he knows that I'm very.... My wife left me, and the reason she said was I always on the side of the landlord. [*Feldman laughs*] She'd yell, "There's no heat!" And I'd say, "Take it easy, I mean..." [*laughter*] I said, "The whole thing collapsed. You can't get heat now no matter what they want to do." And so when I'm with David Frost from Columbia and he's telling me the problems of modern music, I kind of agree with him.

I don't really pursue it, actually, I suppose maybe. John Cage really outlined the function of the composer beautifully. He said you write the music, and then there are these *other things* that happen to it. You can't be responsible for—we all can't live our life like Steve Reich. We can't, even he's tired.

CA: Larry, do you have a question?

Audience: Yea, I guess there are a couple of things but you said you kind of think of yourself as composing as a listener. Do you kind of, as you're composing, move from millimeter to millimeter and then see how you think it sounds and then add the next thing, or is there more of a—

MF: There is no secret to music. Either you put something against something else, and you say how does it work? And you might feel like it works like Messiaen feels it works, but you don't feel that it works, [*Feldman laughs*] because he's putting one thing against another in a kind of mosaic-like way. Or you feel that it has a certain type of *organic* continuity, and...your approach is more monolithic. There are no other approaches. Either it's organic, and you keep it going without making too many waves, or you're putting one crazy thing against another crazy thing.

I think if you really listen to music, it's crazier than you think. I was giving a seminar on Beethoven's hundred and one.¹⁷³ I think it's the nuttiest thing I ever heard. This is a fabulous piece of his, with a crazy fugue in it. The thing is to understand, for example, why he would put a fugue in there in the first place. If you're going to think that it spells out some kind of fantastic architecture to help with the piece, you're mistaken. He put it in there as an element of expression, that there was just something about a fugue at that particular point, which just helped the expression of the music, and the piece is very eclectic in terms of using all different kinds of devices, all for expression. He was so hung up with expression in the last period in his life that he put it both in *German* and *Italian*, just to make sure that everybody got the idea. And that's all it is, in a sense, either

¹⁷³ *Piano Sonata no. 28*, op. 101.

you feel that it's organic, again Boulez, where the fluidity of the music, and the fluidity of the form goes hand in hand, or you don't think of that particular type of architectural or constructive or stylistic, however you want to think of it.

Audience: Why not both?

MF: Eh?

Audience: At the same time?

MF: You can do anything you want. That's also the tragedy: no one's stopping you. Go ahead! [*Feldman laughs, laughter*] Go east, young man.

CA: Yes, over here?

Audience: You spoke about starting a piece and not knowing how it's going to progress, and the simultaneity of thought and action, and other things that might lead one to suspect that composing for you is starting from the beginning and going in a sort of straight, linear shot to the end. I'm wondering to what extent do you draft, sketch, revise your works?

MF: Everybody develops their own method of working. A lot of students, in a sense, just don't understand. They usually think that things got together in a much more formal way. For example, let's take something like *Pierrot Lunaire*.¹⁷⁴ They were just a whole bunch of songs, more or less, and he got the order later, like you would make a movie: you'd put this against this, and this against this. Young composers can't make a movie. They can't make a composition because evidently somebody told them, when they were somewhere, in that little school on the prairie, that things have to follow logically, otherwise they're not going to have a good piece. You know how many good

¹⁷⁴ Arnold Schoenberg's op. 21, composed in 1912.

pieces have been written? There have been more good pieces than fugues. [*Feldman laughs*] The whole idea is not to write a good piece. [*Long pause.*]

The whole idea is to get lost, and then come out, you know, come out of it alive. Though a lot of times, I'm totally lost. It's very upsetting. But what's the use of telling you to get lost? You have to get lost with Rome opera on the phone wanting a piece. Remember Fellini's *8½*, you know? I really feel that there's an element of *big budget* involved. A student of mine who's writing her Ph.D. dissertation, and she's very, very gifted, uptight young professional composer from McGill University, I called her up and said, "How's your thesis going?" and she said, "I finally decided that I'm going to work your way." I said, "What's 'my way?'" And she said, "Executive decisions." Her father's a big stockbroker, you see. She thought of this whole thing as a kind of macho, man in the world, you see, making these executive decisions, deciding I'm going to put this here, I'm going to put that here and everything.

I do put things together. Let's put it this way. I once was stuck again—that's why I'm never going back east—again in a snowstorm, and I pick up a book by Bernard Baruch, how to become a millionaire. So I start reading the book. I should have read it—I don't like these people looking at, reading books you know, all the time, and they don't buy them. I should have read the first page because right off, he tells you—Look, the way I became a millionaire, if you were to try it, you'll go to jail. He said, I made my first million when I was 25 on the London stock market in relation to the New York stock market, and the time differential. He said, that was my first million, but then the government found out about it, you could read about it, it's a very important new law, and there are about four new laws put in by the Federal Trade Commission which I'm

responsible for. And then he goes ahead and actually tells you about what a clever crook he was. And I think that art has, to some degree, there is an aspect—let's forget about talent, we're not supposed to talk about that—but there is an element of *authority*, that someone could *sell* something to you, you know, maybe because just out of context.

I think my music is very normal. You know when I have trouble? When I go to Europe, when I see that Cellini, that head, and all the Americans are walking by, licking their frozen yogurt, and you see this Cellini black *head*, with the *blood*.¹⁷⁵ I mean that's crazy, [*laughter*] you understand? Or if you're walking on a rainy night in Paris, maybe to you it's romantic, not when I see Rodin's statue of Balzac there (fig. 65).¹⁷⁶ I think it's the creepiest thing imaginable. That's crazy.

We're just moving a few little things around. I wish I could write something as *delirious* as that Cellini, where you'll all be out of here in one minute.

Woman in audience: What kind of rug are you looking for?

MF: Rug? I dropped a lot of money here a few weeks ago, I'm finished with San Francisco.

Woman in audience: No sales pitch this time, so...

Second woman in audience: Did you find it?

MF: Oh, yes. I wouldn't even go to the other places, I would recommend Bakhtiari. He has some wonderful stuff, especially early Turkish pieces, just sensational pieces. Most of the old rugs here are not in good condition, and his is in excellent condition.

Audience: He has good pieces, but does he have fugues?

¹⁷⁵ Cellini, *Perseus with the head of Medusa*, 1545, at the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence.

¹⁷⁶ Rodin, *Monument to Balzac*, 1891, on the Boulevard du Montparnasse in Paris.

MF: Does he have fugues? A great rug is better than any fugue. [*Feldman laughs*]

CA: Back here, yea?

Audience: You spoke of departing from the traditional point, trying to break with it when you're working, and yet you also spoke of your appreciation for craft and—

MF: But I also didn't define it. I don't know what tradition is, but I've been asking that question a lot, especially with young people. There's a marvelous Chinese poem about where is the beginning. What do you begin with? What is the beginning? And the whole thing is just talking about what is the beginning.

Someone asked me recently what I thought musical civilization is, and I thought for a minute, and I said, a forty-thousand dollar Steinway, and that's where I've really arrived at, that we've got these fantastic instruments, and you realize that when you're teaching. A kid comes in with a bunch of pipes and he starts blowing into them, and you say, "You know we've got an instrument, it's called a trombone. [*Feldman laughs, laughter*] You're like a new sound source, well good luck to you, young fellow." And I love perfected instruments. I really love perfected instruments, and I continually tell marvelously talented performers.

There's a wonderful violinist, she's married to a first cellist of a big orchestra in Europe, she went to Julliard, American girl, and we worked together, and there was a concert in Venice and she did a solo thing, she did the Schoenberg *Fantasy*,¹⁷⁷ which, you know, it's a big number. And I said, "Look you're very, very good," I said, "but you can't go around playing public recitals with a cheap bow." She said, "Well, we've talked about it." I said, "You're just wasting your time."

¹⁷⁷ *Fantasy for Violin and Piano*, Op. 47 (1949).

I bumped into her two years later, and she gave me a big hug, and she said, “I can’t thank you enough, Morty, I don’t even have to practice anymore.” [*laughter*] I think that’s what the twentieth century is really ending up with. We’re not going to get out—I mean we could go *slumming* into Haiti. We can get involved in voodoo music. We can get involved with *any* kind of fusion music but I don’t think that’s where it’s at. I think that there are some things that are perfected, and there are some things that are not. There are some things that are *flexible*, and there are some things that are not, and I think it’s just a question of selection, actually. I didn’t mean choice or free will, I meant selection.

I think the whole problem is this whole business of self-expression. [*A pause*] I think we misunderstand also the artistry through the ages. I was recently in Japan and had a lovely visit with Takemitsu, and they took me to see those, beautiful stone gardens, and I looked at the damn thing and I said to Toru, I said, “Well, I mean what’s the name of this guy?” and he gives me the name, it’s not anonymous, you see. And I said, “Well, when did he live?” It was the same time as Michelangelo. I said, “Was there a text book, how to make a Zen garden?” He said, “No.” I said, “Oh, he *invented* this?” He said, “Yes.” And this whole fantasy we have about the art of the East being sublimation and ours being more of the individual, I think is a lot of nonsense. For Bach to write that fugue, for Stravinsky to write the Huxley Variations,¹⁷⁸ he just had to, you just have to forget about yourself. I think that all that music and stuff that we feel is like ego-centered and ego-oriented was really works of *astounding* sublimation. Actually, I’m beginning to see history differently, in a way.

¹⁷⁸ *Variations: Aldous Huxley in Memoriam* was Stravinsky’s last orchestral composition, written between July 1963 and October 1964.

I never had an argument with history, I just wanted to become part of it. I think it's terrific. There was absolutely nothing [that] went wrong, everything went right. Again, that's the tragedy, it all went right. Well, I mean it's, it's terrific, and you feel, well where's my voice? The only thing is, is that you don't see, especially with young people, they really don't see the uniqueness. They had bad teachers, that talked about tradition, and yet, the only one I know that Beethoven really influenced is some obscure string quartet by Saint-Saens. I don't think that anybody really influences anybody, except in the most superficial way.

There's no flexibility to change with young people, absolutely. They're like, I remember when I was in public school, where there were God knows how many people were dying of famine in India and it's a social science class, and she was telling us that there *was* a lot of food, that there *was* a lot of rice, but they weren't eating it. It wasn't of their region. She said that's why these people, and in Biafra, in recent years, this would happen, too. And I think it's the same thing, speaking to a marvelous cellist at CalArts and I noticed that the students, they already come, you know, whatever their background is, and they're looking at me slanty-eyed. I'm showing them new ways of notation, new ways of flexibility. I'm giving them a little, I'm giving them a little, you know, an extra five months in this terminal life and they don't want even the five months. They were taught a certain way, they don't want to change. They're no different than the people who don't want to eat the rice of another region.

I asked this marvelous cellist, I said—there's the same thing in performance—I said, “Did you go to any high level master classes in cello?” And she said, yes, she was at

a very unfortunate one with Fournier¹⁷⁹ who's fabulous, and the kid didn't buy the tradition of the way he would use the bow and everything. [She] was taught one way, and actually just wondered why he was... that she was so finished, you see, that she didn't want to be confused by this Frenchman showing how you could really play fantastically, you know, in this tradition.

I'm very concerned about teaching in recent years, and I'm very, very upset about it. In Toronto, in March, I'm speaking to all the composers from French-Canada, and Ontario, all throughout Canada and America on the teaching of composition in America, and I feel that it's so important that I'm actually taking time out to write about it. [I'm] very upset about it...very, very upset.

CA: It seems now that a lot of the direction that teaching is going to take will be involved with computer music. That will only make the situation worse, from your point of view?

MF: Oh, it adds to the tragedy, it also works. [*laughter*] Everything works.

CA: If everything works, what's the tragedy?

MF: That everything works.

CA: But regarding younger students?

MF: Well, it's just a question, it's just a question of... they find the processes and the methods, in a sense, which comes easiest for them. Which means, for example, let's say twelve-tone music is considered an *intellectual* pursuit, well there are people, in a sense, who are very good with moving notes around. I was telling some students the other

¹⁷⁹ Pierre Fournier, French cellist, 1906-1986.

day that I used to play cards with Milton Babbitt¹⁸⁰ when I was a teenager, and Milton would come over every week, we'd play poker, all different kinds of people, Milton, and there was a science-fiction writer.

CA: Cage?

MF: Towards the end. I didn't know Cage when we started the poker game. Cage was another time with another set of poker, only with science-fiction people. [*Feldman laughs*] We had about two years which was a fabulous thing. Anyway, I said, and I noticed at that particular time—this is actually during the period, I just finished studying with Stefan Wolpe¹⁸¹—and he [Babbitt] was just finishing up on that magnificent early piece of his, *Composition for Four Instruments*¹⁸²—and I noticed that this man was a bridge player, was a pinochle player. He knew the *cards that were out*. He was good with knowing the cards that were out, and that's the way he was with notes. There's no difference, it's a card game, it's easier—there are only twelve of them, not fifty-two. And you know, they think he's Einstein. Milton was good at remembering the notes that are out, and he handles them with great élan and flexibility like no one else.

While Charles, Charles isn't here is he? Charles Wuorinen has to work hard at it. Charles has to sweat at it! Milton never has to sweat. So you can't deduce anything about the intellectuality of Milton Babbitt, though he likes intellectual.... Or, even myself, talking about the kind of music, I can't make a virtue of my necessities. I find it *easier* to write this kind of music. I was at a show of one of Franz Kline's early shows in black and white and his mother comes in from the coal mines of New Jersey and she started to yell

¹⁸⁰ American composer, 1916-2011.

¹⁸¹ German composer, 1902-1972, emigrated to the U.S. in 1938.

¹⁸² (1948)

at him because it was in black and white, and she said, “Franz, you always took the easy way out!” [*Feldman laughs, laughter*] It’s a marvelous story. Well, maybe he did!

I always feel, in a sense, that everybody who has some degree of uniqueness is unique only because of—to cover up something or something. Fred Astaire, for example, said that he found that he found his whole dancing technique, the way he moves his hands, so you can’t focus on them, because they’re very *big*, you see. [*A pause*] Imagine Beethoven coming here and saying, “Well the reason I wrote the C-sharp minor string quartet is because I’m deaf.” [*Feldman laughs, laughter*] And it’s probably *true*! I’m convinced, in a sense, he got away from the clichés, and the pressures, and started to get involved with his inner hearing. I feel we do have various levels of how we hear. I always cultivated, if possible, inner hearing. I don’t know exactly what it is. I don’t have perfect pitch, I have relative pitch, but I have perfect pitch if I’m not thinking of *anything*. In other words, I could think a note, or I could think a chord without *hearing* anything. I don’t think it’s too much of a phenomenon, it’s like, it’s like a green thumb, so to speak.

But this whole idea, in a sense, that it comes down to you in a tablet, and you begin, what’s that crap that I, to this day I shake that maybe I’m not doing the wrong thing, that begins like a cell and starts to grow, you know that kind of business? Yea, it grows into cancer. That’s what it grows into.

CA: On that cheerful note, I’d like to thank Morton Feldman for visiting with us tonight. [*laughter, Feldman laughs, applause*]

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