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*I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by* Eugene Malcolm Barban

*entitled* Piano Music of Morton Feldman

*be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the degree of* Doctor of Musical Arts

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PIANO MUSIC OF MORTON FELDMAN

Presented by

Eugene Malcolm Barban

To fulfill the thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

College-Conservatory of Music

of the

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## PREFACE

This inquiry was prompted by a desire to gain some degree of insight into the music of Morton Feldman, particularly the solo piano music. An attempt will be made to discuss not only the music itself, but the aesthetic background as well.

Formally, this document is divided into three chapters. Chapter I will be concerned with a biographical sketch of Morton Feldman, followed by an annotated bibliography of the solo piano works, with brief descriptions of each piece as to stylistic characteristics, unusual features related to notation, etc. Chapter II will be devoted to a closer analysis of selected representative works. The validity of such analysis is perhaps open to question, since Morton Feldman denies any "system" of composition. However, I believe that certain features of the music do lend themselves to analysis, such as intervallic content, or the predominance of certain sonorities. Within Chapter III a discussion of the music as reflective of certain aesthetic criteria will be presented, as well as its relationship to parallel developments within other areas of the arts, particularly painting. It is hoped that this final chapter will bring to bear in the reader's mind a closer glimpse into the "why" of Feldman's works.

JAN 22 1970

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## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHY AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Morton Feldman was born in 1926 in New York City. His early training included piano study under Madam Maurine-Press. At fifteen he began the study of composition with Wallingford Riegger and three years later worked under the direction of Stephan Wolpe.

During the winter of 1949-50, Feldman met John Cage and while associated with Cage, came into contact with Philip Guston, an abstract expressionist painter, Earle Brown and Christian Wolff.

In addition to being an avant-garde composer, Feldman has continually expressed his interest in contemporary art and has organized exhibits of works of painters and sculptors of the New York School since the late 1940's, such as the exhibit held at St. Thomas University in Houston, Texas, where works of Pollock, de Kooning, Line, Rothko and Guston were shown.

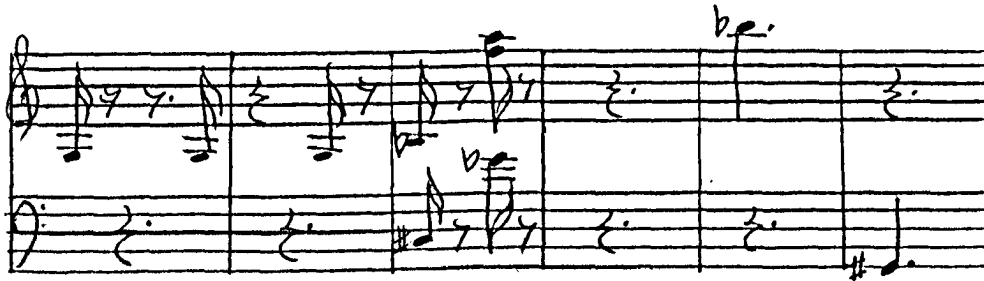
In 1966, Feldman began a year's work in Europe under a Guggenheim Fellowship, presenting several lectures and concerts of his own works.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. Two Intermissions (1950).

Intermission One is a short work of thirty-two measures. No dynamic indications appear except for the words "very soft" at the beginning. The texture is primarily one or two voices, with an occasional four voice texture. It is interesting to note that out of these thirty-two measures, six measures are complete rests, ten measures have only one note. The contour of the lines is highly disjunct, with many wide skips.

#### Ex. 1. Intermission One, Meas. 21-26.



The intervals of a major 7th and minor 9th seem to be a controlling factor, both horizontally and vertically. As in most of Feldman's pieces, the entire range of the instrument is exploited. There is neither a time signature, although the work is barred in 3/8, nor pedal indications, which, according to the composer, are left to the discretion of the performer. Also characteristic of many of these pieces is the use of the grace note which is played at the end of a measure and is tied over

the barline, often being the only note sounding, in other words, a non-ornamental, functional, grace note.

Ex. 2. Intermission Two, Meas. 1-2.

Intermission Two is again a short work, this piece being twenty-eight measures long, eight measures of which are complete rests. The texture is somewhat more dense than in Intermission One, [with the texture] varying from one to eight voices. There is a rapid alternation between measures of great rhythmic activity and measures of one sonority or note.

Ex. 3. Intermission Two, Meas. 3-6.

The afore-mentioned use of the grace note is apparent, as is the use of all registers of the piano. Intervallic control seems to be present with the intervals of the 7th and 9th predominating. Once again, no pedal or dynamic markings appear.

## 2. Intersection Two (1951).

This is one of two works which are totally aleatoric, i.e., all aspects of the performance, including pitches, rhythm, texture, dynamics, are left to the discretion of the performer. The score originated on graph paper, which accounts for its being written as three horizontal rows of boxes. Each row represents a register of the keyboard, high, middle, and low. A box is equal to M.M. 158. The numbers within the boxes indicate how many notes are to be played in that particular register.

### Ex. 4. Intersection Two, p. 1.

	3			5	
		1			2
	4			3	

A note, or group of notes, to be held longer than the duration of one box, is indicated by an extended heavy blackening of the outline of those boxes through which the sound is to continue.

Ex. 5. Intersection Two, p. 2.

		8					
6							
3	4						

The number within a box may be as high as eleven, in which case, according to Feldman, either the forearm or the flat of the hand is to be used, resulting in a large cluster. There are also instances in which a box is subdivided and contains two numbers, meaning that any part of the register may be used, the performer choosing between a high or low part of a particular register.

Ex. 6. Intersection Two, p. 6.

6		
1		
3		$\frac{5}{2}$

Diamond shapes within boxes indicate that the number of notes contained therein are not to be played, but that the hand is to be positioned on the notes in a manner so that one springs

from this position to the next group of sounded notes, in other words, the effect is a quick pounce.

Ex. 7. Intersection Two, p. 7.

	7		5		2	
		2	3		3	
1			6	1		1

A dash indicates the use of the flat of the hand, a plus sign the use of the elbow. There are obvious fluctuations between great contrasts in density, which, according to Feldman, is his conception of contrast between consonance (thinner texture) and dissonance (thicker texture).

3. Intermission Five (1952).

This piece presents a most interesting study in sound. Both the damper and una corda pedals are to be held throughout. Only two dynamic indications appear, FFF and PPP, the first being used for larger sonorities such as the cluster in the following example.

Ex. 8. Intermission Five, Meas. 1.

The extreme range of both the treble and bass are exploited. The predominant intervals, both horizontally and vertically, are 2nds, 7ths, and 9ths. The first twenty-four measures show frequent changes in dynamics and texture, with a certain degree of rhythmic activity. Following these measures, an obvious thinning out of the texture occurs as the time span between sounds increases, this time span in one instance being four full measures. In measures 51-52, a short motive appears, and is repeated eight times in its original form, bringing the work to a close, albeit in a very indefinite mood, one which allows the listener to continue with the sounds in his own imagination.

4. Piano Piece 1952.

The instructions at the beginning read: "Slowly and quietly with all beats equal." This work is written without bar lines and entails a strict alternation between one tone in the right hand and one in the left hand. All notes are written as dotted-quarters.

Ex. 9. Piano Piece 1952.

Intervallic control seems to be present in the preponderance of 7th, 9th, as well as augmented 4ths or diminished 5ths. Contrast of register is used not only between the two voices, but within one voice as well, each line containing skips of over two octaves.

5. Extension Three (1952).

Except for chords marked with an "x", this piece is to be played as softly as possible. The texture is primarily that of one or two voices, with occasional six or seven voice clusters. Although there is no time signature (only one of Feldman's piano pieces utilizes time signatures, namely, Piano Piece 1964), the work is barred in 3/8. However, the rhythmic pattern of two dotted eighth notes dominates the first eight measures, after which the 3/8 rhythm becomes apparent, as does the hemiola pattern of the preceding measures. There are many patterns of sounds repeated in groups of four. Present also are the grace notes standing alone at either the end or the beginning of a

measure. Once again, the piece ends without any feeling of finality, the last four measures being a simple melodic skip of a 9th repeated three times.

6. Intersection Three (1953).

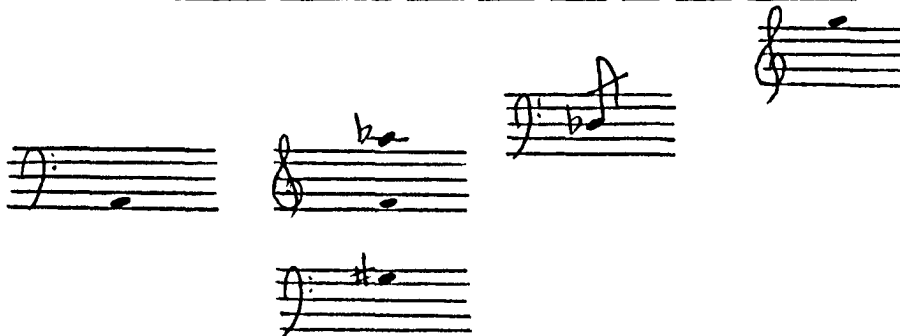
This, the second and final of the graph pieces, is identical in outward appearance as Intersection Two. The instructions given at the beginning read: "Each box is equal to M.M. 176. Each system is notated vertically as regards pitch: high, middle, low. The numbers mean how many keys one plays. Where there are two numbers for one register any part of the register can be used. The player is free to choose any dynamic and to make any rhythmic entrance on or within given situation. Sustained sounds once played must be held to the end of the notated duration." It is noteworthy that as many as thirty-one notes must be played within M.M. 176, and these passages would have to be carefully thought out and practiced before the performance, and would, in all probability, leave little room for deviation from performance to performance. In looking at the graph, the fluctuation between a great deal of activity and density and that of long periods of silence or very sparsely textured passages is apparent.

7. Intermission Six for One or Two Pianos (1953).

This work, on paper at least, resembles the now famous Klavierstucke XI by Stockhausen. There are fifteen separate

sonorities shown on the page, to be played in any order desired, as partially shown in the following example.

Ex. 10. Intermission Six for One or Two Pianos.



There is no indication as to when the piece may be considered to have ended. It could be assumed that one is free to repeat sonorities but that all sonorities should be played at least once. The instructions read: "Composition begins with any sound and proceeds to any other. With a minimum of attack, hold each sound until barely audible. Grace notes are not played too quickly. All sounds are to be played as softly as possible." There are no directions for the use of two pianos, which opens the door to an infinite number of possibilities in the alternation between the two instruments and possibly the simultaneous sounding of both. This piece borders on the threshold of silence, a technique of which Feldman makes great use.

8. Three Pieces for Piano (1954).

Each piece is to be played slowly, very softly, with little or no pedal. The contrast of textures is obvious,

although there are no sonorities containing more than six notes. The extreme ranges are used, as are the grace note figures, with a new feature being added in one instance, the "white" grace note.

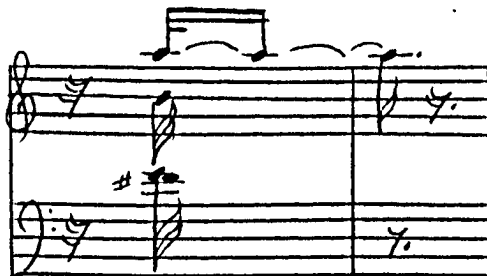
Ex. 11. Three Pieces for Piano, Meas. 5-8.



As in many of these piano works, there seems to be a static quality or lack of movement and direction, which, as we shall discover, is the effect Feldman desires to project.

9. Piano Piece 1955.

Here again we encounter a work which is to be performed quietly throughout. The anticipation of the beat through the use of a tied grace note is used extensively, as is the idea of striking several notes together, but holding only one or two.

Ex. 12. Piano Piece 1955, Meas. 14-15.

Also present are the complete measures of rest. Although no time signature is used, the work is barred in 3/16. Both frequent changes in texture as well as some intervallic control are present.

10. Piano Piece 1956 A and B.

These two pieces are quite similar to those which have thus far been discussed. The only new feature is the extensive use of the "white" dotted eighth notes in addition to the white grace notes.

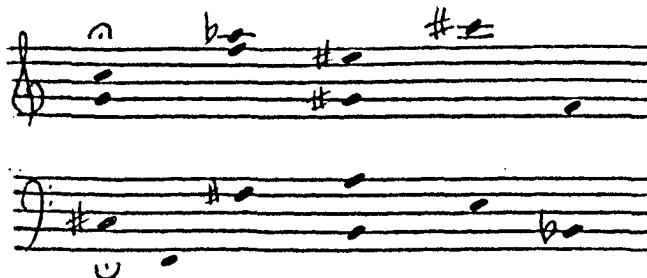
Ex. 13. Piano Piece 1956 A, Meas. 2-5.

Both pieces are to be performed slowly and softly, with occasional fortissimo clusters indicated with an "x". Piano Piece 1956 B has more rhythmic activity than any of the non-aleatoric pieces encountered thus far. Once more, consonance and dissonance are reflected in variations of texture of density. Generally, they exhibit Feldman's predilection for a sparseness of texture. The pieces are barred, but no time signature is used.

11. Last Pieces (1959).

Last Pieces are a study in sonorities, a juxtapositioning of sounds. The notation of these four short pieces introduces the use of black notes without stems which are used exclusively throughout.

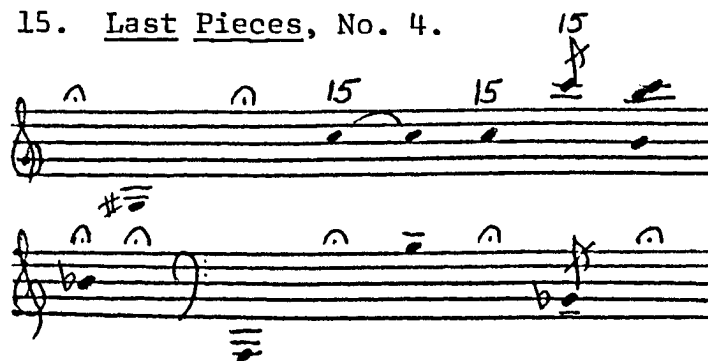
Ex. 14. Last Pieces, No. 1.



The first and third pieces are to be played slowly and softly, while numbers two and four are played in a quicker tempo. The durations for all notes are free and in the fourth piece, the

durations for each hand are free. Thus, one aspect of the music, rhythm, is presented as an aleatoric feature. The writing is almost strictly vertical, with all voices sounding simultaneously, except in rare instances. The texture varies from single tones to large clusters, and octave displacement is frequent. Fermatas are used with great freedom to indicate a general lengthening of note values. No bar lines are used.

Ex. 15. Last Pieces, No. 4.



12. Piano Piece (Philip Guston) (1963).

As in Last Pieces, the notation is in stemless black notes, no bar lines or time signature being employed. The texture is predominantly very dense, with only occasional single notes occurring. The technique of striking a large chord and holding only one or two notes is used extensively, the effect being a small or sparse texture emerging from a larger, conglomerate mass. The entire piece is to be played "extremely soft."

13. Vertical Thoughts Four (1963).

The general style of this work is similar to Piano Piece (Philip Guston), from the use of stemless black notes to the dense textures. The rhythm is quite free, with frequent fermatas. No rests are used in any of the piano music from Last Pieces on, except for one quarter-note rest in Piano Piece 1964.

14. Piano Piece 1964.

Here, for the first and only time, we encounter the use of time signatures. The notation is a mixture of stemless black notes and grace notes written as either black or white notes. For those sounds written as stemless black notes the following instructions are given: "Each sound enters as the previous sound fades." The entire piece is to be played extremely softly. The value of a pulse is M.M. 42 to M.M. 76. The utilization of the time signature is interesting, not only because of its appearance in this, the last piece, but also because of the manner employed. Twenty-seven changes in meter occur in this work, a piece of only forty-one measures in length. The pulses within a measure range from two to eleven, the result being a rhythm which sounds quite free, particularly when it is noted that some sounds may enter at any point during a measure.

Ex. 16. Piano Piece 1964, Meas. 1-5.

Handwritten musical score for five measures, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clefs). The notation includes notes, rests, and fingerings. The first measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (A, C, E) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F#, C, G). The second measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (A, C, E) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F, C, G). The third measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (A, C, E) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F, C, G). The fourth measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (A, C, E) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F, C, G). The fifth measure has a treble clef with a whole note chord (A, C, E) and a bass clef with a whole note chord (F, C, G). The score is annotated with various symbols and numbers, including '5', '7', '2', '3', '8', and 'b'.

## CHAPTER II

### ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS

The two works chosen for discussion in this chapter are Intermission 5 and Piano Piece 1952 which I feel contain elements characteristic of the majority of Feldman's piano works. The technique of analysis employed is that system devised by Howard Hanson and is based upon the measurement and computation of intervals. According to this procedure each interval contained within a chord is measured and marked by a series of letters in the following manner: "p" indicates a perfect 5th or its inversion, "m" indicates a Major 3rd or its inversion, "n" a minor 3rd or its inversion, "s" a Major 2nd or minor 7th, "d" a minor 2nd or Major 7th, and "t" a tritone. The relative consonance or dissonance of a sonority is determined by the preponderance of intervals at either end of the intervallic gamut.

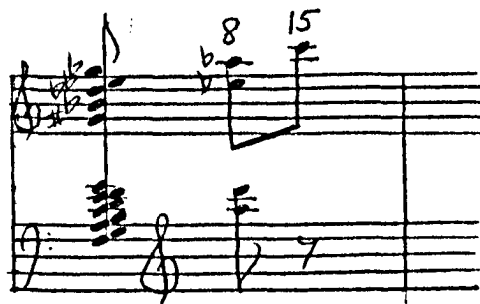
This type of analysis is descriptive in nature and since the sonorities contained within a work such as Intermission 5 are so varied, no conclusions as would pertain to a systematic approach to the use of sonorities can be reached.

#### 1. Intermission 5.

Within this work are three vertical structures which could be classified as tone clusters. The first of these occurs in measure 1 and is comprised of all white keys from small "f"

to G prime and all black keys from G sharp prime to G flat double prime, as shown in the following example.

Ex. 1. Intermission 5, Meas. 1.



The second cluster occurs in measure 22 and consists of two intervals of a perfect 4th whose bottom notes lie a tritone apart. Both 4th are filled in with two Major 2nds and one minor 2nd.

Ex. 2. Intermission 5, Meas. 22.



The third and final cluster appears in measure 23 and like the first cluster cited is comprised of white notes in one hand and black notes in the other hand.

Ex. 3. Intermission 5, Meas. 23.

In addition to these clusters various other vertical sonorities occur which appear in the following example, analysed intervallically according to the system explained in the beginning of this chapter.

Ex. 4. Intermission 5, Meas. 1, 3, 9, 15, 17.

Handwritten musical notation for Ex. 4, showing two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The notation includes notes, rests, and accidentals. Above the first staff, there are handwritten annotations: 'b8', '15', and a sharp sign. Below the staves, there are intervallic analysis labels for five measures:

- Measure 1: P2, d2, t2
- Measure 2: P1, m1, s1, d2, t1
- Measure 3: P2, m1, d2, t1
- Measure 4: m1, n1, s2, d2
- Measure 5: P1, m2, n2, s2, d3

In the example from measure 1 the structural formation is merely two perfect 4ths spaced a tritone apart. Although the basic cell is a consonant interval the result is a chord of considerable dissonance due to the two minor 2nds and two tritones.

It should be noted that most of the sonorities cited contain predominantly the intervals of a 2nd, either Major or minor,

or a tritone. This is true not only vertically but horizontally as well as can be seen in the following example.

Ex. 5. Intermission 5, Meas. 1-5.

## 2. Piano Piece 1952.

This work consists entirely of the strict alternation of single tones between both hands. No vertical sonorities as such exist. Therefore I have chosen to measure all intervals in each voice as well as those occurring as a result of the combination of voices. The following table illustrates the intervallic content of the entire piece.

Table 1. Piano Piece 1952.

	Top Voice	Bottom Voice	Combined Voices
p-	11	16	16
m-	24	16	22
n-	15	9	16
s-	22	16	35
d-	6	19	57
t-	6	8	27

As can be seen from this descriptive analysis, each voice is predominantly consonant while the alternation of voices results in a basically dissonant sound. No systematic use of certain intervals could be determined, nor could any apparent patterns of intervals be found.

Below is one line of Piano Piece 1952 which illustrates the above-mentioned features.

Ex. 6. Piano Piece 1952.



## CHAPTER III

### DISCUSSION OF THE MUSIC

Since the piano music of Morton Feldman encompasses both works which are in some manner aleatoric, and those in which all aspects of performance are indicated, I feel it necessary to discuss these two areas individually. In the chronological ordering of Feldman's works, the aleatoric pieces are quite early, this process being later abandoned by the composer for reasons to be discussed later. In addition, the aleatoric works form only a small portion of the total piano music, somewhat less than ten percent.

The work aleatoric is derived from the Latin word alea, meaning dice, and is used to designate music containing some degree of chance, either in its compositional processes, or its performance, or both.

Aleatoric music does not belong to the twentieth century alone. According to Henry Cowell, "Music utilizing various combinations of chance and choice, pre-established or improvised are not without respectable precedent, in the tala and raga systems of India, and, possibly, on a less serious plane, in the music of Mozart."<sup>1</sup> During the eighteenth century many composers, including Mozart and J. C. Bach became intrigued with this

<sup>1</sup>Henry Cowell, "Current Chronicle," Musical Quarterly, XXXVIII (1952), 123-36.

game.<sup>2</sup> Mozart is the author of an artifact called Musikalisches Würfelspiel, which bears the inscription: "Mozart's musical game, fitted in an elegant box, showing by an easy system how to compose an unlimited number of Waltzes, rondos, hornpipes and reels-mechanical composition of minuets."<sup>3</sup>

Paul Hindemith observes that an English composer named William Hayes in 1751 in a satiric book entitled The Art of Composing Music by a Method Entirely New, Suited to the Meanest Capacity, suggested the following compositional technique: "His advice is to take a brush with stiff bristles, dip it into an inkwell, and, by scraping the bristles with the finger, spatter with one sweep a whole composition on paper. You have only to add stems, bar lines, slurs, etc., to make the opus ready for immediate performance. . . ." <sup>4</sup>

In the twentieth century, methods for incorporating chance elements into the music are varied. Basically, three procedures are at the composer's command. The first, as described by John Cage, involves the use of chance to create a fully notated score, using such sources as the Chinese Book of Changes; modern tables of random numbers used by physicists; or the use of imperfections in the manuscript paper itself, a system analogous to the

<sup>2</sup>Lejaren A. Hiller and Leonard M. Isaacson, Experimental Music (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., 1959), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Hindemith, A Composer's World (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 123.

Rorschach tests of psychology which ". . . may provide a music free from one's memory and imagination."<sup>5</sup>

The second manner employed is that of indicating only the approximate pitches, time relationships, textures, dynamics, by means of graphs or schematic drawings.<sup>6</sup> Among those who have composed works in this style are Feldman, Cage, Earle Brown and Sylvano Bussotti.

Peter Gradenwitz describes a performance of a work by Bussotti at the International Vacation Courses for New Music in Darmstadt, West Germany. The work, entitled Piano Piece for David Tudor, presented itself as a line-drawing made up of straight and curved lines, vertical and diagonal signs, arrows, ornaments, and so forth, which was to inspire the pianist to interpret the signs of this score.<sup>7</sup> Intersection II and Intersection III by Feldman, as well as various works of Earle Brown and Anestis Logothetis belong to this category also.

The third and final method of incorporating chance in a work is that displayed in Feldman's Intermission Six for One or Two Pianos, and in Karlheinz Stockhausen's Klavierstucke XI. In this method, several short phrases or sonorities are placed

<sup>5</sup>John Cage, Silence (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1966), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Leonard B. Meyer, Music, the Arts, and Ideas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 69.

<sup>7</sup>Peter Gradenwitz, "Performer's Role in the Newest Music," Chesterian, Autumn, 1959, 61-64.

at various positions on the page. The performer is free to begin with any phrase and continue with any other. According to the instructions given by Stockhausen, Klavierstucke XI is performed in the following manner:

The performer looks at random at the sheet of music and begins with any group, the first that catches his eye; this he plays, choosing for himself tempo. . . dynamic level, and type of attack. At the end of the first group, he reads the tempo, dynamic, and attack indications that follow, and looks at random to any other group, which he then plays in accordance with the latter indications. Looking at random to any other group implies that the performer will never link up expressly-chosen groups or intentionally leave out others. Each group can be joined to any of the other 18; each can thus be played at any of six tempi and dynamic levels and with any of the six types of attack . . . . When a group is arrived at for the third time, one possible realization of the piece is completed . . . .<sup>8</sup>

Music utilizing chance methods of composition or performance is classified by Meyer as anti-teleological, i.e., it is directionless, with no obvious goals toward which the music moves.<sup>9</sup> Meyer continues, "It arouses no expectations, except presumably that it will stop. It is neither surprising nor, once you get used to its sounds, is it particularly startling. It is simply there."<sup>10</sup>

George Rochberg traces the philosophical source of aleatoric music to Existentialism, a philosophy which contends

<sup>8</sup>Leonard B. Meyer, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>10</sup>Loc. cit.

that the present moment is the nodal point of existence and from this sense of existence is derived one's sense of being.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is the "now", this "present", that is the concern of composers of aleatoric music. And because the present is of uppermost importance both past and future are eradicated. Rochberg says, "They see music as the occurrence of unpredictable events, each moment of sound or silence freed of formal connection with the moment before or after, audible only as a present sensation."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, it is important that as listeners we approach the sounds not as being necessarily related but, in the words of Meyer, as ". . . individual, discrete, objective sensations. A syntax or grammar which would order these sounds and relate them to one another - creating goals, expectations, or a basis for prediction - is to be avoided at all costs."<sup>13</sup> According to Rochberg the spontaneity and freshness of each situation is preserved by the discontinuity and unpredictability of planned indeterminacy.<sup>14</sup>

The parallelism in art is expressed by Philip Guston, an abstract expressionist painter and friend of Feldman's, when he

<sup>11</sup>George Rochberg, "Duration in Music," Modern Composer and His World, Edited by John Beckwith and Udo Kasemets, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 60.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>13</sup>Leonard B. Meyer, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>14</sup>George Rochberg, "The New Image of Music," Perspectives of New Music, Fall-Winter 1963, 1-11.

states, "Doubt itself becomes a form."<sup>15</sup> Feldman expresses his indebtedness to the plastic arts in his attempt to arrive at a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than had ever existed.<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Chase develops this parallel further, suggesting that Feldman had discovered that sound could also be a plastic phenomenon with its own shape, design and poetic metaphor. Chase continues,

His [Feldman's] desire was not to compose in the traditional sense, but "to project sounds into time, free from a compositional rhetoric that had no place here." In his persistent search for a direct, plastic quality in his music, Feldman has replaced "compositional rhetoric" with what he describes as "a totally abstract sonic adventure." According to this conception, "sounds no longer had an inherent symbolic shape; therefore it was possible to allow for indeterminacies in regard to pitch."<sup>17</sup>

Feldman relates his score to a painter's canvas, and states that he attempts to ". . . sensitize this area - this time-space."<sup>18</sup>

Aleatoric music has received its share of criticism from various quarters. The most often stated criticism of chance music is its obvious lack of order, and its subsequent effect on

<sup>15</sup>William Berkson, "Philip Guston: A New Emphasis," Arts Magazine, XL (1966), 15-18.

<sup>16</sup>Gilbert Chase, America's Music, (2nd ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., 1955), p. 668.

<sup>17</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 584.

the listener. George Rochberg takes aleatoric music to task in the following statement.

The anti-order of chance music has no need of memory and its power of recall; therefore it deprives the listener of his most powerful affective and mental apparatus for seeking order in himself and his experiences, including that of listening to music. Chance music would reduce its listeners to creatures subsisting wholly on stimuli-response situations; creatures who bring nothing to the moment of stimulus, and take nothing away from it. It makes one wonder whether chance composers recognize the extent to which they have stripped themselves of the hard-won human characteristic of being able to transcend mere sensation in order to form it in ways that communicate to other human beings the transcendent quality of human experience.<sup>19</sup>

Feldman abandoned graph music between 1953 and 1958, not for aesthetic reasons as such, but rather because he felt the purpose of the graph had been misunderstood by the performer. He discovered what to him was its most important flaw, the liberation of the performer as well as the sound. The graph had not been conceived as a basis for improvisation, but as an adventure in sound. Feldman says, "This realization was important because I now understood that if performers sounded bad it was less because of their lapses of taste than because I was still involved with passages and continuity that allowed their presence to be felt."<sup>20</sup>

From the foregoing discussion of aleatoric music we now turn to that body of works which comprise the greater portion of

<sup>19</sup>Rochberg, "Duration in Music". . . , 62.

<sup>20</sup>Morton Feldman, Notes on Durations, Time Record No. 58008.

Feldman's piano music, those works in which conventional notation is employed. Occasionally a work in this category, such as Last Pieces, will contain a certain amount of flexibility in rhythmic interpretation, indeed, almost to the point where the rhythm itself is left to the performer's wishes. However, I have included these works in the following section since the majority of facets of composition and performance are determinate.

Above all else, Morton Feldman is interested in sound itself. He feels the composer's craft, as traditionally understood, is obsolete and ". . . that everything we use to make art kills it."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the use of any system of composition, such as serial technique, is an anathema to him. As his model of what a composer should not be, he cites Pierre Boulez as the composer ending a long tradition of those whose main interest is in how the music is made.<sup>22</sup> Feldman, in discussing an evening spent with Boulez says, "It is Boulez, more than any composer today who has given system a new prestige - Boulez, who once said in an essay that he is not interested in how a piece sounds, only in how it is made."<sup>23</sup>

As his model of what a composer should be he cites Varese, a composer whose music deals primarily in how it sounds, and

<sup>21</sup>Peter Dickinson, "Feldman Explains Himself," Music and Musicians, XIV (1966), 22-23.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>Morton Feldman, "Pre-determinate/Indeterminate," Composer, No. 19 (1966), 3-4.

whose works continually project their freshness and spontaneity, music which, to quote Feldman, ". . . seems to be writing itself . . . ." <sup>24</sup>

Because of his distaste for any compositional system per se, Feldman has been accused of evading the problem facing contemporary composers today. His reply is characteristic, the problem is theirs, not his. <sup>25</sup> He is of the opinion that music today lacks someone to endow it with a personal syntax, becoming more involved with its own meaning, its own vocabulary. <sup>26</sup> Feldman elucidates further on his concept of control, pro and con, by saying,

If I have a resistance to process, it is because I don't want to give up control. Control of the material is not really control. It is merely a device that brings us the psychological benefits of process, just as relinquishing control brings us nothing more than the psychological benefits of a non-systematic approach. The question at hand, the real question, is whether we will control the materials or choose instead to control the experience. Varese expressed the same idea in a different way when he said of himself and another man that he wanted to be in the material, while the other wanted to remain outside. <sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to categorize the works of Feldman. He himself places his work somewhere between Cage's desire to regard

<sup>24</sup>Dickinson, op. cit., 22.

<sup>25</sup>Morton Feldman, "Conversations without Stravinsky," Source, I (1967), 43-45.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>27</sup>Morton Feldman, "Some Elementary Questions," Art News, LXVI (1967), 54 and 74.

everything as music and the insistence of others upon justification by system.

Leonard Meyer, in his book Music, the Arts, and Ideas, discusses what he terms "transcendental particularism," an approach which I believe reflects, in part, the attitudes of Feldman.<sup>28</sup> Basic to this philosophy is the feeling that our particular sense experiences are the only true experiences; all else is inference. Furthermore, in attempting to arrange things in terms of hierarchies or relationships, the immediacy of things is obscured. "If only unique particulars, not the causal connections between them are real, then no event either presumes or implies the existence of any other event."<sup>29</sup>

John Cage approaches the problem when he describes a concert at which works of Wolff, Brown, Feldman and his own were performed at the New School. Before the concert Cowell remarked that these composers were attempting to get rid of the glue in music so that, as Cage expresses it, ". . . sounds would be themselves."<sup>30</sup>

Today the sound material of music enjoys an autonomy never before accorded it, an autonomy which is a direct result of its liberation from what Roger Sessions calls "the musical train of thought," the process of establishing logical connections

<sup>28</sup>Meyer, op. cit., 158.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>30</sup>Cage, Silence . . . , 71.

between melodic phrase shapes and the harmonic progressions which support them.<sup>31</sup> Terms such as densities, vertical pitch aggregate, sound structure, sound object, emphasize the concept of sound as concrete, quantitative entities in themselves.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the element of sound itself, another element has entered the picture, namely, space. According to Rochberg, it is this image of space which predominates, the sound forming itself within this space as the focal point, the motion of the sound becoming secondary.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of space or spatialization, the interplay of sound and silence, the sense of undirected motion, the avoidance of any systematic compositional process, the obsession with sound for sound's sake, are clearly reflected in the majority of Feldman's piano works. One need only be reminded of the large number of pieces which are to be played very softly, or very quietly, bordering on the threshold of silence, or those works such as Piano Piece 1964 in which one sound enters as the previous sound fades, or those compositions which, like Intermission II, contain measure after measure of complete silence, this silence being broken by perhaps a single tone.

The inter-relationship of sound and silence is discussed by Cage, who likens it to what he considers "life" to be:

<sup>31</sup>Rochberg, "The New Image of Music". . . , 4.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

. . . something is always starting and stopping, rising and falling. The nothing that goes on is what Feldman speaks of when he speaks of being submerged in silence . . . so that listening to this music one takes as a springboard the first sound that comes along; the first something springs us into nothing and out of this nothing arises the next something, like an alternating current.<sup>34</sup>

Zofia Lissa speaks of discarding homogeneous pitch and compactness of the melodic line for ". . . sound points which defy such notions as melody and harmony. Wrapped in silence, separated by rests and far-flung pitches, each sound becomes a sonic formation in itself."<sup>35</sup>

Since 1963, Feldman has been concerned with the duration and decay of a sound, possibly a technique derived from electronic music. Works such as Piano Piece 1964, Numbers for nine instruments, Four Instruments (violin, cello, piano and chimes), de Kooning, Vertical Thoughts 1-5 for soprano and ten instruments reflect his preoccupation with this technique.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the above considerations, Feldman's approach to the art of composition is tempered by his view of the composer as related to his work. This relationship is brought to light in Feldman's own words: "In the early 50's, when Cage, Brown, and I were discovering so many exciting things, it was

<sup>34</sup>Cage, Silence . . . , 135.

<sup>35</sup>Zofia Lissa, "On the Evolution of Musical Perception," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XXIV (1965), 273-86.

<sup>36</sup>Chase, America's Music . . . , 669.

very difficult to set aside my composer's ego. It was painful. I had to step aside to see how beautiful the music was. For me, the medium is the hero, not the composer. We suppressed our egos in favor of the music."<sup>37</sup>

Among the more enigmatic statements by Feldman is that related by Cage in Silence, in which Feldman said that when he composed he was dead.<sup>38</sup> This statement, coupled with his view of the composer as related to the music, would seem to be a reflection of Feldman's desire to escape history, to be uninfluenced by previous styles or composers, to be able to act unimpaired by memory of things past, or conjecture of things to come.

Feldman relates the Kafka parable of a man living in a country where the rules are not clear to him. Since only those who rule are seemingly free from anxiety, he assumes that rules are for those who rule, in fact, what they do is the rule. It is in this light that Feldman cannot understand what another composer did that he should also do in order to reach a ". . . state of artistic grace."<sup>39</sup>

Feldman, like most composers, has not escaped entirely from criticism. His music has been cited as lacking Cage's imagination, Boulez's drive or Luigi Nono's bite. According to

<sup>37</sup>Harold Schonberg, "Art and Bunk, Matter and Anti-Matter," New York Times, September 24, 1967, p. 19.

<sup>38</sup>Cage, op. cit., 37.

<sup>39</sup>Feldman, "Conversations without Stravinsky," . . . , 45.

Persichetti, ". . . it is the lack of dramatic purposefulness and predominantly consonant sound that create barely fluctuating textures and over-all bleakness. Feldman does not limit himself to a single system but in his attempt to avoid the cliches of the serial school he loses certain concepts that his music seems to require."<sup>40</sup>

However much one may disagree with the validity of Feldman's music, it should be remembered that he and other composers mentioned in this chapter are united by a common philosophy, a concentration upon unfamiliar relationships between space and time, sound and silence, and the feeling that all musical relationships, regardless of how they are arrived at, have some potential value and are certainly worth examination.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Vincent Persichetti, "Review of Records," Musical Quarterly, XLVII (1961), 136-7.

<sup>41</sup>Cowell, "Current Chronicle" . . . , 127.

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