VERTICAL THOUGHTS

Morton Feldman and the visual arts

(front cover)
Morton Feldman portrait in hat, undated
Photo: Steven Sloman, New York

(above)
Morton Feldman in Philip Guston's New York studio, c.1965
Photo: Renate Ponsold

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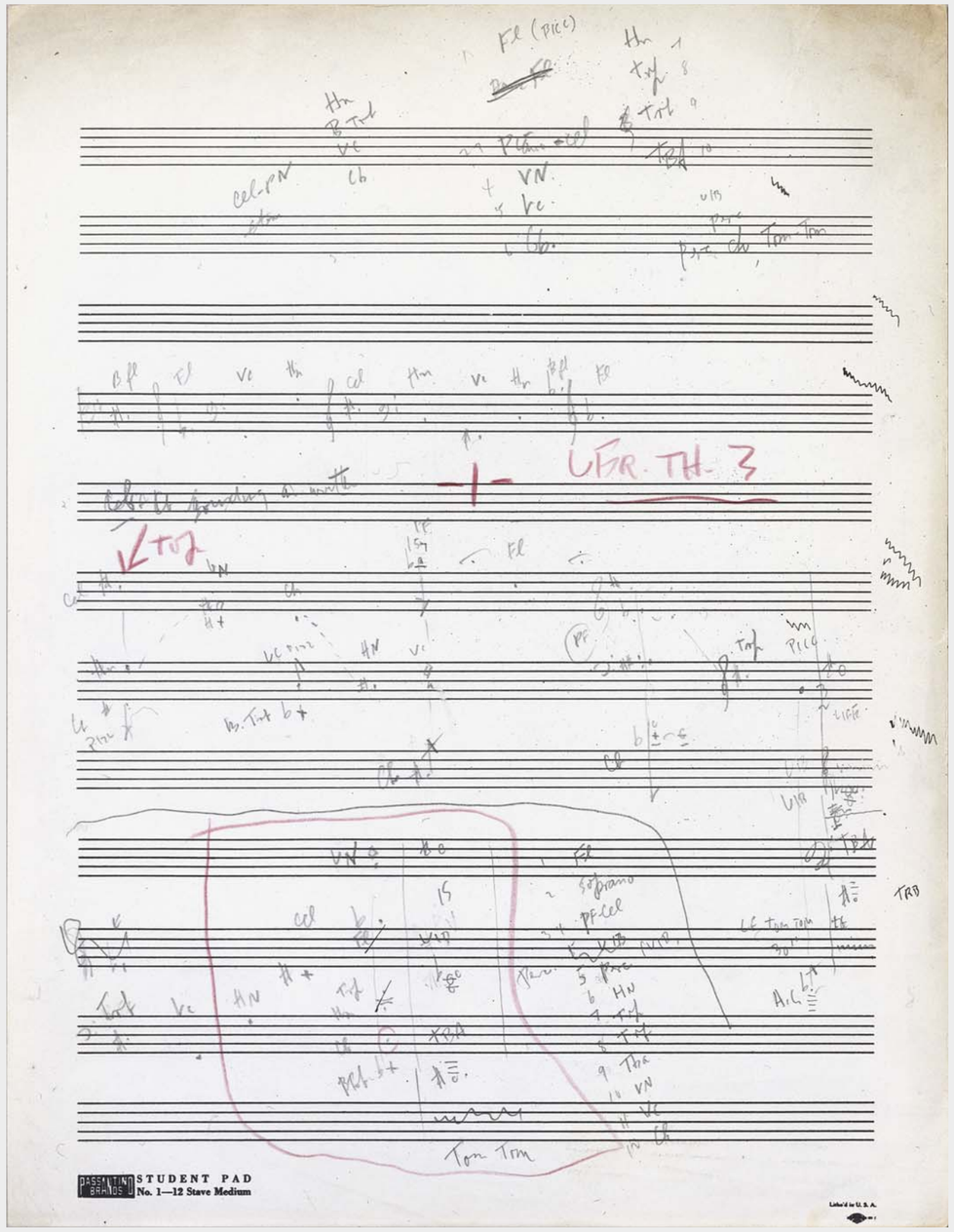
Morton Feldman
Vertical Thoughts 3
1963
Score draft with sketches, 1 p.
31.7 x 24.2 cm
Morton Feldman Collection,
Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland



VERTICAL THOUGHTS

Morton Feldman

A painter will perhaps agree that a colour insists on being a certain size, regardless of his wishes. He can either rely on the colour's illusionistic elements to integrate it with, say, drawing or any other means of differentiation, or he can simply allow it to 'be'. In recent years we realise that sound too has a predilectation for suggesting its own proportions. In pursuing this thought we find that if we want the sound to 'be', any desire for differentiation must be abandoned. Actually, we soon learn that all the elements of differentiation were pre-existent within the sound itself.

When sound is conceived as a horizontal series of events all its properties must be extracted in order to make it pliable to horizontal thinking. How one extracts these properties now has become for many the compositional process. In order to articulate a complexity of such close temporal ordering one might say differentiation has become here the prime emphasis of the composition. In a way, the work resulting from this approach can be said not to have a 'sound'. What we hear is rather a replica of sound, and when successfully done, startling as any of the figures in Mme. Tussaud's celebrated museum.

Christian Wolff once remarked that eventually everything becomes melody. This is true. Time does untangle complexity. We are eventually left with the one-dimensional — with the face of the clock rather than the workings of its inner parts. Time in relation to sound is not unlike a sundial whose enigmatic hand travels imperceptibly throughout its journey. But if sound has as its nature almost being nature, let us then observe our sundial in those moments when there is no longer sun, yet abundant light. Paradoxically, it is at this moment that time is less elusive. All shadows have left, leaving us a weathered object. In these moments time itself becomes less perceptible as movement, more conceivable as an image. In the former case our time-sound is in full scrutiny as a measured light, soon to become the fixed stare of melody. In the latter, time has transfixed itself within the sound. There is still movement — but it has become nothing more than the breathing of the sound itself.

The mistake is in trying to view one's work as Pasternak does when he writes of his love for the 'living essence of historical symbolism'. Which accounts for the curious tone in his writings, as of a man dangling between the best of all possible alternatives.

For Guston art at its inception is synonymous with an all-powerful dynamic in nature rather than man-made history disguised as nature. His sole problem is not in relating man to art, but art to man. With Guston, then, art must have its fall. Like an ancient Talmudist, he endeavours to find out within his conscience the why of its perceptual undoing.

Art in its relation to life is nothing more than a glove turned inside out. It seems to have the same shapes and contours, but it can never be used for the same purpose. Art teaches nothing about life, just as life teaches us nothing about art.

FOREWORD

Widely considered one of the most influential composers of the 20th century, Morton Feldman was himself greatly influenced by the visual arts, particularly those artists who are now associated with the New York School. In 1967 Feldman curated *Six Painters*, which featured a number of prominent modern artists: Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts* emerges from this original project, illustrating how these works – all of which may be defined according to their abstract qualities – inspired Feldman's non-compositional and equally abstract compositions. This direct relationship may be seen in some of Feldman's own works: *For Philip Guston* (1984) and *Rothko Chapel* (1971), also indicating the direct and close relationship Feldman had with these artists. Represented at IMMA is thus a seminal moment in both the artistic and musical spheres, with a clear overlap between two apparently distinct mediums. This exhibition is therefore, in part, a programming commitment to the interdisciplinary, revolving around the notion that art forms are not mutually exclusive, and that the understanding of one may inform another.

Drawn from the former collection of Feldman himself, as well as the collections of the world's leading art galleries – including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Gallery, Washington; The Tate Gallery, London; The Ménil Collection, Houston; and IVAM, Valencia amongst others – this exhibition will echo *Six Painters* by showing some works which appeared in that show, alongside other examples by the six artists which evince similar qualities. The exhibition goes further, however, by presenting works by other artists who were equally influential to Feldman or associated with him, including Francesco Clemente, Barnett Newman, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, R. B. Kitaj, Sonja Sekula, Alex Katz and Cy Twombly. Additionally, the notational style of Feldman – itself similar to an artwork – is evidenced in the original manuscripts on display, the exhibition also tracing Feldman's associations through photographs, record covers, and personal drawings and notebooks. Archival photographs documenting Feldman's only opera *Neither* (1976), a collaboration with Samuel Beckett and the artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, will extend the minimal content of much of Feldman's work. IMMA is also pleased to exhibit a number of Oriental rugs, drawn from Feldman's own collection, which function in a similarly inspirational way to the Abstract Expressionist paintings. Indeed, in the context of the gallery space these rugs appear as paintings themselves, offering insight into Feldman's own working process.

This catalogue, published to accompany the exhibition, is testament to the impact that Feldman had on many of his closest associates, and our deepest thanks must go to the contributors for their often personal and illuminating texts. The essays compiled here present a figure whose various interests form the concrete centre of his musical experiments, lending the sense of artistic inspiration a more weighted concern. The formerly unpublished conversation between Feldman and his friend, the writer and anthropologist Francesco Pellizzi, presented here for the first time, is suggestive of the composer's own lucid mind, the theme of artistic tradition a way of considering the legacy of the abstract experience. The impact of Oriental rugs to Feldman's music is a recurring theme throughout the texts, and is explicitly examined in a personal account by the composer Bunita Marcus, who traces a direct relationship between Feldman's own notational style and the inherent characteristics of the rugs themselves. Conjuring Feldman's New York and the artistic relationships that formed there, artist Brian O'Doherty and art historian Dore Ashton present memoirs that offer some insight into Feldman's personality, showing him to be a man of quick wit, intellect and memorable charm. In a second piece commissioned for this catalogue, Francesco Pellizzi considers in depth the tangible link between Feldman and the visual arts, whilst the composer Kevin Volans approaches his essay from a musical perspective, nevertheless suggesting that 'There was always only one subject of discussion: music/art'. Additionally, IMMA is pleased to present a reproduction of an article written by the composer Barbara Monk Feldman, originally published in the magazine *RES* (Autumn 1997), drawing parallels between Feldman's *For Philip Guston*, and Nicolas Poussin's image *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*. Uniquely, we also include reproductions of many of Feldman's own writings, alongside a scaled reproduction of the *Six Painters* catalogue, itself indicative of the centrality that this project has played in the creation of IMMA's own exhibition.

This exhibition, the first of its kind in Europe, is curated by Juan Manuel Bonet, who came forward with the idea. Bonet is an independent curator and former Director of MCNARS, Madrid; as well as former director of IVAM, Valencia where he previously organised an exhibition about the composer Erik Satie. He has worked in close collaboration with Seán Kissane, Head of Exhibitions at IMMA to select an inspiring and convincing show. Bonet has also written the introduction that begins this catalogue, our sincere thanks go to him, for his vision, knowledge and dedication to this project. As always, this exhibition is a collaborative venture and I would like to thank the staff at IMMA including Eimear O'Raw, Curatorial Assistant: Exhibitions and Imelda Barnard, Project Assistant: Exhibitions. Further thanks should go to Peter Maybury for the unique design of this catalogue and especially to the authors who contributed texts: Dore Ashton, Bunita Marcus, Barbara Monk Feldman, Brian O'Doherty, Francesco Pellizzi and Kevin Volans. I would like to thank *The Irish Times*, RTÉ, and Instituto Cervantes for supporting the exhibition. Finally, special thanks to Barbara Monk Feldman for her commitment to this exhibition, without which this show would not be possible.

Enrique Juncosa
Director

Morton Feldman
Land End, England,
August 1977
Photo: Jan Williams

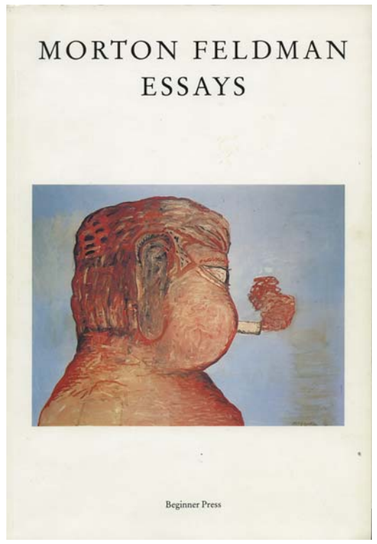
I LEARNED MORE FROM PAINTERS THAN I LEARNED FROM COMPOSERS (1)

'MY OBSESSION WITH SURFACE IS THE SUBJECT OF MY MUSIC'.
- M.F.

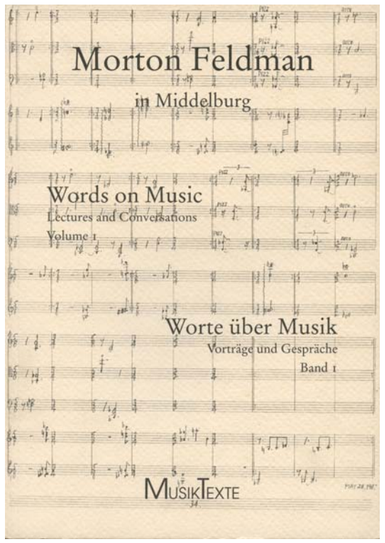
'STENDHAL HAD A BIG SIGN ON TOP OF HIS DESK, IT SAID: "TO BE CLEAR AT ALL COSTS. TO BE CLEAR AT ALL COSTS"'.
- M.F.

For many years now I have been particularly interested in the connections between music and the visual arts in the 20th century. And because of this fascination, in 1996 I entrusted the organisation of an exhibition on Erik Satie at IVAM (the museum of modern and contemporary art of Valencia) to Ornella Volta, who knows more about the composer of the *Gymnopédies* than anyone else. Similarly, I considered doing a show on Edgard Varèse. In the end, however, this was not to be – although I would have liked to organise the 2006 show devoted to him in Basel's Musée Tinguely. In 2003, John Cage and Stefan Wolpe appeared in another exhibition under my direction, which focused on the Black Mountain College and was curated by Vincent Katz for the Museo Nacional Reina Sofía in Madrid. Furthermore, I was involved in a very interesting show in 2007 in Barcelona's Pedrera which centred on Ricardo Viñes, the avant-garde pianist.

Thus from this perspective, it was clear to me for many years that the present exhibition on the great composer Morton Feldman (1926–1987), which I have eventually done for IMMA in Dublin, was something that I *had* to do. The present book/catalogue documents an exhibition that makes visual, through select examples, something which was very clear to the composer himself when he pronounced the following bold phrase (which I have used as the title for this essay): 'I learned more from painters than I learned from composers'. This is something which his friend B. H. Friedman, who compiled the posthumous publication *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Cambridge, Mass: Exact Change, 2000), understood well when he titled his extremely interesting prologue 'Morton Feldman: Painting Sounds'. Comprised of writings by a composer who once described his works as 'time canvases', this is a book which is unusual in discussing painting almost as much as it does music. It is based on a previous bilingual compilation of *Essays* (Kerpen: Beginner Press, 1985) published in Germany during Feldman's lifetime by Walter Zimmermann. One should read it alongside *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964–1987* (London: Hyphen, 2006), a tome edited by the British painter Chris Villars (who, incidentally, since 1997 has been the administrator of an excellent Feldman website which is an invaluable resource for anyone fascinated by the composer's life and work) and most of all the 900 page two-volume publication (one should divide that number by two as this is a bilingual edition): *Words on Music: Lectures and Conversations / Worte über Musik: Vorträge und Gespräche* (Cologne: MusikTexte, 2008), the product of transcriptions of the stunning classes that Feldman gave in the Dutch town of Middelburg between the years 1985 and 1987, that is to say, during his final years.



Morton Feldman: Essays
Walter Zimmerman (ed.)
Kerpen: Beginner Press, 1985



Morton Feldman in Middelburg. Words on Music: Lectures and Conversations (Vol. 1) herausgegeben von Raoul Mörchen (ed.) Cologne: MusikTexte, 2008

Words on Music, which I managed to acquire some months ago and which I recently read in a single sitting, is in my opinion a unique document in that it allows us to hear Feldman's very thought processes in action: a voice that combines precision, depth, the love of paradox and humour, and which is at times poetic.

Although, incredibly, nothing even approaching a biography has yet been written about Feldman (particularly surprising given the popularity of the genre among American readers) he left many clues throughout his life as to his profound interest in the plastic arts. The exhibition curated by him in 1967 with the then chairman of the art department of St. Thomas University, Houston, Frenchwoman Dominique de Ménil, provides a significant indication of this interest. The exhibition, entitled *Six Painters*, united canvases and works on paper – some of which belonged to the composer himself – by Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. The show's catalogue featured a text by Dominique de Ménil, an illuminating essay by Thomas B. Hess on 'Mondrian and New York Painting', and 'After Modernism', an absolutely extraordinary first class text by Feldman which examines in detail the work of Mondrian, Guston and Rothko, and in which, curiously, the other three painters are not even mentioned. Initially I had intended to reproduce a facsimile of the catalogue for the present show, with its sombre cloth cover. Ultimately though, I have settled for retaining its integrity, reproducing it photographically and incorporating it into the publication which the reader now holds. This catalogue has constituted my starting point, the cornerstone upon which I have built the present show for Dublin. To those six painters, all six of whom are absolutely essential to the composer's discourse, I have added others: those to whom Feldman dedicated compositions, those with whom he had most contact, those whose works he owned, and those whose paintings he most often referred to in his writings, his classes and in the interviews which he gave.

In his youth, Feldman, a child prodigy who began composing at the age of nine, learned the rudiments of piano from an aristocratic Russian woman (or *grande dame* to borrow his expression) named Vera Maurina-Press. In her native country she had belonged to the circle of Aleksandr Scriabin, a composer whose music the Spanish poet and critic Juan-Eduardo Cirlot always linked with Rothko's painting, and had studied with Ferruccio Busoni in Berlin. Feldman would never forget his 'fabulous piano teacher' and his work *Madame Press Died Last Week at the Age of Ninety* from 1970 is a testament to this. Some time after his lessons with Madam Press he was taught basic composition by Wallingford Riegger, one of the first exponents of twelve-note composition in the United States.

Some years later, in 1944, Feldman fell under the decisive influence of one of the great unknowns of these early avant-garde composers, Stefan Wolpe – although they spent most of their time arguing and in the end the former confessed that he had learned little. The German took an early interest in Scriabin, and also Satie. He was a disciple of Anton Webern – an obvious influence on the early Feldman who, as he would tell Martine Cadieu in 1971, admired him 'for the nature of his poetry and not for his theory'. He was in touch with Dadaists such as Johannes Baader, Hugo Ball and Hans Richter. He was a student of Klee and Johannes Itten in the Bauhaus. He lived in Palestine for four years. Re-locating to the melting pot of the United States in 1938, he joined Josef Albers' team at the Black Mountain College. In later life Feldman composed a work which he titled *For Stefan Wolpe* (1986), in homage to a man who he had described as a 'wonderful teacher' during one of his lessons at Middelburg a year earlier. He dedicated another work to him, or rather a dialogue with Geoffrey Douglas Madge (which should be read in parallel with 'Conversation about Stefan Wolpe' – a conversation that took place on 13 November 1980 with Austin Clarkson, the greatest specialist on the German composer, and which was not brought to light until Chris Villars published it in his aforementioned *Morton Feldman Says*). Writing in a brief text entitled 'I want to thank' – included in a concert programme also dating from 1986 – Feldman references 'Stefan Wolpe, for teaching me the plastic possibilities of musical shape'. In 1956, when the disciple had become a composer in his own right, Wolpe contributed to the dissemination of his work in Europe, including it in his Darmstadt conference on new American music.

Another formative figure, who was also very important to Feldman, was the mythical visionary Austrian architect Frederick Kiesler, who emerged from this same European avant-garde atmosphere, and later moved to New York. Feldman owned two of his drawings on ruled paper. In his Darmstadt conference (26 July, 1984) Feldman described Kiesler as 'another very close friend of mine from whom I learned perhaps more about art and attitudes than from anybody else': Yet another trail to pursue.

The young Feldman also kept regular company with a roving Frenchman, the aforementioned Edgard Varèse. Varèse was another disciple of Busoni, and another European who had acclimatised to the New World, yet in his case it was in 1915, somewhat earlier than his colleague and great friend Wolpe. Varèse introduced the apprentice composer to Wolpe. Like his wife, Louise Norton (see her wonderful book *Varèse: A Looking-Glass Diary: 1888–1923* [New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1972]), Varèse belonged to the New York Dada group. He was immediately fascinated by the clattering elevated railroads and among other 'instruments' used ships' sirens in his work. However, the young Feldman was more likely to have been impressed by the fact that in his youth he had met Claude Debussy and Romain Rolland, the author of *Jean-Christophe*, a *roman-fleuve* about music and musicians that the apprentice composer read with passion. Varèse's name appears so often in Feldman's writings that it borders on obsession. Their music, nevertheless, could not be more different. Feldman saw Varèse almost every week but it was Varèse's capacity to organise sound and his unorthodox spirit that he admired. In his eyes, these qualities made Varèse the antithesis of the true *bêtes noires* Pierre Boulez or Karlheinz Stockhausen. It is worth remembering that Varèse was the first to speak to Feldman about Charles Ives' music.

Stefan Wolpe in his cabin in the woods at Black Mountain College, c. 1956
Photo: Clemens Kalischer

Composer Edgard Varèse at Columbia Records exhibit, 01 April 1953
Photo: Allan Grant

Some time later, in 1950, Feldman entered the vital and spiritual circle of John Cage, whom he was soon to visit on the corner of Monroe St. and Grand St., opposite the East River. In that austere monk-like apartment his attention was caught by some abstract mobiles by Richard Lippold, who lived in the same building as Cage (as Feldman was shortly to do). It was Cage, some of whose recordings of performances of Feldman's piano works still survive – I have listened specifically to two 1954 pieces which he performed in Milan in a concert entitled *Rumori alla Rotonda*, which took place on 21 January 1959, released on a CD of the same name in 1999 – who lead Feldman into a whirlwind artistic scene, introducing him to the majority of the new painters, sculptors, poets, composers, and dancers who were turning New York into the new Paris, that is to say, into the new artistic capital of the world. It was also through Cage that Feldman came to know fleetingly the pioneers of the first heroic period of the avant-garde, such as George Antheil, Henry Cowell and Virgil Thomson. Before then he had had dealings with Max Ernst and Aaron Copland, to whom in 1981 he would dedicate, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, *For Aaron Copland*.

Feldman's sensitivities to the preoccupations of visual representation, his way of 'lending his ear to painting' and of learning from the work of painters, owe much to Wolpe, Varèse and Cage, in the sense that all three composers were constantly surrounded by painters and sculptors, and had interests which were far-ranging. Their interests, it should be noted, were clearly not always shared by Feldman. The composer had no particular interest in the Bauhaus artists for example – with the exception of Paul Klee – nor was he ever close to Jack Tworkov or Esteban Vicente, painters to whom Wolpe in contrast was very close, having taught alongside them in the Black Mountain College. Nor was he particularly interested in any of the many artists one comes across in biographies of Varèse, such as Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp, Le Corbusier, Albert Gleizes, Hans Hartung, Fernand Léger, André Lhote, Man Ray, the poet-painter Henri Michaux, Joan Miró, Francis Picabia, Auguste Rodin, Joseph Stella, Alfred Stieglitz, or Zao Wou-Ki to name the most important. Cage, so Duchamp-like (incidentally, although he occasionally quotes him, I firmly believe that Feldman did not have any affection for Duchamp) was a composer first and foremost, yet was also a painter, an attribute which approximates him to Satie, and also to the 'satiesque' Robert Caby, George Gershwin, Paul Hindemith, Arnold Schönberg and even Varèse. Feldman was delighted by some of Satie's works for piano for the 'clear purity' of their sound.

In 2003, Buffalo University organised a group exhibition entitled *The Composer's Eye*, in which the curator, Olivia Mattis, compared paintings and drawings of or admired by Feldman, George Gershwin, Hindemith, Schönberg and Varèse. Curiously, Cage did not feature. Feldman was represented not through his (non-existent) plastic work, but rather that of his painter friends.

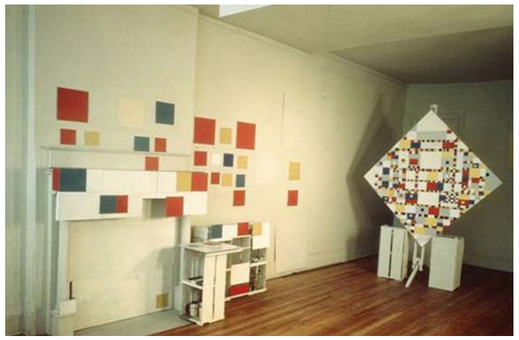
Continuing in this same vein, i.e. composers who are close to painters, one should recall the 2006 exhibition *Toru Takemitsu: Visions in Time*, which was held in the Tokyo Opera house. The catalogue (lamentably entirely in Japanese!) documents the way in which the great composer, friend of both Cage and Feldman – and author of some very interesting *graphic scores*, some of which were collaborations with the graphic artist Kohei Sugiura – is linked to the visual arts. Takemitsu was one of the founding members of the Jikken Kobo, or Experimental Workshop (1951–1957). Inspired by the Bauhaus and its spirit of mixed media, he became acquainted with other painters, sculptors and avant-garde poets. Takemitsu composed works inspired by Odilon Redon, Klee, Man Ray, Miró, Paul Delvaux, Bruno Munari, Isamu Noguchi and Sam Francis, all of whom featured in the 2006 show alongside artists from the Jikken Kobo, virtually unknown in the West, and his close friend, Jasper Johns, whose work he had written about.

The bilingual volume *Radio Happenings: Conversations – Gespräche* (Cologne: MusikTexte, 1993) is a very interesting testimony that deals with the close relationship between Feldman and Cage, and brings together their protracted and often very deep radio conversations recorded in New York during the winter of 1966–1967. During these conversations, Feldman intelligently defends 'the old-fashioned role of the artist – deep in thought'. They talk about Varèse, Satie, Boulez, Stockhausen, Luigi Nono, and the British composer Cornelius Cardew who fascinated them both. In some of his Middelburg lectures, however, Feldman distances himself from his friend: 'I think that a lot of his position on music is a little too pedantic'. In another, he shows very little enthusiasm for Cage's visual art works. And lastly, to Tom Johnson, he says, emphatically: 'Cage is sermon'.

Aaron Copland, composer lecturing in June in Buffalo seminar, composers' workshop. June 1977
Photo: Irene Haupt

Cage and Feldman, Earle Browne and Christian Wolff (son of the German publisher Kurt Wolff who had been forced to flee his country when the Nazis seized power), as well as the pianist and composer David Tudor (another disciple of Wolpe), soon formed the nucleus of a New York School of Music. The veteran Henry Cowell, a man of the 1930s who participated in some of the group's initiatives, would become the first to refer to it in 1952 in a note in *The Musical Quarterly*. This small group of composers formed a parallel to the more nurtured group of painters whose principal exponents were Pollock and Rothko, and also to the even more diffuse New York School of Poetry to which John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and others belonged. Ashbery and O'Hara not only profoundly altered poetic practice, but soon became two of the best art critics in the city and indeed the country. During that period, painters, composers and musicians gathered in various establishments, among those the now legendary Cedar Tavern (sometimes called the Cedar Bar) in University Place, Greenwich Village, between Fifth and Ninth Street. Another important meeting place was The Club on Eighth Street which was frequented by the Abstract Expressionists and the critics who supported them, and was where Varèse, Cage, Pierre Boulez and Feldman himself gave conferences on music. Wolpe was also a regular, and sometimes Hannah Arendt dropped by. *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2002), edited by Steven Johnson, is an interesting work in that it brings together many different strands: Jonathan W. Bernard, who writes about 'Feldman's Painters'; Austin Clarkson, on 'Stefan Wolpe and Abstract Expressionism'; Thomas DeLio, on the Wolpe-Cage connection; John Holzaepfel on the Feldman-Tudor connection; Johnson himself, who provides an introductory text and another on the Feldman-Johns connection; Olivia Mattis on 'The Physical and the Abstract: Varèse and the New York School'; and finally David Nicholls who provides an overview of the group as a whole.

'Liner Notes', one of Feldman's most important essays, appeared in 1962 in *Kulchur*. In it, he refers to these shared concerns: 'The new painting made me desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore'. In another text entitled 'A Life Without Bach and Beethoven', which appeared in 1964 in *Listen*, he returns to the same theme, speaking about 'a sort of frontier atmosphere' in which everything is possible. And this is how those composers started out, endeavouring to make 'chance music' using imprecise notation, and often, especially in the case of Feldman, using visual notation.



Piet Mondrian: Last Studio, 15 East 59th Street, New York in 1944 with *Victory Boogie Woogie*, 1944 and the Wallworks. Furniture made by Mondrian Photo: Harry Holtzman. © 2010 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Virginia

Wolpe, in his Darmstadt conference, finds the perfect words to describe Feldman's music: 'He is interested in surfaces that are as spare as possible and in the remnants of shapes that can barely be heard at a distance… Brought to the brink of dissolution this music is a diabolic test of beauty… Here the material is formed in the flow of its spontaneous generation. Any disposition of material can be eliminated without transition and taken up again without transition. The disjoint elimination of such material is of the same significance as its continued use'.

It is obvious that during this period, a real group spirit formed among its members. And one has to give credit to Ernstalbrecht Stiebler who, in a text entitled 'Feldman's Time' (his contribution to a group of prologues to *Words on Music*) emphasises Feldman's unique position within the group: 'Feldman found his sounds while seated at the piano, listening again and again, without the *I Ching*, and he was the only one of the circle of composers associated with John Cage to refer repeatedly to the European musical tradition and to deliberately use classical instruments, praise their qualities, and thus engage with tradition on a constant basis'.

Although they never had the opportunity to meet, Mondrian was the first artist (all right angles and logical articulation) of the 20th century to interest the young Feldman. Although he had an early opportunity to see the artist's New York canvases, inspired by jazz music, these were not the ones that most interested him. Feldman always felt closer to the work from Mondrian's mid-career, as well as an even earlier brief period in Domburg (this I find especially interesting) where the painter, still finding his way, abstracted images from nature through contemplations of trees, church steeples or, even more remarkably, the sea 'always renewing itself'; a sea transformed into little horizontal and vertical strokes forming tiny crosses. In an interview with Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, who interviewed him in 1976 for *Studio International*, he said: 'The early Mondrians were very important to me in terms of their asymmetric rhythm'. Mondrian's formal system, which included the use of an eraser – he said (in the same interview): 'I love those Mondrians where you can see it's erased' – prefigure in some ways what he would later do with sound, as well as serving as the inspiration for his system of 'graph notations'. As he writes in an essay called 'Some Elementary Questions', which appeared in a 1967 edition of *Art News*: '[Mondrian] endlessly reduces, endlessly simplifies'. However, this is painting with feeling, i.e. Feldman does not see Mondrian as a detached painter, but rather someone who, as he says in 'After Modernism', is preoccupied by 'the touch, the pressure, the unique tone of his performance'. Feldman also said, in one of his Middelburg classes: 'If you understand Mondrian, you'll understand me'. And in another, in relation to *For Bunita Marcus* (1985): 'I kept it very primary, the way Mondrian would use primary colours. […] I use very primary colours'. And on yet another occasion, he says that he considers the most important painter of the beginning of the 20th century to be, not the 'movie star' Picasso, but rather the upright Mondrian: 'this burning intensity, integrity of his work'. Another one of these classes, which took place on 2 July 1987, bears the paradoxical title 'Between Mondrian and Walt Disney'. In it, Feldman identifies his work with that of the painter: 'I'm making abstract paintings, like Mondrian'.

Alongside this total fascination for Mondrian, which was equivalent to that for Rothko – in the catalogue for *Six Painters* the consistently interesting Thomas B. Hess writes: 'Rothko shares with Mondrian a profound, even religious, sense of the absolute painting that by narrowing its range, paradoxically widens its content' – one has to note the radical lack of interest that Feldman showed in Surrealism. In 1984, in his Darmstadt conference, he made a brief reference to the Surrealists – so 'full of class' – and to Max Ernst, and also to the important role played by André Breton in the New York of the 1940s. And there it ends. Some time later, he would return to it (referring warmly to Arp and Magritte) during one of his Middelburg classes, recognising that Surrealism had been important to people who had been important to him, e.g. Cage (who adopted the notion of automatism), Pollock and even Rothko (the latter two earlier in their careers).

Curiously enough, there is not a single reference to be found in all of Feldman's work to the only American Surrealist of note. I am referring of course to Joseph Cornell who was so interested in the work of certain turn of the century French composers (Debussy, Ravel, Satie, Déodat de Séverac, etc.), a devotee of 19th century singers and ballerinas, and pursuer of the vestiges of Ricardo Viñes… I do not know if Feldman and Cornell knew each other personally but chances are that they did – they had common friends, such as Sonja Sekula and Susan Sontag. In the volume compiled by Villars, Cornell is only cited once, by Feldman, in a 1984 interview conducted by his disciple Kevin Volans. However, Feldman, apart from a brief 'Yes', acts like he has not heard the two questions about the 'Cornellian' aspect that the South African composer sees in one of Feldman's works entitled *String Quartet 2*, premiered in Darmstadt by the Kronos Quartet.

Jackson Pollock is the next figure that must be examined in this story. Hans Namuth was a German photographer based in New York who documented artists and their studios in an admirably systematic fashion. In 1950 he filmed some black and white footage of Pollock in action with the aid of Paul Falkenberg. When it came to choosing some accompanying music for those ten minutes of footage – today legendary in that they document perfectly his ritual *dripping* technique and his concept of *all over* paining – Falkenberg came up with the idea of using Indonesian music. Pollock, according to an anecdote by Peter Niklas Wilson – which appears in the liner notes of the Feldman CD *Something Wild: Music for Film* (2001) by Ensemble Recherche – was scandalised, and said: 'But Paul, that's exotic music. I'm an American painter!' Then someone suggested asking John Cage. However, he declined, having never felt any affinity with Pollock's work or Abstract Expressionism in general, not to mention his contempt for the man's personality. He offered the job to his friend Feldman instead, who got straight to work. The result was, in 1951 (the year it was premiered in MoMA) a piece for two cellos, considered by its author as a sort of 'music for choreography' (this was to do with the way that Pollock moved like a dancer while painting). In exchange Feldman received a line drawing from the painter. The composer paid a visit to his studio in East Hampton and was struck by the fact that the only books he had to hand were about Michelangelo – a conspicuous interest on a background in tradition. In one of his Middelburg lectures, Feldman develops the idea of a Pollock who uses the colours of Mondrian (an idea which I find rather strange). In another instance, he emphasises how when he came up with the idea of *graph notations* he had not only Mondrian in mind, but also Pollock's 'all over' concept of painting.

Despite his interest in the world of Pollock, Feldman confesses – in his most nostalgic, memoir-like text on those pioneering years, 'Give My Regards to Eighth Street', published in 1971 in *Art in America* – that he never liked the term *action painting*, coined by Harold Rosenberg to describe the New York School painters. Rosenberg was one of the most vociferous defenders of the school along with Clement Greenberg (through whom Feldman met de Kooning) and the aforementioned Ashbery, Hess and O'Hara.

When explaining his 1963 piece *De Kooning* for another Namuth/Falkenberg documentary of twelve minutes' duration, a piece 'for horn, percussion, piano/celesta, violin and cello', Feldman refers to the Dutch painter frequently, and his wife, the painter and critic Elaine de Kooning (inventor of the term 'Abstract Impressionism'), insisting on his tragic air, and underlines the fact that de Kooning was the most European painter of the group. Nevertheless, we do not find many references to his friend's painting either in Feldman's writing or in his conversations. What he does refer to, through numerous anecdotes, is his attitude towards life and art and his (difficult) personality. In the end, however, it is hard to see how de Kooning is present in any of Feldman's music – even in the music for the film. During one of his Middelburg lectures, Feldman recalls the Dutch origins of Willem de Kooning, placing him in context with Mondrian, but at the same time joking a little: 'If anything, I'm perhaps the only Dutch composer in Holland because I feel I'm out of Mondrian and Willem de Kooning. I feel I'm out of that tradition; serious and experimental', and a little later he describes the painter as having 'a fantastic conscience', and as 'a leader, one of the leaders of our circle'. And again: 'I grew up not with composers but with painters. […] Part of my education as a composer was listening to de Kooning for hours and hours talking about painting. […] I structure silence the way painters structure space'. Throughout those lectures given in Middelburg in the Netherlands, Feldman returns again and again to the Dutch triad of Mondrian, de Kooning and also Van Gogh.

Franz Kline, creator of potent compositions where everything is reduced to a play of black and white, is one of the most coherent painters of that great generation. Feldman also paid homage to him, in this instance with a piece entitled *For Franz Kline* (1962), composed just after the death of his friend. That same year, Kline had done the cover – a stark calligraphic composition – for a joint Feldman and Earle Brown LP released under the Time Records label. In a text from 1972 entitled 'A Compositional Problem', Feldman emphasises his interest in how this painter of black and white introduces colour – he calls it an 'intrusion' – to some of the canvases that make up his beautiful final cycle of works. He compares it to the way that the instruments 'that produce the colour' intrude in music. However, beyond Kline's formal questions, he was impressed even more, as he points out in 'Give My Regards to Eighth Street', by what he would regard as a moral lesson: his conscience of 'the integrity of the creative act'. In his radio conversations with Cage, he recalls, in passing, that like the majority of painters, Kline listened to music while painting and his preference was for Wagner.

Morton Feldman/Earle Brown
1962
Vinyl LP cover,
Time Records
Cover image: Franz Kline

Feldman's relationship with Philip Guston, whom he had met at Cage's home, was very close, closer than with any other artist. With Cage he had contemplated a red Guston painting in the 1951 MoMA group exhibition *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*, which affected him profoundly. Cage and Guston, for their part, had met in Rome in 1948. We are indebted to Friedman, again, for the following testimony: when he tried to make a critical analysis of Guston, Feldman made it very clear that he was dealing with 'not only his best friend but the best living American painter'. Friedman also points out how Guston and Feldman treated their Jewish background in very different ways: the former indifferent, the latter emphatically conscious of it. In 'Liners' the composer insists on the significance of his friendship with the painter: 'my closest friend who has contributed so much to my life in art'. *Piano Piece (To Philip Guston)*, dates from the following year and, as he would tell Orton and Bryars: 'It's a piece that's involved very much with touch if you play it'.

Guston's work from his mid-career shows striking parallels with that of Feldman, who found him 'sublime' and 'elegant' in his capacity to create 'atmospheres'. One should contemplate these quiet paintings, listening to his piano music: the isolated notes, surrounded by great silence; experience these great extensions of painting into sound, completed stroke by stroke, note by note. Wilfrid Mellers, in a book which has gone through several editions, *Music in a New Found Land* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962) offers a great description of Feldman's music for piano during the 1950s: 'Music seems to have vanished almost to the point of extinction; yet the little that is left is, like all of Feldman's work, of exquisite musicality; and it certainly presents the American obsession with emptiness completely absolved from fear'. Dore Ashton in her magnificent monograph *Yes, but…: A Critical Study of Philip Guston* (New York: Viking, 1976) further extends the parallels to include drawing when she writes: 'Feldman concentrated on the *pianissimi*, tracing delicate configurations that Guston was to find analogous to his own drawings at this time'. And later: 'Feldman […] was a source of contention for Guston'. The composer owned a painting called *Attar* (1953), after which Dore Ashton names one of the chapters of her Guston monograph. He also owned another smaller work, from 1952, as well as a collection of drawings. Feldman published his text 'Philip Guston: The Last Painter' in *Art in America* in 1966. In it he equates the role played by Cage in his life with that of Guston, and speaks at length about *Attar* (see page 67), which he admired for its 'complete absence of weight' contemplating it as he wrote. For many years, Feldman and Guston saw each other practically on a daily basis; sometimes accompanied by Varèse. Renate Ponsold took some very beautiful photographs of Feldman and Guston in the latter's studio in 1966. Later the painter would return to figuration, the first solo

show of Guston's new style being held at the Marlborough Gallery in 1970. This coincided with the sudden and definitive rupture of their friendship when Feldman, not knowing quite how to respond to Guston, who suddenly asked him what he thought of his new style, asked for a minute to consider his answer… Nevertheless, in 1978, some eight years later and only a few months before his death, Guston painted *Friend – To M.F.* (see page 65), a tender portrait of the composer in his new style. Feldman would later refer to the portrait as 'wonderful' in a conversation with Francesco Pellizzi. In Robert Storr's opinion, it should be seen as 'an image of their mutually regretted estrangement'. Feldman read the *Kaddish* at his funeral, in accordance with the wishes of the deceased. And in 1981, the composer wrote an excellent prologue to the catalogue for *Last Works*, the posthumous solo exhibition of Guston's work in the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C. His piece *For Philip Guston* dates from 1984 and was one of Feldman's most ambitious works, of four and a half hours in duration. Alan Rich, in the liner notes of the CD produced in 1997 with the Californian EAR Unit, calls it a 'gigantic continuum' in which one can appreciate 'this same obsessive exactitude as in the Guston painting' (referring to *Painting* (1954) in the New York MoMA collection). He calls it: 'music of an outward immobility and inward irresistible propulsion'. The deaths of O'Hara and Guston seem to inhabit *Three Voices* (1982), where once again we find a hint of the former's poem *Wind*, and where the two playback speakers appeared to the composer to be like funeral slabs.

In 1960, a line drawing by Guston was used for the cover of Feldman's first LP, the second in a Columbia series entitled 'New Directions in Music'. The back cover featured a text by Frank O'Hara, which we have recovered (see Page 86), in which he referred to the 'metaphysical place' occupied by the composer, 'this land where Feldman's pieces live'. One should read this text alongside the obituary that Feldman wrote for the poet-critic where he writes the beautiful line: '[he] seemed to dance from canvas to canvas, from party to party, from poem to poem'. And listen to *The O'Hara Poems* (1962), and *For Frank O'Hara* (1973), the two works that were inspired by *Wind*, the poem he dedicated to Feldman.

Morton Feldman and Philip Guston in Guston's New York studio c.1965
Photo: Renate Ponsold

It was through Guston that Feldman came into contact with Mercedes Matter, daughter of the modernist painter Arthur B. Carles, disciple of Hans Hoffman and Alexander Archipenko, assistant to Fernand Léger, and wife of the Swiss photographer and graphic artist Herber Matter. A painter in her own right, who worked in the realm of 'action painting' – one can find some examples of her work among the pages of *It Is* magazine – Mercedes Matter is remembered primarily for founding the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture in 1964. Originally situated in a loft in Greenwich Village, it later moved to a building on Eighth Street which housed an early incarnation of the Whitney Museum. Feldman gave classes there, as did Edwin Dickinson, Guston, David Hare, Alex Katz, Milton Resnick, George Spaventa, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Esteban Vicente, and the art historian Meyer Shapiro.

It was very much a 1950s atmosphere, about surviving on the values in which they believed in, knowing that they would be held up for scrutiny by the following generation. In 1969, Feldman was made Dean of the New York Studio School – paradoxically, as he had never taught music there – and held that role until 1971, when he began to teach at the State University of New York in Buffalo, where in 1974 the post of Edgard Varèse Chair of Composition was created for him.

The formal and conceptual similarities between Philip Guston's work and the wonderful paintings produced in the 1950s by Esteban Vicente have always been clear to me. In Madrid, Paris, Barcelona and Ibiza, Vicente had shared the same concerns as the decisive *Generación del 27* and would become, in his 'second life', one of the longest surviving members of the New York School. Feldman met Vicente in the 1950s and later they were contemporaries at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. The composer owned some of his collages, one of which he describes as 'Kooning-like' but 'absolutely sensational' nevertheless, in his conversation about Wolpe with Austin Clarkson. On one occasion, in 1998, I asked Vicente about Feldman in his New York studio, next to Central Park. He seemed surprised by my question about someone whom he remembered (I have my notes beside me as I write this text): 'as a man who was absolutely grey, and who no-one took very seriously'. I did not get much more out of him. 'The really great composer – he added almost grudgingly – was my friend Stefan Wolpe, a contemporary of mine at the Black Mountain College'. I have to admit that, up until then, I had never heard of the German, and wondered to myself 'this Spanish *hidalgo* is a good friend to his friends…'. I wrote down the name in any case. A few months later, in a record shop in Budapest, I realised my error when I came across a 1995 release from the aforementioned Ensemble Recherche entitled *For Stefan Wolpe*. The CD contains music by Wolpe himself, as well as Cage, Elliott Carter, and a young German composer called Johannes Schöllhorn.

Feldman's relationship with Rothko, in this tale, is somewhat different. A year after the painter committed suicide, Jean and Dominique de Ménil (the latter mentioned above in relation to *Six Painters*) asked the composer to write as a tribute what was to rightly become one of his most well known pieces, *Rothko Chapel* (1971). Feldman composed it in the French village of Pontpoint, in his sponsors' peaceful mansion beside the river Oise, and it was premiered in the chapel in Houston for where it was created on 9 April 1972. The composer wrote a brief text about the work, where he begins contemplating the chapel as 'a spiritual environment created by the American painter Mark Rothko as a place for contemplation where men and women of faiths, or of none, may meditate in silence, in solitude or celebration together'. In the same text he explains how he approached the composition of the piece, and concludes: 'I envisioned an immobile procession not unlike the friezes on Greek temples', a phrase that brings to my mind the immobility of Satie's *Socrate*, a piece whose importance was clear to Feldman. The music of *Rothko Chapel*, as he later explains to Orton and Bryars, 'begins in a synagoguesque type of way'. He subsequently becomes more abstract and confesses to them how much he identified with this final Rothko, who he would see frequently (he later became a member of the board of the Mark Rothko Foundation). He also described to them the very diverse elements which he embedded in the work, among them a fragment which he composed on the day that Stravinsky died. In conclusion, Rothko remains the artist with whom it is possible to detect most analogies with Feldman's work. I say this not in the strictly musical sense – I am not a musicologist – but in terms of attitude. Both occupy an absolutely central position in their respective fields, and today are considered even more important in those fields (this viewpoint is controversial) than Pollock and Cage. Rothko and Feldman, both reiterative, but capable nevertheless of constant change; both offering radical purity, and ultimately heroic; both modern, yet aspiring towards the transcendental, expressing fundamental human emotions through the traditional means of sound and colour. Transfixed by Rembrandt, by Matisse, or – although this applies more to Rothko – by Bonnard. In the same conference in Middelburg where he refers extensively to Pollock, Feldman says: 'The other painter that influenced me was Rothko. Rothko taught me how to keep the stasis intact and still find the energy for motion'. And in another instance: 'Rothko was a rabbinical, erudite Jew, intensely well-read, just as Guston'. And on this same note, writes Brian O'Doherty: 'Rothko's pictures and Feldman's music have a persistent afterlife in memory – there is nothing to remember but that expansion, that radiance'. 'Expansion', 'radiance' – words that I would equally extend to Bonnard.

Morton Feldman at kiosk, Karlsruhe, Germany. March 1974
photo: Jan Williams

Reading the excellent obituary that Feldman wrote for Stravinsky, published in *Essays*, one understands how Feldman and Rothko – who had in the 1930s painted works influenced by the *Novecento* movement and by Filippo de Pisis in particular – shared with Stravinsky a love for Italy, and especially for Venice. 'It is not difficult to understand his love for Venice; a city that has the same immediate all-encompassing sense of space that characterises his entire work. It is enough to look from any window over the Grand Canal, to have everything there in front of you. What we see from the window is the most picturesque and steady human movement. Not only the promenades on either side of the canal, but also boats of all shapes and sizes floating up and down. With all this bustle the orchestration is at once measuredly encompassing and transparent. Clarity, which Stendhal so much insists on, here becomes reality. Little by little the movement becomes almost static in its effortless, multi-faceted continuity. It becomes Stravinsky…' (2)

In one of his Middelburg classes, Feldman highlights his debt to Rothko, especially with regard to notions of scale and proportion, and also to another painter of similar work, Barnett Newman, the composer's erstwhile neighbour and conversation partner when they lived in a building on Nineteenth Street in 1956. Through another one of these classes, we know that he had hoped for Newman to participate in the *Six Painters* exhibition in Houston, but 'there weren't enough paintings'. Today in Houston, one can view a sculpture by Newman outside the Rothko chapel.

The painter Cy Twombly, living in his adopted city of Rome and also collected by the de Ménils, was not to be the subject of a Feldman composition. However, he saw him regularly in the circle of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, owned some of his drawings, and, after visiting him in Rome in 1977 was hugely enthusiastic about the development of his work, which up until then he had not had much opportunity to see in the United States – 'I was just knocked over' he told Stuart Morgan for *Art Scribe* a year after the visit. Both men's work is a rereading of the western cultural tradition, from the point of view of the *tabula rasa* of modernity. In a conference in Toronto (on 17 April 1982), Feldman spoke extensively about Twombly, who he described as an 'exquisite painter', and how certain technical details to do with the use of the piano pedal used in *Triadic Memories*, had been inspired by the painter's technique of using gesso.

There were other artists who belonged to or revolved around Abstract Expressionism that Feldman became acquainted with, and he mentions them on various occasions (although sometimes only in passing of course): William Baziotes, Norman Bluhm, Paul Brach, Sherman Drexler, Jane Freilicher, Michael Goldberg, the sculptor David Hare, Howard Kanowitz, Lee Krasner, Alfred Leslie (also a filmmaker), Nicholas Marsicano, Joan Mitchell, Robert Motherwell ('Motherwell's shape was absolute perfection', he told Stuart Morgan), Philip Pavia (sculptor, treasurer and chronicler of The Club, who had the composer collaborate with his wonderful magazine *It Is*, published from 1958-1965 and really an extension of that circle which I have already mentioned in relation to Mercedes Matter), Ad Reinhardt, Larry Rivers (originally a jazz musician), Clyfford Still, Mark Tobey (whom he met through Motherwell), Bradley Walker Tomlin and Jack Tworkov, to name a few.

Feldman admired the work of Sonja Sekula, a Swiss painter who always remained somewhat in the shadows, on the edges of Abstract Expressionism, to whom he would dedicate a short but potent text. Close to André Breton, Joseph Cornell and other Surrealists, she also lived for a spell in the same building (mentioned above) where Cage, Lippold and Feldman resided until it was demolished in 1954. Sonja Sekula's work was unique, oscillating between Surrealism, action painting and the style of Paul Klee. It is worth remembering at this point that in his writings Feldman makes enthusiastic references to the universe of Klee. This enthusiasm was shared by Boulez and it is one of the few points Feldman had in common with this man with whom he got on so badly, calling him (with an obvious degree of malice) a 'magnificent academician', and comparing him to his compatriot the *tachiste* Georges Mathieu. Boulez, like Karlheinz Stockhausen, was one of Feldman's obsessions, in the negative sense. The American could not stand Boulez's attitude to systems. In correspondences between Cage and Boulez there are numerous references to this tension between Feldman and Boulez. In a letter dating from 1951, Cage writes to the Frenchman that Feldman is mortified by the fact that Boulez does not like Mondrian, and in another later letter, the French composer, in reference to Feldman's *Intersections*, criticises how 'they let themselves go dangerously to the *seduction of graphism alone*'. To this Boulez then adds, contemptuously: 'we are musicians and not painters'.

Boulez was always, alas, anti-Satie, a point which Cage underlines in his militant Satie text *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

Feldman was always interested in the unsystematic approach (in contrast to Boulez) of the Abstract Expressionists and their freedom of spirit, but also in how they were the heirs of a European tradition. This is particularly clear in the cases of de Kooning and Rothko, European by birth, or of Twombly, European by adoption (somewhat like Ezra Pound). In the same way that he was interested in Wolpe, Varèse or the piano tradition, in these painters he perceived this same sense of heritage. However, having said that, Feldman was conscious of the specifically American character of the abstract generation, something which he links to his own interest in certain 19th century American landscape painting of wide open spaces – he spoke about this to Walter Zimmermann in 1975 – and in this tradition of the void which he detects in the literature of that period, i.e. Herman Melville (an important read also for Guston), Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry David Thoreau (who Cage liked). With Feldman, 'we are in the region of Wallace Stevens' *American Sublime*', writes Wilfrid Mellers in his book mentioned above.

Feldman met Robert Rauschenberg through Cage. In one of his Middelburg lectures, he recalled some *White Paintings* by Rauschenberg which hung on the walls of the composer's apartment, and the play of light and shadow on them, and how in this void was the embryo of 'the first silence piece'. A black combine painting by Rauschenberg from 1952-1953, was the first work of art that Feldman owned. He bought it, on the suggestion of the artist, on that first visit which took place in 1953. The artist suggested that he pay whatever he happened to have in his pocket at the time – some sixteen dollars as it turned out. In 1955, Feldman gave a concert in the Egan Gallery for a one man show of Rauschenberg's *Red Paintings*. In 1958 Rauschenberg produced the décor for Merce Cunningham's dance performance *Summerspace* based on Feldman's *Ixion*. Many years later, describing his work *The Viola in My Life IV* (1971), Feldman commented that with this piece he had wanted to work – and he makes the same reflection in regard to *Rothko Chapel* – 'somewhat the way Robert Rauschenberg uses photographs in his paintings'. However, by that stage the painter and the composer had gone their separate ways many years before. In later interviews with Feldman, he pulls no punches when referring to the evolution of Rauschenberg towards something which he found too *chic*. Ultimately, although there are collage-like aspects to Feldman's work, Cage would always be more Rauschenbergian than him.

Jasper Johns was another transitional painter on the cusp of Pop Art that Feldman met early on. He admired his secretive side, and was much more interested in his later developments than those of Rauschenberg. In one of his Middelburg lectures, Feldman stated: 'I think the way I work is also very similar to Jasper Johns', highlighting the notion of variation in the work of the painter, and his way of returning to certain constructs, and duplicating them. In relation to this theme, see Steven Johnson's acute insights in his essay on Feldman and Johns in the above-mentioned 2002 publication.

Morton Feldman in Rome with Accademia di Francia (Villa Medici) in background, Rome, Italy. 1968
Photographer unknown

During one of his conferences in Middelburg, Feldman makes reference to a painter normally associated with Minimalism, Frank Stella. He describes his 1958 painting *Morro Castle* as 'magnificent'. In a conversation with Stuart Morgan, he mentions Al Held, an Abstract Expressionist at the beginning of his artistic career. He was interested in the fact that his musical work, towards the end of the 1950s, was a decisive influence on Larry Poons, who was training as a musician at the time, and had studied in the Juilliard School. In a 1986 conference in the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, he pays tribute to the neon world of Dan Flavin, an artist to whom Francesco Pellizzi had introduced him. We also know that he had contact with Allan Kaprow. However, it is clear that in the artistic sense, Feldman precedes Minimalism, and that its systematic and later conceptual rigour were not for him. He makes no references, for example, to Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Sol LeWitt or Richard Serra. Brian O'Doherty, the critic and artist, who moved from Abstract Expressionism towards Conceptual art, tells a story about a meeting that he organised in his house, which did not have any major outcomes, between the composer and Mel Bochner, Eva Hesse, Sol LeWitt (who gave a present of a triptych on paper to Feldman), and Robert Smithson. In 1967, the same O'Doherty compiled his portable museum box *Aspen 5+6*, which included a record (recorded by Max Neuhaus) of Feldman's *King of Denmark*, with Cage's *Fontana Mix-Feed* on the flipside. The other contributions came from an enormous range of generations and means of expression: Roland Barthes, Samuel Beckett, Mel Bochner, William S. Burroughs, Michel Butor, Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, Naum Gabo, Dan Graham, Richard Huelsenbeck, George Kubler, Sol LeWitt, László Moholy Nagy, Robert Morris, Robert Rauschenberg, Hans Richter, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Tony Smith, and Susan Sontag.

Pop Art, despised by the majority of the composer's friends (I can recall Esteban Vicente's tirades of abuse towards the movement), was not to Feldman's taste either. During my investigations I discovered a photo of him standing in front of a painting by Lichtenstein, but on the few occasions where he cited Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg, David Hockney or Gilbert and George, it was usually negative, distant or tinged with irony.

In terms of his position towards minimalist music, one need look no further than a comment that Feldman made to Thomas Moore, who records it in the edition of *Sonus* that came out in spring 1984: 'We had popular music, like Steve Reich or Philip Glass, but they're show business'. This is a notion which, under one guise or another, he repeated on numerous occasions. However, he was interested in some of these composers' works.

In the case of Alex Katz, a great figurative presence, and a creative spirit akin to the principal poets of the New York School (on this subject, see the catalogue of the exhibition that I organised for IMMA in 2008, *Alex Katz New York*) we find his signature at the foot of a set designed for a dance piece by Paul Taylor based on Feldman's *Meridian*. In subsequent years, Taylor continued to collaborate frequently with Katz and Rauschenberg as well as on one occasion with Ellsworth Kelly.

Among the film music composed by Feldman, we find a piece, from 1960-1961, for *The Sin of Jesus*, by the great Swiss-American photographer Robert Frank. It is based on a story by Isaac Babel and was filmed on a farm owned by pop-art sculptor George Segal.

Ronald B. Kitaj, an American painter who in his day was included in the British scene, was, like Katz, another of the rare figurative voices in the second half of the 20th century. A hugely cultured, literary character, who was, like Feldman, full of highly personal insights, his work is littered with homages to his 'lighthouses', his allegory of Pound comes to mind (Feldman had been very pleased to hear that the author of the *Cantos* had attended the Venetian performance of *The King of Denmark*), as do his book cover silk-screens, and his thoughts on what he termed 'diasporism'. It is within this context that he dedicated two handsome homages to Feldman, an oil painting from 1967 and a silk-screen from 1968 entitled *Fifties Grand Swank*.

The Italian Michelangelo Pistoletto, one of the main representatives of *arte povera*, makes an appearance here as the creator of the sets (the composer found them a little too 'sixties') for the 1977 production of an opera by Feldman in collaboration with Samuel Beckett called *Neither* (1976-1977). Beckett was a literary figure of vital importance to Feldman and the opera premiered in the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome. (It was during this spell in Rome that Feldman visited Twombly).

Despite belonging to a much younger generation, another Italian (turned New Yorker), the 'transavanguardista' Francesco Clemente, was very close to Feldman from the start of the 1980s. They had met through their mutual friend, Francesco Pellizzi, with whose magazine *RES – Anthropology and Aesthetic* the composer had collaborated on various occasions. With the assistance of Bunita Marcus, Feldman organised a series of concerts in Clemente's studio (through his friendship with the composer, Clemente had acquired a piano), each one with its own lovingly designed invitation card.

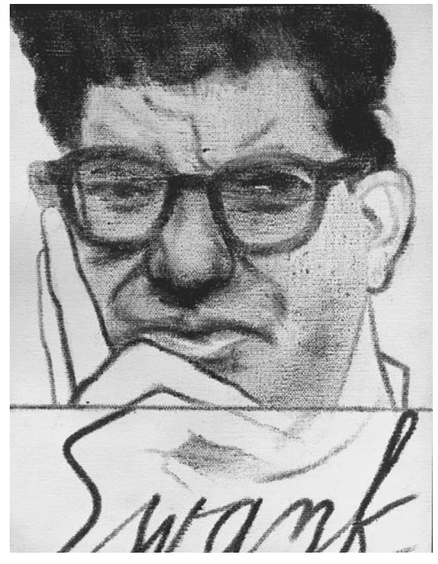
At one of these concerts, *Palais de Mari* (1986), a piano piece that Feldman dedicated to Clemente, was heard for the first time. It is a piece which is very close to silence and one which Barbara Monk-Feldman likened to the composer's love for Degas' lightness of touch. Clemente produced a watercolour of the composer, and a large format allegory in his memory. During one of his Middelburg lectures, Feldman makes reference to Clemente (he owned a watercolour by the artist entitled *The Magic Wand* [1987]) through some lines of verse by Marianne Moore, and compares his art to that of Francis Picabia, a painter who, after years of purgatorial existence, was to re-emerge to great critical acclaim.

Feldman surely had Clemente in mind – also Sandro Chia and others – when he said, during one of his Middelburg lectures: 'today the marvellous young German and young Italian painters are all living in New York'.

From 1976 onwards, Feldman became obsessed by eastern carpets, especially those from Anatolia, and we include some of these in the present exhibition. Bunita Marcus (who writes about them) shared this experience with him, and knows how much they influenced his great sound tapestries. The composer saw these as closer to Jasper Johns, than to Rothko. In 'Crippled Symmetry', a text from 1981, which refers to the work of the same name, Feldman explains how carpets taught him how to work using repetition and variation (*Why Patterns?* has a similar inspiration). He goes on to fantasise about the possibility that Matisse was familiar with those works in the Louvre that had awoken his passion for collecting textiles, a passion he shared with the British critic David Sylvester. In addition, some entirely new details emerge in the Bunita Marcus text cited above, such as the fact that Feldman was also interested in samplers.

Matisse is a name that Feldman mentions again and again. In one of his Middelburg lectures, we find the following wonderfully enigmatic expression: 'I think my music is Matisse, 1905, 1908'.

Obviously there is much more painting, much more art, in Feldman's universe. I have focused here on those painters who were his friends – with the exception, to reiterate, of Mondrian – and on those from whom he learned. However, one could go further and reveal many other things: his astonishment before the 'anonymity' and the 'beauty without a biography' of the Elgin marbles; his admiration, shared with Guston, for Piero della Francesca, who apparently was Guston's favourite painter – in a conversation with Pellizzi he describes with emotion his visit to the museum dedicated to him in Borgo San Sepulcro – his admiration, also, for Titian, for Rembrandt, for Watteau, for Ingres – particularly his portrait of a woman in the Frick Collection. His comparison (obviously a jibe, but in any case well made) of Darius Milhaud's work with the more bourgeois paintings of Édouard Vuillard. And there is much more: his perspicacious references to Eugène Delacroix – as learned a painter as Feldman was a composer, of whom he refers to by quoting some lines from Baudelaire, and of whom he recalls the atelier – now a museum – in a tranquil corner of Paris that inspired *I Met Heine on the Rue Fürstemberg* (1971), Claude Monet – 'the first painter to look into the light' – the 'monumental coldness' of Paul



R. B. Kitaj
Morton Feldman
1967
Oil on canvas
50.5 x 50.5 cm
Private Collection

Cézanne, Fernand Léger, Giorgio de Chirico, Kazimir Malevich – during his *graph notations* period Feldman also worked with blank squares – the 'timelessness' of Alberto Giacometti… And so on, dozens and dozens of further names could be cited, testament to a visual memory of extraordinary power that equalled his literary memory, not to mention his musical one. It is crystal clear that for Feldman, painting did not begin with his generation, and this should be considered in relation to his wide-ranging knowledge of literature – with particular emphasis on French literature, showing a special preference for Stendhal and Marcel Proust – and of course his profound musical knowledge that spanned the centuries, from Josquin to Debussy, via Bach, Mozart (of paramount importance to Rothko), Beethoven, Schubert and Sibelius.

In 'Crippled Symmetry', a text I have already mentioned in relation to his interest in oriental tapestries, one finds, in my opinion, the best synthesis possible of the mature Feldman's interest in an art form, i.e. painting, which had challenged him since the beginning of the 1950s: 'Stasis, as it is utilised in painting, is not traditionally part of the apparatus of music. Music can achieve aspects of immobility, or the illusion of it: the Magritte-like world Satie evokes, or the *floating sculpture* of Varèse. The degrees of stasis, found in a Rothko or a Guston, were perhaps the most significant elements that I brought to my music from painting'.

Today, Feldman's fame continues to grow, not only among composers and music lovers, but also among visual artists. In my own country of Spain, where in 2009 the Casa Encendida arts centre in Madrid put on a Schubert-Feldman cycle of concerts, I would cite the abstract painter José María Yturralde, whose frequent meditations on Feldman were published in the catalogue accompanying his retrospective at the IVAM, Valencia in 1999, writing that 'apparently Morton Feldman was much more influenced by artists than they were by him'; the multifaceted Ángel Guache, author of a short story about Feldman, and very Feldman-like in his *Geometric Poems* (which, despite the title, are actually canvases); and, more recently, Eduardo Martín del Pozo who has produced a cycle of paintings entitled *Crippled Symmetry*, which has already been shown in Spain on a couple of occasions, and is inspired by the work of the same name, a cycle on which he has written some very astute notes. Another painter active in Spain is the Argentinian-born Alejandro Corujeira. Always very interested in the world of music, his painting, *Melodías inventadas* (Invented melodies) from 2009, is explained to Kevin Power in the catalogue of his latest solo exhibition in Madrid: 'In this exhibition, there is a painting called *Melodías inventadas* which seems to have been inspired by the music of Morton Feldman. I use the word 'seems' because the project was not *a priori*, I did not set out to make a picture inspired by Feldman's music, but as the painting evolved, his music was playing in my studio, particularly *Patterns in a Chromatic Field*, for cello and piano, and when it was finished, I felt that it had an audible quality that was not unlike the vibrations that Feldman's works unleash'. Chris Villars (who I mentioned towards the beginning of this text) has dedicated a section of his website to homages – some his own – which form a testament to Feldman's fame on an international level: paintings by Canadian artist Mario Côté, by the Belgians Eric de Nie and Bart Vandevijvere, or the Dutch Ton van Os, to highlight just a few. Also in the Netherlands, in the wake of his compatriot Mondrian, but also of Judd, one should mention Steven Aalders, and his one man show *Vertical Thoughts*, held in 2001 in SMAK, Ghent. In France, Jean-Charles Blais, one of the leaders of the *Figuration libre* in the 1980s – the French equivalent, more or less, of the Italian 'transavanguardia' – is the author, in a very stripped down style (compared to his earlier work) of *Superimposition – After Morton Feldman and Philip Guston* (2002). In Germany, it is under this same Feldman spirit that the visual works, in black and white, of flautist Eberhard Blum emerge, a member since 1973 of the 'Morton Feldman and soloists' ensemble. In 2005, *Reforzate*, a group of subtle drawings by Jürgen Partenheimer, is inspired by Feldman's *Only* (1947). In 2008, a dance work choreographed by Karole Armitage with sets by David Salle, *Connoisseurs of Chaos*, was performed for the first time at the Joyce Theater in New York. The work was based on Feldman's *Patterns in a Chromatic Field* and represents another addition, and by no means a minor one, to the far reaching legacy of Feldman.

JUAN MANUEL BONET

Translated by Jonathan Brennan

(opposite)
Francesco Clemente
For Morton Feldman
2000
Oil on linen
243.8 x 487.7 cm
Private Collection

NOTES

1. Morton Feldman, Middelburg lecture, 2 July 1985.
2. Feldman's obituary for Stravinsky, the original of which survives only in Italian, is included in German (but not in English) in *Essays*. In contrast, it is not included in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*. For the purposes of this essay, the German text has been translated into English. It exists also as a French version by Jean-Yves Bosseur, found in his edition (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998) of the composer's *Écrits et paroles*.

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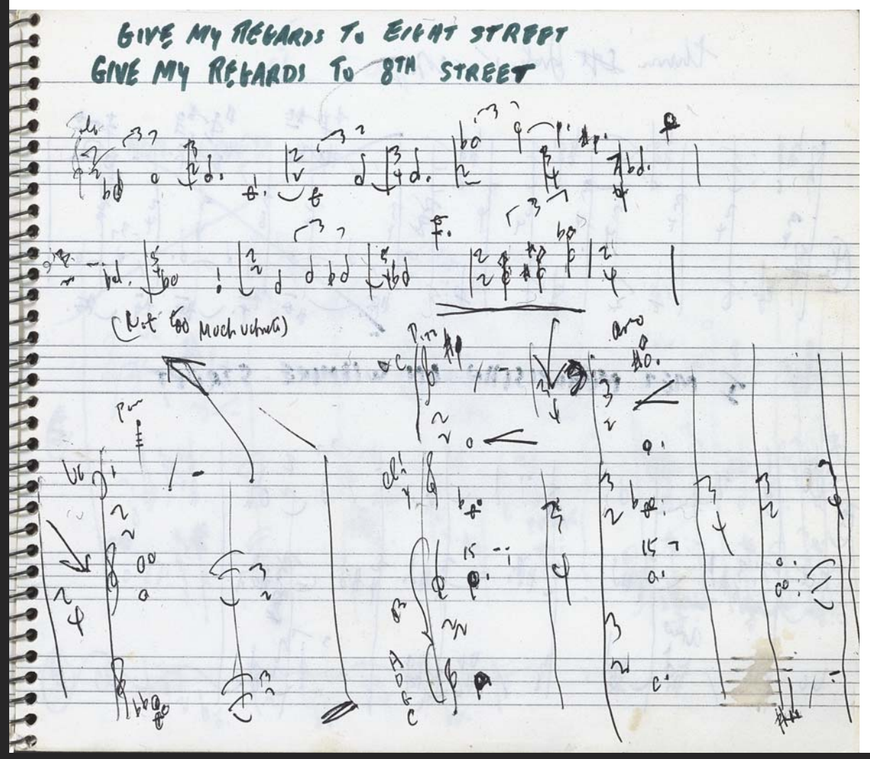
Morton Feldman at the Perisphere,
New York World s Fair, New York,
USA, 1939
Photographer unknown

Morton Feldman
Give my Regards to Eighth Street
undated
Sketch in notebook (notebook 14), p. 13
17.8 x 20.1 cm, pencil on paper
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

Morton Feldman

GIVE MY REGARDS

TO EIGHTH STREET



'BUT TO TELL IT ALL JUST AS IT HAPPENED BECAUSE OF COURSE A GREAT DEAL HAD HAPPENED NOT ONLY TO ME AND TO EVERYBODY ELSE I KNEW BUT TO EVERYTHING ELSE. ONCE MORE PARIS IS NOT AS IT WAS.' **Gertrude Stein**

Not long ago I saw the Elgin Marbles. I didn't faint, as they say Shelley did, but I certainly had to sit down. Nothing knocks us out like this anonymity – this beauty without a biography. The artist himself loves the idea. What artist hasn't longed to get away from the human effort he puts into his work? What artist doesn't have the illusion that the Greeks did their work without human effort? Even the 'timelessness' of Giacometti seems to us more a reference to a buried civilisation than to a buried colleague. Nietzsche with his Greeks, John Cage with his Zen – always this need for an idealised, depersonalised art.

Saint-Beuve, for example, was so carried away by a passion for Classicism that he never said a good word about Balzac, Stendhal, Baudelaire or Flaubert. The critic's ideal has always been the process without the artist. If it wasn't Classicism, it was Expressionism or Cubism – whatever it is; the artist gets in his way. More and more today there is this feeling of 'By all means, let's have art, but no names, please.'

But the 1950s in New York have to do with names, names, names. That's why they're worth writing about.

When I met John Cage in 1950, I was twenty-four years old. He was living then on the top floor of an old building on the East River Drive and Grand Street. Two large rooms, with a sweeping expanse of the river encircling three sides of the apartment. Spectacular. And hardly a piece of furniture in it.

Richard Lippold had a studio next door. Sonja Sekula, an unusually gifted painter (she reminded me of Elisabeth Bergner), lived on the floor below. Soon after John and I met, an apartment became vacant on the second floor, and I too moved into 'Bosa's Mansion', as it was called in honour of our landlord. It was great fun, a sort of pre-hippie community. But instead of drugs, we had art.

There was sometimes more activity in the hallways than our studios, what with John running into my place with a new idea for a piece, or me rushing into his. Visitors too were shifted from floor to floor. I met Henry Cowell in this way. Cowell came to visit John, and John brought him down to meet me. He sat down at my piano, played a few of his pieces, and talked for hours. What a delightful and kind man he was.

One day there was a knock at my door. It was John. 'I'm going over to see a young painter called Robert Rauschenberg. He's marvellous, and his work is marvellous. You must meet him.' Five minutes later we were both in John's Model A Ford, on the way to Rauschenberg's studio on Fulton Street. Rauschenberg was working on a series of black paintings. There was one big canvas I couldn't stop looking at.

'Why don't you buy it?' Rauschenberg said.
'What do you want for it?'
'Whatever you've got in your pocket.'

I had sixteen dollars and some change, which he gleefully accepted. We immediately put the painting on top of the Model A, went back to 'Bosa's Mansion' and hung it on the wall. That was how I acquired my first painting.

One day it was arranged that John, Lippold and I were to be jointly interviewed for a magazine article. I suggested that we get together with the editor at my place for lunch, and said I would make cheese blintzes. John thought it was a wonderful idea, and said he would bring the salad. I told him salad was unnecessary. Lippold then offered to make soup. I finally persuaded him that soup was also unnecessary. Neither of them understood my lunch plans, but finally gave in. As a concession to John, I served the blintzes in his Japanese wooden bowls. Everybody enjoyed them, though I don't think Lippold was ever convinced about the soup. After the lunch, the three of us were photographed together in a hearse belonging to Lippold.

John and I occasionally took a lift uptown in his hearse, which Lippold used to transport his sculptures. Cars on the East River Drive always kept a respectful distance. Once I rode in the back part and amused myself by smiling out the window at passing motorists.

John and I spent a lot of time playing cards. One afternoon my friend Daniel Stern came over with a pair of dice. John came down immediately, and we told him how the game was played. John made his first throw standing up and just dropping the dice to the floor. We explained the procedure was to bend your knees as far down as possible, then throw the dice. This he did. He also started to shake them (we hadn't told him to do that), and before letting them go he cried out, to our amazement, 'Baby needs a new pair of shoes'.

It was Daniel Stern who also introduced us to the world of science-fiction writers. He knew the editor of a science-fiction magazine called *Galaxy*, and took us over to meet him one evening. This editor, because of a phobia about going outdoors, ran the magazine from his apartment. A huge telescope in the middle of the living room brought him closer to whatever was happening in the Stuyvesant Town street below, and a poker game went on almost every night.

For about two years John and I went to this house every week. There were always several card games going. The editor's wife gave the players change from a bus driver's changemaker, which she wore strapped around her waist and worked with lightening speed. There was a lot of talk about science-fiction, also about Dianetics, a currently popular technique that was said to bring back memories of the womb. As I recall, John and I, with our crazy ideas about music, fitted in very well.

One could in those days sit around for hours, talking wild ideas that sounded like the theorising you find in Russian novels. John, of course, was involved with Zen, but in spite of the terseness of Zen, it seemed to fill up the evenings just as well. What was surprising was that John actually invented unprecedented ways to write a music that contained these Zen ideas. One would think I would have gotten more involved with the ideas, since I was so deeply interested in the music they produced. It didn't work that way. The more interested I got in Cage's music, the more detached I became from his ideas. I think this happened to Cage too. As his music developed through the years, he talked less and less about Zen. At most he would give it a sort of warm pat on the shoulder, like some old friend he was leaving in a comfortable hotel bar in Tokyo while he himself began his trek across the Gobi Desert.

John, who lived on practically no money, gave marvellously sumptuous parties. Once I was introduced to a man who looked like a Viennese matinee idol. It was Max Ernst. I had recently read in some book about the bizarre Surrealist behaviour of Ernst. I watched him uneasily all night, waiting for something to happen, but his behaviour remained impeccable.

Another of these parties introduced my music to many of John's friends. The people who came – painters, writers, sculptors – were all new to me. On another evening, David Tudor played some now forgotten piano pieces of mine for Virgil Thomson and George Antheil. This was my first introduction to the musical world. Until then I had known only a few composers my own age.

The faces of these people. The faces of gifted people. Max Ernst. Philip Guston. David Hare. Virgil Thomson. De Kooning. Marvellous faces. Unforgettable faces.

Two of John's most influential lectures were first given at the Artist's Club, located then on Eighth Street. The first lecture was called 'Nothing,' the second, 'Something' – or perhaps it was the other way around. Boulez, on his first visit to America, also spoke at the club. He was totally unknown here; and it was John who arranged this talk. He also took Boulez around to many of the studios. John was so proud of the New York painters.

Then of course there was the Cedar Bar, where I became friends with painters my own age. Mimi and Paul Brach, Joan Mitchell, Mike Goldberg, Howard Kanovitz. I think it was at the Cedar that I first met the poet Frank O'Hara – but O'Hara deserves a volume to himself.

One evening, when I was still a newly arrived immigrant at the Cedar Bar, Elaine and Willem de Kooning casually took my arm as they passed, and said, 'Come on over to Clem Greenberg's.' There were just a few people when we got there. After a while I found myself listening to Greenberg, who was talking about Cézanne. De Kooning showed signs of impatience and seemed to be trying to control his anger. He finally broke out with 'One more word about Cézanne, and I'll punch you in the nose!' Greenberg, very startled, had been saying only very intelligent and perceptive things. It was hard for him to understand that what de Kooning resented was his having ideas on the matter at all. 'You have no right to talk about Cézanne,' de Kooning snapped. 'Only I have the right to talk about Cézanne.'

Walking into Greenberg's, I remember the feeling of not knowing just who anybody was. But as I left that night, I knew who de Kooning was. I didn't feel he was arrogant. I didn't feel he was rude. For me, coming from a background where the emotional life was a buried discourse, this kind of vulnerability was like my introduction not only to the art world, but to reality itself. It took me out of my romantic dream of what it was to be an artist, into the reality of it. It also showed me, through Greenberg, that the real philistines are those that most 'understand you'.

Until the 1950s, the overall trend of American painting was chiefly preoccupied with capturing a certain ethnic, regional flavour, the art itself being a conceptual shortcut to this. Even an artist like Dove seems to come to art somewhat like a gentleman farmer. He has genius, but it is still a sort of landed-gentry genius.

The Whitney Museum in Greenwich Village was the stronghold of this Wasp Bohemia. The beautiful building, taken over now by the New York Studio School, still stands on Eighth Street. I lectured there recently, and while wandering through the upper floors looked in on what used to be Mrs. Whitney's studio. This room was like a page out of a Henry James novel.

In contrast to all this charming Americana, one remembers the power, the impact of those first Abstract Expressionist shows at the Betty Parsons, Egan and Kootz Galleries. In this context, an artist like Bradley Tomlin, who had gone over to the Abstract Expressionists stood out almost like a traitor to his class.

I continually think of Tomlin. I think of him at that table in the Cedar. Aristocratic, aloof, most often alone – still, he came. Occasionally, too, Motherwell, bringing in what Willa Cather somewhere called the 'world shine' – a young Hamilton adjusting his lace cuff at Valley Forge.

As I have written elsewhere, there were two diametrically opposed points of view I had to cope with in those days – one represented by John Cage, the other by Philip Guston. Cage's idea, summed up years later in the words 'Everything is music,' had led him more and more toward a social point of view, less and less toward an artistic one. Like Mayakovsky, who gave up his art for society, Cage gave up art to bring it together with society.

Then there was Guston. He was the arch crank. Very little pleased him. Very little satisfied him. Very little was art. Always aware in his own work of the rhetorical nature of the complication, Guston reduces, reduces, building his own tower of Babel and then destroying it.

Personally I have never understood the term 'Action Painting' as a description of the work of the 1950s. The closest I can come to its meaning is that the painter tries for a less predeterminate structure. This does not mean, however, that there was an indeterminate intention. If indeed there is an emphasis on action, it is the attempt to capture a certain spontaneity always inherent in drawing, and now applied to larger forces. Guston's drawings, for instance, have the look of paintings, while his paintings have the feel of drawings. To varying degrees, one can say the same of much of the work done in the 1950s.

My quarrel with the term 'Action Painting' is that it gave rise to the erroneous idea that the painter, now being 'free', could do 'anything he liked'. But it is not at all true that the more one is free, the more things one has to choose from. Actually, it is the academician who has the alternatives. Freedom is best understood by someone like Rothko, who was free to do only one thing – to make a Rothko – and did so over and over again.

It is not freedom of choice that is the meaning of the 1950s, but the freedom of people to be themselves. This type of freedom creates a problem for us, because we are not free to *imitate* it. In every other era, the Messianic aspect of art has always been sought for in some organising principle, since this principle is, and always has been what saves us in art. What is hard to understand about the 1950s is that these men did not want to be saved in art. That is why, in terms of influence (and who thinks in any other terms?), they have not made what is sometimes called an 'artistic contribution'. What they did was to make the whole notion of artistic contribution a lesser thing in art.

Ryder once said about one of his paintings that it had everything – everything but what he wanted. What Ryder wanted was the 1950s. Ryder was aware that it is not the 'unifying principle' and not the 'artistic achievement' that make the experience behind a work of art. To me it has never seemed an accident that he walked the same pavement on University Place. In temperament, in the emotional tradition of his work, he was the first Abstract Expressionist.

Nietzsche teaches us that only the first five steps of an action can be planned. Beyond that, on any long-range basis, one must invent a dialectic in order to survive. Until the 1950s the artist believed that he could not, must not, improvise as the bull charged – that he must adhere to the formal ritual, the unwasted motion, the accumulated knowledge that reinforces the courage of the matador, and that allows the spectator the ecstasy of feeling that he too, by knowing all that must be known to survive in the bullring, has himself defied the Gods, has himself defied death.

To survive without this dialectic is what the 1950s left us. Before that, American painting had concerned itself with efficient solutions. The Abstract Expressionists were making bigger demands on their gifts and their energies.

Their movement took the world by storm. Nobody now denies it. On the other hand, what are we to do with it? There is no 'tradition.' All we are left with is a question of character. What training have we ever had to understand what is ultimately nothing more than a question of character? What we are trained for is analysis. The entire dialectic of art criticism has come about through the analysis of bad painting.

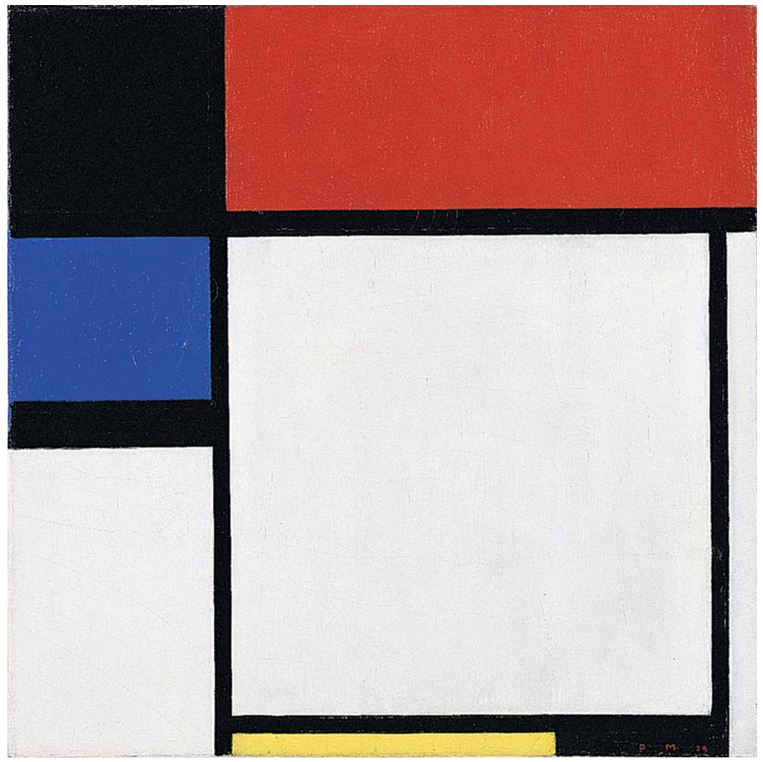
Take Franz Kline. There is no 'plastic experience.' We don't stand back and behold the 'painting.' There is no 'painting' in the ordinary sense, just as there is no 'painting', for that matter, in Piero della Francesca or Rembrandt. There is nothing but the integrity of the creative act. Any detail of the work is sufficient to establish this. The fact that these details accumulate and make what is known as a work of art, proves nothing. What else should an artist do with his time?

Now, almost twenty years later, as I see what happens to work, I ask myself more and more why everybody knows so much about art. Thousands of people – teachers, students, collectors, critics – everybody knows everything. To me it seems as though the artist is fighting a heavy sea in a rowboat, while alongside him a pleasure liner takes all these people to the same place. Every graduate student today knows exactly what degree of 'angst' belongs in a de Kooning, can point out disapprovingly just when he has let up, relaxed. Everybody knows that one Bette Davis movie where she went out of style. It's another bullring, with everybody knowing the rules of the game.

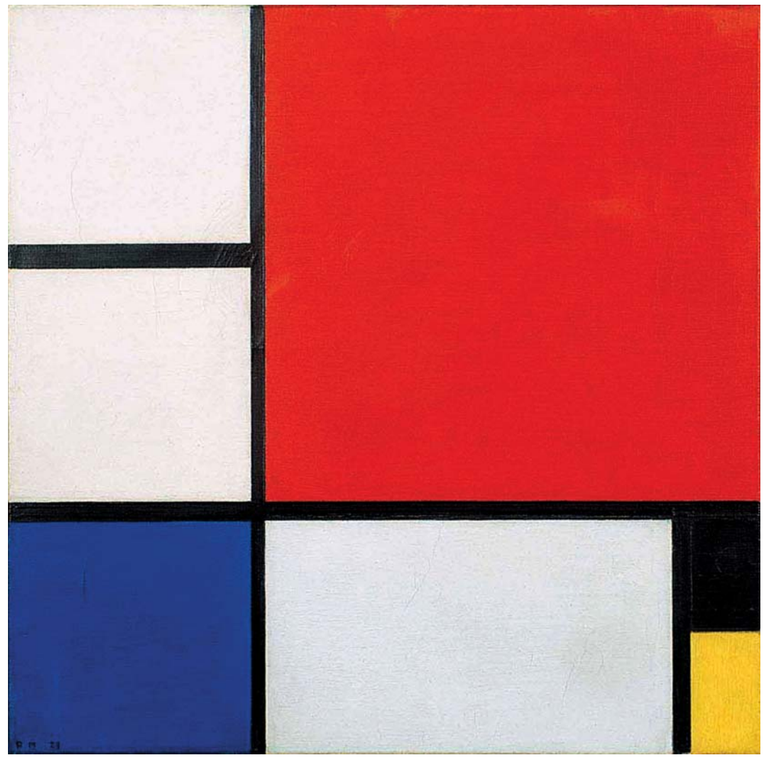
What was great about the 1950s is that for one brief moment – maybe, say, six weeks – nobody understood art. That's why it all happened. Because for a short while, these people were left alone. Six weeks is all it takes to get started. But there's no place now where you can hide for six weeks in this town.

Well, that's what it was like to be an artist. In New York, Paris, or anywhere else.

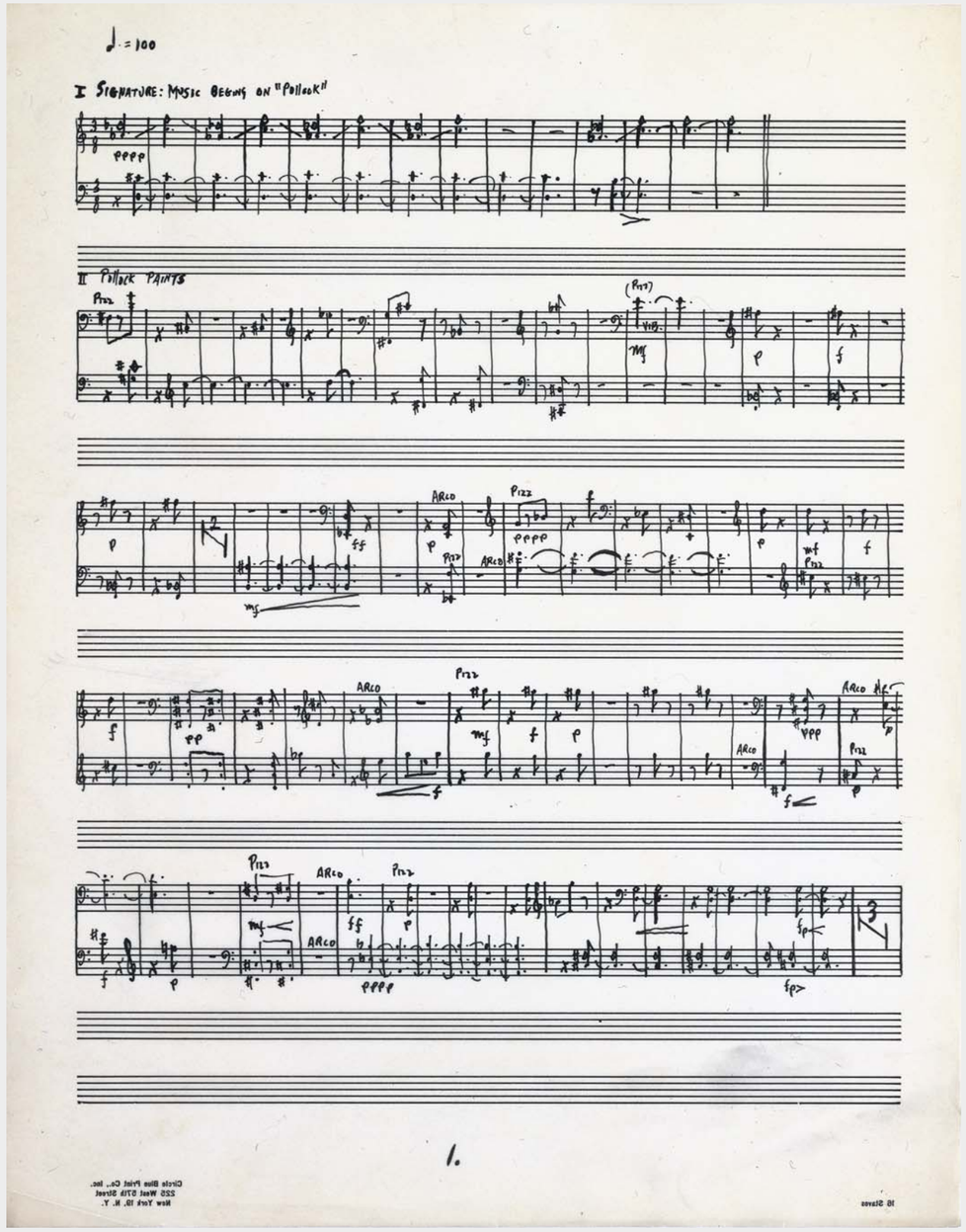
Piet Mondrian *Composition No. III / Fox Trot B with Black, Red, Blue and Yellow*, 1929, Oil on canvas, 45.4 x 45.4 cm



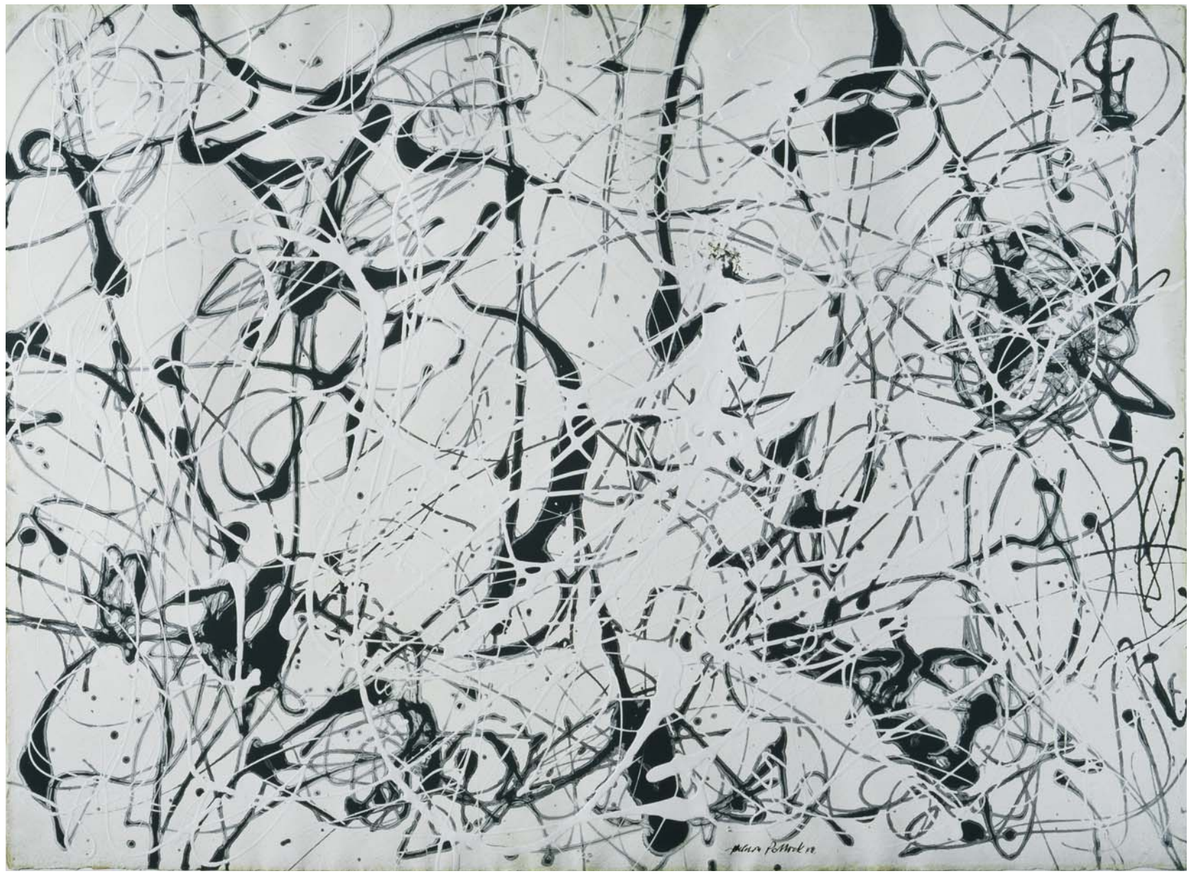
Piet Mondrian *Composition II with Red, Black, Blue and Yellow*, 1929, Oil on canvas, 45.4 x 45.4 cm



Morton Feldman
Jackson Pollock
1951
Fair copy, p. 1
35.6 x 27.8 cm
Morton Feldman Collection,
Paul Sacher Foundation,
Basel, Switzerland

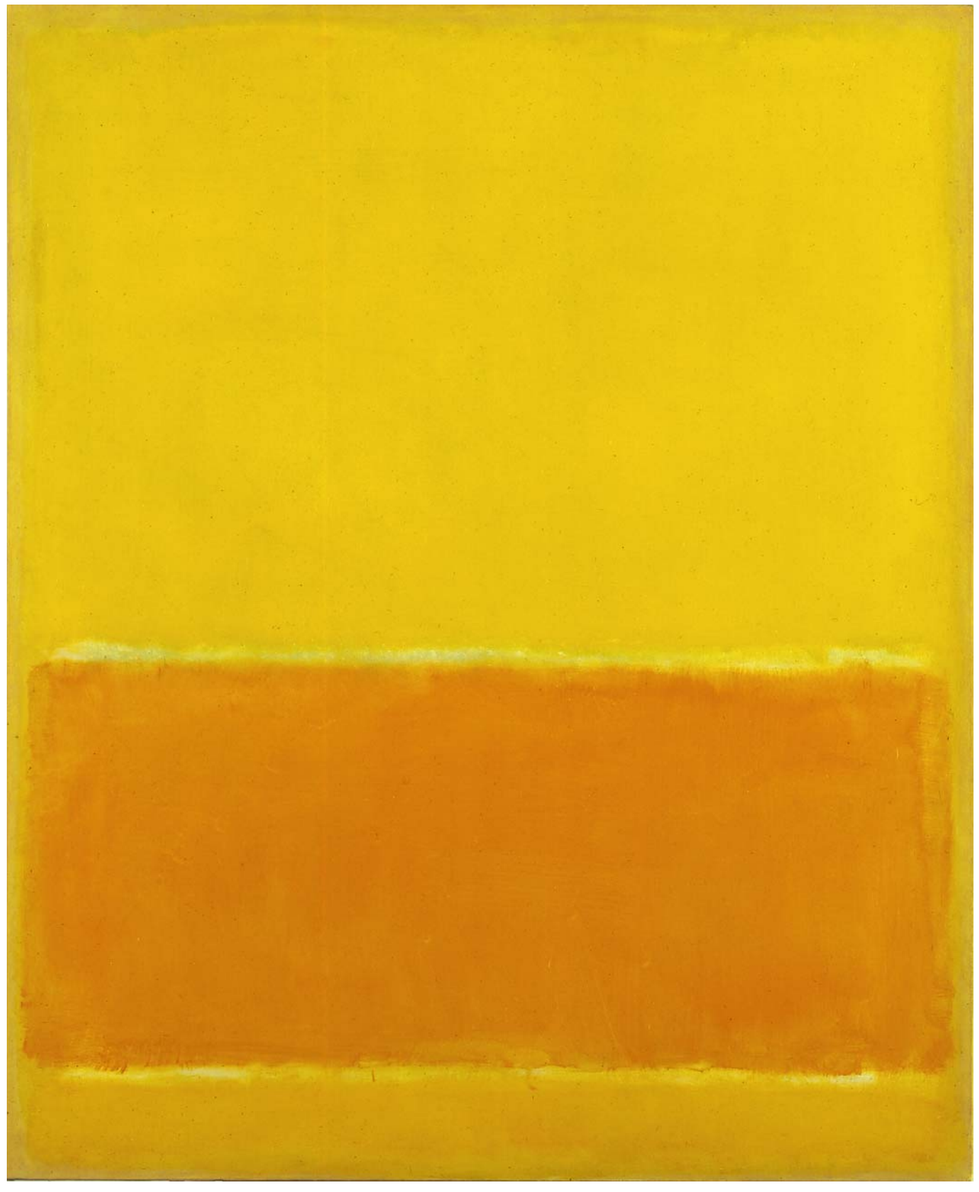


Jackson Pollock *Number 23*, 1948, Enamel on gesso on paper, 57.5 x 78.4 cm
Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery (purchased out of funds provided by Mr and Mrs H.J. Heinz II and H.J. Heinz Co. Ltd) 1960

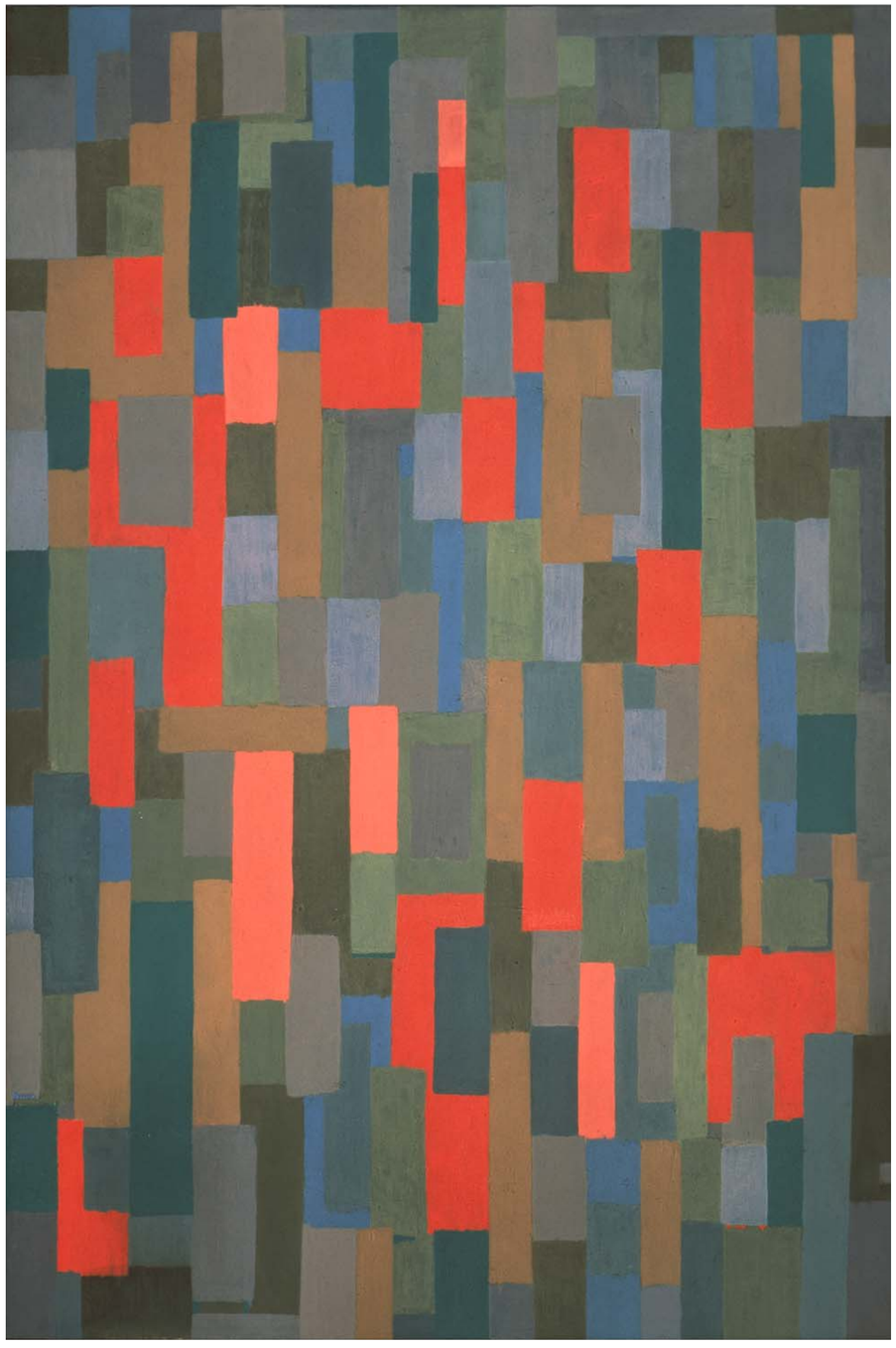


Mark Rothko *No. 8 [Multiform]*, 1949, Oil and mixed media on canvas, 228.3 x 167.3 cm
Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.43.147. Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Mark Rothko *The Green Stripe*, 1955, Oil on canvas, 170.2 x 141.7 cm
The Ménil Collection, Houston

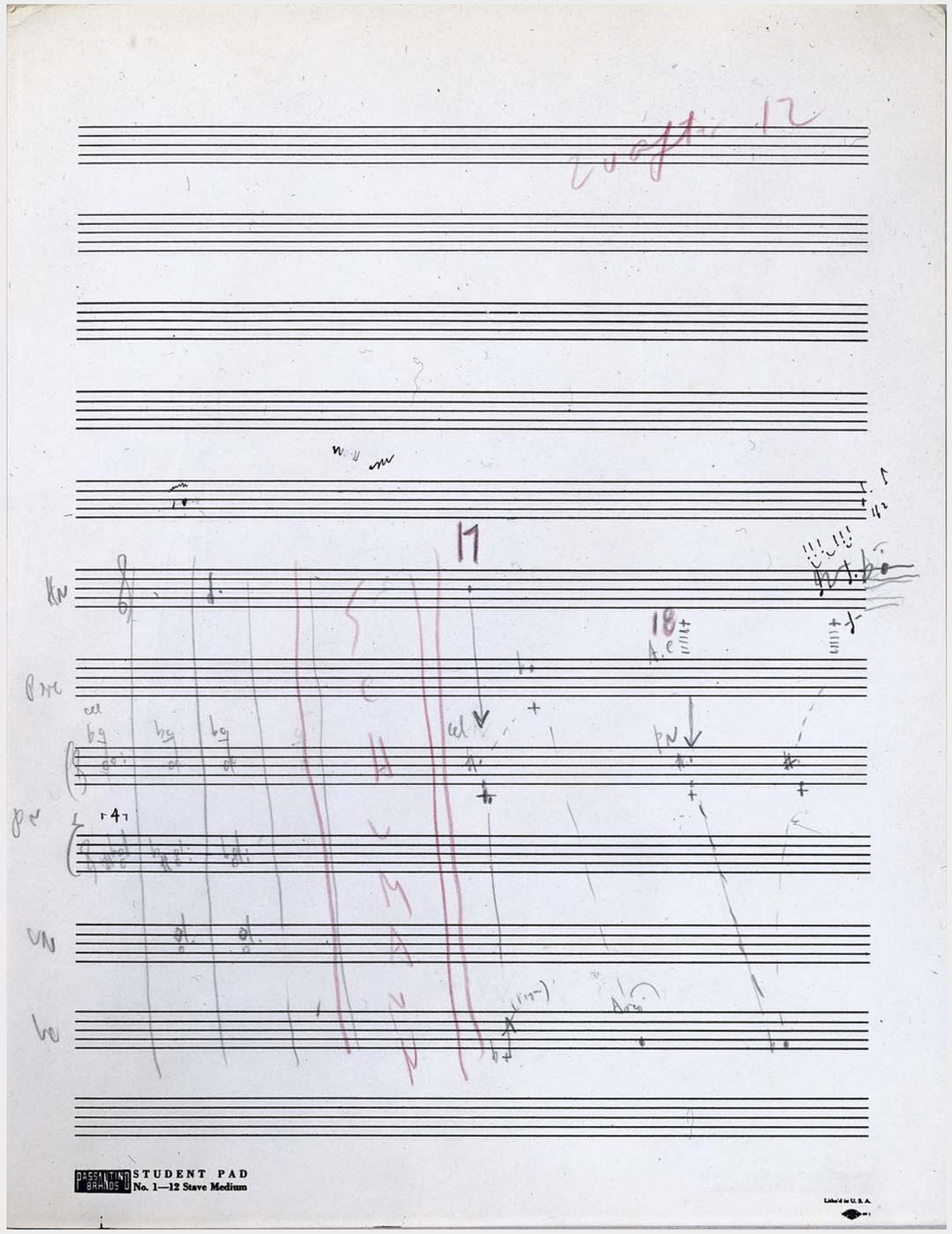


Ad Reinhardt *Brick Painting*, 1950, Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 102 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat



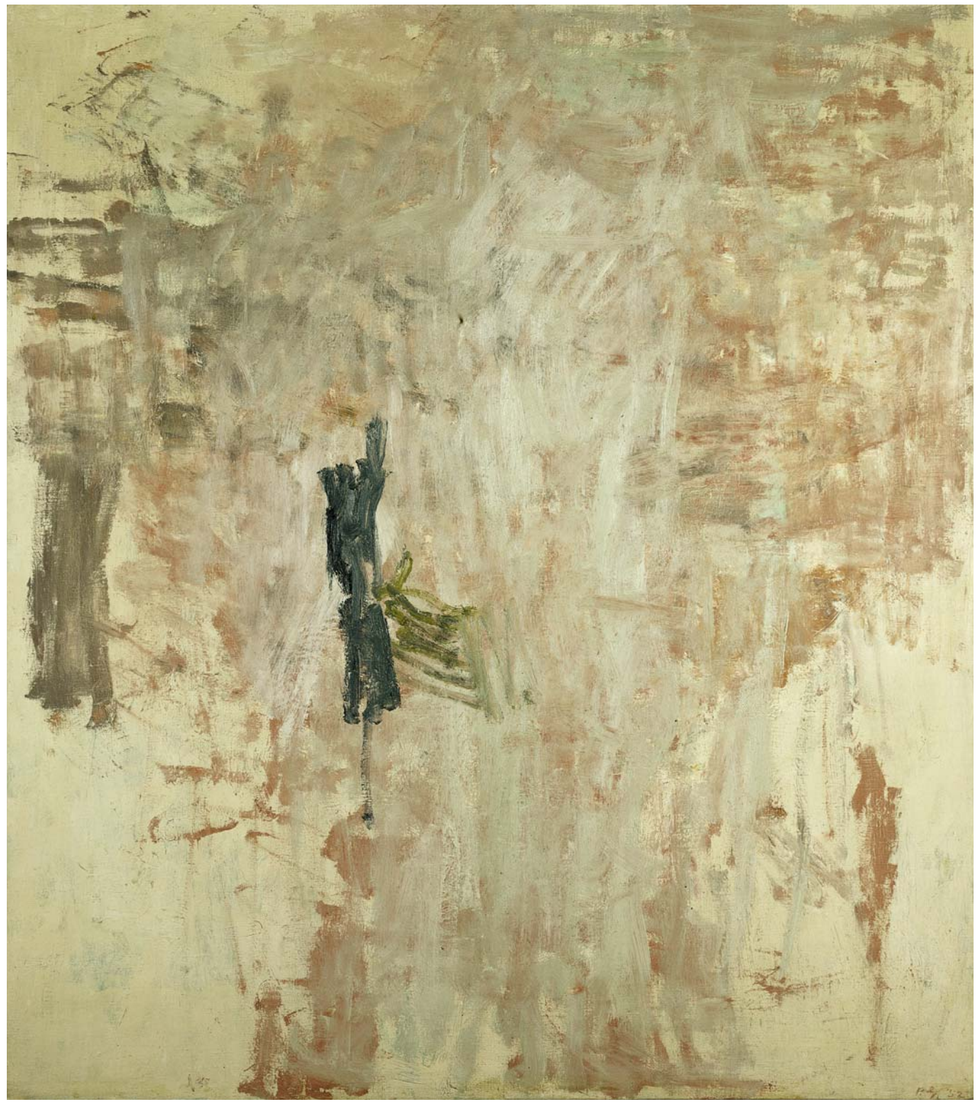
Willem de Kooning *Dog*, c.1949–53, Pencil on paper, 23 x 15 cm
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

Morton Feldman
De Kooning
1963
Score draft, 1 p.
31.8 x 24.3 cm
Morton Feldman Collection,
Paul Sacher Foundation,
Basel, Switzerland



Philip Guston *Painting*, 1954, Oil on canvas, 160.6 x 152.7 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund, 1956
Accession Number: 7.1956

Philip Guston *Untitled*, 1952, Oil on canvas, 102.2 x 90.8 cm
Private Collection



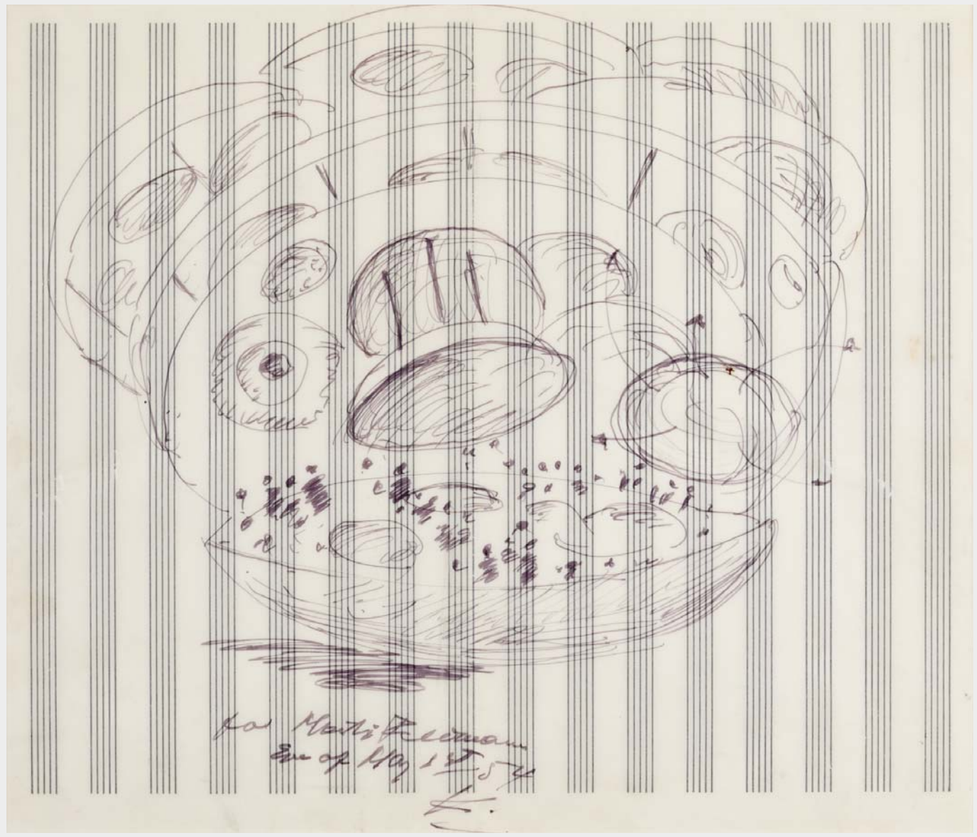
Philip Guston *Untitled*, 1952, Ink on paper, 45.7 x 58.5 cm
Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Gift of Musa and Tom Mayer

Philip Guston *Untitled 'For Morty'*, 1952, Ink on paper, 43.18 x 54.61 cm
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York Mildred Bork Connors Fund, 2004
2004:17

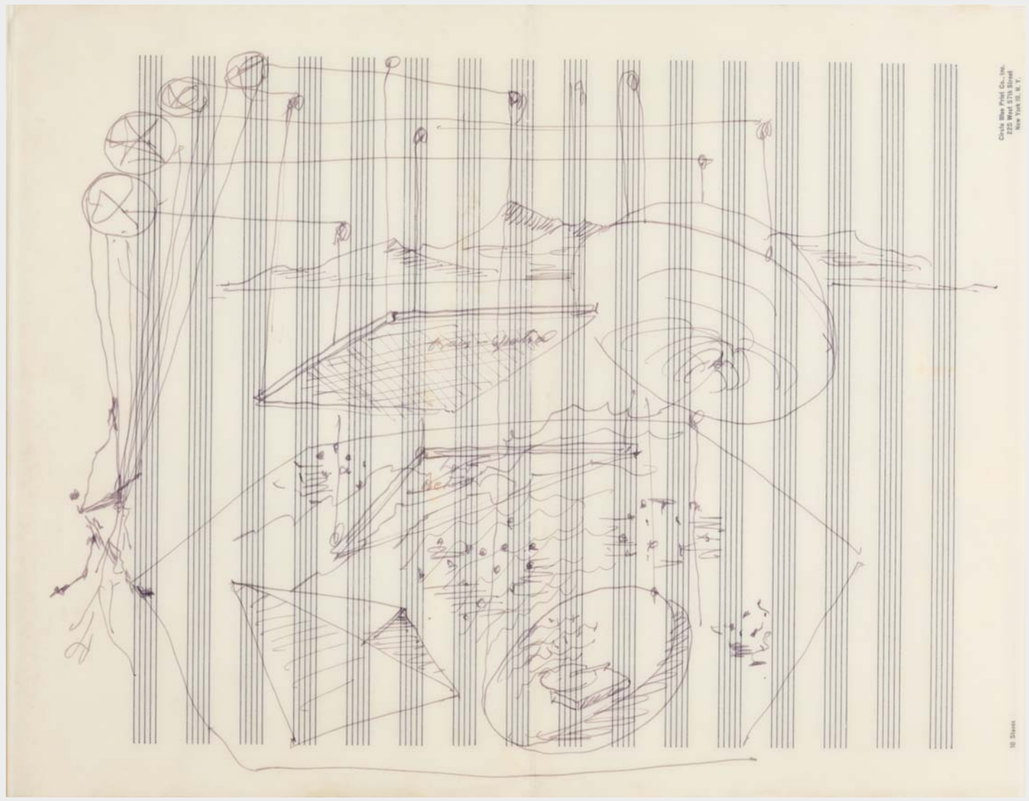
Philip Guston *Untitled*, c. 1954, Ink on paper, 43.2 x 58.4 cm
Private Collection

Philip Guston *Untitled*, 1954, Ink on paper, 45.1 x 61 cm
Timothy Taylor Gallery, London

Frederick Kiesler *Untitled 'For Morti Feldman'*, 1954, Ink on music paper, 25.4 x 30.5 cm
Private Collection



Frederick Kiesler *Untitled*, c.1954, Ink on music paper, 27.9 x 35.6 cm
Private Collection



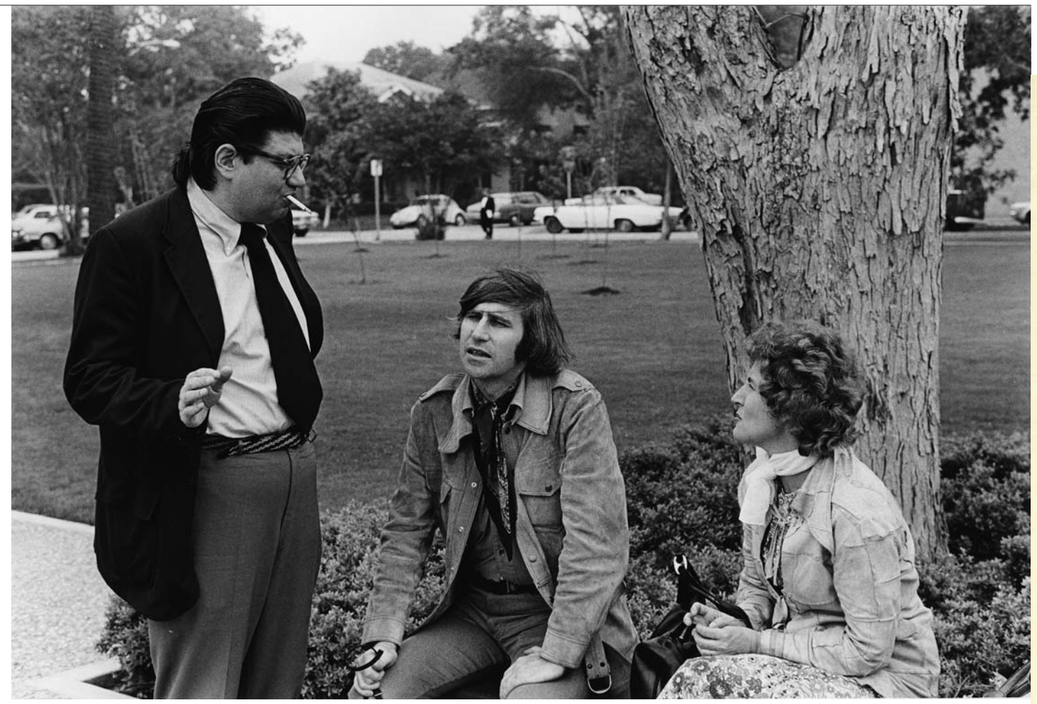
Paul Brach *Flag*, 1958, Oil on canvas, 15.2 x 21.28 cm
Private Collection

Esteban Vicente *Untitled*, 1958, Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 96.5 cm
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia

Esteban Vicente *Number 5*, 1950, Oil on canvas, 89 x 115 cm
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia

Franz Kline *Untitled,* c. 1948, Ink on paper, 45.7 x 53.3 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat

Franz Kline *Untitled (Study for Wanamaker Block)*, c.1954-55, Ink on paper, 43 x 39.7 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat



Barbara Novak, Brian O'Doherty, Morton Feldman outside the Rothko Chapel, Houston, 1976
Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

Morton Feldman: The Burgacue Years

(opposite, background)
Morton Feldman
and Brian O'Doherty
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MORTON FELDMAN
BRIAN O'DOHERTY

There are occasions memory preserves as on a film loop, switched on by a random thought. The time was around 1967. Barbara Novak and I were with Morton Feldman at the Museum of Modern Art's snug viewing room to see a film on Willem de Kooning, narrated by Barbara, music by Morty, made by Hans Namuth and an upstairs neighbour of ours, Paul Falkenberg, who edited Fritz Lang's *M.* As we waited for the film to begin, I felt a tap on my right shoulder. I looked around to see, from left to right, Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, and John Cage, all smiling. Three magical people. But who had tapped? Had to be Marcel, wearing that sweet, slightly devilish smile.

Within that group, numerous friendships. John Cage and Morty. Cage and Duchamp, whose heartbeat I had stolen one April evening. Barbara and Marcel — she had fed him a dose of high cholesterol courtesy of Julia Child. Merce dancing while John read *Finnegans Wake*. Once I upset John by speculating that Marcel must have been quite demonic in his youth. All four men contributed to my *ASPEN 5/6*, an exhibition in a box. The filmmaker, Hans Namuth and I were doing a book together. Later, Hans, who had left home in Germany to photograph the Spanish Civil War, died, like Pollock, in a car crash on Long Island.

Barbara and I saw a lot of Morty then. Every day we met for lunch at the Burgacue on Third Avenue around 33rd. The coffee shop might well have been situated on the slopes of Parnassus, for the names of the great were invoked, particularly by Morty, with a familiarity that suggested he was among their number (he was a great reader of biographies). Morty appreciated Barbara's brilliance, without a trace of sexism, which made our burgers more palatable. The friendship between the three of us lasted until Morty went off to the State University of New York at Buffalo as a professor in the music department and for the first time didn't have to worry about paying the rent, though he did have a job for a while as Dean of the Studio School on Eighth Street founded by the striking Mercedes Matter. Whenever he came down from Buffalo and visited, his first question was 'Who are you seeing now?' Apparently Buffalo wasn't Parnassus.

We were close to broke in those years. Once, we decided that we were giving away free advice to wealthy hosts at parties. So we invented Arts Consultants Services, with letterhead and both our names. The next time we were asked for advice, we sent a formal note offering our services. It was of course ignored. At least we had a laugh. Barbara, at Barnard and Columbia University, was the only one with a steady job after I left the *New York Times* (in 1964), and she supported me through some thin times (when I was grafting Ogham to Conceptualism). As Rothko said to her about his thin times, 'We sent our women out to work'.

(opposite)
Philip Guston
Friend — to MF.
1978
Oil on canvas
172.7 x 223.5 cm
Purchased with funds from the Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1991.48

Morton Feldman at restaurant table Venice, Italy, May 1979 Photo: Jan Williams

I met Morty in 1964 through Harold Schoenberg, my colleague when I was at the Times. Harold, who had played chess with Duchamp ('good but not great') was the Times's music critic and an encyclopedic expert on virtuosos of the piano. Harold once assembled a team of his colleagues (including me) to review, in two-hour relays through the night, an endless composition by Erik Satie, probably his *Vexations*. Harold wasn't too sympathetic to the avant-garde but he was very fair-minded which is almost as good. He suggested I interview this musician who was a friend of the Abstract Expressionists for the Sunday music page. In the mysterious way that durable friendships suddenly — and rarely — begin, Morty and I got on immediately. The interview changed both our lives (exactly the sort of thing Morty would say).

The door was opened by this energetic, fascinating creature with thick lenses and magnificent black hair low on the forehead, brushed straight back, moving with a big man's nimble delicacy, smoking non-stop, pushing his heavy-rimmed glasses up when they slipped down, speaking with a hovering hand (with cigarette) when it wasn't in his pocket, half-closing his eyes when pursuing a thought, breaking out occasionally in a great grinning silent laugh. His friend, Philip Guston, got him dead right in that jowly semi-profile, cigarette butt sticking out, on the cover of Morty's collected writings, sensitively edited by B. H. Friedman.

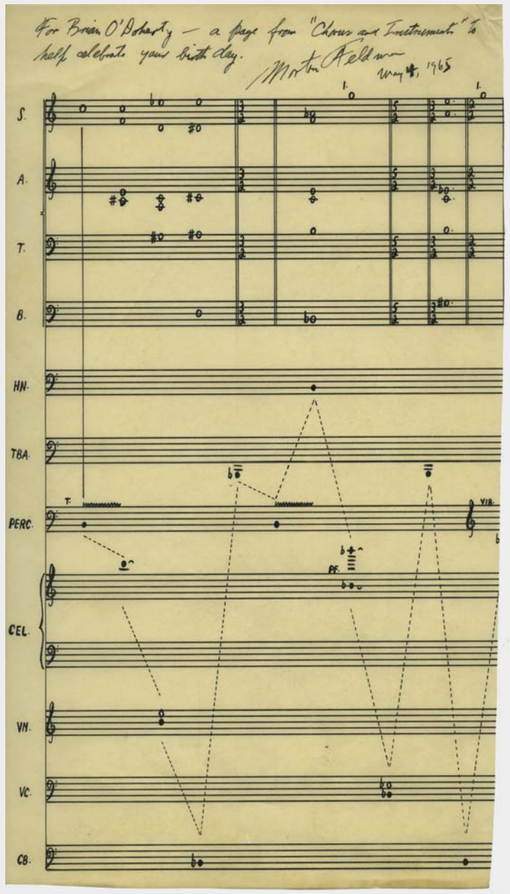
John Cage and his two close associates, Earle Brown and Morty, favoured unorthodox scores which were visually interesting. That morning in 1964, Morty showed me a score that fascinated me – composed of rectangular boxes, each representing a quota of time. 'Each box has a number', he explained, 'the number of sounds that the instrument plays, on or within the duration, that's up to the instrumentalist, I don't tell him the note to play either – just a general area of sound. Since he can place it anywhere within the duration of the box, this means infinite variation of the same quality. Not the same *tune*. You used to have theme and variations. Now you have quality and variations... It's just the spatial relationship and the density of the sounds that matter — any note will do as long as it's in the register.' 'But', I said, 'it'll sound different each time.' 'Yes', said Morty, 'but it will have the same quality, a feeling of density.' That was my introduction to the elusive, paradoxical and brilliant mind that sometimes saw music as a kind of sound-painting and painting as musical, which applied perfectly to the spray of rose-coloured strokes in *Attar*, a painting by Guston on the wall. Clockwise from the door of the small apartment on Lexington Avenue were paintings by Vicente, Guston, Guston, Guston, Kline, Rauschenberg (one of his big black collages), Johns, Guston, Guston, Kline. I also half-remember a Pollock drawing, 'delicate drips of ink on rice paper' according to Bunita Marcus. Years later, Guston invited us to the warehouse in Harlem where his new paintings were parked before that first exhibition of his radical change back to figurative painting. Morty and I registered the shock of those crude figures painted (one easily deduced) by a hooded Ku Klux Klan figure peering close-up at his tiny canvas. Guston wasn't there. On the street, Morty and I looked at each other and shook our heads. A major miss for both of us. Guston didn't talk to Morty for years after that.

Morty and the poet Stanley Kunitz were my bridge to the Abstract Expressionists. Morty was full of stories about them: Kline leaping at a painting as if his brush was a sword; Guston de-idealising paint by saying it was just coloured dirt; telling how Cage generously promoted their work to their behind-the-back amusement. Morty was closest to Guston and Rothko, for whom he had a particular sympathy – as Rothko did for him. Morty's stories gave life to the people I was writing about in *The Voice and the Myth* book about Pollock, Rothko, et al. and their problematic children, Rauschenberg and Johns. Morty lived for a time in the same building where the latter two had their studios. He was on a higher floor. Going downstairs, Rauschenberg's studio door was open. He called Morty in and gave him what looked to Morty like a tangle of wires. Rauschenberg (working in the gap between art and life?) could make art out of anything. Morty didn't want to go upstairs again. He found himself on the street with this fragile concoction in both hands. What to do? He dumped it in a rubbish bin. A big shameless grin.

*

Morty had this theory that when you go to the centre where your career is to be lived, you have to 'pass through' its antecedent history to find out who and where you are. 'You guys from out-of-town', said Morty, 'figure out the code quicker than we do'. I was in an interesting position between two eras, where I often found myself. Stanley Kunitz and his wife, the painter Elise Asher, introduced Barbara and myself to painters, Jack Tworkov, Giorgio Cavallon, and poets, Richard Eberhardt, Carolyn Kizer. Morty didn't have much interest in those folk, nor they in him. Stanley, who had been through all possible fires, was a man of rare grace and sympathy. Morty had a theory that distinguished poets accumulate painters around them in accidental fashion, and not necessarily the best. To me, however, every group gives you access to an atmosphere that offers its own indefinable feeling.

For this group, Pop art, just getting itself born, trivialised Abstract Expressionism's high-mindedness. Henry Geldzahler, then the modern art curator at the Metropolitan Museum, had a wonderful phrase about his Pop colleagues: 'They are sweeter and less hairy' than the Abstract Expressionists. At Stanley's we met Robert Lowell and his formidably brilliant wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, who became a generous supporter of my novels. When we moved into our apartment on West 67th Street in 1969, across the hall from Stuart Davis's old studio, Hardwick and Lowell were upstairs neighbours. Eventually I met Barnett Newman at my first exhibition in 1966 and de Kooning under unusual circumstances (we both wanted to meet Gene Tunney). Before I left the Times in 1964, Hans Namuth introduced me to Mark Rothko, which began at first a wary and then a warm friendship. At this time, one of Barbara's closest friends was Lee Krasner, Pollock's widow, who, enthroned at our Christmas parties, received the homage of young women painters. I was soaking up as much of the New York atmosphere as I could, commuting between various groups, so that I would, in Morty's phrase, 'pass through' and become a New York artist.



My own work, far from the Abstract Expressionists, was being pursued by another executor of the divided self. In 1965, Peter Hutchinson, a young English painter, introduced me to Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham and Eva Hesse, the most original artist I ever met. And Eva's close friend, the critic and feminist, Lucy Lippard, whose insights were startlingly original. We all became friends, some more than others, or at least associates enough to make common cause as we transitioned late Minimalism into Conceptualism. I became aware of the harsh internal pressures between members of an avant-garde, sublimated sufficiently to advance their cause which, when accomplished, propels the group apart, each member to follow his/her own way, eventually pondering each other from an unsympathetic distance. But in the exhilarating heat of that time between 1965 and 1970, I was in dialogue with my friends, staying in touch with the previous generation to whom my colleagues were not sympathetic and, with Barbara, seeing Morty everyday for lunch.

The prescriptive nature of much early Conceptualism sometimes seemed to exclude as much as it gained. It struck me that Morty might be fascinated to meet a new generation interested in sequences, permutations, serialism (ways of subverting traditional composition) and language. And they might be interested in Morty's broad sophistication, compositional indeterminacy, and epigrammatic take on the mundane. In those days, usually in transit between various fields, or different sectors of the same field, the unwise thought of bringing them together frequently visited my mind. One evening we all gathered at 343 East 30th Street, where we had moved from the Village at the suggestion of another Times colleague, Brooks Atkinson. From the 18th floor, the distant silhouette of Lower Manhattan did its imitation of San Giminiano.

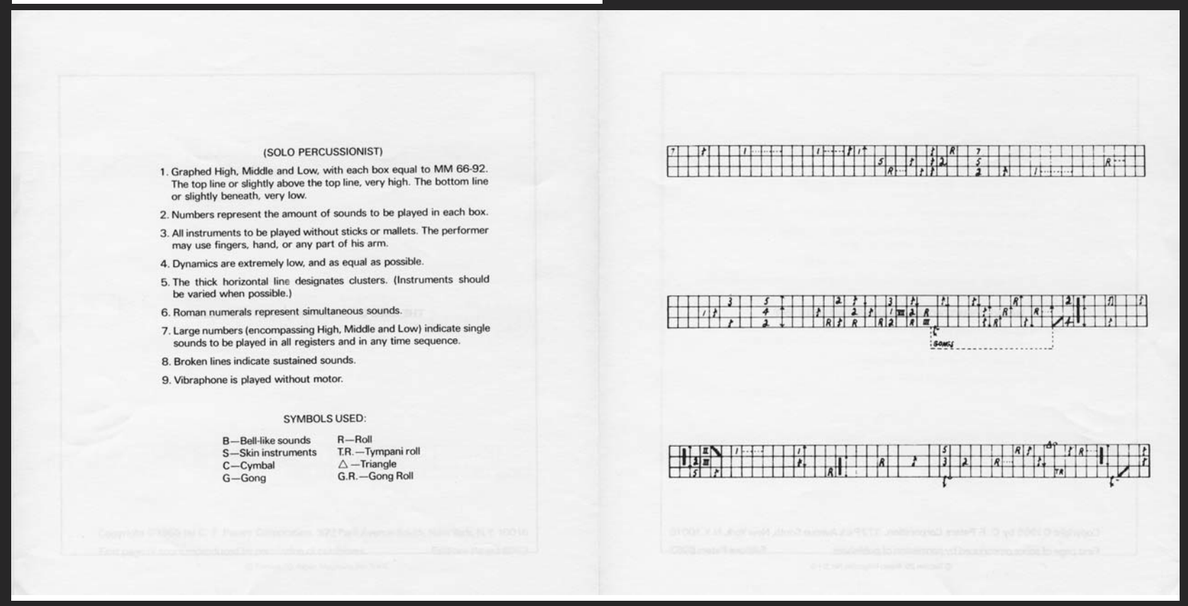
I've always been surprised in New York by the lack of interest one field has in another. Boundaries seem to be sustained by a mutual negative pressure between disciplines. The meeting was half successful. Bochner and Smithson had little to say to Morty nor he to them. But Eva, who knew and admired his work, was thrilled to meet him, as was Sol who, I remember — perhaps influenced by the numerological play — used to refer to that quasi-mathematical passage in Beckett's *Molloy* where he blindly transfers stones from one pocket to another.[1] Sol invited Morty to his studio, and down we went, where Morty, holding his glasses steady with his forefinger, put his face close to yellow pages crammed with Sol's complex calculations on his famous cubes. Sol, always generous, insisted that Morty take several pages (I took two). Morty was gratified by the response of Eva and Sol, but the acquaintance was not pursued.

Morton Feldman
A page from *Chorus and Instruments*,
4 May 1965
Single music sheet, hand drawn
29.72 x 21.59 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Donation, 2008

Philip Guston
Attar
1953
Oil on canvas
123.2 x 116.8 cm
Private Collection

(above)
Robert Rauschenberg,
Untitled Black Painting,
c.1952-3, installed in Morton Feldmas' apartment on Lexington Avenue, New York City.
Over the fireplace hangs *Untitled* by Philip Guston (1952)
1969
Photo: Steven Sloman, New York

(opposite)
Robert Rauschenberg,
Untitled Black Painting,
c.1952-3
Oil and collage on canvas
198.1 x 134.6 cm approx.
Private collection
Photo: Steven Sloman, New York



Morton Feldman
The King of Denmark
1964
Composition for Percussion
First page of score reproduced in
Aspen 5+6 — The Minimalism Issue, Fall-Winter 1967, ed. Brian O'Doherty

*

In summer 1967, Peter Selz invited Barbara and myself to teach at the University of California at Berkeley. Peter also invited Mel and Mark Rothko and their children. There I continued a project I had begun the year before, a grand skewing of antecedent history to accomodate not only my own views and perhaps those of some of my colleagues, three of whom — LeWitt, Bochner and Graham — appeared in a white box (with films, records, printed matter), along with sometime colleagues, Morris and Rauschenberg. Called *ASPEN 5/6*, it was published by a preternaturally calm woman, Phyllis Johnson, who has preserved her mystery to this day. With a cheek that now chastens me, I played chess with the distinguished names I had assembled (among them, Gabo, Robbe-Grillet, Burroughs, Barthes, Sontag, Tony Smith) positioning them to suggest sets of provisional relationships and readings. The box has been called the first conceptual exhibition outside the gallery and it has been frequently exhibited, of course, in galleries. Perhaps this ambitious election of ancestors and contemporaries, a mapping of the territory in which I found myself, could be seen as enacting Morty's notion of passage.

For this venture, I had Morty's *The King of Denmark* rerecorded by a remarkable audio artist, thinker, and percussionist, Max Neuhaus, who also wrote a book on Wittgenstein's architecture. The title, as Morty explained, had nothing to do with Hamlet, but was a tribute to the war-time King who joined his Jewish subjects in publicly wearing the Nazi-imposed Star of David. This piece's haunting sounds (percussion instruments played with the fingers) drop and settle on what Morty would call an aural surface. Morty was paired on the other side of the vinyl record with John Cage's *Fontana Mix Feed*, a wall of solid sound, a perfect opposition, for the simple spine running through the box's contents were the categories of excess and reduction, the gateway though which any perceptive user would be encouraged to enter. Morty and I had many conversations about serialism in music and he pointed me to the German magazine, *Die Reihe*, which Sol was also reading. I was interested in serialism because I was basing drawings and wall-sculptures on the very pure serialism of the ancient Celtic sign-system of Ogham, what Al Held called my iconography, my excuse.

Morty was also at hand to tell me about the eccentric Italian composer, Ferruccio Busoni, when I was writing at much the same time a catalogue for a gallery-mate, Hans Richter, an original Dadaist. I was exploring one of the most intriguing early collaborations in experimental film – Richter and Viking Eggeling's visual researches, based on Bach's fugues. One result was Richter's *Rhythmus 21*, which of course I included in the box opposite Moholy-Nagy's *Light Machine*. Morty didn't have much time for Dada, but he often quoted with delight an occasion when John Cage, with wicked innocence, asked his companions 'What is Dada?' Everyone knew but no one could – or wanted to – say. Morty was enchanted by John's provocation, halfway between Zen and a Dada gesture, which had led, apparently, to considerable pre-verbal tension. I was reminded of one of Morty's favourite quotations from Kirkegaard. A man goes to have his clothes pressed. He sees a sign 'Clothes Pressed Here'. He goes in, but is told 'Oh, we don't press clothes. We only make the sign'. Much the same result. For all their close relationship, Morty didn't appreciate John's status as a culture hero which he felt took him away from his work.

When *ASPEN 5/6* appeared in Fall, 1967, Morty was taken with one of the six 'movements' by which I characterised its contents – Conceptualism, Structuralism, etc. For Dada I substituted 'Tradition of Paradoxical Thinking'. But what got Morty's attention was the sixth category, which I called 'Between Categories', which made him smile. He titled a new work *Between Categories* and wrote an essay of the same title in which he reported on a phone conversation we had about 'surface' in music: Morty's auditory plane, as I called it. 'I'm afraid', wrote Morty in this essay, 'the time has now come when I will have to tackle the problem of just what the surface aural plane of music is'. He turned to the picture plane analogy. 'Rather than (Cezanne) taking us into a world of memory, we are pushed into something more immediate in its insistence on the picture plane.' He came to the conclusion 'that the idea is more to let Time be, than to treat it as a compositional element. No – even to construct with Time (which I had suggested he did) would not do. Time simply must be left alone.' Much of what we talked about appeared in that essay, including Oscar Wilde's comment about surface and symbol, which Morty referred to as subject and surface. With Morty, a phrase, a sentence, could provoke an extended meditation if it hit him at the right angle.

Morty's collected essays, *Give my Regards to Eighth Street* (Eighth Street, not Broadway, was the grungy cradle of much '50s art), are replete with wisdom and the most subtle discriminations about the nature of his trade. The writing – speculative, ingenious, frequently epigrammatic, consistently in touch with painting, always transparent no matter how complex, unpretentious in its range of reference (a product of his very catholic readings) – was something I couldn't get enough of. For three years in the early 1970s, when I edited *Art in America*, I published everything he could give me. We often talked about 'the medium', that which each art uses, is used by, while remaining mysteriously unchanged. Morty rejected 'the morality of the means', which was much spoken about in the '50s. But the medium, its muteness, potential, and imperturbability, seemed to haunt our conversations. Perhaps that's why we were using time and space reciprocally to 'explain' the other. Spatialising time and 'timing' space are of course primitive ways of making talk about them possible. The auditory plane? I believe this is one of Morty's great inventions. What is the auditory plane? It is a plane of attention, seeded with sound posing between silences, extending in space — that is, time — as a sensitised continuum, both the work's substance and medium. When sound is reduced to near silence, listening exactly reproduces itself as Morty 'painted' his canvas, a space of time. Morty's visual imagination was extraordinary, but what he read in the paintings of his fellows was not content, or style, or historical connection, but form and what he called 'amounts' — 'touch, frequency, intensity, density, ratio, colour'.

This spatialised notion of time gave me the feeling that sounds could be dispersed on this fictional plane, retrieved from the past, anticipated from the future, or piled on top of each other (Johns's numbers?) with enough content – a fugitive theme or hint of a motif – to make you stay in place. With signal to noise so diminished, an emphasis of a sound could seem like a thunderclap. I remember Marianne Moore quoting a Greek philosopher (I have mislaid the name) who said that when the bird of attention sleeps, only silence can awaken it. Silence had a curious figure-ground relationship in Morty's music, sometimes figure and sometimes ground. Was his silence, when he was figuring out an answer during our conversations, figure or ground? I seem to remember him saying that whispering caught attention more than shouting. In Morty's conception of time, a composition was never a quota of duration to be filled. It created and filled itself. And you could hear it happen, often so stretched out that sometimes you thought time would break.

*

A few years ago – 2006, when Morty would have been eighty – Bunita Marcus, one of Morty's most inspired supporters and colleagues, invited us to a Feldman concert at the Merkin Concert Hall, just down the way on 67th Street. Morty's compositions got longer and longer as he got older and older, stretching sometimes up to six hours and more. Two pieces were played, *Piano* and *For Bunita Marcus*. A bare stage. The chaste piano. A lone performer, Aki Takahashi, unobtrusively getting out of the way of the music. We became one with an intensely concentrating audience. The experience was thrilling, punishing, fascinating, intense. Your mind, concentrating on molecular listening, became one with Morty's implacable will. Rarely is pleasure so elegantly coerced. A rustle of a programme, a muted cough, shifting feet, became transgressive, the unidentified parties self-condemned. I found myself listening to my body's internal 'music' (breathing, gentle borborygmi, occasional exrtrasystoles). This awareness of the body, I thought later, seemed quite paradoxical compared to the epicurian music that had made one's processes transparent. So Morty's music, which seems to suggest that your body be parked along with cars outside, was indirectly about the corpus and its discontents. Then I remembered a conversation in which I suggested that his perfect audience would be dead, a pleasant corpse in every seat. Morty loved the idea. Where did it come from? I was remembering a scene from a film (Godard?) in which the audience in the theatre was tipped backward into oblivion by some hidden lever. The hostility of the performer to the audience?

Morty came to visit us in Berkeley that summer of '67. The unmodulated weather in Berkeley, across the Bay from the cloud always parked over San Francisco, became wearing. The empty blue sky seemed unnatural to the point of hysteria, which took the edge off one's responses. It was a strange time. The students brought dogs into class.

Asking them to work in that sweet-smelling classroom seemed almost rude. One of my students (maybe the brightest) danced naked in a glass box over North Beach (painted in the American flag, so perhaps not really naked). It wasn't a good time in funky Berkeley for Rothko, as sensitive a detector of atmosphere as ever was. Once, we came in the back door of the lecture room as Barbara was concluding one of her famously concentrated classes. Rothko stepped back as if pushed, said 'She's so intense!' The artists in the classes he taught were unsympathetic to his transcendent aims. Morty, very New York, said that many of the young artists thought art could be made with jam. At the coffee shop on Telegraph Hill, Hell's Angels chomped their burgers and you avoided meeting their eyes. A young, radical art historian, John Fitzgibbon, who spent his time at a recruiting station trying to prevent young men and women from signing on for Vietnam, told us about the recent meeting, already legendary, where the Angels were turned on by the Merry Pranksters acid. Vietnam was on people's minds. Jayne Mansfield was killed in a car crash.

It seemed quite in keeping when, on the way to Sausalito in an open red sports car, big Morty in the front, Barbara in the back, we picked up a murderer. When he reluctantly left, Barbara forcefully said he was evil. Morty and I, obtuse males, scoffed. Barbara was right. A few days later, our passenger was on televison answering a question 'Why did you cut off his arm, Eric?' Answer: 'He gave me bad dope'. Having Morty around brought a measure of reality to la la land. That reminded me of Morty entering my exhibition of gleaming Ogham sculptures at Betty Parsons in 1970. He looked around, said, 'I never saw anything that told me more about reality and described it less'. Morty loved the bon mot. I wondered where he had said it before. 'Only one person at a time should be allowed into this exhibition.' He knew the way to an artist's heart.

Reality was in short supply that summer. You didn't find it over at the Haight, where Utopia was about to crash. Or listening to the Grateful Dead. Or at the Fillmore where everyone went to dance with themselves. Morty danced, cigarette drooping, in small, self-contained arcs, right on the beat. A small, somewhat cherubic man on the sidelines said to me 'your dance is very interesting', a double-edged comment that perfectly defined its sophisticated speaker. To our surprise it was John de Ménil, one of the era's great patrons (The Rothko Chapel in Houston). We should not have been surprised. John, benignly cool, could turn up anywhere. More often however, we turned up at his salons in Manhattan, frequently with the people with which this account began, minus Duchamp but with the addition of Rothko. Morty developed a long relationship with the de Ménil family and with Dominique, John's formidable wife who mostly stayed in Houston and who frequently turned to Morty for advice. During these New York salons, John moved gently around, making a quiet comment here and there, very happy with his company. He was observant. When Morty, champagne glass in hand, missed a step and perchance glided safely down the stairs, John noticed and said to Morty 'Anyone who can do that I have to know'. That was their first meeting.

Morty was as comfortable in any situation as Rothko usually was not. Morty had great adaptability and a grand calm. I remember one evening in Mulberry Street one of our party almost got into a fight with three Italian residents, Morty walked back, slow, deliberate, and leached the tension out of the air. Morty was street smart, as alert to the vernacular as to Stockhausen and Berio, names that frequently came up in our conversations. He faultlessly recognised the genuine, even when he didn't like it. Frequently he would say, 'Art isn't a talent problem; it's a character problem.'

At these de Ménil evenings, Rothko and Morty's mutual pleasure in each other was pleasant to witness, but it did not prevent Morty having a clear, sympathetic view of Rothko's nature. In those days, Barbara and I frequently had tense dinners with Rothko and his wife Mel, who then separated; subsequent dinners were with Rothko and Ad Reinhardt's beautiful widow, Rita, whom I called the dark lady of the sonnets. At that time I was writing about Rothko for the *Voice and the Myth book* and Morty and I would talk about Rothko's work. Morty came up with the idea that each Rothko painting had 'a stare' and I took that and ran with it. Were there parallels between some of Morty's work and Rothko's? I thought there might be. Both of them forced you to pay attention. 'But how', I asked myself of Rothko's paintings, 'does a unitary image emerge from the sets of rectangles?' This was clarified when I saw Rothko listening to a piece of music he particularly enjoyed: Feldman's *The Swallows of Salangan*. It starts as a wall of sound, with many voices. The sound expands, like a huge breath drawn in and in – not dissimilar in effect to the radiance of Rothko's light. The voices do not introduce any idea of succession. 'They stabilise attention, keep it on a high-wire as it were. We are not sure whether the piece goes on a long or a short time. There is, as with Rothko, a singular, powerful idea, and a delusion of process (the additional voices entering in). Afterwards – and Rothko's pictures and Feldman's music have a persistent afterlife in the memory – there is nothing to remember but that expansion, that radiance. This Feldman achieves by the illusion of a single note. By the addition of "lengths" of voices expanding and deluding the original note, the sound is continually infused with new attention... So *Swallows* fixes attention as hypnotically as Rothko's paintings... They also force one to remember, but what one remembers is the same, continually renewed... In this sense, both Rothko's and Feldman's processes give glimpses of instantaneity reached by very elusive modes of handling attention. The instantaneous idea is simply a convention by which attention is translated into yearning or desire, a yearning implicit in Rothko's light and Feldman's expanding sound.'[2] Morty was so pleased by this that he put it on one of his record covers.

*

Morty, Barbara and I found ourselves on the de Ménil's private plane to Houston; also on board, the lords of the Museum of Modern Art, Dorothy Miller and Alfred Barr. Morty and I were to have a conversation before an audience. I've forgotten why. Morty was brilliant and elusive. I was unimpressive and elusive. So we implicitly agreed to keep the audience out. Of course everyone – except, I'm sure, the MoMA folk – thought it was wonderful. Inevitably we found ourselves in the Rothko Chapel, Barnett Newman's interrupted column outside, *en point* like a dancer. John de Ménil had wanted an inscription at the base of the Newman, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do'. The social climate was not hospitable to the idea. What miscreants John had in mind, I'm not sure. This was the first time I'd been in the Chapel. Many, many times, I'd seen the vast canvases in Rothko's studio. There they had a power that overcame their curiously minimal means and hard-edged rectangles. In the harsh Houston light, they seemed mute.

They still seemed mute when we went back in 1976 to hear Morty's *Rothko Chapel* performed in the Chapel. It should have been an extraordinary occasion, which summoned Rothko's posthumous presence. It was and it wasn't. The music was complex, varied, rich. As Morty described it, 'There are few personal references in *Rothko Chapel*. The soprano melody, for example, was written on the day of Stravinsky's funeral service in New York. The quasi-Hebraic melody played by the viola at the end was written when I was fifteen. Certain intervals throughout the work have the ring of the synagogue. There were other references which I have now forgotten.'[3] Responding to the paintings, 'I envisioned an immobile procession not unlike the friezes on Greek temples'.

Later, outside the chapel, minding my own business in the sun, a young woman asked me what I thought of the Chapel. I allowed that they were disappointing in their new setting, and thought no more of it. I didn't realise that wealthy patrons have runners everywhere. That night, at a big dinner in the de Ménil's Phillip Johnson house, around its central open-air garden, Mrs de Ménil, an excellent curator in her own right, interrupted the buzz to say loudly, 'Brian, I hear you don't like the Rothko Chapel'. I filled in the silence by politely suggesting to my hostess that the paintings did not look as well as they had in New York. This negative opinion was dramatically refuted by a former acquaintance, Robert Hughes, who took the role of house critic and proclaimed the works beyond fault, to be indeed of surpassing quality and the effect in the Chapel magnificent. This was another Bob Hughes from the one I remembered with affection when he arrived in New York — a slim blonde hipster, an American flag on his T-shirt, parking his motorcycle, which he called his pig, in my studio. That Hughes and I had memorable times. This new well-fed Hughes was on his way to social levels where I could not follow.

Mrs de Ménil, sometimes affectionately referred to as the Mother Superior, turned to Morton to resolve this grievous difference. I was sorry I had put him in this position before a powerful patron. Morty was uncomfortable but unphased. 'They're [the paintings] like a beautiful woman,' said Morty, 'She looked wonderful in New York', the implication being not quite as beautiful when re-located. That was not the end of it. Mrs de Ménil, a highly responsible patron, embarked on an extended mission to 'fix' the light so that the paintings would yield their magic. Numerous solutions were tried over the following years. I felt it necessary to back up my opinion, so casually delivered on site, with an extended and I believe, sympathetic, examination of the Chapel's problems which ended in high-minded fashion: 'The Rothko Chapel is thus not only a monument to a great artist – and to inspired patronage – but to the age his work assists to a conclusion. For Rothko's Chapel not only summarises modernism's dilemmas, it exemplifies them by reason of its physical and spiritual contexts. The Chapel remains, appropriately enough for the postmodernist age, where nothing is finished or complete, an open situation.'[4]

*

It you live long enough, circles keep closing. I'd called Samuel Beckett when I was assembling the *ASPEN 5/6* to ask him to write a text in keeping with its themes. In a very Irish way, he said 'I haven't a scrap'. I asked him if he would then read a passage from the just-published *Texts for Nothing*. He declined and suggested Jack McGowran, who read brilliantly but the tape stopped in mid-stream. I called Jack in Dublin and he said, 'That's as far as the fee took me'. The enabling fee was sent, the recording completed. Some time later Morty told me about his visit to Beckett in Paris. He had been talking about an opera, which surprised me because we never talked about opera. The only opera he mentioned to me was, when listening to the labouring motor of my first *Duchamp Portrait*, he came forth with a plethora of associations, including 'It sounds like Chinese Opera'. This in turn reminded me of Morty's endless quest for the absolute on Mulberry Street – the perfect Chinese restaurant, which he found.

Morty discovered Beckett at the back of a darkened theatre where he was directing one of his plays. He stumbled up the stairs and shook hands with Beckett's thumb. Beckett said he hated opera. Morty said 'I hate opera too'. It must have been a few months later, Morty called and said an envelope had arrived from Beckett with a 'scrap' of paper inside. 'What does it say?' 'I couldn't make head nor tail of it', said Morty. He wouldn't let me see it, but it must have worked for him, because it became a one-person opera, *Neither*, that premiered in Rome in the spring of 1977. It was different every night.

Some dead people are more alive than many still breathing. Duchamp is one (on a piece of paper he carried on him was written, 'besides it is always the others who die'). Morty is another. He left a message that he was in town. But when I called back, there was only silence. That was the last contact, or non-contact, open to the void which followed his death. Where had that huge ego gone? Or was it ego? I remembered several things: Morty's complete confidence in his gift and in his posterity (he talked of Beethoven as if he were just down the street). There was a large unshakeable centre to Morty's psyche. I remembered our first conversation in 1964. 'I'm anti-process', he said. 'I'm always burning the process behind me. I don't like there to be a trace of process in the finished work. I try to begin and work and end without feeling there's a possibility of possibilities. Process disappears in experience, in me. I don't mean it as the automatic or surrealist "I". I mean somehow the omnipotent "I"'.

After Morty's death, I found myself making an installation in San Francisco. Morty was on my mind. There were two rooms. One I darkened to a twilight, a passage to the lighted terminus within. I called it *Morton's Journey*.

[1] 'I take a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, suck it, stop sucking it, put it in the left pocket of my great coat, the one empty (of stones). I take a second stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, suck it, put it in the left pocket of my greatcoat. And so on until the right pocket of my greatcoat is empty...' See Samuel Beckett, 'Molloy' (1950), in *The Beckett Trilogy*, (London: Picador, 1979), p. 67.

[2] Text by Brian O'Doherty, Photographs by Hans Namuth, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth* (New York: Ridge Press/Random House, 1973), pp. 166-167.

[3] See Morton Feldman 'Rothko Chapel', in B.H Friedman (ed.) *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: The Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (London: Exact Change, 2000), pp. 125-127

[4] See Brian O'Doherty, 'The Rothko Chapel', in *Art in America*, vol. 61, January-February 1973.

(above)
Patrick Ireland
Morton's Journey
Rope Drawing # 86
1987
Doorway, first room
Nylon, water-based housepaint
Artspace, San Francisco

(below)
Detail of *Morton's Journey*
Rope Drawing # 86
1987
Second room

WHO WAS SONJA SEKULA?

Morton Feldman

SHE WAS TOTALLY CHARMING, BEAUTIFUL, WITTY, TINY; THE SILENT MOVIE STAR TYPE.

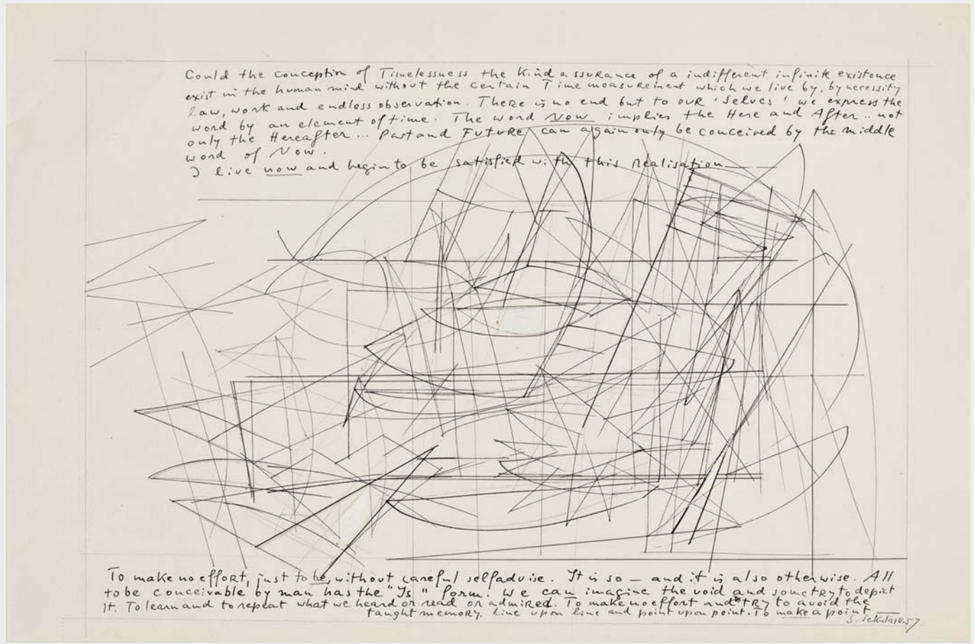
SHE HAD A FANTASTIC, UNUSUAL FACILITY WITH WORDS.

SHE WAS UNUSUALLY GIFTED; HER WORK HAD A CONVICTION, AN AUTHENTICITY THAT MADE YOU WONDER WHO THIS PERSON IS AND WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO ALL THIS TALENT.

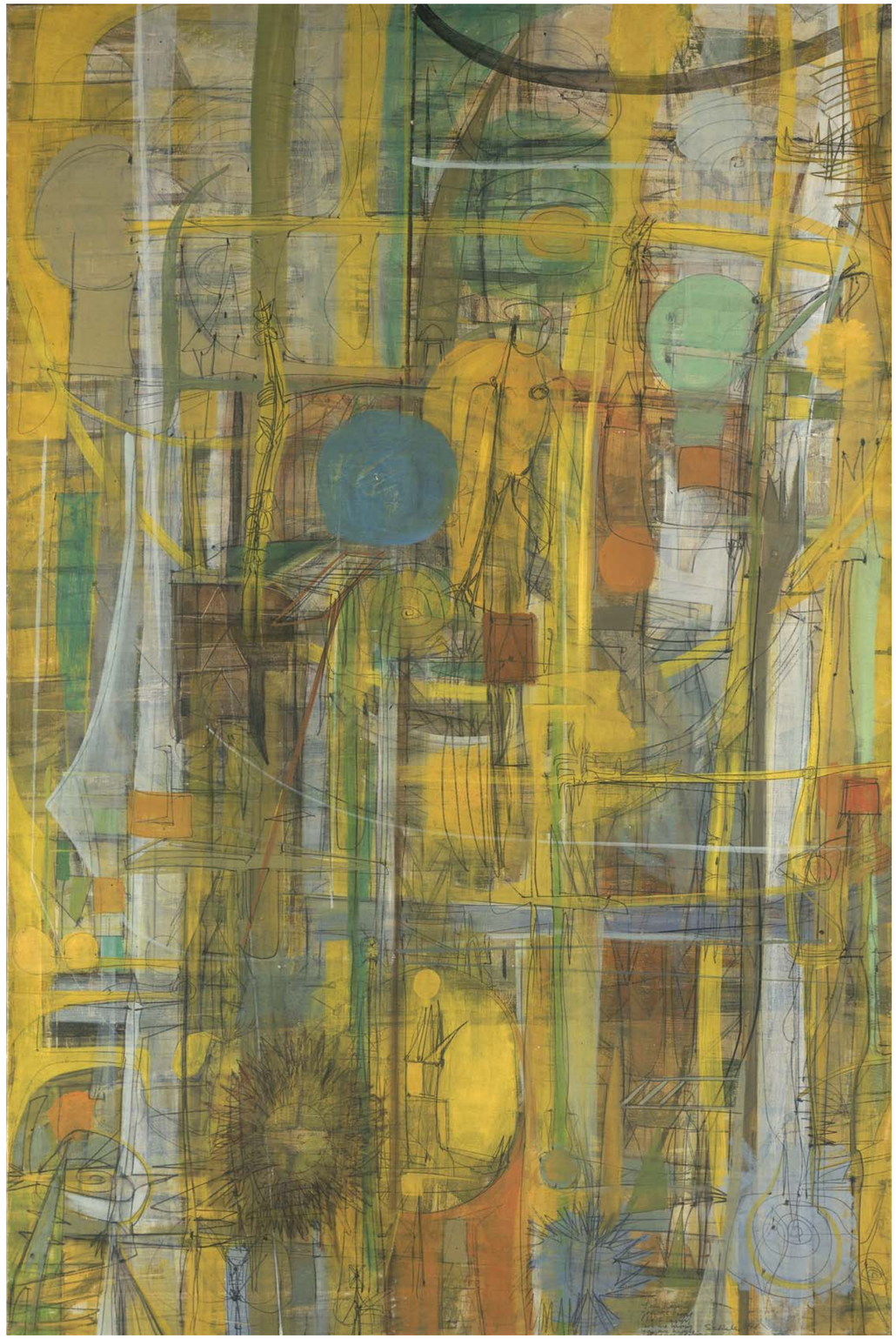
SHE WAS AN ADDITION TO THAT WORLD, THAT WHOLE CAST OF HEMINGWAY CHARACTERS; SHE WAS VERY GIFTED, THAT LITTLE SPICE THAT ADDED TO THE SCENE TREMENDOUSLY.

Sonja Sekula *Silence*, 1951, Oil on canvas, 147 x 101 cm
Kunsthaus Zurich, Gift of the artist's mother, 1966

Sonja Sekula *A Small Small Talk book,* Work on paper, 6 x 12 cm approx
Private Collection



Sonja Sekula *The Sun Room,* 1948, Oil and pencil on canvas, 162 x 107 cm
Private Collection



NO WAY TO BE MORTIFIED

To my ear, Morty's utterances were often gnomic.
That is why I begin my memoiristic response to his celebration with an inscrutable anecdote. On November 20, 1986, I attended an intimate concert in the studio of Francesco Clemente. After Morty finished playing, I went over to him and said, "that was a beautiful embodiment." He replied: "Those columns in the sand." He paused, and then added: "All art is synthetic." What do you mean? I asked. After saying something about Picasso (the only time he ever referred to Picasso in my hearing) he said: "Ninety percent of music is literary, programmatic." You mean, I said, about something? Images, he said. Well... I can't say that was typical of Morty. But that, too, was Morty. In my experience, you never knew what he was about to pronounce, or how much weight to give to his pronunciamentos. When, for instance, he was asked by Fred Orton what he meant when he talked of "the abstract experience", he answered with what I regard as a singular moment of candor. I mean, he said something profound:

It's that other place that is not allegory.
Rothko had it. It's that other place that
is not a metaphor of something else.

I had always felt that Morty was longing for that other place, and much of his real thought--his interior monologue, I imagine--had to do with how he would find the means to get there.
I believe he got there.
Having said that, I would have to add that much of Morty's banter was

designed to put his listener as far away from his secret place as possible. And he did enjoy banter. When, for a while, he was declared dean of the New York Studio School, a place for painters and sculptors, he used to sprawl in his chair and shoot the breeze with whoever wandered in. Whatever his duties as dean were, he didn't seem overworked. I was a frequent visitor in those days and would often have exchanges with him, mostly about painting, or rather, about painters whom we both knew. His office was a kind of village well around which people congregated to gossip.
Long before that, I would meet Morty now and then in Philip Guston's studio. It was, I supposed, Morty's refuge, and also a source of...well, inspiration. They were both struggling to find what Morty sometimes called "moral certainty." Since I was working on a critical biography of Guston, I not only paid attention to what they said to each other, but I sometimes made notes. I think it was while Philip was at work that I once talked to Morty, who was, as usual, reclining on the couch, about his own work. He told me, "I have always been interested in touch rather than musical forms." I wrote that down. I also wrote a phrase very much like one he used later in a published essay:

Sound in itself can be a totally plastic phenomenon,
suggesting its own shape, design, and poetic metaphor.

BUT, and there was always a but (so much so that when I finally finished my book about Guston I called it Yes, But...) But, when Guston released his 1970 bombshell, an exhibition of paintings in an idiom that was no longer congenial to Feldman, (caricatures of Ku Klux Klan hoods riding around menacingly) Morty removed his weighty self from Guston's couch. The coolness that filled the new void between them lasted. Unfortunately.

Feldman's recoil might have had different sources. Sometime during the mid-sixties

I had invited him to give a lecture where I was teaching, and he said twice during the course of a 1½ hour lecture: "Musicians have a different mentality, totally different from painters." In fact, some painters were put off by Morty's imperial presence. Recently, for instance, the painter Sherman Drexler reminisced about Morty rather resentfully in an interview published in The Brooklyn Rail. Drexler recalled an evening in the artists' hangout, The Cedar Tavern, when the editor of Art News, Thomas B. Hess, brought the Japanese master Hasegawa to meet the habitués--Kline, deKooning and whoever else was there. Feldman was at their table:

> As soon as he was introduced to Feldman, Hasegawa bowed and said, "What are you young American composers doing now? Feldman proudly said, "In America we have created silence." And Hasegawa replied, "Ah, in Japan we have created deep silence.

Drexler remarked: Feldman was being pretentious to the wrong person.

I knew two of Morty's mentors, Stefan Wolpe and John Cage. Morty liked to talk about Cage and his "dynamics of silence," and his interest in the void. Cage's rests and pianissimi certainly entered Morty's nascent esthetic in the early years. Wolpe's volcanic outbursts, on the other hand, were probably too far from Morty's own temperament. Remember, Morty said more than once that he was working essentially with three notes. Wolpe could never have countenanced that. Yet, Morty did refer to Beethoven and I think harbored a secret reverence for Beethoven's invention. (He cited somewhere in his published remarks Beethoven's use of a "three note cell" in his sonatas.)

Morty did not harbor the hobgoblin of small minds: consistency. And yet, if I tihnk of my own experiences with his oeuvre, I do think of it as consistent

in a metphysical way. Even when, toward the end of his life, Morty became enthralled with Near Eastern carpets, and altered what he called his technique to be closer to the esthetic of those weavers, I heard the new fabric of sound as consistent with earlier modes. Only, with the carpets in mind, he had shifted, as one critic wrote:

> The music is repetitious but each repetition is slightly altered rhythmically, giving the illusion of gently shifting timbres.

Not surprisingly, Morty admired Samuel Beckett, who had also been meaningfully repetitious, and who, by shifting slightly his diction, advanced a new theory of literature. Or rather, of writing, plain and simple. In fact, I think the analogy with Beckett's words is far more serviceable than any analogy with painting.

Still, Morty used the diction of painters far more than that of writers. When he alluded to Mondrian, he didn't talk of absolute universals, or even of how Mondrian's later works could be aligned with Morty's own early use of rectilinear graphs. He said he loved Mondrian's drawings in which you could see where the artists "erased." I can guess that he was alluding to what were known as the plus-and-minus drawings, and I think I can hear them in Morty's work. Seeing and hearing simultaneously seemed to be quite natural for him. When he talked about certain effects in his own works, or certain desiderata, he called them "monchromey." Or, he talked about "hue." On the various occasions when he spoke about the Rothko Chapel, he would talk about an "overall hue," something he had <u>seen</u> rather than heard. His affinity with Rothko was obvious, even if he altered the circumsatances a little, such as when he said that Rothko's studio, where he had seen the artist at work on the Houston commission, was bigger than the chapel. In fact, it was far smaller. But I suppose that is just

the point. Time and space for Morty were infinitely elastic. Notes were not meant to delineate but to suffuse. In one of Rothko's early paintings, "Slow Swirl By the Edge of the Sea", there are explicit references to music--clef signs and the scrollwork of a violin--all in the service of the larger image which suggests, rather than describes, a spaceless environment as amorphous as certain dreams.

Toward the end of his life, Rothko used to say that he was only interested in proportions. He also said that with the chapel murals, he was making "a place". It was a place much like Morty's music which he himself said was between Time and Space. He once told me that his "compositions" were not really compositions.

> One might call them canvases in which I more or less prime the canvas with the overall hue of music.

In another context, he compared his work with the friezes on a Greek temple--the shallowness for him was desirable, and, I suppose, the sense of flow from one form to the next.

Morty was exceptionally aware of the history of modernism in eadh of the arts. He knew that the tide of reduction had impelled artists engaged in modern painting, as it had inspired our poets. The quest for the thing in itself, as so many attested, was for them a noble mission to which poets such as William Carlos Williams, Francis Ponge, and Feldman's contemporary, Clark Coolidge, were committed. For Morty, a sound was a thing and a composition of sounds was a tide bearing things rather than a composition of governed sounds. Musicians undoubtedly can paraphrase Morty's ideas about music by analyzing his scores. For me, his arcane scores say little but his presence, like a phantom, always visits me during performance. Morty's arcane scores , for me, say little, while his

performances of his own works were always mesmerizing. He always, always, managed to demolish time as I knew it.

To his credit, Morty balked at spewing music theory, at least in public. His gauzy textures did not admit intellectual constraints such as pre-ordained theory. He liked to quote Rothko saying "where is it?" (or perhaps it was Guston). In any case, I am quite certain that Morty's search for "it" was the prime motor in his life.

And I have one more thought: Morty's Jewishness. By that, I mean his propensity for thinking, as we Jews often do, on the one hand, and on the other. Such habits are far from Hegelian certitudes, and leave us open, painfully open, to the velleities of life. And above all, of art.

On some level, some dreadfully deep level, Morty's oeuvre (as he recognized when he added a "Hewbrew melody" to the Rothko chapel piece) is the oeuvre of a wandering Jew.

--Dore Ashton

New Directions in Music 2 / Morton Feldman
1959
Vinyl LP cover
Columbia Records (Columbia Masterworks)
Cover image: Philip Guston

The last ten years have seen American composers, painters and poets assuming leading roles in the world of international art to a degree hitherto unexpected. Led by the painters, our whole cultural milieu has changed and is still changing. The 'climate' for receptivity to the new in art has improved correspondingly, and one of the most important aspects of this change has been the inter-involvement of the individual arts with one another. Public interest in the emergence of a major composer, painter or poet has, in recent years, almost invariably been preceded by his recognition among other painters, poets and musicians. The influence of aesthetic ideas has also been mutual: the very extremity of the differences between the arts has thrown their technical analogies into sharp relief. As an example of what I mean by this, we find that making the analogy between certain allover paintings of Jackson Pollock and the serial technique of Webern clarifies the one by means of the other – a seemingly 'automatic' painting is seen to be as astutely controlled by the sensibility of Pollock in its assemblage of detail toward a unified experience as are certain of Webern's serial pieces. And it is interesting to note that initial public response to works by both artists was involved in bewilderment at the seeming 'fragmentation' of experience. Although these analogies cease to be helpful if carried too far, it is in the framework of these mutual influences in the arts that Morton Feldman could cite, along with the playing of Fournier, Rachmaninoff and Tudor and the friendship of John Cage, the paintings of Philip Guston as important influences on his work. He adds, 'Guston made me aware of the 'metaphorical place' which we all have but which so many of us are not sensitive to by previous conviction.'

I interpret this 'metaphysical place,' this land where Feldman's pieces live, as the area where spiritual growth in the work can occur, where the form of a work may develop its inherent originality and the personal meaning of the composer may become explicit. In a more literal way it is the space which must be cleared if the sensibility is to be free to express its individual preference for sound and to explore the meaning of this preference. That the process of finding this metaphysical place of unpredictability and possibility can be a drastic one is witnessed by the necessity Feldman felt a few years ago to avoid the academic ramifications of serial technique. Like the artists involved in the new American painting, he was pursuing a personal search for expression which could not be limited by any system.

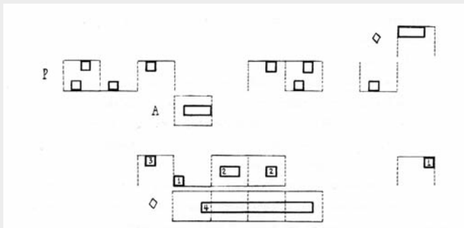
This is in sharp contrast to the development of many of Feldman's European contemporaries, for example Boulez and Stockhausen, whose process has tended toward elaboration and systemisation of method. Unlike Feldman's their works are eminently suited to analysis and what they have lacked in sensuousness they invariably may regain in intellectual profundity and in the metaphysical implications of their methods. But if we speak of a metaphysical place in relation to Feldman, it is the condition under which the work was created and which is left behind the moment a given work has been completed.

Feldman's decision to avoid the serial technique was an instinctive attempt to avoid the clichés of the International School of present day avant-garde. He was not to become an American composer in the historical-reminiscence line, but to find himself free of the conceptualised and self-conscious modernity of the international movement. Paradoxically, it is precisely this freedom which places Feldman in the front ranks of the advanced musical art of our time.

A key work in the development away from serial technique is the *Intersection III* for piano (1953). A graph piece, it is totally abstract in its every dimension. Feldman here successfully avoids the symbolic aspect of sound which has so plagued the abstract works of his contemporaries by employing unpredictability reinforced by spontaneity – the score indicates 'indeterminacy of pitch' as a direction for the performer. Where others have attempted to reverse or nullify this aural symbolism (loud-passion, soft-tenderness, and so on) to free themselves, Feldman has created a work which exists without references outside itself, 'as if you're not listening, but looking at something in nature.' This is something serialism could not accomplish. This freedom is shared by the performer to the extent that what he plays

is not dictated beyond the graph 'control' – the range of a given passage and its temporal area and division are indicated, but the actual notes heard must come from the performer's response to the musical situation. To perform Feldman's graph pieces at all, the musician must reach the metaphysical place where each can occur, allying necessity with unpredictability. Where a virtuoso work places technical demands upon the performer, a Feldman piece seeks to engage his improvisatory collaboration, with its call on musical creativity as well as interpretative understanding. The performance on this record is proof of how beautifully this can all work out; yet, the performer could doubtless find other beauties in *Intersection III* on another occasion.

Projection IV for violin and piano (1951) explores an entirely different area of musical experience. A graph piece also (see illustration), its marvellous austerity is achieved mainly through touch, and I will quote the note to the performer as an example of how the individual area of experience in these graph pieces is indicated to the performers:



"Note: the violin part is graphed above that for the piano. Dynamics are throughout equal and low.

"For the violinist: Timbre is indicated: ◊ = harmonic; P = pizzicato; A = arco. Relative pitch (high, middle, low) is indicated: ⊓ = high; ⊔ = middle; ▁ = low. Any tone within the ranges indicated may be sounded. The limits of these ranges may be freely chosen by the player. Multiple stops are indicated by numbers within the squares. Duration is indicated by the amount of space taken up by the square or rectangle, each box being potentially 4 icti. The single ictus or pulse is at the tempo of 72 or thereabouts.

"For the pianist: The ◊ indicates playing without sounding (for the release of harmonics). Pitches, their number and duration are indicated as for the violinist."

A comparison of these two graph pieces, whose ambiances are so totally dissimilar, gives an idea of the great compositional flexibility possible with graph notation.

Unpredictability is used in a different way still in the *Piece for Four Pianos* (1957). This work, scored in notation rather than graph, begins simultaneously for all four pianos, after which the following notes may be played to the end by each of the pianists at time intervals of their mutual or individual choice. Feldman has said, 'The repeated notes are not musical pointillism, as in Webern, but they are where the mind rests on an image – the beginning of the piece is like a recognition, not a motif, and by virtue of the repetitions it conditions one to listen.' As we proceed to experience the individual time-responses of the four pianists we are moving inexorably toward the final image where the mind can rest, which is the end of the piece. In this particular performance it is as if one were traversing an enormous plain at the opposite ends of which were two huge monoliths, guarding its winds and grasses.

In all of Feldman's recent work the paramount image is that of touch – 'The use of the instrument must be as sensitive as the application of paint on canvas.' (Which brings us back to Rachmaninoff, Fournier and Tudor.) In some pieces the entrance into the rhythmic structure is left entirely to the performer, and it is in this area that unpredictability enters and the performer must create the experience within the limits of the notation.

On the other hand, one of the most remarkable pieces recorded here is *Structures* for string quartet (1951). It is a classical string quartet without sonata development, without serial development, in general without benefit of clergy. Like Emily Dickinson's best poems, it does not seem to be what it is until all questions of 'seeming' have disappeared in its own projection. Its form reveals itself *after* its meaning is revealed, as Dickinson's passion ignores her dazzling technique. As with several other Feldman pieces, if you cannot hear *Structures*, I doubt that studying the score would be a help, though it is a thoroughly notated field of dynamic incident, whose vertical elements are linked by a sort of shy contrapuntal stimulation of great delicacy and tautness.

In an *oeuvre* which so insistently provides unpredictability with opportunities for expansion and breadth, the question of notation at all arises, for the graph would seem to provide an adequate control for the experience and a maximum of differentiation. But differentiation is not Feldman's point, even in the graph music: the structure of the piece is never the image, nor in eschewing precise notation of touch is Feldman leaving the field open for dramatic incident whereby the structure could become an image (as in Boulez). Notation is, then, not so much a rigid exclusion of chance, but the means of preventing the structure from becoming an image in these works, and an indication of the composer's personal preference for where unpredictability should operate. As John Cage remarked in this connection, 'Feldman's conventionally notated music is himself playing his graph music.' And of course the degree of precision in the notation is directly related to the nature of the musical experience Feldman is exposing. This notation can be very precise, as in *Extensions I* for violin and piano (1951), which indicates an increasing tempo of inexorable development from beginning to end by metronomic markers, as well as the dynamics and expressive development.

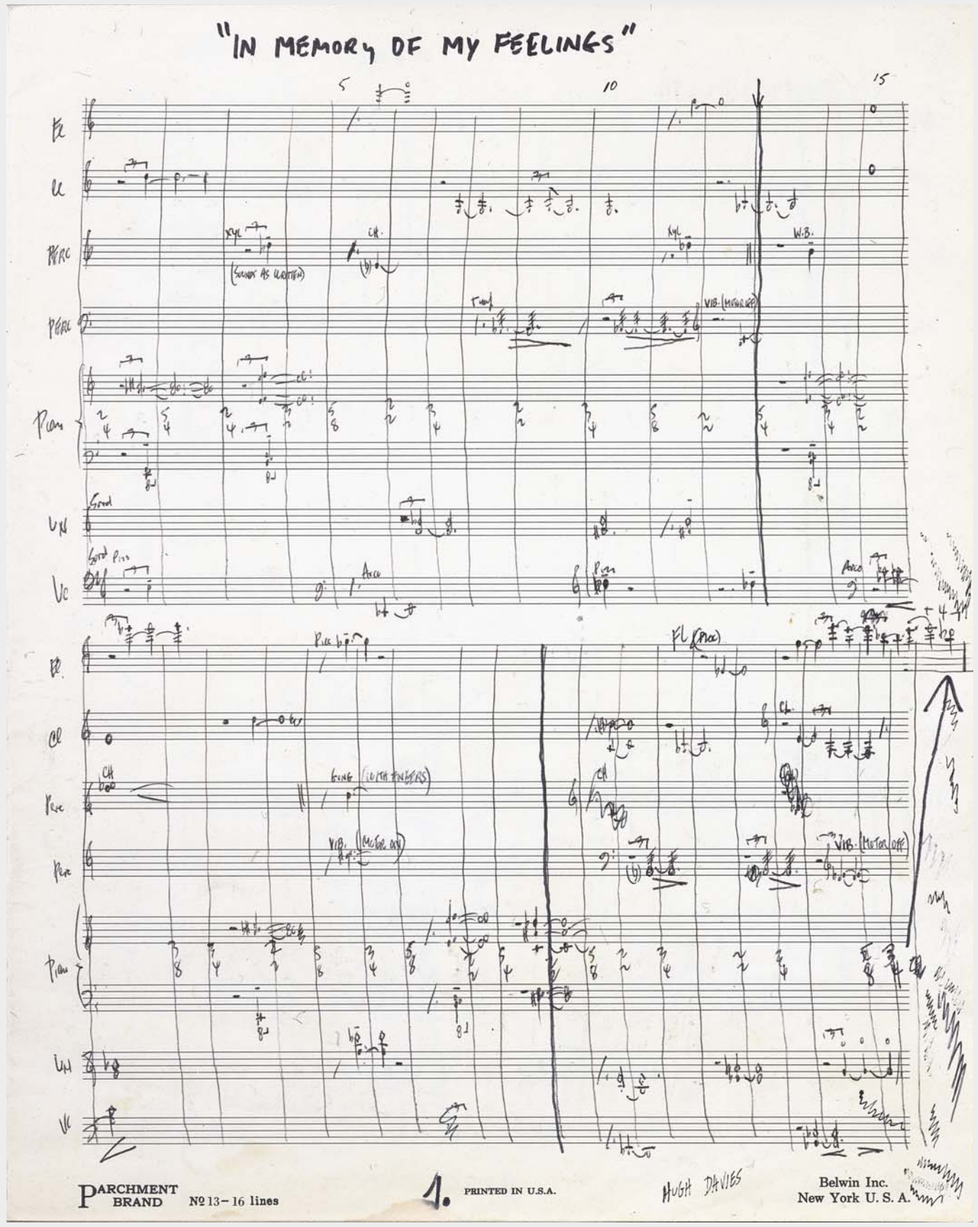
Although the traditionally notated works are in the majority on this record (*Extensions I*, *Structures* for string quartet, *Extensions IV*, *Two Pieces for Two Pianos*, *Three Pieces for String Quartet*), I have gone into the use of unpredictability in this music at such length in order to reach a distinction about its use in much contemporary music. In Feldman's work unpredictability involves the performer and the audience much in the same way it does the composer, inviting an increase of sensitivity and intensity. But in much of the extreme vanguard music in America and Europe, particularly that utilising tape and electronic devices along with elements of unpredictability, the *statistical* unpredictability has occurred in the traditional manner during the making of the piece; it has been employed preconceptually as a logical outgrowth of serial technique, and it is dead by the time you hear it, though the music is alive in the traditional sense of hearing. What Feldman is assuming, and it is a courageous assumption, is that the performer is a sensitive and inspired musician who has the best interests of the work at heart. This attitude leaves him free to concentrate on the main inspiration-area where the individual piece is centred.

What he finds in these centres – whether it is the sensuousness of tone and the cantilena-like delicacy of breathing in *Three Pieces for String Quartet* (1954–56), or the finality of the 'dialogues' in *Extensions IV* for three pianos (1952–53) – is on each occasion a personal and profound revelation of the inner quality of sound. The works recorded here already are an important contribution to the music of the 20th century. Whether notated or graphic, his music sets in motion a spiritual life which is rare in any period and especially so in ours.

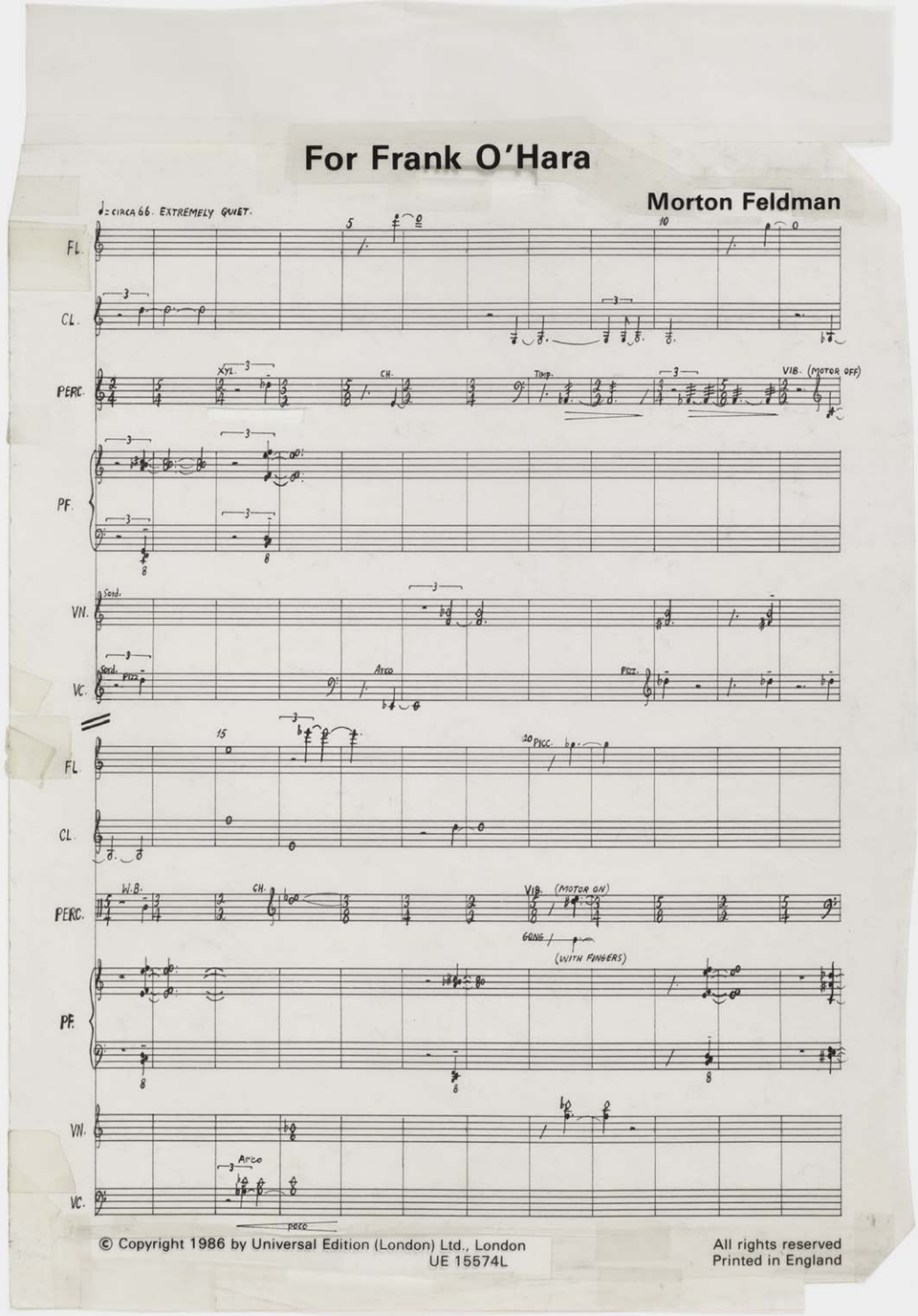
Frank O'Hara

'New Directions in Music: Morton Feldman' — Notes on verso of record jacket, for *New Directions in Music — 2 [Morton Feldman]*. New York, Columbia Records (Columbia Masterworks), [1959]. One long-playing 33 1/3 rpm phonodisc. ML 5403 (monaural) and MS 6090 (stereo). Reprinted in *Brilliant Corners* [Chicago, c.1975, pp. 44–50] and *Standing Still in New York* [Grey Fox Press, 1975, pp. 115–120], and *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, Exact Change, 2000, pp. 211–217.

Morton Feldman
In Memory of my Feelings (later called For Frank O'Hara)
1973
Score draft, p. 1
34.0 x 26.9 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland



Morton Feldman
For Frank O'Hara
1973
Transparency, score
11 pages
On loan from Universal Edition (London) Ltd.



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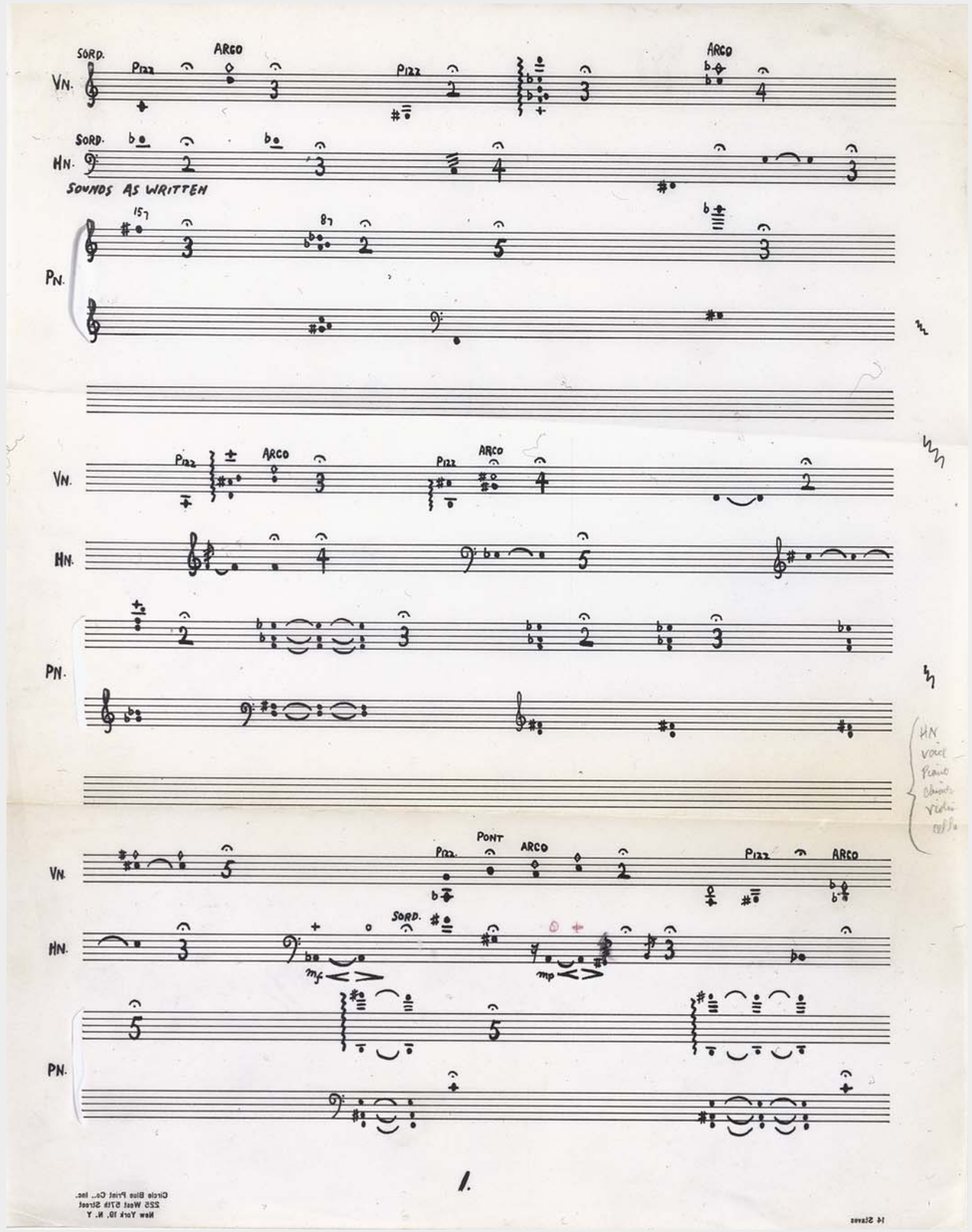
Morton Feldman, composer at piano, looking down
Photo: Irene Haupt

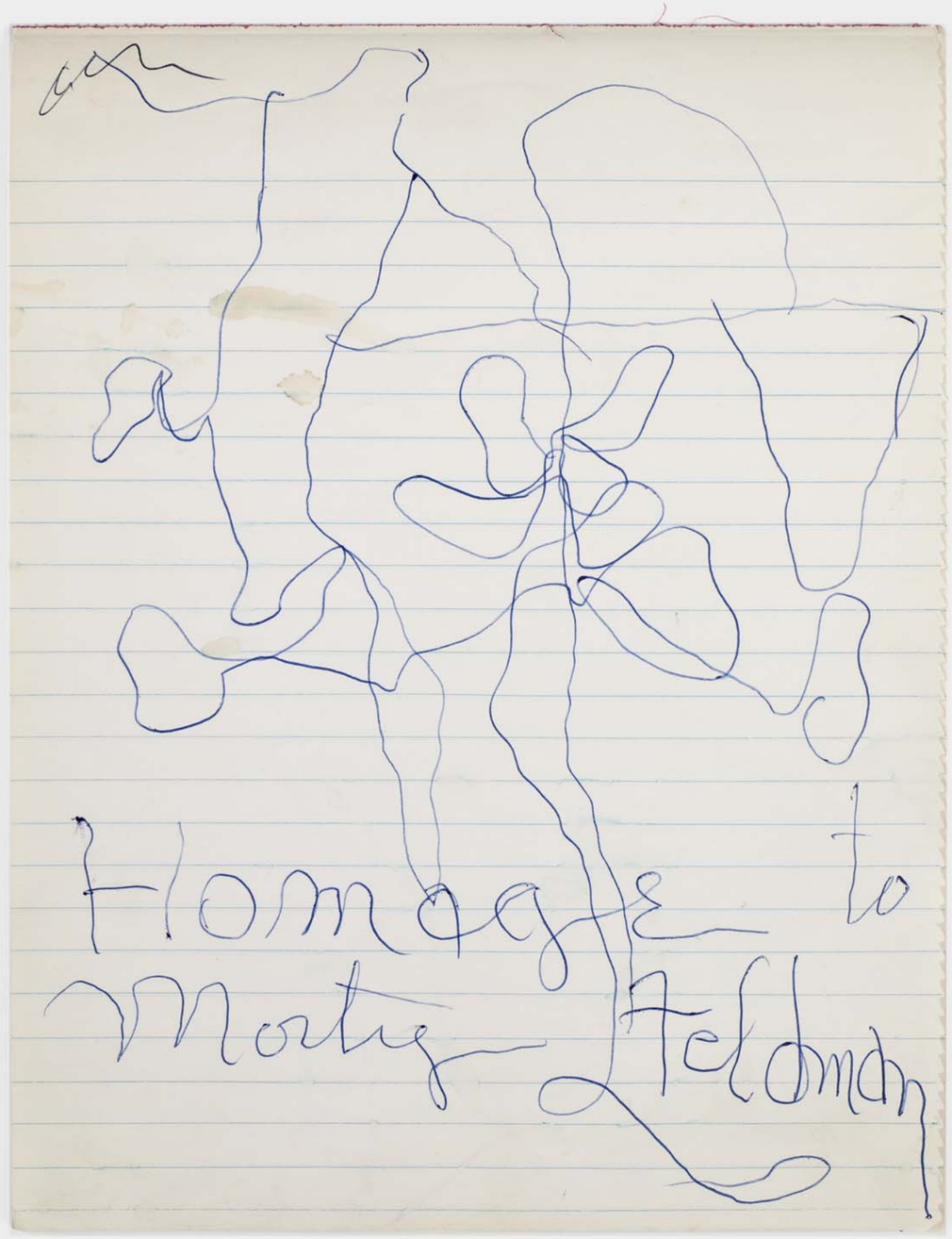
Morton Feldman
For Franz Kline (first version)
1962
Fair copy, p. 1
35.5 x 27.9 cm
Morton Feldman Collection,
Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel,
Switzerland

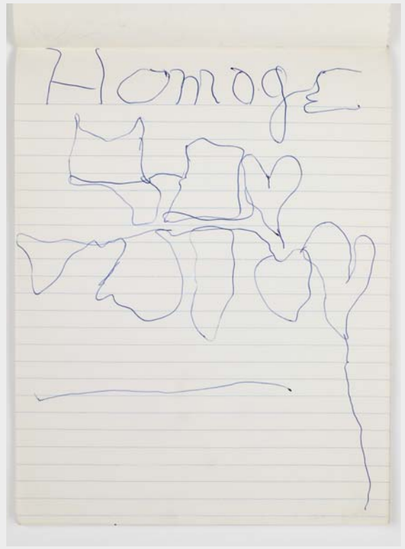


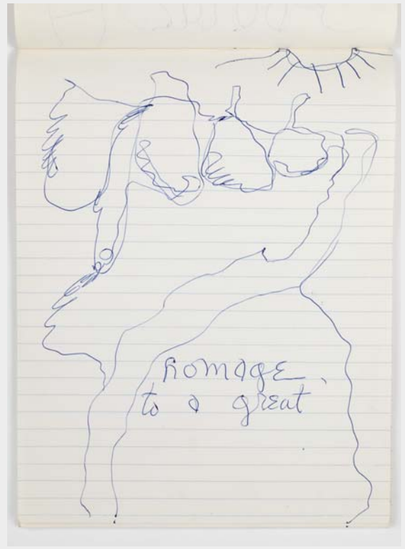
Franz Kline *Black Iris*, 1961, Oil on canvas, 275 x 206.4 x 6.4 cm
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
The Panza Collection

Philip Guston *Dark Day*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 76.8 x 101 cm
Sean Scully, New York

Philip Guston *Homage to Morty Feldman*, undated, Blue pen on ruled paper, Each sheet 27.9 x 21.6 cm/ 11 inscribed sheets
Private Collection




Homage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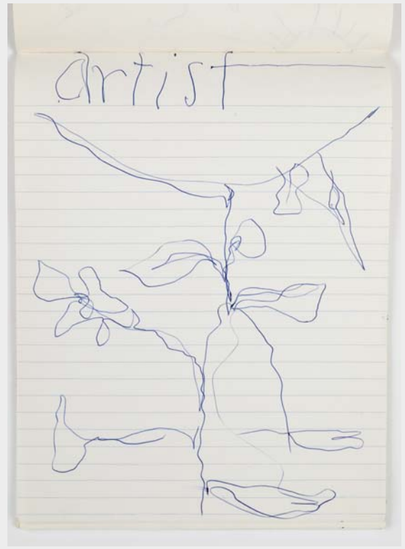
artist


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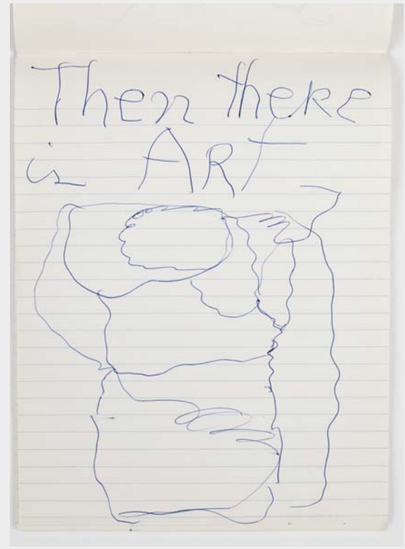
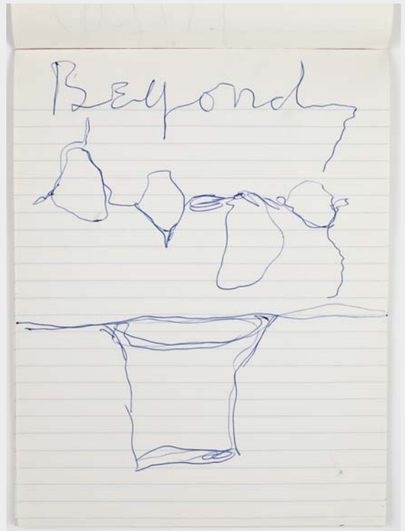

Then there
is ART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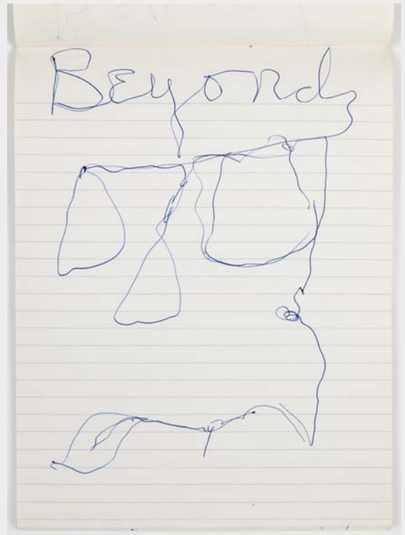
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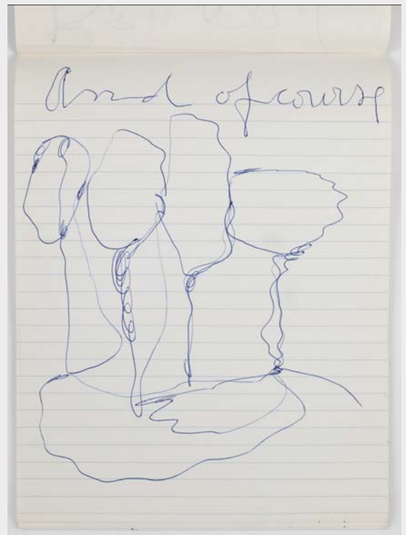
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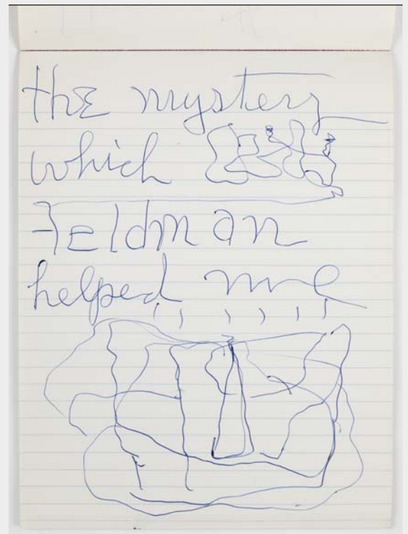
the mystery
which
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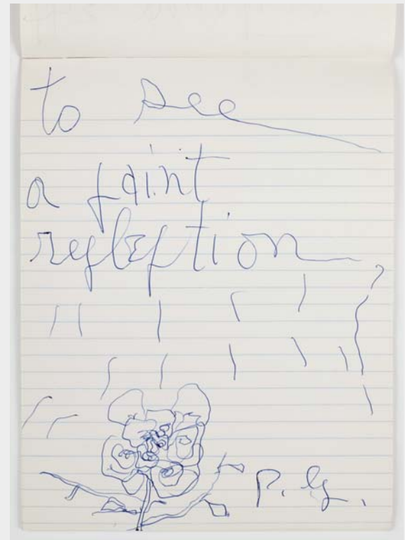
helped me

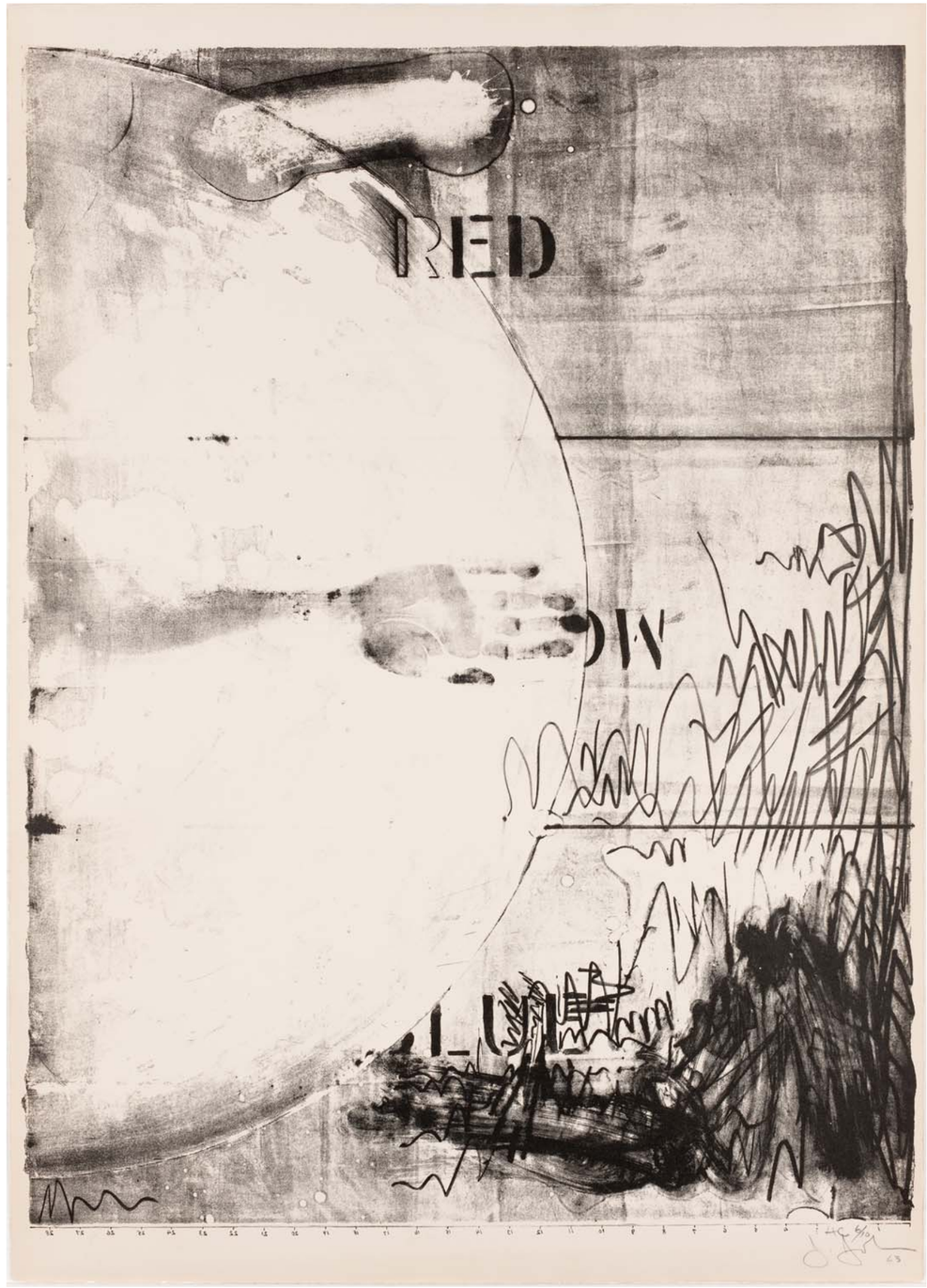

to see
a faint
reflection
P. G.

Philip Guston *Untitled*, 1966, Lithograph (Inscribed 'Artist's Proof for Morty'), 54.6 x 73.7 cm
Private Collection

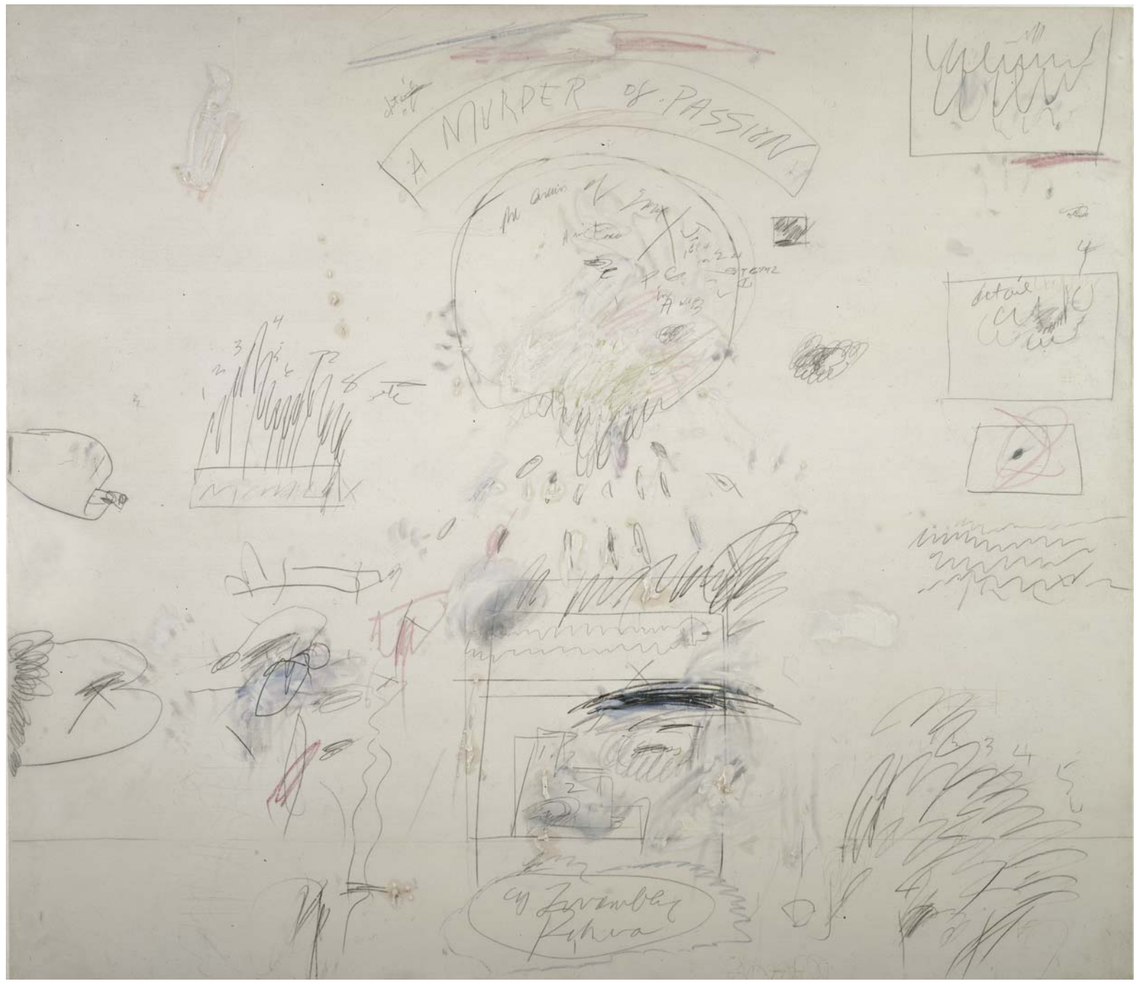
Philip Guston *Untitled*, 1967, Ink on paper, 36.8 x 41.9 cm
Private Collection

Jasper Johns *Drawing number 2 'For Morty'*, 1968, Ink and watercolour on paper, 24 x 18 cm framed
Private Collection

Jasper Johns *Hatteras*, 1963, Lithograph, 104 x 75 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Permanent Loan, the American Ireland Fund

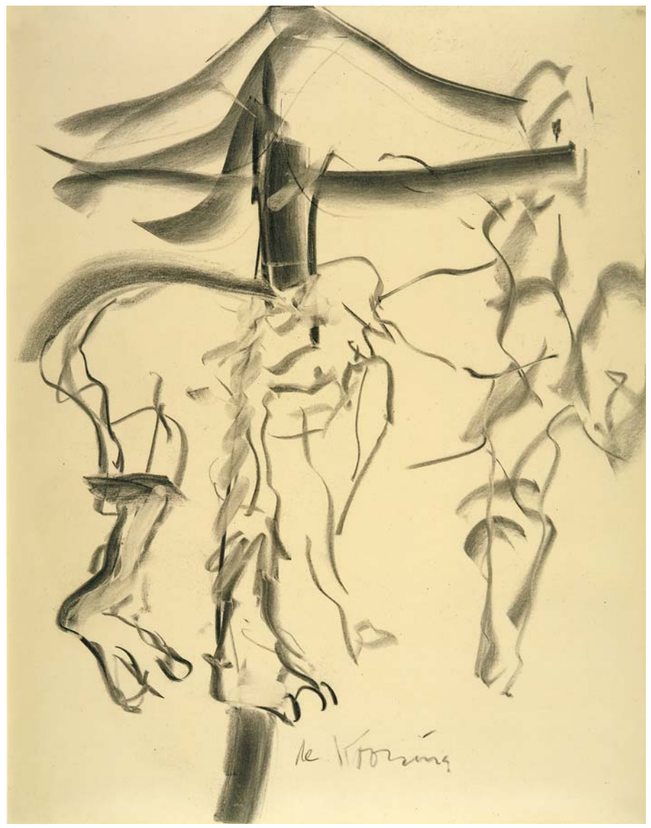


Cy Twombly *A Murder of Passion*, 1960, Lead pencil, wax crayon, oil paint on canvas, 174 x 200 cm
Collection of J & M Donnelly

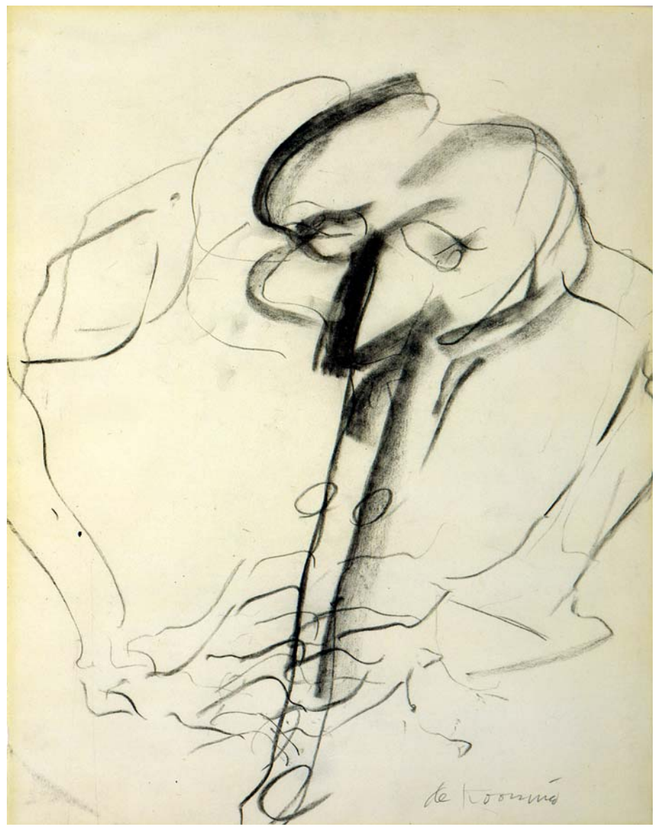


Cy Twombly *Untitled*, 1965, Graphite and coloured crayon on paper, 67.2 x 86.2 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK

Willem de Kooning *Drawing*, 1967, Charcoal on paper (on paper mount), 61 x 47.63 cm
Private Collection



Willem de Kooning *Untitled*, 1969, Charcoal on paper, 57.15 x 45.7 cm
Private Collection



Barnett Newman *Untitled*, 1960, Brush and ink on paper, 35.4 x 25.4 cm
Gift of Mrs. Barnett Newman in honour of Frank Stella (PA 1954)
Addison Gallery of American Art, Philips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts

Melanesia, Malekula. Head shaped house finial with lizard on back.
Fern wood
88,9 x 33 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK

Melanesia, Vanuatu, Malekula.
Fern wood figure
241,3 x 45,7 x 43,2 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK

Morton Feldman and the arts — a recollection.

WORK FIRST, STUDY LATER. **Morton Feldman**

In the late 1970s there stood, in my crumbling, 'late-Victorian' New York City brownstone, a tall, delicate, and somewhat disquieting sculpture which even the most qualified visitors had trouble identifying: younger artists (not to speak of older critics and art historians) were at a loss to guess its origins, or the craft tradition from which it might have stemmed:[1] the object had not been exhibited in a long time (if ever), had never been reproduced, and the fact that a Cy Twombly 'blackboard painting' hung nearby, as well as a small colourful work from the *Commodus* group (1964), didn't seem to help in identifying it. Neither did the 'sculptural' company the object kept there—a number of 'tribal' ancestral effigies of the sort we tend to view as exotic, or 'old' (as John Cage once labelled them to me), as well as some Minimal works from the 1960s (Judd, Chamberlain, Flavin, Andre), all of which added to the confusion of my guests. Only one person knew right away that the powerful and funky construction—with an enigmatic 'fetish-bundle' suspended at its centre—was an early work by Cy Twombly: and that person was Morton Feldman, despite his very poor eyesight.[2] He had immediately spotted (as he told me) the artist's *hand* in the gesture that had drawn the blue, pastel-like 'glyph' in the small glassed window right beneath the dangling 'head'. It was as if through this 'opening' could be heard the seductive *voice* of the *monstruum*, whose four thin wooden 'limbs' hung loosely down, undulating at any slight current before three vertical rows of round reflecting mirrors (the object-figure thus included two sorts of suspended quasi-*mobiles*). Ever since its early days, all of Twombly's sculpture had had this quality of frozen animation, and here the little drawing (almost a cryptic signature) already *spoke* that almost indecipherable language, present throughout the artist's work, but whose unique *pitch* and form, Morton Feldman, with his absolute ear and vision beyond eyesight, could instantly recognise. And in Twombly, in fact, even word-markings can look like the doodles an avant-garde musician might interject (as John Cage was known to do) on musical partitions: *situational* comments on the expressive form the artist is conjuring up before his very eyes, yet an integral part of that very form, in sound or vision.

Cy Twombly
Untitled
1954 (New York)
Wood, glass, mirrors, fabric, twine, wire, wood spoons, oil crayon, house paint, wax
203.2 x 35.3 x 28 cm
The Menil Collection, Houston

> *every twelve years or so, rather than change my style I would always have a crisis, but I would always ask myself the question, 'Now who would I bring to the desert island?' Remember, I am going from one desert island to a new thing, so I have to get out of the old desert island; and being to some degree (very heavily by DNA) an old Talmudist, I could go through this conversation with myself very easily. And about every twelve years I have to. And it was Bunita Marcus's — 'What if Bach was wrong?', that began a new process of rethinking, about my life's music and about the music that was around me.* (Ibid. pp. 1-2)

In the 'Conversation' published in this catalogue Morty said:

> The Twombly drawing in my bedroom, I cannot see it. Very big and just a shape, almost phallic, done with thin pencil. And I have to go and put the shade down; I've been living with this damn thing for thirty-five years and I can't see it. [...] I wouldn't say that it's comparable to pianissimo in music, I would say that if he was a composer you would have to sit on the stage.

Morty told me how he had once run into Cy Twombly, on Madison Avenue, in the 1960s, and the artist had taken the large drawing in question here, of faint waving lines, from a roll under his arm and given it to him. The image of 'sitting-on-the-stage' evoked here by Feldman's imagination, is akin to Morty's sometimes getting down on all fours in order to *feel,* rather than to actually *see*, the texture of a Turkish nomadic rug. I also remember him often slumping forward, as if absorbed in a trance, at the performance of one of his own pieces (and occasionally those of others): he seemed immersed in a sort of *alternate hearing*, or a listening-beyond-listening.

There may be a similar *aural* root to Twombly's 'writing-in-art': it is as if words, names, sentences and lines of poems came to him as voices heard *silently* in the mind or, in the case of sculpture, as if his *things* came to us from the past, carrying half-erased inscriptions—*soft sounds* and visual traces of an evanescent, long-*unuttered* source. This quality, paradoxically closer, perhaps, to a musical rather than to a visual imagination, also reminds me of the rarefied sensuousness of many compositions by Morton Feldman, ever since the early *graph notations* that had caught the attention of John Cage shortly after they'd met. For both Feldman and Twombly, even in cases where *words* are 'cited' as such, they tend to appear as if coming from *elsewhere*, from a state of mind to which history may provide the underlying texture of a language half-forgotten—as if from that 'undiscover' d country from whose bourn / No traveler returns [...]'.[3] They may be perceived as sound *ghosts* from the past (or the future?) that come to leave their faint but indelible mark on the visual *precipitates* of the artist's sensibility.[4] In Twombly, those ghost-words become pure gesture, *inner* correlates of a language at the limits of language itself, in the end unknown and unknowable, but for the flow of its *traces*. In Feldman (particularly in the glorious last ten years of his work) the sounds are like disjointed words, often repeated in shifting modulations and intonations, that become like pattern-configurations, or 'notational images'.[5]

As evident in many passages of the 1986 Studio School talk that I have chosen as one of the guiding threads for my recollections, Morty thought of himself as 'a painter watcher for thirty-five years' and was always amazed at how 'painters' (i.e. 'artists') could shake off their elders, as when Willem de Kooning would 'in a delightfully nice way, once in a while break into a tirade about Mondrian [...], he would say: 'That son-of-a-bitch is trying to tell us that it is all over!' In music, he thought, because of the technical-didactic 'problem-solving' involved, 'you have a marvellous philosophical contradiction: that on the one hand you work in such a way as to get all the values out of it [of the musical problem that one has set-up to deal with], and on the other hand, when you finish, hopefully [... you get] this sort of magic...' (Ibid.) In the context of this talk—about *Coptic Light* and other works of his of that time—Feldman said,

One unspoken reference, in Feldman's mention of Bach, above, in 'free-association' with 'the music that was around' him, may also have been to one of La Monte Young' s five-hour-long revival-performances of his *The Well-Tuned Piano* (1964-73-81-present), a composition of theme-permutations and improvisations for 'just-intuned' solo piano, to which I invited him and Bunita Marcus, in 1981. It was a deconstruction of Bach' s well-tempered canon in favour of a 'return' to natural intervals, and listening to it may have partly contributed (despite great differences in approach and material) to encourage Feldman to expand his own compositional scale by the extended use of pattern variation-through-quasi-repetition.[6] A music critic has noted, regarding 'improvisation' in Feldman: 'Indeed *Piano and String Quartet* [1985] is very 'complicated when it comes to durations. Such complexity derives from Feldman's *attitude* in his late works, to keep notated music free and 'floating', rhythmically speaking, as if it were *a written transcription of an improvisation*. Cage remarked once that Feldman' s late works were Feldman playing his early graph pieces'[7] [emphasis mine]. 'Attitude' was in fact a more central notion for Feldman than improvisation, also in relation to his way of looking at paintings and rugs:

> After living with this painting [Robert Rauschenberg's *Untitled Black Painting* (1952-53) which Morty had bought from the artist at the time, 'for 16 dollars and change'] and studying it intensely now and then, I picked up on an *attitude* about *making something* that was absolutely unique to me. To say that the *Black Painting* could be relegated to 'collage' simply did not ring true. It was more: it was like Rauschenberg's discovery that he wanted 'neither life nor art, but something in between.' I then began to compose a music dealing precisely with 'inbetween-ness' : creating a confusion of material and construction, and a fusion of method and application, by concentrating on how they could be directed toward 'that which is difficult to categorise'.[8]

I remember Morty telling me of a time in his life when he lived in the same building as Barnett Newman, and of how they would accidentally meet on some landing and carry on interminable conversations (sometimes to the exasperation of their respective wives, waiting for them to come to supper) about aesthetic and related questions of vital importance to them. With the proper interlocutor, there was no end to the outpouring of their 'Talmudic' minds.[9] In the early 1980s, I introduced the painter Francesco Clemente, who had recently moved to New York, to Morty and they too became close: to this day, Francesco says that when Morty visited his studio, 'it was as if thought itself were walking in.' In the Spring of 1983, the artist was preparing simultaneous exhibitions in three Soho art galleries, in New York City.[10] There was a small square painting which I had seen before in what I thought was a finished form, but when we visited the studio with Morty, that day, we found the artist in the process of applying a thin band of red and white stripes to the bottom of the picture—claiming to have thus 'resolved it'. It was not easy to say why this small addition to the image had made such a difference, and yet it was immediately evident that the painting had acquired balance and strength, a new 'scale', and more of what Morty called, on that and other occasions, 'visibility'. He always insisted on this notion—which seemed at once natural and surprising—particularly when assessing the impact of new work by young artists whose work he approached for the first time: it was as if what made a work 'perceivable' to him was also what made it artistically viable and effective. Francesco' s subtle, and 'ruthless' (another notion dear to Morty), modification of what had appeared to be a 'finished' (if perhaps somewhat 'soft') picture, gave it a striking jolt that made it impossible to take its appearance for granted, and rendered its 'inspiration' —beyond any *intention*—suddenly *visible*. Morty remembered a similar experience with Mark Rothko, many years before:

> I was once in Rothko' s studio when his assistant restretched the top of a large painting at least four times. Standing some distance away, Rothko was deciding weather to bring the canvas down an inch or two, or maybe even [to raise it] a little bit higher. This question of *scale*, for me, precludes any concept of symmetry or asymmetry from affecting the eventual length of my music.[11]

He added, on the same register:

> It seems that scale (this subliminal mathematics) is not given to us in western culture, but must be arrived at individually in our own work in our own way. Like that small Turkish 'tile' rug, it is Rothko's scale that removes any argument over the proportions of one area to another, or over its degree of symmetry or asymmetry. *The sum of the parts does not equal the whole; rather, scale is discovered and contained as an image*. It is not form that floats the painting, but Rothko' s finding that particular scale which suspends all proportions in equilibrium. Stasis, as it is utilised in painting, is not traditionally part of the apparatus of music. [...] The degrees of stasis found in a Rothko or a Guston, were perhaps the most significant elements that I brought to my music from painting. (Ibid., p. 103)

I became newly aware of the great importance of the 'visual' in the sound world of Morty's 'abstract' compositions, when I ventured to write, while listening to one of his 'long' early 1980s pieces (performed at the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York), some notes that came to me in the form of a metaphorical account of a journey through a spare landscape. After showing these to him (at his request), I was surprised to hear him say that he thought it was a legitimate description of the composition in its development through time, and in some ways more telling than many a musicological analysis. Despite the great intricacy and complexity of the formal and even mathematical underpinnings of his works, his diffidence towards technical 'explanations' of them was well-known. This may relate to Morty' s almost contradictory affirmation that music is not properly 'art' (there is mention of this in our 'conversation' , in this catalogue). He never told me what he thought music actually might be, for him, except to hint that it was in some way a 'technical' endeavour, bound by its own laws and constrictions; painting (at least in modernism) did not have comparable limits and was hence 'freer' (even to some extent 'arbitrary') and *artistic*, and for that reason, perhaps, could inspire music with some of its aesthetic 'freedom'. And this same artistic quality—despite its 'conventions' —was one Morty found in certain traditional crafts, such as the making of (so-called) nomadic Turkish rugs. Of his close scrutiny of them he said that,

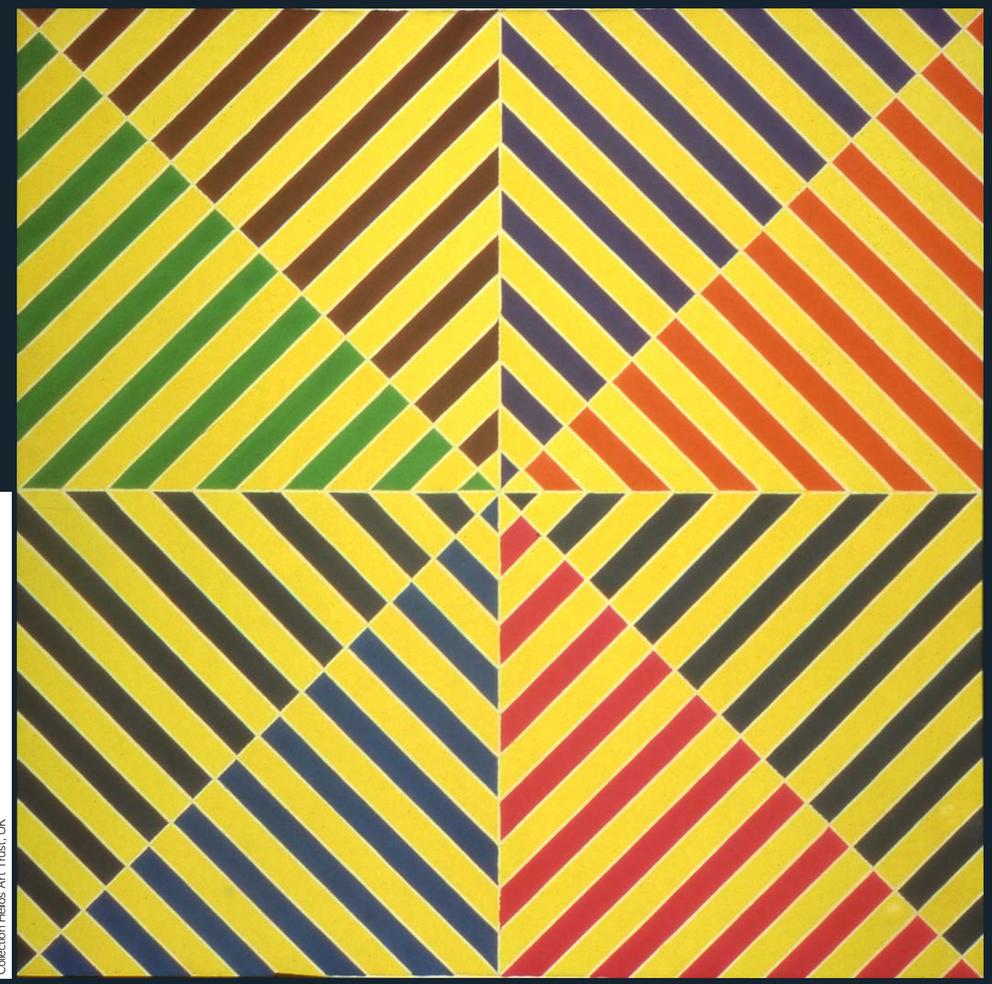
> *you are not involved with your imagination; you are learning the difference between techniques [...]. It is a fantastic discipline to be involved with [...]—where years before I had no consideration for the* artistry *[emphasis mine] that it takes to make them on several points. I am not talking about [...] some kind of chic quality. I am talking about patterns that you don't forget [...]*[12]

Characteristic of Feldman's thinking was this way of keeping himself—and hence his audience, both musical and otherwise—off-balance by a juxtaposition of intuitive, often paradoxical, concepts. Here the artistry he was referring to may be related to the craft of traditional artisans and yet it is this very 'technique' that also conveys—analogically, rather than expressively—the hint of a compositional mystery akin to that of 'art'.

In the same Studio School lecture, delivered less than a year before his death, he went on to say:

> *So I wanted to write this piece, and what I gave up was a sense of identity of myself making something; what I gave up and what I got were patterns which don' t seem too distinguished, that repeat, that continue, and yet to keep it up there in the orchestra in a mechanical way... [...] and still keep some of the miracle of art —[that] was very very exciting. So what I am really also talking about is the nature of the subject matter, what the possibilities of the subject matter are. [Ibid., n.p.]*

This identification of the 'subject matter' with the *material* of art may have led Morty to exclaim, once, in front of a geometric and colourful Frank Stella painting at my house (*Sidi Ifni II*, 1965), 'This, too, is *folk art*!' He did not mean to denigrate the artist' s work, quite the contrary: I think that he wanted to stress the effective *modesty* of the patterns put into play by Stella and their shrewd self-referential *thingness*, that somehow generated an artistic effect almost despite themselves. The 'technique' is rational and conscious, even ruthless, as we have seen, but not the 'art' which remains essentially unpredictable —something 'found' but not 'searched for' as Picasso said.[13] So music is not 'art' —in its intrinsic indebtedness to technique, and perhaps also, paradoxically, in its invisibility and immateriality—and yet it can achieve artistic effects (almost in spite of itself, Feldman seems to have been implying) as it reveals its 'subject matter' (which might, in some ways, be *meta-musical*). The nomadic rug's 'placement of the pattern', Feldman wrote, 'brings to mind Matisse's mastery of his seesaw balance between movement and stasis.' [14] And here is what he said about 'abstraction' in one of his last important talks: 'It is varying degrees of representation treated abstractly, and abstraction treated as varying degrees of representation. That is, abstraction that seems to be almost a *thing* in itself... has the mood of a thing... almost a figuration of a thing. But it's not discernible; it's difficult to read.' [15]



Frank Stella
Sidi Ifni II
1965
Fluorescent alkyd and graphite
223,5 x 223,5 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK

Allusion to these possible 'references' beyond music, and perhaps also beyond 'art' (which also kept coming up in our 'conversation') transpire in something else Feldman said at the New York Studio School, with regard to the importance of the *first step* (the Spanish word *arranque* may better reflect the idea), of any valid artistic endeavour, and to a remark by Boris Pasternak he was fond of: 'He said that the statute of the artist, whatever he is doing, is in *where* he begins and *how* he begins whatever selection' [of the material and its form] (Ibid. n.p.): like the rug weaver setting up the threads on her loom, while perhaps also thinking of other rugs, other rooms... And referring to his *Coptic Light*, its material and the process of its composition, Feldman spoke of looking, into 'the articulation of what you hear [...] like a refracting, a follow-up kind of statement: like the refracted sound mass, which is like listening to it and finally adjusting your ear, the way one would adjust one's eyes to the light [...]' (Ibid. n.p.). The importance of the visual is quite evident here (as already in the title of the piece).

Yet, Feldman did not stop at this sensory metaphor when describing what he was aiming at by his 'refracted sound mass'. The sensuality of his sense of sound reminds me of Lorenzo Ghiberti, when he praised the *tactile* qualities over the visual ones of certain Classical sculptures accidentally rediscovered in his time, or of Mark Rothko, who invariably, when visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, with Feldman, disdained the painting collections, and focused instead on the 'physicality' of Classical sculpture: colour itself, for Rothko (as for Feldman), could acquire this quasi solid presence and significance (and Ancient sculpture, of course, was originally coloured). Morty evoked this kind of sensibility when recalling a conversation he'd had with David Sylvester about their common love of Oriental rugs:

> *And I said to him, 'What does this involve—your having these rugs?' And he says, 'You know, it's like sex; after a while you lose a little interest in it, you want something a little more* tactile*! [...] But where am I with Coptic Light? So I made a switch; nothing painful, I am still nuts about painting, but I made the switch into more tactile elements [...] And so I would look at textiles, and I would look at [the design], but also: were there two loops [in the weaving of the pattern]? So it must be important [...] and the colour [...] red, and blue, maybe a little yellow; and their alternation, and I am getting all excited about something which ordinarily as a young man I would not have been.' (Ibid. n.p.).*

In 'Crippled Symmetry' he wrote: 'As a composer, I respond to this most singular aspect affecting a rug's colouration and its creation of a microchromatic overall hue [...] What could be used to accommodate, by equally simple means, musical colour? Patterns.'[16] There is almost a sense of synaesthesia in these shifts of sensory suggestion in their relation to the very 'abstract'—indeed minimal—musical material. Feldman was, at this time, 'stretching' his compositions over long extensions of time, and yet, often, as in *Piano and String Quartet* (1985), 'there are no repeated elements'.[17] He once told Karl Heinz Stockhausen that his 'secret' was that he did not 'push the sounds around', and it amused him that Stockhausen 'mulled this over, and asked, 'Not even a little bit?'[18] In that same Studio School talk (as always improvised, and relying on a free-association style that proceeded for the most part non-linearly, and by leaps and bounds, very much as in his brilliant form of conversation), Morty referred to the work of Dan Flavin (which I had introduced him to), with its 'contradictory' combination of physicality and abstraction, colour and transparency, 'readymade-ness' and startling effects, 'patterns' and linearity, 'decoration' and absolute *objectual* minimalism, variation and repetition. In both Feldman and Flavin there is a new conception of the workings of *time*, both in perception and 'art': a new, quasi-Augustinian 'psychological' present, attained through the blurring of iteration and difference, or a sense of stillness as the result of a *motuum perpetuum*—that awareness of *fixity-in-mobility* that can come upon one while sitting through one of Feldman's very long late compositions, or while walking through one of Flavin's large environments of structural lights (such as at the Ménil Collection's Richmond Hall, at Dia Beacon, or at the Chinati Foundation, in Marfa, Texas).

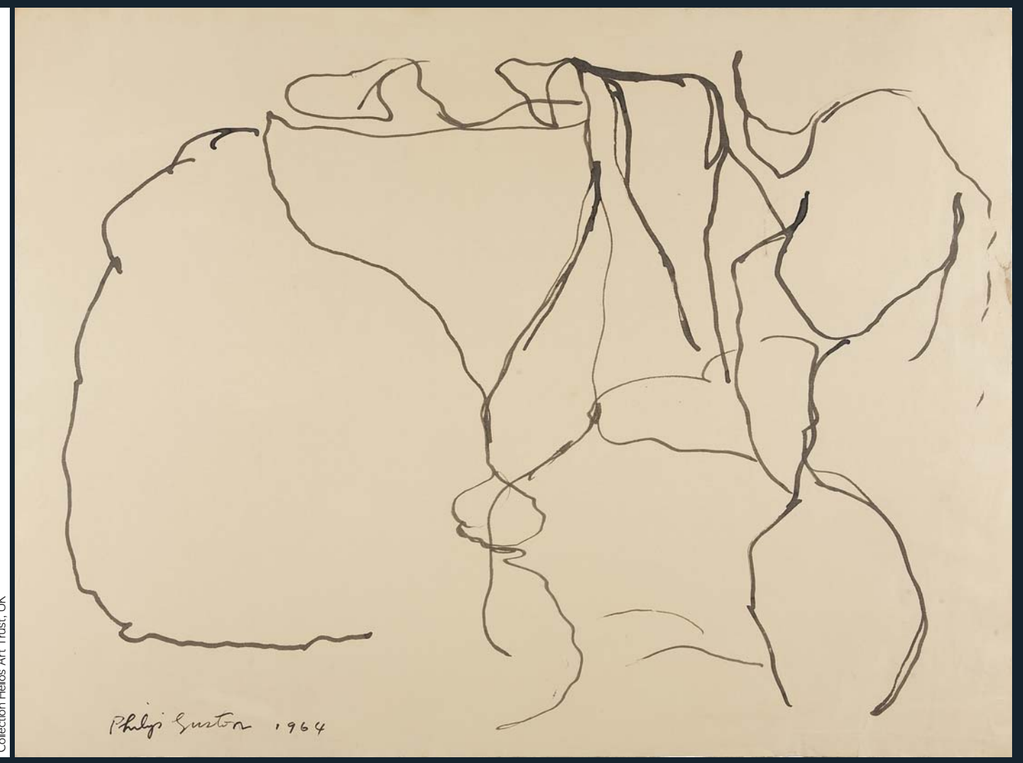
When Morty and I celebrated the first performance of one of his very long chamber pieces with a dinner party at my place in the company of some of his oldest friends (Jasper Johns, Merce Cunningham, etc.), John Cage, who had sat respectfully, though perhaps somewhat uneasily, through the slow performance, could not resist expressing his discomfiture: 'Morty, that was good, but why so long?' We were all startled—Morty first of all—by the directness of the challenge; but Morty calmly responded 'Because it had to be'.[19] I felt, in that brief exchange, the divide between the 'abstraction' of the classical post-Second World War American avant-garde—that New Music (and *Neue Musik*) that had paralleled the explosion of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and early Minimalism (not to speak of aspects of so-called 'Conceptual Art')—and a 'new' New Music that related to a different western sensibility, more open now to suggestions from non-western traditions in terms of scope, performance, perception, and effect of musical composition, and its reception in and through time. Although it is perhaps as hard to translate the articulation of this new *sort* of beauty into words as it is to describe that of certain mathematical theorems, you could at least say, in the words of the Japanese writer Yoko Ogawa, that it is a form that 'strikes a harmonious balance between strength and sensibility.'[20] Even when advising me on the most effective shape I could give to an essay about which I had consulted him, Morty always insisted that one had to be 'ruthless' in assessing the structure and effectiveness of form—and not hesitate to subvert the shape and progression of the material, or even to turn things on their heads, if need be: he spoke of how he would sometimes abruptly change the order of large portions of his compositions. That also implied something like a 'synchronic' conception of musical form, more akin, I think, to that of a visual work than to that of a narrative text.

Milan Kundera wrote about the relation between form, memory and *slowness*:

> To give form to a duration is the requirement of beauty, but also of memory. That which is formless [*informe*] cannot be seized, cannot be remembered [...] There is a secret link between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. [...] In existential mathematics this experience takes on the form of two elementary equations: the degree of slowness is in direct proportion to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed to the intensity of forgetfulness.[21] (My translation, from the Italian).

Looking at paintings, and at Turkish rugs—Feldman may have felt that they posed a different challenge from that of music to the flow of memory and its 'narrative' configurations: they represented a holistic, time-neutral, mode of apprehension and signification that worked, so to speak, *against* time. It was as if, in his late work (as perhaps also, though not as intentionally and self-consciously, in some of his earliest) what he had called the 'memory devices' that allowed the listener to keep track of a composition, no matter how long, had been transformed into devices that dissolved memory itself into stillness and realisation. That may be the undertone of his humourous critique of Proust's reification of memory in our January 1985 'conversation' (in this catalogue). In 'Crippled Symmetry', using his just completed *Triadic Memories* (July 1981) as an example, he had already stated: 'What western musical forms have become is a paraphrase of memory. [... While my] way of working was a conscious attempt at 'formalising' a disorientation of memory.' In a characteristic Feldman contradiction, 'repetition' works as if against itself.[22]

He might never have spoken of it in these terms, but I think that in his late years ('late' given his almost sudden death, certainly not because the spring of his creativity had waned) Morton Feldman could have made his the words of the self-styled Italian 'Unknown Philosopher', Guido Ceronetti: 'Art soothes or dispels pain because it is the mysterious realm of a meta-temporal past free of pain, safe in that it has been absorbed into the Invisible.'[23] Or, as Morty's old friend, the Classicist and fellow composer Christian Wolff said of him: 'Listening to this music is like looking at the star-filled night sky; anything else is material for an astronomy lesson.'[24]



Philip Guston
Untitled
1964
Ink on paper
45.7 x 61 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK

Cy Twombly
Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)
1970 (Rome)
Oil-based house paint, wax crayon on canvas
300,1 x 999,8 cm
The Menil Collection, Houston

Endnotes

[1] I wish to thank Gini Alhadeff for generously helping me to revise the form of this essay.

[2] Morty and I had been friends for more than fifteen years, and he often stayed with me on his visits to the city. Later on, in Rome (in the early 1980s), Cy Twombly dug out for me from his archives a group of haunting drawings, done in Morocco in the early 1950s, in which the skeletal two-pronged vertical shapes already appeared that turned into 'side-arms' of sorts for the quasi-anthropomorphic 'figure'—neither figurative nor abstract—that had so baffled my visitors.

[3] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, 88–89. I am thinking, for example, of *Neither* (or *Opera*, 1977), on words by Samuel Beckett, but also of Feldman's new score for Beckett's 1959 radio play, *Words and Music* (1987), and of his final piece, *For Samuel Beckett* (1987), which was to be followed by one he intended to compose for Beckett's *Cascando*, but was prevented from doing by his sudden illness.

[4] The critic John Rockwell put it well: 'A distinction has sometimes been drawn between eye music and ear music, music that makes most sense when analysed on the page vs. music that convinces primarily through auditory experience. For Feldman, it was the performance, not the inaudible act of notation, that made ultimate sense of the music. Through his lifelong experiments with the sense and visual aesthetics of notation and his often arcane descriptions of his materials, Feldman had ample credentials as an eye musician. But it was not just the instruments but the instrumentalists (and singers) who ultimately made the piece. He wrote of 'notational images' and 'the tumbling of sorts [that] happens in midair between their translation from the page and their execution.' 'Morton Feldman (and *Crippled Symmetry*)', on line. In his own article, 'Crippled Symmetry', Feldman recalled how when his teacher, Stefan Wolpe, who also entertained broad interests in all the arts, would chide him for exerting what he called 'negation', by going 'from one thing to another' he 'had not [as yet] met the painters whose tactical solutions were to contribute so much to this problem that confronted' him [...]: 'my approach, which was not conscious at the time and only revealed itself many years later, was: work first, study later.' See *RES 2 Autumn 1981 - Anthropology and Aesthetics*, pp. 91–103, p. 101.

[5] 'Though these patterns exist in rhythmic shapes articulated by instrumental sounds, they are also in part notational images that do not make a direct impact on the ear as we listen.' Frank Sani, 'Why Patterns? An analysis of Feldman's *Piano and string quartet*', on line, 2000, n.p.

[6] Feldman also greatly respected the quarter-tone subtleties in Giacinto Scelsi's compositions, that had a partly Oriental inspiration, which he knew since the 1960s. Although Feldman had of course known La Monte Young's radically avant-garde music since the late 1950s (when he sometimes performed in Yoko Ono's New York loft, in his proto-Fluxus days), this was the first extensive performance of the work by the composer himself (after its Rome World Première, in 1974, which I had attended), at the Harrison Street 'Dream House' building provided to La Monte Young by the Dia Art Foundation. ('I understand—but a *temple*!', Morty had exclaimed on seeing it, in his marked Brooklyn accent and in a mixture of awe and scepticism for the grandiose scope of that set-up). In November 1981, I also took Morty and Bunita to the New York Première of Philip Glass's three and a half hour long opera *Satyagraha*, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. While the insistent reliance on 'true' repetition of a much reduced material, in this work, corresponded to a post-Minimalist sensibility quite different from Feldman's, it is also possible that its 'success' encouraged him to undertake longer and longer compositions in his later music. (It is a privilege of *true* masters to tap younger presences as stimulus for their own renewal).

There was some circularity in this sequence of connections, as it was Morty who had introduced me, more than ten years earlier, to Jean and Dominique de Ménil, who were to become my parents-in-law. Their daughter Philippa eventually founded the Dia Art Foundation, and she and I were close to La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela. Through another small foundation I established, some time later, I promoted the professional studio recordings of the whole repertory of Pandit Pran Nath, the late Indian Kirana-style master-singer with whom they were closely associated, and who was also Terry Riley's teacher. Before then, when the Ménils were planning the inauguration of the ecumenical and non-denominational Rothko Chapel (in Houston, Texas, 1971), I suggested that they commission from Morty a composition, *The Rothko Chapel* (1971), to be played on that occasion and relating in a direct way to the large, dark paintings in the Chapel—the last major work by Rothko. At the same time, a monumental sculpture by another great friend of Morty's, Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk* (1963–1967), was permanently installed in front of the Chapel and dedicated by the Ménils to the memory and legacy of Dr Martin Luther King.

[7] Frank Sani, op. cit., n.p. A few years later, Feldman gladly participated in a conversation about 'improvisation' in music I organised between him and La Monte Young, that was published as: 'Morton Feldman and La Monte Young, a conversation on composition and improvisation (Bunita Marcus, Francesco Pellizzi, Marian Zazeela)', *RES 13 Spring 1987*, pp. 152–173.

[8] M. Feldman, 'Crippled Symmetry', op. cit. p. 101.

[9] Morty also often spoke to me both of his mother's sharp repartees and words of wisdom (he considered her to have been the most formative person in his life), and recalled John Cage's humourous characterisation of them as forms of high-minded 'Jew-jitsu'.

[10] This friendship encouraged Clemente to acquire an old grand piano for his cavernous studio-loft on Broadway, and to host several concerts there, organised by Morty with the help of Bunita Marcus. Later, Philip Glass also performed there.

[11] Morton Feldman, 'Crippled Symmetry', op.cit., pp. 91–103, p. 92. At my invitation, Morton Feldman served until his death as a most valued 'Editorial Advisor' to this multidisciplinary journal which I had co-founded: his last of several contributions to it (a 'Conversation with Iannis Xenakis') appeared in *RES 15 Spring 1988*, an issue dedicated to his memory.

[12] Morton Feldman, 'Talk at the Studio School, 8 October 1986', New York City, n.p.; transcribed by Rose Hauer from a makeshift registration of it I made at the time, in conjunction with the playing of a recording of *Coptic Light* (1985, for orchestra; 25 minutes). Feldman had been Director of the art school, in the 1960s, and was always glad to return there. It may be relevant, in relation to what he said in this talk about his interest in Oriental rugs (and about Rothko's influence) to quote from a description of this work in the on-line review of a recording of a later performance by the Symphonie Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, conducted by Peter Rundel, in 2002: '*Coptic Light* is monolithic and hypnotic, and functions as a static mass of sound built up through many small cycles, stretched over a long time period. Yet an impression of vast stillness is created, which concentrates the listener's attention on details in the moment, rather than on what came before or may happen later.'

[13] Frank Stella did actually say, in a filmed interview by Lawrence Rubin, that his abstract motives were striving to get away from the second wave of Abstract Expressionism, which had become 'the illustration of energy rather than an expression of energy', and that his were like 'patterns that travelled [...] hard to penetrate—all of the action would be on the surface—not an imitation or a presentation', all of which one could also apply, if metaphorically, to Feldman's use of musical 'patterns'. Dziga Vertov, documentary filmmaker, 1978.

[14] 'Crippled Symmetry', op. cit. p. 94.

[15] Morton Feldman, 'Introduction' to the world première of his four hour long composition *For Philip Guston* (1984), 21 April 1985, at the *North American New Music Festival*, The State University of New York at Buffalo.

[16] Op. cit., p. 94. About this relation between colour and sound in Feldman's work John Rockwell wrote: 'Hushed volume, vivid but subtly muted colours and slow tempos only heightened the effect of individual sonorities. Feldman chose his colours instinctively but with fanatical precision. Every piece arose from the instruments playing it. In the case of *Crippled Symmetry*, it is the exact hues of the flute and bass flute, the piano and celesta, and the glockenspiel and vibraphone that create the piece's sound world'. (Op. cit., n.d.).

[17] Frank Sani, op.cit., n.p.

[18] 'Crippled Symmetry', op. cit. p. 97.

[19] Or words to that effect. 'Feldman's later compositions *had* to be long because the same elements squeezed in or chopped off in works of lesser scale might seem simplistic or uninteresting, whereas at the scale he determined for them, they took on an inevitability and even a grandeur that defined their being.' John Rockwell, op.cit., n.p.

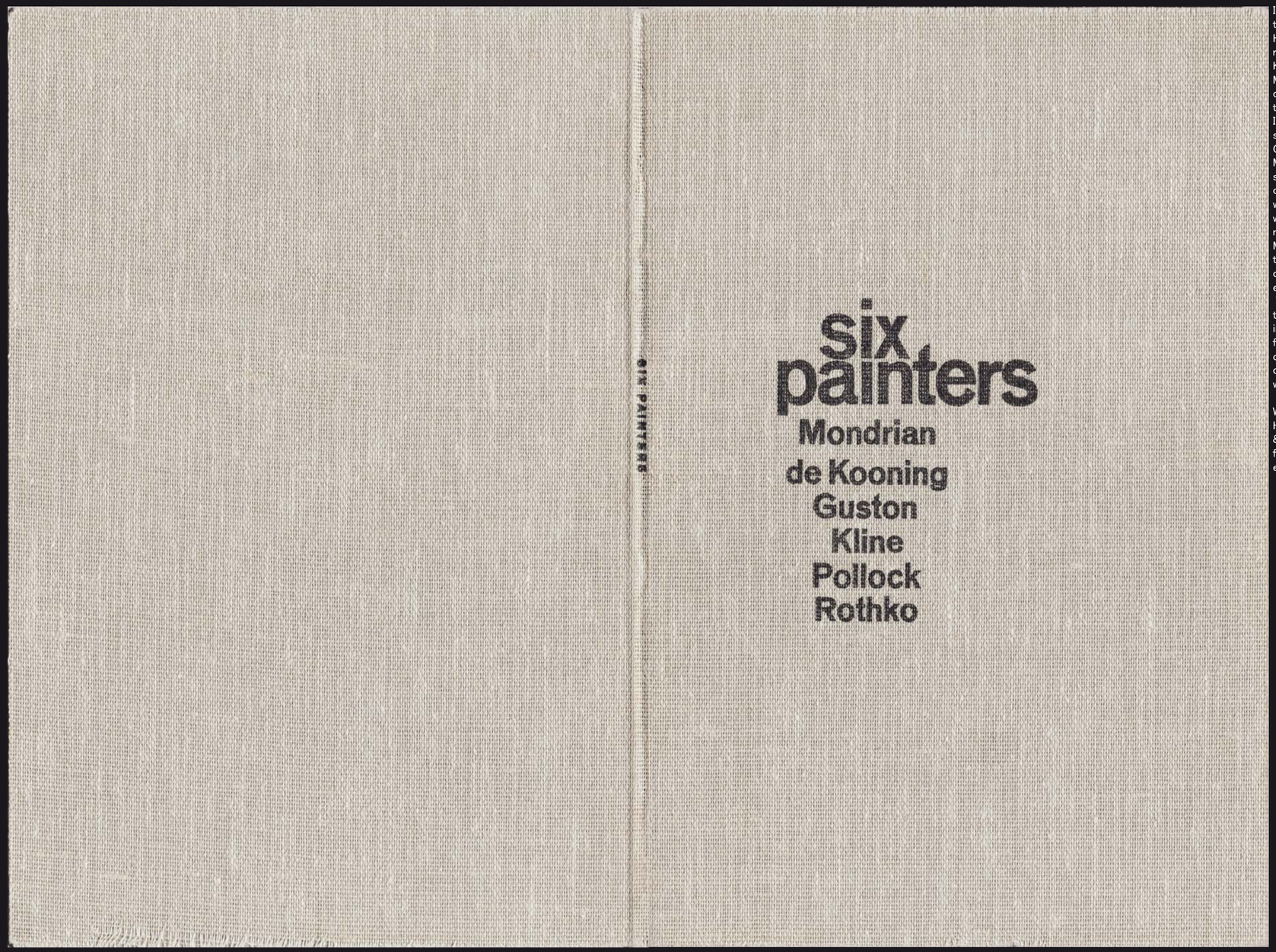
[20] Yoko Ogawa, *The housekeeper and the professor*, tr. by S. Snyder, Picador, 2009.

[21] *La Lentezza*, tr. Ena Marchi, Milano, 1995, p. 45. (My translation from the Italian).

[22] Op. cit., p. 93. This paradox has been seized upon by two British critics who attended the World Première of *Triadic Memories*, in London, in October 1981: 'Described by the composer as probably the largest butterfly in captivity, concerned with the shape of a leaf and not the tree, each tiny segment taken in isolation possesses its own peculiar beauty, their cumulative effect as they dissolve slowly into one another, one of a near trance-like stillness and immobility. [...] Music which depends on the most infinitesimal fluctuations of response [in this sense, also *à la* Duchamp: cfr. his *infra-mince*, FP] [...] everything is unexpected, everything begins to sound curiously the same.' Robert Henderson *Daily Telepgraph*, 6 October 1981). '[...] the psychological effect is often like that of an elasticised Webern work; [...] Feldman shows much ingenuity in *dislocating* [emphasis mine] his slow basic rhythm, throwing parts out of synchronization or building in faint hesitations by ingenious notational means [...] three written notes can occupy 75 seconds [...] A reaction against the busy-ness and absurd over-concentrations of meaning in most intellectual western music." Hugo Cole (*The Guardian*, 5 October 1981).

[23] Guido Ceronetti, *Insetti senza frontiere*, Milano, 2009, p. 28.

[24] Quoted by Michael Dervan, *The Irish Times*, 13 February 2003.



In 1967 Morton Feldman curated an exhibition at the University of St. Thomas Art Department, Houston, Texas. Entitled *Six Painters*, and referring to Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, the show demonstrates a commitment to the Abstract Expressionist works that are now heralded as icons of modernism. In the Acknowledgement page of the small but significant accompanying publication, the then Chairman of the Art Department, Dominique de Ménil, writes that the lending of such works signifies a 'devotion to the artists'. Indeed, this catalogue illustrates Feldman's faith in these works of modern art, his sustained friendships with many of these names further suggesting a relationship that extends beyond mere influence. More significantly, it is possible to trace a clear trajectory between the works displayed in this catalogue and the notational experiments employed by Feldman, so that the composer's 'Vertical Thoughts' emerge as those which cross the perameters of both art and music. Situated in the centre of this IMMA publication, the following *Six Painters* reproduction indicates the centrality of this book in the conception of our own exploration of the lines connecting Feldman with the visual arts.

We are grateful to Dr Bernard Bonario, Art History Programme Chair, Department of Fine & Performing Arts, University of St. Thomas for permission to reproduce this catalogue in its entirety.

SIX PAINTERS

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS ART DEPARTMENT

SIX PAINTERS

MONDRIAN

GUSTON

KLINE

DE KOONING

POLLOCK

ROTHKO

HOUSTON, TEXAS

FEBRUARY–APRIL 1967

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Today, lending a Mondrian, a Guston, a Rothko, a Pollock, a de Kooning, a Kline is a great sacrifice and shows devotion to the artists. I want to express my warmest thanks to Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller, the James Clarks, the Harold Diamonds, Betty Guiberson, the Ben Hellers, Harry Holtzman, Mrs. Cecil Blaffer Hudson, Martha Jackson, Philip Johnson, the Estate of Franz Kline, Frank Lloyd, Adélaïde de Ménil, Mrs. Albert Newman, Elinor Poindexter, the Bernard Reis, Merrill C. Rueppel, Allan Stone, James Johnson Sweeney, Christophe de Menil Thurman and Ted Weiner.

Philip Guston and Mark Rothko have given exceptional glamour to the exhibition by the loan of several important paintings.

I am indebted to Morton Feldman for his active part in the preparation of the exhibition, for his generous loans and for the essay he wrote for this catalogue.

To Thomas Hess also, I am grateful for his introduction to the exhibition.

Dominique de Ménil
Chairman of the Art Department

FOREWORD

Peter Selz wrote in December, 1965*, that after World War II there followed a period "marked by a dynamic new self-assertion, which almost invariably took abstract forms, breaking with previous concepts of easel paintings and accepted standards of sculpture... the fulcrum shifted temporarily to New York. There a group of young artists came to maturity in the presence of older European artists—among them the surrealists and Mondrian probably being most important."

From this group of creative artists, who were to be called abstract expressionists, five have been selected to be exhibited next to Mondrian: de Kooning, Guston, Kline, Pollock and Rothko. In no way are they disciples of Mondrian. No link with him is even apparent at first. His insistence on primary colors and on strictly vertical and horizontal lines suggests the rigidity of a puritan. What could be further away than Kline's dramatic statements in large free strokes, than Rothko's glorious shores of blurred colors or Pollock's galaxies of spots, regally spattered along rhythmic lines?

The limpidity of Mondrian's paintings, the haughty firmness of his lines were reached through intense concentration after overcoming endless hesitations. This appears clearly in the large unfinished composition of 1941 where the positions of the lines have not yet been frozen and where various possibilities coexist. Obviously Mondrian kept a composition fluid until it ripened into some ethereal solidity.

This underlying fluidity and ripening is radically opposed to the art of Picasso whose genius finds its expression in successive assertions, but it is akin to the approach of the abstract expressionist artists. Underneath their violent brush strokes there is study and meditation: A fine pencil line, still visible, delineates the future heavy streak on a Kline composition; the film of Hans Namuth on de Kooning reveals the slow process of this artist's work. Contrary to common belief, there is here more hesitation than abrupt decision, more concentration than action.

In their efforts to tear themselves away from Picasso, the abstract expressionists found in Mondrian a painter whose sensitivity was close to theirs. They also found a master who had totally succumbed to Picasso's influence and totally emerged from it. No wonder they looked at him.

Dominique de Ménil

* Selz, Peter. *Seven Decades 1895–1965, Crosscurrents in Modern Art*, an exhibition held in seven galleries in New York for the benefit of the Public Education Association (New York: April 26–May 21, 1966).

MONDRIAN AND NEW YORK PAINTING

There are many differences between postwar American abstract expressionism and the styles of European modernism (cubism, surrealism, etc.) out of which the New York school developed. One of the most interesting and characteristic is the high regard in which Mondrian was held by such artists as de Kooning, Pollock, Rothko, Kline, and Guston, while he was all but ignored by their colleagues in Paris, London, and Rome.

When I first visited the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1949, I was amazed that Mondrian was not represented in its collection—after all, the artist had spent the greater part of his maturity in Paris. In New York's Museum of Modern Art, where my generation learned its chronology of vanguards, Mondrian was always allocated a key spot. Jean Cassou, the brilliant novelist, poet, friend of artists, and director of the Paris museum, did not seem in the least disturbed by this gap when I mentioned it. "Oh, we knew Mondrian well," he said. "I used to see him regularly—around Montparnasse." About ten years later, a commercial gallery exhibited a series of Mondrian's tree and harbor pictures, very few of which had ever been seen in Paris. The exhibition met with resounding silence.

Meanwhile, in New York in the 1940's and 1950's, Mondrian was on everyone's lips: Harry Holtzman, Mondrian's friend, artistic heir, and executor, was very much a part of the New York scene; and James Johnson Sweeney, who organized a major Mondrian exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, kept the master's ideas visible there and later at the Guggenheim Museum.

Mondrian had painted his last masterpieces, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* and *Victory Boogie-Woogie*, in New York.

His documents and quotations appeared in artists' and critics' writings as regularly in New York as those of André Breton or Guillaume Apollinaire were cited in Paris.

About six years ago, an English critic came to New York for the first time and played a game with the artists and writers—asking them to name the five most important modern painters.

Naturally, we all screamed at the arbitrarily small number, but he persisted and was able to make the following conclusions:
–All the European and American artists he spoke to named Picasso and Matisse in their first five.

–Most Europeans included Bonnard, while *none* of them mentioned Mondrian.
–Practically all the Americans named Mondrian.

Why did we, and we alone, pick this severe, dogmatic, fanatically pure Hollander for a hero?

Well, first, as I have indicated, we knew about him, while he was practically unknown in Paris except to a small body of disciples (headed by the shrill Michel Seuphor).

Then also, he was the artist who worked at the edge—at the limits of possibility.

It should never be forgotten that for American painters in the 1940's, before the breakthrough, Art was dead. Artists were in despair: there was no place to go; no room left for work; everything had been done. They were drawn to Mondrian like detectives to the scene of the crime. There, in his white planes and perpendicular stripes, was the ultimate. And the amazing thing was that this ultimate—this corpse of art—seemed to burn with a mysterious radiance. An inexplicable life still flickered at the interstices.

He had surrounded himself with tons of theory, and it soon became evident that:

–He didn't live up to any of it.
–His logic was quite mad.
–There was something superb about the intellectual energy and ambition of his ideas. Mondrian took art seriously enough to make a dialectic from it that should, he believed, regulate universal human behavior. His style was meant to change all men's lives.

De Kooning, of course, had known of Mondrian since his student days in Holland in the 1920's. His background was the De Stijl movement. He invoked Mondrian endlessly in conversations as the artist with a "stupid" idea, who stuck to his idea, gave it a life of passionate thought, and transformed it into art. Who can tell where the art begins and the idea leaves off? What you see as flashes of light zipping where perpendiculars cross in a Mondrian is the energy of his thought, said de Kooning.

Kline's black and white paintings were called, with some reason, "melted Mondrians," when they were first exhibited in 1950.

Morton Feldman, the avant-garde composer and friend of artists, has pointed out the relationship between Mondrian and Guston's methods of working in the crisis of the medium—the blindingly fixed gaze at the tiny adjustment.

Pollock's cool fire, I believe, is what connects him to the older master, in part surely from what Motherwell has called inspiration out of negation—the achievement of a new height by destroying an important element (in Pollock's case, human figuration).

And Rothko shares with Mondrian a profound, even religious, sense of the absolute painting that by narrowing its range, paradoxically widens its content.

Of course, the differences between Mondrian and the Americans are enormous. He never held, indeed would have been repelled by their gestural ideas; their action ideas; their egocentricity, even solipsism (their it's me, Me, ME! ideas); their glorification of the spontaneous, the fresh (the unfinished and the unfinishable painting), and their view of art as the crude, hairy, rough, raw, real.

They are set apart further by the New York artists' background in surrealism with its adoption of automatism, by 1930's social-realism, Dada, and German and Mexican expressionism. The one ancestor most of the New York artists admired was a visionary painter. The list of differences would be as endless as a description of their paintings. But after all this is pointed out, the connection remains; it is perhaps even stronger because of the differences.

Art comes out of art, and art comes out of life. And Mondrian has become a part of our art and part of our life. Surely one of the most touching moments in the history of ideas arrived when the ascetic Dutch émigré intellectual turned into the older brother of so many brilliantly rambunctious Americans.

His lesson—the connection: Radical Intensity.

Thomas B. Hess

February, 1967

What if I met Pissarro in his own time—say, when he was fifty, a man of unique talent und with a unique position in the art world? What if I watched him slowly growing older, slowly falling under the influence of the younger men? Would I understand better how an idea takes over in the world of art—be in a better position to see the profound irony of idea as opposed to life? In Pissarro's century it was discovered that Nature is not a fixed ideal, but a thing to be reconstructed according to the personal vision of the artist. With this thought begins modernity. And with this thought modernity ends. Where the pre-modernists had pursued nature in terms of its omniscience (i.e., that to become one with nature one had to paint like a god), modernity found its omniscient metaphor in process.

Pissarro appears neither to have understood nor had the gift for invention, or rather for that "literary rightness" so characteristic of modernity. The broken brush stroke to which he finally capitulated—the pointillism of the younger men, was actually after a literary fact rather than a painterly one. Pointillism, after all, is an *idea* about painting. An idea extracted from the sensory experience, but nevertheless, an idea. Impressionism itself is a literary idea, as opposed to an *artistic* rightness. The modernist is magnificently literary always. This is not to detract from his genius, which is nevertheless a practical genius. How could it be otherwise, when escaping from the status quo of nature? A grand plan must be made ready for this escape, and above all—a practical plan!

Pissarro did not know that for the young the emotion of being on the barricades is enough. He did not know that the young do not have responsibility—only audacity. Like Cézanne, he was under the illusion that truth was to be found in the process. Unlike Cézanne, he did not create his own process. And so he failed. It is important for us to understand his failure—more than others' successes. We need his failure, for it contains a human element that hardly exists in modernity.

Just as the Germans killed music, the French killed painting, by bringing into it the literary clarity that had produced a Stendhal—whose motto you will remember, was "To be clear at all costs." But in painting you cannot decide *a priori* what is going to be clear. That's why Fragonard, who aimed at an artistic rightness, looks so much more ridiculous than Delacroix, who has the whole literary apparatus holding him up. One has only to look at a Delacroix to see that ideas are almost literally holding the painting together!

I have always thought this reliance on the literary arose quite naturally out of European culture, in the constant pull between the religious and the aesthetical. The aesthetical, of course, is traditionally defensive because of the religious. Painting, literature, none of the arts could deal with abstract thought, could be conceived of abstractly; they had to present ideas with which to fight this other Idea.

To understand Cézanne, we must realize that if he was not of his own time, neither was he really of ours. He is understood too much by his influence. In essence, his idea is directly opposed to that of the modernist. With Cézanne it is always how he *sees* that determines how he thinks, whereas the modernist, on the other hand, has changed to perception by way of the conceptual. In other words, how one *thinks* has become the sensation.

Cézanne creates a special problem for us because he was so attuned to the process that he actually mistook it for life. We do not know whether the monumental coldness we feel is coming from the man or from his process. Like Manet, Cézanne gave us the "painting as a painting," but he also gave us our last great revelation about nature. This is what makes his "analytic" approach so extraordinarily moving. For Cézanne the *means* had become an ideal.

In modernity we find all Cézanne's preoccupation with process—without this ideal. But without an ideal one can only view life like a social scientist.

Nature, of course, is not life. A symbol, a metaphor—at most a moral. Used as a subject, it is as painfully literary as anything else. Yet obsession with its secrets brought about an ambition, a virtuosity we do not find in modernity. We have only to compare the virtuosity of Picasso with that of Botticelli—to see how true this is.

Modernity reveals itself slowly—there is a stutter within its ironies. It is as fearful of success as it is of failure. And it is so audience-oriented that an Andy Warhol can finally be taken as seriously as a Picasso. Picasso himself, the Arch Modernist, the man in whom the whole movement culminates, lets his audience in on everything, uses them almost as a third eye. Cézanne is not responsible for Picasso. But Picasso is responsible for Warhol.

It is painful to observe that modernity's most advanced ideas, its most adventurous works, are so often academic if not in practice, then in theory. People who criticize modernity fail to realize that everything they want—all the didacticism—all the superlogic they long for—are all right there. In all the search of a Proust, or even of a Cézanne, in all their penetrating analysis of nature and human nature, what lingers is but this analysis. If something else is wanted from these men, we must skirt the edge of a Cézanne canvas, where his touch is free from purpose, or go to the very end of Proust, where metaphor can no longer protect him.

With modernity the painter no longer had to make that perilous transition from one world to another called passage. He had only to "relate" each area, and each idea. Yet it was in this transition, in this journey, that the artist learned a swiftness, a surety, a Nijenski-like utterance of his limbs, an incredible utilization of sight, that we associate now only with the art of the past. This total involvement, this total coordination of the senses, this complete sensual experience has only very recently been captured again in abstract expressionism. Here, in reaction to modernity, there is an insistance that one can no longer take refuge in ideas, that thought is one thing and its realization another, that real humility does not lie in all this super rationality, but again, in trying to paint like a god.

To fully grasp the significance of passage it may help to think of it in terms of music. In late Schubert, for instance, the transition from one musical idea to another is not only apparent, but even *too* apparent. Like a bad poker player, Schubert always shows his hand. But this very faultiness, this very failure is his virtue. In it we see all the ingenuity, all the genius of the artist. In other words, we hear the bravura in a Schubert sonata as clearly as we see it in the lace sleeve of a Velasquez. In Beethoven, on the other hand, we feel a more powerful reserve. In Beethoven we don't know where it ends; we don't know we are in a passage. His motifs are often so brief, of such short duration, that they disappear almost immediately into the larger idea. The over-all experience of the whole composition becomes the passage.

Cézanne carries this idea even further into an extraordinary concept of one's whole life work as the passage. This is why his paintings are not *objects* like the paintings of Manet, who simply finishes one and begins another. Isn't it true that Cézanne makes everyone else look like a caricature of "the artist at work?" Doesn't he make it clear that it is a self-deception on their part to think they can "begin" or "finish" anything? Cézanne of course is not the first. Don't we also feel in Piero della Francesca and Rembrandt that the whole continuity of their work is the passage? Not until Mondrian do we discover this again. For the life of me, I can't tell which Mondrian succeeds and which fails—they are all so much a part of the same thing.

It is rather strange how continually Mondrian's world touches that of the painters of the New York School in the Fifties. Looking at the facts, Mondrian not only embraced cubism when he first came to Paris, but embraced it with all the zeal of the convert, in fact he even clung to it after everybody else had given it up. If Cézanne "solidified" impressionism, it was Mondrian who gave cubism fluidity.

It is hard today to realize how momentous cubism was at that time. It had taken over the world of art to an extraordinary degree. So much so that it's quite surprising to see the perfect ease with which both Picasso and

Braque left it. "We gave up cubism because we loved painting," was Braque's casual explanation. Very witty—very French—but he forgot that everybody else had given up painting because they loved cubism. Only in Europe do you find men like that—men who make a whole revolution, guillotine anybody and everybody who disagrees with it, and then change their mind.

The irony of Mondrian is, that like every Messiah, he was Messianic about things that cannot be transmitted. We must be grateful however, that Mondrian the Messiah failed, for that failure gave us Mondrian the painter. It was because, in his own words, he was involved with, "total sensuousness—total intuition," that Mondrian finally *felt* his way out of cubism.

Though to the end of his life he went back to those first principles that had taken so great a hold over him in those Paris years, there is an almost "indeterminate" aspect to Mondrian. Not in relation to the placement of his square, but in how he painted toward it. Mondrian did not begin with the square. He slowly arrived at it, arrived at it not as a consummate idea (this came only toward the end of his life) but as antagonist as well as protagonist. In effect Mondrian is fighting the square—resisting it. He erases —he paints on it—he paints over it— bypasses it—ignores it—destroys it. It was only toward the end of his life that the square itself began to do what his brush did earlier. He realized then (as Pollock did in his own way) that a totally pure rhythm cannot be articulated by the sensuous brush stroke. Mondrian's final leap was out of the idiom—out of the classic enigma of painting altogether. Where earlier he couldn't get close enough to the canvas, in these last canvases it is as if he stepped out into the life that surrounded him. No wonder he once said to Max Ernst, "It is not you, but I who am the surrealist."

Of course, it is the polemical work that becomes the spokesman for any age—like John Cage today, who many people feel speaks for me. But what was really interesting about the abstract expressionists was the singularly *non*-polemical environment they created. One must understand this point; it is crucial to understand that abstract expressionism was not fighting the traditional historical position, not fighting authority, not fighting religion. This is what gives it that uniquely American tone; it did not inherit the polemical continuity of European art. If Mondrian was a fanatic in the European tradition, Guston is merely a compulsive—quite another thing. Mondrian wanted to save the world. You have only to look at a Rothko to know that he saved only himself.

We think of Rothko, of Mondrian as simplifying the problems of painting, not realizing that they added a still further complication. How could anything that never existed before be considered simple? How could a process that did not reveal itself be meaningful, at a time when process is how we have come to understand art?

What links Mondrian, Rothko and Guston? An unyielding tenacity that suggests nature more than man's inventiveness. What keeps their work from becoming a self-contained object is that each painting gravitates toward the other, either in memory or in anticipation. Again as in nature the experience is in depth, and not a surface to be seen on a wall. We will come back to this thought a little later.

In my own field, music, the high points have been when a compromise was effected between the horizontal and the vertical, as in Bach and then in Webern. Perhaps this is also true of Piero della Francesca and Cézanne. Mondrian, closer to this simultaneous perfection, seems to want to erase it by constantly disturbing the picture's degree of visibility. Yet the visibility of the picture was his only concern. So much so that he *hid* the brush stroke. But this only revealed even more clearly, the touch, the pressure, the unique tone of his performance. It is for this reason that his paintings seem to be painted from afar, but must be looked at so closely as not to see the edge of the canvas.

Rothko gives a totally opposite sensation. There is virtually no distance between his brush and canvas. One views it from a vast distance in which its center disappears.

Guston, neither close nor distant, like a fleeting constellation projected on the canvas and then removed, suggests an ancient Hebrew metaphor: God exists but is turned away from us.

What is the intelligence behind such work that can make the leap (without the need of organizational principle) into the successful orchestration of a work of art? In music the leap is between tone and sound. Tone being that which we relate—sound that which follows not by logic, but by affinity.

We are taught to think of music as an abstract language—not realizing how functional it is, how related to that other spirit, whether it be literary or a literary metaphor of technique. Can we say that the great choral music of the Renaissance is abstract? Quite the opposite. Josquin, who had a genius for making a gorgeous musical coloration around a devotional word, uses music to convey a religious idea. Boulez uses it to impress and dazzle the intellect by representing what seem to be the mountain peaks of human logic. One takes it for granted that Beethoven's "Grand Fugue" is composed of abstract components making a magnificently abstract musical whole. It was only recently that I really began to hear it for what it is: a very literary stormy hymn—a march to God. Music can't be so very abstract when it serves such different and such definite functions!

The abstract, on the other hand, is not involved with ideas. It is an inner process that continually appears and becomes familiar like another consciousness. The most difficult thing in an art experience is to keep intact this consciousness of the abstract.

In the interest of clarity, perhaps we had better separate the word "abstract" as I am now using it from that which it usually implies. The abstract, in the sense that I use the term appeared all through the history of art—an emotion the philosophers have failed to categorize. To make it perfectly clear that it is this uncategorized emotion that I wish to describe, we had better call it the abstract experience. We would like to surrender to this abstract experience. We would like to let it take over. But we must constantly separate it from the imagination, or rather, that aspect of the imagination that is in the world of the fanciful. In my own work I feel the constant pull of ideas. On the one hand, there is the inconclusive abstract emotion. On the other, when you do something, you want to do it in a concrete, tangible way. There is a real fear of the abstract because one does not know its function. The imagination is so many things; it can go so many ways. Paul Klee attests to the infinite possibilities of the imagination. The abstract, or rather the abstract experience is only one thing—a unity that leaves one perpetually speculating. The imagination builds its speculative fantasy on known facts. Facts that have their basis in a very real, a very literary world. Even when it is irrational, it can be measured in terms of the rational—like surrealism. The imagination provides answers without a metaphor. The abstract experience is a metaphor without an answer. Whereas the literary kind of art, the kind we are close to, is involved in the polemic we associate with religion, the abstract experience is really far closer to the religious. It deals with the same mystery—reality—whatever you choose to call it.

Some years ago, Guston and I made plans to have dinner together. I was to meet him at his studio. When I arrived he was painting and reluctant to leave off. "I'll take a nap," I told him. "Wake me up when you are ready."

I opened my eyes after an hour or so. He was still painting, standing almost on top of the canvas, lost in it, too close to really see it, his only reality the innate feel of the material he was using. As I awoke he made a stroke on the canvas, then turned to me, confused, almost laughing because he was confused, and said with a certain humorous helplessness, "Where is it?"

A blind person who works with the knowledge of the confines he moves in might, because of some slight unexpected shock, momentarily lose that all-important sense of the space around him. The simple fact that I woke up at that moment, had much the same effect on Guston. It was as though he himself awoke—awoke to a sudden sense of the *danger* of what he was doing. Yet the painting itself is not a representation of that danger—of that ambition. That collision with the Instant which I witnessed is the first step to the abstract experience. And the abstract experience *cannot be represented*. It is, then, not visible in the painting, yet it is there—felt. In the same sense that Kierkegaard said the religious "dethrones" the aesthetical, one can say that the abstract experience in Guston's painting dethrones the visible masterpiece before us.

The sense of unease we feel when we look at a Guston painting is that we have no idea that we must now make a leap into this Abstract emotion; we look for the painting in what we think is its reality—on the canvas. Yet the penetrating thought, the unbearable creative pressure inherent in the abstract experience reveals itself constantly as a *unified emotion*. The more it does this, naturally, the more distant it becomes from the imagery that it conveys. In this sense, it is not one painting we are looking at, but two. This is what I meant earlier when I described Guston's painting as neither close nor distant—not confined to a painting space but rather existing somewhere in the space *between the canvas and ourselves*. Let me try to make my meaning clear. In Cézanne's late painting, perspective appears almost obliterated. The plane is pushed so close to us that it is almost hard to see. Yet it keeps intact the reality of a painting painted *on a canvas*. Cézanne invented a way to paint something where Guston invented something to paint. Because of this the play of light and dark *no longer takes place on the canvas per se*. It becomes visible only when you perceive that it is *not* on the canvas.

What does one say about Rothko? Mondrian and Guston give us at least a dilemma. This attracts us, gives us something to hang on to, if nothing else. But we cannot climb those big smooth Rothko surfaces. Last year in Los Angeles a certain lady told me that Frank O'Hara had given a lecture on the New York school. When he put on the slide of a Rothko painting, he gave a long sigh, said "It's so beautiful—next slide please." The lady was indignant. "O'Hara came all the way to Los Angeles and that's all he had to say," she complained. I asked her whether she liked Rothko's painting. She didn't, which explained everything.

Rothko is closer to life, yet seems to be without the dilemma of life. And how are we to understand life except in terms of its dilemma? As we all know, if life doesn't give us dilemmas we invent them. Whereas with Mondrian and Guston one must leap into the abstractness in order to experience the painting (and we can make the decision to make that leap), with Rothko we must find a way out of it.

Guston once said that at a certain point of involvement, the time it takes to touch his brush to the palette, pick up some paint and bring it back to the canvas, is too long for him. Years ago there were procedures, questions of what you were going to put in and what you were going to leave out. Today there is no ritualistic way to "get there." It has to *happen*. It's the immediacy that counts. Whether that immediacy takes ten minutes or ten years is irrelevant. The leap into the abstract is more like going to another place where the time changes. Once you make that leap there are no longer any definitions. Does one ask a christian, "How long does it take to cross yourself?"

It is becoming increasingly clear that there is no existing set of conditions on how to begin a work of art. One can begin with practically anything. This is just a matter of impetus, of energy, or wanting to "do something." It is no longer even important how much work you put into it, how long you sit on the egg, so to speak, before it hatches. In a sense, work is just another aspect of art's polemic with the religious. Work is used to justify art—give it some degree of legitimacy. The main thing now is not where you begin, or even what you put into it. The main thing really is when is it finished.

Guston tells us he does not finish a painting but "abandons it." At what point does he abandon it? Is it perhaps at the moment when it might become a "painting?" After all it's not a "painting" that the artist really wanted. There is a strange notion that because someone composes or paints, what he necessarily wants is music or a picture. Completion is not in tying things up, not in "giving one's feelings," or "telling a truth." Completion is simply the perennial death of the artist. Isn't any masterpiece a death scene? Isn't that why we want to remember it, because the artist is looking back on something when it's too late, when it's all over, when we see it finally, as something we have lost?

Mondrian, Rothko, Guston—all of them seem to have come to art by another route, a route abandoned and forgotten by modernity, yet, to my mind, the path that has really kept art alive.

If I can retrace this route (one has to make great historical leaps in order to do this); if, say, I begin with Piero della Francesca, go on to Rembrandt, to Mondrian, then to Rothko and Guston—a certain sensation begins to emerge; a sensation that we are not looking at the painting, but that the painting is looking at us.

The reason for this is that this kind of painting is not conceived as a spatial reality. After all, what is the rectangle of the cubist? Is it, in reality, anything more than simply the shape of the canvas itself—the shape in which the painter, is in a sense, imprisoned? One can say that everyone who paints today is a cubist, just as everyone who writes music today is a serialist. The modernist, in the most brilliant way, has made the limitations of his medium, his subject. Perhaps that is why he talks so much about limitations—talks in fact as though it were the supreme virtue. Anything today that does not comply to the medium, anything that ignores these limitations, gives us the sense of an enigma.

In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard describes the man who has not "achieved reality" as one who is capable of every point of view—even the most profound—but that no point of view can *hold* him, since he is at the mercy of constantly changing shifting moods. Could he have been thinking of Picasso?

Describing in contrast the man who truly "exists," Kierkegaard says, "He is not moody, he is not 'in a mood'—yet he has mood. One may say, in a sense, that his whole life has a mood." Could he have been thinking of Mondrian . . . of Rothko . . . of Guston . . . ?

Morton Feldman

February, 1967

PIET MONDRIAN (1872–1944)

1

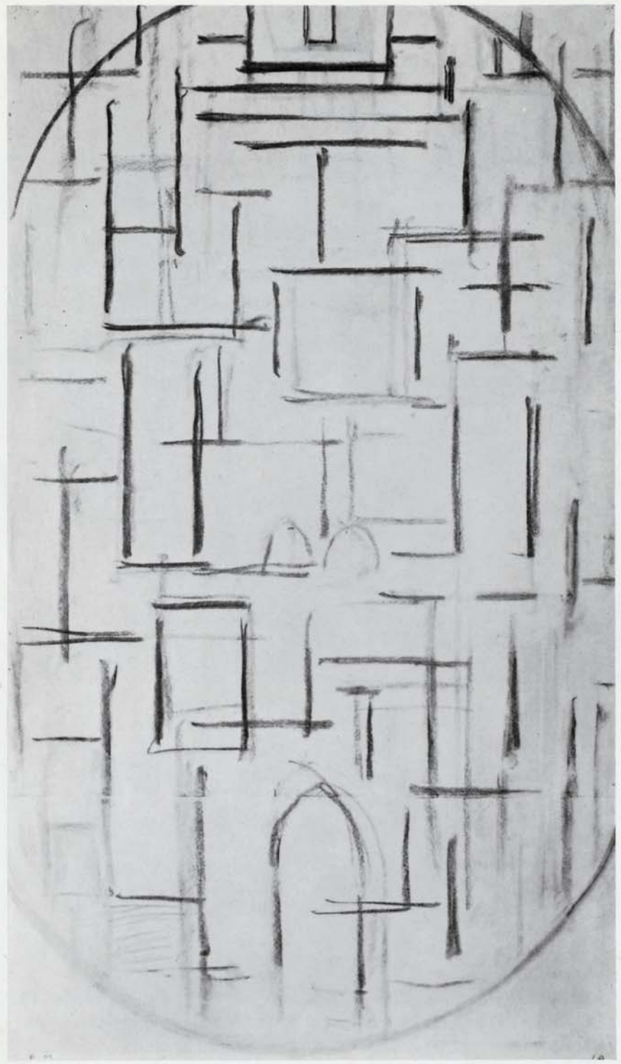
1. *Blue Tree,* ca. 1909–10. Oil on board. H: 21 3/4″ (55.2 cm.); W: 29 1/4″ (74.3 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. James H. Clark, Dallas.

2

2. *Eucalyptus*, 1910. Oil on board. H: 20″ (50.8 cm); W: 15½″ (39.4 cm.). Lent by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

3

3. *Composition with Pink, Blue and White*, ca. 1912. Oil on board. H: 11½″ (29.2 cm.); W: 11″ (27.9 cm.). Lent by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.



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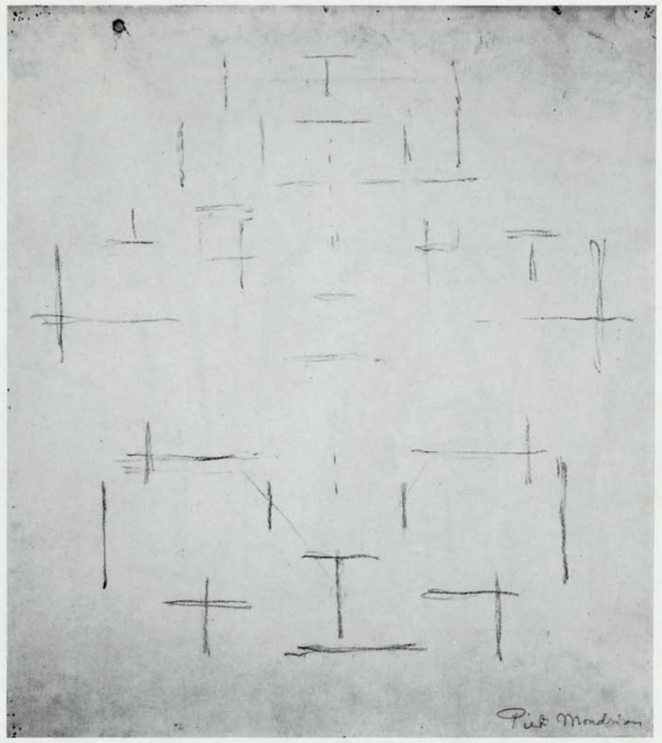
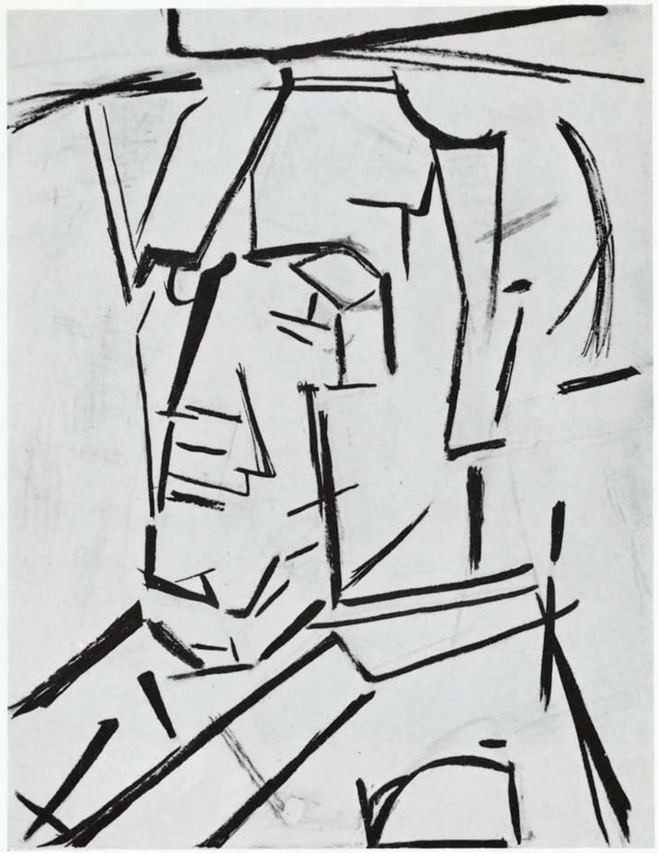


5

4. *Church Facade,* 1914. Charcoal on paper mounted on board. H: 31¾″ (80.6 cm.); W: 18⅞″ (47.9 cm.). Lent by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

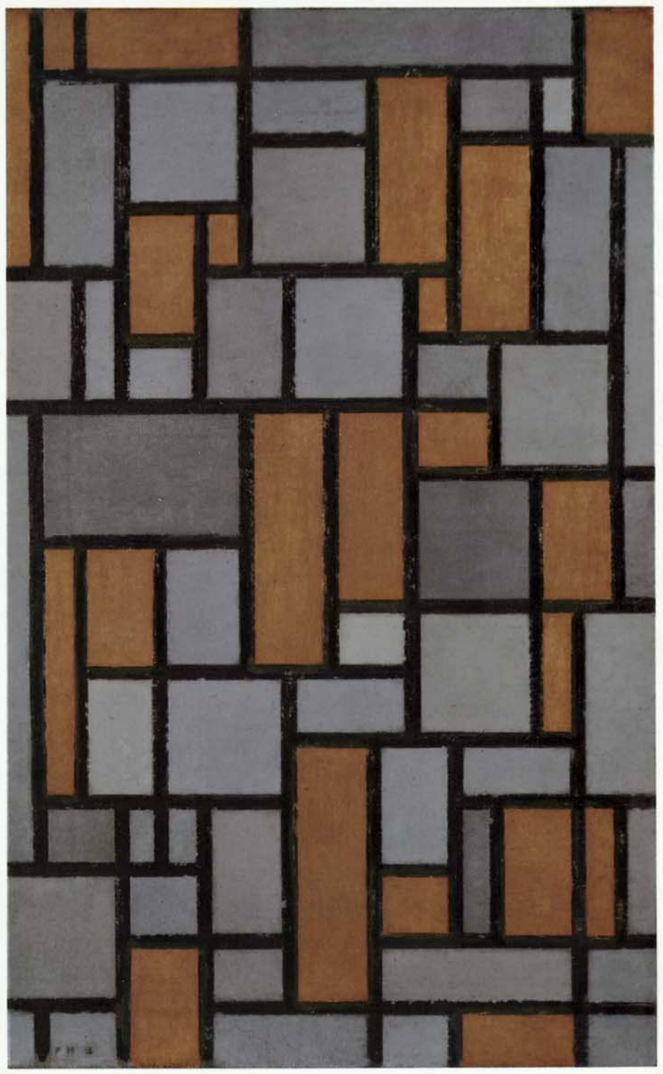
5. *Composition,* 1914. Charcoal on paper. H: 19¾″ (50.2 cm.); W: 17½″ (44.4 cm.). Lent by Mr. Harry Holtzman, New York.



6

6. *Self-Portrait*. Charcoal and ink. H: 25″ (63.5 cm.); W: 19″ (48.2 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. James H. Clark, Dallas.

7. *Composition with Grey and Light Brown*, 1918. Oil on canvas. H: 31½″ (80 cm.); W: 19½″ (49.5 cm.). Lent by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Schlumberger. Illustrated opposite.



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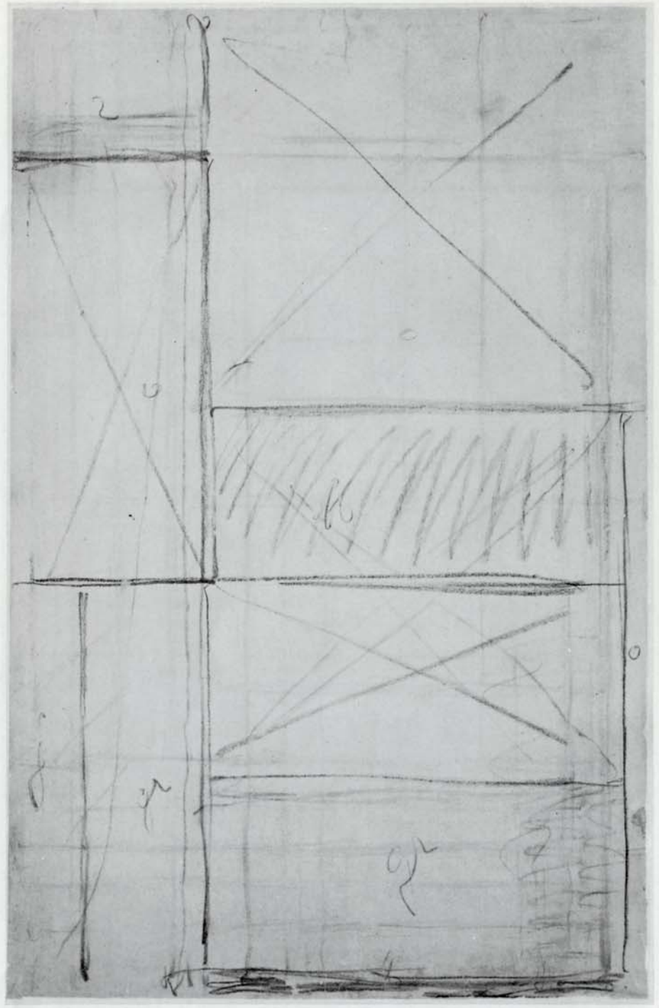

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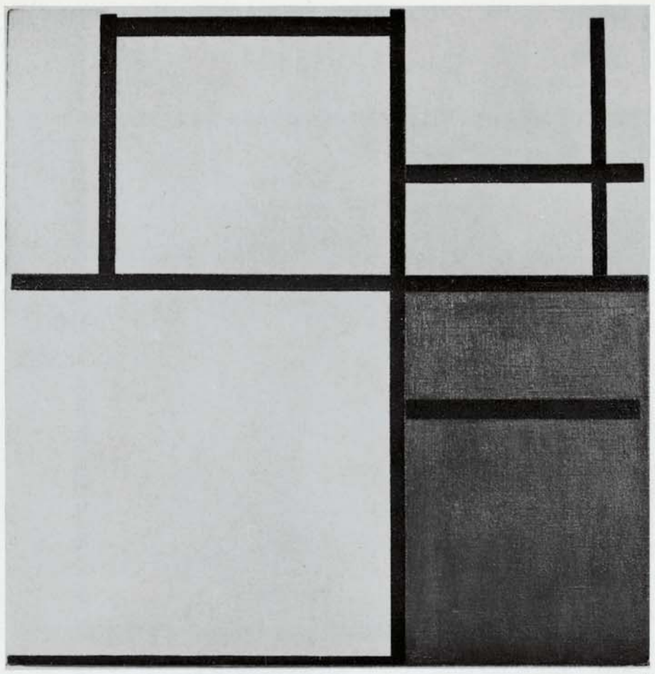
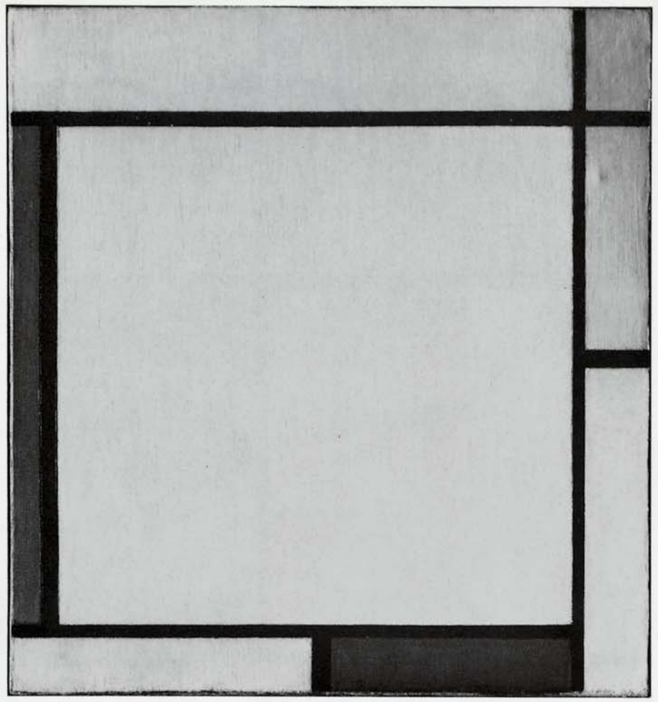


9

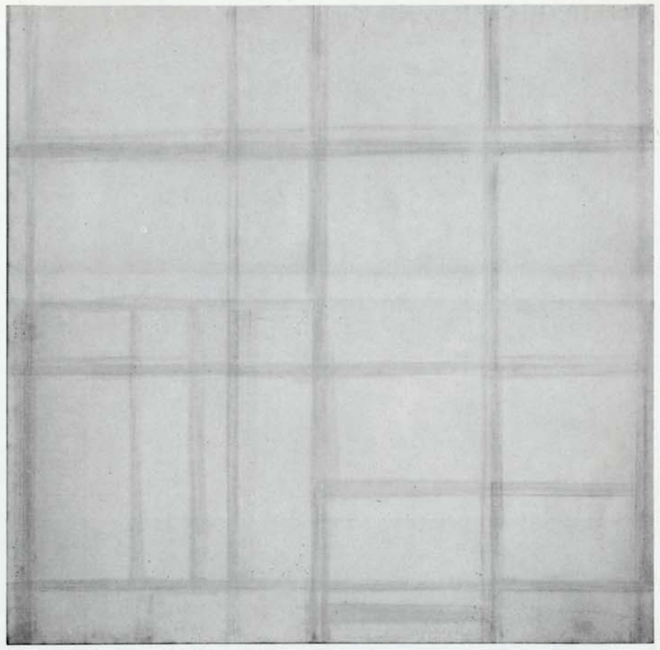
8. *Composition*, 1922. Charcoal on canvas. H: 37¾″ (95.9 cm.); W: 23¾″ (60.3 cm.). Lent by Mr. Harry Holtzman, New York. Illustrated opposite.

9. *White, Grey, Yellow and Blue*, 1922. Oil on canvas. H: 21¾″ (55.3 cm.); W: 21″ (53.3 cm.). Lent anonymously.



10

10. *Painting*, 1927. Oil on canvas. H: $14^{7}/_{8}''$ (37.8 cm.); W: $13^{3}/_{4}''$ (34.9 cm.). Lent anonymously.



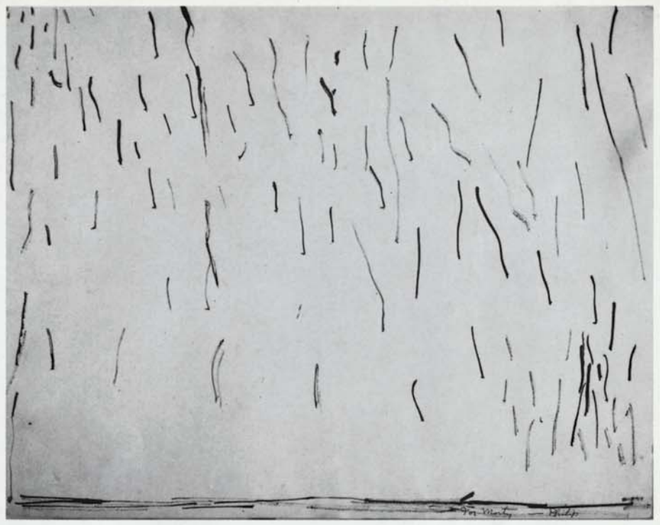
11

11. *New York*, about 1941. Charcoal on canvas. H: $45^{3}/_{16}''$ (1.15 m.); W: $45^{3}/_{16}''$ (1.15 m.). Lent by Mr. Harry Holtzman, New York.

PHILIP GUSTON (born in 1913)

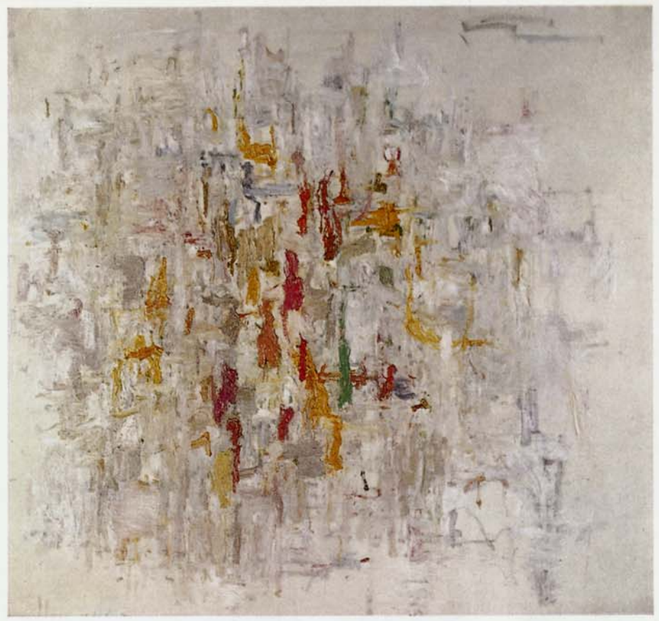
12

12. *Red Painting*, 1950. Oil on canvas. H: 34″ (86.4 cm.); W: 62⅛″ (1.58 m.). Lent by the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.



13

13. *Untitled*, 1951. Ink on paper. H: 17″ (43.2 cm.); W: 21½″ (54.6 cm.). Lent by Mr. Morton Feldman.



14

14. *Painting*, 1952. Oil on canvas. H: 48″ (1.22 m.); W: 50³/₄″ (1.29 m.). Lent by Mrs. Albert Newman, Chicago.

15

15. *Painting*, 1954. Oil on canvas. H: 63¹/₄″ (1.61 m.); W: 60¹/₄″ (1.53 m.). Lent by the Museum of Modern Art, gift of Philip C. Johnson.

17

16. *Untitled*, 1954. Ink on paper. H: 23¾″ (60.3 cm.); W: 17″ (43.2 cm.). Lent by Mr. Morton Feldman, New York.

17. *Untitled*, 1956. Oil on paper. H: 24⅛″ (61.3 cm.); W: 18⅝″ (47.3 cm.). Lent by Mr. Morton Feldman, New York.

18. *The Evidence*, 1957. Oil on canvas. H: 65″ (1.65 m.); W: 68″ (1.73 m.). Lent by Mr. Ben Heller, New York.

19

19. *Nile*, 1958. Oil on canvas. H: 65″ (1.65 m.); W: 75½″ (1.92 m.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. S. Allen Guiberson III, Dallas.

20. *Untitled*, 1958. Oil on canvas. H: 64″ (1.63 m.); W: 75″ (1.90 m.). Lent by the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

21. *Drawing*, 1965. Ink. H: 17½″ (44.4 cm.); W: 23½″ (59.7 cm.). Lent by the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

22. *Untitled*, 1965. Ink. H: 18½″ (47 cm.); W: 25⅛″ (63.8 cm.). Lent by the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

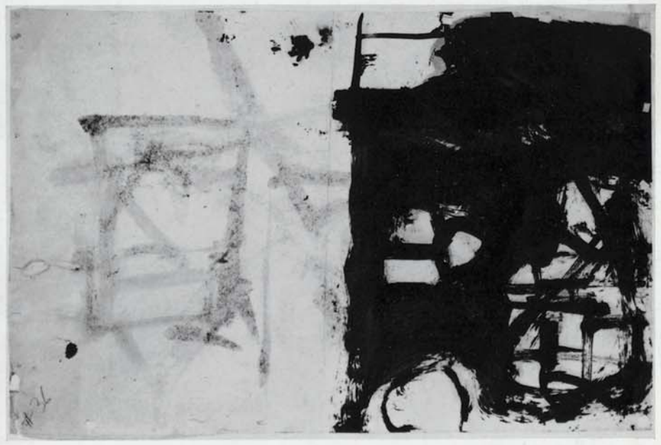
FRANZ KLINE (1910–1962)

23. *Untitled*, 1947. Ink. H: 17″ (43.2 cm.); W: 26¼″ (66.7 cm.). Estate of the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

24. *Untitled*, 1949. Ink on tracing paper. H: 9⅝″ (24.4 cm.); W: 7¼″ (18.4 cm.). Estate of the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

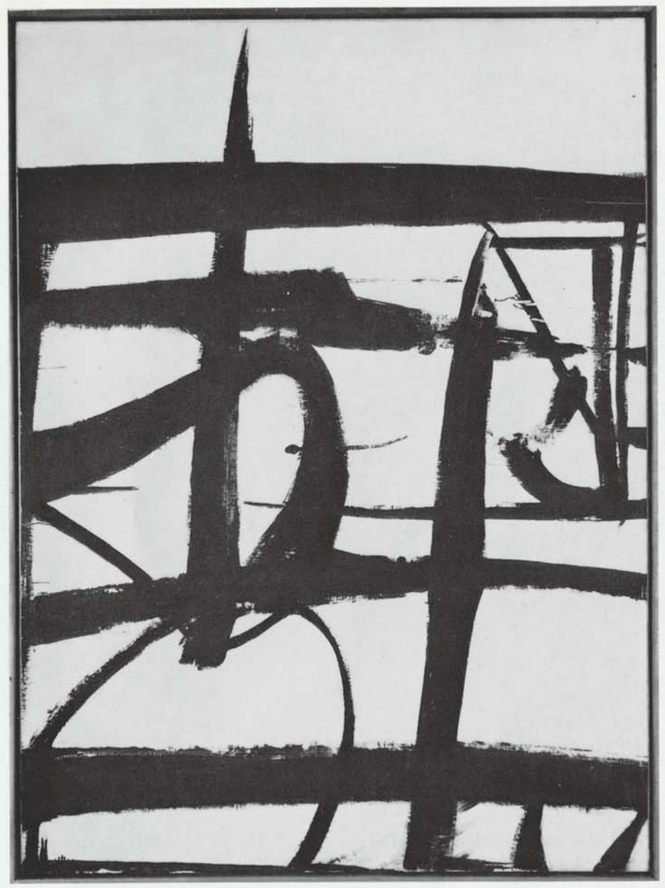
23

23, reverse



25. *The Cardinal*, 1950. Oil on canvas. H: 83″ (2.13 m.); W: 61½″ (1.55 m.). Lent by the Poindexter Gallery, New York.

26. *Untitled*, 1950. Oil on paper. H: 11½″ (29.2 cm.); W: 8½″ (21.6 cm.). Lent by Miss Adélaïde de Ménil, New York.



25

27. *Black and White*, 1954. Oil on paper. H: 14″ (35.5 cm.); W: 9¾″ (24.7 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ted Weiner, Fort Worth.

28. *Black and White*, 1955. Oil on paper. H: 12¼″ (31.1 cm.); W: 8¾″ (22.3 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ted Weiner, Fort Worth.

29. *Black and White*, 1955. Oil on paper. H: 12⅜″ (31 cm.); W: 9⅛″ (23.2 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ted Weiner, Fort Worth.

27

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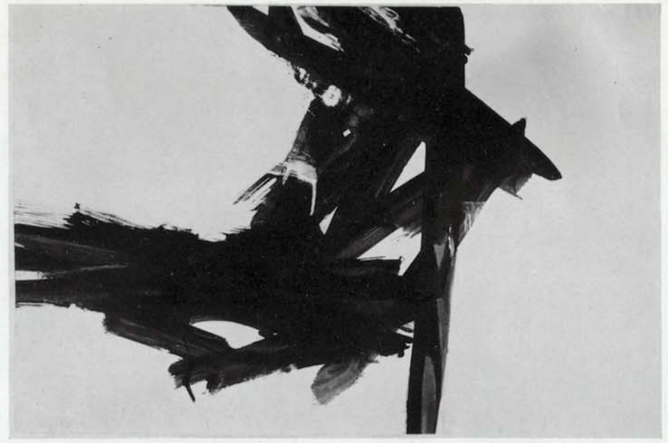

33

30. *White Forms*, 1955. Oil on canvas. H: 74″ (1.88 m.); W: 50″ (1.27 m.). Lent by Mr. Philip C. Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut.

31. *Black and White*, 1960. Oil on board. H: 14½″ (36.8 cm.); W: 15⅝″ (39.7 cm.). Estate of the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

32. *Sun Carrier*, 1961. Oil on canvas. H: 92″ (2.33 m.). W: 67¾″ (1.72 m.). Lent by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts.

33. *Drawing for Corinthian II*, 1961. Ink with oil on paper. H: 15½″ (39.3 cm.); W: 23¾″ (60.3 cm.). Estate of the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

34. *Untitled*. Ink on page of telephone directory. H: 9″ (22.9 cm.); W: 11″ (28 cm.). Estate of the artist, courtesy of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

WILLEM DE KOONING (born in 1904)

35

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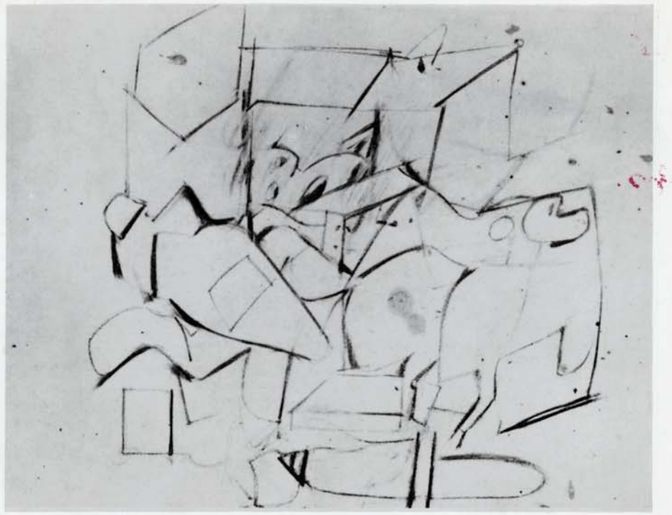


35. *Attic Study*, 1949. Oil on paper mounted on board. H: 19″ (48.3 cm.); W: 24″ (61 cm.). D. and J. de Ménil Collection.

36. *Mail Box Study*, 1946. Pencil drawing. H: 8½″ (21.6 cm.); W: 11½″ (29.2 cm.). Lent by the Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

37

37. *Event in a Barn*, 1947–48. Oil on board. H: 22 1/8″ (56.2 cm.); W: 28″ (71.1 cm.). Lent by the Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

38

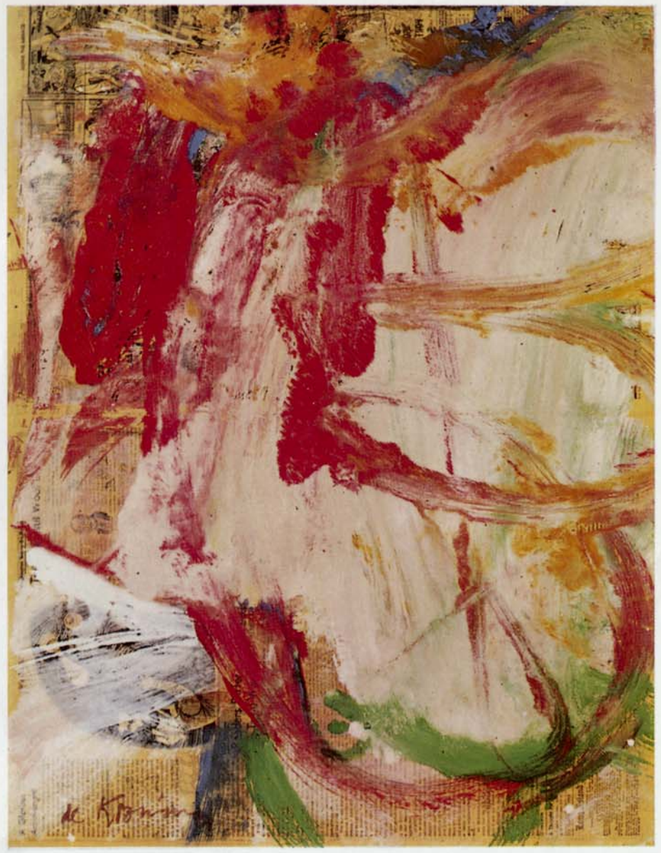
38. *Study for Woman II*, 1952–53. Pastel and charcoal. H: 24″ (61 cm.); W: 18″ (45.7 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Diamond, New York.

39. *Sagamore*, 1955. Oil on paper. H: 22½″ (57.2 cm.); W: 28″ (71.7 cm.). Lent by the Allan Stone Gallery, New York.

40. *Black, White, Rome*, 1959. Oil on paper mounted on canvas. H: 39″ (99.1 cm.); W: 27½″ (69.8 cm.). Lent by Mrs. Christophe de Ménil Thurman, New York.

41. *Immediate Offerings*, 1964. Oil on newspaper. H: 46½″ (1.18 cm.); W: 29½″ (74.9 cm.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Diamond, New York.

42. *Untitled*, 1965. Oil on newspaper. H: 28½″ (72.4 cm.); W: 22″ (55.8 cm.). Lent by the Allan Stone Gallery, New York.



41

JACKSON POLLOCK (1912–1956)

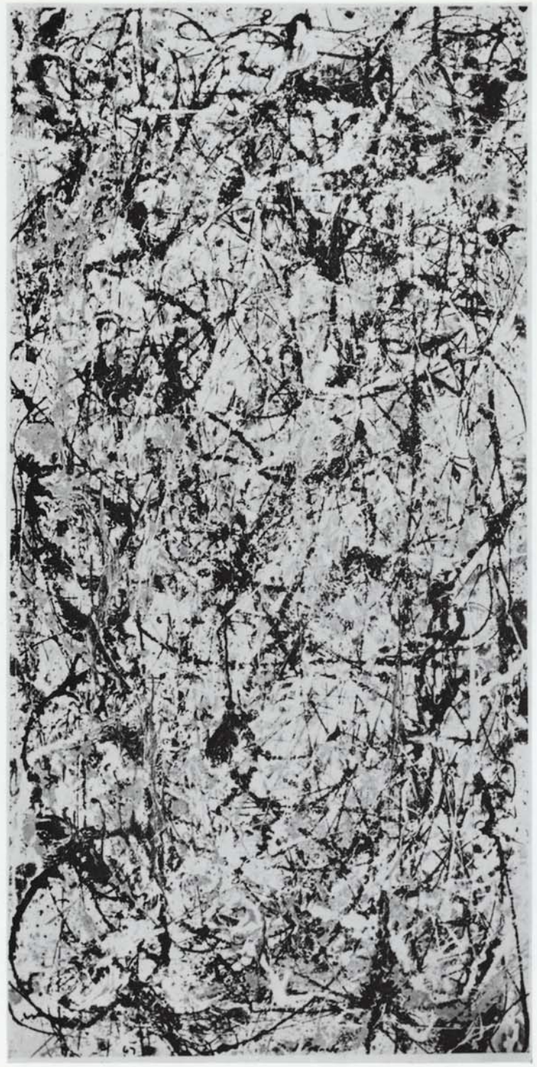
44

43. *Drawing*, ca. 1938. Ink and watercolor on paper. H: 16″ (40.6 cm.); W: 12″ (30.5 cm.). Lent by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

44. *Search for a Symbol*, 1943. Oil on canvas. H: 43″ (1.9 m.); W: 67″ (1.70 m.). Lent by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

45. *The Blue Unconscious*, 1946. Oil on canvas. H: 84″ (2.13 m.); W: 56″ (1.42 m.). Lent by Mrs. Blaffer Hudson, New York.

45



46

47

46. *The Cathedral*, 1947. Oil on canvas. H: 71″ (1.80 m.); W: 35″ (88.9 cm.). Lent by the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.

47. *No. 6*, 1949. Duco and aluminum paint on canvas. H: 44¹/s″ (1.12 m.); W: 53³/s″ (1.35 m.). Lent by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts.

48

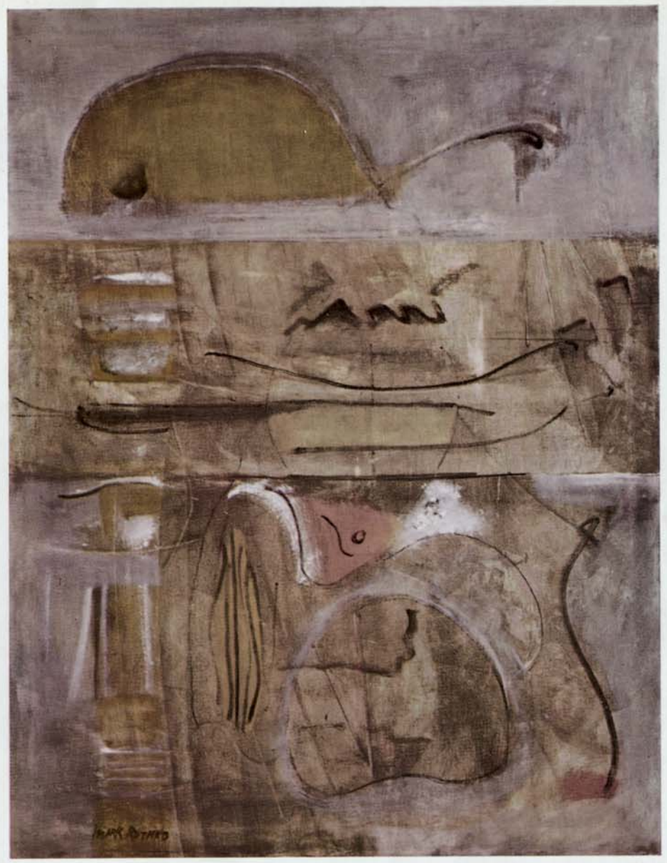
48. *Painting No. 5* (Elegant Lady), 1951. Oil on canvas. H: 55½″ (1.41 m.); W: 58″ (47.3 cm.). Lent by Mrs. Martha Jackson, New York.

49. *No. 4*, 1952. Oil on canvas. H: 57½″ (1.46 m.); W: 14¾″ (37.5 cm.). Lent by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York.

MARK ROTHKO (born in 1903)

50. *Composition*, 1945. Watercolor. H: 21 3/4″ (55.2 cm.); W: 14 3/4″ (37.5 cm.). Lent by the artist.

51. *Astral Image*, prior to 1947. Oil on canvas. H: 44 1/8″ (1.12 m.); W: 33 7/8″ (86 cm.). Lent by the University of St. Thomas, Jermayne MacAgy collection.

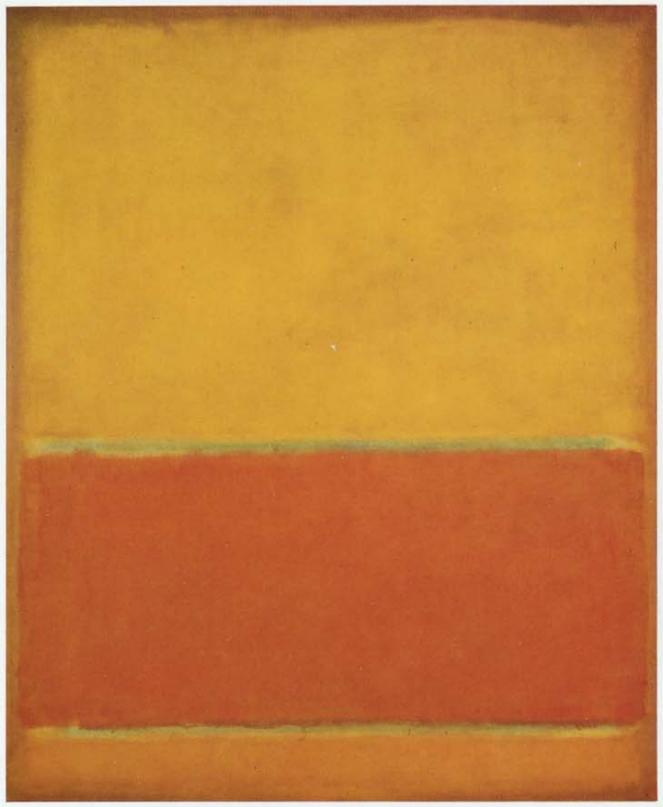


51

52. *Green Stripe*, 1955. Oil on canvas. H: 65″ (1.65 m.); W: 54″ (1.37 m.). Lent anonymously.

53. *Untitled*, 1962. Oil on canvas. H: 69″ (1.75 m.); W: 66″ (1.67 m.). Lent by Mr. Ben Heller, New York.

54. *Untitled*, 1960. Oil on canvas. H: 69″ (1.75 m.); W: 64″ (1.62 m.). Lent by the artist.

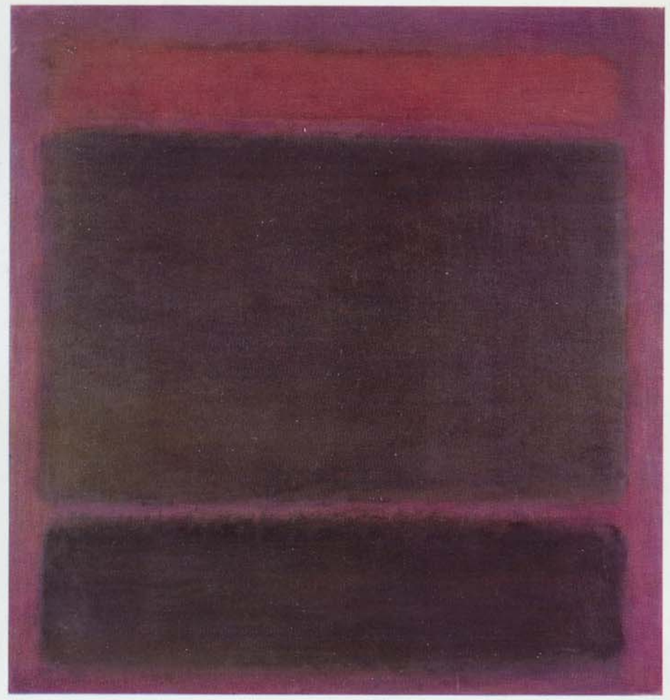


52

55

55. *Untitled*, 1962. Oil on canvas. H: 60″ (1.52 m.); W: 57″ (1.45 m.). Lent by the artist.

56. *Untitled*, 1963. Oil on canvas. H: 69″ (1.75 m.); W: 64″ (1.62 m.). Lent by the artist.



57

57. *Untitled*, 1963. Oil on canvas. H: 93″ (2.36 m.); W: 81″ (2.6 m.). Lent by the artist.

58. *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. H: 91½″ (2.32 m.); W: 69″ (1.75 m.). Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Bernard J. Reis, New York.

The Square Knot

A Memoir

When Morty bought his first sampler I knew something was up. We had just framed a beautiful drawing by Sol LeWitt. Our interests until that time were the visual artists. We went to show after show of his friends, Jasper Johns, Bob Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly; and mine, Francesco Clemente, Steven Sloman and Dennis Congdon. So where did this sampler come from?

Morton was captivated by the detail and accomplishment shown by each girl in her sampler. He liked the simple alphabet. Years later he would do a song for children based on the alphabet, called *Atlanta Sampler*. The samplers usually had sayings like: 'Modesty is a Virtue', or, my personal favorite: 'A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed'. The samplers were mostly from the 19th century and some were in a state of decay.

Morty and I loved shopping for antiques in London, where samplers were part of their cultural history. After a few years of collecting, I think we had at least a dozen samplers. Morty and I hung them in a line across the living room wall. These samplers haunted me. I kept talking about how they looked like a line of dead little girls forced to do their sampler, losing their eyesight and being brainwashed into a life of servitude. Well, eventually, I think I got through to Morty, for the samplers did come down. The best one always stayed in the eating room.[1] It fit perfectly with the simplicity of the room, with its two Shaker chairs and small table. This sampler I liked. It was 17th century Dutch with silk on very fine linen. The colours were well preserved and it looked professional.

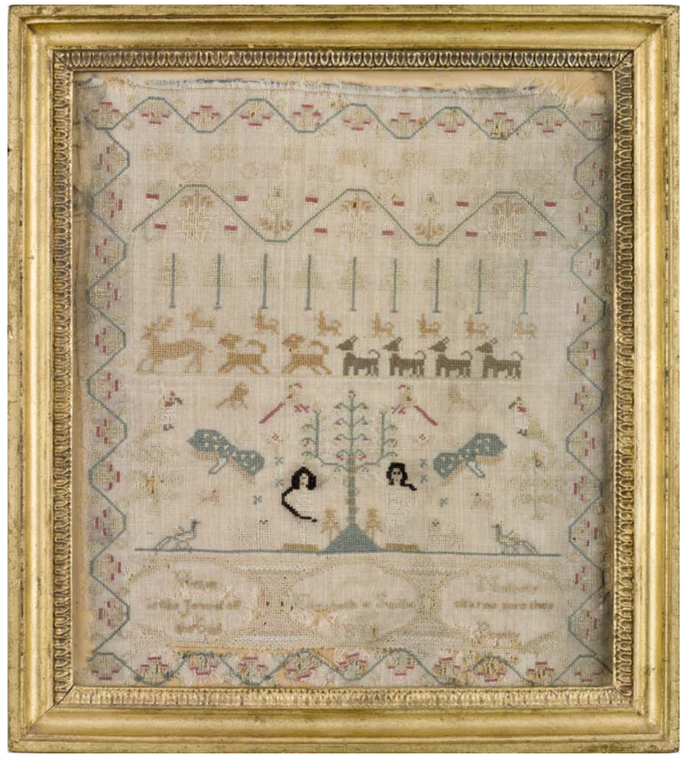
(opposite)
fig. 1
Elizabeth Smith / **Sampler**
Adam and Eve
1810
Silk and linen sampler
34.3 x 36.8 cm
Private Collection

In early 1987 I began a composition about contemporary love called *Adam and Eve*. I was interested in love with all its complications. It seemed to me at the time this piece was written, that there was no longer a 'formula' for dating and relationships. Morty and I were describing our relationship as 'Family', our lives were that entwined. After the rise of Feminism, there were no guidebooks on how to proceed. This must have been Adam and Eve's situation too.

Soon after, Morty presented me with a sampler based on Adam and Eve. This sampler was created by Elizabeth Smith in 1810. Reindeer, dogs, butterflies, birds and lambs, surround Adam and Eve at the tree of knowledge. A serpent climbs the tree. On either side of the sampler are the quotes 'Virtue is a Jewel of the Soul' and 'Modesty Charms more than Beauty'. I love the whimsy and sweetness of the imagery, you really feel as if you are in the Garden of Eden. The skill demonstrated in this sampler is superb and it might have been created as a teaching sampler by an adult.

Around this time Morton went to Iran to perform for the Shah and Shahbanu at the Shiraz Arts Festival. He had a group just forming called 'Feldman and Soloists' which included Jan Williams, percussion, Eberhard Blum, flutes, and Nils Vigeland, piano. Occasionally Morty would perform on the piano himself.

He returned from this trip with a small red Shiraz rug. It was in excellent condition and not very old. Morton was quite excited about the detail in the rug and the very tight stitch. I could appreciate that, but the colour looked very artificial and the design was something seen a million times before. So I wasn't as enamoured by this rug as Morty was. Still, he was on to something and we began research into antique rugs.



Buffalo — where we were based — was a dead city at this time, except for the Albright–Knox Art Museum, the New Music Programmes at the University, and its rich history, which was still found in antiques stores. It was there we began looking. I found a Navajo blanket for $400 from the Op Art period, but besides that, we bought no rugs in Buffalo. A few local dealers found out we were interested and we checked their wares. Then in a Toronto rug shop, we found our first rug. I think we paid about $1900 for it. It had the flavour of Kazak in its bold colouring and design. The dealer thought it was from the Persian/Russian border area.

This rug was the beginning of a love affair for both of us. It showed the signs of age — being soft and supple — and the colours knocked you out. We would lay it on the floor and look at it from both directions. The two large diamonds in its field created an optical illusion. From some angles the diamonds would look the same size, although one was clearly larger than the other. The field of the rug was covered with nomadic iconography. There were abstracted flowers, scorpions, the star of Solomon, combs and other symbols of the tribe. The comb,[2] a tool used in making carpets, represented the rugmaker herself. The scorpions were present because rugmakers believed that walking on the scorpions would make their children strong and fearless. White was a holy colour and the distribution of white on the rug was always quite significant. The appearance of white on the upper part of this rug makes one wonder if this rug was a wedding gift, or used for prayer.

Morty would pick up a corner of a rug and bring it close to his good eye, examining the weave. He was sensitive to textile and fabric, its feel and its structure, from his days in the family garment business. He examined each rug as if it were an expensive piece of clothing. The rug needed to be soft and supple — the signs of use and age: any stiffness or scratchiness was to be avoided.

Morton developed a physical relationship with rugs too. Many a time I would come home to find Morton on his knees, on the floor, scrubbing his carpets with mild soap and water. And there was the feel of tossing out a carpet on the floor, the great sense of expectation as the rug floated to the ground. Once it hit the floor, all present saw it, its patterns and colours glowing in the sunlight. This was always a thrilling moment.

Through the rug books we collected we soon developed a taste for Turkish rugs. There were many reasons for this: the most important was that you could still 'find' rugs that were made for home use, not just the western market. Persian rugs had reached their cultural peak centuries ago, and what was left of these beautiful rugs was mainly in museums. We wanted the feel of the rugmaker's 'spirit' in the rug. Turkish nomadic rugs of the 19th century still carried this spirit. And they were still available.

We also found it interesting that Turkish rugs were made of a square knot, the Persians with a linear knot. The linear knot, like a small dash, lent itself to 'drawing' spirals and floral designs, the type of iconography we associate with Persian carpets. But with a square knot you cannot draw beautiful objects and scenes like you can with the Persian knot. With a square knot you are involved in geometry and mosaic effects. One must create an 'image' with small square knots. The results are always more abstract. This appealed to Morty and me — it was very similar to composition. For instance, take a look at the main border of the double diamond rug (fig. 2). Here you will see carnations made of square knots. Because of the square knot it barely looks like a flower. In addition, the rugmaker has taken total freedom with the colours, shapes, and internal forms that make up these carnations.

For Morty, rugs in general became a new form of visual art, and his weak eyes responded to the colour and saturation of the pile. It was far more intense than most paintings. The fibres of the pile threw off the light with a new depth and intensity, allowing us to find similarities between the mosaic-like patterns of rugs and modern art and music.

(opposite)
fig. 2
Anon / Rug
Kazak Diamond Rug, South Caucasus
c.1880
Wool
189.9 x 125.7 cm
Private Collection

'The Jasper Johns rug' (fig. 4) is a rug we bought in Turkey. Its original use was as a blanket. The thickness of the pile suggests it was used in the cold mountainous areas. We called it the 'Jasper Johns rug' because it reminded us of works such as *Numbers in Color* (1958–9). The subject matter is very similar and each creator was involved with texture and the variation and distribution of colour (fig. 3).

By the summer of 1978 Morty and I were making plans to travel to Turkey, drive around the countryside and look for rugs. What an adventure we had undertaken. In late July we flew to Istanbul. The airport was like a cattle barn. The floors were bare dirt and wooden fences corralled the passengers through Customs. Armed soldiers were everywhere. We hired a taxi into the city. There were no traffic lights. Cars went wherever they pleased, usually missing each other by a fraction of an inch. Soon we learnt that no one drove in the city, everyone taking taxis and buses instead, because it was so dangerous. But that didn't stop us from renting a car with unlimited mileage to drive around the whole country. When I saw the map of Turkey it looked okay at first glance. After reading the key I realised the red line on the map was the only highway — the E1. All the other 'roads' were for camels, horses, mules and such, not to be accessed by our primitive Renault. And it wasn't long before I learnt that the E1 was often just two ruts in the road. If another car came along, you had to pull to the side.

Before taking off for the countryside we shopped in the rug bazaars of Istanbul. In each shop we were brought cups of Turkish coffee which we sipped while we looked at rugs. We usually sat on a stack of carpets and soon were addicted to the musty smell, a blend of wool and goat hair. The shopkeepers were always curious about the two of us. Sometimes they would compliment Morton on having such a beautiful young woman with him. They didn't understand the attraction.

We were in love. Morton freely admitted he hadn't met someone like me before. He used to ask me, over and over, 'Where did you come from?' and 'Are there other girls like you?' He would tell me about himself, 'Oh, I'm just a type you don't know'. But he was wrong. I did know his type: most of my boyfriends and my first husband had been outspoken Jewish men. I knew how to stand up to them and carry my weight in a conversation. Morty once told me, I had a sense you could handle it', meaning the relationship with him. 'Most women can't.' From our first meeting we had been locked in a conversation and debate that didn't end until Morton spoke his last words.

The bazaars mainly catered to the tourists so Morty and I soon left Istanbul. We had visions of finding great rugs in every town we visited. We heard about someone called 'The Professor' who combed the countryside looking for old rugs. And there were many stories of people giving up their 'old rugs' for new carpeting in their homes.

Once we left Istanbul, civilisation disappeared quickly. Even though we had a car, fresh water, toilets and lodging were often hard to come by. Our trip took us through the western and central parts of Turkey. We took one long loop that included the cities of Istanbul, Çanakkale, Bergama, Izmir, Pamukkule, Konya, Ankara and Izmit. Our original plan had been to go into the Kurdish area of the eastern half of Turkey. We wanted to travel and look for Kurdish rugs. But we were warned against this by frightening stories of tourists being decapitated. In addition, the government of Turkey was in turmoil, with the Militia in control. It wasn't unusual to drive around the corner in the middle of nowhere and come upon soldiers carrying machine guns. If Morty and I had thought twice about it we probably wouldn't have gone. But little could scare a New Yorker like Morty, a blind person with the instincts to cross 57th street in the middle of the block and not get hurt. And I was game for anything.

While I drove the car, we talked. With Morton, talking was a twenty-four hour-a-day activity. Rugs, music, composition, the arts — whatever we talked about it was a duet of ideas.

I was a strong feminist and collected women's and children's art. Morty and I always discussed gender issues when it came to the creation of art. We were delighted that samplers were made by females, both child and adult. Turkish rugs greatly appealed to us because they were crafted by strong, independent women. We could see the 'artist' in every rug.

A great example of this is what we called the 'tile' rug (see p. 218–219). This small (possibly prayer) rug tells us a great deal about its maker. This 19th century rug is from the Bergama area, known for unusual and rare pastels. Here the pale blue/ green and cream stars add richness to the red-white-blue structure of the rug. The rugmaker was skilled at dyeing her colours and choosing an overall pleasing pattern of tiles on a blue field. This field is 'captured' or framed by the simple border.

Imperfections abound. Here we see the true personality of the rugmaker. She 'could' do it perfectly but she 'chose' not to. This is a culture that prizes independence and freedom above all. The rugmaker's skill is going to be judged not only by her formal interpretation of tradition, but also by her ability to make bold and courageous moves: to balance beige against yellow, to float an incongruous image in a field or to deliberately alter a pattern mid-stream. Rather than the imperfections destroying the pattern of the rug, these breaks from tradition enhance it with a deep respect for its own singularity.

And this tile rug does something that Morton's music does. It captures a 'field' within its borders. It is as though we are looking at just one part of a much larger tile field. And I have this sense when I hear Morton's music. From the very first sound we have entered a unique universe and Morty is 'capturing' it for us. But like in the rug, we have no sense of the field's complete size, and more importantly, we have no sense of 'scale'.

This tile rug could not have been conceived without the square knot. Every detail is constructed of these small square knots. This influenced Morty too in the way he constructed his music. Like the rugmaker he was involved with detail.

Composers are involved with detail on a massive scale, how they handle this detail becomes their style and language. Essentially there are notes on the vertical (harmony) and notes on the horizontal (melody or duration). Then these notes are assigned pitch and instrumental colour by the composer.

Early in the 20th century we had the appearance of chamber music in the works of Stravinsky and Schoenberg. As the century progressed, composers wrote more and more complex chamber music and relied on the ever-increasing skills of the performer. Performance virtuosity became the norm and polyphonic works proliferated, with each player playing increasingly more difficult lines. This type of polyphony was very 'well-drawn' and would have been expressed best with a Persian knot, the linear knot.

Feldman wasn't interested in this approach. For him and his peers (John Cage and Earle Brown) sound came first; ideas about sound, form, notation, etc, came second.

'You hear a sound, you write it down.' This was Morty's approach. This was completely different than the 12-tone serialists and others who mostly worked with *a priori* form and structure.

In his efforts to write his sounds down, Feldman began with classical notation as a young man, and he invented various abstracted notations and graphic notation along the way. What all his styles of notation have in common is that Feldman was always sensitive to the simultaneity of the horizontal and the vertical. This remained consistent through out his life.

fig 3. **Jasper Johns** Numbers in Color, 1958–1959
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1959

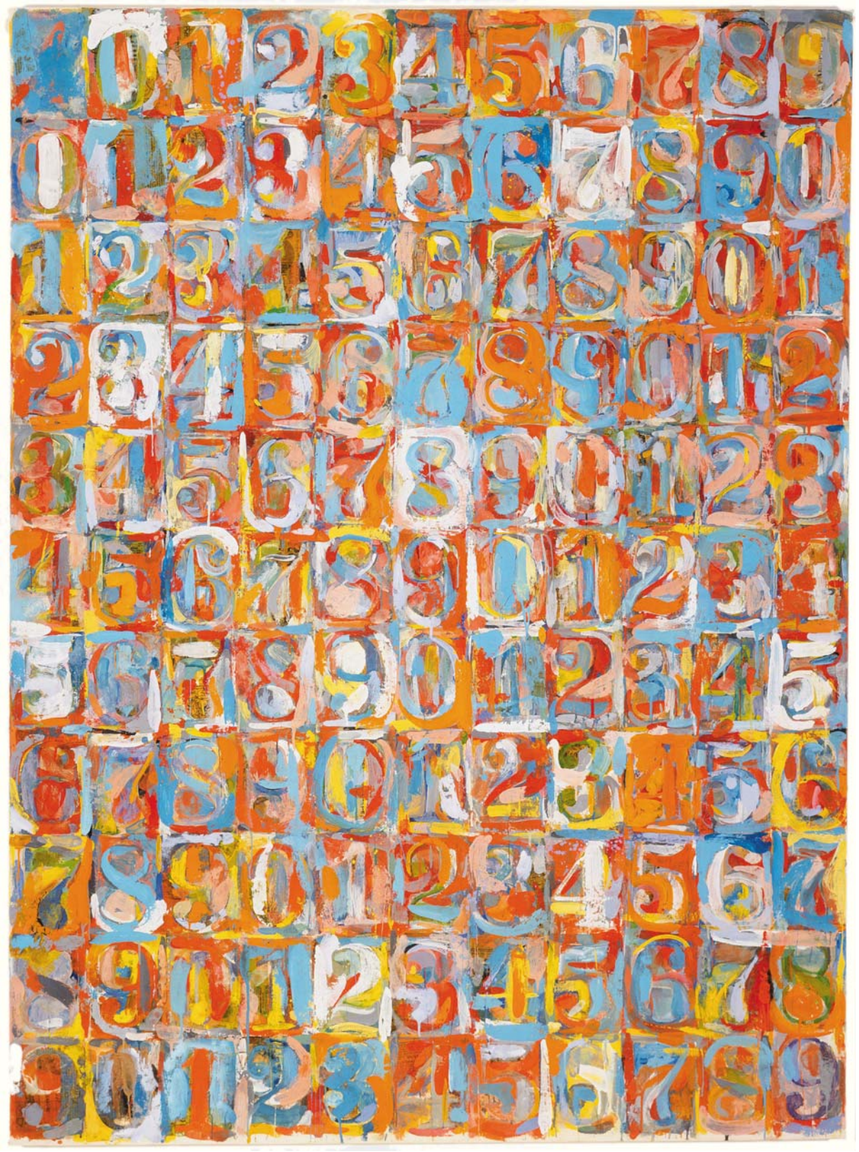


fig. 4
Anon / Rug
Baluch Rug,Jasper Johns'
Persia / Afghanistan
c.1890
Wool
164.5 x 117.5 cm approx
Private Collection

Morty and I liked to refer to this 'simultaneity of the horizontal and the vertical' as 'counterpoint'. From the Latin, *punctus contra punctum*. Point against point. Note against note. This, we felt, was the true calling of the composer. Counterpoint existed in notes, chords, orchestration, meter, anywhere you placed two or more objects together. This is the skill of counterpoint and the composer: to 'place' objects so each has its own integrity. There is no foreground and background. Everything is primary material. In a similar fashion, the rugmaker places square knot against square knot.

And the real skill is in *how* you place the objects, instruments, or notes. You must have a sense of what it is going to sound like before you place it. If you cannot imagine this, you'll have to write another kind of music. When Feldman placed musical objects on the page he knew what they would sound like, he had started from the sound, figured out a notation for the sound and placed it. This is how a painter works on a canvas, they walk back and forth, looking from many angles and then — place the brush. And this is how the rugmaker makes decisions too, as she decides to alter a pattern or put an icon on the field of the carpet.

Orchestration is also an aspect of counterpoint. Here you balance one instrument against another or one group of instruments against another. The real goal for the composer is to make each instrument 'significant'.

Morty and I used to plan concerts for the Albright-Knox Museum: 'Evenings for New Music', and concerts for visiting and student composers. In programming, the goal was always to arrange the works in such a way that each would stand out on their own. It was a democratic process. Thebalancingwas an act of counterpoint. Once I remember us twisting our brains over one programme. Morty had a piece on the programme. He was quiet for a while, thinking. Then he crossed his piece off and rearranged the others. It was the perfect solution, 'See, no one is safe, not even me', he said, with the devil in his eye.

All our musical thoughts about the wonders of counterpoint were reinforced for Morty by the carpets. We talked endlessly about how these women rugmakers worked. The small square knot, tied over and over again, thousands of times, walking the line between her respect for tradition and her personal spirit.

The design aspect of the rug also influenced Morty's use of the 'grid', his one-page canvas. The sense of a grid has always existed in Morton's notation. But it was after our adventure into rugs that the grid became clear in the large orchestral works he was doing in his mature period: 1977–87.

Consider the manuscript page from Feldman's *Flute and Orchestra* (fig. 5). It's almost symmetrical around a central axis. The sense of a field is clearly there. And like a carpet, the repeated notes are like small square knots.

Notice also that each instrument has a fairly simple part on the horizontal. It is rare to see obvious performer virtuosity in late Feldman. It's the composer's job to coordinate the horizontal and the vertical and make music. The basic skill we use is counterpoint, not polyphonic lines given to each performer as we saw in the 20th century, but a balance of square knots. In the earlier graphic scores each box was like a square knot and formed a grid. Over the years the graph paper grid evolved into a notational grid, where the pitch, meter, and imagery was constructed via counterpoint.

Turkey was a relaxing vacation for Morty and I despite the roughness of the terrain and the Militia. I drove, much to the shock of everyone who saw us. Women didn't drive in Turkey at that time. Practically no one did.

As we made our loop around western and central Turkey we took many opportunities to see the tourist attractions. We visited Troy and Ephesus, a great Greek seaport at one time, which is now one and a half miles from the receding coastline. We relaxed in the mineral hot springs of Pamukkale. We sought the Whirling Dervishes in Konya but unfortunately it wasn't the season for whirling.

I took a massage at the Grand Hotel in Izmir that lasted three hours. Morty, lounging by the pool, thought I had been kidnapped. Kidnapped by a great masseur, formerly of the Turkish soccer team, who obviously had had fantasies about giving women massages. As I lay down on his table I saw a framed photo of a man giving a scantily clad woman a massage. But he was quite the gentleman, carefully arranging towels over my naked body as he worked. We spoke in broken English. He was surprised at my age (26) and athletic condition. 'In Turkey, women get 21, then kaput!' he told me. This was Morton's favourite story from the whole trip.

We were astonished and haunted by the Turkish cemeteries we would come upon. Out in the dry, dusty barren land, we would round a bend and be startled by these totems of stone. The grave markers were tall thin stone pillars, always with an extra stone or two on top, like a top hat. They could stand 5, 6 feet in height, these stone representations of the dead. We would happen upon these cemeteries in the middle of nowhere. It was a land of nomadic and migratory peoples, and these were their ancient burial grounds.

Occasionally on our journey we would run into some of these nomads. Some were gypsies, others Kurds. They had herds of goats or sheep and travelled in a horse, mule or camel drawn wooden wagon sitting on a yastik — a woven cushion stuffed with straw. The women and children were dressed in bright-coloured garments reflecting the colours of the flowers of the region. We were both curious about each other but usually viewed each other from a distance; occasionally we would actually converse. I got a real sense of what it meant to be Kurdish when we came upon a woman with a baby under one arm and ammunition and a high powered rifle under the other. They were fighting for their lives and freedom.

We soon became very interested in Kurdish carpets and Kurdish culture. This became a dangerous interest. Turkey in 1978 was smack in the middle of a covert plan to eliminate the Kurds. You were not allowed to speak the language or play the music, even the Kurds themselves. One young man was thrown in jail for seven years for possessing a tape of Kurdish music! Whole towns had disappeared under a cloud of chemical weapons. It was cultural annihilation. Similar to what the Turks had done to the Armenians, years ago.

Somehow it got around, that an American music professor was in Turkey and interested in Kurds and rugs. At the end of our journey, upon our return to Istanbul, we were invited to meet with a young man who had tapes of Kurdish music that he wanted us to take to the United States and have transcribed. It was haunting, beautiful music, based on non-western scales. Morty and I both knew it would be quite difficult to notate these strange scales, but nevertheless, we accepted this offering. This was the break they were looking for. They were so appreciative of our joining their cause that they arranged for us to meet their Great Holy Leader.

So, on one of the last days in Istanbul we were taken to the top of one of the hills on its outskirts. Morty and I were very excited. We had been speculating for days on what sort of prayer rug this Holy Man used. We had fantasised all sorts of glorious rugs, and talked about it endlessly.

We sat at a table out in the fruit orchards. The Holy Leader appeared and we talked and munched on fruit. Somehow we passed inspection, this big Jew from New York and his young girlfriend, and were taken on a tour of the old estate. The house itself was an ancient stone building, dark and empty. Our excitement increased when we were told we were going to see where he prayed. This was the moment! We rounded the corner and peered into the room. The room was bare except for an old dark goatskin on the floor. The hair on the hide was long and thick, except where the knees, head and hands were placed during prayer. These spots were worn to the skin from praying. I think we both felt humiliated and foolish at that moment. This was a true prayer rug.

Just before returning to the United States, we visited a noted rug dealer in Istanbul. Rumour had it he bought rugs from 'The Professor'. In my whole life, I have never seen so many rugs. They were stacked 10 feet high, and the whole warehouse was full of these stacks. By this time, I had seen thousands of Turkish rugs and had a deep understanding of them from touring the country. I had become an expert, though I was not aware of it.

I went to a stack of rugs and started looking at the edges, this was all you could see. But I could tell by the colour, wool and weave, which rugs were done by master rugmakers. Morty wanted to buy, so I began choosing rugs to look at based on the small fragment I could see. The workmen pulled off piles after piles of rugs to get to each one I had selected. The boss came around, a handsome man. He really liked Morty and me but was not happy with my selection of rugs. 'You are taking all my good rugs!' he complained. Then I saw this outstanding prayer rug on the wall (fig. 6). I made them take it down. We examined it for repairs. It was a museum piece, with some excellent repairs made years ago. Well, in the end, the owner was a businessman and I think we bought five or six rugs that day, including the one on the wall.

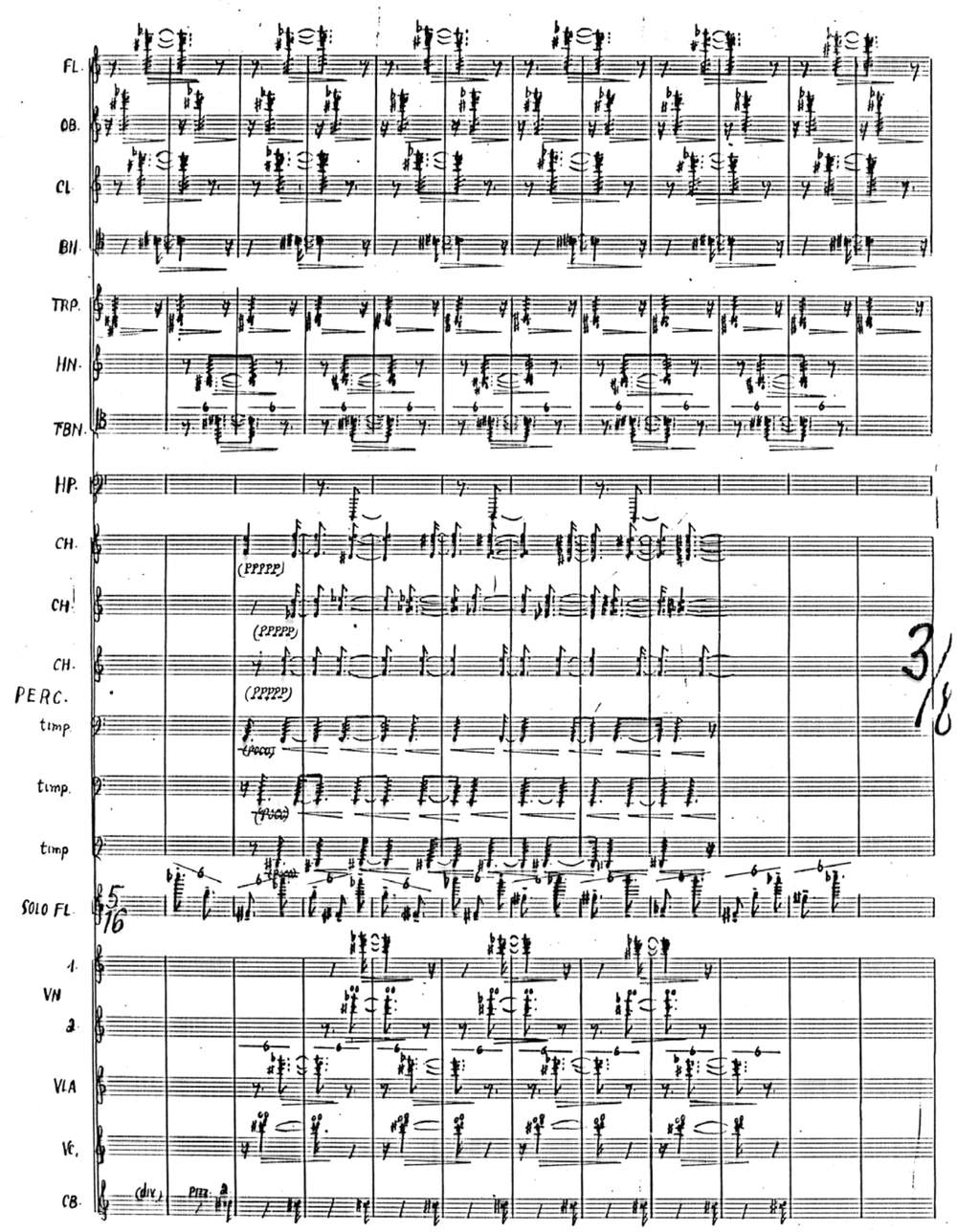
Our trip to Turkey was complete. The influence of the rugs on our music would continue for years. My passion for rugs has never abated. Every spot on my floors are covered with carpets of all sizes. Today this prayer rug hangs over my piano. It's always there to inspire me. The tile rug, more sentimental, guards my bedroom.

Just after Morty died, I was able to select a few of his personal items. I chose a yellow robe I had given him, three shirts, and a small black comb he took everywhere. Now, every five years or so, I open the Ziploc bag the comb is in and sniff. To this day, I can still smell his hair, with its faint odour of Brylcreem. It is like he is still with me.

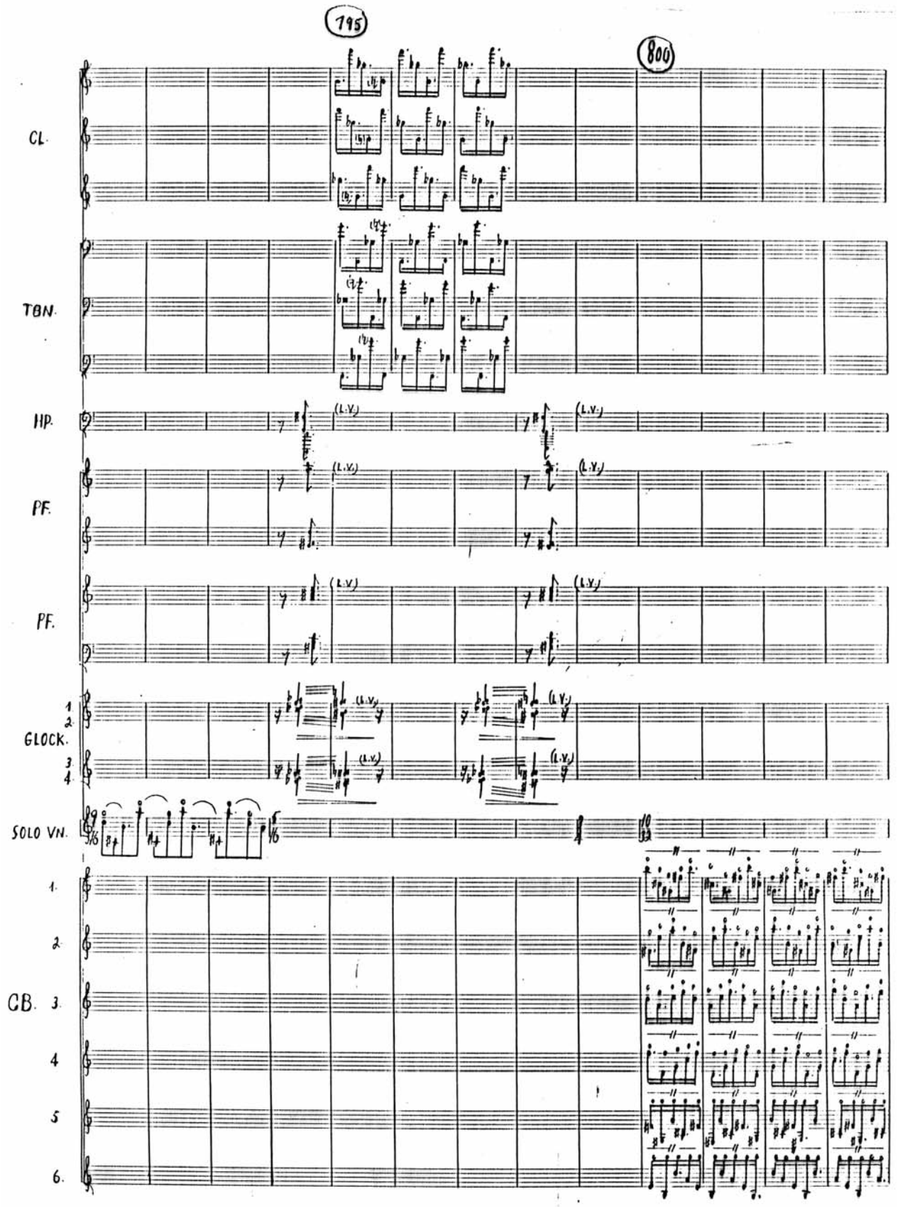
[1] What Morton referred to as the eating room was originally a small maid's room off of the kitchen. It was furnished with just a tiny shaker table, two shaker chairs and an old chest from his family. It was used mainly for coffee, bagels and conversation. Morton always looked enormous sitting there, leaning against the wall, talking.

[2] Every square knot needed to be tied tight and then packed into the previous knots. This packing was done quite efficiently with a wooden comb. With the comb, the rugmaker could pack down a whole string of knots at one time. This made for a stronger, more attractive carpet.

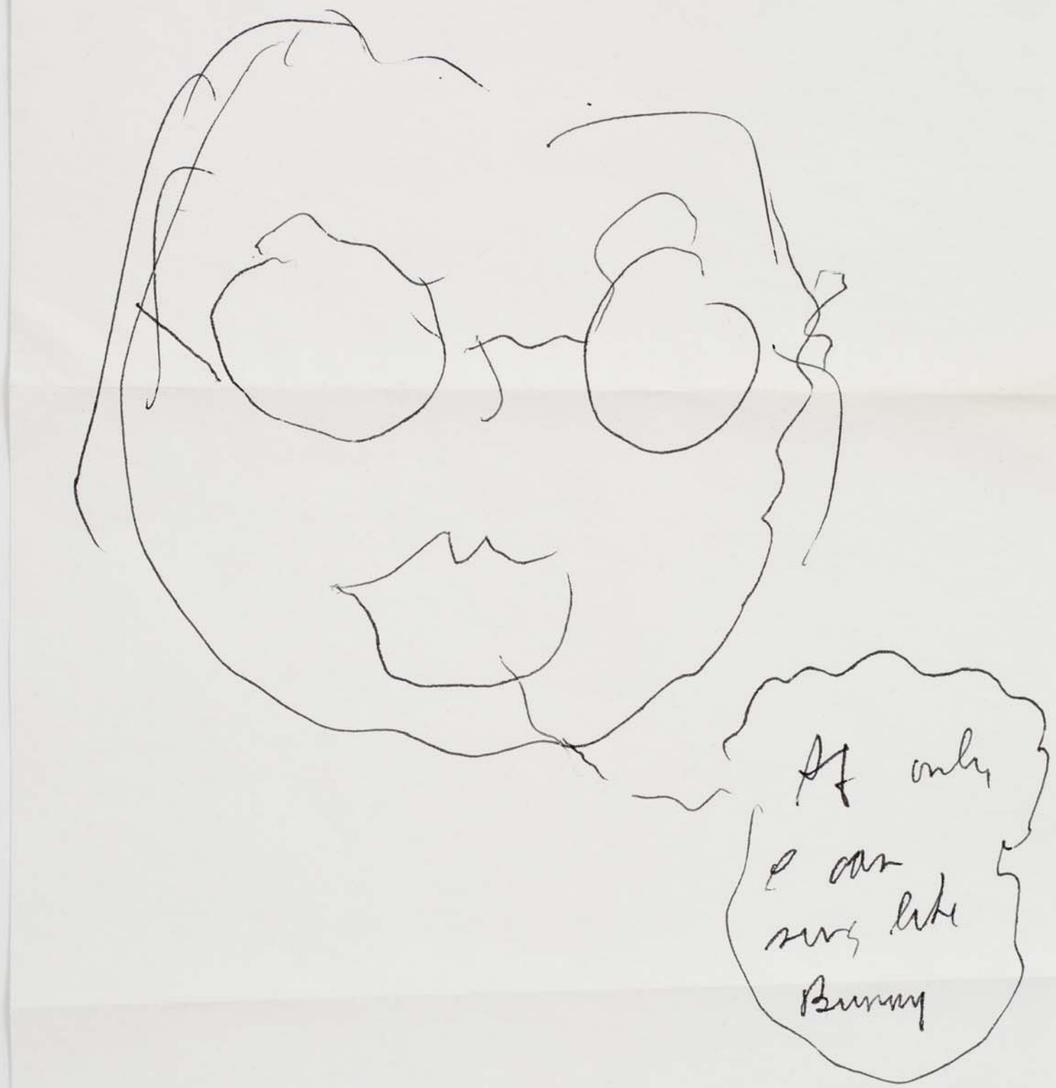
fig. 5 (this page and overleaf)
Morton Feldman
Flute and Orchestra
1978
Manuscript, score (p. 7)
Reproduced by permission of Universal Edition (London) Ltd.



(opposite)
fig. 6
Anon / Rug
Bergama Prayer Rug, Turkey
c.1880
Wool
170.2 x 104.1 cm
Private Collection



Morton Feldman
Drawing *If Only I can sing like Bunny*
c.1983
Pen on paper
21.6 x 14 cm
Private Collection



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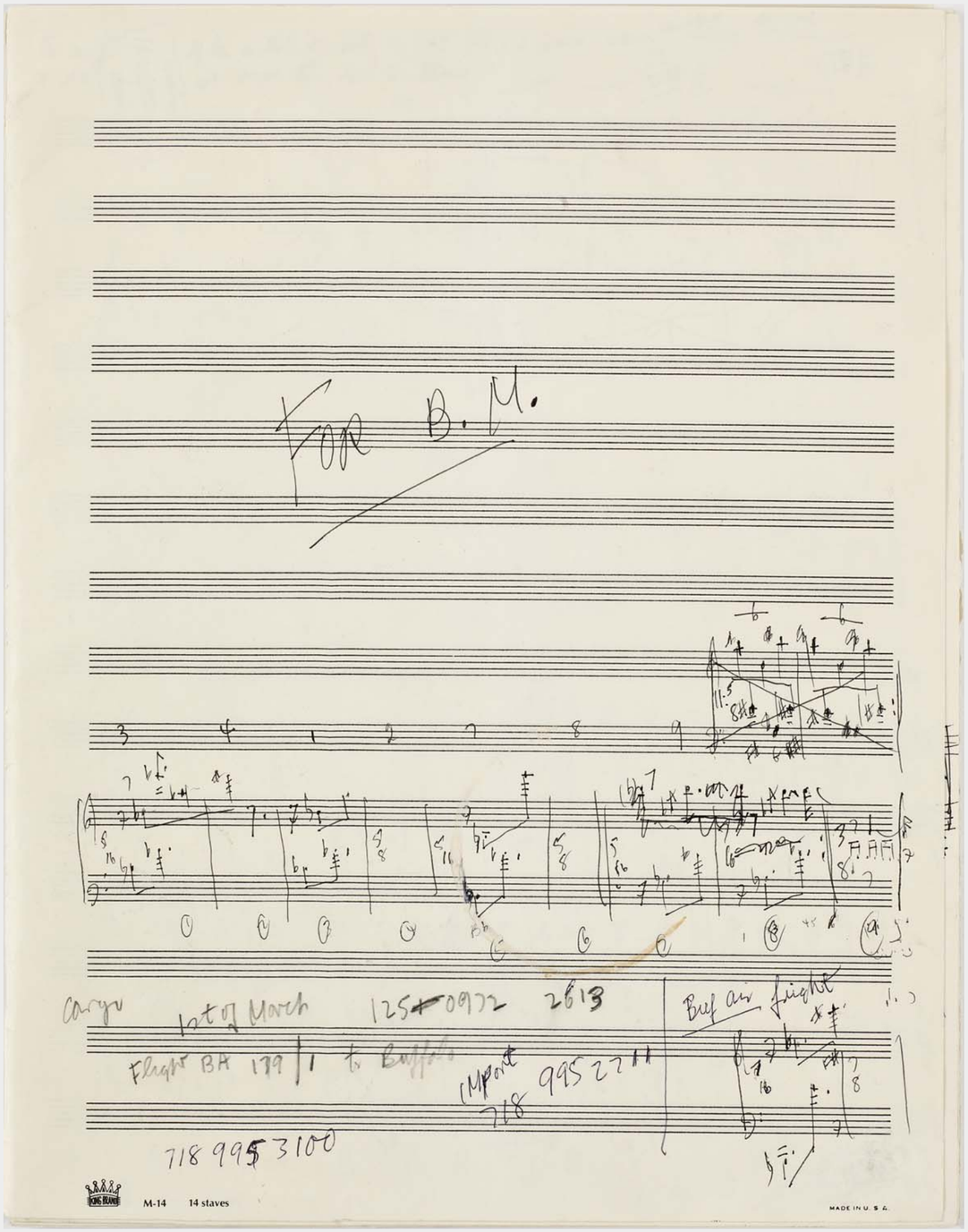
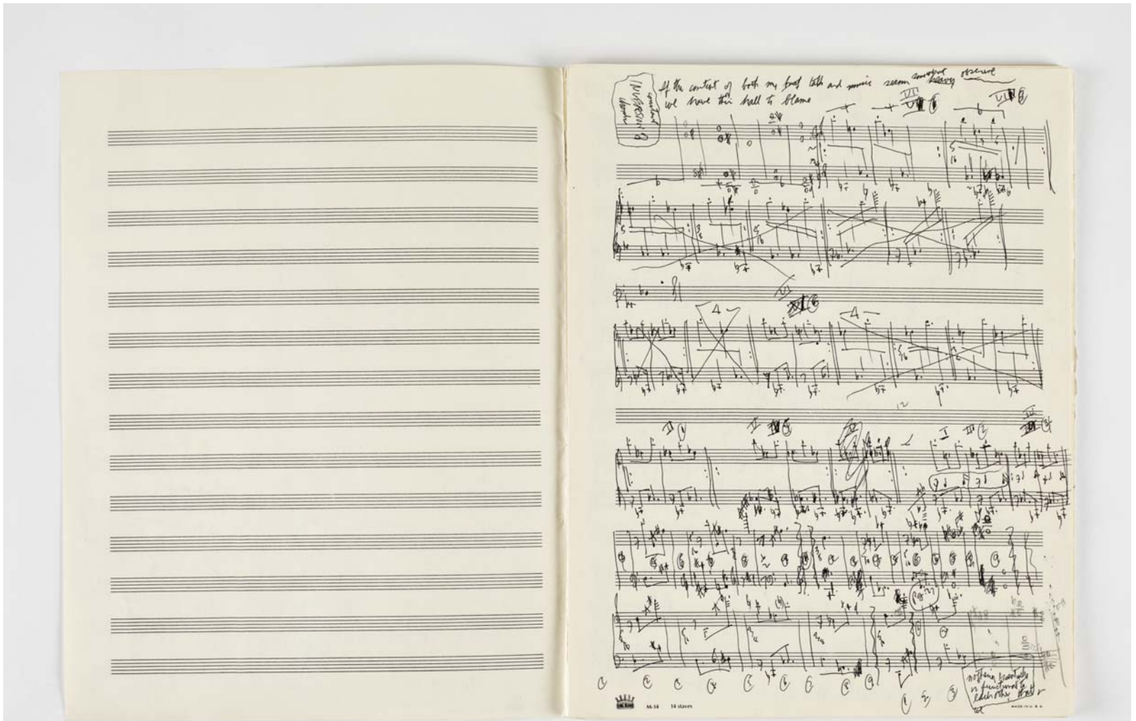
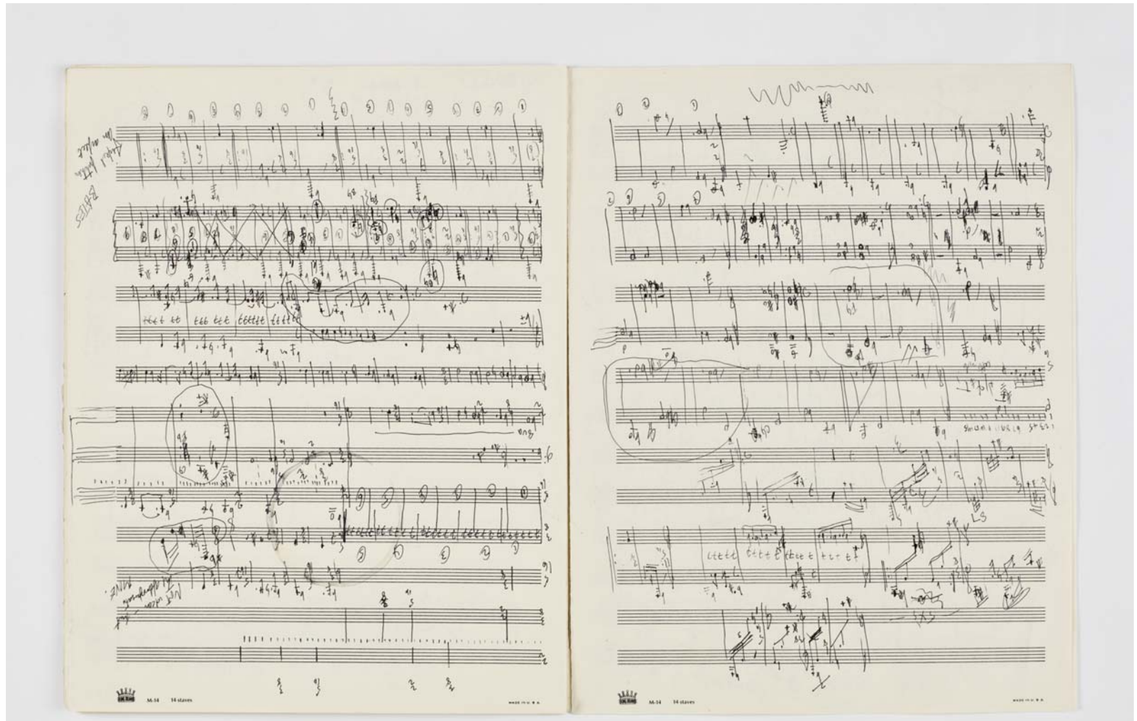
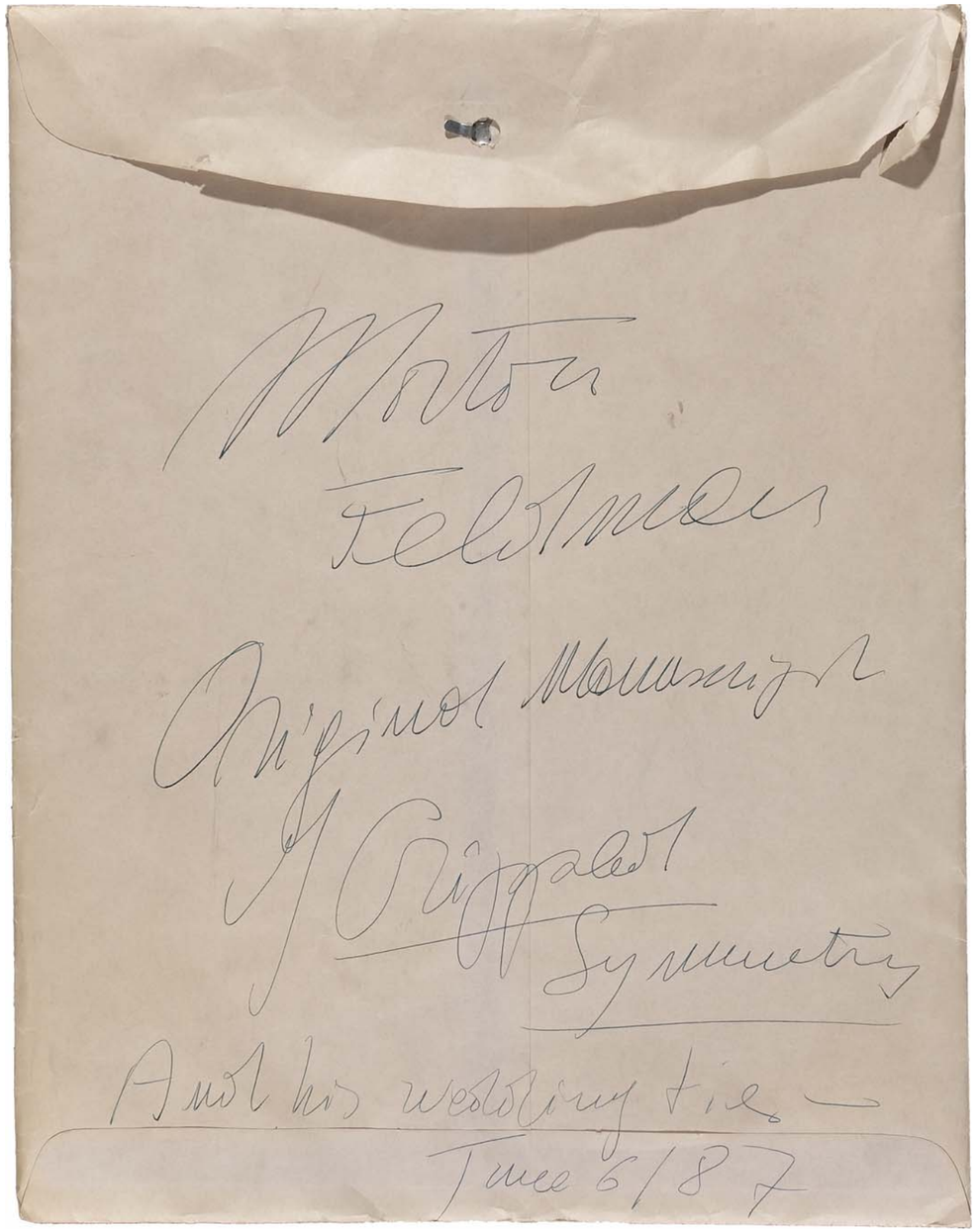
(this page and following spread)
Morton Feldman
Manuscript of *For Bunita Marcus*
1985
Musical score, 35 pages
34.3 x 26.7 cm
Private Collection





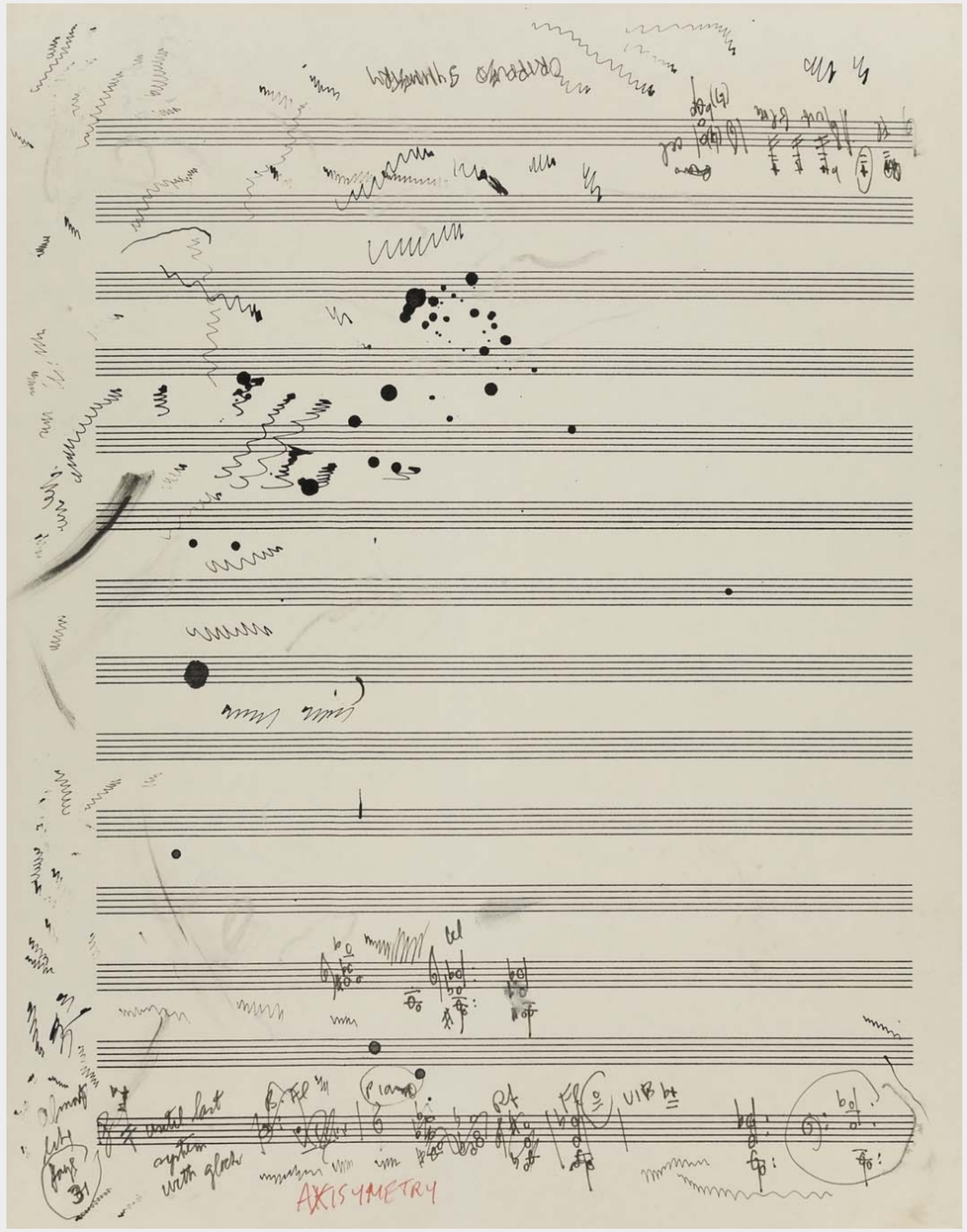


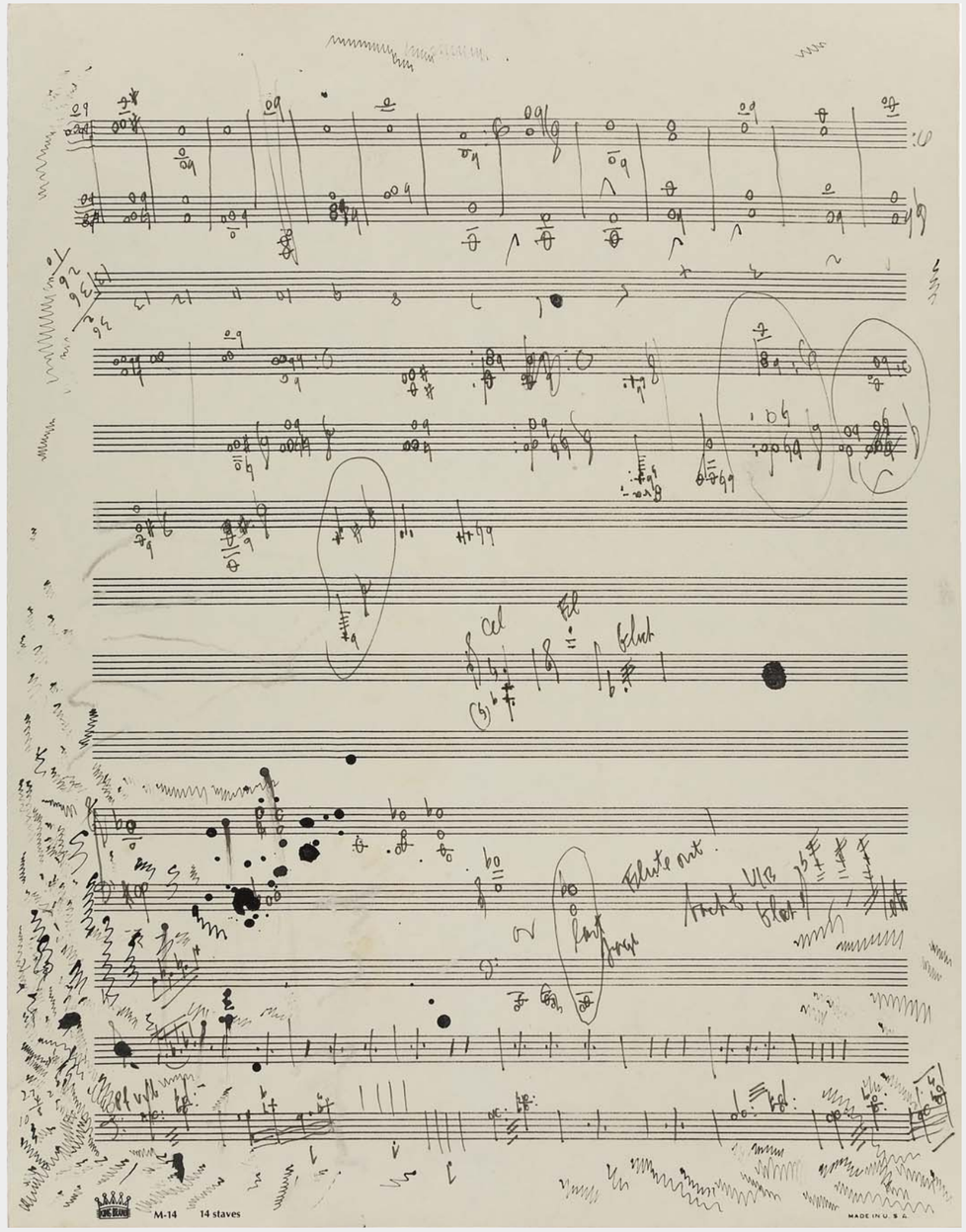
Morton Feldman
Envelope containing Draft of
Manuscript for *Crippled Symmetry*
1983
Collection of Francesco Pellizzi



(opposite)
Crippled Symmetry
Rome, Opera Paese
23 October 1997
Photo: Courtesy Opera Paese

(below and opposite)
Morton Feldman
Draft of Manuscript for *Crippled Symmetry*
1983
Musical score: Ink, pencil, red pen, green marker and masking tape. 11 pages (3 folded, double-sided, pre-printed staff paper sheets with notations – 26.7 x 34.3 cm); (6 double-sided pages, pre-printed staff paper sheets with notations – 26.7 x 34.3 cm); (2 sheets with hand-drawn notations – 21.6 x 27.9 cm)
Collection of Francesco Pellizzi





Bergama Rug,
Crippled Symmetry
Turkey
c.1880
Wool
82.6 x 127 cm
Private Collection

Morton Feldman in Paris shop,
France, July 1974
Photo: : Jan Williams

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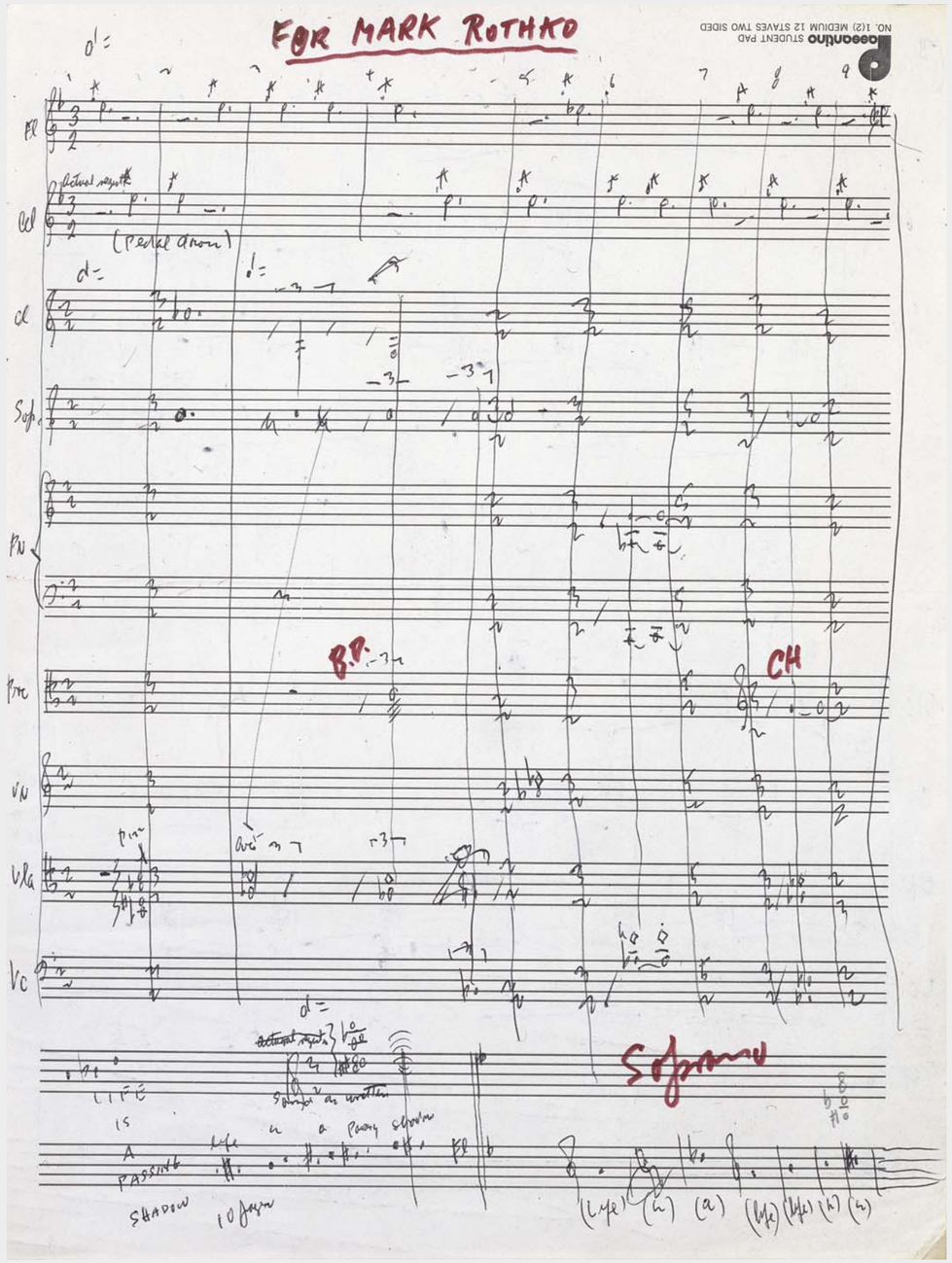
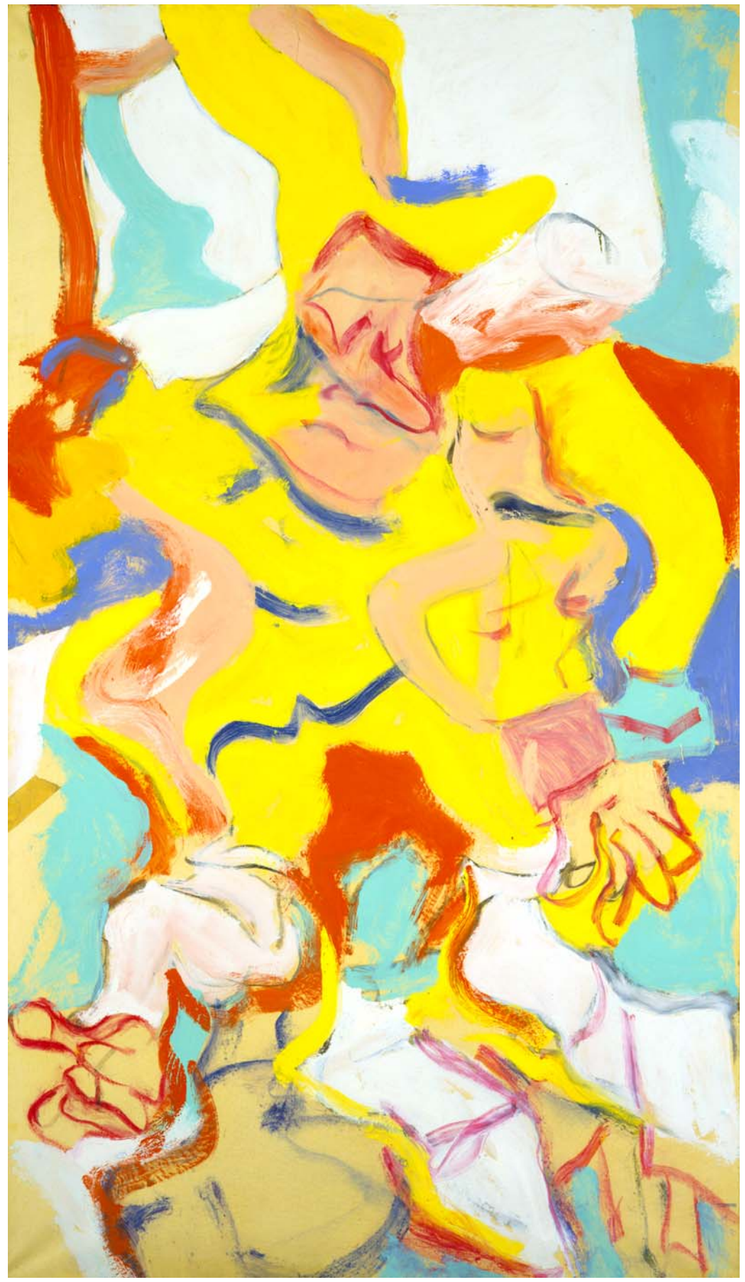
Morton Feldman
Rothko Chapel/For Frank O'Hara
1971
Vinyl LP cover
Columbia: Odyssey

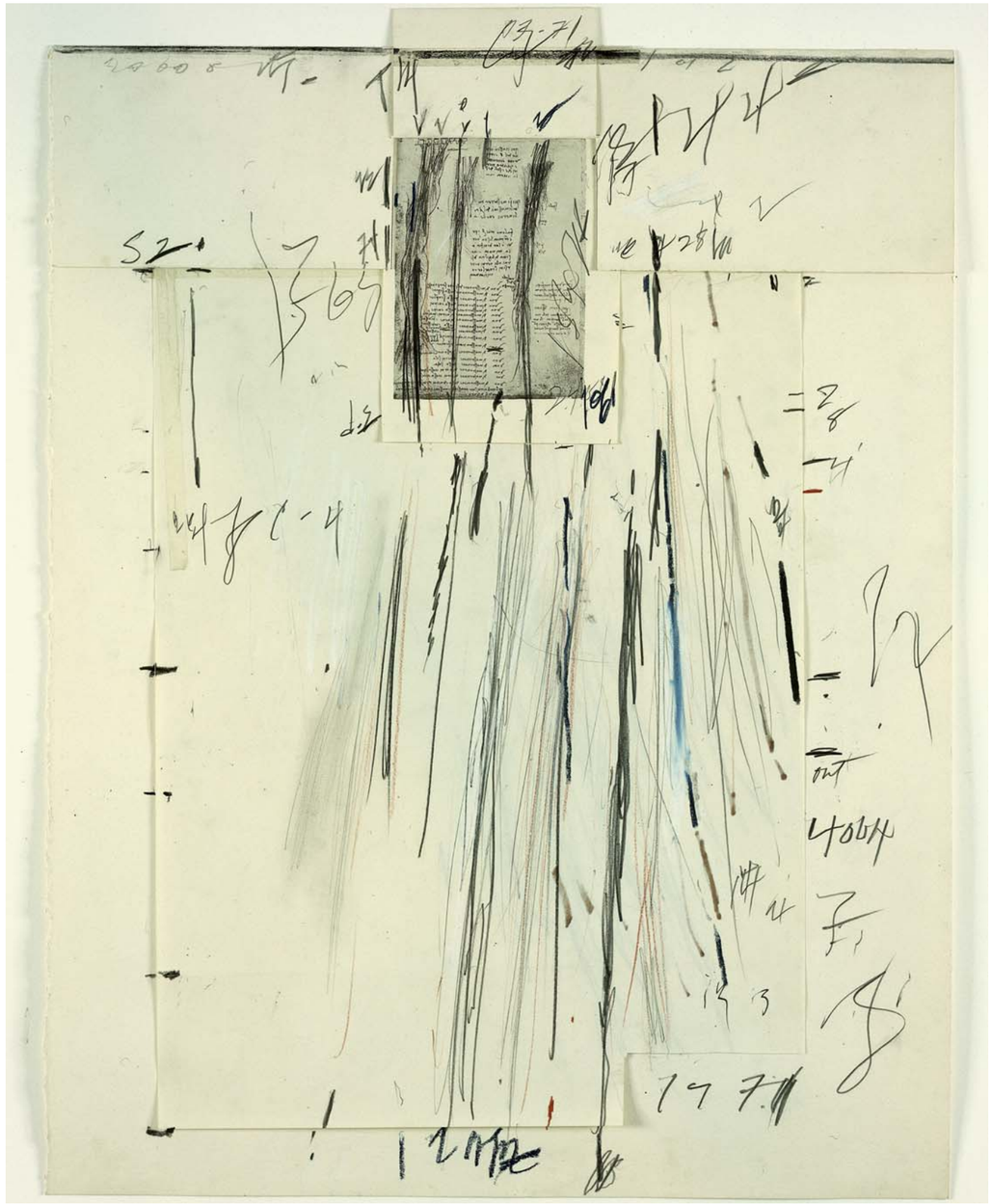
Morton Feldman
For Mark Rothko (later called Rothko Chapel)
1971
Score draft, p. 1
30.5 x 22.9 cm
Morton Feldman Collection,
Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland



Willem de Kooning <no title>, c.1970-74, Oil on vellum on canvas, with masking tape, 186.7 x 107 cm
Private Collection



Cy Twombly *Untitled (Leonardo drawing)*, 1971, Graphite, crayon, pastel, marker, tape and Xerox collage on paper, 81.3 x 24.75 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK



Robert Rauschenberg *Tanya Grossman,* 1974, Lithograph, 57.6 x 39.4 cm
Private Collection

Sol LeWitt *Untitled Triptych,* Magic Marker, ink and pen, 21 x 20.3 cm each panel
Private Collection

Morton Feldman

~ from memory

Kevin Volans

With Morton Feldman there was no small talk – and a conversation could last for several years. When I was checking in to my hotel for the 1986 International Summer Course for Contemporary Music in Darmstadt, Morty saw me from the far side of the lounge and yelled: 'And do you think the string quartet is a fake medium?', continuing the debate we had started over his *2nd String Quartet* in 1984. There was only one subject of discussion: music/art (with, I admit, the occasional footnote about food).

I say music/art because there was always a question in Feldman's mind as to whether music was an art form, or a 'music form', distinct in some fundamental way from visual art. And he constantly examined music and art, unpicking the material and searching for its essence. What is pure material, the nature of time itself, memory function, the role of notation, the role of history, the role of pen and ink...? His field of reference was vast – he claimed the biggest influence in his life was his grandmother who said, 'Morty, know everything, do nothing' – and his observations and illustrations encompassed Freud, Proust, Nietzsche, John McEnroe, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Coptic textiles, Turkish rugs, the Kabbalah, the highway code, the Rapidograph, Napoleon, dry cleaning, Titian, Rembrandt – indeed the whole history of western music and art – to name but a few random references that spring to mind. He was not afraid of misquoting anyone, myself included, in order to make a point.

Underlying this was a belief that the material itself should determine the form and the outcome of the music. In this he was determinedly anti-conceptual. He felt that conceptualism had been the undoing of 20th century music, where methods, systems of proportioning, extra-musical concepts had forced musical material into moulds that went against its nature. He seemed to feel the distorting factors of time, and the deep psychological and historical meaning of combinations of sounds did not permit a pre-programming of musical structure. The long evolution and perfection of traditional instruments brought a significance in their very nature that did not permit their sounds, their pitches, to be cast into arbitrary or capricious forms. This brought him into direct conflict with the universalist methods and empire building theories of other major figures of contemporary music. Allegedly Stockhausen confronted him: 'Do you mean that when you choose a note, you choose from all eighty-eight every time?',to which Feldman replied: ' For a New Yorker, eighty-eight notes is not a problem.'

'I can't write a pitch unless I know which instrument is playing it,' he often said. 'Listen Profoundly!' and 'Know Thy Instrument!' he exhorted young composers. I recall a long conversation we had on the different way the G string on a violin speaks, compared to the D string, or the G string of the viola, and how each demanded a different treatment. (No compositional pre-planning I have come across can take this kind of detail into account.)

In a way he might be regarded as an instrumental snob: the recorder was too arcane an instrument to play atonal music, or the saxophone too brash to be used in serious music. 'I am not qualified to judge electronic music,' he would announce modestly, but later would add: 'I think pitches are too beautiful to be played on the mouth organ!' I don't think he enjoyed controversy, but he stuck to his guns. 'You don't know how much you have going for you with *one note* on the piano! You could faint, it's so beautiful!'

He was strongly opposed to any sort of regionalism or specialism. 'If you don't take on the mainstream, you're lost... You leave the motorway in a foreign country, what happens? You get lost!' Or more provocatively: 'Just because you come from somewhere, doesn't mean to say that you're interesting' (a comment aimed partly at our 'loving disagreement' over my interest in African music).

His friendship and dialogue with artists is, of course, legendary and anecdotes abound: 'If you don't have a friend who is an artist, you're wasting your time.' One day he was arguing with his composition teacher, Stefan Wolpe, who felt his approach was too difficult, too highbrow: 'But what about the man in the street? What about the man in the street?' asked Wolpe. They looked out the window and there, crossing the road, was Jackson Pollock. 'If you need an audience,' he told a class of young composers, '*we don't need you*.'

> Then there was the large black Rauschenberg he saw when Rauschenberg had just moved into the building where John Cage was living. 'How much do you want for that?' he asked. 'How much do you have in your pocket?' Rauschenberg replied.

The story goes he got it for less than $20.

But it is his friendship and dialogue with Philip Guston that seems to have been the most profound. It is difficult at this remove to know who influenced whom the most. But their philosophical split is well known: When Guston came back to exhibit in the Marlborough Gallery in 1970 after a long stay in the Hamptons, he shocked the Abstract Expressionist world with his figurative work. 'What do you think, Morty?' he asked. 'Just give me a minute,' Feldman replied. They never talked again. 'It was the biggest mistake of my life,' said Feldman at Darmstadt twenty years later. '*Never judge a work from the point of view of style*,' he often said – a plea that usually goes unheeded to this day.

His contribution to music is difficult to cover in the space of so short an essay. In my opinion, the great works start with his opera, *Neither*, written to a libretto by Samuel Beckett (1977). This work seemed to open a door for Feldman, and a series of large masterpieces flowed for the rest of his life. The anti-conceptualist nature of the work and the fact that it was nearly all quiet, sustained and employed small repetitive models, did not prevent the music from encompassing some large and varied themes. In writing very long works, he went beyond the normal limits of what the brain can process and effectively eliminated the notion of large-scale form, focusing on micro-structure and the material itself. The pieces became meditations on time itself, rather than *timing*.

The following is a very personal take on some of the works:

Coptic Light for large orchestra (1985) is concerned with the nature of orchestration and the relationship of instruments to each other within a large group. I feel Feldman wanted to present the *fabric* of orchestration, which, similar to a fragment of Coptic cloth, can reveal much about a culture and its concerns through the very nature of the warp and weft.

String Quartet (1979) seems to start out at a point and expand outward in several directions in the space of one and a half hours. To me, this is a work in search of a subject it never finds.

In contrast to this, the six-hour *String Quartet 2* (1983), presents us with a series of perfectly formed subjects, like a vast collection of Joseph Cornell boxes, each encapsulating a different mood. The structuring principle of this work is memory – Feldman composed in pencil during the day and then made a fair copy in ink in the evening ('getting closer to the material'), and then turned the pages face down. In the following days he would bring back the material *from memory* and examine it again – re-notating, reinterpreting – until he felt he knew and understood it, at which point he would drop it out, until nothing was left. The piece can be regarded as a musical equivalent of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

Bass Clarinet and Percussion (1981) seems to be a meditation along the lines of Bach's *Kunst der Fuge*. To me it says, '*this* is all I can do, and this is *all* I can do.' Nothing more.

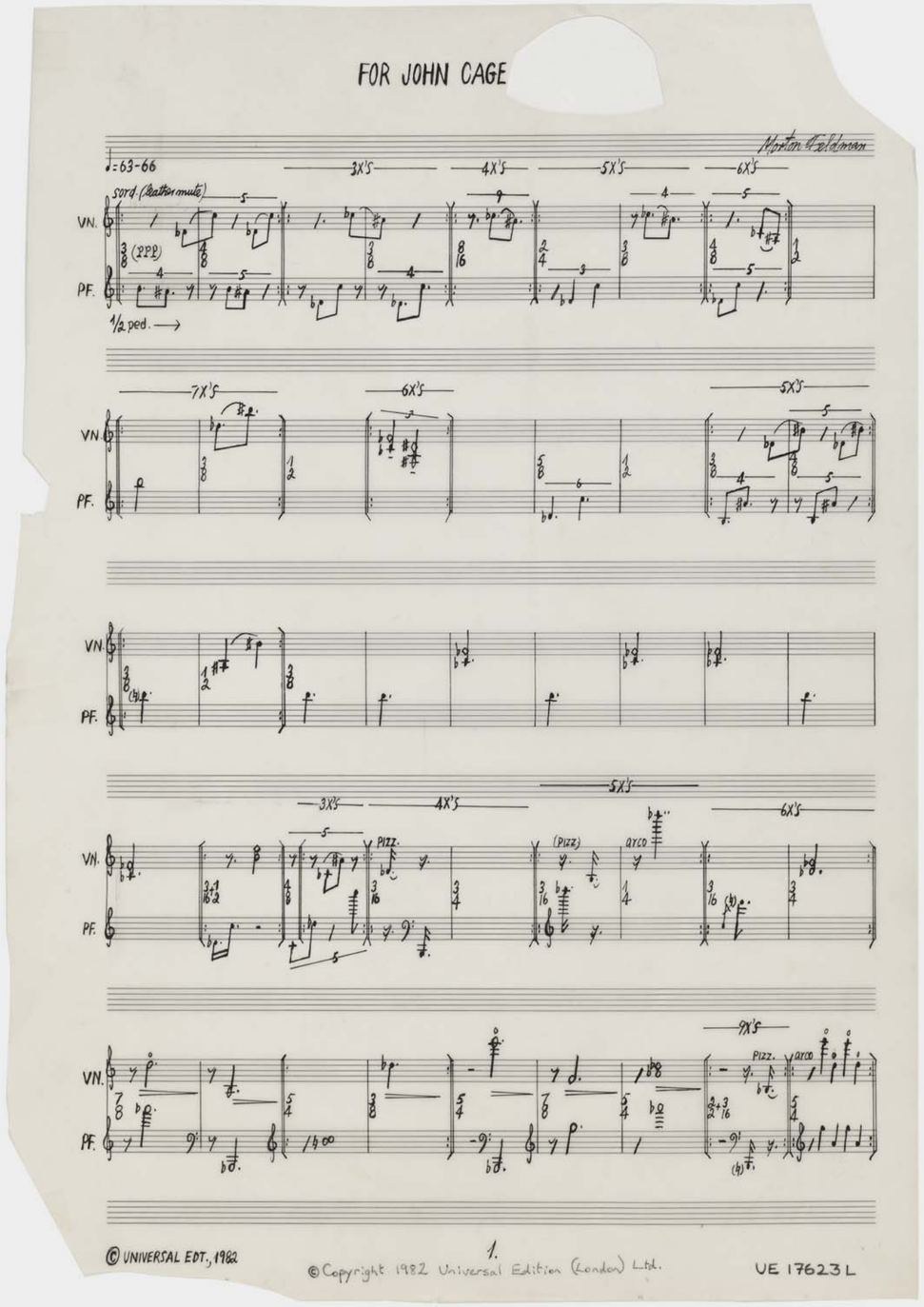
For Philip Guston (1984), a four-hour study in asynchronicity, in which the four instruments start at the same point and develop away from each other at their own pace, with what seems like astonishing rapidity, while remaining somehow in touch. A truly virtuosic piece of composition.

And in *For Christian Wolff* (1986) for flute and piano (doubling celeste), the flute, while remaining quiet and still, gives the illusion of increasing stridency and urgency.

Each of the late works was daunting in its scope and imagination – 'scale' replaced 'form', and 'musical relationships' replaced 'development', and 'material' replaced 'ideas'. The focus constantly shifted, say, from pitch to interval to tone-colour to rhythm to notation to time, and back. Notation became not just the easiest or clearest way of writing the music down, but something incorporated in the compositional process itself as a sophisticated tool for musical exploration. Each piece became a model of some kind – an unconsummated icon – didactically gruelling yet immensely satisfying emotionally.

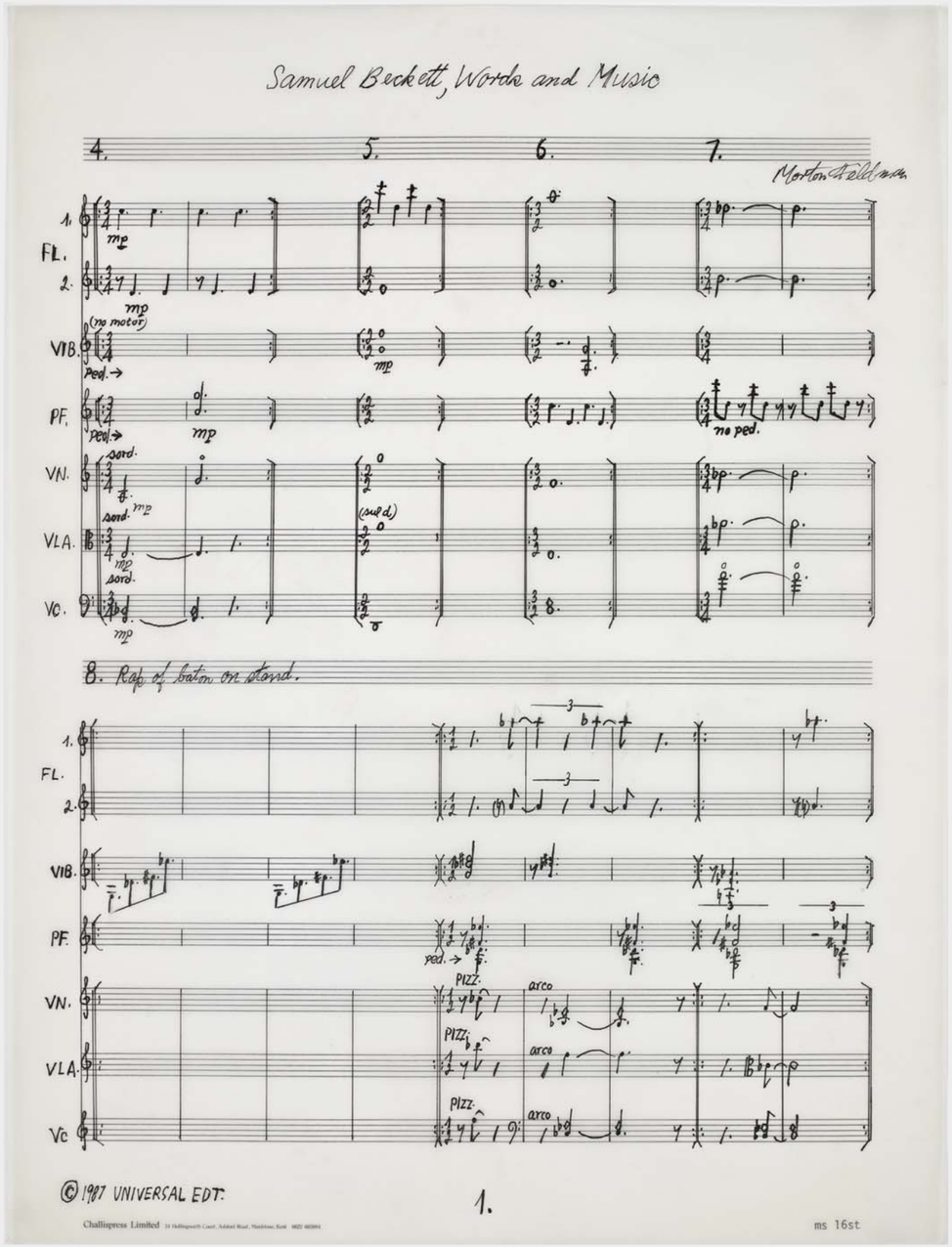
Right to the end Feldman remained didactic, and he left us with a conundrum. On his last evening in Europe, just a month before his death, he had dinner with Bunita Marcus, Barbara Feldman, Aki Takahashi and myself. Towards the end of the evening he said: 'Kinder, I have something important to say. Listen carefully: if ever you have agreed with anything I have said, PLEASE FORGET IT. I mean this. Forget it.'

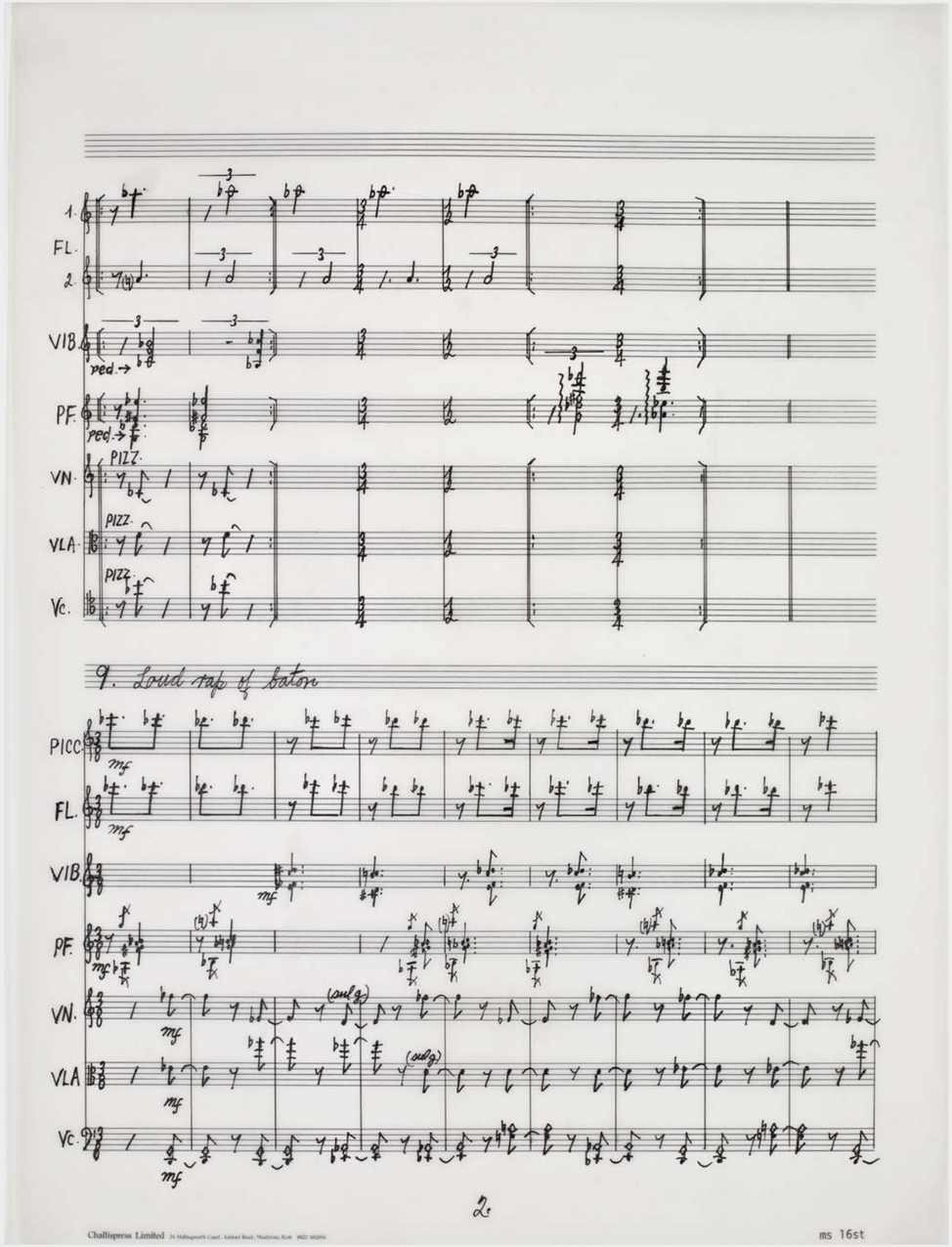
Morton Feldman
For John Cage
1982
Transparency, score
20 pages
On loan from Universal Edition (London) Ltd.



Morton Feldman portrait with music score of *Neither* in background (also used with superimposed image of Samuel Beckett), undated
Photographer unknown

Morton Feldman
Manuscript of *For Samuel Beckett*
1987
Musical score, 2 pages onion skin
Private Collection



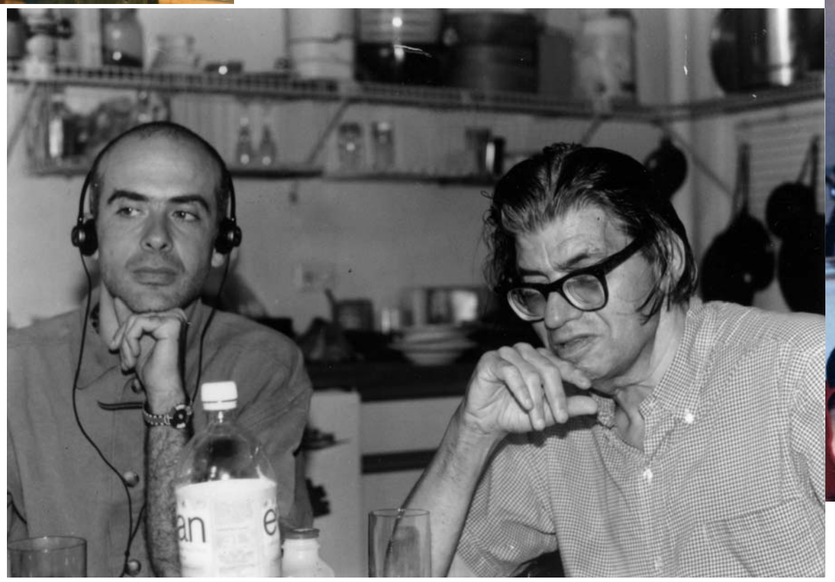


(above)
Neither
Second night, 10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell'Opera
Photo: Donatelli Rimoldi

(below)
Neither
Fifth night, 10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell'Opera
Photo: Donatelli Rimoldi

(opposite above)
Neither
Fourth night, 10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell'Opera
Photo: Donatelli Rimoldi

(opposite below)
Neither
First night, 10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell'Opera
Photo; Donatelli Rimoldi



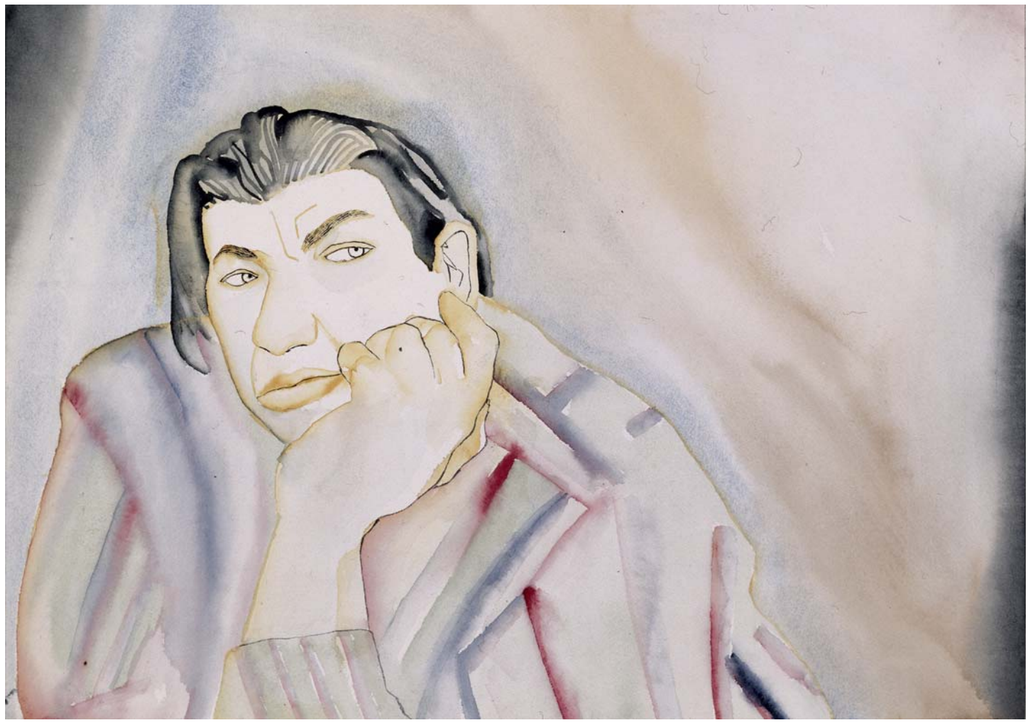
(above and below)
Francesco Clemente and Morton Feldman, c.1986–7

(opposite)
Alba Clemente, Morton Feldman and Francesco Clemente, c.1986–7

All courtesy Alba and Francesco Clemente

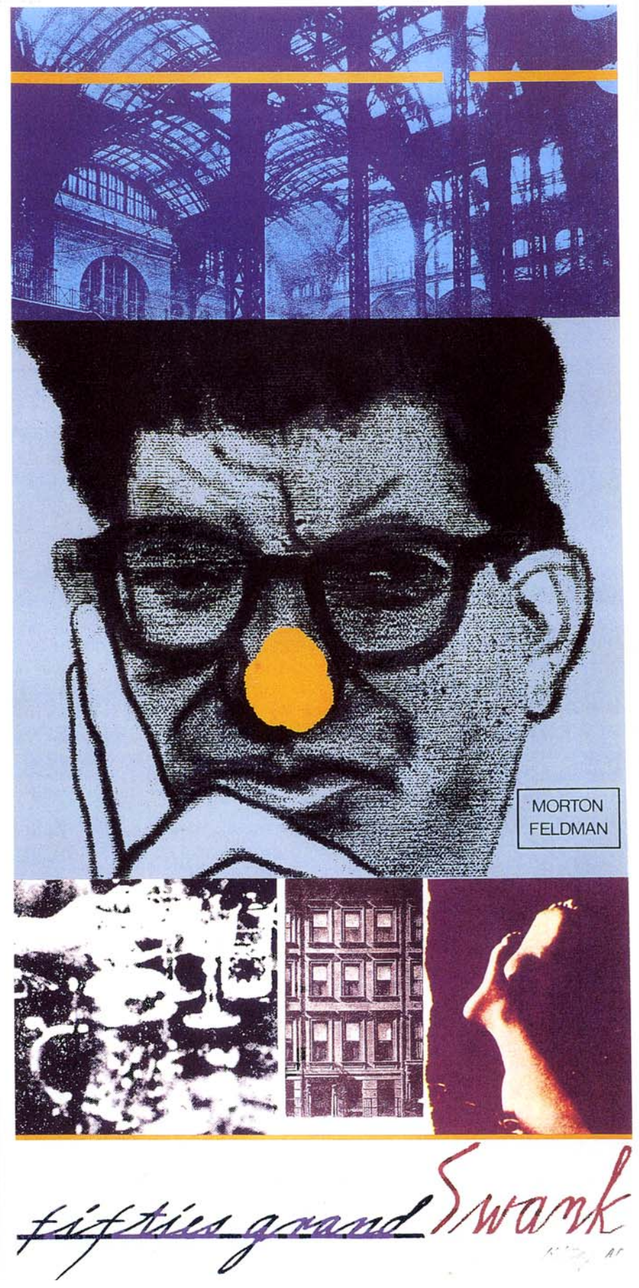
1980s

Francesco Clemente *Portrait of Morton Feldman*, 1982-87, Watercolour on paper, 36.2 x 50.8 cm
Collection of Alba and Francesco Clemente



Francesco Clemente *The Magic Wand*, 1987, Watercolour on paper, 121.9 x 30.5 cm in 3 panels
Private Collection

R.B. Kitaj *Fifties Grand Swank (Morton Feldman) from 'First Series: Some Poets 1966-69'*, 1980, Screenprint, Paper size 80 x 37.8 cm
Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd



Barbara Monk Feldman

Music and the picture plane: Poussin's *Pyramus and Thisbe* and Morton Feldman's *For Philip Guston*

In Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe*, (fig.1) the narrative unfolds during a storm within a vast landscape. A fierce wind sweeps across the painting from left to right. Huge black clouds roll towards distant hills on the right where ghostly buildings are illuminated in a patch of sunlight. On the left, the branches of two giant trees are starkly silhouetted against a brightly lit sky; their trunks descend into the dark shadows of the foreground. In the centre of the picture, an oval-shaped body of water remains mysteriously calm in spite of the force of the storm. On the opposite shore, lightning strikes a branch off a tree. The body of Pyramus lies in the immediate foreground of the painting, vertically aligned with the falling branch. Approaching him from the right, Thisbe cries with outstretched arms.

The legend as it is told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is as follows: Pyramus and Thisbe fall in love but their families refuse to allow then to marry. They communicate secretly with each other through a crack in the wall that separates their homes. Soon they decide to arrange a meeting at night outside the city, at the site of Ninus's tomb, which lies in the shadow of a tall mulberry tree. Thisbe arrives first and encounters a lioness fresh from a kill, prowling in the darkness. She escapes into a cave in fear and loses her cloak, which the lioness tramples and stains with blood. Pyramus arrives moments later and discovers the beast's footprints in the dust, and recognises the torn and bloodied garment. Believing that Thisbe has been devoured by the creature, he thrusts his sword into his side. Thisbe returns to the mulberry tree whose fruit has now turned a deep rose colour from Pyramus's blood. She notices the new colours on the tree and begins to feel disorientated, wondering if she has returned to the same place. She sees something on the blood soaked ground and steps back, her face turning pale. It is Pyramus. She runs to him and calls out. He opens his eyes and sees her face one last time, as though she were a vision, before his eyes close forever. Thisbe recognises the cloak nearby, understands immediately what has happened and takes her life with Pyramus's sword. The families reconcile their differences and agree to bury the ashes of the two lovers in the same urn.

Poussin has represented the moment when Thisbe discovers the dying Pyramus, and realises how he was deceived into choosing his own death. Through her eyes and her moment of anguish we view the painting. With the exception of a figure on horseback in the background, Thisbe alone attempts to move against the force of the wind. One can imagine her voice engulfed by the roaring gale and thunder. Her cry is a strong presence made all the more vivid by the silence of the medium. The illusion of these two sounds—the storm, on the one hand, and Thisbe's cry, on the other—fills the canvas.

Fig. 1.
Nicolas Poussin
Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe
1650
Oil on canvas
195.2 x 273.5 cm
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

The spell of nature and its remoteness from humanity is temporarily displaced, by the way in which the development of the storm is made to occur in counterpoint to that of the narrative. Lightning strikes precisely when Thisbe calls out. In the background, the lioness attacks a group of shepherds—an event that symbolises that the regular course of time has been disrupted: the fleeing shepherds are in Thisbe's direct line of vision; inasmuch as she sees the shepherds and the lioness, she sees them only in the background, but it is precisely this background context of her vision that simultaneously clarifies the foreground and 'present' trauma. To Thisbe, the lioness stands for Pyramus's tragic misconception, which had occurred only moments before. In this sense, the lioness and the shepherds represent after-images, signifying that part of the tragedy that has already occurred. As the eye comes to linger on the lioness, we are made to feel the psychological turmoil of Thisbe, who wants to reverse time.

Other images reinforce the feeling of the reversal and dis-placement of time. Thin strokes of lightning, painted as though they were barely the width of a hair, give emphasis to the speed in which the present moment vanishes. The shepherds who flee from the lioness really flee from time itself—time that is stalled or delayed by Thisbe's anguish. They are swept along in the direction of the wind as by the arrow of time. One of the figures, a man behind the mounted horse that gallops up the hill, has his face and part of his body obscured by a shadow. It is as though he were running into the darkness, but there is also the possibility that he is carrying the darkness with him, so that his running is futile. In the foreground, Thisbe is left alone facing into the wind, resisting the flow if time. Past and present are united in the painting into a momentary illusion of the interchangebility of time that almost seems to disappear the moment we have grasped it. The subtlety of this evocation is accompanied by another that is equally ephemeral—an intense play of light and dark that appears to flicker in and out of the canvas. These two illusions, the one involving displacement of time and the other involving the movement of light, make us uncomfortable. We experience vividly the disorientation of the tragic heroine.

The chimera of time in the drama is made possible by two kinds of light construction. One is the intense, reflected light that integrates three areas of the canvas in a large triangular web. This is the dramatic light. It includes the bright left-hand sky area, the buildings on the opposite hillside on the upper right, and the lower right corner where a strong diagonal beam of light forms along the contour of Thisbe's body.

The second kind of light is more subtly related to the drama. It is created by varying degrees of shading. The process of deep shading prevents us from seeing clearly at first and significantly slows down the rhythm in which we perceive the events of the story. It is as though Poussin had orchestrated the entire mood of the painting by intimating infinitesimal gaps between darkness and bright dramatic light. There is something distinctly opaque about the character of the dramatic light. Once it has led our eye into the canvas it seems to reflect our gaze outward again like a mirror. A prolonged gaze into the shadows reveals areas of more intense darkness, suggesting a near-black ground. This pure darkness seems to draw all shadows into a void — to a point where they appear to lose all substance. The disappearing quality of the light into the dark creates a delicate balance between what can be seen immediately and what cannot be perceived clearly.

In this play of light and absence of light, two surfaces of time emerge: one consists of the actual rhythm of our seeing, or the time it takes for the eye to travel the canvas; the other consists of the rhythm of the narrative time — the relative speed at which the events of the story are unfolding as well as the echo of what has already occurred. It is Thisbe who makes it possible for the two rhythms to be integrated. The complexity of her emotion seems to make time stand still. Her moment of isolation is precisely the moment when the viewer's perception of time becomes integrated with hers — a moment when one enters the painting.

Through Thisbe's eyes we are presented with the illusion that we have glimpsed eternity—an illusion that is accomplished as we experience the myth vaguely, as a displaced memory. But this is also the moment when we are suddenly distanced from it. Only in this distance, as the myth eternally begins to vanish, do we get a fleeting sense of its essence.

* * *

What is the experience of mythological time in the four hour long composition *For Philip Guston*, written for flute, percussion and piano by the composer Morton Feldman? In the search for an answer to this question, let us begin with the idea of two inspirations for time in music—one that is derived from literature, and one that is derived from the visual arts. These two inspirations are not mutually exclusive, and this will make the thread of my discussion difficult to follow. My feeling is that all music is to a degree inspired by time (and memory) of literature, and the problem will be one of separating the time of literature and that of the visual arts within one piece of music. The expression 'visually inspired' does not refer to a specific scene or picture, nor does it refer to any correspondence between specific colours in painting and pitches in music. It will refer here to the correspondence between musical time and specific visual processes —processes that in the visual arts concern the integration of colour, surface, scale and form.

During the activity of reading, for example, there is a fraction of a second when one forms an expectation in which one is 'ahead' of the perceived meaning: it is a fraction of a second in which one is able to form expectation and to grasp meaning before it becomes memory. The infinitesimal amount of time in which expectation occurs must be there: it is the essence of all reading activity; it is the frontier of sanity that guards the boundary between known and unknown. The same frontier exists in the perception of music. In music that draws the principal inspiration for time from literature, the musical relationship between past and present—between memory and expectation—occurs as a result of a feeling for time that is related to the activity of reading.

The same relationship—between memory and expectation —occurs in music for which a principal reference for time can be drawn from the visual arts, but there is also a transformation of the feeling for time that is related to the activity of reading into a feeling for time that is related to a way of seeing. In painting, the treatment of light is integral to this experience. But time can only be referred to in painting, whereas in music, two times exist: the actual time of the performance, and the time existing in our memory as the piece moves along.

Consider for example, the way time is referred to in Poussin's orchestration of light and dark. In visually inspired music, time is also perceived principally by way of the orchestration. This will remain an essential thread in my discussion.

The intense and, at the same time, intimate gradation of light and dark in the Poussin reflects our perception of the two kinds of time—mythological or eternal time, and chronological time. Our difficulty in seeing into the intensity of the dark is a metaphor for Thisbe's predicament: she is unable to make time move back into the past and unable to see herself move on into the future. We experience what Nietzsche called the contemplation of the tragic myth: the experience of having to see while longing to transcend all seeing.

How this is achieved in the orchestration of the light and dark is less significant for purposes of the present discussion than *what* is achieved. This is because the particular relationship between orchestration and time in music, which will be the focus of this paper, is mainly one that lies outside the realm of causal connections.

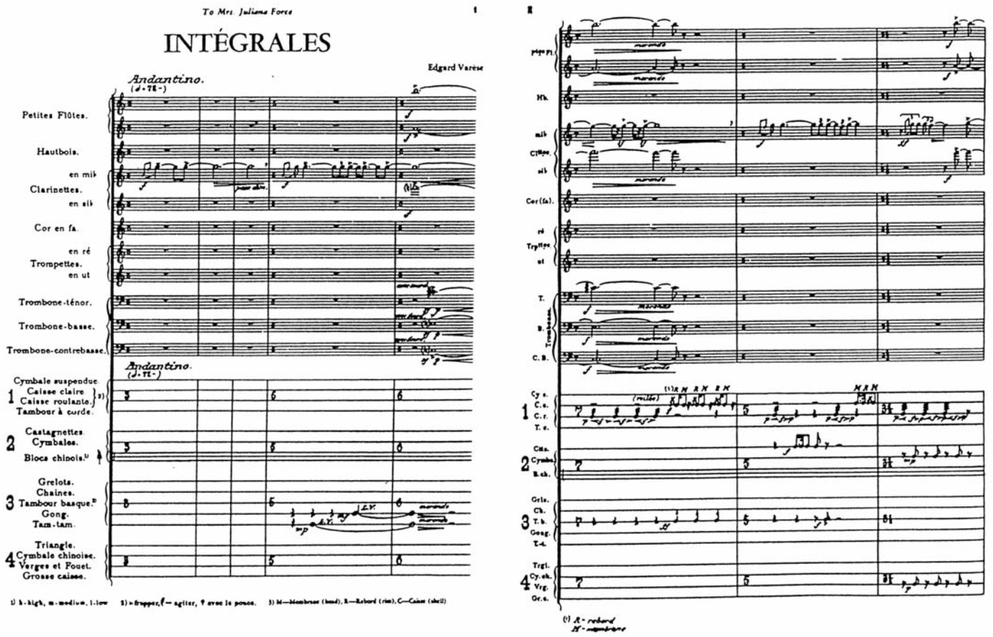
In the Poussin there is a near-physical aspect rendered in the quality of the air, which seems to linger near and evaporate off the surface of the painting. It is as though some of the material substance of the work spills off into the atmosphere—into a void, or an immeasurable distance between ourselves and the object that we are perceiving. The space between the material substance of the work and the surrounding atmosphere is not completely 'empty': it is activated in such a way that the atmosphere appears to absorb the plastic character of the material substance of the work. This 'plastic' phenomenon occurs *within the art work and within the void*, and it cannot be measured: it is perceived as an emptiness that is interpenetrated with the material substance of the work. It represents a phenomenon that consistently evades us: it is most perceptible upon first glance and thereafter, as one proceeds to view the work, it tends to vanish.

Three other non-measurable aspects of western painting will be at the core of our discussion in determining the relation of music to visual inspiration: (1) The scale of the work; (2) the relationship of light and colour and their transformation into volumes or flatness; (3) the impenetrable character of the horizontal and vertical line or lines set in relation to the picture plane. These are the aspects of all western painting since Giotto that contribute in varying degrees to the relation with the experience of visually inspired time in music, particularly since Edgard Varèse.

In music where the principal inspiration for time is drawn from the visual arts musical imagery is sustained, transformed, or reiterated to a degree independently from 'traditional' methods of harmonic development—methods that would include the inversion, the retrograde, the retrograde inversion, and the motivic variation of subject material. Although these traditional methods of harmonic development may be also in evidence in the music that is visually inspired, their formal role is less emphasised.

In the Poussin, the orchestration of 'light' and 'dark' contributes to the first glance perception of an unlocatable surface that is perceived on first glance but is not retained as soon as we are 'in' the painting. It is a surface that seems to 'move' within the painting. Because the movable surface is perceived as a plane it engages us in the same way as an absolute memory—a memory that is commingled with the mythological and the eternal, rather than with the narrative and with the chronological sequencing of events. I remember recognising one of Poussin's canvases that I unexpectedly chanced upon in the Louvre. The canvas was in an adjoining room, and there was a considerable glare of light reflecting from it, so that the subject matter of the painting was not visible. In the off portions of this glare small sections of the basic colour of the canvas could be guessed. The ingredient that had made the immediate recognition of the picture as a Poussin possible was lost as I approached the painting and began to perceive the content. An unlocatable surface, wherein an unpredictable relationship between colour and darkness occurs, is recognised only in the instant before it actually is seen.

In the *Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* the more we see the narrative aspects of the painting and the effects of intense shading, the more we lose our perception of the moveable surface. But the moveable surface is still the signature aspect of the work: as we begin to lose our initial sense of it a more ephemeral vision of the work survives—a vision that is all the more enchanting as it is made to be fleeting and barely secured. This is the kind of vision that re-emerges in all of its intimacy in perception of the Morton Feldman composition, *For Philip Guston*.



Time and Notation

A composer who was once in the process of composing a work for orchestra wanted to discuss notation. He had composed a series of chords at the piano with the orchestration and the rhythms in mind but not yet notated. Later, when the chords were eventually written with their precise rhythms and orchestration, he found that adjustments had to be made in the original material as the notation came into focus. This type of compositional process involves I think a sequential approach to music and time, with adjustments occurring after the notation has already been chosen. Another compositional approach more closely related to the visual processes I am discussing involves those adjustments that occur simultaneously *with* notation. The notation, in turn, concerns attributes that are incommensurable and inherent in the sound at the moment of inspiration; it would be impossible to change the notation without side-tracking from this moment of inspiration. The process that approximates an essence that cannot be *literally* notated is integral in sustaining a part of musical time that is separated from the 'present time' of the performance. Our memory of the previous sounds we have heard during the performance may overlap into the sounds one is in the process of hearing; this memory would reflect another rate of time passing—one that I would refer to as *inner duration*. This idea of inner duration is closely related to the idea of scale in the visual arts where, for example, the amount of space that is to become engaged might be *sensed* by the painter before it is rendered. The scale of the painting concerns an immeasurable quantity, and this corresponds to the aspects of music that cannot be literally notated.

These un-notatable aspects have always been in evidence in music, but in music that is visually inspired, they operate on a structural level. Listening intently to a long composition like Morton Feldman's *For Philip Guston*—a piece that lasts for four or more hours—one experiences the inner duration in the perception that time is somehow 'missing'—that time seems to have 'fallen' between the sounds. After the piece is finished, one recognises that such an absence of time is intrinsic to the perception of what the piece really is. It is as though we needed to see the total picture in order to catch a glimpse of what had been missing all along—that part of the musical imagery that is *not* possible to notate.

The relationship to music that is visually inspired is one that occurs somewhere in the pre-compositional stage. What we are looking for are those aspects of composition that occur when the musical idea is still largely undefined—when it is still on the edge of becoming an idea. These can be related to inner duration in music; they also correspond to the visual phenomenon of plasticity referred to above—where it is not clear where material substance 'ends' and where the void 'begins.' In a Guston painting, for example, the impenetrable character of the surface will sometimes seem to force the picture out of its frame—during those brief moments when one is able to lose consciousness of the frame and of the surface itself.

Consider how the opening measures of Varèse's *Intégrales* (fig. 2) differs uniquely from the contrapuntal style of Schoenberg. Here the function of melody and accompaniment is significantly altered; rhythm and extreme registration are the dominating characteristics of the music. An important result of this orchestration and of this registration is that the *duration* of the musical material is less possible to predict.

In Schoenberg's music and in music that employs a traditional approach to orchestration (where the orchestration *accompanies* the form), the relative length of the phases is still predictable: the consequent phrase in tonal music will be approximately the length of the antecedent phrase; it is not unusual for the remaining six tones of a 12-note row to occur in approximately the same time as the first six, unless a cadential feature is involved.

But in *Intégrales*, the woodwind chords function less as 'harmony' and more as a 'colour' unto themselves. This results in the perception of unpredictable time, or the *inner duration* of the sound. Does the unpredictability of time in *Intégrales* evolve from what the perception of what is immeasurable in painting? Here for example, the *scale* in Barnett Newman's work comes to mind. Newman's *Onement No. 1* (1948) (fig. 3) consists of a single stripe painted in the middle of the canvas. The way in which this stripe asserts itself in relation to the two areas on either side of the stripe and to the entire canvas gives rise to a perception that contradicts our knowledge of size: this corresponds to the perception of delayed time within time, in the opening measures of *Intégrales*.

In traditional music, where the orchestration *accompanies* the form, one does not have this same perception of delayed time. In the same way that the stripe in the painting is not 'stationary' in relation to the space on either side, the duration of the clarinet figuration in the opening of *Intégrales* seems to occupy slightly more that its actual duration, despite the 'static' character of the melodic line. One of the reasons for this is because of the way the colour of the clarinet becomes fixed in the memory, and because of the way this memory is subsequently integrated with other colours and silences in real time. As a result, the trombone colour of measure 5, for example, is perceived in part, as a *transformation* of the clarinet colour. The 'light structure' for both the solo clarinet colour and the trombone chord colour is made to *sound* the same. This perception is based on the following observations:

1. Only three pitches sound in the clarinet for an unprecedented amount of time; this reinforces the E♭ clarinet as a solo colour that is perceived separately from the other woodwind colour of the piccolos and B♭ clarinet chord—A E♭ B—in measure 5.
2. The close registration of the other woodwind colours to the solo E♭ clarinet colour shifts the E♭ colour into a closer association with the trombones; I cannot offer any 'reasonable' criteria why the harmony of the trombones—C E C#—is closer in terms of *colour* to the solo E♭ clarinet colour—D A♭ B♭: this association is attending the relationship between measurable aspects (pitch) on the one hand and immeasurable aspects (colour) on the other; it is based on the way aspects of light and dark are projected in relation to the mixing of the percussion sounds with instrumental pitches, and it is based on the way these aspects are given an emphasis through reiteration. An important result of this transformation of the trombone colour 'into' an E♭ clarinet colour is that our perception of time is changed unexpectedly: we are presented with connections that must be reconstructed from the memory of previous material as the music continues to be heard in real time.

Our problem in determining this correspondence is first of all the problem of determining what aspects in music contribute to the perception of opacity. In other words, what musical attributes clarify our sense of time passing, and what musical attributes seem to mask the passing of time? Both kinds occur in *For Philip Guston*: the musical imagery is bound by a seamless edge that focuses the image at the same time that a part of the image escapes us.

Fig. 2.
Edgard Varèse
Intégrales
Musical score
Music by Edgard Varèse.
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Publications srl

Fig. 3.
Barnett Newman
Onement 1
1948
Oil on canvas and oil
on masking tape on canvas
69.2 x 41.2 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of
Annalee Newman.
Acc.n.: 390.1992

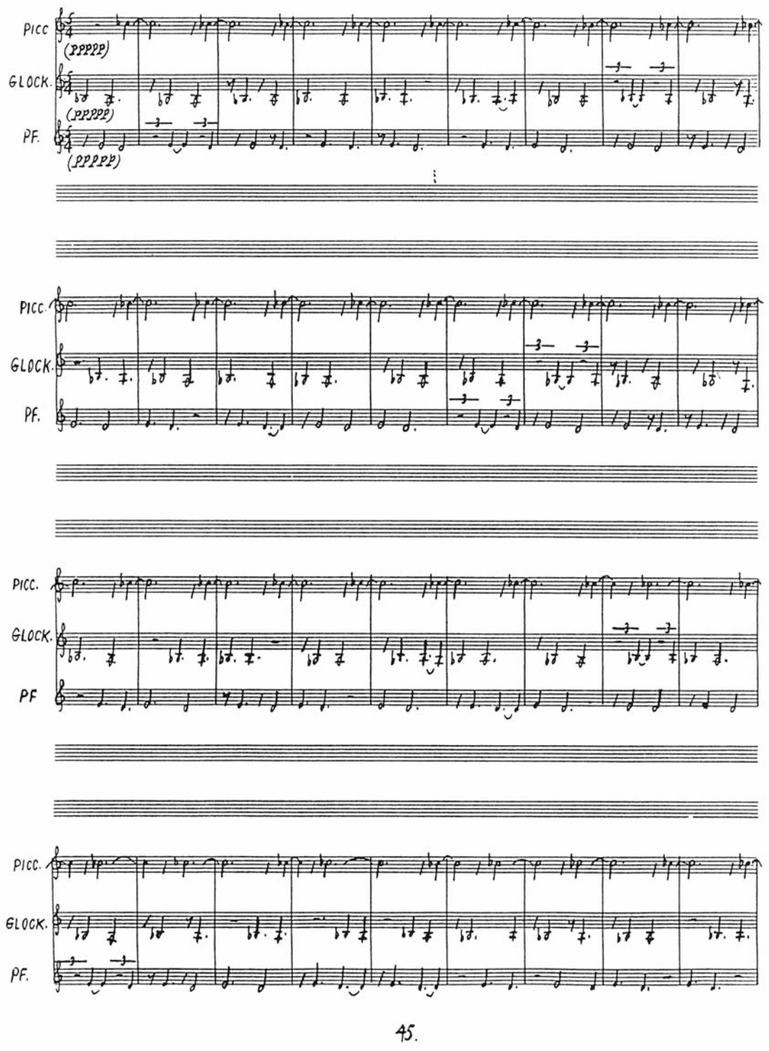

Fig. 4.
Morton Feldman
For Philip Guston
1984
Transparency, score
102 pages
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A section in *For Philip Guston* that is described in more detail below is one example where I believe the second type of opacity occurs: that is, time itself becomes the metaphorical substance in which we become lost. The passage occurs on page 45 of the score (approximately two hours into the piece) and it is distinguished from previous sections of the music by the five dynamic markings, *ppppp*. (fig 4.) It is also the beginning of the longest metrically aligned section of the entire piece.

This is one section of the music where we lose the measur–ability of time—where, for example, one becomes unsure about the amount of time that has passed since the beginning of the composition. There is an inner clock in our ear that measures precisely the time that has passed since the beginning of a piece of music, because at the beginning of every great piece of music is a frame that separates us from the void—from the 'before' the beginning of the music where in retrospect, we realise that nothingness exists. In the musical imagery in the section of the piece on page 45, this inner clock is disturbed and a certain *plasticity* with respect to time occurs: our perception of the amount of time that has passed since the very beginning of the work is 'lost.' It is as though time is foreshortened. In music such a foreshortening with regard to time is unmeasurable, because of the way memory comes into play. In this section of the music our memory of the beginning of the piece collapses: what are the musical conditions of the section beginning on page 45 of the score, *For Philip Guston* that reflect this process of the remembering and forgetting of time?

The sustained whole note duration in the piccolo in the passage that begins on page 45 is unusual: in the music previous to this section a whole note duration in the piccolo occurs at the beginning of the piece on page 3. (fig. 5) After page 3 the longest durations for this colour are the half note durations that occur on page 32. We are concerned here with the whole note duration in the piccolo, which is associated with a particular colour: shorter durations would produce another colour. This longer duration in the piccolo has remained absent for a considerable period of time. Why then does the longer duration of this instrument sound so familiar in the section beginning on page 45, in spite of its prolonged absence up until this moment of the piece?

The longer duration in the piccolo on page 3 is the first instance of this duration for any instrument in the composition. Because of this it remains fixed in the memory as an image—as a 'piccolo colour–duration.' What I am proposing is that during the prolonged absence of this piccolo colour–duration until its recurrence on page 45, time itself substitutes for the colour: this is made possible because of the way the colour somehow remains in the memory between page 3 and page 45. During this time there is an implication that something is 'missing;' a concentrated 'emptiness' accompanies the music within these pages. But there is also the idea that this emptiness is filled by *time as a substance in itself*, the recognition of an image of time as a substance in itself becomes focused in the near repetition (the register is new) at page 45, of the piccolo colour–duration. The image of time–as–substance that substitutes for the piccolo colour *adopts the same contrapuntal properties of the piccolo colour*. As such, time is no longer the 'container' for melody, harmony, orchestration, and rhythm: it is treated as a musical substance in itself and, as such, functions contrapuntally within a relationship between time, absence and memory.

The musical condition wherein time becomes a contrapuntal substance of the music is one of the most difficult musical inventions of this century. Let us address this problem not by way of explanation, but by way of example. A principle of contrapuntal time can be said to be at work in *The Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe* in the placement of the threatening lioness in the background of Thisbe's vision, as she reaches with outstretched arms toward the dying Pyramus. An image from the immediate past is projected alongside and into the present. My conjecture is that in some contemporary music a similar 'placement' of the musical colour works on our memory over time in a contrapuntal fashion, so that musical images from the beginning resonate into the present and cast ever new shadows on the sounds as they are being heard.

The alteration of foreground and background material is one of the principal means of rendering a perception of immeasurable time in music that is visually inspired. The primary background material of *For Philip Guston* is silence. At the opening of the music, the silence almost appears on the page to look like architectural columns (fig. 6, 'empty' measures of 3/2, 7/4, 4/2, 5/2, 5/4 etc.). In these empty measures the sounds from the previous 'blocks' of four measures are allowed to decay. Meanwhile, in each of the blocks of four measures each instrument has a separate metre: the Flute plays 3/8 metre at the same time that the Vibraphone begins a 3/16 metre and the Piano 1/4. The effect is like three film projectors that are played together, while each projector shows sequences that begin at different times. As the sounds from the blocks of four measures spill into the columns of empty measures, they still resonate in memory. The stage is set, as it were, wherein another operation for time—one that includes the memory of varying combinations of attack and release, the memory of the musical colour (and perhaps the memory of time itself)—becomes integrated into the real time of the performance. This projection of our memory of the sound through the sound of the instrumental decay and into the silence is a sort of relief construction of the sound: sound and silence become attached to each other not unlike sculptural figures attached to a wall.

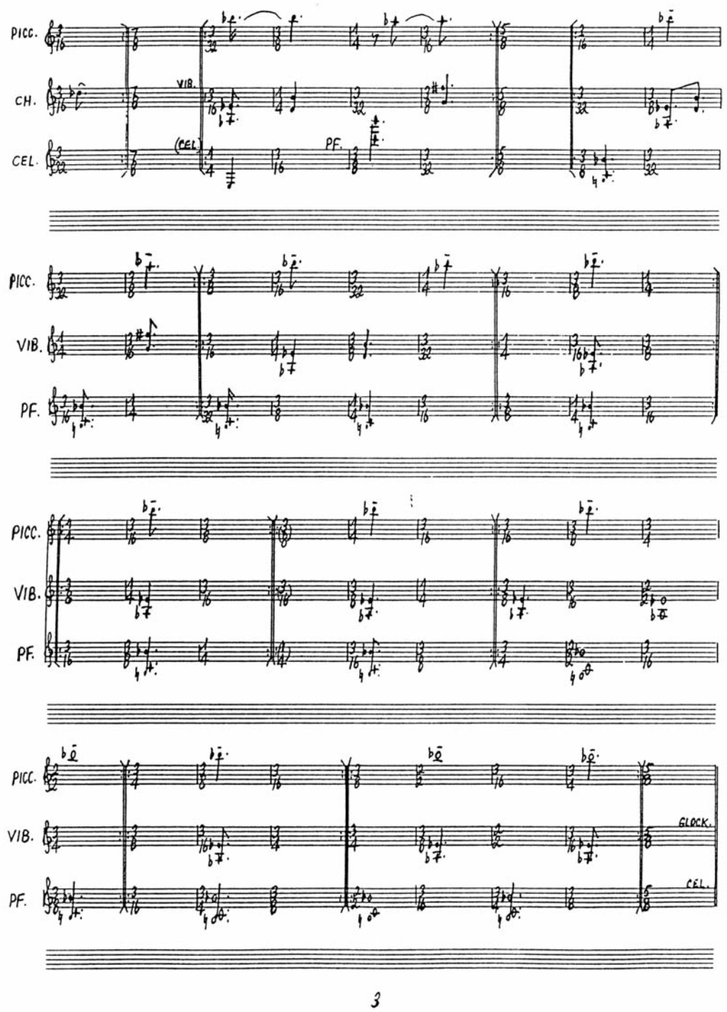

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Fig. 5.
Morton Feldman
For Philip Guston
1984
Transparency, score
102 pages
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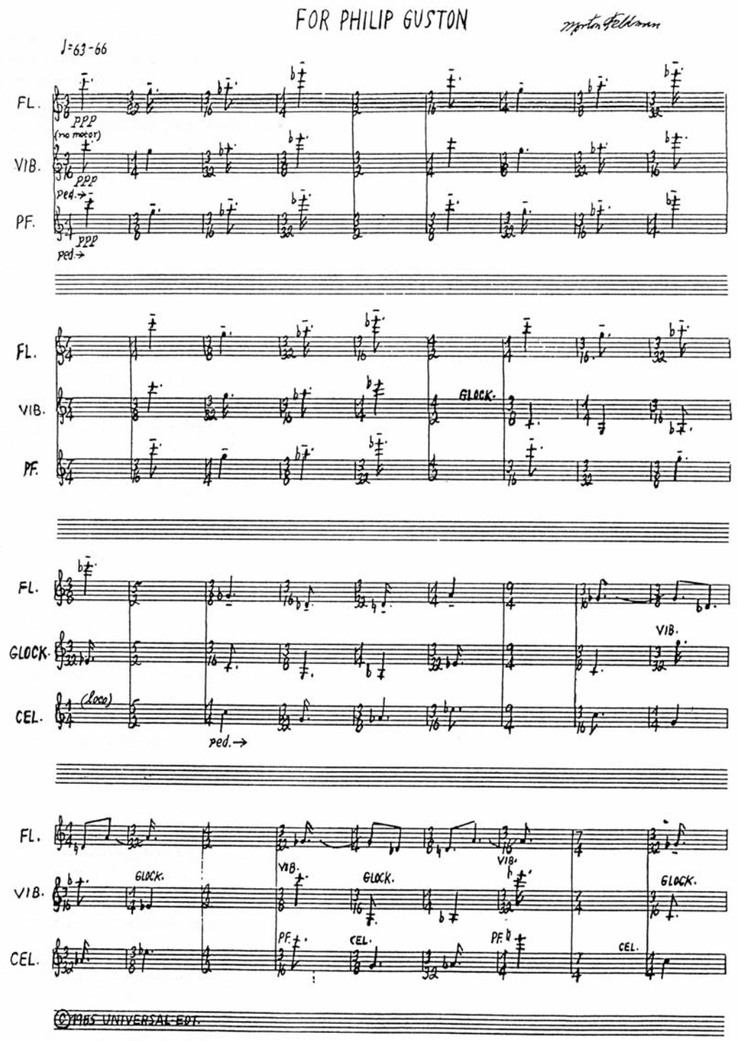

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Fig. 6.
Morton Feldman
For Philip Guston
1984
Transparency, score
102 pages
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Erwin Panofsky presents us with the idea in Renaissance painting of horizontal standing planes that seem to recede into depth, and whose gradual development in painting was critical to the modern concept of space as continuous and infinite (as opposed to discontinuous and finite):

> When entering the world of Duccio and Giotto we feel as if we were stepping off a boat and setting foot on firm land. The architectural settings (and what applies to these also applies, mutatis mutandis, to the landscapes) give an impression of coherence and stability unmatched in all earlier painting, including the Hellenistic and the Roman.
> ... For all their technical shortcomings, the works of Duccio and Giotto confront us with a space no longer discontinuous and finite but (potentially at least) continuous and infinite; and this impression is produced by the fact that the painting surface, while no longer opaque and impervious, has nevertheless retained that planar firmness which it had acquired in the Romanesque and preserved throughout the High Gothic period. The picture is again a 'window'. But this 'window' is no longer what it had been before being 'closed.' Instead of being a mere aperture cut into the wall or separating two pilasters, it has been fitted with what Alberti was to call a *vetro tralucente*: an imaginary sheet of glass combining the qualities of firmness and planeness with that of transparency and thus able to operate, for the first time in history, as a genuine projection plane.[1]

Bearing in mind the horizontal standing planes that recede into depth to which Panofsky refers, we turn now to the opening page in *For Philip Guston* (fig. 6)

The registration of the melody, G5–E♭6, falls short of the upper limit of the vibraphone's compass by one whole tone. (If the melody were to be transposed a minor third higher, for example, a part of it could not be played in the vibraphone.) What does the proximity of the vibraphone colour to the inaudible—and to the void—stand for? What is the formal relationship between the colour on the one hand, and the duration of decay and of silence on the other? Because the vibraphone registration is the most extreme (i.e. the highest in terms of its compass) we begin by referring to its colour as a 'background' one.

We perceive relief or depth gradation from the instruments themselves at the opening of *For Philip Guston* in the following way: the flute occupies a foreground position because its colour in this registration is relatively strong: the piano is 'behind' the foreground colour of the flute, and the vibraphone occupies the background behind the piano. These foreground and background colours are not the result of *measurable* differences in the dynamics of the colours, and their respective positions in relation to foreground and background shift over time. The perception of this alteration of foreground and background colours as well as the perception of depth gradation in the musical *time* underscores a process that is *metaphorically similar* to the operation of colour and space in the *vetro tralucente*, as follows.

In *For Philip Guston*, certain colours have a more 'transparent' quality: this will correspond, for the purposes of our discussion, to the 'projection plane' in a two-dimensional surface, where there is the *illusion* of depth; sometimes the musical colours (or silences) have a more 'opaque' character: this will correspond to the actual concrete depth found in sculpture and in architecture or other three-dimensional arts. The musical conditions that underscore transparency or opacity are determined primarily by the registration and by the alteration of foreground and background colours. For example, the piano and the vibrophone are transparent in the sense that the colour of the flute is projected through their combined colour. When musical colour is transparent, there is the illusion that time passes more quickly: this is part of the correspondence in time to the illusion of depth in a two-dimensional surface. When musical colour is opaque, there is less of an illusion that time is passing either more quickly or slowly: this is the correspondence to the real depth that is perceived in sculpture and architecture and the three-dimensional arts.

A sculptural aspect of architecture—what Panofsky defines as a 'principle if axiality'—further clarifies the perception of time under discussion in music. The principle of axiality is defined as follows:

> What was not as yet perceived, however, and could not be perceived by Romanesque artists, was what must be considered as the essential principle of classical statuary: the interpretation of the human body as an autonomous, quite literally 'self-centred' entity, distinguished from the inanimate world by a mobility, controlled from within. As long as the sculptor thought of his work as a piece of inorganic and homogenous matter bulging out into projections, retreating into cavities, incised with sharply defined contours, but never losing its homogenous density, he was unable to represent the living creature as an organism articulated into structurally different parts. To impart to the human figure that organic balance and freedom which is still best described by the Greek word εὐρυθμία, and to treat drapery in such a way that it appears to be independent from, yet structurally related to the body, was possible only when homogenous matter ('mass') had been replaced by differentiated structure; and this could only happen when proto-Renaissance sculpture came to be practiced within an architectural system based upon what may be called the 'principle of axiality.'
>
> ... In (Gothic) architecture, this style required that the mass of wall and vault be concentrated into tubular shafts and ribs, their centres explicitly indicated by little dots in contemporary architectural drawings; in sculpture it required what I once proposed to term a '*relief en cabochon*,' a form conceived as projecting from a plane surface outside itself (regardless of whether this surface is physically present or only implied by the shape of the figure) be converted into a form conceived as centred around an axis within itself. The jamb figure—originally if one may say so, an overblown relief (fig. 7 A–B), even if the 'ground' of this relief happens to be, in some exceptional cases, a column (fig. 7C)—developed into a genuine statue attached to a colonnette, these two components resulting from a process which began by attacking the block diagonally rather than frontally or laterally (fig. 7D). This new approach led to the crystallisation of both the figure and what may be called the 'residual mass' into two basic cylindrical units, the statue and the colonnette (fig. 7E); it continued with the gradual attenuation of this colonnette (fig. 7F) and ended with the latter's disappearance, the figure becoming completely detached and being either placed within a niche (fig. 7H) in which case the development has come full circle. An analogous process can be observed in the evolution of the archivolt decoration (fig. 7I) and figures playing their part in a relief composition move and act before an imaginary backdrop much like actors on the platform of a small theatre stage.[2]
>
> The *relief en cabochon* to which Panofsky refers brings to mind the relation of silence and instrumental colour: are not areas of instrumental colour projected from the 'plane surface' of silence, regardless of whether or not this silence is physically present? What aspects of memory make the perception of an *implied* silence (a silence that is not present, a silence that hides behind a 'mask' of sound) possible?

Consider, in the opening of *For Philip Guston*, (fig. 6) that the silent measures (including the decay) might resemble the surface of a wall—a plane surface of 'time.' If the silence were to be perceived, for our purposes, as a wall (which continues to be extended *behind* the measures of sound, in measures 6–9 for example), there are two possibilities for the musical colours to emerge from this wall: the colours may gradually develop their own centre of gravity, as an independent 'statue' (like the flute); or they will be less autonomous and they will retain more connectedness to the wall as background colour: For example, the decay in the piano and the vibraphone brings them closer to the background 'wall' of silence. The flute is the most independent colour: it is firmly centred around 'an axis within itself': its notated duration bears a more precise correspondence to its actual duration, as opposed to the piano and the vibraphone, where the pedal sustains the sound longer than their notated durations. Because of the decay in the piano and in the vibraphone, and because of the high registration in the vibraphone, the silence in the 3/2 measure will begin at slightly different times for these instruments (fig. 6, fifth measure of the score). The piano and the vibraphone colours are regarded as background colours because they generally do not project over the colour of the flute. The piano and the vibraphone do not, of course, always remain in the background. The alteration of foreground material and background material is one of the principal means of conveying an experience of time in music that is visually inspired. One of the central problems, then, in determining the formal structure of *For Philip Guston* is the discovery of means for determining those sections where shifts from background to foreground (or vice verse) occur.

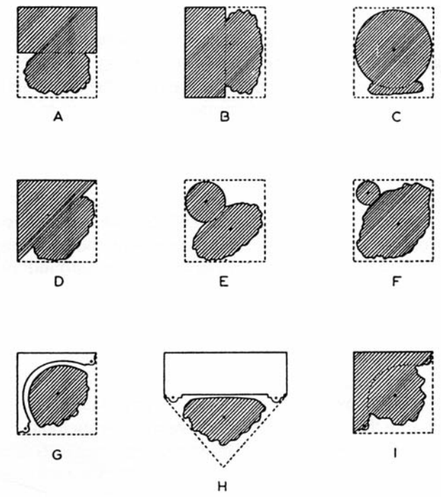

Fig. 7.
Erwin Panofsky
Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art
(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1972), p. 61
Reprinted by permission of Westview Press,
a member of the Perseus Books Group.

This alteration of foreground and background colour is one of the formal operations that makes the sublimation of 'traditional' musical development possible: that is: there is less formal emphasis on the harmonic or motivic variation. In music where the form is articulated primarily through harmonic, twelve tone, or melodic recurrences, time is subsidiary to the form. But in *For Philip Guston*, where silence and colour are the main themes, time is a musical substance, in itself. In music where the form is articulated by harmonic, twelve–tone, or melodic recurrence and variation, there is usually an ordering of time through expositional, developmental and recapitulatory processes. In *For Philip Guston*, one is immediately 'in' the composition much in the way one can glance at an entire picture. In this sense there is not a 'hierarchy' for time: instead, the operation for time is focused on the following: (1) the perception of a 'background' level as a canvas of time (in general, this background involves silence, although silence may also at times become projected); (2) the projection of the silence and of the colour from this underlying background. These two *operations* for time are the result of a discrete gradation that allows for an alternating foreground and background perception of time, much in the way that the colours may be perceived as occupying alternating foreground and background space. Time moves in and out of the canvas, instead of systematically from left to right.

In the opening of *For Philip Guston* the 'silent' measures (measures in which there are no attacks) are placed between measures of sounds in such a way that the memory of the total duration of the measures of sound seems to diminish. This diminishment varies with respect to individual colour as follows: in measures 1–4 there are a total of 29/32 durations for each of the instruments. My conjecture is that the *memory* of this actual duration varies from instrument to instrument: by measure 5, our memory of the 29/32 duration in the flute colour is probably closest to the actual 29/32 duration; the piano is probably remembered in a somewhat shortened version followed by the vibraphone colour, which projects less than the piano, so that our memory of its duration might be nearer to 24/32 notes or so. Looking at the diminishment of our memory of time, it is not difficult to imagine a relationship to the operation of the *vetro tralucente* and to some of the operations found in perspectival representation. This kind of perception in music is not unusual: it also occurs in music where a principal inspiration for time is drawn from literature. In music where the principal inspiration for time is drawn from the visual arts, however, the accumu–lation of such a perception (of a diminishment in time) is orchestrated into a particular colour/time relationship that leads to unexpected results: at critical moments, complete objectivity is restored; during these brief moments it is as though one is able to step outside of the composition even as one continues to listen and view the entire time structure as a horizon, from beginning to end; the time that has been 'lost' in the operation of memory just described is somehow regained. What is the formal process of the music directly related to this operation of memory and the resulting perception of time regained?

The recurrence of the long piccolo duration on page 45 (fig. 4) after a lengthy absence of this colour is one instance where we can perceive a diminishment of time. There is a correspondence to this phenomenon in the treatment of space within the modern picture plane, particularly in Poussin, where one is often confronted with moments of moments of disappearing space. Just as the memory of colour replaces, to a degree, the memory of harmony in visually inspired music, in Poussin, a similar replacement occurs with respect to the representation of the story: that is: the subject of Poussin concerns not so much the representation of the drama as much as it concerns that part of the light construction that modulates away from or else toward and then behind the picture plane: the opposing direction of the colour modulation is itself a contrapuntal force. This kind of modulation of the colour and of the light within the colour in turn results in a feeling of a picture plane that moves slightly in front of or behind the figures on the canvas, and that comes close to the beginnings of an abstract picture plane. Poussin already knew that the 'reality' of space has little in common with perspectival space: in this sense his vision of space is closer to Rothko than to Rembrandt. This treatment of space is barely perceivable, past the critical point where the picture plane itself disappears from seeing. At this critical point, it is as if the picture plane projected itself behind the viewer and behind being, into the void. We can then experience, briefly, an antique vision of time where, as Kierkegaard wrote, the concept of Eternity (for the Greeks) was projected into the Past, rather than into the Future.

In music if the principal inspiration for time is drawn from the visual arts, the same conditions apply in the treatment of the picture plane, only with respect to time, rather than space.

The *Duo for Piano and Percussion* is a work that I composed in 1988. There are two particular aspects of the music that cannot be directly notated because that they are unmeasurable aspects:

1. The memory of subtle changes in colour
2. The perception of immeasurable time

Both of these aspects involve a special relation to time. Some of this relation is connected to the visual arts, but not with an exact similarity; in music, three or four melodies may work together contrapuntally in time; in film, for example, this is less possible because we generally focus on one image at a time.

Fig. 8.
Camille Pissarro
In the Kitchen Garden
1881
45.5 x 55 cm
The National Gallery. Prague

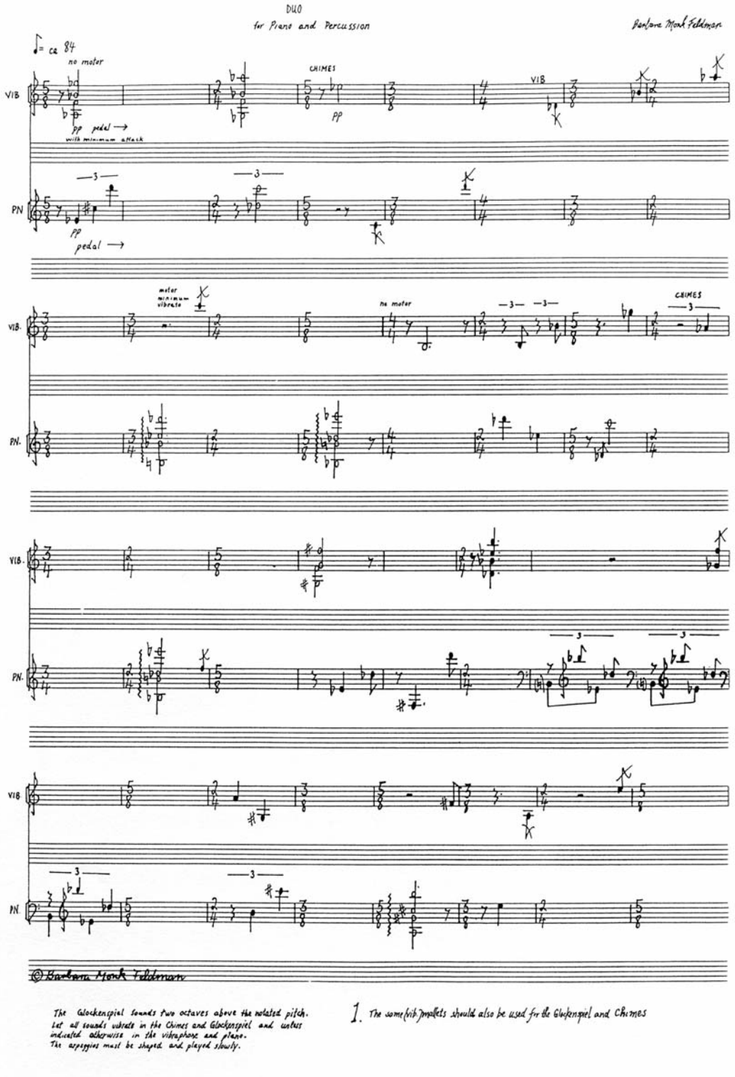

Fig. 9.
Barbara Monk Feldman
Duo For Piano and Percussion
1988
Manuscript, score

The integration of memory into the musical form is accomplished by the separation of musical material into various categories of memory: the notes and their rhythms are most easily recollected (during the performance time). On the other hand, the *duration* of the colour and in particular, the overtone colour, as well as the contrapuntal character of the colours is less clearly remembered over time. The notation must reflect the way in which the relationship between clear and unclear memory works its way into the formal scheme of things. This brings to mind a similar conflict that is sometimes perceivable in Impressionist painting, where the flatness of the light on the canvas is made into a relief structure that contradicts the perspectival space. Pissarro's *In the Kitchen Garden* (1881) (fig. 8) is one example. The painting shows a blue sky in the background, some hills and a bright yellow field in the middleground, and a woman and child walking together along a sheer grey road with dark bluish foliage in the foreground. In each of these three areas, part of the light structure is almost identical: that is, something of the *intensity* of each of the different colours is made to appear the same. As a result, there is the perception of a single transparent plane of light that extends across the picture plane like a flat surface, and that then contradicts the perspectival relationships. This kind of opposition between flat surface and perspective is analogous to that occurring between overtone colour and durations in the *Duo for Piano and Percussion:* the memory of the duration of each instrumental colour combines with the overtone colours as they are being heard in the actual time of the performance, with the result that another plane of reference for time appears to lie 'outside' the compositional structure. This results in two forms of memory—clear and unclear.

An indirect method of notation is required in order to determine an infinitesimal distance between clear and unclear memory. For example, the grace notes that enclose the 'empty' measures 5-9 (fig. 9) are in part, a *cue* for the listener to dwell on the previous exchange between the piano and percussion in the first four measures. Whether this is accomplished depends largely on the touch of the performer, where rather than having these grace notes sound as though they are moving *into* the silence, they must be played so as to reflect a slight hesitation that appears to be coming *from* the silence itself.

Within the 'flat canvas' of abstract painting, there is usually a conflicting experience of depth—of slight distances between foreground and background planes in relation to the picture plane. Students of Hans Hofmann were taught to avoid perspective on the one hand, but to work also with aspects of depth and gradation, on the other: As they were instructed 'to organise forms one behind the other on the single plane of the picture surface rather than causing them to recede through the illusory devices of perspective.' Hoffman said, 'I insist all the time on depth, suggestion of depth.'[3] The two contradictory propositions—the illusion of the flat canvas and the illusion of depth—are integrated within one vision of space: in a musical sense, I have tried to imagine the analogy to this experience of space—of volume and of depth on the one hand and of the flat canvas on the other—from the point of view of formal processes in musical orchestration and from the point of view of two treatments for time that are in a sense at odds with one another: the time of the instrumental colours as they are being projected during the performance, and the time of the *memory* of previous sounds, as this memory itself is orchestrated by the composer to occur without conflict, within the same 'space.'

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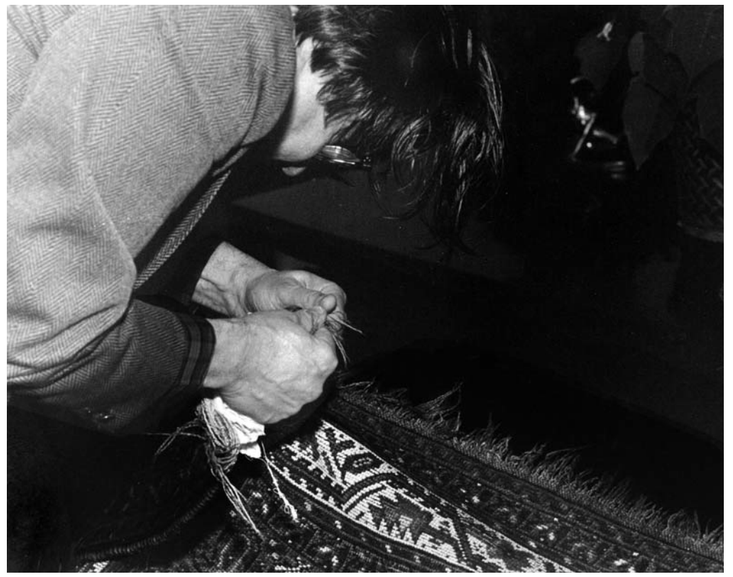
[1] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences* (New York: Icon Editions, Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972), pp. 136-137.
[2] Ibid., pp. 60-62
[3] Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 147.

Morton Feldman

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANCESCO PELLIZZI

15–17 January 1985



(opposite)
Anon / Rug
Bergama Floral Rug, Turkey,
c.1870
Wool
196.9 x 104.1 cm
Private Collection

(above)
Morton Feldman,
composer examining rug
Photo: Irene Haupt

I met Morton Feldman in New Music circles, in Europe, in the early '60s. When I moved to the United States, in 1967, he became a close 'older friend', on my visits to New York from Cambridge, Ma., who introduced me to key aspects of American arts, and people (including the family of my first wife). At my suggestion, he was commissioned to write the orchestral composition to mark the inauguration of The Rothko Chapel, in Houston, Tx. In 1973, Morty moved to The University of New York at Buffalo, to occupy the new and prestigious 'Edgard Varèse' Chair of Composition there, and from 1977 onward he would invariably stay with me, at 12 East 74th St, in Manhattan, every time he came to the City (first alone, then often in the company of Bunita Marcus, later on with Barbara Monk, who was to become his wife). After eight years of these frequent and, for me, memorable visits, it occurred to me—as it happens about two and a half years before his almost sudden death—that perhaps I should try to tape-record some of the conversations Morty and I often had, for the most part sitting in my kitchen, over (long) breakfasts, or late night tea. A supremely oral (as well as aural) spirit, he was ironically and self-deprecatingly amused that I should wish to treasure his words.

In this first recorded conversation—which occurred in spurts, on a single visit between 15-17 January 1985—a sort of leitmotif is provided by the theme of the possible (but often problematic) significance of 'references' (both internal and external) in the design of Oriental rugs (in which Morty had been passionately interested for some years), as well as in music and painting, and by the equally problematic notion of 'abstraction' in art. In editing the transcription, I have tried to preserve the colloquial, even at times somewhat rambling quality of our exchange, as well as Morty's often idiomatic, non-linear ways with thought, language (and grammar).[1]

[1] The conversation offered here was first transcribed, soon after Morty's death, by my then assistant, Rose Hauer, from two cassette-tapes, the second one of which we are now unfortunately unable to locate. My present assistant, Hedi Sorger, has helped to transfer the first of the original tapes and the original typed transcriptions from both tapes onto my new computer system, and to revise the first on the basis of a careful listening to what we have on the surviving tape. Gini Alhadeff then also lent her fine editing eye. All final editorial decisions, however, are my responsibility. Pauses in the recordings are indicated by ellipses within square brackets; hesitations by ellipses in the text; colloquial shifts and suspended thoughts, by a long dash. I wish to thank IMMA for providing the incentive to check, edit and publish this first conversation (others may follow, in due time), which I wish to dedicate to Morty's memory.

F. P.

Africa, Dogon.
Male Torso
Wood
52.1 x 16.5 x 19.1 cm
Collection of Francesco Pellizzi

[*Morty had just acquired a new Turkish 'nomadic' rug for his collection*]

FP Well if you picked it, it's probably good—it's true that one doesn't know; you know how it is with rugs; the more you know...

MF First of all, it's very interesting that it came from an Italian collection. This whole business of national inclination, if there is such a thing, in picking objects. For example, when I am photographed by an Italian, I look Italian; when I'm photographed by a Japanese I look Japanese... I have a picture by Marcello over at his mother's apartment, over by the Vatican and I'm standing there by the *Porta Santa* and they caught a pose, I mean I look Italian! But wait a minute, the funniest thing I ever saw was at a Léger show in Cologne at the Modern Museum, and it was a show from collections of museums all over Europe. Every country picked a Léger that looked closer to their painting tradition; could you think of a Léger that looks like a de Chirico in its perspective? That's the one from the Italians, it had perspective. The Germans picked a more expressionistic one. It was interesting, looking and seeing where they came from in relation to the place. So I figure Italians have an African collection.

MF Do you think, that one is programmed by a kind of cultural...

FP Look, as an example... very few Americans would buy that piece. I bought it from a Belgian dealer who has a place here in New York, and he had it probably because he is a Belgian nobleman. He would have had trouble selling that piece to an American collector. To me the beauty of that sculpture, although it is a fragment, is so extraordinary and the kind of culture it comes from, the kind of material it comes from. You can translate that into an early Greek fragment of bronze, I think that that's absolutely comparable. But it is my Mediterranean eye and European eye, so used to that kind of material, to the ruins, to the fragment. Also to a certain classic sense of form; look how classic that form is. And so obviously that's why I bought it... you see what I mean?

MF Yes, in a sense, you think of it as an equivalent to an Elgin marble. But do you actually feel that because you walked out the house, and passed the Borghese Gardens and you saw all those things with their heads off and you grew up with everything with their heads off...

FP It doesn't bother me at all... Exactly! It's normal for me, a statue like that. Yes, it's almost funny if it has a head, you feel that it's fake. If it has a head it's got to be fake, it can't be authentic! (*laughter*)

MF But seriously, to what degree do you think our background affects our taste?

FP Absolutely. You were asking me before, 'What would you look for?' It's so difficult to say without looking at the piece itself. Because it's the piece itself always that has to tell you. When the piece is in that top category, it's the piece itself that tells you what to look for. See what I mean, when there is that something in the piece that goes beyond the idea of the piece. There's a lot of primitive art, just as there is a lot of art in general, that is just an idea, somebody had a good idea to do that thing in that way, and there is a certain conception, and it's there. But the great piece is always a piece that somehow goes beyond the idea; there is something in the making of the piece where something happened that is not simply the plan of the piece, it is not simply the project of the piece it seems to me. A kind of criteria...

MF Some of the criteria, I feel, is a kind of logical working out. Let me take a perfect example, the last piece that I bought. A marvellous buy for $3,400: sold at Parke Bernet for $10,000, absolutely comparable because these people made everything more or less the same; the prototype is there. And the level of excellence of all the pieces are almost on par. However, somebody bought a piece, a very expensive piece, maybe a little more than my piece in terms of importance. Well, let me tell you a little about this piece, it's a Turcoman piece; it's from a tribe that more or less got settled earlier in Central Asia and they took on North Persian things. Turkistan motifs that didn't have the purity of their own tribe, but they did it with the excellence and purity of their tribe; they brought to it everything. So there is a certain North Persian design. Most of them were made about 1860... Say, they might have a series of petals: It's a one, two, three, four; two would be yellow and another might be made of silk. Its already been worn out now, the silk... How they arranged the yellow and the magenta silk is not important, but there's a lot of colour information; and it can't be too red, it has to have a little pink in the red; otherwise the piece is already a little too late. It looks heavy. The pink makes it float. Okay, somebody spends a lot of money for something with considerably minimal colour information, (but) with a beautiful pink. That is made more colouristically than the earlier 'unsettled' tribal rugs, where there were just degrees of pink, or brown, an outline, a little turquoise coming in. I can't see in a sense why this dealer, this very important authority, would feel that it was important to get a piece made in an earlier style rather than a piece where everybody made more or less in the same kind of conventional colour information in handling the decorative element about the piece... Did they feel they were getting a piece that was purer, was more authentic?... But my piece is more authentic for what it is; it's a colourful, decorative piece. So it's a very interesting notion that this buyer would have about purity, or a style, or an iconography that necessarily doesn't really... Who knows what the weaver had been thinking... maybe they didn't have access to these other colours; maybe they made the colours too. Why read some kind of historical significance into that piece because there is less colour, which brings it back into the earlier style?

FP You don't really know the motivations (of the buyer).

MF I know, I'm trying to read their motivation, because it helps me make decisions. It's a very beautiful, elegant piece. Maybe they're just buying it because there are not that many of those pieces around and they thought that less colour would make it rarer.

FP Perhaps that's the point, for a collector that already has the regular kind, you know, the kind that you have. Did you like it? The one with less colour?

MF I didn't think it worth (the price); I think that the pattern needed the colour information; I think it made it dance. I felt that the colour established a certain rhythm, the overall rhythm of this very beautiful and elegant decorative pattern. It was like on a lattice, beautifully symmetrical, with various designs and these whitish flowers, and it was all very directional, up and down, and very elegant, and I felt the colour kind of...

FP Sometimes there are also questions of taste. Modern taste can go for a certain spareness, a certain severity.

MF But I felt he put his money in the wrong object, I don't care what his motivation was. I mean you don't look for the crowning points of subtlety on a piece like that. The piece is not important enough to invest that amount of money in it no matter how much money you have. It's a $10,000 or $11,000 investment on a piece which, in a sense, historically is not an important design. It's a representative, elegant marvellous design, for someone like me to pick up for $3,500. It was a buy that even a type of collector who would want a piece like that in his collection might not have been lucky at that time to pick up. I only bought it because of the price. I'm trying to say that it is an area that is not as competitive as other Turcoman areas, because they settled very early. However, the best German collections, Swiss collections, have beautiful examples of these pieces, warmth...

FP So when you say early, what do you mean, early? When you say they settled...

MF There are no good examples of Turcoman studies beyond the late 18th century. It wasn't collected. So in other words if you get an early 19th century piece in Turcoman studies you've got yourself a rare piece. But this tribe already settled into the 18th century in the Bokhara Basin Desert. See what happened is that the Russian and the Persian governments disbanded all these people in the mid-19th century, they broke up the strength of these tribes. Russia shipped them some place, Persia dispersed them; so that was the end of the culture. But these people already settled down before the other people were dispersed, and so it's very, very hard to find a very early example of when they were nomadic, and they're not even sure if it's a nomadic example. The work that they did once they settled, in a sense was superb, but a lot of people didn't want to invest heavily in it. I think there's too much romanticism, a little too much fantasy about the whole notion of nomadic life, of nomadic cultures to begin with.

FP How much could they actually move around anyway?

MF They didn't as far as I know. Its like going to Miami Beach for the winter. They went to the same places all the time, and the only reason they went is for the sheep. They brought them up into the higher pastures. Okay, so what's romantic about a nomadic life?

FP It does imply a certain different conception about space and about a relationship to life when you are a pastoralist. It's not that you are a nomad really, but pastoralists always have to move according to certain ecological shifts.

MF But the way they live with their caste systems and the white tent for the wealthy—and the poor. And the decorative element, that's what it is, a display of wealth, nomadically. The lavish care, the expense, when you read about these things you are continually reminded how much these rugs must have cost at the time to make in relation to the economy. So a lot of the reason people like Turcoman nomadic rugs, authentic ones, is because a lot of times more lavish work went into them and they weren't really to sell. While with the rug that I'm interested in, the lavish work that went into it, in a sense they feel was made to sell, but at the same time the artefacts were still tribal artefacts. In other words, what they really did is that they settled down—you know, like Indians settled down near a compound with their wigwams; that's the way they settled at the Bokhara Basin. They still had their tents, so they had to make the same artefacts for the tents that the other ones, 300 miles away, were making. In other words, they still had to make their tent bands. They still had to make their wedding dowries. They still had to do the same goddamn things but they were stationary. But because they were stationary, people don't want to invest their money in their rugs; although the best collections have the best examples.

FP Of course, they were also holding on to certain forms of life; the persistence of certain forms much beyond their actual function of use; it's so striking even in the way we live and what we do. Think of the importance of coats of arms in European noble families down to almost the present day. A coat of arms went out in the 14th century as a useful sign of recognition in battle of the knight's identity when he was covered in his armour. A coat of arms, that was really the name of the man, was what indicated who he was, because for the rest he looked like a tank.

MF The most valid argument against it is something that only the eye determines. Their work is not as austere as that of the more isolated tribes. You look at that stuff, it's austere—an austere balance of pure geology and the austerity of a place where you had everything—these people were warmer. They're more like objects and so that's the thing... they're too beautiful, they're warmer, they're elegant; but maybe that's why these people settled down. They were too smart to have a rough life. Beautiful stuff—I think they're fantastic. So in a sense what you're really talking about finally is whether you're going to put your money in a Botticelli or you're going to put it into something that religiously looks more austere. You see for that period, that's what it amounts to. If one had one's choice. That Botticelli's a little too sensuous, and too...

FP But there is that question of quality again, when you are in that league, at that level, it's not a question of opinion. Because there is no question of opinion about the value of a Botticelli or the value of Cosmè Tura, it's a question of taste. It's a different thing from opinion. You can prefer Botticelli or you can prefer Cosmè Tura, but you are at the same level.

MF However, there is a split in us. I once said to somebody, they asked me about a certain rug, 'Do you like it?' and I couldn't answer. I said, 'Let me put it this way: If I was going to buy what I liked I would waste my money'. If I was really going to finally buy exactly what I liked, I think I would make mistakes all the way down. I mean they might be fine, they might be okay, but a lot of people don't like tribal rugs because it's not colourful enough. If they were going to buy a tribal rug that was colourful beware that there are synthetic dyes in it. There's a tribe that's famous for only five colours and what they do with five colours. People would say maybe, 'Gee, there should be some yellow here, or something'. You can't arrange it in terms of taste. One of the funniest stories about taste in relation to garbage: I was riding back with Larry Rivers from a lecture—we were on a panel together—Newark Airport, we passed a garbage dump and we're looking at it. And Larry says, 'What do you think? A little round grapefruit, I think...', so you see it like a Cezanne. He said, 'it needs a little yellow grapefruit', in this haphazard... And he was absolutely right. There was no articulation in one heap of the garbage... I thought that was fantastic; the whole use of taste even in garbage.

FP That's what I meant: taste is only after, not before. You cannot start from taste. But taste does intervene once you know, once you see already, like he sees that garbage, then his taste intervenes—says, well, I prefer that.

MF So the taste adds stuff. I always wonder what makes me decide not to do something, and it's finally after a lot of experience there is a decision involved with taste and I don't know if taste is essentially the control against disaster—is it finally the control? Or is it a safety-net?

FP I don't think it's control against disaster, but I think in the end taste does determine the *taste*. The taste determines the taste. If you choose Botticelli instead of Cosmè Tura, you have a collection of Botticellis; it has a certain *taste*. It's not more valuable or better than a collection of Cosmè Tura, if you have a collection of Cosmè Turas'... I'm choosing him just because he's a 15th century artist of a different style, a Venetian with a stronger, more expressionistic and different kind of content, a totally different kind of view of things, so you could contrast them. But they are both extremely 'modern' and refined, they are both very 15th century, they are not 'primitivists' in any way.

...

MF The piece we're going to hear tonight—people tell me, that's a masterpiece.[2] The piece that I was talking to Bunny about; but she was right, there was a piece that I wrote before it with the same format that was better, it was purer...

FP And what was that piece called?

MF It was called *Why Patterns?* and Bunny was right. *Why Patterns?* was so good that even I went on to write another one, not like it but using the same format... and she said, 'No, *Why Patterns?*, that's the definitive one, it's absolutely, magnificently pure; it's as if it's writing itself.' And she's absolutely right, and I feel that way too. But Nils [Vigeland] who played *Why Patterns?* a few times, you see, it didn't appeal to him, it was too austere. This was because he had travelled now; because he was looking at it from the British Museum, like the Rosetta Stone. Not that there's anything wrong with this piece. So a second generation copies pretty good; there had not been much loss. But the point that I want to make is that before de Chirico was making the space, it was considered the definitive metaphysical de Chirico...

FP But that's different: The relationship between *Crippled Symmetry* and *Why Patterns?* I see like that between some of the first metaphysical paintings and the ones that de Chirico did maybe a year or two later; they're all done around 1911-1915. They are great paintings with certain developments... The painting you are mentioning—it's something as if thirty years from now you sat down to make a pastiche of *Why Patterns?*, or just a copy... He was painting in a totally different manner at the time.

MF The horses.

FP These remakes were really some-thing he did just to make money...

MF I saw him walking in the street with somebody holding his arm. God, he was out of a painting! The hair, even the coat he was wearing, I don't know where he got that coat. I mean, it wasn't made by a normal man, even the coat he was wearing.

FP Like Frank Lloyd Wright's coat.

MF That's what I remember, I remember the magnificent coat... If anybody were to just buy the coat they'd become famous as a personality, never mind the painting... Well, that whole idea, the whole idea of... that's what's extraordinary. And I'm very interested in the phenomena of what makes it. On the one hand you would feel it's total belief in the materials that gives it that sense of mythology. On the other hand, you cannot have that kind of belief in materials, otherwise you wouldn't have the revelation, something that you've never done before, that didn't exist before. Because if you have a belief in something it's because you know of its existence; you're not trying to prove its belief, like God. So on the one hand one would think that you have to have the conviction of the belief; on the other hand, there is an element of disbelief that makes for the research. So I don't know what that moment is where one is absolutely free to both believe and doubt at the same time, like a kind of St. Augustine. Half and half, one eye believes, the other eye is not believing. And you are leery, for a few times in your life.

FP But isn't that the nature of belief? I've always had these doubts about the nature of belief; I mean I never really take it at face value, the question of belief. People who believe, do they really believe the way we assume they believe? Or do they believe because they're always sort of wanting to believe and they always somehow, they need this constant confirmation and this constant search. I mean, is belief really ever *belief*? And also there is the question of the relationship between belief and faith.

[2] Morton Feldman, *Crippled Symmetry* (1980); for three performers, one playing flute and bass flute, one playing glockenspiel and vibraphone and the third playing piano and celeste–a similar ensemble to that of *Why Patterns?*(1978) and *For Philip Guston* (1984). This was its New York première (lasting 90 minutes), in the Great Hall of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York City, 15 January 1985, played by The Bowery Ensemble, under the direction of Nils Vigeland.

[3] Bernard Hugo (Bernie) Goetz, was a New Yorker who shot four black young men whom he said were intent on mugging him, on the Seventh Avenue 2 express subway train, in Manhattan, in late December, 1984 (less than one month before this conversation took place). He was convicted for illegal possession of a firearm. The incident is said to have generated a nationwide debate on vigilantism, race and crime in major cities, and the legal limits of self-defense.

MF Lets take for example, the piece that I'm writing now. I'm lost in the piece; it's going at a different speed than I'm used to, it's as if I'm running, and I don't run. I applied a certain... I got into an area that's a little bit uncomfortable. Okay. What am I trying to prove? Am I trying to prove my ingenuity, that I'm right? I mean, is the artist, or the human, or whatever thinking—are you really trying to prove that you're right? Or are you trying to prove that you're wrong? And yet there are a lot of indications that maybe you're not wrong. I think there are two types of artists: there's one kind of person that always wants to prove that they're right and their ingenuity is in proving that they're right. There's another kind of artist that can't believe that they could be right... and I'm actually convinced that these are different kinds of... I once gave a little talk about Beethoven. About how everybody analyses Beethoven in terms of his marvellous ingenuity of getting into things. I said nobody in their right mind wants to get into things—whether it's a match, or a work of art. Who the hell wants to get into things? You'd have to be a dope to want to get into things. And I said, to me, Beethoven's ingenuity was how he got out of things, how he would set up and then, like Houdini, make an escape, I said. The bad composer is the one that's getting involved with things; Beethoven uses ideas to get out, not to get in. A very funny talk actually, in terms of, again, where is the emphasis in terms of ingenuity? What we're really talking about is the rat in the corner. That's all we're really talking about, we're talking about survival, whether it's from hour to hour, day to day, or in art, or in finance, or in anything. We're talking about the instinct for survival and what the terms... For example, I'm convinced that the early days of Abstract Expressionism, I think their success really had to do with the fact that there was a stacked deck against them. That with Matisse and Picasso they didn't have a Chinaman's chance, and they knew it and they had nothing to lose. So it wasn't a question of recklessness, it was just a question of nothing to lose, and I would never tell my students that there was nothing that they could bring to any 12-tone theory or any 12-tone insight... that the people that wrote it were like brilliant chess players, there was no contribution in theory from that direction. But they just don't have the knowledge, to know that there's nothing... So this whole business of feeling, in a sense that there's something left on the plate to eat, or a bone or something to eat, and how one has to get out of that influence is a very, very important aspect of art.

FP It also has to do with a level of ambition. You can see Pollock really struggling with Picasso for years, in the early '40s.

MF It's a very good example. Because in that film on Pollock [by Hans Namuth], I did the music, he makes a statement: 'I have to get Picasso off my back'.

FP It's very obvious that it worked...

MF So between Matisse, Picasso and Mondrian... you're being mugged.

FP It is witchcraft. Who is the stronger...

MF That's exactly like this guy Goetz, you're being mugged.[3] Of course a lot of people don't see it that way. They don't see that Stravinsky is coming at you.

FP In order to see it, you already have to be there, and you have to be able to recognise. You have to be on that level of ambition, real ambition, artistic ambition, expressive ambition. You have to have a need.

MF But still they have nothing to lose, beyond the need.

FP Yes, but first you have to be on that level of need, because there are thousands of others who just went on doing post-Picasso, and post-Matisse, and post-modern, and post-this, and post-that, and post-12 tone. How many are there? Thousands... I mean, to feel like the rat in the corner you already have to be...

MF Which I don't think was the case with de Chirico. I think de Chirico in a sense was continuing Italian painting, in many ways. I saw a Botticelli at the Uffizi; and the placement and the frame were in the way Botticelli would do. And it was very de Chirico in terms of the atmosphere.

FP Yes, but in the same way you can detect Dutch things in de Kooning... but that's not what we're talking about.

MF No. I'm talking specifically about the atmosphere of how I read the '50s, where you get a whole bunch of talented people admitting to the genius of these young people. They weren't in China painting things that didn't exist. They weren't living in the kind of illusion that Schoenberg was; Schoenberg absolutely was sick; he was the most pedantic, the most didactic composer that we know of, and he keeps on writing how he does not have a historical point of view. He had some kind of fantasy of artistry, as if there were free will involved in his work... this is wrong...

FP But it was in the times too. It was part of the times. Because this fantasy, if you want, this break... was the great artistic fantasy at the beginning of the century. Its sense of...

MF ... breaking with history. And yet they go by history because they were historians...

FP: Right. You have to be obsessed by history in order to be so concerned... The whole avant-garde, the Futurists, the Suprematists, again and again it's the same attitude... and often with that same pedantic tone.

MF Well, they just replaced one with another.

FP Even in the inspired and interesting discourses that they made. Malevich, who was wonderful. Or Boccioni...

MF But then they used history to justify their acts. They used examples in history; they write essays—they wrote brilliant essays showing, in a sense, what he was doing, that it was really involved... and finding marvellous examples finally. I'm very, very fascinated with music.

Morton Feldman with John Cage, undated. Photographer unknown

Morton Feldman examining Persian frieze, Persepolis, Iran, August 1977. Photo: Jan Williams

(*Tape I — Side II*)

MF I want to think more about it; it's the first time I ever talked about the referential in relation to comprehensibility. I remember when I went to see *Persepolis* with my musician friends, on tour. So there was a big thing and on it were four different scripts. And I'm saying to Jan Williams, 'We can see what kind of a cosmopolitan town this was because they have this thing in four different languages.' I said, 'Now, what does it say?' And he said, 'I don't know, I don't know Venetian.' It was a very funny moment, because you felt it was for the layman, yet you had to know at least one of those languages... (*laughter*)

FP It was not like the Rosetta stone. I thought it was a very good thing that you were saying, yesterday, and I even thought about it as I was listening to your piece, last night. I thought in terms of de-contextualisation; in terms of a certain purity that it's achieved by that. A sort of effect. It's almost like a *depaysement*—there is a place that is taken away from all its surroundings. Place is de-contexualised. But then I had also other thoughts, that went back to our old conversation that you brought up again last night: the whole question of '*l'analyse interminable*', terminable/ interminable. I was thinking about that and I also thought of a connection in Freud between his formulation of the terminable/interminable question and that of the 'death wish', which had never occurred to me before. He comes to the realisation of the interminability of analysis, which is a problematic thing in itself. It is not a simple interminability, it is either finished in the very beginning or never... As he comes to that he also comes to the death wish and that puts the death wish in a perspective I think which is rather different from the way it is usually perceived. At least by me, it used to be perceived as part of the limits of the libido; the libido that reverses itself in a kind of very surrealistic Georges Bataille sort of thing. The limits of Eros and the limits of libido turn into their contrary—you know, death, as in that Japanese film about sexual love and death; *Eros* and *Thanatos*, that sort of thing. And I now wonder if it's really that or—there is obviously that dimension too, but I wonder if there isn't also something else there. Something curiously much more traditional that may have to do with a certain kind of obliteration; that not wanting to get something, that not wanting to be right, and not going after something.

MF That was a very interesting remark; I never said it before. The problem with ideas is that you want to prove that you're right... And I said 'Of course, one doesn't want to prove that one's right, but to what degree one is wrong.' On that level, the grey area—as I finished talking about Freud, and the whole idea of that moment of reality where you don't hear the echo of your own voice... The minute I said that I had this thought running here, reality, then probably just prehistory. You know what I mean? I mean if memory is the thing that is always in a sense accumulating, it's not disappearing, it's accumulating... Then what I'm really talking about is prehistory, and it is a very interesting thing. Many reviews I get talk about the primeval element of my music. A lot of people seem to hear the most simple sound, a pluck, as of something coming from some kind of primeval bog. So the problem then is not the problem of handling say memory, culture, environment, and handling it in terms of other cultures, other environments. The problem then is between existence and... maybe it's people just like Barbara Novak with the Indians... There must be something there; maybe Freud, maybe Jung really had something there with that collective unconscious. Maybe there is, why not? The more instinctual life; who knows? Or life without guilt, pre-Christian evil, you know.

FP Yes. At the same time I also wrote that your music is the least hypnotic music that I know of today; Cage's also tends not to be hypnotic, but it has been at times. Your music, in spite of what some people might think, is really the most western, the least 'Oriental', and the least sort of 'primitive' there is. Your music—one can get distracted from your music; one cannot listen, at moments, it's hard sometimes to keep your attention throughout... But one is never in a hypnotic state; there is nothing of what is happening so much today. If it reaches something primeval it reaches it at the edge of modernity, at the very end of modernity. 'End', I don't know that there's an end, but...

MF It's a primeval western civilisation. It's that moment where some Greek or Roman says 'Hey, this is western civilisation; this is the distinction between me and that guy I met in Cairo.' There had to be some kind of recognition of an element of distinction. I mean isn't western civilisation, wouldn't you characterise western civilisation as the beginning of making distinctions?

FP Well, Jaynes, a strange psychologist at Princeton, has written a big book where he has opposed the bicameral mind, which you could also call the archaic mind, a mind that still hears voices, a mind of possession, the mind of traditional cultures, with the mind of modern man, and modern man of course starts long ago, in proto-Classic times.[4] It's the mind of self-conscious subjectivity—a real change in the functioning of the brain, a real evolutionary change, with constant shifts back and forth, with overlapping and all sorts of complexities, etc., but he sees it as real. It's a very interesting, controversial book, but certainly written by somebody who is an extremely serious man. Maybe I should try to get you a copy, because it might be interesting for you just to look at it... The whole relationship to the culture of death; the hearing of the voices of the dead. It's very puzzling for us, and we never stop really to think how puzzling it is, how the dead were really treated as *living* by high cultures for millennia all over the world, from China to Mexico, from Egypt to Europe itself. Really, there is something there; there is a certain kind...

MF When you have a Jewish mother that dies, you understand...

FP Yes. All of us are able to understand it if we get into that, because we are still of course also that, just as we are still snakes and we are still baptised or circumcised, and we are still apes in many ways. So we are also still that, but we are not fully that. The early Greeks, they were still feeding the dead, they were feeding them literally in their mouths; strange, very, very strange... I think perhaps one could say that—if what distinguishes man is the awareness of death—because man is the only animal who is aware of death, the only living thing that is aware of death, this is a very fundamental distinction. But perhaps this awareness is not just something that is a given, it is something that all of humanity deals with, but in very different ways. There are different levels of this awareness, and different modes and forms of this awareness, and they all imply different kinds of what you might call refusals...

MF Could it be that the European conception, the growing conception of a masterpiece, the conscious Frankenstein masterpiece, could it actually be almost like force-feeding, or something like that, to keep something alive... As you were talking, I was wondering what happened in America, and it happened way back, with writers, paintings; it happened with Melville, D.H. Lawrence talks about it; Melville, and Hawthorne, in those marvellous articles he wrote on American literature; they're superb. What is the American experience from the beginning of the first intellectual doing something artistic that has to do with emptiness?

FP You know—that was the last word I wrote last night as I was listening to your piece...

MF But it's a profound emptiness. It doesn't need to be filled up, with anything. I try not to think about it because it can be milked; you can use it over and over...

FP It's only at the very, very end, which is also the end of perception—Extraordinary, wonderful... I felt as if there were really three movements to the piece; you may not have planned it that way, but...

MF Yes. But I don't think of it as three movements, I think of it as allowing for perceptual and artistic impurities as well. In other words, to allow a stylistic change which is not just one of contrast but of allowing another state.

FP Maybe that's the way one should interpret even movements in classical music. I thought about movement in a different way as I was listening to your music; as always, great art makes you perceive in a different way, and you change your perception of the past. And I saw the movements in classical music in a different way because of how I was listening to these changes in yours, to this extraordinary way in which, in this total stillness, this place that does not change—place without place, place without context—you get this light tension, and it's extraordinary because it's a swamp, for a long period it's a swamp—you are living a very liquid state. It's like the ocean, it's like the mother; you go through all that (for hours) and (then) it's the last half hour...

MF Day-and-night means nothing.

FP No, no; it's pre-day... (*laughter*)

MF Except it *is* structurally, things are getting a little tighter.

[4] I was referring here to the controversial book by Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, first published in 1976.

Anon / Rug
Village rug
Wool
112.4 x 143.5 cm
Private Collection

FP Yes. But in the end you do bring it to a... in the end, after you liquefied everything, and you show the liquidity, you come back and you show that that is also what is around. What you're showing is that you're giving body again to things, you're again giving body to sounds, you're again giving them the reality of manifestation of everyday things. And that is because of what you've shown before; it's like... the Zen master—it's not a question of going beyond reality; reality and beyond reality are the same thing...

MF My feeling about it as of when I wrote it... and I wonder to what degree reading about this thing affected me; I don't know if I actually consciously tried to duplicate that state. I read that the world was first created with a certain different kind of... It was an H2O... but it took time for nature to adjust and there was a maladjustment... chemically, and everything died. And then it took another few million years to get another chemical balance and that was the right balance for things to live. And that was the image that I had; that I'm adjusting a balance that unfortunately wiped out most of the vegetation (*laughter*)... I don't think it entered into my head (it might have entered unconsciously) the whole idea of death and rebirth; something has to die, you can't... One of the most brilliant seminars I ever gave and I'm sure that my students wound up having a nervous breakdown; It was a wild idea; I put together something on the spur of the moment called *The Resurrection Symphony* and what it consisted of, for example, the first movement was that of the *Eroica*; it was all Beethoven. But then I didn't use his slow movement, the *Funeral March*; I used the slow movement of the *Fourth Symphony*, which is very pastoral and sublimely abstract, with landscapes. It's very beautiful; it's not known because it's all atmosphere, there's no great tune. But it's beautiful, sublime. Now there is no connection structurally or technically between all the movements of the *Eroica*, no matter what a theorist might say. You have the first movement and then you have *The Funeral March* and then you have *The Great Variation*... a whole autobiography of his genius, a possibility, there's no real connection, but there *is* a movement of contrast—he is a great dramatist... So I put together the first movement of the *Eroica*, the second movement of the *Fourth Symphony*, something of the *Seventh Symphony*, and nothing worked. If you try to forget your context—that you know these things in relation to other things—just listen to it as it goes from one movement to another. Stylistically it was Beethoven, everything was there. But there wasn't any structural relationship between them. In other words, what I was showing was that one cannot get out of the state that one's in, even though you don't know what's programming the possibilities of the next piece, but if you're entrenched that you cannot go beyond, you can't... I was talking against the use of a computer, like a kind of an astrologer's dream of knowing the future, of saying that if you look into the computer you'll know how the piece is going to finish, everything is preordained. And I was trying to show that it wasn't a question of an organic, technical thing, a kind of primal leaf kind of idea of making a work of art, because it's nonsense, there is no primal leaf in the *Third Symphony*, or any symphony. Even when Beethoven for the first time in musical history in the *Ninth Symphony*, like a movie, like an old-fashioned flash back, goes back to some sublime state that happened in another movement towards the end—it never happened before in the history of music, a remembrance of some great moment—even then, with the references, it sounds absolutely nutty. Shocking. And to some degree...

FP Why do you see it that way?

MF I'm seeing it in the sense that all the things that everybody says is one of the great innovations and the great moments, and they see it formally, and I hear it psychologically and I hear it as almost an aspect of very high-class kitsch. Which is perfectly fine, I'm not even using it as a derogatory term; I mean when I was making fun of Proust to a bunch of kids... You're dying and you say, 'I want to have a Madeleine. I want to go out, call my chauffeur, I wanna go out and smell a wildflower.' I mean it's fine... He's the only one; really, what he did with memory, how he glamourised it. But still all the references in Proust, after everything is finished, it still led to Sodom and Gomorrah—with all the memory, in a sense, as being fiction, a kind of Ruskinesque fiction, an idealisation of the nature of art, *The Stones of Venice*.

MF And I think that's the problem. I was telling a young girl, and she said, 'Well, I'm very interested in your ideas, but I'm an art student, and how do I handle one thing and the other?' I said, 'Well, being an artist, you know, an art student, is like being a 1950s woman, by the time you wake up it's too late. By the time you wake up it's too late, but you have to go through that. Lately, more and more I'm very much into almost a purely psychoanalytic free associating relation to art; I don't take it seriously any more; I'm into the character of the person. I mean the whole idea about Gauguin coming into all that stuff: it is psychologically understandable that he wants to bring the props with him. Just as understandable as Rimbaud in Ethiopia writing once a day to his mother, always asking for money; can you see Ethiopia at that time, what it must have looked like, writing every day for money from home; it was quite ridiculous, but we understand it in a psychoanalytical way. To me that's more interesting than the artistic ramifications of the work; artistic ramifications have to do with their genius, anything they did would have been great, any place they would have gone. They could've gone to Brooklyn, in 1888. At the time they were building the Brooklyn bridge, you could've been painting the Brooklyn bridge. [...]

Leo Castelli was with his wife Ileana Sonnabend in her mother's mansion, in East Hampton. This was in the early days. So, a friend of mine took me to visit the house. And what was on the floor? Which shouldn't really have been on the floor: a Turkish small little rug, of a kind which is now practically off the market. And if I close my eyes I remember walking down a beautiful hallway; wide with streaming light, if I close my eyes. I remember just by the colour that because of this colour this was from central Turkey... But I looked down and I thought it was like... stepping on a stained glass window. In other words, it was a first inkling, and I heard it... and I found myself walking around it while everybody was walking on it, I remember that—it was my first inkling of things to come. I have to ask her, ask Ileana whatever happened to those rugs. I know her, I know her type, she doesn't sell anything. I'll bet she has warehouses of everything. Everything from Art Nouveau: at one period—I was very friendly with them—at one time she went over to Paris and I think she bought out the flea market. This was before there was any vogue for Art Deco, she bought it out! I bet she even had a show on Art Deco jewellery years ago. So I'm sure she still has the rugs. [...]

The Twombly drawing in my bedroom, I cannot see it. Very big and just a shape, almost phallic, done with thin pencil. And I have to go and put the shade down; I've been living with this damn thing for thirty-five years and I can't see it. Now the invisibility of some of his work is not a western art projection. I wouldn't say that it's comparable to pianissimo in music, I would say that if he was a composer you would have to sit on the stage.

FP Well, as you were asking me, I had a thought that I never had before, and it relates also to my collection and what I was saying before of what I bought. Because most of the things that I bought are Minimal or connected to the Minimal movement. And I think it's very interesting, because I think that Twombly, and I never thought of this before, is of those three, the truly pre-minimal painter. He is the one. He was already minimal in a way. With all his Abstract Expressionist connection, etc., he is really not an Abstract Expressionist. And he's not a Pop; and he's not involved in the same discourse as Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns. I think there is a minimal quality in his work which is also what I felt last night listening to your music; there is a minimal aspect to your music which is very, very important.

MF Yes, we're talking about Twombly. Well, that lack of visibility, that lack of actors on a stage projection...

FP There is reduction, no? There is simplification... There are ellipses.

MF That's how you find the aspect of reduction. I always wondered to what degree, what is a reductive art when it still could be referential? Again... Let's take someone like Webern; Webern's use of the instruments—as a kind of demonstration of how he's slicing up, segmenting his role. It is done in such an academic and an obvious pedantic way, that there is no difference say between the way he works with telling the story of his notes and the alleged poetic algebra of his instrumental colour. It is no different to me than *Peter and the Wolf* telling the story, it's exactly the same attitude. Except how people hear it; if they don't know the reference they think it's reductive. But it's still highly referential, and it's referential in terms of the old Netherlands polyphonists, and it's referential in terms of certain forms, and it's referential in terms of itself. It's a research project of reference; people hear it, it doesn't have the references of their own concern. If you didn't know tune... but it's still highly referential art yet it's considered reductive. So it was always somewhat confusing to me what people talk about. Of Mondrian, say... plus or minus... but still in a sense there is always a relationship to nature, or if not nature, say, with the side of a building.

FP Well he started from there, the tree became a tree in the abstraction from the tree. Mondrian was very clear about that. I mean very expressive.

MF How about his basic philosophy, that is also extremely referential, a kind of almost fanatical idea that if he found the right balance between the vertical and the horizontal it was going to save the world, and that kind of business, so...

FP But why should non-referential be equivalent to reductive? I don't see that as at all related...

MF Well, reductive means that you trace... its true history... from the flesh we're getting down to the skeleton; in other words, we could trace its journey from what it was.

FP Oh I see. You see reduction as abstraction in a sense.

MF Yes.

FP I didn't use the word in that sense, really. I don't know if I can explain very well what I intuitively think about reduction. It's more in terms of those very primary expressive means that you were referring to before, when you were talking about *Crippled Symmetry*.[5]

You see, I think that when Donald Judd explores certain forms with his boxes he is not reducing from anything in the sense that Mondrian was reducing; he is not abstracting from anything; his process is not one of abstraction. He is still reductive in the sense that he is reductive mentally. Because he is dealing with very elementary, with very primary means of expression; and somehow in this sense I think that Twombly was already pointing that way, although starting from Abstract Expressionism, but then somehow he seems to have got it simplified... he got away from the intellectualisation of Jasper Johns, and he got away from this sort of proliferation of images and materials, from the world in Rauschenberg, and he seemed to deal with the procedures and... the simple elements...

MF But what you're talking about... The fact... I find this actually crazy, it's marvellous... What you don't do... one then becomes referential in terms of what one doesn't do. In other words he's referential and not doing what they think; in other words, what's the meaning—what we don't do refers to that which other people have done or are doing. In other words, he is referential in terms of relating him to Jasper Johns. So that's how we can discuss him; so what we're discussing is in kind of a referential way. But it does not, again—my new point, one that I'm gonna milk to death, is that it does not explain the work. The non-references don't even explain the work—nothing makes the work comprehensible; that's what makes the whole thing very, very mysterious. Never mind a separate question: Do the references give the work a certain type of importance in itself? That wonderful portrait that Philip Guston did of me in the last year of his life: sideways, smoke coming up... [*Friend — to M. F*] Okay, there were many references; there is Piero, a Piero blue; there were the famous Piero side-portraits; he was nuts about Piero. There are references there; there are references that a lot of people don't even feel are important, but they are important. I spent a weekend with Jackson Pollock, and Jackson didn't talk much, but most of the books that we were looking at and that he was showing me were on Michelangelo. It was just a few weeks before he died; I don't know exactly the date; and he was saying how much he loved the unending rhythm, the continuous lyricism of Michelangelo. He was, in a sense, telling me, referring to one of his biggest influences. *Autumn Rhythm*, for instance, if you begin to think about it, you close your eyes and you look at the overall view, from a distance, of a Michelangelo-like unending lyricism, you begin to see that it was distilled from that. He said it himself, he implied it. Or he would talk about how he grew up with American Indian sand painting; very important to him, especially the way he would walk around and do this and... In other words, he came to New York and in his box in a sense was Michelangelo, Indian Sand Painting, and Los Angeles Art school; as if he, I mean, those were his most important references... The guy that did that Pollock film, Hans Namuth. He showed me a clip and the most important thing is what he said in that film, he talks about having to get Picasso off his back. So there it is; it's all there.

[5] Morty was very much present, as an interlocutor and adviser, in the project of the multidisciplinary journal *RES – Anthropology and Aesthetic*, which I co-founded, with Remo Guidieri, at Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, in 1981 (and have been the Editor of since 1983). At my instigation, he published an article in the second issue of the journal, dedicated to an examination 'of what is symmetrical and what is not' in music and art, drawing examples mainly from his own recent composition *Crippled Symmetry* (1980) and his growing interest in Turkish nomadic rugs, as well as from contemporary artists such as Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Morton Feldman, 'Crippled Symmetry' *RES 2 Autumn 1981 – Anthropology and Aesthetics*, pp. 91-103.

Jackson Pollock
No. 492
c. 1939-40
Red pencil on blue/green paper
16.5 x 10.2 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK

FP Picasso and the Surrealists were really what I think he came to New York with...

MF I forgot the Surrealists in there. And wait a minute, there's another painter that he was *tremendously* involved with, and that was David Alfaro Siqueiros, from Mexico...

FP There was a lot of interest in Siqueiros, then.

MF I had a funny thing happen yesterday, this was very funny. I get tired, I'm walking around, there's not two places to sit in the Modern, but there are two benches in the big hall, where the bathrooms are. So I sit down on one of them and I'm facing the famous Diego Rivera, you know, the class struggle. And I'm looking at this thing and I'm just seeing the... it's very famous so it's somewhat annoying. You're looking at the thing and it's somewhat annoying. And you're looking at it and you know (you think of), Mantegna... Masaccio... and El Greco, a hell of a lot of El Greco—all these Mexicans. And then you look at the damn thing and it's not bad... its not bad.

FP Not as good as Orozco though.

MF There is an underrated artist. Is he very expensive?

FP Now, yes. Although still reasonable to some extent.

MF There was a time when these Mexican painters were big time. I remember Tamayo...

(*Tape II — Side I*)

FP Tamayo built an alternate Museum of Modern Art; it's not far from the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City. It's in the same park, and it's called the Tamayo Museum. He's still alive but he's already enshrined in these two museums, one in Oaxaca with his pre-Columbian collection, which is exquisite.

MF A great collection.

FP Not enormous, but great. And his contemporary collection is not as great as his pre-Columbian collection. He had a good eye for pre-Columbian, really bought extraordinary things—because of his aesthetic 'prejudices'...

MF How was the artists' eye in that Primitivism show (at MoMA), which was somewhat annoying—how was Picasso's eye on the subject of...

FP The modernist artists were interested in recognising certain striking aspects of procedure, of ways that things were done, that already interested them for their own reasons, in my view. And they were not connoisseurs, so they could find what they wanted in a junk piece as well as in a masterpiece... And that's why a lot of the art they had was in fact—not airport art, perhaps the airport did not exist yet—but something analogous in those days to airport art. One thing that is not so well known is that a lot of the 'best' primitive art came out of the places where it comes from at a *later* date; while there is a lot of very mediocre primitive art that has come out very early, because it was the first one to be let go.

MF In other words, you paint better primitives with experience (*laughter*). Like Twombly...

MF What did you think of that Easter Island piece that... just... like a paddle... It had a head, didn't it?

FP It *is* a paddle... Yes, you could also say it is an abstract...There are two senses of abstraction, as I see it: there is abstraction where things don't refer to anything; non-referentiality. And then there's abstraction where you abstract *from* something... it's still a *reflection*.

MF It's amazing what makes something referential. I love that little geometric box with the little penis sticking out—without the penis you wouldn't notice it. I think you could put a little jutting penis on anything and it'll immediately take on the form of a man. That was very beautiful; I liked that piece... There were some beautiful pieces.

FP Yes... But going back to what you were saying about Pollock and Michelangelo, I don't believe in influence; I don't think that influence exists, I've never believed in it. I don't think it works that way. I think that you are involved in your own time with certain problems, that it's a question of getting out of that rut and that you find... And then *afterwards* maybe it can all appear to be foreshadowed, but it is not. Then you realise 'oh yes', 'look how beautiful', yes, he got it from that... But if Pollock had to go into that flow, he didn't do the flow because he looked at Michelangelo; he recognised that Michelangelo had that flow because he was interested in the flow. That's the appropriate order of things. I don't see that anybody learns anything really in that direct sense, from anything. I don't know—do you feel that something influenced you in this direct sense? Or isn't it more that you *recognise* an antecedent—like a memory...

Africa, Tiv.
Housepost, standing male figure
Wood
Collection Hermes Trust

[6] MF was referring here to the then recent and much-discussed exhibition, *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, MoMA, New York, Autumn 1984 (curated by William Rubin).

MF The whole idea of references. They had a show about me some place, they had a kind of retrospective, [...] it included the image of a woman in a kind of 1950s dress, very nicely dressed, and her face is blank. She's a prototype of Feldman's first wife... In a sense that is referential—what you're really saying, is not that specific; prototypes... The funniest thing that I saw in that Primitivism show, I got a big kick out of it, is how the Léger costumes in those old pictures of the line-up on the avant-garde stage were of a kind of primitive chic, which not only dated modernist art but it dated primitivism; everything was finished off in that 1926 or 1927 extravaganza, like a Bob Wilson production.

FP But paradoxically, it is that kind of appropriation, which is always so incredibly biased and stylish and really provincial and naive, that is the lively one, the one that is really exciting and brings something in. Now that we know everything, that there is anthropology and everything, there is no more life in the primitive.

MF There was something I liked at the party last night, when they wanted me to talk more... Everybody wants other people to talk who are coming from the outside; everybody is interested in attitudes about New York culture. Our friend, the nice guy who made that primitivist shield...

FP You mean Ira Richer?

MF Ira... he really wanted to talk about this. I said to him and a whole bunch of people standing near me: 'Well, New York is just becoming another hick town.' They said, 'What do you mean by that?' I said, 'Well you're developing your own art form.' I said, 'You know if I go to Montreal I always ask—What's a Montreal piece?' And every town now has their specialty, like a hick town.

FP And every town now also has its own museum.

MF Yes, although some towns have... the 'Piero' Museum: it is not a bad little home town museum. What town is that, that marvellous town?

FP Borgo San Sepolcro?

MF San Sepolcro. They have their own museum; and sometimes it works. That's an extraordinary museum; I'll never forget it... A movie-maker would have had a field day, he would have fainted with good luck. The place was empty... I bought a little book in Italian; the guard was so delighted... he might have sold three of them in a week. And I'm looking at this thing—no judgment, just the story. So, as we were there alone, we hear this cortege outside the window, this kind of bay window... the whole town, or if not the town, I would think it's the town but maybe it's just the family and friends that are walking, but there's a brass band.

FP Was it a festival? What was it?

MF It was a funeral.Yes. We found out it was someone important in the town who was killed in an automobile crash in North Africa, but that's not important. It was a cortege with a band with music, and that's unusual.

FP Very unusual. I saw the same thing in India, once—it was very extraordinary... with the addition of a dance. They danced in front of the corpse, like the dance of Siva, the dance of death and resurrection. Professional dancers that were really crazy; they are like shamans; a crowd within the crowd.

MF If you go to India again with the family, let me know... I would like to come along for a few days... What culture is there? The culture actually is lost, the Moguls... There was a fantastic mixture of the Islamic and the Northern Indian culture producing unbelievably beautiful—speaking of tomato red—prayer rugs with that kind of tomato red. It's not garish; the Moslem keep it from being garish. I love the Mogul court carpets, I think they're the most beautiful in the world.

FP Arabesques.

MF Beautiful drawing... You know, it would be fantastic if some graduate student could do a research project on *Finnegans Wake* and go around to all the streets and all the pubs, but it doesn't make the work come back. There's always the myth that the more you know about a work, it becomes more comprehensible. I think this is one of the big intellectual myths.

FP The whole university system is based on that.

MF Well, what people think intellectuality is—for example, I had this student that just had a disastrous PhD examination which was beyond belief. She didn't really learn her Webern, she went in and tried to interpret it in a creative way, and after she left I looked at my colleagues and said 'What are you going to tell that student? Is there absolutely no insight that we could offer? Purely in terms of research projects, and not too much in terms of reinterpreting in a new way.' In other words, she didn't do her research, and her interpretations had no credibility whatsoever because it was just a conjuring up by someone who didn't do any research. So, you feel very sad...

FP What you're saying is that it's not normal not to do research, that she really needs to understand Webern. And it's not that that will give you the sense either of its beauty or...

MF For me to talk about it and use terms that are pedantic or academic still does not take away from its beauty. It's just like talking about another work which is not pedantic and not academic as not having beauty. I had a very interesting... I played a masterpiece of Schoenberg—a piece called *Variations for Orchestra*; he hit it in that piece like no other piece he wrote; it's really dazzling, where the intellectual content...

FP What date is it?

MF I think about 1927... Yes, a late piece, but at the most crucial disciplinal period of the 12–tone. It's his one great 12–tonal; I mean it's marvellous, in terms of references and using them in variations. Right after that, I played Satie's *Socrate,* with this not very interesting instrumentation, just this drone in the world. The intellectuality is in the fact that he's doing nothing. That no one would do. His intellectuality—his stamina, his vigour, his conviction is an element of his intellectuality. And the students then were very confused. They recognised that both were masterpieces —one was a masterpiece with everything, and the other one was a masterpiece with nothing.

FP Beethoven said of Handel that it was astounding what he accomplished with such limited means.

MF Yes, but his music was beautiful... And so I gave them a definition of how to evaluate music, and I said 'I look at it that if you feel that the piece is not missing anything, then it's authentic. That it's not missing anything—you just don't feel, well why don't they do this, why don't they do that?' And that whole idea of taking the piece on its own terms is also very difficult because we're not just ending with referential aspects, we're ending with the whole idea of a hierarchy of referential aspects. And when Bob Rauschenberg puts up a photograph, he's making a move from one photograph to another, however he is making it controlled by that piece; the metaphor, the references in a sense, can't go beyond a certain image. In a sense, the piece already is saying 'you can go this far; no, you can't put that photograph of Morty Feldman eating an ice cream cone; it doesn't belong there... It's a marvellous picture of Morty Feldman eating an ice cream cone but you can't use that.' Your whole collection of images that really have no relation to each other, what is to control that selection?

FP Yes. I wonder if Jasper is not doing something slightly different when he's putting Castelli's picture... did you see that picture in that show he had a year ago?

MF Oh yes.

FP You feel the limits of the reference. In Rauschenberg it's a given; in Johns it's always a problem. It's posed, but it's posed as a question.

MF It's not functional, in a way... I was hoping to see Jasper at the concert.

FP Well you know he lives out of town. It was the coldest bitterest night; if it had been a warmer night you would have had many more people.

MF And yet there was a very big audience...

FP I'm going to walk with you for a few blocks...

[···]

(*Tape II — Side II*)

MF ... the whole idea of saying 'would you buy a car from this man?'... then they show you a certain Republican... Would you buy a painting from Rosenquist if you sat next to him over dinner and talked?

FP I would never buy an Oldenburg that way; I had dinner with him... I didn't even know it was Oldenburg; I only found out later, and I was shocked.

MF Somewhat silly, isn't he?

FP Mmm. But he's done good work.

MF But their stuff just didn't have the charisma of those other people, the Pop artists...

FP Well, Andy has presence...

MF Now they're normal people, but two or three years after these other characters, and all the stories about Jackson Pollock and his talents? I was once at a party some place and I heard a window smashed; you couldn't see anything, and this girl said to me 'I wonder what that is', and I said 'I bet it's Jackson Pollock putting his hand through the window'. And I was right; he got mad at something. I remember we went to this famous bar, and everybody was laughing because the bathroom door was off the hinges.

FP It was Pollock?

MF Somebody was using the john for too long; he had to go. And he once kicked the door down at Betty Parsons, whom he loved—she of course loved him—and she had a little studio where she could paint in her 57th office. And he once walked in, and for no particular reason kicked the door down. He was annoyed that she was painting... But they had problems, competing personality–wise, for instance.

FP Well, but these quiet painters, how many of them are there of these minor painters? Again, I think one is justified in getting involved with the minor painters when they are your contemporaries... But to go back and look for minor painters of the '40s and '50s, although they're very good, what's the point? Unless one does it professionally... like certain scholars go and discover academic painters of the 19thcentury, painters like my great grandfather...

MF Is Braque a minor painter in relation to Picasso?

FP Well, Braque has a certain stature really... He had breadth despite a lack of originality.

MF Was Léger a minor painter?

FP No, Léger is a major painter.

MF Well, Picasso was annoyed to death at this guy.

FP But he is a major painter. That's why Picasso was annoyed; that's why he liked Braque.

MF How about Juan Gris?

FP Juan Gris is a minor painter in that sense, in my view... What is he really saying beyond the fact that he's saying that he's a good painter? He's definitely saying that he's a good painter. And he succeeds; he's established himself as a very good painter. That we can all applaud, but it's his business.

MF Don't people have a reassessment, for example... I didn't grow up with any kind of myths around Picabia.

FP Picabia was a strange, original spirit, and a great personality; a great mind, even in writing. He was brilliant, a cultured presence. There is no comparison between the presence of Picabia and the presence of Juan Gris. Which does not mean that these painters like Juan Gris cannot be important to other painters. The kind of work and solutions that they find can be extremely useful to other possibly greater painters... Just as you were saying that a certain lesser artist was very important for Rothko; that happens a lot. The great painters are 'influenced'—they are not influenced, but they steal applications from minor painters. In fact, that's the witchcraft we were talking about yesterday, is that the great artists are the ones that can appropriate more. They have this power; they can use anything. They are in fact vampires; they have this power of taking, like Picasso, more than anybody else; it' s incredible... You could almost use that as a meter of greatness; the power of absorption.

MF I wonder what Cage was thinking about during my piece, in relation to our conversation in *RES*.[7]

[7] John Cage, 'Conversation with Morton Feldman (Bunita Marcus and Francesco Pellizzi)', *RES 6 Autumn 1983 – Anthropology and Aesthetics*, pp. 112–135. Following the success of this first 'experiment' (Cage and Feldman had not really talked 'publicly' for years, before I instigated this encounter), I published in *RES* a few more similar exchanges: John Cage, 'On collaboration in art: A conversation with David Shapiro', *RES 10 Autumn 1985 – Anthropology and Aesthetics*, pp. 103–116; Morton Feldman and La Monte Young, 'A conversation on composition and improvisation (Bunita Marcus, Francesco Pellizzi, Marian Zazeela)', *RES 13 Spring 1987*, pp. 152–173; Morton Feldman and Iannis Xenakis, 'A conversation on music', *RES 15 Spring 1988*, pp. 177–181 (this whole issue of the journal was dedicated to Morty's memory).

FP He told me he liked it; and that he liked the *RES* issue. But he wasn't over enthusiastic—so maybe he didn't like it so much. But I felt he should have been a little bit more grateful at the way I put so much effort at reproducing putting all this music of his; I think the published conversation is quite beautiful looking, with all his drawings—I think he was a bit cool... you know how he is.

MF I think that little by little he's reassessing. The more famous he's becoming, he's reassessing... This boy, his assistant now, born in Canada, wants to be a composer. He wanted to study with me. I met him in London once; he came over and spoke to me. Very well mannered, lovely guy, and I told him that my attitude about teaching has changed, that I'm not involved with Socratic dialogue, and I don't want to discuss issues, pros and cons; that I really feel now what's best for me and for anybody who wants to study with me is my advice. I'm not a good input for the student at all. I should be and I used to be. I said of course it depends on the student. And I saw his work and I said 'You're very comfortable in the world' (I didn't know that he's one of the richest guys around). It's like a psychoanalysis; the best time to go to psychoanalysis is when you're just on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Otherwise you're just wasting time. And I think the same thing, it's not just a question of studying with me and then studying with someone else and getting what this one and that one have to say; you're not going to get anything. I don't want to appear to be arrogant. But I don't advise it. I said, 'You have too many problems; I looked at your scores; you've got tremendous problems in notation, just getting down things, you have too many technical problems,' I said, 'and you always want to talk philosophy.' He's educated, intelligent... and then he wound up helping Cage and learning from Cage. He told me last night, after the concert, he came over to me, Cage never uses the word 'random' at all. He said, 'But how could you be both so close, and so different?' So I looked at him, I said, 'One of us is faking it.' (*laughter*)... I can't figure it out... I made a remark to a very well-known theorist the other day, and I think I ended their life—a very important theorist who really did the groundwork for a lot of things, and one of his contributions was in 19th century music, and his whole idea is that from Haydn on, say to Chopin, they all did the same moves. And he wanted to show the universality of the harmonic language at the time, that they were involved in the same thing, everybody. I said, 'Well if they all did the same moves, why does he only use masterpieces? There are hundreds of thousands of pieces that are also making the same moves. Why doesn't he give examples of those pieces? So what's there in a masterpiece that they're not making that move? Or is there a sense in a masterpiece that in spite of very peculiar things, they're making that move?' In other words, it is the difference between a genius adjusting to certain things they feel is reality and someone who is not a genius, who is conforming. And that's what I was trying to do; make a distinction between adjusting and conforming, and it's absolutely different.

FP It's like the difference between the acceptance by the mystic of the village customs and the conventionality of the bourgeois. They both accept the reality of society, but they each have...

MF Their language.

FP Yes. But they are worlds apart.

MF There's no connection... After Darmstadt, I'm really becoming an anthropologist or sociologist... you know, the way you use the statues without heads... (*laughter*)

FP That's one of the things I've always loved... You've always talked that way about this. You've always been an anthropologist...

John Cage, composer having a drink with Morton Feldman, 1975. Photo: Irene Haupt

MF I loved it. When somebody gives a speech, even though I don't know what he's saying, and he tells that he met a kid out west just standing there, and just talked a little bit about some Hopi drumming. He played some... no notion whatsoever; nice, Hopi, nothing like it... but it must have interest, it's native culture, no? How could it not have some kind of interest? That's one thing, the lack, I feel, of a kind of one-to-one parity—there is a lot of effort in music in relation to the visual arts. I think a lot of it really is mostly the fact that a lot of musical structures were language, that they're giving a message, they're sending a message out. And it's really like Western Union. And with different kinds of very interesting ideas about it. For example, I read about how some African drumming was explained this way, that as they are giving the message the low notes are the man, because it carries, and the high notes are the woman, because it doesn't carry.

FP Well, in Africa, of course it was extremely important. But even in other parts... It's a very interesting question though.

MF I'm just thinking about it constantly... And I'm starting to realise that all the painters I like best became more referential as they grew older, even Twombly, Guston, and Jasper, Rauschenberg... And it turns out that what's happening is that I'm becoming more referential in my own work, and I think that's why people like it; I'm not becoming more reductive, I'm adding—there are some chairs to sit on. What happened was that they used to be referential towards the artistic processes; that was their referential element. Then, the referential element was framed in a sense that might not necessarily be the process that would help you to do your little statue, or whatever it is. Later, there was a period of pastiche, of Picasso using a Velasquez painting, or Stravinsky's famous ones, and then I think what's happening is that the referential is used again—I used referential elements even then. For example, if I had a melody that came up, that was the first stage of being referential. Or if I had to come back another way, it was not as a variation to enhance the form. Now, I find that when I do it, it almost adds up to a hallucination, it adds to the atmosphere. Not formally, but it disorients. I use references now as disorientation. Maybe there's an element of distancing? Like a Brecht play, or something. Or Kafka's *Amerika*: if you read at the opening of where he places the Statue of Liberty you remember that he was never here. And I think that Rauschenberg does use references as building blocks, as a construction really. I think that Guston, Johns and Twombly are essentially doing the same thing. The references are really non-functional.

FP But I don't see really in Jasper the loosening quality that you were referring to.

MF You don't see it in Jasper.

FP I don't really see it in Jasper. I see it in Guston, and particularly in the late Guston it becomes more evident. I was thinking this morning that if I had actually bought Guston in the '60s when you first talked to me about it, perhaps I wouldn't have bought the Gustons I like most, because some of these were painted later.

MF Anyway, thinking about that now, it's reference as disorientation. It could be an aspect of Surrealism. I always felt that Surrealism really is a very important part of American painting. I mean there *is* a surrealist element in Jasper's work, I think.

FP Oh, yes.

MF And I think a lot of it really has to do with the fact that the Surrealists were so entrenched in New York in the '40s.

FP I would say more in Jasper's case than in Guston's. I think there is a greater de-contextualisation of the reference in Jasper; the reference is taken—you could say is hallucinated—it's so taken out of its context. To see in context is the contrary to hallucinating; placing the reality in the complexity of their real world interaction. And Rauschenberg does it with all this juxtaposition, and he may appear to be de-contextualising because the juxtapositions are surprising, odd, but in fact what he's doing is reflecting a certain character of the modern world. So in a way he's a realist; I think he's much more in the tradition of a certain kind of American realism... But Jasper does something very different; I don't think there's really very much in common when you look at them. Now in the perspective of all this time he's much more interested in symbols, in a kind of almost absoluteness of the symbol, which he questions. But as he questions it he's dealing with it. Putting up pieces of the body, of different elements... like apparitions.

MF They thicken the plot; they don't make for comprehensibility. The thing is *comprehensibility* in relation to references: I'm trying to make some kind of mathematical formula here.

FP Yes. Comprehensibility is more in Rauschenberg than in Jasper... Twombly may be something else again.

[···]

MF In relation to references: You understand what I'm trying to do, it's that to me referential was always supposed to be an aid to comprehensibility. And here we find something happening where the comprehensibility is actually becoming even more *incomprehensible*... I don't know what that was, with Guston, but I bet a lot of it really had to do... No one ever discussed it with him; it's too late now. He grew up in Hollywood—an extra. He made money on movie stints when he was a kid. And there was something about him, like Cecil B. DeMille; you walk the corner and you see (the staging of) a (historical) period. He loved the movies and I think a lot of his images are as if he's directing some kind of silent exotic movie or something. He would have been a great prop man. And I can't believe that they're subjects; I have to think of them as plots.

FP I'm sure there is a subject.

MF The subject of Faust. Which in a sense—it's what I meant in the relationship between Jasper and Raushenberg. Ah! This is where we have to either embrace or leave off the psychoanalytic in terms of Jasper—for example, discussing the portrait of Castelli, which is done as a jigsaw puzzle, which is terrific, because he is a puzzle. I remember the first time I met him, I didn't know who he was, I dropped into de Kooning's studio and I was standing there, and this nice man comes in, very enigmatic. I wouldn't call him a dandy, I wouldn't call him slick, and after he left, de Kooning says to me 'He bought some things of mine and he never bargains; he's a very nice fellow. He says, well what do you want? *Everybody*: he bought an important picture of Philip's, and never bargained, never this, never that.' And I think what he wanted was that they were personally building up a kind of public relations thing. Everyone wants to get the best prices, especially if he's buying a lot of things, it's not as if he's just buying something he puts above his windows. I wasn't impressed by the fact that he didn't bargain; in fact, it gave me a clue. And I wasn't surprised later on that he and his wife became dealers.

FP Because they were not dealers when they came to this country. They had money, mainly his wife's money at the time.

MF Not only did they have money, but they already had a very tasteful collection, which also helped them get started, I think. But he was actually the only dealer I've never heard any talk about one way or another. And he must mean something that both Bob and Jasper never left him... I always liked Castelli.

...

Afterwards, Ileana married Sonnabend. First, Sonnabend was living with Leo and Ileana for years. Now you can't work in painting the way Sonnabend painted... You can't work with found objects or things like that. Found objects to me is like history... A found object is a historical object, unless people want to feel that a fire engine, or the like, could be an object that speaks.

FP Of course, Johns has used found objects.

MF Continually, but he has stopped.

FP There are two different kinds of found objects. There is the found object and there is the readymade. They're not exactly the same thing.

MF I don't really have any in my music.

FP You have quotation though. Quotation is again another thing. I was talking with Remo Guidieri, he was using quotation as the equivalent of the found object. But quotation is different, because when you quote you put it in brackets. Yet, you could also say that de-contextualising is also a kind of bracketing...

MF It doesn't work out. That period of music that you like the least of mine is where I used a motive element that's something very much like... [*a lacuna in the transcription*]

FP I wouldn't say it's the period that I like least.

MF Well, it's the period that I like least too. But my purpose was—my conscious purpose is—that I'm going to bring back elements that I ordinarily used—and I've been very influential because I did them in a non-historical way, in other words, nothing was prepared, you would hear something immediately without any preparation, disappear without any preparation—using them as states very much like photographs. But it doesn't work out like that, a melody is a melody is a melody, you see. That's the problem, a melody is a melody, it's not a photograph, it's not this, it's not that, it's a melody. That's why I started to question to what degree music is an art form: can you make these transformations, any kind of brain storm transformation—is it possible?

FP Then do you think that it has to do with the question of time, with the fact that music is perceived sequentially, in a sequence that is necessarily ordered, in the sense that there is a before and an after in every single moment, and that there is no way that you can get away from that. Whereas...

MF There's visualisations, which my music has.

FP Yes, but even with that. Of course you deal with that in your music. But you deal with that while taking that for granted; you have to deal with that in its own terms. But when I look at a painting, I can look at it in so many different ways.

MF I mean, the more you rob it of its references, that is, its history—it doesn't have to be history's history, it could be your own history in art—you can be referential to your own history in art; Schoenberg was like that. Every fifteen years he tried to make a synthesis between say his expressionist period and his classic period. Especially towards the end of his life he tried to put it all together. So, it had nothing to do with anything else but references. And as you strip the references, what are you saying? Instead of talking about the relationship between one cheekbone and another cheekbone when you get the skeleton, you are looking at this [*a lacuna in the transcription*]... In other words, the referential element never loses, because even as you get down to the bones, the referential structures remain. The problem with it is that when you take away the flesh, so to speak, and music then becomes referential only to itself, it becomes very technical. As it becomes referential to itself, you have to exert some kind of control that the whole thing just doesn't dissipate into a blob. So there is an element of articulation. Or as Jasper would say, there is an element of sophistication—but you can't get away with that... I mean if you know that it's a baby, you're not going to pick it up by its throat. What the hell are you going to do?

[...]

MF I passed through graduate school [*as teacher; lacuna in the transcription*]

FP de Kooning too?

MF Yes, de Kooning too; in the 1950s. Art teachers were making them into private schools for various artists. So this little girl, cute little sixteen year old, says, 'Mr. Kooning, is that a pussy cat over here?' It was one of these black and white painting-drawings, his excavation period... He says, 'Where, where? I'll be damned'. My thinking is very much like Jasper, except I can't use the same sources. I realise that there are many things he would say that I said. Like the thing with the conversation with John Cage in *RES*, where I say I write it in order to hear it. Then I came across this remark, where Jasper says sometimes he paints what he sees, and sometimes he paints to see it.

FP He said both.

MF He doesn't like both ways; neither is satisfactory. Very interesting fellow...

FP So he has to do it either one way or the other?

MF It's either one way or the other, but they're both not satisfactory.

FP How can you combine them? That's the problem again?

MF That's his problem.

FP Jasper's dilemma. You were saying something about Machaut before that I didn't understand.

MF That music hasn't advanced very much.

FP Can you explain that a moment for me, as a non-musician?

MF The ways essentially of making a composition, the prototype... I think the first... Gregorian chant would be like the beginning, maybe. The prototype of music, like the Wright Brothers in relation to the airplane, a lot of the ingredients are in [Guillaume de] Machaut, who was also of course literary—he's a poet. For example, he characterised music with these words 'My end is my beginning, and the beginning is my end', which in a sense is a kind of cyclic variation. He didn't invent, but certainly just the way Piero would use perspective as a basis of construction, he used the first sophisticated aspects of rhythm and variation, iso-rhythmic, a variation of the rhythm as it's going... which is actually no different from Boulez's serialisation of rhythm. So all this engineering of extension—one can find back in the 14th century already, and ever since then just the definition of the organisational principles, though the emphasis has changed. Then the growth of instruments, and now instruments will change. When all is said and done, if someone asks me what has Boulez done—by the way, these past ten years, in a very polished way, he's just using my ideas in a different way, but it's all my ideas that are in Boulez's scores—however, what he has got, and no one else has, is just the aspect of speed. He would be the guy that would bring the Indianapolis in—one who has written music with that element of speed and the articulation of what to use in this virtuosity, which has its roots... It's a new approach only because of the sophistication developed with instruments—and instrumentalists are becoming perfected. That was Schoenberg's role, one of the first things I tell the kids in orchestration is that Schoenberg brought the instrument into the 20th century.

The instrument wasn't necessarily just part of a group en masse, but the instruments were used in a virtuoso fashion, which went very well with his more linear type of explorations, rather than the harmonic—which was a different time sense. And that's what Schoenberg picked up on; the early Schoenberg also became a speed virtuoso. So of all that kind of music, whether it's Xenakis, who also is into speed—though it's not as successful, Xenakis is carrying too much baggage. Boulez travels lighter: with speed, directivity, virtuosity, fluidity—that's what he's accomplished, great fluidity. But as far as innovating anything, the serial aspects were already there. You know, most of these periods of musical history lasted for about five years.

FP Wasn't it Schumann who referred to 'The frightful (*redoutable*) speed of her fingers', referring to a pupil of his (perhaps his future wife)? It reminds me of Roman Vlad, the Italian-Hungarian composer, who once said about Vivaldi, '*Vivaldi c'est la vitesse*—Vivaldi is speed'; he subsumed the whole of Vivaldi under that notion. In relation to the music of his time, Vivaldi was then a bit like Boulez? He didn't really invent too much.

MF Yes. When I talk about Vivaldi, I say that the Italian school were the first to invent electronic music, that it was the electronic music of its day. And that's why I tell them that they should beware of the E-string, because that's a speed instrument. Most of that action you hear is on the top string. And I tell them 'Be careful of the E-string, because when you start to be involved with higher techniques on the E-string, no matter what you do, it's reminiscent of Vivaldi.' It was not only Vivaldi, Paganini too. Paganini would not have come out in a black cape made up to look like the devil, if it wasn't for the E-string. His whole career, bamboozling people with that god-damned E-string. That's why a lot of instruments went out of fashion in contemporary music, because they cannot articulate with that speed, either because of the instrument itself or the fingering. The flute became a very important instrument in avant-garde music; just think of all the avant-garde music, just a quick image: it's hard to think of an avant-garde piece without a flute. That's the success of the flute, but that's because the fingering of the flute made it very agile, as the bassoon was not as agile to pick up the inter-variant differentiation. So there's not one important avant-garde piece written for fifty years, in this century, for the bassoon, unless it's a plaintive Russian melody like *The Rite of Spring*. And then Stravinsky did something unusual with the bassoon; he brought it to a high register—for a more conventional composer that would have been a very high register. To this day you cannot write as little as a line in a high bassoon without being referential. So that it's a very interesting thing.

FP Well, that goes back to the question of what can be referential? Can music be referential to anything that is not the music? What is the imagery? There are all these questions, vision and sound—we are so oriented towards vision that it's very difficult to think of what is music really referring to. Referring to other music, to previous music?

MF Well, I think music it's also referring... it's glorifying its own construction. If one wants to build a terrific construct to get to heaven, like a cathedral for certain types of societies, you got to build it. The fact that you're turned on with this metaphor still has to mean that you got to build it. Of course they found out it took about 400 years to build. (*laughs*) So that's another story; what good are the references? It would be interesting to give a talk about that... They found out that if you build this tremendous empty vault with this light coming in, in a sense this is going to give you a feeling, this exalted feeling. That's all very good, but you still had to build it. And this whole idea in a sense is that sometimes if you're going to build it with very pure means it's just not going to work out. I think what's very, very interesting about the Turcoman rug... is that part of its success is due to its border, that is, more related to an arcane cloud border from the outskirts, rather than to something that would be considered indigenous to Turkish nomadic culture. There is nothing indigenous; everything—and they had no idea that just because you're on the steppes of an impenetrable Caucasian area, you have no idea for example if there's a mixture of Islamic symbols plus shamanistic symbols—whether they knew what the hell the shamanistic symbols were, or if it was just another decorative element that could easily be made because of the ways a rug was constructed in terms of its foundation. The building on the grid; there were some designs that are very successful on the grid and some designs that are very nice and not as successful. In this case—that's a very complicated design to do on a geometric grid—that's another thing you're paying for.

FP Yes. So that would contradict what you said; it was certainly not done just because there is a grid, because it's done almost against the grid.

MF No, what I'm trying to say about that is that here you get an obscure isolated area in central Turkey.

FP South-west...

MF Yes, a very isolated, insulated area that has its own iconography, that tree thing.

Anon / Rug
Turkish rug, possibly
Bergama region, c. 1880
Wool
128.9 x 99.7 cm
Private Collection

FP Which is the axis, the tree of the world, of life.

MF And at the same time it has that eastern Turkestan cloud border which essentially was where they came from anyway, that's where the Turkish people came from. So perhaps one can't really talk about stylistic purity when you're talking about it all. You can't even talk about whether they could read or write things; for example, they have different inscriptions in rugs; say, someone would have a rug and they would write 1830, yet the rug was made in at least 1870. She wasn't trying to put something over, she was copying something, she might have thought it was a design element.

FP Right. They know about that in Maya pots of the Classic and post-Classic periods. Michael Coe has proven it: there are a lot of hieroglyphs on Maya painted pots, but most of these are not writing, they are used for imagery; I don't like to use the word decoration, really, because I don't know what decoration really means, it's a word that has a certain connotation, so I try to avoid it, but it's difficult to find another word. Ornamentation perhaps is a better word.

MF I think ornamentation; that's the first word that came. I think it's a kind of interdependent situation where everything that is done enhances the other, so to me it's an aspect almost like counterpoint. In fact, when I discuss this problem in music I would say it is very bad if you say that the field, so to speak, is the hierarchical element. For example, I tell the story of a girl who brings a song, and all the attention will be on a motive line and the accompaniment will be hackneyed. And she said, well that's just the accompaniment. I said, but in a Schubert song everything was fundamentally important; he didn't think 'I'm writing an accompaniment now', which is what is put now in a textbook, melody and accompaniment...

But you should feel that the melody is the melody. And what would you do with Stravinsky's *Symphony of Songs*, where the accompaniment became the important fugue subject, there had to be something fabulous about this accompaniment, that he then could bring out a main subject from it. So I don't like to use the word. I find that to say things are ornamental, or decorative... dead words. That's why when I discuss orchestration I don't like to use the terms background and foreground. I feel that to a terrific composer, yes, background and foreground exist, but that doesn't mean in the sense that he doesn't have to do it without care or without concern.

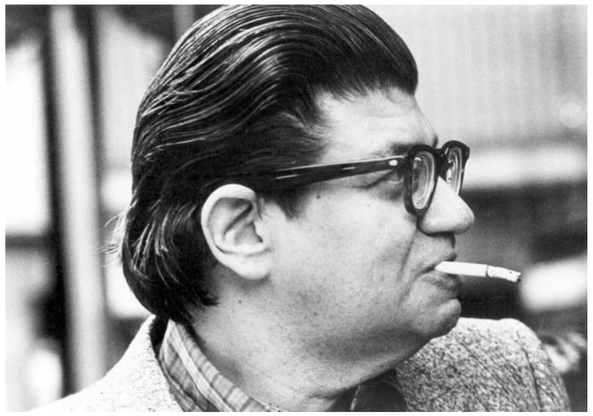
FP Or that one is more or less important than the other.

MF Very, very important. I would play, say, a Tchaikovsky melody, a famous hackneyed melody like the Romeo and Juliet one that everybody knows, and then I'll take its counterpoint—very famous lines on the French horn (sings...) propping up a very famous treatment of that particular melody, and I say: 'Well, I like the melody', yes, but you can't say that the melody is in a sense really the male element... It's like a sexist remark, saying that the man is more important than his wife nowadays; you can't call melody the hierarchical element in that horn, and the second just accompaniment. First of all, this is an immortal, historic blending of two things which in a sense one would usually just think of as technically, just a functional device. In other words, it's inspired counterpoint. They couldn't understand that. That's in relation to figuration. The rug I bought recently, the Turcoman piece, I wouldn't have bought it without a little figuration on top, that seemed incidental. It gave it the atmosphere, it was authentic, it was the kind of move they would make. Without the figuration in a sense I might even have felt that it was a damaged piece.

Morton Feldman supervises the installation of his Steinway piano in his new studio at the New York Studio School, New York City, where he has just assumed the position of Dean of the School
1970
Photo: Steven Sloman, New York

A FELDMAN CHRONOLOGY

SEBASTIAN CLAREN
TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
CHRISTINE SHUTTLEWORTH



Portrait with cigarette, Cologne, 1978
Photo: Roberto Masotti

1926 Morton Feldman is born in Manhattan, New York, on 12 January 1926, the second son of Irving Feldman (1892–1982) and his wife Frances (1898–1985); his brother Harold is nine years older. Both parents are from Jewish families and were sent at the respective ages of 11 and 3 from Kiev in Russia, via Warsaw, to relatives in New York. Feldman's father works as a foreman in a clothing company in Manhattan owned by his elder brother. Later, in the early 1940s, he succeeds in making himself independent, with a company making children's coats in Woodside, Queens (5202 39th Avenue), where Feldman grows up. Feldman later related that he had grown up in a wonderful middle-class environment in the suburbs of New York, in a very conventional apartment with conventional furniture.

1935 At the age of 9, Feldman begins to compose; he takes piano lessons at the Third Street Settlement School on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

1938 Aged 12, Feldman is taught piano by the daughter of a well-off Russian attorney, Vera Maurina Press, who had been a friend of the wife of Alexander Scriabin, had studied in Germany with Ferruccio Busoni, Emil von Sauer, and Ignaz Friedman, and founded the Russian Trio with her husband Michael Press and his brother David. Just before the Second World War broke out she had to flee via Brazil to New York, where she taught gifted children for a very low salary at the Chatham Square Music School on the Lower East Side. When the renowned pianist Joseph Lhévinne wanted to employ her as a teacher at the Juilliard School she stubbornly declined, saying she would 'never leave Chatham Square'. Feldman later maintained that his particular interest in a certain kind of tone first developed through being taught by Madame Press and because he had been able to experience 'the end of the heyday of the great interpreters'. In addition Madame Press had allowed him a great deal of freedom, which he had used to develop his own ideas as a composer, although of course this was not what his teacher had in mind.

1940 At 14, at a time when his father is still working as a foreman and the whole family has to live very economically in order to manage on his income, Feldman tells his mother that he can no longer play on the old family piano. His mother sends him to the Steinway House on 57th Street in Manhattan to choose a piano; without the help of an assistant, he finds a piano with an 'absolutely singular tone', which helps him to develop his hearing. From then on he not only lives 'at or around' this instrument but 'practically in it'.

In a biographical note of 1962 Feldman wrote that his mother had always supported him in his musical interests, while his father had been 'jealous of the intellectual areas that life denied him'. It was his grandmother, according to Feldman in 1983, who had concerned herself with his education, since his parents had always been out at work; it was also his grandmother who had impressed on him that he must 'know everything, think everything, and do nothing'. Perhaps Feldman's wide-ranging reading habits are derived from this education. In 1973 he stated that he had always read a great deal and was currently reading five books at the same time. In the final years of his life he apparently had to renounce reading to a great extent because of his bad eyesight. During his youth Turgenev, Thomas Wolfe, and Romain Rolland's Jean Christophe seem to have been of great significance to him; during the 1960s the authors to whom he referred most frequently were Kierkegaard and Pasternak.

That his maternal grandmother and his father lived in the same house for fifty years without exchanging a single word with each other, Feldman said in 1983, showed him that one could get by 'without communication': 'And then I developed another attitude, an attitude perhaps to the audience, to musicians, to everything outside of my exterior life. That is – I think of the whole world as my mother-in-law.'

1941 At 15, Feldman takes private composition lessons with Wallingford Riegger, recommended to him as a possible teacher by a friend of his brother's who works for a publishing firm. Feldman later describes Riegger as a marvellous teacher, who although he had been the first twelve-tone composer in America, never discussed twelve-tone music, but continually expressed enthusiasm for the variation movement from Beethoven's *Eroica*, and gave him a number of strict counterpoint tasks. Feldman later recalled that, when he was 14 years old, he had written 'a modal little melody and an elegant piano accompaniment' that Riegger had shown to Henry Cowell.

At this time Feldman attends the Music and Arts High School on the Upper West Side. Together with some classmates, including the later writer Daniel Stern and the composer Seymour Shifrin, he founds a Composers Workshop, held in a Settlement School in Greenwich Village and (according to Harold Feldman) led by the Italian composer Dante Fiorello.

1944 On leaving high school in January 1944 Feldman registers for the entrance examination at New York University. On the day of the examination Feldman goes to the University with Harold, but after looking around the room at the candidates, tells his brother, 'this is not for me', and turns back. From then on, up to his forty-fourth year, Feldman works at his father's company, where, by his own account, as the boss's son he had a quiet life, although elsewhere he writes that 'except during slack trading periods' he worked 'eight to ten hours' a day in the family business.

After giving up his piano lessons with Madame Press and composition lessons with Riegger, Feldman lets himself 'drift'. Around 1944 a high-school composer friend of Feldman's sends an orchestral piece to Dimitri Mitropoulos, at that time chief conductor at the New York Philharmonic. In his reply, Mitropoulos recommends as a teacher Stefan Wolpe, who had come to New York in 1939 and is teaching in New York and Philadelphia. When Wolpe rejects Feldman's friend because of his self-satisfied behaviour, Feldman decides to introduce himself to Wolpe and is accepted as a student.

Wolpe describes Feldman's peculiarity in 'not developing his ideas, but going from one thing to another' as 'negation'; the discussion of this behaviour is prolonged for over five years without any kind of progress. Feldman later stressed that he was grateful that Wolpe had never tried to 'question my ideas or extol any systems for me to use'. Through Wolpe, Feldman meets David Tudor, a pianist of his own age, who is being taught piano in Philadelphia by Wolpe's wife Irma, and composition by Wolpe himself. Another student of Wolpe's, Ralph Shapey, is Feldman's 'sibling rival', since they both studied with Wolpe at the same time. 'One day I stopped paying him [Wolpe]. Nothing was said about it. I continued to go, we continued to argue, and we are still arguing eighteen years later', Feldman wrote in 1963. It must have been in the 1940s that Feldman also met Milton Babbitt, with whom he regularly played poker, before the latter 'even had a music connection'.

Wolpe introduces Feldman to Edgard Varèse, without whom 'I would probably not have become a composer', as Feldman wrote in 1977. Varèse does not accept Feldman as a student, but allows him to visit him 'at least once a week' and show him his work. Feldman considered Varèse's advice 'to consider the time needed for the sound to reach the audience from the stage, and to return to the stage', to be the most important tip he had ever been given. In addition, Varèse had been for him an example of 'how one could be a professional composer in America, without leading a professional life'. Varèse had indeed been particularly interested in the fact that Feldman did not follow the conventional career of an academic composer, preferring to make his living in his father's family business, and had encouraged Feldman: 'You know, Feldman, you will survive. I am not worried about you.'

1950 Presumably in the second half of the 1940s, Feldman marries his first wife Arleen, six years his junior, who had gone to the same high school. After giving up his composition lessons with Stefan Wolpe, Feldman does not this time let himself 'drift', but continues to work intensively on his music, until, at one of the two concerts on 26 and 27 January 1950 at which the New York Philharmonic under Mitropoulos perform Webern's Symphony op. 21, he speaks to John Cage, whom he has apparently met before at Wolpe's house. Cage invites Feldman to come to his house within the next few days, and Feldman brings along a string quartet he has just finished, about which Cage is enthusiastic.

Getting to know Cage, who at this time is living on the top floor of an old building on the East River, from which there is a beautiful view of Manhattan and Brooklyn, is a liberating experience for Feldman. He describes his visit to Cage, who owns no furniture except a long marble table with Japanese cushions, a Steinway piano, a writing desk, and a bed, as his entry into 'the world of non-things'. On the same floor as Cage lives the sculptor Richard Lippold, and on the floor below the Swiss poet and painter Sonja Sekula. A little later, Feldman himself moves into the second floor of Bozza's Mansion, as 326 Monroe Street is known after its landlord.

In the spring of 1950 Christian Wolff, the son of Kurt Wolff, Kafka's publisher, who had left Germany in 1933 and fled with his family from France to New York in 1941, is sent by his piano teacher Grete Sultan to Cage, to take lessons in composition. The 16-year-old Wolff, whose favourite composer is Webern, brings a present for Cage to one of his first lessons. It is an English translation of the Chinese *I Ching*, published by Pantheon Books, the firm newly founded by his father in 1942. This book is to be of considerable importance in Cage's development as a composer. Remarkably, as the youngest member of the New York School, as the composers in Cage's circle later become known, Wolff is the first to find his own musical language in a series of minimalist compositions, which contain a limited number of pitches in various rhythmic settings, and apparently go back to composition exercises set to Wolff by Cage.

In 1949 Cage met Pierre Boulez in Paris, and was presented by him with the manuscript of his *Second Sonata* for piano as thanks for putting him in touch with a publisher. Back in New York, Cage tries to organise the first American performance of the sonata. When William Masselos, first approached by Cage, announces that because of immense difficulties he cannot learn the piece within the envisaged time, Feldman draws Cage's attention to the fact that David Tudor has already begun to rehearse the sonata himself, and has even gone so far as to take French lessons in order to be able to read in the original Boulez's articles and Antonin Artaud's writings – of importance for the understanding of Boulez's early music.

Tudor's performance of the *Second Sonata* takes place on 17 December 1950. In a letter to Boulez, Cage reports that Feldman, Tudor, and he himself walked through the streets until 4 a.m. after the premiere celebration, talking about Boulez and his music.

Strangely, Feldman's *Piece for Violin and Piano*, which he described as a very important piece with which he had 'great difficulties because it contained so few notes', is dated on the same day as the premiere of the *Second Sonata*. Feldman adds that the difference between his *Piece for Violin and Piano* and the piece he wrote immediately before it is considerable, which suggests that he regards this as his first mature work. On the first performance of the piece he reports in 1983 as follows:

> [It] was my introduction into the New York musical world and which... It made me quite well known. It was just about the time I met John Cage and he called up Virgil Thomson and he said 'you must meet this young man'. Virgil Thomson was a very influential composer at that time. He had one of the few salons in a wonderful old bohemian hotel, still exists where rock and punk millionaires hang out [Chelsea Hotel]. And it was on the top floors actually of the hotel where he had these beautiful Edwardian rooms. And the hotel to me was fantastic. Not because he was living there but because Thomas Wolfe made it famous. Thomas Wolfe lived there for a few years. So when I first went into the hotel with my wife, it was just wonderful. Going up to Virgil Thomson's apartment. There were a lot of people there and John, I didn't know too many performers, and John got a marvellous young lady, who was a super violinist [Frances Magnes], and David [Tudor] was the pianist for essentially what was maybe a two minute piece. So I was quite nervous with this introduction to the New York musical world. And the piece was played. And there was a very legendary for an American, a very legendary composer who was a very big time Hollywood composer in 1950 writing all the Humphrey Bogart movies, and that was George Antheil. And he was there and it was all very exciting. [...] I didn't talk to anybody. I didn't get into any discussions. I just sat there with my wife and I behaved myself, after all I was about 24 or so, not even 24. Well, the next day I spoke to John Cage and he says... oh, I said to him 'Did you speak to Virgil Thomson? Did he like my piece?' He said, 'Well, if you must know, he said, "Never bring that man to my house again." He said "I don't want to hear how much of a genius he thinks he is with every note he writes."' [laughs] And we've had problems ever since, Virgil Thomson and myself.

In the winter of 1950, presumably after the *Piece for Violin and Piano* in the last week of December, during a dinner at Cage's where David Tudor is also present, Feldman writes his first composition in graphic notation, *Projection 1 for Solo Cello*. Prompted by Feldman's notation, Cage remembers the copy of the *I Ching* that Wolff gave him in the spring, and sketches out the plan for his *Music of Changes* for piano, which he works out the following year.

1951 Up to 1953, Feldman's main published compositions were the *Projections* 1–4 and *Intersections* 1–4, written in graphic notation, as well as the conventionally scored *Intermissions* 1–6 and *Extensions* 1–4. That there must in addition have been a series of occasional compositions, perhaps in a less avant-garde idiom, is shown by a number of programmes of dance and theatrical events where music by Feldman was played; the scores for these works seem mostly to be lost.

In January 1951 the great exhibition *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* is held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Here Feldman sees for the first time a painting by Philip Guston, who becomes his closest friend over the next twenty years. Cage introduces Feldman to the Club, an association of Abstract Expressionists founded in the autumn of 1949, who have rented a loft at 39 East Eighth Street and meet there on Wednesdays and Fridays for discussions and lectures. Here and at the Cedar Tavern on University Place, between Eighth and Ninth Streets, the nearby artists' meeting-place, Feldman meets the most important painters of the older generation (Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, and Mark Rothko), as well as members of the younger generation of New York artists (Mike Goldberg, Jane Freilicher, Howard Kanovitz, Joan Mitchell, and Larry Rivers). He also meets the Viennese architect and surrealist Frederick Kiesler; the poet and museum curator Frank O'Hara, whose poem *Wind*, dedicated to him, Feldman has twice set to music; the painter Nicholas Marsicano, for whose wife, the dancer Merle Marsicano, he writes several pieces; and the painter Mercedes Matter, who fifteen years later is to make him director of her newly founded New York Studio School. Feldman later describes himself as the only musician who regularly visited the Club, while Cage came only occasionally and Wolff never. Later, Earle Brown had 'looked in' from time to time.

In 1951 Cage gives his two famous talks at the Club on his own and Feldman's music, the 'Lecture on nothing' and the 'Lecture on something'; characteristically, Feldman commented that he would have found it more appropriate if the lecture on him had been called 'Lecture on nothing' and the one on Cage 'Lecture on something'. Feldman himself gives a talk on 2 February 1955 on his own music called 'The unframed frame', which is received 'with great understanding'. During his stay in New York in the summer of 1952, Boulez also gives a lecture on his music at the Club. For Feldman the most important event at the Club seems to have been a panel discussion on 'When is a painting finished?', which he discusses up to the last years of his life.

In April, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock's wife, asks Cage if he would like to write the music to a film about her husband, which had been made the previous year by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg. Cage declines, as he 'couldn't stand' Pollock, and instead suggests Feldman, who gratefully accepts the commission. The film, with Feldman's music for two cellos, which his high-school friend Daniel Stern records on two tape tracks, one part after the other, is shown for the first time on 14 June 1951 at the Museum of Modern Art. Feldman describes this commission, and his friendship with Pollock, who clearly takes him to his heart immediately and meets him as often as possible up to the time of his early death, as the 'very beginning of my career'. As payment for his music, Feldman receives from Pollock a small Indian ink drawing.

On 28 April, Merle Marsicano stages her choreography *Solo Suite: Three Dances*, with music by Feldman at the venue that later became the 92nd Street Y.

On 30 April Pearl Lang stages her choreography *Legend*, with music by Feldman, at the Henry Street Playhouse.

As early as May 1951 Boulez writes to Cage that he has written in a 'not very friendly' manner to Feldman, who has apparently sent him a letter with some scores of his own. After a visit by Wolff in the summer of 1951 in Paris, Boulez writes to Cage again in August that he apologises to Feldman for giving the title *Structures* to his compositions for two pianos composed in 1951–2, but he had had it in mind before hearing of Feldman's string quartet of the same title, composed in March 1951. He finds the 'white squares' of Feldman's graphic notation too imprecise and too simple. By the way, he is suspicious of Mondrian and far prefers Klee. Feldman must therefore in the meantime have sent Boulez a selection of his compositions with graphic notation and stressed the connection between them and Mondrian.

Cage then writes to Boulez that Feldman cannot imagine that Boulez does not like his work and is 'somewhat mortified' that he does not appreciate Mondrian either. To Boulez's somewhat superficial criticism of Feldman's *Intersections*, that if the beginnings of the sounds are free, the endings must also be made free, Feldman had answered: 'That would be another piece.' At any rate, Feldman would send him a new Intersection for piano (presumably the *Intersection 2* of August 1951). At the end of the year Boulez writes that he considers Feldman's graphic notation to be a backward step, since it does not enrich, but rather, simplifies the musical vocabulary. The constant metrical unit of 60 mm, which is common to all these pieces (Boulez therefore knows neither *Marginal Intersection* nor *Intersection 2*, in which Feldman prescribes a considerably faster tempo), neglects the possibilities of irrational subdivisions offered by conventional notation. The total neglect of specification of pitch, Boulez claimed, led to a non-definition of the sound. 'Clearly I cannot sanction such an imprecise treatment of pitch.' Mondrian's paintings were the least mysterious there had ever been: 'Let us distinguish this false science from a true science, which is less easy to decipher.' Simple solutions, such as Mondrian's, did not interest him. The important works were those which could not be fathomed, and this was why he preferred Klee's paintings, the abstract as well as the representational ones, to Mondrian's.

On 13 July Arnold Schoenberg dies in Los Angeles.

A juvenile work of Feldman's, *Illusions for Piano* (1948), is published in the October edition of the magazine *New Music: A Quarterly of Modern Composition*.

1952 On 1 January David Tudor plays Boulez's *Second Sonata*, Wolff's *For Prepared Piano*, Feldman's *Intersection 2*, and Cage's *Music of Changes* at the Cherry Lane Theatre, New York. Feldman later recalled: 'I can remember once I said, "You know, John, nobody knows what to do on New Year's Day", and that was the genesis of a concert, one of our best.'

On 18 January Jean Erdman and her Dance Company perform the choreography *Changing Woman*, with music by Feldman, at the Hunter Playhouse. Henry Cowell's article 'Cage and his friends' is published in the January edition of *The Musical Quarterly*.

On 10 February the first performance of Feldman's *Intermissions* 1–5, by David Tudor, takes place, again at the Cherry Lane Theatre.

On 2 March the Living Theatre, directed by Judith Malina, presents the premiere of T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* with music by Feldman.

On 2 May David Tudor performs Feldman's *Extensions* 3 and *Intermission* 5 at the New School for Social Research, which is followed by a discussion led by Henry Cowell.

Cage and his life partner, the dancer Merce Cunningham, on one of their joint tours make the acquaintance of the dancer Carolyn Brown and her husband Earle, who, after completing his studies in engineering and private tuition as a composer, is himself teaching composition in Denver. Cage and Cunningham suggest that the Browns should come to New York to work with them. According to Cage, the group of composers consisting of Cage, Feldman, Tudor, and Wolff, breaks up on Brown's arrival in New York, because Feldman protests against the acceptance of Brown as a new member of the group. According to Brown, Feldman at first welcomes him and invites him to his house, but later falls out with him because Brown defends Boulez's interest in mathematics. Feldman himself suggests that Brown's relationship with the group was only peripheral, and that he was only accepted because his wife was a first-class dancer. Immediately after his arrival in New York Earle Brown writes his most famous compositions, *October 1952*, *November 1952*, *December 1952* and *Twenty-five Pages* (1953).

At this time Feldman, 'like everyone in New York', is in psychoanalysis and cannot believe that Brown manages without an analyst. Possibly Feldman's admiration for Freud's enthusiasm for research and hard work, which he continually expresses in his final years, dates from this period.

On 29 August, at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, David Tudor performs Cage's epoch-making *4′ 33″* (influenced by Robert Rauschenberg's 'White paintings'), Wolff's *For Piano* and *For Prepared Piano*, Feldman's *Extensions 3* and *Intermissions* 1–5, Brown's *Three Pieces for Piano*, Boulez's *Première Sonate*, and Henry Cowell's *The Banshee*.

One of the reasons for Cage's interest in having Brown in New York is a project for electro-acoustic music which he has founded with the financial support of Paul Williams. Brown is in fact Cage's most important helper in the protracted realisation of four compositions: Cage's *Williams Mix*, Wolff's *For Magnetic Tape (suite by chance)*, Feldman's *Intersection for Magnetic Tape* and Brown's *Octet 1*. Cage recalls later that within one small box of Feldman's graphic notation of *Intersection for Magnetic Tape* they had to cut up and reassemble 1,097 fragments of a tape of previously recorded sounds.

After the possibility of a visit to New York by Boulez in August 1950 had collapsed, Boulez arrives there on 11 November 1952 in the context of an American tour by Jean-Louis Barrault. He stays about a month, living in Cage's loft, gives a talk on his music at the Club and performs his *Structure 1* with David Tudor. During his stay it becomes clear that the differences between the American composers in Cage's circle, who at this time support the use of random processes and various forms of indeterminate notation, and the serialist Boulez, are too great to be overcome. At any rate, the correspondence between Boulez and Cage practically breaks down after 1952, and in the few letters exchanged after this date, there is no further discussion of controversial points.

1953 The dancer Merce Cunningham, for whom Feldman wrote his *Variations for Piano* in 1951, founds the Cunningham Dance Company, whose musical director Cage becomes.

Cage introduces Feldman to Robert Rauschenberg, whom he himself met for the first time in the spring of 1951 at an exhibition of Rauschenberg's at the Betty Parsons Gallery, and came to know better in the summer of 1952 at Black Mountain College. Rauschenberg, who has just come back from a six-month trip to Italy with Cy Twombly, sells Feldman one of his 'Black paintings', later considered among his most important works, for $16, all that Feldman happens to have in his pocket at the time. In the same way he sells another of the 'Black paintings' to Earle Brown for $26, the amount of a repayment on a telephonebill which Brown had just received. Feldman was to sell his Rauschenberg in 1987 for $600,000.

1954 Feldman's *Three Pieces for Piano*, the earliest of which is written in February 1954, are the first of a new group of works in which he concentrates almost exclusively on the sound of the piano and writes the most sparsely instrumented compositions of his whole career.

The actual reason for the break-up of the group of composers centred on Cage probably lies in the fact that Bozza's Mansion, the building in which Cage and Feldman live, is demolished in 1954. With Tudor and some friends, Cage moves to an old farmhouse at Stony Point on Long Island, an hour and a quarter's distance from New York. Feldman visits Cage only once, since his extreme short-sightedness makes the steep path leading to Cage's house highly dangerous for him. Not long after Cage returns to New York in 1970, Feldman moves to Buffalo, so close contact over a longer period is still no longer possible. Since the autumn of 1951 Wolff has already been studying classical language and literature at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and visits New York only during the vacations. Feldman and Brown had fallen out in the previous year. Towards the end of his life Feldman said that although Cage thought they had had conversations during the 1950s, he himself had the feeling that he and Cage never really talked to each other, but had only created a 'caste system, so to speak, of who was doing the real work'. The 'Radio Happenings' of 1966–7 and the conversation between Cage and Feldman of 1983 published in *RES* probably give a flavour of this kind of exchange.

On 4 October 1954 Feldman gives a talk at the Raud School for Social Science with the title 'Frontiers of music: the structure of contemporary music'. Two days earlier Cage and Tudor had left for Europe to perform Cage's *Water Music*, *34' 46.776" for a Pianist* and *31' 57.9864" for a Pianist* on 17 October in Donaueschingen, 19 October in Cologne, and 25 October in France. In Donaueschingen they also perform the electro-acoustic compositions from Cage's 'Music for tape' project, which include Feldman's *Intersection for Magnetic Tape*.

1955 On 1 January 1955, in association with an exhibition of Rauschenberg's 'Red paintings', a concert takes place at the Charles Egan Gallery exclusively of works by Feldman, namely his *Extensions 3*, *Intermission 5*, *Three Pieces for Piano*, as well as *Structure 2* and *Extensions 5 for Two Cellos*, neither of which was ever published. Feldman plays the piano pieces himself, insisting that his own piano be brought to the gallery for this purpose. Claus Adam and Seymour Barab play the compositions for two cellos.

During the winter of 1954 Rauschenberg met Jasper Johns. Over a period of several months a friendship forms between the two artists and in January 1955 they move into a factory building on Pearl Street, where they live for the next three years. Through Rauschenberg, Johns meets Cage and Feldman. Feldman later compares the artistic relationship of the extroverted Rauschenberg and the introverted Johns, who together break through the supremacy of Abstract Expressionism in American art and prepare the ground for Pop Art, to the relationship between Cage and himself.

1956 On 30 May a concert organised by Cage and Feldman takes place at the Carl Fischer Concert Hall in New York, at which Feldman's *Structures* and *Three Pieces for String Quartet* are performed for the first time, by the Juilliard Quartet.

On 11 August 1956 Pollock is killed in a road accident. In an unpublished obituary, Feldman writes that Pollock's life represents a double tragedy: 'both death and a life in the art world came too soon'. So even at this early time, Feldman sees public cultural life as the most important obstacle to living art.

Having apparently separated earlier from his first wife, Arleen (the exact date is not known), Feldman marries his second wife, Cynthia, who in the years that follow also takes over the organisation of concerts. At first he lives on Nineteenth Street in the same house as the painter Barnett Newman, later moving to 337 Lexington Avenue, near Central Station. Shortly after marrying Cynthia, he begins a relationship with Lulla Adler, a grand-daughter of the famous actor Jacob Adler.

1957 On 1 January a further New Year's Day concert takes place, at which Feldman's *Projections* and *Intersections* – that is, all the pieces written so far using graphic notation – are performed.

The Piece for Four Pianos, first performed on 30 April at the Carl Fischer Concert Hall in New York, is Feldman's first composition in free durational notation, which becomes his dominant form of notation during the following six years. In 1961–2 he writes the *Durations* 1–5, in which he transfers this notation, first conceived at the piano, to various chamber-music settings.

At a meeting arranged by the painter Paul Brach and Feldman to find a new gallery for Rauschenberg, Leo Castelli meets Johns and immediately offers him an exhibition in his newly founded gallery in January 1958, while Rauschenberg's exhibition is planned, only after repeated requests, for March of the same year. Both exhibitions cause a sensation. Johns's exhibition is the most successful debut any American artist has ever had: the Museum of Modern Art buys four works on the spot, *Green Target*, *White Numbers*, the first *Flag*, and *Target with Four Faces*. With this exhibition Castelli establishes himself as the most important gallery-owner of the Pop Art generation.

1958 In his article 'Sound – noise – Varèse – Boulez' Feldman attacks Boulez for the first time as a 'magnificent academician' without 'elegance' or 'physicality', thanks to whose successes 'we will hear more of Varèse, John Cage, Christian Wolff, and myself'.

On 15 May the twenty-five-year retrospective concert organised by Johns, Rauschenberg and Emile di Antonio takes place, as a look back at Cage's development as a composer over what is now a twenty-five-year period. The last part of the programme is the first performance of Cage's epoch-making *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*.

In the summer Cage travels to Europe with Tudor for a second time, and gives three lectures on 'Composition as process' at the International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt.

On 17 August in New London, Connecticut, *Summerspace*, one of Merce Cunningham's most successful choreographic works, is performed with a set by Robert Rauschenberg and music by Feldman. Asked how it was possible for Cunningham, Rauschenberg, and himself, to work independently on the same piece, Feldman replies: 'Imagine that your daughter is getting married, and I tell her that her dress will not be ready until the morning of the wedding, but it will be a Dior model.' With *Ixion*, the score for *Summerspace*, Feldman has returned after some four years to the graphic notation of the early 1950s, which he now uses in several works up until the end of the 1960s.

1959 As the second edition in the 'New Directions in Music' series, Columbia Masterworks issues a recording of early compositions by Feldman, ranging from *Projection 4 for Violin and Piano* (1951) to *Piece for Four Pianos* (1957).

1960 In October Feldman writes *The Swallows of Salangan* for mixed choir and twenty-three instruments, which receives its first performance on 5 March 1962 in Brussels under the direction of Mauricio Kagel.

Feldman is commissioned by Jack Garfein to write the music for the film *Something Wild*, starring Garfein's wife, Carroll Baker. At a preliminary meeting Garfein complains that Feldman has written a gentle piece in E flat major for string quartet and celesta for the rape scene at the beginning of the film. 'My wife is being raped, and you write celesta music?' Feldman is paid off and replaced by Aaron Copland, who writes one of his most important film scores for *Something Wild* and in 1964 reworks it as an orchestral piece with the title *Music for a Great City*.

1962 The New York branch of the publishers Edition Peters, who have been publishing the work of Cage since 1960, now takes over the publication of scores by Feldman and Wolff. In a letter of 11 February 1962 Feldman sends the contract, signed on 6 February, to Walter Hinrichsen, the director of the firm, with the following note: 'To say I am highly delighted would be an understatement. After all, it was through Edition Peters that I first learned to love music.'

The painter Franz Kline dies of a cerebral apoplexy on 13 May. In his memory Feldman writes his first dedication piece, *For Franz Kline*, completed on 26 May.

1963 One day Lukas Foss, who has missed his flight at La Guardia airport, calls Feldman at his father's business to ask him if he would like to meet for lunch. Feldman, whose main task there appears to be to negotiate contracts with his father's business partners, asks Foss to come and pick him up. He quickly puts on working clothes and positions himself at an enormous ironing machine. When Foss comes in, he sets the steam to full strength and plays the 'artist in chains'. Foss is deeply shocked and cries out, 'Oh, Morty! This will not do. We must get you out of here.' When Foss tries to arrange a teaching post for Feldman at a big university, the responsible committee admits that Feldman is an important figure, but doubts that he is capable of teaching anything.

Feldman writes the music for a film by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg on De Kooning, which is performed for the first time on 4 September as *De Kooning*. This composition is the first of a new group of works, whose scores are notated in alternating time structures. The programmatic cycle of this group of works is *Vertical Thoughts* 1–5, written between April and August 1963 and first performed at the legendary Town Hall Concert on 11 October 1963, organised by Cage with the object of reconciling Brown and Feldman with each other. In the same year a recording is released including Brown's *Music for Violin, Cello and Piano* (1952), *Music for Cello and Piano* (1955), *Hodograph 1* (1959), as well as Feldman's *Durations 1–4*.

1964 On 6, 7, 8 and 9 February the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Leonard Bernstein performs Brown's *Available Forms 2*, Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* and Feldman's *Out of 'Last Pieces'*, a graphically notated orchestral work with piano solo, which is played by David Tudor.
At one of the performances Feldman, to the annoyance of Bernstein, forces Karlheinz Stockhausen, who happens to be in New York at the time, to take a bow on his behalf.

During his first published interview Feldman meets Brian O'Doherty, who becomes one of his closest friends in the 1960s and in his writings takes up a rather defensive attitude to the most recent artistic trends such as Pop Art and Minimal Art, which seems influenced by Feldman's thinking at the time.

In a further interview Feldman calls Stockhausen a revisionist who wants to humanise Cage's and Feldman's work, in order to found a school and achieve power. As a response to Stockhausen's *Zyklus for a Percussionist*, he writes *The King of Denmark*.

Presumably in the same year, Feldman meets Boulez at a dinner-party with some colleagues and spends the rest of the evening with him, describing it as follows:

> I left the gathering quite late with Pierre Boulez, and we walked over to the Cedar Tavern. We closed the bar that night. Closed it, in fact, for good —the building was being demolished. We talked about American literature, very little about music. There was nobody there I knew; the older crowd had stopped going some time back. Somehow it didn't seem right that I should spend that last evening with Boulez, who is everything I don't want art to be. 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.

Possibly Feldman is referring to that evening when he states twenty years later that he once had a seven-hour conversation with Boulez which had changed his life, although Boulez was not aware of this. He explained that he admired Boulez's attitude, just as he admired that of Varèse, Wolpe, Cage, and Beckett.

1965 Edgard Varèse dies on 6 November at the age of 82 from complications following an operation. In an obituary published in *Perspectives of New Music*, Feldman writes:

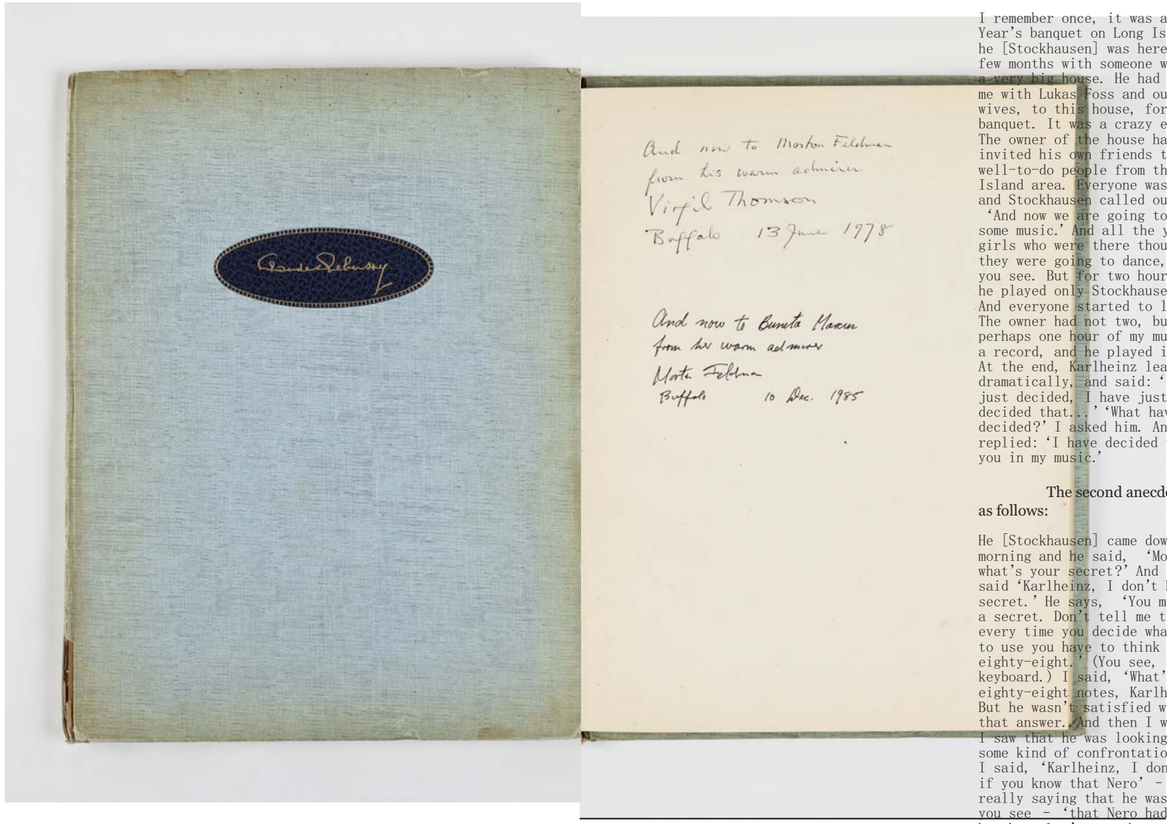
> Being that music is our life, in that it has given us a life — did we make things clear? That is, do we love Music, and not the systems, the rituals, the symbols—the worldly, greedy gymnastics we substitute for it? That is, do we give everything —a total commitment to our own uniqueness? Have we no examples of this? Is this not Varèse? Do we only have models for scale tinkering and instrument clinking? Do we think Varèse is now something to dissect? Are we making ready the test tubes? Remember, there was no funeral. He escaped.

1966 After his reconciliation with Earle Brown, Feldman writes a detailed article about his colleague.

In the spring and autumn of 1966 Feldman goes on two lecture tours in England, where he gives, among others, his paper, subsequently published, 'The anxiety of art', and meets the pianist John Tilbury and the composer Cornelius Cardew, with whom he has already corresponded. Feldman, who has come to Europe for the first time with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, is enthusiastic about the serious reception he experiences, and from now on spends one or two months a year in England. In 1973 he even considers settling in England the following year.

On 25 July Frank O'Hara dies as a result of an accident. In his memories of O'Hara, published six years later, Feldman writes:

> Unlike Auden or Eliot, who never stopped writing for the undergraduate, Frank O'Hara dispenses with everything in his work but his feelings. This kind of modesty always disappoints culture, which time after time has mistaken coldness for Olympian objectivity. [...] Throughout the first half of the 20th century everyone was sure it was Picasso; we are only now beginning to see it was Mondrian. How could anyone have known or guessed? The work seemed so limited, so simplistic, so unambitious. [...] Not that I am comparing Frank O'Hara with an austere artist like Mondrian. What I am saying is, it may be Frank O'Hara's poems that survive when all we now consider 'epic' is shot full of holes, nothing remaining of it but its propaganda.



Claude Debussy
Prélude a lipres midi d'in faune
1963
Robert Owen Lehman Foundation, Washington
Musical score
35.6 x 29.2 cm
Private Collection

Between 9 July 1966 and 16 January 1967 Cage and Feldman meet in the studio of the New York radio station WBAI for five conversations, which are published in the form of transcripts in 1993.

Although Feldman and Stockhausen have already met on the latter's first trip to the USA in 1958, they seem to have got to know each other better only during Stockhausen's long stay in the USA in 1966-7. Two anecdotes which Feldman liked to relate frequently come from this time:

> I remember once, it was a New Year's banquet on Long Island, he [Stockhausen] was here for a few months with someone who had a very big house. He had invited me with Lukas Foss and our wives, to this house, for the banquet. It was a crazy evening. The owner of the house had invited his own friends too, well-to-do people from the Long Island area. Everyone was there, and Stockhausen called out: 'And now we are going to hear some music.' And all the young girls who were there thought they were going to dance, you see. But for two hours, he played only Stockhausen. And everyone started to leave. The owner had not two, but perhaps one hour of my music on a record, and he played it. At the end, Karlheinz leapt up, dramatically, and said: 'I have just decided, I have just decided that...' 'What have you decided?' I asked him. And he replied: 'I have decided to use you in my music.'

The second anecdote is as follows:

> He [Stockhausen] came down one morning and he said, 'Morty, what's your secret?' And I said 'Karlheinz, I don't have a secret.' He says, 'You must have a secret. Don't tell me that every time you decide what note to use you have to think of eighty-eight.' (You see, the keyboard.) I said, 'What's eighty-eight notes, Karlheinz?' But he wasn't satisfied with that answer. And then I went on, I saw that he was looking for some kind of confrontation, I said, 'Karlheinz, I don't know if you know that Nero' – I was really saying that he was Nero you see – 'that Nero had a brother. Let's say that you're Nero and that you wrote epic poetry and I'm his brother and I wrote lyric poetry. Well Nero said to his brother, also the way you're saying to me "What's your secret?", the lyric poet rather said, "Brother Nero, I have no secret." He says, "You must have a secret. Torture him for the secret." And then he tortured him for the secret and he brought him back after this poor fellow had been tortured, he was all mutilated, and he says, "Really Nero, I have no secret." And then Nero looks at the guards and says "Finish him off." '

1967 The painter Ad Reinhardt commits suicide on 30 August at the age of 54.
In three large scale compositions at the end of this group of works, *First Principles* (1966–7), *False Relationships and the Extended Ending* (1968), and *Between Categories* (1969), Feldman links the alternating time structures with elements of the preceding group of works, allowing groups of instruments notated in different time structures to run alongside each other.

1969 Presumably as a result of his contacts in England, Feldman changes his publisher. The first score to be published by Universal Edition is *In Search of an Orchestration* of 1967. From 1970, all Feldman's scores are published by Universal Edition.

1970 In 1965, Mark Rothko accepted a commission from John and Dominique de Ménil to design a series of murals for a chapel, to be built in Houston, Texas. In the last years of his life, during which Feldman and he are particularly close, Rothko mainly works on the paintings for the Houston Chapel, for which purpose he rents an enormous studio on the Upper East Side. He finishes work on the paintings in 1967, after which he begins a series of works on paper, replacing the warm colours of his earlier paintings with grey, brown, and black. Rothko does not live to see the dedication of the Houston Chapel on 27 February 1971, since he commits suicide at the age of 67 on 25 February 1970. Shortly before his death Rothko founded the Mark Rothko Foundation, which was to administer his estate 'exclusively for benevolent, scientific and/or educational projects'. Feldman is one of the directors appointed by Rothko. Later the Mark Rothko Foundation becomes the object of scandal, not however involving Feldman, on the grounds of embezzlement and contravention of Rothko's last will.

The painter Mercedes Matter founds the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, in the former building of the Whitney Museum of American Art (8 West Eighth Street), and makes Feldman, whom she has known since the early 1950s, director of her institute.

The painter Barnett Newman dies on 4 July at the age of 65.

Boulez is appointed chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. In June 1970, when he does not allow a single American composer to be represented at the Ojah Festival in California, the composers Alvin Lucier and Robert Ashley send an open letter to Lawrence Morton, the artistic director of the festival, in which they accuse Boulez of 'consistently imperialistic thought' and of attempting to 'maintain the illusion of European superiority'. The letter is signed by a further eighteen composers, including Feldman.

In the summer, Feldman teaches at Hawaii University, where a piece dedicated to his old piano teacher, *Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety*, is performed on 13 July. After separating from his second wife Cynthia and breaking off his affair with Lulla Adler, he begins a new affair with the viola player Karen Phillips, for whom he writes the pieces under the title *The Viola in My Life*, the first of a new group of works in conventional notation.

In October Philip Guston exhibits his new, figurative works for the first time, at the Marlborough Gallery. A friendship of twenty years breaks up because Feldman does not know what to say about these new works.

Morton Feldman
The Viola in my Life/ False Relationships, 1971
Vinyl LP cover
Composers Recording Inc. (CRI)

The Concord String Quartet
The Avant-Garde String Quartet in the U.S.A., 1973
Vinyl LP cover
Vox Box

1971 At the dedication of the Houston Chapel on 27 February the de Ménils commission Feldman to create a composition in memory of Mark Rothko, to be performed in the chapel. Feldman chooses the instrumentation of *Rothko Chapel* – percussion, celesta, viola, soprano, and contralto solo, as well as double mixed choir – in relationship to the spatial conditions of the chapel, and provides yet another obbligato viola part for Karen Phillips. He spends the spring of 1971 on the country estate of the de Ménils at Pontpoint, France, in order to be able to work undisturbed. The first performance of the composition takes place on 9 April 1972.

Igor Stravinsky dies on 6 April 1971 in New York and is buried on 15 April in Venice. Feldman writes in an obituary that, although in the realms of aesthetics and feeling he represents a totally opposite point of view and does not understand Stravinsky's feelings, he nevertheless feels sympathy for him. He includes in *Rothko Chapel* a repetitive melodic line that he wrote on the day of Stravinsky's funeral.

1972 From September 1971 to October 1972, with the help of a DAAD grant, Feldman lives in Berlin. On his life in Berlin, Feldman commented:

> Now I know the reason for all those German masterpieces. Life in Germany is so boring. You have to write masterpieces to keep interested. In six months I've completed the piece for three clarinets, piano and cello that I started in London [*Three Clarinets, Cello and Piano*], written a 20-minute piece for chorus and orchestra [*Chorus and Orchestra I*], and two pieces for five pianos and voices lasting 45 minutes each [*Five Pianos* and *Pianos and Voices*].

Feldman does not mention perhaps the most important piece from this period, *Cello and Orchestra*, completed in January 1972. In *Cello and Orchestra*, for the first time since the early 1950s, Feldman uses widely extended repeating patterns, such as would play a decisive role in his works of the 1980s. Almost all his compositions during the years that followed are either commissioned works or compositions written for a certain fixed constellation of interpreters. This is an outward sign that for the first time in his career as a composer Feldman was being given the public recognition due to his artistic importance.

On 4 April Stefan Wolpe dies aged 70. Fourteen years later, Feldman dedicates to him one of his last pieces, *For Stefan Wolpe*, for mixed chorus and two vibraphones.

At the first performance of *Five Pianos* on 16 July in Berlin a major confrontation takes place between Cage and Feldman. Cage, who has apparently misunderstood the instructions for performance of the score, written in a new form of 'free durational notation', plays for twenty minutes longer than the other pianists and screams at Feldman after the performance that he is a 'poetic extremist'. In August Feldman states in an English interview that it was not his but Cage's music that changed when they met in January 1950. In a further interview he adds that the actual alternative was not between Cage and Stockhausen, but between himself and Stockhausen, since Stockhausen had long ago assimilated Cage. Cage counters two years later with the statement that Feldman had made a discovery twenty years earlier and remained faithful to it up to that day.

In August Feldman teaches for the first time at the Dartington Summer School in England, where he meets the Australian pianist Roger Woodward, who replaces David Tudor for him, since Tudor has meanwhile become mainly preoccupied with electro-acoustic music. He dedicates to Woodward his *Piano and Orchestra* of 1975 and, together with Aki Takahashi, his *Triadic Memories* of 1981.

Meanwhile the efforts of Lukas Foss to find Feldman a teaching post have at last borne fruit, since Feldman moves from Berlin straight to Buffalo, where Foss is chief conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra. Feldman is first appointed Slee Professor for a year at the State University of New York at Buffalo; the following year, the appointment is extended for a year, and in 1974 it is transformed into a permanent professorship, named at Feldman's wish the Edgard Varèse Chair.

Immediately before taking up this post, Feldman clearly stresses that composition cannot be taught. He has always adopted a very ambivalent attitude to the distinction between amateur and professional composers, since he believes that these categories are based not on the work they have done, but on their respective training. He says Boulez's only criticism of his music consisted in the fact that he earned his living in his parents' business and not in the world of music. However, he develops in the course of his teaching career into a passionate teacher, which he himself links with the fact that as a little boy he wanted to be a rabbi. On another occasion, however, he stresses that the only person to learn anything in his classes is he himself, and that he always recommends his students not to go to university, but study with private teachers, as he himself had done. His teaching method seems to have stayed largely the same over the years;

> while, even before taking up his activity as a teacher, he announces that he will have to teach the students to listen, he states in 1983: 'I don't teach composition per se, but I go at composition by way of its acoustical reality. That is, I teach orchestration.'

Feldman's decision to move to Buffalo surprises all his New York friends, who would never have believed that Feldman, the archetypal New Yorker, could live in any other city but New York. The personal isolation to which he exposes himself by his move to Buffalo seems however to have helped him to concentrate totally on his work, and to develop the discoveries of the compositions he created in the 1970s and 1980s.

Morton Feldman, Perugia, Italy, Feb. 24 1974. Photo: Jan Williams

1973 *For Frank O'Hara*, the first large-scale composition to be completed by Feldman in Buffalo, is dedicated to the memory of his friend Frank O'Hara, who died seven years earlier, and is the second composition after *For Franz Kline* in which the title and dedication of the piece are identical. It was written for the tenth anniversary of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at Buffalo University and premiered on 5 December 1973 at New York's Carnegie Hall. The oboist Nora Post, a member of the Center, becomes Feldman's constant companion for the years that follow.

1975 After Feldman's professorship has been transformed into a permanent chair, he founds the June in Buffalo Festival, in which, in 1975, Cage, Brown, Wolff, and Lejaren Hiller take part; in addition, together with Jan Williams, he directs the 'Evenings for New Music' of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts. In 1975 a scandal is provoked at a performance of Cage's *Song Books* under Petr Kotik, when one of the performers strips his partner naked on stage, which angers Cage so much that on the following day he allowed himself to comment, 'Whenever people do the worst they can, they do it in my name'. In his indignation over this incident, Cage threatens never to return to Buffalo, a threat which however he did not carry out.

Bunita Marcus from Madison, Wisconsin, begins to study with Feldman. She is his most important student and is encouraged by him by all possible means. After gaining her doctorate in 1981, she refuses Feldman's proposal of marriage and moves to New York, remaining however his inspiration and intimate companion throughout the last decade of his life.

1976 In the spring, Feldman begins preliminary work on his Beckett opera, commissioned by Teatro dell'Opera in Rome.

In June, Feldman takes part in a tour by the Creative Associates of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, which includes the Near East. In Shiraz he buys his first Oriental rug.

In July, Feldman completes three compositions in which he is preparing himself to work with a Beckett text: *Orchestra* (3 July), *Elemental Procedures* (18 July), and *Routine Investigations* (24 July).

After attending the premiere of *Orchestra* on 18 September in Glasgow, Feldman comes to Berlin to meet Samuel Beckett and ask him for an original text for his opera. Although Beckett is at first not inclined to write an operatic libretto, in conversation with Feldman he after all develops an interest in the project and, before the end of September, sends the text of *Neither* to Buffalo. Feldman begins work on the opera even before Beckett's text arrives in Buffalo, and completes it on 30 January 1977.

1977 On 22 January *Elemental Procedures*, the central composition of Feldman's Beckett Trilogy, receives its first performance in Cologne.

On 8 June the first performance of *Neither* takes place at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, conducted by Marcello Panni with a set by Michelangelo Pistoletto; the Roman performances of *Neither* are greeted by tumultuous protests by the Italian audiences, who clearly cannot endure an opera without conventional dramatisation. After a revival in October 1978 in Berlin, at which Beckett is said to have been present, and a concert performance in New York on 21 November 1978, *Neither* establishes itself after Feldman's death on the programmes of international opera houses.

Presumably on the occasion of the premiere of *Neither*, Feldman visits Cy Twombly in his studio in Rome and is enthusiastic about Twombly's works, which at this time are largely unknown in the USA.

1978 In a particular kind of midlife crisis, Feldman asks himself if music is actually an art form or just a superior form of entertainment. In a situation where his career is proceeding with such success that he need no longer concern himself with commissions and performances, Feldman makes a decision to risk writing the kind of music in which he would no longer worry about the duration of the composition, bearing in mind the conventional concert situation, the difficulties facing the performers, the possibility of a performance, the expectations of the public, and above all his own expectations, in order to find out if music can be treated as an art form. The results of this decision are compositions of longer and longer duration, culminating in the five-hour-long *String Quartet 2* of 1983.

Later Feldman announces that at the moment when he wanted to free himself from the audience, he won a new audience. He is referring to the fact that the first two pieces, each lasting an hour and a half, that is, the *String Quartet* of 1979 (premiered in 1980) and *Triadic Memories* of 1981 (premiered in 1981), are enthusiastically acclaimed by both audiences and critics. 'Sometimes one wins when one thinks one has lost', is Feldman's laconic comment on this surprise.

1979 Feldman's most extended orchestral composition, *Violin and Orchestra* of 1979, cannot be performed at the Warsaw Autumn music festival because the soloist, Paul Zukofsky, refuses to fly to Poland on the one-way ticket sent to him by the festival organisers. For this reason *Violin and Orchestra* is not performed until 1984, in Frankfurt under the direction of Cristobal Halffter, with Zukofsky as soloist.

1980 Feldman meets the pianist Aki Takahashi, who is a member of the Creative Associates of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts in the last year of its existence. On 24 February she gives a solo concert in the newly built Baird Recital Hall of the State University of New York at Buffalo. While *Triadic Memories* of 1981 is still dedicated jointly to Roger Woodward and Takahashi, all Feldman's later piano works are created with Takahashi's piano playing as a constant point of reference.

In the early 1980s Feldman must also have met the Italian painter Francesco Clemente through a common friend, the anthropologist and art collector Francesco Pellizzi. It was Pellizzi too who recommended to him Frances Yates's treatise *The Art of Memory*, which is of decisive importance for his reflection on the function of musical forms. Clemente, who as co-founder of Transavanguardia, the Italian form of postmodern painting, is on the crest of a wave of success, is the only visual artist with whom Feldman has close contact in the 1980s. In Clemente's studio in SoHo, New York City, Feldman organises several concerts, including the premiere on 20 November 1986 of his last piano piece, *Palais de Mari*, dedicated to Clemente and commissioned by Bunita Marcus, and performed by Marcus herself.

On 4 May, Feldman's *String Quartet*, his first composition of one and a half hours' duration, is premiered at the New York Drawing Center by the Columbia String Quartet. The headline of the review in the *New York Village Voice* is 'Feldman draws blood'; the reviewer, Greg Sandow, draws a direct parallel between Feldman and Beckett and writes that he has 'never heard music that better than Feldman's evokes Beckett's exhausting "chronicle of moribunds in their courses"'.

The painter Philip Guston dies on 7 June at Woodstock, New York, aged 67. Although Feldman and he were no longer speaking to each other during the last ten years of his life, Guston chooses his old friend to read the Kaddish at his grave. In the following year, Feldman ends a catalogue text for an exhibition of Guston's late work with the words:

> There is no attempt in these last paintings towards any aspect of reconciliation with his past concerns. It was a new life, in which his past skills helped him survive on the new ground he immigrated to. All it meant for Guston was to pack only what he needed and go in search for the country of his heart.

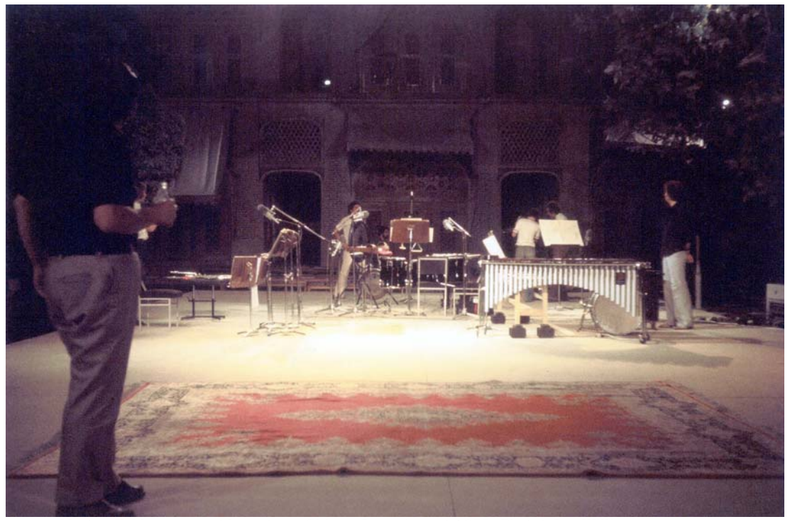
1981 On the occasion of the Californian premiere of his String quartet by the Kronos Quartet, Feldman gives a talk on 26 February at the California Institute of the Arts on 'Twelve tone technique in Varèse's Déserts', in which he very soon diverges from his actual topic and starts to speak about the latest developments in his own music. After the performance, which is celebrated with 'standing ovations', Feldman informs the 'young composers' there that they are 'dead' and should be 'born again to acoustic instruments'.

1982 On 13 March the composition *For John Cage*, lasting an hour and a half, is given its first performance by Paul Zukofsky and Aki Takahashi at a concert on the occasion of Cage's seventieth birthday. In an interview, Feldman expresses annoyance that even at a marathon concert in honour of John Cage, whose name stands for the liberation of music, he is asked how long his piece lasts.

In the spring Feldman writes *Three Voices* for the singer Joan La Barbara, in which two voices are played on tape and the third is sung by the singer on stage. Here Feldman uses parts of the poem *Wind* by Frank O'Hara, dedicated to him, which he set to music in its entirety in 1962 in *The O'Hara Songs*. He explains:

> One of my closest friends, the painter Philip Guston, had just died; Frank O'Hara had died several years before. I saw the piece with Joan in front and these two loudspeakers behind her. There is something kind of tombstoney about the look of loudspeakers. I thought of the piece as an exchange of the live voice with the dead ones – a mixture of the living and the dead.

Morton Feldman at Piano, London, England, August 1977. Photo: Jan Williams



Morton Feldman on outdoor stage, Shiraz, Iran, August 1977. Photo: Jan Williams

Morton Feldman with Eberhard Blum and Bunita Marcus, Berlin, Germany, 1979. Photo: Jan Williams

On 17 April, two days after completing *Three Voices*, Feldman gives a talk in Toronto, in which for the first time he reports comprehensively on his development as a composer after *Neither*. In the second half of the year Feldman works on his *String Quartet 2*, completing it on 27 January of the following year.

1983 In August Feldman takes part in a Contemporary Music Festival in South Africa, organised by Jacques de Vos Malan, a former student of Feldman's, among others.

On 19 November Cage and Feldman meet for a conversation which is recorded by Francesco Pellizzi and published in his journal *RES*.

On 4 December the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation stops the transmission of an important football match in order to be able to transmit the whole of the five-hour-long premiere of *String Quartet 2*, which it had commissioned.

1984 In February Feldman gives a talk at the Theater am Turm in Frankfurt and a seminar under the title, proposed by Walter Zimmermann, 'The future of local music'. In April, Zimmermann organises a wide-ranging retrospective of Feldman's works in Cologne, where on 5 April, among other pieces, *Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano* of 1980 finally receives its first performance.

On 26 July Feldman gives a major lecture at the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music, at the invitation of the radio station Hessischer Rundfunk, as an introduction to his *String Quartet 2*, whose European premiere has taken place the evening before, performed by the Kronos Quartet. After the performance of *String Quartet 2* in a version abridged to four hours, the 87-year-old Alfred Schlee, former director of Universal Edition, embraces Feldman saying: 'Splendid. It seemed to last only 25 minutes.'

With *For Philip Guston*, his only composition of 1984, Feldman's late work begins, characterised by a resumption of the acoustical resources and the multiplicity of shapes of his previous compositions.

1985 On 3 March Feldman meets La Monte Young for a conversation which is re-corded by Francesco Pellizzi and once again published in his journal *RES*.

On 27 March Feldman, as former director of the New York Studio School, gives a talk there on 'Metaphor'.

In April, Feldman's collected writings are published under the title *Essays* in an edition produced by Walter Zimmermann, which includes excerpts from the Frankfurt seminar and a complete transcription of the Darmstadt lecture of 1984.

Presumably in this year, Feldman tries to persuade Beckett to write a second opera text for him, but Beckett declines at a meeting in Paris.

After attending the Festival Nieuwe Muziek for the first time in 1977, Feldman spends several days in Middelburg in 1985, 1986 and 1987, giving a great number of talks and seminars, which can be seen as his theoretical legacy. Feldman's last composition, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello*, is dedicated to the director of the Festival, Ad van 't Veer.

During his free semester Feldman is artist in residence at the California Institute of the Arts.

1986 On 21 and 22 February, on the occasion of Feldman's sixtieth birthday, the California Institute of the Arts puts on three concerts with music by Feldman and by composers to whom he feels close. Feldman's own compositions performed at these concerts are *Four songs to E.E. Cummings*, *First Principles*, *For Frank O'Hara*, and *For Philip Guston*. The other composers are Cage, Varèse, Wolpe, the Japanese composer Jo Kondo, whom Feldman met in New York in 1977–8 and of whose music he thought very highly, and Feldman's students Bunita Marcus and Nils Vigeland.

A transcription of Feldman's first Middelburg lecture of 2 July 1985 is included in the Feldman issue of *Musik-Konzepte*, published in Munich in May 1986.

On 30 May *Coptic Light*, Feldman's last orchestral work, is performed for the first time by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Gunther Schuller. Feldman is deeply shattered by the remark by *The New York Times* reviewer that he is 'the most boring composer in musical history', since he is forced to realise that even after his great successes in Europe he has no chance of recognition in American musical life.

During a further free semester, Feldman is artist in residence at the University of California, San Diego. Apparently Feldman applied for a chair at this university shortly before his death, finding life in Buffalo less and less satisfying after the cuts in the university budget during the 1980s. After Feldman's death, the English composer Brian Ferneyhough is appointed to this post.

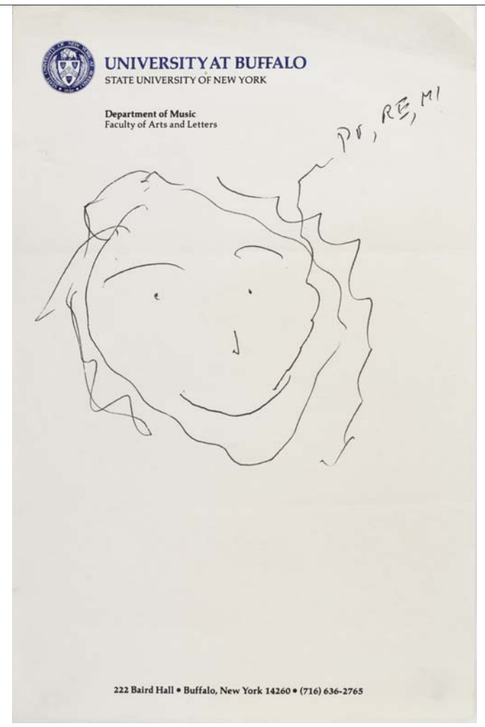
In the summer, Feldman is again the guest of the Hessischer Rundfunk at the International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt, where he gives a talk on 24 July about the composition, first performed the evening before, *For Christian Wolff*, for flute, piano and celesta.

1987 Probably in the previous year Beckett, possibly as a result of Feldman's request for a second opera text, proposes him as composer for the music to his radio play *Words and Music*, which is to be revived as part of a Beckett festival by the New York radio station Voices International. Feldman enthusiastically accepts the commission, seeing it 'as a sort of tribute to Beckett'. The production takes place in March and April in New York as a combined enterprise by Voices International and the German station Westdeutscher Rundfunk. Immediately after 'Samuel Beckett, *Words and Music*' Feldman writes his last dedication piece, *For Samuel Beckett*, for chamber orchestra, which is premiered on 12 June in Amsterdam. On 10 March Feldman is interviewed on the radio by the producer of 'Samuel Beckett, *Words and Music*', Everett Frost, about the way he has handled Beckett's text. He speaks on the same topic on 12 April at the Detroit Institute of Arts. From 17 to 22 March he is at the centre of the New Music Days at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts in Canada.

In June, Feldman marries his student Barbara Monk. A few days later, in the course of an apparently innocuous operation on a stomach ulcer, he is diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas. He is treated with radiotherapy and chemotherapy, but insists on being present at the premiere of his last composition, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello*, on 4 July in Middelburg, and gives a final cycle of his Middelburg lectures on this occasion. When saying goodbye to Advan 't Veer, Feldman makes him promise to hold a further master-class in the autumn. Back in Buffalo, he undergoes further treatment, but this is unsuccessful because his condition has progressed too far. On 3 September Feldman dies in Buffalo at the age of 61.

Feldman was to have given a talk on 9 September in Los Angeles on the occasion of Cage's seventy-fifth birthday, which he wanted to call 'Practically alive with John Cage'. Instead, Cage gives a commemorative speech in which he recalls that Feldman, when in hospital, said that they had had a good life and he had no regrets. Cage performs his *Scenario for M.F.* (with numbers in celebration of his sixtieth birthday), which he had written the previous year for Feldman's sixtieth birthday.

The funeral ceremonies take place on the same day in New York. Bunita Marcus gives the main address. The commemorative edition of *MusikTexte*, published in Cologne in December of the same year, includes a transcription of the Middelburg lecture of 2 July 1987, one of the last talks to be given by Feldman.



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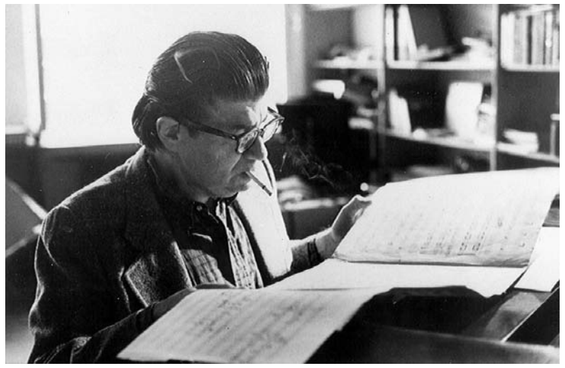
Morton Feldman
Bunita Marcus singing Do re mi, c.1983
Pen on paper
21.6 x 14 cm
Private collection



Morton Feldman examining score, Cologne, 1978. Photo: Roberto Masotti

Mary Vaughan / Sampler
18th century sampler
1746
Cotton and linen
52 x 24 cm glazed and framed
Private Collection

P. 55
Paul Brach
Flag, 1958
Oil on canvas
15.2 x 21.28 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© Paul Brach. All Rights Reserved IVARO, Ireland 2010

P. 245
Francesco Clemente
Portrait of Morton Feldman, 1982-87
Watercolour on paper
36.2 x 50.8 cm
Collection of Alba and Francesco Clemente
© Francesco Clemente Studio

P. 247
Francesco Clemente
The Magic Wand, 1987
Watercolour on paper
121.9 x 30.5 cm in 3 panels
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© Francesco Clemente Studio

P. 42
Willem de Kooning
Dog, c.1949-53
Pencil on paper
23 x 15 cm
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
© 2010 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/ IVARO, Ireland

P. 110
Willem de Kooning
Drawing, 1967
Charcoal on paper (on paper mount)
61 x 47.63 cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy The Willem de Kooning Foundation
© 2010 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/ IVARO, Ireland

P. 111
Willem de Kooning
Untitled, 1969
Charcoal on paper
57.15 x 45.7 cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy The Willem de Kooning Foundation
© 2010 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/ IVARO, Ireland

P. 225
Willem de Kooning
<no title>, c.1970-74
Oil on vellum on canvas, with masking tape
186.7 x 107 cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy The Willem de Kooning Foundation
© 2010 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/ IVARO, Ireland

P. 47
Philip Guston
Untitled, 1952
Oil on canvas
102.2 x 90.8 cm
Private Collection
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 48
Philip Guston
Untitled, 1952
Ink on paper
45.7 x 58.5 cm
Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Gift of Musa and Tom Mayer
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 49
Philip Guston
Untitled 'For Morty', 1952
Ink on paper
43.18 x 54.61 cm
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
Mildred Bork Connors Fund, 2004
2004:17
Digital Image © 2010. Albright Knox Art Gallery/ Art Resource, NY/ Scala, Florence
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 45
Philip Guston
Painting, 1954
Oil on canvas
160.6 x 152.7 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund, 1956
Accession Number: 7.1956
Digital Image © 2010, The Museum of Modern Art/ Scala, Florence
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 50
Philip Guston
Untitled, 1954
Ink on paper
43.2 x 58.4 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 51
Philip Guston
Untitled, 1954
Ink on paper
45.1 x 61 cm
Timothy Taylor Gallery, London
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 97
Philip Guston
Dark Day, 1962
Oil on canvas
76.8 x 101 cm
Sean Scully, New York
Photo © Alan Zindman, New York
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 102
Philip Guston
Untitled, 1966
Lithograph (Inscribed 'Artist's Proof for Morty')
54.6 x 73.7 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 103
Philip Guston
Untitled, 1967
Ink on paper
36.8 x 41.9 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© The Estate of Philip Guston

PP. 99-101
Philip Guston
Homage to Morty Feldman, undated
Blue pen on ruled paper
Each sheet 27.9 x 21.6 cm/11 inscribed sheets
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© The Estate of Philip Guston

P. 104
Jasper Johns
Drawing number 2 'For Morty', 1968
Ink and watercolour on paper
24 x 18 cm framed
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© Jasper Johns/ VAGA, New York/ DACS, London 2010

P. 105
Jasper Johns
Hatteras, 1963
Lithograph
104 x 75 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Permanent Loan, the American Ireland Fund
Photo © Denis Mortell.
© Jasper Johns/ VAGA, New York/ DACS, London 2010

P. 301
Alex Katz
Collage for Meridian, 1960
Pastel
19 x 22.35 cm
Collection of Alex Katz
© Alex Katz, DACS, London/ VAGA, New York 2010

P. 52
Frederick Kiesler
Untitled 'For Morti Feldman', 1954
Ink on music paper
25.4 x 30.5 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© 2010 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

P. 53
Frederick Kiesler
Untitled, c.1954
Ink on music paper
27.9 x 35.6 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© 2010 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

P. 249
R.B. Kitaj
Fifties Grand Swank (Morton Feldman) From 'First Series: Some Poets 1966-69', 1980
Screenprint
Paper size 80 x 37.8 cm
Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd
© On behalf of the R.B Kitaj Estate

P. 59
Franz Kline
Untitled, c.1948
Ink on paper
45.7 x 53.3 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat
© Franz Kline. All Rights Reserved IVARO/ ARS NY 2010

P. 61
Franz Kline
Untitled (Study for Wanamaker Block), c.1954-55
Ink on paper
43 x 39.7 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat
© Franz Kline. All Rights Reserved IVARO, Ireland 2010

P. 95
Franz Kline
Black Iris, 1961
Oil on canvas
275 x 206.4 x 6.4 cm
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
The Panza Collection
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P. 231
Sol LeWitt
Untitled Triptych
Magic Marker, ink and pen
21 x 20.3 cm each panel
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
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P. 31
Piet Mondrian
Composition No. III / Fox Trot B with Black, Red, Blue and Yellow, 1929
Oil on canvas
45.4 x 45.4 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Collection Société Anonyme
© 2010 Mondrian/ Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Virginia USA

P. 33
Piet Mondrian
Composition II with Red, Black, Blue and Yellow, 1929
Oil on canvas
45.4 x 45.4 cm
The National Museum in Belgrade
© 2010 Mondrian/ Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Virginia USA

P. 113
Barnett Newman
Untitled, 1960
Brush and ink on paper
35.4 x 25.4 cm
Gift of Mrs. Barnett Newman in honour of Frank Stella (PA 1954)
Addison Gallery of American Art, Philips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts
© ARS, NY and DACS, London 2010

P. 35
Jackson Pollock
Number 23, 1948
Enamel on gesso on paper
57.5 x 78.4 cm
Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery (purchased out of funds provided by Mr and Mrs H.J. Heinz II and H.J. Heinz Co. Ltd) 1960
Image © Tate London, 2010
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation ARS, NY and DACS, London 2010.

P. 229
Robert Rauschenberg
Tanya Grossman, 1974
Lithograph
57.6 x 39.4 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© Estate of Robert Rauschenberg. DACS, London/ VAGA, New York 2010

P. 41
Ad Reinhardt
Brick Painting, 1950
Oil on canvas
152.5 x 102 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat
© ARS, NY and DACS, London 2010

P. 37
Mark Rothko
No 8 [Multiform], 1949
Oil and mixed media on canvas
228.3 x 167.3 cm
Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.43.147.
Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington
© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko ARS, NY and DACS, London

P. 39
Mark Rothko
The Green Stripe, 1955
Oil on canvas
170.2 x 141.7 cm
The Ménil Collection, Houston
Photo: Hickey Robertson, Houston
© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko ARS, NY and DACS, London

P. 79
Sonja Sekula
The Sun Room, 1948
Oil and pencil on canvas
162 x 107 cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy the Kunstmuseum Winterthur
© The Estate of Sonja Sekula

P. 77
Sonja Sekula
Silence, 1951
Oil on canvas
147 x 101 cm
Kunsthaus Zurich, Gift of the artist's mother, 1966
© The Estate of Sonja Sekula

P. 78
Sonja Sekula
A Small Small Talk book
Work on paper
6 x 12 cm approx
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York
© The Estate of Sonja Sekula

P. 107
Cy Twombly,
A Murder of Passion, 1960
Lead pencil, wax crayon, oil paint on canvas
174 x 200 cm
Collection of J & M Donnelly
© Cy Twombly

P. 109
Cy Twombly
Untitled, 1965
Graphite and coloured crayon on paper
67.2 x 86.2 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK
Photo: Hickey Robertson, Houston
© Cy Twombly

P. 227
Cy Twombly
Untitled (Leonardo drawing), 1971
Graphite, crayon, pastel, marker, tape and Xerox collage on paper
81.3 x 24.75 cm
Collection Helios Art Trust, UK
Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston
© Cy Twombly

P. 56
Esteban Vicente
Untitled, 1958
Oil on canvas
76.2 x 96.5 cm
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia
© Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia

P. 57
Esteban Vicente
Number 5, 1950
Oil on canvas
89 x 115 cm
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia
© Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia

PP. 302-303
Claude Debussy
Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, 1963 Robert Owen Lehman Foundation, Washington
Musical score
35.6 x 29.2 cm
Private Collection
Photo © Ellen Page Wilson Photography, New York

P. 34
Morton Feldman
Jackson Pollock, 1951
Fair copy, p. 1
35.6 x 27.8 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 94
Morton Feldman
For Franz Kline [first version], 1962
Fair copy, p. 1
35.5 x 27.9 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 2
Morton Feldman
Vertical Thoughts 3, 1963
Score draft with sketches, 1 p.
31.7 x 24.2 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 43
Morton Feldman
De Kooning, 1963
Score draft, 1 p.
31.8 x 24.3 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 223
Morton Feldman
For Mark Rothko [later called Rothko Chapel], 1971
Score draft, p. 1
30.5 x 22.9 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 90
Morton Feldman
In Memory of my Feelings [later called For Frank O'Hara], 1973
Score draft, p. 1
34.0 x 26.9 cm
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 26
Morton Feldman
Give my Regards to Eighth Street, undated
Sketch in notebook [notebook 14], p. 13
17.8 x 20.1 cm each page
Morton Feldman Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland
© Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland

P. 91
Morton Feldman
For Frank O'Hara, 1973
Transparency, score
11 pages
On loan from Universal Edition (London) Ltd.
Photo © FXP Photography, London
© Universal Edition (London) Ltd.

P. 236
Morton Feldman
For John Cage, 1982
Transparency, score
20 pages
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Transparency, score
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Morton Feldman
Draft of Manuscript for *Crippled Symmetry*, 1983
Musical score:
Ink, pencil, red pen, green marker and masking tape
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Drawing 'If Only I can sing like Bunny', c.1983
Pen on paper
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Bunita Marcus singing Do re mi, c.1983
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New Directions in Music 2 / Morton Feldman, 1959
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Record courtesy John Prokop

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Vinyl LP cover
Composers Recording Inc. (CRI)
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The Avant-Garde String Quartet in the U.S.A., 1973
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Record courtesy Bunita Marcus
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Elizabeth Smith/ Sampler
Adam and Eve, 1810
Silk and linen sampler
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Kazak Diamond Rug, South Caucasus, c.1880
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Baluch Rug, 'Jasper Johns', Persia/ Afghanistan, c.1890
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Bergama Prayer Rug, Turkey, c.1880
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Turkish rug, possibly Bergama region, c. 1880
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Mary Vaughan/ Sampler
18th century sampler, 1746
Cotton and linen
52 x 24 cm glazed and framed
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P. 240
Neither
Second night,
10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell' Opera
Text by Samuel Beckett, music by Morton Feldman, stage composition and direction by Michelangelo Pistoletto, conductor Marcello Panni, soprano Martha Hanneman.
Image courtesy Michelangelo Pistoletto
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Neither
Fifth night,
10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell' Opera
Text by Samuel Beckett, music by Morton Feldman, stage composition and direction by Michelangelo Pistoletto, conductor Marcello Panni, soprano Martha Hanneman.
Image courtesy Michelangelo Pistoletto
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P. 241
Neither
First night,
10-17 June 1976
Roma, Teatro dell' Opera
Text by Samuel Beckett, music by Morton Feldman, stage composition and direction by Michelangelo Pistoletto, conductor Marcello Panni, soprano Martha Hanneman.
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Neither
Fourth night,
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Morton Feldman
Portrait in Hat, undated
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Morton Feldman in Philip Guston's New York Studio, c.1965
Image courtesy David McKee
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Morton Feldman at the Perisphere, New York World's Fair
New York, USA, 1939
Photographer unknown
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Morton Feldman, composer at piano, looking down
Image courtesy Music Library, State University of New York at Buffalo: Photographic prints 1971-1980
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Music: Morton Feldman; Direction: Michelangelo Pistoletto
Photo: Courtesy Opera Paese
Image courtesy Michelangelo Pistoletto

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Morton Feldman in Paris shop
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Morton Feldman portrait with music score of *Neither* in background (also used with superimposed image of Samuel Beckett), undated
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Francesco Clemente and Morton Feldman, c.1986-7
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Morton Feldman with Francesco Clemente, c.1986-7
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Alba Clemente, Morton Feldman and Francesco Clemente, c.1986-7
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PP. 294-295
Morton Feldman supervises the installation of his Steinway piano in his new studio at the New York Studio School, New York City, where he has just assumed the position of Dean of the School
1970
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Portrait with cigarette, Cologne, 1978
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Morton Feldman on outdoor stage
Shiraz, Iran, August 1977
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Morton Feldman
Perugia, Italy, Feb. 24, 1974
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Morton Feldman examining score, Cologne, 1978
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Morton Feldman with Eberhard Blum and Bunita Marcus
Berlin, Germany, 1979
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Morton Feldman
Land's End, England, August 1977
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Morton Feldman: Essays
Walter Zimmerman (ed.)
Kerpen: Beginner Press, 1985

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Morton Feldman in Middelburg, Words on Music: Lectures and Conversations (Vol. 1)
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Stefan Wolpe in his cabin in the woods at Black Mountain College, c.1956
Photo © Clemens Kalischer

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Composer Edgard Varèse attending art exhibit, 01 April 1953
Photographic print
Photo © Allan Grant/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

P. 11
Aaron Copland, composer lecturing in June in Buffalo seminar, composers' workshop
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Image courtesy Music Library, State University of New York at Buffalo: Photographic prints 1971-1980
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Piet Mondrian: Last Studio, 15 East 59th Street, New York in 1944 with *Victory Boogie Woogie*, 1944 and the Wallworks. Furniture made by Mondrian
Photo: Harry Holtzman.
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Morton Feldman/ Earle Brown, 1962
Vinyl LP cover
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Morton Feldman and Philip Guston in Guston's New York Studio, c.1965
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P. 19
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Rome, Italy, 1968
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Oil on canvas
30.5 x 30.5 cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy Marlborough Fine Art (London) Ltd.
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For Morton Feldman, 2000
Oil on linen
243.8 x 487.7 cm
Private Collection
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BRIAN O'DOHERTY

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Barbara Novak, Brian O'Doherty, Morton Feldman outside the Rothko Chapel, Houston, 1976
Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston
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Morton Feldman and Brian O'Doherty
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Notepaper
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Morton Feldman at restaurant table
Venice, Italy, May 1979
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Philip Guston
Friend — to MF., 1978
Oil on canvas
172.7 x 223.5 cm
Purchased with funds from the Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1991.48
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Single music sheet, hand drawn
29.72 x 21.59 cm
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Oil on canvas
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Robert Rauschenberg
Untitled Black Painting, c.1952-3
Oil and collage on canvas
198.1 x 134.6 cm approx
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Morton Feldman
The King of Denmark, 1964
Composition for Percussion
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Patrick Ireland
Morton's Journey
Rope Drawing # 86, 1987
Doorway, first room
Nylon, water-based housepaint
Artspace, San Francisco
Image courtesy the artist

P. 75
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Detail of Morton's Journey
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Second room
Nylon, water-based housepaint
Artspace, San Francisco
Image courtesy the artist

FRANCESCO PELLIZZI

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Melanesia, Malekula. Head shaped house finial with lizard on back.
Fern wood
88.9 x 33 cm
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Melanesia, Vanuatu, Malekula.
Fern wood figure
241.3 x 45.7 x 43.2 cm
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Untitled, 1954
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Wood, glass, mirrors, fabric, twine, wire, wood spoons, oil crayon, house paint, wax
203.2 x 35.3 x 28 cm
The Ménil Collection, Houston
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Fluorescent alkyd and graphite
223.5 x 223.5 cm
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Ink on paper
45.7 x 61 cm
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Treatise on the Veil (Second Version), 1970
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Oil-based house paint, wax crayon on canvas
300.1 x 999.8 cm
The Ménil Collection, Houston
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(cont'd. over)

BUNITA MARCUS

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Elizabeth Smith/ Sampler
Adam and Eve, 1810
Silk and linen sampler
34.3 x 36.8 cm
Private Collection
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Anon/ Rug
Kazak Diamond Rug, South Caucasus, c.1880
Wool
189.9 x 125.7 cm
Private Collection
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Baluch Rug, 'Jasper Johns', Persia/ Afghanistan, c.1890
Wool
164.5 x 117.5 cm
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Morton Feldman
Flute and Orchestra
1978
Manuscript, score
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Anon/ Rug
Bergama Prayer Rug, Turkey, c.1880
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***RES* ARTICLE, BARBARA MONK FELDMAN:**

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Landscape with Pyramus and Thisbe, 1650
Oil on canvas
195.2 x 273.5 cm
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main
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Edgard Varèse
Intégrales
Musical score
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Oil on canvas and oil on masking tape on canvas
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In the Kitchen Garden, 1881
45.5 x 55 cm
The National Gallery. Prague
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Barbara Monk Feldman
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Manuscript, score
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FRANCESCO PELLIZZI [CONVERSATION]

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Morton Feldman, composer examining rug
Image courtesy Music Library, State University of New York at Buffalo: Photographic prints 1971-1980
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Africa, Dogon.
Male Torso
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52.1 x 16.5 x 19.1 cm
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Morton Feldman with John Cage, undated
Photographer unknown
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Morton Feldman examining Persian frieze
Persepolis, Iran, August 1977
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Anon/ Rug
Village rug
Wool
112.4 x 143.5 cm
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Jackson Pollock
No. 492, c.1939-40
Red pencil on blue/ green paper
16.5 x 10.2 cm
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Africa, Tiv.
Housepost, standing male figure
Wood
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John Cage, composer having a drink with Morton Feldman
1975
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Anon/ Rug
Turkish rug, possibly Bergama region, c.1880
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COLOPHON

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New Galleries

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Juan Manuel Bonet

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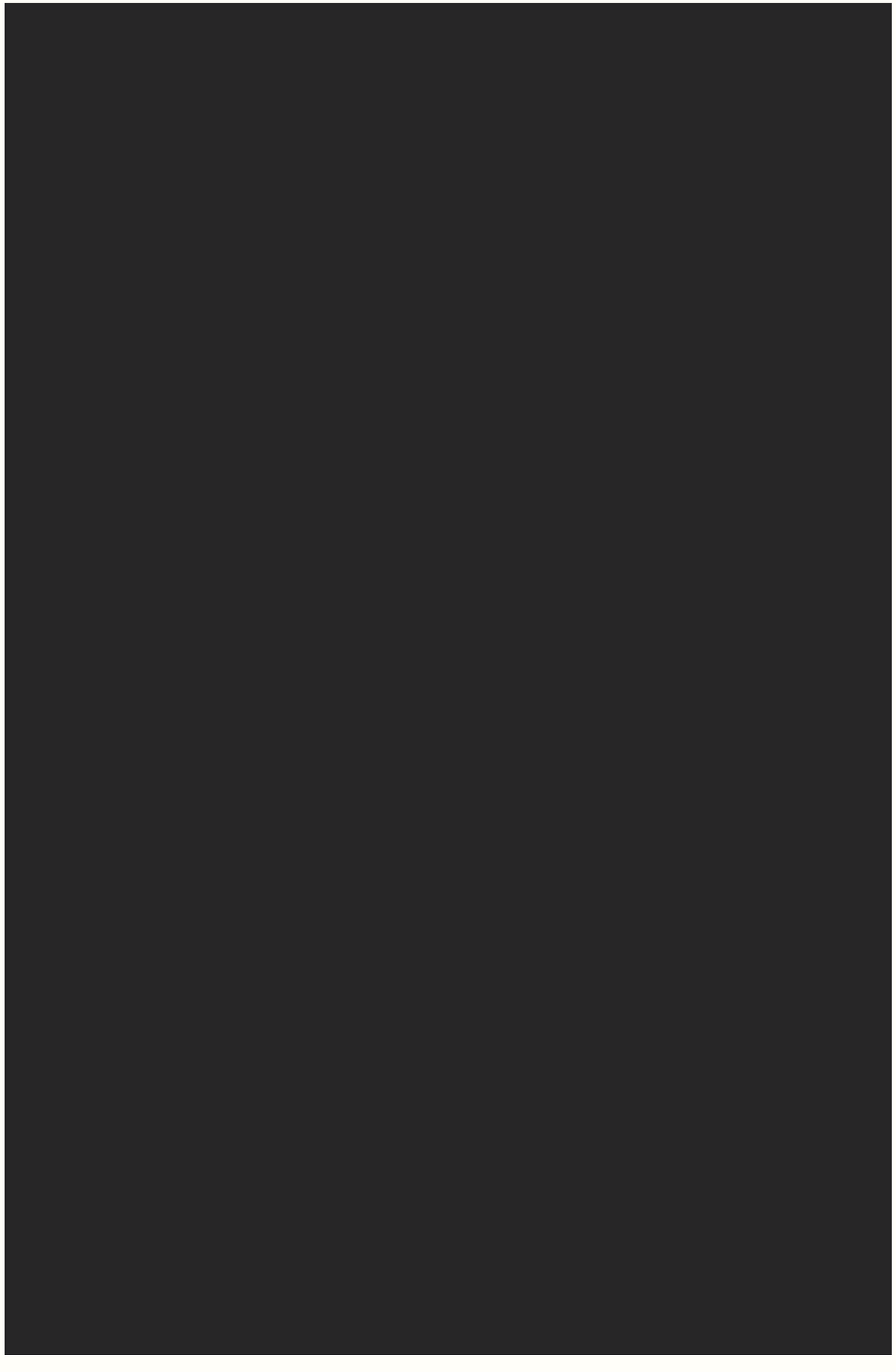

Irish Museum of Modern Art
Áras Nua-Ealaíne na hÉireann

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THE IRISH TIMES irishtimes.com

Morton Feldman is widely considered one of the most influential composers of the 20th century. Known for his experiments with musical notation and for championing ideas of indeterminacy, Feldman found inspiration in the work of the New York School of painters, the majority of whom he formed close and lasting relationships with. Revolving around a project he curated in 1967 entitled *Six Painters,* this catalogue—which accompanies the first major exhibition to address Feldman's relationship with the visual arts—considers the impact that modern abstract art had on Feldman's own musical compositions, tracing direct links and hidden meanings. Featuring works from the original six painters —Philip Guston, Franz Kline, Piet Mondrian, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko—this publication also includes works by many other artists whom Feldman admired. The scope of this catalogue is similarly expanded through the inclusion of various ephemera, including musical scores, record covers, photographs, and works from Feldman's own collection, including a number of Oriental rugs, the abstract qualities of which equally impacted his musical experiments.

Contributors: Dore Ashton, Juan Manuel Bonet, Barbara Monk Feldman, Enrique Juncosa, Seán Kissane (Ed), Bunita Marcus, Brian O' Doherty, Francesco Pellizzi, and Kevin Volans. Also included is a previously unpublished conversation between Feldman and Francesco Pellizzi, alongside a detailed chronology by Sebastian Claren.

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