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**Morton Feldman's Clarinet Works:
A Study Through the Words of the Note Man**

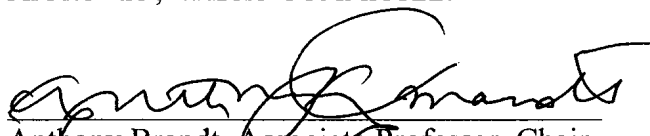
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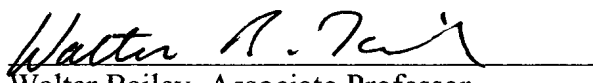
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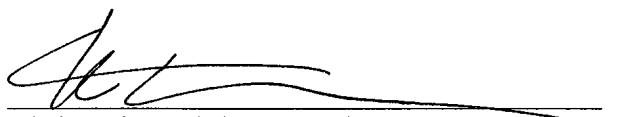
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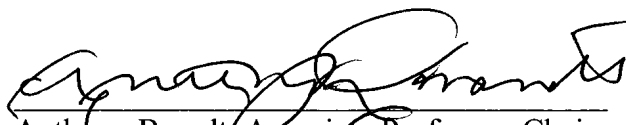
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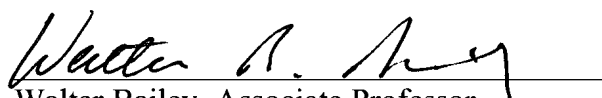
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ABSTRACT

Morton Feldman's Clarinet Works: A Study Through the Words of the Note Man

By

Matthew P. Nelson

Morton Feldman's writings, lectures, and interviews reveal a unified and consistent compositional drive towards a static musical rhetoric, or, to use his term, Time Undisturbed. Essential to his outlook was the notion of orchestration as the primary compositional determinant: Feldman's starting point was not a theme in the conventional sense, but the sound of a particular instrument playing a particular note. His works for clarinet—*Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* (1961), *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* (1971), *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* (1981), and *Clarinet and String Quartet* (1983)—cover the major periods of Feldman's career. As such, they are touchstone works for studying the evolution of Feldman's methods; because they share the clarinet in common, they provide an ideal means for studying Feldman's abiding pre-occupation with timbre as his primary material. Feldman's unique notational styles vary considerably from piece to piece, but he strategically orients each in such a way as to pursue his fundamental goal of Time Undisturbed. Feldman is the rare composer where verbal intention and musical means form an unshakable and poetic bond. Drawing on Feldman's writings and close analyses of the scores, this paper will demonstrate how all of these works reflect Feldman's central concerns, drawing on the potentials of their respective orchestrations to articulate Feldman's unique musical vision.

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CHAPTER 1

FELDMAN AND SOUND

I don't even know to what extent Immanuel Kant was right when he talks about intuitive knowledge. I don't even know if I really believe in it. But you have to know your instrument. You have to know what happens in registration. You have to know how to notate very difficult images. Isn't that composition?¹

I.

Morton Feldman wrote and lectured extensively on the topics of his compositions and his compositional process. These exegeses span his entire career, often straddling the tenuous space between justification and enlightenment, yet his theories remain remarkably consistent throughout despite changes in his means of realization. According to these documents, all of Feldman's music aspires to the constant ideal of unfettered sound, or "Time Undisturbed."² He refers to orchestration and notation, along with symmetry, register, surface, patterns, and repetition, as the materials and tools he uses to achieve sound-based compositions. He often describes his attitude toward these elements in a rigid, absolute way, leading to a puzzling crowd of principles; but each, taken on its own terms, provides fruitful lines of investigation in the scores.

Analyses of Feldman's work tend to be buttressed by his testimony, though often in a selective way. A piece might have a conspicuous point of entry, such as unusual

¹ Morton Feldman, "Darmstadt Lecture," transcription by Hanfried Blume and Ken Muller, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 206.

² Morton Feldman, "Between Categories," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 88.

notation (e.g. *Structures*), instrumentation (*Rothko Chapel*) or patterns (*For Phillip Guston*). How these more conspicuous features cohere within Feldman's unified theory of sound can be less obvious.

Judging by the level of careful detail and consistency in his writings, Feldman genuinely seems to have desired a public understanding of the underlying principles and processes in his music. By allying himself with such New York School visual artists as Philip Guston, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko, he found a very public and relatively consistent analogue that could lend a certain gravitas to his brilliantly executed theoretical discourse. In the case of the New York School visual artists, paint and canvas themselves would many times become the subjects of a composition, interpreted by early critics as "action painting" for the myriad ways in which the composer's moving hand was readily apparent in an otherwise static work. Feldman, though working within a contrasting sonic medium that unfolds and changes over a period of time, yet employed a similar philosophy, allowing tangible elements such as the orchestration and notation of a piece (as distinct from counterpoint) to dictate its resultant sound world. When asked what he took from the Abstract Expressionist painters, he replied, "Maybe the insight where process could be fantastic subject-matter."³

Morton Feldman wrote four major works featuring clarinet over the course of his career: *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* (1961), *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* (1971), *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* (1981), and *Clarinet and String Quartet*

³ Morton Feldman, "Studio International Interview," interview by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 67.

(1983).⁴ These four pieces represent an important contribution to the clarinet repertoire by a significant twentieth-century composer, yet they are seldom performed and even more rarely discussed. They run the gamut of Feldman's compositional styles, from an early indeterminate piece, to what has been described as a "still life" written during his stay in Berlin, to two late pieces that display characteristic patterns and "crippled symmetry" fully notated in mind-bending detail.⁵ *Clarinet and String Quartet* (1983), in particular, shows Feldman at the height of his compositional maturity, and could easily be considered alongside his other late masterpieces.

These works might be approached with reluctance due in part to a seeming lack of (external) formal systems. Boulez's serial manipulation and Babbitt's advanced mathematical strategies make a claim for legitimacy based in part on the pervasive a priori "logic" in their compositions. In contrast, Feldman makes a point of spurning "system" in its historical sense, relying instead on sound. Sound's physical properties and the processes involved in its production are his source material. This can be much more uncertain terrain for the analyst.

II.

"Sound" has a very specific and personal meaning for Feldman. Sound is something indivisible, something vertical, something self-contained, and therefore something lacking perceivable direction and the consequent logical tendencies typically encountered in Western art music. The indivisible aspect of the Feldman sound concept

⁴ The *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* (1961) is published under the erroneous title *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Orchestra* by the C. F. Peters Corporation, but it will be referred to by its former title as it appears on the autograph.

⁵ Morton Feldman, "Morton Feldman Talks to Paul Griffiths," interview by Paul Griffiths, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 47.

bears itself in his gradually increasing attempts to remove the individualistic will of the performer from performances of his works, rendering pieces that deal with their own lives *as pieces*, divorced from the lives of performers and audience. For example, Feldman's use of ubiquitous *ppp* dynamics—his entire lifework is almost entirely written at the edge of silence—creates carefully unified blends of color in which individual voices are hard to distinguish. The perpetually soft dynamic subdues each voice's contrapuntal history and the conditioned directionality ingrained in professional performance training.

Early in his career, Feldman wrestled not only with the problems inflicted on his music by the individuality of performers, but also with the individuality of instrumental timbre. Jonathan Bernard highlights the analogy in the aesthetics of the New York School of visual artists: "From his personal contact with Kline and Guston, Feldman was well aware that both regarded color as more likely to be an intrusion into their painting than anything they could work with usefully."⁶ Feldman's fundamental problem with instrumental color was embedded in the semiotic tendencies it brought to his pursuit of the "Abstract Experience," an experience he describes as being "a metaphor without an answer," an emotion separate from imagination.⁷ "The instrument," he says, "has become for me a stencil, the deceptive *likeness* of a sound. For the most part it

⁶ Jonathan W. Bernard, "Feldman's Painters," in *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts*, ed. Steven Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 185.

⁷ Morton Feldman, "After Modernism," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 75.

exaggerates the sound, blurs it, makes it larger than life, gives it a meaning, an emphasis it does not have in my ear.”⁸

The paradox seems inevitable: how can a composer create sounds from instruments that he distrusts so mightily? How can a composer maintain his skepticism of instrumental color, and yet claim that composition *is* orchestration? Recourse in electronic music might seem an equally inevitable solution to such an absurd impasse. If instruments cannot be properly stripped of their associations with “speculative fantasy,” perhaps they should be eliminated altogether.⁹ But again, Feldman balks at the logical solution, proclaiming, “I think pitch is too beautiful for that electronic sound, to get near it, too beautiful to be played on an accordion.”¹⁰ Feldman’s solution lies in resignation to the art of the impasse. In a 1972 essay he writes:

My whole creative life is simply an attempt to adjust to [this dilemma]. There is very little concern, very little involvement with anything else. It seems to me that, in spite of our efforts to trammel it, music has already flown the coop—escaped.¹¹

The methodological paradox Feldman sets up for himself ultimately frees him to *pursue* sound; the compositional ideal makes the pivotal transition from thing made to thing becoming. The best Feldman can do is to pursue sound. This seemingly impossible pursuit animates the music, constantly reflected in the seemingly impossible

⁸ Morton Feldman, “A Compositional Problem,” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 110.

⁹ Morton Feldman, “Boola Boola,” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 48.

¹⁰ Feldman, “Darmstadt Lecture,” 199.

¹¹ Feldman, “A Compositional Problem,” 111.

task of the performer desperately trying to absent himself from the sonic surface he inevitably creates. Feldman clearly articulated this idea in a 1972 interview with Paul Griffiths:

I have yet to hear an easy harmonic played beautifully and without vibrato with a slow bow on the cello. I have yet to hear a trombone player come in without too much attack, and hold it at the same level. I have yet to hear that kind of control. That's why these instruments are not dead for me: because as yet they have not served my function.¹²

This quote comes just after an early period in which Feldman experimented with open/indeterminate notation—a system of notation where the composer unfixes one or more compositional elements by allowing the performer choices within given parameters. For Feldman, indeterminate elements may include pitches within a given register, durations, tempi, and rhythms. Feldman's notation moved away from indeterminacy because he “was interested in freeing the sound and not the performer.”¹³ The performer brought too much creative expertise to bear on the surface of Feldman's pieces—too much affect, too much individuality, and too much confidence.

And yet the seeds of a new indeterminate philosophy are shown sprouting the first incarnations of what would ultimately become Feldman's answer to the problem of performer self-imposition. If professional musicians would always bring their conditioned historical tendencies to bear on a performance, Feldman would find ways of making them work through incredibly difficult cumulative feats of register,

¹² Feldman, “Morton Feldman Talks to Paul Griffiths,” 48.

¹³ Morton Feldman, “H. C. E. (Here Comes Everybody): Morton Feldman in Conversation with Peter Gena,” interview by Peter Gena, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 122.

enharmonicism, notation, ensemble, transposition, endurance, dynamic, etc., removing comfort and familiarity in an effort to filter all but the concentrated reality of the piece. The compulsive precision of these notated images only exists in theory. In performance, they will yield at best approximations. Feldman's performers can never command the music. Only by muting their interpretive abilities can they even come close to an accurate presentation.

Herman Sabbe eloquently summarizes the ineluctable beauty of this liberating paradox: "Each and every element of Feldman's music is quite definite, whereas the constitution of fixed significations through the establishment of relationships among those elements is being indefinitely deferred ('differ'ed)."¹⁴ Feldman worked with strategies of orchestration and notation, however much he preferred to avoid methodology. Yet, to a certain extent, the indeterminate aspects of these strategies distance him from the authorship of the sounds in performance. Feldman writes, "I have learned that the more one composes or constructs—the more one prevents Time Undisturbed from becoming the controlling metaphor of the music."¹⁵ At first, he used graph notation and free duration (e.g. *Structures, Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet*); in later works, such as *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* and *Clarinet and String Quartet*, he developed new strategies. But the aims remained the same. Feldman, who collaborated with Samuel Beckett on several occasions, finds himself in a similar

¹⁴ Herman Sabbe, "The Feldman Paradoxes: A Deconstructionist View of Musical Aesthetics," in *The Music of Morton Feldman*, ed. Thomas DeLio (New York: Excelsior, 1996), 11.

¹⁵ Feldman, "Between Categories," 88.

situation to that of the great literary figure: “Art is the perfect not-doing of what cannot be done, and peer as we will, we shall not discern Beckett *doing*.”¹⁶

Feldman’s indeterminate processes, his *pianissimo* dynamics, his constantly-shifting timbral schemes, his curious voicings and constant re-voicings of chords, and his feeling that a composer would have to be insane to write for an oboe all stem from his need to deconstruct musical flow, with its momentum and metaphoric significance, and create a contemplative landscape of Time Undisturbed. He says, “I’m trying to hold the moment with the slightest compositional methodology.”¹⁷

III.

“I go at composition by way of its acoustical reality,” says Feldman, which is to say, he composes from the potential of real sound materials.¹⁸ Each instrument is blessed and cursed by its myriad sound potential; blessed in the sense that Feldman can (and often does) exploit its definite characteristics/materials to the fullest in the articulation of sound, and cursed by the interpretive historical associations these materials bring with them, as mentioned above. “You just can’t get an idea, it has to go into the darkroom and materialize itself like a negative. That’s its instrumentation.”¹⁹ This remark, made by Feldman in a 1983 interview with Thomas Moore, speaks to that same potential of the sound materials, specifying instrumentation as a developmental strategy.

¹⁶ Hugh Kenner, *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians* (London: Dalkey Archive, 2005), 76.

¹⁷ Morton Feldman, “Beckett as Librettist,” interview by Howard Skempton, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 76.

¹⁸ Morton Feldman, “Morton Feldman in Conversation with Thomas Moore,” interview by Thomas Moore, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 182.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

In Feldman's view, pitch is inseparable from timbre. He claims, "Unless I know what instrument is playing a note, I don't know the note."²⁰ Thus, even in an unmoving harmony, changes in orchestration make each moment distinct. Pitch and pitch relationships can only be viewed as articulations of particular sound concepts, as suggested by closed sets of real sound materials. This is not to say that pitch is random, except perhaps where specified in his early graph pieces, but rather that pitchy situations and harmonic constructs depend to a great degree on instrumental relationships in his music.

Feldman says, "For me composition is orchestration, and so what leads me to begin a composition is a weight, an orchestration, which is new for me."²¹ This "weight" of orchestration is not, however, expressed exclusively as an immutable block of noise, as noted by Catherine Laws:

While we might expect unchanging, static chordal material to be the most appropriate musical expression of a held moment, Feldman realizes the falsity of such a representation in its inability to continue indefinitely: either the staticity inevitably implies expectations of change, or, at the very least, the piece has eventually to end.²²

Feldman explores instrumental weight through a careful and almost tangible study of the various angles of his orchestration. He seems naturalistic in the way he presents the sound to the listener, a biologist cataloguing the movements of a complex organism

²⁰ Morton Feldman, "Johannesburg Lecture 1: Current Trends in America," transcription by Rüdiger Meyer, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 171.

²¹ Feldman, "Morton Feldman Talks to Paul Griffiths," 48.

²² Catherine Laws, "Morton Feldman's *Neither*: A Musical Translation of Beckett's Text," in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Mary Bryden (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1998), 66.

hitherto unknown. He creates a space in which the sound can be observed, both moment by moment and in its entirety, each moment somehow maintaining its synecdochic agency. This method of composing from orchestration elicits the dictum, “silence is my substitute for counterpoint. It’s nothing against something. The degrees of nothing against something.”²³ In Feldman’s view, the most appropriate riposte to sound is silence. Whereas earlier eras might create counterpoint through distinct contours, Feldman’s instruments have out-of-phase patterns of sound and silence, their presence or absence melded together within often unchanging harmonies.

Silence occupies the interstices of the determinate and indeterminate materials of orchestration and notation, respectively. Silence is both a function of who among the instruments is definitely playing or not playing, viz. the weights of orchestration, and also a function of the more indeterminate duration or location of a notated rest, the only “thing” that can be said to produce the silence. Interestingly, *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* and other “duration pieces” contain no conventionally notated rests; Feldman rather represents the negation of instruments or voices within the overall sonic texture by means of an empty staff. This emptiness is further indicated by a fermata and, in the case of silence lasting more than one durational unit, a number, measured by durations, to specify the length of the silence. Comparing Feldman’s concept of “surface” to Kline’s theories about depth equivalence in painting, Jonathan Bernard notes, “To paint the white [perceived background] as well as the black [perceived foreground] could be seen as analogous to Feldman’s desire, in abandoning his graph

²³ Morton Feldman, “The Future of Local Music,” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 181.

notation of the 1950s for something more precise, to control silence as well as sound.”²⁴

Feldman became increasingly interested in bringing silence into balance with other sound materials in order to create a sonic surface in his compositions, a surface in which instrumental entrances or releases would not interfere with *Time Undisturbed*. His use of silence as counterpoint to sound materials yields surfaces that, though they may shift texturally, yet do not abandon their static impulses, and hold the moment.

Feldman experimented with many different types of notation and notational strategies to achieve sound-based compositions. Regarding this subject he says, “How you notate determines more about the piece than any kind of system using this or that. [...] All I’m really saying, in a long-winded way, is that notation, at least for me, determines the style of the piece.”²⁵ Depending on how they are viewed, Feldman had either three or four distinct styles of notation: graph notation, free durational notation, conventional notation, and, possibly, disorienting notation.

Graph notation, the first of the four types chronologically, was Feldman’s first attempt to free sound by way of a relatively pervasive indeterminate strategy. These pieces are given very strict parameters with regard to elements such as tempo, register, number of keys (in the case of piano), and sometimes number of attacks, but they generally leave rhythm and pitch to the discretion of the performer. Similarly, the free durational pieces fix a sequence of pitches and silent durations, but allow for a wide range of fluctuating tempi and subsequent ensemble relationships. The theories of Earle Brown, John Cage, Christian Wolff, and Feldman, depended on the resultant chaos and

²⁴ Jonathan W. Bernard, “Feldman’s Painters,” in *The New York Schools of music and visual arts*, ed. Steven Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 187.

²⁵ Morton Feldman, “*Soundpieces* Interview,” interview by Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 91.

its potential to yield performances unsoiled by historical tendencies. Feldman catalogs the process:

It follows then, that an indeterminate music can lead only to catastrophe. This catastrophe we allowed to take place. Behind it was sound—which unified everything. Only by “unfixing” the elements traditionally used to construct a piece of music could the sounds exist in themselves—not as symbols, or memories which were memories of other music to begin with.²⁶

Traditional elements seem almost to have been inverted in Feldman’s early indeterminate compositions to reach this end; rhythm and harmony, the historically rational forces behind Western art music, are undone, whereas instrumentation, once a relative free-for-all, provides a fixed weight, a quantity to be pursued in the music. How unlike Stockhausen’s ultimate realization of *In Freundschaft*, a solo piece transcribed by the composer for virtually any woodwind instrument, is Feldman’s concept of composition. The very idea of transcription implies belief in the systematized logic of compositional genius over a piece’s sonic reality. With graph notation, Feldman aimed to create a music in which rhythm and harmony could never realistically be the same in two different performances, whereby these elements would serve only to get past themselves and produce a unified non-metaphor. Even the duration pieces were never intended to be the same twice; the textural densities and local harmony inevitably change from performance to performance, and yet there is consistency in the deconstruction of

²⁶ Morton Feldman, “Predeterminate/Indeterminate,” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 35.

traditional logic. The sound of the instruments is a thing in itself, ever changing, and never progressing.

Nevertheless, Feldman eventually discovered shortcomings in his overtly indeterminate compositions and gradually abandoned this notational technique. His main problem with these strategies had to do with the freedom of the performer:

I found that my most far-out notation repeated historical clichés in performance more than my precise notation. Precise notation is *my* handwriting. My imprecise notation was a kind of roving camera that caught up very familiar images like a historical mirror. I don't want the mirror of history in my work.²⁷

The graph and durational pieces failed to meet Feldman's expectations because they required the essential authorship of performers for actualization. Performers bring with them any number of conditioned habits, and these make their way into the music no matter how hard the performers might try to deny them. Performers interpret, give direction, and ultimately seek meaning in a work, so long as they have control. In these indeterminate situations they become like the jazz player who draws upon his thousands of accumulated licks to produce a solo that fits (or meaningfully does not fit) the chord changes, all the while reacting to the musicians around him, who in turn react to his reactions.

In the early 1970s Feldman moved into a conventional style of precise notation, a notational style that was to be as deterministic as he would ever become. His discussion of titles in an interview with Paul Griffiths reveals the nature of the pieces produced by this notational style:

²⁷ Feldman, "*Soundpieces* Interview," 91.

Titles are very peculiar things. My publishers were not too happy with the titles they were getting from my recent stay in Berlin—they were more like still-life titles: *Three clarinets, cello and piano; Chorus and orchestra; Pianos and voices*. I just felt that there was something about my life in Berlin that suggested these very flat, factual titles.²⁸

The idea of viewing each of these works as a still life seems particularly apt considering such a move as Feldman made from his indeterminate pieces to this resolutely determinate notational strategy. Whereas the graph and durational pieces can only be expressed as real things becoming in performance, all elements of the still life pieces are fixed by notation. The purely technical demands of a piece such as *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* are kept to a relative minimum, whereby it is possible to conceive of nearly identical successive performances which, compared to Feldman's earlier and later works, gives this the feel of a picture, a snapshot trying to capture the moment rather than the undisturbed reality of the instrumental weight becoming a piece. Attacks, though minimized by the *ppp* dynamics, are generally precise and distinct.

Perhaps the most significant change is the use of horizontal quasi-melodic material, which provides a fixed rhythmic impetus to the already familiar vertical space inhabited by Feldman's pieces. Feldman admits that for *The Viola in My Life*, "the rhythmic proportions were brought about because of the durations of the various types of crescendo."²⁹ Crescendo, among other compositional devices, was not practical in the notation of his earlier pieces, and it gave him the opportunity to explore new textural combinations and transitions. In particular, the climax of a crescendo in one voice could

²⁸ Feldman, "Morton Feldman Talks to Paul Griffiths," 47.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

nearly obliterate a pianissimo attack in another voice, and the sense of rhythm implied by a series of attacks could be minimized. The crescendo also unearthed different sound material from the various instruments involved in a given piece, and though Feldman risked a disintegration of surface, he seems to have been willing to trust his ability to de-emphasize the individuality of his instruments by other means, including orchestration.

As rhythm became more of a concern for Feldman, so too did his notational style develop past the austere images in the still life works. In fact, the intricate rhythmic relationships that result from his localized modular patterns in these late works challenge even the most accomplished performers to play everything “correctly.” He describes the process of notating these images:

Sometimes I make a more complicated pattern, but very simple [modules] and out of it I get very complicated rhythms. And the reasons I’m doing it, I don’t want to make a performers situation [where] they’re looking to make a cue. I don’t want rhythm to become an aspect of syncopation.³⁰

Many times, as is the case in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, the measures are visually aligned in such a way that the performers, one of whom might have a consistent time signature while the other’s is constantly changing, can be reading as many as four or five bars apart before Feldman’s patterned additive strategy allows them to re-converge. The score of *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* claims this convergence every 135 quarter notes, or, within the given tempi, approximately every two minutes, giving ample time for either performer to become completely and utterly disoriented (not to imply that they necessarily will).

³⁰ Morton Feldman, “Conversation with Morton Feldman,” interview by Kevin Volans, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 214.

Yet even small amounts of disorientation begin to create a situation in which performers are no longer capable of searching for rhythmic ensemble elements with which to interact. Feldman purposefully attempts to subvert rhythm in these pieces, despite rhythmic modules working themselves out in one voice or the other:

My piece that I wrote for John Cage, it is so difficult, it's the most tenuous type of supple rhythms, just it's not even like rhythm at all, you know how difficult it is to write a complicated rhythm that doesn't even sound like a rhythm? Try it. And it's going and it's unbelievable, the coordination is difficult—the idea for the piece is that they're both in the same space, I had a very unique idea of writing about a piano and violin piece, that they're both in the same space, no business of this one here that one there at all, of course it happens, but it's like one instrument in the same space, just a little echo of sorts.³¹

The instruments achieve unity in their indifference to one another, since there is no direction, no meaningful composite rhythm, and therefore no counterpoint. The lack of counterpoint makes the ensemble “like one instrument in the same space,” since opposition is not an operative principle in the music. Of course the listener perceives sounds being articulated by a combination of instruments, but Feldman constantly thwarts the idea that these articulations parcel time out into any kind of logical system. Without external ideas to carry forward, there is nothing to develop into a significant collaborative scheme, and the performer is forced to concentrate fully on the task at hand, which is exactly the task that Feldman intends:

³¹ Morton Feldman, “Toronto Lecture,” transcription by Linda Catlin Smith, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 141.

A tumbling of sorts happens in midair between [notational images'] translation from the page and their execution. To a great degree, this tumbling occurs in all music—but becomes more compounded in mine, since there is no rhythmic “style,” a quality often crucial to the performer’s understanding of how and what to do.³²

Feldman goes on to compare this newer style of notation to that of his earlier graph and durational styles, which he says operate on similar grounds. All of these styles work by unfixing traditional aspects of composition, and all are indeterminate to one degree or another. Yet in the new style of disorientation, Feldman assumes responsibility for optimizing the realization of sound through his impossibly precise images. He says, “Technically, the music is both idiomatic and playable; but depends, to a taxing degree, on the performer’s concentration.”³³

Additional obstacles hurled at the performer of these works include transpositions, clef changes (for instruments unused to this), irregular spellings of notes, and, in some cases, the barely-legible script on the performance score. Many of these difficulties might be overcome by “performance editions” of one sort or another, giving as many helpful mileposts in the music as possible. Yet this would inevitably sabotage Feldman’s purpose, leading to ensemble cues and syncopation, and the pieces would no longer be his. As the composer says, “My piano always plays Feldman. If you play

³² Morton Feldman, “Crippled Symmetry,” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 143.

³³ *Ibid.*, 144.

Chopin, Schumann, Mozart, on my piano it's always Feldman."³⁴ Similarly, Feldman's unique style of preparing and publishing certain performance scores in his own handwriting serves his deconstructive purpose, and these works cannot be performed except from these scores if they are to be considered Feldman performances. The performer must not be freed from notational strategies that comprise so much of his pieces' material aspects. He eliminates cliché and historicity with his notation while maintaining Time Undisturbed. He leaves nothing to the performer but the pursuit of an individual perfect performance; as long as the performer pursues, the piece may again live its becoming.

Much has been made of the connection between Feldman's fascination with Anatolian rugs and the patterns that may be found throughout his late music. The slight inconsistencies in thread colors produced by variances in small batches of dyes, called *abrash*, are of particular interest to Feldman, since they provide an element of subtle natural chaos in an otherwise deterministic textile scheme. Patterns, and symmetrical patterns in particular, are useful in the context of Feldman's compositional philosophy because they allow a horizontal element in the music while de-emphasizing any kind of goal-driven tendencies. Yet he will often intentionally "cripple" the symmetrical structures he creates in order to avoid a sense of inevitability and, by extension, direction in the music. In a 1981 essay he would claim, "For me, stasis, scale, and pattern have put the whole question of symmetry and asymmetry in abeyance."³⁵ Yet he continued to

³⁴ Morton Feldman, "Morton Feldman—Waiting," interview by Martine Cadieu, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 39.

³⁵ Feldman, "Crippled Symmetry," 149.

build a great deal of symmetry into his patterned structures, just as the rugs he so admired possessed inherent symmetry within their patterns.

The patterns in Feldman's music seem to change as his pieces go on, but Feldman describes this change as "translation" rather than progression, because nothing is really happening except for a shift in the "focus" of the retranslation.³⁶ The translations can apply to any number of elements in the music, including pitches, intervals, and rhythms. He finds this quality in Samuel Beckett's libretto for *Neither* as well:

I see that every line is really the same thought said in another way. And yet the continuity acts as if something else is happening. Nothing else is happening. What you're doing in an almost Proustian way is getting deeper and deeper saturated into the thought.³⁷

Feldman's observation closely mirrors that of Hugh Kenner:

Beckett's comedy, if it can deal with everything it touches because it operates solely with the laws of thought, by the same token can really deal with nothing, because thought is not prior to things, and things escape.³⁸

This idea must have been very attractive to Feldman, considering his interest in stasis. By way of this translation, Feldman was able to create pieces that went nowhere and did nothing; in other words, lacking direction, these pieces live purely in the vertical realm and uphold Time Undisturbed.

Feldman aspired to the same goals throughout his career, reflected both by his discourse and the pieces it describes. He writes, "Freedom is best understood by

³⁶ Feldman, "Darmstadt Lecture," 194.

³⁷ Ibid., 194.

³⁸ Kenner, 106.

someone like Rothko, who was free to do only one thing—to make a Rothko—and did so over and over again.”³⁹ Feldman creates a Feldman at every stage of his career, and though his means of actualization change with each passing decade, he never seems to have wanted to create anything but a Feldman.

³⁹ Morton Feldman, “Give My Regards to Eighth Street,” in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 99.

CHAPTER 2

NOTATION PIECES

It is difficult to describe what characterizes notational imagery. If we could suspend for just a moment all the reasons we think distinguish one era from another—and briefly glance at the pages of the last movement of the *Hammerklavier*, or a florid bar or two from Chopin, or any work of Webern's—we will observe that these pages do not visually resemble the music of their contemporaries. The degree to which a music's notation is responsible for much of the composition itself, is one of history's best kept secrets.¹

Of the four clarinet works, *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* (1961) and *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* (1981) seem most conveniently approached by their striking notation. Both offer visual hints as to Feldman's compositional process. The analyst is led by notation in both cases to unavoidable conclusions regarding Feldman's compositional processes at two very different points in his career. Each of the pieces also demonstrates quite clearly many of the principles Feldman describes in his discourse on notation.

¹ Feldman, "Crippled Symmetry," 144.

Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet (1961)

Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet, a relatively early work, spans a significantly shorter duration than Feldman's late works: Because of the twenty fermatas sprinkled throughout, an exact timing is not possible; however, even at Feldman's slowest tempo marking, the piece would last less than five minutes. Except for the range of tempi and the occasional grace note or sixteenth rest, the piece has minimal rhythmic indications. The score divides the ensemble into five staves, in the manner of most works for clarinet and string quartet, but these staves contain neither measures nor any kind of conventional relative notation (i.e. whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, etc.). Feldman represents pitch durations only by black note heads, while silence is shown by fermatas placed over empty spaces in the staff. The performers are given the following instructions:

The first sound with all instruments simultaneously [sic.]. The duration of each sound is chosen by the performer. All sounds should be played with a minimum of attack. Dynamics are very low throughout. Numbers indicate the amount of silent beats between sounds. Clarinet sounds as written.²

Within the ranges of tempi, the performer may choose to speed up or slow down the rate at which he progresses through the durations, and this rate may or may not align with the potentially fluctuating tempi of other members of the ensemble. The most likely composite scenario is one of rhythmic chaos, in which the only truly unified attack is that

² Morton Feldman, *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* (New York: Edition Peters, 1962), ii.

of the first duration, after which the independence granted by Feldman will lead the performers to rely on their various impulses.

Unfortunately for Feldman, performers are trained to be impulsive in their listening, their interpretation, and their reactions. With the freedom Feldman has given them, performers will likely attempt to make logical decisions about how the piece should sound, how “together” the ensemble should remain throughout, and generally dwell on the minutiae of meaning in this music. The major problem with this style of notation is that Feldman must allow this or risk increased methodology on his part. The durational pieces already seem a notational compromise when compared to Feldman’s graph pieces, and yet they are similarly unable to shed the potential for interpretation and subsequent cliché. For example, an unlikely but possible “interpretation” that progresses through each notational verticality in all parts at 76 beats per minute, even through both pieces, is allowable under Feldman’s stated conditions. It may not be as interesting as something more chaotic, and it is almost certainly not what Feldman intended, but it is still the piece. Similarly, performers’ plans to stay between two or three or four durations of each other lead to cues and rhythms that might as well be represented by pre-determined images, yet this situation is also allowed.

The notation itself intimates a possible solution to this interpretive dilemma. Feldman occasionally places a rogue fermata over a pitch duration in one of the parts, distinguishing it from its neighbors in the vertical strata. Though the fermata might be interpreted a number of ways, it implies difference from those durations that are not provided with fermatas. Feldman uses these fermatas infrequently, only twice in the second of the two pieces, but they certainly provide an element of chaos in the overall notational strategy of the piece, underscoring the independence of each voice. Only this

independence of voices, the lack of action and reflex, unfixes the music to the point that it will be perceived as “sound.” Each performer must therefore come to his own conception of the piece, completely divorced from the spirit of collaboration. This could potentially be achieved by purposeful avoidance of rehearsal and conversation about the piece, allowing each performer a singular line of interpretation that would mean nothing in relation to the interpretive actions of the other players in performance.

Feldman creates an indeterminate interpretive element in the *Two Pieces* with these fermatas, as they *could* represent a number of different things, and the performer must ultimately choose how to interpret them. The most basic historical function of a fermata is to lengthen a note or rest until such time as the performer deems it necessary to move forward with the music; in a way it is one of the oldest of indeterminate notational devices, since its length is determined by the discretion of the performer, usually at the time of performance. Feldman complicates the situation in *Two Pieces* by representing rests as functions of held silence, or fermatas over an empty staff, but for the purpose of analysis, the note heads with fermatas will be treated as though they will be held longer than Feldman’s lower limit within the ranges of tempo, accounting for the most reasonably maximal indeterminate scenario.

Of the two pieces, the first is significantly more active than the second—the durations last between 76 and 92 beats per minute in the first as compared to durations lasting between 52 and 76 beats per minute in the second. Though the vertical harmonic units as presented in the score will almost assuredly never be performed as such, they represent a reasonable average, or at least a probable density of texture and pitch, that will likely adhere more closely to the visual aspect of the score at the beginning of the

piece than at the end, due in large part to the variable tempo indications and the likelihood of separation between instruments over an extended period. In both pieces, Feldman builds nodes of commonality and difference into the pitch material of each instrument, and these combine to form regions of greater or lesser harmonic stability. Though this does not by any means fix the harmony in time, it greatly increases the chances of a mean evolution of densities, which will be realized differently with each performance.

With so much indeterminate material, it is useful to catalog certainties in the music. For one thing, each instrument must complete its part. So there is a cumulative experience that, with respect to pitch and horizontal intervals, will always be the same. The melodic writing is very consistent; the favored motion is by minor second, major second, and tritone. Feldman also gives instructions stating that all instruments should begin together in both pieces, as well as the definite range of tempi in either piece. Because Feldman has indicated ranges of tempi, instruments moving at different speeds can progressively fall more and more apart. For instance, in the second piece, if one instrument consistently takes the fastest tempo and the other the slowest, the farthest they can diverge by the time the first reaches the end of the second system is sixteen durations—approximately one quarter of the work.

This means that by the time one voice reaches duration thirty-four at the maximum allowable tempo, the field of all possible harmonic combinations includes all pitch-classes in the other instruments occurring between durations eighteen and thirty-four.

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in five staves. The first staff is for the vocal melody, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, with a final measure containing a half note. The second staff is for the guitar accompaniment, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It includes a series of chords and single notes, with a final measure containing a half note. The third staff is for the guitar accompaniment, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It includes a series of chords and single notes, with a final measure containing a half note. The fourth staff is for the guitar accompaniment, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It includes a series of chords and single notes, with a final measure containing a half note. The fifth staff is for the guitar accompaniment, featuring a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. It includes a series of chords and single notes, with a final measure containing a half note. The score is marked with 'Pizz' (pizzicato) and 'Arco' (arco) instructions, indicating the playing technique for the guitar parts. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' and the time signature is 2/4.

d. 18-34

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This section describes a full quarter of the piece, yet Feldman controls his harmonic material in such a way as to ensure a probable result. The following graph charts the pitch-class field, where pitch-classes are shown as they occur in all parts from duration eighteen through duration thirty-four:

	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
F																	
E																	
D#																	
D																	
C#		V1		Vlc								V1					
C				V1			Vlc										
B		Vlc					V1					Vlc					
A#	Cl	Cl										Cl					
A				Cl										Cl			
G#		V2		V2			V2 Cl		Vlc			V2					
G		Va		Va			Va		Vlc			Va			Cl		
F#										Vlc							

The graph shows how Feldman creates a statistical harmony, with favored pitches that will be more prominent regardless of their alignment. The amount of silence incorporated into this field also increases the likelihood of thinner textures, especially considering the area immediately surrounding duration thirty-four is void of pitch material. Of course, it is unlikely that performers would move at the exact maximum or exact minimum tempi, and any moderation of tempi obviously narrows the field of possibilities, making pitch-classes from earlier durations much less likely than those closer to the duration that dictates the field.

Feldman's pitched fermatas (as opposed to those representing silence) present many challenges to the analyst, that of phase consistency foremost. Since the fermata

depends wholly on the discretion of the performer, there is no meaningful way to calculate a harmonic field after one of these events has occurred. The first piece in *Two Pieces* makes relatively liberal use of these fermatas, and Feldman does not distribute them evenly through the different voices. Eight of these are given to the clarinet, two to the first violin, one to the second violin, three to the viola, and four to the cello. The first fermata comes in the first violin's eighth duration, meaning any calculation made in the subsequent one hundred twenty-eight durations must necessarily make allowances for this uncontrollable element, as well as any others that fall within the specified range.

Unlike common practice music, where fundamental harmony dictates horizontal relationships, Feldman's harmony is a resultant feature that changes from one performance to the next. Nevertheless, Feldman creates moments of relative textural stability and instability by his statistical treatment of repeated pitches among the five parts. For example, the first thirty-five durations of the first piece emphasize the clarinet's lowest C as well as its C# and D in the staff. In this same space, the first and second violins emphasize the extremes of their ranges, sounding repeated pitches between their lowest C and E \flat , as well as sustained harmonics. The viola repeats limited pitches in its lowest range, notably E \flat , D, and C#, while the cello, the most consistent of any instrument, repeats its lowest D and the C# below middle C, beginning with the pitches that will become its defining pitches. Other pitches occur throughout the voices in these opening durations, but Feldman gives these the most weight, and a probable pitch-focus seems clear in the use of D and C# in all of the parts—this represents by far the strongest focus of its type in the piece.

Feldman uses these flows of density, which never reliably coalesce, within the context of his notational catastrophe, thereby continually dissociating the resultant relationships from historical memory. Within this scheme of purposeful disorientation, the listener perceives only the perpetually changing present moment, since consistent horizontal relationships have been subverted by Feldman's indeterminacy. A sense of Time Undisturbed therefore perseveres in spite of relatively stable harmonic regions in the piece. The following analysis demonstrates the strategy and scope of these regions.

By way of contrast to the first 35 durations described above, Feldman supplies the clarinet and cello with very diffuse pitch material in durations 55 – 70 while he keeps the pitches in the viola purely constant and those in the violins nearly so. Both the violins and the viola had been somewhat diffuse in durations 35 – 55, whereas the clarinet and cello played nearly constant pitches. The piece moves through similar textures, waxing and waning as Feldman dictates various probable textural densities. Durations 80 – 105 mark a decided emphasis on repeated pitches in the lowest register of the clarinet, whereas the final twenty durations emphasize repeated pitches in all instruments.

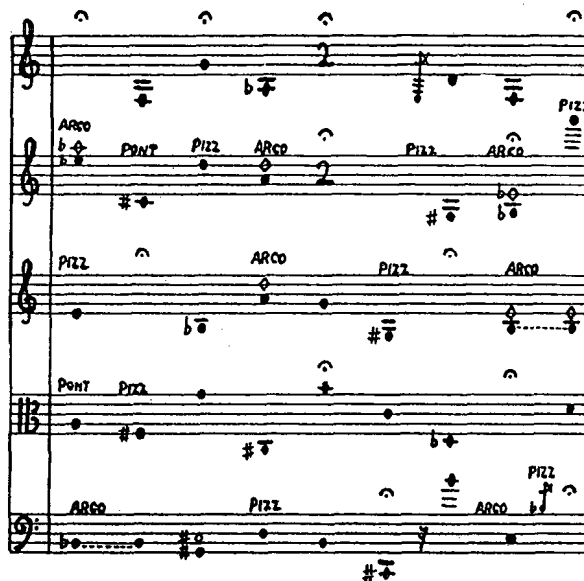
From the visual aspect of the score, it is possible to gather a sense of where and how Feldman has composed the likelihood of horizontal pitch continuity as opposed to more fragmentary processes, and it seems as though the categories become more distinct as they progress toward the end of the piece. The differences between the regions bounded by durations 88 – 102, 103 – 122, and 123 – 136 are readily apparent in the score. Durations 88 – 102 and 123 – 136 contain limited pitch material, as well as very stark and transparent textures, whereas durations 103 – 122 contain all pitch-classes, densely distributed throughout the region. Though the maximum durational differential

covers quite a large area between duration 88 and the end of the piece, allowing for the very real likelihood of some pitch infiltration from either side of any given region, the average harmonic textures at the average 96th and 129th durations will *most likely* be at least somewhat less dense than those produced at the average 110th duration in any performance.

The image shows a musical score for five staves, numbered 1 through 5 from top to bottom. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key markings include 'Pizz' (Pizzicato) and 'PONT' (Ponte). The staves are numbered 1 through 5 from top to bottom. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key markings include 'Pizz' (Pizzicato) and 'PONT' (Ponte). The staves are numbered 1 through 5 from top to bottom.

d. 88 – 98

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d. 103 – 111

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Textural delineations seem to become less obvious as one moves back toward the beginning of the piece. Though there are still pitch-class trails that yield very localized similarities to those described above, the indeterminacy built into Feldman's notation thwarts attempts to generalize their probable realization. A pitch-class graph including instrumental timbres can prove helpful in locating and defining various textures likely to be encountered in the movement's early stages (Appendix 1).

This timbre/pitch-class graph emphasizes the contrast between the horizontal aspects of the piece versus the vertical aspects, as first presented in the ten opening durations. Durations five through ten, the first in the piece that have the potential to be completely out of phase, represent a fittingly fragmentary structure that employs eight of the ten chromatic pitch-classes employed in this passage. Feldman makes the clarinet particularly incongruous with its initial static material, pushing it across nearly the entire pitch-class spectrum. By durations 11 – 23, timbres become quite horizontal in the

orientation of their pitch-class material by means of held notes, whereby Feldman maintains a somewhat dense texture while reducing the frequency of attacks. The probable texture becomes quite sparse and horizontal in durations 24 – 36, followed by a similarly gradual transition back to dense and active probable textures in durations 37 – 63.

Feldman constructs the proportions of likely textural “waves” into the overall form of the piece:

Durations 1 – 10: introduction, establishment of vertical vs. horizontal

Durations 11 – 36: active to inactive, vertical to horizontal (27 durations)

Durations 37 – 63: inactive to active, horizontal to vertical (26 durations)

Durations 64 – 72: inactive, horizontal (9 durations)

Durations 73 – 87: active, vertical (15 durations)

Durations 88 – 102: very inactive, horizontal (15 durations)

Durations 103 – 122: very active, vertical (20 durations)

Durations 123 – 136: very inactive, horizontal (14 durations)

The initial progressions in durations 11 – 36 and 37 – 63 require greater length because of their ambiguity, and they become more and more ambiguous as the instruments move out of phase. The following inactive and active regions of the piece appear to offer the likelihood of something more clear-cut, but their shorter lengths at a later stage in the piece only decrease the probability that they will be realized as such. So too do the very active and inactive regions near the end of the piece ultimately defy categorization; Feldman destroys any certainty of his own pattern by making use of this particular indeterminate notation.

Feldman actually builds a much more determinate scheme into the second of the two pieces, a scheme highlighted by the conspicuous decrease in subversive fermatas. In fact, Feldman uses only two fermatas in the entirety of the piece: one is placed over the clarinet's forty-first duration, and the other comes at the clarinet's sixty-eighth (final) duration. Both occur within the context of a static harmony that will last through the end of the piece, whereby they can no longer throw the harmony into the chaos typical of the first piece.

Feldman structures this piece so that a relatively tumultuous and disjunct opening tends toward a process of harmonic clearing. Since the pitch relationships at the beginning of the piece cohere much more strongly than those at the end by virtue of their relatively narrow range of rhythmic possibilities, initial localized trends can be seen inflicting an impact on the rest of the piece as well.

The major harmonic event in the piece occurs between durations one and three. Here the five-note chromatic sonority that begins the piece quickly fragments, its [A \flat , A, A \sharp , B] portion mapping itself onto the [F, F \sharp , G, G \sharp] portion of duration three, while C remains constant. The major intervallic rift created by this move only seems to widen in the region described by durations four through six, as E and C \sharp threaten to converge. Yet D and D \sharp never materialize anywhere in the piece, and even E, F, and F \sharp gradually recede. By the time the categories have completely hardened (when the last voice reaches duration forty), Feldman articulates only one harmonic idea for the remainder of the piece. This (01346) pentachord was present in the harmony surrounding duration fifteen, but it will not be the defining harmony of the piece until the last voice reaches duration forty and eliminates the possibility of further errant pitches.

The pizzicato and ponticello timbres that recur in the viola's G and the second violin's G# are the first of any of the timbres to firmly attach themselves to their positions in the final (01346) sonority, yet they are also the only timbres to trade pitches within that final sonority, which they have been doing throughout the piece. Besides this slight fluctuation, the final twenty-nine durations remain quite static in terms of pitch and timbre. Nevertheless, the rhythms and potential for tangential pitches that are created by Feldman's notational indeterminacy will continually unfix any sense of inevitability in the music.

Both the first and second pieces of *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* employ strategies that become increasingly definite as they progress, yet Feldman seems to use everything within the bounds of his notational system to deny any type of signification in these strategies. In the first piece, waves of density and frequency of attacks (or lengths of notes) would very gradually solidify in the context of a more determinate notational scheme. Similarly, the second piece's slow movement toward and establishment of a final sonority might be viewed as a logical evolution. But in both cases, Feldman's notation exerts its opposite tendency of cumulative destabilization, forcing strategies that grow ever more certain into contextual situations that make those strategies ever more apocryphal.

Bass Clarinet and Percussion (1981)

Feldman wrote *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* twenty years after completing *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet*, and the visual aspects of the two scores could not be more different. *Two Pieces* contains neither bar lines, time signatures, notated rhythms, nor notated rests, whereas *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* makes use of all of these conventions. Nevertheless, the disorienting nature of Feldman's notational scheme in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* serves an indeterminate purpose similar to that produced by the notation in *Two Pieces*; both use processes that deconstruct traditional rhythmic relationships between parts in order to bolster the independence of those parts. The composite sounds of these strategies do not attempt to force time into any kind of regular or determinate rhythm, but rather rely on rhythms that do not sound like rhythms to animate the essence of Feldman's ultimate ideal—Time Undisturbed. At the same time, the rhythmic difficulties encountered in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* demand the full concentration and constant attention of both performers, yielding a loss of some interpretive agency. Unlike the notational strategies in *Two Pieces*, which allow the performer a fairly large degree of control in the music, the structures in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* serve to control the performer, whose struggles against the labyrinthine notational systems describe the life of the piece.

Feldman arranges all pitch durations and silences in the score of *Two Pieces* into starkly vertical columns, despite the inevitability of deviance from this structure in performance. *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, on the other hand, appears almost contrapuntal at first glance—the bass clarinet's attacks rarely line up with those in the percussion. Feldman assigns the bass clarinet and the percussion voices contrasting

metric schemes despite the identical tempo marking for both, creating a situation in which the spatial alignment of parts in the score rarely corresponds to the temporal reality of the two voices. The percussion voice maintains a constant 3/4 time signature throughout, whereas the bass clarinet changes frequently, but all bars receive identical physical space in the score regardless of time signature:

m. 1 - 9

Feldman BASS CLARINET AND PERCUSSION für Bassklarinette und Schlagzeug (2 Spieler)
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Feldman significantly omits any notation regarding the majority of intersections between the parts, giving the performers only the following instructions: “b. Cl. sounds as written. Every five systems = 135 ♩ for both the b. Cl. & perc.”³ The performers therefore know that they should land in relative proximity to one another by the time five systems of the score have elapsed. Yet this amount of music represents between 122 and 129 seconds, plenty of time for the two performers to become out of phase. Feldman’s use of limited material (patterns translated through pitch, rhythm, timbre, register) further complicates these points of orientation by its self-similarity; a measure that is meant to

³ Morton Feldman, *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* (London: Universal Edition: 1981), 1.

correspond with the other performer's part may look like all of the other measures surrounding it.

Reworking the notation to represent simultaneous progress in the two parts certainly makes performers' perceived tasks easier. Even if such a score is not used in performance, particular measures of convergence might provide mileposts between Feldman's expansive "five system" marks. The sixteenth and thirty-first measures, for instance, are places in which Feldman's bar lines actually represent simultaneities in the bass clarinet and percussion parts. Such an altered version of the first nine measures is provided below:



m. 1 – 9 (adjusted)

Through hours of meticulous work, it is possible to construct such an altered version of *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* in which durations have been given relative space, yielding a score that allows both parts to be read together as they sound. The performer may then see where the parts converge in Feldman's version of the score (e.g. bar 16 in the bass clarinet part begins where bar 16 begins in the percussion part), and also where two different bars happen to line up in Feldman's score (e.g. bars 8 and 9 in the bass clarinet part begin where bars 6 and 7 begin in the percussion part). This type of score can also aid the listener, who is forced to follow one part or the other if using

Feldman's score. It shows the piece in something of an ideal state—the “perfect” piece that the performers work to realize.

Yet Feldman never claimed that his was a music to be watched, and though reading the altered score while listening to *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* can provide a sense of security to the historically-minded listener, correspondence between the visual aspect of this score and the reality of the process in Feldman's music have little to do with one another. No logical tendencies will be gleaned from the simultaneities, since they are derived from a system of patterns and translation that depend greatly on the symmetrical and modular visual aspects of the autograph. In fact, if anything, the altered score presents many more challenges to the analyst, as the operative strategic systems do not reveal themselves so readily as in Feldman's hand. By his notation, Feldman creates a piece in which neither counterpoint nor oppositional or interdependent tendencies play any role; he allows a chaos of sorts to take place in order to get past those historical elements, making it seem as though the two voices are “like one instrument in the same space, just a little echo of sorts.”⁴ An attempt to perform from the altered score, or even just its “cues,” will result in increased attention to counterpoint and collaboration, and therefore interpretation, all of which Feldman sought to avoid throughout his compositional career.

Feldman's *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* score spans ten pages, each of which contains four systems of three staves separated from each other by an empty staff. Each system is divided into nine evenly spaced measures. This arrangement gives 36 measures per page, 45 measures per five-system intersection of the two parts, and 360 measures in

⁴ Feldman, “Toronto Lecture,” 141.

the piece. Though the bass clarinet and the percussion parts are by no means symmetrical in relation to one another, they are bound by a notational system that looks pervasively symmetrical.

The exact center of the piece, between measures 180 and 181, lacks one quarter note beat in the bass clarinet part, and so cannot intersect perfectly with the percussion part and fulfill Feldman's note to the performer: "Every five systems = 135 ♩ for both the b. Cl. & perc." In fact, this beat could be missing from anywhere within the 45-measure period between bars 136 and 180, as there are only 134 quarter note beats in the bass clarinet part as compared to 135 in the percussion parts, but due to the conflicting metric schemes, this omission only becomes apparent where Feldman specifies the two instruments should come back together—between measures 180 and 181. If a misprint, this is an easy fix, as the percussion voices are resting, and another quarter note may easily be inserted into that rest. If, however, this omission is intentional, it could be intended as an element of chaos, or crippling of the overall symmetry of the piece. What should the performer do? No definitive answer is possible.

One might wonder whether even Feldman could have known precisely what this score would sound like at the time of its composition, but his notational strategies suggest that an exact knowledge of the conglomerate might not have mattered to him. He composes very precise patterns into the independent lines that make use of very little basic material, resulting in a piece that, much like *Two Pieces*, contains a reasonable average density without allowing itself to become overly deterministic.

Feldman seems to arrange the patterns in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* in general accordance with his stated points of intersection, the five-system divisions in the piece.

This scheme partitions the piece into eight different 45-measure sections, each of which behaves according to material constraints Feldman constructs in the initial section. He builds continuity and correspondence between some of the sections more literally than between others, but the essence of his material, whether it stems from pitch, interval, rhythm, meter, or register, maintains fundamental relationships throughout all of the sections.

In a 1984 lecture, Feldman compared this compositional strategy to Samuel Beckett's process of initiating fecund material via translations between languages, in which "he would write something in English, translate it into French, then translate that thought back into the English that conveys that thought."⁵ Feldman then describes his analogous process:

What I do then is, I translate, say something, into a pitchy situation. And then I do it where it's more intervallic, and I take the suggestions of that back into another kind of pitchiness—not the original pitchiness, and so forth, and so on.

Always retranslating and then saying, now let's do it with another kind of focus.⁶

The focus in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* certainly shifts between sections, and sometimes even within sections, making use of disparate instrumental sound materials and the patterns to which they seem best suited. Feldman shifts his focus frequently, he says, "because I don't want to be influenced with my own thought. That might divert me from the focus of that moment."⁷

⁵ Feldman, "Darmstadt Lecture," 194.

⁶ Ibid., 194.

⁷ Ibid., 195.

The frequent shifts in patterns sometimes seem puzzling, especially between moments where Feldman changes the percussion instrumentation. Yet each of the sections in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* relates to each of the others by basic material concepts. For example, nearly every section contains some incarnation of chromatic harmony, but this will be translated from the horizontal axis to the vertical, from bass clarinet to definite-pitch percussion, from static textures to rhythmically active, and seemingly everything in between. The following analysis aims to track and identify the patterns and other basic materials that saturate each of the eight sections. Feldman was wary of using the term “variation,” but his idea of translation represents a very specific subcategory of variation in which the music seems to progress (shifts in focus) without ever changing; he essentially says the same thing eight times.

Between all of the shifting patterns Feldman creates, few elements remain literally constant throughout the entire piece. In fact, of the three elements that do remain literally constant, two apply only to one instrumental group or the other. Dynamics represent the exclusive global constant in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*. In the bass clarinet voice, Feldman fixes instrumentation. In the percussion voices, Feldman fixes meter. Other than these three things, Feldman freely focuses and blurs patterns composed of any and all sound materials available to him.

This is not to say that Feldman is whimsical or inconsistent, but rather that he creates the illusion of progress in the eight sections by varying his patterns. Most of the patterns shift somewhat jarringly from section to section, but they often recall patterns that occur elsewhere in the piece; one usually finds these local correspondences in

sections that employ like instruments. An outline of the pseudo-progress in the eight sections follows:

The eight sections all contain their own fixed and unfixed material, based on what Feldman chooses as his focus. The first two sections focus primarily on patterns in the bass clarinet; the uncharacteristically large scale of its fifteen-measure periodic patterns seems to necessitate more than the three iterations contained within one section. The focus shifts slightly between the first and second sections, as indeterminate pitched percussion instruments begin forming pattern-like rhythmic relationships. In the third section the focus shifts to the percussion, where timpani and marimba play very pronounced modular patterns, while the bass clarinet begins a chromatic pitch-class descent, progressing down by semitone with each passing nine-measure system. The xylophone continues modular rhythmic patterns in the fourth section, sounding octatonic chords that transpose down by semitone every system, the lowest pitch in each collection corresponding to the exact pitches described by the bass clarinet's progression in the third pattern. Meanwhile, the bass clarinet begins a pattern of more rapid chromatic pitch-class descent, changing pitches with every note.

Section five has echoes of section three; the percussion has the same instrumentation and rhythmic patterns, while the bass clarinet's symmetrical three-note groupings are placed, system by system, in a metric retrograde of the section three. Thus, the music recollects its past, but in a very disoriented way. The patterns shift dramatically into the sixth section; Feldman moves the focus to alternating patterns of timbre in the percussion and symmetrical rhythmic modules in the clarinet. The material

in the first two systems of the seventh section recalls that of the first section, whereas the last three systems relate to the patterns found in section four.

Feldman fixes the pitch and register of all of the voices in the final section, much as he did in section six; the pattern of oscillating percussion timbres similarly reappears. The bass clarinet part moves through a pattern of metric diminution in the first four systems. *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* ends with a confluence of instrumental timbres in the final system, the fluttertongue in the bass clarinet translating into the seemingly incongruous timbre of two timpani.

Looking through the score, it seems as though a great deal has happened since the beginning of the piece. Yet all of these complicated processes stem from common source material, and very limited source material at that. Taking the first section as a starting point, much of the material behaves by threes: three iterations of a rhythmic pattern in the bass clarinet, three iterations of a metric pattern in the bass clarinet, three registers in the two percussion voices, and three registers (in descending order) employed by the three iterations of the rhythmic/metric scheme in the bass clarinet. Furthermore, the following pitch-class progression recurs three times in each of the three metric/rhythmic periods in the bass clarinet:

D D \flat E \flat D E E \flat D E E \flat D E E \flat E E \flat

This horizontal progression moves by intervals of only minor and major seconds, but not necessarily in a categorically patterned way, despite three successive iterations of D E E \flat , a similar but semitone-transposed three-note chromatic cluster in D D \flat E \flat , and the fragmented pattern E E \flat .

Translations of this “three-ness” may be found throughout the piece. Sections two and three continue the fifteen-measure periodic metric schemes in the bass clarinet, though Feldman changes the structure of the period in section three. The clarinet receives a repeating three-note pattern in section five. The rhythmic relationships established in section six suggest oscillating patterns between the timbres of the three instruments. To open section seven, the cymbals and gong move by three-bar modules, sounding three registers each, while the bass clarinet plays through a progression of pitches that results in a three-note chromatic cluster. Feldman fixes three pitches, one per voice, in the final section, resulting in yet another three-note chromatic cluster.

Other patterns, not necessarily bound up in threes, emerge from the opening section as well. The pattern of periodic descent seems to merit attention, as it affects pitch and interval relationships in the first half of the piece. Its first incarnation takes the form of descending octave displacement in each of the bass clarinet’s periodic patterns; this occurs in both the first and second sections. In the third section Feldman translates this device from the interval of an octave to that of the interval-class minor second, as the bass clarinet descends chromatically by nine-measure periods. The rate of descent in the bass clarinet accelerates in the fourth section, moving pitch by pitch, but in the fourth system Feldman breaks down what has been a very consistent pattern, eventually moving his focus toward the more fixed patterns found in the second half of the piece.

Feldman frequently bases his changeable meter on different kinds of patterns characteristic of the piece, whether they conform to periodicity, retrograde, or schemes of augmentation and diminution. For example, one finds periodic pitch or rhythmic relationships in nearly every section of the piece. Feldman makes liberal use of local

rhythmic retrograde within larger patterns, especially in the case of the timpani voice. He even takes the system-by-system chromatic descent of section three and diminishes it to a bar-by-bar pattern in section four.

Metric patterns materialize throughout *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* in the bass clarinet part, beginning with the fifteen-measure period that remains constant through the first two sections. The order and type of time signatures change in the third section, but Feldman keeps the fifteen-measure periodic cycle intact. Section four breaks the fifteen-measure period, but its first system borrows its metric scheme from the third system of section three. Feldman completely abandons metric periodicity by the time the bass clarinet reaches the second system of this section, as he moves into an additive pattern that very gradually increases the number of eighth notes in his time signatures, beginning in 2/4 and ending in 10/8.

Moving into section five, Feldman derives the metric scheme for the bass clarinet part from section three by means of modular retrograde. The meter in the first system of section five corresponds directly to the meter of the fifth system in section three. The meter in the second system of section five corresponds directly to the fourth system in section three, except that the first two bars are reversed. The third system of section five derives its time signatures from the third system of section three, but bars 4 – 8 in section three are retrograded in section five:

Section 3, System 3: (5/8 2/4 5/8) (2/4 7/8 9/8 7/8 5/4) (5/8)

Section 5, System 5: (5/8 2/4 5/8) (5/4 7/8 9/8 7/8 2/4) (5/8)

The meter in the fourth system of section five is an exact retrograde of the second system of section three, and the final system of section five uses the same metric scheme as the first system of section three.

Feldman does not define large-scale metric patterns or references in the sixth and seventh sections, but the final section refocuses on meter, and the first four systems contain four metric patterns for the bass clarinet. The first two span six bars each, and alternate $9/8 - 2/2$ and $7/8 - 3/4$ respectively. The second two span twelve bars each, and alternate $7/8 - 2/4$ and $5/8 - 2/4$ respectively. This metric pattern reflects a general rhythmic trend of diminution in this part, in which the bass clarinet progresses from whole notes (bars 316 – 321) to dotted half notes (322 – 327) to half notes (328 – 351). The pattern of diminution could represent a loose translation of the many patterns of periodic descent encountered throughout the piece, e.g. registral descent in the opening two sections or pitch descents/cycles in the third and fourth sections.

Feldman most commonly and constantly focuses on rhythmic modules throughout the eight sections, though this rhythmic material gets translated from section to section and instrument to instrument. The rhythms conform to the bounds of Feldman's basic materials as discussed above, but each instrumental group reinterprets how its sound potential might best work within these bounds. The rotation of instruments in the percussion voices therefore expands the palette of variation while maintaining the status quo with regard to Feldman's pre-existing basic materials.

The bass clarinet realizes the dominant rhythmic pattern through the first two sections, described by fifteen-measure periodic cycles. This represents one of the most macro-scale rhythmic patterns in the piece. The percussion gradually moves toward


rhythmic regularity in these sections, but no truly defining pattern materializes until the third section. The clarinet abandons rhythmic patterns in the third section. The tendencies toward patterned behavior in the percussion voices at the end of the second section bleed into the third, but six measures into this section Feldman shifts the instrumentation from the indefinite-pitch cymbals and gong to the definite-pitch timpani and marimba. Both of these instruments produce very quick decays compared to the previous percussion instruments, and they are therefore well suited to more rapid patterns. Feldman gives the marimba consistent patterns of rolls throughout this section.

The timpani voice, on (in) the other hand, receives a series of modular rhythmic cells. Feldman begins the pattern by varying the number of sixteenth rests between seven-note groupings of sixteenth notes as follows:

1:  7

2:  7

3:  7 7

4:  7 7

Feldman then translates this pattern in measures 100 – 105 by fixing a sixteenth rest and varying the number of sixteenth notes between rests:

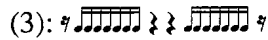
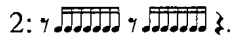
1: 

2: 

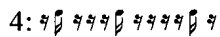
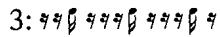
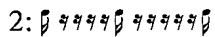
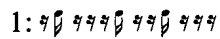
3: 

4: 

Feldman returns to a pattern using a fixed number of notes and variable rests in measures 106 – 108. Measures 109 – 126 fix both notes and rests in either one- or two-measure modules, which Feldman then arranges in a series of patterns:



He makes free use of the first module in retrograde, pairing it with its prime form to create two additional kinds of symmetrical two-bar modules, represented as 3 and 4 above. The final nine bars of the section contain three sixteenth notes and nine sixteenth rests each, but their position within each bar varies to create four distinct modules:



The fourth section contains similar modular rhythmic structures in the percussion, but the density of the octatonic harmony suggests a sparser translation of the previous pattern, which sounded only one pitch. The percussion voices in the fifth section use the modular rhythmic material established in the third section with very slight variations, while the bass clarinet regains symmetrical rhythmic patterns based on three-note cells. These three-note cells become four-note cells in the sixth pattern. Feldman here arranges the rhythms in the two percussion voices so that they will always alternate, but he brings them back together to form three-bar rhythmic patterns in the first two systems of the seventh section. The last three systems of the seventh section correspond to the textures and modular rhythms in the fourth section, but the increased resonance of the vibraphone produces longer durations. The bass clarinet's rhythmic pattern of diminution in the final section has already been described in relation to its meter. The percussion voices here

alternate rolls, as they did in section six, until they come together in the final system of the piece, where Feldman progressively increases the durations of their rolls by quarter notes.

Feldman binds all of his patterns together, each closely related to the next, but patterns involving interval, pitch, and harmony seem particularly inseparable. The chromatic cluster encompasses the prevailing harmony in the opening sections, formed by horizontal intervallic movement of minor and major seconds in the bass clarinet, and Feldman rarely deviates from this foundation.

With his frequent octave displacement in the second section, he translates the intervals in the bass clarinet's period. Nevertheless, this shift only makes the intervals major and minor ninths and sevenths, and they retain their initial interval-classes. In the third section the bass clarinet descends by interval-class minor seconds from D \flat to A, one pitch per system, while the percussion maintains a constant B. This arrangement ensures that the voices will never exceed the interval-class space of a major second. The bass clarinet continues its chromatic descent through all pitches several times over in section four, but Feldman's octatonic chords in the xylophone fix a strategy in which the bass clarinet cannot deviate from a percussion chord tone by more than a semitone. The octatonic scale, built out of alternating minor and major seconds, recalls the initial intervals in the bass clarinet.

In section five, the composite harmony between all voices creates the (0134) sonority that was being sounded in the lower staff of the xylophone in measures 163 – 171. These pitches were also present in the initial voicing of that same octatonic chord in the first nine measures of section four. Feldman makes the sixth section of *Bass Clarinet*

and Percussion the most spare in terms of both harmony and register. The bass clarinet plays a B throughout, while the percussion voices, still timpani and marimba, execute overlapping rolls on B \flat a minor ninth lower. The B and the B \flat bring together the two most pervasive percussion pitches so far in the piece (sections three and five), and they also bring the chromatic interval back into focus. The first system of section seven begins with a familiar pattern: four discreet chromatic trichords and one chromatic dyad in the bass clarinet part. Feldman stretched this horizontal harmonic pattern over fifteen bars in the first two sections, yet here he keeps it to within the bounds of one system. In the last three systems of the seventh section, Feldman treats the vibraphone the way he treated the xylophone in section four, giving four-note chords in each staff to create an eight-note harmony described by major and minor seconds.

Feldman fixes the pitch and register of all of the voices in the final section, much as he did in section six. Both percussion voices change to timpani, and the oscillating timbres of unlike instruments (timpani and marimba) on a fixed pitch from section six are here seen translated into oscillating pitches (A and G) within a fixed instrumental timbre. The A \flat in the bass clarinet fills the gap between them, creating the familiar three-note chromatic cluster. However, this cluster has a distinctly vertical orientation, as opposed to the horizontal chromatic structures in sections one, two, and seven.

Feldman keeps all of his materials to a bare minimum throughout *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, translating from section to section based on the germinal implications that evolve from the piece's initial structures. His foundational materials never change over the course of the piece, but his ever-shifting focus gives the impression that distinct events have happened. In fact, nothing has happened.

CHAPTER 3

ORCHESTRATION PIECES

Orchestration is the life of music without “taking thought.” In almost Freudian terms it is both the instinctual and outer reality of the composer’s musical character. No other idea in the body of the work transcends this.¹

Now getting back to the timbre, another thing I want to mention to my young colleagues: ‘Know thy instrument!’ Know thy instrument better than you know yourselves. It’s very, very important. And one of the interesting things that helped me write [*String Quartet (II)*] was another focus: a little more what I would feel is a more matching relationship between the instrument and the pitch, its timbre and the register it’s presented in.²

Certain pieces of Feldman’s seem to stand out as rather remarkable examples of instrumentation, *Three Clarinets*, *Cello*, and *Piano* among them. These pieces make pervasive use of instrumental sound materials to govern their strategic orientations. Feldman’s assertion that composition is orchestration finds its most accessible manifestation in the works involving dissimilar instrumental categories, as individual species of sound materials exert their influence on the overall texture of the piece.

¹ Feldman, “Unpublished Writings,” 205.

² Feldman, “Darmstadt Lecture,” 198.

Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano (1971)

Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano, the most strictly determinate among the four pieces considered here, is the only work to employ more than one clarinet. Feldman uses the sound materials of these three clarinets to balance those of the piano; the clarinets, as woodwinds, represent the potential for minimal attack and sustained or growing sound, whereas the piano, as a percussion instrument, must have a point of attack from which the sound will always decay. The cello acts as the chameleon of the ensemble, equally capable of percussive pizzicato and softer arco attacks. The clarinets in this group generally sound by committee, necessitated by the corresponding chordal structures in the piano voice. The two extreme sound groups (clarinet and piano) rarely play together in the piece, as Feldman achieves a work in which the basic sound materials dictate its balanced formal structure.

This work fits chronologically between the two notation-oriented pieces already discussed—*Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* and *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*. Yet *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* contains none of the inbuilt indeterminacy the notation of those two pieces suggests. Feldman notates all of the images in this work with precision, but without creating overly complex relationships that might disorient the performer. In fact, the most challenging notational aspect performers can expect to encounter is its strategy of constantly changing time signatures. But by keeping the texture relatively homophonic throughout the piece, Feldman constructs a much more innocuous metric scheme than he employs in such pieces as *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* and *For John Cage*.

The determinate aspects of *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* would seem to put it at odds with Feldman's broader compositional philosophy, in which he achieves sound by means of either "controlled chaos" or constant notational "un-fixing." He used indeterminate devices like these to explore the vertical dimension of music throughout his career, because "for Feldman, to engage the vertical dimension was to do as the painters did, 'to work with that which was unknown to them.' The fundamental mysteries of space hinted at the existence of vast worlds *in between*, places that the painters too sought to occupy."³ This vertical dimension is defined by a lack of structured time in which rests unadulterated sonority. Feldman's duration pieces achieve verticality through their indeterminate rhythms, which purposefully subvert horizontal connections by their very avoidance of meaningful rhythmic and local harmonic relationships. A music inhabiting such a vertical sound space defies inevitability and actualizes Time Undisturbed because there is no logical horizontal tendency, no temporal push or pull whether harmonic, melodic, or rhythmic. Although the notation of *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* is not indeterminate, Feldman remains interested in its vertical space.

The very orchestration of *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* suggests a symmetrical "outer reality" that favors homogenous timbre groups with the potential for vertical arrangement (clarinets, piano). Working with largely homogenous textures, Feldman does not have to worry about the horizontal implications of individual instrumental timbres. Feldman pairs this with a metric scheme that seems to imply a kind of constructed chaos, breaking down rhythmic continuity. Frequent bars of rest further de-emphasize the impression of structured time. He deploys horizontal melodic

³ Bernard, 184.

fragments throughout the piece, but these are a ruse, metaphoric verticalities articulated by melodic instruments. Accordingly, within Feldman's strategy, the piano is the instrument most capable of purely vertical images, and it receives almost exclusively literal vertical treatment.

Feldman fixes everything in *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, yielding a formally finished work. Its process is uncharacteristically independent of performance relative to his early and late pieces, which is perhaps part of why he later chose to label the style of works from this period "still life." Yet its orchestrational process explores different territory than the predominantly notational processes described by the pieces above, and it cannot be expected to behave in the same way. Feldman even said, "I've become fascinated with precise notation now, because I use it to measure other things, which ordinarily I would never have thought of."⁴ Feldman's instrumental materials provide clues as to what things might be "measured" in this piece by the nature of how they relate to one another.

By the time Feldman wrote *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, there was already a historical precedent for chamber works involving three clarinets, including such pieces as Schoenberg's *Suite Op. 29* and several of Webern's songs. Even Stravinsky had written his *Cat's Cradle Songs*, for contralto and three clarinets. The Schoenberg *Suite* actually includes three clarinets (albeit a combination of bass, B \flat soprano, and E \flat soprano), a cello, and a piano, along with two other strings. But Feldman most likely did not choose the instrumentation for his piece based on historical models. At least, it would neither

⁴ Feldman, "Morton Feldman Talks to Paul Griffiths," 47.

operate via logical systems of serial formulae nor make reference to historical musical traditions.

As divergent as their compositional styles seem, Schoenberg, Webern, and Stravinsky all use the three clarinets in their abovementioned scores to create contrapuntal relationships, clearly defining each individualistic voice. Moreover, many consider Schoenberg's *Suite* a fine specimen of twentieth-century polyphony. By contrast, Feldman's three clarinets contain virtually nothing within their rhythmic material that might be viewed as contrapuntal. Nowhere in the score do the second and third clarinets play without the first clarinet, nor does Feldman ever give them rhythms that differ from that of the first. He allows only the first clarinet to sound alone, and the limited amounts of horizontally oriented pitch and rhythmic material among the three clarinets is exclusive to the first part.

This brief but inclusive empirical analysis shows how Feldman treats the three clarinets as if they were one instrument. Even the notation in the score bears this out, delimiting the three clarinet staves with a bracket, just as he uses a brace to bind the piano staves. In terms of counterpoint, the piano differs little from the clarinet. Feldman only ever separates voices from within the piano timbre by holding on to individual pitches that have already sounded in a chord past the length of the other pitches. Most of the piano chords in the piece result in homogenous sonorous constructs, and most are separated from one another by lengthy rests, further de-emphasizing continuity or potential voice leading. The piano frequently holds its sonorities for several beats, and sometimes even for several bars.

In a piece full of vertically arranged sound groups, Feldman makes no use of double-stops in the cello part, favoring instead its versatility as an instrument between categories. The cello's single pitches attach themselves to the clarinet and piano sound groups at will, often participating in their gestures while providing transferable color from one group to the next. Feldman gives the cello a majority of the pseudo-melodic motives scattered over the surface of the piece. With one exception, these motives contain either two or three pitch-classes, usually in the same register, and form an aggregate chromatic harmony. Feldman occasionally repeats these motives in succession, reinforcing the cyclical, and therefore static, nature of the pitch-class collections.

Feldman makes uncharacteristic use of loud dynamics in *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, and he arrives at these loud dynamics by way of crescendo. The crescendo, a notational device, grows only from the potential of instruments that can sustain and increase their volumes and resultant sound spectra. Since the clarinet may sustain or increase its sound and is notoriously capable of producing minimal attacks, it would seem the perfect foil for the percussive attacks of the piano. By way of further contrast, the piano inevitably creates a decrescendo after the hammers have struck the strings; the sound will dissipate even with use of the sostenuto pedal. The cello can make use of bowed strings, producing attack and dynamic qualities similar to those of the clarinet, or it can play pizzicato, mimicking hammer-strikes in the piano. Illustrating both the symmetry and sonic difference in his instrumentation, Feldman specifies crescendi in all but two instances of dynamic flux in the clarinet parts, gives the cello a fairly even

distribution of crescendi and decrescendi, and leaves the piano to sound its naturally ubiquitous decrescendi.

These various directions of dynamic change might have been as crucial to the formation of *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* as they were in *The Viola in My Life (1)*, about which Feldman says, "... underlying almost every viola sound there is a slight crescendo. Now in a free duration you cannot write a crescendo, so the rhythmic proportions were brought about because of the duration of the various types of crescendo."⁵ The following excerpt from *The Viola in My Life (1)* clearly illustrates the kinds of crescendi Feldman mentions:

The Viola in My Life (1) m. 59 – 63

Feldman THE VIOLA IN MY LIFE 1 für Viola und 5 Instrumente

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⁵ Ibid., 47.

Feldman made this statement in an interview roughly contemporaneous with both pieces; *The Viola in My Life (1)* was completed in August of 1970, only the year before *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*. But while *The Viola in My Life (1)* makes exclusive use of crescendi in the viola part, *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* distributes the device amongst all voices capable of crescendo. Decrescendi, conspicuously absent in the former piece, also play a major role in defining instrumental relationships throughout *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*.

Feldman balances instrumental textures based on their dynamic possibilities as early as the fourth and fifth measures of the piece. The clarinet plays a D \flat for six beats in measure 4, a 3/2 bar, while the piano enters on the sixth beat of measure 4 with a quarter note cluster chord and proceeds to hold the chord's D \flat through the end of measure 5, a 3/4 bar. Feldman notates a crescendo for the clarinet in the fourth bar of the score such that it appears to last only four beats, an aberration in a piece permeated by full-bar crescendi and decrescendi. The piano naturally balances this shape with its four beats of decaying sound, leaving one beat of sustained clarinet sound between the two shapes. Though the clarinet 1 performance part contains a crescendo through the entirety of measure 4, the instrumental symmetry implied by the score strongly suggests the score's authenticity as regards the shorter crescendo.



m. 4 – 5

Feldman 3 CLARINETS, CELLO AND PIANO 1 für 3 Klarinetten, Violoncello und Klavier
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Small oppositional relationships abound in *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, as demonstrated by the local alternations between sound materials found between bars 83 – 98 or bars 156 – 173. Yet these micro structures, including those described in bars 4 and 5, have far-reaching implications, as the opposition between growing and decaying sound materials blossoms into the macro strategy for the entire piece. The second and third systems of the piece provide an example of Feldman's larger oppositional scheme. The second system, encompassing measures 7 – 14, employs decaying sounds in the piano while the clarinets rest, whereas the third system contains the predominantly sustained or growing sounds of the clarinets without any piano.



m. 7 – 14: piano

Feldman 3 CLARINETS, CELLO AND PIANO 1 für 3 Klarinetten, Violoncello und Klavier

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m. 15 – 22: clarinets

Feldman 3 CLARINETS, CELLO AND PIANO 1 für 3 Klarinetten, Violoncello und Klavier

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The cello plays a balancing role with its first two instances of dynamic progression, bridging the second and third systems by opposing tendencies in each of the two sound groups. It grafts itself onto vertical harmonic structures in measures 14 and 15, first with the piano, then with the clarinets. But Feldman uses the cello to articulate oppositional dynamic tendencies in both cases, as if to highlight the differences in sound materials. Over the course of measure 14, the cello grows from *pp* to *mf* against a

decaying piano chord, all within the context of a seven-note chromatic harmony. In the following measure the clarinets grow together from *pp* to *mf* while the cello decays from *mf* to *ppp*. Though the resultant chord in measure 15 contains only a three-note chromatic cluster, the three pitch-classes found here are common to measure 14 as well, suggesting another level of correspondence and symmetry between the two figures.



m. 14 – 15: cello

Feldman 3 CLARINETS, CELLO AND PIANO 1 für 3 Klarinetten, Violoncello und Klavier
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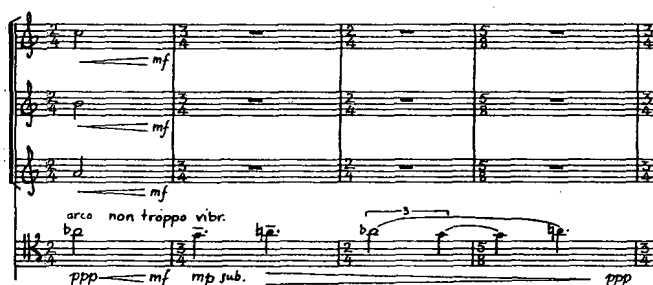
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Feldman builds similar large-scale structures throughout the piece, but the cello does not always locally oppose the dynamic tendencies and sound materials in the other parts; it sometimes forms a dynamic alliance with them to create either synchronized or analogous gestures. For example, in the second system the cello plucks out three tenuto quarter notes. The primary attack in the held piano chord lines up with the first of the three quarter notes in the cello, reinforcing the percussive nature of both sounds. Since the sound of a pizzicato cello attack recedes much more quickly than that of the piano, it is necessary for the cello to rearticulate the note, but not so much as to create rhythms that might imply a horizontal parceling of time. The cello sometimes acquires even more

exact sound correspondence when working in tandem with the clarinet voices—the clarinets and cello all move with the same rhythms and dynamics in measures 49 and 59, the cello's arco and harmonic sound materials enriching the clarinet harmony.

Throughout these examples the cello maintains its identity as a bridge between sound materials. Measures 49 – 57 describe a shift in sound materials from the clarinet group to the piano group, and the cello again acts as the pivotal voice. The cello begins arco and increases its dynamic level with the clarinets, but as soon as the clarinets stop playing it initiates a decrescendo. When the piano enters with yet another held chord, the cello's attacks become pizzicato, mirroring the attack style and decay in the piano voice as it did in measures 7 – 9.



m. 49 – 52: clarinets and cello

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m. 54 – 57: cello and piano

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The largest of these oppositional structures occurs between measures 112 and 153. The piano dominates the texture between bars 112 and 126. The constant cello pizzicato in this section reflects the influence of those piano sound materials. The clarinet plays only one pitch, held for only four beats, within that entire span. By contrast, clarinet sound materials occupy the vast majority of space between measures 138 and 153, the piano only interrupting the texture once. Feldman accordingly gives the cello mainly arco textures throughout this section. Between these two clearly oriented sections, measures 127 through 137 blend all of the sound materials. Feldman gives the cello its only solo arco duration roughly at the center of this middle section, separated from any other material by bars of rest on either side. This arrangement represents yet another pivotal use of the cello, standing as it does between the most expansive continuous articulations of either sound group.

While the crescendo serves the purposes of differentiation and unification of sound materials, it also binds together the motivic material encountered throughout the

piece. Feldman gives the clarinets two conspicuous four-measure gestures near the end of the piece that provide clues as to the vertical nature of his pseudo-melodic fragments. The crescendi in these bars, along with those in bars 19 and 21, represent the only instances of individuation between the clarinet voices. The first, between measures 143 and 146, describes a progression of one crescendo per measure, first in clarinet 3, then in clarinet 2, and finally in clarinet 1. Feldman follows each crescendo with a subito *ppp* in all voices. A nearly identical gesture emerges between measures 150 and 153, except that the pitches have changed from E F G \flat to C D \flat B, and Feldman switches the order of crescendi in the clarinet voices. Two horizontal motivic fragments therefore sound from within the context of constant vertical chromatic harmonies in the clarinets, receding back into a uniform texture for the last measures of each gesture.

All of the chromatic horizontal motives throughout the piece relate to and derive from this vertical relationship, made possible by Feldman's use of crescendo. Furthermore, it establishes a model through which these kinds of motivic gestures may be viewed as translated verticalities rather than goal-driven melodic fragments. Though crescendo usually implies direction and emphasis in music, Feldman's strategy of symmetrical instrumental materials creates an overall cyclical de-emphasis.

Feldman describes how his use of crescendo changed his compositional style in an essay on *The Viola in My Life*:

Since 1958 (not unlike an aspect of minimal painting) the surface of my music was quite 'flat.' The viola's crescendos are a return to a preoccupation with a

musical perspective which is not determined by an interaction of corresponding musical ideas—but rather like a bird trying to soar in a confined landscape.⁶

The idea that *The Viola in My Life* and *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* could both be described by Feldman's "still life" analogy derives from this lack of creative interaction (indeterminate relationships) between the different sound groups. Whereas the early and late pieces categorically defy exact performance, *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* and the other "still life" pieces remain fixed images of sound.

⁶ Morton Feldman, "The Viola in My Life," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 91.

CHAPTER 4

CLARINET AND STRING QUARTET (1983)

If a structure consists of a series of events, all equally important, and, at the same time, each of those events becomes the focus of attention, what, then, do all these events and their details add up to? What makes such a collection a unified whole?¹

Know thy instrument! You can't orchestrate unless you know thy instrument.
 Know thy instrument! Who was the Greek that said that? Know thy instrument!
 Know thyself! Who was the Greek? Socrates, Aristotle, know thyself, sounds like Socrates. I think it was Socrates.²

Written for English clarinetist Alan Hacker, *Clarinet and String Quartet* is by far the largest and longest of Morton Feldman's works considered here. Its forty-five minutes span nearly three times the length of *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* and five times that of *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*. The greater length of this piece typifies Feldman's late style, though it does not approach the infamously monolithic dimensions of such works as his late string quartets and *For Philip Guston* (1984). Performers must inevitably consider the duration of *Clarinet and String Quartet* in terms of both audience and physical endurance; the clarinetist plays nearly the entire piece without appreciable

¹ Wes York, "For John Cage," in *The Music of Morton Feldman*, ed. Thomas DeLio (New York: Excelsior, 1996), 147.

² Feldman, "The Future of Local Music," 194.

reprieve. Feldman admitted in a 1982 interview that he was “ writing very long pieces that are very difficult to play, very difficult to hear, and have to do with the life of the piece, whatever that means and not the life of the performer, or what happens to an audience when they go hear it.”³ Yet despite these challenges, the fact that several commercial recordings of this piece are now available indicates its survival as a performable and performed work.

Feldman composed *Clarinet and String Quartet* only two years after finishing *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, and the scores generally look very much alike. As in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, he gives each instrument its own staff, separating systems with an empty staff. Like instrumental groups are also barred together, distinguishing the string timbres from the clarinet timbre just as he separated percussion voices from the clarinet voice in the earlier work. Feldman divides each system into nine evenly spaced measures regardless of time signature, and he maintains this notational aspect throughout the piece’s twenty pages.

The notational strategy of *Clarinet and String Quartet* differs from that of *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* in that all of the voices share common time signatures simultaneously. The metric scheme never puts the instruments out of phase, though many of the complicated rhythmic proportions create images that mimic such a relationship. Nevertheless, Feldman composes entire sections of the piece homophonically, the precision of his notation closer resembling *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* in these sections than *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*. *Clarinet and String Quartet* also makes liberal use of repeats, a notational device unexploited in the earlier

³ Feldman, “H. C. E. (Here Comes Everybody),” 131.

works. These repeats expand the piece by a considerable amount, from 540 measures to 855 measures. They obscure the exact symmetrical proportions that played such a crucial role in defining formative patterns throughout *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, yet they preserve visual symmetry in the score. Since Feldman does not provide measure numbers in his score, references in the following pages will correspond to measures 1 – 540 without regard to repeats.

In an essay on Feldman's *For John Cage* (1982), an eighty- to ninety-minute duo scored for violin and piano, Wes York describes how Feldman “employs both symmetry and the over-all character of self-similarity to achieve [a] unique sense of coherence.”⁴ York meticulously traces the patterns that saturate *For John Cage* from the most macro-scale constructs down through those most germinal. He charts the remarkably consistent symmetrical patterns found at each level and concludes:

At all levels of organization, then, Feldman develops his forms with the aid of two devices: self-similarity and crippled symmetry. With these he creates a structure of striking originality, a structure in which opposing tendencies both clash with and balance one another, thus imitating nature “in her manner of operation,” as Cage expressed it.⁵

Clarinet and String Quartet, written the year after *For John Cage*, employs similar strategic and aesthetic approaches. The pattern as a compositional tool plays a fundamental role in defining Feldman's strategy for the two pieces. Feldman writes:

The most interesting aspect for me, composing exclusively with patterns, is that there is not one organizational procedure more advantageous than another,

⁴ York, 148.

⁵ Ibid., 194.

perhaps because no one pattern ever takes precedence over the others. The compositional concentration is solely on which pattern should be reiterated and for how long, and on the character of its inevitable change into something else.⁶

Thus he creates an atmosphere in which there is no hierarchy of sound events; the listener focuses attention equally on all presentations of material. *Clarinet and String Quartet* establishes several clearly audible patterns as it runs its course, though these are sometimes complicated by Feldman's seemingly "conscious attempt at 'formalizing' a disorientation of memory."⁷

Feldman began using memory as a compositional device in his late pieces to force an ahistorical kind of experience onto the listener. In pieces that contain as little material as his late pieces do, the listener must eventually focus attention on the minutiae of changing elements such as register or timbre rather than more traditional grandiose metaphoric gestures. It is both useful and entertaining to quote his discussion of memory at length:

In my string quartet often I do things to alienate memory. For example, I might have something return, but it returns in a different ordering. It seems only a little familiar. Like when we see someone for the first time after five years and she looks like the same person but ... You have this all the time, especially at my age. I'm walking down Madison Avenue and I hear: 'Morty, is that you? Gee, you haven't changed a bit.' And she looks like hell, you know! She's finished! [...]

So I put things into a different ordering. Some material might even return in another key, god forbid, which is evoking the whole idea of modulation. Or it

⁶ Feldman, "Crippled Symmetry," 140.

⁷ Ibid., 137.

might come back in another place where the instrumentation differs in only a very, very small way. So there's the possibility for infinite variation. Actually, I have to work harder in constructing pieces these days because I don't want 'baby food' memory: I want real good, very sophisticated memory.⁸

As Feldman's pieces became increasingly longer, the amount of material he put into them decreased. When asked by Michael Whitticker about the large scale of his works he replied, "No! What everyone else is doing is on a large scale! [...] I'm not doing very much—that's why it's so long."⁹ Asked by Whitticker what he wanted the listener to find in his music, he said, "Well, to develop another kind of sense ... to remember other things: a certain type of pizzicato, rather than 'the big tune.'"¹⁰

Clarinet and String Quartet proceeds by means of a limited number of general patterns that evolve very gradually over the course of its 540 measures. Feldman translates them into alternate incarnations, as he did in *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, but the translations in *Clarinet and String Quartet* take more subtle forms. As in *For John Cage*, Feldman uses the ideas of overall "self-similarity" and "crippled symmetry" to organize, or, at times, to disorganize, the patterned sound material in *Clarinet and String Quartet*. The overall self-similar aspects of *Clarinet and String Quartet* grow from the material presented in its opening pages. Nevertheless, growth should not be understood

⁸ Morton Feldman, "Morton Feldman: Conversation Without Cage," interview by Michael Whitticker, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 186.

⁹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁰ Ibid., 186.

as variation, but rather as “a synthesis between variation and repetition” within a strategy—viz. translation as discussed previously for *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*.¹¹

Feldman’s interest in “crippled symmetry,” the intentional thwarting of exact formal retrograde, seems to make its way into *Clarinet and String Quartet*, much as it did in *For John Cage*. To demonstrate this device, let the letters of a palindrome, such as the word “RACECAR,” represent members of a symmetrical formal scheme; slight mutilations produce crippled symmetry, such as sets “RACEDCAR,” “ERACECAR,” courtesy of Rauschenberg, or “RACECARD.” In each case, an additional component cripples the otherwise symmetrical form, frustrating the established symmetrical macro-pattern without unraveling it. In his essay entitled “Crippled Symmetry,” Feldman claims, “For me, stasis, scale, and pattern have put the whole question of symmetry and asymmetry in abeyance.”¹² Yet to have a pattern implies at least some degree of symmetry, and the structures/strategies found in *For John Cage* and *Clarinet and String Quartet* exhibit a corresponding wealth of symmetry and composed asymmetry.

The raw materials of sound production differ greatly between *For John Cage* and *Clarinet and String Quartet*. *For John Cage*, as mentioned above, is realized by violin and piano, and just one stave of the piano (the right hand) at that. *Clarinet and String Quartet*, on the other hand, makes use of a five-voice texture and includes strings as well as a woodwind. This particular combination finds its voice in oppositional patterns of vertical sonorities and horizontal quasi-ostinato and repeated-pitch figures. The more visibly static vertical material is generally the domain of the string sonorities, while the horizontal aspect, if the piece can be said to have one, plays out mainly in the clarinet

¹¹ Feldman, “The Future of Local Music,” 185.

¹² Feldman, “Crippled Symmetry,” 149.

voice. The term “quasi-ostinato” is used to indicate a cyclical pattern of pitch-classes that may or may not repeat with rhythmic regularity. The opening chromatic oscillatory fragment represents such an instance of the quasi-ostinato.

The horizontal designation may, in the context of Feldman’s works, be something of a misnomer, as none of the gestures actually go anywhere. Feldman writes, “For me patterns are really self-contained sound-groupings that enable me to break off without preparation into something else.”¹³ Oscillating fragments and articulated rhythmic patterns provide false senses of kinetic drive within this static context. Nevertheless, these gestures extend across the horizontal space of the bars they inhabit, thereby distinguishing themselves from the vertically oriented sonorities that pervade the rest of the piece.

The vertical and horizontal aspects of *Clarinet and String Quartet* ultimately play against each other in ways that affect the overall form of the piece. Large-scale patterns, in particular, draw on these sound materials to form oppositional symmetrical structures. Feldman dissociates the clarinet from the string texture throughout the work by means of relatively independent material, reflected in his notation by disconnected bars between staves. Even when the clarinet becomes part of the homogeneous vertical rhythmic texture for extended passages, the irregular periodicity of its pitch material conflicts with the patterns established in the other four voices.

The sonic characteristics of the instruments themselves suggest this dissociation and subsequent vertical/horizontal opposition. The string instruments possess a very wide range of changeable vertical sounds, including arco, pizzicato, sordino, ponticello,

¹³ Ibid., 141.

and harmonic colors. Feldman exploits this rich palette throughout the piece by using these colors in combination with one another, all while frequently re-voicing (and sometimes re-spelling) prolonged vertical sonorities. The resultant sounds achieve unity by means of their common harmony, yet the shifting textures might aptly embody Feldman's notion of "a synthesis between variation and repetition" on a very local level. By way of contrast, the clarinet possesses a relatively uniform tone, especially at the persistent *ppp* dynamic. Yet its ability to produce a "niente" attack and near-inaudible articulation yields the repetitive articulated pitches peppering the piece, which represent more horizontal material. In addition to legato articulation, microtonal alternations embedded in the enharmonic spellings of many of these articulated figures produce additional sound color due to the effect of somewhat imperfect fingerings on the resonance of the air column.

Feldman comes at *Clarinet and String Quartet* not with an idea, or even a shape, but rather with the strategies and styles his sound and notational materials suggest.

Clarinet and String Quartet contains very limited material in its twenty pages. In fact, Feldman only uses four basic patterns to generate the entire piece. The first pattern employs the aforementioned quasi-ostinato in the clarinet voice, usually accompanied by chromatic clusters in the strings. The quasi-ostinato initially cycles through a four-note chromatic group, and any number of the strings may join the clarinet in these cycles, though the quasi-ostinato voices do not necessarily play exactly the same rhythm in the same bar. The second major pattern to emerge involves alternating chords in the string

parts, over which the clarinet articulates repeated pitches. Feldman constructs the third pattern from modules of homophonic chord pairs. The fourth and final defining pattern consists of series of staggered attacks in all voices. Feldman constantly alters all four of these patterns, and though they never appear in quite the same form throughout the piece, they always retain their defining features. He leads his listeners through forty-five minutes of music, always orienting them to patterns they think they will remember, but never quite giving them enough exact repetition to create a sense of predictability within those patterns.

The first pattern is recognizable by its repeating cycles of pitches in the clarinet. This pattern receives more radical transformations than any of the other basic patterns. It begins the piece with the quasi-ostinato playing both in the clarinet and the upper reaches of the cello range. The pitch pattern consists of two pairs of ascending chromatic dyads separated by a descending minor third. Each therefore ascends a semitone into the next iteration of the pattern. All the while, the other three strings sustain chromatic clusters, extending the aggregate harmony to a seven-note chromatic cluster. The sustained chords periodically shift their voicings, but the chromatic harmony remains constant throughout this initial segment:

m. 1 – 6

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Measures 41 – 43 show a transformation of the first pattern, in which the clarinet's dyads describe an ascending major ninth and a descending major second, separated by an ascending minor second. The pitch-class material remains constant from the pattern's initial presentation, but the new order of pitches places an emphasis on different intervals. The strings play only fragmented cycles in measures 41 and 42, and though they realize a four-note chromatic cluster in measures 43 – 45, this cluster does not form a continuous chromatic set with the clarinet's pitch material as it did in the opening measures.



m. 41 – 45

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Feldman refocuses the pattern in measures 180 – 183, repeating materials from measures 10 – 12, before gradually subtracting voices until only the clarinet remains in bars 188 and 189.



m. 181 – 186

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The system bounded by measures 316 and 324 reveals two new incarnations of this pattern. The first, between bars 316 and 318, relates closely to the version found in measures 41 – 45, above. The clarinet's chromatic set has been transposed down a semitone from its previous sets, and the dyads progress by an ascending minor third and an ascending minor ninth, separated by a descending major ninth. The chromatic cluster chords underlying measures 316 and 318 relate to the clarinet part as those in measures 43 – 45 did, revealing a discontinuous chromatic aggregate. Measure 317, on the other hand, sees all of the strings move by a semitone, two ascending and two descending, to form a (0235) chord that stands out in striking contrast to the chromatic harmony that has become so closely associated with this pattern. Measures 321 – 324 show a three-note version of the quasi-ostinato.

m. 316 – 324

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Feldman's most radical translation of this first pattern initially occurs between bars 353 and 358. The quasi-ostinato now consists of three successive dyads per measure, each composed of ascending major seconds. The relationships between the dyads shift constantly, as Feldman unfixes both their registration and their arrangements within the bars. The harmonic material in the strings also shifts quite dramatically, favoring sonorities that emphasize major seconds as if to reflect the motivic material in the clarinet voice.



m. 353 – 358

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The second of the four major patterns arranges the instruments by clearly differentiating between the clarinet and string sound groups, again assigning the clarinet horizontal material while keeping the strings largely vertical and homophonic. The defining characteristic of this pattern is a series of articulations of a single pitch in the

clarinet voice. The number of articulations within a bar can vary, but Feldman seems to center them around the number seven.

This pattern first occurs between measures 35 and 40. The clarinet articulates a constant seven pitches per $\frac{3}{4}$ bar, sounding either A or an enharmonic oscillation between $C\flat$ and B every other bar. The harmony in the strings parallels this movement, alternating bars of (0136) chords and chromatic clusters.

m. 35 – 40

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Feldman alters this pattern between measures 217 and 243, but it is still very recognizable by way of the repeated articulations and enharmonic oscillation in the clarinet part. He gives the strings only a chromatic cluster throughout this passage, and its voicing remains constant throughout. Whereas the strings always previously sounded

underneath the clarinet, Feldman sets up an alternating scheme in this passage so that each sound group plays alone.

m. 217 – 223

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This pattern emerges again toward the end of the piece at measure 388 in nearly the exact form it took between measures 217 and 243.

m. 388 – 396

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Feldman makes his third major pattern the most instantly recognizable, as it differs from the rest of the material in the piece so dramatically. This pattern consists of pairs of homophonic chords, usually in the form of dotted quarter notes, arranged into modules of variable length. Though Feldman gives the clarinet voice the same rhythms as the rest of the voices, the clarinet does not generally behave in accordance with the fluctuating vertical harmonic scheme represented by the strings. As in the previous patterns, Feldman orients the clarinet horizontally, usually either repeating chromatic dyads or cycling through repeated pitches that progress by semitones.

Feldman begins this pattern in bars 46 – 49 with an isolated module. He varies the string dyads in each bar, but he keeps the clarinet's chromatic dyads constant. In stark contrast to the piece's previous material, only one of the eight vertical string sonorities represents a chromatic collection.



m. 46 – 49

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Measures 55 – 62 show the continuation of this initial module, though the order of vertical string dyads have been shuffled. If the order of string dyads in the first module is represented as {1, 2, 3, 4}, bars 55 – 58 proceed {2, 1, 4, 3}, and bars 59 – 62 rearrange them yet again as {4, 2, 3, 1}. Bars 55 – 58 keep the pitches of the chromatic clarinet dyads as they were initially presented, but bars 59 – 62 begin a gradual descending transposition. The clarinet moves from its initial A \flat /G dyad to G \flat /F in measures 59 and 60, after which it descends by similar motion to E/D \sharp in bars 61 and 62.



m. 55 – 62

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Feldman frequently brings back single elements from within early modules, juxtaposing them with material from later modules. Bars 121 – 129 offer such an example, where material from the initial presentation of the pattern (bars 46 – 76; dyad groups 1 – 7) is paired with material from the second presentation of the pattern (bars 97 – 108; dyad groups 8 – 13). The pattern proceeds {3, 6, 4, 13, 12, 11, 10}. He here offsets the pattern with rests in measures 121 – 124, after which he proceeds with the original rhythmic scheme.



m. 121 – 129

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Feldman repeats the pattern of vertical dyads found in measures 97 – 108 between measures 283 – 296, complete with their symmetrical structure: {8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8}. However, the greater vertical/harmonic impulse of the line subsumes the clarinet's formerly horizontal/independent line, and the first violin begins to receive the A_b/G that has previously been the exclusive pattern of the clarinet. This blurring of distinct materials continues throughout the pattern, though the attentive listener will

perceive only a slight difference in the timbral organization even if the former section can be recalled exactly. Feldman also disrupts the continuity established in bars 97 – 108 by inserting empty bars in measures 289 and 293.

m. 283 – 296

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Feldman fragments the pattern late in the piece, presenting individual dyad groups. He even goes so far as to allow operations such as retrograde to affect the direction of the dyads. Measures 416 – 420 show the pattern as it becomes fragmented. The first dyad group is retrograded in bar 418 then restored to its original orientation in

bar 420. However, register does not remain constant between the three statements of this same dyad group.



m. 416 – 420

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The fourth major pattern that occurs throughout the piece consists of five periodically repeating staggered attacks between the voices. The harmony in these passages tends either to be fully chromatic or to contain harmonic clusters (e.g. D and D \sharp with F, G \flat , and G). The equalized attacks ensure that all instruments contribute to a composite sense of vertical harmony and horizontal rhythm. This pattern first appears in measure 77:



m. 77 – 81

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In measures 109 – 117 Feldman separates the pattern into individual gestures.

The clarinet and first violin act as horizontal bridging agents between iterations of the pattern.



m. 109 – 114

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A fully chromatic iteration of the pattern appears in isolation between measures 275 and 277. The pizzicato in the cello emphasizes the sequence of attacks here.



m. 275 – 277

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Feldman begins *Clarinet and String Quartet* with pervasive symmetrical relationships on the micro-level, setting a precedent for the larger-scale relationships encountered throughout the remainder of the piece. Regarding his perception of strategy in his own music, Feldman states:

Strategy usually comes about in terms of the same kind of thinking that any other composer would have. Like anybody else the opening measure and its potential

and its flexibility. But what I don't do is try to make a system out of it. But in that sense like almost any other professional composer it is the opening ideas.¹⁴

It follows that the relationships established by the opening measure of *Clarinet and String Quartet* would bear a resemblance to larger structures in the piece, the most prominent feature of which is symmetry.

Ultimately, the symmetry employed by Feldman rarely approaches the exactitude one has come to expect from this device in works by such composers as Webern.

Retrograde, for instance, is quite an important strategy in this piece, but the listener will never discover note-for-note mirror images in the music. Feldman writes, "I have pieces where I don't repeat the tones retrograde, but I repeat the whole module retrograde."¹⁵

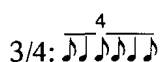
Symmetry, the apotheosis of formal de-emphasis, manifests itself in this piece in order *not* to be heard, and is therefore a function of pattern rather than one of individual notes.

The following briefly explores the "opening measure and its potential and its flexibility" in an attempt to define the space out of which this piece emerges. In the first measure, the top and bottom voices (clarinet and cello) are given a horizontally oriented quasi-ostinato gesture, effectively framing the remaining three vertically oriented voices that sustain chordal material. However, Feldman spells each pitch he assigns to these framing voices quite differently, which may be seen either as a sort of visual symmetry between pitches, or possibly as a clear separation that maintains the independence of the two sound groups.

¹⁴ Morton Feldman, "Johannesburg Lecture 2: Feldman on Feldman," transcription by Rüdiger Meyer, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 176.

¹⁵ Feldman, "The Future of Local Music," 182.

In any case, Feldman creates a symmetrical orchestration in the opening bar, as well as an opposition of vertical and horizontal material. The pitches sounded by the inner three voices combine to make a three-note chromatic cluster, itself a symmetrical sonority. And finally, the rhythms in the clarinet and the cello figures are symmetrical both in isolation and in combination. The composite rhythm produces the following:



The same kinds of localized patterns continue throughout the first eighteen bars of the piece; the orchestration does not change, the rhythms are kept symmetrical within the confines of the bar, and the harmony remains static. Feldman's curious 3/4 time signature lacks any kind of definite articulation in these opening bars, each possessing a somewhat less intuitive four-against-three ictus *quadratus*.

Symmetry also permeates the macro-structures of *Clarinet and String Quartet*. Feldman arranges the patterns in the first 213 measures of the piece so that they form a general symmetrical unit, and he provides local clues that reinforce this structure. Roman numerals I – IV will be used to indicate particular patterns, corresponding to the first through fourth general patterns described above. The first 213 measures progress according to the following scheme:

Group One: m. 1 – 33: I

Group Two: m. 34 – 66: II, I, III

Group Three: m. 67 – 129: III, IV, III, IV, III

Group Four: m. 130 – 173: (I), II, I, III

Group Five: m. 174 – 180: IV, II

Group Six: m. 181 – 216: I

The first and last groups contain only pattern I; therefore I will designate both of these groups as A sections. The second group and the fourth group both progress through patterns II, I, and III in succession, lasting 33 and 44 measures, respectively. These will be labeled B material. Though the fourth group begins with pattern I, it lasts for only three bars and is separated from the rest of the group by a bar of silence. The third group, C, progresses through patterns III, IV, III, IV, and III, possessing self-contained symmetry. This group also spans 63 measures, making it proportionally comparable to the other two pairs of groups. The diminutive fifth group represents something of an aberration in the overall symmetry of these 213 measures, but may be explained by Feldman's tendency to inject chaos into his patterns with "crippled symmetry," and will therefore be labeled D. The overall form of these 213 measures, then, may be represented as ABCBDA.

The C material contains the most symmetrical scheme among all of the groups listed above, and Feldman goes so far as to fabricate a highly symmetrical local pattern to act as an axis of sorts. The central pattern III at measures 97 – 108 begins by progressing through six distinct chord pairs in the string parts over the course of six bars. Feldman then employs modular retrograde in the following six bars to exactly reverse the order of the six chord pairs. He masks this perfectly symmetrical structure by shifting the pitches and register of the clarinet dyads over the retrograded chord pairs.

This axis of symmetry is not unprecedented in *Clarinet and String Quartet*: it occurs again between measures 283 and 296, situated at the center of yet another macro-structure. The patterns from measures 214 through 351 follow a looser arrangement:

Group One: m. 217 – 243: II

Group Two: m. 244 – 262: II, I, III, I, III, II

Group Three: m. 263 – 282: III, I, (IV), I

Group Four: m. 283 – 297: III

Group Five: m. 298 – 324: III, (I), III, I, (III), I

Group Six: m. 325 – 351: III, (I), III

Feldman gives the framing groups (one and six) similar proportions (26 and 27 measures, respectively), but they contain different patterns; group one is composed wholly from pattern II whereas group six is composed predominantly from pattern III. Nevertheless, Feldman alters the two patterns from their original forms in similar ways, creating a kind of meta-pattern from the separation of their vertical and horizontal elements. Both patterns now alternate between solo horizontal material in the clarinet (articulated pitches in II, independent dyads in III) and vertical string sonorities, and so will be designated A and A' within the context of this new macro-section.

Groups three and five seem generally more disproportionate than the majority of pattern pairs discussed so far at 20 and 27 bars, but their sequences of patterns closely parallel one another; these patterns will be represented by B. Both begin with pattern III and eventually progress to pattern I, and each contains short interruptions of what would otherwise contain solid stretches of pattern I. Group four represents the self-contained axis of symmetry, just barely altered by Feldman, and will again be labeled C. Group two maintains a high level of self-contained symmetry within its pattern structure, but it does not relate to any of the other groups, creating yet another crippling pattern shown as D below. The overall form of the material between measures 214 and 351 may therefore be represented as ADBCBA'.

The first two major sections of *Clarinet and String Quartet* reveal themselves as formally symmetrical when juxtaposed: ABCBDA vs. ADBCBA', the second a formal retrograde of the first. The second section certainly does not behave as neatly as the first, but Feldman's cues, the nearly identical axes of symmetry, invite the comparison and yield reasonably consistent results.

The bulk of the third section of the piece gets even muddier than the second in terms of symmetrical relationships, but Feldman clearly defines its extremities with very precise modules. Both modules last exactly 14 measures; the first stretches between measures 352 and 365, while the second covers measures 455 through 468. Both contain exactly the same material, but two distinct bars of pattern III in each provide the necessary signals to illustrate the modular retrograde Feldman has used to cap either end of this section.

Feldman makes the fourth and final section of *Clarinet and String Quartet* its shortest, but he also makes it the most exactly symmetrical. This section spans measures 469 – 540, and it makes use of pervasive modular retrograde and rearrangement within its individual groups.

Group One: m. 469 – 486: IV, I

Group Two: m. 487 – 504: I, III, I, III, I, III, I, III, IV

Group Three: m. 505 – 522: I, IV, III, I, III, I, III, I, III

Group Four: m. 523 – 540: IV, I

At this point in the piece it becomes nearly useless to catalog the patterns, as Feldman has translated and retranslated them into forms that suggest multiple patterns. Yet each of the

perfectly proportioned 18-bar groups displays unprecedented symmetry on both the micro- and macro-levels.

Groups one and four behave similarly, and so will be labeled A material. The first five bars of these groups both begin with material that suggest an augmentation of pattern IV, but the two modules within this structure, one two bars long and one three bars long, occupy opposite positions in the two groups. The six bars of material that ended the first section of the piece (m. 211 – 216) reappear in measures 481 – 486 to end the first group, whereas Feldman rearranges his material such that the sonorities that comprise 481 – 483 are projected onto the last three sonorities of group four.

Groups two and three, represented as B below, both begin with a diminished rhythmic translation of the clarinet quasi-ostinato from pattern I, and though they both employ the same sequence of pitch-classes, they vary the registral placement of their pitches. Group two begins with five measures in the low register and four measures transposed up an octave. Group three does the opposite, beginning with five measures in the higher register and ending with four in the lower. Measures 514 – 522 of group three correspond to an exact modular retrograde, by measure, of bars 496 – 504 in group two.

Feldman creates an ABBA form in this fourth section, and though he shifts the material in the groups around, they maintain an overall symmetrical structure similar to those of the previous three sections. The listener may not discern these formal schemes over the course of lengthy performances, and Feldman intentionally thwarts categorization by means of his crippled symmetrical structures. His drive to realize *Time Undisturbed* leads him to the stasis of patterned symmetry within the scale of vast time canvasses.

CONCLUSION

For me at least sound was the hero, and it still is. I feel that I'm subservient. I feel that I listen to my sounds, and I do what *they* tell me, not what I tell them. Because I owe my life to these sounds. Right? They gave me a life.¹

Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet, *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, *Bass Clarinet and Percussion*, and *Clarinet and String Quartet* span Morton Feldman's entire career, and each employs a distinct notational strategy that reflects trends in Feldman's contemporaneous compositions. *Two Pieces for Clarinet and String Quartet* uses an indeterminate notational scheme characteristic of his early pieces, unfixing traditional horizontal relationships in the music with controlled chaos. *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* achieves verticality by means of its symmetrical orchestration, the sound materials of which exert their influence on broader formal schemes within the confines of precise notation. Both *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* and *Clarinet and String Quartet* contain patterns composed of very limited material, translated and retranslated by Feldman to create the impression of motion without progress.

Feldman never abandoned his primary pursuit of sound, and all of the clarinet works engage in this pursuit, though outwardly each looks quite different from the others. The two works that share a common orchestration are perhaps the most comparatively disparate works on many levels, a situation paradoxically complicated by Feldman's

¹ Morton Feldman, "Conversation Between Morton Feldman and Walter Zimmerman," interview by Walter Zimmerman, in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 55.

ubiquitous proclamation: “Composition is orchestration.” Yet he qualifies the statement, citing notation as a stylistic determinant, and he describes the parallel goals of processes used in both *Two Pieces* and *Clarinet and String Quartet*. Both works challenge musical memory in its historical sense. *Two Pieces* employs indeterminacy, rendering a slightly varied piece with each performance despite its in-built statistical averages and conglomerate pitch experience. *Clarinet and String Quartet* disorients memory by assuming minimal but cumulative gradations in its patterns over the course of its unconventional scale.

Ultimately, each of Feldman’s clarinet pieces pushes listeners past historical models, focusing their attention on sounds that have not been forced out of their natural reality by logic. His writings, lectures, and interviews reveal and reinforce the uniform goals of the processes involved in his works. Feldman’s notational strategies realize a sense of Time Undisturbed because they grow from the sonic implications of his instrumental materials, discarding traditional systems that might interfere with the naturalistic character of his sounds.

Clarinet and String Quartet (1983) stands alongside *String Quartet 2* (1983), *For Philip Guston* (1984), *Coptic Light* (1985), *For Samuel Beckett* (1987), and others of Feldman’s mature works as the culmination of a life-long obsession with sound. Its organic structure has ideological roots in the earlier stylistic phases of Feldman’s career, and it celebrates the static musical rhetoric he strove to achieve with each of his compositions.

Boulez and Babbitt find musical meaning in an almost theistic order imposed on their compositions by extreme logic; Feldman presents his listener with the opposite

world-view, in which the composition exists as a chaotic experience that perpetually changes. Feldman says,

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.²

Feldman championed the cause of the sounds that “gave him a life” with unprecedented fervor, eloquence, and execution. His words and his works continue to influence perceptions of sound and music.

² Feldman, “After Modernism,” 75.

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APPENDIX 1

TWO PIECES FOR CLARINET AND STRING QUARTET

PIECE I

Pitch-Class/Timbre Graph

Duration Timbre Key:

c = clarinet

s = sordino (arco)

z = pizzicato

p = ponticello

h = harmonic

g = grace note

Bold caps indicates a fermata over a pitch-class.

Rows correspond to pitch-class.

Columns correspond to durations.

[illegible]

	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87
B	z																								
A#					z	z		z				z				s	ss	s	s						
A	c	pz									z							H		C					
G#	h	ch	hz					h	h	h		s	s	s					g	z		z	c		z
G							c				s									zz	CS		s		
F#						c					s				s				c	z					
F										p	gz				c	c							h		
E			c	c	c							c							p				p	h	
D#				h	h	hgp						g								z				g	
D										z		ps													
C#									cz	c	g		z	gs		gs		z	h	h	h		C		
C																									
B					cz															zz		z	h	h	c
A#							p									s	s	z					H	g	p
A					g											p		hh						z	ss
G#									c	c	c							h	c		z	z			
G	c	c	c															Cz		s					
F#		h															z								
F			p														c						c		
E					z			z								z						g			
D#																h									
D	z																z	z	z		c		z		
C#																	p		z		Z	z			
C																				z		s			

APPENDIX 2

TWO PIECES FOR CLARINET AND STRING QUARTET

PIECE II

Pitch-Class/Timbre Graph

Duration Timbre Key:

c = clarinet

s = sordino (arco)

z = pizzicato

p = ponticello

h = harmonic

g = grace note

Bold caps indicates a fermata over a pitch-class.

Rows correspond to pitch-class.

Columns correspond to durations.

