Forgetting Music: Duration, Space, and Remembrance in the Late Music of Morton Feldman

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Forgetting Music: Duration, Space, and Remembrance in the Late Music of Morton Feldman

Abstract
With pieces of music at 6 hours in length, Morton Feldman’s late music explores duration, memory, and remembrance. His music presents the listener with a musical landscape to contemplate along with an extreme duration to challenge the listener’s ability to listen to music itself. Feldman’s late music also decontextualizes or sections off time, similar to the Husserlian epoché, by way of its Minimalist tendencies. I take Heidegger’s terms, Dasein and Gestell and apply them to durational music in order to shed light on how durational music affects memory. I explore how the dedicatory titling of his late pieces gives way to thinking of them as pieces of absence, memory, and mourning.

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LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

Forgetting Music:
Duration, Space, and Remembrance in the
Late Music of Morton Feldman

by

Garrett Pluhar-Schaeffer

April 19, 2014

The report of the investigation undertaken as a
Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit in
the Departments of Music and Philosophy

Michael T. Orr
Krebs Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Donald C. Meyer, Chairperson

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Miguel de Baca
Abstract

With pieces of music at 6 hours in length, Morton Feldman’s late music explores duration, memory, and remembrance. His music presents the listener with a musical landscape to contemplate along with an extreme duration to challenge the listener’s ability to listen to music itself. Feldman’s late music also decontextualizes or sections off time, similar to the Husserlian *epoché*, by way of its Minimalist tendencies. I take Heidegger’s terms, *Dasein* and *Gestell* and apply them to durational music in order to shed light on how durational music affects memory. I explore how the dedicatory titling of his late pieces gives way to thinking of them as pieces of absence, memory, and mourning.
To my sister, Alaina
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“Every something is an echo of nothing”

— John Cage
# Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES AND MUSICAL EXAMPLES  

OPENING  

CHAPTER 1: THE LIFE AND WORK OF MORTON FELDMAN  

  PART I: LIFE  
  PART II: WORKS  

CHAPTER 2: MINIMALISM–SOUND–SPACE–MEMORY  

  PART I: SUSANNE LANGLER  
  PART II: THEORY OF MINIMALISM  
  PART III: MORTON FELDMAN AND SOUND  
  PART IV: MORTON FELDMAN AND SPACE  
    SECTION A: MUSIC AS METAPHORICAL SPACE  
    SECTION B: WHEN SOUND BECOMES SPACE  
  PART V: MORTON FELDMAN AND MEMORY  

CHAPTER 3: THE BODY–“DURATIONAL VIRTUOSITY”–DEDICATION  

  PART I: PHILIP GUSTON—THE EMBRACE-REJECTION OF THE BODY–“DURATIONAL VIRTUOSITY”  
    SECTION A: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF PHILIP GUSTON  
    SECTION B: THE BODY IN MORTON FELDMAN’S MUSIC  
  PART II: DURATION–DEDICATION–CONCEPTUALIZATION  
    SECTION A: DEDICATORY TITLING AS A GIFT  
    SECTION B: DURATION AS PROVIDING A SPACE FOR THINKING  

CHAPTER 4: DASEIN–MURNAN  

  PART I: FELDMAN’S MUSIC AS DASEIN  
    SECTION A: DASEIN  
    SECTION B: GESTELL  
  PART II: FELDMAN’S MUSIC AS MURNAN  
    SECTION A: EXPOSITION OF MURNAN  
    SECTION B: THE SIMPLE STATEMENT  

CLOSING  

BIBLIOGRAPHY
List of Figures and Musical Examples

Figure 1.2: John Cage, Lejaren Hiller, and Morton Feldman, Albright-Knox Gallery, 1985

Figure 1.3: Morton Feldman and Philip Guston Outside of the Marlborough Gallery, 1970

Figure 1.4: Philip Guston, Friend to M.F., 1978, Oil on Canvas, 68x88 inches, Saatchi Gallery, London

Figure 1.5: Irene Haupt, Morton Feldman with Bunita Marcus and unidentified person, (detail), State University of New York at Buffalo

Figure 1.6: Rehearsal for the recording of Samuel Beckett’s Words and Music, New York, March 10, 1987

Figure 3.1: Philip Guston, Bombardment, 1937-38, Oil on Masonite, Diameter 42 inches, Philadelphia Museum of Art


Figure 3.3: Philip Guston, Native’s Return, 1957, Oil on Canvas, 647/8 x 757/8 inches, The Philips Collection, Washington DC

Figure 3.4: Letter from Philip Guston to Morton Feldman, October 26, 1968, Morton Feldman Papers, 1950-1999, Music Library, The State University of New York at Buffalo

Figure 3.5: Philip Guston, To B.W.T., 1952, Oil on Canvas, 123 x 130 cm, Jane Lang David Collection, Seattle

Figure 3.6: Philip Guston, Untitled, 1969, Acrylic on Panel 30 x 32 inches, McKee Gallery, New York

Figure 3.7: Philip Guston, Waking Up, 1975, Oil on Canvas, 67 x 129 inches, McKee Gallery, New York

Figure 3.8: Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982, Washington D.C.
Opening

This paper consists of historical sections along with philosophical sections. I begin with a general history and biography of my subject Morton Feldman. This is followed by a brief overview of his works. This is mostly to familiarize you with what Feldman’s music resembled throughout his career.

In the second chapter I bring in the philosopher Susanne Langer to begin a discussion about aesthetics. From this starting point I engage in an analysis of Minimalism with a gradual focus on Feldman’s music in terms of Minimalism. The following parts consist of the analysis of the ideas and concepts in Feldman’s music. This chapter ends with one of the main problems I see in an analysis of the aesthetics of Feldman’s music.

My third chapter begins in the same fashion as the first—this time with a brief biography and discussion of artist Philip Guston’s work and relationship to Feldman. I then continue by taking the issue of the representation of the body in Guston’s work and superimposing it on Feldman’s music. From there, I begin a discussion about the philosophy of titling concluding in the nature of dedicatory titles.

My fourth and final chapter is on two topics, *Dasein* and *murnan*. I begin with a description of Heidegger’s term *Dasein* (being-there) and continue with a discussion of his term *Gestell* (enframing). I then take these two terms and use them as a lens to interpret Feldman’s music. Finally, I introduce the Old English term *murnan* (to sorrow after, to hesitate, to be anxious about) to describe and interpret Feldman’s late music.
Chapter 1: The Life and Work of Morton Feldman

Part I: Life

Morton Feldman was born in Manhattan on January 12, 1926, the second son to Irving and Frances Feldman, both Jewish Immigrants from Russia. As an adult he wore thick tortoise shell framed glasses with his hair slicked back often falling out of place, especially while playing the piano. Gavin Bryars, a fellow composer, remembers Feldman composing at the piano with “his head very close to the keyboard, playing a mildly dissonant chord very quietly, and then holding down the notes with one hand while he wrote them directly into the final score, often in ink, with the other.” He was a tall and broad man who spoke with an “unrepentantly outrageous New York accent.” He was well dressed and almost always had a Camel cigarette perched on his lips. Philip Guston’s daughter remembers Feldman as having a “morose, sardonic demeanor [which] concealed a quick and biting critical intelligence.”

Feldman had a fairly conventional middle class childhood wherein his father worked as a foreman at a family clothing company. His family moved to Queens, where Feldman spent most of his childhood, and his father opened his own children’s clothing company. At the age of nine, Feldman began showing an affinity for music when he began to compose his first pieces. Three years later he began taking piano lessons with

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Vera Maurina Press, a woman who was well-connected in the music world. She was friends with the Scriabins and studied with Ferruccio Busoni. This led to Feldman playing Scriabin and Busoni’s transcriptions of Johann Sebastian Bach. She allowed him stylistic freedom and let him develop his own ideas as young composer. Feldman stated that he “was instilled with a sort of vibrant musicality rather than musicianship” due to the teaching methods of Maurina Press. Two years later, in 1940, the Feldmans purchased a piano for their home chosen by Morton. While Vera Maurina Press gave Feldman the space to grow musically, his grandmother pushed him to develop his intellectual side. A year later, Feldman began receiving composition lessons from Wallingford Riegger, who was a composer of serial music. Feldman had a positive experience with Riegger and was never forced to write twelve-tone music.

Feldman attended the Music and Arts High School and began to hold composer workshops with other students. These workshops had no supervision from teachers, “It was a marvelous thing, we made our own scene, and realized the need to take music out of the classroom into practical experience.” Upon graduation, Feldman applied to NYU but ultimately decided against attending because he felt it was not the right environment for him. Instead, he began working at his father’s garment business. During this period Feldman gave up his piano and composition lessons and focused on working for his father. Later on a friend of Feldman’s sent his composition to Dimitri Mitropoulos. His friend was referred to Stefan Wolpe for composition lessons for Feldman. Wolpe denied

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his friend, which was when Feldman decided to meet Wolpe on his own. Feldman became a student of Wolpe, who in turn was taught by Anton Webern.\(^8\) Wolpe, who was also a twelve-tone composer, also never pressured Feldman into writing serial music. Their interactions during lessons were Socratic, where lessons were based around dialogue, questions and answers:

He loved what was on the opposite side of the coin. He always talked about opposites, in fact, the Hegelian dialectic of unified opposites was essentially his compositional philosophy throughout his life. Would a composition student guess that an understanding of both Hegel and Karl Marx could result in a very valid compositional concept?\(^9\)

Along with their regular weekly meetings, the pair met up several times a week for social gatherings.\(^10\) One place where Feldman and his group of friends liked to meet was at the Bergacue on 37\(^{th}\) Street 3\(^{rd}\) Avenue in New York City.\(^11\)

In an interview with Austin Clarkson, Feldman categorizes composition lessons into two kinds: helping the student do what he or she is doing better, or leading him or her in a new direction. Wolpe used neither of these approaches and opted for a discussion-based teaching method, which did not work for Feldmen. Feldman remarked that “all we did was argue about music, and I felt that I was learning nothing.”\(^12\)

One thing that Feldman gleaned from Wolpe comes from how Wolpe taught music in terms of aesthetic experience. Wolpe was Feldman’s door into the music world.


\(^9\) Ibid.


\(^12\) Morton Feldman, “Linear Notes,” Kulchur 2, no. 6 (1962): 57-60.
He met Varèse by way of Wolpe and wanted to pursue lessons with Varèse but was ultimately denied. Instead of taking lessons, Feldman met with Varèse on a weekly basis and shared their new music. Varèse was an important figure to Feldman because Varèse valued the sound of music itself and not the means in which it is made, something Feldman believed in throughout his life. Feldman remarked that, “Artistically, [Varèse’s] great legacy is a marriage between timbre and pitch that was absolutely uncanny. It’s a great harmony lesson in orchestration, or instrumentation, as harmony, and not conceptually arrived at. He really mixed them a way that the Germans do not mix, probably more out of Debussy.” Feldman took Varèse’s idea about sound before construction and adopted it in his own compositional style.

Feldman married his first wife, Arleen, and ceased taking lessons with Wolpe. He continued to work tirelessly on his compositions and continued to be employed at his father’s business. January of 1950 was arguably one of the most important months in Feldman’s life— it was at this time that Feldman met John Cage at a New York Philharmonic Orchestra concert where Webern’s Symphony op. 21 was being performed. Feldman left the auditorium after the performance of the Webern and found John Cage standing in the lobby alone. Feldman recognized him and said, “Wasn’t that extraordinary?” Cage was “actually shaking with, excitement… actually shaking… literally shaking… with his music.” They discussed Webern and Feldman introduced

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14 Claren, 257.
15 Beckett, 30.
16 Ibid.
himself as a composer. Cage then invited Feldman over to his apartment.\textsuperscript{17} This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between the two men.

Cage’s many connections in the art and music world of New York City proved to be beneficial to Feldman, as he was able to meet and become friends with many artists, writers, and composers. Cage introduced Morton to Philip Guston, an Abstract Expressionist painter. They developed an incredibly strong friendship and enjoyed similar things beyond art and music. Guston’s daughter writes about Feldman, “He was a man whose appetites more than rivaled my father's. They both loved to eat and drink and smoke, and they loved doing it together. The two men prowled the city for movies and good cheap restaurants.”\textsuperscript{18} Feldman’s relationship with Guston will be further discussed further in the fourth chapter.

Feldman met Pierre Boulez, a controversial figure in Feldman’s life, in Paris. He served as a foil for Feldman, who felt that Boulez’s compositional technique of putting the means of composition before the sound was incorrect. Boulez gave Feldman a copy of his \textit{Piano Sonata No. 2} in Paris and Feldman gave this copy to Cage who then began to organize a performance of Boulez’s piece. Although some difficulties were initially presented, the piece was performed by David Tudor, a pianist whom Feldman had met through Stefan Wolpe.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 31.
\textsuperscript{18} Mayer, 61.
\textsuperscript{19} Claren, 258.
Feldman wrote his *Piece for Violin and Piano* along with his first graphically notated pieces, *Projections 1-4, Intermissions 1-6, and Extensions 1-4*. At this time Cage began to learn about Zen Buddhism, this led him to explore the religion spiritually and musically culminating in his piece *Music with Changes*, which rendered Zen concepts explicit.

Feldman’s relationship with Boulez got worse when Feldman sent him scores and Boulez responded negatively. Feldman later wrote an article titled *Sound-Noise-Varèse-Boulez* attacking Boulez and his techniques. It is during this period in the 1950’s when Feldman’s ideas about art and culture solidified. He began to see public life at odds with the living art of the time.
Feldman wrote consistently through the latter half of the 1950s, producing pieces for dancers and film along with other instrumental and vocal music. Jack Garfein, a film director, commissioned Feldman for his film *The Swallows of Salangan*. He composed a gentle piece of music for string quartet during a rape scene in the film. This angered Garfein and didn’t accept it in his film. Garfein paid Feldman, and turned to Aaron Copland to write the film music.²⁰

![Figure 1.2: John Cage, Lejaren Hiller, and Morton Feldman, Albright-Knox Gallery, 1985](image)

In 1962 Feldman’s friend and artist associated with the New York School of Abstract Expressionist painters died and Feldman wrote his first dedication piece, titled

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²⁰ Ibid, 264.
For Franz Kline. In the summer of 1970 Feldman received his first job as a professor at Hawaii University. After this, Feldman began to write larger works including a commission from John and Dominique de Menil to compose music for the Rothko Chapel in Texas.\textsuperscript{21}

When Feldman returned to New York in 1970 he attended a gallery show at the Marlborough Gallery to see Philip Guston’s new set of paintings.\textsuperscript{22} These paintings were very different to Guston’s earlier abstract gestural pieces. They were representational and cartoonish, a turn towards the political issues of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.3.jpg}
\caption{Morton Feldman and Philip Guston Outside of the Marlborough Gallery, 1970}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 268.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 268.
When Feldman saw these new pieces, Guston asked Feldman, “What do you think?” He replied, “let me look at it for another minute.”"24 This pause was the end of their friendship. Figure 1.3 is a picture of Morton Feldman and Philip Guston outside of the Marlborough Gallery directly after Guston’s controversial show. This was the last time that the two friends saw each other.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 1.4: Philip Guston, *Friend- to M.F.*, 1978, Oil on Canvas, 68x88 inches, Saatchi Gallery, London

Feldman, in the past, had been thoroughly supportive of Guston’s work and praised it unconditionally. Guston was extremely hurt by his best friend’s lack of support for his new set of works. He still painted a portrait of Feldman titled *Friend- To M.F.*

(figure 1.4) in 1977 after their friendship dissolved. “It is a poignant image, as Robert Storr observes, of “their mutually regretted estrangement”; Morty's head is half turned away from the viewer.25

After staying in Berlin for a year with a DAAD grant (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst or German Academic Exchange Service), Feldman returned to America with a teaching position at SUNY Buffalo which Lukas Foss, a composer friend, found for him. He moved to 703 West Ferry Street in Buffalo. Feldman was initially hired as the Slee Visiting Lecturer in 1972. After that, SUNY Buffalo hired him permanently and he became the Edgard Varèse Professor of Composition— a position titled by himself.26 During his time as a professor he doubted his ability to teach composition in a university setting. He taught in a similar fashion to how his teacher, Stefan Wolpe, taught— in terms of the experience of music. Tom Johnson, a student of Feldman before he started teaching at SUNY Buffalo, presented portions of his composition notes upon Feldman’s death. Many of them are simple ideas about music, “You have to find a place for everything. Every idea needs to find its place in time, its context, its environment, a world in which it can exist. Sometimes you can write something that doesn't seem to exist in any particular place. That is better. But much harder.”27 Feldman’s philosophic teaching style also took the form of criticism as well. Feldman called Cage a “victim of his own philosophy.”28 He claimed that Cage believed

26 Claren, 268-70.
in the philosophy which prompted his material, while Feldman believed that the philosophy came from the material (sound) itself.29

In 1975, he began “June in Buffalo,”30 a festival featuring contemporary music, which is still continued to this day.31 David Felder, the Birge-Cary Chair in Composition at University at Buffalo, worked with Feldman for two years prior to Feldman’s death. David Felder is responsible for the revival of “June in Buffalo” in 1985 after Feldman had run it for years. Felder mentioned that he had felt there were few places for young composers’ music to be played in the US; summer programs at Tanglewood, Aspen, and Wellesley were largely unavailable for the many younger composers not in the New York/Boston axis. Therefore, Felder believed that “June in Buffalo” was important for the new music scene. While working with Feldman, Felder did disagree with Feldman’s earlier practice that the festival should perform only the older faculty composers, and the new incarnation featured world-class performances of each composer in attendance.32

It was also during this time that Bunita Marcus, a composition student from Madison, Wisconsin, began studying with Feldman. The two were lifelong friends and lovers. At one point Feldman proposed to Marcus but was denied.33 On September 20, 1976 Feldman met Samuel Beckett in Berlin while Beckett was rehearsing one of his stage pieces. They became friends and began to collaborate.34

29 Ibid.
30 Claren, 270.
33 Claren, 270.
Feldman’s aesthetic ideas about music became more complex and troubling while teaching at SUNY Buffalo. He not only began to question whether or not music was actually art, but also questioned whether or not music should be taught in a university. Despite having a generally positive and accepting music education, Feldman’s teaching method at University at Buffalo was anything but “open,” at least in his later years. While Feldman’s music did not sound like that of his teachers, Feldman’s students produced music that sounded very similar to his, a characteristic of Feldman’s later teaching. David Felder observed that “Morty seemed only truly comfortable in teaching students who either by choice or coercion composed music that on the surface closely resembled his
own.” Feldman wrote his first and only opera in conjunction with Samuel Beckett, who wrote the libretto. This opera was in opposition to the other historic operas with a strong plot line. Feldman began to receive plenty of commissions, which allowed him greater artistic freedom. Feldman took this newfound artistic freedom and began writing longer durational works. It was through these pieces that Feldman began to attract a different audience. At the same time Francesco Pellizzi, an art collector, suggested the book The Art of Memory by Frances Yates to Feldman. This book influenced Feldman’s music presumably because it discussed the ways in which people retained vast amounts of information before it could be written on something. This idea became evident in Feldman’s later compositions that last for hours on end. Feldman’s interest in duration reached its peak in 1983 when Feldman completed his String Quartet No. 2, the longest piece of music he ever wrote, at six hours.

Philip Guston, Feldman’s longtime friend, died in Woodstock, New York on June 7, 1980. Guston, who was Jewish like Feldman, chose Feldman to read Kaddish, or prayer, at Guston’s funeral. After Guston’s death, Feldman wrote many of his dedication pieces including For John Cage and For Aaron Copland. In 1984, he wrote For Philip Guston, his second longest piece of music—around five hours. He continued by writing For Bunita Marcus, a solo piece for piano, along with For Christian Wolff and For Stefan Wolpe. Feldman then began to work on For Samuel Beckett, his final dedication piece, in 1987.

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36 Claren, 271.
37 Ibid, 272.
38 Ibid, 272.
In June of that year, Feldman married his student Barbara Monk. Soon after their marriage, Feldman found out that he had pancreatic cancer. He gave his well-known Middelburg lectures in late 1987. He returned home to Buffalo to continue chemotherapy and died in his home on September 3, 1987. His funeral service took place on September 9, 1987, lead by Bunita Marcus.  

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39 Ibid, 274.
40 Ibid, 275.
Part II: Works

It is helpful to think of Feldman's music in terms of three periods: early, middle, and late. James Faulkerson writes, “in his Early Period from the late 1940s until the late 1960s/early 70's, works were essentially characterized by relatively small scale instrumental forces and short durations (2-4 minutes or 10 minutes).” An example of his early work is titled Piano Piece 1955 (Example 1.1). This piece features traditionally notated music. This small section of the short work shows the sort of work that Feldman was composing at the time. Feldman was also working with graphic scores in this period.

EXAMPLE 1.1: Excerpt from Piano Piece 1955, first six measures

It was during this period where Feldman began to put an emphasis on sound and its decay. “In his Middle Period the late 60's/early 70's,” continues Faulkerson, “Feldman achieved a clearly mature, chamber music style. The pieces became longer (frequently c. 20 minutes in duration), continued to use his previously developed sensual sound world and began to explore 'melody'." During this period he wrote music in his new graphic notation style and also in conventional notation.

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42 Ibid.
Example 1.2 is The King of Denmark written in 1964, a period where Feldman was writing in both graphic notation and traditional notation. The King of Denmark is one of the first pieces of solo percussionist music to be written in Western music (Stockhausen’s Zyklus for a percussionist was the first written in Europe in 1959).\footnote{Eberhard Blum, Notes on Morton Feldman’s “The King of Denmark,” Published in the Website “Morton Feldman Page,” http://www.envill.net/mfblumking_eng.pdf.} Feldman was influenced by Stockhausen’s composition along with John Cage’s 27’10.554 for one percussionist, written in 1956.\footnote{Ibid.}

Feldman’s graphic score is preceded by a page of general directions that outline the piece ahead (Example 1.3). No instrumentation is given and the percussionist is given the instruction to use only his or her fingers, hands, or arms. The ambiguity of pitch, instrumentation, and timbre is typical of this period. Instead of giving exact bells or drums to play, Feldman merely says “Bell-like sounds” and “Skin instruments.”
EXAMPLE 1.2: *The King of Denmark* Instructions page

THE KING OF DENMARK (Solo percussionist)

1. Graphed High, Middle and Low, with each box equal to MM 66-92. The top line or slightly above the top line, very high. The bottom line or slightly beneath, very low.

2. Numbers represent the amount of sounds to be played in each box.

3. All instruments to be played without sticks or mallets. The performer may use fingers, hand, or any part of his arm.

4. Dynamics are extremely low, and as equal as possible.

5. The thick horizontal line designates clusters. (Instruments should be varied when possible.)

6. Roman numerals represent simultaneous sounds.

7. Large numbers (encompassing High, Middle and Low) indicate single sounds to be played in all registers and in any time sequence.

8. Broken lines indicate sustained sounds.

9. Vibraphone is played without motor.

SYMBOLS USED:

B - Bell-like sounds

S - Skin instruments

C - Cymbal

G - Gong

R - Roll

T.R. - Tympani roll

△ - Triangle

G.R. - Gong Roll
EXAMPLE 1.3: Excerpt from The King of Denmark, first page

THE KING OF DENMARK

MORTON FELDMAN

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70-30 86th Street, Glendale, NY 11385
One of Feldman’s more well-known pieces from the middle period is *Rothko Chapel*. This piece is scored for SATB mixed choir, solo viola, soprano and alto soloists, celesta, and percussion. It is traditionally notated and is not as difficult as some of Feldman’s other pieces written at the time. The following example is a fairly typical page from *Rothko Chapel*. The rhythm of the piece is relatively straightforward, something which changes in his late period. The difficult part of this piece is the harmony for the voices.

**EXAMPLE 1.4: Excerpt from *Rothko Chapel*, measures 29-35**

*The Choir sings a consistent open hum throughout on the vowel “n” but not too nasal*
He moved on to his late period in the early 1980s. This is when he began to work with the duration of pieces by composing monolithic pieces.\(^\text{45}\) It was during this period that Feldman became interested in repetition and the silence between repetitions. He returned to writing his music in traditional notation, along with adding dedicatory titles to his pieces.

These late pieces are characterized by quickly shifting time signatures along with extreme durations. He employs various techniques in his late music which I will discuss at length in the next chapter. His late music is also mostly handwritten by Feldman himself. The following example is an excerpt from his Piano and String Quartet from 1985.

EXAMPLE 1.5: Excerpt from the last system of the second page of Piano and String Quartet

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
Morton Feldman normally did not write for the piano on more than one staff. This created a situation where most of the notes are many ledger lines and therefore difficult to read. Another thing which Feldman did at this time was to use time signatures to create rest in between episodes of sound.

Feldman also began to make use of tuplets to create metric ambiguity. Feldman’s *Triadic Memories*, 1981, makes use of a quadruplet in a 3/8 time signature. What makes this piece rhythmically difficult is the fact that the quadruplets are not straight eighth notes but are dotted eighth notes.

**EXAMPLE 1.6: Excerpt from *Triadic Memories*, measures 1-6**

![Excerpt](image)

This next excerpt is from the same piece of music, but shows another added layer of difficulty—another staff. Throughout this period the time signature does not change, but the meter is very ambiguous.
EXAMPLE 1.7: Excerpt from *Triadic Memories*, second system page 12
Chapter 2: Minimalism–Sound–Space–Memory

Part I: Susanne Langer

Susanne Langer’s (December 20, 1895 – July 17, 1985) theory revolves around the fact that humans are naturally inclined to create meaning. A human does this by creating a symbol. She defines symbols as “vehicles for the conception of objects.”

Language, writing and logical thinking are discursive forms, meaning that each presents signs. She differentiates between signs, which denote meaning, and symbols, which connote meaning. A sign could be the feeling of hotness— touching a red flame will create a sign that you are feeling heat. A sign is something with a direct relation to what it represents. The color red could mean heat to some, but it also might mean a rose petal to another. A connotation is something that does not have a direct or absolute relation to its signifier. She refers to art as an unconsummated symbol; this type of symbol is one where the meaning of the symbol is not asserted even though it has the ability to be so.

Critics of Langer normally separate her philosophy of art into two different theories. Samuel Bufford argues that Langer's second theory of art is overlooked. The first theory is the one that most philosophers pay attention to. It is introduced in her book, Philosophy in a New Key. In brief, the first theory is that art expresses ideas of feeling. Art expresses what discursive forms cannot express.

The second theory is that art illuminates the world around us. It makes us aware of space, time, or movement. Art does this through the abstraction of shapes, forms, and

46 Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1942), 57.
sounds. By abstracting these things an artist draws the gaze of the viewer in a certain
direction, “In art forms are abstracted only to be made apparent, and are freed from their
common uses only to be put to new uses: to act as symbols, to become expressive of
human feeling.” Art points us to things around us and makes us take notice of them.
Bufford lists two parts to what he calls a “theory which explains what is distinctive about
each realm of art.” The first is that works of art are not like other things in the world.
They present us with an otherness that is distinct from the real world. The affect of this
otherness is “the impression of an illusion enfolding the thing, action, statement, or flow of
sound that constitutes the work.” This is explained by Langer’s term virtual space,
which is like a mirror. When looking at a painting there is another world before us, yet
that world does not exist— it is entirely two-dimensional.

The second aspect to her theory is each art form presents an aspect of experience
that is unique unto itself. Each piece of art has a semblance or an appearance. Because
each piece of art has a semblance “it detaches itself from its actual setting and acquires a
different context.” The semblance is what appears when one comes into contact with
an artwork. This is when the artwork goes beyond its material presence, i.e. canvas and
paint, to being an abstracted, unconsummated symbol. Semblance gives rise to an
artwork’s primary illusion. This illusion refers to the thing which each artistic medium
best expresses. The primary illusion of music is its ability to “make[s] time audible” and
allow us to perceive time in a way in which we do not perceive it. Music lays out time
making it so that time can be organized and filled.

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49 Bufford 10.
50 Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 45.
51 Ibid, 47.
52 Bufford 14.
Langer gives a historical progression of symbol creating. Langer begins with examples of actions being turned into a symbol. This process begins with an outburst of self-expression. This is an unconscious action like a yelp of pain when hurt or a jump from being overjoyed about something. Once this action is repeated for the purposes of demonstrating it to someone else, the action becomes a symbol of that specific emotion felt when the action first occurred, “But as soon as an expressive act is performed without inner momentary compulsion it is no longer self-expressive; it is expressive in the logical sense, it denotes the feeling, and may merely bring it to mind, even for the actor. When an action acquires such a meaning it becomes a gesture.” The repetition of these gestures becomes a ritual, often performed for the sake of catharsis. Ritual is the most primitive symbol making process. The repetition in ritual is an important quality. Each time the gesture is performed it gathers meaning from each of the earlier iterations of the same gesture. Each new iteration of the gesture can be related to each of the earlier iterations. The gesture gains meaning because it followed a similar gesture and will be followed by another.

When Minimalist music is thought of in terms of Langer’s theory two things become important. The first is that Minimalism bears a close resemblance to primitivistic rituals. The repetitive, cell-based quality of Minimalist music lends itself to a reference ritual. A ritual in Langer’s sense is a task performed consecutively for a period of time. The goal of performing this task over and over is to somehow create meaning in the repetition. The goal of a ritual could be the appreciation of the action itself or to enter into a different state of mind. The goal of ritual is quite similar to what Minimalist music

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53 Langer *Philosophy in a New Key; a Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, 152.
54 Ibid.
does. The second important aspect of Minimalist music in terms of Langer’s theory is Minimalism’s relationship to time and the perception of it. While all music presents symbols of time, Minimalism in particular presents us with distinct and idiosyncratic symbols of time.
Part II: Theory of Minimalism

Discussing Minimalism as a movement is difficult to do. In one sense it is difficult because the movement itself, without its many ripples, was so short lived. Another reason is that Minimalism seems quite simple, but is actually swathed in knotted and heavy philosophic concepts that are different from the concepts underlying other forms of classical music. Minimalism has become not a movement but as Diederichsen calls it, “an ideology.” I draw a similarity between the Minimalist movement and the existentialist movement. Each one has traceable roots that stretch far back in time and both are relatively well known. Before going into the aesthetic theory of Minimalism it is useful to understand why Minimalism began.

Diedrich Diederichsen, an author, music journalist, and cultural critic organizes the Minimalist movement into three separate groups. It is important to note that outside of these groups, there are predecessors and composers who continue to be influenced by the Minimalist aesthetic. The first group is the “initial wave,” these composers were avant-garde in their style broke the ground for the actual movement, La Monte Young and Terry Riley were both a part of this group. The second group are the commercially successful Minimalist composers. These composers were the first minimalists to gain critical acclaim for their compositions. Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and John Adams are all in this group. The third group was the “aesthetically or personally linked” group. These are the composers who were influenced by the Minimalist aesthetic and used them in their own music. This third group is a bit tricky to define as the Minimalist aesthetic

56 Diederichsen, 112.
57 Ibid.
easily seeps into other musical forms and genres. Many of these composers are not even considered Minimalists, but their style can be traced back to early Minimalism. Some of these composers are Nils Frahm, Max Richter, Ólafur Arnalds, and Sufjan Stevens, whose track titled “Out Of Egypt, Into The Great Laugh Of Mankind, And I Shake The Dirt From My Sandals As I Run” from his 2005 album *Illinoise* bears a distinct influence of early Minimalism— the likes of Terry Riley’s *In C*.

Minimalism’s primary spur was as a direct response to modernism’s esoteric quality. Modernism in music became more and more difficult to understand and listen to in the post-war years. Minimalism sought to make what was opaque transparent— to focus on sound itself. There was also a tendency to remove form and syntax, in which Modernism was heavily steeped. Twelve-tone music and Neo-classicism both provided fertile ground for developing the extremes of form and syntax. From Webern’s precise writing in *Variations for Piano op. 27* to Stravinsky’s obsession with classical forms in his Neo-Classical period, Modernist music derived its basic essence from form and syntax. The term ‘syntax’ used by Diederichsen is problematic primarily because he does not specify what he means. I take Diederichsen’s term syntax to mean a general harmonic movement, or what gives a piece of music movement toward some kind of end. The chord progression, I-IV-V\(^7\)-I, e.g., has a strong harmonic pull from V\(^7\) to I. The syntax here is the establishment of a tonic and the movement away from the tonic followed by a V chord with a strong pull from the \(\hat{7}\) to \(\hat{1}\). Feldman’s music has no harmonic movement and consequently, no syntax. There is no tonic established and no resolution to a chord. Furthermore, Feldman’s music contains no harmonic pull to any note. The effect of this is a consistent suspension in time as the listener cannot grab onto a distinct
form or find harmonic direction in the sequence of pitches. I take Diederichsen’s term ‘form’ to mean traditional forms like a rondo or sonata.

In response to the stringency of Modernism, the Minimalists created music that moved glacially and explored repetitions of abstracted gestures. Feldman’s music highlighted the problematics of serialism. For Feldman, one note is not the same as the note an octave higher, while serialism contends that a C is a C no matter where it lies on the piano. This is reflected in serialism’s use of the twelve-tone matrix, where [0] is not a constant but rather a relative position or pitch. For Feldman, who composed at the piano, there are 88 individual keys to choose from. For a serialist, there are twelve pitches to choose from each with different octaves. Serialism also contains set patterns decided by the creation of the twelve-tone matrix by the composer. These set patterns and twelve-note series creates a type of syntax that is not harmonic syntax, but a serialist syntax. While it is not as readily perceived as the harmonic syntax in tonal music, it remains syntax nonetheless.

Diederichsen posits that Minimalists were interested in going behind music and investigate sound itself. Minimalist music often utilizes a drone or pulse that takes away the syntax of the piece of music. The drone or pulse removes the sense that time is moving, as it doesn’t provide a steady pulse that we can keep track of and measure time with. Without discrete sections and forms, the time during which music is performed becomes slippery and not easily traversed.

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58 Michael Nyman, Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 50.
59 Ibid, 121-122.
Life itself is wrought with order and schedules. During the period of time a Minimalist piece of music is performed the sequentialization of everyday life is disrupted. It removes the expectancy that traditional harmonic movement provides—gestures repeat at will, mutate, and suddenly end at will leading to the difficult, if not impossible task of determining what is coming next.

The effect of decontextualization in music is a sectioning off of a particular period of time. Diederichsen uses the Husserlian term *époche* to describe this decontextualization and subsequent sectioning off of time observed in Minimalist music. Edmund Husserl calls it, “the temporary bracketing out of all contexts in the perception and apprehension of the object.” Diederichsen concludes that, “Minimalism then appears as the attempt to transpose the (necessary fictional or virtual) results of the phenomenological ‘époche’ from the abstract realm of cognition to the three-dimensional realm of objective reality and make them accessible to the senses.” In other words, minimalist music is taking the Husserlian term *époche* and rendering it audible in music. We can then understand the Minimalists as being actively engaged in taking the phenomenological experience of time and expressing it in their music. By expressing the phenomenological experience of time in music the composer prompts the listener to experience time in a different manner than usual, augmented by the music. While Webern’s music can be understood as distilling and perfecting serialism, La Monte Young’s *The Well-Tuned Piano* can be understood as processing the experience of time—

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61 Diederichsen, 128.
where the exploration of the experience of time in music sheds light on how we experience and remember time in our everyday life.

In Langer’s *Feeling and Form*, she discusses something called subjective time. Subjective time is experience of time without relation to the social measurement of time, i.e. seconds and minutes. Subjective time can be stretched and condensed by our mind. An example of the stretching of subjective time is in the moment of tripping and falling. Each detail of that moment is remembered with vividness. While only a few seconds passed during this sequence, the occurrence is remembered as being much longer.

Music has the ability to change our experience of subjective time. A really long piece of music like Philip Glass’ *Einstein on the Beach* feels much shorter than its four and a half hour run time. I assert that the Minimalists, including Feldman, were actively engaged in explicitly augmenting and playing with our perception of subjective time. The way in which this was accomplished by the Minimalists was to remove form and syntax. Traditional forms gave marked time by separating it into recognizable sections. This allowed the listener to experience music in terms of organization of pitch and rhythmic material and not in terms of subjective time.

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62 Langer, *Feeling and Form*. 

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Part III: Morton Feldman and Sound

Feldman put an emphasis on the immediate aural phenomena—where the sound became the most important aspect of the piece. He was interested in the actual sound that an instrument gave off. This giving off of sound also included the decay of sound after the initial attack of sound. The decay of sound is a “departing landscape” where the last bits of vibrating air exist in our ears before dissipating. For Feldman sound was always leaving us and not coming at us. With this in mind sound becomes this something that cannot be grasped and exists as an ephemeral shimmer constantly evading our hold. What follows from the emphasis on sound, is the de-emphasis of concept and process.

Feldman was interested in creating music where the process of creating it was somehow veiled in the experience of the performance and sound of the music itself. Feldman was staunchly anti-concept in art and music. Feldman believed that conceptualism was unnatural and that it was a forced procedure. He also believed that conceptualism occurs when an artist is unfamiliar with the materials with which they work. This lead to Feldman’s intuitive way of writing music where sound gives way to ideas; not ideas giving way to sound. The form that music, or art, takes depends solely on its material for Feldman. The music does only what the material; pitch, rhythm, timbre, etc. can do.

64 Ibid.
Because Feldman was so against the process being evident in his works and so against conceptual music, he disdained Pierre Boulez, since Boulez’s music was about the process of creating sound. When Feldman’s position of anti-process is compared to what the abstract expressionist artists of the New York School were engaged in, his views begin to seem odd. Feldman took many of his ideas on art and music from the painters of the New York School. Painters like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning were very involved with the actual process of creating art. The actions made during the creation of a painting were as important as the finished product. This is the general trend of abstract expressionist art being a trace or document of the creation of an artwork. Feldman’s music, however, is at odds with the general aesthetic of action painting or process art.

When Feldman taught at University at Buffalo, he stressed the importance of timbre while writing music. He called this “acoustical reality,” or the orchestration of music. Feldman paid close attention to the actual sound that each instrument produced. Feldman wanted people to remember the sound of a piece rather than a theme or recurring motif. Even when Feldman does include a string of pitches, it is difficult to remember actual pitches. What is remembered is the vague impression and effect of the pitches arranged in that way.

Feldman gave the motto, “Know thy instrument!” He put an emphasis on the relation between timbres. For example, Feldman was not fond of the vibraphone, except when it was paired with a celesta. This combination of instruments occurs in For Philip

The interplay between these two similar sounding instruments prompts the listener to focus his or her attention between the slight differences in timbre.

Feldman’s music also often revolves around a particular interval. This interval is explored throughout the entirety of piece. For example, his String Quartet II focuses on the M2 and m2 intervals. Feldman used microtones as well, but in a typical idiosyncratic style. Feldman thought of pitches as having a direction (this mention of direction by Feldman is reminiscent of harmonic movement). Feldman notated microtones by using double sharps and double flats. For the performer a double sharp has more direction than a regular sharp or even no sharp at all. So, while Feldman’s music may seem oddly spelled with many enharmonic pitches it becomes clear that Feldman meant a D double sharp to have a stronger upward pull than an E-flat.70 The enharmonically written D double sharp would ideally be a small bit higher than an E written normally. He described spelling notes enharmonically as, “taking turpentine and putting it into paint.”71 This process involved Feldman making certain intervals smaller or larger than how they would be traditionally played.

Feldman was also concerned with how free and organic his music was. This idea of freeing the sound can be traced back to his graphic scores, which he stopped using in the mid 1950s.72 These early scores allowed the music to have an aleatoric quality. The performer was freed from the constraints of time. He or she was able to choose how long a note should last and which pitch to play. Feldman ultimately moved away from this type of writing in favor of longer scores with pitches and durations chosen by the

71 Ibid, 614.
72 Michael Nyman, Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 50.
Feldman’s late music can be seen as a realization of his graphic scores. In his late music he is essentially making the choices that he had left to the musician in his graphic scores. Feldman was still concerned with the freedom of the sound of each instrument while writing his later works. When music is written out the performers, especially a chamber ensemble, will rely on the other member’s parts to know when they play. Feldman was very concerned about the performers not relying on cues that would make the rhythm of the music become based on the syncopation between instruments. To combat this, Feldman used several techniques that would allow the music to seem organic and not simply syncopated. Feldman has discussed instruments in an ensemble in terms of each having its own distinct time world: Feldman described his music as “a canon of time worlds.” Each instrument moved at a different pace through his music. Feldman also called this metric counterpoint and it is best illustrated in Feldman’s *For Philip Guston*.

In *For Philip Guston*, scored for flute, percussion, and piano, Feldman begins the piece with what I will call *metric groups* which are groupings of measures which equal the same amount of time. The first metric group of *For Philip Guston* is a grouping of four measures, each with a different time signature: \(( \frac{3}{8}, \frac{1}{4}, \frac{3}{16}, \frac{3}{32} )\). Each instrument uses these four time signatures in the first metric group but in a different order. The entire metric group adds up to \(\frac{29}{32}\). So, while all of the instruments will not be playing together, they will all end at the same time. An example of the first metric group can be seen below in Example 2.1.

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EXAMPLE 2.1: First four measures of *For Philip Guston*

What is interesting, and somewhat challenging, about the way Feldman has notated this first metric group is that he has lined up each of the measures even though they are not the same length. Feldman’s score is deceiving because it seems as if each note were played at the same time, while in reality no note is played at the same time as another one. I have produced a more accurate representation of the score which illustrates the polyphonic nature of Feldman’s writing in example 2.2.
EXAMPLE 2.2: First four measures of *For Philip Guston, realigned*

One reason for the deceptive spacing of notes in Feldman’s writing is so that the performers cannot see how the notes will line up in reality. They are forced to play their own part without paying attention to the pitches or rhythm of the other instruments. This gives way to each instrument existing in its own “time world.”

Something that influenced Feldman’s music was his love of Turkish rugs, which is well documented. These rugs provided Feldman with musical inspiration. In her article, “The Square Knot- A Memoir,” Bunita Marcus, Feldman’s good friend and ex-lover, discusses how Feldman though of his music as a Turkish rug. Each note that Feldman wrote was like a small square knot in a Turkish rug. The counterpoint between the notes Feldman wrote was the relationship between the square knots in a rug. The whole rug represented a picture plane with an image captured in the rug itself. The rug seems to be an image of something much larger, where the rug captures a small portion of something much more sublime.

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Marcus makes the comparison between the picture plane of a rug and how Morton Feldman captures a sound space in his music.\textsuperscript{75} Feldman talked about his metric counterpoint in terms of Turkish rugs as well. In a Turkish rug the image of a flower might appear. The size of the flower is only determined by how much space the rug maker has to work with. If there was not enough room on a rug to fit one whole flower the rug maker would only create half of the flower. This relates to Feldman’s metric counterpoint because of how he doesn’t line up the notes in time, but has them simply move in their own time. Turkish rug makers were not concerned with creating a perfect symmetrical image where all elements lined up.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 201.
\textsuperscript{76} Morton Feldman, “Disney and Mondrian,” 606.
Part IV: Morton Feldman and Space

Section A: Music as Metaphorical Space

When Morton Feldman discusses his music he speaks of it in terms of an environment. In a master class given in Middelburg, New York on July 4, 1986 Feldman discussed the length of his pieces of music. Normally, music written in New York at that time was around 20 minutes. Feldman said that, “A twenty minute piece, that’s modest because if it’s a half an hour then it’s The Firebird, it’s a masterpiece. That’s pretentious, a half an hour.”77 In the same lecture, Feldman described the experience of an athlete “going into a different stage.”78 This movement into a different “stage” can occur when listening to music as well. Feldman makes use of this “dip,” as he calls it by being aware of when it happens in his music. The “dip” in Feldman’s music is the moment where the listener begins to lose their concentration and they begin to let their mind wander. By knowing, or approximating, where the “dip” is, Feldman is able to create and add new material at that point in order to make use of that new stage of listening.

While Feldman’s earlier pieces were around twenty minutes or much shorter, his pieces began to become longer with his compositions in the 1970s lasting for a half an hour. It wasn’t until Feldman’s String Quartet I that he began writing truly long pieces of music. His first string quartet was around two hours in length. The pieces that Feldman wrote in the last ten years of his life were mostly over an hour in length. His late works fall into three categories, the first group is made up of pieces that are under an hour. This

78 Ibid, 276.
includes *Palais De Mari* for solo piano, *For Stefan Wolpe* for mixed chorus and two vibraphones, and *Coptic Light* for orchestra. The second category is pieces that are over an hour, but shorter than two hours. This was the bulk of Feldman’s output from 1980-1987; some examples are *Piano and String Quartet*, *Violin and String Quartet*, and *For Bunita Marcus* for solo piano. The final category is pieces that are much longer. The three pieces in this category are: *String Quartet II* at around six hours; *For Philip Guston* for flute, percussion, and piano at around five hours; and *For Christian Wolff* for flute and piano at three hours.

Due to the sheer length of his later pieces, they become much more like musical environments than pieces of music. Instead of listening to the pieces of music as objects that have form, the experience of listening to Feldman’s music is like being immersed in an ocean sound for a period of time. The experience of time as having space can be explained with reference to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s book, *Metaphors We Live By*. In their book, Lakoff and Johnson they explain how our minds think of things in terms of metaphors. The first example that they give is about metaphorical ways to view argument. They posit that we think of argument in terms of war. They give the example, “Your claims are indefensible… If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out.”79 One thing to note of importance is that we simply do not discuss argument in terms of war. The metaphor “argument is war” structures the way that we argue and view argument as a whole.

This metaphorical view of argument is culturally relative and depends on which culture one is from. Lakoff and Johnson give the following hypothetical situation in

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79 George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago), 5.
order to illustrate the cultural relativity of thinking in metaphors: argument as dance. The culture that holds this metaphor would see participants in an argument as performers, “the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way.” The culture thinking in terms of this metaphor would conduct arguments in a much different way than how our culture conducts arguments. These metaphors are similar to a lens or gestalt. Not only do these metaphors structure our lives, but I think they shed light on the culture itself.

By looking at how a composer uses spatial terms in order to describe aural phenomena we can draw certain conclusions from his or her music. Music can be generally viewed under the metaphor “music is space.” I have found that it is common for durational or Minimalist composers to discuss their music in terms of an environment or a space that is entered. Other times music can be discussed with other terms. We hear a melody on top of a bass line or a fugue’s subject moving with or against a fugue’s answer or countersubject. Furthermore, certain sounds seem distant like the somber horn in F even if they are not actually physically distant from the listener.

The first two examples that I gave—music being an environment or space and music having a melody on top of a bass line—can be explored more. The example of a melody on top of a bass line can be easily explained by how we listen and view pitches as being higher or lower than one another. While one pitch may have an increased frequency than another, is not physically higher than a pitch with a lower frequency, I believe that we think of pitch as being higher and lower due to our notation system. Pitches with higher frequencies appear higher on a musical staff than pitches with a lower frequency. It is

80 Ibid, 6.
easy to then assign a pitch with a spatial location. This can then be continued on to the next example that is a fugue’s subject and answer moving with or against each other. This example can also be explained with reference to our notation system.

When we look at the 1866 edition of Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Klavier*, we can easily see the different parts in his *Fugue in G Major*. At the beginning of the first measure we have a line of music. At measure five, another line enters directly below it. We can simply look at this music and see that there are two lines moving from measure five and on. At times they move together and then against each other, similar and contrary motion. After seeing the music written out, we can easily ascribe a location in space, either high or low, to the pitch because we are so accustomed to seeing music written with faster frequencies higher than lower frequencies.

**EXAMPLE 2.3: J.S. Bach, *Fugue 15 in G Major* first 10 measures**

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This next example is from Bach’s *Fugue in A Major*. This score is visually interesting because the music looks very dense and complicated. The first system has three separate lines of material on two separate staves. Then at measure 20 the bottom line stops as the upper lines continue until measure 23 where we can see a marked change in the look of the notes and their position on the staff. Without even listening to the music we can determine, if only vaguely, that there is a general thinning of the musical texture, as the music looks less busy as it goes on. My argument is that because the score is so visual even a person untrained in music can find an understanding of what is going on in the music because we associate pitch with being high or low.

**EXAMPLE 2.4: J.S. Bach, Fugue No. 19 in A Major mm. 16-24**

I must admit that, while listening to music, I see the music as existing in a space and having spatial properties similar to how a musical score appears. The way in which music is notated has a large effect on the way in which we visualize music.

Similar to what Lakoff and Johnson, we can imagine a culture that does not have written music. Instead of thinking about their music in terms of space, they could think

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82 Ibid, 68.
of music in terms of color. Their understanding of music and the way in which they compose their music is structured around their view of music as color. Instead of adding lines of music above another line, this hypothetical culture could think of adding one color of sound to another to make a new color of sound.

So, I can fairly easily explain is why certain sounds seem higher than others with reference to our Western notation system. I begin to have difficulty explaining why Minimalist and durational composers discuss their music in terms of an environment or space. This view cannot be explained by the visual quality of a musical score. We still think of Minimalist and durational music as being spatial but in a different way than the spatial nature of a Bach Invention.

Section B: When Sound Becomes Space

Morton Feldman’s late music is much more concerned with the way in which we exist in the metaphorical space of music than with how it is viewed. Feldman is not concerned with how the music looks or is made, but with the effect of the music. If we look again at example 2.1 we can see the spatial relations of notes in the score that makes us believe that all of the notes are played together. But at the same time, in reality, they are not, see figure 2.2. This is one of the disconnects between the visual representation of the music and the aural reality. This leads us to believe that Feldman is more concerned with the effect and not the production of music.

Feldman’s music presents itself as a vast canopy of sound both extensive and translucent. The listener’s experience of his longer pieces, For Christian Wolff, For Philip Guston, and String Quartet II revolves around the feeling of existing in a very large space
that is moving imperceptibly slow. Internal time slows down and each moment of music feels as if its been stretched out for hours. Once the piece ends, there is the odd sensation that the three or four hours that passed were a mere twenty-five minutes. It is difficult to actually comprehend Feldman’s durational pieces. While an opera has changing sets, characters, and motifs that are developed, Feldman’s longer pieces do not have any of these. His durational pieces exist as large chunks of time sectioned off from the rest of the day. Thinking about a piece like *String Quartet II* becomes less about the individual musical material in the piece of music and more about the general impression, the timbre of instruments, and the experiential quality of the piece. This is contrasted by Alban Berg’s opera *Lulu*, which lasts around three hours. I have seen this opera multiple times and I can recall specific details and musical motifs that recur throughout the entire piece. In my experience of a piece like *Lulu*, I can remember exact moments. But I do not have the sensation of entering into a certain sound world or place. I am able to think about the opera in whole, while Feldman’s *String Quartet II* escapes my efforts of fully containing the music in my mind or thinking about the music as a whole. I do however remember the trace-like state I was put into and brought out of over and over again. This leads me to my next point: that Morton Feldman’s durational pieces have the quality of being mathematically sublime in Kant’s sense.

In Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, the term sublime is defined as: “that which is absolutely great”83 or that which has great magnitude. Something that is sublime is related to the beautiful, though I will not be engaging in a discussion of Kant’s theory of beauty.

Kant ascribes nature with actually being able to present us with the sublime.\textsuperscript{84} Art on the other hand can only try and reproduce the sublime that is experienced in nature. A thing that exists in nature and is mathematically sublime is the universe. When thinking of Feldman’s durational works as being mathematically sublime due to their sheer length, we can better understand why we experience them the way that we do. We are unable to remember the piece in its entirety.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 129.
Part V: Morton Feldman and Memory

When we first hear a piece of new music it is similar to being thrown into the unknown. We are not familiar with the piece of music as a whole and we are not able to remember previous listenings of the piece because we have not listened to it before. While listening for the first time it is impossible to prepare yourself for what music is yet to come. Our experience of Feldman’s music becomes one where we are passively observing an environment passing by us as we are pushed through it.

Upon listening to a piece of music a second or third time we can begin to expect what material will come next. While listening to the first movement of Johannes Brahms’s Second Symphony we hear the first theme, a melody similar to the well-known Brahms’s Lullaby. After we know the piece and have listened to it a few times we can expect that the second theme will come after the first one. We are able to think of both themes in our head and we know exactly when they will enter. We can also know, e.g. that there will be two themes in a first movement of a symphony because of the historical use of sonata form as the first movement of a symphony.

The second listening will allow us to remember gestures, motifs, and sounds that occurred earlier in the piece. While listening to Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring I can remember the astringent bassoon solo that starts the piece. Feldman’s music is much longer than The Rite of Spring and also lacks form and harmonic syntax as well. Even after I have listened to his longer pieces multiple times I still forget what happened earlier in the piece. Feldman’s For Philip Guston begins with a small melodic figure played in the flute. This figure reappears throughout the piece but the time between the iterations of it are very long. While the small melody is somewhat memorable the time between the
iteration is long enough for me to forget the melody as I become engrossed in the current musical material. After one has forgotten the small melody it will return but be changed in some way—it might not even resemble the original melody entirely. Upon hearing this new iteration of it my mind is flooded with the memory of hearing this before. This experience is especially odd because upon remembering the melody I also simultaneously realize that I had forgotten it. This gives Feldman’s music the ability to create a Proustian involuntary memory similar to the way the narrator in Swann’s Way being reminded of memories that he had forgotten. This flooding of new memories was prompted by the narrator dipping a madeleine cookie into tea. Feldman’s music allows us to have a similar odd relationship with our memory through his use of repetitious musical material and the sheer duration of his pieces.

Feldman stresses the importance of listening to the sound of the music or affect. Feldman focuses on the decay of sound in his music. A problem arises when Feldman begins to write longer music. We are unable to keep our attention focused on the music for that long and will inevitably lose focus and think of something else. The duration of the music detracts from our experiencing each aural phenomenon. Feldman’s shorter pieces were more in the range of time where a listener could remain focused the entire time. Now that I have introduced this problem a solution seems to be necessary. I do not, however, have a solution to this problem. I will bring up more problems with Feldman’s music in the following chapter and they too will remain unresolved.
Chapter 3: The Body—“Durational Virtuosity”—Dedication

Part I: Philip Guston—The Embrace/Rejection of the Body—“Durational Virtuosity”

Section A: The Life and Works of Philip Guston

Philip Guston was born Philip Goldstein in Montreal, Canada on June 27, 1913 to Russian immigrants from Odessa, Russia. His father, Louis Goldstein, was a machinist working for the Canadian National Railroad. In 1919, when Guston was still a child, his father moved his family from a Jewish ghetto in Montreal to Los Angeles in hopes of finding a better job. After five years of not being to find adequate work along with debilitating sadness his father killed himself: Guston was still young. What makes this situation worse is the fact that Guston was the one who found his father hanging in a shed. Guston, like his father, suffered from depression.

Guston was an artistic child and began drawing when he was thirteen. This served as a coping mechanism, helping distance himself from his family’s grief. He would seclude himself, sitting in a small attic room with one exposed light bulb, and draw cartoonish figures. As a child, he loved movies and cartoons and these became influences in his childhood drawings. In California, Guston attended Manual Arts High School along with Jackson Pollock. The two boys became friends, as they shared similar

89 Braziller, 12.
aesthetic beliefs. Guston was rebellious, however, and was expelled, after which he began working as an extra in Hollywood films. This was exciting and exhilarating for him, because he got to be in the large Hollywood productions that he loved as a child.

In 1930, after a period of working in non-artistic jobs, Guston attended the Otis Art Institute, a prestigious art school on the West Coast. It was here that Guston met his future wife, Musa McKim. Again Guston did not like the academic environment and dropped out of the program, and began painting murals. His interest in murals stemmed from his appreciation of both Renaissance painters and Mexican Muralists.

Figure 3.1: Philip Guston, *Bombardment*, 1937-38, Oil on Masonite, Diameter 42 inches, Philadelphia Museum of Art
His murals were very political and graphic, featuring images of war and death. They resemble both Social Realism and Surrealism—perhaps a commentary on the horrors and unearthly quality of war itself. He enjoyed painting murals for two reasons. First, a mural needed to be painted quickly as he would be painting on wet plaster. The second reason is that because the mural becomes a part of the actual building or architecture it was painted on.\(^{90}\)

In 1936 Guston moved to New York at Jackson Pollock’s insistence. Soon after moving he married Musa McKim and they had one child in 1943. In New York, Guston was able to work for the WPA as a muralist, allowing him to continue his passion for painting murals. After living in New York for some time, Guston received a teaching position at the University of Iowa. This change in landscape was something very different for Guston who was accustomed to a large bustling city. The time he spent teaching in the Midwest allowed Guston to focus on his canvas paintings. During this period Guston’s art became more abstracted with a movement away from his perspective-heavy mural style. By the end of World War II Guston was a nationally recognized painter with several awards. He had his first solo show in New York City in 1945 at the Midtown Galleries. As his painting style developed, tension began to arise between himself and Pollock, as Pollock felt that Guston had abandoned both him and modernism. Guston left the University of Iowa in 1945 to go to Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. After seeing reels of tape showing Nazi war crimes, Guston’s paintings took on a much darker appearance. He often depicted thin and emaciated bodies that blended in to one

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
another. After working at Washington University for three years Guston took a leave of absence and moved to Woodstock, New York.

In 1948, Guston won the Prix du Rome and was awarded a one-year stipend, which allowed him to travel to Italy. This was beneficial, as Guston was finally able to experience the Renaissance art that he loved so much. This also allowed him a personal respite as well due to the stress of his depression.

After his trip to Italy, Guston’s art began to take on a much more gestural quality. He began to paint very close to the canvas and did not allow himself to step away from it to view the entire painting. This technique produced large sections of color with visible
brushstrokes that add to the gestural quality of his work at this time. His paintings often had a large swath of red and pink in the center. Guston continued to use this bodily pink hue in the paintings he produced in the 1970s. In the mid-1950s he ceased giving his paintings generic names and began to give them titles that alluded to something else.

He was recognized as one of the leading proponents of abstract expressionism along with Pollock and de Kooning. John Cage introduced Morton Feldman to Philip Guston and they became close friends. Morton Feldman called Philip Guston, along with John Cage, his closest friend in New York.

Figure 3.3: Philip Guston, Native’s Return, 1957, Oil on Canvas, 64\(\frac{7}{8}\) x 75\(\frac{7}{8}\) inches, The Philips Collection, Washington DC
Friday

My dear Morty,

I have a feeling that we didn’t have a conversation after all — that I did most of the talking when what I most wanted was to hear you speak. Please chalk it up to my isolation here and sort of fall over when I come to the city. Anyway it was just marvelous to be with you and let love dinner, the two of us when we come to town in a week or so. Also, please remember soon to mail me anything you care to — I mean your writings. It’s my only reading matter. Will you? love ever, Philip
It was also during this period that Guston became more a part of the New York School. He would frequently travel from Woodstock to New York City to visit friends. Being in Woodstock separated Guston from his friends. His depression and loneliness during this time are evident in a letter he wrote to Feldman (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.5: Philip Guston, To B.W.T., 1952, Oil on Canvas, 123 x 130 cm, Jane Lang David Collection, Seattle
In 1966, Guston joined the Marlborough Gallery, which dealt with the majority of the painters in the New York School. Guston had his first gallery opening with the Marlborough Gallery in 1970. The work that Guston painted in the late 1960s exhibits a return to his academic roots. His paintings featured cartoonish figures in empty landscapes—similar to his childhood cartoons. This new period of work exhibited an exceptional unification of his abstract style with his more figurative early work. The touch and structure that he developed in his abstract work translated well into the despair-ridden landscapes and still lifes of the 1970s.

Art critics dismissed Guston’s new paintings and gave him horrible reviews. On top of that many of Guston’s New York School friends turned away from him seeing his return to formalism as a betrayal. His work was seen as being too innocent and childlike. But the art he produced in the late 60’s and 70’s was anything but innocent. His late work shows a great deal of inner turmoil and loneliness. The cartoonish figures are deformed and painted in a shade of pink that makes the subjects looks skinned and bloodied.

Guston’s new artwork caused his relationship with Feldman to cease to exist. Feldman was not able to overcome Guston’s representation of the body in his artwork. Feldman was quoted saying, “I couldn’t see it. I just felt the abstract work from the fifties was so important— and now he abandoned it for the Pop art thing.”\(^{91}\) Guston’s work after this point became even more desolate and surreal. He suffered a heart attack in the late 1970s and his work took on a much darker tone as death was constantly on his

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mind. He painted deluge paintings, where images of heads are being thrown about in an ocean of red. Michael Auping, the head curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, suggests that this is representative of the anxiety of being thrown and tossed through life and emotions.

In the 1970s he began to focus solely on the body by painting dangling limbs and large, bloated heads. This late period can be seen as a return to Guston’s love of comics and a general turn towards more political art in the 1960s. He started painting single paintings in one sitting which he called “one-shot” paintings. These, although figurative, were similar to the action painting that was created throughout the 1950s. This work often contained images of hooded members of the KKK and President Richard Nixon.

Figure 3.6: Philip Guston, *Untitled*, 1969, Acrylic on Panel 30 x 32 inches, McKee Gallery, New York

92 Auping, 21.  
93 Ibid.
The paintings Guston produced at this time became more autobiographical and illustrated his political stance. His portrayal of the KKK stemmed from an experience earlier in his life that he explains as follows, “I was working in a factory and became involved in a strike. The KKK helped in strike breaking so I did a whole series of paintings on the KKK.” His work also shows the movement towards portraying the body in painting, which had largely been ignored in modernist artwork of the fifties.

Figure 3.7: Philip Guston, *Waking Up*, 1975, Oil on Canvas, 67 x 129 inches, McKee Gallery, New York

Section B: The Body in Morton Feldman’s Music

Morton Feldman initially dismissed Philip Guston’s late period work because it was figurative and depicted the body. Feldman was surrounded by painters, composers, and writers in New York who shared his thoughts on art in general. The prevailing aesthetic of the time was abstract expressionism. Feldman played an influential role in the development of ideas in New York during this time.

In the late 1970s Feldman’s music began to address the body in ways that he had not done before. This new attention to the body in Feldman’s music is problematic, however, because his late music both embraces and rejects the body. His movement from graphic notation to traditional notation can be seen as evidence of Feldman’s rejection of the body. Feldman’s interest in durational music both supports and rejects his embrace of the body.

In his essay *Titles*, Jerrold Levinson discusses the philosophy of titling. He argues that titles are integral parts of a piece of artwork. He gives six examples of titles, each with its own purpose. Each of these categories continues from one phase of his career into the next. It is particularly compelling when we see the introduction of a new kind of title into Feldman’s oeuvre.

When we look at the titles of Feldman’s early 1950s paintings, we can see that they are quite dry in the sense that they do not provide a context or a distinct lens through which to view the work. Some examples of these “dry” titles are: Two Intermissions (1950), Intersection I (1951), Projection 5 (1951), Structures (1951), and Extension 3 (1953). Levinson would call these titles mystifying titles, where the titles seem tangential.

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to the work and do not relate to the work itself. These titles continue into Feldman’s later works, but change their form.

After his “dry” titles of the early fifties, Feldman began to adopt two new forms of titles. The first was simply the orchestration of the piece, e.g. The other type, which Feldman continued to use a little later in the 50’s, was more expository in nature. These two types of titles continue late into Feldman’s work. Examples of his orchestration titles are: *Eleven Instruments* (1953), *Pieces for Seven Instruments* (1960), *Three Clarinets, Cello and Piano* (1971), and *String Quartet and Orchestra* (1973). These titles span from 1953 until his death in 1987. They are most common, however, during the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. These titles would be what Levinson calls “neutral” titles. These titles simply take from a character or object in the piece. In this case, Feldman is just using the orchestration as a title.

Examples of his expository titles are: *The Viola in My Life I-IV* (1970-71) and *Triadic Memories* (1981). These would be classified by Levinson as “underlying” titles or “focusing” titles.96 For Levinson, “underlying” titles give weight or emphasis to a preexisting theme or subject, while “focusing” titles give one theme priority over other themes. These two categories, then, are quite similar. A title like *Triadic Memories* focuses on the usage and quality of triads and triplets in the work. It highlights a certain aspect of the piece and allow us to view the work through that title.

The final group of titles in Feldman’s work are dedicatory titles. While Feldman dedicated works to friends throughout his career as a composer, the bulk of his dedicatory titles occur in the 1980s. Examples of these titles are: *For Frank O’Hara*

96 Ibid.
(1973), *For John Cage* (1982), *For Bunita Marcus* (1985), and *For Stefan Wolpe* (1986). These dedicatory titles are difficult to categorize in Levinson’s system. For that reason I choose to add a new category of titles to Levinson’s: dedicatory titles. Dedicatory titles resemble Levinson’s disambiguating titles—where the title tells us what an abstract thing is. These titles act almost as hints and give the viewer or listener a direction into the piece. A dedication can be seen as telling us what the abstract piece of music is about. The reason that dedicatory titles are different than disambiguating titles is that they don’t clarify anything in the piece; they simply dedicate a piece of music to a person. The piece does not need to be about the person that it is dedicated to.

This movement from neutral, underlying, and focusing titles to dedicating pieces can be seen as a sign that Feldman was beginning to embrace the body in his work. The name given in the title brings a person to mind when we are listening to the piece of music. We are then prompted to think about the person during the duration of the piece. The dedicatory title allows us to view the work as a gift or memory piece for a specific person. The physical presence of the dedicatee can come to mind as well.

Morton Feldman also began to move from graphically notated scores to traditionally notated ones. His graphic scores can be interpreted as giving the performer a certain amount of freedom to choose what to play and when to play it. This allows the performer to choose what to do and how to execute the music with his or her own body. But Feldman eventually abandoned this freedom for the performer and returned to traditional notation. John Cage remarked that Feldman’s newly conventionally notated
music is Feldman’s interpretation of his graphic scores. This can be seen as a movement away from embracing the body, as Feldman is denying the performer the bodily freedom to execute the music as they wish.

The extreme duration of Morton Feldman’s late music creates a problem when related to Feldman’s simultaneous embraces and rejection of the body. The duration of the music challenges the body’s limits while explicitly addressing the body’s capabilities to perform tasks for long periods of time.

I will use Feldman’s *String Quartet II* as an example of how his late durational music both rejects and embraces the body. There have been quite a few performance practice articles and reviews of his second string quartet. These articles mostly focus on the difficulties experienced while listening to the quartet and how these difficulties were overcome. His *String Quartet II* was written in 1983 and was not performed as a whole until 1996 when the Kronos Quartet played it. The Kronos Quartet did not approach the piece not as they would normally approach a piece of music, but instead as a sporting event or a ritual. The primary focus of the training before the quartet is performed concerns how the players will play for six hours. The performers had to focus on their own bodily functions before playing this piece. They had to worry about how they would not eat or use the bathroom for six hours. Professor Clark Lunberry describes the piece’s major challenge as being a “concentrated endurance of pain” where one experiences the “pain of time” and “pain as time.”

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99 Ibid.
Normally a performer would focus on the technical aspects of the written music. This technical virtuosity can be seen as coming from the nineteenth century with music being written to be technically difficult and sometimes impossible. This trend continued into the twentieth century and still occurs today. I believe that Feldman was responding to the harsh complexity of Boulez’s music by creating music that is stripped down and drawn out. Instead of stressing technical virtuosity in his music, I want to argue that Feldman’s music requires a new kind of virtuosity not normally heard and seen in music. I call this new form of virtuosity durational virtuosity. The virtuosity and difficulty arising in durational virtuosity is due to the sheer length of the piece and the particular physical demands that it places on the body.

On the opposite end is Boulez’s Piano Sonata II, which is a good example of technical virtuosity. While technical virtuosity requires agility, durational virtuosity requires endurance. Durational virtuosity is also an essential property of Feldman’s aesthetic. For Feldman’s music to function as place where one exists in a different state of mind, his music must be long. This allows one to experience the decontextualization of music through the removal of form and syntax. Duration is also necessary in Feldman’s music in order to explicitly allow for the experience of the deviation of internal time from external time.
Section A: Dedicatory Titling as a Gift

In the essay, “On Language as Such and the Languages of Man,” Walter Benjamin argues that, “Through the word, man is bound to the language of things. The human word is the name of things… Language never gives mere signs.” In other words, language cannot fully express actual physical things. It can express the metaphysical or non-sensuous but fails in terms of doing material objects justice. With this problem in mind I want to continue with a discussion of naming.

I want to discuss three conceptions of titling. They are: Titling as remembering, titling as naming a certain mode of experience, and titling as a chasm between the name and music itself.

Often a name will be used to remember someone. Maya Lin’s *Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial* utilizes names as an integral part of her monument. The names in this monument function in different ways. The first way is to show a timeline of soldiers who have died. At the far left side of the monument very few names are inscribed in the small slice of black granite. As you walk down the pathway the monument becomes larger, showing the progression of time and the increase in the number deaths. At the far right side there is a tapering off of names showing the decline in number of deaths at the end of the war.

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The names function as a way to illustrate the large number of deaths over a period of time. The more nuanced function of the names in this monument is that of remembering. When a deceased person’s name is inscribed in granite, the name becomes semi-permanent. The name will exist in the granite for a long time and many people will be able to read it. This acts as a constant reminder that this person lived. It is also a way to give the deceased person a kind of afterlife as his or her name will continue after their death.

A name, therefore, is used as a placeholder for an actual physical object. Benjamin understands how a word cannot fully express a physical object. When in the absence of the actual physical object, a name functions as naming the concept or idea of the actual physical object. With this idea in mind the concept of naming and titling can seem problematic because it discounts the importance of a title. But I want to argue that the title of a piece is important and is an integral part of the piece itself. The title of the piece provides one lens through which to view the piece. Once you are actually listening to the piece of music the name becomes secondary as the sound of the music comes to the forefront. I deviate from Benjamin’s conception of naming in that I believe that a
title or name retains some importance when listening to a piece of music. While the title of the piece does not necessarily need to be thought of during the entire piece, it provides the listener with a starting point in thinking about the piece. The title informs the listener and gives a direction by which to enter the piece of music. Because Feldman began to title his pieces with dedicatory titles, his works become about the absence and presence of the person to whom the piece is dedicated. They also become about the presence of music that is also titled by a dedication. Because the dedicatee is not present in the piece of music, there is a sense of loss or absence of the physical person. What takes the place of this is the music itself. The music replaces the void created by the dedicatory title. We are then able to interpret Feldman’s music as being inherently involved with the memory of a person.

Titling can also be thought of as not only naming a certain state of mind. This concept becomes especially pertinent in Feldman’s titling. Feldman and the Minimalists strove to create a certain kind of experience where one would be removed from the sequentialization of everyday life. This decontextualization can be seen as meditative or contemplative. The title in Feldman’s late works can then be interpreted as giving a name to the experience of time and sound in his durational works. An example of this would be the state of mind the listener is in during Coptic Light. This piece begins with waves of sound brushing over and past the listener. There is a slow pulse that mutates throughout the piece, becoming slower and faster as the music ebbs forward. The experience I have while listening to this piece of music is difficult to describe as it is not like other experiences that I have had. The title then becomes a way to describe the experience one has while listening to the music.
Finally, we can consider titling as a means of creating a chasm between the music and the name of the music. In one sense, a title does inform a piece of music. We should be aware, though, that a title may also distract or separate us from the actual sound of music.

The dedication in Feldman’s work is normally written as “For so and so.” It is important to note that when Morton Feldman titled his dedicatory pieces they were not just dedicated to people who were alive. Sometimes the dedicatee was deceased at the time of titling. If the person was deceased at the time of titling, it is easy to interpret the work as a memorial piece. But, if the person is alive, the music becomes more difficult to interpret as being a memorial. My answer to this problem is to think of the pieces dedicated to a person who was alive at the time of composition as a gift. *For John Cage* was written while John Cage was alive. When interpreting the piece as a gift to Cage we can think of the piece as an heirloom. The piece is saturated with the memory and idea of John Cage, similar to how a family heirloom has certain memories attached to it.

**Section B: Duration as Providing a Space for Thinking**

As I described in chapter 3, Feldman’s music creates a metaphorical musical space. I want to argue that Feldman’s sonic environments can be seen as spaces to think about the dedicatee. Because the pieces are so long, we are given an ample amount of time to think of the person to whom the piece is dedicated. We have an extended period of time that is sectioned off from the rest of our day when we are given time to ponder the life of the dedicatee. Even in the case of the listener not knowing who the dedicatee
is, he or she will still have the idea that the piece was written for someone. This, ultimately, will shape the way that he or she listens to the piece of music.

Feldman’s movement away from his earlier titling, consisting mainly of titles giving the orchestration, to his late dedicatory titles can be interpreted as bringing the body into the title. We are prompted to think of the physicality of the person due to the title. The sensuous nature of the body is evoked in these newer works written in the 1980’s. This is because we are prompted to think of the physical strain on the performer’s body and the strain that we feel in our own bodies.

When Feldman titles his works with reference to a person the piece becomes conceptual. No longer are we simply thinking about the instruments and their sounds; we also begin to think about who the dedicatee is and what Feldman’s relationship to that person was. We are taken away from the immediate aural phenomena of the music and thrust into the conceptual realm of the music. Our minds drift slowly from the music being presented to us by the performer to our own conceptions about the dedicatee. When listening to For Philip Guston I cannot help but imagine Guston’s paintings while listening to the music. In one sense this can be seen as detrimental to the music as it is creating a separation between me and the actual sound. I prefer to think of these titles as enriching the piece. Yes, the title might push me to think of the title and not the music at times, but the title becomes a part of the environment created in the few hours of listening. It becomes a necessary element to the piece of music—so much so that if it were titled something else, my experience of the piece would be changed.

This brings me to my second major problem in Morton Feldman’s music. The first major conflict in his music was the issue of the duration detracting from the
listener’s ability to listen to each new iteration of musical material. This second major conflict is centered on a similar issue. When a more conceptual title is assigned to Feldman’s music, it can detract from the actual aural phenomena. We are torn between listening to the actual sound of the instruments and thinking about the dedicatee.
Section A: Dasein

I want to begin this chapter with reference to my second chapter. There, I discussed Feldman’s music in terms of the emphasis on the immediate aural phenomena, the spatial quality of his music, and how memory is intertwined with Feldman’s music. This led to my discussion of how duration creates a space for thinking about the dedicatee. I want to take this line of thought a step further and begin to define and analyze this “thinking space” created in Feldman’s music. I want to argue that Feldman’s music creates a time to remember along with a space to think. Feldman’s music sections off a period of time from the regular “sequentialized” time we experience on a day-to-day basis. This sectioning off or Husserlian epoché creates a time to remember the person to whom the piece is dedicated. My main thrust in this chapter will be to discuss the details of Feldman’s musical time and space.

Before I go into details about the mechanics of the musical space, I want to discuss the metaphysical quality of Feldman’s late music. Feldman’s music allows us to take a period of time to think and remember. This break or musical retreat brings us away from the typical happenings in our lives. If I am having a relatively busy day going to and from classes and not having much time to think, Feldman’s music creates a time and place where I can go which removes me from my daily schedule. It creates a pleasant disruption in the normally sequential nature of my day-to-day life.
With this particular characterization of Feldman’s music in mind we can relate it to Heidegger’s *Dasein*. In developing his metaphysics, Heidegger arrives at the term *Dasein* or being-there to describe the way in which we exist in the world. Heidegger begins his discussion of *Dasein* with, “*Dasein* is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its Being this being is concerned *about* its very Being.”¹⁰² This establishes the fact that *Dasein* is a being that can think of and meditate on its own “Being”. There is a distinction between “Being” and “being” in Heidegger’s writing; “being” is that which exists in the world. This could be a rock sitting next to the highway in Illinois, or my next-door neighbor. “Being” is that which has “being” and can think about and meditate on their own state of being. All “Beings” experience *Dasein*, while only some “beings,” those that are “Beings,” can experience *Dasein*.

Time is essential in understanding what *Dasein* is. “Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of Being.”¹⁰³ This leads to the fact that existence is a throwedness through or into time. It is the nature of our existence. We are constantly being pushed through time, existing at the cusp of nothingness.

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¹⁰³ Ibid. 60.
Section B: Gestell

In his essay, *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger sets out to discuss the nature of technology as allowing humans to in a way “predict” the future. An example of this would be weather radar. We use radar and different technologies to predict what weather will occur at a given place at a given time. This is not infallible, but we surround ourselves with predictive technology. We structure our days around what certain weather patterns detected by technology. This sort of technological prediction stems from the kind of predicting we do in our quotidian lives. We consistently plan ahead and expect the future to occur. Heidegger gives the example of walking through a door “When I go through the door of the lecture hall, I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I am already there.” This illustrates how we destine, or plan ahead, in our everyday lives. This destining allows us to feel safe and ignore the true nature of our existence which is *Dasein*. If we did not destine or plan ahead we would be constantly reminded that we are being thrown into nothingness. To live and experience the full nature of *Dasein* is an impossible task. But experiencing nothingness is crucial to our existence as humans as it allows us to create meaning in our lives. Our planning is necessary as we cannot always experience the nothingness of *Dasein*. The destining or planning is given the term *Gestell* by Heidegger. *Gestell* means a frame, or another kind of apparatus that provides support for a larger structure. It also is the scaffolding for a building being build. *Gestell* roughly translates to “enframing” in English.

The reason that I am bringing this concept up is because I want to argue that it relates to music and Feldman’s late music in particular. Most of Western art music is written with what Feldman calls form and syntax. The first movement of Mozart’s Symphony No. 29 in A Major is in sonata form. Sonata form in particular has a very distinctive harmonic syntax to it. There is the constant struggle between the tonic (A major) and dominant (E major). This provides obvious harmonic movement, almost to the point where cadences and next sections can be predicted. That being said, we must allow room for deception in music. Often composers will elongate a phrase to create an anticipation of the cadence. The deception can also occur at the cadence itself in the case of a deceptive or V-VI cadence. Hence, most of this music is written in a way that is predictable. The form of a sonata is very predictable. During the middle development section of a sonata, the listener can be sure to expect the recapitulation of the main theme in the tonic. The structure, progression, and syntax of the chords in a Mozart symphony resemble an enframing or Gestell— they create an artificial structure of expectation.

Feldman’s music is much different than Mozart’s chord- and cadence-driven music. Feldman’s late music lacks traditional harmony and cadences altogether. Instead of heavy harmonic pulls from a V to a I, we have repeated major 7th intervals. This creates the ever-flowing and unfurling quality of Feldman’s music. The timelessness and departure from the traditional experience of temporality is due to the utter lack of syntax and form in Feldman’s music. What Feldman’s music illustrates is the opposite of what Mozart’s Symphony No. 29 in A Major illustrated, it presents us with a depiction of Dasein without the enframing nature of syntax and form. In other words, his music is throwing
us through time. We cannot expect what will occur next. As listeners, we do not know when a certain repeated figure will mutate into another similar figure or when the figure will stop altogether and move onto new material. We are presented with nothingness in front of us as we are thrown through Feldman’s music. Using the term thrown is somewhat deceptive as Feldman’s music lacks the forceful nature that the word thrown implies. Instead we seem to be gliding into nothingness. When I listen to Feldman’s music I cannot know what will come next. Furthermore, I am unable to memorize the content of his compositions because they are so long. Memorizing the piece of music would allow me to expect what material is coming next and would not allow me to experience a representation of nothingness. Feldman’s music provides a time to escape the idle chatter of everyday life. It gives a time to think about nothingness. His music provides us with ample time to wrestle with the complex and difficult issues of death and nothingness. His dedicatory titles provoke thinking about death as they are often dedicated to a deceased person.
Section A: Exposition of Murnan

*Murnan* is an Old English word that comes from the Proto-Germanic *murnan* which means “to sorrow over.” Earlier forms of *murnan* are the Proto-Indo-European root *mer-*, which means “to remember” or “to die,” and has a relation to modern English’s word ‘memory.’ It is also related to the Old Norse base *(s)mer-*, which means “to die or wither.”\(^{107}\) *Murnan* is to take care of something, to sorrow after something, to hesitate, to mourn, to be anxious about something.

This word provides a rich and robust definition that I believe describes Feldman’s late music quite well. I struggled to find a word that encapsulated the varying ideas and feeling that Feldman’s late music conjures up. I did not want a word that was too directive as that would only allow for a certain singular conception and way in which to listen to Feldman’s music. *Murnan* describes the feeling of absence and mourning without explicitly making the piece a memorial piece or monument. His are not memorial pieces because they are not written in memory of someone. They are merely dedicated or given to someone. Even though they are not memorial pieces, they do have the capacity to function like a memory piece. They allow for a time to think about, hesitate, and be anxious about something.

The term *murnan* does not assume that the dedicatee is dead either. It is simply a time to think about the dedicatee and be mindful of his or her existence. Feldman’s dedicatory pieces also contain a definite feeling of emptiness or absence. This is because

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although the piece is titled and dedicated to a person, the person is absent to the listener and the only thing that is left is the title bearing his or her name, the music, and the thought or memory of the person in our mind.

Section B: The Simple Statement

Morton Feldman’s late music provides the listener with three concepts that are in conflict with one another. They are:

1.) Music as immediate aural phenomena
2.) Music as duration, decontextualization of time, and the creation of space
3.) Music as dedication and simultaneous embrace and rejection of the body

I discussed how each of these concepts is in direct conflict with each other at the end of chapters two and three. There is the inability to listen to each new sound and musical gesture because the pieces are so long. Then there is the inability to think about the sound of the music because a dedicatory title is introduced. There is one other conflict that I have not named yet, between the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} concepts. Because the music is so long the listener is unable to think about the dedicatee for such an extended period of time.

With these paradoxes in mind it seems that listening to Feldman is fraught with difficulties and complexities. But in reality the actual listening to the piece is much different than the conceptualization and analysis of it. Feldman’s music actually provides us with music where we have to decide and choose how we, as listeners, want to experience and listen to the music. His music does not dictate how we listen to it. I see his music as a vast music-plane where I have the freedom and the difficulty of choosing
how to listen. This question of how should one listen to music is not one that is brought about in most pieces of music. Most music has a place in which it is played—symphonies are for the concert halls, operas for the opera houses, and hymns for the church. Feldman’s music is atypical due to its length and the listener is presented with the challenge of choosing how to listen to it.

In the end, Feldman’s late and dedicatory music makes one simple statement—that this person lived and existed with us. We are provided with a spatiotemporal area where we can think of, be mindful of, sorrow after, and care for the dedicatee.
Closing

I would like to end where I began— with the title. In it I wanted to capture what I believe to be the most important quality of Feldman’s music: to forget.

Forgetting something is normally a nuisance— forgetting your keys when you leave in the morning will lead to climbing through windows, while forgetting a birthday or anniversary can lead to hurt feelings. There is also a more difficult and scary part of forgetting that is at the heart of many of our anxieties. I worry about forgetting my childhood, something I hold so close. Or I worry about forgetting who I am like the countless people with amnesia in movies and TV shows. I still have awful nightmares from when I used to participate in theater productions while in high school. In my nightmare, I would have either forgotten a line, prop, or an entire cue. It is amazing that four years later, I still have these bad dreams. I believe that the kernel of the fear of forgetting is death— for death is the ultimate forgetting. Death wracks me with anxiety because I will forget my family, my friends, my ideas, what it feels like to lay in the dewy grass at night staring up at the moon, that time I first loved, that time I was so anxious about death I could not get out of bed, or the way I am comforted by the love and care of other humans. I fear death because I will not have the ability to forget.

The forgetting in Feldman’s music is not scary though. Forgetting the music happens quickly and slyly. When I do forget music and then remember what I forgot, I am not stricken with panic but am reacquainted with an old friend. I am happy and content to have heard what I have forgotten again. And when I do forget, I am not yearning for the music to come back. The forgetting in Feldman’s music is not painful.
It is because Feldman’s music allows me to forget painlessly that I can somehow alleviate my anxieties about death—knowing that forgetting is not as bad as I always imagined it to be. I can cope, if only a little bit better, with the understanding that forgetting can be like listening to Feldman’s music.
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