Morton Feldman: Toronto lecture, 17 April 1982

Transcribed by Linda Catlin Smith
Revised March 2019[1]

In 1982, the Canadian composer, Linda Catlin Smith, who had attended lectures of Morton Feldman at SUNY, Buffalo, invited him to give a lecture in Toronto. He agreed and the lecture took place on Saturday night, 17 April, at the Mercer Union Gallery.

It was very difficult for me to decide what I wanted to play, because I'm used to only open, what we call open lectures in universities, in a classroom once a week, and there as you know it's words without music essentially. One of the difficulties is that it's very difficult to talk when you don't know your audience, and I don't know the Toronto audience, especially in relation to my own music. I have very little exposure in Canada. And so it's very difficult for me to get a picture of it. I don't know if you can, there are a few decades here.

Usually, and I don't think I'm any exception, one always wants to play the recent music. That's usually because nothing, say, happened over the decade when you're thinking you finally wrote it or painted it and everybody's gonna recognize it, you're gonna knock 'em out. And then you've heard a new piece which is supposed to knock you out and you sit there and you're listening the way you listen in the '50s … and that doesn't help you. So I was caught there.

There's plenty of room to sit down here; we've got some nice seats in the front.

So as you can see I'm comfortable with an audience, but I'm not comfortable in terms of

[1] Revised by Chris Villars by comparison with a video recording of the lecture which enabled two large gaps in the original tape recording, and several previously inaudible passages, to be filled in.

what my role should be. For example, the ’70s – interesting period, the ’70s. I don’t think anything really happened really of any terrific significance anyplace. Forget about Toronto, but anyplace, in the ’70s. And that’s a very interesting problem, a lot of work that was really done in the ’70s, beginning in the late ’60s, really in a sense has not really been digested. One always wants to, you know, you wanna remember Jasper Johns’s targets and flags, and things like that. But the new work of the ’60s and the ’70s – for many people they would go away. Philip Guston was very close to us, and changed completely in the ’70s. And that work evidently is not going away and so particularly is creating some interest in some places.

But in terms of music what happened in the ’70s – I know that with my own students, they know very little repertoire of the ’70s years. They know what we did in the ’60s, they know what we did in the ’50s, and in my own classroom there seems to be a twenty-year lag. I don’t think it’s twenty years up here. It’s very difficult going to a new place, and you don’t know where they are. Years ago, I was going to Hawaii to teach for a summer,[2] and I know John Cage was there a year before me, so I called him up and I said ‘John, what is it like in Hawaii? What do they think about in Hawaii?’ He said ‘Oh you’re gonna have a wonderful time,’ he said, ‘but watch out, they’re ten minutes behind the times.’ [laughter] A great Cage remark which he forgot to put in one of his books. [more laughter]

OK, so we’re into the ’70s. I have two pieces from the ’70s, and this piece that you heard [*gestures to poster of lecture called ‘Triadic memories’*[3]]. It’s from the early ’80s,[4] and we heard it last week, stunning performance. I’m very divorced from it. I’m actually divorced from everything I write. I mentioned to Jim Tenney over in the corner, that one of the big problems, that you come in, you play something for an audience, and you talk about it with authority, and the music has a hell of a lot of authority. At the same time, as I said to Jim, I have a kind of Don Juan complex with my art. Love ’em and leave ’em.

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[2] Feldman taught in Hawaii during the summer of 1970.

[3] Feldman’s lecture was billed as a lecture on *Triadic memories*, his ninety-minute piano piece written in 1981, which had received its American premiere by the Japanese pianist, Aki Takahashi, a few weeks earlier, on 12 March 1982, at Baird Hall, SUNY, Buffalo.

[4] Feldman actually says ’70s at this point, but the context suggests this was a slip.

And the minute I finish a piece, that's it. And it's very hard, it's very hard for me to even say which pieces that I like. It's very much like the Jewish mother that buys her son two ties for his birthday. He comes for dinner, and she opens the door and she bursts into tears. And he says, 'What's the matter Mom?' And she says, 'Didn't you like the other tie?' [laughter]

So if I would decide which piece to play, as I'll be playing it I'll be thinking about the piece that maybe I should've played.

Unless we could solve the problem, how could we solve the problem? I don't wanna start off on the wrong foot in Toronto. At the same time I don't know the right foot. What should I do? Maybe I should ask you questions? Maybe ask questions about what it is to be a composer? What do you expect from a composer? What do you think a composer thinks about before he goes to bed?

Now here I am, in my mid-fifties, and about a year ago I got very upset. Terribly upset. I began to wonder if music was an art form altogether. Now that's something to get upset about. And I think the reason I got upset about it perhaps maybe is because of my PhD students. Because none of them approach it as if it's an art form. Yes, it's a music form, a memory form, it's a form that is allegedly supposed to do this and that, if you do this and that. And so here I am; after all Beethoven only lived a few years longer than I am now[5], talking to you here. So I'm at the end of my life, let's say I'm at the end of my life; working since I'm thirteen; I wake up one day and I say to myself, 'What the hell am I involved with? Memory forms? Musical forms? Various type of almost like, set Avedon[6] poses? Now we take a walk in the Alps … Now we go slumming with some peasants … Now we thank God that we got rid of venereal disease, or whatever? I mean what the hell is it all about, all the set poses, the set emotions? Do we have anything in music for example that really wipes everything out? That just cleans everything away, from some aspect of illusion and reality? Do we have anything like – Proust? Do we have anything comparable to *Finnegans wake*? I wonder.

[5] In fact, Beethoven died aged 56, which was Feldman's age at the time of this lecture.
[6] Richard Avedon (1923-2004), US fashion and portrait photographer.

So that's something I think about. And that's where I am now: is music, could it be, an art form? That it could exist on its own terms, whatever those terms are. And so as I began to think about that, I began to think about the other thing. I played a game with myself. I make a very comfortable living. I have an elegant home. Jackson Pollocks on the wall. I'm a rug collector; I have nothing to worry about. [laughter] I'm not your typical composer, you see. Do I have to worry about performance? No, I don't have to worry about performances. I have more performances in a year than Varèse had in his lifetime. And my music is pretty esoteric. So it's certain I don't have to worry about performances. But I am worrying, I am worrying about maybe I've been involved all my life in something, thinking that it was other than it might be. And here I went really out on a limb, really out on a limb. And I still got nervous, that I was really safe on third base. See I'm not saying I brought in a home run, but I am on third base. And I was very, very worried, and I'm still worried as I talk to you. I don't mean to be a stand-up comedian, though it looks as if I'm developing some gifts I didn't know about. [laughter]

But I think it's interesting – guy wakes up and says, 'Is music an art form?'

Processes, yes. Fantastic, mechanical dolls, yes. Like a fugue. Very much like those fantastic mechanical toys that became all the rage in the royal courts. That we know how to do. Processes we know how to do.

So what can we expect from a composer, and what can we expect from music? What could it possibly be?

And what's fantastic about music, I find, is that there's something so impregnable, something – I wouldn't say it's mysterious … A remark of Whitehead's clarified something for me last week. I don't know what the hell he was referring to … But he said that the reason that something couldn't be defined is because it was too general. I like that. But not that it was so complicated or so esoteric; it was just like – too general to get a handle on. And that's the way I feel about music. Just too generalized. Everything is too generalized. Everything to me is like a found object. A major third is a found object, what

the hell, you have no right to write a major third – with or without a context. It's like picking up a broken comb from the floor. Everything. This was when I woke up, that was part of a hallucination, if music could be an art form. Everything sounded like a found object. Everything didn't seem to be personal. Everything had a fantastic reminiscence about it. Even my own music. And I wrote a piece that I like very much, called *Triadic memories*, in which I went ahead and treated everything, even my own invention, my own creation, as a series of found objects, no longer even feeling in a sense that I had the capability of making any kind of poetry out of it. Now for me to play now a cassette of a piece like that which is about an hour and a half, I just don't know whether I should do it, it'd be pretty difficult.

But I was talking about the '70s. What happened was, in the '70s, is that I decided that I wanted to become competitive, essentially that's what it amounts to. And by being competitive means that you more or less get involved in mainstream. But what the mainstream was to me was something very, very special. The mainstream wasn't any kind of intellectual ideas – I'm not gonna call Pierre Boulez and say, 'OK Pierre, you win, I lose, let me know how to do it.' [laughter] No, nothing like that, nothing like that. That's not mainstream. What was mainstream to me was only production value. That's all. And I got the cue or the clue from a big-time publisher … I don't even think they publish, no, publisher means ownership. But he's a big-time publisher as Faber was actually in the '20s and '30s – Leo Feist Incorporated. Every time you go in one of those deco – you're looking for something deco and you see those things always Leo Feist, and this was his son, multi-millionaire, big cadillac, big cadillac. Cadillac. Cadillac, cardiac and catalogue – the three C's. [laughter] Big catalogue of things, big time, everything, everything, also esoteric things, twelve-tone things, whatever – anything they could pick up in some kind of bargain and bartering, he had. In fact he owned a big, uh, I don't know why this is important, but it's interesting if you know the kind of people. He even owned an outfit called Associated Music that had people like Milton Babbitt and all kinds of … Elliott Carter. I mean everything besides Jerome Kern. So he knew everything that was going on. So I would see him occasionally, once in a blue moon, might show up at concerts, especially in the excitement about concerts in the '60s in New York. And I was sitting

with him of course in the Russian Tea Room,[7] with another composer. And he looks over to me and he says, 'Feldman, you mind if I tell you something.' I said, 'Go ahead.' He said, 'You're not gonna make it unless.' I said, 'Unless what?' He said, 'You're a fabulous composer, but you're not … unless.' 'Unless what?' 'You need a little drama. Not much. You need a little drama. Just a little bit.' And so, after living, after living for about twenty-five years with absolutely no drama, at least in my music – I had all the drama in my livelihood and my domestic life. Actually I was brought up in the garment centre of New York, and I was in the garment centre until I was actually an international celebrity. By that I mean Toronto. [Laughter] Oh, are you lucky that Dorothy Parker didn't include Canada in that marvellous remark of hers, where she put down some guy, she said, 'Yeah, he's the toast of two continents – Africa and Australia.' She didn't mention Canada.[8] [laughter]

Well anyway, I got very into that, and I started to think about him, and I started to think about history, and the whole idea of mainstream, which is essentially big time, not ideas, not intellectual ideas. I don't even think that they're influential. I don't know who in heaven's name Bach influenced. I've heard some fantasy some late-nineteenth-century composers would have about sonata–rondo form, or … Sounded pretty silly. That French stuff and that German form. I don't even know who Beethoven influenced. Anybody here could talk … ? I don't know, I'm not a glutton. They say that Brahm's first symphony … I had a high school teacher used to refer to it as Beethoven's tenth. I don't know, I don't know who Boulez has influenced. Has Pierre influenced … ? I don't even know who John Cage has influenced. There are and was and still is a generation of Cage cripples, as Steve Reich refers to them. But whether those Cage cripples were influenced by Cage I had no idea and I still don't. I certainly have not influenced anybody, unless … I was told I invented the pianissimo. [laughter]

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[7] The Russian Tea Room was an expensive New York restaurant adjacent to Carnegie Hall on 57th Street. Over the years it became a restaurant where musicians, performers and celebrities gathered.

[8] Feldman's recollection characteristically modifies Dorothy Parker's original remark. She was in fact putting down her own reputation in the 1920s when she said: 'I was the toast of two continents: Greenland and Australia.'

A student of mine, writes computer music, has nothing to do with me, in fact he's not really a student of mine, he's just in some of my seminars, went down to a computer conference. The music was about a mezzo-forte and they say, 'Hey, you're getting influenced by Feldman.' [laughter]

So I don't know in heaven's name, in music, whoever influenced anybody. It's Greek to me and I'm pretty brilliant and don't argue with me. I can't see the influence. I don't even know if there are people who are influence … Schoenberg has influenced a few people. More than Beethoven, I think Schoenberg was the bigger influence.

But we're still in the '70s. But we're gonna forget about the '70s, we're gonna change the subject immediately, we're gonna go on to the '80s. Apropos of what I was talking at, there are about three subjects going on. And I'm going to the subject that I feel a little bit closer to tonight, and that subject is: can music be an art form? What does it take to be an art form? And what happened to me when I started to think about that.

So we're talking about a lot of things, and one of the things we're talking about, or are just about to talk about – I was telling you how comfortable I am, and that I have nothing to worry about. I said the same thing to John Cage when I was just 24 and we first met, I said, 'John,' I said, 'Look,' I said, 'I can't understand what we worry about when here we are in the privacy of our own home, working.' And I got very involved in the psychology of that worry, in the privacy of our own home working. I just couldn't figure it out. And then I took it on thirty years later, and took it into another direction.

And I said to myself, 'What kind of music would I write, if I didn't think about performance?' Not that I really thought about performance, or to write a piece one side of a record. But, a few years ago, not too long ago, just about two years ago, being an entrepreneur in Buffalo, and putting on a series of concerts which were just as good as Bob Aitken's series in Toronto. [laughter] We worked together actually, bringing people, sharing people … You got a marvellous series, I think that without that series I don't know what the hell you would have here. It's a wonderful series, with support. Of course my series wasn't supported. Now it's just a desert down there, just an awful life musically

in Buffalo now. Well anyway, I brought in a few people and at a dinner party for – we threw a dinner party at my place for Elliott Carter and Pennebaker was filming this thing, maybe some of you saw this film about Elliott Carter in Buffalo.[9] And there was one moment where he bristles with something I said. I said, 'Well Elliott what the world doesn't need is another twenty-five minute composition.' He bristles and he said, 'Well most of the pieces you play here are twenty-five minutes.' Then without thinking, I'm on the phone with Charles Wuorinen and I said, 'Charles,' … I never got along with Elliott since I was a kid, and I don't like him. It didn't help that we were actually having a nice dinner in my home where I evidently made him bristle … And I told Charles, 'Well all I said was, "What the world doesn't need is another twenty-five minute piece," and he said, "Well most of my pieces are all twenty-five minutes." ' Then I felt I really had something good. [laughter] So I'm on the phone with Steve Reich and I mention it to Steve and he says, 'Yes that's my length, isn't it?' Then Ralph Shapey calls from Chicago. He's all excited, we're giving an all-Shapey concert. He's a damn good composer, and he said it was the first time anybody put on an all-Shapey concert. This was my sibling rival – we both studied with Wolpe at the same time. And I'm giving this guy an all-Shapey concert and he never played me in his own group in Chicago. What did I do that for? Well anyway – I'm more generous. But anyway, Ralph has a million pieces, a million pieces he wants played. Should he do this or that? He said he'd just finished a piece for piano four-hands, and I said to him, 'Steve Manes and his wife are very, very good, they'll do it.' And I said, 'How long is it, twenty-five minutes?' And he yells on the phone, 'How the hell did you know?'[10] So I got something, the whole idea about the twenty-five minute piece, right?

And then I started to look, and I know a lot of repertoire: Concerto, Bartok's percussion–celesta piece – twenty-seven minutes. Did a seminar on the *Rite of spring* – I think it's thirty-one minutes – about that half-an-hour period of great masterpieces. And the whole idea of that particular time span for the composer and for the listener and

[9] *Elliot Carter at Buffalo* (1980) by D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus, 45 minutes, colour.

[10] Feldman put on an all Shapey concert in his June in Buffalo concert series in 1980. Shapey's piece, *7,* for piano four hands was played in the concert by Frieda and Stephen Manes. Interestingly, the piece lasted only seven and a half minutes.

for me as well. And then I said to myself, 'Well what if I don't think about the length of the piece?' Because evidently, here I was programmed, I was programmed to write a piece twenty-five minutes, thirty-five minutes. And you say I have no problem, I'm not involved in a kind of movement form, I don't write pieces in movements, which makes it a little different. It makes it a little difficult, slightly more difficult, because when you've got that twelve-minute slow movement and that four-minute fast movement, and you juggle the time around with movement form. But I work in, consistently since I began, in just monolithic. Sometimes, like in the *Rothko Chapel* [1971], you sectionalize, but actually it's the only piece I ever wrote that was sectionalized.

So I asked myself what would I write if I just didn't think about the length. And then I said what would I write if I didn't think about the audience. Well there was a review in the *Village Voice* last week, about a new piece of mine, which I wrote for John Cage's big birthday concert. It's for violin and piano – Paul Zukofsky played the violin, Aki Takahashi, who's a sensational, wonderful pianist, played the piano, it's for violin and piano, *For John Cage* [1982], it's about an hour and ten minutes, and the *Village Voice* said that I write music in which my lack of concern about an audience – that they might as well be ants. Which I don't think is fair. I don't think it's fair. It's a very serious problem, I don't think it's fair. How the hell the audience got into this subject, I don't know. I know we needed the French Revolution, but they didn't have to have music to it. I think it's terribly unfair, because a guy says to himself, 'Let's make music into an art form, let's see if we could really do something with it, other than a memory or common practice music form.' I think it's unfair to say that he's thinking of the audience as ants. I mean would you say that with Proust? I once read somebody years ago who thought my work was too esoteric. I read one convoluted paragraph to this person, from Proust. She understood every word. Very convoluted, she didn't have any problem. But with my particular type of sentence structure, she didn't understand anything. She didn't understand what related to what …

So I really want you as my confidante, I want you all as my friends, but I don't want you as my audience. Because the problem is, is that, if music is to be an art form, it has to exist at least six weeks. Give us six weeks without an audience, and maybe something

else could happen. So that's what I'm plea-ing for. Accept my good will. And my good nature. And feel that maybe the role of the composer and the audience has to, will, must, and possibly could, change. So what happened to me, even though I never thought that I was Gluck, because all the form movements are pretty conservative. Though I never really thought you know that I was gonna really change anything like bring back a diatonic pattern, to someone with a BA degree, from Colgate.[11] You know, I'm not Phil Glass.

This is a true story: I was a student, just finishing up with Stefan Wolpe. Stefan was a proletariat twelve-tone composer, there was a hell of a lot of them at one time, and I think that he was the best. He would talk about his music as gutter music. He would talk about, at one time he talked about the man in the street, and he was bawling me out. Here I was, 22, 23 years old, and he was telling me the music is too esoteric, it's just too esoteric. And he's talking about the man in the street, and I was just meeting the artists in Greenwich Village. I was looking out, my eyes were better that time, it was 14th Street and Sixth Avenue, and there was Jackson Pollock walking across the street. And that's my only defence about the man in the street. [laughter]

And I'm every man, I'm certainly you know, a certain generation of New Yorker. Typical New Yorker. It's the last thing, you know, I'm not from London, I'm not from Paris, and New York intellectuals are not snobs. So it's certainly nothing snobbish … But there's something wrong someplace, there's something wrong someplace.

So, the reform movement is – actually there's a lot of irony and the whole thing's gonna work out wonderfully for all of us by the time I'm finished in about two or three minutes. Because I'm coming to the end of my saga. I know it's seems it'll go on, but it's not. I have the glimpse of the end.

Because what happened was – soon as I got rid of the audience, I started to write a series

[11] Colgate University, Hamilton, New York.

of pieces for this audience that I was trying to get rid of. A string quartet we did in Cal Arts[12] – one hour and forty minutes – what happens, standing ovation. Reviews, the Los Angeles … big paper there, what's his name? What's the name of that critic, the Los Angeles … He's been after me for thirty years. Back in the '60s I remember Lukas Foss sent me a review, Lukas always sent me terrible reviews: 'Last night in Royce Hall we heard a *thing* [laughter] by Morton Feldman.' It was only seven minutes. I mean, what did he have against me? It was only seven minutes – 'we heard a thing'. The same guy: 'We have to re-assess our views about Morton Feldman.'

Same thing happened recently with another piece, *Triadic memories* in London.[13] Some of them didn't like it, a little more hesitant about it. One rave review, not that, London papers don't give rave reviews. It was a begrudging rave. But a rave it was, about a piece they had to sit and listen to for an hour and a half. I never got a letter from a colleague. Jim [Tenney] you never sent me a letter. Years ago you sent me a very nice letter. But you never sent me a fan letter. I know you love my music, but you never actually sat down and wrote me a fan letter. Lo and behold, I get a letter from a guy who, I don't know, I've seen him around for many years, maybe we spoke ten words, American composer on the West Coast – Roger Reynolds. 'Bravo. What a step for you. Fantastic piece.' That's *Triadic memories,* which we're not hearing. [laughter] 'What a step forward,' he says, 'bravo'. But he killed it. He killed it in the PS. He said, 'I'd love to get together with you and talk about new designs.' He killed it.

That never happened to me, I never got letters like that from my six or seven minute pieces, never got reviews. So you see what happens? Here I wanna get rid of the audience, I wanna get rid of the critics, and I almost wanna get rid of the performers. But performers want it. They want it. Because there's a whole breed of performers out there. They're science fiction characters. They can't be more difficult, it can't be difficult enough. I once saw a fantastic Australian by the name of Geoffrey Madge teaches piano in Holland – sight reading new pieces like this: Wshhhhhhhhhht. Two people are

[12] Feldman's *String quartet 1* (1979).
[13] The world premiere of *Triadic memories*, performed by Australian pianist Roger Woodward, took place at the ICA in London on 4 October 1981.

holding the score, as he was going through it … [laughter]

My piece that I wrote for John Cage, it is so difficult, it's the most tenuous type of supple rhythms, just it's not even like rhythm at all, you know how difficult it is to write a complicated rhythm that doesn't even sound like a rhythm? Try it. And it's going and it's unbelievable, the coordination is difficult – the idea for the piece is that they're both in their same space, I had a very unique idea of writing about a piano and violin piece, that they're both in the same space, no business of this one here that one there at all. Of course it happens, but it's like one instrument in the same space, with just a little echo of sorts. Very difficult thing to do. But even I got freaked out. It was the first actually technical idea I had, you know, to treat something like that. And I called up Paul Zukofsky and I said, 'Paul, I'm thirty-five minutes in the piece and I'm worried, I don't think the piece is important.' And he says, 'Why isn't the piece important?' I said 'Because the piano is only on one ledger.' … We're all brainwashed …

OK. That was just a preamble to my talk. [laughter] It's like the rich escargot we had for lunch. What would you like me to talk about, would you like to hear some music?

[From the audience: 'Yes.']

What would you like to hear, would you like to hear the '70s, would you like to hear that other subject about production value?

[From the audience: 'The '80s.']

You wanna hear the '80s. You don't wanna hear, you don't wanna to hear something that kind of fights it out with Monteverdi? [laughter] You don't wanna hear my idea of showbiz, after all that's what Monteverdi is you know – pum pum pum pum – that's all showbusiness. Venice was New York, you know. That wasn't Off Broadway up there.[laughter]

They don't put a Titian looking down on his tomb for nothing. But they put him next to a

guy who's not as good. You know who's buried next to Monteverdi? A sculptor, very elegant sculptor.[14]

OK. The '80s. Well, why don't we take a vote on it. Who wants to hear the '80s, and – let me tell you what you're gonna hear. It's an hour and a half, it's not a professional recording. You'll hear there's a fountain or cistern – it was raining.[15] What's that song of Gershwin – about London? 'A rainy day'.[16] Well, it was one of those days. And so you hear the cistern and the little the trickle of water. I don't have Aki Takahashi's tape yet. But he [Roger Woodward] does it beautifully. We could hear, we could hear *Triadic memories* or we could hear some of the more competitive showbiz things like *Elemental procedures*.[17] Toronto Symphony's never gonna do it. [laughter]

That was a very funny story, you know if you don't hear it. I was given a commission by the Cologne Radio,[18] and he thought I'd fit in fine – it was called the New Simplicity. Twenty-five years, thirty years later, there was finally the New Simplicity, and of course my music and Steve Reich, Phil Glass, and the minimal music from America and Europe. So here he'd already told me the title of the thing, and I got this nice commission, where I could bring in my own soloists, which I did and chorus and orchestra, and write a piece for the New Simplicity. But for some particular reason, that was, being that it was the '70s, and so mid-'70s, and being that the mid-'70s was, as far as I could see a very – where middle-age composers, painters and everybody became very competitive, and very worried, and I was no exception, and for whatever reason, not that I thought I was gonna

[14] Claudio Monteverdi's tomb is in the *Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari* in Venice. The sculptor Feldman refers to is probably Antonio Canova (1757–1822) whose pyramidical tomb is also in that Basilica.

[15] The night of the premiere of *Triadic memories* in London it poured with rain. The rain on the tin roof of the ICA theatre was almost louder than the music. Feldman was present and sat next to Harrison Birtwistle. He kissed Roger Woodward's fingers after the performance.

[16] The song by George Gershwin was probably his famous late song 'A foggy day (in London town)', with lyrics by Ira Gershwin, recorded by Fred Astaire in 1937. Feldman's recollection appears to have substituted 'rain' for 'fog'.

[17] *Elemental procedures* for soprano, chorus and orchestra (1976).

[18] *Elemental procedures* was commissioned by Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Cologne.

knock 'em out in Europe, but I found out that the new simplicity was developing into the new complexity. And I wrote, for me, an unusually complex piece. And I was very embarrassed actually the fact that it was on that festival called the New Simplicity.

Then we have another fabulously competitive piece, and it's for flute and orchestra.[19] That's one of the best pieces written by anybody in the '70s. I mean it is a sensational piece. And it's very interesting to hear something, to some degree – peculiar – I can't find the word, I don't mean in a pure peculiar sense, but to hear something in a sense that you don't associate again with orchestra, you associate it more with a more chamber context. To hear an orchestra doing it – it's amazing how an orchestra glamorizes anything, just glamorizes anything. A very interesting problem writing for the orchestra. Very interesting problem. And I think that the problem was essentially, is that, when you're playing in an orchestra, when you're writing an orchestral piece, you're just distant from the instrument, you're just distant from the individual person that's playing it. And it develops a certain type of *shellac*, that is not too *human* in terms of performance, of its relation to performance. And every orchestra piece ever written in the history of music that has it, has that kind of distant, distance on. It's very classy, it's fantastic, but it's kind of remote. Or even a Debussy orchestral piece, is remote. It's there someplace, and you can't get near it. And I had that experience with the orchestra. And the '80s, especially the long pieces, what I wanna do cannot be done with an orchestra because of that reason … It's like a ballet, you know – I don't like to see one ballet dancer or two people whirling around. I like to see a ballet company – that's exciting. But I don't think I'll be able to write an orchestra piece that's lasting an hour and a half – it's not interesting.

One of the reasons in a sense that I could keep up a piece for an hour and a half is because I immediately, in some kind of Stanislavski fashion – I am the cellist, I am the pianist, and I'm keeping that concentration, and I'm working, we're together, but I'm with a cello, I'm with an instrument. I'm not with an orchestra, I'm not with this fantastic, wonderful machine, even though I might draw out an instrument from it, but be sensitive how to use that instrument. And I think that to really be successful perhaps

[19] *Flute and orchestra*, for flute and large orchestra (1978).

is to create this unconscious alienation between an orchestral sound and an orchestra. I don't think that people want the intimacy. They're not walking out of a quartet or chamber music because it's boring them or they don't know what's happening. I think that they, one senses a certain type of intimacy which you're running away from. But there's nothing intimate about an opera, about an orchestra, about the big-time mainstream. Nothing threatening. It's up there someplace.

OK, you wanna hear something from the '80s. Nobody wants to hear my flute and orchestra piece? Remember the story about the two ties … Oh, so you don't like my flute and orchestra piece. [laughter]

It's like Danny Kaye, we'll do one side, then we'll do the other side.

[From the audience: 'Play them simultaneously?']

I'm afraid not. I don't like collage too much.

[Jim Tenney: 'How about one after the other, in chronological sequence?']

I have the stamina you know. I'm famous for six hour seminars where my students are collapsing. I use that as upmanship

I don't know about *Triadic memories*. I think it's good, it's good to hear about a piece, here we're talking about *Triadic*, it's like that marvellous idea about Buddha, they're all waiting for Buddha, but where's Buddha, you see. … You could tell someone, 'I like Feldman.' 'What did you think of *Triadic memories*?' 'Didn't hear it.'

When you've heard it, no matter what it's like, you're gonna be disappointed. I blew it. It can't, it can't be as good as the anticipation. We have to wait for the next – *Triadic memories 2*. Because if I play *Triadic memories* you really should hear my string quartet. And that's an hour and forty minutes.

[Tenney: 'Do you have it here?']

And then you should hear my *Trio*.[20] [laughter] The trio is an hour and a half. But it's interesting the lengths of these big pieces, especially even for the non-composers or the non-musicians. That the instrumentation in a sense became very, very conventional. Like *Untitled composition for cello and piano*,[21] an hour and a half. Very long *Trio*, piano, violin, cello. *Triadic memories*, very long piano piece. But they're all very conventional instrumentation. It works better that way, it's like that wonderful Marianne Moore image, of real frogs in an imaginary pond. Or was it a real pond with imaginary frogs? Does anybody know that? I think both will work.[22] And there's just something about having these unglamorous instruments that we know very well start to do that which historically and technically that we're not – I'm *fed up* with inventive orchestration. You give a course in twentieth-century orchestration, which is essentially the only course I teach, you get annoyed with everybody inventing a new orchestration, leaving out the violins. All right, he was lucky, wrote a piece called *Symphony of psalms*.[23] [laughter] But this whole idea of the inventive orchestration, we've had it, we're finished with it. I don't wanna, I don't wanna sit down and say now, 'Let's see…'. Because I did it and I did it just as good if not better than anybody else, in the '60s. But I don't like it anymore, I just don't like it. Because what it did, it created the music.

It's like when you have lyrics, and you're writing something, it helps the melody, how could it not help the melody? And there was just something about it that began to disturb me. I began to see when I get a beautiful instrumentation, and if you have a sense of instrumentation, and if you're not wilful and if you're not arrogant and you wanna learn from the instruments and how they move, the instruments could do some marvellous things. Very much like paint could do marvellous things. And even someone like Francis

[20] *Trio* for violin, cello and piano (1980).

[21] *Untitled composition for cello and piano* (1981) published as *Patterns in a chromatic field*.

[22] Marianne Moore's poem, "Poetry" (1919) talks of 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'. Feldman's recollection transforms the 'gardens' and 'toads' of the original into 'ponds' and 'frogs'.

[23] The orchestra in Stravinsky's *Symphony of psalms* (1930) has no violins.

Bacon, whose not an abstract expressionist, wrote a very famous paragraph how he watches the paint, there's something about the paint. So everybody in the '50s and '60s got into that aspect. And for the composer, the paint essentially was the instruments.

So you watch that flute, how it's going, how you lace it, what you do here and do there, and you might as well just phone it in. [laughter] What you can't phone in is to take a cello, piano and violin, which in a sense is so *known,* and then to have them operate in a way that they never operated before, you know. The style of the composition has now become very interesting. What else? Well, I'm not even interested in the actual applied color, I wanna see if there's something there that's essentially closer to the musical thought, how the instrumentation to some degree takes over from musical form, to some degree doesn't even need musical form.

And I think there was a fantastic period in history where we needed especially someone like Varèse, who I would say was the Matisse in relation to my music of that direct type of wonderful sense of color, immediate placement of color .... And it can only be that way. Try to make a piano reduction of a Varèse score and you'll see what I mean.

OK. So how about compromising, how about hearing *Flute and orchestra*? [laughter and applause]

But *Triadic memories* is fantastic. [more laughter and applause]

And *Elemental procedures* is a very glamorous piece, believe me. In fact, I used it as a – *Elemental procedures* gave way to a whole series of pieces which were the same psychology, they were called 'try outs', try out pieces for chorus, and orchestra, where in a sense I was no longer interested in writing a piece. I was interested in just trying out things. Not that I really had a notion of what a piece is, and I still wouldn't know what a piece is. Just trying out things. It was terrific. I wrote a whole series of pieces which I called 'try outs', where everything was down in ink, anything was accepted. I'll try this out, I'll try that out. They were all pretty good. The element of selection was not as intense as it used to be. It was alright, because I was on a very good period, I was lucky, I

was no longer unhappy if things weren't so good. So this was the try out piece for an opera I wrote to a poem that Becket wrote for me, called *Neither*. And I had a meeting with Beckett and I showed him – he reads music you know, he plays the piano – and I showed him, it was the first line from a work of his called *Film*[24], and I was showing him how I might treat the voice. But as it so happened, when he finally sent me what he did send me, I didn't treat it in any way that I did in *Elemental procedures*. No way could I treat it like that. *Elemental procedures* was very glamorous, it was still part of the '70s, still competitive. The opera was toward the end of the '70s, less competitive, [laughter] and much more esoteric, and really trying to get back to the '60s, or something or other. But it's a very glamorous piece, and you should hear it some time, but I don't think tonight.

[Partly inaudible short exchanges with the audience while the tape is being prepared omitted here.]

It's *Flute and orchestra*. It's thirty-five minutes, and it's Hans Zender and Southern German Radio, Roswitha Staege. It's an interesting piece, and I hope you like it. Thank you very much. [applause]

[The tape recording of *Flute and orchestra* is played.]

The piece incidentally, it's very important incidentally, is dedicated to the memory of Edgard Varèse. And there was something about the flute line, that was not actually Varèse, but was Varèse for me, in its energy, where it was, and the kind of breathing in the tessitura area especially, as an image rather than just as a register. It didn't start off as a … the dedication came in the middle of the piece. I felt his presence there. I'd love to … if anybody wants to ask me any questions … ?

[Question, inaudible on tape, from the audience.]

[24] *Elemental procedures* sets the first two lines of Beckett's general introduction in his scenario for *Film*.

No did I say visual? Did I say visual?

[More from the audience.]

That the tessitura, that is the high area was more, it wasn't a question that I was, like, I didn't feel that I was in a high register. I felt I was in a place, well of course it was in a high register, but I was in a place in a sense that I learned from him. Not that he exploited the tessitura …

[More from the audience, inaudible.]

I don't think of that, by image, by image I mean – again Whitehead, too general to articulate. I don't even know what I mean by it, just … An image to me is essentially just an intense belief in material, and that I feel that I cannot have musical image without the belief, that the belief goes hand in hand.

And I decide, this was a good choice, because this was the beginning of new concerns for me, different spellings, and what sounded out of tune, in the strings were not out of tune, it was the way the instruments were spelled, but not in a conceptual way, in other words, it just didn't go into quarter-tones it went into – where I would take double sharps and double flats very seriously but not in a Schoenbergian kind of leading tone way, but it was still related to the pitch – but as you know a sharp is a little more directional. I started to take spelling very, very seriously, and to me it was like adding a little turpentine in the chromatic field. I've been living with the minor second all my life and I finally found a way to handle it, and if you look at all the scores, all my recent scores that have string writing, is that I'm very much into the spelling of the strings, not in woodwinds or brass, just the strings. So that's a new concern for me.

And also the questioning, there's a whole gambit here, from nothing to everything, whole gambit, where I'm actually not questioning or re-questioning, just material, where I noodle with the chromatic line, the colour, very peculiar, so it's in the flute – and there's one solo cello playing a harmonic with it with a little bent tone. In other words it wasn't

just a … there's a lot of, you know you lose a lot of information in orchestral pieces, a lot of it is lost here, but it wasn't … just an orchestration of a chromatic tone, how I feel it going, going down other than up, while she was just playing here, the one solo cello is playing the same pitch, and you have a little bend – at the same time the cello section is pizzicato-ing. So the orchestration of just a chromatic thing, like watching them, here, truly like ants, but on a, you know, watching their life, you see. So, the terrific concern about very small phenomena. At the same time also a concern about letting the material in the flute actually make more reminiscent type of curves, almost motivic things. So you have that concern, almost to the other, which is about as far as you can go actually.

Well, the only thing is there's no synthesis here. To me that's what's interesting about these particular pieces of the '70s, I present the information to myself and of course to the listener, and because there's no synthesis, and there's also no argument, there's no discussion. There are certainly no winners. It doesn't end on a major chord. Just an investigation of material, giving free vent, and not having a vested interest in a sense that the material should go either this way or that way.

I just wrote a piece now for three voices,[25] in which it was very disconcerting because I don't wanna write pretty music, I don't even wanna write beautiful music, because on a scale to ten you know – You know, there's a postcard and it's by Uccello, and so beauty – it's a dangerous word to use.

I like my music in a sense to have a kind of – you know, kinda like a garden. I want my garden of Eden and eat it too. I wanna feel in a sense that there is the apple and there is the snake, and yet you're in Paradise. And I think that life-attitude, which is essentially how I feel about life, is in my music, where I really want everything, *alles zusammen* [altogether] in one piece. But never an obvious type of sensual beauty, and certainly not something that is communicable in terms of its motivic imagery or its harmonic

[25] *Three voices* for three sopranos or soprano and tape (1982). The score is dated 15 April 1982, just a few days before the date of this lecture.

language, even if the language is non-functional, whatever that means, it still in a sense can be very very beautiful, and if you handle it beautifully. And what was happening in this piece that I'm writing now, which I just finished the other day, is that I really wanted to write an abstract thing, called *Three voices*, with three singers, and I really, my dream always when I write, is that I wanna do it abstractly. Because I feel that if you finally do it abstractly nothing could equal it. Nothing could equal it. No representational painting can equal maybe one or two paintings where Rothko made it. That's my feeling. It's almost political. Jackson Pollock – one or two things where nothing else could get anywhere near it. But of course when he doesn't make it – put it on a lampshade. Obviously. Same's true of Mondrian.

So I have a total political conviction in that abstract sensation, without the help of an iconic iconography, no matter how startling, or no matter how fantastic it is. It's like Josquin. Easy. Easy. It wasn't easy for him finally to surrender to it, but he did. And I don't think Savonarola would have liked it. So I had that political bias. And it seems as if now, as I mentioned earlier, that my life is coming to a close, got a few more years before Beethoven died, I feel that that, in a sense, is the argument with myself, that's the dialectic that I have with myself, how can I do it abstractly. And it doesn't happen that it works out sometimes, like in this vocal piece. It went the other way. It is luscious, it's sexy, it's gorgeous, you swoon with it, and there's nothing I could have done with it short of throwing it out. Which is a possibility, and if I do, it'll be the first piece that I ever spent a long, long time with that I actually threw out. But at the same time you could make a virtue of all these things, and you could say, 'Oh, I was fighting it, and I fight it and I really surrendered to it', and it's as if I came through with some kind of spiritual and emotional cleansing. I didn't. I didn't. I … [laughter] I was weak, I couldn't say no. And that's the way I feel about it, not that it really, you know. But it's not the way I want it to go, and most pieces happen that way, that they always go that other way, that I can't get to that abstraction, because the abstraction then is essentially where you're in an area where you just – it doesn't speak to you, it doesn't help you. You know, it just doesn't help you.

I was very close with Rothko in the last year of his life, when he was working on the

Rothko Chapel, and I first saw those pictures live, not that actually now they're dead. And he had this fantastic studio. One of the problems, if you go down to the Chapel, is that it to some degree tried to copy the design of his studio – he had a big carriage house in New York, old carriage house – but what the Chapel in Houston doesn't have is all the dirty rain water and the snow for years. And that Texas light, they don't know what to do about it, because the pictures don't look right, they're all kinda – It's not that same dirty light, you know, with all the speckles you get, because it's all broken up. Anyway, the point of the anecdote, the reminiscence: I'd meet him for lunch, and I always ate before I met him for lunch [laughter]. And I'll go there and he just can't leave the damn thing, and he likes to see it in the changing dirty light. And he would always say, all the time, it was actually his song, 'Is it there? Is it there? Do you think it's there.' That's what happens when you work abstractly, you gotta pray. Because it can't be there by making it, you know. Years ago I was going to a big show, the AC, that artists' place in London, the arts club place.[26] Anyway, I would go in there, and they would have a group show, an international show. And there the paintings always looked empty. And all the English paintings, everything was filled up. There's a tremendous term for it in Latin, fear of empty spaces. Many of the paintings looked empty. … So you just don't know. Big problem, when to stop, when to stop painting.

There was a guy in New York, I can't remember his name, shared a studio with Jack Tworkov. Would drink a lot. He was a good painter. Never hurt him. Jack used to hide his pictures. Because he didn't know when to finish them. He lived in Paris all his life. He used to kill the picture. And that's the whole problem with working abstractly, is that you're leaving something out, and you don't know what you're leaving out. You're not taking something out, you're leaving something out, and you just don't know what it is. And you don't know if the experience, what you're leaving out is a certain type of pregnant element that is suggestive of what could happen if you put it in, you see, like a Buddha. So it's a big problem. And to live a whole life working with that particular dedication to the abstract, however you wanna define it, or whether you can conjure up what I'm talking about, is essentially one of the problems I have with music. One of the

[26] Feldman probably means the ICA: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

big problems in music is that if you put something here, and then you put something there, there's obviously, has to be, an immediate reference or reaction in terms of cause and effect. You can't put something here, you know, you can't do it like the guy that was head of – the famous painter – he was actually head of the Royal Academy – Constable?

[From the audience: 'Joshua Reynolds?']

Joshua Reynolds. I read an account of him giving a critique of some background – and he's saying to the student, 'Don't take it so seriously, make nothing of it, make little of it.' Joshua Reynolds, make little of it. A major composition teacher saying, 'This area here, don't take it so seriously, make little of it'. Lay it back. No such thing. No such thing. So that's another reason why I feel that music actually never really became an art form, that is, by an art form something that you cannot identify, something when you hear it, you say, 'What the hell is it?' Like things I'm doing in the '60s, with the Los Angeles critic that said 'a *thing* appeared at Royce Hall last night'. You see, that's what I really mean by it. That music had these connections, one another, all the time … on a scale of how didactic it was, or on a scale of how – that it's not didactic but it's still kind of a relationship of some sort. If they're not relationships, they're correspondences, or the language is similar, the stance is similar, the gesture is similar, you see. Big problem. Big problem. And the biggest problem in music is how do you do it without a process. And the unbelievable vested interest in the history of musical process. Process in a sense that to some degree is not involved in kinda acoustical reality.

Did a seminar on some of Steve Reich's earlier process music, which the students love. We talk about it, and the music is going on on a very high energy field, and the process is over. *Four organs*.[27] It's over. And as you know it's slower and slower and slower and slower and slower, and the piece ends, right? The piece didn't end for me. I started to feel that maybe his unit was too big, that maybe it was too big, that maybe it needed some divisions, maybe the process shouldn't have such logic. I started to tear it apart, though I do admire the piece and actually recently wrote an article where I give an analysis of that

[27] Steve Reich, *Four organs* for four electric organs and maracas (1970).

particular rhythmic structure, particular process.[28] I'm interested in that, though I don't apply that to myself.

You see, acoustically … the new piece with the Hebrew texts,[29] they invited me to hear it down at the Met in New York and he got sore at me, because I said, 'Very nice work, Steve, do you mind me saying something about the piece? You went into a coda, terrific idea, three loud clarinets, way up there. Beautiful. Great idea.' But he created such an energy field, where the harmonic rhythm in a sense was so tumultuous, and then the piece just goes like that. In other words the process, the whole idea – you see, the operation's a success but the patient died – I mean that happens in music, that happens in music all the time. I mean in all kinds of music. Chopin is going along on his preludes. What could be more exquisite than the preludes, they're going along all of a sudden you get a tacky, you get an, essentially, a tacky cadence. Thing is going along. Happens all the time.

Once you get involved, what is the length of the piece, not in terms of the form, that doesn't mean anything, that's no longer operative anymore. There are things happening, sounds are going on, they're on something, it might not be on a background, it might think they're on a background for example if it's push and pull, or this or that, you see. But what the hell is a background, what is our surface in music? Nobody knows what to do with a background, that's why Duchamp did the painting in glass. Essentially Duchamp did the painting on glass because he didn't know what to do with the background. He says it. What's a background? What do you do with a background?

Now. I'm very interested in the whole idea of what, what am I on? I'm not on harmony. Because the harmony's just going down the river quickly. I'm not on harmony. I'm not on anything. You're writing a piece of music, you're not on a goddam thing, you might think you're on a thing, especially if you have a system. But you're on nothing. And one of my

[28] 'Crippled symmetry' (1981), collected in *Give my regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, edited by B.H. Friedman (Boston: Exact Change, 2000).

[29] Steve Reich, *Tehillim* for voices and ensemble (1981), sets Hebrew texts from the Psalms.

concerns now is, what am I on, what is the music on? Like this piece, it's on a lot – fifteen triangles.[30] A lot. Orchestra's a pain in the neck because it becomes – You know there's a certain time when you can't be that good. There's certain times when you cannot show that good. And one of the problems of an orchestra piece is that you become a little too good, you're handling it like a tremendous Park Avenue sidewalk fountains. Don't worry about it we'll get over this particular solo. [laughter] What do you think of brass? After all you have no alternatives, you know the reason you wanna commit suicide is because you don't have any alternatives. So you become too psychoanalytical when you work, because in a sense you're not really, you're performing an operation and you're just, the blood is oozing out and you're putting on Band-Aids, and it becomes a big pain in the neck, because it's really a kind of preventive surgery. After a while, you feel like that woman had a breast removed when it wasn't necessary. But you do that, you do that in orchestral music. You're involved in all kinds of preventive aspects of keeping the thing going, if you have no illusions about composing.

So I'm very into, for example, problems about what am I on, and someday, when you hear *Triadic memories*, you'll notice that the pedal is halfway down throughout the piece, which is not an aspect of an amateur pianist playing a piece of music with the pedal on. When I put the half – I've got an excellent instrument – when I put the pedal halfway down, for me to create any kind of continuity, though I don't mind a certain degree of obscurity. I'm into that to some degree, now you hear it, now you don't, obscurity, you find that the sounds that you write cannot be the sounds that you're used to. Because you wanna create as much clarity in its progression, not a technical clarity, just hearing clarity, that you find that the different kind of sound formations, certain parts of the register that take about thirty minutes before you get it into the … That's a long time. Took about thirty minutes to finally play a long note and you didn't go 'ugh'. And you find that there's a completely new world there, you see, that was very interesting because I had to change my ear, had to change my thinking, and adapt to that, really that was, call it a system almost. But it wasn't really a system. I look for those things. I look for things that slow me down. I look for things where in a sense I have to get away from a

[30] The instrumentation of *Flute and orchestra* includes 18 triangles.

certain type of skill and get involved in a sense of listening, and of developing a skill in relation to listening. Not rather than the skill of who listens, which is essentially the way I feel about most music.

But the idea came from a painter, of having the pedal half down. I've done it in a few pieces now, the piece for John Cage, also the piano part was half down. And it came from a very good friend of mine, I don't know to what degree his work is known here in Toronto – Cy Twombly. Exquisite painter, actually he was part of the Jasper Johns and the Rauschenberg trio. They were all close friends and they all lived together. And I saw a show – Actually, he showed me some once. I first saw it when I visited him in Rome and he took me to his dealer and showed me a bunch of work, and then I saw this new work in New York. And I caught something that was very, very interesting for me, that, only because this picture that I did see in New York, it was a show of fifteen big pictures, that some were related, in name anyway. And I noticed that he used a kind of gesso, very thin gesso, where the tint changed ever so slightly. You could hardly catch it from one painting to another. And it gave it this kind of – rainbow. And I got that idea from him, I got that idea of putting a little gesso, that I'm on this very precarious gesso smudge, so to speak. And I think it works very well.

Usually my problems, I never come to a problem a priori. A priori. I think that anybody goes along the street singing something has a problem. And I'm not the only one, Stravinsky never had an idea in his head until he sat down and started to work. And there are many, many people like that. I don't think about ideas. I don't have any ideas. And I don't even know that I'm into ideas, or I'm after ideas. However, things do happen as you're working. And I suppose ideas do come out of it. But then I become very suspicious when I do get an idea, even when it's a good one, because I usually find that I only get ideas when I'm stuck.

You know, the *Rothko Chapel*, which is not particularly an important piece of mine, but easy to listen to, and I wrote it for a special occasion – And I mentioned to a composer you probably don't know, after hearing it at the concert, that there's not a goddamned idea in it. There's essentially not an idea in it. There's not one idea that I'll actually call an

idea in the piece. It just goes along, always gets the right note. Everything that happens is OK, even when the style changes, there are three style changes in the piece. Everything seems to be fine. Yet there's not an idea in it. Some things might look like an idea, for example there's a lot of polyrhythms in this piece. The fluidity from the beginning, the long breathing thing, going on her own thing. and events. And it wasn't even layered, I didn't, like, write something and then layer things in, actually everything was growing from each other, and everything else is in another time, that happens a lot. But I don't see it as a polyrhythmic idea. Just when I begin to hear it, I begin to hear that the pacing of the flute is going this way, and the other one is going the other, so the ability to do that, is just the sense of experience, of just knowing exactly what it is. Now because I know what something is doesn't mean that I have an idea, you see. So I don't think of it as an idea, and I don't milk it as an idea, you see. I don't even think of it has having any implications towards other art.

But the greatest composition lesson I ever had in my life was at my meeting with John Cage, though I didn't go to study with John. And he said something to me and I've kept up this particular – this to me is my secret. He said, always copy your own music, because while you're copying you'll think about what you wanna do next. And that's exactly the way I work now. I work for two hours, then I copy for another long session. If I work for two hours, I might have four, five hours of copying. And I go back between one and the other. And I love that! And he's absolutely right! But it's not as if I'm having an idea what to do. And I don't know what the process is going. I think actually what's happening is a kind of like, even unconsciously you're just throwing out all the classy things you possibly might think of if you weren't copying! So, in a sense, on one hand it's helping me to write the piece, and on the other hand it's throwing out all the, the baloney that we reassure ourselves with, you see. So I couldn't even imagine, in fact I don't even know what a musical idea is … I'll be going along and I'll say to myself, like in my *String quartet*, I would say, 'What I need here is some kind of twelve-tone construction'. I work six hours inventing a fabulous row, and that's it! I don't say, 'Hey, I'm really a closet serialist!' [laughter] It was like a row for the moment! I don't know why the nature of the

idea. And a wonderful piece I wrote for Paul Zukovsky - the last of the series[31], and perhaps the best of the series - is called *Violin and orchestra*, in which there are three cadenzas, if you could call them that, not technically. What are those three cadenzas? The three cadenzas are three quotes of different Webern rows. I don't know why the hell I used three Webern rows. Maybe because I felt that my music, maybe I felt that the music had an intervallic deficiency, an intervallic deficiency. So I went to Webern for intervals. I didn't use his pacing though, because his pacing stinks! [laughter] I used my own pacing. But I'm fortunate I had a lot of fun, because when I started to pace the Webern rows they didn't sound like intervals! They sounded like pitches. I sort of distanced them, all kinds of things. But anyway, I don't have no idea why I decided to have the rows, late rows of Webern. I have no idea.

But it's very interesting now, since there's an article in a German magazine, seemed to be very extensive, where he gives a rhythmic analysis. The essence of the problem. The problem is, 'How does Feldman float?' And there it is, beautifully done. He takes the first of the series, called *Cello and orchestra*, which I wrote in '71, and he has this graphic, beautifully done, of my durational relationships. And it looks like a million dollars! How I use symmetry here, and how I seem to have a tendency to go asymmetric symmetry and have a balancing symmetry assymetrically, and how I make a counterpoint with that and the orchestral part in relation to the cello. Looks fantastic. But I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know I had an idea about floating, you know! [laughter] But of course I loved that, and it wasn't bad, because he tried to – You know, I mean we could all look at anybody and point out some personality or character deficiency, you know. You know, it wouldn't be too far off, so I wouldn't even argue with some of his observations.

All I'm really trying to say is that I work so personally that if anybody says you're not a composer I never get insulted. I'm very removed from this. I love it, and I know it, and I'm comfortable with it, as much as the next guy. I'm very removed from it. It's very indifferent. Not that I expect, you know, Stravinsky to be Morton Feldman. He was certainly lazy, this genius. He certainly was lazy.

[31] The series of *...and orchestra* pieces that Feldman wrote between 1971 and 1979.

[long pause]

It's a wonderful series you're having here. Who else is coming?

[inaudible audience remarks]

Now that you have your own constitution,[32] [laughter] you could invite more foreigners [more laughter].

[extended applause]

[Audience member: If anyone's thirsty, we have beer at a dollar a bottle. Before you go.]

[32] On April 17, 1982,the day of this lecture, the British Queen and the Canadian Prime Minister signed the proclamation which brought the *Constitution Act, 1982* into force. This formally confirmed that Canada controlled its own constitution and had full independent sovereignty.