

Morton Feldman's *Last Pieces* #3

The music of Morton Feldman constitutes one of the most remarkable explorations of the twentieth century. Together with such artists, writers and composers as Mark Rothko, Philip Guston, Robert Creeley and John Cage, he helped bring the twentieth century closer to an understanding of both the nature of perception and the structure of human experience. Rejecting the most basic tenets of conventional musical discourse, he moved toward a creative stance in which sounds appear to move freely in time and space without the interference of any compositional rhetoric or a priori procedures. Each of his compositions represents a sensitive transcription of the creative moment. Indeed, one is often tempted to refer to them not so much as pieces of music but rather as actions in the process of becoming musical works; as examples of one impulse toward the experience known as art. His compositions exemplify the position first held by John Cage that works of art be created "...not (as) preconceived objects...(but)...occasions for experience."¹

Last Pieces is a set of four compositions for piano written in 1959. The first and third are played slowly and softly; the second and fourth, fast and softly. (These latter two constitute some of the few instances in which Feldman created music to be played rapidly.) In all four pieces, durations of the individual sounds are free and left to the discretion of the performer. The third composition in the set will be considered here (Example 1). Before proceeding to a discussion of the work in its entirety, the various compositional procedures that are employed will be considered.

As will be shown, the first five sounds of the piece foreshadow, in microcosm, the entire work (Example 2). These five sonorities are remarkable in the numerous ways they reflect the salient features of the entire composition. Of these five sounds, the first three set off a chain of events that culminates in the fourth. The fifth and final sonority then returns to the first sound, though somewhat varied (the same two pitch classes are heard, but both are in new registers). This marks, at one and the same time, both a return to the opening as well as an indication of future developments. As with much of this composer's work, the sonic evolution is seamless. Thus, to mark a division at this

Example 1: *Last Pieces #3*, Morton Feldman

Very slow. Soft. Durations are free

The image displays a musical score for 'Last Pieces #3' by Morton Feldman, covering measures 15 to 59. The score is written for two staves, Treble and Bass, in a system of three systems. The tempo and dynamics are indicated as 'Very slow. Soft. Durations are free'. The notation is minimalist, featuring various chords and single notes, some with fermatas, and a few accidentals. The key signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be B-flat major or D-flat major. The score ends with a double bar line and the measure number 59.

3. 30. 59

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point is, to some extent, an oversimplification. Still, much can be learned by momentarily focusing attention on this brief opening passage.

Each sonority is played slowly and softly, seemingly isolated from one another. As the composition proceeds, however, relationships proliferate and a clear hierarchy among the sonorities is established. Finally, meaningful horizontal connections are defined and the sonorities themselves are linked together over time. Thus, from apparently isolated, random events, a network of interconnections gradually emerges.

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains four notes: a quarter note on G4, a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on B4, and a quarter note on C5. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains four notes: a quarter note on F3, a quarter note on G3, a quarter note on A3, and a quarter note on B3. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

sonority

1 2 3 4 5

interval count

3 4 3 3 (2x)
6 3

3

same basic sonority. This information is summarized in the following chart in which a statistical count of all intervals present in the passage is coordinated with variations in texture (Example 4).

Example 4: Interval count for first five sonorities

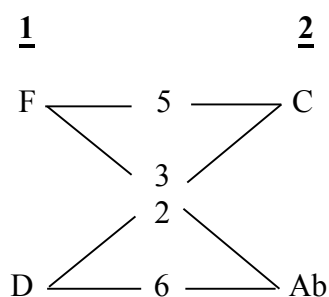
interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	all sonorities
0			
1			
2			
3	3	2	5
4	1		1
5			
6		1	1

Clearly, there is a preponderance of the interval 3 throughout the passage. Statistically, 3 is heard far more frequently than any other interval. Moreover, it seems clear that 3 becomes more important, gradually, as the passage unfolds. The initial 3 (sonority one) is followed by 4 (sonority two). At this point, of course, no hierarchy can be inferred. Then, another, different 3 follows in sonority three, reinforcing the first. As 3 begins to gain importance, through this growing statistical preponderance, the fourth sonority enters sounding two 3's simultaneously, thereby crystallizing the structural priority of this particular interval. In addition, a new interval, 6, is also heard in sonority four. However, given the tremendous emphasis on 3 that has been building, this new interval seems to be heard, primarily, as a by-product of the stacking of the two 3's rather than as a significant structural entity in its own right. The passage then closes with still another sounding of 3 (sonority five) that is, in fact, a repetition of the very same 3 with which the passage opened, D-F (though in a different spatial position). Not

only is the predominance of 3 further confirmed, but another level of connection is introduced - that of specific pitch class relationships.

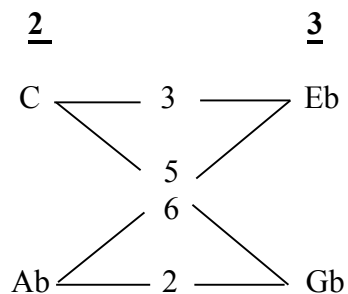
The process described above, in which a hierarchy among the successive vertical sonorities is defined gradually, over time, is reiterated and extended in the horizontal domain. Between the first and second sonorities, one finds the interval connections 2, 3, 5 and 6 (Example 5). Of these, the 3 (F-Ab) reflects the structure of sonority one itself,

Example 5: Interval connections between sonorities one and two.



which is also a 3 (D-F). In addition, each of these 3's shares one component, the pitch class F. Moving on to the third sonority, a pattern begins to emerge (Example 6). The same set of intervals that connected sonorities one and two also

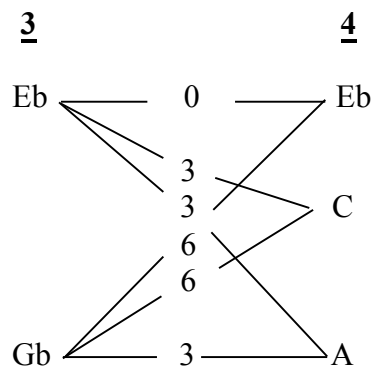
Example 6: Interval connections between sonorities two and three.



connects two with three. Thus, as the composition arrives at its second vertical 3, another 3 connection is employed horizontally (and exposed quite clearly in the upper

registers). By sonority three, then, one senses that 3 may become both a significant vertical sonority and a functional horizontal connection. Finally, upon considering the connections between the third and fourth sonorities, the complete structure becomes apparent (Example 7). Each tone in sonority three connects with one in sonority four

Example 7: Interval connections between sonorities three and four.



via 3. Moreover, anticipating the vertical 6 that is introduced in sonority four, two 6's are also employed horizontally, linking sonority three with four. Thus, as the composition moves into sonority four, the vertical and horizontal domains are, momentarily, synchronized. All intervals heard up to this point, either vertically or horizontally, other than 3 and its by-product 6 are removed and a 3-6 complex emerges with singular clarity.

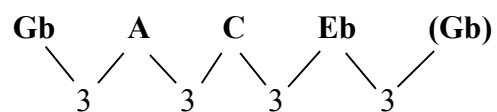
One more factor that helps to establish the tight bond which is felt between the vertical and horizontal worlds at this point is the immediate repetition of Eb⁶ between sonorities three and four; and the repetition of C⁵ between sonorities two and four (Example 8):³ Such repetitions serve to draw these vertical sonorities together over time, uniting them into a larger sonic entity.

What emerges from this growing network of interconnections is a complete and closed set of 3 relationships. (Example 9). This set constitutes the first of a number of such linguistic units that will emerge in various states of completion throughout the composition (Example 10). Indeed, as one may have already realized, over the course of the first five sonorities, two such sets are actually presented (Example 11). The first,

Example 8: Pitch repetitions in sonorities 1 through 5.

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Example 9: Network of 3 relationships.

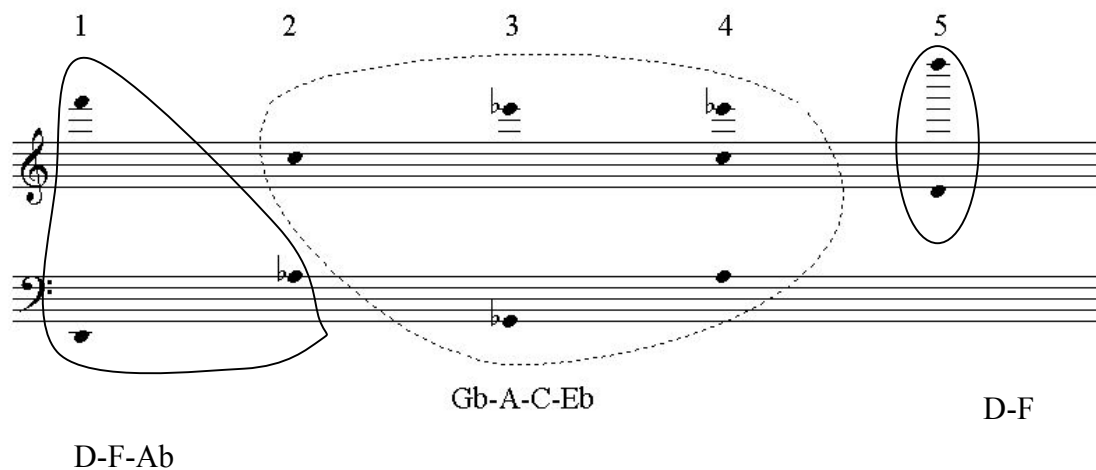


Example 10: One complete network of 3 relationships in sonorities 1-5.

Gb-A-C-Eb

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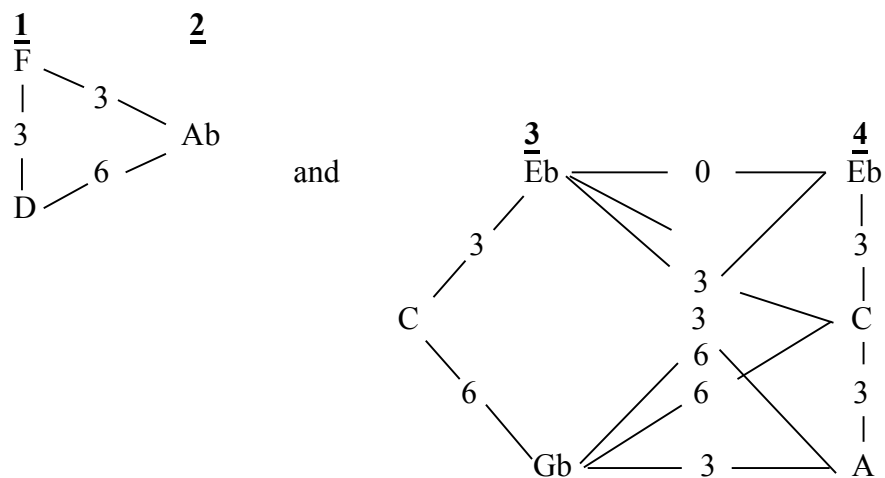
Example 11: Two sets of 3 relationships in sonorities 1-5.



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D- F-Ab, remains incomplete (lacking the B necessary for closure). The second set, A- C-Eb-Gb, is heard in its entirety. Both are constructed from the 3-6 vertical-horizontal network discussed above (Example 12). Thus, two related sets are used, though, clearly,

Example 12: Two sets of 3 relationships in sonorities 1-5.



the first is less apparent, and would probably be recognized only in hindsight, after the completed second set was heard.

The five sonorities analyzed above demonstrate, in microcosm, the essential processes of the composition. The work opens with a few seemingly isolated sounds. Time seems filled with a succession of apparently unrelated sonorities. Gradually, however, one type of vertical sonority, 3, begins to overshadow all others. Eventually, that sound is transferred to the horizontal domain and takes on a new function as a force that binding together successive vertical sonorities over time. This process culminates in the formation of a complete linguistic unit (the complete set of 3's outlined above). Finally, the last sonority both closes the passage, by returning to its opening sound, and foreshadows future developments, through the new spatial placement of that sound.

The Entire Composition

For the purposes of the following discussion, the score has been annotated in various ways (Example 13). Each sonority has been numbered. In addition, the piece has been sub-divided into two parts: part I, sonorities one through twenty; part II, sonorities twenty-one through fifty-one. Each of these has been further divided into three sub-units labeled regions (Example 14). Reasons supporting this particular partitioning of the work will be revealed as the analysis proceeds. The term region is preferable to more traditional terms such as phrase or section since it has fewer connotations of closure, and Feldman's music is generally far too continuous to be properly considered in terms of distinct and separable events. However, in order to coordinate discussion of the piece, the use of some term was felt to be necessary and region seemed most appropriate. In this work, however, there is one unmistakable division that allows the use of such terms as part I and part II. That division occurs, not inappropriately, at the composition's only fermata. At this point he divides the piece into two distinct units bearing a 2:3 ratio to one another (taking into account only the number of sonorities before and after the fermata rather than their durations, which are, of course, variable). As the analysis proceeds, it will become clear as to why the piece is, in fact, divided at this point.

Region Ia

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Region Ib

Region Ic

Region Ila

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34

Region Ilb

Region Ilc

35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51

10

Example 14

Part I

region Ia = sonorities one through eight
region Ib = sonorities nine through eleven
region Ic = sonorities twelve through twenty

Part II

region IIa = sonorities twenty-one through thirty
region IIb = sonorities thirty-one through forty-three
region IIc = sonorities forty-four through fifty-one

Part I

Part I consists of three regions: Ia (sonorities one through eight), Ib (nine through eleven) and Ic (twelve through twenty). Region Ia, of course, opens with the passage discussed in detail above (Example 15). As before, it is necessary to begin with a calculation of the interval content of each sound (Example 16). Clearly, there is preponderance both of 3's and of a very thin, widely spaced texture of two-note sonorities. Thus, the emphasis upon the interval 3 throughout the opening five sonorities of region Ia continues throughout the remaining three sounds of the passage.

Example 15: Region Ia

Region Ia

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

3 4 3 3 (2x) 3 3 1 3

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Example 16: Interval count for Region Ia

interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	all sonorities
0			
1	1		1
2			
3	5	2	7
4	1		1
5			
6		1	1

Once again, it is useful to calculate the specific 3's heard vertically within the passage (Example 17). All but three tones of the entire chromatic collection, Db, E and B, are

Example 17: Count of vertical intervals in Region 1a

D-F (2x)
Eb-Gb (1x)
A-C (1x)
C-Eb (1x)
G-Bb (1x)
F-Ab (1x)

heard within the context of interval 3. Indeed, E and B are not heard at all throughout these eight sonorities. Clearly, of the 3's that are used, only D-F receives any special focus since it is the only one that is repeated. Although, as discussed earlier, its prominence is somewhat further enhanced by the specific placement of this repetition, even this 3 is not given a great deal of emphasis.

As may be recalled, within sonorities one through five, there is a gradual fusion of the horizontal and vertical domains that is accomplished through a transfer of the intervallic hierarchy formed among the vertical sonorities to the intervals forming horizontal connections. This process continues through sonority eight. Moreover, the tendency to form larger linguistic units consisting of sets of 3's also continues. Indeed, by the end of region Ia, all three such sets available within the twelve-note collection are exposed. These are labeled (in order of appearance), sets a, b and c (Example 18). The

Example 18: Sets a, b, c in Region Ia

set a: D-F-Ab (left incomplete; missing B)

set b: A-C-Eb-Gb (complete)

set c: G-Bb-Db (left incomplete; missing E)

The diagram shows a musical staff with two staves (treble and bass clef) and eight numbered sonorities (1 through 8). The notes are as follows:

- Sonority 1: Treble (D4), Bass (F3)
- Sonority 2: Treble (A4), Bass (C3)
- Sonority 3: Treble (Eb4), Bass (Eb3)
- Sonority 4: Treble (Gb4), Bass (Gb3)
- Sonority 5: Treble (D5), Bass (D4)
- Sonority 6: Treble (G4), Bass (Bb3)
- Sonority 7: Treble (Db4), Bass (Db3)
- Sonority 8: Treble (F4), Bass (F3)

Three sets are identified with brackets and labels:

- set a (incomplete - no B)**: Brackets sonorities 1, 3, and 7.
- set b (complete)**: Brackets sonorities 2, 3, and 4.
- set c (incomplete - no E)**: Brackets sonorities 6 and 7.

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crystallization of the process through which set b was completed in sonorities two, three and four leads the listener to seek horizontal 3 connections among sonorities six, seven and eight, thus drawing him to the formation of set c in six and seven, and set a in seven and eight. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the final horizontal link of the region is D-F (uniting sonorities seven and eight). Thus, the vertical 3 that opened the passage becomes its final horizontal link, once again, highlighting, the process of

transference from the vertical to the horizontal domains – a process which is central to the unfolding of the composition's structure and the formation of its three primary linguistic units, sets a, b and c. Finally, it is significant that the two tones needed to complete sets a and c, B and E, are the only two tones never heard in region Ia. The total absence of these two pitches actually seems to intensify growing need to complete a and c. The motivation behind the sonic evolution of the piece, then, appears to be the drawing together of the entire twelve-note collection through constructions of the interval 3, thereby generating the three sets outlined above.

Region Ib consists of sonorities nine, ten and eleven and is somewhat transitional in nature. Again, the analysis begins with a study of the vertical structures of the passage and a calculation of the interval content of each sound (Example 19). In this passage,

Example 19: Region 1b

9	10	11
1 3 4	0 1 (2x) 4 5 (2x)	2

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the composer begins to move the composition away from the 3's that characterized the previous region. Sonority nine links up with earlier material, echoing the 3's of region Ia. In addition, however, this same chord starts to pull the listener away from any sense of 3's predominance by sounding, once more, 1 and 4, both of which were heard in Ia. (One might recall that the only intervals other than 3 heard in the opening region were 1, 4 and 6, each of which was sounded as a vertical sonority only once.) The interval 6, of course, was used with 3 as part of the 3-6 complex discussed earlier. Intervals 1 and 4 were so limited in number compared with 3 that they had little influence except to

provide occasional sense of contrast. In this very first sonority of region Ib, however, both are reintroduced and, moreover, given just as much emphasis as 3.

Sonority ten is the thickest of the piece thus far and contains no 3's. In addition, a new interval, 5, is introduced. This helps to dissipate further the previous focus on 3. Sonority ten contains two 1's giving momentary emphasis to this interval and further destroying any sense of 3's former prominence. (This momentary emphasis is significant; 1 will become quite important later in the composition.) Thus, the thickening of texture - which produces a more complex and varied collection of intervals than previously heard - and the striking loss of 3, both convey to the listener the sense that the composition is moving into new, as yet undetermined, areas of sonic focus. The dissipation of the earlier emphasis on 3 seems complete by sonority eleven where, despite a return to the two-note texture so characteristic of region Ia, another new interval, 2, is introduced. This interval is the only one not yet heard in the course of the composition.

A look at all the intervals heard in sonorities nine through eleven confirms the impression that, throughout the course of region Ib, the composer tends to equalize the intervals. Those intervals that appear to receive some slight emphasis, 1, 4 and 5, are usually buried within thick sonorities and thus made less prominent (Example 20). In terms of interval content, then, region Ib moves far away from the focus on 3 found in Ia. Similarly, in terms of texture, Ib also moves away from Ia, shifting gradually from the two-note sonorities that predominated in region Ia; through a three-note texture (sonority nine); to, finally, a four-note complex (sonority ten). Finally, with respect to the pitch classes employed, Db is finally heard within a vertical 3 (the Bb-Db of sonority nine). The tone B is finally introduced into the composition, though not yet within any 3. By the end of region Ib, then, only one tone, E, remains unused and two tones, B and E, are yet to be drawn into the collection via 3's. One might recall that these are precisely the two tones needed to complete sets a and c, respectively.

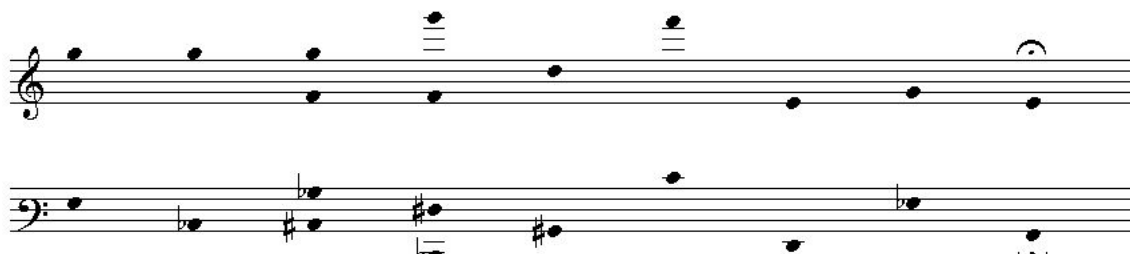
Region Ic consists of sonorities twelve through twenty (Example 21). As before, it is useful to begin with a calculation of the interval content of each vertical structure (Example 22). Clearly, continuing the trend established in the preceding region, in the vertical domain, no special emphasis is given to 3. Moreover, no single interval is

Example 20: Interval count for Region Ib

interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	four-note sonorities	all sonorities
0			1	1
1		1	2	3
2	1			
3		1		
4		1	1	2
5			2	2
6				

Example 21: Region Ic

121314151617181920



311 (2x)2 (2x)65241

2345

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Example 22: Interval count for Region Ic

interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	four-note sonorities	all sonorities
0				
1	2		2	4
2	1		3	4
3	1		2	3
4	1		2	3
5	1		2	3
6	1			1

emphasized. Most striking, in this regard, is the manner in which the passage ends. After the two thick textures of sonorities fourteen and fifteen, Feldman, in the last five sonorities of region Ic, returns to the simpler two-note texture that was so characteristic of Ia. The contrast with Ia is remarkable. Sonorities sixteen through twenty present a complete and equal distribution of all intervals except 3. The intervals 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 are all used, each sounded only once. Comparison with the opening five sonorities of the piece is illuminating (Example 23). Whereas in the opening five sounds of part I, a preponderance of 3's is clearly evident, in the last five sounds of this same part, there are no 3's and one of each remaining interval! This provides further evidence that, within the vertical domain, the aforementioned focus upon 3, which characterized region Ia, has disappeared and has been replaced by a generally equal distribution of all remaining intervals.

The only 3's heard in region Ic are E-G and G-Bb. Obviously, E is finally introduced into the composition, thereby completing the chromatic collection. Moreover, these two 3's are both part of the same set, c. However, this set remains incomplete since Db is

Example 23: Comparison of first five sonorities of part I with the final five sonorities of part I

1 2 3 4 5 16 17 18 19 20

3 4 3 3 (2x) 3 6 5 2 4 1

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now missing (in Ia, set c was represented by G-Bb-Db, here, it is represented by E-G-Bb). Nowhere, however, is set c presented in its entirety. Though 3 is no longer the predominant sonority in the vertical domain, a complete transference has been effected and 3 now abounds horizontally. As a result, the composer establishes numerous large scale connections which link successions of two, three and even four sonorities at a time, thereby, fashioning successive statements of sets a and c. Two brief, inconsequential, two note fragments of set b are also heard; presumably, he avoids sounding too much of b because it was already completed in region Ia (Example 24). The evolution of each of these sets seems quite clear.

At the beginning of the region, two rather long-range evolutions develop: E- G-Bb of set c is stretched out over four sonorities (twelve through fifteen). Then, after a brief overlap, the D-F-Ab of set a emerges and is also stretched out over four sonorities (fourteen through seventeen). After this, the composer reiterates segments of both sets simultaneously, in two registers (sonorities 18-20). These final two 3's have special importance. The horizontal E-G presented here echoes the first vertical sonority of region Ic, while the horizontal D-F in the bass echoes the first vertical sonority of Ia. Thus, the final three sonorities of part I transform the very same vertical 3's that opened

Example 24: Sets a, b and c in Region Ic

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

set a (incomplete - no B)

set c (incomplete - no Db)

set b (incomplete - no A)

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two of the three regions of part I into horizontal 3's. (This transformation was, in fact, prepared at the end of region Ia, when, as noted earlier, D-F was presented as the last horizontal 3.)

One other factor that helps crystallize the formation of these two sets is the extensive amount of pitch repetition heard throughout the passage (Example 25). Such repetition

Example 25: Pitch repetition in Region Ic

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

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was, in fact, first employed in the opening five sonorities of region Ia where it was used to help unify the first statement of set b - the first complete statement of any set heard in the piece (Example 26). Of course, in gesture Ic, the degree of repetition is much

Example 26: Pitch repetition in Region Ia

The musical notation shows two staves, treble and bass. Above the staves are five numbered positions (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Position 1 has a single note on the treble staff. Position 2 has a note on the bass staff. Position 3 has a note on the treble staff. Position 4 has a note on the treble staff. Position 5 has a cluster of notes on the treble staff. A dashed line connects the notes at positions 2, 3, and 4 across both staves, forming a loop. A box labeled 'set b (complete)' is connected to this dashed line.

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greater since two cycles are being extended - at times simultaneously - over longer periods of time.

In summary, in part I, Feldman creates a marvelous sonic transformation as apparently isolated vertical sonorities gradually coalesce into larger structural complexes. The passage opens with a simple vertical texture consisting, almost exclusively of the interval 3, which, as was shown, forms the linguistic basis of the piece. At first, these sounds appear to be separate, unconnected events. Gradually, however, this focus on 3 spreads to the horizontal domain and 3 begins to function as a unifying device capable of linking a succession of disparate sonorities over relatively long periods of time. Thus, over the course of part I, the notion that sounds may be organized over time is born. In addition, a sonic language begins to emerge. The 3's seem to reach out, both vertically and horizontally (often simultaneously), to embrace the entire chromatic collection. Quite naturally, this process, produces a specific

partitioning of that collection into three sets of tones linked exclusively by 3's (Example 27). (Of course, at this point in the composition, only one of these sets has been

Example 27

B - D - F - Ab

E - G - Bb - Db

A - C - Eb - Gb

presented, in its entirety, with all four of its tones sounded contiguously; the others remain near completion, each missing only one tone.) By the end of part I, the notion of sonic language is also born.

Part II

Part II constitutes the remaining thirty-one sonorities of the piece. As with part I, this material also may be partitioned into three regions: IIa (sonorities twenty-one through thirty) which is quite reminiscent of Ia; IIb (sonorities thirty-one through forty-three) which appears to be an outgrowth of Ib, the brief transitional passage of part I; and IIc (sonorities forty-four through fifty-one) which is quite similar to Ic. Region IIa represents, in one sense, a return to the opening of the piece (Example 28, Example 29). Clearly, emphasis is, once again, placed on 3. In addition, as in region Ia, there is also a preponderance of two-note sonorities. Eight of the ten sounds of this region consist of only two notes and the vast majority of these are 3's.

With respect to the specific 3's used, one might recall that, in part I, B was the only tone of the chromatic collection which had never been sounded as part of any 3. In region IIa, B is finally heard in the context of a vertical 3 (sonority twenty-four). This region is the last in the composition in which 3's are given such overwhelming emphasis within its vertical structures. Thus, it makes sense that the only tone not yet heard within a 3 is, here, finally sounded within that interval. The interval 1 becomes more important throughout this region. Though never as abundant as 3, and only really prominent in the thick, four-note sonorities, where it receives less focus due to the more

Example 28: Region Iia

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

3 3 1 (2x) 3 3 3 1 1 (3x) 3 3

4
5 (2x)
6

3 2 (2x)
3

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Example 29: Interval count for Region Iia

interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	four-note sonorities	all sonorities
0				
1	1		5	6
2			2	2
3	7		1	8
4			1	1
5			2	2
6			1	1

complex mixture of intervals, 1 is given some emphasis. It is the only interval, other than 3, ever heard in a two-note texture (though only once), and it clearly predominates within the four-note sonorities of the passage. As may be recalled, 1 was also one of the only intervals other than 3 sounded vertically in a two-note sonority in Ia. It also may be recalled that 1 received some attention within the three transitional chords of region Ib, even to the point of overshadowing 3. As will be shown, 1 will become very prominent (indeed, quite a bit more so than 3) in the upcoming region IIb. For now, suffice it to say that, in region Ia, 1 receives more emphasis than any interval other than 3, though certainly not enough to overshadow 3.

In terms of horizontal structure, and the evolution of the sets discussed earlier, several important developments arise in IIa. First, there is a very clear 3 linking part I with part II, pulling the listener away from the horizontal 3's which end I, back into the world of vertical 3's that opens II (Example 30). The horizontal repetition of the 3 E-G

Example 30: Link between parts I and II

The musical notation shows two staves, treble and bass, in 4/4 time. The treble staff has notes at measures 18, 19, 20, and 21. The bass staff has notes at measures 18, 19, 20, and 21. A dashed line connects the G note in the treble staff at measure 18 to the G note in the bass staff at measure 21, illustrating the horizontal 3 interval.

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in the upper staff in the final sonorities of part I is carried over into part II with one final sounding of G. Moreover, this second G is heard in context of a vertical 3, G-Bb. This, of course, creates a striking contrast with the ending of part I, which, as may be recalled, ended with a total loss of vertical 3's and a completely equal distribution of all other intervals. Thus, the transition from part I to part II involves, quite literally, a transfer of the horizontal 3's which concluded the first part back into the vertical domain and, therefore, a return to the sonic world which opened the piece. This, of course, reverses

the process of part I where the 3's first encountered as vertical structures were transformed into horizontal formations. In addition, at the opening of part II, the horizontal connection is itself momentarily lost for there are no 3's linking sonority twenty-one to twenty-two. Not only, then, is the vertical order restored but, at the same time, the horizontal bonds are severed. The composer returns to a succession of isolated, seemingly unconnected sounds, similar to those first encountered at the opening of the composition, only to begin, once again, a gradual transformation of vertical constructs into horizontal formations. In addition, it should be noted that the G-Bb that forms the opening vertical 3 of part II, echoes the G-Bb's prominent in the first half of region Ic. Sonorities eighteen through twenty-one, then, bear a striking similarity to sonorities twelve through fifteen (Example 31). The material that opened

Example 31: Comparison of sonorities 12-15 and sonorities 18-21

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region Ic returns at the end of that same region and pulls the music into part II.

The most important event in region IIa - one that constitutes yet another very strong link with region Ia - is the sounding of set b in its entirety. The following diagram reveals all sets present in the passage, both partial and complete (Example 32). Within this complex group of relationships, some sets are clearly more readily perceptible and, therefore, seem important; others are much less prominent and, therefore, seem subordinate. Most important, of course, are the two statements of set b (Example 33). The first is incomplete; but, in the second, b is presented in its entirety (all four

Example 32: Sets a, b, and c in Region IIa

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

set c (incomplete)

set b (incomplete)

set a (incomplete)

set b (complete)

set c (incomplete)

set a (incomplete)

set c (incomplete)

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Example 33: Set b in Region IIa

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

set b

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of its constituent tones are sounded contiguously, as was the case in region Ia). Thus far in the piece, b remains the only one of the three sets ever completed, and its completion has now twice been achieved. Set a never achieves completion through any contiguous succession of all its tones. It is, however, completed over the course of the passage, in two successive, complementary segments (Example 34). Due to its rather fragmentary

Example 34: Set a in Region IIa

The musical notation for Example 34 shows two staves, treble and bass clef, with measures 21 through 30. A box labeled "set a" is connected by lines to specific notes in measures 24, 27, and 29, indicating the fragments of the set. The notes are: measure 24 (treble G#4, bass B3), measure 27 (treble Bb4, bass Bb3), and measure 29 (treble Bb4, bass Bb3). The notes in measure 27 are marked with a flat and a sharp, indicating a chromatic alteration.

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presentation, set a never emerges as clearly as set b and, therefore, remains in the background. Set c, however, is never completed in any manner within this region. Indeed, one of its tones, E, is never even heard in the passage (and if one were to include the E that ended part I, a complete, though still fragmentary, statement of c could be fashioned). Moreover, the segments of set c that are heard are spread quite far apart. As a result, c seems to fall far into the background. Thus, with respect to the three sets, one finds further evidence of a return to the world of region Ia and a negation of region Ic. Set b returns and completes as it did in Ia; while sets a and c, which, in gesture Ic were quite prominent, are now, in IIa, to varying degrees, fragmented and dissipated.

In many ways, region IIb (sonorities thirty-one through forty-three) resembles region Ib, the transitional passage of part I (Example 35, Example 36). Both pull away from any focus on 3 as well as the lean, two-note sonorities with which that interval is associated. At the same time, both give greater emphasis to 1 within the context of very

Example 35: Region IIb

31 32 33 35 34 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43

0 1 2 0 1 1 0 3 0 2 2 1 0
 3 (2x) 1 (2x) 5 (2x) 5 4 (2x) 5 (2x)

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Example 36: Interval count for Region IIb

interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	four-note sonorities	all sonorities
0	2	2	1	5
1	3	3	1	7
2	2	1		3
3	1	2		3
4			2	2
5		3	2	5
6		1		1

thick sonorities. Also, both regions present the only instances of octave doublings in the work, which not only signal a further dissipation of the predominance of 3 within the vertical domain, but also advance the process of generating sets a, b and c over time by strengthening the horizontal-vertical fusion of the 3-6 interval complex discussed earlier. The presence of an octave within a two-note texture is a very new sound for this piece and, especially since it is the very first sound heard in the passage, it seems to prepare the listener for a change of sonic emphasis. In general, however, the octaves represent a dissipation of sound and a further thinning out of texture.

The interval 1 crops up with some frequency whenever 3 loses its position of importance. Of course, 1 and 3 exhibit significant linguistic differences. The interval 3 naturally partitions the chromatic collection into three closed sub-collections (the three sets discussed earlier). The interval 1, in contrast, does not naturally partition the twelve-note collection into any such closed sub-collections and, therefore, is more diffuse in its impact. It functions, then, as a foil to 3; not only by providing sonic contrast to 3, but also by negating those particular structuring properties of 3 which Feldman exploits throughout the piece.

The octaves serve one other very important function vis-a-vis the evolution of the various sets of 3's throughout the passage. Somewhat in the manner of the repeated notes of region Ic, the octaves help project the three sets over time. For example, three times Feldman presents octave C's (sonorities thirty-one, thirty-seven and forty-three) and each time these C's are linked horizontally to A's, thereby strongly suggesting set b. In addition, the prominent G# octaves, spread over three sonorities (thirty-eight through forty), are introduced through a G#-B 3 that suggests set a (Example 37).

Despite this use of octaves to help project the three sets, there are, in this passage, no complete, contiguous statements of all elements of any one set. Only set c is heard in its entirety, but it is presented in segments that are fragmented over time and separated by unrelated material. Moreover, due to the rather lengthy temporal span separating these segments of c, any sense of completion is quite strained, if not altogether lost. (It may be interesting to recall that in region IIa, the composer presented a similarly fragmented statement of the four tones of set a.) As will be shown, both sets a and c become quite prominent at the end of the next

Example 37: Sets a, b, c in Region IIb

The image displays a musical score for two staves, treble and bass, spanning measures 31 to 44. The notes are grouped into three sets, each labeled in a box below the staff: 'set b (incomplete)' for measures 31-32, 'set c (incomplete)' for measures 33-35, and 'set a (incomplete)' for measures 36-38. A fourth set, 'set b (incomplete)', is shown for measures 39-40. A fifth set, 'set c (incomplete)', is shown for measures 41-43, and a final 'set b (incomplete)' is shown for measures 44. The sets are defined by specific intervals and are noted as 'incomplete'.

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region, IIc, the final region of the composition. By and large, however, it must be emphasized that, throughout region IIb, all sets are quite fragmented. This provides further evidence of the transitional nature of this passage in which the listener is led away from the vertical stability of region IIa toward the rather extensive linear configurations to be found in region IIc.

Region IIc concludes the composition (Example 38, Example 39). This passage is, in many ways, a synthesis of all that has come before. Here, 3's return as vertical structures with some strength; enough, in fact, to remind the listener of the sonic world that opened each of the two parts of the composition. However, other intervals, 1 and 2 in particular, now share the spotlight. In terms of texture, the passage also constitutes a synthesis of foregoing material. It contains four two-note sonorities, two three-note sonorities, one four-note sonority and, for the first time in the piece, a single five-note sonority which, significantly, is also the first all interval sonority heard in the composition.

In this final region, the music seems polarized around various disparate forces. Despite an obvious return to 3 - especially within its favored thin-textured sonority -

Example 38: Region IIc

44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51

1 2 3 3 1 1 1 1

2 (3x) 3 4 3 (2x) 2

4 (2x) 5 (2x) 6 3

6

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Example 39: Interval count for Region IIc

interval	two-note sonorities	three-note sonorities	four-note sonorities	five-note sonorities	all sonorities
0					
1	1	2	1	1	5
2	1	1		3	5
3	2	2	2	1	7
4		1	1	2	4
5			1	2	3
6			1	1	2

there is still a strong sense of dissipation carried over from the previous region. This arises from the statistical prominence of 1 and 2 as well as the heterogeneous nature of the all interval sonority. Likewise, contrasts of texture pull against one another: there are four two-note sonorities and four larger sonorities, the latter being strengthened by the presence of the new five-note chord.

In terms of the three sets, a similar polarization is also apparent (Example 40). As

Example 40: Sets a, b, and c in Region IIc

44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51

set a
(incomplete - no B;
same tone missing in Ic)

set b
(incomplete - no F#)

set c
(incomplete - no Db;
same tone missing in Ic)

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was the case in the final region of part I, this passage is dominated by two pitch sets, a and c, neither of which has ever been completed through the sounding of a contiguous succession of all four of its tones. Each of these two sets saturates the passage, one after the other; overlapping, filling space and time with their presence. Yet, even though each receives a great deal of attention, neither is given greater prominence than the other. The formation of these sets is aided, once again, by the extensive use of repetition, reminiscent of the final region of the first part of the piece (Example 41). As before, this repetition helps articulate each set and project it clearly, over time, binding individual sounds into larger sonic configurations spanning several successive sonorities.

It is significant, also, that the two sets employed are left conspicuously incomplete.

Example 41: Pitch repetition in Region IIc

44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51

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As may be recalled, thus far, only set b has ever been completed; that is, presented in its entirety, with all four of its tones sounded contiguously. This, in fact, happened two times; in regions Ia and IIa, the beginning of each half. The remaining two sets, a and c, have been pushed very close to such completion but have never actually achieved it. Now, at the very end of the piece, both a and c emerge once again and are given a great deal of attention. With the memory of the twice completed cycle b still fresh, a and c seem, once more, to move toward closure. In the end, however, the composition remains open-ended for, as mentioned earlier, a and c remain incomplete.

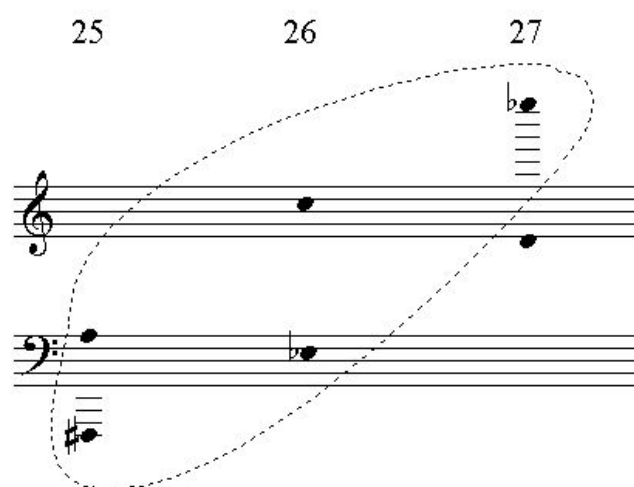
The Entire Composition

As Morton Feldman once noted: "...my compositional impetus is in terms of the vertical quality..."⁴ This is clearly evident in *Last Pieces* #3. The composition's first part begins with a series of what appear to be separate, isolated sounds. Gradually, underlying similarities emerge and a simple hierarchy is established in which interval 3 dominates all vertical sound structures. This primary linguistic element is slowly transferred to the horizontal domain where it is used to link successive sonorities to one another, thereby overcoming the sense of separation with which the process began. Finally, a language emerges. The interval 3, given full reign over the entire chromatic

collection, moves toward the formation of very specific linguistic units: sets a, b and c. The second part of the composition reiterates this process, intensifying the various stages of its evolution. Thus, from isolated events, relationships are formed and a language emerges. In a sense, the subject of this composition is the evolution of language itself.

As is typical of Feldman's work, in *Last Pieces #3*, one is struck by the apparent lack of both rhythmic and dynamic articulation. As noted earlier, durations of individual tones are slow but free, and dynamics are constant and quite soft. Also, with regard to register, in this work, one encounters very little movement; almost all activity seems to be spread evenly across the entire range of the instrument. The result is a very flat, uninflected surface, devoid of any sense of dramatic contrast. If one were to consider, once again, sonorities twenty-five through twenty-seven - one of the two moments in which set b is completed - the significance of this lack of contrast would become clear (Example 42). With regard to register, this passage traverses almost the entire range of

Example 42: Sonorities 25-27



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the piece. The upward motion formed by these three sonorities seems to momentarily unite space, pitch/interval and time into a single, complete linguistic unit - meaningful in the context of what has transpired, thus far, over the course of the composition.

However, the composer never attempts to underscore the special importance of this moment. Indeed, it is not, in any way, treated differently from any other moment in the piece. The sonic connections exist, but must be extracted by the listener for himself without the aid of surface relationships.

The composer's goal, then, seems to be to create music free of all rhetoric. Toward this end, he tends to avoid all procedures that might reveal his own presence consciously shaping the surface of the music for the listener. The lack of rhythmic, dynamic or spatial inflection places both the composer and listener in precarious positions. The composer must present to the listener, a pure sound world divorced from any vestige of a priori compositional procedures. The listener, in turn, is, in a manner of speaking, left floating in a sonic environment that affords few aural signs to guide him in any specific direction. He is left to discover connections for himself - connections that another composer might openly draw to his attention through the conscious use of dynamic or rhythmic constructs.

Feldman's musical impulse, then, seems to involve the creation of a sound world that appears to exist in some primal state, untouched, as it were, by either a composer or any compositional act. In the words of Stefan Wolpe:

There are pieces by Morton Feldman in which the poetry consists in a gradual dissolution of the sound material. He is interested in surfaces that are as spare as possible and in the remnants of shapes that can barely be heard at a distance... Because of this, nothing happens which could lead to greater substantiation of the material. Situations derived from sets of constellations of pitches would be much too concrete, too specific, too corporeal in such a piece. Here the material is formed in the flow of its spontaneous generation.⁵

And in Feldman's own words:

...there was a deity in my life and that was sound. Everything else was after the fact...Process was after the fact.⁶

...I'm very into acoustical reality. For me, there is no such thing as compositional reality.⁷

Feldman's is a music in which there is no apparent structuring of sound prior to its actual unfolding in time. Relationships appear to emerge at the very moment sound is first

perceived by the listener and never, in any sense, prior to that moment. Thus, he creates structures in which order never seems imposed by the will of the composer, but rather, evolves within the perceiver's own awakening consciousness.

Referring to the work of the American abstract expressionist painters (with whom Feldman was so closely associated), art critic Meyer Schapiro noted that a work by any one of these artists "is an ordered world of its own kind in which we are aware, at every point, of its becoming."⁸ *Last Pieces #3* represents another example of such radically new art. In it, Feldman never highlights structural connections, nor focuses upon them in any way. Instead, he gives the listener an opportunity to organize events for himself. He, quite literally, builds into the piece the possibility that the listener may perceive connections. In a sense, he builds in the possibility of order. In light of this, the rather open-ended quality of the work (embodied in the fact that sets a and c are never completed) seems quite significant. To close off all paths of evolution, might, finally, remove the listener from this privileged, albeit precarious, position, for, to expose the process of creating order as one which is imposed from without, is, in the end, to rob the work of its immediacy for the listener.

As the great American writer Fielding Dawson once put it: "...my aim is not the end...but to sustain a story as if it were a constant beginning in a total resolve to touch what will follow."⁹ Similarly, in Morton Feldman's music, the listener continually finds himself in the position of starting over again. He must make a conscious and constant effort to link events over time, and, as he does so, he will become intensely aware of the nature of his own perceptions. In works such as *Last Pieces*, Feldman succeeds in sustaining the sense of immediacy and intensity necessary to engage the listener in this act of awareness. The triumph of Feldman's art lies in the fact that, as relationships proliferate and connections emerge, they never appear to do so through any compositional artifice. Rather, they do so through the act of perception itself.

Footnotes

1. John Cage, "Composition as Process," in **Silence** (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961) p. 31.
2. Notation of intervals:
0 = unison or octave
1 = minor 2nd or Major 7th
2 = Major 2nd or minor 7th
3 = minor 3rd or Major 6th
4 = Major 3rd or minor 6th
5 = Perfect 4th or 5th
6 = Tritone
3. Notation of registers: middle C is labeled C4, the C one octave higher is C5, and so forth; the C one octave lower is C3, and so forth. All tones between C_i and C_j, where i and j are adjacent integers, are given the superscript i and so fall within register i.
4. Paul Griffiths, "Morton Feldman" (an interview with the composer) *Musical Times* (August, 1972), p. 758.
5. Stefan Wolpe, "On New (and Not-So-New) Music in America," *The Journal of Music Theory* (Spring, 1984), p 25.
6. Robert Ashley, "Morton Feldman: An Interview with Robert Ashley," *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, Barney Childs and Elliott Schwartz, editors (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987), p 364.
7. Walter Zimmerman, "Morton Feldman" (an interview with the composer), in *Desert Plants* (Vancouver: Aesthetic Research Center Publications, 1976), p.6.
8. Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," *Art News* (Summer, 1957), pp. 38-39.
9. Fielding Dawson, *The Yellow Cab: An Essay on New Fiction* (Kent, Ohio: Viscerally Press/Three Hawk Press, 1981), p.1.

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