

Hearing the Wood for the Trees

Morton Feldman's *Three Voices* (1982)

by Daniel March

*This article was originally Chapter 5 of the author's D.Phil dissertation ("Beyond Simplicity: Analytical Strategies for Contemporary Music") granted at the University of York, UK, Department of Music, in July 1997. The complete dissertation can be found here: <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/2441>. The text of Chapter 5 is made available here by kind permission of the author. Musical examples are from the score of Morton Feldman, *Three Voices* © Copyright 1982 by Universal Edition (London) Ltd (UE21409).*

Analytical Issues and Procedures

Morton Feldman's *Three Voices* consists, as the title suggests, of three vocal lines, and although the score does not expressly indicate this, is sung by one singer, a soprano, with two of the three parts pre-recorded on tape and played back over loudspeakers, with the third sung live and presumably amplified so as to present a unified sound-texture. The piece was written for the American soprano Joan La Barbara; of its conception Feldman remarked that:

One of my closest friends, the painter Philip Guston, had just died; Frank O'Hara had died several years before. I saw the piece with Joan in front and these two loudspeakers behind her. There is something kind of tombstone about the look of loudspeakers. I thought of the piece as an exchange of the live voice with the dead ones - a mixture of the living and the dead.¹

One further level of this connection to past friends is the use of a small section of Frank O'Hara's poem *Wind*, written in 1962, itself dedicated to Feldman, which begins 'Who'd have thought / that snow falls'.² However, the use of this text only makes up a small portion of the whole piece, and elsewhere the singer uses vocalise; John McGuire comments that 'it is the economical use of this text, contrasted with its monochrome surroundings that lends the text and thereby also the piece a striking eloquence, presenting both sadness and an affirmation of transience' (1987: 26). This music, as with nearly all of Feldman's output, is to be performed very softly, *ppp* being the only indication throughout, and this quiet dynamic and unified timbral quality give the piece its homogeneous, almost elemental quality, which throws greater attention onto the manipulation of short repeating patterns and static chords which make up most of the musical material. *Three Voices* is also a long piece, coming from the period of Feldman's

¹ Cited in booklet to CD recording. New Albion NA018 CD, 1989.

² This poem is also used in Feldman's *The O'Hara Songs* from 1962, with the first two lines forming the entire text for the second song, a reduction of the poem similar to that found in *Three Voices*.

compositional life where he was exploring increased duration in his music, music that Howard Skempton has described as 'feature-film length' (cited in Bohn 1995: 80). In fact, by Feldman's standards, *Three Voices* is relatively short, particularly when compared to pieces such as the five-hour Second String Quartet, but is still a large unbroken expanse of music which lasts around 50-80 minutes, depending on the basic pulse chosen by the performer.

Three Voices raises a number of analytical issues and difficulties, not least because many aspects of the piece question traditional expectations as to how music behaves. The principal effect of this music seems to be to create a temporal mist or fog, where memory and expectation are manipulated and blurred through the large timescale, a slow rate of progress, and an overall form that fails to 'add up' in any traditional way. The music exists very much from moment to moment, but without any real sense of forward momentum, instead articulating a 'flat' surface, with little, if any, differentiation between foreground and background, primary and secondary events. This non-hierarchical approach to form, where attempts to find an overall shape with which to 'make sense' of the piece as a whole are continually undermined, is one of the principal ways in which the 'temporal mist' is created. Fundamental to this perception is the use of repetition, both of large-scale sections and of small-scale patterning, and the ambiguity that is created between 'restatement' and 'variation', again through the use of an extended timescale (it being difficult to remember musical events over such a long span of music), but also through the continual re permutation of a restricted and related palette of basic materials. Although both small- and large-scale levels share this principle of presenting similar elements in different order combinations, there is actually very little connection between these levels, as one gains no sense of the localised patterning 'building up' to create an overall form. Of course, the two levels are related in the trivial sense in which one cannot exist without the other, that without a bar-to-bar surface any larger construction would not be possible, but in this piece the clear demarcation between sections (with a few exceptions) compares with a high level of continuity within those sections, and, conversely, there is little sense of large-scale divisions being determined by the material they contain. However, to suggest that the two are in conflict is to indicate an overly dynamic interrelationship; in the same way that the large-scale patterning presents a 'flat' surface, the small-scale material seems simply to occupy the 'space' allotted to it.

The main analytical problem posed by *Three Voices* seems to be to account for the way in which the music creates this flat surface and how it manipulates time so as to make for the blurring of memory and expectation referred to above. This necessarily involves an examination of the large-scale construction of the music, and its relationship to smaller-scale events, so that one can gauge the degree to which the two levels are separated and to what extent they interact. McGuire, in his analysis of *Three Voices*, 'Repetition and Variation', pays greatest attention to the two surface-level processes which he adduces in his title. He ends his discussion by examining the manipulation of time referred to above, and concentrates on what he sees as the freedom granted to the listener to wander the sound-canvas at will by such a non-directed disposition of musical time, a freedom uncompromised by any abstract structure which would stand between listener and music. He goes on:

For this reason it would be futile to extend the above description with a 'map' of the piece. Post-facto constructions of this sort can tell us very little about a piece of music whose reason for being seems to be to question such attempts, either on the part of the listener or the composer. The piece itself is its own shortest description. (McGuire 1987: 29)

McGuire's point here is that it seems unnecessary to discuss the large-scale structure of a piece of music which, because of reasons given earlier, is not perceived in global terms, is not grasped as an overall structure whilst listening, but rather exists from moment to moment; such discussion, he suggests, contradicts the concept of music which, like the 'Big-Pictures' of Rothko, Newman and Pollock which McGuire draws upon, seems designed to avoid a synoptic view, instead placing the viewer / listener in the centre of the experience. While I would agree that *Three Voices* is not perceived as an overall structure, either during the piece or after it has finished, its large-scale form does seem to be more important than McGuire suggests. Firstly, the music falls quite easily into distinct sections of varying length which are characterised by different treatments, 'variations', of the basic material, or indeed by strikingly individual material; only by examining its division can one be more explicit about the way in which the *ordering* plays a part in the overall picture. Secondly, a number of sections occur more than once but maintain sufficient identity for such revisiting to be clearly recognized. McGuire suggests this process in his categorisation of the different types of material which occur, but again, only through a more systematic segmentation can the similarities and differences between sections be examined in detail; many commentators on Feldman's music have taken his profession of his 'intuitive' mode of composition at face value, but through a comparison

of the different versions of the same basic elements, a level of systemisation *can* be observed.

Finally, and most importantly, examination of large-scale form can help to account for the way in which the ‘temporal mist’ is created, how expectation and memory are manipulated over the entire span of music; the various ways in which sections are repeated, reordered and varied give an indication of how and why it is that the overall form becomes ungraspable. This means that although a resulting ‘map’ of that form does not necessarily relate directly to this listening experience, it can account for a number of aspects of our perception. For instance, more ‘traditional’ music commonly involves the recurrence of privileged material, so that the first section is often the most important and returns at significant points, but by examining the way in which sections recur in this piece, and the various recombinations of material that they contain, one can see why this approach soon becomes unsatisfactory and how a different listening orientation is needed. This is, however, to run ahead somewhat; suffice it to say now that in order to grasp the main analytical problem, to account for the overall effect of *Three Voices*, an examination of large-scale form does seem to be indicated. The following analysis will therefore initially place some emphasis on this aspect, and will also necessarily shift between the two levels, large- and small-scale, for only through an examination of both can one begin to delineate the unusual nature of the music in question

Large-scale Form

In a discussion of the large-scale structure of much of Feldman’s music and particularly of *Three Voices*, some attention needs to be given to the notational aspects of the score, as the relationship between notation and sounding result is somewhat more complicated than might at first appear. Despite the apparent simplicity of the musical materials as written on the page, a number of features mean that there is a clear divergence between what is written and what is heard, and these also indicate some design on Feldman’s part to maintain some independence between the *act* of writing (on which he places great

importance in his lectures and writings³), and the act of performing. Most celebrated of these is his use of enharmonic respellings, so that the performer is confronted with a differentiation between, for instance, C double-sharp and E double-flat, although Feldman did not seem to intend an exact realisation of such minutiae in performance.⁴ Although this kind of extreme case is not represented in *Three Voices*, more traditional respellings *are* used, so that the repeated rising figure E $\flat$ -E $\natural$ -C $\sharp$ on page 2 of the score returns on page 6 as E $\flat$ -F $\flat$ -D $\flat$ (although in a slightly different context). Also on a surface level, the score gives no indication of the vowel sound to be used when no words are given, thus enabling a wide variety of different timbral effects depending on the singer (the expectation would seem to be that one timbre is used throughout), nor is tempo indicated, although 'Feldman performance practice', based on the evidence of his other scores suggests a basic crotchet pulse of MM. ♩ = c.60. All of the above are localised features which suggest that the score should itself be viewed as the result of a performance, in this case Feldman sitting down to write it. As indicated above, it is on the level of large-scale structure that this independence of score and sound is most clearly evident, and it is this aspect that now needs some consideration.

The score of *Three Voices* provides ample evidence that a number of section-divisions were determined by the physical appearance of the music in manuscript, the most obvious being those delineated by the end of one page of score and the beginning of the next.⁵ Of the eighteen pages, twelve are marked by the commencement of significantly different material (ignoring page 1, of course); on a further seven occasions such breaks occur at the end of systems, of which there is a uniform four per page, which

³ For example. 'My pieces are to some degree a performance. I'm highly concentrated when I work. In fact I found ways to arrive at concentration. One of the most important ways is that I write in ink.... And if I see that I'm crossing out, I just leave the piece and go to it at another time' (Feldman 1985: 229-30); 'My concern at times is nothing more than establishing a series of practical conditions that will enable me to work. For years I said if I could only find a comfortable chair I would rival Mozart' (: 94); see also his comments on notation in 'Crippled Symmetry' (: 124-37).

⁴ In discussion of his use of 'microtonal' spellings, Feldman commented that '...when you've been working with a minor 2nd as long as I've been, it's very wide. I hear a minor 2nd like a minor 3rd almost.... And that's the way I hear that pitch. It's coming to me very slowly, and there's a lot of stuff in there. But I don't use it conceptually. That's why I use the double flats. People think they're leading tones. I don't know. Think what you want. But I use it because I think it's a very practical way of still having the focus of the pitch. And after all, what's sharp? It's directional, right? And a double-sharp is more directional' (Feldman 1985: 192-3). Walter Zimmermann is more certain of their function: '...the double-sharps and double-flats... are not deployed functionally, but are rather to be understood as subtle fluctuations at the notes' margins...; the tendency is to interpret them as a quarter-tone or eighth-tone. This is wrong, [Feldman] has in mind pitches pushed to the edges of their identity, but not removed from the tempered tuning system' (Zimmermann 1985: 19).

⁵ This is a common feature of Feldman's music; for an indication of these aspects in other pieces see Ames 1996: 102 and Zimmermann 1984a: 49.

means that only four changes of material fail to coincide with physically significant points: two on page 5 and one each on pages 8 and 11. From this one can conclude that the act of filling a page with music was an important part of Feldman's writing process, and acted as a guide as to when to move on, although not in any hard and fast way, for, as well as the exceptions outlined above, several sections do occupy a number of pages. However, the general principle indicates that Feldman's 'intuitive' way of writing is in fact much more structured and hemmed in by a system, even if only the 'system of the page', than is usually acknowledged; this regularity is further emphasised by Feldman's habit of ruling the bars before writing, so that irrespective of the number of beats they contain, each one appears the same length on the page, in this piece, nine per system, giving a uniform 36 bars per page and an overall total of 648 in the piece.

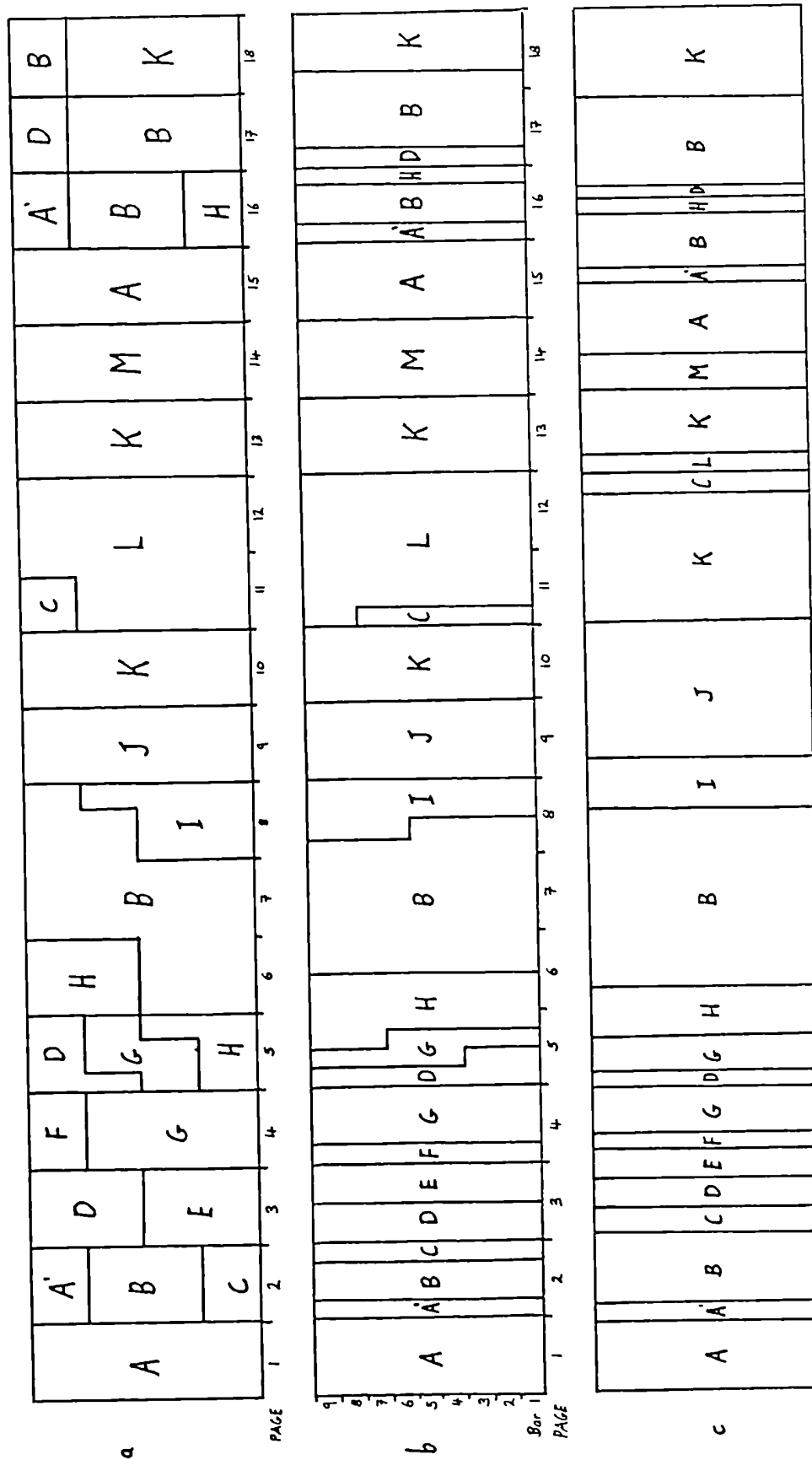
This regularity on a visual level is, however, firmly disrupted when the music is performed, due to two main factors. The first of these has already been alluded to: the widely differing bar-lengths in terms of actual beats that occur through the course of the piece. For instance, to take the two extremes, on page 13 the average bar-length is around seven or eight quavers, whereas immediately beforehand, on pages 11 and 12, each bar lasts only one quaver; with a uniform basic pulsation this plainly means that some passages last a considerable length of time whereas others, which may *look* equivalent, go by extremely quickly. This is often exacerbated by the second factor which is the use of repetition (through repeat markings), either of a three- or four-bar phrase, in which case this is usually only heard twice, or of single bars, which may be played as many as seven times. Thus the first system of page 10, with no repeat markings, occupies 64 quaver beats, whereas the final system, where each bar is repeated at least once, occupies 213, over three times as many. This then clearly demonstrates the way in which visual equivalence does not relate to aural equivalence, driving a further wedge between the notated score and aural result (though, of course, repetitions *are* marked in the score). This manipulation of the uniformity implied by what Feldman called 'the grid', the ruling of a fixed number of bars per system, by the twin processes of differing bar-length and unpredictable repetitions, allows a control of aspects of scale, which Feldman considered very important.⁶ This is most apparent in a comparison of passages which involve repeat bars with those which do not, for here basically the same

⁶ See his comments in 'Crippled Symmetry', in Feldman 1985: 124-37, particularly pages 124-7.

amount of material occurs over a shorter or longer time-span, so that Feldman is not manipulating content but more directly the scale of the music. This means that sections can actually contain exactly the same material and look the same length on the page, but one can last twice as long as the other; as will be discussed, this manipulation of repetition and variation is a very important part of *Three Voices*. However, the distinction between the visual and the aural means that in examining factors such as large-scale proportion, the fact that the two systems necessarily indicate different results means they can be fruitfully compared, for one can test whether, say, an absence of recognisable patterning corresponds on both levels or is simply a factor of one or the other.

In the discussion that follows, therefore, both levels will be considered, although primacy will be given to the way in which the piece actually sounds when performed, as, of course, this is what confronts the listener and is that which he or she has to make some sense of. In addition, the purpose of this analysis is not principally to examine the process of composition, although, as has already been indicated, a number of conclusions may be reached which go some way to challenging the prevailing attitude towards Feldman's compositional approach. Part of that attitude which does seem to be useful is to consider Feldman's preoccupation with Turkish rugs, and to extend this 'carpet' analogy into an examination of the music. In his discussion of Feldman's Second String Quartet, Walter Zimmermann produces what he calls a 'Muster-Teppich' (Rug-pattern) for the entire piece, showing the basic elements and how they return (Zimmermann 1985: 22-3). Figure 5.1 shows three such plans, with the different types of material labelled A to M.

FIGURE 5.1.



The topmost plan is modelled on Zimmermann's, with each vertical rectangle representing one page of the written score, so that it is 'read' in an equivalent manner, each page from left to right, top to bottom, the subdivision into four strips similarly representing the four systems on each page. The second plan, Figure 5.1b, also maps the written score on a page-by-page basis, allotting to each an equal amount of space, but is turned 'sideways', with the vertical axis corresponding to the nine-bar grid, and the horizontal to the systems and pages of the composition. The advantage of this mapping is that it, firstly, enables the pre-drawn grid on the page to be more clearly observed, as well as the way in which this is used as a framework through which the music is 'woven',⁷ and, secondly, records more easily the proportional relationships between sections as each is now grouped together in one block rather than being spread over two or more pages, as in the earlier mapping; this means that it begins to approach a straightforward 'time' graph (time on the horizontal axis), though, of course, the time that it records is not performed but rather visual, on a line by line basis.

The third mapping, shown in Figure 5.1c, does in fact adopt a time / space notation, as distance along the horizontal axis corresponds exactly to the time that each section occupies, and in this case is the actual performed time of the music, including repetitions, based on the number of quavers that each section occupies with a constant basic pulse. This third mapping thus represents the sounding result, whereas the previous two represent the visual aspect, and some quite considerable distinctions can be observed simply on the level of comparative duration between section, most immediately between this mapping and that given in Figure 5.1b, which most nearly corresponds to a 'time' / space diagram (the two have been scaled so as to assist such comparison). The most obvious feature is the difference in length between section L in the score, and section L in performance; as was indicated earlier, this section involves the shortest bar-length (1/8) and, despite occupying nearly two whole pages of score lasts only 83 crotchet beats. Similarly, though on a less extreme level, section M is appreciably longer on the page than in performance. (In fact, in both these cases, though particularly with section L, in an *actual* performance the section is likely to last slightly longer than indicated, simply because the virtuoso vocal writing here may well force a slight drop in tempo.) The opposite process can be observed with all four occurrences of B material, but particularly

⁷ I am indebted to the composer Clive Wilkinson for this observation.

the first and second, and also with section J, where the performed duration is far greater than the written, due to the high level of repetition involved. The same is also true of K, particularly on its first appearance, partially because of repetition, but also because of a greater average bar-length. Otherwise, there is a general connection between the two systems in terms of approximate proportion, for instance, F is shorter than E on all the mappings given in Figure 5.1, though where there are divergences, as outlined above, these are often quite marked.

Before examining the material which makes up each section and how these are defined, a number of general points may be made regarding the overall segmentation and the disposition of sections involved. Firstly, as can readily be observed from Figure 5.1, the types of material recur a different number of times. B material occurs four times, D and K three times, A, A', C, G and H twice and the other six sections only once; this suggests a particular hierarchy of material, and in fact it is clear that B material occupies the greatest proportion of the piece and also makes up the largest single section. However, whether it can be said to be the most 'important' as a result is an issue that will be examined later on. Feldman's attitude to this type of return was expressed in his 1984 Darmstadt lecture:

The only problem is that one might think that what comes back is hierarchical material. What usually comes back is the material I wasn't sure about and wanted to hear again, because of the taste. (In Feldman 1985: 209)

In this music one needs to be wary of assigning undue importance to music which seems to stand out by virtue of its greater frequency, for, as Figure 5.1c shows, the entire piece is made up of an interweaving of new material with versions of the already-heard. The first five pages introduce eight different sections, each of new material, but from that point on this process is interrupted by returning to earlier sections, with the last quarter or so of the piece using only 'old' material. In fact, one can see what looks like a kind of larger-scale restatement with A, A' and B returning in their original order; however, this is quickly interrupted, with H supplanting C, and although D does follow in the 'right order', this sense of a large-scale return is effaced by the final two sections. Apart from this limited occurrence there does not appear to be any simple pattern to the structure shown in Figure 5.1, either in terms of which blocks are placed next to each other, in an alternation of long or short blocks, or of a general movement from one to the other, on both written and performed levels.

What the above discussion has ignored is, firstly, that some types of material are actually quite closely related, and, secondly, the connected issue of to what degree each section is clearly distinct from those which surround it. These considerations add a level of complication to the segmentation which has been used above, and in fact aspects of that segmentation deserve to be examined more closely, for certainly the criteria for dividing the music into blocks is not wholly straightforward, and although the division that has been given does allow for a clear and consistent classification of the musical materials, how they separate into distinct entities needs to be considered. This necessarily involves an examination of the material itself, alongside the classification that the segmentation implies.

Segmentation of Material

The grouping of the music into blocks, resulting in the segmentation presented above, is an attempt to distinguish significant differences between material. The division into fourteen different 'types' may seem somewhat over-generous, and it would be possible to subsume some of these divisions into larger-scale sections, but in a piece in which the basic material is quite limited, and where much of it 'sounds the same', smaller differentiations become more significant. In addition, if a more large-scale approach were taken, then some of the segmentation later in the piece would be difficult to account for. The one subgrouping is already indicated: A' is very much an extension of A, following it on both occasions, yet it is sufficiently well defined, especially as a link to B material, that a subdivision seems justified. Given below is a brief characterisation of each type of material, coupled with an example of a typical passage. The characterisation also gives some indication of the interrelationships between types; this will be considered in much greater detail later on, but does also play a part in determining groupings. For instance, I and J could be coupled together as one larger section, but then the connection between J and F material would be more difficult to articulate; again, this is an aspect which will become increasingly clear.

A: Two-note [0,1] cells, interlocking to create complex resultant rhythm:

FIGURE 5.2.



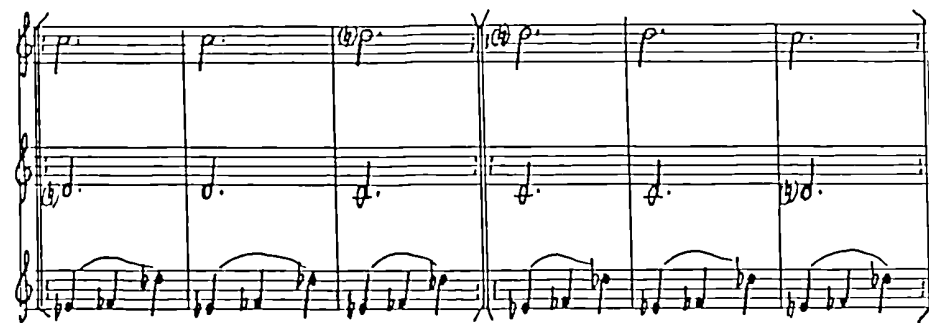
A': Addition of more lyrical rising line to same basic material, results in thinning of texture:

FIGURE 5.3.



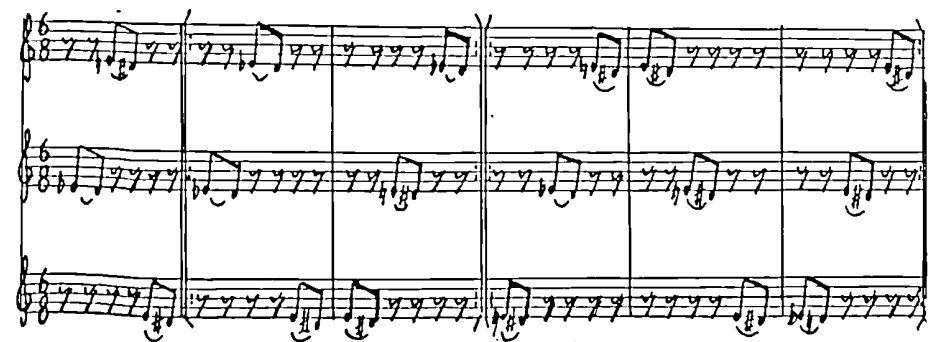
B: E $\flat$ -E-C $\sharp$ [0,1,3] cell (from A') used as an ostinato:

FIGURE 5.4.



C: Two-note cells hocketed between voices (with some overlap on later recurrence):

FIGURE 5.5.



D: [0,1,2] cluster:

FIGURE 5.6.



E: Chromatic [0,1,2,3] rising semiquaver figures:

FIGURE 5.7.



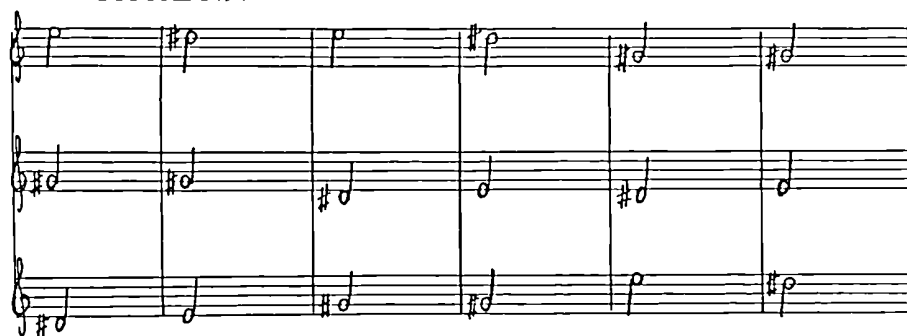
F: Two-note [0,1] rising cells, centred around tritone harmony:

FIGURE 5.8.



G: Mostly static chords (involving crossing of voices), more open harmony:

FIGURE 5.9.



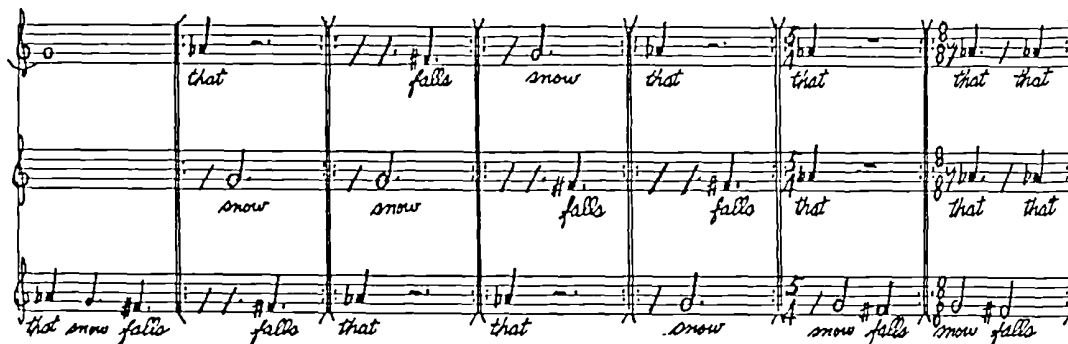
H: Two-note [0,2] rising cells (gesturally similar to F), coupled with longer, more widely-spaced pitches:

FIGURE 5.10.



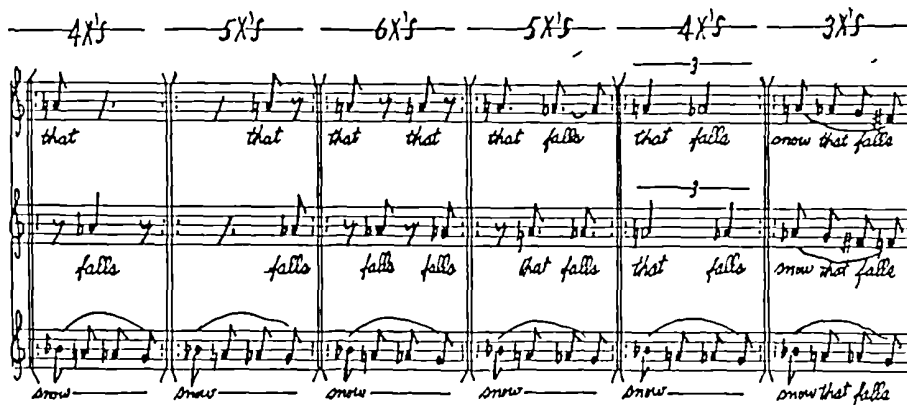
I: Falling three-note [0,1,2] cells, first spread out, then hocketed between voices:

FIGURE 5.11.



J: Develops I, involves four-note cells creating cluster, interlocking creates more complex rhythm (initially somewhat similar to F):

FIGURE 5.12.



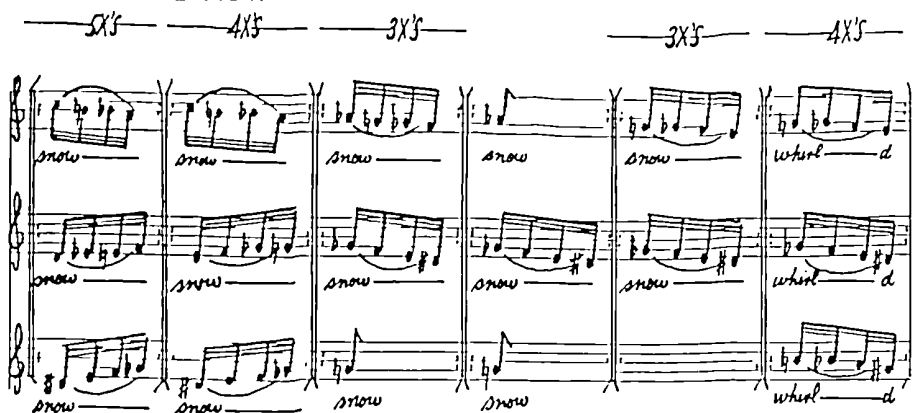
K: Open harmony (similar to G) arranged in sequences, also repeating [0,2,7] cell:

FIGURE 5.13.



L: Very rapid descending figures [0,1,2,3] & [0,1,2,3,4], both in parallel harmony and individually (hocketed):

FIGURE 5.14.



M: Rising and falling chromatic semiquaver 'melisma', in unison and parallel harmony:

FIGURE 5.15.

(a non accented legato)



A number of these groupings perhaps require a little more explanation, for as can readily be observed from only the limited amount of music shown above, the level of correspondence between some types of material is very high. The connection between A and A' has already been discussed, and this process of elision continues into the first

B section on page 2; however, this B material is also heard out of this context, i.e. not following A, and is thus clearly defined as independent. In fact, part of the effect here is that this most memorable and often repeated material is first heard as part of a 'developmental' process of gradual evolution but is later lifted out of that original context. The relationship between C and D sections is first one of continuity, in that D on page 2 can be seen as extending the process of section C; however, again, both types of material recur in different contexts and are thus best considered as distinct. There is a similar overlap between sections F and G, for they both make use of a two-note cell doubled at the tritone. However, in F this motion is upwards, whereas in G it is downwards; more significant is that what seems more characteristic of G, the slow-moving open harmony, is always heard first, thus aurally separating this section from its surroundings. There is a further connection between the G harmonies and the material labelled as K; what marks these later sections is the use of the repeating [0,2,7] cell referred to above, coupled with the words 'who'd have thought', and, although this does not always appear, the harmony which becomes associated with it does, which is sufficient to maintain identity.

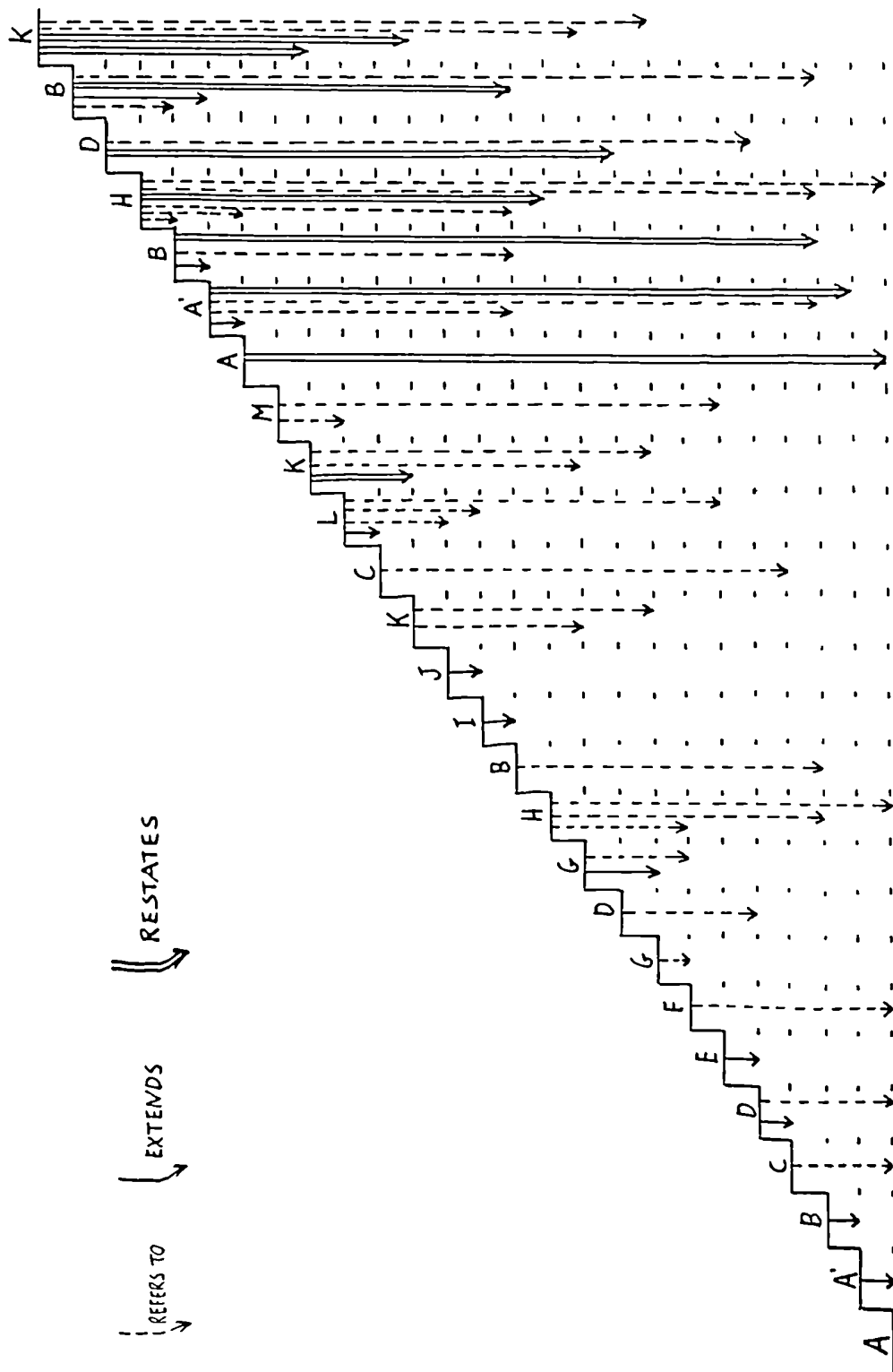
What the above discussion has shown is that, firstly, there is a complex network of references and interrelationship between material in different sections, and secondly, that because of this, not all section-divisions are equally clearly defined, so that the listening experience oscillates between hearing one texture growing out of another and a more stark process of juxtaposition. In addition, because sections recur there is a continual process of recognition, as the already-heard reappears, so that one realises that the same material is returning in different contexts, although sometimes the time-scale is so long that recognition is not as clear-cut as the basic segmentation in Figure 5.1 might suggest. The contrast between a small-scale sense of continuity between sections and a large-scale disjunction as these recur out of their original context tends to increase as the music progresses; when coupled with the network of correspondences which exist between different sections, this means that for much of the piece the listener is presented with material which either directly restates or more indirectly refers to that which was heard earlier, and that although it may stand out from its immediate surroundings, there is some relation to the wider context. This is the most fundamental way in which the temporal mist is created, where a perceptual blurring takes place through a process of alluding to earlier events, either in the immediate or the more distant past, so that it

becomes increasingly difficult to grasp the sense of an overall form.

Figure 5.16 is an attempt to present how this is achieved through the process of referral and restatement. The structure of this diagram is loosely based on one given by Umberto Eco in the second lecture of his *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, in an exploration of the creation of another ‘mist’, in his case the literary one created in Gerard de Nerval’s *Sylvie* (Eco 1994: 40). Eco shows how the narrative structure of that work depends on a series of flashbacks and allusions to the past, and, to a degree, this is comparable to the process involved in *Three Voices*. Figure 5.16 allots each section an equal amount of space, and thus ignores relative length; however, it is still ‘read’ from left to right, with the progression of sections extending up a zig-zag diagonal line, with each section allotted a specific level on the vertical axis. This represents ‘the present’, with arrows descending backwards into ‘the past’, in this case to the other sections to which some reference is being made. There are three possible relationships shown here: a section may extend some aspect of an earlier one, this is shown by a solid arrow; it may refer or allude to it through the use of similar material, shown by a broken arrow; or it may be a more literal restatement, shown by a double arrow. The degree to which sections constitute a restatement is an issue which will be given further consideration later on, suffice it to point out here that although a restatement obviously involves sections with the same letter name, not all such sections are necessarily involved in this process; as an example compare the two sections containing G material, or those labelled as C.

A number of observations can be drawn from this diagram. Firstly, the principle of indicating an extension from one section to the next obviously presupposes a level of continuity, whereas the absence of such a link suggests a more abrupt transition. This process of extension usually involves adjacency, although there are a couple of instances where a more long-range connection is suggested. The two sections involving G material seem to present one overall continuity, ‘interrupted’ by the D material which separates them, although, as the inverted commas imply, this interruption is not really disruptive, but rather presents ‘something different’. The second instance involves the final B section, which, because it is placed fairly close in time to the second A’ section, seems to continue that process of extension which was begun in the previous B section. These aside, Figure 5.16 gives a fairly clear picture of how the piece presents instances of general continuity, and more disjunct juxtapositions.

FIGURE 5.16.



In fact, processes of juxtaposition are in the preponderance, for as can be observed, only nine sections display a clear extension of their immediate predecessor. As was remarked above, however, absences of direct continuity do not necessarily indicate disruption, as in the relation between the G - D - G passage already discussed and a few more examples, particularly towards the beginning of the piece, but in general terms, discontinuity between sections is the predominant effect, and is, of course, important if an alternation between distinct blocks of material is to be perceived.

Figure 5.16 also allows observation of which sections of music are relatively distinct, and which are more heavily involved in alluding to or restating other material. It will be noted that no section completely lacks any backward connection, for each is involved in some relationship to the past, even if it is itself never referred to again: section M presents the clearest instance, referring to E and L material, but not connected to any of the music which follows it in time. In a slightly different way, sections I and J are also not very heavily involved in this network of correspondences: each extends the section which it follows but does not directly relate to any other previous material, and both are later referred to by L material alone. This compares with the other extreme where passages such as the last section of B and the second occurrence of H present four and six links to 'the past' respectively, or, from the opposite end of the process, the first section A to which seven links are later recorded on the diagram. This comparison between sections right at the beginning and towards the end of the piece partially confirms the expectation that the process of recall, referral and restatement gradually increases as the music progresses, reaching its maximum at the end of the piece where the amount of available 'past' has also reached a peak; the high number of later references to the first A section also suggests that the first material is the most important. However, a degree of caution is necessary, for this material neither occupies the most time or is heard the most often in *Three Voices*, both these functions being assigned to B material. In addition, of course, because it comes first means that, at least initially, all other material is necessarily heard in relation to it, particularly since it features the two-note cell which is a common building-block throughout. It is also worth noting that in the second half or so of the piece the number of references to it drops markedly, as other material becomes increasingly involved in the process, so that to suggest that A is always privileged is somewhat misleading. In fact, as the music progresses and the available 'past' increases, the memory of this first section recedes as it is overtaken by more recent

it is overtaken by more recent events which themselves recur and are referred to, so that a general blurring of memory takes place.

Figure 5.16 allows the way in which the various processes evolve over to time to be observed quite easily, for it is immediately apparent when there is a general lack of long-term reference or when such constructions predominate. These may be summarized in general terms very easily. Initially, extension and referral occur widely, the process of referral most often connecting to A material. After the first appearance of section H, however, it becomes more complicated and the direct relationship with A is lost; instead, as can be observed, the process of recollection 'lifts off' from the beginning material, as this passage concentrates more heavily on recalling the 'immediate past', although a number of long-term connections do remain. The most marked change comes with the return of A and A' material, which, with the exception of the relationship of the previous two K sections, is the first instance of a restatement; from here on each section involves this relationship, so that this passage of music not only evokes but actually exclusively uses 'old' material. This is coupled with the most complicated network of relationships in the piece and an overall process of referral which suggests links which traverse almost the entire length of the music. Both these factors suggest why this final quarter of the piece can only problematically be perceived as a large-scale 'return', for not only do the restatements of sections need to be heard over an extremely large timescale, but the complexity and number of the other allusions and references mean that, at this point in the music, each section (apart from perhaps A) is not simply heard as a return but rather as a continuation of processes found in the rest of *Three Voices*.

How this creates a blurring of perception has hopefully become more clear through the preceding discussion, as the linearity which the basic segmentation into types suggests is shown to be a much more complicated process of interweaving new material with allusions to the past, so that a sense of developing overall form is interrupted by continual referrals elsewhere. For example, listeners might be presented with a section which clearly evokes one heard earlier, but then the immediately following section might connect to a completely different area in the musical 'past', or may vaguely 'sound like' two or more different sections, so that a straightforward continuity is hardly ever established (the passages A-A'-B and I-J being perhaps the only two instances). In addition, although the segmentation used here lists fourteen distinct types of material, these are not as individual as such a labelling might suggest, and their interrelationship

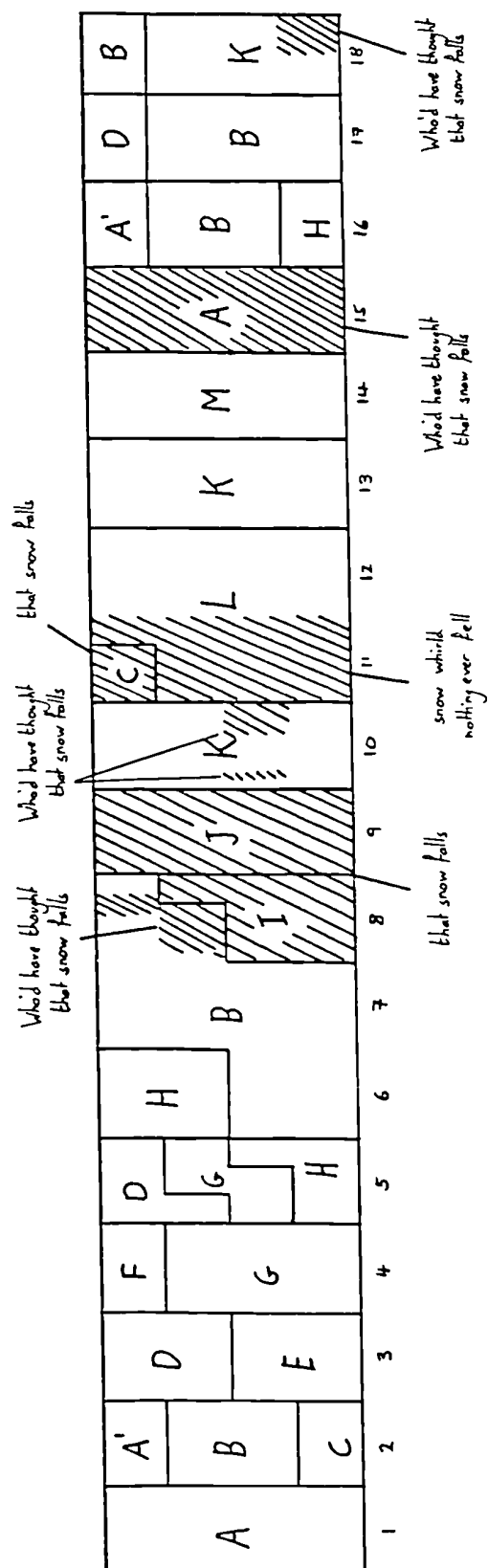
is difficult to isolate the most significant; although certain types of material do stand out slightly, the general effect of the process outlined above is to create a large-scale 'flat' surface. Even those sections which are related through the process of restatement are not necessarily clearly defined on that restatement, for in many instances the material is reordered so that this return is difficult to perceive; in the same way as the large-scale is 'flattened out' through repermuted and reordering, a comparable technique extends this process to the small-scale. How this is achieved will be examined in detail below, after a final feature which might suggest a large-scale order has been discussed.

Words

The way in which *Three Voices* employs its text is one of the most striking features of the piece; certainly, the sudden arrival of words after some twenty minutes of vocalise is, quite simply, a complete surprise, for, as Steven Swartz points out, 'nothing so far in the piece has prepared the listener for the entrance of this text, one line of which is repeated insistently' (1983: 400). In fact, the piece uses four lines from O'Hara's poem, the first and second: 'Who'd have thought / that snow falls', and the ninth and tenth: 'snow whirled / nothing ever fell', but this piecemeal use of a considerably longer text (twenty-one lines in total) means that the music cannot really be called a 'setting', particularly as the effect of using these particular lines does not capture the overall spirit of the poem. What Feldman seems to be doing here is almost suggesting the rest of the poem through its absence, evoking it through a tiny fragment which avoids the way a large amount of text might otherwise threaten to swamp the more restricted musical materials. This process of suggestion is in some ways comparable to the process of recall already observed, but the two work independently, with no direct contact between the musical and the textual process.

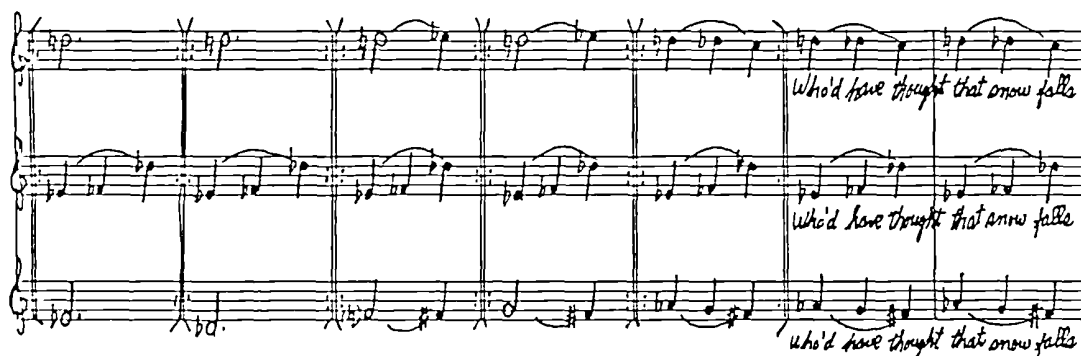
In fact, the proportion of the music which uses words is very small, making up only a fraction of the total duration. This is, of course, most obvious in the considerable 'delay' before the words enter, but after this point they only appear in isolated passages. Figure 5.17 shows these sections in terms of a page-by-page mapping used in Figure 5.1a above; here, shaded areas indicate the presence of a text, and the words that are used appear alongside the relevant sections.

FIGURE 5.17.



After the first appearance at the very end of the second B section there is a reasonably large block, involving sections I and J, where words are used; they then disappear apart from a short passage in section K, reappearing on page 11 with C and L sections, the latter of which marks the only use of lines 9 and 10, with the final two occurrences, section A and the final system of the final page, relatively isolated. The effect of this rather scattered distribution is primarily to de-emphasise the significance that is naturally attributed to the words and the music which presents them. The transition to a texted music on page 8, shown in Figure 5.18, is, as pointed out above, such a remarkable effect that one immediately feels that now the text has ‘at last’ arrived, the piece is entering its most important phase, that the ‘real music’ is now beginning. Feldman extends this expectation by continuing to use the text for a considerable period at this point, and in fact sections I and J are the only sections in the piece which appear *exclusively* with words. However, with the return to non-texted music and their rather fragmentary presentation in the rest of the piece, the use of words recedes to form just another layer in the ‘flat’ musical surface, appearing and disappearing for no apparent reason, with no clear connection to the larger musical process.

FIGURE 5.18.



This lack of connection is part of the way in which the text is de-emphasised and in turn also serves to de-emphasise the process of recurrence in terms of material, contributing to the articulation of this flat surface. As has already been noted, only sections I and J are exclusively texted, on all other occasions the texted passage only makes up a part of a section, or a section will reappear without its text. For instance, the ‘setting’ of lines 9 and 10 occupies only some of section L, as does the texted passage in sections B and K. In both these latter cases, subsequent returns to that material do not involve a return to the use of words, so that the material which first introduced words, at the end of B, is never heard again, whereas what is the most characteristic material of section K makes

up only a small part of two sections and is wholly absent from a third. (This passage of texted music does gain an increased significance, partly because it sets the first two lines as a clearly recognisable, even memorable, repeating pattern, and partly in retrospect, as it is the very last music of the piece.) Elsewhere, the text seems ‘grafted on’ to sections that have already appeared untexted, as with the second appearances of A and C; the effect here is to change the sound of the section so that their connection with their earlier manifestation is considerably blurred. This is most marked with C material, where the use of a whisper (the only occurrence in the piece) changes the timbre completely (see Figure 5.19), but the return of A is also quite different through the effect that the use of words produces. Here the text de-emphasises the feeling of large-scale return, contributing to the masking of this sense which has already been discussed.

FIGURE 5.19.

The image shows a musical score for three voices (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor/Bass) in 4/4 time. Above the staves, there are tempo markings: 5X's, 4X's, 3X's, 5X's, 4X's, 3X's, and 5X's. A bracket labeled '(Whisper)' spans the first two measures. The lyrics are written below the staves. The Soprano part has lyrics: 'that snow', 'that', 'snow snow', 'snow falls', 'falls', 'falls', 'that that'. The Alto part has lyrics: 'that snow', 'that', 'snow snow', 'that', 'snow', 'snow', 'that that'. The Tenor/Bass part has lyrics: 'that snow', 'that', 'snow snow', 'snow that falls', 'snow that falls', 'snow that falls', 'snow that falls'.

The way in which musical and textual ‘recurrence’ are manipulated thus seems designed to avoid any overall form-building sense, with the two processes acting mostly independently, not reinforcing any larger-scale division that might be suggested by one or the other, with the texted music simply acting as yet another variation within the basic sound-world of the piece. Before leaving this discussion of the use of words, the smaller-scale level of how the pitch material corresponds to the words being used merits some brief consideration. As was suggested above, the fact that the words are used piecemeal makes it difficult to view this music as a conventional setting, but on a surface level, there are a few instances of a more traditional style of word-setting or word-painting. The most obvious of these comes in section L, where the phrase ‘snow whirled’ is given the fastest-moving pattern in the piece and literally does ‘whirl’, both within each repeating pattern and between the three voices. A secondary example is the pattern used in section

K with the words ‘who’d have thought / that snow falls’, which circles around and around, rather like the snow, perhaps. In both these cases, however, this setting is coupled with a less clear relationship between words and music: in the latter case, more static material is also given the same text, and in the former, words such as ‘nothing’ and ‘ever’ use exactly the same material, which suggests a looser connection. Of course, the predominant example of ‘word setting’ is the use of a *falling*, usually semitonal, figure which characterises a huge amount of the music, not just the sections which use words. However, the connection between the two is established with the first entry of the text: up until this point in the music the predominant motion has been upwards, for instance in sections E and F and the rising E $\flat$ -E $\natural$ -C $\sharp$ of B, but it is in this B section that the outer parts begin to move downwards by step and it is the arrival at this ‘motif’ which seems to trigger the words. The downwards motion is continued, being the only material featured in sections I and J as well as C and L somewhat later. Too much can be made of the use of falling material: after this point both static and more rising figurations also appear, sometimes even with a text, and this falling figure is used in other pieces by Feldman, for instance in the Second String Quartet, but it does indicate an inherent suitability between the subject of the poem and the music of *Three Voices*. The sense that the music ‘rises’ up to the point of textual entry and falls down thereafter is also one that is attractive, and indeed does apply in the short term, but as the music progresses, and K and B material reappear, the overall division into two parts this suggests is gradually eroded.

This discussion of the interrelationship between text and material suggests that this is yet another level on which correspondences are suggested but never fully established, or once established are gradually eroded, so that there is a continual uncertainty as to what that relationship is. It is this uncertainty that makes the use of words so effective, for rather than applying a simple rule, such as coupling falling music with the appropriate words, identical material both ‘sets’ other words and is heard alone, so that the ambiguity between word-setting and pure abstraction is perpetually in flux; rather than establishing a clear hierarchy between texted and untexted music, this interplay between the two enables a more complex relationship to be continually evolving but never fully confirmed. It is how this intangibility also informs return and restatement of material on a surface level that now needs consideration.

Repetition and Variation / Reiteration and Change

The degree to which sections present literal restatements or more modified versions of the same material has already been alluded to in the consideration of the processes of connection, but it is possible to be quite explicit about which features persist from statement to statement (and which do not), this also involving an examination of recombination and repermutation on a smaller scale. Not only do these processes account for the lack of clarity in the similarities between some sections, but also go some way to showing how the blurring on the large-scale is mirrored by a comparable effect on the small-scale. To avoid an unnecessarily lengthy discussion, only a limited number of sections will be examined, as these may be taken as fairly representative of the general technique: section A, because it is the first section (thus gaining increased importance) and due to its apparent role as a large-scale marker; section B, the largest section both in terms of overall time and number of recurrences; and section K, which contains the most memorable material, the circling 'who'd have thought' cell, and raises a number of issues concerning use of system and general coherence. To facilitate the discussion each occurrence will be labelled using a subscript, so, for example, B₁ refers to the first appearance of this material on page 2, B₂ to the second on page 6, and so on.

The effect of the most obvious distinction between A₁ and A₂, the use of words, has already been discussed, but the material used, or more precisely, the ordering of that material, also differs. As shown in Figure 5.2 above, it consists of two-note cells which interlock to create a complex resulting rhythm, with the pitch materials contained within the span of a minor third. These sections are the only passages in the piece where two different barrings are used simultaneously, and this is combined with a subdivision of the 3/8 into quartuplets and the 4/8 into triplets, resulting in interlocking patterns which produce a subdivision of the crotchet into 24 parts. More important, however, is that each pattern lasts three (4/8) bars and is repeated; thus, as both sections occupy one page of score, there are 12 three-bar patterns in each. These patterns are distinct, that is, the exact configuration of pitch and rhythm is unique; there are, in fact, only nine different resulting rhythms and four pitches used. When A₁ and A₂ are compared the similarities are obvious. Figure 5.20 shows section A₁ with each different three-bar pattern labelled i-xii, and, beside it, the same labelling applied to A₂.

FIGURE 5.20.

A ₁	A ₂
: i : : ii : : iii :	: viii : : vii : : ix :
: iv : : v : : vi :	: xiii : : iv : : x :
: vii : : viii : : ix :	: v : : i : : iii :
: x : : xi : : xii :	: ii : : vi : : xi :

The thirteenth pattern (the fourth of A₂) is of the same rhythmic type as pattern xii (and no other) and involves only one note-change, replacing E $\sharp$ with E $\flat$, so that the difference is almost negligible. It is immediately apparent that A₂ uses exactly the same material but repermutes it in an unsystematic way, maintaining none of the original ordering. This technique serves a slightly ambiguous function here, for although it must necessarily reduce the level to which A₂ is perceived as a varied restatement of A₁, rather than just as a revisiting of similar material, the actual effect seems very limited, for over such a timespan this ‘detail’ is extremely unlikely to be perceived, with a more general level of similarity providing the sense of return, and the timbral difference producing the effect of a distinct ‘version’. The ordering may, however, have some small effect, particularly since the first pattern of A₁ is removed from that privileged position, so that the point of recurrence is itself de-emphasised within a more general process which performs the same function on a larger scale. Thus, a sense of large-scale return which this A section clearly marks is deliberately undermined by control of surface detail, so that one becomes unsure as to whether this is an exact restatement or a further variation, but without losing the sense of basic similarity.

The relationship between the four B sections is somewhat more complicated, but they seem best considered in pairs, with the connections between B₁ and B₃, and B₂ and B₄ being more straightforward. The simplest is between B₁ and B₃, which use the same eighteen bars but in a different order, achieved by simply swapping round the two systems on which they appear. Figure 5.21 shows the two arrangements, with each bar numbered (every bar is different) and laid out as they appear on the page; an interesting detail here is the absence of repeat-marks in the first system of B₃, which shows very clearly Feldman’s use of scale referred to earlier, as the same material now occupies half the time. The very simple change of order retains a basic identity, but the overall sense of B₃ is somewhat different: bars 1-6 of B₁ involve the E $\flat$ -E-C $\sharp$ pattern in a 3+3+2 rhythm, overlaid with falling or rising chromatic figures (see Figure 5.22a), whereas bars

7-18 give the three-note cell a number of different rhythmic profiles, whilst keeping the static D-G# as the overlaid sonority (see Figure 5.22b).

FIGURE 5.21.

B₁: | 1 :| 2 :| 3 :| 4 :| 5 :| 6 :| 7 :| 8 :| 9 :|
 | 10 :| 11 :| 12 :| 13 :| 14 :| 15 :| 16 :| 17 :| 18 :|

B₃: | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
 | 1 :| 2 :| 3 :| 4 :| 5 :| 6 :| 7 :| 8 :| 9 :|

FIGURE 5.22.

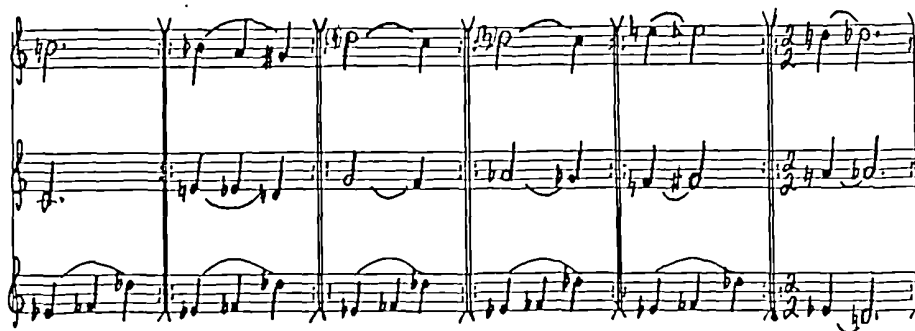
a.

b.

If these two types are in turn labelled X and Y, then in B_1 the overall pattern is X-Y, whereas in B_3 it is Y-X-Y, a small yet distinct difference, and indicative of the result that a simple reordering can produce. This type of X material reappears slightly altered in B_2 , as a lead-up to the entry of the words (Figure 5.23a shows a typical passage). In this section, and in B_4 , the rising three-note cell is reduced to three even crotchets, and this more typical material of B_2 , used exclusively in B_4 , overlays dotted minim patterns, often grouped into three-bar 'phrases' which repeat (see Figure 5.23b for the opening of B_2).

FIGURE 5.23.

a.



b.



Labelling again on a bar-by-bar level, but now with a high level of recurrence, Figure 5.24 shows the pattern for all of B_4 and for a comparable passage of B_2 , this earlier section being somewhat longer, the extra material principally involving the build-up to, and entry of, the text. There is, obviously, a close similarity between the two versions, and, in contrast to the relationship between B_1 and B_3 , the overall continuity, the movement from *a-h* is maintained. Some of the detail, however, does differ, and a slight re permutation of repeating blocks is once again the principal means whereby this differentiation is achieved.

FIGURE 5.24.

B₂: |ABA:|BBA:|BAB:|CCD:|DDC:| EEEFFEEEEFF |:GGE:|EGE:|HHFH:|DDG:|etc.

B₄: |BBA:|BBA:|BAB:|DDC:|CCD:| EGE:|EEFFEEEEFF |:GGE:|HHFH:|FH:|

In general terms, the four B sections display a close correspondence, especially within the two pairings. Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, even without such a level of correspondence the identity of these B sections would never be in doubt, principally because of the strong aural recognisability of the three-note cell which characterises them; what this does show, however, is how Feldman manipulates a limited and undifferentiated collection of materials so as to occupy a very large timescale.

Section K material makes up an interesting network, both within individual sections and between different appearances. All three sections are characterised by static, open-sounding chords which seem to suggest some sense of progression but then continually loop back, and K₁ and K₃ contain the repeating [0,2,7] pattern which sets the first two lines of the poem. K₂ uses the most restricted materials, a set of 14 different chords which also occur in both K₁ and K₃, though K₁ and, to a lesser degree, K₃ also use other materials (in addition to the [0,2,7] cell). Rather than examining all of these in detail, a number of general remarks concerning the coherence of the material can be made, before examining one instructive passage in greater detail.

The first issue to discuss concerns the degree to which the [0,2,7] cell fits into the rest of the section, for at first it appears rather too consonant - tonally orientated even - for music which deals predominantly with relationships of a semitone. However, on closer examination a consistency with the rest of this section does appear. The great majority of all of the chords in K involve the interval of a perfect fourth or a perfect fifth between the upper two notes (and of those that do not, very few use a chromatic interval) which means that the fourths and fifths of the [0,2,7] and its accompanying sonority do actually fit within the general ambit of the section. This link is made clear by the proximity (to both statements) of four chords; Figure 5.25 shows the last system of K₃ which restates (with only slight re permutation) the comparable passage in K₂. (As an aside, the penultimate bar of this passage, and hence the whole piece, is the only bar of complete silence in the entire work).

FIGURE 5.25.



This sequence of four chords occurs seven times in K_1 and characterises the first part of that section; this means that the apparent incongruity of the $[0,2,7]$ cell as a linear construct, which may well derive from its basic memorability, is reduced when considered in harmonic, vertical terms.

A sense of ambiguity, produced through a high level of similarity, is the principal effect of the most conspicuous process of re permutation used in these three sections, which involves the material of the last system of K_1 , the entirety of K_2 and the first two systems of K_3 , and which makes up the majority of the music here. Figure 5.26 shows this material as it first appears in K_1 .

FIGURE 5.26.



Each chord is labelled, a to m , and each bar is also numbered (this numbering referring only to the order of chords within the bar and not to their rhythm), so that each ordered pair is represented by a single number. The purpose of this will be clarified in a moment, but even from this first presentation a number of internal relationships can be adduced. Chord a appears twice, as the first element of pair 1, $a-b$, and as the second of pair 4, $g-a$, and thus performs two different functions (antecedent and consequent). Chord i is self-evidently a revoicing of h ; k is similarly a revoicing of e , and is also a simple transposition of a . This sequence thus already displays a process of repetition and

repermutation, for the same chords are heard within different contexts, thus changing their identity.

A more far-reaching process of repermutation can be observed between the three K sections. Figure 5.27 sets out the order of the numbered pairs of chords as they occur in each of K_1 , K_2 and K_3 , again on a system-by-system plan so that the visual aspect is maintained. The most consistent reordering can be observed in K_2 , where the first two systems present the K_1 version in retrograde, and the fourth alternates between pairs 1 and 6, an alternation also found in K_3 . Pair 9, which begins the third system, is, in fact, a coupling of chord *c* with a ‘new’ sonority, $E\flat-F\sharp-C$; the closeness of this to chord *d* and the fact that it only occurs this once makes it tempting to suggest a mistake on Feldman’s part. This is exacerbated by the use of pattern 2 rhythm, for in these first three systems a great majority of paired chords are given the same rhythm as in K_1 , so that pair 9 is obviously almost identical to pair 2, making the logic of this third system, K_1 ‘rotated’ by one bar, more obvious. The first system of K_3 displays another ordering of the same eight pairs, and the second system is, apart from a few modifications, a retrograde of the comparable passage in K_2 ; Figure 5.28 shows how the barring makes this relationship obvious, to the eye at least.

FIGURE 5.27.

K_1 :	:	1	: :	2	: :	^{3x} 3	: :	^{4x} 4	: :	^{3x} 5	: :	^{3x} 6	: :	^{4x} 7	: :	8	: :	6	: :	^{5x} 6	:
K_2 :		6		8		7		6		5		4		3		2		1			
		6		8		7		6		5		4		3		2		1			
		9		3		4		5		6		7		8		6		1			
		6		1		6		1		6		1		6		1					
K_3 :	:	1	: :	4	: :	3	: :	5	: :	7	: :	2	: :	6	: :	8	: :	3	: :		
		1		6		1		6		1		6		1		6					

FIGURE 5.28.

The image displays two musical sections, K₂ and K₃, each consisting of three staves. Section K₂ is labeled with chords 'j d a b' and a sequence of numbers '6 1 6 1 6 1 6 1' below the first staff. Section K₃ is labeled with chords 'a b j d' and a sequence of numbers '1 6 1 6 1 6 1 6' below the first staff. The musical notation includes various notes, rests, and bar lines, indicating a complex rhythmic and melodic structure.

The way in which these three sections repermute this set of chords indicates that Feldman's compositional technique is not purely intuitive, for although the use of simple systems (retrograde and rotation) evidenced here is an extreme instance in this piece, it does show that such procedures are part of Feldman's method. The effect of these systems is actually quite complex. To take one example, the result of the 'retrograde' relationship between K₁ and K₂ is far from a simple reversal of a chord sequence; because pairs of chords are used, their reversal also alters the continuity from one to the next: K₁ begins *a-b-c-d-e-f* but when these chords return in K₂ the order is now *e-f-c-d-a-b*. The effect of this is to recontextualise the familiar, so that there is a continual interplay between what sounds 'the same' and what sounds 'different' - neither a totally new effect or a simple identity, but rather a blurring between the twin concepts of repetition and variation. These process of recombination and repermuation occur throughout *Three Voices*, and the three section-types, A, B and K, discussed above, represent a cross-section of the different levels of identity between sections, and of the processes that are used to create an ambiguity between a sense of developing new material and restatement of the already-heard.

This discussion of small-scale processes and of the blurring between 'the same' and 'different' patterning obviously connects with the type of organisation observed on a large-scale, sectional level, as both seem primarily concerned with creating a similar

sense of ambiguity. The small-scale modification of sections which reappear - the reordering of chordal progressions, changes of rhythmic patterning and even the grafting of the text onto already-heard material - all contribute to a lack of clarity of identity, so that even when two sections present similar material, their connection is somewhat blurred (this is in addition to the problem involved in recalling material over the very long time-spans that are usually involved). On a more local level, the progression from one sonority to another within sections, or the appearance of similar groups of material, for instance in K sections, relies on a process where variations in material are 'ironed out', so that there is a basic similarity without a clear sense of whether two patterns are exactly the same or not, even when they follow on directly. In addition, the slow unfolding over a long time-scale means that a sense of 'original material', of a seed to which subsequent music may be compared in memory, becomes lost. This perceptual confusion thus corresponds to that found on a large-scale, though the two levels present processes which, although similar, remain mostly distinct; rather than interacting to provide a sense of coherence, the listener is presented with two modes of operation which continually frustrate attempts to grasp their larger sense.

Between Categories

This lack of interaction between the two levels has already been suggested, in that, despite the sharing of a common technique of re permutation and recombination, the listener does not gain a feeling of the smaller-scale events building up to create an overall form, or even determining the articulation of large-scale sections. Having examined the similar ways in which both levels manipulate our sense of memory and expectation through the twin processes of reiteration and change, the reason for this separation becomes clear. Small-scale events rely on the presentation of an unbroken continuity, so that a sense of differentiation on this level is reduced. This has two effects: firstly, very small changes gain greater importance, and, secondly, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a sense of separation between 'the same' and 'different', so that, although the concentration required places importance on minutiae of change, these are not sufficient to give an overall sense of pattern. Such patterns as do arise are often themselves repeated with their internal construction altered so that a similar 'flattening

out' extends to almost all aspects of small-scale continuity. There are a couple of exceptions: first, the [0,2,7] cell in K, which is highly memorable and retains a sense of identity, and, secondly, some of the material in B, the 'slow waltz', which is again more memorable, but which also illustrates an ongoing small-scale patterning, with the same cell repeated over and over, with slight modification each time. This overall process means that this small-scale level does not actually 'lead' anywhere; despite presenting a continuity, no musical event serves as the inevitable result of its predecessor, or necessarily implies that which follows it. This removes a sense of linear process and a related forward momentum, with the musical surface generally lacking in events which would serve to articulate a large structure. However, unlike pieces such as *For Samuel Beckett*, which presents a single, slowly evolving sound-mass for the entirety of its length, *Three Voices* does involve some significant contrast between groups of material, and these mark out the various sections. This articulation does not depend on the small-scale patterning but rather simply contains it, so that there is no sense of when section-divisions (and hence new material) will come.

There is thus some distinction between a small-scale continuity and a large-scale sense of contrast, for as the music progresses, sections initially experienced as extensions are lifted out of that continuity and placed in new surroundings; this large-scale contrast does not, however, articulate a clearly-defined form, for by this point in the piece the listener's *memory* process is at its most disorientated, so that these returns paradoxically confuse rather than clarify. These two levels, large- and small-scale, are best thought of as coexisting rather than interacting, for although they involve some similarity in their respective processes, they remain fairly distinct and do not create any coherent unified structure. In fact, the very point of this music seems to be to elude such conception, for the temporal mist that it creates on the large-scale, and the analogous level of ambiguity on the small-scale, conspire to create a complex musical experience, which has very little to do with traditional musical 'qualities' such as tension and release and a sense of forward momentum. Instead the concentration is on memory, with a large-scale process and local detail which defeat traditional musical expectation, giving rise to a more elusive, less linear result.

The way in which this piece manipulates the memory processes of the listener has already been discussed, and seems to be fundamental to an understanding of this music. Such a conception of *Three Voices* ties in with Feldman's own comments, both on his

general attitude and specific details of compositional technique which could apply here as well:

the historical function of music is essentially a *memory* form, to make memory comprehensible, and I decided that if that's what music is, it's too primitive. (Quoted in Dominick 1985: 285)

What Western musical forms have become is a paraphrase of memory. But memory could operate otherwise as well. In *Triadic Memories*... there is a section of different types of chord where each chord is slowly repeated.... Quite soon into a new chord I would forget the reiterated chord before it. I then reconstructed the entire section: rearranging its earlier progression and changing the number of times a particular chord was repeated. This way of working was a conscious attempt at 'formalizing' a disorientation of memory. Chords are heard repeated without any discernible pattern. In this regularity... there is a *suggestion* that what we hear is functional and directional, but we soon realize this is an illusion.... (Feldman 1985: 127)

Three Voices thus presents an attempt at a more complex memory form which depends on the perception of reiteration and change over a long timescale, and performs its effect by deliberately confronting and subverting attempts to simplify and grasp hold of both the small- and large-scale. As this analysis has shown, this formalisation of a disorientation of memory makes use of a number of specific processes already observed. On a small scale, these involve a reliance on a continuity which presents no sense of direction, and of the confusion produced by the evolution of a multitude of similar versions of the same material. On a large scale, disorientation is created by an expansive time-scale which reduces the effect of restatement, the occasional and 'illogical' use of words, and the various interlocking patterns of recall, restatement and continuation within which each section is involved. In addition, modification of the material of recurrent sections, for instance, the semi-systematic re permutation of chords in K, increases confusion on both levels. All these factors indicate a specific intention on Feldman's part, and indeed, much of his compositional judgement depends upon a sense of knowing how much identity to maintain to create a balance between perception of repetition and variation, reiteration and change, and to produce the complex manipulation of memory that *Three Voices* articulates.

This deliberate contradiction of a number of traditional expectations as to how music behaves, and the concentration on the immediate sound of the music has led many commentators to conclude that Feldman's music cannot, and indeed should not be analysed. As was outlined at the beginning of this discussion, an examination of large-scale form, which is again often viewed as unnecessary, does account for a number of

aspects of the experience of *Three Voices*, and, as has been shown in the current analysis, this investigation of *how* this music creates a blurring of memory can usefully be carried on into a quite close examination of small-scale aspects. In fact, the analytical approach applied here deliberately does not try to read the music in terms of overall coherence and other ‘traditional’ features, concentrating instead on the perception of the interplay of pattern and the resulting sense of confusion, or temporal mist. Some may suggest that such an analysis, in endeavouring to demystify how it is achieved, serves only to reduce the effect of music that should not be rationalised. However, even if the way in which *Three Voices* manipulates time is ‘explained’, when *listening* the music retains its effect; as Umberto Eco comments with reference to his own analysis: ‘...the grid [which accounts for the process] can be designed from outside the text, but when you read again, you return inside the text... as you slow down, as you accept its pace, then you forget any grid... and you get lost again in the woods’ (Eco 1994: 43). As well as illustrating the way in which Feldman creates a piece of music which, in his words, formalises a disorientation of memory, this analysis has also hopefully *increased* rather than diminished the enjoyment of becoming lost in Feldman’s particular patch of the woods.

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