

CHAPTER SEVEN

FELDMAN, SONIC ART AND THE AESTHETICS OF 'SURFACE'

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Introduction

There is an elusive, somewhat rarefied, expressivity to Morton Feldman's work that resists easy analysis. His intuitive treatment of form, harmony, rhythm and musical time instils an abstract aesthetic in his compositions that distances it from traditional musical tropes and moves it closer to the undifferentiated affect seen in Abstract Expressionism, transposed into sonorous form. The composer once stated "My obsession with surface is the subject of my music" (Feldman 2000, 88) and this chapter will examine more closely the nature and significance of "surface" as it relates to the aesthetics of a number of different fields.

It will initially be presented in the light of Hannah Arendt's re-evaluation of the metaphysical hierarchy of truth and appearance as it is presented in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). The subject will be further framed by the views of biologist Adolf Portmann, whose studies on the morphologies of plants and animals placed enormous significance on their outer appearances. The aesthetic implications of surface will then be developed with particular reference to Feldman's approach to composition and the links between his work and Abstract Expressionist painting. In addition, this chapter will look at how a similar aesthetics of surface applies to the field of sonic arts, especially in the work of composer and ecologist David Dunn, as well as to literature, as seen in the writings of Samuel Beckett.

Truth and Appearance

Referring to *Structures*, an early string quartet from 1951, the poet Frank O'Hara writes: "if you cannot hear [the piece], I doubt that studying the score would be a help" (O'Hara 2000, 215). This observation, brief as it is, encapsulates what is perhaps the most well known quality of

Feldman's approach: that of following personal intuition rather than a pre-defined system of organizational principles, thus avoiding a standard compositional rhetoric. The statement suggests that we, as listeners, need not concern ourselves with what the music "means", and rather take it at face value, engaging with its immanent outer surface, a surface comprised of musical sounds.

The idea of a musical surface is inevitably given meaning in contrast to the idea of musical depth and the above quotations point to a dichotomy in relation to how we, as listeners, experience music in general. We perceive, in the former category, the phenomenal manifestation of musical sound as primarily sensual and devoid of a clear or conclusive communicative intent. On the other hand, we have the expectation of understanding, in broad terms, what a piece of music is saying; of following a coherent thread that endows the music with a significance that directs us away from the sounds themselves. This divergent relationship between the superficialities of the sonic surface and the authenticity of an analysable expressive depth, finds its correlate in a long-standing theme in Western Philosophy via the dual notion of truth and appearance.

This notion of an apparent and authentic reality manifests itself early in the development of Western philosophical thought. It is perhaps most clearly expressed in the Platonic theory of Forms. The theory is a response to the problematic question regarding the possibility of immutable and permanent knowledge in a world that is impermanent and constantly changing (Macnamara 1999, 20). In this analogy, Plato posits that the objects and concepts that comprise our world are mere shadows of perfect prototypes that he calls Forms (or Ideas): true essences, which exist eternally and do not change. By reinterpreting given reality as illusory, somewhat flimsy and unreliable and contrasting it to the authentic ontological status of Platonic Forms, a clear hierarchy is posited, one which undermines the worth of the immanently perceived world and resituates it within an elusive metaphysical framework.

In part one of *The Life Of The Mind* Hannah Arendt suggests that such notions concerning the superiority of truth over appearance are fundamentally erroneous. She bases her re-evaluation not on any alternative criteria for certainty as such but rather on the observable tendency for any supposedly permanent truth to destabilize and ultimately dissolve when faced with the probing scrutiny of the inquiring mind. Granted, it is this world of appearances that philosophers and scientists must move away from in their search for the true essences that are believed to exist beyond this world of untruths and opaque surfaces. But this surface world also clearly exists "*prior* to whatever the philosopher

may *choose* as his ‘true’ home but into which he was not born” (Arendt 1978, 23, emphasis in the original). The grounds for the discovery of ostensive truths, according to Arendt, are the matter-of-fact surfaces of the everyday world. No matter how strong our compulsion towards the ideal of truth, a basic property of the world is its inclination towards inscrutability by way of a dense interweaving of opaque strata.

Arendt goes on to question the presumption that appearance is somehow inferior to true Being. She holds that since we as individuals are not just in the world but *of* the world, belonging to it, the human mind is in fact orientated towards interaction with appearances. She points out that if an underlying truth is revealed to the philosopher, for example, it immediately takes on the role of something apparent once again. Even if it is rooted in what might be called a more thorough epistemological understanding of the world it is by no means an unassailable truth that can be confidently preserved. As Arendt puts it:

The primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape, to which they must always return from their laboratories and studies, and which shows its strength by never being in the least changed or deflected by whatever they have discovered (Arendt 1978, 24).

The shift in perspective that Arendt proposes reinstates appearance as a deeply significant aspect of reality; in fact, as reality itself. In presenting this “reversal of the metaphysical hierarchy” (Arendt 1978, 26) she refers to the studies of Swiss zoologist and biologist Adolf Portmann, and it is here that an aesthetic aspect of surface begins to emerge. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present more than a cursory account of Portmann’s ideas. But central to his hypothesis is the examination of the roles that the hidden functional mechanisms and the outward appearances of living organisms have to play in the life process. (By hidden functional mechanisms Portman is referring to the internal organs in animals or the roots in plants; by outward appearances he is referring to features such as the coloured patterns on butterflies’ wings or the petals of flowers.)

Portmann was concerned with countering the prevailing attitudes in biological and morphological studies that sidelined the characteristics of living beings that had no clear life-preserving function and saw them as being merely superfluous and of no real value in understanding the true nature of organisms. He states: “We perceive that in nature a façade has a certain value and that appearance is not a deception but an element of manifestation” (Portmann 1990, 155). Prior to the functions for the preservation of the individual or the species it is the appearances and

modes of self-display that themselves bestow meaning on these functions (Arendt 1978, 27).

If Morton Feldman's obsession as a composer was musical surface, then Portmann's hypothesis suggests that nature's obsession, too, is the surface of the living world. This re-evaluation of appearances distances the process of self-display in nature from the strictures of *teleological* functionality, as seen most pointedly in Darwin's theory of evolution. No longer a briefly considered means to an end, appearances, in Portman's view, are primarily expressions of the inner states of living beings, which refer us to a fundamentally mysterious essence of existence.

“And thus, time and time again, the fathoming of form leads beyond the realm in which research shows us the structures which are merely functionally significant. Presupposed by a comprehensive morphology is the insight that every appearance of living things must be viewed within the widest of intellectual and spiritual horizons. Each plant and animal, no less than we ourselves, must be experienced as an incomprehensible way of being which is grounded in the mystery of reality” (Portmann 1990, 155).

Taking into account this revised analysis of surface appearances, the phenomenal manifestation of life in all its variety begins to display a similar self-supporting, self-sustaining non-functionality that we encounter in many of the more abstract forms of art. Feldman's is a music that is continually in the process of neutralizing the propulsive, forward moving current of *telos*, which tends to take root and flourish as the rhetorical thrust of compositional narrative within a musical work. In this way his work attests to a similar type of vibrant, if veiled, self-display as that presented by Portmann's view of ecology. A key preoccupation for Feldman was what he termed the Abstract Experience and he described this as “that other place that is not allegory ... that other place that is not a metaphor for something else” (Bryars and Orton 2006, 69).

This distancing of music from the *telos* of musical narrative resonates strongly with Portmann's ecological thinking on the self-sustaining display of living organisms. Feldman's music presents itself as something *other* than a mediating cipher for concerns located outside of the material surface of the sounds themselves. This connection also provides access to a nexus that links the aesthetic implications of both Feldman's and Portmann's work to the three other main topics outlined above, namely: sonic art practices, Beckett's approach to the literary medium and to Abstract Expressionism. In what follows I intend to show how these

diverse creative fields interrelate within the framework of an aesthetics of surface.

David Dunn – *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond*

Portmann's revised perspective on how the living world appears suddenly moves ecology into the vicinity of aesthetics. In order to get a clearer idea of this relationship, we may look towards the work of sonic artist and ecologist David Dunn, whose work has straddled the border between artistic and scientific practices for over four decades. In many ways Dunn's creative output represents a vital meeting point between Portman's theories on the appearing living world and the more elusive expressive intent present in Morton Feldman's compositional style. Dunn's soundscape compositions in particular entail open-ended sonic explorations and representations of bio-acoustic phenomena, engaging with the profoundly unfamiliar sonic surface of the living world.

Chaos and The Emergent Mind of the Pond (1985) is one of a number of works that Dunn refers to as "hybrid soundscape compositions" (Dunn 1997, 7). These works rest on an ethos of participation and interaction between the composer and the sonic material. The soundscape that Dunn creates in this piece possesses a type of semantic ambiguity, a compelling inscrutability, similar to that found in Beckett, Feldman or the Abstract Expressionists. (On an informal level, the texture of *Chaos and The Emergent Mind of the Pond*, with dense layers of pops and clicks trailing, colliding, is reminiscent of the ordered chaos in Pollock's famous late works.) The work is based on recordings of sub-aquatic activity in vernal pools in North America and Africa (Dunn 1997, 10). However it is not simply a neutral document of a soundscape normally inaccessible to human ears. The finished work is the result of deliberate editing of the source materials by Dunn, who is in his own words "very 'present'" (Dunn 1997, 9) in the finished recording, as he is, to some degree, in all the works in this category. Despite Dunn's mediating presence in the work, the creative process is not a unidirectional one. Instead, the editing, Dunn says, is carried out with a view to participating "in the emergence of something that is mutually created between the subject and myself" (Dunn 1997, 8-9).

The idea of participation *with* materials rather than utilization *of* materials is paralleled in the underlying attitudes implicit in Abstract Expressionism as well as in Feldman's work, which will be looked at in

more detail later in this chapter. Like these other areas, Dunn's approach belies an artist's sensitivity to the innate prestige that creative material holds in and of itself. Morton Feldman's delicate balancing of intentionality and the unplanned in his music is another facet of this attitude, as is the optimized spontaneity that guided the moment-to-moment interaction between Jackson Pollock and his materials when working on the drip paintings that defined the latter part of his career. In all of these cases, a form of transcendence appears to be the goal; an attempt by the artists to move away from the habit-forming confines of individualistic intentionality and towards a less goal-driven interaction with the self-contained "meanings", accessible when the artwork is allowed to be itself, rather than a semiotic object.

Dunn describes works such as *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond* as stemming from a wish to evolve "an intrinsic relationship to a subject, rather than 'inventing' ... a musical event" (Dunn 1997, 8). In this way the compositional ideas come from the material itself rather than from extrinsic influences and the artist, as participant rather than mediator, interacts with what this material offers. By avoiding the attempt to put the sounds to use for more easily definable expressive ends, Dunn never penetrates the surface of the sound itself. The work is, by Dunn's own admission, reminiscent of an alien language (Dunn 1997, 10) and we can read the term "alien" in two ways. The scientifically informed interpretation sees the term as indicative of "foreign", whereas an interpretation informed more by popular culture suggests the unearthliness of sentient life beyond our comprehension; a *weirdness* in the science-fiction sense, evoking thoughts of the uncanny and the sublime. Taken as an aesthetic object, which, composed and edited as they are, is how Dunn presents them, the unintelligibility of the sounds that comprise *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond* suggests a significance akin to Feldman's Abstract Experience. The semantic opacity of the sonic surface prevails; meaning, in terms of resolved statement, is absent. If these sounds can be classed as a language at all, it is a language that remains at a distance, sounding a significance that escapes interpretation.

Samuel Beckett's *Lessness*

Portmann's views on surface point to the fact that "appearance shows a maximum power of expression compared with the internal" (Arendt 1978, 30). But terms such as "expression" and "meaning" are highly problematic when seen in the light of abstract forms of art, whose *modus operandi* is to

eschew conventional representation in favour of a more elusive aesthetic import. Arendt picks up on this point and writes that to use the term expression in this context is somewhat inappropriate since “an ‘expression’ cannot but express something ...[for example] an idea, a thought, an emotion ... The expressiveness of an appearance, however, is of a different order; it ‘expresses’ nothing but itself, that is it exhibits or displays” (Arendt 1978, 30).

Doubts about authenticity of expression were to be an intractable problem for Samuel Beckett that would span his entire career. A self-aware ineloquence permeates his work, but it is a compelling ineloquence that is conveyed nonetheless; an ineloquence that is surely more revealing than alternate linguistic techniques in attempting to express the futility of attempting to express. The intriguing, searching quality that is evident in Beckett’s work stems from a fundamental premise that language is a tool that is not quite up to the task put to it by the author. Forced to work with such a compromised expressive medium, Beckett developed an elusive style, which jettisoned a dramaturgical treatment of literary time in favour of a more circular, recalcitrant form of “telling”. This somewhat evasive approach allowed for aesthetic import to be conveyed obliquely as an emergent property of the unassailable surface of language itself.

Perhaps the most striking example of this emergent effect in action is in the recursive prose of *Lessness* (1970). Here, the repetitive flow of sparse imagery and the paucity of punctuation create a compelling text from which emerges an expressive whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The style of writing lends itself to a type of predictability that foreshortens the flow of time and draws our attention to a temporal horizon of amplified proximity, from which these linguistic permutations appear.

No sound no stir ash grey sky mirrored earth mirrored sky. Grey air timeless earth sky as one same grey as the ruins flatness endless. In the sand no hold one step more in the endlessness he will make it. It will be day and night again over him the endlessness the air heart will beat again (Beckett 2006, 377).

Present, past and future are mingled and rendered indistinguishable in *Lessness*, disguising any clear sense of narrative. Nothing *is* in *Lessness* – no state marked with surety in time. The closest we come is with elusive references to the past with appearances of the phrase “never was” (Beckett 2006, 375-378) and with the occasional use of the future participle “will”, which refers, appropriately, to that most ineffable and insubstantial aspect of Time: the unknown and unknowable future. As with much of Beckett’s

work, especially later in his career, the language in *Lessness* does not primarily function as a referential sign-post, pointing to states outside of itself or acting as metaphorical mediator between the writer and the world. Instead language coils around itself, with self-referential (in)coherency. Content propagates further content by way of the author's shaping and unfolding of language's stratified surfaces.

Feldman and Abstract Expressionism

In the realm of painting, surface is an issue in both a metaphorical and literal sense. The roots of Abstract Expressionism can be traced, in part, to Surrealism (Hobbs 1985). Following on from the Surrealists, whose aim was to represent in an unmediated manner "the actual functioning of thought" (Breton 1969, 26), Abstract Expressionist art was orientated towards a similarly immanent relation between artist and artwork. However, the Surrealist method, revolutionary as it was, tended to adhere to a system of spatial and figurative correspondences whose roots were still imbedded in the logical relations of representational painting. As Feldman once noted the irrationality depicted in Surrealism could still be "measured in terms of the rational" (Feldman 2000, 75). Although distorted and hallucinatory, Surrealist scenarios never fully escape the bounds of realism. The recognisable presence of conventional and historically traceable modes of depiction that serve to structure Surrealist imagery run counter to their purported wish to document the unmediated workings of thought, divorced from "any aesthetic or moral concern" (Breton 1969, 26).

Although indebted to Surrealism, ultimately Abstract Expressionism made a crucial leap that Surrealism did not, by attempting to allow free-reign to the movements and motions of the creative impulses that lie further beyond the horizon of conscious rationality. The result was that the conventional role of painting as medium for representation of the world (in whatever guise that may be) was set aside and supplanted by a style that placed emphasis on the materiality of paint on canvas and the aesthetic potency of the non-representational image. Ejecting the mediating presence of descriptive meaning from the painting process allowed for a shift in the dynamic between the artist and their material. The result was a transposition of the aesthetic value onto the action-traces of the artist and the *presencing* materiality of the marks they made on the canvas. Echoing Portmann's ecological theories, there is a *self-displaying* at work in Abstract Expressionist paintings; a revealing that locates the aesthetic

vitality outside of the sphere of pictorial narrative and onto the surface of the canvas instead. Their treatment of painting's constituent elements – colour, space, density, form, size *etc.*—are not a means to a representative end but instead both the means and end in themselves. Technique, “touch”, becomes direct and depicts itself without recourse to image. A tautological presence is suggested; a self-showing that disregards *telos*; a presence that needs no further clarification because it allows for no further elaboration. The Abstract Expressionist field of material-bound self-display strives to become total and immanent.

With the emergence of Abstract Expressionism, the physicality of painterly gesture was now removed from the responsibility of figurative depiction that had been a consistent thread in the history of visual art. The marks on canvas, these traces of the artist's movement, were now invested with an autonomy that vigorously intensified the sheer facticity of their presence. Feldman himself noticed the significance of the material trace in the paintings of Cézanne and observed that Cézanne's thought was directed by what he saw, in contrast to the Modernist who had “changed perception by way of the conceptual” (Feldman 2000, 68). By painting directly what he saw, Cézanne gave us “‘painting as painting’...[so that] the *means* had become the ideal” (Feldman 2000, p. 69).

The Abstract Experience that Abstract Expressionism seeks to provide can be approached with recourse to aural sensibilities as well as via the visual. Abstract Expressionism places the viewer's eyes in radically unfamiliar territory. Pollock's action paintings, for example, turn the eyes into pseudo-auditory receptors of visual stimuli and highlight a hidden “musicality”, in the most abstract sense, that tends to be present in Abstract Expressionist paintings in general. His late drip works (e.g. *One: Number 31* (1950), *Autumn Rhythm* (number 30) (1950)) contain something of an auditory sensibility even as the arcing lines and sprays of paint address our sense of sight.

Vision is, in many ways, projective. Its *modus operandi* is to grasp stimuli in the visual field; to scan for and fix them; to interrogate them; to distinguish between them. Listening, in contrast to the fixedness of vision is primarily concerned with transient stimuli; sounds that emerge and recede; sounds whose morphologies are in a constant state of flux; spectral envelopes, dynamic contours, rhythms made manifest via melody, harmony or sonic configurations that are neither. David Dunn has observed that the “forward focus of vision” (Dunn 1997, 1) tends towards a separation and clarification of things in its environment. He contrasts the eyes' propensity to create distinct boundaries between phenomena to the more field-orientated nature of listening. In this light, the perceptual

comportment of the ears is receptive in a way that the eyes are not. The ears are less driven towards projecting their influence into the sonic environment as the eyes are towards the visual environment. In contrast to the sense of vision where “[w]e usually see things as one window frame of visual stimuli jumping to the next” (Dunn 1997, 1), listening entails following changes in the auditory field; hearing the spread and reverberation of “web[s] of sound” (Dunn 1997, 2). The ears are at home in the ever-present flux of time.

Looking at Pollock’s late paintings, the projective intentionality of vision is countered by the audacious sense of motion they display. The movement in these works is taken in by the eyes in a similar way to how our ears are open and receptive to sound, and as such, these paintings are somewhat counter-ocular. Vision becomes receptive – passive and *acted upon*, rather than active. The painting eludes the eye’s attempts to fix it or render it motionless and suitable for interrogation. Suddenly the eyes find themselves in the perceptive realm of the auditory, for whose organs, the ears, such diffuse or evanescent sensory data is normal.

And yet a distinct, intensified flatness prevails, even in Pollock’s busy renderings. The Abstract Expressionists’ avoidance of the illusion of pictorial perspective made room for the total manifestation of the painting’s saturated surface. In terms of its expressive orientation the illusion of perspective in painting might be considered akin to a programmatic approach to musical composition, allying the work with the rhetoric of representation to a far greater extent than if perspective is lacking. With the presence of perspective the painting is no longer rooted in that “other place” (Bryars and Orton 2006, 69) that is the abstract and the possibility for the Abstract Experience to present itself is mediated. Perspective implies a temporal dimension because it is a depiction of space and therefore potential motion. The illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat canvas suggests a time-bound arena within which the unfolding of a narrative, taken in a broad sense, is seen to take place, albeit in the form of a temporal fragment. The representation of space evokes the rhetoric of change and movement and thus implies a narrative function. With the illusion of spatial depth the *telos* of literary expression works its way into the image—the painting becomes an assertion *about* something—and the potential for the Abstract Experience recedes.

In contrast to this, the Abstract Expressionist image is almost violently concentrated onto the two-dimensional plane. Depth is flattened and squeezed out of the picture, and along with it the breathing space of temporality. Morton Feldman’s rejection of compositional rhetoric runs parallel with a similar avoidance of painterly storytelling in the Abstract

Expressionist style and the composer's music shares a particular form of expressive inscrutability with many Abstract Expressionist works. In a remark about musical time, he once commented that he was interested in its "unstructured existence" and "how Time exists before we put our paws on it—our minds, our imaginations into it" (Feldman 2000, 87).

Feldman's music was remarkably consistent, for a composer whose works spanned four decades. Even with his move away from graphic notation to more conventional through-composed style, his music retained a distinctive flatness and remained focussed more on moment-to-moment gestural patterns rather than on more expansive narrative trajectories. To encounter compositions such as *Durations I-V* (1960-1961) or *I Met Heine On The Rue Furstenberg* (1971) or paintings such as Franz Kline's *Merce C* (1961) or DeKooning's *Excavation* (1950) is to be placed in uncanny territory, made unfamiliar by a thoroughgoing neutralization of straightforward comprehensibility. The possibility of orientation seems close at hand but is never quite attainable, in a similar vein to Dunn's *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond*. And like Abstract Expressionist painting, whose para-semiotic daubs, splashes, fields and strokes of colour may hint at but elude referential meaning, Feldman's music tends to withhold clear points of narrative reference whereby the listener might orientate themselves in relation to an expressive arc as it might occur in the temporal canvas of the piece as a whole.

The music moves at its own pace, presenting successions of gestural surfaces rather than instilling the music with a clear sense of goal-orientated progression. We often encounter cellular reiteration; small differences in rhythm and harmonic weighting that occur as musical figures are slowly turned on different axes. Varying magnitudes of temporal or tonal change are combined with strict repetition so that it becomes impossible to predict the precise durational or chromatic contour of what comes next. The small-scale micro-thematic patterning in Feldman's music successfully sidesteps our tendency to read ahead into the piece and because of this his music is largely independent of a rhetorical current that propels events forwards through musical time. Islands of motivic activity emerge and make their presence felt but quickly submerge again, making room for the next proto-musical configuration, which follows a similar course. Movement and development are often present in diffuse or fragmented form but they run alongside a constantly active erasure of this linearity. There is a sense that potential musical *teleologies* are about to differentiate themselves but this differentiation never quite occurs. We feel, on occasion, that different aspects of a forming musical idea are being temporarily illuminated from different

sides. Interplays of sonorous light and shadow, emergence and recession take place, showing a variety of contours and reliefs; making evident, if only in glimpses, the topography of a type of musical terrain. In such music, to relate concepts such as beginning and end (and the implied progression between the two), to either small-scale events or large-scale form, begins to seem irrelevant.

Indeed, time is what provides the grounds for rhetorical agency and narrative drive in the musical work. The process of following a musical narrative, as a listener, inadvertently places emphasis on the rhetorical importance of the temporal distribution of the musical content. In an essay entitled *Concerning Time* (1989), Xenakis speaks of the necessity of “perceptive reference events” (Xenakis 1989, 87) that leave a trace in our memory. Time is imperceptible without either these reference points or, of equal importance, without the notion of anteriority. Anteriority itself, much like our sense of vision, is dependent on “notions of separation, of bypassing, of difference, of discontinuity”. Thus “[a] smooth continuum abolishes time, or rather time, in a smooth continuum, is illegible, inapproachable” (Xenakis 1989, 87).

Feldman’s rhetoric of non-rhetoric

A common gesture in Feldman’s music is the presentation of successive chords, as in *Durations I* (1960), where the harmonic language is such that each chord causes the previous one to fade almost instantly from our memory, hindering the sense of anteriority that Xenakis holds as a primary factor in our ability to perceive time. Morton Feldman’s earlier scores from the 1950s and 60s relinquished a good deal of control over pitches or durations in an attempt to capture the Abstract Experience (e.g. *Projections I-V* (1950-51), *Intersection II* (1951), *In Search Of An Orchestration* (1967)). In the through-composed works that emerged later we notice in his music a not inconsiderable concession made toward the imbedding of developmental tendencies within the composition, intimations of a possible musical discourse. In these works, there is often a fragmented lyricism present that never quite takes hold, and certainly never defines the course of the music. What mitigates the standard sense of music-as-oration is the fact that such lyrical tendencies are narrowly focussed within relatively short time-spans, so that an intimation of rhetorical movement is continually present, but in a shadowy form; constantly temporary so to speak.

Although his stated ambition was to avoid compositional rhetoric, Feldman as a composer was nonetheless working within an inherently rhetorical medium. His ostensive avoidance of standard compositional rhetoric is in itself – of course – a deftly treated form of rhetoric and despite his own rhetoric about leaving time undisturbed, music is unavoidably a temporal phenomenon. It goes without saying that the extra-temporality in Feldman's compositions is *apparent* rather than actual. Leaving time entirely undisturbed, leaves us with nothing to interpret. In a similar vein the first mark made on the Abstract Expressionist's canvas disturbs the surface, mitigates its presence by way of artistic intent, to say nothing of Beckett's predicament regarding authenticity of expression. But the stasis in Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* is a teeming stasis; the stillness in Rothko's colour field works is a trembling stillness. Even the supposed null-point that is John Cage's *4' 33"* (1952) disturbs time by establishing non-composed sounds within a frame of some temporal duration. The sense of extra-temporality that is quintessential to Feldman's *oeuvre* is *composed*; it is a result of skilful pacing and an awareness of the symbiotic relationship between the musical event and the temporal medium through which it is experienced.

Feldman necessarily disturbed time by the very act of composition. But this role was augmented by a knack for covering his compositional tracks, disturbing time to make it seem undisturbed. In his music, there are two contradictory tendencies at work: an interplay between the presence in this world of appearances of his musical sounds—which, in being present are unavoidably implicated in the rhetoric that is an assertion—and the metaphysical ideal of time undisturbed. Ultimately, Feldman employed an enigmatic rhetoric of non-rhetoric, which sees his music rooted in surface appearances rather than stemming from the ideal of escape from these appearances. But it is not *mere* appearance that we encounter in his work. Rather, Feldman's rhetoric leaves open the possibility that the superficiality of appearance, when treated with the right touch, can open the way for something akin to the ideal artistic truth to reveal itself.

The world as surface is a vastly varied stratification of incomplete truths and assertions; partial certainties that reveal themselves in an intensely singular and vibrant manner. In the process of appearing, reality displays to us a structure that is malleable, somewhat unassailable and constantly shifting. In a world that is always to some degree unintelligible, orientation undergoes a constant process of subversion and renewal and it is perhaps this sense of compelling, ever-renewing opacity that most strongly connects the creative fields looked at in this chapter. In concluding, I want to return briefly to the alien soundscape of David

Dunn's *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond*. The charged untelligibility that this work presents stands as a powerful artistic response to the question of phenomenological surface with regard to creative expression. It evokes the Abstract Experience as it may also occur in other forms of creative practice because the deeper meaning of the sonic activity in this work remains to a large extent unknown and unspoken. *Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond* is representative of the aesthetics of surface because it retains a questioning quality that stands, not in opposition to, but distinctly separate from the very notion of statement. Like Feldman's ambiguous aesthetic, it occupies some *other* expressive place, somewhere between the categories of silence and assertion.

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