Harmonic and formal coherence in Morton Feldman's late music

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Abstract

Initially Morton Feldman's later music, i.e., those works dating from approximately 1975 until his death in 1987, can be challenging to comprehend. For instance, the large amount of seemingly undifferentiated aural information, played at a soft dynamic and heard for an extended period of time, can leave a listener with the notion that this music "sounds the same." Unfortunately, turning to Feldman himself for assistance about how to understand these expansive compositions is of limited value, as his narratives are often at odds to understand their formal design and pitch structure.

In this paper, by drawing from sketch materials housed in the Paul Sacher Stiftung, I elucidate that Feldman's compositions contain a more refined degree of precompositional planning than is often acknowledged in the literature. Further, by using the 1981 piano solo *Triadic Memories* as the basis of my discussion, I propose that by correlating portions of the extant sketches with a published score, it is possible to identify a comprehensive harmonic and formal organisation to these large-scale compositions.

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