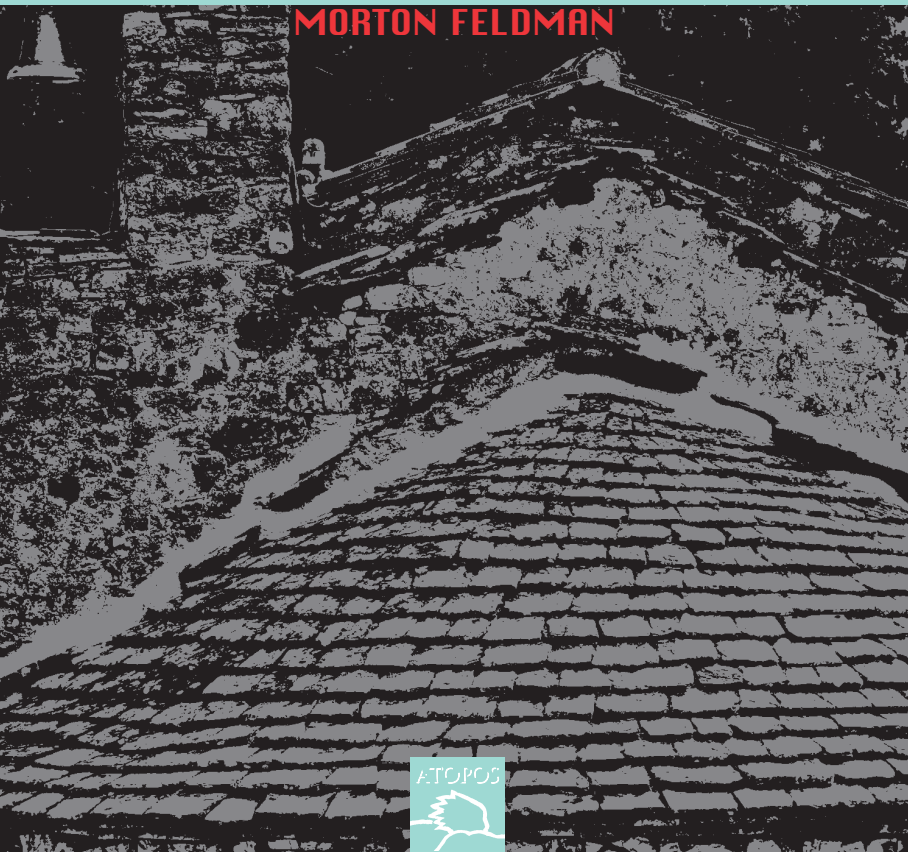


FOR PHILIP GUSTON

MORTON FELDMAN



ATOPOS





For Philip Guston

In a radio discussion Feldman once referred to what he discerned, in many cases, as the professional musician's apparent fear of his instrument, a fear that creates, as he put it, a distance between performer and instrument. He talked of the need, in his own music, for a closeness of player to instrument, an at-oneness embodied in a radical commitment to the muscular, physical and essentially sensual qualities of the art of performance. There must be a feeling of adventure, of freshness; a vibrant, high-risk strategy in which each performance is imbued with a quality of uniqueness.

As performers we know the piece; on the basis of week after week of rehearsal we know the score, we know the organization, the way it evolves, the intimidating enormity of the scale of the work. So how do you approach performance? Concentration is of the essence; concentrating on the moment, on the physical nowness, on the finger as it touches the keyboard, the hand on the musical instrument, the key moment at which pure cognition takes place before the reflecting action of consciousness. The consideration of scale is immaterial, except, perhaps, on a subliminal level. (Speaking personally as an improvising musician, at its best it's as if I am not aware that I am performing; it's about being, and doing; the concept of mistakes, right or wrong notes, for example, let alone formal considerations, just doesn't come into it.)

Likewise, concentration is a key issue for Feldman the composer. It's the word he uses most when he speaks about composing: «I approach my compositions where I'm starting off with no ideas at all. What I don't want is ideas. But what I do need is utmost concentration. If I begin to lose concentration that's when I...or rather put it this way, when I find that I'm crossing chords out, notes out, then that means that I'm actually losing my concentration... When I work I forget (the angel forgetfulness)...I consider sitting around waiting, not having a thought in your head...to me that's work. I think the work aspect is the degree of concentration you put into making this music possible.»

So with Feldman there is this element of spontaneity and of subjectivity (although in the later works the huge scale does necessitate the consideration of 'form'). When he sits down to compose he is thinking in real time, acoustic time, not compositional time. Significantly, Feldman wouldn't talk about compositional reality; in fact, he said there was no such thing; he preferred to talk about acoustical reality. «And so for me the real is not the object, the real for me is not the compositional system, the real for me is to what degree, almost in Kierkegaardian terms, I can exist, I can plunge, I can leap into this thing which I call life, which I call the environment...So don't talk to me about systems, don't talk to me about aesthetics, don't talk to me about life, in fact don't even talk to me about art, and let's end it with this thought: that it all has to do with nerve, nothing else, that's what it's all about; so in a sense it's a character problem.»

Genuine spontaneity (unpredictability) is something which is absolutely crucial. It is at the heart of Feldman's music: the idea that every sound has a unique quality. There can be nothing of the routine in Feldman performance. As in life itself there can be no blueprint; there are so many contingencies, so many things that can happen which can alter the way you play a particular chord, make a particular sound, in relation to any previous performance. Playing Feldman is about living your life. And it is known for people to weep when they hear it.

I recall a BBC radio discussion when the composer Cornelius Cardew, one of the greatest exponents of Feldman's music, posited the inadequacy of art in relation to the awesome power of nature and natural phenomena. Kant, too, had called into question the primacy of the experience of art in relation to the experience of nature. Perhaps then it is the kinship of Feldman's music with nature, rather than with art, its aspiration to nature (like the paintings in the Rothko chapel in Houston, where people sit and weep), which is able to generate such an extreme response.

John Tilbury September 2nd 2013

Appreciating *For Philip Guston* requires a totally different idea of the passing of time. It is a lengthy piece and calls for an approach to the listening experience which is quite diverse from that of a more conventional piece of music. It immediately recalls lengthier works composed in the 1930s - such as Kaikhosru Shapuri Sorabji's *Opus Clavicembalisticum* or his *Symphonic Variations for Piano* (nine hours listening time ...) for instance - or the more recent *Road* by Frederic Rzewski.

Beyond a certain point - as in Bach's *The Goldberg Variations* or *The Art of Fugue*, Beethoven's *Sonata op.106*, the Symphonies of Mahler and Bruckner, etc - form and emotion-inspiring sound imply a sense of syntactic consequentiality. This is at times perceptible at various levels only with a great deal of concentration when listening, due to the length of the work.

As with Feldman, and even earlier with Cage, unpredictability penetrates the musical logic, extending towards a nexus-lacking sense of past-present-future. The listener is led towards a fragmented perception where moment, after moment, after moment is experienced, even at length. Like a boat gliding across a river, the temporary incision of the water leaves a wake which soon disappears, so the listener experiences the passing of time, leaving behind a recollection of sounds. It is something quite different from that listening and searching for formal logic but, perhaps, just as effective.

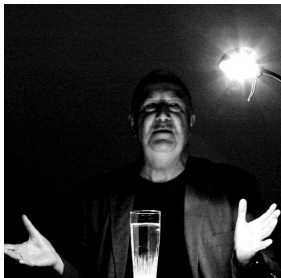
Here, the enchantment of sound does not imply previous knowledge - a view that Cage also shared, when he urged us to fling open our windows and listen to the sound of life. So, we must ask ourselves whether or not listening to what happens implies a new esthetic-anesthetic concept: accepting what reaches our ears and for however long.

For Philip Guston, however, does not present us with the casual sound of life. It unfurls delightful, delicate filigrees that waft in and fade: sustained seduction, quivers of emotion that may recall Schubert's "heavenly length" with regard to the need for detailed yet patient listening.

Daniele Lombardi, September 2013

The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival

The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival is an internationally renowned Festival, founded in 1978 by Professor Richard Steinitz of the University of Huddersfield, and is now directed by the incorruptible and fearless Graham McKenzie. It specialises in innovative programmes with a repertoire of cutting-edge orchestral, choral, electro-acoustic and improvised music, along with film, dance and music theatre. Every November, for ten days, the Festival takes over the town, using a variety of venues, including theatres, churches, as well as the University music department. The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival is now one of the most important and respected music festivals in the world.



John Tilbury

For John Tilbury bio and more information, please Google: John Tilbury pianist.



Carla Rees

www.carlarees.co.uk



Simon Allen

www.simonallen.co.uk



Philip Guston

To B.W.T.

1952

oil on canvas

123 cm. x 130 cm.

Jane Lang Davis Collection, Medina



ATP 022-1-2-3-4

FOR PHILIP GUSTON

DDD

LC-00129

MORTON FELDMAN

CD 1

1 M. Feldman For Philip Guston part 1 1984 78:29

CD 2

1 M. Feldman For Philip Guston part 2 1984 75:20

CD 3

1 M. Feldman For Philip Guston part 3 1984 70:40

CD 4

1 M. Feldman For Philip Guston part 4 1984 64:37

total time 4:49:06

John TILBURY Piano
Carla REES Flute
Simon ALLEN Percussions

The composer prescribes an extremely low dynamic level throughout the piece: ppp