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efforts, as well as his poetry about painting, demonstrate that reflections on medium-specificity and art's autonomy can be cultivated through encounters with difference. Thus, the poet advances Greenberg's own aesthetic concerns without falling victim to the very regimentation the latter critiques.

Toward the end of his essay on American writing, Greenberg suggests, "We distrust critics who seem so incapable of independent and fresh insights into the ways in which their subject matter is related to the rest of human activity" (256). In many ways, my effort here has been to take seriously Greenberg's charge to break out of accustomed ways of thinking and, in particular, to clarify the ways in which O'Hara's work is "related to the rest of human activity." Understanding some of the fundamental ways in which his thinking aligns with Greenberg's provides us with a new way of reading his poems about painting, as well as a formal argument to advance beyond the merely anecdotal accounts about his relationship to other artists. At the same time, by recognizing the poet's openness to collaboration, we are introduced to a variation to Greenberg's ideology; the poet's open sensibility anticipates experimental aesthetic practices that came after abstract expressionism, and provides a clue about the affective values emerging in his own poetic practice. O'Hara's uniquely influential position on the threshold of modernist and postmodernist art movements can be reflected in the complex, but carefully delineated relationships he stages between lyric poetry and interdisciplinary art practice. If there is an affinity between his poetry and the abstract art that was being produced around him, then it is because of, not despite, the particular pressures painting and poetry endure. By studying O'Hara's work in conjunction with his collaborations, we are able to understand how he provides a radical alternative to Greenberg's embalmment of aesthetic autonomy while still preserving the formal necessities of medium-boundedness in his poetry.

Note

1. See Reed's "Footprints of a Wild Ballet: *Poem-Paintings* of Frank O'Hara and Norman Bluhm," and Shaw's "Gesture in 1960," both in Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery, eds. *Frank O'Hara Now.*

CHAPTER 8

Mourning Coterie: Morton Feldman's Posthumous Collaborations with Frank O'Hara

Ryan Dohoney

> What then exactly constitutes the basis of our community?
> —Robert Motherwell (qtd. in Goodnough 159)
>
> And must I express the science of legendary elegies
> —Frank O'Hara, "Second Avenue" (*Collected Poems* 141)

On what grounds can we establish the collectivity of the New York School? Perhaps, as Frank O'Hara proposes, through a "science of legendary elegies." By thinking community elegiacally, we might begin to discover how affective modes of sociability offer ways of interpreting the collaborations between the New York School poets and their musician and artist compatriots.[1] The friendship between composer Morton Feldman and Frank O'Hara—one of the most significant relationships within the New York School—exemplifies this mournful mode of sociability but has been little commented upon.

In my research in the Morton Feldman Collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation, I discovered artifacts of Feldman and O'Hara's extensive engagement with each other's work that elaborate upon our understanding of their friendship and collaborations. In particular, several "posthumous collaborations"—compositions and writings by Feldman completed after 1966 and related in varied ways to O'Hara—will serve as the archive for

this chapter. While others have explored Feldman and O'Hara's friendship in relation to ideologies of freedom and aesthetic unpredictability during their lives (Montgomery 2010), I want to track how Feldman's mourning for O'Hara works as a strategy for perpetuating what Lytle Shaw (2006) has described as "coterie." In the years after O'Hara's death, the New York School existed no longer as a physically proximate reality, but rather as a dispersed network of actors, objects, and performances. Feldman's music encourages us to hear and feel this loss of coterie as an afterimage—something vanished yet present for us affectively.

As Feldman noted in his obituary for O'Hara, "to die early—before one's time—was to make the biggest coup of all, for in such a case the work perpetuated not only itself, but also the pain of everybody's loss" ("Frank O'Hara" 103). The pain of loss among the New York City avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s was as essential to a sense of group identity as were the collaborations between members. Feldman's production of affects of mourning in artworks and compositions became a way to perpetuate loss while also indicating the composer's place among a group of artists with increasing cultural capital. Feldman's collaborations are a type of association that can be understood as affective investment in the larger project of group formation in the New York School. Through this chapter, I extend the work of Bruno Latour (27–42) to humanistic inquiry. As Latour has argued, groups are never stable; instead we see continual processes of group formation that achieve momentary stability through repetition, reiteration, and the establishment of evermore durable networks of associations. Musical performance is one such mode of group formation.

With Latour's central insight in mind, we can reconceptualize collaborations as simultaneously aesthetic products and attempts at group formation. Feldman and O'Hara's relationship provides evidence for a sociability performed through the production of aesthetic feeling notable for its unpredictability and emotional impact. Because the New York School defined its collectivity largely on the basis of a shared interest in specific affective experience, the examples that follow move between documentation of community and the intensities afforded by the music, poetry, and art produced by this social network. Feldman, from the time of O'Hara's death until his own, makes a veritable industry of memorializing his friend (as well as other members of the New York School), and inscribes this mourning into his music through compositional strategies modeled on his reading of O'Hara's poetry after having been brought there by his composition teacher Stefan Wolpe and friend John Cage. Feldman's earliest reference to O'Hara is found in one of the composer's sketchbooks from 1952. On the back cover, Feldman drew up plans for an opera based on André Gide's novel *Straight Is the Gate* with a libretto by O'Hara. Other elements of the production plan show it to be mere fantasy, with a stellar cast and crew that included the singers Patricia Neway and Leslie Chabay in starring roles, Stella Adler as director, and lyricist John La Touche as producer ("Sketchbook 5"). Such friendly daydreaming evinces a close friendship that brought Feldman into O'Hara's circle of young poets and painters. This group would serve as the composer's first and perhaps most enthusiastic audience. O'Hara's early opinion of Feldman is documented in a post-concert note from poet to composer in 1954:

> Just a note to thank you for such a beautiful concert. The performance was wonderful and it was so exciting and inspiring to find one's sensibility led into absolutely new experiences in such a subtle, authoritative way—without any posings or denial which only distract one when it's a matter of real music. (Letter to Feldman, 1954)

O'Hara highlights elements of Feldman's music that he elaborated upon in later writings on the composer, particularly his "subtle authority" unencumbered by "posings," which the poet understood as technical systems such as 12-tone composition (O'Hara, "New Directions").

In 1959, O'Hara began a more public promotion of his friend when he provided the sleeve notes for Feldman's first recording for Columbia Records' *New Directions in Music* series.[2] In those notes, O'Hara helped shape Feldman's reception in terms that strengthened the composer's identification with abstract expressionist aesthetics ("New Directions").[3] O'Hara's critical appraisal of Feldman shared a great deal with the poet's description of Jackson Pollock's work in his 1959 monograph. Both painter and composer, in O'Hara's estimation, created works of unpremeditated expression working through an aesthetics and poetics of individualistic action. The album also serves as a document of the collective sociability of the New York School: O'Hara's notes were complemented by a reproduction of Philip Guston's ink drawing *Head—Double View* (1958) on the album cover. This multidisciplinary collaboration indexed a social network invested in the mutual interpretation and promotion of its members. Collaboration was for these artists as much about defining and sustaining a group identity as it was about the production of poems, paintings, or compositions.

Only in 1962, with *The O'Hara Songs*, did Feldman and O'Hara realize the musical collaboration hinted at in 1952. In the songs, Feldman set

* * *

Morton Feldman and Frank O'Hara met at the Eighth Street Artists Club in late 1951 or early 1952. Feldman became a fixture at the club in 1951,

to music O'Hara's poem "Wind" (*Collected Poems* 269) for an ensemble of bass-baritone voice, chimes, piano, violin, viola, and cello.[4] In his setting, Feldman continued the compositional practice he had developed in 1958 and used consistently. Each performer is given specific pitches to sound at minimal volume, but their duration and the relationships between the parts are left to the performer's choice. As such, each performance is unique and unrepeatable. The two outer movements use the full text of O'Hara's poem while the middle movement uses repetitions of the line "who'd have thought that snow falls?" Following the completion of *The O'Hara Songs*, O'Hara invited another collaboration with Feldman, saying in a letter, "I am very happy to be 'set' by you (and not in a bridge)" (Letter 1962). Included in the letter was a version of the poem "Now it seems far away and gentle" (*Poems Retrieved* 160). O'Hara titles the poem "To Philip Guston," saying, "This thing was inspired specifically by Philip's *Painting 1954* in the Modern Museum's collection, that mostly orange one that's somewhat like *Attar* [the Guston painting owned by Feldman], so it's nice that the three of us are somehow involved in this like with your record" (Letter 1962).[5] Feldman, however, did not set the poem, though he later returned to the text of "Wind" in his *Three Voices* (1982).

After O'Hara's death, Feldman eulogized his friend in a lecture, "Frank O'Hara: Lost Times and Future Hopes," given at the New York Studio School on October 30, 1968, and later published in *Art in America*.[6] Feldman's essay is both a personal remembrance and an insightful interpretation of O'Hara's work. Feldman begins the essay by noting the inevitability and intensity of death with regard to the New York School's sociability: "It was big stakes we were after in those times. Through the years we have watched each other's deaths like the final stock quotations of the day" (103). Feldman goes on to use death as a means of understanding O'Hara's poetry. Feldman was particularly drawn to the unpredictability of the poems and the sense of risk that he felt when encountering them:

> When we read O'Hara we are going along and everything seems very casual, but as we come to the end of the poem we hear the gunshot of [Chekov's] *The Sea Gull*. There is no time to analyze, to evaluate. We are faced with something as definite and real and finite as a sudden death. (105)

Unpredictable affective events proliferate throughout the poems with an intensity that Feldman associates with unspeakable loss. Consider the final lines of "The Day Lady Died," particularly the musicality with which sudden death is figured:

> and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
> leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
> while she whispered a song along the keyboard
> to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing. (*Collected Poems* 325)

The poem, as Feldman might describe it, goes along, seeming "very casual," yet the closing lines draw us into a sensuous remembrance of the voice of Billie Holiday when she "whispered a song" that struck us dead. Musical experience in this poem is figured as a loss—of breath, of life—and its impact sears the memory, forging a relay from seemingly workaday tasks of getting lunch and buying gifts to a sonic experience rendered as visceral near-death response. O'Hara's poems, much as they work through a poetics of process and coterie, also map dynamic affective landscapes in which hearts suddenly harden or the pleasures of sound stifle our bodily processes. This sense of affects and intensities undergirds the notion of a collective sensibility that O'Hara and Feldman are at pains to emphasize in their writing about one another.

* * *

O'Hara and Feldman noted in each other's works a common affective atmosphere—an intensity of sensation and thought emerging from an unpredictable sonic or linguistic construction. With this in mind, I'll now consider the ways in which their aesthetic disposition is continued in Feldman's music from the early 1970s, a few years after O'Hara's death. The pieces that I want to discuss, *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* and *For Frank O'Hara*, were written during a period in which Feldman became particularly invested in gradations of emotional resonance. They also bear a textual trace of O'Hara's poetry.

In his music from 1970 to 1973, Feldman was concerned with what he called "the illusion of feeling," a name he gave to a phase of his compositional output marked by pervasive nostalgia, fragmentary melody, and strong emotional evocation. He described it, after the fact, in an unpublished lecture given in 1972 at the State University of New York at Buffalo (where he was made a professor of music in 1973):

> It appears that this new period of mine was short lived—from 1970 until 1972—beginning with *Madame Press* [*died last week at ninety*] and then *The Viola in My Life* right into *The Rothko Chapel* immediately followed by *I Met Heine on the Rue Fürstenberg* and then ending with a composition called *Three Clarinets, Cello and Piano*.

> After the three clarinet piece I was what the romantics call "lost"—uprooted and living in Europe added to the ambivalence of what to do next. While living in Berlin throughout all of last year—I abandoned what I called the "Illusion of Feeling" for again the "Illusion of Art" that is—I went back to a more abstract music—less detailed—still precisely notated but with another big change—longer, large works. ("Slee Lecture" 1)

Feldman sets up an evocative dialectic of feeling versus art and defines which pieces fall under the rubric of the former, but he's less willing to describe just what in those pieces—beyond their generalized musical characteristics—"the illusion of feeling" might refer to. A clearer sense of Feldman's meaning emerges upon noting that *Madame Press* and *Rothko Chapel* are elegies in memory of deceased friends, and that *The Viola in My Life* was a cycle written out of deep feeling as well—in this case, newfound affection for the violist Karen Philips, for whom Feldman had also composed the solo viola part of *Rothko Chapel*.

The emotional tone Feldman projects in his music from this period is one of mourning punctured by sudden violent intensities that rupture the musical fabric. As a listener, I hear a tension between a decaying sonorous landscape and a contrary impulse to "get on with something"—an attempt to coalesce or get moving. These impulses are crosscut by jarring gestural interventions that fracture the otherwise delicate sound worlds of the pieces. To understand the peculiarity of the last point, it's important to note that Feldman's music had been marked by a singular quietude since the 1950s. "As soft as possible" is the instruction given to performers of his music in *The O'Hara Songs* and elsewhere, and Feldman's ideal performances hover on the edge of audibility. He cultivated what he called "flat" sonic surfaces with a minimum of timbral, gestural, or dynamic contrast. This flatness engenders a number of affective responses in listeners. One valid response is frustration with a music that seems directionless, floating, and (if quiet enough) literally unlistenable. Another response, and one that I would like to encourage in light of Feldman and O'Hara's shared aesthetic, is the sense that the music's quiet intensity can, and often does, draw one into a field of difference figured as sonic uniqueness. This notion of aural singularity may seem far from the relational sociability of Feldman's lectures and O'Hara's poems—and it very well would be, if the uniqueness of sonorous objects implied their autonomy. Clearly, that is not Feldman's intention, any more than it was O'Hara's to create assemblages of unrelated words. The aesthetic and affective force of Feldman's music comes precisely from the relationships that emerge and dissolve among the sounds.

Further indications of Feldman's understanding of "the illusion of feeling," and its resonance with the composer's reading of O'Hara, can be gleaned from studying the compositional sketches for *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*. Though eventually published with a flatly descriptive title detailing its instrumentation, in Feldman's manuscript copy *Three Clarinets* bears the title "In Memory of Our Feelings" (a reference to the title of an early poem by O'Hara, "In Memory of My Feelings"). He subsequently crossed this out and added another title, "There's a Broken Heart for Every Light on Broadway," taken from a Tin Pan Alley tune by Howard Johnson and Fred Fischer. He also crossed out this title. The sketches indicate that he settled on the title "Give My Regards to Eighth Street," only to change it later to the more austere *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*.

"Give My Regards to Eighth Street" is also the title Feldman gave to an autobiographical essay published in *Art in America* in 1971. The theme of "Give My Regards" is nostalgia and, more explicitly, mourning for a lost coterie, so that the essay reads as a sequel to his obituary for O'Hara. In the early 1970s, Feldman had moved first to Berlin then to Buffalo and was no doubt "at sea" socially, having lost the vital network that the New York artists and poets had provided. He gives a sense of this in "Give My Regards" when he writes:

> When you begin to work—until that unlucky day when you are no longer involved with just a handful of friends, admirers, complainers—there is no separation between what you do and who you are.... In some cases the work leads to a concept of music or of art that draws attention, and you find yourself in the world.... Yet there was another "world." Of conversation, of anonymity, of seeing paintings in the intimacy of a studio instead of a museum, of playing a new piece on the piano in your home instead of in a concert hall. (196)

Giving up the illusion of feeling could have meant giving up on a music that projected affects of loss and love into sound, and the music of the early 1970s certainly mourns for lost intimacy.

"In Memory of My Feelings" resurfaced as a possible title in 1973 when it was given to an ensemble piece for flute, clarinet, violin, percussion, cello, and piano—the piece is known today as *For Frank O'Hara* (1973). Feldman's manuscript retains "In Memory of My Feelings" as the title, indicating that it was replaced at a very late stage, perhaps just as Feldman's manuscript was drafted in fair copy and sent to his publisher, Universal Edition. With the replacement title, Feldman recalls two things: his 1962 piece titled *For Franz Kline*, and the elegiac music of the immediately preceding years.[7] But

the question naturally arises of how this elegiac tone is produced—the forms it takes, the textures it produces—and its debt to O'Hara's poetry.

As discussed earlier, Feldman described O'Hara's poems as capable of delivering sudden, devastating turns of phrase that are "as definite and real and finite as a sudden death." "In Memory of My Feelings" is just such a poem; in addition, as numerous commentators have noted, it deals with an unpredictable and fluid conception of subjectivity.[8] No doubt the poem's opening lines appealed to Feldman, perhaps through a shock of recognition: "My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent / and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets" (*Collected Poems* 252). Quietness is, after all, at the heart of Feldman's aesthetic, with its emphasis on the barely or semiaudible. "In Memory of My Feelings" also takes up the theme of death, particularly in its second section beginning with the lines "The dead hunting / and the alive, ahunted" (253). Small wonder, then, that it would come to mind as a title for Feldman's elegy for the poet. As Selby notes, the final sections of the poem are marked by an attempt to reconfigure a sense of self out of the collage of images and experiences (231–34). This strikingly corresponds to Feldman's own creation of music that attempts to get itself together, to build up a coherent sense of progression or movement from fragmentary gestures that can seem aimless or inchoate.

Feldman had marked an end to emotional projection in his music with *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, yet *For Frank O'Hara* inhabits a markedly similar sound world. That the composer flirted with "In Memory of My Feelings" as a title for both pieces suggests that we can hear in both the translation of O'Hara's "sudden death" into the realm of Feldman's sounds. In these pieces, Feldman seems to craft a musical analogue to the intensities of O'Hara's verse, not only in the quick gestural turn, but also in generating musical experiences of focused attention like those the poet valorized in "The Day Lady Died." To get at this type of experience, I'll describe two moments in *Three Clarinets* and *For Frank O'Hara* from a perspective grounded in my hearing of the pieces, bolstered with reference to Feldman's later exploration of melancholy and what he calls "atmosphere."

* * *

Listening to Feldman's *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano*, I'm often struck by its varied sonic textures and how the feeling of the piece is construed as both a physical sensation and an atmosphere of anxiety.[9] As with much of his "illusion of feeling" music, gradations of dynamics in *Three Clarinets* range from extremely quiet to shatteringly loud, whereas before 1970 an all-pervasive quasi-silence was the norm. In *Three Clarinets*, long tones in

the cello or clarinets begin on the edge of intelligibility and gradually fill up our senses, only to quickly vanish. These waxing and waning tones contrast with static fields of sound (produced by multiple instruments) that are more felt than heard, that register their presence in our bodies before we understand them as sonorities. The clarinets play at sharply dissonant intervals, often a minor second apart, which produce an acoustic phenomenon called beating. These beating clarinet chords produce rapid oscillations and fluctuations in the sonorities that give them a buzzing, slightly irritating quality. Yet, Feldman takes the edge off the sound by keeping the clarinets quiet, rendering them focused fields of energy that draw me into the sound. In contrast to these more textural sonic events, Feldman occasionally gives us short two-note melodies, first in the cello and later in one clarinet. These melodies inject a more rhetorical music, in that they seem to get something going both lyrically and rhythmically in a way that the other musical events do not. They give an otherwise amorphous composition a bit of a tune, even if it is a tune marked by brevity, repetition, and unexpected disappearance.

With these types of sounds—long tones of gradually increasing volume, vibrating intensities of tone clusters, and fragmentary, repetitive melodies—Feldman spins out a ten-minute piece that ends as it began, emerging from and retreating into silence. Yet, one moment interrupts an otherwise flat musical scene. Approximately two minutes into the performance, the three clarinets interrupt the musical fabric with a loud, dissonant musical progression of three quivering chords, then suddenly return to disconnected, quiet sounds. The curious thing about this moment is that if feels like a progression—that is to say, the sounds go somewhere in the midst of music that otherwise doesn't feel like it's going anywhere. The three chords sound connected, and provide a brief narrative arc of a consequential phrase. It is a kind of music that gets it together long enough to say something instead of hanging on to its tremulous reticence. To call the three chords narrative may seem to overstate the case, but to notice that such a progression could even appear in Feldman's compositional practice is also to recognize the singularity of his sounds and the way he crafts hermetic atmospheres that lack drama. Drama in this moment comes from a sudden, singular interruption in the midst of an otherwise fragmentary sonic situation.

The music following the clamorous outburst of the clarinets is unchanged from that which comes before it. The sounds seem willfully ignorant of the event that has transpired, and go along unperturbed. The event causes my hearing to be shot through with intensified anxiety about what else might happen. I hear the quiet tensions, the little anxious textures, and the fragmentary melodies with new suspicion. I thought I knew what the music was capable of doing, but my expectations have been radically revised.

Feldman plays on this newly created anxiousness at the end of the piece. There he sets up a situation similar to the one into which the loud clarinet chords intervened: the clarinets begin an unexpected crescendo, as they had before the disruptive progression earlier in the piece. Instead of repeating the dissonant three-chord progression, however, the music pulls back and dies away—a receding landscape that drags our attachment to the sounds with it into silence. At the risk of being too literal, we can recall Feldman's initial, though later redacted, connection of *Three Clarinets* with O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings"; indeed, Feldman seems primarily interested in playing on the memory of my feelings as a listener with his evocation of the memory of the violent event.

An analogous rupturing event occurs in *For Frank O'Hara* from 1973.[10] As Catherine Hirata has noted about the piece, Feldman seems more interested than before in using his gestures to set up musical progressions (sounds that get on with something, go somewhere)—only to undercut those progressions. This is distinct from the way in which the violent event of *Three Clarinets* was disruptive (because it felt like a progression). In *For Frank O'Hara*, a violent event interrupts a play of sounds passing back and forth between coalescence and dissolution. Hirata describes *For Frank O'Hara* in her characteristically trenchant way:

> Heard in the context of the more fragmentary passages of *For Frank O'Hara*, a passage [in which sounds seem to come together and accompany one another] seems vigorous. It is as though suddenly the music gets off the ground, as it were. Each sound rather than seeming isolated from the next, combines with the next so as to create that effect so uncharacteristic for Feldman, namely of a musical progression.... At the same time that Feldman enables these sounds to be heard as a progression, he also undercuts this progression. This assures that the passage still seems to fit with those which are more fragmented (and that it still sounds like Feldman). (129)

A feeling of coming together and falling apart pervades *For Frank O'Hara*, yet a singular moment of rupture also threatens to force the music apart. Near the two-thirds mark of the performance (mm. 177–78), the two percussionists execute a roll on a snare drum that is sudden, brief, incredibly loud, and devastating in its visceral, terrifying impact. Again, a sudden increase in volume intrudes upon the quiet of the sound; as in *Three Clarinets*, however, the violent event is passed over by the other music as ineffectual, unnoticed, or deliberately ignored. The music simply goes on with the winding up and unraveling that Hirata describes. We sense that we're again in a musical landscape in which anything might happen, occasionally does, and we should be ready for it—even if that readiness becomes anxiousness or, more strongly, dread.

* * *

In the preceding paragraphs, I've explored affective events in two of Feldman's compositions and suggested that they might have something to do with Feldman's reading of O'Hara's poetry. Each piece was titled up to a very late point in its compositional genesis with a version of O'Hara's title, "In Memory of My [Our] Feelings," and while I don't mean to suggest that these pieces are programmatic or that they refer specifically to the poem, I do want to consider the ways in which Feldman's reading of O'Hara may be related to the violent sonic interventions in each composition.

Feldman preferred not to think of the snare drum event in *For Frank O'Hara* as necessarily dramatic:

> [Emphatic events] become something else in music. Recently, for example, in my Frank O'Hara piece when I got the two drum guys, now it seems dramatic in context of the musical composition. I didn't think of it as dramatic at the time. If there was an airplane coming over here we would talk a little louder and we are not even conscious how we are affected. But in music we demand other kinds of priorities. ("Studio" 69)

At the time of this interview, the mid-1970s, Feldman was invested in an "illusion of art" produced in longer, repetitive, abstract works. Regarding the earlier O'Hara-connected pieces from 1972 to 1973, it bears recalling how Feldman in 1968 described the poet's verse. Feldman defines affective events in O'Hara's poems through a discussion of the poem "Mayakovsky":

> In an extraordinary poem Frank O'Hara describes his love for the poet Mayakovsky. After an outburst of feeling, he writes " but I'm turning to my verses / and my heart is closing, / like a fist." What he is telling us is something unbelievably painful. Secreted in O'Hara's thought is the possibility that we create only as dead men.... Only the artist who is close to his own life gives us an art that is like death. ("Frank O'Hara" 107)

The drastic turn of the line "closing like a fist" illustrates what Feldman means when he describes O'Hara's verse as presenting a "gun shot" or "sudden death." These are drastic moments that explode the atmosphere of the poem and at times render a violent or disruptive effect—for example, the

quoted lines of "Mayakovsky," with their "outburst of feeling." Yet the poem simply moves on, apostrophizing to "Words!" in the subsequent stanza, indifferent to what has happened (*Collected Poems* 201). Resembling O'Hara's interruptions and sudden shifts of register, tone, and address, Feldman's sonic interruptions work as musical translations of the poet's technique, in which he "dispenses with everything in his work but his feelings" ("Frank O'Hara" 106). Understanding Feldman's reading of O'Hara, in which gunshots go off, characters die or go missing, registers suddenly shift from the comic to the placid to the tragic, we can better understand the bewildering disjunctions within Feldman's music from the early 1970s—its propensity to fall apart just as it seems to be getting together, the intrusion of sounds that are ill-fitted to their situations, and the tendency of the music after interruptions to simply go on doing what it was doing before, without attending to the effects of sudden violence. In these later compositions, a posthumous collaboration between poet and composer found Feldman learning from O'Hara's poetry and letting it influence, at least for a time, his compositional method and the musical atmospheres he created.

* * *

After *For Frank O'Hara*, Feldman focused his compositional practice on the creation of monumental works, such as the six-hour *String Quartet No. 2* (1983), the four-hour *For Philip Guston* (1984), and the ninety-minute *Three Voices*, based on fragments of O'Hara's poem "Wind" (1982). His interest in musical memory and mourning expanded, such that the sense of loss he described in "Lost Times" and explored in his "illusion of feeling" period became a more generalized "affective atmosphere" (Anderson). He described his understanding of feeling and atmosphere in a lecture in 1985:

> I think the most important thing in my music is the gradations of feeling in the music. You can't discuss that. The music has a certain atmosphere that changes. The atmosphere itself is not monolithic... If we could come to some kind of consensus on what I mean by atmosphere, the way D. H. Lawrence would write about the atmosphere of Hawthorne. (*Morton Feldman* 104)

Feldman's understanding of atmosphere resonates with the description developed by Ben Anderson, in which atmospheres convey a sense of collective, permeating feeling. Building on the work of Mikel Dufrenne (1973), Anderson describes affective atmospheres as "autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with. As such, to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague" (80). While Anderson, following Dufrenne, imagines affective atmospheres as expressing singularity, Feldman's interest in the production of "gradations of feeling" motivates his music's propensity to shape and suddenly transform an atmosphere. This also suggests that music is an ideal medium through which to document the effects of affective atmospheres that Anderson has in mind. Far from being floating or ineffable, the specific sets of actors (musicians), technologies (instruments, recording and reproduction machinery), and listeners in musical performance provide concrete channels through which to think of atmospheres as material networks, engendered through specific sets of mediators and events. As such, performance-dependent atmospheres are mutable and subject to sudden changes of mood and tone. This is what impresses me about the moments of rupture in *Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano* and *For Frank O'Hara*—the feeling of the piece changes suddenly and that change affects my future hearing, yet the music seems to go on as though nothing dramatic has happened.

Beyond the creation of a generalizable mood, Feldman's later idea of atmosphere is actually bound up with the work of mourning begun in his obituary for O'Hara, as well as in his music of the early 1970s, the elegies of sudden death. To approach the sense of Feldman's articulation of atmosphere and mourning, we can trace back his reference in the Middleburg lecture to D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* from 1923. The passage Feldman refers to reads:

> There may even be vibrations of ghosts in the air. Ghosts being dead *wills*, mind you, not dead souls. The soul has nothing to do with these dodges.
>
> But some unit of force may persist for a time, after the death of an individual—some associations of vibrations may linger like little clouds in the etheric atmosphere after the death of a human being, or an animal. And these little clots of vibration may transfer themselves to the conscious-apparatus of the medium. (120)

Here, Lawrence articulates a number of themes eventually to be explored by Feldman, including the sense of spectral vibrations in the air (which provides a tantalizing metaphor with which we might describe our hearing of the taut dissonances of *Three Clarinets* and *For Frank O'Hara*). Feldman understands feeling as something haunted, and his pieces become morbid atmospheres.

Benjamin Piekut and Jason Stanyek write about such morbidity effects and desctibe them as "deadness." They write, "Deadness speaks to the distended temporalities and spatialities of all performance, much the way all ontologies are really hauntologies, spurred into being through the portended traces of too many histories to name and too many futures to subsume in a stable, locatable present" (20). Feldman's acoustic elegies are acts of mourning that demonstrate the extended agency of his social network—the residual traces of group formation that built on his attachment to and interpretation of O'Hara's poetry and projected them into performance. Even after *For Frank O'Hara*, Feldman prolonged his posthumous collaboration with O'Hara and the mourning of his lost coterie. The sketches of *For Philip Guston* reiterate Feldman's insistence upon perpetuating the losses of the New York School. On the bottom of one of the manuscript pages, Feldman provides this necrology: "Mom, Philip [Guston], Frank [O'Hara], Mark [Rothko], Jackson [Pollock], Franz [Kline], Stefan [Wolpe]" (*For Philip Guston*). One also finds a more explicit evocation of "deadness" in Feldman's final elegy for O'Hara and Guston, the aforementioned *Three Voices* of 1982 (for soprano and prerecorded tape). On the final page of the manuscript, Feldman wrote two phrases: "Two deceased friends: Philip Guston and Frank O'Hara are the voices from the speakers which in themselves are the 'gravestones' of live acoustical music" and "Three voices in dialogue between the dead and the living" (*Three Voices*). Mourning O'Hara, and making that mourning musical, occupied Feldman for the rest of his life. Only in death was O'Hara's wish realized—that he, Guston, and Feldman would collaborate again as he had hoped in 1962.

Notes

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1. Mark Silverberg (2010) has argued that a poetics of process serves as a collective ideal of the New York School. While I agree that a poetics and aesthetics of process was a shared interest among poets, composers, and painters, it's important to note that Feldman was, by 1963, ambivalent about "process," saying in an interview with Robert Ashley that "it's not about process, it's about sound" (Feldman and Ashley 31). Feldman's intensified relationship with "sound itself" in 1963 also led to a deeper engagement with the formalist vocabulary of Clement Greenberg, especially his focus on the notion of surface flatness as an aesthetic value.
2. The LP featured performances of numerous Feldman compositions including: *Piece for 4 Pianos, Intersection 3, Projection 4, Two Pieces for Two Pianos, Extensions 1, Structures for String Quartet*, and *Three Pieces for String Quartet.*

3. Feldman's recording was reissued on compact disc in 2007 as *John Cage—Music For Keyboard, 1935–1948 / Morton Feldman—The Early Years*, New World Records, 80664–2.
4. For a reading of *The O'Hara Songs* see Montgomery 199–207.
5. O'Hara dates the poem December 20, 1956. Feldman's copy varies from the version printed in *Poems Retrieved* in stanzas one and four; the first stanza is markedly different: "How far away and gentle it seems / now the morning misery (s) of childhood / and its raining calm (s) over the schools." Compare with *Poems Retrieved*, 160.
6. I am grateful to David Cline for providing me with a recording of Feldman reading his lecture at the Studio School. "Frank O'Hara: Lost Times and Future Hopes" was first published in *Art in America* 60.2 (1972): 52–55.
7. Franz Kline had died in 1962 and *For Franz Kline* was the first of several pieces by Feldman with such a dedication as the title.
8. For readings of the poem, see Perloff, *Poet* 141–46, Selby, and Shaw, *Frank O'Hara* 89–98.
9. All my comments here refer to the performance by the Composers Ensemble with Paul Zukofsky conducting. The performers on the recording are Mark van de Wiel, Duncan Prescott, Robert Ault, clarinets; Zoe Martlew, cello; and Catherine Edwards, piano. See Zukofsky 1997.
10. *For Frank O'Hara* was composed for the Center for the Creative and Performing Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo. For more on Feldman and the Center, see Levine-Packer. My comments refer to the recorded performance of *For Frank O'Hara* by the Center released (with *Rothko Chapel*) on the Odyssey label in 1976, which has not been rereleased on CD. A number of more recent recordings are available.