

Morton Feldman: Lecture on *For Christian Wolff*

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The first performance of Feldman's For Christian Wolff was given by Eberhard Blum, flute, and Nils Vigeland, piano/celesta, on 23 July 1986 in the Orangerie at Darmstadt. Feldman gave his lecture on the piece the following day. This transcript of the complete lecture is made available here by kind permission of the transcribers and the Estate of Morton Feldman.

Feldman: The title, *For Christian Wolff*, came five or six days after I wrote the piece. And, I think to some degree, though I always become somewhat upset... I told someone recently that I feel I became the Billy Graham of Darmstadt. [laughter] But it was very, very important these feelings I had about Christian Wolff. And let's extend the parameters a little bit, and add this one. [laughs] And it's interesting that Christian was on my mind, because unknown to me, someone mentioned to me that John Cage very recently wrote some mesostics on Christian Wolff's name. He also was asked by - this is John Cage - Takemitsu asked John Cage to a festival in Japan, where he should pick out one composer of the past and another younger colleague, in the festival. Cage picked out, of course, Satie, and also picked Christian Wolff. I wonder what the reason is.

Not to glorify or romanticize Christian Wolff's image, so to speak, but I think he could use for a little myth making. He was sixteen and a half, and he was sent by his piano teacher, Grete Sultan, to John Cage. John Cage saw his music and didn't believe it. He never really studied with John. All John did was to lay out the score, and just showed Christian more professionally, or essentially neatly, how to make a page. Evidently, that was the way John taught, because that's exactly what he did to me, too.

When I wrote my first pieces for graph, they were on dirty, school notebook graph, where the graph - the dimension of the graphs - was certainly unaesthetic. And John... If you would take a look at the - I forgot the name of the piece... One is, I think that one is *Projection*, for flute and some instruments... violin and piano, 1950. And the other one is a piano piece - you would recognize John Cage's pen, and the neatness of how he did it, graphically.¹ So evidently that was a marvelous, uh... Of course, because of that, many times I become more concerned about my pen than I do about my music! [laughs] It was the John Cage influence.

Another John Cage influence, which he didn't realize would be one of the main strategies to even write a big piece, is something that I'd like to give to all of you, to try it out. Because it's not bad regardless how you write. Of course, if you work with a very rigid overview, it might not help. John told me that I should write a little bit and then copy it. And as I'm copying it, I get close to the material. I see what I'm doing and then I go on, I get ideas. And to this day when I copy out a page and I'm getting to the end of the page, there is no ideas! [laughs] It always works. Because what happens, you say, I'm not getting any ideas and then

¹ Cage recopied Feldman's scores of *Projection 4* for violin and piano (1951) and *Intersection 2* for solo piano (1951). Cage's versions became the published editions.

of course the minute you say that you get an idea. So it's a marvelous strategy and that's exactly how I work. I write for half a day, I copy for the other half a day, and then the following day I continue the same sequence of events. Very important. It gets you close to the work and it more or less - not corrects - but makes you get more involved with what you're doing rather than believing that the concept is infallible.

So Christian came to Cage. I don't even think he was seventeen years old! I once wrote an article in which I referred to him as Orpheus in tennis sneakers. Because he came from high school, you know, from a tennis game. That was the first time I saw him, as this young man. As I mentioned last night his family had a home walking distance from here. He was here, of course, a few times. But now, it is very, very hard to get into a situation about the importance of someone in a historical moment, especially when their work perhaps has proliferated in terms of style. That is, we milk it and then we go on to something else. In other words, if you say Christian Wolff: "Oh we had Christian Wolff already, didn't we?"

What did his music have? Well, it's certainly the most European of both Cage and mine. And what I mean by European is the marriage of concept and poetry. This is a great gift western civilization has had, and he had it. He was very conceptual and yet there was a beautiful poetry. And I think that also attracted Cage to Pierre Boulez.

What did [Wolff's] music have? He made Cage and myself get a little more involved with the distinction between system and process. He brought process to us in another way. That is, just a kind of engineering, not really involved with system making. I still don't understand completely the distinction. Some days I understand it more than other days. But if the word "process" seems to reflect an American contribution, I would say it began with Christian Wolff. That's what Cage took from Christian. I took something else. Now, we never became friends. I think in the thirty-six or thirty-seven years that we've known each other - at least in time - I don't think I ever spoke to him for more than twenty minutes. He doesn't speak very much, you know. He is a very elegant, very quiet, very gentle person, and there's not much to talk about.

There are other things about the title. A piece of his was done here, called *Summer*, a string quartet. If you look at the front page, it's dedicated to me. And there were other reasons. Christian Wolff ruined my life! [laughter] There was something about his music, which I described to someone the other day as if I was thrown out of Eden. There was something about his music that I felt that never again would it be possible for me to write glamorous music. What is glamorous music? Monteverdi is glamorous music. I think about it all the time. It annoys me, because we always want to... after all. Someone said to me the reason Charlie Chaplin was a universal figure, because people that saw it felt that they couldn't get any lower than what was happening in his life. And that's why we perhaps like Fred Astaire, because we can never, ever be like Fred Astaire. [laughs] And, compositionally, I always wanted to be like Fred Astaire. After all I'm a New Yorker. [laughter] So this whole business of being flung, or thrown out of paradise is his gift to me. I'm glad I got out. It was getting too hot anyway. [laughter]

And there is a transition with that remark, paradise getting too hot for me anyway. As I was writing this piece, I was teaching at CalArts for my sabbatical. And I took the job because I already the year before, I was in Florida, and I learned something that only the rich, and horse-race players know. [laughs] Where's Nils? [laughs] And I kind of figured I would like to be in warm climates in the winter. So that's why I took this job at CalArts. And though I

liked everybody there tremendously, and made friends for life there - like Doug Cohen who's here today - there was something about the atmosphere of Los Angeles, that no movie... Nathanael West could not even talk about its culture the way I felt about it. I didn't like it at all. I didn't like the musical life there. I didn't like the performances. You go down to Los Angeles, everybody plays with the same kind of vibrato. [laughter] And I wasn't very happy. Everybody's trying to write glamorous music. Very, very upsetting. And of course, remember I couldn't do it anymore, because of Christian Wolff! [laughs]

So I came back and I finished the piece. I finished the piece at home. I didn't begin it at home. I began it like Karlheinz Stockhausen did that piece in an aeroplane, remember? The opening sketches of the piece or rather the permutations, looking at the permutations with those pitches and what it implies, and a whole set of permutations which I thought was a substitute for crossword puzzles, was done on the aeroplane. And I continued when I got to CalArts. And I wrote the piece in CalArts. And as I was writing the piece, I found that for the first time in my life, I consciously decided to write a piece that was austere. Absolutely. As if it didn't have a taste. And then when I got back, for whatever reason, I titled it, *For Christian Wolff*.

Naturally, I don't feel that my music is sparse or minimal, perhaps the way fat people never really feel they're fat! [laughs] I never really thought of it. I mean, there are articles where I'm like the "father of minimalism", or such and such. I certainly don't consider myself a minimalist at all. But I'd like to tell you a little bit about certain attitudes I have. And essentially a lot of my attitudes unfortunately came from teaching. And the students believe in the system. Or what they call the overview. Which I find very disturbing, disconcerting. I know the importance of this overview, and I know how difficult it is to work without it. One of the first things I did when I became a professor at Buffalo, about seventeen years ago, is that, you know, on a doctorate you have to give what you gonna do. You have to give the overview before you do it, and discuss it rationally. I took it out! And I said all we want of you, or all I want, is serious work - serious means work - work hard, that's all it means. I have no other specification is that they work more than an hour a day. They work four hours a day. But I want a serious work, larger forces, lasting twenty minutes or so, twenty-five minutes or so. That's all I asked for. And I found it was disastrous. Nobody could work. Now, I made it easier. I give the instrumentation. Write a string quartet in two movements about twenty minutes. So it helps a little bit.

I can't give you specifically, in a sense, some of my compositional strategies, and I have them, I have a lot of them. But Sigmund Freud said that the best way, or the only way, to really understand something is to first generalize. And I always generalize the problem to myself before I begin. And the problem is usually very realistic. There is so much given to us before we really begin, that it's absolutely incredible. You're getting 30,000 Marks to write the piece, that's a lot of information. [laughter] It helps our ego, we feel a little bit optimistic. [laughter]

With me, it's the instruments that decides very much how I begin to think of the piece. I do not hear a note without the instrument. I do not hear a note and the instrument without its register. I do not hear a note and the instrument and the register without its placement in time, either specifically, or generally, as Schoenberg reminds us what notation is. And even my early durational music had to do with some kind of compromise of the durational life of the sound. It used to be known as harmonic rhythm. And I am very involved with harmonic rhythm without harmony.

Nils Vigeland I think said something that I really enjoyed hearing after the piece. He said I'm a tonalist that does not believe in tonality. I would say, I'm a serialist that doesn't believe in serialism. I'm an instrumentalist that doesn't believe in the instrument. If I had to think of a flute as a flute, without just one or two people playing it, it doesn't exist. Like that note I was telling you about. If I wanna think of a flute and the state of the art, I hear a vibrato. That doesn't sit well. So I don't know what a flute is unless the person plays it for me. I don't know what it is. I know what it is in terms of its role playing. But I don't know what a flute is. I don't know what a piano is. Marianne Schroeder's piano is different than Yvar [Mikhashoff's]. Yvar's piano is different than Aki Takahashi, Roger Woodward, all the people...[Herbert] Henck. All different kind of pianos. So I cannot think it impersonally. Just as Brahms did not write his *Violin Concerto* without Joachim. Or Schoenberg, without...what's his name in Syracuse?... the dedication...

Audience: The *Violin Concerto*? Kressner. It was Kressner.

Feldman: Kressner. He lives in Syracuse. That's a very important situation. I can't write a violin without Paul Zukofsky. So I'm having a lot of problems about writing instrumental music. Of course like everybody else in the sixties I wrote a piece. I even wrote a piece for instruments, just instruments.² I can't do that now. And a lot of people can't do that now. [long pause, someone leaves the room] Don't we feel, if we follow that young man out of the room, we're really gonna find another Valhalla?

OK. This whole business of generality has now influenced my compositional thinking. Rather than looking for specifics. Because I still now have to redefine exactly what is meant by generality. The generality of barring. The generality of the way Schoenberg would use barring or meter. The generality of what we know of how Stravinsky would use it. Where one would use it as subdivision and one would use it as rhythm in relation to the meter. And again I mentioned earlier that I learned most of my things about the... from the student. No matter where I go to, whether it's California or Darmstadt, no matter where I go to, I find the barring is just an accommodation. There was absolutely no realization of what exactly is happening in the barring. I'm now into the piece that we heard last night, and how this concern about barring and teaching barring has been a terrific preoccupation. I just can't go ahead with a composition lesson unless the student meets me halfway or at least understands the concept behind barring, rather than just an accommodation of events. If we could just hold that a minute, let's get to a conversation I had with Steve Reich. For some particular reason I got involved with a lengthy, very interesting conversation of getting over the barline. The whole problem of getting over the barline. And the whole problem of exactly what is meter now that we don't have tempo anymore. We don't have, you know... I mean, wasn't it wonderful, he's walking in the woods: [sings Beethoven, *String Quartet op. 135*] We don't have that anymore.

All these ideas! We act as if we're lucky that we don't have that anymore. At the same time, I just heard some remarks about - actually not remarks, but some important comment that Wittgenstein makes - about to what degree we can get involved with substitution. That we just can't go from one thing to another and substitute it and it's gonna work. For example, that language is gonna be substituted for what we do, and influence what we do, rather than

² There do not appear to be any surviving works by Feldman (published or unpublished) for "just instruments", assuming this to mean works scored for unspecified instruments.

what we do influences language. And that's where I am. Now as far as musical language, the best thing I ever heard about it... I was floored by it! I had a public conversation with Xenakis. And somebody asked from the floor: is music a language? And Xenakis answered that it is not a language, but it has a language behind it. For some reason, just however you want to call it, it was just fantastic, as if, again like Christian Wolff, with process and system. And don't think that I completely understood what Xenakis meant. But it was like little: music - language. I'm working with that, I like it. I think it's terrific. And that's what he had, you know, Greek, and this stuff and that stuff and this stuff, and sometimes a little crazy. Other kind of languages behind it. Maybe the way Wagner used the old and the new. The way Adorno points out: new music - old German mythology, as a...

I'm beginning to see Xenakis more in a Wagnerian context than I ever did before. Notice that I don't even think about his contribution to computer and random walks! That's not writing the music, take my word for it. These guys - meaning people like me - could make it out of anything! Take my word for that also. 'Cause I heard Kevin complaining, you know. Kevin was a... We have Cage cripples and we have Stockhausen cripples and Kevin worked with Stockhausen. I heard that he told somebody that Stockhausen was lying to him. [laughs] I love the idea. Of course he wasn't lying to him. That's a problem listening to people like me or anybody who you feel might have secret information, you see, to get through an unseen door. It's not true. At the same time I don't want to say don't listen to me or don't listen to Xenakis, because it's a very existential state. If you don't listen to me, you're lost. If you do listen to me, you're lost! [laughter] This has all to do with attitudes. I notice that Xenakis uses the same terminology to things as I do. I don't talk about composition, I talk about strategy. Now the strategies could be a... Everybody has to pick their own strategies, outside of the work and the system. The system is this much of the work. I mean even Boulez says that organization is not composition. Even he says it. It's nothing! It's absolutely nothing! In America the emphasis on pitch structure and pitch structure. They have no idea of the forms of Webern's first *Cantata*. The American doctorate has no idea of the forms of that music.

Now, an important strategy - and if I didn't think it I wouldn't have written the piece - was that any professional knows that the flute and the piano is a boring combination. And all you're gonna arrive at is a kind of a typical gestural crap! [laughter] Right? You might agree, though you wouldn't call it the gestural crap. What am I gonna do, I say, what am I gonna do? Not to make it interesting. To write a piece. You know Mies van der Rohe's remark, "I don't wanna be interesting, I wanna be good". I wanna write a piece! I decide: don't change the flute. Stay with the C-flute. Because then I'm involved with an important strategy, known as the Houdini School of Composition. [laughter] It was the fact that I only had the flute that my... what Xenakis calls imagination. For the time being, I'll use that term also. I don't agree with it, I don't think it's imagination. It just made me feel a little more sharper in terms of my moves, that's all. It also created images. I think in terms of images. I was very happy to find out recently that it was OK. Henri Bergson reminds us that there are two ways that we do things, either conceptually or through images. I'm an image-maker. I think of instrumental imagery. Continually. Only. It's very easy once you think about it.

So the flute, and not changing flutes, was very, very important. Couldn't have written the piece without saying to myself: don't change the flute! That leads to something very crucial on opening up the door into this world. I don't even feel that it's my world. I feel it's... We call it the world. In fact, again, if we could hold that for a minute. A very funny aside, in which I had a conversation with a wonderful composer by the name of Jo Kondo. And Jo orchestrates later. I don't. And I was in Tokyo and Jo said, what do I think about his

orchestration? I said, "Jo, it's too glamorous." [laughs] I said, "You're madly in love with cow bells," and I said "It's fine, but it gives the work an exoticism, which I think should be toned down just a little bit." And I suggested that he orchestrate directly. And to make him feel better I quoted Alban Berg where he continually reminded his students: "Listen profoundly." So I said, "Jo, listen profoundly, and it's gonna make you orchestrate without any kind of either conceptual ideas, you know like *Opus 24*, or *Peter and the Wolf* - which is Soviet counterpart." [long laughter]

Not bad! [laughs] So I had a student that was studying with me at the time, Canadian, and he also worked with Jo Kondo. And he sent my Canadian student a recent piece. It was for piano some instruments, whatever they were. And I put it on in a seminar. And it was like my music! He was listening profoundly! [laughter] And I actually feel that, for example, [unclear on tape] it wasn't an accident in the sense that say Webern liked the trumpet and the flute, which has become a cliché in terms of certain type of instruments. He was listening. It was great. It sounded fantastic.

OK. Another very, very important key to my thinking is where most people think: "what could I do?" I think: "what shouldn't I do?" That's why when you feel that the music is going this way and should go that way and I went this way, is that you're following what you feel is the logical course of its continuity. It doesn't work that way. But that psychology - what I shouldn't do - perhaps is involved with the fact that I'm Jewish. What is known as Jewish paranoia. [laughs] I don't feel comfortable enough to feel that everything is on my side, that it's gonna work just the way I want it. I'm not suspicious, I'm just careful. When people want very flexible material, I want inflexible material. Or I wanna take what might seem flexible material in one style and then reorganize it, and you say to yourself, what the hell is it? Now the opening of the piece and the whole basic structure pitch-wise of the piece is something, you know, everybody's done it: four-note chromatic cells. Everybody has done it. Even Elliott Carter has done it. [laughter] The *Lyric Suite*. Even Bartok has done it. I also did it, in this piece. The only difference between me and them is that I divide the major sets. The only difference between me and them is I stratify the more consonant - I rather prefer it softer - interval of the major ninth. The stratification of what is known as softer intervals, consonant intervals, is done beautifully by Aaron Copland. It's done magnificently, unfortunately in a piece that I'm not nuts about, and that's his *Short Symphony*.

But at the same time, like anybody else, like a serialist who doesn't believe in serialists, like a tonalist that doesn't believe in tonalists, I went to work on this piece. Now, what is the generalization I'm talking about? The generalization is this: black notes - white notes, short durations - long durations. In other words, reinvestigating in a general sense some type of reality principle - not a conceptual principle, but a reality principle - of what the hell music is. And then finding some way, not conceptually, but in listening to the piece - and not listening that profoundly which stops me from getting a compositional idea - I go ahead and write the piece with a very conscious yin-yang aspect in its equilibrium. Do you think I don't know how to cadence? If I cadence, I'm dead. It's like Scheherazade. Or resolution? Now another reason I don't do that, and in the conversation again with Nils Vigeland he talked about that if you surrender to one thing - I'm just paraphrasing him - you start getting involved with hierarchical concepts. How you wanna resolve this or how you wanna resolve that. At the same time what's behind me is that a lot of my resolutions, in a sense, or a lot of my harmony can come from counterpoint, like everybody else. And a lot of my harmony can come from harmony, I suppose. But a harmony without any hierarchical concerns. That's why you remember those chords.

Now let me tell you about the idea behind the piece. Remember, I was talking about barring and the problems of meter, and the fact that it's considered old-fashioned, and that one just wants accommodation, and my conversation with Steve Reich about getting over the barline. I noticed in a sense that the barline is essentially a module. And that the student doesn't realize that for all that time at the beginning of the barline and all that time at the end of the barline that they don't utilize. If you had to pay taxes on that property, you'll realize. [sings opening of Beethoven *Symphony No 5*] Right over the barline: [sings same] Of course I'm not preaching born again meter! But being that I feel that if one is involved with parameters it seems to me to understand that meter is a fantastic parameter in getting fantastic compositional information. Rather than tempo. Information that could change notation, like from a two-two immediately to a seven-sixteen, you're freaked out. I mean, two-two, seven-sixteen, what are you going to do? Unless you just have a little fermata, and you go... So I got very interested in getting over the barline. Now, and also in a sense as a synthesis, the Stravinsky way with the Schoenbergian subdivision. And finding a meter that you can get the most rhythmic variations, you see, in this particular time. Use them both. I use them both. If I hear an image, it's Stravinsky. If I'm involved with variation, it's Brahms... or Schoenberg, metaphorically speaking. But I also question this whole business of substitution. And I'm on my guard all the time. Because if you're working in a nine-eight, it's very easy to get into music, in a sense, that is reminiscent of a certain, like a slow three, you see. And one of the interesting things at rehearsal, is to get the tempo so right, that that nine-eight does not have that kinda historical reminiscence.

OK. Let me tell you a little bit about parameter. I wrote a piece for Bunita Marcus. It started there in that piece³, where I use meter as an aspect of construction, of rhythm, of everything. Everything we know of, and a few others. A surrogate harmony in terms of tension: this way and that way. But the main reason I use it is to slow down the rate of variation, as the piece continues. You could always tell a student work. Everything is interesting in the first measure. The second measure the piece is finished. [laughter] I'm not different. I have angst about being glamorous. And so what the structure of meter does is to slow down the rate of variation. So this is essentially what happens in this piece. I'm also interested in trying now new meters that I never used before. Or I thought had other... You know, nine-eight: Bartok. Nine-eight. So what we have in the beginning is essentially nine-eight and silent measures of five-quarter and four-quarter. A kind of microcosm of the larger unit. And if you would notice it's always five and four, always five and four. The five and four are those little images where he just goes into that high D-harmonic against the seventh chord. Catch it. Timing it and catching it. The other one could be subdivision. The placement or displacement of the note the way Stravinsky does it in some of his pieces, and the way Christian did it in all his early pieces, this displacement. Is the bus leaving? [laughter] We can't miss that bus! [laughs]

The piece goes on. The nine-eight perhaps becomes seven-eight. This is not rhythmic modulation! Other meters come in, like notes. Very conventional use of it, the way one uses notes in a twelve-tone piece. Or the way Varèse, in a sense, uses it in *Integrales*. They throw out a few notes, play around with them, add another note or two, play around with it. It's the same thing. Throw out a meter, sit with it for an hour. [laughs] Throw out other meters, and then mix the meter, like a development section in a conventional piece. Don't do it three quarters into the piece however, regardless your length. So it becomes a very structural thing. But I don't plan it. I have to go from measure to measure to see, or hear, rather. That's right,

³ For Bunita Marcus for solo piano (1985).

we wanna avoid seeing it, we wanna hear it, what's happening in what I would call acoustical reality.

In a piece I'm not gonna play for you, only because it's such a terrible tape of a disastrous New York Philharmonic performance of a piece of mine. Maybe I should play it out of revenge, but it's too late now, I don't have it with me. Where I use meter in another way. I use meter to solve a very practical problem. Remember I told you about, what was it, 30,000 Marks, or something, makes you feel better, gives you ideas for a piece. This was an offer of course I couldn't refuse, because I got a very nice commission from the New York Philharmonic to write a piece. However, there was a pact like with Mephistopheles. It had to be under a half an hour! [laughter] It wrote the piece, to some degree. Because immediately I had to think, how could I make a half an hour sound, at least for the audience, like two-and-half hours. [laughter] In other words, what new experience could I get into, in a sense, working a much more saturated world. Rather than have this piece and then a bass clarinet plays a solo, and then you give something to cello section, you know. Before you know it, you could pick up your twenty thousand dollars for doing very little. The state of the art! What am I gonna do? How am I gonna get to the end of the piece? And I use a meter structure in the piece. Very conventional, but not done in tempo, but with meter, you see. There is a difference. Rather than saying crotchet equals this, and now crotchet is faster, now crotchet is faster still, it is not the same. It's meter. Meter is very elastic. You really gotta hear it.⁴

Just simply, the piece begins in eight-eight. Eight-eight, because it got me closer to the barline. [laughs] And I subdivide everything and there's something happening on every eighth note, and sometimes on a sixteenth note. In other words, every eighth note practically throughout the piece there's some... Very much, in a sense, if you would take a look at that fantastic section of the Stravinsky: [sings: Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms, III*] Look the way he orchestrates! Probably everything there is an axis, there where it comes back together: [sings again] The way he orchestrates on the vertical. The change. It makes any surrealist... It makes Webern and Schoenberg into Kinder [children], in terms of the change and the rate, how it's going, how it's changing - the colour, the spectrum, the instruments - it's absolutely one of the most sensational examples for nuance - not orchestration! - nuance, that's imaginable.

What I did here was very much like in the *Hammerklavier*, when the events get faster and faster and faster and faster until everything just disappears. I do the same thing by starting off at eight-eight, and then gradually, gradually seven-eight, six-eight, five-eight, four-eight... No, four-eight, no. Do I have the four-eight? I don't remember. I know the piece ends on seven-sixteen. I don't know if I went a little, and then got back to seven-sixteen, but I don't think I did it progressively, that would have been too conceptual. I think I went that other way. But that's essentially... And then, when the piece ended, I felt that it ended. Now that's just a bit of engineering, I don't even call that construction, I don't even call it a form. The subdivision of meter to me is not form. I don't like to use the term because it's usually the subdivision of things into parts, as John Cage said. I'm thinking more of scale, rather than form. Just as Stravinsky said that he likes the seams to show, which I think is terrific. He likes the seams to show. I like my work where the seams do not show. I think I got my ideas years ago from a great Spanish dress designer⁵ that was famous for making very expensive

⁴ *Coptic Light* for orchestra (1985).

⁵ Probably Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972).

high-fashion dresses out of one piece of material, just standing there with a scissors and a little pin. I like it seamless.

Though I don't have an overview, this talk was highly structured: Christian Wolff; talking about the piece; and now the final thing I'd like to talk about. And which I don't think I would like to open up to discussion. I'd like to like present it as a very serious thought that even I myself have to think and rethink all the time. And it's essentially: Why is it, or what is it, that music, and those that hear it - we'll forget about them; those that play it - we'll forget about them; but those that write it, have a great rigidity towards change. I am so lucky that I grew up with painters and not musicians or composers. I remember going with Willem de Kooning. We went into Jasper Johns' studio. What has Jasper, I mean, got to do with De Kooning? And De Kooning said, [unclear on tape] you know, and everybody's excited, and painters, and all these different painters, and that one and this one. And Pollock's going like this, and Rothko, and everybody's excited about everybody's work! We don't find that in Darmstadt! We don't find it in Buffalo. We don't find it in the University of Indiana. What is this thing called: no change?

Why music? Maybe it's not an art form. Do we allow things to be an art form? Can we define an art form and its possibilities in music? Why in painting? People work in one way. I remember I met a friend of mine on the street. He's not a well known painter. He never made it. But he is a chaired professor of painting in Princeton University. And who was in his graduate school class but Frank Stella. This man painted figuratively. And he was important in the art world, and everybody respected him. And he went to Leo Castelli, the hottest gallery in New York. He says, you have to see this student's work. And Frank Stella was in college and became a sensation overnight. It hardly ever happens in music. Why? What is there about music? And I'm consumed with this question. It's a serious question.

Why music? There could be a lot of answers, and a lot of the answers are not pretty. And if I give you my answer I don't mean to be negative or critical, I'm just giving an answer. Why it happens is because music is the most difficult of arts. OK. Fine. Two lines of music together and we blow our minds. Why is it? Or have the technique [technical knowledge], the notation, the ability to forget about yourself and like a Zen master to hit the racket in the right place. To forget about yourself. Being that it's such a difficult art, we develop as if it's moral. As if it's ethical. We hide behind tradition, we hide behind history. Why don't painters feel that? We feel it has to be only one way in music. I also feel it has to be mainstream. That's not mainstream. Yes, it has to be mainstream. Yes, like Xenakis, there has to be a history behind it. Yes, things have to be pushed around, you have to move.

And what happens if you go off mainstream? I was telling friends at lunch: Barbara and I were on the highway - mainstream - in Switzerland. We see nice mountains over there, let's go there. Here the highway goes off, let's go there. So we get off the road, we get off mainstream, and we were lost in 30 seconds. Lost! Where the hell's the highway! It's just a few hundred feet from here, where is it? It was very funny. And I realized the connection, actually. Map didn't help, it wasn't on the map. Map didn't help. You've all had this experience. Let's not go where the tourists... I only go where the tourist goes! If they don't have a Mastercard on the window, I don't go in. [laughter] If Beethoven didn't do it, I'm not interested. *Opus 101* is good enough for me. [laughter] But Wittgenstein is right, we have to question substitution.

Now there is another issue and this issue is gonna be a little delicate. Because I can understand its political dynamic if I take Hegel very seriously. Let's not prove Hegel right. Now my confrontation was not with this generation. Unknown to you, you're out of it. The confrontation was before you were born, for the most part, many of you. And the confrontation had to do with the competition of notes. Something I always refer to as pitch envy. Get it? Pitch envy. [laughter] How to construct notes, who's doing it better, what is the more hierarchical way of doing it. Then it's gone. It's not discussed. I sit now side by side with Milton Babbitt, and it's as if there was never an argument. [laughter] Charles Wuorinen, who's the younger king pin of serialism in America, now says I'm one of the best serialists around. So everything is changed. And of course, if you're good, you're a serialist. In fact, they even refer of myself as a closet serialist, because all my books on Schoenberg and Webern are in the closet! [laughs] I don't want anybody to see them. [laughter]

So that issue is finished. And another dynamic happened. I'm giving you a Hegel interpretation of contemporary history. Then we had electronic music and the computer. And then we had something else that was very important right before: percussion. And then little by little, how do we get rid of the notes? How do we get in... How do we take that note. How do we use the notes and get rid of them? How do we get rid of the instrument? God, we're filtering it and it still sounds like a clarinet! And that, in a sense, I think, is the dynamic. If there is an issue. And being that I'm now in Europe, so there must be an issue. [laughter] So the fight is between notes and the Andere [Other]. Which was shamelessly demonstrated a few days ago. A very important issue. I'm on both sides, you know. But remember you can't win either way. But I certainly don't feel... Karlheinz used to speak to me about historical necessity. And I told him, historical and hysterical to a lot of analysts are the same. You mean, I said, hysterical necessity don't you. Group necessity, perhaps. See, I'm the Billy Graham of Darmstadt! [laughter]

Serious issue. Because you're gonna die in this issue. There is a battleground out there. I have a rendezvous with obscurity. There is a battleground out there. There are... I heard some pieces that got involved with this, coming from the electronic, and this, and try incorporating instruments, and microtones, and this and that. And then, one reaches out for pitch. There was a great... If not great, it was a great movie. I don't think it was... I remember reading the book. The book wasn't great, but the movie was great. It was called *All Quiet on the Western Front*. It's about a simple German soldier in the First World War. As long as he was behind the trench doing his job, he was safe to some degree. But a butterfly comes hovering over the trench, and he reaches out for the butterfly - pitch - bang-o! And pitch is like a butterfly.

So are you pitch or are you the present, the future? You can't be both. You can't have your computer and eat it too. [laughter] You could use it, you know: let's see what this random walk looks like, and then he throws it out. I really feel that's it, that's the issue. That's my pitch - which is American for that's what I'm trying to sell you. Not American, English as well. Yes, it's either pitch, one or the other, you gotta make a decision! But perhaps your decision is to go from one to another. That's bad. Because that's a decision that either got to choose pitch or got to choose the Other, you see? Maybe the decision that you have to make is only to think about it. You're not doing anything, just think about it. Or as my mother would say: When under pressure, she would say, all you need is a good night's sleep. So maybe after you leave here, you go back to where you're coming from, and just sleep for about three days. Under sedation, the way the Soviets do it. And God knows, pitches will come to you, or the Other will come. [laughter] I'm not gonna come for you, I'll be in Los Angeles. [laughter]

But I don't wanna be moralizing. I'm talking about - in a general way, in a good-natured way - about what I feel are the issues as I see it. And I think a lot of you wanna know what many of us are thinking of, what we're concerned about, at this particular time. It's very important. It used to be called intellectual curiosity. I don't like Steve Reich's music. I don't like Steve Reich... yet! [laughs] I learned a lot at that conversation. I asked him about a piece of his, the rhythmic structure of *Four Organs*, which I found very, very interesting, because in that sense it's also a meter structure. But I think it was overly conceptual in its format, in terms of getting slower, and slower, and slower, and slower, because what happens with that, it doesn't...it's a process piece, it's not really a composition, and so essentially it just fades out like an old rock record. And it never seems to get slow enough. What he thinks was slow, to me... I'm just ready to start! The last bars of *Four Organs*, especially. But that's also the use of meter in another way, subdivision. You know its format. If you don't, I'm not gonna mention it, you should know it. Very important, interesting, subdivision of meter, how he uses it. And the meters are usually, as I remember it, the measures are usually - always add up in a kind of asymmetrical - Peter, do you know the... do you remember the score? - asymmetrical rhythm, duration or beats, like eleven, thirteen. That was one of the reasons of course, I wrote about this - his piece - in an article, and I teach it in the class. And though, again, I don't use meter like Stravinsky and I don't use it like Schoenberg and I don't use it like Steve Reich, I was interested in a seminar giving all examples, in a sense, the use of meter in a composition.

One most beautiful examples was Poulenc, of a - forgot the name: a chorus without a... "a cappella"! - a cappella chorus, in which he's just following the scansion of the words like a rubber band, and just did it that way. It was very elegant, it just sounds like a million dollars. Just beautiful, just so flexible, and it really hasn't, you know, hasn't really got anything to do with rhythmization. But it has to do with fulfilling from one barline to the end of the barline a very beautiful, plastic fluidity. I liked it very much. So Steve Reich, and Poulenc, and the fact that my students can't bar, got me into meter structures. Now the only reason I'm mentioning it is because I feel that I'm out of it now. I wrote three pieces in which I utilized it and I kind of covered it, especially when the pieces are so long, which are about 80 [minute] pieces, I kind of... I can't use it anymore. But I was very, very interested in it. Again, it gave me ideas for material, the way it gave the classicist or whoever - the tempo, the beat gave them ideas also for material.

Well, that's about it in terms of the piece and the state of the art and Christian Wolff's influence on both Cage and myself. Profound influence, even willy-nilly the fact that Christian's father was the first in America, or anywhere, to publish the *I Ching* in English. And I don't know if it was the first visit, could have been the second or the third, Christian brought him a copy of the *I Ching*, which certainly, as you know, played and still plays a tremendous function in his life.

We can spend the rest of the time with the questions. I just wanna say right now that my patience is at a low ebb, and if you want to ask a hostile question, don't ask it! And see me afterwards, perhaps on the bus ride: where one of us must leave, the other one might still be there! [laughs] OK. Any question.

Audience: What was the Stravinsky example that you hummed?

Audience: Last movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*.

Feldman: Yes. There is an assumption many times when you... I just heard a lecture I gave at the Schoenberg Institute, where I also gave an example, and I was trying to locate it on the record. Went something like: [sings] Where the hell is that? [sings same] [laughter]

Audience: There's a little question there. There's one, there's another one.

Feldman: You, I don't have to worry about a question! [laughter]

Audience: May I ask?

Feldman: Yes.

Audience: Well, there is something I recognized last four, five, six, seven days, that is, that there are many composers who don't think there is a difference between writing a seven bar measure of seven-ten or 9 or 18 and writing - what? - somewhat faster in the time of those bars. Do you see any difference between...

Feldman: Well, first of all, every time, without even seeing the music, I would say the reason they do that is because either they have some scheme they are following through, or they never learned how to use a grace note. In other words, they never learned to get away from just, you know, the way Webern or any of us would use grace notes. In other words, you know, outside of the counting, outside of the making the beat, you see. Most kinds of subdivision of the beat could be done just with a grace note. Many times it can't, it depends on the piece. But a lot of it has to be simplified just with grace notes. Again, it has nothing to do with rhythm, it has to do with the notation of the rhythm. I don't believe that there's such a thing as rhythm. I do believe that there is rhythmization of the material. Twelve-tone meter, or if not twelve-tone meter, for example in the Schoenberg *Serenade*, when the singer... how the singer comes in all the time and where it comes in, and everything, in a sense is a kind of - it's not really rhythm - it's a rhythmization of the intervallic world.

Audience: But what I mean is something different, I'm afraid. It is: you can see it in Stockhausen's first four *Piano Pieces* for example. He writes very complex indications, twenty to eighteen etcetera, and writes on the first page that if one has already found his tempo to play these pieces, one can change the tempo instead of realizing those - I don't know how you call it - those irrational...

Feldman: Irrational.

Audience: Yeah. But nowadays I think that there...

Feldman: Well, I don't know. Just for an example, I don't know really, essentially what... I know there are a lot of... I always feel that someone with a lot of experience is many times straightforward with his notation, how they do it. You can have the most interesting ideas and still be straightforward with the rhythmic information. For example, if you take the percussion part - some of the percussion parts - of a Boulez piece, he's not ashamed to put a whole note to a quarter note against... something. You know, just a crotchet. It's not... Just very simple, part of the time. For some particular reason I'm not polemical about that. I'm not polemical even, say, with Elliott Carter's schemes. I feel that it helps. Let me put it this way: Chekhov said that even a lie leads to salvation. Now many times people who do

something, it seems irrational, but at the same time they couldn't have done... there wouldn't have been a piece without it. So you leave it alone. It helped - whatever the thing - it helped write the piece, even though it's on a primitive, conceptual level, so to speak.

Audience: But there are two possibilities to realize certain ideas...

Feldman: It has to do with notation. What I do with my students is have them notate the same complicated situation four or five different ways underneath each other, and we discuss it. We discuss it in terms of barring. We discuss it in terms of performance. And we discuss it perhaps other things - dynamics, or attacks, or how to notate it. I think what you're really talking about many times results from something that I had a big problem in California, is because all the students there studied with a very close friend of mine that put the beam over, say, the downbeat and everything was a, you know, a subdivision of the downbeat, you see. This guy was a jazz pianist. This is not... Also I was told that it was practical and I felt, if I was gonna tell the students to be a little more plastic in their rhythm, it was as if I was telling them, go around, upstairs, to the painting department. It was as if I was sending them into another medium. Tell 'em: don't put that beam on that first beat! What do you think's gonna happen? To me the most - 3 against 2, to me, it's still like - I feel like this Nobel Prize scientist that always scratches his head when he picks up the telephone. That it's still one of the most unbelievable things invented, pick up the telephone - that's the way I feel about 2 over 3, I love it. The Beethoven *Concerto*, you hear the C minor arpeggio: [sings] Of course I wouldn't use 2 over 3, it's too swanky. [laughter]

But a lot of it has to do first of all with directional writing, following a scheme, and the subdivision, usually, of the crotchet. So you're really going from one beat to another beat to another beat to another beat, and that involves a certain type of complication. However, here we go again! Some people have a feel for it and it's fantastic. It's natural for their material. The only time, in a sense, that it bothers me, is when it's incongruous to their material. That that particular way of notating was not with the... One young woman, a very gifted girl, was beaming that way, and the rhythm was like that and I'm looking at the piece, it was just a beautiful rubato melody. Once after you were listening, you see where she's going, and she's beaming it, as if she was [snaps fingers rhythmically], you know?

Or another [snaps fingers rhythmically again] very important thing about the piece was that there's something about a long piece - it exists though obviously in the history of music, with examples - is the whole question of real time and constructed time. I would say Schubert like: [sings] Here I go again: [sings again, more extended]. With Beethoven I would feel there's more constructed time, because the hierarchical decisions are much more intense and on another level. I would almost say, better. Unfortunately I would say better. At the same time, I don't know to what degree I ever felt that Beethoven was involved with time. I don't think he had the patience for it. I feel that he was involved with timing: [sings *Symphony No 5* motif] Timing. And I identify with the music of the past, in a sense, that just drifts and something closer to what we might think of as real time, and I use that as a dialectic in the piece too. I go back and forth.

My dialectic is involved with just two things, which is a dialectic. And I learned that from my teacher Stefan Wolpe. He used to talk to me about the Hegel unified opposites. You don't hear it in his latest work because it's chromatic. You hear it in his Israel period. We hear this beautiful, tonal type melody, gorgeous melody, against an accompaniment which is extraneous from it, unexpected in its key, both going together. This whole idea of unified

opposites. That thought of unified opposites has been very influential to me. The only difference between Stefan and myself is that I don't have a synthesis. I let them fight it out after I'm dead! [laughs] I'm not gonna decide now. I don't have a synthesis. He had a synthesis. He had his resolution. That's a very important fact with the piece: real time - constructed time. I like constructed time because it's timeless. The real time is going along, you don't realize that five measures of nine-eighths just passed. I have two measures of five-sixteenths and four-sixteenths with a little thing, and it's - where am I? I like things like that. And I'm very careful not to overuse it, in a sense, but I am very much involved. That helps the piece.

Another thing, and this would be the final thing that helps the piece, is... Everybody would have a - either through tuning, or microtonal writing, or geometry - everyone would have another... I hear it differently in terms of the beating. Varèse was very involved, and very involved was Nono. Something that I would call instrumental harmony. Some kind of tension, some kind of energy, that holds the sounds together. And again that's very important for the sound and very important for the instruments that do it. Now, what happens in this piece, outside of an analysis of what people hear, in other words a general description, is that I got three elements there: I got the focus of a flute; I have the piano sound which is to some degree amorphous; I have the celesta, a glorified toy, but it's a great one, where you cannot locate the octave, it's difficult. Also, unless we have a great tuner like they have here that tries to bring the celesta as close to the piano as possible, there's many times and most of the times a kind of imperfection in exactly what the pitch is of the celesta. So you have three different elements going there, creating its own energy - I don't like that word, but we understand what I mean - as a progression that's keeping it alive, you see, this thing. I'm very aware of them, and I'm very aware of those discrepancies and where they sound, sound like in different registers. That's why I love to put material in different octaves, as you notice.

Maybe one last question.

Audience: I was a little worried about what you said about mainstream and not leaving the highway, because a highway leads to a very limited number of destinations. Now, when you set out to write a piece, which...

Feldman: The highway's supposed to lead to heaven.

Audience: I hope so. There is also one leading to hell, you know! But anyhow, when you set out to write a piece, which is not an open form piece, and I don't know any open form pieces of yours, that differs you from Cage for instance, you write a directional piece, you set out to get somewhere.

Feldman: No

Audience: You don't?

Feldman: No

Audience: Because getting somewhere implies sometimes you have to leave the highway. And very often when I listen to pieces of music I have the feeling: he is leading me astray. Why is he taking that other little road? And I don't understand it until I get to the end of the

piece, because that's where he wanted to take me, and obviously there was no other way to get there.

Feldman: Well, this is the decisions you have to make. And let me give you another example that only happened... I love, I love examples that just happened. [laughter] We're riding along in the car and you see a sign: Baden Baden. You see a sign: Baden Baden! [laughter] I said, let's get rid of the car, what, are you gonna have it all throughout Europe, it's gonna be: Paris Paris! You know, you don't know, everybody thinks you know that this is one part of Baden Baden. Why Baden Baden needs eight Baden Badens, I have no idea! That's the problem that you have.

Audience: I can tell you a wonderful one in France, outside Rouen once I saw a sign - a road poster - saying: to the right, all directions, and to the left, other directions! [laughter]

Feldman: Well, in a few days we're going to France, thank you. [more laughter]

Audience: Why do you think it's called Baden Baden!

Feldman: Well, the whole business of directions: if it arrives where you arrive, if it arrives where you like, one feels it's directional in terms of where you feel it should go. I do think of things a lot. I think that no new forms have been invented. I don't find it upsetting. But again, in terms of substitution, of course. And a lot of people never thought of it. The Second Viennese School thought of an inventive way. The thing is to do what everybody else does and do it better. To find another form on the bone, so to speak. Or take an idea from a composer you don't talk about, like Liszt, and like the first *Chamber Concerto* of Schoenberg, which had enough elements to keep a lot of people going for a long time. But I do think about that. But the question of is music really musical forms, being that the syntax, it's *Geschichte* [history], its story telling, to me it's so much like literature. Whole idea of sentence structures. This. That. How can we be on the mountain and then in a minute you're having a drink. Well, then you've never seen *Citizen Kane*, you see. The whole idea of getting someplace without - you don't go to the movies. And we do borrow heavily from the other art forms. The other art forms are inspired by us, we borrow from them. Kandinsky - inspired by the fugue, and things like that.

We're on shaky ground, you know. 'Cause all we could do is do something in another context. I mean, the glorious coda, you know, there are a few endings in the sense that everything... I mean there are only a few models for glamorous endings. One of them is *Les Noces*, which Boulez in *Répons* has not forgotten. [laughter] And the other one is *Ionisation*, which I never forgot. And I used it in *Coptic Light* to get a feeling as I'm getting to the end and the seven-sixteenths come in. I have the harps, a little bit underneath, start playing a figure, that was like helped it, and you hear it as an image coming through. And it divided to some degree, yet it was seamless, yet it divided just at that moment for... But if you would analyze - and this is the most fascinating thing, I think, about music - content and context. If you analyze the chords of *Ionisation*, it's twelve-tone chords made out of tritones! The most obvious, and yet it's Varèse. However, before I go, to tell you how you shouldn't believe me about notes against the Other, play a Varèse piece on the piano. You never heard such junk in your life! [laughter] And with that nightmare, I lovingly leave you. [Applause]