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## "Something that just hovers": Charting Feldman's Neither

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“Something that just hovers”: Charting Feldman’s *Neither*



Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Music  
of Bard College

by  
Madison Owings

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Berlin 1976.....	1
Soprano Part:.....	7
Soprano Themes:.....	15
Chapter 2: Beckett Material:.....	17
Graph Key:.....	33
Graph:.....	36
Chapter 3: Charting <i>Neither</i> : Exploring Content Relationships Throughout the Work.....	45
Chapter 4: The Feldman Equivalent:.....	52
Chapter 5: Why Patterns?.....	61
Chapter 6: Time Canvases.....	67
Chapter 7: Rome, 1977 – Something that just hovers.....	71
Bibliography:.....	74



## I. *Berlin 1976*

In September of 1976, a young ‘kaffe-knabe’<sup>1</sup> led Morton Feldman on to the unlit stage of the Schiller Theater. Arriving off the heels of a successful premiere for his piece, *Orchestra*, in Glasgow, Feldman traveled to Berlin for this meeting he had been preparing for in the previous months. There waiting on stage was Samuel Beckett; now in his 70s, he was overseeing a rehearsal for the German staging of his play, *Footfalls*. Without taking a moment for his eyes to adjust from the bright midday-sun to the Schiller’s darkened stage, Feldman clumsily grasped Beckett’s outstretched hand by the thumb before promptly falling to the ground.<sup>2</sup>

A mutual friend arranged the meeting in Berlin and passed along Feldman’s wish to set a text to music. Before the arrangement, Beckett had never heard of Feldman or his music.<sup>3</sup> Beckett had also disclosed his reluctance to provide a new text for such a purpose--suggesting the use of existing texts to the mutual friend. Feldman was familiar with the entirety of Beckett’s oeuvre, and denied the possibility. “They were impregnable. They didn’t need music,” he explained.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, earlier that year he had inserted a few lines of a from Beckett’s *Film* into his piece, *Elemental Procedures*. Sebastian Claren, whose historical account of Feldman’s life, *Neither: die Musik Morton Feldmans*, is the most complete to date, believes this inclusion--and the works Feldman completed in the summer of 1976--were written in preparation for a Beckett/Feldman collaboration.

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<sup>1</sup> German: coffee-boy, assistant

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Laws, “‘Doing It One Way and Doing It Another Way’: Morton Feldman’s *Neither*,” in *Headaches among the Overtones Music in Beckett - Beckett in Music* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 256.

<sup>3</sup> James Knowlson, “Feldman Meets Beckett,” in *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 415.

<sup>4</sup> Howard Skempton, “Beckett as Librettist,” editorial, *Music and Musicians*, May 1977.



Both had, on numerous occasions, spoken of a shared distaste for the operatic genre. Feldman believed that an inevitable sacrifice on the side of the text or the music would take place, and their respective autonomies would be subsequently compromised. Samuel Beckett had echoed similar views, once comparing the addition to words of “pure music” to “a corruption of the Schopenhauerian will.”<sup>5</sup> His views did not stop him from judiciously inserting music into his plays. Music appears in multiple scenes of Beckett's dramatic work: often excerpts from composers such as Beethoven and Schubert. The title of Beckett's 1982 play, *Nacht und Träume*, is borrowed from the Schubert lied that bears its name (D. 827, Op. 43, No. 2).<sup>6</sup> Regardless, Beckett's distaste for lyrical collaboration with music remained firm. This made the circumstances of Feldman's request especially unusual and prompted a rather awkward introduction between the two. Feldman recounted their discussion in Berlin in an interview with Howard Skempton in 1977.

“...he was very embarrassed. He said to me after a while, he said, ‘Mr. Feldman, I don't like opera.’ And I said to him, ‘I don't blame you!’ Then he said to me ‘I don't like my words being set to music.’ And I said, ‘I'm in complete agreement in fact,’ I said, ‘it's very seldom that I've used words.’ I said, ‘I've written a lot of pieces with voice, and they're wordless.’ And then he looked at me again, and he said, ‘Then what do you want!’ And I said ‘I have no idea! ‘What I'm looking for is the kind of quintessence.’ I said, ‘I'm also looking for something that...’ I don't know if I used the word ‘directional,’ but it was close to it. That just hovered so to speak.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John McGrath, "Beckett and Feldman," in *Samuel Beckett, Repetition and Modern Music* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an Imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 82.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> Howard Skempton, "Beckett as Librettist," editorial, *Music and Musicians*, May 1977.

After the rather fruitless conversation, Feldman asked Beckett to lunch. For Beckett, this was a single beer. Feldman brought the excerpt from *Elemental Procedures* containing the *Film* text with him, and handed it to Beckett, who studied the document with interest. He himself was an amateur musician. After some time, he looked up and said, ‘there was only one theme in his life.’ Feldman asked if he could write it down. Beckett took the pages and wrote “*To and fro in shadow, from outer shadow to inner shadow. To and fro, between unattainable self and unattainable non-self.*” Beckett then said, “It would need a bit of work, wouldn’t it? Well if I get any further ideas on it, I’ll send them to you.”<sup>8</sup>

Claren suggests Feldman’s compositional preparation prior to meeting Beckett and his expressed ‘need’<sup>9</sup> for an original Beckett text was not purely motivated by Feldman’s well-documented appreciation for Beckett’s work. Claren believes the entire project was the fruit of an absent-minded chat that resulted in a misinterpreted rumor. He claims that at some point in March of 1976 an unknown party approached Feldman and asked about his upcoming projects. Feldman communicated a potential interest in working with a Beckett text, and likely thought nothing more of the exchange. Claren writes “...this response must have been distorted in reports to G. Tomasi, then director of the Rome Opera, who called Feldman and asked some days later: ‘I hear you have written an opera with Samuel Beckett. Can we have it?’ Feldman would regardless have said ‘of course’ even though he hadn’t written a note of the work, nor had any contact with Beckett.”<sup>10</sup> Claren’s well-researched supposition is bolstered by an article written by John Dwyer and then published in the “Lively Arts” section of the Buffalo Evening News on November 27, 1976. Dwyer’s account of the interaction is the only that alludes to the existence

<sup>8</sup> John Dwyer, "In the Shadows with Feldman and Beckett," *Buffalo Evening News*, November 12, 1976.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Sebastian Claren, "A Feldman Chronology," *Neither*, 2000, pg. #, accessed March 20, 2018, doi:10.1057/9781137452399.0008.

of a commission prior to the Beckett/Feldman meeting in Berlin. Written in the style of a theatrical script, he details the parting words between the two artists, before they left in opposite directions on a sidewalk in Berlin: Beckett-to resume his work and residence in Berlin, and Feldman to return to his home in Buffalo, New York.

“Feldman: I don’t want to say this, I hate pressure myself, but I will say it. Rome Opera wants it, the National Theater in London, Venice. Considerable money is implied. Can Bill Colleran (Friend of both, a music publisher) send you a contract?

Beckett: No, I have too much money. Think of it as a gift. (The two characters walk away in different directions and the scene closes.)”<sup>11</sup>

In the following weeks, Feldman was busy working on an “overture” for an opera without any existing text. In a recorded interview, Howard Skempton made the natural assumption that Feldman had the text from the start of the writing process, as most composers would not attempt to musically interpret a text they had not yet received nor read. Feldman reminded him he was not ‘most composers’ with a typically humorous reply-- “...that’s why I discovered what an overture is: Waiting for the text!”<sup>12</sup> And then, approximately three weeks after their meeting in Berlin, a small, stiff card arrived at Feldman’s address in Buffalo. Penned in Beckett’s flowery scrawl was a short message followed by several lines, each divided by short dashes below.

---

<sup>11</sup> Dwyer, “In the Shadows with Feldman and Beckett,” 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Skempton, “Beckett as Librettist,” 1977.

It read, “Dear Morton Feldman. Verso the piece I promised. It was good meeting you. Best. Samuel Beckett.”<sup>13</sup>

*To and fro in shadow from inner to outer-shadow*  
 --  
*From impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither*  
 --  
*As between two lit refuges whose doors once neared gently close, once*  
*turned away from gently part again*  
 --  
*Beckoned back and forth and turned away*  
 --  
*Headless of the way, intent on the one gleam or the other*  
 --  
*Unheard footfalls only sound*  
 --  
*Till at last halt for good, absent for good from self and other*  
 --  
*Then no sound*  
 --  
*Then gently light unfading on that unheeded neither*  
 --  
*Unspeakable home*

Feldman pinned the card upon his wall and began to study the text. It would be the last correspondence between them throughout the entirety of the ‘collaboration.’ However, the finished product--a result of a single, brief encounter on a stage in Berlin--would later be known as one of the most successful musical interpretations of Samuel Beckett’s craft. Feldman’s speculative experimentations in the works directly preceding *Neither* affirm themselves in the completed opera: the first of the many large-scale works in his later period of writing.

In the list of twentieth-century moments that mark a profound shift in artistic trajectory, receiving a postcard in the mail is likely among the quietest. It is an occurrence either aptly reflective of Feldman’s musical style, or diametrically opposed to a century defined by its craze for cacophony. With Beckett’s prose, Feldman sought to satisfy the demands of the text without

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<sup>13</sup> Knowlson, “Feldman Meets Beckett,” 420.

compromising his own musical input. Feldman's esteem for Samuel Beckett was such that he wished to "slavishly adhere" to his feelings.<sup>14</sup> In a way, this one-sided collaboration forced a rapidly expansive artistic evolution to take place within the microcosm of a single piece. The following section, in which I analyze the Soprano material, will address the role of the text in greater detail.

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 419.

Score

# Neither

## Soprano Part

Morton Feldman

Soprano

1-14 144 15

to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ fro \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_

153 16

sha - dow \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ inner \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

163 17-18 12

outer \_\_\_\_\_ sha - - - dow \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_

183 19

im - pen - tra - ble \_\_\_\_\_ self \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ im - pe - ne - tra - ble \_\_\_\_\_

191 20

unself \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ way \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

201 21 13 22

neither \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_ be - tween \_\_\_\_\_ two \_\_\_\_\_

223 23 11 24 25 13

lit \_\_\_\_\_ refuges \_\_\_\_\_ whose \_\_\_\_\_

254 *ppp* 26

doors \_\_\_\_\_ once \_\_\_\_\_ neared \_\_\_\_\_ gently \_\_\_\_\_

262 4 27 6

close, \_\_\_\_\_ once \_\_\_\_\_ turned \_\_\_\_\_

©

2

Neither

S 278 away from gently part

S 286 again beck - oned back and forth

S 416 and turned away head - less of

S 497 the way in tent on

S 505 the one gleam or

S 610 the other

S 641

S 649

S 657

S 699

Neither

The musical score consists of ten staves, each labeled with a soprano 'S' and a measure number. The notation includes treble clefs, various time signatures (3/8, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4), and complex rhythmic patterns with slurs and ties. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 4 and 5. Performance markings include 'molto' and 'ppp'. Measure numbers 70, 71, 72-76, 77, 78, 79, 80, and 81 are highlighted in boxes. A large number '15' is written above the first measure of the eighth staff. The score concludes with a final measure on the tenth staff.



4

Neither

S <sup>843</sup> 

S <sup>853</sup> 

S <sup>863</sup> **84-85** **18**  *ppp*

S <sup>887</sup> **86-90** **56** *ppp*  **91**  
 un - heard foot - falls — on - ly — sound

S <sup>917</sup>  **92**  
 un - heard foot - falls — on - ly — sound

S <sup>947</sup>  **93** **94** **13**  
 sounds — sound — sounds — till

S <sup>957</sup>  **95**  
 — at — last — halt — for —

S <sup>987</sup>  **96**  
 good. — ab - sent for good from self and o - ther

S <sup>997</sup> **97** **18** **98**  **99** **9** **100**  
*ppp*

Neither

S 1029

S 1036

S 1065

S 1073

S 1109

S 1117

S 1127

S 1137

S 1147

S 1157

101 9

102 14

103

104-105 31

106 *ppp* *mp*

107

108

109

110

111

6

Neither

Musical score for voice part 'Neither', measures 112-123. The score is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Measure numbers 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121-122, and 123 are indicated in boxes above the staff. The lyrics 'then no sound' are written below the staff between measures 120 and 123. The dynamic marking *ppp* is present in measure 122. The number 15 is written below the staff in measure 122. The score ends with a double bar line in measure 123.



8

Neither

1347 S nei - ther nei - ther

1362 S u - - -

1378 S n - spea - - k - a - - ble - - ho - me - - un -

1385 S speak - a - ble - - - - - ble - - - - -

1392 S ho - me - - - - - un - speak - a - ble - - un - speak - a - ble - home

1399 S un - speak - a - ble - - home un - speak - a - ble - -

1406 S - - home un - speak - a - ble un - speak - a - ble - - home u - n - speak - a - ble - home

1412 S

## Soprano Themes *Neither*

Overture: 1-14 (144 mm.)

Sop. G #1: 14-24 (102 mm.)



Sop. F#GAb #1: 25-28 (42 mm.)



Interlude #1: 29-40 (120 mm.)

Sop. Gb: 41 (12 mm.)



Interlude #2: 42-49 (72 mm.)

Sop. F#GAb #2: 49-50 (12 mm.)



Interlude #3: 50-59 (97 mm.)

Sop. G #2: 59-60 (12 mm.)



Interlude #4: 60-62 (24 mm.)

Sop. F#GAb scale extension: 63-65 (24 mm.)



Interlude #5: 65-68 (36 mm.)

Sop. -9 1/8 note melody: 69-70 (36 mm.)



Sop F#GAb #3: 70-71 (12 mm.)



Interlude #6: 71-76 (42 mm.)

Sop. F#GAb scale extension #2.1: 76-77 (12 mm.)



Interlude #7: 77-78 (15 mm.)

Sop. Solo Cello from Interlude #1: 79-83 (48 mm.)



Interlude #8: 83-85 (18 mm.)

Sop. F#GAb scale extension 2.2\*: 85 (6 mm.)



Interlude #9: 86-90 (56 mm.)

Sop. D-footfalls: 90-93 (24 mm.)



Interlude #10: 93-94 (12 mm.)

Sop. F#GAb #3: 94-95 (12 mm.)



Sop. F#GAb Scale extension 2.3: 95-96 (6 mm.) → orchestra continues ext. 2.3: 96-97 (18 mm.)



Sop. DbCAB: 98-101 (36 mm.)



Interlude #11: 101-102 (12 mm.)

Sop. DbCAB: 102-103 (12 mm.)



Interlude #12: 104-105 (31 mm.)

Sop. F#GAb #4: 106-112 (70 mm.)



Sop. F#GAb ext. 3: 112-120 (48 mm.)



Finale Section: 120-137 (183 mm.)

Mixed Elements-themes no longer sectioned; stacked atop one another

-return of all themes in orchestra and Soprano; independent sectional timelines

-no definite stopping points or lengthy interludes; Soprano almost always singing overlapping themes

## II. *Beckett Material*

“Isn’t it beautiful?” -Feldman, in a letter to James Knowlson accompanying the text.

--

Feldman found a creative peer in Beckett; he frequently insisted they had a similar conception of structure-or what he verbally expressed as a shared sense of “positioning.”<sup>15</sup> At a 1984 lecture in Darmstadt he spoke further on Beckett’s verbal architecture, redefining “positioning” into “translation.”

“He would write something in English, translate it into French, then translate that thought back into the English that conveys that thought. And I know he keeps doing it. He wrote something for me in 1977, and I got it. I’m reading it. There’s something peculiar. I can’t catch it. Finally, I see that every line is really the same thought said in another way. And yet the continuity acts as if something else is happening. Nothing else is happening. What you’re doing in an almost Proustian way is getting deeper and deeper saturated into the thought.”<sup>16</sup>

Though some Beckett scholars question the accuracy of this description, Feldman tried to musically emulate this idea by taking one harmonic thought, or “pitchy situation,” and “translating” it into another slightly varied reiteration of the same material-- “Always retranslating and then saying, now let’s do it with another kind of focus.”<sup>17</sup> This description provides vital context to a piece whose content-conservation could easily misread as musical redundancy.

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Peter Jahn, "Isn't Morton Beckett...Samuel Feldman...?" Isn't Morton Beckett...Samuel Feldman...? by Hans-Peter Jahn, section goes here, accessed March 13, 2018, <http://www.cnvill.net/mfjahn.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman: Darmstadt Lecture 1984*, July 25, 1984, 3, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.cnvill.net/mfdarmstadt1984.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



This Beckett-inspired technique would persist throughout Feldman's future writing. An interviewer described Feldman's earlier music as having chords that establish "a completely different world from the former one." To this he replied "...now I just try to repeat the same chord. I'm reiterating the same chord in inversions. I enjoy that very much, to keep the inversions alive in a sense where everything changes, and nothing changes."<sup>18</sup> This effect achieves a more unsettling memory erasure than that of the former method while also managing to deceive the listener's aural clock, and Feldman hoped this musical approach would mirror the mood of the text. His musical decisions were often negotiated between what he called "the Beckett Material" and "the Feldman Equivalent." While in a broader sense, Feldman's harmonic conceptualization of the text manifests in the entire work--the real compromise is most obvious in the musical relationships within the Soprano voice.

The 10-page length of the "overture" was designated by nothing other than the efficiency of USPS ground shipping in 1976. He received the text on page 10, and, for this "very practical reason," introduced the Soprano on page 11.<sup>19</sup> A similar turn of practical reasoning most likely dictated the phrasal splicing and prolongations necessary to adapt ten lines of prose to span an operatic scale. Feldman's recorded Howard Skempton discussion is the most detailed source in which he describes the text setting process and the Soprano's musical role in *Neither*. He writes of a wish to "...create the feeling that she's singing, and you have a feeling that there is a melody and yet there is no melody. But if there was a melody, a kind of, as if you're hearing a melody and there was no melody, you see... That idea of the color changes going around her."<sup>20</sup>

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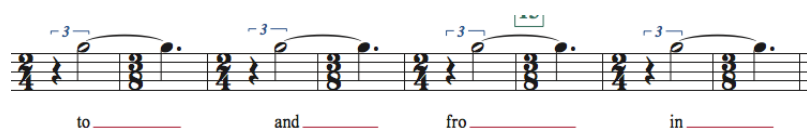
<sup>18</sup> Walter Zimmermann, *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Musicians* (Vancouver: Selbstverl., 1976), 233.

<sup>19</sup> Skempton, "Beckett as Librettist," 1977.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

He began by writing the same repeated pitch in disconnected intervals--producing a bell-like toll. Rhythmically uniform, Feldman described the arrangement as “falling into a grid:” this grid-structure recalls aspects of Feldman’s earlier graph methodology. In this context he likens it metaphorically to “Beckett’s breathing.”

The Soprano’s opening ‘non-melody’ is more of a recurrent suspended durational value instead of a singular rhythmic idea.<sup>21</sup> Its cell-like repetition functions almost isorhythmically. The alternating time signatures,  $\frac{2}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{8}$ , coupled with the entrance landings on offbeat triplets, impede the ear from latching onto any perceptible, rhythmic-gravitational pull.



Mindful of the extreme difficulty to sing so softly in such a high register, Feldman made some adjustments to the previously identical pitch-durations based on the more difficult syllables to sustain in the voice. He describes these moments as points where the text’s lyrical autonomy prevails over his endemic musical instincts: or rather, as points where the ‘Beckett Material’ takes decisive precedence. Two such occasions occur on the words “gently” and “impenetrable” --where the triplet grid figure (as seen on the previous page) is not entirely abandoned but modified to fit particular obligatory verbal articulations.<sup>22</sup> The Soprano’s pitch content remains fixed on a G for 120 measures, but the surrounding orchestral color-shifts supply an underlying sense of momentum to an otherwise stagnant line.



<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The image displays a musical score for Soprano and Orchestra. The score is divided into two main sections, each starting with a rehearsal mark '15'. The first section is in 3/8 time, and the second is in 2/4 time. The Soprano part is written on a single staff, while the Orchestra is written on multiple staves. A red box highlights a specific note in the Soprano part, with a red arrow pointing down to another red box in the Orchestra part. Another red box highlights a section of the Orchestra part, with a red arrow pointing up to the Soprano part. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ppp* and *mp*, and performance instructions like *Cym.* and *tr.*. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

The advancing Soprano-G permeates through shuffling orchestral mosaics, acting as the lone, clear image inside a rotating aural kaleidoscope. Its singularity is self-evident in this sense, but it does not exclusively act alone. There are many occasions when the Soprano pitches fall inconspicuously into other neighboring harmonic arrangements. Presumably, in most operas, the vocal and instrumental material would bear a strong relation with one another: so strong that it can be known to at times verge on symbiotic codependency.

In Neither, the Soprano and Orchestra retain a relationship, but it is not one of active correspondence. The Soprano's intervallic associations do not deviate from those written in the orchestra, but directionally they function on different planes with little exception. The orchestra's music is vertically constructed, and the Soprano music moves in stark horizontal contrast to this enveloping framework. In the chapter covering the orchestral composition, the musical design-scheme will be dissected at length, but when relating to the Soprano content these adjacent structures will be passed over.

One such example of interplay between Soprano and orchestra occurs just before rehearsal 15 (left). The tam-tam tremolo duration mirrors the length of the Soprano-grid but enters a measure behind the Soprano and sustains for an extra quarter

note. At rehearsal 18 the tam-tam rhythm compresses to mirror the grid-size exactly. Right at 15 the flutes enter with an F# a minor ninth against the Soprano's G. The F#/G clash appears frequently in the successive content, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  step relationships command the harmonic syntax from start to finish. This is the most overt example of musical communication between the parts in the Soprano's opening, but it is far from the most significant example of a rhythmic and harmonic correlation between these elements.

The musical components amassed over time invariably progress before reaching a sudden halt at rehearsal 24. The ensuing textural reconstruction is accompanied by a new motif in the Soprano voice.

Pictured above is the Soprano's second grid-formation. The addition of the F# and Ab forms a perpendicular reimagining of the 3-half-step cluster-columns in the orchestra. The Soprano's once steady call echoes between diaphanous string-harmonics and scarcely audible pulses in the woodwinds. Later in the piece, these particular pitches(above) become an axis around which the greater harmony shifts. At this time its ascent fades into a lengthy interlude. Of the interlude, Feldman remarked,

“What made me determine the length of the intermezzo interlude between her singing, that I can't answer really in any kinda way. A world from “gently part again”. It's almost as if I'm just like reflecting on it.... I didn't want a cause and effect continuity, a kinda glue that would take me from one door to another. I wanted to treat each sentence as a world.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Skempton, “Beckett as Librettist,” 1977.

The interlude begins with a sparse, pointillistic pattern of displaced  $\frac{1}{2}$  step clusters that sound with one another in believably incidental groupings.

The image shows a page of a musical score, rehearsal 29-30. The score is for a full orchestra and includes staves for Fl. 1, 2, 3; Ob. 1, 2, 3; C. a.; Cl. 1, 2; B. Cl.; Bsn. 1, 2, 3; Hrn. 1, 2, 3; Tpt. 1, 2, 3; Tbn. 1, 2, 3; Tr.; Vl. I; Vl. II; Va.; Vc. div.; and Cb. The score is marked with 'PPP' (pianissimo) and 'tutti' dynamics. The tempo markings are 2/4, 3/8, and 3/4. The score is marked with rehearsal numbers 29 and 30. The score is marked with 'UE 21 364' at the bottom.

This motion abruptly halts with the entry of broad, sustained, secundal harmonies played in 5-part Viola divisi (rehearsal 51, see next page), accompanied by solo Cello. The Cello fills the Soprano's register-vacancy in her absence and wavers between a Gb and an F. Feldman compared the Cello's unchanging self-governance to "a certain Beckett word that had a life in terms of its duration."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.





Rhythmic augmentation and time-signature extension/diminution are two frequently employed devices that provide a sense of malleability to rigid, introductory themes.

In the first F#GAb variation (2), Feldman performed the opposite alterations from those in the G-Gb variant (1). Instead of turning adjacent measures inward toward each other (1.b.), Feldman kept the base rhythm in strict order throughout the repeated variation (2.b.). Rather than separating tied articulations (1.b.), the second rendering elongates and smoothens the rhythm from its original form (2.b.). Three repetitions span 12 measures before the Soprano is cut off mid-thought by a third, large interlude.

1.a.

to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ fro \_\_\_\_\_

1.b.

beck - oned \_\_\_\_\_ back and \_\_\_\_\_

2.a.

once \_\_\_\_\_ neared \_\_\_\_\_ gently \_\_\_\_\_ close, \_\_\_\_\_

2.b.

head - less of \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ way \_\_\_\_\_

By the time the third interlude appears, Feldman has already revealed most of the base pigments that dominate *Neither's* palette. Therefore, this section is characterized by its emphasis



on detailed micro-pattern construction. Composed of the work's omnipresent fundamental harmonic elements, these highly developed designs unfold above familiar orchestral motivic anchors. This introduction paves the way for their further elaboration and expansion in the smaller orchestral passages to come. It is the last prolonged instrumental section that puts forward a sizeable amount of "new" material. Only two more thickly-textured recurring patterns join the densely crowded thematic throng in the successive passages, and both contain harmonies and structure derived from those implemented in this interlude.

At the section's closing, the Soprano circles back and sings the original G-grid for 12 measures alongside a portrayal of the pointillistic section that began the first interlude. In another showing of the time distortion technique applied to the F#GAb variation, the time signature and the pitch duration of every second measure correspondingly broaden to twice their lengths.



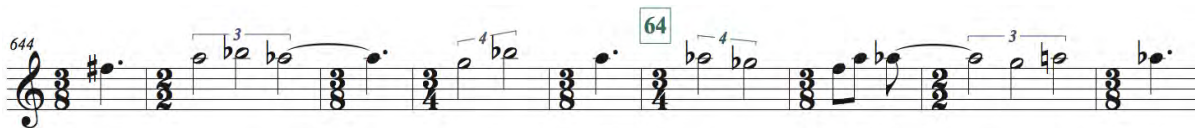
The G-grid return rounds off the Soprano's opening material that depicts a chief method of Feldman's abstraction in this piece: to evoke recognition without complete affirmation. Recurrently, a clearly stated thought is swept away by mammoth textures, and when it returns it is the same, yet not entirely--similar enough activate the memory but altered enough to cause doubt. These 12 measures cap off the first Soprano section rather symmetrically. The repeated G and the F#GAb line form bases that result in five repeated translations with the Gb-grid at its center (see Soprano themes page).

After a 24-measure cascading Tam-tam interlude, the Soprano embarks on its most diversified thematic elaboration thus far. Originating from the F#GAb sequence, it begins with

the 2.b. variation from the preceding page. From there, it omits the  $\frac{3}{4}$  measure of rest and descends from Ab back down to the G before leaping up a minor third to Bb-breaking the Soprano's 500-measure Ab ceiling. This adds another whole-step to the continuing descension back down to F#.



In the above example the two additions of the Bb pitch and third-leaps occur simultaneously, but in immediate, differing contexts both devices are utilized as a means of melodic expansion. For example, the final F# in the above figure becomes the next springboard for another minor-third jump in the next phrase. It leaps up to an A natural--another new pitch for the Soprano voice.



The third newly incorporated mechanism for phrase-extension here is the allowance for whole step motion. The phrase beginning at 644 (directly above), begins on the F# at the end of the last phrase (638), and then leaps to an A natural before moving upward to another Bb. As established in the first phrase from the F#GAb ascension, this phrase likewise moves downward after reaching its Bb peak. A way to quicken the descent, which was first only built upon half-step motion, would be to include whole-step motion seen thrice in the phrase above (644). The orchestra anticipates the pitch-pliability in the Soprano voice. The instrumental music begins with a strict pitch arrangement, but eventually comes to include whole steps within the motives

that allow for a broader range of intervallic possibilities and relationships. As the section continues a newfangled melodic “crippled symmetry appears” in the vocal line.

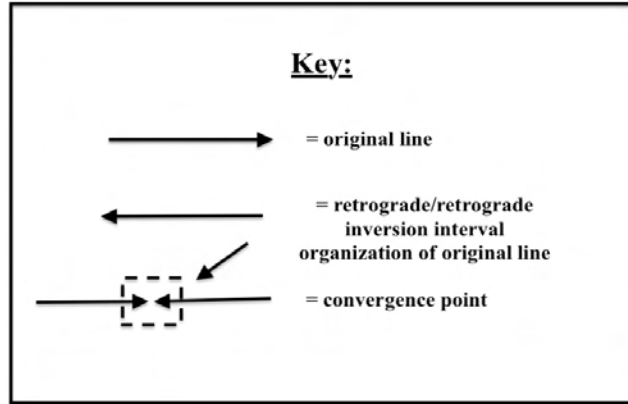
The first pitches in the section act as a quasi-Schenkerian resolution from the ascending F#GAb in the preceding section below. The resolution stems from Schenker’s ideological conception of ‘mental retention’--wherein pitches within an extended time-lapse that are part of an established line are kept in the mind of the listener until the next structural tone in the upper voice presents itself. The supposed awareness of this resolution-prolongation is substantiated by Feldman’s known fixation on aural memory, as well as the overt usage of symmetrical formations in the Soprano material up to this point.

500 50 in - tent on the

603 one gleam or

610 61-62 63 the other

After the F# landing, the formerly constrained pitch-order dissolves into melodic transience. With the third-interval and whole step inclusions, the Soprano line migrates for various heights of scalar ascension and descension. The wanderings appear inconsistent but relate to one another via several overlapping intervallic equivalences.



Musical score for Soprano (S) with annotations. The score consists of five systems of staves. The lyrics "the" and "other" are under the first two staves. The annotations include:

- System 1 (Measures 610-630):** Original line (black) and retrograde line (green) are shown. Convergence points are marked with boxes at measures 61-62 and 63. A red box highlights measure 63. A blue arrow points from measure 61-62 to measure 63.
- System 2 (Measures 640-646):** Original line (black) and retrograde line (red) are shown. A red box highlights measure 64. A blue arrow points from measure 64 to measure 63.
- System 3 (Measures 647-652):** Original line (black) and retrograde line (purple) are shown. A purple box highlights measure 64. A blue arrow points from measure 64 to measure 63.
- System 4 (Measures 653-658):** Original line (black) and retrograde line (blue) are shown. A blue box highlights measure 65. A blue arrow points from measure 65 to measure 63.
- System 5 (Measures 659-690):** Original line (black) and retrograde line (orange) are shown. A blue box highlights measure 65. A blue arrow points from measure 65 to measure 63. The dynamic marking *ppp* is present at the end of the system.



Likewise, the convergence point of the final retrograde-inversion statement (pg. 18, yellow box) moves up from the Ab median to A-natural. Of the six such phrases, the last is the only one not to have its axis-point on an Ab.

From the rehearsal 61 section onward, the Soprano voice performs reproductions of two themes from the first two interludes, variations on her introductory themes, and further expansions upon the material in this last passage. These few fundamental organizations are extensively refashioned to form the musical body that will endure throughout the rest of the piece.

Alterations realized through repetition in the orchestra are not so transparent as those taking place more gradually in the isolated contour of the Soprano voice, although many fundamental arrangements in the orchestra precede later spellings in the vocal part. Despite its precursory nature and its elaborately crafted unfolding designs, the role of the orchestra within this piece is not self-determinate. The Soprano, simplistic as its progression may immediately appear in comparison, foretells the more meaningful changes come to be observed inside the otherwise perfunctory instrumentations, and acts as an isolated signal to forthcoming changes not unlike a ‘canary’ inside the framework of a deep musical ‘coal-mine.’ The Soprano’s slowly creeping ascension, hinted at in this most recently-discussed passage, is the most significant of these musical catalysts. The Soprano’s labored climb forecasts a responsorial exaction within the orchestra in the final pages of the piece; it is a small, fleeting change that shapes a change brought about almost 800 measures later.

Though the functional relationship between the two entities differs from those typically observed in operas, the mere presence of a substantial exchange is most likely one of the strongest musical arguments to justify its operatic definition--besides the obvious matters of

scale, libretto, staging, and vocal material. Feldman himself contended with the term's ascription, often referring to it instead as an "anti-opera."<sup>25</sup> Even so, the components' architectural and functional divisions do not amount to more than the ultimate sum of their parts. Studying the orchestra's material and evolution not only contextually illuminates the origins behind the Soprano's inaugural pitch-content, rhythmic-orientations, and subsequent extensions, but also provides compelling insights into how small, interlocking mechanisms combine to engineer the opera's vast textural expanses.

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine Laws, *Music and Language in the Work of Samuel Beckett* (University of York, 1996), 204.

Graph Key:

X	-	rhythmically uniform/pulse
▨	-	staggered entrances
▣	-	chord cycles
■	-	sustained over/under hang

Green = any 3 semitone structure



Pink X =



Orange X Harp =



Light blue vertical stripe =



Dark Blue Perc. solid =




Dark Blue Perc. X =

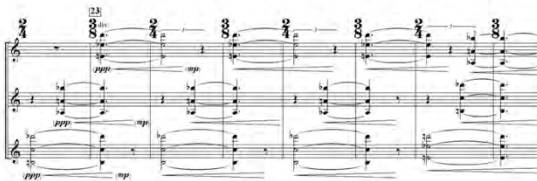


Red Soprano X =





Yellow Harps (Rehearsal 22) = 

Green horizontal lines = 

Red X Diagonal lines Va. = 

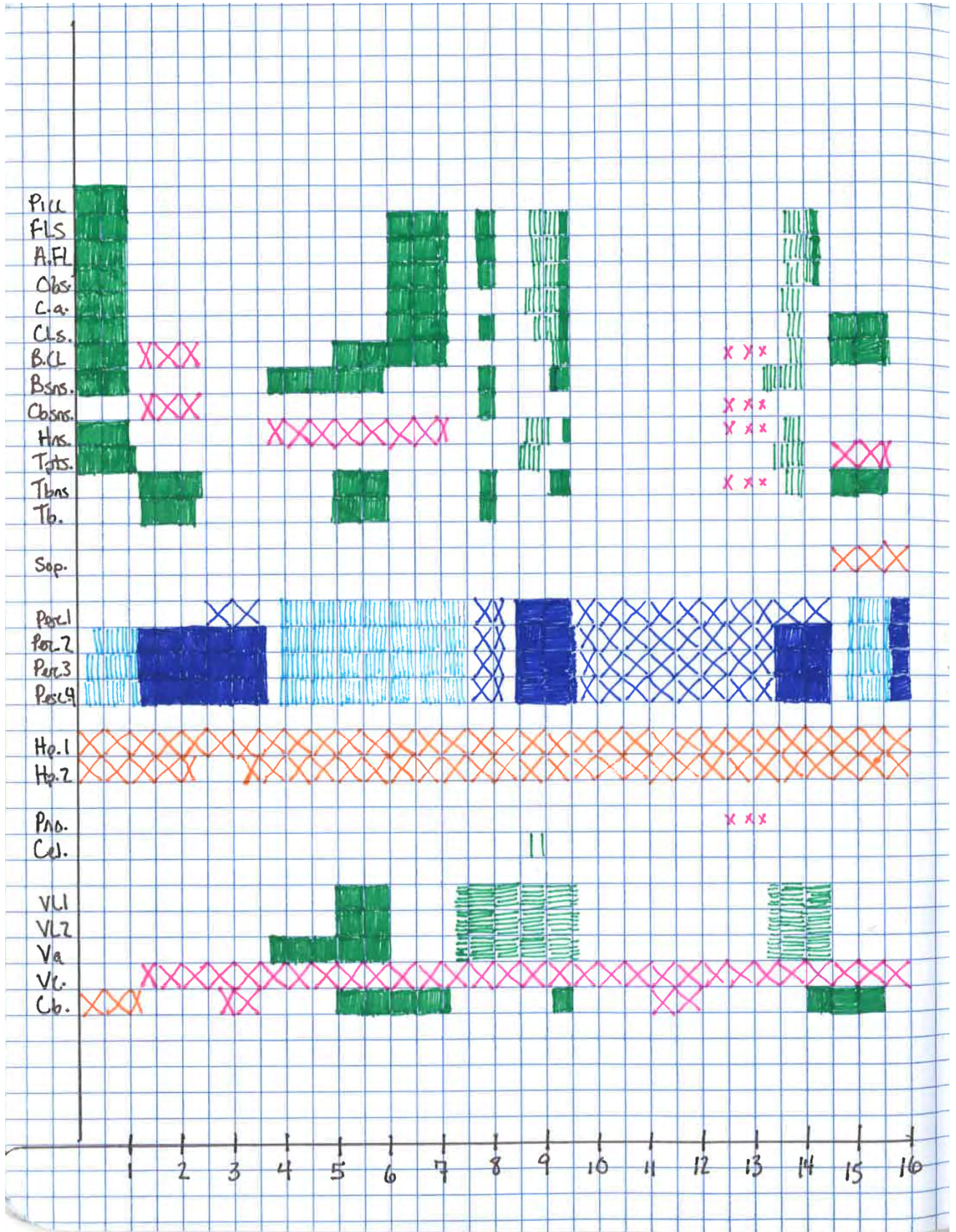
Purple X with dots = 

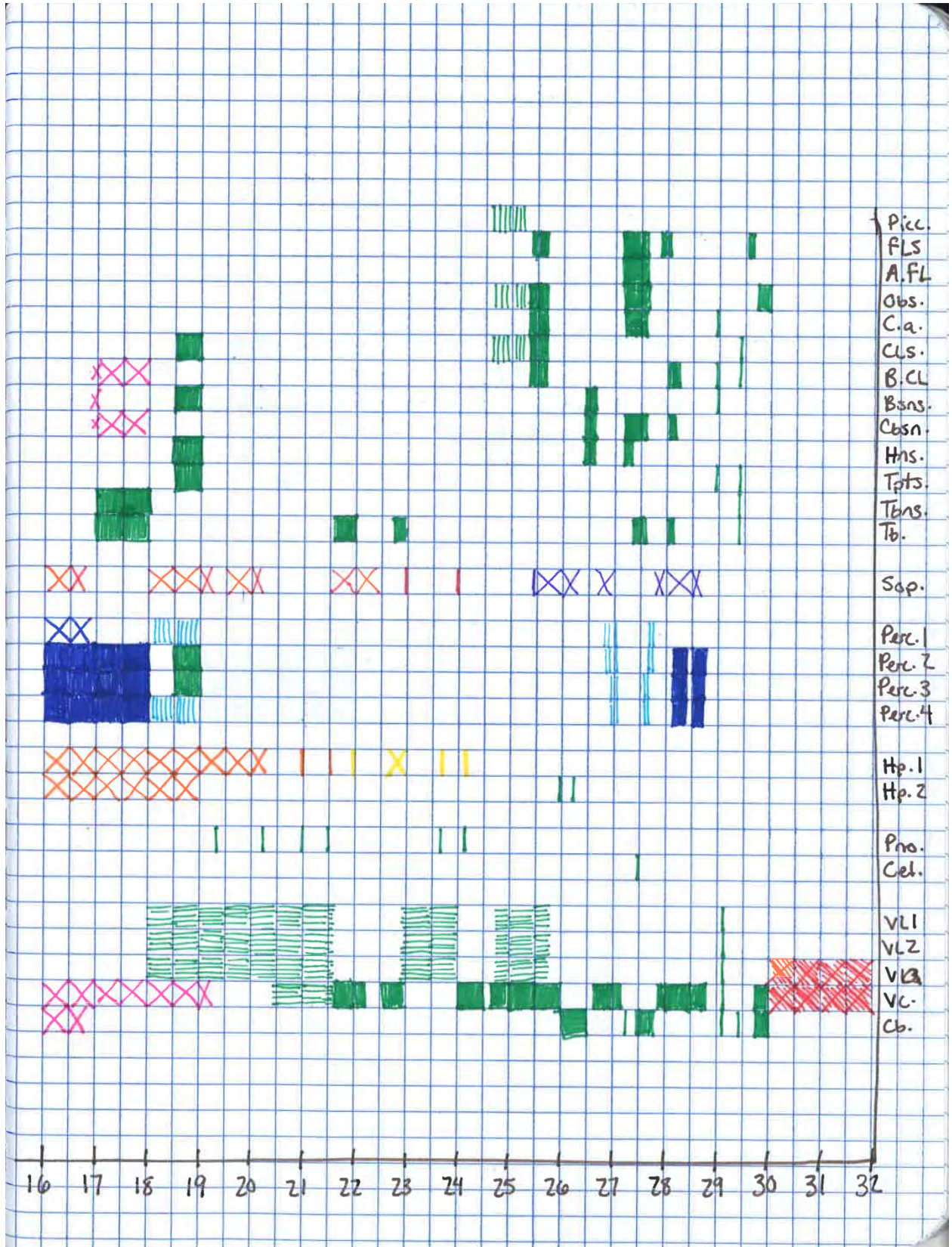
Light Blue X Lower strings = 

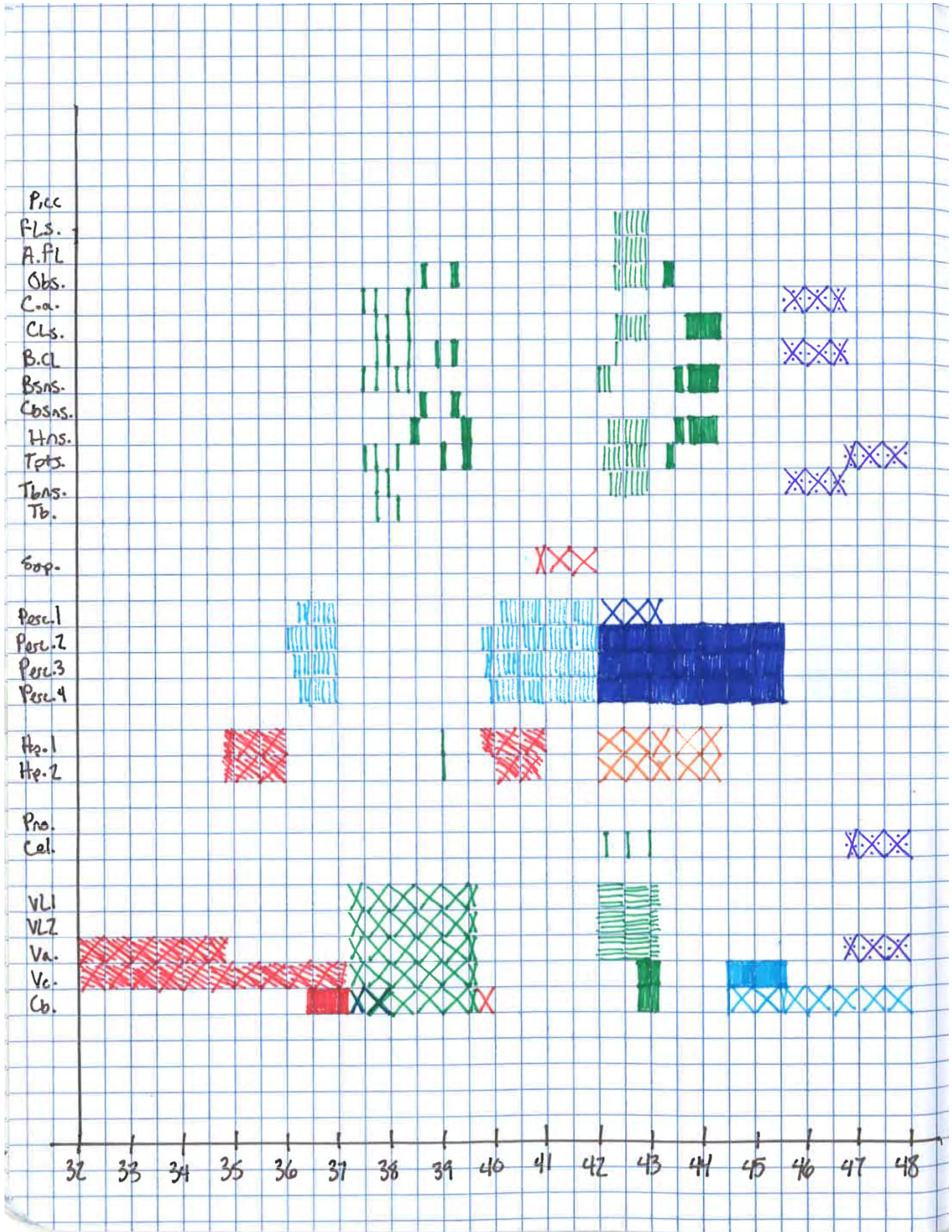
Purple Asterisk Sop. = 

Half-blue Half-green X (104) = 

*This page is intentionally left blank for the full view of the graph  
beginning on page 36.*







The image shows a handwritten musical score on blue grid paper. The score is organized into two main columns of patterns, with a list of instruments on the right side. The x-axis at the bottom is labeled with measures 48 through 63.

**Left Column Labels:**

- Voicing Simultaneity Pattern
- V.S.P.
- V.S.P.
- V.S.P.

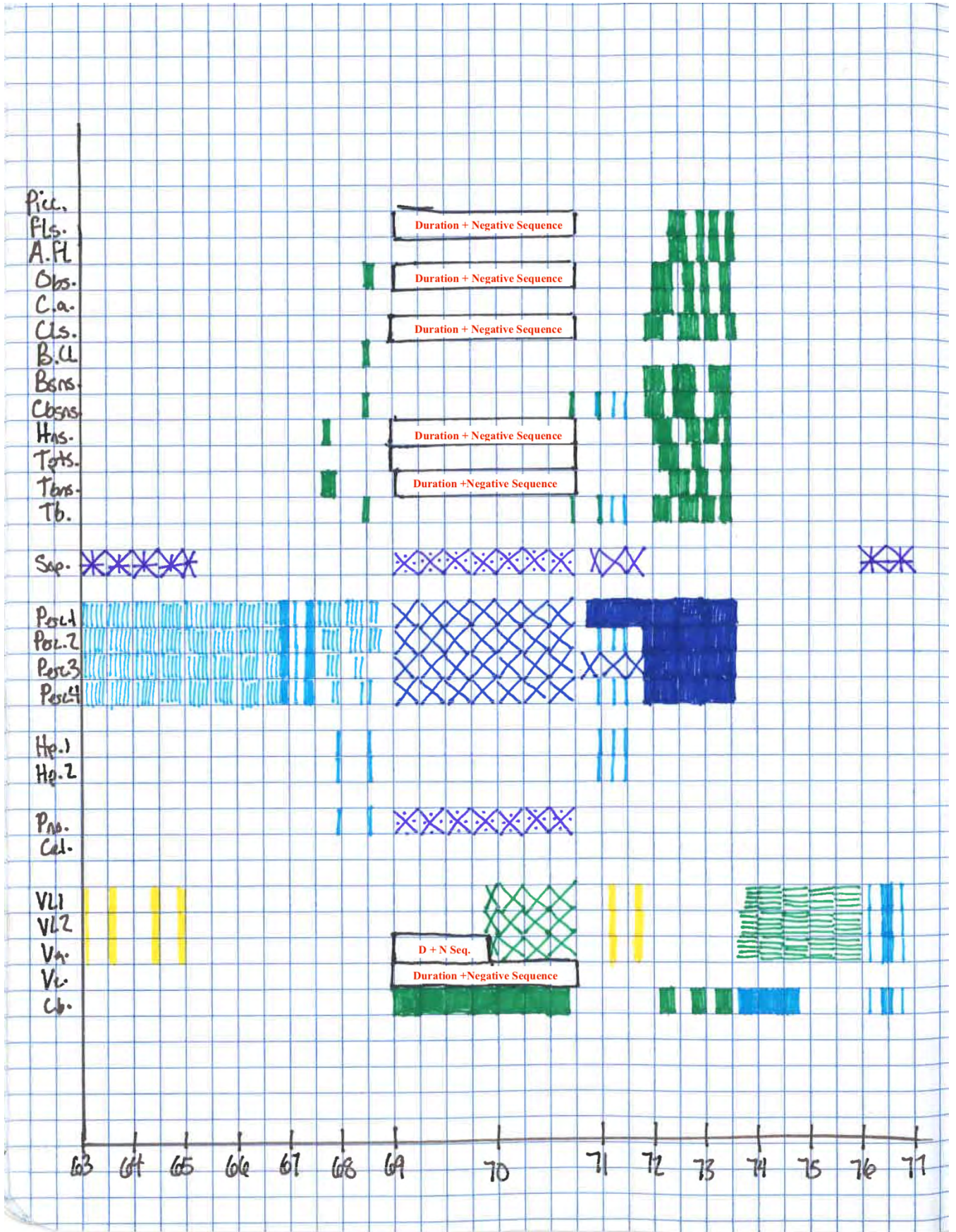
**Right Column Labels:**

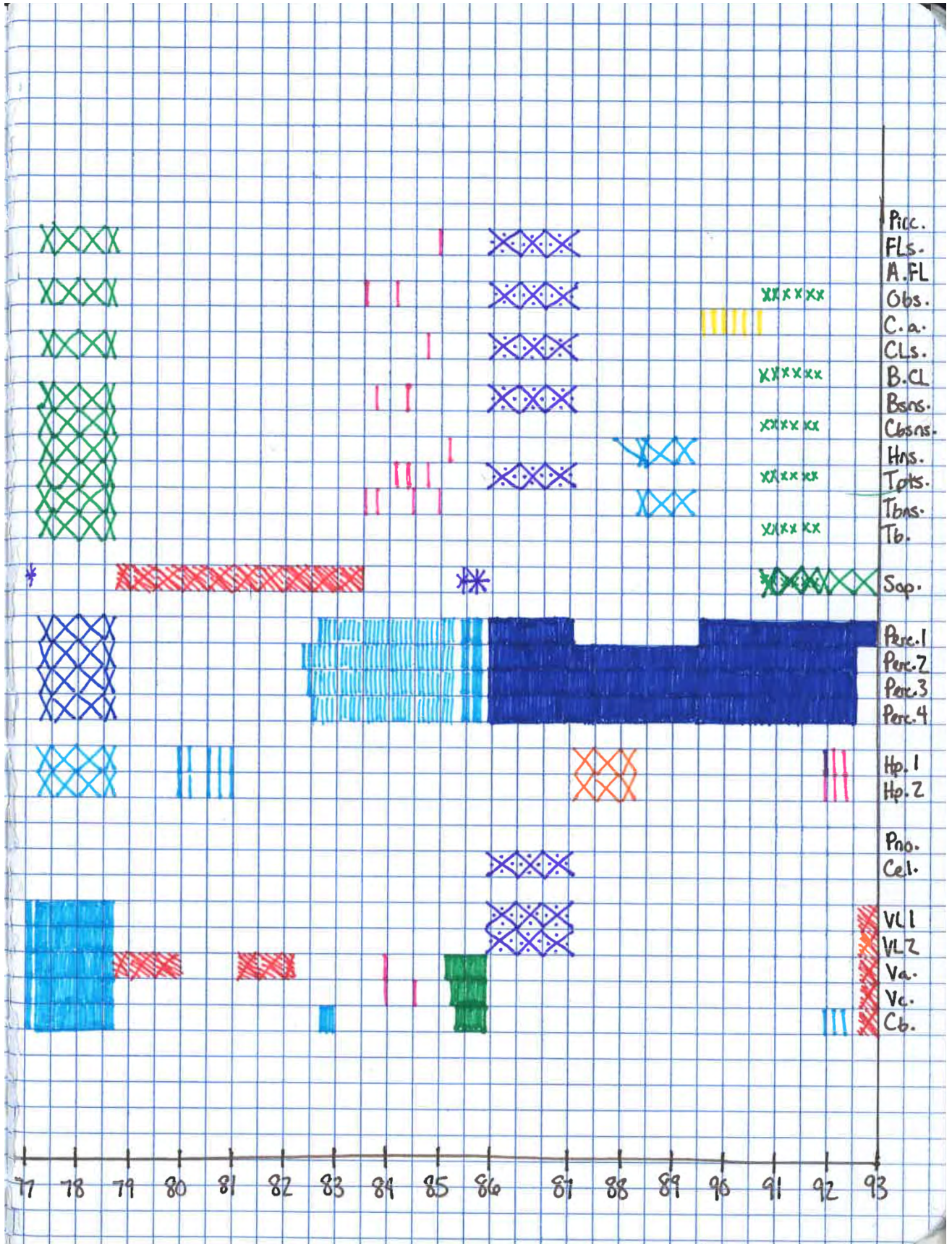
- Duration-based
- D.B. Sequence
- D.B.S.
- D.B.S.
- D.B.S.
- D.B.S.
- D.B.S.

**Instrument List (Right Side):**

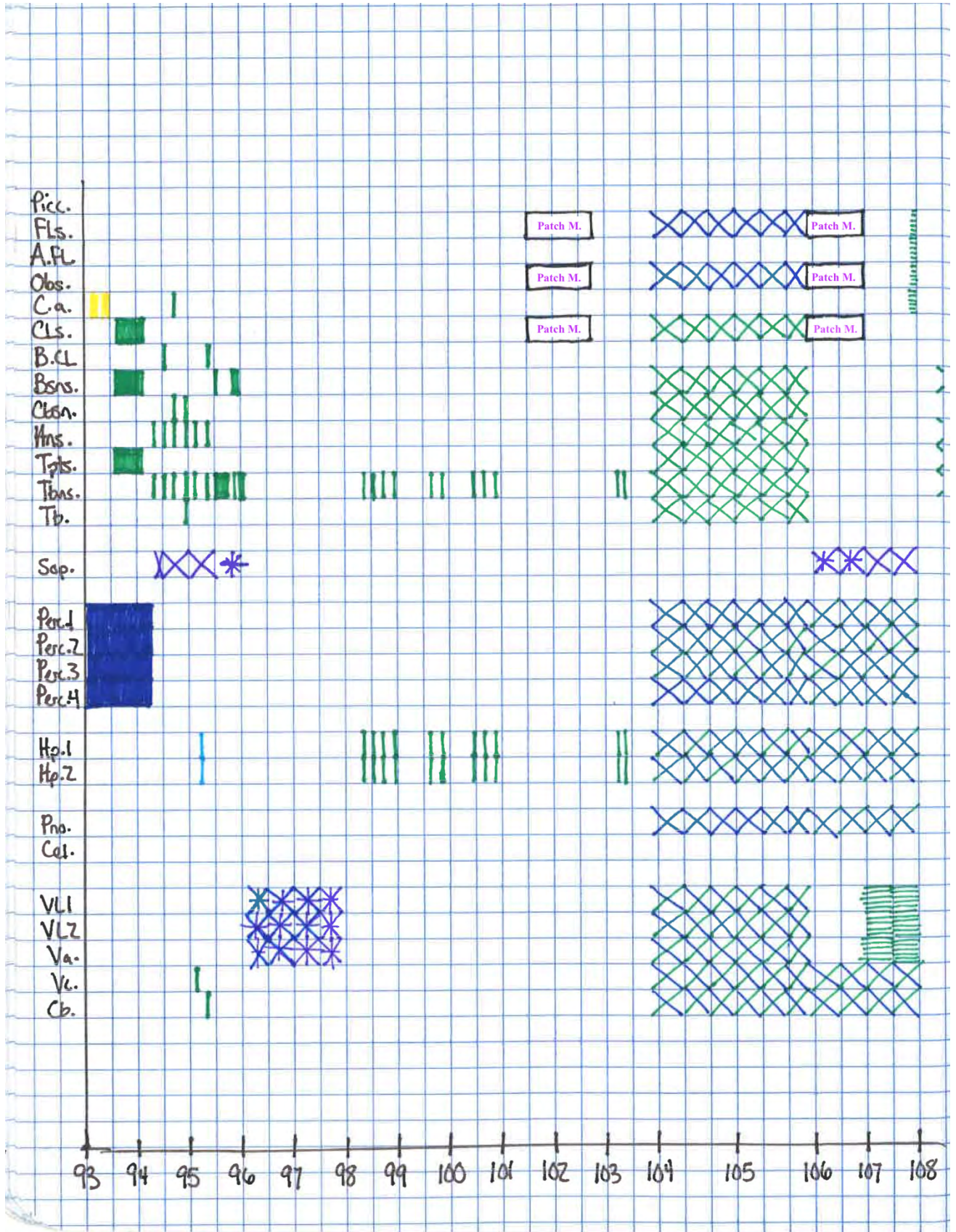
- Picc.
- Fls.
- A.Fl
- Obs.
- C.a
- Cl.s.
- B.Cl
- Bsns.
- Cbsns.
- Hrs.
- Tpts.
- Tbns.
- Tb.
- Sop.
- Perc.1
- Perc.2
- Perc.3
- Perc.4
- Hp.1
- Hp.2
- Pno.
- Cel.
- VLI
- VL2
- Vc.
- Cb.

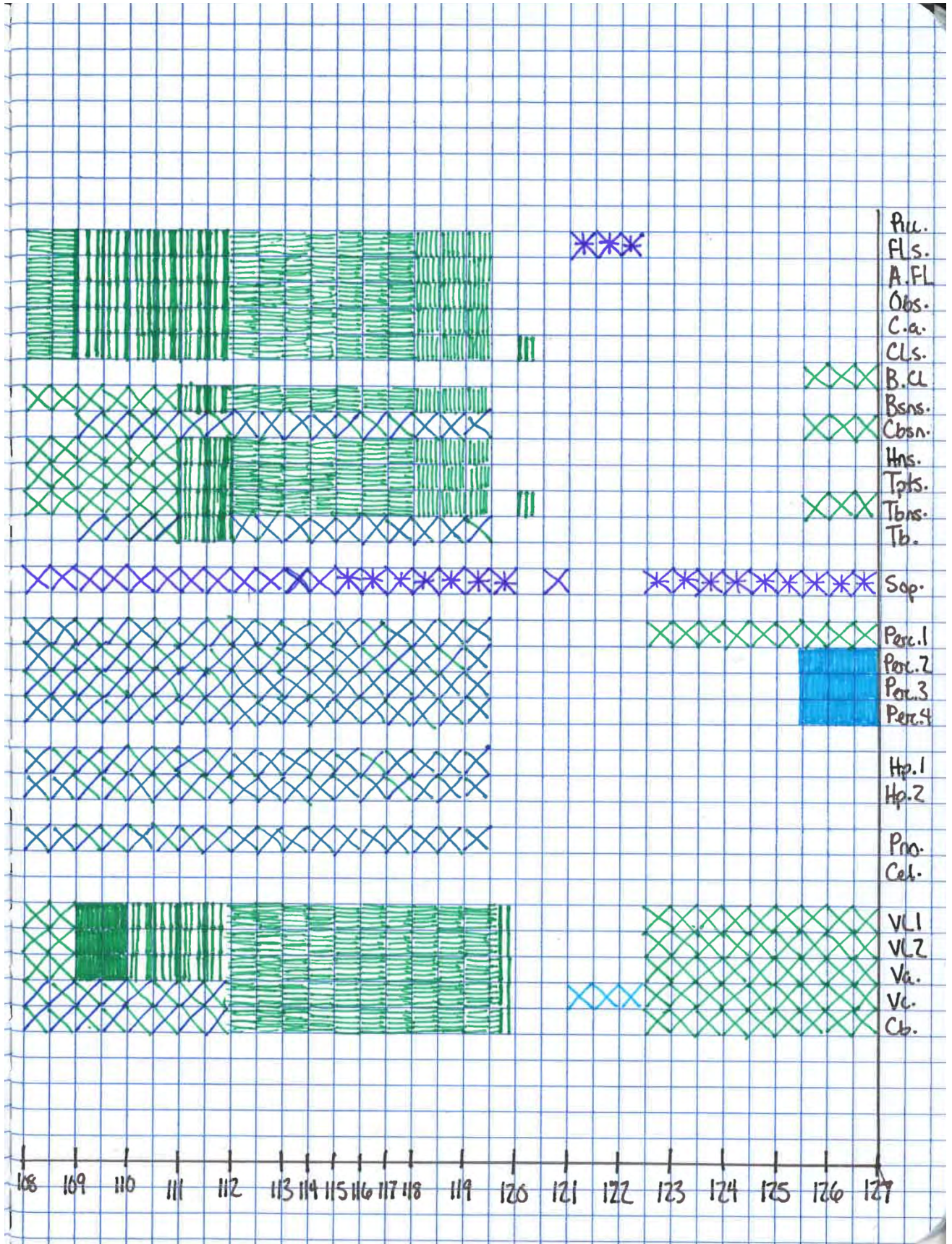
**Measure Markers (Bottom):** 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63

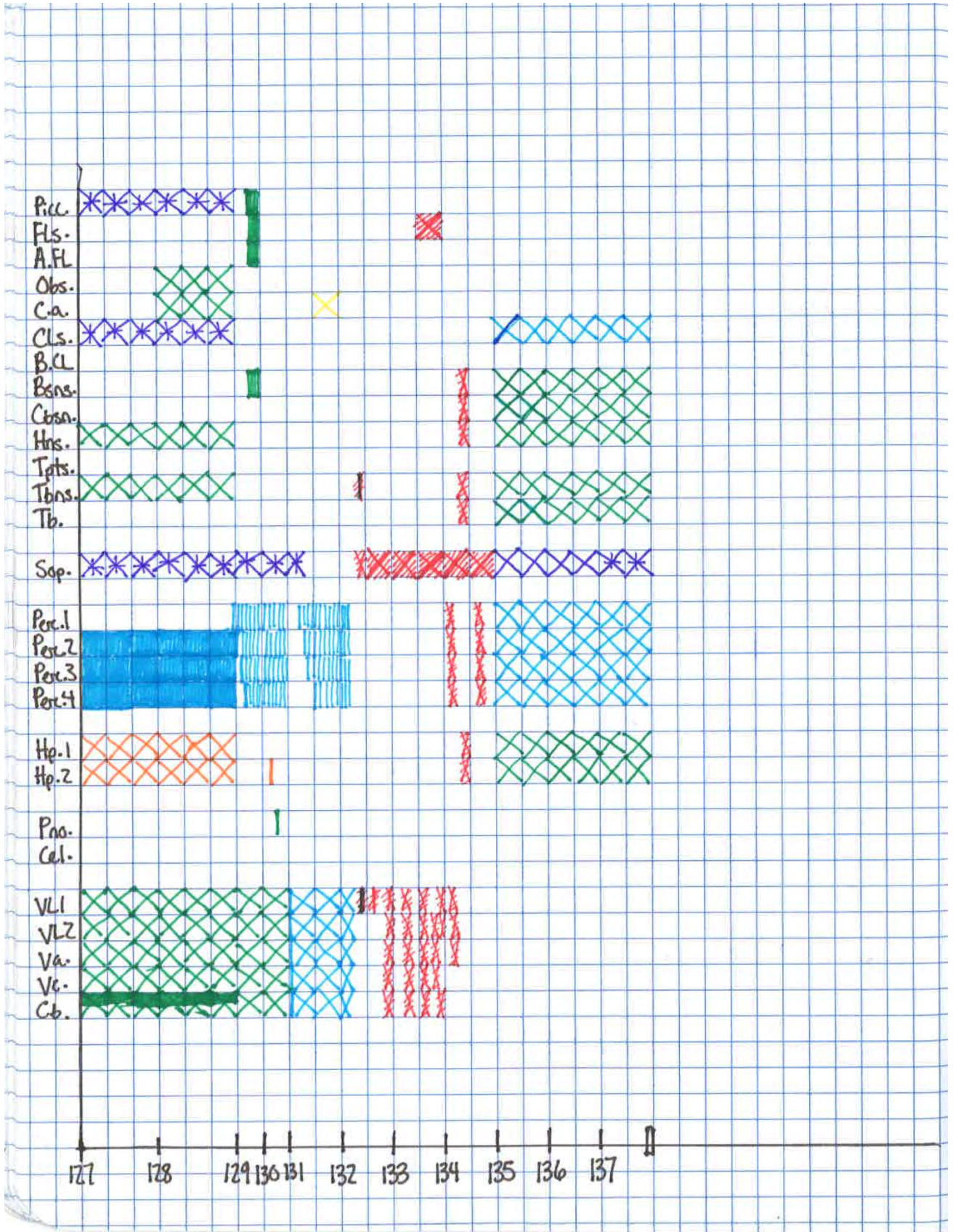












### III. *Charting Neither: Exploring Content Relationships Throughout the Work*

The attached graph serves as an attempt to conclusively chart the progression and recurrence of the pitch, duration, and rhythmic ideas represented throughout the entirety of the work through differing symbols and color-codes. These act as visual guides to their audible correspondences, while providing a sense of aural clarity in a piece where straightforward listening cues can be difficult to immediately discern (with the exception of the distinguishable soprano voice). Not only is it intended as an effective listening guide, but it also aims to highlight the simultaneous connections and departures between actively sounding instruments at any given time; this aspect is prioritized within the graph, as many of the recurring passages are marked by closely similar materials. There are moments when multiple symbols or colors could effectively occur in the same space, but the added consideration of coinciding musical relationships serves as another determining lens through which to decide what marking is most effective in a particular instance. The accompanying key labels the following concepts, but the following pages provide further explanation.

The organization of the graph is set up along a traditional X-Y axis. The horizontal X-axis is numbered according to the rehearsal numbers throughout the piece--spanning from 1-137. The standard number of 10 measures between rehearsal numbers is established early on and only begins to vary at rehearsal 54, meaning this generic size persists for the first 540 measures of the piece. For the sake of brevity without sacrificing detail, each graph square is set to equal to five measures. The first few deviations from this 10-measure model add an extra five measures between rehearsal numbers, so two squares become three. Much further into the piece the space between rehearsal numbers strays slightly from the norm--sometimes 12 measures, sometimes 8. But in these instances, the original unit of 2 squares between rehearsal numbers remains

unaltered because the difference is minor. The divisions of these two squares change respective to the amount of measures between rehearsal numbers (e.g. 1 sq.=6 for 12 measure length, 1 sq.=4 for 8 measure length). The Y-axis lists all participating instruments grouped by types that are separated with one line between them. In summation, this skeletal structure is a timeline showing where each instrument is playing.

The markings themselves are responsible for conveying what is happening rhythmically and harmonically through assorted shapes, symbols, and colors. While this system has been implemented precisely, it would be reductive to limit the nuance of Morton Feldman's composing to a few shapes and colors. What I have attempted to visually represent, rather, is a thorough approximation of the observable repetitive tendencies found throughout the entirety of the piece. Rhythmic occurrences are delineated by symbols, and pitch schemes are separated by color-coordination.

The four symbolic markings for rhythm indicate four general types of rhythmic movement: sustained note values, rhythmically uniform pulse-like motion, cyclical motion, and staggering/cascading motion. Sustained values are noted with filled in blocks. Static-homophonic elements are symbolized by an "X;" this symbol is sometimes altered with surrounding dots or diagonal lines if it conveys a more specific/prominent motive than its color-shape combination would suggest. These chunks are not always acting as strictly equidistant pulses, but if the figure's motion alludes to this structural tendency, it is still classified in this way. The latter two look similar in the score and in the chart, and they both use an assortment of smaller lines within one area to symbolize their rhythmic structure. The element that changes to specify their type is the direction of these lines. Horizontal line groupings are cycles and vertical line groupings are staggering/cascading formations.

The color-coding indicates certain specific pitch or intervallic organizations, but the meanings behind certain repeating colors change depending upon their relative contexts. From the first glance the color green catches the eye, and its prominence remains throughout the duration of the entire graph. It signifies any grouping of three consecutive half-steps, and its status is solidified by the frequency with which it appears throughout the opening stretch of the piece. The orange “X” is the second-most constant throughout the start, and it represents the alternating E#/F in the Harps (see fig.1). Similarly, the Cello’s pink “X” stands for the D#/E pulse, and all other pink “X’s” convey the doubling of this passage in other instruments (fig. 2).

Fig.1 shows two staves of Harp 1 and Harp 2. The notation includes various notes and rests, with some notes marked with 'X' symbols. Fig.2 shows a single staff for Violoncello (Vc.) with notes and rests, also marked with 'X' symbols. The 'X' symbols are color-coded: orange for Harp 1, pink for Violoncello, and light blue for other instruments mentioned in the text.

Light blue is one of the aforementioned colors that carries multiple meanings dependent upon its instrumental context. For instance, when viewed as vertical lines in the percussion section, it indicates the cascading Tam-tams segment (Fig. 3). In other instruments it denotes a grouping of only two-consecutive half-steps, in contrast with the green three half-step cluster marking. The exceptions to this specification between two and three half-steps are the passages containing multiple contrary glissandi between instruments (Fig. 4). Occurring exclusively in the clarinets, lower strings, and only once in the horns and trombones (rehearsal 88), these sections are also noted with light blue, regardless of the half-steps present, because the resulting aural effect is distinct from other comparable pitch areas.

Figure 3 shows a musical score for four percussion parts (Perc. 1, Perc. 2, Perc. 3, Perc. 4). Above the staves, a sequence of time signatures is indicated: 4, 8, 4, 8, 4, 8, 4, 8, 4. Perc. 1 includes a 'B. d.' (basso drum) part. Perc. 2 and Perc. 3 include 'T. d.' (tom drum) parts. Perc. 4 includes 'L. v.' (low voice) parts. The score features various rhythmic patterns and dynamics markings.

Figure 4 shows a musical score for 'Ve. div.' (Violoncello diviso). The score is written in bass clef and features a sequence of time signatures: 3/4, 3/4, 3/4, 3/4, 3/4. A box containing the number '122' is placed above the staff. The score consists of two staves with rhythmic patterns and dynamics markings.

Dark blue is reserved for the Viennese-trichord first introduced in the Timpani (Gb-C#-G) (Fig. 5), and when seen throughout all of the percussion voices it designates any percussion pattern centered around this chord within the Timpani (Fig. 6). This specific pitch arrangement gets its own color designation because it is one of the most constant intervallic arrangements whose pitches and register are unaltered throughout the work.

Figure 5 shows a musical score for three percussion parts (Perc. 2, Perc. 3, Perc. 4). Each part is labeled 'Timp.' (Timpani). The score features rhythmic patterns and dynamics markings, with a box containing the number '122' placed above the Perc. 3 staff.

Figure 6 shows a musical score for four percussion parts (Perc. 1, Perc. 2, Perc. 3, Perc. 4). Perc. 1 includes 'Cym.' (Cymbal) and 'Tm.' (Tom) parts. Perc. 2 includes 'Timp.' (Timpani) and 'Mm.' (Muffled drum) parts. Perc. 3 includes 'Mm.' (Muffled drum) and 'Timp. fine to C' (Timpani fine to C) parts. Perc. 4 includes 'Timp.' (Timpani) parts. The score features rhythmic patterns and dynamics markings, with a box containing the number '122' placed above the Perc. 1 staff.

A red “X” is first used in the Soprano voice for the single repeating G motive, but when noted in any other instrumental voice showing the red “X” it alludes to anything resembling the five-part divisi first displayed in the Violas at rehearsal-30 (Fig. 7).

Figure 7

The purple “X” and its two variations originate in the Soprano voice, when the lone-hanging G evolves to add two other bookending pitches: F# and Ab (i.e. F#-G-Ab) (Fig. 8). Most of the observed horizontal activity within this piece originates from the expanding motives in the soprano voice. These designs are cumulatively derived from neighbor-note motion around a G, and in order to note this relationship the same color, purple, is employed. This decision harkens back to one of the aforementioned goals of this graph: to showcase the links between similar, interchangeable, and differing fragments of the piece.

Figure 8

However, their repetitive nature requires an “X” to be written for all of them. This implies a sameness to each of these ideas that requires detailing through variations to the purple “X”: one



taking the form of an “X” marking with surrounding dots (Fig. 9) and another showing added lines that resemble an asterisk (Fig. 10).

Figure 9



Musical notation for Soprano (Sopr.) showing a series of notes with 'X' markings and surrounding dots, indicating a specific pitch arrangement. The notes are grouped with slurs and have a *ppp* dynamic marking.

Figure 10



Musical notation for Soprano (Sopr.) showing a series of notes with asterisk-like markings, indicating a different pitch arrangement. The notes are grouped with slurs and have a *ppp* dynamic marking.

The color yellow seldom occurs in the diagram, but it expresses a particular, uncommonly occurring pitch arrangement that flanks larger, preceding sections. The pitches themselves are fourths built above or below an A. And eventually as the controlled elements of the piece reiterate themselves into exhaustion, this A slides down to an Ab. Its coupled fourth stays the same, as does its consistent placement at the ends of large sections. This position is easily identified when viewing the graph at points where these large chunks, defined by their thick texture and long timespan, narrow into one or two sporadic voices. At the onset of the piece this texture dramatically thins out around rehearsal 21. There, after 200 measures of the harps playing E#/F, they play a low A that seems disconnected from the other sounding parts (Fig. 11).

Figure 11



Musical score for Figure 11, showing parts for Trombones (Tbn. 1, 2, 3), Harps (Hp. 1, 2), Soprano (Sopr.), and Violoncello/Double Bass (Vc. db.). The score includes lyrics: "be - tween two lit - tle refuges". The harp part has a *ppp* dynamic marking. The Vc. db. part has a *ppp* dynamic marking. The score includes various time signatures and a rehearsal mark [22].

The significance of this untethered A is strengthened by its frequent recurrence in similar areas throughout the piece. Examining the above example, it tolls like a sort of interruptive bell. This rhythmic device materializes in numerous contexts throughout the entire span of the opera, at times a tranquil bell and at others a violent thump (ex: Fig. 12). However, none of the other models possesses the consistency of those centered around the A.

Figure 12

The musical score for Figure 12 consists of four staves. Above the first staff, a sequence of time signatures is listed:  $\frac{3}{16}$ ,  $\frac{3}{8}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  (with a box containing '103' above it),  $\frac{3}{8}$ ,  $\frac{3}{16}$ ,  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{8}$ ,  $\frac{3}{16}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{8}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and  $\frac{3}{16}$ . The staves are labeled as follows: Tbn. 1, 2, 3 (bass clef), Hp. 1 (bass clef), Hp. 2 (bass clef), and Sopr. (treble clef). The Tbn. staff shows two notes with accents and a dynamic marking. The Hp. 1 and Hp. 2 staves show two notes with accents and a dynamic marking. The Sopr. staff shows a melodic line with accents and a dynamic marking.

Although it may not bear great audible distinction or autonomy, its appearance throughout the score is structurally cadential in function. These moments of clarity are always short-lived, and ultimately give way to another sweeping textural undertow.

#### IV. *The Feldman Equivalent*

The orchestra successfully conceals its modest source material through the utter breadth of its scale. These cornerstones, in essence, echo the opening intervals of the Soprano's music, but they are not subject to the same limitations of pitch (ex: F#→G→Ab etc.). Imagining the music on a biological level, the instruments within the orchestra have individual functions and obligations, but contain the same DNA, and all work together to sustain the life of the larger organism, in this case, the piece at large.

The common DNA in this case is the root intervallic-composition that begins on the first page of the overture and persists through the end of the piece. Like the Soprano voice, the material within the Orchestra is based off of half-step groupings; in the opening these half-steps are almost exclusively in groupings of three (below, pg. 1-overture). The tri-chord structure is maintained throughout the work, but in the future dyads appear just as prominently.

The image shows a page of a musical score for an orchestral introduction. The score is written for a full orchestra, including Piccolo, Flute 1, Alto Flute, Oboe 1, 2, Cor anglais, Clarinet 1, 2, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon 1, 2, 3, Contrabassoon, Horn 1, 2, 3, Trumpet 1, 2, 3, and Trombone 1, 2, 3. The time signature is 5/16. The Piccolo part has a multi-measure rest for 16 measures. The woodwinds and brasses play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with dynamic markings of ppp and pppoco. The brasses are marked 'con sord.'.

The clusters appear stretched over registral strata or compressed to their tightest formations. When spread, the intervals appear in their natural inverses of sevenths and ninths. There are no specific instruments that play these chords exclusively in one way or the other, but small, consecutive half-step assortments commonly appear in the lower woodwinds and brass. At times solitary pitches or intervals outside of these semitone derivations crop up, but seldomly without the simultaneous presence of a neighboring half-step in another instrument or register (ex. below).

The image shows a musical score excerpt with five staves. From top to bottom:
 

- bn. 1, 2, 3:** Bass clef, 2/4 time signature, *ppp* dynamic. Notes: Bb, C, Db. Above the staff are time signatures: 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8.
- Hp. 1, 2:** Grand staff, bass clef. A box highlights a note on the right-hand staff, with an arrow pointing to it from the Soprano staff.
- Sopr.:** Treble clef. Notes: Ab, A, Bb. Lyrics: "Ab-A-Bb", "between", "two".
- Ve. div.:** Grand staff, bass clef, *ppp* dynamic. Notes: Bb, C, Db. Above the staff are time signatures: 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8. A box highlights the first measure.

 A box labeled "22" is above the Ve. div. staff. A box labeled "a, 2" is above the Hp. 1, 2 staff. A box labeled "B-C-Db" is above the bn. 1, 2, 3 staff.

On many pages all twelve pitches sound at once in their full aggregate--obviating any implication of broad-scale harmonic progression. Due to this, functional analysis is mostly angled toward specific interval interactions and designs and their ensuing rearrangements, adjustments, and evolutions. That being said, whatever shifts may transpire are not as conspicuous as those occurring within the Soprano voice--whose expansions from narrower source-material are much more apparent when viewed in isolation against the orchestra's. Over time, the grip of semitones is slightly weakened by incorporations of whole-steps to well-

established formations. This allows for greater emerging intervallic possibilities. However, this does not greatly lessen the prominence half-step dyads and clusters maintain through the end of the work.

The piece at large relies so heavily upon this dyadic interval grouping that one could with reason define its structure as minimalist. In fact, many have viewed this period of Feldman's style to be inspired and connected to the minimalist movement, but the orientation and progression of these constants sets the work apart from integral characteristics of minimalist works. Like minimalism, *Neither* maintains a steady pace and alters its conserved basis of material over a large expanse of time. Unlike minimalism, Feldman tries to change these repeating elements as much as possible while keeping them within certain pitch constraints: he does this through combining elements which differ rhythmically, motivically, and through varying pattern-based organizations--even though their pitch content remains perpetually locked in its uniformity. Critic John Rockwell, formerly of *The New York Times*, discusses the response to this duality within Feldman's music in the liner notes for a recording of *Crippled Symmetry*. He writes,

“.....the sterner modernists, especially the Europeans, have grown to respect Feldman's seriousness, his overt sense of musical history, his non-pandering exit strategy from the thickets of post-Serialism. Yet at the same time the minimalists and their audiences have found in him a kindred spirit, too, recognizing his spareness of means and protraction of scale as an antecedent of both the motoric minimalism of Steve Reich and Philip Glass.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Rockwell, "Morton Feldman (and Crippled Symmetry)," , accessed April 26, 2018, <http://www.cnvill.net/mfrockwl.htm>.

Although the work's construction denies it a decisive minimalistic classification, this is not to say that aspects outside of pitch-designation lack a quasi-minimalist degree of control.

Another of these systematized domains is centered around the ways in which these specified intervals are rhythmically set. Generally, within the piece there are four ubiquitous mechanisms of rhythmic stratification: homophonic pulse formations (1), sustaining parts which hang above or below other moving textures (2), stacked instrument collections with separate, staggered entry points (3), and patterns that sound together in thick blocks of instrumental groupings (4). Some instruments, or instrument families, gravitate towards one or two of these settings more frequently than others; many do so within instrument-specific motives that repeat in their exact replications of pitch, but their durations are more frequently subject to augmentations and diminutions in repeated spellings.

In examples of homophonic pulse sequences, the term “pulse” is loosely applied. These fragments nevertheless play a similar role by providing a steady rhythmic momentum beneath the other contrasting parts. The “homophonic” label is applied because these singular rhythms often sound alone or doubled simultaneously in other instruments. Feldman thought these devices would bring an essential Beckettian sense of timing to his more spacious, inert backdrops. The clipped rhythms are also intended to mirror the removed, “machine-like” nature of the ‘unself’ below the halcyon, ‘self-’reflective sprawls that hover above them.<sup>27</sup>

Many pulse-motions would be more or less straightforward, if not for their irregular tuplet groupings or varying rest values between sounding pitches. But this unevenness is usually governed through other means of logistical control. For instance, the seemingly randomized tuplet groupings are often ordered palindromically, or the inconsistent rest values are sequentially patterned, etc. An example of this occurs in one of the first long-lasting pulse motifs

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<sup>27</sup> Skempton, “Beckett as Librettist,” 1977.

which originates at rehearsal 2 in the cello; at first it sounds alone, but also comes to be doubled by the horns.

Musical score for Viola (Va.) and Cello (Vc.). The Va. part is marked "div. con sord. arco" and "ppp". The Vc. part is marked "ppp". A red vertical line is drawn at measure 115, with the number "115" written below it.

The pulse continues for 182 measures, remaining steady in its singular function, and is neighbored by many differing rhythmic assortments. Some of these are sustained, like the viola part directly above it, and others are dissimilar formations belonging to the same rhythmic-classification. One of these is a combined group of independent pulses in five instruments that sound together as one motorized entity. The other is one of the other enduring pulses from the overture, located within the harps.

Musical score for Percussion (Perc. 1-4) and Harp (Hp. 1-2) parts. The Perc. 1-4 parts are grouped together in a green box. The Hp. 1-2 parts are grouped together in a red box. The Vc. part is shown at the bottom in a blue box. The Vc. part is marked "mp ppp".

Here the continuation of the cello line is a large chunk of an extended palindrome that continues in the consecutive measures. The harp rhythm alternates according to the time signature of each measure, as do the cymbals at the top of the percussion section. The other three percussion instruments have fixed pitch and rest values that do not shift in response to the time signature fluctuation; this causes the instruments' attack points to change despite their intrinsic durational stabilities. Exempting the palindromic cello, the time-signature-observant cymbals and harps and the other rhythm-prioritizing percussion instruments both progress in a distinctly moment-form-like fashion. Vertically stacked and controlled by the alternating time signature, these rhythmic "cells" bear a stronger resemblance to the music of Stravinsky and Stockhausen than the minimalist music of Reich and Glass. The moment-form function is not exclusive to sections only populated by these homophonic pulses; it is maintained throughout the work's myriad rhythmically-diverse syntheses. These smaller weaves comprised of identical pitch-orientations coalesce to form a unified image, not unlike the Persian medallion rugs Feldman so greatly admired.

Another rhythmic device in these amalgamations occurs when an instrument sustains a lengthy tied duration, the static quality of which sticks out against the contrasting mechanical rhythmic movements that surround it. In the overture, these holds populate the texture much more densely than in any other region; however, their masses dwindle with the diversification of the orchestral material and the entrance of the Soprano voice. The remaining motives periodically recur and tend to lie at opposite registral poles above or below the other voices. Two of these common, hanging durations always appear in the Basses, Cellos and Timpani.

The Timpani example is unique in that it is one of the only chord-structures lying outside of the whole-step and half-step cluster formations. The chord itself in its original form is a



Viennese trichord built up from a Gb bass with a G-natural root. It appears in frequently inverted respellings, before it is eventually subsumed into other separately functioning fragments in the latter half of the opera. Though its status as the only clear harbinger of chord-based harmony is significant, its purpose lies primarily within its suspended duration and instrument-specific identity and has little to no effect on its accompanying material.

The image shows a musical score for five parts: Perc. 2, Perc. 3, Perc. 4, Vc. (Violin), and Cb. div. (Cello/Double Bass). The Percussion parts (Perc. 2, 3, 4) are in bass clef and feature a sequence of six measures with time signatures alternating between 3/4 and 5/8. Above the Perc. 2 staff, the time signatures are indicated as 3/4, 5/8, 3/4, 5/8, 3/4, 5/8. The Perc. 3 and Perc. 4 parts have a similar rhythmic structure. The Vc. part is in treble clef and features a sequence of six measures with time signatures alternating between 3/4 and 5/8. The Cb. div. part is in bass clef and features a sequence of six measures with time signatures alternating between 3/4 and 5/8. The Vc. and Cb. div. parts show sustained notes and harmonic clusters.

The other main instance of durational prolongation can also be seen in the above figure (Vc.). An interesting feature of the continued pitch-lengths in the lower strings is that they almost entirely sound in their harmonic stratospheres. The cellos in the figure above are one of a few similar showings, but hereafter the majority of string-harmonic durations are played within the basses unless they are, like in the above example, otherwise preoccupied. In the company of cycling pitches in the violins and violas, the basses play harmonic semitones that sustain beneath the revolving clusters in the upper strings. But, as with the timpani, their rhythmic diversity is of greater textural importance than any other speculative utility they may possess.

The third form of rhythmic classification combines the extending durations of the latter device with the rhythmic energy of the former. The product forms when collections of sustained pitches or durations in separate voices have entry points that stagger from one another. Where

the sharp, pointed pulses or pointillistic simultaneities sound in other large, orchestral groupings, the rippled, rhythmic overlap of these sections form broader brush strokes in multidirectional arcs. The standout embodiment of this effect is the previously cited “cascading tam-tams.” This motif appears periodically in similar settings--sometimes manufacturing long correspondent

39

The score for Percussion 1-4 is written on four staves. Above the staves, a sequence of time signatures is indicated: 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns such as tam-tams (T.-t.), l.v. (luteal), and B. d. (Bass Drum). The score is marked with a box containing the number 40.

rhythmic mirrors or organized between sequentially-patterned rests. Its presence at first seems to coincide with the Soprano voice, but it extends to become an independent idea that passes through several familiar modes of transfiguration in its reiterations. The second most common staggered construction is originally set in the woodwinds, but it is accompanied by supplementary brass in its expanded formations.

The score for Woodwinds and Brass is written on ten staves. The instruments listed are Fl. 1, 2, 3; Ob. 1, 2; C. a.; Cl. 1, 2; B. Cl.; Bsn. 1, 2, 3; Hn. 1, 2; Tpt. 1, 2, 3; and Tbn. 1, 2, 3. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ppp* and *mp*. The notation shows various rhythmic patterns and articulations.

These arrangements, like the hanging sustained durations, add another dynamic to the piece’s overall rhythmic makeup. These constructive techniques expand the limits of the largely undeveloped nominal interval-content while adding gestural force to the piece’s contrarily static

elements. While the examples themselves are not so measured as the micro-patterns observed in the next chapter, all but the sustained excerpts have commonalities in their individual settings that unite them in spite of their individual distinguishing features. Palindromes and sequences of sounding parts and rest values are found everywhere throughout the passages of the other three frameworks, and within them related interval and tuplet applications are constantly appearing.

These similar permutations do to the separate rhythmic motions what the common pitch/interval-thread does to the music of the entire work; these vastly differing rhythmic parcels which move independently atop one another are bound through these supplementary, deep-seated elemental likenesses. All of these elements relating to pitch and rhythmic construction act together inside the most sophisticated, isolated structures in the work: micro-patterns. If any of the other consistencies are not so convincing of Feldman's structural adherence in *Neither*, the level of detail applied to the body of these micro-structures will make the suggestion incontrovertible. These will be dissected in the forthcoming pages.

## V. Why Patterns?

The conflict of heavily structured music and its intuitive foil has a long and complicated history which is especially visible between the warring figures that define twentieth-century music. Of these figures, the uncompromising choice between total control or lack thereof weighed heavily on Feldman, whose music underwent several metamorphoses throughout his forty-odd-year-long career. He was first taught by the semi-serialist Stefan Wolpe before befriending John Cage in 1950. From there on, he embraced Cage's philosophy of chance-procedures for several years and wrote graphic scores before experimenting with pieces in free durational notation.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, he realized that indeterminate music would likely be adopted into the canon which it was created to reject. In his 1965 essay, *Predeterminate/Indeterminate*, he writes,

“Up to now the various elements of music (rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) were only recognizable in terms of their formal relationship to each other. As controls are given up, one finds that these elements lose their initial, inherent identity. But it is just because of this identity that these elements can be unified within the composition. Without this identity there can be no unification. It follows then, that an indeterminate music can lead only to catastrophe.”<sup>29</sup>

In the following years, Feldman wrote music in hopes of “finding a way out” of these ideological vacuums, and in 1972 wrote *Cello and Orchestra*. Possibly eclipsed by its close proximity to the premiere of *Rothko Chapel* (1972), it was his first highly systematized piece

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<sup>28</sup> *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2012), accessed March 27, 2018, [https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/mdonohue/wp-content/uploads/sites/261/2017/02/Vertical\\_thoughts-morton-feldman.pdf](https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/mdonohue/wp-content/uploads/sites/261/2017/02/Vertical_thoughts-morton-feldman.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Morton Feldman and B. H. Friedman, "Predeterminate/Indeterminate," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Boston, MA: Exact Change, 2001), 35.

since his work in the early 50s.<sup>30</sup> From this foothold, Feldman began layering systems within his minimalistic soundscapes, and he created a unique form of abstraction not achieved through the absolute denial or embracement of control, but by using time to somehow pass between the two.

The micro-patterns in *Neither* are not the most important formations within the piece. They do not define any over-arching parameters or incite any significant changes. What function they have, if any, is tangentially related to the previously explained modes of rhythmic expansion and diversification, as their pitch-contents do not stray from the intervallic foundation of the work. The purpose of their analysis is simply to explore and prove the atomic elegance of their ordering. They, like the rhythmic instrument-specific motives, are vertically arranged and combined; and when amassed to their fullest, occupying every available instrumental voice, they form overpowering textures of subterranean density.

Keeping within the mindset of “crippled symmetry,” there are points within even the most hyper-exact patterns where Feldman will willfully alter one or two elements, perhaps just for the sake of doing so. However, because the patterns are stated in precise forms prior to any amending, they do not wholly detract from the strength of the patterns’ legitimacies.

Often located within the woodwinds, the patterns are defined through specific labels, but do not repeat in other locations after their original spellings. Four specific structures will be examined, followed by a brief passage discussing the opera’s metrical changes.

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<sup>30</sup> Claren and Shuttleworth, “A Feldman Chronology,”

### A. Voice-Simultaneity Pattern

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Flute (Fl. 1, 2, 3), Oboe (Ob. 1, 2, 3), Clarinet (Cl. 1, 2, 3), and Trumpet (Tpt. 1, 2, 3). The score is divided into four sections labeled A, B, C, and D. Each section contains three staves (1, 2, 3) for each instrument. The pattern is characterized by simultaneous sounding of the same pitches and rhythms in the same voices, but with changing simultaneity between the instruments. The score includes dynamic markings like 'ppp' and 'f'.

This pattern occurs in the last long interlude in the opening section at rehearsal 50. It contains the same pitches and rhythms in the same voices but uses sounding simultaneity between the instruments as its changing variable. It lasts for 18 measures and sounds above a pulse formation in the percussion instruments.

Its progression is as follows: ABC(DCBADC'BCDABCD)AD'

The added prime measures are those whose arrangements bear a strong resemblance to the original combinations, but with one or two inner-voice simultaneity-shifts. There is one large palindrome in the order of its progression and several smaller palindromic segments that overlap inside the larger one. The last two measures don't fall in any particular sequence, but still adhere to the structure of the original simultaneities in measures A and D.

## B. Durational Sequence

The musical score illustrates a durational sequence across 19 measures. The sequence is defined by four groups of durations, each marked with a vertical red dashed line:

- Group 1: 3 1/16th notes X4
- Group 2: 3.5 1/16ths X2
- Group 3: 4 1/16ths X3
- Group 4: 3 1/16ths X4

The score includes parts for Flute 1 & 2, Alto Flute, Oboe 1, 2, & 3, Clarinet 1, 2, & 3, Horn 1, 2, & 3, Trumpet 1, 2, & 3, and Trombone 1, 2, & 3. The music is marked with *ppp* and includes a page number 45 in the top right corner.

This pattern, like the previous one, does not alter pitches, their register, or their instrumentation. The simultaneities are not the binding agent. They change sporadically throughout the continuation of this 19-measure block. The structural logic can be found from observing the durations of each tremolo chord. It follows a strict sequence--first with a grouping of four equal durations of three sixteenth notes, then another of 2 - 3.5 sixteenths, ending with a grouping of 3 durations that span 4 sixteenths. This repeats three times within the third interlude.

### C. Durational Sequence - Negative

The image displays two systems of a musical score for a woodwind ensemble. The instruments listed on the left are Flute 1, 2, 3; Oboe 1, 2, 3; Clarinet 1, 2, 3; Bassoon 1, 2, 3; Horn 1, 2, 3; Trumpet 1, 2, 3; and Trombone 1, 2, 3. The score is written in 3/4 time, with a rehearsal mark [70] at the beginning of the second system. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, with specific durations highlighted by color-coded boxes: purple, blue, and red. The purple boxes represent a duration of 3 sixteenths multiplied by 4, the blue boxes represent 3.5 sixteenths multiplied by 2, and the red boxes represent 4 sixteenths multiplied by 3. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and articulation marks.

Purple = 3 sixteenths X 4

Blue = 3.5 sixteenths X 2

Red = 4 sixteenths X 3

This pattern follows the exact same order of the Durational Sequence before. The pitches, instruments, and articulations have all remained the same. The large difference is, the randomized rhythmic augmentations take out the medium (specific pitch-durations) through



which we were ordering the earlier related-sequence. This transformation uses the exact same duration-pattern but orders it according to the rests coming between the entrances. This “negative” sequence is the photographic negative of the first sequence: it is the same image, just focusing on different aspects.

#### D. Patchwork Cell Melody

Fl.1 -	123	231	321	213
Fl.2 -	213	123	231	321
Fl.3 -	321	213	132	123
Ob.1 -	123	231	321	213
Ob.2 -	213	123	231	321
Ob.3 -	321	213	132	123
Cl.1 -	123	231	321	213
Cl.2 -	213	123	231	321
Cl.3 -	321	213	132	123

This sequence arrives in one of the last orchestral stretches before the Soprano-heavy finale section. It is formed using three melody fragments, each with its own consistent rhythm, and pieces them together in varying orders. If each piece were to be sectioned like the three squares shown above, this passage would visually resemble a brick wall. Each instruments' line has its own progression, and they follow palindromic orders. Three pieces together make up three measures, and the pattern endures for 12 measures.

## VI. *Time Canvasses*

“Both these terms - Space, Time - have come to be used in music and the visual arts as well as in mathematics, literature, philosophy and science....I prefer to think of my work as: between categories. Between Time and Space. Between painting and music. Between the music’s construction, and its surface.”<sup>31</sup>

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The oscillation of *Neither*’s metrical changes effectively complements the piece’s unsteady harmonic temperament. The tempo never changes, but the uneven tuplet groupings within the many metrical transformations confuse the listener’s ability to latch onto whatever counterfeit downbeats there are.

Over half of the piece--775 measures--is in  $\frac{2}{4}$  -  $\frac{3}{8}$  time. This is not including the points where the two meters appear within contexts of other metrical palindromes. There are three points within the piece where Feldman rests in one time signature for an extended period; the first and second are in  $\frac{3}{8}$  and  $\frac{2}{4}$  respectively, and they rest for the duration of specific thick orchestral patterns. The third, in  $\frac{2}{2}$ , spans the final 37 measures of the piece, and is interrupted thrice by a measure of  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Like the other tools and mediums of the piece’s expression, the meter changes also fall into many bouts of patterned sequencing. The following page contains a comprehensive metrical index with the palindromic changes marked in bold.

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<sup>31</sup> Morton Feldman and B. H. Friedman, "Between Categories," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Boston, MA: Exact Change, 2001), 49.

*Meter changes and metrical palindromes:*

5/16-5/8

2/4-3/8 (2 measures)

**Palindrome 2/4-3/8/-2/4-5/8-2/4-3/8-2/4**

3/8-2/4 (up to 432)

3/4-5/8 (24 measures up to rehearsal 45)

3/4-2/2 (35 measures up to rehearsal 49)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/4-3/8-2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2-3/8-3/4-2/2 (15 measures)**

3/4-2/2 (16 measures up to rehearsal 52)

3/8-2/4 (39 measures rehearsal 55)

**Palindrome 3/8-2/4-1/8-2/4-3/8**

2/4-3/8 (34 measures up to rehearsal 59)

2/4-3/4 (12 measures up to rehearsal 60)

3/8-2/2 (7 measures up to 61)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2**

3/8-2/2 (7 measures up to rehearsal 62)

3/4-3/8 (4 measures up to 63)

2/2-3/8 (6 measures)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2**

3/8-2/2 (5 measures)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2 (up to 65)**

2/2-3/8 (6 measures up to 66)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2**

2/2-3/8 (6 measures up to 67)

**Palindrome 3/8-3/4-3/8-3/4-2/4-3/8-2/4-3/4-3/8-3/4-3/8 (up to rehearsal 68)**

3/8-3/4 (2 measures)

2/2-3/8 (4 measures up to rehearsal 69)

2/4-3/8 (35 measures rehearsal 70)

2/2 (1 measure)

3/8-2/4 (10 measures through rehearsal 71)

3/8 (19 measures through rehearsal 73)

2/4-3/8 (24 measures through rehearsal 75)

3/8-2/2 (7 measures)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2 (through rehearsal 77)**

:5/16-3/8-7/16-2/4-5/8-3/4-7/8-4/4-9/8-5/4-1/8+5/4-6/4-1/8+6/4-7/4-1/8+7/4

(through rehearsal 78)

2/4-3/8 (47 measures through rehearsal 83)

**Palindrome 3/8-2/2-3/4-2/2-3/8**

**Imperfect Palindrome - 3/8 and 3/16 switch places**

**(3/8-from end of last palindrome)-2/2-3/16-2/2-3/4-2/2-3/8-2/2-3/16-2/2-3/4-2/2-3/8-2/2**

**(through rehearsal 85)**

2/2 (3 measures)

3/4-2/2 (2 measures)

3/4-3/8 (4 measures through rehearsal 86)

2/4-3/8 (20 measures through rehearsal 87)  
 3/4-5/8 (24 measures through rehearsal 89)  
 2/2-5/8 (12 measures through rehearsal 90)  
 2/2-3/2-2/2-5/4-2/2-3/4 (X2 through rehearsal 91)  
 3/16-2/2 (8 measures through rehearsal 92)  
 3/8 (1 measure)  
 2/4-3/4-2/2 (through rehearsal 93)  
 3/4-5/8 (10 measures through rehearsal 94)  
 2/4-3/4-2/2  
 3/8-2/2 (9 measures through rehearsal 95)  
**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-3/4-3/8-2/2 (X2 ending 2/2 does not repeat itself, starts pattern repeat through rehearsal 96)**  
**Palindrome (3/8-2/2 from end of previous pattern) (3/8-2/2)-3/8-2/4-3/8**  
**Palindrome 2/4-3/8-2/2-3/8-2/4**  
**Palindrome (imperfect-adds up correctly) 2/4-3/16-3/4-3/8-2/2-3/4-2/2-5/8-3/4-2/4 (through rehearsal 97)**  
 3/4-3/8 (X2 through rehearsal 98)  
 3/16-3/8 (9 measures through rehearsal 99)  
 3/8-3/4 (4 measures)  
 3/16-3/8 (6 measures through rehearsal 100)  
 3/4-3/8 (once)  
 3/16-3/8 (9 measures through rehearsal 101)  
 3/8-3/4 (once)  
 3/16-3/4 (once)  
 2/4-3/8 (X2 through rehearsal 102)  
 3/4 (once)  
**Palindrome 3/8-3/4-2/4-3/4-3/8**  
**Palindrome (3/8)-2/4-3/16-3/8-3/4-3/8-3/16-2/4-3/8 (through rehearsal 103)**  
**Palindrome 3/16-3/4-3/8-3/4-3/16**  
 2/4 (X31 through rehearsal 105)  
 3/4 (once rehearsal 106)  
 2/4-3/8 (X2)  
 3/4 (once)  
**Palindrome 3/8-3/4-2/4-3/4-3/8**  
 2/4 (X2 through rehearsal 107)  
 3/8-2/4 (X127 through rehearsal 121)  
 2/2-3/4 (14 measures through rehearsal 122)  
 2/4-3/8 (6 measures through rehearsal 123)  
**Palindrome 2/2-3/4-3/8-3/4-2/2**  
**Palindrome (overlapping) (3/8)-(3/4)-2/2-3/4-3/8 (through rehearsal 124)**  
**Palindrome (overlapping) (3/4)-(3/8)-2/4-3/8-3/4-2/4-3/8**  
**Palindrome (overlapping) (2/4)-(3/8)-(3/4)-3/8-2/4 ←—split up from 2/2 continued following line**  
**2/4-5/8-3/4-2/4-3/16-3/8-3/4-3/16-2/4-5/8 (through rehearsal 125)**  
**Palindrome (imperfect few measures flipped) 3/4-2/4-5/8-3/16-5/8-2/4-3/4-3/8-2/2-3/8-2/4-3/4-3/16-3/8-3/4-2/4-3/16-3/8-2/2-3/8-3/4-2/4-3/16-5/8-3/4-2/4 (through rehearsal 127)**

**Palindrome (overlap) (3/4)-(2/4)-3/8-2/4-3/4 (through rehearsal 128)**  
 3/16-3/8-3/4-2/2-3/4

**Palindrome 2/4-5/8-3/16-5/8-2/4**  
 5/8 (once)

**Palindrome 2/4-3/8-5/4-3/8-2/4 (through rehearsal 129)**

**Palindrome 3/4-5/8-2/4-5/8-3/4 (through rehearsal 130)**

**Palindrome (overlap two measures flipped) (3/4)-5/8-2/4-3/8-2/4-3/4-5/8 (rehearsal 131)**  
 5/4-7/8-5/4-2/2 (once)

**Palindrome 3/4-5/8-2/4-5/8-3/4 (through rehearsal 132)**

**Palindrome 5/8-2/2-3/4-2/4-3/4-2/2-5/8**

2/2 (once) (through rehearsal 133)

3/4-2/4 (X2)

5/8 (once)

2/2-3/8 (once)

**Palindrome 2/2-3/8-2/2-3/16-2/2-3/8-2/2 (through rehearsal 134)**

3/16-2/2 (X2 through rehearsal 135)

2/2 (X4)

3/4 (once)

2/2 (X11 through rehearsal 136)

3/4 (once)

2/2 (X11 through rehearsal 137)

3/4 (once)

2/2 (X6)

## VII. Rome, 1977 - *Something that just hovers...*

On May 13, 1977, nine months after meeting Samuel Beckett in Berlin, *Neither* premiered at Rome's Teatro dell'Opera. Feldman searched for "a pure young voice and an acute musical sense," for the Soprano role, and he ended up selecting a newcomer to Buffalo's new-music scene, Soprano Martha Hannemann. Marcello Panni conducted the first series of performances that featured the set design of Italian sculptor and painter, Michelangelo Pistoletto. Feldman deemed his staging preferences "a little too sixties,"<sup>32</sup> but in his determination to achieve the perfect visual component to this music he directed Pistoletto to "make it like a Rothko painting, the gradation of shadows rather than just a kind of easy symbolic visual aspect of shadows."<sup>33</sup> The most striking image from the original staging is Hanneman dressed in pleated fans of reflective white cloth that extend to the far edges of the stage.



<sup>32</sup> *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2012), accessed March 27, 2018, [https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/mdonohue/wp-content/uploads/sites/261/2017/02/Vertical\\_thoughts-morton-feldman.pdf](https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/mdonohue/wp-content/uploads/sites/261/2017/02/Vertical_thoughts-morton-feldman.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Laws, Catherine. *Music and Language in the Work of Samuel Beckett*. University of York, 1996.

Of course, visual effects were of little concern to the Italian audience, who were perturbed by the display of a seventy-minute opera--without characters, arias, melodies, or dynamics exceeding mezzo-forte--in a concert hall that had hosted Puccini and Verdi programs earlier that season. Maestro Panni, the orchestra, and Hanneman admirably continued in spite of the hissing and whistling crowd. Journalist Bryan Northcott of *The Daily Telegraph* wrote of the scene,

“For a few heady minutes at the Rome Opera I thought I was at last about to witness a genuine theatrical riot of the kind that greeted some of the masterpieces of modernism over 60 years ago --though anything less like *The Rite of Spring* than *Neither* by Morton Feldman...would be difficult to imagine.”<sup>34</sup>

Feldman reportedly delighted in the upset, calling it “great fun” that “they couldn’t stand it.” He sympathetically excused their outburst, adding, “Actually, the orchestration is crazy and quite scary. I was freaked out a little when *I* heard it.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite *Neither*’s turbulent debut, its performances the following year in Berlin proved much more successful. Beckett himself was in attendance for one of the Berlin performances, and thought well enough of Feldman’s efforts to contact him ten years later to compose new chamber music for a revival broadcast of an old radio play from 1961, *Words and Music*. Of the last few pieces Feldman would write before his untimely death in 1987, two would be in the service of Samuel Beckett, whose inspiration and influence never waned in the remainder of Feldman’s life. Though *Words and Music* was not a new work for Beckett, the re-release for BBC radio was a true collaboration between the two figures, and one of Beckett’s last works before he himself passed just two years after Feldman.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Skempton, “Beckett as Librettist,” 1977.

Though some have bemoaned the Beckett-Feldman association as somewhat of a cliché—a cliché largely enforced through Feldman's repeated assertions that their processes were inexorably connected--there is some truth to the concept. Through working with a Beckett text, Feldman had discovered a new way of writing that never subsided from his work thereafter. These were the years in which Feldman's music would reach their highest summits within his lifetime. The large, structural time-scapes that defined the late, enigmatic, behemoth abstraction of Feldman's music began with *Neither*: an opera that would never have come to pass if it were not for a misheard rumor, an ungraceful exchange on an unlit stage, and a postcard.



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