Composers and other artists are sometimes hesitant to comment on their own work. Sometimes this reticence has been due to a belief that the art should “stand by itself”; sometimes the artist feels that it is the job of others to critique his work; at still other times the artist may feel that he is simply unable to verbally articulate anything of importance—even if he feels strongly that there are things he would like to say about the artwork. Nonetheless, innumerable composers and other artists have written about their work, so it seemed especially appropriate, in an issue of Current Musicology in which the articles have been written solely by composers, to review a couple of books that composers have authored.

In this issue I am therefore pleased to review two books that I enjoyed reading, and which consist of writings by composers whose music I like very much. In fact, Jonathan Harvey’s In Quest of Spirit: Thoughts on Music describes, better than any other book that I have ever read, how I hear music. It is an equally great pleasure to review Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman, a compilation of writings by a man who was for many years my favorite composer of contemporary Western cultivated music.

Harvey’s book, which in another form began existence as The Bloch Lectures (given at the University of California at Berkeley, in 1995), comprises approximately 90 pages of text, divided into four chapters; 55 pages of notation (containing 35 examples); and a 38-track CD that vividly helps
to demonstrate what is impossible to communicate with only words or notation. The CD includes excerpts from The Riot, Ritual Melodies, Madonna of Winter and Spring, Song Offerings, One Evening, Tombeau de Messiaen, Ashes Dance Back, In Quest of Love, Inner Light, Bhakti, and Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco. In addition, the CD includes excerpts of pieces by Scriabin (Sonata No. 10), Stockhausen (Kontakte and Inori), John Chowning (Stria), and Jan Rokus van Roosendael (Kaida). Composers whose works are notationally excerpted include Stravinsky, Mozart, Bach, Mahler, Beethoven, Wagner, Britten, Strauss, Brahms, Párt, Tavener, Berg, Fauré, Messiaen, Webern, and Takemitsu. The book's four chapter titles indicate, logically enough, what seem to be some of Harvey's abiding interests: "Who Is the Composer?" "The Role of Ambiguity," "Unity," and "Stasis and Silence."!

The format of Feldman's book is very different. Give My Regards to Eighth Street is a collection of short prose pieces first published between 1958 and 1988. Most were originally conceived as essays or liner notes, although there are five pieces that were first delivered orally: a lecture ("The Future of Local Music"), an interview ("I Met Heine on the Rue Fürstenberg"), an informal talk in New York between Feldman and a friend ("Conversations without Stravinsky"), and informal remarks before performances ("Triadic Memories" and "For Philip Guston"). There are a few notational excerpts on pages 140–42, which provide examples of the kind of sonic patterns Feldman used in Why Patterns? (1978, for flute, glockenspiel, and piano), Spring of Chosroes (1977, for violin and piano), and String Quartet (1979). The text also includes a few drawings (scrawls?) by Feldman, as well as an afterword (from 1959) by poet Frank O'Hara. B. H. Friedman, who edited the volume, provides a snapshot of the composer in the opening paragraph of his introduction:

Morton Feldman (1926–87) was huge—huge in size, about six feet tall, close to 300 pounds; huge in spirit; huge in appetite for food, women, aesthetic experience (in addition to music: paintings, books and, later, Oriental rugs); huge in the energy that produced a torrent of musical compositions and words, spoken and written. He seemed 'larger than life,' an exaggeration of humanity, as if a literary invention like Gargantua or Falstaff, and yet . . . the custodian of an inner thin man who, when 'let out,' expressed a professional elegance that could only have been achieved in something like solitary confinement. (Friedman: xi)

I first became aware of Morton Feldman's music during the early 1980s. Compared to the work of many other composers of the '50s, '60s, and '70s, his music seemed like an oasis of musical sensitivity in a desert of
sterile and mechanical noise that was sometimes cleverly constructed but which I found to be almost never emotionally satisfying. To me, much of the "intellectually rigorous" music of the past several decades has seemed to wallow in complexity for its own sake (its composers often appearing to be more enamored of the notational pitch-grid puzzles they use to generate their next gesture than concerned to communicate anything more than the "craftiness" of their systems of musical construction).

For me, Feldman's music couldn't have been more different. He understood, better than any other Western composer I have ever heard, how to use silence, how to effectively make use of the musical rest. In the book's introduction, Friedman states that Feldman learned from Cage "the importance of silence as positive Void (in the Eastern religious sense) rather than simply as negative space" (xix). The superb use of silence, especially combined with his extraordinarily effective use of timbre, helps to give Feldman's music a spaciousness that I don't perceive in most other composers' works.

Perhaps the most significant fact about much of Feldman's music is that it seems to have been influenced by almost none of the zeitgeist of most of the "serious music" world of the 1950s and '60s. During these decades, he was a part of, but also apart from, the New York composition scene, and in the collected writings he talks about conversations that he had with Stockhausen, walks with Boulez in New York City, and poker games played with Milton Babbitt back in the days when Babbitt was teaching mathematics and "didn't even have a music connection at the time" (F: 116).

Feldman wasn't just compositionally outside of the New Music mainstream. He was also socially and vocationally outside it. For instance, after working at his uncle's dry-cleaning business until he was in his forties, he became, in 1969, dean of the New York Studio School—at which he had also lectured at least fourteen times during the late 1960s (Friedman: xxv).

He was primarily concerned with the sensuousness of sound, and his training was iconoclastic. He writes that when he was twelve years old he "was fortunate to come under the tutelage of Mme. Maurina-Press, a Russian aristocrat who earned her living after the revolution by teaching piano and by playing in a trio with her husband and brother-in-law. . . . She was a close friend of the Scriabins—and so I played Scriabin. She studied with Busoni, and so I played Busoni transcriptions of Bach" (F: 3).

When he was fifteen years old, Feldman began studying composition with Wallingford Riegger, and at eighteen with Stefan Wolpe. About Wolpe, he writes, "[A]ll we did was argue about music, and I felt I was learning nothing. One day I stopped paying him. Nothing was said about
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it. I continued to go, we continued to argue" (F: 3-4). Then, when he was 24 years old, he met John Cage:

In the winter of 1950 I went to Carnegie Hall to hear Mitropoulos conduct the New York Philharmonic in the Webern Opus 21, the Symphony for Small Orchestra. I was twenty-four, there with my 17½-year-old wife. I'd already composed my graph pieces, the first of their kind, but I was vastly unknown. No piece before or since had the impact of that Webern work on me. The audience was cackling, laughing, hooting, people walking out. At intermission I went out to the inner lobby near the staircase, and there was John Cage. . . . Cage asked me what I thought of the Webern. I said I'd never heard anything so thrilling. He practically jumped up and down in agreement and asked my name. When he found out I was a composer he brought me in, introduced me to his friends, invited me to a gathering later in the week. (F: 114-15)

Cage had a huge influence on Feldman's career (encouraged his composing and introduced him to others—even dedicated Imaginary Landscape, for twelve radios, to him) and Feldman speaks of Cage with undiluted affection. Perhaps most important to the development of Feldman's style, it was through Cage that he met many of the painters who were to have such a large influence on his work.

Contextual Holism: The Unity of Art and Artist

What surprised me most about these two books is how similar Harvey and Feldman view a number of different issues. I never met Feldman, but from all reports his personality was very different from Harvey's, which only underlines my surprise at the close similarity of such a large number of their viewpoints about things that they clearly thought (and think) are of great importance. Feldman's concerns, as indicated in Give My Regards, include, in sometimes different form, many of Harvey's concerns, as well as a number of others not addressed in Harvey's book (which, excluding the extensive notation, is significantly shorter than Feldman's). Both authors, however, are preoccupied with the nonduality of composer and composition, and with the central importance of silence and "stasis" in much of their music. For Harvey, the striving for "unity" (i.e., nonduality), and the creation of music that reflects the attempt to achieve unity is, as his book's title suggests, a spiritual quest; for Feldman, although he reportedly took his Jewish identity seriously, nonduality is mostly expressed as a dislike—even a contempt—for what he calls compositional "systems."
Both composers have fairly radical ideas of "nonduality." Throughout both texts, numerous statements appear that make the point that it may be difficult—if not impossible—to conceptually separate these composers from their compositions. For example, Harvey quotes an excerpt from an interview with Stockhausen, in which he notes that Stockhausen places inspiration in the collective domain, which "both is and is not Stockhausen. . . . He wants us not to be conscious of the music (dualistic) but to be conscious as the music (nondualistic). We are the music" (H: 21).

Feldman seems to agree with Harvey (but also seems to have a different view of Stockhausen's stance): "The system cannot help us here," he says, when we "enter" the work and become one with it. "There is no thesis here, no antithesis, no synthesis" (F: 66). "If I want my music to demonstrate anything, it is that 'nature and human nature are one.' Unlike Stockhausen, I don't feel called upon to forcefully 'mediate' between the two. Stockhausen believes in Hegel; I believe in God. It is as simple as that" (F: 18).

The question at hand, the real question, is whether we will control the materials or choose instead to control the experience. Varèse expressed the same idea in a different way when he said of himself and another man that he wanted to be in the material, while the other man wanted to remain outside. (F: 66)

To support their position regarding the indivisibility of the music/ian, they both refer to others who have held the same views. Feldman writes, "Duchamp once said there was no such thing as art, only the artist. In this belief, Earle Brown and John Cage meet" (F: 42); and Harvey quotes the Zen koan: "'Does the ear go to the sound, or the sound to the ear?' In other words, where does the mind stop and the object start?" (H: 33). Feldman again:

What do we see when looking at Cézanne? . . . If our interest lies in discovering how Art has survived, we are on safe ground. If our interest lies in how Cézanne, the artist, survived, then we're in trouble—which is where we should be. The critic's ideal has always been the process without the artist. (F: 89, 93)

Harvey and Feldman both address the difficulty of conceptually separating themselves from their work:

[S]ome of my own works [are] 'closer' to me than others. I cannot define what this 'me' is to which those works are close, but the ones I
prepare for more deeply seem to come from some central place within my being. For these works I spend a few weeks becoming stiller, withdrawing from the world... until finally I arrive at the core of the work—or is it the core of myself? (H: 79)

I do not feel I am being 'free' when I use a process that gives up control of pitches in one composition, rhythm and dynamics in another, etc. etc. . . . What I control is my will—something far more difficult than a page of music. (F: 17–18)

This 1964 statement that the will is more difficult to control than a page of music anticipates Feldman’s 1967 response to a friend:

The general professional feeling is that you’re evading the problem when you work without compositional ideas, without what you call 'systems.'

I’m evading their problem. I’m not evading my own. (F: 55–56)

It seems to me that this point is critically important. If a composer’s music doesn’t logically follow some “system” or other, the only “analysis” that the composer can do is to talk and write in very personal terms about how compositional choices were made (“What I control is my will”).

It is not freedom of choice that is the meaning of the fifties, but the freedom of people to be themselves. This type of freedom creates a problem for us, because we are not free to _imitate_ it. . . . There is no ‘tradition.’ All we are left with is a question of character. What training have we ever had to understand what is ultimately nothing more than a question of character? What we are trained for is analysis. (F: 99, 100–01)

Feldman says that too much composition is writing that is done “in terms of organization, in terms of densities and instrumentation, but they’re not writing _for the ear_” (F: 60). He’s right. Too many composers who came out of academic music composition programs during the mid-twentieth century seemed to write entirely for the sake of analysis of the compositional system employed. However, music that is great fun to analyze may not be very rewarding to listen to. “On the whole . . . the campus composer allies himself with the Germanic musical tradition. This is perfectly understandable; twelve-tone music, while it may not be great fare for the concert hall, is perfect for the schoolroom” (F: 46).

It is Boulez, more than any composer today, who has given system a new prestige—Boulez, who once said in an essay that he is not inter-
ested in how a piece sounds, only in how it is made. . . . The preoccupation with . . . systems and construction seems to be a characteristic of music today. It has become, in many cases, the actual subject of musical composition. (F: 33–34)\textsuperscript{5}

It seems clear that one of the benefits of any formalized compositional “system” is that it more easily allows composers, scholars, and critics to talk about a piece of music without having to engage in the messy, personal business of talking about the lives of individual composers and listeners. Apparently, systems can be more easily analyzed in a vacuum than can their human creators. Feldman says that the \textit{personal} is “anti-process,” while the \textit{impersonal} is “process” (F: 65). “[I]n reaction to modernity, there is an insistence that one can no longer take refuge in ideas, that thought is one thing and its realization another” (F: 70). For Harvey, too, some of these “systems” are endemic to modernism:

Whatever one may think of postmodernism, it is high time that the prevailing orthodoxies of academic music are challenged. . . . [F]or too long music has been described in terms derived from verbal language and its modes of organization—narrative and plot, for instance—and in terms derived from visual concepts, like ‘form unfolding’: structure seen in notation or imagined like an object or journey we move around or through. These are borrowed perspectives and they are inadequate for music, although an entire pedagogic culture is founded on them. The structure of music is not reducible to these other discourses. (H: 27)

\textbf{Stasis, Silence, and Vertical Listening}

Stasis and silence are extremely important components of the music of both composers, and Harvey writes about stasis, silence, and vertical listening in regard to not only himself and his own compositions, but also in relation to Stockhausen, Pärt, and Tavener. For example, he notes the “extremely minor variation, great length, and pervasive silence” in Pärt’s \textit{Passio Domini nostri secundum Iohannen}, and Tavener’s use of the icon as a model for his works, in which the “same extreme negation of self-expression” can be found as in Orthodox chant (H: 70–71).\textsuperscript{6}

When a mode divides the octave symmetrically, it ceases to have the goal orientation of the diatonic system and becomes a musical expression of suspension in space. Here music is not symbolizing; it is itself a form of prayer, a means for experiencing unity. It is not a code for pointing \textit{to} something. (H: 71)
Harvey speaks also of the “stasis of pedals, where the Many and the One are pointed up separately (the static in the bass, the mobile in the upper parts), and [the] turn to modality, where the One permeates the Many without being separated from it” (H: 70). He also notes that timbre is “a nondiscursive element” (H: 39), which is apparently why he considers it to have a great deal to do with “spirit”:

[S]pectralism in its simplest form, as color-thinking, is a spiritual breakthrough. . . . Spectralism, like harmony, is in essence outside the world of linear time. In music, time is articulated by rhythm; in psychology, time is articulated by the process of chopping up and arranging experience into language, which separates us from the primary world and joins us to the linear symbolic order. (H: 39, 40)

A single, held tone is perhaps the most extreme form of stasis, and in support of his statement that spectralism is a spiritual breakthrough Harvey cites both Rudolf Steiner and Takemitsu. “Steiner wrote as early as 1923 of how the single note would in future be found as rich in meaning as an entire symphony—a prophecy now coming true before our ears. This he called the spiritualization of music, the penetration of its inner nature” (H: 80). Harvey quotes Takemitsu as saying that the single sound is complete enough to stand alone—if we are prepared to listen in the manner most appropriate to apprehend its “spiritual” qualities. “For Takemitsu the ‘single sound’ (together with silence) produced by great masters of the biwa or shakuhachi served as a model: ‘A single strum of the strings or even one pluck is too complex, too complete in itself to admit any theory’” (H: 78).

Appreciation of the “single sound” is an aesthetic stance that is something near the opposite of the twentieth-century Western academy’s usually unquestioned assumption that sonic busyness and maximal aural-information density is a good to be desired. Feldman’s answer to virtuosity has often been stasis or silence: “[I]t’s like Rothko, just a question of keeping that tension or that stasis. You find it in Matisse, the whole idea of stasis. That’s the word. I’m involved in stasis. It’s frozen, at the same time it’s vibrating” (F: 184).

The degrees of stasis, found in a Rothko or a Guston, were perhaps the most significant elements that I brought to my music from painting. For me, stasis, scale [i.e., duration of a piece or movement], and pattern have put the whole question of symmetry and asymmetry in abeyance. (F: 149)
Though tonality has long been abandoned, and atonality, I understand, has also seen its day, the same gesture of the instrumental attack remains. The result is an aural plane that has hardly changed since Beethoven. (F: 24) . . . Now, as things become increasingly compressed and telescoped, as differentiation becomes, in fact, the subject of most composition, music has taken on the aspect of some extraordinary athletic feat. . . . Change is the only solution to an unchanging aural plane created by the constant element of projection, of attack. This is perhaps why in my own music I am so involved with the decay of sound, and try to make its attack sourceless. (F: 25)

For Harvey, in particular, the spirituality of stasis is related to his ideas and uses of silence, and he makes the point that “spirit” is the nonphysical or nonmaterial as well as nonverbal reality—perhaps best expressed as silence.

Broadly speaking, spirit underlies discourse. It is the Ground, the All, the background level of the Schenkerian tree, which contains everything, all discourse, yet which seems almost empty of content. It is the Silence out of which every sound is born. (H: 37) . . . [S]ilence-filled ideas are . . . inherent in certain oriental traditions such as Zen Buddhism. Zen has cast its influence on figures as different as John Cage and Toru Takemitsu . . . Takemitsu said he only uttered 80 percent of the idea . . . the rest is silence, the pregnancy of the unsaid, ma. Ma, a profoundly important concept in Japanese culture, is the silent understanding . . . when meaning is intense but nothing is expressed. (H: 78)

For many Western composers, the idea that meaning can exist when “nothing is expressed” seems to be seldom considered. Harvey and Feldman, however, privilege silence as much as sound. Feldman writes: “[S]ilence is my substitute for counterpoint. It’s nothing against something” (F: 181); and Harvey quotes Takemitsu approvingly:

‘Between this complex sound—so strong that it can stand alone—and that point of intense silence preceding it, called ma, there is a metaphysical continuity that defies analysis. . . . To the sensitive Japanese listener who appreciates this refined sound, the unique idea of ma—the unsounded part of this experience—has at the same time a deep, powerful and rich resonance that can stand up to the sound.’ (H: 78)

Stasis and silence can be appreciated as positive commodities only if we are prepared to listen in the way most conducive to their appreciation.
“Vertical listening,” in which sounds are appreciated for themselves (i.e., without regard to syntax) is important to both composers, and in Feldman’s case is made explicit with the series of pieces titled *Vertical Thoughts*, composed during the 1960s, which are, indeed, virtually static and very slow. (In addition, one of the chapters in *Give My Regards* is “Vertical Thoughts”; it was originally an article that appeared in *Kulchur* in 1963.) “When sound is conceived as a horizontal series of events all its properties must be extracted in order to make it pliable to horizontal thinking. How one extracts these properties now has become for many the compositional process” (F: 12).

The activity of listening to form is largely a mental one: we add one note to another, one phrase to another, until eventually they stand in the memory as a structure. We choose which notes to connect with which others to satisfy our desire for rich meaning. We could try to listen to Haydn serially or . . . according to traditional Chinese musical syntax; whatever way it is, we make a choice and store the outcome in mental space.

There is also a less mental way to listen, and that is to be concerned not with harmony and form, but with the ‘now,’ with the color and flavor of the moment. Although, as we’ve seen, all music has a dynamic, a sense of tension, it is occasionally possible to nudge music out of its context and hear it vertically, rather than as a horizontal line. Obviously, the music must invite this mode of perception. (H: 34–35)

Both Harvey and Feldman write that musical discourse can make the act of vertical listening difficult. Harvey: “If the thematic or formal argument never faded to the background (as in most music from Bach to Schoenberg), the immanence of spirit in music might be less consciously perceived” (H: 37). “Obviously, elements of [the music] must be virtually static, or at least very slow; otherwise the discourse, the argument of melody and polyphony, will be too domineering. One must be able to get inside the sound itself, not hear it as a passing element belonging to structure” (H: 35). Unsurprisingly, this leads to an entirely different conception and experience of time, which Feldman addresses when he writes that he doesn’t want time measured; he wants time to be felt by the performers and listeners (F: 177).

Listening in the traditional Western “linear” way to music that carries limited aural information (either because of its reduced sonic palette or because of repetition) can lead only to boredom; silence, in discursive thinking, can be only an absence. When we listen only linearly, silence can exist only as an anticipation of the next gesture. Disciplining our
minds to “slow down” and to focus on the moment at hand is what is required to fully appreciate music like Feldman’s.9 “Vertical listening” enables us to appreciate silence as a “positive commodity”—not as the absence of sound, but as the presence of quiet, which, as Harvey indicates, is the source of all sound.10

Mediating “Spirit”

Harvey and Feldman both write very similar things when they speak of the creation of art as a kind of “failure”—the kind of failure that comes with accomplishing that which, as Feldman points out, one did not want, and with trying to convey the direct experience of spirit, which Harvey says is impossible to communicate. “The irony of Mondrian is that, like every Messiah, he was Messianic about things that cannot be transmitted. We must be grateful, however, that Mondrian the Messiah failed, for that failure gave us Mondrian the painter” (F: 71–72).

Guston tells us he does not finish a painting but ‘abandons’ it . . . After all, it’s not a ‘painting’ that the artist really wanted. There is a strange propaganda that because someone composes or paints, what he necessarily wants is music or a picture. Completion is not in tying things up, not in . . . ‘telling a truth.’ Completion is simply the perennial death of the artist. Isn’t any masterpiece a death scene? Isn’t that why we want to remember it, because the artist is looking back on something when it’s too late, when it’s all over, when we see it finally, as something we have lost? (F: 78)

Thomas Mann . . . once said that all artists must be just a little naive. I have no compunction in singing of what is most charming, no hesitation in trying to portray, sometimes as directly or naively as possible, the experience of spirit itself—always failing, of course, because in the end it’s true: spirit has to be mediated. (H: 36)

Harvey then adds: “But the attempt is crucial. It is my obsessive song” (H: 37). Feldman agrees: what he calls the Abstract Experience is an emotion that “philosophers have failed to categorize . . . The collision with the Instant . . . is the first step to the Abstract Experience. And the Abstract Experience cannot be represented. It is, then, not visible in the painting, yet it is there—felt” (F: 75, 76).

Nono, who finds the social situation intolerable, wants art to change it. John Cage, who finds art intolerable, wants the social situation to change it. Both are trying to bridge the gulf, the distance between
the two. . . But how can you bridge what is real with what is only a metaphor? Art is only a metaphor. It is solely the personal contribution . . . that can give the artist those rare moments when art becomes its own deliverance. (F: 82)

The idea that "art is only a metaphor" is of central importance to both Harvey and Feldman, and for Feldman the metaphorical is only transcended with the actual process of committed creation (what he calls "the personal contribution"), which provides the artist with deliverance from the mundane. One must act—with intention and conviction—even if that means sitting and waiting receptively for the inspiration to create.

At the same time, the creation is a sort of failure because spirit must be mediated—and yet spirit can't be mediated because at the point of "mediation" it becomes something other than spirit. It may, for example, be mediated (i.e., "constrained") as an artwork:

The medium, whether it be the sounds of a John Cage or the clay of a Giacometti, can be equally incomprehensible. Technique can only structure it. . . . It is this structure, and only this structure, that becomes comprehensible to us. By putting the 'wild beast' in a cage, all we preserve is a specimen whose life we can now completely control. (F: 88–89) . . . It is not a question of a controlled or decontrolled methodology. In both cases, it is a methodology. Something is being made. And to make something is to constrain it. (F: 111)

For centuries we have been victimized by European civilization. And all it has given us—including Kierkegaard—is an Either/Or situation, both in politics and in art. But suppose what we want is Neither/Nor? Suppose we want neither politics nor art? Suppose we want a human action that doesn't have to be legitimized by some type of holy water gesture of baptism? Why must we give it a name? What's wrong with leaving it nameless? (F: 80–81)

"Leaving it nameless" would be "very Zen"—which is the answer to Feldman's question. What's "wrong," of course, is that without language we can't have a bureaucracy. Without "names" the only way the composition student can learn is to be in the presence of his mentor. Without a system, we can't have social reproduction; without priests, there is no organized religion. For Harvey, too, the ability to abstract (not to be confused with Feldman's Abstract Experience) also keeps us from truth: "We are unable to access truth because of our concept-making mind" (H: 38).
For Feldman, then, "leaving it nameless" is perhaps a way of avoiding its entrapment by the concept-making mind that Harvey says keeps us from truth. Nonetheless, although both composers feel that art fails to mirror what Harvey calls "spirit" or "truth" and what Feldman might call "the nameless" or the "Abstract Experience," Feldman spent his life (and Harvey spends his life) composing, making the attempt (and always failing) to convey spirit, truth, the nameless.

In the service of this "noble failure," Harvey and Feldman each developed his own distinctive compositional style. One example of Harvey's compositional goals and strategies is provided by a brief outline of the approach to harmony and timbre that he employed during the composition of his opera Passion and Resurrection (1981):

It took me a long time to compose the new world of the Resurrection that [Christ] brings about. Eventually I hit on the idea of symmetrical harmony around a central axis, a floating, weaving world freed from the dark gravity of bass-oriented music—a gravity that has dominated the West since it became obsessed with individuality and its passions, signaled in the birth of the figured bass and early opera. This axial feeling became my preferred technique of harmony for many years afterward. In trying to achieve a medieval directness, I supplied all the characters with a spectrum that moved above their lines in parallel, composed of one to twelve partials according to the dullness or brilliance of the halo I imagined them to have. The simplicity or complexity of their characters determined the limitations of the pitch repertoire they used. (H: 53)

Feldman's Collected Writings is a different sort of work than Harvey's book, so he speaks in even more general terms about his compositional approach, ideals, and techniques:

My primary concern ... in all my music is to sustain a 'flat surface' with a minimum of contrast. (F: 127) ... My music has been influenced mainly by the methods in which color is used on essentially simple devices. It has made me question the nature of musical material. (F: 139) ... My past experience was not to 'meddle' with the material, but to use my concentration as a guide to what might transpire. I mentioned this to Stockhausen once when he had asked me what my secret was. 'I don't push the sounds around.' Stockhausen mulled this over, and asked, 'Not even a little bit?' (F: 142–43)
I work very much like a painter, insofar as I'm watching the phenomena and I'm thickening and I'm thinning and I'm working in that way and just watching what it needs. . . . I have the skill to hear it. I don't know what the skill is to think it, I was never involved with the skills to think it. I'm the only one that works that way. (F: 183–84)

One of the problems with variation in twentieth-century music is that [composers] make the variation too obvious. . . . I am interested now in a lot of music where the variation is so discreet, I would have the same thing come back again, but I would just add one note. Or I have it come back and I take out two notes. . . . Do you hear it? Are you focused enough? (F: 193–94)

Harvey: Centering Experience

Harvey is not embarrassed to speak about what he has experienced while questing for spirit. For instance, he says that encountering Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* in 1960 changed his life, and that a little later he read "forty or fifty volumes" of Rudolf Steiner's writings. He found Steiner's views to be "a participatory epistemology beyond the Kantian closure—in which the self and nature are inseparable: one unified interdependency" (H: 4) (cf. Feldman: "If I want my music to demonstrate anything, it is that 'nature and human nature are one' "). In 1977 he encountered Vedic meditation practice, and he began meditating twice a day (reportedly never lapsing for more than a couple of days at a time).

At one time in my life I often visited Christian monasteries, and I was greatly inspired by the look I would sometimes see in the faces of the contemplatives, a look telling, more than anything else I encountered in life or books, about truth and values. Selfless Christian love leading to profound peace I find again in Buddhism, as I do in Vedic and Anthroposophical experience of higher consciousness. (H: 6)

Harvey's understanding of the positive value of Buddhist "emptiness" seems to me to be exactly right, although I take issue with his idea that scientific empiricism and uncertainty, the "perspectival nature of 'facts,'" and postmodernism "in all its forms" are necessarily nihilistic views:

To me, the most profound way of thinking that reconciled such nihilistic views with my spiritual certainties was Buddhist. When encountered superficially, Buddhism, with its doctrine of emptiness, the idea that nothing, not even oneself, has inherent existence outside self-grasping delusion, can seem quite nihilistic. In fact, how-
ever, it embraced much of what is now current in critical theory, Derrida, and Lacan millennia ago, emerging as a blissfully happy and fulfilling, compassionate and ethical, way of life. (H: 5–6)

Harvey and Feldman have both, in different ways, addressed the problem of describing the experience of nonduality that vertical listening can make possible. The difficulty, of course, is that nonduality is no longer "nondual" once it has been reduced to an abstract verbal code. As soon as we begin to explain, we enter the land of metaphor. (As the General Semanticists say, "The word is not the thing.") "Spirit," then, can be indicated only very indirectly with words. In Harvey's discussion of Buddhism, he notes:

Eastern philosophy differs from Western in its reliance on experience of states of consciousness: one experiences the philosophy rather than thinks it (though some have argued that this puts it outside the scope of philosophy proper). Pure awareness is prior to subject/object duality, or ultimately, in enlightened meditation, posterior to it. When . . . the tension in the I/other ambiguity increases to the point where stability is sought through language, . . . the 'word,' which seems to fix and order things, becomes paramount. In due course it divides the world up according to certain perspectives and leads on to reason, logic, and practical and scientific knowledge.

Music, however, exposes this ambiguity within language-based consciousness. It undoes the 'word' and returns to pure awareness—or at least it gives a glimpse of it. . . . [As] John Rahn put it: 'The experience of music affords a person the chance to think without language, without snipping the experience into discrete "segments" wrapped up into "signifiers" and free of the consequent machinery of negation, polar oppositions such as subject/object.' (H: 48, italics added)

Harvey responds to this "snipping [of] the experience into discrete 'segments' wrapped up into 'signifiers'" by noting what he feels to be music's fundamental unity: "[T]he unity of rhythm, pitch, and color, as Stockhausen long ago observed, is shown to be, like the rest of the universe, all a matter of tempo, of speed, of energy" (H: 59–60). One obvious example of language's power to fracture musical reality is that of "pitch": Pitch exists as a discrete entity only as a word or as an item of notation. Sonically, there is no such thing as a pitch that has no timbre, or a pitch without volume or duration. And if the pitch is lowered enough, it begins to sound like an audible pulse. Yet our verbal and notational abstractions of "pitch" eliminate all other attributes of the audible tone. Harvey quotes another writer,
who says, "Music is about 'one knowing,'" which means that we cannot ana-
lyze musical meaning without analyzing ourselves.

In that phrase, *one* is both subject and object: 'knowing one thing' 
and 'one person knowing' are rolled into a single notion. 'One who 
knows' would bring back duality, but in the phrase 'one knowing' we 
can sense the unity we experience in music when we lose ourselves 
in the awesome, higher harmony that music can be. (H: 49)

This also means, of course, that there is no musical meaning independ­
ent of the perceiver. "Music is not *really* frightening, angry, joyful, or any­
thing else; nevertheless, we readily construct thought-forms and give them 
reality as projections onto the sounds, remaining all the while more or less 
conscious of the elaborate artifice in which we are engaged" (H: 83–84).

As listeners, we respond from our own past memories, the shrapnel 
fragments embedded in our own buried psychic world that are sum­
moned to life by sympathetic resonance with the vibrations of the mu­
ic. . . . One person will remember a childhood adventure, another will 
relive a romantic moment, another will recall a crisis or trauma—
though the memories may consist of little more than the traces of these 
experiences, their surface detail being no longer recoverable. (H: 31)

Consciousness, then, is individual. As for the unconscious, Harvey is not 
sure whether it is individual, as Freud thought, or collective, as the 
Jungians (and Stockhausen) believe, but he says, "[T]he place from which 
inspiration comes is undeniably unconscious" (H: 20).

Harvey also addresses the fact that "the listener"—even if only one 
person—is not unchanging; rather, the listener is dynamic, and there is an 
evolving relationship between art and auditor. And if *we* are dynamic enti­
tics, and the relationship between us and the music is one that evolves, 
then unless the labels we use to designate "music" and "listener" are verbs, 
the labels may have only fleeting applicability.

A lot has been written about what music reflects, or does not re­
fect, in psychic life, in social life, and so on. Such accounts have 
mostly suffered from too static a portrayal of the listener. It's not a 
case of the solid listener witnessing a changing and fluctuating rep­
resentation of some sort, nor does the music depict how the psyche 
works, or express emotion in any simple sense. We are ourselves 
volatile; we are constantly changing. When we listen to music we, as 
well as the music, are on the move, constantly reconstituting our
selfhood, redefining ourselves, perhaps more intensely than usual. (H: 29)\textsuperscript{14}

Feldman: Prophets and Priests . . .

Where do music historians place Morton Feldman? Here is a man who, although trained in Western techniques of creating music through the use of the major “systems” (mostly tonal or twelve-tone), largely eschewed much of this training in many of his mature works. Although disciplined, he was an “intuitive” composer, which meant that starting a school of composition in the same way that Schoenberg did was out of the question.\textsuperscript{15} He claims to have received most of his important inspiration from the painters with whom he associated—and from John Cage.

Feldman has a lot to say about artists and their imitators and critics, and about the difference between artistic creation and cultural reproduction. The difference between artists and pedagogues, curators, and scholars has sometimes been compared to the difference between prophets and priests. Harvey, in *Music and Inspiration* (see note 1), states explicitly that for those composers whose ultimate musical goal is the “communication of a vision of paradise . . . the composer is the prophet, responsible for guiding mankind on the long and sometimes treacherous road to religious revelation” (1999b: 154).

This is a complex issue, and it may help to cite a couple of other sources that have addressed the topic. Georgina Born, for example, in her study of IRCAM, raises the prophet/priest comparison for musicians specifically:

In terms of microsociology, Bourdieu contrasts two kinds of authority in legitimate culture akin to Weber’s distinction between the roles of priest and prophet/sorcerer. . . . First, the institutionalized authority of the teacher or curator responsible for pedagogy, devotion to tradition—essentially for reproduction. Second, the authority of the artist or creator with prophetic ambitions, which is personal and rests on flashes of originality. (Born: 28)

Because Feldman makes the same point regarding the economic realities of artistic creation, it may be worth citing Weber directly by noting that he also makes the case that the “prophet” (i.e., composer) produces “work” even without remuneration: “This criterion of gratuitous service also distinguishes the prophet from the priest. The typical prophet propagates ideas for their own sake and not for fees, at least in any obvious or regulated form” (Weber: 255). Often, gratuitous service is provided because the prophet/artist feels compelled to utter/create, regardless of
material compensation. This feeling of being compelled is sometimes described as heeding a personal “call,” which, for the prophet or artist, may transcend or supersede the legitimate, bureaucratic authority with which corporate enterprises are invested. The prophet or artist’s political power is due instead to his or her personal “charisma.” In On Charisma and Institution Building, Weber examines charisma in his discussion of the differences between the priest and the prophet:

[T]he personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet’s claim is based on personal revelation and charisma. It is no accident that almost no prophets have emerged from the priestly class. . . . Even in cases in which personal charisma may be involved, it is the hierarchical office that confers legitimate authority upon the priest as a member of a corporate enterprise. (Weber: 254)

Besides pedagogy and administration, the priest’s role is that of explication, criticism, scholarship, and canon formulation. In Give My Regards Feldman comments on some of the differences between visionary artists (i.e., those who “produce”) and those who “reproduce” (even if they are also artists): “In music, when you do something new, something original, you’re an amateur. Your imitators—these are the professionals” (F: 23). Prophets or artists who end up being influential are those whose memory comes to be taken care of by “priests” (i.e., historians, curators, critics—in short, canon formulators) and imitators. Feldman also makes the point that during the modernist era most prophets required “disciples” (i.e., imitators) in order to be influential. “It may sound paradoxical, but Kafka, Mondrian, and Webern have never been influential. It’s their imitators that are influential. That’s what gives every artist his real prestige—his imitators” (F: 57).

It is these imitators who are interested not in what the artist did, but the means he used to do it. This is where craft emerges as an absolute, an authoritarian position that divorces itself from the creative impulse of the originator. The imitator is the greatest enemy of originality. The ‘freedom’ of the artist is boring to him, because in freedom he cannot reenact the role of the artist. There is, however, another role he can and does play. It is this imitator, this ‘professional,’ [who] makes art into culture.

This is the man who emphasizes the historical impact of the original work of art. Who takes from it and puts to use everything that can be utilized in a collective sense. Who brings the concepts of virtue, morality, and ‘the general good’ into it. Who brings the world into it.
Proust tells us the great mistake lies in looking for the experience in the object rather than in ourselves. He calls this a 'running away from one's own life.' How many of these 'professionals' would go along with this kind of thinking about art? They give us continual examples of looking for the experience in the object—in their case, the system, the craft that forms the basis of their world. (F: 23)

Another way of saying this is that the mandarin orientation of the historical study of cultivated music requires a different sort of mental focus and perspective than does the creative and entrepreneurial ethos that is required for artistic creativity. Born highlighted this difference in her delineation of the marked contrast between the "chronic aesthetic uncertainty" about the quality of the compositions produced by IRCAM composers (i.e., the "production phases") and the bullish attitudes (or "reproductive certainty") evident in IRCAM's list of approved composers and works—which she labels "IRCAM's canon"—played during IRCAM's Passage du Vingtième Siècle concert series in 1977 (Born: 173). This attitudinal difference is reflected in Feldman's statement that the twentieth century "is more an age that has been taken over by music history rather than music making" (F: 209). Feldman is not without sympathy for the audience, however:

[T]he love of the past in art is something very different to the artist than it is to the audience. . . . The audience feels the loss in change more crucially than the artist, because it loves art with the passionate love one gives a thing one can never really possess. What it incessantly demands of the artist is for him to make up for this loss. But it is very hard for the artist. He feels the audience is suffocating art with its love and concern. He doesn't understand the nature of their love, or the nature of their loss. (F: 31–32)

The truth is, we can do very well without art; what we can't live without is the myth about art. The mythmaker is successful because he knows that in art, as in life, we need the illusion of significance. He flatters this need. He gives us an art that ties up with philosophical systems, an art with a multiplicity of references, of symbols, an art that simplifies the subtleties of art, that relieves us of art. (F: 57)

The references and symbols to which Feldman refers above are particularly important to scholars and critics because they must have something to talk and write about. Artists, on the other hand, generally need the myth less (if at all). Another way of saying this is that artists use the past in ways that are fundamentally different from the ways in which scholars, critics, and curators use the past.
Until the fifties the artist believed that he could not, must not, improve as the bull charged—that he must adhere to the formal ritual, the unwasted motion, the accumulated knowledge that reinforces the courage of the matador, and that allows the spectator the ecstasy of feeling that he too, by knowing all that must be known to survive in the bullring, has himself defied the gods, has himself defied death. (F: 100)

The “trouble” with systems is that they allow compositions to be easily analyzed as isolates (i.e., apart from their composers). Yet this is, of course, the reason for the existence of “systems” (and for notation generally). To professionalize (i.e., to separate the work from the idiosyncrasy of individual personality) is one of the primary goals of most corporate endeavors. There can be no large-scale sociocultural reproduction without a system. In other words, unless the prophet’s insights are abstracted into systematized prescription, there can be no priests and no organized religion.

Prophets, however, feel that they themselves, rather than any institution, bear what might be called “the true message.” This doesn’t so much mean that they feel no connection to the past as it does that their relationship to the past is fundamentally different from that of historians: 16

So I didn’t come up through regular music circles . . . Radical composer, they say. But you see I’ve always had this big sense of history, the feeling of tradition, continuity. With Mme. Press at twelve, I was in touch with Scriabin, and thus with Chopin. With Busoni, and thus with Liszt. With Varèse, and thus with Debussy, and Ives and Cowell, and Schoenberg. They are not dead. (F: 120) . . . I have the feeling that I cannot betray this continuity, this thing I carry with me. The burden of history. (F: 121)

... and Quotations

Feldman was often outspoken about other composers in ways that probably didn’t serve to endear him to them, and in this collection he is often very direct about how unimpressed he was with many of his peers, including some of the century’s most celebrated composers. Earle Brown and Christian Wolff receive the Morton Feldman stamp of approval in a couple of places in the book, but the only older composers who receive unstinting praise throughout the text are Cage and Varèse. The poet Frank O’Hara (who had been a music major at Harvard) and an army of painters receive approbation, but almost no composers.

Feldman had a gift for the epigraphic, the bon mot, the riposte—and in fact, Give My Regards ends with a short collection of such quotes—which he often used in the service of his polemics. Here’s a relatively nonpolemical sampler:
I have always found it more beneficial to experiment with fountain pens than with musical ideas. . . . [Practicality] brings us closer to the work, establishing a rapport with it, rather than encouraging a network of ideas that keeps us outside it. (F: 63) . . . One of the reasons I continue to write at the piano is to help me from the 'imagination.' Having the sounds continually appearing as a physical fact wakens me from a sort of intellectual daydream. (F: 206) . . . As a rule I write in ink. It sharpens one's concentration. Erasure gives you the illusion you're going to find a more meaningful solution. . . . When you write in ink you realize that it is the concentration you're after and not ideas. (F: 207)

I feel a lot of Webern's subsequent orchestration . . . was somewhat arbitrary. (F:160) . . . You just can't take a row and give it to a piccolo and then give the other segment to the double bass. You can't be insensitive to the pitches here, . . . how they speak and go on. So, that whole Darmstadt world, or the Webern influence, is that essentially instruments were used just as another denominator of variation. And very few were sensitive to the instruments playing those notes. (F: 161)

[You] don't want to reveal your ideas the way Webern revealed his structures by his instruments. Webern does not orchestrate. He gives you the instruments and he presents his ideas like a lecture, with the instruments. We have to be careful not to do that. (F: 191)

Varese had (and continues to have) immense importance to me. Perhaps this is because his music, unlike that of Webern or Boulez, does not have the character of a confined 'object.' Varese's compositional tool seems geared only to his own dictum of what he calls 'organized sound.' (F: 16)

My only argument with Cage, and there is only one argument, is with his dictum that . . . 'Everything is music.' Just as there is an implied decision in a precise and selective art, there is an equally implied decision in allowing everything to be art. There is a Zen riddle that replies to its own question. 'Does a dog have the Buddha nature?' the riddle asks. 'Answer either way and you lose your own Buddha nature.' Faced with a mystery about divinity, according to the riddle, we must always hover, uncertain, between the two possible answers. Never, on pain of losing our own divinity, are we allowed to decide. My quarrel with Cage is that he decided. A brilliant student of Zen, he has somehow missed this subtle point. (F: 29–30)
What is unique about Earle Brown is that while he possesses a mind superbly geared toward the analytic, he has nevertheless rejected the idea of system. ‘What interests me,’ Brown writes, ‘is to find the degree of conditioning (of conception, of notation, of realization) which will balance the work between the points of control and non-control. . . . There is no final solution to this paradox . . . which is why art is.’ (F: 42)

Like politics, [art] is dangerous insofar as it is Messianic. Nono wants everyone to be indignant. John Cage wants everyone to be happy. Both are forms of tyranny. . . . But if art must be Messianic, then I prefer my way—the insistence on the right to be esoteric. (F: 81)

[M]usical forms and related processes are essentially only methods of arranging material and serve no other function than to aid one’s memory. What Western musical forms have become is a paraphrase of memory. (F: 137)

Music seems to be understood best by its proximity to other music that is more familiar. We do not hear what we hear . . . only what we remember. (F: 209)

All this aura of freedom. Yet it is self-evident that art is the antithesis of freedom. (F: 210)

The only time an artist gives up his ideas is when a better past comes along. (F: 210)

Why is it that even asymmetry has to look and sound right? (F: 138)

[W]hat I am suggesting is . . . that the chronological aspect of music’s development is perhaps over, and that a new ‘mainstream’ of diversity, invention and imagination is indeed awakening. (F: 151)

* * *

There is really nothing about these books that I dislike. Give My Regards to Eighth Street is a collection of generally short prose pieces that Feldman probably never conceived as constituting a single “book,” and B. H. Friedman can only be commended for the editorial work that was invested in producing this text.

Harvey’s In Quest of Spirit is not a technical exposition of Harvey’s programming or general computing skills; it is not even about the technical aspects of composition. The book is for readers who have some degree of
education in the tradition of Western cultivated music and, preferably, some interest in spectral composition. What Harvey is concerned to show is the importance of ethics to his compositional “project,” and how his quest for what he finds ultimately valuable (i.e., spirit) informs the composition of his music. (I did find myself thinking, however, that he might have mentioned, perhaps in a short appendix, at least the most important parts of the “instrumentation” of the electronic pieces—i.e., the hardware and software used to produce the sounds.)

**Postlude**

*I came across this remark by Mies van der Rohe, which I agree with completely...* He said, ‘I don’t want to be interesting, I want to be good.’ [200]

— Morton Feldman

What do we want music for? What sorts of music do we study? Academies and conservatories have always privileged music that isn’t obviously utilitarian. Formerly, music that the socially privileged found sensuously attractive was canonized. In the twentieth century, however, the emphasis on analysis put the onus on young composers in the academy to produce music that is “interesting.” This emphasis tended to omit music that is only emotionally gratifying. As Jonathan Kramer writes elsewhere in these pages, music that is only attractive is “dismissed in academic circles.” The reason for the dismissal is that it is an important part of the modernist musical worldview that the sonic structures of compositions produced in the academy—particularly in the research university—are able to be described using relatively sophisticated analytic language.

In his own article in this issue of *Current Musicology*, Larry Read writes that in much of his music “free expression is harnessed to, though not entirely contingent upon, generative processes that are impersonal and mechanical.” Fred Lerdahl writes that he has always been attracted to systematic approaches to composition but that he doesn’t “hide behind a hard mask and deny personal expression, a posture that seems to me sterile.” Neither Read’s use of impersonal processes nor Lerdahl’s attraction to systematic approaches denies their need for personal expression or obviates the value of intuition. And in any event, it’s difficult to get entirely away from “systems”: isochronal composing is “systematic,” minimalism is “systematic,” tonality is a “system,” serialism is a “system”... I’ll have to disagree with Feldman. There’s nothing inherently wrong with “systems,” but surely the desire to impose one’s own favorite system on everyone else was an unhealthy symptom of modernism.
As noted above, the whole point of a compositional system is that it seems to allow the works it informs to be more easily separated from the context of the composer's personal experience. Ostensibly, others may adopt the system with no violence done to it whereas we may feel that one composer's appropriation of another composer's eminently personal approach is somehow inauthentic. And perhaps this is why personal experience is marginalized in academia (and indeed, many would argue that the non-abstract is not—or should not—be a part of academia proper).

In her study of IRCAM, Born quotes Kerman during her discussion of the increasing presence of overt "theory" in the compositional process: "'Much of the power and prestige of theory derives from its alignment . . . with the actual sources of creativity on the contemporary musical scene'" (Born: 53). It seems to me, however, that Kerman has it backward: I would say that the power and prestige of academic composition derives from its alignment with music theory. (My contention is strongly supported by the fact that most doctorates in composition require a theoretical essay—i.e., an "analysis"—that explicates and, hopefully, justifies the piece's existence, but that Ph.D. candidates in music theory are almost never expected to justify their research with original compositions to be presented during doctoral defenses.) Feldman also addressed the issue of the relative power of theory/analysis:

Boulez wrote a letter to John Cage in 1951. There was a line in that letter I will never forget. 'I must know everything in order to step off the carpet.' . . . Was it love of knowledge, love of music, that obsessed our distinguished young provincial in 1951? It was love of analysis—an analysis he will pursue and use as an instrument of power. (F: 60, 61)

Born aptly captures the high- and late-modernist attitude toward excessive theorization, writing that "the constant conceptual foraging for scientific analogies to structure composition . . . evidence a continuity with deeper characteristics of musical modernism. [It] should be grasped as an extreme contemporary expression of modernist theoreticism, the tendency for theory to become prior to, prescriptive of, and constitutive of compositional practice" (Born: 197). Or, as Feldman has said about painting: "With Cézanne it is always how he sees that determines how he thinks, whereas the modernist, on the other hand, has changed perception by way of the conceptual. In other words, how one thinks has become the sensation" (F: 68).

The analytic approach of breaking things apart yields only the answers that analysis can provide. Analysis as usually practiced tends to freeze
processes so that constituent parts may be more easily examined. Instead of looking at only parts, however, we might also show how wholes are parts of larger wholes, which includes seeing how composers and other musicians are parts of larger wholes. This is essentially an anthropological and even ecological perspective, and is why I asked for something other than only a structural analysis in my solicitation letters to the composers whose articles appear in these pages. “Who are you?” requires that the composer place him- or herself, perceived as currently constituted (see Harvey’s remarks on the volatility of auditors), within the context of his or her time and place. This means putting the individual back at the center of “analysis.”

The emphasis on “process regardless of product” came to be a peculiarity of modernist composition. The various means often seem to have been more important than their ends, and is what both the conceptualists and the serialists had in common: a focus on procedure regardless of outcome that was at times insistent and even dogmatic. In addition, the exclusive emphasis on the construction of notational systems has often meant ignoring the realities of performance.

It is probably necessary at this point to state that I don’t think that rigorous, knotty music has no place in the university. It should also be said that, as far as I can tell, university composition programs are generally far more open to all sorts of musical creation than they were even ten to fifteen years ago. What I am saying is that music whose sonic structure is not idiomatic to the act of complex verbal explication or notational analysis was (and still is, in many music departments across the country) marginalized in academia. This is now changing, to some degree, but if university composition professors are going to be less restrictive in regard to the types of music they allow their graduate students to produce, yet still require analyses that have some value, they might seriously consider asking their composition students to place themselves at the center of their analyses. This shift of analytical focus could profitably be required even of those composers whose “systematic” compositional methods allow them to more easily hide their personalities behind more impersonal procedures. In other words, individual composers should be regarded as legitimate “objects” of analysis even when they are involved with obviously systematic approaches to composition.

As noted earlier, Feldman maintained that working without “systems” would not allow one to evade compositional problems, and this is essentially the reason why I asked for something more than just a structural analysis from the composers whose articles appear in this special issue of Current Musicology. Talking about the compositional system may help composers to avoid talking about themselves; however, if we really want to gain a greater understanding of how the music came to be created (rather than
studying only scores, or merely letting the music evoke for us whatever the combination of sounds interacting with our imaginations will evoke), then we need to understand the composer.  

Whatever is created in academia must be explicable. Furthermore, it is the awareness of analysis "before the fact" that ends up informing the type of art produced. The knowledge that an "analysis" of the piece might be required to justify the composition of the piece leads the creator to synthesize the components of the artwork in ways that are amenable to the sort of analysis s/he is prepared to produce. In fact, in the case of many graduate student composers, the analyses and theoretical essays that accompany their D.M.A. compositions are written before the music is composed. There is nothing particularly wrong with this, and in any case is only to be expected if university composition programs are committed to producing only music that lends itself easily to notational analysis and/or complex verbal theorization of its sonic properties. I am reminded, however, of Louis Menand’s statement that "theories are just one of the ways we make sense of our choices" (qtd. in Dickstein: 369). The other ways must include an honest account of who we are: Who are we that we create and study the musics that we do?  

Notes  
1. I say "abiding interests" because Harvey published another book in 1999, titled *Music and Inspiration*. Its four chapters are "The Composer and the Unconscious," "The Composer and Experience," "The Composer and the Audience," and "The Composer and the Ideal." All of these help to implicitly identify the composer (cf. chapter 1 of *In Quest of Spirit*), and one of the section headings in chapter four is "Unity" (cf. chapter 3 of *In Quest of Spirit*).  

Although there is no space in this essay to properly review *Music and Inspiration*, it is nonetheless of interest. In its preface, Harvey writes: "It was in 1964 that this book took its first form, as a doctoral thesis. Cambridge University, where I was a student, had disapproved of the subject and tried to steer me towards seventeenth-century musicological topics. I refused this temptation rather easily, and made off to Glasgow University" where, he writes, both he and his topic were welcomed with open arms. And for 33 years, "that was that," until, with the editorial assistance of Michael Downes, Harvey reworked the thesis into a book, thus yielding *Music and Inspiration*.  

Essentially, this book comprises a substantive compendium of quotations—over 200 extracts (and probably an even greater number of shorter quotes) of statements that have been made by over 60 composers from the Western cultivated tradition—that address some aspect of the topic of music and inspiration.  

It is notable that so many composers have written about what Harvey says (in *In Quest of Spirit*) is essentially an unconscious process, and on this topic Harvey has read widely of his peers. From Babbitt to Bartók, Mahler to Musgrave, Ravel to
Rorem, Sessions to Sibelius, Vaughan Williams to Webern, Ferneyhough to Furtwängler (who composed as well as conducted)—Harvey presents in *Music and Inspiration* a comprehensive account of Western composers’ thoughts on this topic.

2. To help avoid confusion, I will preface the page numbers of Feldman’s statements with “F”; Harvey’s page numbers will be preceded by “H.”

3. The “other man” was Milton Babbitt. Varèse wrote: “It seems to me that [Babbitt] wants to exercise maximum control over certain materials, as if he were above them. But I want to be in the material, part of the acoustical vibration, so to speak. Babbitt composes his material first and then gives it to the synthesizer, while I want to generate something directly by electronic means. In other words, I think of musical space as open rather than bounded. . . . I do not want an *a priori* control of all its aspects” (qtd. in Weiss and Taruskin: 522).

4. Feldman’s statement that all we are left with is a question of character is reminiscent of the traditional (particularly Eastern) approach to pedagogy, in which a student comes to master an art at the same time that s/he learns of the aesthetics (and ethics) of the mentor by being in the teacher’s presence and watching him live his life—rather than merely analyzing finished artworks.

5. This topic has been addressed by a number of composers. Among those who write sophisticated, “knotty” music, there are those who believe that, regardless of how sophisticated the precompositional scheme, the music must still mean something aurally; there are also those who feel (together with, reportedly, Boulez) that the interest, and even pleasure, of music is to be found in the contemplation of its “systematic” construction as presented on paper. Elliott Carter is a good example of the former group:

> It’s obvious that the real order and meaning of music is the one the listener *hears* with his ears. Whatever occult mathematical orders may exist on paper are not necessarily relevant to this in the least. . . . [I]f what I come up with . . . is unsatisfactory from the point of view of what I think is interesting to *hear*, I throw it out without a second thought. (qtd. in Fisk: 372)

Milton Babbitt and some of the New Complexity composers are examples of the second group mentioned above:

> [T]he twelve-tone system . . . has opened the way to certain modes of thinking about musical progression, structure, richness, and reach of relationships, of relatedness, depth, and scope of reference, in a way that I could extend personally, that interested me more, and that was simply not available with regard to so-called tonal material. (Babbitt, qtd. in Fisk: 396-97)

Babbitt indicates where his priorities lie by using the term “thinking about” in the above extract. This view was made even more explicit a few years ago, when one of the world’s leading composers of what has come to be called New Complexity stated in a public talk at Columbia University that he found the intellectual contemplation of his music “rather erotic,” and that an actual performance of it was somewhat beside the point. Carter again:

> [T]hese systems are perfectly fine as abstract schemata of one kind or another, but are often useless for musical purposes, simply because they don’t have any particular relation to the composer’s desire to communicate feelings and thoughts of many different kinds, which . . . are logically prior to the evolution of any system. This lack of relation to
the composer's desire to communicate goes together with the fact that these systems lack any relation to the listener's psychology of musical hearing. (qtd. in Fisk: 371-72)

6. Further to "pervasive silence": In 1999—the same year that Harvey's *In Quest of Spirit* and *Music and Inspiration* were both published—Faber and Faber published Tavener's *The Music of Silence*.

7. Cf. Arvo Pärt: "I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played" (qtd. in Duckworth: 164).

8. Cf. Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer: "In Western society, silence is a negative, a vacuum. Silence for Western Man equals communication hang-up. If one has nothing to say, the other will speak; hence the garrulity of modern life which is extended by all kinds of sonic jabberware" (Schafer: 256).

9. It should be noted that not all of Feldman's music requires vertical listening to be appreciated. One poignant example of his more syntactically conventional work is the early (1947) song titled "Only" (text by Rilke; trans. by Leishman).

10. Harvey says above that Zen has influenced composers as diverse as Cage and Takemitsu. Perhaps so, but Cage used silence very differently from either Takemitsu or Feldman. I agree with American composer Bruce Adolphe's assessment of 4'33":

Cage's use of silence, though meant seriously, was given a comic patina by the work's title [4'33'] for the concept of exact timing framed the silence as a theatrical event, even suggesting a sports event, and removed the possibility of its natural power. While Cage achieved one goal—Western concert audiences confronting silence head on—the piece remains a prank. (Adolphe: 129)

11. Needless to say, the concept-making mind is endowed with the same basic assets and liabilities whether it is involved with making art or critiquing it. In other words, critiques of art are also failures of a sort, and serve no better to convey Truth than do the artworks they criticize.

12. In regard to the impossibility of "speeching about music" because of non-duality: Mahler made the same point in a different way when he wrote, "[S]o long as I can sum up my experience in words, I can certainly not create music about it. My need to express myself in music symphonically begins precisely where dark feelings hold sway, at the gate that leads into the 'other world,' the world in which things are no longer divided by time and space" (qtd. in Fisk: 190).

13. Scholars from many different disciplines have commented on this topic. Science historian R. G. H. Siu makes the same point with reference to an example from the natural sciences: "Boyle's law... stipulates that at a constant temperature, the volume of a gas varies inversely as the pressure. If we merely follow the words, the three entities of temperature, pressure, and volume are given individual existences. In reality this is not so and more people are recognizing the fact" (Siu: 52-53). Siu also writes, however, that "dwelling on finite chips from the infinite actuality... is necessary for discursive thought" (Siu: 66) (cf. Harvey: Language "divides the world up... and leads on to reason, logic, and practical and scientific knowledge").

14. Harvey's statement that music's meaning is different from listener to listener and, especially, that we listeners are "volatile" and "constantly changing" may
seem chaotic to some. Copland’s response to this issue is succinct: “The precise meaning of music is a question that should never have been asked, and in any event will never elicit a precise answer. It is the literary mind that is disturbed by this imprecision” (Copland: 13).

15. Just as there are two major viewpoints, even among “rigorous” composers, with regard to the aural relevance of precompositional schemes, there are also two major viewpoints with regard to the teaching of music composition. Schoenberg sought disciples in an attempt to propagate through them his invented twelve-tone composition system. Other composers have felt differently, as shown by the following statements made by Debussy, Satie, and Ligeti, respectively: “There is no Debussy school. I have no disciples; I am myself” (qtd. in Duckworth: 8). “There is no school of Satie. Satieism could never exist. I would oppose it” (qtd. in Fisk: 225). “I am constitutionally an anti-educationalist, and in any case you cannot teach composition” (qtd. in Fisk: 408).

Not all composer-teachers, of course, attempt to influence their students to compose like the teacher, but some do (although I suspect that this sort of coercion is not now as prevalent as it once was). Poulenc: “[H]ow dangerous are the lessons taken from the great composer-teachers. In Los Angeles the young musicians write like Schoenberg, in Boston like Hindemith. Milhaud alone, to the gratitude of his students, maintains in San Francisco a climate of eclecticism” (qtd. in Fisk: 341).

16. This idea that the prophet/composer often feels directly connected to past prophets, and that this “internal lineage” may have nothing to do with where he actually went to school, has also been noted by Harbison:

I have come to believe that a composer begins early constructing his own history of music, one that has nothing to do with the official hierarchies. The writings of Wagner, Debussy, and Stravinsky attest to the efficacy of this practice and, increasingly in modern times, composers from Boulez to Rochberg have also written history to lead inexorably to them. We must do this. (qtd. in Fisk: 469)

17. Cf. Stravinsky: “I think it is a thousand times better to compose in direct contact with the physical medium of sound than to work in the abstract medium provided by one’s imagination” (qtd. in Fisk: 287–88).

18. One other very minor grievance: In providing support for his point that “intervallicism seen in spectral light” is essentially “the symbolic world seen in the larger perspective of the semiotic one” (H: 42), Harvey quotes eight lines of text from Tang Dynasty poet Han Shan, but doesn’t provide the translator’s name. (Han Shan is one of my favorite poets, and a quick look at only my own personal collection of Han Shan in English reveals that Burton Watson, Arthur Waley, Gary Snyder, Peter Harris, Robert Henricks, and Edward Schafer have all published translations of this eighth-century poet; if Harvey translated it himself, there is no indication.)

19. Messiaen reportedly said, “A piece of music must be interesting, it must be beautiful to hear, and it must touch the listener. These are three different qualities” (qtd. in Duckworth: 64).

20. The emphasis on description and analysis of decontextualized events is another way of saying that academics often privilege what might very generally be
called left-hemispheric processing. Kemp, for example, cites studies that show that “brain scans reveal conclusively that atonal and discordant music stimulates the left hemisphere, . . . [which] suggests that the music of different composers will reflect their originators’ cerebral dominance” (Kemp: 131).

21. Cf. Boulez: “[S]ince the Viennese discovery, every composer outside the serial experiments has been useless” (qtd. in Weiss and Taruskin: 507).

22. Ravi Shankar has spoken of the need for musicians to study themselves as well as the ragas: “Unfortunately, too much stress is placed on technical studies and forms. . . . It takes many years of profound study of one’s own inner self and of the ragas to be able to play Indian music with the immense emotional and spiritual effect [sic] that the music calls for” (Shankar: 15).

23. Ingram Marshall has addressed this issue with regard to the privileging of “system” over personal expressions of beauty: “[T]he ‘gang of four’—Stockhausen, Boulez, Cage and Babbitt—banished lovely things from modernism, beautiful things. Although Cage would never say it like that. He would certainly, in his philosophy, allow anything, but I know personally that he was always uncomfortable with music that was expressive. It was basically not where he was going, and he took along a lot of people on that ride, as did European serialists like Boulez and Berio” (qtd. in Smith and Walker Smith: 178).

24. In his recent historical survey of American cultivated music, Struble goes even further: “[A] great deal of the new music, both of the academic serialists and the aleatorists, written in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s trivialized the training and artistry of serious performers, or presented them with technical demands that frankly exceeded the value of the resulting piece” (Struble: 355).

25. A number of composers have spoken of the need for musicologists and critics to take more seriously the composers’ own words about music. Near the beginning of Music and Imagination, Copland wrote:

A well-known conductor once confided to me that he invariably learned something from watching a composer conduct his own composition, despite possible technical shortcomings in conducting, for something essential about the nature of the piece was likely to be revealed. I should like to think that an analogous situation obtains when a composer articulates as best he can the ideas and conceptions that underlie his writing or his listening to music. If my conductor friend was right, the composer ought to bring an awareness and insight to the understanding of music that critics, musicologists, and music historians might put to good use, thereby enriching the whole field of musical investigations. (Copland: 3)

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References


