



# Morton Feldman

Friendship and Mourning in  
the New York Avant-Garde

Ryan Dohoney

B L O O M S B U R Y

Morton Feldman



Morton Feldman

*Friendship and Mourning in the  
New York Avant-Garde*

Ryan Dohoney

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC  
NEW YORK • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC  
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc  
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo are trademarks  
of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in the United States of America 2022

Copyright © Ryan Dohoney, 2022

For legal purposes the Acknowledgments on pp. 195–7 constitute an extension  
of this copyright page.

Cover design: Louise Dugdale

Cover image © Renate Ponsold, "Morton Feldman in Philip Guston's Studio" (1965)  
courtesy of the Paul Sacher Foundation.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,  
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior  
permission in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Inc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any  
third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this  
book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret  
any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to  
exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5013-4546-3  
PB: 978-1-5013-4545-6  
ePDF: 978-1-5013-4548-7  
eBook: 978-1-5013-4547-0

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com) and  
sign up for our newsletters.

*For Sheila Hall*



# Contents

|                                                      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------|------|
| List of Figures                                      | viii |
| Introduction                                         | 1    |
| 1 Spontaneity, Intimacy, and Friendship in the 1950s | 17   |
| 2 “ <i>Élan vital</i> . . . and how to fake it”      | 53   |
| Intermission: The Necessary Other                    | 93   |
| 3 The Elegiac Science                                | 107  |
| 4 “We broke up because of style”                     | 143  |
| Conclusion: Friendship’s Silence                     | 185  |
| Acknowledgments                                      | 195  |
| Bibliography                                         | 198  |
| Index                                                | 209  |

# Figures

|     |                                                                                                               |     |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 0.1 | Howard Kanovitz, <i>The New Yorkers II</i> (1966)                                                             | 2   |
| 1.1 | <i>Projection 2</i> (page 1) by Morton Feldman                                                                | 25  |
| 1.2 | <i>Intersection</i> (page 1) by Morton Feldman                                                                | 29  |
| 1.3 | <i>Marginal Intersection</i> (page 1) by Morton Feldman                                                       | 33  |
| 1.4 | Philip Guston, <i>Head-Double View</i> , 1958                                                                 | 41  |
| 2.1 | Morton Feldman, <i>Intermission 6</i> , first version                                                         | 61  |
| 2.2 | Merle Marsicano                                                                                               | 62  |
| 2.3 | Morton Feldman, <i>Figure of Memory</i> (reconstruction by Edwin Hymovitz)                                    | 64  |
| 2.4 | <i>Works of Calder</i> , directed by Herbert Matter, 1950                                                     | 70  |
| 2.5 | <i>Jackson Pollock 51</i> , directed by Hans Namuth, 1951                                                     | 76  |
| 2.6 | <i>Jackson Pollock 51</i> , directed by Hans Namuth, 1951                                                     | 78  |
| 2.7 | <i>Sculpture by Lipton</i> , directed by Nathan Boxer, 1954                                                   | 82  |
| I.1 | William Lovelace. L to R: Nicholas Zumbro, Morton Feldman, Edgard Varèse, Frederic Rzewski, Charlotte Moorman | 94  |
| I.2 | <i>Projection 1</i> (page 1) by Morton Feldman with Charlotte Moorman's realization                           | 97  |
| 3.1 | Morton Feldman, "Give My Regards to Eighth Street," working copy of <i>Three Clarinets, Cello, and Piano</i>  | 115 |
| 3.2 | Morton Feldman, "In Memory of My Feelings," working copy of <i>For Frank O'Hara</i>                           | 117 |
| 3.3 | Paula Court. Joan La Barbara                                                                                  | 126 |
| 4.1 | Renate Ponsold. Morton Feldman and Philip Guston                                                              | 144 |
| 4.2 | Philip Guston, <i>Last Piece</i> , 1958                                                                       | 149 |
| 4.3 | Philip Guston, <i>Attar</i> , 1953                                                                            | 150 |
| 4.4 | Philip Guston, <i>Friend—To M.F.</i> , 1978                                                                   | 163 |
| 4.5 | Philip Guston, <i>The Coat II</i> , 1977                                                                      | 165 |
| 4.6 | Philip Guston, <i>Back View</i> , 1977                                                                        | 166 |

## Introduction

In Howard Kanovitz's *The New Yorkers II* (1965, Figure 0.1), Morton Feldman sits in the painter's Second Avenue studio. He is shown on the far left in profile, eyes downcast, a cigarette in his hand. Others in the painting seem similarly distracted. Larry Rivers, back and to Feldman's left, also gazes downward. Sam Hunter, in front of Rivers, stares at the back wall of the studio. Next to the window, Kanovitz himself prepares to take a drag while looking past Alex Katz, who stands in the foreground with his back to us. An unidentified man in the foreground also gazes down. Positioned between Kanovitz and Katz, B. H. Friedman looks to the far left, past Feldman. Our focus is drawn to the center of the canvas, where poet and critic Frank O'Hara, with louche countenance and limp wrist, exudes camp glamour.

Along with being a signature photorealist work of the 1960s, *The New Yorkers II* is a curious social text. It portrays a group of close friends, all extensively involved in the midcentury avant-garde and each other's work. Frank O'Hara wrote poems and essays about Feldman and Rivers.<sup>1</sup> His great long poem "Second Avenue" was written in Kanovitz's studio that the painting depicts. Friedman edited Feldman's collected writings.<sup>2</sup> Kanovitz's photo portrait of Feldman appeared on the cover for the composer's 1968 LP, *The Early Years* (itself a reissue of a record from 1959 with liner notes by O'Hara).<sup>3</sup> Katz and Feldman served together on the faculty of Mercedes Matter's Studio School.<sup>4</sup> Rivers and Kanovitz played jazz together in the Village and Feldman arranged tunes for them.<sup>5</sup> Hunter wrote the foundational *Modern American Painting and Sculpture*, which positioned the New York avant-garde within the broader arc of modernism and which Feldman taught in his classes at the University of Buffalo.<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite all this intimacy, these men can't seem to face one another. O'Hara is radiant, of course, but no one can fix eyes on him. If this is an example of what Lytle Shaw would call coterie art, what do these deferrals of vision say about this community of friends? Connection and communication



**Figure 0.1** Howard Kanovitz, *The New Yorkers II* (1966). © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

are denied. Feldman and company are estranged from, or at least indifferent to, one another. Shaw has noted that “the term friends would often seem to designate an almost accidental social formation, stripped of intentionality and form.”<sup>77</sup> It indubitably does here. The men appear to have run into one another in the studio and have nothing to talk about. But, as my account of this group’s ties indicates, they were deeply intertwined. With cutting irony, Kanovitz’s *New Yorkers II* dramatizes a fundamental, even agonistic tension within this world—a state of affairs to which Morton Feldman was hardly immune.

Unlike those depicted in *The New Yorkers II*, I don’t know Morton Feldman. And after more than twenty years of listening and fifteen of research and writing, I’m not convinced I even *can* know him. This is the case even though I feel very close to his music. My recognition of this absent presence keeps certain questions in my mind as I write: What would he make of my work? Would he receive these words as gestures of friendship? What would he make of my interpretations, my imputations of agency, my attempts at recapturing his inner life, my invasive pilfering through his letters, diaries, and

composition notebooks? Are these things friends do? The work of history does not necessarily depend on the bonds of friendship. Prying open archives, I've seen traces not meant for my eyes. My interpretations of Feldman's friendships presume to speak for the dead on which I had no claim in life. Along with Michel de Certeau, I ask, "What about the bizarre relation I am keeping with current society and, through the intermediately of my technical activities, with death?"<sup>8</sup>

"Friends, there are no friends." In this writing, my travels to archives, my puzzling over Feldman's—I want to say "Morty's"—barely decipherable handwriting, I am no friend. My actions, while intimately bound up with Feldman's life, have impure motives. They contribute to my name as a scholar (whatever that might be), they made a case for my tenure, and they give me an audience. My gestures, made in the spirit if not the name of friendship, appeal across the chasm of death. *O friend, I am no friend*. But within this entanglement of intimacy, distance, and loss, an impertinent question sticks in my mind: What kind of friend was Feldman? It is a query he would probably prefer I didn't ask, but I will argue that it matters immensely for our understanding of his music. For all its austerity, fragility, and abstraction, Feldman's music is bound up with human relationships. One only need at glance at the titles of his works—*For Franz Kline, For Frank O'Hara, For John Cage, For Christian Wolff, For Philip Guston, For Bunita Marcus, For Samuel Beckett, For Stefan Wolpe*. A litany of dedications, and a partial necrology.

In what follows, I explore expressions of friendship and mourning across Feldman's authorship. Along with bringing fresh insight into his music and aesthetics, I hope to draw friendship forward as a matter of concern for music studies. I also advance the claim that music is a special mode through which friendship is performed—as dedicatory act and means of group formation. Musical friendship is constituted through acts of performance, listening, and artistic response—acts that cut across Feldman's history. A heady collaborative sensibility animated his artistic community, that bohemian demimonde of painters, dancers, poets, and musicians we call "The New York School." As I argue in Chapter 1, friendship's intimacies fed the aesthetic-creative value of spontaneity at midcentury. Spontaneity was hardly medium-specific and was valued in music and painting as much as in poetry and dance. Working

with and against mid-twentieth-century aesthetic discourses—particularly Clement Greenberg’s formalism—I advance the claim across these chapters that the most important medium within the New York School was friendship. To be more explicit: friendship—as a way of life and a practice of art—was the condition of possibility for the New York School.

*Morton Feldman: Friendship and Mourning* is an attempt to generalize certain claims in my previous book, *Saving Abstraction*.<sup>10</sup> There, I focused on Feldman’s friendship with Mark Rothko and their patrons, John and Dominique de Menil. Together, these actors worked together to establish the Rothko Chapel, with Feldman giving it a musical identity with his piece *Rothko Chapel*. This handful of relationships was inflected by economic and spiritual forces that trouble the egalitarianism we usually associate with friendship. Opening up these agonistic tensions allowed me to tell a story about the entanglement of experimental music, abstract art, Catholic modernism, and petroleum-fueled patronage in Houston, Texas. As I argue in this book, Feldman’s friends, collaborators, patrons, and nemeses have further insights to offer us. While *Saving Abstraction* focused primarily on cross-domain engagements between music and painting in a ritualized space, the chapters that comprise this book track Feldman’s friendships and collaborations across a range of disciplines, including visual art, film, dance, poetry, and, naturally, music. Uniting my investigations into the bounty of aesthetic artifacts I explore is an aesthetics of affection, reciprocity, and friendship.

In taking up friendship as an analytic, I insist on its multivalent capacities. I am in sympathy with Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin, who define friendships as “intimate relationships—erotic or platonic, same sex and different, dyadic and nondyadic—often but not necessarily ones of affection or mutual support.”<sup>11</sup> Friendships are pluralistic, mutable, and powerful for the way they cut across and reshape extant kinship structures. My theorization of friendship has been deeply impacted by religious studies scholar Brenna Moore, whose work on the French Catholic Revival bore directly on *Saving Abstraction*. She, like Dewey and Rifkin, sees friendship a wide-open concept. She writes, “If we take seriously friendship as a category of analysis, it must be understood as expansively and capaciously as possible,” including such things as “imagined intimacy,” “memories of love,” “posthumous presence,” and “betrayal.” “All

of this enables a capacious, multivalent [use] of the term friendship and an essential way to fully understand the formation of the . . . subject.”<sup>12</sup> The friendships discussed herein take all of these forms, though I focus especially on posthumous presence (Frank O’Hara, Philip Guston) and betrayal (John Cage, Charlotte Moorman, Guston).

With her emphasis on negative affects like betrayal, Moore is explicit in her belief that friendships are hardly idealized or utopian social relationships:

As I have come to see it, friendship is no safe haven from other kinds of power, no magic circle protected haven from race, gender, and class, but intimacy and friendship have their own *specific* . . . power within these broader societal forces in ways that can never be fully disentangled. If we take seriously interpersonal relationships, we cannot neglect an analysis of power and politics; but it keeps our studies of structure tethered to people’s experiences, and offers a crucial matrix for analyzing that intermediary realm between the individual and society. . . . Just as friendship as a category of analysis cannot exclude other kinds of disciplinary powers, neither can it occlude hatred, betrayal, and inevitable ruptures in bonds, the disappointments that can overwhelm them.<sup>13</sup>

I’ve suggested that these fraught dimensions of friendship subtend Kanovitz’s *New Yorkers II* and throughout this book I emphasize the precariousness of Feldman’s social ties. Moreover, I argue that Feldman’s music is especially well-disposed to an analytic grounded in friendship. As the ephemeral performance of community, music—no less than friendship itself—is subject to myriad disciplinary powers. Disciplinary, yes, but also liberating and invigorating energies. One of friendships’ affordances that recurs throughout this book is *permission*. Friendships within the New York School allowed these artists and musicians to do their work, to take aesthetic risks, and to make art a way of life. A letter from Feldman to David Tudor in the early 1950s gives us a sense of what this felt like:

When M.C. [Richards] came over to June’s the other evening, I realized for the fiftieth time this year how much I have taken your friendship and desperately (yes desperately) needed devotion to my work. Hardly a day passes when I don’t think of you in either some connection with my work which you helped me make permissible for me to do, or the humanness of

just our lonely selves. Needless to say, I am just saturated with sentimentality as I write this short note.

The work goes on and the months ahead have exactly the same blackness as the kind of music I would like to write—a music like violently boiling water in some monstrous kettle. But I can't seem to get the water hot enough or the kettle large enough to do it. The last INTERSECTION, which I wrote for you, is just an unrealized hint of what is to come.

This past year! I know you know some of my troubles: THE LOUDEST SECRET LIFE IN THE WORLD—all that along with my continual nagging about a bronchial condition which is, at last, waning.<sup>14</sup>

Feldman's vulnerability is bracing. The sheer intensity of his and Tudor's friendship is charged with desperation, devotion, and—as noted earlier—permission. Tudor's commitment as a musical friend is what makes Feldman's work possible *at all* in the situation of privation they find their “lonely selves” in. Feldman calls back to *Intersection 3*, a piano solo for Tudor written in graph notation. It prophesied what Feldman hoped would come artistically thanks to the pianist's permission: violent, boiling sounds. Permission was something Feldman needed from his friends, including Cage—who gave him “early permissions to have confidence in [his] instincts”—and from Guston, who provided similar sustenance.<sup>15</sup>

Mutual support was not limited to encouragement, but encouragement was required for music to come into being. As I discuss in Chapter 1 and the Intermission, Feldman's graph music required the collaboration and goodwill of musicians. These *necessary others* (as I call them) provided essential contributions to the graph works' realizations.<sup>16</sup> Notated on graph paper and without indications of specific pitch beyond broad ranges, Feldman's *Intersections* and *Projections* required deep creative engagement on the part of their performers. The musicians complete the work either spontaneously, in the moment of performance, or with careful co-compositional collaboration. For musicians like David Tudor—as well as for Charlotte Moorman after him—co-compositional work consisted of transforming Feldman's graphs into fully notated and repeatable scores.<sup>17</sup> In his study of Tudor's realization of Feldman's *Intersections*, John Holzaepfel has beautifully captured their inherently social character.<sup>18</sup> He shows how the aesthetic sensibility of *Intersection 3*—its

violent, boiling virtuosity—resulted from the deployment of Tudor’s masterful technique in dialog with Feldman’s subtle control of sonic texture and density. Open, indeterminate compositions like *Intermission 3* exemplify something fundamental about music: that it is always already a performance of plurality. As a pluralist practice, it is dependent upon communal effort. Such effort—emphasized in, but by no means limited to, avant-garde work—depends as much upon “sentimentality” as it does performing ability. It is the work of the chapters that follow to track these sentimental performances across Feldman’s interdisciplinary collaborations.

My sense of music as a potent window onto friendship (and vice versa) grew out of a long engagement with the thought of Hannah Arendt. While she might at first blush seem an unusual interlocutor for Feldman, she was herself on the periphery of the New York School.<sup>19</sup> Arendt counted the critic Harold Rosenberg as a close friend and worked closely with Christian Wolff’s parents at Pantheon Books.<sup>20</sup> Wolff considered her a friend. Arendt also lectured at the Eighth Street Artists Club, where she likely would have encountered Feldman, O’Hara, Guston, and Cage. Beyond these personal ties, her investigations into political action, natality, and plurality have stark aesthetic implications. She noted the important work that cultural goods—including artworks—do to help others build a common world. She writes that the world

is related . . . to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common as a table is located between those who sit around it.<sup>21</sup>

In my account of Kanovitz’s *The New Yorkers II*, I noted how a slew of creative artifacts linked the group of men portrayed—including the painting itself. *Intersection 3* functions similarly: it brought Feldman and Tudor together into a mutually creative relationship that resulted in a public, world-making performance. Works of art come to fill the space between others—bringing them into relation while also respecting their uniqueness. Or as O’Hara put it, in rather Arendtian fashion, “The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages.”<sup>22</sup>

My engagement with Arendt's thought on aesthetics has been greatly aided by philosopher Cecilia Sjöholm, who has gone further than most in disclosing the political theorist's relevancy for artistic analysis. Building on Arendt, Sjöholm argues that "through its sensible qualities, [art] makes public space a product of aesthesis, implying an invisible web of forms of being that help produce our perception. When the public sphere is minimized and exploited, art escapes more and more into intimate details. At the same time, these details are made public."<sup>23</sup> Sjöholm insightfully draws out the tensions between public and private meaning in artworks—tensions to which Arendt is sensitive and that I myself have had to attend to in documenting the importance of friendship to Feldman's music.

If anything, Feldman relished intimate details and preferred performances between friends. He was explicit about the tension he felt between friendship and publicity, speaking in Toronto in 1982:

So I really want you as my confidante, I want you all as my friends, but I don't want you as my audience. Because the problem is, is that, if music is to be an art form, it has to exist at least six weeks. Give us six weeks without an audience, and maybe something else could happen. So that's what I'm plea-ing for. Accept my goodwill. And my good nature. And feel that maybe the role of the composer and the audience has to, will, must, and possibly could, change.<sup>24</sup>

I explore in Chapter 1 how the tension between publicity and privacy plays out in Feldman's music in the 1950s, but it's clear that it was regularly on his mind: he often expressed an overwhelming nostalgia for his group of friends—those "lonely selves" who, without the intrusion of the world, could make art that mattered. Feldman's efforts resonate with Jon Nixon's powerful reading of Arendt. He finds in her life's work an ongoing "hermeneutics of friendship"—that is, persistent reciprocity and negotiation between oneself and the world, a practice deepened and made meaningful by one's relation to others.<sup>25</sup>

Along with insights from Arendtian aesthetics, I build on work from within literary studies that has thematized friendship in New York School modernism. Andrew Epstein notes a veritable "obsession with friendship" in

postwar American poetry and convincingly argues that “aesthetic and cultural forms cannot be fully understood through the study of individual authors in isolation or solely as manifestations of external sociopolitical conditions, but rather should be seen as a product of densely interwoven cultural, intertextual, interpersonal spaces.”<sup>26</sup> He deftly shows how the friendship of Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery, and Amiri Baraka provide one such space for the investigation of a mutually resonant but contested poetics.

Frank O’Hara also serves as a protagonist in Lytle Shaw’s groundbreaking work on the “poetics of coterie.” Where Epstein keeps his trenchant insights focused on poetry, Shaw shows how O’Hara’s writing provides significant insight across disciplines (specifically literature and visual art) as well as how texts and artistic artifacts provide ways of reading kinship structures such as coterie and friendship. Shaw’s analysis of coterie homes in on O’Hara’s use of proper names in his poetry. These names—of friends, lovers, and so on—mediate between audiences, family structures, and literary history.<sup>27</sup> In one sense—a sense that Feldman himself privileges—coterie can be used to describe an avant-garde prior to its dissemination, when its art and music are known only to a select few. As discussed earlier, Feldman’s eventual success and wide dissemination did not sit easily with him, and he nostalgically insisted on numerous occasions that he would rather be in Cage’s loft or settled in at Guston’s studio than in a concert hall.

Feldman expressed this desire throughout his writings and, like O’Hara, made frequent reference to specific friends. As he reflected in “Give My Regards to Eighth Street,” “The fifties have to do with names, names, names. That’s why they’re worth writing about.”<sup>28</sup> Feldman emphasized proper names in his essays and in the titles of his compositions; doing so, he shares a rhetorical strategy with O’Hara, for whom names are

recalcitrant matter—designating identities from which we . . . are held at a careful distance. To universalize them is not adequate; instead, they are strategic remainders that block our easy identification. The effect of these names depends upon a version of the contextual loss—at the double levels of the speaker and the reader. . . . Though O’Hara is continually supplying context, he seems to be interested in what happens when it breaks down, when we encounter markers of identity that we cannot recuperate.<sup>29</sup>

Feldman's logic is similar. The emphasis across his authorship with "names, names, names" estranges us from his intimate community while at the same time highlighting what Shaw calls "contextual loss." This loss is dramatized and most pronounced as something Feldman experiences himself—hence his interest in transforming anonymous audience members into friends. He mourns coterie as his lost context, especially in his elegies for O'Hara and Guston, which I address in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively. Shaw's insight into O'Hara's poetics—that he is interested in what happens when context breaks down—finds a compelling analogy in Feldman's later, long works in which various musical contexts are supplied, ingratiated to us, and then unceremoniously withdrawn. While this is not the same as O'Hara's textual play, the fact that these profound moments of loss are often experienced in Feldman's elegiac works (including *Three Voices* and *For Philip Guston*) suggests affective resonances between their aesthetics. I explore these resonances in depth in Chapter 3.

Shaw is critical of a historicism that treats coterie "as a determinate 'context' that allows one to ground textual valences in specific historical conditions" because it tends "to hypostasize context."<sup>30</sup> Despite this, I remain committed to a historicist, archival approach, largely because empirical work brings to light conflicting intentions that, instead of hypostatizing context, result in their proliferation. My dilemma as a historian of Feldman's world has been how to respect the brute fact of contextual loss while productively speculating on what is recoverable.

I've been fortunate that there are recent models for this sort of inquiry within musicology. Ellen Harris's recent biography of George Frideric Handel argues for the revelatory power approaching a musician's life through their friends. Through her narration of Handel's friendship networks, Harris shows the composer's struggle to negotiate public and private personae—struggles not dissimilar to Feldman's own resistance to his increasing popularity in the late twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Her historiographical approach—a triangulation of Handel's life and works through his intimate relations—serves as a model for my own. Edward Klorman, for his part, has shown friendship's potential use in our work as music analysts. Taking as his archive W. A. Mozart's chamber music, Klorman finds a sociability cutting across the music, impacting not

only its scenes of performance but also its form. While out of courtesy to my interdisciplinary audience I have largely avoided technical musical discussion, Klorman's work shows us how friendship affects musical expression down to the smallest compositional detail.<sup>32</sup> Paul Berry, in turn, working from Johannes Brahms's circle of friends, looks beyond the oeuvre of a single musician and argues that patterns of allusion, nostalgia, and grief are shared across authorships.<sup>33</sup> Such intertextual interpenetration between the music of Brahms and others—including Clara Wieck Schumann and Joseph Joachim—shows how music can provide the basis for friendship. It sustains memory and revivifies our feelings for one another.

Berry's insights are particularly salient to the work that I undertake in the chapters that follow. But where he excavates resonances between musical works, I trace rhetorics of allusion and intertextuality across artforms—including music, dance, poetry, painting, sculpture, and film. Such inter-art translations are always approximate to some extent, but their reception reveals much about how New York School modernism gained a sense of social and emotional—if not aesthetic—coherence. In this book, I am particularly interested in what philosopher Adriana Cavarero calls *narrative reciprocity* as a form of intertextuality.<sup>34</sup> Building on Arendt's concern for "the web of human relationships and enacted stories," Cavarero describes friendship as a relationship woven from the mutual exchange of life stories.<sup>35</sup> These exchanges enliven the scene of our *narrative selves*: "The scene consists in the intersection of autobiographical narrations, which make sure of the result of the reciprocal biographical activity. Put simply, I tell you my story in order to make you tell it to me. At work, therefore, is a mechanism of reciprocity."<sup>36</sup> For Cavarero, friends are distinguished from acquaintances by virtue of the former's ability to tell the story of the other: "friendship is a specific horizon where this narratability can be meaningfully translated in the act of a reciprocal narration."<sup>37</sup> Cavarero's idea of narratability focuses largely on quotidian acts of female friendship, but she does recognize the role that artworks play in reciprocal narration—her prime example being Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. In the Intermission, I connect Cavarero's reading of Stein to Moorman's realization of Feldman's graph music.

As I noted with regard to Kanovitz's *New Yorkers II*, the friends of the New York School told stories about each other. Feldman took the role of narrator seriously, as did O'Hara and Guston. Indeed, we might think of Guston's need late in life to tell stories through a return to figuration as a confirmation of this powerful impulse to offer narratives to his friends. I've already mentioned O'Hara's sleeve notes for Feldman's 1959 LP; he also wrote about Guston's painting. In offering narratives of both of his friends, O'Hara made their abstractions intelligible for audiences.<sup>38</sup> With Bill Berkson, he composed "St. Bridget's Hymn to Philip Guston," a sterling example of a poem being "between people" rather than pages.<sup>39</sup> Feldman, too, wrote on Guston and eulogized O'Hara following his tragic death on Fire Island in 1966. Guston, in a series of late works from 1977 to 1979, told stories about Feldman that attempted to keep the memory of a friendship alive after it had frayed. These acts of reciprocal narration are complicated by their status as public documents that purport to say something meaningful to both the artist and their audiences. Throughout Feldman's life, the public performance of private relationships returns as problem—one he bristled against even as he actively participated in it.

Several times in his life, Feldman found himself in a situation where narrative reciprocity became impossible. O'Hara's death was once such instance; his periodic disagreements with Cage another (Chapter 1); the collapse of his friendship with Guston another still. These events evince another aspect of friendship that I track through Feldman's friendship in the New York School: that of its *shared estrangement*. Tom Roach, building on the late work of Michel Foucault, has eloquently elaborated on this dimension of friendship. In sharing our estrangement with others, we recognize that that death is always already present. Being-toward-death positions friendships between production and negation. With Feldman's friendships, we see how negation can flare up as death (in the case of O'Hara) or as destructive aesthetic disagreement (with Guston). Feldman was at pains to recognize and develop the aspect of his and his friends' art that was *like death*. He recognized it in O'Hara's poetry, which conveyed affects of *sudden death*. Guston too, felt tremendous sympathy with Feldman's equation of creation and death (see Chapter 4). Feldman himself wanted his music—like Socratic philosophy—to be preparation for death.<sup>40</sup>

Near the end of his life, Feldman was asked by a stranger, “Do you compose only for friends or for yourself?” He responded,

Friends? Most of my friends are now dead. If you had asked me that question thirty-five years ago I would have said: “Yes, I think I do.” And there used to be a lot of them. You see here the last of a certain species. I am one of the last of the kind of character that you saw in New York thirty years ago. I am at the end of the line.

In the chapters that follow, I take Feldman at his word and show just how entangled with friendship his music and writing are. Chapter 1, “Spontaneity, Intimacy, and Friendship in the 1950s,” takes a synoptic view of the 1950s, showing the power of Feldman’s friendships to engender the creative spontaneity that was the hallmark of New York School modernism. Guston, Cage, and O’Hara figure prominently, and I track their role in narrating Feldman’s work for his nascent public. Chapter 2, “*Élan vital* . . . and how to fake it,” documents Feldman’s collaborations with dancer and choreographer Merle Marsicano and his soundtracks for films featuring his friends Jackson Pollock and Seymour Lipton. I show how these inter-art events drew upon vitalism as vernacular metaphysics that, like spontaneity, was a shared value among the New York School. This chapter reevaluates scholars’ claims on Cage’s estrangement from Abstract Expressionism, suggesting that vitalism provided more common ground than has been previously recognized. A brief Intermission, “The Necessary Other,” focuses on Charlotte Moorman’s performance of Feldman’s graph score *Projection 1* and Earle Brown’s *Synergy*, and in doing so, examines the reception the New York School’s music in the 1960s. Moorman, through her alternately rigorous and irreverent performance practice, shows the ambiguous inheritance of the revolution of the 1950s.

With Chapters 3 (“The Elegiac Science”) and 4 (“We broke up because of style”), my focus turns to mourning and shared estrangement. Chapter 3 looks in greater detail at the historical record of Feldman and O’Hara’s friendship. I look for traces of O’Hara in Feldman’s work following the poet’s death and find the composer mourning him in his music throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. I close the chapter with an extended discussion of Feldman’s *Three Voices* and the role of composer-vocalist Joan La Barbara in its realization. Chapter

4 narrates the arc of Feldman and Guston's relationship and emphasizes the importance of dedication, mutual support, and reciprocal narration to it. I show how, following the demise of their friendship, each undertook projects that moved between mourning and melancholia—the latter experienced most prominently in Feldman's *For Philip Guston*. The conclusion turns to Hannah Arendt's work to reflect further on Feldman and Guston and the importance of silence to the maintenance of friendship. Taken as a whole, these chapters work with and through Arendt's and Feldman's styles of thought; they attempt to describe a shared sensibility, which, as Susan Sontag noted long ago, is particularly difficult.<sup>41</sup> More ruminative and speculative than *Saving Abstraction*, these studies of Feldman and his world are an attempt to capture something of what it felt like to be among his coterie at a moment when "nobody understood art."<sup>42</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Frank O'Hara, "New Directions in Music," in Morton Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000), 211–17 and Frank O'Hara, "Larry Rivers: Why I Paint as I Do," in *Art Chronicles, 1954–1966* (New York: G. Braziller, 1975), 106–20.
- 2 Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*.
- 3 Morton Feldman, *The Early Years*. LP. Columbia Odyssey 32160302. 1968.
- 4 For more on Matter and the Studio School, see Chapter 4.
- 5 See Kanovitz's prefatory note to Kurt Weill, "Alabama Song," arr. Morton Feldman (London: Universal Edition, 2004). UE 32423.
- 6 Sam Hunter, *Modern American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Dell, 1959).
- 7 Lytle Shaw, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 235.
- 8 Michel de Certeau, "The Historiographical Operation," in *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Cooley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 56.
- 9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 149.
- 10 Ryan Dohoney, *Saving Abstraction: Morton Feldman, the de Menils, and the Rothko Chapel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

- 11 Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin, "Introduction," in *Among Friends*, ed. Dewey and Rifkin (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 5.
- 12 Brenna Moore, "Friendship and the Cultivation of Religious Sensibilities," *Journal of the American Academy of Religio* 83, no. 2 (2015): 437–63, 457.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 439.
- 14 Feldman sent this letter to Tudor at Black Mountain College. Morton Feldman. Letter to David Tudor. June 15, 1953. David Tudor Papers. Box 53, folder 7. Getty Research Institute. Los Angeles, California.
- 15 Morton Feldman, "Liner Notes," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, 5. For more on Guston's support, see Chapter 4.
- 16 I borrow the concept of "the necessary other" from Adriana Cavarero. See Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 81–93.
- 17 The compositional nuances of Feldman's graphs have been extensively and insightfully detailed by David Cline. See David Cline, *The Graph Music of Morton Feldman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 18 John Holzaepfel, "The *Intersections* of Morton Feldman and David Tudor," in *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Art*, ed. Stephen Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 159–72.
- 19 Brigid Cohen has done important work to bring Arendt's thought into dialog with music studies. See Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and Cohen, "Ono in Opera: A Politics of Art and Action, 1960–1962," *ASCAP / Journal* 3, no. 1 (2018): 41–66. Arendt spoke at the Artists Club on March 23, 1951, on the topic of "The European Intellectual." See Philip Pavia, *Club without Walls*, ed. Natalie Edgar (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2007), 162.
- 20 Christian Wolff, interview with the author, January 18, 2018.
- 21 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 52.
- 22 Frank O'Hara, "Personism," in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 499.
- 23 Cecilia Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 12.
- 24 Morton Feldman, "Toronto Lecture," in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen, 2006), 140.
- 25 Jon Nixon, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 159–74.