Elusive Quartet, Imaginary Songs:
Understanding and Experiencing the Music of Morton Feldman and Helge Sten

by

Nicholas W. Miskey
B.F.A., University of Victoria, 2016

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School of Music

Elusive Quartet, Imaginary Songs:
Understanding and Experiencing the Music of Morton Feldman and Helge Sten

by

Nicholas W. Miskey
B.FA, University of Victoria, 2016

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Joseph Salem, Supervisor
School of Music

Professor Kirk McNally, Departmental Member
School of Music

Abstract

Many commentators experience difficulties describing and analyzing Morton Feldman's *String Quartet no. 2* (1983), implying that the quartet eludes stable ascriptions of meaning. Feldman's own philosophy frames these difficulties as symptoms of an antagonism between direct experience and post-hoc understanding of music, a dichotomy tacitly supported in much related discourse. I critique this proposed rift between understanding and experience by analyzing how *String Quartet no. 2* prompts listeners to repeatedly reconsider their own experiences. Obfuscated instrumentation, transformations of repeated phrases, and disorienting formal returns challenge one's perception, pattern recognition, and musical memory, leading audiences to return to linguistic interpretation in an effort to comprehend what they hear. Drawing on writing by Lawrence Kramer, I show that the compulsion to voice these uncertainties is not a result of a separation of understanding and experience, but of the blurring of these categories.

Vacillation between close listening and interpretation also typifies experiences of the music of Helge Sten, produced under the pseudonym Deathprod. For the album *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha* (1996), Sten transfers recorded violin improvisations to wax phonograph cylinders, clouding attributions of the music's manner of production. Incorporating Brian Kane's theory of acousmatic sound, I demonstrate that the resultant spacing of sound and source provokes listeners to oscillate between attending to the music's material properties and struggling to identify its meaning and cause. Work by Jonathan Sterne indicates that historical techniques of hearing associated with the antiquated medium of the phonograph cylinder prolong and complicate this mode of listening. As with Feldman's quartet, auditors of *Imaginary Songs* endlessly fluctuate between attempting to understand and striving to listen closely to the music.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Salem, who, in addition to providing constant support, tutelage, and guidance throughout the writing of this thesis, has been instrumental in encouraging my career and livelihood as a scholar of music.

I am especially grateful to Helge Sten for his kindness and cooperation in providing thorough and informative answers to my questions. I am also indebted to Regina Greene of Front Porch Productions for facilitating communication between myself and Helge.

Finally, my thanks to all my friends, colleagues, and mentors,
at the School of Music and throughout Victoria.
UVic will always feel like my home.

Dedication

For Rosemary,
who knows

Introduction

Music provokes thought. It usually provokes other responses in us as well: emotional, physical, eidetic, verbal. These responses may be some combination of voluntary and involuntary, positive experiences or negative ones, weakly or strongly felt, or even triggered not by direct experience but by memory. In all of these cases, however, thought is invariably involved when we are compelled to reflect on the musical experience we are having or have had. The understanding and experience of music go hand in hand, and their linkage is perhaps the foremost justification for musicology's existence.

In the following, I discuss how the music of two composers – Morton Feldman and Helge Sten – forces listeners to probe the relationship between musical understanding and experience. These composers are dissimilar at first glance. They hail from different continents, they inhabit different artistic spheres, the dates of their careers do not overlap, and the music of each enacts this tension in different ways. Feldman's music, notated and performed by acoustic instruments in the Western classical tradition, seems at first incomparable to Sten's, which is not notated and is largely generated by electronic equipment. One thing that their compositions do have in common is a tendency to elicit contradictory, illogical, or otherwise perplexing responses in listeners.

More often than not, such responses to music lead us to label that music as “challenging.” Perhaps in our thinking we are shocked or intrigued by our own responses – by feelings or impulses we did not think ourselves capable of, or that otherwise do not easily accord with our self-concepts. When this friction in our thought about music occurs, it generates inquiry and debate, prompting investigations that may have no conceivable end. Instances like this may even startle us into feeling significant degrees of separation between parts of ourselves, leading us to posit the existence of a

thinking self and a feeling self, a self that experiences and a self that reacts. On the other hand, by considering what is "difficult" in music such as that by Feldman and Sten, we may also discover what is natural, intuitive, and meaningful in it, bringing our understanding and our experience together again in a complex and intriguing reunion.

I begin by introducing the history and discourse of Feldman's *String Quartet no. 2* (hereafter SQ2), which commentators have found difficult to treat as a studied, performed, and heard object since its conception. To expose the nature of this difficulty, I enumerate and address the analytical challenges presented by the piece, demonstrating how Feldman's preoccupations with nuancing pitch and rhythm, patterns of near resemblance, and musical memory continually spur an audience to question their own experience of hearing the music. Finally, I draw on ideas from Lawrence Kramer's *The Thought of Music* to show that such challenges are necessarily linguistic as well as musical, and that listeners' difficulties with SQ2 arise from the way that the piece makes listeners aware that musical experience and understanding are codependent and inextricable.

This vacillation between understanding and experience is also present in Sten's music, produced under the pseudonym Deathprod. I begin the second major portion of this text with a brief biographical introduction outlining Sten's career and music. Next, I introduce the topic of acousmatic sound through the writing of Brian Kane. I demonstrate that Deathprod's album *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha* is receptive to analysis prioritizing acousmatic listening, and explore how a listener's experience of hearing *Imaginary Songs* is typified by curiosity and speculation about the music's source and manner of production. Here, I incorporate the work of Jonathan Sterne to show that Sten's use of wax phonograph cylinders to complicate the relationship between sound and source also plays on the cultural connotations of recording media and techniques of listening. I conclude that audiences listening to *Imaginary Songs* are prompted to constantly oscillate between apprehending the material characteristics of the sound and understanding the music as an utterance with cultural and historical

significance.

Morton Feldman was born in 1926 in New York, the city in which he was to spend his professional life.[1] His musical training was in his own words "quite conventional," beginning with piano lessons from Vera Maurina Press in his youth and continuing with private study in composition, first with Wallingford Riegger and later with Stefan Wolpe.[2] At the age of 24 he met John Cage, his lifelong mentor and friend, through whom he was introduced to the painter Philip Guston, initiating an immersion in the New York visual art community that profoundly influenced Feldman throughout his life.[3] Although his interests and experiences were diverse, Feldman was undoubtedly a pupil of academic Western art music, holding posts at universities, lecturing at concert halls after performances of his works, and participating actively in the discourse of European music history and theory most commonly taught in Western institutions at the time.

These facts of Feldman's life contrast considerably with those of Helge Sten's. By the time Sten was born in Røros, Norway in 1971, Feldman had accepted a fellowship in Berlin; by Feldman's death in 1987, Sten would have been some years shy of enrolling at the Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts, from which he graduated in 1996.[4] There he was able to exercise an already held appreciation for visual and performance art (not unlike Feldman's), further his competency with unorthodox and electronic means of musical production, and deepen his fascination with sound design.[5] Since 1991, Sten has produced the music known as Deathprod; genres and descriptors associated with Deathprod by critics and listeners usually include dark ambient, electronic, and noise.[6] Unlike the effusive Feldman, Sten is

1 Chris Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987* (London, UK: Hyphen Press, 2006), 7.
2 Ibid., 30; ibid., 7-9.
3 Morton Feldman, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. Friedman (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000), 3-5.
4 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 8; Eivind Buene, "Helge Sten – mellom dogme og drøm," *Kunstkritikk*, April 4, 2004, https://kunstkritikk.com/helge-sten-mellom-dogme-og-drom/.
5 Helge Sten, "Constructing music as constructing a sculpture: 4 Questions to Helge Sten," interview by Clara Bolin and Elena Brandenburg, *Norrøna*, November 29, 2018, https://norroena.hypotheses.org/1544.
6 Paul Simpson, "Deathprod: Biography and History," AllMusic, accessed January 19, 2020, https://www.allmusic.com/artist/deathprod-mn0000188850/biography.

relatively reticent in discussing his career, so that much pertaining to his practices, philosophies, and history in the arts must be gleaned from interviews, press releases, and reviews of his music with sometimes dubious attribution.[7] Sten reports that he has had "no conventional musical training" and limited involvement with Western musical notation.[8] He certainly has not completely distanced himself from the world of Western classical music in which Feldman thrived – his curated mix for FACT Magazine in 2017 featured works by Henry Cowell and C. P. E. Bach alongside American folk and bluegrass – but anyone who discovered Harry Partch through the music of The Residents, as Sten did, has approached the field from a rather different angle than one who was introduced to these composers through a music history course at a university.[9]

Apart from the shared interest in visual art, these brief biographies overlap little, but the two composers do turn out to have a few pertinent concerns in common. Both are interested in using sound in a non-referential or abstract sense, in an effort to focus listeners' attention more closely on the material qualities of the sound they are hearing. A corollary of this interest is that both prioritize the sonic aspect of music rather than its intertexts – although they are also both keenly aware of the ways in which these can reinforce or complicate listening. But above all else, the music of both Feldman and Sten makes it plain that as we hear it, we cannot help but also think it, and that to listen is to be caught in an endless fluctuation between musical meaning and experience.

7 See Helge Sten, "Life as a Minibus Pimp: Ten Questions with Helge Sten," *Textura*, April 2014, https://www.textura.org/archives/interviews/tenquestions_sten.htm.
8 Helge Sten, email message to author, June 9, 2020.
9 Sten, "Constructing music as constructing a sculpture."

Part I

Morton Feldman's *String Quartet no. 2*

Morton Feldman's second string quartet was commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1983 and first performed by the Kronos Quartet in Toronto the same year.[10] Approximately a year and a half after its completion, during the 1984 Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music, Kronos took the piece to the stage again for its European premiere.[11] As was the case for the world premiere in Toronto, the version of SQ2 played by Kronos in Europe was a shortened one, abridged by Feldman himself in collaboration with the group via phone, most probably due to concerns regarding the logistics of performing the 124-page, single-movement work.[12] Nonetheless, this first performance lasted around four hours, despite official predictions of a two-and-a-half-hour running time.[13] It seems that Feldman himself may have underestimated the length of SQ2, which was not performed in full until many years after the composer's death: in the score, Feldman indicated a variable duration of "3 1/2 – 5 1/2 hours," but despite this generously accommodating range, complete performances rarely dip below the five-hour mark, and frequently exceed six.[14]

Feldman gave a follow-up lecture the morning after the 1984 premiere, a transcription of which

10 David Harrington, "Morton Feldman: String Quartet II," *American Masterpieces: Chamber Music*, 2007, 85. Harrington does not mention here that the piece was abridged, but this fact is well attested elsewhere; see Chris Villars, "Notes on the Early Performance History of Morton Feldman's Second String Quartet," Morton Feldman Page, accessed April 1, 2020, https://www.cnvill.net/mfsq2perfs.htm.

11 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 185-89.

12 Ibid., 185.

13 Ibid.

14 Clark Lunberry wrote in 2006 that the FLUX Quartet was the first to perform SQ2 unabridged, in 1999, but later information from Chris Villars contradicts this statement; based on Villars' 2010 conversation with violinist Stewart Eaton, it seems that the Auryn Quartet may have in fact performed SQ2 in full in February of 1996 (!). Villars also states that four other European quartets played SQ2 unabridged in 1999, in the months prior to the FLUX Quartet's performance. See Clark Lunberry, "Departing Landscapes: Morton Feldman's 'String Quartet II' and 'Triadic Memories,'" *SubStance* 35, no. 2 (2006): 37-38, https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2006.0037, and Villars, "Early Performance History;" Morton Feldman, *String Quartet no. 2* (London, UK: Universal Edition, 1983), UE 17650 L; Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 185.

was published a year later.[15] The discrepancy between the estimated duration and the actual duration of the performance was not addressed in the talk, either by Feldman or the audience. This in itself may not be remarkable: since the piece is so lengthy, even minor variations in tempo on the part of the musicians would have resulted in significant differences in duration. But the length of SQ2 – perhaps its most noteworthy attribute – is not mentioned in this lecture either. In fact, there are precious few words devoted to the work at all, or to its performance the night before, an omission actually noted at one point with some (possibly facetious) annoyance by an audience member who bluntly accuses Feldman of avoiding the subject of the piece.[16] One might sympathize somewhat with this disgruntled listener: there is the instinctive feeling that a piece of this size ought to contain a sufficient amount of material to provoke much conversation, yet Feldman's lecture is tangential, rambling, and digressive. The habits and philosophies of twentieth-century composers, artists, and architects emerge as major themes in his lecture more so than anything pertaining directly to SQ2. On the occasions that Feldman discusses his own composition, he tends to apostrophize ("When you draw the double-bar line, the piece is ended, finished"), to relate anecdotes, and to speak of the things he does not do, rather than the things he does.[17] Feldman's immediate response to the aforementioned audience member who took issue with the direction of the talk ("I wouldn't answer anything you asked me. You're horrible! You're hostile!") was received with laughter, but his mock offence may betray a feeling that such a direct inquiry was somehow an insensitive or impolite way to treat a piece that should rather be talked around (rather than about) out of some kind of delicacy.[18]

For his part, Feldman does seem to have been aware of his tendency to speak in general terms,

15 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 191-209. Villars supplements the 1985 transcription, attributed to Hanfried Blume and Ken Muller and published by Walter Zimmerman, with Kevin Volans' version, published the same year.
16 Ibid., 202.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid. From only this transcription, it is as difficult to determine the precise tone of Feldman's reply as it is to tell whether the ensuing audience laughter was good-natured or nervous.

admitting that he is “not a person who goes around and [talks about] 'my piece'.”[19] One might be inclined to write this off as a case of idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of a composer known for idiosyncrasy. However, an examination of the discourse surrounding Feldman's pieces, particularly those composed in the last ten years of his life, suggests that there may be more to it. Put simply (if hazily), an aura of elusiveness, of obscurity, and above all of difficulty surrounds this music. One aspect of this difficulty manifests as *subjective* uncertainties about the qualities of pieces such as SQ2. These confusions can, and often do, pertain to the ill-defined general “nature” of the music: the frustrated audience member speaking after the European premiere is one (perhaps trivial) example of the piece's discourse not quite living up to expectations. A less bathetic example comes from Kevin Volans' discussion of the quartet with Feldman the same day, in which Volans' very first recorded sentence was an admission that he did not expect the piece to be so “personal.”[20]

These concerns, however, also extend to elementary and quantifiable features of the piece. SQ2's history is replete with instances where the expectations of its performers, audiences, and other commentators in this area have been thwarted or overturned, such as the fact that the European premiere ran an hour and a half longer than expected by the composer or the performers. This latter cannot be ascribed to any unfamiliarity with the piece on the part of Kronos, who were intimately acquainted with the pace of SQ2 thanks to their involvement in its 1983 world premiere, as evinced by an account given by the quartet's leader David Harrington:

> [W]e found out that the CBC broadcast had to finish at exactly midnight, because “O Canada” came on every night at precisely that time. For the world premiere, we took a watch on stage and cast worried glances as the hours went by, speeding up the tempo as needed. We finished it in just under four hours.[21]

19 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 202.
20 Ibid., 211.
21 Harrington, “Morton Feldman: String Quartet II.”

Earlier, Harrington's remarks also shed light on the steps the quartet had to take to become comfortable with these aspects of SQ2, the score of which Feldman sent to the performers twenty pages at a time. Here, too, predictions about the piece's running time were clearly upset when Kronos "discovered that 20 pages was about an hour of music," a realization that caused the CBC as much anxiety as the performers themselves after the score had hit the eighty-page mark.[22]

As late as 1996, such difficulties continued to surround SQ2, when Kronos cancelled a much-anticipated unabridged premiere of the piece in New York, citing physical barriers to performance exacerbated by age.[23] This led Clark Lunberry, in 2006, to pen what is perhaps the most well-referenced essay on the non-performance of a piece, and one that gives full voice to the epistemic doubts that seem to frequently accompany SQ2. Lunberry makes much of Harrington's suggestion that the quartet exceeds the bounds of comprehension, being "larger than anyone's imagination" due to its immensity of duration.[24] To this spatial metaphor Lunberry adds a temporal one, invoking Feldman's credo that "what we hear [of music] is, in a sense, *not there*, never *quite* there, always having just passed us by" in order to illustrate SQ2's properties of elusiveness and volatility.[25] For Lunberry, the cancellation of the performance acts as a kind of amplification of this phenomenology in which the sound event is always prior and never present. But Lunberry speaks as frequently of the anticipation he experienced in the months preliminary to Kronos' performance, ascribing a temporally *anterior* inaccessibility to the piece as well.[26] Through these maneuvers, Lunberry effectively draws a sharp distinction between a hypothetical immediate experience of the quartet and his own efforts to imagine or understand it apart from this experience. In Lunberry's article, as for the previous commentators, SQ2 can only be observed from a conceptual distance, through constant repositioning, as though attempting to

22 Harrington, "Morton Feldman: String Quartet II."
23 Lunberry, "Departing Landscapes," 29-30.
24 Quoted in ibid., 18, 19, and 30.
25 Ibid., 23.
26 See ibid., 26-29.

apprehend a distant object by viewing it from differing angles.

This compulsion to re-evaluate what one knows about SQ2 is also entangled with an *intersubjective* difficulty: Feldman's late works are very hard to talk or write about as shared experiences. Indeed, many authors (the present included) theorize Feldman mostly by acknowledging this difficulty and probing for its potential roots. Dora Hanninen predicates an entire article on the difficulties of analyzing Feldman's works due to their scale and repetitive nature.[27] Leslie Blasius, in attempting a hypothetical close reading of Feldman's *Palais de mari*, identifies a point in the score after which his analytic narrative "fails" and further attempts only yield "an impressionistic inventory of stylistic traits which seem to encompass the whole of late Feldman," a description outlining a kind of non-specificity remarkably similar to that of Feldman's own efforts to discuss his music in the lecture at Darmstadt.[28] Although Catherine Costello Hirata's much-cited 1996 essay on Feldman deals with the phenomenology of his earlier works, her meditation on the frustratingly elusive experiences of discontinuity and absence engendered by these could stand – as noted by Blasius – equally, or better, in writing on late works such as SQ2.[29]

Why should it be the case that Feldman's pieces are difficult to analyze? Perhaps the most obvious answer is that these works are simply so long, and comprise so much material, that to closely examine them requires a faculty for attention and memory that few analysts possess or are willing to bring to bear.[30] This explanation on its own, however, is insufficient for a discipline that has embraced the music of Wagner, Glass, and Ferneyhough. Hanninen, too, feels that even among Feldman's oeuvre, shorter (twenty-five minute) pieces are no easier to work with than longer (six-hour) ones, and that "the

27 Dora Hanninen, "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 2 (2004): 225-51, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572205000137.

28 Leslie Blasius, "Late Feldman and the Remnants of Virtuosity," *Perspectives of New Music* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 32-83, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25164540.

29 Catherine Costello Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves: Analyzing the Early Music of Morton Feldman," *Perspectives of New Music* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 6-27, https://jstor.org/stable/833482; Blasius, "Late Feldman," 36.

30 Hanninen, "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," 226-29.

real problem [with analyzing Feldman's music] is not quantitative but qualitative," owing to the composer's curious habits of near repetition of musical phrases.[31] This technique provides a "superabundance of nuance" that is difficult for the analyst to recall but impossible for them to gloss.[32]

If it is difficult to make sense of SQ2 – to *understand* what it means, what it does, and how it does it – it also seems difficult to communicate that meaning to others, or even to find ways of talking about what it might be. This linkage may not be surprising. Signification in the subjective sense is not easily separable from intersubjective communication, even if the two sometimes interact in unexpected or unintentional ways. What is perhaps surprising is that in the case of Feldman's late pieces, this difficulty seems to be frequently read as an indication that one's own experience of the music *cannot* be adequately communicated or even understood. Something, allegedly, remains off limits to the analyst as well as the listener – if this were not the case, it would not be so difficult to find a language that describes the music effectively. This delimitation is a symptom of an emphatic separation of musical understanding and musical experience.

I undertake the following analysis with the aim of eventually questioning and critiquing this proposed separation. In preparation, I consider how visual aspects of the score, despite their clear and unambiguous presentation, mislead analysts and present problems for performers. Next, I focus on how the score is converted to sound. I explore how the piece provokes uncertainty and an unsettled, inquiring mode of listening by playing on three domains of comprehension. First, the limits of a listener's perception – one's abilities to distinguish, compartmentalize, and correlate sounds – are tested by passages that conceal and confuse instrumentation, melodic contour, and beat. Second, the brain's capacity to recognize and anticipate patterns is turned against it by methods of repetition that subtly transform phrases, resulting in uncomfortable recalculations every time a sequence is disrupted. Third, the recurrence of motives throughout the piece, often hours apart, prods at the boundaries of a listener's

31 Hanninen, "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," 227.
32 Ibid.

memory, calling into question what one thinks one remembers. The very process of weighing what is read, understood, and communicable about SQ2 against what is heard and experienced becomes an enthralling medium for appreciation of the music. Finally, I argue that Feldman's music does not insist on any fundamental division between understanding and experience, but rather guides the audience to listen in between the two, blurring and confusing the categories. In this light, the so-called "difficulties" in listening to and analyzing Feldman's music are better thought of not as problems to be overcome but as rich experiences in themselves.

Difficulty, Misdirection, and Analysis

Upon opening the score of SQ2, it is hard not to be struck by the exactitude and clarity of Feldman's handwritten notation. Feldman, who claimed to keep no sketches and work mostly in ink, organized the 124 pages of the piece into three systems of nine bars each per page, so that the entire piece comprises 3348 unnumbered measures, not counting repeats.[33] As violinist Tom Chiu of the FLUX Quartet observes, the boundaries of sections in the piece are almost always dictated by the boundaries of pages or systems, so that "blocks" of similar material are often easy for a performer to read and make sense of.[34] However, despite the tidiness of the notation, there are certainly challenges aplenty in performing SQ2 that are not linked to the physical demands of playing very quiet music on a bowed string instrument for six hours.[35] Perhaps most notable among these is spending the mental

33 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 202.

34 Ryan Dohoney, "Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*: An Interview with Tom Chiu and Max Mandel of the Flux Quartet," *Dissonance* no. 116 (December 2011): 12, reproduced with permission at https://www.cnvill.net/mfdohoney.pdf. The New York-based FLUX Quartet has undertaken more complete performances of SQ2 than any other quartet since their first in 1999, and their five-disc recording of the piece is perhaps the best known and most well-regarded.

35 Measurements of time throughout this analysis are based on the FLUX Quartet's recording, which I have used as a reference throughout. FLUX Quartet, *Feldman Edition 6: String Quartet no. 2*, Mode 112, 2002, 5 CDs.

energy necessary to interpret Feldman's accidentals, which seem to be so applied as to deliberately confuse performance. Enharmonic respellings of notes, especially using double flats and sharps, are used liberally without obvious justification, so that intervals may seem on the page much larger or smaller than they sound.[36] The notation of rhythm often represents another hurdle for performers; the piece's tempo is notated at a constant 63-66 to the quarter note from beginning to end, although there are an enormous number of different time signatures throughout, many of which are not divided by the quarter note and include 3/16, 9/32, 1/8 and other uncommon examples. Furthermore, these meters are rarely – if ever – subdivided according to traditional Western mensuration, and are frequently confused by the addition of tuplets that make counting unintuitive for a performer, such as when an entire bar of 5/8 is to be played as a sextuplet.

With its blend of neat modular design and unconventionally notated musical gestures, SQ2 seems at first receptive to incisive analysis intending to uncover deep connections within the piece. However, as Hanninen observes, in the case of Feldman's music, "the kinds of questions our analytical tools and methods are best at answering may not be the ones we find most intriguing."[37] Magnus Olsen Majmon's taxonomical analysis, to my knowledge the most comprehensive study of SQ2 at time of writing, provides an interesting example of what looking for structure and self-similarity within the piece can accomplish – and the limits of such inquiry.[38] Majmon's classification of all (!) recurring segments in the piece, which he dubs "field-characters," reveals the shocking amount of recycled and

36 FLUX violist Max Mandel notes that these accidentals may be intended to indicate that "a sharp [should be played] sharper and a flat ... flatter," so that, for instance, a C# is slightly higher in pitch than a Db, but he is hesitant to cite this as an explanation for Feldman's idiosyncratic use of accidentals; see Dohoney, "Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*," 14. The nearest words from Feldman on this subject are merely that accidentals are "directional," but Kevin Volans, who was well acquainted with Feldman, dismisses the idea that this implies a call for a change in intonation. Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 198, and Kevin Volans, "What Is Feldman?" *Tempo* 68, no. 270 (October 2014): 11, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298214000321.

37 Hanninen, "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," 228.

38 Magnus Olsen Majmon, "Analysis of Morton Feldman's *String Quartet no. 2* (1983)," trans. Magnus Olsen Majmon, excerpt from *En diskurs om 'det sublime' og Morton Feldman's String Quartet no. 2*, University of Copenhagen, Music Department, 2005. This is, to my knowledge, an unpublished text, made available to the public through Chris Villars' website, at http://www.cnvill.net/mfolsen_english.pdf.

transformed material in SQ2, and supplies a good starting point for researchers concerned with form and repetition on a large scale.[39] However, despite the meticulousness of Majmon's tabulation, certain connections between sections are overlooked, such as the commonalities in time signature and instrumentation between page 10, system 2, and page 15.[40] Others are established prematurely, as when Majmon relates pages 1-2 and page 31, system 2 on the basis of shared pitch content, missing that the registers and onsets of notes are far more diversified in the second example and thus do not have at all the same effect.[41]

Although Majmon's analysis purports to focus on "concrete" and verifiable details, it is as much the product of subjective speculation as is any other.[42] These relationships are not immanent in the piece but are established in the analysis by the influence of the author's priorities and personal experience. There is nothing wrong with this – analysis of music can hardly be otherwise – but it may indicate that in the case of SQ2, taxonomy can only take us as far as understanding the extent to which certain of the piece's "modules" resurface in some form or another, without unambiguously comprehending the nature of these transformations. This is Hanninen's motivation for "focus[ing] on *differences* in the sound of segments with identical notational images," with the hope that this approach will expand rather than foreclose the experience of hearing Feldman's music.[43]

The look of the score may be strange, but how it sounds is even stranger. This is apparent right from the opening of the piece, two pages of music described by Chiu as "agitated" and a strenuous listening exercise.[44] All instruments begin in the treble clef with a time signature of 3/8, playing *con sordino*; the mutes remain in for the duration of the piece. Each instrument is given a single note to

39 Majmon, 23-39.
40 Ibid., 24-25.
41 Ibid., 26.
42 Ibid., 3-4.
43 Hanninen, "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," 242. See also Blasius, "Late Feldman," 38, for more on the inappropriateness of attributing narrative "roundedness" to Feldman's music.
44 Dohoney, "Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*," 12.

repeat in the same register, an octave above middle C: dotted-quarter D double-sharp and E-flat for the violins, D natural harmonic of the same duration for the viola, and a dotted eighth rest followed by pizzicato dotted eighth C-sharp in the cello line. Apart from changes in articulation further down the first page, when the second violin is directed to play sul tasto and the cello makes brief excursions to bowed natural harmonics on the same C-sharp, the only changes are in dynamics. These, which change in almost every consecutive bar, range from triple pianissimo to forte, including instructions of mezzo-fortepiano, and are almost always different in every instrument save for a few notable synchronicities. There is no apparent evidence of any predictable patterns of occurrence for these dynamic changes, although certain general tendencies in orchestration are noticeable, such as the preponderance of triple pianissimo and mezzo forte in the cello.[45]

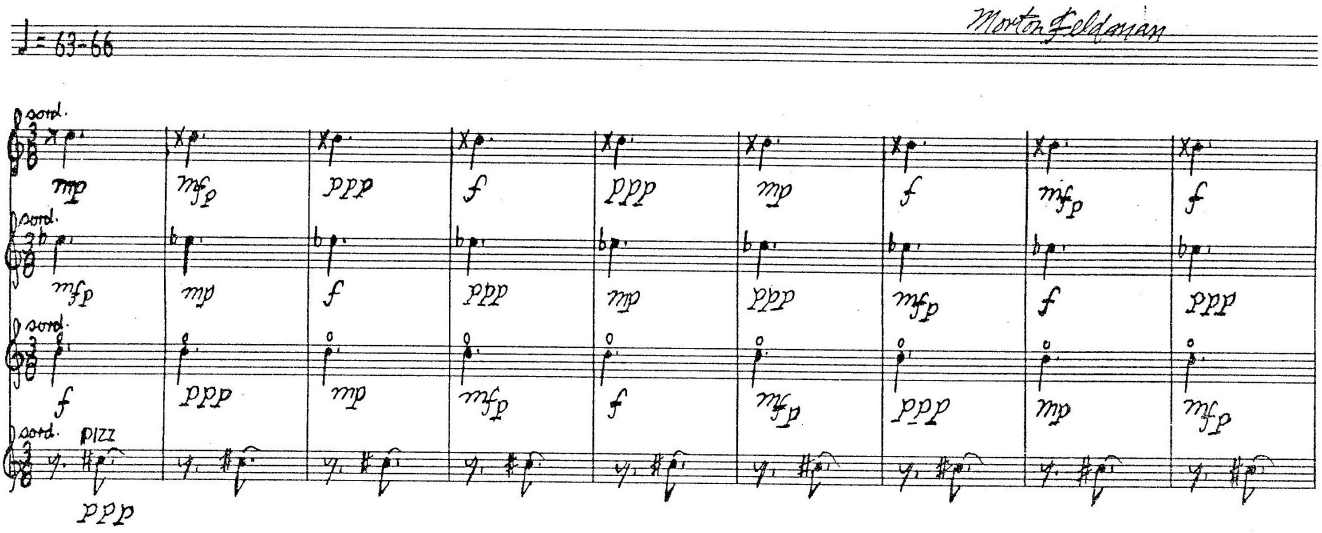

Figure 1.1. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 1, first system.

Despite the unchanging appearance of the notation, it sounds as if a great deal is changing in this music. Since the instruments are confined to playing all in the same register and within the range of a minor third (C-sharp to enharmonic E), distinguishing between each instrument by ear is all but

45 It is somewhat of a cliche to repeat that Feldman did not have much truck with what he considered "systematic composition," such as using series to organize events. See Hanninen, "Feldman, Analysis, Experience," 225; also see Feldman, *Give My Regards*, 22-24, and ibid., 45, both cited in Hanninen.

impossible. Rather than detecting that the instruments are each repeating only one note, the ear sorts each attack by its dynamic prominence, so that events of a similar volume are perceptually linked together. In other words, melodies between instruments, emphasized by volume, are heard as melodies within parts. The simpler explanation – that each instrument is simply playing at different intensities – is less likely to cross one's mind. A listener would be more likely to guess that the instruments have been given melodic lines in secundal motion, rather than that they have each been assigned just one note to play. The cello, separated from the other instruments by time (due to the rest at the beginning of each measure) and by articulation (due to the pizzicato instruction), confuses rather than clarifies the issue: its delayed occurrence raises the possibility that one instrument is on occasion playing two notes in a bar, one pizzicato and one arco.

Curiously, this opening gesture does not reappear for the rest of the piece. Majmon identifies sections that resemble pp. 1-2, but I cannot agree that these constitute reappearances – there is simply nothing else present that sounds quite like this combination of dynamically varying three-note clusters followed by a pizzicato in the same register.[46] In particular, the sudden intrusions of triple-fortissimo dynamics in different instruments, when set against the obsessive, regular rhythm and aforementioned perceptual obfuscations, establish a disquieting atmosphere not represented elsewhere. All of these elements are to be found, in one form or another, throughout the other 122 pages of SQ2, but never in this configuration.[47] Dohoney, Chiu, and FLUX violist Max Mandel propose that the "frantic" pace of the music generates anxiety in the listener, but another possibility is that audiences may find something unsettling in how these pages mislead one to hear melodies where there are only repeated chords.[48]

46 It should be noted that Majmon only claims that sections such as p. 10, system 2, are "related to" or "remind one of" pp. 1-2, with the proviso that different notes are used, there is no pizzicato, and the dynamics are more subdued and do not change. However, there are still further differences that go unmentioned in Majmon's acknowledgement, notably that each bar in the p. 10 system is repeated five times, and the rhythm between each first cluster and the succeeding note in the cello is not even, whereas in the opening pages there is almost no straight repetition of bars and the rhythm is typified by an even dotted-eighth pulse throughout. See Majmon, 24.

47 Dohoney goes so far as to find an "anxiousness that the piece takes five hours to unwind" in these opening pages. Dohoney, "Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*," 12.

48 Ibid.

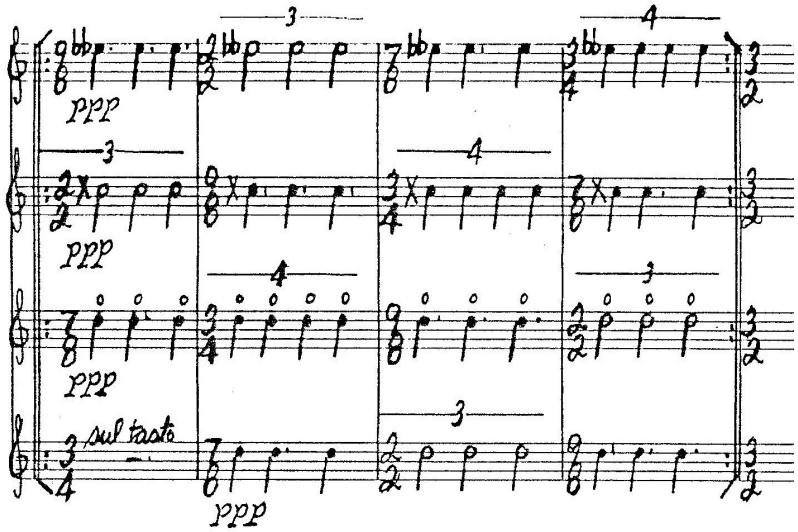

Figure 1.2. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 23, second system, bars 1-4.

While the opening pages steer listeners toward a particular (albeit misleading) perception of the music, many other passages in SQ2 are equally confounding to the ear without inclining toward any specific mode of listening. The second system on page 23 is one such example, wherein all instruments repeat a D (notated E double-flat and C double-sharp in the violins) with asynchronous time signatures and varying three- and four-tuplet rhythms in two repeated four-bar modules. As with the opening pages, since the instruments are occupying the same register, picking out any attack that can be definitively attributed to one or another instrument is almost impossible – a bewildering effect intensified here by the viola playing a natural harmonic and the cello playing sul tasto, further softening already muted sounds. Because the time signatures are not synchronized, even following along with the aid of the score is prohibitively difficult due to the lack of coincidence between parts. Elsewhere, similarly asynchronous systems with more differentiated parts cause just as much confusion for different reasons. The two-octave leaps on page 26, which should act as audible place markers in normal circumstances, are lost in the murk of diverging onsets induced by the changes in meter. On page 32, the organized chaos of dynamic swells from triple pianissimo to mezzo forte is unpredictable

and alarming. This goes double for page 36, throughout which all parts share a time signature but repeat two- or five-bar sections of dyads without sharing repeat signs; the resulting occasional synchronization of triple-fortissimo chords sounds as if some quirk of nature has transpired to line everything up to startle the listener. Such examples, moreover, are only the very tip of the iceberg. Apprehension and doubt linger in some way on almost every page.

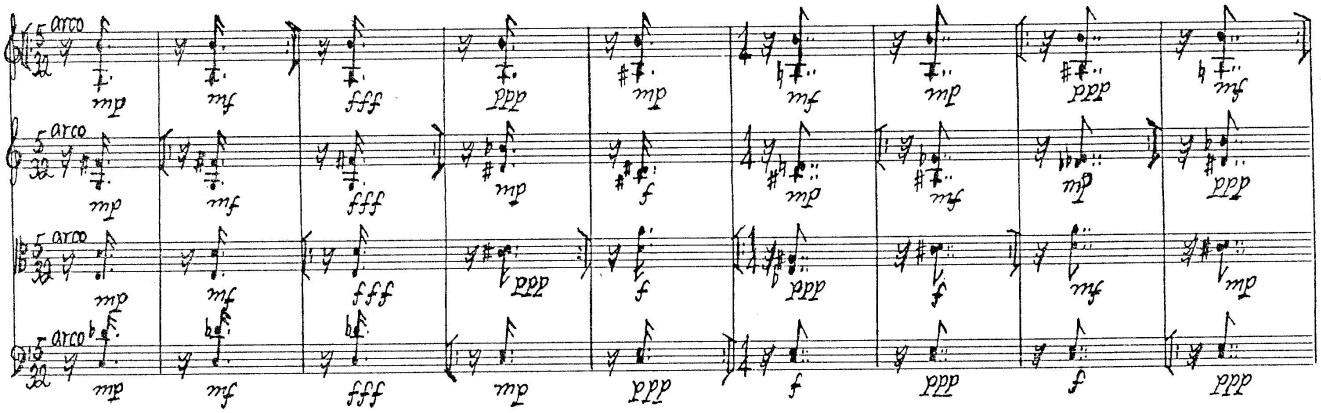

Figure 1.3. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 36, second system.

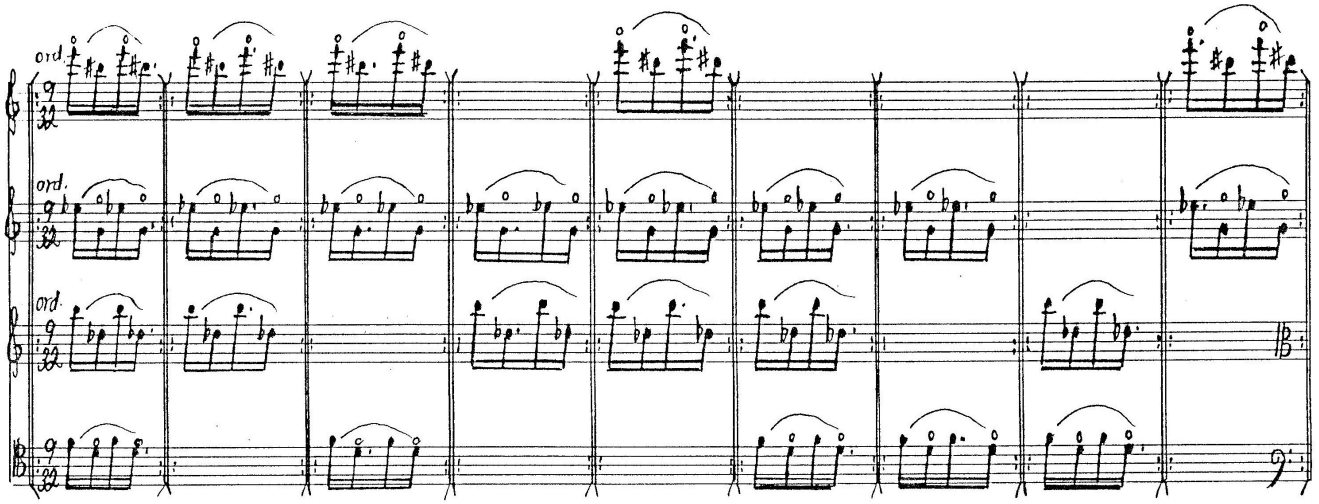

Figure 1.4. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 77, first system.

Feldman's composition also thwarts listeners' expectations by creating unsettling modifications to repeated musical material. The music on page 77 is just one example of why the simple descriptor "repetitive" hardly does Feldman's piece justice. All instruments begin in 9/32 at quintuple pianissimo,

playing a kind of seesawing alternation between two pitches, which differ for every instrument. Three sixteenth notes are followed by a dotted sixteenth so that the measure feels unbalanced, weighted toward its tail end. This first bar is played twice, but is changed in the second bar when the dotted sixteenth becomes the third rather than the fourth note. Further bars in the first system keep the same pitches, but shift the placement of the dotted sixteenth note, so that the quartet lingers at a different point in the rhythm with every successive bar.

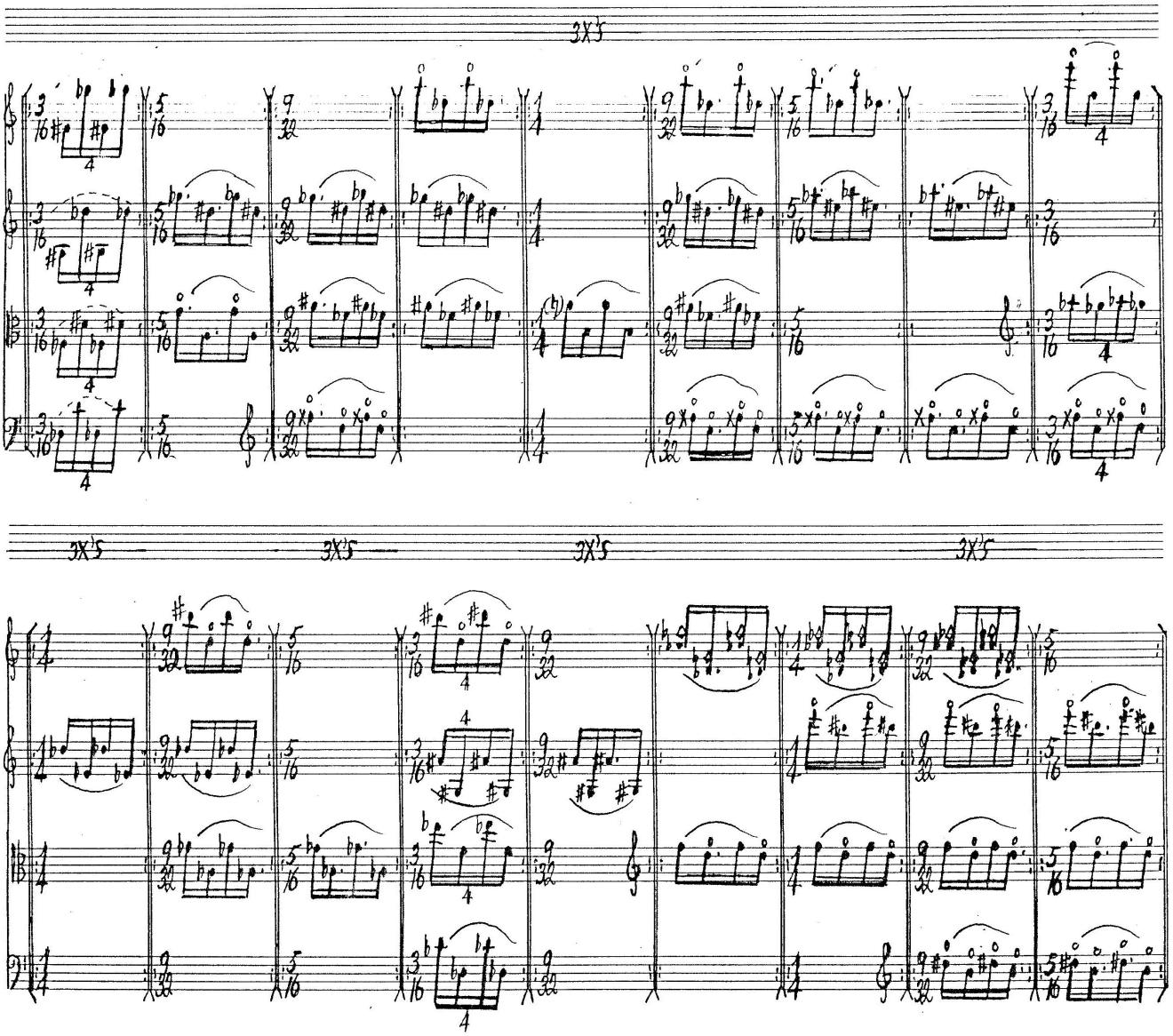

Figure 1.5. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 77, second and third systems.

There is just enough about this passage to give the impression of repetition, notably the retention of the same pitches by every instrument and the regular up-and-down motion of the ensemble, but the one tiny dot of ink that extends one of the beats by a thirty-second has the unsettling consequence of quashing all attempts at predicting the rhythm of each bar every time it is moved. The listener cannot treat the music as if it were completely unpatterned – there is too much that is similar between each bar for this to be possible – but neither can they relax into the rhythm due to its irregularity. The issue is exacerbated when, in the second system, the pitches, time signature, and direction of the intervals completely change, and all notes are written without a dot. Not even the lopsidedness of the bars can be taken for granted, nor can a listener expect to hear each group of notes twice, as we learn when the fifth bar of this system is played three times rather than twice. Further changes to these parameters occur in the third system to hammer the point home.

This is not an isolated incident in the piece – in fact, it might be called its norm. Opening almost any page of the score reveals instances in which Feldman makes small adjustments to the rhythms of repeated measures, subtly transforming a phrase over the course of a system, a page, or many pages. Often the time signature is altered by small increments: sixteenth-note values are added or removed in no particular order so that bars of 4/8 become 7/16, then 9/16, then 5/8.[49] Sometimes tuplets or dotted rhythms are added or removed; sometimes the durations between attacks are stretched or compacted slightly.[50] Crucially, no phrase is ever repeated verbatim to the point of its becoming hypnotic. Pitch content, at least, is almost always reused, often in small units of two or three notes at a time, so that a listener can clearly identify the linkages between each occurrence – but notes that stand out are never quite allowed to become centres around which predictive listening can be structured. On page 108, the low D-flat in the cello that opens the first three bars, almost two octaves below every other note on the page and the only one to be played pizzicato, seems at first to announce the onset of the C-D figure

49 See for instance the final system of page 78.
50 See page 38, first system; see page 5.

repeated by the other instruments. When the D-flat moves to the middle of the bar rather than the beginning in the fourth measure, it is as if the structural integrity of the phrase has been thrown into question, an impression intensified when the pizzicato moves to the final beat in later measures.

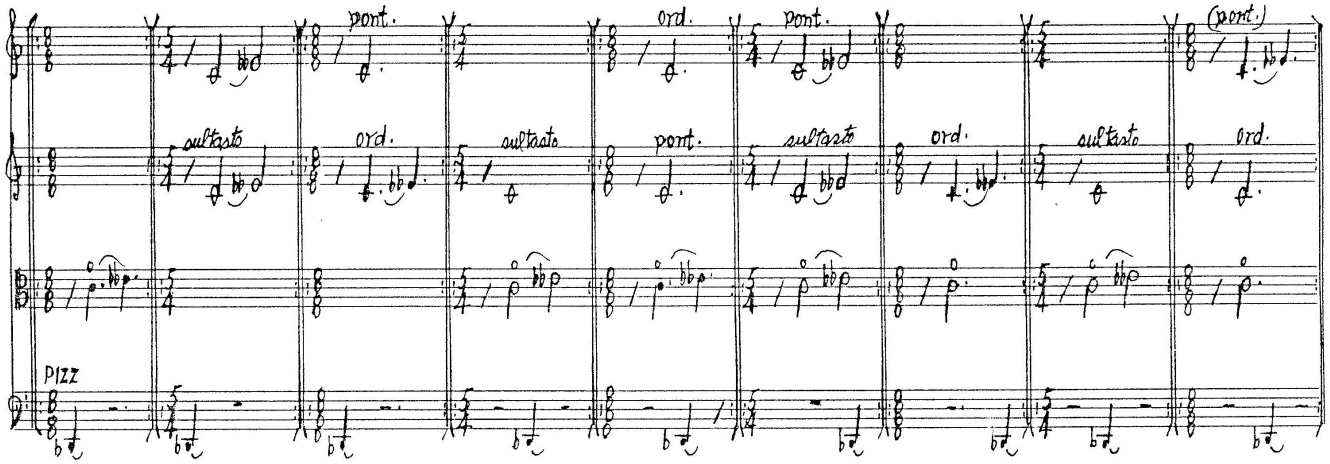

Figure 1.6. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 108, first system.

Although Feldman's writing often plays havoc with listeners' perceptions, he does provide important formal markers. Notable among these is the first system of page 10. The cello holds a triple-pianissimo artificial harmonic on B for the full nine bars, while above it, the three other instruments, also in triple pianissimo, take part in a call-and-response motive beginning on the same pitch but notated C-flat.[51] Many of the idiosyncrasies present at large in SQ2 are observable in this passage, which Majmon calls the "fourth-motif" due to its prevalent descending perfect fourths: time signatures that change in every measure, tuplet rhythms that go against the notated meter, and four accidentals used where one (C-sharp) would suffice to indicate an enharmonically equivalent group of notes.[52] But although the motive may not be uncharacteristic, it certainly stands out in the piece; indeed, to simply call it "the motive" rather than the "fourth-motif" would be reasonable, given that it constitutes perhaps the most unmistakable and identifiable recurring element in the whole of SQ2.

51 Since the cello harmonic sounds two octaves higher than the stopped note, the second violin and the cello begin this section on the same pitch in the same register.

52 Majmon, 24.

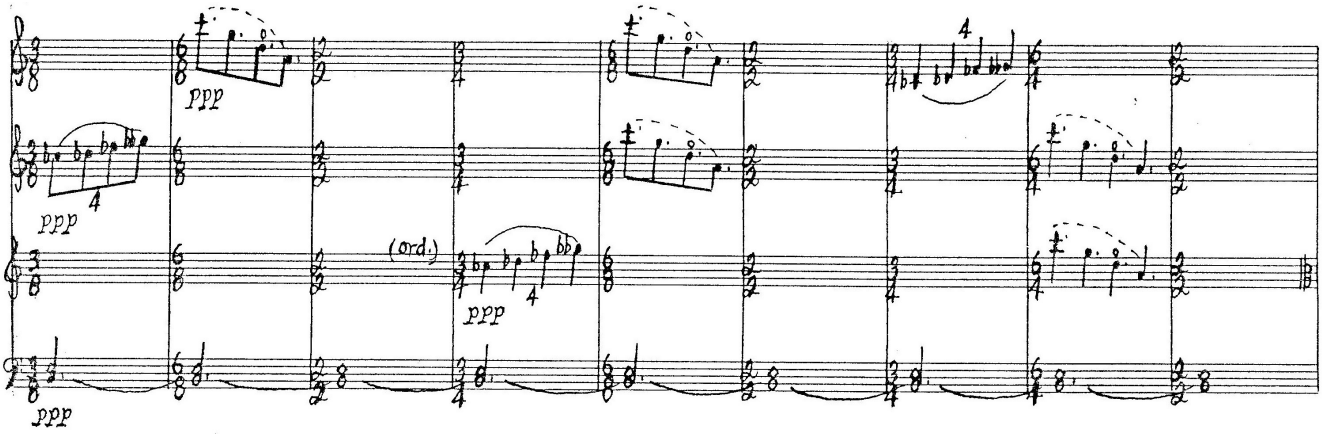

Figure 1.7. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 10, first system.

After the first appearance, "the motive" returns six times in all, with the same foundational ingredients.[53] An artificial harmonic sustained by the cello is accompanied by a melody from an upper instrument, which begins on the same note and works upward by a major second, a minor third, and a minor second. This is then followed by one or more other instruments playing descending perfect fourths that begin a minor ninth above the harmonic. A bar of 2/2, during which only the cello's drone is heard, follows the latter. To call this melody lyrical would not be inappropriate. The first bar, an almost cantabile ascending gesture, is followed by the highest note in the motive, a perfect fifth above – but this heralds the precipitous descent that returns the melody to just below where it began. The contour of the phrase, which places its climax squarely in the middle of a climb and a fall, heightens its expressivity, as does the fact that the second bar's ambitus encompasses the entire range of the first and then some. These eight notes seem loaded with narrative significance. In SQ2, where melodies not constructed around minor- or major-second ideas are rare, to say nothing of antiphonal ones, this motive attracts attention with its every reappearance.

But what kind of attention? The intervallic content of the motive remains the same every time it returns, but almost everything else about it changes: Feldman generally adjusts its pitch,

53 The motive occurs on pages 13, 19, 23, 31, 55, and 68. Pages 19 and 68 are exact copies of the first instance on p. 10 (save for, in the latter, a call for sul tasto in the upper instruments). Page 31 reuses the pitch and rhythmic content of p. 13, at a louder dynamic of mp and with some changes in instrumentation.

instrumentation, time signatures, and even the way its intervals are notated. Its first reappearance on p. 13 sees it transposed down a semitone, with the viola roughly swapping roles with the second violin. Minor thirds and minor seconds are spelled as augmented seconds and doubly-diminished thirds, and the eighth bar of the system is in 6/8 instead of 6/4. This second presentation, approximately seven and a half minutes after the first, is just different enough to feel uncanny. Enough time has elapsed, and enough material has come between the two occurrences of the motive, that listeners not following a score are unlikely to identify the semitone transposition with any certainty. Even the possibility that one might detect the changes in instrumentation, or pick up on the faster ending bar that disrupts the motive's trend of gradual deceleration, is slim. Subsequent iterations continue to incorporate subtle alteration: on page 23, the pitches and instrumentation are the same, but the first two intervals are spelled as a diminished third and an augmented second, while the eighth bar, in 8/8, disrupts the pattern of alternating triple and compound-duple metres. The instance on page 31 copies the notes and rhythm of page 13, but swaps the viola's part with that of the second violin. Page 55 moves the motive all the way up to a starting note of D and spells the descending fourths using only two notes – E falling to B – but with different accidentals.

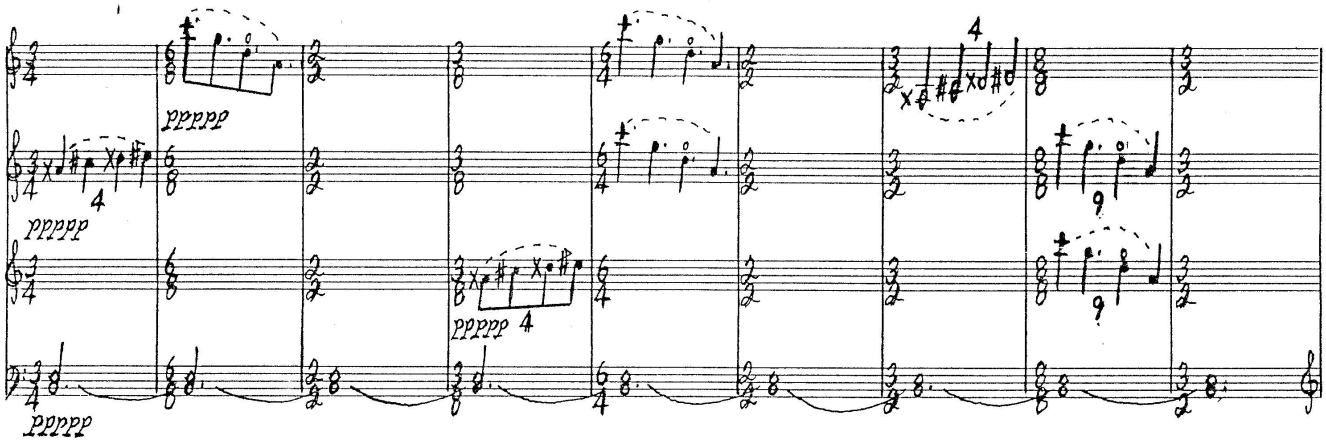

Figure 1.8. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 23, first system.

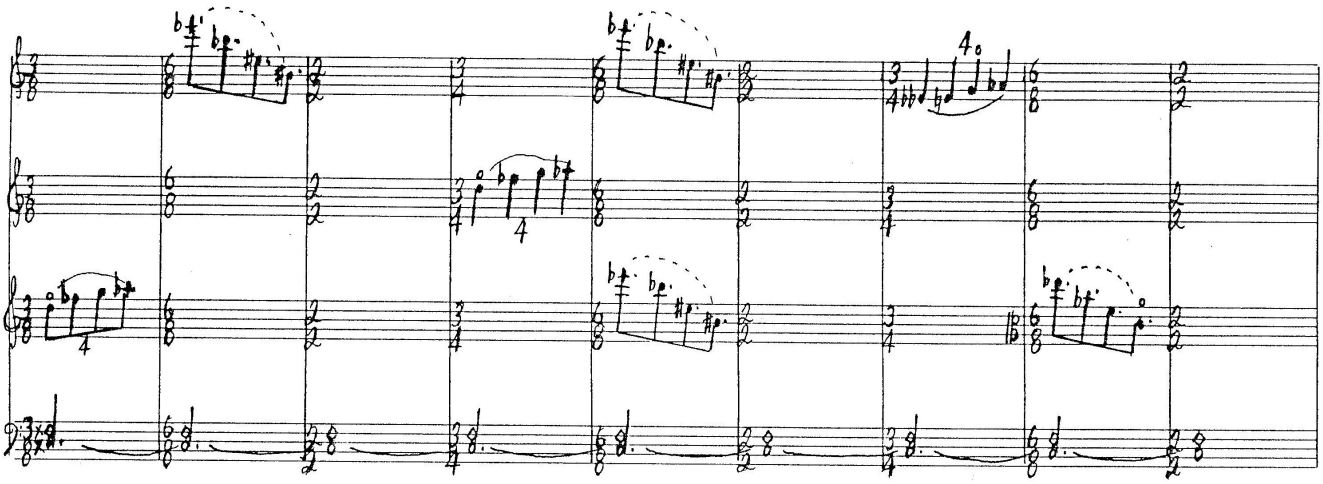

Figure 1.9. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 55, first system.

It is important to remember that the scale of the piece means that in some cases an hour will pass between these presentations, whose frequency declines as the piece progresses. Such delayed and disconnected recapitulations do not provide narrative coherence in the manner of a sonata's returning main theme, but rather, as Blasius eloquently contends, "take shape as intrusions of differing temporalities, as continuities which ... threaten rather than reinforce the music's cohesion as a single thing."[54] By playing on the failures of a listener's memory, what should be a clear and palpable formal signpost turns into a destabilizing mechanism. To hear these returns of the motive is to feel that one is on the verge of identifying connections within the music but that it is impossible to make the necessary cognitive leap that would establish their certainty.

54 Blasius, "Late Feldman," 37. Blasius is speaking of "obvious returns" in Feldman's *Palais de mari*, but this remark is especially apt for much returning material in the even longer SQ2.

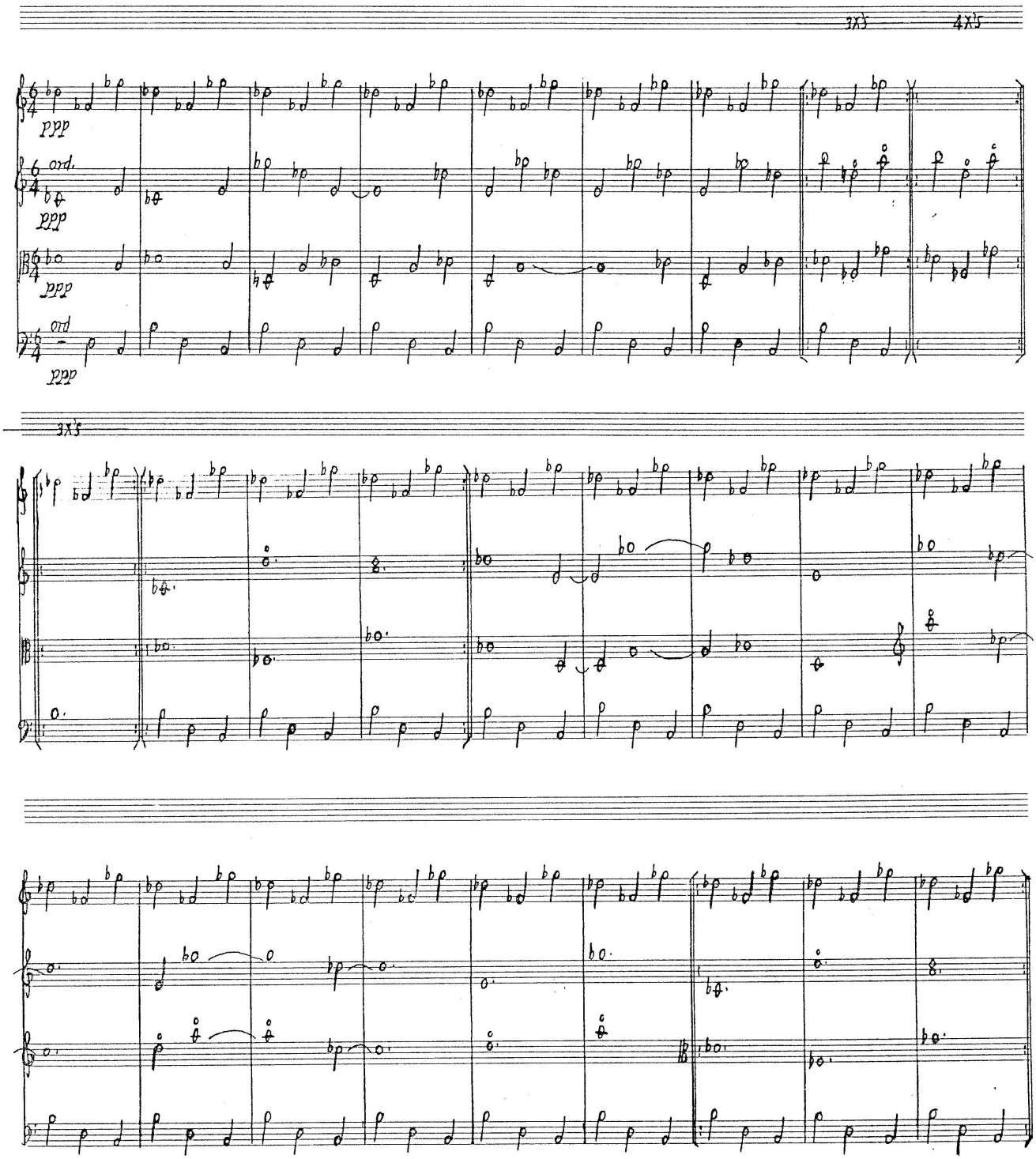

Figure 1.10. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 22.

This subversion of formal integrity is unsettling, but there is another such instance that Ryan Dohoney has gone so far as to call "upsetting," a word echoing Kevin Volans' assessment of the piece after hearing Kronos' 1984 performance in Europe.[55] The issue is first raised on page 22, at which point all instruments engage in a slow triple-pianissimo passage in 6/4 that Dohoney likens to a chorale.[56] The first violin is tasked with a motive that falls and rises between D-flat, F-flat, and G-flat half notes, while the cello plays a descending B-D-A line. Both outer instruments repeat these three-note phrases throughout the page, pausing only for four repeated bars at the end of the first system. The second violin and viola, also playing within this collection of pitches, provide accompaniment, usually playing longer tones that float alongside the slow melodies of the violin and cello. After a little over five minutes, the passage gives way to a reprise of the motive first appearing on page 10. Dohoney calls the page "gorgeous and achingly sad," and members of the FLUX Quartet agree that it is beautiful.[57] It is certainly remarkable in that it is the most tonal section in the whole piece, featuring a diatonic assemblage of notes which would, or whose enharmonic equivalents would, all fit into an A major or B minor scale – a clear departure from the dominance of minor seconds elsewhere in the piece. The low A of the cello thrumming at the end of every bar reinforces the impression of a key centre of A major for this page, an impression both troubled and reinforced by occasional implied departures to the relative minor of F-sharp, as well as frequent suspensions of scale degrees 2, 4, and 6 that never quite resolve.[58]

However, what Dohoney identifies as particularly distressing about this section is not its yearning emotional quality or its tonality, but the fact that it resurfaces – in a way – thirty pages later, and again several more times before the end of the piece. Where listeners might have had to strain somewhat to be aware of changes to the motive of page 10, someone keeping an ear out for the re-entry

55 Dohoney, "Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*," 16; Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 211.
56 Ryan Dohoney, "Morton Feldman: String Quartet No. 2 (1983)," program notes for Spektral Quartet, March 11, 2017, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, reproduced with permission at https://cnvill.net/mfdohoney-sq2.pdf.
57 Ibid.; Dohoney, "Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*," 16.
58 See the final bar of the first system, in which F-sharp minor is allowed to surface due to the absence of an underpinning A in the bass.

of this chorale will immediately be aware that something is wrong with it when it enters again on page 52. For a start, the cello's descending line is now played pizzicato, the second violin enters on thin artificial harmonics, and the ensemble has quieted to quintuple pianissimo. More immediately apparent is the fact that the pitches are different – chromaticism is commonplace, and all twelve notes are represented at some point throughout the system, so that no tonal centre is apparent. The diatonicism of page 22 does resurface in some places, notably in the first and fourth measures, but, as Dohoney notes, this serves merely to relate the passage to its initial "lush" presentation, and is more depressing than reassuring.[59]

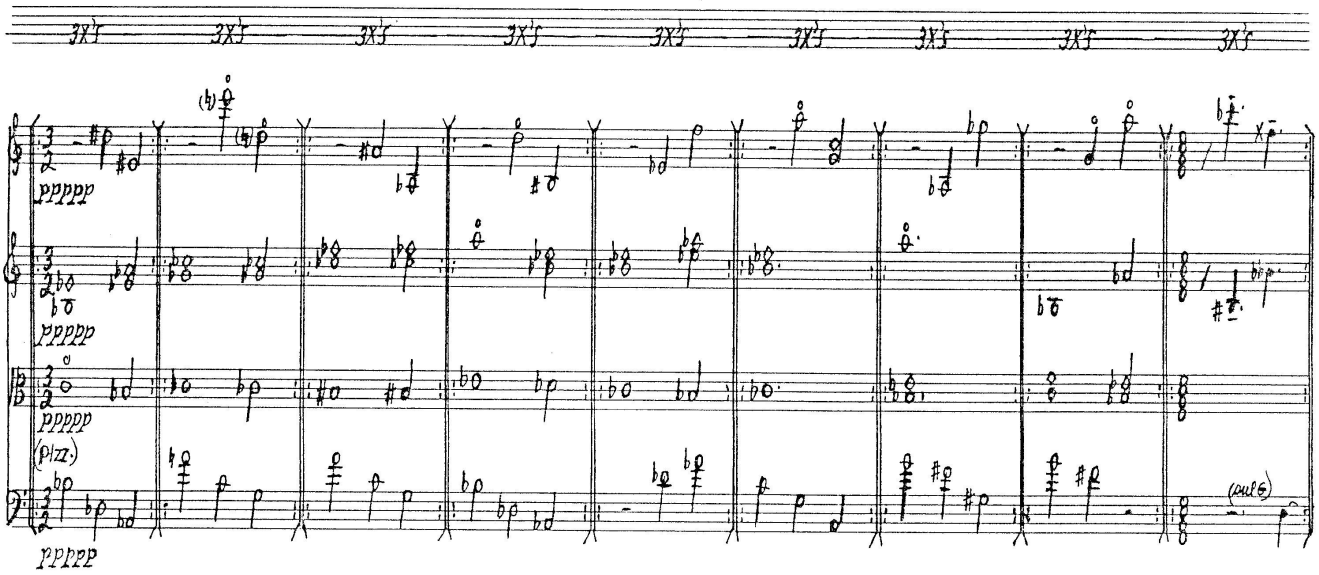

Figure 1.11. Morton Feldman, String Quartet no. 2, page 52, first system.

Interpretation, Meaning, and Experience Revisited

The above are all things that others – Feldman included – have alluded to in their treatments either of Feldman's late oeuvre as a whole or of SQ2 in particular, especially the Proustian sense of

59 Dohoney, "Morton Feldman: String Quartet No. 2."

irrecoverable loss and absence engendered by the "damaged" return of the p. 22 chorale.[60] Feldman may have been referring to exactly this page when he spoke of a "tonal" section in SQ2 that he wanted to have "disintegrate."[61] Although her concerns are on a much smaller scale, pertaining to relationships between individual notes, Hirata feels that Feldman's music is at its core an "experience of discontinuity" that effects in a listener the feeling of sound departing, rather than arriving.[62] Blasius, appraising Hirata's essay, concurs that its main force consists in its attempts to "capture the sense of an experience that has itself slipped away;" his own paper establishes a link between this awareness of vanished time and performative excess, framing Feldman's late music as attempts to remember and to conjure impressions of the elusive "glimmering" moments of comprehension that follow virtuoso performances.[63] But there are also the standing questions of unfulfilled patterns, of misleading and indistinguishable musical gestures, of the struggles with notation alluded to by performers and listeners alike. How might one relate these slippages in understanding to the Proustian "lost time" that others feel in SQ2?

Feldman remarks that "the whole lesson of Proust is not to look for the experience in the object, but in ourselves."[64] One way to gather these concerns under the same umbrella is to find in them an unprecedented focus on personal experience, on how one is listening and what one is hearing. Listening was clearly very important to Feldman; his own writing is replete with, in his own words, "a terrific involvement with a kind of *tone*" that he and other authors have identified as stemming from his early tutelage on the piano under Vera Maurina Press.[65] He often discusses instrumentation in lectures and interviews, hammering home the importance of timbre and finding "matching relationship[s] between

60 As Dohoney remarks, Feldman much admired Proust and often sought to emulate his literary approach in music. See Dohoney, "Morton Feldman: String Quartet no. 2."
61 Feldman, *Give My Regards*, 165.
62 Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves," 13.
63 Blasius, "Late Feldman," 39; ibid., 65.
64 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 189.
65 Ibid., 212; see ibid., 199, and Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves," 11-12.

the instrument and the pitch" in composition.[66] What is especially interesting is that Feldman seems to find an inverse relationship between hearing a sound, or a series of sounds, and comprehending its cultural or historical associations. In a revealing remark a few months before Kronos' performance at Darmstadt, he asserts that the greater a composer's "literary" impulses, the stronger their skills in orchestration should be, in order to permit the sound to "speak" over the story, as if telling an audience "Yes, I know what it is, I know what it is, but listen!"[67] Direct and untrammelled experience of the sound – "listening" – is set in direct opposition to narrative and signifying properties, or "what it is."

This distinction is not unfamiliar to those who have studied Feldman's philosophies of composition. Kevin Volans summarizes that many of Feldman's efforts were spurred by an urge to find "pure, non-referential material" that would allow him to work more directly with sound, without having to deal with intervening cultural associations, or the "chatter of the past."[68] Volans interprets Feldman's techniques as manifestations of the desire for "pure, unconsummated imagery," music that shifts a listener's focus from its function as referent to its raw materiality as sound.[69] By presenting notated material in ways that listeners and performers might feel idiosyncratic or even "wrong," the argument runs, Feldman places the "material itself" at the forefront of listening and discourse. Concentrating on the subtleties of change and difference in the music is meant to bring one into more direct experience of it. But this is a problem: is a listener thus occupied really hearing the sound any more directly, or are they conceptualizing and attending to the shifts in its form and presentation – in other words, analyzing and interpreting it?

It is not so simple to do away with music's signifying capacity, arriving at what Lawrence Kramer calls "mere sound."[70] The position that the experience of music can or should be separated

66 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 198. See also Feldman, *Give My Regards*, 191-94.
67 Feldman, *Give My Regards*, 165.
68 Volans, "What Is Feldman?", 10.
69 Ibid., 10.
70 Lawrence Kramer, *The Thought of Music* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 30.

from interpreting and understanding the social, cultural, and historical functions and significance of music has latent connections to theories of musical ineffability – a construct most commonly associated with the writing of Vladimir Jankélévitch.[71] Ineffability as thought by Jankelevitch is a complex concept with many different potential readings, but most pertinent to the present discussion is its suggestion that speaking of music and listening to music are incommensurable activities – a position that, apart from seeming to render much of musicology moot, has troubling implications regarding the abuse of power structures for some authors.[72]

Kramer does not deny the presence of the features that are commonly referenced as proof of music's ineffability: the assertions that "music refers to the world weakly or not at all; [that] the same music may express a multitude of different things... in different circumstances; [and that] any safety net one brings to the interpretation of music has holes in it."[73] But whereas Jankélévitch sees these things as antagonistic to the act of musical interpretation, Kramer finds in them the very conditions for the efficacy of hermeneutics in music.[74] This counter-argument begins with the recognition that interpretations are not acts of uncovering or decoding alleged truths about music, but "statements that simultaneously emphasize the promise of truth and render it questionable;" that is, when statements leave off being simply descriptive and begin to be hermeneutic, they cannot be simply true or false but rather claim a "likeness to truth" that depends on their similitude to the thing they interpret.[75] Because of the flexibility and weak referential qualities of music, it is abundantly clear that only a likeness, not a conclusive equivalence, can be established in any hermeneutic venture. From this acknowledgement,

---

71 Carolyn Abbate was instrumental in promoting Jankélévitch's writings among English-speaking musicologists. See Carolyn Abbate, "Music: Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505-36, https://doi.org/10.1086/421160, and Michael Gallope et al., "Vladimir Jankélévitch's Philosophy of Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 215-56, https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2012.65.1.215. The following summary of ineffability is based on Abbate's reading of Jankélévitch.

72 See James Hepokoski, "Ineffable Immersion: Contextualizing the Call for Silence," and James Currie, "Where Jankélévitch Cannot Speak," in ibid.

73 Kramer, *The Thought of Music*, 26.

74 Ibid., 26.

75 Ibid., 27.

Kramer proposes that musical interpretation is best understood not as an accessory to verification, but as an instance of communication that extends and complicates the network of meaning of which the "musical message" is already a part.[76] Accepting this network-model has two important consequences: first, the "restricted content of the musical message" is recast as "a property, not a problem" that would prohibit meaning from being queried, and second, the musical object is understood as being part of discourse rather than in a one-way relationship with it.[77] Music "both embodies the independent performativity of meaning and... extends itself to the performative force of utterance."[78] And, conversely, speaking of music – attempting to understand music – becomes part of experiencing music.

The notion that interpreting music is not a departure from, but a deepening of, the musical experience is hardly original to Kramer (who, it must be acknowledged, is a preeminent advocate for the hermeneutic approach in contemporary musicology).[79] Regardless of its origin, it emerges as a particularly powerful approach to the study of Feldman's late works, whose apparent ability to resist deep linguistic interpretation can seem confounding and perplexing. Feldman may attempt to strip away features he considers extraneous to music, leaving only the special, fragile, and vibrant sound of instruments alone, sound too intensely material and slippery to attach to meaning through any feat of language. But, to paraphrase Kramer, peeling back one set of meanings simply leaves Feldman with another.[80] What obtains in the process is not, *cannot* be, "mere sound," but sound that constantly guides listening back and forth between attending closely to the experience of sound as it is heard and interpreting what, how, and why those sounds mean. SQ2 invites speculation, wonder, amazement, frustration, or anxiety at almost every moment: one only has to think of the feelings of a listener opening the score and finding that what is heard and thought is not what is written, or realizing that

76 Kramer, *The Thought of Music*, 28-29.
77 Ibid., 29.
78 Ibid.
79 See for instance Benjamin Boretz, "Experiences with No Names," *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 272-83, https://doi.org/10.2307/833298.
80 Kramer, *The Thought of Music*, 30.

what sounds like an error in performance is a variation, or straining to recall material first presented an hour previously and now recapitulated. This process of reevaluation in the face of persistent aporia about "what is happening" need not be read as an indication that certain essential or mystic qualities of the music are beyond the reach of our comprehension. Rather, this discourse may be better understood as another message of the network of communication that also claims the score, a performance, or a recording as messages.

To look at SQ2 this way is not to bemoan that parts of the piece are off limits to language, but to recognize how much of it is actually interwoven with verbal forms – how much of it demands that listeners attempt to revisit it, to describe it, and to understand it, regardless of whether or not such efforts can or will come to any conclusion. Feldman's music is by no means unique in being subject to this interlacing, but it may make listeners uncomfortably aware that their understanding is always in a process of slipping between music and language. Kramer notes that, in the message-network, "although all the posts... withhold something from language, there is no post that language leaves wholly untouched."[81] Or, to voice this Derridean point from a different angle: "One only interprets music... by interpreting the language that describes it."[82] This serves as a compelling explanation for the entanglement of intersubjective and subjective uncertainties about Feldman's music previously described. When Blasius suggests that Hirata's writing "from inside the music" is effective insofar as it enacts, in language, the performative expressivity of Feldman's pieces, he is responding to the way in which understanding of the music must in some way be conceived in linguistic terms.[83] This understanding is not a calculated distancing from the experience of hearing the music but a deeper involvement with it.

SQ2 is not music that asks us to be silent in its presence, to bow our heads and experience it

81 Kramer, *The Thought of Music*, 31.
82 Ibid., 110.
83 Blasius, "Late Feldman," 38-39.

without speaking – it does exactly the opposite. As Blasius observes, Feldman's late music has elicited a great number of responses from analysts, critics, and admirers since his death.[84] Max Mandel describes listeners in the wake of a performance of SQ2 reporting feelings of transformation, effusively and emotionally speaking in candid terms about their own intimate experiences of the music.[85] It is clear that people feel an urgent desire to speak about Feldman. Why should this be otherwise, when what we are hearing so challenges us and provokes us to interpret and to understand?

84 Blasius, “Late Feldman,” 33.
85 Dohoney, “Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*,” 16.

Interlude

Hirata observes, in an endnote to her essay on Feldman's early music, that a "strange emphasis on the *sound* of Feldman's music permeates virtually the entire discourse about it."[86] Listening is given pride of place in much Feldman scholarship, largely due to the composer's own priorities, predicated on the idea of a "stand-off" between "the conceptual and the perceptual."[87] But this supposed antagonism between listening and interpretation is not stable. The previous study of SQ2 explores how Feldman's emphasis on encouraging listeners to hear the "sound of a sound" (to paraphrase Hirata) actually pushes an audience to translate what is being heard to verbal forms – to interpret the music in order to better experience it.[88]

Feldman's way of thinking rests on the ability to conceptualize sound as being ontologically distinct from music, an axiom that supports the philosophies of many other twentieth-century composers, and in Feldman's case, one that can probably be attributed to his close association with John Cage.[89] But this separability of sound and music is not the only consequence of considering sound in the abstract as Feldman does. His close focus on listening, on the phenomenology of the sound event, also proposes to disconnect sound from its mechanism of production. It is telling that Feldman spoke specifically of wanting to make each attack in his music "sourceless" – a desire that informs his copious use of natural and artificial harmonics, mutes, and extremely soft dynamics in SQ2.[90] An audience listening to such music constantly feels the urge to identify, classify, and situate what they are hearing.

---

86 Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves," 21.
87 Villars, ed., *Morton Feldman Says*, 193.
88 See Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves."
89 Feldman's relationship with Cage is far too complex to discuss in detail here. See Lunberry, "Departing Landscapes," 21-23, for a very brief introduction to the Feldman-Cage lineage.
90 Feldman, *Give My Regards*, 25. See also Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves," 20, for a meditation on how Feldman sought to soften performers' "touch."

In the following section on Deathprod's *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha*, the notion of sound abstracted from source and significance also operates behind the scenes to induce an effect of fluctuation between understanding and experiencing the music. For *Imaginary Songs*, an instrument's recorded sound is passed through media that adds its own distinct timbral quality, rendering it difficult to reconnect music and source. Thus, when auditing and discussing this non-notated work, questions about the identity and cause of a sound prevail, rather than concerns about interpretation and description. However, as with SQ2, the listener is urged to pay even closer attention to the experiential qualities of the music in an attempt to resolve these questions, so that theorizing and hearing continuously lead to one another. As instrument and media commingle, so do understanding and experience.

Part II

Deathprod's *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha*

Helge Sten has produced music under the pseudonym Deathprod for close to thirty years.[91] The history of his career is not currently available for public readership, but it is known that he graduated from the Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts in 1996, and that he worked in performance art with a sound component as early as his teenage years in the mid-1980s.[92] Outside tidbits such as these, his life as a musician and a composer is retold as a list of the music he has made, the people he has made it with, and where it has been heard.

Although Sten's solo efforts as Deathprod have attracted a sizable audience, particularly in his native Norway, he is perhaps better known there as a founding member of the improvised music group Supersilent, contributing live electronics to the ensemble since its formation in 1997.[93] His credits as producer for Supersilent, as well as for many albums by Susanna Wallumrød and experimental rock band Motorpsycho (of which he was also a performing member from 1992 to 1994), are far in excess of the number of albums released under the Deathprod name. Rounding out Sten's history of considerable activity in the Norwegian music community are two well-regarded albums made with electronic musician Biosphere, as well as a collaboration with John Paul Jones beginning in 2011.[94] This latter, due in part to Jones' renown as the former bassist of Led Zeppelin, prompted a slew of interviews in widely read music publications and served to thrust Sten somewhat further into the public eye in the English-speaking world.[95]

---

91 Paul Simpson, "Deathprod: Biography and History."

92 Eivind Buene, "Helge Sten – mellom dogme og drøm;" Sten, "Constructing music as constructing a sculpture."

93 Noah Berlatsky, "Deathprod, dark lord of ambient sound, wants to show you the light," *Document Journal*, October 28, 2019, https://www.documentjournal.com/2019/10/deathprod-dark-lord-of-ambient-sound-wants-to-show-you-the-light/. Rob Young, "Supersilent: Quiet Stormbringers," *The Wire*, February 1999.

94 Simpson, "Deathprod: Biography and History;" Ann-Sofi Emilsen, "Deathprod," in *Store norske leksikon*, last modified July 5, 2019, https://snl.no/Deathprod.

95 See Julian Marszalek, "Riding The Storm: John Paul Jones and Helge Sten of Minibus Pimps Interviewed," *The*

At time of writing, however, there remain just four full-length studio albums accredited to Deathprod alone.[96] Outside the most recent *(Occulting Disk,* 2019), Deathprod's commercially available recordings represent Sten's activity in the middle 1990s – the albums *Treetop Drive* (1994)*, Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha* (1996), and *Morals and Dogma* (2004) are made up mostly of material recorded between 1993 and 1997.[97] These three albums remain Deathprod's best-known works, and have garnered something of a cult status in accounts of dark ambient and experimental electronic music. One testament to their popularity in these circles is the fact that they have been reissued several times, being packaged as a box set in 2004 by Rune Grammofon, given second runs of production by the same label in 2011, and remastered for vinyl in 2017 under the label Smalltown Supersound. This most recent reissue was promoted heavily by Pitch Perfect PR, whose associated press release referred to the albums as Deathprod's "core trilogy" and "complete official canon."[98] Although the benefit of these statements as marketing tactics is undeniable, by thus framing Deathprod's music, they also allude to a pre-existing base of devoted listeners whose interest in the project justifies the reissue. The emphasis on Deathprod's status as a classic underground artist is accompanied by invocations of anachronistic technological fetishism, an aesthetic more obviously given voice in Pitch Perfect's opening paragraph describing the music and its production:

> Based in Oslo, Norway, composer Helge Sten has been crafting this music since the early 90s, a deeply atmospheric, grainy minimalism that slows time down and explores the very particles of

Quietus, February 25, 2014, https://thequietus.com/articles/14513-john-paul-jones-helge-sten-interview-minibus-pimps; Helge Sten, "Life as a Minibus Pimp: Ten Questions with Helge Sten," *Textura*, April 2014, https://www.textura.org/archives/interviews/tenquestions_sten.htm.

96 Simpson, "Deathprod: Biography and History."

97 Sam McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to Reissue Deathprod's 'Treetop Drive' (1994), 'Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha' (1996), and 'Morals and Dogma' (2004), Out May 5th," Pitch Perfect PR, March 1, 2017. Two of the pieces on *Morals and Dogma* were in fact commissioned by the dance group Kreutzer Kompani in 2000, a little later than these given dates. See François Couture, "Morals and Dogma," AllMusic, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.allmusic.com/album/morals-and-dogma-mw0000452905, and Ethan Covey, "Deathprod," *Dusted*, July 8, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20040710143342/http://dustedmagazine.com/reviews/1541, archived from the original on July 10, 2004.

98 McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to reissue Deathprod."

> sound itself. The Deathprod concept arose in 1991 when Sten realized his complex array of homemade electronics, samplers, sound processing and analogue effects – cumulatively known as the "Audio Virus" – could add a musical dimension above and beyond the merely technical. Almost obsolete samplers and playback devices distort and transform sounds into unrecognizable mutations of their former selves.[99]

The "audio virus" concept, essentially referring to Sten's workstation of electronic hardware, has accompanied Deathprod since the project's creation. In addition to Sten's use of the term to summarize his working method, it still frequently appears in critical publications, and has been associated with his work in Supersilent. Sten is credited with "audio virus," rather than "electronics" or similar, in the liner notes for the group's records, as on Deathprod albums.[100] In Pitch Perfect's statement, it is linked to temporal play and anachronism by the accompanying references to the hardware's near obsolescence, the early 1990s, and the "slowing down" of time – all concepts also closely associated with Deathprod.[101] Although the term may be an effective marketing tool in that it purports to differentiate Sten's work from that of other electronic artists, Sten has shown some reluctance to personally engage with it in that way, or with its conjunct connotations of retromania. In 2014, when asked to elaborate on the "audio virus" by an interviewer, he minimized any of its potential philosophical import, instead admitting that the term "was probably more appropriate in 1993 than it is today."[102] He was similarly dismissive of "retro hoarding and/or temporal disjunction" in a 2018 interview, in which he also criticized contemporary imitations of media artifacts such as vinyl "crackle" in recordings, diagnosing enthusiasm for such nostalgic fragments as the result of "poor judgement"

---

99 McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to Reissue Deathprod." It is unknown what part Sten had in crafting this statement, and in the press release as a whole.

100 Young, "Supersilent: Quiet Stormbringers." See Paul Simpson, "Treetop Drive," AllMusic, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.allmusic.com/album/treetop-drive-mw0002270477; Paul Simpson, "Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha," AllMusic, accessed March 23, 2020, https://www.allmusic.com/album/imaginary-songs-from-tristan-da-cunha-mw0002270473; Chris Dahlen, "Deathprod: Morals and Dogma," Pitchfork, April 29, 2004, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/2554-morals-and-dogma/, for a selection of reviews mentioning the "audio virus." Many more can be found.

101 See Sten, "Constructing music as constructing a sculpture."

102 Sten, "Life as a Minibus Pimp." Despite Sten's reticence to employ the term in the present day, its personal significance to him is made clear by the fact that his recording and mastering studio in Oslo is named the Audio Virus Lab.

and "poor cultural understanding."[103]

Debates about the appropriateness of the term notwithstanding, the "audio virus" concept does prime listeners for some of Deathprod's pieces. The idea of a rhizomatic system of signal routing, designed to continually transform and reprocess audio, is an ideal conceptual fit for the first track from *Treetop Drive*, in which a single sample of a string ensemble playing a G minor chord in first inversion is repeated and altered for about fifteen minutes.[104] Triggered by every pulse of the strings, a network of filters, feedback circuits, delay and echo hardware, and noise generators gradually intervenes, so that each sound event is slowly turned into a howl of piercing upper frequencies with a roaring wash of static underneath. Since the source material is so repetitive, the process so lengthy, and the intervention of the hardware so deliberate, the listener cannot help but be aware of the transformation taking place.

Other Deathprod works, however, are not so eager to reveal their own designs. In the following section, I discuss one set of pieces – the first four tracks from Deathprod's *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha*, in which concealment and uncertainty are in fact chief characteristics. As in the case of Feldman's quartet, I will show how doubt about the indeterminate nature of *Imaginary Songs* coaxes listeners to repeatedly attempt to resolve conflicts between their understanding and experience of the music. However, rather than returning to the topics of interpretation and musical meaning at the forefront of discourse about SQ2, I approach Deathprod from a different discourse: that of acousmatic sound. I begin by introducing the principles of acousmatic sound developed by Pierre Schaeffer and challenged by Brian Kane. Next, I examine *Imaginary Songs* track by track, and show that its first four pieces are particularly encouraging of acousmatic listening as theorized by Kane. This analysis prompts important questions about the historical and cultural undertones of *Imaginary Songs*, which join with prior concerns about the objective apprehension of sound to produce an unresolved tension between the act of listening and our post-hoc understanding of the music. Finally, I introduce the writing of

103 Sten, "Constructing music as constructing a sculpture."
104 Deathprod, "Treetop Drive 1," track 1 on *Treetop Drive*, Smalltown Supersound STS279LP, May 5, 2017, 2 LPs.

Jonathan Sterne to better treat Deathprod's play with the history of recording media and technology, and to provide a bridge back to the question of how understanding and experience intermingle in this music.

Acousmatic Sound and Analysis

Acousmatic sound – a sound that one hears without seeing its cause – is strongly associated with the phenomenology of Pierre Schaeffer, who wrote extensively on the possibilities and implications of separating sounds from their sources from 1948.[105] In *Sound Unseen*, Brian Kane summarizes that Schaeffer's work with recording media at the Radiodiffusion Francaise studios led him to conceptualize an ontology wherein sound was not only separable from its cause, but from its historical and social contexts as well.[106] Over some months of this work, Schaeffer developed a term for sound ideally divorced from such contexts: the *sound object*.[107]

In Schaeffer's phenomenology, the sound object is "never revealed clearly except in the acousmatic experience."[108] Its raw or "concrete" being is accessed through a "reduced listening" wherein one's observations are focused on the invariant and immanent properties of the object, without conflating these with any associations they may trigger.[109] The timbre, duration, pitch, contour, and intensity of a sound here take precedence over what that sound might signify, and indeed, Schaeffer asserts that "the 'fervour of listening' is inversely proportional to a sound's function as an index or

105 Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 45; ibid., 15-16. The following summary of Schaefferian acousmatics is based on Kane's reading.
106 Ibid.; ibid., 37-38.
107 Ibid., 15-17.
108 Ibid., 17.
109 Ibid.; ibid., 28.

sign," explicitly pitting meaning against experience.[110] This is why Schaeffer's acousmatic reduction "functions as a relay on the path to reduced listening;" when the source of a sound is hidden, its objective content is separated from its material associations and meanings.[111] Schaeffer acknowledges that this experience of attending to the materiality of sounds may be uncomfortable for listeners who are used to reinforcing acoustic knowledge with visual or tactile understanding, but he asserts that the alienating or uncanny qualities of the acousmatic reduction are overcome through sufficient retraining of the ear.[112]

Kane does not take Schaeffer's theory at face value. Notwithstanding the dubious claims about the purported autonomy of sound, which he identifies as remnants of nineteenth-century music theory and philosophy, Kane is not willing to accept the ease with which Schaeffer waves away the essential strangeness of acousmatic listening, nor the intermediary place he accords it in his phenomenology.[113] Rather than seeing acousmatic listening as a stepping stone on the path to apprehending the sound object, Kane considers these two modes of listening mutually exclusive – a major divergence from Schaeffer.[114] The acousmatic reduction, for Kane, is not simply a separation of the eye from the ear, but of the sound from its source, and this epistemological distancing produces an uncertainty about source, cause, and effect that renders acousmatic sound uncanny.[115] The crucial word here is *separation*, rather than disconnection or any other word that might connote total severance. Kane stresses that completely abolishing any question of a sound's source (in other words, treating it as a Schaefferian sound object) dissipates any acousmatic qualities altogether – but discovering the sound's origin, thereby reuniting the effect with the cause, has precisely the same consequence.[116] Acousmatic sound "depends on the

110 Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 26.
111 Ibid., 147.
112 Ibid., 148.
113 Ibid., 136-37; ibid., 148.
114 Ibid., 149.
115 Ibid., 148.
116 Ibid., 148-49.

spacing of source, cause and effect... [it] exists structurally between [the] two possibilities" of being ontologically connected or disconnected with whence it issues. Whereas Schaeffer sees the acousmatic sound as a stable, material object, Kane defines it as a "gap" that is "neither entity nor sound object nor effect nor source nor cause."[117]

To illustrate the point, Kane introduces a literary treatment of acousmatic sound: Franz Kafka's short story "The Burrow" ("Der Bau"), in which an unknown and troubling high-pitched noise plagues the narrator, an animal constructor of a labyrinth of underground tunnels. The sound, which can neither be spatially localized nor positively identified, serves throughout the story as a source of persistent anxiety for the narrator, who entertains but inevitably discards various hypotheses about its source and cause. Kane notes that, in this case, the symptoms of worry are partially attributable to the "territorial listening" employed by the mole-like narrator – that is, a listening attentive to potential threats to one's domicile or person.[118] However, he also recognizes in this mode of listening an important divergence from Schaefferian theory. The narrator's anxiety does not stem from the discomfort inherent in attempting to hear the acousmatic sound as a sound object; rather, it is rooted in the narrator's straining to reunite the sound with its source and cause, which remain always just out of reach. Because Schaeffer's theory takes the study of the sound object to be the end goal of the reduced listening prompted by acousmatic sound, it cannot "explain the mole's profound anxiety as anything other than pathological."[119]

Kane's emphasis on the interstices of sound and source is apt for exploring the acousmatic situation in Deathprod's *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha.* Certain of *Imaginary Songs'* elements are unknown to, or unknowable for, the listener (unless this happens to be Sten or another person intimately involved in its making), who feels the vivid and disconcerting effects of acousmatic

117 Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 149.
118 Ibid., 148-49.
119 Ibid., 148.

underdetermination described by Kane. But *Imaginary Songs*, like Kafka's "The Burrow," also resists a Schaefferian reduced listening, which would collapse the acousmatic situation by treating these elements as sound objects. Thus, questions of source and timbre dominate in this analysis, which approaches the music from the point of view of a listener who, rather than waving *Imaginary Songs*' underdetermined aspects aside, has accepted the invitation to venture further into its tantalizing acousmatic depths.

Imaginary Songs was first released on CD in 1996 (the precise date is unknown) on the Norwegian underground label dBut.[120] The year corresponds with Sten's graduation from the Trondheim Academy, and several sources claim that the music on the album was conceived as part of a capstone project.[121] There are five pieces on the album, the last of which, "The Contraceptive Briefcase II," is a thirty-minute extract (three quarters of the album's total length) from a concert of Sten's theremin and assorted electronics, Ole Henrik Moe's violin, and five vocalists doubling on pitched glasses, recorded live by the Norwegian Broadcast Corporation in March of 1996.[122] The four other tracks – the set of which is the focus of this analysis – are very different in both qualitative and quantitative terms. None exceed two and a half minutes in length, all are named after places (as it turns out, locations on the island of Tristan da Cunha), and, in contrast to the professionally produced high-fidelity recording of the "Contraceptive Briefcase" concert, all are inscrutable recordings of a musical

120 "RACD 109 – Deathprod: Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha," Rune Grammofon, accessed March 23, 2020, http://www.runegrammofon.com/artists/deathprod/racd-109-deathprod-imaginary-songs-from-tristan-da-cunha-cd/.

121 See, for instance, Lucas Schleicher, "Music In Review – Deathprod," *Brainwashed*, June 6, 2004, http://www.brainwashed.com/brain/brainv07i22.html, and "Deathprod – Treetop Drive 3," *Low Level Listening* (blog), August 27, 2008, https://lowlevellistening.blogspot.com/2008/08/deathprod-treetop-drive-3.html. Based on information in the second cited source, it seems likely that this knowledge is gathered from the 32-page booklet that accompanied the Deathprod box set, released in 2004 and now sadly out of production (Rune Grammofon's website makes the brusque and somewhat upsetting statement that the material has been "DELETED"). As such, I have been unable to acquire a copy to verify this information.

122 Deathprod, *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha*, Smalltown Supersound STS278LP, May 5, 2017, LP. This vinyl reissue splits "Contraceptive Briefcase" into two parts, in order to be able to fit the album on one LP. Apart from this change, there are few major differences between this reissue and prior releases of the album, since the album was remastered directly from the original mix tapes; see McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to Reissue Deathprod." I have therefore chosen to treat these issues as interchangeable for the purpose of this analysis, which only deals with the first four tracks.

source that is barely identifiable.[123]

There are two difficulties inherent in ascertaining just what is making the music in these four "imaginary songs." The first, which presents in the initial few seconds of the opening track "Burntwood," is the fact that the audio seems to be issuing from a playback device that produces the unmistakable artifacts of antiquated recording and listening technology. These include clicks and pops redolent of physical media, such as deteriorating or dusty phonograph records, as well as a persistent low-level broadband static. Perhaps even more striking than this fact is that, when the music begins, its frequency range is heavily constrained, with few or no perceptible upper partials – a clear indication of a low-fidelity method of recording, playback, or both. We will leave these important and fascinating traces of the recording process for the time being, because it is at this last point – the arrival of the music on this album – that the second difficulty in identification arises.[124]

"Burntwood" begins with two high-pitched and drawn-out tones, a prominent F5 and a slightly less audible B-flat a fourth higher, both slightly sharper than equal temperament.[125] The timbre of these tones is difficult to identify, not least because of the aforementioned low fidelity of the recording. At first impression, they could be produced by some kind of whistle or high-pitched wind instrument with a breathiness and a piercing quality, a resemblance reinforced by occasional squeaks as very high harmonics are generated (perhaps by intentional or unintentional overblowing). However, there are also catches and points of "grit" in the sound that suggest it is somehow being generated by continuously applied friction, as in the case of a bow on a string instrument or a finger on the rim of a water-filled

123 Tracks two, three, and four are clearly named after geological features on the British Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha, as is evident from an examination of most detailed maps of the island. The title of track one is not as well attested, but it appears to refer to a plateau or steppe on the northwest slope of the volcano that makes up most of the island. See Tristan da Cunha Government and Tristan da Cunha Association, "Tristan da Cunha Website," accessed March 24, 2020, https://tristandc.com/.

124 I have included figures of spectrographic representations of *Imaginary Songs*' first four pieces to aid in the following analysis. All spectrographs are generated in Audacity with a Hanning FFT window of 4096, on a linear frequency scale with 80dB dynamic range.

125 In the absence of an available score, where one might point to, for example, "*that* C in *this* bar," I have opted for scientific pitch notation throughout this section in order to aid in easily identifying the registers of pitches.

glass – two guesses that accord well with the instrumentation on “Contraceptive Briefcase.” These inconsistencies and “imperfections” in the sound also make it unlikely that these tones are being generated by electronic equipment. On the other hand, the rich higher harmonics of a string instrument or a glass are not immediately audible in “Burntwood.” Whether this is again a result of the intervention of the recording process is difficult to say.

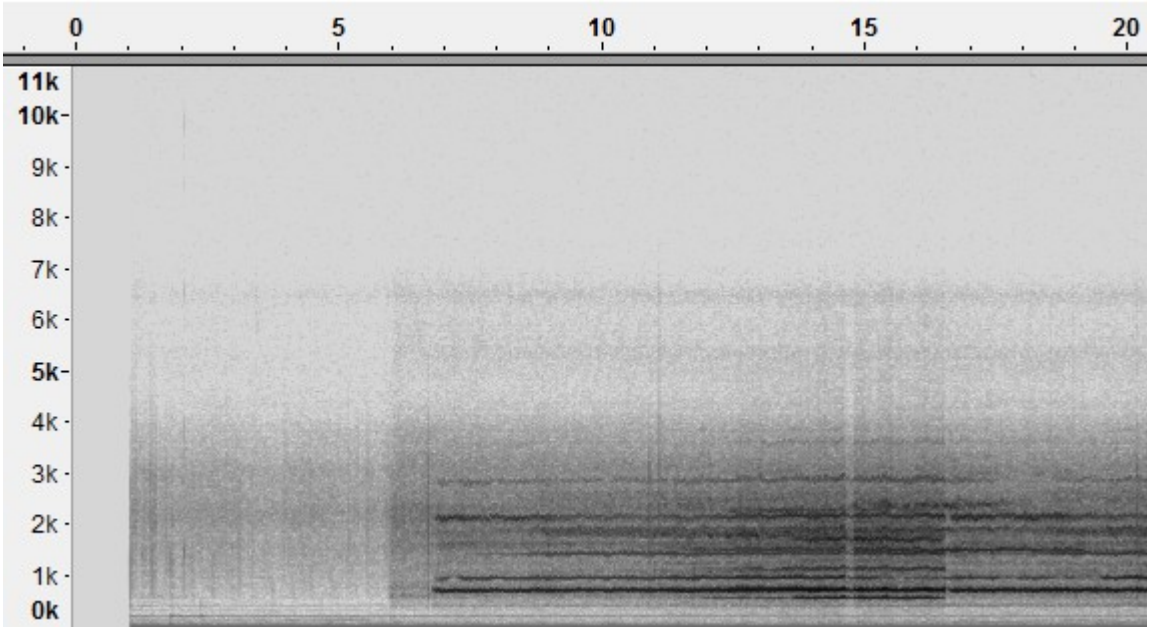

Figure 2.1. Deathprod, "Burntwood," spectrograph of first 20 seconds. Maximum displayed frequency 11kHz. Note the relative absence of frequencies higher than approximately 7kHz. Sounded notes and their overtones are represented by dark horizontal lines in the lower portion of the image.

As “Burntwood” proceeds, the waters muddy further. The opening perfect fourth is supplemented with a D-flat just below the ostinato F5, establishing a B-flat minor triad in first inversion that swells in volume until the D-flat is abruptly cut off. This three-note sonority, which already undercuts the likelihood of a single bowed string instrument producing the music, is followed by very quiet repeated additions of E-flat while the D-flat continues to swell underneath at intervals. This pattern forms a section lasting until around the one-minute mark in the track, when a prominent two-note motive, between the high B-flat and the A-flat a whole tone underneath, is introduced. Thirty

seconds later, this section is also abruptly forestalled: the B-flat drops out entirely, while the lower D-flat returns along with a recurring A. The piece ends around the two-minute mark on this cryptic augmented triad after a brief half-second fadeout. Only the noise that prefaced the track remains; this lasts for around sixteen seconds before “Burntwood” ends and the next track, “Stony Beach,” immediately begins. The listener is left with the impression of a few tones that seem both ghostly and penetrating, but with few clues about the source of the music, the reason for its hazy and indistinct presentation, and anything else that might dissolve the acousmatic situation.

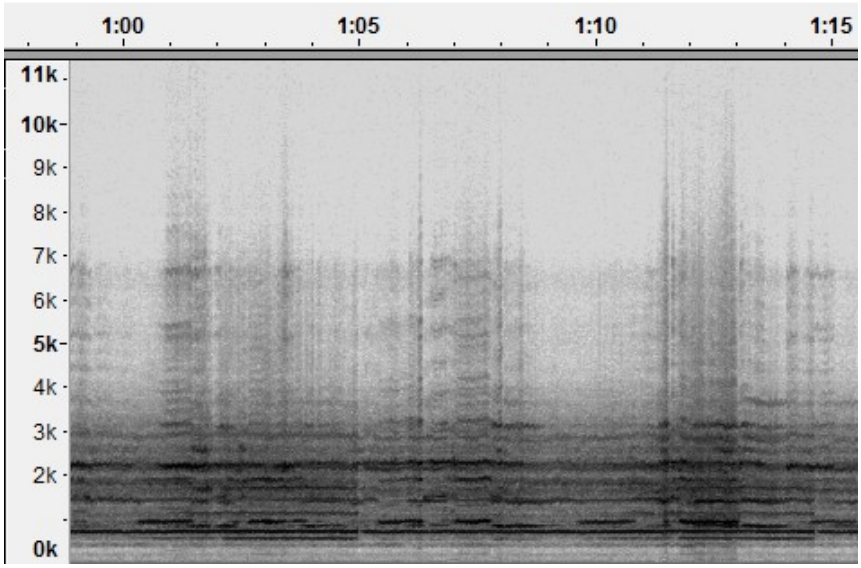

Figure 2.2. Deathprod, "Burntwood," spectrograph of 0:59 to 1:15. Maximum displayed frequency 11kHz.

“Stony Beach” opens by fading in extended tones subject to wide vibrato. The notes alternate quickly and at random intervals between an approximate A4 and E5, while the vibrato ventures as far as a whole tone above and a semitone below these pitch centres. As the piece progresses, strange hums, most prominently pitched at an A3 and a G4, enter alongside the vibrato; after around a minute into the piece, they threaten to obscure it altogether at intervals. The vibrato seems to settle a little more decisively on E, but occasionally breaks suddenly into much higher registers, and, during the last

minute of the piece, climbs gradually so that by the end it has almost reached a centre of G5. A fadeout at the apex of this climb leaves only the hums, which dwindle and are cut off after fifteen more seconds. The track ends in the same way as did “Burntwood,” with a long period of background noise. At points throughout, the instrumentation all but gives way to noise, with only faint traces of tones heard in the background. Whether this noise is produced by the recording media or by another recorded source is unclear.

If “Burntwood” hinted at the possibility of a bowed string instrument, it seems that the presence of one has now all but been confirmed, at least on “Stony Beach.” The width of the vibrato and the timbre of the notes could be the products of a theremin or an electronic instrument with non-discrete pitch control, but the lapses into more piercing tones sound overwhelmingly like the noises made by a member of the violin family that is slipping into harmonics, due to either inadvertent longitudinal bowing or intentional generation. Again, only speculation on the origins of the sound is possible here – despite the vivid experience of the music, sound is not quite reunited with source.

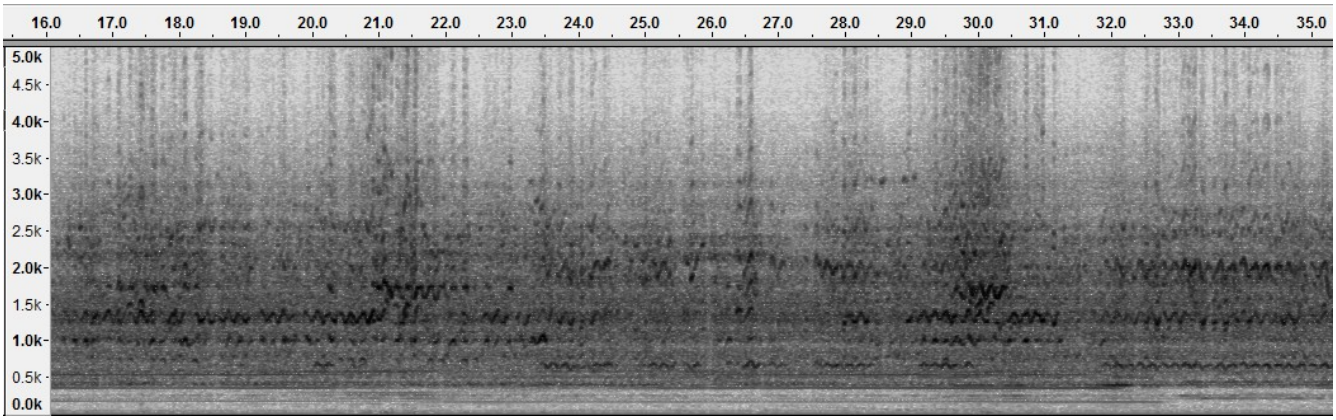

Figure 2.3. Deathprod, "Stony Beach," spectrograph of 0:16 to 0:35. Maximum displayed frequency 5kHz. The instrument vibrato and harmonics are clearly represented by zigzag patterns, especially in the 1kHz-2kHz range.

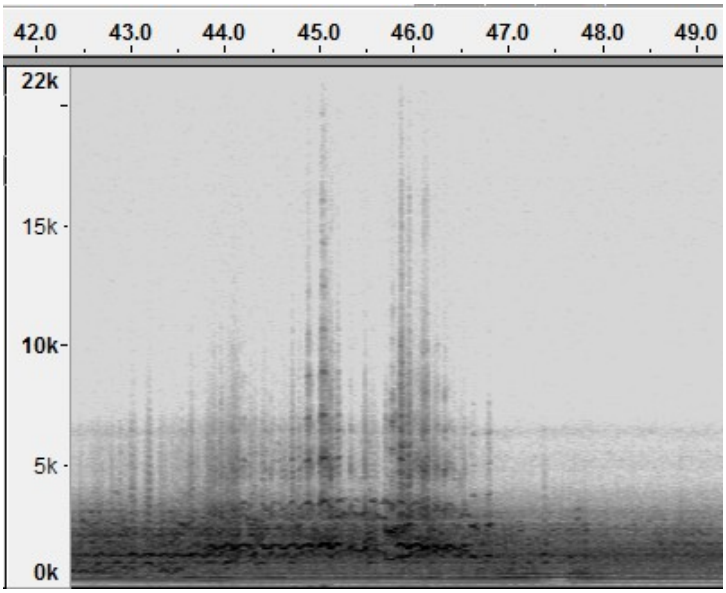

Figure 2.6. Deathprod, "Stony Beach," spectrograph of 0:42 to 0:49. Maximum displayed frequency 22kHz.

However, the third and shortest track, “Hotentott Gulch,” appears to completely confound this hypothesis about instrumentation when, fifteen seconds in, we hear sharp percussive attacks in a brisk, decisive rhythm. If previous timbres were difficult to identify, this one presents an even greater challenge: it could be described as anything from a muted cowbell to the bottom of a steel bucket being hit with a stick. There is no consistent pattern to the rhythm – there are many pauses and inflections throughout at random intervals – but it is characterized by a motive that might be best notated as a triplet whose first two durations are tied, an interpretation supported by the fact that at two points the performer plays actual triplets in the same rhythm. After just one minute, the attacks abruptly cease, leaving a much longer (over half a minute) period of media noise than that which bookends prior tracks. The strangeness of this piece, whose percussive character is so different from its forerunners, is amplified hundredfold by the fact that music sounding very much like “Burntwood” is barely detectable in the background throughout. Although a positive identification is not possible, close listening reveals the presence of the same D-flat swells under a prominent F, as well as the B-flat – A-flat motive that entered in the latter portion of this first track.

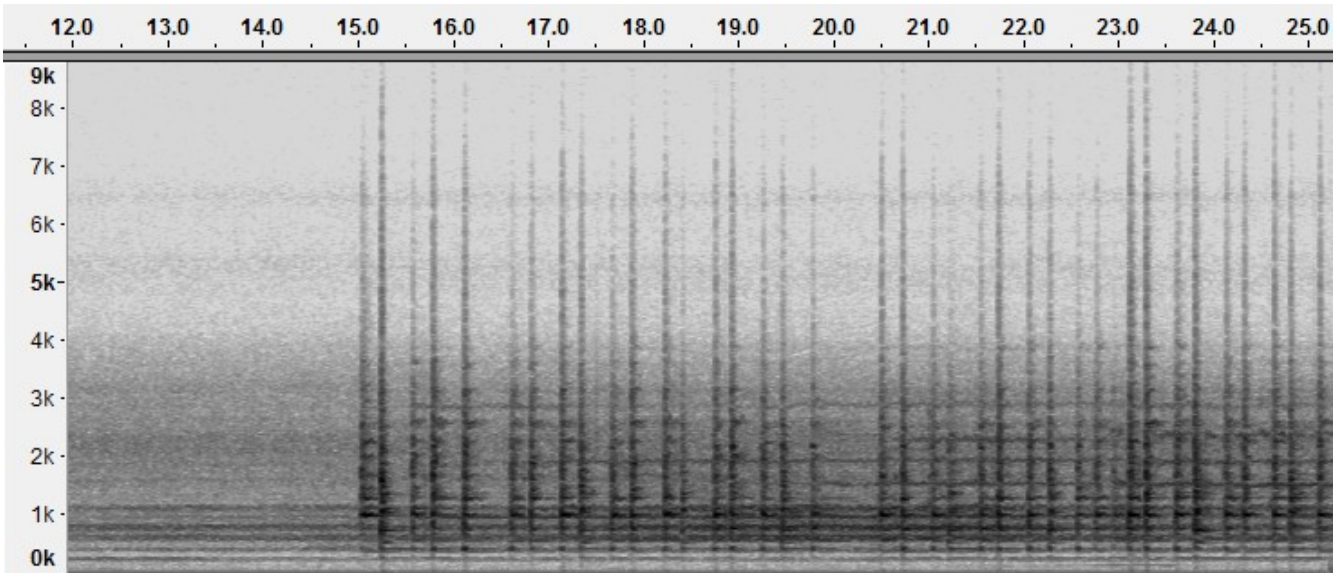

Figure 2.5. Deathprod, "Hotentott Gulch," spectrograph of 0:12 to 0:25. Maximum displayed frequency 9kHz. The percussive attacks are represented as sharp vertical lines.

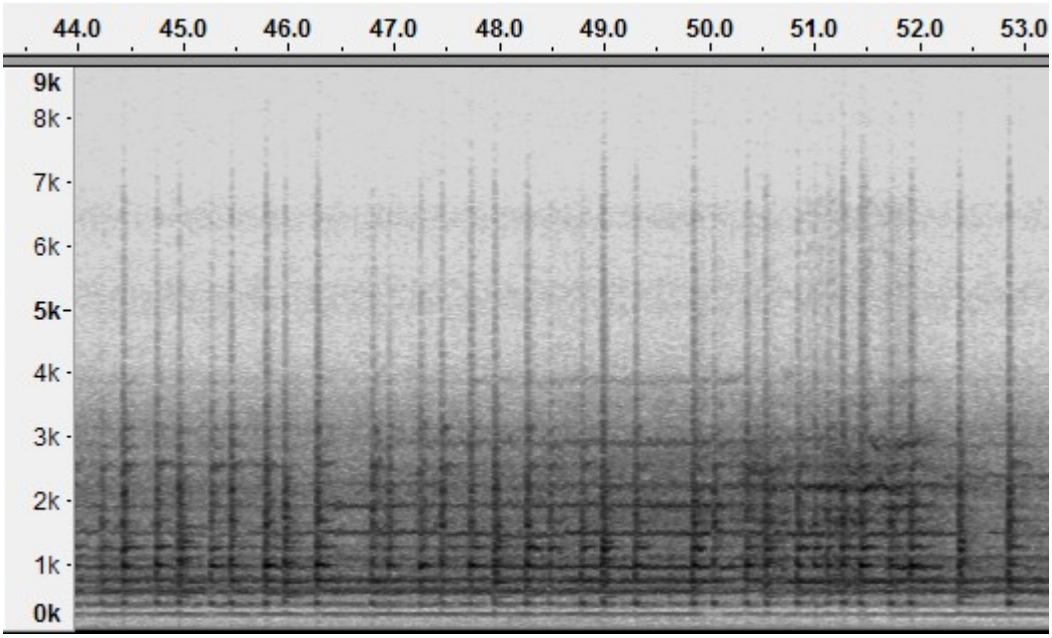

Figure 2.6. Deathprod, "Hotentott Gulch," spectrograph of 0:44 to 0:53. Maximum displayed frequency 9kHz. The horizontal lines, particularly visible between 50 and 52 seconds, represent the "Burntwood" sound-alike in the background of the track.

"Boatharbour Bay," the final "imaginary song," is by far the quietest. After an opening sonority rich in overtones wavers between F-sharp and C-sharp, somewhat recalling the sound of flute multiphonics, the piece subsides into murky and mostly inharmonic sound for the remainder of its length, about a minute and a half. But for a few barely audible clarinet-like tones on A-sharp and B throughout, as well as the brief intrusion of a D-sharp near the end, the track is filled with the noise of a quiet but gritty hiss, interleaved with the vaguest suggestion of the opening F-sharp sonority. One is compelled to strain the ears to listen ever more closely to these ghostly traces of music, but any other pitches revealed in this process are so elusive that they may simply be the result of perceptual trickery. This track features an even longer runout of noise after the music than "Hotentott Gulch," which, after forty-five seconds, actually continues into "The Contraceptive Briefcase II," over the low-register electronic drones that begin the piece. It takes a full minute for the last trace of the "imaginary songs" to fade out and disappear entirely from its anachronistic entry into this recorded concert.

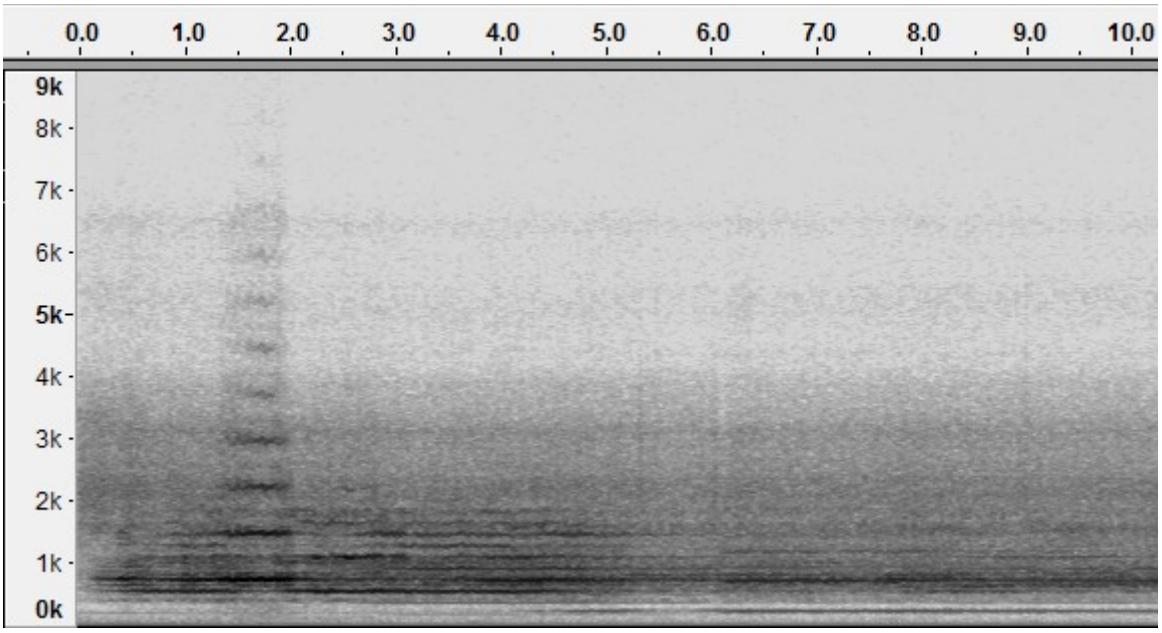

Figure 2.7. Deathprod, "Boatharbour Bay," spectrograph of first ten seconds. Maximum displayed frequency 9kHz. Note the rich overtones of the opening sonority between 1 and 2 seconds, represented by a horizontal "ladder" pattern of lines, and the relative sparseness of the following music, indicating a lack of definite pitch.

Recording Media, History, and Isolation

In this summary of *Imaginary Songs*, I have avoided guiding a reader toward any particular conclusions regarding either its instrumentation or its recording. I hope that by doing so I have provided an indication of how underdetermined this music is, how little it gives away about itself, and how it may instill confusion in a listener coming to the album unaware of what it may contain. This, however, is not the state of mind in which most listeners might be expected to approach *Imaginary Songs*, for on the back of the album's case are two instructive personnel credits for tracks one through four. We learn from reading these that Ole Henrik Moe, the sole performer, is responsible for providing violin (in addition to his appearance on "Contraceptive Briefcase"), and that these first four tracks featuring Moe were "recorded to phonograph cylinder" by Kjell Vidar Olsen.[126] My analysis has thus far kept these things secret, but they are hardly little-known facts about the album; indeed, they are two of its major selling points. Smalltown Supersound's press release for the reissue of the Deathprod "trilogy" clarifies that violin tracks by Moe were recorded "in the forest outside Oslo," and that these were edited by Sten before being "transferred to phonographic wax cylinders to give an extra dimension of decay."[127]

Understanding that the featured instrument is indeed a violin settles some, but not all, of the issues of timbre on these tracks. One likely explanation for the events of "Stony Beach" is that Moe is simply playing with wide vibrato on a double-stopped fifth between A and E, sometimes crossing strings, while occasionally generating harmonics either by partially lifting the fingers of the left hand or moving the bow toward a ponticello position during strokes. On "Burntwood," too, the odd piping timbre of the violin can perhaps be understood as a result of Moe's high-register playing being warped somewhat by the low fidelity of the phonograph cylinder. Instances where the timbre becomes more

126 Deathprod, *Imaginary Songs*, back cover.
127 McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to Reissue Deathprod."

inharmonic are presumed to be moments of overpressing or other unorthodox bowing techniques. However, this increased knowledge of the instrumentation of *Imaginary Songs* does not dispel the acousmatic situation entirely; sound is not quite reunited with source. If there is only one violinist, there must have been some overdubbing involved in "Burntwood," because up to four discrete notes are sustained simultaneously. But we have no way of knowing what post-recording manipulations in fact took place, nor what other extended techniques Moe may have employed in his improvisations.[128] In the case of tracks three and four, perplexity is actually increased rather than reduced by the knowledge that a violin was producing the percussive attacks on "Hotentott Gulch" and the radio-tuner hum of "Boatharbour Bay." One might hazard that the first is due to striking the body or the strings of the violin in some way, and that the second is produced by bowing an unorthodox area of the instrument, but beyond this we can only guess. Reifying one hypothesized property of the music (the instrumentation) has made another (the technique) uncertain: previous guesses of electronic sources and percussive instruments are shown to be incompatible with the reality that there was one violinist producing these sounds, so the listener is provoked into casting about for an explanation that *is* compatible. The leap in understanding continues rather than concludes the experience.

Listening for what is underdetermined and withheld in *Imaginary Songs* therefore proves to be a rich experience, although not a conclusive one. And one can go further with such lines of questioning: themes of separation and mystery permeate *Imaginary Songs* in more than an acousmatic sense. The tiny island of Tristan da Cunha lies some 2800 kilometres from the nearest continental landfall of Cape Town in South Africa, and 2173 kilometres from St Helena, its nearest neighbour; it is often called the world's remotest permanent settlement.[129] At time of writing, there are 245 residents on the island, which has acquired a reputation as a place of monumental isolation since the first attempts to settle it in

128 Sten has confirmed that the recordings were "heavily processed" on an Akai DD1000 digital editor prior to being transferred to wax cylinder. Helge Sten, email message to author, June 9, 2020.

129 Tristan da Cunha Government and Association, "Tristan da Cunha Website."

1810, around three hundred years after its discovery by Portuguese sailors.[130] Sten became interested in Tristan after perusing reports from a 1937 Norwegian botanical expedition to the island, and, it is implied, conceived of these pieces as works of musical speculative fiction chronicling the journey and visit.[131] Given these references, it is tempting to interpret Sten's work as a kind of ultimate acousmatic reduction, an archive from a far distant island comprising a signal preternaturally dissociated from its source, not only by time, recording media and geography, but by the fact that the said "archive" is actually fictitious (i.e., imaginary).[132] This is certainly the angle Pitch Perfect adopts when they call the album a "yearning set of electronic SOS calls that are destined to never quite reach out through the airwaves," and it is a position taken up by many other commentators, who have hammered home similar points of anachronism, dislocation, and Derridean hauntology.[133]

Sten's ambivalence about the role of antiquated recording artifacts combines with these evocative references to prompt consideration of his use of phonograph cylinders not as objects to induce nostalgia or retromania, but to encourage a particular kind of acousmatic listening with historical and geographical implications. Unfortunately, details about exactly what kind of cylinders were used in *Imaginary Songs* are meagre. Even the liner notes of the record itself do not mention that the material of the cylinders was wax, rather than another material such as celluloid – there is a considerable amount of hearsay attesting to this fact, but the most reliable proof comes from the press release for the 2017 reissue.[134] Wax cylinders were first patented in 1886 by Chichester Bell and

130 Tristan da Cunha Government and Association, "Tristan da Cunha Website."

131 McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to reissue Deathprod." Ole Henrik Moe was responsible for introducing these writings to Sten.

132 See *Richard Burgess, The History of Music Production* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24-25, Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), ch. 6, and Alexander Rehding, "Wax Cylinder Revolutions," *The Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 123-60, for more on the history and implications of the use of early recording technology as a preservative measure in ethnomusicology.

133 Ibid. See for instance Schleicher, "Music In Review – Deathprod," and Douglas Murphy, "Deathprod – Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha," *Entschwindet und Vergeht* (blog), February 4, 2009, http://youyouidiot.blogspot.com/2009/02/deathprod-imaginary-songs-from-tristan.html.

134 McAllister, "Smalltown Supersound to reissue Deathprod." Sten, in private communication, also specifically referred to the cylinders as being wax-based. Helge Sten, email message to author, June 9, 2020.

Charles Summer Tainter, associates of Alexander Graham Bell at the Volta Laboratory Association, and were quickly imitated by Thomas Edison, whose tinfoil cylinders had themselves been the forerunners of Bell's and Tainter's.[135] Recordings produced in this format were enormously popular but enjoyed a relatively brief heyday, maintaining just about twenty years of dominance in the burgeoning and rapidly developing audio reproduction market. From around 1890, the Columbia Phonograph Co. was selling "300-500 cylinders a day," but by 1908, they had cut cylinder production altogether in favour of the flat gramophone discs patented by Emile Berliner.[136] In 1912, Edison's company followed suit in promoting disc records over cylinders; although Edison continued to manufacture celluloid cylinders until the company's closure in 1929, cylinders of all kinds waned in popularity from that date.[137]

It is highly unlikely that Sten was able to procure an original Edison or Volta cylinder – a rare object that, in 1996, would certainly be seen as a collector's item and would be unthinkable to use as a recording blank. The cylinders used for *Imaginary Songs*, which apparently came from Kjell Vidar Olsen's personal collection of early recording technology, were probably acquired from a modern manufacturer such as Vulcan Records, or the now disbanded Miller and Morris Company, and would thus likely have been based on Edison's 1888 "brown wax" design.[138] Soft brown wax cylinders were abandoned by most production companies after 1901 in favour of "gold-moulded" or black wax cylinders, because these latter permitted mass production and were more resistant to wear.[139] In the present day, however, brown wax designs remain valuable to phonograph enthusiasts precisely because one can record directly onto the surface of the cylinder without requiring the manufacture of a metal master copy. Their softer surface also permits their reuse: by shaving the outer surface of the cylinder

135 Burgess, *History of Music Production*, 9-10.
136 Frank Hoffmann, ed., *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 430-32.
137 Ibid., 716; see also Norman Bruderhofer, "Cylinder Guide," The Cylinder Archive, last modified January 11, 2020, https://www.cylinder.de/index.html.
138 Helge Sten, email message to author, June 9, 2020. See Vulcan Records, "About Us," accessed May 24, 2020, https://www.vulcanrecords.com/about/, and Paul Morris, "The Story of the Manufacture of Wax Cylinder Blanks," accessed May 24, 2020, http://www.paulmorrismusic.co.uk/WaxCylinderStory1.asp.
139 Burgess, *History of Music Production*, 10; Bruderhofer, "Cylinder Guide."

carefully and evenly until the grooves and ridges are abraded, one can record a new groove on the same cylinder, a boon for an independent user.[140]

Other metaphorical artifacts of this turn of the twentieth century are present in *Imaginary Songs*. Although Edison eventually developed the technology to record up to four minutes of audio on later celluloid cylinders, the brown wax cylinders had a maximum running time of around two minutes and fifteen seconds, at a stretch.[141] This limit is reflected in the durations of the "imaginary songs," all of which run for around two minutes – two ("Burntwood" and "Stony Beach") exceed it in total length, but the recordings of Moe's violin fall well within.[142] Allowing for the boundaries of the recordings to be concealed and complicated somewhat by the gapless playback of the album, their total running time (eight minutes and forty seconds) almost perfectly fits on four brown wax cylinders. And, of course, there is the ever-present noise and "grit" of the media, along with the characteristic reduced frequency range that betrays the age and limitations of this early recording technology.[143]

It may seem at first that to proclaim the significance of these historical and cultural associations is to submit to exactly the sort of retro fixation denounced by Sten. But there is a further subtlety in the modes of listening that condition this significance, a subtlety that undercuts allegations of mere nostalgic fetishism. Jonathan Sterne, in *The Audible Past*, makes the compelling case that one condition for the invention of sound reproduction technologies was the conception of sound existing apart from its issuing body.[144] Sound, rather than its causative organs or instruments, could become "the general

140 Bruderhofer, "Cylinder Guide." This fact originally seemed to me an intriguing explanation for the apparent presence of "Burntwood" in the background of "Hotentott Gulch," as if the ghostly traces of the first track were the result of a recording not completely effaced from the cylinder's surface, but Sten's communication with me made it clear that this was not the case, as one cylinder per track was used. Helge Sten, email message to author, June 9, 2020.

141 Burgess, *History of Music Production*, 10; Bruderhofer, "Cylinder Guide." Bruderhofer is more specific about the fifteen-second addendum. Modern manufacturers generally specify a maximum recording time of two minutes and ten seconds for Edison-style wax cylinder blanks.

142 Sten confirms that time limitations imposed by the cylinders were "always a part of the artistic decisions throughout." Helge Sten, email message to author, June 9, 2020.

143 As is visible in figure 2.1, the audio (including the phonograph cylinder noise) has few components above the 4000 Hz mark, and almost none above 7000 Hz, with a few exceptional cases in which the violin breaks into very high registers.

144 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 33.

category or object for acoustics" only after it had become ontologically separable from these causes.[145] When inventors began to focus on the effects of sound – on the vibrations it induced in the human ear, rather than on how it was generated – the transducing "tympanic" function of the ear became understood as a useful model for sound reproduction.[146] Listening, not speaking or any other means of projecting sound, attained paramount importance in theories of audio.

Sterne identifies a relationship between this cultural understanding and the development of "audile technique," or techniques of listening associated with rationality, spatialized hearing, and expertise in detecting and making sense of sound.[147] The philosophy behind audile technique rests on the conception of an individual and private acoustic space inhabited by the listener, which is used to separate and parse fields or strata of sound according to their relevance or proximity.[148] This is not quite the "territorial listening" of Kafka's erstwhile mole, but a mode of listening that requires and emphasizes a certain amount of technical skill in attending to sonic phenomena, and carries socioeconomic implications insofar as it commodifies the personal space necessary to give full and proper attention to sounds in isolation.[149] The phonograph was just one of many early devices that required listeners to detach "hearing ... from the proximal audio environment," to prioritize close listening to a sound's salient characteristics in order to "participate in another, 'mediated' linkage" between source and ear.[150]

Of course, in emphasizing separability of sense, source, and effect, and detail-oriented listening, this understanding of early sound reproduction seems at first to find something innately acousmatic in audio reproduction technologies. Connections are easily drawn between Schaeffer's reduced listening and audile technique: their shared "privileging of sonic details," basis on the "individuation of the

145 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 33.
146 Ibid., 34.
147 Ibid., 93-95.
148 Ibid., 158.
149 Ibid., 155.
150 Ibid., 158.

listener," and focus on sounds first as objective phenomena rather than as significant intersubjective events.[151] Returning to the question of experience and meaning, these priorities seem squarely aligned with the former, dissociating sound from significance and endorsing objective apprehension and direct experience. But, as Sterne shows, to accept this view is to disregard the very cultural prerequisites that enable these practices – the complex semantic associations, social and political presumptions, and economic conditions that render the sound of an instrument meaningful and the crackle and hiss of wax cylinders ancillary. These are the often overlooked forces at play in an interpretation of *Imaginary Songs* that concentrates on the music's literal or figurative distance from a listener: the learned and invented ability to "sort through" the sounds, to recognize them as *sounds* in plural rather than "sound," and to strain to detect instrument and medium. To take the further step of anchoring them to a conceived spatial and temporal origin (say, Tristan da Cunha, 1937) is therefore to make conclusions about their meaning based on techniques that ask us to forget meaning, to treat as objective and to "filter" out the artifacts of the phonograph cylinder but still require them to signify for us.

All the same, this seeming contradiction may not be undesirable, nor in need of any resolution or correction. What is interesting is that this inability to settle decisively on sound perceived as object or sound as understood by the subject resonates with what Kane calls the chiasmus of the acousmatic situation, the disquieting way in which underdetermined sounds waver between being considered as interior and exterior to the auditor.[152] Object, subject, source, and identity: all things are up for debate when it comes to acousmatic sound. But the premise of acousmatic listening as theorized by Kane is precisely that definitive solutions to such debates do not address the "central problem" of acousmatic unsettledness, a problem that, as I have argued, is not really a problem but a rich breeding ground for musical enjoyment and inquiry.[153]

151 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 158.
152 Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 159-61.
153 Ibid., 150-51.

Imaginary Songs exploits the acousmatic tension between sound as objective and sound as meaningful. It provides a great amount of sonic detail, inviting considerations of the sound's essential qualities (timbre, pitch, duration, and so on) and hinting at the efficacy of reduced listening as a tool to come into more direct *experience* of the sound. But by masking much of this detail as an idiosyncrasy of the medium (i.e., the noise of the wax cylinder), it also coaxes listeners into a cultural *understanding*, into hearing the historical associations that reduced listening would cast aside. The reverse is also true: by withholding many of the cues that listeners might usually use to identify the violin as a violin, *Imaginary Songs* provokes questions about what the instrument is, what it is doing, and how to understand its sound relative to other idioms of music. At the same time, suppressing this knowledge creates a subtractive effect that draws listeners further into contemplating "raw" information such as timbre and pitch. The listener is pulled between understanding and experience – or, to be more accurate, these two categories become less and less epistemologically distinguishable, more and more indeterminate. All one can do is cast about between sound and source, between meaning and visceral feeling, following with anxiety or curiosity whatever threads of inquiry can be picked up in the process.

Conclusion

When commentators conclude that SQ2 is uniquely difficult to discuss, they are responding to the ways in which the piece urges listeners to continually reevaluate what they hear. Feldman's peculiar and nonsystematic approach to instrumentation, repetition, and form plants ideas of counterpoint, patterning, and structure in listeners' heads that are called into question as soon as they are established. These techniques render the music highly encouraging of an unsettled mode of listening that seems to call for a resolution always just out of reach. The difficulties in discussion are therefore not consequences of SQ2 resisting linguistic interpretation – as Blasius notes, certain things about Feldman's late music are "almost too amenable to description" – but arise in response to a vivid awareness that discourse can only continue, not draw conclusions about, the musical experience.[154] Ironically, it is Feldman's very focus on the materiality of the musical experience, on "the sounds of the sounds themselves," that prolongs this vacillation between interpretative understanding and untrammelled experience of the music.[155]

The acousmatic experience in Deathprod's *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha* provokes a similar realization for different reasons. By veiling the sounds of violin improvisation in the noise of a phonograph cylinder, Sten at once dissociates the effects of the instrument from their causes and supplements the gap between sound and source with contexts of historical recording technology, ethnography, and isolation. What results is a tension between listening closely to the violin in an attempt to discern its source and attending to the cultural and historical implications of Sten's music, both activities that depend on each other but cannot resolve one another. As with SQ2, the listener is continually shuttled between interpreting the music and apprehending the vivid details of its sound.

154 Blasius, "Late Feldman," 33.
155 See Hirata, "The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves."

To study music is also to study how we hear, feel, and think it. As we theorize and interpret, we repeatedly return to the practice of listening, querying our experiences again and again. But we are also constantly returning from experience to understanding, passing from hearing to meaningful description, in order to extend the communicative power of music into the realm of language. Knowing and speaking of music can seem ineluctable as equally as it can seem incommensurable with listening, because of the ease with which the two seem at times to slip between each other. And in time, the discourse we develop comes to enact the way music communicates and behaves. Understanding music after the fact becomes as much a part of experiencing it as does listening. Music provokes thought; it cannot be otherwise.

Bibliography

Abbate, Carolyn. “Music: Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505-36. https://doi.org/10.1086/421160.

Berlatsky, Noah. “Deathprod, dark lord of ambient sound, wants to show you the light.” *Document Journal*, October 28, 2019. https://www.documentjournal.com/2019/10/deathprod-dark-lord-of-ambient-sound-wants-to-show-you-the-light/.

Blasius, Leslie. “Late Feldman and the Remnants of Virtuosity.” *Perspectives of New Music* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 32-83. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25164540.

Boretz, Benjamin. “Experiences with No Names.” *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 272-83. https://doi.org/10.2307/833298.

Bruderhofer, Norman. “Cylinder Guide.” The Cylinder Archive. Last modified January 11, 2020. https://www.cylinder.de/index.html.

Buene, Eivind. “Helge Sten – mellom dogme og drøm.” Kunstkritikk, April 29, 2004. https://kunstkritikk.com/helge-sten-mellom-dogme-og-drom/.

Burgess, Richard James. *The History of Music Production.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Deathprod. *Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha.* Smalltown Supersound STS278LP, May 5, 2017. LP.

———————. *Treetop Drive*. Smalltown Supersound STS279LP, May 5, 2017. 2 LPs.

Dohoney, Ryan. “Morton Feldman: String Quartet No. 2 (1983).” Program notes for Spektral Quartet, March 11, 2017, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL. Reproduced with permission of the author at https://cnvill.net/mfdohoney-sq2.pdf.

———————. “Performing Feldman's *String Quartet #2*: An Interview with Tom Chiu and Max Mandel of the Flux Quartet.” *Dissonance* no. 116 (December 2011): 10-17. Reproduced with permission of the author at https://www.cnvill.net/mfdohoney.pdf.

Emilsen, Ann-Sofi. “Deathprod.” In *Store norske leksikon*. Last modified July 5, 2019. https://snl.no/Deathprod.

Feldman, Morton. *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*. Edited by B. H. Friedman. Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000.

————————. *String Quartet no. 2*. London, UK: Universal Edition, 1983. UE 17650 L.

FLUX Quartet. *Feldman Edition 6: String Quartet no. 2*. Mode 112, 2002. 5 CDs.

Gallope, Michael, James Currie, Brian Kane, James Hepokoski, Judy Lochhead, Michael Puri, and Steven Rings. “Vladimir Jankélévitch's Philosophy of Music.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 215-56. https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2012.65.1.215.

Hanninen, Dora. “Feldman, Analysis, Experience.” *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 2 (2004): 225-251. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572205000137.

Harrington, David. “Morton Feldman: String Quartet II.” *American Masterpieces: Chamber Music*. 2007.

Hirata, Catherine Costello. “The Sounds of the Sounds Themselves: Analyzing the Early Music of Morton Feldman.” *Perspectives of New Music* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 6-27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/833482.

Hoffmann, Frank, editor. *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.

Kane, Brian. *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Kramer, Lawrence. *The Thought of Music*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

Lunberry, Clark. “Departing Landscapes: Morton Feldman's 'String Quartet II' and 'Triadic Memories.'” *SubStance* 35, no. 2 (2006): 17-50. https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2006.0037.

Majmon, Magnus Olsen. “Analysis of Morton Feldman's *String Quartet no. 2* (1983),” trans. Magnus Olsen Majmon. Excerpt from *En diskurs om 'det sublime' og Morton Feldman's String Quartet no. 2*. University of Copenhagen, Music Department, 2005. http://www.cnvill.net/mfolsen_english.pdf.

Marszalek, Julian. “Riding The Storm: John Paul Jones and Helge Sten of Minibus Pimps Interviewed.” *The Quietus*, February 25, 2014. https://thequietus.com/articles/14513-john-paul-jones-helge-sten-interview-minibus-pimps.

McAllister, Sam. “Smalltown Supersound to Reissue Deathprod's 'Treetop Drive' (1994), 'Imaginary Songs from Tristan da Cunha' (1996), and 'Morals and Dogma' (2004), Out May 5th.” Pitch Perfect PR, March 1, 2017.

Rehding, Alexander. “Wax Cylinder Revolutions.” *The Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 123-60. https://doi.org/10.1093/musqtl/gdi004.

Schleicher, Lucas. “Music In Review – Deathprod.” *Brainwashed*, June 6, 2004. http://www.brainwashed.com/brain/brainv07i22.html.

Simpson, Paul. “Deathprod: Biography and History.” AllMusic. Accessed January 19, 2020. https://www.allmusic.com/artist/deathprod-mn0000188850/biography.

Sten, Helge. “Constructing music as constructing a sculpture: 4 Questions to Helge Sten.” Interview by Clara Bolin and Elena Brandenburg. *Norrøna*, November 29, 2018. https://norroena.hypotheses.org/1544.

———————. “Life as a Minibus Pimp: Ten Questions with Helge Sten.” *Textura*, April 2014. https://www.textura.org/archives/interviews/tenquestions_sten.htm.

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Tristan da Cunha Government and Tristan da Cunha Association. “Tristan da Cunha Website.” Accessed March 24, 2020. https://tristandc.com/.

Villars, Chris, ed. *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987*. London, UK: Hyphen Press, 2006.

————————. “Notes on the Early Performance History of Morton Feldman's Second String Quartet.” Morton Feldman Page. Accessed April 1, 2020. https://www.cnvill.net/mfsq2perfs.htm.

Volans, Kevin. “What is Feldman?” *Tempo* 68, no. 270 (October 2014): 7-14. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298214000321.

Young, Rob. “Supersilent: Quiet Stormbringers.” *The Wire*, February 1999.