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Witkiewicz's Theory of Pure Form and the Music of Morton Feldman¹

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Because Witkiewicz thought the notion of form was ambiguous, he coined the term “pure form” to describe his theory of form, form itself being simply “that which imparts a certain unity to complex objects and phenomena.” When this “unifying of the many into the one comes about” and “directly affects us” and leads to “aesthetic satisfaction,” it is pure form.² These observations are fairly consistent with ideas of formalism current in the arts in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. However, Witkiewicz adds further conditions. He emphasizes the unity of the individual, both as artist in creating and as spectator in perceiving the pure form. This “unity in mul-

¹ This essay is based on my paper, *Pure Form in Music*, presented at the Witkacy 2009 conference in London on September 18, 2009 and part of my paper, *Witkacy's Music*, presented at the Witkacy 2010 conference in Washington on April 30, 2010.

² S. I. Witkiewicz: *On Pure Form*, trans. C. S. Leach, [in:] *Aesthetics in Twentieth Century Poland*, ed. J. G. Harrell and A. Wirzbiańska, Lewisburg 1973, p. 50–51.

tiplicity" is "the basic law of existence..., given to us directly in the form of the unity of our personality." All art, therefore, is "an expression of the unity of our personality," acting on us "in an immediate way by means of its very structuring."³ Elsewhere he says, "Pure Form acts directly, calling forth in us... heightened 'metaphysical feeling.'"⁴ This is different from most other modernist theories of form. Witkiewicz was introducing here personal and philosophical considerations about the making and reception of works of art, which other formalists, eager to discuss only the work itself, tended to avoid.

Witkiewicz was obsessed with the idea of unity in plurality and considered it the precondition for the "primal formal instinct of man"⁵ and the attempt to deal with the questions, "Why am I precisely this being, and not some other? At this place in infinite space and at this moment in infinite time? In this group of beings, on precisely this planet? Why do I exist at all? I could not exist; in fact, why is there anything at all?"⁶ Witkiewicz thought that the metaphysical disquietude that resulted from these kinds of questions was essential to enable the creative process to produce a unity of pure form, distinct from the unattainable unity in the multiplicity of the universe.⁷ This artistic unity leads to the "heightened metaphysical feeling" mentioned above. According to Witkiewicz, art, which does not come into being in this manner, does not endure and tends to result in novelty and snobbery about the past.⁸ In experiencing works of art in pure form, spectators theoretically perceive the artist's "heightened metaphysical feeling" in a sense related to their own individual condition. They participate in this unity and become part of it, identifying with the form. But if something that is not art is expressed or communicated, then the unity, as well as the thrill that comes from the sense of unity, will be compromised.

Witkiewicz defined music as "sounds set to rhythm,"⁹ its essence, as with all art forms, not to be found in "emotional elements," but in a "formal construction that directly arouses metaphysical feeling."¹⁰ Consequently, to talk

³ Ibidem, p. 53–54.

⁴ S. I. Witkiewicz: *Second Response to the Reviewers of The Pragmatists*, trans. D. Gerould, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, ed. D. Gerould, Evanston 1992, p. 154.

⁵ Idem: *Pure Form in the Theater*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶ Quoted in D. Gerould: *Witkacy: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer*, Seattle 1981, p. 146.

⁷ See E. Makarczyk-Schuster: *Raum und Raumzeichen in Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's Bühnenschaffen der zwanziger Jahre*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, p. 55–58.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ S. I. Witkiewicz: *Einführung in die Theorie der reinen Form des Theaters*, [in:] *Verrückte Lokomotive. Ein Lesebuch*, ed. A. Wirth, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 44.

¹⁰ Idem: *Pure Form in the Theater*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, op. cit., p. 148.

about pure form in music is to talk about both the structural shape of the music and its metaphysical implications. "For Witkacy," writes Daniel Gerould, "music is the purest form of artistic expression, since it is the art furthest removed from life and most capable of giving voice to metaphysical feelings that lie beyond language."¹¹ In music the pure form is captured in sound. All sound and noise act upon listeners physically, striking them with sound waves which, in themselves and unlike words, do not ordinarily carry content or outside information, so that the immediate reaction is a purely physical one, one that imprints the sounds on the physical being of the listeners. When the sounds are formally organized in relation to each other to become music, it reverberates physically through the bodies of listeners, getting literally inside them, so that they sense themselves almost channeled by the music, their sensibilities aligned to the music like iron filings aligned by a magnet. When this identification occurs between music and the listener, it is a particularly unique sense of form because it can occur without conceptualization and articulated meaning and can easily make listeners forget the everyday details and contingencies of their lives and give them a sense of intensity without actually drugging them, unlike the thrill of being carried away by sentimental and non-musical aspects of the performance. In perceiving the pure form of the music, listeners are physically participating in its unity. The pleasure comes from that experience of the formal oneness, a purely metaphysical identity because it is based entirely on artistic form. Witkiewicz thought, as did Schopenhauer and Nietzsche before him, as Artaud did at the same time, and as Beckett thought after him, that "all art is metaphysical."¹²

It is not clear what Witkiewicz meant by this heightened sense of "the unity of one's individuality,"¹³ given his persistent public and social habit of taking on different personae, pretending to be different people, and his constant use of many different pseudonyms for himself. Commentators have noted Witkiewicz's sense of multiple personalities in himself and others, his view of the personality as a "battleground of two egos," and the many masks

¹¹ D. Gerould: *Witkacy*, op. cit., p. 257.

¹² Cf. J. Degler: *Witkacy in the World*, [in:] A. Micińska: *Witkacy: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz: Life and Work*, trans. B. Piotrowska, Warsaw 1990, p. 297; A. Artaud: *Seraphim's Theatre*, [in:] *Collected Works*, trans. V. Corti, Vol. 4, London 1974, p. 166; U. Pothast: *Die eigentlich metaphysische Tätigkeit. Über Schopenhauers Ästhetik und ihre Anwendung durch Samuel Beckett*, Frankfurt am Main 1982, p. 11–12.

¹³ S. I. Witkiewicz: *Second Response to the Reviewers of The Pragmatists*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, op. cit., p. 154.

he lived behind.¹⁴ As Mark Rudnicki has observed, if one wanted a photograph to characterize the true Witkiewicz, which one would one choose? The “buffoon, drug addict, priest, doctor,” or “madman?” Or maybe the one of him sitting in front of two mirrors, presenting four images of himself?¹⁵

The British philosopher Galen Strawson has argued in his book *Selves* that the use of the first-person pronoun “shifts between two different things” in one’s thought and speech. “Sometimes ‘I’ is used with the intention to refer to a human being considered as a whole, sometimes it’s used with the intention to refer to a self – two things that have quite different identity conditions,”¹⁶ the former referring to what Thomas Nagel calls a kind of “public human being, as when you say: ‘I’ll meet you in front of Carnegie Hall;’” the latter referring to the “subject of consciousness, as when you think, ‘I hear an oboe.’”¹⁷ Witkiewicz’s concern is for the second “I,” the one referring to the subject of consciousness. This is the I he sees being drowned out by the public I in modern society. It is this subjective I which feels a sense of unity with the experience of pure form, both in the act of creation and in reception. As Witkiewicz’s narrator in *The Only Way Out* says of the painter Marcell, “he expressed metaphysical convulsions and anguish in purely formal constructions, which likewise acted directly by means of their forms and called forth in the viewers the very same psychic state he had experienced at the time these forms came into being.”¹⁸ The form’s unity is experienced by both the creator and the perceiver as a personal unity, creating especially in music, a state of intensity at the moment of experience independent of the feelings and activities of everyday life. Whether Witkiewicz actually thought that there was a unified personality or not, his point of emphasis here is on the aesthetic experience of a *sense* of unity, a *feeling* of oneness, even though a continuity may not actually persist. The experience is a rush of energy unifying many impulses and inclinations that are often at odds with each other.

¹⁴ See T. O. Immisch, K. E. Göltz, U. Pohlmann: *Witkacy – Metaphysische/Metaphysical Portraits*, with essays by U. Czartoryska and S. Okołowicz, Leipzig 1997, p. 7, 19, 53.

¹⁵ M. Rudnicki: *The Theater of Life or The Search for Self*, <http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/witkacy/mark.html>, 1.

¹⁶ G. Strawson: *Selves. An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics*, Oxford 2009, p. 6.

¹⁷ T. Nagel: *The I in Me*, “London Review of Books”, 5 November 2009, p. 33.

¹⁸ S. I. Witkiewicz: *The Only Way Out*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, op. cit., p. 299.

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According to Witkiewicz the evolution of society was moving inevitably toward increased collectivity and diminished individual freedom. His fears were realized in the twentieth century most horribly with the fascist and communist tyrannies in Europe and Asia. It wasn't only the tyranny of these movements that Witkiewicz saw as a threat, but also their abilities to offer comfort and security as an alternative to the risks of personal freedom. Nowadays, some of these tyrannies still function and other kinds of mass movements have come into being, while new types of media technology and social manipulation further constrict individual development. Advertising and public relations steadily strive to manipulate and control individual decision-making. Material pleasure and success have become staples of personal development, both requiring, for the most part, accommodation and conformity to superficial social norms.

Witkiewicz also thought that the decline of the autonomy of the individual would carry with it a parallel decline of the significance of the arts, since pure form was so intimately connected with a sense of the unity of one's being. People would become more and more indifferent to art, treating it as a past-time or hobby, if not ignoring it altogether. Like most modernists, he advocated avant-garde forms of art to shock people out of their indifference to the arts, warning that "the feverish pace of life, social mechanization, the exhaustion of all means of action, and a blasé attitude toward art" would make it necessary for art to try to galvanize the public by being "complicated, or as the case may be, artificially simplified, artistically perverse, disturbing." Traditional styles and forms would only support and encourage superficial attitudes to art. Concern with what he called the "Secret of Existence" and attempts to understand it would become "inconvenient for a socially perfect, mechanized man."¹⁹ Witkiewicz believed that art offered the only possibility of understanding what was happening in the evolution of society.²⁰

In the public sphere, music is generally promoted as a kind of entertainment. Beyond entertainment, music is used both as a background and, in advertising, to get attention. It is used as accompaniment to just about everything we do: to stimulate us when we go shopping, to help relax us when we travel, to console us as we wait in the doctor's office, to keep us company on

¹⁹ Idem: *On Pure Form*, [in:] *Aesthetics in Twentieth...*, op. cit., p. 55–56.

²⁰ Idem: *New Forms of Painting and the Misunderstandings Arising Therefrom*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, op. cit., p. 107.

the telephone while we languish on hold, and even to make us feel at ease in someone else's house. Many of us work with music in the background. And that's not all: there is also the background music of TV shows and movies, not to mention those fanfare-like entities of sound used to support announcements and proclaim the commencement of various kinds of radio, television, and cinematic presentations, including even the news. All of this is music. The issue here is not about the kind of music, but about the fact that *it is always there*. Music of one sort or another is constantly surrounding us. So much so, in fact, that it becomes difficult to endure silence, and silence, as philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch pointed out, is as necessary to music as non-being is to the sense of a meaningful life.²¹

If we are constantly surrounded by music as a background to most of what we do, the significance of music becomes diminished. Taken for granted, it relies on passive listeners who may never know the experience of listening to anything that might require concentration or extended attention. In addition, the use of music to manipulate the consumer reinforces the therapeutic view that music is either soothing to the troubled or stimulating to the bored. Music certainly can be stimulating and soothing, but constant over-exposure flattens out genuine stimulation and makes the music little more than some kind of wallpaper or half-conscious accompaniment to other public noises. Furthermore, most of the music used in public is by design familiar to a large majority of the public. Performing and playing familiar pieces over and over afflicts all kinds of music. A narcissistic population, seeking stimulation in the familiar and succor in things pertaining to its own perceived reality, makes music into a narcotic, which, like Witkiewicz's "Murti Bing pill," helps to influence the populace to abide in a state of contentment. Although Witkiewicz did not write much about music and left no specifications about the conditions of music in the future, this state of affairs, so much in line with other aspects of his predictions based on his theory of social evolution, provides a good testing ground for applying his theory of pure form to music. The application of his theory to forms of art upon which he had no historically direct influence demonstrates the vital relevance of Witkiewicz's theory of pure form, both in terms of the public use of music at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries and in the work of major twentieth-century composers.

²¹ V. Jankélévitch: *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. C. Abbate, Princeton 2003, p. 132.

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The music of Morton Feldman is an example of an extreme form of music that exhibits Witkiewicz's idea of pure form. Echoing the latter's demands for immediacy in art, Feldman explained in 1962 how the painting of the abstract expressionists made him "desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore." He acknowledged that the composers Edgard Varèse and Anton Webern had "elements" and "glimpses" of what he was after, but he said that he didn't find in them the level of "concentration" that he needed.²² Feldman's main interest was sound, sound as it is in a pure and unadulterated state, as if being heard for the first time, without preconditioned notions or familiarity based on past musical practices and traditions. Like John Cage, he was interested "in liberating sounds from the formal concepts of European music,"²³ where, as he thought, a sound was only important as a part of a structure or development. Feldman was a large man, about six feet tall and weighing almost 300 pounds, loud and full of laughter. He had an enormous appetite for life and its pleasures. He was an endless talker.²⁴ This garrulous and noisy man paradoxically composed a music that is quiet, slow, and extremely delicate.

Eight years before he died in 1987, Feldman began creating pieces of great length, taking sometimes several hours to perform, written for solo performers or small chamber groups. There is nothing sonically grandiose in any of these pieces, nothing dramatic or bombastic and certainly nothing loud. Indeed, Feldman said in 1987, "There is no place for the drama of a gesture or an action in my music."²⁵ These long works developed partly from his impatience with the knee-jerk assumption that each composition be twenty-five to thirty minutes long, as well as Feldman's fascination with scale, influenced by Mark Rothko's huge panels and the large canvases of Jackson Pollack. He may also have wanted to allow "his quiet voice to be heard in the total isolation it required," as Alex Ross writes.²⁶ In a lecture in

²² M. Feldman: *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, ed. B. H. Friedman, Cambridge 2000, p. 5.

²³ E. Stiebler: *Feldman's Time*, trans. T. Jones, [in:] M. Feldman, *Words on Music/Worte über Musik. Lectures and Conversations/Vorträge und Gespräche*, ed. R. Mörchen, Köln 2008, p. 18.

²⁴ See B. H. Friedman: *Introduction* to Feldman's *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, p. XI.

²⁵ M. Feldman: *Words on Music/Worte über Musik*, op. cit., p. 710.

²⁶ A. Ross: *American Sublime*, "New Yorker", June 19, 2006, p. 87.

Toronto about the state of music in 1982, Feldman asked, "Do we have anything in music for example that really wipes everything out? That just cleans everything away, from some aspect of illusion and reality? Do we have anything like – Proust? Do we have anything comparable to *Finnegans Wake*?"²⁷ To be sure, he would repeat again and again his desire to strip away illusions, saying shortly before he died, in his typically bizarre syntax, "To me, the artist has only one duty, only one duty and no thing other than that one duty, is to strip away illusions about things... including myself. My whole life is that I'm trying to prove myself wrong, not right."²⁸ This remark is close to Samuel Beckett's statement, "To be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living."²⁹ In these two remarks, both Feldman and Beckett reject the notion of the artist as an all-knowing seer or the ultimate wise citizen, observing the world in serenity, and replace it with one of the artist as an experimenter, deliberately learning by error, never satisfied, and with little prospect of traditional success, a posture similar to Witkiewicz's repeated restless experimentation in different art forms. When asked about what sort of illusions Feldman wanted to strip away, he replied, "The illusion of progress, the illusion of an audience, the illusion of success, the illusion of what's exciting. Nowadays I would say the illusion of what is intellectual and what is not intellectual."³⁰ As was the case with Witkiewicz, Feldman was dismayed at the way all art was becoming devalued socially, complaining that art had become a "middle class toy for the educated."³¹

Feldman was also influenced in his later music by the Near Eastern rugs he collected, especially Turkish rugs where the patterns and colors are slightly irregular. He called it a "crippled symmetry."³² He put this "crippled symmetry" into practice in his long pieces, where musical patterns are woven together over time with slight alterations. In listening to these pieces, one marvels, as the musicologist Catherine Hirata comments, at the way Feldman "could weave such a variety of different patterns," and follow them with the "various ways in which one pattern can be succeeded by another pattern." She notes that some listeners find Feldman very boring because

²⁷ Ch. Villars (ed.): *Morton Feldman Says. Selected Interviews and Lectures, 1964–1987*, London 2006, p. 136.

²⁸ M. Feldman: *Words on Music/Worte über Musik*, op. cit., p. 798.

²⁹ S. Beckett: *Three Dialogues*, [in:] *Disjecta*, ed. R. Cohn, New York 1984, p. 145.

³⁰ M. Feldman: *Words on Music/Worte über Musik*, op. cit., p. 800.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 854.

³² Cf. *idem*: *Crippled Symmetry*, [in:] *idem*, *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op. cit., p. 134–149.

nothing "happens" in his music. She suggests that those who are not bored may be practicing "a new way of listening: rather than waiting for something to happen, they are savoring what they are hearing now."³³ In the music's lack of forward thrust and in its emphasis on sound patterns assembled in the manner of Turkish rugs, the music eschews concepts of a defined beginning, middle, and end, as Feldman advocated,³⁴ and conveys a sense of an almost flat surface upon which the listener's attention roams. Feldman was sensitive to the fact that musical forms as forms of memory are a conventional basis for composition. The "crippled symmetry" of his music was a way to disorient the memory and permit the somewhat altered material to be taken on its own terms when it appears.³⁵ It is also a way of shutting off the voluntary memory to allow Proust's involuntary memory to be more active in listening.

The next to last piece Feldman wrote was called *For Samuel Beckett*. It is a tribute to another strong influence on his work and to a person with whom he identified. Though both did not like opera, they collaborated to produce an "opera" entitled *Neither*, which is actually a monologue for soprano and orchestra, one of three pieces of Beckett's set to music by Feldman. A good argument can be made for finding examples of pure form in Beckett's plays. Certainly the encapsulated space on stage, often indifferent to the realities of space and time, as well as the bewildered and bewildering interactions of the characters, are formal arrangements similar to those in Witkiewicz's theater of pure form. *Neither* could also be an example of pure form, oscillating as it does back and forth between "self and unself" and their incomprehensibility, but the music is dependent on its relationship to the text in a way that instrumental music is not. Only a small portion of Feldman's music was written for voice. He was not unlike Witkiewicz in this regard, who seems to have thought that the purest form of music was instrumental.³⁶

There are no programmatic meanings or messages in Feldman's music. His music does not seek to express anything. In thinking about responses to his music, it helps to keep in mind Claude Lévy-Strauss's notion that the meaning of music, like myth, occurs in its reception and not in its transmission. "Music has its being in me, and I listen to myself through it,"³⁷ he wrote.

³³ C. Hirata: *Morton Feldman*, [in:] *Music of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde*, ed. L. Sisky, Greenwood Press, Westport 2002, 135.

³⁴ M. Feldman: *Words on Music/Worte über Musik*, op. cit., p. 706.

³⁵ See S. Claren: *Neither. Die Musik Morton Feldmans*, Hofheim 2000, p. 286.

³⁶ See D. Gerould: *Witkacy*, op. cit., p. 38, and S. I. Witkiewicz: *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, op. cit., p. 69.

³⁷ C. Lévy-Strauss: *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. J. and D. Weightman, New York 1969, p. 17.

Consequently, a music that is going to make it possible for listeners to reflect on the “mystery of existence,” as Witkiewicz expects, would need, in our time, where there is such an obsession with looking for meaning everywhere, to eschew any suggestion of message, lest it short-circuit listeners’ responses by trying to program them as they listen. Program music and music with a message thrive on this short-circuiting, even frequently causing listeners to think that the music’s programmed “meaning” is their own.

In his novel, *Doktor Faustus*, Thomas Mann has the fictitious composer, Adrian Leverkühn, define the essence of music as “an organization of time.”³⁸ Lévi-Strauss considers music to be a machine “for the suppression of time.”³⁹ But Feldman had a different sense of time in music. In 1969 he commented on a conversation he once had with the German composer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, who had admonished him for not having a rhythmic beat in his music. Feldman said, “I am not a clockmaker. I am interested in getting to Time in its unstructured existence. That is, I am interested in how this wild beast lives in the jungle -- not in the zoo. I am interested in how Time exists before we put our paws on it -- our minds, our imaginations, into it.”⁴⁰ In Feldman’s long pieces, the music *embodies* time. It is time itself that one perceives along with the music that one hears, time in the form of music. This might have something to do with the sense of loss or melancholy that some listeners perceive while listening to Feldman’s music, because surely, any extended attention to time, to its nature, its constant passing and its moving closer to its ending, which is death, is bound to carry with it a feeling of loss. Time, as much as anything else, is at the basis of Witkiewicz’s mystery of being, in one sense a matter of an individual life and its moments, in another the vast and almost incomprehensible multiplicitous life of the universe. The pianist Louis Goldstein has written of his experience playing Feldman’s *Triadic Memories*, describing especially how the “sublimity of the ending, one hundred minutes into the piece,” sometimes had the effect of “utter tragedy, when in spite of great effort, time finally does break down and an awareness of terrifying emptiness is discovered.”⁴¹

The duration of these long pieces makes enormous demands on listeners and, especially, performers, both in the endurance required and in the diffi-

³⁸ T. Mann: *Doktor Faustus. The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. J. E. Woods, New York 1997, p. 338.

³⁹ As quoted in E. Leach: *Claude Lévy-Strauss*, New York 1970, p. 125.

⁴⁰ M. Feldman: *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, op. cit., p. 87.

⁴¹ L. Goldstein: *Morton Feldman and the Shape of Time*, originally in: *Perspectives on American Music since 1950*, ed. J. R. Heintze, New York and London 1995, p. 67–80 and available on line at <http://www.cnvill.net/mfgldstn.htm>.

cult technique required to play it. This fits in with Witkiewicz's demand, mentioned earlier, for art that would be in some way challenging. An experience of listening to Feldman's *String Quartet (II)* without a break, in the six-hour and seven-minute recording of the Flux Quartet on an audio DVD, requires a commitment to time that is hard to achieve in a busy and noisy world; but once made, the figures and patterns heard become ends in themselves and one gets caught up in concentrating on how the "composition sounds, rather than how it is made."⁴² The mind inevitably drifts, as well, both with the music and beyond it. The listener, solely in the presence of time and a sound undiluted by compositional rhetoric and virtuosity, finds himself in an unusual condition of heightened self-consciousness, oscillating between the music and what is going on in himself. The last dynamic indication of the entire piece, on page 76 of the 124-page score and two and one half hours before the end of this recording, is *ppppp*, a five-fold pianissimo. The affect of these two and a half hours of slow, barely audible and persistent music was intense and deep, but it depended on having listened to the previous three and a half hours, much as the impact of *Time Regained* depends on having read Proust's six novels that precede it. The feeling of a "vast stretch of time," to use Beckett's oft-repeated line from *How It Is*, combined with the moments of silence in the music, lead to a sense of huge pockets of empty space, perhaps the "emptiness" Louis Goldstein referred to above.

Many listeners have commented on their sense of solitude in listening to Feldman's music. Alex Ross has also noticed a "lonely, lamenting tone that runs through" the music, and how listening to this piece is to "enter into a new way of listening, even a new consciousness."⁴³ The composer Christian Wolf comments on a feeling of isolation in listening to the piece, even in public performances,⁴⁴ while the musician, Hans-Peter Jahn, writing on Feldman's music in general and also noting the sense of isolation, states, in a comment that would have been dear to Witkiewicz, "There is hardly any other type of music that lends itself so little to collective listening."⁴⁵ It would be crude to say that the listening described above resulted in a "heightened metaphysical feeling" plain and simple, but it was definitely a musical expe-

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ A. Ross: *American Sublime*, "New Yorker", June 19, 2006, 88, 87; see also idem: *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, New York 2007, p. 484–488.

⁴⁴ Ch. Wolf: *Feldman's String Quartet No. 2*, liner notes to the Mode CD and audio DVD of Feldman's *String Quartet (II)*, mode 112.

⁴⁵ H.-P. Jahn: *Isn't Morton Beckett... Samuel Feldman...*, trans. R. Koch and Team, liner notes to the Kairos CD of Feldman's *For Samuel Beckett*, Kairos 0012012KAI.

rience far removed from both escapism and virtuosity and certainly metaphysical, affecting the listener directly at the core of individual being and giving some kind of a sense of unity in the midst of the confused multiplicity of everything else, as Witkiewicz advocated.

Abstract

In this paper I discuss how “pure form” applies to the music of composer Morton Feldman. Starting from Witkiewicz’s idea that music is the purest form of art, I discuss his speculations on the “heightened metaphysical feeling” that results from aesthetic experience. I also look at Witkiewicz’s rejection of sentimental music. I then take up the conditions of music in our time, where music is used as light entertainment. This exemplifies Witkiewicz’s fears about the use of art as a distraction to keep people happy. I then examine the music of Feldman as an antidote to these trends. His music conveys a sense of a flat surface upon which the attention of listeners drifts contemplatively with the music, experiencing it as an end in itself. I try to show how his music affects listeners at the core of their being and gives them a sense of unity in the midst of the multiplicity of everyday life.

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