

DESCRIPTION-AS-ANALYSIS AND
ORCHESTRATION-AS-FORM
IN FELDMAN'S *COPTIC LIGHT* (1985)

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 @tgj505 

Coptic Light (1985)

- Listening: BLOCK 1 out of 38
- Ames (1997): “This neglect [of his works] undoubtedly resulted from the fact that although Feldman had a unique and influential style, he avoided rigorous compositional procedures.
The music simply does not lend itself to tidy analysis.”
- This paper is about the many challenges of analyzing Feldman...

Coptic Light (1985)

- EXAMPLE 1: 8-bar BLOCKS in *Coptic Light* with repeated sections shaded.

Block: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
First bar: 1	9	17	25	33	41	49	57	65	73	81	89	97	105	113	121	129	137	145
Measures rep.										6	6							8

Block: 20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38
First bar: 153	161	169	177	185	193	201	209	217	225	233	241	249	257	265	273	281	289	297
Measures rep.	5	5	4	4		5	7			8			6	8	6	6	8	8

Block 1

- DUKER (2011): Flute parts with patterns noted.

The image displays a musical score for Block 1, Duker (2011), featuring flute parts with specific patterns noted. The score is organized into two systems, each with two staves. The top system is labeled 'Flute 1 and 2' and the bottom system is labeled 'Flute 3 and 4'. Each staff contains a series of notes, including eighth and sixteenth notes, with various articulations and phrasing marks. Patterns are indicated by letters 'a', 'b', 'c', and 'd' placed below the notes. Pattern 'a' appears in the first and third measures of the top system. Pattern 'b' appears in the second and fourth measures of the top system and the first and third measures of the bottom system. Pattern 'c' appears in the third and fourth measures of the top system and the second and fourth measures of the bottom system. Pattern 'd' appears in the second and fourth measures of the bottom system. The score is written in a standard musical notation style, with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 4/4.

Block 1

- DUKER (2011): Flute parts with patterns noted.

- Oboes: c,c,b,d',d',b,a,a

- Violins: b,d,c,a,a,c,d,b

The image displays a musical score for Block 1, featuring two systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Flute 1 and 2 (top) and Flute 3 and 4 (bottom). The second system includes staves for Violins (top and bottom). The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and slurs. The patterns are labeled with letters: 'a', 'b', 'c', and 'd'. The Flute parts feature triplets and slurs. The Violin parts also feature triplets and slurs. The score is presented in a clear, professional layout with a white background and black notation.

Block 1

- HANNINEN (2004): Population of dyads.

pcs {A,C,D,E} = [0,2,4,7]	{A, E}	Vn 1, 2 (8)	Fl. 1, 3 (8)	Ob. 2, 4 (8)	Cl. 1, 3 (8)	
	{C, D}	Vla, Vlc. (8)	Fl. 2, 4 (8)	Ob. 1, 3 (8)	Cl. 2, 4 (8)	Timp. (8)
pcs {B \flat ,C \flat ,D \flat ,E \flat } = [0,1,3,5]	{B \flat , E \flat }			Bsn 1, 3 (8)	Trp. 1, 3 (8)	
	{C \flat , D \flat }			Bsn 2, 4 (8)	Trp. 2, 4 (8)	

- Covers most of the winds and strings
- Analyzes lots of pitch content
- Attempts to capture overall impression of this swirl of sound

What is the “it” of *Coptic Light*?

Having an avid interest in all varieties of arcane weaving of the Middle East I recently viewed the stunning examples of early Coptic textiles on permanent display at the Louvre.

*What struck me about these fragments of coloured cloth was **how they conveyed an essential atmosphere** of their civilization. Transferring this thought to another realm, I asked myself what aspects of the music since Monteverdi might determine its atmosphere, if heard 2000 years from now. For me the **analogy would be one of the instrumental imagery of Western music.***

These were some of the metaphors that occupied my thoughts while composing Coptic Light.

*An important technical aspect of the composition was prompted by Sibelius’s observation that the orchestra differed mainly from the piano in that it has no pedal. With this in mind, **I set to work to create an orchestral pedal**, continually varying in nuance. This “chiaroscuro” is both the compositional and the instrumental focus of Coptic Light.*

What is the “it” of *Coptic Light*?

Form and Narrative, less granular

Essentially, a rounded binary...

Orchestral GROUPINGS

- EXAMPLE 3: Groupings and idiomatic gestures

(1) Winds+Harps	(2) Strings	(3) "Stacks"	(4) Pianos	(5) Timpani
4 Flutes 4 Oboes 4 Bb Clarinets 4 Bassoons 4 F Horns 4 Trumpets 4 Trombones Tuba 2 Harps	18 Vln. 1 16 Vln. 2 12 Vla 12 VC	4 Vib./Marimba 10 CB	2 Pianos	Timpani

↓ Block 15

Musical score for Block 15, featuring Flute (FL.) and Oboe (OB.) staves. The score shows a melodic line in the flute and a supporting line in the oboe, with various articulations and dynamics.

↓ Block 13

Musical score for Block 13, featuring Vibraphone (VIB.) staves. The score shows a melodic line in the vibraphone, with various articulations and dynamics.

Musical score for Block 6, featuring Violin (VN.) and Viola (VLA.) staves. The score shows a melodic line in the violin and a supporting line in the viola, with various articulations and dynamics.

← Block 6



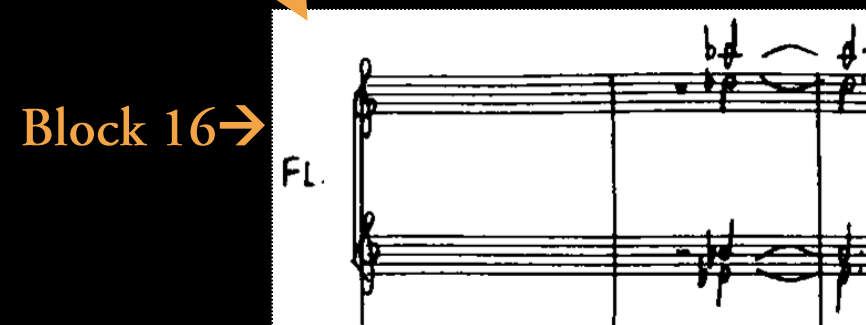
Orchestral GROUPINGS

(1) Winds+Harps	(2) Strings	(3) “Stacks”	(4) Pianos	(5) Timpani
4 Flutes 4 Oboes 4 Bb Clarinets 4 Bassoons 4 F Horns 4 Trumpets 4 Trombones Tuba 2 Harps	18 Vln. 1 16 Vln. 2 12 Vla 12 VC	4 Vib./Marimba 10 CB	2 Pianos	Timpani

- LISTEN FOR how the instrumental patterns subtly shift.

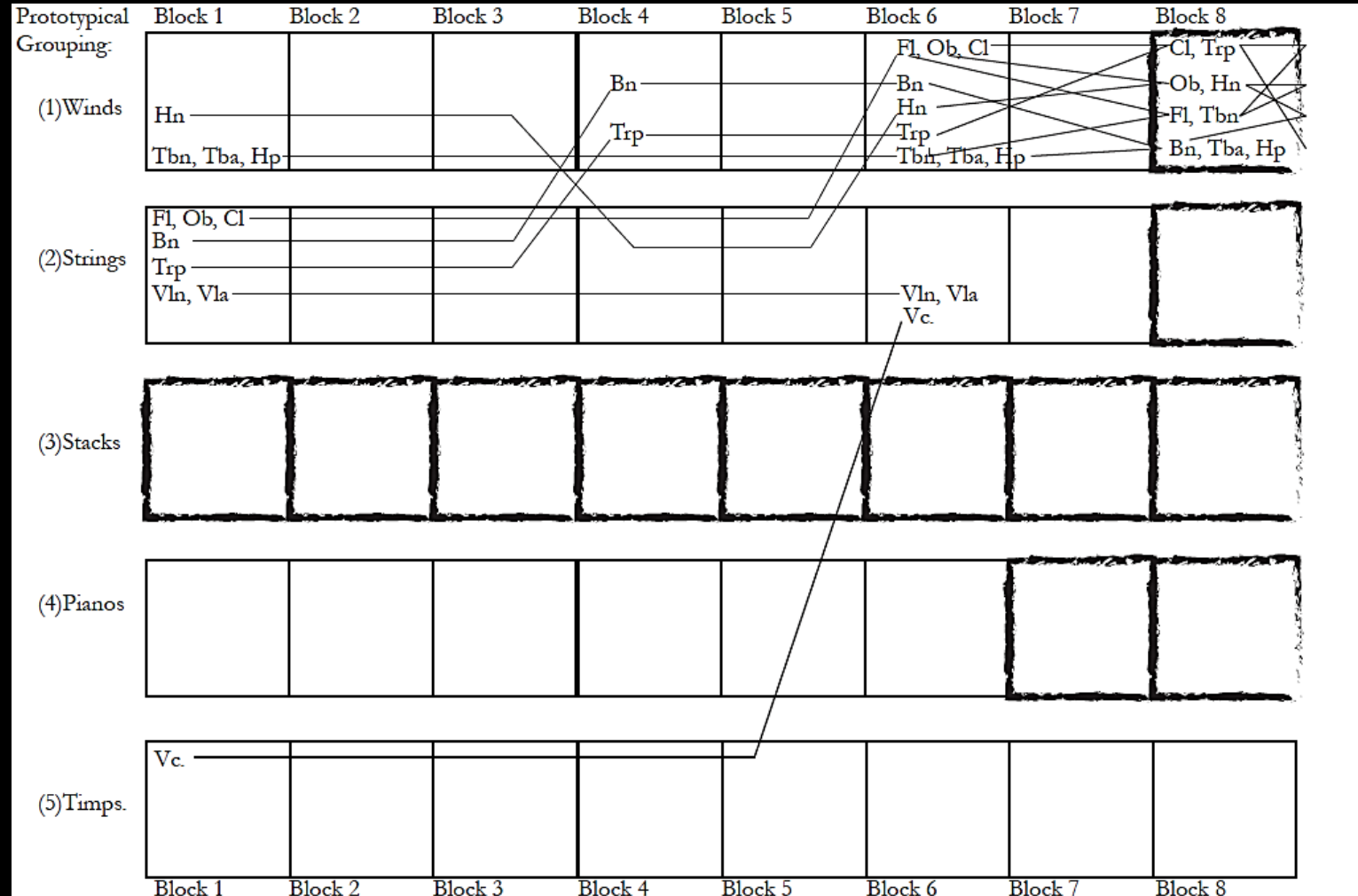
Orchestral GROUPINGS

- EXAMPLE 4: Flutes' path towards prototypical grouping



Orchestral GROUPINGS

- EXAMPLE 5: Paths taken as GROUPINGS emerge

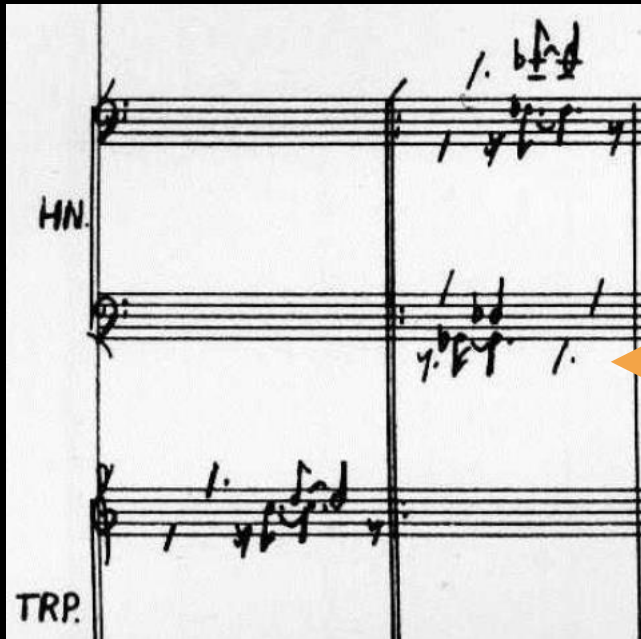


Part 1: Through BLOCK 19

- Prototypical groupings continue.
- Stuck in narrative rut, though taken to extreme in BLOCK 19
- Johnson (2013), narrative in *Triadic Memories*
 - 1. Aimlessness
 - 2. Pervasive uncertainty
 - 3. Process of disintegration
 - 4. Enfeebling slide towards paralysis

Part 2: BLOCKS 20–32

- Strings turn towards winds/stacks GROUPINGS



←Block 27



←Block 21

- Rhythmic Acceleration:
 - Winds offset attack points
 - High strings move to IC 1&2
 - Time signature gradually contracts from 8/8 to 7/16
 - Pizzicato strings, hocketing in winds

Coda: BLOCK 33 to the end

- Jolting near-patterns become more motor-like. GROUPINGS collapse
- Opening E-A violin dyad returns; recapitulatory sounding!



Form of *Coptic Light*

Intro.

A

B

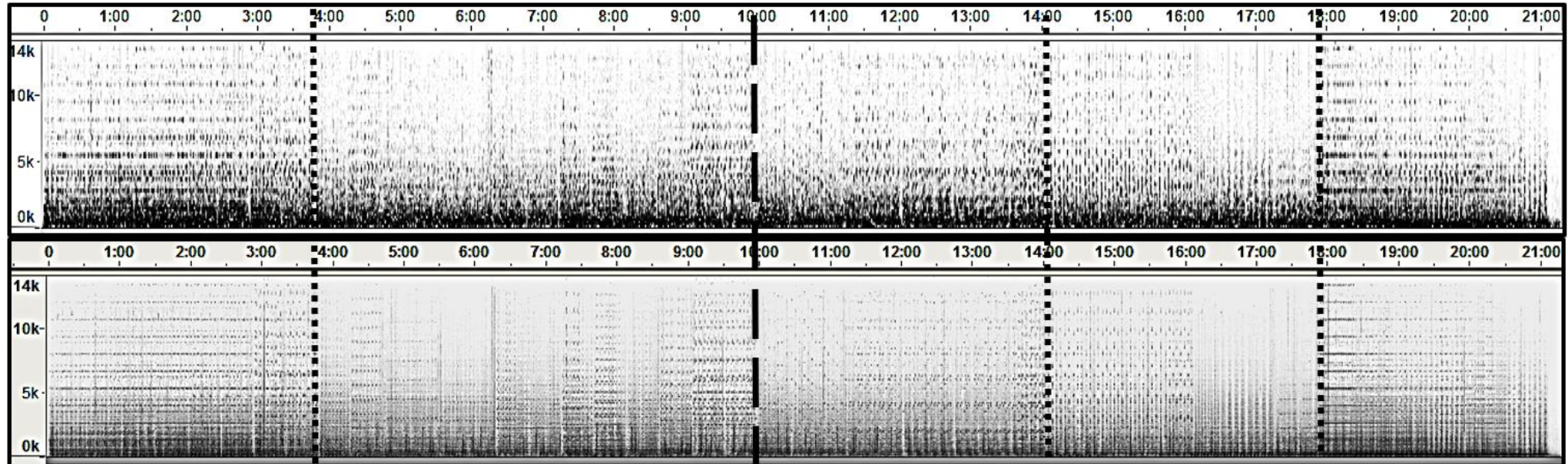
A'

9

20

26

33



Feldman

- Marilyn Nonken interview (2004)
- Bunita Marcus
 - *Adam & Eve* (1987)



Jenny Johnson (2009) about *The Rugmaker*:
“The opening of *The Rugmaker* washes over me like rain.
I am gripped by its lacy, liquid glissandi,
its delicate, gossamer, seashell fragment harmonies,
and its crisp and brittle lattice-like pitch patterns.”

- Bunita Marcus
 - *Adam & Eve* (1987)

COMMISSIONED BY THE MIDDELBURG FESTIVAL FOR THE XENAKIS ENSEMBLE

ADAM AND EVE

Bunita Marcus

♩ = 54

GENTLY SHAPED:

FLUTE

VIBRAPHONE I

VIBRAPHONE II

PIANO

VIOLIN

CELLO

Thank you

Selected Bibliography

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