



We Broke Up Over Style

Morton Feldman, Philip Guston, and the Aesthetics of Reconciliation

PD Dr. Ryan W. Dohoney, Bienen School of Music
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL/USA)

Thursday, 25. March 2021, Universität Bern, Time: 6.15 p.m.–8 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://northwestern.zoom.us/j/96252867198>

Meeting ID: 962 5286 7198

In this talk, I reflect on the failed friendship of composer Morton Feldman (1926–1987) and painter Philip Guston (1913–1980). Drawing on Hannah Arendt's theorization of friendship and its role in aesthetics and politics, I trace the work of mourning Feldman and Guston attempted following the breakdown of their relationship in 1970 following Guston's turn away from pure abstraction towards a figurative and allegorical style. I focus first on Guston's paintings from the mid-1970s in which the painter absorbed Feldman and their shared history into his new aesthetic. I then turn to Feldman memorialization of Guston in the 1980s. Focusing on the spectral presence of Guston in his compositions *Three Voices* and *For Philip Guston*—I argue that Feldman also turned to the past as he struggled to reconcile himself to Guston's late style. However, unlike Guston, Feldman deferred reconciliation even though he realized, in the end, that he was changing as his friend had changed. I conclude with some broader reflections on the study of friendship as a critical method for interdisciplinary inquiry.

RyanDohoney is a musicologist and historian who writes on U.S. and European Modernism and Experimentalism in the 20th and 21st centuries. He serves as Associate Professor of Musicology at Northwestern University where he is also faculty member in the programs in Critical Theory and Gender & Sexuality Studies. He is the author of *Saving Abstraction: Morton Feldman, the de Menils, and the Rothko Chapel* (Oxford, 2019) and the forthcoming *Morton Feldman: Friendship and Mourning in the New York Avant-Garde* (Bloomsbury). He has also written on the philosophies of Adriana Cavarero and Alfred North Whitehead and is currently working on a monograph on Julius Eastman, multi-ethnic experimentation, and the Black radical tradition.

Email: ryan.dohoney@northwestern.edu

Website: <https://www.music.northwestern.edu/faculty/profile/ryan-dohoney>



Hochschule der Künste Bern
Haute école des arts de Berne
Bern University of the Arts

Walter Benjamin Kolleg
Graduate School of the Arts and Humanities | GSAH
Studies in the Arts | SINTA
Muesmattstrasse 45
CH-3012 Bern

