MTO 28.2 Examples: Hier, Becoming and Disintegration in Wolfgang Rihm’s Fifth String Quartet, Ohne Titel

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)
https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.22.28.2/mto.22.28.2.hier.html
Example 1. Rihm, String Quartet No. 5, bars 1–16

Sudden change in texture: dissonant but relatively metrically stable

Harmonics produce new timbre; texture remains metrically unclear; register narrows to smaller band

Metrically unclear; sharp, punctuated attacks

Lower instruments drop out and music seems to stop; harmony remains dissonant
Example 2. Rihm, String Quartet No. 3, end of the second movement

"Ideal-Music"
Tonal, motivic melody, rich tone, metrically stable

Disintegration
melodic collapse, dissonance, timbral thinning

Example 3. Gestures directed to and away from romanticism

Directed Away From Romanticism
Essential
Harmony generated through semitone projection
tertian harmony
Meter lack of pulse regular pulse
Melody disjunct, pointillistic stepwise, scalar
Thematicism atheme tic motivic
Texture fragmented, polyphonic homophonic
Timbre extended techniques warm string sound
Articulation martellato, marcato legato

Directed Toward Romanticism
Inessential
Example 4. Musical parameters and their closeness to romanticism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Harmony</th>
<th>Meter</th>
<th>Melody</th>
<th>Thematicism</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>Timbre</th>
<th>Articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most Characteristic</strong></td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Stepwise</td>
<td>Repetition of Motives</td>
<td>Homophonic</td>
<td>Warm Blending</td>
<td>Legato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Progressions</td>
<td>Syncopation</td>
<td>Many leaps</td>
<td>Repetitions of loosely related</td>
<td>Polyphonic</td>
<td>Thinner string</td>
<td>Tenuto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Triads, sevenths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>material</td>
<td></td>
<td>sound, non vibrato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diatonic</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Fragments of</td>
<td>Repetition of motivic</td>
<td>Full texture</td>
<td>Sul tosto,</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>Meter</td>
<td>melodic material</td>
<td>particles (intervals)</td>
<td>but no principal</td>
<td>flautando</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole-tone,</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Short horizontal</td>
<td>Distinctive ideas without</td>
<td>Fragments</td>
<td>Sul ponticello,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quartal</td>
<td>punctuation</td>
<td>intervals</td>
<td>repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td>artificial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>harmonics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Least Characteristic</strong></td>
<td>Non-diatonic</td>
<td>No sense of</td>
<td>No sense of</td>
<td>Unrelated material</td>
<td>Near silence</td>
<td>Percussive</td>
<td>Marcato,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with semitones</td>
<td>metrical</td>
<td>melody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>effects, non-</td>
<td>Martellato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and/or tritones</td>
<td>stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>standard playing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Homophonic texture, legato playing in melody

melody moves increasingly by leaps

detached playing staccato weaker sense of meter

polyphonic texture, return to legato
Example 6. Gesture energy levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynamic Level:</th>
<th>Low Energy</th>
<th>High Energy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm:</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register:</td>
<td>Slow surface rhythm</td>
<td>Fast surface rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Falling, compression</td>
<td>Rising, expansion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 7. Gestural space in Rihm’s quartet

- Directed Away From the Ideal-Music
- Directed Toward the Ideal-Music
- Strongest Sense of Becoming
- Weakest Sense of Becoming

- High Energy
- Low Energy
Example 8. Rihm, String Quartet No. 5, bars 358–392
Sudden loss of energy

fragmented, energetic material

sul pont.

Brief expressive gesture, legato
First hints of D minor

Tremolo increase in energy, harmony generated by semitone, sul pont sul pont.

Ordinario playing, tertian and diatonic sonorities

quasi-functional progression, V–I in D minor
clearer establishment of 4/4 meter

(d: V7 i)
Example 9. Recomposition of Example 8

Example 10. Gestural contour of Example 8
developing sense of meter, detached, martellato playing discordant harmony drawn from (016)

clear sense of meter, traditional rhythmic figures

ostinato establishes meter

minor triads disintegrate

clearer meter persists

dynamic suddenly lowers

clusters return

rhythmic ostinato fragments

new ostinato appears
Ostinato continues and meter is again clarified

Meter obscured, lack of motivic material

Thinner texture, less energy

Fragments from earlier return

Straussian "64" chord leads to diatonic collections in Ab and F

Return of descending semitone motive from bar 39

Meter established (3/8)
Example 12. Rihm, String Quartet No. 5, bars 495–511

relatively clear sense of meter, melodic fragments

ord. quasi-tertian sonority alternating with harmonics, (0167)

quasi-melody: implied tertian harmonics until final chord, metrical stability

textural reduction, emphasis on intervals drawn from (016)

"E-flat Major" "B-flat minor" "C Major" "A Major"

(0124)
Example 13. Recomposition of Example 11

Example 14. Recomposition of Example 12

Example 15. Large-scale form of the Fifth Quartet: becoming and disintegration

Large-Scale Form of Rihm's Fifth Quartet
Example 16. Passage C from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 294–302

tonally suggestive melody, but lack of warm string sound, steady pulse
sul tasto, flaut., non vibr.

Example 17. Passage B from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 149–155

nacch schneller, wild

clear 3/4 meter, triads, clash between stepwise melody and harmony

melody liquidates and is consonant with accompaniment

progression B-flat minor—A-flat minor—D weakly suggests tonal function
Example 18. Passage A from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 46–48

3/8 meter weakly established
some motivic relationship to earlier material

Example 19. Passage W from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 89–98

harmonics with no articulated pulse, no melodic material, fragments of gestures, semitone clusters
Example 20. Passage X from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 232–243

more metrical regularity; more conventional playing techniques; hint of melody, C#-B-C-C#

sharp, percussive articulation

clusters, lack of diatonic material

some concordant intervals
Example 21. Passage Y from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 400–406

repeating rhythmic pattern (3+3+2), consistent texture, stable 4/4 meter

hint of melody: F–A–G–Eb

clusters with repeating rhythm
new melodic idea, A–D–A–G–Ab

motivic repetition of D–A–Ab
Example 22. Passage Z from Rihm’s String Quartet No. 5, bars 546–554

cello introduces fragment of melody, Ab–G, that grows as the passage progresses but clusters accompany the melody; some rhythmic regularity but unpredictable

Example 23. Overview of the Fifth Quartet’s formal process