



A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR MUSIC THEORY

**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

Schnell, rastlos

Relatively low-energy, consonant, melodic kernels

Sudden change in texture: dissonant but relatively metrically stable

Metrically unclear; sharp, punctuated attacks

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

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

zartes vibr. *pppp*

pppp *ppp* *pppp*

Disintegration
melodic collapse, dissonance, timbral thinning

p *ppp* *poco vibr.*

sfzp *ppp* *pp* *p* *ppp*

sul tasto, non vibr.

rhythmic discontinuity **morendo** non vibr.

staccato articulation, abrupt ending

Example 3. Gestures directed to and away from romanticism

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

Example 4. Musical parameters and their closeness to romanticism

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

Example 5. Brahms, String Quartet in C minor Op. 51, No. 1, I, bars 1–19

Homophonic texture, legato playing in melody

melody moves increasingly by leaps

p *cresc.*

detached playing

staccato

weaker sense of meter

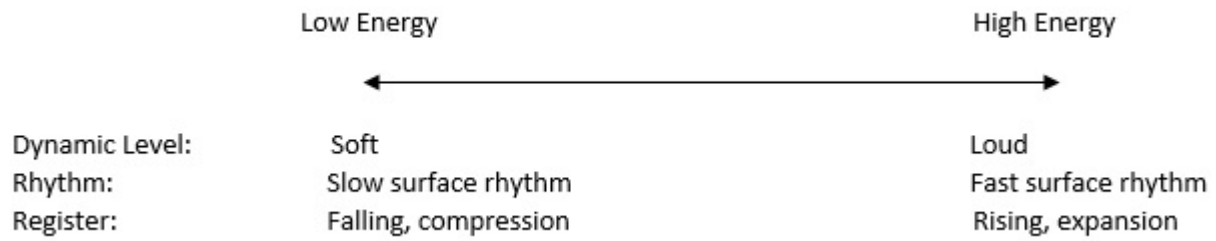
f *fp* thinner string sound

p

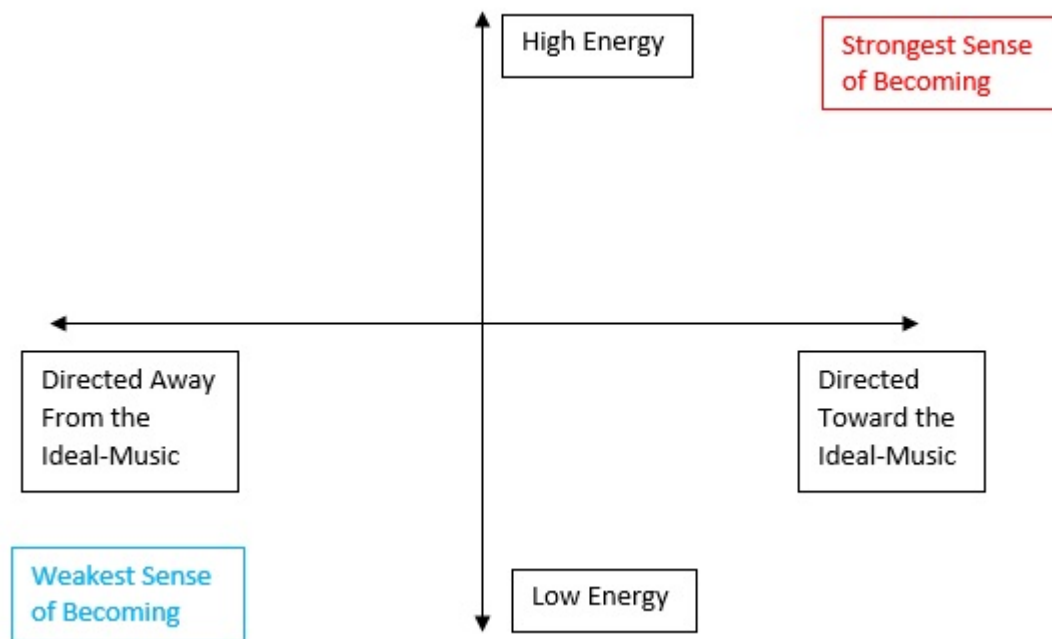
polyphonic texture, return to legato

15

Example 6. Gesture energy levels



Example 7. Gestural space in Rihm's quartet



Example 8. Rihm, String Quartet No. 5, bars 358–392

slow surface rhythm, sparse texture

pizz. *8va* *a* *mp* pizzicato and sul pont articulation *pp* arco s.p. *b* *ord.*

358 *fff* *fff* *fff* *fff* *fff* *pp* *ppp*

362 *fff* *pp* *fff* *simile* *ppp*

365 *loco* *mp* *pp*

368 *c-var* *a-var* *pizz.* *d* *fff* *fff* *simile* *pp* *non vibr.* *ppp*

372 *fff* *pp* *a-var* *c-var* *ppp* *fff* *simile* *fff*

arco

Tertian Harmony, Repetition, Sense of Meter, Rich Timbre

Melodic Material, Quiet Dynamic, Metrically Unclear

Accents provide metrical stability (2/4 and 3/4)

Sudden Disintegration

High Energy, Dominated by (0156)

Melody Coalesces and combines earlier motives

375

376

Sudden loss of energy

378

fragmented, energetic material

sul pont.

380

ord. 3

381

loco

martellato

espress.

Brief expressive gesture, legato

First hints of D minor

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

382

ord.

6

6

6

6

fff sul pont.

fff sul pont.

fff sul pont.

fff sul pont.

385

fff simile

ord.

sul pont.

ord.

Ordinario playing, tertian and diatonic sonorities

quasi-functional progression, V-I in D minor

clearer establishment of 4/4 meter

389

fff *pp*

fff

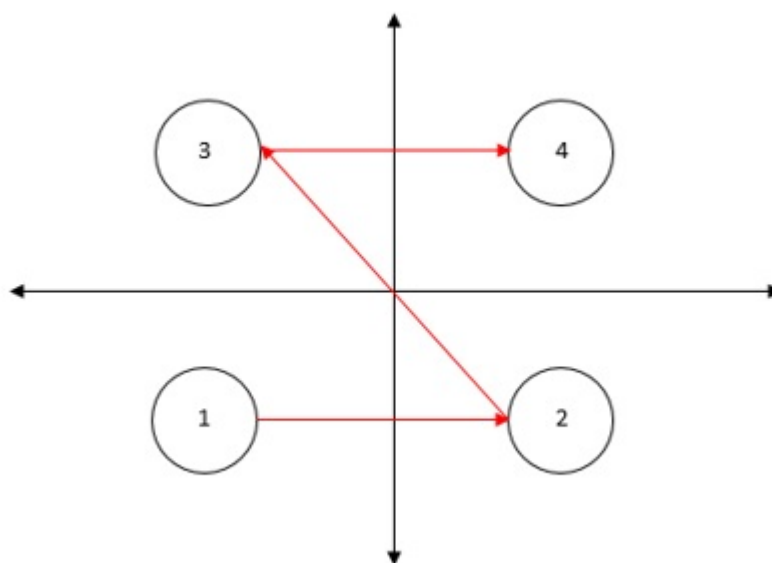
(d: V7 i)

3

Example 9. Recomposition of Example 8

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is in 3/4 time, featuring a treble and bass staff. The treble staff begins with a dynamic marking of *a* and includes a *Rit.* (ritardando) instruction. The bass staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a dynamic marking of *d*. The second system is in 4/4 time, also with treble and bass staves. It starts with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking and includes the instruction *a tempo*. The treble staff has a dynamic marking of *a and c* and includes a *b* marking. The bass staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Example 10. Gestural contour of Example 8



Example 11. Rihm, String Quartet No. 5, bars 26–48

developing sense of meter
detached, martellato playing
discordant harmony drawn from (016)

26

p *fff* *fff* *fff*

27

fff *pp* *fff*

28

p *fff* *pp*

clusters become A minor triads

ostinato establishes meter

minor triads disintegrate

clearer meter persists

dynamic suddenly lowers

clusters return

rhythmic ostinato fragments

new ostinato appears

Example 12. Rihm, String Quartet No. 5, bars 495–511

relatively clear sense of meter,
melodic fragments

Accel ———— Accel ———— A Tempo

legato articulation

495

pp *ff* *pp* *ff* *pp* *ppp* *ff* *ppp* *ff* *ppp*

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

textural reduction, emphasis on intervals drawn from (016)

500

mp *ppp* *sffz pp* *ppp*

quasi-melody; implied tertian harmonies until final chord, metrical stability

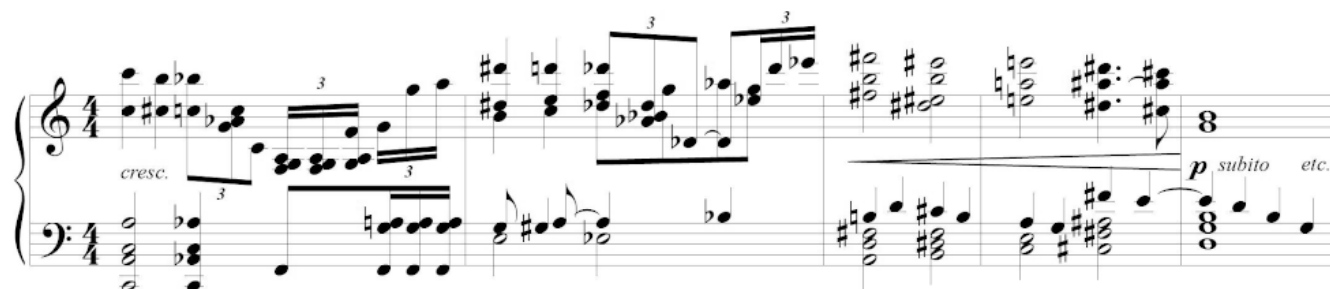
506

mf *ppp* *niente*

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

(0124)

Example 13. Recomposition of Example 11



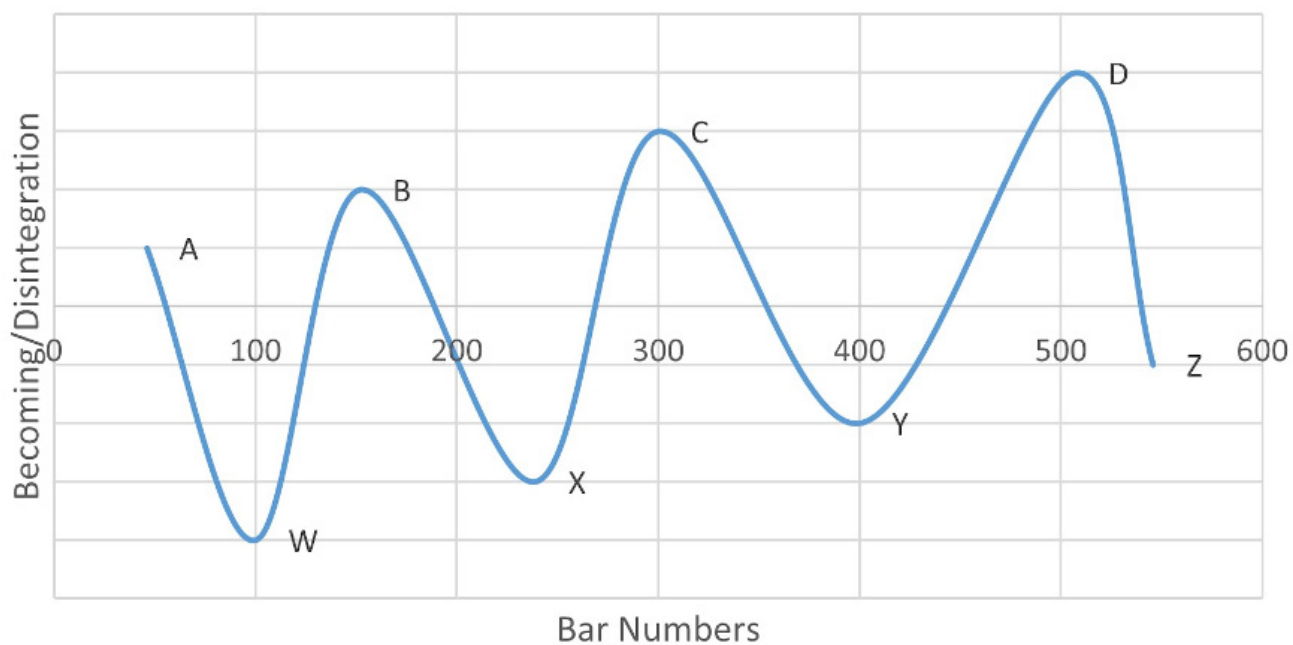
Example 14. Recomposition of Example 12

A musical score for a piano piece in 4/4 time. The score is written for both hands. It features complex textures with triplets and dynamic markings like 'cresc.' and 'p subito etc.' The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

A: D/(D of D) S D T

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 tast., flaut., non vibr.

294 *ppp*

sul pont. - - -

sfz

perfect fifth

pppp

very loose motivic repetition (027) evokes diatonic collection A-B $\flat$ -B-E

concordant fifth

pppp

pppp

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

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

149 *fff* *martellato!* sharp, loud articulation

melody liquidates and is consonant with accompaniment

152 (8^{va})

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

46

fff

sfz

3

fff

diatonic subsets

quasi-64 *pp*

48

6

6

6

pp

6

6

6

6

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

89

fff

pizz. v

sul pont.

fff

94

fff

sul pont. arco 3

pizz. fff

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#

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system begins at bar 232. The treble staff contains several measures of music, including a triplet of eighth notes marked *sfz* and a triplet of sixteenth notes marked *sfz sfz sfz*. The bass staff features a *sfz* dynamic and a *pizz.* (pizzicato) instruction. Annotations include "sharp, percussive articulation" and "clusters, lack of diatonic material". The second system begins at bar 238. It includes a *pizz.* instruction, a *subito non trem.* (subito non tremolo) instruction, and an *arco* (arco) instruction. The score concludes with a *non dim!* (non diminuendo) instruction. The overall texture is characterized by dense clusters and non-diatonic intervals.

232

sfz

sharp, percussive articulation

pizz.

sfz

sfz sfz sfz

arco

sfz

sfz sfz sfz

non dim!

clusters, lack of diatonic material

238

pizz.

subito non trem.

arco

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

400

sfz *fff* *ppp* *fff* *simile* *sfz* *pp*

404

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

pizz. 3 3 3 3

fff 5

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

melodic ascent G–Ab–A
hint of melody+accompaniment texture

echo of earlier semitone-rising melody
some rhythmic regularity (3+5+3+4.5)

diatonic collections in accompaniment

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

