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Author
Bauer, Amy

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11 Genre as émigré

The return of the repressed in Ligeti's Second Quartet

Amy Bauer

As Carl Dahlhaus noted, the string quartet paradoxically unites the intimate sphere of chamber music with 'pure, absolute musical art'.[1] In the late Beethoven quartets this private realm became identified with formal innovation, to embody the late Romantic ideal of the intellectual fused with the spiritual. If twentieth-century critics saw the crags and fissures of Beethoven's late works as insurmountable, they also turned his untidy process into a virtue, a harbinger of modernity's split subject.[2] The string quartet retained this dual association with intimacy and rigorous thought in monuments by Debussy, Bartók and Schoenberg. Yet the genre also bore an inherent friction that proved a challenge to later composers. It retained a generic framework inherited from the Classic quartet, yet became associated – as in late Beethoven – with formal innovation and the new.[3] The twentieth-century string quartet thus became the exemplar of a special relationship with the past, one that recognized the genre's legacy as a perpetual vehicle of progress. As Ulrich Dibelius notes, there is nothing trivial in this legacy; those composers who avoided writing one, Messiaen and Stockhausen among them, conspicuously rejected a shared, collective tradition in favour of individual pursuits.[4] Ligeti's two string quartets – the first from his Hungarian period, and the second a summary work from the late 1960s – take on this legacy directly, with very different results bound to their date and provenance. Thus, in this chapter I touch on Ligeti's Hungarian quartet along with those elements in the Second Quartet that obliquely engage with it and with great quartets of the past. But I will also address the reception history of the quartet in the context of the late 1960s avant-garde.

Métamorphoses nocturnes

Ligeti's first string quartet, *Metamorphoses nocturnes* (1953–4), was the only work he presented to the West upon emigration, at a formal premiere in Vienna in 1958.[5] Although the finest work of his Hungarian period, the quartet remains rooted in the legacy of Bartók and Berg's *Lyric Suite* (a work Ligeti studied in the Budapest Academy's library, although Socialist authorities deemed it too radical for performance). Vigorous arguments in the literature concerning the true form of *Métamorphoses nocturnes* signify Ligeti's success in moving beyond his models, despite the quartet's retrospective character.[6] Friedemann Sallis grounds the quartet as a

whole in the context of a non-functional but 'emblematic' tonal framework, in which diatonic harmonies refer to the conventions of common-practice tonality without serving a form-building function.[7]

Ligeti's early sketches began the quartet with a clear tonal centre on D, although his revised beginning starts with the semitonal four-note motive that begins the published quartet. The switch from D in the bass to ascending chromatic lines marks the shift to a contrapuntal exposition, 'a kind of variation form without a theme', or 'character variations' based on the opening cell in the first violin.[8] Sallis divides the quartet into nine sections based on sites where the opening subject – two major seconds sounded a minor second apart – is audibly expanded and transformed to produce 'character variations' that never stray far from the opening motive.[9] A Bartókian arch form subsumes a proper exposition, seven internal 'transformations' (foreshadowed by the nebulous tonal background and rhythmic neutrality of the exposition) and a finale.

The quartet's main theme forms a Ligetian lament in its archetypal form: a stepwise descent from a brief, laboured climb to G5. An antecedent phrase in three sections (bs 7–14) reaches the peak, from which an equally divided consequent descends (bs 15–19; Figure 11.1).[10] The chromatic tetrachord (G, G♯, A, A♭) expands upwards through accretion (B) and replication (C, D♭, D, E♭), but changes directions at a peak of F5, to close with a glissando from C6 that completes the aggregate with F♯5, as if to begin the chromatic cycle anew. The recursive structure of this motive can be described as a chain of interlocking trichords related by retrograde inversion (labelled RI; superscripts denote the index of inversion), as shown in the transformational graph below the theme in Figure 11.1.[11] Each separate trichordal motive is highlighted by a different shade of grey in a pitch reduction of the theme. Arrows describe the transformation of one motive into the next through the RI relation, with the RI^5, RI^6 and RI^{11} relations predominant.

This chromatic theme prefigures the contrapuntal design and formal shape of the exposition, and of the variation structure of the work as a whole. The lyrical theme in bars 1–25 is set against rising chromatic lines in canon that follow a symmetrical, whole-tone grid. The first theme group thus resembles that of an invention, whose subject and countersubject conspire to tile the chromatic plane: the chromatic line drops an octave and continues rising, while the first violin in bars 18–19 marks the boundary of a chromatic space from F♯5 to F6, as shown in a registral graph of the exposition in Figure 11.2.[12] The rising scales in three voices model a mathematical torus: at the peak of each ascent the chromatic line loops around – by dropping an octave – and continues rising until cut off by thematic activity. The motive's contour foreshadows the chromatic wedge that opens up between voices in bars 26–9; this becomes a new, secondary theme, further expanded in bars 31ff. The antecedent and consequent structure of the first theme will fragment near the end of the exposition, where both themes appear juxtaposed and in stretto before closing the exposition proper.

The tonal landscape is similar to that of the second song in Berg's Op. 2, 'Schlafend trägt man mich', in which the vocal line threads a path between vertical harmonies that express alternating whole-tone collections. The contrapuntal

Figure 11.1 Recursive retrograde inversion relations in the theme of *Métamorphoses nocturnes*.

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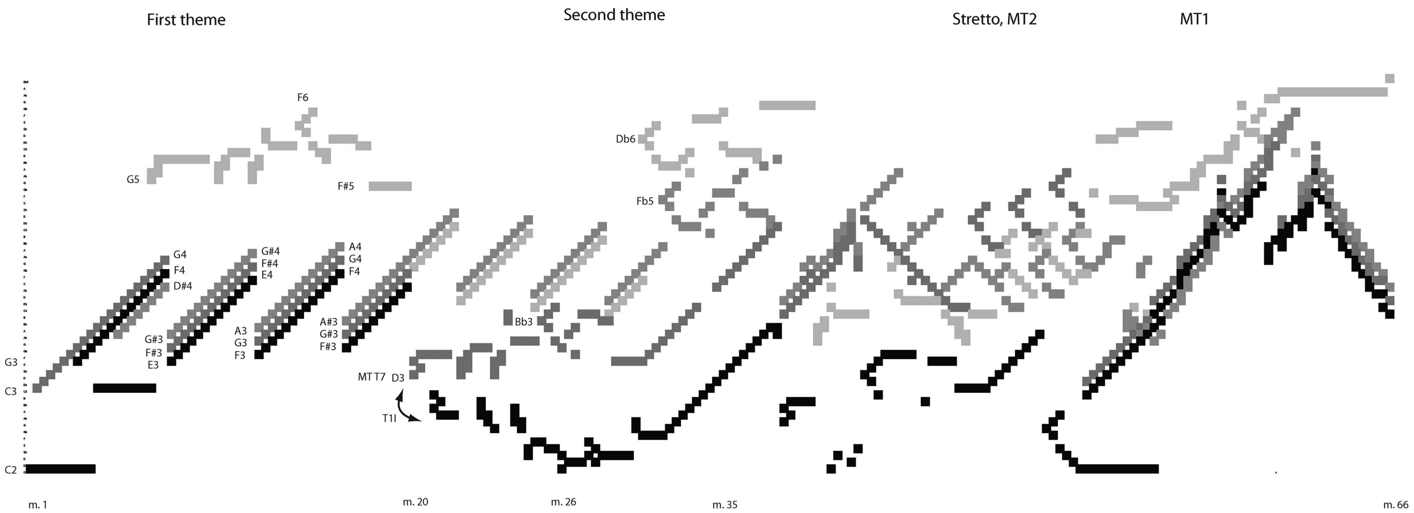

Figure 11.2 Registral graph of *Métamorphoses nocturnes*, bars 1–41.

'ground' expands the motivic 'figure', replicating the whole-tone at the distance of a minor second with exponential abandon. A sense of perceptible motion expressed by foreground chromatic motion and fifth-relations distracts from the harmonic immobility of the whole. Although the theme is chromatic, Ligeti emphasizes diatonic tones, notably C and G, building on Bartók's practice of reinforcing pillar tones shared among two or more scale structures within a polymodal context.

In yet another nod to Bartók, symmetrical transformations of the opening subject control *Métamorphoses*'s central narrative. The quartet is ruled by one fundamental trope: the chromatic in one dimension – either horizontal or vertical – set against diatonic interval cycles in the form of thirds and fifths in the other, as shown by the examples in Figure 11.3. For instance, at bar 114 (reh. C), fierce down bows introduce a permutation of the head motive as a sharp-edged wedge figure transposed and expanded upwards by semitone (Figure 11.3a). The motive appears here in five parallel voices: one line harmonized by the symmetrical tetrachord (0, 1, 5, 6).[13] As it would in Ligeti's micropolyphonic works of the 1960s, canon returns in two voices a minor second apart (bars 146–80), where it controls the growth and cessation of chromatic clusters.

As both Sallis and Jonathan Bernard note, symmetrical harmonies dominate key points in the quartet's form.[14] After the violins have ascended to C7, the same (0, 1, 5, 6) harmony returns them to the central register at bar 148 (reh. D). This sonority appears three times in an 11-chord progression of six different tri- and tetrachords voiced symmetrically, as shown in an annotated reduction of the passage (Figure 11.3b, bars 148–55). This progression repeats immediately in the lower register with a twist: five of the chords reappear at T^5, but each appearance of the (0, 1, 5, 6) tetrachord relates to its original appearance by T^0 or T^{10} (these transpositions are of course related internally by T^5). The third and final variation phrase of this section subsumes each chord within a larger symmetrical collection framed by the diatonic.[15] Within the third subject area at reh. FF (b. 726), the seconds of the main theme appear as their complements and compounds, in a canon composed of the pitch intervals 11, 13 and 23 (Figure 11.3c). Here the wedge permutation of the second subject controls the entrance of the canon's voice order: A♭ in first violin, F in second violin, G in viola and G♭ in cello, although their consecutive entry mirrors the canon's chromatic descent, and inversion, of the opening countersubject.

String Quartet No. 2

If the first quartet consciously assimilated the legacy of Bartók, Ligeti's String Quartet No. 2 (1968) comes to terms with his own legacy since 1954, after success, scandal and a degree of security (the notorious attack on serialism) in his technical language prompted a retrospective turn. Intended as an index of his techniques to date, the second quartet was the composer's first work of more than two movements after 1956. Ligeti described it as his most 'difficult' work composed to date; the quartet's virtuosic exploration of pre-existing ideas posed a compositional challenge, reflected by its corresponding difficulty for listeners and performers.[16] The first movement is marked Allegro nervoso as if to comment ironically on the

Figure 11.3 Symmetrical harmonies in *Métamorphoses nocturnes*.
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'burden of tradition', the very attempt to compose a quartet after 'Beethoven's last quartets, or Bartók's fourth and fifth quartets, or the *Lyric Suite*, or after Schoenberg'.[17] The Second Quartet follows a narrative which rewrites the first as a series of variations on a chromatic theme, one that indexes Ligeti's techniques to date: pattern-meccanico, micropolyphonic and so-called kaleidoscopic textures as heard in the 'De die judicii sequentia' movement of the *Requiem*.[18] A more sophisticated 'sequel', the Second Quartet draws more audible cues from Webern than Bartók. Yet the Allegro's episodic nature looks further back as well, to nineteenth-century monuments that threaten to overshadow the recent past. Like an overture, and like Beethoven's Op. 130, it introduces four more discrete, self-contained but related movements. The quartet opens with a 15-bar passage of high whistling harmonics, like a swarm of buzzing insects, shown in Figure 11.4.[19] We are five bars into the Prestissimo before the first intimation of a theme appears: a high E6 in the first violin, which will eventually disappear in high harmonics. Swift descending motions in bars 16–18 usher in a sostenuto passage followed by a central prestissimo section; the listener seems to hear one transition after another, with only a furtive, oblique relation to traditional notions of first-movement form.

Op. 130's first movement suggests a template for the Allegro nervoso as well, especially the rhythmic, motivic and harmonic ambiguities of its Allegro passages.[20] Constant shifts in texture and dynamics pervade Op. 130 (for example, Beethoven modulates abruptly to the flat submediant in the second group), yet

Figure 11.4 Ligeti, String Quartet No. 2, movement, I, bars 1–5.

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transitions – such as that in bars 37–41 – are often static. Its quiet dynamic and homophonic texture contradict the expected character of a development, while the beginning of the recapitulation is obscured by sequential modulation and the return of the second group in the wrong key. Anxious shifts between the lyrical Adagio ma non troppo and contrapuntal Allegro continue into the coda, which William Kinderman calls a 'supreme exercise in paradox'.[21] Here the Adagio's chromatic A-B♭ in bar 217 is extended (bs 219–21) until it reaches a chromaticized Allegro (b. 223), eventually fusing into a single theme at the close, as indicated in Figure 11.5.

Figure 11.5 Beethoven, Op. 130, movement I, bars 214–34.

Ligeti's Allegro substitutes shifting sostenuto and meno mosso sections for Op. 130's Adagio and Allegro. As extreme distillates of a formal contrast that once embraced melody, harmony, texture, dynamics and tempo, they imply an irrevocable dissolution of Beethoven's already fragmented sonata form. Yet the sense of two violently opposed subjects still animates Ligeti's movement. The opening chromatic kernel is juxtaposed with sustained diatonic harmonies. But the restricted pitch compass of the opening harmonics marks a strong contrast with the 11-note rows of the *subito prestissimo* at bar 23 (which become fully dodecaphonic lines in b. 53ff.). 'Ferocious' and 'crazy' leaps give way to an elegant, embryonic melody that emerges in bars 28–43 and 49–50. And the opening chromatic kernel – which returns at T^1 in bar 38 – is juxtaposed with sustained diatonic harmonies (the Ligeti 'signal' (0, 2, 5) in b. 19, and a trilled pentachord in b. 80).

A beautifully realized coda sets the contradictions of this movement into relief, fusing contrasting elements by means both crude and delicate. The pitch reduction shown in Figure 11.6 reveals five chromatic lines set in contrary motion, which trace a converging wedge in bars 82–4, similar to that found in many sections of *Métamorphoses nocturnes*. The cello plays ascending fifths against a descending line in the viola, while the violins head downwards in parallel sixths that contract to fifths in bar 83. From bar 82 to the downbeat of bar 84, the voice-leading resembles a messy version of the classic omnibus progression, prolonging a dominant harmony on E. As the lines begin to converge in bar 83, the second violin and the viola turn upwards to meet one powerful descending line in three octaves which itself jumps within a four-octave span like a spring. This registral transfer – and the shift from tremolo to harmonics – contradicts the downward pull of the scale, suggesting the phenomenon of Shepard's tones before it was generally known.[22] This 'magical reinterpretation of a basic musical image', in Paul Griffiths's words,[23] returns us to G♯, the central pitch-class of the 1967 orchestra work *Lontano*. As in the coda of Beethoven's first movement, the final passage of the Allegro resolves conflicting harmonic and emotional impulses – the sustained vs. the agitated, ethereal open harmonies and roiling chromaticism – liberating the opening pizzicato cluster in a concluding lament.

The quartet's movements are all variations on the 'same thought', as reflected through the prism of what had become for Ligeti well-defined tropes of the fragmented (movement I), the static (II), the mechanical (III) and the 'threatening' (movement IV, whose condensed form Ligeti compares to a dwarf star).[24] The second movement returns to micropolyphony, citing *Lontano*'s opening canon directly (tones 1–11 in a permuted form). As do all movements but one, it begins with the same, modest *idée fixe*: a (0, 1, 2) trichord that builds from the opening G♯ (G and A follow in bars 5–7), blurred by microtonal deviations. The *Poème Symphonique* for 100 metronomes (1962) supposedly served as a draft for the third movement's pattern-meccanico texture, a texture associated with *Continuum* (1968), *Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet* (1968), the *Chamber Concerto* (1969–70) and later works.[25] The aggressive, angular 'succession of fragments' that comprises movement IV sounds like an unholy merger of the Allegro molto of Bartók's fourth with Stravinskian shifting meters.[26] The (0, 1, 2) trichord returns at pitch on the

Figure 11.6 Ligeti, String Quartet No. 2, movement I, reduction of coda revealing chromatic lament.

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downbeat of the first bar in movement IV at triple forte. The final movement opens with a rapidly reiterated D♯4-F♯4 in all four parts marked ‘from afar’. Is this meant to mark the D♯-E-F kernel that began the quartet? Or does it reach further back: to the two pitches that opened the ‘Trauermarsch’ of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony, recalled in an intimate chamber setting, at a distance in time and temperament from the profligate, late nineteenth-century symphonic tradition?

The (0, 1, 2) trichord does *not* open movement III, which the composer described as a tribute to the pizzicato movement of Bartók’s fourth quartet. Yet the ‘Come un meccanismo di precisione’ is in many ways the clearest presentation of Ligeti’s technique and its debt to Webern. Shifting rhythmic divisions and articulations in each part obscure the listener’s sense of pitch structure, and heighten the movement’s extramusical, mechanical nature.[27] Yet its underlying form is shaped by different treatments of the chromatic, in the form of regulative – if unrelated – twelve-tone series. One series maps out the first section (bars 1–12; labelled A in an annotated pitch reduction of the movement in Figure 11.7), which closes with a tetrachord bounded by G♯7 and B♭2. A Bartók pizzicato in cello marked *sffff* (B♭2, b. 12) announces a central section, in which chromatic (and supra-chromatic) series appear simultaneously in all four parts. A final *sffff* Bartók pizzicato in the cello (A3, b. 34) introduces a kind of inverted reprise of the opening section: a single series that proceeds from an opening tetrachord – again, with B♭2 in the bass – to a unison.

Two bars of silence open movement III before A5-B5 pizzicato quavers pick out the first row (section A in Figure 11.7). Adjacent tetrachords of the row form diatonic vertical harmonies that establish a regular harmonic rhythm in the A section. As the series ends, a D-E♭-F-F♯ (0, 1, 3, 4) symmetrical tetrachord opens four conjunct lines that diverge by adjacent quarter tones, reflecting the rhythmic diminutions that preceded the split. This microtonal version of Ligeti’s familiar chromatic wedge in effect creates a slow-motion, pointillist glissando that culminates in an F minor seventh chord (b. 17). A new harmonic rhythm is established as these four voices expand into eight (bs 18–19), to form an octachord that contracts to its tetrachordal complement in bar 20. As the B section reverses direction and draws inwards, glissandos in the violins and cello move outer voices towards a transposition of the opening major second 14 quarter tones lower in a concentrated, microtonal form composed of four quarter tones repeated for ten bars (bs 21–30). Quick arpeggios culminate in a high cadential B/F♯ dyad in the violins, ‘as if torn off’, to close the section.

The (0, 1, 3, 5) harmony heard in the opening introduces a second variation section labelled C. Here, pitch, rhythm and articulation mirror one another within a chaotic mix of durations, series and bowing styles (beginning with *gettato*). Unrelated twelve-tone rows cycle through each part, as each successive note changes both its register and its number of repetitions. As the trichord absorbs four independent chromatic lines, so an extreme rhythmic augmentation smoothes out the rhythmic complications in the final section (marked *subito: poco meno mosso*, b. 34.3). The reprise assigns each instrument one of the first four notes in the new series as well as a different pizzicato (sul tasto, ‘wooden’, sul ponticello,

Figure 11.7 String Quartet No. 2, pitch reduction of 'Come un meccanismo di precisione', bars 1–45.

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and 'rattling') and rhythmic division. The aural impression resembles four broken toys moving in four different tempi, as if each were a metronome winding down à la *Poème Symphonique*, or perhaps 'sand in the gears', in Harald Kaufmann' s words.[28]

Ligeti's *meccanismo* movement reflects the ultimate fate of the classical scherzo, desiccated beyond recognition. It flips the nineteenth-century convention – in which ever more elaborate music boxes strove to mimic flesh and blood players – by asking live performers to replicate a flawed machine, one with a natural sense of entropy. As it did at the end of section C, the reprise of the 'Come un meccanismo' condenses to a signal trichord, twice, before again fanning out, via triple stops in the upper voices, to an octachord in bar 37. The violins and viola shift to a tetrachord that would serve as the octachord's twelve-tone complement, were it not a quarter tone too low (b. 38). This 'quasi-rhyme' with the passage in bars 19–20 – and the quarter tones peppered throughout the movement – represent more than the programmatic sounds of an expiring machine. They comment ironically on the serial procedures that Ligeti once so famously derided, yet continued to employ. The composer's punchline to this wry aside arrives when all twelve tones and their quarter-tone shadows are compressed into a unison F♯5 that fades into two bars of absolute silence at the movement's close.

The Second Quartet was widely regarded as a contemporary masterpiece upon its premiere. Despite its extremely abstract language, it cemented Ligeti's position within a bifurcated avant-garde as a composer unafraid to draw from a wide variety of, in the words of John McCabe, 'stylistic resonances and bases'.[29] This large number of 'stylistic resonances' incited an equal number of scholarly responses, from Herman Sabbe's systematic, structuralist analysis to Harald Kaufmann's search for literary antecedents.[30] Richard Steinitz felt compelled to preface his discussion by citing absurdist theatre, Flemish painting, modern dance and the literature of Krúdy, Kafka and Borges, as if to repress the quartet's origins in a genre identified with absolute music.[31] By contrast, Hans-Peter Kyburz, prompted by his own survey of the quartet's messy scholarly reception, foregrounds the absolute in a strictly proportional analysis, reducing the quartet's most important relationships to various combinations of the number 11.[32] Upon reflection, Ligeti admitted to 'primitive' motivic-melodic allusions, but stressed the self-contained nature of the quartet: 'My thinking of that time was completely musical'.[33] Yet ten years after its composition he admitted to Péter Várnai that the Second Quartet not only contains reminders of his Hungarian compositions, but is a 'dissolved manifestation' of the earlier quartet.[34]

Such observations mark the Second Quartet as a moment of extreme self-consciousness in both Ligeti's personal history and that of the genre. Evidence of the Hungarian works surfaces within the quartet as a return of the repressed, as it were, mirroring the status of the émigré composer within an increasingly politicized late 1960s avant-garde. Its reception history is thus bound up with that moment when European musicologists plumbed the 1960s avant-garde – balanced between the academy and a more politicized existence outside of it – for signs of wider relevance.

Das 'Endspiel' von *Kammermusik*

1968 was a watershed year in many respects; regarding music, Wolf-Eberhard von Lewinski wrote: 'Probably at no other time in the history of music can composers of the same generation be so neatly divided into two opposing camps'.[35] The West European avant-garde was seen as implicitly, if not directly, allied with the aspirations of political radicals, and each new work or symposium that Ligeti offered promised possible confirmation of his engagement with larger issues. The Second String Quartet thus became a problem for critics. It declared Ligeti's reverence for genre even as fellow modernists rejected not only genre conventions but also referentiality *tout court*. Yet the Second Quartet preserves the character Dahlhaus identified with the eternally new: the 'quality of incipient beginning' made permanent.[36]

Thus, Martin Zenck adopts a somewhat clinical, sociological perspective on the quartet's value, trying to separate his actual experience of the work from his pre-existing bias. From a phenomenological standpoint, the quartet's premiere more than met his expectations. Abrupt shifts between different musical spaces, communicated with tactile gestures and events, disrupted the typical distance between audience and objectified work. Such spatial relations included both the physical space of the quartet and subtle allusions to a fragmented past, that of the string quartet as well as echoes of larger works by Bruckner, Mahler, Debussy and Schoenberg. But upon reflection, the same gestures that disturbed his ingrained listening habits often appeared excessively stylized and redundant. Zenck concludes that objective judgement of the quartet likely relies as much on an interpreter's subjective predisposition as it does on a formalist analysis after the (listening) fact.[37] This circular re-evaluation of the musical object is encoded into the fabric of the Second Quartet, which – suffused with allusion – floats above the tradition, as if tethered to it by a kind of lifeline.[38]

For Gianmario Borio, the quartet's distanced, critical reflection on the genre's history is its great strength. He presents the Second Quartet as a repository of unresolved problems and unanswered questions in music history, contradictions that encourage new generations to take up the challenge.[39] Bartók's ABCBA form in the Fifth Quartet was itself a variation on the structure of Beethoven's op. 131 quartet, in which seven movements, led by a fugue, established an arch form with a central Scherzo. Ligeti in turn begins with Bartók's five-part arch form as found in the Fourth and Fifth Quartets, rearranging it to suggest ABCAB', with the caveat that movement V is a variation on movement I (Allegro, Adagio, Scherzo, Presto and slow Allegro).[40] Yet, in deference to his use of Beethovenian formal models, Bartók's greatest extension of classical practice remains the use of symmetry to forge motivic-thematic correspondences between movements.

Ligeti's Second Quartet retains but the shadow of a subject, sacrificing unique thematic character for more universal gestures whose formal aspects still refer directly back to Bartók, foremost among those the principle of continuous variation.[41] When asked directly about Borio's conclusions, Ligeti hesitated to adopt the term *continuous variation* for a work that eschews motivic-thematic identity

in favour of 'textures and transformations of textures, gestures, motions, types of motion', much less attempts to keep the full chromatic in constant circulation.[42] It was Harald Kaufmann who noted that, in its return to a radical focus on the disjunctions of form, the Second Quartet might have specific antecedents older than Bartók, Webern or Berg. Ligeti's crude compositional gestures – the celebration of the fragment, and the abrupt juxtaposition of vastly different tempi, dynamics and mood in movements I, IV and V – pointed directly back to Beethoven's late quartets.

Kaufmann records fleeting citations: the quartet's first phrase seemed to borrow a thematic shape from the Allegro of Op. 130, I (bs 20–4), while ensuing passages touched on moments from Op. 132, I. But he stressed that these were no ordinary citations; in Ligeti's quartet, 'gesture becomes the subject'; the passage to the fulfilment of the thematic idea moves 'micrologically' to the idea itself.[43] In Beethoven, theme is inextricable from subject. Since Ligeti's figures capture only the barest outline of Beethoven's gestures, they can but point at familiar categories like theme and embellishment: empty placeholders for an absent subject, as in Beckett's *Endgame* or Ionesco's *The Chairs*. Most subsequent commentators on the quartet echo Kaufmann, with Dibelius as a case in point. The quartet begins with a pregnant pause, *senza tempo*, before a sharp pizzicato accent. As Dibelius notes, this somewhat traditional call to attention contrasts with many of Ligeti's earlier works, which grew organically from 'almost nothing' at the outset. Yet as these gestures accumulate, we hear them as marking the boundaries of thematic areas, which are empty, central 'zones' devoid of content or activity.[44]

The Allegro con delicatezza

The quartet's finale rewrites its complex opening movement, confirming Bartók's arch form, while summarizing it in an essay both expansive and reflective by turns. The anxiety of influence signalled by the Allegro nervoso is transmuted into an Allegro con delicatezza of surpassing calm that only twice exceeds a *piano* dynamic. The original D♯-E-F cluster returns gradually, as independent rhythmic lines in a balanced, pulseless flow, as shown in a pitch reduction of the opening section in Figure 11.8. Inner tones (E and F) are added in canon (bs 4–8), to create a

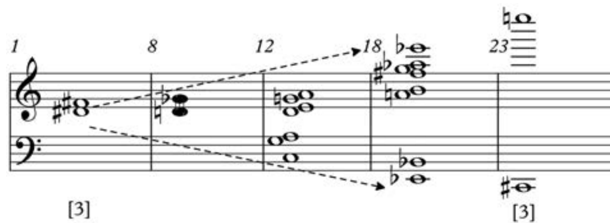

Figure 11.8 String Quartet No. 2, movement V, expanded pitch field in bars 1–23.
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revolving pitch series that expands outwards until it reaches a sustained pentatonic collection on the downbeat of bar 12 (C3-G3-A3-D4-E4-A4).[45] Hence, the tense harmonics that served as an opening subject in movement I are traded for open strings, which cycle through the rotating pitch collections from movement III's meccanico texture, yet performed in an organic, 'liquid' manner.

The violins' ascent to G♯4 (b. 12.2) reasserts a pillar tone of the work; expanding lines transfer G♯ upwards to rest amid a sustained chromatic hexachord from F♯-B, framed by outer voice E♭s (bs 18–19). At this point the chromatic wedge that closed movement I returns, flaring into C♯2-E7 (bs 22–32). As the outer voice E♭s of bars 18–21 reinterpret the opening D♯, so the minor third spread over six octaves in bar 22 reinterprets the opening D♯-F♯ ostinato. Another iconic Ligeti harmony occurs at bar 30, where cello and viola sustain a tritone C♯2-F5 with tremolo in a 'night music' section that recalls the final *senza misura* of the First Quartet. This tritone gives way to pale arpeggios that eventually collapse to a unison G♯ trill (bs 36–7), which slows gradually to prepare the emotional climax of the movement in bars 40–1, as shown in Figure 11.9. Here the chromatic chord from bar 18 is rewritten in the diatonic, retaining the E♭-flat as the bass of a luminous black-note pentachord approached by appoggiatura, to initiate what Ligeti referred to as his 'Bartókian section'. This black-note pentachord gives way to a white-note diatonic collection in bars 42–4 displayed over 6½ octaves; a nod to Ligeti's earliest practice in works like *Éjszaka*, as well as his concern for complementarity as a structural principle.[46]

As indicated by an outline of bars 45–50 (Figure 11.10), the central E♭ returns to initiate wave-like motion in 32nd notes played as though 'a single instrument', the united motion masking registral transfers upwards that maintain a sense of

Figure 11.9 String Quartet No. 2, movement V, bars 40–4.

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Figure 11.10 String Quartet No. 2, movement V, outline of collapsing ‘waves’ in bars 45–50.

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continual descent, as in the exposition of *Métamorphoses nocturnes*. The last 32nd note in the first violin (b. 47) breaks with unison voicing, fraying and thickening the texture; a subito *fff* return of the chromatic trichord splits the whole into two pairs (b. 50), which answer in call and response before degenerating into hocket in bars 53–5. This is followed by a reverse 'exposition': the fragmented texture reassembles into the mixed tuplet arpeggiations heard in bars 12–17, which – compacted once again into a tight chromatic knot – float with a three-octave iteration of D (bs 58–9).

At this point the violins articulate a tritone D♭/G as the open Ds in the viola and cello slide down 'imperceptibly' to D♭. Low strings barely stroke a ghostly open G, as the violins waver above the D♭ (b. 60), evoking the sound of an entire orchestra: the tritone horns that shine through the end of *Lontano*, or the D♭-G held tenderly under the turn figure at the close of the Adagio in Mahler's Ninth Symphony (shown in the reduction in Figure 11.11). As at the end of the first movement, Ligeti descends a semitone in pitch space through a register transfer upwards, in a final protracted bass lament from F3 to D♯3 as the violins contract to a trill on F5/F6 (bs 72–5). A final peroration touches the edge of pitch space (E♭2 and F♯6, bs 75–80) as the

Figure 11.11 String Quartet No. 2, movement V, tritone reminiscence in bar 60.

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opening figure returns verbatim for a brief moment of reminiscence, until an expanding wedge gesture – with the dynamics and velocity of a whisper – sends all four parts outwards into 'nothingness', the *silenzio assoluto* that closed each movement.

The ends of genre

While Beethoven's quartets advanced the genre as the standard bearer for musical progress, they also marked a certain loss of absolute music's innocence. Early twentieth-century quartets – Debussy's Op. 10 and the final quartets of Bartók, Schoenberg, Webern and Berg – seem in turn to function as each composer's personal farewell to the genre, even if – as in the case of Bartók – future works were curtailed by the author's death.[47] It is as if – having taken on new programmatic, technical and expressive challenges – the genre itself eventually grew exhausted by the demands of history; as if there were nothing more the string quartet could teach us in the late twentieth century. We might note that, in constantly drawing our attention back to the void, as well as in ever-finer gradation of *piano* dynamics, Ligeti's Second Quartet most clearly evokes Webern's hushed language.[48] Silence in Webern's practice, as in Ligeti's quartet, represents not a final state but a nearly limitless realm for exploring liminal states of expression, most emphatically that of loss: the loss of a common culture, tradition and language. But we might ask why Ligeti chose to explore a quieter, emphatically muted sound in the context of a multi-movement quartet.

Eric Drott has recently argued for an expanded focus on genre in modernist music, one that looks beyond taxonomies of ensemble composition or public function to conceive genre as 'a dynamic ensemble of correlations, linking together a variety of material, institutional, social, and symbolic resources'.[49] Viewed from a dynamic perspective, internal musical cues based on harmonic language or style may play less of a role in defining a genre like the string quartet than external commentary. From such a vantage, the reception history of Ligeti's Second Quartet frames it as a modernist abstraction of tradition, as opposed to the Hungarian quartet, which bore such a visceral connection to Bartók and Berg.

Over time, Kaufmann's notion of the Second Quartet as the 'Endgame' of music – a drama of empty placeholders for the traditional conventions of theme and embellishment – became itself a convention, for a genre whose central tenet, when all else fails, retained its rootedness in a continuous, if idealized, tradition. In that sense the string quartet is the emigrant genre *par excellence*, and a proper vehicle for Ligeti's own experience of both loss and 'inbetweenness' in the West. In a 1968 letter to Kaufmann regarding Kaufmann's forthcoming entry on him in an English-language lexicon, Ligeti wrote that he felt stateless, even if he identified for the nonce as an Austrian of Hungarian descent. He asked if he could appear as a Kakanian composer: strongly tied to a tradition, even if it be that of the lost cosmopolitanism that marked the Austro-Hungarian empire. He had, after all, just finished composing a string quartet, the 'most inspired product of the Kakanian *Hofcompositeur*'.[50]

Notes

1 Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 15.
2 Adorno famously called the late works 'catastrophes'; Theodore W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), p. 126. Carl Dahlhaus briefly summarizes the reception history of the late works in chapter 12 of *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music*, trans. Mary Whittall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). See also Michael Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy: Adorno and Beethoven's Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Daniel K. L. Chua, 'Believing in Beethoven', *MA* 19/3 (2000), pp. 409–21.
3 See Kenneth Gloag's discussion in 'The String Quartet in the Twentieth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 288–309.
4 Dibelius/*Ligeti*, p. 130.
5 Sallis/*Ligeti*, p. 122.
6 The work is generally classed as a 'theme and variations', and the version recorded by the Arditti Quartet for the complete works divides into eight sections (Sony CD SK 62306). Various commentators have argued for everywhere from five sections (Bianca Tiplea Temeş, 'Ligeti's String Quartet No. 1: Stylistic Incongruence?', *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Musica* LIII/2 [2008], pp. 187–203) to 12 (Wolfgang Burde, *György Ligeti: Eine Monographie* [Zürich: Atlantis, 1993], pp. 102–8) or even more divisions (if tempo indications alone serve as guides).
7 Sallis/*Ligeti,* p. 127.
8 György Ligeti, liner notes for WER 60095 (Mainz: WERGO, 1984) and Sony SK 62306 (1996).
9 Transformations of the opening motive produce distinct second (b. 69) and third (b. 660) subjects as well as a series of variations or 'inventions' on the second subject (bars 210–659). Sallis/*Ligeti*, pp. 134–51 passim.
10 The threefold iteration of G that opens the main theme prefigures the initial gestures that open later Ligeti works such as *Lontano*, *Lux aeterna* and Piano Étude No. 7.
11 Since the transposition and/or inversion of each operand is clearly expressed on several levels, we could invoke Richard Cohn's property of transpositional combination to describe the recursive structure of the opening thematic motive G5-A5-G♯5-A♯5-A5-B5; Richard Cohn, 'Inversional Symmetry and Transpositional Combination in Bartók', *MTS* 10 (1988), p. 31. Thus, the first five pitch-classes in the theme could be analysed as two semitones at the distance of one whole-tone [1*2] or two whole-tones at the distance of one semitone [2*1]. The recursive replication of trichords by retrograde inversion models David Lewin's RICH relation; see *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 180–5.
12 Each square on the graph's x-axis represents crotchet duration, while each square on the y-axis represents a semitone from C2 through B♭6. Each instrument and functional role (subject/countersubject) is depicted by a different shade (pale grey represents the first violin, while the black represents the cello; as scales switch registers, they also transfer from one instrumental voice to another).
13 Pitch-class sets follow the conventions established in Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
14 Sallis/*Ligeti*, pp. 137, 139 and 149; Jonathan Bernard, 'Inaudible Structures, Audible Music: Ligeti's Problem, and His Solution', *MA* 6/3 (1987), p. 212.
15 After the final D♭/D/G♭/G chord shown in Figure 11.3b, a 17-chord progression begins on the D major collection and moves through several transpositions of sets 8–6 (0, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8), the major hexachord (6–32), 8–9 (0, 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9) and 8–23 (0, 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10) before closing on an F major septachord on the downbeat of bar 161.

16 Ligeti/*Conversation*, p. 104. The work was written for the LaSalle Quartet, which required a year of rehearsals before its premiere; Steinitz/*Ligeti*, p. 167. Quite a few additional works could be added to the ten which Gianmario Borio lists as predecessors in texture and mood to Ligeti's Second Quartet; 'L'eridità Bartókiana nel Secondo Quartetto de G. Ligeti: Sul concetto di tradizione nella musica contemporanea', *SM* 13 (1984), p. 295.
17 Ligeti/*Conversation*, p. 103.
18 Paul Griffiths suggests that the Second Quartet may have been an early experiment in setting pure intervals (the harmonic series) against the equal-tempered chromatic scale, although I would suggest that the frequent quarter tones complicate this model; Griffiths/*Ligeti*, p. 64.
19 Borio calls this section an introduction, with the central idea of the work occurring in bars 16–18, a passage that to my ears has a transitional quality; ''L'eridità Bartókiana', p. 301.
20 David L. Brodbeck and John Platoff outline the way these ambiguities play off in the Beethoven movement against a more normative sonata model; 'Dissociation and Integration: The First Movement of Beethoven's Opus 130', *19th-Century Music* 7/2 (1983), pp. 149–62. See also William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 332–5; and Richard Kramer, 'Between Cavatina Ouverture: Opus 130 and the Voices of Narrative', *Beethoven Forum* I (1992), pp. 165–89. Kofi Agawu identifies 15 separate sections in this movement, comprising 79 units; *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 282–91.
21 Kinderman, *Beethoven*, p. 335.
22 In the seminal experiment of Roger Shepard, a repeated pitch succession appears to perpetually ascend by intervals of a semitone, a computer-aided illusion created by changing the loudness of specific partials so that the pattern appears to reach the original pitch level after 12 semitonal ascents; Roger N. Shepard, 'Circularity in Judgements of Relative Pitch', *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 36/12 (1964), pp. 2346–53. The D♯ of the opening cluster is the only pitch missing from the descending chromatic line in bars 84–7. This gesture also foreshadows 'Monument' (the first movement of the *Three Pieces for Two Pianos*, 1976) and the piano études modelled on the juxtaposition of chromatic lines set to unique taleae and even tempi, such as 'Vertige', 'L'escalier du diable' and 'Columna infinita' from Book 2 of the *Études for Piano*.
23 Griffiths/*Ligeti,* p. 64.
24 Ligeti/*Conversation*, pp. 107–9. Alan Poirer's analysis of the quartet focuses on these textures, mapping them to Ligeti's previous works; Alan Poirer, 'György Ligeti: L'enjeu thématique dans le Deuxième Quatuor à Cordes', *Musurgia* 3/4 (1996), pp. 45–54.
25 Ligeti/*Conversation*, p. 108.
26 Ligeti claims to end the fourth movement with a nod to the *Rite of Spring*; Ligeti/*Conversation*, p. 110.
27 Dániel Péter Biró does not analyse this movement in depth, but remarks that in it 'Ligeti's transformations take the place of the themes themselves'; 'Bartók's Quartets, Folk Music, and the Anxiety of Influence', in *The String Quartets of Béla Bartók*, ed. Dániel Péter Biró and Harald Krebs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 276.
28 Harald Kaufmann, 'Ligetis zweites Streichquartett', *Melos* 37 (1970), p. 186.
29 John McCabe, 'The Condition of Music', in *The Black Rainbow: Essays on the Present Breakdown of Culture*, ed. Peter Abbs (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 122–3. See also reviews by Wolfgang Schwinger, 'Ligetis neues Streichquartett', *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (16 December 1969), n.p.; and Rolf Gaska, n.t., *NZM* 133 (1972), pp. 92–3.
30 Herman Sabbe, *György Ligeti: Studien zur kompositorischen Phänomenologie* (Munich: Edition Text & Kritik, 1987), pp. 13–36; Kaufmann, 'Ligetis zweites Streichquartett', pp. 181–6. Kaufmann's article prompted Ligeti to write a lengthy letter that responds

to several of Kaufmann's points; Ligeti letter of 16 August 1968, 'Briefwechsel György Ligeti – Harald Kaufmann', in *Von innen und außen*, ed. Werner Grünzweig and Gottfried Krieger (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 1993), pp. 237–40.

31 Steinitz/*Ligeti*, pp. 169–70.

32 Hans-Pater Kyburz, 'Fondements d'une interprétation: La construction numérique', *Contrechamps* 12/13 (1990), pp. 133–52. Other formalist analyses of all or part of the quartet include Richard S. Power, 'An Analysis of Transformation Procedures in György Ligeti's String Quartet No. 2', DMA diss. (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1995); Richard Toop, 'L'illusion de la surface', *Contrechamps* 12/13 (1990), pp. 86–9; and Jonathan Bernard, 'Voice-Leading as a Spatial Function in the Music of Ligeti', *MA* 13/2–3 (1994), pp. 243–8.

33 Ligeti in Stephen Satory, 'An Interview With György Ligeti in Hamburg', *Canadian University Music Review* 10 (1990), p. 105.

34 Ligeti/*Conversation*, p. 14.

35 Wolf-Eberhard von Lewinski, 'Where Do We Go From Here? A European View', *The Musical Quarterly* 55/2 (1969), p. 204.

36 Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 13.

37 Martin Zenck, 'Entwurf einer Soziologie der musikalischen Rezeption', *Die Musikforschung* 33/3 (1980), pp. 266–70.

38 Ligeti/*Conversation,* pp. 105–6.

39 Borio, 'L'eridità Bartókiana', p. 294. Martin Iddon reflected on Borio's analysis at length in 'Bartók's Relics: Nostalgia in György Ligeti's Second String Quartet', in *The String Quartets of Bartók*, pp. 243–60.

40 Universal Edition's 1963 publication of Bartók's Fifth Quartet included Ligeti's own formal analysis, which the composer saw fit to revise for his collected writings; György Ligeti, *GS* II, pp. 315–17. In the Satory interview Ligeti cites the pizzicato movement of Bartók's Fourth Quartet as an inspiration for the third, meccanico movement of his Second Quartet, and avows that bars 41–50 of his fifth movement are intended as a general allusion to Bartók; 'An Interview With György Ligeti', p. 107.

41 'L'eridità Bartókiana', pp. 295–307 passim.

42 Satory, 'An Interview With György Ligeti', pp. 103 and 106.

43 Kaufmann, 'Ligetis zweites Streichquartett', pp. 182–4.

44 Dibelius/*Ligeti*, pp. 134–5.

45 Miguel Roig-Francoli illustrates long-range stepwise voice-leading and unity of intervallic content with a 'middleground' graph of this movement; his graph omits several events noted below; 'Harmonic and Formal Processes in Ligeti's Net-Structure Compositions', *MTS* 17/2 (1995), pp. 253 and 256.

46 See Satory, 'An Interview with György Ligeti', pp. 106–7. Zenck hears this moment as an allusion to Debussy; 'Entwurf einer Soziologie', p. 268.

47 See Ralph Hawkes, 'Béla Bartók: A Recollection by His Publisher', *Tempo* 13 (Autumn 1949), p. 13. And Ligeti himself planned further quartets; see Bianca Ţiplea Temeş, 'Tracking Down Ligeti's Unfinished Third and Fourth String Quartets', *MPSS* 25 (2012), pp. 49–54.

48 David Metzer examines how Webern's ever-finer gradations of stillness investigate the border between sound and silence in *Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 68–81.

49 Eric Drott, 'The End(s) of Genre', *Journal of Music Theory* 57/1 (Spring 2013), p. 9.

50 '. . . genialstes Produkt des kakanischen Hofcompositeurs'; Ligeti letter of 25 July 1968, 'Briefwechsel György Ligeti – Harald Kaufmann', pp. 231–2.