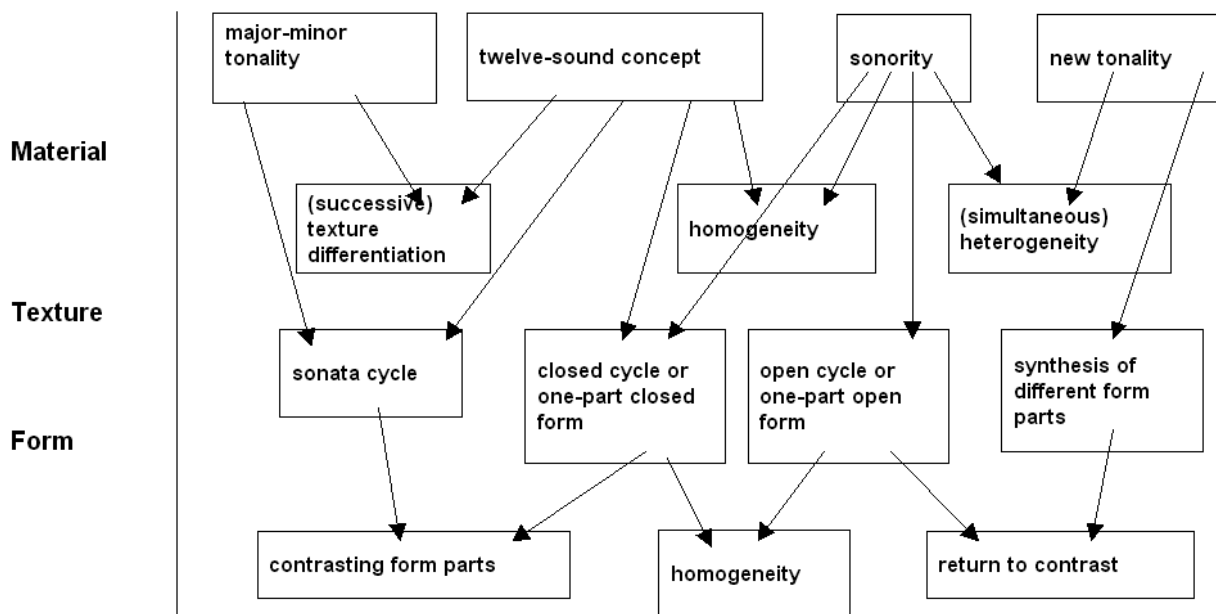


The 20th Century Polish Composers towards the String Quartet Archetype

The main feature of 20th century Polish quartet output is its incredible dynamism and variety which resulted from the changes occurring in the field of composition, and also in music aesthetics. In the last hundred years, the genre of the string quartet underwent numerous transformations determined by the processes taking place in the field of sound material, texture and form, which can be shown in some simplification in the following schema:

Example 1



These processes were happening independent of each other at different levels and created a net of joint-relations leading to a deformation of the initial model.

What is then the characteristics of the genre and what features can we acknowledge as archetypal for a string quartet?

In the consciousness of composers and listeners this genre was associated with a definite formal scheme – with sonata form on the first position followed by the slow part, minuet or scherzo as well as the cycle closing sonata form or variations. These formal schemes had a specific feature being strictly connected to a particular set of harmonic norms resulting from the use of the tonal system. At the same time as this was happening their development had reached its prime, whereas the crisis of the dur-moll system became also a crisis of form. The sonata form and four-part cycle arrangement stabilized in Haydn's quartets, already about half a century later was questioned by the bold formal experiments of Beethoven last quartets. Keeping in mind the latest works of this composer, we can assert that the opposition to the formal rules, typical for a string quartet, and sometimes even their negation, stimulated the creation of outstanding compositions.

The endeavours to support this form shaped, along with the development of tonality based on new harmonic means, typical for the first half of the 20th century, produced some difficulties. Already the neoclassical string quartets of Grażyna Bacewicz or Alexander Tansman revealed a discrepancy between the formal model, which derived from musical tradition and the musical means to fulfill this model. Maria

Piotrowska mentions frankly the “auditive alienation of the former musical phenomenon”¹. The sonata form, which in the first half of the 20th century was almost accepted as the norm in the area of Polish chamber music, loses its dynamic, processional character by introducing new, typical at that time harmonic means. They constituted a wide spectrum of possibilities from diatonic (tonal reminiscences) through new modalism to the twelve-tone scale. Neoclassical string quartets combine within two separate qualities – the form, which was shaping itself in accordance with the improvement of the dur-moll system and deriving from this system its dynamic character and power, and new harmonic means. The new harmony did not create a closed system deprived of dynamism thanks to the substantial contribution of modal elements. The attempts leading to the merging of the form are becoming more important: these are monothematism based on the integration of the cycle with the help of mutual thematic material, as well as the reminiscences of that material or its anticipations. In neoclassical quartets there appeared also the original composer’s ideas serving the integration of the work. In Alexander Tansman’s output it was the rule of bridges, defined by the composer in a conversation with Tadeusz Kaczyński as “a certain method by means of which I obtain the formal integration. «The bridge» is a harmonic structure, rhythmical and melodic, used several times within a composition. This rule could be valid for one part or, like in *VII string quartet*, serve to integrate the whole cycle”².

Simultaneously with the dawn of neoclassicism, a clear limitation of the contrast function in string quartets took place, which in the horizontal aspect was leading to an increase in the homogeneity of a composition and the preference of a one-piece structure. The abandonment of a contrast in the vertical aspect led to the homogeneity of the texture and the decline of the individual parts differentiation. In the new harmonic situation, in which the emancipation of all chromatic tones occurred, the division into the dominant part which realized the melodic line and the concurrent accompaniment lost its importance. The lines are starting to get tangled in factual monolith, and in creating this homogeneity the heterophony was often helpful. This process had very serious consequences not only factual but also formal, one sign of which was smaller-in-size compositions.

A distinct caesura in the 20th-century quartet output constitute the compositions of Witold Lutosławski and Krzysztof Penderecki created in the first half of the 1960’s. In eight minutes long *Quartetto per archi* by Krzysztof Penderecki the dominant role is played by sonoristic means. This composition, thanks to a radically new look at quartet texture brought the illusion of new perspectives of the genre’s development. Not for long, however, as the presage of the crisis became, 8 years later, the *Second String Quartet*, in which Penderecki, working on the same area of sonoristic means – this time less varied than in the *First Quartet* – tries to build the dramaturgy of the composition in which the technique of multiple repetition of sound structures and the form-shaping role of dynamics play a part. However, it is not the depletion of the “new” sonoristic effects’ resources that is here the presage of crisis – after all nobody seemed to be deluding themselves that they are unlimited. However the disproportion between at the time very innovative sound means and the simplicity of the used architectonic models became apparent. (See Example 2.)

In the first part of the 1960’s there appeared another work important for the development of the genre – the *String Quartet* by Witold Lutosławski. It was so significant a composition that it constituted the first distinct trial to oppose the new model to the formal classic scheme and, similarly to the classical model established on the foundation of tonality the piece by Lutosławski was supported by its adherence to the strict laws of aleatoric harmonics. To the originality and uniqueness of the *String Quartet* form by Witold Lutosławski, contributes the combination of two – it would seem contradictory tendencies – the features of an open form (with the openness relying exclusively on the mobility of the individual composition layers), and the dramaturgy typical for the great closed form. The aleatoric technique, whose scope was gradually limited by the composer, did not disturb the formation of suspense in *Quartet*, nor its overall achievement. The mobility inspired by the kinetic sculpture by Alexander Calder did not lead here to stability – like in the case of the deriving from the same source output of Haubenstock-Ramati. The piece by Lutosławski is an example of the dynamic form in the clearly processual character. This composition had a clear influence on Polish quartet output, it was expressed by taking over only some of the most characteristic features of aleatoric technique. All its elements were subjected to the system, and makes the statement so personal that a direct continuation of this path by other composers was practically impossible. (See Example 3.)

¹ M. Piotrowska, *Neoklasycyzm w muzyce XX w.*, Warszawa, 1982, p. 118.

² T. Kaczyński, *Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Tansmanem*, “Ruch Muzyczny”, 1967, No 12, p. 6–7.

Example 2. Krzysztof Penderecki. *Quartetto per archi* p. 6, © by PWM.

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, specifically page 6 of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Quartetto per archi*. The score is organized into four systems, each containing four staves for the instruments: Violin I (VI I), Violin II (VI II), Viola (VI), and Violoncello (VC). The notation is highly detailed, with numerous accidentals, dynamic markings (including p , p_2 , and x), and performance instructions such as *c.l.* and *pizz.*. The score is marked with time signatures (0", 1", 2", 3", 4", 5", 10", 15", 20", 25", 30", 35", 40", 45", 50", 55", 60") and includes various musical symbols like \uparrow and \times .

The Polish composers' output of the 1960's and the first half of the 1970's questioned not only the typical architectonics of the genre, with a privileged role of the tonality-based sonata form, but also other features determining the string quartet archetype, like for instance the periodicity with the obligatory contrast rule between the parts, leaving as the only attribute of the genre, the strings as performers.

Example 3. Witold Lutoslawski. *String Quartet*, © by PWM.

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zacznij razem z innymi
begin together with the others

vno I

vno II

vla

vc.

ff

sost. acc.

rit.

acc.

poco a poco accelerando

simile

PRESTO (ca 10♩/sec.)

fresc.

ff

powtarzaj aż do sy
repeat until the c

ff

sost. acc.

precipit. rit.

acc.

poco a poco accelerando

simile

PRESTO (ca 10♩/sec.)

ff

precipit. rit.

simile

accelerando

PRESTO (ca 10♩/sec.)

ff

powtarzaj aż do sygnału wiolonczelisty, po czym
repeat until the cello's signal, then play to the end

ff

simile

sost. acc.

a poco accelerando sim.

PRESTO (ca 10♩/sec.)

poco cresc.

al ff

An example of a work that negates most properties of the genre can be the *Second String Quartet* by Zygmunt Krauze composed in 1970. It is a development and radicalization of the idea undertaken by the composer in the *First String Quartet* created five years earlier. The factual and materials' homogeneity of the work brings the composer closer to the idea already numerous previously undertaken in *Five Unistic Compositions* (1963) and *Polychromics* (1968). The idea of unistic form has been inspired by the paintings of Władysław Strzemiński. The resignation from the contrast having been so far a significant feature of the quartet genre – the rule regulating the continuum of the cycle form, and also one of the three (apart from repetitiveness and variationality) rules shaping the first link of the cycle (sonata form) had its serious factual and formal consequences. The limitation of the contrast function in horizontal aspect led to an increase the composition's homogeneity and a preference for a one-part-structure, whereas the abolition of contrast in vertical dimension – to the homogeneity of the facture and the disappearance of the differentiation of parts' role.

Example 4. Eugeniusz Knapik. *String Quartet* p. 27, © by PWM.

The musical score for Example 4 is presented in three parts. The first part, titled "Largo; semplice" and "Lento; tranquillo tempo rubato", consists of four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo) for the first two staves and *pp* for the last two. The second part, titled "e cantabile", consists of a single staff with dynamics marked as *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The third part, marked with a boxed "1", consists of three staves (Violin 2, Violin, and Viola/Cello) with dynamics marked as *mf*, *ppp* (pianississimo), and *pp*. Specific fingering instructions are provided for the Violin 2 staff (5th finger), Violin staff (4th and 2nd fingers), and Viola/Cello staff (4th and 4th fingers).

The negation of the genre's tradition in the output of Polish composers in the 1960's assigned to a string quartet, focused mainly on three areas: material, texture and form. It is changed from the earlier, derived from neoclassicism and connected with the classicizing attitude attempts to modernize the composer's technique by: systemity (in operating the twelve-tone-material), radicalism (in the use of sonoristics, resigning from typical for the genre factural ideas) and abandonment of the traditional, based on the periodicity form models. The changes we observe at the time on the area of the string quartet genre were determined by processes occurring in the field of sound material, facture and form, and were initiated by avant-garde artists. This led to their works gradual moving away of the created from the model genre structure, whereas the executory medium remained here a link with tradition.

The last quarter of the 20th century brings a diametrically different attitude towards tradition – including the genre one. The abandonment of the 'division between the sound of the past and present'³ and the more frequent 'entering into a dialogue with the past' – all this became a point of reference for the synthesizing tendencies, which referred to both aesthetics and material or form.

The composers' output of the end of the 20th century is proof of the genre's liveliness, including the string quartet genre, which fits perfectly the postmodernist music reality. The composers play a "game" with the classical model, not forgetting, however, about all those formal solutions, which are connected to avant-garde activity. Their consequence is the introduction of the form – hybrid, characterized by the elasticity of the mobile form and the dramaturgy of the closed form. The return of the narration idea, the discourse run by a neo-tonal language as well as the return to the previous hierarchy of elements –

³ J. Kramer, O genezie muzycznego postmodernizmu, "Muzyka", 2000, No 3, p. 66.

the primacy of melody with the accompanying harmonic background over the until quite lately all-important sonoristics, becomes significant. The melody, however, which clearly points at the second part of the *String Quartet* by Eugeniusz Knapik, not only regains its former meaning but also comes back in full glory with the romantic *Tempo rubato* and the simply ecstatic character. (See Example 4.)

Consequently, after the experiments of the avant-garde artists of the 1960's, we observe the gradual return to the roots – to the periodicity of form, contrast and factual differentiation. Nonetheless, these returns were not an indication that composers were totally dismissing the avant-garde's achievements. The condition of the postmodernist string quartet is best characterized by the terms: "synthesizing" and "heterogenic", as the works then originating combined all those elements, which in the field of material, facture and form were elaborated in the phase of the avant-garde's activity.

The string quartets created in the last quarter of the 20th century indicate indeed a stronger unity with the genre's tradition, although they do not accept it uncritically. In the quartet compositions of the last two decades of the former century we perceive a wide spectrum of attitudes – ranging from the ironic to the nostalgic recollection of tradition with its vast range of senses and meanings. The traditional melodic or factual models undergo modifications, which can almost lead to their destruction, as were presented at Warsaw's Autumn in 1993, *Five compositions* for a string quartet by Paweł Szymański. The means used by the composer – the disturbances of the rhythmical course, the phase shifts of one of the polyphonic construction's lines or glissandos, serving to obliterate the contours – the favourite deformation tool, serve rather to transform the model than to deconstruct it.

An observation of the history of the 20th century string quartet illustrates the great vitality of this genre demonstrated not only by its special fertility as measured by the number of masterpieces, to which the 18th and 19th century history could already testify, but also its dynamism or susceptibility to transformations and changes. Undoubtedly, it is this dynamism in connection with the attractiveness of the executory medium that caused the string quartet, although perceived as an elitist genre, to enjoy an increased popularity in recent decades, especially among the representatives of younger generations of Polish composers.

Santrauka

XX a. lenkų kompozitorių požiūris į styginių kvarteto archetipą

Autorė nagrinėja styginių kvarteto modelio funkcionavimą XX a. lenkų kompozitorių kūryboje. Šio „modelio“ esmė yra originalioji sonatos forma su keturių dalių ciklu, įsigalėjusi J. Haydno kūryboje. XX a. lenkų kvartetiniams kūriniams yra būdingas ypatingas dinamiškumas, kurį sąlygojo kompozicinių technikų ir muzikinės estetikos pokyčiai.

Kompozitorių kūryba čia pristatoma remiantis istorinio modelio neoromantine atmaina, modernia ir neoklasicistine modifikacija, neigimu (avangardo laikais) ir postmodernistine samprata.

Septintąjį dešimtmetį tradicinės formos lenkų kompozitorių kūriniuose styginių kvartetui neigimas apėmė tris sritis: garsinę medžiagą, faktūrą ir formą, o vienintele sąsaja su tradicija išliko atlikimo priemonės ir žanro terminai.

Paskutinįjį XX a. ketvirtį atsirado visiškai kitoks požiūris į tradiciją, taip pat ir į muzikos žanrus. Panaikinus „ribą tarp praeities garso ir šiuolaikinio garso“, „leidžianti, o ne draudžianti“ (Kramer, 2000) postmoderniosios muzikos prigimtis bei vis dažnesnis žvilgsnis į praeitį paskatino sintezavimo tendencijas estetikos, medžiagos ir formos srityse. Kompozitoriai ėmė žaisti su klasikiniu modeliu, tuo pačiu metu neignorudami avangardistinių galimybių (atvirosios, mobiliosios formų). Pagaliau jie priėjo hibridinę formą, pasižyminčią mobiliosios formos lankstumu ir uždariosios formos dramaturgiškumu. Svarbūs jos elementai – ir vėl grįžtanti pasakojimo idėja, neotonalioji kalba, senoji elementų hierarchija. Melodija kartu su ją lydintiu harmoniniu fonu pradeda dominuoti ir išstumti iki tol vyravusį sonorizmą. XX a. pabaigos styginių kvartetą galima apibūdinti kaip „sintezuojantį“ ir „heterogeninį“. Panašiai kaip neoklasicistiniai XX a. pirmosios pusės kvartetai, jis vėl pradeda remtis tradicija bei atsigręžia į klausytoją – būtent tai jį skiria nuo žymiausių avangardistinių kvartetų.