

Two Grotesque Scenes

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Two Grotesque Scenes is an 18 minute, two movement musical composition for Clarinet in B flat, Violin, and Cello composed by the author. The present paper will explore its key concerns, which include dichotomies such as repetition vs. non-repetition, sound vs. silence, pulsed vs. non-pulsed rhythms, melody and accompaniment vs. gestural/contrapuntal textures, and 12-tone serial pitch material vs. pitch material derived from unordered pitch class sets. Additional concerns, including a dramatic, often counterintuitive approach to form will also be discussed. The paper will first provide aesthetic context for the work by exploring its influences, primarily including avant-garde rock and post-serial styles. It will then engage in an in-depth analysis of both movements, including technical discussions of approaches to pitch derivation, phrasing, rhythm, and structure, relative to the piece's goals and influences.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The primary thrust of my compositional activities during the 2010-2011 school year has been a two part, approximately 18 minute chamber work for a trio of Clarinet in Bb, Violin, and 'Cello. The instrumentation was chosen essentially arbitrarily; I decided at the outset that I would purposefully omit piano, as many of my recent pieces have utilized piano, and I sometimes feel that my music is overly reliant on the instrument's versatility, particularly its ability to anchor any particular musical texture. Given this one restriction, I decided I would write a piece that would feature a common instrumentation between two new-music ensembles which I will have had the opportunity to work with in the coming months. This strategy allowed me to write a major work without fear of never hearing it in its entirety. As the piece would be heard at different times in the year, it was decided that the work should be divided into two extended, non-continuous halves, which may be played together, or separately, in either order.

Two Grotesque Scenes, as the piece was titled early in its development, explores a number of my musical interests, several of which can be described as dichotomies. These binary oppositions include repetition vs. non-repetition, sound vs. silence, pulsed vs. non-pulsed rhythms, melody and accompaniment vs. gestural/contrapuntal textures, and 12-tone serial pitch material vs. pitch material derived from unordered pitch class sets. Additionally, the piece seeks

to tell a dramatic, abstract story through the use of sometimes counterintuitive structures¹ and often disproportionate levels of emphasis on different types of material, hence the title, which refers more to the meaning of the word “grotesque” as art that is bizarre, distorted, or incongruous rather than its other implications of ugliness or disgust. The present paper will seek to explain the piece in terms of these ideas, first by briefly looking at their origins in music that I have felt influenced by, and then by presenting an in depth analysis of the work’s two movements.

1.1 INFLUENCES

Two Grotesque Scenes may be better understood in the context of the varying musical influences that it was born under. My music draws on a number of sources, as I am constantly interested in new musical experiences, particularly with music that challenges its audience and that features a high level of kinetic energy. Although I consider myself an open-minded listener of many different types of music, my recent pieces can be seen as drawing primarily upon two traditions: avant-garde rock and heavy metal, and certain rigorous serial/post-serial classical music. To my ears, these two sub-genres have a certain spiritual similarity, in that they both revel in challenging their audience with music that is characterized by an ecstatic approach to complexity. In both cases, the music is both immediately exciting on a visceral level, while its intricacy rewards, if not demands, repeated hearing.

Grotesque Scene #1 is perhaps the more rock-influenced of the two movements. The dichotomy between repetition and non-repetition used throughout the work is a feature I have

¹ The term “counter-intuitive” can here be taken to mean music that intentionally denies the received expectations of other music that it references stylistically. This concept will be discussed further in the analysis of movement 2.

observed as common in avant-rock groups. The now-defunct guitar/bass/drums trio Grand Ulena's only full-length album, *Gateway To Dignity*, is a fantastic example of this tension between the complex and the blunt. For example, compare the opening of *Crowbar at Crescent and Cricket* with the passage that begins at 2:52. The opening consists of a metrically complex unison, followed by a dissonant, non-repetitive guitar solo. The latter passage consists of a simple unison riff, neurotically repeated many times with only slight metrical distortions. I was fortunate enough to witness this group live, as a teenager, at a concert that was held in a tiny, cold practice space. I was impressed not only by how they moved from knotty, metrically complex riffs to obsessive repetitive passages, but how dramatically they treated such ideas, often pretending to "mess up" by acting as if they were frustrated with their performance, then quickly moving into other material with utter synchronization.

The music of rock group/sometimes chamber group hybrid Zs is another example of this repetitive/non-repetitive tension. The obsessive 6/8 material that begins at measure 60 of *Grotesque Scene #1* is a pseudo quote from the title track of Zs recent album *New Slaves*. *New Slaves*, in particular, is severely repetitive, and could be fairly classified as a work of minimalism, although the level of aggression is much higher than that of most classical minimalist music. However, pieces such as the amazingly all 6-person-unison *Retrace a Walk*, from their self-titled debut EP, are extremely non-repetitive exercises in complex rhythms. This sort of unison writing, found in most complex rock music that I am familiar with, can be seen as a direct influence on phrases such as measures 125-127 in *Grotesque Scene #1*.

Young composer/guitarist Alex Nagle has, as far as I know, written possibly the most direct connection between avant-rock and rigorous atonal classical music in his piece *Hooks*, recorded by his former band Normal Love on their self-titled album. Aside from the unison blast

beat passages that punctuate the various sections, the music almost sounds like Milton Babbitt transcribed for loud rock band. Obviously, the influence of music like this on my chamber music cannot be directly felt, but perhaps a sort of metaphysical transformation occurs when the music is re-transcribed to its original idiom.

Two Grotesque Scenes is referential to various serial/post-serial composers in a variety of ways. The most obvious of which is its pitch material. Both movements alternate between utilizing a 12-tone row and unordered tetrachords, derived from this row. I feel that this type of pitch material gives my music a certain harmonic/melodic bite that would be lacking if the music was more consonant. Aside from the use of a generally chromatically saturated pitch field, both movements feature passages that are highly complex and non-repetitive. The ending of *Grotesque Scene #2*, beginning at measure 156, is the most extended example of this. In my music I typically think of this type of music as being pseudo-improvisatory.² In this respect I have perhaps felt most directly influenced by the music of Donald Martino, whose emphasis on virtuosic, soloistic lines, and whose use of complex rhythms as a sort of notated rubato in pieces such as the *Triple Concerto* and *Notturmo*, seems to have an improvisatory spirit.

The mechanistic aspect of my piece, in addition to being influenced by the aforementioned rock music, also takes inspiration from composers Harrison Birtwistle and Franco Donatoni. Birtwistle's music seems to me more severe, where Donatoni's later approach, in pieces like the sextet *Arpege*, is perhaps lighter in spirit. Although literal repetition is often absent in much atonal classical music, Birtwistle's *Carmen Arcadia Mechanicae Perpetuum*, for

² By "pseudo-improvisatory" I mean music that is highly notated, but exhibits a similar sort of rhythmic and gestural profile as totally improvised music. A recent example of improvised music that I have felt influenced by is *Electric Fruit*, an entirely improvised album recorded by the trio of Peter Evans, Mary Halvorson, and Weasel Walter. The "improvisatory" character of my music and of composers such as Martino's differs from this music in that it is typically more clearly pitch oriented, where as a free-music trumpeter such as Peter Evans may often play in such a way that emphasizes noise sounds or a less clearly defined sense of pitch.

large chamber group, does feature a level of obsessive repetition at its beginning and ending. This piece can be seen as a secondary reference of the unison material in *Grotesque Scene #1*.

Both movements of my piece contain sections marked “Dance-like,” such as the passages that begin at measure 27 in movement 1 and at measure 120 in movement 2. This material is most directly inspired by the middle period works of Arnold Schoenberg, such as the *Piano Suite* and the *Third String Quartet*, where he combines a 12-tone pitch language with clear classical/baroque forms and textures.

Rather than creating a jarring mish-mash of influences, my goal with *Two Grotesque Scenes* was to create a dramatic dialogue between these different ideas, many of which derive from avant-rock and serial/post serial music, and hopefully at least some of which are of my own invention.

1.2 GROTESQUE SCENE #1

Grotesque Scene #1 was composed first, and is the more schizophrenic of the two movements, featuring at least ten different sections over the course of its 9 minutes, each marked off by double bar lines. The movement can be most broadly described as the ensemble’s repeated attempt to coalesce into a clear melody and accompaniment “dance” texture. Each attempt is thwarted, with the ensemble always falling into either chaotic, improvisatory material, obsessive repetition, or complete silence. A sometimes tragic, sometimes comical dialogue is sought between minimalistic, complexist, and more moderate aesthetics’ approaches to texture and repetition.

The movement does not begin with “dance-like” textures, but rather with a mercurial clarinet solo marked *Impish/impetuous*, which contains a number of the movement’s basic ideas and motives embedded within it, and utilizes the work’s two contrasting methods of pitch generation. These two methods both derive from the following 12 tone row. (**Figure 1**) The first method is to treat the row serially, utilizing different forms of the complete series, whereas the second method involves breaking the row up into 3 different tetrachords and using each tetrachord separately as an unordered pitch collection.

Embedded within the clarinet line are several basic ideas that recur throughout the movement. The first of these are improvisatory gestures, which typically feature a rapid alternation of varying tuplet values, quick changes between legato and staccato playing, and off-beat long-short patterns. The second main idea is a slow line motive that contains two quarter

Pitch materials

12 tone row (P0)

tetrachord 1 tetrachord 2 tetrachord 3

prime forms of above chords

tetrachord 1-(0147) tetrachord 2-(0134) tetrachord 3-(0145)

Figure 1: Basic pitch material for both movements

notes followed by two dotted quarter notes. This motive often occurs in conjunction with the improvisatory gestures. The last idea is a distorted 6/8 accompaniment figure, which alters the basic compound meter eighth note pulse with additive/subtractive rhythms (i.e. adding or subtracting an $1/8^{\text{th}}$ note or $1/16^{\text{th}}$ note from the meter) and shifting tuplet values within a dotted

quarter note beat (5 in the space of 3, 4 in the space of 3, etc). The following excerpt (**Figure 2**) segments this opening solo according to these basic ideas, and according to pitch derivation. As is the case with much of the piece, similar ideas are presented utilizing both serial and non-serial pitch collections, giving the material a slightly different harmonic shade when the change in method occurs. In this case, the first half of the solo is serial, whereas the second half of the solo is entirely derived from the (0147) tetrachord, which is always transposed by a major second, in order to avoid common tones from one transposition to the next. The major triad embedded within this chord perhaps does the most to differentiate the second half of the solo from the first. The almost alberti bass like, C-major arpeggio figure at measure 11 is particularly striking.

Obviously such a brief, rapid juxtaposition of ideas can only provide a glimmer of the movement's eventual shape, rather than a clear outline of what is to come. The numerous subsequent sections each develop ideas presented in this solo, while introducing dialogues between repetition and non-repetition, and sound and silence. The "distortions" of the 6/8 accompaniment figure material are temporarily exorcised in the first "dance-like" section, but the ensemble is unable to sustain this type of music for any length of time.

The second section, marked *Brash*, and beginning at measure 14, finds the strings playing material that closely mirrors the clarinet's opening solo. There is a rapid juxtaposition between the improvisatory, slow line (now embellished by glissandi), and distorted 6/8 material (now presented as rhythmic unisons). This complicated material quickly disintegrates into the movement's first use of literal repetition at measure 20. (marked *Deadpan*) It is as if the ensemble has grown frustrated by the nervousness of their gestures, and has decided to simply trail off, repeating the end of the section's last phrase almost sarcastically. (in this case a quickly

Opening clarinet solo: segmentation according to pitch derivation and motivic content

The image shows a musical score for an opening clarinet solo, segmented into four measures. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The time signature changes frequently: 3/8, 5/4, 2/4, 5/4, 5/16, 5/16, 6/8, 4:3, 5/4, 5/4, 4/4, 8/16, 7/16, 8/8, 4/4, 4/4, 4/4, 6/8, 5:3, 8/8, 4/4, 4/4.

Measure 1: Labeled with **P8** and **P3 (incomplete)**. It features a triplet of eighth notes, a quintuplet of eighth notes, and a dotted quarter note. Annotations include "Improvisatory material: shifting triplets, alternating legato/staccato, off beat long notes, etc." and "2 Quarters/2 dotted quarters slow line motive".

Measure 2: Labeled with **P1 (incomplete)** and **P3 (remainder from above)**. It features a quintuplet of eighth notes and a 4:3 ratio. Annotations include "Additive/subtractive rhythms, occurring as distortions of 6/8 accompaniment figures" and "More improvisatory material".

Measure 3: Labeled with **(0147)-T6**, **(0147)-T8**, and **(0147)-T10**. It features a quintuplet of eighth notes and a triplet of eighth notes. Annotations include "(improvisatory material continued)" and "Additive rhythm leading to improvisatory material".

Measure 4: Labeled with **(0147)-T0**, **(0147)-T2**, and **(0147)-T4**. It features a quintuplet of eighth notes and a 5:3 ratio. Annotations include "(improvisatory material continued)" and "more distorted 6/8 material".

Figure 2: Movement 1 opening clarinet solo segmentation

repeated minor 6th double stop in the violin followed by a low pizzicato in the cello) The cello, perhaps in a spark of inspiration, ends this repetition with a simple, waltz-like ostinato at measure 27. This transition is made possible by the common low 'F' in the cello at measure 26. The two staccato eighth notes that end the bar seem to exist in the sound world of both sections' material. This next section, marked *Dance-like*, signals the first occurrence of the 6/8 idea without rhythmic distortions. Harmonically, the material switches from the serial music of the preceding string duo, to material now derived entirely from the (0134) tetrachord. The violin and clarinet respond with a clear antecedent-consequent legato phrase in dotted quarter notes, which forbiddingly ends with a slight distortion of the pulse, via the use of duple divisions of the 6/8 meter at measure 30. The subsequent phrase attempts a similarly clear structure, but fails, removing an eighth note from the opening bar and introducing 5/16 unison disruptions. The violin acknowledges this melodically with an uncharacteristic glissandi. As the material continues to disintegrate into an improvisatory texture, the harmony switches back to the more complex serial scheme. This disintegration occurs through the aforementioned metrical distortions and through the reintroduction of sounds associated primarily with the improvisatory material. For example, at measure 42 the clarinet plays a minor-second trill as the meter switches from compound to duple. This switch allows the players to play more complex rhythms, such as the quintuplet followed by a triplet rhythm in the clarinet at measure 43. The cello continues to play its 6/8 quasi-ostinato for the first two beats of this measure. Its waltz-like character is then destroyed by the shifting speeds that occur with the switch from 1/8th notes to 1/8th note triplets to 16th notes. This transition in the cello creates a sense of overlap and gradual, rather than sudden, disintegration. The resulting passage, marked *Impish* at measure 44, sees all three instruments playing the complex gestural material of the opening for the first time. Again, at

measure 51, the passage breaks down into a neurotic repetition of its ending, this time with a more argumentative tone. The use of motivic cells previously outlined in **Figure 2** in this passage is outlined in a semiotic-chart, shown in **Figure 3**. This chart explains how each given moment of the music is derived from these initial motives, either in how they are similar, or in how they alter their source material. The chart is read left to right, top to bottom. As each instrument plays independently (with the exception of the cello and clarinet's unison in the middle of the passage), a separate chart is given for each instrument.

Thus far the music has begun in a complicated and unpredictable way. It has expressed frustration with itself via banal repetition of certain material, and it has attempted, but failed, to establish a clear melody and accompaniment "dance" texture. The next section, beginning at measure 60 and marked *Obsessive, with stubborn interruptions*, reveals the remaining ideas of the movement. The repetition of the 6/8 accompaniment pattern, presented now by all three instruments, (of course with occasional metrical disruptions, now often in the form of triplets within the quarter note beat of a 5/8 bar) is not an expression of frustration or disinterest, but of obsession. The ensemble is now giddy, reveling in the mechanical ecstasy of the staccato eighth notes. The interruptions, such as measure 65, which contains a glissandi-version of the slow line idea along with a tremolo major 7th double stop, suddenly recall, in schizophrenic fashion, the other textural extreme explored thus far. The music is not only interrupted by this improvisatory material, but also by silence, which has been hinted at in earlier passages, but is now presented as extreme pregnant pauses, where the players may stare at one another and contemplate their obsession, before resuming the activity at hand.

Now that all of the main ideas of the movement have been presented, the violin solo, beginning at measure 84 and again marked *Impish/Impetuous*, seems to start over from the

Clarinet

Improvisatory Motive	Slow Line Motive	Distorted 6/8 Accompaniment Motive
m. 43: Shifts between quintuplets, triplets, and 16ths, alternates legato and staccato attacks	m. 44: Descending, rhythmic retrograde, second to last note staccato, last note removed	m. 46: 3 eighth notes followed by 4:3 eighth notes. Legato/staccato alternation
m. 47: Two legato descending 16 th notes followed by four ascending staccato 16 th triplets	m. 48: Reduced to a downward bend only	
m. 51: Tremolo only		

Violin

Improvisatory Motive	Slow Line Motive	Distorted 6/8 Accompaniment Motive
	m. 43: Changed to glissandi. Rhythm is partially shortened and retrograded. Down-up contour	
m. 44: Begins with short-long, then moves to staccato quintuplets, then another short-long	m. 45: First note is tied over from the previous measure, now uses a “zig-zag” melodic contour	
	m. 46: Reduced to a descending glissando only	
	m. 48: Original rhythm in zig-zag contour	
	m. 50: Reduced to an ascending glissando only	

Cello

Improvisatory Motive	Slow Line Motive	Distorted 6/8 Accompaniment Motive
		m. 43: 6/8 Quasi-ostinato breaks down into 1/8 th note triplets, then 16ths, then an off beat staccato double stop
		mm. 44-45: Begins with a long tremolo into 3 staccato eighth notes
m. 45: Two legato descending 16 th notes followed by three ascending staccato 16 th note triplets		m. 46: 3 eighth notes followed by 4:3 eighth notes. Legato/staccato alternation
	m. 47: Reduced to an ascending tremolo glissando only	mm. 48-50: Two staccato eighth notes followed by a 5/16 distortion of the 6/8 patterns with a legato/staccato alternation
m. 51: Short-long into tremolo		

Figure 3: Semiotic Motivic Analysis of *Grotesque Scene #1* mm. 43-51: *Impish*

beginning, with material similar to that of the opening clarinet solo, in that the same basic motivic ideas are rapidly juxtaposed. For example, the distorted 6/8 pattern is presented at measure 89, while the slow line motive is presented again at measure 97. This solo differs from the opening in terms of context. Whereas the opening clarinet solo presented a confused preview of material that would be developed later, the obsessive repetition of the material preceding the violin solo would seem to demand such complex, non-repetitive material as relief. This solo leads into the ensemble's second attempt at establishing a clear melody and accompaniment texture. This passage, marked *Dance-Like* at measure 99, recasts the accompanimental motive, thus far always heard as eighth notes in 6/8, as a driving, syncopated texture in 4/4. Unlike the earlier 6/8 music, this material is entirely derived from inverted forms of the 12-tone row. Once again, the ensemble presents a clear antecedent consequent phrase structure, which is slightly distorted by the use of triplets in its final bar. This music is interrupted by a complex rhythmic unison at measure 4, before presenting a canonical version of the opening phrase at measure 107, which becomes "stuck" in its last cadence with a stubborn repeated note gesture. This leads to the movement's most obsessively repetitive material heard so far. The resulting *Obsessive* section, beginning at measure 111, purposefully repeats this material beyond the apparent limit of good taste, with occasional metrical distortions preventing any sort of trance-like affect.

The energy of the preceding *Obsessive* passage carries over into its dissolution in the following *Furious* section at measure 120, which returns to the improvisatory character heard several times before. This material culminates in another complex rhythmic unison, which is followed by the ensemble significantly losing energy for the first time at *Losing Steam*. (measure 128) This loss of energy occurs via a reduction in tempo, dynamic level, attack rhythm, and density level. This material moves from being derived from various transpositions of the (0145)

tetrachord to retrograde forms of the 12-tone row as it runs out of energy. Upon reaching the most still moment of the movement at measure 141 (*Settling*), the ensemble begins a repetitive recollection of the earlier complex unison idea, now played softly, with silences between each repetition.

The final portion of the movement begins with one last attempt at establishing a clear melody and accompaniment texture at measure 152 (*Dance-Like*). This section presents a confused combination of the 6/8 and 4/4 versions of this idea, which by now is obviously destined to disintegrate. This disintegration occurs at measure 167 with the passage marked *Crazed*. This disintegration uses the same technique as the first “dance-like section,” with the cello continuing its ostinato-like material at measure 165 in a simple meter, while the other instruments begin to play more complex, shifting rhythms. This final improvisatory section is the most intense heard thus far, featuring frequent crescendos to fortissimo in all three instruments. This final burst of energy culminates in the shrieking triple forte chord heard at measure 176, which explodes into the obsessive, repetitive material that ends the piece, starting at measure 177. This material is a combination of the basic 6/8 pulse rhythm with its more complex distortions. This ending features the longest pause heard in the movement, before ending with a quieter version of the concluding neurosis. It would seem that obsession has won the day.

Although alternating types of pitch derivation are significant to the micro-level progression of each section, *Grotesque Scene #1*'s overall structure is almost entirely determined by dramatically conceived changes in texture. The work's structural narrative of repeatedly trying to coalesce into melody and accompaniment textures, but in each case falling into either improvisatory material, repetition, silence, or some combination there-of, is shown in **Figure 4**.

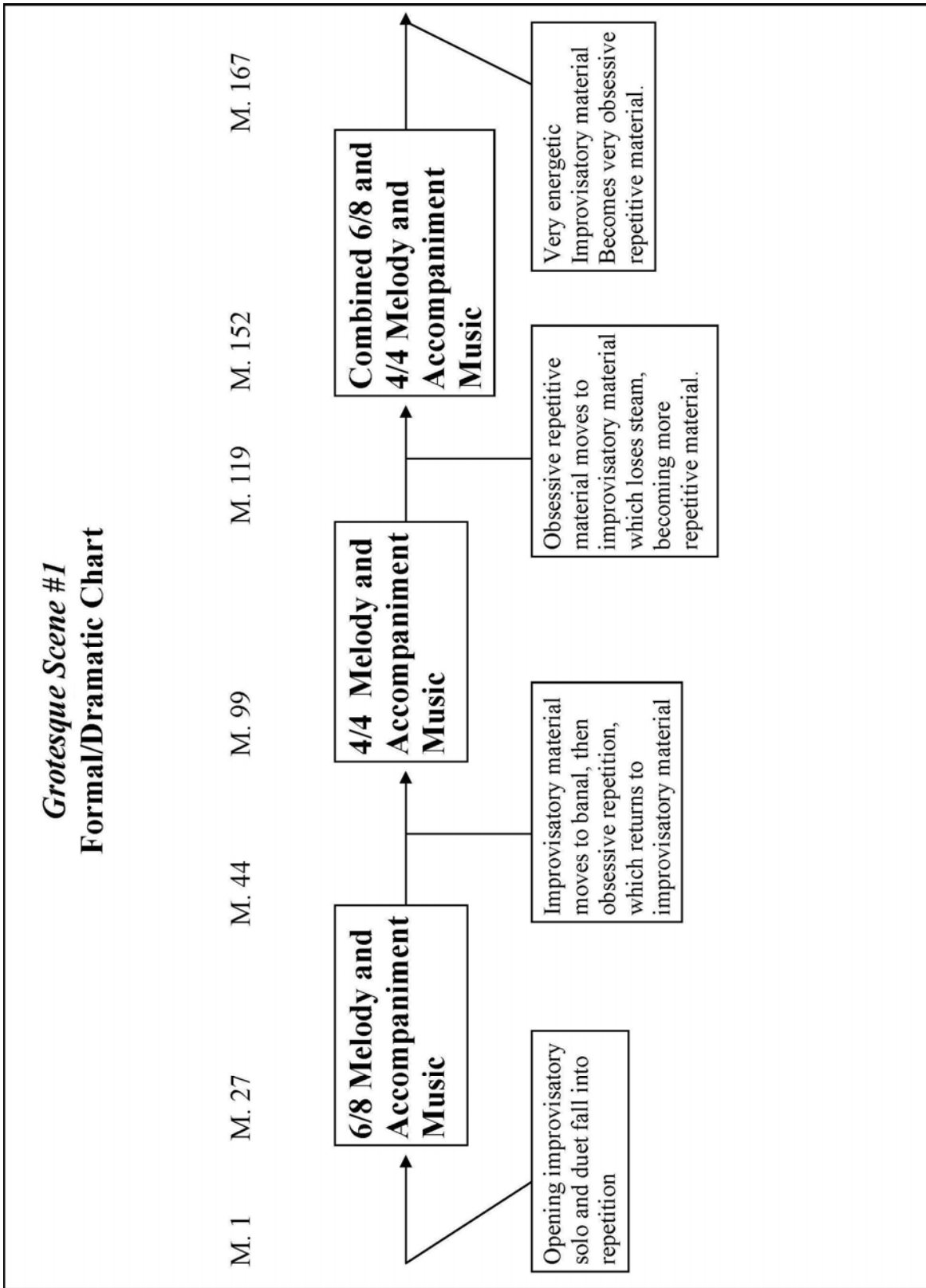


Figure 4: *Grotesque Scene #1*: Formal/Dramatic Chart

1.3 GROTESQUE SCENE #2

Unlike its schizophrenic brother, *Grotesque Scene #2* features only three main sections, where in each case the ensemble embraces some type of counterintuitive dramatic arc. These sections are counterintuitive in that they intentionally thwart the stylistic expectations that they invoke. The opening section features a succession of brief, complex gestures that repeat several times, with only slight distortions occurring each time. These repeating gestures are separated by “palate cleansing” sustained notes/glissandi, which act as a sort of substitute for silence. Although these gestures inhabit the stylistic tradition of the above-mentioned post-serial composers, the consistent use of only slightly varied repetition, and the insistence of the long notes would seem to go against the received wisdom of intuitive stylistic practice in this sort of music. It would be surprising, if not shocking, for example, to hear obvious, literal repetition in any mature work of Elliott Carter.³ This deliberate, repetitive structure gives an oddly meditative quality to the otherwise as-complex-as-possible nature of this music. This opening material eventually gives way to a middle section which is constructed around a repeating pattern of shifting meters. This pattern is initially left primarily silent; only the performers are privy to its intricacy. As the music progresses, the meters are gradually “filled in” with actual sound material, eventually revealing the rhythmic pattern to the listener. The resulting “dance” material culminates in the movement’s most traditionally Beethovenian climax. Again, this gradual progression from near silence to melody and accompaniment material would seem to thwart the stylistic expectations set forth in similar sounding music from Stravinsky⁴ or middle-period Schoenberg. This climax immediately breaks apart into the movement’s final section, where the

³ Characteristic works that I have personally found compelling include *Night Fantasies* for piano and the *Clarinet Concerto*.

⁴ The clear, yet rhythmically intricate textures from pieces such as the *Histoire du soldat*, can be seen as an influence on this passage.

opening gestural material is recast in a more conventionally organic narrative, with the material constantly developing in non-repetitive fashion, as would be typical in Carter or Martino. The frenzied nature of this material proves to be unsustainable, as it quickly gives way to the movement's extended slow ending, thwarting any possible expectations for a final accumulation in volume or density.

As with the first movement, *Grotesque Scene #2* is concerned with unusual types of repetition. This is seen most blatantly in the movement's opening section, marked *Meditative*. This section presents a series of short gestures in the improvisatory character heard frequently in the first movement. Whereas similar material in the first movement was primarily derived from a small number of motives, due to the repetitive nature of this opening section, a more open sense of invention is present from one repeating gesture to the next. Although the pitch material remains the same, a greater number of rhythmic, textural, and contour characters are presented. Despite this, certain tendencies can be observed. For example, the quick alternation between small bursts of legato, followed by staccato notes is continued from the first movement (see the opening measure). Fast legato lines that oscillate around a small number of pitches, typically with different tuplet subdivisions in the different instruments, are more characteristic of this movement. The last beat of the violin line at measure 25 is an example of this. Additionally, textures characterized by sustained chords that expand or contract registrally into a slow moving counterpoint, with occasional faster attacks interrupting the stasis, recur several times throughout the piece. Measure 14 is an example of this.

Rather than develop organically via constant change, the repeating gestures in the movement's opening section repeat almost literally, with only slight distortions occurring each time. For example, the first repetition of the opening gesture at measure 3 changes no more than

3 notes per line, while varying the rhythm of each line only slightly. This opening section additionally revisits the pregnant pauses of the first movement, which are now filled in by sustained notes or glissandi (such as the Cello's 'G' at measure 2) that become longer with each repetition. The effect is strangely slow and static, despite the busy nature of the music.

The gestures of this opening section establish a not-quite exact alternation between slow and fast, and between serial and non-serial pitch material. The harmonic and textural character of each individual gesture is outlined in **Figure 5**. In each case, the subsequent repetitions of each gesture (not shown in the excerpt) are altered in intuitive ways, rather than adhering to the pitch structures used in the first presentation. For example, in the first repetition of the opening gesture at measure 3, the clarinet's second 'A' becomes a 'B', its first 'E' natural becomes a 'D' sharp, while occurring slightly later rhythmically, and its final pitch is moved from a 'D' to an 'E'. The violin's ending ascent is shifted over rhythmically, and the final note is taken down a whole step. Finally, the cello adds an additional 'G' sharp snap pizz and an extra note to its legato ending. Such are the minute ways that the music is varied from repetition to repetition of each individual gesture. The opening section ends with a final (literal) repetition of the first gesture, with the clarinet taking the slow note, rather than the cello.

This opening, which contains essentially no silences, leads to the movement's second section, marked *Maintaining rhythmic energy through the silences* at measure 64, which is largely characterized by odd pauses. These pauses are made strange by a series of meter changes that repeat literally throughout the section. The meters and their groupings are as follows:

5/8 (2+3) → 3/4 → 2/4 → 6/8 → 3/4 → 7/16 (2+2+3) → 3/4

(#1: Fast: repeat x 5) (#2: Slow: repeat x 5)

11 T11 of (0147) T1 of (0147)

(#3: Fast-slow: repeat x 3) T5 of (0134) T7 of (0134)

T0 of (0134)

f T0 of (0134) pizz ord. arco T5 of (0134) 6

(#4: Slow: repeat x 2)

17 5 5

ord. pizz

ord. 3 3

(#5: Fast: repeat x 4) (#1: Fast: does note repeat)

18 11

slap tongue ord. 6 3 5 6

arco sul pont. ord.

7 pizz arco

3 5

Figure 5: *Grottesque Scene #2* opening: outline of harmony and repetition

Initially the meters are only experienced by the performer, as the music consists mostly of empty space. This is intended as a parodistic homage to the performance practice of much modern classical music where meter is used in a way that is either only a convenience (such as in Lachenmann⁵), or in a way that seemingly has nothing to do with the sounding result (such as in Ferneyhough⁶). Often in such pieces, members of the ensemble will conduct the meters, to the distraction of some audience members, but generally to my personal amusement. Such counterintuitive⁷ uses of meter create a psychological drama in performance. Rather than continue with this hidden use of meter changes throughout the section, the music gradually reveals the meters by filling them in with music that accents the strong beats of the measures. The music used in each case initially appears as non-sequiturs, but eventually reveals itself to be derived from the second half of the section. For example, the ascending almost-chromatic-scale in the violin at measure 74 is derived from a similar pattern at measure 127. The slurred triplet against staccato 16th notes texture at measure 103 refers to a similar alternation between the two at measure 134.

The first two repetitions of the metrical cycle feature only two events, the next two (starting at measure 78) feature three, the next two four, and so on until the music is entirely filled in. This culminates in the second half of the section, marked *Dance-Like* and beginning at measure 127. As with the first half of this middle section, the second half freely alternates between serial and non-serial pitch derivation. This dance-like material is clearly metrical and recalls the various attempts at creating a melody and accompaniment texture in the first movement. The material is similar in that the violin and clarinet frequently play harmonized

⁵ The opening of *Gran Torso* for String Quartet is a clear example of this.

⁶ The piano piece *Lemma Icon Epigram* contains the most extreme examples of this that I have observed in his music. The disjunction between metrical and aural complexity in the slow middle section is particularly jarring.

⁷ In this case, an “intuitive” use of meter would be music that makes the basic pulse and the hierarchy of beats clear to the listener through melodic contour, rhythmic emphasis, etc

melodies, while the cello plays quasi-ostinato figures. It differs in that there is far more emphasis on staccato repeated 16th notes and scalar patterns. Rather than quickly disintegrating, this material is allowed to develop for an extended length of time. It would seem that the ensemble is capable of such music after all, but perhaps only in the context of a complex metrical structure. This middle section culminates in perhaps the most traditional cadence of the entire work, with the repeated arpeggios crescendoing to a sustained triple forte chord at measure 152.

This triple forte chord, after a brief pause, explodes into the busiest, most dense improvisatory material in the entire piece at *Beginning explosively, then mellowing drastically* (measure 156). Unlike the movement's opening, this material is constantly developing and changing in organic fashion. As with the opening, this material is less tightly motivic than similar material in the first movement, but the aforementioned oscillating legato gestures (see measure 159, beat 4 in the violin) and expanding/contracting slow contrapuntal textures (see the ending) are emphasized. Additionally, the dramatic slow line motive of the first movement would seem to return with moments such as measures 162-163 in the cello. As this passage progresses, the opening gestures are reintegrated. At measure 164 gestures #1, #3, and #4 are heard once again, but are now recontextualized as part of this organic narrative. The intense complexity of this material proves to be too much for the ensemble to sustain, and as a result they take the first opportunity to drastically reduce the rate of attacks, with the recollection of the slowest gesture from the opening at measure 169. For the remainder of the piece, the ensemble gradually plays music that is slower and quieter, ending with the plaintive material at measure 186. It would seem the ensemble has exhausted itself to a point of rest and stillness.

The overall form of *Grotesque Scene #2* is simpler than that of *#1*. It contains three sections, the first characterized by short, complex repeating gestures, separated by long sustained

notes, the second by a cycle of metrical shifts and increasingly short pauses, and the third by a recontextualization of the opening gestures as organically developmental material, which moves from a peak of intensity to a peak of stillness.

1.4 SUMMARY

Both of the *Two Grotesque Scenes* share certain common concerns. Both contain a core of either highly-metered melody and accompaniment material, or of complex, improvisatory material, depending on the perspective of the listener. Both use silence and repetition in odd, counterintuitive ways, and both tell a dramatic, yet abstract story. *Grotesque Scene #1* finds the ensemble repeatedly trying to dance, but always failing due to their own neurosis, while *Grotesque Scene #2* finds the ensemble first meditating on their improvisatory gestures, then gradually beginning to dance against a complex psycho-metrical backdrop, and finally exploding into full-fledged improvisatory material, which quickly causes them to tire and eventually relax into stillness. The two movements differ in their structural shape and in their personality. *#1* is more schizophrenic, with many sections of frequently obsessive material, while *#2* is more deliberate, featuring only 3 main sections, which in each case allow more time for each musical idea to emerge.

The two *Scenes* may be played in either order, which will create a different hyper-narrative depending on the format. Placing *#1* first has the work begin with the complex clarinet solo and creates a large amount of repetition in the middle of the piece, with the work eventually ending with its most extended non-repetitive music and its slowest, quietest material. Placing *#2* first has the piece begin in repetitive, but meditative fashion. Its most non-repetitive material will

make up the middle of the piece, and obsessive repetition will have the last word. Additionally, although both movements contain slow and fast music, the more schizophrenic nature of the first, in contrast with the more deliberate pacing of the second, will create a fast-slow (#1 to #2) or slow-fast impression (#2 to #1), based on the ordering.

Two Grotesque Scenes synthesizes a variety of influences, mostly from experimental rock and serial/post-serial classical music, with a number of my own ideas. It is my hope that I have created a piece that is dramatic, exciting, and unique.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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