

minature form in electroacoustic  
and (instrumental) new music

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“Life is complicated. Get to the point.”

–Chicago Miniaturist Ensemble

## comparison of projects featuring miniature form and works of short duration

ACREQ – Concours int'l « électro-vidéo clips »	30–90 sec. → 2–3 min.	1991–96	annual project
empreintes DIGITALes – Électro clips (CD)	max. 3 min.	1990/96	one-time CD project
eD – Miniatures concrètes: Électro clips 2 (CD)	max. 3 min.	1998	one-time CD project
Concurso Internacional de Miniaturas Electroacústicas	2–5 min.	2003–09	annual project
CEC – DISContact! III (CD) "Electro Shorts"	max. 5 min.	2003	one-time CD project
Vox Novus – 60x60 Project	exactly 60 sec.	2003–	annual (more or less)
New York Miniaturist Ensemble	100 notes	2004–?	ongoing project (defunct)
Vancouver / Chicago Miniaturist Ensemble	100 notes	2007/08	
DEGEM – 90 Sekunde Wirklichkeit (CD)	about 90 sec.	2005	one-time curated CD
DAAD – Folkmar Hein's retirement concert	exactly 65 sec.	2009	one-time project
SC140 (Supercollider 140 char. of code per piece)	140 char. of text	2009	one-time project
Miso Music – "Sound Walk" in Música Viva	max. 5 min.	2010	one time project
Bozzini Quartet – À chacun sa miniature!	unspecified	2010	funding campaign
SFSound Group – Small Packages	"no longer than the longest webern movement"	2010	one-time project

# 1ST ATTEMPT AT DEFINING MINIATURE FORM

The following criteria are proposed for the definition of a work as a miniature. A work can be declared a miniature if it meets most or all of the following criteria:

1. is in many cases characterized by a **singular and reductive compositional idea** (in the sense of scope; it could in fact be quite complex sonically / musically);
2. **lacks development** of the kind that would necessitate or benefit from a large-scale form;
3. has a *relatively short duration* (*typically* under *approx.* 5 min.);
4. is a **single "movement"** form in the large majority of cases (however, it may also be further divided into subsections);
5. is a **"closed" form** and does not seem to require continuation.

# CATEGORIES OF MINIATURE FORM

- A) **compressed models of traditional forms**
- B) **étude de l'objet** (study of the object)
- C) **process**
- D) **narrative**
- E) **snapshot**
- F) **action** (instrumental only)

# SUBCATEGORIES OF MINIATURE FORM

## **A) compressed models of traditional forms**

This category is for works that fundamentally have no different a form than if they were substantially longer. These “works of short duration” are however more concise in their approach, they “get to the point” much quicker and with significantly less elaborate development than would be found in a more expansive setting.

# SUBCATEGORIES OF MINIATURE FORM

## B) étude de l'objet (study of the object)

Focused on a single “material” which constitutes the primary focus of the piece. The material is present throughout the work and (typically) remains clearly within the foreground.

The subject of the étude can be:

- a sound source or sound object
- a texture
- a rhythmic cell or meter
- a technique

# SUBCATEGORIES OF MINIATURE FORM

## C) process

The process underpinning this form may or may not be perceptible by the listener upon audition and may in fact have a much more substantial duration than works in other miniature categories.

The process can be:

- algorithmic (programming) –
- a closed (compositional) system – e.g. all variations of a group in all orders
- situational – inherently limited by the object / performance technique
- teleological – moves from one state to another

# SUBCATEGORIES OF MINIATURE FORM

## D) narrative

The sound is meant to underscore, support or even reflect or represent the dramatic content and flow or development of some form of narrative. The narrative is not necessarily based on or around a (composed or oral) story or on a sequence of events that could be represented in text; it can also explore the sonic characteristics and identity of a place, or of an environment, real or imagined.

The narrative can be based on or around:

- a soundscape or soundwalk
- a short story or anecdote
- a text
- an “inner world”
- cinematic imagery

# SUBCATEGORIES OF MINIATURE FORM

## E) snapshot

A singular sound or performative object is played only once in the piece, “framed”, cropped, given “relief” by other sounds, fragments and sound objects. In opposition to the *étude de l’objet* category, here the “subject” is usually played once; or, if repeated, will be “identical” to the first iteration, in contrast to the *étude* form.

## F) action

Restricted to instrumental music. Performers use various sound objects, including (or not) their instrument. There is visibly a lot of “action” made by the performer(s) but this does not necessarily mean there is a dramaturgy in the theatrical sense. Seeing the actions performed is essential to the experience, even in cases where with only the audio, the listener has the impression of a “complete” piece.

## TRADITIONAL (WORK OF SHORT DURATION)



Nous sommes heureux de... (1992 / 0:57)

CD: La mécanique des ruptures [empreintes DIGITALEs 1994]

**Gilles Gobeil** (Canada \*1954)

<http://newmusicnotation.com/gobeil>

Finalist in 1991 in ACREQ's 2nd international Electroclips competition.

# TRADITIONAL (WORK OF SHORT DURATION)



DUO (1997–98 / 2:43)

CD: Cache 2000 [CEC 2001]

jef chippewa (Canada \*1969)

<http://newmusicnotation.com/chippewa>

"a screaming, ripping, convulsive, thrashing, cuddly, contorted, thrusting, tender, grinding, oozing discharge of multiple orgasms shared by an aries analogue modular synth and an alto sax – an epic electroacoustic hardlove story in condensed form"

## ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET – SOUND SOURCE



Dripsody: An Étude for Variable Speed Recorder  
[mono version] (1955 / 1:28)

Hugh Le Caine (Canada, 1914–1977)

<http://www.hughlecaine.com>

Le Caine's first project for his new Multi-track (formally known as the Special Purpose Tape Recorder), *Dripsody* was composed in one night using a recording of a drop of water falling into a bucket, re-recorded at different speeds to produce the pitches of a pentatonic scale.

# ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET – SOUND SOURCE



a glass is not a glass... (2010 / 18:55) [0:00–2:00]

CD: Cache 2010 [CEC 2011]

Adam Basanta (Canada)

<http://www.sfu.ca/~aba36>

"The sound of a common wine glass encapsulates both its banal everyday use as well as the inherent musicality of everyday objects. This ordinary sound, excited by various means, is treated with a metaphoric sonic magnifying lens, highlighting its various characteristics: attack and resonance, harmonicity and inharmonicity, rhythm and texture."

# ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET – SOUND SOURCE



Electro Miniature (2001 / 2:38)

Simon Steen-Anderson (Denmark, 1976)

<http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk>

The sound of a bow ricochet followed by a transition from *ordinario* to extreme pressure with crescendo is the basic material the entire piece is built on. The processed sounds mimic not only these clichéd new music string performance techniques but also the deconstruction of sound (source) into fragmented elements for further exploration commonly found in electroacoustic and (instrumental) new music.

# ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET – TEXTURE

♪ {LocalOut.ar(a=CombN.ar(BPF.ar(LocalIn.ar(2)\*  
7.5+Saw.ar([32,33],0.2),2\*\*LFNoise0.kr(4/3,4)\*  
300,0.1).distort,2,2,40));a}.play//#supercollider

(2009 / 4:15) [0:00–1:40]

project: Supercollider140

<http://supercollider.sourceforge.net/sc140>

Nathaniel Virgo

[ no prognote available ]

# ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET — TEXTURE

♪ `play{2.collect{RecordBuf.ar(Limiter.ar(HPF.ar  
(Convolution2.ar(k=Crackle.ar(l=Line.kr(1,2,90)),  
b=LocalBuf(2048),Dust.kr(4)),8)+k)*(2-l),b)}}}`

(2009 / 1:30)

project: Supercollider140

<http://supercollider.sourceforge.net/sc140>

Sciss

[ no prognote available ]

# ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET — RHYTHM



Mambo à la Braque (1990 / 3:02)

CD: Électro-clips [empreintes DIGITALEs 1990/96]

Javier Álvarez (Mexico \*1956)

<http://www.temazcal.co.uk>

"Short musical segments, all of which came from different recordings of a very well known mambo – Caballo Negro (Black Horse) by the King of mambo, Cuban composer Damaso Perez Prado, are reassembled as a sound mosaic using other clearly dissimilar sounds to 'glue' them in time. This is "cubist" music, a new reinvented mambo, made out of 'mambo snippets'."

# ÉTUDE DE L'OBJET — RHYTHM



17 miniatures (2012 / 25:00) —

"04: reiterations" (1:22)

for three performers playing flutes, extended piano, drumset /  
percussion, and several dozen objects

jef chippewa (Canada \*1969)

this piece is built of eight overlapping figures, each containing five decelerating reiterations of the same sound. all start pppp and four of the figures (claves, snare drum, heavily dampened piano, picked piano string) crescendo to as loud as possible while the others (triangle, ride, bass drum, piano harmonic) remain at pppp throughout. a transition from multi-sound texture to individual sounds. [for compositional reasons, the last ride and dampened piano notes were omitted]

# PROCESS – ALGORITHM (PROGRAMMING)

♪ {Splay.ar(Ringz.ar(Impulse.ar([2, 1, 4], [0.1, 0.11, 0.12]), [0.1, 0.1, 0.5])) \* EnvGen.kr(Env([1, 1, 0], [120, 10]), doneAction: 2)}.play

(2009 / 2:10 [?])

project: Supercollider140

LFSaw

[ no prognote available ]

# PROCESS – CLOSED SYSTEM



17 miniatures (2012 / 25:00) —

"17: chord" (3:45) [2:00–3:45]

for three performers playing flutes, extended piano, drumset/  
percussion, and several dozen objects

jef chippewa (Canada \*1969)

[ no prognote available ]

# PROCESS – SITUATIONAL



this is for real (2004 / 1:30)

CD: 90 Sekunden Wirklichkeit [DEGEM 2005]

Bernhard Gál (Austria \*1971)

<http://www.bernhardgal.com>

[EN] "it sounds pretty familiar, but is it really what it sounds like? and would it sound different, if it was really real [or] not really real? by the way, these are just 52 real seconds, which were later on time-stretched into ninety seconds. really. for real."

[DE] "es klingt recht vertraut, aber ist es auch wirklich das, wonach es klingt? und würde es anders klingen, wenn es wirklich echt bzw. nicht wirklich echt wäre? übrigens sind es nur 52 wirkliche sekunden, die im nach hinein auf neunzig sekunden „zeitlich auseinandergezogen“ wurden. echt. wirklich."

# PROCESS – SITUATIONAL



in nomine (2004 / 5:00) — iii [3:43–5:00]

for flute, oboe, clarinet, piano, percussion, violin, viola and cello

jef chippewa (Canada \*1969)

The durations in the last part of the 3rd section of *in nomine* are defined by the inherent limitations of the sound objects and instruments: the duration of the sustained chord is as long as the oboist can hold the note (without recourse to circular breathing); the flutist grates one entire carrot rapidly while the pianist cuts out (individually) all the letters of the alphabet written on a large sheet of thick construction paper.

# PROCESS – TELEOLOGICAL



< (2003 / ca. 11:00)

for tape and ca. 10 (different) small loudspeakers

**Alexander Grebtschenko (Bulgaria \*1975)**

The tape part is an extremely dense mix that is sent in mono to all loudspeakers at an equal level. The piece begins with the faders at infinity and, over the course of the piece, the faders are all brought up very slowly. Gradually, each of the speakers begins to distort and eventually the speaker cones rip – individually, due to the different qualities of the speakers. At the end, the speakers produce only noise that vaguely resembles the materials actually recorded on the tape.

[ the title is pronounced "kleiner als" (less than) ]

# NARRATIVE – SOUNDSCAPE (URBAN)



## Ruins of a Factory (3:45)

CD: Finalists of the 2007 Concurso de Miniaturas

Grzegorz Pieniek (Poland \*1963)

<http://www.myspace.com/grzegorzpieniek>

"This piece was inspired by the post-industrial landscape of Lodz, a city often referred to as 'Polish Manchester'. Over the centuries, the city was the heart of the Polish textile industry. Nowadays, many old factories are abandoned and deteriorating, becoming a gloomy realm of rusty machines and dust. Visiting such places gives a strong impression that the spirit of the factories is still alive. Sometimes the wind blowing through the hollow halls gives the impression that the machines are still running."

## NARRATIVE – SOUNDSCAPE (SOCIAL)



Hockey Night in Opera (1995? / 2:27) [0:52–2:27]

CD: DISContact! II [CEC 1995]

Egils Bebris (Canada)

"A soundwalk through the classical concert hall and the sports temple."

# NARRATIVE – SOUNDSCAPE (ABSTRACT MIXED)



Paysage automatique (2010 / 5:40)

Émilie Payeur (Canada \*1986)

<http://www.myspace.com/emiliepayeur>

[EN] "A surrealist stroll through the labyrinth of an automatic landscape, whose substance is built through redundant renewal. An automated soundwalk...."

[FR] "Promenade surréaliste dans les dédales d'un paysage automatique dont la constance consiste en un renouvellement redondant. Promenade automatique..."

# NARRATIVE – SHORT STORY / ANECDOTAL



Summer BBQ (2006 / 1:19)

CD: Deep Wireless 5 [NAISA 2008]

Wendy Atkinson (Canada)

"Spoken word is combined with eBow on electric bass to tell the true story of a family dinner gone wrong."

# NARRATIVE – SHORT STORY / ANECDOTAL + PROCESS – ALGORITHMIC



I Beat John Sobol at Pool Last Night (1995? / 3:03)

CD: DISContact! II [CEC 1995]

Steve Heimbecker (Canada)

*"I Beat John Sobol... is in a style of composition (Word Music) where the computer transcribes letters, words and sentences into musical notation which allows the author of any text to be the musical composer as well. The text is the music."*

The music is generated algorithmically (knowledge-based system) from the text of the short story; the narrative form is dominant but the algorithmic process is also essential to the piece.

# NARRATIVE — BUILT AROUND TEXT



1+5 (2006 / 3:00), mvmt. IV [0:27 (1:50–2:33)]

for slam poet, alto flute, viola, cello, piano and drumset

jef chippewa (Canada \*1969)

<http://newmusicnotation.com/chippewa>

"strictly speaking, there is nothing false in art, only stages of consciousness of oneself: only that which is not self-reflective is false."

—mathias spahlinger, „wirklichkeit des bewußtseins und wirklichkeit für das bewußtseins."

## NARRATIVE – “INNER WORLD”



Diptych: I – Auxferd Nightburr'd November 2  
a.m.; II – Our Child (1984–88 / 2:58)

CD: DISContact! II [CEC 1995]

Daniel Feist (Canada, 1957–2005)

“One old bird in the middle of the night  
Singing and singing and singing  
Thinks the streetlamp's the sun  
Crazy old bird. Old disconnected bird  
Hasn't he heard  
Nobody's Listening”

# NARRATIVE (CINEMATIC / IMAGERY)



Entre les deux rives du printemps

(2006 / 18:08 or 4:00) [0:00–2:30]

CD: Trois songes [empreintes DIGITales 2008], full version

CD: Finalists of the 2007 Concurso de Miniaturas, miniature

**Gilles Gobeil** (Canada \*1954)

<http://newmusicnotation.com/gobeil>

[Between the Two Banks of Spring] Freely adapted from *Paradise* (Part 3 of *The Divine Comedy*) by Dante (1265–1321). A poem filled with speed, energy and pure light, but also bearing a few reminiscences of earthly mistakes.

# SNAPSHOT



17 miniatures (2011) – "10: clip gong"

for three performers playing flutes, extended piano, drumset/  
percussion, and several dozen objects

jef chippewa