

Shel(I)ter

A series for ensemble and electronics

Clara Maïda

2009-10

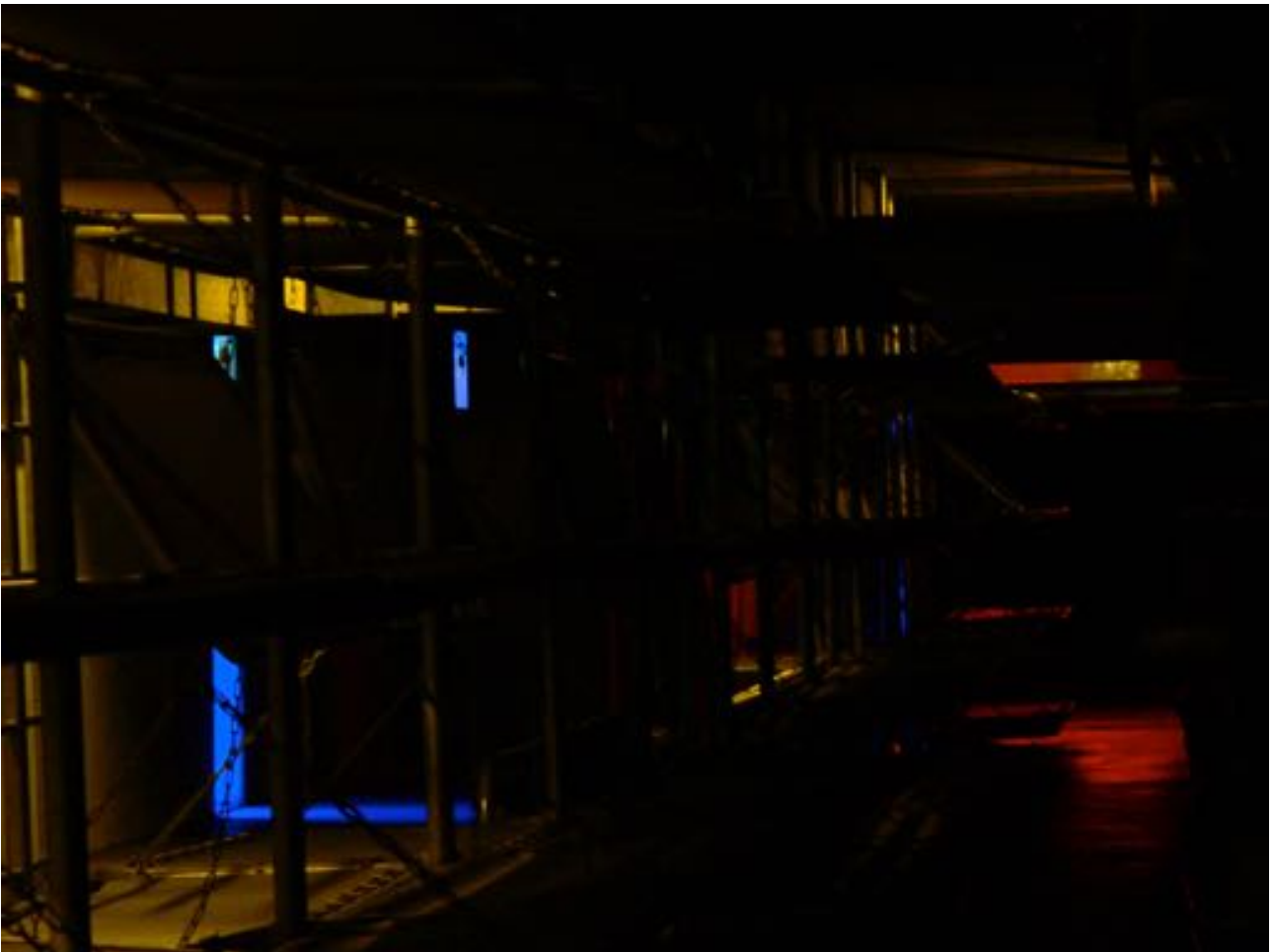


Photo: Atomic bunker, Kurfürstendamm, Berlin © Clara Maïda, 2004

Shel(I)ter

A series for ensemble and electronics

CLARA MAÏDA - DAAD PORTRAIT-CONCERT

Co-production: BERLINER KÜNSTLERPROGRAMM of the DAAD/*Ultraschall* festival
(with the support of IMPULS NEUE MUSIK)

Clara Maïda

1 – Shel(I)ter - später... () ...Winter (p.3)

for clarinet, bassoon, cello, three percussions and electronics
(14'40)

World premiere on May 16, 2009. *Les Musiques* festival (GMEM, Marseille, FR)

Commissioned by the FRENCH MINISTRY OF CULTURE and the GMEM

Residency at the GMEM - Realization of the live electronics: Charles BASCOU (Marseille, FR)

and at the E-STUDIO of the TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT - Realization of the fixed electronic part (Berlin, DE)

LES PERCUSSIONS DE STRASBOURG and NOUVEL ENSEMBLE MODERNE - Conducted by Lorraine VAILLANCOURT
Technical processing: GMEM

2 – Shel(I)ter - unter... () ...Gitter (p.4)

for clarinet, bassoon, cello, three percussions and electronics
(14'45)

World premiere on January 30, 2010. CLARA MAÏDA - DAAD PORTRAIT-CONCERT, *Ultraschall* festival (Berlin, DE)

Residency at the ELECTRONIC STUDIO of the TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT (Berlin, DE)

L'ITINÉRAIRE ensemble - Conducted by Jean DERoyer - Technical processing: Sébastien NAVES and Franck ROSSI

3 & 4 – Shel(I)ter - seither... () ...Splitter & hinter... () ...Eiter (p.5)

A piece in two parts for eleven amplified instruments
12'04

KOMPOSITIONSPREIS DER LANDESHAUPTSTADT STUTTGART 2011 (DE) - 1st Prize

World premiere on January 30, 2010. CLARA MAÏDA - DAAD PORTRAIT-CONCERT, *Ultraschall* festival (Berlin, DE)

Commissioned by the FRENCH MINISTRY OF CULTURE and L'ITINÉRAIRE ensemble

L'ITINÉRAIRE ensemble - Conducted by Jean DERoyer - Technical processing: Sébastien NAVES

Shel(I)ter is a series of four pieces which refers to a very specific space, one of the atomic shelters in Berlin.

The reduplication of the letter "I" in the title condenses the words "shell" and "shelter", which both evoke the attempt to protect the body against any aggression. But "shell" also designates a weapon. So the double polarization of this word underlines how absurd Human behaviour is when objects of massive destruction and objects of "massive protection" are built at the same time.

Placed inside brackets, this redoubled "I" indicates both a stop and a junction or the transformation of a repeated element, a break away, a mutation of the structure of a given material or situation, as well as a separation or imprisonment, the self-destructive perverse effect that any protection is also likely to induce when it leads to isolation.

In *Shel(I)ter*, we can talk of "nanomusic" (in reference to nanosciences which observe and manipulate objects on the atomic scale), since this mobility and this transformation of the properties of the musical fabric result from microprocesses that act on the sound particles, generate variations of masses, forms and paths, but also resistances and persistences. The atomic dimension thus reminds us that everything is particle, everything is atom, the sound field being considered only as one of the possibilities of the infinite field of matter.

1st part: **Shel(l)ter - später... () ...Winter**

for clarinet, bassoon, cello, three percussions and electronics
(14'40)

In this first piece of the series, the sub-title *später... () ...Winter* - which means in German "later... () ...winter" - alludes to the hypothesis of a nuclear winter which would follow the explosion of several bombs.

According to the modelling processes proposed by scientists, in such a situation, large quantities of smoke and ashes, generated by the combustion of plastics and fuel, would be released in the earthly atmosphere and would induce this kind of climatic condition. The formation of a layer of particles would greatly reduce the solar radiance. Thick black clouds would form and absorb the light thus inducing extremely cold weather conditions.

The piece is articulated around this dialectic between, on the one hand, an extreme disruption of the musical matter, phenomena which mimic the nuclear fusion, fission or chain reaction, and on the other hand - particularly with electronics -, an elastic coagulation of sound masses which slide as lava flows. These slides can evoke unsteady layers described by geology (like during a ground collapse, for instance) as well as a state of psychic trauma experienced as a kind of temporal suspension, a freezing of mental faculties or the impression of an inner upheaval.

Nuclear fission is the phenomenon by which a big nucleus of an atom disintegrates into several smaller fragments, while the emission of neutrons releases a great deal of energy.

In a nuclear chain reaction, each neutron emitted during the fission of an atomic nucleus can provoke in turn the fission of another nucleus, and this process will be able to multiply. An A bomb is designed deliberately to trigger a nuclear chain reaction.

Therefore, the musical writing is "atomic". It results from an assembling of infinitely small particles, which form compact objects. While energy is accumulating, these objects explode in sound space and disseminate their components.

The writing is also "genetic". The disruptions induced in matter are reminiscent of those described on the chromosomal level, with the possibility of errors of replication, breaks, permutations of microelements. All these small modifications thus generate distortions and new (or mutant) forms.

Clara Maïda, November 2010

2nd part: **Shel(l)ter - unter... () ...Gitter**

for clarinet, bassoon, cello, three percussions and electronics
(14'45)

The second piece of the series refers more directly to this strange place that an atomic shelter is.

The sub-title *unter... () ...Gitter* - which means in German "underneath... () ... metal grate" - evokes, on the one hand, the subterranean aspect of the place which can be related to a cellar or even a vault, for this descent down the town can give one the impression to be buried.

On the other hand, the word "Gitter" accounts for the oppressive sensation that a closed space can induce. The opacity of walls, the cut with the outside and the silence would thus give rise to a discomfort or an anguish all the more acute as the duration of the stay would be unknown in the case of an atomic catastrophe.

The protective function would then be of secondary importance and the impossibility to leave the shelter would be experienced as an imprisonment.

In this piece, the harmonic structure relies on four aggregates, four bounds which limit space. Four series of rhythmical processes played by the wood percussions build some kinds of blocks located between various sequences of the piece which are hatched. Each time a development of the material is attempted, it is interrupted as if an obstacle were impassable. Short sound situations are alternately stated, but they cannot carry on their trajectory. They return, but their briefness persists because of the powerlessness to clear the way for an opening.

The musical speech is confronted with this inexorable dimension of confinement which generates a long moan. A kind of panic-stricken monologue expresses ever more the difficulty of existing in such an environment, the feeling of absurdity and the proximity of madness which would be the only possible outburst outside the framework.

The electronic sequences punctuate the piece with instants in which the distorted memory of a lost world seems to emerge fleetingly. But the absence of perspective revives in the conclusion the invasive presence of a sound force, static and pulsating, close to these automatic and stiff gestures made by an individual when he has given up all hope.

Clara Maïda, November 2010

3rd and 4th parts:

Shel(l)ter - seither... () ...Splitter & hinter... () ...Eiter

A piece in two parts
for amplified flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, horn, percussion,
violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello and double bass
(12'04)

This last piece of the series is made up of two parts. It evokes the pulverization of objects and bodies which follow the explosion of an atomic bomb and the disruptions that radioactive emissions operate on organic matter.

In the first part, whose sub-title is *seither... () ...Splitter* - which means in German "since then... () ... splinter" - the musical elements which had been used in the previous works are torn to pieces. It is the explosion of a world, and jagged fragments fly across sound space in all directions.

Sound objects have lost all cohesion, all polarity. Their scraps collide and suffer numerous diffractions towards a multiplicity of trajectories. We are in a situation of crash and disorder. A falling movement regularly returns and mimics at the same time the radioactive dust fallout and the collapse of what used to be.

I had in mind the dynamic image of the shock wave and the huge blast, the fireball which is formed, the mushroom cloud which spreads out in waves, quickly ascending with a very important emission of thermal energy and radiations before it releases its rain of particles.

The second part *hinter... () ...Eiter* - which means in German "behind... () ... pus" - depicts the deterioration of matter, the affection of flesh, scars and blisters, the decomposition and the putrefaction of bodies. It is the world of deliquescence which induces the mutation or the destruction of shapes.

In some sequences in which the musical material has rarefied, wind instruments emerge at the heart of grief (mainly the oboe, clarinet, trumpet and horn). They produce multiphonic sounds close to a death rattle and a moan. They give voice to the survivors, express their suffering and pay tribute to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

These voices express at the same time the psychic trauma and the body injuries. Their monstrous connotation refers to organic ravages as well as human barbarity.

The shapeless sonorities of the percussive sequences (the skins rubbed with a super ball stick) or the final texture, which superimposes elastic glissandi of the strings, remind us that, beyond the immediate lesions of the organism caused by the explosion, the irradiation can imprint invisible and extremely deep modifications in the cellular tissue. These mutagenic effects will occur in abnormalities affecting the descendants.

Clara Maïda, November 2010