

www

A series for string quartet
(writing of the series in progress)

Clara Maïda

2004-13



Photo: Reflected strings, New York City - © Clara Maïda, 2012

www

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1- ...who holds the strings... (p.3)

for string quartet
(8'10)

World premiere on March 17 and 18, 2004. Léonard de Vinci Opera, *Les trente ans du quatuor Arditti* (Rouen, FR)

ARDITTI QUARTET

2- ..., das spinnt... (p.4)

for amplified string quartet
(9'50)

World premiere on November 15, 2013. *Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival* (UK)

Commissioned by the FRENCH MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION and ARDITTI QUARTET

ARDITTI QUARTET

A piece dedicated to Irvine ARDITTI and ARDITTI QUARTET

www, as anyone knows, indicates the three-letter access to the Internet, the initials of the World Wide Web.

This notion of network is at the heart of the 21st Century. It permeates ever more our way of apprehending the world and our daily life, on the individual level as well as on the social one. The Internet is omnipresent in our lives and its name, derived from the word "net" reminds us that it is a reticular structure with very tight interconnections.

Music can be considered as an ensemble of systemic potentialities such as the living, cerebral, psychic or computer systems. Like those, it is made of graphs of evolutional signs, lines of forces and diagrams of flux. The sound network can be formed of sub-networks which are connected together and whose density varies from a loose meshing to a maximal threshold of concentration. A whole unsteady geology appears, for the different strata can undergo constant rearrangements, with back-and-forth movements between a texture and a sound object.

In *www*, the string quartet is therefore conceived as a kind of cartography of sound trajectories. The chains of processes create a dynamic and complex system with polydirectional vectorizations, with very mobile and ephemeral anchoring points. Thus, the whole texture is moving and very elastic. The sound ramifications develop within a proliferating network.

1st part: **...who holds the strings...**

for string quartet
(8'10)

...who holds the strings... - which was the second part of the triptych for four instruments *Order of release, border of relish* - is the first part of *www*. This quartet is thus located at the crossroads of two series. It is a meeting point between lines (the series) which cross through a network of pieces.

The title of the piece plays on the word "strings" (which both refers to a piece of string and to the writing for string instruments) and the expression "the one who holds the strings" which means "the one who holds the reins", or "the one who pulls the strings".

In this piece, no one holds the strings. The string quartet is conceived as a global entity, a kind of object which moves alone, driven by its own mechanics. The strings are tangled in a mobile and fragile architecture made of perpetually transforming microscopic elements, which never have any fixed location and whose articulation suffers constant alterations.

Tears appear, new links are tied then torn again.

Various forces such as attraction, repulsion, combination, phagocytosis, govern the objects, putting them face-to-face, and thus create an ever temporary morphology.

All the sound objects of the piece present a recurrent specificity. They overturn around a pivot, from left to right or up and down.

This oscillating gesture around an axis also governs the harmonic distortions (some chords are built in a reversed mirror-like relationship with the original chord), the melodic structures (repeated motifs around a pivot pitch), the melodic ascending-descending or descending-ascending curves around a horizontal axis, the registers (rocking motions between low and high zones of pitches), the dynamics (crescendo-decrescendo or inversely), as well as the swinging system between two musical situations.

An antagonism between the musical objects or situations can appear. A situation, with its persistence, can drive out another.

The articulation of very small and abstract objects, which are more principles of objects than objects (a simple gesture, the pivot around an axis, the rocking motion) raises the question of representation.

What can be perceptible when this representation is refused or impossible? What can be the variations of one same gesture, in which new perspectives can one make them appear? An envelope, a movement... Something runs along the sounds, at the border of what can be represented.

It is the insistence of the gesture that helps us to mark it out in a temporal course and attempts to draw the vague outlines of an invisible and inaudible real.

Clara Maïda, March 2004

2nd part: ..., **das spinnt...**

for amplified string quartet
(9'50)

A piece dedicated to Irvine ARDITTI and ARDITTI QUARTET

..., *das spinnt...* is the second piece of the series *www*, these three letters indicating, as everyone knows, the access to the Internet, the initials of the World Wide Web.

As in the first piece of the series, *...who holds the strings...*, the title alludes to a network of threads.

The German word "spinnen" refers to the spinning action (to spin the cobweb, for the spider).

..., *das spinnt...* is an incomplete sentence, with no grammatical subject, which can be translated as "...which weaves..." or as "...which spins a web...". And the web can also be the Web, i.e. a ramified space with no point of centralization.

The title is based on the double meaning of the word "spinnen" which evokes at the same time this weaving of threads and, in a more colloquial use, the reproach addressed to a person who acts in an extravagant way, with a kind of slight madness. "Du spinnst!" corresponds to: "Are you crazy!". Besides, in French, the expression "avoir une araignée au plafond" (literally, to have a spider on the ceiling) also means "to be mad". And the English word "spin", which both refers to a revolving motion and the spider's work, indicates in quantum physics the intrinsic kinetic momentum of particles.

One can see that a network - a semantic one, this time - goes across different languages. The "spider on the ceiling" converges toward "spinnen" with the idea of craziness in the background, to whatever degree of expression or intensity, and towards the *spin* of particles.

The musical writing works its way between the web (with both meanings of the term), the psychic turbulences and those of matter, or the propagation of sound waves.

As a matter of fact, with this repetition of a same letter in a movement which could last forever, this symbol *www* visually evokes a waveform and reminds us that any matter, according to the very poetic String Theory developed by modern physics (even though it is still to be verified), might be not made of particles but of invisible strings which vibrate with different frequencies.

In the piece, all these filaments never stop intertwining and following their path, creating an extremely kinetic sound diagram crossed by searing intensities. In this very dense and elastic network, the connections circulate from one instrument to the other. The trajectories weave an ensemble of traces in all directions, thus creating ever more disordered, ever crazier extensions, proliferations, with numerous junctions and with a complex temporality.

The tangle unravels endlessly, except for a few anchor points that get stuck from time to time on a kind of circular and repetitive mechanical device, in particular the one concluding the piece.

Clara Maïda, November 2013