



Sunday, March 29, 2015  
Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag  
**Colloquium The Age of Boulez**

## **The Parisian Catalogue : a tonneau de fête for Pierre Boulez**

Etty Mulder

For the sake of common ideas on the research of Pierre Boulez, as well as the discussion between our foundation and the Parisian Musée de la Musique, I want to make a statement on the text of the catalogue of the Exposition that was opened on March 17th in the new Philharmonie.

A catalogue has to be conceived as an autonomous document, an issue in itself. Therefore, my statement of today surely will be elaborated in relation to further visits to the exposition that will last till June 28th. Today, in this conference, first of all I want to discuss some aspects of the initiative as such as well as my first impressions of the catalogue.

Last year already we could have the impression that there was no any doubt that Pierre Boulez, on the occasion of his nineteenth birthday had to be celebrated by the Cité de la Musique as the ultimate protagonist of modernism, of modern arts, modern philosophy in the Western world.

You could hear fans of Impressive names sounding during the discussions around La Vilette – large numbers of connections around Boulez were echoing. Francis Bacon, Michaux, Joyce, Kafka, Giacometti, Mondriaan, Montaigne, Foucault, De Kooning, Proust, Dubuffet, Albert Diato, Nicolas De Staël, Genet, Artaud, Masson, Hamlet, René Char, Kandinsky, Miller, Bonnard, Webern, Bob Wilson, Alban Berg, Emily Dickinson etc.. Next to Boulez in the old Philharmonie 2, David Bowie was announced to be celebrated in the Philharmonie 1, so the big stars from the old and new world should lighten together on the sky of La Cité, crossing over the various genres of music .

To me the most fascinating connection without doubt was the one between Pierre Boulez and Francis Bacon, who – maybe- never met: If they met, at least one of the two was too drunk to remember a real meeting. But never mind: in the opinion of the director of the exposition, “directeur d’ ouvrage” of the catalogue, Sarah Barbedette, there will be a day on which the works of Bacon and Boulez start echoing each other just as, according to Boulez, happened to Cézanne and Debussy.... And even though the line would be very thin, there would be a moment in which it were suggested that it could be stronger ! So far the catalogue.

This catalogue has no English or German translation, so forgive me if I am paraphrasing the fantasies too much. In fact it is okay to add personal fantasies on works of art to an exhibition, even if you are an organizer without historical arguments.

There is, in fact, rather much room for suggestion and fantasy among the names in the catalogue. You could for instance write a separate book on Pierre Boulez and Nicolas De Staël, as the director of this catalogue happened to do. She did so because Nicolas de Staël visited two concerts, march 1955 of Boulez program *Le Domaine Musical*. She doesn't mention Boulez' own text on De Staël, the bibliographical aspects and referential responsibilities in the book as well as the catalogue, certainly are not the strongest side of the work. This book by Barbedette is entitled *Poétique du Concert* [Ed. Fayard, 2014] and it shows the red painting [of the concert] of De Staël on the cover. It was already in 2014 when the striking red of De Staël, was undeniably doomed to become the LOGO for the exposition and catalogue of 2015. Indeed here we are again: De Staël, his *Poétique du concert*, as well as his *L'Étude d' orchestre*, the striking red of the commissaire de l' exposition herself.

During the year 2014, the form of the exhibition was announced in a solemn way, its purpose would be to be totally new as Boulez himself used to have this magical aura of continuous renewal. There should be no system, no chronology, no logic, one should follow free associations, juxtapositions, focalizations, themes, ideas, and avoid any form of rigidity or discipline. Thirty-five very short topics are presented in a strange combination of enigmatic titles. Here is an impression: *Recommencer par le commencement/ Avignon 1947/ La famille d'élection/ Au temps des Women/ L'oeil intellectuel de la délire/ Boulez face à Boulez/ La fontaine et les fondations/ Le paradoxe pédagogique / Au palais des glaces*, etc. etc. Some compositions are also in the list: *Sur Incises, Le Marteau sans Maître, Wozzeck, Répons*. Several important names are in the list too: Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Nicolas de Staël, Mallarmé, Stravinsky, Vieira da Silva, Frank Gehry, etc. etc. Some of the authors mentioned are well-known Boulez-specialists.

These thirty-five small articles however are composed without connecting structure. The number of facts and notes obviously had to be limited. The illustrations and photographs are extremely beautiful, and there are too many of them.

The creative person who, in a structural sense, is totally absent in the book is Pierre Boulez the writer on music and other arts, the author on musical and artistic themes and theories. Boulez the thinker, Boulez the philosopher, Boulez the theorist of art. The item has not been thematized in itself. Of course "en passant" we come across a quotation from an article or even a book [*Penser la Musique aujourd'hui*], but there is no word of reflection on the impressive interdisciplinary genius - the writer-personality Pierre Boulez. Voilà Boulez without his texts. The name of the editor of Boulez, Christian Bourgois Editeur, is not in the list of names. There is no list of Boulez' publications.

Obviously no musicologist, art historian or art theoretician has been involved in the preparation of the catalogue. Surely, I suppose, there must have been an external musicological and professional control as to the chronological division en marge of the catalogue. The bibliographical part [there many different kinds of references in the texts] indeed is a rather problematic part of the book.

La Cité de la Musique has the characteristics of a normal provincial village. In fact it should not surprise us that its population aimed to present to us above all a very richly documented and very beautifully illustrated French book on an extremely French Pierre Boulez as a rather vague post-modern personality, conform la mode and with help of the glamour and noise of David Bowie.

Pierre Boulez himself, as we know him as a cosmopolitan, travelled around the world as a famous conductor and, by the way, exiled himself from France to South Germany, to live in the city of Baden–Baden, where last January 18th, at the opening of the Boulez-festivities, he was made its citizen of honour. We can be sure that Boulez, with his many orchestras and rehearsals, indeed spoke more English or German in the course of the years than any other French conductor ever did.

Coming to a more detailed description of the outside of the catalogue we now see on its cover the undeniable image of a conductor. It shows a very beautiful picture of Pierre Boulez, looking like a bird that is about to fly towards the sky. The picture was made in 1970 in Bayreuth by Friedrich Lauterwasser. Looking at this beautiful image we have to realize however that the conductor is **on** the book, but this conductor is not really **in** the book, except in some passages on the centenary of The Ring in 1970. In this catalogue the interdisciplinary creative identity has not been presented in an analytical way, in fact Boulez could have any thinkable profession or identity, he could even be a pop-singer, you only have to be prepared that everything is possible. Feel free! And this, ten years ago was called indeed a postmodern situation. {Indeed, however we couldn't know this already this moment of our colloquium and : in the exposition some of his music – I shall discuss this later on-should be presented in the context of a pop-music light-show: the Sonata nr. 2, Pli selon pli} In official modern culture this is called: *cross over*. To get informations about Boulez' development as a conductor, his ideas about concert-programmes and interpretations you will have to read other books.

What is special about the text is its form. It is a mosaic without pictures or images. The choice has been to avoid integration and look for huge accumulations. This format inspired me to look up the French word for the Dutch "grabbelton": tonneau de fête, in English: lucky-bag.

After some introductions by Eric de Visscher, Laurent Bayle, Yves Bonnefoy - ISarah Barbedette writes her introduction in the article Différentes façons d' être voyant – different ways to be visionary. She is repeating titles, names of persons and works, evoking a whole world for persons who know them, jeux de mots, labyrinths. I would call this: créer un monde par titres. Or in English: a fetishism

of names. It is her purpose to evoke, by this book, a new project on Boulez to stimulate him, engage him to participate. The idea has been formulated in a short acknowledgement to Pierre Boulez that seems to anticipate on his willingness to do so and to be ready to join her, who has taken the position of a leading Boulez-personality: “this is an exposition that could arouse him to consider it as the description of a new project” [*le principe d’une telle exposition avec ce mélange d’ouverture, de distance et de curiosité que peut susciter chez lui l’exposé d’un nouveau projet*].

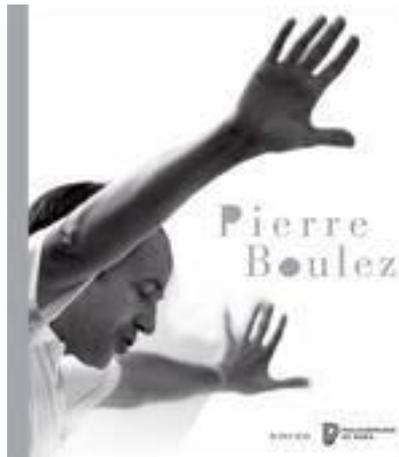
Reading the book does bring up the important question what could be the relationship between the catalogue and the exhibition in the Philharmonie. Has this relation been purposed as a complementary one, so that some issues of the exhibition are in the book while others are not? If this is the case this book is no catalogue.

Maybe it was meant as a neologism of some other kind of document that did not exist before. In fact the idea to write in a totally new form of language to communicate on Pierre Boulez could be an interesting initiative following his own artistic and creative aura of continuous renewal. Only a very gifted person maybe could take on such a project.

Of course there could have been a need to reduce the amount of materials in the catalogue: one has to make choices. In that case, the pretension should not have been so striking, not so explicit: *inscrire l’oeuvre dans l’histoire*. We must conclude that the personality of the great artist Boulez has been reduced to the format of this organization.



Nicolas de Staël, *étude d'orchestre*, 1955



Nicolas de Staël, Étude d'orchestre, 1955. Huile sur papier.

Catalogue d'exposition Pierre Boulez, Philharmonie de Paris

### Informations pratiques

- Exposition Pierre Boulez, jusqu'au 28 juin 2015.
- [Catalogue d'exposition : Pierre Boulez, éd. Actes sud.](#)
- Philharmonie de Paris, Cité de la Musique : 221, avenue Jean-Jaurès 75019 Paris
- Ouverture: du mardi au vendredi de 12h à 18h, le samedi et dimanche de 10h à 18h, fermeture le lundi.