

Pierre Boulez, Surrealist

Pierre Boulez's creative output has usually been studied from a music analytical perspective in the context of serialism, but I contend that the French literary and broader intellectual context was ultimately at least as important to the composer. While Boulez's extensive published writings rarely mention surrealism, David Walters writes in his unpublished thesis that «[Boulez's] tendency to hide his major sources of influence is a characteristic of his writings».¹ Key contemporary commentators on Boulez mention surrealism only in passing, but here I argue that surrealism had a crucial impact on Boulez in his formative years. Robert Piencikowski, in his preface to Stephen Walsh's translation of Boulez's *Relevés d'apprenti*, suggests that Boulez's polemical writing style is influenced by «certain surrealist pamphlets of the 1920s»,² presumably André Breton's two *Manifestes du surréalisme*. Moving beyond this focus on Boulez's writing – always a secondary activity for him – I will explore how creative work (not just theoretical and polemical writings) by authors such as Breton affected Boulez the creative artist.

«Pulvériser le son»: Boulez and Antonin Artaud

Towards the end of the fourth movement of Boulez's *Piano Sonata no. 2* (1948), we read the striking performance instruction «pulvériser le son», a term which encapsulates the overwhelming violent passion of the work. While Boulez tends to be pigeonholed as a cerebral composer, this work above all others shows that this coexists with extreme visceral energy. The work's title gives few clues to its content, and indeed in an interview Boulez said: «I choose as titles forms which have lost any real connotation».³ But where does the crushingly intense emotional mood of Boulez's sonata come from? The composer gives us

¹ DAVID WALTERS, *The Aesthetics of Pierre Boulez*, PhD dissertation, Durham University, 2003, p. 44; available at *Durham E-Theses Online*: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3093/> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

² ROBERT PIENCIKOWSKI, *Introduction*, in PIERRE BOULEZ, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. by Stephen Walsh, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, p. xviii (orig. ed. *Relevés d'apprenti*, ed. by Paule Thévenin, Paris, Seuil, 1966).

³ PIERRE BOULEZ - RICHARD MILLET (interviewer), *Prenons garde à la démagogie*, «Revue des deux mondes», January 2001, pp. 28-34: 31 («Je choisis pour titre des formes qui ont perdu toute connotation réelle»). Translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.

some pointers in his well-known article *Propositions*, written the same year as the *Sonata no. 2* and published in «Polyphonie». The principal topic of this article is rhythm in music, and it ends:

I have a personal reason for giving such an important place to the phenomenon of rhythm. I think that music should be a collective hysteria and magic, violently modern – along the lines of Antonin Artaud and not in the sense of a simple ethnographic reconstruction in the image of civilizations more or less remote from us.⁴

Rhythm, therefore, has magical properties, and it is impossible to read this passage without considering the central impact of Artaud on the young Boulez. Artaud used automatic writing to communicate feelings and the subconscious directly, and he was known for his travel reportage. He travelled to Mexico in 1936 on a lecture tour to promote surrealist writers, and during this visit he went on an expedition and participated in a voodoo ceremony which is narrated in *D'un voyage au pays des Tarahumaras* (1937).⁵ Surely Boulez's «collective hysteria and magic» specifically references Artaud's involvement in collective rituals; by extension, music should be seen as a performative, shared experience, with rhythm as the fundamental element bringing performer and public together.

Boulez attended a reading by Artaud for the first time in July 1947, an event described by Peter O'Hagan as a «decisive encounter in Boulez's development».⁶ It is likely that Boulez heard Artaud read *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*. For the performance of this work that was recorded by Radio France on 22-29 November 1947, Artaud's texts were read by the author and three others including Paule Thévenin, a close friend and later, his literary executor, who also became a close friend of Boulez (for instance, she edited the texts chosen for *Relevés d'apprenti*). Every account of Artaud's readings focuses on his distinct vocal performance style which encompassed sounds beyond speech, an issue Boulez himself addressed in an article which he significantly titled *Son et verbe*:

⁴ PIERRE BOULEZ, *Propositions*, «Polyphonie», 2 (1948), pp. 65-72, translated as *Proposals* in P. BOULEZ, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, cit., pp. 47-54: 54. This phrase is also cited in ROBERT WANGERMÉE, *André Souris et le complexe d'Orphée. Entre surréalisme et musique sérielle*, Liège, Mardaga, 1995, p. 274, source given as letter to André Souris of 6 November 1947: «par l'invention rythmique, il attend que la musique soit “ envoûtement et hystérie collectifs, violemment actuels, suivant la direction d'Antonin Artaud, et non pas une simple reconstitution ethnographique à l'image de civilisations plus ou moins éloignées de nous ”».

⁵ First published in «Nouvelle revue française», 287 (1937), pp. 232-247.

⁶ PETER O'HAGAN, *Pierre Boulez and the Piano. A Study in Style and Technique*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, p. 74. Also see BRICE TISSIER, *Pierre Boulez et le “Théâtre de la cruauté” d'Antonin Artaud. De “Pelléas” à “Rituel, in memoriam Bruno Maderna”*, «Intersections», XXVIII, 2 (2008), pp. 31-50.

I am not qualified to study Antonin Artaud's language thoroughly but I can find again in his writings the fundamental preoccupations of modern music; hearing him read his own texts, accompanying them with cries, noises, rhythms, has shown us how to create a fusion of sound and word, how to make the phoneme spurt out when the word can do no more; briefly, how to organize delirium.⁷

A revised version of this article, published in 1958 as *Son, verbe, synthèse*,⁸ significantly fails to mention Artaud's name, though the material cited above is otherwise almost identical; when looking back on his formative years, Boulez thus attempts to distance himself from the source of his inspiration.

Artaud had previously worked on an operatic project, *The One All-Along*, with Edgard Varèse⁹ and had discussed collaborating with André Jolivet, though neither of these plans resulted in a completed work. Boulez himself began a large-scale work entitled *Marges*, initially intended for voice and the six percussionists of Les Percussions de Strasbourg, which was to have been based on texts by Artaud and others.¹⁰ This piece went through several iterations from 1961 to 1968 but, like the Varèse and Jolivet projects, it too was eventually abandoned.

Boulez's new rhythmic language also derives, up to a point, from Olivier Messiaen and André Jolivet (they are both cited in *Propositions* but ultimately their rhythmic approaches are criticized for being «underlined by an avalanche of chords» in Messiaen and in the case of Jolivet, for his «empirical technique»¹¹). Most of all, this notion of «collective hysteria and magic» comes from surrealism as well as specifically from Artaud, and the last phrase strongly suggests that what James Clifford has termed «ethnographic surrealism» specifically stimulated Boulez: more about this later.

André Souris and Belgian Surrealism

Edward Campbell notes that Boulez had a number of contacts in the 1940s with figures associated with the surrealist movement, one of the most important being the Belgian composer and writer André Souris, whom he rightly terms «a key figure in Boulez's

⁷ P. BOULEZ, *Sound and Word*, in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, cit., pp. 39-43: 43.

⁸ Originally published as P. BOULEZ, *Son et verbe*, «Cahiers Renaud-Barrault», vol. 22-23 (1958), pp. 119-125, the article was later published in expanded form under the title *Son, verbe, synthèse* («Melos», XXV, 10 (1958), pp. 310-313) and translated by Martin Cooper in Id., *Orientations. Collected Writings*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, London, Faber, 1986, pp. 177-182.

⁹ Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Robert Desnos and Alejo Carpentier also worked on this libretto. Cf. LUCIE KAYAS, *André Jolivet*, Paris, Fayard, 2005, p. 111.

¹⁰ Cf. LUISA BASSETTO, *Marginalia, ou "l'opéra-fantôme" de Pierre Boulez*, in *Pierre Boulez. Techniques d'écriture et enjeux esthétiques*, ed. by Jean-Louis Leleu and Pascal Decroupet, Genève, Contrechamps, 2006, pp. 255-298.

¹¹ P. BOULEZ, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, cit., pp. 48-49.

early development».¹² Robert Wangermée says that the Russian émigré writer Boris de Schloezer drew Boulez to Souris' attention, having himself been introduced to the young composer by Pierre Souvtchinsky.¹³ Souris programmed Boulez's *Sonatine* for flute and piano in Brussels on 28 February 1947 (it was played by Herlin van Boterdael and Marcelle Mercenier) and was charged with the editorship of the new Paris journal «Polyphonie» in the spring of that year. It was Souris who commissioned the article *Propositions* from Boulez.¹⁴ André Souris was at the centre of Belgian surrealist circles, involved with the journal «Correspondance» which was founded in November 1924, one month after the publication of Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, and part of the Belgian surrealist group founded in September 1926 which also included E.L.T. Mesens, René Magritte, Paul Nougé and Camille Goemans. Mesens was a composer who was already known as a supporter of Erik Satie, and Souris changed his musical style from a Debussy-influenced language to one more reminiscent of Satie under the impact of his Belgian colleagues.

Boulez eventually met Souris in April 1947 in Brussels, when he was on tour playing the ondes Martenot for the Renaud-Barrault theatre company.¹⁵ In a letter to Souris (which, like many Boulez letters, is not dated, but which was annotated by Souris as received on 31 January 1947) Boulez wrote that his music was about «violence, shock, life» and he believed «this is what is most lacking, it seems to me, in every work by the serial “school”». ¹⁶ And for Souris, «the language of music was more apt than any other to faithfully relay the deepest feelings»; as such, he believed that music was «perhaps the medium most suited to surrealist expression». ¹⁷ Souris did not lose his attachment to surrealism, though his Belgian colleagues, particularly Magritte, did not believe that serial and postserial musical languages were compatible with surrealism. ¹⁸ I think Magritte was wrong, as we will see.

¹² EDWARD CAMPBELL, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 27.

¹³ R. WANGERMÉE, *André Souris et le complexe d'Orphée*, cit., p. 258.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 269 («Au printemps de 1947, Souris s'est vu confier la responsabilité d'une revue qui se crée à Paris [...], "Polyphonie"»).

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 273. On this occasion, Boulez played Joseph Kosma's music for a Jacques Prévert pantomime drawn from the film *Les enfants du paradis*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 272 («Boulez disait ensuite ce qu'apportait sa propre musique: la violence, le choc, la vie. "C'est ce qui manque le plus, me semble-t-il, à toutes les œuvres de "l'école'atonale", ajoutait-il»).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6 («"la matière musicale était plus propre qu'aucune autre à épouser fidèlement les mouvements intérieurs" et que, dès lors, la musique constituait peut-être "le moyen le plus conforme aux démonstrations surréalistes"»).

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

Surrealism and “Objective Chance”

But how do key surrealist concepts connect with Boulez’s aesthetic? One example is Boulez’s interpretation of the term “chance” (in different contexts, *hasard* and *aléatoire* in French), which differs from its commonplace English meanings and should be related to surrealist aesthetic notions of automatism. This concept has been linked by several literary scholars to Baudelaire’s theory of *correspondances* – where the senses are mingled – and to Proust’s theory of involuntary memory. Chance, for these authors, is a mediator: an idea or memory can spontaneously be triggered by an object or gesture. Boulez himself, in his article *Aléa*, gives his surrealist-inflected interpretation of the term “aléatoire”: «opposing accidental chance, we find chance by automatism, whether consciously pure or with some idea of controlled alternatives».¹⁹

The literary scholar Alison James writes:

The Surrealists seek access to the secrets of the unconscious and liberation from rational constraints in the surprising coincidences of daily life – a quest explicitly theorized by André Breton in terms of “hasard objectif” (objective chance; defined, paradoxically, as a manifestation of necessity).²⁰

Breton explores this concept, typically, across several works, most notably the triptych *Nadja* (1928), *Les vases communicants* (1932) and *L’amour fou* (1937). These works, which combine autobiography, philosophy, pictures, criticism and aphorisms, are closely connected, sharing a number of ideas and images. For instance, in *L’amour fou*, Breton refers to the same Giacometti statue that appears in a photo in *Nadja*, which he describes as a «work in progress» by the artist. Breton feels the need to explain this repeated image: «who cares about this repetition of the background, excused by the deep and constant transformation of the location».²¹

Phrases such as «work in progress» have of course a real Boulezian resonance, and the composer himself recognised the term’s connections with surrealist concepts.²² In an interview carried out on 17 June 2013, Peter O’Hagan asked Boulez whether it is «entirely a

¹⁹ P. BOULEZ, *Alea*, in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, cit., pp. 26-38: 29.

²⁰ ALISON JAMES, *Constraining Chance. Georges Perec and the Oulipo*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2009, p. 11. Cf. ANDRÉ BRETON, *Les vases communicants* [1932], Paris, Gallimard, 1955, p. 110: «N’est-ce pas là faire encore trop bon marché de la parole d’Engels: “La causalité ne peut être comprise qu’en liaison avec la catégorie du hasard objectif, forme de manifestation de la nécessité?”».

²¹ ANDRÉ BRETON, *L’amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937, p. 39 («tant pis pour cette répétition du décor, qu’excuse la transformation profonde, constante, du lieu»).

coincidence that the seven notes of the seventh *Notation* relate to those of *...explosante-fixe...*» and the composer replied:

It could be once I was looking at the old manuscripts, and I picked it up. You know that with Surrealism, one has spoken very much of *objets trouvés* – one takes something you meet by chance. I myself have *objets trouvés* but in my own production, and sometimes when I look at old works, I think, “Oh, I have not done anything with that – I must begin” – and it comes as I turn the pages of a work and suddenly find something of interest to me. It’s a mixture of chance and a will to explore and work on things.²³

Made towards the end of his life, this is one of the most direct statements by Boulez that surrealist procedures impacted on his music. And the title *...explosante-fixe...* is a part-citation of Breton: it is striking that Boulez uses it as the title of several related works from the 1970s onwards. This Breton aphorism which is most obviously related to Boulez’s work appears first at the end of *Nadja*: «beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be»,²⁴ developed in *L’amour fou* as «convulsive beauty will be erotic-veiled, exploding-fixed, magic-circumstantial or it will not be».²⁵

Above all, this union of apparent opposites – such as explosion and stasis – is central to the aesthetic of surrealism and to Boulez’s music. His reference to «organised delirium» in his article *Son et verbe* and his profound union of serialism and frenzy at the end of his *Piano Sonata no. 2* show that for him, artistic creativity happens at the point where opposites come together. This is coupled with the concept of «deep and constant transformation», to cite Breton again, which has clear parallels with serial technique. The “surrealist attitude” has sensation and change at its heart. Indeed, Breton wrote in *L’amour fou*, citing the physicist Gustave Juvet:

²² The concept of “work in progress” is fundamentally a Mallarméan concept – the notion that a work is only ever a fragment of an oeuvre. One fragment of Mallarmé’s unfinished and unfinishable *Livre* reads: «Un livre ne commence ni ne finit; tout au plus fait-il semblant» («A book neither begins nor ends; at the very most it gives the impression of doing so»), quoted in JACQUES SCHÉRER, *Le “Livre” de Mallarmé. Premières recherches sur les documents inédits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 181.

²³ P. O’HAGAN, *Pierre Boulez and the Piano*, cit., p. 329.

²⁴ ANDRÉ BRETON, *Nadja* [1928], Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 190: «La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas».

²⁵ A. BRETON, *L’amour fou*, cit., end of part 1, p. 26: «La beauté convulsive sera érotique-voilée, explosante-fixe, magique-circonstantielle ou ne sera pas». The first version of this text was published in the review «Minotaure», 5 (1934), pp. 8-16, and titled *La beauté sera convulsive*. The same number of «Minotaure» included a photograph of a Spanish dancer taken by Man Ray which was also titled *...explosante-fixe...*; this photo was later reproduced in *L’amour fou*.

It's in the surprise created by a new image or new association of images where the most important aspect of progress in the physical sciences can be found, because it is astonishment which excites the rather cold sense of logic, and obliges us to establish new connections.²⁶

Alison James emphasizes that «the surrealist concept of chance is double-edged»:

When Breton defines surrealism as an “automatisme psychique pur” (pure psychic automatism) that, in the absence of any intervention of reason, expresses “le fonctionnement réel de la pensée” [the real functioning of thought; citing the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924)], it is clear that this inner reality is not considered wholly random. Indeed, from the surrealist point of view, rational, moral and aesthetic preoccupations represent a set of exterior accidents that obscure and disrupt the essential operation of the mind. This reversibility of chance and necessity is most evident in *L'amour fou* (1937), where Breton develops the notion of “objective chance” [...]. The difference between this account and the Aristotelian definition is that the internal finality, for Breton, may exist in the unconscious. Breton goes on to posit the necessity of such encounters, overtly praising the paranoid faculty of overinterpretation: the forms that we see in the clouds are in no way accidental, but augural. Italo Calvino argues convincingly that Breton's formula “did away with the irrationality of chance”. Objective chance, illuminated and motivated by surrealist logic, is no longer chance at all.²⁷

Viewed through this lens, serial musical processes are paradoxically not only a way of creating or ensuring order, but also of creating the new and unforeseeable – of controlling chance and in Boulez's words, organizing delirium. Boulez might have written to Cage in December 1951: «I am a little afraid of what is called “automatic writing”, for most of the time it is chiefly a lack of control»,²⁸ but it seems that for him, at that time, serialism was the perfect medium for expressing his paradoxical need for control and automatism, for what Breton would have termed “objective chance”.

Ethnographic Connections

Artaud's preface to *Le théâtre et son double* (1935) also comes close to Boulez in its evocation of opposites and drive to go beyond simple appearances:

²⁶ A. BRETON, *L'amour fou*, cit., p. 122 («c'est M. [Gustave] Juvet qui, dans *La structure des nouvelles théories physiques*, écrit en 1933: “C'est dans la surprise créée par une nouvelle image ou par une nouvelle association d'images, qu'il faut voir le plus important élément du progrès des sciences physiques, puisque c'est l'étonnement qui excite la logique, toujours assez froide, et qui oblige à établir de nouvelles coordinations”»).

²⁷ A. JAMES, *Constraining Chance*, cit., p. 112. James cites ITALO CALVINO, *The Uses of Literature*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986, p. 47 (orig. ed. *Una pietra sopra. Discorsi di letteratura e società*, Torino, Einaudi, 1980).

²⁸ *The Boulez-Cage Correspondence*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, trans. by Robert Samuels, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 113. A revised and augmented bilingual version of this correspondence was published in 2002 (PIERRE BOULEZ - JOHN CAGE, *Correspondance et documents*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, new edition revised by Robert Piencikowski, Mainz, Schott, 2002).

Every true effigy has its shadow which is its double; art happens at the moment when its sculptor believes they have freed a sort of shadow whose very existence will disturb and move. As for all magical cultures whose hieroglyphs pour out meaning, the true theatre also has its shadows; and, of all languages and arts, it is the only one to have shadows which break through their limits. And, from the start, one can say that limits are unbearable for them.²⁹

These esoteric aspects of art were, in musical terms, also at the core of Jolivet's art in the 1930s: he had his own connections with Artaud, and his music was strongly marked by the interconnection between surrealism, esotericism and ethnography. The Surrealists rediscovered myth in the 1930s partly because of recent ethnographic expeditions and displays. An Exposition coloniale internationale was held in Vincennes, on the edge of Paris, from May to November 1931 and culminated in the foundation of the Musée de l'homme, which opened in 1937. Each of France's colonies was represented at this exhibition, which combined cultural display and commercial advertisement.

Gabriel Audisio's critical appraisal of the musical exhibits appeared in «La revue musicale». Ideally, Audisio would have liked this exhibition to feature more recordings made in the field by ethnomusicologists, but instead he bemoaned that «we never knew whether we were looking at something real or something sham».³⁰ This exhibition could also be viewed as one of the final flings of the “exotic display” attitude to non-Western cultures, and indeed opposition to the exhibition was expressed by the Surrealists, by authors including André Gide (whose travelogues *Voyage au Congo* (1927) and *Le retour au Tchad* (1928) tell of exploitation of Africans by colonial masters promoting their business interests), and by the Communist Party through the medium of its newspaper «L'humanité».

Boulez's interest in non-European musics and instruments was certainly deepened by André Schaeffner³¹ – whom he met in 1949 when they both contributed to the journal «Contrepoints» – but this interest predates his meeting with Schaeffner and is audible in his

²⁹ ANTONIN ARTAUD, *Le théâtre et son double* [1938], in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, IV, 1964, § “Préface. Le théâtre et le culture”, p. 18 («Toute vraie effigie a son ombre qui la double; et l'art tombe à partir du moment où le sculpteur qui modèle croit libérer une sorte d'ombre dont l'existence déchirera son repos. Comme toute culture magique que des hiéroglyphes appropriés déversent, le vrai théâtre a aussi ses ombres; et, de tous les langages et de tous les arts, il est le seul à avoir encore des ombres qui ont brisé leurs limitations. Et, dès l'origine, on peut dire qu'elles ne supportaient pas de limitation»).

³⁰ GABRIEL AUDISIO, *Musique et spectacles à l'Exposition coloniale*, «La revue musicale», XII, 120 (1931), pp. 346-51: 351 («On n'aura jamais su quand on était devant du vrai ou du chiqué»).

³¹ Schaeffner wrote his most important book in 1936 (*Origine des instruments de musique. Introduction ethnologique à l'histoire de la musique instrumentale*, Payot, Paris, 1936). His correspondence with Boulez has been published in PIERRE BOULEZ – ANDRÉ SCHAEFFNER, *Correspondance 1954-1970*, ed. by Rosangela Pereira de Tugny, Paris, Fayard, 1998.

earliest works. Boulez's teacher Messiaen was a "catalyst" in this sense, as, most certainly, was Jolivet, who was particularly interested in ethnology in the mid-1930s, one of the most innovative phrases of his career. Jolivet visited the Exposition coloniale, but also had the opportunity to hear traditional music in the field on visits to his future parents-in-law in Algeria in 1932-1933. Perhaps most significantly, Varèse introduced Jolivet to Artaud in 1934. For Jolivet, according to his biographer Lucie Kayas:

The discovery of ethnology as framed by philosophers was combined with childhood memories linked to non-European cultures: it anchors his studies of memory and the imaginary. Surrealism was the unifying stimulus in an aesthetic of the juxtaposition of opposites which also opened the way to an esoteric approach.³²

This interconnection of surrealism and ethnology was a driving force in French culture of the interwar years. The Institut d'ethnologie was founded in 1925, a year after the publication of the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, and many of the same people were involved in the magazine «Documents» (founded in 1929), the Musée de l'homme and the Collège de sociologie. Indeed, André Schaeffner himself studied with the leading ethnologist Marcel Mauss and worked at the Musée de l'homme alongside people including Georges-Henri Rivière, one of the founders of «Documents» who is described by James Clifford as «a music student and amateur of jazz who would become France's most energetic ethnographic museologist».³³ «Documents» was a publication where images, poetry, longer-form writing and polemics came together, and contributors to issue 34, *Intervention surréaliste*, included Breton, Max Ernst, Man Ray, and from the Belgian surrealist group, André Souris and E.L.T. Mesens. As for the short-lived Collège de sociologie (1937-1939), they were a diverse group of writers and ethnologists who, in the words of James Clifford, «were preoccupied with those ritual moments where experiences outside the normal flow of existence could find collective expression, moments when cultural order was both transgressed and rejuvenated».³⁴ Georges Bataille's concept of "sociologie sacrée" was one definition of their activity (and Clifford notes that in France, ethnology and sociology were not sharply distinguished); it is interesting to relate that there are some commonalities between their mani-

³² L. KAYAS, *André Jolivet*, cit., p. 148 («La découverte de l'ethnologie dans un cadre philosophique se mêle à ses souvenirs d'enfance liés aux cultures non européennes et ancre des connaissances d'ordre intellectuel dans le terrain de la mémoire et de l'imaginaire. Le surréalisme en assure le ferment unitaire dans une esthétique de juxtaposition des contraires, ouvrant en même temps la voie à une approche ésotérique»).

³³ JAMES CLIFFORD, *On Ethnographic Surrealism*, «Comparative Studies in Society and History», XXIII, 4 (1981), pp. 539-564: 546-547.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 559.

festos and that of La Jeune France. The manifesto of this group of composers (which was launched in 1936 by Jolivet, Messiaen, Yves Baudrier and Daniel-Lesur) opened: «As the conditions of life become more and more hard, mechanical and impersonal, music must bring ceaselessly to those who love it its spiritual violence and its courageous reaction».³⁵

The «juxtaposition of opposites» which Kayas defines as a key surrealist concept became, as we have already seen, an essential element of Boulez's aesthetic from his earliest works. During his exceptionally creative years of the late 1940s, Boulez briefly considered a career as an ethnomusicologist and carried out research in the Musée Guimet, where he transcribed field recordings that had been made for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition. The museum planned a major field trip to French Indochina (present-day Cambodia) in 1947 involving Boulez, but the mission was cancelled because of war.³⁶

Jolivet in the 1930s is associated with the *style incantatoire*, a style central to French music in the 20th century, as evoked by Julian Anderson in his chapter on the composer. Anderson notes strong links between Jolivet and Boulez's early works: «Compare, for example, the opening bar of *Mana* with the obsessive recurring gesture featured throughout Boulez's *Notations* no. 7: both melodic and harmonic content, as well as rhythmic profile are clearly very similar».³⁷ We have already seen that the seven-note theme of the seventh *Notation* appears in multiple guises in Boulez's music. The eighth of the *Notations* is titled *Afrique* in the composer's manuscript, though this title does not appear in the published version. The right-hand part focuses on only two pitches, E flat and B flat, marked «with a strongly percussive character» («Donner à cette figure tout son caractère de percussion»), iterated rapidly above chordal interjections in the left hand.

Conclusion

Let us return to André Souris, who in 1955 wrote an article *Les sources sensibles de la musique sérielle*, in which he is eloquent on the connections between serialism and surrealism:

³⁵ The text was published in the programme note for the American premiere of Messiaen's *Les offrandes oubliées*, which was given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky on 16 and 17 October 1936, and is reproduced in NIGEL SIMEONE, *La Spirale and La Jeune France. Group Identities*, «The Musical Times», CXLIII, 1880 (2002), pp. 10-36: 15.

³⁶ Cf. LUISA BASSETTO, *Ritratto del compositore come apprendista etnologo. Pierre Boulez prima dell'incontro con André Schaeffner*, «Musicalia», 7 (2010), pp. 61-82: 62: «J'ai songé un moment faire de l'ethnologie musicale, et s'il n'y avait pas eu la guerre d'Indochine, je serais parti en mission au Cambodge, dans l'hiver 45-46».

³⁷ JULIAN ANDERSON, *Jolivet and the "Style Incantatoire". Aspects of a Hybrid Tradition*, in *André Jolivet. Music, Art and Literature*, ed. by Caroline Rae, Abingdon, Routledge, [2018, in print], pp. 15-40: 32. I am very grateful to Anderson and Rae for giving me a copy of this chapter in advance of its publication.

People often question the validity of this technique [serialism], denouncing its automatism, its gratuitousness, and its resistance to the expression of free imagination. But these criticisms are based on a superficial overview, according to which serialism is entirely about arithmetic combinations which are superposed and systematically applied to all aspects of musical discourse. In this view, the composer's personality has no role to play at all, and nothing could predict the resulting sound of the work before it is performed. In parenthesis, I would say that this can be justified as a surrealist experience; it is equivalent to trusting in chance, as John Cage literally did to very interesting effect in his work. But no serial composers seem to have such ambitions. Rather, they vaguely want (curiously, I say) to continue tradition, to follow who knows what historical imperative, to specialise.³⁸

Souris does not mention Boulez here: their paths diverged from the early 1950s, particularly after Boulez distanced himself from «Variation», a proposed journal dedicated to serialism which Souris planned to edit.³⁹ Boulez objected to Souris' publication because he disliked the notion of being grouped under a label with other composers, but although Boulez may not have wanted his music to be described in simplistic terms – be that serialist, surrealist or any other label – evidence of the impact of surrealist writers on his work is compelling.

James Clifford wrote that «André Breton often insisted that surrealism was not a body of doctrines or a definable idea but an activity»⁴⁰, and more pertinently where the interrelationship of the arts is concerned:

In France particularly the modern human sciences have not lost contact with the world of literature and art, and in the hothouse milieu of Parisian cultural life no field of social or artistic research can long remain indifferent to influences or provocations from beyond its disciplinary boundaries. In the twenties and thirties [...] ethnography and surrealism developed in close proximity.⁴¹

³⁸ First published in *Entretiens d'Arras*, Paris, CNRS, 1956; reprinted in ANDRÉ SOURIS, *Conditions de la musique et autres écrits*, Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles – CNRS, 1976, pp. 169-176:174 («On n'a pas manqué de mettre en doute la validité de cette technique [le sérialisme], de dénoncer son automatisme, sa gratuité, et les résistances qu'elle oppose au déploiement de la libre imagination. Mais ces critiques ne se fondent que sur une information superficielle, d'après laquelle la composition sérielle se ramènerait exclusivement à une superposition de combinaisons arithmétiques systématiquement appliquées à toutes les fonctions du discours musical. Dans cette opération, la personnalité du compositeur n'interviendrait nullement, et rien, avant l'exécution, ne pourrait laisser prévoir le résultat sonore ainsi obtenu. Par parenthèse, je dirai qu'une telle démarche pourrait se justifier au niveau des expériences surréalistes; elle équivaudrait à faire confiance au hasard, comme John Cage l'a fait littéralement dans des ouvrages de grand intérêt. Mais aucun des musiciens sériels ne semble ambitionner pareille désinvolture. Chacun se flotte (curieusement, ma foi) de continuer une tradition, de suivre on ne sait quel destin historique, de se spécialiser»).

³⁹ Cf. R. WANGERMÉE, *André Souris et le complexe d'Orphée*, cit., p. 308.

⁴⁰ J. CLIFFORD, *On Ethnographic Surrealism*, cit., p. 539.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

And Boulez in the 1940s, a composer who read voraciously and had close connections to the small but influential ethnomusicological circle in Paris, forged his early work in this crucible of influences. As he wrote later in his article *Poetry – Centre and Absence – Music*: «Music can be linked with poetry at a number of different levels of importance and intensity, from a mere title to intimate fusion and from the anecdotal to the essential». ⁴²

The first years of Boulez’s compositional activity were remarkably significant, not least because so many of his works from the 1960s until the end of his life draw, in some shape or form, on pieces first conceived by him in the second half of the 1940s. It is not exaggerating to state that these early pieces are the kernel which remained at the centre of his compositional preoccupations for the rest of his life. It is irresistible to speculate that this heart of his work is what Boulez was referring to on one of the few occasions when he quoted Breton. At the end of his article *Nécessité d’une orientation esthétique*, he states: «I am convinced that in every great composer (in every great creator) there is an “unshatterable kernel of darkness”! [...] I put my faith in this “kernel of darkness”, which will endure after a momentary flash has dispersed». ⁴³ Boulez has, however, completely decontextualized this quotation; Breton wrote this phrase not in the context of artistic creativity, but in the introduction to a 1933 translation of Achim von Arnim’s *Contes bizarres*, referring to sexuality. ⁴⁴

In order to locate Boulez culturally, serialism is far from the only context within which he should be positioned, though it is also true that serialism can be paralleled with surrealism as a method for generating the unforeseen, the unpredictable. In his earliest creative years, Boulez aggressively expressed his distaste for dogmas, stagnation and academicism. Rather, he was always in search of what is new, vibrant and open.

⁴² *Poésie – centre et absence – musique*, lecture given in Donaueschingen in 1962 and published in German in «Melos», XXX, 2 (1963), pp. 33-40; cited in P. BOULEZ, *Orientations*, cit., p. 184.

⁴³ PIERRE BOULEZ, *Nécessité d’une orientation esthétique*, based on Darmstadt lectures from 1963 and originally published in *Points de repère*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Paris, Christian Bourgois – Éditions du Seuil, 1981, pp. 54-77: 77 («Pour conclure, je voudrais reprendre, à propos de la personnalité du compositeur, une admirable expression d’André Breton [...]. Je suis sûr qu’il existe dans tout grand compositeur (tout grand créateur) un “noyau infracassable de nuit”! [...] J’ai confiance en ce “noyau de nuit”, qui subsistera après l’éclat d’un moment dispersé»).

⁴⁴ The original context of Breton’s expression is: «De nos jours, le monde sexuel, en dépit des sondages entre tous mémorables que, dans l’époque moderne, y auront opérés Sade et Freud, n’a pas, que je sache, cessé d’opposer à notre volonté de pénétration de l’univers son infracassable noyau de nuit», ANDRÉ BRETON, *Introduction*, in ACHIM D’ARNIM, *Contes bizarres*, Paris, Éditions des Cahiers Libres, 1933, pp. 7-25: 24.