

At the end of 1940s, Pierre Boulez expressed a strong interest in the musical use of microintervals. Essays, letters and the first versions of at least three works show this path. In *Polyphonie X*, *Coup de Dés* and *Le visage nuptial* the starting material is based on quarter-tones. Furthermore, as working hypothesis, in its writings the composer considers smaller subdivisions, up to 1/24 of tone. In a letter to John Cage (1955, 30<sup>th</sup> of December), Boulez quotes a «new chamber music piece»: it is probably the uncomplete first version of *Polyphonie X*, for 49 instruments (1950-51). Drafts and sketches of the first 17 pages of the work are hold by Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel. Boulez presents series of 24 quarter-tones, divided in two 12-tones series shifted by a quarter-tone. For the first time, dodecaphonic method techniques are applied to microintervals, in the mark of a wider concept of continuum of musical parameters and a new idea of work. In the same letter, Boulez remarks: «Most of all, I would like to abolish the idea of musical work to be played in a concert, with a fixed number of movements».<sup>1</sup> The basic concept is to create a “book structure” that, as in a poetry book, can be read jumping from one page to another; the model could be Cage *Sonatas* and the *Book of Music*. Boulez wants to write following a radical serial principle, but «widening it to extreme consequences».<sup>2</sup> The serial method would concern the whole frequency spectrum, from 16 to 20.000 Hz. Thus, explains the composer, «all the sound material can be organized. In that way, the concepts of modality, tonality and series would be strictly combined to form one concept. The same happens with the continuity and discontinuity of sound material, since it is the choose of discontinuous in the continuous. I intend to do this with my 1/4 of tone. In two or three years they will be 1/12 and 1/24 of tone».<sup>3</sup> In the same letter, Boulez asserts the possibility of combining 1/4 and 1/3 of tones in a 1/12 of tone scale, with the purpose to obtain scales based on 1/18 and 1/12 of tone<sup>4</sup>; the intention is to build microtonal series, «microcosms, with the principle of generalized series».

In the early 1950s, Boulez gave up the idea of a music in which microtones play a significant rule. Sketches and first versions of a work were brought to a semitonal context. It is very important to examine this creative transformation of the materials. *Polyphonie X* was re-written for 18 instruments. This new version (finished in 1951) is quoted in Boulez essay *Eventuellement* (1952)<sup>5</sup> The latter shows a new point of view about microtonality. Its possibilities are still considered, but in a more abstract plan: «It it not a question, at the moment, to display such a virtuosism for not yet realizable works. Nevertheless, we will in the future, it will come the time in which it will be possibile to give a certain credit to speculations based on new intabulations and new mechanic and

<sup>1</sup> Boulez e Cage (2006), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Relevés d'apprenti*, p. 171.

electronic medias».<sup>6</sup>

*Coup de Dés*, for choir and great orchestra, based on a text by Mallarmé, was a sort of germination of this future music. For it, Boulez would make it build «a specifically tuned instrument».<sup>7</sup> *Le visage nuptial* too, began in 1949, was initially conceived on a quarter-tone basis, before to be transformed in a 12th-tone work.

The aim of this project is to study Boulez sketches, draft, first versions and texts of this period, to make it clear the rule of microtonal intervals in a wider new conception of musical work and with the idea of continuum-discontinuum of music parameters. Furthermore, it will be important investigate the reasons that led Boulez to transform or forsake his microtonal works. Complex reasons that concerns musical instrument possibilities, performance, society and culture. It will be important to confront the microtonal and the semitonal versions of the same work, in the mark of a global serialized principle.

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<sup>6</sup> Eventuellement, p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 160.