

Pierre Boulez's

Le Marteau sans maître

Robert Piencikowski

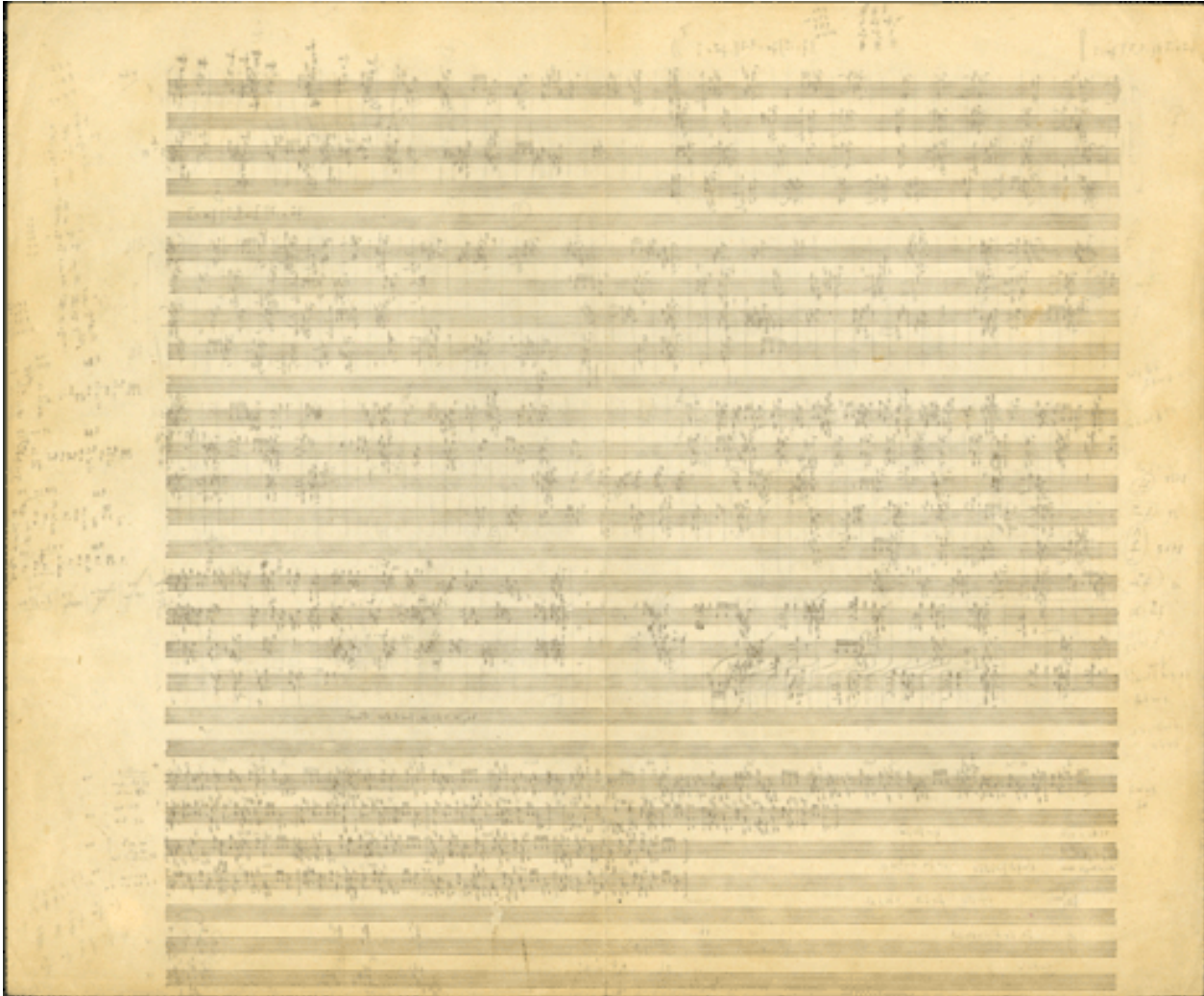
Pierre Boulez wrote his *Le Marteau sans maître* (*The Hammer without a Master*) between the years 1952 and 1955. The work, whose title is borrowed from the collection of poems by René Char, consists of three intermingled cycles, each based on a specific musical setting of one of the three poems the composer has selected, surrounded by purely instrumental "commentaries." He has deliberately avoided the term "variations" to eliminate any confusion with traditional thematic development. The succession of the movements appears as follows:

1. Avant "L'Artisanat furieux"
2. Commentaire I de "Bourreaux de solitude"
3. "L'Artisanat furieux"
4. Commentaire II de "Bourreaux de solitude"
5. "Bel édifice et les pressentiments," version première
6. "Bourreaux de solitude"
7. Après "L'Artisanat furieux"
8. Commentaire III de "Bourreaux de solitude"
9. "Bel édifice et les pressentiments," double

The autograph manuscript of *Le Marteau sans maître* comprises three leaves of manuscript paper of two different types. The first two leaves consist of fragments cut from larger leaves originally measuring 34 by 56 centimeters and containing 56 staves. This paper is of a very thin weight, and printed with staves on only one side. Since it is so translucent that the staves printed on one side can easily be read on the reverse side, on several occasions Boulez has actually notated material on these sides using such "ghost" staves. The other paper type, thicker, is printed on both sides. Boulez used these types of papers throughout the 1950s, and he may have obtained a large quantity of both types at that time for use in his 1948-1950 orchestral revision of *Le Visage nuptial* (originally composed in 1946). Boulez typically added to a leaf fragments of manuscript paper, cut from larger sheets, in order to accommodate the demands of denser musical ideas.

The manuscript papers used in the Moldenhauer sketches of *Le Marteau sans maître* are as follows:

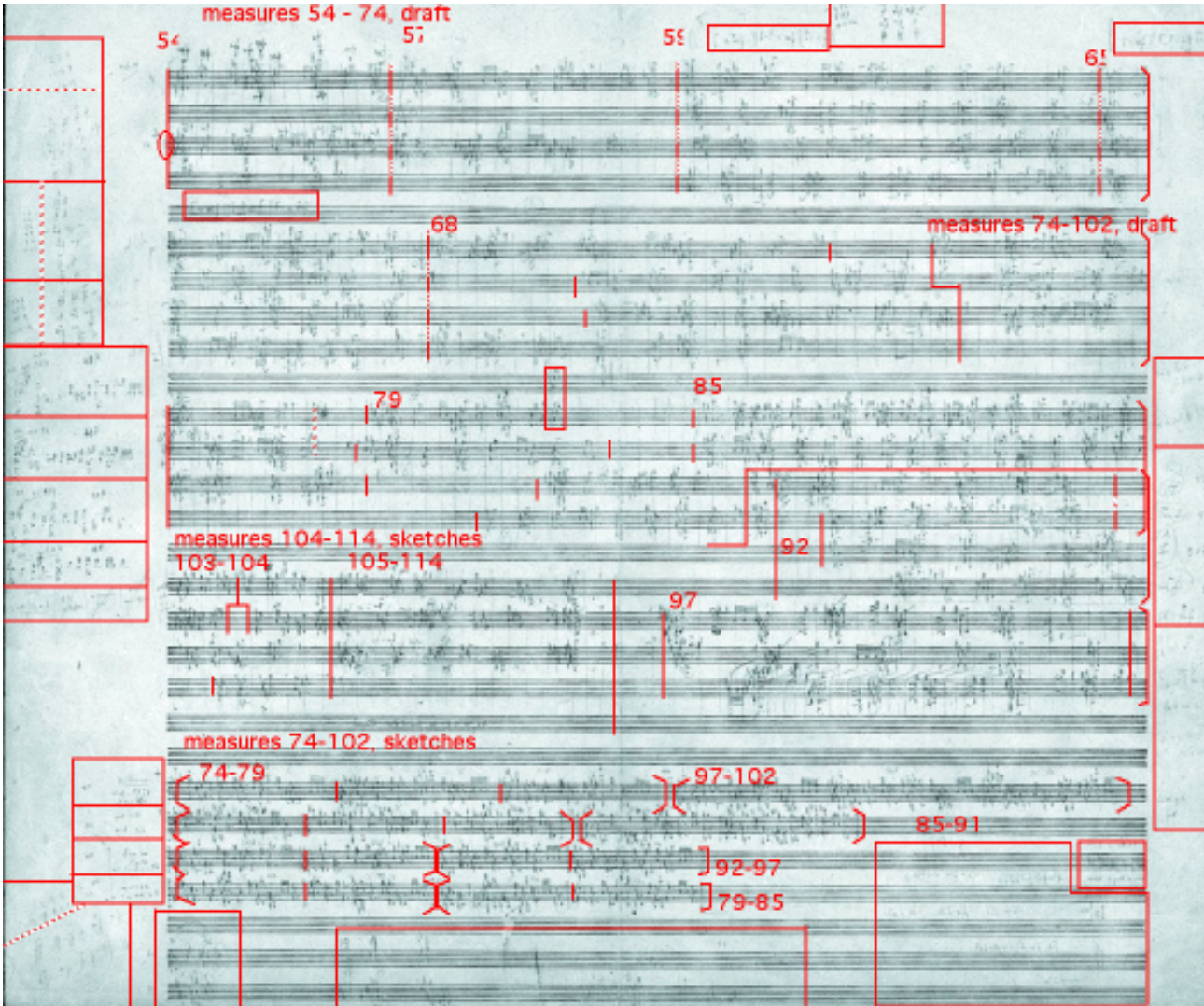
One-sided: Two sheets, of 28 staves per sheet, obtained by cutting one whole sheet (of 56 staves) in half horizontally; both halves contain drafts of the first two "Bourreaux de solitude" movements (Commentaires I and II).



Two-sided: One sheet of 20 staves obtained by the asymmetrical division of a larger sheet of manuscript paper. The two sides of the sheet contain the final part after measure 88 of "Bel édifice et les pressentiments," double movement.

My observations of the musical material in these fragments are limited to the first document's single side, which comprises sketches for the second and third parts of "Commentaire I de 'Bourreaux de solitude,'" measures 54 to 102, and measures 103 to 114 of the complete score. (The staves on which these measures appear are designated in numerical order from the top to the bottom of the page.)

The printed staves contain, for the most part, sketches for the draft of measures 54 to 102. The margins are devoted to sketches for measures 74 to 102--which leads us to believe that the latter material preceded the former on the page. There is also a first sketch of material which will figure in measures 103 to 114, and which is more fully developed on the verso. The remaining areas of the page contain sparsely written indications regarding the use of register, as well as the vertical disposition of groupings of notes, deduced from the structure. Since Boulez was concerned in this movement with his technique of total serialization in which not only pitch but other musical components such as the duration of pitches and dynamics are involved, there are many evidences of this concern in this sketch. Detailed notes and instructions extend even into the margins of the page, which are filled with indications concerning the compression and/or extension of the scales of duration, as well as of dynamics and attacks which will be given to those durations.



(reproduction, black and white, with red-line drawing overlay)

Staves 1-20: bars 54-102: draft

| | | |
|---------------|---------|----------------------------|
| staves 1-4: | left: | bars 54-56; 57-58 |
| | middle: | bars 59-64 |
| | right: | bar 65 |
| staves 6-9: | left: | bars 65-67 |
| | middle: | bars 68-73 |
| | right: | bars 74-76 |
| staves 11-14: | left: | bars 77-78 |
| | middle: | bars 79-84 |
| | right: | bars 85-102 (staves 11-12) |
| staves 13-16: | right: | bars 92-96 |
| staves 17-19: | right: | bars 97-102 |

Staves 16-19: bars 103-114: sketches

staves 16-19: left: bars 103-104 and bars 105-114

Staves 22-25: bars 74-102: sketches

staff 22: left: bars 74-79; right: bars 97-102
staff 23: left: bars 85-91
staff 24: left: bars 92-97
staff 25: left: bars 79-85

The sketches for the draft of measures 54 to 102 are notated using five systems, generally consisting of four staves, each separated by a blank staff. To find space, Boulez drafts the two last systems tightly together on the right side of the page, the left side having been devoted to the structural sketching of measures 103 to 114, and puts them higher than usual, so that the fourth system overlaps the third and fourth staves of the third system, filling the blank staff between these systems. The same compression occurs between the fourth and fifth systems, resulting in a reduction in the size of the latter system from four staves to three.

This compression is due to the presence, on the left side, of the structural sketch for the material in measures 103 to 114. Appearing at this point as only the barest outline of the musical shapes they are eventually to assume, this material will be filled out by sound

complexes produced by various combinations of intervals. In this way the composer amplifies the musical texture to give it the character of a coda. The instrumentation also contributes to this amplification: the reappearance of the alto flute, for example, which had been silent during measures 54 to 102. Boulez applies this procedure of structural amplification to the sketch on the verso of this page, indicated by the textual note in solfeggio notation at the bottom of this system (staff 20), evidently regarding the work's structure: "Ensuite mi-b, do, mi-n, sur ré-n, et sur fa-#" [Then E-flat, C, E-natural on D, and on F-sharp].

Staves 22 through 25 contain the structural sketches for measures 74 to 102, as follows:

staff number 22 mm. 74-79 and 97-102

staff number 23 mm. 85-91

staff number 24 mm. 92-97

staff number 25 mm. 79-85



(detail)

Even more preliminary sketches for these structural sketches appear at the bottom of the page. We can hypothesize that this preparatory material was written as a continuation to a previous

page of even earlier sketches intended to be developed as measures 54 through 74, perhaps even as measures 1 through 53. This would explain the appearance of these sketches at the bottom of the page, which seem to be the reason why Boulez was obliged to compress the system on staves 13 through 16 and 17 through 19.

As stated above, a large part of the rest of the page contains sparse annotations concerning registration. However, on staves 26 through 28, at the lower left of the page, we can see the sound blocks from which Boulez derives the sonorities of measures 79 through 85. On staff 24, at the lower right of the page (adjacent to structural notation in solfeggio), is an array of seven notes (si-b, ré-n, la-n, mi-n, sol-n, mi-b, fa-n) above which the composer has written their German solfeggio equivalents (B D A E G S F) and under which he has written "*Oubli, signal lapidé*," the title of the composition whose structural elements were to be reemployed in *Le Marteau sans maître*. The earlier work, a setting of poems by the French poet and playwright Armand Gatti for a cappella chorus, has been withdrawn.

The technique on which Boulez bases the "Bourreaux de solitude" cycle was described by him on two different occasions. The first of these was in 1954 in the article "...auprès et au loin":

If the interval is tied to a duration, and this duration is inserted into the order of the derived series, then a third type of generation occurs, much stricter than the others, because the pitches are ineluctably tied to a duration from the start; yet the wealth of possible combinations is just as great, since the order is modified with each derivation. Thus one gets different groupings, horizontally and vertically, in which one can vary the unit of duration since the relationship of serial order to duration is a function of a unit common to all the durations used. In this form of generation, therefore, time alone is the necessary and sufficient condition for the creation of a hierarchy, both in an absolute form not susceptible to variation (the serial order) and in a relative, variable form (duration, the unit of duration). Here again we have respected that duality which we defined as the principle of all musical action: the possibility of choice within a coherent system; the consequent avoidance of the arbitrary.^{1,2}

This may eventually not be the place for a detailed discussion of Boulez's unique and original explorations of serialization, or of the very different techniques he used in other different movements of *Le Marteau sans maître*. Suffice it to say that, initially conceived for use in a section of *Oubli, signal lapidé*; of 1952, the serial technique involving pitch and duration used in *Le Marteau sans maître* is intended to serve as a contrast to the "sound-blocs" of variable density of the "L'Artisanat furieux" cycle, as well as to the series of registers of the "Bel édifice et les pressentiments" cycle.

To sum up, this document details the three different stages involved in the compositional process, from the first sketches of the basic material used in this work, through the development of this material, and ultimately to the work's definitive version:

1. Measures 54 through 74: draft
2. Measures 74 through 102: sketches, draft
3. Measures 103 through 114: sketches; draft on the reverse side

We are thus confronted with a sort of "snapshot," witnessing the composer grappling with the transformation of his sound material from an embryonic stage, where the sound structures are still not outlined, to the definitive state in which, through their formal placing, the structures will be shaped by way of musical craftsmanship.

¹ Pierre Boulez, *Relevés d'apprenti*, ed. Paule Thévenin (Paris: Éditions Le Seuil, Collection "Tel Quel," 1966), p. 198; trans. Stephen Walsh, in "Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 153-54. For further reading, see Mary Breatnach, *Boulez and Mallarmé: A Study in Poetic Influence* (England: Scholar Press, 1996), esp. chap. 2, "Music and Mallarmé's Aesthetic," pp. 20-69; and Pierre Boulez, *Relevés d'apprenti*, trans. Stephen Walsh, "Sound and Word," pp. 38-43, esp. p. 40.

² The second of these may be found in Pierre Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,