

# The Boulez–Cage Correspondence

**edited by**  
**Jean-Jacques Nattiez**

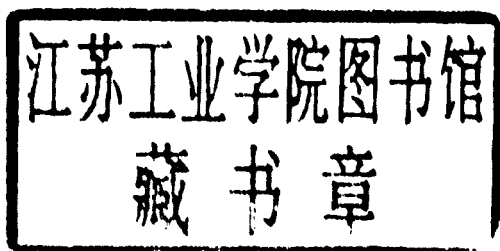
translated and edited by  
Robert Samuels

THE BOULEZ-CAGE  
*Correspondence*

*Documents collected, edited and introduced by*  
**Jean-Jacques Nattiez**

with Françoise Davoine, Hans Oesch and  
Robert Piencikowski

*Translated and edited by*  
Robert Samuels



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Between May 1949 and August 1954 the composers Pierre Boulez and John Cage exchanged a series of remarkable letters which reflect on their own music and the music and culture of the time. To this correspondence a further letter from 1962 has been added together with various other documents, including an unpublished lecture given by Boulez on Cage's music for prepared piano.

At the time, Cage and Boulez were great friends and these amicable letters reflect their differing ideas on the course new music should take. While Boulez was thinking about forms of serialism, Cage was moving in the direction of ever greater compositional freedom and chance procedures.

Professor Nattiez has written a full introduction to this collection of documents, and the meticulous and detailed annotation of every letter makes this a volume of extraordinary value for our understanding of the development of both Cage and Boulez and the music of their time.

## THE BOULEZ-CAGE CORRESPONDENCE

## Preface

In 1980, whilst I was working in Bayreuth editing Pierre Boulez's *Points de repère* (translated as *Orientations* (London: Faber, 1986)), I discovered the existence of an important sequence of letters between Pierre Boulez and John Cage, dating mainly from 1949 to 1954; I was able to have access to the letters from Cage received by Boulez. Thanks to the goodwill of Don L. Roberts, music librarian of Northwestern University at Evanston, I obtained the other half of the correspondence, the letters from Boulez, which Cage had placed there in order to make them available for research. These were then transcribed by Françoise Davoine, thanks to a grant from the Music Faculty of the University of Montreal, whilst I took charge of the letters from Cage to Boulez.

When the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel acquired Boulez's manuscripts, and thus the letters from Cage, the late Dr Hans Oesch, the Foundation's director of research and musicological publications, gained the permission of the two composers for the publication of the correspondence. He then asked me to prepare a critical edition. This was published in 1990 as the first volume of the *Publications of the Paul Sacher Foundation*, by Amadeus Verlag of Winterthur.

For the original publication, Robert Piencikowski meticulously checked the transcription of Boulez's letters, and Hans Oesch read that of Cage's letters. John Holzaepfel contacted me with the translation by Cage of Boulez's letter no. 35, discovered in the David Tudor archives. I have published a French translation of this document in the French edition of this correspondence. A full critical edition of this letter, edited by John Holzaepfel, will appear in a later volume of the *Publications of the Paul Sacher Foundation*, dedicated to Boulez. Pierre Boulez, John Cage, Francis Dhomont, Dominique Jameux, Jean Nattiez, Marianne Souvchinsky, and the archive administrators of Éditions Gallimard and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra provided me with invaluable information for the critical apparatus. Célestin Deliège, Paul Griffiths, and Robert Piencikowski read a first draft of the original edition and made many helpful comments, suggested additions and corrections, and gave crucial information now incorporated in the notes. Célestin Deliège in particular made several observations which enabled me to give the edition its final appearance. I am profoundly indebted

## *Preface*

to Frans van Rossum, who is working on a biography of Cage, and gave me much information relating to his career: this enabled me to complete my introduction and to correct several errors contained in the original and French editions.

Thanks once again go to Dr Paul Sacher for giving permission for this English edition and for the use of the music examples from the original edition.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez

## *Translator's introduction*

In presenting the correspondence between Pierre Boulez and John Cage to an English-speaking audience, the aim has been to preserve as far as possible the familiar style of the letters. The original edition of the correspondence, published under the auspices of the Paul Sacher Foundation, published each letter in its original language, preserving the errors of each writer when using the language of the other and the numerous orthographical mistakes. This has been followed in the present edition, and orthography of numbers, abbreviations, and other inconsistent features have been retained, except where the result would be needlessly obscure. This accounts for most of the divergences between the version of part of no. 26 published in *Orientations* and that published here. English spelling errors have been preserved, except for proper names. American musical terms (e.g. "measure" and "quarter" for "bar" and "crotchet") have been used in the translations in order to conform with the untranslated English sections. Original punctuation has been preserved, except in one detail: Boulez uses dashes and full stops interchangeably, and so some dashes have been changed to full stops for the sake of clarity. In order to give consistent terminology in technical discussions, all quotations from Boulez's writings have been translated for this edition. However, page references to English editions of the sources are given where these exist.

The dating of the letters posed some problems. For the letters sent by Cage to Boulez on his tours, the addresses from the envelopes have been placed at the head of the letters; unfortunately, however, the stamps and postmarks are missing, cut off by the young Boulez for his parents' stamp collection. Conversely, Boulez's letters to Cage are rarely dated, and, unlike Cage, Boulez appears to have thrown away several letters from the latter part of the correspondence; dates have been deduced as far as possible from the contents. Fresh information has allowed more accurate dates to be assigned to some letters for this edition. Boulez's customary monogram with which he signs each letter has been rendered by the abbreviation PB throughout. In the rare cases where there is doubt over the transcription of the often cramped handwriting this is indicated by square brackets ([ ]). These brackets always indicate an editorial emendation.

A problem arose from the fact that several of the letters are written partly in



English and partly in French; given that Cage's French is considerably better than Boulez's English, it seemed desirable to mark on the page the portions that had been translated, without recourse to numerous footnotes. Thus *untranslated* sections have been italicised (i.e. sections originally in English). Since two thirds of the volume were in French originally, this seemed easiest on the eye. (The articles appearing as nos 5 and 32 are exceptions to this rule: they appear in roman font, although they were written originally in English.)

Several notes have been added to this translation compared with the version published by the Paul Sacher foundation (*Pierre Boulez / John Cage: Correspondance et Documents*, ed. J-J. Nattiez, Winterthur: Amadeus Verlag, 1990). These are indicated by (RS). In addition, a biographical glossary has been compiled in order to reduce the number of notes in the body of the text.

James Pritchett made many useful observations, particularly concerning the problematic letter no. 35. These have been acknowledged where possible, and his notes indicated by (JP).

My thanks go to Derrick Puffett for his comments on the draft of this edition, and in particular to Penny Souster of Cambridge University Press for her patience and advice during this first venture into translation and editing.

Robert Samuels

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the notes:

- A John Cage Reader* P. Gend and J. Brent, eds, *A John Cage Reader* (New York: Peters, 1982)
- Stocktakings* Pierre Boulez, *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship* (Oxford: OUP, 1991). Translation by Stephen Walsh of *Relevés d'apprenti* (Paris: Seuil, 1966). Page references are to the English edition.
- Jameux Dominique Jameux, *Pierre Boulez* (Paris: Fayard, 1984); translated by Susan Bradshaw (London: Faber, 1991). Page references are to the English edition.
- Orientations* Pierre Boulez, *Orientations*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez and trans. Martin Cooper (London: Faber, 1982). Translation of *Points de repère* (Paris: Christian Bourgois éditeur, 1981). Page references are to the English edition.
- Peyser Joan Peyser, *Boulez* (New York/London: Schirmer Books, 1976)
- Silence* John Cage, *Silence* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1961)

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# Introduction

*Cage and Boulez: a chapter of music history*



