

THE PHILHARMONIE DE PARIS

The time has come for us to learn from this conflict between a client and a project manager¹. This is critical for the working of our democracy, for the future of our professions, for the respect of the rights of the architect and for the role of architecture in our society. We need to have this debate in the very interests of our citizens.

In a few days, the Philharmonie de Paris will close its doors for two months of work about which I know nothing. What will the work cover? What will the cost be? How is it going to be financed? The public nature of the project merits complete transparency. Well, I've been confronted for several years already with the complete opacity of the client's decisions and I think it's both essential and useful to ask ourselves why. Who today knows the real cost of the Philharmonie? Let's kill the common belief that I'm responsible as the architect for the overspend on the Philharmonie. That is actually due to its ambitious program – the desire to create a concert hall that can be reconfigured, along with six rehearsal rooms, a conference room, exhibition spaces, a special sixteen-room education centre, and so on. Whether built by me or some other architect, the cost of the project would be the same.

The Philharmonie de Paris is a totally new experimental philharmonic hall, which the composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, who has just celebrated his ninetieth birthday, has fought for all his life. Its program was ambitious from the start, leading to the project's being dubbed 'the Pompidou Centre of Music' insofar as the building was to offer something more than a concert hall. It was to offer a living space that was open and connected to the Parc de la Villette via a rooftop walkway that was meant to be an extension of the park; and, via a 'sign' overhanging the city's ring road, it was to be a hand reaching out to the neighbouring suburban fringe. The Philharmonie, in short, was meant to be the first structure to be located on the capital's periphery at the heart of a Greater Paris that I've never ceased working towards.

In 2007, I was singled out by an independent panel as the out-and-out winner of the international competition to design and build the Philharmonie de Paris from among six of my fellow architects. That was clearly because my project was the only one that the Philharmonie de Paris Planning Association and its trustees, the Cultural Ministry, the City of Paris and the Ile-de-France Region, wanted to see built. So the Philharmonie was originally a unifying project, as generous as it was essential.

And yet a story of conflict began to unfold. Completely contrary to common practice, the task of carrying out a project as substantial as this one was entrusted to a private non-profit association set up under the terms of the Law of 1901. This association never became a public institution, as would normally be the case – and as a senate report would later regret. Laurent Bayle, the association's

¹ Client and project manager: the client is a physical or moral entity for whom a project is undertaken and realised. As the sponsor of the project, the client is the one who defines the terms and conditions, requirements, budget and estimated schedule, as well as the objectives to be achieved. To realise its project, the client calls on a project manager under the authority of one or more architects. A physical or moral entity, the project manager has the task of realising a work of architecture, the design of the plans, and the organisation, supervision and coordination of the people working on the same project; and of delivering the product once it is finished.

president, certainly wanted to do good: he wanted to steer the project faithfully, adhering to the interests of the musical community as closely as possible and shielding the project from any political hitches. But the days when the presidential office of the Republic and the government had any desire for architecture were over. The economic crisis of 2008 also played a role, as did the duty of being careful with money. That's why I alerted the trustees numerous times to the real cost of the project and the need to keep a tight rein on it.

Things panned out differently. The association decided at the outset to hide the real costs of construction. Its procrastinations delayed construction work by 24 months, when the total time provided in the project management's studies was just 15 months, a feat for such a project. It then launched an invitation to tender practically without competition, whereas I never stopped asking for an invitation to tender lot by lot so we had a better chance of controlling the schedule and overall cost. This unilateral decision on the part of the association's CEO led to the choice of Bouygues Construction and co-contracting firms that are at its mercy.

A whole Machiavellian mechanism was then thought-up, machinery for sidelining the architect of the project. The project manager never stopped shoring up its powers and tampering with the building of the project, while my own powers never stopped being reduced, to the point where I was removed in 2013. That lack of trust and respect caused budget overruns that should have been avoided.

In January 2015, against my advice, the Philharmonie de Paris opened its doors. I explained myself in the pages of *Le Monde* (dated 15 January 2015). Since then, it has enjoyed enormous popular and critical success: close to 500, 000 people have already been to a concert, an exhibition or an event within its walls. Music lovers as well as the world's greatest orchestras and conductors have been unanimous in their praise of the exceptional acoustics and viewing pleasure of the Grande Salle, the main concert hall. Many people have enthused over the building's beauty. But everyone has been able to see that it was badly finished, or unfinished, both outside and in, and that numerous spaces were still closed to the public. Surely they could have shown more confidence in the building's architect and avoided this situation. So, the Philharmonie de Paris isn't properly finished? Well then, let's finish it together.

This spring I asked the trustees to refer the dispute to a mediator in order to allow me, in everyone's best interests, to be reinstated in my job and to oversee this indispensable work on the finishes. The 'Pompidou Center of Music' isn't quite there yet, the public parts remain unfinished or marred by defects. That request has gone unheeded to this day.

This conflict is evidently the prelude to an unacceptable situation: the loss of the government's authority in the management of its projects, the collapse of the law of July 1895 relating to the management of public projects (known as the MOP Law), and the inevitable prospect of getting bogged down in the foibles of public-private partnerships so often decried.

Today, Paris and France as a whole have not got the concert hall we deserve. It's high time its architect was entrusted with the finishing work the Philharmonie de Paris deserves so that it can at last be what I want it to be: a calm, serene object that shines in the night and reflects all day long the leaves in the Parce de la Villette and the cars flowing along the *boulevard périphérique*.

Jean Nouvel