

Valuation in a reversed economy

The case of contemporary art music in France and the United States

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Introduction

Valuation is a social process, and it is an important part of the activities of art worlds (Becker 1982: 39). Value is “radically contingent” (Smith 1983: 11) and evaluation is a “complex set of social and cultural activities.” (Ibid: 6) These activities and negotiations do not aim to create universal values that are constant in time, and indeed they could not do so—valuation in artistic fields is rather a constant process, with some going so far as to say that art is valuation (Citton and Querrien 2014: 12). In this chapter, we will look closely at valuation processes in the world of contemporary art music, which is part of what Pierre Bourdieu (1992) calls the “pure” side of artistic production. This purity comes from a reversal in how success is defined, in that “the artist can only triumph on the symbolic plane when she loses on the economic plane (at least in the short run).” (Ibid: 141, author’s translation) This creates a situation, which Bourdieu also qualifies as “paradoxical” (Ibid), in which artists are seen to eschew financial gain for their work, while nonetheless earning a living (at least for those who are successful in the field) from their work. Our purpose here is to understand the micro-sociological effects of the reversed economic world described by Bourdieu and to see how valuation takes place when economic concerns must be sublimated. We will see that the traits that define a reversed economy in the Bourdieuan sense are actually used as evaluative criteria themselves.

The present chapter will look at valuation in informal settings. I will use data from interviews with actors (primarily composers and funders) from

the contemporary art music world in France and the United States, conducted in the context of a broader study of peer review in this field (Fryberger 2016). These interviewees all identified themselves as being part of a non-commercial artistic sector, and thus as being part of the pure pole of artistic production as described by Bourdieu. These interviews focused on valuation processes taking place in the interaction between a composer and a commissioner or in peer review panels comprised of composers. This study also included observation of informal valuation processes, notably in social media. To make it easier to navigate, I include here a table (Table 1) of the individuals who will be directly cited in the present text¹.

This text is organized as follows: I will begin with a short overview of how the world of contemporary art music functions, followed by an overview of Bourdieu's perspective on the pure pole of artistic production. This will lead us to a discussion of valuation processes within the pure pole, with our focus being on contemporary art music. This discussion will center around three issues, following from Bourdieu's analysis of this reversed economy: disinterestedness, production volume, and position taking. The chapter will close with conclusions regarding how valuation processes work in the pure pole of artistic production.

Table 1: Interviews

Identifier	Date of birth	Country of birth/Country of residence ²
Composer 1	1977	France/France
Composer 3	1978	Italy/Italy
Composer 4	1966	–/France
Composer 23	1980	USA/USA
Composer 36	1989	USA/USA
Composer 37	1977	–/UK
Private patron 1	1942	France/France

1 A full list of the 67 individuals interviewed for this study is provided in Fryberger (2016).

2 The country of birth for some individuals is not indicated, as this would risk revealing their identity.

The contemporary art music world

A first, important point: what is contemporary art music? This is a thorny, unresolved question, constantly up for debate, but the following definition gives us the context necessary to understand what is at issue in the present text:

[...] pieces that [are] composed or preplanned reflectively, fixed in some sort of notation for a performer or creator to interpret or execute, and intended to be listened to by an attentive, informed, and critical audience. We might add that it is a style of music that traces its primary lineage back to the courts and churches of pre-Renaissance Europe, and although those courts and churches are today mostly long defunct or culturally marginal, contemporary art music maintains an important relationship with their modern-day descendants and the structures of production and listening that they represent (Rutherford-Johnson 2017: 3).

In terms of funding, government structures have primarily taken over the role once played by courts and churches, and the world of contemporary art music, both in France and the United States, is indeed highly subsidized. It is made up of a majority of actors who do not make a living from their artistic practice, as most composers and performers working in this domain have a “day job”, so to speak, often as teachers. In France, funding both for the creation and performance of new works is centrally organized, with funds being distributed through competitive, peer review-based processes organized by the Ministry for Culture or its local entities (DRACs—regional public arts funding bodies). In the US, funding for this type of music is not centralized, and various non-profits and university structures provide support for the creation and performance of this music.

New works are often commissioned by performance ensembles, and this process typically involves three actors: the performer(s), the composer, and a public (or in the case of the US, sometimes private) funding body. Typically, the composer and performer join forces to apply for funding for composing and performing a new piece. What is important to understand for our purposes here is that pieces are rarely, if ever, composed without a specific performance situation being already arranged. The composer is not in this sense a supplier who brings his wares to a market, hoping to find a buyer;

the performer and composer work together, and funding comes from a third party, long before an audience is involved in evaluating the piece in question. Audiences for this type of music are very limited, and composed of a significant portion of individuals who are implicated in this world in various ways, with a limited portion of people who could be seen as external to this world. If we take the neo-classical definition of a market, with actors entering and leaving an exchange like strangers, and where the opposition between buyers and sellers is resolved through a contract or price, we would have to say that this is not, in that sense, a market. There are negotiations between composers and performers, or between performers and festivals, etc., which do result in a compromise regarding a price or contract, but this agreement is heavily determined by the funds made available by a third party. Bourdieu (1992:139) claims that it is the lack of commercial value of works in the pure pole of artistic production that effectively keeps them out of market structures. The fact that the wares touted by composers are not brought to a broader market means that valuation takes place amongst actors who are often intimately familiar with each other's work, and the negotiations typically involve binary decisions—will the piece be performed/funded or not—rather than efforts to agree on a price.

It bears mentioning, in the context of the present volume, that the world of contemporary art music has transnational characteristics, in that actors circulate widely between different (primarily Western) countries, as can be seen even in the short list of interviewees cited in this text (Table 1). This study has shown, however, that transnational careers are only available to a sub-set of composers working in this field. Indeed, I found that there is a small portion of composers who circulate in the international modernist festival, residency, and ensemble circuit, while a large portion of composers actually write almost exclusively for national outlets. The present article focuses on the former. Thus, there is a portion of this world—including audience members, performers, works, curators, and composers—that travels widely, which can be seen in opposition to composers or ensembles who cultivate a national or local audience. These two groups rarely meet in practice. It is also important to note, as I have shown elsewhere (Fryberger and Velasco-Pufleau 2019), that national origin plays an important role in aesthetic decisions and how works and composers are evaluated. I would therefore call the world of contemporary art music a faux-transnational one, or one

that strives for a transnational identity, with national borders nonetheless being highly meaningful.

Bourdieu's reversed economy

The pure pole of artistic production, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu, is a place where artists cannot and will not produce their art for financial gain. They are forced to find sustenance elsewhere, either from inherited wealth (Bourdieu 1992: 141) or from another source of employment. Immediate financial gain is regarded with suspicion, although the possibility of deferred profit is seen as legitimate (ibid: 140). This means that there is a strict separation between symbolic value and market value (Ibid: 234). The works produced must carry within themselves the norms for perceiving and understanding them (Ibid: 140), meaning that the criteria for their evaluation come from the works themselves. The art field, as conceived by Bourdieu, comprises a "space of positions and positions taken, both realized and potential." (Ibid: 380) An artist can take a position by producing a work of art, a manifest, or taking a political stance, for example (Ibid: 381). Bourdieu posits that the field is defined by constant struggle, and that this struggle is what generates the field itself (Ibid). This struggle for position has implications both for artists working in the present and for the way their predecessors are seen (Ibid: 382), because this struggle is fundamentally about imposing "legitimate categories for perception and appreciation" (Ibid: 261)—in sum, determining how valuation processes should be carried out.

We can derive a certain number of evaluative criteria from this perspective on artistic production, disinterestedness first among them. It would follow that artists working in the pure pole would use the economic structure described by Bourdieu to evaluate their peers, in order to understand if their artistic production fits into the artistic field in question or not. In order to be part of the pure pole, artists would need to display an attitude of disinterestedness, seek financial gain elsewhere than from their artistic work, create works that imply their own criteria for evaluation, and participate in the struggle inherent in the field by taking a position. In what follows, we will look closely at how these factors are activated (or not) in valuation processes in the field of contemporary art music.

Valuation in the pure pole

In the first part of the 1980s, we were rather scandalized by a [...] speculative trend [...] in contemporary art. We would go to a gallery, and they would say: “you need to hurry, there’s a waiting list”. What’s that all about? “This is going to get expensive, because such and such an artist is going to be in X gallery in New York”. And we thought, what is this? And so we thought, isn’t there a place where market logics aren’t present, where the issue isn’t money gaining value? Because when we buy [art], it’s not because it could become more valuable. If that happens, fine, but that’s not the point. We want to support artists, tell them that we like what they do by buying their work. To get to know them, spend time with them—our wish is to spend our evenings with them, meet them. [...] And so we thought, in music, could we not do the same thing? [...] Find someplace where people don’t talk about money, where money’s not the issue (private patron 1, France³).

This quote is from a French private arts patron, who began as a collector of contemporary art before he started commissioning composers. This citation clearly illustrates the complex relationship to money present in the reversed economy (Bourdieu 1992) of autonomous artistic worlds. This patron clearly sees that he has access to the artistic worlds he is interested in via his financial input, but he wants this financial contribution to be seen as a gift and not as an investment. His disinterested attitude must be matched by the same from the actors of the art world in question: for this economic exchange to take place, it must be sublimated on both sides. The exchange of cultural and emotional capital is stressed—in other words, being able to talk about art and make friendships. When a piece of music is commissioned by a private patron, the transaction is transformed into reciprocal gifts: the money from the patron goes through an intermediary body (a performer, a non-profit organization, or a governmental body), meaning the link between the patron and the composer is not openly financial (and the sum is tax deductible), and the composer “gives” the piece to the patron, often by dedicating the piece to him. The economic exchange remains hidden, whereas the gift (dedication written on the score) is valorized and visible. Economic exchanges being

3 All interviews cited were conducted by the author, and those with French composers or patrons were conducted in French—translations are mine.

repurposed into gift relations is a typical feature of the pure pole of artistic production (Drott 2010; Craig 2007). It therefore follows that this patron uses disinterestedness as a means to evaluate the composers he wishes to support. A composer who does not display this attitude would be rejected—regardless of how his music might sound—because this patron is explicitly seeking composers who “don’t talk about money”. This means, of course, that in the most autonomous artistic worlds—some of which are highly subsidized—an attitude of disinterestedness can actually increase the economic and symbolic value of an artist (Bourdieu 1977; 1992).

An attitude of disinterestedness toward money is tied to the perceived sacred quality of this music, as money is considered to be impure. A composer who openly seeks to maximize his earnings creates doubts about the authenticity of his creative work. To illustrate this, we could look at the case of composer Arnold Schönberg⁴, who was called a “Geschäftsmann” (businessman) by his most virulent critics: “in Vienna, in 1908, this word summed up the accusation of having neglected art for its opposite, money.” (Buch 2005: 116) In order to accommodate this perception of money being dirty when it comes too close to art, composers have different strategies for displaying an attitude of disinterestedness. Compartmentalization is a common strategy. A French composer describes this:

And the pieces that you wrote for television, which pieces are those?

Those are very old pieces, ancient pieces. That happened by chance, it’s a long story.

[...] So those pieces are not in your catalog?

Yes, that’s right. The problem is, those are pieces from my youth, I don’t deny them as such, but they are aesthetically and technically quite distant, which means that I wouldn’t put them on an official list of my works. I draw a dividing line (Composer 1, France).

This composer’s website includes a “cabinet of curiosities” where, among other things, one can find “a few pieces (more or less antediluvian): sins of youth, if you will”. He does not deem the pieces in this category fit to be included in

4 Arnold Schönberg (born in Austria in 1874, died in the United States in 1951), was one of the most influential composers of the 20th century. He first pushed music into atonal territory and then developed 12-tone technique in the 1920s.

his list of “principal works” or “series” (etudes, symphonies, caprices...), and thereby creates a strict separation between his autonomous, artistic, serious work, and his work that has other, not entirely “artistic” ends. His compositions that can be heard on television are not included at all on his website, although they are the background that makes the rest possible, in the sense that they provide the means for his existence. This composer draws a very clear dividing line between his artistic production and the production which could be seen as profit-seeking, and he was visibly uncomfortable discussing this work during our interview. By drawing this line, he is able to operate on both ends of the artistic spectrum—the pure and the impure—and it is his “impure” work which gives him the possibility of keeping his other work free from pecuniary considerations. He took pains in the interview to describe a piece he had written on commission, which he completed before he knew how much, or if he would be paid for it. Émile Durkheim (1995: 38) made clear that a long initiation is necessary to place the sacred and profane properly in relation to each other according to the conventions of a given field, and it is precisely this that is learned over the course of an artistic career. It is the act of creating these relationships that sets one group of people apart from others (Fields 1995: xvi). Thus, a contemporary art music composer must learn how to properly relate the sacred (art) to the profane (money) in the way that is acceptable to this community in order to be part of it.

The pluri-activity of artists is a constant of contemporary art worlds. A survey of new music composers (with a very broad definition, including composers who compose film music) in the United States concluded that less than 10 per cent of them were able to live from their creative work (Jeffri 2008). This is seen as an advantage for many of the composers I interviewed: the fact of earning one’s living through activity other than composition is valued, because in this way they are not explicitly motivated by money to compose and do not feel they have to compromise their artistic ambitions. For example:

I can do this [compose as I wish] because now I have a teaching job. At one point, I didn’t teach, and I lived from commissions. That meant I had to compose a lot more, with more regularity, and also go looking for commissions more. That changes the attitude one has toward institutions—that was a situation I really didn’t feel good about (Composer 4, France).

Composers who have a paid job on the side feel free to compose as they wish, and tend to see other composers who compose “for money” as compromised and motivated by pecuniary considerations. Rather than being seen as a hindrance, some composers see this strict compartmentalization of their activity between “paid” and “artistic” work as an advantage. This compartmentalization gives them precisely the artistic freedom necessary to position themselves fully in the pure pole of artistic creation.

In this reversed economy, artists are expected to be conscious of their obligation to be motivated by profits that are not strictly financial. This means, however, that a composer who conforms to this obligation can still produce works that use this complex relationship to money as raw artistic material. A piece like *Fremdarbeit* (literally meaning “foreign work”, but typically translated as “outsourcing”⁵) by Johannes Kreidler⁶ would fall into this category. In this work, Kreidler outsourced the compositional work, or at least pretends to have done so. It is possible that this is indeed a fiction which is part of the piece, which would make the whole work closer to a performance piece than to a traditional piece of music.⁷ The premise is that he outsourced the work to a Chinese composer and an Indian programmer for a commission he received from the Klangwerkstatt Berlin for a new piece for the Ensemble Mosaik. In the program note⁸, he speaks explicitly of the economic exchanges that supposedly determined the existence of this piece. This piece thus operates on several levels: it is a commentary on globalization and exploitation, and also breaks with the convention of not discussing the financial aspects of a commission. By highlighting the low cost of the outsourced composition, he adopts a posture of explicitly seeking financial gain, but does so in order to critique this posture and expose it elsewhere. Thus, he is able to keep his status as a disinterested artist and keeps his autonomy, both for himself and the work—the work thereby remains within the bounds of contemporary art music. A more direct commentary on the disinterested nature of work

5 This term has a complex history and is today negatively connoted. For a complete discussion of this term, see Iddon (2015: 39, note 7).

6 Johannes Kreidler (b. 1980) is a German composer, one of the founders of the so-called ‘New Conceptualist’ school of composition.

7 See a full discussion of this likely fiction and its implications in an article by Martin Iddon (2015).

8 October 12, 2018 (<http://www.kreidler-net.de/fremdarbeit.html>).

within this artistic sphere can be found in the work of Alexander Schubert⁹, who sells advertising spots in his multimedia works, as for example in his piece *Star Me Kitten*¹⁰. The humor this provokes comes from it being seen as a transgression. These two examples show how disinterestedness can become material for musical works themselves, all the while maintaining the disinterestedness of the composer himself.

Disinterestedness and production volume go hand in hand. Harrison White (2002) posits that the fundamental element for evaluating quality is production volume: indeed, without sufficiently visible production volume, evaluation cannot take place. In a world such as that of contemporary art music, a composer cannot know the value of her production before it circulates (Menger 2009), and thus a certain volume is necessary for this work to be visible. The present study reveals that production volume also has meaning and is used for quality assessments in the world of contemporary art music, despite price, and thus an incentive for scarcity, not being publicly available information for evaluating this work. Composers freely admit to measuring their own production with a stopwatch, using this measure to evaluate their own production and that of others. There are numerous passages on this subject in composer Gérard Pesson's¹¹ diary, e.g.: "I have never been able to cure myself of this other calculation variant which consists of timing every fragment of music I sketch." (Pesson 2004: 21, author's translation) Composer 3 (France) declared that he had decided at one point to limit his production to 45 minutes per year, which was low compared to his previous production levels. This decision was made so that he could maintain his sense of artistic freedom and so that he would not accept projects "just for money"—possible thanks to a teaching job. If we look at historical avant-garde composers known for their limited production, such as Edgard Varèse, who only wrote 2.5 hours of music in his lifetime, Anton Webern with 7.57 hours, or Pierre Boulez with 13.7 hours¹², it would seem that 45 minutes per year is actually

9 German composer, Alexander Schubert (b. 1979) explores cross-disciplinary and cross-genre musical creation, with a performative focus.

10 October 2, 2018 (<http://alexanderschubert.net/ads.php>).

11 Gérard Pesson (b. 1958) is a French composer of contemporary art music.

12 These numbers were generated using the following sources: Edgard Varèse, *The Complete Works*, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/edgard-var%C3%A8se--the-complete-works-mw0001049342> (consulted 2 October 2018); Anton Webern, *Complete Webern*, <http://www.deutschegrammophon.com/de/cat/4576372> (consulted 2 October 2018); Pierre Boulez,

quite a lot—but it is the meaning given to these numbers that matters, more than the numbers themselves in any absolute sense. What we can conclude is that composers are trying to communicate something with their production volume, and limiting production is intended to communicate an attitude of disinterestedness and a guarantee of artistic freedom.

Production volume therefore sends signals which are interpreted by other actors in this world. Composers use their peers' production volume to justify their judgments. For example:

I know many people who work like that. People who have a lot of commissions and write a lot of music, whether it's for money or just the need to be the focus of attention, for me these are symptoms of the same problem. These motivations are very similar for me.

Sure, but if you are really motivated by profit, you don't go into contemporary music. Of course, but there are people who have this attitude in contemporary music—they could easily slide into film music. What keeps them here is simply that they have enough of whatever they need to stay here (Composer 4, France).

Production volume, when judged to be excessive, is thus used to create doubt about the artistic drive of the composers cited. In this composer's analysis, some of his peers' need to compose does not come from a profound, intimate desire to create this kind of music, but rather from a need for attention. We can hypothesize that there is an acceptable production volume for a composer of contemporary art music, somewhere between the minimal level necessary to be visible¹³ and an overproduction judged to be attention-seeking by her or his peers.

Since production volume is indeed a signal used to justify quality assessments, it follows that it is commonplace to signal one's productivity in this milieu. A propitious place to observe this is in the activity of contemporary art music composers in social media fora, such as Facebook. What one observes there is that photographs of double bars (which indicate the end of a

Euvres complètes, <http://www.deutsche Grammophon.com/fr/cat/4806828> (consulted 2 October 2018).

¹³ Perhaps three pieces played by recognized ensembles: this is the requirement for many funding applications, and this may represent a minimal level of visibility that allows one to access the next level.

piece) are frequently posted: this is a clear way to show one's productivity to peers. Here are two examples of texts accompanying such photographs, the first from a composer in the PhD program at Harvard University (Boston, USA), the second from a composer about his opera composed at the IRCAM¹⁴:

DOUBLE-BAR on [X] for [X] ensemble [link to ensemble provided]. I'm really, really proud of this 23-minute long work for violin and percussion, with piccolo/bass flute, clarinet, and e-guitar. It'll get its premiere on May 25, which is basically as long as it will take me to do a pile of edits and make parts. / PRETTY PLEASED OVER HERE (Composer 36, USA, Facebook, 2014).

I think I just wrote the LAST BAR of opera [X]... (there is still electronics part to be realised, and will check every notes, harmony, etc., still lots of work, but I have the ENDING!) (Composer 37, Facebook, 2014).

Harrison White (2002) posits that production volume is the most common signal to be found on production markets, and we can see here that this signal is also significant for the world of contemporary art music, even though this is the “pure” pole of the music field, and not ostensibly a market. Note that composer 36 cited here goes so far as to include the precise length of the piece in his status update. This observation complicates the assessment of this field as not being subject to market forces (e.g. Bourdieu 1992; Menger 1983). It shows that a reversed economy indeed does use evaluative mechanisms present in market settings—market logics, if you will—but that these judgment factors are reinterpreted by these actors. Signaling production, in this case, is also a way of signaling reputation (writing for certain ensembles, premieres at certain festivals, etc.), and specifically signaling production *volume* indicates the labor intensity of the works produced, and thereby the commitment of the composer. For Bourdieu, the amount of time spent on creating a work of art is an essential feature for its evaluation:

a rather indisputable criterion for determining the value of any artistic production [is] investment of effort, sacrifices of all kinds, and, definitively, [investment] of time, which goes hand in hand [...] with independence from

14 The IRCAM (*Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*) is a center for electronic music research in Paris, founded by composer and conductor Pierre Boulez in 1977.

forces and constraints from outside the field, or worse, from inside [...] (1992: 145).

Disinterestedness is thus signaled with production volume, which is tied up both with the necessary effort and time spent on artistic work, and with the capacity of the art world in question.

By attaching quality judgments to production volume, actors in the contemporary art music world also work to respect the production capacity of this art world. They thereby seek to maintain this delicate ecosystem, where resources are far from abundant. Indeed, every art world has a limited capacity for high-quality works (Becker 1982: 141). This capacity is linked to the economic and institutional resources of the world in question and to practical questions or conventions related, for example, to space (e.g. in a museum setting) or time (e.g. the standard duration of a concert) (ibid). Evaluative criteria change as a function of this capacity:

Insofar as aesthetic systems change their criteria to produce the number of certified works an art world's distributive mechanisms can accommodate, even the most absolute of them, those which most resolutely draw a strict line between art and nonart, in fact practice a relativism which defeats that aim (Becker 1982: 143).

This point helps clarify the issue of scarcity in art worlds. Scarcity is a necessary component, but not the sole component of artistic value (cf. Moulin 1978), and because of this, actors in art worlds must take a stance on this issue, either by explicitly limiting their production or by making the transgression of this convention part of their artistic practice (Ibid). In this context, we could bring up the case of Johannes Kreidler again. His biography¹⁵ mentions studies with Mathias Spahlinger (major composer in the contemporary art music world), university positions he has occupied, and premieres at legitimate and legitimizing festivals (Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, Huddersfield, etc.). He is best known for works that take the form of activist performance art, such as his protest against the merger of the Baden-Baden and Freiburg orchestras during the Donaueschingen festival in 2012, wherein he destroyed a cello onstage (this was a commission from the Gesellschaft für

15 October 2, 2018 (<http://www.kreidler-net.de/english/CV.htm>).

Neue Musik). This piece provoked a rousing discussion in the contemporary art music world, which was summarized by critic Chris Swithinbank on his blog¹⁶. Kreidler's official catalog¹⁷ lists about a dozen works per year, whereas his blog¹⁸ (not to mention his Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts) show a very different reality: he generally posts several new pieces per week, whether electronic, visual, or purely conceptual—these often contain a biting commentary on the world of contemporary art music. As there are limited resources for pieces to be played in public fora, he has turned to electronic means of production and distribution. This hyper-productivity is a way to mock the contemporary art music world and its sacralized composition processes, which are supposed to involve intense, laborious, and therefore long periods of research to develop true singularity for each individual piece. However, his official catalog remains within the norms of contemporary art music, and this critique becomes a marker of originality, a strategy for taking a position, without pulling him out of this art world.

The previous example shows one position-taking strategy, but the most common one encountered by far mobilizes the history of contemporary art music. Indeed, an artist cannot ignore the history of her chosen discipline. Multiple avenues are possible: rupture, continuity, dialogue, pastiche, stubborn ignorance, etc., but awareness of this history and a stance in relation to it are obligatory. This stance is an essential aspect of how an artist's work is evaluated. This applies to those producing works of art and those who consume them: Raymonde Moulin (1986: 378) shows that gallerists back their new discoveries up by explicitly displaying profound knowledge of art history. In this fashion, gallerists use this knowledge to increase the value of "their" artists, just as the artist does the same to justify certain choices. But what is history made of? And how do canons form? A striking example is that of the reception of J.S. Bach over the centuries. The musicologist Joël-Marie Fauquet and sociologist Antoine Hennion show how he became "the father of music", the legitimate source for the traditions that followed (Fauquet and Hennion 2000). The "historicization" of classical music, and therefore of contemporary art music, starts with the veneration of J.S. Bach, work that has

16 October 2, 2018 (<http://www.chrisswithinbank.net/2012/11/a-more-readable-version-of-the-discussion-around-johannes-kreidlers-protest-at-donaueschingen/>).

17 October 2, 2018 (<http://www.kreidler-net.de/english/works.htm>).

18 October 12, 2018 (<http://www.kulturtechno.de/>).

been undertaken by renowned performers, composers, critics, etc., beginning in the 18th century, and which still continues today (Ibid). For example:

I wish Messiaen would come back down to Earth, and that he would give us something to applaud that only owes its existence to music and seeks to glorify God only through its musical virtues. That was the method of Jean-Sebastien Bach, a rather good method, after all (Marc Pincherle, quoted in Hill and Simeone 2008: 195, author's translation).

This is a critique from the 1945 premiere of *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* by Olivier Messiaen¹⁹. This critic is taking Messiaen to task for providing both printed and verbal commentary on his music, a practice which was in its infancy in 1945. It is the commentary from the composer, and especially its religious content, which is seen as being faulty because it stands outside the field of “musical virtue”. The critic is implicitly asking Messiaen to end his devotion to a pagan god (the Almighty himself) and follow the one “true” God, Jean-Sebastien Bach.

Each art world must undergo a canonization process in order to exist, and this work is constantly renewed and renegotiated by every generation of artists—this is the work they have to do in order to be part of the art world in question. The canon is first and foremost a tool for artists to position themselves in an art world. In my observations of the behavior of contemporary art music composers in social media, I observed that part of their activity consisted in precisely this: discussing and positioning themselves in relation to canonical composers. Here are some examples:

Come on, clearly the theatrical bit with the strings in “Périodes” [by Gérard Grisey] isn't acceptable (composer 23, USA, Facebook, 2014).

Something [String Quartet I-II-II—Mauricio Kagel (Arditti Quartet)] I will listen to tomorrow. I still haven't quite manage to find a way to full enjoyment to his music (totally my fault) but hoping to get there soon (composer 37, Facebook, 2014).

19 Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was a hugely influential French composer, known for his creation and use of ‘modes of limited transposition’ and birdsong, as well as for his deep Catholic faith and its presence in his music.

so i resisted playing this awful game until it became possible to force [X] to pick me a composer. / with a little nip of venom, he assigned me milton babbitt, who is fine! i'd guess listening to this is better than, say, eating a square foot of unseasoned corrugated cardboard. i definitely enjoyed his guitar music quite a bit in high school. / i'm posting this as an exercise in ecstatic dutifulness, but if you want to continue the game, 'like' this and i'll tell you to listen to spahlinger (composer 36, USA, Facebook, 2014).

The composers discussed and critiqued here benefit from a reputation such that the expression of a negative opinion from lesser known composers will not necessarily affect them. Reputable and well-known figures such as Milton Babbitt and Gérard Grisey provide stable markers around which newcomers can position themselves. In the shifting sands of contemporary art music, some fixed points are necessary, and canonized composers act as precisely this. This is indeed the way a status market (Aspers 2009) functions—a stable hierarchy of actors is used to position oneself, and without this hierarchy, evaluating production becomes impossible. History and the canon thus have discursive merit: they can generate discourse or keywords to describe an artistic project, and thereby to take a position.

This work of taking position in relation to canonized composers has multiple effects: one shows one's knowledge of major figures in the world of contemporary art music—which shows one's desire to belong to this world—and this is also a way to situate oneself aesthetically. In this respect, let us return to part of the comment on Mauricio Kagel²⁰ cited above: "I still haven't quite manage [*sic*] to find a way to full enjoyment to [*sic*] his music (*totally my fault*) but hoping to get there soon." (composer 37, Facebook, 2014, my emphasis) This declaration shows the desire to adhere to the values of the world of contemporary art music and the efforts made to do so by this composer. The composer recognizes that he cannot categorically reject the work of canonical composers, even if he could provide a coherent critique of their music and thereby justify a negative judgment. Despite a negative judgment, this composer recognizes his obligation to take these canonical composers into account in order to be recognized as a member of this art world—adopting these values is thus a survival strategy. This judgment also provides a

20 Mauricio Kagel (born in Argentina in 1931, died in Germany in 2008) was a composer known for focusing on the theatrical side of musical performance.

lens through which we can evaluate the work of the composer who made this judgment. It is clear that his work is not meant as instrumental theater (Mauricio Kagel's distinct legacy), and likely does not have the performative, even humorous, traits that are widely associated with Kagel's oeuvre. Generally speaking, one of the dividing lines in the world of contemporary art music is on theatrical/performative traits, so aligning oneself (or not) with Mauricio Kagel is a way to position oneself in this respect.

Taking position is an essential part of valuation work, and valuation and the criteria used to conduct it are only important to those who are personally invested in the maintenance of a given art world (Gracyk 1999: 216). Valuation is a manifestation of a commitment to a position, as we saw in the previous example, and I would even go so far as to say that in status markets, where there is no scale of value independent from the actors involved (Aspers 2009: 116), position taking is valuation.

* * *

What this chapter has shown is that the characteristics of a genre are used in evaluating works produced within it: valuation is as much about fit as it is about quality. This can be seen in the judgments discussed regarding disinterestedness or production volume—the way the music sounds has nothing to do with these judgments, and they are not meant to say anything about the music itself. What actors are evaluating in such statements is whether or not the composer in question displays the traits necessary to be part of this art world, as it is understood by the actors within it. This is fundamentally boundary-making work, a task which takes up a considerable amount of energy within art worlds (Becker 1982: 36). The aim of this chapter has been to show how these boundaries are drawn not only by using what could be deemed aesthetic criteria, but also the specific features of the “reversed economy” of autonomous artistic production, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1992), particularly expressions of disinterestedness. The traits that define the pure pole of artistic production (among them: disinterestedness, low production volume, and struggles for position) are actually used by actors in these fields as valuation criteria and, as such, become intimately tied to considerations of quality. In this way, the features of the pure pole are passed down from one generation to the next.

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