“12,000 euros is not a lot to pay for a dream”: The Structured “Heteronomization” of Assessment in a Theatre Grants Committee

« Une part de rêve à 12 000 euros » : l’hétéronomisation encadrée du jugement dans une commission Théâtre

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Introduction

Each year in France, approximately 1,200 independent companies and projects receive devolved performing arts funding for dance, music, theatre, circus, and street theatre. The state retains symbolic power within these sectors—a power which is reinforced by delegating the task of funding beneficiary selection to professionals of the artistic field. As a legacy of the Third Republic, the Ministry of Culture relies on an exceptional number of consultative bodies which involve professionals of the arts and culture in public decision-making (Dubois 1999). At the overall administration level, these bodies have undergone reform in the context of the rationalization of administrative organization. Presented as outdated forms of decision-making, they were deemed undemocratic and incompatible with “the need for responsiveness in government action.” For Rue de Valois, and more specifically the creative sector, their heterogeneity was made an issue in the 2010s, culminating in an initial reform of their operating procedures in 2015. As well as formalizing evaluation procedures, revision of the founding principles introduced market and political criteria. Thus, the committee had to take into account “first and foremost the artistic quality of the project or programme followed by its distribution prospects and economic viability.” In December 2021, a revision of the founding principles confirmed this reorientation.
In what way do these regulatory changes imply a practical transformation of assessment discussions and of the evaluation methods used? The literature on committees tends to promote the hypothesis of a dichotomy, or even the resistance of these actors to revision of the system of reference for public action. Thus the arrival of cultural professionals in local authorities led to a narrowing of the application evaluation principles towards promotion of the avant-garde and technologization (Dubois et al. 2017). In theatre, the struggle for creative recognition by directors and producers of publicly funded theatre was also reflected in the 1980s by the stranglehold on national committees of proponents of avant-garde creation, which was impervious to criteria outside the field of art (Noiriel 2011; Glas 2018). This observation also reigns true for fine art where “the autarky of assessors” (Heinich 1997a) which guaranteed the autonomy of these “arenas independent of all others” (Urfalino & Vilkas 1995) in the 1990s remains (Misdrahi 2015; Grange 2019).

However, transformations in public action and in the trajectory of careers in the arts prompt us to reconsider the role of the state in preserving the autonomy of the artistic field. On the one hand, all administrative sectors are subject to managerial doctrines, according to a logic to which culture is no exception (Dubois 2001; Négrier & Teillet 2014). On the other hand, the assessors to whom the state delegates the task of evaluation are arts professionals who experience a heteronomous redefinition of the norms of their professionalism in all domains: contemporary music (Picaud 2019); dance (Sorignet 2010); theatre (Pilmis 2012); cinema (Lizé & Naudier 2015); and cultural programming (Dutheil-Pessin & Ribac 2017). The hypothesis at the heart of this article is that the allocation of public funding to performers, which contributes to artistic consecration, encourages the heteronomization of the artistic field through the combined effect of transformations in public action on one side and transformations in professional socializations on the other. It is not the funding schemes alone, with their regulatory frameworks, which have led to the introduction of economic and managerial assessment criteria. It is through their implementation throughout the evaluation process that the assessors help to make such categories acceptable or even legitimate. Each category represents a certain standpoint which, in order to be understood, must be viewed in the context of the social profiles of the assessors.

To explore this theory, the article will study a funding allocation committee in the performing arts sector (box). Theatre professionals play a role as assistants of public decision-making within it. As specialists, they have technical knowledge which grants them an authority of judgement which justifies a delegation of power (Paradeise 1985). But it is in practice, through their involvement in the course of discussions, that they see themselves and are seen as experts (Fritsch 1993) and contribute to producing the authoritative discourse at the basis of artistic taxonomies. The liturgical conditions for the production of this discourse (Bourdieu 1991: 113) represent the entry point of this article: a study of the legitimate people by whom and the situations and forms in which the discourse must be uttered. In other words, the committee offers a framework for an assessment situation in which the professional, in order to be continuously recognized as expert, must respect the normative order that regulates the interaction (Goffman 1974). Leaving aside what might happen backstage of this negotiation, the article approaches the convocation of these specialists as the stage on which we see interactions in public, which are revealing of the frequency and the legitimate forms of the use of heteronomous criteria.
The study of the committee begins with analysis of these frameworks, taking into account the evolution of evaluation standards defined by the state as well as the means of selecting assessors. The second section considers speaking at meetings as a resource to which members of the panel have unequal access depending on their social profile. The article makes a final shift in focus in the third section when it studies assessors’ profiles in terms of their argumentation, and highlights the link between agents’ social profiles and their differentiated use of economic and political registers.

Box 1. Ethnography of a Grants Awarding Committee in the Theatre Sector

This article will analyse the autonomy of professionals’ technical evaluation (Sapiro 2019) based on observation of a grants awarding committee in the theatre sector. One of the thirteen Directions régionales des affaires culturelles (Regional Directorates of Cultural Affairs, DRAC) holds a meeting twice a year for a period of three days. Each session convenes about thirty experts from the subfield of theatre—actors, directors, producers, and programme planners—to assess around sixty arts grant applications. Project proposals are submitted by companies from the region. Two types of funding may be applied for: contract—which is handled in the winter sessions—or project funding—which is handled in the summer sessions. The first consists of funding provided to a company over several years, the second is funding to put on a new production or a revival.

The field study consisted of observing three sessions (one in 2018 and two in 2019) from an observer standpoint granted by the DRAC management. A range of documents including the CVs of the thirty assessors supplements the data. Entry via the administrative management structure allowed a certain depth of questioning in interview with members of the regional management concerned, but not with assessors, whom I was not supposed to contact personally. Requests made to them following the observations also remain unanswered. The first observation session, in 2018, enabled familiarization with the conventions for speaking at meetings and with the identity of the convened assessors. This familiarization was put to use during the two sessions of 2019. Two types of survey were then carried out from a position among the observers of the meeting (see fig. 1). First of all, the content of the exchanges was recorded using notes taken on a computer, with a speed of input to produce a record as close as possible to the terms employed in the discussions. The result is therefore a reconstruction that is as accurate as possible based on these notes. The liveliest passages were sometimes recorded. Second, each intervention was timed.

The material thus collected fed two paired databases. The first had 764 instances of verbal contributions, relating to 112 company proposals. These were coded into fifteen variables, including reference to the project discussed, the ranking of the intervention, its duration, its orientation (in favour, against, or informative), and about ten assessment registers, which are presented in more detail in the third part of the article. This first database was linked to a second listing the characteristics of the assessors. Each of the thirty assessors observed was coded using variables specifying their gender; age group; location of professional activity (city centre, near or far outskirts); job; main employment status (employed or self-employed); level of qualification; subject area and type of educational...
establishment attended; education and trajectory type (irregular, state- or independently subsidized); total number of contributions to meetings; average length of contribution; number of times speaking “against”; and frequency of use of each of the ten registers of argumentation identified.

1. A Standardized Situation of Artistic Assessment

The advisory bodies on which the state relies to legitimize decisions on granting funding for the performing arts operate according to objective and harmonized rules set out in statutory texts. These lay down the procedures for applying to funding schemes as well as the criteria for evaluating applications, the composition of panels and their method of deliberation. Products of the specificities of cultural policy and of transformations to public action, they are part of the normative order of interaction through which the state regulates methods of assessing the artistic value of works and creators. The regulatory criteria for deliberation provide a first level for the definition of a theatre assessor. Respecting these criteria determines the legitimacy of the decision taken.

1.1 A Managerial Redefinition of the Frameworks for Artistic Assessment

The emphasis placed on advisory boards and the state’s delegation of a public funding mechanism to arts and culture professionals is a result of historic modes of the institutionalization of cultural policy. Until the First World War, the process of devolving power to the fields of cultural production was ongoing. Drawing on the principle of art for art’s sake, their agents rejected the heteronomous principles at work in the fields of economics and politics. So as to make its bid to intervene possible, the state made long-term, ostensible use of mixed collaborative spaces. These commissions, committees, and boards were even more gladly received in the administration des Beaux-Arts (administration of fine art) of the Third Republic following the atrophy of its classical administrative structures (Dubois 1999: 136-141). Reflective of the style of policy-making of the era, these bodies provided a means for observation or even surveillance of the political by the arts. After the Second World War, the state became the guarantor of autonomy in the field of art in the face of economic principles (ibid.: 217-264), thereby granting its agents shared power with those in the field of cultural production to say what art is, and to do so in particular from within committees. The latter acquired a discreet coercive right, like in the case of the media wherein they allowed the executive to ensure control while preserving freedom of the press (Méon 2005). In other words, the committee represents a framework that guides the criteria and modes of artistic assessment and therefore the analytical frames according to which the boundaries of art are defined.

The historically very narrow functioning of the various sectors of cultural administration favoured the regeneration of evaluation criteria and heterogeneous operating procedures from one field of intervention to another, as well as their uneven and out-of-sync formalization. This compartmentalisation was called into question in the early 2000s by the strong promotion of the cross-disciplinary nature of public
policy in all sectors. In an emblematic way, in 2010, the Ministry of Culture saw its ten directorates merged into four entities as part of the General Review of Public Policies (RGPP). Since then, the new direction générale de la Création artistique (Directorate-General for Artistic Creation) has encompassed the directorate of music, dance, theatre, and shows (DMDTS) and the délégation aux Arts plastiques (fine arts department, DAP). This new entity, according to modernizing rhetoric, must ensure the “consolidation of a common culture” and the “implementation of internal synergies and crossover.” At the same time, the process of separating management from the implementation of public action which began in the 1990s continues. This is reflected in the decentralization of a major portion of subsidies. This context favoured the framing of the heterogeneity of funding mechanisms for this sector as a public issue in the 2010s, according to criteria summarized in a circular:

“Since the granting of this funding is reliant on various legal bases composed of sets of guiding principles of different levels established either for certain sectors or for certain activities, it appears necessary to establish a uniform regulatory framework for funding allocation in order to simplify the procedure, harmonize practices, and make the system for granting subsidies more transparent while maintaining the specificities of each artistic discipline.”

A process of reform and harmonization of the funding categories led to a uniform regulatory framework in 2015, which was then reinforced by the recent reform of December 2021. In the performing arts sector, two categories remained at the time of my observations: “project funding”, which is awarded to help the creation, revival, or extension of a theatrical production; and “contract”, which is granted for a period of three years during which the project initiator receives a grant to support the company’s overall activity. These grants are awarded to artists or companies by the regional prefect, under the direction of the relevant DRAC and on the advice of an advisory commission made up of experts.

The principles governing the functioning of the advisory boards thereby explicitly extend the opinion of the assessors to criteria that go beyond artistic considerations to take into account the inclusion of project initiators in networks of partnership, the economic solidity of their proposal, and the involvement of teams in cultural action where the project is based, etc. The creation of a single platform for application submission standardized the process from one region to another: companies fill out a submission form, together with accompanying documents such as their artistic project, video clips, an activity report, etc. These are then assigned by the platform to the relevant regional directorate according to the postal code of residence entered by the candidate company.

Application forms take the form of a multi-tabbed Excel spreadsheet. Completing an application for project funding thus requires, for example, providing information on the company (presentation of the management and upcoming artistic and cultural projects); the project for which funding is sought (outline of project, partnerships, distribution, number of performances planned, production budget); activity of the company (shows created and performances given over the past five years); employment (working and employment conditions of the team); project budget; and collaboration between team and organization (conditions of collaboration with actors, directors, etc.).

The application form constitutes a translation of the criteria set out in the principles, formalizing and defining the frameworks for project assessment within which the
assessors’ opinions must fit. The eligibility of applications is conditional upon compliance with heteronomous criteria for distribution and co-production\textsuperscript{13}. The assessors are called on to deliver an opinion “by giving priority to the artistic quality of the project or programme, and then examining the prospects for distribution and its economic viability\textsuperscript{14}; in other words, to broaden the artistic evaluation towards criteria relating to the professionalism of the artists involved. While the committee gives professionals a mandate to say what is art and what is not, this is within the limits of a defined assessment framework over which the state retains power, and the evolution of which closely depends on transformations in public action. In parallel, as well as these objective criteria, the performativity of opinions delivered by the committees and their power to consecrate are guaranteed only if the panel meets certain objectified and non-objectified criteria for the definition and selection of assessors.

### 1.2 Formal Criteria and Tacit Rules of Selection

The study of the curricula vitae of the assessors, supplemented by public data on the educational and career trajectories of those concerned and interviews with the DRAC agents responsible for organizing the committee, reveals tacit modes of selection that coexist with the tendencies governing the composition of these panels. Analysing the characteristics of participants helps us to understand who the state views as a suitable assessor. This population is singular in the sense that all are performing arts professionals for whom organization by project, with either irregular or self-employed status is the norm (Menger 2005; Pilmis 2013; Sinigaglia 2017).

Each regional committee is composed of an odd number of assessors who are appointed for a two-year period, which can be renewed once, and carry out their role without remuneration. The principles specify the rules for selection: assessors are chosen “for their skills in the domain concerned or their close links with related developments in the same domain, in particular through regular attendance at concerts and shows.”\textsuperscript{15} While respecting parity, the panel must comprise varied profiles in terms of activity (performer, programmer, company manager, etc.), represent diverse aesthetics, and offer a balanced representation of the region. The rules objectified in these regulatory frameworks thus give a wide scope to the DRAC members responsible for putting the panel together. Their role is to identify nominees and to encourage them to participate, and then to put together a list of names which is submitted to the regional prefect. The latter appoints members by decree for a period of two years, which is renewable once.

The identification of potential recipients is done through acquaintance and connections, in accordance with the system of organization of network working that characterizes the performing arts (Dutheil-Pessin & Ribac 2017; Menger 1997). This recruitment by strategic co-optation, observed in other sectors (Heinich 2009a), guarantees in practice strong control over the selection of recipients by the DRAC. It is during informal exchanges, after performances or in working groups or other committees, that potential members are approached. This identification is accompanied by a certain degree of persuasion since being an assessor with the DRAC is binding. This unpaid role involves devoting several days a year to evaluating proposals, sitting for about ten days of plenary sessions a year, and of course collecting information on candidate companies throughout the year. These constraints are
moreover associated with symbolic forms of remuneration: recognition of a central place in the theatre world; creation of a network thanks to informal encounters (dinners and lunches) with representatives of the ministry and the main performing arts actors of the region; as well as in-depth knowledge of the workings of public funding.

16 The population of the thirty assessors observed in the committee is 55 years old on average (the youngest being 34 and the oldest 73) with a majority of men (17 compared with 13 women, or 57%). Like Parisian actors (Menger 1997), they constitute a group of inheritors recruited from the upper strata of the professions and socio-professional categories and endowed with significant scholastic capital. Nearly two-thirds among them have completed five years of higher education (65%)—mainly in arts subjects: literature; history; or educational studies, for example—or at a prestigious *grande école* (20%)—at one of the *Instituts d’études politiques* (Institutes of Political Studies, IEPs) or in business or engineering which select students through a competitive examination. The participants hail from academic year groups that were marked by the professionalization of cultural occupations which translated into the proliferation of training in cultural administration (Martin 2008). More than half of them thus did courses leading to qualifications in administration or management. The high occurrence—in either higher or continuing education—of these subjects represents a common socialization which, as in the case of the intermediaries, contributes “to the deconsecration of artistic activities, which are partly perceived against economic criteria and from the angle of a particularly competitive market” by these professionals (Lizé & Naudier 2015: 167).

17 The assessors’ particularity also lies in their trajectory: they are indeed among those who have remained in the career, sometimes at the cost of adjusting their artistic aspirations (Sinigaglia 2017). Their institutional membership means that they fall within the primary regional network of theatre (Sinigaglia 2013), that is to say, in places whose technical and financial means are substantial enough to support artistic projects and bring them to recognition (Langeard, Liot & Rui 2018). Almost all of them thus perform their role at endorsed institutions (“national stages”16), publicly funded theatres with a strong national reputation, or municipal theatres. As a result, they are among the main public actors of performing arts financing, working both to produce works and distribute them to the wider public (Barbéris & Poirson 2016). Their position, which is most often stable and institutionalized, places them with rare exceptions at the most autonomous pole of the field of art.

1.3 Institutionalized or Irregular Trajectories

18 More than half of the assessors observed are company managers or directors (managers, general secretaries, heads of programming, assistant managers, or artistic directors) (Table 1). The rest either have creative roles (theatre directors, performers, or writers) or are employed in programming or distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment management and/or administration</th>
<th>Programming and/or distribution</th>
<th>Creation and/or teaching</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 1. Staff distribution and proportion of assessors by job category (n=30)
The functions held by the respondents at the time of observation are part of professional trajectories which began sometimes thirty or forty years earlier, and are almost exclusively in the artistic field. Different progression patterns can be identified, distinguishing stable and institutionalized trajectories (n=15/30) in which the agents pass from one organization to another to perform managerial, programming, and distribution functions, from more irregular paths (n=10/30) which alternate creative roles with roles in production or management as either salaried or self-employed workers. A very small minority pursue freelance careers in which they either have several activities at once, or move from one activity to another in creation or production (n=5/30). These elements provide information on the stratification of the panel convened in the committee.

The assessors with institutionalized trajectories are very similar to culture-sector managers and those working in the administration of culture (Dubois 2013). They have experienced the period of the institutionalization of cultural jobs, the proliferation of training in cultural engineering, and the structuring of university courses in this field in the 1990s. This is the case of Claire L., who is in her forties, and a graduate of cultural project management in the 1990s. Having started out in communications and children’s theatre programming roles in communities and theatres, in the second stage of her career she became responsible for independent distribution for various companies. Conversely, assessors with irregular trajectories have a two-tiered training (art and management, art and literature, etc.) and move between creative and administrative and/or management work, according to career modes characteristic of traditional paths of access to the position of theatre manager (Glas 2018). Thus Yvan C., a graduate of history and drama, for example, set out on an artistic career path as an actor, which he did for about ten years from the early 2000s. He gradually moved away from this path, starting with a succession of administrative jobs and investment in continuing education (continuing education in performing arts administration—a master’s in “cultural projects management”). He then became a manager of a performing arts company, then company director, and finally manager of a theatre.

These types of trajectory have different outputs depending on the gender of the assessor. First, irregular trajectories are over-represented in men (half have this type of trajectory, while this is true for only a third of the assessors overall), and under-represented in women (n=2, or 15%). Second, such multi-positioned male trajectories are over-represented among those who occupy managerial or establishment administration functions, since seven directors (41%) have this type of trajectory. Women, whose trajectories are more linear, are over-represented in production and distribution functions, under-represented in the management of establishments, and
when they are directors it is more often in establishments located in smaller towns and cities than those of the male directors. This follows the dynamics of the glass ceiling to which the culture sector is no exception (Jacquemart et al. 2022).

The internal hierarchy, governed by the degree of integration within the state (Noiriel 2009), distinguishes the assessors occupying the highest and most institutionalized positions in endorsed establishments located in the biggest cities from the assessors occupying managerial, administration, or production functions in less prestigious organizations. Alongside these groups, the performer assessors, who are often towards the end of their career, benefit for their part from an artistic legitimacy confirmed by their collaborations with theatre directors and a central place in the field of theatre. This hierarchy weighs in turn on the distribution of verbal contributions and on specialists’ dispositions to take on board evaluation criteria that had hitherto been marginal or even illegitimate. These standpoints must be understood through the prism of trajectories which either place these assessors within or distance them from the most autonomous instances of the field.

2. An “Open, Thorough” and Consensual Debate

The committee thus constitutes an assessment situation in which the status of assessor is built over the course of the debates. The formal and informal rules governing meetings provide the framework for the experience of assessors as far as they define expected or deviant behaviours and ways of arguing. While, on the one hand, the decrees and circulars make visible the requirement for an open debate, and therefore the freedom of judgement of the assessors which conditions the legitimacy of the opinions delivered, observation reveals, conversely, an order of interaction dominated by consensus.

2.1 Control of a Space of Free Speech

Each of the two annual meetings of the committee is preceded by the sending of a convocation, specifying to members the dates and times of the meeting and a URL giving them access to the contents of the application files listed on the agenda. Organized by the DRAC’s theatre department, the meetings are most often held at the premises of the directorate. The assessors sit around a central table; observers sit at the same table if there is room, as was the case at our observation of summer 2019 (fig. 1). Around the main table, the main places were occupied on both sides by representatives of the state (three theatre advisors, the head of the theatre department, two administrative assistants, and an inspector of artistic creation). The assessors are freely positioned on either side of this core. The observers—who are predominantly local authority representatives and whose number varies (usually fewer than five)—are placed at the end of the table or, in other configurations when there is a lack of space, on a second row along the wall.
At each of its two annual meetings, the college examines around sixty cases in three days. Each consultation follows an identical format. It opens with an approximately five-minute presentation by a DRAC theatre advisor of the main elements of the project and of the company behind it. Following this individual speech, the chair of the committee—the head of the DRAC theatre department during my observations—assumes the leadership role assigned to her according to the guiding principles and which consists in “the establishment of an open and thorough debate.” Her interventions are mainly limited to questioning the assembly in order to open the debate (“Who wishes to speak about this company?”), identifying the volunteers and then giving them the floor before declaring the debate closed and proceeding to the show of hands (“Votes for? Votes against? Abstentions?”). The vote count is overseen by the president and the two administrative assistants present at her side. The end of the count opens a new sequence, with the presentation of a new proposal, most often in alphabetical order of consultation as proposed in a summary table of applications distributed to each participant at the beginning of the session. The proceedings and the opinions expressed are of advisory value and are then used by the DRAC agents to guide the selection of projects to be eventually funded. The state representatives and the observers hardly spoke during the discussion when I was observing.

While the debate is supposedly open and also accessible to all assessors, the modes of speech allocation on a voluntary basis reproduce socially situated inequalities in the negotiation space. As in the case of joint committees, where the most experienced in the field of social dialogue lead the debate (Fleuriel 2013), it is those who consider themselves and are considered to be the most legitimate who dominate. Thus the interplay of age, gender, and trajectory type determines the frequency and duration of
contributions. Assessors in their sixties and seventies thus speak substantially more often (31 times) than their counterparts who are under 45 years of age (21 times) (see table 2). Similarly, women intervene less often than men, who also speak for longer. Female assessors debate for an average cumulative duration of just over fifteen minutes, compared to half an hour for male assessors (see table 3). However, the significant dispersion around these averages encourages further consideration of the cumulative effect of these properties. It is thus the oldest men—those who hold artistic functions (head of programming, actor, and critic) at the end of a career oscillating between freelance work and institutional posts which gives them double legitimacy—who speak not only more frequently but also for longer than women at the beginning of their career. Behind the apparent openness of debates and the guarantees of parity provided by the founding principles, the space of speech is therefore unequal, dominated by the most experienced agents and those who enjoy artistic and institutional legitimacy.

Table 2. Frequency and duration of contribution according to age of assessor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>34-45 years old</th>
<th>46-56 years old</th>
<th>60-75 years old</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number</td>
<td>21 (σ=12)</td>
<td>22 (σ=20)</td>
<td>31 (σ=25)</td>
<td>25 (σ=21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average duration</td>
<td>60 sec. (σ=15 sec.)</td>
<td>56 sec. (σ=17 sec.)</td>
<td>64 sec. (σ=27 sec.)</td>
<td>60 sec. (σ=21 sec.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019

Table 3. Frequency and duration of contribution according to gender of assessor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>34-45 years old</th>
<th>46-56 years old</th>
<th>60-75 years old</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=17</td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number</td>
<td>21 (σ=18)</td>
<td>29 (σ=22)</td>
<td>25 (σ=21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average duration</td>
<td>51 sec. (σ=12 sec.)</td>
<td>66 sec. (σ=24 sec.)</td>
<td>60 sec. (σ=21 sec.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019

Table 4. Frequency and duration of contribution according to trajectory type of assessor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trajectory Type</th>
<th>Irregular</th>
<th>Institutionalized</th>
<th>Freelance</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number</td>
<td>30 (σ=25)</td>
<td>24 (σ=20)</td>
<td>22 (σ=12)</td>
<td>25 (σ=21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average duration</td>
<td>58 sec. (σ=11 sec.)</td>
<td>63 sec. (σ=28 sec.)</td>
<td>54 sec. (σ=9 sec.)</td>
<td>60 sec. (σ=21 sec.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019
These social properties do not act on their own, and form a legitimacy that is built on interaction. Thus Hugo T., from the academic sphere, is one of the oldest assessors. He only allows himself to speak after the other experts have given the initial opinions. His interventions, rare (n=13), are centred on the meaning and interpretation of the works and often interrupted by other participants who contradict him. Conversely, Steeven K., from a working-class background, enjoys artistic recognition while being among the youngest of the assembly. In his frequent contributions (n=41), he employs social capital in his knowledge of the candidate companies and cultural capital by placing certain proposals within the history of theatre, and he reverses the stigma of a less privileged background than those of his peers by emphasizing the proximity to the public this gives him:

“It’s a repetitive humour, and nothing is spared. I also wonder about how well they control it. Laughter is also a case of controlling the body, and here there’s no control. [...] I was saying before, my family’s not from a cultural background, and my little nephew looks at things on the internet: people who are face to face trying to make the other laugh. That’s the same thing.” (E.g. 19, man, performer)

Individual experience is thus mobilized to back up his argument. It is also used by some older assessors who associate the interpretation of works and knowledge of companies with their personal stories or those of those close to them, as in the case of the discussion on a project about the experience of AIDS where the experts who had experienced the peak of the epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s were more active and listened to. But it is above all being able to mention previous collaborations with candidate companies, as venue managers can do, which gives the assessors’ interventions most authority.

For less “central” agents, the confirmed knowledge of a more recent sub-discipline is a source of legitimacy. This is particularly the case for specialists in children’s theatre, object theatre, and street performance, which are disciplines that remain dominated compared to straight theatre (which alone takes up almost 80% of exchanges). The debates on funding applications from these sectors are an opportunity for several assessors who otherwise rarely make contributions, to refer to the companies’ history, to compare one show to another, to describe the evolution of the format of a show, and to benefit in this way from being heard by the assessors who usually dominate the debate, but who have most often remained distant from these disciplines which have been more recently supported by the state. This is the case, for example, for Audrey R., who was recently appointed to the committee. She is an employee of an organization providing cultural services, who rarely speaks (n=8), but half of her interventions—which are long and listened to (74 seconds on average)—concern object and street theatre.

### 2.2 Criticizing Without Dividing

Each application is subjected to a sequence of debates of varying length (table 5). A discussion consisting of on average seven contributions takes place, lasting a total of six minutes. The norm is to express a positive opinion. A proposal attracts on average two negative opinions, but half receive no negative criticism. More broadly, less than a third of the 764 contributions are openly negative. This result is nuanced again when it is time to vote, where the “against” votes are scarce in favour of abstention.
Table 5. Qualification of the debates on applications (n=112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of contributions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total duration of debate</td>
<td>7 mins</td>
<td>6 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative contributions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019

The discussions are thus both intensive and fairly non-divisive, which is a product of an alignment of judgements guaranteed by the methods of assessor selection, as well as by the rules of the debate. Thus only 15% of applications give rise to exchanges comprising positive and negative opinions. The vast majority of proposals are discussed mainly in the form of positive opinions. Negative opinions are concentrated on a small number of applications. In other words, an unfavourable opinion on a company is expressed communally: isolated negative opinions are very rare. In this respect, a very small number of companies treated with disdain: the announcement of the start of the debate on their proposal is met by sighs and negative comments. They give rise to a greater number of exchanges, but these are no less homogeneous than the others, as shown in the following excerpts concerning a company which attracts six unfavourable opinions out of the eight expressed:

“It is a theatre that questions politics. The writing is sometimes weak, but this aspect is successful. It is also a company that uses many actors and has considerable output. [...] There is ambition in its projects and real merit.” (E.g. 37, man, management, ranking 1)

“It’s the biopic show syndrome: you could do the same show about a different period of history and it’d be the same thing. [...] I thought it was very flat. Same as in [a previous show], everything seemed a bit fake to me.” (E.g. 4, man, management, ranking 2)

“[…] [This artist] has a very personal perspective, a subjectivity which relies on research carried out subjectively. [...] It is theatre; it is not a history lesson like those who want to stick as closely as possible to truth, to the university; [this performer] works like [someone in] theatre […]” (E.g. 30, man, academic, ranking 3)

“I agree about ambition and theatricality. It’s not badly written. But it’s poorly developed. It’s a bit swotty pupil of preparatory classes […]” (E.g. 18, man, management, ranking 4)

“Yes, it’s poorly developed; it’s based on simple ideas about things. It didn’t do much for me in terms of content […]” (E.g. 15, man, management, ranking 5)

“[…] It’s not at all unpleasant to watch [laughing], it even draws you in. […] But things are told a literary way, not in a way that shakes you up a bit. With acting like this, it’s hard to go any deeper. The actors are good, all equal, smooth. […]” (E.g. 14, woman, performer, ranking 6)

“I agree with what’s been said: it’s not interesting theatre, it’s not political. It is ambitious but there’s no dramatic depth. [...] It’s a bourgeois perspective on history […]” (E.g. 21, woman, performer, ranking 7)

“It’s a clever, cultured, academic perspective from a prestigious school, there’s no doubt. [This company attracts] a rather young audience because that’s popular these days. It’s superficially political theatre, but it’s not fully engaged.” (E.g. 03, man, production/distribution, ranking 8)
Negative opinions are therefore not expressed in isolation, but are rather focused on certain proposals and, rather than generating division, they allow a common judgement to be built and expressed, as in the case mentioned. The succession of exchanges above reveals the broad outline of consensus within the committee that a successful proposal will: contribute to the theatre economy (by the volume of employment it will bring) while maintaining authenticity in its approach (such as not seeking to attract new audiences out of self-interest), be unique, and distinguish itself from the academic sphere. These values express the identity of this group, composed, as we have seen, of assessors with a recognized career trajectory, legitimized by their passage through endorsed institutions, and who fulfil the role of guarantor of publicly funded theatre.

The convergence of opinions is based both on the methods of selecting assessors, as we have seen, and of selecting the proposals discussed. Only the applications of companies which meet the eligibility conditions set out in the founding principles are debated (see above). Advisors from the DRAC’s theatre section also assist in the companies’ drafting of projects and direct them towards one of the available funding schemes, thus helping to eliminate the proposals furthest from the assessors’ evaluation criteria. These discrete mechanisms of control explain the rarity of reminders of the rules observed during the session.

Assessors occupying a dominated position, exercising their functions in less central institutions (artistic collectives, teaching and research, independent production) tend to express a divergent opinion more often. On average, the members of the assembly vote in favour three quarters of the time. The six assessors (three men and three women) who express more than 40% of the negative opinions are also those who most often mobilize economic criteria such as strength of budget, level of return, or quality of employment within the candidate company, and argue the objectified rules of evaluation to legitimize a minority view: “Let’s not be naive: four-fifths of companies are going to receive a positive opinion. Should we support a company that already has a lot of support, with marketable projects, or should we support companies that prioritise taking risks?” (e.g. 12, man, performer, ranking 8).

Although they are rarely divided, thus following the standard of objectivity and consensus linked to the role of the assessor (Veitl 2005), the opinions expressed reveal that the respondents do not necessarily share the same categories of perception and evaluation (Pacouret & Hauchecorne 2019). They do not all understand the evaluation criteria as set out in the regulatory frameworks adopted in 2015 in the same way.

3. Plural Forms of Heteronomy

As with any public action tool, the frameworks imposed by their founding principles can be ignored, circumvented, or resisted by the professionals who must take them into account (Matelly & Mouhanna 2007; Aust & Gozlan 2018). This final section delves into the content of the debates, to study how the evaluation criteria imposed by the regulatory texts are mobilized in practice by the assessors. Who deviates from them, who takes them on board, and under what conditions? The objectification of argumentation profiles makes it possible to highlight the existence of a heterogeneity of registers so as to match them. Although socially similar and bound by the norms of consensus imposed by the assessment situation, assessors vary in their willingness to
mobilize arguments of economic viability, involvement in the region, or the necessary mediation work in the proposals.

3.1 Objectified Argumentation Profiles

Each of the recorded verbal contributions was codified to categorize the type of argument used (a contribution can employ one or more categories of argument). The variables created aim to identify and evaluate the place of the criteria introduced by the 2015 reform in relation to autonomous criteria such as uniqueness, lack of financial self-interest, resistance to public success, etc. They also enable comparison between the committees observed in 2019 and those studied previously by other sociologists. Finally, the analysis focused on the verbal contributions of the experts, insofar as the DRAC representatives intervened only on an ad hoc basis, essentially to present the proposals at the beginning of the sequence, give the floor, and count the votes. The coding work was carried out in several stages. The first consisted in the inductive identification of registers based on a reading of verbal contributions. The registers thus identified were compared with those defined for the visual arts sector by Nathalie Heinich and employed by Marian Misdrahi (Heinich 2009b; Misdrahi 2013, 2015). Some criteria, such as legal and functional, were virtually absent from my data. Others, such as emotion, trajectory, and politics, are redefinitions which are a better match for my observations. At the end of this work, ten main registers, from the most autonomous to the most heteronomous, were selected for coding:

- uniqueness: Describes the originality of the approach as well as its sincerity and the inspiration behind it;
- aesthetics: Evaluation of a proposal’s value in terms of its beauty, harmony, or technical quality;
- emotion: Subjective feeling and emotional register;
- meaning: Meaning of the work and its situation with regard to the history of the theatre;
- trajectory: Consideration of the project leader(s) in terms of career, education, and degree of recognition;
- reputation: Denotes the notoriety of a performer or work within the community of assessors and theatre professionals;
- integrity: Ranking according to what is considered to be art and what is not;
- politics: Considerations relating to the role of the committee (and by extension of the state);
- economic: Valuing the rationalization of spending and efficiency of investments;
- civic: Focused on the general interest and the common good based on a project’s effect on the public or the contribution of a performer to the theatrical offer.

In general, the assessors’ contributions mobilize several types of argument simultaneously: half of them use two or more (table 6). The registers identified are also mobilized in unequal ways. Some, such as reputation, appear in every other contribution, where as general interest arguments appear in less than 10% of cases (table 7). These first data show that the arguments mostly fall within autonomous valuation criteria: reputation, which refers to the recognition of a work or performer by their peers; uniqueness; aesthetics; and the meaning attributed to the works. Concerns relating to the general interest, the economy, or the role of the committee are more rarely expressed. The legitimate forms of argument therefore remain those based on specific assessment criteria. They coexist with heteronomous criteria which,
in order to be legitimate, must be mobilized according to certain forms, and which are also mobilized differently according to assessor.

Table 6. Number of registers per contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>1st quartile</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>3rd quartile</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0\textsuperscript{18}</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019

Table 7. Frequency of occurrence of registers in the 764 contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Register</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Register</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trajectory</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading of results: The register of "meaning" is mobilized in 33% of the contributions recorded.

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019

To understand by whom and in what form autonomous and heteronomous criteria are mobilized, I constructed the argumentation profile of each of the thirty experts. This profile was established using principal component analysis (PCA)\textsuperscript{39} based on frequency of appearance of each of these registers across all contributions by each assessor. Thus an assessor who mobilizes the criterion of reputation in half of their contributions, that of trajectory in a third, and the economy in a tenth will have a score of 0.5 on the first criterion, 0.3 on the second, and 0.1 on the third.

The PCA’s construction makes it possible to first analyse the links between the ten registers defined. The cloud of variables shows the opposition between registers that consist in situating the performer within the subfield of the theatre by considering their reputation and trajectory, and registers centred on the work: the emotion it produces and the meaning that can be assigned to it. This first formative opposition is added to that distinguishing heteronomous criteria (politics or economic) from autonomous criteria (aesthetics or uniqueness).
Fig. 2. Registers of verbal contributions: graph of active variables

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019

Table 8. Variables with highest correlations (axes 1 and 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension 1</th>
<th>Dimension 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trajectory</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marion Demonteil, 2019
The cloud of individuals then makes it possible to situate the thirty assessors observed within this space. Note that, in an exploratory approach, individuals were equally weighted. Only one assessor (e.g. 36, here in dark blue) became an illustrative individual. The argumentation profile of this assessor, the only representative of private theatre, introduced a degree of variation too great for the construction of the
The latter mobilized the economic register substantially more frequently than the other assessors.

42 The shape of the cloud of individuals does not help to identify groups of assessors. However, by using the method of k-averages\(^{21}\), which makes it possible to group individuals by proximity in terms of argumentative profile, two trends emerge. More than the opposition, this structure highlights a continuum between assessors mobilizing more autonomous registers (group 1) and those more frequently employing economic, political, or civic criteria (group 2).

43 Rather than an opposition, a common base can therefore be defined. The reputation register is the first that is widely shared. Appearing in half of the contributions, this register helps us to situate a company or show as much as it demonstrates the speaker’s place in networks of acquaintance and connections. Reputation is attached to the performer himself/herself: “We trust [this performer, called by first name].” (e.g. 13, woman, production/programming.) It is reinforced by recognition of the company, which is reflected as much in the production support it receives: “We see partners who are great specialists in puppetry, so we can trust them” (e.g. 21, woman, performer) as much as in their programming at festivals, and in particular at Avignon and its fringe (Off Festival).

44 As in the field of fine art, the authenticity of the performer and their work is also a recurrent criterion of evaluation. It is based on an assessment of sincerity, originality, and commitment—qualities which are condensed in the following argument: “[This performer] has an unwavering artistic commitment [...] she takes her time. She lets things mature. [...] I think she’s a great poet of the invisible.” (e.g. 03, man, production/programming). By contrast, the quest for public success and the perceived desire to put oneself forward personally, are criticized. These are qualifiers that directly refer to the disqualification of those who “seek the honours and income that commercial success procures, and thus depend on the public, political protections, and critical consecration, that is to say on heteronomous forces from outside the field” (Champagne & Christin 2012).

45 This assessment of the performer and/or their work coexists with elements which allow the assessors to demonstrate their technical mastery of the different aspects of the show: the script; the direction; the acting; the music, etc.

“ ’There is pleasure on the stage even if it is not very well acted, research has gone into the staging, there is drama, subjects, real generosity. She has to work on the acting.'” (1483, e.g. 15, man, management)

“In her other show, I didn’t like how it was written, the direction, or the acting. The staging does not work, the video part is not very immersive.” (306, e.g. 33, man, management)

46 The employment of technical knowledge coexists with attempts to categorize and interpret the meaning of work, which is shared by all assessors: “This text has great resonance with questions we are asking today, dealing with the birth of liberalism in England. It’s interesting for people of all ages. There is a quality to the direction, a technique based on few financial resources, good acting direction” (e.g. 33, man, management).

47 While common assessment methods unite the assessors, their position in the theatre space is one factor which explains the variations observed not only in the use of these common registers but also in resorting to various different heteronomous criteria.
3.2 Emotion and Reception: Dominated Female Assessors’ Concern for the Audience

The first group, located on the left of the PCA space, consists of 12 assessors. Women make up 58%, comprising professionals who are distinguished from their counterparts by high academic capital, which is notably reflected in an over-representation of graduates from grandes écoles (including top business schools and Institut d’études politiques, IEPs) and those having taken preparatory classes for this route (most often in arts subjects). Performers, producers, and managers of venues, these specialists carry out their responsibilities at establishments located on the outskirts of the major cities of the region. The feminization of this category, combined with less centrality in the local theatre space, results in a lower occupation of the space of verbal contributions. These assessors speak as often as their counterparts, i.e. 27 times on average, but their interventions are significantly shorter: lasting on average 47 seconds (compared with 68 seconds for group 2).

The argumentation profile of the members of this group is characterized by the importance of emotion and of the audience. The experience of the performance is central to their interventions:

“[I saw the ‘Alpha’ show], I was dumbfounded, I didn’t feel any emotion. As a woman, this show troubled me.” (e.g. 09, woman, production/distribution)

“I saw [the Beta show] but I’m torn. You want to love it, support it, but you see the work […] The actress is very good, but you want more and you feel annoyed when you don’t get it.” (e.g. 13, woman, production/distribution)

“I really liked [the Gamma show]. It’s disturbingly true to life, it’s very touching. It reminded me of ways of being, thinking, speaking, which were diabolically accurate.” (e.g. 18, man, management)

The reference to precise productions supports an assumed recourse to subjectivity: the assessor affirms a personal point of view and their feelings and emotions. The aesthetic description of the shows is accompanied by the reconstruction of an experience based on which these assessors affirm a like or dislike, which is put forward as personal: “I’d like to see this work made; I like post-modern dance, it’s a reference that speaks to me” (e.g. 26, woman, management).

For these specialists, the quality of an artistic approach, of a company’s project, or of a show is also measured by its reception. Unlike their peers in Group 2, they value “openness” towards the public, and they disparage “dryness” and narrow-mindedness. Attention to a work’s reception is less in line with the principles of cultural democratization, namely the expansion of the theatre audience, than with the idea that theatre must advance the masses, according to the tradition of popular theatre of the Liberation (Gœtschel 2004): “It’s clever, it’s appealing, but where’s the meaning? An acrobat five hundred meters above the void is all very well, but if he can make me understand the difficulty of living, it is better” (e.g. 24, man, management). These assessors thus associate the category of popular theatre with the requirements of performers vis-à-vis the audience:

“i’d like to go and see that. This is very good popular theatre, with real demands.” (e.g. 19, man, management)

“I’d add that it is valuable to see its confidence in the intelligence of very young children.” (e.g. 26, woman, management)
“[This director knows how] to offer the audience shows that match their ambitions.” (e.g. 31, man, management)

And in parallel, the “vulgar” and the “rude”, which denote the shows that are “seductive”, “easy”, or “oversentimental”, are damning qualifiers. Theatre is seen as an experience—that of the assessor at performances, as we have seen, but also that of the spectator, who is expected to be “troubled” or “shaken up”. They scorn the cerebral character of works: “It’s very cerebral—it’s like being at school—but I like them” (e.g. 14, woman, performer). They treat work conceived by directors from universities with disdain, as we have seen. In this introspective approach, criteria such as the economic robustness of companies and projects are seldom mentioned (4% of the speakers of this group) and when they are, it is to imply their secondary nature: “I was in a dream when that project was read out, when I read the synopsis. […] 12,000 euros is not a lot to pay for a dream [laughing]” (e.g. 03, man, production/distribution).

The modes of intervention of this group can partly be explained by its feminization. Gender underlies lesser dispositions for public speaking, and mobilized registers echo the stereotypical “qualities” of sensitivity and attention to others, as well as their traditional reference to the world of childhood (Mathieu 2000). Consistent with their gender identity, these assessors make interventions which stem from the domain of the intimate. The five men in this group are distinguished from their counterparts in Group 2 by means of trajectories which have more often passed via popular education and higher education, in which they were socialized to the social vocation of theatre and to the attention of young audiences from an educational perspective.

3.3 Contextualization: Dominant Assessors’ Awareness of Conditions for Creativity

The second group, on the left of the PCA space, comprises seventeen assessors. With a higher proportion of men (65%), it is less strongly characterised by academic excellence: the majority of its members have a university degree, but less than 20% have a postgraduate qualification. However, these agents occupy higher professional positions than those of the first group. They work in more central establishments of the subfield of theatre in the biggest cities of the region, sometimes after a first career as a director or actor. Their professional trajectory has socialized them towards economic criteria and functional politicization, which explains the more frequent mobilization of market criteria among these specialists. Their dominant institutional position is reflected in a different occupation of the space of verbal contributions: while these assessors do not speak more often, they speak for significantly longer than their peers in the first group (68 seconds per contribution compared with 47 seconds).

This group evaluates the projects from a contextual perspective: that of the performers, whose trajectories are traced, and that of the works and their genesis. Unlike their peers, who hold opinions which are seen as personal, the members of this group provide additional information on the trajectory of performers (their filial or romantic ties with other members of the theatre sector, the births and deaths of those close to them, and so on) or on the story behind a project (original intentions which were eventually discounted, links between personal history and the work in question, and its informal forms of support). An indication of their position runs through their contributions: their centrality in the theatre space, at the heart of the institutions of
the largest cities of the region; and their role in networks of connections, which means they enjoy an asymmetry of information giving them the advantage in the influence of collective opinion (Heinich 1997b). “I don’t know it, but I’ve heard about it [on another advisory board]” (e.g. 37, man, management.) “My friend [X] told me that it had been well received everywhere; I know it was sold out in Grenoble” (e.g. 29, man, performer).

The quality of the scripts that are staged, the rarity of the chosen writers, and being difficult to understand are the central criteria of the criticism developed within this group. This posture reflects the permanence of the place of the script in public theatre (Noiriel 2011). Unlike the first group, they barely consider the audience, valuing instead the intelligence and erudition of those behind the project, whose avant-garde, “divisive”, “cerebral”, and “difficult” work they appreciate. Like in committees devoted to fine art (Heinich 1997a), reflexivity is required: the performer’s ability to present a theoretical formulation of their work is a guarantee of its authenticity. They therefore rely more frequently than their peers on reading the application files, from which they quote excerpts to justify their opinion. “Structure”, “clarity”, and “precision” are considered to be signs of a project’s solidity. Leaders in a field and a debate whose rules they master perfectly, these specialists value “distance” and humour as opposed to the figure of the “quiet and intelligent”, “swotty preparatory class student”, with a “bourgeois” perspective on the theatre, or that of the overly-ambitious, motivated by a quest for personal recognition, and whose “navel doesn’t get past the door”.

This group is also characterized by the use of economic criteria, which are mobilized in 16% of contributions compared with 4% in the first group. More than the others, they explicitly take the funding arrangements for projects into account, and these are contextualized in relation to the funding arrangements for theatre in general. These heteronomous criteria are closely linked to artistic considerations. Budgets are thus analysed and mobilized as indicators of artistic activity. “And about the budget it’s very strange: 2016 [there were] huge sums; 2017 nothing; 2018 weak; 2019 huge. So this raises the question of the consistency of this work based on the figures” (e.g. 21, woman, performer). In addition, giving financial support to a company means giving it an administrative structure that is conducive to putting on performances, keeping on top of financial management, and freeing up time for creation.

“We’re here to help make projects happen, it takes time and money to create.” (e.g. 01, man, performer)

“The artistic reasons have been stated. These actors do their own payslips. They can’t go on like this because they need to devote their time to creation. ‘Contract funding’ means being able to pay someone [who takes care of the administration].” (e.g. 15, man, management)

Money is thus presented as an intrinsic component of creation: money is time and therefore work opportunities. Similarly, co-productions are distribution possibilities.

Here too, without being the only explanatory factor, gender is behind many characteristics of this group’s contributions to meetings. The stronger dispositions of these assessors towards speaking in public go hand in hand with the supposedly masculine skills of universalising and abstraction, rationality, and distance with regard to the emotions. Modes of argumentation in line with the Habermas model of speaking in the public space (Habermas 1987). We can also suppose that their dominant position in the theatre space, which testifies to their degree of integration into the state, results from a professional socialization that disposes them to see in the rigour, but also the humour and the “distance” demonstrated by some companies in their proposals, some
of the most legitimate components of the professional ethos of performers (Darmon 2015).

60 Ultimately, the objectification of argumentation profiles highlights the heterogeneity of the modes of argumentation. While assessments of artistic criteria and criteria specific to reputation and originality remain dominant, heteronomous criteria are indeed also present in the debates. However, their mobilization is not uniform, and only some of the assessors make use of them. It is those who hold the most central positions in management, production, and creation—those most integrated into the state—who endorse the principles of the vision enshrined in the texts of the 2015 reform to the greatest extent. These practices testify to the effectiveness of the reform, since the doctrines translated into the texts are attached to concrete ways of judging actors (Pillon 2022).

Conclusion

61 Cross-analysis of specialists’ positions, standpoints, and frameworks for interaction when put into an assessment situation has been shown to be heuristic in several respects. The results first complement the existing literature on these instances of consecration. The prism of the assessment situation reveals the multiple biases by which bodies of consecration intervene in logics of heteronomization: that of law, as shown by the explicit integration of market criteria in the texts framing committees since 2015; that of tools (forms) via which projects must be submitted; and the delegation of power to assessors who share, at least in part, thought patterns which enable these criteria to be taken into account. The analysis shows that, more than the frequency of appearance of heteronomous evaluation criteria, it is the interaction between these different dimensions that guarantees the promotion of economic and political logics.

62 The revision of the regulatory frameworks by the ministry therefore does not act on its own on the heteronomization of the field. It is through the delegation of the implementation of these criteria to authorized agents, who employ them because they are integrated into their patterns of perception, that the state helps to promote market criteria. Measuring the place of heteronomous criteria over the long term would demonstrate the effect of successive generations of assessor on the evolution of forms of argumentation. Although the links between generation and forms of argumentation could not be established here since the sample of assessors was too small, a working hypothesis is worth developing: do new assessors with an interest in questioning the rules of the artistic field, especially because they partake in the affirmation of a new artistic professionalism, tend to employ more heteronomous criteria?

63 By considering the evolution of regulatory frameworks alongside the social profiles of assessors, the article also helps to open up the black box of state acts (Weller 2018). Grants and seals of approval have a symbolic power which is operative since these acts are produced in accordance with a liturgy (the appointment of assessors by ministerial decree; the signing of award decisions by the prefect; meetings by convocation etc.), but also because the authorized actors respect the rules of the debate. This consists in preserving the façade of an open debate centred mainly on aesthetic qualities and the reputation of the performers. It is on this condition that the assessors recognize between themselves the quality of an independent actor of political decision-making.
Together, these results encourage a qualification of the theses of the state’s withdrawal from cultural matters, especially since they show its role to be still central in the construction of categories. The reception of these mechanisms and the legitimacy accorded to the opinions of committees by members of the artistic field may constitute another indicator of the maintenance of symbolic state power.

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NOTES

1. _aides déconcentrées_ (decentralized funding): devolved services act as direct representatives of the French state in each region. They ensure the implementation and oversight of decisions made by the central administration.


3. The “rue de Valois” designates here, by metonymy, the central administration of the Ministry of Culture.

4. Decree no. 2015-641 of 8 June 2015 on the allocation of decentralized funding for performing arts.

5. Reform began in 2007, pursuing the objective of reducing public expenditure, in particular by rationalizing the administrative organization of all ministries.


7. A category including, according to the ministry, dance, music, theatre, street theatre, and circus.

8. Circular of 4 May 2016 on arrangements for allocating decentralized performing arts funding.

9. Decree No 2015-641 of 8 June 2015 on the allocation of decentralized funding for the performing arts; decree of 16 December 2021 relating to the conditions for allocation and the procedures for submission of applications for decentralized funding for the performing arts; Circular of 1 March 2022 on the means of allocating decentralized performing arts funding.

10. Based on observations prior to the 2021 reform, the article analyses developments introduced in 2015, which are, moreover, predominantly confirmed in the new principles.

11. Decree n°2015-641 of 8 June 2015 on the allocation of funding, and decree of 22 December 2015 on conditions for allocation and submission procedures for decentralized performing arts funding applications.


13. For example, funding for new productions or revivals: new production/revival eligibility: “Funding is conditional on proof of a minimum of eight performances at a minimum of two different venues. The planned performances will be subject to a performance rights or co-production contract with a guaranteed minimum to cover the production cost (or at least a share of the revenue above 70% for the company)”, Ministry of Culture, DRAC Île-de-France, “Assistance and procedures” webpage accessed on 27/11/2021.


15. Ministry of Culture, circular of 4 May 2016 on the procedures for allocating devolved performing arts funding.
16. The national stages are co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and by local authorities. They are dedicated to contemporary creation and its dissemination, and support productions and audience reception.

17. Circular on arrangements for allocating devolved performing arts funding, 04/05/2016, Annex II: procedure for the examination of requests and procedures for the establishment and operation of regional or interregional committees.

18. The citations from our observations are referenced as follows: assessor identifier; gender; job category.

19. When speaking does not involve any of the defined registers, consisting for example mainly of a question calling for further information.

20. The analysis was carried out using R software, specifically here the factomineR package (Lé, Josse & Husson 2008).

21. The exploratory method of k-averages compares the assessors’ argumentation profiles and brings them into k groups characterized by their proximity to the average of each of the ten quantitative variables included in the analysis. Here, we have a division into two relatively equal groups in terms of numbers.

22. The quotes extracted from our observations are referenced as follows: verbal contribution identifier; identifier of assessor who made contribution; gender of assessor.

ABSTRACTS

How do transformations in public action, and more precisely the dissemination of the precepts of New Public Management, change the role of the state in maintaining the autonomy of artistic activities? Based on an internal study of debates in a funding-allocation committee for the theatre sector in France, this article analyses links between regulatory frameworks of artistic evaluation and the social profiles of the evaluators. Observing these meetings—perceived as assessment situations—helps to break open the black box of state activity by demonstrating how a category of public funding is allocated in practice. Public intervention is shown to be a vehicle for the heteronomization of theatre activity, the effectiveness of which hinges on the link between a framework for interaction that is defined by the authorities—and objectivised in regulation—which promotes heteronomous criteria, and the assessors who make use of it, who are socialized into an economic and political vision of culture.

Comment les transformations de l’action publique, et plus précisément la diffusion des préceptes issus du new public management, changent-elles le rôle de l’État dans le maintien de l’autonomie des activités artistiques ? À partir de l’étude interne des débats d’une commission d’attribution des aides au secteur du théâtre, l’article examine les liens entre les cadres réglementaires de l’évaluation artistique et les propriétés sociales des évaluateurs. L’observation de ces réunions, qui sont pensées comme des situations d’expertise, contribue à ouvrir la boîte noire des actes d’État en resituant comment une catégorie d’aides publiques est concrètement attribuée. Elle montre que l’intervention publique est un vecteur d’hétéronomisation de l’activité théâtrale, dont l’efficacité repose sur l’articulation entre un cadre d’interaction, défini par les pouvoirs...
publics – objectivé dans le règlement – promouvant des critères hétéronymes, et des expert·es, socialisé·es à une vision économique et politique de la culture, qui s’en saisissent.

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