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Risky Gifts and Uncertain Business: A Discussion of Results from a Survey on Commissioning in New Music

Le risque du don, l'incertitude des affaires : discussion des résultats d'une enquête sur les commandes en musique contemporaine

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Résumé de l'article

Quels sont les risques courus dans une commande en musique contemporaine ? À travers des entretiens avec 24 commanditaires, interprètes et compositeurs du Canada, des États-Unis, d'Australie et de France, un modèle de différents types de risques rencontrés dans le cadre d'une commande est développé. Malgré le fait qu'ils fournissent l'argent pour une commande, les commanditaires apparaissent comme les moins exposés aux risques financiers, dans sa définition classique ; les sommes données pour des commandes fonctionnent véritablement comme les dons philanthropiques, comme le veut la législation. De la même manière, les compositeurs ne sont pas plus exposés aux risques financiers, étant plutôt préoccupés par l'incertitude inhérente au processus créateur. Ce sont finalement les interprètes qui se révèlent les plus exposés aux risques financiers, *a fortiori* quand ils agissent à titre d'« intermédiaires » entre le commanditaire et le compositeur. Les interprètes se doivent de respecter une multitude de mesures relatives à la sécurité au travail et de gérer des problèmes de flux de trésorerie découlant de résultats contradictoires et des calendriers de paiement non alignés. Ils se trouvent ainsi pris en tenaille entre les désirs des compositeurs à prendre des risques esthétiques et les obligations créées par le don philanthropique.

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Risky Gifts and Uncertain Business: A Discussion of Results from a Survey on Commissioning in New Music

Annelies Fryberger and Matthew Lorenzon

What are the risks involved in commissioning new music? We jointly conducted 24 semi-structured interviews[1] in Australia, New Zealand, France, the US, Québec, and British Columbia[2] to find out how risk affects the creative process as it is experienced by private and public commissioners, performers, and composers. We asked each subject to describe the conditions of a particular commission and their relationship to other participants in the project. We then asked subjects to describe problems or issues that arose during the commission before moving on to a broader discussion of issues in contemporary music commissioning. Discussion often revolved around that most common stake in discussions of risk: money. However, we quickly found that the stakes were as much aesthetic as financial for many of the parties involved. The concept of "unwelcome" risk also gave way to a broader notion of uncertainty that subjects considered essential to creative practice. Our goal in this text is to present our initial reflections based on these interviews before opening debate more broadly on the role commissions play within diverse international contexts.

Risk is the possibility that a return on investment will be different from that expected. The notion usually connotes the possibility of loss. The investment may be financial, but composers and performers also wager their labor for aesthetic and cultural outcomes. But the private patrons we spoke to experience none of this

1. Details regarding our interview and sampling techniques are presented in Appendix I.

2. Our interviewees: Françoise and Jean-Philippe Billarant (private patrons, France), Linda Bouchard (composer, Québec), Tim Brady (composer, Québec), Daryl Buckley (artistic director, ELISION ensemble, Australia), Julian Burnside (private patron, Australia), David Chisholm (composer, Australia), Jacob Cooper (composer, USA), Laila Engle (flautist, Syzygy Ensemble, Australia), Nicolas Gilbert (composer, Québec), Robert Honstein (composer, USA), Joshua Hyde (artistic co-director, soundinitiative, France), Nathalie Joachim (flautist, eighth blackbird, USA), Lisa Kaplan (pianist, eighth blackbird, USA), Gordon Kerry (composer, Australia), Dylan Lardelli (composer, New Zealand), Simon Loeffler (composer, Denmark), Giorgio Magnanensi (artistic director, Vancouver New Music), Yan Maresz (composer, France), Maxime McKinley (composer, Québec), Marco Momi (composer, France), Eugene Ughetti (artistic director, Speak Percussion, Australia), Nicholas Photinos (cellist, eighth blackbird, USA), Gabriel Prynn (cellist, Trio Fibonacci, Québec), Samuel Smith (composer, Australia), and Sir James Wallace (private patron, New Zealand). Both authors have conducted interviews on this topic for their research in the past: see Fryberger (2014) and Lorenzon (2015). The authors wish to thank all of these individuals who generously answered our questions.

risk. It is in the nature and legal standing of the philanthropic gift that the donor does not expect a return from their investment. This article will begin by discussing the uniquely risk-free scenario of the contemporary music commissioner, considering their fee in terms of a philanthropic "gift."

We then turn to performers who, in acting as middlemen between commissioning bodies and composers, are highly exposed to risk. The sense of obligation that comes with a philanthropic gift encourages ensembles to go to extraordinary lengths to mount a performance, including navigating labyrinthine local planning laws and picking up the bill when funding falls short.

We found that composers were concerned with the aesthetic rather than financial outcomes of risk. As such, composers managed their relationships to ensembles to maximize the quality of their composition or its performance. Furthermore, interviewees were aware of how financial and aesthetic risk management placed determinate limits upon the space and time available to them for exploring and learning in an atmosphere of aesthetic uncertainty.

Commissioners and the Philanthropic Gift

As a philanthropic activity, the expected outcomes of commissioning new music are more closely aligned with humanitarian aid than other forms of art patronage. In the words of the French patrons interviewed, Françoise and Jean-Philipe Billarant:

> It's definitely more gratifying to say that I gave × amount to Doctors Without Borders, or that I funded a well in Africa, than to give money to Ircam or the Ensemble intercontemporain, because people think they have a lot of money. […] They are subsidized by the State, so people think they don't need funding.

The private patrons interviewed in France and Australia shared this mindset when it comes to commissioning new music. All were active collectors of art before becoming aware of the possibility of commissioning music. It is precisely around the issue of investment (and so of risk) that the two art forms differ. While speculation in the visual arts is common, nobody has ever made money out of commissioning art music. The French patrons claimed to commission composers for two reasons: they became aware of the need for funds in this area (despite the wealthy appearance—and public funding—of many contemporary art music institutions) and contemporary music has the advantage of not being "contaminated" by money, as is the case in the visual arts.

Both the Australian and French commissioners cited altruistic reasons for investing in contemporary music. The Australian human rights and refugee advocate Julian Burnside has previously appealed to the future and as-yet-unknown cultural value of some musical works.[3] In this interview he principally expressed concern for the welfare of composers, stating: "I am not so naive as to think that music would not be written but for commissions, but the composers might make less of an income." These patrons see this investment as altruistic because they feel they are helping people in need without any expectation of results. The French patrons described a pantheon of giving, wherein contemporary art music was equated to humanitarian aid—it is truly the "aid" aspect that motivates these patrons, and to a lesser degree the artistic result or its long-term artistic

3. Found here: <www.julianburnside.com.au/law/why-bother/> (accessed March 15, 2016).

value. On the Australian side, Burnside, was extreme in this respect, stating unequivocally:

> The fact that I commission music and the way I go about it is probably the only genuinely altruistic thing that I do. I expect nothing from it. I get some enjoyment from some of the music; I get enjoyment from the fact that I'm doing something that I think is worthwhile, and that's it.

The French patrons interviewed, however, certainly derive cultural capital (in the sociological sense) from their investment, as it allows them to play an active role in a highly legitimate cultural field. They furthermore take pride in influential actors (i.e., Pierre Boulez) praising works they have commissioned: "Pierre Boulez said after the concert that it was a masterpiece—he even congratulated us. 'Bravo for having commissioned that work'."

If contemporary music commissions are considered to be investments in the careers of composers more than in musical works, then risk is limited to funds not reaching their intended destination. As such, if the commissioner's funds reach the composer, then the investment has produced its expected return. After funds have reached the composer, performance outcomes and score dedications are only additional benefits. This is not only how commissioners often perceive their philanthropic gifts, it is how tax-deductible gifts are legislated in most countries.

Maximizing the benefits to the composer can include securing a performance of the commissioned work. To this end, many commissioners funnel their commission through an institution with access to performers, concert venues, or with their own concert series. Institutions such as Ircam in France or Musica Viva in Australia can act as "auspice organizations" (Australia) or "fiscal-sponsorship organizations" (USA), in that they lend their non-profit status to the composer. The gift is tax-deductible for the patron when it goes through an organization like this, while it would not be if it went directly to the composer. These organizations are furthermore instrumental in bringing composers and commissioners together. In this way they mitigate another risk: they ensure that the commissioner's money is going to a "good" composer with a history of delivering commissions. Similar, then, to a donation to a humanitarian organization that is familiar enough with the terrain to know where to build a school or dig a well, the private patron can trust the expertise of an auspicing organization.

The auspice organization maintains the illusion of a non-transactional relationship between the commissioner and the composer, which is important for both aesthetic and financial reasons. The non-transactional relationship of commissioners and composers was more important in France than in the other countries we looked at. In the case of the French patrons interviewed, this arrangement allows them to develop disinterested friendships with the composers they commission, which is indeed the primary counter-gift provided by the composer, much more so than the work of music itself. It is striking that in France both sides make careful efforts to dissimulate the transactional nature of the relationship. The composers commissioned by these patrons made clear that they had never asked these patrons for anything, and the patrons ferociously defended the freedom they give to the composers, stipulating that all the arrangements (fee amount, deadline, instrumentation, etc.) are made by the auspicing organization. This effort at dissimulation is indeed part of the emotional labor—to borrow a term typically applied to the service

industry—required of a composer, at least in the French context. This labor is part of what makes this elective affiliation possible: both parties tacitly agree on a certain attitude toward this financial transaction, without which the transaction could not take place. We are thus in a distinctly Bourdieuian reversed economy, wherein the parties to the transaction can only participate in it by pretending that they are not.[4] This attitude is less present, or not present at all, in the interviews in other countries, where a more pragmatic attitude regarding contractual aspects—especially the negotiation around the commissioning fee—prevails.

In all the countries we studied, commissions from private patrons were a distinct, though symbolically important, minority. Funds for contemporary art music are typically public, but we found that gifts from the public purse generate the same sense of obligation as private ones. This may be explained by the fact that public institutions are not faceless entities, since they are typically organized around peer review systems[5] and are thereby tightly integrated into the fabric of the new music world. Just like a private commission, funds from public institutions may go directly to a composer or pass through a third party such as an ensemble, festival, or venue. As an unofficial middleman taking care of the financial transaction between auspice organizations and composers, ensembles further absorb any risks that could apply to the commissioners. However, this gift can have unintended consequences for the performers of the new work.

4. Bourdieu, 1977, p. 4.

5. [NDLR] See Fryberger's article in this issue.

Performers and Risk

It is common throughout the arts for early-career practitioners to pursue poorly remunerated opportunities in the hope of future gains, and contemporary music ensembles are no exception. We found that ensembles are willing to absorb significant financial risks that may properly rest with another party. Why would this be the case? In the case of a commission both the commissioner's funds and the piece itself are considered gifts entailing further obligations for the ensemble. In one striking example from our interviews an ensemble informally negotiated a commissioning fee with a composer and then received the score of the piece before contractual details were finalized with the commissioning festival. In the end, the festival provided less funds than expected and the ensemble, in order to save face, made up for the shortfall by dipping into the musicians' remuneration. The ensemble may be seen here to be absorbing risk properly belonging to the auspicing organization, who finalized their contract well after the composer had begun work on the piece. This was a situation where an established composer, with multiple income streams from other sources, was working with a young ensemble. For the ensemble, this was an opportunity to commission a work which could help reinforce their reputation and the composer did not need to worry about contractual details because his livelihood was not at stake. For all of these reasons, the performers bore the economic brunt here of a lack of clarity on financial details and incompatible timelines. They also felt the need to redouble their efforts in order to perform the piece often and well to make up for the significantly lower commissioning fee the composer ended up receiving.

Commissions rarely include funds for a work's performance, leaving ensembles with the responsibility of juggling multiple funding applications for everything from the commissioning fee to score rentals, performance rights, safety regulation compliance issues, and venue rental. Given the premium placed on premieres, the creation of new work is essential. In addition, the current structure of this art world is such that composers are reticent to create new work without certain performance outcome. This means that a performer is typically on board from the beginning. This is reassuring to the composer, but less so for the performer for whom the new work can become a liability.[6] That a work gets performed is also a primary concern of commissioners, both private and public, for whom an investment in a non-performed work seems worthless, or is indeed a condition for the investment in the first place. Both the composer and the commissioner thereby lay the onus of providing a return on investment—money or creative effort—squarely on the shoulders of performers, without necessarily providing the material means required to make this possible.

Because performers have the financial liability of rehearsing and performing a work, they also absorb the risk of accommodating scores that arrive late from composers or last-minute changes to the score. In one extreme case, a premiere was cancelled by a composer who judged the piece not ready. It was then up to the performers to explain the change in program to the presenters and organize an adequate substitute program. It was interesting to note that this was discussed at length by the ensemble in its interview, while the composer made no mention of it in his.

When working outdoors or with experimental instruments, the onus of Occupational Health and Safety Compliance also falls directly on the ensemble, possibly entailing significant costs. "The problem for small organizations," ELISION Ensemble's Artistic Director Daryl Buckley explained, "is that risk is a moveable feast dependent on the stakeholders who are interested in it." ELISION's program "transmisi" by the composer Richard Barrett and the visual artist Heri Dono for the 1999 Asia Pacific Triennale is a limit case of a small ensemble bearing responsibility for an escalating list of expensive legal safety requirements:

> In the case of the [concert at] Tennyson Power Station, we had to put up a kilometer and a half of fencing, repair concrete stairwells, replace handrails, and build an internal roof to protect the audience from one or two panes of glass that were damaged in a cyclone a decade before, but which had been stable since. I suggested getting those panes removed, which involved having people abseil over the structure. But the windows were structured in such a way that you could only remove them by breaking them inwards. There was then broken glass over girders internal to the space, so we had to have people scale the girders and clean the glass. Because it was for the Asia Pacific Triennale, the body dealing with health and safety was concerned with the language groupings, so we had to have the safety instructions translated into forty or so languages. Then there was rain. It went on and on and on.

It defies belief why an ensemble would take on the risks involved in converting a power station into a performance venue, unless one considers the culture of risk-taking in the hope of significant future gains. Buckley's interview confirmed this:

6. The term "liability" was explicitly used to refer to such a situation by the Artistic Director of Speak Percussion, Eugene Ughetti.

> It started off really well. We had presented a work in Perth [Richard Barrett's *Opening of the Mouth*, performed at the foundry of the Midland Railway Yard workshops] with the protection of the Perth Festival, but somebody had previously died filming a stunt in the [Tennyson] power station and from that point onward every government agency became interested in us. But I was locked in because being part of the Asia Pacific Triennale was such a big thing. But it wasn't the Queensland Art Gallery mediating these challenges, it was ELISION, a small arts organization. In Japan, Switzerland, Germany, or the UK, we have never had problems like that. I would never again take audiences into an outside environment unless someone else was taking the risk.

Our interviews found that ensembles can end up investing heavily in order to deliver on the investments of private commissioners, auspice organizations, and composers. Despite their eagerness to deliver, ensembles have to make pragmatic decisions based on financial and time constraints. These pragmatic decisions can have a flow-on effect for composers who have a greater awareness of artistic risk than the other interviewees. The composers we interviewed were less concerned with financial risk than with ensuring the quality of their work in performance and in maximizing the space available for aesthetic uncertainty—that is, their own musical development and exploration.

Composers and Uncertainty

Composers do discuss commissioning in terms of risk, but whereas ensembles were highly concerned with financial risks as well as performance quality, composers were preoccupied with maximizing the return on their labor in terms of producing a work of high artistic quality. The composers interviewed identified two main risks in this sense, which pertained to the two other agents in the commissioner-performer-composer triangle. Firstly, composers were, understandably, anxious that their works receive a good performance. Secondly, some composers felt the need to assert their independence from the commissioners and the money attached to the commission. Both a bad performance and the perception of being "bought" affect how the work is judged. Composers have different strategies for managing these risks, which vary in different national contexts.

Anticipating the amount of rehearsal time the performer will have to prepare the piece is one way the composer manages the risk of a bad performance. Our interviews seem to indicate that composers working in the USA, Australia, and Canada, more so than their colleagues in France, take more into account the conditions of the piece's rehearsal. This is particularly important when working with large ensembles and orchestras, where rehearsal time is typically set far in advance and cannot be modified, even when the piece delivered cannot reasonably be prepared in the time allotted for it. The Montréal-based composer Tim Brady recounts a large ensemble piece which was given one rehearsal and a dress rehearsal before the premiere. During the first rehearsal, it became evident that the work was rhythmically too complex for the players in the given rehearsal time. By thinning out the texture of the piece before the dress rehearsal, "the piece went from terrible to mediocre overnight."

Prior familiarity with the performer is another key means for managing performance outcomes. Brady gives the example of his five-year residency as a composer with the Orchestre Symphonique de Laval. This long-term working relationship gave Brady important learning opportunities, especially by having the freedom to move about the rehearsal room listening to

different sections of the orchestra in order to fine-tune his writing. Smaller ensembles often have the advantage of being able to provide more flexible rehearsal opportunities, including the workshop model used by the American ensemble eighth blackbird.

eighth blackbird explicitly aims to work as closely as possible with the composers they commission—the only exception to this was a commission from French composer Bruno Mantovani, whom they had never met and did not work with at all on the piece. Otherwise, and especially regarding the commission discussed specifically in our interview, they plan workshops or conversations at different stages of the composition process, from just a discussion of general ideas to sketches, extensive rehearsals of final pieces, performances, and then further revisions if necessary. Both the composers and performers in this situation described this as akin to an editorial process in literature and expressed regret that this way of working was not more common. For the commission discussed in our interview, the composers were actually part of a composer collective and were commissioned as a collective. This unusual, though not unheard-of, structure[7] provides opportunities for feedback at different stages of the composition process, thereby helping the composer manage some of the uncertainty inherent to it.

New technology adds further uncertainties to the compositional process[8] that composers can creatively exploit under the right conditions. At Ircam, where both technological and artistic outputs are prized, pieces are often commissioned precisely to showcase new technology. Since everyone involved is potentially learning new tools, this can be stressful for the composer, the ultimate “author” of the work and therefore seen to be primarily responsible for its success. The Ircam residency/commission model is distinctly collaborative, especially between the composer and his or her computer music designer (*réalisateur en informatique musicale* - RIM). This type of work can truly open the doors to a stimulating confrontation with uncertainty: in the case of one composer writing on commission for Ircam for a new instrument developed there, he described a feeling of “total ignorance” and the need to “work blind.” This was seen as distinct from his compositional process previously, where there were fewer unknowns and thus fewer surprises. This type of commission therefore puts a premium on creating space for uncertainty.

Alongside efforts to manage performance outcomes, the bulk of our interviews pointed to the desire to make sure the composer remains independent or, to use more sacred language as found in some interviews, “undefiled” by earning money to compose. This vision was more extreme in the French case, whereas composers in other contexts had a much more pragmatic,

7. Two examples would be: in the USA, the Sleeping Giant collective (<www.sleepinggiantcomposers.com>, accessed March 11, 2016) and the Danish Dygong collective, which is more of a concert production group made up of 4 composers who also perform as a group (<www.dygong.dk/index.htm>, accessed March 11, 2016). Other, larger composer collectives also exist (e.g., Los Angeles Composers Collective, Irish Composers Collective, the NY Composers Collective), but these act more as advocacy organizations, and do not function as a unit which could potentially be commissioned as such.

8. [NDLR] See Akkermann’s article in this issue.

unproblematic relationship with the more business side of their work.[9] The composers we interviewed in France were in fact proud to say that they did not make a living from composing (thanks to teaching positions, primarily), and heavily implied that those who do are compromised in their artistic production, for example:

> Before, I didn't have a teaching position, and I survived on commissions. That meant that I had to write more, and more regularly, and also seek out commissions, which changes the relationship one has with institutions. It was a situation I didn't feel comfortable in. [Now,] if I don't feel the need to write, I don't write. […] Commissions don't change anything—even the lure of money doesn't make me feel the need to write. […] Even though this might seem crazy, there are people in contemporary music who do write for money, even if they don't say so. They have lots of commissions and they write a lot of music […], whether it's for money or the need to be front and center, for me that's the same thing. […] They could just as well be writing music for film. […] What keeps them is simply that they have enough of whatever it is they need to stay.

On the contrary, composers in other settings aspired to being able to live from their musical output, and did not question the integrity of those who do so.

While the sample size involved here is quite small, we found that greater pains were taken in the commissioner-performer-composer triangle to ensure the composer's artistic freedom in France than elsewhere. Composers definitely recognized the risk of a perceived or real loss of independence in determining the final identity of a piece because of obligations to the commissioner or performer. But if all parties "do their legwork upstream" and have an idea of who they are working with and their expectations, then this risk is mitigated somewhat. Commissioners and ensembles trust composers because of their knowledge of past work, which means they do not feel the need to interfere in the process. However, this implies that it can be difficult for composers to depart from an identity they have established for themselves. For example:

> I was a composer of strictly acoustic music for close to 30 years […]. I wrote orchestral music, […] I was working with chamber music, I was conducting, this was my life. About 15 years ago, I became interested in new media, electronics, and the intersection of traditional artistic practice and new technologies. And when I started to try to get funding for multimedia pieces, it was a disaster. […] I was seen as a composer of traditional, orchestral music, and I would come up with a multimedia project, and they didn't know what to do with me. […] Over the last 10 years, […] about 7 out of 8 grants with the Canada Council are turned down. Maybe more—maybe 9 out of 10 (Linda Bouchard, Canada).

This clarifies partially why it is difficult for a composer to just take an open brief from a commissioner and run with it: indeed, the past affects how future work is evaluated, and can lock a composer into an identity, and past failed experiments limit future possibilities. Thus, the very hands-off approach of private patrons in particular, who go so far as not to care about the style or even the quality of the piece and instead are more interested in making it possible for the composer to pursue their practice however they saw fit, is not necessarily enough to free up a composer to make dramatic changes in their output.

Independence from performers can also be an issue for some composers. The most extreme example of this was the case of a composer in France who stated that he preferred to work with performers who are

9. [NDLR] See, as an example of the other extreme, Wiprud's paper in this issue.

not specialized in contemporary music, ideally younger ones who were not yet stars, as they tend to meddle less in the compositional process. Experienced performers were more likely to suggest things or show him solutions other composers had tried. By working with non-specialized performers, they were much more of a blank slate, and the responsibility for the piece's identity falls squarely on the composer's shoulders. By contrast, Brady considers the experience of performers as a welcome contribution during the compositional process, adopting their recommendations "70% of the time." For the French composer quoted here, his approach means that managing the uncertainty inherent to the artistic process is his job alone, which may partially explain this composer's extreme feelings of anxiety (compared to other interviewees) regarding his compositional process.

While the composers interviewed discussed efforts to manage the risk of a bad performance and that of a loss of independence—risks that prove to be coupled in the end—they also prize the uncertainty inherent to the creative process. Our interviews found a constant state of tension between this risk mitigation and the space allowed for artistic freedom/uncertainty. For instance, beginning discussions with an ensemble early in the process can close down avenues that the composer might otherwise like to explore or also open others. Buckley's decision not to organize the ELISION Ensemble's performances in non-traditional venues is an example of pragmatic decisions limiting the freedom of the composers who choose to write for a particular ensemble. A composer who initiates this type of conversation may see it as voluntarily limiting him/herself early in the compositional process, in an effort to ensure a good performance, while others may see it as a way to explore possibilities that s/he may not have considered alone. As Buckley says, to sit down, "as a group of artists and performers, and decide how this thing could be and where it could go." The distinction seems to be that some composers view the compositional process as more collaborative than others, and national context seems to influence this vision heavily.

In one striking example of a composer choosing uncertainty over risk mitigation, a Québécois composer described his evolution from writing in a way that would produce dependable outcomes (formulas that performers would understand, pieces that could be put together in a relatively short rehearsal time) to a more experimental style with more attention to sound. This evolution was prompted by, among other things, his growing awareness of what he called an "international modernist" style as opposed to a more local, postmodern style to be found in Montréal. We could see this shift as one of moving toward greater uncertainty, toward sound work that may not come across the same way by different performers, or a compositional process that consciously involves more experimentation and a greater use of extended technique. This type of uncertainty is of tremendous value here: it is both the privileged territory and the minefield composers allow themselves to explore when they consciously seek to develop themselves artistically.

In the interaction we have described here, commissioners and, especially, performers, are willing to take on significant risks in order to leave space for uncertainty in the composer's work. It is precisely this space for uncertainty that is seen to distinguish a composer of contemporary art music from his colleagues in more

popular forms of music, and this is in part why it is so important: without it, the composer is not seen as legitimate within his chosen field. Performers and commissioners must provide certainty (guaranteed performances, financial resources, rehearsal time) so that the composer be allowed to fundamentally not know where the compositional process might take her/him.

Conclusion

By examining the problems that arise during the commissioning process in contemporary music we have identified that the process' three main actors maintain unique relationships to risk. Indeed, we found that risk did not explain the motivations and experiences of the actors. By supplementing risk with sociological notions of the gift and uncertainty, we were able to produce a model of various risk scenarios within the commissioner-performer-composer triangle.

It was remarkable to find that those who provided the capital for a commission were precisely those least exposed to financial risk. By identifying the relatively riskless situation enjoyed by commissioners, we were surprised to find that commissioning contemporary music shared characteristics with humanitarian aid. Further research could give an account of why this is so, comparing the starkly different markets of contemporary visual art and music. This research could also thicken the account of the expected returns on investment in contemporary music, including the motivating factor of philanthropic tax concessions. Whether tax-deductible or not, we found that commissioning fees did indeed function sociologically as the gifts they are legislated to be.

Introducing the notion of the gift helped us understand the social ties established in a commissioning relationship and clarifies the way a feeling of obligation drives performers and ensembles to incredible and financially risky lengths. One aspect of the gift relationship of interest here is the fact that a gift given in reciprocation typically has "interest" associated with it—as in, one gives more than one receives.[10] This helps us understand the impression of mounting obligations as the money is given to the composer, who then gives a score to an ensemble, which then has to reciprocate on this two-fold gift. We furthermore found that gift relations are influenced by national contexts. We saw that France represented an extreme case of commissioning being seen as a gift relationship whereas in other contexts, notably the United States, a commissioning relationship can come closer to a market exchange.

The financial risks incurred by ensembles makes them pragmatists. This fact was not always appreciated by composers wishing to make room for independent creativity. Risk thus affects the compositional process in a complex and circuitous manner—through the risk mitigation strategies of the performers. We found the composer's scenario to be a matter of balancing opportunities to experiment and develop as a composer with the realities imposed upon them by the performers. Further research into the relationship of risk and uncertainty in different contexts—be they national, cultural, or historical—would make for fascinating comparative reading.

The central role played by commissions[11] in the world of contemporary art music implies a specific structure

10. See Lair 2007.

11. To get a measure of this role, take, for example, the 2011-2012 season of the US-based International Contemporary

for the world of contemporary art music: one that is centered on the creation of works more so than on artistic exploration without a specific end. The creative process is thus not open-ended—it is associated with deliverables on deadlines, as is typical of project-based fields. More exploratory funding is exceedingly rare and this certainly impacts the way composers and performers approach their work. This way of organizing the world of contemporary art music is a legacy of the Romantic era, wherein the work-concept gained the regulatory force that it has today, such that "all activities [must] be transparent in order to let the work shine through."[12]

APPENDIX I: Interviews

We contacted our interviewees in the early months of 2016, primarily by email. We sought to speak with commissioners, ensembles, and composers who had worked together on a given project. We aimed to speak with two such sets of people in the different countries mentioned in the introduction. The interviewees were chosen based on projects or individuals we had uncovered in our previous research on this subject, or through contacts made through this research. As such, we used a snowball sampling method, with the aim of getting a general understanding of how the discussed issues might be viewed differently in the countries we studied. Our interviews were semi-structured, in the sense that we had determined the themes we wished to address in advance, as well as a set of questions to loosely follow (see below), but we left room for exploring issues raised by our interviewees during the course of the interviews. All the interviews were recorded, and were conducted via Skype, telephone, or in person; one interview was conducted solely in written form over email.

How did you meet the composer/commissioner/ ensemble? How long did you know each other before you worked together on a concrete project?
How many times have you worked together and when?
How did this specific collaboration come about?
What were the parameters of the commission? (deadline, performance space, duration, instrumentation…?)
Why did you choose this composer/commissioner/ ensemble for this project? What does this composer/commissioner/ensemble do well that you particularly appreciate? Did you consider other composers/commissioners/ ensembles?
Can you describe any disagreements, logistical problems, or other issues that had to be overcome from the first conversations to the performance of the work?
Tell us about a commissioning project that fell through, and why. What factors can make this type of collaboration fail?

Ensemble (ICE) and that of the French Ensemble intercontemporain (EIC). In the repertoire played that season, 55% of it was written after the year 2000, in the case of ICE, and 45% for the EIC. Of this repertoire, 80% (ICE) and 71% (EIC) was commissioned work—though not necessarily commissions of these ensembles. These numbers represent minimal proportions, as only pieces which were clearly indicated as commissions were counted (Fryberger 2014, p. 57-58).

12. Goehr 1994, p. 274.

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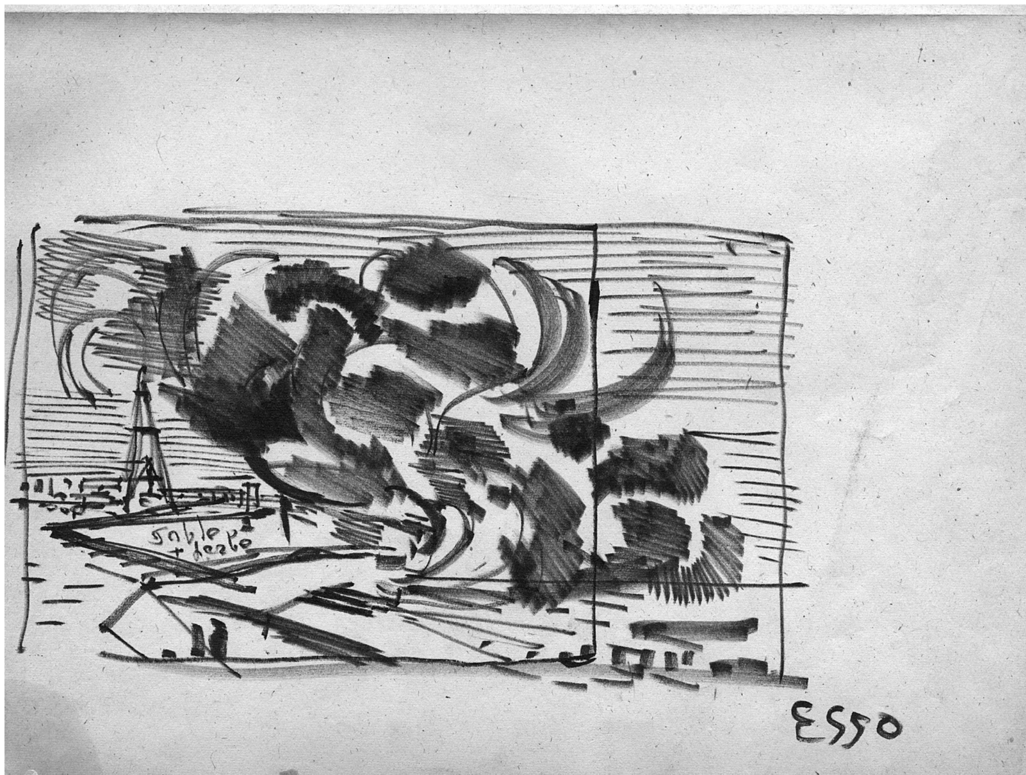

Reynold Arnould, *Torchères, extraction pétrolière* (Esso, Parentis), 1957-1958. Dessin au feutre, 20 × 27 cm. Droits réservés.