

*Marko Vesić*  
(*Марко Весич*)

***WHAT IS BEHIND PERFORMANCE?  
IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATING  
IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC PRACTICES:  
POSITION OF MUSICOLOGISTS***

Before we try to redefine the position of a musicologist in contemporary social reality, it is necessary to set his current position regarding culture and the field of musical production. In that way, we will limit ourselves to the domain of contemporary musical practices which are a part of west European tradition (territorially they can exist anywhere) and their problems which we want to theorize. Zdravko Blažeković gives a general overview of the situation of the musicology and musicologists as follows: «Although the study of music is a diverse field, the outside world sees musicology as impenetrable and narrow. The blame for this is on us. We are too often unwilling to engage with the crises in the world. Too many Western music academics are only interested in publishing their books with large university presses and write articles only for highbrow academic journals that never leave university libraries» [12, 3].

The profession of musicologist, as a historically constructed position in the field of culture, implies, above all, theoretical textual production, i.e. the production of scientific knowledge, whether it is systemic musicology, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary movement. Regardless of the wide range of research orientations, a

musicologist is, according to the doxas of the intellectual field, a researcher in the field of humanities and as such does not leave the field of theoretical production which, in any sense, is usually available only to other researchers or those who are part of academic environments in which the scientific activity of musicologists takes place. Several reasons influenced such a social identity of musicologists, but two are the most important: the need to achieve a dialectical relationship between the authority of the creator and the professor (critic, theorist), who adduces institutional authority, within the autonomy of the intellectual field from the end of the 19th century (which, in a sense, through their dynamics, provides field autonomy, but also the mechanism of the system according to which works will be valued, affirmed and which will influence movements and trends in art, i.e. the accumulation of symbolic capital in certain positions in the field) and the gap that is created in terms of symbolic capital [6, 97] between those who deal with theoretical work (professionals, experts) and those who do not know the theoretical framework of the activity (a difference that is the basis not only of knowledge but also of perceiving the work of art) [9, 459]. On the other hand, internet presentations of faculties that offer music education organize and present the study program of musicologists as a scientific activity, especially emphasizing future pedagogical and research work as expected employment opportunities<sup>1</sup>.

High culture and the field of artistic production tacitly demand special norms of behavior, understanding, evaluation, and view of that culture which is established

---

<sup>1</sup> Berkeley is a great example of this problem. Faculties are generally not oriented towards the education of musicologists which is directed towards their participation in the space of culture as a cultural worker and / or mediator between complex relations in the field infrastructure; musicologist as organizer, manager, project writer and associate of composers is almost not recognized in the dominant order of cultural agents, which neglects their relationship and re-establishes this unfavorable structural inequality. The Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade has a study program () which educates individuals for active participation in culture, and the Faculty of Music has recently become part of the DEMUSIS project, which, among other things, envisages a program aimed at that goal, which, unfortunately, due to the existence of a kind of doxa, is not recognized as something relevant and (artistically) important.

as dominant and is clearly understood as a culture which is not available to everyone but only to the chosen and which, as a rule, belong to the dominant social class. When we re-examine the generally accepted position of the musicologist, the question arises about the relationship between the institution of classical music and its audience, which Pierre Bourdieu would describe as follows: «In the face of meanings outside the realm of legitimate culture, consumers feel empowered to be pure consumers and to judge freely; on the contrary, in the field of consecrated culture, they feel bound by objective norms and obliged to take the position of a believer, a ceremonial and a ritual position» [6, 93-94].

The author wants to remind us of the fact that consumers of high culture imply a normative and expected reading of cultural content, as well as an implied approach and attitude towards it. However, reading cultural content implies possessing specific cultural and symbolic capital that enables decoding of existing code or codes if we understand the work as a means of communication of dual nature, as an artistic object through its contextualization and as an order of signs contained in autonomous artistic logic [10]. The absence of specific knowledge results in the mystification of art and cultural works, but also in the rejection in case its consumption is the result of one's desire or need, and not the need to realize symbolic capital just to provide economic or social capital in its transformation<sup>2</sup>. The foundations of this problem lie in poorly organized educational systems that do not pay enough attention to culture and its artifacts, which, according to Bourdieu, are of paramount importance, but at the moment it is not the primary topic of research. The consequences of this can be briefly seen through the following conclusions: «Popular visitors sometimes see in the absence of instructions, which would facilitate the visit, an expression of the will to

---

<sup>2</sup> We are talking about a situation in which the social subject voluntarily participates in cultural consumption and participation, and is not motivated by other needs; a good example of this is going to a theater or gallery just to identify with a certain social class or to participate with other social agents in an already established high-class ritual that will end with dinner at a restaurant.

be excluded through esotericism, and more educated visitors see in this a purely commercial intention (i.e. an incentive to buy a catalog). In fact, arrows, billboards, guides or lecturers could in no way be a substitute for school education, but by their very existence they would legitimize the right not to know, to be there even though you don't know, the right of the ignorant to be present: they would contribute to diminishing the feeling of the unavailability of the work and the displeasure of the visitors, as nicely expressed by the remark heard in the Versailles Museum: "This castle was not built for the people and that has not changed...» [8, 17].

It is quite clear that understanding art is the first and foremost, and certainly the biggest problem we encounter when it comes to high or legitimate culture. In addition, the repertoire of classical concerts should be questioned, which are most often oriented towards established and long-deceased composers. In his lecture at the symposium Psychology and Music in Belgrade, John Sloboda presented the results of some research that shows that in 1982, 13% of the US population (approximate values also apply to the UK) actively attended classical music concerts, and in 2017 only 8%, while the attendance of theaters, galleries, and museums remained approximately the same. The average age of visitors in the first study was 35 years, and in the second as much as 60. The conclusion that could be made by itself refers to the repertoire and it coincides with the research that shows that in the last 50 years, at the world level, Beethoven is the most represented composer, followed by Mozart [2]. This structural inequality has its origin in the sociology of culture and will be explained later, but for now, it is important that we get acquainted with all the problems that exist in the field of art production.

As our research is focused on contemporary music, it is important to define the notion of contemporaneity and the notion of contemporary art. Contemporary art is the art that is created at the current moment, that is, at the moment of writing about it. Contemporaneity also implies the rejection of the modernist view of history,

postmodernist posthistoricism as well as any other form of relationship with historicization and art history, relying on self-awareness of the current moment, cultural contexts, geopolitical situations and other vectors of social space that exist within the production and understanding of works of art [2, 647]. The term contemporary music is more extensive than the term contemporary art and it is exactly this ambiguity and division of opinions of different musicologists that forces us to decide more specifically on certain practices of musical work, and it implies music that originates in modern times that we have described on different world stages, aware of its contextual, political, economic, social and all other dimensions and potentials. In other words, we will be speaking of music, which is primarily understood as the point of intersection of a networked image of the world, where a piece of music is precisely a node of a network or the resulting vector of different vectors of social space. It is about work that is created in the current moment, work that problematizes and that must be problematized.

The real position of the composer does not exist without his visibility in the field of culture and on the art scenes on which he works, and this should be understood as a *conditio sine qua*. Their visibility does not depend, primarily, on the aesthetic or other qualities (it is better to say the properties) of the work that will be understood differently in different historical moments and contexts, but relies, above all, on the social infrastructure or social capital that the composer possesses, by their actions and engagement, to ensure participation and position on the stage. In her research, DeNora showed that the popularity of Beethoven's music was primarily related to the large number of concerts and engagements which were supported by the good organization and infrastructure of the people who participated in it [2]. Later, that music was canonized and became a part of the history of music, a reference system of evaluation, and the origin of other currents in the field of music production. It becomes clear that so large a participation of Beethoven's music in the repertoires

of cultural institutions around the world is the result of his original great visibility and canonization, which is reflected in the educational system of each country and, unfortunately, is understood as the moment of greatest progress and value in music history and after which everything is less important or completely irrelevant<sup>3</sup>. At a time when it is necessary to follow the logic of the market and reconsider the dominant positions in the field of cultural production, a musicologist could potentially take on the role of manager and organizer to deal with real issues of placing the composer and his work in a market where there is a big difference between production and demand and certainly consumption too, and therefore a large number of sheet music remains in the drawer. Of course, they would be required to actively participate in the promotion of a certain composer's work, placement in dominant newspapers and magazines, in organizing interviews and general presence in the field of culture, but who is ready for possible work without material compensation but for symbolic capital and visibility, which will later, with some risk, be transformed into economic capital. In no case should an artist follow the logic of a prototype of a romantic creator who shuns the real world, but must participate, together with a musicologist, in the social acceptance and affirmation of his work. The composer is expected to be aware of all social circumstances, external influences on the field of music production, but also the logic of the field, and the position he occupies. Bourdieu observes the legality of the field as follows: «If the harmony between supply and demand has the appearance of a completely stabilized harmony, it is because the relationship between the field of cultural creation and the field of power takes the form of an almost perfect analogy between two structures in the hierarchy: in fact, as

---

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary art practices are most often taught at the end of the school year, which is also or probably the end of a certain course (because they themselves are at the "historical" end) and often, due to lagging behind, they do not come to be taught. In addition, professors themselves often do not know or deal with contemporary art, whether it is the result of their poor education and dominant structure that is obviously replicated or it is an individual attitude that relies on a general disinterest in something new that requires and new approaches.

in the field of power, economic capital grows when it moves from temporarily subordinate positions to temporarily dominant, while cultural capital varies in the opposite direction, so, in the field of cultural creation, economic profit grows when we move from the autonomous pole to the heteronomous, or, if desired, from "pure" art to "bourgeois" or "commercial" one, while specific profits vary in the opposite direction» [9, 355].

The position in a legitimate culture is taken and built within its distinction with other positions, but it is conditioned by the motion and acquisition of the symbolic capital which is integral to the affirmation of the legitimate culture as such. A musicologist will, in that sense, provide public appearances, participation and general visibility to the composer only in specific magazines or with specific publishers, at concerts, symposiums, and manifestations that imply specific symbolic values and that affirm their work and direct towards the end of the spectrum the artist is championing. It is also of paramount importance that he be permanently culturally active and that the continuity is marked by various communication channels. The economy factor may represent a prerequisite and security on the path of independence which is, as such, based on the specific *illusie* and *nomos* of the field, but need not be *condito sine qua* which would prevent the artist from taking their position and survive in the field. In other words, the musicologists' primary research at this moment is directed towards the field of culture and its Rule of Law, which condition it and which need to be followed by the artist.

Bourdieu, on the other hand, demonstrates the importance of the lifestyle and habit forming in an artist by noting the *basic* and essentialist characteristics an artist is expected to possess on the example of Balzac's «*Treatise on Elegant Living*» [9, 86-87]. In a certain sense, a contemporary artist and composer is expected to possess certain characteristics and to be different, unique, recognizable, that is to have built an identity and *image*. The role of a musicologist is to conduct research on the field that

would help mythologize their personality. It is generally well-known that Charles Bukowski used to present himself as a spendthrift who does not consider money in public, but research showed that he did take care of his finances, but that was one piece of interesting information about his private life (as we can see, the myth surrounding the artist is, indeed, fiction). In other words, the composer, as any other artist, must build a recognizable and unique identity within the field of culture, whether it comes to reticence or supposed introversion or an extravagant and exhibitionist position<sup>4</sup>. The identity construction depends not only on the personal preference but also on the conditions of the field which the musicologist must reassess and should participate in. Another moment of his engagement turns towards a plural and historicized representation of the composer's career creation. The persona historicization, its changes and possible movements between the private and the public, can be best seen through the concept of *transmedia storytelling* [1] which involves recording documentary material, serials or any content which is a media or post-media mediator and which has the purpose to *tell* the artist's story through multiple communication channels<sup>5</sup>. This manner of forming an essentialist identity Bourdieu bases on the existence of historical circumstances that remain invisible to an uninformed observer and which represents the foundation of the position. Therefore the trajectory of the artist's motion is experienced as immanent to them and the result of their destiny, a predestination which, seemingly, objectively exists [9, 429]. This misperception should be used precisely in the way formerly described and the artist, as well as their work, needs to be observed as a currency of cultural exchange and expenditure. The mythologization of the persona is, again, based precisely on its distinctive markings and uniqueness, but also the historicization of its changes which

---

<sup>4</sup> Isidora Žebeljan, a Serbian composer from the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, dances in front of the podium when her music of a character very close to a dance is performed.

<sup>5</sup> Nemanja Radulović, a well-known Serbian violinist, is an example of the successful use of transmedia storytelling.

should also be followed through the events which would offer an experience of an incredible destiny of the artist and the interesting facts characteristic precisely of that persona to the audience. Marina Abramović, for instance, speaks of extremely intimate topics and personas who had influenced her creative maturation, with constant oscillations between the private and public space and discourse in her «*Memoirs*» [4]. When speaking about the composer's persona, musicologist not only participates in its discursive making, but actively affects the work, proposing steps (based on their knowledge of both music history and art and the characteristics of the field of culture and research) which are, at the given historical moment, the most optimal for the artist. They, analogically to the cultural workers and associates in the visual arts, may give an idea to the composer, which they will realize, and which is an important strategic step within the field. The relationship between the composer and the musicologist needs to be redefined and established in a manner opposite to the expected, rival view of the position and (theoretical) opposition and based on the cooperation and interest which will, in the mutual interaction and the field and market dynamic, affirm both of them [9, 191-195].

The identity problem, as explained, is not both the problem of the work and its understanding. In that sense, the position of the musicologist is additionally complex and demands a larger use of primary intellectual resources adopted during the classical studies. During the mentioned lecture, John Sloboda, speaks of several problems that the audience encounters during its visits to the classical concerts juxtaposed to popular culture concerts and as shown as the main issue is the conservative approach and the relationship with the legitimate culture which, as stated, involves particular behavior, understanding and passivity codes which is not characteristic of the demands of the contemporary audience. Instead, from the point of view of the audience, we shall try to view this problem through the prism of the culture and theory developed by now multiply mentioned, Pierre Bourdieu.

The position of contemporary music is especially complex and unique, as it is constantly in the process of social fading, it is new and strives to take a certain place as opposed to the other, dominant aesthetics which exist in the current moment. Each new occurrence within the cultural field affects the understanding and the redefinition of the other segments of the field and positions, it pushes the nodes of the network, position, and redefines the structure constellation anew [1]. That characteristic of the contemporary music cannot leave the musicologists indifferent and will participate in the work interpretation. On the other hand, if we do not speak of the socio-historical dimension of the work and phylogenesis, contextualization, and other vectors of the social space whose reflection we observe *at work*, ontogenesis or the existence of the work represents another segment of the issue. This is where it is important to introduce the concept of taste, found in Bourdieu's principles: «On the question of taste, each determination is – more than in any other field – negation. With the most judgments on tastes, *the truth* consists of *rejection* that follows these judgments, namely of the objective and subjective relationship with any other taste, and therefore with the taste of others» [7, 109].

The author implies that determination for any aesthetic or position of taste he understands as a distinction in relation to the other more or less dominant tastes. This is how we do not become endangered of the essentialist view making a promise as itself, or in essence but we define a thing by positively differentiating it from another thing. Contemporary music, therefore, may be defined as a sum of differences that exist on an aesthetic plane and/or autonomous musical logic we find in a work of art – the distinction as the basic characteristic of recognition, understanding and contextualization related to all immanent musical parameters and, consequently, rhythm, form, text if existent, we analyze and position them according to distinction (Bourdieu presents the example of a type of verse, an Alexandrine, by writing about what it does not represent). However, the distinction is, much more relevantly, also

realized on another, socio-historical plane and the current moment in the field, and the inner constellation of the work is certainly on part the direct result of the action of the field (it seems that it is required to relativize the relation between a tool and a purpose in aesthetics, and in the contemporary work it is inclined towards the former).

All the abovementioned leads to the key point, that is, the relation established between the audience and the musicologist. The musicologist takes the competence of a lecturer and in an active discussion with the audience (possibly the composer as well), aims to provide it with *codes* which aid it to be able to understand both the phylogenesis and the ontogenesis of the work, as well as the political, economic, social and every other context not boiling the work down to immanence which signifies remystification. The musicologist interprets the work using its versatility not in a manner fitting to scientific research but a lecturer who, together with the audience, participates in the creation of meaning. I consider an approach as comprehensive as this important because a musicologist, in the role of a lecturer, is not completely certain what audience they would encounter (it could be high-schoolers, or a very heterogeneous group). On the other hand, the familiarity with *the rules of a board game* silently agreed to by everyone, the musicologists serves to make the whole event/spectacle/performance very arbitrary and improvisation tuned provided that works can be performed multiple times, which means that they invite the audience to actively cooperate which may include live interaction with the performers, sheet music, instruments with them building a completely new perception of the legitimate culture, its consumption and contemporary works being created there and then, as opposed to the recognizable and canonized works, the established reading being self-reproduced. It is relevant that, during the process of relativization of the expected norms, the audience does not lose the awareness of the symbolic value of intuition of art which would create a farce out of the whole act, but to stay within the *illusie* which represents the foundation of the entirety of the board game.

The symbiosis of the current moment and the intellectual procedure of decoding demanded from the audience goes in favor of the musicologist's position. To understand an ancient ritual, we must understand its *codes*, but take into consideration that all those who participated in the rituals did not have any sort of mental arrangement for it, on the contrary, they were considered to be self-evident. In other words, the final aim of the musician's actions is to provide not only the mechanisms, that is the codes necessary for the understanding of the content, but also the historical moment and its reconstruction in the base of the work or precisely that, specific work of a legitimate culture. Only then could the audience be able to reconstruct or at least question their taste and to redetermine itself in the field of culture. The result of this interaction is the permanent reassessment of the relationship of a culture and its contents, as well as the adoption of a new experience that becomes a part of the conscious and self-evident *aesthetic capital*<sup>6</sup>.

The differences being directed towards the contemporary music practices by this research do not negate the possibility for this type of arrangement to be used for any sort of work or performance activity, and I consider this even desirable. However, the contemporary work includes a large number of novelties when speaking about the performance and composer techniques, the relationship with culture and the social reality as well as all of its dimensions, therefore making the position of a musicologist to be understood as a medium or mediator between the audience and the contemporaneity which does not remain unquestioned, natural and self-explanatory because nothing in this world is. It is important to notice that during the whole process, the musicologist is the one creating cultural markers or brings them to different relations of connotation and denotation. They do not leave things to chance,

---

<sup>6</sup> Aesthetic capital is a term that does not exist in active use, but with its derivation I want to point out the importance of terminology even in informal or semi-formal communication between musicologists and the audience. Aesthetic capital will, in this case, mean the entire aesthetic experience that is considered self-evident within the habitus and that participates in the evaluation and adoption of other aesthetic contents and experiences as a kind of reference system.

that is, to mystification and ignorance, but also does not actively deal with the educational and symbolic capital which the audience has adopted to a certain extent, but constructs a new one which would potentially modify the taste, call the old one in question and put the audience in an active position through discursive practices or workshops, as well as any other content which would negate the existence of the formerly adopted behavior rules which greatly impede *communication* between the contemporary work and the audience.

A manifesto or a plan of the musicologist resembles, slightly, the *Pompidou* in Paris. Everything once implied and was inside is placed on the outside and used as a tactic of a market match or as a means of understanding and domination in the field of a legitimate culture. The tactics are familiar and historically established and have the aim of visibility and recognizability in the field of culture on one side, and on the other, appropriately, the understanding and acceptance along with all the tectonic movements of the field inevitable to the realization of progress. The summary of the position of a new musicologist would imply its absolute active participation in culture which had become too distant from the dominant academic (and academized) theoretical approaches, and which are, in practice, most often, irrelevant and do not coincide with real circumstances and cultural relations and the relations in the creative work. On one side, the musicologist is the composer's associate who participates in the making of their identity and the organization of their visibility, but he is also an advisor who provides the composer with a surplus of symbolic capital which would, within its limits, result in innovation, and is made through interaction between the creative thought and theoretical knowledge<sup>7</sup>. In other words, in order to be avant-garde, it is necessary to be familiar with all current codes and how to decode them to

---

<sup>7</sup> It is useful to mention the example of Marcel Duchamp through which Bourdieu explains innovation which is the result of social and historical movements, but above all education and cultural capital that the author carried with him (P. Bourdieu (2002) *Pravila umetnosti*, Novi Sad, Svetovi).

violate them and introduce new ones while observing their historical and linguistic arbitrariness. Another dimension of the problem is related to the creative work in interaction with the audience and the musicologist is the mediator between the required knowledge and aesthetic experience within the particular social context and the institution of classical music. By taking the role of an informal lecturer, interpreter and a kind of guide, the musicologist strives to question the norms of the social *doxa*, a silent and unquestionable value of culture and anticipated behavior by, through presentation and interpretation of the contemporary creative work, trying to provide the basis for a new worldview and potential shifts of taste. By redefining their position, the musicologist strives to also modify the position of the audience that becomes much freer by attaching to it the role of an explorer, a composer that becomes an active participant in the culture, not a romanticized lone artist (which is still very popular and a result of a negative and aged), and, at the end, the creative work not represented as self-explanatory but becomes contextually determined, interactive and demystified. The greatness of this historical undertaking is visible precisely through this.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Abramović, M. *Memoari: prolazim kroz zidove*, Beograd, Samizdat. 2017.
2. Blažeković, Z. *The Mission of Musicologists in Cultural Preservation*, Basel, IMS Musicological Brainfood 2, No. 3. 2018.
3. Bourdieu, P. *Intelektualno polje i stvaralačka zamisao*, Novi Sad, Kultura. 1981.
4. Bourdieu, P. *Klasna funkcija umetnosti*, Novi Sad, Svetovi. 1981.
5. Bourdieu, P. *Umetnička dela i razvijanje ukusa*, Novi Sad, Kultura.

6. Bourdieu, P. (2003). *Pravila umetnosti*, Novi Sad, Svetovi. 1981.
7. DeNora, T. *Beethoven and Construction of Genius*, Los Angeles, University of California Press. 1995.
8. Jenkins, H. Transmedia Storytelling. *Moving characters from books to films to video games can make them stronger and more compelling*. Technology Review *Ibid*: 231-232. 2003.
9. Sloboda, J. Keynote Lecture, PAM-IE 2019 Belgrade Conference. URL: ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_AvjmB1Id8w&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AvjmB1Id8w&feature=youtu.be)) (14.07.2020)
10. Šuvaković, M. *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti*, Beograd, Clio. 2011.
11. Wollheim, R. *Art and its Objects*, Cambridge, Cambridge Philosophy Classics edition. 2015.