2 Objectifying Subjectivity*

François-Marie Gerard

Assessment is subjective. Always.[1] Inevitably. Necessarily (Cardinet, 1992; Gerard, 2002; Romainville, 2012; Weiss, 1984). It is subjective because throughout its process, as described, for example, by Durand and Chouinard (2012), assessors make decisions based on their subjectivity—however professional it may be (Gerard, 2002)—wondering: what are the objectives pursued? What are the criteria employed? What is the information to be collected? What are the indicators arising from this information which could be judged by the criteria? What methodology should be used to collect the information? How—based on the juxtaposition of criteria and indicators—can a value judgement be determined which will meet the objectives of the assessment?

Each time, they could make other decisions, but it is these which they make, as a function of a systematic and conscious reflection, not in a random or an impulsive fashion. At least, this should be the case. The question of subjectivity is not in itself a problem for assessment. However, what is—at times—a problem is when this subjectivity is not mastered, when it is thoughtless and haphazard, for example when an assessor is not explicitly aware of the choices he or she is making and of the reasons underpinning them. The enemy of assessment is not its subjectivity but its arbitrariness (Jeffrey, 2013; and, on this subject, also see Chapter 1).

The subjectivity in question here is far from being a flaw. On the contrary, this is the very essence of the nobility of human beings. "I think, therefore I am," wrote René Descartes at the start of the 17th century. It is because we think that we exist that we are human beings. The fundamental difference between a human being and all other living creatures is precisely human thought and subjectivity. This is what is at work in assessment: it is this which allows for the giving of meaning, the constructing of value in what is assessed. This is incidentally its first etymological meaning: being connected to the *subject*, starting with what occurs in our spirit, with what is inside us, as opposed to the *object*, which would be deemed as objective. It is only in its second meaning that the word *subjectivity* takes on what has become a negative connotation: stemming from personal judgement or taste, as if that were unavoidably invalid or not trustworthy.

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Obviously, we need to reach a common understanding of what constitutes assessment. In that respect, an etymological detour is essential. The words *assessment* and *assess* (*évaluation* in French) have their origin in Indo-European roots: **wal*, meaning "to express one's strength" or "to be powerful." On this basis, the Latin will use *evaluatio*, a word comprising the preposition *e* (or *ex*), meaning "out of," and the noun *valuatio*, derived from the verb *valere*, meaning "to be strong," "thriving," "powerful" or "worth." This etymological reference is revealing: *assess* signifies bringing out the value of what is being assessed, showing its strength and its power.

Thus, it can be a question of *formulating a judgement* on the object to be assessed (Bressoux and Pansu, 2003), *attributing a value* to it (Hameline, 2005), *attributing a meaning* to the performance of a subject (Jorro, 2007), *making sense* out of it (Ardoino, 1976) or *laying the groundwork for a decision* (De Ketele, 1993; Gerard and BIEF, 2009; Stufflebeam et al., 1980). From the latter perspective, assessment may be defined as follows (De Ketele, 1989, 2010): assessment is the process of collecting a range of relevant, valid and trustworthy information and then evaluating this according to a number of carefully selected criteria, so as to attribute meaning to these results. This could lay the groundwork for establishing a basis for decision-making.

However, the issue of subjectivity—as well as the questions it brings up—does not always have the same importance. Notably, this depends on what is being assessed—that is, the object of the assessment. In today's world of education or training, we distinguish two main objects of assessment. We can assess

- *competencies*[2]— that is, the manner in which a student handles a complex situation requiring a complex production, combining in a more or less appropriate and integrated fashion various *resources*; and
- the *resources* themselves, in terms of knowledge or *savoir-faire*, if not attitudes.[3]

For example,[4] for a music student, assessing a resource consists of verifying thaThe or she can play every scale with their instrument, while assessing a competency would require the same student to play—before a live audience—a concerto accompanied by an orchestra with which he or she has never played previously.

Intuitively, we feel that the assessment of *resources* may be relatively objective, since, to a certain degree, simply to *check* whether the student performs exactly as expected is enough, while the assessment of competencies is—by definition—much more complex, since it calls upon various dimensions, which are themselves subjective.

The assessment of resources certainly cannot be reduced to a mere *inspection*, even if—for example in the field of music— *machines* can now perform such assessments. Nonetheless, one should not conclude that these *resources* are purely simple.

Thus, in his work *Psychopédagogie de l'école musicale. Entendre, écouter, comprendre*, Afsin (2009) rightly stresses the necessity of taking into consideration three major domains which are interrelated in a complex fashion: cognitive, psychomotor and affective (Gerard, 2000). The author gives the following examples (referenced in De Ketele, 2011) which are particularly telling, especially since they clearly reveal the interconnected nature of these three fields.

- The cognitive domain: "The subject will be able to sing the theme of the 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's 9th Symphony, starting on an *F-sharp* note, that is, in the key of *D-major*, but will then, with instruments, redo this same melody starting on a *B* note, that is in *G-major*, with no visual aid" (De Ketele, 2011, p. 126).
- The psychomotor domain: "The subject will know how to perform the 9/8 *aksak* rhythmic pattern (unstable, irregular) of the Turkish song *Resiye* using his or her thumb and little finger on a Basque drum" (p. 126).
- The affective domain: "The subject will be able to create and improvise within various rhythmic patterns (5/8, 7/8, 9/8, etc.) and in every decomposition. The mastery of *Veresiye*'s rhythmic may allow the subject to develop his or her own specific emotional interest in music based on *Aksak* rhythmic units" (pp. 126–127).

Although these *resources* are far from simple, they can be assessed relatively *simply* and *objectively* because they bear on clearly defined objects for which it is sufficient to note whether or not they are present, allowing students a certain margin of error and enabling them to achieve higher or lower numbers if the assessment takes the form of numbered grades.

I n contrast, to assess a competency, one cannot merely take note of *the right answer* since there is no such thing. The student production is complex—that is, composed of various elements in interaction. It is this very complexity and these interactions that the assessor must *highlight*. Thus, the criteria on which a student production will be assessed should be clearly determined, and the specific indicators to operationalize these criteria must be explained. We will return to these aspects. Furthermore, the question of subjectivity arises in various terms according to the assessment at play. Overall, the issues are quite different depending on the function of the assessment and the approach adopted in the assessment process.

1 The Functions of the Assessment

The functions of the assessment—that is, its very purpose, in direct relation with the type of decision to be taken at the end of the assessment process—could be threefold, regardless of the assessment's objective. Whether in art or any other discipline, one

may wish to guide the student or the work, improve a training or apprenticeship process, or provide certification, supplying proof that the training process has reached its objectives and that the student has mastered the designated competencies.

If the goal of the assessment is to improve and regulate the training, the teaching or the apprenticeship process, which we call "formative assessment," the question of subjectivity does not really arise. In training musicians, we know very well that they will be working with different masters, known for both their musical and their pedagogical competency. Two films, each in their own way, illustrate this approach: *The Music Teacher* (original version *Le maître de musique*) (Corbiau, 1988), with the extraordinary José van Dam, and, in a completely different genre, *La famille Bélier* (Lartigau, 2014), in which an obscure high school music teacher discovers and develops an unexpected vocal talent. In the end, in both cases, it does not matter whether these *teachers-assessors* are objective or subjective. What counts is that they are engaging in the musical development of these budding artists and allowing them to meet other masters. Each of these brings all their subjectivity to make the artist more complete and more compelling. Everyone knows that the mastery of music is totally subjective, but this poses no problems, since this very subjectivity greatly contributes to the development process of the talent in question. This individual will certainly have to deal with other subjective reactions which, each in their own way, will help *polish the diamond in the rough* and create an outstanding artist. In this sense, *objectifying the subjectivity* simply consists of multiplying the subjectivity. Artists *shaped* by a single teacher would truly be losing out on numerous facets of their art.

Alongside this function of regulating assessment—which should be the most frequent in a training process—the experts in assessment agree that there are two others: that of providing guidance and that of grading.

In artistic training in higher education, the function of orientation is particularly important, especially when it is a matter of selecting new candidates for entry into a training programme. For candidates, choosing the right path is a key moment which might impact their entire lives. Thus, it is fundamental that the decision taken truly correlates with their potential. For the training institution, selecting or refusing such a candidate is an equally important process: there is the risk of inappropriately accepting a candidate who could harm the institution, or the opposite, refusing a candidate who might have become an excellent artist, which would constitute a grave error. The need to objectify the selection process is, consequently, particularly crucial to reduce as much as possible the risk of error. However, this risk will always exist: it is known that it is difficult to determine the validity of a predictive assessment and that such a prediction is relatively limited in time, being relevant for a period of six months to seven years (Lievens et al., 2005). In other words, the same process of selection, however rigorous, used with the same person, could very well lead to different decisions according to the precise time when the assessment was conducted.

Finally, one should consider that the orientation assessment in artistic training includes two types of important decisions during the training process, rather than at the outset:

- the decision to allow a student to advance to the next year or to allow him or her to proceed with a particular artistic project (e.g. a contest), to the extent that, in both cases, this is a prediction of the student's trajectory. This assessment does not consist of confirming that the student has mastered the competencies focused on during the training but rather of predicting whether he or she will be able to succeed in the next year or artistic project; or
- the decision to advise the student to continue the training at some other school or with some other teacher.

The function of certification[5] is as important, although one must avoid emphasizing it too much during the training process. It involves socially certifying, usually based on a particular work taken as proof that the results of a completed action (or sequence of actions) correspond to the objectives. In a training context, certificate assessment allows for the granting of a diploma or certificate attesting to the student's success. The rationale for this assessment is not pedagogical (it adds nothing to the training process) but rather social (it serves to assure society that the graduate has effectively mastered the targeted competencies). For a training institution, the risk is once again twofold: the risk of graduating someone who has not mastered the competencies— here we are referring to improper success— but also that of not graduating someone who *has* mastered the competencies— improper failure. Both risks exist and are equally important. Thus, it is essential to guarantee that the final decision does not depend on the assessor's goodwill or mood nor on the circumstances of the assessment.

2 The Assessment Processes

The situation is complex since the issue of the functions of the assessment is in constant interaction with possible assessment procedures (De Ketele, 2006; Gerard, 2013; Gerard and BIEF, 2009). Indeed, each function may be accomplished by one or several of the following processes, which—while different—all truly exist and cannot be a priori deemed either good or bad:

- a summative procedure, which seeks to report on the various types of learning in attributing a sum (a grade, a score, a quantitative measure or an assessment)

as the outcome of the comparison between the referred assessment (what is observed by the assessor) and its referent (that to which a work should correspond);

- a descriptive process, which attempts to describe in qualitative fashion behaviours, performances, difficulties, products, procedures used and so forth, which will be of use in the decision-making; and
- a hermeneutic (interpretative or intuitive) procedure seeking to attribute, more or less consciously and voluntarily, meaning to the collection of indices, both qualitative and quantitative, gathered together as the basis for a decision.

Whatever the field, the interplay of functions and procedures offers at least nine possibilities. Inspired by the work of De Ketele (2011), Table 2.1 picks up on several situations arising in the field of musical training.

A priori, the most subjective assessment is the one using the hermeneutic approach, especially since the indices are usually not collected in a conscious or systematic fashion. Nonetheless, it should not be rejected, on the one hand, because it is used by many teachers, especially in artistic training, and, on the other hand, because this intuitive and pragmatic approach often proves to be as effective as certain complicated approaches used by experts. A number of studies have demonstrated that in-class teacher assessments of students' behaviour and competencies have an advantage over standardized assessments in predicting school performances and students' path to success or failure (Guimard et al., 2007). Even though they are subjective in their approach, teachers rely on an assertive and interactive knowledge of students, allowing them to effectively offer more than the results of a standardized assessment.

Research indicates that this hermeneutic approach can prove highly effective for an orientation assessment, including in the duration of the prediction. In the context of a regulation assessment, these assessments by teachers are of limited validity since they do not, alone, allow for the determination of the processes at play in learning, or help diagnose students in difficulty in any other way than in an intuitive, overarching fashion. However, the hermeneutic approach may prove useful in completing a descriptive process, either to guide or to regulate the student, since not only does it consider descriptive elements observed, but it also takes into account other indices (notably from earlier learning processes) to produce a relevant diagnosis that will allow for a better orientation of the ongoing learning.

Finally, within the framework of a certificate assessment, clearly, such a process must be handled with the greatest care, especially since teachers—as Crahay reminds us (2006a) —are naturally highly confident in their own judgement, almost to the point of believing they are fail-proof. "More precisely, a good number of teachers questioned seem to consider that their judgement is objective due to the very fact that they are in daily contact with the children" (Crahay, 2006a, p. 137).

Table 2.1 Situations in the field of musical training

Functions		
Orientation (preparing an action)		
Processes	› Summative	Marking an entrance examination in musical training to determine whether the student may or may not be admitted to the training programme
	› Descriptive	Identifying and describing a series of appropriate indices to enter musical training
	› Hermeneutic	Rendering a favourable or unfavourable judgement on admission to musical training based on a series of quantitative or qualitative indices (previous training, an interview, a test, etc.)
Regulation (improving an action)		
Processes	› Summative	Assigning a numbered grade to a musical exercise during the learning process to encourage students to continue their efforts or to begin the process
	› Descriptive	Describing a series of errors to correct following the learning process
	› Hermeneutic	Analysing a performance during the learning process, gathering an entire series of quantitative or qualitative indicators observed and interpreting them to orient more effectively the remainder of the learning process
Certification (certifying an action)		
Processes	› Summative	Attributing a grade in a musical training diploma and, on this basis, determining whether the student passes or fails
	› Descriptive	Describing the competencies acquired during the musical training
	› Hermeneutic	Awarding a student a diploma at the end of a period of musical training by assembling an entire series of quantitative or qualitative indices which signify that the candidate has the appropriate profile to graduate

Source: Adapted from De Ketele, 2011.

Even if all this research concerns compulsory education, there is no reason to think that it cannot equally apply to higher education in the arts.

The hermeneutic approach is essentially subjective. However, it would be wrong to think that the other two approaches are not. Certainly, the summative approach *appears* to be objective due to the numbers on which it is based. Yet it was this approach on which the initial research on docimology, the science of assessment, focused. As early as 1938, Laugier and Weinberg showed that one needs 127 correctors of a philosophical dissertation to obtain an average grade which no longer changes with the addition of a new corrector. For a French composition, 78 are needed, and 13 are needed for a test in mathematics (De Peretti, 1993).

How many are needed to stabilize the grade of an artistic production? Doubtlessly more than 127. Nonetheless, when this text was written, the 2015 Concours Reine Élisabeth (Queen Elizabeth Competition), devoted to the violin, was taking place in Belgium. The jury of what is considered one of the most important musical competitions comprises 12 famous violin-related personalities, known for both their musical abilities and their pedagogical competencies. This jury functions exclusively on the basis of scores: at the end of each session each member of the jury submits to the bailiff his or her scores for all the candidates. No consultation takes place among the jury members, and there is no deliberation in the usual sense of the term. The scores are considered confidential and the list of winners is, after an eventual adjustment, calculated on the basis of these scores. Therefore, this is a purely summative procedure which could also be applied to an academic situation. Since all the candidates who have reached this stage have a high level of technical artistry, the competition has always awarded the top prizes to excellent musicians. Yet, in light of the research on docimology, one might wonder whether a jury composed of 12 other violin personalities would come up with different results.

The descriptive approach is also subjective, but it is perhaps the procedure which is most readily controllable and controlled. Indeed, while one of the great difficulties of the summative approach is that one never really knows how the final grade is determined and, thus, what exactly it means, the comments produced in a descriptive approach are both more significant and more easily verifiable. The observer, or the student being assessed, can readily determine to what the *descriptions* are referring and can confirm or deny their veracity.

3 Towards an Objectification of Subjectivity

By its very nature, assessment is subjective. Of course, it is unacceptable to cling to this statement, and all the attempts made to best objectify assessment must be taken into account. However, it would be dangerous to believe that it is possible to overcome subjectivity and conduct an entirely objective assessment, at least when the

goal is to assess competencies—and their acquisition—and not merely the mastery of techniques. With modern technology, it is entirely possible for a machine to verify that a musician is playing a score perfectly, with the appropriate rhythm and tempo. However, this is not assessment but rather control. If one goes beyond the purely technical aspects and wishes to determine whether the musician (or the student musician) can *bring the score to life*, create emotion in the listener, bring an original vision to the work being performed and so forth, only a genuine assessment would be able to bring out this *added value*.

This assessment, which only human beings can do, will inevitably be subjective. What matters is not suppressing the subjectivity but keeping control of it in such a way that it is not random or blind or arbitrary. The real danger would be an *unrestrained* subjectivity, with neither safeguards nor visibility.

Objectifying assessment then consists of, on the one hand, making it as transparent as possible, including clearly informing students, and, on the other hand, incorporating specific benchmarks which, although not totally objective, will at least prevent the process from being completely haphazard. All the subjective phases of the assessment process (Gerard, 2002) should be targeted by this *objectification*.

3.1 The Function of the Assessment

The function of the assessment should be precise and known to both the assessor and the assessed. The objectives of the assessment must be clearly defined and must have already been submitted to the students, so that they know what decision will result from that assessment: is this a matter of guiding the student, of regulating his or her learning, or of certifying the acquisition of the designated competencies? Ideally, the assessment should never serve another function than that already declared, at least never to the detriment of the student. Thus, it would not be acceptable to exclude from the final assessment test for certification that a student has, in the context of a formative assessment, revealed his or her difficulties or shown certain weaknesses. One might imagine that the student be advised not to appear for this final test, but this should not be based on the formative assessment during which, by definition, the student is invited to display his or her problems so that remediation work can be undertaken to overcome these difficulties. However, one could easily envisage that, before the final certificate assessment, a selection process could be organized to avoid exposing students who are prone to fail it. In some ways, this would serve as a certificate pre-assessment. To the extent that the process is clear, and the students are so informed, this pre-assessment—whether or not the students succeed—could be used for training purposes, to perfect certain elements which have not been mastered or to identify the skills demanding more systematic work. In such cases, the use of assessment for another function than that for which it was originally intended benefits the student.

3.2 The Assessment Criteria

A second fundamental benchmark should be to give the most precise definition possible of the criteria to serve as referents during the assessment. A criterion is a look at the object being assessed, a *point of view* one adopts to assess the object. The criterion corresponds to a *quality* of this object. An artistic production may have many qualities. Thus, it is important to specify the qualities—that is, the criteria—that will be considered during the assessment. The issue is to make explicit and systematic what is all too often implicit and random. Throughout the entire assessment process, the criteria are present, but they are often implicit, only known—sometimes even unconsciously—to the assessor who, in addition, does not always give the same weight to a given criterion depending on the student who is being assessed, often to the detriment of the student or to his or her learning processes. For example, a particularly expressive student violinist would be penalized because of a false note, while another student would be reproached by the same assessor for the coldness of their interpretation, although there was no false note. The definition of criteria must, therefore, specify the precise characteristics of the student production which will be assessed and the weight given to each of these criteria. The assessor must then systematically and equally refer to these during the assessment. The *value* of student productions will emerge only through these criteria, which should be used in the same fashion for every student, based on indicators we will speak about later in this text.

Today, the work on criteria is at the heart of the process of assessment of student competencies and of their learning, in particular with respect to its objectification. Moreover, a good number of texts from this book should concern their definition in the context of various types of artistic training. For example, in the Programme de formation de l'école québécoise (the Québec School Training Programme) (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2007), we find the following criteria, which are applicable to higher education:

- for the competency *to create musical works*: variety in the use of elements of musical language, efficient use of audio techniques, originality in the treatment of musical elements, consistency of the creative proposal and the actual performance, and integration of reflective feedback during the creative experience;
- for the competency *to interpret musical works*: fluidity in the succession of musical phrases of the work, efficient use of technical and musical elements, consistency of the interpretation and the expressive nature of the piece, uniformity in the application of rules relative to ensemble music and the integration of reflective feedback during the experience of interpretation; and

- for the competency *to appreciate musical works*: the relevance of elements monitored, the justification of his or her appreciation, the appropriateness of the disciplinary vocabulary employed and the integration of reflective feedback.

To fully benefit from the objectification of the assessment process, these criteria should:

- be clearly defined, not only for the purposes of formulating criteria but also to explain precisely what is meant, for example, by "variety in the use of elements of musical language." And this, not only in specifying indicators which will be used to assess but also to clarify, in terms of criteria, exactly what is covered;
- be mutually independent (Gerard and Van Lint-Muguerza, 2000), which means that failure or success in one criterion should not automatically entail failure or success in another;
- eventually be weighted, if one wishes to accord more weight to one criterion rather than another. This weighting should be the result of considerable reflection, and, if possible, collective, and established as a function of learning indicators and objectives (Lemenu and Heinen, 2015);
- be known by those being assessed, including their precise significance and their eventual weight relative to the other criteria; and
- be used systematically, in the manner intended, during the correction process of the student production.

3.3 The Information to Collect, or Indicators of the Criteria

Based on the function of the assessment and of the criteria selected, the assessor decides which information to collect, notably by deciding in which actual situation students will find themselves demonstrating their competency. This situation reflects not only the competency selected:[6] the situation will differ between assessing the competency *to interpret musical works* and that of *appreciating musical works*. The level of training will also be taken into consideration: interpreting a piece by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or one by Anton Webern does not demand the same level of competency.

Beyond the specific assessment conditions, it is also important to be very precise about the manner in which the assessment criteria will be applied. Indeed, a criterion, for example the *integration of reflexive feedback*, is by its very nature both general (it can refer to a number of competencies, as is the case in the example, and can even generally be used in various domains) and abstract (in itself, we know neither what the *reflexive feedback* will entail nor what its *integration* signifies).

Therefore, it is impossible to assess a student production on the basis of criteria if one is lacking explanations about what the criteria signify, on the one hand, but also about the practical elements which could be observed in the production and which demonstrate mastery of the criteria, on the other hand. This is the role of indicators. The indicator is

- contextualized—it refers to a precise situation (in our example, the particular work to be interpreted); and
- specific—one may directly observe it (I can determine the accuracy of the notes, I can hear the particular musical structure which was worked on in the course, etc.).

It is the indicator which—in the student production—provides information on the mastery of criteria and, thus, on the competency or learning to be acquired. It provides information and, for this reason, only ever yields an indication. A frequently observed pitfall is to accord the indicator greater importance than it deserves (Gerard and BIEF, 2009): it is not the indicator itself which is being assessed, indeed being *graded*. The mastery of the skill does not depend solely on the *sum of the criteria* but rather on their interaction. This observation is even more important in the artistic field since it is so much more apparent there than in other more circumscribed domains that it is impossible to be exhaustive in the a priori identification of indicators. An art student's strength often depends on the originality of his or her production, something which had not previously been considered but which reflects the student's mastery of a given criterion. Obviously, this originality must be taken into account during the assessment when assessing the criterion to which it refers.

This explains why, unlike the criteria, the indicators for each assessment situation should not be revealed as such to students. There would then be the danger that the student production would be reduced to the strict application of predefined indicators when the very richness of an artistic production resides specifically in its originality, in its added value. For example, during a certificate exam, where the student is invited to interpret a sonata for violin by Mozart, a composer with whose work the student is already familiar, a student performs a *staccato*, also previously worked on, not indicated in the score but which adds to the performance. This student is demonstrating *originality*. If the teacher says, before the performance, that a *staccato* in this passage would be an indicator of originality, the student will, more than likely, seek to do so, but it will no longer be a demonstration of originality. Therefore, the student must not be informed of the specific indicator. However, he or she must know that being original involves varying, when possible, the rhythms, nuances, effects and so forth. Moreover, it is often impossible a priori to know the indicators of originality, which is a problem with this criterion that is, however, essential in the arts. Based on what students produce, assessors will say to themselves that a particular element reveals creativity or originality. Thus, it is not possible—and this is true for all

criteria—to develop an exhaustive list of indicators a priori and, thereafter, to transmit it to students.

While students should not know the indicators to be used in the actual certificate assessment situation, it is important that they be able to consolidate their own understanding of the criteria, not only through a precise explanation of what the criteria mean to the teachers, but also thanks to the specific indicators used to assess them during earlier formative assessments.

3.4 Assessment Strategies or Procedures

The manner in which they are assessed has a strong impact on student productions: it is not the same thing to have to interpret a work in front of a jury composed of one's professor, or another professor one knows well, as before a totally unknown jury, or even in front of a public comprising college students. Similarly, it is not the same situation to interpret a piece that has been worked on all year compared to interpreting one which is imposed on the student a month before the exam or even a week before. Moreover, these differences are only meaningful as a function of the relevant learning objectives.

A part from all these elements influencing the quality of the production, notably in affective terms, it is also important to be clear regarding the assessment approach to be employed. Is this simply a summative procedure wherein the decision stemming from the assessment will depend on the sum of grades attributed to different criteria, indeed to indicators? Or, on the contrary, is this a purely hermeneutic procedure wherein, for example, the members of a jury will have a discussion based on elements which they perceived more or less intuitively? Is this a hermeneutic procedure which combines summative and descriptive elements, and which assigns meaning to all of these indices? Or is this a descriptive process which will oblige assessors to specify explicitly the elements on which their judgement is based? Each of these procedures exists, but they do not have the same value, and, above all, they do not necessarily lead to the same conclusions. Thus, it is vital to be very precise and to justify them, especially to the students, and then to respect them, in all fairness, once they are in play.

3.5 The Confrontation Between Indicators and Criteria, or the Value Judgement

Once the information is collected, a crucial step occurs: the assessor examines the indicators observed in the student production based on the criteria underlying the assessment. It is at this point that the assessor must assign a value to the student

production, according to the criteria assessed. Depending on the approach selected, this *value judgement* leads to a grade, an appraisal or comments. At the end of the day, regardless of the system employed, the assessor will have to decide whether or not the criterion has been achieved, whether or not, more broadly, all of the criteria have been mastered and, therefore, whether or not the learning objectives have been attained.

It is crucial to stress that the ultimate judgement is expressed in dichotomous terms: the criterion has been achieved or not, the competency has been attained or not, the learning objective has been reached or not. From a strictly pedagogical perspective, only this dichotomous conclusion matters, regardless of the function of the assessment (orientation, regulation or certification). Of course, in the case of a competition, such as the Queen Elizabeth Competition, a winner must be chosen. While this is true, it is interesting to note that, whatever happens, the 12 finalists in this competition are designated as *laureates*: they have satisfied all the criteria. Six of them will be ranked by order of excellence, with one among them chosen as the *winning laureate*. This is a very high level of international competition, and its rewards are known to be quite substantial. Yet during an exam in a training context, these *hierarchical classifications* have little meaning. All that matters, in the end, is knowing whether or not the student has mastered the designated competencies and is, therefore, eligible to begin or continue the training programme, or knowing which techniques or dimensions need more work, or finally being able to graduate students, knowing that they have mastered the designated competencies and that they will reflect well on the institution that trained them.

This dichotomous vision is, doubtless, reductionist, but it has the advantage of once again placing at the heart of the assessment process its very raison d'être: knowing the direction in which to guide the student or whether the student can be selected; knowing what areas still need work; or knowing whether it is possible to certify that the student has successfully completed the training programme.

One might think that limiting oneself to this dichotomous dimension, in which the criterion has been mastered or not, would drastically diminish the disparities in corrections between assessors, determined as they are to give the most precise grade possible, sometimes to the hundredth of a point, although we know very well that these marks only have value for those that give them, never constituting real *scientific values* that measure the student production. Statisticians, even in such objective fields as metrology, have long ago given up on the *true value* of a measurement, knowing that it is never perfect, and the true value will always remain unknown. What is applicable to measuring the intensity of a current, tension or length is that much more so for measuring the creativity, expression and intensity of an artistic production.

Conclusion

It is astonishing to observe how subjectivity is perceived with such negativity. In numerous circumstances, as soon as an opinion is expressed, one hears the familiar reply: "Yes, but that is subjective!" While it is obvious that an objective fact does not have the same value as a subjective representation, it would be pointless to claim that the factual value is superior to that of representation. The great Québec singer Gilles Vigneault was more than once accused of singing false notes. It is true that, if his performances were analysed electronically, one might detect a few distortions of the exact note. Yet, as Marc Gagné (1977) writes, "Vigneault sings with a hideous, rasping voice, but he does it with such emotion, and gives so much of himself that one never tires of listening to him" (p. 206).

Works, such as those of Demoucron (2014), on objectively measuring and analysing gesture in musical performance are certainly essential, even though they might not apply to all artistic domains. Nonetheless, these techniques, however sophisticated, could never fully explain why an emotion overtakes us when a musician, whether professional or in training, performs a work that we have heard many times but which, thanks to this musician, unexpectedly, suddenly touches us profoundly.

There is no reason to believe that subjectivity is limited to the artistic field. For example, in the highly *professional* context of analysis of training needs (orientation assessment), we have known since the publications of Barbier and Lesne (1977), Bourgeois (1991) and Roegiers et al. (1992) that "social life never gives to scientific inquiries objects that could be said to have objective needs. We only ever encounter expressions of need formulated by various social agents, for themselves or for others"[7] (Barbier and Lesne, 1977, p. 20).

Claiming to believe that subjectivity cannot exist in assessment, or refusing any assessment that would be based on it, would be both vain and illusory. On the contrary, what is important is to accept this subjectivity in assessment, in as much as it is true that denying or ignoring it would be the best way to give it free rein, with the risk of letting it run wild. It is crucial to control it, to know at what level or at which stage it occurs and how it influences the process. Furthermore, assessors can only gain credibility by making the subjectivity of their process more transparent. In exposing and justifying it, that is to say, in clarifying explicitly the choices they make and in exposing their *raisons d'être*, they will be able to better master the unknown territories they are exploring. In that respect, assessment must primarily be about the student. It is crucial that students know exactly *what game they are playing*. They must know why they are being assessed—that is, what the real stakes of the assessment are. They need to know explicitly the criteria to be applied to their performance, as well as the mechanisms which will allow concrete elements (the indicators) to sustain and develop the meaning and judgement applied by the assessors to their productions.

If this transparency exists, if the assessment process shifts from the arbitrary zone to which it is too often confined, then assessors will have succeeded, to the degree possible, in objectifying their subjectivity.

Notes

1. Today, this perspective seems to be widely accepted in educational literature, even if there are still some irreducible (often qualified by the way), especially in the field of language learning (Antoine and Caelen, 1999; Inspection générale de l'Éducation nationale, 2013).
2. In reality, skills are never evaluated as such, because they correspond to the potentiality to manage a certain type of situation. At most, we can evaluate performances, which are the manifestations of skills in concrete situations. On the basis of these performance evaluations, one can infer the mastery or not of the corresponding skills. In the remainder of the text, however, we will always talk about skills assessment, and not performance assessment.
3. Attitudes are essential in the educational process, but their assessment poses certain difficulties—both technical and ethical—to such an extent that it seems almost impossible to assess them (Gerard, 2011).
4. If the reflection proposed in this text concerns any artistic training, even any training, the examples given always concern musical art. They should be able to be adapted without difficulty to other artistic fields or to any other discipline.
5. The certification evaluation in question here should not be confused—as is frequently the case—with the summative evaluation which will be discussed later, in the evaluation procedures (De Ketele, 2006; De Ketele and Roegiers, 1996; Gerard, 2011; Perrenoud, 2001). This confusion is linked to two dimensions:
   — on the one hand, there is the dimension of evaluation functions, what it is for. At this level, we can oppose formative assessment, of which the function is to regulate learning, to certification assessment, which aims to certify mastery of the targeted learning.
   — on the other hand, there is the dimension of the evaluation process, the way we go about evaluating. At this level, we can oppose a summative approach, based on a measurement resulting in a score obtained by the sum of points attributed to a series of items independent of each other, to the descriptive evaluation, which precisely and qualitatively describes behaviour, performance, difficulties, products, procedures used, etc.
6. Whether or not it is explicitly defined in the training programmes.
7. « (…) la vie sociale n'offre jamais à l'observation scientifique d'objets dont celle-ci puisse dire qu'il s'agit de besoins objectifs. On ne rencontre jamais que des expressions de besoins formulés par des agents sociaux divers, pour eux-mêmes ou pour d'autres (…) » (Barbier et Lesne, 1977, p. 20)

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