

Yulyia Yurchuk: *The Role of the International and Czech Independent Music Media and Journalism in the Context of the Latest Economical and Technological Changes*

Opponent's review

The Bachelor thesis of Yulyia Yurchuk *The Role of the International and Czech Independent Music Media and Journalism in the Context of the Latest Economical and Technological Changes* discusses an important topic of contemporary music culture – the role of media and journalism, the topic unresearched in the Czech environment.

The structure of the thesis is clear and understandable: two theoretical chapters followed by an empirical one, which is based on interviews with three music journalists about functioning of their media. In the three-page Introduction, two sentences describe methodology, nevertheless, they remind a robotic-generated formulations: *I will use ethnographic methods, grounded theory* (besides the fact that grounded theory isn't an ethnographic method, I didn't realize it), *thick description* (I didn't find any) *and analysis of qualitative data. My ethnographic data is based on the interviews with Prague music journalists.* p. 6

I'll start with my strongest reservation: the empirical part has only very little in common with the theoretical chapters. It's true that the connection of these three chapter justifies/explains the title of the thesis, because while the first two chapters present theories grounded in data from international, above all British and American territories, the third part is based on Czech data. Nevertheless, the classical connection of theoretical premises which throw light upon „a chaos of information from social reality“ is missing completely. Unsurprisingly, in the third chapter, one can't find any reference to the theories discussed earlier.

Besides this – in my opinion fundamental - reservation, I'll mention some other ones, which I consider prototypical.

The first one concerns a universality of the presented theories, or their suitability. Let me demonstrate it on the first chapter „Culture and Music Industries“ (p. 6 – 18). In it, Yurchuk discusses concepts and ideas of several influential authors from the field of ethnomusicology, popular music studies, but also sociology (Bourdieu), etc. Among them, the most important are Hesmondhalgh and Negus. Undoubtedly famous thinkers. The chapter's main ideas are those by Negus: *„cultural products are generated for the sake of entertainment or simple consumption and are organized in order to get commodified the most effectively (s. 8), and 'industry produces culture and culture produces industry.* Everyone, who is at least partially familiar with a diversity of music fields/soundscapes/environments, knows that the Negus's statement is not applicable absolutely: actually, it is applicable only on a specific cultural segment subjugated to rules of commodification. (One could use the Holt's term „corporate music industry“, p. 12)

In the Czech environment (and I suppose that the situation is similar at least in other European countries, too), I know various „fields“ where music (and other aspects of culture) are neither „products of industry“ (in Yurchuk’s understanding, such products „are organized in order to get commodified the most effectively,“) nor do they reproduce it. For example: the all pre-1989 Underground culture (here I sincerely recommend Kevin Hagen’s book *Living in the merry ghetto: The music and politics of the Czech underground*, 2019), as well as a substantial part of the post-1989 Underground; very vivid folk music of South (and partly Northern) Moravia, or Romani community musicking... They are products of community life. Neither rules of commodification, nor rules of so-called independent music industry, which – according to Yurchuk - *share some common features and characteristics with major music production which it was trying to avoid in the first place* (p. 15) – are applicable for them.

Here, we approach the other reservation: unclear meaning of some terms. What does concretely mean „independent“? In the human world, nothing is completely independent. Is it a sort of trademark, or an emic label? In the Czech context, I would understand it as a phenomenon, which is not dependent on the global market. In the Czech environment, we can mention several labels (media), unsurprisingly connected to the above-mentioned fields, for which a financial profit is not the most important aspect of their existence: the *Guerilla Records* (for underground and alternative music), *Gnosis Brno* (for (especially Moravian) folk music...

I am also not sure about the meaning of the term „mainstream“ either, especially when used for e.g., *Respekt* journal.

What I’m trying to say: if we don’t know a meaning of fundamental categorizing expressions (= fundamental theoretical terms), then the theory is inapplicable.

The third cluster of reservations concerns the third chapter. Its goal is – according to the author - „to show and explain the journalists’ perspective about the role and functions of music media in the current time“. (30) She provides it through quotations from interviews with three music journalists from three different Czech media: an „independent“ music-focused multi-genre magazine *Full Moon*, a „mainstream“ *Respekt* journal, and a public on-line *Radio Wave*. Fourteen questions for the journalists are quoted in Appendix. A reader, however, doesn’t know, why exactly these respondents? how were the interviews led? when? etc. Too many formally important questions.

Nevertheless, the answers of all three journalists are rather similar. After all, various authors write for several media, and thus, the categorization of music journalists (chap. 2) is not applicable. Obviously, knowledge of *Full Moon* readers differ from those of *Respekt* (the first one is „deeper, more specialized), and thus, topics in both media differ, nevertheless, journalists from both media have similar freedom of choice. Adequately to the small Czech „pond“, the Czech music journalism doesn’t have substantial economic impact on careers of musicians. The interviewed journalists consider themselves above all gatekeepers. This finding is the most important of all the thesis.

Summary: In my understanding, a bachelor thesis is supposed to be an (perhaps very limited) prove of author's scientific skills. In this sense, the thesis of Yulyia Yurchuk is on the edge of acceptability. A final decision should be made according to her defense.

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