

CRITIQUE OF WORKS OF ART ON THE RADIO

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Abstract. *This paper investigates the position that art criticism over the radio has in Serbia nowadays. The starting point was the hypothesis that the increase of the number of specialized radio stations in Serbia does not bring more opportunity for art critique. In order to test this hypothesis, we analyzed the program guides of four specialized radio stations and concluded that the cultural program does not exist with these commercial stations, thus, there is no journalistic art criticism. An analysis of the results of secondary research on cultural topics on Public Broadcasting Services in Serbia (by Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016) resulted in the data on the spread of critique in the programs of Radio Belgrade and Radio Novi Sad. The conclusion is that there is a critique-related program present on Radio Belgrade and that it exists in the specialized cultural show on Radio Belgrade 2. It is called “Top five cultural events of the week” (“U prvih pet – kulturni događaj nedelje”) and it is very well organized both significantly and conceptually. On the other hand, Radio Novi Sad, a regional public broadcaster, although still retaining a journalistic critique of art in its program, is experiencing a great reduction of it which is reflected in the fact that fifteen years ago this radio station had ten critics, while today they hardly have anyone.*

Key words: *critique of works of art, cultural program, radio, media, Serbia media system*

INTRODUCTION

The place of journalistic critique of art in Serbian radio programs can be considered a sign of changes taking place at two levels. The first level consists of changes that occurred in the media, which in Serbia, when it comes to radio, is characterized by a multitude of commercial radio stations and a public radio service created by converting the state radio station. The outcome is two types of media with different missions and roles. Starting from the different roles of these types of radio stations, the analysis deals with commercial radio stations and in particular with radio public service. The second

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plan of changes concerns professional journalistic work, which changes in many media, even in the radio. These changes result in the amount of wages that are being reduced, in the volume of work that increases until the entry into the profession of the former audience generating free media content. The critique of artworks in the media does not remain immune to these changes. Attitudes of critics attending the conference which took place on May 27, 2017 in Belgrade¹, and asking themselves: “Who (doesn’t) need critique?” will be used as sources for how these changes are reflected in the area.

COMMERCIAL RADIO

Increasing the number of specialized radio stations in Serbia does not bring about new opportunities for critique of artworks. Why? The analysis that follows will show that the nature of the radio format² which is reflected in the understanding of the audience as a group of consumers (Krizel 2005, 203–204; Ugrinić and Veljanovski 2014, 60–64; Martinoli 2015, 35–37; Valić Nedeljković 2007, 62) inevitably leads to the satisfaction of the needs of listeners as understood by the market. It proves that there is almost no room for the journalistic genres dealing with the expression of a critical opinion about art, such as journalistic critique.

The analysis starts with determining the actual programs of commercial radio stations which are dedicated to culture oriented topics. For the purpose of this paper, we reviewed four radio station formats in Serbia: Play Radio, Radio S, Naxi Radio and TDI Radio. It was concluded that these radio stations have some common features. Namely, their program is divided into segments, while the radio hosts are the most important, sometimes perceived as stars. For example, on the Play Radio website, it is said that this radio owes its success to how the program was conceived and to the hosts who “come from different spheres of life, but they are all connected through the love for music, life and people”.³ Accordingly, the names of the program segments are very often called after the names of the radio hosts. On Play Radio, weekdays’ program schedule has only one morning program that is called *Play Morning (Play jutro)* while the other program segments are named after the hosts: *Nataša Guberinić*, *Luka Matić* and *Marko Katić*.⁴ A similar practice exists on Radio S as well. The program segments are usually named after the hosts: *Good morning Serbia with Irena and Ivan (Dobro jutro Srbijo sa Irenom i Ivanom)*, *Day with Natalija (Dan sa Natalijom)*, *Afternoon with Vesna (Popodne na ti sa Vesnom)* and *Evening with Nina (Veče sa Ninom)*. The concept of each show is briefly explained on the website of that particular radio, but culture is never mentioned.⁵ Even

¹ The conference was organized by *SEEcult.org*, culture portal of Southeast Europe, as part of a regional project “World around us – critical views in the region”, together with the organizations *Kurziv* and *Kulturtreger* from Croatia, *SCCA-Ljubljana* from Slovenia and *Kontrapunkt* from Macedonia. Video from this conference is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7mJZGsnlX4>, visited on 11th July 2017.

² The radio format allows, says Krizel, “to shape a typical listener by using typical content and deliver it to the advertiser” (Krizel 2005, 203). Similarly, Dubravka Valić Nedeljković says: “Formats exist to provide advertisers with a defined consumer group, selected based on marketing market research. The guidance and specialization of the program in the 70’s of the 20th century in the media-developed countries is called the radio format” (Valić Nedeljković 2007, 62). Regarding the emergence of commercial radio stations, the first radio formats and chaos in the ether of the nineties, please see: Djorić, S., (2002) and Mihajlov Prokopović, A., (2008) p. 538.

³ http://www.b92.net/o_nama/index.php, visited on 9th July 2017

⁴ <http://www.playradio.rs/program.php>, visited on 9th July 2017.

⁵ <http://www.radios1.rs/schema/index/Programska+sema>, visited on 9th July 2017

though Naxi Radio does not call its programs by host names only (*My 50 [Mojih 50]*, *Touch of the Night [Dodir noći]*, *Music without Interruption [Muzika bez prekida]*), there are still some cases like that (*Morning with Sveta Stefanović [Jutro uz Svetu Stefanovića]*, *Afternoon with Ivana Drobnjaković [Popodne sa Ivanom Drobnjaković]*).⁶ The exception is TDI Radio that does not do this.⁷ The analyzed radio stations predominantly have music programs that mainly insists on “the best music” (Play Radio and Radio S), “quality music” (Naxi Radio) and “hits” (TDI Radio). Moreover, the focus is on having a party: “The morning party that everyone is invited to”⁸ is a description of the morning program concept in *Play morning* show on the Play Radio. *Optimism* and *positive energy* are the words that are most commonly found in other brief explanations of the shows on the other three analyzed radio stations (Table 1). Therefore, the birthplace of journalistic criticism, the cultural program, does not exist on these four commercial radio stations.

Table 1 An overview of some of the characteristics of the analyzed commercial radio stations in Serbia

Radio name	Program segments	Program segment name	Music description	Design of some program segments – key words
Play Radio	YES	Mostly use radio host names	“the best”	fun
Radio S	YES	Mostly use radio host names	“the best”	Good mood, smiling, useful talks
Naxi Radio	YES	Use radio host names	“quality”	AC format, short and interesting speech segments
TDI Radio	YES	Do not use radio host names	“hits”	funny, interesting, dynamic

PUBLIC RADIO SERVICE

Since the Serbian media system is dual and, besides commercial radio stations, there is a Public Broadcasting Service, the fate of journalistic art criticism on the radio is linked to this type of radio station. We are therefore focusing on the public radio service that nurtures the culture programs. This primarily derives from a well-known Public Broadcasting Service mission (Veljanovski 2005), and this area was legally regulated in Serbia when the Law on Public Broadcasting Service was passed in 2014. Even before this law was passed, the transformation of the state-owned Serbia Radio and Television service into a Public Broadcasting Service was carried out, but not without being confronted with all sorts of problems. What is the position of the cultural program with

⁶ <http://www.naxi.rs/emisije>, visited on 9th July 2017

⁷ <http://www.tdiradio.com/site/program.html>, visited on 9th July 2017

⁸ “*Play morning* is a new show on Play radio that will be broadcast from October 19th every work day from 6 am to 10 am. This positive show brings together a combination of the best music and current topics presented in a fun and friendly manner by two radio stars: a longtime host, pole dance instructor and DJ Una Senić, and the actor Zoran Pajić. The two of them will be the smiling hosts of the morning party to which everyone is invited.” Downloaded from the Play radio website: <http://www.playradio.rs/playjutro.php>, visited on 9th July 2017

the Public Broadcasting Service from the point of view of law and regulations? If we go back to the principles of a Public Broadcasting Service set up by John Reith, the BBC's first director, who insisted that radio programs should present what is the best in every field of human knowledge and creativity, as well as that standards should be established and maintained (Brigs and Berk 2006, 301; Šingler and Viringa 2000, 51–52), it is clear that the cultural program is an inevitable part of the Public Broadcasting Service. This is explained in Article 7 of the Law on Public Broadcasting Service of the Republic of Serbia which determines what the public interest that Public Broadcasting Service should provide in its programs is. Moreover, this is also the “development of culture and artistic creativity”, “fostering artistic and creative values”, as well as “representation of cultural heritage and artistic creativity in the country and abroad” (Law on Public Broadcasting Service of the Republic of Serbia, 2014, Article 7).

What do things look like in reality? Radio Belgrade 2, Public Broadcasting Service, is known as the “channel of culture and art”. Its program is based on the slogan “elitism for all”. During the celebration of the anniversary of Radio Belgrade 2, the journalist Teofil Pančić wrote: “The Channel 2 program is intended for literate and intelligent listeners, regardless of their worldview. I cannot imagine anything more provocative, more subversive than that! Can you imagine it! And by God imagine this – on Channel 2 they talk about books, theater, music, films, social phenomena, political ideas and controversies, lengthily, without any infantile chatting with interlocutors and listeners, and without any “funny” jokes. All this is broadcast together with normal music of various kinds and (almost) without any commercials” (weekly magazine *Vreme*, March 8, 2007). Radio Belgrade 3 was created and developed based on similar radio formats established in the European countries after World War 2 which were oriented primarily towards art, culture and science. Nowadays, this program is seen as an exclusive one, and the goal of the program is to present human creativity in its original form. In its debates part, Radio Belgrade 3 predominantly talks about philosophical creativity and humanistic disciplines. One of the characteristics of this radio station is that the names of the programs are not permanent, rather they are chosen in accordance with the topic and content of the show, and they mostly represent thematic cycles (Mihajlov Prokopović and Vujović 2012, 361–362). This wave of “superb art and culture” puts aside “educational and populist” aspect of the media role, and the followers of this wave define this concept as the use of dialogues and monologues on the radio in order to provide “the argumentative character of culture”. As far as the monologues are concerned, the goal is to achieve “highly stylized and logically prepared presentations”.⁹

Research about the presence of culture and art content on public broadcasting programs (Radio and Television of Serbia, and Radio and Television of Vojvodina), which was carried out between January and June 2016, shows that cultural contents broadcast on Radio and Television Serbia are thematic and genre-varied (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 2). For the purpose of this paper, it is significant to mention the report which contains our research results concerning the monitoring of Radio Belgrade and Radio Novi Sad program.

According to the report, on its four channels, Radio Belgrade¹⁰ prepares and broadcasts a large number of cultural shows, and this topic is also present in non-culture related shows. Thus, in the central informative program called *News of the day (Novosti dana)*, 6% of

⁹ http://www.radiobeograd.rs/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=70&Itemid=70, visited on 10th July 2017

¹⁰ Those are: Radio Belgrade 1, Radio Belgrade 2, Radio Belgrade 3 and Radio 202.

content were cultural topics, while in the morning program *Seize the day (Uhvati dan)* on Radio Belgrade 1, this aspect was present for 22% of the air time on work days and 30% on a Sunday program. This is a high percentage of cultural content, the report said, and the diversity of topics was also positively evaluated. In addition to this, five cultural shows of the Radio Belgrade 2 were also analyzed: *Endless Blue Circle (Beskrajni plavi krug)*, *Cultural Circles (Kulturni krugovi)*, *Cultural Disputes (Sporovi u kulturi)*, *Top five cultural events of the week (U prvih pet – kulturni događaj nedelje)* and *Eye of the Balkans (Oko Balkana)*. The report concludes that these shows (as well as the TV shows on Serbia Radio and Television) cover the current topics and cultural events, illustrate the creativity of individual artists, and offer a problem-based approach to cultural topics. Each of these shows, as said in the report, retains its specificity, concepts and place in the program (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 6–7). Using the method of analyzing the content of these shows over a six-month period, the journalistic critique was particularly identified in Radio Belgrade's shows *Cultural Circles*¹¹, *Top five cultural events of the week*¹² and *Eye of the Balkans*¹³. It should be noted here that art criticism in the radio programs often takes the form of an interview in which the critic has the main role by giving his own opinion about the work and the author, while the journalist who hosts the program remains in the background. On the show *Top five cultural events of the week*, art criticism takes up a significant amount of air time – it makes up 33% of the broadcast content. In the observed period, the topics covered by this show were related to literature, theater, ballet, music, fine arts and film (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 4).

Radio programs of the Public Broadcasting Service of Vojvodina (Radio and Television of Vojvodina), as well as the television shows, contain a sufficient amount of cultural content. The approach is professional, and “in certain program segments even highly creative” (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 8). On Radio Novi Sad Channel 1,¹⁴ cultural content is broadcast in news programs, mixed radio shows and specialized programs. The previously mentioned research found out that cultural topics take up from 4% to 10% of the broadcast content in the central news and political program called *News (Novosti)*, depending on the frequency of cultural events. The morning program of Radio Novi Sad Channel 1 dedicates 15% of their air time to culture, but these are mainly folklore festivities and fun pseudo-events. The percentage and the quality of topic selection increase in the morning (24%), as well as in the daytime programs, where 44% of the time is dedicated to cultural events. Specialized cultural radio shows are: *Spectrum (Spektar)*¹⁵, *Art salon*¹⁶, and *In good company (U dobrom društvu)*¹⁷. This entire concept is organized by

¹¹ The show *Cultural Circles* is broadcast every day on Radio Belgrade 2 at 3 pm and represents the “central cultural and art show” (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 3).

¹² The show *Top five cultural events of the week* is broadcast on Sundays at 11 am, it lasts for 2 hours and is aired on Radio Belgrade 2. This show always has guests such as artists, theorists, critics or representatives of a cultural institution. As mentioned in the report, “the guest is on the show all the time, while journalists and critics of Radio Belgrade also alternate in the studio, talking about a topic in the form of an interview” (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 4).

¹³ *Eye of the Balkan* is a one-hour show that is broadcast once a week – on Wednesdays at 10.00, and it is intended for literature topics.

¹⁴ This program broadcasts content in Serbian language.

¹⁵ The show *Spectrum* is on air every Friday from 22.05 to midnight. Cultural scene accepted it as “the Radio Novi Sad brand when it comes to art” (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 8).

¹⁶ The show *Art salon* is a half-hour show that talks about cultural events (both official and avant-garde) in the form of interviews in the studio, and interviews from the scene.

¹⁷ *In a Good Company* is a show that, in the form of an interview in the studio, presents well-known artists.

only two journalist editors and one part-time associate. They also prepare specialized shows (except for the show *In good company* which is organized by external authors). Some art criticism was noticed in the specialized radio show called *Spectrum*, but it takes up only 2% of air time. This research suggests that the art criticism on Radio Novi Sad programs has almost disappeared, although in the past it had occupied a significant amount of time on this radio. According to the report, this is a logical consequence of the reduction of the number of specialist journalists who wrote art criticism. Fifteen years ago, the editorial office of the Radio Novi Sad Channel 1 had at least ten specialized journalists who wrote about cultural topics. Those were two art critics, two theater critics, two film critics, two literary critics and one critic specialized in alternative and amateur art scenes (Veljanovski and Valić Nedeljković 2016, 9).

ART CRITIQUE: NEW DILEMMAS

This change, identified by the research “Culture on Public Broadcasting Services”, that is, the ever smaller number of critics at Radio Novi Sad, is also a consequence of the reconfiguration of the journalistic professional field during which journalists undergo major changes in their professional work: they work more, but are paid the same or less, the opportunities for paid journalistic work are reduced, and thanks to the new digital technologies the users become the producers of free media content (McChesney 2015, Deuze 2008). All this favors the creation of “the cult of the amateur” (Keen 2007).

Professionally dealing with criticism of works of art, although increasingly difficult to achieve, remains a preferred practice. This topic was discussed in a conference on the status of art critique in the region called “Who (doesn’t) need critique?”¹⁸ “Back at the time when I was growing up, there were people who were authorities in the field; they built this authority on the basis of their credibility and those were paid jobs in the state-owned media. You simply knew that when they commented on a film, for example on RTS (Radio and Television Serbia), you trusted their judgment. “I think that our existence prevents us from doing that today in a way which would build credibility” (Maja Ćirić, curator and critic).¹⁹

The position of critics, the journalistic elite (Todorović 2002, 96), is endangered because the possibility of publishing art criticism in the media is reduced. They do write critique nowadays, but very often cannot live on it. “I think that all of us who write literary criticism cannot survive on writing, because if we depended only on it, we would not live a long and happy life” (Vladimir Arsenić, literary critic).²⁰ Maja Ćirić is of a similar opinion too: “In our society, being an art critic is not a respected profession, therefore, it is not a very well paid profession. Due to this economic situation, it is not possible for someone to coherently and continuously do art criticism in a way to build an authority that will be able to cope with the time which we live in. So, the first issue is the professionalization of the art critic profession”.²¹ Branislav Dimitrijević, an art theoretician, talked about his opinion on art criticism in Belgrade: “When I say art critique I am referring to a short text that contains a basic opinion based on some kind of analysis. There is no such thing in Belgrade. This does not mean that there is no critical writing, this does not mean that there are no

¹⁸ The conference “Who (doesn’t) need critique?” took place on 27th May 2017 in Belgrade. Video from this conference is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7mJZGsnlX4>, visited on 11th July 2017.

¹⁹ From the speech at the conference “Who (doesn’t) need critique?” held on 27th May 2017 in Belgrade.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

frequently asleep but from time to time awoken critics, who from time to time write something interesting, but there is no such kind of regular practice”.²² Although he believes that there is enough room for film critiques in the media, Ivan Velisavljević, a film critic, also emphasizes the lack of money in this field: “As for the payment of film critique, the situation is exactly the same as in theater critique – were it not for the festivals and judging, were it not for the academic journals, were it not for a single publication of the Slovenian pavilion that paid 600 euro for a text about the journals on Yugoslav film, there would be literally no film criticism, although I'm not someone who is inclined to say that we all need to be paid by the state ... People would anyway write critique – I think that this need to write critique might be stronger than the need for money”.²³ This enthusiasm is also shared by Vladan Jeremić, participant of the project *Dematerialization of Art*: “Criticism cannot function as a segment of the cultural industry that is now offered to the consumer on the market assuming that the consumer should consume it. In our opinion, this is mission impossible. It is also necessary to include criticism of the political economy in the whole concept of culture criticism or art criticism. Criticism is not only criticizing the ideology”.²⁴

CONCLUSION

By summarizing all the dilemmas brought up in this conference, we can conclude that the participants themselves have, sometimes, completely opposing opinions. Thus, some of them claim that criticism is widely read and present in the media, while others note that “critique appears occasionally only so that we can say that it exists, but its authority has been violated precisely by this discontinuity... There is some media which are consistent in publishing critique and this is very important. Such media are fragile, they are marginalized, but they are very important not only for the artists, but also for a broader audience no matter how small it is” (Miljenka Buljević, one of the founders of *Kulturtreger* from Croatia)²⁵. The next difference that existed among the participants in this conference is related to the answer to the question of whether a critic should be paid for his/her work and with whose money (with money from the media he/she writes for, or with budget money that the media acquired). Some even highlighted the role that the Public Broadcasting Service should have in ensuring continuity in criticism publishing. Thus, in contemporary debates, the role of media and the relationship between critics and the media emerged.

It has already been shown in this paper that commercial radio stations programs in Serbia do not have room for cultural topics, and consequently there is no room for journalistic art critique. If we look at the results of the recently published research on the presence of cultural content in the programs on Public Broadcasting Services, we can conclude that there are criticism-related programs present on Radio Belgrade and that it exists in the specialized cultural show on Radio Belgrade 2 called *Top five cultural events of the week* which is very significantly and conceptually organized. On the other hand, Radio Novi Sad, a regional public broadcaster although still retaining some journalistic critique on its program, is experiencing a great reduction of it which is reflected in the fact that fifteen years ago this radio station had ten critics, while today they have almost none.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

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KRITIKA UMETNIČKIH DELA NA RADIJU

U radu se ispituje pozicija koju kritika umetničkih dela ima danas u programima na radiju u Srbiji. Polazi se od hipoteze da rast broja specijalizovanih radio stanica u Srbiji ne donosi novi prostor za kritiku umetničkih dela. Da bi se ova hipoteza ispitala analizirane su programske šeme četiri specijalizovane radio stanice i došlo se do zaključka da program o kulturi ne postoji na ovim komercijalnim talasima, te da shodno tome, nema ni novinarske kritike. Analizom rezultata sekundarnog istraživanja zastupljenosti sadržaja iz kulture na javnim medijskim servisima u Srbiji (Veljanovski i Valić Nedeljković 2016) došlo se do podataka o raspostranjenosti kritike u programima Radio Beograda i Radio Novog Sada. Zaključak je da na programu Radio Beograda kritika postoji i da je njeno mesto u specijalizovanoj emisiji iz kulture Drugog programa Radio Beograda "U prvih pet – kulturni događaj nedelje" veoma značajno i određeno koncepcijom ove emisije. Nasuprot tome, Radio Novi Sad, pokrajinski medijski servis, iako ima kritiku na svom programu, doživljava veliku redukciju u ovoj oblasti u kojoj je pre petnaest godina bilo zaposleno desetak kritičara, a danas gotovo da ih nema.

Ključne reči: kritika umetničkih dela, kulturni program, radio, mediji, medijski sistem Srbije