

Questions for the defense of the dissertation of Rob Ahlers

1-3-2021, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, prof.dr. Evert Bisschop Boele

Please pick the question that fits best in the ceremony as a whole.

1.

Dear candidate,

I thank you for your dissertation. I have studied it with interest. Being from Groningen and knowing the importance of Eurosonic Noorderslag for the city, I find it great that now it has been covered by a dissertation.

My question concerns the following. In your first chapter you argue that, as a follow-up on Bianchini's division of festivals in three historical periods, we now have entered a fourth stage, which you coin as 'the age of translocalism'. Unfortunately, in the end of your dissertation you again state in the summary that we have entered the age of translocalism, but you do not discuss how – or whether at all – your empirical study really supports your argument. I find it dangerous, given the inherent hybridity of high- and late-modern societies, to work with these kind of historical stages at all. But even if we can, as a form of grand gesture, state that indeed there have been three stages in our society's 'festivalization', could it not be the case that translocal festivals such as Eurosonic Noorderslag are simply a specific form of festival *within* Bianchini's 'age of city marketing'? And is not the fact that Eurosonic is consciously combined with Noorderslag, and the fact that Groningen municipality heavily supports the festival, a sign of this? And could the fact that you see translocal aspects in all four festivals you studied be not so much a sign of us entering a new stage, but rather a result from the fact that you chose to study festivals comparable to ESNS – all European music showcase events? And is therefore your reasoning in this respect not of a slightly circular kind? I would like to invite you to share some of your reflections on this issue with us.

2.

Dear candidate,

I thank you for your dissertation. I have studied it with interest. Being from Groningen and knowing the importance of Eurosonic Noorderslag for the city, I find it great that now it has been covered by a dissertation.

My question concerns methodology. I find that your methodological underpinning is remarkably short. In the introduction you mention that this dissertation is “also a multi-sited ethnography” (ms. p. 9), and that ethnographic research “has been a major source of enquiry” (ms, p. 17). You then mention such aspects as “reflexive ethnography” (ibid.), “storytelling” and “thick description” (ms, p. 18).

Although I do not agree with you that this research is a multi-sited ethnography, I grant it to you that your dissertation is ethnographically inspired. You did observe, you did interview, you did gather documents and artifacts. And although your subject of research is not the emic perspective of other human beings, to be caught through storytelling in thick descriptions, but rather a festival, you do, especially in chapter 5, shed light on how musicians experience the festival.

My question is on the concept of reflexive ethnography. I take it that by reflexivity you mean the constant awareness of the ethnographer that, as a researcher, he is just as ‘situated’ as the people he researches; that this situatedness by necessity has an influence on his findings; that therefore reflexivity – a thorough awareness of his own situatedness – is indispensable; and that an explicit sharing of this reflexivity is indispensable in order to let the reader assess the plausibility of his findings. You mention in your dissertation that you are a drummer and have been active on the festival yourself; but I do not find reflections on how this specific kind of situatedness may have influenced your findings. I would like to invite you to share some of your reflections on this issue with us.