

OPINION

By Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva, Institute of Art Studies, BAS

For the habilitation work of Dr. Alexander Donev Angelov "Independent Cinema. From Edison to Netflix" for acquiring the academic position Associate Professor for the competition in professional direction 8.4 Theater and Film Art, at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, published in State Gazette issue 97/10.12.2019

The proposed by Dr. Donev habilitation monograph "*Independent Cinema. From Edison to Netflix*" (FunTesia publishing house, 2019, 306 pages) is the first serious academic work in Bulgarian on the specifics of independent cinema, as an alternative to the prevailing practices of film production, financing, distribution and screening. The monograph examines a significant current academic problem and offers an original and at the same time in-depth look at the non-institutional nature of independent cinema. Dr. Donev's emphasis on the history of the film industry, sociology and social anthropology predetermines the author's interdisciplinary approach, which seeks to go beyond the orbit of traditional film studies, focused primarily on the development of film language and style. It is important to note that this approach does not simply remain at the level of declared research intentions, but is developed as an effective academic methodology. Dr. Donev justifies his "rejection of the priority of the aesthetic" in two "Introductions" to the main text of the monograph, and highlights two other important parameters - the role of the digital revolution in breaking the established patterns of cinema distribution and the Bulgarian context which is of prime interest.

Dr. Donev bases his research work on a historical overview of the practice of independent filmmaking in the US film industry and on theoretical interpretations of this phenomenon from the early 20th century to the modern era of the digital transformation of the film industry (Chapter 1). Digital distribution, analyzed as an alternative to established film screening practices, is presented in great detail in Chapter 3, following the example of the Netflix streaming platform's models of independent film production and democratization of film distribution. Analyzing the example of Netflix which imposes new cinema industry practices, Dr. Donev traces the various stages of audiovisual distribution and attempts to unravel the dynamics of the relationship between the traditional Hollywood model and digital novelties. Chapter 3 is entitled *Streaming Independence* and focuses on digitalization as a tool for achieving production and distribution independence from market-dominated or state-subsidized institutions, i.e. as an alternative to institutionally created and distributed cinema.

Actually, defining independent cinema through its non-institutional nature is the main thesis and the main contribution of Dr. Donev to clarify the essence of the concept, which over time has accumulated numerous connotations and definitions of different order, that introduce more confusion than clarity of understanding of the essence of this phenomenon. In this sense, the most contributing from a theoretical point of view is Chapter 2, entitled *Current Aspects of the Relationship between the Independent and Dominant Structures of the Film Industry*. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about the field of cultural production, Dr. Donev tries to state the problematic relations institutionally – independent cinema in sociological terms and to consider them primarily as a problem of cultural anthropology, rather than as an aesthetic manifestation.

A particular aspect of the study is the although very brief analysis of the term *independent cinema* in the Bulgarian context, and examples from foreign film practice are selected in such way as to prepare the ground for the application of a new approach to the Bulgarian cinematographic process in Donev's subsequent research. This new understanding aims to propose and rationalize a new model through which to reform the institutional framework of contemporary Bulgarian cinema. The author shares his intention to elaborate on the topic of the place of independent film production in Bulgaria in his future texts.

The monograph has a detailed bibliography (80 sources in three languages), filmography and an index of names and concepts, applications that make it a serious source of information and facts. The style of Dr. Alexander Donev is communicative and readable, while this does not harm the theoretical values of his habilitation work and his other academic publications. The text of the book *Independent Cinema. From Edison to Netflix* is based on clearly articulated thesis, original author opinions and self-inferred conclusions. The statement is logical and with a convincing argumentation of the defended views. His book is already enjoying considerable interest from experts. The same can be said about his previous book *"Help from the Public. Bulgarian Feature Films from the Beginning of the 21st century and their Cinema Viewers"* (FunTezi, 2018), published on the basis of his dissertation for the awarding of educational and academic degree "Doctor". This is also true about his numerous articles, some of which have been published in academic journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information. Dr. Alexander Donev's books and articles have long earned well-deserved recognition among the professional community, as evidenced by the attached list of citations of his works. Dr. Donev actively participates in the academic exchange of ideas, presenting a number of reports at international conferences and conferences with international participation. Dr. Alexander Donev actively participates in the project of the Institute of Art Studies *Post-totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema - Models and Identities*, funded by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Along with his in-depth academic work, Dr. Donev has been engaged in significant artistic and creative projects. As a co-producer of the animated film *How Sardel Made Renovations*, he was awarded the Bulgarian Film Academy Award for 2015, and as a co-writer and executive producer of the documentary *Jazta Prasta, or Which are the Bulgarian Notes* is the winner of the Union of Bulgarian Film Makers Award from the 2009 Golden Rhyton Festival.

Dr. Donev has been actively teaching at NATFA (1994-1996) and from 2016 to the present) and at New Bulgarian University (1998-2016). He is the author of his own courses in bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs.

The required points on the indicators for the academic position of Associate Professor have been achieved and exceeded, as on the indicators Г" and "Д" the points are more than twice above the minimum requirements.

I have a remark on the form in which the contributions of habilitation work are presented - with a vague structure and the use of a third party, rather than the first, in enumeration, but without these faults affecting the meaning of the contributions made.

In conclusion, I would like to state categorically that given the serious, purposeful and fruitful academic work and the proven scientific, creative and pedagogical capabilities of Dr. Alexander Donev Angelov, he has all the necessary qualities to take the academic position of *Associate Professor* and I strongly suggest to the academic jury to support his candidature to this competition and to the Academic Council of the Institute of Art Studies to approve him as an *Associate Professor*. I firmly vote *yes*.

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Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Bratoeva-Darakchieva