

OPINION

By **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rumyana Nikolova**, Institute of Art Studies – BAS

On the dissertation of **Ilko Evgeniev Ganev**, doctoral student at the Institute of Art Studies – BAS on the subject:

Project Theater in Bulgaria after 1989

For acquiring the educational and academic degree Doctor

Academic supervisor – Prof. DSc Nikolay Iordanov

Ilko Ganev's dissertation *Project Theater in Bulgaria after 1989* consists of 332 pages and has an introduction, five chapters, conclusion and results and bibliography.

The doctoral student's research interest focuses on theatre created and funded on a project basis. The introduction presents the aim of the study, specifies the terminology, presents the structure of the text and its methodology ("*The aim of this study is to outline the problems and results of the long-standing managerial, financial and creative searches, as well as all the specific conditions in which the Bulgarian theatre develops and functions as a starting basis for the emergence and subsequent development of project theatre in Bulgaria*"). Already in these first pages, the Ganev outlines the main problems in the functioning of the so-called project theatre.

In the first chapter "*The Beginnings of Project-Based Financing in Bulgaria. Borrowing Models and Practices*", taking into account the dynamism of the period after the political changes of 1989, the doctoral student seeks to answer questions such as how cultural policies affect artistic practice and what is the difference between the emerging project theatre and what we define as conventional theatre. In order to highlight the changes concerning the performing arts since 1989, Ganev provides a brief retrospective of the previous period. In this chapter, the author also offers an internal periodization of the period under consideration, traces the beginnings of project funding, and highlights important events and structures relevant to the time and the topic, such as the National Centre for Theatre, the Landry Report, attempts at reform, etc. Here Ilko Ganev makes it clear that he does not consider project theatre as equivalent to independent theatre. His research interests include project-based performances in state and municipal theatres. This complicates and enlarges the research field, because the cultural policies directed towards state and municipal theatres, as well as the way they function, prove necessary and important for the text. Therefore, descriptions of the overall context and development of the theatre network are important for the understanding of project theatre issues. The doctoral student examines the processes in state-subsidized theatres, comparing them with those in

project-funded productions. Presents the methodology by which state-funded theatres are financed and how its revisions lead to theatres not making their stages and crews available for co-productions. It is an accurate observation that *"this poses the major challenge for project theatre due to the lack of infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of project-based performances outside the system of state cultural institutes."* Ganev supports his observations and conclusions with figures and data.

This part of the dissertation traces the emergence of new formations, as well as names of leading directors, that have defined the shape of what we call project theatre and the Ministry of Culture's policies towards them. The chapter ends with conclusions and generalizations from the observations made.

Chapter Two, *"Donor Funding Organizations. Principles, Conditions, Impact on the Environment"* examines donor organizations that fund projects in the field of arts and theatre - National Centre for Theatre, Soros Arts Centre, Swiss Foundation for Culture "Pro Helvetia", SP "Culture" and other municipal programs in Varna and Plovdiv, "America for Bulgaria Foundation", cultural services at foreign embassies, British Council, Goethe Institute, French Institute, National Fund "Culture". Also presented are the most up-to-date programs that appeared and were active immediately prior to the writing of the text. In this part, the work could serve as a guide for funders that have been and are active in Bulgaria in the last 30 years. Here, the doctoral student, while examining the policies of the funding organizations, also draws conclusions and generalizations about the outcomes of project theatre, its impact in the cultural sphere and on audiences.

In Chapter Three, *"Sustainable Examples. Theatre Performances, Directors, Artists and Troupes"* the processes presented up to now are transferred at an artistic level. Different phenomena from the beginning of the period are examined - troupes, organizations and artists such as Theatre Workshop "Sfumato", Theatre Department at the NBU and Vaskresia Viharova, "Dialogue" Theatre, First Private Theatre "La Strada", Theatre "Credo", directors who realized their performances on a project basis. In parallel, the development of the project conditions is also traced. The text goes on to present organizations that continue to be active in the creation of project theatre today: "DEN GRI Foundation, Legal Art Center, Derida Dance Center, 36 Monkeys, Organization for Contemporary Alternative Art and Culture, Panic Button Theater, Association for Contemporary Alternative Art and Culture "Based on Actual Events", Brain Storm Project, Meteor, Vox Populi Studio for Documentary Theater, Replica Theater. The organizations are introduced through brief historical references, their artistic profile and their more important projects.

In the Conclusion the author summarizes his observations and conclusions, highlights the contributions of the project theatre and the problems connected with its functioning, management and financing.

The subject of Ilko Ganev's dissertation is provocative and complex and has not been studied before. It contains at least three possible research fields - cultural policies towards performing arts, the policies of funding organizations and the artistic outcomes of these policies. One of the contributions of the work is precisely the skillful linking and interweaving of these different perspectives. This is done in a coherent and logical structure of the thesis. Another contribution of the study is the internal periodization of the period under consideration, with an analytical note of the changes during the different stages. The dissertation presents and analyses one of the essential directions of the development of the Bulgarian theatre after the political changes in 1989 until today - the project principle of financing and development of theatre activity. The dissertation also has the merit of raising issues and problems of the current existence of the Bulgarian theatre - the lack of a clear strategy for the development of culture, the lack of monitoring of the implemented projects, the conflicts caused by the current regulatory framework between the publicly subsidized theatres and the performances financed on the project principle, etc. The dissertation also demonstrates a very good handling of sources whose data are analyzed and used to prove the analyses made.

In conclusion, and because of the qualities of the dissertation, I recommend the distinguished members of the scientific jury to vote positively for awarding the educational and academic degree Doctor to Ilko Ganev.

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