

OPINION

**By Prof. Dr. Andronika Martonova, Screen Arts Department,
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On the habilitation thesis of Dr Deyan Statulov (*Re*) *Commissioned Films. Propaganda Practices in Bulgarian Cinema (1944 – 1989)* for acquiring the academic position of **Associate Professor** in *Film Studies, Film Art, and Television* (History of the Bulgarian Cinema; Archives and Institutions) professional direction 8.4 Theater and Film Art, (published in State Gazette issue 41 of 09.05.2023) for the needs of the *Screen Arts Department* of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS

The present opinion has been prepared according to the act for the formation of an academic jury, №293-ПД by the Director of the IAS – Prof. Dr Joanna Spassova-Dikova, dated 04.07.2023.

I. Assessment of compliance with minimum national requirements

From the enclosed reference - completed card of NACID on the relevant indicators and the required sum of points, it is clearly seen that Chief Ass. Dr Deyan Statulov not only complies with the minimum national requirements according to the ADASRB and the Regulations for its implementation, including those of BAS, but exceeds them. The total points of the candidate are 1095, while at minimum requirements they are respectively 360.

II. Research (creative) activity:

Dr Deyan Statulov participated in the competition for associate professor with one published monograph, eight articles in refereed and indexed journals, one substantial extensive study in a collection of research under a project funded by the National Research Fund "Post-totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema - Models and Identities" (completed 2021, with supervisor Prof. Dr. Nadejda Marinchevska - Institute of Art Studies, BAS)

The monograph (*Re*) *commissioned Films. Propaganda Practices in Bulgarian Cinema. 1944-1989* (Locus, 2023, ISBN: 978-954-783-384-5), is a logical, even in a way I would say an inverted mirror continuation of his previous book related to censored and banned works. The thesis is a pioneering study, the first of its kind, which focuses mainly on Bulgarian feature films under socialism and its aim is to present a new perspective on power-cinema relations. The main research work involves the retrieval, analysis, interpretation, and contemporary reading of archival

documents revealing the mechanisms and institutional levers through which screen propaganda was carried out. The ideological canon is exposed through the interweaving of several narratives. These relate to institutions, film titles, propaganda practices, the contact zones between the different arts and cinema, and the 'players' - the active individuals who participated or were involved in the whole process of social-emotional-film engineering.

All this implies an enhanced interdisciplinary approach, in which Dr Deyan Statulov has done an excellent job. The book is impressive precisely for its concentrated content - the work covers in its essence 4 very seriously developed chapters (we can say 6 if we count the introduction and the conclusion), the Bibliography is compiled with a precise selection of 125 sources, among which many archival materials. And as we know - archives are labor- and time-consuming to work with.

To the scholarly apparatus we must add over 160 footnotes that bring further clarification and elaboration. In the end, what has emerged is a very important and significant book for Bulgarian film studies, which 30 years after the democratic changes dares to largely reveal (as the author emphasizes - without pretending to be exhaustive) key aspects of the BCP's monopoly on the country's cultural existence. A particular contribution is the attempt to reveal both the failure and the success of the propaganda line in our cinema by examining various practices, institutions, state programs such as 1300 Years of Bulgaria, the processes of forced assimilation of Muslim communities, and the manipulation of history.

Dr. Statulov's research decision to reverse the power-propaganda-cinema triad narrative through a large-scale analysis of the documentary film *Breathe*, directed by Yuri Zhironov, from 1988 as a precedent of realization, display, and sanction.

The other publications of Dr Deyan Statulov show in fact the approbation of the habilitation thesis, because to some extent they are an integral part of the monograph. However, it is clearly visible how the process of analysis has been going on and the relevant texts have found their extension, improvement, and fine-tuning during a more voluminous scholarly work.

Among the scientific works with which the candidate participated in the competition I would like to highlight the study: **Film Distribution, Exhibition and Festival Life in Bulgaria in a Post-Totalitarian Environment - In: Strokes to the New Bulgarian Cinema, Institute of Art Studies, BAS (2021, ISBN:978-619-7619-18-8, 52-101).**

I also find this study to be particularly contributory and pioneering in the overall textual works of the researcher Statulov. The chronological framework in which the analysis is situated is from 1990 to 2020, but the historical part still marks the most important highlights of the socialist display. The picture of transition to a new social construct is also particularly dynamic in terms of film distribution and festival forums. The candidate has very precisely explored all the lines of socio-political, economic, and cultural life in the post-totalitarian decades to focus on the specificity of a little explored topic: the transition of a planned to a market model in the

projection practices. This rather large study also includes interviews (as an Appendix) with leading organizers of established film festivals and panoramas in Bulgaria over the years, as well as the perspectives of some of the participants in film screenings during the period. And this will remain as a valuable document for the next generation of researchers who hopefully study post-2020 festivals and screenings in Bulgaria.

To the requisites of the scientific activity - Dr Statulov is a cited author in over 10 publications, has participated in various international and national conferences. All this makes the candidate's scholarly production visible and articulable.

III. Scientific and applied activities:

Apart from his research work, I must emphasize that Deyan Statulov is one of the most recognizable operational film critics in the public cultural space. His active work is visible in various television columns and the regular maintenance of the website Cinema.bg. As an author, he also publishes in various print media, such as the magazine L(Europeo, Culture, Cinema, etc.).

He has also realized authorial products in the field of arts - his name stands behind collective and individual projects. Among them are: "Cinema Histories In Between" (Exhibition at the Regional History Museum - Sofia. Opening - 25 November 2021); "Censored Films: Behind the Scenes" (Exhibition at the Odeon Cinema - Sofia. Opening - 10 November 2022); Exhibition "Vasil Gendov. Life between Theatre and Cinema", "Archives" Hall of the State Archives, 5 Moskovska Str., Opening - 07.12.2021. The candidate is also actively involved in projects of the Screen Arts Department.

High appreciation of his work were the awards of the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers - "Vasil Gendov" Prize - 2022. In 2023, his previous monograph was awarded as a bright achievement by the General Assembly of the scientists of the Institute of Art Studies.

Apart from the cinema, Deyan Statulov has been working with children for years, only in the field of theatre art - he is the head of the *Fantasia* troupe in the town of Ihtiman. His graduates are even now students at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov" precisely because of their long training in the theater studio, led by the candidate.

Personal impressions of the candidate:

I have known Deyan Statulov since the 1990s, when I was studying Film Studies at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov". He has always been dedicated to cinema, his colleagues, thorough and precise in the selection of the panoramas he prepared, impartial as an evaluator and in various artistic committees, defending his opinion in a reasoned and professional manner. His work with the archives has been consistent and inspiring in its diligence and patience.

All this gives me a definite and beyond any doubt reason to state that Dr Deyan Statulov possesses all the necessary qualities to occupy the academic position of Associate Professor. I vote FOR and I propose to the Scholarly Council of the Institute to elect the candidate without hesitation.

Sofia, 08.10.2023

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