

## OPINION

By Prof. Dr Ivan /Ivo/ Ivanov Draganov, Sofia, 61 Neofit Rilski Str,

On the competition for acquiring the academic position of **Assoc. Prof.** 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

Dear members of the Scientific Jury,

In the competition for Associate Professor in Film Studies, Film Art and Television at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, professional direction Theater and Film Art – 8.4 there is just one candidate – Chief Assistant Dr Deyan Ivanov Statulov. He has presented for the occasion his monograph: ***(Re)commissioned Films. Propaganda Practices in Bulgarian Cinema (1944-1989)***. It consists of an introduction, five chapters, conclusion, bibliography, filmography, and appendices.

In this monograph, Chief Assist. Dr. Deyan Statulov continues with his scholarly explorations in the field of the new history of cinema during the totalitarian period of the state's development (1944-1989) with his highly acclaimed dissertation on ***Im/Possible Freedom. Ideological Censorship in Bulgarian Cinema (1944-1989)***. In it, Dr. Deyan Statulov thoroughly revealed the mechanisms of subjugation, total censorship, and control in Bulgarian cinema during the totalitarian period. Very precisely, academically, without being boring and tedious, he introduced criteria, concepts, facts and made his own very valuable commentary and analysis. The research for this book, both then and now, is impressive - it has taken the author many years of hard and time-consuming in-depth work in various archives that are slowly and with difficulty being opened to citizens and researchers.

I highly value the new scientific research of Dr. Deyan Statulov. Following his dissertation, this monograph is a natural development of his thorough, very well-structured, and thoughtful research. With precise, well-organized factual analysis he studies the complex structure of the system of normative aesthetics and the enormous financial, administrative, and human resources thrown every year by the totalitarian state to maintain the organized enthusiasm of the working masses. The whole book is an in-depth look at the enormous buffoonery of a super idea, (the kindest thing I can say about socialism). He has once again concentrated on ferreting out, deciphering, and analyzing reams of parasitic pap. De facto, he unmasks bureaucrats without any qualification, but devoted to the BCP. People who had the sole task of monitoring and most importantly preventing anyone from expressing dissent with communism or anything outside the directives of socialist realism. *In person, dictator Todor Zhivkov explained to filmmakers that no film would be released if it stood outside the norms of*

*socialist realism*. Dr. Deyan Statulov has revealed the system of total control as a carefully conceived, organized, coordinated, and operating political structure that controls the system of cinematography at various levels. He clearly demonstrates that at every seemingly creative post or position there is a loyal, vetted official of the Communist Party or the State Security Service who understands little about cinema but knows how to enforce the party charter.

Already in his introductory remarks he raises the problem of unshared and denied values, of the new institutions and the models of work in them. Since the aim of his study is to reveal censorship and how it functions, he offers all the definitions of it at the beginning, after a short introduction. From these it becomes quite clear that censorship is a form of government control over speech and free thought under all regimes of government. It is stated to be in the public interest, but this is a fallacy. It is always in the interests of those in power and is a means of concealing their desire to keep the public ignorant and uninformed. Statulov makes it clear that many of those working in the cinema are not just artists, but confidants of the authorities who, as servants of propaganda, have the primary task of replacing values that generations have grown up with and replacing key names in Bulgarian history and culture with those of newly invented heroes of the partisan resistance. (For example, Hristo Botev with the quoted infantile poem by the proclaimed classic of children's literature Assen Bolev.) The analyses of Dr. Deyan Statulov stick only to facts. The author accurately describes the levels of censorship, citing relevant orders. He proves that the fate of talented people was for a long time in the hands of officials from the Ministry of Culture, even though the Art Council of Cinematography also admitted artists, but with strong party positions.

It is a war of the authorities against free thought, against the right to one's own opinion and the fierce intolerance of totalitarian regimes towards artists, philosophical thought, and the civic position expressed in critical analyses of the respective government. This is a permanent conflict between the interests of power and the interests of society.

In the following chapters III "Propaganda in Bulgarian Cinema" and IV "Mechanisms of Propaganda. Methods and Practices", Dr. Deyan Statulov very clearly and precisely justifies the key role of propaganda and its main task - the replacement of people's consciousness and existence. As in his dissertation, in this monograph the author reveals the main historical stages of the development of propaganda from the most ancient times. (In the KINO magazine many years ago, I wrote an article about this battle for people's minds.) In Bulgarian cinema, the author emphasizes that the propaganda model of socialist realism and other doctrines has its origins in the adoption of the Film Culture Act in 1946. The author has placed an important emphasis on the peculiarities of propaganda when it is organized and financed by the state to serve a single political force. He fully outlines the merger of the party with the state, through resolutions, decrees, and laws, resulting in the denial of any possibility of free creative initiative. Very important is his discovery of the so-called "*Functional Scheme of Cine Interaction*". I have been working in cinema since 1972.

I have always had a critical view of its aims and objectives, but I never imagined that manipulators could enter and control to the smallest detail the process of production and exhibition of Bulgarian films. Everyone was under total political surveillance; it is clear from his scholarly work. (And that of the State Security, naturally.)

Dr. Statulov quotes very well the book "Fascism" by our first democratically elected president Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev in the parts where he writes about the creative unions and organizations, which are a kind of extension of the state by running them with vetted personnel. In fact, through their specific duties pointed out by the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the author proves the narrowing of the limits of any freedom, the forced channeling of creative thinking expressed through all kinds of written and oral instructions. This is like Leo Tolstoy writing "War and Peace" within the framework of the garrison regulations of the Red Army. In practice, in Bulgarian cinema it was like that.

In Chapter IV, "Mechanisms of Propaganda. Methods and Practices" in subchapter 3 "The 1300 Years of Bulgaria Program", the entire campaign of the series of films - super productions to commemorate the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian state is precisely traced. I have participated in two of them, I know the size of the budgets of three of the films and I know what the workload was for the creative and organizational teams for their realization. Dr. Deyan Statulov's research is as accurate as possible and gives a true picture of the enormous excess effort of those working at Boyana Film Studios to fulfill the state commission. The film "The Blow" was shot in an impossibly short time, at the cost of not a single day off for the crew for four months. The only one who voiced any objection to this campaign was the director of SFF Boyana, Ivan Popyordanov. He tried to convince the authorities with due reason that the studio did not have the resources to accomplish such a large-scale task. He was replaced in a flash, and after the death of Lyudmila Zhivkova, part of the megalomaniac order was cancelled for financial reasons.

Particularly valuable and interesting are the author's inquiries in subchapter 4 about the making of a film on the Antonov case and the efforts of Bulgarian film executives to attract for co-production the Italian producer Marcello Danon, whom I knew personally from his work in Bulgaria on the film *Days of Rage* with the actor Oliver Reed and the actress Claudia Cardinale in 1972. It's not clear why the idea was never realized, but presumably in the aftermath of the assassination of Pope John Paul II no one in Italy would have risked producing a film that defended Sergei Antonov's thesis.

A very strong semantic and creative counterpoint to this film megalomania is Chapter V "*Beyond Propaganda*" on the documentary "Breathe". This chapter could have been developed in a subsequent scholarly work by Dr. Deyan Statulov, exploring the drive for truthfulness and honesty to the facts of reality on the part of the artists in our documentary cinema, particularly evident in the 1980s.

It is wonderful that a young man has devoted so much time to unmasking the propaganda in Bulgarian cinema, which was total, almost impossible to circumvent and stiffening to the artists, many of whom were vetted and loyal to the Bulgarian

Socialist Party. Films such as Knight Without Armor ; Detour ; The Boy Turns Man; Indian Summer ; Orchestra Without a Name and some others were rare. A few artists tried in children's cinema to suggest the existence of problems of our socialist life, but they were few.

It is of great importance to expose the iron structure of control, surveillance, and repression of everyone working in Bulgarian film studios. I claim to know from an administrative point of view the units within the Bulgarian Cinematography State Company, but not the behind-the-scenes activities of the State Security collaborators, nor the relations with the Central Committee departments. Dr. Deyan Statulov's monograph fills a major gap in our knowledge of professional relationships in the cinema at the time.

Dr. Statulov has 7 publications, one study in the specialized press, and 8 citations of his publications on the subject under development. In addition, there are 15 publications accompanied by an annotation. This scientific work is very valuable from the point of view of the history of Bulgarian film studies and the history of our feature cinema. In a broader measure, it is also important for Bulgarian culture.

With the stated **positive evaluation** of the merits of the scientific work:  
*(Re)commissioned Films. Propaganda Practices in Bulgarian Cinema (1944-1989)*.  
I have no critical remarks.

For all the reasons stated so far, I would like to conclude by emphasizing once again the scientific achievements of the candidate and the specific very important contributions of the monograph under review. I am convinced that they fully meet the high requirements stipulated in the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the indicators in the NACID science metrics map. That is why I take the liberty of recommending the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, to accept positively the candidature of Dr. Deyan Ivanov Statulov and to elect him to the academic position of Associate Professor.

12.09.2023 г.

Reviewer:  
(Prof. Dr. Ivo Draganov)