

# OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Donev Angelov, Institute of Art Studies, BAS

On the competition for acquiring the educational and academic degree doctor, Professional field 8.4, Film Studies, Film Art, and Television

On the dissertation on the subject: THE WORK OF THE FILM DIRECTOR ON DOCUMENTARY PORTRAITS

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## 1. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

This dissertation studies portraiture in documentary filmmaking with an emphasis on the work of the film director in its creation. The thesis (of a considerable length that exceeds the requirements of the procedure) places equal weight on the specificity of documentary means of expression, the characteristics of a widespread genre associated with the formation of the documentary type of cinema in general (beginning with *Nanook of the North*, 1922), and the role of the director in the realization of a high-quality film work of this type. The moral and ethical aspects of the relationship between author and protagonist are analyzed, as well as the aesthetic uniqueness of the genre and the impact of rapidly advancing digital technologies on the director's interpretation and transformation of the documentary film portrait. One of the persistent themes running through the thesis, explored in numerous examples and in the films of various authors, is the question of truth, the balance between veracity/objectivity/realism and imagery/summation/emotional effect of the documentary work.

The research has been conducted in depth, covering a wide range of topics and issues that are presented accurately in the context of the historical development of cinema and its social and artistic functions. A balance has been achieved between a film historical and cinematic approach, focusing on the development of film expression, and a professional-practical analysis, which is based on the dissertator's personal filmmaking experience, and her generalizations, drawn from a sound knowledge of the genre's development. A good impression is made by the predominant reference to examples from Bulgarian documentary cinema, which contributes to the originality of the study. Against the background of the rapid development of documentary film forms in recent decades, thanks to the serious facilitations in filmmaking brought by digital technologies, the thesis's issues are topical and significant.

The applied methodology consists of traditional approaches to film studies, combining both film-aesthetic and film-historical analysis. Interdisciplinary methods from the scientific fields of history, sociology, cultural studies, and ethics are also

widely used. To reach her own conclusions, the dissertation has drawn on the analysis of a considerable number of specific films (the attached filmography counts 219 titles). The bibliography of 109 sources includes various types of literature representing both the personal experiences of documentary filmmakers and the scholarly views of classical film theorists and contemporary scholars. Noteworthy is the author's ability to analytically juxtapose her own filmmaking practice with the insights gained from the methods of established documentary filmmakers.

## 2. Contributions of the dissertation research

In the attached special reference (9. Scientific contributions of the present dissertation) the dissertator has correctly and thoroughly stated the scientific contributions of her research, and I hereby confirm their validity and significance.

I would like to add that for the purposes of this dissertation, a combination of established methodological techniques and tools have been used, which have been skillfully applied to the study of a current film genre and the development of a directorial toolkit for working within it. In this way, a concrete and multifaceted analysis of the object of study has been achieved. The evolution of the genre, the variety of techniques and the specific directorial techniques for the successful realization of the cinematic works belonging to it are revealed in detail. Although the focus of the dissertation falls on the documentary portrait, much of the reasoning is of fundamental importance for understanding the aesthetics and nature of documentary filmmaking in general.

I would also add, as specific contributions, the author's ability to combine film historical and film theoretical generalizations with specific film studies and film critical analyses of individual films. This approach is even more valuable insofar as it is implemented by a researcher with practical experience as a documentary filmmaker.

## 3. Notes and recommendations

There is no doubt that the proposed dissertation possesses considerable merit, which allows me to spare two insignificant but irritating (at least to me) inaccuracies, relating not so much to the substance as to the style of scholarly presentation.

The exaggerated qualification "well-established masterpieces in the field of the portrait genre" (p. 9) for the works (without mentioning specific titles) of a number (almost 20) of contemporary Bulgarian documentary filmmakers sounds a bit confusing. This is an isolated case, but such "dropped" irrelevant superlatives may cast doubt on the undoubtedly correct and thorough reasoning of the researcher. I would also like to draw attention to an example of overconfidence in citation. It concerns the words of a film historian of great authority, such as Todor Andreikov, who, not entirely correctly from today's point of view, stated more than 40 years ago: "women directors in the first half of the century are counted on one hand" (p. 28). In fact, contemporary research shows that women artists, even in silent cinema alone,

were significant in number - a recent study by the American Film Institute documents the names of more than 800 women directors, writers, and producers in Hollywood between 1910 and 1930. The problem is that their work has been neglected by film historians, film critics and other scholars for more than a century.

The text of the dissertation has considerable cognitive value, it is written in good language, enriched with a large amount of film examples and specific analyses, which leads me to recommend its publication after some editing.

### 3. Publications and participation in scientific forums

The doctoral candidate has submitted a reference for 7 publications on the topic of the dissertation, which significantly exceed the number required in accordance with the Additional Requirements (section 1.2) to the Regulations for the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and academic positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS. Most of the publications presented are the result of the candidate's participation in authoritative scientific forums. All of them prove categorically that Tamara Peshterska possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge in the respective specialty and abilities for independent scientific research.

### 4. Conclusion:

The presented dissertation on " The Work of the Film Director on Documentary Portraits" fulfils the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS. The text is an independent scientific work with its own original and contributory points in enriching existing knowledge in the fields of cinema and television.

This gives me reason to vote with conviction for the awarding of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Art to Tamara Valerieva Peshterska-Iordanov.

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Associate Professor Dr Alexander Donev