

## STATEMENT

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professional field 8.4. "Theatre and Film Art", scientific specialty "Film and Television  
Production"  
regarding the candidacy of Elitsa Stefanova Mateeva  
for acquiring the academic degree of "Doctor"  
in Professional Field 8.4. "Theatre and Film Art"

### 1. Significance and relevance of the research problem

Elitsa Mateeva's research is situated in a highly intriguing realm, centered around the manifesto "Dogma 95" – a phenomenon that has captured global attention towards contemporary Danish cinema.

However, the dissertation extends beyond a mere exploration of this phenomenon. It casts a discerning eye on contemporary Bulgarian films, in which traces of the characteristic aesthetic, conceptual, or production principles of "Dogma 95" can be discerned, either as an echo or as mediated interpretations of accumulated notions about cinema.

The axis along which the research unfolds is undoubtedly original – within the rich historical and film-theoretical context, on one hand, lies the carefully arranged puzzle of theoretical film thought, while on the other, the evolutionary line of 20th-century cinema manifestos is delineated. In this manner, Elitsa Mateeva not only elucidates the logic behind the emergence of "Dogma 95" but also constructs an emotional understanding of the nature of the phenomenon of "manifesto" with all its totalitarian categoricalness and simultaneous ephemerality.

Additionally, Elitsa Mateeva explores the reflection of the "Dogma 95" phenomenon in Bulgaria, meticulously tracing, gathering, and summarizing the texts of Bulgarian professional and non-professional critics dedicated to this phenomenon and its films and directors. Based on the positions expressed in these texts, she outlines the Bulgarian perception of the Danish "vow of chastity".

The attitude of domestic analysts oscillates within a wide amplitude ranging from rejection and irony to sincere interest and respect for the achievements of the "dogmatists". The diverse spectrum of opinions convinces us that the manifesto and its authors have been noticed in our context, that their works have evoked emotions and reflections, and that the hypothesis of their influence (whether conscious or intuitive) on contemporary Bulgarian directors has its grounds.

It is precisely in the attempt to capture this "echo" of the principles of "Dogma 95" in Bulgarian films that the relevance of the current work lies. The chosen analytical perspective highlights specific aspects and aesthetic quests in the new Bulgarian cinema, providing us with a peculiar reading of its qualities and situating it within a European context.

Elitsa Mateeva also turns her research gaze towards a territory almost unknown to the Bulgarian audience – that of the series created by Dogma directors. The presented works reveal yet another

interesting perspective on the principles of the movement – seemingly, a significant portion of them can be utilized not only for creating experimental and unconventional film works but also effectively integrated into the production machinery of television – a medium largely geared towards mass taste and dependent on it in selecting what to produce.

In this sense, we reach another testament that the canons of "Dogma 95" are not merely provocation, PR stunt, or a framework of temporally limited creative experiment – evidently, they have the potential to be adapted to different contexts and vitality, since decades after their proclamation, we can still find their imprint in new works.

I would highlight as a value of the dissertation the particular attention that the author pays to female directors of "Dogma 95", not only because it duly acknowledges the achievements of women in cinema (a field still largely dominated by men) but also because it reveals the specific creative sensitivity with which women have enriched the legacy of the movement.

I find that the intention stated in the introduction of the presented text to offer "information and knowledge that help expand our understanding of the processes in cinema" has been fulfilled. The dissertation is based on an impressive bibliography and filmography, which have been thoughtfully and skillfully utilized. The arrangement and synthesis of such a volume of film facts are unequivocal evidence of Elitsa Mateeva's impressive film erudition and her profound knowledge of the subject matter (although such evidence is hardly necessary, as her work and achievements in the field of film studies are well known and demonstrated in her other texts and published books).

## **2. Qualities of the dissertation text, recommendations, and questions**

I have already noted the rich factual content that the dissertation boasts. It allows the author to make many interesting associations between different phenomena, principles, creators, and works. Here, I cannot help but highlight another, at least for me, very important merit of the text – it is presented in a highly figurative language, imbued with unadulterated excitement and sincere love for the art of cinema.

I believe that cinema should be studied not only with the tools of analytical logic and rationality but also with the heart and senses because its works affect us precisely in this way – intellectually and emotionally; if emotion is excluded from scientific inquiry, it would remain incomplete and flat.

The sentiment that the author has infused into her work paves the way for the text beyond the academic sphere – it can be captivating reading even for non-professionals, cinephiles, and even for a wider audience interested in understanding the evolution of theoretical thought in cinema, discovering how it has found expression in the most representative films of the respective movements, and delving into the meaning behind the limitations of the Dogma (the fact that Elitsa Mateeva's text prompts us to ask ourselves the fundamental question of whether limitations in art lead to "limited art" or, on the contrary, lend it additional value). Moreover, this text would provide readers with a key to understanding certain stylistic trends and creative decisions in contemporary Bulgarian cinema.

This great love and deep interest that the author harbors for cinema sometimes lead her to "digress" into details that are certainly important and interesting but, at times, may weigh heavily (for example, in the sections devoted to futurism, Dziga Vertov, Bazen, etc.); elsewhere, we encounter repetitions of the same ideas with similar wording (for example, on page 70 it is stated "Dogma 95" is evidently (and theatrically) "political" in its intention", and a little further down on the same page "In "Dogma 95" there is, of course, a dose of theatricality"), or even of the same text (on pages 118 and 121: "Jakobsen is one of the most successful Danish directors. His work with children is more than a challenge, it is a textbook on flexibility, mobility, and dynamic training because children do not master the mechanics of acting in eliciting emotions.").

The transcriptions exhibit certain inaccuracies: for instance, the names of Frenchmen Pierre Braunberger and Anatole Dauman have been anglicized, while concepts with established Bulgarian translations have been directly translated from English ("Jericho trumpet" instead of "Jericho tube"). Additionally, Winterberg's name is consistently misspelled as Witenberg in specific instances (pages 111 and 112, occurring five times). At times, the style becomes ambiguous or contradictory, with shifts in verb tense (present historical, past, and even future in the past), along with occasional punctuation errors. It appears that, under emotional pressure, the writing struggled to keep pace with thought. However, these imperfections are remediable through meticulous editorial revision and, fundamentally, do not diminish the text's value.

One notable aspect of the work is its departure from strict chronological exposition, as evidenced, for instance, in the presentation of certain directors and their films. Rather than adhering strictly to a linear progression, the narrative occasionally diverges, introducing different themes or perspectives before returning to the main thread. This technique often enriches the text, offering insights into phenomena in a piecemeal fashion, from varied angles and depths. However, there are instances where this departure from consistency feels abrupt, impeding the reader's comprehension.

I highly appreciate that the historical overview provided in the first chapter is not merely a collection of facts unrelated to the main theme of the dissertation or verbal padding to increase volume. Elitsa Mateeva presents a detailed panorama of manifestos, theoretical views, and artistic declarations of creators from different generations, skillfully establishing connections between various epochs and authors (for example, the associative line Deluge - "Dogme 95").

It is astutely noted that, despite its brevity, this movement revitalized Danish cinema's presence on the global film stage. The accolades and recognition from international film festivals, along with the buzz and discussions surrounding Danish cinema, propelled it from the periphery of the North into prominence. However, it is essential to emphasize that Danish cinema had already undergone periods of prosperity and garnered international acclaim prior to the emergence of the dogmatists. The principles advocated by the dogma movement did not originate within a cinematic landscape devoid of tradition or significance.

Therefore, it seems to me that in this meticulously outlined evolutionary context, there could have been a place to at least attempt to trace the path of Danish cinema from its "golden" era to the emergence of "Dogme 95." It would also be interesting to pay attention to the situation in Danish cinema immediately before the emergence of Dogma, perhaps even to the social and cultural climate in the country, thus verifying whether certain factors from the environment were catalysts for the concepts and philosophy stated in the manifesto.

The dissertation prompts another question for me: why did the author opt to explore the reflection of "Dogma 95" in Bulgarian films produced specifically between 2014 and 2023? Does she believe that no other Bulgarian films preceding this timeframe exhibited the influence of the manifesto, or is this chronological boundary deliberately set to restrict the analysis to the last decade?

### **3. Scientific Contributions and Conclusion**

Elitsa Mateeva has very correctly indicated the expected scientific contributions of her work and has unequivocally defended them.

Finally, I cannot fail to note as a merit of the proposed development the fact that the author remains very honest regarding the hypothesis of the "Dogma" imprint on the analyzed Bulgarian films. Although she finds signs of similarity, she does not succumb to offering speculative claims but quite openly points out that these points of proximity are the product of different intentions: "In 'Dogma 95,' a cinematographic excitement to film in the name of the national cause is apparent - to highlight Danish cinema. In contrast to these intentions, the situation in Bulgarian productions is more prosaic: a narrative is used that corresponds to the director's artistic excitements."

In conclusion, I am convinced that the dissertation undeniably showcases not only Elitsa Mateeva's profound expertise in the field of cinema but also her ability to execute a remarkable scientific study, notable for both its volume and complexity.

With these considerations in mind, I confidently endorse the attained outcome and recommend to the esteemed scientific jury that Elitsa Mateeva be granted the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field of 8.4 Theater and Film Arts.

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