

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nevelina Popova,

teacher of scriptwriting in New Bulgarian University (8.4 Theatre and Film Art)
on the academic works for the competition for acquiring the academic position of
Professor in Film Studies, Film Art and Television 8.4, at the New Bulgarian University,
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for the candidate Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova, DSc.

Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova DSc is participating in the competition for the academic position of "Professor of Film Studies, Cinematography and Television (short feature film)", professional field 8.4. Theatrical and film art, for the needs of the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business of NBU, announced by the New Bulgarian University with the publication of the State Gazette, issue 38 / 24.04..2020, impressively prepared, as a person who has built her academic career without haste, with all the responsibility and seriousness of a dedicated researcher and lecturer. This is obvious at first glance - she meets all the requirements according to national and university criteria for this position - in total for all criteria she collects 1560 points from the required minimum total number of 750 points. Behind these formal points stands her serious research in film studies , media studies and academic life, which not only cover but also exceeds the national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University for this academic position. Among them are her books and the publications of her articles in various authoritative editions.

Her academic activity is also impressive – it covers creating and updating programs and courses, constant work with students and doctoral students, participation, initiation and management of various educational and scientific projects, which I will discuss in more details later in my review.

Research and creative activity

Petia Alexandrova's monograph “Short-form films: Advantages and Challenges. Models and Practices of Bulgarian short features” is a comprehensive study of our short feature film, it is the

first research in this field. The focus of the research, as can be seen from the subtitle, are the Bulgarian short feature films created after 1989. Impressive and obviously long-term work, rich and vivid evidence of the film process in our country in recent decades. With research dedication and devotion, Petia Alexandrova enters an important territory that has not been systematically explored so far and in its entirety, despite the many episodic analyses, most often as part of more general research or as a presentation of individual films. Here, for the first time, the problems of this type of cinema are posed as comprehensively and in depth as possible, from different points of view: of film theory and history, of sociology and psychology, of art history and media studies. This is truly an interdisciplinary scientific work that goes beyond the traditional professional framework of film studies. Through her career as a film critic, journalist and lecturer, Petia Alexandrova has already gained enough experience and professional maturity to consider short film as a socio-cultural phenomenon, in the wide range between film theory and concrete practice, in the context of historical changes and specific social and cultural policies, through the prism of different media strategies and generalising critical reflection. The whole text is marked by extreme research precision and authorial commitment to this often neglected type of cinema, as well as by the inner conviction in the meaning of this work. Following the hot trail of the processes, this book is filling the existing gap in the history and theory of Bulgarian cinema, which, as the author herself says, may “not be felt like a gaping hole, but the lack of systematic and clear specialized research is actually a gap in the expert field of screen research ”. The structure of the text is very well thought out, the text is divided into four parts and leads us skilfully through the various theoretical fields. Each subsequent part upgrades and illuminates the processes in the short feature film from a new angle. We could define this structure as spiral; it gradually covers various aspects of the development of short feature films in our country. After the introduction to "shadow cinema", in which Petya Alexandrova states the current problems of short film and the goals of her research, in the first part she ambitiously embarks on difficult theoretical curves to clarify the conceptual apparatus, types and subtypes of short film. The second chapter, entitled "Social Being", focuses entirely on the practice of production, distribution and media coverage of short films; in it the reader gets acquainted with the specific history of the various forums, festivals, portals and platforms for short films. The third chapter is devoted to the historical development of Bulgarian short films (from its beginning to 1991 and the last decade of the 20th century), as well as to screenplays, omnibus films and hybrid short films - as specific and sustainable models for the dramaturgic organization of the material in the short feature film. The last fourth chapter examines the processes in short feature film in the new

millennium, by decades, as thematic diversity, aesthetic pursuits and results, and last but not least - as separate bright authorial presences. It is here that the author's gaze and critical reflection move with particular ease - freely, skilfully and benevolently, even in troubled fields – because she is crossing an extremely familiar territory, tamed by her long-term research efforts.

Petia Alexandrova's text is captivating and easy to read, despite its theoretical workload and the vast amount of information that has been processed in it. In its comprehensiveness and in the author's aspiration to cover all films and personalities there is encyclopedic precision.

Filmography in this case can serve as a kind of catalog and reference book of Bulgarian short films.

In theoretical terms, it is especially valuable for me to clarify the theoretical concepts and defining characteristics of independent, experimental, alternative, avant-garde and underground films. These characteristics inevitably overlap and this determines their frequent synonymous use. But understanding the intrinsic specificity of each group of films in the large, diverse family of experimental cinema is important to anyone involved in cinema. In particular, I would like to note as a contribution of this work the clarification of the concept of "independent cinema" in both directions - in terms of production / subsidies and in terms of aesthetic demands, suggesting experiment and innovation. I agree with Petia Alexandrova that the concept of "private film" is clearer and fairer when it comes to films produced with private funds, but falling into the category of clichéd mainstream production.

The historical review of short films and the parallels with feature films is important part of this work. The subchapters for the screenplays and omnibus films are also contributing.

An indisputable contribution of the research is the multifaceted examination of films and authors, from the last two decades. Here Petia Alexandrova's inspiration is constantly felt. The analyzes and portraits of the authors are extremely interesting. She enters into current processes and tendencies, makes bold parallels and comes to essential summaries. The titles of the subchapters themselves are not only witty, but also symbolically accurate paraphrases of film titles, through which the film process and the fate of the new generations in Bulgarian feature cinema are made meaningful.

The relevance and significance of this study for me is indisputable. It helped me to "revise" familiar but faded pictures, personalities and events from the Bulgarian cinema landscape. Short films are especially open to the dynamics of global processes and new communications. Petia Alexandrova proves that the space of Internet offers short films much more opportunities than traditional forms of cinema distribution. Thus collected and presented, the various festival

opportunities, modern forums and platforms for short films build a sufficiently complete picture of the current situation in our country and worldwide. As a part of the global dynamic picture various forums constantly change and short forms take up more and more space, often not receiving adequate evaluation from critics, media and the viewers themselves.

That is why this book is so timely and important. Stepping firmly on the past and present paths of Bulgarian short film, it is turned to its future. Petia Alexandrova does not hide her attachment to short forms as especially adequate for today's dynamic world. She hopes that the short film in the future will cease to be a rehearsal for feature debuts and will defend its independent aesthetic territories and opportunities for active dialogue with modern audience.

This latest book of Petia Alexandrova is part of her constant dialogue with modern audiences. This is undoubtedly a mature book - the fourth in the author's biography (after her three books "The Sorrows of the Title", Prosveta Publishing House, 2006, "Lost in Viewing", Riva Publishing House, 2012 and "Transitional Stories of Culture and Communications", NBU Publishing House, 2015). It bears the richness and inner freedom of the accumulated experience, develops further previous theses and expectations, draws paths for Bulgarian cinema, connects theory with practice - making sense of the processes in the overall historical and cultural context. This is typical for Petia Alexandrova's writing. It is related to her active long-term work as a film critic and journalist. Her live connection with current processes is also characteristic of all her theoretical articles, some of which have been reports at international scientific conferences. She presents for the competition 21 articles published in the most authoritative peer-reviewed editions - repeatedly in the collections "Art Studies Readings", "Problems of Art", published by BAS, Institute of Art Studies, in Kino magazine, ed. of SBFDF, in collections - yearbooks of the Department of Mass Communications, ed. of NBU, in the collection "Bulgarian cinema, 100 years after the beginning", ed. of NATFA etc. One of the articles is in English and two are in Russian; they are based on reports presented at international scientific conferences.

The works of Petia Alexandrova have been cited over the years by colleagues in 13 theoretical works, published in Bulgarian and international peer-reviewed publications.

Petia Alexandrova is an active participant in a number of national and international projects. Selector of the *Golden Rose Bulgarian Feature Film Festival* (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018); author of a catalog of the *Salon of Arts*, National Palace of Culture (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008); film selector for *Cinemamania* (1999-2005); selector of the international festival for student films *Early Chicken* (2005-2015). He is also a participant in the project "COURAGE.

Connecting Collections. Cultural Opposition: Understanding the Cultural Heritage of Dissidents

in Former Socialist Countries", led by: Wolf Brunbauer, Institute for Southeast European Studies in Regensburg, under the Horizon 2020 program of the European Union research and innovation <http://cultural-opposition.eu/>. (2016-2019). Due to her personal efforts, cooperation has also been established between NBU and MDLU, Moscow. Supported by the Strategic Development Fund, NBU, 2016, the project includes several activities, including teaching during the spring semester of the academic year 2015/2016 in the specialty "Public Relations" at MDLU, Moscow and is dedicated to the study of contemporary Russian culture for scientific studies of Assoc. Prof. Alexandrova; includes distant internet meetings between students from NBU and MDLU within the seminar "Knowledge of PR and journalists"; comparative analysis between the Public Relations programs at the two universities and was presented at the spring scientific conference in May 2016 at Dep. "Mass communications" of the NBU.

Petia Alexandrova is also the initiator and leader of various national and international projects. Editor-in-Chief of the Yearbook of the Department of Mass Communications, NBU: editions 2012, 2013, 2014. ISSN 1310-8670. She is also the leader of the international educational project *Arts & Authority*, implemented by NBU and Connecticut College, March - May 2018q also remotely by Internet, with the participation of students and professors from both universities. A film from the discussions and presentations, made by her students and PhD students, was shot and edited. She is also the leader of a workshop on "Arts and New Technologies", with the participation of students from "Mass Communications" and "Cinema and Television", which filmed TV discussions in five programs: theater, literature, cinema, music and fine arts at NBU in 2014.

Petia Alexandrova's creative activity is related to both television and documentary cinema. She is the screenwriter of the TV show for Bulgarian cinema "Laterna Magika", an external production for BNT. Broadcast every week in the period 2002-2004, with 50 programs, each with an individual script, 30 minutes each. Produced by Urban Media and Cinemak Studio, directed by Ivan Georgiev GEC. Currently, Stanislav Donchev is shooting a documentary based on her script, which is supported by Sofia Municipality and NBU.

Impressive in terms of volume and teaching dedication are the **educational and teaching activities** of Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova. Over the years at the university she has developed over 20 author's courses - classroom and extracurricular. She provides and updates all her courses with study materials in the Moodle platform of NBU; there she is constantly uploading presentation materials with detailed content, links, videos, additional materials in accordance

with the requirements of NBU. The high evaluation grade given by her students is indicative. For the last twelve semesters, the average grade for satisfaction with her courses and her teaching work is 4.47 out of a maximum of 5.00.

Assoc. prof. Petia Alexandrova has been scientific supervisor of many graduates over the years; she has written numerous reviews on diploma works and has participated in various examination commissions. She also actively participates in the Student Internships Project in all its phases so far. She was an academic mentor to 30 students. She has actively assisted in concluding and re-signing contracts between NBU and BTA, BNR and BNT. She has provided internships to students at several festivals, mainly at Sofia Film Fest. As a selector of the International Student Film Festival "Early Chicken" (2008-2015) and the *Golden Rose Festival* (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) she has regularly included films made by students from NBU.

The presence and activity of Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova in the **administrative and public activity** of NBU is indisputably tangible - not only in the Department of Mass Communications, but also in the whole university. She has participated in the launch of the master's program "Digital Communications" and the doctoral program "Media and Public Communications". As Director of the Program Council (2015-2017) and participant in the Program Council of the Department of Mass Communications (since 2017 - until now ...) she is a member of the Academic Council of NBU. Over the years, she has actively participated in the improvement of the programs "Journalism" and "Public Relations".

Personal impressions of the candidate

I have known Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova for years, long before she started teaching at NBU. I appreciate her tireless work as a film critic, journalist and editor, the breadth of her interests and views, her keen sense of the ongoing processes. It is not possible here in this review to encompass all her multifaceted presence in our overall cultural life. Still, I can not fail to mention her numerous publications and appearances in the electronic media, her work as a longtime editor in the magazine "Lik" (2000 -2013), and in the magazine "Artisanin" since 2017; her work as a selector of various festivals, as a member of various art commissions, as a compiler of catalogs and bulletins, as an organizer of film panoramas, as a co-organizer of Cinemania, Salon of Arts, as a publisher and editor of "Post-Stories of Art", 2001 and "Telling the Image", 2003, publishing house "Sphragid". Petia Alexandrova is a truly constructive person,

highly organized and demanding, dedicated to cinema, literature, theatre and all cultural processes. She is very energetic and easy to work with, she can always be relied on. All this is the basis of her fruitful teaching work, in which Petia Alexandrova manages to pass on to young people her experience, skills and talent. That is why I think that on the way to her academic development taking the position of professor is somehow inevitable and natural - she just deserves it.

I am convinced that Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova deserves to take the academic position of "professor" in the professional field 8.4. Theatrical and film art (Film Studies, Cinematography and Television), for the needs of the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business of NBU, published in the State Gazette, issue 38 / 24.04.2020. So I am convinced she should be admitted to the selection of the Academic NBU Council.

All abovementioned gives me reason to vote "FOR".

14.08.2020

Assoc. Prof.

Nevelina Popova