

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lora Viktorova Mutisheva
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professional field 8.4. “Theatre and Film Art”

**on the dissertation of
Vasilena Valerieva Radeva**

on the topic:

“Theatre Based on a True Story: Document and Fiction in Contemporary Bulgarian Theatre”

for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”
in professional field 8.4. “Theatre and Film Art”

Scientific supervisor of the doctoral candidate:

Prof. Violeta Decheva, D.Sc.

The dissertation of Vasilena Valerieva Radeva is devoted to one of the most current problems in contemporary theatre: the relationship between documentality and fiction in the performing arts, and the development of theatre based on a true story in contemporary Bulgarian cultural context. The topic has clearly expressed scholarly and applied significance, because it examines processes that are an essential part of contemporary European and Bulgarian theatrical reality.

The work has a volume of 191 pages, of which 139 are main text. The structure includes an introduction, an exposition in three chapters, conclusions and a final conclusion, as well as a bibliography of 10 pages with 84 sources - 59 in Cyrillic and 25 in Latin script, and an appendix with interviews with artists whose work is the object of the study. This structure shows consistency of exposition and a balance between theoretical analysis, empirical material and practical research.

I have known Vasilena Radeva since her student years at NATFA “Krastyo Sarafov”. We graduated together in the class of Prof. Plamen Markov - she in the specialization “Directing for Dramatic Theatre”, and I in “Acting for Dramatic Theatre”. Even then she distinguished herself as a director with exceptional sensitivity to the newly developing history and the social environment, as well as to their theatrical and social space. Over the years I have had the opportunity to observe her overall development as a director and teacher and to work with her in the professional context - at NATFA and at Sofia Theatre in the production “We Are Not All Saints!”. This practical experience gives me grounds to highly appreciate the observations and conclusions in the dissertation.

In our work on “We Are Not All Saints!” we used approaches characteristic of documentary theatre - biographical improvisations, work with personal memory and the transformation of real stories into stage material. Although the text is dramatic and based on personal experiences of the author, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with the prototypes of the characters in a real environment, which brought the process closer to documentary practices. The laboratory approach in the rehearsal process is very close to theatre based on a true story. This work proved valuable for the actors, as it opened space for deeper personal participation and a specific form of stage truth. Radeva combines directorial clarity with delicacy toward the human personality, which is clearly visible in the dissertation as well.

Significance of the Research Problem

Contemporary theatre increasingly turns toward reality, personal testimony and the socio-political traumas of the present and the recent past. In this context, the dissertation is timely and necessary. It examines documentary and neo-documentary theatre as key forms for making sense of contemporaneity.

It is especially important that the study does not treat documentality as a genre, but as a process of transformation in which the fact passes through the personality of the artist and through the stage language. Thus the document is understood as a dynamic category, not as fixed material.

The research focuses on productions from Bulgarian independent and institutional theatre that give it current relevance and applied character. The analyzed productions outline diverse approaches to theatre based on a true story and show the development of neo-documentary practices in Bulgaria. The inclusion of performances from the author’s personal professional experience adds a reflexive layer.

The dissertation goes beyond purely theoretical analysis by also including teaching experience related to documentary methods in actor training. This is especially valuable in the context of contemporary theatre education.

Among the creators and formations discussed are some of the leading names in contemporary Bulgarian theatre. The selection is well argued and demonstrates a variety of aesthetic and methodological approaches.

Subject and Methodology

The subject of the study is the relationship between document and fiction in contemporary performance based on a true story, as well as the authorial presence of the director and the actor. Radeva convincingly shows that the document always relates to the subjectivity of the artist and to his or her artistic and ethical decisions.

The work traces the development of documentary theatre in a European context during the twentieth century and juxtaposes it with the contemporary Bulgarian stage. This allows a combination of historical perspective and current analysis.

The methodology is interdisciplinary and includes theoretical analysis, historical review, comparative method, interviews and author-reflexive approaches. The interviews with directors and artists have an essential role as part of the research process, and not merely as an appendix.

Contributions

Among the main contributions are:

- systematization and analysis of Bulgarian practices in theatre based on a true story;
- analysis of directorial strategies for translating document into stage language;
- study of the interaction between document and fiction;
- analysis of the public function of documentary theatre;
- development of practical approaches for work with actors.

An original contribution is the author-reflexive analysis of the candidate's own directorial and pedagogical practice, which gives the research practical value.

Concluding Remarks

The dissertation is written in clear and professional language, and the argumentation is consistent.

As a recommendation, I would note that future research could examine acting techniques in documentary theatre in greater depth - a topic with potential for independent development. Contemporary theatre education increasingly turns toward this type of practice, and similar studies would be valuable for students and teachers.

A more in-depth study of the international context of documentary theatre and a stronger distinction between descriptive and analytical sections would also be possible.

These remarks do not diminish the value of the work, but outline opportunities for future development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that the dissertation of Vasilena Valerieva Radeva is an independent, original and contributory scholarly study with theoretical and practical value. It demonstrates depth of professional preparation, research maturity and a serious contribution to the development of Bulgarian theatrical theory and practice.

The dissertation fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.

For this reason, I give my categorically positive assessment and confidently propose to the respected scientific jury that Vasilena Valerieva Radeva be awarded the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 8.4. “Theatre and Film Art”.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lora Mutisheva