

Reviewer's opinion

by Prof. Plamen Shulikov, PhD (Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen) on the materials submitted by assistant-professor Mariana Todorova Dafova, PhD (Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, dance and Visual Arts - Plovdiv, Department of Applied Arts), for participation in a competition (reg. no. RD-27-122/ 21.09.2023) for the occupation of the academic position of associate professor in professional field 8.2. Fine Art, sub-field Photography

Among the texts submitted by **Mariana Dafova** for the announced competition, the most representative, at least in terms of its problematic scope and cognitive ambition, is the monographic research titled "**Time and Transformation in Photography**" (Plovdiv, 2022). The conjunction in the title logically equates "time" and "transformation" in order to state as its main focus functional changes in the photographic image that go beyond the transformations of time in it, and through it. Even without this extension, however, the problem of time in photography is complex enough. Its multidimensionality is rightly presented by M. Dafova as a kind of "colimbarium" (Nietzsche) of aspects - the technological time of exposure, the time interval between the moment of exposure and the moment of reception, and the relationship between the moment captured in the photo-image and the general flow of historical time, among others. The author's passion, as a practicing photographer, for the technical aspects of time in photography is natural and understandable. She passionately outlines a detailed (perhaps too detailed compared to the overall size of text) retrospective to the background of the long-term physico-chemical "agreement" between the technically imperfect tools of photography and the Faustian humanistic urge to pause the flow of time, to achieving perfect control over time. By the way, this pessimistic asymmetry reached cosmic proportions in 1850 in the diary of E. Delacroix (R. Barthes). Having read in a footnote about successful astrophotographic experiments at Cambridge, that the light emitted by photographed celestial bodies needed twenty years to reach the Earth, he made the shocking conclusion that the light needed to produce the Cambridge daguerreotypes had been emitted long before Daguerre ever invented the method of fixing light. Implicit in Delacroix's note is the suspicion that the current present of the photographic image is

actually the distant past. This curious evidence of a disturbance in Newtonian ideas of time as irreversible succession is actually an argument in favour of Kant's understanding that the notion of time is a subjective construct. At the same time, it is also a vague premonition both of the upcoming Einsteinian "relativism" and of Lorentzian transformations as its predecessor with a direct relation to the choice of exposure time in photographic practice. The inevitably doomed technological relation between photography and time as an essential part of its noema turns it into a kind of contrasting manifestor of the latent antinomy "view/poiesis". The pre-photographic critical tradition is focused on the technical, i.e. poetic distinction between the arts. According to Simonides, for example, it is between painting and poetry (following Plutarch), in Lessing - between successive and coexisting arts, etc. Only photography succeeds in disturbing the comfort of the interpretive stereotype, forcing it to confront the shocking temporal and topical literalness of its "graphic sadism" (V. Benjamin). The indexical (C.S. Peirce) witnessing essence of the photo image mobilizes the interpretive resource of criticism to the limit, in order to incorporate in its notion of artistic alienation the difficult-to-overcome photo-illusion of realism, more precisely of pre-artistic literalism. Perhaps accounting for Nietzsche's doubt in the referential relationship between man and the visible world, reaffirming humanity's cognitive debt to metaphor ("On Truth and Falsehood in an Extra-Moral Sense", 1873), today's imagology adopts Nietzsche's antinomy "rational man/intuitive man", to modify it in favor of the observer-spectator (R. Barthes) as "eye/ spirit" (M. Merleau-Ponty), "eye/ gaze" (J. Lacan). G. Boehm, for example, conceptualizes the ancient contest between Zeuxis and Parasius aimed at turning the image into a "pasture for the eyes," insisting that it is in fact a contest not of truth but of deceit, a contest in which (according to Lacan) "the gaze (as performer of metaphorical transfers) triumphs over the eye (as a relatively impartial optical instrument)". Thus, G. Boehm definitively links the so-called iconic turn in modernity with the temporal inversion of the image in the observer, who becomes restless, even painfully restless (e.g. P. Barth) center of multidirectional time vectors, i.e. of condensed, "over-condensed" time (Ts. Boyadzhiev, p. 79). Correctly consistent with this, albeit too broadly outlined, context is M. Dava's conviction that "the sealed photo-image is present in multiple temporal connections" (p. 29).

Based on research on travel photobooks (S. Martin, 2010), the author perceives the temporal aspects of these "devices offering time" (p. 83), as a kind of representative taxonomy of the temporal "multitude" in general (real, condensed, receptive, future, retrospective time, etc.).

M. Dafova traces the historical prerequisites for such a generalization through the pivotal moments in the critical self-understanding of photography from the so-called "pre-academic period" by S. Walden (e.g. I. Gaucher, W. H. F. Talbot, E. Eastlake, S. Baudelaire, the critics around the "Photo-Secession" and the subsequent early modernism, as well as those attracted to the USA state project "FSA", etc.), as well as from the "academic period" (e.g. the critics from the Frankfurt School of Philosophy V. Benjamin, Z. Krakauer, R. Arnheim, T. Adorno, from later American analytical art criticism represented by S. Sontag, from French structuralism presented by R. Barthes, from French sociology in J. Baudrillard, and French psychoanalysis in J. Lacan).

M. Dafova subjects her reflections on the technologically assumed genetic connection between photography and time to verification through the huge corpus of so-called "found photographs". Apparently partial to their inexperienced witness nature, and to their illusory counter-conceptuality, she presents a series of author's projects (T. Sovan's "Silver Mine", T. Stoyanov's "The Stoyanov Family", K. Benit's "Souvenir Photos", E. Friend's "DaraallaLuce", W. Mokrinsky's "Cousins and Neighbors", D. Schouder's "Failed Memory", P. Hertz's "Bug-Nation: Restoring Social Memory", T. Hauser's "Modern Ruins", J. Schmidt's "Photos from the Street", JR's photo installations). Among them, it is worth highlighting D. Schouder and J. Schmidt. D. Schouder - because of the conceptually significant parallel between digital and human memory, on the basis of which he explains the lacunae in human memory through digital errors (pp. 111-112). J. Schmidt, who, while I was writing this text, happened to be in Sofia - because of his indisputable status as one of the first ideologists of the essentially archaeological march towards the hidden treasure of "found photographs". His appeal from the 1980s had a manifest character: "No new photos until we use up all the old ones!" After all, he had no way of knowing at that time that the concept with genre pretensions "found photographs" would have to include within its scope Vivian Maier's far from unsophisticated photographs. Accidentally *found* after her death, they added to the aura of their unquestionable significance a touch of anachronism without which their enlightened reception is virtually impossible.

Based on the qualities of the monograph submitted by M. Dafova, which will certainly optimize her teaching, on the well-researched bibliography, on the sufficient number of publications on the subject of the monograph, as well as on her certified photographic practice, I

suggest that assistant professor Mariana Todorova Dafova, PhD, be awarded the academic position of *associate professor* in professional field 8.2. Fine Art, sub-field Photography.

19.11.2023

Prof. Plamen Shulikov, PhD