

Review

on the dissertation work of Mariana Todorova Kamburova
in professional field 8.2. Fine Art, doctoral program Applied, Fine Arts and Design
Faculty of Fine Arts, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, Prof Asen Diamandiev, Plovdiv

Topic: Time and transformation in photography

1. Information on the procedure

Mariana Todorova Kamburova's doctoral dissertation was discussed at a department meeting at the Department of Applied Arts on 24.09.2021. Based on the successful discussion and the proposal made by the members of the department, the work is approved for defense. By order of the Rector of AMDFA from 10.10.2021, the procedure for the defense of the dissertation was opened. The doctoral student submitted the necessary documents for this purpose, and the dissertation was available to all interested and potential discussants. There are no procedural violations.

2. Information on the doctoral candidate

Mariana Kamburova has a master's degree in photography, graduated from AMDFA 'Prof Asen Diamandiev' in 2006. She teaches History of Photography and Applied Photography at the Academy. As a practicing photographer, she is the author of numerous solo exhibitions such as "Time and transformation of a school in the village of Hvoyna" (2017), "Plovdiv - through my heart" (2012) and "My great friends" (2009/2010). Among her participations in joint exhibitions at home and abroad can be highlighted the author's presence in the exhibition "Plovdiv - the oldest living city in Europe" (Leipzig, 2020), in the exhibition "Ancient Plovdiv - a legacy of millennia" in the Bulgarian Cultural Institute in Warsaw (2017), as well as in the forum International Photographic Meetings Plovdiv in 2006. Her photographs were published in the luxury book *Plovdiv - Ancient and Alive* of Letera publishing house.

Along with her work as a photographer, Mariana Kamburova actively participates in the development of the concepts, the preparation and the organization of the student exhibitions of the specialty Photography. She enjoys the respect of her peers both inside and outside the Academy.

The doctoral candidate has three approbation publications related to the dissertation, published in the academic editions of AMDFA. These are texts that give an idea of the development and make visible the successive steps that the author has taken in her work, as well as her scientific growth in the course of the task.

The abstract (47 pages) adequately and correctly presents the dissertation and creates an accurate idea of its parts, positions and contributions.

3. Description of the dissertation

The dissertation *Time and Transformation in Photography* consists of an intro (three introductory paragraphs), three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and an appendix consisting of over 90 photographic examples.

Chapter one, entitled “Science in the Capture of Photographic Time”, examines a series of milestones in the history of photography that centered around several main focuses: (1) the process and the ways of recognizing the new media on the basis of its cognitive potential, and its connection with the particularly expanding system of science in the context of the mid-nineteenth century; (2) the emancipation of the new media towards other artistic media and especially towards the media of painting - a development that goes through different stages and ideas about the place and the function of photography; (3) the reflection on the photograph as symptomatically based on the problem of the changing exposure time. In this way, the work gradually introduces the problems of *time*, having already established and adjusted the historical context of the photographic media. At this stage, it is a private and more precisely technologically relevant aspect to the dissertation problem. This otherwise private point of view, however, is fully developed in the perspective of modernism in parallel with the construction of the media status of photography, so this story has its motivation and place here. A general expression of the parable made in this first chapter is contained in the emblematic work of Hartmut Rosa *Acceleration and Alienation* - not accidentally repeatedly used by Mariana Kamburova as a key to the topic.

Chapter two, entitled “Photographic Theories”, discusses the development of the perception of photography at a meta-level removed from the immediate practice, which dates back to about the second half of the twentieth century, although the immediate roots and particularly striking manifestations of this meta-level date back to the beginning 1930s (Benjamin, Krakauer). At this point, the dissertation has already reached its natural "theoretical" core: the notions of time arising from different humanitarian fields and traditions (physical, anthropological, philosophical, sociological). Here is the importance of the temporal position of the existential, as well as perhaps the even more difficult task of directing this issue to areas that only a hundred years ago were perceived as an indisputable space of the aesthetic. But photographers benefit from having a relatively small number of specialized books, written with a good and effective didactic setting, that build solid bridges between the philosophical phenomenological tradition and the innumerable plantations of images and their mimicry. Fragments of these bridges create the precondition for landing in this section - the possibility of debarking, of successfully forcing the flow of time. The flow of the elusive transformations of the matter into the "chronos", interrupted by the cutting (or piercing, as Bart says) of the *kairos* (for comparison with p. 20) – the forcing at the moment of origin, the appearance of the super-distant in the immediate vicinity of oneself, the moment of

awakening, of astonishment, of the decision, of the profane enlightenment or the moment of the shooting - this is the coordinate system of the thesis.

Chapter three - "Photographic interpretations of time", presents two independent analytical views of the author. One is a comprehensive study of the problematization of the concept of "found photography", derived directly from the post-Dadaist notion of "objet trouve". Here, along with focusing on specific descriptions of individual projects, the dissertation returns to the historical logic of development - this naturally leads to the legacy of Lautreamont (107) and the surrealists with the characteristic presence of Susan Sontag with her setting from *Melancholy Objects*. In this interpretive "nest" are placed the experience of Tihomir Stoyanov, literally renewing the search for random (unnecessary, unrecognized,) photograph by surrealists, hand-embroidered photographs of Carolle Benitah, intertextual projects by William Mokrinski, David Shouder's visualization of places of blockage, the search for those "bugs" in which memory "jumps", began to combine into a mechanical arbitrariness. The section continues with the presentation of the conceptual projects of Thomas Hauser, Joachim Schmid, etc. For this purpose, the thesis identifies a segment of the issues of futuristic experiments and reflection of Arturo Bragaglia and in the conceptual logic of this segment arranges the projects of Klaus Rinke, Roman Opalka and the autobiographical perspective of the current time in Sonya Stankova's project *In Mom's Home*.

As partial shortcomings of the dissertation work can be pointed out insufficient internal structure of the individual chapters, some distraction of ideas and lack of concentration. Such defocusing is a result of the not very precisely defined topic – both “time” and “transformations” are not clarified and, accordingly, are not aimed at any single plan of understanding. Although the work often loses its clarity, Mariana Kamburova still coped with the great challenge of the topic and went her own way, finding the form in which to collect and arrange and successfully subordinate her scientific and professional foundations.

4. Scientific contributions

- The problem of temporal placement of the photographic image is one of the central focuses in the media reflection of this subject and at the same time represents an essential node in the cognitive potential of photography. Every attempt to understand and rethink it is a contribution, because it leaves traces of a subjective consciousness and reconfigures the content of the problem.

- A specific significant contribution of the work is the consolidation of the connection between the historical perspective of the presence of photography and its media - critical reflection. If so far these two areas of scientific interest in photography have been present, if not separately, then by means of already developed by significant theoretical works for their own purposes exemplary infrastructure, Mariana Kamburova's efforts bring together different in their intentions exemplary networks.

- Of contribution value is also the very release of the rich material from various photographic practices, which until now – at least in the Bulgarian receptive environment – has been available mainly for a specialized audience, and that is thanks to accidental promotional publications. In Mariana Kamburova's thesis, this material is placed in the logic and sequence of an essential interpretive problem.

- A novelty for the Bulgarian context is the interpretive focus on an entire range of phenomena of the conceptual photography, its rethinking in the context of the media and genre paradigm, as well as the functional subordination of the phenomena to the topic of the thesis.

Conclusion

Mariana Todorova Kamburova's dissertation *Time and Transformation in Photography* gives a good idea of her handling of the issues and thematic scope, as well as mastering the related scientific discourse and research practice. The presented work has a contribution value and on this basis I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the candidate the educational and scientific degree of Doctor and I confidently vote "in favor".

January 4, 2022

Prof Galina Lardeva, PhD