

OPINION

By Prof. Dr. Joanna Minkova Spassova-Dikova,

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on the candidature of Sen. Asst. Dr Josif Astrukov for acquiring the academic position of Associate Professor in *Film Studies, Film Art and Television* (Digital Technologies and Screen Images), professional direction 8.4 *Theater and Film Art*, published in State Gazette, issue 52 from 18.06.2024 for the needs of the Screen Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS

I know personally Dr. Josif Astrukov as a PhD student at the Institute of Art Studies from 2011 to 2014. Astrukov first studied "Medical Physics" at Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" from 1997 to 2002. He obtained his master's degree in film and television directing at NATFA in 2007. Since 2015 he has been holding the academic position of Senior Assistant in the Screen Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies.

Astrukov's research interests include screen arts; dance and cinema; multimedia performances; photography.

He is the author of the monographs *Photography as... 2023, Screen and Stage. New Multimedia Performances, 2023; VideoDance, 2015.*

The candidate has several publications in academic and specialized journals. As of 2018, 4 of them are in WoS and 4 in ERIH PLUS.

Dr. Astrukov has participated in the research projects "Performing and Screen Arts in Bulgaria - Research, Historical Compendium and Laboratory, in the framework of the project Building and Development of the Centre of Excellence Heritage.BG, contract number - BG05M20P001-1.001-00, 2021-2023 and *Post-totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema - Models and Identities*, National Science Fund, contract number - DN 20/4, 2017-2021.

Since 2017 - New Bulgarian University, lecturer at the departments of Design, Media and Communication, Photography, Master and Bachelor programs - seven courses in total.

2014-2020 - Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", lecturer at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, master's program "Production and Creative Industries".

Over the years Dr. Astrukov has completed the following projects:

Exhibitions	Short Films	Books/ Photo albums
2022 "Still Life"	2019 "Elusive"	
2018 "One"	2010 "A..."	2022 "DanCine project"
2017 "DanCine project"	2009 "Вода"	2017 "Разпилени мисли..."
2011 "СЪВРЕМЕНЕН ТАНЦ"	2006 "Run Out of You"	2003 "Вакуум"
2008 "НадписЪ"	2005 "Ние"	
2005 "Форма и слово"	2007 "Jam Session"	
	2006 "Прага 18"	
	2004 "Поглед в очите"	

He has worked on several film productions (Bulgarian and foreign) as a photographer and assistant. In 2024 he will celebrate 20 years of working with choreographers and dancers in the field of contemporary dance. Within their productions he has carried out various photographic projects, coverage of performances, videos. In collaboration with Petya Stoykova, in 2016 he produced two short dance films, *A Dream Come True* and *Another Dream Come True*, selected in the Open Horizons program of the Golden Rose Film Festival 2017.

Dr. Astrukov was awarded the First Prize - Competition for Young Researchers - 100 Years of Bulgarian Cinema - Facts, Practices, Reflections, Institute of Art Studies - BAS, 2015.

Dr. Astrukov's practical, creative and teaching experience contribute significantly to his achievements in scientific research.

The presented publications cover the required scientific metrics for the acquisition of the academic position "Professor" in the field of the required developments in the indicators B.3. - B.5. and Г.6. - Г.15. in the field of "Art" under the ADASRB.

He has submitted a habilitation thesis, the monograph *Photography as...*, 2023. The thesis is structured in 13 parts - an introduction and another 12 chapters with a total of 212 pages and one table and over 100 illustrations. The bibliography contains 17 sources in Bulgarian and 12 in English - 29 in total.

In the book, the author asks what photography is today. Popular culture? Is the amateur who takes photographs the creator or the consumer? To what extent can mass consumer photographs be called art? The monograph traces and analyzes the contemporary transformations of photographic images in the age of digitalization. The different types of transfer, from analogue to digital works, the evolving technological solutions over the years of digitalization and the corresponding changes affecting the result are systematized in detail. Many examples are shown from practice, both personal and from various published sources.

Many current phenomena in photography are presented and analyzed - photography as pop culture, the fleeting image, mixed forms between photography and cinema (video), stock photography, mass simulations of the old aesthetics, etc. They are examined both from a technological point of view and in a broader social aspect - images as part of contemporary communication, changing reception and attitudes and the culture of image consumption. Special attention is paid to contemporary generative platforms, the so-called "artificial intelligence", which has become topical in recent years. It traces the historical genesis of the concepts, the individual algorithmic solutions and the process by which neural networks are themselves trained to generate images. Many examples from practice are given to analyze the process in depth. The public debate on both the pros and cons of this technology and the possible future consequences is also commented on. An important aspect is the interdisciplinary approach to the issues, according to the contemporary model of digital arts today. The processes analyzed are dynamic - photography and technology do not stop their development and its multiple forms are constantly enriching each other without being mutually exclusive. Making sense of digitization from the 1990s to the present provides an opportunity for future art historical research in the field.

Another published monograph, which is not a habilitation thesis, is presented under the title *Screen and Stage. New Multimedia Performances*, 2023. This thesis is structured in 5 parts - an introduction and 4 more chapters, with a second chapter with 4 subchapters and a third chapter with five. One of them has two parts. The total volume is 136 pp. There is one diagram and nearly 50 illustrations. The bibliography contains over 80 sources. A number of these are from the internet.

The book traces the development and the attempts to mix screen and stage, from the emergence of cinematography, through the various technological steps and currents

in art, to contemporary digital multimedia performances, which are extremely hybrid in nature. Their purely technological dependence also determines their place in the text, along with the analysis of their modes of construction and possible perceptions of the audience. The text offers interesting parallels of the productions today, which, when related to the past, give the general picture of these works born from the intersection of the two arts of theatre and cinema.

This study systematizes for the first time the history and types of interactions of screen and performing arts, from the creation of cinema to contemporary interactive multimedia performances on real and virtual stage. The various attempts are traced chronologically, along with analysis and presentation of visual materials and sources. Contemporary technologies and concepts are explored, from their historical genesis to their contemporary uses and applications that make new multimedia performances possible - "interactivity", "virtuality", *motion capture/tracking*, "cyber performances", and the most general concept - "digital performance". The overall context and the general environment in which they are created and perceived are also analyzed. An essential part of the research is the scientific methodology created to systematize the types of performances according to their different characteristics - analyzed in terms of the creative process and the main channel of communication with the audience. Each type is presented with examples from the Bulgarian or international scene. Concepts such as "sound performances", "visual performances" - "interactive illusion", "interactive reality", "avatar performances", "virtual performances", "tele-performances" are introduced. The systematization is based on other established sources, but with many new phenomena added and commented on, especially in the dynamic digital environment. Technology is constantly evolving, which is analyzed in the final chapter on potential future directions and trends. The book is a foundation for future research developments.

The remaining articles and studies - 3 in number, plus 6 additional ones submitted for the competition – are diverse in nature but outline the broad spectrum of the candidate's research interests and his in-depth knowledge in various fields.

Some academic contributions of Dr. Astrukov have already been highlighted, but I would like to point out that I fully agree with the contributions pointed out by the candidate himself because of his research pursuits.

I would like to emphasize the relevance and interdisciplinarity of his research, which looks for intersections between the arts, the changes that occur in the various arts

with the development of modern technology. Dr. Astrukov's work is distinguished by its originality, innovation, creativity, ability to select and analyze the latest phenomena and trends in contemporary digital arts, mostly related to the spectator reception imposed massively by digital platforms, whose peculiar peak has proved to be the pandemic environment.

Among the topical themes addressed by the candidate is that of the lonely viewer. Unlike most contemporary researchers who focus solely on digital platforms and technologies as the root cause of this phenomenon, this issue is seen through the prism of many social processes that we have been observing for decades, the psychological effects of social networks as well as the overall environment of human relationships in the real and virtual world. All of these make up a kaleidoscope that we are confronted with every day on the digital screen. In parallel, Dr. Astrukov also follows the current developments in the field of contemporary dance and experimental cinema, whose intersections he has been exploring for more than a decade. The ever-changing new technologies in photography and the visual arts are also the subject of some of his recent publications - the topic of the so-called "artificial intelligence" is particularly important now. The specific scientific tools developed by Dr. Astrukov make it possible to follow the processes in an interdisciplinary perspective. They are all in constant development and change, as technologies and as authoring processes.

In view of the already highlighted qualities of Sen. Asst. Dr. Josif Astrukov as a researcher, practitioner, artist and educator in the field of photography, cinema, performative arts and digital technologies, as well as the contributing points in the presented materials, I give a positive evaluation and support his candidacy for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in *Film Studies, Film Art and Television (Digital Technologies of Screen Images)* at the Institute of Art Studies.

24. 10. 2024

Signature:

Prof. Dr. Joanna Spassova-Dikova

