

## OPINION

By prof. Martin Venets Dimitrov, PhD, *Department of Audiovisual Production, School of Screen Arts – Krastyo Sarafov National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts, major Film Studies, Film Art, and Television (Film and Television Cinematography)*

**Subject:** Dissertation submitted for acquiring a doctoral degree in professional field: 8.4. *Theatre and Film Arts, Major Film Studies, Cinema Art, and Television (Film and TV Cinematography)*

**Author of the dissertation:** Rosen Mladenov Mihaylov

**Dissertation title:** *New Means of Expression in Dance Theatre – Multimedia and Video*

**Academic supervisor:** prof. Dr. Lyudmil Hristov

### **Brief biographical data about the PhD student**

Rosen Mihaylov graduated Classical Ballet at the National School of Dance Art (NUTI) - Sofia, specialized in modern dance in the United States. In 1997 he won the International Scholarship of the American Dance Festival (ADF) for choreography. He has participated in a number of residency programs and seminars in contemporary dance, contact improvisation, choreography and composition, physical theater, etc. in London, Berlin, Zurich, New York, etc. Over the years, he has become one of the leading contemporary dancers and choreographers in Bulgaria. Master of Motion Picture Dramaturgy and has a bachelor's degree in film and TV Directing at the New Bulgarian University (NBU) - Sofia, as well as communication management at the College of Telecommunications and Posts - Sofia. Founder of the dance company *Heteropodi*.

The materials submitted by Rosen Mihaylov include the following documents:

- dissertation
- executive summary
- summaries of publications
- reference to the contributions

I have no comments on the documents provided.

### **I. General presentation of the dissertation**

The dissertation *New Means of Expression in Dance Theatre – Multimedia and Video* developed by the PhD student Rosen Mihaylov is relevant to the topic, with historical references from the history of dance to the present day and a specific practical orientation through the personal experience of the doctoral student.

The dissertation amounts to 223 pages, of which 190 pages. are focused on the subject. Introduction. Four chapters. Conclusion. Scientific Contributions, Annex of eleven pages. with rich illustrative material and bibliography. There are tables and graphs.

The executive summary is designed and written according to the requirements, and it accurately presents the essence of the doctoral work. The PhD student is diligent in his citations and uses sufficient grounds on which he builds and justifies his thesis.

## **II. Subject of the study and objectives:**

The emergence and formation of new means of expression in modern dance, translating them into the virtual environment through the aesthetics and theory of video shooting. Tracking the main stages of the development of dance theater, imposed by modern technological development and its renewal in the new space with a different artistic form – screen dance. The main goal is to track the change between classical and modern dance art, as well as to differentiate and aestheticize a new form such as camera dance.

## **III. Knowledge of the problem**

The author shows awareness of the state of the current research in this field, which is evident from the bibliographic list of Bulgarian and foreign sources included in the dissertation, as well as from the in-depth and critical analysis with competent comments to them.

## **IV. Research (creative) activity and results**

The dissertation, presented by Rosen Mihaylov, is the result of his long-standing and dedicated work on creating various dance activities - choreographies, performances, specific shots, and pursuits of ways of creating certain emotions for the viewer. What is noticeable in the title of the paper is “multimedia and video.” This is one of the reasons why the PhD student embarks on the study of new means of expression for creating a qualitatively different emotional visual result.

The introduction is the author's rationale why this work is needed, as the introductory part itself is made up of reflections and questions that the author asks, in order to find an answer in the rest of the material. The candidate, Rosen Mihaylov, aims at a study of whether the perception of dance in classical and modern form manages to fulfill the stated task to impress and create emotion in the viewer as a set of thoughtful and conceptual aesthetic transformation, along with the introduction of new and different means of expression.

Within the first and second chapters, the candidate reveals the historical, aesthetic, and philosophical reasons for the emergence of dance art. Dance allows performers to express their individuality and reveal themselves through their movement. Dance (movement or posture) is a source of inspiration and a means of self-expression. From the root cause of understanding the movement as a set of symbolic forms, the transmission of national traditions as a way of preserving the heritage of a culture, to the dramatic presentation of the choreographer's idea. The information is presented clearly, specifically with rich cited material and it is obvious that the dance as art is Mihaylov's calling. It is rare to write with love and emotion on a certain topic. In practice, this work is a kind of theoretical continuation of the choreographer's professional path. Dance is a language that expresses emotion and reaches the recipient without words. It creates mood, joy, passion, sadness, and all sorts of emotions only through the movement of the body and the mastery of space. Quite subtly, the author communicates with a written word and creates a sense of stage movement, dynamics, and immersion in time only through the presented material...

Chapter three *DANCING FOR CAMERA - Dance, Cinematography and Filming* is the core of the dissertation. In thirty-four pages, through a references, the dissertation justifies the dramaturgical and philosophical-aesthetic reasons for filming a dance. From the creation of the dance composition and the presentation on stage, to the ways of registering the action

itself. How does this nonverbal communicative communication, rhythmic and harmonious, as a way of expressing thoughts and feelings, differ from performing in front of a camera. Rosen Mihaylov's reasoning is logical and analytical. He specified the difference between literally registering a dance play and a specially shot screen dance performance, with its specificity: *Video-cinema shooting is not only documentary registration, nor clip art editing, but internal artistic-conceptual directorial and hyper seminal over-and-co-and-re-choreographing, which preserves the dance-choreographic object to the maximum extent credible and adequate, not only as a technology and mechanics of movement, but also as a kind of aesthetic expression in which it adds its characteristic additional and new nuance.*

If the dance for the stage is intended for a limited and dedicated audience in the hall, then the shot dance is intended for viewing and enjoyment by all viewers through the screen. In front of the camera, the main attention is paid to the visual presentation and communication through movements and visions in front of the stage image. Mechanically, dance in front of a camera or *screen dance* differs from traditional dance performances on stage in that it focuses on framing, composition, angles and viewpoints, light drawing, processing of the filmed material, editing with different dynamics that emphasize the expression of dancers / actors. Through this means of expression, the dance is created to express more abstract and experimental ideas that are difficult and even impossible to present on stage due to its specific choreography, which could not be recreated in a live performance. For example, Lea Anderson's *Sardines*, 1990, being a recording of a four-minute performance with only an upper point of view, cannot be perceived by the audience because of the inability to observe what is happening from this camera position. Another example is *Bloodsucker*, 2017, by *Anjali Dance Company*, where the camera is on stage and moves around the performers, constantly changing the shooting angle, dynamics and play with focus... *Hands*, 1995, with choreographer Jonathan Burroughs, where what happens on the screen in almost five minutes is only rendered through his hands, without the participation of his static body.

Due to the specifics of the scene, the perception of the audience is always in general, and it is only through light spots that a detail of the body can be emphasized, as is the case with the hands. Shooting in precise cinematic terms helps to suggest the director's idea quickly and specifically to the viewer. It is curious that the screen productions realized in this way offer a distinct experience of the art of dance. One of the reasons is that the camera, in fact the viewer, changes their perspective, throws away their physical presence and "climbs" on the stage. This is how they join the performance as a direct participant, who perceives what is happening and reflects... *This is how the wider boundaries of the art of screen dance beyond easily recognizable and unprepared spectator samples emerge.* (R.M.)

In the fourth chapter "Heterotopia & Heterochrony", the candidate presents two of his works - *The Waiting Room* and *6:16 p.m.* - a VR dance film (360° Video version of *The Waiting Room*). Admirations for Mihaylov, as it is not common for a PhD student to have the confidence to apply his practical works in an academic endeavor. *Dancing for camera is an original artistic filming carried out in the collaboration of three main figures choreographer, film director and cinematographer.* (R.M.)

The shooting of the show *The Waiting Room* is conducted in a classic documentary-coverage style, with two cameras with different plans - COMMON and CLOSE. They are located among the audience but are far from the stage. The impact of the filmed dance is more similar

to a spectator's observation. At moments chosen by Mihaylov, emphasis is placed on a movement with the second camera in portrait plans and with panoramic movements, while the first camera is entirely static and stationary. It recreates the viewer's point of view in front of the stage. In general, we have a registration of the wonderful spectacle, but this gives a rather informative idea of the event itself.

*6:16 p.m.* is a completely different piece, and, at that, it is experimentally successful. Although it is basically a video version of *The Waiting Room*, the way of shooting and overall realization is radically different. As well as the impact itself. Conceptually, *6:16 p.m.* is realized exactly in the form of *screen dance* - it is created not for the audience in front of the stage, but for spectators in front of the screen. The choreography has changed, for example, the dancers stand in a circle, around the camera and communicate with each other, while the viewer is already an active participant in the performance and can choose where to direct his "gaze". This is possible with the help of a camera with a 360-degree viewing angle. While the screen on which this dance is viewed retains its rectangular proportions, the viewer is "forced" to move the image frame to be able to capture everything that is happening on stage. In this way, Mihaylov creates another timeline of perception, that of the interactive viewer and creates a qualitatively new performance, because every viewing of a 360-degree video is the discovery of a new movement from another viewing angle. Dancers can convey their artistic expression in a more dynamic and engaging way. An innovative, attention-retaining, and thought-provoking work is created. Although presented as an experiment, *6:16 p.m.* is, for me, a type of screen sculpture for dance theater, which is curious and unconventional. Modern technology is an integral component of artistic experience. I would suggest paying more attention to the light atmosphere, contrasts, colors, and accents in subsequent VR dance projects, similarly to the way *The Waiting Room* was created.

## V. Contributions:

- The study is the first to pose the problem of philosophical-aesthetic and theoretically learned grounds for the emergence and establishment of new means of expression in modern dance in the context of the great artistic transformation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- The very concept of "modern dance" is reevaluated, which is considered in a broader theoretical sense, as a stylistically composed element.
- By presenting the main theoretical-artistic and philosophical-aesthetic features of *screen dance*, one arrives at the characterization and distinction of the concept of *camera dance*, which makes a correct analysis and an attempt to compile an up-to-date definition. It is traced in the field of personal experience through interpretative self-analysis in two projects - the performance *The Waiting Room* and the dance installation *Virtual Bodies*.
- A number of terms and concepts in the field of modern dance are clarified in detail, subjected to critical academic observation, and consolidated into a single theoretical system.

## VI. Conclusion:

The presented monographic work is a quality and worthy dissertation – with factual credibility, personal attitude, and accuracy of the presentation. The dissertation reveals a promising researcher with wonderful talents for academic activity.

I convincedly vote “yes”!

My proposal to the honorable scientific jury is to award Rosen Mihaylov the doctoral degree.

09.8.2023

prof. Dr. Martin Dimitrov