

REVIEW

of the dissertation thesis

PRAXEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF REFLEXIVITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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REVIEWER:

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The dissertation thesis *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective*, submitted for defence in Professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture, totals 241 pages. It consists of an Introduction, two main parts, each with three chapters, a Conclusion and four Appendices. The bibliography contains 144 titles in Bulgarian, 25 in English, 8 in French and 1 in Russian, which are indeed used in the text of the dissertation. The dissertation thesis is supplemented with an Extended Summary that includes a correct list of contributions by the study and a bibliographic description of six publications related to the theme of the dissertation. All formal requirements for the defence of a dissertation thesis have been duly fulfilled. I am not in a conflict of interest with the author, Milena Georgieva Tasheva.

In essence, this dissertation thesis is an extensive, ambitious study of the problem of practical reflexivity in two main sociological paradigms – in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and in ethnomethodology – from which Tasheva attempts to draw her own synthetic concept of practical reflexivity (in Part One of her

dissertation). The stake is raised even higher in Part Two, where – building primarily upon the works of Deyan Deyanov – she attempts to elaborate a “practical logic of molecular performative interactions” in which the “logicity” of practice is not imported, but is instead grasped as an effect of immanent practical reflexivity.

The “staging of a dialogue that is necessary but ... that has never taken place before, between Bourdieu’s and ethnomethodology’s visions of reflexivity” (p. 13) is a contribution in itself. What’s more, Tasheva’s work with practical reflexivity is a careful reconstruction and analysis of different layers of the meaning of this concept, which are sedimented in the works of Bourdieu and the ethnomethodologists. She starts by analyzing the general requirement for reflexivity of sociology, a reflexivity which contains the traditional classical meaning of “reflection” as a requirement that the social scientist be aware of his or her own position and dispositions but, nevertheless, has a somewhat different meaning in Bourdieu’s sociology – since the social scientist is part of the social game, “reflexive sociology is not ‘pure reflection’, it is a ‘craft’, an ‘art’ (in the words of Durkheim) – ‘pure practice without theory’” (p. 28). Thus, another general thesis of Bourdieu’s – the requirement for ontological complicity between habitus and habitat, for aligning the scientist’s subjective expectations to the objective structures in the field of observation – acquires a nonclassical, to some extent “postmodern”, loose meaning: reflexivity seems to be practical cunning, adaptability to the environment, bodily sense and habit of vigilance about changes. It is precisely along those lines that Tasheva changes the understanding of reflexivity, increasingly distancing it from the idea of rationality and clear self-consciousness so as to bring it closer to unconscious, reflex behaviour: “reflex reflexivity”, as she puts it. A habit that has sunk beyond the light of consciousness, turning into an a priori reflex.

The idea of practical reflexivity is revised even more substantially by the ethnomethodologists. Whereas in Bourdieu it is still a requirement addressed at the scientist, at the subject of observation, and this requirement is realized as formation of a subjective practical sense, in Garfinkel, Sacks and their followers reflexivity is not a function (sense, reflex, etc.) of the observer, it is a function of practice itself. “There is no escape and refuge from reflexivity, say the ethnomethodologists, precisely because of the inclusion and exposure of the body in a dynamically changing world that is immediately given not to the consciousness, but first to the senses and is therefore sensuously sensed, i.e. had, encompassed and understood

sensuously, not consciously” (p. 64). Perhaps here Tasheva could have deepened her analysis by showing that in the ethnomethodologists, the alignment and disalignment is no longer between subjective expectation (*habitus*) and environment (*habitat*) or, if I provocatively use the even older terms, between “subject” and “object” – it is between one or other routine and the indexicality of practice.

In fact, this is why – due to insufficient, in my view, recognition of the extent of desubjectivation to which reflexivity is subjected in ethnomethodology – when she formulates her own understanding of practical reflexivity Tasheva is still quite close to Bourdieu’s vocabulary: “Practical reflection as an a priori reflex is ‘insinuated’ both in the conditions of ‘immediate adaptation’ and upon its fractalization – at ‘the critical moments of disintegration and disarray’. Upon disruption of the ‘consonance’ between *habitus* and *habitat*, at ‘moments of hesitation’ and ‘hysteresis’, reflexivity as a corrective effort, as a ‘responsive potential’, works for establishing/restoring the complicity between the body (of the football player, for example) and the micro-habitat. Its operation consists in the implicit ‘judgements’ about the just-performed action and ‘correction’ of the wrong position of/towards *à venir* as ‘first movements’, as an a priori reflex, so that what the body has to perform right now is immanent to its internal capacities and relevant to the concrete requirements of the game that is unfolding here, now, and thus. The body thinks, i.e. reflects, through activity by means of which it simultaneously reflects and is reflected, embodies and is embodied in the *habitat*.” (p. 69)

In any case, however, what we see here is extremely careful work on conceptual (re)construction. By the way, the analysis of the logic of gift-exchange, inscribed in this first part of the dissertation, also proposes an interesting perspective: the supposition that a third participant, who has remained invisible to analysts until now, is a condition of possibility of gift-exchange. To my mind, this interesting thesis needs further specification.

Whereas Part One of the dissertation introduces us in a wonderful way to the complex problematics of practical reflexivity, Part Two is most ambitious – it seeks to elaborate “a practical logic of molecular performative interactions”, i.e. an instrument that allows empirical analysis of the effects of reflexivity in our practices: that is, which monitors both the effects of “logicity”, of inferability of a performative from other performatives, and the effects of alogical – wholly

contextual, ad-hoc indexical – realignment of the habits and routines that are the conditions of possibility of practico-logical inferability.

Here I must stress that the doctoral candidate is still far from outlining a clear practico-logical strategy. Although the proposed version rests, in a stable way, on Harvey Sacks's conversation analysis and Kolyo Koev's more general interpretation of the logic of practices in an ethnomethodological perspective as well as on Deyan Deyanov's works on nonclassical transcendental logic, the field of study has not been sufficiently mastered – what's more, precisely with regard to one of the central terms, "performative". Austin himself is reconstructed somewhat superficially and, moreover, with a central error that is repeated several times in the dissertation: "in his speech act theory Austin distinguishes performative utterances from the so-called descriptives and assertives by the characteristic illocutionary force which the latter lack" (p. 118). Such a statement does not take into account Austin's later lectures, in which he abandons the performatives/assertives division and shows that all utterances are performatives because all have illocutionary force: the new division, as it is well-known, is locutives (formerly assertives), illocutives and perlocutives. A more in-depth inquiry into the theory of performativity and the history of this problematic would have also allowed avoiding the appealing but quite naïve division of performatives into discursive and bodily ones, where the concept of "bodily performative" is even listed as a contribution by the study. Actually, already Derrida (in "Signature Event Context") and, later, Judith Butler blurred the boundary between bodily and verbal as well as between act and event, therefore today "performance" invariably combines both. A widening of the author's competences in the field of postanalytic philosophy and above all in the different versions of speech act theory after Austin (Searle, Cavell, etc.) will certainly allow more careful construction of the project on a "practical logic of molecular performative interactions". Incidentally, the term "interactions", added by Tasheva, as well as her essentially ethnomethodological, systematic insistence on the unique adequacy of practico-logical analyses to the eventual context are a good addition to the otherwise also good idea of Todor Petkov and Deyan Deyanov about elaborating a "molecular performative logic". What we have seen so far in the construction of this field, however, seems to be only an initial sketch. Which is certainly not to say that the effort to develop this field isn't worth it.

In conclusion – beyond all critical remarks – I want to expressly point out that what we have here is a dissertation thesis that addresses, at a very high scientific

level, complex and important – still open – problems and very often finds solutions to them in a convincing manner. It is precisely because of this scientific audacity that the dissertation also provokes one to argue with it. With great respect for the scientific audacity but also for the high competences demonstrated by the doctoral candidate, I firmly declare that I will **vote FOR awarding Milena Georgieva Tasheva the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD)** in the area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture, for her dissertation thesis *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective*.

Sofia

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Sincerely,

Prof. PhD Dimitar Vatsov