

STATEMENT

**By Assoc.Prof. PhD Svetlana Temelkova Sabeva
The Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**

on the dissertation thesis of Milena Georgieva Tasheva

entitled *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective*

Area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences

Professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture

Doctoral programme: Sociology

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student; 2. Actuality of the theme

The dissertation of Milena Tasheva is located within an interdisciplinary field that has formed in the last decades of the 20th century, the field of so-called praxeologies that offer not just a critique of what they define as their opposite – of ‘theoreticism’ or ‘theoreticist attitude’ – but also an overall rethinking of social ontology, of the methodology and the analytic style of social research. As in every scientific ‘turn’, the work in this field is as attractive as it is risky – because of its diffuse boundaries and multidirectional problematizations where the danger of ‘shortcuts’ lurks, but also because of its polemic style in which, to paraphrase a formulation of Edmund Husserl about Galileo’s genius of discovery. Every ‘opening move’ is inevitably a ‘concealing move’. Milena Tasheva’s study has not merely avoided these risks. Among its remarkable qualities are: 1) offering of a heuristically and methodologically precise work on a distinctly constructed research object – the embodied practical reflexivity in the form in which it is exercised primarily in the social relations that follow the paradigm of ‘the gift’; 2) in the course of this work – in continuing the tradition of productive synthesis between the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, ethnomethodology and the theory of practical logic, as established in the last decades in the circle of the Institute for Critical Social Studies and the Department of Sociology and Human

Sciences in the University of Plovdiv – the author succeeds in manifesting and approbating an original research orientation – the so-called ‘practical logic of molecular performative interactions’. Behind this achievement, there stands a long and hard road that sometimes takes the form of a labyrinth of sociological and logical problematizations, of rethinking theses that have already been formulated, of multiplying ‘unruly’ theoretical and empirical objects. Maybe this road is best defined in a wording by Milena Tasheva herself – an incessant ‘self-corrective effort’ of the scientific habitus in relation to both the self-developing object and the authors and paradigms thanks to which one can practice ‘thinking through’. These are also my personal impressions of the long years of personally knowing Milena Tasheva whose research talent was evident as early as in the student seminars – her uncompromising depth and intellectual honesty (also before herself) in the work of science.

The dissertation can be categorized into fundamental research that also has applied character, and become inscribed very successfully into the current international debate on praxeological orientations in social sciences.

3. Knowledge of the problem; 4. Methodology of the study; 5. Characteristic and evaluation of the dissertation thesis and the contributions

The dissertation’s volume is 241 pages, including two main parts consisting of three chapters each, a conclusion, four appendices with analyses of empirical cases, and a bibliography.

The first part constructs the object of study – the embodied practical reflexivity – by a dialogue between the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and ethnomethodology. The first chapter presents basic points of Bourdieu’s conception of sociological reflexivity as a feature of scientific habitus, in putting three original accents. After an exposition on the ‘sociology of sociology’, well familiar in the literature, the accent shifts to the reflexivity as thematized in the theory of practice, which allows to single out the problem of the ‘logic of practice’ and the stakes of the theory of practical logic at which Bourdieu only hinted (and which was developed mainly in the studies of Deyan Deyanov) and also to the later socioanalytic conception of Bourdieu of ‘reflex reflexivity’. The third accent of the reconstruction is key to the whole dissertation – on the theory of the gift and the possibility to put it under the ‘logical microscope’. This permits the author to reformulate the gift from a symbolic form into a practical-logical form and define it as a ‘molecular performative’ (p. 38). In the same time, Tasheva develops her justified critique to Bourdieu’s lapses in his analysis of ‘the practical temporality of the gift’. The second chapter proposes a profound reconstruction of the late

ontological conception of Bourdieu, as developed mainly in *Pascalian Mediations*, of practical reflexivity as a constitutive trait not only of the scientific habitus but of the system of dispositions of every agent in a field (habitat). The accent here is: 1) on the ‘unpardonableness and dynamism’ of the ontological complicity between habitus and habitat, which is a condition of possibility of the unfolding of practical reflexivity as an ‘a priori form’ becoming active in situations of ‘hesitations’, ‘misfires’ and ‘hysteresis’ (lag) of the habitus but remaining ‘turned to the practice rather than to the one who performs it’ (p. 60); and 2) on the ‘socialized body’ conceived not as an ‘impediment’ but as an ‘instrument of knowledge’, by which Bourdieu radically overcomes the philosophical and practical dualisms of modernity. Here Milena Tasheva also proposes her interpretation of the thesis of the ‘incorporation’ of the world, insisting that the accent must be ‘not so much on the “material inclusion” – the “exposedness” of the body – than on the *consequences* of it. “Through” Bourdieu this would permit an analysis of social structures’ (p. 61). The third chapter presents ‘reflexivity as a problem before ethnomethodology’, dwelling mostly on the late conceptions of ‘embodied reflexivity’ in the ethnomethodological research on labour. The thesis of ‘production of embodied object’ articulated to ‘ways of the body’ and ‘material orderliness’ is mirrored in Bourdieu’s notion of reflex reflexivity.

In the second part of the dissertation, the theme of practical reflexivity is developed with a sophisticated set of logical instruments, being simultaneously situated in the context of the ‘logic of molecular performatives’ and differentiated from it, since an accent is sought on ‘molecular performative interactions’ (p. 97). With this interactionist moment, the author aims to emphasize the problem of ‘actual conjoining’ of those identities of agents that are a ‘function of a situational occupation of social positions in symmetrical or asymmetrical “pairs of relations”’ (p. 98), and by that, to refer to two other research fields – that of post-Bourdieuian socioanalysis that is interested in the pathogenic environments of everyday life and the fractalization of personal identities, and that of the sociology of inequalities. In this part, two key problematizations are deployed, specifying the concept of practical reflexivity by the logical conceptions of ‘performativity’ and ‘molecularity’ and including the analysis of a large number of cases. The classical Austinian notion of ‘discursive performativity’ (‘an action different from mere saying of something’ – p. 109) is expanded – thanks to the dialogue with relevant themes from ethnomethodology, Bourdieu, and the nonclassical transcendental logic – in a few dimensions: 1) up to the layer of ‘implicit performativity’ developed through ‘indexicals’ that are analysed not just as indexical expressions but also as ‘logical forms’; 2) up to the layer of the explicit and implicit

‘performativity of the body’. The second practical-logical conceptualization is designated by the term ‘molecularity’ (under the influence also of Harvey Sacks’s idea of ‘molecular sociology’) and it regards how the ‘assembling’ of a situation takes place in ‘an ordered sequence’, drawing inspiration from the conversational ‘sequence analysis’ and from the analysis of practical inference in the nonclassical transcendental logic.

The four Appendices outline the empirical archive of the ‘practical logic of molecular performative interactions’, testing this set of instruments on different cases of fractalized social experience.

The evaluation of the contributions of this polyparadigmatic study, so remarkable in its architectonic depth and heuristics, can no doubt proceed along several lines, emphasizing to different degrees the sociological and logical problematics that are integrated into it. In accordance with my competence, I would first put forward the contributions related to a few innovative theoretic syntheses that Milena Tasheva proposes.

First: Critique of the theory of the gift of Pierre Bourdieu and reformulation of the gift from a symbolic form into a practical-logical form as a ‘molecular performative’, which permits essential traits of the relations based on mutual giving (discreet acts, insecurity, strategic games with time etc.) to be studied through their practical-logical correlates. This heuristic move is also in the basis of Milena Tasheva’s proposal of formalization and operationalization of the practices of giving which, on the one hand, can be recognized as a structuring principle of the social in its historical variations, and on the other, to be explored endogenously.

Second: Productive assimilation and expansion of the logical analysis of performativity in John Austin with ethnomethodological and practical-logical techniques, as well as justification of the new concept of ‘bodily performativity’ understood as an ‘inference in a practical syllogism’. Along with the thesis of ‘implicit performativity’, permitting to mark the limits of everyday situations, and the exemplary analyses conducted with remarkable methodological precision (especially of the Hugh Capet case), these syntheses make it possible to deploy the research stylistics of the so-called ‘practical logic of molecular interactions’.

Third: Profound reconstruction of structural analogies and differences between the notion of practical reflexivity in Pierre Bourdieu and ethnomethodology, as well as of the parallel concepts of embodiment of the social order.

The required presentation of the ‘knowledge of the problem’ and the ‘methodology of the study’ was already done above.

6. Evaluation of publications and the personal contribution of the doctoral student; 7.

Extended summary

Milena Tasheva has appended six publications on the theme of the dissertation in referenced Bulgarian periodicals (two of which are forthcoming in the *Kayros* online journal) prepared in the period of 2004 to 2019 and marking different stages of the development of her work on the dissertation. They are all original and reflect her own scientific contributions.

The extended summary has 32 and it is produced with precision and clarity. The formulation of contribution moments of the study correspond to the actual achievements.

8. Recommendations for the future use of the dissertation's contributions and results

In the genre of recommendation for future development, I would permit myself a remark regarding one of the most general and repeatedly stated points in the dissertation, according to which the practical logic of molecular performative interactions is developed with the ambition to be the 'organon of socioanalysis'. In order to make good this design, in my view, it must face a radicalization of the problem of the limits of the conception of embodied practical reflexivity as defended here. I mean not just an expansion of the empirical archive that should include both everyday and subclinical and clinical phenomena in which the body stops being an 'instrument' but stands as an 'impediment' of knowledge, and however much the agent stands 'turned to the world', this world offers him neither doxic truths, nor new impressions, nor a passing of time. The question is one of principle: doesn't an analytic of the body, that conceives of **the** body as nothing else than an incorporation of a social order and designates it as a 'socialized body', become discrepant precisely with the experience of the body? Is it indeed able to analyze the architectonics and polydimensionality of embodiment itself, respectively its constitutive fragility and possible dissociations? In my view, a phenomenologically and psychoanalytically analytic of the 'norm of embodiment' would establish a far more multidimensional 'dialectic' between actual and habitual body, between body scheme and body image, between intentional and socially designated body, between the way in which the body is in the world and the way in which it is a 'zero point' for the world, etc. Thus the 'place' of embodies singularity would be identified. Only then behind the gloss of 'socialized body' one could reveal the experience of **bodies** and forms of intercorporeality that are the proper theme of socialysis. In an analogous line, my other remark is directed to the other pole of the analytic of molecular performative interactions that views the molecularity of the situation through symmetrical and asymmetrical 'pairs of

relata'. In order to grasp the affective dynamics of social differentiations that is important to socioanalysis, it seems to me that the 'pairs of relata' are not to be taken as a static reality but one must task genetically how do precisely these or those pairings come about, which are neither pre-given nor contingent. By that I mean to stress that the problem field of socioanalysis, although overlapping, doesn't entirely coincide with that of praxeology. In conclusion to this remark, my question comes: doesn't the thesis that 'for overcoming hurtness, what is needed is only an 'obsessive persistence' for turning (self-)correctivity into a reflex acting 'not ex post on the opus operatum but a priori on the modus operandi' ' (Extended Summary, p. 25) rely too much on that 'activist interpretation of everyday life' whose limits Kolyo Koev revealed a few decades ago?

9. Conclusion

The dissertation thesis conforms to the whole of criteria and requirements for the acquisition of a doctoral degree as set in the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the regulations of that Act's application and the regulations of the Paissiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. **Based on the merits and contributions of the dissertation thesis *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective*, as presented in this Statement, I convincingly advise that Milena Georgieva Tasheva be awarded the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' in the area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture, doctoral programme of Sociology (Sociology and Human Sciences).**

18.06.2019

Plovdiv

Author of the statement: Assoc.Prof. PhD Svetlana Sabeva