

Opinion

by: Prof. PhD Liliana Deyanova

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on: dissertation thesis for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD)

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

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

Doctoral programme: Sociology

Author: Milena Georgieva Tasheva

Thesis: *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective*

Supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. PhD Stoyka Penkova, Department of Sociology and Human Sciences, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski**

1. Description of the submitted materials and biographical data about the doctoral candidate

As a member of the Scientific Jury for defence of Milena Tasheva’s dissertation thesis (appointed by Order No. P33-2184 of 8 May 2019 of the Rector of Plovdiv University), I received *all* materials required for the defence of the thesis under the Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and Article 36 (1) of Plovdiv University’s Regulations on Academic Staff Development.

The text of the dissertation thesis *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective* totals 241 pages, structured in two parts, six chapters, an introduction, a conclusion, and four appendices

. The bibliography comprises a total of 178 sources (of which 144 titles in Bulgarian, 25 in English, eight in French and one in Russian). The dissertation thesis is **supplemented** with six **publications related to its theme.**

The 31-page **Extended Summary** presents the content of the dissertation thesis by chapter and describes the main object, tasks, subject and content of the study. It includes a **self-assessment of the dissertation’s contributions.**

Milena Tasheva (née Makaveeva) graduated with a Master's Degree in Sociology from Plovdiv University. After winning a competition, she was admitted to a full-time doctoral programme at Plovdiv University. For years, she was part-time assistant in fundamental academic disciplines, a team member of research projects (such as *"I have no one to turn to"* – *Socioanalytical Dimensions of Vulnerability*, or the Institute for Critical Social Studies' *Contradictions of the Legacy*). She has taken part in research seminars and prestigious scientific conferences, including international ones. The present dissertation thesis is the product of an independent doctoral programme at Plovdiv University's Department of Sociology and Human Sciences (where the author is currently a full-time assistant after winning a competition).

2. Characteristics and assessment of the dissertation thesis and its contributions

The goals of the author of this thesis are to understand "the logic of practice" as different from "the logic of logicians", "the logical logic" and to introduce main problems and concepts of the "practical logic" that is so necessary for any sociological inquiry. That is why the main object of the study is defined as "developing the problem of practical reflexivity" (practical reflexivity as a "praxeological problem" and as a "reflex reflexivity actually unfolding in practice", as "socialized corporeality" (Extended Summary, p. 8).

The original conceptions and precise analytic grid that have crystallized here are the result of very long (almost two-decade-long), thematically deepening – but invariably purposeful – research and talented interpretation of authors, topics, debates, and concrete empirical applications of methods that are of significant importance to sociological theory (including in the latter's capacity as a methodology of human and social sciences).

The author has a subtle sense – a "practical sense" – for the possibilities and limits of validity of the main, sensitive to "the endogenous logic of practice", theoretical paradigms between which she stages theoretical dialogues (the so-called "method of thinking through"). Especially productive – and fundamental to her study – is the parallel between the understanding of "reflexivity" in Bourdieu's reflexive sociology and the analyses of "embodied reflexivity" in Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (from "ethno-methods" to "embodied reflexivity") is particularly productive. Also key and innovative, however, are the parallels between Austin and Bourdieu (revealing the performative character of social action), between Bourdieu and Mauss (revealing the logic of gift-exchange and, generally, of "symbolic exchange of goods"), Sacks's "molecular sociology" and Garfinkel's ethnomethodological critique of conventional social sciences, etc.

Starting from Bourdieu's "third way in sociology" and its systematic, long-accumulated interpretation in the works and "scientific habitus" of a community of researchers (at, above all, the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"), Milena Tasheva presents original analyses of Bourdieu's theory of "practical sense" and his related theory of "non-coincidence of theory and practice" (a theory whose methodological imperative is to reintroduce – through a reflexive "theoretical practice" – the time into theory). As my questions in this brief "Opinion" are mostly about those first parts of the dissertation thesis and *main contributions* of Milena Tasheva, I will quote a key passage from Bourdieu's last lectures at the Collège de France. Part of this passage is quoted several times in the dissertation thesis because Bourdieu's "praxeologization" of the very concept of reflexivity is central to the latter. It is about a specific form of epistemological vigilance termed "objectivating the subject of objectivation": "To be able to apply to their own practice the objectivating techniques that they apply to the other sciences, sociologists have to convert reflexivity into a disposition constitutive of their scientific habitus, a *reflexivity reflex*, capable of acting not *ex post*, on the *opus operatum*, but *a priori*, on the *modus operandi*" (Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 89). The thus understood "reflexivity reflex" is employed also in a well-argued, and constantly elaborated in the course of the study, critical discussion of (Bourdieu's) concept of "ontological complicity of habitus and habitat" (habitus and field). This "ontological complicity" is interpreted very subtly and innovatively by Milena Tasheva as "dynamic and unpre-given", "ecstatic", etc.

I will mention very briefly – because of the practical logic of the administrative genre "Opinion" (its power to name and, thereby, to confer identity and to sanction deviations from the latter – which, by the way, is yet another main topic discussed precisely in the dissertation study) – just a few more of Milena Tasheva's magnificent analyses and theses. For they are truly contributive to studies in the field of practical logic, while also contributing to the development of socioanalysis as a theory that starts from, but is not confined to, Bourdieu and that opens up possibilities for a therapeutic practice:

The theory of "molecular performative interactions" and the identification and illustration of "bodily performatives" in their capacity as inferences in what already Aristotle called "practical syllogisms" are key to understanding the possibilities opening up for future theoretical and empirical studies in this avant-garde and ever more topical field of practical logic.

The brilliant analysis of what Mauss calls “atom of gift-exchange”, i.e. the three obligations – to give, to receive, to reciprocate – and the distinction made between “preliminary return gift” and “preliminary gift” is also a description of the functions of the so-called *third participant in gift-exchange*.

It is exactly at this point, however, that we can ask ourselves, not just because we have reached the section on

3. Questions and comments

Isn't a similar “*third*” party, which has the functions of the *third participant in gift-exchange*, also involved in the other kinds of exchange – market exchanges in the so-called modern society? (It is probably no accident that in one of Bourdieu's last monographs the section devoted to “the twofold truth of the gift” is followed by a section on “the twofold truth of labour”; or that some of Bourdieu's most remarkable analyses are of the transition from traditional to modern economic exchanges and of the respective “temporalities”.) And aren't there some sort of more general logics of “symbolic forms”, in which Bourdieu was interested very early on, even before he wrote his “Postface” to his translation of Erwin Panofsky's classic book about the “linear time”, dominant in modernity, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*? I will explain part of the predicate self-evidences and enthymemes in this question of mine.

I'm asking myself what concept of “time” and even of the “ontological complicity” of habitus and habitat, habitus and field, the author works with in some of the analyses of “time” and the “temporality of practice” in her dissertation. In asking myself this question, I have in mind, for example, Bourdieu's “Economic Practices and Temporal Dispositions”, an analysis that is indeed key to understanding the premodern practical sense of time and the specific modality of ‘retentional-protentional relations’. It is listed in the bibliography, but seems not to have been used in the dissertation; otherwise it wouldn't have been possible to say that “Bourdieu doesn't retain the practical functions of time” (Dissertation Thesis, p. 16).

I can enumerate more “enthymemes” in my question, but I will mention only the most important one: Milena Tasheva's incorrect interpretation of “field” as “context of action”. She says, for example, that her analysis seeks “to overcome the high structural level of the objective positions that structure the field as a social context of action”; she introduces the concept “microhabitat”, etc. But Bourdieu underlines that he has introduced the concept of field – as a correlation of forces – to counter the vague concepts “milieu”, “context of action”. The field is a correlation of unequal forces (by the way, in the dissertation the concept

“inequality” appears only in the footnotes, while “symbolic violence” is missing altogether; yet both of those concepts would have adds even more depth to the descriptions of “socialized corporeality”). Bourdieu doesn’t have, of course, a unified concept of “field”, but this topic is irrelevant here. “Field” (or “habitat”) is not a high or low level, it is a method of thinking ... And the over-orthodoxialiation in such cases of the otherwise beloved heterodox Bourdieu doesn’t help understanding the the almost miraculous encounter between the habitus and a field, the “magic of ontological complicity”. Understanding for which Milena Tascheva’s dissertation thesis has undoubtedly an extremely important role.

4. Overall review of the publications related to the dissertation thesis and of the candidate’s personal involvement

The candidate has submitted a list of six publications directly related to the problematic of her dissertation studies and her central theses. They are also parts of her doctoral dissertation’s text. They are no doubt the product of personal research, written personally by her, even when published as articles by the author in publications of collective studies.

5. The author’s **self-assessment** of the contributions of her dissertation thesis is realistic. The **Extended Summary** is written according to the requirements. I understand the reasons for including more than fifty titles in the bibliography, but I think that only the key titles or the ones directly cited in the dissertation could have been listed.

6. Personal impressions and recommendations for future use of the dissertation results

I know Milena Tasheva (née Makaveeva) as a student of mine and author of an original diploma thesis on a topic related to that of her present dissertation thesis. I have taken part in joint seminars and studies with this very talented, meticulous and carefully generalizing scholar, and I have every reason to be certain that her dissertation thesis is ready (with some minor editing) for publication as a book (that will be helpful also to students and doctoral students).

7. Conclusion:

Considering the above-listed and other contributions of the dissertation thesis *Praxeological dimensions of reflexivity: a sociological perspective* as well as the academic, scholarly, and moral qualities of its author, I propose to the members of the Scientific Jury that we vote to award 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.

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