

## OPPONENT'S REVIEW

of a dissertation thesis for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (Ph.D.)

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

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

Doctoral program: Sociology

**Thesis:** PRAXEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF REFLEXIVITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Author:** Milena Georgieva Tasheva

Reviewer: Prof. DSc. Kolyo Koev

### 1. Personal impressions

I have known Milena Tasheva since her student years (mainly from the courses I have taught at Plovdiv University). Even at that time, she stood out against her colleagues displaying a remarkable sensitivity to details in the interpretation of sociological cases and a taste for the unconventional analytical decisions. Later she transferred those qualities to her academic work, showing an exceptional consistency in her sociological development. From early on the author announced her interest for corporeality in social practice combining it with an interest for the so-called logic of molecular performatives. Parallel to her research work more than ten years M. Tasheva conducts seminars in different disciplines, connected to her interests, thus testing her ideas in her immediate work with students.

### 2. Topicality and innovativeness

The thesis announces an orientation to the identification of still unrecognized, "undeciphered" by contemporary medical and therapeutic practices forms of social suffering and social vulnerability, with a special accent on the idea of socioanalysis, outlined by P. Bourdieu but left undeveloped in his works. The socio-analytical perspective understood both as a device for disclosing new forms of everyday uncertainties and their interpretation has been elaborated in the dissertation as "socioanalysis of self-inheritance". M. Tasheva introduces new and fresh accents into this analytical approach, intensively developed in the Department of Sociology and the Sciences of Man at Plovdiv University. I would stress the persistent ambition of the author to systematically retain in the frames of that approach

“the singularity and uniqueness of everyday modes of experiencing social vulnerability and the suffering generated in and by society itself” (Summary, p. 7).

Thus the innovative character of the work might be seen both at the fundamental methodological level and at an empirical level (as a toolkit for practical work with above-mentioned forms of everyday suffering), contributing eventually to the development of new social-therapeutic practices.

### 3. Literature review and knowledge

The central theoretical focus of the dissertation, the problems of reflexivity and particularly of practical reflexivity, implies concentration on authors and social-scientific traditions which have played a critical role for the emergence of the so-called praxeological turn in the humanities and social sciences. M. Tasheva reasonably takes the works of J. Austin, P. Bourdieu, H. Garfinkel, H. Sacks, etc. as a horizon of her own analyses. Compelling evidence of her deep knowledge of the field and the discussions on reflexivity is the way the author “pairs” the ideas of different thinkers, for instance: reflex reflexivity (Bourdieu) and ethnomethodologically interpreted (non-egological) reflexivity (Garfinkel); performative logic (Austin) – socialized corporeality (Bourdieu) – molecular sociology (Sacks). Hence – the important inferences: “practical reflexivity” in the first case, “multiplace performative interaction” in the second.

Here I would like to stress something which is rarely seen on Bulgarian academic soil: brilliant knowledgeability of Bulgarian works, related to the dissertation, adequate (not merely ceremonial) referring to relevant authors and their ideas, clear positioning in the achievements of others with distinct discrimination of the own contribution in the context.

### 4. Methodology

Aims and methods are clearly described, the author represents the ideas and knowledge with sufficient theoretical background. Methods of research work are appropriate for the aims and hypothesis formulated in the thesis. I would even say that the dissertation exceeds the requirements of a Ph.D. thesis: it aims at *renovating the methodology* used and achieving *innovative theoretical results*. The analysis evolves by way of the so-called “thinking-through” – a technics, which makes possible obtaining ideas from dialogues, staged between different thinkers which result from their thought dispositions but go beyond their borders at the same time. The dialogues between P. Bourdieu and H. Garfinkel. M. Mauss and the Conversation Analysis, J. Austin and H. Sacks fulfill such a function in the unfolding of the consecutive parts.

## 5. Structure

The dissertation consists of Introduction, two parts, six chapters, two interim recapitulations, Conclusion and 4 appendices. It develops around several overlapping problem circles, described in the thesis as a “progressive narrowing” from the wider context of the socio--analysis of self-inheritance through the logic of molecular performatives to the practical logic of molecular performative interactions. The idea of practical reflexivity emerges from the context of those three topical circles.

The driving force behind both parts of the dissertation is the above-mentioned dialogue(s), staged between the main protagonists. *The first part* is grounded on the dialogue between Bourdieu’s understanding of reflexivity and ethnomethodological perspective toward reflexivity as situated members’ work. The key concept here (and hereinafter) is “reflex reflexivity”. First, the question of “transforming the objectivizing reflexivity into the professional reflex of the scientific habitus” is considered which refers to the way the systematically developed (“up to a maniacal degree”) reflexivity of the researcher sediments in a method. Further, the reflexivity of the scientific habitus (a key topic in Bourdieu's methodology) is contrasted against practical reflexivity, which displays its own temporality, irreducible to scientific practice. The incapability to retain this temporality, as M. Tasheva shows, is one of the main drawbacks in Bourdieu’s theory of “non-coincidence of theory and practice”, which is markedly seen in the analysis of gift-exchanging practices (a paradigmatic topic in his works). Mrs. Tasheva, in turn, demonstrates the possibility for retaining the practical functions of time in the analysis through the idea of the “sequential relevance” (Sacks) of the particular acts in the molecular structure of the gift, which makes possible the logic of the gift to be interpreted as “endogenous”.

This perspective to the practical logic of the gift insists on the *crucial role of the third party* in the temporal unfolding of the interaction in the gift-exchange practice. Hereinafter the analysis focuses on practical reflexivity itself, while the reflex reflexivity is considered as a corrective work of the agent “oriented towards establishing of reciprocal relevance between actual action field and the acting agent” (p. 73).

Such a vision of practical reflexivity opens up the opportunity for a juxtaposition of Bourdieu's reflexivity with the ethnomethodological idea of reflexivity-in-the-course-of-members'-practices and particularly with its later and radicalized version, which deals with the "embodied reflexivity" and "unique adequacy of the method". The final (enriched) conceptualization of "reflex reflexivity" after the dialogue between Bourdieu and the ethnomethodology reads: reciprocal elaborating between "contingent circumstances" and lived body through unceasing modification of the compliance between them.

*Part II* develops further the idea of reflex reflexivity, displaying its practical-logical functions in the frames of the so-called molecular performative interactions. Referring to the conceptualization of category “molecular performative” by D. Deyanov and T. Petkov, M.

Tasheva, in turn, problematizes the concepts "performativity" and "molecularity" through Bourdieu, on the one hand, and through ethnomethodology, on the other. She insists in the end that both concepts should be always taken as interconnected. The author bases her case on thematization of performativity as "situated" phenomenon, as "performative form" in which the local practice molds. It allocates and controls normatively the agents' actions, and while recognized by them it is accomplished by the agents "each another next time" as for the first time. In short, it is a kind of "performative molecule, consisting of reflexively correlated, mutually relevantized, i.e. organized in a certain embodied-reflexive way *atoms-indexical expressions and actions*" (p. 106).

An important move in the dissertation is widening the notion of performativity which amounts to its treatment as objectivized in things and more specifically as embodied in the lived body performative. This move makes possible the further elaboration of *strictly logical problems* of molecular interactions with the interpretation of the bodily performative as "reflex reflexive practical inference" being the most significant result.

The last part of the dissertation focuses on the molecular structure of social interaction. The accent here is placed on the everyday conversation as a molecular junction which preordains the allocation and recognition of visible moves through which the competent participants bind each other in a system of mutual rights and obligations. Important in this case is the interpretation of the molecular interaction as a multiplace relationship, which predetermines the members' practical sense for relevance, irrelevance, noticeable absence, as well as the respective repairing actions-performatives.

The last sections bring the analysis back to Bourdieu's logic of gift, raising the fundamental socio-analytical question of the un-self-identical habitus' possible strategy of "exiting the interstice of fractal experience". A central role in this strategy the author assigns to the "preliminary gift", structurally differentiated from another important for the temporal occurrence gift form– the "preliminary return gift".

In Conclusion, the general outcomes of the work are summarized.

## 6. Main contributions

In the preceding presentation of the dissertation key points, I already designated more or less M. Tasheva's main contributions. Here I will try to give them a more systematic form. Let me note that they are nicely introduced in the *List of contributions* which I accept without objections.

I am deeply impressed by the unwavering way the thought stylistics of "thinking through" is being followed in the thesis: thinking of Bourdieu through Garfinkel, of Austin through Sacks, of Garfinkel and Sacks through Bourdieu, etc. I have already noted above that this is the

specific texture, from which the analysis comes out and which contextualizes it. I would add that while this “thinking through” really spreads out the thought horizons of the authors involved, it does not enforce alien logic on them. This is not self-understanding, given the traditional misreading of ethnomethodology by Bourdieu and his followers. In this sense, the dialogue between Bourdieu and Garfinkel provoked in the dissertation is both an *achievement in itself* of M. Tasheva’s sensitive reading and rich of possibilities context which brings forth other contributions.

The elaboration of the notion “reflex reflexivity” is such worth-mentioning contribution. The formula (which the candidate takes from Bourdieu but works out in its own original way) reads that reflex reflexivity (as always actually developing phenomenon) exerts its impact „*not ex-post on the opus operatum but a priori on the modus operandi*“. Precisely to this imperative, taken in its literary sense, but projected upon the practical reflexivity, commits itself the dissertation. To this end, M. Tasheva cleverly takes an opportunity granted to her by the ethnomethodological idea of reflexivity: as running always between members as well as between members and circumstances while changing each time the position of every single member. This perspective allows the author to focus on the very temporal development of reflexivity and to avoid describing it retrospectively. That means to exhibit it as “the (self) corrective effort of the habitus, being launched with every contact between the agent and the unforeseeable circumstances and agents, which constitutes the conditions for the social interaction to unfold” (p. 97). In this description we can undoubtedly hear *instead of and beyond* Bourdieu the famous formula of Garfinkel from *Ethnomethodology’s Program* „another each next first time“: “while each next case of action is different, each next case of a particular recognizable sort of action must also be ‘another’ one of something that has been recognized before. Each is a first, but each is also a next”. The notion “reflex reflexivity” achieved thus far has been brought back into the socio-analytical toolkit as an instrument for the analysis of “everyday work as oriented to self-inheritance”(p. 172).

I would like to summarize two more contributions, which seem to be important for the theoretical achievements of the dissertation. Both contributions refer to the gift-exchange practice and I emphasize them because they demonstrate the consistency in the work of M. Tasheva.

An often quoted by colleagues early discovery of the candidate points to a specific inversion in the gift-exchange structure, where the *return gift* might precede the *gift*. The author demonstrates that this practice, already noticed in Mauss’ analyses, is indeed a strategic – performative – use of the *preliminary gift*, which should be distinguished from the strategy of the *preliminary return gift* (Deyanov). Thus the preliminary gift giving is seen as a reflex reflexive action of the practical sense as well as an investment in the future of the identity experienced as a fractal.

Another contribution, referring to the practical logic of the gift-exchange, but having also wider meaning, is the recognition of the "third participant" in the gift-exchange whose

position warrants the retaining of time between the discrete atoms of the gift-exchange: time intervals turn to be a substantial element of the very practical-logical form of the gift molecule. In order to develop this idea, M. Tasheva turns to the Conversation Analysis, where the turn-taking in everyday conversation – and particularly opening a chance for taking part in the conversation – has been made a special point of discussion. Critically important for the relevant involvement both in the logic of gift-exchange and in the everyday conversation is the attention to the temporal sequence of turns. Hence the multiplicity, i.e. the molecular organization of the local everyday interaction which is being described – in a wider sense – as a structure with visible and recognizable positions and situated performative effects of competent/incompetent dealing with them.

Assessing the overall contribution of the dissertation, I would say that while having mostly theoretical character, tracing M. Tasheva's original way in the theory of practical logic, it is also oriented to elaborating tools for empirical sociological work and thus has a potentially applied character.

## 7. Overall review of the publications

The List of publications includes 6 papers, 2 of which appeared in *Sociologicheski problemi* journal (indexed in ProQuest, EBSCO and CEEOL), 1 in the journal *Philosophy*, 1 in a collection of sociological essays, the last 2 – forthcoming. There is one noticeable absence, however – the paper: “The Problem of Reflexivity: the Borderline between Ethnomethodology and Socioanalysis” (*Sotsiologicheski problemi* 2018/1). The absence is important because the article marks a significant stage of the candidate's development. But even so the overall number and the character of the publications is more than enough for the defense. All of them are connected to the content of the dissertation, reflecting different phases of its advance.

I know at least several works, in which publications of M. Tasheva have been quoted, but unfortunately, the candidate has not presented a list of references to her works.

## 8. Candidate's personal involvement

The thesis is entirely a result of M. Tasheva's own efforts. While she correctly refers to related achievements in Bulgarian and foreign context, the contributions and the results achieved are her personal performance.

## 9. Summary

The Summary is written according to the academic requirements, it gives a clear idea of the dissertation structure and strictly reflects the main results achieved.

## 10. Critical remarks and recommendations

During the preliminary defense, I made a number of critical suggestions to the dissertation. Now I am very pleased to say that Mrs. Tasheva took almost all of them into consideration. Here I am going to make two additional recommendations, which might be helpful for the future research work of the candidate because they refer primarily to the continuation and deepening of the parallel reading of Bourdieu and the ethnomethodology.

The first thing I would like to mention concerns the treatment of reflexivity by Bourdieu and by Garfinkel and more specifically a complication, connected with the *initial position* of the respective treatment. As M. Tasheva clearly shows, in Bourdieu, it is in the first place a question of *self-reflexivity*, of reflexivity as an element of the scientific habitus, as a method, i.e. of *reflexivity as controlled by the scientist*. However the transition from “reflexivity” thus treated to “practical reflexivity” seems to be problematic. Garfinkel’s initial position refers to the reflexivity as fluctuating *between* members as situated actors (that is, between members not considered as full-blooded personalities). So, if we define the reflexivity in Garfinkel as practical, it cannot *in any sense* be *under control* of the “particular” persons (members); while developing *between* (and not *in*) them, it unceasingly modifies their positions. Now we are in the position to understand why in *Ethnomethodology’s Program* Garfinkel says that the researchers in social sciences are unable (perhaps because of practicing reflexivity “up to a maniacal degree”?) to lose their phenomenon. But if you cannot lose your phenomenon, continues Garfinkel, you are not able to make a discovery as well. So it seems that we must differentiate between *two types of practices* (“scientific” and “practical”, as they are called in the dissertation) to *which two incommensurable types of reflexivity* belong. At the same time we must take into consideration the unavoidable intrusion of “practical practice” (the “lifeworld’s” practice, as Garfinkel says in his “misreading” of Husserl) into the “scientific practice”, often with the effect of exploding the scientific practice (this is, for instance, the lesson of the Schreker’s case, mentioned in the thesis). It is no accident that in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* and in other works Garfinkel speaks of “practical sociological reasoning” and “professional sociology” as two different parallel practices. Some of the things just said are anticipated in the dissertation, but a more detailed differentiation of research moves is recommended.

The second recommendation concerns the notion of “social time” between the discrete acts of gift-exchange. This notion appears at least in two places of the dissertation – firstly in connection with the “third party” and secondly in connection with the so-called “pending gift”. It seems to me that the author could further specify the “social time” in question as “vectorially”-charged. As an interesting analog, in this case, the treatment of the pauses in

the Conversation Analysis might be taken, where a difference is made between “a pause of the actual speaker” (when he considers the continuation of the utterance during his own turn), “a pause after the utterance completion of the first speaker” (time for taking a turn) and “his pause” – a pause on the side of the next speaker (when silence is pending because the turn-taking is not “timely”). I see these three “pauses” as three temporal vectors (three *qualitative specifications* of “social” time), which might be interestingly involved in the analysis of gift-exchange logic.

#### 11. Overall evaluation

The thesis contains research results which offer an original contribution to sociology and correspond to all the requirements of the relevant laws and regulations, governing the academic affairs in Bulgaria and Plovdiv University “Paissiy Hilendarski”.

The dissertation demonstrates that Milena Tasheva possesses deep theoretical knowledge and professional abilities in sociology and exhibits indisputable qualities and skills for the autonomous accomplishment of scientific research. ***In light of the above, I recommend without hesitation that Milena Georgieva Tasheva is awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (Ph.D.) in the area of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture, doctoral program: Sociology (Sociology and Sciences of Man).***

Sofia

10. 06. 2019 г.

Reviewer: Prof. DSc. Kolyo Koev