

OPINION
ON
THE DISSERTATION OF
SNEJANKA MIHAILOVA, FULL-TIME PHD STUDENT, ENTITLED
" THEATER OF THOUGHT: THE INTERSECTION OF PHILOSOPHY, THEATER
&
PERFORMATIVE ARTS PRACTICE",
FOR OBTAINING EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR/PHD" IN
PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.3. (PHILOSOPHY - PHILOSOPHY TAUGHT IN ENGLISH)
BY PROF. NIKOLAI MIHAILOV, PHD, SU "ST. KL. OHRIDSKI", FJMC

The presented dissertation is 168 pages long and is divided into two main parts, each of which consists of several chapters - 5 in the first and 4 in the second. The text includes an Introduction and Conclusion, as well as an impressive bibliography in English, Italian and Bulgarian languages, numbering almost two hundred sources, a significant achievement for a doctoral/PhD thesis. Even at first glance, the PhD student's committed approach to the topic, the systematization of the text and the highlighting of the highlights of the research are evident. The author's intention is to explore the interrelationship of theatre, philosophy and the performing arts with a focus on feminist practices in Italy from the late 1960s to the 1990s. It is a highly original and innovative approach, delineating a new field of research, a philosophy of theater, handling skillfully the concepts and analyzing the practices introduced and established by the feminist movement in Italy and its philosophical ideas. Particularly interesting both as a topic and as a way of exposition and justification is the dissertation student's successful attempt to research and present theater "not as a performance, but as a methodology of group forms of thinking" based on the experience of the Italian feminist movement in the period 1970-1990 ., also related to the situation that "for feminists, thinking and philosophy derives from the experiences present in the everyday life of most women" (p.97). My overall impression of the text is that of a full-fledged and very thorough study, relevant to the topic stated in the title, written by an erudite author with a marked inclination for philosophical analysis and argumentation, with an original and I would even say creative view of theater as a philosophically meaningful human practice and with extensive knowledge in the field of philosophy, cultural studies, the practice of contemporary social movements.

In the classical definitions of aesthetics in relation to the theater, emphasis is always placed on the development of the form of the drama (in its genre diversity) and its philosophical subtext. Some philosophers go even further and consider history altogether as drama (script)/theatre (event) with its conflicts, heroes, climaxes, characters and of course – spectators. Reflecting on the connection between theater and philosophy, the PhD student takes as a possible starting

point for such research the position of how to "think about theater as a thought practice" (p.25). In this sense, the author reasonably considers mimesis as a theatrical category of thinking, both through collective experience and as an enactment, in which learning and self-transformation are very important not only individually, but also for the community. To think in theatrical terms means to establish again and again new interconnections with the experience, or if I try to follow the original author's discourse – to follow the script of your own life and play yourself. The dissertation has exceptional philosophical insight, as the author consistently pauses and examines in detail concepts and those of iconic names in philosophy - Martin Heidegger, J.P. Sartre, E. Levinas, E. Husserl, as well as basic philosophical concepts - truth, being, thinking, knowledge, existence, action, etc. The fourth chapter of the dissertation, entitled Thinking and Voice: Adriana Cavarero, makes a particularly good impression on me, in which the analysis dwells in detail on the concept of acoustic thought in the perspective of the absence of a voice (p.67). Prof. Cavarero is a philosopher and thinker, influential author and representative of the philosophy of feminism. As the PhD student reminds, referring to Prof. Cavarero, Aristotle also speaks of logos in Poetics as *phone semantice*, or a signifying voice. The key concept of devocalization of the logos and the subordination of the vocal to the visual (of the voice of the signified) is discussed in detail, and in relation to the notion of truth, a markedly philosophical approach. The same can be said about the lines devoted to the ideas of Luisa Muraro, Carla Lonzi¹ and their fundamental connection to feminist thought.

The dissertation, in its second part, examines the practices of groupthink that arose in the context of the second wave of the feminist movement in Italy. This is also the place where the author demonstrates his skills in analyzing the main starting points of his concept - performative, performative techniques, their relationship with theater and the role of performative in group practices and in women's political movements. As the candidate notes, spending time together as a moment of political awareness is completely new for women, whose only culturally defined space is the personal dimension. One of the main conclusions of the candidate, who bears all the marks of originality and the result of his own research, is that the voice is a practice and not a concept that seeks to provide another basis for metaphysics, he enters the philosophical scene through practice ("doing things with words", p. 112). It is not theory that opens up space for new practice, the author believes, but quite the opposite. The voice appears against the background of the intersection of philosophy, theater, performance

¹ The PhD student defines Lontzi's "Self-Portrait" as an exceptional conceptual performance: "a unique conceptual performance, the first work of a genre that perhaps belongs to the future" (p. 123), and further accepts Lontzi's approach as an example of the practice of "deep trust (commitment) in oneself" (p.157).

that took place between 1969-1990. The research and analysis of the female philosophical community "Diotima" gives additional scientific density to the study and its main thesis - the connection between philosophy and performance, "something we can call Diotima on the stage (acting Diotima)" (p. 113).

The author also introduces his own concept, mainly for the dissertation research - "theater of thought", to emphasize the autonomy of the theater from the act of staging and to denote the intersection between philosophy, theater and performing arts. I believe that this concept, as well as the overall exposition, the described scientific contributions provide an author's, grounded and up-to-date intellectual framework through which many of the problems of the modern social world can be thought. This framework, according to the author, also gives the cultural relevance of the rich forms of actions and practices and their special importance for dealing with the crises of the present and ultimately - for an attempt at positive change in human relationships. And the theater and other forms of art, in addition to aesthetics, also set social and political goals by giving cultural significance to certain values - behind the images of "framed women", as some call the profile de-erotized portraits of women during the Renaissance² to the paintings of the odalisques Matisse also has philosophical prerequisites. So it is with theatre, from classical rules and conventions to the plays of the recently deceased Megan Terry, posing questions to the political and social consciousness of society, incl. and those about the place and role of women as a criterion for his philosophical (thought) maturity. This observation confirms the importance of the choice of the PhD student both as a topic and as a method of its research.

Conclusion. There is no doubt for me, that the presented dissertation work on the topic *"THEATER OF THOUGHT: THE INTERSECTION OF PHILOSOPHY, THEATER & PERFORMATIVE ARTS PRACTICE "* has all the necessary qualities, convincingly meeting the criteria for the type of research required for the educational and scientific degree "PhD/Doctor" in professional field 2.3. (Philosophy – Philosophy taught in English). It is philosophical in nature and presents a logically constructed panorama of authors, ideas, paradigms, concepts, as well as proves the exceptional erudition – philosophical, aesthetic, linguistic, research, teaching – of its author. Dealing with fundamental issues and iconic authors in the fields of philosophy, ontology, ethics, art, history and theater theory, the text is written in English, conveying the candidate's messages in an extremely comprehensible and even in places fascinating way. The dissertation also introduces us to a long and recognized

² For example in the painting by Piero della Francesca, "Duchess Battista Sforza".

European tradition - the Italian (autocoscienza) - in understanding and solving common political, social and moral problems with the methods of philosophy and art, something that significantly enriches Bulgarian humanitarian knowledge. In the original author's position, in addition to in-depth knowledge in the field of art, social history, aesthetics, axiology, theater as a human activity, there is also an independent understanding of the theses of feminism - skepticism towards the "objective" and "eternal" truths of philosophy, towards the almost mechanistic explanations of the nature of art, theater, performance, to the idea of the author or actor, based on the example of its Italian representative(s). The presented publications of the PhD student are fully relevant to the topic of his research and, in addition to fully meeting the minimum national requirements for obtaining the PhD degree, show and prove the in-depth academic interest and high practical competence (interviews and personal meetings with distinguished names of the researched groups, working in an archive with original documents, etc.) of the PhD student to the problematic fields of his work and the affirmation of a new philosophical system for the theater with deeply traced roots in theatrical and philosophical history. The entire activity of Sn. Mihailova, as far as I can judge from the documents provided, is dedicated to the interest in philosophy, art, teaching and in general - knowledge. **I propose to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to confer to Snejanka Mihailova the educational and scientific degree "PhD/Doctor" in professional field 2.3. (Philosophy – Philosophy taught in English), as I myself will vote most convincingly for this.**

Sofia, 12.09.2023

Prof. N. Mihailov