

REVIEW

by **PROF. DR. PETAR PLAMENOV**

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)

Snezhanka Mihailova's doctoral thesis „Theater of Thought: Intersection Between Philosophy, Theater and Performative Arts Practice“ consists of 168 standard printed pages and an extensive bibliography of approximately one hundred printed and electronic books, periodicals and materials (including illustrations and internet links) in English , Italian and Bulgarian, adequately related to the issues of the development. The work is structured according to the required standard with an introduction, clearly stated main goals and tasks, in two large sections, in themselves, divided into chapters with their own internal division (The first part with five chapters. The second part with four chapters) and a conclusion and derived contributions . The work is written in English and shows a very good command of the language, an adequate scientific style and a thorough knowledge of the necessary terminology from the field of both modern philosophy and the perimeter of theater studies and contemporary performance. Mihailova has also provided the necessary number of scientific publications based on the research she presents.

Snezhanka Mihailova's text is distinguished by an original thematic scope. It is considered within the horizon of a rather interdisciplinary intellectual freedom, which presupposes the rare ability to compare more general philosophical theses and concepts with concrete artistic phenomena and realities. This gives Mrs. Mihailova's doctoral thesis not only a representative, theoretical and critical, but also an additional purely descriptive-artistic and interpretive-evaluative value and weight.

The study recognizes its own scope primarily in exploring the conceptual interrelationship between theatre, philosophy and the performing arts. Precisely, so that the thesis can be illustrated as an example, the feminist practices in Italy from the late 60s to the 90s of the 20th century are used as an exemplary field for observation. The critical examination

focuses on the emerging theory in relation to the general philosophy of the theater, where the "voice" is thought not only as one of the artistic means of expression, but as a specific method of bringing out the thought. The voice is therefore some sensitive and responsive form of retransmission of thought. Thus, the "*vocalization of thinking*" is articulated as a kind of "*practice of thinking-in-group*", which give a chance to perceive the reality of being from the female point of view. Although the theater and theatrical performance itself, already at the birth of the "*practices*" introduced by the feminist movement in Italy, can already be characterized as a kind of universal form of the "acoustics of thought" - in the aspect of creating groups, thinking-in-presence, *self-awareness (autocoscenza)*. The text sets out to carry out a meticulous reconstruction of these particular spiritual processes that can be traced in "*the various genealogies in the history of thought and of the theater*".

Thus, the main goals and tasks of the master's thesis are recognized as a fundamental re-emphasis, rethinking and expansion of the boundaries of the history of experimental theater from the mid-20th century, as an enticing opportunity to recognize the unenviable role and place of the suppressed "*absent voices*". Therefore, Mihailova believes that among the essential initial tasks of the work is the updating of the philosophical categories in the theatrical discourse, which can be achieved by consciously expanding the outlines of theatrical practices. Thus emphasizing both the critical and creative potential of theater and the performing arts, their capacity for real social change is also taken into account. That is why the analysis places as its main meaning the foregrounding of the immediate natural depth of the theater not as a performance, but as a methodology of a community group form of thinking (thinking-in-assembly). Hence, the main focus of attention falls on the notorious work of the so-called "*second generation*" in the Italian feminist movement, whose manifestation spans the two decades closed between 1970-1990. The work seeks its arguments in the philosophy of the theater of the second half of the twentieth century (in the theoretical legacy of thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, Adriana Cavarero, Luisa Muraro, Carla Lonzi, etc.) and tries to highlight their relevance and significance in the current post-postmodern, post-capitalist, hyper-technological context.

Contemporary philosophical thought more and more distinctly recognizes its work as the creation of specific conceptual fields, from where to draw unexpected knowledge about the human and where it is constantly rethought by unknown aspects. The philosophy of art and, in particular, the philosophy of the theater works in a similar perspective, which points to

theatricality not only as a space of artistic heuristics, but also as a kind of space, in the archetypal version of the ancient theater, where the theater is not just a finished work for entertainment or education, but some active form of democracy of the spirit, the general search for knowledge, the discussion of essential problems and their resolution. In this aspect, the genome of the theatrical and the theater are undeniably close not only to the foundation of the Socratic dialogue, but to the philosophical aletheia in general - precisely the openness and brightness of the truth and, last but not least, its aesthetic and ethical universal sharability.

Therefore, it seems to me that the intellectual move offered by Snezhana Mihailova's text in connecting philosophy and theater is completely permissible and serious. Appreciating the theatrical action and act, and that in its more extreme and freer experimental forms as a specific state of thinking-in-presence and even more of thinking-in-a-group, creates a new interpretative field whose evaluation is yet to come and the present text is one of the first attempts at its independent derivation and general critical assessment. Precisely in order to secure this intellectual move of hers, the author introduces a new concept of her own - "*theater of thought*", which she uses as a kind of bridge to highlight the relevance in the immediacy of the act of thinking-reasoning as a fundamental connection between philosophy and theater. The concept implies a new understanding of the idea of the stage and the stage convention as a privileged space of search and "*ontological hesitation*". Through this change, the stage itself becomes the arena of philosophical deliberation of mental encounter, while the very theatricality and stagecraft enriches philosophically sterile contemplation with the unexpected breathing experience of the body and its immediately candid life and sincere practical openness. The reasoning leads Mihailova to the conclusion that the voice on stage can be understood in a new status, even as a new "*separate discipline at the basis of thinking*". Of course, one should recognize not only the thought-language, thought-speech connection, but also another often neglected point, namely that thought has both external and internal acoustic expression, i.e. it is thought that has its own voice, it is continuous *self-talking-listening*.

In her landmark theoretical work: "*For more than one voice: Toward a philosophy of vocal expression*," the Italian Cavarero emphasizes that we take into account the fact that devocalization takes place precisely in the act of vocalization, of utterance. By conceiving the voice only as a function of utterance, it becomes philo-rather posophically insignificant; the true locus of signification turns out to be voiceless, and voiceless thinking is a de facto subordination of the voice to the signification, which corresponds to a subordination of the

voice to the visual. Hence the legitimate question of whether an immediate vocal apophansis (an affirmative or negative statement, regarding the fact of the existence or non-existence of something) is possible based on a singularity that is not reducible to identity, but instead opens up to multiplicity. The trauma from the devocalization of the logos leads precisely to the loss of the profoundly unique and unique in our country. Therefore, a daring philosophy highlighting the vocalization of the logos opens up new broad interpretive possibilities, especially in the field of experimentation to connect philosophy, theater, performance and the experience.

The theoretical productions were examined by Mihailova in the field of theatrical practice and experimental methodologies of the so-called "thinking-in-group" in the Italian feminist movement between the 70-90s of the 20th century. Perhaps this is the part of the dissertation with the greatest contribution weight, as it illuminates many complex, controversial and little-known details and concepts. Both the first document of Italian feminism - Manifesto programmatico del gruppo DEMAU (abbreviation of "demystifying patriarchal authoritarianism"), as well as the practice of self-awareness implemented by the movement of the early 1970s "Women's Rebellion" (Rivolta Femminile) are presented and interpreted) as well as the particularly significant activity of the "Diotima" women's philosophical community founded at the University of Verona.

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.

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