

STATEMENT

IN COMPETITION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SCIENCE AT NBU

By Assoc. Prof. Evgenia Georgieva Krasteva - Blagoeva, 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences for the degree of Doctor of Science in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics), with a candidate Prof. Dr. Kristian Krastinov Bankov

The proposed dissertation of Prof. Dr. Kristian Bankov has a volume of 375 typewritten pages, published as a book in English by *Springer Nature* in 2022. The publication of the research by such a prestigious international publishing house is in itself an unequivocal sign of high quality. The use of a monograph in English as a habilitation paper is also rare in the domestic academic environment and should be commended. The work has as its subject one of the most significant problems of contemporary culture, namely the transformations it is undergoing as a result of the widespread penetration of the Internet and new communication technologies into everyday life. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first monograph on the subject worldwide to use the semiotic approach. In this sense, it can be seen as possibly the beginning of a significant trend that will give shape to the discipline in the decades to come.

From the beginning of the paper the reason why at this stage there cannot be a unified and homogeneous semiotic theory of digital culture is justified. While new technologies, social media, and more recently artificial intelligence are changing the cultural landscape with unprecedented dynamism, a semiotic theory of culture rests on foundations that have been built on the solid foundations of textualism for more than a century. According to the author's theoretical framework, the first steps of digital semiotics should be taken as a critique of dominant models, illustrated by concrete analyses. These analyses are unified by three guiding themes, which are present in all chapters of the monograph and are the basis for the goals and objectives set by the author. These are the theme of the commercialization of culture, the weaknesses of textualism in the analysis of interactive culture, and the new mechanisms of identity construction in the digital age.

The dissertation shows a thorough knowledge of all the most important schools and approaches in semiotics. In his research prof. Bankov gives preference to two leading schools of cultural semiotics - those of Umberto Eco and Yuri Lotman. The two authors are given as examples of how new theoretical models are introduced into semiotics - a similar aim of the dissertation. Typical of semiotics is the work with secondary sources - written texts or other manifestations of culture, but fixed in some expressive form. Eco and Lotman spent years researching and publishing scholarly articles, then combined these publications into

monographs in which they synthesized new theoretical models based on the results of their earlier research. This approach was also adopted by prof. Bankov, who, as is well known, was formed as a researcher in the school of Umberto Eco.

As an original contribution, the introduction of the concept of "plateosphere" in the first part, where the theoretical framework of the study is outlined, stands out. With it, the author defines the major platforms of social media by analogy with Lotman's semiosphere. Another important contribution is the comprehensive panorama of existing research in digital semiotics, which is visualized as a geographical map. According to the author, given the particular divisions of schools and currents in semiotics, there is no other researcher who reflects with equal attention the English-language literature, the huge number of publications in Italian, the French contributions, and not a small number of sources in Russian and Bulgarian. The study also contributes an unusual attention to economic problems and concepts for humanities scholars. The semiotic modeling of the monetary sign, the analysis of the communicability of economic value with regard to its circulation in new media, the formation of value in cryptocurrencies, etc. are necessary for the understanding of the new commercialized culture, which is one of the main theses of the dissertation.

The author systematizes the most important theoretical and applied postulates of the work with graphical models, making them more accessible and applicable by other researchers. These are (a) typology of the monetary sign, (b) economic value through the purchasing power of the monetary sign, (c) a further developed model of identity; (d) a model of evolution and devolution of the sign according to its historical uses.

Regarding the other publications of prof. Bankov has attached a list of 29 articles and chapters from collective monographs, most of which have been published in prestigious international peer-reviewed journals, indexed in *Scopus* and *Web of Science*. Moreover, the introduction of the dissertation mentions the presentation of these studies as plenary and keynote papers at world congresses and other important international forums, which leaves no doubt that the research work of prof. Bankov on the topic of the dissertation has long been validated by the international semiotic community.

The works of prof. Bankov on the topic of the dissertation are cited enough to meet and exceed the requirements of the law. A *Google Scholar* reference shows 198 citations, 125 of them in the last five years, most of them to articles and chapters of monographs on digital culture.

I would also make a few critical remarks. The topic of artificial intelligence is generally absent from the study, as well as from the accompanying publications, and it appears to be a leading trend on the impact of the digital environment on consumers. I say this also as a recommendation for future research by Prof. Bankov, as I am sure his expertise will inevitably extend to this new socio-cultural reality. The work covers many anthropological themes and concepts, most of which are traditionally an intersection of the two disciplines and find here a quite adequate treatment. Only in the chapter on the football experience in the digital

economy is reference to anthropological research on the topic entirely absent, which abounds and would have given more depth to the study.

In conclusion, I would like to clearly emphasize the high scientific level of the dissertation and the theoretical generalizations and solutions to major scientific or applied problems contained therein, which are in line with the state of the art and represent a significant and original contribution to science. Stressing my positive attitude towards the work and the author, whom I have known for many years as a colleague - a thorough researcher, an inspiring lecturer and an outstanding member of the academic community of the NBU - I propose to the members of the Honourable Scientific Jury to award to Prof. Dr. Kristian Bankov the degree of Doctor of Science in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics).

25.09. 2023 Assoc. Prof. Dr. Evgeniya Krasteva-Blagoeva
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