

## OPINION

on the publications and professional activity of

**Dr. Sylvia Emilova Borissova – Spassova**

Chief Assistant Professor at the “Culture, Aesthetics, Values” Dept. of Institute for  
Philosophy and Sociology - BAS

in connection with her participation in the competition for the academic position of

**Associate Professor in professional field 2.3 Philosophy (Aesthetics)**, announced in the  
State Gazette, issue 67/28.07.2020 r.

By

**Prof. Nonka Bogomilova, D.Sc. in Philosophy**

### **I. Education and scientific career of Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Sylvia Emilova Borissova-Spassova**

Sylvia Borissova, the only participant in the present competition, has a Master's degree in Contemporary Philosophy, obtained in 2007, and since 2011, a Doctoral degree in the professional field of Philosophy (Aesthetics), awarded for her dissertation on *Limits of Aesthetic Consciousness*. Since 2016 and until now, she has held the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor at the “Culture, Aesthetics, Values” Dept. of ISSK – IFS (BAS). During this period she has shown an active approach, responsibility and communicative skills in this sphere of research, as witnessed by the large number of varied activities, described in detail: 2 monograph works and many studies and articles published in our country and abroad; participation in many national and international scientific forums; research and leadership positions in scientific projects; editorship, translator, lecturer, expert and consultant activities, etc. Most of her varied activities are in the sphere of her scientific interests and, respectively, in the field of the present competition – Aesthetics, Philosophy of Art, Negative Aesthetics.

The scientometric indicators of Dr. Borissova considerably exceed the minimal requirements for “associate professor” set down in the ADASRB and the Regulations for its Application.

### **II. Assessment of the scientific publications submitted for the competition**

The varied teaching and research activity of Dr Borissova is complemented and developed in her publications, which include the following works, submitted for the competition: 1) The

monograph *Aesthetic of Quietness and Silence*, 2019 (her habilitation dissertation); 2). Three studies, published in scientific journals and five articles, two of them in English.

Each of these publications has its specific research profile and value. But the conceptual matrix and theses in all of them, which are the supporting framework of their theoretical field, were laid down in the dissertation *Aesthetic of Quietness and Silence*, that is why it will be emphasized in this assessment relative to the competition. The monograph consists of 6 Chapters and Bibliography of 287 sources, most of them in Bulgarian and in English. Each of the chapters presents and comments on different statuses, hypostases and phenomena of the main categories underlying the title – quietness and silence: quietness as a borderline object of negative aesthetics (Chapter One); the cultural phenomena of quietness, legitimized as philosophical concepts (Chapter Two); quietness and silence as full-fledged aesthetic phenomena (Chapter Three); quietness and silence in the context of the senses (Chapter Four); quietness and silence in art (Chapter Five); quietness and silence as the key to everything (Chapter Six). Some of the basic concepts and those in the habilitation work are supplemented, clarified and nuanced in the study "Systematic possibilities of negative aesthetics" and in the article "The mythology of beauty as a mythology of the identical."

1. Among the indisputable **creative achievements** in the publications attached to the documentation of the competition, I would like to highlight the following:

1.1. The choice and formulation of the discussed problems and the research tasks related to understanding the basic concepts of negative aesthetics are characterized by originality, innovation and creative scope not only in the context of the Bulgarian but also in the international research field.

1.2. The monograph engages in a complex research task with a clear philosophical profile: the legitimation of quietness and silence (its subjective correlate) as fundamental categories of negative aesthetics.

1.3. The basic concepts of habilitation work - quietness and silence - are considered in many layers, almost in a "compendium" format: as philosophical concepts, borderline objects of negative aesthetics, presented in sensory perception and in art - an approach that requires and shows intellectual strength and will to retain and harmonize the different levels of analysis.

1.4. In these different levels of analysis, a number of classical philosophical concepts are being hidden, discovered and rediscovered - subjective and objective, content and form, external and internal, body and spirit, knowledge and play, language and truth: liberated, agitated, played by the dynamics and energy of this multi-layered approach.

1.5. In solving this complex and large-scale task, Dr Borissova demonstrates not only excellent specialized training, but also a broad culture - she works freely and eruditely with authors (including Bulgarian), theses and illustrations from different fields of knowledge and spirituality: philosophy / aesthetics, culturology, art history, literature, poetry, cinema,

mythology, religion; with classical, modern and postmodern representatives of philosophy (Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, Kant, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Otto, Lyotard, Marcuse, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Lukacs, Heidegger, Sontag); with a fine sense he comments and analyzes poetry, music, cinema, painting - this impression is confirmed by some of the articles participating in the competition.

1.6. The thematization of quietness (and silence) as a kind of aesthetic absolute, guarantor of the pure, original, undamaged and unspent principle of human language, soul, meaning and value turns research into rebellious, rejecting noise, routine, mundane, and at the same time defines it as value-constructive.

1.7. This positivity from the negative, this attempt to "purify" language and the human world from empty chatter, from the aggression of the re-active and pro-active principle, from the dominance of benefit and use vs game, rationality vs sensibility and mental depth opens the study to the broad horizon of philosophical anthropology: to an idea, a concept of the human and its counterpoint - the non / human.

1.8. One of the main achievements of the habilitation work is the chosen and perfectly executed genre for presenting this negative-positive view of the sense of the human and the aesthetics of the human - the philosophical essay: here the author shows that she masters the richness and beauty of the native language, whether she uses it to discuss complex and abstract philosophical matters or the fragile emotional fabric of the poetic.

1.9. The intellectual courage to present as a habilitation work an excellent creative product realized in the genre of philosophical essays will certainly lead to further genre emancipation of the Bulgarian philosophizing, until recently either stigmatizing the essay as "unscientific" or discrediting it with dubious formats: abundant pathos, "garnished" with a sparse logos and ethos.

2. Among **the comments and remarks** to the publications attached to the competition, rather as an **invitation for discussion**, I would like to draw attention to the following:

2.1. The fundamental functions of consciousness and the phases of aesthetic reflection, described in the First Chapter of the work as an approach to the concept of "quietness" (p.27-32) are marked by a certain analytical and argumentative inadequacy: reference to Kant by analogy (p.32); introduction of operations and concepts with interrogative and conditional phrases - "isn't it", "can we imagine" (p. 32, p. 34); use of vague expressions - "on the edges of", "tangent" (p. 32) - in key points for the main thesis, etc.

2.2. This "modus operandi", completely admissible and even charming in the following chapters of the monograph, in the first, conceptual part introduces an element of instability in its foundation - the legitimation of quietness as an absolute, borderline object of negative aesthetics and silence as its subjective correlate; instability, often reminiscent of itself in the

rest of the story: these phenomena remain abstractly "nothing" until the end, which is specifically "everything" (in a positive sense).

2.3. The negative pathos embedded in the essence of these two concepts / phenomena legitimizes them rather trans-aesthetically - as "empty", "pure" principles of a philosophical anthropology, through which they are personified like Hegel's Absolute: freedom of the sensory, the irrational, the unconscious vs the control of the rational; silence and "closing" vs the chatter of dialogue and contact; the value of the internal vs the dictates of the external; the absolutely other (almost according to R. Otto) vs the discredited available.

2.4. This philosophical-anthropological (even cosmological) profile of quietness and silence largely deprives them of a clear aesthetic identity: they turn out to be a kind of negative, but in fact a value-laden replica or even a duplicate of the disenchanting human world - hence their ubiquitous presence in play, word, body, mind, dreams, myths, love, death, truth, beauty, fidelity, mysticism, religions, art, etc.

2.5. The description of this universe-duplicate, personifying quietness and silence leads to a beautiful but also a little tiring verbosity, superimposing and building on comparisons, metaphors, poetic figures and free associations, encouraged and supported by the free expression of poetic philosophy of the Neoplatonist M. Picard - understandably, in this genre, quietness and silence turn out to be an object, but not a "subject", a "bosom" of the word (in this case and in principle).

### **Conclusion:**

**The solid creative achievements and contributions, the large erudition, humanistic and critical attitude, and creative potential, make me convinced that Dr. Sylvia Emilova Borissova - Spassova fully deserves the academic title of Associate Professor in professional field 2.3 Philosophy (Aesthetics) for the awarding of which I will vote without hesitation.**

Respectfully,

Prof. **Nonka Bogomilova**, D.Sc.

11.12.2020