

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sylvia Emilova Borissova-Spassova (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
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for the dissertation:

“21st-Century Art between Value and Price”

by Nikolina Dimitrova Deleva

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree

“Doctor”

in Professional Field **2.3. Philosophy**, Scientific Specialty

05.01.06. Aesthetics

at the Department of Culture, Aesthetics, Values, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology –
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

1. Formal characteristics of the application for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” and the dissertation work

The dissertation has a total volume of 263 printed pages and consists of an introduction, three chapters and conclusion. The sources are covered in two sections – bibliography (243 items, of which 40 in Bulgarian, 15 in Russian, 181 in English, 4 in French, and 3 in German) and non-specialized sources, classified according to the announced “content analysis of digital results from search engines, profiled sites and platforms, news from electronic and print media, etc.” (p. 256; 68 Internet sources, of which 37 in Bulgarian and 31 in English).

The dissertation abstract in a volume of 55 pages presents the general characteristics of the dissertation work, an exposition by chapters, and the main conclusions. The contributing moments in the doctoral student’s self-assessment dissertation are reflected; they are divided into 3 points.

There are 9 publications on the subject of the dissertation, published in Bulgarian scientific periodicals and one Russian scientific collection. The publications are relevant to the professional field and scientific specialty of the procedure and are explicitly related to the dissertation topic. In formal terms, the minimum national requirements of a total of 80 points for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” have been covered and exceeded.

I have no co-publishing with the author.

2. Structure and contents of the dissertation work

The dissertation work has as its main *object of research* “the 21st-century art”. From this concept, part of its logical volume is used – for the author, this “is not a global art in which there is an equal representation of different cultures, but it is above all that one, which is accepted as art in the context of Western Europe and America. The arts of other cultures and contexts remain local in scope and do not gain global visibility unless they are appropriated and adapted to the dominant Western context of the arts. They do not get access to institutional recognition and do not enter the definition of “contemporary art”. The scope of the subject is within institutionalized art and does not consider the art of the independent scene” (p. 5). The *subject of research* is the relationship *value–price of 21st-century art*, i.e. its valuation as a commodity in Western Europe and America. The *topic actuality* is related to the attempt to analyze this relationship in the context of the given research object, which is rather a segment of contemporary art, double legitimized by the power positions of Western art institutions on the world stage, and by the economic valuation of works of art, on the other and in connection with this.

The *aim* of the dissertation is “to present the state of art in the period from the 1990s to today” (p. 5); from here, a description of the goals by chapter, which are tasks at the same time, follows, more precisely: (1) the definition of the term “contemporary art” and the contexts of its use; (2) articulation of the “subjective (who) and objective factors (what), determining and legitimizing the values of contemporary art in a situation of missing norms and criteria” (p. 7); and (3) explanation of “market mechanisms and value–price relationships in the 21st-century art” (p. 7). The *research hypothesis* is that the connections and interdependence between art, value and price are broken (p. 7).

The methodological apparatus is primarily oriented towards the systematic analysis and “interdisciplinary approach and use of data and methods from various scientific fields – history and philosophy of art, aesthetics, ethics, epistemology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, philosophy of money, philosophy of perception, etc.” (pp. 7–8). The main text lacks information about descriptions in the context of non-specialized sources, content analysis and its use for the purposes of proving the author’s hypothesis.

The structure of the main text covers the issues of the definition of “21st-century art” (Chapter One), the values of 21st-century art (Chapter Two), as well as 21st-century art in the context of money (Chapter Three), in a logically ordered content with an overview within the detailed sections.

The abstract adequately reflects the scope, scientific-methodological apparatus, structure and content of the work presented.

Nikolina Deleva’s dissertation examines a topic that has occupied various guilds in the cultural (including aesthetic and artistic) and economic spheres for the past several decades – this interest, born of the urgency of the emerging questions, is evidenced by the swarming articles in humanitarian, artistic, and sociological criticism, as well as in specialized periodicals and in the columns of daily newspapers. For the first time, the topic occupies a central place in a doctoral work in our country, and this is its undoubted merit

My notes to the dissertation work are in several points:

1. The necessary attention has not been paid to the conceptual and categorical grid and the derivation of definitions which are key for the method of systematic analysis:

(a) The logical volume of the concept “21st-century art”, which is also a central research object, is not consistently maintained in the text. The title of the dissertation is much broader than the text states. An example: if contemporary art is defined by the author as impossible to distinguish from life, from other areas of life and other media, at the same time the references in the text, according to the introduction, are given to the arts that take place in an exhibition hall – but the exhibition hall is actually related to artistic convention still in its classical sense, even purely in spatial, interior-ornamental and other sense, separating art from life (regardless of the content and message of the works of art exhibited in the hall). Theater, dance, opera, for example – in their contemporary ramifications are often not even presented in institutionalized art spaces. As well as, on the other hand, the immersive, participatory and interactive forms of art, with which the author also serves as examples, by their very experimental nature, are much more often born and developed in the independent sector – precisely in spite of, and not thanks to, the institutionalized contemporary art. Another example: if for the author “a theoretical challenge is to make sense of the factors that form the value of an art that is not appreciated through the senses, has no aura and authenticity, is completely abstract, non-psychological and even immaterial” (p. 6), then this enters in contrast to the exemplification in the dissertation of works from the visual arts. The dissertation considers art as a commodity and as an institution; while explicitly not taking into account the

independent sector, which in practice also covers institutionalized art.

According to p. 42, “contemporary art has no norm, measure, values, canon is the lack of canon, there is no leading aesthetic direction or single paradigm to dominate”, while the entire third chapter is devoted to the exemplification of a single paradigm – that of the considered segment of contemporary art institutionally recognized by the West, while even generalizing that “contemporary art is a commodity and a means of profit” (p. 219).

(b) Price, evaluation and value are not distinguished and clearly defined concepts in relation to each other and often their use is blurred in the course of the exposition. These are also central concepts, so they should have fixed initial working definitions in a stated systematic analysis.

(c) If for the author “the aesthetic loses its status as a metacategory and is replaced by the artistic” (pp. 49–50), then this contradicts another author’s statement that “receptive aesthetics is particularly relevant in the context of modern interactive forms of interaction with art” – the center of receptive aesthetics is precisely the aesthetic, not the artistic.

(d) Non-traditional aesthetic categories such as the shocking, the terrible, the paradoxical came with Friedrich Schlegel’s code, and were not born in the contemporary art of the 21st century - cf. the statement on p. 50. The questions about the de-actualization of taste as a norm, about the distinction between kitsch and art, between high and popular art, are taken up by authors at a very late stage, since they are not new at all and the debate on some of them (e.g. about taste) flared up even before the Romantics.

e) Esthesis is not a “sensory response” (p. 231).

2. The structure-determining role of deriving a clear and concrete scientific-methodological apparatus is neglected:

(a) Articulated tasks of the research in relation to the set general goals are missing, which in turn is related to the lack, or lack of clarification, of the author’s position and argumentation in the collected and retold overview literature on the sections; articulation of the achieved work results is missing as well.

(b) The main hypothesis (“the connections and mutual conditioning between art, value and price have been broken”) contradicts the conclusion that the result of the processes in modern society is “total axiological relativism” (p. 235), as well as another statement towards the end that “putting a price is a performative act of identity creation and valuation” (p. 231).

3. Regarding the requirements for the formal and technical parameters of the academic text:

(a) The literature cited and used covers the hermeneutic criteria for the scope of a dissertation work for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, yet, more primary sources could be covered at the expense of the secondary ones, and also of the secondary ones by leading authors with works fundamental to philosophical aesthetics and axiology not mentioned. The main bibliography also lists a number of general and third-party Internet sources for which a separate section is allocated, and it is good to separate them. In the titles in Latin there are texts that are actually translations and are in Bulgarian (e.g. No. 80, p. 242). The bibliographic descriptions are not fully reflected and are not completed— for example, the authors of some materials on Internet sites with the author indicated in them are missing, the titles of the materials used are also missing (e.g. No. 96, 186, 190, 206, etc.). In the case of an approved translation of a given work into Bulgarian, it is recommended to use or – in the case of personal translation preferences – at least refer to the Bulgarian translation edition (e.g. the approved translation of Fredric Jamieson’s book into Bulgarian is “Единствена модерност”, and not “Единична модерност”, etc.).

(b) The bibliographic citation has been doubled for some reason – both in parentheses according to APA and in footnotes. For the text to be complete in order to meet the academic

standards, only one option should appear, the first being recommended.

(c) Typographical and spelling errors have not yet been corrected, many names have been incorrectly transcribed and their established uses in Bulgarian have not been taken into account (Ayer has to be Айър, Moore – Мур, Freeland – Фрийленд, “Бодрийяр” is the Russian spelling, Banky is Banksy, etc.).

3. Scientific contributions of the dissertation work

The scientific contributions are too general in relation to the stated object and subject of research and are not tied to the specifics of the topic and the argumentation of the research hypothesis; and this, in turn, can only be achieved through a clear definition of a conceptual and categorical systematic grid, as well as the goals and objectives of the study in general and of the chapters in particular. Contributions currently displayed:

“1. Exploring the question of the indistinguishability of art from non-art as an epistemic and axiological problem.

2. Analysis of the evaluative functions of price, discourse and symbolic capital.

3. Conceptualizing the disconnect between art, value and price” (p. 235)

– in effect express several of the more private tasks in the study. The second and third points mentioned challenge the author’s assertion of the broken link between value and price.

4. Conclusion

With the notes addressed to PhD candidate Nikolina Deleva on her dissertation work I would like to remind her that writing a dissertation work invariably carries the requirement of academic responsibility, as well as personal authorial responsibility to the readers.

Based on the materials and scientific works presented in the procedure, and in particular – the dissertation work, bearing in mind the contributing nature of the chosen topic and its scientific potential, which I wish the doctoral student to further develop, I give my positive assessment and vote “pro” the awarding of educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to **Nikolina Dimitrova Deleva** in Professional field **2.3. Philosophy**, scientific specialty **05.01.06. Aesthetics**.

Based on the materials and scientific works presented during the procedure, and in particular – the dissertation work, bearing in mind its contributing worth and its indisputable scientific qualities and erudition, I give my positive assessment and am convinced to vote “pro” the awarding of educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to **Nataliya Atanasova** in Professional Field **2.3. Philosophy**.

20.06.2024

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sylvia Borissova