

## **OPINION**

**by Associate Professor Blagovesta Ilieva Nikolova, PhD**

**in connection to a procedure of assessing the candidatures for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 2.3. Philosophy for the needs of department "Social Theories, Strategies, and Forecasts" at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in response to an official announcement in State Gazette No. 58, July 9, 2024**

The opinion is prepared in compliance with Order No. RD 09-235.3, issued by the Director of IPS-BAS and dated September 9, 2024.

Documents to participate in the procedure were submitted by a single candidate - Assistant Professor Nevena Ivanova Ivanova, PhD, from the "Social Theories, Strategies, and Forecasts" department of IPS-BAS. The submitted materials include: the candidate's academic CV; completed tables demonstrating compliance with the minimum national requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and the academic positions "Assistant Professor" and "Associate Professor," as regulated in the Bulgarian Academic Staff Development Act (ASDA) and the ASDA Implementation Rules, as well as the specific minimum requirements of BAS outlined in the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (RCPSASDBAS) and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology's Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions. Other submitted materials include an author's report highlighting the key contributions of the academic texts submitted for the competition; a list of scientific works submitted; copies of the habilitation work and publications in academic journals or book collections; a list of participations in international fora; and a list of citations.

Assistant Professor Nevena Ivanova, received her PhD in 2011 from the University of Tokyo, Japan, with a dissertation text entitled “Shaping Subjectivity: Time, Space and Mirror-Image in Electronic Art Practices 1960s-2000s.” She is participating in the current competition with a monograph: *(Re)programming Life: Synthetic Biology between Industry and Biohacking* (Paradigma, 2024); three articles and study papers (one co-authored) in English, published in academic journals indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases; and nine additional peer-reviewed publications — three in English, one in French, and five in Bulgarian. A report of six citations in scientific publications indexed in global databases is also provided, four of which cite co-authored works. The candidate has covered the minimum points required for the position of "Associate Professor" in each category relevant to field 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.3. Philosophy.

From the provided CV it becomes clear that much of Dr. Ivanova’s work focuses on international academic discussions devoted to the philosophical implications of how new and emerging technologies transform human cognitive and aesthetic experiences. She has taught in both Bulgaria and abroad (at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov," Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, and City University of Hong Kong) and has participated in postdoctoral programs in France, China, and Japan. Since 2017, she has served on the editorial boards of *Evental Aesthetics: Independent Journal of Philosophy* and *Open Philosophy* (De Gruyter Ltd.). She has participated in 23 international fora. She is also the co-founder and director of *symbiomatter: Laboratory for Experimental Arts*.

The author’s report summarizes the main achievements of each of her publications. In terms of content, I offer the following comments. The submitted articles and papers align well with discussions on the ambivalent nature of digitization and automation processes in contemporary societies. Dr. Ivanova's earlier work focused on aesthetics, while her more recent texts reveal a growing interest in the philosophy of technology, specifically on issues of cognition.

Regarding her monograph, it must be noted that the latter addresses highly significant topics, such as the dominance of the general engineering paradigm in modern

societies, its ambitions to "operationalize" life, the treatment of living systems as objects of design, and their exploitation as resources for utilitarian purposes. Dr. Ivanova's monograph represents an original study with a significant contribution to the Bulgarian academic landscape.

Dr. Ivanova offers an intriguing interpretation of the encounter between the normative horizon of the engineering logos (control, predictability, efficiency) and the spontaneity of the living world that it seeks to colonize. This tension is well reflected in the evolution of synthetic biology, both in its conceptual and practical manifestations. Drawing primarily on the work of Bernard Stiegler, Nevena Ivanova constructs a conceptual framework involving the concepts of *pharmakon*, *proletarianization/deproletarianization*, and *amateur*, which she employs to analyze the empirical evidence she has collected. The developments in synthetic biology challenge traditional political-economic, politico-philosophical, epistemological, and other assumptions.

As to the arguments presented in the book, I would like to pose the questions below, which may serve as avenues for further exploration by Dr. Ivanova. First, how would she address the contradiction between the need for conscious "uptake" of technologies, as advocated by Stiegler, and the temporal regime of contemporary capitalism? Its information and communication infrastructure erodes the room for reflection, compressing time, which leads to a loss of knowledge across the three dimensions (practical skills, life wisdom, and theoretical knowledge). Is there a way out of the logic of acceleration that would allow us to "shape" our collective future rather than passively adapting to what is to come upon us?

This leads to a second question. In the monograph, the figure of the amateur is discussed as a deproletarianizing force and a possible solution to the aforementioned problem. I wonder, however, if the amateur is perhaps overestimated as an agent of transformative change. Is deproletarianization possible on a societal level without a radical reshuffling of the political-economic landscape through classic regulatory mechanisms aimed at reclaiming "the living" from the grip of the commodification processes—a reclamation Karl Polanyi discusses through his concept of the "double movement"?

In conclusion, given that the candidate meets the minimum national requirements and that the submitted works demonstrate high-quality research, I find it justified **to support** the candidacy of Nevena Ivanova Ivanova for obtaining the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 2.3. Philosophy for the needs of the "Social Theories, Strategies, and Forecasts" department of IPS-BAS.

Sofia

Associate Professor Blagovesta Nikolova, PhD

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