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REVIEW

by Professor Christo Nikolov Kaftandzhiev, PhD, Sofia University, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications, scientific specialty 05.04.11 - General and Comparative Linguistics

regarding the scientific works of Professor, PhD Kristian Bankov for the degree of Doctor of Science in the doctoral programme "Semiotics" of the NBU in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics)

My review should answer the following questions:

1. Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms.

The scientific works of Professor Bankov are about semiotics and its digital aspects.

Semiotics is one of the leading sciences and its role is even more significant with the digitalization of communications.

The digital aspects of mass communications are central in Professor Bankov's scientific writings on semiotics.

This, without any doubt, is the most important and key feature of contemporary communications.

For these two reasons, Professor Bankov's proposed academic writings are quite significant both in scientific and applied terms.

2. Accurately formulated goals and objectives of dissertation

Professor Bankov formulated the goals and objectives of dissertation precisely and they meet the requirements of validity and reliability.

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3. Evidence that the dissertation has been developed independently and does not repeat verbatim the topic and a significant part of the content of the work submitted for the degree of Doctor.

Kristian Bankov developed his dissertation years after his a Ph.D. thesis.

The dissertation does not in any way repeat the work submitted for the degree of PhD, which is entirely in the field of philosophy of language from a semiotic perspective.

In the materials I received there are six papers in this respect:

- 2016. "Vistas for organized semiotics" (co-author Paul Cobley) in *Semiotica* 2016; 211: 9–18, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin
- 2018. "Legendary brands and economic value: a semiotic approach" in *The American Journal of Semiotics*, 34.3-4 (2018), 273-291, doi: 10.5840/ajs201913142;
- 2019. "From Gold to Futurity: a Semiotic Overview on Trust, Legal Tender and Fiat Money" in Cheng Le and Marcel Danesi (eds.), *Social Semiotics*, Special Volume 29 'Legal Discourse analyses and their advances', 336-350, doi: 10.1080/10350330.2019.1587833; ISSN: 1035-0330; eISSN:1470-1219
- 2021. "Lying as a transaction of value: explorations in semiosis and communication from a new perspective" in Drăgan, Nicolae-Sorin (ed) *Differences, Similarities and Meanings. The Interplay of Differences and Similarities in Communication and Semiotics*, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 151-162. ISBN 978-3110658828.
- 2021 "Gastromaniac. How (Food) Influencers Create Trust" *Digital Age in Semiotics and Communication: Digital Gastromania*. Vol III 2020/2021, Sofia: NBU publishing house, 42-57. ISSN (Print) 2603-3585, ISSN (Online) 2603-3593
- 2021 „Face and Trust: A Semiotic Inquiry into Influencers, Money, and Amygdala“ *Sign Systems Studies* 49(3/4), 2021, 527-542

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4. Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and relevance of the literature used

Professor Bankov knows very well the research problem. This is proved by the literature cited, which is from excellent scientific publishers and journals and from the last years.

5. Correctness in citing a representative number of authors

Professor Bankov has correctly cited a representative number of some of the best world scientific authors in the relevant fields.

7. Availability of a substantiated and developed theoretical model of the study

Professor Bankov criticizes existing theoretical models from before the digital age, that are applied uncritically to contemporary culture. He develops new, more adequate models in some of the book's chapters. The comprehensive theoretical approach reflects the basic ideas and concepts of the relevant contemporary semiotic schools.

8. Conformity of the chosen methodology and research methodology with the goal and the objectives of the dissertation

Professor Bankov's dissertation does not conform to the standard structure of scientific study applying an established theoretical model with an empirically provable hypothesis. Here we are dealing with research conducted in the field of digital culture over a period of 12 years, and only at the end of this period was a theoretical model derived that synthesizes the most essential of the otherwise heterogeneous manifestations of the analyzed matter. This is a fairly standard approach in theoretical semiotics, used by many of its leading representatives (Eco, Lotman, Greimas, Barthes, etc.).

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9. Availability of own input in the collection and analysis of empirical data

Professor Bankov's research is original. The same applies fully to the collection and analysis of the empirical data.

Description of contributions:

1. A brief description of the nature and assessment of the reliability of the material on which the contributions of the dissertation are built

Professor Bankov's academic works are leading in the field of theoretical semiotics and digital culture. They are also written on the basis of some of the world's best and most recent academic articles and books in these fields.

2. Description of the candidate's contributions and their classification

a) The dissertation must show that the candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge of the relevant specialty and the capacity for independent research

It is important to emphasize that the contributions are in terms of the general development of semiotics and not only about its Bulgarian scientific aspects.

- 1) This is the first monograph entirely devoted to the semiotics of digital culture.
- 2) The work is interdisciplinary, and in addition to the usual semiotics-related studies of new media, cultural studies, anthropology, and sociology, there are also strong economic concepts.
- 3) The work offers completely original visualized models of a) typology of the monetary sign, b) economic value through the purchasing power of the monetary sign, c) a developed model of identity, d) evolution and devolution of the sign according to its historical uses.
- 4) The work offers a comprehensive panorama of all the contributions in the field of digital semiotics (visualized on a map), including all the major traditions. No such attempt has been made before.

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5) The work offers a completely new semiotic interpretation of the notion of interactivity, through a substantial critique of textualism.

6) The work offers an original treatment of Lotman's semiosphere model applied to digital culture after the rise of Web 2.0, the notion of "Platphosphere" is introduced.

7) The work applies in an original way the semiotic approach to model the value of bitcoin, the new meaning of the term "gender" in the Bulgarian language, the football experience as a mediatized product, etc.

b) The dissertation must contain theoretical generalizations and solutions to scientific or applied problems that represent an original contribution to science.

The dissertation contains a number of both theoretical and scientific-applied concepts that are new in terms of semiotics and represent a definite contribution to its development.

Assessment of the degree of personal involvement of the dissertant in the contributions

All these contributions are the personal effort of Professor Kristian Bankov.

Assessment of the relevance of the abstract to the main points and contributions of the thesis

The abstract fully reflects the dissertation.

Impacts of the thesis on the external environment

1. Assessment of publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they have been published

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The majority of Professor Bankov's publications, connected with the dissertation, have been published in Western journals and books that are indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science.

This is more than eloquent evidence of the high scientific quality of Professor Bankov's articles and books.

Personal qualities of the author (if the reviewer knows him)

I know Professor Bankov for many years. His scientific works are an important part of the development of academic semiotics in Europe and in Bulgaria (as an important part of the European cultural and scientific space).

Professor Bankov is also a very talented academic manager. Probably for more than 15 years he and his team have been organizing the September Semiotic School in Sozopol very successfully.

This school is the most important academic event in Bulgaria regarding semiotics and one of the most important in the Balkans and in Europe.

Professor Bankov organized a world congress on semiotics within the New Bulgarian University. This congress is excellent in terms of the image of Bulgarian science, as well as the image of New Bulgarian University.

Professor Bankov has also is the director of the Semiotics Centre of New Bulgarian University for many years. Thanks to this Centre, many bachelors, masters and doctoral students of New Bulgarian University receive excellent education in the field of semiotics.

Professor Kristian Bankov lectures semiotics at a number of world universities and scientific conferences. This is an eloquent proof of Professor Bankov's knowledge and authority as a semiotician.

Opinions, recommendations and comments

The doctoral thesis is written very well and I do not have any special remarks.

Probably Professor Bankov will continue to develop these ideas in his next

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scientific works - articles and books.

Professor Bankov is an addicted football fan. Due to this, I would suggest football as the main topic for a future semiotic conference in Sozopol. I also propose to Professor Bankov to write a scholarly book on football from a semiotics perspective.

A very important topic at the moment, and in the future, is the Artificial Intelligence. This topic is definitely worth semiotic interpretations and Professor Bankov could also write a book in this field – Semiotic aspects of Artificial Intelligence.

Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of dissertation

On the basis of Professor Bankov's academic works and the evaluation I wrote in the review, I strongly vote that Professor Kristian Bankov, PhD, must be awarded the degree of Doctor of Science in the PhD program “Semiotics” in NBU. I hope that the other members of the Commission will vote in the same way.

Date: 16.10.2023

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristian Bankov', with a stylized flourish at the end.