

**Петър Пламенов “Екстаз от текста.
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Experience with the Text: Pleasure and
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This is a book about both ecstasy and something much more comprehensive than ecstasy as such. In fact, Peter Plamenov’s account extends far beyond a strict concentration on the topic of ecstasy. This is the case not only because he adheres to a broad approach in his writing, but largely because this specific topic necessitates delving into the spheres of world culture, examining philosophical foundations, studying religion and even mystical connotations. Additionally, it requires an examination of language, literature, and art. In all these spheres, Plamenov demonstrates an impressive erudition, ranging from virtuosic mastery of Ancient Greek and Latin, to connoisseurship about the Byzantine heritage, to commenting on the entire history of Western philosophy. He interprets the works of the Church Fathers, medieval scholars, the sages of modernity and contemporary times, culminating in profound aesthetic and linguistic analyses as well as brilliant passages of literary and art criticism.

In a philosophical sense, Plamenov adopts a truly productive and astute perspective, informed by the Aristotelian term “entelechy.” This position allows him to engage with and systematically elucidate the complex reality of ecstasy, as well as to clarify the corresponding concept that grasps it. The teleological energy that entelechy both discharges and regulates enters into the essence of ecstasy and discloses it

advantageously. Furthermore, only with the indispensable assistance of entelechy can the unique potential of ecstasy be captured, manifested, and understood. Plamenov is fully aware of these rich and powerful capacities of entelechy. He skillfully uses them to gain sufficient clarity about the apex of ecstasy, that is, its circular infinity, freedom, and its ability to abide in the origin of life and immortality, which is love in its various incarnations, the highest and the most desirable being divine love and grace.

The various dimensions from which the study of ecstasy is viewed in the book are organized into four chapters: “Ecstasy,” “Amazement,” “Language and Ecstasy,” and “Criticism and Ecstasy.” Each chapter consists of longer or shorter subsections that explore topics such as *ekstasis contra stasis*, ecstatic body, enthusiasm, language as *prima poesis*, deciphering the obvious, image and likeness, hermeneutical ecstasy, the infinity of the circle, and more. There are also two outstanding appendices: the first, dedicated to parody, draws the conclusion that “parody is alienation from being and from its sense of sharing and loving and friendly-adversarial testimony. Parody in this way devalues morality and also devalues and neutralizes the other. The ‘I’ remains unborn, units rather than persons are born, these are copies of *the-one-and-the-same*, but not faces.”¹ The second appendix, dealing with the phenomenon of reading, claims in a no less irrefutable manner that “reading is resistance, luxury, and freedom.”² This leads to a contrast: “in the virtual world the image dominates, but it represents ideas visually, unlike the act of reading, which does not offer ready-made solutions but creates and awakens an entire palette of possibilities of thought.”³

The most tangible and precise epitome of ecstasy, possessing an almost magical impact, is music (and we have no reason to doubt this opinion, coming from an author renowned for his opera and ballet criticism). Plamenov is quite right to insist that “music is an ecstatic art.” To this, it can be added that music is an entelechial art too, and this is why music can serve as an adequate expression of ecstasy. Like music, ecstasy is a pre-eminent means of elevating the human being above vi-

¹ Петър Пламенов, “Екстаз от текста. Естетически опит с текста. Удоволствие и критика“, София, Университетско издателство Св. Климент Охридски, 2023, 449.

² Ibid., 468.

³ Ibid., 471.

cious and dead stasis (characterized by a one-dimensional frozen state) and above “the perversity of what is obvious.” Its philosophical sense is discovered in the “liberation of the soul or spirit from the bondage of the inertia of the flesh and in spiritual insight, which negates the awe of the spectacle of the world and of what is external and turns subjective sight inwards towards the spirit and upwards towards the transcendent. Ecstasy is a swift attainment of the truth, which is given as a lightning revelation, in full with no persistence, no effort or struggle, but with eminence, blessings, and mercy.”⁴ Plamenov justifiably argues that ecstasy attains its culmination when it reaches the Christian sense of the Word as Logos. This is especially true in the Byzantine Orthodox tradition. The Byzantine tradition is ecstatic in its theology, philosophy, religious rites, and iconography, and these ecstatic foundations are eloquently manifested in Byzantine culture as a whole and even in the everyday life of Byzantium. This implies that the Byzantine tradition and its inheritors keep alive the genuine sense of ecstasy, endowed with grace, and are much less prone to the temptations of demonic deviations common to an anti-human stasis disguised in dazzlingly radiant values.

This book elegantly succeeds not only in building a theory of ecstasy but also in addressing pressing problems that impact contemporary life. Its practical significance is most evident in the above-mentioned appendices, on “The Misery of Parody” and on “Reading versus Gawking.” Here, Plamenov engages in a timely discussion of the fallen nature of contemporary life, focusing on the dehumanizing role of capital, to whose rapturous drumbeat humankind is marching towards its end. Nevertheless, the book ends on a slightly optimistic note: the king is certainly dead, but the reader, apparently enjoying access to intellectual ecstasy, is still alive.

⁴ Ibid., 41.