

With Milan Petrušek's sudden death, Czech sociology has lost one of its most important architects. However, I feel strongly that I should end this remembrance on a hopeful note: his intellectual legacy will be continued by his students, to whom he was devoted until his unexpected death on 19 August.

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### **The Janáček of Czech Sociology: Miloslav Petrušek**

At the peak of this year's summer heat, Czech sociology lost one of the most talented authors, teachers, and public protagonists in all its history. Miloslav Petrušek, professor of sociology at Charles University in Prague, and for many years member of the editorial board of *Sociologický časopis*, died suddenly on 19 August at the age of 75. With Petrušek and Jiří Musil, another prominent Czech sociologist, who passed away this past summer sociology in the Czech Republic lost its most distinguished figures, who made an extraordinary contribution to the sense of continuity and to the dignity of the discipline in the difficult period of the second half of the 20th century. In the last decades of their life, Petrušek and Musil powerfully promoted a sense of unity in the compartmentalised discipline, radiated a formative influence on the youngest generations of future sociologists, and cultivated an awareness of the close interrelation between sociology and other social sciences and humanities.

When in 1989 the Iron Curtain was lifted and the world opened up for Petrušek as well as for millions of other citizens of Central and Eastern Europe, he was in his mid-fifties. Like his lifetime inspiration and intellectual hero, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who became the president of Czechoslovakia in 1918 at an even older age, Petrušek proved to be ready for the immense task that was put in front of him: to become the main protagonist in the reconstruction of sociology from the ravages caused by communism. There can be no doubt about it: in an academic community decimated by forty years of ideological control which, unlike in most neighbouring countries, did not slacken significantly even in its last two decades, he made a deeply consequential decision to dedicate all his available energy—which became proverbial—to the renewal of independent, free and critical social sciences, and of sociology and its institutions in particular. At least in Prague, if not in the whole country, Petrušek epitomised the rebirth of Czech sociology after 1989. An ousted academic without advanced academic titles and able to continue his work only in the semi-official 'grey zone', Petrušek—unlike

the *conformistes* from the Normalisation period, was only able to receive his habilitation and a full professorship, both at Charles University in Prague, after the regime change. But the times were such that a quiet academic career as a chair of a department was ruled out and he was entrusted with the much more difficult role of the founder and builder of new institutions. When he returned to his old Department of Sociology at Charles University in 1990, he found its staff composition to be the same as before 1989. Disappointed, he began the largest institutional undertaking of his lifetime: he convinced the university president, who was resolved to abolish the Faculty of Journalism that had survived from the previous era, to instead transform it into the new Faculty of Social Sciences. This really materialised and Petrušek became the second dean of this faculty and served two consecutive terms (the legal limit) between 1991 and 1997. After this, he was for three years the university vice-provost. Even in those demanding and politically exposed positions he did not turn into a grey and inconspicuous figure without opinion or public profile like so many other university dignitaries. He displayed what could be called the ability to transcend his official role: he was always full of temperament and wit, ready to turn to jokes on the most formal occasions. One significant, but not entirely uncontroversial, contribution of his at that time to the university as a sociologist was his insistence on the importance of academic *rites de passage* for forging and strengthening the identity of both beginner and advanced academics. He invested heavily in this aspect of academic life: gave many excellent speeches at perhaps hundreds of 'immatriculation' and graduation ceremonies as well as other academic events. After 2000, he retired from active academic politics to go back to what he considered most essential in the life of a university professor: teaching. But he continued to be involved in shaping the course his alma mater was taking on a more informal level and had done more than anyone else to promote the cause of sociology in an academic environment characterised by the dominance of hard sciences. On his initiative, Charles University awarded an honorary doctorate to Zygmunt Bauman in 2002, the only sociologist to be granted this honour so far, and several years later Bauman received from Václav Havel the VIZE 97 prize, with Petrušek again being the *spiritus movens*. Knowing all too well what a university can turn into if the academics give up on the most fundamental moral principles, Petrušek insisted on the need to complement the pursuit of knowledge with moral self-reflection. He contributed to cultivating the dialogue between the two with a book of essays on such topics as politics and morality, students and their university, or the betrayal of the intellectuals that was published by Charles University on the occasion of its 660th anniversary [Petrušek 2008].

It was teaching, no doubt, that was his major passion and the activity for which he was extremely gifted. From teaching he never withdrew in free political conditions, whether in the time of his service in high academic positions, or in the last years of his life, when his health was becoming increasingly fragile. He was certainly fond of the classic Central European format of a lecture, in which

the professor talks for the full duration of the session with students listening, taking notes, and occasionally raising their hand to ask a question. This can really become a boring business. But not in Petrušek's classes. He was able to captivate the attention of the audience with his first words and keep it enthralled for the rest of the session. Over years, he lectured on a broad range of topics: some of them, chosen here rather randomly, bore enigmatic titles such as 'The Chronotopos of Modern World Sociology', or 'Societies and Thinkers of a Late Age', and while the titles of others were more conventional their content was no less interesting: 'Czechoslovak Sociology in a European and a Global Context', 'Classical and Modern Sociology', 'Czech Sociology in Exile'. Three things perhaps best characterised the substance of Petrušek's lectures: First, he not only talked about the big names and approaches (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, etc.), but drew on his vast encyclopaedic knowledge to include great, but marginalised or even lesser figures. Second, he was hardly ever willing to content himself with the discussion of sociological matters *strictu sensu*: frequent were excursions into the realms of philosophy, history, and art, and no less common were commentaries on the current political and social developments, both domestic and international. Third, Petrušek was intent on producing an image of sociology as an undertaking in which the national, European, and global levels are internally related and he was able to trace down the genealogies of central motifs across very disparate national contexts. Related to this were his constant reminders that Czech speaking sociologists should not only have a full command of the classical Western canon and know enough about their national tradition, but should also be familiar with the history of their field in the other countries of Eastern Europe. The essence of his approach is well captured in the appendix to one of his syllabi:

Included in the lectures, or the subject of a whole lecture, should be consistent information on the 'small sociologists of big sociologies' (such as Sombart in Germany or Sorel in France) and on the 'great sociologists of small sociologies' (e.g. Znaniecki as a Polish sociologist, Mikhailovski as a forerunner to interpretative sociology, the Russian physiological school and sociological behaviourism). Living in Central Europe, we might want to know a bit about the traditions of sociological thought in this corner of the world.

Whatever the topic of his talk, the lecture rooms during his classes were usually crammed and many ended in ovations.

A teacher, however excellent and dedicated he might be, without much published work would appear somewhat suspect in today's academic world. This wasn't Petrušek's case. He published quite extensively, despite the circumstances, which were a far step from a privileged academic existence. In his adult life, he spent 29 years in the post-totalitarian system, and only 28 years in the conditions of freedom, that is, during the Prague Spring years and after 1989. He managed to make excellent use of the windows of opportunity that opened, the first just

for a very short five years, at the start of his academic career and then again in the last 20 years of his life. Early in his career, he contributed a chapter to what was probably the most important product of the revival of Czechoslovak sociology in the 1960s, the volume *The Social Structure of Czechoslovak Society*, edited by Pavel Machonin [Machonin et al. 1969]. Machonin, a reform communist with excellent connections in the Party apparatus, and himself a victim of the purges after 1968, had done more than anyone else for the reconstruction of the discipline in a climate in which it was still looked upon as a 'bourgeois pseudoscience' by the representatives of official Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Machonin directed his own research institute and as an open-minded man was supportive of young novices of the profession. Petrušek spent several decisive years in Machonin's team, but he eventually decided to move to the university's department of sociology, as he felt himself more and more attracted to teaching. For Machonin's book, which was able to avoid the unwanted attention of Czech censors or an outright publication ban only by being swiftly printed in Slovakia, Petrušek contributed a study of social contacts and socio-preferential orientations of Czechoslovak citizens in which he analysed the ways in which structural factors influenced the patterns of primary social relations then prevailing in Czechoslovak society. He was also fortunate enough to see his first monograph appear in 1969, before any chance for him to publish officially on a major scale disappeared for many years; the book, *Sociometry* [Petrušek 1969], is an intelligent and thoughtful exposition and critique of Jacob L. Moreno's sociometric method of group analysis and group therapy and one of the best Czech sociological works of the 1960s (published some years later in a Hungarian translation [Petrušek 1972]). In the late 1960s, he participated in another major collective project which left a deep mark on his style of doing sociology in subsequent decades: jointly with his former mentor, the 'bourgeois' sociologist and philosopher Josef Ludvík Fischer, and his colleague Zdeněk Strmiska, who would soon seek exile in France, he edited *A Short Dictionary of Sociology* [Fischer, Petrušek and Strmiska 1970], the first sociological encyclopaedia published in Czech, and was one of its principal contributors. Hence the vast, encyclopaedic knowledge Petrušek commanded and was able to mobilise effortlessly in his later writings and speeches.

After 1969 one door after another was being locked on Petrušek, and for most of the Normalisation period he wasn't allowed to publish anything in official publishing houses and journals—except for one textbook, *Introduction to the Study of Sociology*, 200 copies of which were published in 1978 at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. Yet, he, like many other colleagues banished from academia, found a new way to operate in the semi-official zone of Czechoslovak social sciences. The opportunities for this existed in the lower echelons of the national research structure, in institutes or teams connected to industrial production, urban development, or sport. It was at the giant steel mill Vítkovice, owned earlier by the Rothschild family, but converted into a major communist-era industrial enterprise and renamed after the first communist president of Czecho-

slovakia Klement Gottwald, in Ostrava, the stronghold of hardline communists, that the two volumes of Petrušek's new textbook, *Introduction to General Sociology*, appeared in 1985. This mimeographed booklet contains no impressum, a sign perhaps that the publishers were aware of the risk they were taking. Petrušek also participated in semi-official sociological conferences and workshops held in the 'grey zone', the product of which were various semi-official edited volumes. Many of the contributions he wrote for these were printed again in his books that appeared in the 1990s. But even more importantly, since the mid-1980s, Petrušek resorted to the most successful invention of the Soviet dissident circles, samizdat. His monograph, *The Alternative. Reflections on the Position of Sociology in an Alternative-less Society*, appeared in samizdat form under the pseudonym Petr Grňa in 1986 [Petrušek 1986] (the book was later reprinted as *Alternative Sociology* [1992]). In this book, Petrušek launched a frontal attack against official Czechoslovak sociology, asking the central question of what sociological explanation can be given for the fact that sociology in Czechoslovakia had degenerated into a sterile discipline that was in the direct service of the political power-holders of the time. The same critical tone directed against the official representatives of the discipline, but also witty studies of life under socialism, reviews of banned Western literature, reviews of the Soviet literature, at that time paradoxically more interesting than the domestic variant, and literary studies, essays and short columns, characterised the spirit of a unique project Petrušek undertook with his colleague Josef Alan: the samizdat publication of a sociological journal, *Sociologický obzor* (Sociological Horizon). Around 10 issues of this critical journal, each some 100 pages in length, appeared between 1987 and 1989, thus presaging within sociology the approaching demise of the communist system. A certain loosening of the tight grip of the Party over society in the last years of Gorbachev's Perestroika (much hated and opposed by the conservative communists) resulted also in the unthinkable happening: Petrušek was given part-time job at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and allowed to publish one research article in this journal (on a theme characteristic of his interests in that period: language in sociological theory), and some shorter studies on sociology of art in other journals. At the institute, he became a member of a team that was then beginning its preparations for what was to become one of the major works of Czech sociology in the 1990s: the two-volume *Comprehensive Dictionary of Sociology* [1996], in which Petrušek acted as the chair of the editorial board and the author of over 200 entries.

After 1989, Petrušek could publish freely, but this time, he had to face another powerful enemy of scholarly productivity—high academic positions. He managed to go on publishing at an impressive rate. Part of his output in those years were the manuscripts drafted or published earlier; but there were also many new texts, books, journal articles, textbooks, essays, book reviews, anniversary greetings, obituaries, interviews, newspaper articles, and so on. Early in the 1990s what is arguably one of Petrušek's most original works in the domain of theoretical so-

ciology came out, the book *Theory and Method in Modern Sociology* [Petrušek 1993], a collection of articles, most of which had been published during the 1980s in semi-official outlets. This book also marks the height of Petrušek's flirtation with postmodernism, new and fashionable among many intellectuals in post-communist countries after 1989; but he rejected postmodernism's relativistic consequences and opted instead for what he termed the principles of complementarity and tolerance in sociology. This book is also an epistemological defence of qualitative research, accompanied by a corresponding critique of quantitative, or to use his own term, 'computer sociology', with many inspiring pages dedicated to defending the possibility, but also disclosing the limitations, of a scientific analysis of the meaningful dimension of social life in the form of an interpretative social science. Other works from this period bear witness to his preoccupation with what was for him a life-long passion, namely literature. He considered it an integral part of the *métier* of a sociologist and a prerequisite for productive sociological work to possess a certain musicality and to be able to understand social reality through literature, music, and the fine arts. Petrušek's major concern was with literature and also with the sociology of literature, a field that in the Czech lands had received significant impulses from Marxists such as Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldman and from Jan Mukařovský and other representatives of the Prague School of Linguistics, but could not develop free of ideological constraints in the communist period. The two small books that Petrušek published on this subject, *Sociology and Literature* [Petrušek 1990], and *Sociology, Literature and Politics* [Alan and Petrušek 1996], became the seminal contribution to the belatedly established field of the sociology of literature in the Czech language.

As a dedicated teacher, Petrušek did not shy away from focusing his energies on textbooks and compendia, which he considered a necessary part of the renewal of the social sciences in this country. *Sociological Schools, Currents, Paradigms* appeared for the first time in 1994 (and again in a revised form in 2000) and was for many years the only domestic handbook of sociological theory and methodology with significant inroads into neighbouring fields of knowledge, above all social anthropology and philosophy. Towards the end of his career Petrušek produced two more textbooks, one authored alone and intended to serve as a teaching aid for civil servants [Petrušek 2009], the other co-authored with his students [Petrušek et al. 2011]. But it would be a mistake to assume that the last decade of his life was spent only writing handbooks for students. On the contrary, *Societies of a Late Age*, one of his crucial works, was published in 2006, and another incisive analysis of the contemporary world, *Society of Our Age. A Popular Sociology of (Un)popular Problems*, came out in 2011 [Petrušek 2006; Petrušek and Balon 2011]. *Societies of a Late Age* has the dual quality of being at once a theoretical analysis of different forms of contemporary societies and a critique of the various ways in which contemporary sociology has attempted to grasp the nature of those societies. Organised as a dictionary, the book discusses, one after another, 108 different attributes of contemporary society that can be found in the literature of the last

50 years (to give just some examples: narcissist, late, nomadic, post-metaphysical, consumer, ludic, funny, creatogenic, noisy, affluent, credential) and subjects them to a critical scrutiny. As he recalls in the introduction, the project grew out of his encounter with the vast world of scholarship on contemporary societies that opened up to him when, after having been forbidden to travel for 20 years, he visited for the first time a Western European university library. Yet, there is not much left of that first moment of enthusiasm. The book's tone is rather sceptical, with all the labels invented by the social sciences seen as yet another example of society's urge for self-naming, an urge that is as necessary as it is elusive in its ability to capture the essential aspects of the object we call society.

His last book, *Czech Social Sciences in Exile* [2011], appeared in 2011. In it, Petrušek attempted to pay back the immense debt that the Czech social sciences had incurred towards those of its members who had emigrated and many of whom had disappeared not only from common knowledge but also from the awareness of professional sociologists. The book, one of the results of Petrušek's close collaboration with his students, is light and highly readable, but full of tales about difficult and tragic fates. It is also the last in an impressive series of Petrušek's texts dedicated to the history of Czech sociology, with which he established this branch of the discipline in this country and provided it with durable foundations.

I have mentioned all of Petrušek's monographs, but other segments of his work are no less important. First, he is the author of several dozen scholarly articles, many published in *Sociologický časopis*. To give an idea of the breadth of his interests, let me mention just the topics of the full-length articles by him that have appeared in our journal in the past ten years: the history of Czech sociology in the Normalisation period; Raymond Aron's analysis of totalitarianism; the development and relationship between the sociology of culture and cultural studies; reductionism in sociology, with a particular emphasis on sociobiology; the late work of Zygmunt Bauman; the current state and future prospects of Czech sociological theory. Second, Petrušek had an extraordinarily prolific output of shorter pieces: he loved to review books, in particular those that came from Poland, Russia, or France, or new editions of old Czech works now forgotten—sometimes it seemed by everyone but him. He had also assumed for himself the role of historian and chronicler of Czech sociology, and in this quality, he never declined to write biographical sketches of members of the profession for their anniversaries or obituaries, or texts documenting the history of national sociological institutions. Sometimes he went even further than that writing short pieces in which central historical figures in the Czech nation (for instance, Masaryk and Beneš, both incidentally sociologists, but also Havel), their work, and their sometimes ambiguous legacy were re-evaluated in the light of most contemporary sociological concerns. Third, and this was extremely momentous in a country where no more than a dozen or so translations of Western works managed to appear between 1948 and 1989, Petrušek systematically supported and facilitated transla-

tions of essential social science literature from various national traditions. The list of authors about whom he wrote detailed forewords or afterwords is impressive enough: Simmel, Veblen, Durkheim, Mauss, Bourdieu, Giddens, Merton, Mills, Bell, Talmon, Canetti, Sorokin, and Znaniecki. In the case of Zygmunt Bauman, the contemporary author who is probably closest to him, Petrušek translated some of Bauman's works himself (mostly from Polish) and was the sponsor of the many other Czech translations of his work that have appeared since. Many of these translations of classical or contemporary authors were published by what started in the early 1990s as a fairly small publishing house called Sociologické nakladatelství (Sociological Publishers), known to readers by its easy-to-remember acronym SLON (which means 'elephant' in Czech). This publishing house has grown over the years and now publishes dozens of books every year, but it still remains a family or, perhaps better put, a friend-based business. One of its two founders and operators since its beginnings up to the present has been Petrušek's extraordinary wife Alena Miltová, and Petrušek himself had significant influence on the editorial policy and the selection of titles that were, through this channel, made available to Czech readership.

Miloslav Petrušek was a central figure in the Czech social sciences community, popular with the thousands of students who over years attended his fascinating lectures, admired by his many readers, and highly esteemed by his colleagues in academia. He was, however, remarkably less active and less influential internationally, a fact that can only in part be accounted for by the isolation imposed on him and the social sciences in general by the Normalisation regime in the 1970s and 1980s. No doubt, another part of the explanation lies in the fact that in his early formative years, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the Czechoslovak social sciences were anything but fully open to international communication and travel opportunities, especially in a westward direction, were and remained fairly limited. Petrušek, as evident from his publications from that period, intensely studied the works of American and Western European authors. Yet, one of his typical traits as a sociologist was always to avoid one-sidedness, which in this specific respect meant that he looked for ideas and inspiration not just in one, but in various cardinal directions. Not out of opportunism—he did it also at a time and in a way that could no longer have any career-advancing effect—but out of a genuine interest, he turned his attention to the East and became familiar not only with Soviet sociological literature and official Marxist thought, but also with Russian and Soviet novels and poetry, aesthetics, literary theory, linguistics, philosophy, and historiography. No less importantly, he, like many other bright minds in Czechoslovak sociology of the 1960s, began to look across the northern border and his eye was caught by the unusually rich and surprisingly free (compared to Czechoslovakia) landscape of Polish sociology, of which he became one of the best Czech friends and connoisseurs. But Miloslav Petrušek was, above all, what one could call a deeply rooted personality. He came from the unique cultural milieu of Moravian-Slovakia, a region in southern Moravia adjacent to

the Slovak border, known for its special dialect, folklore, music, dance, and dress, and, even more significant, a characteristic sensitivity and way of life, at once passionate and down-to-earth, spiritual and sensual, distrustful at first and friendly to a fault later. The readers of Milan Kundera's first novel *The Joke* might recall that its climax takes place in one of the centres of what is nowadays the somewhat artificially maintained cult of Moravian-Slovak folklore. And it was not far from there, in the Moravian capital Brno, that the immortal Leoš Janáček, one of Petrušek's most personal affections, composed his works, which frequently used motifs overheard in the speech and songs of the local population.

To characterise the interaction of local, national, and global influences on his personality is a complex task. Petrušek was certainly not an uncritical champion of the local culture of Moravian-Slovakia or any other region. One could extend the metaphor of rootedness to say that while his roots were firmly planted there his branches stretched over the nationalised academic milieu of Brno and Prague, where the fruits of his lifetime work were reaped, and the air he breathed was that of the cosmopolitan modern culture and social sciences. Yet, in his work and efforts, he was a man who was tied, above all, to the national culture and language of his country. His command of the Czech language was exceptional and a large portion of his written work is as much a form of *belles lettres* as it is sociology. He was a master of the art of writing a sociological essay, full of original turns of phrase, *jeux de mots*, allusions not always easy to decipher, and somewhat long and winding sentences. Admired by many of his Czech readers, I think he was feared by the translators, and the fact is that very few of his texts exist in English or other languages of international communication. No doubt Petrušek identified strongly with the 'national community', something that perhaps should not count as a sin in the contemporary world of unstable identities and failing loyalties. He was by no means a nationalist, though. Besides an obvious sympathy for the culture and social sciences of other Slavic nations (which did not turn him into an old-fashioned 'Slavophile' either), he was fully appreciative of the most global forms of sociology, kept himself up to date with the developments in the English-speaking world, and followed with great interest and understanding the trajectories of other national sociologies in Western Europe, the French in particular.

In the summer 2012, Milan (as he was known to his friends) Petrušek received the news that he had been chosen to receive this year's VIZE 97 Prize of the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation on the grounds that 'he had contributed to the restoration of trust in sociology'. His family has reported that he was overwhelmed with joy. Alas, on one hot August day, his ill heart failed him after an excursion he had made into the countryside with some of his students. Czech sociology lost its own Leoš Janáček: a highly creative mind that formed a unique whole with no less passionate a personality. The VIZE 97 Prize was awarded on 5 October in memoriam, and in a double sense: both the prize's founder, Václav Havel, and its laureate this year, Miloslav Petrušek, both members of the excep-

tional cohort of 1936ers, did not live to see this day. The ceremony was thus an occasion for mourning rather than celebration. But one thing was heartening to the many sociologists who attended: they could feel proud of their discipline, and this, they knew, was another great achievement of Miloslav Petrušek.

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