

In Memoriam Jiří Musil*

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the invitation to Warsaw to speak in memory and in honour of our dear deceased colleague Jiří Musil. Today, our common obituary for Jiří is drawn upon memories and experiences we have all had in times of considerable social and political change, which we over a long time never expected and, which we still depend on. The social and political transformation processes in Europe are still going on, and are processes that have heavily influenced us, continuing to influence us in the future. Following the almost worn out, but still quite valid quotation of Ovid: *Tempora mutantur nos et mutamur in illis*—Times are changing and we are changing with them.

And we can say that Jiří Musil was both the subject and object of these processes, but most of all he was a brilliant social scientist who was able to analyse and to advise others about individual and social backgrounds both in the past and the present.

But why do we meet in Warsaw and not in Prague—the home and the domain of Jiří Musil? The answer is easy, but for those who did not experience the years of the Iron Curtain it is almost not incomprehensible.

I became acquainted with Jiří Musil in the context of the Polish–German—at the time that meant West German—symposia on Urban and Regional Sociology. These symposia started in the early 1980s and were initiated by Bernd Hamm and Polish colleagues—I would like to name especially Bohdan Jałowiecki—and later organised by me on the German side. For over a decade these symposia in West Germany and in Poland were scientific forums that crossed the barriers of the Iron Curtain that (with varying degrees of strength) separated Eastern and Western Europe since 1945. In the 1980s, these forums made scientific and human exchanges between peers possible, in accordance with the political strategy of ‘change through rapprochement’. However, re-establishing communication could not be expected nor was it possible, since the Second World War did not lead to the creation of free countries in Eastern Europe. Instead, the countries there were crushed again and put under the rule of the Soviets, as Anne Applebaum [2012] has documented in her latest book, with many examples of the adverse fates of individuals.

The fact that these rapprochements initiated by West German colleagues succeeded first with Polish colleagues and not with Czechoslovakian ones, let

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alone East German ones, depended surely on the different forms and sensibilities of the states involved at the time. The separation of the two German states was especially rigid, proving that spatial and cultural proximity can create more obstacles than distance does. It was also noticeable that at that time there was considerably greater political and social heterogeneity and liberality in Poland than in the other socialist brother and sister states. Looking back, the reality of the Iron Curtain allowed varying forms of permeability that were accessible through a variety of perforations. However, in those days reality and the future appeared grey rather than permeable and colourful. Still, it was a worthwhile experience, not only based on our knowledge today.

Because our Polish colleagues had long had contact with Jiří Musil from the former Czechoslovak Republic, a socialist brother country, they invited him first to our meetings in Poland. In the beginning, Jiří was not able to participate in our meetings in West Germany. However, he later managed to participate in our meetings in Bad Homburg, (funded by Werner-Reimers-Stiftung) by, in the style of his fictional countryman Schwejk, attending in the company of an ingenuous colleague who was more politically integrated in the then Czechoslovak state, allowing them both to enjoy a trip to the West. This strategy enabled Jiří Musil again to participate in our productive scientific and cooperative exchange between social scientists from the East and the West. He had these opportunities because before 1968 he had already had quite intensive contact with West German colleagues. He used the chance of so-called hidden paths, 'Schleichwege' as we say in Germany, which were quite present, as we now know [Borodziej, Kochanowski and von Puttkamer 2010].

Only after 'the Turn' in 1989, or the *Wende* as we say in German, did I get knowledge of the fact that in the late 1960s Jiří Musil had contact with East German colleagues. At that time they were starting investigations into the influence of the built environment on social behaviour. This was a new approach for them and the international orientation and reputation of Jiří Musil was of great help because, since he came from a fellow socialist country, they were able to participate in international developments that were otherwise not as easily open to them. He was a welcome partner and even a sort of a patron, a function that enabled him, twenty years later, to advise me on which colleagues from the former GDR were scientifically and humanly profound and not just ideologically stubborn.

However, it is more important to state that Jiří Musil—measured by those of his publications that we had access to in West Germany, not only in the Czech language—was a prominent scholar embedded in the international stream of socio-ecological research in the field of urban studies [Musil 1968, 1988]. He was part of this international discussion in the West, far away from any ideological involvement, and with none of the ideological prostration that we are familiar with in the publications of many East German colleagues, who in the introductions to their work would cite the ideological canon and connect their scientific topics with the official ideology. This was a sign of the systematic pressure they were subjected to

as well. Despite the ridiculousness of such texts, we should abstain from any form of moral or political indignation, especially since we had the chance to avoid such pressure or at least were not subjected to it.

Jiří Musil did not commit himself to such compromises. However, this resulted in pure scientific, almost neutral texts, following the international mainstream and missing all the liveliness or spiritedness we experienced when talking with him in person. But only a few were able to live with such unwillingness to compromise, and those who behaved in this way did so more or less at the expense of their academic career. This unwillingness to make compromises characterised Jiří Musil and made him unique as a scientist in the context of his country. Unfortunately, up until 1989, it also excluded him from a successful academic career in the CSR. In this respect, he resembled Aleksander Wallis very much. Neither of them followed the partial truths of either political or societal origin. On account of their power of scientific analysis, they were immune to following the paths of assumed absolute truths. A sentence by Robert Musil, a namesake of Jiří, in his novel *A Man without Qualities* describes this quite well: 'At any time it took revenge when partial truth was generally accepted. On the other hand nobody would have accepted a partial truth, if it were not overestimated.'

In personal talks and in scientific discussions during our symposia, Jiří Musil excelled in sharp thinking, possessed excellent knowledge of the relevant literature and deep historical insight, combined with a human openness and friendliness. All this created an atmosphere of trust and friendship when having discussions with him. And this in turn created a constellation of personal appreciation for him and a friendship was forged between us which continued through all the changes of the past and not ending until he passed away.

Two books resulted from this basis of friendship and collaboration. The first was a study based on a conference we both organised centred on a comparison between the transformation processes in Germany after unification and in other countries of Eastern Europe. In this book [Musil and Strubelt 1997] we analysed the positive aspects of these developments, such as the re-emergence of European cities almost forgotten behind the Iron Curtain, and the rise of new disparities as well as the recovery of persistent spatial structures; for example, the rise of new inner peripheries in contrast to flourishing metropolitan areas. Jiří's knowledge about such inner peripheries reflected his own experiences and studies. These are regions we can now discover in the photos of Jindřich Streit—an artist resembling Jiří Musil very much in his unwillingness to make compromises [Streit 1993]. And whoever once visited Jiří in his rural refuge in Dvorce knows about his rural background and appreciates this urban man's understanding of rural areas.

Later, together with my colleague Grzegorz Gorzelak on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, I edited a 'Festschrift' (*liber amicorum*), a book in honour of Jiří Musil, that showed the wide range of appraisal Jiří was met with all over Europe [Strubelt and Gorzelak 2008].

However, soon after the fall of the Iron Curtain our Polish/German/Czechoslovak symposia came to an end because the opening of the borders and the search for new horizons made this form of institutionalised exchange more and more superfluous.

I say this without any form of resentment, because such institutionalised contacts were, during the times of the Iron Curtain, the only way to bring about collaboration. After the rise of the new open societies, there were many more opportunities for scientific exchange, and a new universe with a broad variety of contacts came into existence. It is quite understandable that such an institutionalised exchange, necessary in times of competing societal systems, was dissolved by the wide variety of individual interests. Individualism was the winner and this is quite normal.

Jiří Musil was searching for new opportunities as well and he found them by helping to found the new Central European University (CEU)—a new platform of exchange between the West and the East. By working and teaching in this context, he caught up on all those aspects and topics of scientific analysis and public counselling that had been denied to him before. Now, he was openly accepted not only in the scientific community abroad but in his country as well. Once, he remarked to me that now, in his ripe old age, he had the chance to make up for all the restrictions he had suffered before. He enjoyed these new opportunities and possibilities very much. He not only took credit for his scientific works, but also earned a new form of material independence. I enjoyed seeing him flourish and I am grateful to him for our continued mutual trust and friendship.

I regret very much that he could not participate in one of my last publications about the 'Past of the Future' [*Bundesamt für* . . . 2008]. In this publication from 2008, I asked many of my colleagues how they evaluated the current social and spatial state of things in relation to the ideas, perspectives, or hopes they had had twenty-five years before. Unfortunately, he was not able to participate, which he also regretted. I regretted it even more because I missed his answers very much, particularly on account of his personal and intellectual background. It would have been very interesting to know his ideas, especially due to the current developments in many European countries, which favour national reasoning or even national interests more and more over European ones. The idea of a united Europe as a common ground for all of us becomes more and more endangered over time, and the experience of a Europe divided or crushed by an Iron Curtain and the dream for a united Europe seems to be vanishing; working for the common project of Europe is also endangered because intellectuals like Jiří Musil cannot raise their voice any more. The treatise 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty', written by Albert Hirschman, is more relevant than ever, and new open societies still have to prove whether they can guarantee a common European purpose. The rise of new national orientations in many countries, based on a poor reworking of the past can lead to wrong or erroneous paths and developments [Kopeček 2012]. Now, it is even more that we need people of the stature of Jiří Musil, for whom

Horace's words *Sapere aude*—‘dare to be wise’—was more than just a sentence. For Jiří—and not only for him—it summarised the programme of European Enlightenment, following Immanuel Kant, but under the risk that Arthur Schopenhauer had realised: ‘You can only be a wise man under the condition that you are living in a world of fools.’

In this respect, Jiří Musil was a wise man. We miss him as a friend, as a sharp analyst of society (especially of urban affairs), as an expert on the past and future of Europe, and, in time, also as a brilliant scholar and attractive *homo politicus*.

When Napoleon met Goethe, he remarked ‘Voilà un homme’. I think this applies to Jiří Musil as well.

Wendelin Strubelt

(I would like to thank Martha Adem Alvarez for improving my English.)

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