Zygmunt Bauman and Czech Sociology (1964–2010)[1]

'From the Czech Fields and Groves'[2] – before Bauman's arrival in Czechoslovakia

This opening excursion into history is not directly related to the subject at hand and may seem superfluous, but without an 'awareness of the context', as the prominent Czech writer Vladislav Vančura nicely phrased it, I believe it is impossible to understand anything – and this applies even to the role of Zygmunt Bauman in the development of Czechoslovak (and later Czech) sociology: the historical and intellectual context of this subject is essential if it is to have meaning and some degree of universal legitimacy and represent more than just a recollection of a single, albeit significant, episode in the history of one 'national school of sociology', and one rather marginal in the history of world sociology.

From today's perspective, now that we know how the 'story of Czech sociology' turned out and how it is progressing today, Zygmunt Bauman's appearance on the scene of Czechoslovak sociology might seem somewhat unusual. Bauman came to Czechoslovakia from Poland, where he was already a renowned sociologist, to help put local sociology, which was then in a state of collapse, back on its feet. Czechoslovak sociology emerged out of the cataclysm of the Stalinist period not merely damaged but in ruin, and literally so: the field was institutionally destroyed, as sociology journals were shut down and university courses in sociology closed (1950), leading figures in the field, who represented a source of continuity with the pre-war period of the First (Masaryk) Republic (1918–1938), were professionally and socially sidelined, and the Masaryk Sociological Society was abolished. So in the mid-1960s, when the famous but short-lived Khrushchevite 'thaw' (Ilya Ehrenburg's term[3]) reached Czechoslovakia, there was no one left in the country who on the one hand possessed the requisite professional authority (someone acceptable to the academic community, which was trying to re-establish itself and wanted to become explicitly sociological and no longer hide beneath the screen of 'scientific Communism' and 'applied research'), and

[1] The factual outline of this text was originally used for a book prepared to mark Bauman's anniversary in Poland. The two texts are substantially different.

[2] The title of the chapter is a play on words and derives from the name of the symphonic poem *My Country* composed by the founder of Czech national music Bedřich Smetana.

[3] Ehrenburg had many acquaintances and friends among prominent left-wing (!) intellectuals from the First Czechoslovak Republic, figures such as the poets Vítězslav Nezval, František Halas, Konstantin Biebl, Karel Teige, the theatre artist E. F. Burian, the painters Josef Šíma and Emil Filla, and in Slovakia Ladislav Novomeský and the erudite politician Vladimír Clementis. Many of them were later – direct or indirect – victims of the Stalinist purges.

on the other hand was also acceptable to the ideological department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which had the final word in decisions about the fate of the (not just social) sciences.

During the First Republic and in the brief post-war interlude from 1945 to 1948 Czech sociology was senselessly divided into two schools: the 'Prague' school (more 'right-wing', empirical, 'non-evaluative', and more American-oriented) and the 'Brno' school (more 'left-wing', inspired by Masaryk, moralising, striving to effectuate positive change in 'public affairs', and more oriented towards France and the Slavonic world, especially the south). Neither of the schools survived the Marxist-Leninist storm unblemished, and their leading figures either died (some early on in Nazi concentration camps) or were forced into retirement (e.g. I. A. Bláha, E. Chalupný, J. L. Fischer, J. Král). Some young sociologists immediately emigrated after the 1948 communist coup, and many of those in exile in the West eventually went on to establish solid professional careers (e.g. Jiří Nehněvajsa, Jiří Kolaja, Zdeněk Suda, Ivan Gaďourek, Richard Jung). The 'Czech sociological diaspora' also included Ernest (Arnošt) Gellner, who came from a Czech-Jewish community in Prague, but had to flee in 1939 before the Nazi occupation; in the UK he went on to become a philosopher, sociologist, and anthropologist, returning to Prague after 1989, where, amidst a flurry of intellectual activity, he died in 1995.

When the 'thaw' reached Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, there were only three figures in the country who represented potential continuity with the past – a continuity that, unfortunately, was 'of no pragmatic use': Josef Král, a leading figure in the Prague school, not very original, but a militantly anti-communist professor in the 'traditional' mould; Josef Ludvík Fischer, an exceptionally original analyst of democracy and totalitarian regimes (he wrote an analytical work on *The Third Reich* already in 1932) and the inventor of 'pre-Parsonian' structural functionalism; and finally, Karel Galla, in the 1930s a sociologist-empiricist, a pioneer in the field of rural sociology, and the author of a relatively interesting work on the theory of progress. Of these three 'bourgeois' professors of impeccable scientific or at least academic authority, only Karel Galla placed himself in the service of a field of social sciences deformed by Marxism that had expelled sociology from its ranks.

Sociology on the road to resurrection

Sociology in Czechoslovakia thus could not be reawakened from its induced sleep to take on a new life in any other form than as 'Marxist sociology'. Because the material, thematic, institutional, and personnel continuity had been broken, a vital role in the process of 're-institutionalisation' (and that is mainly what it was about) necessarily had to be played by contemporary young researchers, who rightly lacked any respect for the ideologised pseudo-sciences of the 'sci-

entific communists' and 'scientific atheists',[4] although – in conformity with one of Hegel's 'ruses of reason' – they themselves not infrequently participated very actively (and some even for a relatively long time) in the stabilisation and doctrinal anchoring of Stalinism in Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically, the Soviet Union was unable to offer any precedent for the revitalisation of sociology because the process of 'resurrecting sociology' there and in this country occurred roughly at the same time. In the Soviet Union, in the first half of the 1960s 'empirical sociological research' alone began to be allowed; the Institute of Concrete Social Research (IKSI) was established soon after that; and an independent journal of sociology only began to be published in 1976 (*Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya* – the very title 'sociological research' is significant). Consequently, Poland (and to some extent Hungary) was the only model worth following. In Poland there was no interruption in the developmental continuity of sociology, the field was marginalised for just a relatively short period, and prominent sociologists stayed in the field and never lost their public or academic respect (that the situation in Poland was by no means ideal in the Stalinist period has been described by Nina Kraśko [1996], but sociology was already being re-introduced into higher education institutions in Poland in the mid-1950s, more than a decade earlier than in Czechoslovakia; for more, see Szacki [1998: 115–131]). Even the 'camouflage' names of the departments were changed: in the 1960s Zygmunt Bauman headed the openly named Department of General Sociology at Warsaw University.

Thus, the 'intellectual sources' of inspiration for the revitalised field of sociology in Czechoslovakia were not and could not be sought in its pre-war intellectual tradition, and less so in contemporary Western sociology, knowledge of which was slim, fragmented, and ideologically wholly distorted: in 1948–1960 not one Czech translation of a Western book of sociology was published. As a result, the revival of sociology was temporally synchronised with the period in which what in Marxist-Leninist doctrine is called 'revisionism' was developing. This was not, of course, the 'historical revisionism' we are familiar with from historical literature, seeking alternative (or even contradictory) accounts of certain historical events, which has become a part of the historiographic 'establishment'. This was the 'ideological-political revisionism' that emerged within Marxism and was first described in 1908 by Lenin as follows: 'the second fifty years of the development of Marxism from the 1890s began with the struggle of an anti-Marxist current within Marxism, a current that took its name from the former Orthodox Marxist Eduard Bernstein' [Lenin 1975, vol. 1: 79; Engl. Lenin and Stalin 1946]. Kołakowski gives a detailed description of the internal transformation of Marxism, which he called its 'development', in a seminal work published in 1978 [Kołakowski 1978, vol. 2.]. Lenin was surprisingly clairvoyant when in the same publication he stated that 'every even somewhat new question, every even some-

[4] 'Scientific communism' and 'scientific atheism' were later, during the 'Normalisation' period, elevated to the status of academic disciplines, which were studied as five-year academic programmes terminating in an academic title.

what unexpected turn of events (…) leads ineluctably to one brand of revisionism or another' [Lenin 1975: 83]. Understandably, criticism of Stalinism (1956) and the temporary political-ideological thaw in Eastern bloc countries was 'Leninist' in this way; it was a 'somewhat new question', a 'somewhat unexpected turn of events', which then 'ineluctably' evoked a revisionist response.

Revisionism as an internal product of Marxism of course first 'struck' Poland and Polish 'orthodox Marxists' – which included both Kołakowski and Bauman, and both Baczko and Maria Hirszowicz – who gradually turned into first unorthodox and then explicitly revisionist Marxists. When Bauman arrived in Czechoslovakia he was at the half-way point in this process: long not a Stalinist, but not quite yet entirely an ideologically unacceptable revisionist.

Unorthodox Marxism also managed to establish itself in Czechoslovak (though more so in Czech than Slovak) philosophy and the still 'covert' field of sociology, doing so even at an international level. Karel Kosík's book *Dialectics of the Concrete* was published in Czech in 1963, but numerous translations of the book were also published (e.g. English and German in 1976, Spanish and Serbian already in 1967). This work represented a relatively original attempt to link Marxism to existential phenomenology, and 'everyday life' became its dominant theme – a theme that would eventually become widespread in sociology a good quarter of a century later (with – except for the existentialism – roughly the same intellectual foundations). In the Czech lands, a similar role to that of Karel Kosík was played by Ivan Dubský, by Milan Machovec (his book *Ježíš pro moderního člověk* was published in German in 1972 and in English in 1976 as *A Marxist Looks at Jesus*, and his monograph *T. G. Masaryk*, on the President of the First Republic, who was also a sociologist, was published in Czech in 1968 and in English in 1969), Ivan Sviták, who by then had already been expelled from the Party (his work was published in English, too, but only after he emigrated in 1969), and by many others.

Young sociologists who had never studied sociology thus learned to think sociologically from 'revisionist philosophers', but also from methodologists in the natural sciences and from natural scientists themselves (important figures in this, for instance, included Henri Poincaré, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Niels Bohr, Ernest Nagel, and later Thomas Kuhn, whose books, paradoxically, were read in Russian translation in this country). Gradually efforts were even made to acquire at least rudimentary knowledge of modern Western sociological thought, which at that time was mainly represented by three trends: Lazarsfeldian methodological neo-positivism, Parsonian and Mertonian structural functionalism, and finally, the 'critical' or 'radical' sociology of the Frankfurt School and also, for example, of Mills, Riesman, and Whyte.

However, all this alone was not enough to institutionalise sociology, as the field also had to demonstrate its 'social utility' and thus refute the myth that sociology was just a bourgeois pseudo-science (a view still alive even in 1965!), and doing that required the revival of ineffectual but nonetheless, from a practical viewpoint, functional discussions about the 'subject of sociology' and about its position in the 'structure of Marxist social sciences'. However, this simultane-

ously sparked a rise in the number of small empirical studies, especially in the field of industrial sociology (relating to the fluctuation and mobility of the labour force, the effective use of leisure time, and also ideologically engaged themes like 'the role of socialist work brigades in achieving a classless society', etc.).

Those who ultimately played the key role in the institutionalisation of sociology were the young Marxists, in particular Pavel Machonin. Machonin was a great 'academic strategist' well familiar with the conditions at the top of the hierarchy in the Party system, which in concrete terms meant that he was able to estimate 'how far' one could go, where the 'minefields' of Party prohibitions lay, and what confrontations were worth waging with ideological dogmatists, who were not few in number.

Zygmunt Bauman as the 'legitimator' of sociology

It was at this point that Zygmunt Bauman entered the plot as a *dramatis persona.* In 1964 Pavel Machonin organised a conference on the 'social structure of socialist Czechoslovakia' (in a village called Hrazany), to which he invited important representatives of the social sciences in the USSR, Yugoslavia, Hungary (András Hegedüs) and Poland, as well as Czech and Slovak, still just 'potential', sociologists. These figures served two functions: (1) that of 'teachers' – their presentations and the ensuing discussions provided young, future sociologists (autodidacts, but very enthusiastic ones) with an opportunity to test their knowledge within the scope of this limited but nonetheless 'international' competition; and (2) that of 'legitimators' – their presence was intended to sanctify the efforts to institutionalise Czechoslovak sociology, which included introducing the first large-scale sociological study of the social structure using sociological methods, a study that at the same time would legitimise the cognitive and 'socio-technical'[5] function of sociology.

Two Polish sociologists, Zygmunt Bauman and Mária Hirszowicz, spoke at the first 'real' sociological conference in Hrazany. In the conference proceedings that were published in 1967, Bauman submitted a text titled 'The Social Structure of Socialist Society (against the Backdrop of Changes to the Class Structure in the People's Poland)' and Mária Hirszowicz contributed her study 'Formal and Informal Aspects of Organisational Structures'.[6] Bauman's text was essentially

[5] The term 'socio-technical function' referred roughly to what Karl Popper called 'piecemeal social changes'. The term itself was introduced by the Polish sociologist and later émigré Adam Podgórecki [in Polish 1966].

[6] Perhaps it will not be off topic to mention that at the time of this conference I was 28 years old and knew Bauman personally because I spent my first study stay abroad in 1963 in the Department of General Sociology at Warsaw University, and Bauman was head of the department at that time. By remarkable coincidence the paper I presented at the conference (1964) was thematically similar to the study by Hirszowicz – 'Formal Organisation and the Informal Structure of the Industrial Enterprise'.

'traditional', but it was supposed to be, in order to show that sociology is an 'instrument of knowledge' that can be used to 'diagnose' serious problems and propose 'socio-technical solutions' to them. Bauman cautiously demonstrated both functions through two basic themes: the limits and possibilities of planning, and the position of the intelligentsia in the social structure of the 'new society'. In addition, he gave a conceptually very sensitive analysis of the phenomenon of 'social equality', when he showed that the dreams of 'complete equality' and 'maximum redistribution' of property were utopian and did not correspond to the contemporary state of our societies.

Bauman's initiatory role in 1964 was fundamental: his conception of sociology as a 'normal science' (here not at all yet in the Kuhnian sense) that fits within the structure of the Marxist reflection of social reality was accepted as more or less authoritative and could serve as a source of support and argumentation. The 'Bauman publication boom' began shortly thereafter: in 1965 the Czech translation of *Sociology for Everyday Life* was published and was soon followed by his *Sociology,* which in Czechoslovakia became a basic textbook in the field – firstly publicly, and then secretly, after the Prague Spring was crushed. Regimes came and went, Party functionaries fluctuated, but Bauman's *Sociology* survived – it proved its timelessness and scholarly unassailability, even though no one was allowed to talk about it. When in 2002 Zygmunt Bauman was awarded an honorary doctorate from Charles University in Prague, he gave a lecture at the Faculty of Social Sciences to mark the occasion, and after the lecture, while he was signing his books, he was approached by people who had graduated in the field in the 1970s to sign their well-thumbed, much-used, and note-filled 'Bauman textbooks'. It was touching to watch Zygmunt Bauman as he was confronted with the Czech translation of his book from the mid-1960s after such a long time, a work that perhaps he no longer even embraced, but which had fulfilled its 'educational' function and thus had passed the test of time. In 1967, his book *Career: Four Sociological Sketches* was published, and *Visions of a Human World: Studies on the Social Genesis and the Function of Sociology* was published in Slovak. By 1970 several more editions of *Sociology* and *Sociology for Everyday Life* had been published, so there was not a sociologist in Czechoslovakia who did not know Bauman's name and at least some of his work. At that time, of course, no one suspected that the same situation would repeat itself, with different actors, different books, and a 'different Bauman', almost exactly thirty years later.

Drama in Poland and the euphoria of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia

In the 1960s Czechoslovak sociology gradually pulled itself up to a level comparable to that elsewhere in Central Europe, underwent relatively dynamical development, especially in the field of empirical research, and became fully institutionalised: *Sociologický časopis* was launched, the Institute of Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was founded, and sociology came to be

included on the curricula at three Czech and one Slovak university (in Prague, Brno, Olomouc and Bratislava). Just as the large sociological study on the 'global society' (in Gurvitch's sense of the term) was being implemented in Czechoslovakia, in Poland developments were taking a different dramatic turn. It must be acknowledged with regret that amidst the euphoria of the Prague Spring in 1968, when Czech sociologists suddenly had a sense of complete freedom over their decisions and felt there was a point to becoming involved in public affairs, they did not much notice that at the same time there were purges going on in Poland and that Bauman and Hirszowicz,[7] whose role in helping to found Czechoslovak sociology was not just undeniable but also generally well known, had been 'let go' from their work at Warsaw University. It is said – though there are no archive documents available to support this – that the authorities of Charles University at that time gave serious thought to bringing Bauman into the university's academic community, but perhaps a realistic view of the situation ultimately drew Bauman to safer and less threatened landscapes. In a tragic paradox a certain Julius Wacławek at the Polish Communist Party's daily newspaper *Trybuna ludu* denounced the Polish 'sociologists-revisionists for having tried to integrate the theory of social stratification instead of Marxist theory into analyses of society' [cit. in Kraśko 1996: 234]. What was 'already' a big offence in Poland in 1968 did not become one in Czechoslovakia 'until' 1970: that year all the young sociologists who had been conducting large-scale research on social stratification – initially covertly referred to as 'the vertical structure of socialist society' [see Machonin and Krejčí 1996] – were literally driven out of sociological institutions, stripped of their teaching functions, hit with a total publishing ban, and not infrequently left in very inauspicious social and professional circumstances. The dream of 'free sociology' crumbled in direct proportion to how much Czechoslovak sociology had opened up to the world, taken on new impulses inside its 'invisible colleges', and pursued translation work and contacts with Western sociologists. Bauman's books, along with dozens of others, came to figure on the officially 'secret' but nonetheless generally well-known 'index of banned books'.

The intellectual catastrophe of 'Normalisation' in Czechoslovakia

The long period from 1970 to 1990 is a period in Czechoslovakia which came to be known as the 'Biafra of the spirit', a time that, in 1975, in a famous letter to Gustáv Husák, President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Václav Havel described as having the following effect: 'So it is the worst in us which is being systematically activated and enlarged – egotism, hypocrisy, indifference, cowardice, fear, resignation, and the desire to escape every personal responsibility, regardless of the general consequences.' [Havel 1992: 175] If culture as a whole suffered dev-

[7] The book *Sociological Confrontations: Marxism and Contemporary Sociology* (1966) was among the works by Mária Hirszowicz published in Slovakia.

astation, then once again, like in the Stalinist years, sociology was utterly destroyed. Destroyed but with one difference – the institutions remained, but they were intellectually voided and humanly and morally ravaged. I do not know how 'typically Czech' it is that those who caused the devastation and who during it acquired their academic ranks (which they awarded to themselves with the blessing of the 'Party and the government'), shielded themselves from criticism after 1989 with the argument that they had 'saved sociology' and that the Institute of Sociology had remained in place, the journal went on being published, and sociology (in 'Marxist-Leninist' form) continued to be taught. But they had been absolutely indifferent to the fate of their former colleagues – and all the more so to that of sociologists outside the borders of a Czechoslovakia without freedom.

Naturally, after 1989, everything had to start over again. The problem was that while those who had been expelled from their jobs in sociological institutions could be formally rehabilitated, some of them had lost interest in the field, others were no longer at an adequate professional level (it was an irony of fate that the level they remained at was just that of Bauman's textbooks from the 1960s) because over those long two decades they read almost no contemporary sociological works, and a small group had unfortunately been driven to the kind of negative state that the 'powerful above' wanted them to be in – apathy, sometimes alcoholism, total resignation. It was another of the 'Czech paradoxes' that those who had remained most knowledgeable in contemporary philosophy and even sociology were a number of professionally cultivated Marxists who unapologetically and devotedly served the regime, for which they were 'rewarded' with access to Western literature, the leisure to study, opportunities to publish ('within the limits of the law', as Jaroslav Hašek used to say), and even the doors were left half-open for them to travel to the West.

Bauman's return

Zygmunt Bauman was reintroduced into the Czech Republic in the form of his several well-known studies on social types of the post-modern age [Bauman 1995] – I translated them shortly after I was finally able to get hold of Bauman's texts from the 1980s. Rather paradoxically, publication of this exceptionally successful book (released in two editions with large print runs, and the book is still read today) was received with criticism from 'enlightened Marxists' who saw Bauman as something of an essayistic anomaly – they were familiar with Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida (and we were catching up), and Bauman struck them as not post-modern enough. One in this select group wrote that 'if Mr XY wants to introduce post-modern thought through Bauman's essays, he will be leading his students into a dead end'. Today I am certain that starting with Bauman was the right way to go; the dazzling effect of French postmodernism, 'deconstructivist' philosophy, and Heideggerian phenomenology tended to induce first muddled thinking and then a fashionable trend from which nothing was gained but mas-

tery of an enigmatic language that had little to say about reality (or only the 'initiated' thought it did).[8] Publication of *Reflections on a Postmodern Age* (in Czech only, 1995 and 2002) was followed by the Czech publications of Bauman's 'textbook' on sociology, *Thinking Sociologically: An Introduction for Everyone* (1990, in Czech 1996 and 2000) and then *Thinking Sociologically*, written with Tim May (2001, in Czech 2004). In 2002 *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) was published in Slovak and then a year later in Czech. While by 2000 almost all of the Czech translations of Bauman's texts has been published by SLON (Sociologické nakladatelství; Sociology Press), after that Bauman was 'discovered' by other publishers, as he proved to be not just a notable author but also an important 'commercial article'. As a very readable author, a sociologist with enormous scope and extraordinary life experience, and the figure who as a Marxist had given the stamp of legitimacy to the 'new sociology' that was emerging in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, Bauman truly reigned supreme – next to Giddens there is no foreign author read more than he is in Czech sociology.

Doctor honoris causa Universitas Carolinae and a meeting with Václav Havel

In 2002 Charles University decided to award an honorary doctorate to Zygmunt Bauman. In October 2002 Bauman not only came to Prague and gave an outstanding ceremonial speech, but he also took part in a three-hour talk with students – with his wife Janina by his side. He was received at the Polish Embassy in Prague and visited Prague Castle at President Václav Havel's invitation. This created a curious situation: I asked President Havel what language we would speak in, and Havel blithely responded that he would speak Czech and Professor Bauman Polish, that is how he had always communicated with Michnik and Geremek, why should it be any different this time? I had my doubts (based on experience) about this form of communication, and as I expected ended up in the role of interpreter – for me it was a great honour, but for Bauman and Havel probably somewhat amusing. Havel led us into his Presidential Office and apologetically excused himself to attend other duties, but he insisted we have a look around and stay as long as we like. After the visit with Havel, during which both men displayed a clear liking for one another and an intellectual understanding, Bauman said that, except for his visit with the Queen of Denmark, he had never before experienced anything so uplifting to the spirit and that at the same time had brought him so close to someone he respects but had never before met personally.

[8] Paradoxically this was also true of dissident intellectuals, who reached Heidegger and Husserl through the study of Jan Patočka and adopted a peculiar philosophical vocabulary and outlook on the world, which only Vaclav Havel's 'common sense', intellectually enlightened, but unencumbered by 'autonomous philosophy', was able to transcend.

Zygmunt Bauman repaid Czech sociology in an exceptionally noble gesture. In August 2002 Prague suffered heavy floods which destroyed a large part of the library collection at the Institute of Sociology. Bauman donated a large collection of his own books to the Institute of Sociology and to the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University (which had nominated him for the honorary doctorate), which supplied them with almost every important work of Western sociology from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Nor did Václav Havel forget his meeting with Zygmunt Bauman. Havel and his wife Dagmar set up the Dagmar and Václav Havel Vision 97 Foundation, which each year awards a prize 'to significant thinkers whose work exceeds the traditional framework of scientific knowledge, contributes to the understanding of science as an integral part of general culture and is concerned with unconventional ways of asking fundamental questions about cognition, being and human existence'.[9] Zygmunt Bauman became the prize's eighth laureate (in 2006), preceded by Karl Pribram, Umberto Eco, Joseph Weizenbaum, Robert Reich, and Philip Zimbardo, and followed, for example, by Julia Kristeva. To mark the occasion of the award the Foundation always publishes a book or collection of studies by that year's laureate. In honour of Zygmunt Bauman's award they published an interview with Bauman that was conducted by Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska and Roman Kubicki [Bauman 2006]. The book opens with the speech Bauman gave at the award ceremony, in which he said: 'Hope is the only thing that we know needs to be stubbornly pursued, as it is the only human attitude that has no valid or worthy alternative. Hope is allowed – and only allowed – to help us to avoid sin, cowardice, and egoistic self-centredness and to give us the strength we need to resist the temptations of absolute truth, whole truth, and exclusive irrevocable truth.'

After the ceremony, in which his late wife Janina also took part, Václav Havel borrowed several of Bauman's books from me that he had not yet read. He has not yet returned them to me – but I known they are in good hands. Zygmunt Bauman occasionally returns to Prague for the international conference Forum 2000, which was initiated by Václav Havel, and which brings together important thinkers from every academic field to discuss the most serious issues of our times. Zygmunt Bauman – and this is part of the source of his popularity and recognition by the public – is one of those figures who have something to say about these issues. The words of the first Czechoslovak President, a sociologist by profession, Tomáš G. Masaryk would seem to apply well to Bauman: 'I have never dealt with any problem that was not then a problem personal to me, that did not then touch me personally' [in Ludwig 1935: 246].

Miloslav Petrusek

English translation Robin Cassling

[9] http://www.vize.cz/en/prize.php.

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