

Summary

The Autumn of Postmodernism: The theoretical Challenges of the Present Time (*Podzim postmodernismu. Teoretické výzvy současnosti*) is a collection of twelve studies from the fields of philosophy, politology, aesthetics, and literary studies. The inspiration to compile this book lay in the conference *Roads out of Postmodernism? Postmodernism, Capitalism, and Utopia* (*Cesty z postmodernismu? Postmodernismus, kapitalismus, utopie*) held on December 13th, 2013. The purpose of this meeting of philosophical, political, and aesthetic scholars was to discuss Michael Hauser's book *Roads out of Postmodernism: A Philosophical Reflection on a Time of Transition* (*Cesty z postmodernismu. Filosofická reflexe doby přechodu*, Filosofia, Praha 2012), in which the author presented his approach for overcoming the contradictions and biases in postmodern thought. However, the contributions read at this conference (by V. Bělohradský, J. Pechar, J. Fiala, J. Stejskal, and R. Kanda) comprise only the minority of the publication presented here. Authors who had not actively taken part in the debate at the time were approached, and thus the publication grew substantially in size—and took on a design different from that originally intended.

In his introductory “Seeking Perspective” (*Hledání perspektivy*), *Roman Kanda* reflects upon the conceptual dichotomy of utopia and perspective. Here he references a 1958 article by Marxist philosopher Karel Kosík. Kosík characterizes utopia as an idealization of the future that separates the present from the future with a caesura. Perspective, meanwhile, reveals within the present the conditions for creating future societal and economic formations, as well as cultural and ideological forms. Kanda also casts light upon Hauser's titular metaphor, the “autumn of postmodernism”—it aims to express departure, the historical intermezzo of a situation of transition. (It is an updating of the title of Johan Huizinga's book *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*.)

This book is divided into four thematic sections. The first, entitled “Breaking Through the Circle of Postmodernism” (*Prolamování kruhu postmodernismu*), offers five differentiated perspectives on the questions surrounding the area of subject theory and how to conceptu-

ally grasp postmodernism (and, for some contributors, also surrounding its defense). The book's second section, "The Contradictions of Late Capitalism" (Rozpory pozdního kapitalismu), offers a pair of contributions—one oriented sociologically, the other politologically—covering the pitfalls and dangers of current societal and economic developments. The third section, entitled "The Challenges of the aesthetic Modernism" (Výzvy estetické moderny), contains essays on how currency can be sought within pre-postmodern art, i.e. in the art of romanticism (K. H. Mácha), modernism, and the avant-garde. The fourth part, "From Utopia to Perspective" (Od utopie k perspektivě), by Hauser himself, broadens and deepens the discussion and is far more than just a postscript. It is both a response to criticisms sounded in certain of the preceding texts, and simultaneously an elaboration upon some of the author's theses and arguments. The book also includes an Editor's Note and an index of names.

Now we will provide readers with a closer look at the individual contributions, noting their basic themes and lines of argumentation. In his essay "Which Way Lead the Roads out of Postmodernism" (Kudy vedou cesty z postmodernismu), *Václav Bělohradský* takes note of the rhetorical construction of philosophical texts. This has been a subject of interest for none other than postmodernist thinkers (R. Rorty). Bělohradský brings two objections against the attempts to overcome postmodernism. Before postmodernism can be overcome, it must be bounded—defined. But in a society overflowing in communication, we lose the necessary distance between the defining and the defined—a crisis of definition has arrived. The second objection is channeled towards the very nature of defining the postmodernism that is to be overcome. These definitions and characteristics, Bělohradský believes, emphasize the contradictions of postmodernism, but do not sufficiently appreciate its epistemological rebellion, which lies in the radical criticism of the fetish of objectivity, and which amounts to its very own political truth.

For *Martin Škrabaha*, author of "Solitary Breakthroughs" (Osamělé průlomky), Hauser's *Cesty z postmodernismu* lacks a unifying blueprint. It is more a series of conceptually unsystematic reflections, lacking any deep interconnection or feeling of unity. Besides its linguistic

ponderousness and occasional incomprehensibility, Škabraha criticizes the book for its lack of a theoretical reflection upon societal practice (which could, perhaps, tie into Kosík's conception) and a proper consideration of the intersubjective level.

Jozef Lysý's "The Crisis of a Type of Rationality of the Modern Times" (*Krise novověkého typu racionality*) explores the question of postmodernism and its limits, in part against the background of the conception of Slovak theorists Václav Černík, Jozef Viceník, and Emil Višňovský. These theorists define the conflict between modernism and postmodernism as one that takes place within the rationality of a new age. Postmodernism only "overthrew" modernism by accenting particularism in place of universalism, plurality in place of singularity, fragments in place of wholes, heteronymy in place of homonymy, etc. The current crisis of this new-age rationality is not, Lysý says, the last judgment of the history of thought. It can on the contrary be a hope and the starting point for a future philosophy.

The relation between modernism and postmodernism is also covered by *Jiří Pechar* in his "Modernism and Postmodernism" (*Modernismus a postmodernismus*), which is especially reminiscent of Lyotard's conception of postmodernism as the radicalization of modernism. However, the author goes on to concentrate on criticizing Žižek's interpretations of Lacan's theory. Pechar provides evidence that Žižek shifts and modifies certain of Lacan's concepts, and this even at the cost of a certain muddying or argumentational self-contradiction, which does not fail to affect Žižek's conception of the subject. In his contribution's conclusion, Pechar returns to the theme of overcoming postmodernism by breathing new life into modernistic aims. This type of formulation of the problem is, Pechar states, necessarily ambiguous, and therefore reminiscent of Derridean impulses that could possibly bear more weight.

In his study "The Perils of Particularism and the Matter of the Subject" (*Úskalí partikularismu a otázka subjektu*), *Petr Kužel* performs his analysis against the backdrop of post-Marxist theoretical thought. He mentions in this context the philosophy of A. Badiou, S. Žižek, J. Rancière, and É. Balibar, and turns especially to the work of the already-mentioned L. Althusser. Kužel's introductory thesis as-

serts that Hauser's criticism does not primarily concern postmodernism, but rather particularism, of which postmodernism is "merely" the main representative. Thus the path out of the postmodern paradigm should be the search for that which is general. However, this path can be found not outside of postmodernism, but rather dialectically inside of postmodernism itself—in its gaps and contradictions. Kužel also critically tracks the Marxist footprints in Hauser's work and helps to better define certain areas. As regards the subject, Kužel values Hauser's adjustment to Žižek's conception, within which Hauser replaces Lacan's concept of the Real with Althusser's latent content, from which the subversive strength of the new form of the subject arises. Nevertheless Kužel's fundamental objection is the notion of an "authentic subject" detached from disciplining mechanisms. Kužel asks: what would be the ontological status of such a subject? Kužel sees as one possible solution Althusser's perception of the subject as permanently ideological and thus not detached from the dominant order, but with one important addition—that ideological apparatuses produce not only the reigning ideology, but also—as their "side effect"—a revolutionary ideology.

Oleg Suša opens up the book's second section, oriented towards sociology and politology, with his essay "Human Potential: Hopes, Conditions, and Paradoxes. Emancipation for Individuals, or Capital?" (Lidský potenciál: naděje, podmínky a paradoxy. Emancipace individua, či kapitálu?). Within it, he studies the context and paradoxes of two key philosophical and sociological themes from the end of the last century: human potential and the information revolution, which were originally tied to the concept of civilizational progress. However, the globalization process of the last few decades has made this optimistic faith markedly problematic. Both themes have gradually been co-opted by the practices of capital. Instead of the emancipation of man, we have seen the emancipation of capital, and social inequality and forced individualization continue to deepen.

Jaroslav Fiala opens his essay "Present Shock: Roads from Neoliberalism to Postfascism" (Šok z přítomnosti. Cesty z neoliberalismu k postfašismu) with a criticism of a social-democratic left that is impotent in implementing leftist politics. The right, on the other hand,

is successfully depoliticizing social topics and transferring them to the language of moral panic. Fiala labels the current context of negotiations and economic/political practices as a culture of guilt, in which it is demanded of the individual that they increase their own value on the labor market while accepting all risks. In harmony with R. Seymour, Fiala characterizes the neoliberal ideology as an authoritarian reconfiguration of liberalism—thus in neoliberal discourse one can speak of a liberal dictatorship (F. A. Hayek). At the end of his contribution, Fiala outlines the scenario for future development in which the dystopian genre prevails.

The third section, dedicated to the area of aesthetic theory and the situation of art in the late-postmodern era, opens with a compact contemplation by *Jakub Stejskal* “Distance and Modernity” (Distance a modernita), on modernity and cognitive distance. The author declares his intention to defend the concept of distance and explore how much weight it can carry, using the visual arts as his material. We can flip the postmodern deconstruction of the distanced (the “objective”) view and speak of the plurality of modernities—and of perceivers not as consumers, but rather as potential distanced observers (J. Ganeri). Distance eliminates the concept of affect, which likewise abolishes the distinction between consumer and (distanced) observer.

Roman Kanda’s essay “Art on the Road out of the Postmodern: Engagé or Radical?” (Umění na cestě z postmodernismu: angažované nebo radikální?) looks toward the discussions on art engaged to political causes that recently took place on the pages of Czech cultural periodicals. It sets as its goal a more comprehensive, theory- and history-based approach to the problem area. In three steps, the author explores the relationship between the artistic and the societal, between autonomy and political engagement—and attacks both of these polarities as historically contingent constructs. If art cannot be pondered without reflecting on the societal context, then one cannot help but see certain contradictions within the concept of political engagement in art as well. Kanda defines such engagement as the antithesis of autonomous art—in which lies its limitation. Engaged art places communication (the obligation of understanding) above form (or “anti-form”). The author then presents an outline for a concep-

tion of radical art that, while it does not stand against engaged art, emphasizes ambivalence of form. Radical art shares with engaged art its rejection of postmodern polyperspectivism. In its objectification, it protests against reality (T. W. Adorno).

The next two contributions turn to Hauser's interpretations of the work of K. H. Mácha. *Petr Pola* offers "Mácha and the Roads to a New Modernism" (Mácha a cesty k novému modernismu), in which he analyzes in detail the argumentation that Hauser presents in *Roads out of Postmodernism*. He reproduces Hauser's idea that the crisis of today's art stems not from a lack of creative personalities, but rather from the very nature of late-postmodern culture. Mácha's work expresses the loss of connections between the subject and the world, and yet this loss is not absolute; it is an extreme experience and a starting point (in this Mácha resembles L. Klíma). Pola's objection concerns whether or not Hauser fully appreciates the true reasons for the birth of postmodernism—which, Pola states, was born not from fatigue and weakness, but rather from the realization that certain paths within modernism are impassable.

In the last contribution in this section, entitled "K. H. Mácha and His Road into Nothingness and Maturity. Romantic period and Postmodernism" (K. H. Mácha a jeho cesta do nicoty a k dospělosti. Romantismus a postmodernismus), *Martin Z. Pokorný* also takes a closer look at Hauser's interpretation of Mácha. He appreciates as original Hauser's finding that Mácha's characters lie in an intermediate time and space. Mácha's deep artistic reflection upon Man's relationship to the absolute arose at a moment in history when God was ceasing to serve as the absolute, and when the absolute had already become ungraspable per se. Through precisely this fact, Mácha's work can inspire us in our efforts to overcome postmodernism.

The book's fourth section is entirely devoted to *Michael Hauser's* text "Beyond the Borders of Postmodernism. Theoretical Clarifications and Responses to Authors" (Za hranice postmodernismu. Teoretická vyjasnění a odpovědi autorům). Hauser's foundation here is the conception of postmodern society as a utopia. He turns first to the observations by V. Bělohradský and M. Škrabaha. The postmodern rejection of definitions and dichotomies is contradictory because borderlines

of a sort—for example between good and evil—are reflexively expected. And yet it is not possible to define them, to lay the fence-posts for these concepts. The construing of “the way out” as a rhetorical figure should be more a warning than a statement. The postmodern deconstruction of dichotomies, hierarchies, and concepts is ultimately taken advantage of by the powers that be; they are in harmony with the logic of its functioning. Thus postmodernism does not represent the longed-for road outwards. And yet, in Hauser’s opinion, neither does the anarchic tradition, i.e. that of critical strategies, protests, rebellions, and uprisings, which do not lead towards the establishment of a new order. In the next part of his reaction, Hauser covers the putative contradictions in his *Roads out of Postmodernism*. He admits to certain ambiguities in his text, but also points out the phenomenon of misunderstanding caused by reduction and the act of not-seeing and not-distinguishing certain symptoms and phenomena. Postmodernism, Hauser states, continues to maintain its dominant position, and yet this position becomes ever weaker as its ideological function gradually strengthens. Both postmodernism itself and institutions, the economy, etc. produce unintended consequences that amount to latent content. Hauser expands Althusser’s concept of latent content out to include societal phenomena and asserts that none other than latent contents are the road out of postmodernism—one generated by a situation of transition. Meanwhile, latent contents are only visible in retrospect. Hauser devotes the last part of his reactions to the question of the subject. On the basis of the impulses of Petr Pola, he specifies his position between two approaches—Blanchot’s space of “the Neutral” and Žižek’s Hegelian “night of the world.” Regarding the essay by Martin Z. Pokorný, he states that the alternative to modernism is not postmodernism, but rather negative modernism, which is “dark,” or transcendental modernism, which emphasizes a relationship to ideas. Regarding Petr Kužel’s question on whether or not one must consider the authentic subject in its detachment from disciplining mechanisms, Hauser responds by objecting to Kužel’s solution to the given problem: is revolutionary ideology a “side effect” of the ideological apparatus at all times, or only under certain conditions—and if so, which ones? Both sets of ideologies—legitimizing and revolutionary—would

be acting on the subject, and so it is not clear if revolutionary ideology as a “side effect” can contribute to the rise of an acting subject, because revolutionary ideology can easily be “overheard.”

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