

## On Postmodernism, Writing Libraries and Language Vagabonds

Tomáš Hauer: *A Through Post-modern Theory* Prague: Karolinum 2002, 228 p.;  
Tomáš Hauer: *Write Your Own Bookcase (or Language Vagabonds and Postmodern Public area)*, Prague: ISV 2002, 260 p.

In the course of the last fifteen years an apparent gap in the Czech philosophical milieu, which was the result of the previous era, has started to be filled. While in the West a debate on the trendiness and vigour of the post-modern thought moved heaven and earth, **in this country bookshops offered other titles instead of books on topics like these. However, only one and a half decade was enough to fill this gap, at least partly. Nowadays it is possible to read works by Lyotard, Deleuze, Derrida, Baudrillard, Welsch, Rorty, etc.** Besides there is the original production of home provenance trying to enlighten in different forms and from different points of view what we have become accustomed to calling postmodernism.

One of the leading representatives of the Czech post-modern philosophy is Tomáš Hauer, who teaches at the Technical University of Ostrava and at Ostrava University, who has devoted himself to this subject matter for some time and who is the author of a number of works and studies on related topics.<sup>1</sup> In 2002 two books on a similar subject appeared: *A Through Postmodern Theory* (below TPT) and *Write Your Own Bookcase or Language Vagabounds and Postmodern Public area* (below WYOL).

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<sup>1</sup> I mention at random a few works from his production: Hauer, T.: *Natural World and Postmodernism or Wandering is not Beating Around*, Ostrava: Aries 1995; Hauer, T.: *Enquiry as recontextualization*, Ostrava: VŠB-TU 1996; Hauer, T.: *Ethical Consequences of R. Rorty's Post-modern Irony*, in: *Etika* 1993, č. 2, p. 4–12; Hauer, T.: *Natural World and Postmodernism*, *Filosofický časopis*, Praha 1993, 3/1993, p. 1–18; Hauer, T.: *Recontextualization of metaphores*, in: *Filozofia*, 1995, č. 4, p. 195–203; Hauer, T.: *Solid Subjects, flexible texts and public speech talk*, in: *Convention in Science and Philosophy*, Prague: FÚ AV ČR 1998, p. 86–96; atd.

In these books Tomáš Hauer presents in two different ways a fundamental profile of post-modern thought, therefore we can recognize them as an introduction into post-modern philosophy. As postmodernism itself is envisaged with strong contempt in some philosophical circles, any attempt at clarifying this philosophical tradition can be perceived as a step offering a product of a possible view of this intellectual trend belonging to the last decades of the last century and the beginning of the present century.

One of the traditional philosophical problems is to determine what philosophy itself means. Postmodernism is no exception. In the Czech conditions an interpretation stressing paradigmatic features of radical plurality has gained influence due to (besides other factors) the translation of the chosen passages from Welsch's *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (*Our Postmodern Modern*, Prague: Zvon 1994). Although Tomáš Hauer uses plurality as an explanation frame, in many places (cf. e.g.. *WYOL*, p. 231, *TPT* p. 43, etc.) he understands postmodernism in opposition to Welsch's mentioned opinion. Hauer, following Lyotard, claims that postmodernism characterizes mainly "*a new conception of a public area. Adapting to the fact that we are able to deduce all thegnoseological, political and ethical effects from the recognition that our effort to describe the same problems and situations in a neutral way produces various sets of equally important sentences.*"<sup>2</sup>

Therefore the key topic for him is public area again. According to Hauer, post-modern public area is different from the place where public opinion is only formed. Using Habermas's distinction, he states that his conception of a public area is "...*the sphere of our life where by means of our ultimate vocabularies the individuals, elites, political parties or various professional groups try to push through their interests whose externalities affect a larger part of society. ... Post-modern conception of public area is then based on the conviction that nothing can be definitely motivated, but everything can be criticized, therefore no view, value or interest in itself is more humane, more important and more privileged than another one.*"<sup>3</sup>

In the public area defined like this, individuals as well as groups have to give up the right to the truth or probability, because there is no criterion which could be used as a standard for justification of the competing attitude. Additionally, not even this post-modern vocabulary and post-modern conception of a public area is obligatory for us in any respect, because postmodernism is only one of those

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<sup>2</sup> T. Hauer: *A Through Postmodern Theory*, Prague: Prague: Karolinum 2002, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> T. Hauer: *A Through Postmodern Theory*, Praha: Karolinum 2002, p.44–46, comp. also T. Hauer, *Write Your Own Bookcase* (or *Language Vagabonds and Postmodern Public area*), Prague: ISV 2002, p. 182-185.

groups pushing through its interests in a public area. And nothing can be definitely motivated, not even the justification of this view.

Hauer does not steer the consequences of his public area determination this way and focuses mainly on the roles and tasks played or met by individual components of a public area. One of those aspects especially pointed out by the author is the metaphor of the literalized culture, which does not refer to an argumentation or the theory, but tries to develop imagination, sensitivity to many differences of humane matters and whose source is mainly the world of literature, whose stimuli is Tomáš Hauer mostly inspired by.

Further content of TPT is made by a devoted and absorbing introduction into the selected postmodern theories. Besides the necessary primordia, rightly and properly set into the framework of the tradition of structuralism, Gianni Vattimo (TPT, p. 85–122), Jean Baudrillard (TPT, p. 122–136), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (TPT, p. 139–185) and Jean Françoise Lyotard (TPT, p. 187–226) get their own profiles.

In spite of the fact that the proclaimed intention of the book is mere sketching and fleeting surveying post-modern attitudes (TPT, p. 13), the author does not stick to this approach and at a number of places he verges on the systematic explanation of those issues which especially address him and which he considers important enough to expand on. It certainly is not detrimental to the matter, because the book does not appear as an ordinary study text on post-modern philosophy, but remains a lively dialogue between the author and the leading personalities of postmodernism.

This moment stands out even more in Hauer's second book. WYOL is the original attempt at "postmodernism in practice". Even the title itself suggests that the reader gets a clearly structured manual, which will guide them through the possible problems while making their own bookcase. Tomáš Hauer tries to meet such an expectation, because he gradually explains the reasons why you should plunge into such a (not very usual) plan, he eliminates the difficulties which can discourage you from such intentions, motivates the readers for the next progress and finally he admits that he was just circling around this revolutionary idea without providing a satisfactory explanation (WYOL p. 210), which represents just one of the well-designed estimates opening the door to further upgraded problems and their elaborating.

What makes anybody entitled to suggest that people should make their own bookcase? According to Tomáš Hauer the essential condition is to become a language vagabond. We may think that this denotes somebody who in fact cannot even read or write. However, the case is different here. A language vagabond is somebody who has: "...essential and unceasing doubts about their own vocabulary

they use at present to tell the story of their own life, ... They do not long for historical magnificence, but their main goal is private autonomy. ... They realize that the arguments conceived in their present vocabulary are just sufficient for them to vindicate their version of the world"<sup>4</sup> And above all even in the ideal state of full functionality of the reason and perfect informedness people will come to a variety of conceptions of a good life, so a language vagabond is still aware of the fact that their vocabulary is not much closer to reality than other vocabularies they can encounter in a public area.

This is an image of a language vagabond who – supported by literal and philosophical stimuli – can plunge into creating their own bookcase. However, Hauer does not mean a case where dust can accumulate on his books. The phrase *make your own bookcase* is presented as a metaphor which (referring to Derrida) prefers writing to the written material, because the book suggests the idea of the original described in the book, while writing resigns to the original, as the original is always a copy. The encouragement to make your own bookcase is important for work with other texts, because we should not be “so interested in what the author “really” had to say or what the text says “in itself”, but in what transcends it: what I spontaneously think of while reading it, coincidental connection with something I know (and the author may not know), some abnormality, analogy, hint, likeness, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

Not only in this connection is it necessary to appreciate that the author relieved an otherwise substantial book by prosaic passages which look like autobiography. Thanks to this the whole book takes on a form of the above mentioned manual directly presenting practical examples. And to comply with this version completely, Hauer points out that the whole book is as a matter of fact only “rewriting“ and reading (and therefore an interpretation) of the book by G. Chang called *A Guide to Post-modern Thought* (WYOL, p. 32). Every open-minded reader asks: does this untranslated original the author pays homage to exist at all? And how could it exist if the original is always a copy? In this way Tomáš Hauer draws the idea to the real end: he makes his own bookcase.<sup>6</sup>

And in this bookcase the representatives of post-modern traditions of thought appear again. Tomáš Hauer reassembles a mosaic from their conceptions in a leisurely way and introduces difficult theories to the readers. Thanks to the form and

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<sup>4</sup> T. Hauer: *Write Your Own Bookcase (or Language Vagabonds and Postmodern Public area)*, Prague: ISV 2002, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> T. Hauer: *Write Your Own Bookcase (or Language Vagabonds and Post-modern Public area)*, Prague: ISV 2002, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Namely it is not important for us at all if a book of this kind was written by a professor in Virginia and whether the professor called like this lives or whether he really works for this university.

contents of the book we can speak about an outstanding work which can address a number of readers, who do not necessarily need to become language vagabonds.

Both books can be considered as two different, but equally inspiring introductions to postmodernism. If we consider Gadamer's distinction between an actuality and a piece of information stated by Hauer himself (the value of the former being determined by the closeness in time to what it announces while the value of the latter increases in time) then we can argue with post-modern certainty that if postmodernism itself is not a mere fashion, Hauer's books devoted to up-to-date topics have a mainly informative character.