



Concepts, Theories, Methods

Lucie Storchová a kol.: *Koncepty a dějiny. Proměny pojmů v současné historické vědě*
[Concepts and History. Changes in Terminology of the Present History Science]. Praha: Scriptorium 2014, 447 pages.

Jaroslav David, Radek Čech, Jana Davidová Glogarová, Lucie Radková, Hana Šústková: *Slovo a text v historickém kontextu. Perspektivy historickosémantické analýzy jazyka*
[The Word and Text in a Historical Context. Perspectives of a Historical-semantic Analysis of the Language], Brno: Host 2013, 324 pages.

The interest in theoretical and methodological issues has been in the Czech historiography permanently on rise. Recently it has not been the case only of the two reviewed publications, but it also concerns a publication on critical theories in the modern society. However, it deserves its own review, also due to the fact that it was inspired by long term intellectual activities at the head of which there has been an influential *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt am Main since 1923. Similar situation is as for a voluminous book on research problems of modern history.¹ The research team around Lucie Storchová has to be credited first and foremost for one thing, i.e. that it was thanks to their research endeavour that there has been a greater pressure as for a culture of conceptualization in the historian's work in the Czech historiography. In its conception it rather reminds of a 8 volume German encyclopaedia *Historische Grundbegriffe* (eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck, 1972–1997), that deals with principal interpretation terms not only with respect to historiography but terminological exquisiteness of the journalism as such.

Whereas the German publication was ordered alphabetically, in the Czech one we can see an effort to structure the concepts in accordance with the theme that is covered in a single collective monograph. From complexity of the genre point of view it is necessary to state that a summarizing conclusion is missing there. Nevertheless, it has been replaced with a well compiled index and the reader can find with each entry a downward reference to the same terms that are to be found in other entries. Individual entries also always upgraded by means of a final passage on potential prospects of a further research. Nevertheless, there is still a problem in a more thorough reasoning of the procedure explaining why some of the terms had been chosen as essential ones and others had been left out. The choice had been influenced by discussions among the authors; we are shortly informed about this fact at the very beginning in the introduction. That is why we do not know how the consensus what is and is not significant had been arrived at. The notion of historian's work is matched here with an impact upon his/her theoretical apparatus. The matter of fact that his/her pre-understanding of the topic he/she is analyzing had

¹ See: Marek Hrubec et al., *Kritická teorie společnosti. Český kontext*. Prague 2013 and Jana Čechurová — Jan Randák et al., *Základní problémy studia moderních a soudobých dějin*. Prague 2014.

been also influenced by either admitted/conscious or sub-conscious world-view or other value preferences is a rather complementary than a constitutive component of particular author approaches.

The very treatise of how the present historiography has got as far as the term conceptualization and how this term has been developing is indeed missing here. It is quite a surprise for me that the term “conceptualizing historiography” that was brought into historical research 40 years ago by French historian Paul Veyne is mentioned in some entries, however without any further analysis that would take into account his constitutive texts from 1974 and 1976 (p. 17–18, 53, 55 and 72). He perceived a conceptualizing historiography as a “real historiography”. He took into account among others “ideal types” by Max Weber that can name particular events by virtue of more general notions thanks to which we can better orientate ourselves in human relations.

In so doing he perceived ideal types as an essential premise of historian’s text integrity that he/she, however, has to construct with a regard of a period and themes that the text is dealing with. He thus perceived them in a more historical way, hence less “universally” than Weber. Nevertheless he admitted that it was indeed by their means that the event approach to historiography could be overcome. In addition he opined that the history is much closer to philosophy than to science since it analyzes its object in a mediated way, hence it is in its very substance an intellectual discipline. The historian should, according to his point of view, concentrate how to explain in the best possible way why people in the past acted in a different manner than people do at present. The conceptualizing historiography was then according to Veyne to differentiate between value components of past and present cultural routine with an impact upon a message what we as historians find in them as characteristic or otherwise constitutive.²

At the same time I have to ask to what extent the notion conceptualization is unisonous in the reviewed work with an aggressive poster of the Russian avant-gardist and one of the authors of the bolshevist propaganda El Lisicikij who created it in 1919 in order to support whiteguards’ defeat in the civil war. The authors used it to wit as an “eye-catcher” on the book cover in such a way that in the frontispiece its motto is published in Russian the text of which could be translated into English in a following way: “Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge”. The Russian text itself that was an integral part of the author’s graphics they had however removed. I suppose thus that their main intention was to emphasize in such a way, by virtue of this graphic symbolism, an offensive character of their doing which they attribute a fundamental pedagogical significance to. Nevertheless their perception of the history as science would have merited, after numerous postmodern attacks to its scientism as such, a much more thorough reasoning with respect to the matter of fact that it can be at present in a rather tautological way interpreted first and foremost as the history of research and thinking which is, on the ground of “some” reasons, labelled as a scientific one.

2 Paul Veyne, *L’histoire conceptualisante*. In: *Faire de l’histoire I. (Nouveaux problèmes)*, eds. Jacques Le Goff Pierre Nora. Paris 1974, pp. 62–92 and *ibid.*, *L’inventaire des differences*, Paris 1976.



I am at the same time very well aware of the fact that this task is highly demanding. It was presented as a theme mainly in the entry on the science and knowledge written by Lucie Storchová and Jiří Růžička (p. 155–181). On the ground of their attitude to the issue we may come to a conclusion that they perceive history, or if you like historiography much more than a mere science in a Foucaultian way, i.e. as “gnosis” that in nearly unlimited extent of various contextualizations and configurations analyzes conditions of possibilities and limits of the part of “cognizable” which the scholars in various historical periods have attributed greater credibility than other parts. This theory nevertheless cannot explain why the historiography contrary to a historical novel or film is “in fact” the science since these also work de facto with a concept of trustworthiness that can be measured also by means of their potential to a symbolical communication. In other words: the bigger it is, the more trustworthy they are.

At the same time I have a feeling that the colleagues Storchová and Růžička perceive the research analysis of the subject field by means of Weberian ideal types as an out-of-date ones, by virtue of which the historian picks from a particular, or if you like unsorted reality such things that he/she considers as for this reality from the abstract differentiation point of view as representative. Then he/she tries to prove suitability of in such a way perceived ideal types by means of their explication productivity. This methodological approach is however still convinced that the sciences on society cannot out of their scope establish a meaningful world picture. According to concepts of the Weberian nominalism these pictures are in addition typologically various, e.g. they differ from the religion or utopias since they are not based upon the faith or wishful thinking but on verification upon which the premise can be applied that the greater its extent the better the construction of an ideal type. The truth as such does not exist then but it is still based on constructions of interpretation trustworthiness.

The very discourse of the publication is divided into three main parts that more particularly structure the topics that the authors deem as suitable in accordance with their point of view. Essentially it is a structure based upon the symbolism of an “upside down tree” the very unity of which is created by the roots that are, however, in this case situated at the “top”. Further on there is a central trunk and branches that are, nevertheless, not situated above the trunk but below it. First and foremost they are interested in key concepts of the historiography themselves (source, method, event, time, space, matter of fact, notion, structure, process, discourse, narration, history actor, history) and then in important and from the research point of view up-to-date conceptualization turning points as much as their applications in the historical research (society, culture, industry, class, gender, ethnicity, race). At the same time we may come across here with analytical conceptualization categories that other present historians perceive as evident (identity, memory, modernization, science/knowledge/gnosis and authoritarian regimes, war, piety, city, landscape).

Let us leave aside a choice in the third analysis, even though we could object why the war was dealt with in here but not the revolution, the same case being dictatorships and authoritarian regimes versus civil society, city vs. countryside. It is clear from the index the most frequent terms in the book are such notions as *discourse*, *culture*, *politics*, *substantiality/reality*, *economics*, *context*, *power* and *system*. As for frequency the *historical development* is far behind. This matter of fact proves that this



publication differs fundamentally due to its approach from the work *Úvod do studia dějepisu* that came into being in 1985 under the management of Miroslav Hroch. The authors of *Koncepty a dějiny* dedicated to wit this work to the 30th anniversary of this, as they themselves call “the most influential Czech work in this field of study”. The authorship concerning, more than 20% can be credited to Jan Horský, who is followed by Jiří Růžička with less than 17%, then there is Lucie Storchová with some 10%. Together they are authors of a nearly half of the text. Let us point out that in the team of 15 authors there are 5 women.³

The theoretical reflexion inherent in individual entries is generally impressive. However, there is a problem of authorities’ choice that are perceived as representative ones for the given theme. However, the problem is not only the matter of fact that most of these authorities come from English or German written historiography and other social sciences, together with the French ones. I deem as much more compelling to what a “depth” these analyses go and to what extent also the part of the Czech historiography was taken into account that was being formed in a vivid contact with Western methodological models which it was able to “enrich” sometimes. The historian of economic and social history would have anticipated that in a such voluminous entry on economy (p. 155–181) also influential authorities would have been covered who were dealing with industrial cycles, crises (Josef Schumpeter) or with a social and cultural role of money (see at least Jacques Le Goff, Niall Ferguson and Georg Simmel). I am pointing it out since Jiří Růžička in his analysis stresses out among others the theoretical concepts of an industrial development, or if you like its changes. The theme capitalism concerning such Czech historians as Jaroslav Purš, Pavla Horská and Milan Myška should have been mentioned, too.

It is logical that e.g. the French economist Thomas Piketty could not have been mentioned whose bestseller was published in French as early as in 2013, in English and German in 2014 and it was to be published in Czech under the title *Kapitál v 21. století* in May 2015. Růžička’s entry shows a lovely intellectual involvement, nevertheless after having read it one has to ask if, when covering such a broad term, it is possible at all to choose conceptualizations where a relative agreement could be achieved that they are, at least for modern economic history, more representative than others. I however miss in the entry on modernization at least some reference to Bedřich Loewenstein, Jan Keller and Milan Hlavačka; in the entries on cities Jiří Musil and Luďa Klusáková. We might also ask whether, when speaking of the race, the opinions of the Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz would not have been relevant and if, when dealing with the class, it is possible to leave out completely the French historiographic tradition which was referred to as early as twenty years ago by Ivana Holzbachová.⁴

In the cases when the authors cover a great number of personalities their reading sometimes tends to a literary form of a varicoloured mosaic where it is sometimes ob-

3 Radek Buben, Veronika Čapská, Miloš Havelka, Jan Horský, Jaroslav Ira, Markéta Křížová, Rudolf Kučera, Karolína Pauknerová, Michal Pullmann, Jiří Růžička, Lenka Řezníková, Matěj Spurný, Lucie Storchová, Karel Šima, Jan Tuček.

4 Ivana Holzbachová, *Společnost — dějiny — struktura. Historický materialismus a škola Annales*. Prague 1988, pp. 99–104.



scured what they themselves opine about the very object of their reading. A well-considered reduction of personalities together with a closer thematization would make in my opinion such a reading much more synoptic, but at the same time it would be also more evident what the author's attitude to the theme he/she is covering was. It would be worth reviewing individually then what discourse space the authors in fact dwell in. I have indeed a feeling that some of them oscillate between "objectivism" of a great number of historiography personalities that they draw from, the others strive for something, I would call the "happy mean" in between nominalism that stresses out a construction of interpretation notions and realism where the terms always in some way stand out of the language towards the "reality" situated outside of it, as it is evident e.g. in the conclusion of the entry by Jan Horský on the structure (p. 67).

In other articles an endeavour is manifested in one or another way to overcome postmodern relativism when it tries to make the historiography again an object of a critical research of the society. The representatives of this trend are also interested in the fact to what extent it may be reacted upon problems of the time we live in without giving up postmodern methodological instrumentarium in all cases when it can much better than modernist approaches cover how, or if you like why, and in what contexts the notions and their meanings are being constituted, i.e. the contexts by means of which we, as historians, interpret the past in an interaction with a great scale of information that we possess about it. This way was chosen, as I think, as for the entries by Karel Šima on narration (p. 87–94), Lenka Řezníková on space (p. 36–45) and Michal Pullmann on society (p. 121–132). An initiative role of gender studies when enforcing theoretically more sophisticated historiography concepts is then pointed out by Lucie Storchová (p. 194–204).

Whereas the first reviewed book results from heterogeneous and partly also hybrid plurality of conceptualizations, the second one is focused "merely" upon methods of historical semantics. Its authors follow a methodological legacy of Josef Macek, especially his inspirational essay *Historická sémantika* that was published in 1991 in *Český časopis historický*. Let us add that its original version could not be published in 1970 there even though it was already under proof copy reading. It is true, however, that in the Czech historiography there was also a parallel line of a methodological use of historical semantics that was presented in the monograph on the industrial revolution by Jaroslav Purš who admits his inspiration by Lucien Febvre. This line however remained in the publication *Slovo a text* without notice even though Purš was as close to quantification of historical processes as some of its authors stress out quantification methodological instrumentarium of historical semantics.⁵

Their text is divided into several parts where, from the methodological point of view, such terms are important as: theme concentration of the text, theme concentration and ideology, key words, measurements of similarity differences in theme words selection and semantics of proper nouns with an impact upon toponyms. Their approach undoubtedly confirms a theory that an elaborate quantitative analysis of shifts in meaning of the same words, their quantivalence and changes in a diachronous line must be evidently a productive interpretation strategy. It provides then not only for

⁵ See Jaroslav Purš, *Průmyslová revoluce. Vývoj pojmu a koncepce*. Praha 1973, pp. 29–119.



linguists but for historians, too more complex interpretation possibilities that are more sophisticated than historically-semantic methods which are not of a quantitative character. Any historian of economic and social sciences is taken here mainly by analysis of the New Year speeches of Czechoslovak, or if you like Czech presidents in between 1949 — 2013 (Radek Čech) and the terms *labourer and peasant, bourgeois/petty bourgeois, party and democracy* (Jaroslav David). It can be completed with an essay upon regional newspaper in Opava and Ostrava — Přívoz at the turn of the 19th and 20th century in relation with an ideological fight, nationalism and anti-Semitism (Hana Šústková) where I however miss anything social-democratic press concerning.

At the same time it is evident that the results of a quantitatively perceived semantic analysis depends as much as with other historical methods upon a choice of information sources that are to be used for this purpose. Nevertheless the issue of construction of representativeness of this choice and with it related interpretation hypothesis would have deserved much more attention. By virtue of this prism e.g. the semantics of the term *proletarian* could be interpreted. The proposition that as for its changes the greatest influence was that one of modernization development of the society and especially the penetrating, or if you like an enforcement of the communist ideology of the 19th century into public discourses (p. 150) turned to be indeed correct, however too general. The authors did not manage to take hold of the meaning of the revolution in 1848–1849 for a principal shift in this semantics where the proletarians, e.g. in Paris and Vienna became a political power that energetically rushed into the public space in order to enforce there its requirements in a form of a mass social protest (compare p. 144 ann.).

This term then started being loaded with various semantics that was not only Marxist by far, as it is by the way very well evident from Klácel's journalist dictionary from 1849 which the authors of this book had left aside. This dictionary very well records that any revolutionary period is able to enrich the language with a whole range of terms that had been only rarely its part before or that had started, due to its pressure, apparently change their meaning.⁶ Thus I am returning to an issue to what extent the language determines our interpretation of the story or whether it is rather external signals of social changes that determine the interpretation of the history in our language. In this context we may come across in the publication *Slovo a text* an emphasis upon realistic interpretation of this relation where the hypothesis of a social change influences a semantic analysis of the language that should express it. Nevertheless it is also necessary to take into account an impact of the type (genre) of an analyzed text and also the personality of its author (p. 61, 99, 125, 140, et al.).

It is indeed pity that only a relationship between finding of a quantitative semantic analysis on the one side and a phenomenon of a symbolical communication on the other is covered here in a complementary way. As for this one conclusion could have been presented that in the First May slogans in between 1949 — 1984 there was never a term *proletarian* to be found that had been replaced with the term *working class*, or

6 Compare the entries *Anarchy, Barricade, Communism, Pauperism, Proletarian* and *Revolution*. In: M. F. Klácel. *Slovník pro čtenáře novin, v němž se vysvětlují slova cizího původu*. Brno 1849.



if you like *labourer* (p. 233). The historian would have tried in this context to prove a hypothesis that the confrontation potential inherent in the term *proletarian* started to be replaced with a positive symbolism of a “happy” building of the socialist society in the name of a “Happy Present Day” or “Happiness and Beauty” of the life (see First May slogans from 1961 and 1977, p. 311 and 313). The Czechoslovak communists probably saw in this language shift after ten years of their rule a much more attractive legitimization of their power than in “aggressive” symbolism of the class fight.

At the end it is a pleasure to state that both publications are of such a quality that they can be nearly perceived as a must for all those interested who do not like finding their way in the past only by virtue of what is deemed as “axiomatic”. This recommendation should be taken to heart first and foremost by such historians who either make do with their sources or who try to satisfy such ideological codes of the present time that they deem as “desirable”. If the professional historians or history students do so, a difficult task will be awaiting them since it will be only their decision which of the presented concepts, theories and methods they will adopt. Surely they can also opt for another possibility, i.e. they will look for their research inspiration elsewhere. In any case they will have to choose what is conceptionally important for them and what is not.

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