Comment.Math.Univ.Carolin. 60,1 (2019) 157–160

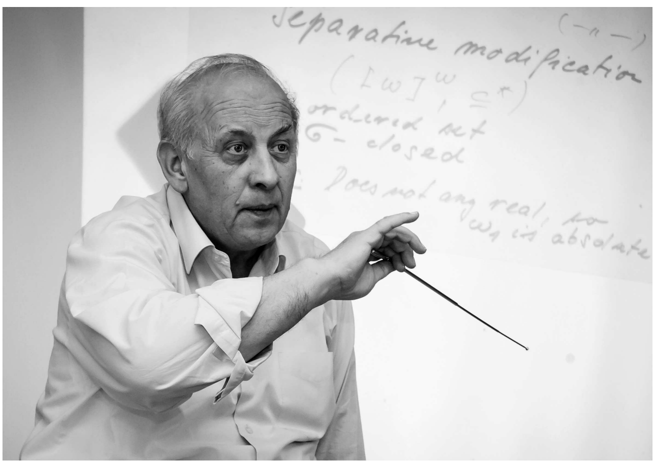
A letter to Bohuš

Mirna Džamonja

Just a few words

Dear Bohuš,

when Michael Hrušák asked me to write an article in your honour for a special issue of the Commentationes, back in the late summer of 2017, all memories of you, the friendship and the mathematics we shared, came back. I decided to write an article that you would have liked, on the subject of Boolean algebras.



I worked hard to find a good problem and I suceeded (it is about uncountable algebras having the approximation property, as in [8]) and have had a few good ideas of a proof. But the problem turned out to be deliciously more complex than what I had estimated and the proof is not yet done. It is coming. The pieces of algebras are constantly floating in my mind, I know some things, yet I am still not happy with the result, and I would only want to give you something I am really happy about and that was made especially with you in mind. So, forgive me Bohuš, I cannot write you an article in the time that is left to meet Michael's

---

DOI 10.14712/1213-7243.2015.278

The author thanks l'Institut d'Histoire et de Philosophie des Sciences et des Techniques, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, where she is an Associate Member.

deadline, but I can at least show you my appreciation in writing a few words about mathematics and life.[1]

I think we first met in the Logic Colloquium in Prague in 1998, but it was a big international conference and we did not speak much. My first real memories of you come from an unforgettable Winter School in Abstract Analysis, section Topology, held in January 2001, where you and Petr Simon kindly invited me to give a series of lectures. It was in Zahrádky, in a castle that then belonged to the Charles University, a castle that later unfortunately burnt. In the romantic setting of a far away village in the Czech Republic, covered in snow, I gave five lectures on "Set-theoretic problems in analysis." This was not an ASL Summer Meeting, this was not Prague, this was what Czech mathematicians do when they are among themselves. Except for Uri Abraham, Justin Moore and me, all the other participants were either Czecho-Slovak or Polish and in large majority were coming to the Winter School every year, year after year, and in large majority did not really go to other conferences. In a large majority they spoke English only if necessary. Very active participants in the lectures, their wish to talk to me would disappear immediately after. We ate our meals in the usual banquet style and for the first few days, I would regularly approach a round table engaged in a lively conversation, only to find any sound disappear as soon as I sat down. It was a bit overwhelming and the spartan diet, if one is a vegetarian not eating sugar, as I was then, did not help.

The sound would come back in the late evening though, not that anybody was aware that I heard. I was sleeping in a rare single room and in front of it was a large table where the doyens of the conference sat down in the evening with a considerable amount of Becherovka and talked about maths and life. In either Czech or Polish, none of which I was presumed to understand. But of course, unknown to this impressive crowd, I understood almost everything in Czech (and almost nothing in Polish, which prompted me to learn it seriously at some later time) since my native tongue is Serbo-Croat. And of course, I heard it all, since they were just in front of my room, and after midnight it tended to get a bit rowdy. The women presence at the conference consisted of a two sweet young women students, Eva Murtinová and Jana Flašková, a serious lady who was the conference secretary (and who became much less serious when she got to know somebody) and me. So, there were some comments about women, not about the students obviously, and no harm done, since nobody understood. But I did and it is not in my nature to be silent, or at least not for a very long time.

So, two nights of this and I decided to join the happy crowd and show them what the Yugoslav women are made of. I sat there in my most attentive way, totally awake, with some bad wine to join in with the Becherovka and we talked. In English and a few Slavic words here and there, about maths and life. The crowd became larger and some younger participants joined in, the conversations became more lively and everybody was doing their best and we had so much fun.

[1]And, not to doubt, when I finish that article on Boolean algebras, it will most surely be dedicated to you!

Even the round tables during the meal became rather talkative afterward, maths and friendship were everywhere! That is how I became an honorary member of the Polish and Czech unofficial mathematical society and that is how nobody would ever again dare to consider me anything but 'one of the boys' – since my newly made friends Bohuš, Petr, Lev and Kali would certainly made sure to tell them off. I met many people during that conference: I have already mentioned Bohuš and Petr, but there was also my dear Lev Bukovský, then the young crowd Michael Hrušák, Henryk Michalewski and Justin Moore and Eva and Jana; then, a few years older than me, the mysterious Polish mathematician Grzegorz Plebanek who worked for his habilitation (a survey with further references [10]) in his, for me then 'isolated,' Wrocław, on the same Haydon problem that I worked on for my thesis in my, for me then 'world known' Madison, Wisconsin ([2], [3]), and many others. I discovered through them a whole school of mathematics which had been largely unknown to me because of the political situation that existed while I was growing up and was not completely resolved even in 2001 (neither the Czech Republic, Slovakia nor Poland were in the EU then). I became a coauthor on a paper with my buddies Michael and Justin ([9]) and on another one with Eva ([1]), as well as a long term collaborator ([4], [5], [6], [7]) and a special friend with the formerly mysterious Plebanek. I came to many Winter Schools after that and visited Prague, Warsaw and Wrocław many times. I collaborated with Petr and Grzegorz on a large European network of mathematicians 'Infty' funded by ESF. Sadly, Petr is now gone too.

Many years have passed and many events have happened since then. I do not know if it is possible for mathematicians in Europe today to appreciate the impact of what the Winter School meant at that time. Everything has become so easy now, we communicate, we travel, we exchange students and 'Infty' was a proof of concept. I hope none of this intellectual and physical freedom will disappear with the recent shameful rise of nationalist governments in countries that should know better. Remembering how hard it was back then when the events described in this article took place might help to stop the madness from developing further.

Bohuš, your contribution to mathematics is enormous and much has been said about it, in time of your life and of your death. Your contribution to the life of mathematics in Prague is also well documented and kept alive by a large number of your mathematical descendants. I have wanted in this short note to honour something for which you were less known, but which deserves to be mentioned. You, along with Petr, contributed enormously by organizing those Winter Schools, by 'converging' on the board (those in the know will understand) in your lectures, by accepting everybody who deserved (and one had to deserve in those days), man or woman, east or west, to your unofficial society of mathematicians, by doing mathematics for its own sake. You and others like you kept European intellectual life alive, in good and in bad times. I quoted all these papers of mine here only to emphasize: none of them would have happened without you and Petr bringing us all together. And we are not the only ones, younger mathematicians such as Grzegorz's student Piotr Borodulin-Nadzieja and my students Tanmay Inamdar and Omar Selim have continued the tradition. Not to forget the organizers of the continuing Winter School, which has now become a world known event, led by David Chodounský. Thanks Bohuš. It would be nice to meet again.

References

[1] Bartoszyński T., Džamonja M., Halbeisen L., Murtinová E., Plichko A., *On bases in Banach spaces*, Studia Math. **170** (2005), no. 2, 147–171.

[2] Džamonja M., Kunen K., *Measures on compact HS spaces*, Fund. Math. **143** (1993), no. 1, 41–54.

[3] Džamonja M., Kunen K., *Properties of the class of measure separable compact spaces*, Fund. Math. **147** (1995), no. 3, 261–277.

[4] Džamonja M., Plebanek G., *Generalisations of ϵ-density*, Acta Univ. Carolin. Math. Phys. **44** (2003), no. 2, 57–64.

[5] Džamonja M., Plebanek G., *Precalibre pairs of measure algebras*, Topology Appl. **144** (2004), no. 1–3, 67–94.

[6] Džamonja M., Plebanek G., *On Efimov spaces and Radon measures*, Topology Appl. **154** (2007), no. 10, 2063–2072.

[7] Džamonja M., Plebanek G., *Strictly positive measures on Boolean algebras*, J. Symbolic Logic **73** (2008), no. 4, 1416–1432.

[8] Marciszewski W., Plebanek G., *Extension operators and twisted sums of c_0 and $C(K)$ spaces*, J. Funct. Anal. **274** (2018), no. 5, 1491–1529.

[9] Moore J. T., Hrušák M., Džamonja M., *Parametrized $\diamondsuit$ principles*, Trans. Amer. Math. Soc. **356** (2004), no. 6, 2281–2306.

[10] Plebanek G., *On compact spaces carrying random measures of large Maharam type*, 30th Winter School on Abstract Analysis, Lhota nad Rohanovem/Litice u České Lípy, 2002, Acta Univ. Carolin. Math. Phys. **43** (2002), no. 2, 87–99.

M. Džamonja:
School of Mathematics, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, United Kingdom

E-mail: M.Dzamonja@uea.ac.uk

(*Received* October 13, 2018)