

the good ghost of zagreb

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Valentin Knez could not even himself really remember when and why he started to go in for statistics because it seemed to him that it happened such a long time ago and that the root of that passion must go back even to his childhood. In asking himself about the reasons for his love for that science he came to the conclusion that he had been completely drawn by his strong feeling of duty, which was uncommonly strong and always present despite the fact that he was a lonely person. Valentin Knez constantly felt the need to pay his debt to society, to deal with the people around him as much as he could, to offer them the most he could and in this way to live a full life. It seemed to him that he could do this best through statistics, because on the one hand it deals with people and their actions, and on the other hand it offers people useful facts and information and in this way it helps them.

Also he could not remember how he had really decided to keep files on crimes and accidents, deaths, murders, oppression, killings, drownings and stranglings. He was not a person who was fascinated by crime, nor a detective story fan, and it was most likely that his social feelings were decisive in his choice. These occurrences (robberies, fires, accidents at work, train catastrophes) were strangely frequent, so Valentin wanted to make a statistical inquiry into how many there were, where they most frequently occurred, what were the common causes, how frequently and with what intensity they occurred, and then on the basis of these conclusions, to help to root out this social evil.

He diligently collected newspapers from all parts of the country, especially the evening papers where the most was written about crime. He carefully cut out the articles and lines from the law and crime sections. On his wardrobe, in his bachelor room, he had various folders with newspaper clippings that had been categorized and systematized together with commentaries. He followed up the fate of the murderer and those who hid the truth from the law, he knew the recidivist by name and those who had been let out of jail before their time was up due to good behaviour.

Translated by Srebrenka Kunek-Huljev

Of course his work did not only comprise of collecting clippings. On his table, that had been covered with wrapping paper, on which there was a lamp with a green lampshade, there were many files, columns of numbers and indicators. He classified crimes according to the motives (jealousy, looting, self-defence, involuntary manslaughter, revenge), according to the social class (tramps, peasants, workers, clerks, intellectuals), according to the number of victims (one, two, three or more), according to the weapon or instrument used with which the crime was committed (revolver, knife, stick, bottle, brass nuckles, stone, fist, poison, rope and others), according to the length of the inquiry, according to the sex and age of the person or the persons who committed the crime, according to the place when the crime had been committed, according to the towns, according to the republic and region. Everything was categorized in his files. He was of the opinion that he had an overall picture that very few in the country had and he was certain that all this was useful work because he worked creatively like a scholar. Apart from the tables, he made up a map of the whole country (and as far as he could of other countries too), and on them he drew special lines which connected places where similar crimes had been committed, with the same frequency and by criminals who were similar. He called them* »isoscrimes« and on the basis of them he could follow up everything very well.

However it is important to stress two things—firstly in his work Valentin especially dealt with Zagreb, his own city. He had studied it first and observed it the most closely. He knew every house where some kind of murder had taken place, every room where somebody had committed suicide by leaving the gas on, every bathroom where somebody had been strangled in the bath tub, every pub where someone had got a knife in their guts and every place in the sticks where someone had been beaten to death. He went round to all these places and was able to compile a completely precise picture. He loved his city and it was what he cared for the most.

The years of intensive and dedicated work could not but in the end bear fruit. Of course not in the form of social recognition or fame (because all this was still his secret), but in the form of an inner happiness like that which a craftsman has who is finishing a piece of work. The corpus of material that Valentin Knez had at his disposal constantly grew and came to be better and more systematically compiled. Newer and newer ideas started to come to the statistician, and he became more and more conscious of the type of treasure that was at his disposal.

Of course, numeration is never an end in itself— it always aspires towards something broader, to more generalized conclusions which are a continuation of its calculations. Valentin Knez the statistician of crimes did not have any idea of the possible outcome, it was not at all his aim to see the relationship between crime and society. His opinion was that he would be doing enough, and more than enough if he established which and what type of crimes occurred in which social class and what the reasons behind these crimes were. In this way he could establish the frequency of crimes in general crimes primarily being understood as one of the greatest social evils.

However it came about that he himself was surprised by the results of his work. One Sunday morning, while he was sitting by himself in his room, bent over his papers, leafing through them slowly and from time to time glancing at the grey wall of the house in the yard, he noticed something that attracted his attention. What happened was that he noticed that the conclusions of individual statistic surveys, as well as the summaries of certain cases which were encircled with a red colour, that among the red islands there was somehow always the same distance. He noticed that they were always similarly arranged on the white page. At first he felt only a certain satisfaction because of his tidiness and the way his work was clearly set out. It was then that he asked

* isos — (Greek) same, similar.

himself if there did not perhaps exist some interdependence between the real sequence of events and the graphic presentation.

He started to read again. First of all he asked himself whether he, in his desire to be tidy, hadn't subconsciously leaned towards regularity, symmetry and order. But this was not so. He very quickly became convinced that the regularity came from somewhere else, that it was caused by the events that were written down. Good grief! He stood dumbfounded and in thought. Well, he thought, that can have far-reaching effects! The kind of effects that anyone, and especially himself, had not even hoped for. It was something so very new, so encouraging, that Valentin Knez started to apply himself to his work with twice as much zeal.

The idea turned out to be unusually fruitful and every day it was verified by new proofs. Valentin Knez established the fact that there existed not only a great deal of statistic frequency of similar cases but also a regularity in their occurrence. At first this was fairly hazy but when he delved deeper into the matter the researcher could not doubt in it any more — it was too evident, too mathematical, too luring. Crimes occurred as if according to some calculation and one by one were entered into Knez's plan, verifying the system and astounding its author.

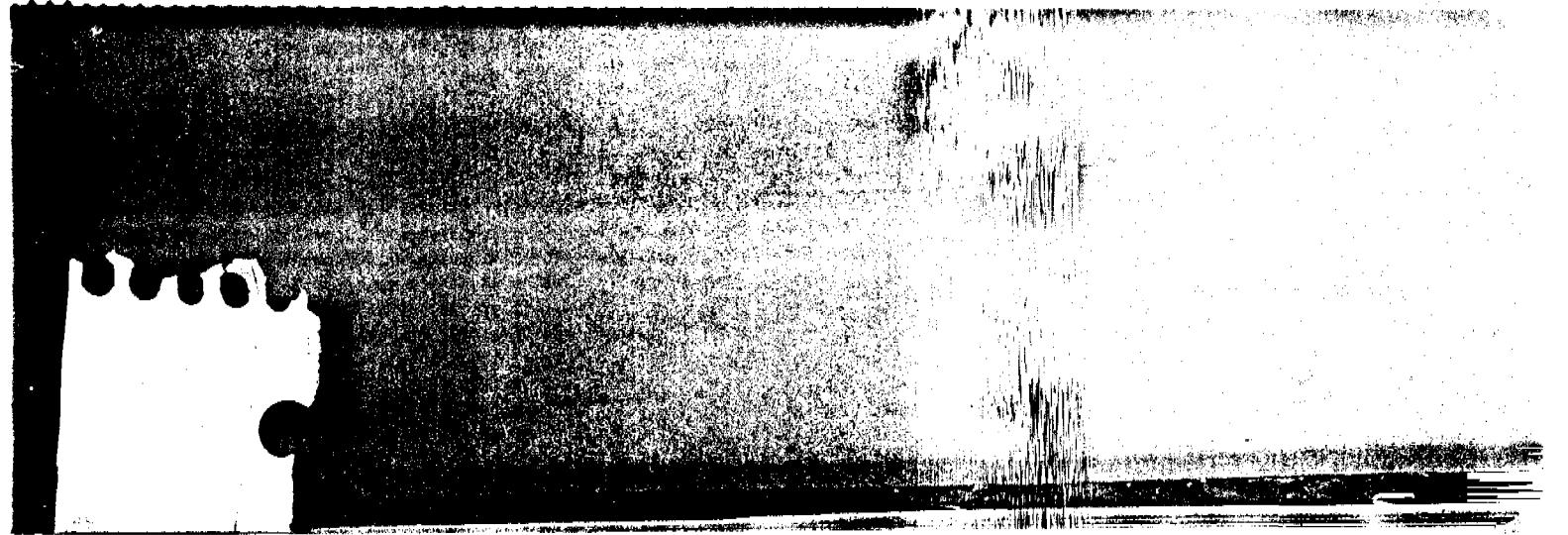
The picture became clearer and clearer. Not only that — the statistician could almost exactly tell how many crimes would take place in Zagreb in a month, how serious the crime would be and approximately in how many cases would the doer of the crime be discovered. A book needed to be written about this. He opened up a new folder and wrote the following title on it — FORESEEN CRIMES.

Even so he still had to wait a while longer. He realized that he still did not know everything, that he would come to know even more. As time progressed (which means months and years) his forecasts became clearer and more precise, they became so clear that he asked himself if anyone would believe in them. The thing was that now by basing his judgement on

statistics he could already foresee precisely where the crime would take place, in which street, in which house, who would commit it, with what and in what way. He foresaw infanticide, arson, stranglings and he could exactly establish the specific parts of the city where the crime would occur. He was able to pinpoint the place, time and duration of the crime. He felt somewhat anxious and terrible when of a morning he would go to a pub in Dubrava knowing that in it, that same night, somebody would be killed. He would foresee the number of knife stabs that the victim would get in the stomach and in the shoulder joint, the number of slashes received by the use of a broken bottle, the number of blows using a chair. He would stop in thought in front of a window of some house in the fashionable north parts of the city, knowing that there, on that same afternoon, some husband would strangle his wife. Valentin Knez could never get rid of a feeling of terrible temptation, of some sort of fatalistic feeling of helplessness and even involvement in it and also a responsibility. He was not able to rid himself of these thoughts even though he knew that he could nothing to prevent the crimes (not only because he was weak and alone but also because they occurred inexorably) and he knew that nobody would believe him. This is why he continued to collect statistical data.

Time passed and the picture became more and more complete and Valentin Knez expanded, worked out in detail and even radicalized his vision of the situation and his conclusions which were a result of the statistic data. This occurred not so much because he was relentlessly carried away by his idea as much as because he felt pushed by the new discoveries that he constantly came across.

And so, he thought, we, as well as the public institutions and the judicature, counted on that order. In this he did not consider whether crime was naturally implanted or if it was acquired by living among people. The orderly and rhythmic occurrence of crime enabled the world to progress, for things to be logical in it and for them to occur according to what was expected. Crimes, when considering them from



one aspect, are possible only in some fairly long intervals and the punishment that is given is the rhythmic emphasis of the role of society and the instilling of this into our consciousness. The disturbance of that rhythm would be detrimental. This is because the regularity in the occurrence of evil is as important and as necessary as the rising of the sun or the change of the seasons. If this were not so we would be denied of finding our way round the world, everything would start to go the wrong way round and be in a state of disorder. It would be like the sun were to rise in the west. The rhythm of crime is a rhythm of the life of every city and the whole world.

Our subconscious knowledge of this rhythm saves us from becoming victims to crime. The ones who stop feeling the rhythm suffer. This rhythm is one of the basic points of orientation for us.

Of course this did not mean that we did not need to try to prevent crimes. On the contrary, this should be continuously done and this is what Valentin Knez aspired towards. The only thing that was important was not to disrupt the rhythm, to be more specific, it would be worthwhile to set up a new rhythm, a rhythm for the prevention of crimes. A rhythm in the non-occurrence of crimes had to be achieved and their initial prevention as well as the quietening of criminal instincts, the awakening of defence capabilities and the refreshing, in potential victims, the connection with their subconscious which knows what is right. Valentin Knez saw salvation in this. It would be worthwhile to achieve a rhythm that was more relevant to man and at the same time easier, more realistic and which would enable a transformation in society. There were times when the statistician doubted very much in the realization of his plan but in his happier moments he already saw it finished.

His work slowly drew to an end, the book grew and the material which showed the proofs in his investigation were numerous. In the spring of that year his book was almost finished. The moment which the statistician was a bit afraid of was drawing near. The moment

was not far off when he would have to show his plan to the experts, to put it before them so as they could judge it and start to work on putting it into effect.

It was then that unforeseen things started to take place. It was the beginning of summer. Valentin was thinking how the most interesting news would come from the coast. However in June he noticed that something very strange started to happen to the crimes. He was perplexed.

There were some fairly small deviations from the established rhythm, so small that Valentin Knez could hardly notice them at first — a murder that was supposed to have been carried out with a knife according to the plan, was carried out with a gun. The statistician came to the conclusion that his calculations had not been good, and he started to check them. Nevertheless the calculations were correct. Then a couple of crimes occurred earlier than expected.

Instead of happening in the morning the crimes took place in the morning, instead of them happening in the morning they occurred in the early hours of the morning of that day, instead of taking place in three day's time they would happen that day. Valentin Knez was astonished and frightened. Although the circumstances under which the crime was performed were always according to the plan, and it was the same thing with the doer and the victim but even so the statistician was seriously worried. He checked and re-checked and he always came to the conclusion that he had not made a mistake but that spasms and nervous tissues had started to occur in the life tissues of the city, in its body.

Then one morning, on June 14th, when he opened up the newspaper he had to lean on a post while he stood and read at the Trešnjevac market place. In Kalinova Street, in a block of flats, some man had been killed with a big kitchen knife by his wife and son. Valentin Knez stood and started to breath quickly. He could very clearly remember that that murder should have taken place on September 28th., in the same family of course, but in Livadičeva

and not in Kalinova Street. Valentin Knez walked home slowly, knowing that it was no use looking into his notes. The rhythm had been disrupted. Even so, there still existed a possibility that it had only an incident, but the small disruptions of the day before deeply disturbed him. The best thing would be to wait.

Next day, early in the morning, his hands again shook while he opened the newspaper. Yes there, on the page where the crime section was, the following was written: in a garden restaurant in Medulićeva the maitre d'hotel killed an acquaintance, a man who also worked at a hotel, in an argument over money at ten o'clock in one of the back rooms. That had not been foreseen at all, neither the person who had committed the crime, the place nor the implement; a crime was supposed to take place in Medulićeva in a year's time. Valentin Knez stood bewildered and frightened and looked around himself. That was not all, a murder had taken place in Jarun. In a fight between neighbours someone had fired bullets and a married couple were killed. This had also not been foreseen. Valentin Knez went slowly down the street, forgetting where he was heading for. There was no doubt any more, the rhythm had been disrupted. The statistician looked around himself trying to find an affirmation on the faces of the people around him. It was as if they did not sense anything. Even so he was almost frightened that somebody could run up to him and put a knife into his breast. That was possible now.

Now everything was possible and he could expect anything. The life rhythm of the city had been disrupted, the road to chaos and bloodshed was opened. Any minute there could come to a completely unconditioned, arbitrary and illogical crimes. The life saving rhythm in the people had been disrupted, they were unprotected, they did not know where evil was going to come from. That was why they were frightened and Valentin Knez knew that they themselves would start to attack each other. There would be more crimes. He could not even bear to think what Zagreb would look like — screams everywhere, blood and spilled brains.

Valentin Knez shut himself into his room and smoked. He was in despair and he was in a state of feverish excitement. He was not interested in what had caused the changes in the rhythm. The only thing he thought about was whether the rhythm could be saved. At first and only for a brief second he again thought that his calculations were no good and momentarily that the whole system was no good. He quickly had to relinquish those thoughts — the news on the radio told of totally new, unusually numerous and even more cruel crimes. He did not care about his system he only cared about Zagreb. If the system did not save it nothing else would. Again he plunged back into his work.

He sat in his room and for a couple of days he only went out in order to buy the newspaper and every hour he listened to the news. Amid cigarette smoke, behind lowered blinds, and under the light of the lamp with the green lampshade he sat entering new crimes into the system and tested their relation — the way and the role of the deviations from the rule. He made up the new system which had been brought about by events in the last few weeks and related them to the old system by establishing the differences and similarities. It was terribly strenuous work but Valentin Knez's conscience worked feverishly, he was in a hurry to understand because he knew that the crucial moment had been reached when everything would be decided.

He classified the columns, tried them out this way and that, he compiled and again destroyed the tables, made graphs, made up schematic plans of the city and with different coloured pencils he entered new crimes into the system. He observed their frequency and wrote and wrote and drew. He performed experiments. He hypothesized. He made up imaginary crimes and petty crimes as well as the most incredible possibilities. This lasted for a couple of days. He was pale and the rings under his eyes were blue when at dawn, on June 20th., he rolled up the blind and deeply breathed in the air.

Next morning his hands were again shaking while he opened the newspaper. He was searching for something and then he saw the short

report that was written under capital letters **MURDER IN NEHAJSKA**: Last night around two o'clock an unknown murderer killed Josip Jazbec, 51 years of age, in Nehajska where he had a flat. Most likely this was done with the use of a wooden object. The cause of the crime is not known but according to what the representatives of the investigation body told us it was most likely due to plunder. Investigations are continuing.

Even though his hands were still trembling Valentin Knez felt a certain tranquility. He saw that an acceleration of the rhythm was the only solution. He would not be able to make his book known to the public. Even so he felt stronger, maybe even stronger than before because he knew that he was doing his duty towards society, towards the people around him and for his own city — Zagreb. After shoving the new axe handle deeper under the bed he went to check the place where the action was going to take place that evening after which he opened up a new folder and carefully started writing the following heading: **CORRECTIONS OF THE RHYTHM.**