From the History of the Pre-Marxist Aesthetics in Bohemia: Herbartian Formalism

Peter Steiner
Slavic Department, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

ABSTRACT
From a bird’s eye view, the history of nineteenth-century aesthetics can be cast in terms of strife between two mutually opposed philosophical camps. On the one hand, the champions of a content-oriented understanding of beauty as the sensory manifestation of the idea (the followers of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) and, on the other hand, the formalists (inspired by Johann Friedrich Herbart) who conceived of beauty as a purely relational category devoid of any content. This article focuses on the robust development of the formal school at Prague University after 1850 exemplified by the theories of Robert Zimmermann (1824–1898), Josef Durdík (1837–1902), and Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910). It concludes with posing the question whether the structuralist aesthetics advanced in mid-1930s by the Prague Linguistic Circle was not, in fact, an echo of the indigenous Herbartian formalism.

KEYWORDS
Pre-Marxist aesthetics; Herbartian formalism; Bohemia

中文摘要
本文指出，19世纪美学史可以大致概括为两大观点相左的哲学阵营之间的争论。一方倡导注重对美学内容的理解，将美视为理念的感性呈现（黑格尔的追随者），而另方则为形式主义者（多受赫尔巴特启发），认为美仅仅是一种单纯的关系范畴而无内容可言。本文集中探讨1850年后布拉格学派的蓬勃发展，其中罗伯特·齐默曼（1824-1898）、约瑟夫·杜尔迪克（1837-1902）及奥托卡·霍斯廷斯基（1847-1910）等学者的理论为这一学派主要代表。本文在梳理的基础上指出，上世纪三十年代中期由布拉格语言学派发展而来的结构主义美学是否是对赫尔巴特形式主义的一种回应值得追问。

The formalistic orientation does not merely subvert the social engagement of art, its ability to partake in the communal struggle, in people’s edification, but it also ruinously affects its very artistic value.

– S. M. Kagan, “Formalism,” The Great Soviet Encyclopedia.

Commemorating the centenary of Johann Friedrich Herbart’s birth in 1876, Josef Durdík – the man whose own theories I will engage soon – took a short historical overview of the study of beauty in his native land. Aesthetics, he told his listeners, has been taught in Prague since 1763 first by Karl Heinrich Siebt (1735–1806) and after him...
by many others, among “which the most famous were [August Gottlieb] Meissner and [Ignaz] Cornova” (Durdík, 1876, p. 319). The subsequent development of this discipline in the lands of the Bohemian crown was quite contentious, he added, with several philosophical systems and traditions competing for general acceptance. But there was not a shadow of a doubt in Durdík’s mind that by the second half of the nineteenth century the winner of this intellectual contest was Herbartianism.

We might suspect that Durdík, an ardent Herbartian himself, had an axe to grind. He might well have, but his bias should in no way lessen Herbart’s impact on Central European thought, the historians of ideas concur. William Johnston (1972, p. 281), for example, mentions Herbart as “the philosopher [...] most widely taught in Austria between 1820 and 1880” even without visiting there once. His concepts were particularly influential insofar as the study of beauty was concerned. “The most sweeping wave of Kantianism in nineteenth-century aesthetics,” Günter Zöller opines (2014, p. 60), “originates with Johann Friedrich Herbart, a follower of Kant and opponent of G. W. F. Hegel.” But since “oblivion has engulfed Herbart with unusual speed” (Dunkel, 1970, p. 3) a short presentation of his ideas could help us to grasp what aestheticians found so attractive about them some hundred fifty years ago.

1. Relations über alles!

Yet this is easier said than done for plenty of reasons. Herbart’s intellectual horizon, first of all, was rather far-flung with his most lasting legacy in the fields linked to aesthetics only obliquely – psychology and pedagogy (cf. e.g., Gubser, 2006, p. 98). Secondly, the unfriendly style of his writings combined with the sheer quantity of output (collected in some 19 hefty volumes) makes an explication of Herbart’s ideas a life-long project. And the pitfalls stemming from an ineluctable reliance on secondary sources often proceeding from mutually incompatible perspectives multiply the problems. Furthermore, as Frederic Beiser informs us (2014, p. 93), “Herbart’s intellectual development was not stable and continuous but tumultuous and fragmented,” not fitting neatly into the conventional history of philosophy. Even his self-avowed Kantianism can be questioned because in different stages of his career Herbart disregarded some of the most cherished principles of this system. Given all these obstacles (my own age notwithstanding), one can but endorse Beiser’s astute observation (2015, p. 1058) that “a proper understanding and appreciation of Herbart is the task for a future generation.”

For the sake of simplicity, it seems warranted to divide Herbart’s philosophizing into two correlated parts – the theoretical and the practical ones – the former concerned with “is” and the latter with “ought.” The place of aesthetics within this natural/normative distinction is rather obvious and, for this reason, my treatment of Herbart’s metaphysics will be quite perfunctory. An heir to the intellectual lineage Leibnitz-Wolf-Kant, Herbart strongly believed that “mathematics is the ruling science of our time” (Herbart, 1890, p. 105) and this insight guided him in advancing a metaphysics quite different from the similar projects of the German idealists and romantics. At the highest level of abstraction, one could say that his “method of relations” (Herbart, 1887a, p. 181) conceived of all forms of experience (whether pertaining to the perceived phenomena, which he termed “realia,” or their cognitive
representations) as complex units whose identity stems from the interdependencies among constitutive elements. In the spirit of Leibnizian *mathesis universalis* Herbart strove to construct a mental combinatorics that would study all possible types of relations among psychological components and their interactions (cf. Zumr, 1965, p. 419).

Chronologically speaking, Herbart’s first attempts to formulate his practical philosophy preceded his metaphysics, going back to the early 1800s (see, e.g., Mohns, 1914, p. 3). Whether swayed by British moral philosophy or by Schiller’s essay “On Grace and Dignity” (1793), Herbart assumed that the human attitude toward both the good and the beautiful is a matter of taste and, therefore, he circumscribed ethical judgment in terms of aesthetics. By denying “that there is a single principle of morality” while insisting “that reason is not the source of moral obligation” (Beiser, 2014, p. 126), he clearly stepped out of the sandbox of Kantian ethics. This, however, should not lead to an erroneous conclusion that Herbart was a moral relativist. *Au contraire*; the subordination of ethical judgment to the aesthetic one derives from the “absolute validity” of the latter – its independence from any ulterior motives on the beholder’s part and its self-evident nature – for such judgments are, as Herbart put it (1897, p. 80), “immediate” and “voluntary.” In other words, “under identical subjective and objective conditions, the same aesthetic judgment must recur” (Kim, 2015). Why? The answer lies in Herbart’s “method of relations.” The object of an aesthetic judgment is always complex, a set of relations, like “the outline of a statue, characters in the drama, tones in a musical chord” (Herbart, 1897, p. 329). An isolated, simple element can be neither beautiful nor ugly. And it is the self-same formal structure of an aesthetic object that compels the audience to perceive it again and again in a uniform fashion.

Although Herbart did not advance any appurtenant template for aesthetic relations, he did so for ethics. Here the dialectics of pleasure and displeasure concerns the structure of volitional acts. The five ethical principles, he outlined in the form of binary oppositions, are important for my further discussion because Herbart’s followers subsequently adopted them with some modifications as the organon for their formal analysis of beauty: (1) the idea of *inner freedom* (inclinations, desires, passions vs. our intuitive grasp of what is right or wrong); (2) the idea of *perfection* (the will vs. its quantifiable strivings: intensity, extension, concentration); (3) the idea of *benevolence* (one’s own will vs. the other’s will as an object); (4) the idea of *right* (one’s own will vs. the other’s will as a competitor); (5) the idea of *requital* (one’s own will vs. the other’s will as a foe) (Herbart, 1887b, pp. 355–375). “It is these possible relations among wills,” Alan Kim (2015) paraphrased Herbart, “that constitute the possible forms of the will, and that are judged fine or shameful by practical judgment.”

2. “Prague never lets you go…”

“After 1850,” observed Johnston (1972, p. 284), “the University of Prague became the stronghold of Herbartian thought.” Its faculty, according to Ivo Tretera’s detailed exposition (1989, pp. 129–298), received Herbart’s ideas with open arms for more than one reason. Some valued their overt political neutrality, to others they provided welcome ammunition against the “dodgy” Hegelianism, the third were captivated by the sober empiricism of this approach. Despite this or perhaps because of this, Herbart’s
presence on the local intellectual scene was overwhelming. With some dozen prominent Prague professors (both Czech and German) entering Herbart’s intellectual orbit, it lasted for some 70 years (from 1832 to 1902) with the apex between 1861 and 1887, after which belated positivism began to replace it (Tretera, 1989, p. 209). Given my task, I will deal only with those Praguers who applied Herbart’s “method of relations” to aesthetics, concentrating above all on two Czech thinkers, less known abroad: Josef Durdík (1837–1902) and Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910).

The man who made the Herbartian aesthetic go mainstream was Robert Zimmermann (1824–1898), a pupil of the Prague philosopher Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) under whose wing he wrote on Leibniz’s monadology in general and Herbart’s relation to it in particular (1849). More important for my subject, though, is his Aesthetik published in two volumes. The first installment, Geschichte der Aesthetik [The History of Aesthetics] (1858), appeared during Zimmermann’s tenure at Prague University (1852–1861) and its sequel, Allgemeine Aesthetik [The General Aesthetics], followed seven years later (1865), when Zimmermann was already teaching in Vienna. Both volumes are pioneering contributions to the discipline. The former is usually considered the first history of aesthetics from Plato to the mid-nineteenth century; the latter a systematic study of beauty based on the quintet of Herbartian moral principles mentioned earlier. The subtitle of the second volume – Formwissenschaft – conveniently sums up Zimmermann’s conception of aesthetics – a science of form – the idea already implicit, as George Weiss remarked (1928, p. 109), in Herbart’s writings. “The discovery of [the concrete aesthetic relations]” Zimmermann (1861, p. 354) declared in his programmatic essay of 1861, “will open up for aesthetics an enormous new field of research” making it eventually “a science as exact as that of chemistry or physiology” (p. 354). The death knell of idealistic, content-oriented philosophies of beauty was sounded.

Zimmermann unveiled “the concrete aesthetic relations,” some four years later in The General Aesthetics. This, however, was less the matter of a discovery and more of a creative conversion of Herbart’s quintet of ethical principles into “the primary aesthetic forms” of (1) the characteristic; (2) the magnitude; (3) the harmony; (4) the correctness; and (5) the balance (Zimmermann, 1865, pp. 35–70). But how faithful was he to Herbart in this endeavor? Zimmermann himself was a rather self-effacing author, presenting himself in the “Introduction” to the volume as a mere synthetizer of Herbart’s thought “elaborating aesthetics from the Herbartian perspective” (V) who, if fallible, “would prefer to err together with Herbart” (X). Otakar Hostinský, on the other hand, even though quite respectful of Zimmermann’s contribution to the discipline, felt obliged to append his painstaking reconstruction of Barbart’s original aesthetic ideas with a lengthy “Historical and Critical Commentary” (Hostinský, 1891, pp. 71–135), to put the record of what he perceived as Zimmermann’s deviations from the master’s thought straight.

I will not recapitulate the main points of Zimmermann’s aesthetics for they reoccur mutatis mutandis in Josef Durdík’s magnum opus – his 700-page-long Všeobecná aesthetika [General Aesthetics] (1875) – the first and the last attempt at this genre in Czech intellectual history. “Durdík’s premises” Sus (1960, p. 783) summed up the derivative nature of this work, “are the loci communes of Herbartianism which he learned at the university from Robert Zimmermann.” “Aesthetics is,” predictably, “the
science of the general laws of beauty” (Durdík, 1875, p. 3), proceeding from the following three axioms: (1) beauty is free of all subjective connotations. Neither profit, nor interest, nor pleasure could be identified with the aesthetic experience because of their ad hoc nature. (2) Aesthetic judgment has to have an a priori character. Since there are certain phenomena that are beautiful for everyone, aesthetic judgment is self-explanatory and needs no proof. (3) ‘Complexity is the essential sign of all beauty’ (Durdík, 1875, p. 15). A single element – one tone, color, or representation – is a psychic rather than aesthetic phenomenon. In other words, since aesthetically indifferent isolated elements are the material and their aesthetically valorized correlations are the form, aesthetics, if it is to be science-like, must concern itself solely with the latter. It must be formal.

Durdík’s elaboration of the basic forms of beauty came (with some minor variations) directly from Zimmermann’s quintet mentioned earlier (cf. Hostinský, 1882, p. 122). His ruminations on the subject, however, are rather loquacious, and I will be able to provide just the skeleton of his disquisition (with a small sample of binary oppositions he proposed). Representations, Durdík upheld, regardless of their actual content, can be associated either on the basis of quantity or of quality. In the first case we arrive at the form of (1) the force (a variation on Zimmermann’s “magnitude” borrowed from physics) that encompasses oppositions like big vs. small or complex vs. simple. The qualitative relations among representations derive either from their accord (the similarity between the paired items exceeds the dissimilarity) or, conversely, from their discord. Those based on the former are either the forms of (2) the characteristic (prototypal vs. ectypal, symbolic vs. allegoric) or of (3) the harmony (symmetric vs. asymmetric, rhythmic vs. irregular). The ones generated by the latter are the forms of (4) the correctness (prescribed vs. arbitrary, pure vs. mixed) or of (5) the balance and closure (free vs. necessary, original vs. trite) (Durdík, 1875, pp. 36–83).

After outlining the basic forms of beauty, Durdík moved on to their actual manifestations. For the sake of brevity, I will limit my discussion to art alone. The Czech formalist bifurcated this category into two types. Music and painting, on the one hand, are of the sensory nature, literature, on the other hand, of the spiritual one. Or, more precisely, the latter “stands at the boundary” between the two. Observed Durdík (1875, p. 225): “[t]hough embodying sensory beauty through its phonic quality and rhythm it also pertains to spiritual beauty.” Given this dual nature of poetic beauty, representations – for Durdík the proper material of literature – can be correlated into two types of form. Since each and every representation “must have its sign […] to become sensory perceptual” (1875, p. 310), the palpable elements of such signs can be organized into specific patterns comprising the outer form of poetry. The relations among the mental representations themselves would, then, constitute the inner form of poetry. Of these two, Durdík insists, it is inner form alone that is essential to literature. A proof of this is, in his eyes, artistic prose which, though devoid of outer form and based solely on the relations of representations, is still considered an artistic phenomenon. And this in contrast to non-artistic everyday language or scientific prose whose lack of inner form prevents them from gaining, in Durdík’s opinion, an artistic status even if deliberately furnished with an outer form by being, say, versified.

Arts are not different from each other solely according to the type of beauty they embody but also according to whether they have a subject or not. There are arts that are
a priori void of any subject like architecture and music, and there are others that can be subjectless by choice. Painting, for instance, may either depict situations and characters or, with equal ease, dispose of them – the arabesque being an oft-quoted example. But the subject per se, Durdík is never tired of repeating, does not carry any intrinsic aesthetic value. It is only one of many components within a complex whole, an integral part of the immanent set of relations – artistic form. “Anything in the subject that is not reworked,” states he (1875, p. 599), “is just a raw, rough material, a remnant (residuum) which [...] the artist failed to overcome.” Only secondarily and only in comparison with other works of art can the subject contribute to the aesthetic value of a work. This happens, for example, when two paintings are equally perfect from the formal point of view and one has a more valuable subject. But this said, “the value of a work of art is” for Durdík (1875, p. 598) “not based on what the work signifies, but on what it is.” (emphasis in original) And because “anything can be an art’s subject” (1875, p. 656), the main task of the aesthetician is to study actual artistic forms, rather than the extra-aesthetic valeur of their constitutive elements, which may be utterly subjective. In Durdík’s own words (1875, p. 656), “[i]f we say that the aesthetician should study the object itself, not what the creator intended, what he wanted to express, etc., we mean that an aesthetician’s object is form, that 'his what? is how?'. Not what the artist expressed, but how he expressed it is the question.”

As expected, fire and brimstone are poured on the heads of content-oriented or idealistic aestheticians recklessly ignoring the category of form and finding instead “the essence of beauty in content” because of their inscrutable believe that “it is the content’s value that makes its manifestation pleasing to us” (Durdík, 1875, p. 107). For Durdik such a stance borders on mysticism, relegating those who subscribe to it (Hegel, Schelling, Vischer, et al.) to the proverbial dustbin of history. The utility of their theorizing might be propaedeutic for “just as all men at the boundary between alchemy and chemistry had to know alchemy, we should know the idealist systems” (Durdík, 1875, p. 116). But you don’t need the weatherman, Durdík (1875, p. 116) intimates to his readers, to know which way the wind blows: “[a]nd as astronomy arose from astrology and chemistry from alchemy, idealist aesthetics will be succeeded by the scientific one, i.e., formal aesthetics.”

Durdík’s successor at Prague University and the first holder of the chair of aesthetics endowed in 1883 (see Jůzl, 1985, p. 81) was Otakar Hostinský. He himself never wrote a systematic general aesthetics, and this task befell his pupil Zdeněk Nejedlý who compiled Hostinský’s lectures together with the notes of his students into a unified theoretical work, the posthumous Otakara Hostinského esthetika [Otakar Hostinský’s Aesthetics] (1921) which, however, never progressed beyond its first volume. If Durdík strove to combine empiricism with an all-encompassing deductive theoretical system, Hostinský was a strict inductive empiricist. In Nejedlý’s informed assessment, for Hostinský, “aesthetics had value only insofar as it is based on empiricism as the source of aesthetic facts and on induction as the scientific method. Without empiricism and induction, aesthetics” in Hostinský’s mind, “is not a science” (Nejedlý, 1907, p. 4). Harking back at Nejedlý’s essay, Novák (1941, p. 107) contrasted Durdík’s “abstract formalism” to Hostinský’s “concrete” one.

A lecture Hostinský delivered to the Royal Bohemian Society of Sciences on 21 March 1881 summarized comprehensively all his major grievances about the then
current interpretations of Herbart’s aesthetics. Its leitmotif can be paraphrased as “back to the original Herbart.” Such recourse is a must, Hostinský maintained, because the modern Herbartians (Zimmermann and Durdík in his stead) distorted the original empiricist thrust of Herbart’s philosophy by grounding aesthetics in the five “practical ideas” initially formulated for ethics. It was, therefore, incumbent on the modern formalist to ask: “[f]irst, is it consistent with Herbart’s spirit and thrust to accept uncritically his five practical ideas as the basis of general aesthetics? Second, are the universal aesthetic forms truly parallel to the practical ideas?” (Hostinský, 1882, p. 122).

His answer to both questions was a resounding no. The Herbartian followers eager to create a comprehensive conceptual system, Hostinský charged, readily substituted a series of ad hoc decisions for the study of data at hand. For Herbart, first of all, aesthetic was not derived from ethics but vice versa and his quintet was just one particular configuration of relations valid for volitional affairs but hardly for another normative domain. Second, Zimmermann’s equation of the five practical ideas with the five universal aesthetic forms was, more often than not, the matter of their tropological extension, not of any genuine kinship. Finally, without any proof, the Herbartian formalists indiscriminately applied the five universal aesthetic forms to all types of beauty (whether natural or artistic) turning a blind eye to their substantive differences. And even though formalist aesthetics was, Hostinský acquiesced – insofar as it conceived of this inquiry as an autonomous discipline, independent of any philosophical presuppositions – superior to all other existing schools of thought, his overall evaluation of its current state was rather blunt: “Herbartian school,” Hostinský did not mince his words, “had not yet succeeded in establishing a rock solid and unshakeable basis for an exact general aesthetics” (1882, p. 138).

Mistrust of speculative theorizing not only prevented Hostinský from writing a general aesthetics but also made him look with suspicion on the general concept of art. Rather than seeking what its major constituents have in common, he focused on its individual representatives and, in particular, on that which separated them – their materials. In doing so he was always ready to apply the most recent methods of the natural sciences – physics, acoustics, physiology, etc. – in his own research, perhaps with the best results in music. For literary studies he accepted the venerable concept of poetic beauty as the relation of representations. Hostinský, however, argued forcefully against the simple opposition of form and material advocated by Durdík. There is no raw, formless material, he insisted. “The poet […] receives his material already pre-formed; but he reshapes this form […] Thus we cannot oppose the principle of material to form and believe that only in the second stage of artistic re-creation do we arrive at form” (Nejedlý, 1921, p. 53).

This observation carries a special significance in regard to literary plot, which is already a set of relations prior to its entering into the text. The connections among the elements of plot are for Hostinský “objective relations, that is, relations among things themselves, independent of a perceiver” (Nejedlý, 1921, p. 354). In the literary work, these relations comprise both the plot of the work and its temporal succession. In a move somewhat resembling the Russian formalist distinction between “story” and “plot,” Hostinský proposed to distinguish two kinds of elements: those “which compose
the narrated subject of the poem” and those that “arise through the way this story is presented” (Nejedlý, 1921, p. 354).

In contrast to the radical Russian formalists, though, Hostinský did not completely banish the “narrated matter” or, more generally, represented reality, from the purview of aesthetics. As he declared in a lengthy study on artistic realism, the “verisimilitude of artistic representation is as much an aesthetic element” as the formal features of the work, that is, the “shapely lines and forms, harmony of colors and tones, continuity and contrast of poetic representations, proportionality of the total composition” (Hostinský, 1890, p. 4). Nejedlý (1907, p. 23) interpreted the essay’s apparent “anti-formalism” in the following way: “[i]f the entire beauty rests completely in the relation between two representations (formalism), then verisimilitude (realism) is indeed an important aesthetic element based on the relation of reality to its depiction in the work of art.” Hostinský, however, was rather cautious not to confuse the programmatic aesthetics of a single artistic movement with aesthetics as a scholarly discipline. He was keenly aware that in contrast to “realistic” art there is what he termed “idealistic” art (e.g., absolute music, ornament, fantastic literature) whose works lack, to a considerable degree, any relation to the real world. For this reason, “idealism and realism are not the highest universal principles of art, exhausting and delimiting the essence of artistic creation. [...] [They] are merely principles of style which vary with circumstances, substitute for one another, or even co-exist in the course of history” (Hostinský, 1890, p. 41). For scholarly aesthetics, the two are fundamentally equal and one of them cannot be extolled to the detriment of the other.

Providing an overall view of Hostinský’s aesthetics has its hiccups. The last great Czech formalist was too much of an inductivist to willingly subsume all aesthetic phenomena under a few general rules. As pointed out earlier, he never produced a systematic theoretical aesthetics, and the wealth of his ideas is dispersed over dozens of publications. We are thus forced to rely on Nejedlý’s belated systematization, produced, *nota bene*, only after he had already left the theories of his late teacher behind. Nevertheless, insofar as it can be reconstructed, Hostinský’s system was based on the following four postulates: (1) aesthetics is the science of beauty in all its particular manifestations; (2) it is an empirical discipline which accepts aesthetic phenomena as sensory perception furnishes them to our cognition; (3) it is an independent discipline and cannot be deduced from any other discipline; (4) its method is analytic-synthetic: aesthetic phenomena are first dissolved into elementary self-evident aesthetic relations from which higher combinations are subsequently constructed (see also Novák, 1941, p. 126). Hostinský’s failure to subsume all his theorizing in an overarching system notwithstanding, in the history of formalism he was a major figure. According to Josef Zumr’s recent appraisal (1998, p. 61), Hostinský “might be rightly considered the most significant systemizer and the creative personality of Herbartianism in aesthetics [...] its consummator.”

3. “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”?

The popular adagio that history does not repeat itself but it often rhymes has a curious relevancy for the Czech aesthetics’s trace dependency. True, Hostinský’s death brought the great Herbartian tradition in Prague to its end with his most gifted pupils – Zdeněk
Nejedlý (1878–1962) and Otakar Zich (1879–1934) – decamping for the research methods and theoretical programs more attuned to the intellectual atmosphere of their own era (see, e.g., Nejedlý, 1912–1913; Zich, 1921). Yet, as the prominent Czech critic, F. X. Šalda (1867–1938), noted already in mid-1930, the Herbartian conceptualization of aesthetics found its echo among the next generation of local students of art: in the structuralists coalescing around the Prague Linguistics Circle (established 1926). According to this view, reiterated many times since (cf. e.g., Novák, 1941, p. 136; Sus, 1958, p. 310; Wiesing, 2016, p. 7), what apparently brings these two schools of thought together is their decidedly anti-substantivist stance, their perception of the aesthetic object as a relational whole.

Should we thus assume that the Prague School was simply a continuation of the Herbartian aesthetics by other means? This question defies an easy answer, and given the focus of my current presentation, I will not try to provide it. Let me just point out that the purported historical rhyming between the two schools, to play up the prosodic metaphor, is somewhat imperfect because the poiesis of structuralism involved yet a third party, exogenous to the Czech scholarly tradition. For even a cursory look at the output of Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975) and his cohorts makes it clear that much more than from Durdik or Hostinský, they drew their theoretical inspiration from the Russian formalism. Yet, triangular liaisons are notoriously tenebrous and the relationship of the nascent structuralism to the two preceding formalisms is no exception to this rule. The three cameos of this tangled theoretical ménage à trois proffered by otherwise perceptive Šalda (1934-1935) prove the point: (1) “Mukařovský’s formalism [[] besides its domestic roots is […] an autonomous likeness of the Russian formalism” (p. 61). (2) From some statements in Shklovsky’s Theory of Prose “it is evident how this new conception of literary science is affined with our good acquaintance – the Herbartian aesthetics (p. 63). (3) “The crux of Mukařovský’s contribution is his ability to transform the static structure of the relational aesthetics into a new, developmentally dynamic principle […] he arched the way from Herbart to Hegel” (p. 65). Go figure! But, then, who ever told you that intellectual history should be a cakewalk?

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**Funding**

This study was supported by Key Project of China National Social Science Fund “Bibliography and Research of Eastern European Marxist Aesthetics” [15ZDB022].

**Notes on contributor**

Peter Steiner taught at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and Harvard University, finally settling at the University of Pennsylvania where he is Emeritus Professor of Slavic Studies. Dozens of his scholarly articles have appeared in various academic periodicals and publications. He edited and translated a two-volume selection of Jan Mukařovský’s essays, “The Word and Verbal Art” (Yale U.P., 1977), “Structure, Sign and Function” (Yale U.P., 1978), and a reader of Prague Structuralism, “The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929–1946,” (Texas U.P., 1982). His two most important books are Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics (Cornell U.P., 1984) that was translated into Bulgarian, Czech, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish, and Deserts of Bohemia:
Peter was a recipient of many scholarly awards (Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Fellowship, National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, American Council of Learned Societies Grant, among them) and was Visiting Professor at University of Carolina, Chapel Hill (1981, 1996), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1985/86), Yale University (2009), Masaryk University of Brno (2011), and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (2016). Currently, he is serving on International Advisory Board of Poetics Today, Advisory International Panel of Slavonica, and Editorial Board of Slovo.ru.

References

Beiser, F. C. (2014). The genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796-1880. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Beiser, F. C. (2015). Herbart's monadology. British Journal for the History of Philosophy, 23, 1056–1073. doi:10.1080/09608788.2015.1059315
Dunkel, H. B. (1970). Herbart and Herbartianism: An educational ghost story. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Durdík, J. (1875). Všeobecná aesthetika [General aesthetics]. Prague: I. L. Korber.
Durdík, J. (1876). O významu nauky Herbartovy, hledíc obzvlášť k poměrům českým [The significance of Herbart’s theory particularly viewed in the Czech context]. Časopis Musea království českého, 50, 294–328.
Gubser, M. (2006). Time’s visible surface: Alois riegel and the discourse on history and temporality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
Herbart, J. F. (1887a). Hauptpuncte der Metaphysik. Vorgeübten Zuhörern zusammengestellt. In K. Kehrbach (Ed.), Sämtliche Werke (Vol. 2, pp. 175–216). Langensalza: Herman Beyer und Söhne.
Herbart, J. F. (1887b). Algemeine praktische philosophie. In K. Kehrbach (Ed.), Sämtliche Werke (Vol. 2, pp. 329–458). Langensalza: Herman Beyer und Söhne.
Herbart, J. F. (1890). Ueber die Moeglichkeit und Nothwendigkeit, Mathematik auf Psychologie Anzuwenden. Vorgelesen in der Königlichen Deutschen Gesellschaft, am 18. April 1822. In K. Kehrbach (Ed.), Sämtliche Werke (Vol. 5, pp. 90–122). Langensalza: Herman Beyer und Söhne.
Herbart, J. F. (1897). Kurze Encyklopädie der Philosophie aus praktischen Gesichtspuncten entworfen. In K. Kehrbach (Ed.), Sämtliche Werke (Vol. 9, pp. 17–338). Langensalza: Herman Beyer und Söhne.
Hostinský, O. (1882). O významu praktických idej Herbartových pro všeobecnou estetiku [On the significance of Herbart's practical ideas for the general aesthetics]. In Zprávy o zasedání Královské české společnosti nauk v Praze: Ročník 1881 (pp. 120–139). Prague: Královská česká společnosti nauk.
Hostinský, O. (1890). O realismu uměleckém [On artistic realism]. Prague: Bursík a Kohout.
Hostinský, O. (1891). Herbarts Ästhetik in ihren grundlegenden Teilen quellenmässig dargestellt und erläutert. Hamburg: Verlag von Leopold Voss.
Johnston, W. M. (1972). The austrian mind: An intellectual and social history 1848-1938. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Jůzl, M. (1985). Hostinského pojetí estetiky a filozofie dějin umění, [Hostinský’s conceptualization of aesthetics and of the philosophy of the history of arts]. Prague: Univerzita Karlova.
Kim, A. Johann Friedrich Herbart, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2015 Edition). E. N. Zalta (Ed.). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/johann-herbart/
Mohns, W. (1914). Herbarts Stellung zur Englischen Moralphilosophie. Langensalza: Herman Beyer und Söhne.
Nejedlý, Z. (1907). Otakar Hostinský. Česká mysł, 8, 3–43.
Nejedlý, Z. (1912-1913). Krise estetiky [The crisis of aesthetics]. Česká kultura, 1, 19–23, 42–47, 76–78.
Nejdýl, Z. (1921). *Otakara Hostinského estetika: Díl I. Všeobecná estetika* [Otakar Hostinský’s aesthetics: Volume I. General aesthetics]. Prague: Leichter.

Novák, M. (1941). *Česká estetika od Palackého po dobu současnou* [Czech aesthetics from Palacký to the current time]. Prague: Fr. Borový.

Šalda, F. X. (1934-1935). *Příklad literárního dějepisu strukturálního* [An example of structural literary history]. *Šaldův zapisník*, 7, 59–68.

Sus, O. (1958). *Theoretické základy Hostinského estetiky: Hostinský a Herbart* [Theoretical bases of Hostinský’s aesthetics: Hostinský and Herbart]. *Filosofický časopis*, 6, 301–314.

Sus, O. (1960). *Sémantické problémy umění u Josefa Durdíka* [Semantic problems in Josef Durdík]. *Filosofický časopis*, 8, 776–790.

Tretera, I. (1989). *J. F. Herbart a jeho stoupenci na pražské univerzitě* [J. F. Herbart and his partisans at Prague University]. Prague: Univerzita Karlova.

Weiss, G. (1928). *Herbart und seine Schule*. Munich: Verlag Ernst Reinhardt.

Wiesing, L. (2016). *The visibility of the image: History and perspectives of formal aesthetics.* (N. A. Roth, Trans.). London: Bloomsbury.

Zich, O. (1921). *Úkoly české esthetiky* [The tasks of Czech aesthetics]. *Česká mysl*, 17, 40–47.

Zimmermann, R. (1849). *Leibnitz und Herbart: Eine Vergleichung ihrer Monadologien*. Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller.

Zimmermann, R. (1861). *Zur Reform der Aesthetik als exacter Wissenschaft*. *Zeitschrift für exakte Philosophie im Sinne des neueren philosophischen Realismus*, 2, 309–358.

Zimmermann, R. (1865). *Allgemeine Aesthetik als Formwissenschaft*. Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller.

Zöller, G. (2014). *History of kantian aesthetics*. In M. Kelly (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of aesthetics* (Vol. 4, 2 ed., pp. 59–61). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zumr, J. (1965). *Herbartova filosofie ve vztahu ke Kantovi, Leibnizovi a Hegelovi* [Herbart’s philosophy in relation to Kant, Leibniz, and Hegel]. *Filosofický časopis*, 13, 413–422.

Zumr, J. (1998). *Máme-li kulturu, je naší vlastí Evropa: Herbartismus a česká filosofie* [If we have culture, our homeland is Europe: Herbartism and Czech philosophy]. Prague: Filosofia.