

FORM AND MEANING:
THE PREHISTORY OF PRAGUE
FORMALISM AND STRUCTURALISM

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This article addresses the aesthetic formalism that originated in Prague as a phenomenon which demonstrates particularly well the inclination to base the most varied approaches to life on the objectivity of form as a stabilizing element. Given a diversely shaded social and national mobility in the Austria of the *Gründerzeit*, form as an element offering support and stability had a broader social impact there than elsewhere.

The attempts directed at aesthetic formalism, to free the systematic from the historical, furnish evidence of this circumspection which separates it so much from the historicism of "Small German" imprint. Although the representatives of this school did not escape national polarization (R. Zimmermann and E. Hanslick became nationally conscious Germans; J. Durdík and O. Hostinský found their way into the Czech national camp), they maintained common intellectual and taste patterns. Hostinský – a generation younger than the founders of the school, Zimmermann and Hanslick – modified this pattern under the influence of evolution and Wagnerian ideas. This attempt to discipline the romantic – typical for this school – led in the Czech case to the division into two groups: a neo-romantic (mythical reformulation of the modern with a

strong national accent, Wagner-Smetana) and a neo-classic (predominance of form, Brahms-Dvořák). This could be considered an unwanted analogy to the cultural difference between the Austrian and the German orientation.