250 Years of Aesthetics at Prague University — How the History of the Teaching of Aesthetics Has Evaded Historians

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Abstract. This paper pursues two aims: to outline the 250 years of aesthetics at Prague and, using this as an example, to demonstrate that traditional writing on the history of aesthetics has been unable to provide a suitable explanation of the complexity of the phenomenon that I would call 'university aesthetics'. For even our brief survey of the main figures of aesthetics at Prague suggests that the history of the field has not been concerned exclusively with the immanent development of aesthetic thought as depicted and explained by traditional writing about the history of aesthetic. Instead, it has also been shaped in an important, if not decisive, way by numerous external, political, and social factors, because this kind of aesthetics is firmly linked with the university as an institution, characterized by its distinctive internal organization and governance and dependent on the political decisions of the State.

This year, aesthetics at Prague University celebrates the 250th anniversary both of its becoming part of the Faculty of Arts here and of the establishment of the first Chair of Aesthetics. It is therefore only right that on this important and, I dare say, internationally unique anniversary of aesthetics at Prague University, which is one of the reasons the European Society for Aesthetics is meeting here at this time, the conference participants should be given at least a brief introduction to the main figures and features of its history. The broader importance of such an outline is increased by the fact that the character of aesthetics at Prague compels one to think more generally about the nature of the prevailing writing on the history of aesthetics, particularly about what has been eluding it. I will therefore pursue two aims in this paper: to outline the 250 years of aesthetics at Prague and,

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using this as an example, to demonstrate that traditional writing on the history of aesthetics has been unable to provide a suitable explanation of the complexity of the phenomenon that I would call 'university aesthetics'.

A comprehensive history of aesthetics at Prague University has yet to be written. Even the attempts to describe individual aspects and periods have so far been insufficient, because they have (with the exception of the initial period from 1763 to 1805)[1] drawn on a small number of sources, and were therefore unable to ask the basic questions. The unsatisfactory state of research – and this must be emphasized – is in no way unique. It is true of aesthetics at most universities not only in the former German-language area, of which Prague too was a part until the end of the First World War, but also – at least insofar as I have been able to discern – in universities in the rest of Europe.[2]

[1] This article was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic for the project 'Aesthetics at the University of Prague in the Context of Central Europe in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', no. P409/11/2083.

Apart from the individual histories of Charles University and its Faculty of Arts, which discuss all the chairs, including the Chair of Aesthetics, the following specialized works about aesthetics at Prague have also been published: Miloš Jůzl, 'Sto let stolice (katedry) estetiky na české filozofické fakultě Univerzity Karlovy', *Estetika* 21 (1984), no. 1, pp. 3–18; Helena Lorenzová, 'Osvícenská estetika na pražské univerzitě (Seibt a Meißner)', *Estetika* 34 (1997), no. 3, pp. 27–40; Eva Foglarová, 'Od krásných věd ke krasovědě', in Vlastimil Zuska (ed.), *Estetika na křižovatce humanitních disciplín*, Prague: Karolinum, 1997, pp. 161–92; and Tomáš Hlobil, *Geschmacksbildung im Nationalinteresse: Die Anfänge der Prager Universitätsästhetik im mitteluropäischen Kulturraum 1763–1805*, Hanover: Wehrhahn, 2012.

[2] Of the European universities, apart from those in the German-language area, what has been covered best so far is the beginnings of instruction in aesthetics topics at Scottish and English universities. But that took place in research primarily focused on the history of rhetoric, because professorships of aesthetics in Great Britain were not established in the eighteenth century. Without making any claim to have covered all the literature, I recommend looking in particular at Paul G. Bator, 'The Formation of the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, 1989, pp. 40–64; idem, 'The Unpublished Rhetoric Lectures of Robert Watson, Professor of Logic, Rhetoric, and Metaphysics at the University of St. Andrews, 1756–1778, *Rhetorica* 12, 1994, pp. 67–113; Russell M. Wyland, 'An Archival Study of Rhetoric Texts and Teaching at the University of Oxford, 1785–1820', *Rhetorica* 21, 2003, pp. 175–95; and Paul B. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: The Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1993. The most comprehensive survey of the teaching of aesthetics and the *Schöne Wissenschaften* at universities in the German-speaking lands is by Klaus Weimar, *Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts*,

It is no accident that this history has been insufficiently covered. It is a direct consequence of the nature of the prevailing writing about the history of different branches of philosophy. Based on the conviction that in the development of philosophical thought one can and should explain the internal laws and the watersheds connected with them, originality, or even progress,[3] these histories do not take into consideration the contemporaneous political and social circumstances. Most of the aesthetics taught at Prague, which I will soon be speaking about, has evaded this traditional writing about the history of aesthetics.From the standpoint of the 'history of the victors' (as Walter Benjamin put it), there is only one way to bring the 'vanished' thinkers back into the light – and that is by including them in the currents of ideas, which this history has highlighted. If we consider the history of aesthetics at Prague using this approach, we end up with the following chronology.[4]

Carl Heinrich Seibt became the first to hold the Chair of Aesthetics at Prague, beginning in 1763. He was concerned with aesthetics in the spirit of his teachers at Leipzig, Johann Heinrich Gottsched and Christian Fürchtegott Gellert. In addition to the French authorities that his teachers acknowledged (Charles Rollin and Charles Batteux), Seibt also

Munich: Fink, 1989, pp. 56–106.

[3] Concerning the false notion that changes in aesthetics are determined by the laws of development, and concerning the misleading results of this approach, see Werner Strube, 'Teoria wzniosłości Mendelssohna albo jak pisać historię estetyki', *Principia* xxi-xxii, 1998, pp. 109–17. For more on the striking selectivity of existing histories of eighteenth-century German aesthetics and their necessary distortions, see Tomáš Hlobil, 'Kdy budou napsány dějiny estetiky německy mluvících zemí 18. století?', in Michal Sýkora (ed.), *Kontexty III*, Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis, Philosophica-Aesthetica 25, Olomouc, Univerzita Palackého, pp. 31–37. In Prague aesthetics, the individual teachers have fallen into oblivion partly because of the regional nature of this university, which became even more local from the late nineteenth century onwards by the instruction being in Czech. In this connection, one must note that, especially in German writing on history, recent works on individual topics in aesthetics also manifest a clearly growing interest in the so-called 'minor authors'. See, for example, Carsten Zelle, *'Angenehmes Grauen': Literaturhistorische Beiträge zur ästhetik des Schrecklichen im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1987, and Ernst Stöckmann, *Anthropologische ästhetik: Philosophie, Psychologie und ästhetische Theorie der Emotionen im Diskurs der Aufklärung*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2009.

[4] I have not included in this survey short-term or one-off substitute teachers of aesthetics.

started from the ideas of two contemporaneous German aestheticians, Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Moses Mendelssohn, who were calling for the abandonment of what was known as *Regelpoetik*, because in art they gave preference to feelings over reason. Seibt's successor, August Gottlieb Meißner, who taught aesthetics from 1785 to 1804, was an advocate of *Wirkungsästhetik*, which he conceived as the theory of being moved emotionally (*Rührungsästhetik*). Of the contemporaneous aestheticians Meißner gave preference to the ideas of British scholars, particularly Alexander Gerard, Edmund Burke, and Henry Home, Lord Kames. It is typical that in his lectures Meißner never mentioned Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which was published in 1790. It seems that German philosophical idealism did not penetrate aesthetics at Prague till the lectures of Joseph Georg Meinert given from 1805 to 1810, as he had studied at the bastion of this stream of philosophy, Jena.[5] Nevertheless, Johann Heinrich Dambeck, Meinert's successor, had already by the second decade of the nineteenth century again lectured using Heinrich Zschokke's textbook of psychological-anthropological aesthetics (that is, deliberately non-transcendental aesthetics). At the same time, Dambeck was following on from the ideals of *Humanität* as proclaimed by Friedrich Schiller. Dambeck's successor, Anton Müller, taught aesthetics from 1823 to 1843, in the spirit of an idealist Romanticism adjusted, that is, made moderate, for Austrian purposes. In the late 1840s, the philosophy of Johann Friedrich Herbart made its way into Prague aesthetics. Herbartism, which in the second half of the nineteenth century became de facto the official state philosophy of the Austrian Monarchy, subsequently dominated aesthetics at Prague. It was developed both in German (by Wilhelm Volkmann and Robert Zimmermann) and in Czech (by Josef Dastich and Josef Durdík), until the division of Prague University into a Czech-speaking and a German-speaking part in 1882.[6] At the Czech-speaking part, Herbartism was the decisive current of aesthetics until 1910, when the main proponent of formalism

[5] Meinert's lectures have not survived. Their idealist nature can be assumed especially from reading the inaugural lecture. J[oseph] G[eorg] Meinert, *Rede über das Interesse der Aesthetik, Pädagogik, Geschichte der Gelahrheit und Filosofie für Gebildete Menschen*, Prague: Widtmann, 1807.

[6] The only non-Herbartian lectures in aesthetics in this period were offered in Czech by Jan Erasim Wocel.

in Czech aesthetics, Otakar Hostinský, died. But the legacy of Czech Herbartian aesthetics, which rejected psychological subjectivism and acknowledged formalism and empiricism, continued in the proto-structuralist lectures of Otakar Zich from 1911 to 1934. This orientation came to a peak beginning in the mid-1930s with the teaching of the internationally most translated and cited Czech aesthetician – Jan Mukařovský.

Aesthetics at the German-speaking part was different from aesthetics at the Czech-speaking part of Prague University. Its leading figure, Christian von Ehrenfels, in lectures held repeatedly for many years, from the winter semester of 1896/97 to the summer semester of 1929, anticipated the influential Gestalt psychology and Gestalt theory. Ehrenfels's successor was Emil Utitz, who gave lectures in psychologically based aesthetics from the mid-1930s until he was forced to leave the university in 1938, for racial reasons.

During the Second World War, the Nazis closed all Czech institutions of higher learning, including Prague University. In these years, aesthetics could develop institutionally only at the German University of Prague. The subjects taught at this university, which was now part of the higher education system of the Third Reich, corresponded to Nazi ideology of race. Aesthetics became a marginal subject, yet was not excluded from the curriculum. (Kurt Schilling taught it in the summer semester of 1940.)

With the liberation, Czech universities reopened after a six-year pause and the German University of Prague was closed down. At Prague, Mukařovský quickly restored the tradition of Czech structuralism in aesthetics, but did not develop it long. In the 1950s, shortly after the Communist takeover of late February 1948, he publicly denounced structuralist ideas in favour of Marxism, establishing Marxist-Leninist aesthetics at Prague along Soviet lines, that is, aesthetics strictly subordinated to the policies and ideology of the ruling Communist Party. Apart from the brief political thaw in the 1960s, when, among other things, the tradition of Czech structuralist aesthetics was revived (led by Miroslav červenka and Milan Jankovič), this stage of aesthetics at Prague lasted for forty years. In this period, which was marked by severe restrictions on the free development of aesthetic thinking and on an orientation to Western philosophy, the ruling Communist Party permitted, in addition to Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, only experimental aesthetics to develop somewhat. The leading fig-

ures of aesthetics at Prague in those days were, one after the other, Mirko Novák, Antonín Sychra, Jaroslav Volek, and Miloš Jůzl. After the collapse of the Communist régime in late 1989, the monopoly held by Marxist-Leninist aesthetics quickly vanished as well. Now led by Vlastimil Zuska, aesthetics at Prague soon began to tie into the ideas and debates of contemporary American, British, French, and German aestheticians.

If we were to continue the traditional approach to writing the history of aesthetics, we should end this survey with the previous basic description and periodization of the 250 years of aesthetics at Prague. But if we are inclined to believe that the aim of writing history is to present and explain historical events in context and thereby, when discussing aesthetics, to reveal and clarify the original state of the aesthetic thinking of a certain period in its greatest breadth and completeness, then it is reasonable to say that the traditional approach has been concerned with only a part and, I dare say, even the smaller part, of aesthetics at Prague. The reason is that the traditional history, which highlights only the leading and original thinkers, is too selective to be able to provide an accurate picture of the true state of aesthetics in a given period. With only some exaggeration it is fair to say that traditional writing about the history of aesthetics has not only failed to reveal this state of affairs, but has even concealed it. That is well demonstrated by the history of aesthetics at Prague, which, with few exceptions, appears to be the history of 'vanquished thinkers', even if in their day they were clearly victors.

Even our brief survey of the main figures of aesthetics at Prague suggests that the history of the field has not been concerned exclusively with the immanent development of aesthetic thought as depicted and explained by traditional writing about the history of aesthetic. Instead, it has also been shaped in an important, if not decisive, way by numerous external, political, and social factors, because this kind of aesthetics is firmly linked with the university as an institution, characterized by its distinctive internal organization and governance and dependent on the political decisions of the State. This linkage raises questions, falling into two groups, without answers to which, no history of aesthetics taught at university can ever be properly understood. Questions of either group, the first concerning life inside the university, the second outside, however, cannot be completely separated from each other, as we shall see from the example of Prague, be-

cause the State authorities sought then, and continue to seek today, direct or indirect influence over the form and content of the universities.

Among the central questions that help one to identify and explain the institutional dimension of aesthetics at universities are the following. What was aesthetics (or rather the subjects in which teachers considered questions of aesthetics) called? In what years and semesters were courses in aesthetics offered? In what group of subjects was it included? What place did it hold in the various hierarchies of faculty disciplines? Who taught it? What was their status at the universities and what were their salaries? What textbooks and publications did they base their lectures on? What place did aesthetics hold amongst the other subjects? At first sight, all these questions seem to be focused solely on what was happening inside the university. They are, however, overarched by a question that goes beyond them – namely, to what extent did the State authorities influence the implementation of these steps? When researching aesthetics at Prague, changing the starting point (by substituting social and political influences on the research and teaching of aesthetics at university for the immanent development of aesthetic thought) yields a different chronology from the one offered when including the leading figures of aesthetics amongst the intellectual currents identified by traditional writing on the history of aesthetics.

If we disregard the short episode of the so-called Second Republic of Czechoslovakia, which existed from the signing of the Munich Agreement in late September 1938 to the German occupation of rump Czechoslovakia in mid-March 1939, it is fair to say that in its 250 years aesthetics at Prague was researched and taught under six completely different political régimes: (1) the Austrian Monarchy (and from 1867 the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy), (2) the democratic Czechoslovak Republic, from late 1918 to late 1938, (3) the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, from mid-1939 to early May 1945, (4) the restored democratic Czechoslovakia, from early May 1945 to late February 1948, (5) Communist Czechoslovakia, from late February 1948 to late 1989, and (6) the democracy that was re-established in late 1989, at first as the Czechoslovak Republic and then, since January 1993, as the Czech Republic. All these changes of régime are reflected in the aesthetics taught at Prague, because each régime, to various extents and with various degrees of thoroughness, influenced the operation of uni-

versities here. To demonstrate just how fundamentally the political and social changes influenced the content, development, and chronology of aesthetics at Prague, I will, in view of time and space restrictions, use a single, but fitting, example – namely, its initial, but also longest, period, including the period under the Monarchy, from 1763 to 1918.[7]

The Vienna Court, in particular the individual rulers of Austria, controlled and adjusted the operation of Austrian universities by means of the Court rescripts (*Hofreskripte*). The rescripts stipulated that aesthetics should be taught only at selected Austrian Faculties of Arts (*Philosophische Fakultät*). This faculty held a special place in the Austrian university system until 1848. Unlike the Faculties of Theology, Law, and Medicine, the Faculty of Arts did not prepare students for the practice of a profession. The purpose of the two or three years of study there was only to prepare students for entrance to the so-called 'superior faculties'. Simply the position and purpose of the Faculty of Arts in the Austrian educational system at the time therefore determined that instruction in aesthetics would be aimed at teenage students in the preparatory phase of their university education. Moreover, this was their first encounter with abstract aesthetic thought. Merely the inclusion of aesthetics in the programme of the selected Faculties of Arts which were conceived as introductory programmes (*propaedeutics*) necessarily meant that lectures in aesthetics were not, nor could they be, the milieu in which it was important to come up with new ideas and theories in the field or to start new trends or anticipate them. The discrepancy between the didactic nature of aesthetics taught at Prague and the nature of traditional writing about the history of aesthetics, oriented to the search for decisive, original results, has meant that we know little of the teaching of aesthetics at Prague and most other European universities, though it is clear that this teaching did contribute importantly to the dissemination of ideas in aesthetics. After all, at Prague, for example, hundreds of students registered for lectures in aesthetics every year between 1763 and 1805.[8]

[7] For more on this, see Tomáš Hlobil, *Geschmacksbildung im Nationalinteresse: Die Anfänge der Prager Universitätsästhetik im mitteluropäischen Kulturraum 1763–1805*, Hanover: Wehrhahn, 2012.

[8] One need only consider, for example, the hundreds of students taking notes at August Gottlieb Meissner's lectures on aesthetics or the lectures on aesthetics offered at

The decision of the Austrian rulers, which determined the organization of Austrian universities, also later influenced the individual fields, including aesthetics. After 1848, as part of the Thun reforms the Faculty of Arts was given a status equal to that of the other three faculties. The Faculty of Arts thus ceased to be only for introductory programmes (*propaedeutics*), and became a fully fledged faculty. This decision strengthened the research nature of the Faculty of Arts and compelled the individual teachers, including teachers of aesthetics, to have more clearly defined specializations. For aesthetics at Prague, the Thun reforms brought another important change, when they allowed the teaching of aesthetics not only in German, as had been the case before, but also in Czech. The linguistic standpoint soon became the defining factor for the further organization of the university, because Prague University was, by a decision of Emperor Francis Joseph I, divided into a Czech-speaking and a German-speaking part in 1882.[9] From that year until 1939, one observes the independent development of two sections of aesthetics at Prague, a Czech and a German.[10]

The Austrian rulers influenced the form and content of aesthetics at Prague not only by means of general decisions regulating the operation of universities and their faculties; they also used rescripts that directly stipulated the form and content of the individual subjects. And in this regard too it is reasonable to conclude that everything related to aesthetics also bore a political hallmark. The introduction of aesthetics at Prague, the earliest attempt of its kind anywhere in the Monarchy, was an important part of Empress Maria Theresa's long-term efforts to reform and modernize Austrian universities on the model of their more developed north German and central German counterparts, which she was compelled to

the same time in the form of private *collegia* at Leipzig University. All these facts testify to the considerable popularity of this subject. For more on this, see ibid.

[9] The division of the university was one of the cultural culminations of the Czech National Awakening, in which aesthetics at Prague played a lasting and important role.

[10] This two-track approach lasted until November 1939, when the Nazis closed Czech institutions of higher learning. Only the German University of Prague remained open, but was incorporated into the system of German universities in the Reich. Consequently, during the Second World War, lectures in aesthetics at Prague were given only in German. After the war, the German University was closed in 1945 for good, thus ending the Prague tradition of aesthetics in German.

do by having lost the war with Prussia. By this decision, Maria Theresa was pursuing two aims in particular – linguist and moral. At Prague, the Faculty of Arts, which was controlled by Jesuits at that time, was Latin-speaking. Aesthetics as a subject taught in German was meant to buttress the position of German as the central language of the Monarchy. Among the duties of Professors of Aesthetics was instruction in German rhetoric, intended to teach students a German that was not only correct but also stylistically refined. Aesthetics as a subject concerned with questions of beauty and art, primarily classical, was also intended, by means of cultivating taste, to help to make from Austrian students ethical and loyal subjects. This utilitarian conception of aesthetics weakened the scholastic nature of the Faculty of Arts and instilled in it a more practical orientation.

No less political than the introduction of aesthetics into the Prague curriculum was the filling of university chairs. Although the lower levels of administration (the faculty, the university, the provincial government, and the Court study commission) were important in the selection of who would hold the chair, the last word, throughout the existence of the Monarchy, was always the monarch's. That is again usefully illustrated by the example of the first filling of the Chair of Aesthetics at Prague. The immediate incentive to establish the chair was a request for the creation of a Chair of *Schöne Wissenschaften* (eventually renamed Aesthetics) and the appointment to it, which Carl Heinrich Seibt made to Maria Theresa on 24 January 1763. He argued for the necessity of the new subject by pointing out that the *Schöne Wissenschaften* were not taught at Austrian universities, even though they had long been established at more developed universities (led by Leipzig, where he had once studied), and that it was a highly attractive and useful subject for students. After behind-the-scenes frictions in the Studienhofkommission (a body like today's Ministry of Education), Maria Theresa granted Seibt's request and appointed him an unpaid professor *extraordinarius* on 29 October 1763, making him the first lay member of the Faculty of Arts at Prague since the Thirty Years' War. She subsequently also decided about his further career, including his promotion to full professor (*ordinarius*) with the high salary of 1200 guldens annually in 1771. The filling of the Prague Chair of Aesthetics in later years was similarly political. Other factors that were considered before appointments included the applicants' confession and their inclination to certain

philosophical trends, which were either preferred or rejected by the Vienna Court. Meißner, in keeping with the instructions of Joseph II, was the first Protestant appointed in the Faculty of Arts at Prague since the Thirty Years' War. Dambeck, for instance, was chosen over other candidates for the professorship of aesthetics, because, unlike his rivals, he did not profess German idealist philosophy.[11]

The rulers of Austria took decisions not only about the selection of teachers of aesthetics, their salaries, and promotion, but also about the content of their lectures. The Court rescripts set the textbooks by which aesthetics was meant to be taught. If a teacher was resolved not to stick to these books and chose his own book or even decided to base his lectures on his own research and ideas, the rescripts required him to present for approval the publication or manuscript of his choice. The Vienna Court first chose as the approved aesthetics textbooks German translations of the works of Charles Batteux and Henry Home, Lord Kames. After 1785, those were superseded by the German textbooks of Johann Joachim Eschenburg and Johann August Eberhard. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, a textbook of local provenience, by Franz Ficker, Professor of Aesthetics at Vienna, became the required reading at Austrian universities.[12] After the university reform of 1848, lecturers in aesthetics at Prague began to teach solely according to their own work or ideas. Many of these works, for example, by Robert Zimmermann and by Josef Dastich,[13] were eventually published. In particular, Zimmermann's works in German met with

[11] Eugen Lemberg, 'Die Besetzung der Lehrkanzel für Aesthetik an der Prager Universität im Jahre 1811: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus in Böhmen und zu einer Böhmischen Geistesgeschichte in Generationen', *Mitteilungen des Vereines für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen* 68, 1930, pp. 55–70.

[12] *Einleitung in die Schönen Wissenschaften: Nach dem Französischen des Herrn Batteux, mit Zusätzen vermehret von Karl Wilhelm Ramler I–IV*, 4th edn, Leipzig: Weidmann, 1774; *Grundsätze der Critik: in drey Theilen, von Heinrich Home*, Leipzig: Dyck, 1763–66; Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Entwurf einer Theorie und Literatur der schönen Wissenschaften*, Berlin and Stettin: Nicolai, 1783; Johann August Eberhard, *Theorie der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*, 3rd edn, Halle: Waisenhaus, 1790; and Franz Ficker, *Aesthetik oder Lehre vom Schönen und von der Kunst in ihrem ganzen Umfange*, 2nd edn, Vienna: Heubner, 1840.

[13] Robert Zimmermann, *Über das Tragische und die Tragödie: Vorlesungen gehalten zu Prag im Frühjahre 1855*, Vienna: Braumüller, 1856; idem, *Aesthetik*, Vienna: Braumüller, 1858; idem, *Allgemeine Aesthetik als Formwissenschaft*, Vienna: Braumüller, 1865; and Josef Dastich, *Základové praktické filosofie ve smyslu všeobecné ethiky*, Prague: Tempský, 1863.

international acclaim.

The Court rescripts determined not only what topics were to be taught in aesthetics, but also the language of instruction. Until 1848, aesthetics at Prague was taught only in German. But from the winter semester of 1850/51 it was also taught in Czech (by Jan Erasim Wocel). The Court rescripts also determined the status of aesthetics in the faculty curriculum. That changed considerably during this period, especially in connection with the overall transformation of the Faculties of Arts. After it made its way into the curriculum of the Faculty of Arts at Prague, aesthetics at Austrian universities achieved its supreme standing in Joseph II's reforms, which were adopted in 1784. They stipulated that aesthetics would be taught for one hour every day of the week in the third year of philosophy studies and that anyone who wished to continue his education in the superior faculties would have to pass a course in aesthetics. After the death of Joseph II, there was a deliberate gradual weakening of aesthetics. The last straw was Emperor Francis II's reform of the Faculties of Arts in 1805; aesthetics ceased to be a required third-year subject and became an elective instead. The 1824 reform then made an examination in aesthetics compulsory for people applying to receive training as teachers. After 1848, when the Faculties of Arts were made equal with the other faculties, lectures in aesthetics held in Czech and German became a regular subject, continuously offered until the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918. In this period, aesthetics was offered by various teachers and to various extents, from one to four hours a week.

The Court rescripts also determined the standing of aesthetics teachers and of other subjects connected with aesthetics. Until 1848, aesthetics at Prague was taught solely by professors. Later, once Seibt, having taught for eight years without remuneration, was raised to a paid full professor, aesthetics was taught only by full professors. A professorship of aesthetics was most often linked with teaching classical literature, less often pedagogy, art history, the history of science, and the history of philosophy. At Prague, from 1849 to 1883, no professorship of aesthetics was created. The absence of a chair did not mean, however, that aesthetics was on the decline or even about to vanish. That is clearly testified to by the number of lectures offered in aesthetics. From the academic year 1849/50 to the academic year 1881/82, lectures in general aesthetics and in the aesthet-

ics of various kinds of art were offered 54 times; there were also lectures by two different teachers concurrently in Czech and German or in German only.[14] In this period, lectures in aesthetics were most often given by teachers of philosophy at all levels of their academic career (private docent, professor *extraordinarius*, and professor *ordinarius*), but it was also taught by professors of classical archaeology, art history, and theology. Two habilitations were expressly linked with aesthetics in this period – namely, the docentship of aesthetics of the plastic arts, held by Wilhelm Volkmann, and the docentship of aesthetics of music, held by Otakar Hostinský. Other independent positions of professor *extraordinarius* of aesthetics were not created until after the division of Prague University into a Czech-speaking and a German-speaking part in 1882, and solely at the Czech-speaking part. In 1883, Emperor Francis Joseph I appointed Hostinský Professor *Extraordinarius* of General Aesthetics. In 1892, he was promoted to Professor *Ordinarius*. The tradition of an independent professor *ordinarius* of aesthetics at the Czech-speaking part of the university then continued largely uninterrupted until 1948.[15] By contrast, at the German-speaking part an independent professorship of aesthetics was never created, although there too aesthetics was taught continuously till this part of the university was closed down, just after the war, in 1945. The most important subject – general aesthetics – was taught exclusively by professors of philosophy (not of aesthetics) – namely, Ehrenfels and Utitz. Apart from general aesthetics, there were also numerous lectures in the aesthetics of music (given by Guido Adler and Heinrich Rietsch).[16] By contrast, lectures in the history of German aesthetics were rare (given by Ferdinand Josef Schneider).

If we take into consideration the institutional dimension of aesthetics at Prague, as it is reflected in the summarized main decisions of the Vienna Court, which determined the form and content of Austrian universities as well as their Faculties of Arts, the individual subjects, and Prague Uni-

[14] See, for example, the lists of lectures at Prague University from these years, deposited in the Charles University Archive.

[15] An exception is the period of the Second World War, when the Nazis closed Czech institutions of higher learning.

[16] It is with music that the sole private docentship of aesthetics at the German University of Prague is linked. It was the short-lived docentship of the theory and aesthetics of music, which was held by Josef Georg Daninger in the late 1920s.

versity, the chronology of aesthetics taught at the university here looks considerably different from the chronology based on the immanent development of aesthetic thinking. The first stage of aesthetics at Prague was from 1763 to 1848, when aesthetics was taught in German according to the set textbooks at the propaedeutic Faculty of Arts and when the position of professor *ordinarius* was established; the second stage, from 1849 to 1882, when the Faculty of Arts became a fully fledged faculty and when Chairs in Aesthetics were closed down, although aesthetics was often and continuously lectured on by various teachers in German and in Czech using their own ideas; the third stage, which began with the division of Prague University into a Czech-speaking and a German-speaking part in 1882 and ended with the breakup of the Austrian Monarchy in the autumn of 1918, is characterized by the re-establishment of a professorship of aesthetics in the Czech-speaking part and its regular instruction without full institutionalization in the form of a professorship at the German-speaking part.

This extremely concise outline of the history of aesthetics at Prague, which has not been limited to only an explanation of its relationship to the individual trends distinguished by traditional writing on the history of aesthetics has, I hope, clearly demonstrated that without taking into consideration the institutional aspects, one can never properly comprehend the aesthetics taught not only at Prague, but also at any university. The main reason is that aesthetics at university is not an isolated phenomenon, encased exclusively in the immanent philosophical aesthetic tradition; rather, this kind of aesthetics was, and continues to be, markedly influenced by the socio-political conditions and circumstances of the times. It is the institutional approach, moreover, that allows one effectively to include so-called 'minor aestheticians' in the interpretation as well, something that the traditional history of aesthetics overlooks, and it can thereby substantially expand the range of existing research.

But even the institutional approach does not exhaust the overall complexity of aesthetics at university. The question of what was, and is, the actual relationship between the socio-political conditions, that is, between the decrees of the ruling powers, and what was actually taught at the departments, has remained untouched. Research conducted so far on the notes made from lectures given by various Prague teachers of aesthetics indicates that the lectures that were given often, if not most of the time,

diverged in form and content from what the authorities had desired them to be, despite all the alleged identity between what was prescribed and what was taught, which is declared in university documents, for example, the lecture lists. The obscure nature of the subject as taught at Prague demonstrates that aesthetics taught at university continuously eludes easy interpretation. But not even the insurmountable difficulty of completely comprehending it should prevent us from continuing to try to do so as precisely as possible.