

SUMMARY

Imagination and Form: Between Aesthetic Formalism and the Philosophy of Emancipation

The present volume has been put together on the occasion of the ninetieth birthday of Josef Zúmr, who has devoted his life to studying the history of Czech thought. The scope of Zúmr's works is broad, encompassing philosophical currents such as Herbartism (represented by the followers of Johann Friedrich Herbart), Russian formalism, Marxism, surrealism and structuralism, as well as figures such as K. H. Mácha, Ladislav Klíma, T. G. Masaryk, Emanuel Chalupný, Josef Ludvík Fischer, Karel Teige, Karel Kosík and Robert Kalivoda. Zúmr's work also transcends the narrowly delineated boundaries of scholarly disciplines, freely moving, for example, from aesthetics to literary theory, from metaphysics to political and social philosophy, from historiography to the philosophy of history. However, there is one element that links together all of Zúmr's writing: an understanding of Czech philosophy as a history of emancipatory thought. We have attempted to capture this unifying bond in Zúmr's thought in the title of this book. It points to the two central focal points of his work, which developed "between aesthetic formalism and philosophy of emancipation."

The book is divided into six thematic sections. The first, *The Struggle between Form and Content*, deals with aesthetic formalism and Platonism. In the first chapter Martin Z. Pokorný analyses Czech romantic poet Karl Hynek Mácha's *May* (1836) alongside Schelling's *Clara* (1810), with special focus on the authors' presentation of an ambiguous relationship to nature. Nature is perceived by both authors as a symbol of life but at the same time as a symbol of finitude and death. Through a comparison of these two authors, Pokorný shows that the romantic imaginative field was structured by a conception of time as an element that is substantially elusive and impossible to grasp imaginatively. Carole Maigné outlines in her contribution the

“cartography” of Herbartism, which in her view evolved between two centres: Prague and Vienna. According to the author, the development of this intellectual current was also marked by a creative tension manifested most conspicuously in the reception of Herbartism by Robert Zimmermann. Maigné demonstrates that Zimmermann conceptualized aesthetics as a science of form that presented the work of art as neither the creation of a genius nor the self-expression of an absolute spirit. In this formalisation of aesthetics Maigné sees the main reason why the institutionalisation of Herbartism was so successful in the Austro-Hungarian Empire: in her view, aesthetic formalism provided a universalistic framework in which it was possible to express a transnational identity within a multinational state. Upon the background of these political implications of Herbartism, Maigné also focuses on the dispute between Herbartism’s Prague and Vienna currents. In the course of this dispute, the question of universality was intensely discussed in connection with particular national identity. Xavier Galmiche deals with this dispute further in the next chapter, in which he analyses the example of Zdeněk Nejedlý’s appropriation of Herbartism. Galmiche reminds us that Nejedlý’s objection to aesthetic formalism was mainly concerned with the argument that national specificity and hence national identity was being lost within the universalism of aesthetic formalism. At the same time, Galmiche argues that the above objection led Nejedlý to develop the science of form in a direction that could incorporate the previously rejected element of particularity, drawing on motifs borrowed from romanticism: the stress on genius and sentiment. Nejedlý articulated these motifs with the aid of a vitalistic vocabulary, through which he merely underlined the political dimension of his aesthetics, which had a strongly normative and later even an authoritarian charge.

The second section, *Encounters*, deals partially with Patočka’s interpretations of T.G. Masaryk, and partially with the intellectual friendship of Irena Krońska and Roman Ingarden. Jan Zouhar traces Patočka’s lifelong struggle with the thought of Masaryk. He speculates that Patočka was attracted in particular by Masaryk’s endeavour to find a moral basis for politics face to face with the crisis of modernity, and further by Masaryk’s reflections on democracy,

the role of religion, and other problems. Masaryk's reflections, at least in Patočka's view, bring him close to the considerations of Edmund Husserl on the "crisis of European sciences". Zouhar further observes that although Patočka's relationship to Masaryk's thought was more or less affirmative, at the same time it was always critical. In the subsequent chapter, Wojciech Starzyński evaluates the influence of the Polish philosopher Irena Krońska on the development of Polish phenomenology. Krońska dealt primarily with the phenomenological realism of Roman Ingarden. In her review of Ingarden's work *Controversy over the Existence of the World*, she reproaches him on the one hand for "ontologizing" and on the other for formalizing phenomenology. In her view, Ingarden abandoned phenomena and focused on modes of existence, which he tackled with the aid of logical laws. Although Krońska's critique did not elicit wide response, she continued to develop her phenomenological critique of Ingarden, which Starzyński documents on the basis of Krońska's correspondence with Jan Patočka.

The third section, Surrealism – Formalism – Structuralism, is devoted to the figure of Vratislav Effenberger. Tomáš Glanc seeks lines of connection between these three intellectual currents, dealing with a functional version of structuralism espoused by Effenberger, who was in turn inspired by Roman Jakobson. Glanc writes that structuralism, according to Effenberger, was born out of a spirit of aesthetic formalism but is also typified by dynamism, as well as an emphasis on particularity as an integral component of semantic gesture. Effenberger further enhanced this dynamism with a surrealist element, the psychic, which was directed toward an examination of the "dynamism of the human spirit transforming life." Whereas the dynamic structuralism of Jakobson was restricted to the field of grammar and poetry, Effenberger was attracted by "logic," which is particular to the dynamism of the spirit. Effenberger's thought is also the theme of the following article, by Šimon Svěrák, which is concerned with Effenberger's theory of ideology. For Effenberger, ideology was a neutrally imbued concept, close to Mukařovský's concept of worldview, since it fulfils an integrative function. According to Svěrák, Effenberger was very clearly aware that the historical cataclysm of the

last few decades had awakened disintegrating tendencies, in which there was seemingly no room for an “integrating perspective”. For Effenberger, the disappearance of a unifying ideological perspective represented a motivation for Effenberger to clarify its social and political function, which could be stabilising or revolutionary, and to seek its origin within the structure of human subjectivity, which is determined by freedom.

The studies in the fourth section, Radical Democracy and Materialism, are devoted to the thought of Karel Kosík, and specifically to the concept of methodology in Kosík’s understanding of the history of philosophy and of philosophy itself. Tomáš Hermann demonstrates that Kosík’s works *Czech Radical Democracy* and *Dialectics of the Concrete* do not represent two different periods of Kosík’s academic activity (historical and philosophical). Rather, he argues, a distinct methodological continuity exists between these two texts, and the earlier historical material helped Kosík define the concept of concrete totality, which he later developed fully in *Dialectics of the Concrete*. Ivan Landa focuses on Kosík’s ontological work. He shows that in opposition to the phenomenological reading of *Dialectics of the Concrete*, Kosík derived his philosophical anthropology from the ontology of labour. Moreover, Landa argues that Kosík’s approach to Heidegger’s fundamental ontology is rather of a critical nature and that Kosík in his polemic with Heidegger defended and developed a conception of practical materialism, at the centre of which was a materialistic conception of time and temporality.

The fifth section, entitled The People and the Avant-Garde, relates to the concept of the emancipatory subject in the form of the avant-garde and the people. Roman Kanda points to the example of Vítězslav Nezval’s engagement with the history of the avant-garde in the mid-1950s. On the one hand Nezval maps history, while on the other he endeavours to exert a positive influence on the present. By positively evaluating the heritage of avant-garde, Nezval was able to find a path linking the interwar avant-garde to the aesthetic milieu of the second half of the 1950s, which later took on a life of its own in the following decade. Invoking the example of Robert Kalivoda, Kanda demonstrates that, for many in the 1960s, the avant-garde did

not represent a closed historical phenomenon but rather an open project of social emancipation. In a similar spirit, Joseph Grim Feinberg points to the antinomic nature of the concept of the avant-garde. On the one hand the concept coincided with the socialist movement's self-understanding as a leading force for radical change, while on the other hand the concept—in aesthetic as well as political context—contradicted equally important socialist idea that the people represented the proper subject of emancipatory thought and history. By examining socialist movement's turn to folklore in the course of the twentieth century, Feinberg points to ways in which the movement attempted to overcome this internal contradiction and move beyond earlier conceptions of the vanguard party as a small, closed group relatively distant from the popular masses.

The concluding thematic block, entitled *The Philosophy of Emancipation*, is devoted to the search for an emancipatory tendency within the historical process. At the same time, this section is also explicitly devoted to the work of Josef Zúmr. Miloslav Caňko, in the first article, focuses on the work of Robert Kalivoda, in which he traces the tension between his conception of the Hussite *revolution* and the Hussite *epoch*. Caňko accentuates the emancipatory charge of Kalivoda's conception of revolution as against the epoch, which in its way divests the originally revolutionary ideas of their emancipatory charge. In the second article, Petr Kužel follows Zúmr's inquiry into the genealogy of Czech structuralism, which reveals deep continuities between the tradition of Czech structuralist thought and Herbartism. Kužel places this trend within the broader context of both the Czech and the French tradition. In the last article, then, Jan Mervart attempts a reconstruction of Zúmr's philosophy of Czech history founded on an emancipatory continuity from the Hussite movement to the present. At the same time, he argues that emancipation, in the sense of permanent liberation and development toward the free self-realisation of the human individual, serves here as a kind of universal principle, going beyond the narrow bounds of the Czech national narrative.

The book is concluded by an extensive interview with Josef Zúmr recorded in the summer of 2017 by Roman Kanda and Jan Mervart.

It is devoted to philosophy, literature, art and to Zumr's own biography. It also sheds light on the specific nature of academic life during state socialism. For those readers who are not familiar with the details of Zumr's lifelong scholarly interests, this interview offers a means of orienting oneself within Zumr's extensive academic work. It may also serve as a guide to the book itself.