Professor Herta Schmid has worked at several universities (Bochum, München, Potsdam, Amsterdam) and in the years 1995 to 2002, co-edited, with W. Koschmal, the journal Bala-gan, focusing on Slavic drama, theatre and film. Her own research concentrated on Russian, Polish and Czech cultures, dedicating much attention to Prague Structuralism. Between 1975 and 2008, she co-edited as many as 12 crucial volumes.1

1 Out of this number I would like to mention those most relevant for our purpose: on the theory of drama: Moderne Dramentheorie (Kronberg 1975); Drama und Theater. Theorie – Meth- ode – Geschichte (Munich 1991); Bühne und Öffentlichkeit, Drama und Theater im Spät- und Postsozialismus (Munich 2002); on semiotics of drama and theatre: Semiotics of Drama and Theatre (Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1984); on drama and theatre communication: Dramatische und theatralische Kommunikation. Beiträge zur Ge- schichte des Dramas und Theaters im 20. Jahr- hundert (Tübingen 1992); and on Czech Structuralism: Jan Mukařovský and the Prague School/ Jan Mukařovský und die Prager Schule (Prague 1999). In this context another two volumes of conference proceedings on leading Czech poets deserve a mention: Karel Hynek Mácha, Die tschechische Romantik im europäischen Kontext (Munich 2000); Vrchlický und der tschechische Symbolismus (Munich 2003); and on the fruitful era of the early 20th century: Kapitel aus der Po- etik. Die zehner Jahre in der tschechischen Sym- bolismus und Avantgarde (Munich 2008).

A selection of her work (which may well be the first of its kind) was done by Aleš Haman and Radim Kopáč. Given the fact that it is focused on a Czech readership, the editors divided the selected texts, published between 1989 and 2009, into three groups: the first contains 7 studies dedicated to the leading figure of the Prague Structuralist School, Jan Mukařovský;2 the second group is

dedicated to the analyses of Czech literary works (by Comenius, Jaroslav Vrchlický, and Karel Čapek); and the third comprises of 4 chapters analyzing the poetics and semantics of Václav Havel’s plays.

All three groups present Herta Schmid as an innovative thinker unwilling to settle with the traditional readings and ready to develop Structuralist theories creatively. In doing so Schmid relates to the work of others (Oleg Sus, Felix Vodička, Robert Kalivoda, Miroslav Červenka, Mojmír Grygar, Milan Jankovič, Mojmír Otruba, Květoslav Chvatík, Lubomír Doležel) as well as confronts it with the post-Structuralists (Jacques Derrida). Czech readers will appreciate Schmid’s valuable confrontations of Czech Structuralism with its predecessors (Russian Formalism, Leo Spitzer, Karl Bühler, Robert Hanslick). It seems that the aesthetic of Friedrich Schiller would be a rewarding subject of study in this context with its influence of Kant, Shaftesbury and Burke, as Herta Schmid suggests. Her texts show Czech Structuralism as an open and dynamic work containing the germs of new solutions capable of new interpretations. So Schmid presents telling evidence that Mukařovský’s anthropological and functional aesthetic contains “post-Structuralist” elements; that his “system of the poetic idiom” has all the features of Saussure’s concept of “system”; likewise she finds in Mukařovský a certain counterpart to Peirce’s theory of two interpretants (the “primary- and environmental interpretant”).

Inspiring contextual investigations and discoveries – that is Schmid’s most consequential contribution. There is little doubt that this (and the symposia where she convened encounters and discussions of Czech and German scholars) is what has played a central role in the rehabilitation and rethinking of the heritage of the Prague Structuralist School. This volume, opening with Aleš Haman’s introduction and concluding with a full bibliography of Schmid’s work, gives a chance to understand the scholarly paths of this leading and so far insufficiently appreciated theorist.