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Herta Schmid

The Concept of Sign, Its Origin and Influence on Mukařovský's Structuralism

In his programmatic article “Structuralism in aesthetics and in the science of literature” (*Strukturalismus v estetice a ve vědě o literatuře*, 1940) Jan Mukařovský gives advice on how to handle scientific notions or terms. When, due to new insights and discoveries, a certain term has to be redefined, the term's verbal denomination should be kept.¹ Denomination and contents are thus regarded as two sides of a sign, whose signifier is static, whereas the signified is dynamic. Mukařovský delivers also a reason for his advice: each single science has its own terminological system. That system would lose its identity if the signifiers were constantly adapted to the ongoing changes. The signifiers are thus comparable to a geographical map, whose points mark a stable network of towns, but leave social or cultural aspects out of the picture. Another reason is the export or import of terms between different sciences. An example of terminological import is the intrusion of *structure* into the theories of aesthetics and arts, Mukařovský's own disciplines. By taking over this term from natural sciences he gives it a new definition rooted in the tradition of philosophical aesthetics and art theory.

Mukařovský enumerates a long list of thinkers that have inspired his aesthetics and theory of literature, among them J. F. Herbart, J. Durdík, O. Hostinský, O. Zich, the Russian Formalists, Broder Christiansen, and several artists. Philosophers like Hegel and Husserl, the theorist of language Karl Bühler, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and, last but not least, several members of the Prague Linguistic Circle are also mentioned. Each name on the list stands

¹ The proper handling of scientific terms and of signs in general is thoroughly discussed in Bernard Bolzano's *Wissenschaftstheorie*. Umberto Eco (1981) demands that Bolzano's semiotics be given more attention. It seems to me that Mukařovský has already fulfilled that demand.

for specific aspects of the central term “structure” in Czech Structuralism. In this context Jiří Veltruský, a pupil of Mukařovský, should not be forgotten. Veltruský extends the list to ancient or older thinkers like Aurelius Augustinus and Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius). Especially noteworthy is the name of Heinrich Gomperz on Veltruský’s list. Gomperz evaluated the unifying function of rites and ritual signs as necessary for the maintenance of political authority.²

Most important for Mukařovský’s conception of structure is the fact that he links it with two other terms: the “sign” and the “function”. According to Mukařovský, the conception of structure as a “meaningful” sign distinguishes Czech aesthetics from all other structural sciences. As to the notion of function he declares that only this notion has made Structuralism in literature possible. Therefore, sign has become the fundament of structural aesthetics, function the fundament of structural theory of literature. Structure, sign and function are the basic terminological and notional triad in Mukařovský’s theory. I put the adjective meaningful in quotation marks in order to indicate that the type of sign ‘without meaning’ figures also among Mukařovský’s thoughts about structure, sign, and function, although he hesitates to give it a proper name.³

One should expect that none of the triadic notions can be eliminated. Yet that is exactly what happens five years later in the article “The Concept of the Whole in the Theory of Arts” (*Pojem celku v teorii umění*, 1945). Structure is now still connected with function, but no longer with sign. The reasons for dropping the sign must be found out by the reader, because Mukařovský gives no clear account of them. I suppose that a discussion with the biologist Jan Bělehrádek mentioned in the article is one of the possible reasons. Biology defines the organic whole (i.e. a living being) as a closed entity, whose single parts fulfil specific functions in relation to one another and to the whole. The organic whole needs each single part and the parts need the whole, it represents a closed whole. In 1945, the type of a “closed” whole seems to be no longer acceptable to Mukařovský. He now defines structure as an “open” whole. The torso of a human-like statue serves him as an example. The defective torso as prototype of an open structural whole tells much about the change that

2 For an overview on Veltruský’s account of predecessors cf. (SCHMID 1997). Gomperz delivered also a semiotic theory of realism in art, which could have been a hidden point of attack in Roman Jakobson’s conception of realism.

3 What I bear in mind is the problem of the thing as a non-sign discussed by Mukařovský in “Záměrnost a nezáměrnost v umění” ([Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art], 1943). Later on I suggest that Mukařovský’s ideas about thing and non-sign could have been influenced by Husserl. Husserl develops the idea of a sign “without symbolic meaning”, i.e. an index. The problem of the non-sign is closely connected with the problem of theatrical ostension. Cf. (SCHMID 2008).

has taken place in Mukařovský's thinking. The missing limbs, so we hear from him, set the onlooker free to complete the whole in his imagination. Different onlookers will produce different completions. In addition to that the torso lacks balance between its compositional parts, *Gestalt*-qualities, and relations with surroundings. In literature, the fragment is an open structure comparable with a torso. Missing parts in the verbal context affect composition, *Gestalt* and meaning. Although Mukařovský still admits that these aspects belong to the artistic structure, he devaluates their impact. That devaluation is all the more astonishing when we think of "On Poetic Language" (O jazyce básnickém, 1940), where the three principles of structural semantic analysis, namely unity of meaning, oscillation between static and dynamic meaning and accumulation of meaning, all presuppose completeness of verbal context, composition and *Gestalt* or at least such completions that follow objectively given directives and prevent superfluous or false additions. (An example is a missing line in a sonnet. A reader familiar with the quantitative norm of exactly fourteen lines in a sonnet will fill in no more than just that one line. A poem called a sonnet yet presenting more than fourteen lines is most confusing.) The three principles, also called principles of the "semantic gesture" (*sémantické gesto*), are not sufficiently applicable in a defective text. They are principles of a quantitatively complete structural whole, which is defined from upside down (whole to parts) as well as from down to upside (parts to whole). In the article of 1945 this double-sided structural relationship is reduced to a one-sided relationship: either from upside down or from down to upside. It becomes evident that a deep going *shift* has taken place in Mukařovský's thinking.

I suppose that this shift is caused by a new orientation within the system of humanistic sciences. Mukařovský himself is clearly aware of his reorientation. He lists several names attributed to these sciences, "sometimes called humanistic, another time cultural, and recently social" [zvaných někdy duchovními, jindy kulturními, nově pak vědami sociálními] (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1977: 70; MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1945: 85).⁴ In the beginning of Mukařovský's Structuralism his orientations were the "humanistic" sciences – the Czech expression *duchovní vědy* corresponds with the German *Geisteswissenschaften* –, then he went over to "cultural" sciences connected with Jurij Tynjanov's and Roman Jakobson's concept of structure of structures, and now, in 1945, he inclines to "social" sciences. As a consequence of the reorientation, "[a] structure could – from the standpoint of the social sciences – be called a set of norms" [struktura mohla by – ze stanoviska věd sociálních – být označena jako soubor norem]

4 First year and page refer always to the English quotation, second year and page to the Czech quotation.

(MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1977: 81; MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1945: 95). When aesthetics and literary science are regarded from a social standpoint, the triad structure – sign – function has to be redefined as structure – function – norm. The sign, grounding the function in the old triad, vanishes, the norm, taken from social sciences, controls the function. The question arises, why do social sciences not tolerate the notion of sign in aesthetics and literary science?

An answer to the question could be that the aesthetic sign stands in opposition to the collective consciousness, which in social sciences is considered a normative authority. The aesthetic sign does not acknowledge that authority, it rebels against all authorities outside the work of art. In “Art as a Semiotic Fact” (*Umění jako semiologický fakt*, 1934), his first attempt at a semiotic or semiological conception (the latter name comes from De Saussure), Mukařovský states that the intention of the art work is directed at the set of collective norms and values in order to measure that set by its own intrinsic norms and values. Within the relationship between art work and collective consciousness, Czech classical Structuralism, coined by Mukařovský during the early 1930s and early 1940s, the main weight lies on the work. In mid 1940s the founder of classical Structuralism changes sides by ‘opening’ the work’s structure towards collective social hierarchies. Shortly after 1945 he abdicates totally from Structuralism.

The decline and final end of the classical period of Czech Structuralism have been described often, so I need not deepen that topic. What I do want to point out is a recent development in aesthetic thinking that shows analogies to Mukařovský’s changing sides in 1945. When in the 1960s and 1970s knowledge about Czech Structuralism began to spread in Western countries, it was highly praised for its semiotic profile, but even more for its approval of the individuality of art works. Nowadays, in some intellectual circles semiotics seem to be outdated. Erika Fischer-Lichte, once a spokeswoman for semiotics in the theory of theatre, tries to establish a non-semiotic, anti-intellectual aesthetics called aesthetics of the performative.⁵ Keywords of this latest offspring of post-Modernism are: sensation, emotion, association, atmosphere, communication, interactivity, community, and the like. That list betrays an inclination towards collectivism, which goes even further than Mukařovský’s turn in 1945, because the artistic production itself is now collectivized – interactivity in the form of role-changing between actors and public in an emotional atmosphere unifying stage and audience creates an ‘open’ theatrical process or ‘event’. Psychotherapeutic groups on the one side, religious congregations

5 Cf. (FISCHER-LICHTE 2004). For a detailed report on Fischer-Lichte’s anti-semiotic aesthetics, cf. (ROUBAL 2010).

typical for American sects on the other side seem to have delivered the prototypes to that new aesthetics. Taking up the parallel between Mukařovský's "social shift" and Fischer-Lichte's so-called "performative turn", one may suspect that the latter's rhetorical promise of healing or salvation of the human being masks a normative authority hostile to veritable individuality. When Mukařovský in 1948 officially abdicated from Structuralism, the ideology of Socialism was governing in his country and he openly confessed that ideology. Later on I will try to lay bare the hidden ideology of performative aesthetics. Before that I have to find out why the sign in general and the aesthetic sign in special mean a challenge to collectivism of any kind.

Edmund Husserl's conception of sign and Mukařovský's aesthetic sign in comparison to the anti-semiotic performative turn

Researchers of Prague Structuralism tend to explain Mukařovský's interest in semiotics by the rise of modern linguistics at the beginning of the 20th century. That assumption is indeed justified, because linguistics was much advanced in the knowledge about signs. In the already mentioned programmatic article "Structuralism in aesthetics and in the science of literature", however, where the contributions of philosophers to Mukařovský's theory are specified, we read the following passage: "The philosophical preconditions [of Czech Structuralism] were contributed by the philosophy of Hegel (the dialectical concept of inner contradictions in a structure and in the development of it) and of Husserl (the construction of a sign and of its relationship with things)"⁶ [Filosofické předpoklady dodala zejména filosofie Hegelova (dialektické pojetí vnitřních rozporů v struktuře i jejího vývoje) a Husserlova (výstavba znaku i jeho věčný vztah) (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1940: 27). In the continuation of this passage Karl Bühler is mentioned for his psychology of verbal, mimic and colour signs. Since Husserl himself refers to Bühler, I concentrate only on Husserl's "construction of a sign and of its relationship with things", indicated by Mukařovský.

Edmund Husserl mainly discriminates between two types of sign, the so-called *Anzeige* (index), and the verbal *Ausdruck* (Husserl defines *Ausdruck* as a symbol. *Ausdruck* is not "expression" in Bühler's Organon-model, but rather Bühler's *Darstellung*. Further on I will use the term "symbol" for *Ausdruck*. The *Anzeige*, for example mimic and gesture of a speaker, has no self-standing meaning, it merely accompanies the verbal symbol. Only the symbol correlates with signification, so that symbol and signification together consti-

6 My translation, H. Schmid.

tute the two sides of a sign called signifier and signified. Ferdinand de Saussure regarded the signifier (*signifiant*) as the material part of the sign, the signified (*signifié*) as its mental part. The referential relation of the sign (in Czech *věcný vztah*) is of little interest to De Saussure, so that his definition of the sign consists only of two parts. To Husserl as well as Mukařovský reference is extremely important. Thanks to the reference the entire symbolic sign is constituted by three parts – signifier, signified, and referential object. The third part joins the first and second parts in a communicational situation, when a speaker communicates his thought about a referential object to a hearer. So far Mukařovský follows Husserl’s model of the tripartite verbal symbol. But he seems to doubt Husserl’s ideas about thought. Husserl declares that in an act of silent thinking the material part (signifier) of the verbal symbol is superfluous – thinking of a lonely human being can do without words.⁷ When we later look at Mukařovský’s conception of the aesthetic sign, we shall see that the material side of the signifier, be it of verbal or other nature, must never fall off.

Husserl’s semiotic model is neither concerned with aesthetics nor with the arts. Still, it delivers certain insights into his rather complex teaching of intentionality. Intentionality in general means such an activity of the mind, by which the synthesis of a cognitive (logic) act and a perceptive (intuitive) act constitutes one and the same object. The two different acts complete each other in such a way that the cognitive act presents the object under the form of an ‘empty’ notion, whereas the perceptive act presents the same object in the fullness of its sensual qualifications. Both combined acts can be regarded under two aspects. The first aspect focuses on the linear phases of time: the initial phase belongs to the act of logic forming, the subsequent second phase to the act of perceptive filling. Husserl calls this sequence of two time phases the dynamic aspect of intentionality. The second, static aspect focuses on the logically formed and perceptively ‘filled’ intentional object as the common result of the two consecutive intentional acts. We remember that the opposition between statics and dynamics belongs to the three principles of Mukařovský’s poetics (in “On Poetic Language”), there called “oscillation between static and dynamic meaning”. The term “oscillation” indicates that the aesthetic intentional activity is simultaneously dynamic and static, so that one cannot separate the final static result from the dynamic processes of its constitution. Dynamics is rather an intrinsic aspect of statics, statics an intrinsic aspect of

7 Husserl’s conceptions about signs are systematically explained in the first part of the second volume of his *Logische Untersuchungen*, there under the heading “Ausdruck und Bedeutung” [Expression and Meaning]. In her summary of Husserl’s philosophy Elisabeth Ströker qualifies this part of *Logische Untersuchungen* as a side-product, whose relevance becomes evident only within the framework of the total system of Phenomenology (STRÖKER 1992: 12–50).

dynamics. This gives us an example of the way in which Mukařovský uses the tool of dialectical argumentation inherited by Hegel.

Let me try to exemplify the different conceptions of intentionality of both semiotic thinkers, Husserl and Mukařovský, by an object called “tree”. When “tree” occurs in the sequence of Husserl’s intentional acts, it is in the first phase subordinated under a logical class; in the second phase it is realized in its characteristic outer appearance, and finally the tree ‘stands’ before the subject’s mind in its well defined logic form filled with concretizing contents. “Tree” in Mukařovský’s conception of the intentional acts is a quite different thing. The word “tree” can mean a class of plants or a type of a man, who is strong and tall like a tree. Such insecure, darkened meaning prevents the logical as well as the intuitive act to reach their shared referential object. Nevertheless, the striving of both acts after one and the same object persists in the subject’s mind. That striving makes itself noticeable just because it does not attain its final end.

In his article about intentionality and unintentionality Mukařovský tries to grasp the problematic speciality of aesthetic intentionality by the introduction of a new, seemingly anti-semiotic term. He now states that in a work of art the intentional activity is not only irritated by oscillation between statics and dynamics but also between thing (*věc*) and sign. The thing in opposition to the sign must not be confounded with the referential object of the aesthetic sign, because referential objects are always correlates of a sign’s meaning. Mukařovský duly discriminates the starting point of a semiosis (*východisko*) from its endpoint (*bod vyústění*) (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1943: 120). The referential object takes the place of the endpoint. The thing in opposition of the sign, then, takes the place of the starting point. The introduction of the thing into the semiotic chain testifies to Mukařovský’s ongoing reflection about the semiotic character of intentional acts in the aesthetic sphere.

Maybe, Husserl’s two types of sign, the index and the symbol, help to understand better what Mukařovský bears in mind when he speaks about the thing in opposition to the sign. Helpful could also be Hegel’s contribution to Czech Structuralism. I quote it once again from Mukařovský: “The dialectical concept of inner contradictions in a structure and in the development of it”. I begin with index and symbol.

These two types of sign need not necessarily have each their own specific material. A materialized index can take over the function of a symbol and *vice versa*. Applied to Mukařovský’s thing in opposition to sign, this could mean that the material of a work of art is simultaneously imprinted by the characteristics of the symbolic sign and of the indexical sign. As long as the work is regarded as a symbol, the attention of the mind takes full notice only of

those characteristics that correspond with a symbol, whereas the characteristics of the index remain unnoticed or overshadowed. In the case of special interest in the index, attention changes perspectives, so that now the characteristics of the index appear in full light, whereas those of the symbolic sign fall back into shadow.

Such manoeuvres with light and shadow, connected with a change of perspectives and interest, do not yet justify the opposition thing – sign. Hegel’s dialectical manoeuvres present new aspects of perspectives. Dialectics presupposes two terms of a contrastive pair. If thing – sign is accepted as such a pair, we can, via several operations of double contradictory negation according to the model “thing is a non-sign, sign is a non-thing”, finally arrive at the statements “a work of art is a sign and a thing, a work of art is an index and a symbol”. The dialectical manoeuvres are insofar problematic, as the choice of terms for the grounding contrastive pair thing – sign seems to be arbitrary. Why should we at all consider the work of art a sign or a thing? Here helps the addition “and in the development of [the dialectical concept of inner contradictions in a structure, HS]” in the above quotation about Hegel’s dialectics. “Structure” is here posited on a level higher than the work of art. That higher level is culture, interpreted as a hierarchy of different structures which all fall under the notion of “culture”. In 1940, when Mukařovský referred to Hegel’s dialectics, his structural thinking was still inclined to philosophy and culture, but not yet to the “social” sciences. “Culture” (think of Jakobson’s and Tynjanov’s structure of structures) establishes its own view on aesthetics and the arts. This view, at least as Mukařovský sees it, is directed by interest in signs and likewise in things. Things should be “culturalized” and signs serve as tools to the aim of “culturalization”. This cultural turn seems to explain why Mukařovský uses Hegel’s dialectics in order to look at the work of art as thing and sign.

The article “Intentionality and Unintentionality in Arts”, dating from 1943, belongs to the phase wherein Mukařovský is still thinking in terms of structures, signs, and functions. When he speaks about the aesthetic function, he understands it in the meaning of a sign-producing energy. In the sphere of art, the aesthetic function produces such signs, which are not only signs, but also things. That is the basic thesis of this crucial article. Dialectically viewed, the thing in contrast to sign is also a sign, yet of a different, lower kind, which, as I indicated above, he hesitates to baptize. Husserl has maybe helped me to find that name – the thing is a kind of sign called index, and an index is a non-symbolic sign, just like the symbolic sign is a non-indexical sign. Yet index and symbol can be inherent in one and the same material, so that the material work allows perspectives on its symbolic and indexical sign-aspects. The perspec-

tive on the symbolic aspects is in cultural respect more important, because a symbol is endowed with intentionality which ultimately makes the world understandable. The index has no intention to understand the world, it merely points at the symbol. What then is an index good for?

In pointing at the symbolic sign, the index, which belongs to the class of motivated signs, can indicate manipulations of the symbolic sign, which belongs to the class of arbitrary signs. Various manipulations are thinkable, when, as in the case of literature, the verbal symbol is used in practically orientated communication. The manipulations can also serve rhetorical purposes, which hide or mask their practical purposes.

I am now approaching the announced comparison between Mukařovský's aesthetics and the performative aesthetics, but before that I will allow myself to summarize Mukařovský's aesthetics with his own words in the article "The Significance of Aesthetics" (*Význam estetiky*, 1942):

We see that the aesthetic function constitutes a certain counterbalance to all the other functions, of which especially the practical is directly and unconditionally necessary for the preservation of bare human life. [...] Only the aesthetic function can preserve for man, *vis-à-vis* the universe, the position of a foreigner who keeps coming to unknown regions with fresh and keen attention, who is constantly aware of himself because he is projecting himself into the surrounding reality because *he measures it with himself*.

(MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1977: 22; 1942: 70. My italics, HS.)

[Vidíme, že funkce estetická tvoří jistou protiváhu všem ostatním funkcím, z nichž zejména praktická je přímo výhradně nutná k udržování holého lidského života. (...) Jen estetická funkce dovede udržovat člověka vůči universu v postavení cizince, jenž vždy znovu přichází do krajů neznámých s pozorností neotřelou a nastraženou, jenž vždy nanovo uvědomuje si sebe tím, že se promítá do okolní skutečnosti, a okolní skutečnost tím, že *ji měří sebou*.]⁸

The quoted passage speaks out high expectations: the aesthetic function transforms man into a "foreigner" in world and society. The foreigner is aware that he is given *a place in the universe*. He likewise "measures" all things, among them those that serve practical purposes in life, with himself. The passage presupposes Mukařovský's theory of anthropological functions and anthropological measures of the aesthetic function explained in many previous articles.

8 The expression "foreigner" (*cizinec*) in Mukařovský's text can be connected with Viktor Sklovsky's "estrangement" (*ostranenie*). But there is also a connection with the emancipatory project of European Enlightenment.

The special contribution of “Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art”, following one year after “The Significance of Aesthetics”, is the notion of the work as a thing and a non-sign that belongs to the kind of indexes. The purpose, why Mukařovský introduces this new sign into his semiotic aesthetics, is hidden in the nature of the index which, being a motivated sign, resists manipulation and falsification more effectively than the arbitrary, conventionalized sign. Thanks to its specific nature, the index can also function as a point or *place in the structure* of the work of art, from whose position the “functioning” of the work of art as an aesthetic sign can be observed, measured and evaluated.

The acceptance of society as rule-giver to the *open* work of art in “The Concept of the Whole in the Theory of Art” in 1945 extinguishes the index’s function of arbiter inside the structure of the work. The rules and norms of society overtake governance over the productions of arts.

I need not add much to what I initially said about Erika Fischer-Lichte’s “performative aesthetics”. The very fact that this kind of aesthetics extinguishes semiotics speaks for itself, when we compare it with Mukařovský’s semiotic aesthetics. This new kind of aesthetics brings a renewal of normative aesthetics, whose norms can be expressed by two orders and one prohibition. The first order says: “Be social!” The second order says: “Be open for the demands of your body, which needs sensations and emotions!” The prohibition says: “Do not use your reason for thinking about other things except the demands of your group and your body!” Admittedly, this is a caricature. Fischer-Lichte gives many worthy insights into the intentions of performative artistic productions and into historical predecessors. One must also give her the credit that she herself believes in the social usefulness of performance theatre and art.

Doubts remain, however, when I read the book of Thomas O. Davenport and Stephen D. Harding *Manager Redefined The Competitive Advantage in the Middle of Your Organization* published in 2010. The announced redefinition of the manager grounds in the “manager performance model”. Many of Fischer-Lichte’s key-terms reappear, but the field is now a specific social group, the members of middle management in all kinds of institutions. The new kind of managers are given instructions how to handle their employees. The employees’ creativity is evaluated as human capital that the manager tries to exploit as much as possible to his own and his organisation’s profit. The freedom necessary for creativity is defined as follows: “One of the most important and significant freedoms we allow our employees is the freedom to be an individual” (DAVENPORT and HARDING 2010: 55). A professional caricaturist could not find a better formula for the definition of freedom in an or-

ganisation interpreting creativity as human capital. Significant is also the advice of the book's authors to keep the ultimate purpose of organisation and management hidden to the employees. Hiding is a general characterization of the praxis of performance: the middle manager must not let see that he is at all performing a role *vis-à-vis* the employee, the upper managers know more about the final purposes than the middle managers, only the top chiefs know them to full extent. So hiding or masking is a means to reserve knowledge and power to a small group of people at the top of a hierarchy, at whose bottom the employees are given the illusion of freedom.

Fischer-Lichte claims that her performative aesthetics aims at freeing man from many restrictions and oppressions in modern society. The book on performative management describes the methods of how to suppress freedom. Fischer-Lichte praises "*Verzicht auf Verstehensleistungen*" [renouncement on acts of understanding] (FISCHER-LICHTE 2004: 362) in performative art, yet performative management teaches how to prevent "*Verstehen*" (understanding) in the sense of gaining insight into the ultimate purposes of an organisation. So maybe the book on management performance sheds full light on what is left in the shadow by the aesthetics of performance.⁹

9 Ch. A. Heinroth (1837: VI), author of a panegyric *Vorrede* [Foreword] to Bolzano's *Wissenschaftslehre*, emphasizes the importance of reason in all arts, sciences, life in general and civil institutions. Even the state can be endangered without the "proper use" of reason (*seinen richtigen Gebrauch*). Heinroth was engaged with pedagogical innovations in schools.

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Prof. Herta Schmid was born on 24 Oct 1942 in Mülheim an der Ruhr. She studied German and Russian languages and philosophy at Ruhr-Universität in Bochum, receiving her degree in 1969. Between 1965 and 1966, she attended an educational stay at Charles University, Czech Republic. She received her doctor's degree from Universität Konstanz in 1973 for dissertation on plays by Čechov, and habilitation (for book on short stories by Pushkin, Gogol, and Chekhov) from Ruhr-Universität in 1981. She worked as research assistant and assistant lecturer of Slavic Seminar at Ruhr-Universität from 1972 to 1982, from 1982 to 1984 as senior lecturer in the same department, when she, finally, became professor of Slavic Seminar at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, where she was employed from 1984 to 1991. She also worked as research associate of Slavic Seminar at Universiteit van Amsterdam from 1972 to 1989, and professor of Theatre Studies at the same university from 1991 to 1996. Institute of Slavistics, Potsdam University, hosted her in 1996–2008. She became emeritus professor on 1 March 2008. Her research and academic interests lie in Slavic literatures (Russian, Polish, and Czech), Russian drama, literary theory (Prague Structuralism, Russian Formalism, and aesthetics), drama theory, theatre semiotics, literary analysis, and literary comparatistics.

Summary

Herta Schmid: The Concept of Sign, Its Origin and Influence on Mukařovský's Structuralism

The main argument of the article is that the notional triad of structure, sign and function lies at the basis of Mukařovský's classical aesthetic Structuralism. When in 1945 he changed the triad into "structure – function – (collective social) norm", this omitting of the sign marked the decline of his Structuralism. The notion of sign must be regarded as a necessary condition for structural aesthetics. The importance of that notion is given by the fact that the aesthetic function is a sign-producing faculty rooted in man's anthropological constitution.

The conception of the sign has been influenced by modern linguistics. Evenly important is Husserl's discrimination between the index and the symbol. The article tries to discover the possible connection between Husserl's pair "(auxiliary) index – (full) sign" and Mukařovský's pair "(non-sign) thing – (full) sign", discussed in his "Intentionality and Unintentionality in Art" (1943).

Another argumentation refers to E. Fischer-Lichte's theory of performative aesthetics. T. O. Davenport's and S. D. Harding's handbook on performative management sheds a dark light on the anti-semiotic ideology of the recent trend in aesthetics, which aims at the elimination of reason in art by eliminating the (full) sign. In contrast, Mukařovský's Structuralism tries to lay bare the critical potentials inherent in the pair "thing – sign".