



Call for Papers

Acta Structuralica Special Issue on Polish Structuralism (2021)

edited by

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Motivation and Function

One of the main aims of the international journal *Acta Structuralica* is to provide a more complex and coherent history of structuralism than one usually finds in handbooks or in most academic discussions. A fundamental way to support this view, which sees structuralism as a multi-faceted, plural and still integrated scientific enterprise, is to call attention to alleged “minor” authors or traditions. By doing so, we intend to demonstrate that this “minority” is nothing but the effect of contingent historical and political circumstances, whereas from a purely scientific point of view they are of the greatest interest. It is against this background that the journal has published an issue devoted to the rediscovery of the Romanian tradition of structuralism. This new special issue on Polish structuralism represents thus another essential contribution to the cause of the Journal and its publisher, sdvig press, whose main aim is to support and disseminate knowledge in the Humanities between Eastern, Central and Western Europe.

Structuralism has a particularly rich tradition in Poland, which stretches from the early influence of Russian formalism and Prague structuralism on figures such as Manfred Kridl, Dawid Hopenstanz, and Franciszek Siedlecki, to constituted “schools” in their own right, in particular in Vilnius, Warsaw and, much later, in Poznań, as well as to a general influence on literature, visual and performative arts, film, education, etc. Poland also plays an especially interesting role in the networked constellations of structuralism as Polish scholars contributed significantly to its diffusion and to exchanges between centres such as the Soviet Union, Prague and the United States. Roman Jakobson and Maria Renata Mayenowa endeavoured to make Poland, after 1956 “a land relatively open both to the East and the West” (Dobrzyńska 1990: 152), a central place for the emerging of the structural humanities and a venue for the “semiotic intelligentsia” (Zholkovskii 2016). The 1968 breakdown of these hopes marked a severe blow to Mayenowa and Polish and East European structuralism in general (Dobrzyńska 1990: 152).





Legacy Dispersed and Fundamental

A seminal figure of Polish structuralism, Janusz Sławiński, took part in a 2001 survey entitled “What has remained of...,” in which the legacy of the most authoritative and influential theoretical schools of the 20th century was scrutinized. Sławiński’s allotted topic was literary structuralism, which – according to him – remains the last word on stylistics and verse theory (Sławiński 2001: 15). One can add to that post-classical narratology as a superstructure building upon structuralism. More importantly than listing structuralism’s achievements, Sławiński takes it upon himself to outline “the basic *theoretical principles* and issues” (Sławiński 2001: 15) which defined the movement. The “*doctrinal minimum*, both necessary and sufficient” (Sławiński 2001: 17) advocated the notion of

the work of literary art as a highly organised word product (*twór słowny*), i.e. an utterance or a text. Such a product arises as a result of a double operation: the selection and the combination of signs belonging to two systems – one linguistic and one literary (literary tradition). These two systems demarcate the range of the work’s potentiality or the repository of its possibilities. The elements of the work refer not only to each other and to the whole they make up, but at the same time to the corresponding sets of elements that amount to its systemic backdrop (Sławiński 2001: 16).

Aside from these boundary conditions, the Polish structuralists freely choose their methods, approaches, and topics. Hence structuralism’s protean nature in its glory days in the 1960s and 1970s and its “dispersed presence” (*obecność rozproszona*, Sławiński 2001: 17) in contemporary literary studies. In 1973, Edward Balcerzan went even as far as to deny the existence of a structuralist idiom and a structuralist method, and instead expanded on the structuralist “communicative situation” (*sytuacja kominkacyjna*, Balcerzan 1973: 4), which is a situation typical of all avant-gardes (Balcerzan 1973: 4). Not only does a structuralist try to be always up-to-date and in league with historical avant-gardes’ explicit and implicit poetics; not only does he or she project on literature at large avant-garde values (as was the case with Tynianov’s and Mukařovský’s notion of evolution and evolutionary aesthetic value (cf. Tynianov [1924] 2000; Mukařovský [1936] 1970), but it also uses avant-garde devices of parody and (self-)ridicule to render models of literary phenomena, while at the same time transgressing the limits of the humanities towards the sciences, on the one hand, and literature, on the other (Balcerzan 1973: 4; 1972). Polish structuralism – both in its prime and in hindsight – seemed to take great pride in its syncretic, eclectic, and open character (Sławiński 1980; 1981). The leading Polish structuralists disavowed extremist positions, typical of many a French colleague, and at no time renounced such traditional humanistic values as empathy, engagement, and the sense of historicity.

What is, then, Polish structuralism? – we wonder.

Research Topics

In this special issue, we propose to map Polish structuralism as a large field of possibilities. We welcome both historical and methodological approaches and most gladly accept combinations of the two. We are particularly interested in:

- Polish structuralism’s relationships with other dominant schools of thought in this area, such as formalism, phenomenology and the Brentano School (Lwów-Warszawa School), Marxism, neo-positivism, hermeneutics, etc.
- its ties with other scholarly cultures (Russian, Czech, French, American, etc.), including the



role of great precursors, e.g. Roman Jakobson, Viktor Vinogradov, Jan Mukařovský, Petr Bogatyrev, Nikolai Trubeckoi

- the Polish precursors to global structuralism, such as Jan N. Baudouin de Courtenay, Mikołaj Kruszewski, and Wiktor Porzeziński
- the interferences of structural literary studies with other object areas (science of language, society, art history and theory, musicology, etc.)
- the relevance of the interwar Vilnius and Warsaw schools for the developments after 1958
- the relevance of structuralism's computational results for the present-day digital humanities as well as the ratio of the mathematical methods to philological inquiry, beginning with Kazimierz Wóycicki's book on Polish trochaic verse from 1914
- the impact of the historical events, especially the major traumata, on the lives of the structuralists
- the structuralist's everyday world
- the meaning of "Polishness" in the case of structuralism
- the role of the Jews and other nationalities in Polish structuralism
- the kinds and periods of literary history the Polish structuralists worked on
- the language of structuralism – its syntax and its *Dictionaries*
- the structuralists as creative writers
- structuralism on and in translation
- institutions of structuralism: institutes, congresses, conferences, magazines, book series, circles, family ties, friendships and hostilities, etc.

Deadlines

Paper proposals in English or French are to be sent to Michał Mrugalski (michal.mrugalski@uni-tuebingen.de) before **September 30, 2020**.

Letters of acceptance will be sent out by the end of **October 2020**.

The deadline for submitting articles is **June 1, 2021**.

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