



Enthymema XXXVI 2024  
V ozhidanii nashego budushchego  
sotrudничества  
(Waiting for our future collaboration)

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**Abstract** – In memory of Peter Steiner.

**Keywords** – Peter Steiner; Russian Formalism; Czech Structuralism; Theory of Literature.

Sini, Stefania. "V ozhidanii nashego budushchego sotrudничества (Waiting for our future collaboration)". *Enthymema*, n. XXXVI, 2024, pp. 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.54103/2037-2426/28154>

<https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema>



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ISSN 2037-2426

# V ozhidanii nashego budushchego sotrudnichestva (Waiting for our future collaboration)

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We open issue 36 of *Enthymema* by remembering Peter Steiner, who died suddenly on 26 November 2024 in Chengdu, China. He had recently arrived from Guangzhou, where he had held some lectures.

I would also like to add a few words of remembrance to the text sent to us by our friend and member of our Scientific Committee Ondřej Sládek

*Enthymema* had the honour and pleasure of meeting Peter Steiner in 2013. I had written to him on 19 August to ask him if he would grant our journal an interview, which Ornella Discacciati had offered to make during the “100th anniversary of Russian Formalism (1913-2013)” conference to be held in Moscow from 25 to 29 August hosted by the National Research University-Higher School of Economics and by the Russian State University for the Humanities. Shortly thereafter, on 21 August, Peter responded cordially saying that yes, he would be happy to be interviewed. In fact, he was even keen on sharing his paper with us beforehand. The paper title was “Art, Law, and Science in the Modernist Key: Shklovsky, Schmitt, Popper,” and, surprising us with his modesty, he invited us to write back with criticism and suggestions.

The salient features of his personality, which we were to witness repeatedly over the years, were already there on our first encounter: Peter was always open to and available for conversations, he was never haughty – despite his academic stature and his international scientific fame –, and he had a talent for making his interlocutors feel at ease. I read his text and replied with some comments and easy suggestions to explore the link to some authors that were familiar to me. He responded immediately, welcoming my theoretical suggestions, adding other links, and thanking me for my careful reading. His email ended with: “V ozhidanii nashego budushchego sotrudnichestva” (Russian: “looking forward to our future collaboration”), a phrase that I considered a great honour. For it came from a man who, for many years, had been a point of reference for my studies. His *Russian formalism* had shown – in the wake of Victor Erlich, but with clearer evidence and a wealth of new sources – the heterogeneity of the Formalists’ theoretical and operational proposals, which had hitherto been handed down to us as a compact group, in which individual contributions were hard to distinguish. Peter’s articulation of the concepts of form through the “metapoetics” of the tropes machine, organism, system, and synecdoche had been the basis of my work on form, for example in an article that I had published in *Enthymema* in 2010 “L’intero irrequieta” (“The Restless Whole”).

We invited Peter Steiner to the International Conference “Roman Jakobson: Linguistics and Poetics”, held from 18 to 20 November 2015 at the University of Milan and the University of Eastern Piedmont. presented a paper entitled “Which Side are You on? Roman Jakobson in Interwar Prague”, fruit of his research in the archives, and illustrating Jakobson’s relations with the political institutions during with the interwar stay in Czechoslovakia.

This was, let it be reminded here, one of the last academic events in which Umberto Eco participated. At the end of this article you will find for some pictures of that unforgettable conference, attended by scholars from Russia, China, the United States, and several European countries. The Chinese scholars were invited thanks to Peter Steiner.

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It was thanks to him that I was invited to the Second International Conference on Modern Slavic Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics jointly held in Guangzhou from 25 to 2 June, 2016 by the Research Council for Foreign Literary Theories and Comparative Poetics in China, the Research Centre for Literary Theories of Chinese Academy of Social Science, the Chinese National Association of Comparative Literature and Literary Theories, the Bachtin Research Centre in China, the Centre for Foreign Literature and Culture of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and the Faculty of European Languages and Culture of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. I am not listing all these institutions for the sake of historical accuracy and institutional correctness, but to show how the range of this academic network bears evidence to the relationships that Peter had established with many Chinese intellectuals over the years, teaching at different universities and collaborating on various translation projects of Russian formalists and Czech structuralists. No surprise then, that a huge number of scholars – professors, young researchers, and students – from Chinese universities attended the online celebration in his honour, held on 11 January 2025, in Philadelphia, who testified unanimously not only to the kindness, intellectual and human generosity that Peter was capable of over many years of collaboration but also to the enormous cultural contribution that his work has produced for literary studies in China.

Immediately after the meeting in Guangzhou, we began to plan an international conference to be held in Italy on European, Slavic, and global structuralism. Unfortunately, Covid forced us to interrupt this project, which we postponed to better days but which we continued to discuss in our correspondence. In the meantime, Peter pointed out publications and conferences to me and sent me contacts of scholars of structuralism, Russian formalism, and literary theory.

I met Peter in person again in 2023, during the conference “The Question of Formal Method 100 Years Later” organized from December 13 to 15 by the University of Bergamo and the University of Pisa. His plenary lecture, held on December 15 in Bergamo, entitled “Formalism in Mathematics, Law, Aesthetics, and its Russian Variety”, showed with luminous clarity the width of his critical discourse, one in which he intersected different disciplinary fields with rigor, theoretical solidity, and a great wealth of historical and intellectual references. His curiosity and openness to dialogue characterized both his scholarship and his human relationships. We remember him as a scholar capable of sharing fraternally and simply with his interlocutors the erudite conversation, moments of serious reflection, and moments of convivial joy: without looking at academic affiliations, but only for the pleasure of dialogue and forging relationships, collaborations, and friendships between people.

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International Conference “Roman Jakobson: Linguistics and Poetics”. Università degli Studi di Milano, Sala Napoleonica, 18 November 2015. Peter Steiner and Umberto Eco. (In the background Michail Talalay and Stefania Sini). Photo: Stefania Sini’s private archive

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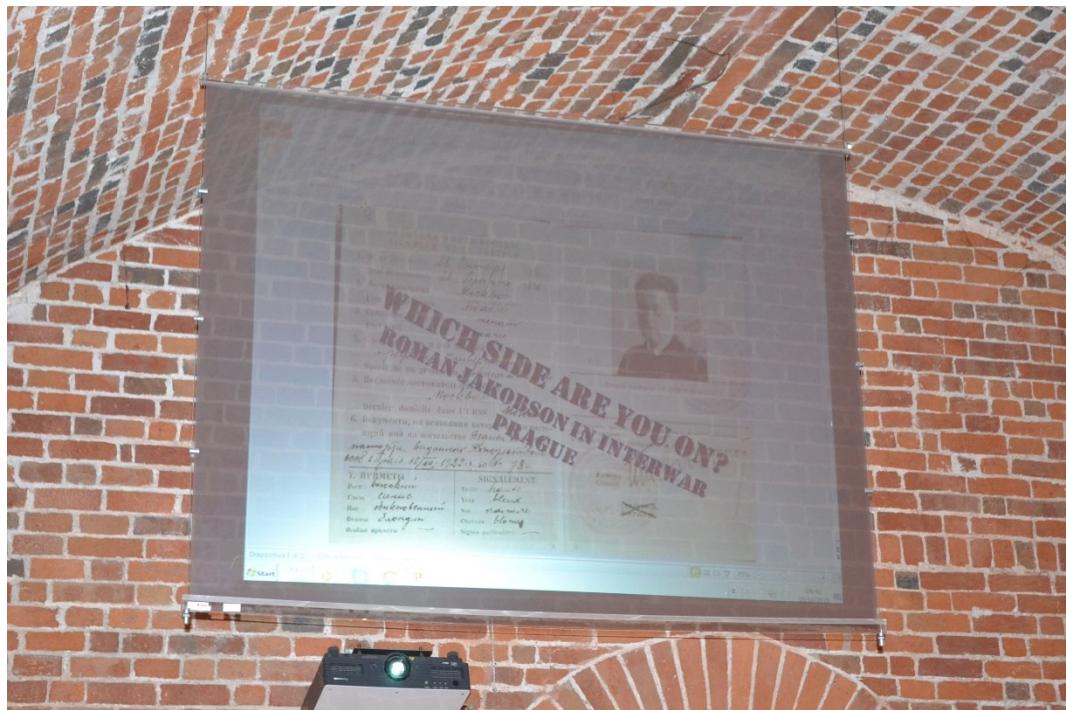
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International Conference “Roman Jakobson: Linguistics and Poetics”. Università degli Studi di Milano, Sala Napoleonica, 18th of November 2015. Peter Steiner and Umberto Eco. Photo: Stefania Sini’s private archive

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International Conference "Roman Jakobson: Linguistics and Poetics". Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Vercelli, Aula Magna Sala della Cripta di Sant'Andrea, 19th of November 2015. Peter Steiner's Power Point presentation. Photo: Marina Sorokina's personal archive

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Peter Steiner's 2020 New Year greetings from China. Received by email on the 19th of December 2019. Photo: Stefania Sini's private archive.