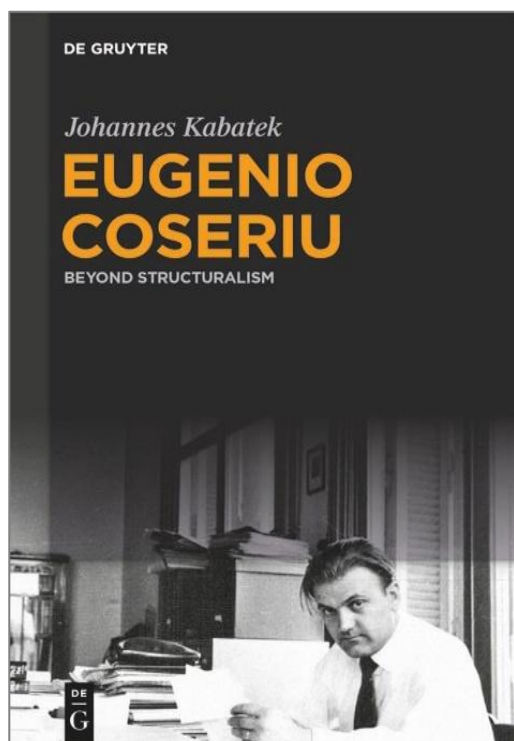


## BOOKS

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### Johannes Kabatek, *Eugenio Coseriu. Beyond Structuralism*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2023, XVIII + 325 p.

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The volume *Eugenio Coseriu. Beyond Structuralism*, signed by Johannes Kabatek and published by Walter de Gruyter Publishing House, Berlin, 2023, marks an exceptional event, from multiple standpoints: 1) it is written by one of the last direct disciples of Eugenio Coseriu and one of the best connoisseurs of his oeuvre; 2) it is the first “comprehensive” monograph dedicated to Eugenio Coseriu’s monumental work – as the author himself states (Kabatek 2023, 1); 3) and last but not least, it is written in English, therefore dedicated to the whole world, not only to the speakers of the languages in which Eugenio Coseriu wrote or the languages into which his books were translated.

Johannes Kabatek is a renowned linguist and Romance language specialist, former professor at the University of Tübingen (after the death of Brigitte Schlieben-Lange, Eugenio Coseriu’s direct successor to the chair of Romance linguistics), and currently professor at the University of Zurich. This book represents a part of the tribute paid by the disciple to his master, namely: the creation of the Eugenio Coseriu Archive at the University of Tübingen, inaugurated in 2005; the digitization of Coseriu’s work and its dissemination on the Internet ([www.coseriu.com](http://www.coseriu.com) and [www.coseriu.ch](http://www.coseriu.ch)); the founding of the online magazine *Energeia*, in 2009; the organization of numerous scientific events



dedicated to Eugenio Coseriu; the coordination of scientific projects on Coseriu themes; the editing of multiple manuscripts signed by Eugenio Coseriu; the publishing of remarkable works based on Eugenio Coseriu's linguistic theory (Kabatek 2023, XIV).

The explicit objective of the book is to give "an introduction to the vast Coserian oeuvre, an overview that will offer, chapter by chapter, basic insights into his work and thought" (Kabatek 2023, 1), providing "an overview of his main contributions to linguistics (and to other disciplines), as well as tracing the main periods of his life" (XIII). In essence, Kabatek's book represents a metatextual reconstruction of Coseriu's work, a hermeneutics of fundamental Coserian texts, a re-actualization of the major Coserian themes, and an account of the evolution of his thought. In the attempt to highlight Coseriu's contributions to the development of linguistics and to retrieve his thought for current linguistics, Kabatek wrote a book that is exemplary in every respect.

The volume aims, in the first instance, to show that Coseriu's thought goes far "beyond structuralism", as the title of the book suggests, and that he should be considered, in the history of linguistics, as more than simply one of the European structuralists (Kabatek 2023, XIII). In Chapter 6 of this volume, entitled "Structuralism" (125-156), Kabatek states that Coseriu's entire scientific activity bears the imprint of structuralism, that he recognized the importance of structuralism in the history of linguistics, but that he tried to show its limits, his linguistics configuring, in this sense, "a way to go beyond Structuralism by retaining some of its principles and limiting them to the restricted area of systemic aspects of language" (126-127). In the same chapter, the author presents Coseriu's conception of the principles of "analytical structuralism", the two facets of structural analysis from Coseriu's standpoint, the relationship between Coseriu and Louis Hjelmslev, Coseriu's contribution to structural semantics, as well as his reaction to semantics beyond structuralism, Coseriu's contributions to the development of structural syntax and to the application of functional-structuralist principles to the Romance verbal system (125-153).

The most significant aspects of Eugenio Coseriu's linguistic theory are explored in the other chapters of the volume: Chapter 1 – "Coseriu's epistemological principles and the essence of language" (6-33); Chapter 2 – "Norm and correctness" (34-58); Chapter 3 – "On proper names, pragmatics and text linguistics" (59-84); Chapter 4 – "Language change" (85-103); Chapter 5 – "Varieties and variational linguistics" (104-124); Chapter 7 – "'Tradition and innovation': the History of Linguistics" (157-174); Chapter 8 – "Philosophy of Language" (175-197); Chapter 9 – "Romance languages and linguistic typology" (198-214); Chapter 10 – "Coseriu and Chomsky" (215-231); Chapter 11 – "Aesthetics" (232-252).

The order of the topics addressed in this book derives from a partial chronology of Coserian thought, as the author himself states (Kabatek 2023, 4). Thus, he suggests a linear reading of the volume due to this order and to the system of cross-references used throughout the text (4). The volume is thematically structured into chapters that unfold according to a predefined pattern, with small variations derived from the nature of the targeted Coserian topic, namely: an introduction; the presentation of the theory itself across several subchapters, which vary in number and size depending on the specifics of the theory; outlook; criticism; conclusions or final

remarks, if necessary; Coserian biography cited in the chapter, but also further reading and the works cited in the chapter. This type of structured textual approach configures one of the dominant features of the volume, i.e. polyphony. In addition, parallel to the authorial text, an illustrated volume is being configured, containing pictures of Eugenio Coseriu and his colleagues, disciples and friends, manuscripts, letters and other documents that evoke his memory, or tables and diagrams that support some of the ideas expressed in the text.

Kabatek's book offers an overview of Coseriu's contributions to the development of linguistics, providing, at the same time, relevant data on the period and context in which Coserian theories were formulated, as well as a perspective on their reception. The author thus documents certain biographical moments of Coseriu, in direct relation to the creation of Coserian theory, even if this is not one of the aims of the volume. The actual approach consists of a step-by-step commented presentation of Coseriu's linguistic theory, coupled with detailed analyses of the most important aspects of this theory, explanatory forays and solid arguments in a Coserian sense, as well as the correction of some errors, confusions and misunderstandings made by interpreters of Coseriu's work. In this latter sense, it can be stated that this book represents not only a re-reading of Coseriu's work, but a profound exegesis, and a repositioning at the very conceptual core of Coseriu's theoretical edifice, often distorted from its original meaning, in other words a *restitutio in integrum*. The volume thus becomes a space for virtual dialogue between Coseriu's texts and the exegesis and lays the groundwork for subsequent research on his oeuvre.

The book begins with a brief presentation, followed by a critical assessment, of Coseriu's epistemological principles which, according to Kabatek, represent the foundation of the entire scientific activity of Coseriu and justify its aim and coherence (Kabatek 2023, 6). In the same first chapter, "the general Coserian conception of language" is presented "in a nutshell", as are the "ten theses on the essence of language and meaning" that Coseriu introduced at a seminar held at the University of Strasbourg, in 1999 (22-31).

The second chapter of the volume explores a fundamental concept of Coseriu's linguistic theory, namely the concept of norm, as well as some related aspects. The author emphasizes that in Eugenio Coseriu's theory the concept of norm, as part of the trichotomy system, norm, speech, is not prescriptive, but purely descriptive (*Sistema, norma y habla*, Montevideo, 1952), stating: "At the centre of a language, there is its systematic organisation. On its base, the norm adds conventions of regular realisation, and beyond these regularities, the concrete materialisation of language in individual speech adds further details." (Kabatek 2023, 42). In the same chapter, Kabatek also presents the problem of "linguistic correction", as well as the relationship between norm and discourse traditions (44-51).

The third chapter of the book focuses on Eugenio Coseriu's fundamental contributions to the linguistic theory of "proper names, pragmatics and text linguistics". Because Coseriu saw translation as essentially a problem of text linguistics, the same chapter also describes, in broad outlines, the theory of translation Coseriu developed.

The fourth chapter explores the problem of linguistic change, as it was conceived by Eugenio Coseriu in the book *Sincronía, diacronía e historia. El problema del cambio lingüístico*, published in Montevideo, in 1958, but also in subsequent extensions: *Sincronía, diacronía y tipología* (Madrid, 1968), as well as *Linguistic change does not exist* (Galatina, 1983).

The fifth chapter explores “one of Coseriu’s successful trichotomies”, namely, “the distinction between diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic varieties”, the first two terms of which were adopted by Coseriu from the Norwegian linguist Leiv Flydal (Kabatek 2023, 105). In the author’s view, Coseriu “has made important theoretical and empirical contributions to variational linguistics, and especially in the field of Romance linguistics” (104). In this context, Kabatek presents, on the one hand, the “debate” between Eugenio Coseriu and Uriel Weinreich, on the topic of the existence of structural dialectology, and, on the other hand, one of the successful developments of Coseriu’s conception of varieties, namely the one elaborated by Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher (113-118).

The seventh chapter describes Eugenio Coseriu’s research in the area of linguistic history and the history of Romance linguistics. In this context, Kabatek uses as a starting point one of Coseriu’s epistemological principles, namely that of “tradition and innovation” (Kabatek 2023, 157).

The eighth chapter presents, as the author states, “Coseriu’s explicit work on the philosophy of language” (Kabatek 2023, 175). In Kabatek’s view, Coseriu had a strong philosophical background, and, in addition, he was permanently concerned with understanding the essence of language and defining other fundamental linguistic concepts (175-176). A substantial part of this chapter addresses the history of the philosophy of language elaborated by Coseriu (177-187).

In the ninth chapter, certain aspects of Romance linguistics and Romance typology are outlined. A sequence of this chapter is dedicated to the relationship, especially in the context of linguistic typology, between Coseriu and Wilhelm von Humbolt, whom Coseriu admired and whom he considered the founder of general linguistics (Kabatek 2023, 203-207).

The tenth chapter is dedicated to the relationship between Eugenio Coseriu and Noam Chomsky and the latter’s work, an “asymmetrical” and “very problematic” relationship, as the author mentions (Kabatek 2023, 215, 229). According to Kabatek, Coseriu manifested “a hostile attitude”, albeit a solidly “argued” one, towards generativism (228-229).

The eleventh chapter addresses one of Coseriu’s major areas of interest, namely aesthetics. In this sense, the author presents Coseriu’s contact with this field and his dissertation in the field of aesthetics held in Italy in 1949, the problem of art in Coseriu’s vision, as well as the relationship between language and poetry, from Coseriu’s perspective. This theme was placed at the end of the volume given that Coseriu was, in the first instance, a linguist and not an aesthetician, although aesthetics represented a constant aspect of Coseriu’s work, from the very beginning (Kabatek 2023, 4).

In the epilogue or twelfth chapter of the book, Kabatek recounts some personal experiences from the relationship with Eugenio Coseriu, such as the first meeting with Coseriu and conceiving a book of interviews with Eugenio Coseriu, together with Adolfo

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Murguía, which later materialized in the volume *Die Sachen sagen, wie sie sind* (Tübingen, 1997) (Kabatek 2023, 253, 258-260).

The book ends with a brief chapter of biographical data (Chapter 13, *Biographical Data*) (269) and a chapter containing references used throughout the book (Chapter 14, *References*) (270-320). The volume concludes on a pessimistic note regarding Eugenio Coseriu's place in the context of current linguistics, which is primarily "an experimental, quantitative, computational linguistics": "Linguistics in the 21st century is going in new directions, and Coseriu's work definitely seems to have passed into the realms of the history of linguistics: what remains is a name, some concepts and terms, and a couple of labels." (Kabatek 2023, 266). This book offers, in the author's view, three reasons "for not forgetting Eugenio Coseriu and his work": 1) "a general claim for a historical consciousness"; 2) "the openness of Coseriu's thought"; 3) "the appealing nature of Coseriu's voice" (266-268).

Finally, we would like to express our belief that Eugeniu Coseriu "will not stand only in name" and that "his is more than a bare name" (cf. Bernard of Cluny). Beyond his name, there is a fascinating universe to discover, which is constantly expanding and becoming multiverse-like.

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