

**Phenomenology and Structuralism**  
**PHIL 607**  
**Fall 2011**

MW noon – 2pm  
Dr. Beata Stawarska  
Office: PLC 330  
Office hours: MW 2-4pm and by appointment  
[stawarsk@uoregon.edu](mailto:stawarsk@uoregon.edu)

This seminar will examine the complex interrelation between phenomenology and structuralism (and post-structuralism), two of the most influential schools of thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. Continental philosophy. According to the received view, these traditions are mutually opposed since the former is committed to the primacy of subjectivity in meaning and experience while the latter evacuates the subject in favor of impersonal systems of relations. Structuralism is therefore sometimes labeled ‘anti-phenomenology’. However, this received view is superficial and anachronistic; while it captures the spirit of the French academia in the 1960s, it glosses over the many historical and thematic affinities between the two traditions. We will therefore re-examine phenomenology and structuralism with an eye to both differences and points of contact.

Our reading list covers a representative list of contributions to both traditions, with a focus on their relation. We will open with texts introducing and outlining phenomenology and structuralism, discuss the linguistic foundations of structuralism in Saussure’s linguistics, and focus on the interdependency between the linguistic project of Jakobson and the phenomenological project of Husserl (as documented by Holenstein). We will discuss the impact on structuralist thought for the human sciences broadly construed, including the scientific structuralism in Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology and Lacan’s psychoanalysis (which will be tied to the heated debate with the phenomenological philosopher Sartre in the 1960s). We will examine Derrida’s grammatology as an example of (post)-structuralism in philosophy. We will then consider Merleau-Ponty’s unique attempt to combine Saussure’s project with Husserl’s phenomenology, and Ricoeur’s phenomenological defense against the perceived menace of structuralism. Finally, we will read some of the recently discovered and published

original writings by the perceived ‘founder’ of structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure. These writings differ widely from the official doctrine found in the *Course in General Linguistics*, and thus demonstrate that structuralism stands on a somewhat shaky foundation. In fact, the source materials are rich in phenomenological concepts and methods, and thus further complicate the received view that phenomenology and structuralism stand far apart.

The students will gain a well-rounded understanding of the developments within each of the two key intellectual traditions, as they impacted philosophy, as well as the human sciences in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. We will address questions of how human agency and structural process co-exist, whether an emphasis on pre-personal and unconscious structures like language and social order can be reconciled with consciousness and subjectivity, what role history and social revolt can play in a structuralist program.... and many other questions relative to a phenomenologico-structuralist dialogue. Our focus is therefore going to be thematic as well as historical, and we will attempt to employ the tools of structuralist analysis and phenomenological description while assessing the relation between the two traditions. The students should also gain a nuanced appreciation of a shared heritage of (any) intellectual tradition, and refine critical skills in the process of reading canonical texts.

## **Reading Schedule**

### **WEEK 1 (09/26 – 10/02):**

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#### **1. Introductory meeting**

Recommended: Editor’s introduction in Culler, *Structuralism*, (4 vol.), pp. 1- 14; The Linguistic Basis of Structuralism, Culler pp. 84 – 98

#### **2. What is structuralism (and post-structuralism)?**

Levi-Strauss Structural Analysis in linguistics and in anthropology, *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 31-54.

Recommended: Language and the Analysis of Social Laws (SA).

Barthes: Structuralist Activity

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## WEEK 2 (10/03 – 10/9)

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3. **What is phenomenology?** Husserl: Introduction, Meditations 1 and 2 (*Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 1 – 55). Presentation 1.

Recommended: Sokolowski: Chapters 1, 2, and 4 (*Introduction to Phenomenology*)

4. **Phenomenology and structuralism I.**

Holenstein: “Jakobson and Husserl: a contribution to the genealogy of structuralism,” pp. 47 – 77.

Excerpt from Husserl *The Logical Investigations*, Investigation 4, Vol. 2 (pp. 47 - 77). Presentation 2.

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## WEEK 3 (10/10 – 10/16)

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5. **Linguistic foundations I:**

Saussure, *The Course in General Linguistics* – Preface, Introduction, and last para.

Book available at Black Sun Books.

Recommended: excerpt from Stawarska, unpublished ms, p. I, on the editorial history of the *Course*

6. **Linguistic foundations II** – *The Course*, Part I, Linguistic Sign, ch. 4 Linguistic Value, and ch. 6 on relative arbitrariness

## WEEK 4 (10/17 – 10/23)

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7. **Structuralism in anthropology**

Claude Levi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, ch. I, II, III and V (pp. 3 - 41; 53-68). Presentation 3.

8. **Phenomenology and structuralism II.**

Simone de Beauvoir: Review of the *Elementary Structures of Kinship* by Levi-Strauss (*Les Temps Modernes*, in French; draft translation available); *Second Sex*, Vol. I, Introduction, pp. 3-17, P. II History, Ch. 2 pp. 76-89.

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## WEEK 5 (10/24 – 10/30)

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9. **Structuralism in linguistics**

Jakobson – “Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances”

Presentation 4.

10. Guest Lecture – Prof. Christine Daigle, Foucault and Phenomenology, reading TBA, date subject to change.

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## **WEEK 6 (10/31 – 11/6)**

### **11. Structuralism in psychoanalysis**

Lacan The Agency of the Letter (*Ecrits*, 412 - 441). Presentation 5.

Recommended: Jean-Paul Sartre repond (interview with Bernard Pingaud), L'Arc, 91-92 (in French).

Silverman: Sartre and the structuralists (*Inscriptions*, 197-218), on reserve at Knight Library

### **12. Structuralism in philosophy**

Derrida – Linguistics and Grammatology (*Of Grammatology*, 27 - 73). Presentation 6.

Recommended: Interview with Julia Kristeva in *Positions*.

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## **WEEK 7 (11/7 – 11/13)**

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### **13. Phenomenology and structuralism III. Subjectivity:**

Benveniste Ch. 20. The Nature of Pronouns, ch. 21. Subjectivity in Language (*Problems in General Linguistics*, 217-230)

Kristeva, “The Speaking Subject” (Culler, *Structuralism*, vol. I, 282-292).

Presentation 7.

### **14. Phenomenology and structuralism IV.**

Phenomenology pro Saussure I: Merleau-Ponty “On the Phenomenology of Language” (*Signs*, 84 - 97). Presentation 8.

Recommended: Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence (*Signs*, 39 - 83).

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## **WEEK 8 (11/14 – 11/20)**

15. Phenomenology pro Saussure II: Merleau-Ponty: “Science and the Experience of Expression” (*The Prose of the World*, pp. 9 - 46).

Recommended: Silverman, Part II “And Structuralism,” *Inscriptions*.

Merleau-Ponty, Ch. 6 “The Body as Expression and Speech” (*Phenomenology of Perception*).

### **16. Phenomenology contra Saussure**

Ricoeur “Structure, Word, Event,” “The Question of the Subject: the Challenge of Semiology”(Conflict of Interpretations 79-96; 236-7, 246-266). Presentation 9.

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## **WEEK 9 (11/21 – 11/27)**

### **17. Saussure re-considered I**

Source materials of the *Course in General linguistics*: Course II, lesson 1, pp. 1-24; “Notes for a Book on General Linguistics (1893-94),” “Unde Exoriar” (*Writings* 136-140; 197-8).

Recommended: Agamben: “The Barrier and the Fold” (*Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, 152-8)

**18. Saussure re-considered II.**

Source materials II: Course III, Nature of the Linguistic Sign, 74-75; 91-102, 134-143. "For the semiology chapter," *Writings* 162-162.

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Prospectus due Wednesday in class.

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**WEEK 10 (11/28 – 12/4)**

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19. **Phenomenology in Saussure** – *Writings*, 85-86, excerpt Stawarska unpublished ms. Presentation 10.

20. Presentations final paper.

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Note: I reserve the right to make changes to the reading list.

All readings are available on Blackboard unless otherwise stated. *The Course in General Linguistics* by Saussure is available at Black Sun bookstore.

**Course requirements:**

1. Participation in class discussion. You are expected to come prepared to each class: you need to have read the required reading carefully and be ready to discuss it.

2. One in-class presentation of 30 minutes on a required meeting. Your presentation outlines the thesis developed in the reading, with specific references to the text.

3. Prospectus for the final paper

You will select a topic for your final paper and submit a 2 pages long prospectus with an outline and literature review for approval and comments. You are advised to meet with me at least once before submitting the prospectus.

4. Short presentation on the final paper in the last in-class meeting.

5. Final paper

The term paper is a conference style paper, 10-15 pages in length.

All written assignments should be double spaced, font size no smaller than 11.

**Grade components (out of 100%)**

Attendance and class participation – 10%

In-class presentation on required reading – 20%

Term paper – 70%

**Attendance policy**

No more than one unexcused absence is allowed. Each additional unexcused absence negatively affects your grade (-0.3 of the final grade).