

Foucault and Co

PHIL 375, UBC

Philosophy and Literature

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Structuralism Table

	Pre-Structuralism	Structuralism	Post-Structuralism
unit of meaning	word	sentence	text/discourse
"it is raining outside"	stating the fact	stating the fact in contrast to other facts	starting point for a multiplicity of perhaps incoherent facts
meaning	content	form	self-reference
semiotics	design	difference	sign
truth	correspondence	coherence	multiplicity
hermeneutics	trust	comparison	suspicion
grammar	semantics	syntax	polysemy
explanation	construction	reduction	deconstruction
authorship	intent	system	death
location	centre	structure	decentring

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

What is the narrative eighty years after Damiens' execution to which the public execution is set in contrast?

- A ▶ the overcrowding of prisons
- B ▶ the abolition of the death penalty
- C ▶ a timetable of rules for young prisoners
- D ▶ institutional racism in prisons

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

What does Foucault identify as a problem with modern discourse about sex?

- A ▶ modernity is too body-focused (instead of mind-focused) in its sexuality
- B ▶ we talk about sexual desire too much (the endless mill of speech)
- C ▶ we don't talk about sex enough (repressed sexual desire must be articulated)
- D ▶ men want sex, women want conversation (gender imbalance with respect to verbal and sexual intimacy)

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

According to Foucault, modern discourse about sex is intimately linked to

- A ▶ the economic and political problem of population
- B ▶ the fear of sexually-transmitted disease
- C ▶ an erosion of monogamy due to homosexuality
- D ▶ the Christian dogma of the Trinity

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

What, according to Foucault, is the relationship between knowledge and power?

- A ▶ knowledge and power have separate domains
- B ▶ power corrupts knowledge
- C ▶ power produces knowledge, power and knowledge imply one another
- D ▶ knowledge constrains power

The Penal System: A Historical Discontinuity

executioner	vs.	army of technicians
punishment of body	vs.	suspension of rights
individual (King and Condemned)	vs.	institution
violence	vs.	bio-power
theatre	vs.	order and silence (7)
law and its subjects	vs.	norms and their subjects
everyday perception	vs.	abstract consciousness (9)
transcendental responsibility	vs.	responsibility relieved by bureaucratic concealment (9)
body as immediate object	vs.	body as intermediate object
punishing the body	vs.	curing the soul

Foucault: History of the Present

Four general rules:

- ① The concept under consideration fulfills a **complex social function**
- ② The concept under consideration is specific in the more general field of exercising power – it is a **political tactic**
- ③ the **technology of power** is the principle both of humanization and knowledge of man
- ④ the body invested with power relations **creates the soul**

- the industrial system requires cheap, efficient labour (25)
- it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission (25)
- there is a knowledge of the body which is not a science of its functioning (26)
- this knowledge and this mastery constitute the political technology of the body (26)
- micro-physics of power (26)
- the irreducible entanglement of knowledge and power (27)
- subjugating human bodies by making them objects of knowledge (28) (see *Notes from the Underground*)

Subjectivity

- “the psychologists and the minor civil servants of moral orthopaedics” (10), “army of technicians” (11), “there swarms a whole series of subsidiary authorities” (21)
- economy of suspended rights
- the body as intermediary to the juridical subject
- the soul: “a new character came on the scene, masked” (16f, much more on page 29)
- substitution of objects: from crimes to passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, environmental and hereditary effects (when a child is punished, it is now for moral, not for practical reasons)
- the field of knowledge susceptible of scientific knowledge (the textification of the world, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail)
- the “assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgment” (19)

Michel Foucault

... one may map ... through this displacement, a whole field of recent objects, a whole new system of truth and a mass of roles hitherto unknown in the exercise of criminal justice. A corpus of knowledge, techniques, scientific discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish. (23)

The political investment of the body is bound up . . . with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination (26)

What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power . . . this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the privilege, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions . . . these relations are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes (27)

Michel Foucault: Histoire de la sexualité, page 113

C'est à la condition de masquer une part importante de lui-même que le pouvoir est tolérable. Sa réussite est en proportion de ce qu'il parvient à cacher de ses mécanismes. Le pouvoir serait-il accepté s'il était entièrement cynique? Le secret n'est pas pour lui de l'ordre de l'abus: il est indispensable à son fonctionnement.

Bernard Williams: Truth and Truthfulness, 28

A genealogy is a narrative that tries to explain a cultural phenomenon by describing a way in which it came about . . . Our ethical ideas are a complex deposit of many different traditions and social forces, and they have themselves been shaped by self-conscious representations of that history. However, the impact of these historical processes is to some extent concealed by the ways in which their product thinks of itself.

Michel Foucault: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 142

However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secrets that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.

In the context of Hume's account of moral responsibility, genealogy denotes the kind of explanation pointing to the origins of a social practice of which it is essential that they themselves are not used as reasons to follow the practice. The core of the practice is somehow constituted by a certain forgetfulness toward its history. The forgetfulness is at the root of lending the practice intrinsic rather than instrumental value: a value which becomes detached from the original usefulness of the practice; also a value which experiences a threat to its reflective stability, and possibly a breakdown, when its historical origins are uncovered.

Here are some examples for cultural phenomena (it may be very controversial whether these really are cultural phenomena!) that have been submitted to genealogies:

- ① truth (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- ② justice (David Hume)
- ③ morality (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- ④ gender (Judith Butler)
- ⑤ knowledge (Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*)
- ⑥ love (the prairie vole)
- ⑦ soul (Michel Foucault, *The Body of the Condemned*)

Perhaps, too, we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands, and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes people mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit, rather, that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

These “power-knowledge relations” are to be analyzed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system; but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge. (27f)

The Soul

- genealogy of the modern soul (29)
- the soul is not an illusion, “it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body”
- not born in sin and subject to punishment, but born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint (the university precedes the student)
- on it are built scientific techniques and discourses, and the moral claims of humanism (30)
- the soul (which we long to be free) is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: *The Body of the Condemned*, 29f

The history of this micro-physics of the punitive power would be a genealogy or an element in a genealogy of the modern soul. Rather than seeing the soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished—and, in a more general way, on those one supervisors, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

This is the historical reality of this soul, which, unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint. This real, non-corporal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: *The Body of the Condemned*, 29f

On this reality-reference, various concepts have been constructed and domains of analysis carved out: psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc.; on it have been built scientific techniques and discourses, and the moral claims of humanism. But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not that a real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection or technical intervention, has been substituted for the soul, the illusion of the theologians.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: *The Body of the Condemned*, 29f

The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A soul inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.

Hermeneutics of Sex

Here are some ways in which Foucault informs a hermeneutics of sex.

- institutionalized knowledge and power bring sex within the purview of hermeneutics
- in line with anti-narrativism and the scientific tradition, the hegemony of hermeneutics is perceived as a threat
- Foucault, however, has no narrative-free alternative (bodies inconsequential bucolic pleasures?) to the deployment of discourse: interpretation (power/knowledge) creates subjectivity
- consequently, Habermas' concept of the ideal speech situation is illusory; there is no speech without power (concatenation of microdominations)

Transformation from Feudal to Bourgeois

- calling sex by its name more costly
- discursive explosion based on secrecy
- authorized vocabulary
- steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex (18)
- an institutional incitement to speak about it
- the Christian pastoral
- rules of self-examination
- the imperative and nearly infinite task to tell (authenticity)
- transforming desire into discourse (narrativization of sex)

- the author of *My Secret Life* and the halfwit of the Lorraine (where bucolic pleasures turn into judicial action, medical intervention, clinical examination, and theoretical elaboration, 31)
- “the strangest of these practices was the fact of recounting them all” (22, this wouldn’t be strange to a narrativist like Schechtman or Taylor, for whom the experience must be articulated before it can be meaningful)
- the convergence of morality and rationality (24, Freud and Pence)

- the emergence of population: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, diet, habitation
- schools: architectural layout—the question of sex was a constant preoccupation (27); the sex of the schoolboy became a public problem

Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms which, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize the sexual discourse, an immense verbosity is what our civilization has required and organized . . . we talk about sex more than anything else . . . we have never said enough on the subject . . . speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret

The Possibilities of Inversion

Consider the following inversions.

Foucault It is not the subject that determines social power, but social power that determines the subject.

Butler Sexual identity does not follow from personal identity, but personal identity follows from sexual identity.

Rousseau The literal meaning does not precede the figurative meaning, but the figurative meaning precedes the literal meaning.

Derrida Writing, because it is supplemental, intermediate, distancing, characterized by transference, the sign of a sign, is not the worse, but the better representation of the function of language.

Features of the traditional view of identity:

- persisting through time
- as the same, unified, and internally coherent
- related to consciousness
- capacity for language and
- moral deliberation

Butler now asks:

To what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject? (23)

Butler Inversions

- personal identity \leftarrow gender identity
- becoming a person \leftarrow becoming gendered
- identity \leftarrow regulatory practices
- the descriptive \leftarrow the normative
- the doer \leftarrow the deed

Intelligible Gender vs Spectres

Intelligible genders are those which institute coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. They are met by the spectres (Marx, “A specter is haunting Europe” in the *Communist Manifesto*) of discontinuity and incoherence (23). They cannot ‘exist,’ because their practices of desire do not follow from either sex or gender. The matrix of intelligibility produces rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder.

The Matrix of Intelligibility

Identity is an effect of discursive practices (Habermas!).

- compulsory heterosexuality
- totalizing frame
- phallogocentrism (the precursor of compulsory heterosexuality)

Three Views on Gender

Luce Irigaray Irigaray is a Belgian philosopher who claims that there is only one sex, the masculine, which elaborates itself in and through the production of the Other.

Michel Foucault The category of sex, whether masculine or feminine, is a production of a diffuse regulatory economy of sexuality.

Monique Wittig Wittig was a French philosopher who claims that the category of sex is always feminine because the masculine remains unmarked as the universal.

The Hermeneutics of Sex

Irigaray's theory of sexual preference suggests that women can never be understood on the model of a "subject" within the conventional representational systems of Western culture precisely because they constitute the fetish of representation and, hence, the unrepresentable as such. Women can never "be," according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which that domain marks itself off. Women are neither the subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine. (25)

The Hermeneutics of Sex

The grammar of gender masks the univocal and hegemonic discourse of the masculine, because being a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible (not if you are an essentialist). For Foucault, the binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies (26).

Metaphysics of Substance

The metaphysics of substance, a term associated with Nietzsche, shows that a number of philosophical ontologies have been trapped within certain illusions of “Being” and “Substance.” In no sense, however, do they reveal or represent some true order of things (28). Metaphysical substance is often derived from grammar, as in Descartes “I think therefore I am.”

The matrix of intelligibility is held together by asymmetries of sexual desire. There is another inversion here: sexual desire does not proceed from sexual identity, but it constitutes it. Sex is not the cause for the effects of sexual experience, behaviour, and desire; the cause-effect relationship is reversed (Foucault, 32). Foucault's antidote: Herculine Barbin, whose experience is "a world of pleasures in which grins hang about without the cat."

The Cheshire Cat



Smiles, happinesses, pleasures, and desires are figured here as qualities without an abiding substance to which they are said to adhere. As free-floating attributes, they suggest the possibility of a gendered experience that cannot be grasped through the substantializing and hierarchizing grammar of nouns and adjectives. Through his cursory reading of Herculine, Foucault proposes an ontology of accidental attributes that exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction. (33)

Butler disagrees with Foucault. Gender is not a noun, but is also not a set of free-floating attributes. Gender is performatively produced; it is always a doing. The doer is merely a fiction added to the deed, as in Descartes-Nietzsche.

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

According to Taylor's understanding of Foucault, the idea of a liberating truth is

- A ▶ Humanity's salvation from oppression
- B ▶ A profound illusion
- C ▶ Worthy to be pursued despite its inherent difficulty
- D ▶ An outdated concept that no longer functions in our society

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

Taylor draws a close link between Foucault's notion of truth and power and this other philosopher:

- A ▶ Friedrich Schiller
- B ▶ John Locke
- C ▶ Aristotle
- D ▶ Friedrich Nietzsche

Beware of Avant-Guard Dog



Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

Which philosopher's work on writing and figurative speech does Derrida use as his starting point for his own reflections?

- A ▶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- B ▶ Jean-Paul Sartre
- C ▶ Michel Foucault
- D ▶ Voltaire

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

Which analogy (or origin) does Derrida use to show how the practice of writing won out over the practice of reading?

- A ▶ space travel (satellites)
- B ▶ alchemy and chemistry (production of ink)
- C ▶ musical notation (staves)
- D ▶ agriculture (ploughs and furrows)

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

Where, according to Barthes, does the text assume a measure of unity and focus?

- A ▶ in the reader
- B ▶ in the author
- C ▶ in the narrator
- D ▶ in the writer

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

Which of these triplets does not reflect the three stages of society in Derrida/Rousseau?

- A ▶ savage/barbaric/civil
- B ▶ pictography/hieroglyphs/alphabet
- C ▶ fetishism/polytheism/monotheism
- D ▶ hunter/shepherd/ploughman

Note how Derrida uses the hermeneutic method to explain his ideas: always in relation to already existing texts (Rousseau, Warburton, Condillac, Malebranche).

But the importance of these two chapters, the obstinate effort to consolidate a theory, the laborious ruse to disqualify the interest given to writing, are signs that one may not neglect. Such is the situation of writing within the history of metaphysics: a debased, lateralized, repressed, displaced theme, yet exercising a permanent and obsessive pressure from the place where it remains held in check. A feared writing must be crossed out because it erases the presence of the proper within speech. (292)

Contrasts

feelings	vs	ideas
South	vs	North
vowels	vs	consonants
figurative	vs	literal
passion	vs	need
savage metaphor	vs	idea metaphor
savagery	vs	civility (transference, interval)
state of nature	vs	state of society (happy pause, 304)
pictography	vs	algebra (two simplicities, 310)

The progress of writing is thus a natural progress. And it is a progress of reason . . . why is that dangerous progress natural? No doubt because it is necessary . . . it is need and not passion that substitutes light for heat, clarity for desire, precision for strength, ideas for sentiment, reason for heart, articulation for accent. (295)

savage metaphor the metaphor which is not preceded by anything (giants): no literal or proper meaning precedes it, no rhetor watches over it (301)

rhetor the rhetor accedes to objective truth, denounces error, deals with the passions, but all by virtue of having lost the living truth of the origin . . . the enlightened spirit stabilizes the literal meaning, and does it by a process of knowledge and in terms of truth (302) (truth is only one epoch, implying the presence of the signified, see 312)

noun the work which produces the common noun supposes, like all work, the chilling and displacement of passion (303)

transference the interval between the thing itself and its reproduction (307)

Festival Around the Water Hole

A language without discourse, a speech without sentence, without syntax, without parts, without grammar, a language of pure effusion, beyond the cry, but short of the hinge that articulates and at the same time disarticulates the immediate unity of meaning (304)

Is Rousseau mistaking ontogenesis with phylogenesis here (absorption into the present moment, 336)? "... a world alien to the trace: pure presence of the pure present" (316).

These innocent spectacles will take place outdoors and they will have nothing "effeminate" or "mercenary" about them. The sign, money, ruse, passivity, and servility will be excluded from them. No one will use anyone, no one will be an object for anyone. (333, the London gay club in Foucault)

The Onto-Theological Idea of Experience

The epoch of logocentrism is a moment of the global effacement of the signifier: one then believes one is protecting and exalting speech, one is only fascinated by a figure of the *technè* (311).

The very concept of experience remains dependent on the idea of original sin. There is one law there: the notion of experience, even when one would like to use it to destroy metaphysics or speculation, continues to be, in one or another point of its functioning, fundamentally inscribed with in onto-theology: at least by the value of presence, whose implication it can never reduce by itself. Experience is always the relationship with a plenitude, whether it be sensory simplicity or the infinite presence of God. (308)

The word “supplant” well defines the act of writing (305). The “supplement gives itself as supplement of supplement, sign of sign.”

The supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognize that there is a supplement at the source. (330)

The Role of Philosophy

A writing within which philosophy is inscribed as a place within a text which it does not command. Philosophy is, within writing, nothing but this movement of writing as effacement of the signifier and the desire of presence restored, of being, signified in its brilliance and its glory. (311f)

Philosophy is the “invention of prose” (312).

Representation in politics and in writing: the culture of the alphabet and the appearance of civilized man (326). In capitalism, there is an arbitrary sign which is superior to all non-arbitrary representors: money. Writing also is superior to the voice in representing; at the same time, it is a “machine of death” (327). Overwhelming success

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Fragment on Pronunciation

results in our having nothing to say to others except the least interesting things in the world and things that they care least to understand: sermons, academic discourses. (328)

The Essence of the Supplement

Derrida says repeatedly that the supplement is necessary. “The progress of writing is necessary” (295).

Not to attribute any necessity to the historical appearance of writing is at once to ignore the appeal of supplanting and to think evil as a surprising, exterior, irrational, accidental addition and therefore effaceable.
(321)

On page 341, however, he also claims that “the strange essence of the supplement is not to have essentiality: it may always not have taken place.” What gives? “The supplement is neither a presence nor an absence. No ontology can think its operation” (342).

Honoré de Balzac: Sarrasine

This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.

What is writing (166)?

- the destruction of every voice
- that neutral, composite, oblique space
- where the subject slips away
- where all identity is lost
- intransitive (167)
- no function other than the practice of symbol

Author versus Scriptor

Author	Scriptor
precedes the text	is born with the text
representation	performance
central	field without origin
original	anterior
deciphered	disentangled
pierced	ranged over
origin (author)	destination (reader)

- words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely
- life never does more than imitate the book, the book itself is only a tissue of signs (169)
- God and his hypostases—reason, science, law

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

Where, according to Barthes, does the text assume a measure of unity and focus?

- A ▶ in the reader
- B ▶ in the author
- C ▶ in the narrator
- D ▶ in the writer

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

God and his hypostases: which one of these is not one of them?

- A ▶ law
- B ▶ reason
- C ▶ science
- D ▶ monogamy