

Structuralism and Post-structuralism
PHIL 615
Fall 2012

MW noon – 2pm, PLC 314
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This seminar will examine structuralist and post-structuralist contributions to Continental philosophy, as well as the human sciences, in the 20th and 21st centuries. We will consider the emergence of the structuralist doctrine from the linguistics of Roman Jakobson and Ferdinand de Saussure, as well as some contemporary perspectives on these foundational works. We will discuss the expressions of structuralism within the human sciences broadly construed, including Lévi-Strauss's anthropology and Lacan's psychoanalysis. We will then turn to the critical post-structuralist critique of the scientific structuralism as developed in the deconstructive readings by Derrida (especially from *Of Grammatology*), and to an emphasis on the interdependency between the semiotic and the symbolic as developed by Julia Kristeva (especially in *The Revolution in Poetic Language*). Here are some questions we will consider in the course of this seminar: What is the relation between structuralism and post-structuralism (a break or a shift in emphasis?) How can a focus on pre-personal and unconscious structures like language and the social order be reconciled with a non-reductive approach to a speaking subject, desire, and the living body? What role do historical change and social revolt play in a structuralist and post-structuralist program? and other questions reflecting the participants' own research interests. Our focus is going to be thematic as well as historical, and we will seek to employ the tools of structuralist and post-structuralist analysis while assessing their contributions to contemporary Continental philosophy.

Reading Schedule

WEEK 1 (09/26 – 10/02):

1. Introductory meeting.

Recommended: Editor's introduction in Culler, *Structuralism*, (4 vol.), pp. 1- 14.

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

Claude Levi-Strauss: Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology, *Structural Anthropology (SA)*, pp. 31-54.

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

WEEK 2 (10/03 – 10/9)

3. Linguistic foundations:

Jakobson *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Preface by Levi-Strauss, Xi-Xvi; Lectures I and II, 1-43). Presentation 1.

4. Jakobson *Six Lectures* (Lectures III-VI, 45-116). Presentation 2.

WEEK 3 (10/10 – 10/16)

5. Historical origins and contemporary perspectives:

Saussure, *The Course in General Linguistics* –Preface to the First Edition (liii-lvi), and Introduction, Ch. 1-V (1-23, Baskin translation). Book available at Black Sun Books.

6. Introduction, ch. VI & VII (23-37); Part One: General Principles, ch. I. Nature of the Linguistic Sign, (65-70); ch. II. Immutability and Mutability of Linguistic Sign (71-78). Recommended: excerpt from Stawarska, unpublished ms, Arbitrariness of the Sign; Natural Symbolism of Sound.

WEEK 4 (10/17 – 10/23)

7. Historical origins and contemporary perspectives:

The Course, Part Two, Synchronic Linguistics (with an emphasis on ch. IV. Linguistic Value, ch. V. Syntagmatic and Associate Relations, and ch. VI. Mechanism of Language) (101-134).

8. *Ceci n'est pas un livre: the inception of the Course in General Linguistics; Post-script – The structuralist reception of the Course in General Linguistics* (Stawarska, excerpts from unpublished ms).

WEEK 5 (10/24 – 10/30)

9. Structuralism in anthropology

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

10. Post-structuralist critique

Derrida, Structure, Sign, and Play (in *Writing and Difference*).

Suggested further reading re: Levi-Strauss: Judith Butler: Performative Acts and Gender Constitution (Theatre Journal, 1988).

WEEK 6 (10/31 – 11/6)

11. Structuralism in psychoanalysis

Lacan, The Agency of the Letter (*Ecrits*, 412 - 441). Presentation 4.

12. Post-structuralism and deconstruction

Derrida – “Differance” (in *Speech and Phenomena*); “Implications. Interview with Henri Ronsse” (in *Positions*). Presentation 5.

WEEK 7 (11/7 – 11/13)

13. Derrida – ***Grammatology – Methods***. Readings: Part I, Exergue, and chapter 1. “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing.” (1-26). Presentation 6.

14. “Semiology and Grammatology. An Interview with Julia Kristeva” (*Positions*, 17-36). Linguistics and Grammatology (*Of Grammatology*, 27 - 73). Please review Introduction, Ch. VI, from *Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure).

WEEK 8 (11/14 – 11/20)

15. Readings: Part I, chapter 2. “Linguistics and Grammatology.” (27-73), contd.

Recommended: Stawarska, excerpt unpublished ms: Metaphysics of presence, and the primacy of writing.

16. ch. 3 “Of Grammatology as a Positive Science” (*Of Grammatology*, 81-93). Presentation 7.

WEEK 9 (11/21 – 11/27)

17. P. II, 1. The Violence of the Letter: from Levi-Strauss to Rousseau (*Of Grammatology*, 101-140). Presentation 8.

18. Post-structuralism and the semiotic

Kristeva, from *Revolution in Poetic Language*. I. The Semiotic and the Symbolic. Presentation 9.

Prospectus due Wednesday in class.

WEEK 10 (11/28 – 12/4)

19. Kristeva, from *Revolution in Poetic Language*, II. Negativity: Rejection. Presentation 10. Recommended: Kristeva, “The Speaking Subject” (Culler, *Structuralism*, vol. I, 282-292).

20. Grad Presentations: final paper projects; concluding remarks.

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 and *Of Grammatology* by Derrida are available at Black Sun bookstore.

Below is a sample of scholarly compendia relevant to this seminar:

- Dosse, Francois. *History of Structuralism*, vol. 1 & 2, U. of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralism – Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, 4 vol. Routledge, 2006.
- Sturrock, John. *Structuralism*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

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. Two 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 of the final paper project 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. Detailed guidelines for the prospectus and the final paper will be distributed in class.

Grade components (out of 100%)

Attendance and class participation – 10%

In-class presentations on required reading – 20%

Prospectus – 20%

Term paper – 50%

Total – 100%

Attendance policy

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