

Review of  
Beata Stawarska,  
*Saussure's Linguistics, Structuralism, and Phenomenology:  
The Course in General Linguistics after a Century* (Palgrave, 2020)  
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In *Saussure's Linguistics, Structuralism, and Phenomenology: The Course in General Linguistics after a Century*, Beata Stawarska surveys for English-language readers important differences between the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure as presented in student lecture notes and other materials from his *Nachlass*, and the received picture of Saussure known to most of his twentieth-century readers via the 1916 *Course in General Linguistics* assembled and published by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. She highlights several important ways in which the received "Saussurean doctrine"—especially the oppositional pairings of signifier and signified, *la langue* and *la parole*, and synchrony and diachrony—is actually more complex and more open-ended than Saussure's structuralist adherents and poststructuralist critics have claimed. She suggests that this revised understanding of Saussure's ideas can lead toward a rapprochement between the traditionally opposed camps of structuralism and phenomenology.

### **I. Theme, Audience, and Approach**

Stawarska has done a great service for those of us interested in these issues, but who may not have had the time (as in my case) to read her much larger, 250-page work on this topic, *Saussure's Philosophy of Language as Phenomenology: Undoing the Doctrine of the Course in General Linguistics* (Oxford University Press, 2015). *Saussure's Linguistics, Structuralism, and Phenomenology* is a much smaller book, published in Palgrave Macmillan's "Pivot" series designed for works shorter than traditional monographs. The work is presented as a handbook "addressed at a wide, interdisciplinary audience," which may be read on its own or alongside the text of the course, and Stawarska includes a helpful reading map linking specific chapters in her book to specific chapters in the 1916 published version of the *Course*. But the book is only partially a commentary on specific chapters of Saussure's well-known published work. It is also, and indeed, primarily, an exercise in philosophical philology, cataloguing ways in which the published "Saussurean doctrine" differs from the views of Saussure available in the *Nachlass*. It is heavy on criticisms of the published version of his ideas and evidence intended to set the record straight, but rather light on details concerning the reasons Saussure actually held particular theses and on examination of those theses as self-standing philosophical claims.

Because of this approach, the first and much larger Part I of the book, "Legitimacy of the Saussurean Doctrine" (Chapters 2-10), is in an odd position: it presents the results of highly specialized, high quality research concerning the production and reception of a published work that would seem to be far too specific for "a wide, interdisciplinary audience," and yet does not engage in the detailed examination of the theoretical issues her research raises for disciplinary

audiences expecting critical engagement (e.g., philosophers, literary theorists, perhaps intellectual historians). Similarly, Part II examines Saussure's "Contemporary Legacy" (Chapters 11-13), but is dominated by broad considerations of the text's reception and only sketches arguments and positions concerning Saussure and later twentieth-century authors.

After comparing this book to the table of contents of Stawarska's 2015 work, and reading Patrick Flack's review of the latter in *Phenomenological Reviews*, I have the impression that this book is largely a rewriting, rearranging and abridgment of the same material. But that is not the work under review here. Thus, in what follows, I address *Saussure's Linguistics, Structuralism, and Phenomenology* as the relatively self-standing handbook it purports to be, and ignore the question of whether Stawarska has more thoroughly defended her interpretation in the earlier-published version of these ideas (I suspect she has). Considered on its own merits, the book offers a fascinating glimpse into issues concerning the promulgation and reception of Saussure's views, and the implications of these issues for a rapprochement between phenomenology and structuralism, but it offers little more than a glimpse: the book is lacking on the level of substantive philosophical discussion or historical contextualization of the relevant issues. Depending on its readership, this may or may not be a limitation of the work. In the next section of this review, I present a general overview of Part I, raising some critical points along the way. In the final section I turn to the treatment of phenomenological figures and themes, which occurs primarily in Part II, and raise some additional, more specifically phenomenological concerns.

## II. Setting the Record Straight on Saussure

The first few chapters provide an overview and helpfully summarize the case against the received interpretation of the Saussurean doctrine. Chapter two outlines the key doctrinal elements that have made the course so influential in the history of twentieth-century intellectual movements, especially structuralism, and surveys various strands of its legacy. Here, Stawarska sets up an important tension that informs the rest of the book: on the one hand, there is good textual evidence that speaks against taking the published content of the book as representing Saussure's views: "it can be documented that the editors or rather 'ghostwriters' of the Course introduced apocryphal content, reversed the order of presentation, projected a conceptual apparatus of vertical dichotomies, and adopted a dogmatic tone in their redacted version of general linguistics" (11). If we want to get the *real* Saussurean doctrine rather than that of Bally and Sechehaye, we will need to follow Stawarska in diving into various texts in Saussure's *Nachlass*, including the lecture notes of several students who actually attended Saussure's courses in general linguistics (remarkably, the compilers of the published version did not attend any of the iterations of the course, though they did attend other courses taught by Saussure (16)).

On the other hand, the *legacy* of the published content of the course has become so important in the history of twentieth-century intellectual movements that simply to reject the received doctrine would be to neglect the very influence that Saussure has had: "a critical study of a Great Book is a testimony to its established legacy and enduring relevance. The force of the critique depends in part upon the recognized importance of the object being critiqued" (12). Twenty-first century readers thus find themselves in a difficult position: on the one hand, details concerning the problematic circumstances surrounding the publication of the course lead us to want to seek

out the “real Saussure.” On the other hand—especially insofar as Saussure’s lasting legacy and importance has not been (or has not been exclusively) in the field of linguistics, but rather in fields such as literary theory and Continental philosophy and in broad discipline-spanning intellectual movements like structuralism and post-structuralism—what seems important is not so much figuring out what Saussure *actually said*, but rather understanding the course in the context of its influential reception—even if that reception is, from the standpoint of authorial intent, highly problematic.

Stawarska uses this tension to frame her own interpretation, which she characterizes as both a “deconstructive” and a “critical” reading of Saussure. And yet her exegesis remains mostly at the level of philological, this-is-what-the-author-really-said considerations. Thus, while Stawarska may be right to characterize the course as “a complex and multifaceted text that arguably deconstructs the very doctrinal understanding it seeks to espouse” (13), there is remarkably little attention paid—with a minor exception in her treatment of Derrida in Chapters Seven and Twelve—to the issues raised by a self-professed deconstructive reading whose main goal seems to be to set the record straight concerning the real intentions of the author. I return to this issue below.

Chapter Three is a useful guide to the shocking ways in which the editors of the published version of the *Course* both took liberties in the presentation of the material and promoted it through avenues such as publishing their own reviews of the work. There is one important element underlying Stawarska’s broader considerations introduced in this chapter that I wish she had spelled out in greater detail and with more precision. Stawarska is highly critical of Bally and Sechahaye’s concern to present Saussure’s doctrines in linguistics in the light of “complete objectivity” (18), and their efforts “to conform the then emerging science of general linguistics to the normative expectations within scientific disciplines” (11). She seems to suggest that this scientifically oriented presentation somehow leads to the problematic structuralist assumption “that cultural signification can be studied like an object within traditional physical sciences, that is, independently of users and/or observers and irrespective of historical change” (10). And she cites with approval Saussurean critiques, in the *Nachlass* material, of “naïve realism in linguistics,” of “an unexamined metaphysical commitment to entities assumed to exist independently of language use” and of “a naturalist approach to language”—all phrases which seem to be references to the same phenomenon (28-29). At the same time, she presents her own antidote to the misreadings as resting on the firm ground of “standards of empirical validity” (26) and as offering “an empirically based understanding” (11) of Saussure.

But there is very little discussion of what exactly these broadly scientific notions, on either side—naturalism, the empirical, natural science, etc.—are taken to be. This is particularly surprising given that both structuralism and phenomenology are known for their detailed considerations of the contested terrains of science and objectivity in the face of considerations of our subjectivity as thinkers, speakers, experiencers and knowers. These are no simple matters, and Stawarska surely owes the reader a more detailed account of them. Scientific objectivity was no more a simple, uncritical, unquestioned doctrine in empirical and formal disciplines at the turn of the twentieth century than it is today. Stawarska’s simultaneous reliance on the authority of the “empirical” (does this mean the lived-experiential, in the phenomenological sense?) and suspicion of objectivity and scientific disciplines is strongly reminiscent of the sort of

reactionary anti-scientism characteristic of some post-structuralist and deconstructive theory in the 1980s and 90s. If this is not her position, a more detailed treatment of these concepts would help to show it.

Perhaps the most damning example of Sechehaye and Bally's violation of academic norms is detailed in Chapter Four, where Stawarska shows that the famous concluding statement of the published *Course*, "the only true object of study in linguistics is the language, considered in itself and for its own sake" (qtd in Stawarska 24), is apocryphal, and not warranted by the source materials. This influential statement, she shows, becomes a sort of guiding thread for the problematic interpretation of Saussurean doctrine among structuralists. By singling out language as the sole object of study, and implying that Saussure believed it should be studied as a complete and self-standing system, independent of, e.g., social and historical contingencies, the editors set the stage for the problematic hierarchical and anti-historical presentation of core Saussurean concepts.

Against this hierarchical presentation in the published course, Stawarska presents a "horizontal" (67, 94) interpretation of Saussurean linguistics. For example, contrary to the received view, Saussure did not straightforwardly privilege *la langue* (the language system, considered in terms of the interrelations of signifiers but independently of its actual usages) over *la parole* (actual usage of the language in everyday social speech contexts) as the "true object of study in linguistics." Saussure's actual presentation of this distinction in the *Nachlass* is rather more nuanced and modest: he presents *la langue* as a "platform," "viewpoint," or "orientation" from which to view the "complex, heterogenous linguistic terrain" of *la langue*, rather than as "a superior and self-standing object" (30). Thus whereas the published course overstates the distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, Saussure's own statements from the *Nachlass* lead Stawarska to conclude that, in his actual view, "linguistic study involves an intellectually complex and self-reflective process that, in principle, precludes the possibility of unmediated access to a simple object" (31).

One of the most informative sections of the book explains how the presentation of the well-known figure from Chapter One of the published *Course*, featuring images of a tree and a horse alongside "ARBOR" and "EQUOS," was intended by Saussure to represent the traditional nomenclature view of language, according to which there is a separation between "an immutable order of things in the world" and "an immutable order of ideas and words" (38). On this nomenclature view, words stand in for things, and thus constitute a version of what Stawarska calls the "classical metaphysical view" of representation, such as we find in Aristotle, the Port-Royal rational grammarians, and the Augustinian theory of language Wittgenstein criticizes in the introductory sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* (38). But the next figure in the published text, which is supposed to represent the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, imports parts of the previous figure (the image of the tree and the word "arbor") even though there is no support for such importation in the manuscripts of the lectures. On the basis of such considerations, against the received view of the structuralists that Saussure's treatment of the sign is static and represents a "complete doctrine," Stawarska argues that Saussure's actual view as recorded in the *Nachlass* materials "presents testable, evolving, and if need be, revised hypotheses" (35).

There is of course a tension between structuralist and classical representationalist views. One does not typically think of the structuralists as paradigmatic representationalists. To endorse the view that language or any other semiotic system operates as a system of differences is in fact to downplay, if not reject outright, the claim that words stand in for things. Thus the Saussurean view as presented in the published version of the course is not only unfaithful to Saussure's actual doctrines, it is also in tension with itself: as presented, "Saussure's conception of language seems to be divided between, on the one hand, the metaphysical idea of a sign as *signans/signatum* and, on the other hand, the novel differential understanding of signification developed later in the *Course*" (37). Setting the stage for her reading of Derrida on Saussure, Stawarska shows how this tension in the published *Course* is avoided in Saussure's *Nachlass* via his account not of absolute but of "relative arbitrariness" (Saussure, qtd. in Stawarska 43) at the level of the language system as a whole (45-46). The real Saussure, Stawarska argues, regards the sign *system* as always already engaged with the changing socio-historical world and thus open ended.

The socio-historical aspects of the real Saussurean view are investigated more closely by looking at Saussure's conception of the speech community. Saussure recognizes "a historical fact at the origin of every state of the language" (Saussure, qtd. in Stawarska 51), resulting in a conception according to which "language and the social world are co-constituting factors of cultural signification, and it would be impossible to posit one without simultaneously implicating the other" (51). This is in direct contrast with the way the role of society is downplayed in the published version of the *Course*. In effect, then, when we consider the unpublished source materials, the *Course* "effectively complicates the order of the hierarchical dichotomies (*la langue* and *la parole*; synchrony and diachrony) from the 'Saussurian doctrine.' It calls into question the view that modern linguistics is an ahistorical and formal science, and it suggests that subject and structure-based approaches to cultural signification advanced, respectively, by the traditions of phenomenology and post-structuralism, can be productively combined" (53).

But the chapter does not specify who holds (or held) this view of modern linguistics. The phenomenological and (post-) structuralist considerations that presumably supply the remedy are only gestured at, and the important notion of historicity, so central for phenomenology and arguably one of the features that most clearly distinguishes it from structuralism, isn't discussed in detail. The suggestion seems to be that historicity is dealt with via Stawarska's Chapter Eight, on synchrony and diachrony. But as both Husserl and Heidegger have shown us, diachrony, temporality, and historicity are not identical concepts, even if they are interrelated. Here, in a pattern repeated throughout the book, at an obvious point of differentiation between structuralism and phenomenology, Stawarska marks the issue but does not further develop it via detailed philosophical discussion, essentially limiting her account to setting the record straight on Saussure.

The chapter on synchrony and diachrony argues that the relationship between the two planes of linguistic analysis is more complicated in Saussure than one would think from reading the published version of the *Course*. Rather than a hierarchy—*la langue* as characterized by synchrony over *la parole* as characterized by diachrony—Saussure's actual view in the course is not hierarchical but "horizontal" between *la langue*/synchrony and *la parole*/diachrony: "what may seem like a single and simple object of study (the sign; *la langue* ; a synchronic fact) turns

out to be crisscrossed with its other interlinked facet (the signified; *la parole*; a diachronic fact)” (74). Chapter Nine provides an intriguing further account of this interlinking in terms of the notion of creativity or “linguistic innovation.” Whereas the published version presents this material after introducing the synchrony/diachrony distinction, suggesting that “linguistic innovation is of purely diachronic interest,” Stawarska argues, following analysis of remarks in the *Nachlass* by several Francophone interpreters, that Saussure’s doctrine of linguistic innovation is actually intended to explain the way in which *la parole* affects *la langue* over time, thus “horizontally” connecting diachronic and synchronic aspects. This is accomplished primarily through an account of analogy as a creative principle, as exhibited especially in the norm-defying language use of children and literary writers. In phenomena such as false verb conjugations, children’s mistakes are still “operative within a given conjugational paradigm” (79). Such analogical innovation is presented more generally as a “motor driving historical change” (80). In short, “analogical innovation deploys grammatical principles of novel formation harbored within the language structure” (80), and is “intrinsic to the language system itself (81).

Here again, however, Stawarska seems to ignore obvious points for engagement with structuralism and phenomenology: How does this account square with the traditional structuralist concern with the language system? Aren’t such “conjugational paradigms” and “linguistic structures” precisely the sorts of concerns that most occupied the structuralists? And if the real Saussure thinks analogical innovation within such structures is a driver of historical change, surely the close parallel between this idea and the phenomenological notion that eidetic structures of experience help to determine the meaning content of lived experience without fully predetermining it merits closer examination.

Chapter Ten brings together the various threads in Part One to summarize Stawarska’s critique of the general presentation of the published version of the course as an account of “a central language structure... assumed a priori,” with diverse natural languages as a set of “factual consequences” of lesser importance (87). Against this view, Stawarska argues that Saussure’s actual view, as evidenced in students’ lecture notes, “moves from a detailed survey of several languages (*les langues*) to a concluding, hypothetical notion of language (*la langue*) as such. Presumably, this is what Stawarska means when she characterizes her reading, earlier in the book, as “empirical” rather than “objective,” and which she contrasts to the problematic view as presented in the published texts that “*la langue* can be construed as an a priori abstract idea to be couched in universal laws” (94).

The chapter again raises interesting interpretive points that beg for further engagement—especially, in this instance, vis-à-vis phenomenology. Is not, e.g., Husserl’s phenomenology an example of “an a priori abstract idea couched in universal laws,” and which yet is arrived at through “empirical” analysis—assuming this means analysis of lived experience? Doesn’t Husserl’s insistence that, in some sense, the a priori is to be found *in experience* speak against the dichotomy Stawarska implicitly endorses, between the a priori/ necessary/ universal/ objective, one the one hand, and the a posteriori/ contingent/ particular/ subjective on the other? Was it not a central theoretical concern of phenomenology (and, indeed, of post-structuralists such as Derrida and Foucault) to overcome the simplified reliance on just such dichotomies?

### III. Engagement with Phenomenology

Part II, “Contemporary Legacy,” does not further explore these issues directly but does (along with Chapter Seven of Part I, which seems oddly placed in the ordering of the chapters) explore some related themes, via a brief engagement with one broadly structuralist (Lacan, Chapter Eleven) and two phenomenological (Derrida, Chapters Seven and Twelve, and Merleau-Ponty, Chapter Thirteen) authors, focusing on what they had to say about Saussure and how they read the course. Stawarska’s treatment of these issues, while fascinating, seems to me to fall short of the purpose expressed in the introduction, of offering a “rapprochement” between structuralism and phenomenology via the long-observed actual doctrines of Saussure. This may be in part because it is oriented around readings of particular figures, rather than addressing the philosophical issues directly. Given the venue of this review, I will focus on the chapters engaging phenomenological figures.

Chapter Seven, “Derrida and Saussure: Entrainment and Contamination” interrupts the chain of chapters detailing the doctrines of the *Course* through engagement with Derrida, seeking a rapprochement between his critique and Saussure’s actual, more nuanced views. Stawarska is skeptical of Derrida’s reading of Saussure as practitioner of the metaphysics of presence: “It is difficult to imagine how Saussure’s linguistics could have made a difference to the study of cultural signification in the twentieth century, if it were as burdened by the Western metaphysical legacy as Derrida claims it is” (56). The chapter does not explain what exactly this burden is, why it would have inhibited Saussure’s influence, or why we should take Derrida to be right about any of this. It may be true that “few scholars have challenged Derrida’s indictment of Saussure’s linguistics as a species of metaphysics of presence...” (56), but it is not true that few have questioned this Derridean doctrine in its own right. It is also unclear whether Stawarska means to connect the critique of the metaphysics of presence with the critiques of the nomenclature view of the sign and of the striving for objectivity as discussed above.

Stawarska claims that Derrida’s critique of Saussure is misplaced—that he misinterprets the master on the basis of the published text of the *Course*—but at the same time that Saussure’s actual view is in fact relatively close to Derrida’s own, with its emphasis on “entrainment” and “contamination,” and its rejection of simple notions of purity or presence. Following Derrida’s *Glas*, Stawarska focuses on the potential objection raised by onomatopoeia. If Saussure’s claim is that there is no natural relation between the world and the sign-system (the thesis of arbitrariness), then it would seem that onomatopoeia presents a putative counterexample, insofar as such words appear to be modelled on natural sounds. The editors of the published version of the course go to great trouble to effectively rule out such cases and thus diffuse the objection, on the grounds that these sorts of words “are never organic elements of a linguistic system” (Saussure, qtd. in Stawarska 60). But the latter phrase is an editorial insertion without basis in the manuscript (61). In Saussure’s *actual* view, Stawarska argues, onomatopoeia does not constitute an objection to the claim that there are no natural signs. As Derrida argues, even onomatopoeic words are already contaminated by an outside, and are always already part of a sign system: the intralinguistic motivation by the language system enables individual signifiers like *glas/knell* and *fouet/whip* to be heard as expressions indicating a sound (or an object capable of making a sound), rather than the external sound-source motivating these expressions directly” (62). Thus, for the real Saussure, as for Derrida, onomatopoeia is not an exception to the rule of the

arbitrariness of the sign system, but rather an exemplification of that rule—so long as we recall, as argued in Stawarska’s earlier chapters discussed above, that the arbitrariness thesis applies at the level of the sign system as a whole, not at the level of individual signs.

Stawarska’s argument here—which is Derrida’s argument—is worth more consideration than it receives in the book. What proves that “there are no natural signifiers in language?” The claim is that any attempt to locate a putative exception to this rule will in fact reveal contamination and entrainment, and thus show that in fact the rule holds. But how does one identify cases of contamination and entrainment, except on the basis of the presupposition that the thesis always already holds? If the thesis is correct, there is no “nature” outside of the sign system available as an independent outside, as a neutral point of comparison: there is nothing outside the text. But if this is antecedently presupposed, then *of course* any attempt to find something that escapes the sign system will come up empty! If the thesis is incorrect, and there *are* neutral points of comparison for such questions—putative natural signs—then it will be said that “Following Derrida, the language system is worked from within by forces deemed external to it (be they sounds found in the physical world, phonetic evolution that is deemed merely fortuitous in the *Course*, or intertextual relations). Just as there are no ‘authentic’ onomatopoeic expressions based directly on the mimesis of sound, there are no absolutely arbitrary signifiers devoid of any and all external motivation” (63). The claim thus seems more dogmatic assertion than phenomenological description subject to verification via lived experience.

I don’t wish to question Stawarska’s exegesis of Saussure or of Derrida on this point, but surely, in a philosophical monograph, we are entitled to some considerations as to whether their views are *correct*. Potential counterexamples could be drawn, for example, from similar discussions in another of Derrida’s major source figures, Husserl (see, for example, the discussion of natural signs as a form of indication in §2 of the first *Logical Investigation*—particularly relevant given Husserl’s analysis in this section of the notion of “motivation,” a term Stawarska utilizes frequently, although it is unclear if she intends it in the technical phenomenological sense), or, venturing outside the world of Continental philosophy, from Paul Grice’s account of natural signs in “Meaning.” At the very least, some further clarification of what Stawarska means by “empirical” considerations could shed light on the method though which we are supposed to (fail to) discover natural signs.

Chapter Twelve, “Post-structuralism: The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing,” attempts a slightly different sort of rapprochement with Saussure, focusing on Derrida’s reading of the *Course in Of Grammatology*. Stawarska’s claim is that, despite his deconstructive focus on the text rather than the author, and despite the well-known structuralist and post-structuralist rejection of the import of authorial intent, Derrida’s deconstructive critique of the “civilization of the book” in favor of a notion of “unbound text” or writing should have led him to examine Saussure’s unpublished manuscripts more closely. The notion of the open-endedness of the sign-system, which Stawarska plausibly takes as the marker that distinguishes post-structuralism from structuralism, should have lead Derrida beyond the published text of the course to discover Saussure’s own much more open-ended views in the *Nachlass*, of which there is evidence that Derrida was aware. Had he done so, Stawarska claims, Derrida would have found a Saussure whose views are in fact much closer to his own: “These writings went unpublished during Saussure’s life, and one could lament a rectifiable failure to deliver intellectual products or



consider that the linguist was contesting scientific normativity and the civilization of the book. Saussure was *performing* the end of the book and the beginning of writing” (113).

Couldn't the same be said of any author who left unpublished manuscripts? What is special or uniquely interesting about Saussure here, versus, say, other linguists of his day? Beyond linguists, what of other authors in this time period (e.g., Husserl, Heidegger, Freud), who also wrote extensively and only published a fraction of what they wrote? Were they too contesting “scientific normativity and the civilization of the book?” If they were too, then which of their contemporaries were not? What was the source of the scientific normativity that was contested? Again, my point is not that there is nothing to what Stawarska claims—these are interesting and important historical-philosophical issues that merit discussion. My point is, here again, we are not given that philosophical discussion, nor any engagement with Saussure's contemporaries that might help to shed light on the intricacies and novelty (or lack thereof) of his views. Chapter Twelve is thus especially illustrative in bringing to the forefront the question of immanent critique, noted at the beginning of this review, that haunts Stawarska's book as a whole: doesn't this whole approach of establishing the “real Saussure” stand in some tension with Stawarska's implicit endorsement of the poststructuralist, deconstructive project? Should it matter, from that perspective, whether the *Course* represents what Saussure himself actually thought, or even what he is “performing,” given that this is now the received view of his ideas—the text? Stawarska is of course aware of this tension. But here, as elsewhere, we are not offered any detailed philosophical account to justify or dissolve it. Is the absence of a detailed treatment of this rather central theoretical issue itself a performance that “deliberately contests scientific normativity,” or perhaps a rejection of the metaphysics of presence?

The final chapter of the book opposes structuralist and post-structuralist readings to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reading of Saussure. The chapter begins with some interesting considerations of Saussure's notion of the “language phenomenon,” and suggests that this tells against the traditional notion (presumably of structuralist inspiration) that Saussure has nothing to say about the subject. For Saussure, Stawarska claims, “the subject is equal parts a ‘human being’ and a ‘social being,’ and speaking is an inherently communicative act which borrows from society and thanks to which one interacts with the community. The language phenomenon belongs, therefore, to the individual speaking subject and to the greater social world of historically sedimented conventions. As such, the language phenomenon described by Saussure *cannot be confined to the inner world of consciousness emphasized within the classical tradition of phenomenology*” (119-120, my emphasis).

Stawarska seems to be opposing French phenomenological figures such as Merleau-Ponty and Derrida to earlier “classical” phenomenologists whom she takes to have held this view. But we are not told what this inner world is, or who exactly held such a view. What of Heidegger's rejection of the subject in favor of *Dasein* and Being-in-the-World? What of Husserl's oft-expressed rejection of the notion of the ego as a monadic, solipsistic subject? Given that Stawarska explicitly invokes the “classical tradition of phenomenology” as a foil, surely we are owed some account of these figures' views. Even if Stawarska wishes to limit her consideration to the French tradition of phenomenology, surely she is aware of Sartre's claim that it follows from the very idea of intentionality that “everything [even consciousness] is finally outside” (Sartre, “Intentionality: A Fundamental idea of Husserl's Phenomenology”). There is no detailed

discussion of these central phenomenological themes, and long-discredited caricatures of the classical phenomenological project are presented as accepted doctrines. That project is certainly not beyond reproach; the potential challenges that Stawarska gestures at are interesting and important. But she never does more than gesture. There is no philosophically detailed reproach for the reader (or this reviewer) to agree or disagree with. Beyond historical sources, given her focus on the social aspects of the sign system, Stawarska might also have engaged with the currently burgeoning phenomenological literature on normativity, collective intentionality, or social ontology, but her account of the “contemporary legacy” of phenomenology relevant for the desired rapprochement is limited to mid to late-twentieth century French figures and some occasional references to Agamben.

The subsequent treatment of Merleau-Ponty that concludes the book is interesting, but again frustratingly minimal (direct engagement with Merleau-Ponty makes up about 3.5 pages of the book). Stawarska devotes a few pages to Merleau-Ponty’s view of Saussure, primarily based on *Signs*, excerpts from *the Lectures at the College De France*, and *The Prose of the World*. Her discussion is centered on Merleau-Ponty’s “methodological subjectivism,” which focuses on the phenomenon of speech and sees in the synchronic an always-incomplete historical residue of the diachronic, of previous generations of speakers (121). In this sense, Merleau-Ponty recognizes in Saussure an “interdependency between *la langue* and *la parole*” (121) and in light of this proposes a “new, situated conception of reason where historical contingency goes hand in hand with an enduring logic of both mutual understanding and world disclosure that are attained via an evolving linguistic medium... the signifying ‘body’ of language in the social and historical context” (122). Whereas Merleau-Ponty’s critics found this to be a misreading of the *Course*, the real Saussurean doctrine, as Stawarska has explicated it, in fact better accords with Merleau-Ponty’s view. Thus, as was the case with Derrida, Merleau-Ponty is actually closer to the real Saussure, if further from the Saussure we know from the published *Course*, and may even be seen as a reformer of the study of language in the Saussurean mould via his focus on the subjective experience of speech (123).

Stawarska concludes the book thus:

[T]he subject and structure-based approaches to cultural signification need not be opposed. Language construed as a phenomenon is individual as well as social, intentional and automatic, received and invented, contemporary yet ancient. Language construed as a phenomenon calls, therefore, for combined phenomenological and structural approaches to cultural signification. Saussure’s linguistics points a way out of the institutionalized antagonism between these two philosophical traditions of inquiry, and it enables a greater rapprochement than is traditionally acknowledged. Saussure’s linguistics can therefore be claimed as an important intellectual resource in contemporary research on how subjective experiences and structural arrangements continually intersect (123).

This passage nicely encapsulates the Stawarska’s overarching thesis: a re-reading of Saussure that goes beyond the problematic published version of the *Course* can help to accomplish a rapprochement between the traditionally opposed camps of structuralism and phenomenology. The book is a helpful outline of such rapprochement, if not on its own an accomplishment of it.