Graduate School for Social Research

Philosophy in the Process of Making Concepts: Sonic Ontology

Instructor:	Prof. dr hab. Szymon Wróbel email: wrobelsz@gmail.com
Office hours:	Mondays, 16:00-17:00 (after arranging an appointment)

	WINTER Semester	SPRING Semester
HOURS	15	15
	Mondays, 17:00 - 20:00	
FREQUENCY	4 x 45 every two weeks	4 x 45 every two weeks

Starting date: November 17

Classes take place on the Zoom platform, for 2 semesters for a total of 30 hours (3 ECTS)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND AIMS:

The paradigmatic ontology that has dominated Western philosophy is the ontology of body and image. We exist where our bodily sensations (pain and pleasure) emerge or where someone (any authority) commands us to recognize "our" image. We are a body (in the body) or an image (or in the image). Sonic ontology attempts to break with the dominance of this imprisonment of existence within an body-object or image-frame. Sonic ontology points to another source of human existence: sound-voice. It is the voice that is at the beginning. However, this is where the problems arise, which will be the problems of the seminar. First, sound-voice is not an object in the traditional sense, because it does not have the status of a thing-being. Sound has no clear boundaries, and its matter is problematic. Voice-sound is rather "material" for all objectification, reification, fetishization, i.e., for all ontological abduction. We are uncertain about the materiality and objectivity of sound, which seems to be merely a tremor. Secondly, a voice calls us into existence. But what kind of voice is this? Whose voice is it? Do we initially treat our own voice as the voice of the Other? Are we capable of recognizing our own voice, which initially seems like a scream-command, i.e., an expulsion of pain? Voice quickly becomes subordinated to language. This subordination results in the belief that humans are the only beings without a voice, which replaces language. Thus, beyond the body and image, a third ontological dominator was born—language, which effectively subordinated the other two (body and image). Sonic ontology is an ontological project that paves the way for sound-voice against the domination of body, image, and language.

This is an English-language course, organized as a 2-semester seminar in the academic year 2025/26. The course is open to any interested PhD student at GSSR.

COURSE TOPICS: Contemporary philosophy, history of philosophy, history of ideas, social philosophy, political philosophy.

- Credit requirements: Grades will be based: 25% on Class participation, 25% on Reading Reactions; and 50% on the Essay. Total possible points = 100

(corresponding to 100%). The condition for passing is also writing an essay (15 pages of standardized typescript) related to the topic of the seminar. The essay is graded on a scale of 2 to 5. A good essay should contain a clearly stated thesis and a clearly chosen way of argumentation. The argumentation may refer to empirical examples, but it may also be more analytical in nature. The clarity or originality of the thesis and the consistency of proving this thesis will be assessed.

KNOWLEDGE TO BE ACQUIRED:
Participants are expected to acquire two types of knowledge: (1) orientation in the philosophy, (2) orientation in contemporary ways of interpreting series of concepts such as idea, concept, technique of thinking, rationality, argumentation, discussion, public debate.

Knowledge (L8H_K):
Student knows and understands the world's achievements relating to:

- theoretical foundations
- general and selected specific issues of the academic or artistic discipline

at a level enabling the revision of existing paradigms;

Student knows the main scientific developments in the academic or artistic disciplines essential to the study programme;
the methodology of scientific research,
rules for dissemination of scientific results, including through open access.

Skills (L8H_S)
Student can:
- critically evaluate the achievements of one's academic discipline;
- critically evaluate one's contributions to the development of that field;
- recognize the value of knowledge in solving cognitive and practical problems.

Social Competences (L8H_C):
Student is ready to:
- take advantage of knowledge from different academic or artistic fields to creatively identify, formulate and innovatively solve complex problems or perform research activities, especially:

- to define the aim and subject of the research, formulate a research hypothesis
- develop research methods, techniques and tools and use them creatively
- draw conclusions on the basis of research results

-perform critical analysis and evaluation of the results of scientific research, expert activities and other works of a creative nature and their contribution to knowledge;
- transfer the results of research studies to the economic and social spheres

ASSESSMENT

The condition for passing is active participation and writing an essay (15 pages of standardized typescript) related to the topic of the seminar. The essay is graded on a scale of 2 to 5.

A good essay should contain a clearly stated thesis and a clearly chosen way of argumentation. The argumentation may refer to empirical examples, but it may also be more analytical in nature. The clarity or originality of the thesis and the consistency of proving this thesis will be assessed.

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Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

PQF Level 8 Descriptor	Evaluation Method in the Course
L8H_KS – Depth and Scope	Assessed through students' ability to engage with philosophical theories of the image, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of historical and contemporary debates.
L8H_KX – Context	Evaluated in students' ability to contextualize concepts within philosophy, semiotics, political theory, and aesthetics. This is reflected in class discussions and written assignments.
L8H_SU – Using Knowledge	Measured through the development of a 15-page philosophical essay, where students must apply, critique, and integrate theoretical approaches.
L8H_SC – Communication	Evaluated through class participation and reading reactions, requiring students to express and defend complex arguments in academic discourse.
L8H_SO – Organizing Work	Assessed through students' ability to structure independent research, meeting deadlines, and formulating a coherent essay proposal.
L8H_SL – Learning	Demonstrated in students' ability to revise their essays based on feedback, incorporating new insights into their work.
L8H_CE – Evaluation	Assessed through peer discussions and instructor feedback, requiring students to critically evaluate and refine their own theoretical positions.
L8H_CR – Responsibility	Measured through adherence to academic integrity and proper engagement with sources in their writing assignments.
L8H_CP – Professional Role	Evaluated through students' ability to produce an essay that meets scholarly standards, preparing them for future academic publishing.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CLASSES AND CORRESPONDING LITERATURE:

1. **There Is No Invocatory or Scopic Stage: the Object-Voice and the Scopic-Object.**

Readings: Jacques-Alain Miller, *Jacques Lacan and the Voice*. [in:] Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf eds, *The Later Lacan: An introduction*, 137-46, 2007. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Elements of Epistemology*, [in:] *Lacan and Science*, by Jason Glynos, Yannis Stavrakakis, London: Routledge 2002.

2. **There Is No Such Thing as the Voice**

Readings: Mladen Dolar. *The Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. *The Voice as Something More, Essays toward Materiality*, edited by Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin, The University of Chicago Press Chicago and London 2019.

3. **The Voice That Is Not Mine**

Readings: Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. Barthes, Roland. "Listening." [in:] *Th e Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, translated by Richard Howard, 245–60. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991

4. **The Sirens' Song/ The Silence of the Sirens**

Readings: Maurice Blanchot; *The Sirens' Song: Selected Essays*. edited and with an introduction by Gabriel Josipovici; translated by Sacha Rabinovitch, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1982. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. New York (1972) [1947]. Eduardo Mendieta, *The Silence of the Sirens*, The Journal of Speculative Philosophy , Vol. 28, No. 3. Barbara Engh, *Adorno and the Sirens: Tele-phono-graphic Bodies*, [in:] *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 120–35.

5. **The Aural Phase: In Salutation of All the Voices**

Readings: Dominic Pettman, *Sonic Intimacy, Voice, Species, Technics (or, How To Listen to the World)*, Stanford University Press, 2017. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron, London & New York: Verso, 1993.

6. **The Mortal Ear**

Readings: Peter Szendy *All Ears: The Aesthetics of Espionage*, Fordham University Press, 2016. Peter Szendy, *Stigmatology. Punctuation as Experience*, Translated by Jan Plug, Fordham University Press 2018.

7. **Sonic Materialism: A Philosophy of Digging/ The Sound of Stones**

Readings: Salomé Voegelin, *The Political Possibility of Sound. Fragments of Listening*, Bloomsbury Publishing Inc 2019.