

Reading Course 7.5 p. (January 2018 – May 2018)

Reconstructing Constructionalism – A Close Analysis of Phenomenology and Qualitative Methodology.

The reading course starts with an introduction the last week in January 2018 and concludes May 2018 with an individually written assignment on own empirical work – developing of an article, or a section of a dissertation – using a phenomenological sociological methodology. The independent reading course will continue, after our January meeting, with a discussion seminar in February and further bi-weekly meetings Spring, 2018. Date and time will be given after our introductory meeting.

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Introduction. This reading course examines the phenomenological tradition, as it is known under three major headings: Transcendental phenomenology, Hermeneutic phenomenology and Existential phenomenology. Each tradition will be looked at as an important influence in the development of qualitative methodology within the social sciences. We know that both Harold Garfinkel and Aron Circourel were strongly influenced by phenomenology and developed ethnomethodology in different directions. We also know much about “literal description,” and “bracketing.” We might have even followed the trend of ethnomethodology into conversational analysis. At least, many of us, have used ethnomethodology or radical symbolic interaction as a basis for some sort of norm critique or in explaining, “unintended consequences.” Even so, some of us become a bit perplexed as we analyze our interviews and ethnographic mappings. Others have jumped into discourse analysis. Even if we know that there is a persistent push towards “mixed-methods,” we still want to know how to analyze or interpret “accounts,” and how to “understand” a narrative. Hopefully, we all want to know what is implicit, what we take-for-granted, in the sociology of knowledge we are using or muddling through without really clearly thinking it through. This reading course does not provide answers but aims for a better understanding of qualitative methodology by critically examining what has been done within phenomenological sociology. Indirectly, but pertinent to the course, is the improvement of our skills in analysis and interpretation when our methodology is focused on “accounts” and “narratives.” Most actual, is also knowing how to make clear the theoretical or philosophical assumptions on which our empirical work is based.

Background. N. Kafle in “Hermeneutic phenomenological research simplified,” http://kucc.ku.edu.np/bodhi/vol5_no1/11.%20Narayan%20Kafle.%20Hermeneutic%20Phenomenological%20Research%20Method.pdf presents precisely what he says in the title, a simplified view of hermeneutic phenomenology. Following Kafle’s simplification we can state that, transcendental phenomenology, Husserlian phenomenology, is based on the idea that it is possible to suspend personal prejudices in attempting to reach to the core or essence through a state of pure consciousness,” (ibid p.186) thought of as a “phenomenological attitude over the natural attitude.” Husserlian phenomenology had as its interest to discover and describe the ‘lived world.’ By suspending personal opinion it is according to Husserl, possible to arrive at a single, essential and descriptive presentation of a phenomenon

(ibid). Such a phenomenological perspective can also be found in the basis of ethnomethodology and a concern with literal description. The “phenomenological attitude,” capable of suppressing prejudices, is seen as a “reduction” but the ideas of how to practice the reduction such as “bracketing” and how this is accomplished in integration of personal opinion while analyzing descriptions is up to discussion.

Hermeneutic phenomenology originally proposed by Martin Heidegger rejected the idea of suspending personal opinions and used instead the idea of an “interpretive narration” for description. In hermeneutic phenomenology the idea of reduction is thought as impossible and instead one should try to get beneath the subjective experience and find the genuine objective nature of a thing as an individual realizes it. Thus the focus is turned to the subjective experience of individuals and groups, unveiled through their life world stories. Description is an interpretive process. The school was enriched by Hans George Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Max van Manen (ibid, p.187).

Existential phenomenologists are seen as a group of scholars that share a view that philosophy should not be conducted from a disinterested standpoint. They mean that a phenomenon only shows itself to one that is engaged with the world. Thus their meaning is a description of “being” or of the “lived-body” in perception.

The course. Although, we will read literature from all three traditions, the focus of the reading course will be on “hermeneutic phenomenology” and understanding accounts and narratives. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. It focuses, as does ethnomethodology, on what might be seen as trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding.

As sociologists, we will be looking at the different traditions of phenomenology as providing the qualitative tools of research necessary to uncover the micro processes of behavior that lay behind the macro processes of social change (the Coleman problem). We will look at hermeneutic phenomenology as producing rich textural descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals.

We will connect this with stories that are told of that experience.

Thus our way into methodology in this reading course is to explore the stories people tell of their experiences with the help of hermeneutic phenomenology as a method of interpretation. We will examine the use of the Husserlian concept of “thematic analysis,” as well as use of “typifications,” the metaphor of “horizon,” and the idea of escaping our preconceptions but also confirming them.

Readings:

Our readings and introduction to a synthesis of sociology and phenomenology will be through the following:

1. Another glance at the work of Alfred Schutz and what we missed the first time.

Alfred Schutz - on Phenomenology and Social relations, Edited and with an introduction by Helmut R. Wagner, 1970: University of Chicago Press. Pp 1- 95.

This work places phenomenology within sociology and gives a good introduction to concepts such as the “natural attitude,” and the “life-world” as well as how we approach social interpretation and individual orientation. Schutz puts Weber together with Husserl and deals with the world as intellectually spontaneous yet in an active mode of intentionality. It is interesting to follow the idea of experience as attention. As Wagner points out “the object is apperceptionally constructed in the synthesis of different ‘perspectives’ in which the object is actually seen or remembered later in typified fashion (p5).”

2. We will also be referencing

Collective Papers III of Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*. Edited by Ilse Schutz. With an Introduction by Aron Gurwitsch. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966.

Of importance are also several essays in *Phenomenological sociology: Issues and Applications*. Edited by George Psathas 1973 J. Wiley & Sons, Inc.

particularly, “Toward radicalism in sociology and every day” by Kurt Wolff,

“A Phenomenological approach to the study of Formal Organizations” by Roger Jehenson and

“Phenomenology and Marxism: A Salute to Enzo Paci” by Fred R. Dallmayr

3. Another major source in this reading course will be the book by Susan J. Hekman *Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Knowledge*. 1986, Polity Press.

In this book we will go through a brief history of the sociology of Knowledge starting with Marx and the early history of the sociology of knowledge, through the “*methodenstreit* and German sociology of knowledge and on to the realists. After a short walk through Mannheim’s Hermeneutic Sociology of Knowledge and a glance at Gadamer and his debate with Habermas, we end in the revision of methodology of the social sciences. We can discuss - if we want - to further our readings into Foucault and moral nihilism.

4. The *Phenomenology Reader*, edited by Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, Routledge 2002,

is a mile stone in giving us a comprehensive collection of primary texts of major ideas “expounded by the great phenomenologists” and an evolution of phenomenology it includes readings from Brentano Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, Gadamer, Arendt, Sartre Merleu-Ponty, Levinas, Derrida and Ricoeur. We will chose for discussion some of the readings.

5. In addition, we will be looking at articles currently published in a phenomenological sociological perspective to better understand how contemporary sociology uses a phenomenological sociological methodology for understanding accounts and narratives. Each discussion will start with a brief synopsis over what we have read

and what is important to discuss in a view to “reconstruct constructionalism.” Remember this is a reading course. As a reading course, attendance will be limited to a maximum of seven doctoral students. However, the discussions will be opened to all interested doctoral students (and faculty) who are not able to partake in the course.