Welcome to Theories of Science

KULT8850/1

Spring 2025

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KULT (=Dept. of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture)

Plan for today

- Until 10
  - Why taking this course is a good idea (besides it being mandatory for PhD students at HF)
  - An introduction to "Getting to know each other in academia": the standard way
- Rest of the day:
  - Hannah on research ethics
  - Jonathan on Objectivity, Method, and Truth

Mandatory for HF but why?

1. Faculty of Humanities (and guests): No science without **critical reflection** of the philosophical fundamentals and the socio-cultural context of research and how both affect research process and outcomes
2. Help PhD students to **navigate** their PhD projects
3. Encourage **collaboration and exchange** (in its broadest sense) across different projects and disciplines within the humanities and across faculties

What do we do in this course to achieve these goals?

3x2(+1) days x 3 goals

- Day 1+2: Philosophy and research ethics
- Day 3+4: Science in context
- Day 5+6: Critique of science
- (Day +1: Conference)

1. Guided reflection

in lectures and group work covering

1. Philosophy and research ethics (days 1+2): what is knowledge, what types of knowledge are there, what is objectivity, what is theorising, what is allowed and frowned upon, ...
2. Socio-cultural context of scientific knowledge production (days 3+4): How does this context form science (and the other way around)?
3. Critical perspectives on science (days 5+6): Could it be otherwise?

2. Navigational support

1. Through helping you to find your way of dealing with thorny issues of objectivity, truth, and ethics (days 1+2)
2. By painting a map of the socio-cultural and institutional landscapes that you will have to navigate (days 3+4)
3. Helping you to redraw the map in a better way (days 5+6)

Plus: By giving you an assignment which allows you to practice "being a scholar"

3. Collaboration and exchange

in multi-, inter, transdisciplinary discussions

1. across different approaches to knowledge, objectivity, truth, and research ethics (days 1+2)
2. as intrinsic feature of research (days 3+4)
3. to go beyond individualising and individualised complaints and competition (days 5+6)

Formalities

- Mandatory attendance
    - Important to achieve the goals
    - Life happens, I trust your judgement, just keep me updated
- The **conference** will be prepared collaboratively: You are the conference committee, I am your secretary
- Assignments are related to the conference
    - deliver a very short abstract before the conference
    - present at the conference ("physical", as recording or online), and
    - **hand in an extended abstract (7.5 ECTS) or a short conference paper (10 ECTS) by 31 August 2025**

Questions, needs, wishes?

Getting to know each other ("as academics"-edition)

The academic standard approach A: Through affiliation (institutional, personal)
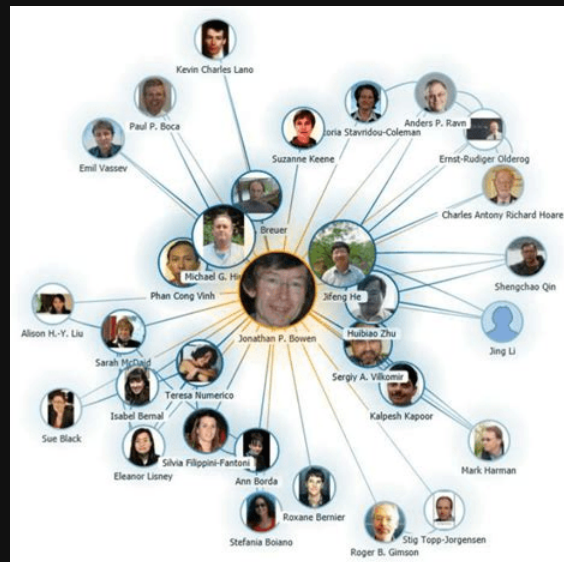
The curse and/or game of reputation

- Individually **and** institutionally
- knowing (of) each other < citing and being cited < inviting and being invited < hiring and being hired
- Also important when creating publication opportunities and applying for research funding

Unintended consequences

Leads to

- a vast sea of scholarship which is never noticed by anyone
- chronic avoidance of "invisible work" among some "successful" researchers
- over-promising and over-committing
- outright fraudulent behaviour ("paper mills", "citation cartels")

More consequences

- Academics meet as individuals **and** as potentially useful "connection"
- Academia is not good at facilitating the social side of things: You are often let alone with the task of finding your "allies", future colleagues, academic friends
  - Go to conferences
  - "Cold" calls (invitations, questions, requests) are encouraged (even if they are not always answered)
  - Academia is vast: find your tribe within

The academic standard approach cont.d:

Your PhD projects in three sentences

- Finally! Time to do in-depth work! So much to explore, so much to learn!
- And then we are forced to present our research in very compressed form - and often already at the very beginning of the work!
- And it gets even worse after concluding the research: What have you found out (in three sentences)?

Some related questions

- Days 1+2: Philosophy
  - What do we know **before** we do our research?
  - How do we know that our research is **concluded**?
- Days 3+4: Socio-cultural context
  - What are the institutional, cultural, societal **expectations** towards our research and how do we deal with them in a way that benefits our projects?
  - And how do we deal with the fact that we compete with 1000s of people (more?) for attention
- Days 5+6: Critique
  - How does "how" and "with whom" we do our research affect the outcome?
  - What does our research actually "do"? Who is served and who is excluded?

Plan for today

- Getting to know each other II
- Rune on theorising as practice
- Ståle on knowledge, body, science

Non-standard approach:

Thought experiment: The day after your defence

What would you like to be able to say after all is said and done?

A. Ultimately, my PhD work was committed to the search for **knowledge and truth** about XYZ.

B. Ultimately, my PhD work has contributed greatly to my **personal development**.

C. Ultimately, my PhD work was committed to the search for **solutions** to problem XYZ.

D. Ultimately, my PhD work was committed to a **critique** of XYZ.

The options

- **Knowledge and truth**: a thesis that adds "knowledge" about XYZ, no matter how useful or affirmative/critical this knowledge is.
- **Personal development**: a thesis as part of a "Bildung"-journey , you have "grown", satisfied your curiosity, have met inspiring people, seen beautiful places, etc.
- **Solutions**: a thesis that contributes (maybe only a little part of) a solution to an "important" contemporary problem
- **Critique**: a thesis in the critical tradition which assumes that the most important task is to get rid of wide-spread misconceptions about XYZ

Group work

- Think about which statements match best (5 min)
- Walk to your "coordinates" and find one or two person(s) to talk with in your vicinity. Talk about why you are where you are and where you also could be and where you definitely not would like to be (in the room)
- To be continued...