EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE PAST:  
SCIENCE, FEMINISM, PSYCHOANALYSIS

Course description

This course is a research seminar designed to help students work on papers for classes, theses and individual projects. Each student – sooner or later - must make his or her own choice of epistemology, choosing among and integrating approaches as seems appropriate for different questions, intellectual goals and fields of study. Thus this course will introduce various epistemologies utilized in the humanities and human sciences and stress an awareness of how to draw on and combine these approaches for analyzing students’ own research materials.

We will concentrate on the epistemological debates and approaches that characterize contemporary humanities. Our central concerns here will be to identify the different theories of knowledge; to assess the strengths and weakness of the different approaches; to comprehend the reasons why humanists may employ different modes of inquiry; to understand the systematic implications that different theories of knowledge have for our scholarly agendas and investigatory processes; and to consider the possibilities for an interplay among and synthesis of the various epistemological perspectives in our actual conduct of inquiry. In doing so we will distinguish between two epistemological perspectives: those of the so-called "hard sciences" which stresses logical-causal explanation and is designed to provide predictive knowledge and a "soft science" epistemology, which stresses contextual and experiential understanding designed to provide an empathetic awareness or clarity. Core examples will include interpretivism, feminist standpoint theory and situated knowledges.

Course requirements

Attendance is mandatory. Students who miss more than three meetings (except illness or others serious matters) will not be graded. Students are expected to read assigned readings carefully and participate in discussions. Participants will be expected to give homework and one class reports (this should be no more than a 10 minute summary of a reading and should raise some questions for class discussion after the summary). A 15-20 pages final paper is required. Its topic will be chosen by the student himself/herself and it is should draw upon materials used in other courses the student may be taking. I expect each participant in the course to meet with me to discuss his/her project.

Course schedule

March 31
1. Introduction: overview of the course.

April 7 – no class

April 14
2. Explanation as the main task of science (covering-low model: Carl Hempel)
Carl G. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science*. Prentice Hall, 1966 (chapter 5 [and 6])

April 21
3. Paradigms and revolutions in science – Thomas S. Kuhn
April 28
4. Problem of verification of knowledge

May 5
5. Feminist epistemologies (part I)

May 12
6. Feminist epistemologies (part II)

May 14
7. Epistemological value of memory

May 19 – special guest: Purnima Mankekar
8. Feminist epistemologies (part III)

May 26
9. Psychoanalysis as Critical Theory (Melanie Klein)
C. Fred Alford, Melanie Klein and Critical Social Theory: An Account of Politics, Art, and Reason Based on Her Psychoanalytic Theory. Yale University Press, 1989 (fragments)

June 2– special guest: Hayden White
10. Epistemology and ideology (Michel Foucault)

June 9
11. Research as a play (D.W. Winnicott)

Ewa Domanska
Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (CASA); Building 110, Room 111K - Main Quad
Email ewka@stanford.edu; office hours: Tuesday, 2:00-4:00 and by appointment