



Feminist Science Studies

Objectivity, Truth, and Knowledge

Dr. Josef Barla | Goethe University Frankfurt | Institute of Sociology | barla@soz.uni-frankfurt.de | Winter term 2022/23 | MA SE

contents

Feminist scholars have demonstrated that scientific knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. In this course, we will therefore focus on scientific knowledge production as a social practice. Reading classic and contemporary feminist theories of science, we will explore the relationship between science, objectivity, and truth. What does it mean to emphasize the situatedness and the historically contingent and social nature of scientific knowledge? How can 'we' arrive at stronger versions of objectivity? How are categories of difference such as sex, gender, and race, to name but a few, informing the ways 'we' experience and understand the world? Engaging with these and other important questions, we will discuss how feminist epistemologies and philosophies of science have fundamentally reworked the relationship between body and mind, matter and meaning, the subject and the object of knowledge. While the first part of the seminar will deal with epistemological and theoretical foundations of feminist science studies, in the second part we will read recent contributions to feminist science studies as well as feminist new materialist interventions that aim at producing situated knowledges through critical engagements with various worldly phenomena.

methods

This course is a reading and discussion intensive seminar for advanced students. A willingness to read and discuss challenging texts and to carefully prepare for our meetings is thus expected. Thematic inputs by the course instructor will be complemented by the students through short presentations, group work, and active participation in the discussions.

aims

In this seminar, students will become familiar with key theories and concepts concerning the relationship between scientific knowledge production, objectivity, and power. They will engage with various concepts and theories and discuss them with regard to their merits. A particular focus will be placed on questions of the entanglement of knowing, being, and responding to the world as part of it as well as on the ways in which sex, gender, race, and other categories of difference are embedded into and at the same time also enacted by scientific knowledge. Previous knowledge in science studies, philosophy of science, and (feminist) epistemology is recommended although not expected. At the end of the semester, students will gain a substantial knowledge about key theories, concepts, and ongoing debates in feminist science studies and beyond.

participation

Since this is a discussion-based course, the single most important factor is going to class and participating in discussions. It is through discussions that we learn to synthesize and evaluate information, share our informed knowledge, and respond critically but respectfully to the ideas expressed by others. Successful completion of this course, thus, requires careful reading of the semester literature, co-moderating a session, and a regular active contribution to classroom discussions. Consider this as an opportunity in practicing discussing your ideas in a public forum. Please be mindful of respectful communication and language when sharing your thoughts with your peers. For further information, feel free to consult Goethe University's Guidelines on a Discrimination-Sensitive Attitude: <http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/80757763/>.

Participation requirements (Teilnahmeschein):

- **thesis paper** for a core text on the syllabus (c. 1 page; consists of 3-4 theses as well as open questions for discussion); to be submitted at least 5 days in advance; short presentation of the theses paper in class (~ 5 Min.)
 - **OR** -
- **two contributions to the course blog** (c. 500-700 words each that engage with a text from the syllabus, connecting it to recent developments and phenomena in science, politics, or art; to be submitted 5 days in advance)
- **co-moderation** of a thematic session

Examination requirements (Modulabschluss):

- **see above**
- **term paper** (15 full pages for MA students / 12 full pages for BA students; to be submitted by 15 March with feedback or 15 April 2023 without feedback; topic to be discussed with me)

studying in times of multiple crises

The climate crisis, the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, a war in the middle of Europe—the current situation is undoubtedly a challenge and a burden for all of us. Even though we are all affected, I am aware of the fact that we might be affected in different ways and deal with existential fears and pressure differently. I am available at any time should difficulties arise with the requirements of the course. For a safe and pleasant study atmosphere, please pay also attention to the regular notifications on the website of Goethe University. *If you feel ill or test positive for COVID-19, please be sure to stay at home.* Please contact me in that case or if you have care obligations so that we can work out a solution for missed assignments and class participation.

good scientific practice

Academic dishonesty is a very serious misconduct. This includes plagiarism as well as other attempts at deception. Academic dishonesty will result in you failing the course and will be recorded as attempted at deception by the examination office FB03. In serious cases, this can even lead to exmatriculation: www.fb03.uni-frankfurt.de/101940130/Plagiate Don't let it get that far. If you encounter difficulties with submission deadlines or with writing your term paper, do not hesitate to contact me so that together we can find a solution.

course materials & blog & communication

The semester literature and other important information can be found on the OLAT course website. I will use e-mails and announcements through OLAT to keep you informed and connected during the semester. Please use your university e-mail account for communication and log in regularly in order not to miss important information.

We will use a **course blog** <https://feministssciencestudiesacourseblog.wordpress.com> to allow for unconventional forms of critical inquiry and the discussion of concrete examples from science, politics, and art in the form of blog posts. This also aims to foster mutual engagement with each other's contributions.

Dr. Josef Barla

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main | FB03 Gesellschaftswissenschaften

Institut für Soziologie | Arbeitsbereich „Biotechnologie, Natur und Gesellschaft“

✉ barla@soz.uni-frankfurt.de | Web: <https://www.josefbarla.com> |  @Barla_Josef

Student hours: by arrangement

schedule & literature

Biweekly | Wed. 14:30-18:00 | Room SH 4.104 | Campus Westend

Introduction

26 October 2022

Course introduction and syllabus overview

Diffraction knowledge/s I: Objectivity, facts, and truth

9 November 2022

Session 1 | 14:30-15:30

Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison (2007): *Objectivity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: pp. 27-39 & 55-68.

Session 2 | 15:45-16:45

Harding, Sandra (1991): *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter: "'Strong Objectivity' and Socially Situated Knowledges", pp. 138-163.

Session 3 | 17:00-18:00

Group discussion and reflection

Diffraction knowledge/s II: Situated knowledges

23 November 2022

Session 1 | 14:30-15:30

Haraway, Donna (1988): "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599.

Session 2 | 15:45-16:45

Collins, Patricia H. (2000): *Black Feminist Thought; Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York: Routledge. Chapter: "Black Feminist Epistemology", pp. 251-271.

Session 3 | 17:00-18:00

Group discussion and reflection

Diffraction knowledge/s III: Feminist science studies

7 December 2022

Sitzung 1 | 14:30-15:30 Uhr

Weasel, Lisa H. (2004): "Feminist intersections of science: Race, gender and sexuality through the microscope", *Hypatia* 19(1): 183-193.

Sitzung 2 | 15:45-16:45 Uhr

Barad, Karen (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Chapter: "Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality", pp. 189-222.

Sitzung 3 | 17:00-18:00 Uhr

Group discussion and reflection

Sitzung 1 | 14:30-15:30 Uhr

Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival, directed by Fabrizio Terranova, 2016 (Discussion of selected scenes)

Sitzung 2 | 15:45-16:45 Uhr

Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman (2020): *becoming human. Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*, New York: New York University Press. Chapter: “‘Not Our Own’: Sex, Genre, and the Insect Poetics of Octavia Butler’s ‘Bloodchild’”, pp. 121-158.

Sitzung 3 | 17:00-18:00 Uhr

Group discussion and reflection

Sitzung 1 | 14:30-15:30 Uhr

Neimanis, Astrida (2018): “Nature Representing Itself: Bibliophilia in a Changing Climate.” In Vicki Kirby (Ed.). *What if Culture was Nature all Along?* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 179-198.

Sitzung 2 | 15:45-16:45 Uhr

Liboiron, Max (2021): *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. Chapter: “An anticolonial pollution science”, pp. 113-155.

Sitzung 3 | 17:00-18:00 Uhr

Group discussion and reflection

Reflection of the semester literature and discussions, wrap-up, feedback round, and discussion of term paper topics.

Modules:

- Soziologische Theorie, Geschichte der Soziologie und Wissenschaftstheorie (SOZ-MA-1)
- Geschlecht, Migration und Diversität (SOZ-MA-2)
- Wissen, Technik und Umwelt (SOZ-MA-6)
- Spezialisierung (SOZ-BA15-SP)
- Spezialisierung (GS-BA-6)

further readings

- Barad, Karen (2017): "Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness: Re-turning, re-memembering, and facing the incalculable", *New Formations* 92: 56-86.
- Barad, Karen (2014): "Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart", *parallax* 20(3): 168-187.
- Barla, Josef (2016): "Technologies of failure, bodies of resistance: science, technology, and the mechanics of materializing marked bodies". In Victoria Pitts-Taylor (Ed.), *Mattering: Feminism, Science and Materialism*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 159-172.
- Barla, Josef (2021): "Beyond reflexivity and representation: Diffraction as a methodological sensitivity in science studies", *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, DOI: 10.1080/1600910X.2021.1934506.
- Code, Lorraine (1981): "Is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant?", *Metaphilosophy* 12 (3/4): 267-276.
- Haraway, Donna (2019): "It Mattes What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories", *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/08989575.2019.1664163.
- Harding, Sandra (1993): "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity'?" In: Linda Alcoff und Elizabeth Potter (Eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 49-82.
- Longino, Helen (1990): *Science as Social Knowledge. Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter: "Values and objectivity", pp. 62-82.
- Merrick, Helen (2010): "Science Stories, Life Stories: Engaging the Sciences Through Feminist Science Fiction", *Women's Studies International Forum* 33: 141-148.
- Murphy, Michelle (2012): *Seizing the Means of Reproduction. Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*, Durham and London: Duke University Press. Chapter: "Immodest Witnessing, Affective Economies, and Objectivity", pp. 68-101.
- Roberts, Dorothy E. (2009): "Race, gender, and genetic technologies: A new reproductive dystopia?", *Signs* 34 (4): 783-804.
- Schiebinger, Londa (1993): "Why mammals are called mammals: Gender politics in eighteenth-century natural history", *The American Historical Review* 98 (2): 382-411.
- Schrader, Astrid (2010): "Responding to *Pfiesteria piscicida* (the Fish Killer): Phantomic Ontologies, Indeterminacy, and Responsibility in Toxic Microbiology", *Social Studies of Science* 40(2): 275-306.
- Singer, Mona (2008): "Feministische Wissenschaftskritik und Epistemologie: Voraussetzungen, Positionen, Perspektiven". In: Ruth Becker and Beate Kortendiek (Eds.), *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung*, Wiesbaden: VS Springer, pp. 285-294.
- Subramaniam, Banu (2014): *Ghost Stories for Darwin. The Science of Variation and the Politics of Diversity*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press. Chapter: "The Emperor's New Clothes. Revisiting the Question of Women in the Sciences", pp. 200-222.
- Subramaniam, Banu & Angela Willey (Eds.) (2017): Science Out of Feminist Theory Part One: Feminism's Sciences, special issue of *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 3(1): 1-23.
- Tsing, Anna L. (2015): *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 11-43 & 267-274.