Every PhD thesis needs to explicitly grapple with issues of theory and methods. This PhD course grabs the bull by the horns and challenges participants to seriously engage with foundational problems in history. The aim of the course is to facilitate thorough discussions on a broad range of theoretical and methodological problems, including scientific theory and ethical issues. Topics will change from year to year, and the course will introduce current debates in international historiography in relation to them. This year the candidates are challenged to grapple with digital humanities through workshop and discussions.

The course has a core syllabus that all participants are expected to have read and reflected upon before the course begins. There will be additional recommended reading lists on issues related to and beyond those dealt with in the course.

The course will be conducted in English or Scandinavian, depending on the language skills of the participating PhD students. The students are expected to contribute actively in all parts of the course.

Program on the next page.
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<th>Time</th>
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<td>12:00-13:15</td>
<td>Lunch with ‘Walk and talk’</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>12:00: Ruth Hemstad - &quot;Nordiske Riger&quot; og &quot;Skandinaviske Symphatier&quot;: Begrepsendring og adjektivhistorie belyst gjennom digital fjern- og nærlesing</td>
<td>Lunch with ‘Walk and talk’</td>
<td>Concluding session</td>
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14:15-15

Lecture: Carolyn Biltoft, «Medusa’s eternal recurrence: history, myth and the world horizon»

Seminar 2: «Writing Methodology» by Carolyn Biltoft, Graduate Institute Geneva

Cont.

Cont.

Essay seminar

Dinner at restaurant 16:15

Dinner at restaurant 18:00

Mandatory writing:

**Essay:** The essay of 6-8 pages should discuss a methodological and/or theoretical problem. The specific problem shall be clearly identified and be the center of the discussion. The essay should be analytically advanced and situated in the relevant literature, with full references. Please note that it should be shaped as a standalone piece, and that a draft introduction for your PhD will not be acceptable. The draft essay will be discussed as part of the course, and each participant will serve as a main commentator for one essay as will one of the teachers. The essay should be uploaded to the learning platform three weeks before the workshop. After the course, the essay is to be revised and resubmitted. Revised essays must be resubmitted by April 1st. The grading will be pass/fail.

**Reading responses:** appr. ½-1 page reading response for each of the seminars. The response should be uploaded to the relevant seminar folder at the latest 1 week prior to the workshop. You are expected to make one or a set of observations that you think are worth taking particularly note of, building on the readings provided for that particular seminar. If relevant, include one paragraph where you this observation in the context of your own project. The teachers may refer to and show submitted reading responses in full or in part during their seminar.

On the modules:

« How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Theory» by Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, UiO

What is historical theory? How is it different from a theory or philosophy of history? And who needs theory when the facts can speak for themselves? Focusing specifically on social theory, this lecture looks at what role theory plays in history writing and research. Looking beyond what is regarded in the discipline as the empiricism/theory dichotomy, the lecture
refamiliarizes the idea of theory by looking at some of the theories and concepts commonly taken for granted by historians. It further looks at how such assumptions influence both the selection and interpretation of facts. On the other side of this issue, several questions then arise: how does one link facts to theory without subordinating the former to the latter? What constitutes the starting point for thinking theoretically about one’s own work? And what relationship do sources, concepts, and theories have to each other? The lecture addresses these questions by looking at a text that crosses the disciplinary boundaries of history and the social sciences (Mitchell). The lecture concludes by looking at some of the methodological implications historical theory has for understanding the formation of an archive and for archival research.

Required reading:
https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article/120/3/884/19860

Suggested readings:

«Medusa’s eternal recurrence: history, myth and the world horizon» by Carolyn Biltoft,

Every historical narrative is by its nature an act of re-telling, an interpretive reiteration of that which had already been uttered or recorded. Moving away from the mere idea of history as myth in the sense so often associated with the concept of “invented traditions,” this paper
attempts to think more broadly about the parallels between the meaning-making role of mythology and the narrative work of especially world or global history. First, the paper unfolds as a critical survey of the appearance of the figure of Medusa in a range of nineteenth and twentieth century texts and images—from the works of Sigmund Freud, to the Sicilian flag, to the Versace logo. In exploring the historical conditions surrounding the “Medusa’s” recurrence in diverse and indeed global contexts, the paper suggests that we might find a fertile parallel for rethinking how historians first excavate and then re-narrate the past. What do we learn from the many ways that the figure of Medusa has returned as a sign of eroticism, excite, fear or disdain? This is a particularly useful exercise precisely if we are to fully interrogate how and to what extent contemporary political narrative arcs, tropes, and metaphors influence historians’ relationship to the “sources” and the stories that they set out to retell. Finally, the paper concludes by suggesting that the recurrence and reinterpretation of specifically mythological metaphors provides a non-linear and much longer-term modality for reconsidering world historians desire to make sense of the “whole” of human history.

Required reading:

Suggested readings:

"The Strength of Tradition", by Erik Opsahl, NTNU

"Within every scholarly discipline there is a solid system of knowledge which has been inherited from earlier research and which, after several generations of scholars have passed, has come to consist of self-evident truths whose premises are no longer debated or doubted. This basis of knowledge is disseminated, elaborated and cemented through teaching, books, scholarly journals and conferences; and it gradually becomes the property of a scholarly community and eventually becomes a scholarly tradition". These words are relevant in relation to research into Norwegian agrarian premodern history, it has been argued. Together we will discuss how accurate this description is for the actual historiographic tradition, and then whether you are able to uncover features of similar traditions in your field of research.

Required reading:
Helge Salvesen: "The Strength of Tradition. A historiographical analysis of research into Norwegian agrarian history during the late middle ages and the early modern period", Scandinavian Journal of History, 1982, pp.75-133

Suggested readings:
John Aberth, Contesting the Middle Ages. Debates that are changing our Narrative of Medieval History. Routledge, London 2019, Chapter 8 "Ashes to Ashes, we all fall down, pp. 243-315."
Together we will both discuss common blocks to and solutions for writing often, effectively and even sometimes beautifully as scholars. In the first half of the session we will discuss the anatomy of “writers block” and create solutions for tackling it when it happens. In the second section we will learn how to map and emulate scholarly writing that we admire.

Part I What is Writer’s Block?

Required reading:

Part II: “Mapping” Practices

This section will not have reading but rather asks that the students bring a piece of scholarly writing (article, book chapter) that they admire. Together we will learn how to “map” other scholars’ work as a kind of writing practice. We will also discuss concrete techniques for organizing one’s research, creating rough drafts, and working on the structure and flow of an argument.

“Making space: maps as a source in historical research” by Erling Sandmo of the Norwegian National Library and UiO

Maps are immediately recognized as representations of the real, but they are also obviously contested sites, where world views, imperial gazes and assemblages of local knowledges are merged and hidden. The study of maps may therefore open interesting perspectives on histories of power, knowledge, and science. They may also serve as intakes to a discussion of historical ontology: mapping has always been about the representation of the real – but reality is historical, and the ontology of space is closely intertwined with the ontology of time, our domain as historians. Using examples from the history of cartography, this seminar will zoom in on specific maps and their possible interpretations and importance as intakes to basic categories of knowledge. It will also bring up a series of recent historiographical “turns”: material, visual and spatial.

Mandatory reading:
Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias (1967/1984)

Recommended reading:
David Turnbull, Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe: Mapping the Construction of Knowledge Spaces, Imago Mundi 48 (1996), pp. 5-24
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1151257.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab52d789b5318b7ba28f991e58158778a
Digital history proficiency workshop, Norwegian National Library

What does the digital shift mean for historians? This workshop explores some of the key questions historians encounter when we start using digital tools to answer historical questions. It will also provide training in using digital source materials. Participants are welcomed to join a workshop led by the National Library in Oslo who will provide a look into their own digital collection that holds archival material from the medieval until today. Introductory lectures will discuss some of the ethical, historical and methodological key issues in Digital Humanities (DH).

- What opportunities and problems arise with the digitalization of sources? How do tools and programs affect the questions historians ask? Is there anything in the algorithms that make some knowledge or some analyses unintelligible or opaque?
- We will also historicize the phenomenon. What is the history of Digital Humanities? Who were the actors that brought us here? Could it have been different? Should it?
- Furthermore, are there any particular ethical issues that arise or become more acute when historical materials are digitized?

In addition, on the following day at Blindern, PhD-candidate Alexandre Simon-Ekeland will give a seminar with examples of how he uses OCR in his own project.

Required reading:
- Eivind Røssaak: "Når nasjonens hukommelse digitaliseres: Kulturens ubevisste vender tilbake", Mediehistorisk tidsskrift, nr. 2, 2018, s. 22-41:
- Frode Boasson og Anders Skare Malvik: "Digital humaniora, mediehistorie og litterære subjektivitetstruktur: Om forholdet mellom norsk litteratur og utviklingen av den kommersielle pressen 1855-1900 i et DH-perspektiv", Norsk litteraturvitenskapelig tidsskrift, 2, 2019 (årg. 22), s. 146-167:
  https://www.idunn.no/nlvt/2019/02/digital_humaniora_mediehistorie_og_litteraere_subjektivitet
- Matthew Wilkens, "Digital Humanities and Its Application in the Study of Literature and Culture", Comparative Literature 67:1, s. 11-20 (vedlagt)

«The Epistemology of History» by Svein Atle Skålevåg, of the University of Bergen

What kind of knowledge does history provide? Does it provide knowledge of a specific object, i.e. History? Or does it rather provide knowledge distinguished by being acquired in a specific manner, or following a specific methodology? Or does it study objects in a certain perspective (i.e. how object are situated in a specific time)? The historicist answer to these questions was that history was the scientific study of History, and that it was characterised by a certain method, source criticism. This constituted the epistemology of history in the late 19th and early 20th century. The assumption that there is such thing as History was challenged openly in the second half of the 20th century. Though it lingers on as a regulatory
idea, few will today defend the idea of history as an epistemic object. But it remains debatable what kind of discipline history is after historicism.

**Required reading:**
Kjøbenhavn 1911.

Kristian Erslev “Historieskrivning. Grundlinier til nogle kapitler af historiens theori»

**Additional reading:**
Paul Veyne: “Foucault revolutionizes history.” In Arnold Davidson et al *Foucault and his interlocutors* (1997)

*«Numbers in history. History in Numbers»* by Camilla Brautaset, UiB.

When, where and why did quantification and statistical thinking become a widespread practice? How has quantitative sources, theories and methodologies influenced history as a discipline in general, and economic history in particular? In this seminar we will discuss numbers and history. We will discuss quantification as a practice and the rise of statistical thinking in the 19th century, but emphasis will be placed on the deployment of statistical sources and approaches in history writing in general and in economic history in particular in the 1960s and 1970s. What has happened to quantitative history writing since? Underpinning this discussion is the larger question if and if so, how, sources and methodology define disciplines?

**Required reading:**

**Recommended reading:**