S-113 – Knowledge in Displacement: Emigration and Exile in the History of Mid-Twentieth-Century Science

Organizers:
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Abstract:
Understanding the economy of scientific production in its global dimensions has become a priority for scholars in our field. In order to join efforts to rethink the history of science outside of national(ist) frameworks, this two-session symposium invites reappraisal of a key moment in the formation of transnational scientific networks: the emigration (and remigration) of European scientists to the Americas in the decades surrounding World War II.

The outsized contribution of émigré scientists in the development of physics during and after the War is already well established. But what about other fields? Our symposium’s focus will be on those areas of research which were conceptualized or institutionalized as sciences largely in this time period, including the cultural, human and life sciences. Our goal is to understand how migration changed the concept of science itself, and to explore its complex (and sometimes conflictual) relation to the formation of a Cold War rationality that extended quantitative and/or positivist methodologies beyond the physical sciences. In so doing, we also seek to raise questions of broad relevance to a transnational history of science: How does the position of emigrant, foreigner, exile, or refugee structure scientific interests, strategies, and productions? What are the conditions of possibility—or failure—for the transplantation, translation, and refashioning of the émigré scientist? And how can we understand and theorize the relation between the uprooting of people and of scientific paradigms, between cultural estrangement and scientific creativity?

We invite contributions investigating the linguistic, cultural, economic, institutional, and/or political aspects of the scientific life in displacement as they relate to the process of disciplinary formation during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Proposals on émigré historians or philosophers of science will be considered alongside those on the cultural, social, or life sciences. We are particularly interested in papers reflecting upon the ways in which this particular moment in the history of scientific emigration helps us rethink scientific emigration in other times and places, e.g. displacements between colonial centers and peripheries, between privileged and impoverished systems of research and higher education, or between war-torn and (temporarily) secured areas of the world.

In addition to our own two papers, we expect to receive four proposals respectively devoted to Vilém Flusser in Brazil and the formation of media & communication science; Lévi-Strauss in Brazil and the US, and the relations between anthropology & information science; Wassily Leontief in the US and the economic sciences; and Edgar Wind in the US and the concept of a science of culture. The symposium is open to further contributions. We have written the description in the form of a call for proposals in the hopes of inviting 2-4 extra speakers, depending on how many expected participants eventually confirm.
Keywords: Transatlantic Scientific Migrations – Disciplinary Formation – Social and Human Sciences – Medicine and Life Sciences – 20th century.

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