

S-110 – Cosmopolitanism and the Local in Science and Nature

Organizers:

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Abstract:

Science, and its associated technologies, is typically viewed as “universal”. At the same time we were also assured that science can trace its genealogy to Europe in a period of rising European intellectual and imperial global force, ‘going outwards’ towards the periphery. As such, it is strikingly parochial. In a kind of sad irony, the ‘subaltern’ was left to retell that tale as one of centre-universalism dominating a traditionalist periphery. Self-described ‘modernity’ and ‘the west’ (two intertwined concepts of recent and mutually self-supporting origin) have erased much of the local engagement and as such represent science as emerging *sui generis*, moving in one direction. This story is now being challenged within sociology, political theory and history. History of science has opened possibilities for the critique by exploring the local, material cultures and translations as a way of moving knowledge about. Significantly, scholars who study the history of science in Asia and India have been examining different trajectories for the origin and meaning of science. It is now time for a dialogue between these approaches. Grounding the dialogue is the notion of a “cosmopolitical” science. “Cosmopolitics” is a term borrowed from Kant’s notion of perpetual peace and modern civil society, imagining shared political, moral and economic spaces within which trade, politics and reason get conducted. This symposium will allow us to deepen an international dialogue in order to study this important notion of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and its multivocal encounters, situating it in the histories and structure of globalized exchange. This two-part symposium addresses the sites of “cosmopolitanism” and their relation to the local, critically examining the notion of “cosmopolitan science” and what it might bring to the understanding of the movement of knowledge.

1. Science, Cosmopolitanism and Knowledge Circulation: concepts and problems

Science, technology and the study of nature have long been a product and byproduct of exchange, translation and circulation, locally and internationally. This so-called ‘cosmopolitan’ view of science mitigates both our notions of *prima facie* univocal universalism and the centre/periphery models of dissemination and hegemony. The first half of the symposium will be engaging this turn to “cosmopolitanism”, triangulating the new historiography of science with that of attempts to rescue different trajectories in the origins of globalised science. Centering on selected case studies, we will explore the theoretical issue of “cosmopolitanism” in science by following the movement of ideas, persons and things.

2. Globalization and its miscontents: science studies and cosmopolitanism

This section will discuss the troubles with cosmopolitanism and the relationship to the local – how universalism, globalization and the particular may complicate our categories of “cosmopolitan science”.

Keywords: Global – Cosmopolitanism – Circulation – Asian science – European science.

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