



Motions of Knowledge – Knowledge in Motion Conceptualizing “Knowledge Circulation” for Historical Research

**15th Annual Graduate Conference in European History (GRACEH), to be held at the
University of Vienna, April 7–9 2021**

Currently, knowledge and the status of knowledge are increasingly being contested in discourses outside academia, for example through the circulation of so-called alternative facts on social media and by leading political figures. History of Knowledge has appeared as a field of research in the 2000s which is not only concerned with knowledge as a “product” and the question whether certain forms of knowledge are “true” or “false”, “good” or “bad”, “useful” or “useless”. Instead, its interest lies with the actors, practices and processes that revolve around and constitute knowledge. In contrast to the more traditional History of Science, the New History of Knowledge asks how, when, and possibly why a certain type of knowledge appears, disappears, and further, what effects it has, in which contexts it functions and who its carriers are (Sarasin 2011, 165).

In accordance with this new approach, we refer to Philipp Sarasin when defining knowledge as an intrinsically historical phenomenon: It circulates between people, groups and institutions and constantly evolves, changes and realizes anew (Sarasin 2011, 166). The New History of Knowledge perceives knowledge as a form of communicative action, of which circulation is a constitutive feature (Secord 2004, 661). Within this dynamic and circular exchange (Kreuder-Sonnen 2018, 14), knowledge is constantly created, mobilized and transformed. While transfer is usually seen as a unidimensional form of exchange, a circular approach implies that knowledge is distributed in all directions, different fields and various societal contexts. Even so, it is important to note that knowledge does not spread freely; it is not equally accessible to all nor evenly distributed (Sarasin 2011, 164; Östling et al. 2018, 18).

Thus, the “circulation of knowledge” as a concept brings together heterogeneous actors, spatialities, practices, systems as well as orders of knowledge, which provides the opportunity to reconceptualize established spatial, chronological, social and cultural categories (Raj 2007). Furthermore, this concept enables us to detect dynamic movement between often overlooked actors, places and social settings - even in asymmetrical power relations (Kreuder-Sonnen 2018, 13).

Therefore, this conference will be centered around the four following analytical aspects of “knowledge circulation”, which are themselves intrinsically entangled: (1) actors of knowledge, (2) mediality and materiality of knowledge, (3) spatiality of knowledge and (4) power relations and knowledge production. The aim of this conference is to discuss various analytical dimensions of the “circulation of knowledge”, their potential and possible limitations for historical research. The

theme of the conference allows us to welcome a wide range of topics, which are not limited to European history. Papers could revolve around the following analytical questions:

1. Actors of Knowledge

Central to this dimension is a broad perception of what actors might be. We consider actors involved in “the circulation of knowledge” as numerous and diverse which also includes non-human actors as most prominently formulated by Bruno Latour.

- Who are the various actors involved in knowledge production and what are their key tasks and functions?
- Which roles do untypical protagonists such as objects, immobile actors, “go-betweens” (Raj 2016), and frequently overlooked actors play in the circular production of knowledge?

2. Mediality and Materiality of Knowledge

Approaching the "circulation of knowledge" from a discursive perspective and with regard to the "practical turn" in the History of Knowledge, contributions could engage in the discussion of the following questions:

- How do different cognitive, technical and media practices sustain, reinforce and stabilise knowledge? And how does a circular approach to the study of knowledge production contribute to analysing these processes?
- In which media is knowledge stored, transported and displayed and how can these media be understood as sites of “knowledge circulation”?

3. Spatiality of Knowledge

Knowledge is always spatially, chronologically, and socially situated. Nevertheless, local knowledge is never created in isolation but rather continually formed in processes of interaction and connection with other settings. Here, we are interested in contributions that tackle the analytical challenge of identifying local practices without losing sight of their wider interconnections:

- How can we identify the multiple sites of knowledge production? How do physical, social, cultural and ideological boundaries impact the circular production of knowledge? And how can we identify the transgressive potentials of knowledge movement through a circular approach?
- How does “the circulation of knowledge” challenge established spatial categories such as centre and periphery, locality and globality?

4. Power Relations and Knowledge Production

The process of circulation provides all actors with agency - to a different extent. It therefore becomes useful in identifying power relations and hierarchies. Even though the movement of knowledge transcends boundaries, access to and control of knowledge is always contested. We therefore encourage contributors to take those political dimensions into account.

- Where, when and by whom is knowledge produced and recognized? How are subaltern or alternative forms of knowledge formulated and how do they challenge and contest established systems of knowledge? How can “the circulation of knowledge” be used to analyse asymmetrical power relations, e.g. by race, class and gender inequalities?
- In which contexts can the concept of "knowledge circulation" also be used to uncover possibilities of empowerment and negotiation?
- How do these conflicting discourses and knowledge systems contribute to discursive change within the process of knowledge production?

General information:

Note on **COVID-19**: We plan to inform selected participants by the end of January 2021 to allow enough time for travel planning. We follow the situation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic closely. At the moment, we plan an on-site event but are happy to work with participants who cannot travel to Vienna or prefer presenting online. If the circumstances advise it, the conference will be held online.

Paper abstracts (up to 300 words) and a brief biography (up to 100 words) should be submitted via email by 13th of December 2020 (graceh2021.hist@univie.ac.at). **Please indicate in your application if you would prefer participating at the on-site event or if you would rather participate online.** You will hear back from us by the end of January 2021.

There are no conference fees. Financial aid might be available for PhDs without institutional funding. **Please indicate in your email in case you need funding.** There will be more information on funding opportunities in winter.

If you have questions, you can get in touch with the organizational team here: graceh2021.hist@univie.ac.at or visit our homepage (<https://graceh2021.wordpress.com/>) for more information.

Selected literature:

Kreuder-Sonnen, Katharina. *Wie man Mikroben auf die Reise schickt. Zirkulierendes bakteriologisches Wissen und die polnische Medizin 1885-1939* (Tübingen 2018).

Latour, Bruno. *Eine neue Soziologie für eine neue Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 2007).

Östling, Johan/Larsson Heidenblad, David/ Sandmo, Erling/ Nilsson Hammar, Anna/ Nordberg, Kari. *The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction*. In: Östling, Johan/Larsson Heidenblad, David/ Sandmo, Erling/ Nilsson Hammar, Anna/ Nordberg, Kari (Eds.). *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund 2018), 9-33.

Raj, Kapil. *Go-Betweens, Travelers, and Cultural Translators*. In: Lightman, Bernard. *A Companion to the History of Science* (West Sussex 2016), 39-57.

Raj, Kapil. *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900* (Basingstoke/New York 2007).

Sarasin, Philipp. *Was ist Wissensgeschichte?* In: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2011), 159-172.

Secord, James A. *Knowledge in Transit*. In: *Isis*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (2004), 654-672.