

# CEFRES PLATFORM LECTURES

WOLF FEUERHAHN



## SEMANTICS IN A TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF 'MILIEU'

**Wolf Feuerhahn** is a CNRS researcher, co-director of the Alexandre Koyré Center and the editor-in-chief of *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*.

Transnational History is nowadays a flourishing field of research. In the last ten years, history of concepts has been impacted by this historiographical turn. It lays much more focus than before on problems of transnational and transcultural resemantization of concepts. The emergence and success of new expressions like 'traveling concepts' (Mieke Bal), 'nomadic concepts' (Olivier Christin) are a good indicator of this situation.

I suggest to go a step further in this direction. My methodological proposition will be based on the transnational history of the term *milieu*. Traveling from France to Germany, from history of literature to biology and sociology, the word *milieu* came to be identified as a French theory. It was seen as an expression of determinism, of the connection between the rise of the natural sciences and the rise of socialism. Coining the term *Umwelt* in strict opposition to the French word, the vast majority of German academics rejected it. But *Umwelt* was precisely retranslated into French as *milieu*, becoming the flag of an antideterminist and postmodern philosophy (Deleuze).

Through this case study, I would like to promote what I would term "transnational historical semantics" as opposed to the Koselleckian history of concepts and its *a priori* distinctions between words and concepts, and to reflect on how words are semantically affected by their transnational and crossdisciplinary destiny

Language: English.

Where & When: Národní 18, Prague 1, 7th floor; 19 April, 4:30-6:30 PM.

### FOR ALL INFORMATION

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