

Shadows of Knowledge: Capitalism and the Creation of Ignorance

9th June 2023

Badia Fiesolana, Room Emeroteca

Presentation:

Current and past scandals in the areas of health and the environment have revealed troubling connections between private companies and the governmental institutions that make our public policy. There are a wealth of examples from which to choose. For decades, consumers and workers have been exposed to pesticides containing glyphosate (now known to be a probable carcinogen). PFAS, a class of “persistent contaminants” that are produced during petrochemical industrial process, have polluted rivers and groundwater in both Europe and the United States for decades. And most recently, there has been a concerning lack of transparency between corporations involved in rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine and the European commission.

Many scholars have addressed conflicts of interest between government and business and the lobbying of public institutions. However, a groundbreaking field called ‘agnotology’ has recently emerged allowing scholars in history, political science, law and economy, a fresh lens to address these problems. Deriving from the classical Greek word agnōsis, ‘not knowing’, agnotology describes not simply ignorance, but rather both the calculated and uncalculated structural production of unknowledge. Lack of knowledge has always been a structural issue for both citizens and civil society. Agnotology unveils how ignorance, instead of knowledge, is produced by intricate power relationships between science, politics and economic actors.

This issue goes beyond the environmental health problems, and concerns many topics such as military secrecy, security, discrimination, domestic violence, occupational health, to name but a few. This workshop allows some of the main names in the field of agnotology to discuss recent and innovative work in an interdisciplinary dialogue. The speakers will address the ways in which shadows of knowledge are shaping how we address, or fail to address, some of the most urgent problems of our time.

Programme

8:30-9:00 - Welcome coffee

9:00-9:15 - Opening remarks: Valentin Thomas & Deirdre Moore (European University Institute)

9:15-11:00 – Panel I: Ignorance as a Tool of Governance

"The Contentious Politics of Expertise in the Covid-19 Crisis: Social Mobilizations and Scientific Controversies in Italy and France", Riccardo Emilio Chesta (Polytechnic University of Milan)

"*War Mosaics: Mobilising Non-Knowledge in and of Security Assistance*", Simone Tholens (European University Institute)

"Anti-Epistemology : Ignorance by Law", Peter Galison (Harvard University) - Recorded talk

"Legacies of Intentional and Organizational Ignorance in the Case of PFAS and the U.S. Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)", Lauren Richter (University of Toronto)

Discussant: Gaby Umbach (European University Institute)

Chair: Valentin Thomas (European University Institute)

11:00 - 11:30 – Coffee Break

11:30 - 12:30 – **Keynote:** "Scientific Knowledge, Ignorance and Non-Problems: Attempting to Quantify Environmental and Occupational Cancers" Emmanuel Henry (Université Paris-Dauphine-PSL*)

Moderator: Marcus Immonen Hagley (EUI)

12:30 - 14:00 – Lunch break

14:00 – 16:00 – Panel II: Ignorance Known and Unknown in the Living Environment

"The Art of Unnoticing: Risk Perception and Contrived Ignorance in China", Loretta Lou
(Durham University)

"Weaponized Uncertainty: How the Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Recovered on Paper
(and not in the water)", Aaron Van Neste (Harvard University) - remotely

"From Japanese Cherry Trees to Japanese Beetles: Agnotology, Race, and Migration",
Jeannie Shinozuka (Soka University of America)

"Agnotology of a Dessicated Tree: Phytopathological Knowledge and Non-Knowledge in
the Case of 'Xylella' in Puglia", Christian Colella (CNR-IREA)

Discussant: Deirdre Moore (European University Institute)

Chair: Alice Pearson (European University Institute)

16:00 – 16:30: Coffee Break

16:30-17:30 – Keynote: "Chemical Passports: Environmental Science, Information,
and Regulation in the Trade of Toxic Substances" Angela N.H. Creager (Princeton
University)

Moderator: Emma Kluge (EUI)

17:30: Concluding remarks, Deirdre Moore and Valentin Thomas (EUI)

Organizing committee (EUI-MWP): Valentin Thomas, Deirdre Moore, Tomás
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