

Call for Papers: Funding bodies and late modern science

Utrecht University, Cultural History Research Group and Descartes Centre, 30 November – 1 December 2017

In his *The Scientific Life. A Late Modern Vocation* Steven Shapin addresses the status of the late modern scientist. On the one hand, we have an image of modernized and rationalized science: there is an impersonal, universal scientific method that has made science an object of planning as much as any other domain of modern society: “The full expression of the rule of rule over spontaneity is found in the confidence that the production of truth can be not just rationally organized but effectively planned.” (p.10) In this image of science it is of no importance who the scientist is: s/he is just an executor who is ‘morally equivalent’. At the same time, however, Shapin shows us that in late modern technoscience supposedly “premodern resources” like personal virtue, familiarity, and charisma have become all the more important in the production and spread of scientific knowledge and technologies. “Late modernity proliferates uncertainties”, Shapin argues, “and it is in the quotidian management of those uncertainties that the personal, the familiar, and the charismatic flourish.” (p.5).

Whereas Shapin focuses on industrial research – *en passant* questioning many of the supposed differences between science in industry and academia – we want to turn to a defining institution of academic research that displays similar tensions: **the funding body**. In recent years, these agencies have received much criticism, as they would have installed an *audit culture* in science: a culture of accountability with anonymised protocols, standardized application procedures and cycles of quality control, that are part of the present-day system of competitive research funding. Funding bodies, in short, seem illustrative of the organized *distrust* that would be typical of late modern institutions. Yet, it can easily be argued that *trust* remains very much central to the workings of funding bodies. The judgement of applications, for one, is often a process of personal interaction. In fact, following Shapin, we might postulate that in the organization of competitive research funding in late modernity a supposedly premodern resource like trust has become all the more important in the distribution of funds and management of careers.

In this mini-conference we want to explore the tension between distrust and trust, between the procedural and personal, in funding modes. Our central questions are how funding bodies have developed over time; how they have reconfigured “*who truth-speakers are* in late modernity” (p.6); and how this has changed (techno)scientific practices over the course of the twentieth century.

Contributions are expected to take funding bodies as their starting point, but can address many different aspects of the practice of science: the formation of disciplines, the development of scientific *personae*, the changing role of valorization and societal relevance of science, changing forms of science policy, the practice of application and grant-giving, et cetera.

Confirmed speakers are Steve Fuller (Warwick), Kirsti Niskanen (Stockholm), Laura Stark (Vanderbilt), Mark Solovey (Toronto), Ludovic Tournès (Geneva), Melinda Baldwin (Washington). In addition, we welcome submissions for twenty-minute paper presentations relating to the topics mentioned above. Abstracts of 300 words should be submitted by 15 June 2017 and can be sent to Pieter Huistra at p.a.huistra@uu.nl or Noortje Jacobs at Noortje.jacobs@maastrichtuniversity.nl. A selection of the papers will be published in a special issue of the *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*.

The conference will take place at Utrecht University and is co-organized by the [Cultural History Research Group](#) and the [Descartes Centre for the History and Philosophy of Science](#). There will be no conference fee. Lunches and a conference dinner will be offered to all speakers at no cost. Participants will be responsible, however, for their own accommodation costs.