Netherlands Graduate School of Science, Technology, and Modern Culture (WTMC)
Summer School 2010

Observing Experts Observing, with Michael E. Lynch

Soeterbeeck, Ravenstein, The Netherlands, 16-20 August 2010

Experts are everywhere in our techno scientific societies. They are crucial in legal proceedings, where forensic experts read traces at crime scenes or explain the reliability of evidence brought before a judge. They advise governments on what to do about crises, from epidemics, to oil spills, or stock market crashes. We also consult experts in our everyday life, when we visit doctors or mortgage advisers. In many areas of modern life, we rely on experts to inform our decisions. For several decades, social scientists have signalled a decline in expert authority. Allegedly, experts are no longer just trusted at face value, but have to substantiate credentials and are expected to explain the reasoning and evidence that underpins their assessments.

Forensic experts have found ways to fortify the 'chain of evidence' from crime scene to court, medical doctors are learning to cope with detailed questions from informed patients, and climate scientists have to explain the proceedings of their expert panels in detail. In public performances, such as in court or on TV, experts have to play their role carefully –often prepared through media training or moot courts. They must perform their expertise: claim and demarcate their domain of authority, defend or redefine it when challenged, and be careful about what they claim. It seems that the growing importance of experts has also made their role more complex and difficult.

All of these phenomena are a cornucopia for Science and Technology Studies (STS). As experts observe and comment on fingerprints, the early signs of imminent disaster, or diagnose the traces of past mishaps, we in turn study the experts and try to unravel their performances: we observe experts as they observe and explain the world. Some of us even become experts ourselves, as STS scholars in turn testify on the nature of expertise or comment on the role of science and technology.

To guide us through these issues, the 2010 WTMC summer school will rely on the expertise of Michael E. Lynch, our anchor teacher this year. Michael Lynch is professor at the Cornell STS department, current editor of Social Studies of Science, and has been a prominent STS researcher for decades. Experts and their performances have been central in his work, but from his vantage point he will also be able to help us find our way in the field of STS more in general. As is customary for the WTMC summer schools, the programme will also consist of additional guest lectures and extensive skill-training activities, among which ethnographic research will be a central focus this year.

This event is specifically intended for researchers working on a PhD in Science and Technology Studies, history of technology, or related fields. Priority is given to members of the Netherlands Research School of Science, Technology and Modern Culture (WTMC) in the registration for this workshop. The precise programme will be finalised shortly after the registration ends, to accommodate presentations by participants.

The preparation work for this even is estimated at about 80 hours of study. Completion of this Summer School is granted with 5ECTS.

The registration form for the workshop is available online at
http://www.mb.utwente.nl/steps/forms/wtmc_summer_school_2010.doc/

Please register by 30 May 2010