
GP 7: Vortrag Krige

Time: Tuesday 18:00–18:45

Location: H1

Special Talk

GP 7.1 Tue 18:00 H1

Invisible Hands, Invaluable Assets — •JOHN KRIGE — Kranzberg Professor, School of History Technology, and Society at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA 30332-0345

The reward system of science, and our culture's enthusiastic valorization of individual achievement, mean that a high premium is placed on the discoveries of great men and women. The history of science, mimicking the prevailing norms of the social system, and often depending on leading scientists for their intellectual cooperation and institutional support, tends to reinforce this view of how knowledge is produced. And understandably so, for the sciences, and physics in particular, have attracted some of the greatest minds of all time whose outstanding contributions to our understanding of nature deserve to be recorded.

Nevertheless, at least in the experimental domain, and with in-

creasing importance after World War II, these individual achievements would not have been possible without the assistance of skilled and highly competent technicians, whose practical knowledge of the material world and how to manipulate it provided an essential platform on which cutting-edge research was made. These technicians and virtuosi in the mechanical arts are the silent and formally unrecognized participants in laboratory life whose contributions, even if appreciated, are seldom celebrated, nor usually traced in the historical record. To give them their voice is not only to recognize their contributions to science but also to reconfigure our understanding of the conditions of the possibility of scientific innovation and successful scientific achievement. Drawing on a number of case studies in physics and related fields this paper will throw light on the contributions of the otherwise invisible hands whose activities have been overshadowed by the brilliance of the men and women who have made major contributions to the advance of scientific knowledge.