

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Desire For Method in Early Modern Europe

Princeton and NYU, 25-26 October 2018

Peter Mack (University of Warwick)

Brian Ogilvie (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

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“... that which we take for true being is actually a method.”

Edmund Husserl

The desire for method shaped the culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Method's importance to early modernity can be felt in proportion to its variety, as there was not one method but several. While the subject has long been a focal point for historians of science, methods are found in many renaissance arts, including grammar, logic and rhetoric; poetry, history and philosophy; and theology, politics and ethics. What were these methods, and why were they held in such high social and cultural esteem? Which methods—e.g., Lullist, Ramist, Jesuit—affected which areas of inquiry, and how? To what extent were the fundamental achievements of the period—such as humanist pedagogy, popular drama and vernacular devotion—results of methodization, or reactions against it?

We ask participants to question the methods of early moderns at a time when scholars across the humanities are reconsidering their own, and we therefore seek to turn this questioning on scholarship itself. How has method altered the historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What are the fates of various methods—e.g., philological, comparative, formalist, contextualist and Marxist—that have been important to the field? What problems in the field remain to be solved, and which methods may help us address them?

Possible topics:

Ramism and the transformation of rhetoric and dialectic;
Perspective in the visual arts and methods of representation;
Analytic geometry and the mathematization of nature;
Printing and its influence on literary and philosophical culture;
Reformation and debates over biblical hermeneutics;
Spiritual exercises and literary genres of meditation;
Baconianism and the invention of experimental philosophy;
Pedagogy and its influence on politics and religion;
The emergence of historical scholarship;
Crypsis, secrecy, and insinuating methods;
Lullism and esoteric speculation;
Encyclopedias and the systematization of knowledge.

Key words: method, desire, logic, rhetoric, poetry, philosophy, theology, Reformation, biblical hermeneutics, pedagogy and perspective.

This conference is designed to promote engagement between graduate students and professors across disciplines, and it will commence with a workshop for all participants that will discuss the question of method in recent scholarship. Presenters are invited to the conference dinner, hosted by Princeton and NYU. A small number of graduate student bursaries will be available for students traveling long distances to attend the conference.

Please submit 350 word proposals for 15 min papers and a CV to desireformethod@gmail.com by September 1, 2018. All papers must be submitted in full by October 11 to allow time for faculty responses at the conference.

The Desire for Method is funded by the Department of English, MARC, and Gallatin School of Individualized Study at NYU, and by the Department of English and the Graduate School at Princeton. This conference is convened by Ruby Lowe (NYU), Orlando Reade (Princeton) and Matthew Rickard (Princeton).