Ingrid Kloosterman

An Institutionalised ‘Fremdkörper’

Seven Stages of Academic Parapsychology in the Netherlands

1 Why so marginal?

The history of Dutch academic parapsychology is particularly rich. Ever since the 1920s and as far as to 2011, psychical and parapsychological research has had a place in academia in the Netherlands. This history has received little scholarly attention. Thus far, the history of parapsychology after World War II has been neglected in general by the international historiography of science. Dutch parapsychology provides an interesting case study for the investigation of the developments within this specific science during the whole 20th century.

Parapsychology is an interesting science. The scientific investigation of the supernatural seems counter-intuitive at best and impossible at worst. But, at the same time, several notable scholars and scientists have pondered the question of the existence of the supernatural and have tried to systematically investigate its manifestations. The academic presence of this deviant science seems puzzling. To what extent can an ‘abnormal’ endeavour such as the research of the paranormal be a part of ‘normal’ institutions or universities? How can we understand the persistent academic presence of a discipline in the Netherlands that always seems to have been regarded as being different or contested and even as being a ‘pseudo-science’?

The examination of the processes of the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology in the 20th century provides an answer to these questions. By looking closely at the precise workings of the institutional developments, a new perspective is opened up which not only emphasises the creative marginality of parapsychology but also sheds light on the complexities of discipline-formation.

2 The meaning of institutionalisation

In the history and philosophy of science, the institutions where science is made or produced have received ample attention in the last several decades. The difficult quest for the precise special quality of science was in juxtaposition to what seemed to be easily established in practice. As sociologist of science Thomas Gieryn has put it famously in 1983: “Even as sociologists and philosophers
argue over the uniqueness of science among intellectual activities, demarcation is routinely accomplished in practical, everyday settings.”¹ The demarcation between science and non-science is settled, specifically, in university buildings. Academic disciplines and scientific endeavours within university walls are usually perceived as accepted practices. Simultaneously, research outside these walls is typically not respected as being academic or scientific. Demarcation is happening when the choices are made between inclusion and exclusion. What scientific practices and research subjects are welcome in classrooms and laboratories? Which scientists and what kind of research is excluded? How does this change over time? By investigating these intricate ways of institutionalisation the profound social nature of science becomes manifest.

The history of attempts to research the ‘paranormal’ or the ‘supernatural’ has always been especially relevant for this demarcation problem. Psychical research or parapsychology functioned as a touchstone for ‘normal’ science, deeming the researchers of the paranormal as ‘pseudo-scientific’.² Usually demarcation takes place by pointing out the differences between the practices of these ‘pseudo’-scientists and one’s own procedures. In these histories, parapsychology is not taken seriously as a science per se but is mainly regarded as deviant or a caricature of ‘real’ science. But from the 1960s onwards, through the growing attention for the social character of scientific practice, these ‘fringe’ sciences have themselves become the focus of attention. By situating the emergence of these ‘supernatural’ research agendas in the context of the fin de siècle, academic interest in the paranormal is typically understood as a cultural product. With the growing uncertainties of the modern era, a persistent need emerged for solid proof of the existence of the ‘other world’. In the disenchantment of modern times, religion had lost its lure as an arbiter of truth. Scholars and intellectuals tried to ground their religious beliefs in empirical data, so as to be able to cling to their convictions even in these scientific times. In historic interpretations of parapsychology, then, the discipline is understood as a substitute religion.³ Although fringe sciences are deemed worthy of investigation by themselves, they are not in their own right regarded as a science.

Thus, largely lacking are studies that start out from taking parapsychology as a ‘scientific practice’. One notable exception has been Mauskopf and McVaugh’s “The Elusive Science”, investigating the researches by Joseph Banks Rhine into “Extra Sensory Perception”.⁴ These historians have situated Rhine in his institu-

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¹ Gieryn: Boundary-Work, 781.
² See Oppenheim: The Other World.
³ See Turner: Between Science and Religion.
⁴ See Mauskopf/McVaugh: The Elusive Science.
tional context by making his Zener card experiments the central topic of their research. Mauskopf and McVaugh claimed that Rhine, by developing a (claimed) replicable and quantitative experimental procedure for demonstrating the existence of the supernatural, made a paradigm-altering contribution to parapsychology as a scientific discipline. The quantitative experimental approach provided the field with a unifying disciplinary self-consciousness that supposedly transformed psychical research into parapsychology. Due to Rhine’s efforts, by the end of the 1930s American parapsychology showed several characteristics of a ‘real science’: a scientific community, common problems, a research tradition and a research technique. Nevertheless, genuine scientific acceptance remained problematic. The problem of obtaining acceptance is related by Mauskopf and McVaugh to the difficulties of producing convincing experimental results and the isolated position of parapsychologists (through e.g. separate journals and working in private institutes). Here Mauskopf and McVaugh allude to an interesting paradox – institutionalisation does not necessarily result in academic acceptance – that can be distinguished in the Dutch situation as well.

More recently, researchers have investigated the scientific merits of psychical research and parapsychology by relating its history to developments within psychology. In his comparison of psychical research in England, France, Germany and the United States, Andreas Sommer used as a starting point that “[...] from the early 1880s to shortly before William James’s death in 1910 psychical research was considered a legitimate branch of international scientific parapsychology.” Due to cultural factors and not to a lack of empirical success, eventually the two disciplines drifted apart. In studying the developments in German psychical research and parapsychology, Heather Wolffram tried to refrain from any moral evaluations of the two disciplines and instead focused upon “the difficulties surrounding the epistemic claims of these fields as problems of discipline formation.” In her study interesting processes of cross-fertilisation between parapsychology and mainstream psychology are pointed out. Although these recent studies aim to investigate parapsychology in its own right, they rather focus on what the disciplines represent or have contributed to ‘mainstream’ science instead of taking the developments within the disciplines themselves as a starting point. And, again, these fairly recent studies still focus on the period around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.

5 See Wolffram: The Stepchildren of Science.
6 Sommer: Crossing, 19.
7 Wolffram: The Stepchildren of Science, 23.
The crucial thing to understand about the history of the research of the paranormal is how and why it became demarcated from ‘normal’ science. As historian of science Richard Noakes has put it, it is time to move beyond to try “to understand why anyone ever took psychical research and ancestral enterprises seriously”, since, with the various recent cultural studies about the interest in the ‘paranormal’, we now know the extent to which it was (and is) intertwined with our western culture. Noakes posed a new task: “[...] what historians need to do is to understand why it [psychical research, I. K.] has not commanded the consensus enjoyed by other sciences.”

To try to find an answer to this question it is not enough to keep focusing upon the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century – as so many studies have done so far. The history of parapsychology does not end after World War I and not even after World War II – professors were being appointed in the 1950s, research-laboratories were established in the 1960s and journals founded in the 1970s.

Furthermore, to try to understand the difficult position of parapsychology as a scientific practice, the specific character of the research of the paranormal should be kept in mind. For parapsychology has not “commanded” consensus, as Noakes has rightly put it, but simultaneously, it has also not been unequivocally ignored. The sociologist James McClenon seemed to ask the crucial question: “Why has parapsychology survived for over a century without either achieving legitimacy within or rejection from science?” Only by extensively investigating the – often neglected – second half of the 20th century and through international comparison can we begin to try to answer these questions. In my work I investigate the research on the paranormal as such, by relating the various internal developments of the scientific practice of parapsychology to psychology – thus perceiving the discipline as a social science. Because parapsychology in the Netherlands – and elsewhere – has always been a numerically small field, its history provides an excellent method to investigate the long-term developments within social-scientific practices and institutionalisations.

The histories of both parapsychology and psychology are not only profoundly intertwined because of the involvement of individuals in both of the disciplines, but also due to their co-emergence at the end of the 19th century. To understand the history of parapsychology, its institutional developments within the 20th century should be studied in context of the changes within the discipline of psychology. Due to specific historical reasons related to psychology as a scientific discipline, parapsychology in the Netherlands was academically present in the whole

8 Noakes: Historiography, 75.
9 McClenon: Deviant Science, 221.
20th century. Also, in the United States (at Duke University in Durham) and in Germany (at the University of Freiburg) parapsychology was academically present. But from 1974 until 1988 the Netherlands had even two professors in parapsychology, and in this same period parapsychology was also an integrated part of the department of psychology. These specific factors and the longevity of academic parapsychology make the Dutch situation quite unique.¹⁰

In my (forthcoming) dissertation I discuss the history of Dutch parapsychology by focusing upon four different aspects that constitute science as a practice.¹¹ Firstly, the changes in the research objects are a central element of my study; evolving from spirits to telepathy and from psychokinesis to PSI. These changes are very much related to developments regarding research methods, constituting the second basic aspect of my dissertation. Thirdly, parapsychology developed as an academic discipline due to the constantly persistent public interest in the supernatural. The role and importance of relating to the general public as a parapsychologist is a third aspect of my thesis. And lastly, the role of institutions cannot be overstated. It is precisely the long institutional history of Dutch parapsychology that is intriguing, and this fourth aspect will be the focus here, by discussing the seven stages of Dutch academic parapsychology. A discussion of these seven consecutive key periods in the history of Dutch parapsychology will suggest why and how a marginal field could have lasted so long within academia.

3 Seven stages of Dutch parapsychology

The institutional history of parapsychology is specifically situated in Utrecht. One of the main actors of Dutch parapsychology – and a driving force himself – was Wilhelm Tenhaeff (1894–1981). Just like his German equal Hans Bender – as discussed by Anna Lux in her contribution in this volume – Tenhaeff made crucial contributions to the developments within Dutch parapsychology especially after the World War II. Tenhaeff was born in Rotterdam as the son of a director of a short-haul company. Against the will of his father he started studying psychology at Utrecht in 1925, with a special interest in psychical research. He became a private lecturer (“Privatdozent”) of parapsychology in 1933 and a professor of parapsychology in 1953.

¹⁰ Kloosterman: Psychical Research and Parapsychology Interpreted.
¹¹ My dissertation “Wetenschap van gene zijde” [Science from Beyond] will be published (in Dutch) as a monograph in early 2017 at Boom (Amsterdam).
It could be argued that Tenhaeff himself was Dutch parapsychology—at least in the eyes of the general public. Tenhaeff will be our guide through the institutional history of Dutch parapsychology, beginning in the 1880s and ending in 2011. In seven consecutive periods, various institutional milestones will be discussed. To highlight the marginal character of the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology and to demonstrate that in the Netherlands organised psychical research took off later than elsewhere, we will start with a period filled with failed institutionalisation attempts.

One of the reasons why Tenhaeff became interested in the supernatural in the first place was a novel of the Dutch author and physician Frederik van Eeden (1860–1932). The mystical fairytale “De kleine Johannes”, written by Van Eeden, published in 1884, was part of secondary education in the Netherlands when Tenhaeff attended school as a little boy. Tenhaeff was not born yet when Van Eeden himself was already deeply emerged in psychical research. Van Eeden was one of the Dutch pioneering psychologists and parapsychologists. He represents the earliest beginnings of Dutch academic parapsychology. Ever since his experiences with hypnosis in the Salpetière-clinic in France in the 1870s, Van Eeden was determined to generate interest in the serious investigation of several intriguing phenomena he experienced, such as second sight and thought transference. Van Eeden was part of a tradition where physicians turned towards the investigation of the paranormal from their clinical experiences. Active promotion of the serious nature of research of the paranormal by Van Eeden was particularly necessary in the Netherlands, for natural scientists had a long tradition of promoting abstinence towards the occult.

One way in which Van Eeden tried to promote psychical research was by organising a public séance with the medium Miss Fay in 1890. Miss Fay was a physical medium, capable of moving objects through her alleged psychical force. The séance organised by Van Eeden on the January 18 was a replication of the experiments undertaken with Miss Fay by British psychical researcher and physicist William Crookes (1832–1919). Unfortunately for the organisers, Miss Fay was not able to produce any convincing phenomena during this particular séance. Therefore, the contribution to any institutionalisation of psychical research was non-existent and the séance only seemed to add to the skeptical position of respected natural scientists against psychical research.

Nevertheless, Van Eeden himself became increasingly convinced of the reality of the phenomena he experienced in séances, especially by the medium Mrs.

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12 Eeden: De kleine Johannes.
13 See Harting: Hallucinatien, 161–196.
Edmund Thompson. Van Eeden wrote an article in favor of this medium for the British “Society of Psychical Research”\textsuperscript{14}. This can be seen as the beginning of a more non-critical approach to the supernatural. Simultaneously, Van Eeden gradually lost interest in his position as a protagonist of academic psychical research in the Netherlands. He became convinced that during a séance it was only possible to become intuitively aware of the reality of the phenomena – scientific investigation was impossible.

Simultaneously, in this first key-period at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, many spiritualistic societies emerged in the Netherlands. During World War I Tenhaeff came into first direct contact with experiences of the supernatural in these societies. The various societies for spiritualism had wildly different positions regarding the nature of the other world. Whereas some societies would be profoundly Christian, other societies focused on the role of reincarnation\textsuperscript{15}. In 1888, “Harmony” was established as an overarching society to try to facilitate collaboration between the various groups. Henri de Fremery (1867–1940) was one of the most active and notable spiritualists in this period. De Fremery came from a very prosperous family. His family was involved in trade in the Indies and held various military positions. From 1896 to 1902 De Fremery was an artillery officer in the Indies. After his short-lived military career, he dedicated himself to societal causes and to spiritualism. The wealth of his family enabled him to do so.

Like Van Eeden, De Fremery believed that the promotion of serious investigation of the spiritualist phenomena was necessary in order to be able to support spiritualism as an ideology. Together with another novelist, Marcellus Emants (1848–1923), De Fremery tried to found a Dutch “Society for Psychical Research” (SPR) in 1904. They wanted to persuade Van Eeden to become the first president of this society. Van Eeden declined because he was increasingly interested in intuitively experiencing the reality of the other world in the context of séances instead of conducting precise experiments. Besides Van Eeden no other Dutch scholar or scientist was willing to work publicly on spiritualism. The subject remained academically controversial. De Fremery turned to his fellow spiritualists, trying to further psychical research in the Netherlands. He worked together with the former student of medicine Floris Jansen (1881–1937) in founding a laboratory for the investigation of the origins of the supernatural. Because neither spiritualists nor scientists wanted to finance the work in the laboratory, already

\textsuperscript{14} See Eeden: Account, 75 – 116.

\textsuperscript{15} E. g. groups around Elise van Calcar (1822 – 1904) and “Veritas”, a spiritualist society established in 1869.
in 1906 Jansen had to stop his various experiments on, amongst others, telepathy and Reichenbach’s Od-radiation. For natural scientists the work in the laboratory was too amateurish and for the spiritualists the experiments appeared unimportant – they were more interested in discussing the meaning of the spiritual beliefs than in examining their contested reality. On the eve of World War I, this first key-period, which can be characterised as a failure to institutionalise, came to an end. Despite various attempts, psychical researchers did not succeed in gaining momentum to obtain some rudimentary form of institutionalisation. The scientific community still opposed the attempts to try to investigate the supernatural, and the spiritualists were interested in ideology above everything else.

After World War I the situation changed drastically, and therefore this second key-period is defined by the emergence of the first societies of psychical research. In this period Tenhaeff became actively involved in psychical research. Twenty-one years of age, he was an active member of the “Society for Psychical Research and Animal Magnetism”. This society was founded by the teacher Leendert Groeneweg (1877–1950) during the war, in 1915. The horrors of World War I had shocked the entire world – also the neutral Netherlands. There was a growing need for holistic and hopeful perspectives upon the world. This resulted in a growing popularity of animal magnetism during and shortly after World War I.¹ Animal magnetisers claimed to be able to heal people through the laying of hands-passes. Doing so, they believed to rearrange vital energy and hence contribute to the health of their patients. Groeneweg and his society wanted to provide a scientific foundation for these healers and make them more professional. As to be expected, this led to opposition from physicians – as they would continue to do so throughout the 20th century. Groeneweg developed a course-program for magnetisers to train them theoretically and practically. If the healing of patients by the magnetisers was confirmed by two magnetisers, the student received a certificate. Traditional physicians feared that this could lead to serious harm to patients and to a widespread belief in the powers of magnetisers. Groeneweg’s society also tried to discover the background of animal magnetism by looking for proof of the existence of a vital force. In this research program Tenhaeff was most actively involved. However, Groeneweg’s society was not regarded as being serious academic, since the focus was upon practical applications and not many respected scientists were involved.

In 1919 the establishment of the Dutch SPR, with the pioneering psychologist and famous philosopher Gerard Heymans (1857–1930) as its first president,
marked an important moment in the history of Dutch institutional parapsychology and in this second key-period. For the first time a society came into being with respected scientists and scholars as its members. In the aftermath of World War I, the cultural and academic climate seemed more open to holistic ideas — such as a collective consciousness through which the existence of telepathy could be understood — and supported the foundation of this scholarly society.

Media-attention for the supernatural sparked the foundation of a Dutch SPR. A visit of the telepath Eugene de Rubini in 1919 led to vibrant discussions in the newspapers.¹⁷ To many spectators it was clear that Rubini made use of ‘muscle-reading’. But this explanation did not provide any conclusive proof that the whole phenomenon of telepathy in general was nonsense. For some scholars the reading of thoughts was theoretically very well possible. Heymans — and his kindred spirits — were convinced that our consciousness is interconnected and therefore it should be possible to obtain a thought from somebody’s mind — just like you suddenly remember a memory you thought you had forgotten. Heymans believed he obtained solid proof of this conviction in a famous experiment with the student Abraham van Dam.¹⁸ Van Dam was very successful in predicting the right field on a board, thus leading this respected scientist to the conclusion that telepathy does exist. This experiment helped to secure some scientific respectability but was not as heralded by the still-present spiritualists. Van Dam was not a medium, and he was willing to abide to the demands of his investigators. Mediums, however, were more fragile according to the spiritualists and they should be dealt with more respectfully and delicately. Their collaboration with scientists could not be as straightforward as with Van Dam. The more scientific oriented members of the Dutch SPR wanted the mediums in the séances to obey to their rules. Eventually, a schism between the critical-minded and the more spiritualistic-inclined led to a falling out in 1925. Tenhaeff would only become actively involved with the Dutch SPR in 1928, up to this point he was a member of Groeneweg’s organisation. This organisation would cease to exist in 1935, when Groeneweg was convicted for the illegal practicing of medicine.¹⁹

In the aftermath of World War I and in a developing discipline of psychology in this second key-period, a fragile beginning was made with the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology. Compared to other countries, the foundations of

¹⁷ De Rubini visited the Netherlands in June and July of 1919 when he gave several shows in theatres in Amsterdam.
¹⁸ Heymans/Brugmans/Weinberg: Een experimenteel onderzoek, 6.
¹⁹ This conviction was largely symbolic. Groeneweg had to pay a fine of one gilder and had to spend one night in jail: Magnetiseur veroordeeld.
these societies for psychical research were rather late, which can be explained by the more ‘hostile’ environment of natural scientists. In the Netherlands developments in the research of the supernatural had to come from psychologists, and since this new field of study was for a long time non-existent or relatively small, it lasted until after World War I before an organised Dutch psychical research emerged.

With Heymans and his fellow investigators leaving the SPR in 1925, it seemed Dutch psychical research had come to a halt shortly after it had finally attracted some academic interest. But, partly due to Tenhaeff’s participation, in the third key-period of the 1930s, Dutch parapsychology became for the first time embedded in universities. Together with the biologist and psychiatrist Paul Dietz (1878–1953), Tenhaeff had started the Dutch “Journal of Parapsychology” in 1928. This journal with an academic tone and the cooperation of various scholars was a successful attempt to revive academic interest in the research of the paranormal. Consequently, in 1932 Paul Dietz was appointed an unsalaried private lecturer (like its German equivalent “Privatdozent”) of parapsychology at the University of Leiden, and in 1933 Tenhaeff got a similar position at Utrecht University. Both these renowned universities – founded in 1575 and 1636 respectively – were and are public universities without any specific religious background.

Dietz and Tenhaeff were active popularisers of Dutch parapsychology. Tenhaeff had begun to study psychology, and when he obtained his PhD in 1932, immediately he became a private lecturer in parapsychology. Dietz was trained as a biologist and a psychiatrist. He had been interested in the supernatural from his student-days onwards, and his interest was amplified by his experiences with the clinical practice. Both Dietz and Tenhaeff wrote extensively for the general public; both in newspapers and in their books they aimed at a general readership.²⁰ In the 1930s Dietz and Tenhaeff became the most important leaders of the Dutch SPR. Under their influence a laboratory for psychical research was started in Amsterdam. This laboratory – funded by private donors – supported the scientific stature of the young discipline.²¹

With a journal, a research laboratory and two lectureships a true stride forward seemed to have been made in the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology. Whereas at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century no institutionalisation seemed to be taking off and in the second key-period of the 1920s only two loosely structured and non-academically affiliated societies

²⁰ E. g. Dietz: Mensch en droom; Dietz: Telepathie en helderziendheid; Dietz: Telepathie en psychologie der menigte; Tenhaeff: Het spiritisme; Tenhaeff: Hoofdstukken.
were founded, this changed in the 1930s. This can be explained in the context of the developments in Dutch psychology as a whole. In the 1930s Dutch psychology – and especially psychotechnics – was growing explosively. The mainstream paradigm in Dutch psychology in the 1930s was that of a practice-oriented kind of psychology that could help people with their everyday actions and decisions – such as finding the right job. Whereas in the 1920s the theoretical foundations of psychology were being discussed, in the 1930s the practical implications of psychological research were emphasised. With its close relation to the interest of the general public, parapsychology could benefit from this growth of applied psychology in general. But the success of the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology in the 1930s should not be overstated. With two unsalaried positions for both Dietz and Tenhaeff this institutionalisation still remained marginal and the laboratory was only loosely associated with the University of Amsterdam.

This subtle institutionalisation of parapsychology came to a complete halt with the outbreak of World War II. Parapsychology was deemed “Amerikani­sche[r] Unfug und Schwindel” during the German occupation. The SPR was banned and the laboratory was shut down. Dietz even retired from parapsychology altogether. Tenhaeff was in hiding during the war but remained involved in parapsychology. In the postwar reconstruction of parapsychology, Tenhaeff would play an important role. The 1950s – our fourth key-period – eventually even became the heydays of Dutch parapsychology. In 1953 Tenhaeff was appointed associate professor of parapsychology at Utrecht University, making him the first European holder of a chair. Tenhaeff’s chair was an associate one, meaning he received the title of a professor but was not paid as one. These associate chairs had to be supported by the Queen herself and were meant. The associate professorships had also to be supported by a societal organisation. In this case, the right to an associate professorship of parapsychology was given to the SPR, who asked Utrecht University to welcome the new unsalaried professor. Tenhaeff’s chair was under immediate supervision of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science – making Tenhaeff additionally a ‘Fremdkörper’.

Right before Tenhaeff was appointed, the annual international conference of the “Parapsychology Foundation” was held at Utrecht in 1953. In this period after the war, Utrecht was regarded as the centre of international parapsychology because of the chair in parapsychology at Utrecht University. In the rebuilding years of the 1950s, parapsychology could obtain an academic position in a more solid form than ever before. The post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands

22 See Dongen/Gerding: PSI, 68.
was not only practical but also moral and intellectual. Psychology had developed academically as a discipline before the war, but was – much like parapsychology – numerically still small in the 1930s and 1940s. When several of the pre-war professors were fired after 1945 because of alleged association with the German occupier, the whole field of psychology had to be rebuild – again, much like parapsychology itself. At Utrecht University several psychologists were fired and the reconstruction of psychology got a very specific character. In the so-called “Utrecht School” a profound personalistic and phenomenological approach to psychology was developed after the war.² This “Utrecht School” was not a formal school. It should be regarded as a conglomeration of kindred spirits – consisting of about ten different professors – between approximately 1949 until 1955. These professors pursued an anti-reductionist approach to psychology. The idea was to ‘meet’ the individual in order to be able to grasp the meaning of human experiences. Parapsychology – with its emphasis upon experiences in everyday life – could fit within the scheme of this specifically anti-reductionist perspective upon psychology.

The first president of the SPR after the war – the professor of ethnology Henri Fischer (1901–1976) – played an important role in founding the associate chair in parapsychology. As the president of the SPR and as an integrated professor at Utrecht University, Fischer could mediate between parapsychology and its institutionalisation. Fischer was a respected intellectual in academic circles and in close contact with the psychologists. He convinced them of the relevance of the subject, despite serious objections from the faculty of medicine. Just as in the 1920s, orthodox physicians were opposed to giving parapsychology a serious status, since they expected an upsurge in quackery. They feared that a professorship of parapsychology would give legitimacy to certain healers and therewith jeopardise the general health of the public. But the ties between parapsychology and psychology were tight enough in this period to withstand the criticism of the faculty of medicine. In their anti-reductionist approach of science, Tenhaeff and the “Utrecht School” were ‘soul-mates’. Important for securing a chair for parapsychology was the fact that it would be an associate chair – making Tenhaeff not an integral member of the university staff. This position was also unsalaried and Tenhaeff made a living on his wife’s income. Despite this ‘small’ professorship, Tenhaeff was given the opportunity to make a legitimate scientific field into the paranormal in the near future.

Tenhaeff himself played a major role also outside university in the postwar reconstruction of Dutch parapsychology. With the medium and magnetiser Ger-

²⁴ See Weijers: Terug naar het behouden huis.
ard Croiset (1909–1980), he travelled all over the Netherlands – and even abroad – gaining interest for his psychic abilities to aid the police, for example, with locating lost persons.\(^\text{25}\) Croiset was the most famous paranormally gifted individual in the Netherlands after World War II. Together with Croiset, Tenhaeff became a household name giving lectures, writing books for a general audience and often appearing in the media.

When Tenhaeff was appointed a professor in 1953, also the “Parapsychological Institute” was established, financed partly by the government and partly by the “Parapsychology Foundation”.\(^\text{26}\) The Institute was part of Utrecht University. The hope and expectation truly was that Utrecht would become the center of parapsychology in Europe and the expectations were high:

>`The hope is to found permanent European headquarters of the [Parapsychology, I. K.] Foundation, and in the opinion of all members of the Committee [of the conference, I. K.] Utrecht with its important role in history and in the sciences would be the ideal place for such headquarters.\(^\text{27}\)`

In 1963, the beginning of our fifth key-period, these expectations were lowered, but still plans were made for the further institutionalisation of parapsychology. In 1963, the faculty of social sciences was established at Utrecht University; it became the stage of *political and organisational debates around parapsychology*. Whereas the social sciences had previously been part of the faculty of humanities, due to the growth of especially psychology and sociology, a separate faculty for the social sciences came into being in the 1960s. In 1940 only 51 students were involved in psychology, in 1963 this number had grown to 2,000 nationwide. From 1922 until 1940 eight professors got a chair of psychology, from 1945 until 1960 there were 20 professors of psychology in the Netherlands.\(^\text{28}\) In these broader institutional developments the plan was made to replace the associate chair of parapsychology with a full professorship, which would make the discipline an integral part of the new faculty. This was so much more important because the Dutch SPR could not finance the chair anymore by itself when Tenhaeff – 66 years old at the time – would retire.

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\(^{25}\) See Tenhaeff: Beschouwingen.

\(^{26}\) See the article by Eberhard Bauer in this volume.

\(^{27}\) Zorab: *Het eerste internationale congres*, 232: “Men hoopt dat het mogelijk zal zijn een permanent Europees hoofdkwartier van de [Parapsychology, I. K.] *Foundation* op te richten, en het is de mening van alle leden van de Commissie, dat Utrecht vanwege zijn belangrijke rol in de geschiedenis en op het terrein der wetenschappen de ideale plaats zou zijn voor de vestiging van zulk een hoofdkwartier.”

\(^{28}\) Eisenga: *Geschiedenis*, 180.
The physicist Jaap Kistemaker (1917–2010), president of the SPR in these years, played a major role in convincing the board of the university to agree with a fully paid professorship of parapsychology. The dean of the department of psychology – the psychologist Johannes Linschoten (1925–1964) – was also supportive of parapsychology, even though a professorship for the discipline was not his main concern. His focus was upon getting his new department up and running. A professorship for parapsychology was, again, opposed by the faculty of medicine, for they were afraid that such a professor would only function as a promoter of quackery. That is what they believed Tenhaeff had been doing. The fact that Kistemaker and the SPR wanted to appoint the psychiatrist Joost Meerloo (1903–1976) only added fuel to the fire. Because if a ‘physician’ such as Meerloo would become an ordinary professor of parapsychology, the representatives of the faculty of medicine were convinced this would only add to superstition and would lead to serious threats to public health. After Linschoten had died unexpectedly in 1964, the new dean of the department of psychology consulted the other faculties of Utrecht University about appointing Meerloo to the chair of parapsychology. Because of the reaction of the faculty of medicine and the fragile position of the new department of the social sciences, the dean decided to lay low on the issue of full professorship for parapsychology. This situation demonstrates the fragile position of parapsychology and the importance of patrons for a successful institutionalisation of the research field.

The decision to refrain from finding a full professor in parapsychology sparked a tumultuous period in the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology where Tenhaeff mobilised his political contact to attract attention for parapsychology. Through his involvement in the Freemasonry, Tenhaeff was in close contact with various ministers and politicians. Both in parliament and in the newspapers the issues regarding his succession were dealt with and caused embarrassment to the Board of Utrecht University. Parapsychology had a very public face from 1963 until 1974, and this shows the extent to which the universities were looking for their appropriate societal role in this period. Due to the public controversies, parapsychology played a major role in these debates, while the discipline itself had a marginal position at the university.

In the sixth key-period this tumultuous period – when the democratisation and expansion of the university had been playing a central role – led to the unique situation that two professors of parapsychology were appointed. In 1974, the Swedish psychologist Martin Johnson (1930–2011) was appointed a full professor of parapsychology in Utrecht, while Tenhaeff – almost eighty years old – continued his teaching on the basis of his associate chair. In the 1960s the idea had been to replace Tenhaeff’s associate chair by a full professorship of parapsychology. But when the discussions about the right successor exploded, the Board
of Utrecht University tried to minimise public damage. To avoid more bad publicity, the board of the university had decided to uphold the extraordinary chair in parapsychology. The influence of the board on this chair was limited in any case, since the Queen had appointed it to the SPR, which meant that it was up to the society itself to appoint an associate professor and the influence of Utrecht University was limited in the matter.

This led to a situation when not only two professors were appointed, but also two locations for research existed in Utrecht. This was, first, the “Parapsychological Institute”, founded in 1953 with Tenhaeff as its director and home of the “Dutch Journal of Parapsychology”. Secondly, Johnson and his main employee Sybo Schouten worked at the “Parapsychology Laboratory”, founded in 1974 and an integral part of the department of psychology and its “Psychology Laboratory”. Johnson also established his own journal in 1975 – the internationally oriented and therefore English “European Journal of Parapsychology”. The institutes and their professors were two separate worlds. There was no collaboration in research nor in teaching, because of the profoundly distinct perspective upon parapsychology. Schouten and Johnson had made the conscious choice to refrain from any involvement with the media and to focus solely on international parapsychology and methodological advances in quantitative parapsychological research. Several international visiting research workers came to the “Parapsychology Laboratory” making it a vibrant yet small academic community. Tenhaeff, on the other hand, remained in close contact with the media and continued his qualitative researches and his public lectures with Croiset. The two professors and the two institutes seemed to be incongruent with the limited amount of people actively working in the field in the Netherlands.

In 1978 Tenhaeff – three years before he passed away – ended his twenty-five year career as an associate professor when he was succeeded by the eclectic intellectual Henri van Praag (1916 – 1988). Van Praag had never obtained a PhD but was academically educated in psychology, sociology, history, mathematics, physics and sinology. Van Praag continued partly in the footsteps of Tenhaeff by devoting attention to the public interest in the paranormal, for example in his Dutch popular-scientific journal “Prana” – founded in 1975 to facilitate a dialogue between different spiritual perspectives – and also in his many books.²⁹ At the same time, he worked on normalising the relations with Utrecht University, and in 1978 there was an organised ‘peace-meeting’ between the two professors. This could have marked the beginning of a unified Dutch parapsychology. But in the 1980s in the Netherlands the sciences in general and the social scien-

²⁹ Van Praag published a “Parapsychological Library”, consisting out of ten volumes.
ces in particular had to deal with extensive budget cuts. Even though Johnson and Schouten had worked hard on close relations with general psychology, in 1988 the ordinary chair in parapsychology and the “Parapsychology Laboratory” were abolished due to these budget cuts. In this fragile situation, when the dozen different universities in the Netherlands were fighting for their existence, it seemed that the board of the university did not want to run the risk to be affiliated with the deviant science of parapsychology. It could harm its position in the national debate. Johnson went back to Sweden and Schouten eventually would turn away from parapsychology. Van Praag died in 1988, only two years after he had stepped down as an associate professor. It seemed as if the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology was over. Whereas in the previous key-period the deviant character seemed to have played in the advantage of the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology by using its public appeal, in this sixth key-period the ‘supernatural’ nature of the research hindered the continuance of the ordinary chair. The social sciences were preoccupied with distancing themselves from the audience in order to maintain scientific legitimacy.

But the history of the institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology does not end here. In the seventh and, thus far, final key-period a new extraordinary professor of parapsychology was appointed in 1991, leading towards the diminishment of academic parapsychology in the Netherlands. The appointment of Professor Dick Bierman (*1943) was neither quiet nor simple. After the abolishment of the “Parapsychology Laboratory” and the ordinary chair, the SPR still had the Queen-given-right to appoint a new associate professor. In negotiations with Utrecht University it soon became evident that both parties had conflicting views about who would be the right successor. Utrecht University preferred Sybo Schouten, because he was familiar to them and seemed to promise the least chance of external controversies. The SPR, on the other hand, preferred one of its own candidates, because of Schouten’s previous connection to the department of psychology. Legally, the SPR had the sole right to decide and it chose Bierman – much to the dismay of the department of psychology. When Bierman – both a physicist and psychologist by training – was appointed associate professor, he was not welcome at the faculty of social sciences. Thus there was continuity and the chair still existed, but more than ever parapsychology was a ‘Fremdkörper’.

In the beginning of 2000 the rules regarding associate chairs appointed by the Queen changed, giving more influence to the boards of the universities when it came to the future of these professorships. In 2007 the associate chair of parapsychology would be evaluated, and the SPR was sure that in the current academic setting the future of the chair would be difficult to maintain. The secretary of the SPR, Hans Gerding (*1947), was in close contact with the sociologist and
professor of the theory of science Ilja Maso (1943–2011), who was also the rector of the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. This public and state-funded university is unique in the Netherlands and aims at educating spiritual and mental counselors from a humanistic background. Maso himself was interested in parapsychology and in 2007 he welcomed the associate chair to this university. In 2009 Bierman retired and was replaced by Stefan Schmidt (*1967), a German psychologist. Because of his work as a clinical psychologist in Germany his ability to go back and forth to Utrecht was limited, and when Maso died in 2011 the support for the associate chair had waned completely. So parapsychology never really became part of the University of Humanistic Studies, it had most of all been an indulgence of Maso.

Although the SPR still exists today, the academic institutionalisation of Dutch parapsychology has virtually been non-existent in recent years. Hardly any parapsychological research is being done, nor are any young scholars interested in pursuing the field. The discipline does play a role, however, in contemporary – public and scientific – debates about the methodological foundations of experimental psychology.

## 4 The power of the marginal

Institutionalisation is usually interpreted as the indicator of success of a scientific field. Institutions are perceived as loci of power, securing legitimacy. For a deviant science such as parapsychology, institutionalisation is taken to be a sign of recognition and acceptance. If there is acceptance, for example, by the AAAS, or if an ordinary professor of parapsychology is appointed, this is understood to indicate the serious nature of the field’s scientific research. Especially in the eyes of the general public, then, parapsychology should in the Netherlands be regarded as a serious discipline with an impressive institutional history.

And, naturally, there are many arguments in favour of this perspective. Famous (pioneer) psychologists such as Frederik van Eeden and Gerard Heymans were actively involved in the first days of Dutch parapsychology, thus already demonstrating the legitimacy of the field. In the 1930s Dietz and Tenhaeff became part of the academic community as private lecturers, and in 1953 Tenhaeff

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30 Although recently at the University of Groningen the psychologist Jacob Jolij has demonstrated interest in parapsychological research.
31 E.g. Wagenmakers/Wetzels/Borsboom/Maas: Why Psychologists, 426–432.
32 Since 1969 until today the “Parapsychological Association” has been a member of the “American Association for the Advancement of Science” (AAAS).
got a chair as an associate professor of parapsychology. This chair was supposed to be replaced, even, by a full professorship in 1963. When this did not succeed, two separate chairs of parapsychology existed in the Netherlands from 1974 until 1986. This institutional history of the chairs of parapsychology in the Netherlands came to a halt only very recently, when in 2011 the associate chair was abolished at the University of Humanistic Studies.

Besides this rich history of professorships of parapsychology in the Netherlands, the institutional history of Dutch parapsychology could also be told by the places where parapsychological research was being done. For the establishment of science, the value of the loci of research cannot be overstated. Van Eeden did a controlled séance in a private room. Heymans moved Dutch psychical research into the laboratory, thus elevating it to a higher level of legitimacy. In the 1930s the SPR had its own laboratory. And in the 1950s Tenhaeff worked in the “Parapsychological Institute”, as a part of university. In the 1970s this process continued, and now two loci of research existed: the “Parapsychological Institute” and the university-financed “Parapsychological Laboratory”. But this institutionalisation stopped in the 1980s, after budget cuts diminished Dutch parapsychology. As a consequence, it lost its (public) visibility and perhaps therefore its objective existence.

The summing up of these institutionalisations of Dutch parapsychology seems impressive at first. But if we look closely, it is clear that also a process of marginalisation was taking place. Marginalisation and institutionalisation are not mutually exclusive processes and, if we look at the history of Dutch parapsychology, even dialectically intertwined. There are three reasons. First, the institutionalisation only took place partially, and the professorship was only an unsalaried, associate one. Second, parapsychology was always dependent on protagonists (donors or patronisers), and never stood on its own feet. Third, the process of institutionalisation was always going hand in hand with a process of marginalisation.

Whereas in other disciplines the appointment of private lecturers in the 1930s was quickly followed by paid lecturers and professorships, this was not the case with parapsychology. Only after the war, in a specific university-context, Tenhaeff was appointed an unsalaried professor of parapsychology. The full professorship, to be established in the 1960s, was never a priority for the representatives of the new faculty of social sciences. In 1988 the full professorship was swiftly abolished in a series of budget cuts. After 1991 the associate chair still existed but became even more marginalised at Utrecht University when the new

33 See Derksen: Wij psychologen.
professor, Bierman, was not even welcome in the buildings and facilities of the faculty of social sciences. The transfer of the chair to the University of Humanistic Studies in 2007 can even be regarded as a further marginalisation, which eventually led to the entire abolishment of the chair in 2011.

So despite its institutionalisation, parapsychology remained a deviant science. It was precisely this marginal character of Dutch parapsychology that kept the discipline in the vicinity of the academic community. For many scholars and scientists, the supernatural belonged to the private sphere and not to the scientific world. In the Netherlands, physicians were most actively opposed to the meddling of parapsychologists in the academic community. They feared that this would fuel the superstition of the people and could lead to serious harm by condoning paranormal healing. And the popularity of the supernatural added to the marginalisation of parapsychology, because it raised eyebrows with the orthodox members of the academic community. But the public appeal of the supernatural was precisely what made parapsychological research so relevant, at least after World Wars I and II. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, when not only the scientific hegemony was contested but also the democratic society grew enormously, parapsychology was anything but hindered by its marginal position. Because of their public appeal, both Dietz and Tenhaeff were accepted by the academic communities in the 1930s and 1950s.

Moreover, the controversial position of parapsychology led to the acceptance of not one, but two professors in parapsychology in the 1970s and 1980s. With the full professorship the idea was to incorporate it within the department of psychology, thus ‘normalising’ parapsychology. This was actively opposed by Tenhaeff, who feared the loss of the ‘special’ character of parapsychology. Whereas this special character was usually framed in terms of differences in methodological approaches, it could just as well apply to the relation towards the general public. Dutch parapsychology had to balance between scientific legitimacy and societal relevance. In this precarious situation both marginalisation and institutionalisation played a crucial role. To gain academic attention for the field it was necessary to highlight the elaborate and careful experiments that were undertaken, for example by Heymans in the 1920s and in the 1970s in the “Parapsychological Laboratory”. As a serious science, parapsychology could be welcome in the realm of the university. But, at the same time, if parapsychologists appeared too ‘normal’, it would just emerge into the broader field of psychology and the field itself would vanish. Thus, the ‘special’ character had to be maintained at all costs. This was usually done by actively referring to the societal need for the research.

In the 1970s the normalising tendency of the parapsychologists in the “Parapsychology Laboratory” added to their demise. Without any active public appeal,
maintaining the full professorship became impossible. But in the explosive growth of the universities, the relation towards the general public had become distorted. Thus, it was not as easy as in the 1950s to relate to the general public. The expectations about scientific research had changed. Whereas in the 1950s a direct relation with the general public was detrimental for the social sciences in general to demonstrate its relevance, in the 1970s it had become more important to uphold a level of scientific legitimacy; hence distancing itself more and more from the general public. The University of Humanistic Studies seemed to be the last resort for an inherent societally oriented parapsychology. But even here any linkage to the afterlife – so profoundly part of the public appeal a hundred years ago – was not possible anymore. The juggling of institutionalisation with marginalisation and of scientific legitimacy with societal relevance came to a halt.

We are often sympathetically inclined towards the underdog and even attribute innovative qualities to the marginalised.\(^{34}\) The history of Dutch parapsychology demonstrates that, to be of value, an outsider does not have to have contributed in a direct way to the center. As an institutionalised marginal, parapsychology can serve as a mirror for the processes that are taking place all the time within scientific institutions – and elsewhere – with regard to the role of coincidence, of luck, and of referring to scientific legitimacy and societal relevance to obtain and maintain an academic position.

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