

The models of scientists - to be found in their diagrams, equations, maps, and even machines - can be understood as their representations of phenomena in the world. But when we look back into how scientists created those models, we often find processes of narrative-making: scientists, in seeking to understand their part of the world, create narratives about how it might work. And then, in usage, we find those model-representations becoming tools: tools of exploration, explanation and reasoning, activities that often involve scientists telling narratives with their models. So narrative resources come into two processes of scientists' modelling: first in spinning narratives to help fashion their models of the world, and second in using narrative accounts to reason with and explore their 'world in the model'. Models and narratives seem odd bed-fellows, but are often conjoined in the creative work of science.

Mary S. Morgan is the Albert O. Hirschman Professor of History and Philosophy of Economics at the London School of Economics; an elected Fellow of the British Academy; and an Overseas Fellow of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has published on social scientists' practices of modelling, observing, measuring and making case studies; and is especially interested in how ideas, numbers and facts are used in projects designed to change the world. Her most recent books are *How Well Do Facts Travel?* (2011) and *The World in the Model* (2012); and the outcome of a major ERC grant: *Narrative Science: Reasoning, Representing and Knowing since 1800* (edited with Kim M. Hajek and Dominic J. Berry, 2022).

About the Lecture Series: A model can be an object of admiration, a miniature or a prototype, an abstracted phenomenon or applied theory, a literary text — practically anything from a human body on a catwalk to a mathematical description of a system. It can elicit desire, provide understanding, guide action or thought. Despite the polysemy of the term, models across disciplines and fields share a fundamental characteristic: their effect depends on a specific relational quality. A model is always a model of or for something else, and the relation is reductive insofar as it is selective and considers only certain aspects of both object and model. Critical discussions of models often revolve around their restrictive function. And yet models are less prescriptive and more ambiguous than codified rules or norms. What is the critical purchase of models and how does their generative potential relate to their constitutive reduction? What are the stakes in decreasing or increasing, altering or proliferating the reductiveness of models? How can one work with and on models in a creative, productive manner without disavowing power asymmetries and their exclusionary or limiting effects?

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Model

Narratives