

Call for Papers

Model Imaginaries: Literature, Economics, Abstraction

International Conference

July 4-6, 2024, at the John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin

Deadline for submission of proposals: February 15, 2024

Models shape the world we live in. As tools for reducing complexity, models are designed to reveal patterns of interaction that remain hidden to the naked eye. Abstracting, simplifying, condensing, or miniaturizing can be ways of making the world intelligible. But models also serve more than heuristic purposes. Models can be designs for something new, blueprints for building or redesigning the world around us. And when models are put to use, they enter into and may alter the world they model. Models are then not external to but part of what they seek to explain. They can become self-fulfilling prophecies, entering into feedback loops with the world, blurring the distinction between models *of* something and models *for* something.

This blurring of boundaries between model and world occurs not least in the discipline of economics, which exerts singular influence over policy decisions. From the normativization of John Stuart Mill's pared-down model of "economic man" to the performativity of financial models as "engines, not cameras" in financial markets today, economic modeling has long exemplified the ambiguity of models as mediating mechanisms between the real and the ideal, description and prescription, showing and shaping. While the power of models to shape our world depends on their use by institutional actors, their widespread use depends on their aesthetic and cultural appeal. The "elegant simplicity" of models is a criterion for their success. Models of economic behavior are only performative when people conform to them, and for people to conform to them they need to be made attractive. The performativity of models is greatest when they take on a life of their own, when they circulate in cultural form independently from the methods and material interests that gave rise to them.

This conference inquires into the role that culture generally and literature more specifically play in mediating between models *of* and models *for* something. With a particular interest in economic modeling and model economies, we ask: How are model abstractions made accessible and circulated in cultural form to the public? How does literature embody or provide intimate experiences of models? What genres, modes, or styles engage in modeling practices and what models of knowledge do they generate? How are models narrativized or narratives modeled, and what happens in the space between model and narrative? How does literary remodeling or countermodeling provide alternative forms of—or challenge what counts as—economic knowledge? How does literature model models? And how do literary models reflect on or redress the biases and blind spots of economic modeling?

We invite proposals for presentations on any topic that engages with these questions or others on the intersection of culture and literature, economics, and modeling.

Please submit your abstract of around 300 words and a short bio by February 15 to James Dorson at dorson@zedat.fu-berlin.de

The conference is organized by the Research Network "Model Aesthetics: Between Literary and Economic Knowledge" funded by the German Research Foundation. For more information on the network, its members, and past workshops, we invite you to visit our website: <https://model-aesthetics.com>