

Bridging the Gap: Scientific Imagination Meets Aesthetic Imagination

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Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science
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Why, how, and when do scientists imagine, and what epistemological roles does the imagination play in scientific progress? Over the past few years, many philosophical accounts have emerged that are relevant to these questions. Roman Frigg, Arnon Levy, and Adam Toon have developed theories of scientific models that place imagination at the heart of modelling practice. And James R. Brown, Tamar Gendler, James McAllister, Letitia Meynell, and Nancy Nersessian have developed theories that recognize the indispensable role of the imagination in the performance of thought experiments. On the other hand, philosophers like Michael Weisberg dismiss imagination-based views of scientific modelling as mere ‘folk ontology’, and John D. Norton seems to claim that thought experiments are arguments whose imaginary components are epistemologically irrelevant.

In this conference we turn to aesthetics for help in addressing issues concerning scientific imagination-use. Aesthetics is said to have begun in 1717 with an essay titled “The Pleasures of the Imagination” by Joseph Addison, and ever since the imagination has been what Michael Polyani called “the cornerstone of aesthetic theory”. In recent years Kendall Walton has fruitfully explored the fundamental relevance of imagination for understanding literary, visual and auditory fictions. And many others have been inspired to do the same, including Greg Currie, David Davies, Peter Lamarque, Stein Olsen, and Kathleen Stock.

This conference aims to connect work on artistic and scientific imagination, and to advance our understanding of the epistemic and heuristic roles that imagination can play. Specific topics may include:

- What kinds of imagination are involved in science?
- What is the relation between scientific imagination and aesthetic imagination?
- What are the structure and limits of knowledge and understanding acquired through imagination?
- From a methodological point of view, how can aesthetic considerations about imagination play a role in philosophical accounts of scientific reasoning?
- What can considerations about scientific imagination contribute to our understanding of aesthetic imagination?

The conference will include eight invited talks and four contributed papers. Two of the four slots for contributed papers are being reserved for graduate students, each of whom will receive a travel bursary of £100.

To apply, please send an anonymised abstract of around 1000 words (including footnotes and references) and a cover letter including your name, position, affiliation, and title of your abstract to Mike Stuart (m.stuart@lse.ac.uk) by 7 July 2017.

For more information regarding the conference please contact f.salis@lse.ac.uk or m.stuart@lse.ac.uk or check the conference webpage [here](#).