

MARCEL J. BOUMANS

Models of Clutter

ABSTRACT. In his seminal ‘Models of Data,’ Patrick Suppes [1962] proposes a ‘hierarchy of models’ to define a correspondence between abstract theories and the complex activities of conducting experiment and measurement. Although he nicely distinguishes a lowest level of ‘ceteris paribus conditions’, that is, a level of ‘noises, lighting, odors, phases of the moon,’ he does not provide a model for this level, and therefore is not able to connect this level to the upper levels. The level of ceteris paribus conditions aims at reducing clutter: to mute loud noises, to fresh the air from bad “odors”, or to re-organize the schedule for observations. These attempts to reduce clutter, that is, these cleaning activities are often the most time-consuming activities in scientific practice and require a lot of creativity and intuition. Because philosophy of science is, in my view, philosophy of science in practice, these activities deserve more attention. This article, therefore, proposes an attempt to complete Suppes’s hierarchy of models by suggesting a methodology for designing and testing ‘models of clutter’ that account for the level of ceteris paribus conditions.

KEY WORDS: ceteris paribus conditions, clutter, hierarchy of models, model of data, philosophy of science in practice

1. Introduction

Because philosophy of science should indeed be about science, that is, the practice of science, a few likeminded philosophers founded in 2006 an organization, the Society for the Philosophy of Science in Practice, that aims at supporting this kind of philosophy. Philosophy of science-in-practice is philosophy that analyses science in the making, that is, the daily practice of scientific research and everything that such practice entails (e.g. processes of inquiry, institutional settings and social dynamics among in-