

ATS1208

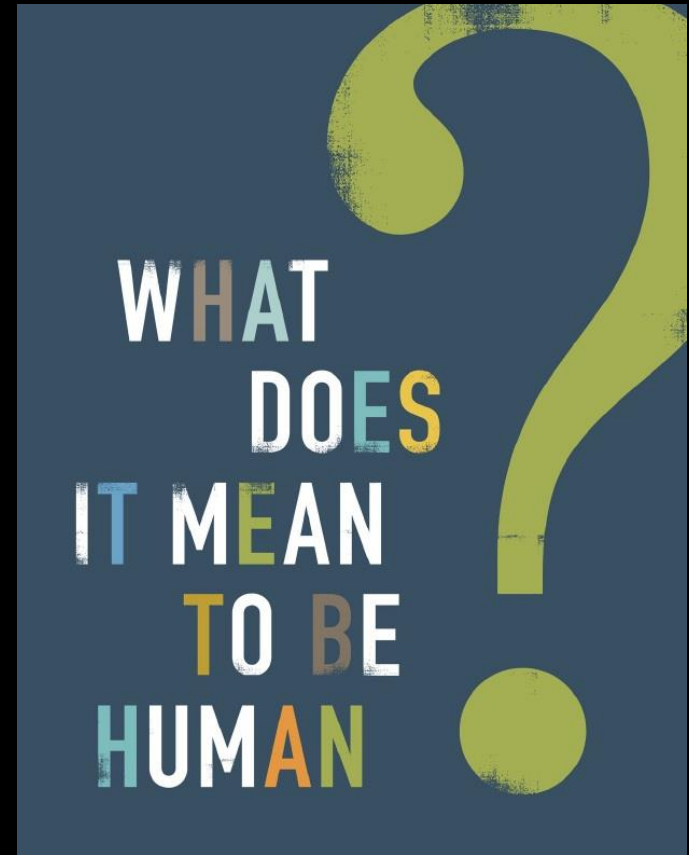
Digital Humanities: Concepts, tools and debates

Week 3: What are 'the humanities'?



Today's lectorial

- Humanities as a particular approach to education
- The relationship between 'the sciences' and 'the humanities'
- The technologies and tools of 'the humanities'
- What are 'the humanities' heading today?



What are humanities for you?

- Log in to <https://etherpad.net/p/xGT3PIBBI8>
- Edit the list of humanities disciplines
 - Add ones that you think are missing
 - Add (civil) comments about ones you think should not be included

‘Before the Humanities, the Humanists’

- ‘In philosophy the contemplations of man do either penetrate unto God, or are circumferred to nature, or are reverted upon himself. Out of which there do arise three knowledges – divine philosophy, natural philosophy and human philosophy or humanity’

(Bacon 1605)



The origins of modern science

- ‘Galileian science ... could have taken over the scholastic saying *‘individuum est ineffabile’* (‘we can say nothing about the individual’). Using mathematics and the experimental method involved the need to measure and to repeat phenomena, whereas an individualising approach made the latter impossible and allowed the former only in part’

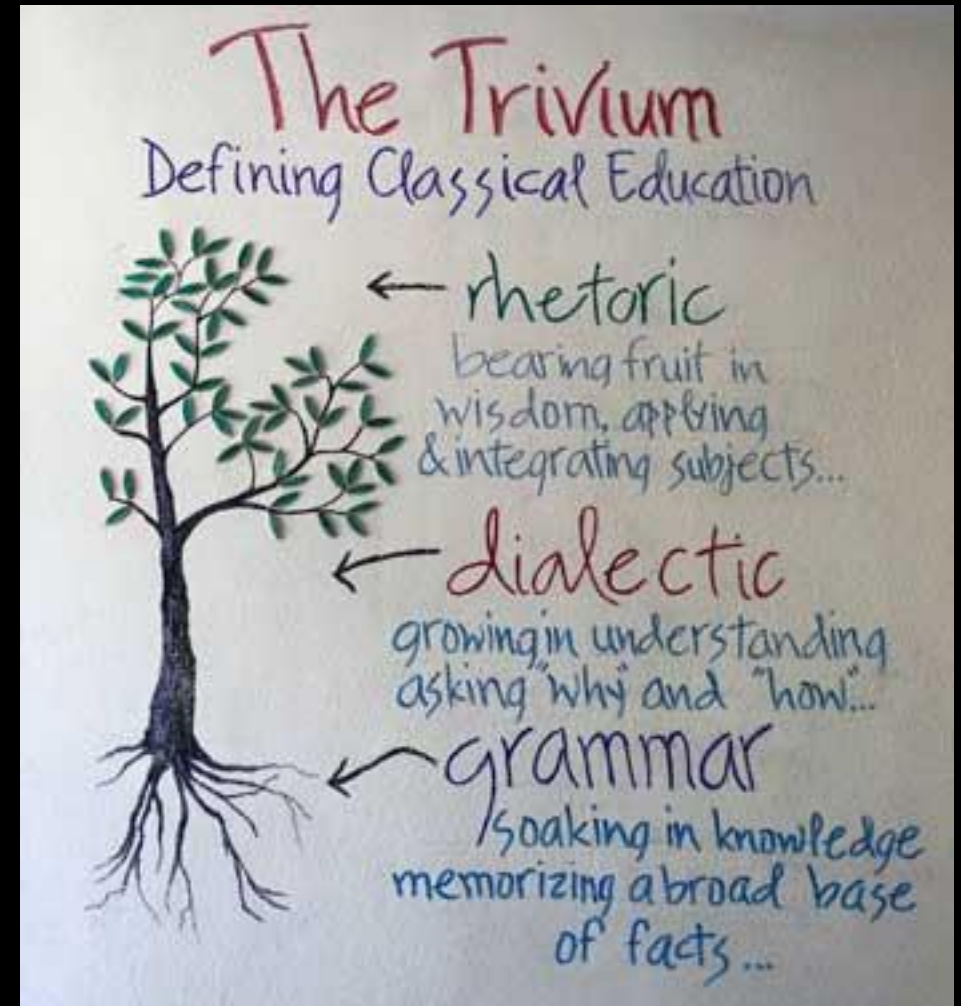
(Ginzburg 1980: 15)



Education to promote *Allgemeine Bildung*

- ‘Traditionally, and especially during the last 200 or 300 years at least in the West (and since about that time in Japan, as well) an educated person was someone who shared a common stock of formal knowledge – someone who had what the Germans called *Allgemeine Bildung* and the English (and following them, the nineteenth-century Americans) called a *Liberal education*’

(Drucker 2012: 205)



Education as personal development

- ‘the main concern of educators was to help pupils to integrate the different disciplines and knowledges they had learned into an unitary “mind set”, in an unitary self-sustaining complexity’

(Bologna 2004: 4)



Disciplines and institutions

- Where do we fit (Steve and Simon)?
 - What disciplines do we think we work in?
 - What faculties are we employed by?

What did a university look like in 1850?

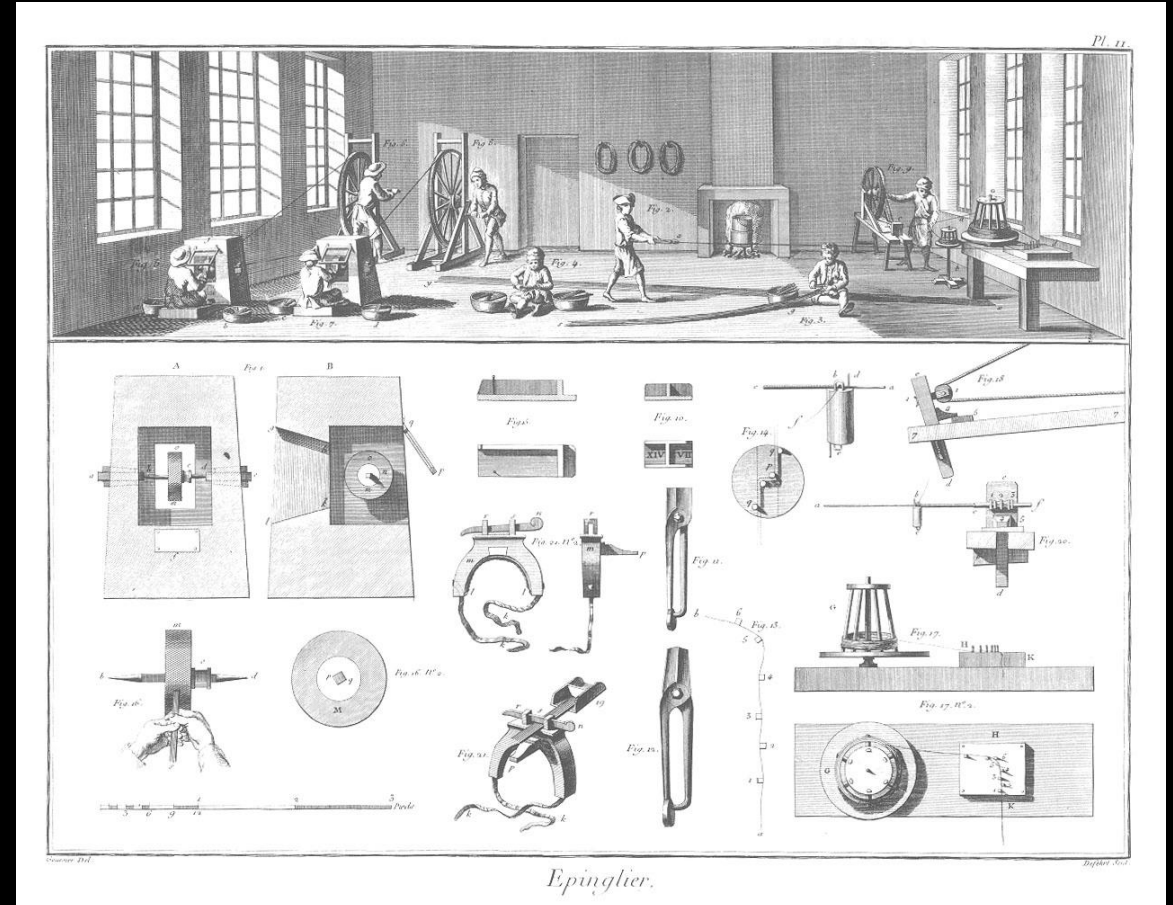
- In Copenhagen, the following faculties could be found:
 - Jurisprudence & Political Science
 - Mathematics & Science
 - Medical Science
 - Philosophy



The rise of 'disciplines'

- 'The shift from humanism to the institutionally sanctioned disciplinary practices and protocols that we associate with the humanities today is best described as a gradual process of subdivision and specialization. Carried out in the course of the modernization of the medieval university, the process was powerfully inflected by the rise of princely academies in the 16th and 17th centuries, and, in their wake, of learned societies and national academies in the 18th and 19th centuries. Each of these had their own licenses on knowledge, as well as professional rituals, meetings, and publications'

(Burdick et al. 2012: 6)



'The humanities' acquire a name

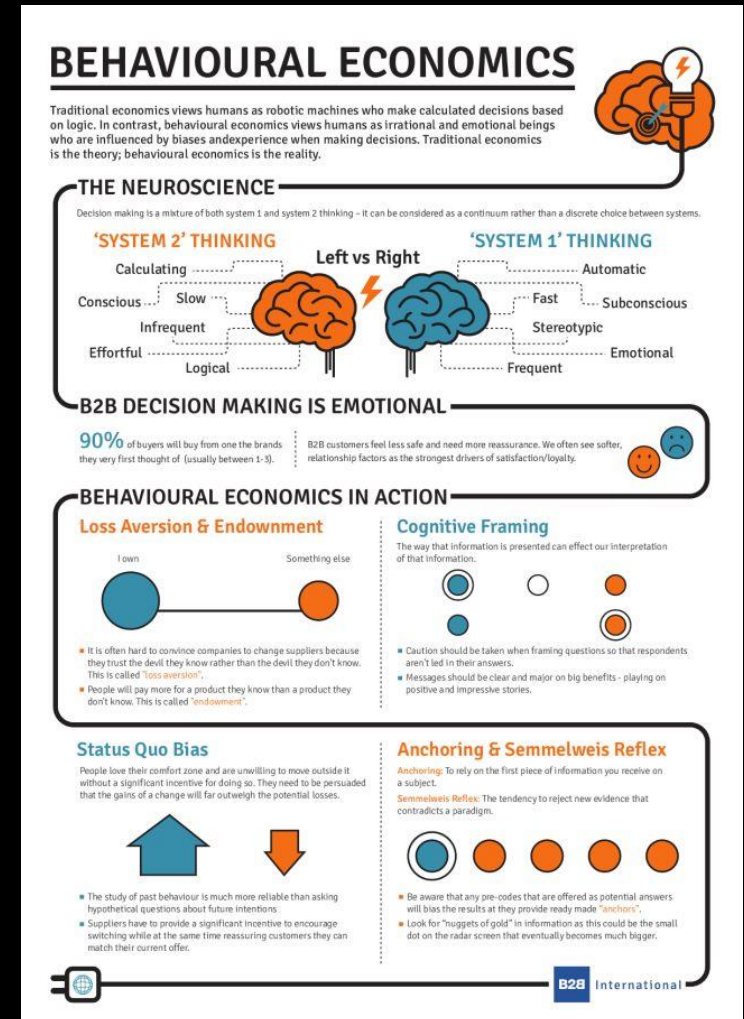
- 'The relevant branches of learning were not collectively referred to as "the humanities" before the early twentieth century ... it is important to recognize that the category of "the humanities" principally (though not exclusively) evolved as part of a defensive movement against the perceived challenge of a kind of **positivism** that claimed to be generalizing the methods of the natural sciences'



‘the humanities’ *versus* ‘the sciences’?

- ‘This impulse, strongly evident in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, also meant that strenuous attempts were made to distinguish the humanities disciplines from those classified as “social sciences”, precisely because the latter seemed so much more hospitable to, or at ease with, the supposed methods of the natural sciences’

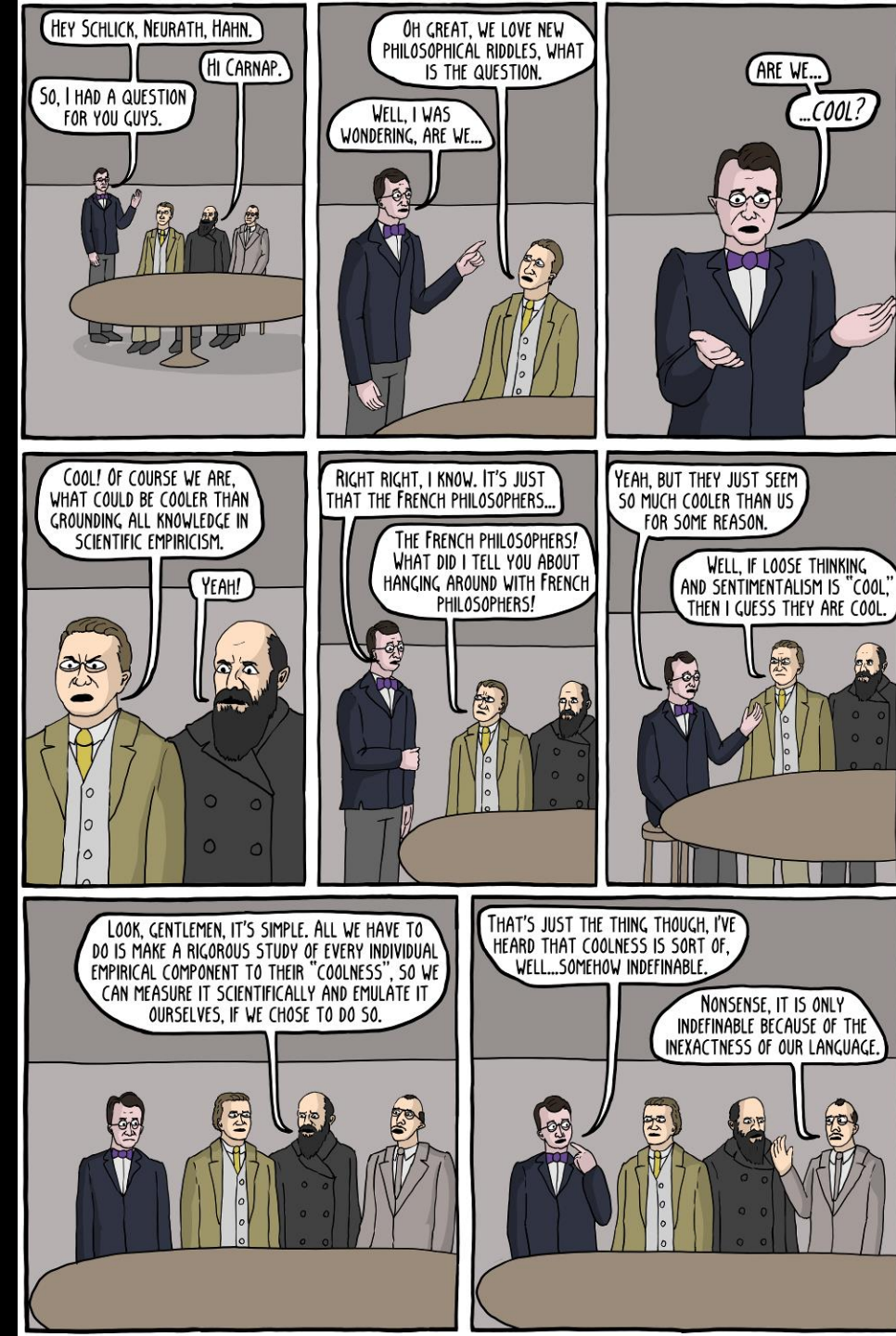
(Collini 2015: 273)



Positivism

- ‘the reduction of science to statements about directly observable facts and the elimination as meaningless of any sentence that is neither analytic nor empirical, e.g. of metaphysics’
- ‘the view that the social sciences and even humanities have basically the same aims and methods as the natural sciences’

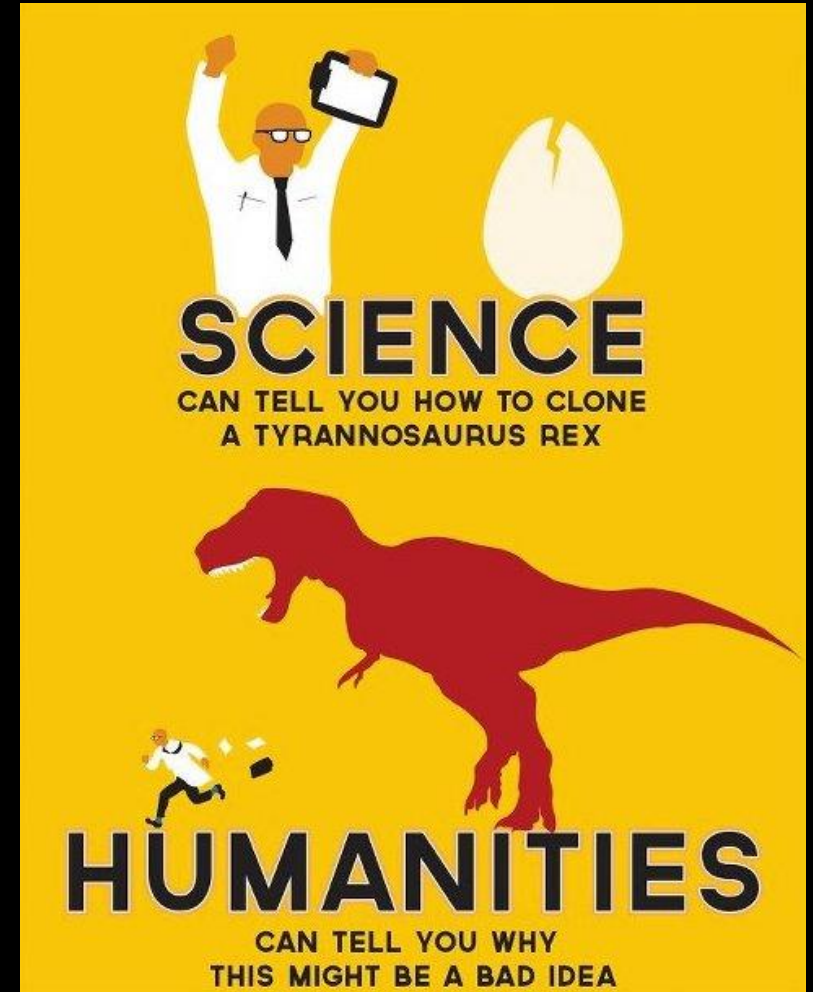
(Giedymin 1975: 276)



Humanities = 'everything that isn't science'?

- 'while the humanities thrive on dispute and dialectic, science privileges academic consensus'
- [Yet] ... At the dawn of the 1800s, natural science and the humanities coexisted in remarkable harmony'

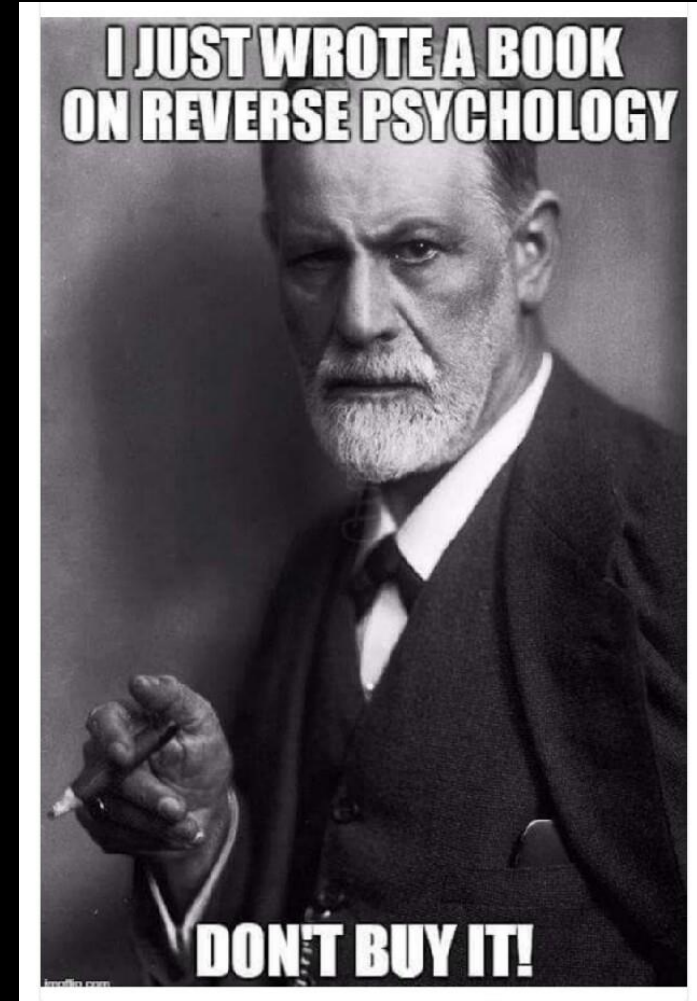
(McNeely & Wolverton 2008: 210)



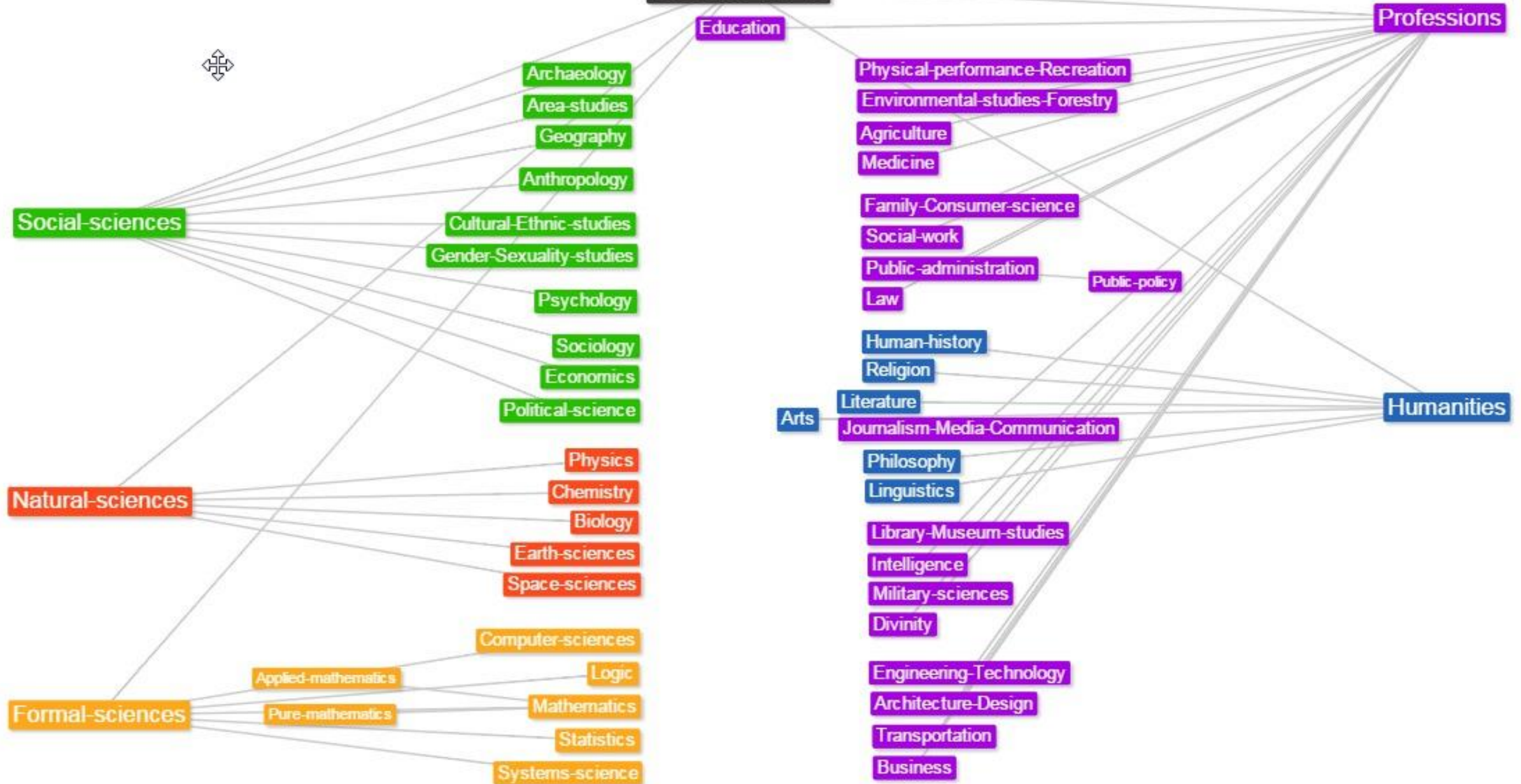
So where do we fit 'the social sciences'?

- 'In essence, humanities and the social sciences are the study of the human condition – a field of study concerned with human behaviours, exploring the contours of culture and society across space and time. The study provides a perceptive framework of the processes of social systems and examines the impacts of social organisation on the individual and groups.'
- 'Central to our approach is to develop the way students think and to offer a diversity of enquiry through a broad range of disciplines. We expect our students to become skilled in the use of language, and in the analysis of evidence, in whatever context it may present itself'

(Federation University Australia 2017)



DISCIPLINES



Is it so easy to separate 'humanities' & sciences?

- 'The proper rigour of the natural sciences could never be achieved by medicine, because of its inability to quantify (except in some purely auxiliary aspects); the inability to quantify stemmed from the impossibility of eliminating the qualitative, the individual; and the impossibility of eliminating the individual resulted from the fact that the human eye is more sensitive to even slight differences between human beings than it is to differences between rocks or leaves'

(Ginzburg 1980: 21)



The re-definition of humanities 'disciplines'

- A number of the disciplines associated with humanities have shifted or been redefined over the past century
- In many universities, sociology only established its own space after WWII, while other changes have accelerated within the last 50 years
- For example, feminism has had an enormous impact across the humanities, from history to literary criticism

36 line icons: ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES



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What 'materials' do historians handle?

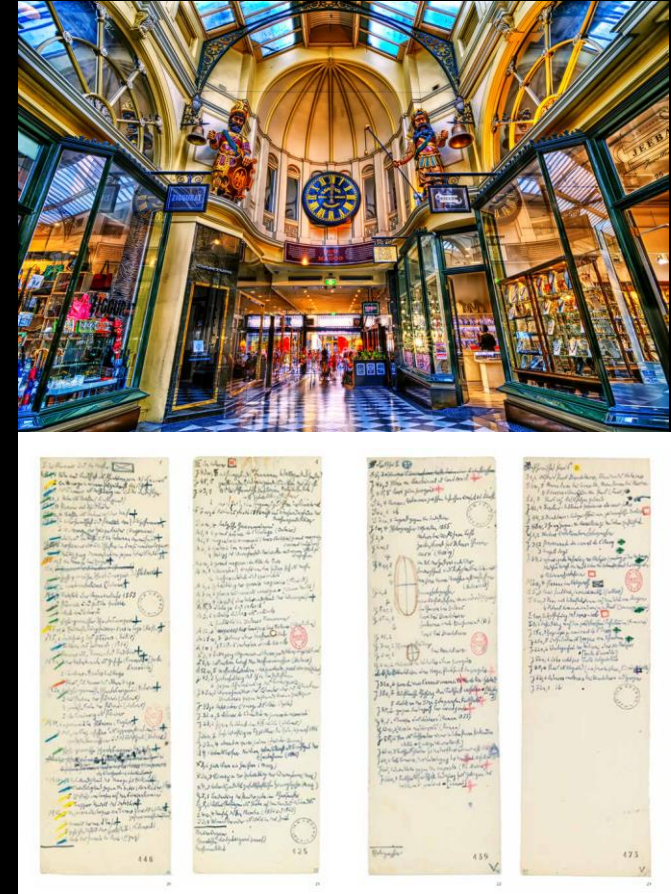
- 'Whether it is the bones immured in the Syrian fortifications, a word whose form or use reveals a custom, a narrative written by a witness of some scene, ancient or modern, what do we really mean by *document*, if it is not a "track", as it were – the mark, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind?'

(Bloch 1984: 55)



The humanities already have technologies

- ‘Traditionally, humanities scholars have used narrative to construct the portrait that furthers this objective. Narrative encourages the interweaving of evidentiary threads and permits the scholar to qualify, highlight, or subdue any thread or set of them—to use emphasis, nuance, and other literary devices to achieve the complex construction of past worlds’



The humanities already have technologies

- ‘All of these elements—interdependency, narrative, and nuance, among others—predispose the humanists to look askance at any method or tool that appears to reduce complex events to simple schemes’

(Bodenhamer et al. 2010: xiii)



New technologies

- New material to study
- New ways of analysing and presenting material

Are they still relevant today?

- ‘To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the “authentic” print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed’

(Benjamin 1936)



So are 'the humanities' in crisis today?

- 'The humanities in modern times ... have developed a close alliance with writing and print. Writing and print are here to stay and will certainly amount to even more in the future than in the past, but ... they are now interwoven with newer media—radio, television, the cinema, and other devices—with which they interact and which transform them ...'



Or are they *always* in crisis?

- ‘The humanities are certainly in an unsatisfactory state, but are also probably better off than at any time before in history. For, if they are alive, the humanities are always in a state of crisis. Man’s [sic] life is one of crises, and the humanities do not stand outside man's life but live within it. The unchallenged life is not worth living’

(Ong 1971: 21-2)



Further reading

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