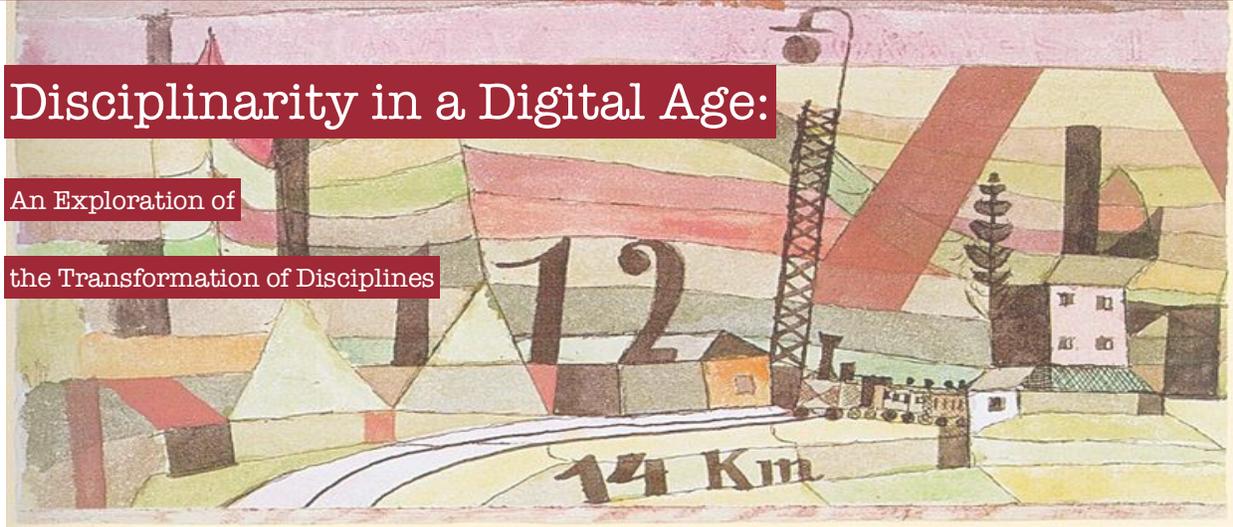


Call For Papers

Disciplinary in a Digital Age:

An Exploration of

the Transformation of Disciplines



Department Of Humanities And Social Sciences - INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI

7-14 January 2019 (Exact dates will be announced soon)

CONCEPT NOTE

The evolution of disciplines under the influence of digitization is a matter that demands urgent scrutiny. Both the sciences and humanities are confronted with 'data' poised for manipulation. While digitization can enrich the tools and methods available for investigation, it also rekindles dreams of a singular methodology universal enough to consolidate an unwieldy multiplicity of disciplines. But this promise of digitization must echo with the noise of 'science wars' in the nineties. That flashpoint was a sure betrayal of the territorial instincts that define academic departments thereby obscuring the real history of disciplines as they individuate out of the ferment of interacting discourses. As the Sokal affair saw the publication of a hoax article in a leading cultural studies journal, the paradoxical appropriation of scientific content was an occasion to ask if editorial ideology could ever qualify as a 'method'. All in all, digitization provides for a moment to reconsider both the future and the history of disciplines today.

Indeed it was the Sokal affair that also precipitated a growing interest in philosophy of science displayed by the absorption of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend in discussions of postmodernism. Postmodernism itself is a condition mediated by the emergence of digital media. The pressure of this seemingly ubiquitous technological context leads one to question the very idea of disciplinary in a digital age. As digitization creates ground for computation, does it necessarily propagate a view of science that is essentially about control and prediction? Or does the formalism heralded by digitization ask us to reexamine the role of formalization in science as such?

While science aggressively sets standards of intelligibility for the humanities, earlier attempts at formalizing the humanities had to negotiate institutional obstacles of another kind. Consider the curious contradictions forced into the thought of Vladimir Propp as one of those Formalists suspected for not being Marxist enough in Soviet Russia. External to disciplinary boundaries, there are also attempts to prop up grand programs which seek to unify all knowledge or systematize existing groups of disciplines. Auguste Comte places sociology at the top of the hierarchy of sciences because it can ill-afford to isolate its subject matter from its context unlike physical

sciences. On the other hand, cybernetics and complexity studies drew inspiration from the dependence of sociology on context.

Hence we have ever more reason to persist in not reading scientism of the humanities as a mere symptom of disciplinary insecurity. Disciplines aspire to become scientific not merely to pass Karl Popper's problem of demarcation (they often do not). Rather disciplines participate in and are constituted by a discursive totality that transcends their respective boundaries even if never all-encompassing. Superficially, it is clear that unlike literature, mathematization implies that economics is characterized by strong disciplinarity. But if we mark scientific attitude by a tendency towards formalization, the question is to ask what varieties of formalism prevail and what purposes they serve. As Michel Foucault cautions us that even the epitome of formalism: mathematics is often loosely characterized as a progress from one naive formalism to another less so. Likewise, one may ask which stage of formalism another sub-discipline like theoretical linguistics is poised at?

Within the field of economics, formalization is often suspected as an excuse for "saying less" when one could say more. On the other hand, the digital humanities have been defended as an opportunity to expand upon the possibilities allowed by traditional techniques of literary criticism. Such was also the intent of the sociologist Gabriel Tarde when he criticized the economists not for being reductively calculative, but for not calculating enough. And now that the digital age allows for virtually limitless calculation, big data may allow for a quantification in sociology that could stretch the possibilities of economics itself. Digitization opens the Pandora's box not only for the quantification it accelerated but also for formalization, in general, as it spread across disciplines. The conference seeks to nurture this spirit of enquiry into the question of disciplinarity in the humanities and social sciences and its entanglement with the history and practice of sciences.

Questions that the conference seeks to address include but are not limited to:

- *Role of explanation in the social sciences in the context of 'big data'*
- *Import of concepts like 'entropy' from natural sciences*
- *With the systematization of data, questions about the telos of enquiries in humanities & social sciences*
- *The role of data in the emergence of experimental philosophy*
- *How digitization affords the possibility of simulation and the philosophical issues therein*
- *The relevance of econometrics to disciplines beyond economics*
- *The relationship between digitization and formalization*
- *The disunity of the social sciences in view of the disunity of the sciences*

Submission guidelines

Please submit an extended abstract (maximum 1000 words) by 15 October 2018 to the conference email: philoconference.iitd@gmail.com

Dates and Deadlines

15 October: Submission Deadline

1 November: Notification of Acceptance

Please follow the conference [blog](#) gain further familiarity with the expected themes and the spirit of the conference in general including the work of some of the invited speakers.