

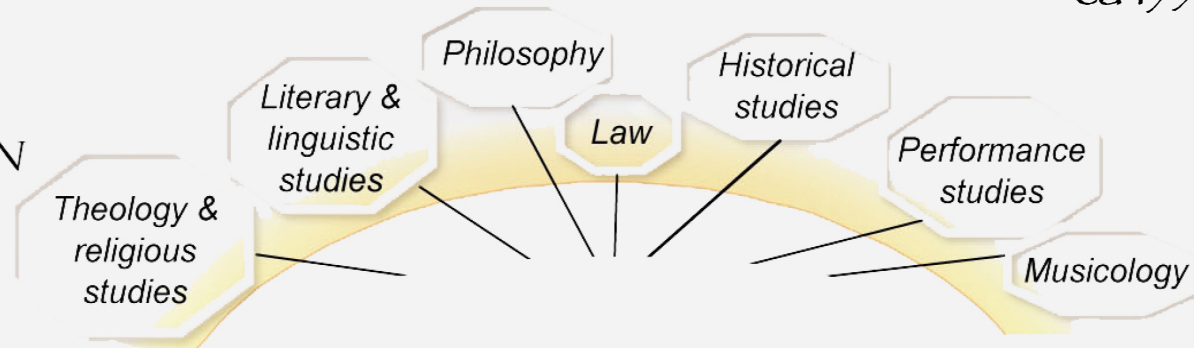
# Mimesis to poiesis in the digital humanities

Willard McCarty  
Department of Digital Humanities  
King's College London  
[www.mccarty.org.uk/](http://www.mccarty.org.uk/)

ca 1950-1995

*APPLICATION*

in academic departments



by computing centres, libraries & other non-academic units

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

from work done in



COMPUTER SCIENCE

& COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH

The result:  
many good  
things, but on the  
whole little  
advance on  
mimetic  
mechanisation of  
the codex –  
hence by analogy  
with the  
mechanisation of  
music,  
*the knowledge  
jukebox.*





# CultureSampo Semantic Web Publishing Machine



HELSINKI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
Media Technology

## PUBLISHERS

### Organizations

- Museums
- Libraries
- Archives
- Media

### Web Sources

- Wikipedia
- LOD

### Citizens

- Societies
- Individuals



## CUSTOMERS

### Organizations

- Museums
- Libraries
- Archives
- Media
- Tourism

### Web Sources

- LOD
- Europeana

### Citizens

- Societies
- Individuals

W3C Semantic Web  
FinnONTO Content Infrastructure

## DEVELOPERS



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



SeCo  
SEMANTIC COOPERATION



"There are six of us.  
"The youngest is Bobby, who's 8.  
"We've brought our own lunch.  
"We've \$20 to spend.  
"Granny can't do much walking.  
"And we have to be out by 7  
o'clock.  
"What is our best itinerary?"

One minute later, the Browns have their answer and are on their way through the streets of Montreal to enjoy a day at Expo 67.

Andrew Webster, "Computers: The New Age of Miracles", *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 16 November 1965

Little conceptual advance in ca 40 years

*The entertainment system was belting out the Beatles' "We Can Work It Out" when the phone rang. When Pete answered, his phone turned the sound down by sending a message to all the other **local** devices that had a **volume control**. His sister, Lucy, was on the line from the doctor's office: "Mom needs to see a specialist and then has to have*

a series of physical therapy sessions. Bi-weekly or something. I'm going to have my agent set up the appointments." Pete immediately agreed to share the chauffeuring.

At the doctor's office, Lucy instructed her Semantic Web agent through her handheld Web browser. The agent

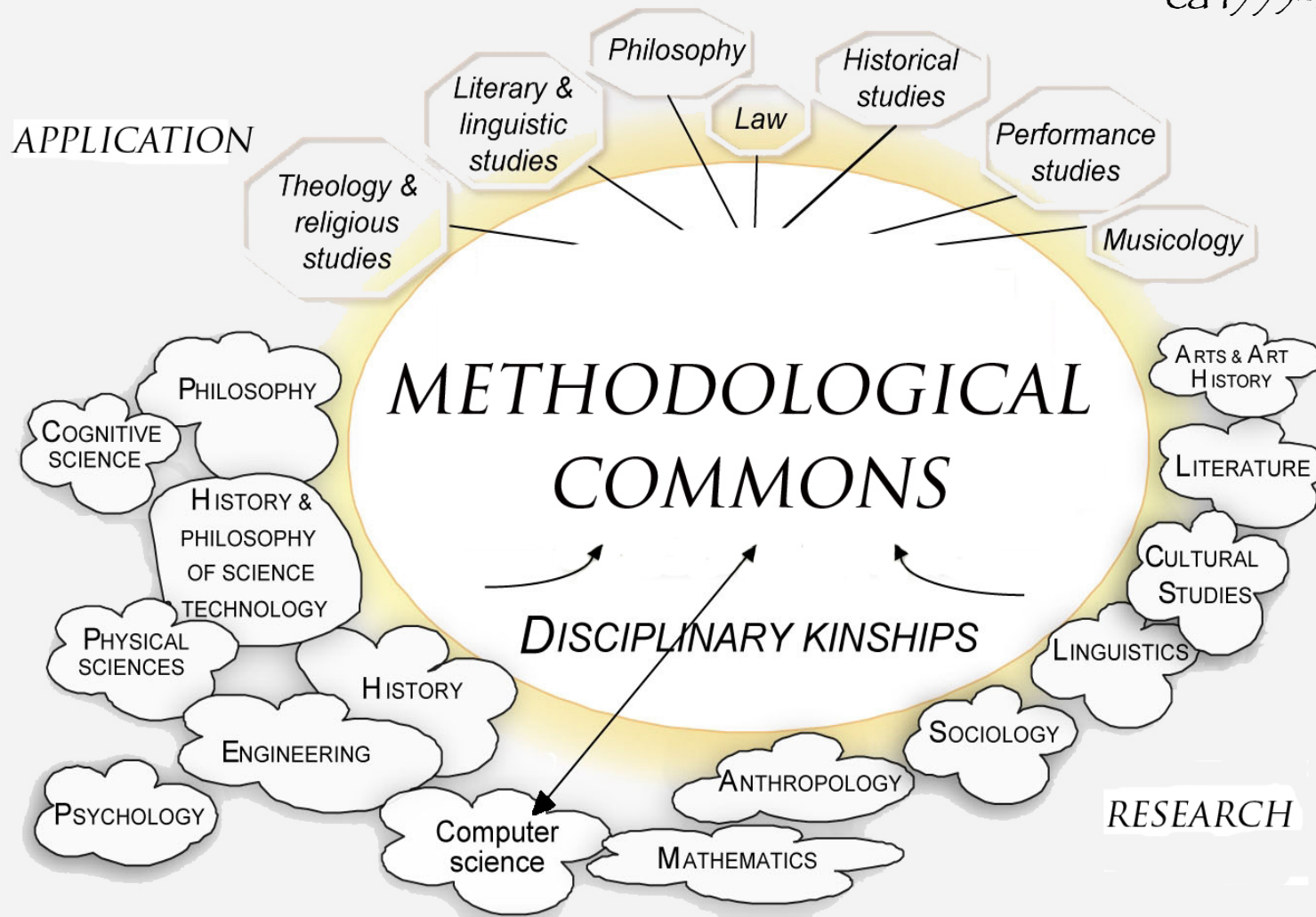
In a few minutes the agent presented them with a plan. Pete didn't like it—University Hospital was all the way across town from Mom's place, and he'd be driving back in the middle of rush hour. He set his own agent to redo the search with stricter preferences about **location** and

status securely verified by other means," the agent reassured him. "(Details?)"

Lucy registered her assent at about the same moment Pete was muttering, "Spare me the details," and it was all set. (Of course, Pete couldn't resist the details and later that night had his agent explain how

Tim Berners-Lee, James Hendler and Ora Lassila, "The Semantic Web", *Scientific American*, May 2001

ca 1995-2005

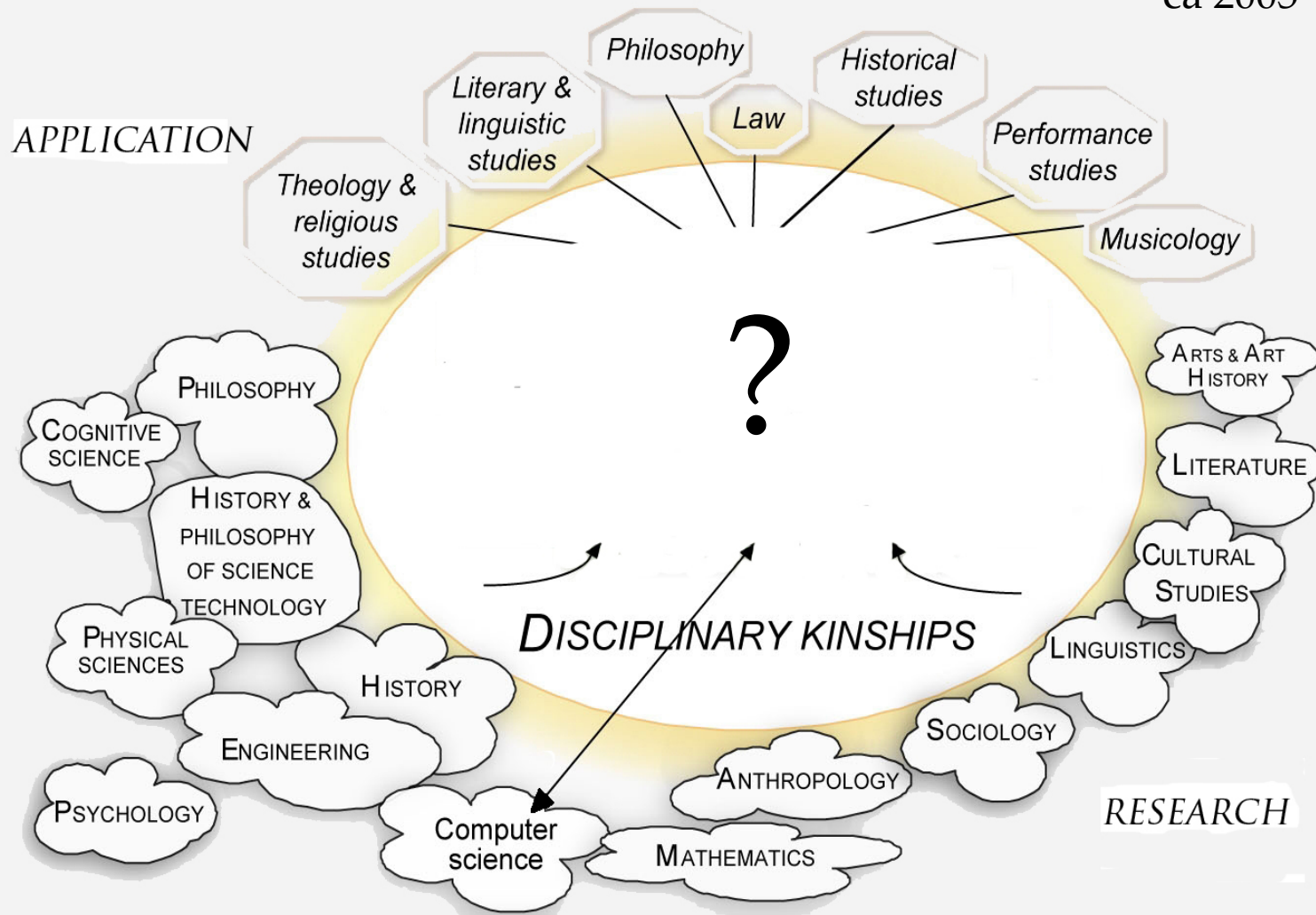


Formation of a discipline centred on methods: the digital humanities as keepers of a “methodological commons”. But how is this of the humanities?

# Difficult questions & tentative answers

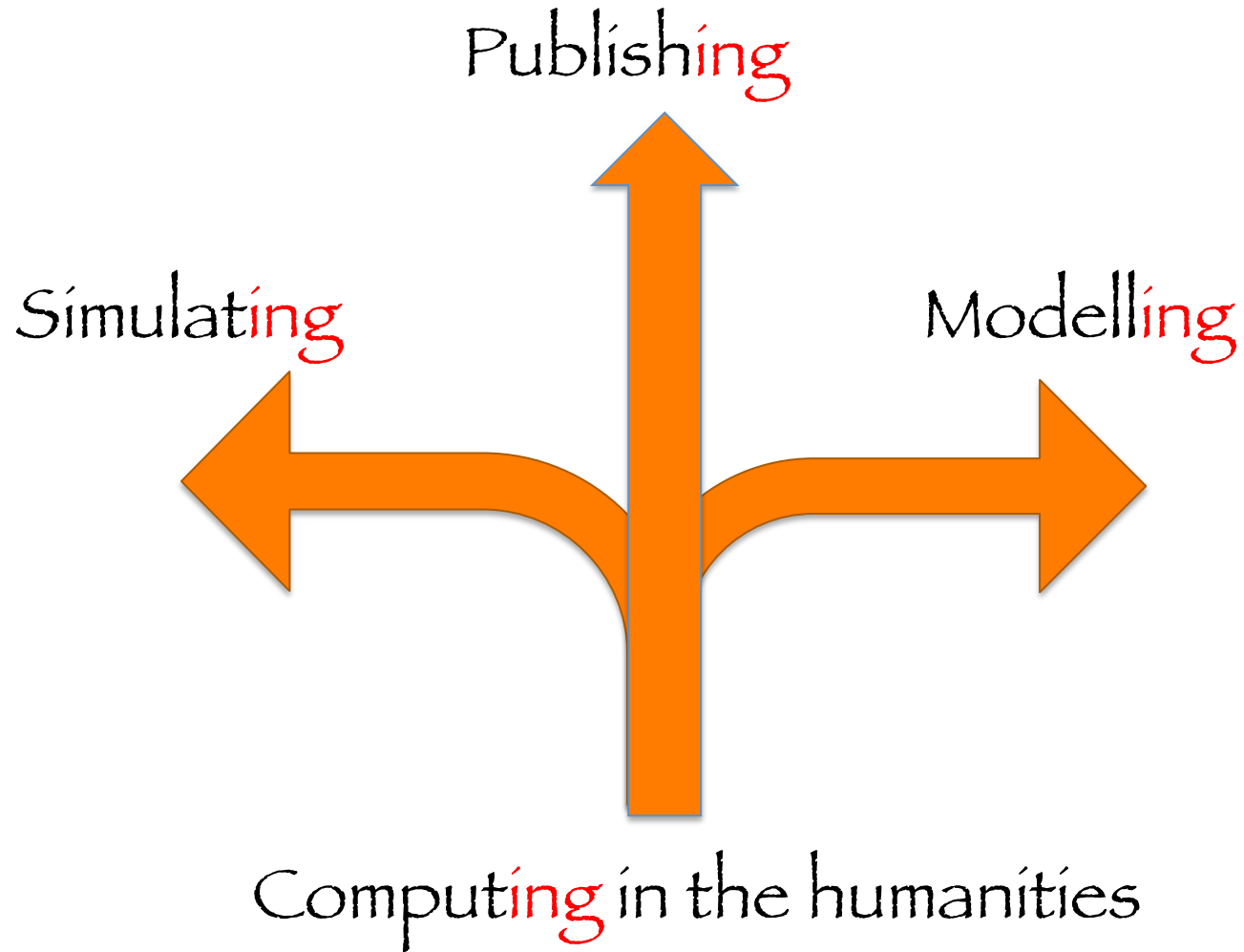
- What are we trying to do?
  - Simply to be useful to the older disciplines? Become the perfect servant, and so be without a life of our own?
  - Found a new discipline on the basis of a methodology which provides cogent explanations of phenomena that cannot be obtained by any other means? Thus Latour's moral quandry (in "The Politics of Explanation"):
    - "If the work of explaining something is that of empire-building, *should we explain something?.... Do we want to add yet another discipline and profession to the many that we study?.... Do we lust for power and recognition?....*"
- This lust is wrong because it distracts. Explanation and its concrete instantiation in methods are not a desirable goals because they divert us from that which we study. They become things in themselves, distancing us from that which give them meaning. Computational methodology is a house built on sand.
- Again Latour: *replace methodology by style* (by playing a role rather than following a rule).

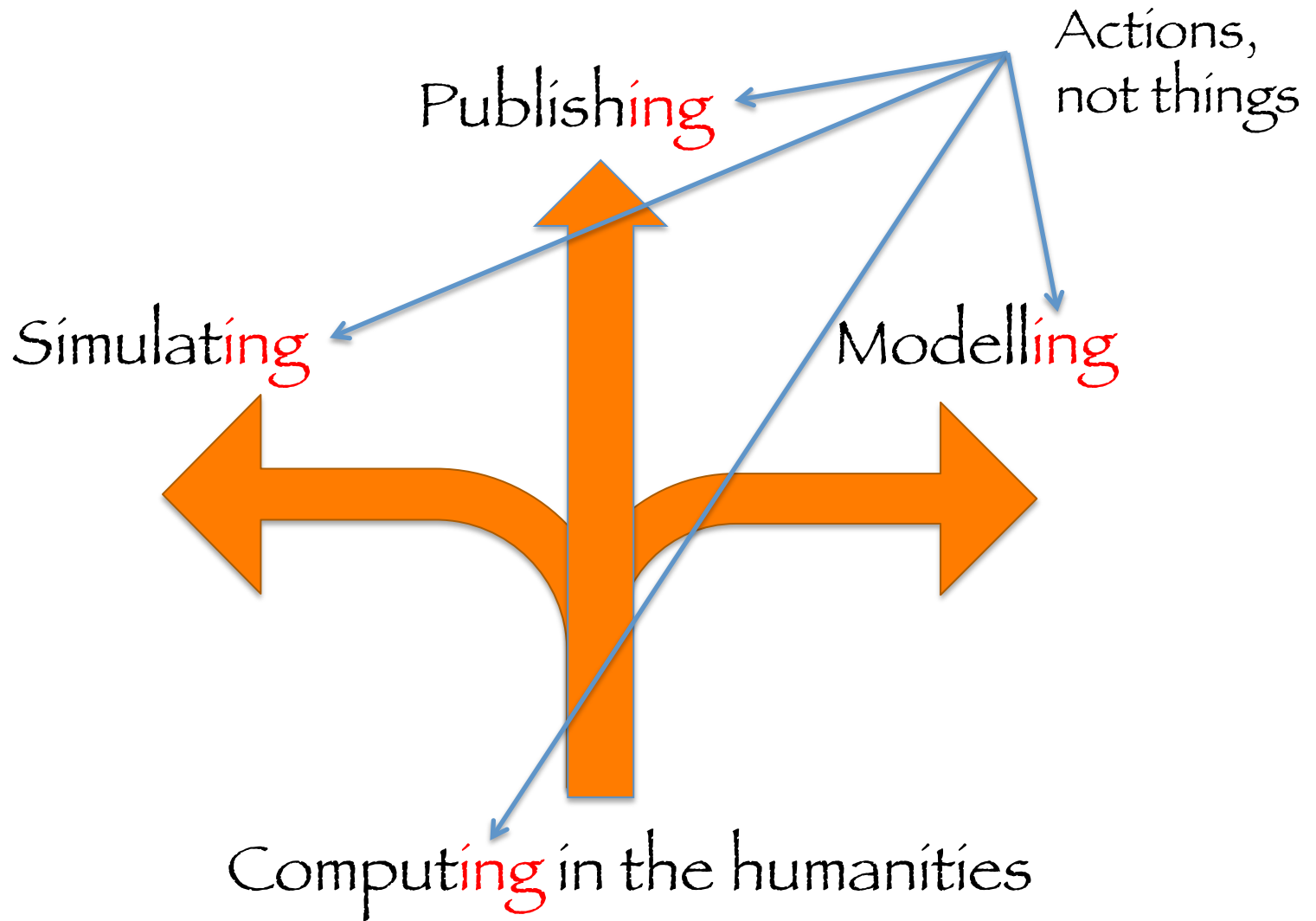
ca 2005-

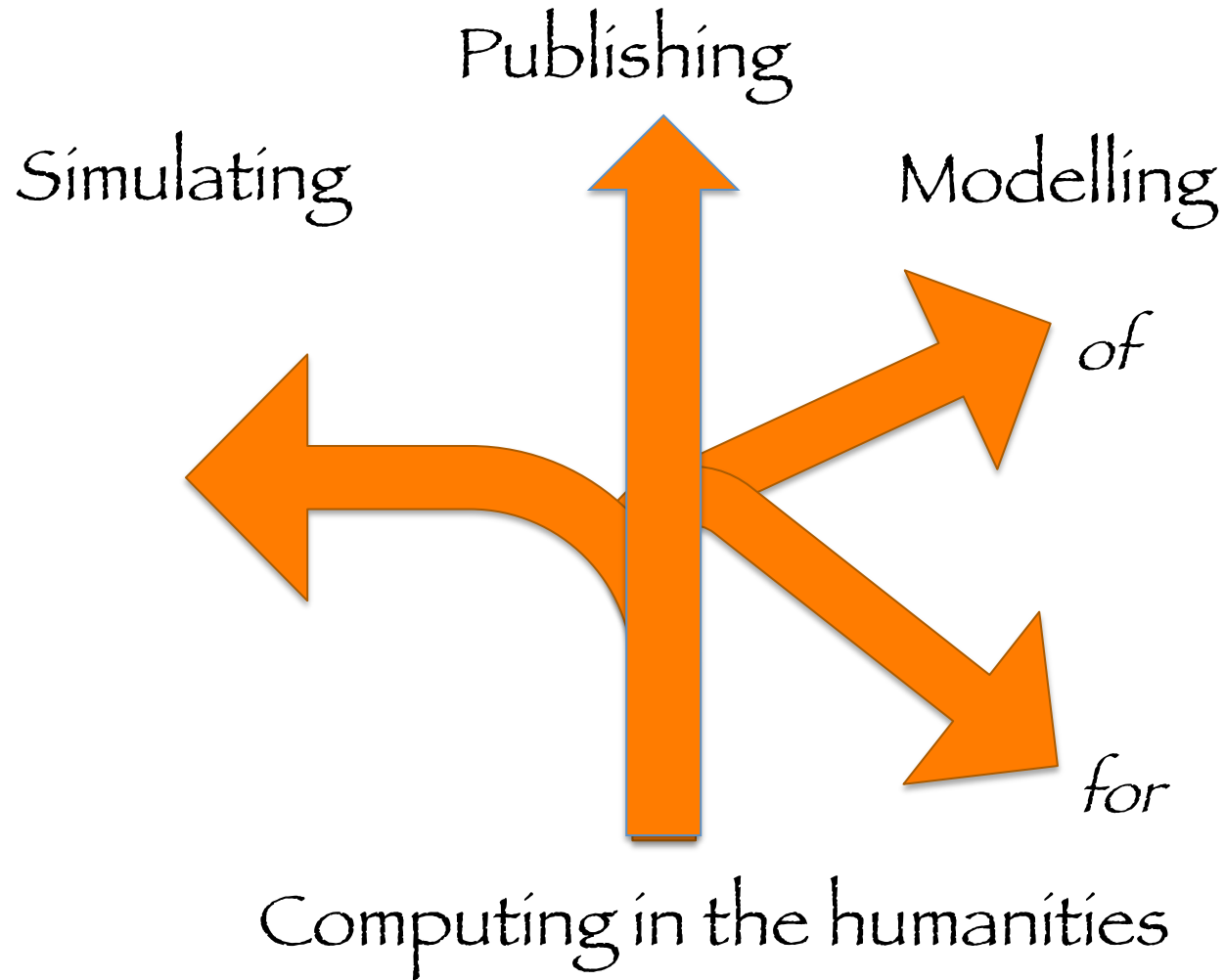


Apart from theories and imperatives, what actually do we find going on in this space of the digital humanities?



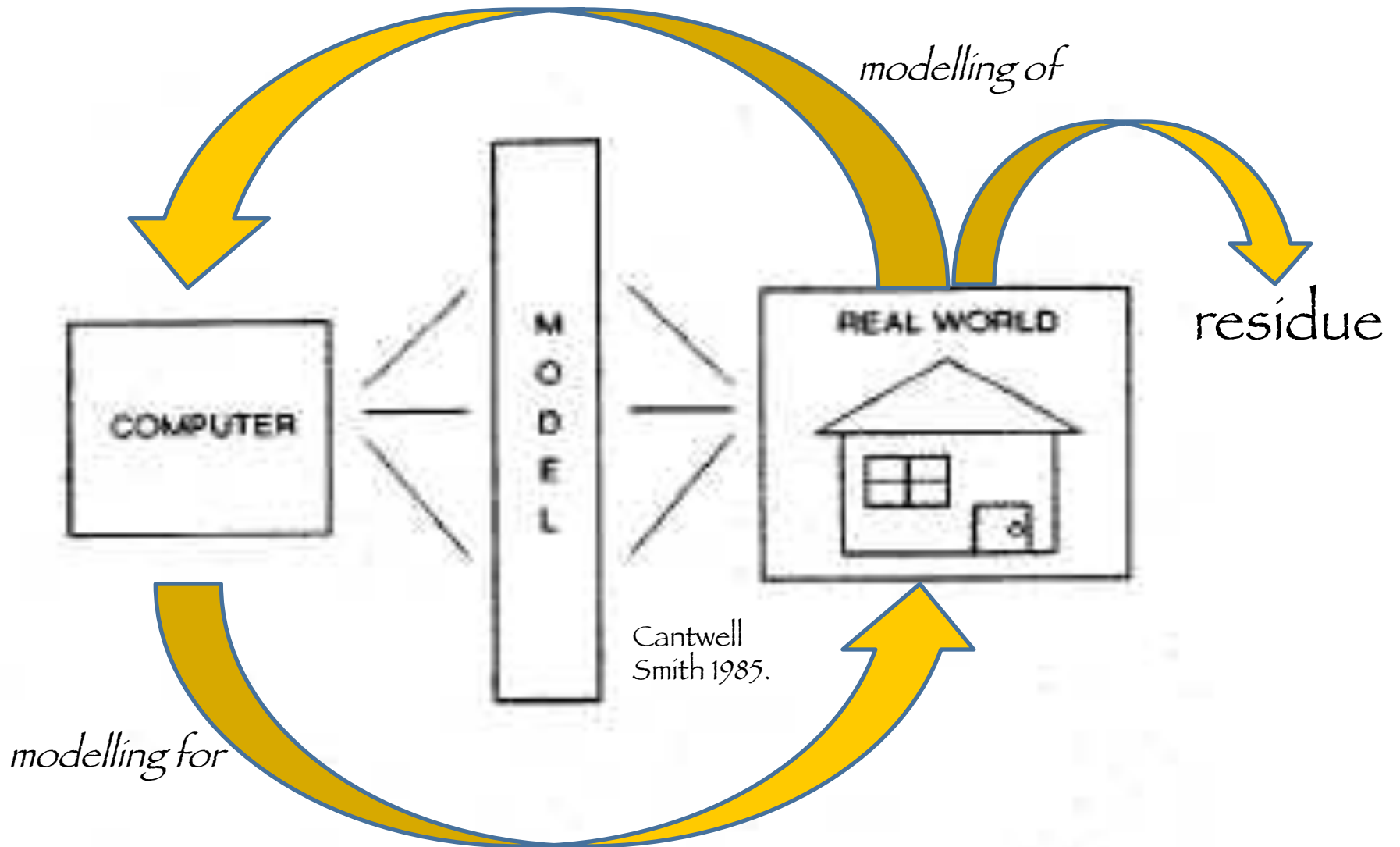








# Basics: modelling



Simulating

Modelling

*is*

*of*

Mimetic

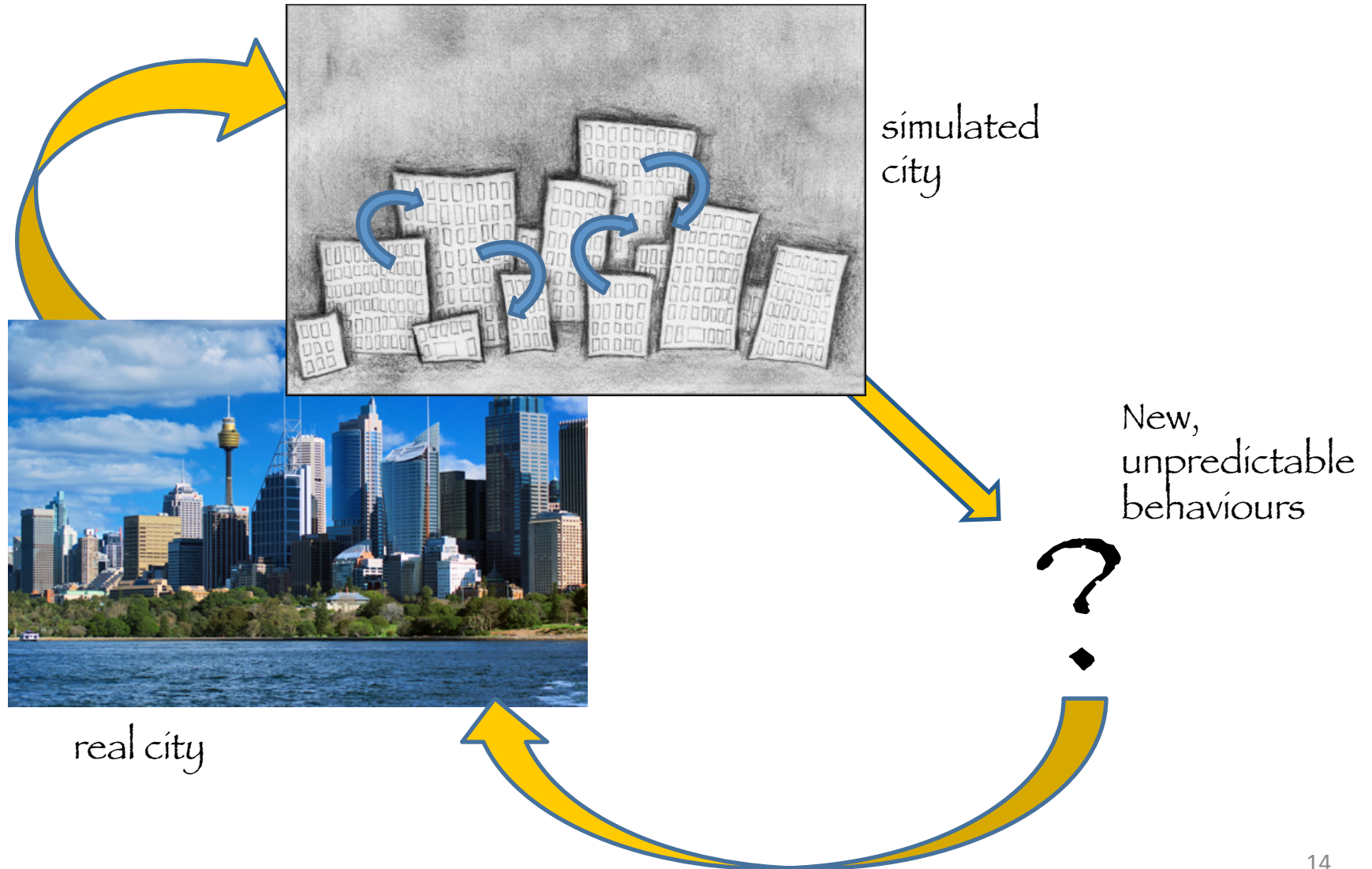
Creative

*might be*

*for*

Computing in the humanities

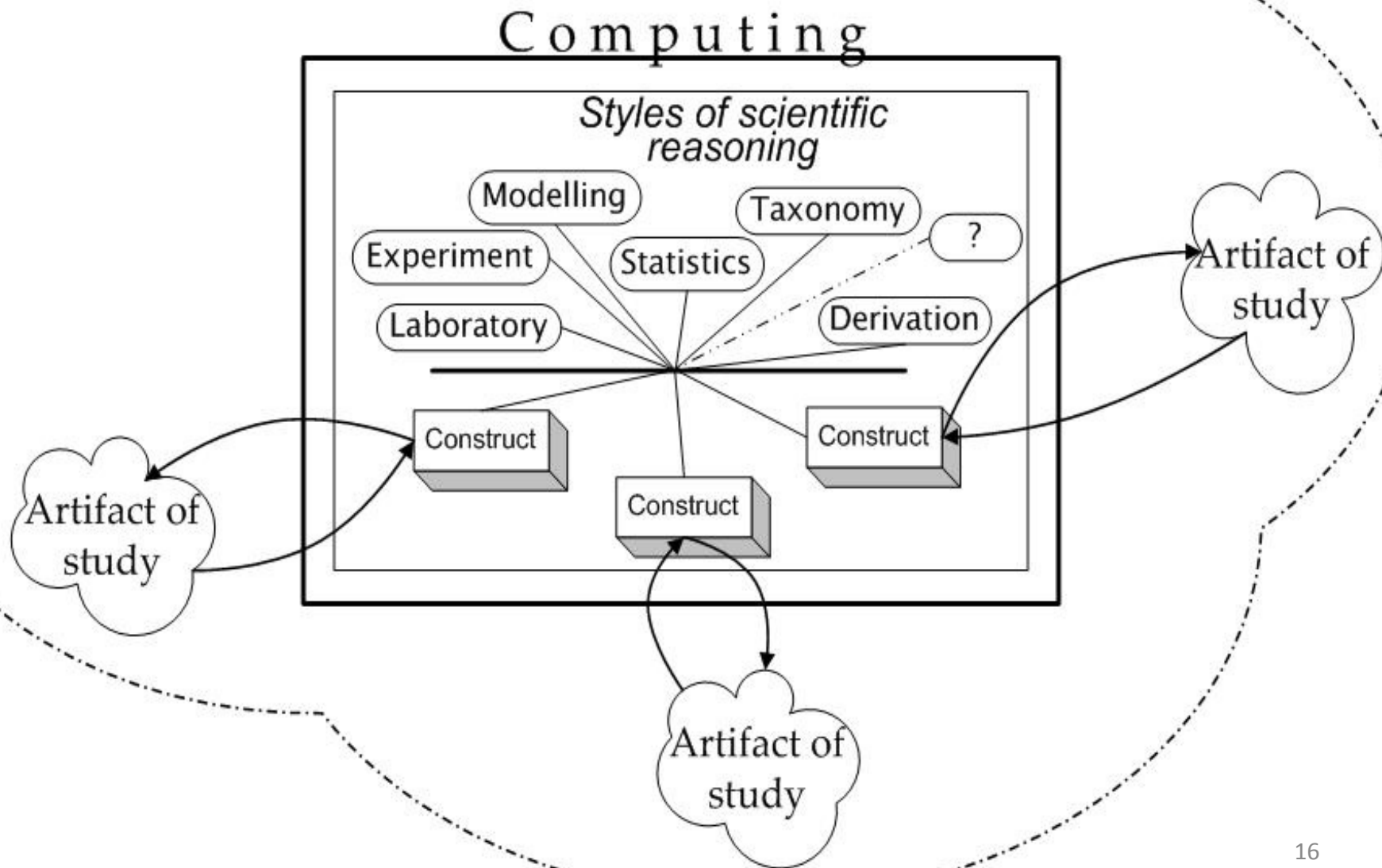
# Basics: simulating

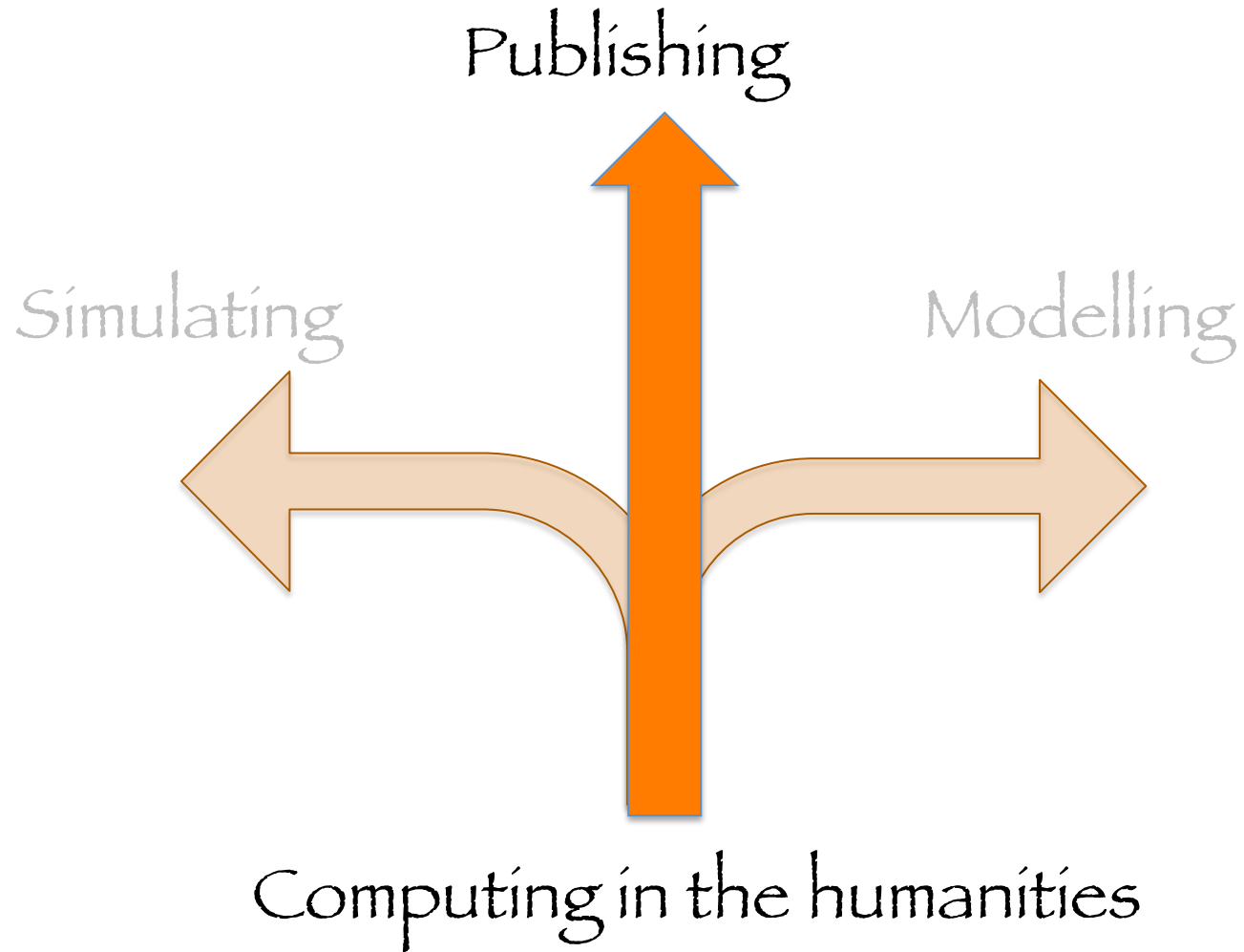




- Jerry Fodor: “no computation without representation” (*Language of Thought*, 1975).
- I suggest: “No computing (in the humanities) without experimenting and comparing”.

# The humanities





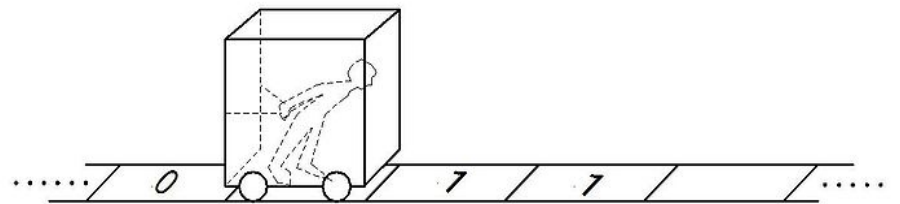


# Like a thief in the night

- Joseph Weizenbaum: “...the direct societal effects of any pervasive new technology are as nothing compared to its much more subtle and ultimately more important side effects” (“On the Impact of the Computer on Society”, 1972).
- What, for us now, are these?
  - Wide & interdisciplinary rather than deep & specialist;
  - Argumentative rather than evidential;
  - Probabilistic rather than determined;
  - Conjecturally scientific – when it suits the research;
  - and...



Charlie Chaplin, *Modern Times*, 1936



“We may compare a man in the process of computing a real number to a machine which is only capable of a finite number of conditions....” A. M. Turing, 1936 (after George S. Boolos and Richard C. Jeffrey, *Computability and Logic*, 2007: 21, Fig. 3.1)

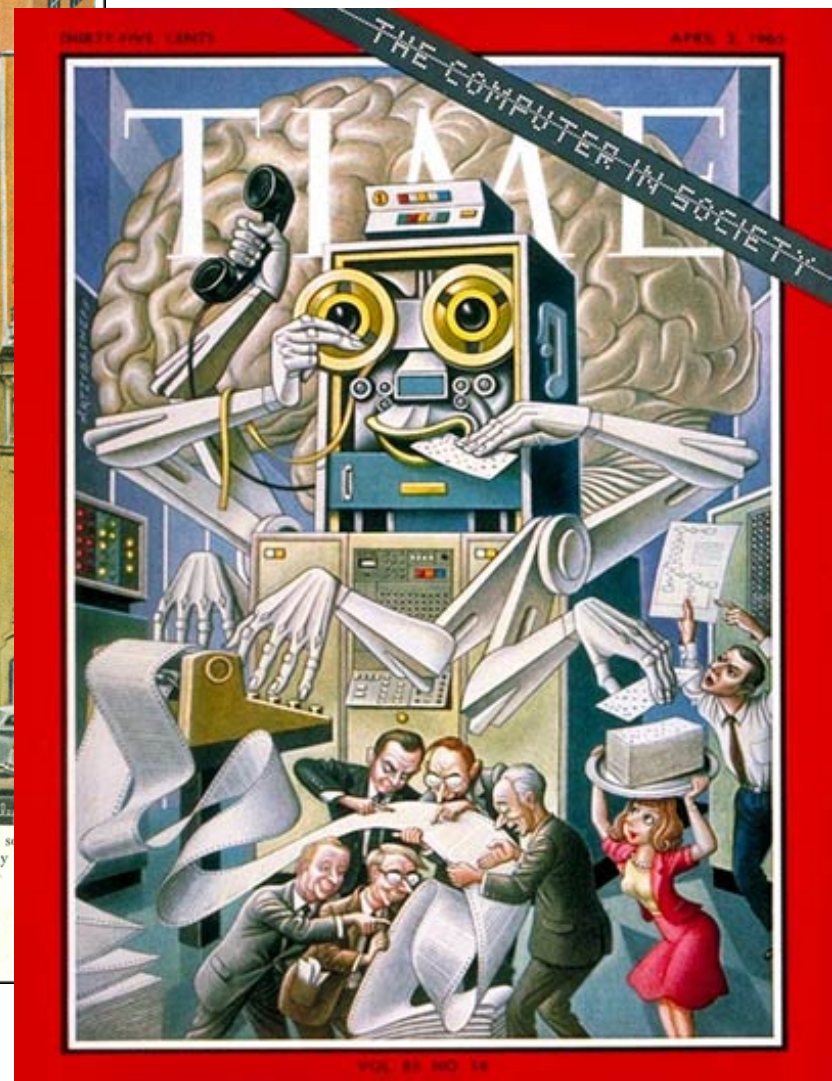




INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES, famous name in office equipment, builds some of the world's most complex and efficient machines. Shell Industrial Lubricants are used in many of these machines.

## Oracle on 57th Street

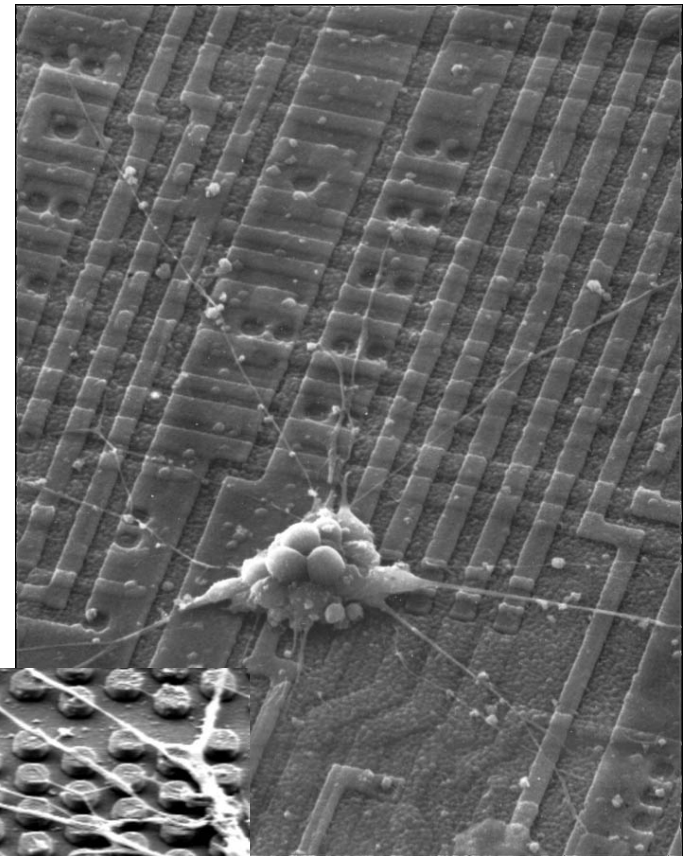
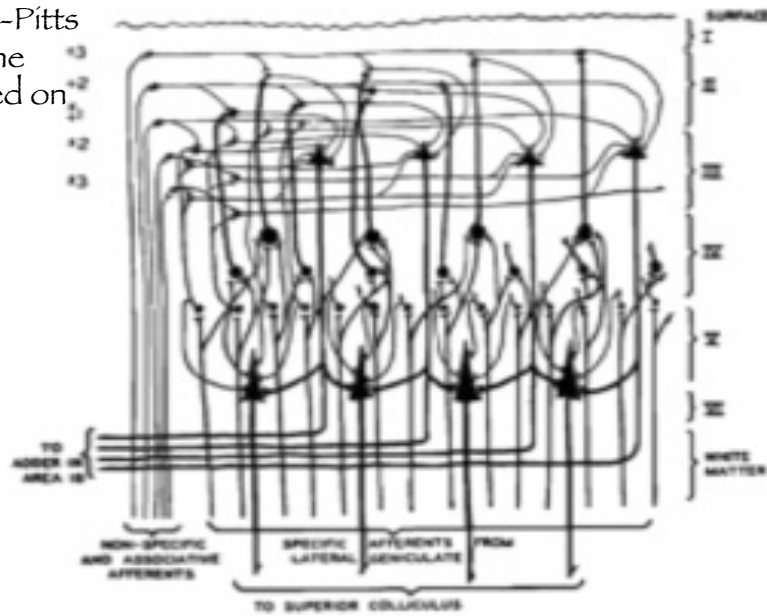
Shell Oil advert, *Saturday Evening Post*, 16 December 1950, showing IBM World Headquarters, 57th Street and Madison Avenue, which then displayed the Selective Sequence Electronic Calculator (SSEC, nicknamed "Poppa" by passers-by) in the front window.



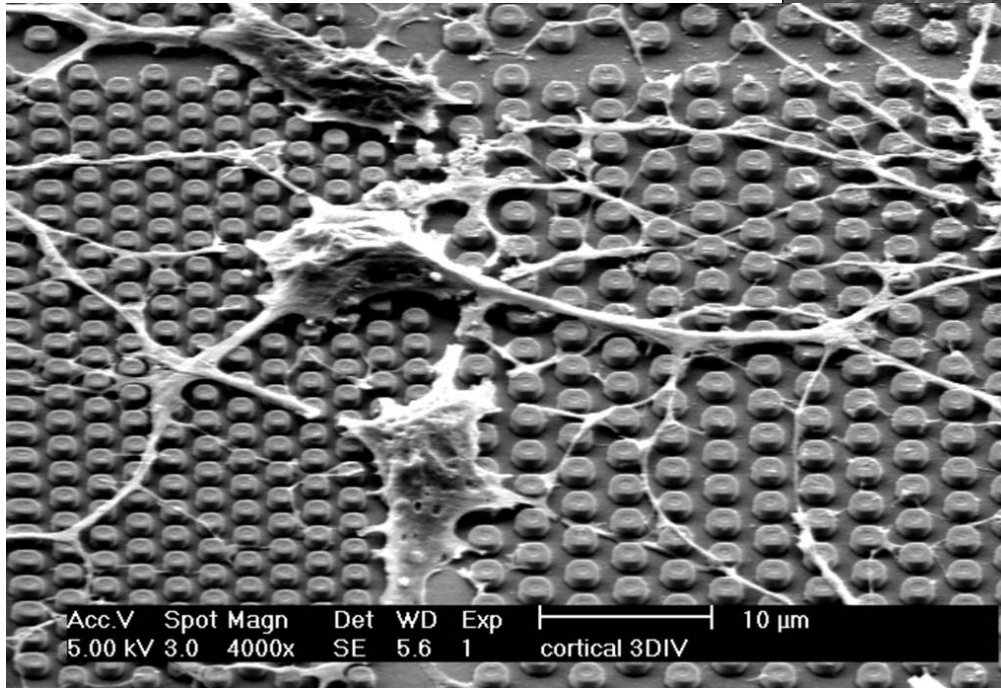
Front cover, *Time Magazine*, 2 April 1965.



McCulloch-Pitts model of the brain, based on the Turing Machine, 1943-48



Commercial communications interface between neuronal cells and silicon-based electronic devices, the Golden Brain project, November 2004.



Judy Trogadis & John K. Stevens, promotional microphotograph of a human brain cell growing on a Motorola 68000 chip, 1984.