



Data Science Institute  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

## *Colloquium Series Event*



### *Data Mining: The Critique of Artificial Reason, 1963-2005*

**Date:** Wednesday, December 3, 2014

**Time:** 6:00 p.m.

**Location:** Davis Auditorium, CEPSR

*A light reception will take place after the event in the lobby.*

**Matthew L. Jones, James R. Barker Professor of Contemporary Civilization  
Department of History, Columbia University**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

Data mining, or, as it was known, Knowledge Discovery in Databases (KDD), is the activity of creating non-trivial knowledge suitable for action from databases of vast size and dimensionality. From the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, data mining moved from a disparaged, dubious sort of statistical work—"fishing" or "dredging"—to become what its practitioners proclaim to be an utterly transformative technology. According to KDD advocates, traditional scientific approaches to data—and the traditional competencies of scientists—simply could not keep up with the volume of data and multidimensionality possible thanks to computers. Something else is needed, something less pure—because it deals with vast impurities of dynamic data, nearly always from a particular business, governmental, or scientific research goal. Establishing the legitimacy of KDD meant demonstrating that lack of luxury. Using traditional and digital humanities methods, I look at how stories of technologically determined emergence were crucial to the legitimization of data mining in authorizing the loosening—and the partial abandonment—of the disciplinary and epistemological values of its predecessor disciplines, statistics and machine learning.

#### **BIOGRAPHY:**

Matthew L. Jones is a historian of science and technology, and the James R. Barker Professor of Contemporary Civilization at Columbia. He was a Guggenheim Fellow for 2012-13 and is a Mellon New Directions fellow for 2012-15. He has just completed *Reckoning with Matter: Calculating Machines, Innovation, and Thinking about Thinking from Pascal to Babbage* forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press, and is completing a book length study on the NSA and recent analytic technologies from the 1990s to the present. His first book *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 2006) focused on the mathematical innovations of Descartes, Pascal and Leibniz.

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