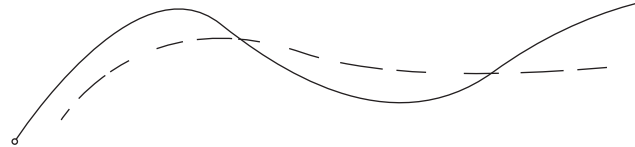


NEW
LIBERAL
ARTS





NEW LIBERAL ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

Written by Timothy Carmody and Robin Sloan

“Can we not devise a system of liberal education which shall find its foundations in the best things of the here and now? Literature and art are all about us; science and faith offer their daily contributions; history is in the making to-day; industry pours forth its wares; and children, no less than adults, are sharing in the dynamic activities of contemporary social life. Not in the things of the past, but in those of the present, should liberal education find its beginnings as well as its results. Fortified by the resources, interest, and insight thus obtained, it can be made to embrace areas of culture and power which are relatively remote and abstract.” —David Snedden, “What Of Liberal Education?” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1912

This book began as a blog. That’s the twenty-first-century way of saying it began as a conversation.

And that conversation started with Jason Kottke, the blogger who coined a phrase, “liberal arts 2.0,” that made us wonder: *What might that mean?*

Pile on some posts at Snarkmarket by the two of us and our co-blogger Matt Thompson, and threads began to form. Mix in smart, curious commentary from the Snarkmarket community, and an opportunity emerged.

This is the idea, roughly: to collectively identify and explore twenty-first-century ways of doing the liberal arts.

You might be wondering: Why bother? The liberal arts for smart people in the twenty-first century are like ancient myths for astronomers with telescopes. They’re just old ways of talking about problems that were intractable—until we had the right tools. If this is the case, then we don’t need *any* kind of liberal arts, let alone *new* liberal arts. We just need new science and technology, and people who know how to use them.

Or, to the extent that our problems can't be solved by new science and technology, they're unchanging dilemmas that grapple with the deepest parts of human nature. If this is the case, then we don't need to update the liberal arts—we just need to renew them. We need liberal arts that are not modified, but *purified*.

The very name, “liberal arts,” evokes a body of learning that is as durable as it is ancient.

In the classical tradition, formalized in the European Middle Ages, the *Artes Liberales* consisted of a *trivium* of arts of reading and composition—logic, grammar, and rhetoric—and a *quadrivium* of arts of observation and calculation—arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

In ancient Rome, bodies of learning like medicine and architecture were excluded from the liberal arts because they were too practical. These were the sort of arguments that got Cicero and Varro all atwitter. In the Renaissance, it was painting and sculpture that troubled that line between *ars* and *techne*. The basic idea of the liberal arts, though—the studies most suited for the education of free people—stayed the same.

But by the nineteenth century, the liberal arts had changed drastically, as part of the creation of the modern university, especially in the United States. Exact sciences like chemistry, anatomy, and physics migrated from technical colleges to what had been primarily liberal universities—and technical schools likewise began to get serious about teaching their students how to read, write, and think.

This is how you get schools like Harvard and MIT not just staring at each other across town, but sharing ideas and resources, and later competing for students and professors. This is how you get guys like Charles Eliot and William James—pragmatic scholars training reflective doctors, lawyers, teachers, scientists, and engineers.

And this is the truth of it: The liberal arts have *always* been changing just as much as we have.

So here, as we're still just getting started with a new century, it seems like a good time to focus some bright minds on that change. To take stock of what's changed already. To flesh out what's changing right now. And perhaps to nudge those changes onward.

So, now, here are some new liberal arts.

Not the new liberal arts. Our titling is intentional. When we posed the question to the community at Snarkmarket, we were sure to specify:

We don't want to generate a canonical list, but rather a laundry list. We want pitches for new liberal arts that are smart, provocative, insightful, surprising, and/or funny.

So that's what you'll find here. It's less a definition than a glimpse into the course catalog of an idiosyncratic new school—a liberal arts college 2.0.

Just like any catalog, this isn't meant to be a book you read front-to-back. The contributions are listed in alphabetical order, and they're intended for random access. Flip to a page that looks interesting. See what you think. Come over to snarkmarket.com and join the conversation.

Before you start flipping, a few final notes.

Our special thanks to contributor Gavin Craig, who provided the spark of inspiration for the book-ness of this book, and to designer Brandon Kelley, who took bloggy blobs of text and turned them into something elegant and durable. Thanks also to Diana Kimball and Nick Strauss for their work on a special contribution.

If you're reading this as a PDF: We hope you enjoy it. And we hope you send it to your friends and anyone else you think might enjoy it, too. After all, what's the point of a free digital copy if you don't, well, *copy* it?

If you're reading this as a physical book: We hope you enjoy it, too. This beautiful object is our way of keeping faith with the past. For all this fuss about new-ness, we know the score: Books are pretty great *techne*. Also, use your bookmark. It has a secret.

NEW LIBERAL ARTS



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ATTENTION ECONOMICS

In this digital world, your attention, once in abundant supply, has become SEX increasingly scarce.

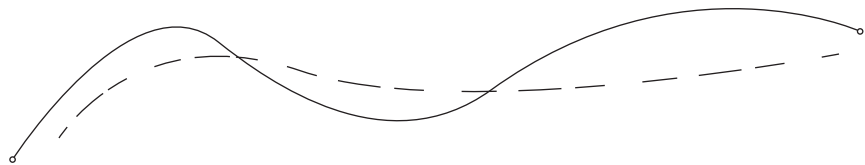
Now, what did you take away from that sentence? Was it the thesis to this program? Or was it something else? You, my dear student, are going to need to study attention economics.

In this age we are surrounded by stimuli, messages in our environment clamoring for a little piece of our awareness. Advertisements are designed and sold with the simple premise of stealing one small mote of your attention. Your technological devices, designed to assist you in your life and work, beep incessantly with updates, alerts and alarms. Cars become more and more like the cockpits of fighter planes with their heads-up displays and data readouts. Even our relationships take more maintenance; lovers separated by such a small obstacle as a day at the office stay in constant contact through email, instant messaging and social networks. In our new digital world we've finally started to run out of one of our most precious resources: Our own attention.

In the distant past, educated people worked for decades to train their brains to retain information. Greek bards had to be able to recall the story and rhythm of, if not the exact words of, either of Homer's epics at the drop of an Athenian dime. Monastery-confined monks would construct vast "memory palaces" in their minds to store and recall data in photographic detail. Starting with paper and pen, technological advances began to make that sort of rigorous mental dexterity obsolete. But in our rush to modernity, have we gone too far? Have we given over too much of our brain power to the devices built to boost our productivity? Are our brains now just tasty mush for our zombie progeny? →

To survive, we're going to need a whole new brain:

- » MULTITASKING: How do you pursue four tasks at once? What lessons can you learn from your parallel-processing possessions?
- » AMBIENT CONSUMPTION: In a world awash with information, how can you consume and derive value from the cloud? How do you become a great blue whale, sucking informational krill through your massive maw?
- » FOCUS: What do you do when it's time to *not* multitask? How do you stay laser-focused in a world of distractions?
- » STILLNESS: And lastly, but most importantly—how do you turn it all off? Massive parallel input of interesting information at hyper-speed is addictive—but your brain needs rest. Learning to be still brings not only the mental discipline necessary for proper focus, but also the opportunity for that rare insight or intuition beyond your day-to-day productivity. There are signals you need to hear that won't come through your phone or email and it's easy to deafen yourself with information overload. ☹



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BREVITY

140 characters is the new 30 seconds. 30 seconds is forever.

Anything important is worth saying quickly. By the time it has been said, it is already the past, and so the saying must become a moment of its own. Brevity is urgency and modesty at once. Attention is the scarcest resource. Millions are dying and we have only seconds.

The right word is worth a thousand words.

Brevity is representation and not description.

Show and don't tell becomes a truth and not a cliché when video can be posted instantaneously. The message must place the reader in the moment, and since the moment is unavailable, the message must place the reader in the message.

Now.

(Not then, not later. There is no later.)

This is not the victory of form over content. The stakes are much higher than that. ☹



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CODING AND DECODING

This course is about the deep end, and building the courage to plunge into unfamiliar places. Using lessons derived from the practices of cryptography, programming, and foreign language acquisition, we will learn to deduce information from context and recognize new patterns.

A language—of jargon, words, symbols, gestures, or images—is a collection of tokens. Shared language is a primary marker of community, a handy in-group/out-group indicator. The more languages we know, the more patterns we can recognize; the otherwise fleeting signals around us sink into meaning. Finding the pulse in what would otherwise be white noise, we come to understand and affect the surrounding world.

Coding and Decoding aims to confront two realities. [h t t p](#)

- » ONE: Languages are everywhere, and everywhere they are crucial. By expanding the scope of “foreign languages” to include unspoken languages (such as Perl, Ruby, and HTML) and hypervocal tongues (such as the vocabularies of science, slang, and religion), that scope begins to include tools not just of communication, but of invention. [a r e v](#)
- » TWO: Most languages are most useful to know upon first encounter. But, precisely because it is the first encounter, it is the very time when we understand them least. This course aims to elevate the experience of first encounter. Through repeated and total immersion in unfamiliar endeavors—new countries, new communities, new machines—we will learn more quickly how to float. [g a e](#)

Coding and Decoding is about all modes of communication, and all are in its view. But it is built with particular attention to the future, and what that future will be like. Technological experts can seem like magicians, conjuring effects wordlessly. By approaching that magic as a collection of component parts instead of an indivisible miracle, we can learn to see through these sleights of typing hands. In seeing through, we will learn to perform them ourselves; and think, as magicians, about the worlds we will build.

Language, now, is about more than communication. It is the architecture behind much of what we experience. Understanding that architecture will allow us to experience more.

Decoding requires immersion, patience, and attention. Coding comes more haltingly, but it comes most surely and usefully out of decoding. This class will require curiosity and endurance. ☹



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CREATIVITY

Creativity should be studied as a field in its own right, and should be included in the new liberal arts.

To clarify, I'm not calling for psychology classes on creativity, though that would be great. I'm saying creativity should be studied as a kind of martial art. You should train to be a ninja of creativity.

So what do I mean by creativity? It's a process that is independent of any particular domain and has its own set of universal characteristics. Just like Ninjutsu, it's a skill, and requires practice.

Here's my stab (no pun intended) at some core components:

1. CREATIVITY IS ABOUT ACTION WITH FEEDBACK.

A medium is perturbed in some way, and a person reacts to that perturbation, causing further perturbations. A medium could be anything from a piece of music to a web page to a set of financial data. This is where aesthetics and personality are expressed in the act of creativity. It's also where things get done. An idea without action is worthless.

2. CREATIVITY IS ABOUT EXPLORATION.

Fundamentally, you're discovering something new, usually about yourself. But sometimes it's a new chemical, a new equation, or a new law of the universe. Also, when you are exploring, you don't know everything already. There's the "fog of war" in front of you. Expertise can be dangerous to creativity: An expert sees few new possibilities. Creative wanderlust disappears when it seems there is nothing new to discover. But the truth is, there are always new frontiers—in the form of new techniques, related disciplines, and unconventional points of view. →

3. CREATIVITY IS ABOUT PLAY.

Sometimes creativity is just having fun. But it's the kind of fun you have when you solve a hard problem or when you achieve what you thought was impossible. This is what leads people into careers they are actually passionate about. A sense of deep purpose, responsibility, or wanting to save the world are not enough to healthfully sustain an individual. At some level, you must derive some fun from your work. If you're not having fun—deep fun—then it's not worth doing.

4. CREATIVITY IS ABOUT GROWTH.

This component unifies the other three and is essentially the end result of practice. Your ability to provide feedback to your creative perturbations improves as you create more. You shouldn't be an explorer who discovers the same mountain range over and over. Instead, travel to the part of the map where there be dragons. Through growth, a person develops an understanding, patience, and appreciation of others—because they understand others can grow, too. Also, communities of creativity can grow together: Ideas can be shared, works of art exchanged. In these ways, the growth from creativity isn't just personal but shared; we all benefit. ☹

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FINDING

```
NEW
10 INPUT "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING TO FIND?", thing_to_find
20 PRINT "OK, LET'S FIND SOME "; thing_to_find
30 FETCH ASSUMPTIONS
40 GET type_of_thing FROM all_types_of_things FOR
   thing_to_find BASED ON assumptions
50 GET all_resources_available
60 FOREACH resource IN all_resources_available
70   IF resource.type == type_of_thing THEN BREAK
80 NEXT
90 knowledge_biscuit = get_info_from_resource(thing_to_find)
100 IF knowledge_biscuit IS NULL THEN UPDATE assumptions;
    GOTO 40
110 PRINT "OK, WE HAVE FOUND "; thing_to_find; ".
    IT IS "; knowledge_biscuit.
END
```

What are your assumptions ?

How do you find all_resources_available ?

Do you know all_types_of_things ?

Let's discuss.

FIND THESE THINGS:

- A. Photos of US Airways Flight 1549 one hour after it crash-landed in the Hudson River.
- B. A Chinese restaurant near your home address that takes credit cards and is open for lunch.
- C. A function in PHP to turn an absolute date ("April 1, 2009") into a relative date ("one month ago").
- D. Season 1, episode 5 of the TV series "Lost."
- E. The U.S. representative who received the most money from the financial services industry last year. ☹



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TERESA WOLNARSKI

FOOD

You are what you eat.

Food is part of every system. Humanity was created in the moment that nutrition was transformed into culture. There is nothing about this process that cannot be reversed. Food is the ultimate mutually dependent binary. Food is not food if it is not nourishing an organism. Organisms cannot survive without food. And we are organisms; there is no doubt about that.

Agriculture creates society. Cities form when there are enough surplus calories being produced to support non-farmers. The arts and sciences are born when there is time available for uses other than growing or hunting.

This disconnection between the production and consumption of food has deepened over time. Now, we, the non-producers, don't trust ourselves to grow food. We don't trust our soil and our rain. We've surrendered one of our most basic needs to strangers, corporations, and advertisers. As a result, we eat food that isn't food: prepackaged, preservative soaked material; pre-cooked and frozen meals re-heated and served at overpriced "casual dining" restaurants. We eat vegetables, if we eat them, that have been processed beyond recognition. Most often, we can't even see, much less touch or smell, the food we're buying until after we've purchased it and removed layers of plastic and cardboard packaging. Our ignorance is so complete that we do not even know what food is supposed to taste like. We eat meat from degraded animals killed in filthy conditions, and it doesn't even taste good.

The reconsideration of food as a liberal art must include a number of facets: SUSTAINABILITY, or the ability to continue to produce calories sufficient to support the ever-increasing number of people not involved in agriculture; THE ETHICS OF DISCONNECTION, which leads not only to inhumane conditions, but to an inability to prevent contamination in the food supply chain; and THE AESTHETICS AND PLEASURES OF TASTE, simple taste. Food is intrinsically connected to nature, ecology, politics, pop culture, family values, and economics. →

The new liberal art of food must seek to ameliorate the alienation of consumption from production. Gardening, even just window gardening, can take place in the most densely-populated urban areas. Post-urban centers like Detroit offer the opportunity for agriculture on a larger scale, with the benefit of offering inexpensive, healthy, local food to those in the greatest need. The farmer's market cannot replace the supermarket, especially for those of us who live in areas with a limited growing season, but if we grow and we share or even sell to each other, then we are more likely to be aware of where our food comes from—and what can go wrong with it along the way.

Eating not only connects us to the natural world and to the self as organism, but also to each other. In considering food as a liberal art—something which can be examined, known, and enjoyed—we must also become aware of those for whom lack of choice is not just a cultural condition but a socio-economic reality. Encouraging local production at even the smallest, individual scale is not a luxury; it is a means for social justice. Fresh produce and minimally-processed foods must be for as many as possible, as often as possible. Not just for the wealthy; not just for suburbanites with easy access to supermarkets and giant, garden-ready backyards.

It may not be necessary or beneficial to demand that we each grow all of our own food, but we must know what we are eating and why. We must know and be able to accept how it was raised and harvested and killed. The answer is not a new FDA label or supply chain, where food is still produced, processed and packaged out of our sight, in conditions that we are left to trust are clean, safe, and humane. Rather, the answer is participation on as many levels as possible. We grow. We market. We buy. We prepare. No pleasure without responsibility. No responsibility without pleasure. ⊙



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GENDERFUCK

No one is normal. Seriously, try to think of a few friends you consider to be pretty normal. And then remember the quirky things they do around you sometimes. And *then* imagine the freaky stuff they probably do that you don't even know about. Think how cool it would be if every one of your friends and family members and co-workers knew about the freaky stuff *you* do (or maybe just contemplate doing) and didn't even think it was freaky. In this course, we'll be exploring how some stuff gets to be called "normal" and other stuff gets to be called "freaky," and how we might be able to fuck with all that.

In the first part of the course, we'll turn our attention to the constant stream of messages about gender we're exposed to every day, and try to think critically about them.

Common questions posed will be:

- A. Where do my ideas about normal gender come from?
- B. How do I regulate my thoughts and behavior based on those ideas?
- C. What are the rewards associated with meeting standards of gender?
- D. What are the consequences of failing to live up to gender norms?
- E. What would I be like if I didn't feel compelled to act like one particular gender?

In the second part of the course, we'll consider examples, both famous and mundane, that fuck with normal conceptions of gender. Students will be encouraged to share their own experiences and observations of genderfuck, and to challenge themselves to leave their prejudices at the door of the classroom. Gender really doesn't work for anyone the way it's supposed to. *No one is normal*. Everyone breaks the rules of gender at some point. Now we just need to figure out how to generalize that rule-breaking so as to make the rules recede from view.

Our ultimate goal for the course will be to identify and embrace the moments in our culture where normal stops being so important, in the interest of making the world a more comfortable place for *everyone*. ☹



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HOME ECONOMICS

It starts with a bunch of bananas at your local grocery store. As you look at them, you are thinking about the price per pound, and the nutritious benefits they give your body. But what are the broader implications of that bunch of bananas? Who picked them? Was he or she paid fairly for the work? Did the bananas ripen naturally, or were they sprayed with chemicals and artificially ripened? How did the bananas get to your supermarket? Even though the price per pound is relatively low, what are the hidden costs? Does the health benefit to your body outweigh all these other costs?

The questions get even more complicated when you move on to the meat department.

Why home economics? Every single person in the United States makes daily decisions that affect their own health, but also have broader implications. To be educated about that impact, and to learn about and contribute to alternatives, is to have the power to lead healthier, more sustainable lives. The very health of our bodies and our planet depend on it.

Home economics has two core components: theoretical and practical. The theoretical component would cover the following:

- A. SUSTAINABILITY. How can we define sustainability, while finding ethical solutions to support a growing population?
- B. MAKING SENSE OF LABELS. Locavore, vegetarian, organic, green, EnergyStar, LEED certified: What do they all mean? How does the government define them for businesses? Are the definitions fair?
- C. U.S. FOOD PRODUCTION. How did we end up with a giant corn monoculture? What can we learn from farming methods of 100 or 200 years ago?
- D. SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE. What are the best practices? What are the cost/benefit ratios of solar panels, for example? Of graywater systems?
- E. COMMUNITY PLANNING. What can and should local governments do to encourage people to reduce their ecological footprint? →

- F. ANIMAL ETHICS. How can we realistically obtain protein for 6 billion+ people while reducing pollution caused by raising animals for meat? What role should animal welfare play?
- G. INTERNATIONAL TRADE. What impact do U.S. imports and exports have on local economies and environments in developing countries?

The practical, or lab, component of home economics would cover topics such as the following:

- A. GARDENING: maximizing small spaces, organic methods, preserving harvested food
- B. PERMACULTURE: emphasis on urban planning and insect/bird habitat
- C. ANIMAL HUSBANDRY: small animals that can be raised in urban areas (such as chickens), including humane slaughter and meat processing
- D. COOKING AND BAKING: healthy, whole, practical foods for everyday life
- E. THE SCIENCE OF YEAST AND OTHER FERMENTATION PROCESSES: bread, beer, and cheese making
- F. NUTRITION: why one glass of apple juice is not equal to one apple, and other common misconceptions demystified; plus basic nutritional needs for average men, women, and children
- G. WATER AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY: practical in-home solutions ☉

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INACCURACY

Inaccuracy is the art of being intentionally inartful in an immaculate way; it differs from most other liberal arts in that it is not constricted by the singular political perspective ever so entrenched in academe. Thus, it behooves the modern renaissance 2.0 person-in-training to see the world as composed of the true dichotomies—conservatives and liberals, bloggers and journalists, Friendster and MySpace, vapidty and profundity, and greatness and failure. And obviously, a future contributor to society needs to display vim and pizazz in order to make a contribution. After all, inaccuracy can start wars—or end them. ☹

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ITERATION

How do you make things?

You could lay out the process as a line. You start at one end with a bundle of goals and plans. As you work hard—designing, writing, rehearsing, or doing whatever else is required—you progress along the line. At some point, you get to the end, with a product, a novel, a performance. You're finished!

You could lay out the process that way. But you'd be doing it wrong.

Making things is a circle. You start the arc with an idea about the world: an observation or hunch. Then you sprint around the track, getting to a prototype—a breadboard, a rough draft, a run-through—as fast as you can. Your goal isn't to finish the thing. It's to expose it, no matter how rough or ragged, to the real world. You do that, and you learn: Which of your ideas were right? Which were wrong? What surprised you? What did other people think? Then you plow those findings back into an improved prototype. Around the circle again. Run!

Iteration is difficult when you're working with stone or steel. It's easy when you're working with words or web pages. But, this is important: More things are becoming more like words and web pages in the twenty-first century. Even solid, material things. Even stone and steel. Iteration applies to more domains than it ever did before, and its reach is growing.

Whatever your materials, iteration improves the process of making things.

There's a lot to learn about:

- » **YOUR OWN WORK STYLE.** Do you resist showing unfinished work to others? What does it take for you to feel comfortable sharing a prototype that is, clearly, a piece of junk?
- » **YOUR MATERIALS.** What's the minimum you can do to create a simple prototype or rough draft? Are there simpler materials or easier techniques you can temporarily substitute to save you time and effort?
- » **HOW TO TEST THINGS.** How do you get people to playtest your prototype in the right context? How do you extract rich, useful feedback from them? →

» HOW TO NAVIGATE THE PROCESS. When do you leave your original goals behind entirely? How do you recognize a big, unexpected opportunity staring you in the face?

As you refine your iterative process, you make the loops faster and more productive. Ideally, iteration isn't a circle at all; it's a spiral. With each loop, you know more about the world. With each loop, you're making something better. With each loop, you're simply *making* better.

With iteration, instead of driving an idea blindly into the world, hoping to get lucky, you tip-toe, feeling as you go. And you are guided by the feedback you get. Often that feedback says, "Right on! Keep going." But just as often it says, "Nobody wants this thing you're making. But there's something useful hiding here." The latter kind confounds our conventional view of success; in truth, it's the secret origin of some of our deepest genius.

Iteration is liberation. There are no beginnings or endings—just small steps forward. ☹



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JOURNALISM

Traditionally, professional journalists have presented themselves as mediators, whether between ideas and readers, events and historians, celebrities and the public, or the state and its subjects. Now that anyone can communicate to millions with just a cell phone, that gatekeeper role has grown less and less relevant. However, emergent forms of journalism continue to give our exchanges structure, even if they aren't the structures we've come to immediately recognize.

Journalism was once defined as “what professional journalists do.” Today, journalism can be re-described as a community's conversations with itself. The role of the journalist can be re-imagined as facilitating that conversation. Effective journalism will amplify a community's questions about how well it's doing and help find answers.

Once, journalism was defined by its medium—radio, television, print, the Web. The medium still matters—we need to understand how different forms of journalism shape information and serve communities—but today, the forms matter less than journalism's effects. The new journalists will ask not just what should appear in tonight's broadcast or tomorrow's newspaper, but how their work is advancing the discussion.

We used to think of our society as a mass audience—a body of people all watching Walter Cronkite at the same time. We now confront a network of overlapping communities and conversations, and journalism must find the patterns that connect those diverse points of view.

Journalism becomes the story of how a society optimizes itself. It creates an ever-evolving record of how the society is functioning, so citizens can amplify their successes, improve their inefficiencies, and fix their mistakes. Once thought of as “the first draft of history,” journalism drafts the blueprint for an ever-changing present. It brings together the best information we have to evaluate our choices and adjust our course.

This is the place journalism holds in the new liberal arts: It is the art of the now. ☉



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MAPPING

“When, for example, I observe an aerial view of the Ile-de-France, I contemplate an unfamiliar agglomeration I’ve never clapped eyes on or set foot on before; and even if the map of Paris is not the same as the urban territory, such cartography is infinitely more precious to me than its view from the air, because it shows me the breaks, the fractures in the symmetry—in a word, the fractalization of a fabric that photography never lets you see.”¹

Which better explains the landscape: maps or photographs? There’s no longer any reason to choose. The potential now exists to create visceral, photo-integrated maps that are able to successfully communicate the urban conditions such as “fractalization.” Applications such as Google Maps increasingly change the way we see, understand, and describe our environment. Cameras with geo-tagging capabilities afford us the opportunity to embed photographs into digital maps, resulting in something that’s more than a record of place; it is a record of time. Moments are mapped and universally accessible; a shared global consciousness arises via shared cartography. The personal becomes public while public space becomes personalized.

Mapping is a convergence of technology and the arts: design, photography, language, history, programming, and economics are all relevant to crafting an understanding of your role in the built environment. But the reverse is also true: an understanding of the built environment helps you understand fields like design, language, and economics. Current real-time mapping enables us to map classes of objects from the global to the local: from far-off military movements to locally-available produce. →

¹ Virilio, Paul. *City of Panic*. Oxford: Berk, 2004

From the lost art of the hand-drawn map to live GPS tracking, mapping teaches you the skills required to better understand your position—literally and figuratively—in the world. You’ll need to apply critical thinking skills as you extrapolate and configure data to understand the possibility of multiple “views” of a single location. You will learn to process and codify empirical data to re-present your environment at a various scales.

Please note that this *will* also include full-scale mapping (please refer to the renowned apocryphal anthropologists Lewis Carroll² and Jorge Luis Borges³ for more information).

Please also note that all students will be required to pay for their own sub-dermal GPS implants for purposes of tracking and documentation. ☹

² Carroll, Lewis. *Sylvie and Bruno*. (no copyright)

³ Borges, Jorge Luis. “On Exactitude and Science,” *A Universal History of Infamy*. London: Penguin Books, 1975



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MARKETING

How are ideas sold?

The answer to that question is the key to influencing the world. It's how the popular kids in school sustain their status; how parents, teachers and peer groups affect the behavior of children; how Osama bin Laden draws new recruits into al Qaeda; how Apple launches new products. Ideas succeed not by being good or bad, but by being sold effectively.

In a world where people break into tribes based on their identification with a brand or product, marketing bleeds into politics, law, and national security. Skilled marketers will be anthropologists and social network theorists, tracking how people group and label themselves. They'll be masters of cultural forensics, able to dissect the origins and impact of any product or campaign.

As it becomes easier and easier for anyone on earth to communicate with anyone (and everyone) else, it's increasingly important to understand the epidemiology of ideas. Students of marketing will learn the nuances of information infection: how to distinguish promotion from presentation, how to trace messages to their source. They'll learn to recognize the patterns of information flow, and spot the moment when an idea's reception flips from hype to backlash. And they'll explore the ethics of marketing, the role that accuracy and privacy play in the spread of ideas.

Whether or not they know it, everyone practices marketing. But not everybody does it well. Those who do wield a powerful advantage. ☹



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MICROPOLITICS

You can probably name your head of state, your chief minister of defense, and the main branches of your federal government. But do you know the name of your city manager? The head of your neighborhood association? The neighbor who hasn't missed a city council meeting since the 1970s?

So much of the texture of everyday life is hashed out in obscure municipal backchannels, by small groups of engaged citizens getting together on weekday evenings. The buildings you see every day, the restaurants you dine at, the closing time of your neighborhood bar, the bus routes to and from your home—these things are the way they are because of a complex system of professional networks and planning meetings that few have the know-how to navigate. When the spare change and free time of millions of people can elect a U.S. President, we've entered a new era of civics built not on institutions, but on individuals.

This is micropolitics, and it affects more than places. The particulars of health care plans that will affect millions are being drawn up by civil servants in remote corners of government, while a quietly influential elite adds loopholes and kickbacks over expensive dinners. Masters of micropolitics will learn to find these nodes of civic influence and ensure that the best ideas get a place at the table.

Learning micropolitics doesn't just mean learning how to draw an org chart for a city or a neighborhood or an issue. It means learning how to improve that org chart. It means learning the practical art of organizing small groups of people to make noise, apply pressure, or elect someone. It's about finding the small changes that have big effects in the life of a community.

As they say, all politics is micro. ☹



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MYTH AND MAGIC

From Dionysus to David, Kali to Kerridwen: Since the beginning, people have created stories to explain, explore, and celebrate nature and the human condition. Similar themes and tropes—the Sun God, hair as sacred, cleansing rituals—have emerged in places as far apart as Aboriginal Australia and Aztec South America. Even in today’s age, where science and the skeptical mind scoff at “fairy tales,” myths and legends have power: as urban legends, tabloid fodder, classic movies.

Why are people compelled to explain life in stories? How does storytelling build community and society? What role do they play in our education, our commerce, our day-to-day lives?

Myths become the basis of rituals: think of ceremonial feasts with sacrifice and magic, or the witchdoctor’s night-long remedies to cure your ills. How did those myths transfer into ritual, and how did those rituals affect society as a whole?

Were Freud and Jung correct in their assessments of a collective human consciousness, where all of humanity share the same sets of symbols and interpretations? Or are symbols highly individual in nature, reflecting the personal myths and legends inherent in every person?

Will future historians look back at this time and regard Oprah, Britney, or Paris as the deities of our time? Will they consider Friday night parties, twenty-first birthdays, and the World Cup as our religious rituals? In our future, what will be scoffed as crackpot conspiracy, and what will become our Holy Word?

To master mythology, you have to learn and be immersed in your own myths—those of your culture, your heritage, your location, your lifestyle, your history. What are your archetypes? What are your themes and tropes? How do you communicate your myths to others? What are your core beliefs, and how are they affected by your personal myths? →

You'll also deconstruct rituals to create your own. What does each element represent? What is the significance of time, nature, music, location? Which elements have lain forgotten, and which have increased in significance? Does the ritual change over time?

What sort of magic occurs in your life? What do you count as magic?

In this course you will exercise your skills of imagination, creativity, investigation, critical analysis, cross-cultural understanding, research, synthesis, and curiosity. You will be challenged; you will encounter ideas that seem absolutely silly, ideas that seem atrocious, ideas that seem ahead of their time, ideas that seem visionary. You will find contradictions and synchronicities. You will deal not only with fun fantasy, but also with deep, dirty secrets.

Will you analyze myth, or will your life become myth? ☹



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NEGOTIATION

“Do you know what astonished me most in the world? The inability of force to create anything.” —Napoleon Bonaparte

Negotiation is the art of reconciling differences without resorting to political, economic, or physical force. Negotiation is more than getting the other to give you what you want; it means understanding that other, in the full complexity of their life, and leading them to understand you. It is a way of thinking about the world that considers even enemies as potential partners. It is a path to change.

Why is negotiation important now? As a society, we’ve solved most of the easy problems. The ones that are left are too complex to be solved by any single person, or even any single group, no matter how intelligent or well-informed; we need to bring more minds to bear. Negotiation is the lubricant in the engine of massive cooperation; it reduces the friction of disagreement and produces collective, social rewards that compensate for an absence of personal, ego rewards.

Negotiation implies negation of the self, negation of the ego. One of the core needs of negotiation is the surrender of petty sureness; the parties must give up clinging to things that don’t matter—such as the conviction of righteousness—in exchange for those that do. It requires openness, a way of presenting the self that invites disclosure and respect. You can’t negotiate if you’re busy telling everyone why you’re right.

Negotiation begins with an invitation to dialogue, acknowledging the other as a peer and equal. When the parties come together, they assume the best of each other: that each is presenting their position as accurately as possible, has good reasons for holding that position, and is able to change it in response to new information or arguments. They assume that the other knows things they do not, and they come with an eagerness to learn. →

We study negotiation in a context that incorporates several related concepts: facilitation, presentation, and massive cooperation.

- » FACILITATION involves teasing out the best strands of a person's thought and mirroring them back clearly, while steering interactions away from personal attacks or ego displays. In a way, facilitation is negotiation without an overt conflict at its center; it aims to smooth and improve the process of working as a group.
- » PRESENTATION is the art of transmitting complex information in a personal context. It conveys a position as more than a set of facts or series of logic; it offers a sense of the path you've taken to arrive here, of your knowledge as you live it rather than knowledge floating in a void. Good presentation helps parties to see reason in the opposing position, even if they disagree with it.
- » COOPERATION is becoming more than yourself by working with others. MASSIVE COOPERATION is the scale at which individual contributions begin to disappear into the whole. ☹



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PHOTOGRAPHY

FROM THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS FOR THE COLLEGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY:

Apart from the exact sciences, nothing has transformed the idea of the liberal arts as profoundly as PHOTOGRAPHY—which enables not only the recording of still and moving images, but their reproduction, transmission, and projection onto a page or screen.

The classical liberal arts are arts of the word, products of the book, the letter, the lecture. The Renaissance added the plastic arts of painting and sculpture, and modernity those of the laboratory. The new liberal arts are overwhelmingly arts of the DOCUMENT, and the photograph is the document par excellence.

Like the exact sciences, photographic arts are industrial, blurring the line between knowledge and technology. (The earliest photographers were chemists.) Like painting and sculpture, they are visual, aesthetic, based in both intuition and craft. Like writing, photography is both an action and an object: writing makes writing and photography makes photography. And like writing, photographic images have their own version of the trivium—a logic, grammar, and rhetoric.

We don't only SEE pictures; we LEARN how they're structured and how they become meaningful. Some of our learning is intuitive, gathered from the ways our eyes and brains make sense of the visual world. We have an habitual sense of how photographic meaning is created, taken from our experience watching movies or taking our own photographs. But we also have a critical sense of it, taken from our aesthetic responses to photographs and cinema, and our awareness of how both are edited, enhanced, and manipulated. Photography is the art and science of the real, but also of the fake; of the depth and the surface, and the authentic as well as the inauthentic or nonauthentic appearances of the world. →

Rather than “pictures,” “film,” or even “images,” PHOTOGRAPHY, the recording of light, is the term to bet on: It’s the only category that can describe pictures on metal, glass, paper, celluloid, or flash memory—whether still or moving, analog or digital, recorded or broadcast, in color or black and white, representative or abstract. It is essential to examine equally the transmission and consumption of photography as well as its production: still images, cinema, television, digital video, and animation all belong to you, as well as photoreproduction, photomontage, image databases, and any possible combination where the still or moving image appears. Even the optical cables that have transmitted this data to you several times over communicate through pulses of light. Photography is the science of the interrelation and specificity of all of these forms, as well as their reproduction, recontextualization, and redefinition. Photography is a comprehensive science; photography is a comparative literature.

It took universities centuries to answer the demand posed by the exact sciences to liberal education. It is our task to pose—and to answer—the demand photography makes of us now. ☉



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PLAY

Even before we learn to speak, we play. It's how we begin to explore the world. Games exert a primal power over us; after we're fed, clothed, and sheltered, we must entertain ourselves. Harness that power, and what might we create?

Culture in the information age has taken a sharp turn towards play. Corporations seeking creativity from their employees set them loose to toy around, and reap big rewards from the results. Video games have exploded into a new entertainment industry, extending play deeper and deeper into adulthood. Games have crept beyond our consoles, arenas and arcades to suffuse all our entertainments, becoming reality shows on television and alternate reality games everywhere else.

Students of play will not only learn to exploit these cultural forces, they'll unlock the cheat codes for the games that underpin everything—language, politics, science, faith, art. They'll figure out how to approach goals as game designers—how to engineer systems of rules, scores, simulations and wagers that can transform everything from tax preparation to house-cleaning into recreation. They'll discover how to tap our innate affinity for play to improve education, our communities, and our quality of life.

Of course, play isn't all serious. It's ultimately about the pursuit of fun—figuring out the pleasure centers of our brains and hacking them for fun, profit, societal benefit, or all of the above. And it's not just for kids anymore. ☹



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REALITY ENGINEERING

“I don’t know where the artificial stops and the real starts.”
—Andy Warhol

Reality engineering is the study of how “The Real” is manufactured. Previous epochs have approached this discipline with frowning condescension (cf. *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky). We will eschew loaded words like *inauthentic*, *spin*, and *fake*. Instead, our coursework approaches the manufacture of reality from the giddy middle: with a euphoric yet critical belief that the most thrilling bits of modern life straddle the fence between artificial and authentic.

As an inherently diverse field, the coursework will span disciplines. We will dabble in many fields, including but not limited to: public relations (spin), marketing (buzz), biology (mimicry), art (*trompe l’oeil*), religion (god), economics (money), psychology (Capgras syndrome), medicine (plastic surgery), food (Splenda), and mass communications (Rathergate).

When your parents ask what you are studying, your response will be bold: truthiness.

Blurring the lines was always the norm, so our coursework utilizes classics from the broad canon of simulated reality:

- A. Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*
- B. Milli Vanilli, *Girl You Know It’s True*
- C. Orson Welles, *War of the Worlds*
- D. James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces*
- E. Plato, *The Republic*, “Allegory of The Cave”
- F. MTV, *The Hills*
- G. Andy & Larry Wachowski, *The Matrix*
- H. *lonelygirl15*
- I. Danger Mouse, *The Grey Album* →

J. *The Blair Witch Project*

K. FanFic.net

In the weekly LAB portion of this class, which accounts for 25% of your grade, you will build a project using one the following para-reality tools:

- A. Photoshop
- B. The Sims
- C. Auto-Tune
- D. Wikipedia
- E. ACID Pro
- F. MySpace

Your FINAL PROJECT, which accounts for 50% of your grade, will take the findings from your lab explorations and explode them into a fully-simulated environment, previous examples of which include:

- A. Getting plastic surgery.
- B. Starting a tribute band.
- C. Launching an offshore gold farm.
- D. Committing a crime and making your own video reenactment.
- E. Founding an LSD-induced cosplay cult. ☹



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TRANSLATION

If there's anything at all that a modern curriculum should make clear to everyone, it's that there's no room for the monolingual any more. Because our modern world is so small today—and by small I mean globalized, rather than parochial, which is another kind of smallness; because in this world it is possible to know more about what's happening in Gaza than what's happening in our own neighborhoods. Perhaps in no other age has cultural and linguistic insularity been more perilous. We can't afford not to speak to people whom we can't speak to. We can't afford not to read writings that we can't read. We can't, in other words, afford not to understand people whom we do not understand.

I therefore propose that translation should be one of the new liberal arts: translation in its literal sense of transmitting texts from one language to another, but also in the metaphorical sense of a sustained, collective effort towards genuine intercultural understanding. It couldn't function as a stand-alone class in a single college: It must be plugged into a network of participating colleges from as many countries as possible, and it needs to be a genuinely global effort.

Every student would declare at least two languages: their native tongue and one or more languages of their choosing, however firm or tenuous their grasp of them. Seminar groups would consist of students who declared the same two languages, so that discussions could take place in two mutually intelligible languages, at varying levels of ability. These are the groups they'd work in, communicating in online forums and discussion groups, live chat, and video conferences.

How do you learn translation? Perhaps from the real world:

- » Students could choose a suitably global event, collect media coverage of this event in different languages—in print, by broadcast, or online—and draw comparisons. How are the same events recast in different languages to different cultural audiences? What prejudices, slants and spins might be exposed by such an endeavour; or where might common ground arise where we least expect it? →

- » Students could investigate and report on literature outside their native language and together, as a group, come up with a more global literary canon.
- » Students could work together to translate and exchange something they loved with someone else: a play or poem, the lyrics of a song, a funny TV ad, a speech by a personal hero.
- » Students could take each other through tours of their internet, in their language. What blogs, news sites, and journals do they read? (For all its globalizing dimensions, whole swathes of the internet exist in languages we cannot read).
- » Students could read to each other—poetry, short stories, anything—in their native languages. Even if you don't understand it, hearing things in another language can be an enchanting, empathetic experience.

The point of a class like this wouldn't be merely to develop competence in a language for its own sake, but to show us new worlds of literature, sounds, ideas and ways of being that exist outside what we know—to create opportunities for us to come to know them, and perhaps, to fall in love with them.

If done right, this class would even be a new kind of community service. Every translation generated in this class would go into a digital archive, for the benefit of future classes and a wider global public. Every graduating class of translators would add to a growing pool of bilingual world citizens: they might be anything from the greatest diplomats and the savviest journalists right down to the teenager who makes friends with the new foreign kid in school when no one else can, or will. And generation by generation, the world would fill with them: these deeply sympathetic people who would be nodes between cultures, slowly forging rapport and understanding from the friction and incomprehension that plague our small world today, with such vast, grievous consequences. ☹



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VIDEO LITERACY

“Film is not the art of scholars, but of illiterates.” —Werner Herzog

Students of the new liberal arts will need to learn to WATCH and LISTEN all over again. Basic literacy—reading and writing text—is no longer enough. Now, all media is transmitted through the window of a glowing screen. Television and web video have become dominant modes of communication and even print news media rely increasingly on video to show us “truth.” Understanding video is essential to participating in modern society. Studying video literacy, students will gain the tools to analyze the full spectrum of audiovisual media.

HOW DOES PERSPECTIVE SHAPE MEANING? Everything begins with a frame. From telephoto lenses to tilt-shift video, find out how lens length directs attention and contextualizes an image.

HOW DOES EDITING CREATE NEW LAYERS OF INFORMATION? Context is everything. Find out how news editors “spin” seemingly-neutral video footage, and how editing choices shape an on-camera interview. From Vertov to YouTube, study the evolution of montage.

HOW DO SOUND AND IMAGE WORK TOGETHER to create something far greater than the sum of their parts? Study silent cinema and music videos. See how sound can sell an image, and vice versa.

From webcams to Imax, HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY SHAPE WHAT WE SEE? Learn how production values can signal qualities like “authenticity” or “the future.” How is TV influencing web video, and vice versa? How does viral distribution inform how we think about video information? How is piracy changing the entertainment industry and its products?

Then, there’s history. How did analog media shape the formats we see today? How are digital media breaking out of these formats? Consider the importance of narrative structure to the moving image and the rising significance of database structure. →

From Fox News to Al Jazeera to Google in China, explore news media around the world to find out how cultural values and political objectives shape news. Investigate news as storytelling and news as spectacle. How do narrative and musical clichés trigger emotional investment in an event?

The moving image has the power to entertain, inform, and manipulate a mass audience. In the new liberal arts, the exploding global language of audiovisual media demands A NEW LITERACY. ⊗

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