

Literacies for the Near Future
Abstract for Old/New Track
AIGA Response_Ability Conference
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In her presentation at the October 2009 national AIGA conference "Make/Think," Bennington College president Elizabeth Coleman posited that "we are desperately in need of a new liberal arts," one that unites thought and action, privileges ideas and imagination, and honors collaboration over isolation. The key component in her rethinking of a liberal arts education is design. She notes, "Design - understood as a systematic, collaborative way of addressing problems and transforming possibilities - is a prime candidate for the new set of studies needed to revitalize higher education."

While Coleman's call for liberal arts educators to embrace design as a foundational literacy is both exceptional and much needed, I believe her advocacy for a "new set of studies" could be pushed farther. Indeed, advances in pervasive computing, 3-D imaging, holography and gestural interactivity all point to a world that asks us to interact with information - and each other - in very different ways. When computational intelligence is embedded into the built environment around us, how do we extend our understanding of contemporary literacies as well? When information takes the shape of what urban computing theorist Adam Greenfield calls "ambient informatics," how do we rethink information literacy?¹ When media becomes immersive and 3-dimensional, what new critical aptitude do we require? And when digital communication becomes increasingly embodied and gestural, what somatic literacies do we need to imagine for today's learners? In short, what are the responsibilities of design educators within a digital culture to teach learners truly prepared for the near future?

Answering these questions is not simple. Indeed, rather than merely embracing multiple literacies in an additive mode, we need instead to address the epistemological changes that underlie the transformation of education within a digital culture. Which is to say that we need to shift the very means by which we conceptualize the basic functioning of our culture. Whether we are teaching general education courses or a more specific, design-oriented curriculum, we need new metaphors and cultural practices that align with our current reality.

My presentation, conceived for the "old/new" track, will explore what design educators might retain from existing traditions of teaching and what might be gained through innovation. Further, it will posit several models and metaphors for how that innovation might be understood within design education; how it might extend design curricula to other educators, thereby serving as a vital cultural force; and how these models connect with and sustain the AIGA's 2014 mandate.

¹ Adam Greenfield and Mark Shepard, *Situated Technologies Pamphlets I: Urban Computing and its Discontents*, The Architectural League of New York, 2007.