



## THE BASICS

Transformations of the Human (ToftH) is excited to offer our inaugural experimental seven month curriculum, which runs from December 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022.

Admitted students are expected to live in the San Francisco Bay Area. Each student receives a stipend in the amount of \$40,000. Successful students will have an opportunity to apply for a full time role at ToftH as a Staff Researcher upon completion of the curriculum.

## THE AMBITION

Our school is designed to bring into existence a new, experimental practice that brings together philosophy, art, and technology, which we call **PArT**. We use the term *philosophy* in a broad, non-disciplinary sense to mean the study of concepts and categories of thought and how they organize human life. With the term *art*, we refer to a kind of philosophical research practice carried out in terms of a material practice. When we say *technology*, we largely refer to contemporary fields like AI, robotics, neurotechnologies, bioengineering, biogeochemistry, and more.

**PArT** equips students to practice the abstract (philosophy, ideas) in terms of the concrete (building technological and art objects).

## THE IDEA

Our starting point is twofold. On the one hand, there is the recognition that human life appears to be organized by concepts: by assumptions and presuppositions that are so implicit that it is difficult to articulate them. On the other hand, there is the acute awareness that contemporary technologies create new realities and possibilities that defy the concepts/categories that organize everyday life. In short, technology not only disrupts markets, it also disrupts the implicit philosophies — the concepts — we live by: insofar as technology disrupts how we think, do, experience, it has **philosophical stakes**.

Who, at present, attends to these philosophical stakes? Who understands technology R&D as an experimental, philosophical practice in which new possibilities of thinking, doing, and experiencing are elaborated?

Can we build technology in terms of its philosophical stakes and potentials? Is it possible to learn how to build objects/products with a philosophical agency from contemporary art practices? Can we build technologies — or launch a company — because we wish to disrupt some of the concepts we live by?

## THE GOALS

The world has outgrown the 19th-century disciplines that still organize most universities. We conclude that what is most needed now is a whole new, post-disciplinary approach, one focused on the difference today makes: on the ways in which technology disrupts the old and has the power to enable new realities/possibilities. By definition, this new approach has to be experimental: to come to terms with the new/different requires a playful engagement beyond the already thought and known. Our curriculum is designed to equip students with the knowhow for these experiments.

Students who attend ToftH School learn to:

- identify concepts we live by; discover where these concepts come from/how they came to structure our thinking/experiencing; understand what their disruption actually means
- invent new concepts: concepts that capture the new realities, bring them into view (as opportunities), that make them navigable (without unnecessarily limiting what is possible)
- build technology with a philosophical agency: build technologies that, like works of art, offer new philosophies/concepts that can change how we live.

## THE WHO

Who should attend ToftH school? People who feel constrained and inhibited by the limits of what is and who are interested in understanding contemporary technology as a philosophical laboratory: as an opportunity to experimentally explore the possibility of new conceptual spaces for thinking, living, experiencing, doing. Applicants should be comfortable exposing themselves to uncertainty; experimenting outside their disciplinary comfort zones and professional training or modalities; and playfully trying out hands-on opportunities to collaborate in teams.

## THE MODULES

Our curriculum is organized in five modules.

### 1. Why and to What Ends ... Or What Are Concepts?

We discuss the idea and purpose of the curriculum, zooming in on what concepts are, what conceptual thinking is, and why it matters.

### 2. Human, Nature, Technology ... and other Concepts

We trace the history of some of the most fundamental concepts that have framed modern life, chief among them human, nature, and technology — though we also explore the conceptual and practical histories of politics, society, and truth, among others.

### 3. Philosophical Labs ... Seeing the Abstract in the Concrete

We embark on a series of philosophical labs: Artists and technologists introduce us to their work and we visit art studios and technology labs. The goal here is to see how the conceptual histories we traced inform contemporary art and tech – and to discover how contemporary art and tech disrupt and/or mutate these concepts/conceptual spaces and thereby create something new/different. In other words, we undifferentiate philosophy, art, and technology from one another (PArT).

#### 4. Exposure to Practice: How to do the Abstract in Terms of the Concrete

Students join ongoing ToftH research projects with tech companies and learn what we call collaborative concept work: how to make concepts visible to technologists and how to elaborate, in a tech environment, the possibility of building technology with a philosophical agency.

#### 5. Final Project (which students can do alone or in teams)

In the final module students are asked to invent a project of their own. This could be a proposal for a project with a company, it could be an artwork, a business plan, an outline of a novel or a poem or ... something new/different.

## THE FACULTY

To accomplish our goals and provide the best possible education, we have assembled a world class internal and external faculty, which include, among other: Benjamin Bratton, Eoin Brodie, Hans-Peter Brondmo, Brian Cantwell-Smitth, Ian Cheng, Antonio Damasio, Kate Darling, Stephanie Dinkins, Drew Endy, Danny Ferrante, Reid Hoffman, Elaine Hsiao, Yuk Hui, Pierre Huyghe, Yann LeCun, Christian Madsbjerg, Margaret McFall-Ngai, Hartmut Neven, Michael Specter, Ben Vickers, Liping Zhao, Andrew Zuckerman.

Across all modules, students will be accompanied by Transformations of the Human Staff Researchers.

*We think of PARt as an intervention.*

*At present, a concern for philosophical stakes is absent from technology R&D.*

*As a consequence, new technologies disrupt concepts and create new realities, but in unplanned, unanticipated ways.*

*We can change that — by bringing philosophy, art, and technology together.*