

Approaching The Humanities Through Soccer

[Here.](#)

Harvard, humanities, Viktor Shklovsky, soccer – what could be better?

The instructor who highfalutin'ly claims that “shaking things up” through this kind of course is just like Viktor Shklovky's “ostranenie” or, *anglice*, “making strange” or, in German, *Verfremdungseffekt*, one of the most important of the literary devices Shklovsky identified in “Art As Devices” (*Iskusstvo Kak Priyom*) is off base, because shaking things up, by studying why some call soccer “a beautiful game,” is not the same thing as making them strange. Or should I have refrained from using “off base” because it belongs to another sport? And do you find it unsporting not to greet this addition to the curriculum with delight, and instead to deplore this effort of instructors to appeal cravenly to students, to try to get them interested, by holding up for solemn study what already receives too much attention, in concocting this course that surrenders to the spirit of the age, does not distinguish the permanent from the passing, and reveals a failure of these teachers of the humanities to take as their truest task the transmission of culture, history, literature. This soccer course may not be as unacceptable as courses about “the philosophy of Hip-Hop” that Harvard also endorsed when it hired, and then gave tenure, in the very department, Philosophy, that once included, at the same time, William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, Josiah Royce, to Tommie Shelby, son-in-law of Thomas Scanlon, professor and recently head of the Philosophy Department, after a “nation-wide search.” But that's faint praise.