NYU Abu Dhabi — Interactive Media

SOFTWARE ART: TEXT

IM-UH 2116

Fall 2017

COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor

Pierre Depaz (pierre.depaz@nyu.edu)

Meeting Time

Tuesday — 10:25AM - 1:05PM
Thursday — 11:50AM - 1:05PM

Classroom

C3-153

Office

C3-032

Office Hours

Open-door policy

Credits

2

Class website

https://github.com/pierredepaz/software-art-text

This course counts towards the following NYUAD degree requirement:

- Multidisciplinary Minors > Interactive Media
- Majors > Literature and Creative Writing

Course Description

Although computers only appeared a few decades ago, automation, repetition and process are concepts that have been floating around artists' minds for almost a century. As machines enabled us to operate on a different scale, they escaped the domain of the purely functional and started to be used, and understood, by artists. The result has been the emergence of code-based art, a relatively new field in the rich tradition of arts history that today acts as an accessible new medium in the practice of visual artists, sculptors, musicians and performers.

Software Art: Text is an introduction to the history, theory and practice of computer-aided artistic endeavours in the field of prose and poetry. This class will be focused on the appearance and role of computers as a new way for artists to write and read both programming and natural languages. While elaborating and discussing concepts and paradigms specific to computing platforms, such as recomposition, stochastic writing, found material and interaction, students will be encouraged to explore their own artistic practice through the exclusive use of their computers, by writing their own programs. As such, Software Art: Text will be a literary history and critical studies course with an active writing component (in both Python and English). Students will be exposed to new creative perspectives on reading and writing in the digital age.

Software Art: Text is a complement to Software Art: Image, a 7-week course on the use of software from the perspective of the visual arts.

Course Objectives

When the course is finished, students will:

- Have developed an understanding of process-based artistic practice.
- Have developed a knowledge of the unique features of software in creative writing.
- Be accustomed to presenting, commenting and critiquing software art.
- Have developed their own artistic practice through writing software.
- Have acquired technical proficiency writing creative programs in Bash and Python.
- Have gained a greater understanding of the place of the written word in a world immersed in computation.

Course Assignments

This course consists of both theoretical discussion and in hands-on assignments. The course assignments will therefore include **readings**, **writing**, **presenting** and **coding**.

Reading
Readings will include book chapters, research papers and articles from art history, art philosophy and software studies fields. These readings will introduce the students to the history of computers as a tool to produce fiction, its impact on how we look at the written word, as well as an overview of the field's main figures.

Participating
Since the class will be focused on critical outlooks on artworks as well as discussion of both their execution and underlying concepts, participation by the students contributes to 15% of the final grade. Participation includes **(a)** expressing one's own perspective on the readings, **(b)** discussing classmates' perspectives on the readings, **(c)** offering critical and respectful feedback on classmates' work, **(d)** sharing additional content that can be relevant to the topics discussed in class.
- 15%

Drafting
Students will be encouraged to produce computer-generated texts by posting weekly on a public blog. These weekly assignments will explore a particular technique, concept, or artist who will have been discussed that week in class. Each draft or series of drafts will be accompanied by a short write-up explaining the creative process of that exploration (what does the program do? why? what is the intended aesthetic effect?).
- 15%

Coding
The main assignments of the class will be two series of work, revolving around two concepts, *Assemblage* and *Fiction*. Each student will be required to produce one or several works that demonstrate both **(a)** technical skill, **(b)** aesthetic judgement and **(c)** critical knowledge, which will then be presented and critiqued in class. The final project will follow those same requirements, but will not have a pre-defined prompt.
- 15% + 15% + 20%

Writing
Each of the main assignments will be accompanied by a 500 word statement providing a theoretical context to the production of the work, in order to introduce students to not only art creation but also to art criticism and allow them to not only produce, but communicate. These statements will have to touch on **(a)** the conceptual background for the work, **(b)** the reasons for its formal qualities as well as **(c)** the evolution of the work over time.
- 5% + 5% + 10%

Submitting Assignments

Each assignment should be submitted by **(1)** posting the output on the student's website, and by **(2a)** sending the direct link to that posting to the instructor as an email, along with **(2b)** a .zip file of the files.

Grade breakdown

Participating	15%
Sketching	15%
Coding - Assemblage	20%
Coding - Fiction	20%
Coding - Final	30%
Total	**100%**

Grade calculation

Students will be given grades based on a 100 point scale. Each assignment will be graded on a point scale, and these points will be added up to determine the final grade, according to the following:

94 - 100 A
90 - 93 A-
86 - 89 B+
83 - 85 B
80 - 82 B-
76 - 79 C+
etc.

Readings

All readings will be available as PDFs on the class website (https://github.com/pierredepaz/software-art-text/wiki/readings).

Required readings:

- *Virtual Muse: Experiments in Computer Poetry*, Charles O. Hartman
- *Shebang*, Nick Montfort, Counterpath Press, 2014. ISBN 9781933996462

Attendance

Attendance and arriving on time to all class sessions is required and expected, too many unexcused absences will lower your final grade. **Two unexcused absences lower your final grade by a letter**. Each subsequent unexcused absence will lower another letter grade. Two tardies will count as one absence. Arriving more than 15 minutes late will also count as an absence. If you will be missing a class due to illness, or unavoidable personal circumstances, you must notify your professor in advance via email for the absence to be eligible to be excused.

Laptop Use

As it turns out, digital media are more and more designed to take our attention away from our current actions. As such, laptops, tablets and smartphones are not allowed during lectures. In order to avoid wasteful printing of materials, students are encouraged to take notes and write down questions as preparation for class discussions.

Academic Integrity

As set forth in NYU Abu Dhabi's Academic Integrity Policy, the relationship between students and faculty at NYU Abu Dhabi is defined by a shared commitment to academic excellence and is grounded in an expectation of fairness, honesty, and respect, which are essential to maintaining the integrity of the community. Every student who enrolls and everyone who accepts an appointment as a member of the faculty or staff at NYU Abu Dhabi agrees to abide by the expectation of academic honesty.
The full policies and procedures relating to Academic Integrity may be found on the NYUAD Student Portal.

If you're going to copy/paste some code, please include the author/StackOverflow link as a comment.

Schedule

1 - INTRODUCTION

Readings
- *Virtual Muse: An Experiment in Computer Poetry*, C. O. Hartman, Chap. 1.
- *On Doubt*, V. Flússer, Univocal Publishing, 2014, Chap 3.

Lab - 10/31
- Housekeeping
- Introduction to the tools
- Introduction to text manipulation in bash

Lecture - 11/02
- A short history of poetry
- Early examples
- A history of languages in programming

Homework
- Find five different interesting corpus of text, bring them to class as a .txt file.
- Find a poem you like. Come to class prepared to discuss why you like it.

2 - CUT/PASTE

Readings
- Dada manifesto, ready-mades.
- Jackson McLow
- Nick Montfort
- *A Grammar for grep*

Lab - 11/07
- Intro to regular expressions
- Intro to scraping in Python

Lecture - 11/09
- Guest lecturer - Jill Magi

Homework
- Work on your first project.

3 - GRAMMARS AND CHAINS

WORK 1 DUE

Readings
- *Linguistics for non-linguists,* F. Parker, K. Riley, College Hill Press, 2005. Chap 4.
- N-grams and Markov chains, A. Parrish, http://www.decontextualize.com/teaching/rwet/n-grams-and-markov-chains/
- Markov chains explained visually, V. Powell, http://setosa.io/ev/markov-chains/

Lab - 11/14
- Stochasticity
- Markov Chains
- Grammars
- Katie Rose Pipkin
- Ross Godwin

Lecture - 11/16
- Work Readings

Homework
- Find a particular bot on the internet. Interact with it. When did it appear that the bot was not a human agent? How did you find out? How did it change your interaction?

4 - INTERACTIVITY

Readings

- *ELIZA -A Computer Program For The Study Of Natural Language Communication Between Man and Machine*, J. Weizenbaum, Communications of the ACM, Vol. 9, 1966
- Cybernetics.
- Interactive Fiction.

Lab - 11/21

- tinysubversions
- Allison Parrish

Lecture - 11/23

- Bots
- Twitter bots

Homework

- Find a piece of fiction on Twine, Inform or Storyscape. Read through it, and blog about it.

5 - HYPERTEXT

WORK 2 DUE

Readings

- *The Garden of Forking Paths,* J.-L. Borges.
- *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature,* E. Aarseth.

Lab - 11/28

- Intro to Twine

Lecture - 11/25

- History and theory of Hypertext
- NetArt
- Telematics
- Emily Short
- Porpentine

Homework

- Write a short blog post about a programming language you know, or one you would like to learn, and about what kind of creative writing it would be best suited for.

6 - SOURCE CODES

Readings

- *Speaking Code*, G. Cox., MIT Press, 2012.
- {Code Poems}
- *There Is No Software*, F. Kittler.

Lab - 12/05

- Authorship
- Source Code
- Performance

Lecture - 12/07

- Work Session

Homework

- Work on your final

7 - FINAL PRESENTATIONS

FINAL DUE

Readings

- *Frivolity and Unction,* D. Hickey

Lab - 12/12

- Final Reading.
- Discussing the last readings.

Lecture - 12/14

- Class conclusion
- Preparation for IM Show

BREAK