Building is, for us, a new kind of hermeneutic — one that is quite a bit more radical than taking the traditional methods of humanistic inquiry and applying them to digital objects. Media studies, game studies, critical code studies, and various other disciplines have brought wonderful new things to humanistic study, but I will say (at my peril) that none of these represent as radical a shift as the move from reading to making.


It’s time to bridge the gap between the physical and the virtual—time to use more than just your fingers to interact with your computer. Step outside of the confines of the basic computer and into the broader world of computing.

– Tom Igoe, Physical Computing

In the humanities, the rise of code and software studies introduces a dilemma related to the “two cultures” split in which many of us are persistently stuck: our expertise at critically analysing digital texts is limited by our inexperience with software programming and electronics prototyping. In other words, our approaches to digital media are only “screen deep.” In an effort to bridge this divide, the following course comprises both theory and production. Half of each week will be devoted to reading and writing about recent scholarship associated with code and software studies as well as with calls for a materialist turn in our studies of the digital. Readings will include books, articles, and “born digital” projects by scholars and artists affiliated with new media studies, digital humanities, digital poetry, and the contemporary arts. The other half will be devoted to hands-on learning and project development with the Arduino UNO electronics prototyping platform and the Processing programming language. Both of these technologies are open-source and inexpensive. Moreover, they were designed for non-programmers and -engineers to learn how to be creative in computational media.

This course is an opportunity to engage with the new hermeneutic to which Ramsay alludes above. **Prior experience is not required.** The ultimate goals of this seminar are to 1) develop a critical understanding of the scholarship associated with code and software studies. 2) gain confidence and experience developing several physical computing projects through guided instruction, and 3) develop a sense of the invention possibilities of humanities computing by planning and prototyping two projects of your own. The seminar will begin with guided, hands-on tutorials that introduce the basics. As the scope of project development expands, a wide range of Arduino-compatible microelectronic sensors, motors, and shields will be available.

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