

Art + Tech Workshops

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ABSTRACT

Many teaching artists interested in code and technology struggle their way through years of self teaching. In the interest of creating a community of artist/learners, I designed coding workshops for the 2018 Media Lounge programming, called Art & Tech workshops. The Art & Tech workshops created a community of like-minded teaching artists committed to supporting progress and fostering a more inclusive future for New Media.

The idea for the Art & Tech workshops grew out of my personal experiences grappling with coding and technology. It took a long time for me to feel comfortable identifying as a new media artist, even though my visual work and pedagogy has been steeped in tech since I began teaching college art in 2014. When I began making new media work, I hesitated to label it as such because I felt that I lacked the ease and expertise essential to sustaining a new media practice. However, after four years of teaching a variety of software, digital fabrication processes and coding languages I welcomed a new media practice as one that is constantly in flux and based in learning/re-learning. As a teaching artist, demystifying technology to make the genre of New Media Art more inclusive has become my mission.

As an Assistant Professor of Art + Technology at Northeastern Illinois University, an appointment I began in Fall 2016, I wanted to become involved with the New Media Caucus to synthesize my personal mission with the broader organization. I proposed the Art + Tech workshops for the 2018 Media Lounge to introduce art and technology processes to uninitiated arts educators who were interested in incorporating new media into their studio course work.

I designed two workshops using native browser tools and a free and open source coding application to reduce barriers for participation. The participants only needed to bring a laptop or tablet and connect to wifi. Although synthesized into step-by-step projects with visual end results, the content of the workshop was facilitated from two perspectives, that of the student and that of the facilitator or faculty member. This dual approach allowed the workshop participants to learn the skills for creating the project while gaining troubleshooting skills particular to areas of the project where students struggle.

I designed and facilitated the first workshop, “Break the Internet.” The workshop walked through the steps of accessing and using a browser's web inspector to alter the server response content of a given website. Once participants understood how to work with the web inspector elements and console tabs, the workshop demonstrated techniques for altering the HTML and CSS of the

website. Next, the workshop taught a crash course in HTML elements, HTML image/gif attributes, and CSS properties and values for layout, color and type treatments, resulting in brutalist web compositions. Through this destructive process, participants learned how HTML, CSS, and JQuery come together to create the modern web. They also learned how to debug HTML and CSS and navigate potential issues students might encounter within the web inspector. Most importantly, they know where to find easily understandable HTML & CSS references and help documentation.

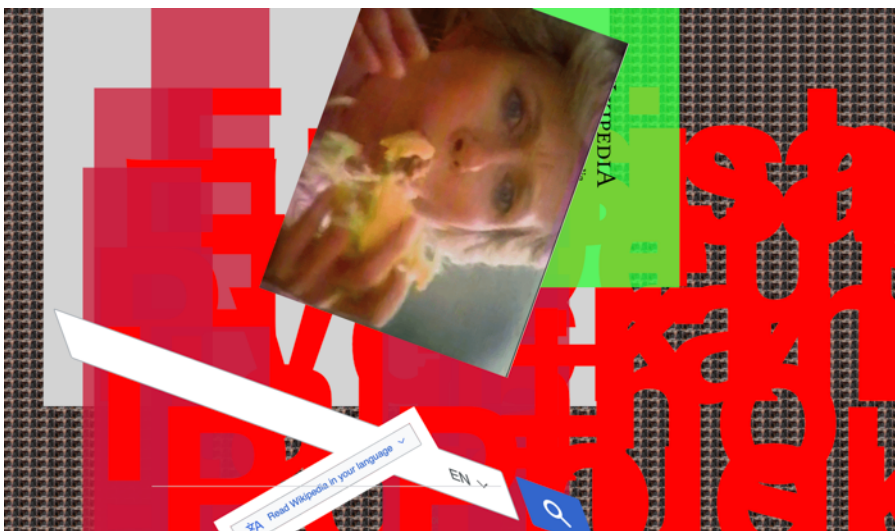


Figure 1. Brandon Waybright's composition from the Break the Internet Workshop



Figure 2. Composition from the Break the Internet workshop



Figure 3. Composition from the Break the Internet workshop

Echo Theohar, UC Santa Barbara Art and Technology MFA, designed and facilitated the second workshop, “Experimental Computer Vision.” This workshop utilized the built-in computer camera of a laptop, teaching participants how to directly edit captured videos in real-time. The workshop used the free and open-source Processing app to introduce and explore variables such as time warping, pixelization, drawing, image processing, and the basic Processing library functions. Like Break the Internet, Experimental Computer Vision required no experience with coding and encouraged uninitiated participants to begin by altering simple values from the example sketches*. To personally engage with participants, Echo shared anecdotes of her journey into coding throughout the workshop. Echo stated, “When I started coding I did not think that beginning with an open source snippet of code and altering the small parts I understood was considered coding.” Echo went on to assure the participants that it is the best way to begin to understand the structure and functions of the processing library. Echo opened up one of the example sketches and used the processing reference page to navigate participants through the code, showing participants how to translate the code into something they understood. They could then alter the code in slight ways to create something different than the initial base code, with the potential of becoming a unique piece.

Echo’s experience of teaching programming within a traditional fine arts program had highlighted core differences in how the same skills were taught in new media track programs. According to Theohar, “There seems to be a gap between the students’ prior knowledge of and experience with code when entering a beginner’s programming course for the first time. This is something that I believe needs to be addressed when teaching in a fine art program - these types of students often greatly benefit from exercises that are familiar to visual arts practices, such as visualizing code projects through print (zines, books, etc.) or using code to manipulate video or images in real time (similar to experimental video editing, for example).”

Theohar also stated that he “had a great time discussing [the above] nuances with other arts instructors at the conference, and was pleasantly surprised to see so many folks in the crowd who were well-versed in creative coding practices.” He further stated that “In the future, I hope that

panel discussions about the future of coding in arts programs (or some similar topic) can happen in conjunction with the workshop aspect of the New Media Caucus' scheduling. I think the most rewarding aspect of the conference for me was the chance to speak with fellow educators about their personal struggles / solutions in relation to the topic at hand."

A community of like-minded creatives comfortable with messy and imperfect understandings of new media processes is something that Jessye McDowell, New Media Caucus Chair of Communications, and I will be continuing working towards. Jessye recently interviewed me for [The HUB's "Member Spotlight,"](#) which is a new Q&A style interview with an NMC member for the NMC blog. During the interview conversation Jessye and I realized we had many of the same experiences learning new media processes, and that we both longed for more access to a learning community. This coming semester Jessye and I will be building a feature for The HUB, with the goal of creating a pseudo-support group for creatives who are self teaching their way through new media processes. This web community will feature teaching artists of all skill levels who work with code and tech driven processes. The platform will feature candid interviews with artists discussing how they stumbled their way into the new media realm. The platform will also host an archive of creative projects to support artists-teaching-artists-how-to-teach-themselves. This will include the weird workarounds and unconventional workflows discovered by the artists self taught process.

Working with the New Media Caucus for the 2018 Media Lounge was overall a wonderful experience. Programming throughout the day cultivated a collective mission to pursue a New Media. More voices were included to redefine the discourse of the genre so that it can evolve. The Art + Tech Workshops gave access into coding that is sometimes overwhelming to find on one's own. It also planted the seeds of a learning community and a non-traditional learning environment which will be critical in developing the future of New Media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thank you to Joyce Rudinsky for trusting me with these workshops.

AUTHOR BIO

KT Duffy is an Assistant Professor of Art & Technology at Northeastern Illinois University. Duffy's mission in life is to demystify code and technology for other creatives. They will be doing summer code workshops in Chicago for the Center for College Access and Success' STEAM2 Conference, GirlCon, and the Code + Beer event at LoRez Brewery in Pilsen, where they and their collaborator, artist Ali Seradge, will be resident artists in July. Their recent exhibitions include Agentive Valley, with Eric Souther, at the South Bend Museum of Art, and a forthcoming August '18, solo exhibition at Terrault Contemporary.