

Spring 2024

COM 369-102: Digital Poetry

Christopher Funkhouser

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Digital Poetry | NJIT | Spring 2024

**Prof. Chris Funkhouser / funkhous@njit.edu / Cullimore 425 / (973) 596-6335
COM 324 / office hours: 3-5 Wednesday and by appointment**

Course description:

This course develops a student's understanding of how technology has changed the writing, reading, and analysis of poetry, and has created a new genre of writing. Through studies in digital poetry, a craft which is based in literary, visual, and sonically based arts, students are introduced to multiple poetic genres. The course investigates a range of activities taken up by poets and programmers who integrate computer technology in their works, pairing it with language and other expressive forms. Students will review and discuss dynamics presented in an array of titles produced during recent decades. Poems that include algorithmic programming, graphical artistry, videography, hypermedia, and other techniques are explored in order to build an understanding of the values of these disparate forms of expression, which are sometimes combined. During the semester, students deliberate on the creative and practical potentials of this modality of writing while acquiring skills and literacy in written poetry, contemporary reading and writing practices, computer literature, and visual design. Students will be encouraged to apply theoretical knowledge to the analysis and creation of multimedia literature, and will, at the end of the course, create and present a poetic artifact and evaluate its literary construction, design, and audio-visual strategies.

This course is scheduled to meet in-person every Wednesday night during the semester. Attendance is mandatory. Missing multiple classes will harm your final grade. Campus meetings will happen in CKB 114 on Wednesdays at 6 p.m.

A Final Examination will not be given.

Course materials, assignments, and information will be exchanged via Canvas (<https://canvas.njit.edu/>), which will include topical discussion forums and work submission portals.

Course textbooks, provided as .pdf files (on Canvas):

C. T. Funkhouser: *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* (PDF), *New Directions in Digital Poetry* (PDF)

Other course materials will be posted on Canvas and on the Course Syllabus. See links below.

Professor Funkhouser will be available for individual appointments (office hours, on campus) on Wednesday afternoons, and by appointment.

Note: Syllabus is subject to change; any major amendments will be announced on Canvas.

General Coursework Outline / Grading

Assignments [55 points]

See below for details. Note: Be sure every file you submit in the course contains your last name (e.g., smith-Assignment1.pdf).

Research Journal [20 points]

From the very beginning of the course students will make journal entries in a Google Docs file. This document should include weekly entries based on class materials and anything relevant you encounter during your Research on the subject of digital poetry. Brainstorm your ideas for Assignments and the course project here. Weekly sections should be clearly identified, and every entry in the journal should be dated.

Course Project [20 points]

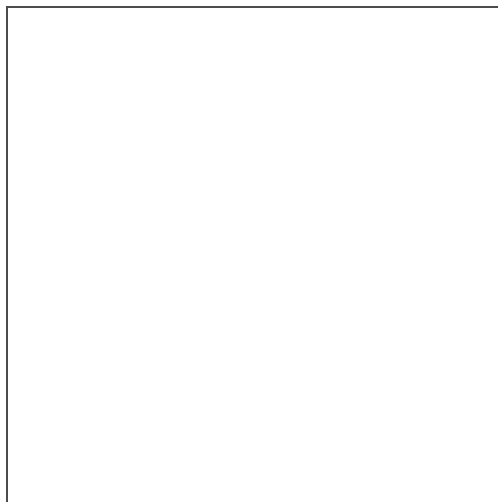
Each student will prepare a Course Project. The final interval of the semester is devoted to it; more instructions will follow. Generally speaking, you will prepare a WWW-based (or other) creative project using language and digital media, which would include (though not limited to), making hypertext or visual poetry, video/animations, algorithmic writing, or other types of coded works. Projects must be accompanied by a 2-3 page explanatory project statement. Proposals are due on 4/1 (or before). PROJECT DUE DATE IS APRIL 26.

Term Report [5 points]

A 4-5 page summary of your impressions on any aspect of Digital Poetry and your experience in the course.

Course Schedule

Note to students: Contents of the syllabus for this course will be incrementally presented, added on a weekly basis, in order to keep you focused on work required at the time. Below is an abbreviated version of the syllabus, which indicates all the major areas of investigation and assignments. If for some reason you need to see syllabus details for the entire semester, please let me know and I will furnish a copy. —cf



January / Building Familiarity

Begin composing your Research Journal (via Google Docs) immediately. Journals should consist of a FULL activity log for coursework: chronicle, with notes on process, everything you do—and think about—with regard to this class. PUT A DATE ON ALL OF YOUR JOURNAL ENTRIES. Journal entries focus on your research, process, and perceptions about material presented and produced in the course. Links to your Journals will be registered on Canvas, and will be evaluated more or less on a weekly basis (i.e., 10 times during the semester). Again: all notes related to your Independent Research in the course and classroom presentations should be included. Each evaluation is worth 2 points.

1/17 | Introduction to Digital Poetry

lecture, “What Is Digital Poetry?”

- **Course Introduction, student introductions**
- **Overview of the history and evolution of digital poetry**
- **Introduction to the different forms of, and influences on, digital poetry (generative, visual, interactive, etc.)**

Relevant Books:

- **Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance)***
- **Raymond Queneau, *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [on reserve at NJIT]**
- **Nathaniel Philbrick, *Why Read Moby Dick?***
- **C.T. Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995* [PDF on Canvas]**
- **C.T. Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry* [PDF on Canvas]**

In-class Viewing: Brian Kim Stefans, [the dreamlife of letters](#), *Electronic Literature Collection*, Vol. 1;

Reading Assignment: Christopher Funkhouser, "[Digital Poetry: A Look at Generative, Visual, and Interconnected Possibilities in its First Four Decades](#)", *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*.

Read Jim Andrews, "[Digital Poetry in Digital Literacy](#)"; in addition to writing comments in journals, be prepared to discuss in class next week.

Begin writing in Research Journal

+ Independent Research (IR) + Week 1 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 1/24; 2 points]

1/24 | Digital Poetry and Language

lecture, "Le(s) Mange Texte(s): Creative Cannibalism and Digital Poetry"

- **Introducing specific concepts and elements of digital poetry**
- **Discuss relationship between digital technology and language, and how digital poetry utilizes, challenges, and expands traditional ideas of language and meaning**
- **Analysis of use and delivery of language in various digital poetry works**
- **Discussion based on student IR**

Relevant Books/Texts:

- ***Flarf: An Anthology of Flarf***
- ***DADA: 1915-1923***
- **Kurt Schwitters, *PPPPPP***

- *Doc(k)s Alire* série 3
- Robert Creeley, *Daybook of a Virtual Poet*

In-class Viewing: see [lecture materials](#)

Required viewing (outside class): [What is Dada?](#)

Assignment 1: IBM Poetry. Read [“IBM Poetry: Exploring Restriction in Computer Poems”](#) and Emmett Williams' piece, “Dear Ann Noel...” on IBM method (Canvas). Download the IBM Poem template (Canvas). Make two different IBM poems using the process. In addition to creating the poems, compose a 1-2 page response discussing your impressions of the exercise. Assignment will be graded based on engagement, following directions, and accuracy of output. [due 1/31; 10 points]

+ IR + Week 2 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 1/31; 2 points]

1/31 | Generative Poetry

lecture, "Kissing the Steak: The poetry of text generators"

- Introduction to the concepts, characteristics, and techniques of generative poetry
- Discussion of the ways in which generative poetry can be used to create new forms of language and meaning
- Discussion/Analysis of various generative poetry works

Relevant Books:

- Pedro Barbosa, *A Literatura Cibernetica 1 & 2*
- Allison Parrish, *Articulations*
- Nick Montfort, *The Truelist*
- Ranjit Bhatnagar, *Encomials*
- Chris Funkhouser, *Electro Perdix*

In-class Viewing: Pedro Barbosa, [Cyberliterature](#), *Electronic Literature Collection*, Vol. 3 (related work, in Portuguese: [O motor textual. Livro virtual / infinito](#)); John Cayley, *windsound*, *Electronic Literature Collection*, Vol. 1 <https://programmatalogy.shadoof.net/?wsqt> (partial) + Michał Rudolf, [Renderings: Poet](#), *Electronic Literature Collection*, Vol. 3; Liam Cooke, [bot.exe](#); [Shy-nag \(1\)](#), [\(2\)](#);

Reading: [“Picture Becomes Text, Becomes Writing: Software as Interlocutor”](#), *Cordite Poetry Review*, along with A D Jameson’s [instructions for “spell-check technique](#). See also, [Shy nag central](#)

Assignment 2: Using poems, song lyrics, or prose paragraphs (or even some other form of text), create a work (or multiple works) of “Spell-check” poetry. Text output, in all, should be at least one page in length, and you should include the original (source) text on a separate page. Assignment will be graded based on engagement with the exercise and accuracy in following directions to create output. Explanation/demonstration will be provided. [due 2/7; 10 points]

+ IR + Week 3 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 2/7; 2 points]

February / Research

2/7 | Visual Poetry

- **Overview of visual poetry and its key characteristics**
- **How to create visual poetry and poetry installations**
- **Discuss how multidimensional poetry challenges traditional ideas of poetry consumption**

Relevant Books:

- **Emmett Williams, ed., *Anthology of Concrete Poetry***
- **E.M. de Melo e Castro, *Algorritmos***
- **David Daniels, *Years***
- **Crag Hill & Nico Vassilakis, eds., *The last VISPO Anthology***
- **Kamau Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey***
- **Chris Funkhouser, *pressAgain***

See Brent Cox, [excerpt from *Disorienting the Avant Garde*](#)

Assignment 3: Prepare 2-3 visual poems in digital format (you may use software or analog methods); text does not have to be original (i.e., you can use a text generator or appropriate someone else's text). Please give each composition a title, and include notes on your compositional processes. Assignment will be graded based on concepts reflected in your composition. [due 2/14; 5 points]

+ IR + Week 4 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 2/14; 2 points]

2/14 | Visual Poetry (cont.) and Interactive Poetry

- **Overview of the different forms of interactive poetry and its key characteristics**
- **Exploration of the ways in which interactivity can be used to enhance the reading experience**

Relevant Books:

- **Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Page and Screen***

In-class Viewing: Ana Maria Uribe ([Typopoems](#), [Anipoems](#)); Ottar Ormstad, [When](#); Jim Rosenberg, [The Inframergence](#) (demo), Stephanie Strickland, [The Ballad of Sand and Harry Soot](#), Jazer Chand, [Blackout Poetry Tool](#), bp Nichol, [First Screening](#), Jose Aburto, [Immersive Poetry](#)

Assignment 4: Think of ways you would approach the act of creating an interactive poem. Write 250-500 words describing what you would do. No idea is too outrageous! Assignment will be graded based on thoughtfulness and engagement with the task. [due 2/21; 5 points]

+ IR + Week 5 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 2/21; 2 points]

2/21 | Interactive / Animated Poetry (cont.)

- **Discussion about your visions of interactive poems**
- **Overview of key figures and varied characteristics**
- **More on graphical and non-linear approaches to engagement**

Relevant Books:

- ***Visible Language 30.2, New Media Poetry* (Eduardo Kac, ed.)**
- **Stephanie Strickland, *Vniverse***
- **D.L. Goodman, *The Magic of the Unicorn***
- ***The Aesthetics of Digital Poetry* (Block, Heibach, Wenz, eds.)**

In-class Viewing: Follow this link

+ IR + Week 6 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 2/28; 2 points]

points]

NEXT WEEK: IN-CLASS READING OF STUDENT WORK.

Everyone should bring a text pertaining to this course (from Assignment 1, 2, 3, Journal, or Extracurricular material) TO READ/PERFORM ALOUD.

2/28 | Digital Poetry and Code

IN-CLASS DIGITAL POETRY READING +

Introducing codework

- **Overview of Poetry and Code and its key characteristics**
- **Exploration of various digital poetry works that incorporate code**

Relevant Books:

- ***Criss-Cross Art Communications, #7, 8, 9 (1979)***
- **Giselle Beiguelman, *O livro depois do livro***
- **Nick Montfort, *#!***
- **Nick Montfort, *World Clock***

In-class Viewing: Giselle Beiguelman, Code Movie: https://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/beiguelman_code_movie_1.html; [Mez](#); [Alan Sondheim](#); Nick Montfort, [Taroko Gorge](#)

Assignment 5: Create your own thematically-based version/modification of *Taroko Gorge*. Numerous mods of this work can be found at <https://collection.eliterature.org/3/collection-taroko.html>. You will edit the html/javascript code from Montfort's original, and post the files in your public_html space on NJIT's AFS server. Basic instructions on how to do this will be provided [I recommend downloading and using [MobaXterm software](#) from NJIT to do this]. Further instruction can be found at <https://ist.njit.edu/personal-webpages-on-afs>. In addition to creating and posting your remix, submit a two page response discussing your personal experience in creating such a work. Assignment will be graded based on engagement with the exercise, and accuracy in following directions to create output. [due 3/13; 10 points]

IR + Week 7 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 3/13; 2 points]

March / Media Exploration

3/6 | Digital Poetry and Artificial Intelligence

IN-CLASS DIGITAL POETRY READING Continues + discussion of your Taroko Gorge remixes and posting protocols.

- **Overview of Poetry and Artificial Intelligence**

Relevant Books:

- **David Jhave Johnston, *Aesthetic Animism: Digital Poetry's Ontological Implications***
- **Jhave, *Rerites: June 2017***
- **Jhave, *Rerites: January 2018***
- **Multiple authors: *ReRites Humans + A.I. Poetry + Raw Output + Responses***

In-class Viewing: Jhave, <http://glia.ca/rerites/>

Assignment 6: I have compiled a list of AI poetry generators. Over the next three weeks, explore and do a personal evaluation of these resources (ChatGPT is not included on the list, but you may also experiment with it if you have an account). Create and format a small anthology of poems (10 pages of poetry minimum) that employ specific constraints, and keep track of the specifications you use (e.g., write a poem in X style—different AI generators have different input modes). Please note your specifications/commands in an Appendix to your anthology, and add a table of contents as well. Lastly, identify the best poem one of the AI sites wrote for you, write a 2-3 paragraph statement as why you think it is the best AI poem you made, comparing it to other output you generated, and include this as an "Afterword" in your anthology. Use either Google Docs, or MS Word / PDF to produce your anthology. Assignment will be graded based on engagement with the exercise and accuracy in following directions to create output. [due 3/27; 10 points]

+ IR + Week 8 + 9 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 3/22; 2 points]

3/13 | SPRING BREAK

3/20 | Digital Poetry in Games

- **Exploration of ways in which digital poetry integrates with games, including videogames**
- **Discussion of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by digital poetry in games**
- **Analysis of various digital poetry works in video games**

Relevant Books:

- **Brian Kim Stefans: *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics***

Class discussion: *Taroko Gorge* remakes, AI Poetry anthologies, Games, Course project (in brief)

In-class Viewing: Jim Andrews, *Arteroids*; Marko Niemi, *Stud Poetry* (see link below)

Works to discuss in your Journals (choose at least one from each category)

Assignment 7: Prepare your Course Project proposal [Be prepared to discuss ideas in class next week. Final draft due 4/3; 5 points]

IR + Week 10 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 3/27; 2 points]

3/27 | Digital Poetry and Social Media

- **Exploring the ways in which digital poetry is used on social media platforms**
- **Discussion of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by digital poetry on social media**

Relevant Books:

- **Jeneen Naji: *Digital Poetry***

Informal Draft of Course Project Proposal is due in class. Submit Assignment 7 before class next week.

IR + Week 11 Research Journal entries [due for evaluation 4/17; 2 points]

April / Gathering Content

4/3 | Digital Poetry: Sound and Performance

- **Overview of Digital Poetry and Performance**
- **Overview of poetry and sound and its key characteristics**

Relevant Books: Eduardo Kac, ed.: *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*

In-class Viewing/Listening: Charles Amirkhanian, Jim Andrews, Henri Chopin, cris cheek, John Giorno (Dial-A-Poem), Judd Morrissey, Ed Sanders, others

Consultations with students about Course Projects

Assignment: Begin to gather material and prepare Project

4/10 | Project Preparation Studio

IN-CLASS DIGITAL POETRY READING II (part 1)

In-class project consultation and studio

4/17 | Project Consultation Studio

IN-CLASS DIGITAL POETRY READING II (part 2)

In-class project consultation and studio

4/24 | Project Demonstrations

Final Project is due: [20 points]

Term Report due. [5 points; due 4/26]

ALL WORK FOR COM 369 MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 4/30/24

OTHER COURSE INFO:

This course is designed to ensure NJIT's Communication and Media program successfully provides its students with a foundation in a range of forms of communication. The course's overall objectives are designed to promote each student's understanding of multi-media communications, using a digital media as an expressive tool. Through project development and completion, students build practical skills in writing, visual communication, and developing expression with digital media. The course will improve a student's flexibility in language and communication in contemporary media format, thus advancing their general skillset in consuming and producing texts.

Students in this course will: 1.) Gain firsthand understanding of communicative genres; 2.) Explore the practical and creative implementation of language; 3.) Develop individual technical and written creative practices using media; 4.) Use peers to develop ideas, and cultivate production of original work; and 5.) Foster digital artifacts for publication.

Learning outcome 1: Engage in critical thinking and reflection regarding use of language and communication strategies.

Learning Outcome 2: Gain a practice-based introduction to understanding processes and tools of verbal communication across networks.

Learning Outcome 3: Gain a practice-based introduction to methods for speaking effectively and making decisions that enable efficient communication with others.

Learning Outcome 4: The course will expand a student's conceptual perspective of communication, thus improving his or her skills in both quantitative and qualitative reasoning, critical thinking, information literacy, and project management.

Core competencies addressed by the course include: Student awareness of, and engagement with, communications strategies; building perception of contemporary communication(s) environments; performative practice with communication tools; critical thinking on the subject matter; cultivation of communication literacy.

Instructional objectives / evaluation:**Students will be evaluated on the basis of their work's:**

- (1) Real-world communication; design qualities**
- (2) Sustained investigation; development of materials (process over time)**
- (3) Use of multiple sources and perspectives; originality**
- (4) Creating polished products; aesthetic products**

Integrated assessment (feedback from multiple sources) will be used in evaluating works produced in the course.**Scale converting number to letter grade****A = 90 - 100****B+ = 85 - 89****B = 80 - 84****C+ = 75 - 79****C = 70 - 74****D = 60 - 69****F = 59 or less**

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu

Course Prerequisites: [HUM 102](#) with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher.