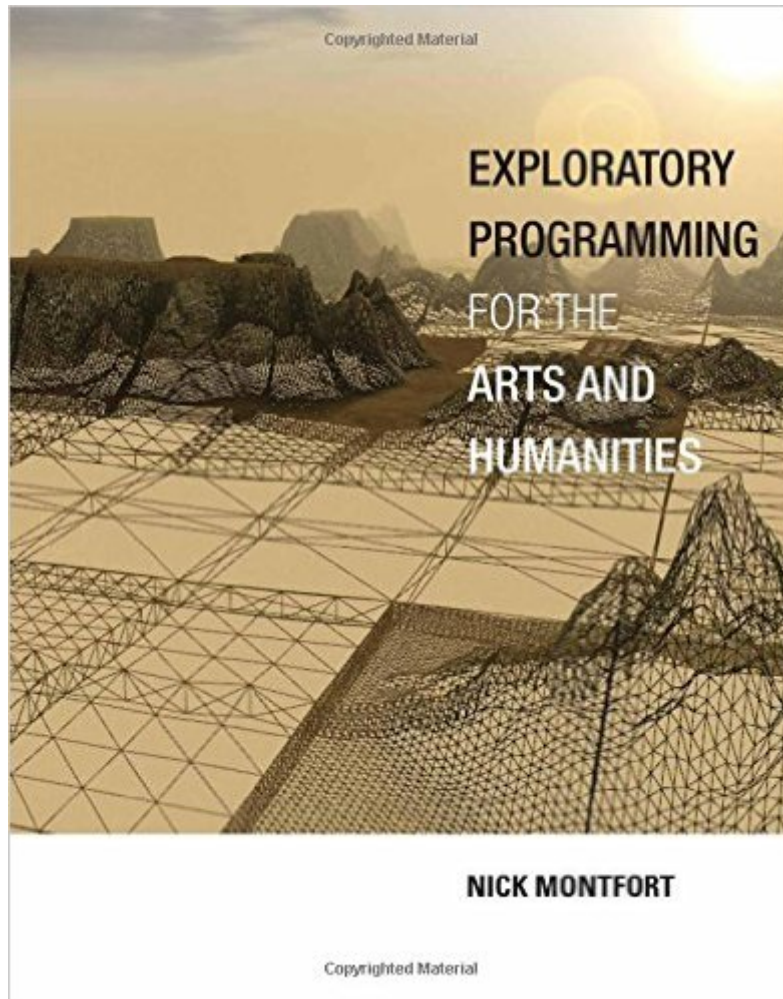# Exploratory Programming For The Arts And Humanities (MIT Press)

Synopsis

This book introduces programming to readers with a background in the arts and humanities; there are no prerequisites, and no knowledge of computation is assumed. In it, Nick Montfort reveals programming to be not merely a technical exercise within given constraints but a tool for sketching, brainstorming, and inquiring about important topics. He emphasizes programming's exploratory potential -- its facility to create new kinds of artworks and to probe data for new ideas. The book is designed to be read alongside the computer, allowing readers to program while making their way through the chapters. It offers practical exercises in writing and modifying code, beginning on a small scale and increasing in substance. In some cases, a specification is given for a program, but the core activities are a series of "free projects," intentionally underspecified exercises that leave room for readers to determine their own direction and write different sorts of programs. Throughout the book, Montfort also considers how computation and programming are culturally situated -- how programming relates to the methods and questions of the arts and humanities. The book uses Python and Processing, both of which are free software, as the primary programming languages.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought this on the strength of the review by Casey Reas, co-creator of Processing, in which he said that he "learned things continuously" throughout this book. Like Reas, I have been coding as an artist for many years, and based on Reas's review, I expected I would learn a lot more from this

book. However, the level is very elementary, and nothing the book teaches you (text processing, data visualization, animation, etc.) is developed to any significant level of depth. As this book is an introductory book on programming, for the arts and humanities, I half-expected this to be the case. However, Reas's review also noted that this book is also an exploration of "computation as culture", so I thought that even if it didn't teach me anything new as a programmer, it would offer some sort of analysis of how coding is situated within culture, how coding is ideological, and reinforces particular dominant ways of seeing the world, and relating to it. It doesn't really carry out any such analysis or critique, however, but functions more as a sort of cheerleader for coding skills - how they can help us all to improve our cognition and give us better tools to analyze and investigate the world. Montfort believes that better coding literacy is empowering, which may be true, but he doesn't offer any kind of critique of how the culture of coding is infiltrating itself into all kinds of different fields, and what effect this is having on the way we see the world and relate to people and things.. As a Professor of Digital Media, Montfort is well-placed to offer this sort of critique, and it would have been most welcome, and a point of difference between this and other "learn to code" books. It was disappointing that it didn't deliver this.

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