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Reflective Essay

When I started this course, I already had some background in programming, but it was not a happy story. At Dawson, I took computer science courses and then moved into the IMA program. The switch between programs and the way I learned coding before really affected me. I worked on big projects with teams where I often felt behind, like I was the slow one who needed more time to understand things. On top of that, we were learning at least three different programming languages in a semester. It was very overwhelming. It felt like everything was moving too fast, and it burned me out. I developed a kind of coding trauma overtime and I honestly didn't want to touch code again.

Even in group work though, I noticed something important about myself. I always wanted and volunteered to do the frontend. I liked working on the visual side, designing layouts, and making things look and feel nice for users. When I coded the frontend, I felt a small sense of joy and control, even during stressful projects. That was part of what pushed me toward IMA and now Computation Arts. I like spaces where creativity actually matters and not just an afterthought to serious technical work.

When I was a kid, I was very creative. I drew a lot, I thought of stories, and I liked to make things. But as I grew into my teens, I slowly stopped practicing that side of myself. I went into advanced math and science classes because I thought that was the right and stable path. I imagined myself in some technical career, and I tried to convince myself that was enough. But I wasn't happy. I felt like I was forcing myself into a version of success that didn't really fit me. That's why being in this program now feels like I'm reconnecting with a part of myself that I left behind.

This course, and IMA in general, helped me see programming differently. Instead of just solving abstract problems or building purely functional programs, we used tools like p5 and JavaScript to create interactive concepts, small games, and visual ideas. Working with things like if-statements, for-loops, and variables didn't feel like dry theory anymore. For example, using mouseX and mouseY to make elements react to the cursor, or using a for-loop to draw many shapes and create patterns, made coding feel so much fun! I started to connect code to creativity, which belongs to art and design as much as to computer science.

Because of that, my relationship with programming has changed a lot. I still sometimes feel slow or anxious when I don't understand something right away, but now I also see what I can do. I can build small interactive things, play with randomness to generate surprising results, or use arrays and functions to organize a little system. I've been exposed to game design, interactive design, and story-based work. When I write code now, I also think like "What mood does this create? What experience am I building? How does the interaction feel?" That mix of technical and creative thinking is new for me and I like it.

At the same time, I'm still figuring out my place in the creative tech world. At first, I thought I wanted to be a UI/UX designer because it was interesting. Now, after this course and other IMA classes, I'm more open. Graphic design, game design, interactive storytelling, maybe even creative coding as an art practice? All of these feel possible. I don't have a single fixed career goal yet, but I do know I want to stay somewhere in the art, design, and technology.

One of the most important things this course did for me is help me slowly repair my relationship with coding. For a long time, I really wanted to avoid it because it reminded me of stress, burnout, and feeling "not good enough". Now when I make something that responds to user input, I actually feel fulfilled. Coding in a creative way is healing some of that old trauma. It makes me feel like I can own this skill on my own terms, not just as a requirement someone forced on me.

Looking forward, I'm also very interested in AI and how it connects to creative work. I want to explore how AI can be used in interactive projects, generative art, or even game design. I can imagine combining what I've learned with AI tools to build experiences that react in more complex or surprising ways. I know I'm not there yet technically, but this course made that future feel less impossible and more like something I can work towards.

I also want to do a deep dive into game design as a whole, not just the coding side. I want to understand how to conceptualize a game, how to brainstorm mechanics, how to design art and sound that support the story. Coding becomes one part of a bigger process. It's the way I bring characters, worlds, and interactions to life. The idea that I can use if-statements, for example, not just to check a condition, but to decide what happens in a narrative flow or how a player moves around, makes programming feel like a storytelling tool.

I don't think I can say I completely own the role of creative coder yet, but I feel much closer than before.. At the start, coding was something that had hurt me and made me doubt myself. Now it's something that helps me express ideas and explore who I am as an artist. I still have a lot to learn, but I can imagine a future where creative coding is simply part of my practice. I'm looking forward to building bigger projects, collaborating with others in a healthier way, and continuing to turn lines of code into experiences that feel meaningful, beautiful, and fun.