Imagining the Digital (2016/17 English Literature, University of Birmingham)

As we continue to move through a moment of pervasive digital culture, and increasingly ubiquitous digital technology, new aesthetic paradigms emerge across the arts. This course explores those paradigms, theories and fictions of the digital, as they appear in recent Anglo-American culture. Rather than reflecting on this concern through the parameters of digital texts alone, the course will foster an expanded idea of digital culture, one that includes print and analogue works that reflexively engage with the digital.

The course will introduce students to digital culture as a material, philosophical, political and fictional set of encounters, covering a range of critical approaches. The course will ask students to engage with: an introduction to terminology around new media and digital culture; key texts and theories around the hard and soft components of digital culture; considerations of philosophical approaches inspired by digital culture; and ideas of virtuality that explicitly link digital culture to fictionality. Each week will be based on a critical approach and a primary text, or set of texts; the latter will be made up of novels, short stories, films, and artworks.

Learning Objectives

The course aims to:

- Encourage an understanding of the ways digital culture has been discussed and imagined through fiction and theory of the last few decades
- Encourage familiarity with a range of theoretical approaches to the digital
- Develop students' ability to connect digital culture as it is encountered in their everyday lives with the material, philosophical and fictional underpinnings of those encounters
- Foster students' interest in, and approach to the fiction and theories of digital culture

Assessment Information

Assessment will be 1x 1000 word essay and 1x 3000 word essay

Teaching

1hr weekly plenary + 2hr weekly seminar

Weekly Guide:

On this module we will be thinking through the material and social political entanglements of everyday new media in relation to literary and visual culture.

Everything listed below is compulsory reading. There is a *long* extended reading list organised alphabetically, with general readers listed separately. Peruse these; find things you like; use the bibliographies of the compulsory reading—explore! You can always ask for recommendations or a second opinion if you are unsure.

week 1
On being "Digital"…

- Ben Peters "Digital," from *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*, ed. Benjamin Peters (Princeton UP, 016) available online in draft form at http://culturedigitally.org/2014/05/digital-draftdigitalkeywords/
- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Invisibly Visible, Visibly Invisible" from *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (MIT Press, 2011), 15-18. whole book pdf here http://sites.uci.edu/mariaselenebose/files/2016/01/wendy-hui-kyong-chun-programmed-visions-software-and-memory.pdf

week 2

- Ellen Ullman *The Bug* (2003)
- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (cont.) "Sourcery and Source Codes" from *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (MIT Press, 2011), 19-54.

week 3

- Chimananda Ngozi Adichi *Americanah* (2013)
- Caroline Levine, "'The Strange Familiar': Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie's *Americanah*," in *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 61.4 (Winter 2015): 587-605
- Thomas Streeter "Internet" from *Digital Keywords* (citation as above) available at http://culturedigitally.org/2014/09/internet-draft-digitalkeywords/

week 4

- Dave Eggers *The Circle* (2013)
- Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics." *Cultural Politics* 1.1 (2005): 51-74, available at https://commonconf.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/proofs-of-tech-fetish.pdf
- Rob Horning, "Know Your Product." *The New Inquiry*. July 29, 2015. Accessed July 25, 2016. http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/know-your-product/.

week 5

- Tao Lin *Taipei* (2013)
- Marie Calloway *Adrian Brody* (in *what purpose did i serve in your life* 2013, available to read online here http://muumuuhouse.com/mc.fiction1.html (Links to an external site.))
- Prathna Lor, "Everybody's Poetry," *the minnesota review* 85 (2015): 153-161
- Miles Klee, "Stephen Tully Dierks, Tao Lin, and the alt lit scene's rape problem," *The Daily Dot*, 2014, 2015 available at http://www.dailydot.com/upstream/does-alt-lit-scene-have-rape-problem/

week 6 reading week

week 7

- Sheila Heti *How Should a Person Be* (2010)
- Rachel E. Dubrofsky & Megan M. Wood, "Posting Racism and Sexism: Authenticity, Agency and Self-Reflexivity in Social Media," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 11:3 (2014): 282-287:

After reading this introduction select one article from this special issue of *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* to read as a companion to Heti's novel. Make notes considering the following question:

To what extent are the anxieties and concerns of the article you have read (and the issue as a whole) the same as those that inform Heti's titular question, "How Should a Person Be?"?

week 8

- *We Live in Public*, dir. Ondi Timonen (2009)
- *Catfish*, dir. Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman (2010) / TV Show
- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Sarah Friedland, "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards," *differences* 26.2 (2015): 1-28

week 9

- Teju Cole *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007)
- Mishka Henner, "How We Got the Skammerz Ishu Cover", Vice.com http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/how-we-got-the-cover-143298-v20n12 (Links to an external site.)
- Lisa Nakamura, "'I WILL DO EVERYthing That Am Asked': Scambaiting, Digital Show-Space, and the Racial Violence of Social Media" *Journal of Visual Culture*, 13.3 (2014): 257-274 [avail. findit@bham]

week 10

- *The Internet's Own Boy*, dir. Brian Knappenberger (2014)
- *Citizenfour*, dir. Laura Poitras (2015)
- Christopher Kelty, "Geeks, Social Imaginaries, and Recursive Publics," *Cultural Anthropology* 20.2 (May, 2005): 185-214
- Gabriella Coleman, "Hackers", from *Digital Keywords* citation as above available at http://culturedigitally.org/2014/10/hackers-draft-digitalkeywords/

week 11

- Recap & Essay Discussion