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/

week 2


week 3

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Americanah (2013)
- 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)

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

week 6 reading week
week 7

- Sheila Heti *How Should a Person Be* (2010)

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


week 9

- Teju Cole *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007)

week 10

- *The Internet’s Own Boy*, dir. Brian Knappenberger (2014)
- Gabriella Coleman, “Hackers”, from *Digital Keywords* citation as above available at [http://culturedigitally.org/2014/10/hackers-draft-digitalkeywords/](http://culturedigitally.org/2014/10/hackers-draft-digitalkeywords/)

week 11

- Recap & Essay Discussion