

IM902-30 Approaches to the Digital

26/27

Department

Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Michael Dieter

Credit value

30

Module duration

9 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Computer networks, devices and infrastructure today undergrid nearly all form of societal, political and cultural life. Police and hospitals, schools and transport, traffic lights and government bodies, elections, museums and artists rely on software systems for their everyday performance. Whether used for tracking, organising, evaluating, creating, designing or communicating, digital technology and its use irreversibly transforms the fabric of everyday life, defining the horizon of the future. Given the widespread implications of such 'digitalization,' this module offers an introduction to how different disciplines beyond computer science have approached the digital methodologically and epistemologically.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

Computer networks, devices and infrastructure today undergird nearly all forms of societal, political and cultural life. Police and hospitals, schools and transport, traffic lights and government bodies, elections, museums and artists rely of software systems for their everyday performance. Whether used for tracking, organizing, evaluating, creating, designing or communicating, digital technology and its use irreversibly transforms the fabric of everyday life, defining the horizon of the future.

Given the widespread implications of such 'digitalization,' this module offers an introduction to how different disciplines beyond computer science have approached the digital methodologically and epistemologically. We will examine, compare and contrast a number of different frameworks in this way, including: media theory, software studies, digital methods, social studies of media technologies, media archaeology, anthropology, political economy, design research and net criticism. The aim is to provide a general understanding of these key perspectives and to encourage a sense of how digital culture can be researched and understood in interdisciplinary ways.

The module is open to students from all disciplines; no specific prior knowledge is required.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week Two – Media Theory

This seminar introduces students to key concepts in media theory through a focus on the canonical debate between Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams during the 1960s and 1970s. Arising from in the context of literary studies, cultural theory and philosophy, this debate provides a context to explore important questions on causal relations between technology and society related to aesthetics, epistemology and labour. In this way, the topic for this week offers a foundation for a set of themes that recur throughout the module as a whole, such as the historicity of media systems, the socio-political aspects of technological infrastructures and status of knowledge in relation to software operations.

Week Three – Software Studies

This week provides an overview of software studies as an emerging field of theoretical inquiry, methodological innovation and creative practice. Arising from the intersection of media theory, art and computer science, the week introduces a number of key concepts, events, institutions, projects and texts that have shaped this domain. It also focuses on a specific critical exchange between Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Alexander R. Galloway that deals with the ideological status of contemporary software, recalling in part the complexities of the McLuhan/Williams debate, but within the context of the technical specificities of programmable media.

Week Four – Media Archaeology

This week introduces some key concepts and figures in German media studies, specifically in relation to the notion of media archaeology. The lecture and seminar will cover a range of disciplinary influences associated with the concept, from work in film studies to media art practice, concentrating in particular on the historical and philosophical writing of Friedrich Kittler and more recent contributions to the field from Bernhard Siegert and the Weimar School of cultural techniques.

Week Five – Social Studies of Media Technologies

This week will cover a broad range of theoretical and methodological approaches at the intersection of science and technology studies, and media communications. While offering an

introductory map of this terrain, specialized approaches like actor-network-theory will be discussed along with the relevance of recurring critical questions that first arise in the philosophy of technology and media theory. Examples of recent research that unifies these two domains in unique ways will also be introduced and discussed.

Week Six - Political Economy of Information

This week reflects on the political economy of information and provides an introduction to Marxist frameworks for the analysis of digital culture. A range of concepts will be discussed, including dialectics, commodification, class and the commons, along with debates over free labour and the materialist dynamics of commercial web platforms. The week also includes a reflection on commercial dataveillance and the complexities of informational valorisation.

Week Seven - Design Research

This week explores design research, theory and practice with an emphasis on collaborative and participatory projects. The lecture and seminar explores relations between science, art, activism and design, concentrating in particular on the problem of method. In the process, it reflects on case studies that contain speculative and aesthetic engagements with environmental activism and atmospheric sensing.

Week Eight - Anthropology of Digital Culture

This week introduces anthropological approaches to digital culture, concentrating in particular on ethnography as a methodological framework and practice. While providing a historical account of this disciplinary apparatus, the lecture will discuss the different forms and potential challenges of performing ethnographic research. In doing so, a unique focus will be placed on anthropological investigations of the techno-politics and vernacular cultures of hacking.

Week Nine - Net Criticism

This lecture concludes the module with a reflection on the role of critique in relation to network culture. While historicizing notions of critical reflection and oppositional thought, it covers diverse experimental modes by which media criticism can be articulated; along with futures for negation in an era governed predominantly through affirmation.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Gain a theoretical and practical understanding of systematic challenges brought in relation to digital infrastructures across disciplines;
- Acquire an advanced and interdisciplinary grounded conceptual vocabulary and a creative methodological approach towards the multiform phenomena of the digital era and their interpretations;
- Innovatively and independently evaluate digital phenomena and apply conceptual and methodological frameworks that yield original and sound interpretative analyses;
- Develop and demonstrate independent interpretative analysis through experimental practice, discussion, and forms of academic writing.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Interdisciplinary

Students are introduced to debates on the evolution of the digital from a range of disciplinary perspectives. They will be asked to evaluate these debates using methods and concepts drawn from diverse disciplines.

Subject specific skills

- Plan and produce independent and creative research, while being able to reflect on its disciplinary roots and to present it to a wider audience;
- Connect theoretical and conceptual knowledge and the understanding of practice, especially in relation to the subject specialism;
- Leverage a confidence and competence in interdisciplinarity for further study and work.

Transferable skills

- Think critically, creatively and independently in relation to a particular thematic area of the student's choice;
 - Meet regular deadlines;
 - Demonstrate time-management skills;
 - Demonstrate problem solving skills;
 - Demonstrate independent learning skills;
 - Participate in class discussions;
 - Demonstrate and practice presentation skills;
 - Present and report on group discussions;
 - Experience and participate in both individual and team-based activities.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (3%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (3%)
Practical classes	9 sessions of 1 hour (3%)
Private study	63 hours (21%)
Assessment	210 hours (70%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Prescribed reading and self-directed work on summative assessments.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A6

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Objects and Concepts: Critical Review	20%	42 hours	Yes (extension)
Students select one concept from the module's first five weeks and apply it to a specific digital object.			
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Skills Portfolio	30%	63 hours	Yes (extension)
Students maintain a Workshop Portfolio across the module, completing three short methodological tasks based on selected workshop sessions from different parts of the module.			
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Research Essay	50%	105 hours	Yes (extension)

Weighting**Study time****Eligible for self-certification**

Students combine two methodological approaches to a case study, informed by key concepts from the seminars, lectures and weekly readings. Includes an expectation for independent reading, along with integrated theoretical discussion and empirical analysis.

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback reports via Tabula. Formative oral feedback throughout term.

Availability**Courses**

This module is Core for:

- TIMA-L99A Postgraduate Taught Digital Media and Culture
 - Year 1 of L99A Digital Media and Culture
 - Year 2 of L99A Digital Media and Culture

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 1 of TIMA-L981 Postgraduate Social Science Research
- Year 1 of TIMA-L99A Postgraduate Taught Digital Media and Culture

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of TIMS-L990 Postgraduate Big Data and Digital Futures
- TIMA-L995 Postgraduate Taught Data Visualisation
 - Year 1 of L995 Data Visualisation
 - Year 2 of L995 Data Visualisation
- Year 1 of TIMA-L99D Postgraduate Taught Urban Analytics and Visualisation

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 1 of TIMS-L990 Postgraduate Big Data and Digital Futures