# Digital Culture

## COURSE OVERVIEW

### What

This course is an introduction to the theory and practice of digital media, of how they affect the formation of human groups, and how are themselves affected by human groups.

### Why

Changes in means of communication imply changes in the nature of communication itself, and therefore in the nature of the societies which communicate through these means. The near-ubiquitous presence of computer-mediated communications thus affects the way that humans organize, relate and imagine. As computers are changing us, this class provides the tools to approach and understand the nature of these changes.

### How

To do so, this course will proceed along three axes: *decoding*, *coding* and *exploring*.
*Decoding* will be a cross-disciplinary approach to the digital, spanning history, sociology, anthropology, media studies, science/technology studies and software studies.
*Coding* will involve students the practicalities of working with, and creating, digital objects (websites, videos, podcasts, visualizations).
*Exploring* will stand on the two previous and take the form of a digital exploration: a sociological investigation on the social, economic and/or political impact of digital technologies on human behaviors and practices. This investigation will be designed, developed and presented on a digital platform harnessing the specific affordances of digital media.

# GRADING

## 1. Participation (additional 10 %)

- You are expected to participate during class, through (1) completing and reflecting upon any assigned weekly videos or readings, (2) initiating and contributing to discussions during each session and (3) paying attention to lectures and discussions if not actively participating in those discussions.
- You will also be able to contribute outside of class, by posting relevant material on the Discord server for this course, be it articles, videos, websites, etc. Details about this will be shared in the first class.

## 2. Individual commentary (30%) - Due on XXX

By session #4, each group will have to submit a 1,000-1,500 web commentary outlining the relationship between the topic of their digital exploration and an article of their choosing. This commentary will be evaluated both on content and form, and should include:

- A short presentation of the topic you will, as a group, be working on, including a clearly-defined central question, along with your working research hypotheses and proposed methodologies.
- An analysis of the chosen article, including field, angle, methods and position.
- A review of some of the current debates on the main topic of the article.
- A commentary on what kind of light this article sheds on your proposed exploration.
- Multimedia material (images, sounds, videos) to support and illustrate your point.
- In terms of form, this commentary will have to be presented as a web page, including proper HTML and CSS markup, and possibly JS interactivity.

## 3. Digital exploration (70%) - Due on XXX

By the end of the class, you will have produced, in groups of 3 or 4, a study about a practice, a service, a platform, etc. in the digital space. The submission of this exploration will have to be done as a digital-first format. (website, video series, podcast, but also possibly Facebook, Instagram, are.na, etc.). This work will include:

- A significant bibliographical and webographical research.
- A presentation of your core question(s) (*problématique*).
- An overview of your methodology (e.g. online interviews, online questionnaires, experimental protocols, online ethnographies).
- Analyses and interpretations.
- Summary of findings.

Try to be creative and give a personal tone to your exploration, both by tying it to your personal experiences and interests, and by taking into account your potential audience and publishing platform.

## WORKLOAD

You are expected to spend between 2 and 3 hours each week on coursework, including preparing any readings, watching assigned videos, and making progress on your exploration with your group.
A typical weekly workload will include: one or two readings, and a short response to that reading, and some work on your individual commentary, or group exploration.

# Session 1 - XX/09/2020 - Introduction

## Session overview
*This session will focus on covering why this course exists, what are the specific topics it will touch upon, and how these topics will be approached. This will include a discussion of the main course assignment—your digital exploration—, as well as the presentation of possible examples and inspirations. The last part of the session will be dedicated to forming groups based on shared areas of interest.*

## Homework
- Prepare a list of themes and stakes related to living in a digital world that you are interested in.

## Session breakdown
- Course presentation
- Instructor and student introductions
- Breakdown of subjects and areas of interest, group formation
- Overview of possibilities in digital explorations.
- Hacking the web with the JavaScript console.

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# Session 2 - XX/09/2020 - Structure

## Session overview
*The Internet as most of us know it is a complex entanglements of ideals, agendas, fundings, technologies and organizations. The first part of this session will address the multiple influences which shaped the Internet into the global telecommunications platform that we use today, and will serve as the foundation for the rest of the course topics. The second part of the session will introduce students to the practicalities of working with web technologies, such as HTML documents and the client-server architecture.*

## Homework

- **Read** John Perry Barlow, *A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace* (https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence)
- **Read** Vannevar Bush, *As We May Think* (https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/)
- **Register** an account on glitch.com (https://glitch.com/)

## Session breakdown
- A Brief history of the Internet: from ARPAnet to the Web 2.0
- Internet infrastructure: protocols, backbones and regulators
- **[Practical]** Introduction to HTML and CSS

## Further references
- **Watch** Moodle S1E1 - S1E2 - S1E4 – S1E6

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# Session 3 - XX/10/2020 - Society

## Session overview
*The Internet has enabled new forms of communications that infused different kinds of social activities, from knowledge exchange on bulletin boards to online communities in virtual worlds, as well as mass-participation (and sometimes mass-revolution) through social networks. This session will focus on how the concepts of living-together, such as the public sphere, the commons or the performance of the self have gained new dimensions in the digital realm.*

## Homework
- **Read** Yochai Benkler, *Cautionary Notes on Disinformation and the Origins of Distrust* (link on class website)
- **Read** Zeynep Tufekci, *Engineering the Public: Big data, Surveillance and computational politics* (https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4901/4097)
- **Register** A new Twitter account for the bot you're going to make.

## Session breakdown
- Roundtable presentation of exploration summaries (per group)
- The Free Software movement
- Remixing, hacking, glitching
- The revolution will be live(-streamed)
- **[Practical]** Creating a simple twitter bot with generative grammar (https://cheapbotsdonequick.com/)

## Further references
- **Watch** Moodle S1E3 - S3E1 - S3E2 - S4E3 - S4E4 – S6E6

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# Session 4 - XX/10/2020 - Economy

## Session overview
*New means of communication have also allowed the development of new means of value production. From knowledge creation to on-demand services, this economic production relies both on old and new forms of labor, now digitally mediated. This session will look at what role platforms have in the global economic system, particularly focusing on the place of the API (Application Programming Interface) as a means to interface workers, consumers and managers, both on a conceptual and practical level.*

## Homework
- **Finish** your digital commentary**.**
- **Read** Shawn Wen, *The Ladies Vanish* (https://thenewinquiry.com/the-ladies-vanish/)
- **Read** Alex Rosenblat, *The Truth About Uber's App Manages Drivers* (https://hbr.org/2016/04/the-truth-about-how-ubers-app-manages-drivers)

## Session breakdown
- Platform capitalism
- Working below the API

- Commons-based peer production
- **[Practical]** HTTP and API

## Further references
- **Watch** Moodle S2E5 - S2E6 - S5E2 - S5E3 - S5E4 - S5E6

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# Session 5 - XX/11/2020 - Software

## Session overview
*This session will take a closer look at what software is. Code as a sociotechnical object presents interesting characteristics, both by what it is, what it does, and who writes it. The history of software development as a technical practice and an economic field will allow us to switch perspectives from the end-user to the producer, and touch on recent developments in the field of software studies and platform studies. The session will conclude with an introduction to the Python programming language, and a demonstration on how to write a simple surveillance tool for Twitter users.*

## Homework
- **Read** Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and the Everyday Life*
- **Prepare** an update on your digital exploration (things you've done, things you've yet to do, things you're struggling with). Come prepare to discuss it in class.

## Session breakdown
- The history of software
- The nature of algorithms
- Interfacing information
- **[Check-in]** About your digital explorations

## Further references
- **Watch** Moodle S6E3 - S6E4 – S6E5

## Session 6 - XX/11/2020 - AI

### Session overview
*This session will conclude the course by looking at the broad direction in which digital culture is headed due to the recent developments of machine learning techniques, a subset of artificial intelligence research. As machine learning systems open up questions about agency, decision and epistemology in fields as varied as justice, medicine, finance and taste, we will explore its implications for societal organization.*

### Homework
- **Read** Julia Angwin et. al., *Machine Bias: Risk Assessment in Criminal Sentencing*, (https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing)
- **Read** Will Knight, *AI's Language problem* (https://www.technologyreview.com/s/602094/ais-language-problem/)

### Session breakdown
- The history of artificial intelligence
- History of artificial intelligence
- The machine learning breakthrough
- A new kind of decision-making, and decision-vetting
- **[Practical]** Analyzing a simple chat bot

### Further references
- **Read** Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason*, W.H. Freeman, 1971.

## Session 7 - XX/11/2020 - Finals

## Session overview

*This session will be dedicated to the presentation of the digital explorations. Each group will have 10 minutes to present their project, and 10 minutes to answer questions for classmates and instructor. This will be an opportunity to gather formal feedback on your project, and make adjustments before the final deadline, 30/11/2020.*

## Homework

- **Prepare** Your final presentation materials, and make sure that your exploration is available online.

## Session breakdown

- Final presentations
- Course wrap-up

## EXTRA CREDIT

Extra credit can be earned up to 10% of the total grade by accomplished some or all of the following:

- Contribute to the class server by posting content either relevant to the class sessions or to your digital exploration.
- Develop and deploy your own webpage, even if you are linking to another platform (YouTube, Instagram) on which your digital exploration is published.
- Include some original data by using scraping and crawling tools (see class website for a list of resources)