



Guest editors

Dong Xia & Sandro Eich
University of St Andrews

Contact:

novelmedia@st-andrews.ac.uk

Call for expressions of interest/abstracts

‘Novel Media/Media Novel: Theorising Digital Media Cultures in the Contemporary Novel’

Contemporary novels are marbled with representations of digital media. Despite the notable attention to digital technologies already present in post-war literature, the twenty-first century has witnessed the unprecedented integration of digital media into everyday lives, where digital objects and systems are shaping social and cultural paradigms anew. Contemporary writers, in and through their writing, actively engage with the digital media experience of the twenty-first century. In Patricia Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This* (2021) the protagonist grapples with her personal history of trauma through the short form of tweets and in Gabrielle Zevin’s *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* (2023) the world of game design structures the protagonists’ experiences of the world from early childhood to middle-age. Such writing complicates the configuration of

digital media and traditional print form and engages in innovative and experimental ways with how digital cultures shape our human experience. This special issue seeks contributions about ‘the digital’ in ‘media novels’ – that is novels “in which media other than writing appear as a thematic or structural element” (Punday 2012: 3). From the daily routine of email writing to social media browsing, from Twitter politicians to Big Data surveillance, and the effects of a digital landscape made up of platforms: our contemporary digital economy has changed the habitual and political aspects of everyday life in which we find our minds and bodies structurally repurposed and affectively mobilised. These shifts in our media culture are made visible when digital media find their way into literary narratives, when the technicity and politics of the digital meets its poetics.

Rather than reading the contemporary novel as mimetic in nature, we invite papers which explore to what extent novels can function as a vital source of theorising the digital media cultures of our times. What are the societal contexts of staging digital media forms in literary writing in which the presence of digital media is not only the background for everyday life but plays a central role in the formal make-up of the narrative? Could we go as far as announcing that some of the contemporary novels featuring digital experience constitute the ‘novel of *digital* ideas’ as a new configuration of the ‘novel of ideas’ (LeMahieu 2015)? What, if any, is the symbolic function of digital media in contemporary writing? And how can interdisciplinary readings of contemporary literature contribute to innovative ways of theorising media and literature? Therefore, instead of limiting contributions to readings facilitated by current approaches within media studies, we are looking for critical contributions that develop ways to theorise digital media cultures through, with, and in contemporary fiction. Contemporary fiction, in our understanding, thus serves as a vehicle for theory formation, or even the formation of entirely new scholarly fields (cf. Rimmôn-Qênān 2004; Mack 2014).

To that end, we invite contributions with a critical perspective from literary studies, media studies, cultural studies, philosophy, gender and queer studies, comparative studies, postcolonial studies, educational studies or any other relevant cognate disciplines. Possible topics for contributions include but are not limited to:

- The representation and structural incorporation of digital media forms (social media, emails, video games etc.) in novels
- Digital media as a symbolic form or a cultural logic
- The role of fiction in negotiating the interface of digital media and human experience
- The limitations of print within the novel form
- New formalism and digital media
- The novel vs/and digital short forms (Tweets, captions, text messages etc.)
- E(-)pistolary narratives
- Digital media and (post) pandemic experience
- Key figures of digital culture (hackers, programmers, users etc)
- The ‘digital divide’ and/or discriminatory and emancipatory aspects of digital media
- The role of digital media in forming online identities and communities
- Young adult fiction and the formative role of digital media during adolescence

We would particularly like to encourage early-career researchers and researchers from underrepresented backgrounds to consider submitting an expression of interest. Additionally, we strongly encourage submissions that showcase awareness of issues related to diversity and inclusivity and contribute to promoting works by authors from underrepresented backgrounds. If you are interested in contributing to this special issue, please submit your 300–500-word abstract (+bibliography), or an equivalent expression of interest in your preferred multimedia format to novelmedia@st-andrews.ac.uk. We are also commissioning book review essays (circa 3000 words) which critically engage with recent scholarship on the relationship between the novel and digital cultures. We are open to receiving suggestions for books you would like to review; however we also have a list of possible books for review available upon request.

Deadline for expressions of interest/abstracts: 1 December 2023



Bibliography

- LeMahieu, Michael. ‘The Novel of Ideas.’ In *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945*, edited by David James, 177-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Mack, Michael. ‘Literature as Theory: Literature and Truths.’ In *The Palgrave Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*, edited by Barry Stocker and Michael Mack, 429-41. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Punday, Daniel. *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012.
- Rimmôn-Qênã, Șîlammî. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London/New York: Routledge, 2004.