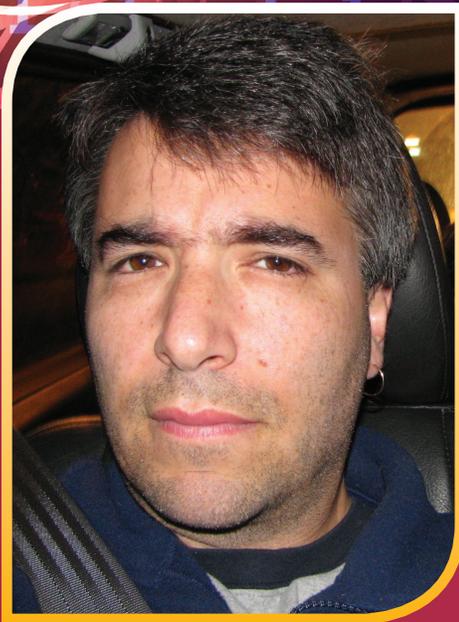




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Ontological Limits of the Digital



ADEN EVENS
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

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3:30 p.m.

GRUCCI ROOM • 102 BURROWES BUILDING

Digital technologies are nearly ubiquitous and serve a great many purposes, but this very heterogeneity discourages an analysis of universal characteristics of the digital, including consideration of possible fundamental limits on what the digital can do. Instead of drawing conclusions about the digital by surveying its applications, this talk examines the ontological foundations of digital technology, especially the ontology of the bit, in an attempt to construct a general theory of what the digital does. How do bits underpin digital operation, giving the digital its vast and broad reach? What aspects of bits, and the digital structures built from them, carry over into the human-machine interface and so also into the cognition and behavior of those who engage with digital technologies? Recognizing that digital ontology is in important respects unlike the ontology of the material world, this talk attempts to articulate the ontology of the digital, identify its distinctive modalities, and speculate on that basis about its unassailable limitations.

ADEN EVENS is Associate Professor and Vice-Chair of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College. His extradisciplinary research explores the ways in which formal systems influence individuals and cultures. His early career work on music, sound, and associated technologies led to the publication of the book *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience* (U Minnesota Press, 2005). Since then, he has been writing and teaching about the digital, perplexed at how few people seem to share his sense of alarm at the increasing hegemony of this underexamined facet of our lives. His second book, *Logic of the Digital* (Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2015), offered a sober look at the digital's underlying principles.