

# DHSS 102: Media Archaeology

Spring 2024

TTH 3:30–4:45pm | Wallace Library Room #A440

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Office: Liberal Arts Hall #2307

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00am–12:00pm

## Course Overview and Central Inquiries

In this class we will excavate the material and cultural histories of media. The verb “excavate” marks our dual focus on 1) recovering the physical materials of the past; and 2) situating those materials in their social, cultural, and political contexts.

We’ll focus on three specific media objects: **the printing press, the daguerreotype, and the computer punch card**. Additionally, you’ll work in small teams throughout the semester to tell the story of a single piece of “old technology” (we’ll talk more about the definitions of *media* and *technology* in our first weeks) and we’ll all have the opportunity to learn about your chosen media objects during final presentations.

Each unit focuses on an enormously significant topic in the history of media—moveable type, photography, and computer programming. An in-depth study of any of these topics is well beyond the scope of a single semester. To keep our content manageable, I structure each unit as a series of snapshots: quick interactions with a few texts and objects that provide a glimpse into the much richer histories of these media forms. This approach also models some of the core inquiries of our course: how can we resist linear and developmentalist narratives of media history? When we resist such narratives, what new understandings do we gain about the cultural and material situatedness of media?

To anchor our study of these topics, we will spend several class sessions at the Cary Graphic Arts Collection and the Image Permanence Institute for hands-on experience with different artifacts (you’ll get to work an English common press and hold daguerreotypes in your hands!).

How is the development of media situated in material and cultural circumstances?

When were “old” media technologies considered “new?”

How did media inventions contribute to new ways of seeing, hearing, thinking, and experiencing the world?

How and why does media become a “habit” or a “routine” part of daily life?

What can we learn about our current narratives of technological progress from thinking about past media technologies?

## Course Objectives

- ⇒ learn the basic history and culture of three significant media forms (printing press, daguerreotype, and computer punch card)
- ⇒ recognize the complex role old media continue to play in media histories and our contemporary relationship to technologies
- ⇒ think critically about the material and cultural histories of some of our most familiar technologies
- ⇒ practice close reading of both texts and their material forms
- ⇒ hone workflow and project management skills, as well as your ability to collaborate with team members on an extended project

## Course Work

This course relies on several different kinds of work, all focused on collective knowledge building. Our goal is to learn from each other this semester and we'll use the following activities to facilitate that learning:

► **Readings and Discussion Forums.** The foundation of our explorations this semester. Each unit we'll look at articles, digital resources, and physical media. Reading the material assigned before class is imperative to ensure we can have a dynamic, engaging discussion in the room. **I will occasionally drop pop reading quizzes at the start of class.** Our discussion forums (3 total) will give us a chance to expand our in-person discussions of the readings.

► **Media Archaeology Project.** You'll work in small teams to take apart a media artifact, research the origins of all of its parts, and then share the story of your

artifact with the class during final presentations. We will dedicate several class sessions to project work. More details to come during Week 2.

► **Final Process Letter.** I'll invite you to complete a final "process letter" in which you discuss how your work and thinking evolve as a result of our coursework. This serves as a final self-evaluation of your engagement with our course material, and you'll also have a chance to share thoughts on the development of your group's Media Archaeology Project.

**Late Assignment policy.** Everyone will benefit the most from consistent and thoughtful engagement with our material and assignments each week, as the schedule outlines. If you need accommodations for late assignments, please see me in the first week of class to develop an individualized plan of work.

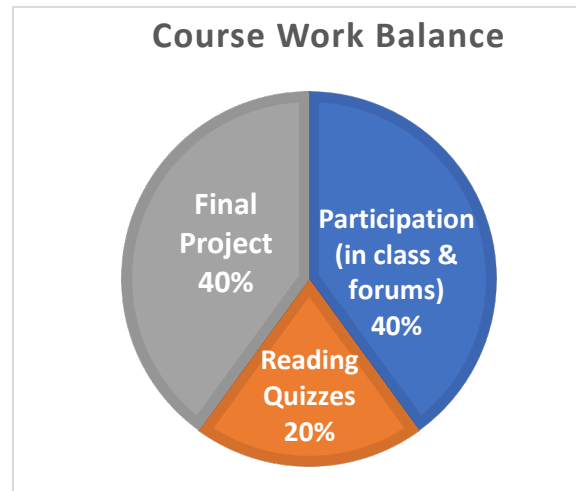
## Grading and Evaluation

If you're worried about your grade, your best strategy should be: **join the discussions (in-person and forums), do the reading, and contribute consistently to your team project.** This is not an especially demanding course in terms of the amount of material, but it will challenge your thinking and raise exciting new questions if you keep up consistently with the work.

Discussion forums will be graded out of 2 points (0 = no or woefully inadequate submission; 1 = good discussion participation; 2 = outstanding discussion participation). For each forum, I will respond with questions and feedback that engage your work rather than simply evaluate it. I understand that verbal participation in class does not come easy to everyone. We have both verbal in-class discussions and virtual forum discussions for this reason – you can decide where you’re most comfortable prioritizing your participation.

Pop reading quizzes will be very easy if you’ve done the reading and will also be graded out of 2 points (based on responses to 2 questions).

The Media Archaeology Project will be the only assignment this semester with a formal rubric. More details on the project requirements and evaluation in Week 2. As part of your final submissions for the course, you’ll also submit the Final Process Letter, which asks you to reflect carefully on your own work and the work of your group members.



## **Reading and Work Schedule**



Come to class with any material listed for that day read/viewed and ready to discuss. Take note of workshop days – more details to come in advance of workshops.

Tuesday, January 16	course introduction Dead Media Research Activity Bruce Sterling, et al., <a href="#">Dead Media Project</a>
Thursday, January 18	Tara Brabazon, “ <a href="#">Dead Media</a> : Obsolescence and redundancy in media history”
Tuesday, January 23	Lisa Gitelman, <i>Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture</i> (excerpts)
Thursday, January 25	“ <a href="#">Printing 101</a> ” “ <a href="#">The Kelmscott/Goudy Albion Iron Hand Press</a> ” Marshall McLuhan, <i>Gutenberg Galaxy</i> (excerpts)
Tuesday, January 30	Elizabeth Eisenstein, “An Unacknowledged Revolution”; “Defining the Initial Shift”; and “Some Features of Print Culture” (excerpts from <i>The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe</i> )

Thursday, February 1	Media Archaeology Project (MAP): Introduction, Object Selection, and Disassembly Day 1 <b>Due: Discussion Post #1</b>
Tuesday, February 6	Miles Grier, "Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England's Early Imperial Imagination"
Thursday, February 8	No Class (Catch Up Day)
Tuesday, February 13	<b>Cary Collection Printing Press Workshop 1</b> ; watch ahead of time: " <a href="#">Intro to Letterpress Printing at the Cary</a> "
Thursday, February 15	Leah Price, "Introduction," <i>What We Talk About When We Talk About Books</i>
Tuesday, February 20	Watch " <a href="#">Early photography: making daguerreotypes</a> " and "The Daguerreotype"; Read Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, <i>Objectivity</i> (excerpts)
Thursday, February 22	MAP: Disassembly Day 2
Tuesday, February 27	Read Louis Kaplan, "Where the Paranoid Meets the Paranormal: Speculations on Spirit Photography"; Watch "Mumler's Spirit Photography"; and "Abraham Lincoln's 'Ghost Portrait'"
Thursday, February 29	Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes" <b>Due: Discussion Post #2</b>
Tuesday, March 5	<b>RIT Image Permanence Institute Workshop</b> ; explore ahead of time: Image Permanence Institute's <a href="#">Graphics Atlas</a>
Thursday, March 7	James Agee and Walker Evans, <i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i> (excerpts)
Tuesday, March 12	No Class (Spring Break)
Thursday, March 14	No Class (Spring Break)
Tuesday, March 19	Watch: " <a href="#">How was it Made? Jacquard weaving</a> "; " <a href="#">Jacquard Loom</a> "; and " <a href="#">Punch Card Programming</a> "; Read James Essinger, <i>Jacquard's Web: How a Hand-Loom Led to the Birth of the Information Age</i> (excerpts)
Thursday, March 21	Sydney Padua, <i>The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage</i> : <i>The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer</i> (excerpts)
Tuesday, March 26	Melissa Terras and Julianne Nyhan, "Father Busa's Female Punch Card Operatives"
Thursday, March 28	MAP: Researching 101

Tuesday, April 2  
Thursday, April 4

Dale Fisk, "Programming with Punched Cards"  
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Did Somebody Say New Media?"  
**Due: Discussion Post #3**

Tuesday, April 9  
Thursday, April 11

Readings/Discussion Wrap Up  
No Class; **Due: MAP Final Presentation Drafts Submitted**

Tuesday, April 16  
Thursday, April 18

MAP: Team Meetings w/ Prof. Sperrazza  
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Tuesday, April 23  
Thursday, April 25

MAP Final Presentations  
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Friday, April 26

**Due: Final Project Portfolio (group submission) and Final Course Process Letter (individual submission)**