

MCC-UE 1151.001

# Media History of New York

<http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/media-history-of-ny>

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TuTh 12:30–13:45

Office hours: 244 Greene, 506, W 15:00–16:30

## Course description

New York has played a crucial role in the history of media, and media have placed a crucial role in the history of New York. New York has been represented by media since Henry Hudson wrote his reports to the Dutch. Media institutions have contributed centrally to its economy and social fabric, while media geographies have shaped the experiences of city living. This course explores media representations, institutions, and geographies across time and is organized around the collaborative production of an online guidebook to the media history of the East Village.

Concretely, we will be looking at media as networks with archaeologies, sacrificing coverage for the opportunities to get dirty and trace spatiohistories from multiple vantage points. Our media history of New York, then, is an archaeology of Downtown (south of 14th Street). We will first look to both the Astor Place Riot of 1849 and the Village Vanguard of the 1950s and 1960s before switching gears for the second half of the course to study the mediascape of the East Village and environs from the 1960s to today. The course culminates with producing a web-based exploration of that mediascape, “Downtown Archaeologies,” through artifacts found and studied by students within the Downtown Collection at the Fales Library.

## Goals of the course

- to make you better readers and scholars by
  - introducing you to
    - \* the spatiohistory of New York City south of 14th St.;
    - \* thinking about the city as a setting and object;
    - \* viewing media through its networks and archaeologies;
  - developing your skills in
    - \* studying cultural artifacts carefully and analytically;
    - \* designing and realizing a collaborative research project using the Fales Library;
    - \* summarizing and presenting analytical texts in class;
    - \* engaging with opinions in academic writing;
    - \* making maps with Leaflet;
    - \* writing webpages with Markdown;
    - \* using Git and the Atom text editor;
    - \* getting lost on purpose;
    - \* writing analyses that are cogent and syncretic, making use of the various methods on hand.

## Books

- Algarín, Miguel and Holman, Bob, eds. *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe*.
- Gordon, Max. *Live at the Village Vanguard*.
- Mattern, Shannon. *Deep Mapping the Media City*.
- McNeil, Legs and McCain, Gillian, eds. *Please Kill Me: the Uncensored Oral History of Punk*
- Sante, Luc. *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*.

## Course requirements and policies

### Assessment

**Participation 10%** The success of any course is directly related to the levels of engagement brought both by the instructor and the students. As such, class participation is vitally important. Similarly, though attendance is logically required for class participation, it is not sufficient. This class requires active participation both inside the classroom and outside.

You can miss up to three meetings without penalty, and you can use these opportunities tactically, to provide space and time to either fulfill other obligations or recuperate from the previous night. I don't care why you didn't come. I start to care with the fourth absence, and I start to require documentation. Repeated absence—including excused—quickly gobbles up the class participation component of the grade and begins to threaten your ability to even *pass* the course.

In a discussion-oriented class, “active participation” involves the following components. All of these are necessary to receive maximum points for participation:

- being in class on time,
- arriving having done the reading for that day,
- participating in short writing assignments in class,
- participating in class discussion in ways that build upon contributions from others, and
- refraining from the use of electronic devices.

**Reading journal and dust collection 15%** For one class meeting a week (groups will be determined on the first day), you will be required to post your latest entry in your reading journal three hours ahead of time (at the latest) to our class blog. A reading journal provides you with the opportunity to jot down both your thoughts regarding that meeting's reading and points of entry to the text that will help kickstart class participation with questions about specific passages. The journals should be around 500 words in length. These are experimental moments for you, so do not hesitate to take risks in your readings. That said, they should be written clearly.

After spring break, when we begin to focus on the East Village, you will supplement your reading journals with “dust collection,” wherein you add your own interactions with the mediascape by walking around the East Village, mediated by your telephone or other recording device, to your post. The goal here is to help build the foundations that will eventually go into the final project.

**Dérives 30%** You will undertake two dérives during the semester. In both, you will get lost in Downtown, while also documenting and tracking yourself. In order to direct your dérive, you will use either the Derive App for your smartphone or a set of cards printed out ahead of time. In order to track the dérive, you are required to trace your path and take notes on a Field Papers atlas and, if possible, track yourself using GPS (the Derive App, if you let it, will save your route).

During the course of the dérive, which can last hours, you should reflect on the work we have already done for the class, both in what you observe while getting lost, but also in the process of getting lost itself. This is a time for psychogeography, not wandering listlessly about while checking the 'Gram. Stroll without headphones; look around and feel the environment around you.

At the end, you will write up a short (1,000–1,250 words) report for each dérive, including textual references from our readings. The report will be joined by the original Field Papers atlas with notes. You can and are encouraged to use other forms of media to supplement the report.

**Artifact post 25%** During the second half of the semester, you will craft a report/post (1,000 – 1,500 words) about a single artifact you have found in the Downtown Collection at the Fales Library. In describing the artifact, you should position it

within the media spatiohistory of Downtown by investigating the various networks and archaeologies criss-crossing within the artifact. You will need to pitch me on the artifact in the form of the one-paragraph précis. You will also improve upon this post over the course of our collaboration on the final project. The post should follow basic rules of academic citation.

**Final project — “Downtown Archaeologies” 20%** In the last few weeks of the course, we will combine the artifact posts with other, shorter works to create the “Downtown Archaeologies.” Working collaboratively, we will draw connections between our various artifacts and determine which nodes are missing between them, subsequently filling in those edges with new nodes that take the form of shorter posts involving further research either at Fales or elsewhere. We will try to tailor the tasks to the strengths of the students. Additional writing, of course, should follow basic rules of academic citation.

## Policies

**Assignments** The assignment instructions, though detailed in the syllabus, may be enhanced or supplemented during the course. If you have any questions about an assignment, you should ask for clarification early. The assignments are due on the dates noted in the syllabus.

All writing will be done in Markdown and saved, staged, committed, and pushed, either to our class blog (<https://nyscapes.github.io/media-history-blog>) or to the “Downtown Archaeologies” repository (<https://nyscapes.github.io/downtown-archaeologies/>).

Late assignments jeopardize both your and my rhythms in the class, so they will be penalized. I will give you feedback and will happily discuss any work with you, but grades should be considered final.

**Attendance** As indicated above, attendance is required. Three absences will be excused without supplemental documentation, and I encourage you to use these tactically. Catching up is your responsibility.

Subsequent absence requires formal documentation. Otherwise it begins to harm your final grade. Though class participation is only part of the final grade, extreme absenteeism (more than six meetings missed) will put your ability to pass the course at risk, even if the absences are excused.

Please show up on time to class, as well.

**Electronics** Our time in class is meant as a sanctuary from the distractions of the rest of the world. Additionally, our class relies on discussion and engagement, and the front of a laptop screen is a brilliant shield behind which a student can hide, even unintentionally. During our meetings, then, there can be no use of electronic devices. Please also set whatever devices you have but aren’t using to silent mode.

**Communication** Communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process, and this course depends on clear communication in both directions. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, the best course of action is to come visit me during my office hours as noted at the top of this document. If your questions, etc., cannot wait until then, then clearly you can also email me. I should respond within 48 hours, but please write again if I do not.

This is a new course, meaning that there will be even more unfinished edges ready to scratch someone than in a typical course. We have a collective goal of learning, however, so if the unfinished edges get to be overwhelming, I’ll adjust the parameters of the course appropriately. I’m not out to catch you, nor is this course a process of grotesque punishment. Please don’t treat it as such.

Once more, with feeling: *communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process*. If you have concerns or worries, please let me know about them sooner rather than later.

**Disabilities** If you have a disability, you should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities ([mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu); 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. Please inform me *at the beginning of the semester* if you need any special accommodations regarding the assignments.

**Academic integrity** Please look at NYU’s full statement on academic integrity. Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in an F and will be reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action. Remember that plagiarism is a matter of fact, not intention. Know what it is, and don’t do it.

## Schedule

Required readings indicated with quotation marks (“”) will be available as pdfs. *They should be printed out for use in class.*

The list of references at the end of the pdf version of the syllabus provides bibliographic details for all the texts for the course.

### 1. Media Archaeologies, Sociologies of Culture

- Tue, 23 Jan: Introductions. Whitehead, “City Limits.”
- Thu, 25 Jan: Kittler, “The City Is a Medium.”
- Tue, 30 Jan: Mattern, *Deep Mapping the Media City*
- Thu, 2 Feb: GitHub / Markdown / Atom Tech Day (Bring your laptops!)
- Tue, 6 Feb: Mattern, “Conclusion: Coding Urban Pasts and Futures”; Williams, selections.
- Thu, 8 Feb: Debord, “Theory of the Dérive” and “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography”; Meeting with Marvin at Fales Library (Bobst, 3rd floor)

### 2. The Overdetermined Astor Place Riot

- Tue, 13 Feb: Baker, *A Glance at New York* (online).
- Thu, 15 Feb: Foster, selections. Sante, selections. **Dérive 1 due.**
- Tue, 20 Feb: Cliff, selections.
- Thu, 22 Feb: *Account of the Terrific and Fatal Riot at the New-York Astor Place Opera House...* (online).

### 3. Transgressing and the Village Vanguard

- Tue, 27 Feb: Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues.”
- Thu, 1 Mar: Gordon, selections. **Dérive 2 due.**
- Tue, 6 Mar: Gordon, selections; *Downbeat* reviews.
- Thu, 8 Mar: Nisenson, selections; *Downbeat* reviews. **Artifact précis due.**

### 4. The Community of the East Village

- Tue, 20 Mar: *Downtown 81* (online). Sante, selections.
- Thu, 22 Mar: Pietri, “Puerto Rican Obituary” and “The Spanglish National Anthem.” Sante, selections.
- Tue, 27 Mar: *SlamNation* (online); *Aloud*, selections.
- Thu, 29 Mar: Smith, selections.
- Tue, 3 Apr: *Please Kill Me*, selections. **Artifact post due.**
- Thu, 5 Apr: *Please Kill Me*, selections.
- Tue, 10 Apr: *Blank City* (online).
- Thu, 12 Apr: *Aloud*, selections; Estevez, selections.
- Tue, 17 Apr: *Kill Your Idols* (online).
- Thu, 19 Apr: McIntyre, *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: Posters, Rants, Manifestos and Blasts*.
- Tue, 24 Apr: *The Universe of Keith Haring* (online); *Aloud*, selections; Estevez, selections.
- Thu, 26 Apr: Collaborative Lab
- Tue, 1 May: Collaborative Lab
- Thu, 3 May: Debugging and Going Live Party

## Bibliography

*Account of the Terrific and Fatal Riot at the New-York Astor Place Opera House, on the Night of May 10th, 1849; with the Quagrels of Forrest and Macready, Including All the Causes Which Led to That Awful Tragedy! Wherein an Infuriated Mob Was Quelled by the Public Authorities and Military, with Its Mournful Termination in the Sudden Death or Mutilation of More Than Fifty Citizens, with Full and Authentic Particulars.* New York: H. M. Ranney, 1849.

Algarín, Miguel, and Bob Holman, eds. *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café.* New York: H. Holt, 1994.

- Baker, Benjamin Archibald. *A Glance at New York. A Local Drama, in Two Acts. To Which Are Added a Description of the Costume—Cast of the Characters—Entrances and Exits—Relative Positions of the Performers on the Stage, and the Whole of the Stage Business. As Performed at the Principal English and American Theaters*. New York: Samuel French, 189n.
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- Clausen, Christina. *The Universe of Keith Haring*, 2008.
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- Dahnier, Céline. *Blank City*, 2010.
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- . "El Spanglish National Anthem." In *Pedro Pietri: Selected Poetry*, by Pedro Pietri, edited by Juan Flores and Pedro Lopez Adorno. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2015.
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