

Reading Machines — Technology and the Book

[Ryan Cordell](#)

Course Metadata

Meeting Room: Holmes Hall 472

Day & Time: Wednesdays, 4:30-7:50pm

Professor:

Spring Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

“Reading Machines” will pivot around the double valence of its title, outlining a literary history of new media from the hand-press period to the present. Our approach will draw on scholarship in book history, bibliography, media studies, and digital humanities, an intersection [described by N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman](#) as “comparative textual media.”

We will take this comparative, interdisciplinary approach first to better understand *machines of reading* (e.g. the printed book, the internet) as material, historical, and cultural objects. We will examine how practices of reading, writing, and publishing have interacted—thematically and materially—with contemporaneous technological innovations over the past 250 years. We will complement our readings with praxis, gaining hands-on experience with textual technologies from letterpress (using the English Department’s new letterpress studio) to computer programming, as well as direct experience with archival materials in special collections around Boston. Together, weekly “book labs” and course discussions will help us consider relationships among modes of textual production, reception, and interpretation: including in our purview both “intellectual work,” such as

writing, and “manual labor,” such as typesetting.

Through our discussions, we will unpack the second valence of the course title, developing greater capacities to critically *read machines*, analyzing the political, cultural, and social forces that shape—and are shaped by—textual technologies. We will raise urgent questions around privacy, algorithmic bias, intellectual property, information overload, and textual authority, asking how a rich new media history might inform our technological present and contribute to a richer construction of the digital humanities field. This course will include a substantial introduction to programming in the R language, but presumes no prior technological expertise.

Acknowledgements

In developing this course I learned from many people, but I particularly thank [Whitney Trettien](#), [Anastasia Salter](#), [Matthew Kirschenbaum](#), and [Kari Kraus](#) for graduate syllabi from which I drew particular inspiration.

Course Policies

Caveat Emptor

This class may be a bit different from most of your graduate classes. I hope you will see these differences as exciting and intellectually stimulating, but you should be aware of the following caveats as we begin (and thanks to Miriam Posner for [writing the first draft](#) of these caveats for her DH grad course). If you can face these challenges with persistence, verve, and (reasonably) good humor—and abide by the code of conduct outlined below—we should have an intellectually enlivening semester. If you have any concerns about these caveats, please come talk to me. I am confident we can find a way forward if we work together.

1. The course will itself be an experiment.

The concepts and structure of “Reading Machines” emerged from my experiences teaching experiential book and media history to undergraduates; my own experiences—alongside faculty, librarians, and graduate students—with hands-on archival work and instruction through organizations such as the [Rare Book School](#) and the [Digital Humanities Summer Institute](#); and my growing conviction that theory and praxis must be intertwined in scholarly discussions of historical and contemporary textual technologies. This course will focus on inscription technologies from the hand press period to the internet, which we will come to understand through a range of readings *and* hands-on “humanities labs” in class.

An experiential course such as this opens itself up to many quirks: the syllabus may shift; a given tool might not work as expected; an experiment might veer off track or fail altogether. In other words, this course will require both an inventive spirit and patience from its students.

2. You will not produce a final seminar paper.

You will produce a final, (potentially) collaborative project that will ask you to be conscious about relationships among media and messages. Likely this project will require substantial writing, but it will not look like a 20 page seminar paper at semester's end. Instead, your projects will require sustained work and will be multimodal, comprising text and other elements (e.g. digital images, maps, network graphs). Your projects may be fully digital, fully analog, or some hybrid of the two. These projects may well lead into more established forms of writing or publication, but we will not begin there.

3. You will collaborate (not just do group work).

Digital humanities projects often require collaboration among scholars who bring different intellectual and technical skills to expansive projects. This class will require you to work together both in class and for some of your assignments, distributing responsibilities and sharing credit.

4. You will be required to acquire some technical skills (old and new).

I do not require or assume any particular technical experience as we begin this course, but I will expect you to be willing to experiment with new tools and learn new technical skills throughout the semester. In this course, those skills will run the gamut from the historical—such as letterpress printing—to the contemporary—such as computer programming. “I’m not very technical” will not excuse you from the hands-on portions of the course any more than “I’m not poetic” would excuse you from reading Dickinson in a survey of American literature. Some of the tools we test you may find useful for your research program; some you will not. But I expect you to try them with enthusiasm and an open mind.

Code of Conduct

The code of conduct for this course borrows directly from the stellar model outlined by Northeastern's [Feminist Coding Collective](#). Their Code of Conduct and Community Guidelines are well worth consulting in full, but I have copied and lightly adapted those items most pertinent to the work we will do in our class.

- **It's okay not to know:** Assume that no one inherently knows what we're learning. We all come to this class with different backgrounds and abilities; none of us (including the instructor) will know everything and that is okay! Encourage a space where it's okay to ask questions.
- **Be respectful:** Do not use harmful language or stereotypes that target people of all different gender, abilities, races, ages, ethnicities, languages, socioeconomic classes, body types, sexualities, and other aspects of identity.
- **Online spaces:** Respect each other in both physical and digital spaces.
- **Collaborative and inclusive interactions:** Avoid speaking over each other. Instead, we want to practice listening to each other and speaking with each other, not at each other.
- **Use "I" statements:** focusing on your own interpretation of a situation, rather than placing blame or critiquing someone else.
- **Harassment clause:** The following behaviors are considered harassment and unacceptable in this community (these are borrowed from the [Django Code of Conduct](#)):
 - Violent threats or language directed against another person.
 - Discriminatory jokes and language.
 - Posting sexually explicit or violent material.
 - Posting (or threatening to post) other people's personally identifying information ("doxing").
 - Personal insults, especially those using racist or sexist terms.
 - Unwelcome sexual attention.
 - Advocating for, or encouraging, any of the above behavior.
 - Repeated harassment of others. In general, if someone asks you to stop, then stop.

Required Texts

The majority of our readings will be available online or through a digital course packet. You will need to acquire the following books, however:

- Amaranth Borsuk, [*The Book*](#) (MIT Press, 2018)
- Sydney Padua, [*The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The \(Mostly\) True Story of the First Computer*](#) (2015)

Class Schedule

Each week there are readings listed under *Core* and *Penumbra*. The core readings are just that: central to the week's discussion and lab. Everyone should read these closely and prepare to discuss them. The penumbral readings include some of the many brilliant pertinent readings I could not require because time is, sadly, finite. Each week you should choose (at least) one of the penumbral readings, based on your own interests, to read closely and be prepared to discuss in class.

In the week you lead class you should prepare all of the core and penumbral readings, and if you choose to dig into one of these topics for an assignment the penumbral readings are the first place you can start expanding your thinking.

Accessing Readings

The majority of our readings will be available online or through [a digital course packet in Leganto](#). The first time you wish to access items from Leganto you will need to log in through Blackboard (the only time we'll use it this semester), but thereafter the direct links in the schedule should work. If you switch to a new computer or device you may need to log in through Blackboard once.

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Core:

- Marshall McLuhan, "[The Medium is the Message](#)" (1964)
- Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects," from [Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture](#) (MIT Press, 2006)

- Alan Liu, [“Imagining the New Media Encounter”](#) (2008)
- N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman, “Making, Critique: A Media Framework,” introduction to [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)

Penumbra:

- N. Katherine Hayles, “Media and Materiality” and “Material Metaphors, Technotexts, and Media-Specific Analysis” from [Writing Machines](#) (2002)
- Tara Brabazon, [“Dead Media: Obsolescence and Redundancy in Media History”](#) (2013)
- Mark Alan Mattes, [“Media”](#) (2018)

Lab 1: Mark(it all)down

January 16: Format

Core:

- Octave Uzanne, [“The End of Books”](#) (1894)
- (Watch) Carl Schlesinger and David Loeb Weiss, [“Farewell etaoinshrdlu”](#) (1978, about 30 minutes)
- Amaranth Borsuk, “The Book as Object” from *The Book* (2018)
- Meredith L. McGill, [“Format”](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Jane Austen, Letters to her sister Cassandra (these are in order so you can read down from the first link to the next two letters):
 - [Friday, January 29](#)
 - [Thursday, February 4](#)
 - [February ?? 1813](#)
- 19th-Century Commentaries on Novel Reading:

- [“On Novel Reading”](#) (from *The Guardian; or Youth’s Religious Instructor*, 1820)
- [“Devouring Books”](#) (from the *American Annals of Education*, 1835)
- M.M. Backus, [“Novel Writers and Publishers”](#) (from *Christian Parlor Magazine*, 1844)
- Wendy Hui Kong Chun, [“The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future is a Memory”](#) (2008)
- Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, “Afterword on Platform Studies” from [*Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*](#) (2009)
- Jonathan Sterne, “Format Theory” from [*MP3: The Meaning of a Format*](#) (2012)

Lab 2: Illuminating the Book

January 23: Book

Meet in the Northeastern Archives & Special Collections, 92 Snell Library (in the basement)

Core:

- Charles W. Chesnutt, [“Baxter’s Procustes”](#) (1904)
- Robert Darnton, [“What is the History of Books? Revisited”](#) (2007)
- Leah Price, “Introduction” and “Reader’s Block” from [*How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*](#) (2012)
- Johanna Drucker, [“Preliminary 1. Histories of the Book and Literacy Technologies”](#) and [“Preliminary 2. Bibliographical Alterities”](#)

Penumbra:

- Robert Darnton, [“What is the History of Books?”](#) (1982)
- Leah Price, [“From The History of the Book to a ‘History of the Book’”](#)

(2009)

- Jessica Pressman, [“The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First Century Literature”](#) (2009)
- Patricia Crain, “Reading Childishly? A Codicology of the Modern Self” from [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)
- Matthew Kirschenbaum and Sarah Werner, [“Digital Scholarship and Digital Studies: the State of the Discipline”](#) (2014)

Lab 3: Into the Archives/Thinking with the Codex

January 30: Page

Core:

- Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” in [Herman Melville: the Dover Reader](#) (1855)
- Bonnie Mak, “Architectures of the Page” from [How the Page Matters](#) (2012)
- Jonathan Senchyne, [“Paper Nationalism: Material Textuality and Communal Affiliation in Early America”](#) (2017)

Penumbra:

- Lisa Gitelman, “Preface,” “A Short History of _____,” and/or “Near Print and Beyond Paper: Knowing by *.pdf” from [Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents](#) (2014)
- Jonathan Senchyne, [“Rags Make Paper, Paper Makes Money: Material Texts and Metaphors of Capital”](#) (2017)

Dead Media Poster Presentations

February 6: Press

Core:

- Benjamin Franklin, [*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Chapters 2-7](#)
- Lisa Gitelman, “Print Culture (Other Than Codex): Job Printing and Its Importance” from [*Comparative Textual Media*](#) (2013)
- Amaranth Borsuk, “The Book as Content” from *The Book* (2018)
- Marcy J. Dinius, [*“Press”*](#) (2018)

Penumbra

- Elizabeth Eisenstein, [*“An Unacknowledged Revolution Revisited”*](#) (2002)
- (Watch) Stephen Fry, [*The Machine That Made Us*](#) (2008) *Note: This video is about 1 hour long; plan accordingly!*
- Ann Blair, “Introduction” from [*Too Much To Know*](#) (2011)
- Elyse Graham, [*“The Printing Press as Metaphor”*](#) (2016)
- Matthew P. Brown, [*“Blanks: Data, Method, and the British American Print Shop”*](#) (2017)

Lab 4: Letterpress I

February 13: Type

Core:

- Articles about the [*Victoria Press*](#)
 - M. M. H., [*“A Ramble with Mrs. Grundy: A Visit to the Victoria Printing Press,”*](#) (1860)
 - [*“The Victoria Press,”*](#) *Illustrated London News* (15 June 1861)

- Emily Faithfull, [“Women Compositors,”](#) *English Woman’s Journal* (1861)
- Sarah Werner, [“Finding Women in the Printing Shop”](#) (2014)
- Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “Introduction: It Is Known” and “Word Processing as a Literary Subject” from *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing* (2016)

Penumbra:

- [“Printing” vocational film](#) (1947) and [“Learning to Set Type” vocational film](#) (1940s)
- Donald F. McKenzie, [“Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices”](#) (1969)
- Ellen Cushman, [“‘We’re Taking the Genius of Sequoyah into This Century’: The Cherokee Syllabary, Peoplehood, and Perseverance”](#) (2011)
- Andrew Piper, [“Deleafing: The History and Future of Losing Print”](#) (2013)
- Joshua Ratner, [“Paratexts”](#) (2018)
- Blog posts from the [Kern Your Enthusiasm](#) series.

Lab 5: Letterpress II

February 20: Assemblage

Note: Professor Cordell away: virtual class; no lab

Core:

- Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Introduction” from [Writing with Scissors](#) (2012)
- Lara Langer Cohen, “Notes from the State of Saint Domingue: The Practice of Citation in Clotel,” from [Early African American Print Culture](#) (2012)

- Browse at least 2 of the scrapbooks below:
 - [Frederick Douglass's Scrapbook](#)
 - [Scrapbook about Frederick Douglass](#)
 - [Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911](#) (click on the links under "Browse This Collection" to find the books)
 - [Benjamin "Pap" Singleton scrapbook](#)
 - [Lewis Carroll Scrapbooks](#)
 - [Carry Amelia Nation diary and scrapbook](#)
 - [The Scrapbooks of Molly Picon](#)
 - [Willa Cather's childhood scrapbook](#)
- Juliet S. Sperling, ["Image"](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Whitney Anne Trettien, ["Creative Destruction / 'Digital Humanities'"](#) (2016)
- Catherine Coker, ["The margins of print? Fan fiction as book history"](#) (2017)

February 27: Copy

Core:

- William Blake, ["The Tyger"](#) and ["London"](#) (For each poem, compare at least 3 editions).
- Donald F. McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form" from [Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts](#) (orig. 1986)
- Ryan Cordell, ["Q i-jtb the Raven': Taking Dirty OCR Seriously"](#) (2017)

Penumbra:

- G. Thomas Tanselle, ["The Bibliographical Concepts of 'Issue' and 'State'"](#) (1975)

- Christopher Looby, [“Southworth and Seriality”](#) (2004)
- Joseph Viscomi, [“Illuminated Printing” exhibit](#) from the *William Blake Archive*
- Alan Galey, [“The Enkindling Reciter: E-Books in the Bibliographical Imagination”](#) (2012)
- Whitney Anne Trettien, [“A Deep History of Electronic Textuality: The Case of English Reprints Jhon Milton Areopagitica”](#) (2013)
- Martin Paul Eve, [“‘You have to keep track of your changes’: The Version Variants and Publishing History of David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas”](#) (2016)

Lab 6: TBA

March 6: Spring Break

March 13: Circulation

Core:

- Meredith McGill, “A Matter of the Text” from [American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853](#) (2007)
- Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, [“Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery”](#) (2009) *Note: make sure to read each of the sections in the table of contents at the top*
- Ryan Cordell and Abby Mullen, [“‘Fugitive Verses’: The Circulation of Poems in Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers”](#) (2017). Also Read “Beautiful Snow” and 2 other verses of your choosing from [Fugitive Verses](#), looking at the example poems at the example newspaper printing linked at the top of each.

Penumbra:

- Melissa J. Homestead, [“Every Body See the Theft’: Fanny Fern and Literary Proprietorship in Antebellum America”](#) (2001)
- Ellen Gruber Garvey, [“Anonymity, Authorship, and Recirculation: A Civil War Episode”](#) (2006)
- Leslee Thorne-Murphy, [“Re-Authorship: Authoring, Editing, and Coauthoring the Transatlantic Publications of Charlotte M. Yonge’s Aunt Charlotte’s Stories of Bible History”](#) (2010)
- Rachael Scarborough King, “Introduction” to [*Writing to the World : Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres*](#) (2018)
- [Electronic Literature Collection: Bots](#)

Lab 7: Building a Bot

March 20: Interface

Core:

- Jon Bois, [“What Football Will Look Like in the Future”](#) (2017)
- Élika Ortega, [“Not a Case of Words: Textual Environments and Multimateriality in Between Page and Screen”](#) (2017)
- Amaranth Borsuk, “The Book as Idea” and “The Book as Interface” from *The Book* (2018)

Penumbra:

- Charity Hancock, Clifford Hichar, Carlea Holl-Jensen, Kari Kraus, Cameron Mozafari, and Kathryn Skutlin, [“Bibliocircuitry and the Design of the Alien Everyday”](#) (2013)
- Lori Emerson, “Indistinguishable from Magic: Invisible Interfaces and Digital Literature as Demystifier” from [*Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*](#) (2014)
- Craig Mod, [“Future Reading”](#) (2015)
- Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, [“Anatomy of an AI System: The](#)

Lab 8: Electronic Literature

March 27: Text

Core:

- Jerome McGann, ["The Textual Condition"](#) (1991)
- Sydney Shep, ["Smiley, you're on candid camera': Emoticons & Pre-Digital Networks"](#) (2010)
- Denis Tenen, "Computational Poetics: An Introduction" and "Metaphor Machines" from [Plain Text: The Poetics of Computation](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Michael Whitmore, ["Text: A Massively Addressable Object,"](#) from *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (2012)
- Rita Raley, "TXtual Practice," in [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)
- Johanna Drucker, "From A to Screen," in [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)
- Hannah Alpert-Abrams, ["Machine Reading the Primeros Libros"](#)
- Scott Weingart, ["The Route of a Text Message"](#) (2019)

Lab 9: Computational Text Analysis I

April 3: Data

Core:

- Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "Extreme Inscription: A Grammatology of the Hard Drive," from [Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic](#)

[Imagination](#) (2008)

- Sydney Padua, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer* (2015)
- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, ["Introduction"](#) and ["Chapter One: Bring Back the Bodies"](#) from *Data Feminism*

Penumbra:

- Ellen Gruber Garvey, "facts and FACTS: Abolitionists' Database Innovations," from ["Raw Data" Is an Oxymoron](#) (2013)
- Lauren F. Klein, ["The Image of Absence: Archival Silence, Data Visualization, and James Hemings"](#) (2013)
- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, ["Feminist Data Visualization"](#) (2016)
- Melissa Terras and Julianne Nyhan, ["Father Busa's Female Punch Card Operatives,"](#) from *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*
- Katie Rawson and Trevor Muñoz, ["Against Cleaning"](#) (2016)
- Molly O'Hagan Hardy, ["Black Printers' on White Cards: Information Architecture in the Data Structures of the Early American Book Trades,"](#) from *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*

Lab 10: Computational Text Analysis II

April 10: Code

Core:

- Roberto Busa, ["Why Can a Computer Do So Little?"](#) (1976)
- Stephen Ramsay, "An Algorithmic Criticism" and "Potential Readings" from [Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism](#)
- Benjamin M. Schmidt, ["Do Humanists Need to Understand Algorithms?"](#) from *Debates in Digital Humanities 2016*

- Annette Vee, “Introduction: Computer Programming as Literacy” from [*Coding Literacy: How Computer Programming is Changing Writing*](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Lauren Klein, [*“The Carework and Codework of the Digital Humanities”*](#) (2015)
- Paul Ford, [*“What Is Code?”*](#) (2015)
- Ted Underwood, [*“A Genealogy of Distant Reading”*](#) (2017)
- Richard Jean So, [*“All Models are Wrong”*](#) (2017)
- Alison Booth, [*“Mid-Range Reading: Not a Manifesto”*](#) (2017)

Lab 11: Computational Text Analysis III

April 17: TBD

Seminar Unpaper Presentations

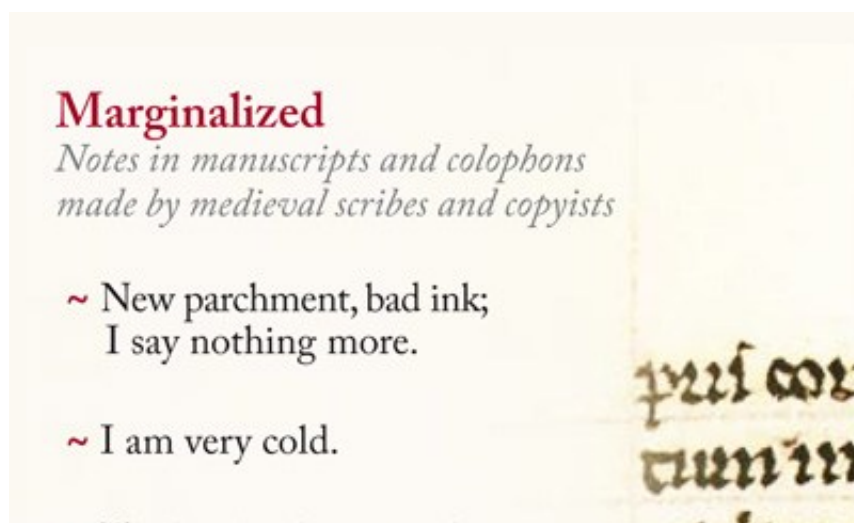
Let’s start with a quote from Marshall McLuhan, which we discussed last week:

The electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no “content.” And this makes it an invaluable instance of how people fail to study media at all. For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium. Then it is not the light but the “content” (or what is really another medium) that is noticed. The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized. For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth.

In today's lab we read and wrote by candlelight in part to think about practices of early manuscript production, and it is certainly true that medieval scribes sometimes copied manuscripts by candlelight, particularly in the winter months when daylight was scarce.

However, it is also true that technologies of illumination didn't change that significantly for a long while—people in the mid-nineteenth century still read and wrote by candlelight and [they were still scrivening](#) well into the age of print. We are so accustomed to the ways electric light reshapes our daily lives that it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine landscapes and lives not defined by it.

To frame this in another way, the candle is a non-textual medium that has profoundly affected the texts we have inherited from previous generations: the candle is not a format, perhaps, but it has profound influence on the evolution of our textual formats. An ecology of media, including candlelight, parchment, and calligraphic standards circumscribed and defined the labor of early book making, which in turn helped determine what books were made, what forms they assumed, and how they were used. And that labor is also important as labor: bookmaking was a laborious process, an embodied process. The books through which we understand early periods are not simply those that were written, but instead those that survived, and often because they were mediated and remediated through a series of scribes, formats, materials, and, later, typesetters and editors.

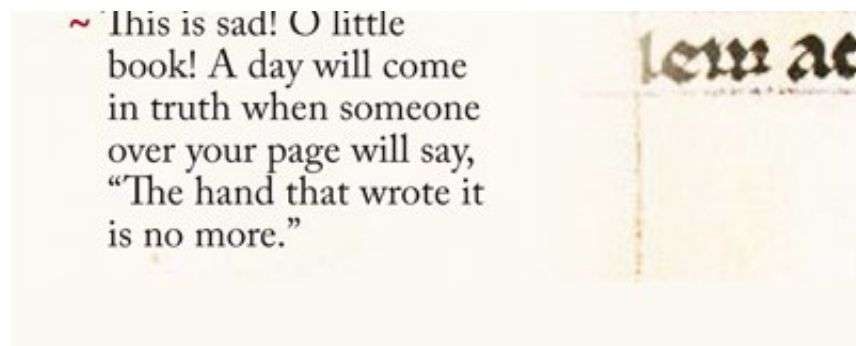


- ~ That's a hard page and a weary work to read it.
- ~ Let the reader's voice honor the writer's pen.
- ~ This page has not been written very slowly.
- ~ The parchment is hairy.
- ~ The ink is thin.
- ~ Thank God, it will soon be dark.
- ~ Oh, my hand.
- ~ Now I've written the whole thing: for Christ's sake give me a drink.
- ~ Writing is excessive drudgery. It crooks your back, it dims your sight, it twists your stomach and your sides.
- ~ St. Patrick of Armagh, deliver me from writing.
- ~ While I wrote I froze, and what I could not write by the beams of the sun I finished by candlelight.
- ~ As the harbor is welcome to the sailor, so is the last line to the scribe.



capitula
intus
q̄d si lq
pessim
erunt i
simun
putred
per tot
malio

tingit
consum
expedi
effusio
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cum tu
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cas 7 p
uentex
homin



From [Brian Pickings](#), a list of complaints about copying found in the margins of medieval manuscripts.

Lab Report 2 Prompt

For this lab report, I want you to do two things. First, to reflect as always on the lab we conducted together. How does working by candlelight help you think about early practices of textual production and the codex format? What new insights are produced by the experience?

Second, I would ask you to choose another format: perhaps something more contemporary, such as a software format, or something related to your own area of research interest. Then, I would ask you to consider—and this might require some brief additional research—a technical or material element that influences the form, production, or use of your format. You have latitude here, but you should be considering something that seems on first glance to stand apart from the content of your format, as the candle perhaps seems separate from the content of the manuscripts produced by its light. What new insight might we glean by considering these elements together, or by widening our lens from a given medium to the technologies or materials central to its expression?

Class Schedule

Each week there are readings listed under *Core* and *Penumbra*. The core readings are just that: central to the week's discussion and lab. Everyone should read these closely and prepare to discuss them. The penumbral readings include some of the many brilliant pertinent readings I could not require because time is, sadly, finite. Each week you should choose (at least) one of the penumbral readings, based on your own interests, to read closely and be prepared to discuss in class.

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Penumbra:

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- Leah Price, [“From The History of the Book to a ‘History of the Book’”](#)

(2009)

- Jessica Pressman, [“The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First Century Literature”](#) (2009)
- Patricia Crain, “Reading Childishly? A Codicology of the Modern Self” from [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)
- Matthew Kirschenbaum and Sarah Werner, [“Digital Scholarship and Digital Studies: the State of the Discipline”](#) (2014)

Lab 3: Into the Archives/Thinking with the Codex

January 30: Page

Core:

- Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” in [Herman Melville: the Dover Reader](#) (1855)
- Bonnie Mak, “Architectures of the Page” from [How the Page Matters](#) (2012)
- Jonathan Senchyne, [“Paper Nationalism: Material Textuality and Communal Affiliation in Early America”](#) (2017)

Penumbra:

- Lisa Gitelman, “Preface,” “A Short History of _____,” and/or “Near Print and Beyond Paper: Knowing by *.pdf” from [Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents](#) (2014)
- Jonathan Senchyne, [“Rags Make Paper, Paper Makes Money: Material Texts and Metaphors of Capital”](#) (2017)

Dead Media Poster Presentations

February 6: Press

Core:

- Benjamin Franklin, [*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Chapters 2-7](#)
- Lisa Gitelman, “Print Culture (Other Than Codex): Job Printing and Its Importance” from [*Comparative Textual Media*](#) (2013)
- Amaranth Borsuk, “The Book as Content” from *The Book* (2018)
- Marcy J. Dinius, [*“Press”*](#) (2018)

Penumbra

- Elizabeth Eisenstein, [*“An Unacknowledged Revolution Revisited”*](#) (2002)
- (Watch) Stephen Fry, [*The Machine That Made Us*](#) (2008) *Note: This video is about 1 hour long; plan accordingly!*
- Ann Blair, “Introduction” from [*Too Much To Know*](#) (2011)
- Elyse Graham, [*“The Printing Press as Metaphor”*](#) (2016)
- Matthew P. Brown, [*“Blanks: Data, Method, and the British American Print Shop”*](#) (2017)

Lab 4: Letterpress I

February 13: Type

Core:

- Articles about the [*Victoria Press*](#)
 - M. M. H., [*“A Ramble with Mrs. Grundy: A Visit to the Victoria Printing Press,”*](#) (1860)
 - [*“The Victoria Press,”*](#) *Illustrated London News* (15 June 1861)

- Emily Faithfull, [“Women Compositors,”](#) *English Woman’s Journal* (1861)
- Sarah Werner, [“Finding Women in the Printing Shop”](#) (2014)
- Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “Introduction: It Is Known” and “Word Processing as a Literary Subject” from *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing* (2016)

Penumbra:

- [“Printing” vocational film](#) (1947) and [“Learning to Set Type” vocational film](#) (1940s)
- Donald F. McKenzie, [“Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices”](#) (1969)
- Ellen Cushman, [“‘We’re Taking the Genius of Sequoyah into This Century’: The Cherokee Syllabary, Peoplehood, and Perseverance”](#) (2011)
- Andrew Piper, [“Deleafing: The History and Future of Losing Print”](#) (2013)
- Joshua Ratner, [“Paratexts”](#) (2018)
- Blog posts from the [Kern Your Enthusiasm](#) series.

Lab 5: Letterpress II

February 20: Assemblage

Note: Professor Cordell away: virtual class; no lab

Core:

- Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Introduction” from [Writing with Scissors](#) (2012)
- Lara Langer Cohen, “Notes from the State of Saint Domingue: The Practice of Citation in Clotel,” from [Early African American Print Culture](#) (2012)

- Browse at least 2 of the scrapbooks below:
 - [Frederick Douglass's Scrapbook](#)
 - [Scrapbook about Frederick Douglass](#)
 - [Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911](#) (click on the links under "Browse This Collection" to find the books)
 - [Benjamin "Pap" Singleton scrapbook](#)
 - [Lewis Carroll Scrapbooks](#)
 - [Carry Amelia Nation diary and scrapbook](#)
 - [The Scrapbooks of Molly Picon](#)
 - [Willa Cather's childhood scrapbook](#)
- Juliet S. Sperling, ["Image"](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Whitney Anne Trettien, ["Creative Destruction / 'Digital Humanities'"](#) (2016)
- Catherine Coker, ["The margins of print? Fan fiction as book history"](#) (2017)

February 27: Copy

Core:

- William Blake, ["The Tyger"](#) and ["London"](#) (For each poem, compare at least 3 editions).
- Donald F. McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form" from [Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts](#) (orig. 1986)
- Ryan Cordell, ["Q i-jtb the Raven': Taking Dirty OCR Seriously"](#) (2017)

Penumbra:

- G. Thomas Tanselle, ["The Bibliographical Concepts of 'Issue' and 'State'"](#) (1975)

- Christopher Looby, [“Southworth and Seriality”](#) (2004)
- Joseph Viscomi, [“Illuminated Printing” exhibit](#) from the *William Blake Archive*
- Alan Galey, [“The Enkindling Reciter: E-Books in the Bibliographical Imagination”](#) (2012)
- Whitney Anne Trettien, [“A Deep History of Electronic Textuality: The Case of English Reprints Jhon Milton Areopagitica”](#) (2013)
- Martin Paul Eve, [“‘You have to keep track of your changes’: The Version Variants and Publishing History of David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas”](#) (2016)

Lab 6: TBA

March 6: Spring Break

March 13: Circulation

Core:

- Meredith McGill, “A Matter of the Text” from [American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853](#) (2007)
- Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, [“Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery”](#) (2009) *Note: make sure to read each of the sections in the table of contents at the top*
- Ryan Cordell and Abby Mullen, [“‘Fugitive Verses’: The Circulation of Poems in Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers”](#) (2017). Also Read “Beautiful Snow” and 2 other verses of your choosing from [Fugitive Verses](#), looking at the example poems at the example newspaper printing linked at the top of each.

Penumbra:

- Melissa J. Homestead, [“Every Body See the Theft’: Fanny Fern and Literary Proprietorship in Antebellum America”](#) (2001)
- Ellen Gruber Garvey, [“Anonymity, Authorship, and Recirculation: A Civil War Episode”](#) (2006)
- Leslee Thorne-Murphy, [“Re-Authorship: Authoring, Editing, and Coauthoring the Transatlantic Publications of Charlotte M. Yonge’s Aunt Charlotte’s Stories of Bible History”](#) (2010)
- Rachael Scarborough King, “Introduction” to [*Writing to the World : Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres*](#) (2018)
- [Electronic Literature Collection: Bots](#)

Lab 7: Building a Bot

March 20: Interface

Core:

- Jon Bois, [“What Football Will Look Like in the Future”](#) (2017)
- Élika Ortega, [“Not a Case of Words: Textual Environments and Multimateriality in Between Page and Screen”](#) (2017)
- Amaranth Borsuk, “The Book as Idea” and “The Book as Interface” from *The Book* (2018)

Penumbra:

- Charity Hancock, Clifford Hichar, Carlea Holl-Jensen, Kari Kraus, Cameron Mozafari, and Kathryn Skutlin, [“Bibliocircuitry and the Design of the Alien Everyday”](#) (2013)
- Lori Emerson, “Indistinguishable from Magic: Invisible Interfaces and Digital Literature as Demystifier” from [*Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*](#) (2014)
- Craig Mod, [“Future Reading”](#) (2015)
- Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, [“Anatomy of an AI System: The](#)

Lab 8: Electronic Literature

March 27: Text

Core:

- Jerome McGann, ["The Textual Condition"](#) (1991)
- Sydney Shep, ["Smiley, you're on candid camera': Emoticons & Pre-Digital Networks"](#) (2010)
- Denis Tenen, "Computational Poetics: An Introduction" and "Metaphor Machines" from [Plain Text: The Poetics of Computation](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Michael Whitmore, ["Text: A Massively Addressable Object,"](#) from *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (2012)
- Rita Raley, "TXtual Practice," in [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)
- Johanna Drucker, "From A to Screen," in [Comparative Textual Media](#) (2013)
- Hannah Alpert-Abrams, ["Machine Reading the Primeros Libros"](#)
- Scott Weingart, ["The Route of a Text Message"](#) (2019)

Lab 9: Computational Text Analysis I

April 3: Data

Core:

- Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "Extreme Inscription: A Grammatology of the Hard Drive," from [Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic](#)

[Imagination](#) (2008)

- Sydney Padua, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer* (2015)
- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, [“Introduction”](#) and [“Chapter One: Bring Back the Bodies”](#) from *Data Feminism*

Penumbra:

- Ellen Gruber Garvey, “facts and FACTS: Abolitionists’ Database Innovations,” from [“Raw Data” Is an Oxymoron](#) (2013)
- Lauren F. Klein, [“The Image of Absence: Archival Silence, Data Visualization, and James Hemings”](#) (2013)
- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, [“Feminist Data Visualization”](#) (2016)
- Melissa Terras and Julianne Nyhan, [“Father Busa’s Female Punch Card Operatives,”](#) from *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*
- Katie Rawson and Trevor Muñoz, [“Against Cleaning”](#) (2016)
- Molly O’Hagan Hardy, [“Black Printers’ on White Cards: Information Architecture in the Data Structures of the Early American Book Trades,”](#) from *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*

Lab 10: Computational Text Analysis II

April 10: Code

Core:

- Roberto Busa, [“Why Can a Computer Do So Little?”](#) (1976)
- Stephen Ramsay, “An Algorithmic Criticism” and “Potential Readings” from [Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism](#)
- Benjamin M. Schmidt, [“Do Humanists Need to Understand Algorithms?”](#) from *Debates in Digital Humanities 2016*

- Annette Vee, “Introduction: Computer Programming as Literacy” from [*Coding Literacy: How Computer Programming is Changing Writing*](#) (2018)

Penumbra:

- Lauren Klein, [*“The Carework and Codework of the Digital Humanities”*](#) (2015)
- Paul Ford, [*“What Is Code?”*](#) (2015)
- Ted Underwood, [*“A Genealogy of Distant Reading”*](#) (2017)
- Richard Jean So, [*“All Models are Wrong”*](#) (2017)
- Alison Booth, [*“Mid-Range Reading: Not a Manifesto”*](#) (2017)

Lab 11: Computational Text Analysis III

April 17: TBD

Seminar Unpaper Presentations

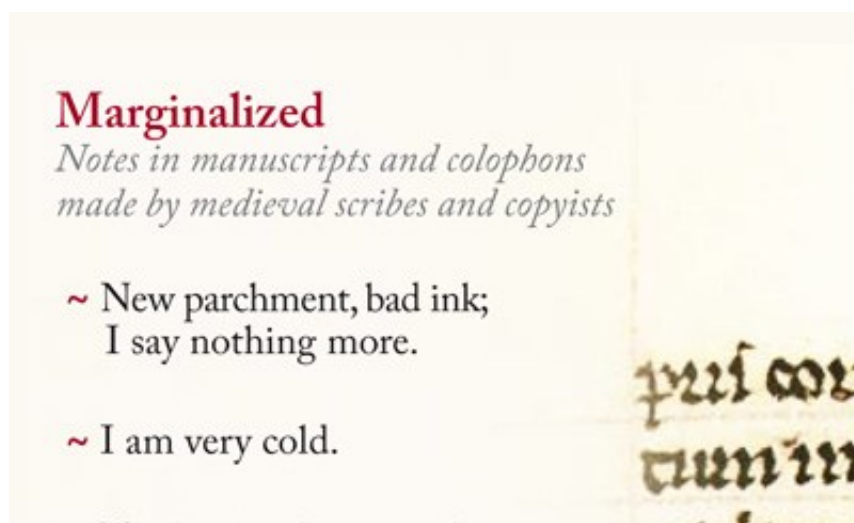
Let’s start with a quote from Marshall McLuhan, which we discussed last week:

The electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no “content.” And this makes it an invaluable instance of how people fail to study media at all. For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium. Then it is not the light but the “content” (or what is really another medium) that is noticed. The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized. For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth.

In today's lab we read and wrote by candlelight in part to think about practices of early manuscript production, and it is certainly true that medieval scribes sometimes copied manuscripts by candlelight, particularly in the winter months when daylight was scarce.

However, it is also true that technologies of illumination didn't change that significantly for a long while—people in the mid-nineteenth century still read and wrote by candlelight and [they were still scrivening](#) well into the age of print. We are so accustomed to the ways electric light reshapes our daily lives that it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine landscapes and lives not defined by it.

To frame this in another way, the candle is a non-textual medium that has profoundly affected the texts we have inherited from previous generations: the candle is not a format, perhaps, but it has profound influence on the evolution of our textual formats. An ecology of media, including candlelight, parchment, and calligraphic standards circumscribed and defined the labor of early book making, which in turn helped determine what books were made, what forms they assumed, and how they were used. And that labor is also important as labor: bookmaking was a laborious process, an embodied process. The books through which we understand early periods are not simply those that were written, but instead those that survived, and often because they were mediated and remediated through a series of scribes, formats, materials, and, later, typesetters and editors.

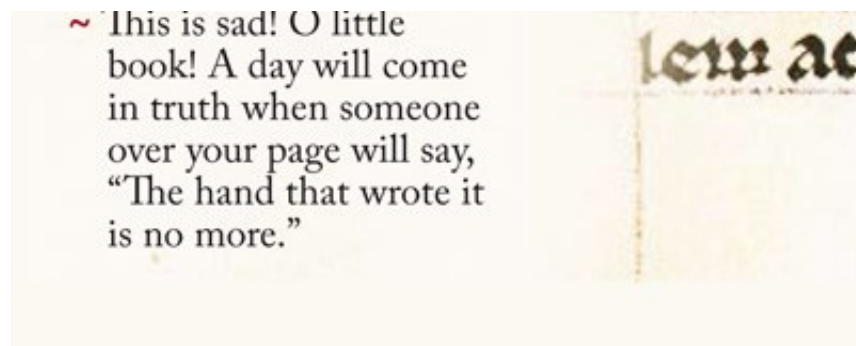


- ~ That's a hard page and a weary work to read it.
- ~ Let the reader's voice honor the writer's pen.
- ~ This page has not been written very slowly.
- ~ The parchment is hairy.
- ~ The ink is thin.
- ~ Thank God, it will soon be dark.
- ~ Oh, my hand.
- ~ Now I've written the whole thing: for Christ's sake give me a drink.
- ~ Writing is excessive drudgery. It crooks your back, it dims your sight, it twists your stomach and your sides.
- ~ St. Patrick of Armagh, deliver me from writing.
- ~ While I wrote I froze, and what I could not write by the beams of the sun I finished by candlelight.
- ~ As the harbor is welcome to the sailor, so is the last line to the scribe.



capitula
intus
q̄d si l̄
pessim
erunt i
simun
putred
per tot
malio

tingit
consum
expedi
effusio
tris tu
cum tu
pedes.
tia. 7 c
manar
cas 7 p
uentex
homin



From [Brian Pickings](#), a list of complaints about copying found in the margins of medieval manuscripts.

Lab Report 2 Prompt

For this lab report, I want you to do two things. First, to reflect as always on the lab we conducted together. How does working by candlelight help you think about early practices of textual production and the codex format? What new insights are produced by the experience?

Second, I would ask you to choose another format: perhaps something more contemporary, such as a software format, or something related to your own area of research interest. Then, I would ask you to consider—and this might require some brief additional research—a technical or material element that influences the form, production, or use of your format. You have latitude here, but you should be considering something that seems on first glance to stand apart from the content of your format, as the candle perhaps seems separate from the content of the manuscripts produced by its light. What new insight might we glean by considering these elements together, or by widening our lens from a given medium to the technologies or materials central to its expression?

Course Assignments

Your work in Reading Machines will happen across four major assignments:

- [Leading Class Discussion](#)
- [Fieldbook](#)
- [Dead Media Poster](#)
- [Final Seminar Unpaper](#)

Evaluation

The Trouble with Grading

As you no doubt know, grading can be a contentious issue in college courses, particularly in writing- and discussion-based courses, where grades can seem arbitrary and contestable. Grading in school does not much resemble the way you will be evaluated in your lives or careers, where you will define many of your own goals and be measured by how responsibly and effectively you achieve them. For these reasons, [in my undergraduate classes](#) I have moved toward contract grading. To quote Cathy Davidson, a professor at CUNY from whom most of my ideas about contract grading are adapted:

The advantage of contract grading is that you, the student, decide how much work you wish to do this semester; if you complete that work on time and satisfactorily, you will receive the grade for which you contracted. This means planning ahead, thinking about all of your obligations and responsibilities this semester and also determining what grade you want or need in this course. The advantage of contract grading to the professor is no whining, no special pleading, on the students part. If you complete the work you contracted for, you get the grade. Done. I respect the student who only needs a C, who has other obligations that preclude doing all of the requirements to earn an A in the course, and who contracts for the C and carries out the contract

perfectly. (This is another one of those major life skills: taking responsibility for your own workflow.)

In graduate courses, however, these issues are even more acute. Beginning with your comprehensive exams, in fact, you will move away from being given letter grades and toward a system where you must take ownership of your own work, ensuring it meets the standards of professional research and writing. Your professors will give you feedback and guidance—and will at points decide whether your work is sufficient to move to the next stage—but your comprehensive exam papers or dissertation chapters will not be given A's or B's.

In addition, Reading Machines is an experimental course in which I want you to feel empowered to experiment and even sometimes to fail. I want to create an environment in which intellectual risk-taking and creative scholarship can be rewarded, even when it does not pan out as hoped.

Consultative Grading

Ultimately, the university will require me to assign a grade to your work this semester. In order to address the concerns outlined above and create space for experimentation, you will assess your own work in this class in dialogue with me, as mentor rather than judge. You will ultimately grade your own work based by assessing your work across the course assignments as they relate to the goals you set for yourself, your work to meet those goals, and your intellectual growth during the class.

Formally, this means that I will ask you to draft self-evaluations a few times during the semester, including a final self-evaluation through which you will assign yourself a grade. Barring extreme circumstances (see the Adjustment Caveat below) this self assessment will determine your grade for the semester. Ideally, knowing this process in advance will free you to do more ambitious work from the beginning of the semester.

My Commitments

In order to foster your progress this semester, I commit myself to:

1. Providing substantive and timely commentary on your assignments aimed at cultivating your research skills, analytical abilities, and scholarly voice.
2. Making myself available for in-person consultation and practical help during office hours and at other scheduled times, including virtual meetings if we cannot find a mutually-agreeable time to meet on campus.
3. Assuming no technical expertise from students going into any of our laboratories. We will begin at the beginning, so that no one feels left behind. In order to ensure this happens, I will listen carefully to students if they feel lost and adjust a given lab plan as necessary to keep everyone together.
4. Allowing students with expertise in particular technologies to challenge themselves and craft their own laboratory experiences beyond our work in class.
5. Working with you to understand your goals and methods when you take intellectual risks in assignments, even if the final product does not turn out as expected.
6. Respecting your identity, perspectives, and intellectual commitments in class discussions and assignments. I may push you to consider other perspectives, but I will not dismiss your thoughts or take them lightly. If you feel I am doing either of those things, I will listen and adjust my responses as necessary. See our [class code of conduct](#) for more details.

Your Commitments

This system will only work, however, if you also commit to:

1. Holding yourself to the highest standards. You should work to the best of your abilities throughout the semester in your reading, class-room

conversation, and assignments.

2. Taking intellectual risks when possible, pushing yourself to think, write, and create in new modes and grown as a scholar and teacher. This may prompt anxiety, which you can work through by doing and with my help (see above).
3. Experimenting with new tools and learning new technical skills with enthusiasm and an open mind.
4. Assisting your colleagues with our laboratories when you have prior expertise, or if you acquire it more quickly during the lab itself.
5. Clearly articulating your goals and methods when you take intellectual risks in assignments so that I can understand what you are seeking to do, even if the final product does not turn out as expected.
6. Respecting your colleagues' identity, perspectives, and intellectual commitments in class discussions and assignments. You may push them to consider other perspectives, but you should not dismiss their thoughts or take them lightly. If someone feels you are doing either of those things, you should listen and adjust your responses as necessary. See our [class code of conduct](#) for more details.
7. Meeting with me, in person or via Skype, at least two times during the semester to discuss your work and ensure you are meeting expectations (my own and yours) for work in the class.

Adjustment Caveat

I do reserve the right to adjust grades as appropriate, if a student takes undue advantage of the consultative grading paradigm. However, I do not anticipate needing to exercise this right.

Leading Class Discussion

s19rm.ryancordell.org (<https://s19rm.ryancordell.org/assignments/discussion/>) · by Ryan Cordell

Reading Machines (Spring 2019) (<https://s19rm.ryancordell.org>)

- Policies
- Schedule
- Overview and Grading Leading Class Discussion Fieldbook Dead Media Poster Seminar Unpaper
- News



(<https://s19rm.ryancordell.org%20>)

Once during the semester you will be responsible for leading our class discussion. This means a few things:

1. You should read all the readings—including the optional readings—for your week carefully and well in advance.
2. You may also tweak our readings for your week by adding one additional article and possibly moving one required reading into the optional category. You should speak with me well in advance about either, as I might see something essential in a piece that is not obvious to you. Any decision to change the reading schedule should be made at least one week prior to your assigned session, so that your colleagues have time to adjust their preparations.

3. You should come to your assigned class ready with a few questions or points you would like to discuss. I do not expect you to steer us for the entire discussion period, but certainly for the first 20 minutes or so.

Back to Assignments Overview

Ryan Cordell • 2019 • s19rm.ryancordell.org (<https://s19rm.ryancordell.org>)

Theme by beautiful-jekyll (<http://deanattali.com/beautiful-jekyll/>)

[s19rm.ryancordell.org \(https://s19rm.ryancordell.org/assignments/discussion/\)](https://s19rm.ryancordell.org/assignments/discussion/) • by
Ryan Cordell

Fieldbooks

“Reading Machines” is an experiential course that moves between discussion of readings and applied “humanities laboratories” each week. A central goal of the class will be to bring its two facets into conversation: to use our readings and discussions to contextualize our applied work in laboratories, and to use our applied work in laboratories to enrich our understanding of concepts from our readings.

To help accomplish this goal, you will maintain a fieldbook, which will constitute your central scholarly activity throughout this semester. I call this assignment a “fieldbook” rather than a “journal” to convey its hybridity: week by week, your entries will include a mix of description, analysis, code, figures, or images. This ongoing assignment will give you the chance to organize the diverse tasks of the class’ experiential work, practice the skills introduced in the labs, bring your experiential work into conversation with class readings and personal research, and experiment with ideas that will be further developed in your seminar unpaper (see below).

There will be two types of entries in your fieldbooks: **bibliographic annotation** and **lab report**.

Bibliographic Annotation Entries

In order to help you attend closely to our course texts and prepare for each class, you should prepare a few paragraphs responding to the core readings and your chosen penumbral text. I mean a few paragraphs **in total**, *NOT* a few paragraphs per text. Your entries should synthesize and bring readings into conversation, and should focus on a few ideas you want to highlight rather than attempting to summarize everything in the readings. These entries should be prepared, roughly, in the style of the annotated bibliography. It will be easiest to complete this assignment if you jot down notes and ideas while reading.

You should draft each bibliographic annotation fieldbook entry in its own .md file, following the naming convention outlined above, and commit it to your fieldbook repository prior to the pertinent class period. *To emphasize: each class preparation entry should be saved as a separate file in your Github repository.*

Lab Report Entries

Your lab report entries will vary quite a bit from lab to lab. I may post a prompt for a lab to help start your thinking, in which case you should begin your reports from these prompts.

In each lab report entry, I will expect to find a brief description of the lab activities completed and any outcomes (code, a material product, etc.). For coding labs, you will likely integrate code snippets directly into your Markdown file (more on this as those labs approach), while for other labs you may instead reference external proof of your work, such as photos. I will also expect prose that reflects analytically on the work of the lab, putting it into conversation with *one or two* readings *from the same week of class* as the lab, as well as readings drawn from the larger class or beyond where appropriate. This prose need not be quite as formal as a research paper, but it should demonstrate careful thought and preparation. You should integrate the readings explicitly, if possible through direct quotation. Use this writing to experiment with intellectual pairings you think might be generative to your larger thinking and help you prepare for the class' Unessay projects.

Organizing Your Fieldbook

Your fieldbook will be a collection of Markdown or .md files collected in a [Github Repository](#). We will learn how to write in Markdown and contribute to a Github repository during the first laboratory (which you will reflect on in your first lab report). You will share the address of your repository with me so that I can check your progress. I may also ask to repost stellar fieldbook

entries on our class website, either under your name or anonymously as you prefer.

You should name your files following the following convention:

For bibliographic annotation entries:

YYYY-MM-DD-bibliographic-WHAT-WORDS-YOU-WANT.md

For lab report entries:

YYYY-MM-DD-labreport-WHAT-WORDS-YOU-WANT.md

Flexibility

Reading Machines is a challenging and full class. The semester will include thirteen weeks of readings and eleven or twelve humanities laboratories. To give you some flexibility, you may choose to forgo bibliographic annotation entries twice during the semester, and you should plan to complete seven lab report entries. I strongly recommend you not delay starting this work, but instead begin early and work steadily so that you can use this flexibility as the inevitable stresses of the semester emerge. Your bibliographic annotation entries are due prior to the pertinent class, while lab report entries are due within two weeks of the pertinent lab session.

[!\[\]\(0b5e7e25e8775f7e7e80906ada4f0021_img.jpg\) **Back to Assignments Overview**](#)

Dead Media Poster Presentation

In [“Imagining the New Media Encounter,”](#) Alan Liu suggests that “The déjà vu haunting of new by old media is clear enough.” New technologies and new modes of communication draw, both technically and metaphorically, from older modes—including “dead media” that have, to all surface appearances, entirely disappeared.

To better understand this haunting, you will work in pairs to research a historical new medium and/or technology that flourished and then faded from popular view: some might call this [“media archaeology”](#). These new media might be very old or relatively new: new textual technologies have emerged since the invention of writing, while some popular technologies introduced as recently as a decade ago are already obsolete.

How ‘Dead’ is Dead?

I would ask that you employ a relatively strict, but not pedantic, definition of “dead media”: it should mean less than “completely and totally banished from human culture” and more than “no longer hip.” To put this idea another way: a small community of dedicated enthusiasts should not rescue a technology from being called “dead media,” but neither should we prematurely kill off a medium that is still in wide use, even if cutting edge users have moved on (think CDs, perhaps).

Resources for Finding a Medium

You might consider this list from the original [Dead Media Project](#) or from the [Dead Media Archive](#) as you plan your topic. When choosing your medium, opt for the unfamiliar and the strange if at all possible—try to find a medium you suspect your colleagues have never heard of, or perhaps one they will *think* they know until its reality surprises them.

The Poster

You will prepare a conference-style poster to present your “dead medium” to your classmates and instructor. If you’ve never created a research poster, consult the references on [the “poster session” Wikipedia page](#) for writing and design tips. Your poster should address on the following questions:

1. How did this medium innovate, diverge, or respond to even earlier media? What precisely was new about it when it was the “new media?” Remember that for contemporaneous people, these media were every bit as strange, exciting, or terrifying as the most cutting edge advances are to us today.
2. What were the cultural effects of this medium during its heyday? Did it produce substantive changes in domestic life, politics, art, or other spheres? Were there cultural changes its creators sought, either successfully or unsuccessfully, to institute through the medium?
3. Were there competing media that attempted to meet the same needs or fill the same niche as your chosen medium? How did this competition play out?
4. How and why did your medium decline in importance?
5. What were the lasting effects or products of your medium? Was it a media “dead end” or did new media evolve from it? How does your medium linger in descendants, images, memory, or language?

You should not attempt on your poster to tell us everything that you might say about your chosen medium in a written paper nor explain its every nuance. When designing think CONCISE, INFORMATIVE, and CREATIVE. Students often choose to create a model or interactive aspect to their poster to help their colleagues understand their medium. The idea here is that the form’s restriction (paradoxically) promotes your creativity, as some might argue the formal restrictions of certain poetic forms force the poet toward ever-more-deft feats of language. You will have ample opportunity during the poster session to share more details and anecdotes from your research than

you can fit onto your poster itself.

We will hold our “dead media” poster session in the lab section of class on January 30.