

# THE REPRODUCIBLE IMAGE IN THE AGE OF AUTOMATION



**FRIDAY MAY 26TH, AT  
3:30-5:00PM PST**

[HTTPS://SEATTLEU.ZOOM.US/J/6498489179](https://seattleu.zoom.us/j/6498489179)

## MAL AHERN

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES

I am a media theorist working at the intersection of visual studies and the history of technology. My current book project, *Factory Forms*, investigates the changing nature of the technologically reproduced image in the decades after World War II, when new forms of automation transformed pressrooms, film laboratories, projection booths, and television signal processing. Using close visual analysis, I show how technological changes and labor struggles reveal themselves in mass-produced images, and how such visible changes fed back into artistic production in both fine art and popular visual culture.

This talk imagines image reproduction as a site of social and aesthetic struggle. By image reproduction, I mean **COPYING**, and at a large scale: striking many prints of the same film, churning out many copies of a single issue of an illustrated magazine; projecting films at the correct speed and aperture; operating telecine or loading prerecorded tapes for television broadcast. This work is, ideally, invisible, and so has tended to be treated as uncreative, uninteresting, and not worthy of theorization. In the United States at midcentury, new forms of automation threatened to displace skilled workers in printing pressrooms, film laboratories, and projection booths. Cybernetic theories and new computation technologies collided with craft techniques, leaving visible traces across the supposedly uniform mass image. Attending to the historical shifts in image reproduction can reframe the visual culture of the postwar economic boom, as well as subsequent pushes towards digitization and media convergence.