

IMAGES and POWER

Sc. 532
Fall 2006
Stephen Pfohl

Office: Boston College, McGuinn 416
Office Hours: Thurs., 2-4 PM, and by appt.

“People are ... aroused by pictures and sculptures; they break pictures and sculptures; they mutilate them, kiss them, cry before them, and go on journey's to them; they are calmed by them, stirred by them, and incited to revolt. They give thanks by means of them, and are moved to the highest levels of empathy and fear.

–David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

This seminar explores the psychic and energetic-material power of images within historically organized global/local social contexts. How do images affect our hearts and minds and bodies? How do images influence our everyday rituals, our techno-scientific practices, our connections and disconnections, our conscious and unconscious fears and desires? How do images show up in the clothes we wear, in the ways we walk, in the objects we want, in the foods we eat and don't eat, and in the ideas and feelings we have about ourselves and others? How do images enter our flesh, captivate us, fascinate us, arouse our senses or put us to sleep? How do images inform our habits and fantasies, pleasures and doubts, worries and joys, rituals and rebellions? How do images shape our personal, political, cultural, moral, and religious beliefs about nature, about justice, and about what's possible and what's not?

How have images become entangled with cruel, complex and contradictory teleelectronic flows of racialized, gendered, territorialized, eroticized, militarized, and class-driven modalities of social inequality? How are images entangled with the hi-tech machinery of war and with the commodity form that lies at the core of global corporate capitalist technologies of profit, control and advantage? And how might such entanglements be subverted? How might they be remade? In exploring these questions and related questions, the course provides an introduction to critical sociological approaches to the study, making, and remaking of images. In what ways might we materially intervene within, subvert and possibly transform the iconic image-power of contemporary social, economic, racialized and sexual currents of domination? As resources for an engagement with these and related questions, the seminar also introduces participants to consider a variety of critical sociological and visual cultural practices. These include dadaist, constructivist, surrealist, feminist, Marxist, social psychoanalytic, situationist, queer, postcolonial, radical multicultural, anti-systemic and other "power-reflexive" approaches to the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of images.

Topics and Readings.

1. Sept. 6 *Introduction.*

2. Sept. 13 ***Ways of Seeing.***

a. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: BBC/Penguin, 1972, pp. 1-34, 45-64, 83-112; 129-154.

b. Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret," excerpts from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy and Capital, Vol. 1*, in Maynard Solomon (ed.), *Marxism and Art*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973, pp. 38-40.

3. Sept. 20 ***Dreaming Images: Seeing Symptoms: Visual Culture.***

a. Stephen Pfohl, "The Reality of Social Constructions," in James Holstein and Jay Gubrium, Eds., *Handbook of Social Constructionism*, Guilford Press, 2007 forthcoming*.

b. bell hooks, "Introduction" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 1-7.

c. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Introduction: What is Visual Culture?," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 1-31.

d. Robert D. Romanyshyn, *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 1-15.

e. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. xii-xix; 1-18.

4. Sept. 27 ***Picture it: I See/He Flies/She Questions!***

a. Susan Bordo, "Introduction," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-26.

b. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Lift-Off: we are all astronauts," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 16-31.

c. Stuart Ewen, "Shoes for Thought," and "Images Without Bottom," in *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1988, pp. 1-23.

d. Michael Taussig, "Physiognomic Aspects of Visual Worlds," and "Spacing Out," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 19-43

e. Susan Buck-Morss, "Introduction," "Temporal Origins," and "Spatial Origins," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 1-43.

5. Oct. 4 ***Window on the World: Finger on the Trigger.***

- a. Michael Taussig, "The Golden Bough: the Magic of Mimesis," and "With the Wind of World History in Our Sails," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 44-58.
- b. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Picture Definition: Line, Color, Vision," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 37-64.
- c. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "The Window and the Camera," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 32-64.
- d. Stuart Ewen, "Goods and Surfaces" and "The Marriage Between Art and Commerce," in *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1988, pp. 24-53.
- e. Susan Buck-Morss, "Intro., Part II, " and "Natural History: Fossil," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 47-77.

6. Oct. 11 ***Aestheticizing Bodily Relations: Eating the Other.***

- a. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Age of Photography (1839-1982)," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 65-90.
- b. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Self as Spectator," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 65-102.
- c. bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 21-39.
- d. Susan Buck-Morss, "Mythic History: Fetish" in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 78-109.
- e. Susan Bordo, "Braveheart, Babe and the Contemporary Body," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 27-65.

7. Oct. 18 ***Virtual White Wishes and Utopian Fissures.***

- a. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Virtuality: From Virtual Antiquity to the Pixel Zone," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 91-126.
- b. Stuart Ewen, "Chosen People," in *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1988, pp. 57-77.
- c. bell hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 61-77.
- d. Susan Buck-Morss, "Mythic Nature: Wish Image," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 110-158.

* **PLEASE NOTE:** No formal seminar meeting on Oct. 18th. Discussion of readings for both Oct 18th and Oct. 25th will take place on Oct. 25th. Instead of attending class on Oct. 18th, all seminar participants are invited to attend the mixed-media performance by Jackie Orr, "Daddy Does Cybernetics: Diary of a Mental Patient," Tuesday, October 24, 12-1:30 PM in Devlin 101.

8. Oct. 25 ***History in Ruins and Bodies in History***

- a. Susan Bordo, "Never Just Pictures," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 107-138.
- b. Stuart Ewen, "The Dream of Wholeness," in *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1988, pp. 78-108.
- c. Michael Taussig, "The Golden Army: the Organization of Mimesis," and "With the Wind of World History in Our Sails," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 59-87.
- d. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Body as Specimen," *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 103-132.
- e. Susan Buck-Morss, "Historical Nature: Ruin," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 159-201.

9. Nov. 1 ***Shadows of Overdevelopment: the Colors of Fear.***

- a. Susan Bordo, "P.C., O.J. and the Truth," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 67-106.
- b. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Transculture: from Kongo to the Congo," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 129-161.
- c. bell hooks, "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 87-113.
- d. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "The Abandoned Body and its Shadows," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 133-173.
- e. Susan Buck-Morss, "Intro. Part III," and "Is This Philosophy?" in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 205-252.

10. Nov. 8 ***Dreamworld and Spectacle***

- a. Susan Bordo, "Can a Woman Harass a Man?," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 139-172.
- b. Michael Taussig, "Spirit of the Mime: Spirit of the Gift," "Mimetic Worlds: Invisible Counterparts," and "the Origin of the World," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 88-128.
- c. Stuart Ewen, "Varnished Barbarism" and "Mechanical Sentiments," in *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1988, pp. 111-149

d. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "World as Spectacle," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 176-198.

e. Susan Buck-Morss, "Dream World of Mass Culture," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 253-286.

11. Nov. 15 **Seeing Otherness: Eye/"I" Want To Burn.**

a. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Seeing Sex," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 162-192.

b. Michael Taussig, "Alterity," "The Color of Alterity," and "The Search for the White Indian," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 129-175.

c. bell hooks, "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 165-78.

d. Stuart Ewen, "Form Follows Value," "Form Follows Power," and "Form Follows Waste," in *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1988, pp. 153-258.

e. Susan Buck-Morss, "A Materialist Pedagogy," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 287-330.

12. Nov. 29 **Reframing the Eye/I of White Western "Man."**

a. Susan Bordo, "Bringing Body to Theory," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 173-191.

b. bell hooks, "Revolutionary Renegades," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 179-194.

c. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Re-entry: paths of return," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 199-229.

d. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "First Contact: From *Independence Day* to *1492* and *Millennium*," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 193-227.

e. Michael Taussig, "America as Woman: the Magic of Western Gear," and "The Talking Machine," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 176-211.

13. Dec. 6 **Redreaming Images, Remaking Power.**

a. bell hooks, "A Feminist Challenge," and "The Oppositional Gaze" and "Revolutionary Renegades," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 79-86; 115-131.

b. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Diana's Death: Gender, Photography and the Inauguration of Global Visual Culture," and "Fire" in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 231-254; 255-259.

c. Susan Bordo, "The Feminist as Other," in *Twilight Zones: the Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 192-213.

d. Susan Buck-Morss, "Afterword: Revolutionary Inheritance," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, pp. 331-340.

e. Michael Taussig, "His Master's Voice," "Reflection," and "Sympathetic magic in a Post-Colonial Age," in *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 212-255.

Course Requirements.

1. Active preparation for and participation in seminar discussion. While there are various styles of active seminar participation, all participants enrolled for credit must, with at least one fellow student, share responsibility for opening and leading class discussion of assigned texts during two meetings of the seminar.

2. Construction of semester-long JOURNAL-ART-NOTEBOOK.

Journal-art-notebooks involve written and visual meditations and short essays on specific course materials, readings, themes, and discussions. Journal-art-notebooks should also include analytic applications of course materials to found images and everyday (sociological) sightings. Journal entries are to be typed (or handwritten neatly) and journal-art-notebooks must include a minimum of eight 2-3 page entries over the course of the semester. Journals will be reviewed twice during the semester. Journals are due for review on Oct. 25th and again at the time of the scheduled final examination. (60%)

3. MIXED MEDIA ANALYSIS OF VISUAL CULTURE. This project involves critical inquiry into the use of images in contemporary social life. Participants are asked to sociologically explore aspects of images and power involving a specific visual cultural event, event series, object, social technology or social practice. Final project is to include both written text (approximately 15-20 pages) and 15-20 minute multi-media presentation at class performance session(s) to be scheduled near end of semester. One page statement of proposed projects are due on Oct. 11th. Proposals should include brief statement of visual cultural topic to be studied, methods to be used, and likely form of mixed-media presentation or performance. Students are invited to collaborate on these ethnographic projects. Written components of this project are due at time of scheduled final examination. (40%)