Images and Power

“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 social-psychic and energetic-material power of images within historically specific global/local contexts. How do images affect our hearts and minds? How do images influence our everyday lives, our techno-scientific practices, our connections and disconnections, our conscious and unconscious desires and fears? How do images show up in the clothes we wear, in the ways we walk, and the objects we want? How do images influence the foods we eat or don’t eat and the ideas and feelings we have about our selves and others? How do some images enter our flesh, captivate us, fascinate us, or arouse our senses? How is it that other images 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 and about justice? How do images influence what we imagine to be possible and what’s not?

Visual images are today everywhere entangled within a complex and contradictory web of global electronic flows of information. Images are typically racialized, gendered, territorialized, eroticized, militarized, and class-driven. Some of the most powerful images are hooked-up to hi-tech machineries of war, surveillance, and the economic marketplace. Images also lie at the core of global corporate technologies of profit, control and advantage. How might such images be best understood? How might they be critically subverted, transformed, or remade? In exploring these and related questions, this seminar provides an introduction to a variety of critical sociological approaches to the study, making, and remaking of images.

As resources for engaging with questions pertaining to images and their power the seminar also invites participants to consider a variety of “power-reflexive” sociological and visual cultural practices. These include Dadaist, constructivist, surrealist, feminist, Marxist, social psychoanalytic, Situationist, queer, postcolonial, radical multicultural and anti-racist, anti-systemic and other critical approaches to the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of images. In addition, during Spring Semester of 2009 the Images and Power seminar will pay particular attention to the critical force of the dialectical image in the writings of Walter Benjamin and visual cultural theorists influenced by Benjamin.
Topics and Readings.


   Subtext:


4. Feb. 5th  *Picture it: I See/He Flies/She Questions!*


5. Feb. 12th  
**Window on the World: Finger on the Trigger.**


Subtext:  

6. Feb. 19th  
**Aestheticizing Bodily Relations: Eating the Other.**


7. Feb. 26th  
**Virtual Wishes and Utopian Fissures.**


- **PLEASE NOTE:** BC Spring Break, no class March 5th

8. Mar. 12th  *History in Ruins and Bodies in History*


Subtext:


10. Mar 26th  *Methods of the Marvelous and the Challenge of Surrealism.*


11. April 2  *Dreamworld and Spectacle*


Subtext:

Note: No class on April 9th, Boston College Easter Break

12. Apr. 16th  *Seeing Otherness: Eye/"I" Want To Burn.*


Subtext:

13. Apr. 23rd  *Reframing the Eye/I of White Northwestern "Man."*


Subtext:

14. Apr. 30th **Redreaming Images, Remaking Power.**


Subtext:

**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 March 12th 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
February 19th. 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%)

**Academic Integrity**

Academic Integrity is of utmost importance to this and all Boston College courses and research.
The university’s academic integrity procedures will be rigorously enforced. For a full description
of Boston College’s academic integrity policy, see
WWW.bc.edu/offices/stsrv/academic/resourses/polityc/#integrity.