

SC 532, Spring 2009, Boston College,  
Thurs. 1:30-4:00 PM, McGuinn 415  
Stephen Pfohl, McGuinn Hall 416  
Office hours: Tues and Thurs: 4:15-5:15 PM, and by appt.

## **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.

1. Jan. 15th ***Introduction.***

2. Jan. 22nd ***Ways of Seeing.***

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

3. Jan. 29th ***Dreaming Images: Seeing Symptoms: Visual Culture.***

a. Stephen Pfohl, "The Reality of Social Constructions," Chapter 33 in James Holstein and Jay Gubrium, Eds., *Handbook of Social Constructionism*, Guilford Press, 2008, pp. 645-668.\*

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.

Subtext:

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

4. Feb. 5th ***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. 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.

Subtext:

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

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

a. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Picture Definition: Line, Color, Vision," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 37-64.

b. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "The Window and the Camera," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 32-64.

c.. 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.

d. Susan Buck-Morss, "Introduction, 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.

Subtext:

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

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

a. bell hooks, "Eating the Other," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 21-39.

b. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Self as Spectator," in *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 65-102.

c. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Age of Photography (1839-1982)," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 65-90.

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. Kevin Robbins, "The Touch of the Unknown," Chapter 1 in Kevin Robbins, *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*. New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 11-34.\*

7. Feb. 26th ***Virtual 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.
  - e. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 217-251.
- **PLEASE NOTE:** BC Spring Break, no class March 5<sup>th</sup>

## 8. Mar. 12th *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. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "Body as Specimen," *Technology as Symptom and Dream*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 103-132.
- d. 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.

Subtext:

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.

## 9. Mar. 19th *Shadows of Overdevelopment: the Colors of Fear.*

- a. Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," Chapter 1 in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King Reading Urban Uprising*. New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 1-12.\*
- 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. Mar 26th *Methods of the Marvelous and the Challenge of Surrealism.*

- a. Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1990, 11-79.\*
- b. Robin D.G. Kelley, "Keep' It (Sur)real: Dreams of the Marvelous," Chapter 6 in *Freedom Dreams*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002, pp. 157-198; (notes) 223-226.\*

c. Whitney Chatwick, "The Muse as Artist: Women in the Surrealist Movement," *Art in America* (July 1985), pp. 120-129.\*

## 11. April 2 ***Dreamworld and Spectacle***

a. Kevin Robbins, "Consuming Images: from the Symbolic to the Psychotic," Chapter 5 in Kevin Robbins, *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*. New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 107-126.\*

b. 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

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

d. 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.

Subtext:

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.

**Note:** No class on April 9<sup>th</sup>, Boston College Easter Break

## 12. Apr. 16th ***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. bell hooks, "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston: South End Press, 1992, pp. 165-78.

c. 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.

d. 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.

Subtext:

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.

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

a. Celeste Olalquiaga, Chapter Five, "Tupincópolis: The City of Retrofuturistic Indians," in *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 75-94.\*

- 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 Millenium," in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 193-227.
- Subtext:  
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.

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

- a. bell hooks, "A Feminist Challenge," and "The Oppositional Gaze" 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. Stephen Pfohl, "New Global Technologies of Power: Cybernetic Capitalism and Social Inequality," Chapter 23 in Mary Romero and Eric Margolis, eds., *The Blackwell Companion for Social Inequalities*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006, pp. 546-592.\*
- 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.
- Subtext:  
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 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/stsr/academic/resources/politcy/#integrity](http://WWW.bc.edu/offices/stsr/academic/resources/politcy/#integrity).