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 production and consumption of global visual cultural images and “ways of seeing.” How do some images (but not others) captivate our attention and enter our hearts and minds? How do visual images influence our imagination of others and ourselves? How do visual technologies influence the ways we practice science, politics, sex, war, gender, ethics, religion, economics, and love? In what ways do visual images shape our desires and fears? How do images influence what (or who) we are attracted to or find repulsive? How do images affect how we dress, eat, stand, walk, work, play, give birth, speak with God, or grow old at specific moments in history? Why is it that some images fascinate us, while others put us to sleep? How do visual images affect our habits and fantasies, beliefs and doubts, pleasures and anxieties? How do images affect what we imagine to be possible or not possible?

Visual cultural images are today everywhere entangled within a pulsating web of global electronic flows of information. Some of these enchant us. Others make us close or turn our eyes away. Most images capture our attention in ways that are gendered, racialized, territorialized, militarized, and class-driven. Many of these images are hooked-up to high-tech machineries of global warfare, surveillance, and the corporate marketplace. Power-saturated images promise profit, control, and strategic advantage. Other images (or other ways of practicing vision) invite more playful or prayerful pathways into what is valued or sacred.

How might the cultural power of visual images be understood from a sociological perspective committed to the pursuit of social justice? How, moreover, might unjust and damaging visual images be subverted, transformed, or remade in more equitable, mutually empowering, and life affirming ways? In exploring questions such as these, the seminar encourages participants to engage reflexively with the making and remaking of visual images in a social context.

As resources for engaging critically with the complex contours of contemporary visual culture, the seminar also introduces participants to a variety of artful “power-reflexive” styles of both sociology and visual cultural practices. These include Dadaist, constructivist, surrealist, feminist, Marxist, social psychoanalytic, Situationist, queer, postcolonial, radical multicultural, anti-racist, anti-systemic, and other critical approaches to the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of images and power.
Topics and Readings.


2. Sept. 10th  *Ways of Seeing.*


4. Sept. 24th  *Picture it: I See/He Flies/She Questions!*

6. Oct. 8th  **Window on the World: Finger on the Screen.**


7. Oct. 15th  **Aestheticizing Bodily Relations: Eating the Other.**


8. Oct. 22nd  **Panoptic Modernity, Mechanical Reproduction, Fascinated Implosion.**


d. Jean Baudrillard, ”The Implosion of Meaning in the Media,” in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majority ... or the End of the Social and other essays*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, 93-110.*
9. Oct. 29th  **History in Ruins and Bodies in Ads.**


10. Nov. 5th  **The Abandoned Body and its Eroticized Return.**


11. Nov. 12th  **Dreamworld and Spectacle.**


12. Nov. 19th  **Seeing Otherness: Decolonizing the Eye/"I" Want To Burn.**
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 share responsibility for opening and leading class discussion of assigned readings during two meetings of the seminar. (10%)

2. *Construction of semester-long JOURNAL-ART-NOTEBOOK.* Journal-art-notebooks involve the construction of short visual essays (using both text and images) on specific seminar materials, readings, themes, and discussions. Strong journal entries will bring course materials to bear upon found images and everyday (sociological) sightings. Journals entries are to be typed (or handwritten neatly) and completed journals will include a minimum of eight 2-3 page entries. Journals will be reviewed twice during the semester. Journals are due for review on October 22nd and again no later than noon on December 12th. (60%)

3. *MIXED MEDIA ANALYSIS OF VISUAL CULTURE.* This project involves a critical inquiry into images and their power in contemporary social life. Participants are asked to use relevant course materials and themes in analyzing specific visual cultural images or practices. Final projects are to include both a written text (approximately 15-20 pages) and a 15-20 minute multi-media presentation during a special “performance session” of the seminar to be scheduled near end of semester. One-page project proposals are due on October 15th. Proposals should include a brief statement of the visual cultural topic to be studied, the methods to be used, and the likely form of the mixed-media presentation or performance. Students are invited to collaborate on these ethnographic projects. Written components of this project are due no later than noon on December 12th. (30%)