

### **Course 3**

#### **Propaganda Images – Strategies and Efficacy**

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The necessity of a reflection on the visual strategies of propaganda images seems particularly evident at a historical moment, in which the main political and cultural debates more and more focus on elements that, because of their visual qualities and impact, are to a large extent assumed to be symbolic. This is particularly evident in the recent debates about religious and cultural “otherness” in Europe. Objects such as the veil or the crucifix or architectural and urban elements, whose visibility seems to become a powerful connotation for cultural presence, such as minarets or shop signs in foreign languages, have played a central role in recent political campaigns, or have even been the object of legal issues.

On the one hand, the role of visual analysis in its multiple forms and traditions is central to any understanding and questioning of those main cultural issues of our times; not merely in relation to images as they are explicitly used in opinion or political campaigns, but also in relation to imaginary projections and connotations that objects, symbols, and visual elements are capable to powerfully embody in such circumstances and that are amplified and made explicit by political discourses. We emphasize that, besides explicit propaganda issues typical of totalitarian states and dictatorships, the course aims to explore the ideological dimensions of political campaigns as well as the ideological implications of a broad range of visual issues linked to the public sphere such as monuments, media communication, and the representation strategies of political leaders, etc.

On the other hand, going back to the historical forms of propaganda and, above all, to the link between the arts and the ideological elements they enclose, is necessary to fully understand how recent forms of an ideological use of imagery often reactivate complex and stratified visual and historical references. Therefore, the course welcomes contributions that analyze the visual arts, architecture, cinema, propaganda issues, practices and documents of specific historical moments in order to question the structure of the ideological myths and metaphors embedded in these very objects. It also welcomes contributions about those artistic issues that aim at an open ideological deconstruction, exposing the codes and strategies of an official ideological discourse to a kind of semiotic overthrow.

This interdisciplinary approach, nourished by a dialogue between semiotic and historical perspectives – often implicitly mixed into the richest analysis – will allow us to question the visual strategies implied by historical objects and more recent issues on several levels.

Young scholars in the fields of art history and art theory, visual anthropology- and the anthropology of the arts, visual semiotics, and visual studies are encouraged to apply for presentations regarding the following topics and fields of interest.

## Possible Focuses and Research

- An analysis of the visual strategies in recent and less recent propaganda images, with particular attention to issues of points of view, framing functions, focalization (as construction of relevance), and image-text relation. In order to understand how an **implication of the viewer**, as well as his/her cognitive and emotional position, is often “programmed” and constructed through specific visual strategies.
- The questioning of the **visual memory** such images often include and of the peculiar efficacy they draw from it. On the one hand, recent images, which become central in a political context, may include a visual reference to other historical and “emblematic” images. These historical references are *re-activated* in recent images, with evident ideological implications (e.g. the photograph of the “flag on ruins”, which broadly circulated after September 11th has a “historical doppelganger” in a Pearl Harbor picture).. On the other hand, propaganda images and images with ideological objectives are often “crossed” by a visual memory going back to art history itself, inscribing ancient *formulas* (sometimes in the form of Warburgian *Pathosformeln*) in recent objects with specific effects, reversals, and paradoxes.
- Objects chosen as highly representative and “symbolic” by propaganda and political campaigns also activate or reinforce cultural and – often – phantasmatic projections. It is here that **imagination** releases all its political potential. Here, we question anthropological issues such as the visibility of the other, the inscription of power positions in spatial and visual relationships, the question of the “purity” of culture and the invention of tradition.
- The **history** of propaganda strategies and the ideological implications **of art historical objects**. It will be particularly interesting to question the great “ideological machines” of recent and less recent history – baroque art, or the propaganda of the totalitarian states – in order to understand their own strategies and, possibly to question what they address to our contemporary gaze in a revelatory constellation.
- **Methodological** and **epistemological** issues will also be studied. Particularly the tension between the historical status of objects and the theoretical categories we use to analyze them (that, elsewhere, has been named the tension between the –etic and –emic issues).

Additional suggestions as to relevant topics are welcome.

This multiple approach proposes an analysis of the relationship between visual strategies and ideology that calls into question the conception of a visual object as a mere instrument of autonomous power, and that rather turns itself towards the idea of power as “inscribed” in and embodied by a complex net of visual elements.

**Course Languages:** English. A good passive comprehension of German is necessary to participate in the course.

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**Guest Lecturer:** Eric Michaud