

# VISUAL LITERACY

EDITED BY

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5. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).
6. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, trans. Steven Byington (London: Aldgate Press, 1982), 41–43.
7. Cited in John Gage, *Color in Turner* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 169.
8. See for example Gerald Finley, *Angel in the Sun: Turner's Vision of History* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 98.

## CHAPTER 4

# From Visual Literacy to Image Competence

JON SIMONS

In this paper my focus is on the notion of “political image,” which I take to be both startlingly simple and yet also incredibly complicated. In attempting to consider what political images are, I will discuss three considerations of images in a general sense, all of which have some bearing on the notion of political imagery. The first is commercial branding, which pertains to the connection between image and reputation. Then I venture into some contemporary neuroscientific understanding of mental images. The third consideration I look at is Tom Mitchell’s family of images, which I would suggest has as much to do with image studies as visual culture studies. However, I am unable to derive a theory of political imagery from these considerations, but instead use them to complicate the theorization of political images, arguing instead that a pedagogy of political imagery should rely as much on image making as the interpretation and analysis of images.

I am concerned also with the distinction between visual images, or pictures, and images in a broader sense. By drawing attention to the difference between pictures and images, I suggest that an interdisciplinary pedagogy of “image studies” would be significantly different from an interdisciplinary pedagogy of visual studies. The latter would focus, for example, on the visual character of neuroscience as a discipline that relies heavily on imaging techniques. I do not doubt that the alternative

approach, which I take to be an aspect of visual studies as envisioned by our host, Jim Elkins, is a fascinating area of study.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, reflexive consideration of the ideas about images in contemporary neuroscience would have to take into account the visual techniques that are an integral part of the discursive formation of neuroscience. However, I do think that it is quite different for students to learn how to read magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans as well as learning to read Australian aboriginal art, than it is for students to learn how to read and respond to political images. Ultimately, the difference comes down to a nonexclusive difference between a formation of students as astute, fascinated scholars of the visual aspects of the world in which they live, and as astute citizens in that world. The difference between students as scholars and as citizens also entails different roles for universities, though each of them is equally anachronistic and unrealistic in current circumstances. Any worthwhile reflection of pedagogy in higher education today, certainly in the British case, must surely meld into an effort not only to understand those circumstances, but also to change them. While these necessarily political reflections go far beyond the current possible scope of this paper, the education of students as citizens entails that academics also act as citizens, taking responsibility for their pedagogic practices.

### Political Pictures, Political Images

I will begin by explaining the difference between political images and political pictures with reference to the recently deceased Susan Sontag's essay on the photographs of the torture of prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison.<sup>2</sup> The photographs are undoubtedly pictures of enormous political importance, and Sontag's essay is a fine example of at least one of the ways in which some pictures can and should be read. The predominant trope of Sontag's essay is nicely summed up by the first page subheading: "Susan Sontag on the Real Meaning of the Abu Ghraib Pictures." Sontag treats the pictures to a political hermeneutic, arguing that "complex crimes of leadership, policies and authority [are] revealed by the pictures." By looking at the pictures, Sontag can read the pathologies of U.S. political power and sociocultural existence.

Sontag's essay, though, is as much about what the photographs do, or what she would like them to do, as what they reveal or mean. First, she notes that photographs have accrued "an insuperable power to determine what people recall of events." Despite the Pentagon's planning, then, these pictures of torture would stick in people's minds as much as, say, the contrived toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue. Second, they "tarnish and besmirch the reputation—that is the image—of America." President George

W. Bush was "sorry that people seeing these pictures didn't understand the true nature of the American heart," while then U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld worried about the reputation of the U.S. armed forces "who are courageously and responsibly and professionally protecting our freedoms across the globe." Sontag reports that the Bush administration principally deplored the damage done to the United States' image by the pictures. There is an important distinction between the visual images, the photographs that have political meanings and effects, and the political image, or reputation, that is affected.

I am interested in educating students to be engaged citizens, in which case the sort of discussion that would be generated by the photographs and Sontag's essay would be a good starting point. But, if the U.S. administration was so concerned about the damage to its image that the Abu Ghraib photographs could do, we should spend some time figuring out the nature of such images, the reasons for their significance, and how scholars and students can learn to appreciate how they function.

### What Is a Political Image?

As I said previously, the notion of political image is at one level remarkably simple. Sontag uses it as a synonym for reputation. Margaret Scammell, a scholar of political marketing, concurs that the industry understands image in terms of "the reputation, trustworthiness and credibility of the candidates or parties."<sup>3</sup> So, *image* simply means something like reputation, overall character, or personality. The problems begin when we academics start picking away at that simplicity and when we encourage our students to do the same. Bush and Rumsfeld are referring to the reputation of the U.S. government and armed forces to bring what they call freedom and democracy to the world, which rests on the image of the United States as a free and democratic nation. To equate image with reputation can only be the very beginning of the elucidation of the notion of political image, because "reputation" is only ever part of the picture. It is always "reputation" with respect to something else (e.g., economic management, family values, being freedom loving, or possessing folksiness) that is part of the image of the party, politician, or country.

A political image is, then, as complex as the notion of "reputation." That is one reason why I cannot simply present a political image for analysis, such as the image of the United States. One might also wonder whether the vagueness of the term *political image* is a helpful use of the term *image*, but whether we like it or not, we are stuck with it, just as we are stuck with a sense of living in an ill-defined "image culture." I am going with the flow of conceptual imprecision, deferring indefinitely the attempt to define the "image"

part of *political image*. In trying to unpack further some of the complexities that are involved with political images, I will look at thinking about images in the contexts of marketing, neuroscience, and visual studies.

### Brand and Image

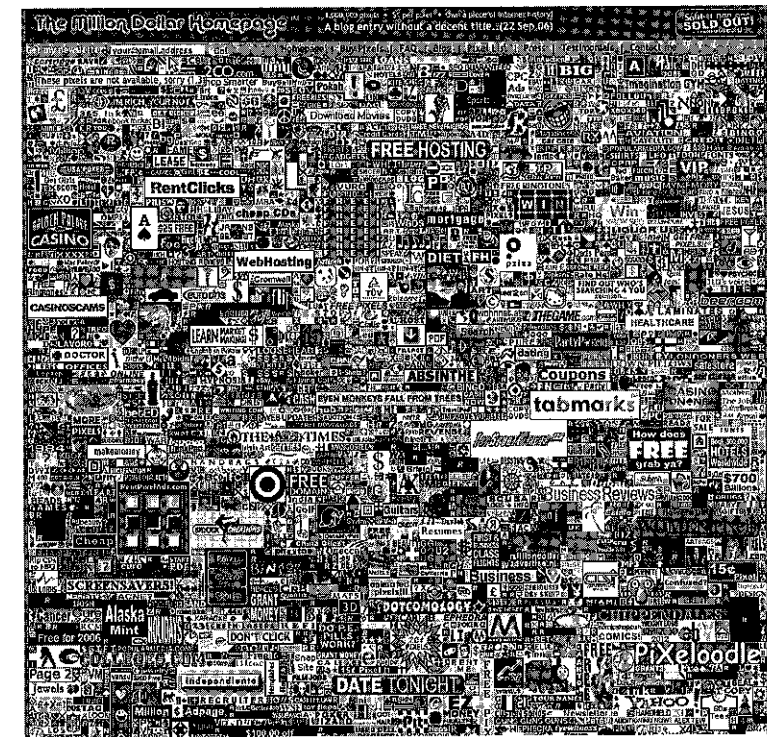
Commercial brands are vital as a means of differentiation in a market environment in which products are very similar. According to Interbrand, an organization that markets branding, brands are used for the “inculcation” of “underlying appeals” to “create an indelible impression” on consumers.<sup>4</sup> The underlying appeal of brands is about “a compelling vision” or “compelling idea,” which involves the move from “a commodity product to an emotional product, through to the real attachment and engagement that comes from creating an experience.”<sup>5</sup> Branding, then, is about the emotional appeal of visions, ideas, and experiences. In Naomi Klein’s account, the real product that is consumed is the brand, or products “presented not as ‘commodities’ but as concepts: the brand as experience, as lifestyle.”<sup>6</sup> By the 1990s the cash value of the corporate brand was quantifiable, as companies such as Nike and Microsoft realized that they did not produce primarily things, “but *images* of their brands.”<sup>7</sup> So, Klein usefully shows that corporate brands and images are interchangeable, and that such images involve personalities, consciousness, lifestyles, cultural meaning, and experience. That does not help us specify more precisely what the term *image* means even in the corporate context, but we can see that corporate images or brands are the same sort of images as political images. Scammell and Interbrand refer to similar points about reputation and trust. If the U.S. administration was concerned about the damage to the United States’ image, it was also concerned about the falling value of its brand.

### Brain and Image

Taking a cue from Antonio Damasio’s popularization of his work in neuroscience, we might say that when the U.S. administration worries about the damage done to its, or the United States’, image or brand, it is concerned with how people *feel* about the United States, or even what they *think* about the United States. Damasio’s contested position in contemporary neuroscience holds that mental “images are the currency of our minds” and that “[t]hought is an acceptable word to denote ... a flow of images.”<sup>8</sup> He goes as far as to say that “any symbol you can think of is an image, and there may be little leftover mental residue that is not made of images.”<sup>9</sup> By *image*, he means “a mental pattern in any of the sensory modalities, e.g., a sound image, a tactile image, the image of a state of well-being.”<sup>10</sup> Damasio holds

that in the end, all the images in our minds come down to the body. They are “images of the interactions between each of us and an object which engaged our organisms.”<sup>11</sup>

Images are the stuff of consciousness that emerges in evolutionary terms when the “primordial story” about the life states of an organism “can be told using the nonverbal language of body signals.”<sup>12</sup> These body signals enable sophisticated life regulation of the organism in its environment. As Damasio puts it, “Good actions need the company of good images. Images allow us to choose among repertoires of previously available patterns of action and optimize the delivery of the chosen action.” Images are “unwitting nonverbal signifiers of the goodness or badness of situations relative to the



Alex Trew’s Million Dollar Homepage, [www.milliondollarhomepage.com](http://www.milliondollarhomepage.com), as it appeared in October 2006. Trew made a homepage with a million pixels, and sold them in batches at a dollar per pixel. Advertisers quickly filled the page with their logos, creating a visual chaos that can only be understood by mouseovers and clickthroughs. The site is a nice emblem of the conceptually crowded subject of internet visuality—a field where scholarship can hardly keep up with new developments. The Million Dollar Homepage crashed in January 2006 after Trew refused to pay blackmailers; it has spawned imitations that sell ads by byte, and even one that sells by square inches of space on a picture of the advertiser’s body.

organism's inherent set of values."<sup>13</sup> Emphasizing the evolutionary stakes again, he says that "survival in a complex environment ... can be greatly improved by purposeful preview and manipulation of images in mind," while consciousness connects "inner life regulation and image making."<sup>14</sup>

Damasio refers to very complex sets of actions and objects, including socially cooperative behaviors as actions and memories as objects. So, although images always come back to the body, or the relation of the organism to its environment, "we can invent additional images to symbolize objects and events and to represent abstractions."<sup>15</sup> According to Damasio's account we should expect political images of the United States, or of one's own polity, to be images of a general state of well- (or ill-) being. The image that the United States conjured up by the pictures of Abu Ghraib is a sick United States, one that does not ensure the social well-being of its prisoners and those who guard them, of those whose land it occupies and those who occupy it.

I would certainly have more work to make Damasio's notion of image work as political image, but the main point I want to make in this paper is that Damasio's notion of mental image is very amorphous, very difficult to pin down. As we saw above, he uses *image* to refer to all kinds of symbols and perhaps all mental activity. Indeed, his (and others') over-expansive definition of *images* has been criticized by Max Bennett and P. M. S. Hacker, who engage in a philosophical clarification of conceptual confusions that they claim bedevil contemporary neuroscience. They argue, "Mental images ... are a major source of conceptual confusion. For it is deeply tempting to conceive of mental images as species of the genus *image*."<sup>16</sup> Bennett and Hacker insist that "mental images are [not] private pictures, which one sees with one's mind's eye," because they are not pictures at all, and because one does not see with one's mind's eye, but visually imagines or recollects.<sup>17</sup> Mental images are not internal representations of what they are images of, because they are not determined "by convention, by similarity, or by *representational* intention."<sup>18</sup> Bennett and Hacker's basic point is that neuroscientists misconstrue the cogitative human faculty of imagination as a faculty that is always exercised in relation to mental images, yet imagination is not perception.

I take it that Bennett and Hacker would say that no purposeful preview and manipulation of images go on in our minds that enhance our well-being. We think about situations (not images of them) and have unconscious as well as conscious associations (not images) with such situations that would prompt us to repeat or avoid those situations. In brief, they would say that good actions do not need good images, but good thinking, of which imagination is a part. Thought is not a flow of images, or thinking about images, as it is too polymorphous to be characterized so reductively.<sup>19</sup>

I do not intend here to assess in detail the merits of Bennett and Hacker's criticism of loose neuroscientific talk about mental images. I see much merit in their point that neuroscientists need to think carefully about the concepts that they use. It is confusing for Damasio to talk metaphorically about seeing mental images, when such images are not visual images but mental patterns, which he says "we call, *for lack of a better term ... images*."<sup>20</sup> But I would not rush to ascribe all such confusions to conceptual incorrectness, as if the concepts used in science are only the consequence or correlative of clear or muddled thinking, rather than of the complex social and cultural configurations from which they emerge.

Rather, my point in pitting Bennett and Hacker against Damasio is to show how complicated and involved the use of the term *image* is and how difficult it is to define a political image. Damasio is aware that he uses words as synonyms of each other, and our difficulty is perhaps that we cannot get much further than that without doing violence to the ways we use language. So, when elsewhere Damasio mentions the "experience of an image," we might wonder whether *experience* is another synonym for *image* and hence also for *mental pattern*.<sup>21</sup> *Feeling* may also be a synonym for *mental image* in his work. Idea, image, experience, perception, feeling. Bennett and Hackett might not like it, but I think I know what Damasio means, without actually being able to define a mental image or political image.

### What Is an Image?

Tom Mitchell's groundbreaking work on images conceives of a family of images, made up of graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, and verbal images.<sup>22</sup> Bennett and Hacker would like to break up the family, as they do not believe that mental images belong to the same family as graphic and optical images. They fall into the trap Mitchell describes of beginning "by asking which members of the family are called by that name in the strict, proper or literal sense," with the implication that "other uses of the word are figurative and improper."<sup>23</sup> But of course Mitchell's family tree is so interesting because it is so difficult to figure out how all these different types of image end up in the same family, which like all families has unclear boundaries because of its alliances with other concepts and entities. It is also a family rife with disputes, about which type of image really belongs to the family or which type of image most defines the character of the whole family. If I were to try to fit political images in branches of the family, they would be perceptual and mental, yet they also seem to belong to Mitchell's parent concept of image, which refers to likeness, resemblance, or similitude in a nonliteral and nonpictorial sense, "an abstract, general, spiritual 'likeness,'" when *image* refers to something like *model* or

*schema*.<sup>24</sup> The image of the United States under attack by the Abu Ghraib pictures is thus given a likeness in a model or schema in which the abstract qualities of freedom loving, democratic, prosperous, virtuous, and powerful all play a part.

But my real point is not to decide which branch of the family political images belong to, because, as Mitchell argues, there is no uncontested or correct version of the genealogy of images, and so no uncontested delineation of the branches of the family. As he explains, "[A] book which began with the intention of producing a valid *theory* of images," looking for a "theoretical answer to the [question], What is an image? ... seemed inevitably to fall back into prior questions of value and interest that could only be answered in historical terms."<sup>25</sup>

The main lesson I want to take from Mitchell is humility. I am not going to come up with a definitive theoretical definition of a political image, certainly not on my own, precisely because the ideological stakes about political imagery are so high. This inability to come up with a theory of political images raises pedagogical questions. How am I going to teach students to be astute, informed, and engaged "readers" or interpreters of political images if I cannot begin by explaining to them the nature of that which I would like them to understand?

### The Pedagogy of Political Image Literacy

One answer to my question of how to teach students about political imagery is to follow Mitchell, to lead them into a "critical fall into the space between theory and history" in which they can learn about the stakes involved in contemporary discussions of political imagery. I do this at the start of a (post)graduate-taught class called Thought, Image, Critique. I frame the beginning of the module with "the problem of images for politics." The first seminar description reads,

In this seminar we look at a paradigmatic case of the alleged power of images. Politics, it is said, has been overwhelmed by the mass communications media, curtailing the possibilities for rational, public political discussion. Politics is said to have been subordinated to the marketing of parties and politicians by means of images, sound-bites and "spin." Media images thus appear to be a problem for politics, at least for democratic and socialist politics.

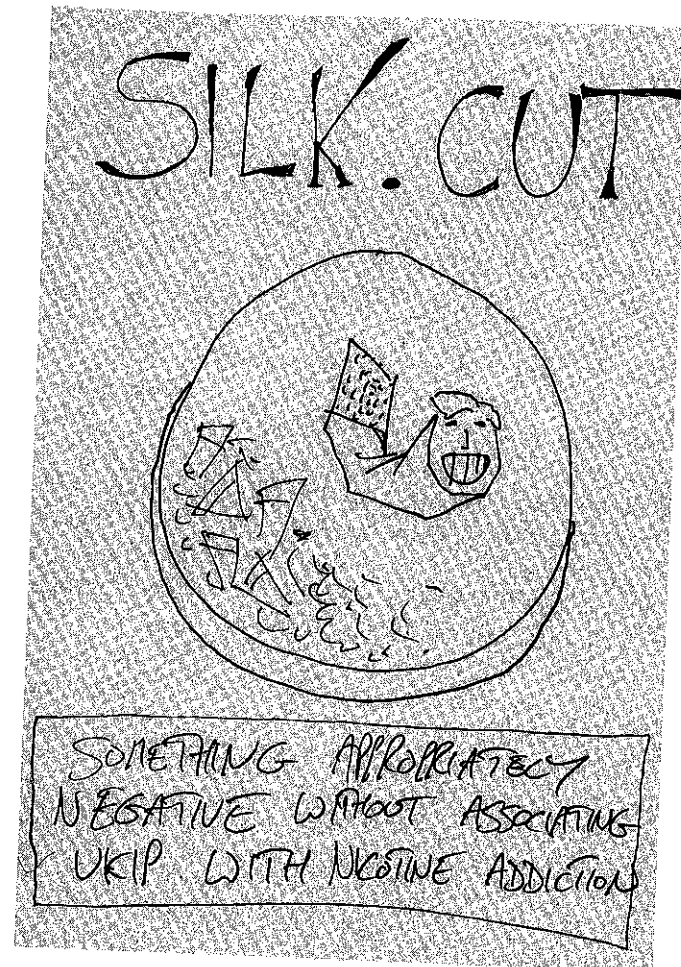
It is relatively easy using the work of Jürgen Habermas and others<sup>26</sup> to establish what is at stake in the debates about the prevalence of images in democratic politics, especially in the debate about the value of words in the form of discursive argumentation as opposed to images for democratic deliberation.

Having said that, it is much easier to find texts that make the case for the value of reasoned argumentation, and against imagery in politics and the pernicious influence of the mass media, than cases in favor of images in politics. A transdisciplinary perspective about the broader family of images, visual and nonvisual, encourages students to develop a range of ideas about the value of images of different sorts, expanding the discussion from iconophobia or iconophilia in relation to political images. Although I am unable to teach students a theory of political images, I have adopted another teaching approach, which relies on what the students already know. Instead of only talking about the texts that talk about political images, I now run class exercises that locate the students not only as cultural consumers (which is where the texts critical of political imagery place them) but also as cultural producers. For example, in the first seminar an exercise asks students to compare a British Labour Party poster from 1929, for the campaign that led to the first Labour electoral victory, with an infamous poster designed by Saatchi and Saatchi for the successful Conservative Party campaign in 1979. In 2004 students preferred to focus on how persuasive the posters were, and why, as if they were telling me that if I began by asking what political images are for, it would be easier to think about them.

The first exercise puts the students in the role of discerning cultural consumers. The second exercise situates them directly as cultural producers, which is where some of them will end up. It goes as follows:

You are working in an advertising firm that has taken on a brief to promote and campaign for a political issue, party or even personality. Choose whatever political message you want to "sell," and think up a campaign concept together, that you can "pitch" to the rest of the group using an overhead transparency, the whiteboard, or just by speaking (or all three and anything else you can find).

I was happily surprised by the inventiveness of the students, who in minutes came up with some startling ideas. In this example students chose an obnoxious client, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a populist, anti-European, and generally xenophobic party that has had recent success in elections for the European Parliament. Much of their success was ascribed to Robert Kilroy-Silk, a former Labour Party MP turned TV presenter, whose brief dalliance with UKIP ended when they refused to make him their leader. This poster is a piece of negative campaigning. The students were demonstrating that they knew how to market politically with minimal time and resources. What could they achieve given more time and resources? What would they learn about political imagery if the rest of the module taught them some graphic design, including



computer graphics; some copywriting; something about marketing; and some psychology? In other words, how much could students learn about being engaged and critical citizens if they learned the skills needed to produce as well as “read” political imagery? Perhaps I project too much from my own ineptitude in these areas, but I imagine that they would learn much of what they need to learn. When we become literate in a language, we learn to write as well as read. Competence in political imagery would thus demand the ability to make as well as interpret political images, just as science students learn to make as well as interpret images that represent data.

### The Illiterate University

The university environment in which students (and faculty) could learn to make as well as interpret political imagery does not exist, and there is very little chance of it coming into existence, certainly in the British higher education system. I suggest that the obstacles to learning political image literacy in British universities are the same as those to learning visual literacy, in the sense outlined by Jim Elkins. As I understand Elkins’s project for a pedagogy of visual literacy, it is about the formation of students as astute, fascinated scholars of the visual aspects of the world in which they live. But I believe there is another, anti-instrumentalist intention within his eclectic project for visual literacy that includes art history, science images, image-making skills, and non-Western images, only to argue in the end that there is no “general visual literacy.” Rather than teaching visual literacy as a transferable skill that could be applied in any discipline or work setting, he says it is that which is “personal, embodied, unpredictable,” not the “everyday manner of seeing that comprises habit, directed enquiry, and common experience.”<sup>27</sup> Visual literacy is an aspect of an education that encourages students to attend to the world around them, to wonder in its details and in its patterns. The purpose of this is that “the university would be a richer and more challenging place if a range of such images were a *lingua franca*.”<sup>28</sup> And the world would be a richer place, thought not literally so, if more people were educated to wonder in it.

Unfortunately, universities in Britain and other places such as Australia are being pushed in more rather than less instrumentalist directions. Higher education is beset by an instrumentalist managerialism characterized by the same audit culture of quality assessment, quality, and control that operates in the rest of public education, in the National Health Service, and in other public services. This audit culture has been introduced as part of the more general neoliberal strategy of governing all social institutions as businesses, with the added twist that all institutions become self-governing, become responsible for their own management according to practices or technologies of government that they have not chosen themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Outwardly, there has been no interference with academic freedom, because the auditing technologies of quality assessment are neutral in terms of content, which is why they can be transferred so easily from profit-making enterprises to public services. Representatives of academic institutions are nominally free to choose the content of the British Quality Assurance Agency’s national qualifications framework and subject benchmark statements, which determine (though quite generally) what has to be learned and to what level in each subject area, or what are now



Visual literacy in philately is partly an offshoot of connoisseurship in the fine arts. There are entire books devoted to stamp forgeries; some require the same nearly microscopic attention that is helpful in spotting forged fine art prints. The politics of stamps—and the obliviousness of some collectors to that politics—involves a wholly different kind of literacy. Scholars like David Scott have studied the politics of stamp design, and there are pertinent theories of collection, including Walter Benjamin's, but no full-scale study of the subject. This is the first stamp issued for Zululand, with the profile of Queen Victoria.

to be called “learning outcomes.” The benchmarks for communication and for media, film, and cultural studies do include a section on “skills of social and political citizenship” and the ability to “critically appraise some of the widespread common sense understandings and misunderstandings of communications, media and culture.”<sup>30</sup> On the face of it, one of the outcomes to be monitored is the formation of engaged citizens.

But it is the “transferable skills” that really matter and in which potential employers are interested; these are also expressed in vague and vapid terms that describe in an inoffensive manner the sort of creative worker or entrepreneurial self who will thrive in the neoliberal environment.<sup>31</sup> Graduates will thus be able to “work in flexible, creative and independent ways, showing self-discipline, self-direction and reflexivity.”<sup>32</sup> In brief,

we can teach what we like, subject of course to market demand and the generation of sufficient research funds, so long as the outcome of the learning process is the formation of self-disciplining subjects. And we can teach whatever we like, so long as we reform ourselves as self-reflexive practitioners who suit our teaching practices to the learning outcomes that are in fact the outcome of the managerial technologies of assessment.

I am repeating the complaints of colleagues over lunch and in the pages of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* because pedagogical issues are central to the concerns of this conference on visual literacy. I do not feel that at present I have the luxury of considering or even imagining new curricula in visual literacy or image studies that are not subject to the audit culture. We do not have the freedom to revive the old idea of a university in which a shared, transdisciplinary lingua franca of images can be learned. Nor do we have the freedom to establish courses dedicated to political image literacy that foster astute and engaged citizens, because in a democracy that means citizens who seek and exercise control of the political conditions in which they live, work, and learn. If we academics have lost collective control (if we ever had it) of the discursive practices by which universities are governed, what can we teach students about governing the conditions under which they live? In reflecting on the ideal pedagogy, program, or university, I have been drawn to reflect on how far we are from such an ideal. Politics will have to come before pedagogy, or, rather, only a political pedagogy can bring the sort of university in which dream programs for visual literacy or image studies can flourish.

#### Endnotes

1. James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003).
2. Susan Sontag, “What Have We Done?” *Guardian*, May 24, 2004, sec. G2, 2–5.
3. Margaret Scammell, *Designer Politics: How Elections Are Won* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 20.
4. Tom Blackett, “What Is a Brand?” in *Brands and Branding, an Economist Book* (April 2004), [www.interbrand.com](http://www.interbrand.com), 4, 2, respectively.
5. Blackett, “What Is a Brand?” 7; and Chuck Brymer, “What Makes Brands Great,” in *Brands and Branding*, 2, 5.
6. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 21.
7. Klein, *No Logo*, 4.
8. Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (London: William Heinemann, 2000), 318–19.
9. *Ibid.*, 319.
10. *Ibid.*, 9.
11. *Ibid.*, 321.



12. Ibid., 30–31.
13. Ibid., 30.
14. Ibid., 24. See also Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (London: Vintage, 2003), 207.
15. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 204.
16. Max R. Bennett and P. M. S. Hacker, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 181.
17. Ibid., 187.
18. Ibid., 193.
19. Ibid., 178.
20. Damasio, *Feeling*, 9, emphasis added.
21. Ibid., 323.
22. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 10.
23. Ibid., 12–13.
24. Ibid., 33.
25. Ibid., 3.
26. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); and Daniel Boorstin, *The Image* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
27. Elkins, *Visual Studies*, 195, 193.
28. Ibid., 187.
29. See Michael Powers, *The Audit Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Cris Shore and Steven Roberts, “Higher Education and the Panoptic Paradigm: Quality Assessment as ‘Disciplinary Technology,’” *Higher Education Review* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 8–17.
30. Quality Assurance Agency, “Subject Benchmark Statements: Communication, Media, Film and Cultural Studies,” <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/communications.asp>.
31. See Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990), for the notion of the entrepreneurial self.
32. Quality Assurance Agency, “Subject Benchmark Statements.”

## CHAPTER 5

## The Visual Complex

*Mapping Some Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Visual Literacy*

PETER DALLOW

Martin Jay, in his 1988 essay “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” argued that the modern era was “dominated by the sense of sight in a way that set it apart from its premodern predecessors and possibly its postmodern successor.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly the scale and penetration of visual technologies, and the scope and range of visual practices and their consumption, expanded in the modern era. Authors and researchers such as Barbara Stafford, Jonathan Crary, James Elkins, and W. J. T. Mitchell, among others, have argued that we have entered a new cultural era where visual technologies, as much as the technology of visualization itself, have reached deep into our everyday lives, as they have into the sciences, architecture and engineering, the media, the arts and entertainment industries, the professions in general, and most of the social spaces we inhabit. The “visualization of knowledge,” as Barbara Stafford has cogently argued, is integral to the functioning of all advanced professional activities, and hence to the curricula of all university teaching programs:

The history of the general move toward visualization thus has broad intellectual and practical implications for the conduct of and the theory of the humanities, the physical and biological sciences, and the social sciences—indeed, for all forms of education, top to bottom.<sup>2</sup>