

# Education and the New Disciplinary: Surveillance, Spectacle, and the Case of SBER<sub>1</sub>

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## *Abstract*

In this paper the authors pursue the evolving relationships between Foucauldian understandings of "surveillance" and Debordian notions of "spectacle." Using the contemporary commitment to standards-based educational reform (SBER), they address the following questions: (1) To what extent might contemporary K-12 education be understood in terms of a "blending" of surveillance and spectacle? To what benefits? (2) Within what contexts and via what mechanisms does this merging occur? (3) What are the potential practical consequences of this arrangement? and (4) How might SBER (as a case study) illuminate the fusion of surveillance and spectacle in terms of cause(s), effect(s), context(s), mechanism(s), consequence(s), critique(s), and resistance(s)?

Antiquity had been a civilization of spectacle. *'To render accessible to a multitude of men [sic] the inspection of a small number of objects'* [italics added]: this was the problem to which the architecture of temples, theatres and circuses responded. With spectacle, there was a predominance of public life, the intensity of festivals, sensual proximity. In these rituals in which blood flowed, society found new vigour and formed for a moment a single great body. The modern age poses the opposite problem: *'To procure for a small number, or even for a single individual, the instantaneous view of a great multitude'* [italics added]. In a society in which the principal elements are no longer the community and public life, but, on the one hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state, relations can be regulated only in a form that is the exact reverse of the spectacle: 'It was to the modern age, to the ever-growing influence of the state, that was reserved the task of increasing and perfecting its guarantees, by using and directing, towards that great aim the building and distribution of buildings intended to observe a great multitude of men at the same time.' (Foucault, 1975/1979, pp. 216-217)

As Foucault suggests, both spectacle and surveillance can be and have been used in the establishment and maintenance of regulatory power. But whereas he characterized "ancient" civilization as a civilization of "spectacle" (control grounded in the observation of the few by the many) and "modern" civilization as a civilization of panoptic "surveillance" (control grounded in the observation of the many by the few), in this paper we contend that the two in fact have merged (or that they at least coexist), creating, in effect, an even more problematic and insidious mode of disciplinarity.

Examples of both working contemporaneously (if not conjointly) include the present popularity (and power) of "tabloid" and "reality" television (e.g., *Jerry Springer* and *Survivor*)--examples of "spectacle"--and the parallel functioning of (for example) e-mail monitoring (e.g., the recently publicized efforts of the FBI) and "nanny cams" (i.e., Webcams that make it possible for working parents to observe the actions of their children's daycare providers)--examples of "surveillance." Interestingly, the news media provide examples of both--spectacle, for instance, in their increasingly intrusive investigation of individuals' private lives (e.g., politicians, Monica Lewinsky) and their evermore continuous coverage of such "media events" as the high profile criminal cases of football stars O. J. Simpson and Ray Lewis (what Rich [2000] calls the "mediathon")--as well as surveillance, for instance in their "investigative reports" or "hidden camera" documentaries of large (and often corrupt) organizations. Frequently, these spiral into a surveillance-spectacle-surveillance-spectacle chain. In some ways, those with formal and official positions of power see them as mutually corrective, such that "fixing" the effects of spectacle requires increased surveillance (and so on, as the US government's reactions to the events of September 11 suggest).

In this paper, we argue that education today must be understood according to a setting in which spectacle and surveillance come together, a state of affairs in which discipline is established and maintained as individuals and groups are monitored simultaneously by

both larger and smaller entities. We make use of standards-based educational reform (SBER) as an indicative "case" (especially vis-à-vis the conditions of curriculum standards and mandated high-stakes testing), one in which this form of disciplinary power relates dynamically with and to what we (can) know and how we (can) know it. In this instance, for example, state bureaucrats "monitor" school performance within a "micro" setting (surveillance) while at the same time the "public" considers school performance (or "accountability") via media-reported (frequently as headlines) standardized test scores (spectacle). In the extreme, given the potential of new virtual and on-line, audio and visual computer capabilities, these (educational and social) circumstances make available a new disciplinarity, one in which regulation can occur via the absurd possibility of "everybody watching everybody all the time," one that signals a qualitative shift in the mechanisms of the gaze, one conceivable only in light of technological advances (e.g., the Internet, "hyperreality" [Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997]) and changing political/cultural/economic relationships between the "public" and "private" spheres and between "corporate" and "individual" identities.

We intend first to demonstrate that with respect to contemporary education, disciplinary power (i.e., "disciplinarity") must be understood within a context defined in part according to the *convergence* of surveillance and spectacle (as opposed, that is, to either one or the other individually). We utilize the case of SBER to illustrate: (a) the mechanisms by which such a confluence of power-elements occurs; (b) the contexts within which such a state of affairs is made possible; (c) the extent to which this conceptualization might provide insights into accepted and prevailing pedagogical practices, viewpoints, and policies; (d) the potential practical consequences (i.e., those of surveillance, spectacle, *and* "surveillance-spectacle") of this disciplinary setting; and (e) the increased complexity and turbulence made necessary by this convergence of surveillance and spectacle in terms of the production, establishment, evolution, and maintenance of any effective mode (or modes) of critique and/or resistance. More precisely, we address the following questions:

- (1) To what extent might contemporary K-12 education be understood in terms of a "blending" of surveillance and spectacle? To what benefits?
- (2) Within what contexts and via what mechanisms does this merging occur?
- (3) What are the potential practical consequences of this arrangement? and
- (4) How might SBER (as a case study) illuminate the fusion of surveillance and spectacle in terms of cause(s), effect(s), context(s), mechanism(s), consequence(s), critique(s), and resistance(s)?

### **Image and Education**

Increasingly conceptualizations of public schooling rest upon the influence of dominant and dominating *images* rather than on any more authentic understanding of the complex realities of classroom life. Based upon what we see in the movies and on television and what is presented within the mainstream "news" media, we create our interpretations of what is, what was, and what should (or will) be. This especially holds true in the ever more powerful socio-cultural-political-economic-pedagogical settings of

SBER (e.g., Vinson & Ross, 2001; Vinson, Gibson, & Ross, 2001), most clearly, perhaps, within the current move toward high-stakes standardized testing, a collective regime in which both the cultural knowledge and the behavior of students, teachers, administrators, classrooms, schools, and districts are not only (in)validated but also disciplined. In sum, the convergence of a number of phenomena related to image and high-stakes testing, including various means by which scholars might seek critical and practical insight, the mechanisms by which image and high-stakes testing both reflect and are reflected by contemporary societal circumstances, the enforcing consequences of such actualities, and the techniques by which such statuses might be resisted define the scope of this paper's efforts.

We recognize first a certain "hegemony of the image" that mirrors and is mirrored by--made possible by, is reinforcing of and reinforced by--several developments in contemporary US society, specifically within the realms of technology and globalization. It is, for instance, consistent with the advent of the possibility of "24-7" access to cameras, in terms both of *seeing* and of *being seen*. This emerges, for example, in the proliferation of Webcams, around-the-clock broadcast and cable (and satellite and Internet) TV, state-sponsored privacy-monitoring (e.g., the FBI's "Carnivore"), the multiplication of media outlets, and "reality" television. Moreover, it is constructed within an economic environment of conglomeration and oligopolification, a setting in which media giants merge their abilities to even more strongly control access to both technology and the (re)production of, contact with, and manipulation of public images (e.g., AOL and Time Warner).

Contemporary regimes of high-stakes testing must be understood within such contexts, as mutually (re)inforcing and as specific instances of the hegemonic dominance of media images. For example, how many times do individuals and groups determine the "effectiveness" of particular schools by relying on reported test scores--*images*--whether or not they have any first-hand information on what actually occurs in any unique and concrete school environment? Moreover, as public education increasingly comes to dominate US political discourse [e.g., Jones, 2001], to what extent do such standardization policies normalize the cultural and behavioral interests of the economically and culturally powerful, especially as "liberals" and "conservatives" continue to merge around a singular idealized view of schooling (e.g., President Bush's "No Child Left Behind"; see Vinson, 1999; Vinson & Ross, 2001)?

As society's rulers coalesce and more generally use both surveillance (the disciplinary observation of the many by the few) and spectacle (the disciplinary observation of the few by the many) as conjoint means of controlling individuals and groups, high-stakes testing represents not only the plane on which the school-society link is played out, but also a reinforcing context within which the interests of the wealthy and powerful work to legitimize what counts as both knowledge and appropriate behavior, especially as national education policy continues to be determined by the representatives of elite cultural and economic ideologies (e.g., in post-*A Nation at Risk* commissions comprised of key corporate leaders [e.g., IBM's Lou Gerstner], union officials [e.g., NEA's Bob Chase and AFT's Sandra Feldman], and politicians [e.g., the National Governors'

Association] convened for the purposes of determining the *nature and meanings* of US public schooling). In effect, such powerful elites control not only public/media images of contemporary education, but also how they are (re)produced vis-à-vis the contents of "official knowledge" and "proper" pedagogical behavior (e.g., Ross, 2000; see also Business Roundtable, 2001; Department of Education, 1990, 1991; Dianda, McKeon, & Kapinus, n.d.).

What are the mutual relationships between images of public schooling *and* the operations of high-stakes testing, particularly regarding the degree to which both work to enforce, control, and discipline both cultural knowledge and behavior? To what extent do these images seek to "normalize" the interests of the economically and politically powerful as "natural" or "correct"? Drawing on the vast literatures surrounding, for example, the notion of *image* (e.g., Barthes, 1977 [on the "rhetoric of the image"]; Bakhtin, 1981, 1990 [on "chronotope"]; Boorstin, 1961/1992 [on the "pseudo-event"]; Baudrillard, 1995 [on "simulacra"]; and McLuhan, 1964/1994 [on the idea that "the medium is the message"]), *surveillance* (e.g., Foucault, 1975/1979), *spectacle* (e.g., Debord, 1967/1995), and high-stakes standardized testing (e.g., Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Ohanian, 1999), we pursue: (1) the relationships between images of schooling and the contemporary societal merging of surveillance and spectacle; (2) the means and mechanisms by which such relationships work to enforce certain dominant and dominating norms; (3) the school-society relationship vis-à-vis high-stakes standardized testing; (4) the consequences of such conditions (e.g., regarding architecture [schools as casinos?] and pedagogy ["impersonal" "distance education"]), and (5) various mechanisms by which such circumstances might be resisted and/or transcended (e.g., Guy Debord's conceptualizations of *dérive* and *detournement*), including in terms of how they indicate the various problematics of everyday life (e.g., de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1968/1971, 1947/1992; Perlman, 1969; Vaneigem, 1967/1972).

## **Understanding the Contemporary Scene: Standardization & Image<sup>2</sup>**

The contemporary state of the school curriculum--its appearance-of-uniformity-appearance-of-diversity paradox (e.g., Vinson & Ross, 2001)--reflects in part two recent and evolving socio-pedagogical trends: (1) the contradictory commitment to both "standardization" *and* "diversity" and (2) the increasingly important convergence (or at least coexistence) of "spectacle" and "surveillance." On some level both work to create the conditions by and within which schooling broadly reflects and is reflected by the characteristics (i.e., political, economic, social, cultural) of the larger (global) society.

That those who run public schooling continue their call for "higher standards," "high-stakes testing," "accountability," and "competition" while simultaneously praising the merits of "individual" and "cultural" differences should surprise no one, and in fact mirrors and is mirrored by not only the current empirical pedagogical debates surrounding uniformity and diversity but also prevailing US societal conditions--especially those reflected *economically* vis-à-vis global, state-sponsored, corporate, "infotech" capitalism and *politically* in terms of an apparent fusion or de-evolution of political independence toward a bland, insincere, uniform, and stultifying "centrism" (see,

e.g., the "New Democrat," the "Compassionate Conservative," the Blair-Clinton project of the "Third Way," etc.). Taken together, these contexts produce an uneasy and ultimately false coalition of *sameness*, with the politically powerful claiming to promote the common ("mainstream") good while at the same time their corporate/financial allies and supporters pursue profit-seeking policies at the expense of authentic economic opportunity, social justice, meaningful democracy, the environment, and human rights. No wonder cynicism, "voter apathy," and electoral mistrust. With little real difference between the dominant Democratic and Republican Parties (see, for instance, the "lesser of two evils" mentality among many members of the citizenry and the tag-team effort to marginalize third parties), and with their joint endorsement by and of the elite corporate hierarchy, there ultimately is little or no room indeed for the less wealthy, the less powerful, and the less well-connected.

Clearly, *educational* leaders, including those responsible for establishing, maintaining, and reforming(?) curriculum and instruction are to some extent beholden to the demands of multiple political interests (including those of *government* leaders who, in turn, depend on and benefit from the interests of the economically and culturally powerful, for example in terms of campaign contributions). Yet, these same educational leaders are influenced by (and thus beholden to) a range of additional constituencies. These include, among others, parents and students, teachers, scholars, community leaders, activists, and residents of local neighborhoods, many of whom hold little concern for the politically and economically privileged. That these various groups and individuals present and experience a vastly more diverse reality than that of those who represent the US/global corporate-state is an understatement. Yet it explains, in part, the odd and conflicting dual commitments of today's public school managers, existing as they do between the two worlds of elitist-socioeconomic-competitive-standardization and the everyday experiences of grassroots community activism and pluralistic cultural diversity. But perhaps more importantly it hints at the necessary extent to which this paradoxical state of affairs can only be understood contextually.

The move toward curriculum standardization can be seen, of course, in the myriad "official" policy statements and content documents created and put forth by an array of professional academic organizations, for example those which seek control over the meaning or "nature" of social studies education--that domain of curriculum work historically charged with "democratic" and "citizenship" education (e.g., Center for Civic Education, 1991, 1994; Geography Education Standards Project, 1994; National Center for History in the Schools, 1994a, 1994b; National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 1981; NCSS Curriculum Standards Task Force, 1994; National Council on Economic Education, 1997). Though it signifies an attempt to mask any real paradigmatic conflict or struggle, ironically SBER (here, especially, curriculum standards and high-stakes standardized testing) may instead reflect a multiplicity of tensions and confusions over the relative place and meaning of not only the range of constituent school disciplines but also fundamental questions relative to purpose, content, instructional methodologies, and assessment (i.e., What is it that citizens "need" to know? How do/can they come to know it? and How can we be sure they have learned it?). As such, this issue--standardization vs. diversity--may in fact be related to and encompass an assortment of

other continuous yet equally contentious and relevant issues in terms of curriculum design and development, including the degree to which curricula should be constructed at the "grassroots" level or "hierarchically," the extent to which *purpose* or *testing* should "drive" curriculum and instruction, the relative merits of "progressive" and "traditional" orientations, and the overall pedagogical balance between "discipline-centeredness" (or "disciplinarity") and "a/anti/interdisciplinarity."

At present, this move toward curriculum standardization represents the dominant, status quo viewpoint and its underlying and foundational aims (e.g., Levin, 1998; Tucker & Coddling, 1998; for a general overview of national standards as an issue, see, e.g., Wolf, 1998). Its fundamental features include formal and official curriculum standards frameworks, of course, but also a hypercommitment in favor of high-stakes standardized testing and a one-size-fits-all view of classroom/school conformity. As indicated above, this perspective is manifested vis-à-vis a host of policy statements developed at multiple levels, including the national (e.g., Department of Education, 1991; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the state (Finn & Petrilli, 2000), and the professional academic organization (e.g., NCSS Curriculum Standards Task Force, 1994). It grows out of the current "liberal-conservative consensus" among politicians, corporate leaders, the news media, and educational policy makers (e.g., apparent *liberals* such as Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997; and *conservatives* such as Ravitch, 2000) that both "higher standards" (read SBER-curriculum standardization and high-stakes standardized testing) and greater "accountability" are *essential* to the well-being and strengthening of US public schools (note that both major party candidates supported "stronger accountability" and more standardized testing during the 2000 presidential campaign). It is grounded in formal reports such as *A National at Risk* and reflected, endorsed, and expanded in works of typically conservative (culturally and economically) scholarship (e.g., Hirsch, 1987, 1996; Ravitch, 2000; Ravitch & Finn, 1987; see also Mathison, Ross, & Vinson, 2001; Vinson & Ross, 2001).

Though dominant and indicative of a powerfully elitist consensus, the recent move toward SBER must and can only be understood contextually and against certain overlapping and contiguous socio-cultural, economic, and political currents, including changes in technology, the advent of state-sponsored global-corporate capitalism, and the "triumph" of the US "one party system" (e.g., Business Roundtable, 2001; Magdoff, Wood, & McNally, 1999). More precisely (and significantly), we must understand that SBER reflects and is reflected by such contexts as they produce/construct/create and are produced/constructed/created by a characteristic feature of 21st century life in the US: namely, the imperatives (in terms both of *desire* and *opportunity*) of *seeing and being seen* (i.e., both *how* we are seen and being seen and *that* we are seeing and being seen; one might consider related notions of the "cult of celebrity," Warhol's "fifteen minutes of fame," and Orwell's "Big Brother"). These imperatives induce a clear disciplinarity, a conformity, and a perceived necessity to standardize/become standardized.

So, specifically, what are these various contexts and changes? In terms of technology (*here* a socio-cultural change) one might consider, again, several fairly recent developments, including the advent of 24 hour per day/7 day per week television

"broadcast" via hundreds of cable/satellite channels, the Internet, and the proliferation of such innovations as Webcams--making it possible, of course, both to see and be seen simultaneously and continuously. Economically, within the environment of globalized capitalism, see for instance how daily, around-the-clock updates reveal the scope to which stock prices increase or decrease for financial powerhouses regardless of profit--image here apparently matters more than performance. Similarly, note how the current race to the "middle" waged between the major political parties (e.g., year 2000 Democratic and Republican presidential candidates Bush and Gore) depends less on any authentic issue advocacy and more on how they are *seen* (and how they themselves see things). In effect, this leads to the establishment of a one-party system in which powerful Republicans seek to appease their Right wing (e.g., Patrick J. Buchanan, the Christian Coalition) while simultaneously staking a claim in the "center" (aka "compassionate conservatism"), and powerful Democrats do the same with respect to their Left wing (e.g., Ralph Nader, environmentalists; see the "New Democrat"). As a result, real difference is marginalized and traditional allies (e.g., Nader via the Democrats and Buchanan via the Republicans) are forced out and compelled to accept an existence *viewed* as extremist and non-mainstream. This would be, perhaps, not so problematic were it based less on *mere* image (i.e., polling data, focus group results, PR, advertising) and more on a heartfelt dedication to significant issues and differences. For both sides, however, the goal seems to be less one of defending and promoting the collective social good, and instead one of ensuring first *that* they are in fact seen, and second that *how* they are seen (Democrats *and* Republicans) is as "conservative" but not "too" conservative and "liberal" but not "too" liberal.



At heart, these contexts--socio-cultural, economic, political--(re)establish the priority of sight--the "gaze"--as a mechanism of discipline and social control. More specifically, they create and are created by the conditions within which the convergence of "surveillance" and "spectacle" occurs, and establish in part the setting for what might be called the "new disciplinarity," a mode of often subtle coercion grounded in the extreme potentials of continual seeing and being seen, of both surveillance *and* spectacle.

For Foucault, surveillance represented a disciplinary power built out of the (eventually automatic and invisible) possibilities of the many being visible to the few (a la the architecture of the modern prison created according to the design of Bentham's Panopticon). At present, elements of surveillance exist in such features of society as "Nannycams," "Carnivore" (the FBI's e-mail-tapping framework), and "Echelon" (the government's [NSA's] program for monitoring virtually all worldwide telecommunications).

As a further case in point, *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported on how the FBI, INS, IRS, and other federal agencies circumvent the Privacy Act of 1974 and various



agency policies to collect information on millions of Americans (Simpson, 2001). Note that following the surveillance scandals of the 1960s and 1970s, in which it was revealed that the FBI compiled files on Vietnam War protesters, civil-rights activists, and thousands of others on an apparently random basis, Congress adopted laws that discouraged the collection of data on presumably law-abiding citizens. Moreover, the FBI's own *Manual of Investigations, Operations, and Guidelines* states that "only that information about an individual which is relevant and necessary to accomplish a purpose authorized by statute, executive order of the president, or by the Constitution is to be recorded in FBI files." *The Wall Street Journal* describes the agency's "end run" around these guidelines in which it outsources its "Big Brother" activities to private companies like ChoicePoint--the same corporation that supplied faulty data to the state of Florida which led to thousands of Floridians, primarily African Americans, being purged from the voter rolls for the November 2000 election. According to the *Journal's* report, 20,000 IRS agents have access to outside data on taxpayer assets, driving histories, phone numbers, and other personal statistics compiled by ChoicePoint, which claims to have information on nearly every American with a credit card. FBI agents use a password to log on to a customized web site (www.cpfbi.com, "ChoicePoint Online for the FBI") that links them with privately owned data about millions of US citizens (Simpson, 2001).

Spectacle, conversely, presupposes a mode of disciplinarity based on the processes of the few being visible to the many (a la the ancient architectures of theaters, circuses, and temples). Yet according to philosopher Guy Debord (1967/1995) in *The Society of the Spectacle*, it describes contemporary society as well, especially in that:

The whole of life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation. (p. 12)

Further:

The spectacle is not [merely] a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the *permanent presence* of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself. [Moreover, the] language of the spectacle is composed of signs of the dominant organization of production--signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that organization. (pp. 12-13; see also Bracken, 1997; Debord, 1988/1990; Jappe, 1993/1999)

Though perhaps not as familiar as Foucault's (1975/1979) interpretation of "surveillance" and "discipline," the concept of spectacle has gained increased acceptance, notably with respect to aesthetics and "film studies" (e.g., Eilenberg, 1975; Matthews, 1975; Polan, 1986), although it has acquired some level of attention in educational theory as well (e.g.,

Coleman, 1987; Roman, 1996; Senese & Page, 1995).

What makes today unique, however, is the merging or at least coexistence of the two, making it *possible* and among some people (even) *desirable* to see and be seen continuously and simultaneously (i.e., because of the Internet and cable/satellite/wireless technologies). In the extreme, the potential becomes more real that society will (or at least *can*) be understood as nothing but a medium through which everybody *can* watch everybody all the time and across and throughout all space--nothing more than a totality of images and spectacular relationships. Standardization/SBER in fact represents the extent to which this setting occurs, and presents a case not only by which the surveillance-spectacle merger can be understood but also one that can itself be understood against and according to surveillance and spectacle. An example here of the workings of surveillance is the official "monitoring" of testing procedures; an example of spectacle occurs in the media reporting of test scores. Both, in the end, privilege image over authenticity and work as a means of social control, political/economic dominance, and conformity.

Although curriculum standardization represents the dominant, consensus view, and granting its status as a major public policy issue (e.g., Johnson & [with] Duffett, 1999), it has not remained without its share of critics (e.g., Kohn, 2000; Mathison, Ross, & Vinson, 2001; Ohanian, 1999; Ross, 2000; Vinson, 1999; Vinson, Gibson, & Ross, 2001), most of whom have sought other avenues, including those comprising the notions of *diversity*. In many cases, these critiques have emphasized the nature of SBER as *oppressive* (e.g., drawing on, for example, Freire, 1970 and Young, 1992), *antidemocratic* (e.g., drawing on Dewey, 1916/1966 and Herman & Chomsky, 1988), and in contradiction with the demands of the *collective* good (for a discussion of curriculum standards as oppressive, antidemocratic, and anti-collective good, see, e.g., Vinson, 2001).

### **SBER, Surveillance, & Spectacle**

SBER--especially its high-stakes standardized testing component--exists within the complex intersection of surveillance and spectacle. The result is a situation, or set of situations, consistent with those characteristics of the larger society. Although the consequences of such a framework are critical, we consider in this section simply the extent to which, and the means by which, the SBER-surveillance-spectacle association occurs. We do, however, explore the potential consequences of this peculiar and somewhat inhuman condition below.

High-stakes testing represents a multifaceted setting of surveillance, in terms both of behavior and formal school knowledge. As both "gatekeeper" and (perhaps) "doorcloser," it works to ensure first that certain content is being "covered" (and thus *theoretically* "learned"). The "or-else" effect establishes the priority of that particular content (information, facts, skills, values, and so on) as well as the inferiority, unworthiness, and marginalization of other contents (and knowledges). It operates as a "checks and balances" system of observation that seeks to privilege the dominant and formally created

curriculum and related modes of instruction. It enables, in other words, curriculum managers to "see" whether and "how well" a prescribed program is being followed. Moreover, it works within a panoptic order such that teachers "survey" students, administrators survey teachers and students, and school boards (and other public officials) survey all of them, each in successive and more indirect rounds of disciplinarity. A la Foucault, the model attains a certain automaticity such that regardless of whether one knows that an administrator is actually in a given hallway peering through a classroom window, the possibility always exists that he or she might be--thus, the system practically runs itself. Behavior is regulated similarly, in that test questions demand specific instructional orientations (teacher-centered, behavioral, etc.). As applied at the level of the body (individual as well as group), testing represents the managerial effort to mandate a precisely organized regime of pedagogical activity, a narrowing link between what can be known and, ultimately, what can be done.

This regime becomes spectacular as the relative position of the observer changes, such that it is not a single principal surveying a school or a superintendent a district, but a larger viewing public using its broader and collective gaze as a disciplinary mechanism. At the heart of this process rests various news and information media outlets that publish and publicize images of schooling such as test scores. Newspaper readers and TV news viewers represent a public "observing" schools, one that is intent on, moreover, influencing schools to perform--or conform--in a particular way or toward a particular ideal. The repercussions, of course, are great, affecting such factors as property values, reputation, the expansion of employment opportunities, and educational resources. This spectacularization of teaching and learning, SBER, has the circular effect of strengthening the conditions of surveillance: As the public views test scores as either too low or contributing to some "achievement gap," they pressure school and other public officials to do something. These officials, in turn, intensify their (and certain allies', including the business community and teachers' unions) control over curriculum, instruction, and assessment vis-à-vis greater and expanded degrees of surveillance (all of which the public "watches" to see whether or not it is effective--i.e., whether politicians and administrators deserve their continued support). This leaves schools, classrooms, teachers, and students in the middle, caught within a spiraling surveillance-spectacle cycle. Discipline and conformity increase, or else no promotion, graduation, funding, and so on. The connection between school knowledge and economics magnifies. Standardization intensifies, presenting a paradox given the contemporary commitment of US schools to democracy, equality, fairness, opportunity, and diversity.

### **Tests Scores and the Illusion of Reform: Two Examples**

A further irony stems from the fact that the entire structure of SBER develops purely on the basis of image. Both media and public, via test scores, create understandings grounded not in what actually occurs in schools and classrooms--nor on what teachers and students actually do--but on how this all is represented. Further, those responsible for surveillance--often located outside of schools--draw their conclusions about performance or achievement or effectiveness not on what takes place per se, but on whether standardized test scores rise or fall. Higher scores, all is well; lower scores, all is not

well--regardless of the authentic actualities and experiences of school and classroom life. Two examples, Texas and Chicago, illustrate the role of image (i.e., the [re]production of test scores) in the convergence of surveillance and spectacle within the context of SBER.

**Texas.** The representation of education reform efforts in Texas provides the first example. George W. Bush and other SBER advocates (both Democrat and Republican) have claimed that the introduction of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test in 1990-1991 produced a miraculous turnaround in educational achievement in the Lone Star State, reducing dropouts, increasing student achievement and reducing the test score gaps among white, African American, and Latino/a students. Recent studies have raised serious questions about the validity of the reported test score gains in Texas.

A study by Haney (2000) found that the TAAS actually contributes both to retention in grade and dropping out. He reports that only 50% of minority students in Texas have been progressing from grade 9 to high school graduation since the initiation of the TAAS program (and evidence suggests that slightly fewer than 70% of all students in Texas actually graduated from high school in the 1990s). Across the past two decades there has also been a steady rise in the rates at which African American and Latino/a students in Texas have been required to repeat grade 9; by the late 1990s nearly 30% were "failing" grade 9. Grade retention rates for African Americans and Latinos/as in Texas are nearly twice as high as for white students.

As test scores on the TAAS have soared, researchers have failed to find similar improvements in other, more reliable, measures of Texas students' achievement (e.g., SAT scores and the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP). Indeed, as measured by performance on the SAT, the achievement of Texas high school students has not improved since the early 1990s; SAT-Math scores have deteriorated relative to students nationally, reports Haney. A study by the Rand Corporation (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000) found that the dramatic reading and math gains indicated by TAAS results were not reflected in the NAEP. Instead, NAEP results indicate only small increases, similar to those observed nationwide. Moreover, according to the NAEP the test score gap between whites and students of color in Texas is not only very large but also growing.

There is an expanding consensus among researchers that the "miracle" test score increases on the TAAS are the result of both intensive test-prep activities that undermine substantive teaching and learning (McNeil, 2000) and the increasing number of students excluded from taking the test (Haney, 2000). McNeil reports that many schools in Texas are devoting tremendous amounts of time to highly specific "skills" intended to improve students' scores on the TAAS. After several years in classes where "reading" assignments were increasingly TAAS practice materials, children were unable to read a novel intended for students two years younger. Haney reports that in 1999 Texas tested 48% of its special education students, down from 62% in 1998--that is an additional 37,751 students not taking the test. Those exemptions include 13% of Latino/a, 12% of African American, and only 5% of white students. Haney found that a substantial portion of increases in TAAS pass rates in the 1990s is due to such exclusions which prompts him

to conclude "the gains on TAAS and the unbelievable decreases in dropouts during the 1990s are more illusory than real. The Texas 'miracle' is more hat than cattle."

**Chicago.** Chicago Public Schools (CPS), touted by SBER advocates as a reform model, provides a second example of how the structure of SBER is based largely upon a mere and distorted image, a lie rooted in the very power of the surveillance-spectacle gaze. Schmidt (2000), for example, found that CPS's "standards and accountability" campaign, which relies on the use of high-stakes tests, functions to decrease the number of students of color ever making it into high school. For although CPS reported that student enrollments increased by 20,000 between the 1995-1996 and 1999-2000 school years, the number of students making it to the high school level actually *decreased*, at least in part as a result of SBER/high-stakes testing policies. In addition, although the number of African American students increased in Chicago elementary schools the number in high school decreased by nearly 10,000 (a 16% drop). And while the overall number of "Hispanic" students in CPS dramatically increased in this period (up 18,000), the number of Hispanic students in high school increased by a total of only 700.

What does it mean to be the "best school in Chicago?" *The New York Times* reported that Northside Preparatory was "Chicago's best" high school, ignoring the fact that it is also Chicago's whitest high school and that the school admits students only if their standardized test scores are above 80% of their student peers. But as Schmidt (2000) also reports, shifting populations and then taking credit for test score gains is "an urban [schools'] trick of long standing." Jean Baptiste Beaubien Elementary School, for example, has been identified as well as one of Chicago's "success stories" as the percentage of its students scoring at or above national norms increased from 39.6% in 1995 to 77% in 2000. But as Schmidt (2000) shows, a closer look at these gains demonstrates their correspondence with a similar *decrease* in scores at Luther Burbank Elementary School. For in reality, both the increase and decrease resulted from a single action--the transplanting of 300 students in the "regional gifted student program" from Burbank to Beaubien schools. The bottom line, as Schmidt argues, is that SBER is "a smokescreen behind which growing inequities are being hidden" even as CPS paradoxically is represented as the model of urban school reform.

### **Some Consequences: Alienation & Architecture**

Many of the potential consequences of the SBER-surveillance-spectacle conglomerate are already well known, especially those related to mandated high-stakes standardized testing. As critics such as Haney (2000), Kohn (2000), McNeil (2000), and Ohanian (1999), among others, have pointed out, under such a regime both curriculum and instruction narrow, innovation declines, "achievement gaps" expand, and (perhaps most ironically these days) more children are in fact "left behind." And, as we have already pointed out, connections between formal school knowledge and the economy generally solidify (often via the involvement with politicians and educational managers of corporate and financial leaders; see, e.g., Ollman, 2001). As we also noted earlier, there are, of course, further risks to the extent that SBER (at least curriculum standards) may be oppressive, antidemocratic, and anti-collective good.

### *Alienation*

Perhaps most clearly, SBER, and schools and education under capitalism more generally, must be understood fully as products and practices of alienation.

What occurs in schools can only be understood by examining the conditions by which certain practices are legitimated or delegitimated (excluded). SBER, as we have shown, is both a product and practice rooted in real social relations that are mediated, in part, by image (i.e., test scores). Marx (1988) argues in *The German Ideology* that

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as idea; hence the relationships which make the one class the ruling class, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (p. 64)

SBER is the primary contemporary means by which schools remain agents of domination--the means by which, as Althusser (1971) suggested, "the school teaches 'know-how,' but in [a] form which ensures the subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'" (p. 133). As with other aspects of commodity-capitalism, with regard to schools the social relations among people are not regulated *directly*, but *indirectly* through things, including here such things as mandated curriculum and, most particularly, test scores.

As Marx (1986) explained, we experience alienation when we are separated from our own activity, the products of our work, and fellow human beings.

Alienation is apparent not only in the fact that my means of life belong to someone else, that my desires are the unattainable possession of someone else, but that everything is something different from itself, that my activity is something else and finally (and this is the case for the capitalist) that an inhuman power rules over everything. (p. 151)

Marx repeatedly insisted that alienation appears not only in the result, but also in the process of production, within the productive activity itself. In his description of what constitutes alienation of labor, Marx could just as easily been describing the work of students and teachers under the SBER regime dominating schools today.

First, that the work is *external* to the worker, that is not part of his [*sic*] nature, and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not

develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labour*. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. (Marx, 1964, pp. 122, 124-125)

This powerlessness, lack of agency, and absence of subjectivity can plainly be found in schools. Block (2000) argues that despite the rhetoric that schools are community based, capitalist schools

must be viewed as always and already products of alienation. Hence may arise the possibility of national curriculum and standards despite the notion that schools function in and for the communities in which they are situated and in which and by which they are formed. Schools as institutions do not then belong to either these communities, to the populace which they mean to serve, or to the population which functions within them.



There is increasing evidence, for example, that the pressure and anxiety associated with high-stakes testing is unhealthy for children, literally making kids sick. A recent report by the Alliance for Childhood (2001) includes a description of state test day for third graders by a Massachusetts school nurse: "My office is filled with children with headaches and stomachaches . . . one [student] was beside himself on the morning of the test--he could not stop sobbing." Roy Applegate, president of the California Association of School Psychologists described "nerve-racked" students, parents, and principals suffering from excessive anxiety related to high-stakes

tests. "I observed a group of low-performing students being given a pep talk by the principal," Applegate is quoted as saying. "As I looked at the faces of the seventh- and eight-grade students, most appeared terrified, depressed, or disinterested in the principal's words. I think the principal was terrified as well." Increasingly school counselors are reporting anxiety-related symptoms as a result of high-stakes tests, including sleep disorders, drug use, avoidance behaviors, attendance problems and "acting out," all of which degrades test performance and inhibits authentic learning.

In 1999, Boston College researchers asked fourth-, eighth- and 10th-graders to draw pictures detailing their thoughts about Massachusetts' standardized exam (Wheelock, Bebell, & Haney, 2000). About one-fifth of the students expressed positive feelings about the test, but 40 percent of the kids had negative reactions, ranging from anxiety to despair. One student sketched himself sitting in a growing pool of his own sweat, while another offered this assessment: "After the first two days of tests, your fingers and your mind hurt." The researchers found that students are further panicked by the intense hype and scrutiny surrounding high-stakes tests. Children are stressed not just by the test but by all the public discussion of the consequences of the test. The fear and anxiety have been exacerbated by the test-mania accompanying SBER.



In his analysis of everyday life in capitalist society, Perlman (1972) said that "the task of capitalist ideology is to maintain the veil which keeps people from seeing that their own activities reproduce the form of their daily life" (p. 3). He argued that the transformation of living activity into capital (alienation) takes place *through* things, but it is not carried out *by* things. Therefore, things that are products of human activities (such as test scores and curriculum standards) *seem* to be active agents because "activities and contacts are established for through" them, and because people's activities are not transparent to them, they confuse the mediating object with the cause.

Perlman presents the story of a "fetish worshipper" to illustrate this point.

When a hunter wearing an amulet downs a deer with a stone, he may consider the amulet an essential "factor" in downing the deer and even in providing the deer as an object to be downed. If he is a responsible and well-educated fetish worshipper, he will devote his attention to his amulet, nourishing it with care and admiration; in order to improve the material conditions of his life, he will improve the way he wears his fetish, not the way he throws the stone; in a bind, he may even send his amulet to "hunt" for him. His own daily activities are not transparent to him; when he eats well, he fails to see that it is his own action of throwing the stone, and not the action of the amulet, that provided his food; when he starves, he fails to see that it is his own action of worshipping the amulet instead of hunting, and not the wrath of his fetish, that causes his starvation. (p. 8)

The fetishism of commodities, money, and, in the case of SBER, test scores as well as the mystification of one's daily activities and the "religion of everyday life" that attributes living activity to inanimate things has its origin in the character of social relations under



capitalism. As Perlman notes we do in fact relate to each other through things--the fetish is the occasion for which people act collectively, and through which they reproduce their activity. But the fetish itself does *not* perform the activity.

### *Architecture*

There are, of course, consequences more specifically connected to the association of and between surveillance and spectacle. The spiral or circular (if not convergent) and mutually (re)productive character of the relationship, for instance, helps ensure (1) that both in fact are strengthened and (2) that (therefore) school discipline and enforcement (in terms both of content and behavior) are tightened and subsequently made more effective. This is fundamental to our case.

Yet with respect to the quote by Foucault (1975/1979) with which we began this work, a framing perspective, a somewhat different and unique potentiality becomes all the more apparent. It involves the necessities, forms, functions, evolutions, impacts, and meanings of *architecture*. Though the scope of this study extends principally only to schooling, certainly some of our conclusions apply as well to the broader society, especially to the extent that the broader society contextualizes and reflects, and is reflected and contextualized by, contemporary public education.

In some ways, the present spectacle-surveillance complex, with its associated contextual components of technological change and so on, makes traditional modes of architecture irrelevant. As Foucault discovered, specific modes of disciplinarity required or encouraged specific modes of architecture (e.g., spectacle--temples, theatres, coliseums; surveillance--the panopticonic prison [etc.]). But the modern evolution of observational technology changes all this. In fact, it creates and in part is created by at least two new modes of "architecture"--what might be called "teletecture" and "cosmotecture." The archetypes here are not the theater or the prison, but are instead, respectively though often mutually, the *Internet* and the *casino*. Teletecture represents the demolition of architecture per se. It is a disciplinary mechanism that requires no walls--or in today's slang, no bricks and mortar--because the possibilities of its gaze-based regulation are complete and absolute--without boundaries. With the advent of the Internet (and high-speed digital and wireless connections), Webcams, 24 hour per day access to the media, again the potential exists for a disciplinary means of control in that everyone *can* watch everyone all the time. Wireless technologies make particular and fixed space unnecessary, so that *any* available space will do. The implications here for education suggest an expanded role for "distance" learning and a reduced role for the historical setting of the school, no longer required, of course, by the disciplinary demands of education (including those relative to SBER).

Cosmotecture presents a distinct yet related state of affairs in which gigantic buildings are created in order to regulate the behaviors of many individuals engaged in multiple activities--all under the gaze of cameras. Although, perhaps, today the casino best represents this spectacle-surveillance hybrid mode of gaze-based discipline, other examples might include the modern international airport and the "mega" shopping mall.

In effect, each represents a miniature and self-enclosed world--a cosmos--where the activities of the many can be seen by the few, *and* where the activities of a few can be seen by the many. (Interestingly, we understand that a Website exists where surfers can view the operations of casino surveillance.)

Granting that both telectecture and cosmoteecture present the merging or coexistence of spectacle and surveillance, they do nonetheless raise a number of interesting questions relative to the relationships between schools and broader societies. Most directly related to schooling, they suggest the possibility (which may or may not be feasible or likely) that powerful individuals and groups could standardize both knowledge and behavior without the need for any direct (unmediated by technology), person-to-person, human interaction (for good or for bad).

In addition, though, and maybe more problematic to some people, this spectacle-surveillance alliance signals a new relationship between *voyeurism* and *exhibitionism* (e.g., reality TV, Webcams, *Jerry Springer*, electronic eavesdropping, and so on). In such instances, groups and individuals expose themselves (to some extent as *images*, as *non-realities*), blurring the public and private, while simultaneously (although even this no longer need apply given Tivo and various recording and "downloading" technologies) other groups and individuals observe them solely for the purposes of *entertainment*--frequently built upon an underlying set of *economic* relationships. Questions arise, however, relative to the degree to which such relationships are voluntary, "honest," and "human." A certain tension exists, in fact, between a willing and an unwilling acquiescence, not all too different, perhaps, from the implicit and explicit deal made vis-à-vis institutional security cameras in which we sacrifice a certain degree of privacy for a certain degree of public safety. The surrounding issues, though, are certainly far from settled.

## Resistance

The merging of surveillance and spectacle presents clear and unique obstacles for any sort of critical and pedagogical resistance, particularly as each (alone and in combination) has infiltrated everyday life. It (obviously) requires in part both a resistance to surveillance and a resistance to spectacle, and implies that we take seriously more traditional forms such as those available via the political process and those accessible via local grassroots organization. Modern discipline, following Foucault, suggests, for example, a continuing struggle against any and all concentrations of power. In practice, this can be observed on the part of teachers and students who have boycotted standardized testing and/or have refused to participate in its encompassing mechanisms (e.g., some students have worked to "sabotage" the system by "faking" scores or by declining to "play" the tests by "opting out"). Such actions, of course, bring with them their own certain and unique risks (see Rossi, 2000).

Debord and his *Situationist International* (e.g., Knabb, 1981) colleagues created specific revolutionary techniques grounded in a variety of theoretical-practical understandings of spectacle and its effects. One, the *dérive*, literally "drifting," involves

"a technique of transient passage through various ambiances [and] entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll" (Debord, 1981, p. 50). It is "A mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society" ("Definitions," 1981, p. 45).

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the *dérive* point of view cities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones. (Debord, 1981, p. 50)<sup>3</sup>

The extent to which "drifting," the *dérive*, offers practical resistance techniques pertinent to schooling and SBER is an open question. It may offer some insight into *how* to opt out, boycott, and refuse, however. Psychogeography, as it were, may offer a rather novel means for understanding the effects of SBER, particularly high-stakes testing, as it exists and is practiced in its present form.

The second of Debord's techniques is *detournement*, defined as "the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble. The two fundamental laws of *detournement* are the loss of importance of each detoured autonomous element--which may go so far as to lose its original sense completely--and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect" ("Detournement as Negation and Prelude," 1981, p. 55). It is:

Short for: *detournement* of preexisting aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of these means. In a more primitive sense, *detournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres. ("Definitions," 1981, pp. 45-46)

What might be the meaning or the effect of "detourning" test scores or newspaper headlines about them? Of destroying--negating--their old meaning and creating a new one? Or, similarly, of taking images ostensibly about something other than test scores and "reworking" them, perhaps by changing captions, slogans, and so on? *Detournement* presents, perhaps, one of the more direct and possible challenges to the hegemony of the image, including that presented within the framework of SBER. Both *dérive* and *detournement* imply the dangers and possibilities of challenging standardization, testing, image, surveillance, and spectacle as each intrudes upon the human-ness of everyday and experiential life.

## Summary and Conclusions

Such issues as surveillance, spectacle, and the related notion of "privacy" recently have gained an increased degree of notoriety (e.g., Calvert, 2000; Rosen, 2000), though in education Foucauldian perspectives have dominated (e.g., Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). Still, there has been at least some discussion related to the idea of spectacle (e.g., Coleman, 1987; Roman, 1996; Senese & Page, 1995). With the continued evolution of audio, visual, and "virtual" technologies, however, we expect an even greater emphasis not only upon spectacle, but on surveillance and their interconnections as well.

Further, especially given President Bush's commitment to testing and the ongoing liberal-conservative consensus around "higher standards," the issue of SBER seems not to be going away. Hopefully in this paper we have at least highlighted some of the characteristics of disciplinarity within the current setting of surveillance, spectacle, and surveillance-spectacle. Moreover, we hope to have suggested a few of the contexts and mechanisms by which this setting has emerged and by which it is maintained, its consequences effected, and its powers reinforced. Finally, we hope that we have in some way illuminated SBER as an exemplar case of the merging of surveillance and spectacle and as an image-bound inducement for new modalities of resistance.

Of course, we encourage further investigation, especially theoretical extensions of our work--optimally, forms of inquiry drawn from a range of related disciplines--but also empirical studies into the causes, effects, contexts, mechanisms, and consequences of SBER, surveillance, and spectacle, including those aimed at creating a meaningful and sophisticated set of critiques and those dedicated to effective and human(e) methodologies of pedagogical resistance. Perhaps above all else, we hope that scholars will continue to ask the questions we sought to pursue.

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## Notes

[1](#) This paper originally was presented as a Roundtable discussion for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, April 2001. Although it was submitted to *Cultural Logic* for publication prior to the events of September 11, readers are encouraged to make their own relevant and appropriate interpretations.

[2](#) In this section we draw heavily from our previous work, especially Vinson and Ross (2001).

[3](#) The members of the *Situationist International* offered the following definitions related to "psychogeography":

**psychogeography:** The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.

**psychogeographical:** Relating to psychogeography. That which manifests the geographical environment's direct emotional effects.

**psychogeographer:** One who explores and reports on psychogeographical phenomena. ("Definitions," 1981, p. 45)

Readers should also refer to various entries in Knabb (1981).

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