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# "THE CONCRETE INVERSION OF LIFE"

*Guy Debord, the Spectacle, and Critical Social Studies Education*

1. THE WHOLE 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.

2. IMAGES DETACHED FROM every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a *partial* way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation. The tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life.

3. THE SPECTACLE APPEARS at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated—and precisely for that reason—this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation.

4. THE SPECTACLE IS NOT a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. (Debord, 1967/1995, p. 12-13)

So begins Guy Debord's most famous work, *The Society of the Spectacle.*[1] To a large extent ours is an age of spectacle in which many if not most of our social relationships are mediated by images—an age in which living largely has been replaced by representation.

It is an era of separation through connectivity and connectivity through separation. The social today means avatars, Facebook, YouTube (see, e.g.,

"Fred"[2]), Twitter, MySpace, Blackberrys, Skype, texting, blogging, and Wii. Of the iUniverse of ibeing. It is a "reality" of viewing and contemplation, one in which "human" interaction occurs electronically, not face-to-face. Above all else it means wirelessness, the apparent gold standard of modern era. Games are played in real time but in virtual space. We offer on-line degrees and distance education. We keep in touch yet never really see—or even hear, in some cases—others; we don't need to. Today we present ourselves as we choose to be perceived. As, therefore, we will be perceived (unless we're photoshopped). Our Facebook pictures can be anything. For who would know otherwise? And who could do anything about it? Why would they? We are our representations.

We are increasingly in communication, on-line, separated and yet connected. We are members of more and larger communities than we have ever been before, albeit sometimes anonymous ones. Loneliness/aloneness has perhaps never been more prevalent or pervasive. Go figure.

As we bemoan the assault on privacy, we aspire to be public figures, "famous" potentially for all eternity and not merely a measly fifteen minutes. Increasingly we are all "reality" stars, or rather virtual reality stars.

Human beings, of course, have always developed new technologies for communication, maintaining contact, and entertainment. "Necessity" is, after all, the mother of invention. But Blackberrys, Wiis, iPods, and the Internet are not the telephone, radio, or TV (sort of). Today is different. In the past communication technologies (connectivity) made up for, temporarily, separation. They were a less desirable, though welcomed and even sometimes and regrettably necessary, alternative to face-to-faceness. They sufficed though they never replaced the immediacy and intimacy of the directly lived interpersonal. We engaged in them usually because we had no other acceptable choice.

Today we simply don't choose. Or we prefer not to choose. Or we choose the virtual over the direct, the mediated over the unmediated, the image over the real, unable to fathom why we would ever choose otherwise. We simply e-interact as if there were no other choice. We have to. This is Debord's "pseudo-world," his "autonomous movement of non-life." Where once we used connection to overcome separation, today we use it to maintain separation and separation to maintain—to rationalize—connectivity. The two are mutually reinforcing if not indistinguishable. As opposed to the communication technologies of the past, today's are instantaneous and all-encompassing, 24/7, absolute. We do not, or cannot, leave home without them. All representation, all mediation, all of the time. Connection and separation are substitutes, not complements, or perhaps both substitutes and complements. One is the same as the other. The spectacular world today, in essence, is multifaceted and increasingly convergent—interfaced. In the past, it was either/or, one or the other, sometimes simultaneously, but always independently. One watched TV or telephoned, even if one did so at the same time. In the present all is hybrid. Is a telephone not a TV? There is no such thing as connection, and no such thing as separation. Or, there's nothing but connection and, or *as,* separation. All is separation-connection, connection-separation. It

makes no difference either way. Are we or are we not "bowling alone" (Putnam, 2000)?

This contemporary state is both positive and negative. We are not Luddites. Our purpose here is not to trash technology; we like technology very much. Our point is simply that advances in mediation bring consequences, sometimes good, sometimes bad. Maybe even mostly good. Who could argue, for instance, with being able to stay in contact with others if the alternative is not being able to do so? To Skype one's family from overseas? To making education available to those who might not be able to access it were it not for newer communications tools? Who would not favor the speed, if not the intimacy and detail, of broadband over that of posting letters? Free wi-fi and mobile phoning over the cost and paper waste of postage stamps and landline long-distance charges? Flash drives over file cabinets? Cell phones when one's car breaks down? Of seeing and hearing simultaneously over either by itself? The frequent over the infrequent? That this may all represent progress is unquestionable, yet with progress something always is inevitably lost.

Our point instead is that it is not all good. With the advantages of these technologies come disadvantages. There are drawbacks to an era of cyberreality, virtual reality, and hyperreality. To our society of the spectacle. To the fact that what "once was directly lived has become mere representation," to a society in which social relationships between people have become increasingly mediated by images" (Debord, 1967/1995, p. 12-13). More specifically, the advent of the society of the spectacle brings with it implications for contemporary citizenship, and these implications for contemporary citizenship bring with them implications for education, most particularly, we argue, for social studies education and its emphasis on effective citizenship.

In much of our previous work we have sought to understand the relationships between schooling and society by exploring the contemporary convergence of spectacle and Foucauldian surveillance, principally as a means of critique.[3] We have considered this spectacle-surveillance merging as the context within which image comes to dominate reality; contemporary schooling develops as a reproductive mode of discipline and deterrence; and schooling becomes increasingly oppressive, antidemocratic, inauthentic, and counter to the collective good. We have pursued these ideas through interdisciplinary frameworks developed in such diverse yet connected fields as visual studies, cultural studies, media studies, and film studies, and through such conceptions as Bakhtin's chronotope, Barthes's rhetoric of the image, Boorstin's pseudo-event, Baudrillard's simulacra and simulation, and McLuhan's the medium is the message. We have situated the emergence of image-power via the postmodern desire to see and be seen—that is, the union of exhibitionism and voyeurism—and located the mechanisms according to which all of this must be critically interpreted within the complex and interrelated settings of "the will to standardize," "globalization," and "technological change" (Vinson & Ross, 2003).

Our purpose in this chapter is to more precisely explore the meanings of Debord's notion of "The Society of the Spectacle": its definitions, components, and implications. We address most importantly its potential relevance for contemporary

social studies education. As such, this chapter is both an extension of our previous work and a narrowing of it. That is, although we treat only the idea of spectacle—as opposed to spectacle and surveillance combined, for example—we do so here in greater depth and breadth than we did in our earlier studies. While we continue to believe that spectacle and surveillance must be interrogated as conjoined characteristics of postmodern society, in this chapter we seek to provide some greater understanding of spectacle by focusing on it in isolation. As such, our specific questions are:

– What is the "society of the spectacle"? What are its key components and attributes? What are its implications as a critical concept in terms of making sense of contemporary society?
– How and to what extent might Debord's conception of "spectacle" be relevant to critical social studies education today?
– What does it mean to be a "good" or "effective" or "engaged" citizen within "the society of the spectacle" and what is the significance of these meanings for (critical) social studies education?

In this chapter we explore Debord's characterization of "the spectacle," drawing primarily on "Separation Perfected," the first chapter of *TSS*. Next we consider the spectacle's implications for critical social studies, relating it primarily to the framework established in *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994).[4] Lastly, we consider the potential implications of applying Debord's spectacle to critical social studies, specifically in terms of purpose, curriculum, and instruction.

DEFINING THE SPECTACLE

In the first chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle,* "separation perfected," Debord lays out several of the spectacle's most complex and necessary themes, many of which he develops further in subsequent chapters. At the very least, the spectacle means:

– the dominance of image over lived experience
– the privileged status of the commodity
– the promotion of abstract (exchange) value and labor
– alienation
– passive observation (by spectators) and contemplation (at the expense of living or experiencing)
– a specific economics and ideology (capitalism)
– isolation/separation/fragmentation/lack of community, and
– the denial of history. (Vinson & Ross, 2003; Debord, 1967/1995)

Further, Debord's treatment is different from Foucault's perhaps better known use of "spectacle" in his effort to characterize modern "surveillance" as a disciplinary technology distinct from the disciplinarity of antiquity. As Foucault argued:

Antiquity had been a civilization of spectacle. "To render accessible to a multitude of men [*sic*] the inspection of a small number of objects": this was the problem to which the architecture of [ancient] 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." 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 [*sic*] at the same time." (1975/1979, p. 216)

Foucault's distinction is between ancient discipline grounded in spectacle*,* or the observation of the few by the many, and modern discipline grounded in surveillance*,* or the observation of the many by the few. While we do not necessarily disagree with this view, that is with Foucault's spectacle-surveillance distinction with respect to discipline (we have argued elsewhere that we see exploring the convergence of Foucauldian spectacle and surveillance as useful in explaining the disciplinary tendencies of contemporary society), Foucault's treatment of spectacle is in many ways less developed than, and incompatible with, Debord's. For, basically, Foucault and Debord were defining different concepts. This fact helps explain why for Foucault surveillance is fundamental to the structure of modern society, and why for Debord it is spectacle.

In order to better define Debord's unique conception of spectacle we turn first to Sadie Plant, Len Bracken, and Anselm Jappe, distinguished scholars of the Situationist International (SI) and interpreters of *The Society of the Spectacle.* We then present our own analysis, specifically drawing on "separation perfected" as a central theme in Debord's theorizing.

*Plant, Bracken, Jappe*

According to Sadie Plant (1992), for Debord the spectacle is the characteristic structure of "modern capitalist society…a frozen moment of history in which it is impossible to experience real life or actively participate in the construction of the lived world" (p. 1). In this Debordian view, that of society as "organisation of spectacles," spectacle suggests that

The alienation fundamental to class society and capitalist production has permeated all areas of social life, knowledge, and culture, with the consequence that people are removed and alienated not only from the goods

they produce and consume, but also from their own experiences, emotions, creativity, and desires. (Plant, 1992, p. 1)

Here, "People are spectators of their own lives, and even the most personal gestures are experienced at one remove" (Plant, 1992, p. 1). As Plant (1992) summarizes,

> Above all the notion of the spectacle conveyed the sense in which alienated individuals are condemned to lives spent effectively watching themselves. It suggested that, far from being inevitable attributes of the human condition, the boredom, frustration, and powerlessness of contemporary life are the direct consequence of capitalist social relations….[The spectacle means that] the only possible relation to the social world and one's own life is that of the observer, the contemplative and passive spectator [situated within a] tautological world in which the appearance of real life is maintained in order to conceal the reality of its absence. Bombarded by images and commodities which effectively represent their lives to them, people experience reality as second-hand…. (p. 10)

The society of the spectacle, then, is one of separation and alienation, passivity, representation, non-life, and mere observation, one of mediation by images and commodities.

Len Bracken (1997), in *Guy Debord: Revolutionary,* stresses the Marxian character of Debord's spectacle, and argues that Debord "explicitly ties his concept of the spectacle to Marx's critique of the commodity" (p. 129). As Bracken rightly notes, Debord's opening of *The Society of the Spectacle*—"the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles" (p. 12) is a play on Marx's (1867/1887) introduction to *Capital*—"The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'" (Chapter 1, Section 1). Bracken suggests that by "the spectacle" Debord means the "spectacle-commodity" and that spectacle is "shorthand for the *society of the spectacle-commodity"* (p. 129). In essence, the spectacle is the totality of capitalism, alienation, and isolation self-maintained and self-perpetuated by way of separation masquerading as connection or unification.

> For Debord, the spectacle is the tyrant that thwarts the natural human situation of acting and speaking together; not merely using crude, time-tested means of orchestrating isolation such as mutual fear, but with the multifaceted methods of separation of the modern political economy that go to the heart of existential alienation…. [In effect], Debord is making a Marxist critique of the economy that highlights the production of "image-objects" and the way this process subjugates workers. [For] Debord, the spectacle isn't the world of vision, it is the vision of the world promoted by the powers of domination. (Bracken, 1997, pp. 129-130)

Further, Bracken (1997) understands the spectacle as Debord's update of Lukacs' (1923/1967) interpretation of reification and fetishism. From this perspective, the clearest and most effective way of making sense of what the spectacle means "is to equate the society of the spectacle-commodity with the entire economic ecology that none of us can escape: the spectacle as the economy and its self-representation" (p. 131). In the spectacle, "as people consume the object-images that circulate in a society governed by…meaning-making machinery, they become part of the spectacle. Indeed, they become the spectacle" (p. 131).

Anselm Jappe's (1999) take on the Debordian spectacle, most notably in his biography *Guy Debord*, parallels to some extent the interpretations of Bracken. Like Bracken, Jappe suggests that too frequently the spectacle is misunderstood *solely* as the powerful workings of the contemporary and "neutral" mass media. In Jappe's judgment, this view is too simplistic and incomplete; it is a misreading of Debord. As Jappe (1999) argues:

> Invasion by the means of mass communication is only seemingly a deployment of instruments that, even when badly used, remain essentially neutral; in reality the operation of the media perfectly expresses the entire society of which they are a part. The result is that direct experience and the determination of events by individuals themselves are replaced by a passive contemplation of images (which have, moreover, been chosen by other people). (p. 6)

This point is that the mass media are not themselves the spectacle, but are rather one political and politicized aspect or expression of the entirety of the society of the commodity-spectacle—in Debord's (1967/1995) words, "its most stultifying superficial manifestation" (p. 19). Or, as Bracken (1997) writes:

> …people [too often] narrowly identify Debord's concept of the spectacle with media images…Debord very explicitly states that…the "mass media" is only a "glaring superficial manifestation" of the spectacle. (pp. 130-131)

In Jappe's (1999) reading of Debord, central to understanding the spectacle is making sense of separation, or the "fragmentation" of life "into more and more widely separated spheres, and the disappearance of any unitary aspect of society" (p. 6). Here Jappe takes on Debord's famous conception of spectacular alienation—an outgrowth of Marx's view. Where alienation meant historically "an obvious downgrading of *being* into *having*…. the present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from *having* to appearing" (Debord, 1967/1995, p. 16). It is here, spectacular alienation/separation, which the importance of image comes into play.

> The spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the image. Everything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle, conceived of as an ensemble of independent representations. (Jappe, 1999, p. 6)

This, for Debord, was a *reunification in separateness,* one that worked toward the specific ends and interests of the spectacle, of its strengthening and reproduction. Within the context of the hegemony of appearance, "everywhere we find reality replaced by images. In the process, images end up by becoming real, and reality ends up transformed into images" (Jappe, 1999, p. 7).

As Jappe (1999) argues, however, the problem is not with images or representations per se, but rather it "resides in the independence achieved by representations" (p. 8). Such representations, though "born of social practice, behave as independent beings" (p. 8), existing outside of human control, speaking to human beings monologically, and requiring only passive contemplation and spectatorship to maintain their dominance and their ability to fragment and to reunite in separation to the spectacle's own politico-economic advantage.[5] This, in essence, is the ontology of what today we call viral.

From Plant, Bracken, and Jappe, then, we are left with a fairly straightforward view of the spectacle. It is as Ford (2005) states: "In *The Society of the Spectacle* Debord describes in 221 theses a society devastated by the shift from use-value and material concreteness to exchange value and the world of appearances" (p. 102). Or as Debord (1988/1998) himself wrote in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*:

> In 1967, in a book titled *The Society of the Spectacle,* I showed what the modern spectacle was already in essence: the autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty, and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign. (p. 2)

Overall, then, the society of the spectacle is modern capitalist existence extended throughout the entirety of social and individual life. It is alienation, as we are separated—fragmented—from one another and from ourselves via autonomous, mediating images and commodities that present, in effect, our lives to us. Being is appearing, as living and experiencing have been reduced to the consumptive and passive contemplation and mere observation that the society of the spectacle necessitates. The spectacle, dictatorial politico-economic capitalism, leads to spectatorial non-life, which in turn strengthens and perpetuates, through its totalizing unification-in-separation tendencies, the spectacle—that is, itself. It is/we are the spectacle.

*Our Interpretation*

In "Separation Perfected" Debord (1967/1995) presents the society of the spectacle—or, simply, "the spectacle"—according to four defining and overlapping themes: (a) separation versus unity and unity within separateness; (b) the expansion of capitalism into all aspects of social life; (c) the replacement of living and experiencing by representation or the mediation of social life by images; and (d) appearance-based passivity, contemplation, observation-spectatorship, and falsity.

*Separation versus unity / unity within separateness.* Debord (1967/1995) calls separation "the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (T25)[6]; separation in fact is the spectacle and the spectacle's cause and effect. Grounded in the power of the self-perpetuating economic order and in the mediation of the social by images, separation (and the related phenomena of isolation, alienation, and fragmentation) becomes not only separation from the products of one's labor (historical alienation) and separation from others via representation (isolation), but also separation from self (fragmentation).

> The spectacle is hence a technological version of the exiling of human powers in a 'world beyond'—and the perfection of separation *within* human beings. (T20)

The spectacle *appears,* however, as a means of unification, not one of separation, and it is this, for Debord, that reveals its ultimate deceit. "As a part of society, [the spectacle] is that sector where all attention, all consciousness converges" (T3). Though the spectacle also appears "as society itself" (T3), when seen as only a part, a specific focal point, the emptiness of the spectacle's apparent unity becomes clear. "Being isolated—and precisely for that reason—this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation" (T3), or unity within separateness. For Debord this is crucial, for "the origin of the spectacle lies in the world's loss of unity" (T29). The spectacle's falseness is its seeming ability to authentically reunify when in fact it divides. What unification there is rests simply on a linkage through isolation—workers from the products of their labor, "spectators" from one another, self from self. The spectacle indeed does "unite what is separate, but it unites it only *in its separateness*" (T29). It is this truth, according to Debord, upon which the modern economy, which is produced by and produces isolation, and the modern ascendancy of non-life, "the spectator's alienation from and submission to the contemplated object" (T30), both depend.

*The expansion of capitalism into all aspects of social life.* Debord's second theme, the expansion of the economy—of capitalism—into all aspects of social life, illuminates his notion of "the spectacle [as] both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production" as it comes to rule, as it comes to be—as it "epitomizes"—"the prevailing mode of social life" (T6). The economic becomes the social and the social becomes the economic, ad infinitum. Thus, "what the spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social formation; it is…that formation's agenda" (T11). It is also, therefore, our formation and our agenda.

The spectacle is, moreover, "the perfect image of the ruling economic order" (T14) and its—society's—*"chief product"* (T15). It produces and is produced by the social/economic sphere; it is "simply the economic realm developing *for itself*" (T16), with no other ends, such that the spectacle's "triumph," "founded on separation, leads to the *prolitarianization of the world*" (T26). The economy and

the spectacle and separation merge—they become indistinguishable. This is because "the spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation…the alienation that has inhabited the core of the economic sphere from its inception" (T32) and that fundamentally "cuts people off from their lives" (T33). For in the end, "the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image" (T34), mediation, and non-life.

*The replacement of living and experiencing by representation.* According to Debord (1967/1995), "The whole 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" (T1). Representation, however, is not in itself the spectacle. For "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (T4). It is our mode of (non)life, therefore, not representations or images per se, that defines the spectacle. In other words, whatever the particular image and whatever the particular mechanism of mass mediation, the spectacle is "a visible negation of life…a negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself" (T10) in which "all activity is banned, all *real* activity has been forcibly channeled into the global construction of the spectacle" (T27). The spectacle, thus, is not image or representation, but life as representation, social relationships mediated by images; it is a construction of social life which "in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life" (T2). To the extent that life is representation and social relationships are image-mediated, and granting the totalizing power of such modern inventions as capitalism and the mass media, then, Debord concludes, life itself has become and is *appearance-life* rather than *real-life,* and there is no longer any experience, any unmediated social, any unified or genuine being.

   Finally, this spectacular world of non-life reaches it "highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself" (T 2).

> For one to whom the real world becomes real images, mere images are transformed into real beings—tangible figments which are the efficient motor of trancelike behavior…. The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction….Wherever representation takes on an independent existence, the spectacle reestablishes its rule. (T18)

The power of the spectacle to elevate the unreal to the real—the image-life—is then its life's blood, its peculiar mechanism of reproductive and self-serving maintenance.

*Appearance-based passivity, contemplation, and spectatorship.*   In the society of the spectacle appearance comes to matter more than anything else that transforms life into *non*-life—passivity, contemplation, spectatorship. Or, rather, appearance and alienation. Within the spectacle being equals appearing, and "'everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear'" (T12). In fact, "the spectacle

proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance" (T10). Here there is nothing else but passivity, contemplation, and spectatorship—watching. The spectacle is "modern passivity" (T13) and modern unreal reality, modern non-life. It is the mediation of all relationships, being, experience, and existence by image-objects and the modern politico-economic (capitalist) commodity-image; it is the spectacular complex that dominates humanity and denotes the entirety of what it is to be—to appear—human.

For Debord (1967/1995) *non*-life is *appearance*-life; as "the spectacle turns reality on its head" (T8) life and non-life are inverted. "Lived reality suffers the material assaults of the spectacle's mechanisms of contemplation…" (T8). Life becomes non-life, experience becomes contemplation, and unity in separateness—the spectacle itself—becomes the contemplated. It is precisely here, in spectacular "society's real unreality" (T6), that "truth is a moment of falsehood" (T9), and that life actually becomes non-life, a "reality" of appearing and seeing, "a universe of speculation" (T19). It is, further, within this realm of non-life, of appearance-life, that (1) the spectacle operates, both as producer and produced and cause and effect, and (2) the sovereign economy, the autonomous image, passive contemplation, and appearance form and are formed by the spectacular "perfection" of separation.

Overall, then, considering the explications offered by Plant, Bracken, and Jappe as well as our own interpretations, we are left with a general conception of the Debordian spectacle as a phenomenon characterized by both an inherent critical complexity and a gestalt-like architecture in which its whole is created out of the interaction of its several and diverse essential elements. In sum, the society of the (commodity) spectacle—*the spectacle*—is the totality of contemporary, postmodern social life: alienation, isolation, fragmentation; the sovereign and encroaching power of the economic sphere; the mediating, autonomous image-object/commodity-image; spectatorship, passivity, contemplation (of ourselves, of others, of images); appearance; and the false, deceitful, unreal reality of "separation perfected," (re)unity within separateness.

In the next section we provide a perspective on contemporary social studies education drawing principally on the NCSS's (1994, 2008) *Expectations of Excellence*.

CIVIC COMPETENCE AND SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

According to the National Council for the Social Studies social studies is

the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence…Its purpose…is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. (NCSS Task Force on Standards for Social Studies [TFSSS], 1994, p. 3; NCSS Curriculum Review Task Force [CRTF], 2008, p. 6)

NCSS defines "civic competence" both as "the knowledge, intellectual processes, and dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in groups and public life (CRTF, 2008, p. 6) and as "the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of students to be able to assume 'the office of citizen' (as Thomas Jefferson called it) in our democratic republic" (TFSSS, 1994, p. 3). For the NCSS this purpose of promoting civic competence is one of the distinguishing features of social studies; the second, that social studies "integrate[s] knowledge, skills, and attitudes within and across disciplines" (TFSSS, 1994, p. 3) supports the first. Both require, in the vision of the NCSS, an understanding of and a commitment to "the inclusion of all students" and "diversity" (CRTF, 2008, pp. 6-7). In the *Expectations of Excellence* (TRSSS, 1994; CRTF, 2008) "thematic strand" most clearly connected to civic competence—Strand Ten, "Civic Ideals and Practices"—NCSS maintains that "Social studies programs should include experiences that provide the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic" (TRSSS, 1994, p. 30; CRTF, 2008, p. 21).

Overall, then, the NCSS's approach to citizenship can be characterized as one in which (a) citizenship education as informed and reasoned decision-making for the public good is the fundamental purpose of social studies education; (b) effective citizenship is civic competence; and (c) civic competence results from social studies education that involves teaching and learning those knowledges, intellectual skills and processes, attitudes, and dispositions that are most consistent with or relevant to understanding and strengthening democracy and "democratic" global interconnectedness. In the next section we attempt to make sense of this view of social studies education vis-à-vis the spectacle and critical pedagogy.

## THE SPECTACLE, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, AND CRITICAL SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

The social studies are understood to be those whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society and to [the human being] as a member of social groups. (Committee on Social Studies, 1916, p. 9)

Our purpose in this section is twofold. First we attempt to construct a definition of critical social studies education by applying the principles and characteristics of contemporary critical pedagogy to the conception of social studies education outlined by the NCSS. Second, we consider how and to what extent Debord's notion of the spectacle might contribute to the theory and practice of contemporary critical social studies education. Our focus throughout is upon the theory and practice of both the organization of society and the individual as a member of society, as a member of social groups.

*Critical Social Studies Education*

Although contemporary critical social studies education is grounded in the closely related though broader and more multifaceted realm of critical pedagogy, its roots go back at least to the works of Karl Marx.[7] In its modern form it evolved most obviously from the writings of John Dewey (1916/1966, 1938/1963, 1956), social reconstructionists such as George S. Counts (1932) and Harold Rugg (1923), and the scholarship of such early critical pedagogues as Paulo Freire (1970) and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976).

In the social studies proper, much of the initial critical framework was developed by authors such as William B. Stanley and Jack L. Nelson (1986). More recent efforts to define and create critical social studies can be found in the work of Gibson (2007), Hursh and Ross (2000), Kincheloe (2001), Malott and Pruyn (2006), Marciano (1997), Marker (2000), Ross (2000a, 2006), Ross and Queen (2010), and Vinson (1999, 2006).

Defining the means and ends to be pursued in critical social studies is not something that can or should be done once and for all, or separated from the experience of everyday life in a particular context. There is no monolithic program, plan, or approach that encompasses critical social studies and any attempt to characterize it must necessarily be at least somewhat imprecise and incomplete. That said, critical social studies education is typically recognized as left-leaning opposition to "traditional," "dominant," or "mainstream" social education, however each of these is defined (e.g. Ross, 2000a). It is often characterized as social studies for social justice and participatory democracy. Critical social studies most often is linked to teaching and learning that takes seriously the causes and effects of racism, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, ableism and other technologies of oppression. It explores questions of power, culture, and difference, incorporating both theoretical and activist orientations, and it seeks in the process the construction of some mode of socio-pedagogical praxis committed to some form of emancipatory/resistance-directed social reconstruction.[8]

Our view of critical social studies education is fixed most directly in the theoretical and practical principles of contemporary critical pedagogy. As a complex field of study, critical pedagogy is inclusive; its tenets and influences are wide-ranging so that no two "critical pedagogues" likely agree entirely on every point or issue. In its contemporary constructions critical pedagogy draws upon a range of radical perspectives, including but not limited to neo-Marxism, feminist theory, critical race theory, postmodernism/poststructuralism, cultural studies (and related disciplines such as film and media studies), queer studies, postcolonial studies and anarchism.[9]

Perhaps the most distinguishing element of critical pedagogy is its aim to empower people to transform their world. There is no uniform definition of critical pedagogy as educators and theorists have transformed the concept over the years as they deployed new approaches to understanding the world and changing it.

Critical pedagogy usually refers to educational theory, teaching, and learning practices that aim to raise learners' critical consciousness regarding oppressive

social conditions. Critical pedagogy focuses on the development of critical consciousness for both "personal liberation" and collective political action aimed at overcoming oppressive social conditions and to create a more egalitarian, socially just world. Pedagogy that is critical encourages students and teachers to understand the interconnected relationships among knowledge, culture, authority, ideology, and power. Understanding these relationships in turn facilitates the recognition, critique, and transformation of existing undemocratic social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social relations.

Critical pedagogy is particularly concerned with reconfiguring the traditional student/teacher relationship, where the teacher is the active agent, the one who knows, and the students are the passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge. The critical classroom is envisioned as a site where new knowledge, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers alike, is produced through meaningful dialogue. In short, critical pedagogy aims to empower to students by: (1) engaging them in the creation of personally meaningful understandings of the world; and (2) providing opportunities for students to learn that they have agency, that is their actions can enable social change.

Lastly, according to Kincheloe (2007), critical pedagogy today involves a new synthesis of critical principles. He identifies the "key dimensions of this critical synthesis" as:

– The development of a socio-individual imagination;
– The reconstruction of the individual outside the boundaries of abstract individualism;
– The understanding of power and the ability to interpret its effects on the social and the individual;
– The provision of alternatives to the alienation of the individual;
– The cultivation of a critical consciousness that is aware of the social construction of subjectivity;
– The construction of democratic community-building relationships between individuals;
– The reconceptualization of reason—understanding that relational existence applies not only to human beings but concepts as well; and
– The production of the social skills necessary to active participation in the transformed, inclusive democratic community. (pp. 35-39)

Taken together, these principles and characteristics present a reasonably good portrait of contemporary critical pedagogy—its commitments, its key concepts, and its theoretical alignments. When applied to the depiction of citizenship education offered by NCSS, they suggest insights into what a meaningful understanding of critical social education *might* look like.

For instance, what would "civic competence" mean from a critical pedagogical perspective? What knowledges, skills and intellectual processes, attitudes and dispositions would it require? What would define the "public good" toward which citizens are to make "informed and reasoned decisions"? What kinds of decisions would these be?

The knowledge component of civic competence might include, for example, an interdisciplinary understanding of concepts or ideas such as marginalization, disenfranchisement, class, gender, race, ideology, hegemony, critical consciousness, and resistance and their relationships to social justice and equality—their complexities, contextualizations, histories, and present-day enactments (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Kincheloe, 2005). These concepts, from a critical perspective, could not be reduced, say, to a set of vocabulary terms to be memorized and multiple-choiced. An in-class or school-based curricular effort might involve, as but one example, a "thematic unit" on oppression, perhaps following Iris Marion Young's (1992) broad and multidisciplinary "five faces of oppression" framework.

As advanced by Kincheloe (2005), of course, such an approach would be "interested in maintaining a delicate balance between social change and cultivating the intellect—developing a rigorous education in a hostile environment that accomplishes both goals" (p. 21). So with respect to civic competence, critical knowledge would certainly include such "traditional" content as the principles and structures of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights.

Further, a critical civic competence might incorporate such requisite skills and intellectual processes as reading the world, social critique, resistance, authentic dialogue, imagination, interpretation, community-building, reasoning, and the social skills necessary to active participation in democracy that would contextualize and characterize the purposes of critical social education. On this last point, Kincheloe (2007) is particularly helpful:

> As a result of an evolving critical pedagogy, teachers and students will gain the ability to act in the role of democratic citizens. Studying the ideological in relation to self-development, socially educated individuals begin to conceptualize the activities of social life. Viewing their social actions not only through the lenses of the political but also the economic, the cultural, the psychological, the epistemological, and the ontological, individuals analyze the forces that produce apathy and passivity. In this manner, critical pedagogy [and critical social studies education] comes to embody the process of radical democratization, the continuing effort of the presently excluded to gain the right and ability to have input into civic life. As individuals of all stripes, ages, and backgrounds in contemporary hyperreality search for an identity, critical pedagogy provides them an affective social and individual vision in which to invest. Making connections between the political, the economic, the cultural, the psychological, the epistemological, the ontological, and the educational, individuals gain insight into what is and what could be as well as the disposition to act. Thus, as political agency is cultivated, critical pedagogy becomes a democratic social politic. Once again, social consciousness and the valorization of the individual come together to produce an emancipatory synergy. (p. 39)

The attitudes and dispositions relevant to a critical civic competency might include, among others (a) a commitment to justice and equality (perhaps obviously); (b) an understanding of human activity (including education) as inherently political; (c) a dedication to the alleviation of human pain and suffering (physical, emotional, psychological, and so on); (d) a commitment to empowerment and anti-oppressiveness; (e) taking seriously the issues surrounding identity, culture, and diversity; (f) anti-conformity; (g) a dedication to authentic democracy and community; and (h) an opposition to alienation, marginalization, and silencing/voicelessness.

Informed and reasoned decision-making would be grounded in what Kincheloe (2007) called "the reconceptualization of reason—understanding that relational existence applies not only to human beings but concepts as well" (p. 38). This reconceptualization—or reconstruction—begins both with the understanding of the "irrationality of what has sometimes passed for reason in the post-Enlightenment history of Western societies" and with the formulation of "relational reasoning" (p. 38).

A relational reason understands conventional reason's propensity for conceptual fragmentation and narrow focus on abstraction outside of a lived context. The point here is not to reject rationality but to appreciate the limits of its conventional articulation in light of its relationship to power…. [I]t analyzes the importance of that deemed irrational by dominant Western power and its use-value in sociopolitical affairs and the construction of a critical consciousness. Such alternative ways of thinking are reappropriated via the realization of conventional decontextualization…. All things are a part of larger interactive dynamics, interrelationships that provide meaning when brought to the analytical table. Indeed, our evolving critical pedagogy finds this relational reason so important and so potentially transformative that we see the interaction between concepts as a living process. These relational dynamics permeate all aspects of not only our social education but also of critical consciousness itself. (pp. 38-39)

The ends, the "public good," toward which these knowledges, skills and intellectual processes, attitudes and dispositions would be applied would, of course, be one of a social and educational vision of justice and equality. From a critical pedagogical point of view, this is a vision that "demands a fundamental rethinking, a deep reconceptualization of," for example:
– what human beings are capable of achieving
– the role of the social, cultural, and political in shaping human identity
– the relationship between community and schooling
– ways that power operates to create purposes for schooling that are not necessarily in the best interests of the children that attend them
– how teachers and students might relate to knowledge
– the ways schooling affects…students from marginalized groups [and]
– the organization of schooling and the relationship between teachers and learners.
Further, with respect to the good, the public, and society:

A critical pedagogical vision grounded as it is in social, cultural, cognitive, economic and political contexts understands schooling as part of a larger set of human services and community development….In this context, educators deal not only with questions of schooling, curriculum, and educational policy but also with social justice and human possibility…. In this context teachers draw on their larger vision to help them determine what types of human beings they want to graduate from their schools…. If we are unable to articulate this transformative, just, and egalitarian critical pedagogical vision, then the job of schooling will continue to involve taming, controlling, and/or rescuing the least empowered of our students. Such students do not need to be tamed, controlled, and/or rescued; they need to be respected, viewed as experts in their interest areas, and inspired with the impassioned spirit to use education to do good things in the world. (Kincheloe, 2005, pp. 6-8)

This is critical pedagogy directed toward a socially just social transformation, a pedagogy in opposition to dominant, mainstream, and disconnected or reproductive schooling that serves, in this critical view, primarily the interests of the powerful.

So, a cautious and preliminary definition of critical social studies education, one grounded in civic competency and critical pedagogy, might be that

Critical social studies education is education for critical citizenship, that is civic competence, built upon (a) *critical knowledge* (e.g., knowledge of such concepts or ideas as marginalization, disenfranchisement, class, gender, race, ideology, hegemony, critical consciousness, and resistance, (b) *critical skill and intellectual processes* (e.g., reading the world, social critique, resistance, authentic dialogue, imagination, interpretation, community-building, reasoning, and the social skills necessary to active democratic participation), and (c) *critical attitudes and dispositions* (e.g., a commitment to justice and equality; an understanding of human activity as inherently political; a dedication to the alleviation of human pain and suffering; a commitment to empowerment and anti-oppressiveness; taking seriously the dynamics of identity, culture, and diversity; anti-conformity; a dedication to authentic democracy and community; and an opposition to alienation, marginalization, and silencing/voicelessness).

It is such a definition that would orient, that would serve as the heart of, the theory and practice of any critical or radical social studies education.

Although we believe that these should be central to any social studies education, they typically are not, at least with respect to most mainstream social studies programs in our age of standards-based educational reform.

In the next section we consider what contributions Debord's notion of spectacle might make to contemporary critical social studies education.

*Critical Social Studies Education and the Spectacle*

Essentially, our conceptual and problematic goal in this section is to combine our initial definition of critical social studies education with our understanding of Debord's construction of the spectacle. To reiterate, we see critical social studies education as, perhaps too obviously, an education for critical citizenship, an education that takes seriously the demands of civic competence and, therefore, emphasizes critical knowledge, critical skills and intellectual processes, and critical attitudes and dispositions. Our understanding of the spectacle, again, rests on what we see as the four foundational themes Debord pursues in "separation perfected," namely:

- separation versus unity and unity within separateness;
- the expansion of capitalism into all aspects of social life;
- the replacement of living and experiencing by representation (the mediation of social life by images); and
- appearance-based passivity, contemplation, spectatorship, and falsity.

Our main effort here is to consider what each of these themes means with respect to critical knowledge, critical skills and intellectual processes, and critical dispositions.

*Critical knowledge.* Against the backdrop of the society of the spectacle, a contemporary critical citizenship education would focus upon critical knowledge in terms of addressing the following questions:

- How, if at all, and to what extent, is contemporary society one of unity within separateness? What does this mean? What are the implications and/or consequences of this possibility?
- How, if at all, and to what extent, has capitalism—the dominant mode of modern production—infiltrated *all* other aspects of modern society and modern social life/social relations? To what effects?
- What is the significance of the increasingly mediated nature of social interaction—for instance, through Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Blackberrys, texting and so on? Is this significance positive or negative?
- To what extent is society today more passive/contemplative/appearance-based /spectatorial than it was in the past? How has this affected, if at all, what it means to be a good or effective citizen?
- What does/might/should any or all of this mean with respect to social justice, equality, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens—*civic competence?*

The sources of information relevant to such critical knowledge would be both broad and deep, and would include the personal, the "official," the dominant, and the marginalized; it would be knowledge that is fundamentally political, economic, cultural, social, historical, and contextualized, and it would be knowledge that takes the issues of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class etc. seriously with respect to separation, capitalist oppression, representation, appearance, and passive contemplation (among other considerations).

*Critical skills and intellectual processes.* The critical skills and intellectual processes consistent with a Debord-inspired critical social studies education are similar to those of any other critical pedagogy-influenced education. Thus, they include: reading the world, social critique, resistance, authentic dialogue, imagination, interpretation, community-building, reasoning, and the social skills necessary to active and critical democratic participation. The principal differences, which we discuss in the next section, encompass those behaviors and constructions specifically delineated by Debord and the Situationist International themselves, namely the "construction of playful situations," the *dérive,* and *détournement* (e.g., Debord, 1956, 1957; Marcus, 1989; Merrifield, 2005; Situationist International, 1958a, 1958b).

*Critical attitudes and dispositions.* As is the case with critical skills and intellectual processes, the critical attitudes and dispositions of a Debordian critical social studies education are similar to those most consistent with a critical pedagogically-constructed citizenship education more generally. Again, these include: a commitment to justice and equality; an understanding of human activity as inherently political; a dedication to the alleviation of human pain and suffering; a commitment to empowerment and anti-oppressiveness; taking seriously the dynamics of identity, culture, and diversity; anti-conformity; a dedication to authentic democracy and community; and an opposition to alienation, marginalization, and silencing/voicelessness. What would perhaps, however, distinguish the critical attitudes and dispositions of a critical citizenship education designed specifically with the society of the spectacle in mind would be its connection to what we identify in the next section as the fundamental principle of Debordian critical theory, which is its view of social change. As we describe in the next section, it is this principle that distinguishes the Debordian vision of citizenship.

## A DEBORDIAN VISION OF CRITICAL CITIZENSHIP

We begin this section with our attempt to reconstruct a "Debordian vision" of critical citizenship. Next we consider the implications of such a vision for contemporary critical social studies education.

Any notion of a Debordian critical citizenship must, we think, be grounded in a single basic idea that underlies much of the SI's thinking: "First of all we think the world must be changed. We want the most liberating change of the society and life in which we find ourselves confined. We know that this change is possible through appropriate actions" aimed toward "a superior organization of the world" (Debord, 1957, p. 17).

We base our specific understandings of a Debordian critical citizenship on three fundamental components of the SI's agenda, each developed in opposition to the various aspects of the spectacle we defined in previous sections, and each consistent with Debord's interpretation of social change, appropriate action, and a superior organization of modern life. These components are (a) "constructing

situations," (b) the *dérive,* and (c) *détournement.* Each of these principles reflects both a theoretical and applied orientation, and taken together they constitute the principal Situationist program, its praxis, and its revolutionary strategies and tactics.

*Constructing playful situations.*

The Situationist International (1958a) defined a "constructed situation" as "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events" (p. 45). It involves "the concrete construction of momentary ambiences of life and their transformation into a superior passional [*sic*] quality (Debord, 1957, p. 22). A constructed situation, therefore, includes at least three primary characteristics: (a) it is unitary rather than separated or fragmented; (b) it is a game, and thus playful; and (c) it is superior to those situations which are presented to us by and as the commodity-spectacle.

Debord's understanding of a constructed situation relates to and implies another of the SI's key conceptualizations, that of "unitary urbanism." For the SI (1958a), unitary urbanism is "the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior" (p. 45). It is the creation of a setting—the milieu or ambience—in which Debordian praxis—critical citizenship—is enacted and with which it interacts. Unitary urbanism is "dynamic" as often the outcome and "nature" of constructed situations and the specific traits of "experimental behavior" cannot be predetermined.

In general, Debord (1957) defines the essence of this behavior—the action side of a constructed situation—"as the invention of games…of an essentially new type" whose "most general goal must be to extend the nonmediocre part of life, to reduce the empty moments of life as much as possible" (pp. 23-24). For Debord (1957):

> The situationist game is distinguished from the classic conception of the game by its radical negation of the element of competition and of separation from everyday life. The situationist game is not distinct from a moral choice, the taking of one's stand in favor of what will ensure the future reign of freedom and play. (p. 24)

This unique emphasis on play sprang from Debord's critique of the "industrializing of leisure," its commodification and spectacularization, and its stultifying effects on the working classes. Thus, the Debordian game demands the intentional reunification of leisure in the service of the most radical forms of freedom and liberation. To Debord, then, play, as a radical component of constructed situations, was at its heart a permanent revolutionary art and technology of life (see Marcus, 1989; Merrifield, 2005).

In sum, Debord and the SI (1958b) saw constructed situations as comprising two inseparable and reciprocating features, a unitary ambience or milieu *and* a set of experimental behaviors directed toward a revolutionary and superior recreation of contemporary life; both the ambience/milieu and behaviors were crucial.

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> Our conception of a "constructed situation" is not limited to a unitary use of artistic means to create an ambience, however great the force or spatiotemporal extension of this ambience may be. The situation is also a unitary ensemble of behavior in time. It is composed of gestures contained in a transitory decor. These gestures are the product of the decor and of themselves. And they in their turn produce other forms of decor and other gestures…. The really experimental direction of situationist activity consists in setting up, on the basis of more or less clearly recognized desires, a temporary field of activity favorable to these desires. This alone can lead to the further clarification of these primitive desires, and to the confused emergence of new desires whose material roots will be precisely the new reality engendered by…situationist constructions. (SI, 1958b, p. 43)

For Debord and the SI, two of the most important modes of experimental behavior were the *dérive* and *détournement.*

*The* dérive.  For the SI (1958a), *derive*—literally "the drift" or "drifting"—was defined as "a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society; a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences" (p. 45). In some ways, as a critical act*,* it is related but not identical to Baudelaire's (1863/1964) and Benjamin's (2006) conceptions of the *flâneur* (more or less urban "stroller"; see also Merrifield, 2005; Tester, 1994; White, 1994). For Debord (1956), it is

> a technique of transient passage through varied ambiences. It entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects…which distinguishes it from…classical notions of the journey and the stroll. (p. 50)

Its intentionality, then, its concern with *psychogeography*—"the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (SI, 1958a, p. 45; see also Self & Steadman, 2007)—is what makes it a qualitatively different concept from that of the *flâneur.*

> 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, 1956, p. 50)

This diminished role of chance, therefore, also distinguishes one who engages in *dérive* from the *flâneur.*

A *dérive* is fundamentally about the emotional "natures" of various "quarters" of a city; it is essentially urban, a walking or "wandering" tactic, usually nocturnal

and lasting for several hours. In a *dérive* those involved seek to "identify…[the] subtle moods and nuances of neighbourhoods…documenting [the] odours and tonalities of the cityscape, its unconscious rhythms and conscious melodies; ruined facades…[and] foggy vistas" (Merrifield, 2005, pp. 30-31). According to Merrifield (2005), "*Dérive* sought to reveal the idiocy of separation, trying to stitch together—by highlighting the gaping holes—what was spatially rent" (p. 48). It is, further, what "paved the way" for the SI's understanding of unitary urbanism (Merrifield, 2005).

The idea of the *dérive* was to reveal and challenge the status of separation and fragmentation, non-life/appearance-life/commodity-life—the spectacle itself. As an experimental behavior within a constructed (and playful) situation, the unitary urban *dérive* was to be a "living critique…reuniting physical and social separations" (Merrifield, 2005, p. 48). It was, as praxis, the anti- or counter-spectacle.

*Détournement.* Related to the *dérive,* and like it "at the core of unitary urbanism" (Merrifield, 2005, p. 50), *détournement* was a second experimental behavior that worked within constructed situations to challenge the peculiar power of spectacular society. For the SI (1958a), *détournement* was

> Short for: *détournement* of preexisting aesthetic elements. It necessitates 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, *détournement* 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. (pp. 45-46)

*Détournement* is a mode of subverting the normal, of contradicting or negating accepted behavior in order to "create light, to *disalienate,*" to connect and to unify (Merrifield, 2005, p. 50). It is a means to "make life richer" (Merrifield, 2005, p. 50). Classic examples, according to Merrifield (2005), are "squatting, building and street occupations…graffiti and 'free associative' expressionist art" (p. 50). Such strategic tactics

> …turn things around, lampoon, plagiarize and parody, deconstruct and reconstruct ambience, unleash revolutions inside one's head as well as out on the street with others…. They force people to think and rethink what they once thought…. [*Détournement* operates as] an instrument of propaganda, an arousal of indignation, action that stimulates more action. (p. 50)

As the spectacle turns life and reality on their heads, *détournement* turns the spectacle on its head, forcing it to confront the anti- or counter-spectacular and to make room for, or to get out of the way of, living, experiencing, and unity.

As acts of unified living, as counter-mediation, as counter-appearance and counter-separation, the *dérive* and *détournement* work together within the overall context of constructed playful situations and as enacted according to the

milieu/ambience of the anti-commodity-image/image-object. As Greil Marcus (1989) describes this project, this artistic technology of critique and revolution, Situationist praxis would demand that we:

> practice détournement—write new speech balloons for newspaper comic strips, or for that matter old masters…insist simultaneously on a "devaluation" of art and its "reinvestment" in a new kind of social speech, a "communication containing its own criticism," a technique that could not mystify because its very form was a demystification…. [It would demand as well that] we pursue the dérive—give up to the promises of the city, and then to find them wanting—to drift through the city, allowing its signs to divert, to "detourn," steps, and then to divert those signs, forcing them to give up routes that never existed before—there would be no end to it. It would be to begin to live a truly modern…life, made out of pavement and pictures, words and weather: a way of life anyone could understand and anyone could use. (p. 170)

As we understand it a Debordian vision of critical citizenship is a twofold and dialogical project. It first pursues the creation of superior situations—ambiences and milieus—in opposition to those imposed by the spectacle. Second it advocates the practice of uniquely experimental behaviors, the *dérive* and *détournement,* for example, that are necessarily linked not only to one another but also to the contextual and constructed situations within which they are actualized and with which they interact. The resulting complex is organic and constitutes a mutually productive, innovative, and reciprocating mechanism of resistance and critique. This praxis, both strategic and tactical, aims at the complete destruction or negation of the totality of practices that define the society of the spectacle.

### Implications of Debordian Critical Citizenship for Contemporary Social Studies Education

In our view critical citizenship education should be the centerpiece of any effort to construct a radical, social justice-oriented program of social studies education. And while there may be broad agreement on this point among critical social educators in principle, the devil, as always, is in the details. For there are undoubtedly many possible and reasonable visions of a radical social studies.

Our goal in this section is, in a sense, one of "putting it all together." What are the implications of a Debordian critical citizenship education for contemporary social studies education? What would a Debord-inspired radical social studies education look like in terms of purpose, curriculum, and instruction?

Most simply, and with the understanding that the point of critical social studies education would be critical citizenship education, the purpose of critical social studies, then, would be the promotion of critical citizenship. Again this implies (a) a critical civic competence organized around the teaching and learning of certain critical knowledge, critical skills and intellectual processes, and critical attitudes and dispositions (in other words the spectacle-based critical citizenship education

we described earlier in this chapter); and (b) an emphasis on Debord's (and the SI's) fundamental premise, that "the world must be changed," that this must mean "the most liberating change of the society and life in which we find ourselves confined," and "that this change is possible through appropriate actions" (e.g., *dérive* and *détournement*) toward and in interaction with "a superior organization of the world" (i.e., "constructed [playful] situations"; Debord, 1957, p. 17). Ultimately this would be a citizenship education grounded in resistance to the workings of the spectacle, to separation, fragmentation, isolation, alienation, the capitalization of social life, non-life, the dominance of appearance, and contemplation-passivity-spectatorship.

From this perspective, the curriculum of a critical social studies education would first seek to abolish school-society distinctions as well as any distinctions among the formal, the informal, the enacted, the null, and the hidden curricula. Everything would be on the table. The specifics of this curriculum would involve the particulars of a Debordian-inspired critical competence—critical knowledge, critical skills and intellectual processes, and critical attitudes and dispositions. It would, therefore, include the application of certain critical skills and behaviors, for example dialogue, imagination, reading the world, and resistance (among others) and the SI-specific behaviors of *dérive* and *détournement,* toward the acquisition of particular critical knowledge, including that relevant to the meaning and purpose of constructed situations and to our questions regarding the spectacular nature of modern, techno-capitalist society.

What is perhaps most important is what all this might mean for instruction. For we are suggesting, in effect, a pedagogical practice grounded in constructed situations, the *dérive,* and *détournement.* From this view, teachers and students would embrace the notion that constructing superior milieus and ambiences is appropriate to a critical social studies—to a revolutionary theory and practice (a *praxis*) of the social.

The first implication of this would be the blurring, even the destruction, of the boundaries that exist or are perceived to exist between the school and the larger society. Ideally then instruction would be no more or less likely to occur "in the world" than it is to occur in the classroom. Schooling really would become living. Social studies teachers and students would be engaged in the *dérive,* exploring the psychogeographical effects of their communities, constructing situations, playfully experiencing in a unified way both the banalities and the "nonmediocre aspects" of the world and of life.

A second possibility might involve teachers and students treating schools and classrooms like Debord and his SI colleagues treated the urban streets of Paris. Teachers and students might re-imagine the school/classroom environment and recreate it as a set of "playfully" and "deliberately constructed," evolving and new—unified and superior—ambiences and milieus, ones aimed toward "the most liberating change of the society and life in which [they, teachers and students] find [themselves] confined" (Debord, 1957, p. 17). One can only imagine what this might suggest within the present conformative and restrictive age of *No Child Left Behind* and standards-based education reform.

The *dérive,* of course, is as possible within schools as it is outside them, and certainly teachers and students could examine the unique psychogeographical relief(s) of each of the often hidden spaces of and within schools. Wandering through hallways, in and out of classrooms and offices, being drawn into or away from particular points, being instead of appearing, engaging in passionate rather then passive and active rather than contemplative playful and unified behavior.

The construction of situations and engaging in the *dérive*, of course, take on new meanings when enacted within the age of separation-connection we described in the introduction to this chapter. For, plausibly, the utilization of playful situations and the *dérive* could work against, could resist and counter, whatever fragmenting and isolating tendencies exist within today's mediated and representational social world. Students and teachers might jointly, whether in "real reality" or cyberreality, reconstruct the milieus of such technological spaces as Facebook and Twitter—what would Facebook or Twitter look like if reconstituted as "superior" and passionate ambiences? What would define superior? How might students and teachers make these "situations" better, more life than non-life—perhaps as more critical tools of effective citizenship? What kinds of curriculum would be necessary to support this? Is hacking a legitimate technique, perhaps as a sort of nonviolent disobedience? (It is important to note here that true harm does not have to occur. One point of such activities is play and experimentation. These practices are aimed in the direction of social justice and unsettling and/or disrupting the political and economic power of the spectacle; and the practice of constructing situations is by its very definition temporary.

The second experimental behavior, *détournement,* would encourage teachers and students to reconstruct "preexisting aesthetic elements" into new and superior meanings; its practices might include graffiti, parody, lampoon, and satire, even plagiarism in a way. Distributing newspapers or standardized tests, for example, with reinvented headlines and questions and answers; touching-up— "improving"—news broadcasts or photographs or websites (think *The Onion* or Dada). As Merrifield (2005) describes it, the purpose of this kind of *détournement* would be to "force people to think and rethink what they once thought" and to "turn things around…to stimulate action" so as to "unleash revolutions inside one's head as well as out on the street with others" (p. 50). As is the case with constructing situations and the *dérive,* with *détournement* contemporary technologies may be used against themselves to challenge their potentially isolating/separating/fragmenting and appearance/mediation/representation-dominated tendencies. All of these artistic techniques, these strategic tactics— constructed situations, the *dérive,* and *détournement*—are aimed at overthrowing the commodity-spectacle and the autonomous reign of image-objects in the interests of a maximized status of social justice, liberation, and "truly" living and experiencing. This is a humanist and anti-capitalist project *par excellence,* a project of not only critical social studies but also one of "effective" and authentic citizenship, and one that not only values and advocates a critical schooling for social justice, but one that takes seriously both an intellectual and an activist education.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have explored the connections between Guy Debord's conception of the society of the spectacle and contemporary critical social studies education. We have grounded our work within the modern context of social networking and technological interconnectivity—separated connectedness or connected separation. We have offered our own interpretative definition of the spectacle and of critical social studies education—which builds on a specific combination of the fundamental principles of contemporary critical pedagogy and the NCSS's mainstream conception of civic competence. Most importantly, perhaps, we have constructed a Debordian "vision" of critical citizenship and considered its implications for a critical social studies curriculum and instruction. Our overall effort has been to look at the interrelationships among Debord's understanding of the spectacle, modern "social" life, critical pedagogy, and critical social studies education. While ours is merely an initial and speculative study, we hope that this chapter will stimulate not only a renewed and reinvigorated dialogue about the meanings of citizenship and citizenship education, but also a re-examination of the theory and practice of critical social studies education and contemporary critical pedagogy more broadly.

NOTES

[1] It is beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter to provide any degree of in-depth biographical or interpretive introduction to Guy Debord, the Situationist International (SI), or the vast body of Debord's work beyond *The Society of the Spectacle.* Readers interested in this literature, however, should see, for example, Debord's (2004) own *Panegyric: Volumes 1 & 2,* Len Bracken's (1997) *Guy Debord: Revolutionary,* Andrew Hussey's (2001) *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord,* Anselm Jappe's (1993/1999) *Guy Debord,* Greil Marcus's (1989) *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century,* Andy Merrifield's (2005) *Guy Debord,* Sadie Plant's (1992) *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age,* Simon Ford's (2005) *The Situationist International: A User's Guide,* and McKenzie Wark's (2008) *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International* (among others). A great deal of information, including translations of Debord and other situationists' texts (the SI was anti-copyright) are available on a number of excellent websites. See especially those of The Bureau of Public Secrets (www.bops.org), Not Bored! (www.notbored.org), and nothingness.org (www.nothingness.org).

[2] We thank our junior colleague Miriam Pellegrino for the reference to "Fred".

[3] See, for example, Ross, 2000b; Ross & Vinson, 2003; Vinson, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2005, 2006; Vinson, Gibson, & Ross, 2001; Vinson & Ross, 2001, 2003, 2007; Welsh, Ross, & Vinson, 2009.

[4] While there are a number of reasonable approaches to social studies education we could have chosen to emphasize, we selected *Expectations of Excellence* for two principal reasons: (1) its prominence as representative of the thinking of NCSS, the largest organization of social studies educators in the United States; and (2) its *general* resemblance to mainstream social education. In previous work (e.g., Vinson, 2001) we have also explored the Center for Civic Education's (CCE) *CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education* (CCE, 1991) and its *National Standards for Civics and Government* (CCE, 1994). We do not mean to imply that *Expectations of Excellence* is *inherently* any better or worse than other similar standards documents. See also the "Draft Revision" by the NCSS Curriculum Review Task Force, 2008

[5]  Like Bracken's, Jappe's analysis emphasizes capitalism and the critique of the commodity, a subject Debord takes up most directly in "The Commodity as Spectacle," the second chapter of *THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE*. In that we are focusing foremost on Debord's notion of "separation perfected," we will not concentrate on Debord's theory of the commodity here but will instead refer readers to Debord, Bracken, and Jappe.

[6]  In this section we cite direct quotes to Debord's (1967/1995) *The Society of the Spectacle* by thesis (T) number so that readers can refer to any published or on-line edition of the work. Our quotations are from the translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Debord, 1967/1995). Thus "(T1)" is a citation of a direct quotation taken from Thesis 1 in *The Society of the Spectacle.*

[7]  For an excellent introduction to the historical foundations of critical pedagogy see Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2003, esp. pp. 1-10), who trace the origins of modern critical pedagogy through "twentieth century educators and activists" such as Dewey, Myles Horton, Herbert Kohl, Jonathan Kozol, Maxine Greene, Bowles and Gintis, Martin Carnoy, Michael Apple, and Ivan Illich; Brazilian authors such as Freire and Augusto Boal; Foucault and Antonio Gramsci; and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School.

[8]  In this chapter we treat critical social studies and critical citizenship education as synonyms.

[9]  The following paragraphs are drawn from Ross (2008).

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