The Examined Life:  
On the Formation of Souls and Schooling  

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The spread of examination throughout educational institutions is often viewed as an overly constraining influence, one that distorts pedagogic relationships and prevents more genuine educational activities from taking place. This critique of examination ignores the extent to which the structure of the school and the soul of the child are already constituted by examining techniques. A survey of the 19th-century emergence of mass schooling shows that examining techniques have long been embedded in schools. The early development of mass schooling incorporated two distinct and enduring approaches to the formation of souls: disciplinary and pastoral examination. These examining practices would help construct the kind of self-governing subjectivities required by the nation-state. Those who seek to confront practices of examination today face a task that is far more demanding than it first appears. This confrontation would involve nothing less than a rigorous and wide-ranging critique of how examination and schooling in their various forms continue to assemble us as subjects of power.

KEYWORDS: monitorial school, disciplinary power, pastoral power, examination.

The unexamined life is not worth living.  
—Socrates

The site from which the examined life is defended has been crowded out. This place is no longer that of the solitary philosopher as in Ancient Greece—philosophers have stepped aside and professors have taken their seats. Today, to take a stand in support of the examined life is to occupy...
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a position already claimed by academics. The examined life is now viewed as an institutional concern, though the institution charged with this task is, nevertheless, under threat. The university faces “assault” (Bailey & Freedman, 2011), perhaps even eventual dissipation (Allen, 2011; Simons & Masschelein, 2009). Its beleaguered employees are called upon to defend its reputation, the reputation of an institution that is devoted (or so one assumes) to the examined life, to a labor of learning and reflection.

I have no intention to defend the university from attack, at least not here. My aim is to suggest that there may be a reverse view. I will claim that over the past two centuries it has become increasingly difficult to avoid the examined life that many in academia seek to defend. Furthermore, I will argue that as sites of examination, educational institutions are culpable in a wider project that has rendered subjectivity open to the inquisitor. That their members should be encouraged to endorse and defend these institutions is less obvious than it may at first appear. Employees of educational institutions are agents of examination while also finding themselves subject to its strictures. The examined life cannot be separated from the effects of power. In this article I deliberately conflate the examined life, in the high-minded Socratic sense, with examination in the mechanistic and lowly everyday sense of the word. I claim that these two approaches are inseparable and complicit in the construction of well-governed subjects.

Faced with the empirical facts, one is tempted to view the rapid spread of examination (in its mechanistic and lowly form) as a colonizing force, overcoming every aspect of education with its reductive logic. The story of examination in schools and elsewhere then becomes the history of a repressive influence. By extension, the mark of a good educator is to oppose examination as a damaging and overbearing force, one that spreads its suffocating weight upon other more genuinely educational activities. Though few educators would seriously entertain a project that sought to remove examination entirely, many would situate themselves as working to resist its variously “corrupting” effects. Here, resisting examination becomes a matter of allegiance to higher educational ideals. If only we could escape some of its influence, if only we could remove aspects of its imprint from the child. If only we could just examine a little less and educate a little more.

Sentiments like this are misconceived. The logic of examination constitutes modern schooling and education as its ontological condition. As such, it cannot be removed or meaningfully resisted without radically dismantling the school as a social and historical project (Peim, in press). To understand the extent to which examination now constitutes schooling, it is necessary to investigate the social systems within rather than upon which examination was formed (Hoskin, 1979; Peim, 2001). The modern examination was not independently invented and then imposed on educational institutions as if from above. Rather, it was developed as part of a broader regime of
educational technologies that combined to form the architecture of modern schooling.

The modern school emerged out of a variety of historical practices between the late 18th century and the start of the 20th century. Together these cultural and institutional practices were occupied with making society, “by making the child as a future citizen,” a process of social formation wherein the “rise of schooling” intersected with the “formation of the nation-state” (Tröhler, Popkewitz, & Labaree, 2011, p. 1). In pursuit of this momentous formative endeavor states have depended upon sophisticated techniques that enable them to construct the subjects they require (Foucault, 1979/2002). These techniques have acted to shape individuality in such a way that those concerned are isolated from one another but open to the influence of government. Initially, governmental techniques focused on the training and regulation of bodies (in prisons, hospitals, armies, as well as in schools) so as to construct the soul. This modern soul should be understood here not as a vital and inextinguishable essence but as a material reality; it was produced in and around the child through relations of power, becoming in effect, the “prison of the body” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 30). As I will make clear, the technocrats who supervised the creation of popular schooling later contributed their additional focus on interpersonal examining techniques. These techniques developed the modern soul as a self-regulating consciousness.

The overall effect was to combine dividing practices and practices of exclusion (where “the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others”) with techniques that would train the child to “turn him- or herself into a subject,” techniques that enable the individual to recognize externally defined traits within the self and then act upon them (Foucault, 1983, p. 208). As a material reality, the modern soul depends on a terrain of concepts and domains of analysis within which it can be determined. It relies on the “carving out” of categories ranging from more general ideas—“psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc.” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 29)—to more child-specific notions—the troubled child, the child of promise, the borderline child, and so on. As this article will argue, examination plays a crucial role here in forming this necessary subjectivity. Examination constructs a specific frame of reference that works to form the child so that he or she may live within the scope it defines.

Examination should not be viewed as a monolithic technology, a singular force intruding upon the educational scene. Together with the formation of schools it evolved from a cluster of practices that were developed at a number of sites and were influenced by a range of political, social, historical, and psychological narratives. These practices were not variations on a single theme but were “acts of differential creation” (Tröhler et al., 2011, p. 20). In order to be more precisely understood, the specific manifestation of each case of schooling or examination should be situated within the local
and historically specific grid of relations through which they were given intelligibility. For reasons of space, this article will nevertheless consider only two institutional sites. It will do so in a way that carefully avoids the drawbacks of institutional analysis as outlined by Michel Foucault (1983, p. 222), where the “fundamental point of anchorage” of relationships of power should be located outside the institution, even if they have become embodied and crystallized within its walls. To prioritize the institution in an analysis of power risks “giving an exaggerated privilege” to “functions that are essentially reproductive” as well as to coercive and legalistic frameworks of power (p. 222); it risks a neglect of those operations of power that are far more dispersed and productive.

This article will focus largely on examination and schooling in Britain during the 19th century, occasionally looking elsewhere to indicate that the techniques it explores have wider relevance. Perhaps deviating from the preoccupations of comparative cultural history (though not necessarily deviating from the spirit of Foucault’s genealogy), it does not explore in any great detail the specific cultural idiosyncrasies of the technologies it sets out to examine, although these deserve careful scrutiny. The purpose of this article is largely rhetorical. It seeks to demonstrate that even a relatively quick survey of the development of modern examination must cast doubt on contemporary efforts to ameliorate its effects. Specifically, it seeks to break down the current tendency in education to adjudicate between good and bad examining practices, between those examining techniques that are seen as oppressive, impersonal, and excessively mechanistic and those that are celebrated for their flexibility and attention to the needs of the child. It is argued that both summative and formative traditions in assessment help perpetuate in their respective techniques processes of subject formation that have as their object the construction of selves amenable to government. The rejection of one tradition of assessment in favor of another (a shift from high- to low-stakes testing, for example) may therefore do little for the emancipation of educational techniques from the effects of power. Indeed, the overhaul of assessment practices in the face of rising critique might even act to refine the influences of power on the formation of the child.

To appreciate the extent to which regimes of power infuse these more recent practices of examination, it is necessary to explore their genealogy in greater detail and trace these techniques back to their emergence in the 19th century. The institutions within which these practices emerged have long since disappeared, these being the early 19th-century monitorial school and the mid 19th-century moral training school. These two short-lived and transitional institutions warrant close attention as they collected together and transformed the practices from which modern schooling and examination were built. As I will argue, examining practices were never simply oppressive, even in their most severe monitorial manifestations. Rather than subject
the soul of the child to mechanical constraint, these practices produced the soul as a desired subjectivity. In other words, the relentless advance of modern examination did not trample the interior of the child. The modern soul is the outcome of an array of productive techniques within which examination has assumed a central role. In a similar reversal, examining techniques that seek to listen to the child, techniques that are celebrated for their benign attention to the unique needs of the individual learner, are not innocent of power interests and their effects. As I will illustrate, they were tied up within a system of moral coercion that operated through interpersonal relationships and the inculcation of self-revealing and self-regulating techniques.

This article argues that the task faced by those who seek to confront practices of examination today is far more demanding than it first appears. This confrontation would involve nothing less than a radical, wide-ranging critique of how examination and schooling in their various forms work to assemble us as subjects of power.

Two Institutions

In this article, I consider two rival systems of schooling: the early 19th-century monitorial school and the mid to late 19th-century moral training school. Though the article focuses on their early development in Britain, each institution had worldwide influence. Monitorial schools spread throughout Europe and across the Atlantic to the Americas (Caruso, 2008; Miller, 1998; Upton, 1996), while the influence of the moral training school can be traced across the Atlantic to colonies such as Nova Scotia (Curtis, 1988; Perry, 2003). These institutions were designed to educate groups such as the growing urban poor that threatened to disrupt existing social structures. When transplanted across the Atlantic to the Americas, their techniques were also applied to other problematic groups, such as recalcitrant peoples of the First Nation (Rayman, 1981).

As sites of instruction they were contrasted to the “unsystematic and possibly morally dangerous education already available in the urban slum” (Jones, 1990, p. 58). Run by inferior people who were scratching together a living on the margins of society, the “private adventure, or dame school” was viewed as irregular, nomadic, and quite possibly a breeding ground of immorality (p. 58). According to Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth (secretary to the embryo Ministry of Education from 1839), “a great number” of the schoolmasters “plying their trade in the country . . . undertake these duties either because they are incapacitated by age or infirmity . . . or because they have failed in all other attempts to procure a livelihood” (Kay-Shuttleworth, 184/1973, p. 296). The Newcastle commission, reporting 20 years later, continued this critique of irregular institutions, expressing with regret that they were still springing up like “mushroom growth” (Education Commission, 1861, p. 94). It suggested with no small measure of condescension that they
revealed a lot about “what kind of education finds favour with that particular class of parents” (Education Commission, 1861, p. 91). After reporting on one particularly “miserable” establishment, located “at the top of a very steep and broken staircase” where “the chief text-book seemed to be a kitten,” we are told that “the teachers of these schools” have “almost always” selected their profession “either because they have failed in other pursuits, or because, as in the case of widows, they have been unexpectedly left in a state of destitution” (Education Commission, 1861, p. 92). As one commissioner famously declared: “none are too old, too poor, too ignorant, too feeble, too sickly, too unqualified in any way or every way, to regard themselves, and to be regarded by others, as unfit for school-keeping” (Education Commission, 1861, p. 93). The urban poor could not be trusted to educate themselves, tending to set up “institutions of the most temporary kind” (Education Commission, 1861, p. 94) that were clearly not fit for purpose. A more systematic education for the depraved masses was required.

This moment in the history of schooling, a moment that witnessed the birth of more systematic and widespread instruction, could be viewed as a triumph of inclusion. A chain of events was unfolding that would ultimately result in the guarantee that all children will have access to a formal education. And yet, inclusion came at a price, as the “very inclusive principles that ordered the [newly established] sciences of education and pedagogical practices entailed inequality” through the subsequent divisions by which they characterized and distinguished the qualities of their subjects (Popkewitz, 2004, p. 236). These pedagogic practices and the sciences they helped bring about were occupied from the outset with processes of division and partitioning. Moreover, inclusion came at the price of accepting the systems of rationality that governed these new institutions. They were, moreover, instruments of wider government. Through the institutionalization of their children, the dangerous classes would be made available for surveillance and thus rendered legible and open to governmental calculation. Vast educational laboratories were created, resulting in the huge expansion of associated discourses of expertise; multiple sites were established for the adaptation and invention of governmental techniques (Foucault, 1975/1991).

Each mode of schooling—monitorial and moral training—developed its own unique cluster of examining practices. In the monitorial school, examination was integrated within a disciplinary and functional architecture. As such, it cannot be considered apart from the entire ensemble of practices that made up this institution. The moral training school, by contrast, based its conception of examination on the construction of an intimate link between teacher and pupil, though this too relied on a larger functional articulation of spaces. In this article, I argue that the subsequent history of examination is a history of the relationship between these two basic approaches—one disciplinary, the other pastoral. In the 21st century, certain derivatives of these disciplinary and pastoral techniques have been
identified in the classroom, appearing as a complex and integrated array of inscription devices and pastoral controls (Allen, 2012; Popkewitz, 2004). This article looks back to a time when these two approaches were more clearly divided. It provides a conceptual backcloth that can be used to make sense of their more recent entanglement.

The analysis builds on the work of Foucault (1979/2002, 1983) and Ian Hunter (1987, 1988, 1994) on pastoral power, exploring the development of interpersonal examining techniques in institutions such as the mid 19th-century moral training school. However, I begin by exploring a rather different tradition of examination, one that concerns itself with the more apparently brutal grading, regulation, and training of bodies. This approach can be observed in the early 19th-century monitorial school and many would say can still be observed in schools today. From an emancipatory or humanistic perspective, this mechanistic aspect of examining practices is easily condemned as being overbearing, constraining, or oppressive. However, as argued previously, this ignores how examination might first constitute or at least reorganize the subjectivities it is said to repress.

Foucault (1975/1991) develops a more subtle analysis of these bodily techniques in his account of “disciplinary power,” a form of power that produces more than it represses. Care should, nevertheless, be exercised when drawing analogies between the systems Foucault describes and more recent history. For example, it has been suggested that the mechanistic regime of the monitorial school gave rise to a syndrome in education that has become “a kind of innate characteristic” (Miller, 1973, p. 10). Indeed, the disciplinary techniques Foucault identified in the early 19th century are often treated as if they led to “fossilized structures” (Margolis & Fram, 2007, p. 198) that continue to influence schooling relatively “untouched” (Gore, 1988, p. 232). Based on the assumption that historical continuities are rarely this direct, I will revisit disciplinary power by insisting on its early 19th-century specificity. This requires a careful investigation of how disciplinary power functioned through the architecture and practices of the early 19th-century monitorial school. Some of the features I describe, both theoretical and empirical, may be familiar to the reader. Foucault’s work is well known and the monitorial school has been subject to a great deal of empirical research. However, there is a need to explore the precise mechanisms of monitorial schooling in greater detail, avoiding the temptation to see it as an agent of repression, which would be to ignore or misread Foucault’s analysis. It is also necessary to make a case for the monitorial school to avoid the claim that it was a short-lived and thus marginal institution, that it was nothing more than a regrettable diversion from a noble tradition of progressive educational developments. Foucault’s references to the monitorial school are comparatively brief (Foucault, 1975/1991, pp. 154, 165, 167), leading some to begin filling the gaps in his account (Caruso, 2008; Hassard & Rowlinson, 2002). Building on these efforts, I aim to construct a picture of...
the monitorial school that presents it as a complex strategic ensemble within which examination performs an integral and inseparable role. This analysis of monitorial schooling is designed to show how, from the outset, examination practices both constituted early forms of mass schooling and initiated the process of constructing the modern child.

**Disciplinary Power**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1975/1991) was concerned with a period of transition occupying the late 18th and early 19th centuries during which punishment was gradually withdrawn from its earlier site of public spectacle, eventually becoming hidden behind the walls of the penal institution. Torture was replaced by a less sporadic mechanism that aimed to cure through training rather than through the public infliction and exhibition of punishment. This new approach relied upon technologies that were being developed in multiple sites during this period, from the prison, to the hospital, barracks, and school. Viewed together, they describe the diffusion of a new mode of power that Foucault named “disciplinary.”

Jeremy Bentham’s circular prison, the “panopticon,” is the metaphor typically used to represent disciplinary power (Bentham, 1791/1843). As a metaphor, it demonstrates how disciplinary architecture could support the automatic functioning of power, where inmates become the bearers of the system that subjects them. Unable to discover precisely when they were being observed, inmates would act as if observation were constant. By referring to this feature of the “panoptic” gaze, we avoid any reduction of disciplinary technique to a simple method of dominatory control, for disciplinary power is said to operate through the dispositions and hence “freedoms” of those it molds. But the panopticon was after all only “the diagram of a mechanism of power” that has been “reduced to its ideal form” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 205), and by virtue of this reduction, details are lost. Elevating this optical system to a central metaphor of disciplinary power generates a refracted and shallow understanding of disciplinary potential. When speaking of surveillance, Foucault remarks: “These mechanisms can only be seen as unimportant if one forgets the role of this instrumentation, minor but flawless, in the progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behaviour” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 173).

Disciplinary power can only be properly understood by addressing the greater range of techniques upon which it depends.

The power of discipline is “one of analysis” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 197) based upon an ability to locate and separate that which is to be studied. Indeed “one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique.” It is for analytic purposes that discipline: “arrests or regulates movements,” clears up “confusion,” dissipates “compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways,” and establishes
“calculated distributions” (Foucault, 1975, pp. 218–219). The production of disciplinary knowledge is an essential part of operations in this strategy of power. Multiple techniques of partitioning can be identified; these include the basic “spatial distribution” of bodies, which is physical but can also be represented in discourse (the distribution of inmates in cells or the register that records their arrival at the prison), a careful breakdown and coding of bodily movements (such as can be found in the breakdown of gestures that define a military parade), the sequencing of activities through longer periods of time (visible in a school curriculum), and efforts to coordinate the entire ensemble of bodies through a “composition of forces” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 167). These techniques were variously combined with forms of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment and together they culminated in a specifically disciplinary version of examination (Foucault, 1975/1991). Here, examination should not be interpreted as if it were the fundamental principle or essence of disciplinary power. Separated from its network of associated disciplinary techniques, examination has little specific gravity or strength of its own.

Monitorial Schooling

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings . . . all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 197)

Here Foucault describes a set of measures to be taken in a town struck by plague. This description also provides a fitting synopsis of the monitorial approach. It coordinated a range of techniques that sought to produce sanitized subjects, thereby protecting them from sedition and immorality. These subjects would become preoccupied within a regime of power that was more subtle and economical than any simple instrument of repression, as its supporters clearly recognized. In Tennessee, at a school designed for First Nation children, it was claimed (in 1818) that “this mode of teaching relieves that bitterness which otherwise those would feel, who have not been accustomed to confinement” (Rayman, 1981). The monitorial school spread the simple brute fact of confinement across its multiple intersecting techniques. Established toward the end of the 18th century, it quickly spread as the system of choice for educating the poor, boasting great potential:

Even in the mere point of the health of the body, and the preservation of the animal life of man, Vaccination, the most valuable discovery in the physical art, of which this country, or the world, can boast,
falls short of this invention; which provides the means of supplying a remedy for the disorders of filth, idleness, ignorance, and vice, more fatal to children than the ravages of the Small-Pox. (Bell, 1808, p. vii)

Indeed, in the opinion of one colonial chaplain, this “New System of Education” was nothing less than a form of “mental vaccination” (British and Foreign School Society [BFSS], 1814, p. 44). It was “the most sure means of arriving at the cure of those evils which at once disgrace society, and deprive it of many who might form its most active and useful members” (BFSS, 1815, pp. 3–4). A Rev. John Platts is later quoted arguing: “Of all our exertions for our fellow creatures” this system of education is able to actually “correct those morbid humours which so corrupt the morals of society” (BFSS, 1815, p. 43). Naturally, since both mental vaccination and social cure were now possible, the “greatest discoveries, heretofore made for the improvement of human life, sink into comparative insignificance” (Bell, 1808, p. viii). At least this is what Dr. Andrew Bell (the first architect of the monitory school) and his expanding band of enthusiasts came to believe and subsequently preach.

Initially designed to cater to orphan children of European officers in Chennai, India (formerly Madras), it was refined over a period of years until the return of Andrew Bell to Britain in 1796. One year later, Joseph Lancaster set up a remarkably similar system, and within a short space of time the monitory approach was spreading throughout kingdom and empire, into Europe and across the Atlantic to the Americas. In Britain two rival societies were established in order to advise this array of independent schools, the National Society (after Bell) and the British and Foreign School Society or BFSS (after Lancaster).

The Madras school run by Andrew Bell aimed to rescue mixed-race children from “the habits of wretched depravity” in which they had been “educated by their mothers” (Bell, 1812, p. xx).

It has long been said, that the half-cast children of this country show an evident inferiority in the talents of the head, the qualities of the mind, and the virtues of the heart. I will not enter into the question, How far government, or climate, and perhaps complexion as connected with climate, influence the character of the human race. Whatever may be the opinion on these heads, I believe that the effect of education will not be denied. . . I think I see, in the very first maxims which the mothers of these children instil into their infant minds, the source of every corrupt practice, and an infallible mode of forming a degenerate race. (Bell, 1812, p. 20)

Believing in the formative powers of education, Bell set out to form his subjects in “habits of diligence, industry, veracity, and honesty” as well as “instructing them in useful knowledge” (Bell, 1812, p. 19).

However untoward a child may be found on first entering the school, no violence of temper, no perversity of disposition, no depravity of
principle, no sluggishness of intellect, should discourage the hope of effecting a decided change, through the Divine blessing, on a patient and persevering application of the regulations prescribed. (BFSS, 1839, p. 9)

For want of proper assistants, who were, we are told, invariably poor in quality, Bell was forced to design a system that he could superintend alone. A severe but effective economy of power would be required if one solitary master was to transform “stubborn, perverse, and obstinate” boys into an “annual crop of good and useful subjects.” Yet, this is precisely what Bell declared as his achievement. His basic claim was to have invented a “new mode of conducting a school through the medium of the scholars themselves” (Bell, 1812, pp. 20–24). This system would rely on a tight network of reciprocal supervisions making use of dependable scholars, able to extend its operations through an expandable series of levels. By virtue of this dispersion of reliable assistants and supervisory techniques, the mass of relations established by this pyramid of relays would remain discrete. The process of supervision is devolved within a concerted system of observation; it is spun through a network that is supported by its own interlocking web. As an economy of power it was designed to cope with the lower orders of society who might be seen as the least disposed to undertaking the task of running their own affairs. Via their children who were gathering in the monitorial school, they would provide the test bed for a strategy of government that sought not to subjugate them from above, but to instruct the masses in procedures deemed appropriate for regulating and governing themselves.

Along with Lancaster who believed that “coercion” is “the most disgusting word in the British vocabulary” (Lancaster, 1803, p. 23), Bell asserted the mildness of his new technique. Principles of mildness and productivity are key to disciplinary power; they replace the costly, sporadic, and uncalculated use of violence with a far more carefully applied, constantly felt economy of force. Accordingly, Bell’s school was a place governed by “means as much more effectual as they are more lenient than usual” (Bell, 1808, p. 5); the transformation he claimed to have achieved in his pupils was not the result of raw strength. After all, the problem with a “system of terror” and the “fear of punishment” is that neither is “so constant nor so certain an operation” (Bell, 1812, p. 39). If “newly-invented racks or screws, or whips, or cords” had been placed into his hands, the “experiment should have perished in embryo.” Instead, Bell was forced to construct a minute “division of labour” after which he was left with the “simple and easy charge of directing, regulating, and controlling his intellectual and moral machine” (Bell, 1808, p. 3). The burden of the school should not fall heavily upon the master if it is well constructed; “school-keeping” should no longer be a “toilsome employ” if the school is “conducted by a regular system” (Lancaster, 1803, pp. 17–18). The mechanisms of such a school would provide a constant,
certain, and thus lighter form of control; milder for the pupils it subjects and easier for the master who superintends. The machinery bears its own weight. 

Time was to be maximized in the monitorial school, which it sought “to intensify [by] the use of the slightest moment, as if time, in its very fragment-ation, were inexhaustible” (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 154). Bell argued that “to attain any good end in education, the great object is to fix attention, and excite exertion,” thus preventing idle waste (Bell, 1808, p. 10). The teacher who seeks to “command a constant and perpetual attention on the part of the scholar” is, of course, limited by “such a number of boys as he can at once have under his eye and within his reach” (Bell, 1812, pp. 38–39). The complex machinery of the monitorial school overcame this barrier, securing the attention of each pupil through an “uninterrupted succession of short and easy lessons.” Constant activity was to be further ensured through “the perpetual presence and never-ceasing vigilance of its numerous overseers, which preclude idleness, ensure diligence, prevent ill behavior of every sort, and almost supersede the necessity of punishment” (Bell, 1808, p. 3). It should come as no surprise that one solitary term is described as key to this “simple, easy, pleasant, expeditious, and economical” system (Bell, 1808, p. 6):

Were it required to say, in one word, by what means these primary and effectual requisites, attention and exertion, are to be called forth, that word were discipline; a word, which at once conveys a happy illustration of the subject of inquiry. For, as its classical and original meaning is Learning, Education, Instruction, it has come, as often happens, to signify the Means by which this end is attained, whether it be the method, order, and rule observed in teaching, or the punishment and correction employed for this purpose . . . as in an army, discipline is the first, second, and third essential. (Bell, 1808, pp. 10–11)

The “fundamental articles in a school, are arrangement, method, and order”; in a word, discipline (Bell, 1808, p. 11). So convinced was Bell of the powers of his approach that he would even boast that a single master carrying out his methods could “without difficulty, conduct ten contiguous schools, each consisting of a thousand scholars” for the “school teaches itself” (Bell, 1812, p. 40). To some extent qualifying this claim, Bell assures us that such machinery cannot run in perpetuity without periodic maintenance and the regular input of his energies: A “scrutinizing eye must pervade the whole machine” and an “active mind must give it energy” (Bell, 1808, p. 16). In fact, the “smallest inattention to the preservation of any part of the system occasions a proportionate falling off” (Bell, 1812, p. 32). F. J. Gladman, former pupil and later, Inspector of Schools for the BFSS, writes:

The Organizer's business is to construct a machine . . . and to put it in going order. This being done, he has to supervise and adjust its working from time to time, so as to get the most out of it, with the least
possible friction. Good organization is known by the . . . results it produces, as well as by its apparent taking care of itself, or by the smoothness, exactitude, and machine-like regularity of its working. (Gladman, 1898, p. 368)

The disciplinary outline of the monitorial school is now becoming clear: It was designed to form habits of diligence and industry that would be of use to society at large, using a severe but effective economy of power. The monitorial school was run by its scholars who were located within, and became part of, its complex regulatory machinery. Order was maintained by a system that avoided coercion and terror, favoring instead more subtle means of encouragement. Correctly arranged, this moral machine would bear its own weight while maximizing the use of time in every pupil. Idleness was prevented and constant activity ensured by the never-ceasing vigilance of its numerous overseers. As in an army, disciplinary technique would allow a single master to conduct the activity of a thousand scholars without revolt. And yet, though this machinery could remove the toilsome burdens associated with school-keeping, it nevertheless required periodic maintenance. The system required the oversight of an educational engineer, of a practitioner who was able to apply the newly established educational expertise.

Monitorial Organization of Space

The substance of these grand plans can be found within the detailed arrangements of the monitorial school, where the organization of space was a key part of its functioning (Upton, 1996). The school was assembled in a single large room or hall, with windows “at least six feet from the floor” to prevent outside distraction. At one end was the master’s desk. Occupying the middle of the room were forms (benches) and desks that were “fixed firmly to the ground” (Gladman, 1898, p. 373).

Upon entry all pupils proceeded to their unique number “printed on the school wall” where the spaces left vacant describe absences at a glance (Lancaster, 1810, p. 25). Once the pupils were called to their seats, it would become clear how the school hall was divided into a hierarchy of classes and functionaries (see Figure 1). Each class would sit at its respective desk, which defined in physical space the position of its members within the hierarchy of school life. This allotted spot was a relative position within a route of progression that operated throughout the school, from the front, nearest the master’s desk, to the rear. All internally recruited functionaries would have their stations, a “general monitor of order” standing “on a high stool at the lower end of the room” facing the scholars, and the “monitors of classes” standing above the seated majority, taking up “their position to the right of their respective groups” (Gladman, 1898, p. 374).
One can see here how the architecture of the school hall transformed an amorphous mass of children into a legible entity. The definition of each child, including his or her role within the school, was the direct result of positioning within this conceptual and functional grid. The organization of classes and monitors defined a norm of progression, constructing the terms within which its pupils were encouraged to view themselves. Perched on the benches before them was their past, on the benches behind, their future.

To the right-hand end of each writing desk at which sat “seventeen or eighteen scholars” was a “standard (a kind of notice board)” from which the class marks were suspended (Gladman, 1898, p. 375). This rendered in material form for all to see the conceptual grid of marks that defined the class and each individual within it. Also to the right of the desks are smaller boards called “telegraphs” that could turn freely on an iron rod, the lower end of which was fixed into the top of the standard just referred to. “Upon one side of the board is inscribed the number of the class, and on the other the letters E X. The E X enables monitors to inform the General Monitor that they have examined the slates” (Gladman, 1898, p. 375), thereby assuring that testing was carried out on a periodic basis.

Figure 1. Interior of a monitorial school.
Even the precise movement of the child, seated along in the regimented order of each bench, was to be defined according to the breakdown of bodily mechanics:

Habits of prompt obedience must be universally established. With children who are restless, volatile, and unused to restraint, mechanical motions of the body, as they are at once easily understood, and readily performed, afford the best means of inculcating these habits; and no teacher ought to rest satisfied until he has brought every child to sit, stand, speak, or be silent, on the instant of the command being given. (BFSS, 1839, p. 10)

“Positions of the Scholars,” an illustration repeatedly included in BFSS manuals (Bartle, 1990) (see Figure 2), outlines a numbered scheme of bodily movements. These correspond to a range of associated commands enabling the school to be run according to a meticulous breakdown of gestures. Not all teaching occurred within these parallel lines of wood; some lessons took place at “draft stations” along the edge of the hall that were indicated by semi-circular lines cut in the floor. Finally, strips of “baize were hung from the ceiling” to check the “reverberation of sound” (Gladman, 1898, p. 375). The organization of space was clearly integral to the operation of the monitorial system, from registered positioning at desks, to a meticulous breakdown of movements, and a functional location in a hierarchy of progression from the front of the school to the rear; all of this is to be found within a complex architectural formulation.

Monitorial Organization of Hierarchy and Movement

Within this predefined space there was a detailed and self-referential process of movement whereupon each scholar “finds his own level, not only in his class, but in the ranks of the school, being promoted or degraded from place to place, or class to class, according to his proficiency” (Bell, 1808, p. 15). The most dependable were given special duties: Each class had a teacher and an assistant teacher who were also pupils themselves. They were not only cheaper than more mature teachers hired from outside. Being young and impressionable, they could, according to Bell, be more finely tuned to the specific workings of his pedagogic machinery. In addition, knowing “no more than what is level to the capacities of their pupils,” they would “lose no time in teaching what is beyond the comprehension of their scholars” (Bell, 1812, p. 42). In marked contrast to parallel developments in the moral training school (see the following), it was a devout attention to the surface of the pupil cohort and not to its depths that was the hallmark of a good teacher.

The problem of overdevelopment was nevertheless mirrored by the problem of excessive simplicity: “any boy lame, or deformed” or limited in his faculties could be rejected if it was thought he would become
a “burden” (Bell, 1812, p. 84). Those who were admitted were expected to be able to perform their function as a component part. The basic drive within the school was to “obtain pre-eminence” in the class and then “to rise above it, and be promoted to a superior; and especially not to sink below it, and be degraded to an inferior class” (Bell, 1808, p. 19). Promotion to a higher class only occurs when a boy has held a high rank among his peers for some time and is only permanent if he can quickly rise to near the middle of his new class, otherwise he must revert to his original classification. Any boy who fails for some time to perform well in his existing class is also degraded. However, if he can maintain a high rank in the lower class he is not “doomed to permanent degradation” and promotion is secured. Thus, one might say that a flavor of demotion is seen here as sufficient incentive to secure “redoubled exertion.” Overall, this system of perpetual readjustment ensures that “every boy in every class is fully and profitably employed” with the improvement of each “rendered a maximum” (Bell, 1808, p. 20).

A clever supplementary twist to this sequential distribution of pupils further heightens the stimulus to conform. Each class is divided into pairs of tutors and pupils (not to be confused with the teacher and assistants in overall
The superior half of the class tutors the inferior half, and the seats taken along the bench reflect this design: The lowest member of the class sits beside the highest, the next lowest beside the next highest, and so on all the way along the bench. Achieving the status of tutor is an honor for “you have exalted [the tutor] in his own eyes” by giving him a character to support (Bell, 1808, p. 21). These tutors are now responsible for a double fate. They must protect their charge from demotion by teaching well. But they must also maintain their high rank by being the most proficient at what they teach; for “what disgrace attaches to the boy who, by his negligence, is degraded into a pupil, and falls perhaps to be tutored by his late pupil, promoted to be a tutor” (Bell, 1808, p. 23).

Ranking depended upon a meticulous trail of documentation. It began with the individual scholar who “registers for himself all his daily operations in the last page of his copy, or ciphering book.” This is subsequently compared to what he did the day before and what others of similar standing achieved. There are also weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual reviews. “The page, in which these registers are kept, is ruled into thirty-one parallel lines, so as to last a month, and into as many columns as there are daily entries to be made.” The teacher also compiles a more general daily record containing the “number of lessons read; pages or lines gone over in these lessons; and hours thus employed” (Bell, 1808, pp. 46–47). In Lancaster’s system, the monitor appointed as “inspector-general of reading” would examine samples of each class on a periodic basis, getting round to “some hundreds” in a few days (Lancaster, 1810, pp. 27–28). Overall, this documentary trail ensured that each pupil had a “permanent testimony to merit and demerit, even if [they were sometimes] overlooked in passing” (Bell, 1808, p. 28).

The “black book” was seen as “the most powerful operator.” All misdemeanors (including failure to report misdemeanors) were recorded here. The schoolmaster would then decide if an “immediate reprimand, or threat” was suitable or whether the offense should become part of the weekly ritual of punishment. “Abstract lectures,” we are told, “are little attended to, and still less understood, by children. To reach their minds and touch their hearts, you must give a visible shape and tangible form to your doctrine” (Bell, 1808, p. 31). As a disciplinary technique, the monitorial reprimand would travel through the body to the constructed soul.

A parallel “system of encouragement” acted to reduce the need for punishment. The schoolmaster awarded paper tickets for good work, and a monitor of tickets recorded these in a book. A variety of prizes, ranging in value, were available for purchase from a separate monitor when enough tickets had accumulated. In addition, there were several orders of merit, and those who reached higher rank would wear badges on a daily basis until these were forfeited by bad behavior. We are told that pupils seemed “more affected by their loss than by coercion” (Lancaster, 1803, p. 50). Teachers
and assistants also received “pecuniary” and “honorary” rewards. “Silver medals, of different numbers and size, were distributed in the annual examination by the president” (Bell, 1808, p. 24). Many other duties also had their respective officers and systems of encouragement: There was a “sub-usher and usher” who would “watch over the whole” (p. 16), a monitor of slates, of cleanliness, of absences, and so on until every duty was discharged.

The Hundred Hands of Briareus

The details of this system continue ever further into the minutiae as its architects labor with tireless precision to outline the workings of their pedagogic utopia. Enough has been said to give an overall impression, and we must take care not to get carried away by Bell and Lancaster’s rhetorical excess. At one point Bell describes how this system bestowed upon him “the hundred hands of Briareus, the hundred eyes of Argus, and the wings of Mercury” (Bell, 1808, p. 32). Still, according to the annual reports of the BFSS, there is evidence to suggest the system was working, though these reports, “frequently pious in tone” (Bartle, 1992, p. 78), were perhaps edited “to give a favorable impression to subscribers” (Bartle, 1988, p. 23).

In a report received from a school in Boston it was claimed that “corporal punishment is dispensed with” and “playing truant is very rare” (BFSS, 1816, p. 41). However, at Leith, the school “at its first formation, was quite an offence to the neighbourhood” on account “of the uncontrollable rudeness of the scholars out of doors, and the noise, insubordination, and misrule that reigned within” (BFSS, 1821, p. 49). After 5 years they were happy to report general success, though it is unclear exactly how this was achieved. In a Sheffield school, the account of moral rescue for one particular girl (who was “violent to the extreme” and “addicted to fighting, swearing, and almost every thing that was bad”) is in the form of a sudden religious conversion, following exposure to scripture (BFSS, 1819, p. 41). We might infer from this that methods were far from uniform and were not always disciplinary.

The negative side of monitorial discipline was perhaps more unpleasant and extensive than it first appears. Lancaster pictures himself as a tireless and necessary innovator in this domain. Even though he had “a perfect horror” of the rod (Salmon, 1904, p. 10), this came more from a dislike of its tendency toward arbitrary violence than its cruelty as such. Rather than thrash into submission, Lancaster preferred to establish a more regular economy of pain. Modes of correction must be “inflicted, so as to give as much uneasiness to the delinquents, without disturbing the mind or temper of the master” (Lancaster, 1810, pp. 35–36). As these methods were corrective and not simply punitive, they were arguably disciplinary. However, if they were heavily depended upon in the monitorial school they could also be seen as signifying the failure of those milder disciplinary techniques outlined previously.
Instruments of punishment included “a wooden log” placed round the neck, which “serves as a pillory”: “The neck is not pinched or closely confined—it is chiefly burthensome by the manner in which it incumbers the neck, when the delinquent turns to the right or the left. . . . Thus he is confined to sit in his proper position, and go on with his work.” “When logs are unavailing, it is common to fasten the legs of offenders together with wooden shackles” and order them to walk round the hall until they are “glad to sue for liberty.” If this fails, “the left hand is tied behind the back, or wooden shackles fastened from elbow to elbow, behind the back. Sometimes the legs are tied together,” preventing boys from wandering about. “Occasionally boys are put in a sack, or in a basket, suspended to the roof of the school, in sight of all the pupils, who frequently smile at the birds in the cage.” This punishment “is one of the most terrible” and was especially “dreaded by the monitors.” Frequent offenders were “yoked together, sometimes by a piece of wood that fastens round all their necks” and forced to parade the school “walking backwards,” which made them “pay very great attention to their footsteps.” Others were “dressed up with labels” describing the offense and walked round the school by two boys proclaiming the fault (Lancaster, 1810, pp. 34–35). Dirty boys were cleaned in front of the whole school by a girl. Truants were tied to a post and if particularly “incorrigible” would be “tied up in a blanket, and left to sleep at night on the floor” (Lancaster, 1810, p. 26). In punishing by confinement after school, the master’s attendance was obviated “by tying them to the desks.” Those who adopted “a singing tone in reading” were ridiculed with a special costume, others were made to wear the “fools coat.” A lazy boy would have a pillow fetched “and placed on the desk for him to lay his head on, as if asleep, in the face of the school,” a “boy wandering from his seat may be placed under a hen coop.” Idle boys were also rocked in a cradle (Lancaster, 1810, pp. 35–37). All this was to be applied with a cool, calculated temper using techniques of discomfort and shame.

If we are to believe Lancaster, these methods “have been seldom used, as hardly to be known among the happy children in my school” (Lancaster, 1810, p. 38). And yet, his very ingenuity and obvious desire to parade his inventiveness leads to suspicion. Early BFSS manuals also “reflected Lancaster’s views on humiliating penalties” (Bartle, 1990, p. 23). We are told that a basic principle to be adopted in administering punishment is “the continual force of novelty.” Variety and invention are needed because any single punishment frequently used “loses its effect” (Lancaster, 1810, p. 35). Despite rising opposition to uncontrolled thrashing within the BFSS,8 we are left in some doubt concerning the ultimate effectiveness of disciplinary power in the monitorial school. We have a sense of this disciplinary machinery failing to achieve perfect synergy with its subjects of a sort that we would expect from the more flamboyant statements of its most enthusiastic proponents or from the impression we garner from Foucault of
disciplinary power. Perhaps the “unconscious is not as biddable as the Foucauldian model sometimes implies, nor desire so malleable” (Donald, 1992, p. 19)?

What these criticisms forget is that Foucault never intended to describe a fully sealed and infallible machinery. Disciplinary power, by definition, “is necessarily a failing project” (Coopey & McKinlay, 2010, p. 108). It never attained totalitarian completeness. Foucault did not set out to discover and denounce systems of domination, as “these are only the terminal forms power takes” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 92). He sought to investigate more subtle and partial examples of power that we have a tendency to overlook. The analytic task we perhaps face is to investigate how exactly disciplinary techniques were transformed in response to new challenges and old failures.

We can nevertheless still appreciate how to some degree the monitorial school produced an “economy of labour, time, expense, and punishment.” We can see how, like “the steam engine, or spinning machinery,” it had the capacity to “diminish labour and multiply work” (Bell, 1808, p. 36). Indeed, at times the monitorial school was directly linked with industry, supplementing its income by “selling examples of [pupils’] needlework” (Bartle, 1995, p. 10). In the education of First Nation children in Tennessee and Kentucky, monitorial schooling became exclusively concerned with preparing pupils for manual labor (Rayman, 1981). In such cases, monitorial schools achieved a more or less direct link between their internal machinery and the external industrial machinery. These connections aside, the monitorial school also provides us with a precise understanding of the location and role of examination in this early experiment with mass schooling. It allows us to see how examination was intimately linked to the formation of subjectivity. Examination helped locate the child within a functional and conceptual grid of progression, allowing the child to regulate his or her body according to these externally set requirements.

Examination in and Beyond the Monitorial System

Examination was at the hub of this monitorial system, in the sense that it was a point of connection between other disciplinary techniques. Overall distribution and movement benefited from its ability to render visible an otherwise obscured process of learning and effort. It was located at multiple sites, including: the system of telegraphs that ensured it was taking place with coordinated regularity as part of every lesson; the keeping of records by pupils in the backs of their books at the end of each day and month, allowing comparisons between pupils and within pupils across time; the consequent distribution of scholars along the bench, pairing tutor and tutee in cooperative rivalry; the system that decided whether temporary demotion would become permanent; the records of overall class activity found both in a book and on public display; and finally, the monthly, quarterly, and annual
reviews as well as systems of recognition and remuneration. Examination was a constant and diffuse presence in the overall economy of the school. All practices depended on this ability to locate, describe, record, and compare, to raise up what was formerly “below the threshold of description” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 191). It placed individuals within a “network of writing” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 189) that would define them.

Occasionally, Foucault encourages us to extend the grasp of disciplinary power to the present when he remarks: “It has always been and still is [italics added] an intrinsic element of the disciplines,” or examination “is still [italics added] caught up in disciplinary technology” (Foucault, 1975/1991, pp. 226–227). However, Foucault does not trace its development from the 19th century to the present as it appeared to him in 1975. All we are left with are these enigmatic claims. It is therefore important to ask whether examination has indeed endured to the present day in the form previously described. Is examination still so central and so deeply coordinating in contemporary pedagogic practice? Or was examination in the monitorial school so specific to a particular organization of space and hierarchy that when the monitorial school dissolved, so did the examination in this particular disciplinary incarnation?

In considering these questions it must be remembered that monitorial schools, as disciplinary institutions, were “mixed spaces” that were both “real” and “ideal” in their constitution (Foucault, 1975/1991, p. 148). Therefore, the disciplinary role of examination could in all possibility still endure in the latter rarefied form even if many details of a material structure have departed. Its early development also sits at the birth of the human sciences, at the dawn of partitioned, scientifically measurable, normalized human-kind (Hacking, 1990). In this sense, disciplinary power is assured a continuing legacy. Its associated disciplinary knowledges along with the examining experts they produce are still in place in one form or another. At a very basic level, examination still renders the invisible visible and situates the subject in a relative scheme. Nevertheless, since other modes of power have developed alongside the disciplinary in pedagogic practice, it is necessary to chart their development too. If disciplinary-examination does indeed extend its strategy of power to the present day, this must surely be in a highly revised form, one that incorporates, for example, modes of schooling that derive from a later progressive tradition. Retaining our early 19th-century focus, there is an important pedagogic precursor that should no longer remain neglected; this precursor is associated with a different formation of power, a pastoral power that is also folded into the makeup of the modern school. The introduction of pastoral technique produced an entirely different relation between teacher and pupil than was constructed by disciplinary power. The ensuing legacy of pastoral-examination for the functioning of examination today is just as significant, if not more so, than the legacy one might attribute to its more easily identifiable companion, disciplinary-examination.
Examination, the Moral Training School, and Pastoral Power

The moral training school incorporated two techniques that together introduced a new dimension to the role of examination in education. First of all, it developed techniques that would allow it to include within its calculations life exterior to the school. Second, it operated according to a metaphor of depth, seeking an increase of depth in the relationship between teacher and pupil, in terms of the teacher accessing and working to enhance the child’s interiority. This was a major revision to the monitorial approach where shallowness was a virtue, where monitor-teachers were recruited for reasons of their near intellectual equivalence with one another. They were to know “no more than what is level to the capacities of their pupils” (Bell, 1812, p. 42). The adult-teacher in charge of the school was also operating at the surface, charged with maintaining the school’s complex mechanism of bodily manipulations. Access to detailed records accumulated by its dispersed examining techniques provided little in the way of depth to the shallowness of perception. By contrast, the depth of the moral training school teacher was of an altogether different order. This institution achieved depth in the pedagogic relationship by elevating the teacher as moral exemplar and confidante.

The first strategy depended on its disciplinary precursors. Monitorial schools were profoundly interior spaces. A brief survey of the pictures collated by Upton (1996), for example, reveals how the monitorial schools of early 19th-century Albany, Washington, and Philadelphia opened straight on to the pavement. The perimeter of the school was the boundary marked by the wall of the school hall. What the monitorial school achieved by gathering together such large groups of children from the urban poor was to establish the urban exterior as a problem space in relation to the school. This was a problem to which the moral training school provided a solution.

The moral training school pioneered in Glasgow by David Stow was designed to counteract the effects of this urban exterior by taking into account its relation to the work of the school. The moral school devised specific strategies that were intended to counter the morally damaging “training of the streets” (Stow, 1854, p. 153). These strategies would mediate the relationship between exterior and interior of the school through a simulacrum of the street, known as the playground. Unlike the monitorial school, this pedagogic system would not be one that “prevents the natural vivacity of children,” as Lancaster (1803, p. 7) would have preferred. Instead, it would seek to stimulate the natural tendencies of children, to encourage their self-expression within the boundaries of the playground in order to derive moral lessons from their conduct. Through the use of this space, children could be “superintended in real life” where real life is a cipher for the life of the street. This simulated urban exterior would supplement the “unnatural restraint of a covered school-room,” allowing children to be “freely at
play” having “free scope” and “full vent” to display their true dispositions, revealing traits upon which the teacher would then operate (Stow, 1854, pp. 6, 8).

The second strategy—constructing the moral depth of teacher and child—secures the unique economy of power that was developed by the moral training school. In building a regime of instruction based on moral depth, this institution introduced a form of moral government that Foucault (1979/2002, 1983) called “pastoral power.” This innovation was part of a wider cultural shift that was transforming Christian techniques for application to an increasingly secular context. In our case, this concerns a revised set of relations established between a teacher and his or her pupils, mirroring the set of relations established by Christian institutions between a shepherd or pastor and his or her flock. The continued dependence of 19th-century schooling on religious discourses has been explored in a variety of national contexts, showing how “themes of salvation, redemption, and fear of a fall from grace” were integrated within the discourses of modern schooling (Tröhler et al., 2011, p. 15). For example, Popkewitz (2011) has shown how the pursuit of reason, science, and liberty was combined with reformed Protestant notions of redemption and salvation in the American progressive tradition. My focus here is more limited, as I explore how this translates onto the integration of a specific pedagogic technique within the daily practices of the pastoral school and its accompanying regime of examination.

According to Foucault’s tentative genealogy, pastoral power originated as a set of techniques in Christian institutions. An arrangement was established within the church where certain individuals could, based on their religious quality, serve others in order to achieve salvation in the next world. This was not a form of power that issued simple commands from above; rather, it relied on the willingness of the pastor to sacrifice his or her own interests for the care of the flock. Indeed, the ultimate salvation of the pastor depended on the success of this relationship. It was a form of power that not only paid attention to the flock as a whole, but also attended to the individual in all his or her detail. Individual care depended upon the construction of intimate and confessional relationships that produced “a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it” (Foucault, 1983, p. 214). Pastoral care was “coextensive and continuous with life” and was linked to a “production of truth—the truth of the individual himself.” Though the pastorate eventually lost a great deal of its former influence, the techniques it developed “spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution” (Foucault, 1983, p. 214). These individualizing techniques were integrated alongside disciplinary mechanisms within the modern secular Western state.

In a secular context the word salvation took on different meanings with a “series of worldly aims” taking the place of the “religious aims of the traditional pastorate” (Foucault, 1983, p. 215). At the same time, the officials of
pastoral power increased, including within their orbit the 19th-century schoolteacher. Teaching became a form of professional sacrifice for the present and future moral, social, and educational well-being of the pupil. The schoolteacher would require “no small support from Christian faith” to reverse “the mental darkness, the stubborn tempers, the hopeless spirits, and the vicious habits” of the pauper child (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1841/1973, p. 296). This demanded a “spirit of self-sacrifice and tender concern for [their] well-being” (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1841/1973, p. 296) based on a sober understanding of just “how degenerate these children are.” The “men who undertake this work should not set about it in the spirit of hirelings” (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1841/1973, p. 295); a moral tie should be established that would bind the subjectivity of the teacher to the pupil, establishing a relationship of mutual dependence. This was a “significant shift from the view that the only interest a teacher might have in a school is the fear of losing his [or her] situation. The teacher now had to be imbued with an ethic of service” (Jones, 1990, p. 61). An ethic of this sort went far beyond the instrumental link established by devices such as the infamous Revised Code of 1862 or payment by results. It created a teacher who begins to associate his or her own subjective well-being with the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of the pupil. The teacher is encouraged to develop an educational conscience.

The formation of this new teacher was itself a product of moral training. It relied on a sustained period of instruction carried out in the newly established 19th-century normal school, set up by pioneers such as Kay-Shuttleworth at Battersea and Stow at Glasgow (Jones, 1990). This would prepare teachers “for a life of self denial” (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1841/1973, p. 312). The newly ordained teacher would then be placed in a school such as Stow’s moral training school, where he would be supported by a carefully designed architecture that would help project his moral presence. In this school a single “more intimate space”—“the prototype of the modern classroom”—was organized around the “superintending eye and voice of the teacher,” replacing the “molecular sub-divisions of the vast monitorial schoolroom” (Hunter, 1988, p. 59). Pupils were arranged in the rising tiers of a gallery from which they could return the gaze of their moral exemplar, the schoolteacher. Direct supervision and a series of complex moral ties replaced the distributed supervision of the monitorial schoolroom.

Supervision began in the playground where pupils would be observed in their natural state. From these observations the teacher would extract moral lessons to be brought back into the schoolroom. Upon returning to the gallery from the playground, any case of good or bad conduct could be reviewed by the master, who would encourage the “whole gallery to join in” as they do in all other exercises (Stow, 1854, p. 203). The entire school was recruited in “applauding the good deed, or condemning the misdemeanor” (Stow, 1854, p. 156). Here, the effect of peers (the “power of the Sympathy of Numbers”) is elevated as a “principle of the highest
importance.’’ Stow (1854) viewed this as an “influence, mighty either for
good or evil.” At present the sympathy of numbers was “all on the side of
evil” due to the negative training of the streets. “To lay hold of this prin-
iple,” Stow argued, “and turn it to good, is the great desideratum” (p. 153).
The gallery was designed to harness that power. For example, if a boy steals
his play-fellow’s toy, the master takes no action in the playground, but
“when the children are again seated in the school gallery, as usual, he com-
ences the process of examination” in the shape of a story about the boy
who stole a toy. It is unnecessary to mark out the culprit as his head will
hang down, thus “he is visible to all
by his downcast and reddened counte-
nance.” The master reminds them that although “he had not observed him,
God assuredly had; or rather, he draws out this statement from the children
themselves” (Stow, 1854, p. 206). Through yet more questions and answers
the mode of punishment is discussed, negotiated, and decided. Thus, the
whole group participates in moral correction.

As the school inspector Jelinger Symons (1852) instructed, in his book
on the moral and industrial training of the working classes, the teacher
must “be ready to seize every opportunity presented by passing events”
for “impressing on the child’s heart some valuable lesson” from scripture
(p. 121). The combination of duly noted lived experience in and around
the school with the collective judgment making processes of the gallery
would transform “wild beings” (p. 120) into moral subjects, it would instill
“habits of investigation” that interrogate the mundane events of daily life
and expose them to religious appraisal. In the moral school, these habits
would be “formed and transformed into wholesome channels [within the
child], which will benefit the child to his life’s end and beyond it” (p. 116).

Compared to monitorial examination, examination in the moral training
school was of a radically different order. Even though here too examination
was spread throughout the practices of the school (rather than being con-
fined to particular moments and absent from others), it was more intuitive
than deductive, it was more in tune with the unique demands of the
moment. Examination in the moral training school was a technique that
sought to reveal the peculiar condition of the child and then use this con-
structed knowledge to design a specific intervention in response. This was
performed through a sequence of subjective adjustments that could involve
an interaction between the child and his or her peers as well as with the
teacher. Through this technique, the class would begin to develop the capac-
ity for subjective judgment making, of the sort required in such situations.
They would learn, in effect, how to construct the truth of the case and
how to then judge themselves even before the gallery assembled.

In the moral training school the master would carefully shepherd the
children toward better habits while also embodying the moral exemplar to
which they all aspire: “The teacher must be what he wishes to make the chil-
dren” (Symons, 1852, p. 126). This relationship demands that he places
himself “on such terms with his pupils so that they can, without fear, make
him their confidant, unburden their minds, and tell him of any little mischief
they may have done” (Stow, 1854, p. 156). The confessional practice Stow
outlines here would build upon, but also go beyond, the playground-gallery
system of observation and correction. It would extend a truth procedure out-
side this architectural system, developing an obligation to confess on behalf
of the child that would cover a range of activities far greater than mere play-
ground misdemeanors.

As an examining technique confession requires careful deconstruction:

The obligation to confess . . . is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no
longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the
contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature,
“demands” only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because
a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it
down, and it can finally be articulated at the price of a kind of liber-
tation. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence. (Foucault,

This “internal ruse of confession” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 60) obscures
how as an instrument of power it actually functions in reverse. Power con-
strains us through confession to produce a truth about ourselves; it renders
silence awkward. In the moral training school subjects were encouraged to
reveal themselves according to the logic they had absorbed through the mor-
ally focused, morally saturated engagements of its pedagogy. Inner truth
became a function of the larger framework of pastoral relations within which
the child was positioned. Placing any external consequences of confession
to one side, the ritual itself would then produce “intrinsic modifications in
moral training school would develop the child’s capacity for reflecting on
and governing the self.

Considered overall, pastoral power would allow mechanisms of state to
develop a certain degree of purchase on the subjectivity of the child. It would
construct an intimate knowledge of individuals, garnered from practices of
surveillance and self-reflection. This would presumably allow for the forma-
tion of a governable self-regulating citizenry once education was extended
to the entire population. A mode of examination was involved here that
was more personal than the disciplinary technology described previously,
for it was no longer preoccupied with the operations of complex disciplinary
machinery. This is not to suggest that pastoral examination operated without
external artifice. It too relied on distributed techniques and architectures in
order to function. And yet, its focus in constructing the interiority of those sub-
jected to its practices was more intensely developed, depending less on bodily
manipulation and more on interpersonal techniques of supervision and con-
fession that were better able to endure outside the confines of the institution.
Mixed Systems of Instruction

These two institutions—monitorial and moral training—employed relatively distinct methods of examination that were distributed within, rather than imposed upon, the relations that constituted the school. A schematic overview of their functioning should not, however, be allowed to obscure the extent to which these institutions also borrowed from each other, establishing relationships between their respective approaches that foreshadowed the ultimate integration of disciplinary and pastoral techniques with the state-sponsored elementary schools of late 19th-century Britain and elsewhere.

The monitorial school was not static in form and did in fact begin to absorb pastoral techniques. Indeed, some monitorial schools may have integrated such techniques from the outset. A very early report to the BFSS from a school in France makes reference to the use of an approach comparable in some respects to Stow’s pastoral regime. By the mid 19th century, monitorial schools were coming under attack for their severe economies of instruction, even though this had once been their disciplinary selling point (Bartle, 1988, 1993). According to a manual of the BFSS issued in 1856, the society had recently decided that the monitorial hall should be divided into three parts, with small groups sitting in semicircles at the front, the standard fixed benches for classes in the middle, and larger groups assembled in a gallery at the back. A heavy curtain would partition off each section and there was to be a playground outside. Nevertheless, the school was still run according to a disciplinary mode. Classes would move from one section to the next according to a rigid timetable and on a regular basis. There would be a signal upon which the children would leave their seats and march according to a beat, “one, two, three, four, to indicate the time to which they are to move” (BFSS, 1856, p. 128). Various other commands would regulate the raising of curtains, distribution of books, cleaning of slates, and so on. In addition, the school was still taught and run by the scholars themselves, and if trustworthy assistants could not be found the curtains would be raised: the school would return to a less intimate “purely monitorial” system (p. 2).

Nonetheless, in response to the criticisms of Stow (1854) that had been republished 2 years beforehand (in a book that had reached its 10th edition), the BFSS claimed that the school was no longer an exclusively interior space. Playgrounds were now also “regarded by good teachers [in the monitorial school] as places in which the dispositions of boys are frequently most strikingly manifested” and upon which subsequent instruction would rest (BFSS, 1856, p. 146). The moral training of the monitorial school was just as efficient, we are told, as in the moral training school; indeed, it had come to use similar methods. For our purposes, whether these techniques had been developed independently or in direct response to the moral training school is relatively unimportant. The point to observe is that disciplinary power was being supplemented by a pastoral mode.
Perhaps moral training schools were more resistant to the reverse process of disciplinary infusion? After all, Stow had a very influential proponent, Kay-Shuttleworth, who believed that the “social body cannot be constructed like a machine, on abstract principles which merely include physical motions.” The social body also required “the cultivation of religion and morality” and thus the methods of the moral training school (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1832/1973, p. 38). Yet, disciplinary elements can still be identified in Stow’s design: Obedience must be “instant” and children should move “à la militaire” with every motion of the class being “as much as possible simultaneous” and according to precise verbal instructions (Stow, 1854, pp. 332, 339). The position and gait of the schoolmaster is minutely prescribed (Stow, 1854, p. 322), and the school is referred to repeatedly as a “machine” (Stow, 1854, pp. iv–v). In addition, as with disciplinary power, the pastoral mode must be presumed to have its defects and be seen as a system of only partial success. Indeed, Kay-Shuttleworth himself admits that it is impossible to “overlook all the moral relations of men” (Kay-Shuttleworth, 1832/1973, p. 29). Alone, the pastoral teacher bore an impossible responsibility for the betterment of the lower classes and other socially marginalized groups. As it turned out, the continuity of this pastoral technique depended on its integration with the activities of other actors and discourses. Toward the end of the 19th century a rising concern for the health and hygiene of the population led to a proliferation of agencies concerned with the workings of the home. It was within this complex of agencies and “tutelary agents” that the pastoral schoolteacher began to find support and adapt, supplementing a discourse of moral rescue with new discourses of hygiene and social health (Jones, 1990, p. 73; Rose, 1985, 1989/1999). As part of this process, the confessional techniques of examination also expanded at an increasing rate, adapting in turn to new institutional sites. The shaping of the private self became a widespread activity (Rose, 1989/1999).

It is nonetheless still worth returning to the moral training school in order to focus on the functioning of a technique before its proliferation. This case study provides a conceptual grounding that can help clarify the significance of later developments. We can already see within the moral training school more modern ideas, such as those of a “‘child-centred’ pedagogy, overseen by an unobtrusive yet vigilant teacher” (Hunter, 1988, p. 34). The question to ask is how these more recent approaches continued or adapted a project that was once more explicitly concerned with the formation of souls. For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to note that during the 19th century there was this parallel tradition in examination. It followed a path that was distinct from the disciplinary route, and it too has had an important influence on the present. This alternative approach to examination makes a virtue of pedagogies that pay attention to the natural environment and dispositions of the child. In a display of openness it recruits peers to the processes of assessment within a setting that has been carefully
fabricated by the teacher and the school. The child is located, very explicitly, at the center of examination, for his or her own personal benefit. These allusions to a relationship between Stow’s 19th-century pedagogy and more recent trends in education make an important point about more seemingly holistic trends in examination. They alert us to the potential for a moral scheme behind traditions that are resolutely antimechanistic, traditions that “prioritize” and listen to the child.

If we broaden our contemporary definition of examination to include the wide range of pedagogic techniques that extend beyond the examination hall throughout and outside the school, techniques that seek to reveal the truth of the child and use that truth to inform the educational encounter, that is, if we interpret examination broadly and acknowledge its widely distributed effects, it should be clear that a history of examination must pay attention to pastoral developments as much as it does to disciplinary ones. In other words, a history of examination should pay as much attention to techniques that respond to the child, in the child’s own terms, taking into account his or her prior experience and wider nature (which would be a pastoral approach) than to those more easily condemned techniques that seek to define the environment within which the child must exist and discipline the child according to its artificial terms (which would be a disciplinary approach). The line of distinction between these two techniques has, of course, been blurred. Extending our gaze back to a period when they can be more easily separated heightens sensitivity. It helps prevent our being blinded by a desire to challenge only the more conspicuous, heavy machinery of contemporary examination. It diverts our critical gaze either side of the manifest accountability techniques to which education appears increasingly subject. More humane-appearing traditions of examination may be just as dangerous, if not more so. Listening to the child, incorporating the child’s experience into an examination procedure that has been lightened, and rendered formative, does not allow us to escape the grasp of power (Allen, 2012). It merely represents a switch in emphasis from one venerable tradition of power to another.

Conclusion: Reflecting on the Present

Today it is almost impossible to sense what it would be like to live an unexamined life. This is not simply due to the fact that examinations are everywhere, that it would be difficult as things currently stand to pass through any modern system of schooling without being examined at one point or another. The problem is greater than objecting to the mere empirical spread of examinations: regulating and recording educational progress, or lack of progress; informing the relation between child and parent, guardian, relative, or friend; suffusing practices of teaching and management; informing practices of social care, therapy, and incarceration; backing up or
undermining policy; controlling access to further education; informing employers; conditioning employees. The difficulty we face is also more subtle than one of expressing our profound disapproval of examination as a ubiquitous rationality, one that defines our epoch, one that limits how we think. Perhaps we do live in “an age of examination”; perhaps it is difficult to imagine how we could live differently without this incessant requirement to test and to score. But this is not a matter for the imagination to solve. This is not simply about picturing how we could educate differently. To say that it is about picturing how we could relate to each other differently would be closer to the point. Still, the difficulty we face in an age of examination cannot be combatted by dreaming of what it would be like to go without examination and then exploring whether by virtue of this vision there is any scope for adjusting what we do, how we teach, how we learn, how we school. Examination cannot simply be removed and dreams cannot simply replace it.

First, examination constitutes the school as its ontological condition. Second, insofar as dreams are wishes of the heart (as any Disney film will tell you), they will be limited by an inner sense, a sense expressed through the modern soul, which as this article has endeavored to show, may itself be the product of examination. Examination helps constitute the soul of the child through the cluster of practices that make up the examining-schooling complex. Since the 19th century, examination has produced the concepts or conceptual frame through which we have come to know ourselves. The monitorial school was an early laboratory in this effort, integrating a process that rendered an amorphous mass legible, with a procedure that taught the subsequently partitioned mass to understand and regulate itself in terms of the knowledge that the monitorial examination-schooling complex constructed. The moral training school further developed this construction of the soul by teaching its subjects how they should relate to themselves, initially through an external artifice of architectures and interpersonal relations and later through the absorption of these procedures to an inner conversation that constructed the self to be confessed. These two early 19th-century sites established the frameworks of schooling from which later institutions were built. They developed examining strategies that later fed into the expansion of a far wider examining complex. Toward the end of the 19th century the specific labor of producing souls was multiplying across an increasingly dense grid of social agencies tasked with revealing and directing the truth of personal and social life.

As this article has argued through its account of disciplinary and pastoral examining techniques, any critique of examination and its deleterious effects should avoid the temptation to denounce it as a repressive influence. This examining complex constitutes us as subjects; we owe our existence to it. The critique of examination should begin by objecting to the subjects we have become.
Notes

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1 For previous empirical studies in the British context see, Brooks (1993, 2008), Sutherland (1984), Roach (1971), and Montgomery (1965).

2 There is no space here for anything but a very limited treatment of Hunter’s argument; for a more detailed and critical consideration I refer the reader elsewhere (Cherryholmes, Symes, & Yates, 1995; Goddard, 2006, 2009; Hunter, 1995).


4 Hoskin (1990) tends toward this position in his genealogy of examination.

5 Upon arrival at the writing desk each pupil “places his finger on the slate screw, and stops without turning” (11). When all have “quitted the aisles, the monitor of order says, ‘front,’ they all turn and face him” (8). Following the command “look” they follow the movement of his finger, and turning in that direction, bring their hands “smartly on the desks” (11). Following the command “in” they “spring in” (1); after the word “recover” they “bring their hands to the sling of the slate” (2); after “slates” they pick up the slate (4); after “clean” they clean (5); after “hands” they cease rubbing. Preparing to get up at the end of writing they follow a similar sequence of words and actions: “sling, slates” (2); “hands down, look, turn” (6); “out” (11); “front” (8); along with “unsling” (9); “hats” whereupon hats are put on the desks; “put on hats” (10); and “hands behind” (British and Foreign School Society [BFSS], 1839, pp. 55–56).

6 It was also hoped that future head teachers could be sourced from the monitorial school itself, through the retention and further training of monitors (Bartle, 1974).

7 Although here too ingenious techniques were used. In one school at Edinburgh, the accusation of poor teaching by the respective class monitors could be raised at an appeal, and, if proven, those who registered the complaint took the place “of those who have not observed the blunder, and the Monitor himself loses a place.” Thus supervision and relay operated in both directions (BFSS, 1814, p. 59).

8 Excessive beatings were noted as evidence of unsatisfactory teaching by BFSS officials (Bartle, 1993).

9 This was encouraged in part by government inspection. A report by Hugh Seymour Tremenheere on July 1, 1842, was particularly critical: There were too many pupils under the supervision of only one master and the monitors relied upon were too young and too ignorant. This was an attack on the basic logic of instruction practiced in the monitorial school. However, it should be noted that the BFSS had already begun a transition to simultaneous methods some 3 years previously (see McGarry, 1985, pp. 273–277).

10 When a scholar has committed a fraud, the teacher makes it known to the whole school, and asks the scholars, if they know any declaration of the Holy Spirit which is applicable to the case.” They “hasten to quote some passage of Holy Scripture.” The teacher then “desires the children to encourage the mind of the penitent by some other declaration.” They offer other passages suggesting a route to correction. “Thus the teacher disappears before the Almighty.” The children are now governed by the “Holy One who reveals himself to their tender minds, by means of their fellow-scholars” (italics added). Religious instruction becomes mutual” (BFSS, 1819, pp. 49–50).

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