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The Nation of the Controlled

We as a people are so accustomed to control, that we fail to realize it's invented itself into a social normality, by creating lifestyle occurrences that require us to follow direction for in return, what we believe is success. These occurrences are familiar to us through the structure of hospitals and even jails, but the most important is the educational institution, for the fact that we are all forced to be apart of it, and it has taught us all this social order of governance. This social order of governance is what those who strive for success have respected throughout an entirety of a lifetime. Brought to reader's attention is the idea of panopticism, introduced to us by Michel Foucault. Throughout his writing of *Panopticism*, readers are presented an idea of oppression that is not commonly considered, which involves the reality of these social organizations. A common misconception we have about these institutions is that they are intended to help individuals develop for the benefit of themselves, in the end creating success in their lives, however, they are just means of keeping us under control making us cyborgs of the nation. This control is intended to supervise, record, and examine us, with the intention to know us, then to use us. With this understanding, it is purposeful to reconsider prior knowledge of the benefits of these social organizations because in the reality uncovered, these common organizations are nothing other than means of teaching us how to live according to these institutions.

As previously stated, the power of our nations educational institution is the most important and popular form of organization that teaches discipline, and because of this influence it imposes on our lives, this teaching of discipline is continuous throughout ones entire lifetime; we never escape the educational institutions effects. Interestingly enough, this particular organization is so powerful, that people participate in it with or without desire; life is impossible if we do not conform to being a participant in the organization of education, therefore, it is invented in everyone's life as a priority and not an option for a path towards a successful future. We make it our goal because a lifestyle without it is much more complicated and filled with disappointment. After reading Foucault, I later began to question how much of our encounter with education is based on control, and how much of our education is actually intended to benefit us for our personal fulfillment?

The first question I ask is, how much of our encounter with education, is based on control? Home-schooled, public-schooled, and private-schooled children all encounter the same thing; they are all being observed and assessed. They are observed on their behavior to make sure they are on track with how they "should" be according to their age and they are assessed in comparison with other children similar of their demographic, to compare developments, and again, make sure they are on track. Foucault introduces *Panopticism*, by describing measures of precaution of a town affected by a plague, which resembles a similar order of observation as the school system. To create a feeling of knowledge of the plague, he says, "Each Street is placed under the authority of a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance; if he leaves the street, he will be condemned to death (Foucault 282)." Anyone who leaves their house is not at risk of death from the plague,

rather at risk of death from those who are controlling them such as the syndic, intendant, and quarters, as a means of punishment (Foucault 282). I am saying not that the plague won't be responsible for the cause of death, rather that the aspect that should be feared most, is the people who are controlling everyone from the plague by keeping them in solitary, and not the plague itself. I see the educational system as the plague, described by Foucault because, if we do not subject our lives to it, respecting the authority dictated upon us by administration, we're individually at risk of punishment for not accepting control, for not being obedient. And along the same means of observing and assessing like in education, the plague observed and assessed all citizens who resided within the plague, making them fearful of control, and making them believe that their only chance for survival is at the hands of the people who observe, and assess them.

To assess how much control is actually exhibited through education, can be understood through the workings of Laura Kipnis, writer of *Love's Labors*. She works in this writing, to try and create a new understanding, more complex than we are familiar with, about love. Something worth noticing in her essay is when she says, "Let's imagine that to achieve consensus and continuity, any society is required to produce the kinds of character structures and personality types it needs to achieve its objective...(Kipnis 403)" She says imagine, because no one can be so certain of something so seductively hidden behind the idea of self fulfillment. Considering her ideas in aspects of education, one would identify that to move forward, teachers, principles, deans, and even students control and create a structure that produces character, and personality that is desired; the whole educational system is working *at* the students individually to create what it wants out of them, and the students are working *at* each other without even realizing. The

objective of these fine enforcers is to create a stable foundation of people who in the end will be susceptible to control of any kind such as, work, government, and even personal decision making. Since the very first day of school, these institutions intend to help us advance at the level of obedience and intelligence it expects we need to demonstrate at the next grade, until it ends, and it never ends. The personality, and character type that is designed by the educational system is one that is obedient to all people and all organizations of control, accepting to change as you develop grade levels, a character of people who do not ask questions, rather demonstrate what they think they know without certainty.

To understand clearly why the educational institutions are so successful in demonstrating control amongst people, you would have to understand the tools used to enforce it, such as disciplinary mechanism. The disciplinary mechanism is a tool of control, wonderfully described by Foucault as, "...slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded...in which each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed among the living beings, the sick, and the dead (Foucault 283)." Control is not control if you are not fully aware of the disciplined people you monitor; if you don't know every detail about them like they know themselves, like they do themselves, there is no room to even come close to controlling them without them knowing, and isn't this what the school system is all about? Whenever a child demonstrates bad behavior it is recorded, and left on file. Where does that file go, and how long does it exist before it is permanently destroyed? Yes, bad behavior should be handled for the benefit of everyone around it, but lunch detention turns in to after school detention, detention turns into jail, jail turns into the death penalty. Ultimately, I am saying that punishment never

ends, and it all begins with the school system enforcing the beginning stages of it, and not working to help the student but working at making them feel incompetent, which in the end will keep them stuck in that state of mind with no room for development.

Kipnis says something powerful in her writing that made me think; “A certain degree of basic repression is necessary for any civilization to survive (Kipnis 404).” Kipnis, is talking about love and adultery, but this statement is very relatable to school repression. With this understanding of how our world works, one would realize that school, and other establishments like it -which is more than you think- purposely demonstrate repression as a means to continue survival. For example, throughout my school experience, I was always a student awarded for good behavior, academic achievement, and things like demonstrating “proper school qualities”, and these ceremonies always took place amongst the audience of the whole school, many of them who did not demonstrate these similar attributes. Every time, I had to walk across the stage to receive an award, I could feel the eyes of all the students who didn’t care, who tried tremendously hard to follow the order but failed, and who at this moment in time hated me for the reason that I was being awarded for doing the things I was “supposed” to do anyways. I was broadcasted by my schools as one of the elite of my class, who was susceptible to control and order, and who would make it easier in life because of that fact. The students who have to sit in the audience silenced, and who are told without anyone saying that they are not recognized, that they are not good enough, represent the repression that is necessary for survival of an overall civilization. How does a nation so prominent, get to a point in time, where one of its means of survival is based off the intentionally repressed factors of it? This is not to say that the more repressed people we

have the better chance our nation has at survival, but rather, the amount of repression should not be considered in the light of others, it should not be broadcasted in silence and left helpless.

The second question I ask is, how much of our education is actually intended to benefit us for our personal fulfillment? Regarding any encounter in life, people admire sharing their accomplishments, especially their academic achievements. We all do it, we all like letting people know how advanced we really are, but why? We “brag” because without thinking, we actually consider these accomplishment personal achievements; they are personal achievements in the sense that without them, we would personally not be achieved, but in reality if we didn’t partake in acquiring these achievements, everything about life would be much more complicated. It’s simple, the answer to all your worries right here; if you participate in the educational system in full -this includes many years and degrees from college institutions- your life will be prosperous, marvelous, and envious, you will have no worries. The education system is intended to make us believe we are personally fulfilled; it makes us believe a lot of things to conceal the fact that it is imposed to just control us and let us believe the unreal.

Education in reality is about confinement, and has nothing to do with the personal fulfillment of individuals, rather the personal fulfillment of our oppressors. It benefits our oppressors making us have the same belief and understanding about what is expected of us, and challenges us at the same time individually from the close monitoring we experience. Foucault writes about a prison specifically with this idea of confinement, which after reading it multiple times, I could see the connection it has to education. Foucault with extreme detail writes,

to avoid those compact, swarming, howling masses that were to be found in

places of confinement, those painted by Goya or described by Howard. Each individual, in his place, is securely conducted to a cell form which he is seen from the front by the supervisor, but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangements of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is guarantee of order. (287)

From this, a realization of familiarity came about when thinking of test taking. There are subtle differences, but overall the comparison is accurate. In some classroom settings, students desks would be organized in front of the teacher, so the fear would be set in place that the instructor is watching you at all times, and even if he or she is not watching you, they will still see everything, ever wrong movement, every wondering eye. When Foucault talks about the separated cells, one could see this as the students when they have to space out and sit in every other desk to avoid close interaction with each other, enforcing this “object of information, never a subject in communication.” This loss of connection from interaction, to unawareness if the teacher is watching you, creates for the invisibility that is stated in the quote, and indeed, guarantees the capability to be able to control someone, make someone afraid of consequence.

Everyday in life should be a day where we realize more and more how the system controls us. Many things about all we know are disguised with this fantasy that it benefits us for self-fulfillment, and that it is intended to make our lives better, but everyday it just evolves further to teach us order of being controlled without us even realizing. Everything about this disguise is true, because the ultimate goal of the system is to control us, regardless if this makes us happy or not, and the fantasy that seems like

reality is what makes us accepting of this control; those that do not conform to this, face the control without the fantasy, in the end making them the “leper”, which “gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement (Foucault 284).” We can choose to love or hate the system, but doing whatever is against the preferred social norm, will leave us in the dark, leave is in the dungeon, when there is so much more left to be seen in this marvelous place, beyond the control.

Works Cited

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