My Work and Foucault's Genius: Foucault, Barthes, Said

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Recently some commentators have linked my work to Foucault, which I hasten to add is wildly beyond any association I probably deserve. What they seem to find is that the use of extremely specialized work I have done fulfills his injunction about the use of details. For example, Aglaeca writes:

“Foucault tells us that details are the concerns of the true believer, the scholar, the educator, administrator, the professional, manager, and the specialist.

P. J. Rich (1989) states, “If any more proof of interest in the topic is necessary, in his magisterial book Orientalism, Edward Said… himself a product of Victoria College, the ‘Eton of Egypt’… His observation in particular should prompt investigation of the relationship between pedagogy and politics in Empire, and the study of the ways that public schools supports British ascendancy” (14).

Rich demonstrates that ritualism is an instrument of power, of order, and an imperial mindset, a corner stone. In Rich’s words, “a startling similarity exists between the Empire and these schools, especially in the way in which the two
used ritualism as an instrument of control” (16). How familiar is it for an American child to respond to a Pavlovian bell. Each morning they are “expected” to repeat the pledge. An anonymous speaker announces over the system, “everyone body rise” [a command] in fidelity towards the flag of ‘your’ country, and repeat “I pledge,” “be seated”. Here again national ritualism is unfurled as a straight-armed tool, now placed over our hearts, but some use the right-angled pose. Attention to detail informs us that Francis Bellamy, cousin to the novelist Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward: 2000-1887, gave us the socialist pledge intended to be part of a nationalist boy’s organization, like the scouts and the public school since he also held a high position in the state school board. What we have is the creation of reverence towards discipline, military, and social (economic, class) order. That is what the boy needs; it is how the old proscription goes. Adophe E. Meyer, Ph.d, a historical author on pedagogy, brings that matter into sharp focus. As a matter of common fact Meyer tells his reads that [American education is], in part a colonial heirloom” (1967, 137). On the same page, he notes the impure pairings of the series public, private, secular, ecclesiastical, in the school systems, but does not cover the struggle. Education today, as in colonel times, exists as a matter of networked power relationships, tied to the interest of individuals in the world. Military
bases, “interventions”, wars of “liberation,” these “projects” fund academic research with taxpayers and corporate monies, and often-free student labor. All while the poor are materially collected, studied, instructed, contained, controlled, etc. They are to suffer until they are disposed or used up like fuel, so the educated can go study foreign relations for cooperate interests, produce policies, enlarge our collections in libraries, banks, and museums. This is how some use “our” great machines of “knowledge” production. Yet even in the tot days of American education, we find revolt, resistance to the notions of a public. Meyer’s claim the cause was taxation, but I feel there was something more at play. An international education organization, EUROLIO, reproduced an article where an anonymous person is quoted saying, “it is unthinkable that someone could imagine that this [national propaganda] is an important area of study [forced learning] while the internal conflicts of countries that share borders with Israel and have daily consequences for our country are secondary” (Common Ground News Service 2009). The article continues how Israeli public schools focus on Great Britain as the “founders” of the Kingdom of Jordan. There is no mention of resistance, rather admiration. The article comes right out and says the truth of ways such nationalist “western” historical perspectives dominate; students enter into the ritualism of
ordered-military. They are disciplined in such a way that they learned to internalize these proscriptions, like the proper writing of an essay, such that they watch their actions and obey without thinking. Antonio Gramsci notes that ritualism makes rational the irrational (Rich, p. 18). You know, they say if you smile when you are unhappy, it will make you happy. It is not just whistling as you work, rather it is the routine that normalizes even that which we consider the vilest of human horrors, scaring degradations. The set, mode and settings are not to be underestimated (Leary, Metzner and Alpert 1963). One only need review the Stanford Prison Experiment (1971) to find what horrors roles and institutions, stations and places, can manifest (Zimbardo 2009). This ordering occurs so that “you” can go about “your” business, so please smile while you work. It is just good policy. Under the chapter title, “Life Ways of Thinking,”

Rich reveals imperialism as an initiation that lasted into adulthood, until death. We must move past stages that (re)present us as readable, that lodge us, or index us as novels. Instead, we should unveil the topology of detailing under themes such as ritual and education. As I continue to read with Foucault, I hear Rich proclaiming, “public school freemasonry was a flourishing empire of its own” (p. 24). One must ask why ritualism, education, and empire? I notice their neglect by “main-
steam,” “serious” academics. This exclusion occurs across of the “humanities.” Even though ritualism plays an integral in the imperial project, still these orders of education, knowledge, and morality receive but an occasional reference. To reveal the hidden and manifest in a worldly and textual manner is to reveal a current problematic that persists for constituted beings. Neither masonry nor educations are stable bodies. They have different locales. Nor are they subject to the same rule(s). My focus is these structures keeping a relationship of “school boy” and “school master.” We must recognize the truth of such euphemism, “baby-sitting factories” for public schools, corporate-state “labor-training” facilities. These truths need revelation. I mean real praxis and sustained attacks on the absurd and power driven reality of school-state-corporate nexus. We cannot avoid terror and uncertainty, because these actions, writing, speeches, risks to our very livelihoods, our lives. However, in the case of masonry and education I think it is left out because it is seen as trite or exotic, and not political (or important), but it indeed is political. Masonic and fraternal ritual was (and is) instrumental in instructing rulers, executives, men of empire and imperial visions, the rights of “Man” (Rich p.25). Fraternal college organizations are homes of what are, in work places, known as the boy’s-club. That is not to say all masons are the same or agree. I am not trying to prove a
consensus or generalization. In fairness it must be noted, early on peoples, such as a New Hampshire Grand Master, disproved of the militaristic degrees and fanatical pilgrims “[which are] as opposite to the benevolent spirit of true Masonry as black aprons are to pure white ones” (Seward 1923). Good intentions, his words, one can question that, either way they are fraught with progressives-humanist bigotry and purity. Today bodies such as these are proudly connect by a shared imperial mythology some call (sacred) history. Boys-clubs such as the private Phi Kappa Sigma International Fraternity, Inc., (1850-present) or the publicly funded Binghamton Boys Club are both marked with traces, perhaps it is because the rituals gave them their “heart” or “spirit.” As for the Masonic lodge meetings, they are courtrooms, and the proceedings are parliamentary. The purpose of lodge is that they assemble to preside as elect stewards over heaven and earth, invoking deity, opening on the altar the sacred book of Law. In these ways pressing their territoriality and morality to the four corners of the earth, each symbolized with a station and a place. Just like for an imperialist, the sun rises in the east but set (is fulfilled) in the West (Said 1979, 239). To dream that it is a virtue, to rise with the crow, now with the sound of a buzzing clock. Our privilege is to drudge in our time allotted slots, work for our daily bread and fuel imperial-commercial projects with our stolen labor-time until rest and sleep.
Repeat until death. While they entertain us with toys, occupy us with gadgets, “the production social life itself” (Hardt and Negri 2000, xiii). No, “the classical age did not initiate it; rather it accelerated it…” Its instrumental rituals, Educations, made boys into men of the Lodge of Imperial-Fathers.”

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