Some Origins of Singularity of thought and SocialConformity

By Steven J. Gerardi

New York City College of Technology CUNY, United States

Abstract- Louis Althusser suggested eight forms of ideology which comprise the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). According to Althusser these ISA's manage hegemony without the need for the state repressive force. This original effort suggests that in the wake of massive historical and social change, two additional ideologies must be added to Althusser concepts; a) the Mass Culture Ideology; and b) "Technological Nihilism". Indeed, both ideologies operate in tandem with each other resulting in the singularity of thought, social conformity, and hegemony.

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Abstract- Louis Althusser suggested eight forms of ideology which comprise the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). According to Althusser these ISA's manage hegemony without the need for the state repressive force. This original effort suggests that in the wake of massive historical and social change, two additional ideologies must be added to Althusser concepts; a) the Mass Culture Ideology; and b) "Technological Nihilism". Indeed, both ideologies operate in tandem with each other resulting in the singularity of thought, social conformity, and hegemony.

I. Overview of the Theoretical Context

This section will provide a brief overview of the major theoretical concepts associated with hegemony beginning with Marx. Marx argued that in advanced capitalist society there are two interdependent components, the Base and Superstructure. The Base is seen as the repressive force of the relations of production (i.e. government, armed forces, police, and court system); the Superstructure encompasses culture, values, and norms. Together they reproduce the means of production and hegemony. Gramsci further suggested that the Superstructure consists of two parts; 1) political society and 2) civil society. Political society consists of the repressive force (i.e. police and military) and in civil society the consent of the people is found manifesting hegemony. Louis Althusser further elaborates the Base/Superstructure issue in his work entitled "The Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISA). In this work Althusser suggested that there are 8 forms of ISA's: 1) religious; 2) educational; 3) family: 4) legal; 5) political; 6) labor unions; 7) mass communication system; and 8) cultural norms.

Althusser suggested that during the pre-capitalist mode-of-production, the church-family were the primary forms of ISA in the reproduction of the means of production. Today however the School-Family ISA has replaced the Church-Family in the reproduction of the relations of production. Essentially, children from every class are placed in school where the curriculum stress the dominate culture, thus the reproduction of social origins and hegemony.

This is evident in Bourdieu and Passeron work on social class as an important indicator of cultural

Author: Professor of Sociology New York City College of Technology (CUNY). e-mail: SGerardi@CityTech.Cuny.Edu

capital for the school setting (based upon distinctive cultural knowledge that is transmitted by families of each social class to their children) (Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, 1977). Children of the poor/working class inherit substantially different cultural knowledge, skills, norms, styles of dress and linguistic abilities than children of those within the educated middle class (it is estimated that a middle class child learns 25,000 more words than their low SES contemporary), this concept is referred to as "Cultural Reproduction of Class Consciences". At issue within this concept is that gaining cultural knowledge is dependent on the parents' "Human Capital". Human Capital can be seen form of consumption in which individuals through education make investment in themselves (human capital). Individuals are seen as capitalists making investments in their acquisition of knowledge and skills. The more human capital, the more economically valuable the individual becomes in advanced capitalism.

Furthermore, individuals reared in the dominate culture have high levels of human Capital, and their offspring gain this through cultural reproduction. Thus, cultural reproduction entails three fundamental propositions: 1) parental cultural capital is inherited by children; 2) children's cultural capital is converted into educational credentials; and 3) educational credentials are a major mechanism for upward social mobility in advanced capitalist societies. Lastly, Bourdieu and Passeron suggested that education mirrors capitalism in that it stratifies individuals into status groups. Hence, those with high levels of human capital are easily able to excel based upon their understanding of the cultural codes. Thus, such individuals on average will continue on a track that places these them into high paid prestigious occupations. By contrast, those with little or no understanding of the dominate cultural codes, generally finding themselves in occupations that are significantly less prestigious, therefore commanding less compensation and social status.

This is further evident in Basil Bernstein's (Class, codes and control, 1975) work on language, coding theory, curriculum and the transmission of knowledge as an important interpretation of class, family, school and social status. Bernstein's concept of code is central to his analysis of the transmission of knowledge. Code refers to a "regulative principle which underlies various message systems, especially curriculum and pedagogy". Curriculum, according to Bernstein, is valid

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knowledge. Pedagogy acts as the valid transmission of this knowledge and evaluation is the realization of knowledge taught. Both the curriculum and the transmission of knowledge for Bernstein are based in language. According to Bernstein language interpretation determined by class, and is a function of social differences. Furthermore, various functions of language in a given social context have a profound effect on children's social learning. Bernstein establishes a distinction between language usage of the working class or "public language," and the language use of the middle class which he labels "formal language." Furthermore, public language results in the low SES student statistically failing in school. On the other hand, the middle class student succeeds in school because of formal language.

As was indicated earlier, this original effort suggests that in post modern society two additional ISA must be added to Althusser list, "Mass Culture", and "Technological Nihilism" to complete the movement toward hegemony. In the next sections of this effort these new concept will be made clear.

a) Mass Culture

This effort will define the mass culture as a commutation technique using simplistic messages with little or no higher order symbolic content, fostering a mass-illusion for need of goods and services which are simply not necessary. Mass Culture and its economic counterpart consumerism, claims to be a democratic force (for it provides individual free choice in the free market system), but in fact it exercise control over all aspects of social life in post modern America(Technological, informational and a Service Mode-of-Production). Indeed, only a few public individuals dictate the public's perceptions of freedom, and individuality. The Mass Culture is mass produced, and therefore culture is a universal mass standardized product. Mass consumption of culture, establishes a mass population (population of people not limited to social background) with a tendency toward being aloof to their social conditions, no matter how precarious their circumstance. Mass consummation and culture by virtue of being mass produced, appeals to a mass population/ audiences. The larger the mass population/ audience watching, listening, reading, the more simplistic the symbolic content must be in order to reach all segments of society, regardless of social origins. Hence, the mass culture communicates simplistic standardized messages, homogenizing the mass audience into a socially/politically passive mass population in which free human spirit is undermined. A case in point is the fashion as a mass perception. In fashion there is an effort to express individuality through dress. However, because it is a fashion trend many dress alike, hence individuality is lost (Gerardi 2006). This mass illusion is based upon a few "mass superstars" (i.e. movie, T.V.

and sports figures) who hold control over the perceptions of freedom and individual autonomy in post modern America.

Illustratively, let us examine Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) The Metamorphosis. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist, awakes one morning transformed into a gigantic, hideous multi legged insect. In this perceived temporal state, Gregor must conform to social forces around him by confining himself to his room, only to be seen by his family. He becomes dependent on his family for every necessity of life. He comments: "what an exhausting job I picked on. It's much more irritating work than doing actual business in office. The devil takes it all! "Gregor's metamorphosed state is a volunteristic autonomous decision to reject self in an effort to recapture his individuality. But this rejection implies for him rejecting his individuality, his autonomy, indeed his human form.

Similarly, the conscience volunteristic submission and conformity of individuals can be seen as the product of the external authority of the mass culture. Indeed the Mass culture has striped the individual of free thought and individuality itself. Constant exposure throughout one's life to the continuous demands of the mass culture implies the continuous management of individual free thought. This management is predominating in a post-modern society because it affects all segments of social life. Having an individual opinion of fashion(for example) stands outside the mainstream, hence seen as unreasonable and irrational. Indeed, social conformity has become reasonable and sensible behavior and singularity of thought is rational and reasonable in the post-modern era.

b) Technological Nihilism

Yet another factor in post modern society contributing to singularity of thought and social conformity is "Technological Nihilism". This original effort defines "Technological Nihilism " as the intrinsic perception of a free creative individual as being insignificant, without purpose, totality free of human existence founded in technological management (of contemporary humanity). The sociological outcome is the inability to perceive ones' economic, social, and political life. "Technological Nihilism" degrades the contemporary free human spirit into the logic of rational technological domination.

Historically human creativity provided the individual freedom of expression, and autonomy. A classic example is Modernism. Modernism was a socially progressive movement which validated free human conscience transformation of nature's raw materials into human creativity. Modernism further required a re-evaluation of material reproduction, philosophy, and all aspects of social life(in the name of social progress). Moreover, technological

advancements historically were originally viewed as a force which freed humanity from the toils of repetitive manual labor, hence liberating humanity.

Although technology has set humanity free from such labor, the dialectal twist is that technology (rooted in the ideology of the technological rationality), has restructured itself into a repressive force morphing into a new normal human identity based in social conformity, and singularity of thought.

To clarify, consider for a moment the image of a youngster seating at a computer attempting to learn new computer software. The software routine demands a new understanding of the technical process which presents itself as obstacles to gaining entry. This individual must conform to the software's demands both in language and behavior. So the youngster turns to the tech support system of the software company where on line the "techies" in effect tell the youngster what to do and how to think in order to gain access to the program. Essentially, it is sensible for that youngster to follow another's directions in order to have use of the software.

However, during this exercise the youngster learns to accept the will of another, which also includes the computer. This volunteristic social behavior becomes even more insidious because the youngster internalizes the directions of another, rejecting his/her free thought and individuality by relying on the will of another.

As the youngster grows into an adult, there is the tacit understanding that the demands of the post-modern era will require consistent technical conditioning. Consequently, there is continues management of autonomous individual thought by the authority of technological nihilism. Furthermore, this management of the autonomous individual is an ongoing process throughout ones' life (Gerardi, 2006). The conscience volunteristic submission and conformity of post-modern humanity to what can be seen as the external authority of the technology has stripped the individual of free thought and individuality itself. Constant exposure throughout one's life to the continuous demands of the technological nihilism implies the continuous management of individual free thought. This management is inescapable because it transcends technology itself, and affects all segments of social life.

II. Conclusion

Mass Culture and Technological Nihilism are unavoidable and inescapable in contemporary post-modern society. The affects of over exposure to these forces are: a) social conformity; b) loss of individual freedoms; c) social totalitarianism; and d) singularity of thought.

As was mentioned earlier a case in point is fashion. In fashion an effort is made to express individuality through dress. However, as many begin to dress alike and look alike, human individuality is lost and social conformity is the rule (Gerardi, 2006). Furthermore, Technical Nihilism during the rapid and almost anomic technological advancement of post-modern society, the historical concept of individuality is lost and a new form of human identity arises. The conscience volunteristic submission and conformity of humanity to what can be seen as the external authority of technology has striped the individual of free thought and individuality itself. Constant exposure throughout ones' life to the continuous demands of the Technological Nihilism implies the continuous management of individual free thought. This technical management is inescapable in a post-modern society because it transcends technology itself, and affects all segments of social life (Gerardi 2006). A case in point is the youngster analogy mentioned above.

Moreover, being critical in an era which demands social conformity is irrational. Having an individual opinion which stands outside the mainstream is unreasonable. Social Conformity has become reasonable and sensible behavior in the post-modern technical era. This social conformity is analogous to Star Trek's "Borg". The "Borg" is a race of quasi- human beings in which the "collective" seeks one purpose, the pursuit of mechanical perfection of the human race through technical assimilation. This assimilation enhances the control of the "hive" or Borg society as a social collective. Analogous to the Borg "hive" concept in post modern society is singularity of thought, social conformity, loss of individuality, and ultimately freedom fostering the "collective" and hegemony.

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