

Understanding Propaganda: Noam Chomsky and the Institutional Analysis of Power

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Noam Chomsky's theory of propaganda is a useful way to understand class domination. The strengths and weaknesses of Chomsky's theory are examined by means of a comparison with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. Since work that discusses and analyses Chomsky's theory is sparse, this piece first gives a detailed explanation of his theory. This requires a short clarification of Chomsky's terminology, focusing on his definitions of *indoctrination* and *class*. Thereafter a thorough account of Chomsky's ideas regarding class structure, the indoctrinating functions of educational and media institutions and the difference between upper and lower class propaganda are discussed. A common criticism of Chomsky's arguments is that they are conspiratorial. Thus, following the discussion of Chomsky's theory I present an argument that Chomsky uses an institutional analysis as opposed to conspiracy theory to reach his conclusions. After arguing that Chomsky has a coherent, logical theory of propaganda that is not conspiratorial, this thesis shifts to a comparison of Chomsky and Gramsci's theory. The elements of Gramsci's theory that are relevant to Chomsky are discussed, focusing on their overall similarities, in particular, the question of consent. The final chapter consists of a comparison of the two theories, examining each theorist's ideas on the nature of education, language, consent and the possible ways in which the lower classes can oppose their own oppression.

The goal of this thesis is to argue that Noam Chomsky has created a theory of propaganda that is a useful way to understand elite domination. Domination in this sense means, the interests of the populace are in line with the interests of the wealthy members of society. The elite align lower class interests with their own through a system of propaganda that indoctrinates the populace.

When Chomsky uses the word 'indoctrination,' he assumes that a person consciously accepts certain beliefs and attitudes with their own. People make the choice to be indoctrinated, however under certain circumstances people are more likely to uncritically accept doctrines.

Democracies in capitalist societies do not function properly because the lower classes are indoctrinated with propaganda. Propaganda comes from media and educational institutions because the elite either have direct access to these institutions, or by the profit-oriented nature of the economic structure their interests are served.

In order to understand Chomsky's theory of indoctrination, one must understand his ideas on human nature – people have an instinct for freedom, morality and autonomy. This means a preferred form of govt would be one that lets people have total independence from power structures, other than the ones that people collectively decide on. These instincts must be dealt with by the elite if they wish to remain in power, and they do it with propaganda.

Propaganda limits the boundaries of acceptable discussion, it creates a framework of thought that no one can speak out of. The idea that propaganda can achieve this goes back to the 1920's in Britain and the US in the public relations industry. Propaganda makes elite interests appear like the interests of the population.

There are 4 classes – elite, ideological managers, political class, and lower class. Elites are business owners, basically the owners of the means of production. The IM construct and spread propaganda for the elite. They are rewarded by the elite with prestige and money. The political class is the small group that pays attention to IM's. They are indoctrinated with the propaganda, sometimes become IM and elite themselves. They benefit from the system. The lower class is the least indoctrinated and benefit the least from the system.

The propaganda that creates this class system stems from educational and media institutions. Children's instinct for creativity and autonomy is stifled in early education. Education is a process of regimentation, and there are rewards for obedience. The divide begins here. The obedient ones carry on into university, where IM have full reign. University students often become the political class. Propaganda is rampant as the very nature of social science is to legitimize existing ideas and institutions. Subversion is penalized. Feigned dissent is technique by which debate is lively, but within certain boundaries that will not affect elite interests.

Media is also a propaganda institution, as profit orientation, sourcing (IM) and ideologies control what is printed in the media. **The problem with the analysis of educational and media institutions is that it does not adequately address lower class propaganda when the majority of the populations are in fact lower class.**

The philosophy of futility is the reason the lower class are politically passive, a mix of consumerism and distractions from political life. Consumerist behaviour discourages social interactions. Apathy is further encouraged by the limited debate in the political arena, so the lower class sees no point in

becoming politically active, as the media is entirely elite propaganda. The discussions about the elite spreading propaganda through institutions sound conspiratorial, so it must be discerned that Chomsky is not a conspiracy theorist.

Accusations of conspiracy theory are enough to marginalize an idea, as it holds a specific place in academia as a 'curse word.'

The Propaganda Model focuses on institutions and their profit orientation, its sources for case study are from the media and govt.

Institutional analysis and conspiracy theory are antithetical, as IA focuses on a groups collective behaviour within say, a media institution, while a CT explains events by secretive and deceptive individuals who attempt to change outcomes of events through unlawful acts.

The five filters form a guided free market model, as profit orientation is what drives behaviour. General Motors does not engage in conspiracy.

Chomsky is even criticized for refusing to entertain the idea of conspiracy theory, thus ignoring, as Mark Fenster, an opportunity to recognize conspiracy theory as a way to see revelations into the public psyche. David Coady also criticizes Chomsky, and institutional analysis itself, for downplaying the role of individual actors.

Establishing that Chomsky uses an institutional analysis to construct his theory of propaganda means that giving criticism of his conclusions involves comparing his theory to another theory of domination – Gramsci's hegemony.

Gramsci's hegemony focuses on cultural institutions, media, schools, church, that guide the populaces attitudes and beliefs. As Chomsky, Gramsci saw the public's consent as the reason the elite still maintain control, but needed to explain why they continue to give their consent. However, he presents a spectrum for consent from bordering coercion to full consent.

Gramsci speaks of consent due to habit, which is like passivity, similar to Chomsky's idea of why the lower class is passive. However, Gramsci mostly focuses on legitimacy, as the lower class actively accepts elite doctrines. According to Chomsky, only the political class is enthusiastic about the prevailing order.

The lower classes according to Gramsci accept uncritically the ideas of the past, while in Chomsky's world the ability to criticize is weeded out in school and the media and universities frame acceptable debate. What is interesting is that Gramsci provides the reason why the lower classes won't revolt, but Gramsci's lower class sustains a similar indoctrination as Chomsky's upper class, leaving a hole in Chomsky's theory, as 'why don't the lower classes revolt if they recognize their plight?'

Gramsci also breaks down forms of hegemony –integral, decadent and minimal. Minimal hegemony is when dominant groups incorporate leaders of political and cultural institutions from potentially hostile groups into their ranks. **In this framework, hegemonic activity is limited to the middle and upper classes, like Chomsky's theory.** The lower classes feel their subordination, but don't have the theoretical consciousness to understand it.

The role of intellectuals in creating a counter hegemony is to provide another interpretation of reality. This requires recapturing these 'leaders' of political and cultural institutions, or generating them to serve the masses. Gramsci calls these intellectuals, 'organic intellectuals.' Gramsci calls intellectuals that preserve the existing order 'experts in legitimization.'

One would assume that, like Chomsky, the place to form these intellectuals is the school system. Gramsci disagrees, as he says restructuring the school system should be limited to eliminating vocational schools that destine some for the working class. Gramsci thinks all citizens should attend the same schools and get the same education. However, Gramsci did see the development of a national language within the school system as one means of building a counterhegemony.

Minimal hegemony and trasformismo are similarities in the methods of elite domination, essentially, they describe similar forms of domination they see in society. Differences are the degrees of consent, the 'theoretical consciousness' of the masses, and the role of intellectuals in building a better society.

They also agree on the effects of consumerism on maintaining the status quo, but Chomsky sees it as an imposed mechanism of domination, while Gramsci sees it as a result of hegemony. ***Consent due to habit is Chomsky's primary theory on public consent, while Gramsci states that the masses consent because they believe the elite to be legitimately running society.*** So, in Chomsky's theory, why don't the lower classes revolt if they understand their plight?

The answer is that the educational institutions pry away people's instincts for freedom, creativity and autonomy, destroying their will to act. Attitudes of obedience carry over into adult life and prevent political and social action, as the desire to consume replaces the aforementioned instincts.

A proper education would nurture these instincts. Gramsci sees education as the suppression of instincts. Chomsky does not see language playing a major role in effecting the cognitive ability of the masses, while Gramsci does according to Femia.

Also, intellectual vanguards, according to Chomsky are another form of centralized power unnecessary. Understanding propaganda is the means towards social change.

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Introduction

In the book *Animal Farm*, George Orwell describes the emergence of an extreme totalitarian state. His descriptions of centralized power that control the population are humorous, but also disturbing, as it is a portrayal of how an authoritarian government maintains power by the constant threat of violence. The authoritarian state in *Animal Farm* controls the population by prohibiting democratic institutions and censoring the press and speech. Oppression in a totalitarian system is easily identified and denounced by those who live in societies with democratic institutions, perhaps the reason for *Animal Farm*'s popularity during the Cold War in the United States and other western, democratic countries. Orwell stated that the purpose of *Animal Farm* was to expose the crimes, notably government censorship, of the Soviet Union.¹

However, Orwell had a little-known additional purpose in writing *Animal Farm*, as he attempted to demonstrate how censorship exists in totalitarian regimes and capitalist democracies alike, as they both share a regimented, ideological media. In the originally unpublished preface to *Animal Farm*, Orwell claims that in capitalist, democratic societies "Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness."² Orwell states that censorship exists in his own society just as much as in the Soviet Union, but that

The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need of an official ban...because of the general tacit agreement... [of] wealthy men who have every motive to be dishonest on certain important topics.³

What Orwell is essentially describing is a propaganda system within a free society. There is a difference between the way propaganda functions in these two societies - totalitarian propaganda is easy to recognize, as it primarily consists of the ideologies and beliefs the state produces. It is not necessary for the populace to *believe* the propaganda, as its function is to inform the citizenry on how to remain obedient to state policies, in order to control their actions.

¹ Orwell, George (2000) *Animal Farm and Related Readings*. Preface. Glencoe-McGraw Hill: Columbus.

² Orwell, George (2000) *Animal Farm and Related Readings*.

³ (ibid)

Noam Chomsky promotes a theory of propaganda that demonstrates how a society with no official censorship laws can produce propaganda that controls the population more efficiently than totalitarian methods. Chomsky's theory states that propaganda in capitalist, democratic societies has an *indoctrinating* effect on the populace that promotes the interests of an elite class. In a society with democratic institutions, the rulers cannot control the actions of the populace with force, so Chomsky states "it becomes necessary to control attitudes and opinions."⁴ Systematic propaganda limits the boundaries of discussion and debate within the media and school system, diminishing the population's ability to question and criticize government action. Chomsky's theory often elicits accusations of conspiracy theory or government „brainwashing.“ However, Chomsky presents an explanation that it is naturally the case in a profit-oriented economy that the attitudes and beliefs of the owners of society, the *business class*, are promoted, while ideas that are potentially harmful to elite power are suppressed.

This thesis argues that Chomsky's theory of propaganda is a valuable way to understand elite domination, as he provides a logical, non-conspiratorial explanation for the source and effects of elite propaganda that demonstrates how societies with democratic institutions are influenced by propaganda. The mechanisms of elite propaganda are more difficult to discern than totalitarian propaganda, as they actually fashion attitudes of subservience as opposed to coercing the population into submission. Thus, Chomsky examines how a profit-oriented economy influences the institutions that form our attitudes and beliefs, focusing on the educational institutions and the media. This method of examination is called an institutional analysis, a form of analysis that this thesis argues is a constructive, non-conspiratorial approach to examining elite propaganda. However, in order to effectively evaluate Chomsky's theory of propaganda, it is necessary to compare it to another theory, one that will help the strengths and limitations in Chomsky's theory.

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist from the early 20th century, also provides a theory of elite domination called *hegemony* that is unique to capitalist democracies. Gramsci takes a different approach in understanding how the attitudes and beliefs of the elite remain those of the population, as he claims that the ruling class is able to maintain power by directing and fashioning the morals and values of the lower class through control exerted over the leaders of civil institutions i.e. churches, media and schools. Gramsci

⁴ Chomsky, Noam (2003) Collateral Language. *Z Magazine*. July-August. (David Barsamian, interviewer)

provides a cultural explanation for elite power, as elite control over civil institutions produces two perceptions of the world amongst the population, called *theoretical consciousnesses*: one remains loyal to the elite system of beliefs, while the other is discontented with the status quo but cannot conceive of a means to achieve social change. This thesis demonstrates how Chomsky and Gramsci's theories share many similarities, but focuses on their differences in an attempt to reveal that Chomsky's theory is the more useful way to understand domination in capitalist democracies.

This work argues that even though Chomsky is not taken seriously in the academic community as a political scientist, he presents a detailed theory that explains the flaws in a capitalist, democratic system, since his theory states that even though people have the freedom to make their own decisions, they must guard themselves against powerful influences that intend to direct what they think and do in an attempt to maintain power.

Chapter 1 - a Short Clarification of Chomsky's Terminology

Before a discussion of Chomsky's theory can take place, it is necessary to define and explain some of his contentious terminology. Chomsky is often criticized for his strong language, using terms like *indoctrination* and *thought control* to describe systems of control in American society. These terms bring to mind totalitarianism; for instance indoctrination often conjures images of the society characterized by Orwell in *1984*. Chomsky uses these terms in an attempt to express how a democratic society can suffer forms of class domination similar to those in totalitarian states, though by different methods. These terms require clarification, as their implications are far reaching. It must be noted that Chomsky is not a political scientist – his work lacks academic rigour, with unclear meanings and definitions in regards to his concepts and terminology, making his work difficult to study in an academic setting due to contradictions and lack of precision.¹ Thus there is a danger in using terms like *indoctrination*, as there are various interpretations of its meaning, making it necessary to carefully examine Chomsky's intentions when using such provocative terms in order to gain a clear understanding of his theory. These are interpretations of Chomsky's use of the words *indoctrination* and *class* that are useful for understanding his theory.

Chomsky often uses the term *indoctrination* in a pejorative manner to describe the process by which the masses consent to the will of the elite. The definition of *indoctrinate* is „to teach a person to uncritically accept ideologies, doctrines or beliefs.“² There is an ongoing debate in the field of educational studies as to what methods are considered indoctrination and which are educational, exemplifying the ambiguous nature of what is classified as indoctrination.³ Indoctrination requires the indoctrinated victim to come to a state of beliefs using their *own* cognitive abilities. As stated by Gideon Yaffe, there are two forms of manipulation: indoctrination and coercion.⁴ Violence or the threat of violence cannot force an individual to *believe* an idea, only make them comply with the desired outcome of the enforcer. Thus, in the dramatic climax of *1984*, Winston is not indoctrinated, as through a process of violence and extreme fear his will to engage in independent thought is eliminated. If the will to reach conclusions with one's own mental abilities is lost,

¹ Edgley, Allison (2000) *The Social and Political Thought of Noam Chomsky*. Routledge: New York. p.80. Edgley claims, in reference to the question "What is the state?" that "Chomsky himself never actually explicitly defines the concept. Indeed he rarely defines any of his concepts, something his critics are eager to challenge him on."

² Collins English Dictionary (2003) 4th Edition. Harper Collins Publishers: New York City.

³ Sears, Alan and Hughes, Andrew (2006) Citizenship: Education or Indoctrination? *Citizenship Teaching and Learning*. 2(1). July.

⁴ Yaffe, Gideon (2007) Indoctrination, Coercion and Freedom of Will. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol.67 Iss.2, pp.335-356.

indoctrination is impossible, as the thought process has been terminated and this process is what makes indoctrination possible. The Soviet Union is often incorrectly accused of indoctrinating its citizens, as state control was actually maintained mostly through coercion, the reason for the KGB and other coercive forces that suppressed dissent.⁵

Yaffe states that indoctrination occurs when an individual is presented with a range of beliefs or actions that are limited to only those that serve the manipulator and the victim willingly complies.⁶ Yaffe and Chomsky would agree that an individual will not choose oppression unless their mental state is weak or the range of possibilities is limited. In order to produce a situation where indoctrination can occur, the manipulator must possess power over the circumstances under which their influence is asserted, either by controlling the flow of information or exploiting the weak cognitive abilities of the victim, for instance the methods of religious or military indoctrination. Religious indoctrination often takes place at an early age (children generally have weaker cognitive abilities than adults) as children are repetitively bombarded with religious doctrines, rules and principles. Military indoctrination involves periods of the elimination of the individual identity and the dehumanization of others, done within the confines of a facility that controls all discourses and activities.⁷ This period is actually labelled „socialization“ in the United States Army training program, which includes a period where superiors attempt to recreate the values and behaviours of soldiers, where critical attitudes are forbidden. Soldiers undergo intense mental and physical activities that aim to gradually eliminate or replace their prior conceptions of themselves and society through continuous repetition and pressure from superiors. Both of these forms involve a powerful manipulating actor that is able to control the flow of information and take advantage of an individual's weakened mental state while filtering out contradictory ideas and repeatedly emphasizing the doctrine.

Chomsky claims that the methods of indoctrinating an entire populace are not so different from those that indoctrinate a soldier or a child. A doctrinal system that limits discourse arises within the State due to the nature of a profit oriented society, as the elite promote their interests by controlling the civil institutions that shape discourse, which mostly includes the educational and media institutions. The doctrinal system begins at an early age in the schools, exploiting the susceptibility of young minds by encouraging uncritical attitudes

⁵ Johnson, Loch (ed) (2006) *Strategic Intelligence: Volume 3*. Greenwood Publishing Group. p.34.

⁶ Yaffe, Gideon (2007) *Indoctrination, Coercion and Freedom of Will*. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol.67 Iss.2, pp.337.

⁷ Britt, Thomas, Castro, Carl, and Adler, Amy (2005) *Military Life: The Psychology of Serving in Peace and Combat*. Vol.2. Praeger Security International. p.16.

towards powerful entities in society. This indoctrination runs „from kindergarten up through professional life,“ with the structure of the educational system repeatedly promoting obedience and submissive attitudes towards authority.⁸ School systems function as an institution that encourages subordination to power, as Chomsky states “Starting with kindergarten, the main requirement is you do what you’re told.”⁹ Societal pressures promoted by the media and other civil institutions further encourage a consumerist lifestyle and discourage critical attitudes towards the institutions that benefit from the profit-oriented economy. However, as opposed to military or religious indoctrination, it is by the nature of a profit oriented society, not by conspiracy, that indoctrination of elite values occur.¹⁰

Another term often used by Chomsky and deserving clarification is *class*. Chomsky states that class based analysis is „indispensible“ in understanding social processes, as is clear in his work *Class Warfare*.¹¹ Chomsky is vague in his specific meaning of *class* though, choosing to avoid terms like „ruling class“ and instead speaking of *elites*, which describes members of what Chomsky calls the *business class*, which mostly consists of the owners of large corporations.¹² Chomsky makes references to the traditional Marxist analysis of class, the struggle of the workers against the owners of the means of production, but believes that in contemporary American society the class of productive workers includes a very diverse spectrum of professions from manual labourer to scientists.¹³ Chomsky calls this collection of workers the *general population*. However, as will be discussed in the first chapter, Chomsky’s understanding of the different sectors of society is integral to his understanding of how elite classes dominate the population, as the elite are not a homogenous group and are often at odds with one another, which accounts for the diversity of ideologies within the media. Furthermore, Chomsky states that members of the general population are split into two groups, the *political* and the *lower classes*, which contribute to their own domination in a myriad of ways. As mentioned earlier, Chomsky’s political theory lacks the rigour of a political scientist, so often there is often confusion surrounding his concepts and terms. However, I have attempted to represent Chomsky’s theory as accurately as possible by finding consistent strains of thought and ideas in his books and lectures.

⁸ Chomsky, Noam (2000) Propaganda and Indoctrination. *Znet*. December 10.

⁹ Chomsky, Noam (1996) *On Democracy*. Summer. (Tom Morello, interviewer)

¹⁰ How the elite control discourse in society through media and educational institutions will be discussed later, but for the purpose of clarifying what Chomsky deems ‘indoctrination’ it is necessary to assume his theories of media control and education are accurate.

¹¹ Chomsky, Noam (1997) *Class Warfare, Interviews with David Barsamian*. Vancouver: New Star.

¹² Herman, Edward (1989) ‘The Political Economy of the Mass Media.’ *Monthly Review*. January. (Robert McChesney, interviewer) Chomsky and Herman do not use the term ‘ruling class’ in an attempt to avoid being ‘[pegged] on the ideological spectrum.’

¹³ Chomsky, Noam (ed) Otero, C.P (1988) Anarchism. *Language and Politics*. Black Rose Books: Minneapolis. pp.167.

Chapter 2: Noam Chomsky's Theory of Propaganda – an Institutional Analysis

Democratic capitalist societies often possess formal institutions that allow the public to take an active role in determining the nature of society, like elections or public forums. These societies also possess freedoms that enable the expression of a variety of opinions through public media. Aside from the occasional use of violence and specific laws that limit certain behaviours, capitalist democratic societies generally lack authoritarian structures of control and possess democratic institutions for the public to utilize in order to express their interests. However, Noam Chomsky states that in capitalist democracies, government action is often not representative of public opinion, while elite interests are heard and disguised as the interests of the public. Chomsky's conception of democracy in these societies is

a system of government in which elite elements based in the business community control the state by virtue of their dominance of the private society, while the population observes quietly. So understood, democracy is a system of elite decision and public ratification....Correspondingly, popular involvement in the formation of public policy is considered a threat.¹

Chomsky theorizes that the failure of democracy in these societies is due to a complex system of indoctrination that uses systematic propaganda to promote the interests of the elite class. Chomsky's theory of propaganda involves the imposition of boundaries of acceptable thought, where these limitations are created and propagated by the elite. These limitations are primarily constructed and disseminated by two institutions – the media and educational institutions. Establishments with economic and political power utilize a series of mechanisms that control the range of debate and shape attitudes within the media and educational institutions, what Chomsky labels as “a filtering process in a free-market system.”² The result, according to Chomsky, is an indoctrinated populace that does not pursue its interests, as they accept the ideologies and beliefs of the elite class. Chomsky gives an *institutional analysis* of dissemination and effects of propaganda in the major media in *Manufacturing Consent (1988)*, describing the various roles that media institutions play in generating public opinion. His argument focuses on the top-down nature of power, explaining how by the nature of a profit-oriented economy that elite interests will be served unknowingly by most sectors of the public. Looking closely at Chomsky's theories on human

¹ Chomsky, Noam (1987) *On Power and Ideology: The Managua Letters*. South End Press: Boston. p.11

² Edwards, David (1998) *The Compassionate Revolution. Where Ego's Dare*. Green Books: Dartington.

nature, education and the media, one can understand Chomsky's examination of power in capitalist democracies as an institutional analysis of how propaganda is used to manufacture the legitimacy of the elites' right to act as a ruling class.

The Susceptibility to Propaganda

In order to appreciate Chomsky's theory of indoctrination, one must understand his beliefs concerning human nature and natural human instincts. Chomsky argues that humans possess genetically inherited mental capacities that relate to intellectual and moral development, more simply, humans possess instincts. These instincts include genetically determined language capabilities like the ability to adhere to a system of rules and construct new methods of expression, and to understand language and concepts despite never having encountered them.³ Chomsky applies this same principle to morality, stating that humans' moral capacity is innate, based on the natural ability to make moral choices "in new situations and over a substantial range we do it in a convergent fashion."⁴ Chomsky assumes then that because humans are moral, we desire a society that lacks poverty and inequality, but still maintain a fundamental interest in autonomy and independence from power structures. This desire for autonomy prompted the evolution of democracy, as people possess a "fundamental human need to take an active part in the democratic control of social institutions."⁵

Chomsky believes that as autonomy from government becomes feasible through the success of democracy, human beings will strive towards a libertarian socialist society that lacks coercive institutions and political, economic and social hierarchies.⁶ According to Chomsky, libertarian socialism is basically anarchy, a society where there are no institutional power structures and the economy is controlled through collective action. Chomsky believes a libertarian socialist society will function more in accordance with human nature and will eventually surpass the capitalist, industrial society.⁷ Chomsky argues that in order for the elite to remain in power, these instincts for freedom and compassion must be stifled, as they

³ Chomsky, Noam (2000) On Humanism and Morality. Montreal Serrai, Autumn issue, vol.13 no.3. (Tom Wennerberg, interviewer)

⁴ Chomsky, Noam (2000) On Humanism and Morality.

⁵ Rai, Milan (1995) *Chomsky's Politics*. Verso. New York.

⁶ For many, the term libertarian socialism is a contradiction, as 'liberty' entails freedom from all authoritarian structures while 'socialist' requires an enforcing entity, often the State. Chomsky, a self-proclaimed Libertarian Socialist within the anarchist tradition, argues that libertarian socialism is not only non-contradictory, but that implicit within freedom is equality. An examination of Chomsky's beliefs of freedom and human nature explain the logic behind libertarian socialism, his ideas for moving towards a more free society and his controversial political decisions for which he receives relentless criticism.

⁷ Cohen, J. a. (1991). Knowledge, Morality and Hope: The Social Thought of Noam Chomsky. *New Left Review*, p. 5-27. A libertarian socialist society would lack all violent, coercive and authoritative institutions and the public would have free, equal access to the tools of information and production.

⁸ Otero, C.P. (1981) *Radical Priorities*. Black Rose Books. Montreal.

naturally lead to the dismantling of institutions that exercise power. Thus it is necessary to persuade the masses to engage in self-deception to accept elite domination, to avoid moral and intellectual conflict, and to suppress what Chomsky often refers to as “the instinct for freedom,” as defined by the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.⁹ Chomsky states that most people cannot tolerate cognitive dissonance, that “most people are not liars”¹⁰ and hence they choose to internalize propaganda and suppress their instinct for truth and freedom. The dominant and the dominated must engage in self-deception, as the struggle for power pries people away from their true nature, and forces the dominant to justify their behaviour and the dominated to justify their complacency. The primary method used to promote self-deception is exposure to propaganda.¹¹

Chomsky’s quote, “Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to the totalitarian state,”¹² articulates his theory of control in capitalist democracies. The method of domination in societies that lack democratic institutions is generally force, as violence serves as the primary tool of ensuring obedience from populations that lack formal channels of influence. However, in societies that possess formal democratic institutions, the elite must not only to control what people do, but what they think.¹³ Unable to control the population with violence, the elite use propaganda to construct a framework of acceptable thought, influencing the minds of the public to make decisions in favour of elite interests. Critics of society are allowed and encouraged to question and disapprove of how political and economic affairs are conducted, but only within certain boundaries that remain within the dominant ideology. Debate outside of these boundaries is limited, as the avenues of discussion are susceptible to mechanisms of power that suppress dissenting views. These boundaries are not asserted, but presupposed as an unstated framework for acceptable discussion, tacitly reinforced by those who discuss issues within the approved doctrines. The framework is set by what Chomsky claims is an “indoctrinating” education system and the constant bombardment of constructed information aimed at all sectors of the population.

Chomsky labels this information “propaganda,” a constructed set of messages transmitted through mass channels that attempt to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions

⁹ Chomsky, Noam (2005) *Chomsky on Anarchism*. AK Press. Edinburgh.

¹⁰ Chomsky, Noam Avram (1988) What the World is Really Like: Who Knows It – and Why. *The Chomsky Reader*.

¹¹ Chomsky, Noam Avram (1988) What the World is Really Like: Who Knows It – and Why.

¹² Chomsky, Noam (2003) *Media Control*. Open Media: New York

¹³ Chomsky, Noam and Otero, Carlos Peregrin (2004). *Language and Politics*. AK Press: New York. Chomsky states that capitalist democracies do occasionally resort to violence to enforce consent, but typically use propaganda as the means of maintaining the status quo.

and actions of a specific audience for ideological or political purposes. Chomsky states that controlled propaganda operations have become common with the rise of capitalist democracy, as he shapes his theory of propaganda and democracy from the published works of Edward Bernays, a leading figure in the American and British public relations industry in the 1920's. Bernays claims in his seminal work *Propaganda* (1928) that the right to freely suggest and persuade, which he refers to as the engineering of consent, is "the very essence of the democratic process," and that if the freedom to suggest and persuade is concentrated in a few hands, we "must recognize that such is the nature of a free society."¹⁴ Chomsky also quotes the famous American journalist Walter Lippman who gives an analysis of propaganda promotion as a "revolution in the practice of democracy," as "a specialized class of responsible men manage the common interests that elude public opinion entirely."¹⁵ However, Chomsky states that this "revolution" is a natural development in a democratic society, as when democratic institutions become more accessible, the need for advanced systems of thought control become necessary for the elite class to survive. The class that is able to persuade the public is known by Bernays and Lippman as the specialized class, as this class protects democratic institutions from "ignorant and meddlesome outsiders," and only if this protection is carried out can the "public interest be served."¹⁶ However, according to Chomsky, the specialized class is the second tier of a layered capitalist, democratic society, all geared towards serving and espousing the ideas of an elite class, or as Lippman equates it, serving the "national interest." Similar to the institutional analysis employed to understand a theory of propaganda in *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky reaches conclusions concerning class structure in democratic, capitalist societies by examining the effects of economic and political power on the populace. Chomsky's theory of propaganda in capitalist democracies includes a description of a four class system distinguished by each class's role in the service of power.

The Structure of Society

Chomsky's conception of capitalist democratic societies consists of four classes: the elite, ideological managers, the political class, and the lower classes. There are inconsistencies in Chomsky's work regarding his exact construction of class, but usually only in name, as in definition he clearly asserts that there are four groups that operate within the

¹⁴ Chomsky, Noam (1991) Force and Opinion. *Z Magazine*. July-August.

¹⁵ Chomsky, Noam (2003) *Hegemony or Survival*. Metropolitan Books.

¹⁶ Chomsky, Noam (1991) Force and Opinion.

social order that are distinguished by their ability to serve existing institutions.¹⁷ The rulers of society, the class that is composed of various interconnected elites, predominantly business and government elites, construct propaganda to legitimize and maintain their position in society to the political class. Elites control the economy, the State and the media, thus giving them power to control the institutions that most heavily influence society. Recognizing that their interests are commonly in opposition to the interests of other groups in society, elites must construct and distribute their propaganda via these media. The elite are not a conspiratorial class working together secretly to maintain their position in society, as Chomsky states there are two types of elite - the internalizing elite and the realist.¹⁸ Self interest and propaganda conflict with moral instincts, leading some elites to engage in self-deception and internalize their propaganda to avoid cognitive dissonance. However, for realists this is not necessary and they create propaganda fully understanding the implications of their actions. Chomsky states that “The more intelligent people are just lying, but the less intelligent believe it [their own propaganda].”¹⁹

The second tier are the ideological managers, also referred to as the specialized class or “the secular priesthood,” composed of academic experts, state and corporate managers, people in positions of control within the media, and any other managerial position within institutions that distribute and articulate political and economic policy.²⁰ The function of ideological managers is to distribute and reinforce propaganda among the broad population.²¹ The sections of the managerial class takes part in decision making in the state, private economy and doctrinal institutions.²² This class is often referred to broadly as intellectuals, but Chomsky expresses disdain for this label and contends that ideological managers are a special formation in modern industrial society, but have also maintained the role of the priesthood, the “guardians of state doctrine,” from centuries before.²³ Ideological managers

¹⁷ Jennings, Tom (1995) Common Sense: Golden Goose or Propaganda? *Anarchist Studies*. Vol.3 (2).

¹⁸ Cohen, J. (1991). Knowledge, Morality and Hope: The Social Thought of Noam Chomsky. *New Left Review*, p.5-27

¹⁹ Chomsky, Noam (1989) *Language and Politics*. Black Rose Books. p. 713.

²⁰ Jennings, Tom (1995) Common Sense: Golden Goose or Propaganda? *Anarchist Studies*. Vol.3 (2).

It is possibly more accurate to state that there are three classes and members of the elite or political class interchangeably function as ideological managers, as an ideological manager serves the purpose of spreading propaganda, thus each of the three classes could possibly serve as an ideological manager, whereas Chomsky typically notes members of the political class as serving the elite.

²¹ Cockburn, Alexander (1995) The Golden Age is in Us. *Verso*, 407-409

²² Doctrinal institutions include any institution that instructs or teaches the public the dominant ideology, for example schools, churches, and media organizations.

²³ Chepesiuk, Ron (1995) Sixties Radicals, Then and Now. *Macfarland*, 133-146 (quote on 135) By “guardians of state doctrine,” Chomsky states that “we honor the commissars and we condemn the dissidents. And furthermore, this goes right through history. Go back to classical Greece and the Bible. Who drank the hemlock in classical Greece? Was it a commissar or a dissident? When we go to, say, the Bible, you read the biblical record, there are people called prophets. Prophet just means intellectual. They were people giving geopolitical analysis, moral lessons, that sort of thing. We call them intellectuals today. There were the people we honor as prophets, there were the people we condemn as false prophets. But if you look at the biblical record, at the time, it was the other way around....The ones we call prophets were driven into the desert and imprisoned. Yeah, that’s the way it’s been throughout history.”

control discourse in a democratic system, as they are the gatekeepers of how reality in society will be perceived due to their privileges as experts and their control over the distribution of propaganda. Where a totalitarian state possesses an army to inflict violence and regiment the actions of its population, elites use the managerial class to espouse propaganda to the lower classes of society and regiment their thoughts.

According to Chomsky, ideally, the role of the intellectual is to question and interpret the actions of existing institutions to serve the public. However, in the post-industrial society, intellectuals reinforce and justify the actions of existing institutions, acting as “experts in legitimization” as Gramsci has referred to them.²⁴ Ideal intellectuals who question existing institutions, are what Chomsky calls “free floating intellectuals,” intellectuals who research problems due to their inherent interest or importance.²⁵ Free floating intellectuals use the university system to achieve an egalitarian and socially mobile society, using the social sciences as a means to research relevant social issues. Chomsky claims that this brand of intellectual has effectively been replaced by those who function as ideological and cultural managers, referred to as the “intellectual elite.”²⁶ Chomsky states that the intellectual elite is the most heavily indoctrinated of all the classes, as to articulate the interests of the powerful well, it is necessary to internalize the reigning belief system. Ideological managers pass through a system of indoctrination that rewards those who effectively submit and articulate the interests of the elite, which generally means this class must fully believe and understand the interests of power. This class is motivated to serve the elite due to rewards: endless opportunities to gain prestige, influence and wealth. Chomsky says of intellectuals, “If you ask why intellectuals are submissive, the answer is they wouldn’t be intellectuals otherwise.”²⁷

The third group is the primary target of propaganda, the political class, also referred to as the middle class. The political class represents the portion of society that is educated and politically active (the term „political“ denotes their participation in the political process), thus the most important class to control, as presumably their resources, level of education and potential activism could shift the balance of power away from the elite. Chomsky refers to the Russian anarchist Bakunin’s prediction of the role of the intelligentsia under democratic capitalism, “to beat the people with the people’s stick,” as democratic institutions are

²⁴ Merrington, John (1968) Theory and Practice in Gramsci’s Marxism. *The Socialist Register*, 154.

²⁵ Chomsky, Noam (1969) The Menace of Liberal Scholarship. *The New York Review of Books*. Jan.2.

²⁶ Chomsky, Noam (1969) The Menace of Liberal Scholarship.

²⁷ Chomsky, Noam (1998) Language, Politics and Composition. *Journal of Advanced Composition* 11(1).

acceptable precisely because the elite class is able to influence the political class with propaganda, and are preferable because they function as a device of legitimation in a “business-rule democracy.”²⁸²⁹ Ideological managers act as the authority on matters of concern for the middle class, promoting elite interests by obfuscating the truth and using their status as justification for their political and social positions. The political class is the main threat to elite rule, as Chomsky states that if this class became dissatisfied with the status quo, it would withdraw support, making its consent necessary to maintain control.

The bottom tier is the largest, the lower class - the uneducated, politically inactive segments that struggle to mobilize and benefit least from the system. This class is not as susceptible to managerial propaganda, as the political class has an interest in maintaining the elites’ position as they receive marginal benefits from elite control, while the lower class generally does not. This class is the least deceived by propaganda aimed at the political class and often understand the elementary picture of the hierarchical structure of society and their position. However, they are susceptible to various other forms of secondary propaganda promoted by the mass media which Chomsky calls distractions from “political life.”³⁰ These include spectator sports, popular culture, religion and other forms of alienation from the public sphere. Patriotism, moral hysteria and fear of external enemies also contribute to the barrage of social forces that encourage immobilisation and apathy towards political involvement. Lower class propaganda will be discussed at length at the end of this chapter.³¹

The structure of society is a natural creation and consequence of elite power, each shaped by the role they play in serving power and maintained by indoctrinating the public with two institutions that heavily influence the ideological make-up of society – educational institutions and the media. These institutions play different roles in maintaining elite control but function in the same way, as educational institutions manufacture servants of the elite and marginalize the disobedient, while the media manufactures the consent of the population to elite interests through by suppressing dissenting views. It is important to note that Chomsky states that the indoctrinating efforts of educational institutions and the media are not conspiratorial, but a natural result of the nature of these institutions, as those in power will be

²⁸ Otero, Carlos (2004) *Language and Politics*. AK Press. p.181

²⁹ Chomsky, Noam (1991) *Force and Opinion*. *Z Magazine*. July-August.

³⁰ Chomsky, Noam (2002) *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*. New York Press: New York. p.98.

³¹ Jennings, Tom (1995) *Common Sense: Golden Goose or Propaganda?* *Anarchist Studies*. Vol.3 (2).

able to influence society based on their access to institutions that determine the attitudes and beliefs of society.³²

Education

Chomsky views educational institutions as a crucial mechanism in the propaganda system. The techniques and mechanisms used to control public opinion receive their foundations in educational institutions, beginning at the earliest forms of education and reaching into nearly all forms of higher education. Regarding Chomsky's belief in human nature, people have an instinctual desire to be creative and free, to critically analyse situations in order to achieve autonomy. Chomsky also states that this desire must be terminated or controlled at the youngest possible age, for if educational institutions stimulated adolescents' minds to engage in critical analysis, self-analysis and the analysis of culture, the lower classes would use democratic institutions to achieve social change. The goal of early education is to encourage obedience and passivity amongst young children, gradually filtering out disobedience, independent thought and creativity through punishment, and rewarding children for conformity.³³ The coercive nature of educational institutions is reinforced by the rewards granted to conforming students, as young people quickly understand the benefits of obedience and the disadvantages of dissent. Chomsky claims that the regimentation and indoctrination that occurs in schools revolves around forcing students to adopt a worldview that is conducive to the interests of the elite, which involves a great deal of self-deception on the child's part. As mentioned earlier, self-deception is necessary because the human mind naturally questions the existing world and struggles to hold two contradictory beliefs.³⁴ Thus, the "norm is obedience, uncritical attitudes, taking the easy path of self-deception."³⁵ Teachers and officials are hired to execute this form of instruction, while some who attempt to foster creativity and critical attitudes struggle against state imposed curriculums and regulations that place importance on other forms of instruction, for instance standardized tests. In this way educational institutions contribute to the framework of acceptable thought and discussion in society by extinguishing individuals' natural creative capacities through a

³² Chomsky, Noam (1989). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Speech delivered at University of Wisconsin-Madison, March 15.

³³ Chomsky, Noam (2002) *Class Warfare*. Common Courage Press: Philadelphia.

³⁴ It should be noted that Chomsky primarily focuses on the indoctrinating effects of the social sciences in schools and advocates teaching the same investigative methods of the physical sciences in the social sciences, noting that social sciences are taught based on unquestioned, assumed assumptions. Chomsky states that both areas support power, but the social sciences serve as a mechanism of indoctrination.

³⁵ Chomsky, Avram Noam. (1988) What the World is Really Like: Who Knows It - and Why? *The Chomsky Reader*. Pantheon: New York.

system of rewards. However, for a fraction of the population adherence to this framework becomes a means to achieve the greatest rewards of subordination.

Chomsky claims that within the university system, the social sciences are the domain of the managerial class, which function as disciplines that justify and legitimate ideologies and practices that serve elite interest. Chomsky characterizes the social sciences as “an attempt to provide credibility to what could often be characterized as a set of truisms, assumptions and observations, which, at our present level of understanding, could never be proven.”³⁶ In a free society, the university should be expected to be “subversive” in all fields, as it is taken for granted that any creative work will challenge prevailing orthodoxy.³⁷ Academic work should probe the frontiers of understanding and attempt to provide alternatives to conventional assumptions. In turn, Chomsky states that academic work that only continues to support and conform to existing ideas will not be pursued by creative social scientists, unless there are alternative goals of the discipline and academics, for instance to support conventional ideas for careerist purposes. Compared to the physical sciences, which are governed by factors of academic integrity, the social sciences produce simple, obfuscated conclusions about the world, which are dominated by and serve the prevailing ideologies and social structures.

Chomsky breaks down the social sciences into two domains, “exposing facts” and “analysis.” Exposing facts legitimates existing power structures in areas like political science by giving an analysis of the history in which the discipline has naturally arisen. Facts are naturally suppressed and distorted as they pass through the discipline because of the nature of the subject, which is to provide explanations for the evolution of society from the vantage point of the elite, naturally legitimizing existing institutional structures. For example, a heralded, unexamined fact in American educational institutions is the strong “democracy” of the United States. It is taken for granted in discussions of politics that the United States is a functioning democracy, yet the discrepancy between government actions and public opinion regarding issues like war and health care are not discussed. The instructor communicates biased information in a process Chomsky refers to as the indoctrinating function of the university, producing more “obedient intellectuals” and obedient citizens that will justify elite ideas. The other domain of the social sciences is “analysis” which are attempts at revealing truths and meaning from the exposed facts. Part of the prestige and influence one gathers

³⁶ Barsky, R.F. (1998) Chomsky's Challenge: The Pertinence of Bakhtin's Theories. *Dialogism* 1(1): 92-106.

³⁷ Chomsky, Noam (1970) *For Reasons of State*. Collins/Fontana. Suffolk. p.90.

from becoming an intellectual is due to analysis contrived from facts produced by the doctrinal system, which Chomsky states are “pretty obvious” and “mostly trivialities or nonsense...dressed up in big words for careerist purposes.”³⁸ Discussion and critique legitimize analysis by giving the appearance of thoughtful debate, yet praiseworthy critique never ventures outside of the framework of discussion, only using prevailing assumptions that will not challenge the legitimacy of power. One technique of legitimation used by intellectuals is feigned dissent.

Feigned dissent is controlled discourse where controversy and differing opinions are encouraged and celebrated as evidence of freedom of discussion, yet the boundaries of discussion prevent specific opinions from entering the debate. The more rigorous the debate, the more the propaganda system succeeds in presenting the illusion of free speech and representation while excluding ideas that could threaten the desired outcome of discussion. The doctrinally approved boundaries are never expressed in conversation, as they are tacitly assumed, yet they define the limits of responsible opinion. The success of feigned dissent illustrates how the intelligentsia are the proponents of propaganda as well as the most heavily indoctrinated sector of society, as acceptance of the approved doctrine is the path to respectability and prestige within academia and other respectable circles. The result of feigned dissent is the manufacturing of consent and the destruction of a culture of dissidence, as acquiescence and conformity to opinion that serves power becomes a technique in acquiring respectability.³⁹

The Manufacture of Consent – A Filtering Process

In *Manufacturing Consent* (1988)⁴⁰ Chomsky uses “the propaganda model” to give an institutional analysis of the distribution of elite propaganda amongst the political class in capitalist democracies. The model exists to provide a framework for Chomsky’s claims that the mass media are instruments of power that “mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity.”⁴¹ According to Chomsky, the media act as central mechanisms that distribute propaganda in capitalist democracies, as the model assumes that the media are integral actors in “class warfare,” fully integrated into the institutional framework, and act in unison with other indoctrinating sectors, for instance educational

³⁸ Barsky, R.F. (1998) Chomsky’s Challenge: The Pertinence of Bakhtin’s Theories. *Dialogism*, 1(1): 92-106.

³⁹ Chomsky, Noam and Otero, Carlos Peregrin (2004) *Language and Politics*. AK Press. New York.

⁴⁰ *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988) was co-authored by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky.

⁴¹ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam. (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon: New York City.

institutions, to establish, reinforce, and police corporate hegemony.⁴² The model assumes that the elite, agenda setting media routinely protect dominant elite interests by promoting and suppressing information, emphasizing or diverting attention away from certain topics, and endorsing or criticizing issues in ways that will be functional for dominant elites and dominant social institutions.⁴³ The process that takes place in educational institutions that produces the ideological managers who work for the elite-agenda setting media could also be labelled a *filtering* process. As stated earlier, ideological managers are the most heavily indoctrinated sector of the population, allowing them to fully believe they are operating with full integrity and goodwill, yet the ideological constraints are so powerful that alternative choices outside of the framework of discussion are not a possibility. The constraints journalists face consist of five filters that manipulate information to remain within doctrinally approved boundaries – concentrated ownership/profit orientation of dominant media, advertising, sourcing, flak and ideology.

The first filter, the size, ownership and profit orientation of the mass media, describes the relationship between media, corporations and government due to common interests that dominant institutional sectors share. It is natural that information that runs contrary to those interests will struggle to surface in the media. Often the owners of large media firms are connected with other corporate entities, as well as the government, all representing members of the elite class. The elite and the media thus have a symbiotic relationship, making it difficult for the media to fulfill its supposed role⁴⁴ as a voice for the masses as a watchdog, as media managers are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces.^{45,46}

The second filter is advertising. Advertising has become the means of survival for nearly all media institutions, especially newspapers, as papers that attract advertisements are able to produce at a significantly lower cost. This puts newspapers that do not attract advertisers at a serious disadvantage, as a free-market advertising based system tends to drive

⁴² Klaehn, Jeffery (2002) A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky's 'Propaganda Model.' *European Journal of Communication*. Vol.17(2) p. 147-182.

⁴³ Klaehn, Jeffery (2002) A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky's 'Propaganda Model.'

⁴⁴ Chomsky, Noam (2002) *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*. The New Press. New York. p.15. Chomsky uses the Propaganda Model to test the "traditional Jeffersonian role of the media as a counter-weight to government," or as the media is colloquially referred to, a 'watchdog.'

⁴⁵ Herring, Eric and Robinson, Piers (2003) Too Polemical or Too Critical? Chomsky on the Study of the News Media and US Foreign Policy. *Review of International Studies* (23) 553-568.

⁴⁶ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon: New York City.

them out of existence or to marginality.⁴⁷ This amounts to *advertisers* controlling which media institutions remain in business. Thus it is natural for a media institution to abstain from printing controversial stories and perspectives that are contrary to the interests of an advertising corporation. For example, working class newspapers are at a disadvantage, as information about unions, organizing, or corporate greed will not attract major advertisers who benefit from the lack of unions and worker organization. The loss of media institutions that represent the working/middle class public at large constitutes the loss of “an alternative framework of analysis and understanding that contested the dominant systems of representation in both broadcasting and the mainstream press.”⁴⁸ Advertisers also strive to avoid complex or controversial subjects that interfere with “the buying mood.”⁴⁹ Chomsky and Herman predict that over time, as the concentration of media increases due to wealthy competitors, this filter will become increasingly pertinent.

The third filter is sourcing. The mass media are drawn into symbiotic relationships with powerful sources due to economic necessity and the benefits of a reciprocal relationship. Dominant elites routinely facilitate the process of gathering information: they provide press releases, advance copies of speeches, periodicals, photo opportunities and „ready for news“ analysis.⁵⁰ Government and corporate sources are routinely endorsed and legitimized because they are recognizable and believed to be credible.⁵¹ Using corporate and state sources doesn’t require fact checking and background checks, as they are typically perceived to be accurate based on reputation – an unearned reputation perpetuated by media and assumed by the public. The sourcing filter emphasizes the necessity of media institutions to report corporate and government interests favorably, as they possess a reciprocal relationship where journalists cite experts whose opinions are generally accepted without scrutiny and dissenting views are frequently excluded.⁵² This technique is used to manufacture core assumptions that gain widespread recognition without a rigorous examination of other interpretations and facts. Thus, information is structured into news discourse that is typically functional for elites.⁵³

⁴⁷ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon: New York City.

⁴⁸ Curran, James (ed) (1978) Advertising and the Press. *The British Press: A Manifesto*. Macmillan: London.

⁴⁹ Herring, Eric and Robinson, Piers (2003) Too Polemical or Too Critical? Chomsky on the Study of the News Media and US Foreign Policy. *Review of International Studies*. 23 (553-568)

⁵⁰ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. P.19.

⁵¹ Klæhn, Jeffery (2002) A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda Model.’ *European Journal of Communication*. Vol.17(2) p. 147-182.

⁵² Klæhn, Jeffery (2002) A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda Model.’

⁵³ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. p.19.

The fourth filter is flak – the pressure applied by dominant social and corporate institutions on media in order to coerce subordination. Flak consists of negative responses to a media statement or program that come in the form of letters, petitions, lawsuits, phone calls and other modes of complaint or punitive action from powerful institutions or individuals. Advertisers strive to avoid constituencies that may produce flak, making flak an effective deterrent for media insubordination. Flak is only an effective tool for the powerful, as “The ability to produce flak, and especially flak that is costly or threatening, is related to power.”⁵⁴

The fifth filter is the ideology of anti-communism. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Chomsky and Herman have discussed broadening this filter to “the dominant ideology.”⁵⁵ The dominant ideology includes various issues discussed in the media that *Manufacturing Consent* examines: such as the merits of the free market, the benevolence of one’s own government and the demonization of other nations. However, Chomsky and Herman opted to focus on the ideological element that they felt was most important as a control and disciplinary mechanism at the time of writing, the consistent opposition towards communism by the media. When speaking of the abuses of communism, the demand for serious evidence is suspended by the media, echoing the prima facie nature of the sourcing filter. Presently, Chomsky and Herman contend that in the same spirit of anti-communism, the media present a religious faith in the market, “so that regardless of evidence, markets are assumed benevolent and non-market mechanisms are suspect.”⁵⁶ Media promote the dominant ideology, framing it as the „public interest“ and „national interest,“ when in reality the dominant ideology caters to elite interests.

The foundations upon which the Propaganda Model are based are that dominant social institutions are indoctrinating and oppressive. The media is forced to promote the interests of the elite through a systematic filtering process. Due to the limited range of discussion, the interests and attitudes of the political class generally remains within the framework set by the media. However, the media also exercise control over the lower classes through a different form of propaganda not discussed in *Manufacturing Consent*.

⁵⁴ (ibid)

⁵⁵ Wintonick, Peter and Achbar, Mark (1994) *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*. Montreal: Black Rose.

⁵⁶ Herman, Edward (1996) The Propaganda Model Revisited. *Monthly Review*: July.

Stifling the Lower Class

Chomsky gives a detailed institutional analysis of power and propaganda in *Manufacturing Consent* and explains how indoctrinated media institutions serve the elite by controlling discourse that shapes public opinion. His analysis of educational institutions is also an institutional analysis, largely focusing on the role of intellectuals, again focusing mainly on elite propaganda. Yet, in Chomsky's institutional analysis of the use of propaganda in capitalist democracies, discussion surrounding lower class indoctrination does not play a major role, as the central locus of *Manufacturing Consent* focuses on the consent and indoctrination of the political class. However, Chomsky points out that the indoctrination of the lower classes is the largest component of the propaganda system, as

if you look at the whole phenomenon, it seems to me that it plays quite a substantial role. I don't think it's the only thing that has this kind of effect. Soap operas do it in another domain-they teach people other kinds of passivity and absurdity...this stuff is a major part of the whole indoctrination and propaganda system.⁵⁷

Though not explicitly discussed in *Manufacturing Consent* or any of his other works, Chomsky's theory of propaganda reaches conclusions regarding the *passivity* of the lower classes by using an institutional analysis as well. Chomsky refers to a *philosophy of futility*⁵⁸ that maintains apathy amongst the lower classes and discourages political participation.

The Philosophy of Futility: Powerlessness and Cultural Distractions

Chomsky states that the masses "cede democracy" to the elite and in effect live in a polyarchy, a form of government where decision making is under the control of a small group, whose power rests on mass political passivity.⁵⁹ Political passivity is achieved in a myriad of ways, perhaps the most significant being the consistent use of propaganda to influence the population politically, socially and culturally. An example of elite political propaganda is the continual declarations by the media that the state is democratic, when public participation is limited to biannual or quadrennial elections. The elite use propaganda as an instrument of instruction and persuasion, yet there is a distinct difference between elite propaganda and lower class propaganda – elite propaganda aims to indoctrinate the political class with the dominant interests, while lower class propaganda promotes apathetic attitudes

⁵⁷ Chomsky, Noam (2002) *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*. Pantheon: New York City. p.100.

⁵⁸ Chomsky, Noam (2002) *A World Without War*. Delivered at the 2nd World Social Forum, January 31. The term *philosophy of futility* was coined by Columbia University marketing professor Paul Nystrom in his book *Economics of Fashion* (1928).

⁵⁹ Chomsky, Noam (2001) Face to Face with a Polymath. *Frontline*. November issue. (anonymous, interviewers) Chomsky is speaking of the United States in this passage, but applies the same critique to most of Western Europe and other capitalist democratic states.

and serves as a distraction from political life. These attitudes of the lower class include the *philosophy of futility*, as the elite class, the business leaders of society, use propaganda to create “passive consumers” out of the masses, which effectively amounts to a distraction from political life. From infancy, individuals are bombarded with propaganda that inculcates feelings of subordination to the existing order, persuading them to abandon their right to political participation and leave economic, political and social decision making to the elite class. A politically inactive population allows the elite to create their own exclusive arena of political life, limiting political choices to only dominant interests. Chomsky writes:

When you have a formal democratic system, when people have won rights after years of struggle, like the right to vote and participate in elections, you have to take the risk out of democracy by ensuring that there is very little substance to their democratic choices.⁶⁰

Substance is taken out of democratic choices in two ways – the range of debate within democratic institutions is limited to the acceptable boundaries of the elite class, restricting the influx of new ideas and potential for social change. Secondly the masses are further distracted from political action by popular culture. Politicians, intellectuals and all other social managers shape the range of debate within institutions of social change. As social change is impossible due to elite boundaries of discussion, the population becomes apathetic towards political participation. Along with the widespread acknowledgement that democratic institutions are futile, Chomsky explains that popular cultural distractions function as a mechanism to further steer the masses away from political action, as the masses give their time and energy to cultural phenomena like sports and television.

Sport is another crucial example of the indoctrination system...It offers people something to pay attention to that is of no importance...It keeps them from worrying about things that matter to their lives, that they might have an idea of something about....People have the most exotic information and understanding about all sorts of arcane issues...It's a way of building up irrational attitudes of submission to authority, and group cohesion behind leadership elements, in fact its training in irrational jingoism...That's why energy is devoted to supporting them...and advertisers are willing to pay for them.”⁶¹

These mystifying features of popular culture reinforce themes of the existing order – mainly an emphasis on consumerism. A cycle of political apathy is created from the influence of popular culture, limiting political action amongst the lower classes. The populace believes that political participation is insignificant, as the range of debate is narrow amongst leading candidates and rarely addresses the public's aspirations. As a result of the limited political

⁶⁰ (ibid) Chomsky is paraphrasing the thesis of a book by Alex Carey *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy* (1997).

⁶¹ Quote from Alex Burn's 'Operation Mindcrime: The Selling of Noam Chomsky.' In *Disinformation*, November 15, 2001.

options, Chomsky states that portions of the lower class electorate often vote for leaders based on their media image, as their political issues are often marginally different.⁶²

Chomsky states that consumerism is also an efficient device of social control, as the elite use consumerist propaganda to atomize individuals, break down social relations and distract people from realizing their interests and concerns in a political and social sphere.⁶³

According to Chomsky and other theorists who discuss consumerism, a consumerist lifestyle necessitates a drive for wealth in an effort to purchase material goods. This requires long work hours and profit-oriented goals that discourage social relationships. The decline of social relations and solidarity with other members of the lower class through the promotion of consumerism is a means of suppressing political engagement through isolation, where individuals become tools of production as they work more than required to fill basic needs and ignore the socially and psychologically destructive effects.⁶⁴

Criticism of Chomsky's Institutional Analysis

Demonstrated in a logical manner, it becomes clear that Chomsky's theory of propaganda in society centres on the profit-oriented nature of the economy. Thus, the emphasis of Chomsky's examination of elite power in regards to the institutions they serve focus primarily on the upper classes, but does explain certain aspects of lower class domination, as the elite fashion the attitudes, functions and purposes of the doctrinal institutions that indoctrinate and control the lower class. If one agrees with Chomsky's views on human nature, his institutional theory is a consistent and coherent description of class domination. However, before engaging in a discussion that closely analyses Chomsky's theory of class domination, it is important to discuss the most common criticism that surfaces in academic circles in regards to Chomsky's conclusions – that his overall logic and conclusions are conspiratorial. Interestingly enough, his critics on the left and right critique his ideas as being an "overly conspiratorial view" of the world and society.⁶⁵ The next chapter argues that Chomsky's analysis of propaganda and the elite is an institutional analysis, and that because Chomsky employs an institutional analysis to

⁶² Chomsky, Noam (2004) *The Disconnect in US Democracy*. *Khaleej Times*, October. Chomsky cites many examples of distortions of political action, for instance he often uses Gallup polls as empirical evidence for his claims, for example a September 2004 poll asked American voters their motivations for voting for George W. Bush and John Kerry as Presidential candidates. Only 6% of Bush voters and 13% of Kerry voters chose "agendas/ideas/platforms/goals."

⁶³ Chomsky, Noam (2000) *Globalization and its Discontents*. A debate between Chomsky and Washington Post readers in the *Washington Post*, May.

⁶⁴ Chomsky, Noam (1995) 'On Violence and Youth'. *Harvard Educational Review* 65(2). Summer. (Pepi Leistyna, Stephen Sherblom, interviewers) The socially alienating effects of consumerism are discussed in Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

⁶⁵ Brociner, Ken (2009) 'Moving Forward Without Dogma.' *In These Times*. January 25.

understand how the elite control elements of civil society, he does not engage in conspiracy theory.

Chapter 3: Noam Chomsky – Institutional Analysis vs. Conspiracy Theory

“People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public...”

-Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776

There is no shortage of criticism of Chomsky and his work. However, due to his vast amount of empirical work and selection of controversial subjects, critiques of his articles and books often focus on identifying Chomsky as a racist, communist, and Nazi, amongst others. This is typical for a writer who frequently publishes material on contentious topics in the United States and around the world. Chomsky is often portrayed as anti-Semitic in France and Israel, where, according to Chomsky, freedom of speech is limited concerning Holocaust denial.¹ During the Vietnam era and Iraq War, Chomsky was regularly referred to as “anti-American,” accusations presented in detail in a series of articles by David Horowitz and others in *The Anti-Chomsky Reader*. However, these portrayals are normally accusations and opinions, and are not based on thorough investigation and evidence. Academic critiques of Chomsky’s analysis of politics and international affairs are rare, a result of what Chomsky calls the dissident nature of his work, which he attempts to explain in *The Responsibility of Intellectuals* (1967) and *Manufacturing Consent* (1988). As we have noted, perhaps Chomsky’s most popular label amongst all critics, including academics, is that of a conspiracy theorist. This is largely due to the hypothesis of *Manufacturing Consent*, where Chomsky attempts to prove with a Propaganda Model that the media serve to mobilize “support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity.”² Various academic commentators have referred to the Model as conspiratorial, an interesting criticism which merits some discussion, since unlike accusations of anti-Semitism, claiming that the Propaganda Model is conspiratorial is a form of critical analysis, despite the limited amount of research usually conducted in reaching this conclusion.³ Before analysing whether the Propaganda Model fits the definition of conspiracy theory, it is necessary to understand what

¹ Chomsky, Noam (1980) *Some Elementary Comments on the Rights of Freedom of Expression*. Appeared as a preface to Robert Faurisson, *Memoire en defense*.

² Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Vintage Books: London. p.xi.

³ One example is In Ole Holsti and James Rosenau’s book *American Leadership in World Affairs* (1989), they refer to the Propaganda Model as “an almost conspiratorial view of the media.”p.174. Oliver Kamm, a well known British writer and newspaper columnist for *The Times*, regularly publishes articles accusing Chomsky of believing in conspiracy theories.

constitutes a conspiracy and the different connotations of “conspiracy theory” in hopes of identifying useful critiques of the Propaganda Model.

Conspiracy Theory and Society

The plain language definition of conspiracy theory is a theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful actors. However, the term “conspiracy theory” possesses several different connotations. Accusations of conspiracy theory occur because, according to Chomsky, they work as a device in which power (corporate ownership) defends itself, the equivalent of a “curse word” used by academics and journalists to dismiss criticism of the powerful institutions in which they serve.⁴ Chomsky contends that

If you’re down at a bar in the slums, and you say something that people don’t like, they’ll punch you or shriek four-letter words. If you’re in a faculty club or editorial office, where you’re more polite – there’s a collection of phrases that can be used which are the intellectual equivalent of four-letter words and tantrums. One of them is “conspiracy theory,” another is “Marxist,” ...used by people who know that they can’t answer arguments, and that they can’t deal with the evidence.⁵

Accusations of conspiracy theory working as a technique of dismissal are discussed in Mark Fenster’s *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (1999). Fenster argues that the conventional assumption that conspiracy theory is based on paranoia leads to the dismissal of topics that deserve merit.⁶ Chomsky and Herman devoted the preface of *Manufacturing Consent* to an explicit rejection of conspiracy theory, attempting to avoid immediate dismissal of their theory, and correctly predicting that one of the Model’s main criticisms would be its supposedly conspiratorial nature. Herman remarks that

Mainstream critics still made the charge, partly because they are too lazy to read a complex work, partly because they know that falsely accusing a radical critique of conspiracy theory won’t cost them anything, and partly because of their superficial assumption that, as the media comprise thousands of „independent“ journalists and companies, any finding that they follow a „party line“ that serves the state must rest on an assumed conspiracy.⁷

Chomsky and Herman recognized that the term “conspiracy theory” when applied to their Propaganda Model possesses this secondary connotative meaning beyond its plain

⁴ Chomsky, Noam (1990) Bewildering the Herd. *The Humanist* November/December issue. September 7. (Rick Szykowny, interviewer)

⁵ Chomsky, Noam (2004) On Historical Amnesia, Foreign Policy and Iraq. *American Amnesia*, February 17. (Kirk W. Johnson, interviewer)

⁶ Fenster, Mark (1999) *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis.

⁷ Herman, Edward S. (2003) The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective. *Against All Reason*. Dec. 9.

language meaning, used to describe a theory that represents a closed system, one not amenable to standard rules of evidence, what Fenster calls “paranoid style.”⁸

The literal translation of the word conspire means “to breathe together,” as in to whisper, connoting a secretive nature. According to Chomsky, the conclusions reached in *Manufacturing Consent* concerning propaganda in the mass media and the powerful elite are not secretive, as the nature of the mass media’s propaganda function has been discussed, directed and documented since its near inception. The importance of propaganda in what Walter Lippman referred to as the “manufacture of consent” has long been recognized by political scientists and writers on public opinion and the political requirements of the social order.⁹ Attempts at constructing and implementing successful propaganda campaigns in the mass media have been quite common and not hidden from the public. For instance, Edward Bernays, considered one of the fathers of the field of public relations, led a successful campaign to overthrow the government of Guatemala on behalf of the United Fruit Company, a well documented event that meets the criteria of a conspiracy.¹⁰ Bernays’ books *Propaganda* (1928) and *The Engineering of Consent* (1947) discuss in detail the methods and techniques of guiding public opinion, while political scientists like Lippman remarked that propaganda had become a “regular organ of popular government” and continues to steadily increase in sophistication and importance.¹¹ In *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky attempts to describe how the media serve a propaganda function by analysing the media with the Propaganda Model, continuing the study of propaganda produced by theorists like Bernays and Lippman.

Conspiracy Theory and the Propaganda Model

The Propaganda Model meets the criteria of a theory, but not a conspiracy theory. The Model investigates mainstream media sources by analysing their functions as *institutions*, emphasizing the effects of profit-oriented organizations. The Propaganda Model meets the criteria of an institutional analysis because the sources used for case study are primary media and government sources and the focus is on the systematic,

⁸ A conspiracy theory meeting this secondary definition would be one that continues to encompass evidence when faced with contradictory facts, for instance Holocaust deniers who are shown pictures of gas chambers claim that the photographs were doctored by members of a Zionist conspiracy.

⁹ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon: New York City. p.xi.

¹⁰ Schlesinger, Stephen, and Kinzer, Stephen (1999) *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*. Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.

¹¹ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. p.xi.

regular, publicly documented behaviour of the institutions.¹² Chomsky contends that institutional analysis is the direct opposite of conspiracy theory, as institutional analysis focuses on a systemic study of a group's collective behaviour within institutions, while conspiracy theory attempts to explain events or situations by a secret and deceptive small group of powerful people. Since the Propaganda Model is an institutional analysis of the media that focuses on facts in relation to the media's profit-oriented nature, it is unfair to label Chomsky a conspiracy theorist based on his work in *Manufacturing Consent*.

Breaking down the five filters of the Propaganda Model further, we can see that Chomsky's analysis is not conspiratorial, but instead explains media bias towards elite interests due to the profit-oriented nature of media organizations. Chomsky analyses media institutions in *Manufacturing Consent* by focusing on their functions as corporations and examines the constraints on journalists operating in a capitalist society, describing the Propaganda Model as a "guided free market model." Chomsky and Herman claim that accusations of conspiracy tend to arise because of the overwhelming evidence that supports their claim that the media fulfil a propaganda function due to institutional factors. They argue that independent entities operate on a basis of common outlooks, pressures and incentives from the market and internal organizational forces that produce similar constraints on journalists, as opposed to powerful leaders colluding to achieve certain ends.¹³ The five filters are descriptions of the constraints journalists face due to the media's institutional characteristics.

The common thread amongst the five filters is the corporate nature of media institutions. Chomsky states that a corporation's primary goal is to increase profits, and to identify problems that decrease market share. Chomsky argues that placing journalistic integrity above profit will lead to the demise of the institution, so media institutions will function as a business first and on communicating information second. In regard to this analysis, media institutions engage in conspiracy as much as General Motors does when it attempts to increase profits – it is possible that people gather and "conspire" to make profits, but this is merely the structure of corporate capitalism, as Chomsky states "If someone were to say „On no, that's a conspiracy," [in regards to General Motor's attempts to increase profits] people would laugh."¹⁴

¹² Gibson, Clark (2005) *Institutional Analysis at CIPEC*. Center for the Study of Institutions, Population and Environmental Change.

¹³ Herman, Edward (2003) The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective. *Against All Reason*, December 9.

¹⁴ Chomsky, Noam (1990) Bewildering the Herd. *The Humanist* November/December issue. September 7. (Rick Szykowny, interviewer)

The first two filters, ownership and advertising, are often referred to as conspiratorial, as the Model predicts that journalists will filter information that could be potentially damaging to corporate entities that own or depend on media institutions for advertising. If advertisers determine which media institutions remain in business, it is reasonable that corporations will cater to advertisers' preferences of stories and information. As a competitive, profit-oriented institution, media institutions will hire journalists who have successfully risen through the doctrinal system and who understand the boundaries of discussion within their organizations.¹⁵ However, it is not entirely accurate to state that journalists engage in "self-censorship," as they are products of a doctrinal system that rewards the ability to report intelligently on all issues that are not costly to elite power. According to Chomsky, reporters will not only dismiss or ignore information that is harmful to business interests, but often fail to understand criticism of business as pertinent information. Chomsky contends that it is possible that editors and bosses play a role in censoring information by disciplining and firing workers for reporting information damaging to the institution, but that filtering potential ambitious and intelligent journalists who understand that success means discussion within boundaries, or who learn how to "play the game" as Chomsky states, is the most efficient method of controlling information.¹⁶

Unlike conspiracy theories, where groups of individuals play the largest roles in changing the course of events, Chomsky places emphasis on the importance of institutions, stating that "Individuals can be replaced, and then these institutions can continue to function as they do...I generally tend to downplay the role of individuals – they're replaceable pieces."¹⁷ However, Chomsky does acknowledge the importance of certain individuals within his "guided market system," as he states that the system is guided by the leaders of the corporate community and top media owners and executives who often make similar decisions because they share similar perspectives of the world, are subject to similar incentives and constraints, and thus feature or omit certain stories in unknowing collective action.¹⁸ However, these individuals do not engage in conspiracy, as if they are removed from their positions as executives, the systemic properties of the institution will be left in place and

¹⁵ For a detailed description of the doctrinal system, see chapter 1, pp.7-10.

¹⁶ Chomsky, Noam with Barsamian, David (2001) *Propaganda and The Public Mind: Conversations with Noam Chomsky*. South End Press: Cambridge. p.168.

¹⁷ Chomsky, Noam (1990) Bewildering the Herd. *The Humanist* November/December issue. September 7. (Rick Szykowny, interviewer)

¹⁸ Herman, George and Chomsky, Noam (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon: New York City. p.xi

other executives will replace the previous ones, meaning their ability to take part in media control is only allowed due to their position within the institution.¹⁹

Richard Hofstadter popularized the traditional conception of conspiracy theory as the work of malicious, secretive individuals.²⁰ The definition of conspiracy theory has evolved from the classical Hofstadter analysis of conspiracy theory as the work of rogue, secretive individuals to encompassing large, international organizations like the WTO and the Trilateral Commission working towards a “New World Order.” Downplaying the role of individuals may not automatically eliminate the possibility of conspiracy, and the emphasis placed on the nature of profit-oriented institutions does not necessarily separate Chomsky’s claims from those of covert world domination by international companies. What separates Chomsky’s ideas from conspiracy theories is his explanation of how normal operations of some institutions generate behaviours and motivations that serve the interests of a minority and how conspiracy is natural and necessary when profit-oriented institutions have power, what Adam Smith alludes to in his famous quote regarding two businessmen conspiring against the public. The fundamental question to understand in regards to the Model’s conspiratorial nature is what Adam Smith describes as a conspiracy.

Criticism and Institutional Analysis

Chomsky is in fact criticized from both sides of the conspiracy debate, as he connects controversial issues into a grander, revealing narrative of contemporary affairs which simultaneously draws criticism from self-proclaimed conspiracy theorists who chastise him for his refusal to entertain the possibility of conspiracy as well as others who interpret his arguments as supporting conspiracy theory. Chomsky has discussed conspiracy theories at length, as he has written extensively on the JFK assassination²¹ and the September 11th attacks and rejects their feasibility, drawing criticisms from conspiracy theory analysts like Michael Morrissey.²² Yet he also is attacked by writers as a conspiracy theorist, for example in Daniel Pipes *Conspiracy* (1997), as Pipes states that Chomsky

forwards a conspiracy theory that blames the US government for virtually every ill around the world, including environmental pollution, militarism, economic poverty, spiritual alienation and the drug scourge. It manipulates the mainstream media (to divert the revolutionary potential of workers), sponsors academic post-modernism (to

¹⁹ There are instances of what some call “institutional conspiracy” but the term is nonsensical taken the definition of conspiracy. Galileo is sometimes considered the victim of an institutional conspiracy for his theory of heliocentrism.

²⁰ Hofstadter, Richard (1964) *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. *Harper’s Magazine*, November. pp.77-86.

²¹ Chomsky, Noam (1993) *Rethinking Camelot: JFK, the Vietnam War, and U.S. Political Culture*. Black Rose Books: Minneapolis.

²² Morrissey, Michael (1993) Chomsky on JFK and Vietnam. *The Third Decade* 9.6, 8-10.

bewilder the uninitiated), and encourages professional sports (to distract attention from serious issues).²³

Despite Pipes' claims that Chomsky totalizes and connects large issues into one cohesive theory, what Pipes ignores, as well as other anti-conspiracy theorists and conspiracy theorists alike, is how Chomsky has arrived at his conclusions – through empirically detailed institutional analysis. The issue is that many conspiracy theorists like Morrissey and critics like Pipes focus their criticism on Chomsky's conclusions as opposed to his methods of research. In the physical sciences, scientists uncover faults in other scientists' conclusions by examining their methods of research, whereas Morrissey and Pipes disagree with Chomsky's conclusions and take no further action to disprove his methodology.²⁴ This is evident as Pipes labels Chomsky a conspiracy theorist, yet makes no mention of why Chomsky is a conspiracy theorist, other than the consistency of his conclusions.

However, in Mark Fenster's seminal work on conspiracy theory in society, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (1999), Chomsky draws a different form of criticism, as Fenster compares the two traditionally accepted definitions of conspiracy theory: that of Hofstadter and the „paranoid style“ conspiracy, and the more recent illustration of conspiracy theories as a new form of populist resistance to hegemonic power. In Fenster's work, he argues that the “paranoid style” concept of conspiracy theory cannot account for their pervasive presence in contemporary culture i.e. television, novels, movies, or what the rising popularity of conspiracy theory reveals about political subjectivity. Fenster proposes that conspiracy theories should be regarded as “symptoms” of political and social conditions, as they represent a movement towards a progressive and utopian vision of an inclusive political culture.²⁵

Fenster contends that Chomsky, a part of the “left-progressives,” conceptualizes conspiracy theory as a form of irrational political behaviour, similar to the outdated classical Hofstadter explanation of conspiracy, as Chomsky draws a distinction between paranoid conspiracy theories and the analysis of power and proper political action.^{26,27} Fenster

²³ Pipes, Daniel (1997) *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where it Comes From*. New York: Free Press. P.160

²⁴ It should also be noted that some critics like Michael Parenti argue that Chomsky's refusal to entertain conspiracy theories ignores the possibility of institutional conspiracies, as Parenti describes the CIA as an ‘institutionalized conspiracy’ in that its purpose is to often engage in covert and criminal activity in order to preserve a stable market environment for US corporations.

²⁵ Melley, Timothy (2000) *Conspiracy and the Populist Imagination*. Review of Fenster's *Conspiracy Theories* (1999) published in online review forum ebr10, winter 99/00. www.alt/ebr.com.

²⁶ Chomsky, Noam (1995) Human Rights in the New World Order. Speech delivered at Liberty's Human Right's Convention, Central Hall, Westminster, July 16th.

²⁷ Fenster, Mark (1999) *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. p.45.

criticizes Chomsky for simplistically assuming, as Hofstadter did, that political beliefs and behaviours are the result of manipulation and crisis rather than legitimate actions to the political and social world.²⁸ Chomsky, as well as other “left progressives” understands conspiracy theory as merely drawing attention away from structural explanations for political and economic exploitation. Fenster understands conspiracy theory as a symptom of a society’s separation from political participation and argues that

Just because overarching conspiracy theories are wrong does not mean that they are not on to something...a withering civil society and the concentration of the ownership of the means of production, which together leave the political subject without the ability to be recognized or signified in the public realm.

Ultimately, Fenster and Chomsky agree on conspiracy theories functioning as a distraction from serious political activity and reject the idea that they are *authentic* voices of a counter hegemonic resistance, but they disagree on the value conspiracy theory possesses as a social indicator, as Fenster’s critique of Chomsky is that he discounts the potential revelations into the public psyche that examining conspiracy theories may reveal in an attempt to gain credibility amongst a wider audience. Fenster accuses Chomsky of what David Fetzer of the 9-11 Truth Movement calls “politically correct purity,” which means that Chomsky goes to such extreme efforts to distance himself from conspiracy theorists that he sacrifices the ability to identify the merits in their study.²⁹

Chomsky is also placed into a “leftist” group that irrationally rejects conspiracy theory by David Coady, who correctly labels Chomsky as an “institutional theorist.”³⁰ Coady emphasizes the impersonal nature of the Propaganda Model, which downplays the roles of individual actors, and Chomsky and Herman’s efforts to make the Model a purely structural analysis. Coady’s critique is that the Propaganda Model possesses the potential to be conspiratorial, as “impersonal explanations in terms of institutional structures and market forces are not inconsistent with conspiracy theories.”³¹ Coady cites the conspiratorial nature of various institutions, for instance the CIA, as well as the conspiratorial nature of market forces, referencing the Adam Smith quote regarding market forces leading to conspiracy. Coady also identifies the root of an institutional theorist like Chomsky’s critique of conspiracy theory – excessively easy solutions to social problems are not viable solutions, as Chomsky states

²⁸ Fenster, Mark (1999) *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis p.48.

²⁹ Fetzer, James (2006) Scholars: On It’s First Anniversary. Nov.25. <http://www.scholarsfor911truth.org/ScholarsAnniversary.html>

³⁰ Coady, David (2007) Are Conspiracy Theorists Irrational? *Episteme*, November. p.197.

³¹ Coady, David (2007) Are Conspiracy Theorists Irrational? p.197.

The available facts, as usual, lead us to seek the institutional sources of policy decisions and their stability... People who wish to understand and change the world will do well, in my opinion, to pay attention to it [institutional sources], not to engage in groundless speculation as to what one or another leader might have done.³²

Coady claims that institutional theorists' primary fear is the removal of malevolent people from power will leave the structures intact as they are, only to be filled by another individual who fulfils the same function. Coady focuses on the dangers of systemic and institutional solutions, noting that they are often unrealistic and ideal, as changing individuals in power is more reasonable than gaining mass political support to alter an entire institution. It is also possible that a new system could bring new sets of problems, potentially worse than the previous system. The point of Coady's critique is that the abuse of power will continue "if we ignore the fact that much of that abuse is conspiratorial."³³

Coady's critique of the Propaganda Model is more a broad critique of institutional theorists themselves, as they do not sufficiently apply to Chomsky. Perhaps Coady is right that institutional theory and conspiracy theory are not mutually exclusive as Chomsky claims. However as an institution, the media is not resoundingly conspiratorial, and the Propaganda Model only examines media behaviour in *Manufacturing Consent*. Chomsky states that some conspiracy probably takes place amongst media executives but the overwhelming bias of the media is due to institutional factors. Coady illustrates his point that focuses on individual actors by citing George Orwell, as "If men would behave decently the world would be decent."³⁴ Yet, as Chomsky points out regularly, it is the nature of business to abide by Smith's vile maxim "all for ourselves and nothing for other people."³⁵ The structural factors of business drive individual enterprise to greed, as every „decent man“ must compete against his competitors and consumers to increase profit. Coady's example of the CIA as a conspiratorial institution is fair, but the CIA is not concerned with making a profit, while profit is the priority of media corporations.

Coady's argument concerning the danger of change within institutions themselves is understandable, yet it does not disprove the validity of institutional analysis. Systemic changes are certainly more difficult to attain than dismissing corrupt individuals, but this does not prove that the problems are not systemic, just that the problems are deeply embedded in

³² Chomsky, Noam, quoted from Fenster, Mark (1999) *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. p.46.

³³ Coady, David (2007) Are Conspiracy Theorists Irrational? *Episteme*, November p.197

³⁴ Orwell, George (1961) *George Orwell: Collected Essays*. Secker and Warburg: London. pp.31-87.

³⁵ Smith, Adam (1776) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Book III, University of Chicago Press: Chicago. p.418.

the structure. Also, concerning the possibility of an institution more prone to abuse than one already in place, according to Coady's rationale, society should also allow corrupt politicians to remain in power out of fear for a potentially more corrupt successor – a system of thought most individuals reject outright.

Conclusion

An aspect of the conspiracy theory debate not discussed is that conspiracies do occur. The list of proven conspiracies is long, and many have had enormous impact on the world.³⁶ Labelling an idea a conspiracy theory does not logically discredit the idea, but it often academically discredits it. Chomsky distances himself from conspiracy theory as he wants his evidence and conclusions to become part of the debate in political and social studies.³⁷ Ironically, with such controversial and unconventional conclusions, Chomsky's attempts at entering works like *Manufacturing Consent* into mainstream debate have resulted in attacks from traditionally opposing sides (the *left* and *right*) of the political spectrum. Perhaps refusal to entertain conspiracy theory hinders Chomsky's ability to give an analysis of world events, but as a believer in the merits of studying institutions to gain a better understanding of social and political events, it is a sacrifice Chomsky is willing to make.

Now that it is established that Chomsky does have a consistent, specific method of analysis that is not conspiratorial, it is important to test his conclusions by comparing them to other theories of domination as a means of entering Chomsky into academic discussions of class domination. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Chomsky's institutional analysis principally focuses on elite propaganda and its effects on the political classes. Despite Chomsky's theories on the effects of consumerism and cultural distractions, detailed discussions of lower class indoctrination are largely missing from most of his theory. Chomsky provides empirical evidence of elite propaganda in the media in *Manufacturing Consent*, but is unable to provide a similar model for the exact effects of consumerism or cultural distractions. The reason for this is the hierarchy created in analysing elite propaganda is based on what groups serve power, so the emphasis in works such as *Manufacturing Consent* is placed on the managerial and political classes, as there is ample evidence to examine the propaganda that indoctrinates these classes. In order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of Chomsky's theory surrounding lower class indoctrination, it is necessary to compare it to another theory of elite

³⁶ There are numerous examples of uncovered and successful conspiracies: the successful plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln (1865), the Business Plot to overthrow the U.S. government (1933), the Watergate burglary and cover up scandals (1972).

³⁷ Herman, Edward (1996) The Propaganda Model Revisited. *The Monthly Review*. July.

domination, one that uses a method of analysis other than institutional analysis and primarily focuses on the plight of the lower class.

Chapter 4: Antonio Gramsci: Hegemony and Lower Class Domination

Chomsky's theory of propaganda uses an institutional analysis of the cultural and civil elements of society, focusing primarily on what he labels *doctrinal institutions*, the schools and media institutions. However, his conclusions are reached only by examining propaganda in the context of how it serves existing institutions, as he states that the indoctrination of each individual can be traced back to the institutions of centralized power, controlled directly and indirectly by the elite. *Manufacturing Consent* describes in detail the indoctrination of the managerial class and the political class, but an emphasis on lower class indoctrination, as well as an emphasis on the importance of lower class political action is absent in Chomsky's theory of society and propaganda. Historically, political activity amongst the masses has transformed into full scale civil unrest, which leads to social change, as witnessed in not only American history, but in the histories of various countries.¹ Thus it is equally as important to focus on lower class indoctrination and to examine other theories of domination that focus on the masses. *Hegemony*, a theory created by the Marxist Antonio Gramsci, deals specifically with mass subordination and focuses more on a cultural explanation rather than institutional analyses of domination. A comparison of Chomsky's ideas with Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony emphasizes some of the deficiencies in Chomsky's theory and offers possible additions and modifications, but also highlights the strengths that Chomsky sees in the human spirit to overcome oppression.

Antonio Gramsci and Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist from the early twentieth century, offers a theory of elite domination that explains the subordination of the lower and middle classes to the elite. Hegemony focuses on the cultural assimilation of groups into the dominant ideology, where all societal classes share core values that preserve the system of domination. Gramsci uses the term hegemony to describe the method by which predominance of one class over others is obtained in capitalist, democratic states by the consent of the masses, as opposed to force.² Hegemony is attained through a myriad of ways in which civil institutions shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby people perceive and

¹ For example, the American Civil Rights Movement, the Indian Independence Movement and the end of Apartheid in South Africa.

² There is a debate concerning the exact definition of hegemony. However, Femia states that 'When Gramsci refers to hegemony in his *Quaderni*, it is almost invariably clear from the context that he conceives it purely in terms of ideological leadership, and that he wishes to counterpose it to the moment of force.' For the purposes of this paper, hegemony will refer to this widely accepted Femia definition.

evaluate problematic social reality.³ These civil institutions, which Gramsci calls *civil society*, include any organizations or groups that influence morality, customs, religions, politics and all social relations i.e. church, school, unions. Hegemony is thus a form of social control which takes two basic forms: the external influence of behaviour and choice through rewards and punishments, and the internal moulding of personal convictions into a replica of prevailing norms.⁴ Gramsci made a clear analytical distinction between civil society and political society, with political society comprised of all entities and coercive institutions within the State's direct control (police, courts, representatives).⁵

Perry Anderson refers to hegemony as “the evolution of the art and science of politics,” as before the development of hegemony, coercion was the primary form of maintaining elite control over the masses.⁶ Gramsci, writing in the early 20th century, explains the advances made in the art of mass control by drawing a comparison between the despotic and „satrapic“ forms of government of the East, and the representative governments of the West that were democratically guided by the populace.⁷ Gramsci states that in the East, a region with a relatively inexistent, formless civil society, control was maintained through violence, as every rebellion was immediately crushed with force. The populations of the East are passive and fragmented, often widely dispersed, and understand their role as „subjects“ to power and authority.⁸ In the West a public space exists where the popular masses are active and politically conscious. The evolution of civil society presented a challenge for elite classes, as representative institutions threaten the control of the elite and distribute power amongst the masses. However, power within democratic, capitalist societies remains with the ruling class under hegemony, as the elite influence the ideology and sentiments of the lower class, effectively winning the consent of the masses. Thus, the elite educate the masses with their systems of values and morals through control exerted in the churches, media, unions and schools.

³ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. p.24.

⁴ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. p.45.

⁵ Anderson, Perry (1976) The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*. Routledge: New York. (3)343.

⁶ Anderson, Perry (1976) 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci.'(3)343.

⁷ Fontana, Benedetto (2005) The Democratic Philosopher: Rhetoric as Hegemony in Gramsci. *Italian Culture* 23, 113-115. The dyad East/West, in which each term is antithetical to the other, is a traditional dichotomy in Western political thought that has its roots in the works of Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle. The contrast between East and West should be understood theoretically as a conceptual category as opposed to a geographical description of the early 20th century. However, Gramsci was certainly making a generalization of 20th century Europe, where Italy, Britain and France had emerging or functioning democracies, as opposed to Russia and other eastern European countries that were ruled by monarchies.

⁸ Fontana, Benedetto (2005) The Democratic Philosopher: Rhetoric as Hegemony in Gramsci. *Italian Culture* 23,113-115.

Gramsci labels the Eastern method of control a *war of manoeuvre*, as the elite must react to rebellion, as opposed to the Western *war of position*, where the elite have crushed the prospect of rebellion by gaining the legitimate right to rule, or consent, from the masses.⁹ In an authoritarian state that lacks civil society, the state must use force to calm spontaneous rebellions, or use the constant threat of force to prevent uprisings from forming. For instance, Tsarist Russia used a war of manoeuvre to control its populace under Peter the Great with the formation of a police state and the use of public execution and corporal punishment (lashings, branding irons). Reactionary uprisings must be met with violent reactionary measures to maintain the control of the state. However, in representative governments where civil society is strong and the public possess some influence, moral and intellectual leadership is necessary to influence the masses. This leadership gains the consent of the masses, greatly diminishing the risk of spontaneous rebellion by apparently ceding some power to the populace.

Thus the ruling class is able maintain dominance over the others by directing and fashioning the morals and values which contribute to the complex systems of political and social domination. In order for the masses to gain control, Gramsci theorized a counterhegemony must replace the reigning hegemonic structure– the creation of an alternate interpretation of the functioning political, social and economic institutions. Gramsci theorized a counterhegemony would be formed by infiltrating civil institutions and encouraging the rise of new systems of values and beliefs that would replace the existing hegemonic structure to benefit the masses, a feat that could be accomplished through the influence of „organic“ intellectuals, the leaders and managers of civil institutions, and restructuring of the elements of civil society. These organic intellectuals, raised from within the working class, are the catalyst in undermining the existing social relations in order to create a counterhegemony, as they lead and direct the nature of civil institutions.

The Theory of Consent

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is centred on the premise of *consent*. When Gramsci refers to consent, he speaks of a psychological state involving acceptance of a socio-political order or characteristics of that order. Similar to hegemony, there are various levels of consent, as individuals may conform politically or socially for different reasons, meaning that

⁹ Anderson, Perry (1976) The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*. Routledge: New York. (3)342.

some forms of consent are weaker and with varying degrees of enthusiasm.¹⁰ These levels of consent are explained in four broad categories on a continuum ranging from nearly coercive to consent with the utmost enthusiasm: acquiescence under duress, habit, agreement and pragmatic acceptance.

At the coercive end of the spectrum is acquiescence under duress, which is basically conformity due to fear of repercussions. Despite the lack of violence, this amounts to coercion, for instance an individual may consent to a certain socio-political order but object to the laws imposed by the government. The repercussions of breaking the law outweigh the benefits the society produces, so one chooses to consent but does not actively endorse the system. Consent due to habit is a matter of unreflective participation in an established form of activity, occurring because an individual rarely is faced with opportunities to reject the status quo, thus lacking the ideas and initiative to alter their behaviour, as opposed to consciously accepting the values of the norm. This bears similarities to Chomsky's description of the American lower class, which due to a lack of faith in the political system and the limited opportunities for public participation choose political inactivity. The third form of consent, which best represents Gramsci's theory of hegemony based on the concept of *legitimacy*, is consent based on some form of agreement or conscious attachment to certain core elements of society. Consent by agreement embodies Gramsci's hypothesis that within a stable order, there must be a substratum so powerful that it "counteracts the divisive and disruptive forces of conflicting interests."¹¹ It is impossible to precisely understand what individuals actually agree upon in this form of consent (beliefs, values, institutions), but according to Edward Shils, it includes the "cognitive propositions and moral standards about the societal distribution of benefits and about the worth of institutions of authority and order by which this distribution is brought about, changed, or maintained."¹² Thus agreement focuses on the allocation of goods, the permissible range of disagreement, and the institutions that make these decisions. Chomsky's *political* class, the group that is politically active, demonstrates a substratum that endorses the political system, as they believe in the system's legitimacy to rule. It is Chomsky's political class that "counteracts the divisive and disruptive forces" as Femia states. However, within this substratum, agreement takes different forms as well, ranging from the complete internalization of the dominant values to the belief that the present form is the only viable form society can take so participation is necessary. The final form of

¹⁰ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. p.38.

¹¹ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought* p.39.

¹² (ibid)

consent is pragmatic acceptance, which is conformity due to convenience. Conformity is basically a less enthusiastic form of agreement, where endorsing the present system ensures the reciprocal conduct of others, which is necessary to achieve one's own goals of the pursuit of wealth, power, security etc.¹³ The key element of pragmatic acceptance is that there is no viable alternative that guarantees the luxuries the present system offers, thus the risk is unacceptable.

What remains unclear in Gramsci's theory of consent is the mode – are the various forms of consent passive or active? Acquiescence under duress and habit are passive, as either through fear or ignorance the status quo is „endorsed“ by the public. It is inaccurate to use the term „endorse,“ because fear is coercive, while inactivity due to ignorance can hardly be said to be „active“ endorsement of a system. Gramsci discusses agreement and its counterpart pragmatic acceptance as active consent, stating that the elite maintain control based on a deeply held belief by the masses that the ruling class is legitimate.¹⁴ However, this belief is complex and layered, as Gramsci characterizes hegemony as the

Spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group, consent „historically“ caused by the prestige (and therefore by the trust) accruing to the dominant group because of its position and function in the world of production.¹⁵

In this passage Gramsci comments on the trust the ruling class has accumulated over time, not due to their contributions to societal advancements of equality or freedom, but due to their position as the owners of production, whom Chomsky would call “the responsible men, the self-described „intelligent minorities“ who...administer power.”¹⁶ Sectors of the masses actively consent to the rule of the dominant order, but the core of Gramsci's theory of hegemony deals with the superficiality of this consent due to the contrary conscious thoughts and unconscious values of the masses, as they have uncritically accepted what Gramsci calls *common sense* from the past. Common sense, or a conception of the world, is “mechanically imposed by the external environment” by the “social groups with which they are automatically involved from the moment of their entry into the conscious world.”¹⁷ An individual receives common sense from “the local priest or ageing patriarch whose wisdom is

¹³ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. p.39.

¹⁴ As noted earlier, not every sector of the population believes in the legitimacy of the ruling class, just groups within the masses that counteract the dissenting fragments of the mass population.

¹⁵ Gramsci, Antonio (1949) The Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture. *The Works of Antonio Gramsci*. Turin: Einaudi. p.9.

¹⁶ Chomsky, Noam (ed) Phillips, Peter (2001) Introduction: Project Censored 25th Anniversary. *Project Censored 2001*. Seven Stories Press, April.

¹⁷ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p.627.

law” or “the minor intellectual soured by his own stupidity and inability to act.”¹⁸ But the active man-in-the-mass has an “instinctive feeling of independence” despite consistent exposure to common sense from civil society.¹⁹ Every common person feels their subordination, but is unable to articulately express their grievances for lack of conceptual ability, thus dealing with what Gramsci calls

two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically accepted. But this „verbal” conception is not without consequences. It binds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, in a manner more or less powerful enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory character of consciousness does not permit any action, any decision or any choice and produces a condition of moral and political passivity.²⁰

Gramsci essentially claims here that the masses do not actively accept the social order as there seem no possible alternatives and they lack the necessary conceptual tools, or „clear theoretical consciousness” which would enable them to take action against their discontent. Workers are bound together by their function in society and their discontent, but remain politically passive; in short because of what they feel (discontent) and what they think (there are no alternatives to their world). Perhaps Gramsci’s theory of two theoretical consciousnesses provides a pertinent critique of Chomsky’s theory regarding the lower class, as Gramsci gives a reason why the lower classes do not revolt. However, Chomsky explains how the lower classes recognize elite propaganda, yet does not give a clear explanation for their lack of action in his ideas concerning the *philosophy of futility*.²¹

The Forms of Hegemony

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is not monolithic, as there appears to be inconsistencies in the definition, yet these inconsistencies can be explained by breaking down hegemony into three types – integral, minimal, and decadent hegemonies.²² These levels describe the intensity of the hegemonic situation, as the degrees of variation are rooted within

¹⁸ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p.627.

¹⁹ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks. pp.641-642.

²⁰ (ibid) pp.641.

²¹ Defined in chapter 2.

²² Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. These three forms of hegemony are articulated in the *Il Risorgimento*, but Femia is the first to produce a coherent definition for each of them.

the dynamics of historical development.²³ *Integral* hegemony describes the most stable form of a hegemonic situation, one where the elite and proletariat engage in moral and intellectual unity. An integral hegemonic situation involves the elite carrying out a progressive function for every sector of society, causing “the entire society to move forward, not merely satisfying its own existential requirements but continuously enlarging its social framework for the conquest of ever new spheres of economic and productive activity.”²⁴ However, integral hegemony emerges and evaporates quickly, as modern capitalist society is not capable of representing and furthering the interest of every class. As integral hegemony fades, the moral and intellectual unity of elite and non-elite also weakens, as when “the dominant group has exhausted its function, the ideological bloc tends to decay.”²⁵ This period of transition away from integral hegemony is called *decadent* hegemony.

The last and weakest form of hegemony is *minimal* hegemony. The dominant groups create a minimal hegemonic situation when they do not “accord their interests and aspirations with the interests and aspirations of other classes.”²⁶ Rather, the elite maintain dominance through the practice of *trasformismo*, the act of directing leaders of cultural, political, social and economic importance away from potentially hostile groups and into the ruling class. The elite essentially give away power to individuals in order to retain power, as rewards are given to elite integrated leaders, for example employment and power in decision making institutions. Hegemonic activity exists in this framework, but is confined to the upper and middle classes, as social discontent is widespread amongst the masses in a minimal hegemonic situation. This situation bears significant similarities to Chomsky’s understanding of the structure of society in regards to which classes are the most indoctrinated with elite propaganda. However under minimal hegemonic circumstances, because the leaders of potential political, economic and cultural action are integrated into the elite and the masses do not possess enough cultural sophistication to channel their grievances into an articulate framework, mobilization does not produce rebellions and uprisings that accurately represent the discontent of the masses. Resistance is confined to pre-political, chaotic activities that lack direction due to the confining nature of the existing categories of thought and behaviour. The rebellions that take place under a minimal hegemonic situation are based on „generic hatred,“ a lashing out at the elite, as the masses feel their domination, yet cannot understand

²³ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. p.46

²⁴ Gramsci, Antonio (1949) *Il Risorgimento. The Works of Antonio Gramsci*. Turin: Einaudi. p.71-72.

²⁵ Gramsci, Antonio (1949) *Il Risorgimento* p.72.

²⁶ (ibid) p.106.

and articulate the means which it takes place.²⁷ The masses are still subject to the intellectual and moral hegemony of the elite, but it is a weak hegemony characterized by a low level of integration, unlike the upper and middle classes which are fully integrated into the elite sphere.

The Role of Intellectuals

In a minimal hegemonic situation, intellectuals serve as the catalyst for the preservation of the ruling order. Gramsci uses the term „intellectuals“ broadly, as he states that

..all men are intellectuals but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals...there is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded...everyone carries on some form of intellectual activity..., participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.²⁸

However, Gramsci notes that while every individual uses their mental abilities to create or legitimate conceptions of society, there are some who do much more, the “organizers and leaders” of a given class.²⁹ *Intellectual* is meant to describe civil servants, political leaders, managers and any other individuals of influence within civil institutions. Within these categories he distinguishes between *traditional intellectuals* and *organic intellectuals*.³⁰ Traditional intellectuals are taken to be autonomous of the existing social order as their static roles in society have gone unchanged for long periods of time. They are widely regarded as static due to their supposed historical continuity throughout many social upheavals and other transformations of society. Nevertheless, they are complicit in its actions and affects and eventually come to compromise with it, in part because of institutional pressures and financial inducements.³¹ Despite the absence of direct censorship of their thoughts and ideas, the behaviour of traditional intellectuals is conformist, even if only indirectly, to the status quo. Gramsci claims that traditional intellectuals do not give up their position as „deputies of the dominant class“ easily, as they promote a continuity between past and present society to assert and maintain their place in society. However, when confronted with the inevitability of

²⁷ Gramsci, Antonio (1949) Past and Present. *The Works of Antonio Gramsci*. Turin: Einaudi. p.14.

²⁸ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks. London, Lawrence and Wishart. p.334.

²⁹ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) Selections from the Prison Notebooks. p.334.

³⁰ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. p.131.

³¹ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought*. p.132.

change, traditional intellectuals will surrender their support of the decaying social order and accept the emerging order, as aptly stated by Marx.

Men never relinquish what they have won but this does not mean that they never relinquish the social form in which they have acquired certain productive forces. On the contrary, in order that they may not be deprived of the results attained and forfeit the fruits of civilization, they are obliged. From the moment when their mode of carrying on commerce no longer corresponds to the productive forces acquired, to change all their traditional social forms.³²

Organic intellectuals play a more active role in the maintenance of hegemony, and as Gramsci theorizes, in the potential formation of a counterhegemony. Organic intellectuals are leaders that emerge from within a given class to influence and organize on behalf of the dominant group.

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity...not only in economic but also in the social and political fields.³³

The extent to which organic intellectuals participate in the political system varies according to their class orientation. Gramsci calls organic intellectuals of the elite “experts in legitimation,” as their role is to mediate the ideological and political unity of the existing hegemonic structure, rendering it acceptable to allied and subordinate groups, universalizing the dominance of the elite class.³⁴ However, intellectuals of the lower classes struggle to organize, as their social function is not clear and must be guided if a counterhegemony is to be created. Gramsci calls for a „collective“ intellectual or political party to lead the masses towards a new social consciousness.

The Schools

Central to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is that hegemonic direction is accomplished through moral and intellectual persuasion, that “rule by intellectual and moral hegemony is the form of power which gives stability and founds power upon wide-ranging consent and acquiescence,” which more clearly states that “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship.”³⁵ One would expect that the primary centres of hegemonic activity would be found in the schools, thus drastic changes in the educational

³² Marx, Karl (1977) In a letter to Annenkov, compiled in *Marx, Engels Selected Works*. Penguin Books Harmondsworth. P.660-661.

³³ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London, Lawrence and Wishart. p.8.

³⁴ Merrington, John (1968) *Theory and Practice in Gramsci’s Marxism. Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*. Routledge: New York. (2)16.

³⁵ Entwistle, Harold (1978) Antonio Gramsci and the School as Hegemonic. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments*, (3)252. The Gramsci quote from *The Prison Notebooks* p.350.

system would be necessary.³⁶ However, Gramsci wrote extensively on the positive aspects of early 20th century Italian schooling, lauding many aspects of mainstream culture and rejecting the idea that liberal education is “bourgeois” and that the idealization of a working class culture is necessary. Gramsci saw an education composed of the natural and social sciences as a means of eliminating social stratification, the form of education that Gramsci himself had received. Gramsci’s critique of the schools as hegemonic came mostly in structural terms, focusing on the vocational schools as fulfilling a hegemonic function, as the vocational school system performs different levels of hegemonic activity and encourages the divide between the classes. Gramsci states that

This social character is determined by the fact that each social group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate. If one wishes to break this pattern one needs, instead of multiplying and grading different types of vocational schools, to create a single type of formative school (primary-secondary) which would take the child up to the threshold of his choice of job, forming him during this time as a person capable of thinking, studying and ruling – or controlling those who rule.³⁷

In order to create a counterhegemony, the traditional humanistic secondary school must be made universally available to all in order to “develop in each human being an as yet undifferentiated general culture.”³⁸ This general culture would begin to eliminate the intellectual inequalities amongst the classes; however Gramsci did stress one important aspect of curriculum necessary to developing this common culture - language.

One of Gramsci’s few criticisms of the curriculum in Italian schools revolves around enhancing the formal study of language for the masses.³⁹ Gramsci considered the study of language an examination of everyday life, as language represents a deeply rooted window into the examination of the social conditions of oppression.⁴⁰ In *Letteratura e vita nazionale* he notes that the education of the „active man-in-the-mass“ does not provide the means to formulate a counterhegemony, to manipulate abstract symbols or to think systematically and clearly.⁴¹ Gramsci states that language training is the primary deficiency in the hegemonic school system, as he claims that every culture guides its system of values and conceptions of the world within language and that intellectual activity is confined within the range of an

³⁶ Gramsci uses the Italian word *scuola* when referring to hegemony, focusing only on primary and secondary education when using this term.

³⁷ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London, Lawrence and Wishart. p.40.

³⁸ Parekh, B (1975) Marx’s Theory of Man. *The Concept of Socialism*. London, Croom Helm. p.46-52.

³⁹ Entwistle, Harold (1978) ‘Antonio Gramsci and the School as Hegemonic’ in *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments*, (3)254.

⁴⁰ Landy, Marcia (1986) Culture and Politics in the Work of Antonio Gramsci. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments* (3)168.

⁴¹ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press, Oxford p.44.

individual's vocabulary. Also, if political concepts like „democracy“ are identified as the distorted conceptions within the dominant ideology, an alternative image of society also becomes difficult to conceive.⁴²⁴³ Gramsci calls this dilemma for counterhegemony the „*questione della lingua*“ and refers to the many dialects of early 20th century Italy as serving a hegemonic function, as these dialects of the lower class did not possess the necessary conceptual tools to encourage counterhegemony.

Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited or provincial, which is fossilized and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interest will be limited, not universal...⁴⁴

In order to remedy this problem Gramsci advocates the instruction of the national language within all schools as a way of creating the general culture that will diminish the intellectual inequality of the masses with the elite.

The Weakness of Hegemony

Hegemony provides an alternative to the institutional analysis of Chomsky, focusing more on the cultural aspects of domination and offering insight into the importance of the plight of the lower classes, a focus which is largely absent from Chomsky's theory compared with his ideas on elite propaganda. However, a closer look at hegemony compared with Chomsky's ideas of indoctrination illuminate the differences between cultural and institutional explanations for elite domination.

⁴² , Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. p.44.

⁴³ As is often the case with interpretations of Gramsci, there is some contention surrounding the theory that language serves a hegemonic function. Joseph Femia interprets Gramsci as stating that an individual's conception of the world is limited to the vocabulary they possess to describe it, quoting Gramsci as stating 'every language contains the elements of a conception of the world.' However, examining the entire quote from the *Prison Notebooks* above, Harold Entwistle interprets Gramsci as not stating that language limits conceptual abilities, but that it is necessary for all classes to learn the dominant language of the region to build a counterhegemony. In this quote, Gramsci is actually stating that it is possible in all languages to conceptualize the complexities of the world, yet a counterhegemony requires a national unity which is difficult to achieve without a unifying language. This is more a commentary on the structure of the school system and society, as all classes sharing a single language serves practical purposes for counterhegemony, but does not entail that language itself serves a hegemonic function by limiting the mental abilities of the masses. Gramsci does discuss the hegemonic function of language, but Femia and Entwistle have interpretations of Gramsci's meaning.

⁴⁴ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London, Lawrence and Wishart. p.325.

Chapter 5: Examining the Commonalities of Chomsky and Gramsci

What is interesting about comparing Gramsci and Chomsky is they both attempt to describe the same phenomenon – why the mass population *consent* to the rule of an elite class in capitalist, democratic states. They follow and describe the development of new forms of domination, Gramsci focusing on European and Chomsky on American historical events of the 20th century. Gramsci describes the difference between East and West, the move from force to consent, examining the constantly emerging and shifting forms of hegemony and the creation of a civil society, which he calls “the evolution in the art and science of politics.” Chomsky also observes a change in the social and political world, referring to the “new art in democracy” to the evolution of the Public Relations industry in Britain and the United States after the first World War, during the advent of rapid industrialization. Chomsky’s description of the present political and economic situation in capitalist democracies shares many similarities with Gramsci’s theory of minimal hegemony and the act of *trasformismo*, as hegemony, or what Chomsky labels as indoctrination, is limited to upper class citizens and countered with large scale discontent among the lower classes. Chomsky, who often states that the upper classes are the most indoctrinated and describes the integration of branches of society - intellectuals, managers, teachers, small businessmen – who come to share elite beliefs and values due to promises of monetary reward and fear of the consequences of insubordination. However, Chomsky and Gramsci are in disagreement over the domination of the lower class, of how and why it takes place, as Gramsci claims that two *theoretical consciousness*¹ keep the lower class politically inactive, a product of the cultural usurpation of civil institutions. Chomsky attributes lower class inactivity to other mechanisms that stem from the effects of a profit-oriented economy and the institutions with power that it benefits.

Similarities – Consumerism and Habit

An interesting comparison is Chomsky and Gramsci’s ideas on commodity fetishism. Though not central to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Gramsci notes that there are habits of submission induced by the capitalist work routines, as he states that commodity fetishism drives the individual to accept the dominant ideology and plays a large role in the voluntary acceptance of the status quo. This understanding is very similar to Chomsky’s, as he also

¹ The two theoretical consciousness, or one contradictory consciousness, is discussed in chapter 2, page 24.

states that instinctual habits of submission similarly restrain the masses from political action. However, Gramsci theorizes that it is the “strategic nexus of civil society which is believed to maintain capitalist hegemony within a political democracy,” as consumerism is a result of hegemony, not a cause. For Chomsky, consumerism is one of the primary means the elite class maintains power, as all doctrinal institutions prepare individuals to take part in the profit-oriented economy.

Also, Chomsky’s *philosophy of futility* attributes elite domination to mass political *passivity*, as the public passively acquiesces to the norm.² One of Gramsci’s four types of consent under hegemony is “habit,” which is equivalent to Chomsky’s idea of political passivity. Both Chomsky’s theory and Gramsci’s theory of consent due to habit attribute political inactivity to unreflective participation in the system as well as feelings of powerlessness about promoting change. However, consent due to “habit” is Chomsky’s primary theory of the public’s consent, focusing on the ineffectiveness of democratic institutions and cultural distractions, while Gramsci acknowledges “habit” as one type of consent but focuses more on consent due to agreement, as Gramsci states that active consent due to a belief that the elite are serving the interests of all classes better describes the acquiescence of the masses.³

The Intellectual Ability of the Lower Class

One key difference between the two theorists is that Gramsci states that the masses often actively *endorse* the dominant ideology, not passively due to powerlessness or distractions from political society, but because they believe it is in their best interest due to the effects of cultural hegemony. It must be noted that Gramsci’s notion of consent is better explained on a continuum, one that varies in intensity, from passive consent to full and active acceptance of the dominant order.⁴⁵ The argument that individuals are discontented with the status quo but cannot conceive of a different alternative is on the weak end of the hegemonic continuum. This perspective is similar to Chomsky’s ideas of subordination, as Chomsky theorizes that due to media and educational institutions that serve elite interests, ideas and ideologies that are contrary to those of the elite are filtered out of education and information,

² Chomsky, Noam (2001) Face to Face with a Polymath. *Frontline*. November issue. (multiple anonymous, interviewers)

³ In reference to the term ‘masses’ or ‘public,’ this term denotes the lower class in Chomsky’s structure of society, as well as Gramsci’s proletariat.

⁴ The pure definition of consent is a topic of contention, but for these purposes the Femia definition is used, one that analyses consent as being more than merely ‘verbal’ as many scholars state.

⁵ Hodgekiss, Phillip (2001) *The Making of the Modern Mind: The Surfacing of Consciousness in Social Thought*. The Athlone Press: New York and London. p.64. Edward Shils calls the full acceptance of the dominant order the “essence of consent,” while other Gramsci scholars tend to refer to the contradiction between intellectual beliefs and conduct, the disconnect between thought and action, as an appropriate definition of hegemonic consent.

making the range of discussion regarding social change narrow and political action in favour of the lower classes rare. However, Chomsky's description does not include the active consent of the lower classes, it could better be described as a lack of options and a lack of will. More central to Gramsci's theory of hegemony is the idea that consent amongst the masses often involves the belief that the elite have a legitimate right to rule, where the masses agree that the distribution of goods and legitimacy of decision making institutions is sound because they lack the conceptual tools to comprehend their situation effectively.⁶ In the active, agreement form of consent that Gramsci finds central to hegemony, the masses do not feel alienated from institutions and believe that civil society is working in favour of the masses, as opposed to Chomsky's theory.

Compared with Gramsci's theory of consent, the two ideas have a elemental contrast. According to Chomsky's understanding of society, the masses acknowledge and understand their plight fully and are the least indoctrinated of all the classes. The political structure is transparent as it is general knowledge amongst the masses that the government serves the interests of a few.⁷ This is the fundamental difference – in Chomsky's view, the lower classes are consciously dissatisfied with the political, economic and social situation but are too apathetic to change it; in Gramsci's view, lower class individuals simultaneously consent and are discontented with the economic and social situation, but cannot understand how or why they should seek change. However, Chomsky's mechanisms of domination (philosophy of futility, cultural distractions, indoctrinating institutions) explain how the elite dominate the lower classes, but do not clearly explain *why* the masses do not revolt. Gramsci's theory of the *contradictory consciousness* explains how the lower classes lack the conceptual ability to rebel against the ruling class, whereas Chomsky's theory does not explain inaction due to conflicting consciousness, but rather as a result of the systematic suppression of human instincts that strive towards freedom and solidarity.

⁶ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. p.39.

⁷ Chomsky, Noam (2006) On Democracy. *Radio Free Los Angeles*. July. (Tom Morello, interviewer)

A crucial aspect to Chomsky's theory of lower class consent involves the transparency of the lower class dilemma. The lower classes feel alienated from democratic institutions, and recognize what their alienation entails. Chomsky states that the lower classes often do not believe State action works for the interests of the masses, in fact many within the lower class believe that State action only benefits the elite. Chomsky uses Gallup polls and surveys as empirical evidence for his claims, for example when asked if he believed American society to be democratic, he stated "A Gallup poll for years has been regularly asking people who they think the government works for, and it has usually been running about 50% saying "the few and the special interests, not the people." Chomsky states that "well over half of the population believes the economic system to be unfair" and that lower class workers possess little influence in democratic institutions.

Dismantling the Human Instinct

In order to understand Chomsky's theory of lower class indoctrination, it is necessary to examine his ideas concerning human nature, as he believes that humans possess two innate instincts – the desire for freedom and the desire for solidarity. Intertwined with the desire for freedom is creativity, as freedom requires the ability to conceptualize and explore new ideas, a capacity that every human being is equipped with naturally. Chomsky believes that the only humane society is one that would allow these instincts to flourish, where spontaneous initiative and creative work would thrive and the organization of society would be founded on already naturally existing, self-governed communities that would enter into mutually beneficial agreements when necessary.⁸ So for Chomsky, capitalist democracy must suppress the fundamental human desire for freedom and creative production, as a profit-oriented economic society, which functions under the rule of private tyrannies (property owners), requires submissive workers to follow orders uncritically. The profit-oriented nature of society in capitalist democracies has produced civil institutions that function as instructors of submission, indoctrinating individuals from a young age to enter the work force as wage slaves. This is accomplished primarily through the school system.

Chomsky's theory of propaganda focuses on a more systemic property of the dominant order's organization – the suppression of the human instinct for freedom and creativity in educational institutions. In order for the profit-oriented economy to function, attitudes of submission must be imposed on individuals at the earliest age, impeding the personal growth necessary to be autonomous through one's own creative endeavours. Youth undergo serious training for the profit-oriented world and are encouraged to adopt unquestioning attitudes and to obey those in power. In speaking of the American school system, Chomsky states

...what's valued here is the ability to work on an assembly line, even if it's an intellectual assembly line. The important thing is to be able to obey orders, and to do what you're told, and to be where you're supposed to be. The values are, you're going to be a factory worker somewhere - maybe they'll call it a university – and what matters is discipline...that's pretty much what the schools are like, I think: they reward discipline and obedience, and they punish independence of the mind.⁹

⁸ Lightbody, Brian (2003) Theseus vs. the Minotaur: Finding the Common Thread in the Chomsky-Foucault Debate. *Studies in Social and Political Thought*. p.72

⁹ Chomsky, Noam (2002) *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*. New York Press: New York. p.236.

Chomsky understands domination as the suppression of the instinct for freedom – individuals recognize oppression, boredom and inequality, and they also possess the ability to conceive of alternate forms of economic, political and social society – but the will of the lower class to resist is weak due of constant subjugation since childhood. Cultural distractions and consumer propaganda serve to further tear individuals away from their desire for freedom and collective action, as the desire to consume replaces the desire to take part in creative, productive work.

Like Chomsky, Gramsci also believes education is the necessary suppression of certain human instincts, stating that “Education is always a struggle against the instincts related to the basic biological functions, a struggle against nature, to dominate it and to create the „actual human being.”¹⁰ However, Gramsci sees a *proper* education as necessarily oppressing these instincts, as the physical and psychological tools essential to intellectual achievement are not enjoyable, as education “is a process of adaptation, a habit acquired with effort, tedium and even suffering.”¹¹

Chomsky believes education should nurture the creative capacities of individuals, while Gramsci is sceptical of the utopian ideal that education merely guides intellectual development, stating that he does not believe in the “spontaneous development” of a child. Instead, Gramsci believes it necessary to teach discipline and sociality, to suppress some natural instincts that hinder intellectual development, as education is largely a process of conformity.¹² A better term for Gramsci’s interpretation of conformity is perhaps *socialization*. According to Gramsci “What is really difficult is to put the stress on discipline and sociality and still profess sincerity, spontaneity, originality and personality.”¹³ Stemming from their contrasting ideas on the function of education and human nature, Chomsky and Gramsci differ on what part education plays as an indoctrinating institution, or as Gramsci would say, a hegemonic institution. Gramsci does not view primary and secondary education as the principal institutions of hegemony and focuses on adult education as the explicit political manoeuvre towards societal change, especially that of workers within the industrial context.¹⁴ Chomsky sees domination as a much deeper phenomenon, as even the mind of a child must be conditioned at an early age to comply with the dominant order and must receive

¹⁰ Entwistle, Harold (1980) *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London.

¹¹ Entwistle, Harold (1980) *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics*.

¹² Monasta, Attilio (1993) Antonio Gramsci. *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*. 23(3-4) p.604.

¹³ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p.42.

¹⁴ Entwistle, Harold (1978) Antonio Gramsci and the School as Hegemonic. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments*, (3)252. The Gramsci quote from *The Prison Notebooks* (3)260.

constant propaganda over the course of a lifetime to sustain their obedience. Chomsky offers an important contribution to Gramsci's hegemony, as

It is a mistake to look at Gramsci as an authority for the view that radical social change, involving the replacement of bourgeois by working class hegemony, can be engineered primarily through formal educational institutions, especially those for children.¹⁵

Perhaps change within formal educational institutions is much more important than Gramsci recognizes, as if Chomsky is correct, the seeds of domination are planted at this stage and play a much larger role in preserving the social order than discussed in the theory of hegemony.

Language

Another area of contrast between the two theorists concerns the use of language as a means of social control. According to Femia, Gramsci displays an interest in how subtle connotations of language "freeze perception and conception, thus facilitating the acceptance of conventional assumptions and impeding the expression of heretical ideas."¹⁶ Essentially, language serves a hegemonic function, as according to Gramsci, "language contains the elements of a conception of the world."¹⁷ Chomsky also comments on how language is distorted to serve specific interests, usually by the powerful, but does not believe language serves a hegemonic function by limiting the conceptual ability of the lower class. Chomsky states that identifying distortions in concepts is "common sense" for people of all classes, and only requires "ordinary intelligence" to understand.¹⁸ The elite may profess that the current society is „free,“ but this does not mean that the lower classes only understand the rhetorical definitions of "freedom." As the preeminent theorist of linguistics of the 20th century, Chomsky maintains that linguistics is not useful for understanding domination.¹⁹

However, according to Entwistle, Gramsci's theory of language is relevant to understanding early 20th century Italy and may not have general implications for hegemony. Gramsci stressed the need for the masses to become proficient in Italian, as many dialects, including Gramsci's own Sardinian, were more common amongst the lower classes than the official language. Gramsci states that communication between intellectuals and the masses is

¹⁵ Entwistle, Harold (1978) Antonio Gramsci and the School as Hegemonic. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments*. (3)260.

¹⁶ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford p.44.

¹⁷ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p.325.

¹⁸ Chomsky, Noam (2001) The Fifth Freedom. *Guerrilla News Network*, November. (Stephen Marshall, interviewer)

¹⁹ Chomsky, Noam (2002) At a Q&A session after a lecture at the University of Berkeley on March 21st, Chomsky was asked "How have your studies in linguistics contributed to your analysis of world events?" to which he replied, "That's easy. Zero."

widespread, but as John Cammet states, “the language gap between the intellectuals and the masses was much greater in Italy than elsewhere.”²⁰ Understanding language as a hegemonic function is not applicable to Chomsky’s theory as it was to Gramsci’s, as the lower classes of the societies Chomsky cites most often (the United States and the UK) generally speak the same language as the elite classes. However, Chomsky would agree that certain groups, for example intellectuals, use arcane terms to obfuscate facts (explained in chapter 1), but recognising rhetoric does not require knowledge in linguistics as Femia infers.

The Elitism of Organic Intellectuals

Ultimately, Chomsky and Gramsci disagree on how the lower classes should combat domination. Chomsky’s theory attacks the notion of counterhegemony as merely another form of authoritarian structure, however this time led by groups of organic intellectuals. Even Gramsci is aware of the flaw in methodology

A human mass does not distinguish itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders...But the process of creating intellectuals is long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersals and regroupings, in which the loyalty of the masses is sorely tried.²¹

Ideally, the masses should be self-emancipating, but this is not possible because “they lack the sophisticated theoretical consciousness that would enable them to be fully aware of the contradictions in their own lives.”²² Gramsci theorizes that the growth of working-class intellectuals within the respected lower class areas is necessary to shift the consciousness of the masses. Thus a counterhegemony must be waged, a cultural war (a war of position) to gradually recapture conceptual territory within civil society, and Gramsci sees a small group of radical intellectuals guiding the growth of revolutionary organic intellectuals. Chomsky has little faith in revolutionary vanguards, as “the promise of past revolutions has been betrayed, in part, because of the willingness of the intelligentsia to join or serve a new ruling class.”²³ Chomsky states that in any case where one individual exercises power over another, an infringement of liberty has taken place, as Gramsci is attempting to replace the intellectual

²⁰ Cammet, John (1967) *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*. Stanford University Press: Chicago. p.20.

²¹ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London, Lawrence and Wishart. p.334.

²² Karabel, Jerome (1976) *Revolutionary Contradictions. Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*. Routledge: New York. (3)23-24.

²³ Chomsky, Noam (1971) *The New Radicalism. Modern Occasions, Spring issue*. 1(3) p.317-327. (anonymous, interviewer) Chomsky is speaking of Lenin’s revolutionary vanguard in this sentence.

vanguard with a “working-class” vanguard that must be engineered from theorists like himself.

According to Chomsky, attempting to guide people’s actions, ambitions and consciousness is a poor strategy to combat domination, as well as a form of authoritarianism. A counterhegemony attempts to build a new civil society that can overtake the present reigning hegemonic system, but the manufacturing of beliefs and sentiments, even if supposedly for the good of the masses, is still a threat to personal liberty. Exposing the deceit and lies in propaganda is the means to dismantle the civil society that contributes to oppression, but the engineering of a new society must come spontaneously due to natural human abilities and creativity. In summary, if Chomsky were to critique Gramsci, it would be similar to his critique of intellectuals and the study of social science in general, as Chomsky believes that every individual is able to understand his own oppression and that facilitating the emergence of a new group of intellectuals is not necessary to organize the masses.²⁴ Instead, engaging in *intellectual self-defence*, the process of examining how one comes to believe something, where the information originates, and if it accurate is the means through which individuals combat propaganda. Chomsky has faith in the natural human ability to uncover deceit and eliminate domination without the aid of intellectuals.

David Barsamian – Antonio Gramsci, who helped popularize the term "hegemony," wrote in 1925, "A main obstacle to change is the reproduction by the dominating forces of elements of the hegemonic ideology. It's an important and urgent task to develop alternative interpretations of reality." How does someone develop "alternative interpretations of reality," as Gramsci suggests?

Chomsky - I respect Gramsci a lot, but I think it's possible to paraphrase that comment, namely, just tell the truth. Instead of repeating ideological fanaticism, dismantle it, try to find out the truth, and tell the truth. Does that say anything different? It's something any one of us can do. Remember, intellectuals internalize the conception that they have to make things look complicated, otherwise what are they around for? But it's worth asking yourself how much of it really is complicated. Gramsci is a very admirable person, but take that statement and try to translate it into simple English. Is it complicated to understand, or to know how to act?²⁵

²⁴ Gramsci, Antonio (ed) Hoare, Q and Nowell Smith, G (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London, Lawrence and Wishart. p.334.

²⁵ Chomsky, Noam (2003) Telling the Truth about Imperialism. *International Socialist Review*, November-December. (David Barsamian, interviewer)

Conclusion

Chomsky's theory of propaganda is a valuable way to understand how the elite maintains power within capitalist democratic states, as it has developed new concepts and ideas that improve on previous theories of domination. Chomsky exclusively focuses on institutional explanations for elite domination that produce a class system based on service to the elite, as well as a detailed account of the indoctrinating effects of media and educational institutions. In Chomsky's theory of class structure, he provides a valuable addition to Gramsci's lower/ruling class hierarchy by clearly defining the *political class*, the group that gives the elite legitimacy to rule. Chomsky's political class is the substratum that Gramsci speaks of, that "counteracts the divisive and disruptive forces of conflicting interests."¹ Chomsky also enhances Gramsci's claim that the elite maintain their position in society via control of the moral and intellectual leaders (intellectuals) of civil institutions i.e. media and educational institutions. Chomsky explains *how* the elite attain and maintain the allegiance of these intellectuals, as by the nature of a profit-oriented economy the elite are able to influence civil institutions. Gramsci attributes the obedience of intellectuals to the prestige of the elite, whereas Chomsky gives a detailed description (the Propaganda Model) of how the profit system produces propaganda in the media and other institutions.

Chomsky also provides a theory of elite domination that addresses an outstanding weakness of Gramsci's theory – a theory of the indoctrinating effects of educational institutions. Gramsci focuses on cultural explanations for elite domination, yet states that hegemonic activity does not begin in the primary schools, despite the influence that early education has in forming an individual's attitudes and beliefs. Chomsky sees the schools as a primary doctrinal institution, since the function of educational institutions is to eliminate critical attitudes, stifle creativity and promote obedience to power – essentially dismantling natural human instincts and desires and replacing them with attitudes and beliefs that encourage consumerism and political and social apathy. Chomsky understands primary education as the first step towards indoctrination, as it prepares the individual to receive and internalize elite propaganda.

¹ Femia, Joseph (1981) *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. p.38.

In regards to the school system facilitating domination, Gramsci by contrast emphasizes (according to Femia and Landy) the hegemonic function of language promoted in the schools, stating that language represents a “window into the examination of the social conditions of oppression.”² Gramsci states that every culture guides its system of values and conceptions of the world within language and that intellectual activity is confined within the range of an individual’s vocabulary. A useful addition to Chomsky’s theory could be an examination of the role that language plays in power relations, as discussion surrounding the role of language in maintaining power hierarchies is absent from his theory because he claims that “such questions...have no intellectual depth and are of „marginal human significance.”³ Perhaps Chomsky is right and the analysis of discourse and rhetoric does not make any significant contributions to understanding elite domination. However, it is more probable that Chomsky’s refusal to examine language as hegemonic highlights a limitation of Chomsky’s theory: a strict adherence to an institutional analysis.

Chomsky claims that in order to gain an understanding of society and its power relations, one must examine existing institutions, as

The available facts, as usual, lead us to seek the institutional sources of policy decisions...People who wish to understand and change the world will do well, in my opinion, to pay attention to [institutional sources].⁴

Yet, as with any theory or method of analysis, institutional analysis has its limitations, due to the fact that gaining a complete understanding of elite power requires examining all possibilities, whether institutional, conspiratorial or cultural. Chomsky is criticized for his adamant refusal to entertain conspiracy theories, as according to Mark Fenster, conspiracy theories are a useful way to understand the public psyche. Fenster states that Chomsky distances himself from examining the possibilities of conspiracy theory to achieve “politically correct purity,” despite the fact that conspiracies are real and they do have a real effect on the world. Another relevant criticism is that institutional analyses of power often require altering an institution to achieve social and political change, a task that David Coady deems “unrealistic and ideal.”⁵

² Landy, Marcia (1986) Culture and Politics in the Work of Antonio Gramsci. *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments* (3)168.

³ Chomsky, Noam (1991). Language, Politics and Composition. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, (11)1. (Gary Olsen and Lester Faigley, interviewers)

⁴ Chomsky, Noam, quoted from Fenster, Mark (1999) *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. p.46.

⁵ Coady, David (2007) Are Conspiracy Theorists Irrational? *Episteme*, November p.197

Another limitation to Chomsky's theory is the lack of sufficient focus on lower class indoctrination and propaganda. Chomsky makes the distinction between the political and lower classes, as the political class internalizes elite propaganda and consents to elite rule, while the members of the lower class are not indoctrinated, but are rather passive consumers, apathetic to political life. Chomsky claims the lower class is not indoctrinated, but that the will and ability of its members to penetrate mass propaganda (cultural distractions, consumer advertisements) is eliminated, as the lower class experiences what he calls the *philosophy of futility*. However, Chomsky's major work regarding propaganda, *Manufacturing Consent*, emphasizes elite propaganda, thus only focuses on the political class that makes up what Chomsky claims is 20 percent of the population, while the other 80 percent is merely kept "distracted" by mass media advertisements, sports and entertainment.⁶ The strength of Chomsky's theory is its analysis of elite propaganda, but its weakness is its simplistic understanding of how propaganda influences the lower class.

Gramsci uses a cultural explanation to demonstrate lower class domination, arguing that the lower class have *two theoretical consciousnesses* that impede their ability to understand their subordination. This calls for a group of organic intellectuals to guide the masses towards combating the elite class with a counterhegemonic ideology. However, as Gramsci admits, there are contradictions in the role of organic intellectuals, as ideally the masses should be self-emancipating. Chomsky provides a useful critique of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, or rather, counterhegemony, as in contrast to Gramsci's belief in the importance of intellectuals to direct the lower classes, Chomsky states that organic intellectuals are unnecessary and claims that all individuals have the means to understand their subordination. For Chomsky, exposing the distortions and lies of propaganda is the only method to achieve social change.

This theory of social change is refreshing, as Chomsky presents a very negative view of how in an apparently free, democratic society, the population serves the interests of an elite class. Yet recognizing propaganda does not require the aid of intellectuals, but merely choosing to think outside of the boundaries of discussion we see on a daily basis and organize with others who do the same. Unlike Gramsci's theory of organic intellectuals, this is a goal towards ending class domination that is achievable, providing hope that creating a real democratic society is possible.

⁶ Chomsky, Noam (2001) Face to Face with a Polymath. *Frontline*. November issue. (multiple anonymous, interviewers)

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