Panopticism society becomes orderly and regimented with

Panopticism is a concept developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault to illustrate how constant observation can enhance discipline and efficiency in institutions. Foucault developed the panopticism concept based on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon theory, which stated that designing central surveillance towers in prisons would enhance discipline in the corrective institutions. According to (Foucault 201), panopticism induces " a state of conscious and permanent visibility" in people, hence making them aware of higher power that they must obey. Such awareness makes people more cautious, and more willing to abide by set rules or laws. Consequently, the society becomes orderly and regimented with only a few people going against set societal rules.

The effect of panopticism

Throughout his writing, Foucault uses the panopticism concept as a metaphor for discipline in societies. Specifically, he uses Bentham's panopticon theory to advance the notion that " power should be visible and unverifiable" (Foucault 201). Foucault gives the impression that seeing goes beyond the physical aspect of sight. He states that power visibility should be ingrained in a person's mind, in a manner that creates awareness of a higher observing power.

To enforce the unverifiable aspect of power, (Foucault 201) suggests the ' spies' should never make their presence obvious to the subjects of their observations. However, the observed must always know that they are under someone's gaze. Simply put, the spy must do his work discreetly without his subjects becoming aware of his presence. As a mechanism of power, panopticism has a mysterious and startling effect on people. For starters,

(Foucault 202) notes that panapticon " automatizes and disindividualizes power." As such, the subject of power becomes anxious and more aware that someone could be watching and waiting to impose corrective measures on him or her for wrongful behavior. Based on the anxiety and awareness created by the all-seeing eye, individuals internalize the concept of power by becoming aware of its invisibility, tact, and plurality.

This maintains discipline in the society, since people adopt self-policing actions as a measure of avoiding the consequences of non-abidance from the observer.

Darkness and light of panopticism

Citing Bentham (Foucault 202) observes that panoptic institutions are surprisingly light. Quoting some of the examples given by Bentham, Foucault observes that, " there were no more bars, no more chains, no more heavy locks…[in the panoptic institutions]." This observation suggests that the relaxation of physical security measures gave rise to the constraining force of an unseen power. In Bentham's views, the constraining force was limited to the panoptic institutions. As such, the effect that panopticism had in arresting evil and breaking communication could only be felt within the panoptic institutions.

In Foucault's views however the full lighting used in panoptic institutions was a " visibility trap" that is replicated in the larger society in order to enforce discipline (Foucault 200). The dark nature of panopticism is evident through Foucault's observation that individuals in panoptic institutions are confined into cells where they are visible to the supervisors, but they do not have the

liberty to see other people. More specifically, Foucault observes that such an individual becomes the object and source of information for the observer, yet he or she is not allowed to become a subject in the communication. This ensures that the person under observation is disassociated from the collective mass of people, hence becoming a separate individual who is sequestered and observed in solitude.

The transparency of action created by panopticism

According to (Foucault 215) " Discipline ' makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise." Foucault examines how the panoptical theory is executed in institutions such as hospitals, schools, and prison, and concludes that panopticism enhances efficacy and regulations in such environments. The use of due dates, timetables and exams further construct and advance the discipline aspect in people by ensuring that a person does what is expected of him or her by those in higher positions of power. Foucault observes that although power is evident in law and in its raw physical form, it can also be seen in political technologies and norms.

In the prison example he uses, Foucault (201) argues that an inmate who believes that someone could be watching him or her at all times alters his or her behaviors accordingly. Specifically, the writer states, " he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 202).

With panopticism, the subject of observation takes up desirable behavior,

since he believes that he will be examined or judged based on his actions. Being the subject of visibility (and not knowing if the observer is watching or not) becomes a way of life for people in panoptic settings. Such lifestyles persist even when the surveillance stop, thus reinforcing a disciplinary system.

The discipline created by panopticism supports Foucault's notion that making people believe that they are being watched makes controlling them easier. Once people are convinced that an invisible power is watching them, they willingly alter their behaviors in order to conduct themselves in a manner expected of them. It is (Foucault's 219) assertion that " discipline fixes; it regulates or arrests movement; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact grouping of individuals wandering about the country in predictable ways; it establishes calculate distributions" that capture the entire magnitude of the discipline effect created by panopticism.

Grades, discipline, and panopticism

Judging by Foucault's writings, grades fit in the discipline criteria as well as in the panopticism concept.

Grades are awarded based on how well a person performs in a given subject area. In some cases, a person is graded depending on how he or she compares to others. This means that grades are set on concrete applications, founded in the education system. One can argue that the need to earn good grades indirectly ensure that students maintain discipline in their courses. Grades also fit in the panopticism concept based on the argument that they are earned within an educational institution or setup. A student, who fails to

attend school or access knowledge from relevant sources, would surely have bad grades when examined. Besides, (Foucault 204) states that the panopticon also functions like some kind of power laboratory, where " knowledge follows the advances of power.

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Tenure, discipline, and panopticism

As the grades discussed above, tenure is not a physical place. However, the same concrete applications applicable in grades apply to tenure too. To execute the terms of tenure however, one would need an inherent sense of discipline, which according to Foucault could be born from taking on the task of self-supervision.

Tenure fits in the panopticism theory since executing the ' terms of tenure' requires one to work within set policies set by the employer. Moreover, the tenure holder would want to execute everything as directed by his or her employers in order to attain set goals, and to please the panoptic observer. Specifically, (Foucault 206) notes that the panoptic schema has a preventative character that assures economy and efficacy in personnel.

Evaluations, discipline, and panopticism

Like grades and tenure above, evaluations too qualify as a discipline, in addition to being applicable to the panopticism theory.

They fit in the disciplines criteria based on the fact that people who would otherwise ignore knowledge strive to concentrate and gain as much of it as they possibly can, based on their awareness that evaluations will be used to

test their understanding on a subject. Failing an evaluation may deny a person better prospects in future, and it is this knowledge that instills discipline in people. Evaluations also fit in the panopticism concept because they represent a scientific method through which social engineering can be attained. Aptly put, by evaluating people, appraisers determine who is fit and competent enough for specific positions in the society. Reading Foucault's views gives one the impression that running from the ' all-seeing eye' in the contemporary society is a near impossible task. Specifically Foucault observes that panopticism has multiplied itself since those who have been molded under its gaze have moved on to mould others. As such, people have learned not only to watch others for conformity with laid down rules, but also themselves. This means that the world is a more disciplined place than would be the case if the panoptic schema were not in place.

It is also undeniable that the modern man is under the ' constant' gaze more than he would care to admit. New electronic technologies have specifically exposed the contemporary person to more surveillance, with or without his knowledge. Admittedly, today's panoptic living has beneficial and disadvantageous consequences. Government's surveillance on its citizens is for example necessary for security reasons. However, it goes against the citizens' rights to privacy.

Conclusion

When used for the ' greater good' of the society, panopticism is a marvelous machine that instills discipline in people, and makes the society a more calmer, fruitful, and rewarding place. True to Foucault's observations, the modern culture is capitalistic, individualized, and disciplined. This makes it

comparable to earlier cultures where people operated in a unified manner and thus used observation to serve in internalizing shared beliefs and values. Due to the competition, broken communication and disharmony created by the individualized, capitalistic modern society, stabilizing features such as schools, hospitals, prisons and other collective institutions have been put in place. They are the modern day embodiment of the panopticon, which has been defined by Foucault.

Even where no one else is watching, people in the modern culture strive to be their own observers in order to establish a social identity or survive both physically and emotionally. The phrase ' winners never quit' is just one example of how panopticism has spread the discipline agenda among masses in a manner that present success as the ultimate goal in life. Attaining the most valued assets, values, and rewards in the modern culture is therefore arguably a result of the marvelous machine of panopticism.

Works Cited

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