

The Eyes that Never Blink: Analysing Technological Totalitarianism in Orwell's 1984


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Abstract - This research paper aims to examine, explore and analyse the role of digital technology that works solely in favour of the state and further leads to complete social control in George Orwell's masterpiece, *1984*. Orwell's novel serves as a stark warning against the threats posed by a totalitarian regime that seeks to create a society devoid of privacy, individuality, and truth. Such an authoritarian regime employs mechanisms that are utilised by the Party. The extensive use of technical devices, including telescreens, hidden microphones, the Thought Police, and the linguistic manipulation of Newspeak, helps achieve the desired goals of the state. The psychological impacts of these control mechanisms, especially the digital ones, on the masses are examined, further demonstrating the insightful effects of constant observation and propaganda on human behaviour, thought and action. This study aims to explore how Orwell's Oceania has moved from the pages to the present time, emphasising the frightening similarities in how modern states worldwide handle data privacy and public information. Using examples from modern technology and politics, this study emphasises the enduring relevance of Orwell's warnings in the age of science. By reassessing Orwell's warnings, the present study will focus on the urgent need to defend democratic ideals and individual independence against the escalating surge of state and digital monitoring.

Keywords- Surveillance, State, Digital, Totalitarianism, Control, Orwell, 1984.

George Orwell, one of the greatest novelists, remained a fierce political critic, a courageous journalist, and the 'conscience of a generation.' Most of his works are analysed and it stood the test of time as a persistent pursuit of objective truth. He was born in 1903 in Motihari, India and educated at Eton. He joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma and the time which he spent there (1922–1927) instilled in him a profound sense of revulsion for imperialism hence, he resigned to become a writer. Later on he decided to live in poverty in London and Paris so that he can understand the miserable condition of working class. For George Orwell English language was not just a medium for storytelling and entertainment but a strong instrument which can bring a positive change in society. Almost all his works serve as a characteristic tool for the 20th century. In his works one comes across the ephemeral nature of certainty, and the incessant endeavor of the individual against the collective authority. His *Animal Farm* (1945), one of the most famous allegorical fables is widely regarded as a masterpiece that allegorically critiques the Russian Revolution. In this novel he uses farm animals to show how 'power corrupts' the individuals and how revolutionary ideals transform the liberator into the new oppressors. Orwell's career reaches its zenith with the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) which depicts an alarming

dystopian future under Big Brother. It introduced iconic concepts like Newspeak, Thoughtcrime, and Doublethink which caused stir in the world later on.

The present study examines how present-day constant surveillance by authority reflects Orwell's 'dystopian vision', elaborating how the figure of Big Brother is replicated within the monitoring practices of modern-day capitalist societies. It will also bring to the fore how the modern form of monitoring and controlling represents Orwell's technological totalitarianism, how Big Brother mirrors today's capital society, and how the use of information technology signifies the idea of the panopticon of Michel Foucault. This study will also argue to reconstruct the concept of digital surveillance in the context of increasing security weapons by different countries of the world. Because of the digital technology human beings have become the prisoner of their own wishes. In addition to it, personal information of the people is being used as a commodity in the capitalist society subsequently establishing technological totalitarianism in the world.

In Orwell's *1984*, the Party uses a sophisticated array of control devices to secure and establish complete authority, most notably through digital eyes that never blink. The ever-present telescreens symbolize such a society where secrecy no longer exists and the government has absolute right, without any resistance from the masses, to watch everything a person does in the state. Orwell writes:

The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard (Orwell 3).

These platforms (digital eyes) function solely in favour of the state as it broadcasts state narratives while collecting real-time audio and visual data to suppress any spark of rebellion in the state. The slogan, 'Big Brother is watching you,' acts as a constant reminder to the masses of this total loss of privacy and liberty. Telescreens act as the central nervous system of Big Brother's monitoring. It is installed in the whole state in both private residences and public spaces. In this novel, Orwell shows "telescreen working on the model of the Panopticon that is formative of the behavior of the people who are constantly observed for almost all the actions they perform" (Syeda 134). These devices circulate a persistent stream of propaganda while simultaneously recording every movement and sound. Such "Propaganda generated social distrust and strengthened Party power" (Widaad 201) in the state. This constant monitoring helps in maintaining state discipline but the psychological awareness of being watched continuously effectively abolishes the concept of private life. As Winston Smith, the protagonist, reflects, "There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time" (Orwell 6). This pervasive ambiguity coerces citizens to adhere to Party dictates, as the constant threat of digital eyes promotes a climate of self-censorship among individuals. Such transformation marks "a pivotal evolution in the history of power, where domination no longer imposes from above but weaves itself into the fabric of social life" (Samal and Sahoo 845).

The chief function of telescreens is to foster ideological conditioning of the masses. Through a persistent stream of propaganda, the Party ensures thorough psychological submission and creates a climate of constant fear. 'Two Minutes Hate' program perfectly illustrates this emotional manipulation. The primary aim of effectively using the screens is to weaponize civilian rage and

to strengthen social control in their interest. Orwell writes “The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in” (Orwell 14). Much like Winston’s inhibition before writing his diary whether he should write it or not, we now face a similar pressure to over-analyze our activities, knowing that in a world of uninterrupted surveillance, no action is indeed private. All citizens are being monitored all the time while bringing everything under digital law as one witness Oceania’s ‘Inner Party’ and the use of telescreens. With the help of such surveillance technology, they can banish anyone at any time. If someone’s ‘Double Thought’ was marked on the telescreen, he would get his due punishment. The authority with access to modern technology has turned ordinary people into mental prisoners worldwide and it has become essential for the perpetuation of capitalist society. That is why the governments of different countries around the world are introducing digital laws which, sooner or later, are symbolic of Big Brother of 1984.

The Thought Police also serves as another primary instrument of control by the Party, which utilizes psychological warfare to identify and eradicate ‘thoughtcrime.’ This omnipresent force ensures that it roots out ‘thoughtcrime’—the ‘sin’ of independent thinking—so that no private rebellion goes unpunished and the party can have absolute grip on the mind of the people. To quote from the text, “It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away. A nervous tic, an unconscious look of anxiety, a habit of muttering to yourself—anything that carried with it the suggestion of abnormality, of having something to hide” (Orwell 62). Perpetual surveillance forces people to censor themselves, which tighten the Party’s hold on society by eliminating disagreement before it begins. The Thought Police inhumanly enforces conformity with the help of monitoring, informants, and torture. Winston Smith’s constant state of nervousness demonstrates how effective these methods are. He lives every moment of his life in the shadow of inevitable discovery. Winston says “Your worst enemy... was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom” (Orwell 62). Fear remains the default device of the Thought Police, turning every mind into its own prison and silencing dissent before it can be expressed.

Thought Police catches and penalizes a person with the help of telescreens. These devices are capable of detecting even the most subtle movements or facial expressions of individuals. With the help of telescreens, Big Brother and his party members keep monitoring every moment of an Oceanian citizen. Winston had already committed the essential crime—one that existed, the moment he think of it. Even without writing a single word, it was the ultimate offense, which contained every other possible act of defiance within it. This defiance is labeled as 'thoughtcrime.' The narrator describes the terrifying process by which the 'Thought Police' identify and arrest those who harbor subversive ideas.

It was always at night -the arrests invariably happened at night. The sudden jerk out of sleep, the rough hand shaking your shoulder, the lights glaring in your eyes, the ring of hard faces around the bed. In the vast majority of cases, there was no trial, no report of the arrest. People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, and your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: vaporized was the usual word (Orwell 13).

The Party reins Oceania by controlling its language also. Through Newspeak, their official language, they are not just deleting words; they are also erasing the ability of people to think defiantly. Syme, who is an architect of the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary, explains the philosophy behind this linguistic erosion. “Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end, we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it” (Orwell 52). Newspeak functions as a dual mechanism not only for observation and domination, but also narrowing the scope of thought itself thus paving the way of total technological surveillance and social control. When language in any nation is stripped down, the ability of the people to think critically is also discouraged to a great extent. The Party uses Newspeak, its official language, as a tool for mental policing, ascertaining that even the concept of freedom eventually vanishes. In Orwell's world, the loss of words is the ultimate loss of the self. Orwell writes. “Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller” (Orwell 52).

Orwell's description of Oceania demonstrates the corrosive effects of surveillance, which devalues the individual. Citizens in Oceania are stripped of their names and souls, becoming nothing more than puppets for the state to monitor. Orwell shows that being watched 24/7 doesn't just catch criminals—it erases humanity, consequently molding citizens into hollow instruments of the Party's will. It is not just “the threat of a constant watch, but also an overpowering force and relentless violence which keep the people disciplined” (Syeda 137). Winston Smith's grave loneliness is the natural outcome of a world where privacy is no more and every human instinct is treated as a threat. The Party's systematic interference in personal relationship serves as a primary engine of dehumanization. In a world, where a simple embrace is considered as a revolutionary act, sexual and romantic bonds are treated as threats to the established social order. Winston and Julia's clandestine affair acts as an act of defiance, and it is inhumanly crushed by the regime's omnipresent technological surveillance while shattering their relationship, the Party proves that no corner of the human soul is safe from its gaze, even the most private human relationships. Such acts of the state replace interpersonal loyalty with a hollow, state-mandated vacuum.

A remarkable similarity can be viewed between modern law implementation and Orwell's dystopian vision. In Oceania, the 'Thought Police' aggressively hunt those who are guilty of 'thoughtcrime'—the act of harboring beliefs that contradict the Inner Party's Ingsoc ideology. By systematically silencing nonconformists who dare to think outside state-mandated boundaries, totalitarian leaders utilize psychological manipulation to retain absolute control over the masses. Across the globe, people do not have the right to even think against authority. Modern individuals often find themselves in a position strikingly similar to the citizens of Oceania, surviving under the digital eyes of a contemporary 'Big Brother' that never blinks. One could argue that contemporary society mimics the suppressive mechanisms of the Inner Party. Just as thought criminals were erased to preserve the regime's power, modern digital surveillance devices and political pressure threaten individual independence. This 'democratic dictatorship' results in a total loss of privacy and freedom. This is most visible in the context of North Korea, where the state's influence over information, ranging from the restriction of speech to the literal rewriting of history. In such systems, people are given permission to act and speak only within the narrow restrictions of government approval.

Decades after its publication, Orwell's *1984* remains the ultimate warning against the rise and control of the surveillance state. Orwell's vision of a society defined by omnipresent digital control

highlights how easily personal freedoms can be erased when authority goes unopposed. In an era where data privacy is continuously under threat, the novel's themes are more relevant and meaningful than ever. By exploring the psychological influences of Ingsoc's regime and its modern-day parallels, this paper reasons that we must prioritize civil liberties over the seductive promise of totalitarian 'solutions.'

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